

# the pioneer

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**India needs strong leader, stable govt:**  
**Jaishankar**



**INDIA, SINGAPORE SET TO FIRM UP KEY PACTS TO BOOST TIES**



**'Bhaje Vaayu Vegam has unexpected twists & gripping SEQUENCES'**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
The pioneer

The KCR government purchased phone-tapping equipment from abroad. I have information that BRS MLCs too invested in this project. BRS leaders are preventing Prabhakar Rao from returning to India. The facts of the case will come out if Prabhakar Rao returns and tells what happened. It is a test for our political leaders and the commitment of the police. Thousands of phones were tapped. KCR government did it to stay in power forever

— Yennam Srinivas Reddy, Mahabubnagar MLA

P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**Rescue youth trapped in...**

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday wrote to the state Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy requesting to take up the human trafficking issue with concerned ministries at the Government of India and arrange for rescuing all such youth at the earliest. In his letter, he informed that hundreds of youth belonging to Andhra Pradesh have been languishing in Cambodia after being trapped by fake agencies luring them with attractive employment opportunities. Naidu said that the media has reported that the...

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**Urbanisation led to 60% more...**

Urbanisation has led to nearly 60 per cent more night-time warming in over 140 prominent Indian cities compared to non-urban areas surrounding them, a new research from the Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar has found. According to the research, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Rajkot had the highest urban effect, while Delhi-NCR and Pune were found to be at the fourth and fifth position, respectively. Urbanisation is known to be responsible for the urban heat island (UHI) effect, in which the concrete and...

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**Sugar exports hinge on monsoon...**

India may allow sugar exports after assessing the final sugarcane sowing and output in the 2024-25 season, as the world's biggest producer after Brazil is expecting a lower sugar output of 30 million tonnes next season, sources said. For the current 2023-24 season ending September, sugar production has reached 31.5 million tonnes so far, with the final output likely to touch 31.8 million tonnes as mills in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka wrap up crushing, the sources added. Last year, India produced 32.8...

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**India is strongest side even with...**

India's remarkable reservoir of talent and formidable depth within their squad makes them strong contenders to win the upcoming T20 World Cup, feels former England skipper Eoin Morgan. India have gone with almost the same squad as they had in the last edition of the T20 World Cup while adding the likes of young Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal and Sanju Samson. "The strongest side even with injuries throughout the tournament is India. Their strength and depth is absolutely incredible," Morgan...

-SPORTS

## EC biased: Sajjala

Alleges a change in poll panel's working style after the formation of the TDP-BJP-JSP alliance before elections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) State general secretary, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, has expressed concern over the Election Commission's conduct in Andhra Pradesh following the formation of the TDP, BJP, and Jana Sena alliance before the elections.

Addressing a press conference here on Tuesday, he said that the party stands for impartiality and transparency in the electoral process. He highlighted the need for fair treatment from the Election Commission during the upcoming counting on June 4.

Sajjala also commented on recent statements by political leaders, including Amit Shah's assertion about the NDA's prospects in the State, noting the party's scepticism about BJP's chances in southern states compared to the north. Addressing specific incidents, Sajjala raised questions about the handling of violence and attacks allegedly involving TDP members during the polling day. He urged for transparency, particularly regarding CCTV footage and videos of incidents, to ensure accountability.

## Naidu hails NTR as guiding light of Telugus

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tributes flowed in for the late NT Rama Rao, founder of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and former chief minister of unified Andhra Pradesh, on his 101st birth anniversary. TDP leader Nara Chandrababu Naidu led the homage, hailing NTR as the guiding light of the Telugu people, an icon of inspiration, and a beacon of Telugu pride.

In a message addressed to Telugus worldwide, spanning both Telugu-speaking states, Chandrababu Naidu urged remembrance of NTR's monumental contributions to this significant milestone. Chandrababu Naidu underscored NTR's groundbreaking initiatives in social welfare, emphasising his belief that serving society equated to worship, and championing the provision of necessities for the underprivileged as the essence of governance.



Furthermore, Naidu highlighted NTR's transformative impact on governance, laying the groundwork for developmental reforms and exemplifying servant leadership. He praised NTR's unwavering dedication to the progress of all sections of society, endeavoring him to the masses.

TDP General Secretary Nara Lokesh also paid homage to NTR, describing him as the epitome of Telugu pride and a revered figure in the State's history. Lokesh emphasized NTR's commitment to upholding the self-respect of Telugus, advancing public welfare, and propelling the state towards progress.



- Sajjala emphasises the need for the EC to act impartially during the upcoming counting on June 4.
- He expressed doubts about BJP's chances in southern states compared to the north.
- Sajjala raised questions about the handling of violence and attacks allegedly involving TDP members during the polling day, urging for transparency and accountability through the release of CCTV footage and videos of incidents.

lighted concerns about the treatment of YSRCP members and demanded accountability for alleged misconduct. Sajjala underscored the importance of upholding democratic principles and ensuring fairness in the electoral process, calling for impartiality from all involved parties, including the Election Commission and law enforcement.

## 3 boys drowned in check dam

PNS ■ JAGARAM

Three boys drowned while taking a bath in a check dam here on Tuesday morning, police said on Tuesday. The mishap occurred at Jagaram Gadda in Vizianagaram district.

Vizianagaram sub-divisional police officer R Govind Rao said the teens had gone to swim in the check dam and there was no foul play over the incident.

"Early this morning they went to Jagaram and accidentally drowned in the water," Rao said. When one of them started drowning, two others jumped in to save him. But all of them drowned as they did not know how to swim.

The bodies of the teenagers were retrieved and shifted to Vizianagaram government hospital for post-mortem.



## YSRCP opposes relaxation of postal ballot norms by EC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation of YSRCP leaders, spearheaded by former minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani), convened with the Additional Chief Electoral Officer on Tuesday to express concerns over the relaxation of norms for postal ballot counting in Andhra Pradesh. Joining Nani were YSRCP leaders Merugu Nagarjuna and Lella Appireddy, among others.

Addressing the media following the meeting, former minister Perni Nani highlighted the Election Commission's recent directive, which stated that Form 13 A postal ballots bearing the Returning Officer's signature but lacking a stamp should not be rejected.

Nani raised questions about the EC's decision, specifically targeting

its selective relaxation of rules in the Telugu state. He emphasized that EC guidelines clearly state that Form 13 A postal ballots must bear the unmistakable signature of a gazetted authority and be properly sealed.

Expressing concerns, the YSRCP leader cautioned that the relaxation could potentially lead to disputes and compromise the secrecy of votes. He urged EC officials to reconsider their stance on the directive regarding postal ballot counting.

Meanwhile, Minister Meruga Nagarjuna criticized the opposition party's cadre for inciting chaos and perpetrating violent acts during and after the May 13 polls in the state. He held the EC accountable for failing to adequately address the situation and called for an immediate withdrawal of the recent directive.

Continued on Page 2

## COUNTING IN AP

## 'EC allotted 20 companies of Central forces'

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has earmarked 20 companies of Central forces for Andhra Pradesh, gearing up for the vote counting scheduled for June 4. Chief Electoral Officer, Mukesh Kumar Meena, along with DGP Harish Kumar Gupta, Collector Srikrish B Latkar, and SP Malika Garg, inspected the vote counting arrangements at the JNTU campus. The focus was on the stringent security measures sur-



rounding the EVM strongroom. During the inspection, CEO Meena provided feedback to officials

and urged them to expedite the counting process preparations.

Continued on Page 2

## Bail to accused in stone attack case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 8th Additional District Court Magistrate in Vijayawada granted conditional bail to Vemula Satish Kumar (A1), the primary suspect in the stone attack on Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. The incident occurred during a road show when Satish, hailing from Vaddera Colony, Ajith Singh Colony, Vijayawada, allegedly hurled a stone at the CM. The bail, issued on Tuesday, requires Satish to post a bond of Rs 50,000 along with two sureties of equal amount, satisfactory to the Magistrate. Additionally, the court ordered that Satish must report to the concerned Station House Officer every Saturday and Sunday between

10.00 am and 05.00 pm until further notice from the court.

Satish, the main accused in the stone attack on CM Jagan (which took place on April 13), had filed a bail petition in the Vijayawada metropolitan sessions court, claiming innocence. He asserted that he was wrongly implicated in the case. Satish was apprehended by the Ajith Singh Nagar police on April 17, following accusations of launching a stone at the CM during his Memantha Siddham Bus Yatra in Vijayawada city. Since then, he has been in judicial custody. In his plea, Satish maintained that it was an unidentified assailant who aimed a sharp-edged stone at the CM with apparent intent to harm or potentially cause fatal injuries.



## Ex-MLA Aniseti passes away

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Former MLA Aniseti Bullebbai Reddy passed away after a prolonged illness at his residence in Nagulapalli village of Uppada Kothapalli mandal on Tuesday. He was 72. He was the MLA from 1989 to 1994. He was again elected to the Assembly in 2004 and continued till 2009.



He served as the MLA of the then Sampara constituency for two terms and was known for his upright-ness and service to the poor. He quit the Congress and joined the Jana Sena in the presence of Pawan Kalyan in 2019.

Bullebbai played a vital role in sanctioning house sites and also the

construction of houses for a large number of poor people in Valasapakala and Pagadalapet areas which are now named after him as Bullebbai Reddy Nagar.

The departed MLA also played a significant role in the development of a Pedda Cheruvu at Panduru village which has become the major source of drinking water supply to several villages besides the Kakinada city. People from all walks of life in Kakinada, and Pithapuram constituencies mourned his demise. Leaders of political parties including former Union Minister M.M. Pallam Raju condoled his death and paid tributes to Bullabbai Reddy on Tuesday.

## 23 dead as rain, landslides wreak havoc in Mizoram

PNS ■ AIZAWL

At least 23 people, including 13 in a stone quarry collapse, were killed in Mizoram on Tuesday due to landslides and incessant rain in the aftermath of cyclone 'Remal', state disaster management authority said. Several other people went missing in landslides, mostly in the state capital region, which was cut off from the rest of the country for several hours during the day and bore the brunt of the natural calamities.

In a massive landslide, at least 13 people, including two minors, were killed and eight others were missing as a stone quarry collapsed in Aizawl district, the Mizoram State Disaster Management Authority (MSDMA) said.

Three persons were also killed and 17 others injured in separate incidents in Assam on Tuesday as heavy rain accompanied by strong winds



lashed the state in the aftermath of the cyclone.

Two persons died and over 500 others were injured as downpours wreaked havoc in Meghalaya.

The stone quarry collapse incident in Mizoram happened around 6 am in an area between Melthum and

The stone quarry collapse incident in Mizoram happened around 6 am in an area between Melthum and Hlmen on the southern outskirts of the Aizawl town, an official said. The MSDMA stated that several houses and worker camps caved in due to the impact of the landslide, burying at least 21 people beneath the debris.

So far, 13 bodies have been recov-

ered and eight people are still missing, it said. Among the deceased in the stone quarry collapse are a four-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl," a police officer said. Aizawl's Deputy Commissioner Nazuk Kumar told PTI that the

search operations will continue till the entire site is cleared.

"Twenty-two bodies have been recovered. The number could go up. There was an abandoned stone quarry and not functional for the last three decades. Houses near the quarry collapsed," Mizoram Director General of Police Anil Shukla to PTI.

He also said the rescue operation is underway. "Those involved in the rescue operations are facing difficulties during the night. We are still searching for survivors. Five-six are still missing," the DGP said, adding that heavy rain was affecting the operations.

Shukla said the rain-triggered landslides at several other places in Mizoram were reported and several other persons have been "swept away".

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# Liquor shops shift to digital payments amid criticism

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a sudden shift of policy, government liquor shops in Visakhapatnam have stopped accepting cash payments, causing frustration and confusion among customers. Until recently, these shops only accepted cash, despite the availability of digital payment options like PhonePe and Google Pay.

This move has been met with criticism, especially from labourers and the poor, who are struggling to adapt to the new system. For years, opposition parties have accused the government of diverting funds by not utilising digital payments. Now, in an unexpected policy reversal, government liquor shops are insisting on digital payments exclusively, rejecting cash transactions altogether. Shop employees have been instructed to prioritise digital transactions, aiming to achieve a minimum of 200-400 digital payments per shop daily.

This abrupt policy change has particularly affected the labourers and elderly, many of whom do not use mobile phones for transactions. With alcohol sales in the district reaching Rs 150-190 crore



The abrupt policy change has particularly affected the labourers and elderly, many of whom do not use mobile phones for transactions. With alcohol sales in the district reaching Rs 150-190 crore monthly, and 80 per cent of this from cheap liquor, the lack of digital payment facilities among poorer customers is causing significant inconvenience.

monthly, and 80 per cent of this from cheap liquor, the lack of digital payment facilities among poorer customers is causing significant inconvenience. Workers, fishermen, and other low-income individuals, who predominantly purchase cheap liquor, are finding it difficult to transition to cashless transactions. They have voiced their frustration, questioning the timing of this new policy under the current government.

After the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) came to power, it moved away from the previously proposed phased prohibition of alcohol. Allegations of irregularities in the manufacture and sale of alcohol have

plagued the government, with opposition parties accusing it of exploiting liquor sales and distributing adulterated products. There have also been claims that local representatives were closing nearby government shops to benefit private bars.

Critics are now questioning why the implementation of cashless transactions, which is being enforced now, was not done during the previous five years of YSRCP's governance. Concerns have been raised about the transparency of these transactions and whether the revenue generated through digital payments will benefit government coffers or be diverted elsewhere.

As the government pushes

for digital payments in liquor sales, the sudden change has created widespread dissatisfaction, especially among the poor and elderly who rely on cash transactions. The policy shift raises questions about transparency and the true intentions behind the move, casting a shadow over the government's handling of liquor sales and revenue management. The transition to cashless transactions in government liquor shops is a step toward modernizing payment methods, but its sudden implementation has highlighted the need for a more inclusive approach that considers the technological capabilities of all citizens.

# TMC snatched rights of OBCs: PM Modi

PNS ■ BARASAT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday flayed the TMC government in West Bengal for "snatching the rights of OBC youths" to facilitate its appeasement politics and "vote jihad".

Addressing an election rally in Barasat, Modi, without naming West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, criticised her for questioning the judges of the Calcutta High Court and wondered if the TMC would now "let loose its goons on judges" following unfavourable rulings. "The court has exposed the treachery of the Trinamool Congress with the OBCs. The party snatched the rights of OBC youths to support its appeasement politics and 'vote jihad'. The TMC has betrayed the OBCs of West Bengal," he asserted.

The Calcutta High Court had last week struck down the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since



2010, finding such reservations to vacancies in services and posts in the state illegal.

Banerjee had said she will "not accept" the ruling, dubbing it as a verdict passed under the influence of the BJP.

"It is quite evident that TMC doesn't like those who expose its treachery and lies. I am astonished to see how the party is questioning the judiciary. Don't they have any faith in the judiciary and our Constitution? The way they are attacking judges is unprecedented. I would like to know whether the TMC would now let loose its goons on judges as they are exposed? The entire country is seeing how TMC is strangulating the judiciary in West Bengal," Modi said.

Reaffirming his commitment to combat corruption, the PM said after his resolve of "na khaunga, na khane dunga" (I will neither accept bribes nor allow others to do so), his new guarantee is "jisne khaya hain usey bahar nikalunga" (those who have taken bribes will be

taken to task).

The prime minister also took umbrage at Banerjee's recent comments against a few monks of the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha and alleged these socio-religious organisations were being threatened to appease the TMC's vote bank.

"The TMC cannot tolerate the truth. It targets anyone who exposes the party's crimes. You have seen that a TMC MLA had recently said that Hindus will be drowned in river Bhagirathi.

"On this, the saints and monks of Bengal had asked the party to correct its mistake. But, the TMC started abusing the monks for the sake of appeasement politics," Modi asserted.

Modi said the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are known for service and morality across the world, but the "TMC is openly threatening them, warning them from an open platform".

# 'INDIA bloc will end 50% cap on quota'

Protect Constitution with 'dil, jaan aur khoon': Rahul

PNS ■ BANSAGAON

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Tuesday that an INDIA bloc government will end the 50 per cent cap on reservation while asserting that the alliance will protect the Constitution with "dil, jaan aur khoon".

Addressing an election rally in Uttar Pradesh's Bansagaon with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Gandhi said, "These elections are a battle of ideologies. There is INDIA bloc and the Constitution on one side and those who want to finish the Constitution on the other."

Holding up a copy of the Constitution and a photograph of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Gandhi said Ambedkar dedicated his life to the Constitution.

"Dalits faced atrocities for



years. In our Constitution, they were given honour. But now, the BJP says that it will tear apart Ambedkar's work. No force can dare to tear the Constitution of Dr Ambedkar and (Jawaharlal) Nehru," the former Congress president said.

The INDIA bloc will protect the Constitution with "dil, jaan aur khoon (heart, life and blood)", he said and added that the alliance will end the 50 per cent cap on reservation while also increasing it.

"We did this wherever we ran the government -- be it in Chhattisgarh or Madhya Pradesh. We will do this in the entire country," he said.

On the Agnipath scheme, Gandhi said the INDIA bloc, once it assumes power, will tear apart the scheme and throw it in the dustbin.

"Modi ji has turned soldiers into labourers. The Centre has made two categories in the army -- Agniveer and others. If an Agniveer gets injured or is martyred, he will neither get a martyr status nor compensation," Gandhi claimed.

"Why this discrimination?" he asked. Gandhi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who calls himself a true patriot, insulted jawns by implementing the the scheme.

# The myth &....

Continued from Page 1

Yet, despite these expectations, hundreds of seats and berths remain available in private buses operating from Hyderabad, Chennai, and Bengaluru to Visakhapatnam. Over 100 AC Volvo buses ply these routes daily, with tickets available at a 10 to 20 per cent discount. This availability contradicts the narrative of a city overwhelmed with visitors for the swearing-in ceremony.

Furthermore, an analysis of flight bookings in key cities like Hyderabad, Vijayawada, and Visakhapatnam shows ample availability. "If there were a genuine surge in demand, ticket prices would reflect the increased bookings. Instead, flight tickets remain available at standard rates, with prices as low as Rs 3,337 from Vijayawada to Visakhapatnam, indicating no unusual travel plans," said Srinivas, owner of VITZ Travels Ltd.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Pawan Karthik, vice-president of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Andhra Pradesh, refuted the narrative of a booking frenzy. "The campaign that all hotels in Visakhapatnam are booked is not true. No special bookings for June 8, 9, 10. Rooms are empty in all hotels. If YCP wins, they will be booked on June 4. There is no need to do it already," he stated.

The divergence between YSRCP's social media campaign and the actual situation on the ground is striking. While the campaign portrays a narrative of overwhelming support and logistical challenges in Visakhapatnam, the reality shows that hotel rooms and transportation options remain plentiful. In the digital age, where information is readily accessible, the public must verify facts and rely on credible sources to understand the real scenario. The coming days will reveal whether YSRCP's confidence is well-placed or if the narrative is merely a strategic move in the heated election climate.

# Ex-member of UPSC calls for probe into Uttarandhra land scam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former UPSC member and Uttarandhra Adhyayana Vedika chairman Prof KS Chalam, has called for a thorough investigation into land scams involving the acquisition and encroachment of D form lands by outsiders in Uttarandhra. In a petition sent to the Chairman of the National SC Commission and the Governor of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday, Chalam highlighted the involvement of government officials in the illegal occupation of lands assigned to Scheduled Castes and other weaker sections.

Chalam emphasised that the petition does not aim to make accusations against specific ministers or officials but seeks to address the misuse of legal processes to curb this abuse. He pointed out that the process of legislating the sale of Dalit lands in Andhra Pradesh was strategically timed before elections, with records and



registrations being processed post-election.

During British India, the Zamindari system was prevalent in the north, and post its abolition in 1948, there was no systematic approach to managing surplus land acquisition by the government. Chalam's petition claims that around 8,000 acres of Dalit lands have been alienated since 2008, having been unlawfully acquired by outsiders. He urged the authorities to protect these lands, reminding them that the sale of lands assigned to Dalits and other disadvantaged groups to non-Dalits is illegal.

Chalam criticised the ruling government for relaxing provisions designed to prevent the sale of Dalit lands, a move that undermines the objective of distributing barren lands to poor Dalits.

He stated that the government's 'Land Bank' scheme, intended to recognize and address the needs of poor Dalits, has not been effectively implemented. He called for the protection of Dalit lands in old Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, and other districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Land ownership is crucial for Dalits' identity, self-esteem, and economic development, Chalam noted, urging the authorities to prioritize this issue.

He demanded the immediate appointment of a commission to investigate the allegations of illegal transactions involving D form patta lands, ensuring justice for the affected Dalits in Uttarandhra districts.

# 'EC allotted 20 companies...

Continued from Page 1

He emphasized the exclusion of individuals involved in election-related violence from serving as counting agents.

"The deployment of 20 companies of Central forces ensures statewide security during the vote-counting process," CEO Meena affirmed.

DGP Harish Kumar Gupta announced the prohibition of liquor sales on June 3 and 4 in light of the vote counting. He instructed police personnel to conduct thorough inspections of lodges and hotels to identify any suspicious individuals. Additionally, he highlighted the introduction of body cameras for police officers.

In a comprehensive presentation, Collector Srikesh B Lathkar outlined measures to ensure transparent and accountable vote counting. Over 700 supervisors, assistants, and micro-observers will oversee the process. Enhanced security protocols, including 155 CCTV cameras at the counting centre, were detailed. Political party representatives will have thrice-daily access to inspect the strong room.

SP Malika Garg provided updates on law enforcement efforts, reporting 1196 bound-over individuals and 59 arrests related to EVM vandalism. Post-poll violence resulted in 33 arrests, with 883 individuals apprehended during polling day incidents in Palnadu district.

IGP Sarvashrestha Tripathi and Joint Collector M Shyam Prasad were also present during the proceedings.

# YSRCP opposes relaxation...

Continued from Page 1

MLC Lella Appireddy emphasized the necessity for the Election Commission to uphold democratic principles impartially, dismissing allegations raised by the TDP regarding counting irregularities. He urged the EC to take decisive action, ensuring its decisions are devoid of bias.

MLA Maddali Giri, former Minister Ravela Kishore Babu, and Party Grievance Cell president Narayana Murthy were also present.

# KTR: TG emblem changed, will borders be changed too?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA KT Rama Rao opposed Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's statement that Telangana's official emblem is going to be changed.

He said in a post on X, "The Chief Minister's attitude is two-tongued. What a stupid idea! Why are you so angry with the Kakatiya Kalatoranam? Why are you annoyed with the Charminar? They are not symbols of monarchy but are symbols of thousands of years of cultural glory. These are standing symbols of the priceless existence of Telangana."

"Will you bury the ponds built during the Kakatiya period? Will the Assembly, once a symbol of monarchy, be dismantled? You are saying today that Telangana's emblem will be changed. Will the borders of Telangana be erased tomorrow?" KTR said.

"Your Congress is ruling Karnataka. The official emblem of Karnataka also has royal symbols. Tell me will they be removed too? The national emblem of India features the lion of Ashoka. The national flag also has the Ashoka Chakra. Why don't you answer about them?" he said.



'I have nothing to do with Keeravani issue'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that State Anthem writer Ande Sri has been given the responsibility of composing the Telangana State Anthem and he would like to know who Ande Sri will choose to design the song.

The CM said that it is not his job to compose music with any music director and made it clear that he has nothing to do with Keeravani's issue. Revanth made these comments during a chat-chat with the media on Tuesday in New Delhi.

# 23 dead as rain, landslides...

Continued from Page 1

"We have rescued two persons alive from the stone quarry site," he added.

At nearby Hlimes of Aizawl district, at least five people died and four others are still missing when several houses collapsed in a landslide, the MSDMA said.

A building in Aizawl's Salem Veng caved in due to a landslide, following which three persons went missing and their bodies were recovered later, an official said. He also said that one person each died in Falkawn and Lunsei of Aizawl district when landslides buried their houses.

The MSDAM also stated that eight members of a family inside a house were swept away by a heavy landslide at Chawnpui of Aizawl district.

The state capital was cut off for the whole day from the rest of the country due to landslides on National Highway-6 at Hunthar and NH-54 at Bungbungla. The road block-

ages were cleared in the evening and the traffic movement was restored, the officials said.

According to the India Meteorological Department's regional centre in Guwahati, light to moderate rain is very likely to occur at most places over Mizoram on Wednesday, while thunderstorms and lightning with gusty wind reaching up to 30-40 kmph speed are very likely to occur at isolated places in the hill state. The Mizoram government has ordered the closure of all offices and PSU units on Wednesday in view of the weather warning issued by the IMD, except those departments involved with disaster management and essential services.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma convened an emergency meeting with Home Minister K Sapdanga, Chief Secretary Renu Sharma and other senior officials to take stock of the situation, a senior official said.

The CM announced Rs 4

lakh ex gratia for the families of those killed in the stone quarry collapse and calamities caused by rain. Sapdanga handed over cheques of Rs 2 lakh each to the families of the eight Mizo people who died in the quarry collapse and said the remaining amount would be given to them soon.

"The identities of the four non-tribal people are being verified. If they are permanent residents of Mizoram, they will be given the ex gratia. If they came here temporarily to work, then they will not get any financial support," he said. Lalduhoma said the government has earmarked Rs 15 crore to tackle disasters triggered by rain, which occurred as an aftereffect of cyclone 'Remal'.

Later, Lalduhoma along with Sapdanga, who is also in charge of the Disaster Management and Rehabilitation Department, visited the stone quarry site to take stock of the situation and oversee the rescue operations.

# CBI, ED oppose Kavitha's bail plea, says she is 'powerful'

KCR was not mentioned by ED in liquor case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The CBI and the ED opposed in the Delhi High Court on Tuesday the bail pleas of BRS leader K. Kavitha in the corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam saying that she was "highly influential and powerful" and can influence witnesses.

Kavitha's lawyer Mohit Rao denied that the ED had mentioned KCR in Kavitha's bail case. KCR was not mentioned in the arguments of the ED but the lawyers said in court that the father of Magunta Raghavareddy, that is, Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy was mentioned.



Magunta Raghavareddy in his testimony said that he introduced people involved in the liquor case to his father Srinivasulu Reddy.

Countering the submission made on behalf of Kavitha that she, being a woman, be released on bail, the probe agencies contended she played a key role in the conspiracy behind the "scam" and as an active politician and as a Member of the Telangana Legislative Council she cannot seek parity with "vulnerable" women.

After hearing the argu-

ments of the counsel for the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the CBI, and Kavitha, Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma reserved orders on her bail application.

During the hearing, the CBI counsel argued that Kavitha was "not just a woman but a very influential person and was powerful enough" to influence witnesses and one of them has even claimed she had threatened him. The ED's counsel also contended that Kavitha was a co-conspirator and a beneficiary of the excise "scam" and that the proceeds of the crime were directly going to her.

The counsel claimed that the BRS leader, who was accused of a white-collar crime, was involved in the destruction of evidence and coercing people to retract their statements.

The ED in its reply to

Kavitha's bail application claimed her release would adversely affect further investigation to unearth the "deep-rooted, multi-layered conspiracy".

The ED said that the Telangana lawmaker is a "highly influential" individual accused of committing a grave economic offence.

"K. Kavitha conspired with other people and was actively involved in the payment of kickbacks of Rs 100 crore and then in establishing the money laundering ecosystem, that is, M/s Indo Spirits through her proxy which generated proceeds of her crime of Rs 192.8 crore. By such acts, K. Kavitha is involved in various processes and activities connected to the proceeds of crime (POC) amounting to Rs 292.8 crore," the probe agency said in its counter affidavit.

# Black shoes, two pairs of socks for all schoolkids: Praveen Prakash

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Principal Secretary of the School Education Department has confirmed that arrangements are underway to ensure that all students, from Classes 1 to 10, receive essential school supplies promptly. It has been mandated that all black shoes are to be delivered by June 5, with distribution scheduled to coincide with the reopening of schools on June 12.

In a press release on Tuesday, he emphasised the importance of quality and uniformity. He disclosed his personal involvement in visiting shoe manufacturing facilities, similar to the scrutiny applied to school bag production. During these visits,



In a press release on Tuesday, he emphasised the importance of quality and uniformity. He disclosed his personal involvement in visiting shoe manufacturing facilities, similar to the scrutiny applied to school bag production.

specific directives were issued to ensure the suitability of the footwear across a range of foot sizes, from 16 cm to 30 cm.

Specifications for the manufacturing process were meticulously outlined, with the upper part of the shoe mandated to be constructed from

polyvinyl chloride (PVC) material, with a thickness of 1.8 mm +/- 0.22 mm. Additionally, the sole material was stipulated to possess a density of 0.85 +/- 0.10 grams/cm<sup>3</sup>.

Addressing the workers directly, the Secretary underscored that the responsibility for both the quality and timely delivery of the products rests not solely on the manufacturers but also the overseeing officers. As shoe manufacturing operates within a centralised industry, any lapses in quality or supply would directly implicate the Principal Secretary, necessitating utmost care and diligence from all stakeholders involved.

## Rescue youth trapped in Cambodia: CBN

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday wrote to the state Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy requesting to take up the human trafficking issue with concerned ministries at the Government of India and arrange for rescuing all such youth at the earliest. In his letter, he informed that hundreds of youth belonging to Andhra Pradesh have been languishing in Cambodia after being trapped by fake agencies luring them with attractive employment opportunities.

Naidu said that the media has reported that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has conducted raids across states and found deep-rooted organizations trapping youth. It is a pity that the state government has not initiated any steps to rescue all youth of Andhra Pradesh from Cambodia, Laos and other such destinations where they are forced to indulge in illegal activities.

## MENSTRUAL HYGIENE DAY Focus on period poverty

Inability to afford menstrual products severely impacts physical health, infringes upon fundamental rights, and perpetuates gender inequality and economic disparities

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the world observed Menstrual Hygiene Day on Tuesday, May 28, attention was drawn to the pervasive issue of period poverty, which affects millions of girls and women globally. In many developing nations, the inability to afford menstrual products severely impacts physical health, infringes upon fundamental rights, and perpetuates gender inequality and economic disparities.

Dr. Ooha Mahanthi, National Director of the Rural Development Welfare Society (RDWS), an NGO, emphasised the urgent need to tackle period poverty, especially in marginalised communities such as urban slums, rural villages, and tribal regions. This year's theme, "Together for a Period Friendly World", underscores the collective effort required to destigmatise menstruation, promote menstrual health edu-



cation, and ensure every girl can manage her period with dignity.

RDWS is leading this initiative in collaboration with the Save the Child Foundation. Save the Child Foundation, a non-profit headquartered in Frisco, Texas, operates in over 15 countries, including India, and is committed to advancing gender equality and equity. With grants exceeding \$4 million, their efforts to provide essential menstrual hygiene products and education have

positively impacted the lives of over 2,50,000 girls.

"In India, RDWS and Save the Child India are dedicated to distributing menstrual hygiene products to girls in need. Our initiatives extend to girls in shelter homes and slums across the Telugu States. This Menstrual Hygiene Day, we aim to distribute over 30,000 sanitary napkins to empower girls to manage their periods with dignity and attend school without fear of stigma," said Ooha Mahanthi.



## Pawan Kalyan pays tributes to NTR

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan paid tributes to Telugu Desam Party (TDP) founder and former chief minister NT Rama Rao on his 101st birth anniversary.

In a message here on Tuesday, Pawan Kalyan said that NT Rama Rao was proud of the Telugu people as he upheld the self-respect of Telugu people. "I pay rich tributes to the late NT Rama Rao on his birth anniversary on behalf of me and on behalf of the Jana Sena party. NT Rama Rao had brought reforms in the revenue sector during his regime," he recalled.

He lauded NT Rama Rao for the Rs 2 a kg rice scheme. NT Rama Rao created a niche for himself not only in the cinema field but also in politics, Pawan Kalyan extolled.

# Young innovators shine at HackAP Robotics Hackathon

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a remarkable display of ingenuity and creativity, young minds from various educational institutions and companies across Andhra Pradesh converged at Andhra University for the 10th edition of the HackAP Robotics Hackathon, hosted by A-Hub. The two-day event witnessed the participation of 32 teams, each showcasing their innovative solutions to real-world challenges.

Abhishek, a student of Prathibha Vidyalayam, stood out among the participants, demonstrating a multi-functional robot designed to revolutionise farming practices. The robot, equipped with capabilities ranging from sowing and ploughing to harvesting, embodies the fusion of technology and sustainability by harnessing wind and solar energy for efficiency. Abhishek's team also developed an accompanying app empowering farmers to monitor crucial water and soil parameters, aiming to elevate agricultural practices to new heights.

M Eshwar Sai, a ninth standard student of Sri Sarada



Vidya Nilayam, expressed excitement and nerves at his first hackathon participation. Despite initial apprehension, Sai embraced the opportunity to delve into the world of robotics, highlighting the enriching environment provided by the event.

Dr. Ravi Eswarapu, CEO of A-Hub, lauded the enthusiastic participation of startups and aspiring entrepreneurs, emphasising the event's role in fostering innovation and collaboration. Held in collaboration with Alcove Partners and TiE Vizag, the HackAP Robotics Hackathon witnessed intense competition, with 11 teams advancing to the finals. Team Zyclone emerged victo-

riously, clinching the first-place title, followed by Team Kreda Mitra and Team Agrobot Brawls securing second and third place, respectively. The judging panel commended all participating teams for their dedication and groundbreaking work in robotics, acknowledging the challenging task of selecting winners amidst such impressive displays of creativity.

The valedictory ceremony, presided over by Diwakar Vadapalli, Incubation Manager at A-Hub, and Dr. Ravi Eswarapu, celebrated the achievements of the top teams, underscoring the hackathon's success in fostering design thinking and innovation.

## Jana Sena leader alleges irregularities in land registrations

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Jana Sena leader Pithala Murthy Yadav, on Tuesday, once again raised serious allegations regarding the forced registration of assigned lands allotted to Dalits, valued at thousands of crores, according to exact sketches. He criticised Chief Secretary Dr. KS Jawahar Reddy, questioning the lack of a satisfactory response even after 72 hours.

Speaking to the media on Tuesday, Yadav highlighted that if Government Order (GO) 596 had been received on December 19 of last year, the registrations could have been completed within 15 days. He cited specific instances, stating that numerous registrations were executed



under the name Kalakonda Bharat Subhash in Survey No. 271/6 in Gandigundam. He also mentioned that in Bhogapuram, multiple registrations were recorded in the name of Rajkumar Agarwal, raising questions about the identities and roles of these individuals. Yadav pointed to Surreddy Trilok as the alleged mastermind

behind the entire operation. He further alleged that after the implementation of the election code, registration details were concealed, and the website was blocked to prevent the issuance of Encumbrance Certificates (ECs). He questioned why the EC website was non-functional during the caretaker government's tenure.

Yadav assured that within a week, the involved funds would be traced to the YSR Congress Party, and a comprehensive investigation would be initiated by the next government. He demanded that the entire issue be investigated either by a sitting judge or the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to ensure transparency and accountability.

## Second batch of Haj pilgrims leaves for Jeddah

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Minority Welfare Department Secretary and Haj Operations Chairman K Harshavardhan flagged off the second delegation of the Holy Haj Yatra at Eidgah Jama Masjid Haj Camp at Gannavaram on Tuesday afternoon. The second batch of 322 people took off for Jeddah at 4:55 pm.

Waqf Board CEO and Haj Committee Executive Officer Abdul Qadeer, Haj Committee members CRDA Additional Commissioner Aleem Basha, Dudekula Corporation MD Gaus Pir, Urdu Academy Director Mastan Vali, and State Minority Welfare Department Deputy Secretary Srinivas wished the Haj pilgrims.

# SRM varsity signs MoU with IGCAR

To collaborate on academic and research projects in biomedical research, disaster management

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University-AP has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, to collaborate on academic and research projects in biomedical research, disaster management, and other domains.



The MoU was signed by Dr B Venkatraman, Director-IGCAR, and Prof Manoj K Arora, Vice-Chancellor, SRM University-AP, in the presence of Dr Vidya Sundarajan, Head, PHRMD & QAD, IGCAR Kalpakkam; M Menaka, Head, RAMS, Kalpakkam; Prof Ranjit Thapa, Dean-Research, SRM University-AP and Dr KA Sunitha, Associate Professor, SRM-AP.

The MoU underscored a

mutually beneficial agreement between the two institutes. On the academic front, it provides internship opportunities, research collaboration for projects and industry visits for the students and faculty of SRM-AP. This ensures a knowledge transfer between the two organisations, promoting stellar growth in scientific and technological

advancements. "This is a remarkable opportunity for our students to enhance their fields of study, gain academic insights from expert scientists and participate in cutting-edge research projects at IGCAR. This will ensure that we, at SRM-AP, nurture students with a great scientific temperament," stated Prof Manoj K Arora.

SRM-AP has already collaborated with IGCAR on a consultancy project in the pioneering field of biomedical research last year. The parties have successfully conducted health screening of over 1,500 subjects in the Chengalpattu region in Tamil Nadu, with SRM Medical Hospital & Research Centre and AIIMS Mangalagiri as secondary collaborators. Upon the successful completion of the project, IGCAR and SRM University-AP further extend their association with an official MoU for academic and research collaborations. "The MoU with SRM for translational research will be a huge motivation for the young faculty and scholars to pursue breakthrough research in their scientific domains," remarked Dr B Venkatraman, Director-IGCAR.

# BJP eyes long-term dominance in AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In the wake of the closely watched assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Andhra Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is anticipating winning three to four Lok Sabha seats along with a substantial share of assembly seats thereby emerging as a formidable player in the political landscape. The news found enthusiasm owes much to the BJP's shrewd coalition-building prowess, particularly its strategic alliances with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) under the leadership of N. Chandrababu Naidu and the burgeoning Jana Sena Party (JSP) helmed by the charismatic Pawan Kalyan.

However, despite the electoral triumph, the BJP leader-

ship remains acutely aware of the challenges ahead, especially under the potential scenario of a TDP-led government.

Recognising Pawan Kalyan's perceived deficiency in individual political clout, the BJP discerns a strategic opportunity to harness his widespread popularity and grassroots support to fortify its presence across Andhra Pradesh. Plans are already in motion to integrate Kalyan into the broader national political landscape, with envisioned roles ranging from the deputy chief minister in a prospective NDA government to a cabinet position at the central level, should the alliance fall short.

Looking towards the horizon, the BJP's meticulously crafted long-term vision revolves around nurturing its alliance with the Jana Sena Party, harbouring ambitions to ultimately assimilate it into the BJP's ideological fold. Even

in the event of Pawan Kalyan's reluctance to entertain the notion of a merger, the BJP remains steadfast in its commitment to sustaining the partnership, envisioning a potent coalition poised to emerge as a credible political alternative in Andhra Pradesh by the turn of the decade.

As the spectre of a potential decline in the TDP's influence looms large, the BJP is keenly attuned to the shifting political dynamics, poised to seize upon every opportunity to consolidate its position in the state. In a landscape characterized by flux and uncertainty, the BJP's strategic manoeuvres in Andhra Pradesh underscore its unwavering aspirations for long-term dominance and the cultivation of strategic alliances in the region.

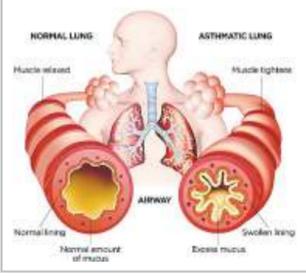
# High altitude can trigger asthma attack: Experts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Asthma is a chronic condition that inflames and narrows the airways, making it difficult to breathe. Some of the potential symptoms can include wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. These symptoms can be triggered by various factors, including allergens, irritants like smoke, dust, and even the cold air at higher altitudes, says Dr Lokesh Gutta, Consultant - Interventional Pulmonologist, Manipal Hospitals Vijayawada.

decrease in oxygen levels can be a significant trigger for asthma symptoms. Asthmatic airways are already sensitive. When oxygen levels drop at high altitudes, the airways react by constricting

airways and exacerbate asthma symptoms like coughing and wheezing. As altitude increases, the temperature typically decreases. Cold air can act as an asthma trigger, causing the airways to tighten and making breathing difficult.



Lower air pressure at high altitudes can affect the release of certain hormones that regulate airway function, further contributing to asthma symptoms.

He said that discuss your travel plans and asthma management with your doctor well in advance. They might adjust your medication dosage or prescribe additional medication

further, restricting airflow and leading to breathing difficulties.

High-altitude air is generally drier than air at sea level. Dry air can irritate the

for use at higher altitudes. This portable device measures how well you're exhaling air, helping you and your doctor monitor your asthma control.

## WCMS crossing laid in Vetapalem Yard of Vijayawada Division

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant achievement, the Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway, has successfully laid a Weldable Cast Manganese Steel (WCMS) crossing in the Vetapalem yard section for the first time. This innovative technology marks a major milestone in the Division's ongoing efforts to enhance safety and efficiency in rail operations.

The WCMS crossing was laid on the down line at Vetapalem yard in the Vijayawada-Gudur Section very recently. The basic objective of using WCMS is to modernise the Indian Railway track for coping with the increased speed and Heavy Axle Load (HAL).

WCMS crossings are crucial components used in railway tracks at the junctions where two rails cross. They are designed to handle the increased speed and heavy axle loads (HAL) charac-

teristic of modern railways, ensuring the smooth transition of train wheels from one track to another.

Speaking on the occasion, Narendra A. Patil, Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada, said: "We are proud to have achieved this historic milestone, which demonstrates our commitment to innovation and excellence.

The Weldable Cast Manganese Steel crossing will significantly enhance safety and reduce maintenance costs, benefiting both passengers and freight customers."

The DRM congratulated S Varun Babu, Sr DEN, Coordination, Mayank, DEN, Central, Srinivas, ADEN, Bapatla and the Engineering team on their stupendous achievement. DRM said that Vijayawada Division will continue to strive for excellence, harnessing cutting-edge technology to enhance the overall rail experience.

# VMC Commissioner inspects drinking water supply in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Commissioner of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar, conducted an inspection of the drinking water supply in the Moghalrajpuram area on Monday. The inspection covered various key areas including Patamatavari Street, Gummati Street, Atluri Parvathamma Street, Water Tank Road, Ashram Road, and Boyapati Road.



During the inspection, Commissioner Pundkar personally assessed the drinking water supply and sanitation facilities in the area. He visited the Moghalrajpuram water tank and ensured that filtration processes were being conducted efficiently, affirming that there were no issues in the supply of drinking water from the tank. Furthermore, Commissioner Pundkar interacted with the residents to gather feedback on the water supply situation and personally inspected the quality of

drinking water. Speaking on the occasion, he said that no other diarrhoea cases have been found in the family or nearby houses where the death took place allegedly due to diarrhoea with the contamination of drinking water on Monday. Though preliminary testing of water samples was negative for contamination, they were sent to the Guntur Laboratory for further testing. He instructed the denizens to drink warm water after boiling the tap water to

ensure their health and safety and instructed officials to conduct an awareness programme on drinking warm water.

As preventive steps, the commissioner issued several instructions to the officials including door-to-door surveys to identify and rectify any issues related to water supply promptly. Extra staff will be deployed to ensure comprehensive surveying of the area and to address any concerns raised by residents effectively. Samples of the drinking water will be sent to the laboratory for quality testing to ensure compliance with safety standards. Wherever necessary, pipelines will be cleaned to maintain the quality and efficiency of the water supply system, he said.

Additional Commissioner General A Mahesh, Zonal Commissioner-3 Siva Ramakrishna, Chief Engineer M Prabhar, Executive Engineer Chandra Sekhar, Deputy Engineer and Assistant engineers were present.

# Political stalwarts elected naturally: Where have they gone?

One are the days when leaders got elected on the basis of their stature marked by highest ideals and impeccable morals. The quintessence of such leaders is Vavilala Gopala Krishnaiah, noted freedom-fighter who had never used money or muscle power and yet got elected as legislator four times from the same constituency with only public support. He was a member of the Legislative Assemblies of the Composite Madras State, Andhra State, and the Andhra Pradesh State during the '50s, '60s & '70s! He was elected from the Sattenapalli Assembly constituency of the combined Guntur district that was also part of states of Composite



Madras, Andhra and AP. This great patriot served people with utmost sincerity and commitment. Let us recall politics of those days and compare them with the situation during the just-concluded elections. Had he contested in the present elections, he would have undoubtedly lost his election deposit! Likewise, Communist leader Puthchalapalli Sundaraiah, who used to go to Parliament on his bicycle in the '50s, got elected to Assembly four times from the Gannavaram constituency of the erstwhile Krishna district. Thanks to him, a positive political atmosphere prevailed for the undivided Communist Party of India during the 1955

**Vavilala and Sundariah represent literally the good old days when towering personalities got elected without the influence of money bags or muscle power. Today, the political situation has deteriorated beyond redemption. Industrialists and other crorepathis, who had amassed money by fair means or foul, queue up for tickets from principal political parties like the Congress, Bharat Rashtira Samithi, YSRCP and the Telugu Desam Party in both Telugu states.**

elections. As the CPI had registered resounding victories in the 1952 general election, everybody had expected a Communist wave in 1955. However, the Congress won the polls. Then general secretary of CPI Ajoy Ghosh had termed the results as 'shocking' and stressed the need for introspection among his comrades. Had CPI won the polls of 1955 in Andhra State, Sundariah would have become the chief

minister of the newly formed state of Andhra that had been carved out of the Composite Madras State in 1953. Further, he would have become the head of the first ever Communist government elect-



M D RATNA KUMAR  
Senior Journalist

ed through the ballot. Two years later, EMS Namboodripad created such a record by becoming the chief minister of Kerala. Vavilala and Sundariah represent literally the good old days when towering personalities got elected without the influence of money bags or muscle power. Today, the political situation has deteriorated beyond redemption. Industrialists and other crorepathis, who had amassed money by fair means or foul, queue up for tickets from principal political parties like the Congress, Bharat Rashtira Samithi, YSRCP and the Telugu Desam Party in both Telugu states. The parties too welcome only money bags. The candidates fund the parties and also bear election

expenses related to their respective seats in the Lok Sabha & Assembly elections. Apart from money bags, muscle power has become vital. Muscle power is necessary to influence polling even if they can't entirely bring it under their control. This includes vandalizing EVMs, frightening voters in queue at polling booths, attacking those who question jumping of queues by those ushered in by cadre, and the like. At the level of voters too, regardless of the money spent for development and creation of public assets, they want the 'extra' that comes in the form of inducements during polls. So, parties find it easy to influence voters who are habituated to accepting inducements in cash or kind or both. Parties

therefore feel emboldened to unleash attacks on voters who refuse to accept inducements on the principle: "Those who are not with us, are against us". So, money and muscle power have become the essential ingredients for electoral success. In this backdrop, common people aspiring to bring about change cannot help feel diffident about contesting. Likewise, in the Fifties, two youngsters of Communist Party, S. Butchikotiah and Guntur Bapanaiah of Krishna district, got elected to the Lok Sabha and the Assembly respectively, based only on the party's ideology. For that matter, can anyone win an election without money and muscle power today? Unfortunately, the answer is a big No!

## Trial run of counting on June 2

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

A trial run will be conducted two days before the counting of votes in Rajahmundry. The trial run of counting of votes will be held on June 2.

The trial run of counting of votes is being held to provide practical training to the counting staff. The trial run of counting of votes will begin at 9 am on June 2, and Collector K Madhavi Latha directed all the counting officers and staff to attend the trial run. Buses will be made available for them at Diwan Cheruvu on the day. The counting of votes of Parliament and Assembly constituencies of the district will be taken up on June 4 on the Nannaya University campus.

Collector Madhavi Latha said a medical team would be made available at each counting hall. She directed the DMHO to coordinate with the GSL to provide emergency medical services. The Collector also ordered the APEP DC L Superintendent Engineer to take all steps to ensure that there would be no power fail-



**Collector Madhavi Latha said a medical team would be made available at each counting hall. She directed the DMHO to coordinate with the GSL to provide emergency medical services.**

ures during the counting of votes on June 4.

She directed the PD of DWMA to take steps to provide drinking water at the counting centres on the counting day. The security personnel should allow those who are issued identity cards into the counting centres. An officer with the designation of Special Deputy Collector was appointed especially to monitor allowing authorized agents and counting staff into the counting centre.

District transport officials were instructed to provide buses to bring counting staff and agents of parties to the counting centre on the counting day. Municipal officials were instructed

to provide parking slots for vehicles on the University campus and take up sanitation on the campus of the University to keep the premises clean.

Initially, the postal ballots will be counted. The counting officers and staff were impart-

ed the needed training on how to take up the counting of postal ballots. The postal ballots and ETPBS counting will be taken up on the second floor in the Administrative block of the University. Specific assignments have been allocated to the election officials regarding counting EVM votes.

The Collector instructed the election officials, staff and officials of various government departments to work in a coordinated manner and complete the counting process without any confusion. Entire government machinery should work with diligence till the end of the counting process, Collector Madhavi Latha told them.



## 15 injured as RTC bus overturns

PNS ■ KURNOOL

APSRTC bus conductor was among 15 people injured when the bus overturned at Pedapadu village on the night of Monday.

Police said that the RTC bus was going to Kurnool from Emmiganore. The driver of the bus lost control resulting in it overturned on the road.

As many as 15 passengers, including the bus conductor, were injured in the accident. The injured were admitted to the GGH where the condition of the bus conductor was said to be critical. The driver of the bus was drowsy at the steering wheel which led to the accident, police said.

## Complete steps for counting of votes in two days: DC

PNS ■ ELURU

All necessary arrangements are being made for the counting of votes in which over 1000 officers and staff will take part in the Eluru district.

Elaborate arrangements are being made for the counting of votes to be taken up on June 4. Collector V Prasanna Venkatesh accompanied by Superintendent of Police D Mary Prashanthi, inspected the arrangements being made for the counting of votes on the campus of CR Reddy College here Tuesday.

The Collector directed the officials to complete the arrangements in two days. The counting of votes should be in such a manner that the agents of political parties can watch the process. Display boards should be erected in the counting centres to display the leads after the end of every round, the Collector told the officials.

Tables should be arranged



separately in the counting hall to count the votes of the Assembly and Parliament segments. A Special route should be formed to bring the EVMs from the strong room to the counting centre carefully, he said adding that outsiders and unauthorized persons should not be allowed to enter the route, he instructed the officials.

As many as 14 tables are being arranged to count the votes of each Assembly segment, Collector Prasanna Venkatesh made it clear. He

also inspected the place allocated for parking vehicles on the campus. Over 1000 officials and staffers from various government departments will take place in the counting of votes. Training progress was held for the Micro Observers, Counting Agents and Supervisor in this regard, the Collector added.

Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, DRO D Pushpamani and Municipal Commissioner S Venkata Krishna were among those who accompanied the Collector.



## Cases registered against Somireddy

PNS ■ NELLORE

Cases were registered against Telugu Desam party senior leader and former Minister Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy on the charge of distributing money to buy votes.

Minister for Agriculture Kakani Govardhan Reddy complained to the election Returning Officer with evidence stating that Somireddy distributed money to voters on the polling day.

Responding to the complaint, Sarvepalli Returning Officer China Obulesu directed the police to register cases against Somireddy. On the directions of RO, the police registered cases under Sections IPC 173-E, RC Act 123 Clause -1.

## UoH among top 12% of universities in the world

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

University of Hyderabad (UoH) is ranked among the top 12 per cent of universities in the world for international students. It is among the best ranked universities from India in the World Best Value University Rankings 2024 for international students.

The University Database Lead at Study Abroad Aide is the world's most comprehensive database of universities, encompassing over 8,000 institutions - including 3,349 institutions in the continent of Asia. After evaluating 3,349 higher educational institutions in 20 Asian countries, Study Abroad Aide has placed the University of Hyderabad in the top 12 per cent of universities in Asia.

Prof. B J Rao, Vice-Chancellor, UoH said, "Affordability and quality of education has been the positive outcomes for the university. We are happy at being ranked among the top 12 per cent in Asia and will make



efforts to do our best to be the first choice for international students in India".

The Study Abroad Aide (SAA) World Rankings for best value universities for international students features universities across 69 countries.

As the world's leading database of universities and colleges, Study Abroad Aide ranked all universities around the globe based on two metrics: affordability and academic reputation.

SAA database team col-

lects the official university website, location, university type, admission pages, tuition fee, English proficiency test scores and courses offered for Bachelor's and Master's degrees. To provide an accurate platform to aspiring international students, the following factors have been evaluated for ranking the institutions. They are international student body, total enrolment, ranking categories - best universities, most affordable universities and best value universities.

## 1.57 kg of ganja seized, woman arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The State Task Force team of the Excise department caught a woman on Tuesday while selling packets of ganja in Fatehnagar area of Balanagar, Hyderabad.

Sub-inspector B Balaraju said that the accused named Sheikh Zameen Been, has been selling ganja in Fatehnagar for years. She was selling a packet of ganja at Rs 300 to Rs 500. She bought it at Rs 600 from the Puranapool area and made it into small packets and then selling at Rs 10,000. The police arrested the accused, produced her in court and sent her to remand. Excise Superintendent Pradeep Rao appreciated the efforts made by head constable Yadagiri and constables Santosh Arun and Balaraju in the case.

## Inter-state child selling racket busted, 11 babies rescued

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As per the complaint of Manyam Sai Kumar (30), Medipally police rescued one baby girl along with three accused individuals and arrested three accused persons out of eleven on May 22. Following the interrogation with one of the accused, the police officials rescued 11 babies on Monday.

The accused A1) Shobarani, R/O: Peerzadiguda, Medipally A2) Hemalatha aka Swapna, R/O: Chengicherla, Medipally and A3) Shaik Saleem R/O: Peerzadiguda Medipally were arrested.

The remaining accused Kiran, Preethi, Kannaiah and others were found absconding. The police officials filed a case in Cr no. 579/2024 U/S 370,372,373 r/w 34 IPC, Sec 81.87,88 JJ Act-2015 of Medipally police station.

As per the confession by the accused Shobarani, it is stated that the culprits used to get the babies from Kiran and Preethi from Delhi and Kannaiah from



Pune. In all, 50 babies were supplied to the accused persons who in turn gave them to their agents. The agents used to sell the babies to the persons who are in need of babies in AP and TS in different places with a price ranging from Rs 1,80,000 to Rs 5,50,000 per baby with the help of mediators.

The accused persons received nearly Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000 for each baby as a profit in the process of selling. Till now, 11 babies were rescued from the accused in coordination with the CWC of

whom two have been sent to Shishuvihar for safe custody.

Under the leadership of Dr. Tarun Joshi, IPS, Commissioner of Police, Rachakonda, P.V.Padmaja, IPS, Dy. Commissioner of Police, Malkajgiri Zone, Rachakonda and under supervision of S.Chakrapani, ACP Malkajgiri-Division. The following team is involved in the detection of cases. i.e. R.Govinda Reddy, SHO Medipally, B.Prabhakar Reddy, SIP, A.Narsing Rao, SIP, S.Anil Kumar, SIP and team of PS Medipally.

## Hyd surges ahead with 26% lead share in GCC leasing

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad surged ahead with a 26% lead after Bengaluru, which had a 60% share in Global Capability Centre (GCC) leasing. CBRE South Asia Pvt. Ltd, a real estate consulting firm in India, reported a notable increase in GCC leasing activity, rising by approximately 17% in FY 2023-24 compared to the previous fiscal year. In total, GCCs leased 22.5 million sqft during FY 2023-24, a significant rise from the 19.2 million sqft leased in the preceding year. This growth observed from April 2023 to March 2024 was mainly driven by the engineering, manufacturing, BFSI (Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance) and technology sectors.

report, from January to March 2024, GCCs leased about 29% of the total office space in India, which adds up to 4.2 million sqft. Engineering and manufacturing companies took up over a quarter of this space, closely followed by automobile firms.

GCCs are significant drivers in India's office sector. With 1.3 million professionals as of 2019, GCCs made up 30-35% of total office leasing in India from 2017 to 2019 with over 1,250 operational centres. The survey shows, between 2020 and 2022, GCCs accounted for 38-43% of leasing, with over 1,580 centres and a talent pool of 1.66 million as of 2022. It's expected that GCCs will make up 35-40% of total office leasing from 2023 to 2025, with India hosting over 1,900

GCCs by 2025 and a talent pool exceeding 2 million.

The survey also states, India's skilled workforce, with 5.4 million tech experts, makes it a top destination for GCCs looking to expand their operations efficiently. The country offers competitive costs for talent, rentals and operations, making it attractive for businesses. Major global players in sectors like BFSI, technology and engineering are expanding their GCC presence in India, possibly setting up large campuses.

CBRE projects significant GCC leasing of 40-45 million sqft between 2024 and 2025, driven by companies establishing large campuses and new sectors like life sciences, automobiles and aviation joining the expansion.

## AIMIM leader Rasool Khan passes away

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) MLA Virasat Rasool Khan passed away in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

In 1989, Khan was elected MLA from Charminar. In 2009, he was elected from Nampally Assembly constituency.

Khan is survived by his wife and a son. AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi took to X and said, "Saddened to hear about the passing away of Virasat Rasool Khan. He was AIMIM's MLA for two terms from Charminar and Nampally and a municipal corporator before that. He was lovingly called Munnunawab."

## Former Intel chief Prabhakar Rao's life in danger, say Congress MLAs

Achampet MLA Dr Vamshikrishna files complaint with DGP requesting action against former MLA Guvvala Balaraj

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress MLAs have said that there is a danger to former Intelligence chief Prabhakar Rao's life.

Addressing the media at the Gandhi Bhavan here on Tuesday along with Achampet MLA Dr Vamshi Krishna, Mahubnagar MLA Yennam Srinivas Reddy said that it would be better for Prabhakar Rao, who is now in the US, to return to India and reveal what happened in the phone tapping case.

Otherwise, it is dangerous as someone involved in the phone tapping case may harm Prabhakar Rao physically, he said.



Yennam Srinivas Reddy said the KCR family had tapped the phones of BRS MLAs too. "The KCR government purchased phone-tapping equipment from abroad. I have information that BRS MLCs invested money in this. BRS

leaders are preventing Prabhakar Rao from coming back to India. The progress of the case depends on Prabhakar Rao returning and telling what happened. It is a test for our political leaders and the police. Thousands of phones were being tapped. The KCR government did it to stay in power forever," Yennam Srinivas Reddy said.

He said that he had filed a complaint with the DGP regarding phone tapping. BRS Ministers and BRS MLAs were behind the phone tapping. There is no need for the Congress government to engage in phone tapping, Yennam said and demanded that the DGP should take the

case seriously as it is not a simple one.

Dr Vamshi Krishna said that his phone was tapped with encouragement from former MLA Guvvala Balaraj. He said that he had filed a complaint with the DGP and IG seeking action against Guvvala Balaraj.

Phone tapping took place as per the directions of KCR and KTR. They tapped the phones of Revanth Reddy and his family too and also the phones of persons who spoke against KCR, he said, and added that 30 officials were involved in tapping phones.

Vamshi Krishna said that he would appeal to the CM to take action against the culprits after conducting a probe.

INDIA CORNER

## Bastar bandh call against 'fake' encounter gets mixed response

A call for 'Bastar bandh' given by the Sarva Adivasi Samaj (SAS) in protest against an alleged fake encounter in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh evoked mixed response on Tuesday. As many as 12 Naxalites were killed in an encounter with police near Pidia village in the district on May 10. Locals including family members of the deceased and some activists claimed that it was a fake encounter and the deceased were not Maoists, allegations rejected by the police and state government. SAS, an umbrella body of tribal organisations, had asked people to observe a shut-down across the seven districts of the Bastar division on Tuesday. Business establishments in some cities including Jagdalpur remained closed till late afternoon but the impact of the protest was less visible elsewhere, sources said. No untoward incident was reported from any part of the region, said police. The tribal-dominated Bastar division in south Chhattisgarh comprises the districts of Kanker, Kondagaon, Narayanpur, Bastar, Bijapur, Dantewada and Sukma.



## Rajasthan cancels registration of hospital over blunder

Rajasthan government issued orders to cancel the registration of a private hospital in Jhunjhunu where healthy kidney of a patient was removed during a surgery, officials said on Tuesday. The government will take further action against the hospital, which could also be an FIR, following an inquiry, they said. The healthy left kidney of a patient at Dhankar Hospital in Jhunjhunu was taken out, instead of the right kidney on May 15. Later she was taken to a hospital in Jaipur where doctors told her about the error. Additional Chief Secretary of Medical and Health Department Shubhra Singh said that a serious case of the removal of the left kidney of a female patient instead of the right kidney has come to light in Dhankar Hospital of Jhunjhunu. "The state government has cancelled the clinical establishment registration of the hospital with immediate effect and action is being taken to cancel the empanelment of this hospital in various government health schemes," she said.



## Scam probe: MP gov orders closure of 66 nursing colleges

The Madhya Pradesh government has ordered the closure of 66 nursing colleges across 31 districts in accordance with the High Court order in the alleged nursing college scam being probed by the CBI. The scam pertains to gross irregularities in the functioning of several nursing colleges which lacked infrastructure while some existed only on paper. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has directed the closure of 66 nursing colleges across 31 districts in accordance with the High Court order, as per the CMO. Yadav has directed officials to ensure that no student of these nursing colleges is affected and arrangements be made for them to appear for examination. The Commissioner of Medical Education Department has sent the list of these colleges to the respective district collectors and told them to act as per the HC's directives, the CMO said. The recognition of these colleges was already cancelled.



# India needs strong leader, stable govt: Jaishankar

Says ongoing conflicts worldwide won't end so quickly

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The world is in a tense situation with ongoing conflicts unlikely to end quickly and India in this scenario needs a stable government and a strong and powerful leader "with networking, standing and respect", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday.

Interacting with a select group of media persons here, he said there are ongoing conflicts in Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza-Iran and there are issues on the Indian borders too, adding a clear message should go that India has a strong leadership.

"The world is in a tense situation and the ongoing conflicts would not end so quickly and that's why India needs a stable government, a strong and powerful leader with networking, standing and respect," he said.

"If your family was in Ukraine during the Russia-Ukraine war, who would you want at the top of the nation - Prime Minister Narendra Modi or some other face," Jaishankar asked.

"I see four-five years of diffi-



"The world is in a tense situation and the ongoing conflicts would not end so quickly and that's why India needs a stable government, a strong and powerful leader with networking, standing and respect," he said.

cult times ahead and the electorates should wisely vote as similar conflicts could happen on our borders," he told the media persons.

China is constructing roads, bridges and model village at the border on the land it took in 1962 and had made a road to Siachen with the coordination of Pakistan and India has also deployed forces, improved logistics on the border and the budget for India-China border has been increased from Rs 3000 crore to Rs 15,000 crore, the minister said.

The idea behind the vibrant village programme under which

border villages are being developed is to stop flight of people from borders by creating basic facilities like infrastructure, water, digital connection and provide livelihood, Jaishankar said while responding to a question.

"We are living in a competitive world and China is asserting itself and India has also focused on manufacturing (Made In India) to make the country self-reliant, generate employment and self employment avenues for the overall development," he said.

The minister also said India has given a clear message that terrorism would not be tolerated

and terrorists would pay the price.

Ten years of the Modi government is a symbol of positive change, he said.

"Our support base is increasing in the United Nations (UN) under Modi's leadership," he said and added that "Modi is being looked upon as a strong leader and today, nations look up to India."

Referring to the issue of India's permanent membership at the UN, Jaishankar said that in 1944, India was not an independent nation and could not get the membership.

## Patnaik to become former CM of Odisha after June 4: Shah

PNS ■ BHADRAK/JAIPUR (ODISHA)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday asserted that Naveen Patnaik will become former CM of Odisha after June 4, exuding confidence about the BJP forming the next government in the state by securing more than 75 seats in the 147-member assembly.

Shah, addressing an election rally at Chandbali under the Bhadrak Lok Sabha constituency, also claimed that the saffron party is set to win 17 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha.

"Come June 4, and Naveen babu will no longer remain the chief minister, he will become the former CM... BJP is set to win 17 Lok Sabha seats and 75 assembly constituencies in Odisha," he said.

Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha.

Shah also said the BJP will ensure that the next chief minister is fluent in Odia, and understands the state's language, culture and tradition.

"Should a 'Tamil babu' run the government from behind the scene... By casting your vote in favour of the lotus symbol, bring a 'jan sevak' to rule



"Come June 4, and Naveen babu will no longer remain the chief minister, he will become the former CM... BJP is set to win 17 Lok Sabha seats and 75 assembly constituencies in Odisha," he said.

is our promise," he said.

Stating that lakhs of youths were migrating to other states in search of work, the home minister said: "Once the BJP forms government in Odisha, we will set up industries so that youths don't have to look for jobs elsewhere."

He also hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for providing free 5 kg of rice to the people of Odisha, and criticised Patnaik for distributing the rice in jute bags with his photographs.

"PM Modi's government is 'chawal wali sarkar', while Naveen Patnaik's government is 'jhole wali sarkar'," Shah added.

He said the BJP will return money to people cheated by chit-fund companies within 18 months of forming government in Odisha.

## 'Why BJP not using bulldozer against paper leak accused'

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday attacked the BJP, saying the ruling party always keeps its bulldozers ready but does not use them against those involved in exam paper leaks.

Yadav also said that after June 4, there will be "happy days" when the council of ministers (at the Centre) is going to be changed.

Addressing a joint rally with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Bansaon Lok Sabha constituency, Yadav said, "On June 4, happy days will come, happy days will come for the press as well. Mantri mandal (council of ministers) and 'media mandal' will change."

"This election is to save the Constitution," he said.

The SP chief further said that if the INDIA bloc forms government after June 4, the quantity of free ration will increase, and along with ration, (mobile) data will also be provided.

"INDIA bloc and Samajwadi Party have decided that you will be given government jobs under reservation. The Agniveer scheme will be scrapped," Yadav said.

### DEFAMATION CASE

## Delhi court refuses to summon Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday refused to summon Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a criminal complaint filed by a BJP leader who accused him of defamation for claiming that AAP leaders were approached to join the saffron party in return for cash.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tanya Bamniyal, however, summoned AAP leader Atishi, saying "prima facie" there was sufficient evidence against her in the matter.

The judge directed Atishi, a minister in the Kejriwal cabinet, to appear before the court on June 29.

BJP leader Praveen Shankar Kapoor had filed a case against Kejriwal and Atishi over poaching allegations made by the two.

"Having considered the facts and circumstances, the testimonies of the complainant's witnesses, the evidence placed on record, it prima facie appears that the alleged accused no. 1 (Atishi) has made specific defamatory statements as aforementioned against the complainant," the judge said.



judge said.

Further, it prima facie appears that the aforesaid defamatory statements made by Atishi have been sufficiently published in the electronic media/social media which may make the right-thinking members of the society against the complainant, the judge said.

It appears that Atishi, by her spoken words and by words which were intended to be read, has made defamatory imputations which prima facie have lowered the reputation of the complainant amongst the right-thinking members of the society and the same has been made knowing and intending to harm the reputation of the complainant, the judge added.

## Court sends Bibhav to three-day police custody

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Tuesday granted three days to Delhi Police for custodial interrogation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, who has been accused of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal. Maliwal was allegedly assaulted at the chief minister's official residence on May 13. Metropolitan Magistrate Gaurav Goyal sent Kumar to police custody till May 31. A detailed order from the court is awaited. Delhi Police had sought five days' custody of

the accused. Kumar's counsel opposed the Delhi Police's plea for his custodial interrogation, claiming it had no evidence. On Monday, Kumar's bail plea was dismissed by a sessions court, which said there appeared no "pre-meditation" by Maliwal in lodging the FIR and that her allegations could not be "swiped away". Kumar was arrested on May 18. He was sent to police custody for five days on the same day by a magisterial court, which observed that his anticipatory bail plea had become infructuous because of his arrest.

# 'Adversaries of Lord Ram have never found lasting peace'

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

## UP CM Adityanath targets Cong, SP

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said the Congress and Samajwadi Party leaders seem to have lost their minds on the issue of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and added the "adversaries of Lord Ram have never found lasting peace".

Addressing an election rally in Gorakhpur, Adityanath said, "Congress says the construction of the temple has sent a wrong message globally and should not have been built, whereas the Samajwadi Party dismisses the



temple as useless. The leaders of both parties seem to have lost

their minds."

"The Ram Bhakts (devotees) have built an international airport named after Maharishi Valmiki in Ayodhya, a waiting room named after Shri Ram's friend Nishadraj, and a restaurant named after Mata Shabari. They have also installed a 56-foot statue in honour of Nishadraj in Prayagraj," he pointed out, stressing that no follower of Nishadraj can align with the traitors of Ram. Adityanath said the adversaries of Lord Ram have always faced downfall regardless of their stature or power.

"His blessings are focused on progress and development. Today, devotees of Lord Ram are working towards the nation's development, from expanding roads from two lanes to 12 lanes, building AIIMS, medical colleges, IITs, IIMs, and airports, to providing tap water to every household and promoting industrialisation," he added.

## Congress demands CBI probe in Pune Porsche crash, says Fadnavis must resign

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Congress in Maharashtra on Tuesday demanded a CBI probe into the Porsche crash incident in Pune, in which two persons died, and said Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis should step down. Two IT professionals lost their lives when a Porsche allegedly driven by a 17-year-old in an inebriated state ran over them in the Kalyani Nagar area of Pune city on May 19.

The incident sparked outrage after the Juvenile Justice Board granted bail to the teenager and asked him to write an essay on road accidents, but he was later sent to an observation home till June 5. The police have since arrested the teenager's father, grandfather, and Dr Ajay Taware, head of the Forensic Medicine department of the Sassoon General Hospital and its chief medical officer, Dr Shrihari Halnor, for allegedly manipulating the blood samples of the juvenile.

## Welfare schemes, policies in India not oriented towards poor: Chidambaram

PNS ■ KOZHIKODE (KERALA)

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Tuesday said the various welfare schemes and policies in the country are "not pivoted to the poor".

Chidambaram said an egalitarian society can be created only if the schemes and policies are oriented towards the poor. The former union minister was

speaking on the topic 'Inclusive Growth: Myth and Reality' at the M P Veerendra Kumar Commemorative event organised by the RJD here.

He said, "Unless we understand the economic and social hierarchies that mirror each other, and reorient our policies towards the bottom, especially the SCs, STs and other depressed sections, it will not be possible to call us an egalitarian society". He pointed out that the present society is not equal or reasonably equal, fair or just.

"Not that it can never be. You can build

an egalitarian society. Purely capitalist and rich countries have built egalitarian societies," he said.

Chidambaram said that egalitarian societies can be built by making healthcare and education universal and free.

"Unfortunately, our concept of an egalitarian society does not include universal and free healthcare and education. In most western countries, especially European nations, education is free from kindergarten to post-graduation. Healthcare is free from a minor illness to major surgeries," he said.

# Urbanisation led to 60% more night-time warming in Indian cities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Urbanisation has led to nearly 60 per cent more night-time warming in over 140 prominent Indian cities compared to non-urban areas surrounding them, a new research from the Indian Institute of Technology Bhubaneswar has found.

According to the research, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Rajkot had the highest urban effect, while Delhi-NCR and Pune were found to be at the fourth and fifth position, respectively. Urbanisation is known to be

responsible for the urban heat island (UHI) effect, in which the concrete and asphalt (used in constructing roads and pavements) surfaces store heat during the day and release it in the evening, thereby raising night-time temperatures.

Over time, this heat further affects other aspects of climate, including rainfall and pollution, researchers said in the study published in the journal Nature Cities. The study sought to determine how much urbanisation and local climate change each contributed to raising night-



time temperatures over the past two decades (2003-2020).

"The mean urban effect for all these cities across India was

found to be 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade. This leads to an estimate of 37.73 per cent of the total urban warming being linked to urbanisation -- that is, nearly 60 per cent enhancement of warming relative to the surrounding non-urban areas," the authors wrote. They also found that cities in the northwestern, north-eastern and southern regions showed a "more pronounced increase" in night-time temperatures than in the other parts of the country.

However, the contribution of urbanisation towards night-time

warming was higher in the eastern and central Indian cities, which are developing and thereby, undergoing rapid expansion, the researchers said. Almost all the cities, included in the analysis, showed rising night-time surface temperatures, which have increased by about 0.53 degrees Celsius on average every decade.

Further, the trend of hotter night-time temperatures was not limited to the cities, as most of India warmed by 0.26 degrees Celsius on average every decade during the period studied, the researchers said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A positive vote

The highest voter turnout in Kashmir in three decades bodes well for Assembly polls

At a time when almost the entire nation is reluctant to exercise its franchise, Kashmiris have shown courage and resilience to come out and vote despite its high-risk perception. Only Kashmir and Bengal have shown a surge in voter turnout this election. Bengal's case is understandable as it has been a political State all along but Kashmir has never shown such keen interest in general elections as in 2024. This surge in civic participation is being hailed by the Election Commission (EC) as a promising indicator for the forthcoming Assembly elections. It is being seen as a crucial step towards the restoration of democracy in the State. On August 5, 2019, the Government of India abrogated Article 370, which granted special autonomy to the region of Jammu and Kashmir. The move was accompanied by a series of political and administrative changes, including the bifurcation of the State into the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The decision was met with mixed reactions, both domestically and internationally, and led to a period of political instability and security concerns in the region. In the aftermath of this significant constitutional change, the Central Government has focused on integrating the region more closely with the rest of India, promising development, investment and a return to normalcy. One of the key components of this strategy has been the re-establishment of a democratic framework through local and Assembly elections. However, the biggest impediment had been people's resistance and mistrust of the civic authorities.



Now that they have voted in high numbers, they have in a way shown their willingness to have a democratic Government at the State level. The recent elections, which saw the highest voter turnout in three decades, mark a significant milestone in this process. The voter participation was markedly higher compared to previous elections, indicating a renewed faith in the democratic process among the Valley residents. This increase in voter turnout can be attributed to several factors, including improved security and Government initiative. This unprecedented voter turnout is a good omen for the upcoming Assembly elections. These elections are viewed as a pivotal moment for the restoration of democratic governance in J&K. The high turnout suggests that the people are eager to participate in the democratic process and would have their voices heard in governance. Their active civic engagement is essential for the legitimacy and success of the Assembly elections. It also reflects a broader acceptance of the political changes that have occurred since the abrogation of Article 370. Despite this positive development, several challenges remain. Additionally, the Government and EC need to address the grievances and aspirations of various sections of people to maintain the momentum of democratic engagement. Now the poll panel must ensure that the upcoming elections are free, fair and transparent, with a focus on maintaining the momentum of increased voter participation.

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# India needs substantial defence investment



ASHOK K MEHTA

The BJP's defence manifesto, dubbed 'Modi ki guarantee,' pledges robust security measures but faces criticism for overlooking persistent threats and insufficient defence spending

India's Twin Challenges Warrant Active Deterrence: Achievable through Investment in Defence BJP's defence and national security manifesto is Modi ki guarantee for Surakshit Bharat. It launched a massive 15-day campaign to invite suggestions through face-to-face meetings and the NaMo app from around 10 mn supporters. The election manifesto is immersed in Modi pictures and a surfeit of Modi ki guarantees. There is plenty the BJP is taking credit for. Eliminating terrorism though attacks occurred only last week in J&K. Cross Border Terrorism has a tragic history: attack on Parliament in December 2001 (under BJP rule) and Mumbai 2008 under United Progressive Alliance (UPA) dispensation. In 2001 BJP applied coercive diplomacy -Operation Parakaram- which was partially successful. In 2008 UPA exercised strategic restraint — doing nothing. Its zero tolerance for terrorism was demonstrated by Uri and Myanmar surgical strikes in 2016 and Balakot air strikes in 2019. These created deterrence against spectacular terrorism. BJP's claim of no attack in the last decade is wrong: terrorists struck at Pathankot, Pulwama and Uri Brigade Headquarters and 2950 civilians and security forces were killed in terrorist-related incidents between 2014 and 2023. BJP's inventory of achievements is impressive: revocation of Article 370, 52 per cent reduction in Left Wing Terrorism, with Home Minister Amit Shah declaring it will be crushed within three years. There is an overall decline of 73 per cent in the insurgency in the northeast but no mention of Manipur where violence has continued for one year and repelling ordered twice. Manipur, a serious embarrassment for the Government will reignite insurgency. Given the violent situation on the India-Myanmar border, with the Junta fighting a losing battle with rebels, Myanmar will present a major threat to the North East. Hailing CDS as an achievement, the BJP emphasised the completion of theorisation soonest. Further infrastructure development in the northern



borders is matched by a thrust towards the security of the Indian Ocean Region. Defence manufacturing and Atmanirbharta figure prominently under Making India a Global Manufacturing Hub. There is no mention of China or Pakistan and dealing with the twin threats they pose even as the opposition has attacked the Government for loss of territory in east Ladakh which the Government has denied emphatically. Clean chit to China will resolve the border dispute on India's terms difficult if not impossible. Restoration of status quo ante (April 20, 2020), demanded by successive Army Chiefs, is also not realizable. The lack of political guidance to the Armed Forces is a major deficiency. The first indication in four years that agreement on theorisation is nearing came from RM Rajnath Singh this month. Leaving it to the CDS whose operational role is unclear to obtain consensus on the allocation of resources, the job profile of service Chiefs when theatre commanders are in place and operational command and control of theatres is unworkable without inputs from RM and NSA to CDS. Equally, NSA Ajit Doval and the National Security Council Secretariat have to update the National Security Strategy submitted by Integrated Defence Staff in 2021. Surprisingly, the Government has not taken



DEFENCE ALLOCATION HAS PLUMMETED FROM A HIGH OF 3.5 PER CENT IN CONGRESS RULE IN THE LATE 1980s WHEN I WAS A MEMBER OF THE DEFENCE PLANNING STAFF TO LESS THAN 2 PER CENT TODAY, EVEN WHEN THE GDP HAS RISEN EXPONENTIALLY

these two interlinked issues — Theatrisation and NSS— seriously enough. Speculation is rife these will happen within one year of BJP 3.0. During the UPA rule, NSS was prepared thrice. The issue most befuddling is the static of defence spending on which the 2024 BJP manifesto is silent. The Congress on the other hand has stated in its current manifesto that it will arrest the decline in defence spending and allocate sufficient funds. Sufficiency of funds is a challenge no Government has addressed. Defence allocation has plummeted from a high of 3.5 per cent in Congress rule in the late 1980s when I was a member of the Defence Planning Staff to less than 2 per cent today even when the GDP has risen exponentially. The latest SIPRI report shows India's defence budget is USD 84bn compared to China's USD 296 bn. In defence allocation, for 2024-25, defence outlay was increased by 4.7 per cent which is the lowest in ten years (except in 2020-21) when it was 1.45 per cent of the GDP. As a percentage of GDP defence spending has not reached even 2 per cent at a time when two full-fledged wars are being fought along with several skirmishes. The capital budget for modernisation best illustrates the parsimony: the gap between the amount demanded and the amount allocated in 2015-16 was Rs 16,646 crore while in 2022-23 it rose to Rs 63,328 crore. Government officials offer the perennial excuse that defence forces can't spend the money. Amit Cowshish who was financial advisor (Acquisition) a decade ago says the 1.9 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal is 13 per cent of Government expenditure. A defence spending budget which is 3 per cent of GDP alone can begin to catch up with China in military capability. The rest of the world is investing hugely in defence with 31 Nato nations committed to reaching 2 per cent of GDP with the UK pledging to reach 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027. Even pacifist Japan has decided to put aside the 1 per cent spending on defence constitutional limitation and will spend 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027 and invest USD 315 bn to augment capabilities and deterrence. The capital cost of catheterisation and attendant reforms have to be factored in. Modi has to bite the bullet to deter China and with Jaishankar try to make the twin threat challenge one-front. Modi's This is not the era of war is day-dreaming! (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

### PICTALK



Students celebrate with their teacher over Secondary School Certificate (SSC) results, in Mumbai

PTI

## Nurture dreams with open eyes and determination

Believe in the power of continued dreaming and the importance of supporting others in their journey towards realising their aspirations

Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon on 21 July 1969. We read about the historical event in the newspapers the next day. I think on a subconscious level, the event sowed the seed of the first dream that I saw with open eyes. For days on end, all that I could think of was ways to create a miniature earth and moon within the confines of our bedroom and the ways that I could send my own Apollo to the moon. My dreams kept on evolving. At that stage, all that I would look forward to was to move to the next class with good marks. Much later, coming from a family of first-generation engineers, it was only natural for me to join an engineering course. Towards the end of my course, I started dreaming of becoming an entrepreneur. I realised the difficulties in pursuing this goal at that stage due to the limitations of a middle-class background. I parked my dream, to be retrieved at an appropriate time. I thought of my next steps. At the age of 21, it was only



natural to dream of a good job, followed by marriage and children and promotions; till I realised that I wanted something beyond the predictable routine of a Government job. This led me to join the private sector. It was now time to bring forward my earlier dream of being an entrepreneur. The dreams kept on evolving with my advancing age; some were discarded, some were attained and few remain, hoping for fruition in the years to come. One unfulfilled dream is to help others, much younger and less privileged than me, to dream. A child is born a child. It does not know the meaning of being

poor, till others make it conscious of the disparity. I firmly believe that each human being dreams with open eyes; it could be a prayer to be able to see the dawn next day, a hope that the wages would be better tomorrow, or the belief in a better life. I know a couple, now settled in America, who have started a foundation to assist the underprivileged young. The lady passionately told me about the introductory annual session that they arrange for the youngsters, usually at some rated property, to give them exposure to a life that currently is beyond their means, but which they might be able to lead one day if they pursue their dreams. I was sceptical as I thought that such an environment might be too intimidating. My fears might be unfounded. The Internet has made available a plethora of possibilities to the younger generation. A young boy, whose education we have been supporting for the past few years, wants to be an astronaut. He might not

make it, but the best advice that I could give him and others, is to continue to dream even if you fail — there is always something new to look forward to. We know of people who get paralysed or lose their eyesight and sometimes even their limbs. Yet, there are many instances of people overcoming their handicaps through sheer grit and courage. A visually impaired young woman found dumped in a waste bin 25 years back, cleared Maharashtra services examinations recently. There are many more around us. All that they need is for someone to help them nurture their dreams. We need only to remember writer Mary Anne Radmacher, "Nurturing is not complex. It's simply being tuned in to the thing or person before you and offering small gestures toward what it needs at that time." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### ERRANT VETS KILL KERALA'S WILDLIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Errant vets shoot to kill Kerala big cats, jumbos," published on May 27, this is my response. The recent deaths among wild animals in Kerala, including elephants, tigers, leopards and cheetahs, raise serious concerns about the State's conservation efforts. The tranquillizer shots administered by veterinarians are fatal in many cases, leading to questions about the competence of veterinary doctors and the quality of the drugs used. The animals are often captured and then killed, with the excuse that they are "trespassing" into human settlements in search of food and water. However, a closer examination reveals that the encroachment is the other way around, with human settlements expanding into former reserve forests. The destruction of water bodies and greenery due to encroachment and illegal quarrying has left the animals without a place to live, leading to starvation and, ultimately, death. The situation is dire and if left unchecked, Kerala's forests may soon become deserts and its wildlife may become museum pieces. Dhruv Malhotra | Mumbai

#### WAR IN WEST ASIA PERSISTS

Madam — Apropos the news story "Hamas racket attack triggers air raid sirens in Tel Aviv," published on May 27, this is my response. There seems to be no end to the war in West Asia. While Hamas claimed on Sunday that it fired a 'large rocket barrage' at Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv, Israel has ignored the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) ruling, asking it to halt its offensive in Rafah immediately. It has also intensified attacks across Gaza. Israel's decision to ignore the ICJ ruling is unfortunate. In persisting with its military action to 'eliminate Hamas', Israel has inflicted untold suffering on Palestinians, giving rise to a humanitarian crisis in a region that could do without renewed polarisation. Far from achieving its objectives of destroying Hamas and its military infrastructure, Israel is probably aiding the terrorist group's fresh

#### Domestic airfares remain globally low



Apropos the news story "Domestic airfares on a northward trajectory; still among the lowest globally, say experts," published on May 27, this is my response. As a regular newspaper reader, the escalating airfares in India, soaring up to 40 per cent, have caught my attention. Despite being among the lowest globally, the recent surge reflects the challenges faced by the aviation industry, primarily due to capacity constraints exacerbated

by supply chain issues. The rise in fares, though significant in percentage, seems less drastic considering inflationary pressures. Industry experts suggest this trend may persist until FY2026, signaling a structural shift. However, the affordability of air travel in India, compared to developed markets, remains commendable. The discourse around finding a balance between operational efficiency and revenue generation is crucial. Airlines must navigate this delicate equilibrium to ensure sustainability in a dynamic market landscape. Achieving profitability at varying load factors underscores the complexity of the aviation business, emphasising the need for adaptive strategies. In essence, while the surge in airfares may present short-term challenges, addressing underlying capacity issues and maintaining a balance between cost and revenue is imperative for long-term viability. Aaradhya Patel | Delhi

recruitment. In disregarding calls from its closest ally, the US, Israel is undermining the rules-based global order. About 143 countries have supported full UN membership for Palestine and three European countries—Ireland, Norway and Spain—have decided to formally recognise Palestine as a State for 'peace in the Middle East'. Israel's friends and partners, the US in particular, need to stress to Tel Aviv the diminishing returns of its current course of action. The peace and security in the region and the fate of the multilateral rules-based order hang in the balance. Disruptions like these have a long-term ripple effect on an already tense world. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

#### MARVELLOUS ANATOMY OF A BRANCH

Madam — Apropos the news story "Genesis of Growth: From Bud to Branch," published on May 26, this is my response. The intricate anatomy of a branch is a testament to the remarkable adaptability and resilience of trees. From the initial bud formation to the eventual shedding of

unproductive branches, each stage of growth is a masterclass in strategic planning and resource allocation. The delicate balance between auxin and cytokinin hormones ensures that the tree grows in a way that maximises its exposure to sunlight and minimises shading, while the development of lignin provides a robust defence against pathogens and pests. The branching patterns of trees are a reflection of their genetic makeup and environmental conditions, with different species adopting various strategies to optimise their growth and survival. The branches themselves serve as vital conduits for water and nutrient transport, providing habitat and support for a diverse range of organisms. Ultimately, the cycle of growth and retreat in trees serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of change and the wisdom of knowing when to let go, inspiring us to adapt and evolve in our own lives. Kiara Mehta | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE MYSTICAL NATURE OF SHIVA'S THIRD EYE

It is a potent symbol of destruction, creation and spiritual awakening



SWAMI CHARANASHRIT

In Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva, the destroyer and transformer among the Trimurti, is often depicted with a third eye on his forehead. This eye is not just a physical feature but a powerful symbol with deep spiritual and metaphysical connotations.

## The Origin of Shiva's Third Eye

The third eye of Shiva, also known as the "eye of wisdom," is associated with many legends and mythological stories. One prominent story explains how Shiva's third eye emerged. It is said that when Shiva was in deep meditation, Kamadeva, the god of love, attempted to disturb his meditation by shooting an arrow of desire. In his fury, Shiva opened his third eye, from which a powerful beam of fire emerged, reducing Kamadeva to ashes. This event not only signifies the destructive aspect of Shiva but also underscores the concept of burning away desires and illusions to achieve a higher State of consciousness.

## Symbolic Meaning

**Spiritual Insight:** The third eye is often seen as the center of higher consciousness and wisdom. It represents the ability to see beyond the physical and perceive the underlying truths of the universe. In this sense, Shiva's third eye signifies spiritual awakening and enlightenment.

**Destruction and Regeneration:** Shiva's third eye embodies his role as the destroyer of evil and ignorance. The fire that emanates from the third eye symbolises the destruction of impurities and the subsequent regeneration and purification of the soul. This destructive power is necessary for the creation of a new and purer State of being.

**Inner Vision:** Beyond its destructive capabilities, the third eye is also a source of inner vision and clarity. It allows Shiva to see beyond the superficial and understand the deeper realities of existence. This inner vision is essential for guiding his actions and decisions, making Shiva a just and wise deity.



## Cultural and Religious Significance

The third eye holds profound importance in various aspects of Hindu culture and spirituality. It is often associated with the "Ajna" or "brow" chakra, one of the seven primary chakras in the human body, which is believed to govern intuition and insight. Practitioners of meditation and yoga often focus on this chakra to develop their inner vision and achieve spiritual growth.

In iconography, Shiva's third eye is frequently depicted in sculptures, paintings and other forms of art. It serves as a reminder of the deity's transcendent powers and his ability to look beyond the ordinary. Temples dedicated to Shiva often have representations of the third eye, symbolising the presence of divine wisdom and protection.

## The Third Eye in Contemporary Understanding

In modern times, the concept of the third eye has transcended religious boundaries and has been embraced in various spiritual and esoteric traditions around the world. It is commonly associated with the pineal gland in the brain, which is thought to play a role in regulating circadian rhythms and has been linked to mystical experiences.

For many spiritual seekers, the third eye represents the pursuit of higher knowledge and self-awareness. Practices such as meditation, mindfulness and certain forms of yoga are often aimed at "opening" the third eye, enabling individuals to gain deeper insights into their lives and the universe. Shiva's third eye encapsulates the essence of Shiva's role in the Hindu pantheon as a deity who destroys in order to create anew, who sees beyond the physical to understand the profound truths of existence. The third eye serves as a guiding light towards enlightenment and inner peace, reminding us of the power of true vision and the necessity of transcending the illusions of the material world.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

## Creating food systems for tropical climate



ISHOO RATNESH SRIVASTAVA

As climate change reshapes our environment, its impact on food systems becomes clear. We must model our food systems for resilience to ensure food security in a warmer world



Climate change is bound to affect our food systems. The impact of rising CO2 levels may impact crop yields in complex ways like altering plant metabolism, changing soil fertility, erosion by pests and several others. Thus our food systems must be modelled for resilience in a warmer world. While we must make behavioural shifts in our food habits, it is also important to revisit history to learn how science has contributed to addressing the food question in the past. The introduction of high-yielding varieties (HYVs) during the Green Revolution made us overcome the Malthusian trap in the mid-20th century, which threatened a mass starvation-like situation. HYVs produced more grains per plant, requiring less land and resources, however, the use of fertilisers and pesticides also increased.

## Targeted &amp; Precision Gene Editing

Genetic alterations in plant breeding are both natural and human-induced and have been there for years. These methods involve cross-breeding, altering DNA with radiation or planting a gene like a pest-resistant Bt gene inserted in the cotton seed. The conventional methods for human interventions involve changes in a large part of a plant's genetics, resulting in both intended and uncertain consequences like enhancing one trait and an inadvertent suppression of others. However, technologies like CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) offer precision cut-and-paste-like operations at the ladder level in the DNA helix (the nucleotides).

This accuracy thus minimises the risk of unintended edits in the genetic material. The tool is derived from natural defence systems in bacteria and the



GENETIC ALTERATIONS IN PLANT BREEDING ARE BOTH NATURAL AND HUMAN-INDUCED AND HAVE BEEN THERE FOR YEARS. THESE METHODS INVOLVE CROSS-BREEDING, ALTERING DNA WITH RADIATION OR PLANTING A GENE LIKE A PEST-RESISTANT BT GENE INSERTED IN THE COTTON SEED

breakthrough led to a Nobel Prize win for Jennifer Doudna and Emmanuelle Charpentier in the year 2020.

To get a more intuitive feel of the technology, think of the conventional gene editing technologies similar to a random insertion of a chapter in a book which might look rather messy whereas CRISPR has the ability of adding that chapter well aligned with the context and information flow of that book. Although not entirely free of risks, it is widely believed that CRISPR holds immense potential for creating climate-resilient crops like a wheat plant thriving in summer, similar to how the HYVs addressed the challenges during the Green Revolution.

## The AI Advantage :

Proteins are the building blocks of life. These proteins are synthesised upon activation of certain genes in the plant or animal cell. One of the biggest mysteries of life on earth is to understand what triggers the synthesis of a particular protein in a cell and how a protein molecule is shaped in 3-D, as this understanding helps in determining the protein's function and how it would interact with other such molecules to create organ structures or say an enzyme.

AI tools like Google's AlphaFold attempt to predict these 3-D structures of protein molecules by reading the cellular codes in the form of amino acid sequences. It's quite similar to imagining a complex machine and its functional-

ity, say an automobile engine, merely by reading the instruction booklet meant for its assembly. No doubt an AI-enabled enhanced and faster understanding of life's fundamental systems like the protein structures can help in the creation of more resilient crop varieties.

Key Concerns: No doubt there are risks associated with gene edits. It is very much like tinkering with life's basic systems and this may have consequences beyond the intended genetic material, species, geographies and time horizons. Beyond the perceived threat of these scientific misadventures, there are ethical concerns associated as well like the creation of designer babies or large corporations monopolising the technology.

## Way Forward:

While we must tread with caution in the gene space, we should also realise that genetically modified organisms have already entered into the world's food systems. A large part of animal feed is genetically engineered and several ingredients in human food too have such modifications.

The benefits of gene tech are not limited to food crops rather they have path-breaking implications on human health in terms of disease prevention or cure and myriad others. The recent introduction of indigenous CAR-T cell therapy by India, targeted towards genetically engineering T cells (immune system cells) for cancer cure is one such example. The Indian Council of

Agricultural Research is working in the field of CRISPR to develop crop varieties suitable to the country's needs.

The need of the hour is to build robust knowledge systems, invest in genetic engineering research, create robust institutional mechanisms for stakeholder collaboration including the consumers and envisage regulations that blend civilisational ethics and the tenets of contemporary science. In conclusion, climate change necessitates a resilient approach to our food systems, incorporating advanced technologies like CRISPR for precise genetic modifications.

This innovative tool, inspired by natural bacterial defenses, offers targeted solutions for creating climate-resilient crops with minimal unintended effects.

Combined with AI advancements in understanding protein structures, these technologies promise significant improvements in agricultural productivity and sustainability. While ethical and safety concerns remain, the benefits of genetic engineering extend beyond agriculture to human health.

By investing in research, fostering collaboration and establishing ethical regulations, we can harness these advancements to secure our food future in a warming world.

(The author is an officer of the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers. He has been a UK Commonwealth Scholar; views are personal)

## Time to prioritise human life over commerce

The Ghatkopar tragedy underscores the urgent need for stricter safety measures and accountability to prevent future incidents driven by commercial greed

In a massive human tragedy, involving human negligence, 16 innocent lives were lost and almost 75 people were injured when a hoarding fell on a petrol pump in Ghatkopar, a suburb in Mumbai on May 13. It is guessed that the hoarding had a weak foundation and probably fell due to the heavy winds that were blowing that day and struck several people who were present at a nearby petrol pump. It is learnt that the hoarding was three times the size sanctioned by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and stood on the land owned by the Government Railway Polic (GRP). The advertising panel that held the hoarding in question was put by Ego Media whose owner Bhavesh Bhide



SIDDHARTHA MISHRA

was arrested in this connection on Thursday. This incident would not have occurred if care had been taken by those who are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring observance of legal norms. Any damage or harm caused to persons, naturally, raises concerns of some kind of negligence or human carelessness. It is apparent that some negligence was involved and legal norms were violated.

There was negligence on the part of the people who put up such a dangerous advertising panel as well as the local authorities.

The natural question here is why was the company allowed to put an advertising panel, that posed danger to human lives, in violation of the relevant norms and why some action to remove such a dangerous panel was not taken in time by the concerned authorities. There is clear negligence of the owners and workers of the company that put this panel on the public road as they could reasonably foresee that such a panel may cause harm or injury if care is not taken. But there is also apparent negligence of the local authorities whose accountability is required to be fixed

as their responsibility is to keep watch on city roads and, wherever necessary, take quick action to prevent accidents and damage. In this particular matter also, there is an obvious indifference towards the breach of duty and negligence as is apparent in the general attitude of apathy and lackadaisical approach in the Government functionaries as well as among the common people in India. This incident has posed many questions involving faulty urban governance in Indian cities as well as highlighting the general apathy towards human life in our country.

There is no doubt that the Ghatkopar incident was an accident and accidents do occur despite precautions and they happen even in the most

developed nations. But incidents and accidents causing deaths, injuries and damages are rampant in India, perhaps, much more than in any other country.

The national newspapers are full of news of deaths, injuries and damages caused either due to road accidents, dog attacks, fire incidents, drowning in rivers, lakes and swimming pools or due to negligence in many other situations including while doing medical procedures. What is surprising is that such news does not invite or attract much public reaction and only some hue and cry is raised in bigger matters for some time which is gradually forgotten. The Government officials also do not seem much bothered by such incidents and they also respond

momentarily to assuage the public outcry for the time being.

The thought that perplexes one here is how unfortunately so many innocent and precious lives were lost and what impact it would have had on their family members. Many of those who died must have been the sole breadwinners in the family on whose income the family may have been dependent. The unexpected deaths of near ones and injuries to those who survived must have caused huge shock and left indelible marks on the psyches of relatives and injured that will remain a constant source of pain for them for the rest of their lives. The loss of relatives as well as the source of income will turn this tragedy into a double

jeopardy for the shattered and grieving family members.

Anyone, with an awakened mind and a sensitive heart, who is witnessing rampant human tragedies regularly happening in India, naturally shudders to think about whether there is any guarantee of security or value of human life in this country. Ghatkopar tragedy among other such incidents again compels one to think that whether every individual, in this country, is so insecure and vulnerable that anything can happen to them anytime and anywhere and there is always a possibility of an accident occurring with them due to negligence and callous apathy of others towards human life. This dismal atmosphere makes the author recall a Statement

from a friend's son who had long back gone to study in England. When asked about the difference in life between India and England, he sadly quipped that in England people do not let even their animals die and go to every extent to save their lives, but in India, we see people regularly dying like animals, without much compassion being felt by Government or people. Hope that the Ghatkopar incident will raise concerns and make the Government and people more careful and responsible and a general atmosphere of care and value for human life shall prevail to save precious human lives in our nation.

(The author is a Sr Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, the University of Delhi; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

### Average air ticket prices spike 9% in Jan-March period: FCM Travel

Average air ticket prices in India spiked 9 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, primarily on account of general increase in travel demand and 'much stronger' economic growth, according to Australian Securities Exchange-listed FCM Travel. At the same time, FCM Travel said there was a 20 per cent jump in the premium class bookings in the January-March period compared to the same period last year, driven by sectors such as manufacturing IT as well as conglomerates. "Domestic air capacity has increased more than 3 per cent but due to the demand in travel, we have seen average ticket prices increase by 9 per cent which is attributed to a much stronger economic growth and a general increase in demand for travel," said Sunny Sodhi, Managing Director of FCM Travel India. Popular domestic routes for business travel include Delhi to Mumbai, Mumbai to Delhi, and Bengaluru to Mumbai, he added.



### Coal India incorporates new arm for coal-to-chemical business

State-owned Coal India on Tuesday announced the incorporation of a subsidiary firm, Bharat Coal Gasification and Chemicals Ltd (BCGCL) for undertaking a coal-to-chemicals business. Coal India (CIL) holds a majority 51 per cent stake in the new entity while the remaining 49 per cent is owned by BHEL, the coal behemoth informed the BSE. Coal India in February signed a joint venture agreement with Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) for undertaking a coal-to-chemicals business. Clearance of NITI Aayog and the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has been received for the formation of the joint venture company between BHEL and CIL, the filing said. "Bharat Coal Gasification & Chemicals Ltd has been incorporated... for coal to chemicals business to produce ammonia and nitric acid as intermediate products and ammonium nitrate as end product," the filing said.



### Ice pop brand Skippi raises Rs 10 crore

Skippi, an ice pop brand, on Tuesday said it has raised Rs 10 crore in a Pre-series A funding round led by Hyderabad Angel Network (HAN) and Venture Catalysts (VCATs). Besides, the company is in discussions to raise an additional Rs 7 crore in the coming weeks, according to a statement. "The capital will be primarily allocated to brand building and marketing initiatives, with a focus on enhancing working capital, driving new product development, and hiring key leadership personnel for the next phase of growth," it said. Launched in 2021, Skippi is available in over 20,000 outlets nationwide and through major online platforms. Its monthly revenues have increased 80 times from initial figures of Rs 5-7 lakh since appearing on Shark Tank Season 1. The company, which aims to reach a Rs 100 crore valuation, has expansion and innovative product offerings, including the recent introduction of cornsticks and cream rolls.



# India, Singapore set to firm up key pacts to boost ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Singapore are looking at firming up a set of ambitious agreements to shore up cooperation in areas of green economy, digitalisation, energy, food security, health-care and skill development in the next few months in line with their strategic ties, diplomatic sources said on Tuesday. The pacts are likely to be finalised by around September-October as both sides identified the "priority areas" after a series of extensive deliberations, they said.

A comprehensive stock-taking of the bilateral ties is expected at the next meeting of India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR), a mechanism that was established to take the bilateral relations to a new level, the sources said. The inaugural meeting of the ISMR that took place on September 17, 2022 in Delhi



"There is an intent on both sides to move forward on the ambitious agreements within the first 100 days of formation of a new government in India," said a source

identified digital connectivity, fintech, green economy, green hydrogen, skill development and food productivity as the key areas for deepening the bilateral ties.

"There is an intent on both sides to move forward on the ambitious agreements within the first 100 days of formation of a new government in India," said a source.

Singapore has been a key trading partner of New Delhi and cumulatively the city-state accounted for about 23 per cent of India's FDI (foreign direct investment) equity inflows since 2000, according to official estimates. Singapore considers India as an important engine of growth and it has been focusing on expanding the bilateral trade basket in the last few years. Next year, India and Singapore will celebrate 60 years of diplomatic ties and it could be an occasion to unveil new measures to further cement the ties, said another source. A key member of the 10-nation ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) grouping, Singapore is seen by India as a crucial strategic partner in the Southeast Asian region against the backdrop of China's attempt to expand economic and military influence in the Indo-Pacific.

# Commerce ministry working on standard operating procedure for FTA negotiation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry held deliberations with experts, former officers and senior officials from different departments on framing a standard operating procedure for free trade pacts and other related issues under these agreements, an official release said on Tuesday. The commerce ministry in the release stated that the 'Chintan Shivir' was organised on May 16-17 at Neemrana, Rajasthan. The Shivir facilitated discussions on various issues related to negotiations of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) by India, its position and strategy that should be adopted for such negotiations," the ministry said.



The commerce ministry in the release stated that the 'Chintan Shivir' was organised on May 16-17 at Neemrana, Rajasthan

The participants also deliberated on standard operating procedures (SoP) for FTA negotiations, capacity building and resource management for trade negotiations as well as certain contemporary issues under modern FTAs such as labour, environment, and gender.

It said that Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal spearheaded the deliberations which sought to chart a strategic course for India's future engagement in FTA negotiations. Economic assessment and modelling of FTAs, addressing new disciplines into FTAs such

as labour, environment, gender, and indigenous people; and services and digital trade in FTAs were among the main themes for discussions, it said. SoP for FTA negotiations including stakeholder consultations; capacity building and FTA resource management; and leveraging trade agreements to address emerging areas such as CBAM (carbon border adjustment mechanism), supply chain disruptions, critical minerals, and artificial intelligence were also discussed. It said that participants in the economic assessment session highlighted that detailed economic studies, including models like computable general equilibrium, are necessary to guide FTA negotiations.

### Hindalco firm Novelis Inc to launch US\$ 945 million IPO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

US-based Novelis Inc, which is part of Hindalco Industries, will launch an initial public offer (IPO) to raise up to US\$ 945 million, with an estimated equity valuation of up to US\$ 12.6 billion. In the proposed public issue, around 45 million shares will be sold by Novelis Inc's sole shareholders A V Minerals (Netherlands) NV, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hindalco Industries Ltd. The company will not receive any proceeds.

Novelis, a leading player in the production of innovative aluminium products and solutions and the world's largest, announced the launch of its roadshow for the initial public offering (IPO) of 45,000,000 (45 million) common shares held by its sole shareholder. "The IPO's price per common share is currently estimated to be between US\$ 18 and US\$ 21 per share. Novelis has applied to list its common shares on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol 'NVL,'" the company said in a statement on Tuesday.

# Stock markets fall for 3rd day ahead of poll results; Sensex drops 220 pts

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Extending the falling streak to the third day in a row, benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 220 points in volatile trade on Tuesday due to profit-taking in power, oil and capital goods shares ahead of results of Lok Sabha polls.

After gyrating between gains and losses during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 220.05 points or 0.29 per cent lower at 75,170.45. During the

day, it hit a high of 75,585.40 and a low of 75,083.22. The NSE Nifty dropped 44.30 points or 0.19 per cent to settle



at 22,888.15 despite beginning the day on a positive note.

Analysts said that stock markets are witnessing 'buying on dips and sell on rallies' amid uncertainty ahead of the general poll results. Sensex and Nifty scaled lifetime highs on Monday but closed lower due to heavy profit taking at the day-end. From the Sensex pack, Power Grid, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Maruti were among the laggards.

# Urban Enviro Waste Management profit jump over threefold

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Waste management solution provider Urban Enviro Waste Management on Tuesday posted a threefold jump in its net profit for 2023-24 compared to the year-ago period mainly due to higher revenues.

The company reported a net profit of Rs 7.05 crore for FY24 against Rs 2.15 crore in 2022-23, a company statement said. Its revenue jumped to Rs 102.47 crore in 2023-24 from Rs 39.15 crore in 2022-23. For the full year, the EPS (earning per share) rose to Rs



16.29, a 157.57 per cent increase from Rs 6.33 the last fiscal year. Kamlesh Sharma, Chairman and Managing Director of Urban said in the statement, "We are pleased with our robust financial performance. Our commitment to innovation, sustainability, and community engagement has driven

our growth and positioned us as leaders in the solid waste management sector." Looking ahead, Sharma stated that the company will continue to focus on expanding its services, enhancing operational efficiencies, and driving sustainable practices to create long-term value for stakeholders. Urban Enviro Waste Management provides waste management solutions & municipal solid waste (MSW) management services comprising waste collection, transportation, segregation & disposal services across the country

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Silver rallied strongly by Rs 3,100 to Rs 95,950 per kg in the national capital on Tuesday, while gold went up Rs 130, in line with strong global trends.

According to HDFC Securities, rising for the second straight session, silver prices surged Rs 3,100 to nearly a two-week high of Rs 95,950 per kg. It had closed at Rs 92,850 per kg on Monday.

Meanwhile, the yellow metal prices climbed Rs 130 to Rs 72,950 per 10 grams. It had finished at Rs 72,820 per 10 grams in the previous session.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at US\$ 2,346 per ounce, up US\$ 2 from the previous close. "Gold traded with a marginal gain in European trading hours on Tuesday, aided by a weak US dollar. Traders are now awaiting crucial US

inflation data, which could shed light on how soon the US Federal Reserve can reduce interest rates, potentially providing further direction for gold prices," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of



Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Silver also traded higher at US\$ 31.50 per ounce in the overseas markets. According to market experts, silver prices soared, breaching the US\$ 31-level, signalling the end of the bearish correction. Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the

MCX, gold fell Rs 169 to trade at Rs 71,840 per 10 grams. The most-traded June contract of gold hit an intra-day low of Rs 71,762 per 10 grams.

Further, silver contracts for July delivery were also trading lower by Rs 294, or 0.39 per cent, to Rs 94,314 per kg on the bourse.

"Gold prices were weak in the first half of the session in both Comex and MCX markets. Following a strong rally on Monday, prices paused within a small range of US\$ 2,340-2,353 in Comex and Rs 71,770-72,030 in MCX.

"The mixed market reaction came after renewed tensions in the Middle East. Traders will focus on the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index release on Friday, which will provide hints about inflation," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.



# Infosys collaborates with German bank to transform its trading ecosystem

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian IT major Infosys on Tuesday said it has collaborated with Commerzbank, a German bank, and Murex, which is into trading, risk management and processing solutions for capital markets, on a successful "go-live" or operationalisation of a consolidated, unified trading platform.

The joint project has enabled Commerzbank to consolidate FX, FX derivatives, equity, and commodities onto Murex's integrated MX.3 platform, simplifying its operations, cutting costs, speeding up time to market, and preparing for future challenges. "Infosys today announced that it collaborated with Commerzbank... and Murex... on a successful go-live of a consolidated, unified trading platform that streamlines the bank's business processes and

IT landscape," according to a release.

In effect, the consolidation on a unified Murex platform enables the bank to accelerate its digital transformation journey by driving system efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Within the project, Infosys supported Commerzbank in optimising utilisation of Murex's comprehensive suite of solutions and services and carried out development, integration, testing and migration, alongside go-live and aftercare support.

With this partnership, Commerzbank's trading operations saw substantial improvements. It also helped in simplification of their technology landscape, while reducing the cost of managing multiple servers and platforms, thus laying the foundation for business growth and scale.

# Fortis lines up Rs 1,300 cr capex to expand existing hospitals



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fortis Healthcare is investing up to Rs 1,300 crore in expanding capacities at existing hospitals over the next few years, according to a senior company executive.

The healthcare provider aims to add around 2,200 beds over the next few years. "So, some of the capex has already been incurred in that (addition of bed capacity).

"Additional capex will be somewhere around Rs 1,200 crore to Rs 1,300 crore, which includes equipment also, everything put together," Fortis Healthcare CFO Vivek Goyal said in an analyst call.

He noted that the healthcare provider is looking to add bed capacity at various existing facilities, including hospitals in Faridabad and Anandpur Sahib. "At Faridabad, there is space available, and we have planned to further expand in regard to Anandpur, we have acquired a company with a different land

parcel. So, we want to operationalise that also. Post expansion of these 100 beds, we will be adding maybe another 50 beds in the next financial year in that unit," Goyal said. At Shalimar Bagh, Fortis is building another tower in the adjacent plot and that should give us another 200-plus beds, he said. "This is already included in our overall plan of expansion of 2,200 beds," Goyal said.

The healthcare provider expects to commence its Manesar facility by the second quarter of this financial year. "We will be opening initially 100 beds, and we will see how the ramp-up goes on," Goyal said.

Fortis is adding 100 beds at a facility in Kolkata for which it has received all the approvals. Besides, the healthcare provider is expecting the OC (occupancy certificate) to come for the Bengaluru facility (BG Road) at the end of the second quarter of this fiscal, he added.

# Sugar exports hinge on monsoon

Cane sowing as output seen lower in 2024-25

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India may allow sugar exports after assessing the final sugarcane sowing and output in the 2024-25 season, as the world's biggest producer after Brazil is expecting a lower sugar output of 30 million tonnes next season, sources said.

For the current 2023-24 season ending September, sugar production has reached 31.5 million tonnes so far, with the final output likely to touch 31.8 million tonnes as mills in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka wrap up crushing, the sources added. Last year, India produced 32.8 million tonnes of sugar.



Sugar production in the 2024-25 season is estimated to be lower at 30 million tonnes due to lower sowing in

Karnataka, as per trade estimate, the sources added. "The industry has demanded exports of 1 million tonnes

of sugar. Since we are expecting lower sugar output next year and stocks are required for ethanol production, the priority of the government is to ensure available stock for domestic consumption as well as for ethanol," one of the sources said.

"Exports can be allowed if surplus stock is available," the source added.

Currently, there are curbs on sugar exports. The sources said the government would review the sugar production situation after July, once the monsoon spreads and final sugarcane sowing data becomes available.



# KAYA JONES RECALLS WITNESSING A 'VERY DETAILED ALLEGATION' REGARDING NICK CARTER

Melissa Schuman accused Backstreet Boys musician Nick Carter of rape in a recent news article. But it was Kaya Jones, his ex-girlfriend, who stood up to encourage the Dream singer.

Another documentary series that explores the lives of well-known artists and the issues they have been a part of has been released by Investigation Discovery. From Fallen Idols, a clip PEOPLE just published a story about Nick and Aaron Carter, in which Kaya Jones states that she contacted Melissa Schuman following the This Is Me singer's accusations.

"It disturbed me because this girl (Schuman) was being discredited by it. Thus, I was interested in hearing Melissa's perspective," Jones said in the video. According to the story, Jones contacted Schuman via Twitter and gave the Afraid singer her contact information. Schuman then got in touch with Jones. In the video, Schuman recalled her conversation with the Buttons artist and described her as a "kind" lady. She also mentioned that they

chatted for "hours," with Schuman stating that she needed "someone to tell me that my life wasn't over." Melissa Schuman originally levelled the accusations against Nick Carter in 2017. She accused the Drowning musician of raping her in his Santa Monica residence in 2003, when she was eighteen years old, through a blog post on her website. Carter asserted that the sex was consensual while refuting the accusations.

## Siddharth and Saif's next project titled Jewel Thief- The Red Sun Chapter

Filmmaker Siddharth Anand has set the internet on fire with his new social media post. The director-producer had shared a picture with Saif Ali Khan with a caption that read, "Back on set with my first hero! How can nothing change!" The movie put media speculations to rest and confirmed that the filmmaker and actor are set to collaborate with each other after 17 years, which has left the fans excited for the upcoming film. Now, Siddharth has shared a picture of Robbie Grewal and Saif with a caption that seems to be the title of the trio's project together. As per Anand's latest Instagram post, the highly anticipated movie will be titled Jewel Thief- The Red Sun Chapter. Siddharth is producing the project under Marflix Pictures along with producer Mamta Anand, while Robbie Grewal is directing it. This combination of producers, director, and actor has set high expectations for the project, which is being touted as a heist drama. The project will also feature Jaideep Ahlawat in a pivotal role. And as per reports, the project will focus on the battle between Saif Ali Khan and Jaideep Ahlawat and will be a direct-to-digital release. Siddharth Anand, Mamta Anand, Saif Ali Khan, and Robbie Grewal, along with the rest of the cast and crew, are currently shooting for the project in Budapest. While the project marks Robbie and Saif's first collaboration, Khan and Siddharth have previously teamed up for Salaam Namaste and Ta Ra Rum Pum. Fans are excited to witness what the trio is going to bring to the screens!

## Unravel dark secrets, betrayal, and forbidden truths with Neha Sharma's 36 Days

Directed by Vishal Furia, this series boasts an impressive ensemble that includes Purab Kohli, Shruti Seth, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Amruta Khanvilkar, Sharib Hashmi, Sushant Divgikar, Shernaz Patel, Faishal Rashid, Chahat Vig, and Kenneth Desai. It promises to be an exciting ride filled with suspense and mystery. 36 Days is produced by Applause Entertainment in association with BBC Studios India. This series is the official Indian adaptation of the UK show 35 Days, originally produced by Boom Cymru for S4C and distributed by ITV Studios.



## Mission Impossible 8 delayed again, this time with a costly setback

Tom Cruise is a well-known figure worldwide and one of Hollywood's top stars. His films are highly anticipated by fans, particularly the action-packed Mission Impossible series. He is presently filming Mission Impossible 8, yet there has been a costly setback. Tom has been hard at work on releasing new films in the franchise since the first one was released in 1996. Love is also expressed by fans, and the box office reflects this. The numbers state that the MI brand has amassed over \$4 billion in revenue worldwide. Nonetheless, MI7, also known as Mission: Impossible Dead Reckoning Part One, did not have the same success at the box office last year, but Tom has moved past it and is back on the sets of the sequel. According to reports, Tom Cruise's Mission Impossible 8 has been delayed once again. This time, it was postponed because a submarine malfunctioned. The submarine is worth £23 million, which is around \$29.38 million in USD.



The report explained that the gimbal, which is used to lower the 120-foot-high structure, jammed under the submarine's weight and had to be repaired. A source revealed, "They're not happy as it puts production behind, which costs a lot of money per day." Mission Impossible 8 was previously postponed because of the Hollywood strikes. The film's original release date this summer has been rescheduled for May 2025. However, given this, it might potentially be postponed even longer.

## Abhinay Deo explains how Savi puts a modern twist on 'Sati Savitri' facade



Known for hilarious films like Delhi Belly, director Abhinay Deo takes a sharp turn with Savi. This upcoming thriller packs action, suspense, and a social message. Savi's trailer has audiences buzzing, showcasing a wife's daring mission to save her framed husband. Deo says that crafting this unique mix of genres wasn't as much of a challenge as it was giving a modern spin to a legend. Deo offers a modern twist on the classic tale of Sati Savitri, where a woman defies the odds to fight for her husband's life. He says, "In a way, 'Sati Savitri's' story is something I have heard since I was a child. It is ingrained in my system. When we set out to do a modern take, the biggest challenge was how to make mythology relevant to today. That's the reason the

story files the way it does here. It needed to be simplified. What did this resilient woman do? She got into a duel with Yamraj to bring back her husband. We have done that in our film. The system is Yamraj. The British system is far more stringent. The British jail system is more challenging. The difficulties for Savi are far more heightened. But the story is simple." The film is produced by Mukesh Bhatt, Bhushan Kumar, and Krishan Kumar under the banners of Vishesh Films and T-Series. Shiv Chanana and Sakshi Bhatt have joined in as co-producers. The film is an edge-of-the-seat thriller action. To learn how a simple housewife masterminds a dangerous jailbreak and whether she succeeds in executing it, head to the theatres near you on May 31, 2024.

## PARUL GULATI TO STAR IN SOCIAL MEDIA SHOW BLUE TICK

Actress Parul Gulati is set to captivate audiences once again in the highly anticipated social media show Blue Tick. Directed by the talented Shubham Singh and produced by Folklore Films, the series delves into the captivating journey of Pallavi Pahuja, portrayed by Parul, a determined young woman hailing from South Delhi with dreams of stardom. In Blue Tick, Parul embodies the character of Pallavi Pahuja, an aspiring actor whose unwavering belief in her talent drives her relentless pursuit of success. Sharing insights into her character, Parul Gulati revealed, "It is the story of a West Delhi girl who has big dreams in her eyes, and because she is young, she is a risk-taker. There is really no fear of failure for her. I relate hard to her because I myself was spotted on a social media platform, and my big dream of coming to Mumbai and becoming an actor came true. It is a beautiful story of the rise and fall of

this young girl, who only has her dreams to protect, and how she rises back up again! Pallavi is a fascinating character to portray. She symbolises the modern-day aspirant, utilising social media as a ladder to climb towards her dreams. The quest for a blue tick on her profile becomes her beacon of validation, showcasing the power dynamics within the realm of social media influence." The show promises an intriguing exploration of the dichotomy between virtual validation and real-world success as Pallavi navigates the highs and lows of her journey in pursuit of the coveted blue tick. With themes resonating with audiences globally, Blue Tick offers a compelling narrative that reflects the zeitgeist of our digital age. Joining Parul Gulati in this enthralling venture is Siddharth Nigam, whose on-screen chemistry promises to elevate the viewing experience. Shot against the vibrant backdrop of Delhi, the series unfolds a captivating tale of ambition, resilience, and the price of fame.



### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



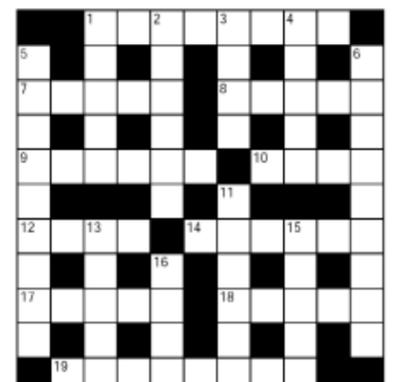
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU

Sudoku grid with numbers and a solution key. Includes rules for the puzzle.

#### GINGER MEGGS



#### ACROSS

- 1 Tiniest
2 A fish in rivers and lakes
3 Stick this on an envelope
4 Having a meal
5 Shout
6 Say you are sorry
7 A building where a horse is kept
8 Frequently
9 A keyboard instrument
10 Frequently
11 A light in the night sky

#### DOWN

- 1 Fire a gun
2 Pretending
3 Mislaid
4 Frighten
5 Tried

## 'I discovered being diagnosed with PCOS while competing to be India's Next Superstar'

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

From a wildcard entrant on *India's Next Super Dancer* to her current status as a multidimensional actress, it exemplifies actress Elisha Mayor's unshakable dedication and passion for the craft.

Navigating the difficult landscape of Bombay's entertainment industry, she has auditioned thousands of times, each encounter moulding her into the vibrant actress she is today!

A little while back, her portrayal of Tanya, taught her the significant distinction between independence and hyper-independence, which mirrored her own challenges and development. Her ability to create depth in her characters, as seen in the *Dil Dosti Dilemma*, demonstrated her awareness of complex human emotions and relationships.

As an actress, especially during Bombay's difficult period, she strived to do everything alone, attempting to be strong and fight for her aspirations, saying, "I ended up living like an army officer—disciplined to the point of becoming a machine. For a few months, I forgot how to have fun, the value of establishing friends, and how socialising can refresh your mind, allowing you to be more productive and creative."

But Tanya's character taught her that attempting to solve everything on your own might be unproductive. Tanya keeps things private, believing that she must address all of her difficulties before discussing them with her friends and family. She considers herself a problem solver, even at home, where her parents haven't spoken in months. Tanya is in denial about her parents' possible separation, and she is anxious to make things right without contemplating that they may have fallen out of love. She explains, "Playing Tanya required me to focus on her vulnerabilities and the emotions she was concealing. She is afraid that her family will come apart, but she keeps her anxieties to herself, attempting to maintain a veneer of strength. This job taught her that expressing vulnerability is critical."

From the initial table read, they understood they had a well-written series with rich character sketches and a well-connected plot. "It's not just about teenagers

and grandmothers; it's about everyone in the series, and how they all learn and evolve by the end of the story," she says. "As actors, we play a role in choosing characters and roles, and I feel that *Dil Dosti Dilemma* has a major talking point that I connected with deeply: the idea that the elderly must make an effort to connect with teenagers."

On the other hand, she noted how pageants can be a terrific learning experience, particularly if you're just getting started. "What you take away from them is determined by how you approach the situation. While pageants are competitions, if you step back and think big, they provide an excellent opportunity for development. They boost your confidence, train you to give your all every day, and help you manage demanding schedules and function on little sleep. When I first started acting, these talents came in very handy."

However, she discovered that, as an actor, you must be free. She describes, "You cannot constantly be graceful, sit in a certain way, or talk in a specific way. You must let go of your limitations and adapt to whatever the role requires. When I portrayed Alok in *Kala* as a footballer, my training as a dancer allowed me to release my body and adapt to footballer body language. This represented a significant departure from the poised and polished approach

necessary in beauty pageants." This event demonstrated the distinction between pageantry and acting, and the expertise she earned from pageants aided her acting career! A well-written script and character development are critical, and while she works hard and thoroughly prepares, she has also discovered that teamwork is essential. "What I've learned is the value of asking the correct questions. These questions not only clarify my character but also help me comprehend the larger story and the director's vision for telling it."

A lesser-known fact: She was a wildcard entry on *India's Next Super Dancer*, and she says that starting as a wildcard contestant had its own set of challenges: "By the time you join, the audience and judges have already picked their favourites and are deeply invested in the journeys of the contestants who have been competing for three months or more. I remember vividly my first performance, when I achieved a flawless score of 5 out of 5 from judge Karan Johar. His good reaction provided the drive I needed to embark on that journey."

However, during that show, Elisha encountered something she had never thought of. One of the most difficult problems she encountered was her health. As she spelled out, "I later discovered that I had Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), which significantly affected me during the competition. The format of the show required us to stay in a house surrounded by cameras and without access to our phones. This made it difficult to obtain the medical assistance, attention, therapy, or rest I required to manage my problems. I was battling with terrible bleeding, bloating, and acne, which drained my confidence. Competing to be *India's Next Superstar* while not feeling or looking my best was really challenging. I recall avoiding mirrors because my face was covered in acne, which even makeup couldn't hide."

Despite these obstacles, she grew more focused. She realised the only thing she could control was her performance on stage for those ten minutes, whether she

Actress Elisha Mayor, who is currently basking in appreciation for *Dil Dosti Dilemma*, opens up with *The Pioneer* about the lessons she learned from her character and many more revelations in this exclusive chat.



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Despite these obstacles, she grew more focused. She realised the only thing she could control was her performance on stage for those ten minutes, whether she

was acting or dancing. She put on blinders! This approach took her through to the semi-finals.

She is quiet and prefers to be present in real life rather than spend time on social media. However, as an actress, she recognises that social media is an important tool for promoting her work and reaching a larger audience; she states, "I am extremely cognizant and conscious of the contrast between Elisha the actor and Elisha the person. This separation allows me to disconnect from whatever happens online. Humans have an inherent desire for affirmation outside of themselves, and social media is an extension of that propensity. When helpful criticism turns into trolling, it's critical to disengage and disconnect from social media. By striking this balance, I can protect my health while also connecting with my audience."

Throughout her career, she has auditioned about 2000 times and continues to do so on a monthly basis. She has never let the term "rejection" affect her! "Some roles are simply different, and your talents may not always match exactly what the role requires. As an actor, this understanding allows me to let go of the pressure and enjoy the experience. By focusing on the process rather than the goal, I can genuinely appreciate each audition."

Meanwhile, her "mantra" as an artist is to explore and express; the *Kala* fame adds, "I don't limit myself by saying, 'This is who I am and this is who I am not.' I am continuously looking for opportunities to develop, improve, and expand as a person and artist. While I have a strong moral compass, I am also open to a variety of roles. This stems from acknowledging the various aspects of my personality—some days I begin with religious music, others with hip-hop or rap. I'm excited and grateful for my upcoming projects. While I can't give too much information about my new characters or the plots just yet, I can say that these endeavours contain a lot of dance. For the first time, I'll be dancing on television, and I'm excited to share that aspect of myself with the public."

I AM EXTREMELY COGNIZANT AND CONSCIOUS OF THE CONTRAST BETWEEN ELISHA THE ACTOR AND ELISHA THE PERSON. THIS SEPARATION ALLOWS ME TO DISCONNECT FROM WHATEVER HAPPENS ONLINE.

## Panchayat season 3 continues to entertain with more political spin, emotions & laughter

TEJAL SINHA

We didn't realise how two years had passed. Season 2 of *Panchayat* released in 2022, bringing tears to the audience's eyes as it progressed. The third season of the show is finally here!

**PLOT:** Season 3 of *Panchayat* sees the continuation of the conflict between Pradhanji (Raghubir Yadav) and the MLA, Chandrakishore Singh (Pankaj Jha) that began in season 2. Elections are quickly approaching, and the MLA has caused concern among Phulera residents such as Pradhanji and Manju Devi (Neena Gupta). Bhedi Bhushan Sharma, aka Banrakas (Durgesh Kumar), from Phulera, is his supporter. On the other side, Abhishek Tripathi (Jitendra Kumar), alias Secretary, has suffered the wrath of the MLA and has almost lost his position. Will any new hope emerge for the people of Phulera?

**PERFORMANCE:** To begin, let us look at Jitendra Kumar's performance. He has been excellent in his duties from the start, and he has gone above and beyond this time. Raghubir Yadav and Neena Gupta deliver outstanding performances as Pradhanji and Manju Devi, respec-

tively. Not only are their individual performances fantastic, but it's also entertaining to watch them squabble and fight. Chandan Roy Sanyal has also captured the essence of Vikas. This season's main character, Prahlad, will bring tears to your eyes! Faizal Khan has done an excellent job portraying the changes in his character's emotions and attitude onscreen.

Seeing Durgesh Singh in the part of Bhushan Sharma, called Banrakas, makes you angry and giggle at the same time. This demonstrates the actor's superior performance. Binod (Ashok Pathak) is as entertaining as ever, while Kranti Devi (Sunita Rajwar) is opportunistic. The MLA is as wicked as ever, and seeing him makes you want to smack him, indicating that actor Pankaj Jha did an excellent job. Sanvika is a bit obnoxious, but she does a wonderful job as Rinki.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** It is difficult to manage such a vast cast, given everyone adequate screen time, and serve a series on screen in a distinct but equally enjoyable manner. But Deepak Kumar Mishra, the filmmaker, has done it. He did justice to Chandan Kumar's script, and Amitabh Singh's cinematography helped him tremendously. This series has several excellent twists. It's always fun to see both new and familiar characters together! Watching this causes you to laugh, cry, and become furious, and your heart rate often begins

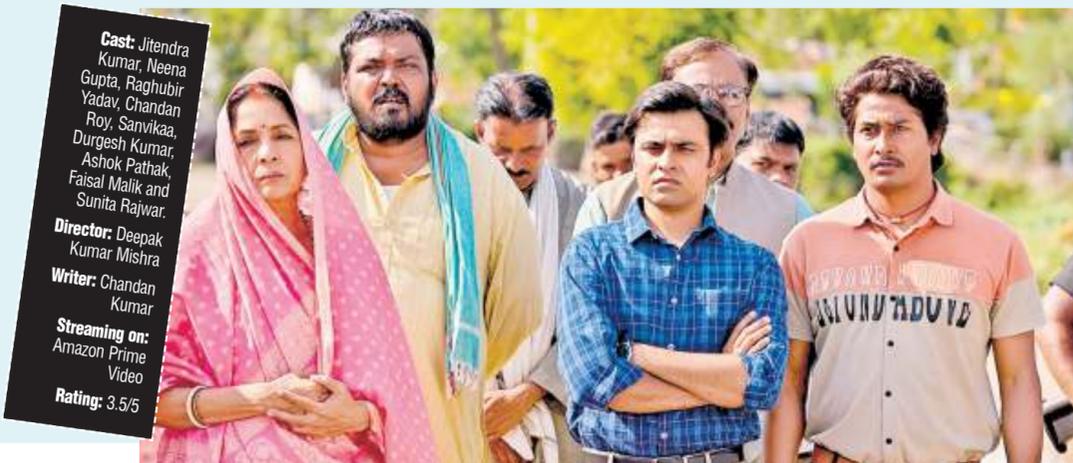
to increase. The series' music adds to its entertainment value. Overall, the story of Phulera Village will keep you entertained. Deepak Kumar Mishra's musical compositions heighten the series' emotional resonance and storytelling power. The music, which ranges from the upbeat title tune to the understated background soundtrack, flawlessly matches the show's different moods and enhances the vividness and immersion of Phulera's existence.

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**DRAWBACKS:** For the third installment, the writer really raised the ante. But ultimately faltered, with the season coming to an unmemorable climax. Just a few minutes before the finale, there was a high moment that might have been a fantastic cliffhanger and the beginning of the fourth season.

**VERDICT:** All-in-all, *Panchayat Season 3* has once again demonstrated why it is one of the best instances of Indian web series storytelling. Every scene captures the flavour of rural India through a meaningful narrative and fascinating people. Once again, TVF's writing captures hearts, and for the binge-watchers; you will complete the entire season in one go.

Review



**Cast:** Jitendra Kumar, Neena Gupta, Raghubir Yadav, Chandan Roy, Sanvika, Durgesh Kumar, Ashok Pathak, Faizal Malik and Sunita Rajwar.  
**Director:** Deepak Kumar Mishra  
**Writer:** Chandan Kumar  
**Streaming on:** Amazon Prime Video  
**Rating:** 3.5/5

## STEERING PALM OIL DEBATE IN SKINCARE



In the world of skincare, versatile palm oil has been nothing short of a miracle oil, offering undeniable benefits like moisturisation and antioxidant properties. Let's explore the reasons that make it a staple in cosmetic products and how it can work wonders for our skin!

When selecting palm oil-based products, it's essential to prioritise sustainability. Given palm oil's unique advantages, there is no real substitute for palm oil. This is reinforced by a UK trade association, which says the best alternative to palm oil is sustainable palm oil.

**Excellent emollient:** As a skincare ingredient, palm oil not only moisturises but also enhances the texture of our favourite creams, lotions and lip balms. Its semi-solid consistency at room temperature works like a dream when it comes to effortlessly blending oil and water-based ingredients. In soap making, palm oil lends a luxurious lather while ensuring the product remains firm and long-lasting. Plus, its remarkable oxidative stability and resistance to rancidity means products stay fresh for longer.

**Nutrient powerhouse:** Peel back the layers, and you'll uncover a treasure trove

of vitamins and antioxidants within palm oil. Vitamin A and E take centre stage, acting as armour against environmental aggressors and premature ageing. And let's not forget about carotenoids like beta-carotene, which swoop in to support skin regeneration and repair. Its moisturising properties prepare our skin to face the challenges of daily life, preventing dryness and irritation. No wonder, palm oil is a popular ingredient in body butter and moisturisers!

**A heritage of healing:** Palm oil's journey from traditional remedy to global skincare superstar is a witness to its efficacy. For centuries, communities in Africa and South Asia have revered palm oil for its nourishing properties. From moisturising parched skin to taming unruly hair, its benefits are legendary. Accessibility and affordability have made it a household staple in these regions, earning it a permanent place in traditional cosmetic preparations. As the world shrinks and cultures mingle, the beauty of palm oil has transcended borders, finding its way into modern skincare formulations.

In the realm of skincare, palm oil stands tall as a multitasking marvel. Its emollient prowess keeps your skin supple and soft, while its nutrient-rich profile nourishes from within. Additionally, its versatility and compatibility with diverse ingredients make it a valuable component in traditional cosmetic preparations.

So go ahead, pamper yourself with the power of palm oil responsibly, and let your inner glow shine through. Your skin and planet will thank you for it!

(The author, Dr DM Mahajan, is a Senior Consultant in dermatology, at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals.)

# Far from IPL, bowlers set to lord over batters in T20 World Cup

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Put through the wringer in the IPL, can bowlers hope to breathe a bit easy in the T20 World Cup next month? The genesis of this question lies in the transformation that T20 batting underwent in the latest edition of the IPL. The 250-mark was breached only once in the league till this season, but teams went past that point eight times in the just-concluded edition. Many of the batters who led that revolution, such as Australian Travis Head and West Indian Andre Russell, will be seen in action in the ICC showpiece in the Americas next month. So, it's quite natural for fans to expect another batting waltz. But their approach cannot be as one-dimensional in the World Cup as it was in the IPL for a variety of reasons. To begin with, teams will not have the luxury of an Impact Player in the World Cup. So, they will have to be ready to switch to an attritional style of cricket as and when the situation demands.

Mitchell Starc underlined that point after playing a big role in guiding Kolkata Knight Riders to their third IPL title. "There is an Impact Player Rule here (in IPL) and not in the T20 World Cup. You are going to rely more on your all-rounders. You cannot put your batting all-rounder at No. 8, like you did in the IPL. "I don't think that you'll see these kind of high scores in the T20 World Cup, purely because there will be one batter less," said Starc. In the earlier part of the IPL, Chennai Super Kings used Shivam Dube, a pace bowling all-rounder, exclusively as a batter through the Impact Player rule, though he usually walked in at No. 4 or 5 in place of a bowler. Dube produced a couple of match-winning knocks against Royal Challengers Bengaluru and the Knight Riders. But in the World Cup, the left-hander will have to showcase his bowling skills too to get a slot in the eleven as vice-captain Hardik Pandya plays a similar role and remains the first-choice. Skipper Rohit Sharma has made that bit



quite clear already. "I will be expecting if we need Shivam to face a few overs, he will. Same with Hardik, he has come and bowled whenever needed. All-rounders must do that whatever their role is," he had said after the announcement of India's squad. However, that's just one part of the story. The batters will also have to negate pitches that will be very different from the ones they got used to in the IPL. "The West Indian pitches are no longer what they used to be in the '80s or in the '90s. They are now slower, and at times gripping," a veteran curator told PTI.

"I am sure the bowlers, particularly spinners, will have much more say than in the IPL, especially from the second week of the tournament. "India have included four spinners in their squad. It was maybe because of the nature of the pitches in the West Indies. Hence, I don't think we may see all those 250 totals there," he added. In the USA, only Florida has prior experience in hosting high-profile cricket matches. New York and Texas are bracing for their maiden foray into the sport. Will that have an impact on the scoring rate? "Yeah! It can be as initially the teams might be looking to assess the pitch and other conditions. I think these drop-in pitches that are being used in some of these venues are more consistent than the natural pitches. So, we may see a few high scores in that round," he said. David Warner, who has immense experience in playing international and franchise cricket in the West Indies, concurred. "The pitches in the Caribbean being dry, the ball will get roughed

up and it's going to spin. I don't think they're going to be as compact as they are here (in the IPL). The lacquer on the ball is staying longer (in IPL) and hence it's not getting chewed up and hence very little turn on offer. "I've played a lot of cricket over there and played in the CPL (Caribbean Premier League). The wickets tend to get lower and slower," Warner pointed out. The average run-rate in this IPL was a whopping 9.56, the highest ever in the history of the tournament, and the average score remained upwards of 180. The average first innings score in Hyderabad was in the vicinity of 230. However, the stadiums in the West Indian islands are cut from a different cloth as some statistics will reveal. The average T20 score in Antigua is a dawdling 123 and at Barbados it is 138. It is even bleaker in Guyana at 124, at 115 in Trinidad and at 118 in St. Vincent. Gros Islet tops the chart with a princely 139. By the look of things, the bowlers are set to be royalty in T20 at least for a month.



## India is strongest side even with injuries: Morgan

PTI ■ LONDON

India's remarkable reservoir of talent and formidable depth within their squad makes them strong contenders to win the upcoming T20 World Cup, feels former England skipper Eoin Morgan. India have gone with almost the same squad as they had in the last edition of the T20 World Cup while adding the likes of young Yashasvi Jaiswal, Yuzvendra Chahal and Sanju Samson. "The strongest side even with injuries throughout the tournament is India. Their strength and depth is absolutely incredible," Morgan said on Sky Sports. "And it's almost probably, we're talking about who the players that were missed out in their squad of 15 because of the quality that they possess. "They are favourites for me, the quality they have on paper, if they produce it I think they can beat anybody quite well in the tournament," he added. India were spoilt for choice as they were forced to leave the likes of Shubman Gill and KL Rahul. "The only decision I would have had differently and if I was selecting the squad, I would have Shubman Gill over Yashasvi Jaiswal. I have played alongside him, I know how he works. "I feel he's a future leader within that side and I think in big moments, in World Cups the more leaders the better. Even if he's sitting on the sideline, you still need inspiration from here and there, a sense of positivity." India head into almost every

tournament as favourites but they haven't won an ICC title in over a decade. The last trophy the 'Men in Blue' lifted was the Champions Trophy in 2013. In the last edition of the T20 World Cup they were hammered by 10 wickets by eventual winners England in the semifinals in Adelaide. "I think they can (win), because they have got to a stage now where Adelaide would hurt, recently losing the (ODI) World Cup at home to Australia in front of 1,25,000 Indian fans. "The spinner will come into the game, the level of batsmanship will come into the game if the wickets slow down like we think. But also that excellence in power hitting is the point of difference for me. Shivam Dube has to play, I think he'll set this World Cup alight. **IRONY THAT ONLY TIME INDIA WON T20 WC WAS PRE-IPL. ATHERTON:** Many argue that India's cricket in T20 format has improved by leaps and bounds since the advent of the IPL. But former England captain Michael Atherton pointed out that it is ironic that the only time India won the T20 World Cup was before the IPL came into being. "It's also an irony, because everyone talks about the IPL and how it has improved India's T20 cricket. The irony is that the only time they have won is pre-IPL," Atherton said. India were the first T20 World Cup winners in 2007. Under the captaincy of the talismanic Mahendra Singh Dhoni, they had beaten arch-rivals Pakistan.

## Want Hardik to come good in T20 WC, he has gone through a lot: Harbhajan

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh has nothing but empathy for Hardik Pandya as he navigates a challenging phase in his career and is hopeful that the all-rounder, who "hasn't been a free man in the last two months", will become one during next month's T20 World Cup. Pandya endured a forgettable IPL both as captain and player with his team Mumbai Indians ending bottom of the heap in the points table. What made things worse was the incessant jeering of fans whenever he took the field, including at MI's home turf — the Wankhede Stadium. But Harbhajan expects the tide to turn in the Americas during the T20 showpiece. "When he wears that blue jersey, he will be a different Hardik Pandya because we know he can score those runs and take those wickets. I want Hardik to come good as he has gone through a lot and I wish him all the very best to have a very good tournament for India," Harbhajan told PTI in an exclusive interview. "If he has a good tournament, obviously India will have a great chance to go forward," he said. "Yes, his form is a bit of a concern...And lot of other stuff was going on around him, his shifting from Gujarat to Mumbai, was a big change and the team (MI) didn't react



too well to Hardik coming back and that too as captain," the 43-year-old added. The reason for the fan backlash against Pandya was MI's decision to hand him the captaincy after taking it away from the long-serving Rohit Sharma. There was speculation throughout the season that MI's dressing room was a divided house due to the change of guard. Rohit will now captain the national side with Pandya as his deputy in the World Cup starting June 1. Harbhajan, a multi format World Cup-winner, urged the team management to bring Pandya and Rohit on "same page". "It looked like they (MI) were not playing together as a team. So there was a lot going on. Hardik wasn't a free man in the last two months. I believe both of them and many others who have played in different teams will have to come together to do something special for the nation..." he said. "Winning a World Cup is a bigger achievement than winning an IPL trophy, so I would urge the management to bring everyone together, have them on one page and make sure they play like one. "I believe it's the responsibility of the management to come together, and win together. Even if they lose they should be losing together."

**BUMRAH WILL NEED SUPPORT:** Jasprit Bumrah is the only speedster among the chosen three (the other two being Arshdeep Singh and Mohammed Siraj), who doesn't need conditions to be successful, feels Harbhajan. "Pace attack definitely could be a concern because Bumrah is in a different league for the kind of bowler he is. He will win you games on any kind of pitch. He doesn't need conditions whereas other bowlers like Arshdeep and Siraj would need help from conditions. "If there's bounce, Siraj might do well. He is tall, can also swing it both ways, hits the deck hard and has got pace. But if wickets are slow then the challenge begins for other bowlers. "There will be lot of responsibility on Bumrah's shoulders but I hope other guys also take responsibility to be someone special." **IPL PERFORMANCES WON'T MATTER:** Harbhajan said IPL form would make no difference to the players' fortunes in the ICC showpiece. "No matter what you have done in your IPL career or previously, this is what counts the most...If I was in their shoes, I would be looking for this opportunity to showcase that I have been better than what I have been doing," the 'Turbanator' stated. **VIRAT IS A CHANGED T20 BATTER:** Harbhajan was mighty impressed with how Virat Kohli

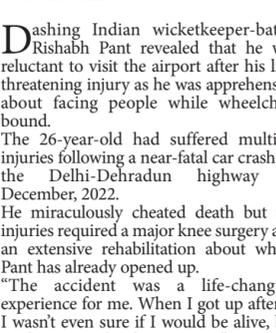
tweaked his T20 game during this year's IPL by adding shots to his repertoire, which drastically improved his strike rate. "Virat has shown a lot of improvement from last year to this year and people spoke about his strike rate. It was in 130s during last year and this time it is in 160s," he said. "Of course it's a big big change. Virat and Rohit will have to score quickly in Powerplay but also need to respect the conditions in USA and West Indies." **IF GAMBHIR BECOMES COACH:** Harbhajan doesn't know whether Gautam Gambhir, who is being spoken of as the favourite to take over India's head coach position from the outgoing Rahul Dravid, will get the job but he does believe it would be a crown of thorns for whoever chooses to wear it. "If I say it properly, it is a speculation, which is doing rounds...The biggest thing a coach can do is to bring everyone together, so that team plays together. So, whether Gautam becomes coach or Ashish Nehra, or whoever gets the opportunity, hope they do better than what others before them did." He also ruled himself out of the race. "I don't think I will be able to give that much time. At this stage of my life I have a young family and I need to be around them and look after them. Yes, when the right time comes, I will put my foot forward and say I am ready for it," he concluded.

## Could not go to airport because I was nervous about facing people in a wheelchair: Pant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dashing Indian wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant revealed that he was reluctant to visit the airport after his life-threatening injury as he was apprehensive about facing people while wheelchair bound. The 26-year-old had suffered multiple injuries following a near-fatal car crash on the Delhi-Dehradun highway in December, 2022. He miraculously cheated death but the injuries required a major knee surgery and an extensive rehabilitation about which Pant has already opened up. "The accident was a life-changing experience for me. When I got up after it, I wasn't even sure if I would be alive, but God was very kind to save me," Pant said on "Dhawan Kareng", a talk show hosted by India cricketer Shikhar Dhawan. "I couldn't go to the airport because I was nervous about facing people in a

wheelchair. I couldn't even brush my teeth for two months, and for six to seven months, I suffered unbearable pain," Pant recalled. However, the flamboyant batter returned to action after 14 months in the recently concluded IPL, giving glimpses of his devastating best.



## India A to play Australia A ahead of Border Gavaskar Trophy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India A will play two first-class matches against Australia A in the run-up to the marquee Border Gavaskar Trophy later this year, CA announced on Tuesday. The two games are scheduled to be played at the Great Barrier Reef Arena in Mackay and the MCG from October 31-November 3 and November 7 to 10 respectively, Cricket Australia said. The warm-up games will provide an opportunity for fringe players from both sides to push for a Test berth. "Hosting those A matches at the upgraded Great Barrier Reef Arena and the MCG give these 'A' matches significant status and will provide great opportunities to players from both sides to put up their hand for selection," said Peter Roach, CA Head of Cricket Operations and Scheduling. The Indian team will also play a three-day intra-squad match

at the WACA Ground from November 17. India had played warm-up matches against Australia A in their previous tour Down Under in 2020-21 as well. The opening Test is set to be held at the Optus Stadium in Perth from November 22. It will be the first time since the 1991-92 season that the marquee series has been extended to five Tests. "To have that (the series) running simultaneously with the women's ODIs and preceded by two significant Australia A v India A matches will be terrific for our fans," Roach added. The Indian women's cricket team will also be touring Australia around the same time. The second ODI between the two sides on December 8 is set to clash with the second Test. Australia have not won the Border Gavaskar Trophy since 2017, having lost all past four series 2-1, including two at home in 2018-19 and 2020-21.

## ICC grants List A status to Major League Cricket in US

PTI ■ SAN FRANCISCO

The ICC has granted Official List-A status to Major League Cricket matches in the US in only its second season, a move aimed at promoting the game in one of the biggest sports markets. The International Cricket Council's decision comes a week before MLC commences its second season and less than a week before the Americas host cricket's showpiece event, the T20 World Cup. The ICC's move makes MLC as the official T20 league and America's first world-class domestic tournament. "Now, every century, half-century, 've-for', run-out, win, loss, and championship will be documented as official career statistics in an internationally recognised



format of the game," said MLC in a statement. The official status to MLC means it will provide local US players and upcoming stars of the game the opportunity for international recognition, furthering the development of domestic talent in the country. "The List-A status comes after the MLC's successful inaugural season and underscores its unwavering dedication to delivering premier cricket in the United States," the statement added. MLC CEO, Vijay Srinivasan, had recently announced the expansion of tournament from 19 games in 2023 to 34 by 2025. "We saw cricket mania sweep across the US last year off the back of our inaugural season of Major League Cricket. Now, we take exciting

momentum into the highly anticipated ICC T20 World Cup and season two of the MLC," said Srinivasan. "With an unforgettable summer of cricket on our doorstep, we're ready to capture the hearts of American sports fans with our thrilling, adrenaline-charged game that is the most exciting emerging T20 tournament across the globe," he added. Sanctioned by USA Cricket, MLC saw several players from across the world, including New Zealand and Australia among others, take part in the tournament last year. Six teams — Los Angeles Knight Riders, MI New York, San Francisco Unicorns, Seattle Orcas, Texas Super Kings, and the Washington Freedom — featured in the inaugural edition.

# 'Bhaje Vaayu Vegam has unexpected twists & gripping sequences'

K. RAMYA SREE

Kartikeya Gummakonda starrer *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* is all set to hit theatres on May 31, and the film is set to fight it out with a couple of other releases at the box office this week.

Presented by UV Creations and produced under the banner of UV Concepts, *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* boasts a stellar cast led by Kartikeya Gummakonda and Iswarya Menon, with Rahul Tyson adding his expertise to the mix. In an interview with us, director Prashanth Reddy delves into various aspects of the film, providing audiences with a deeper understanding of what to expect.

Beginning by offering insights into the film's storyline, Prashanth highlights the distinctive narrative approach adopted in *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*. He teases the audience with hints of unexpected twists and turns, promising a riveting cinematic experience. He shared, "The story of *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* is unlike anything audiences have seen before. We've incorporated unexpected plot

twists and gripping sequences to keep viewers engaged from start to finish."

During the conversation, the director also opened up about the challenges faced during the film's production, including technical issues and unexpected delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He shared, "We faced several hurdles during the production of *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*, including technical glitches and delays caused by the pandemic. However, we remained committed to delivering a top-notch cinematic experience to our audience."

Prashanth sheds light on the carefully crafted characters in the film, emphasising the importance of casting choices and character development. "The characters in *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* play a crucial role in driving the story forward. Each character has been meticulously developed to add depth and complexity to the overall narrative."

With a focus on engaging the audience from start to finish, Prashanth shares his philosophy on filmmaking, emphasising the importance of seamless storytelling and captivating visuals. He discusses the film's title

and its relevance to the plot, as well as the meticulous attention paid to the background score and pacing: "We've employed innovative filmmaking techniques to ensure that *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* captivates audiences from beginning to end. From the title to the background score, every aspect of the film has been carefully crafted to deliver an unforgettable cinematic experience."

Looking ahead, Prashanth hints at upcoming projects and expresses his eagerness to continue exploring innovative storytelling techniques.



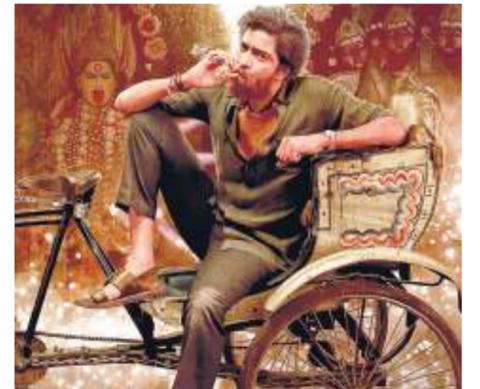
Ahead of the film's release, we have the director of the film, Prashanth Reddy, offering a glimpse into the making of this eagerly awaited emotional action thriller.

## INTENSE FIRST LOOK OF ALLARI NARESH'S BACHCHALA MALLI RELEASED

The anticipation for Allari Naresh's upcoming film, *Bachchala Malli*, reaches new heights as the first look poster is revealed, offering a glimpse into the intense and action-packed narrative crafted by director Subbu Mangadevi. Produced by Ramesh Danda and Balaji Gutta under the esteemed banner of Hasya Movies, known for their blockbuster hits like *Samajavaragamana* and *Ooru Peru Bhairavakona*, the film promises to be a riveting cinematic experience. In the striking first look poster, Allari Naresh captivates audiences with his never-before-seen mass avatar, sporting messy hair and an uneven beard. With a serious gaze and intensity in his eyes, Naresh exudes power and determination as he sits atop a rickshaw, cigarette in hand. Adorned with sacred threads around his neck and hand, Naresh's character exudes an aura of strength and ferocity.

The backdrop of the poster reveals a carnival atmosphere, complete with fireworks and individuals dressed in fierce deity costumes, hinting at the high-voltage action sequences that await audiences in *Bachchala Malli*. This glimpse into a thrilling fight sequence promises to be an action

entertainer unlike any other. Joining Allari Naresh in this captivating tale is Amritha Aiyer, who takes on the role of the lead actress. The ensemble cast includes acclaimed actors such as Rohini, Rao Ramesh, Achyuth Kumar, Balagam Jayaram, Hari Teja, Praveen, and Viva Harsha, each bringing their unique talents to the screen. *Bachchala Malli* is poised to be a grand cinematic spectacle, with a team of renowned technicians handling various aspects of the production. Vishal Chandrasekhar, known for his exceptional work in *Sita Ramam*, will compose the music, while Richard M Nathan, acclaimed for his cinematography in films like *Maanaadu* and *Pangam*, will capture the visuals. Editing duties will be helmed by Chota K. Prasad, with Brahma Kadali serving as the production designer. Written by director Subbu Mangadevi himself, the story and dialogue of *Bachchala Malli* promise to take audiences on an emotional journey set against the backdrop of the 1990s. Currently, the film is in its final stages of production, with shooting taking place at RFC, Hyderabad.



## Iswarya Menon: Playing a traditional character allows me to delve into a new dimension

KRS

As the clock ticks closer to the release of the highly anticipated film *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*, Iswarya Menon, the talented actress known for her dynamic performances, sits down to share insights into her character and her journey in the industry.

In *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*, Iswarya steps into the shoes of Indu, a traditional girl with a natural charm and an unwavering dedication to the story's narrative. Speaking about her character, Iswarya remarks, "Indu is not just your typical heroine. She is a beauty who is deeply involved in the storyline, and her actions are driven by her affection for Venkat, the protagonist."

Emphasising the film's raw content and impressive blend of action and emotion, Iswarya expresses her

enthusiasm for being part of a project that offers depth and substance.

Transitioning from her previous role in *Spy*, where she showcased stylish action sequences, Iswarya embraces the opportunity to explore a different facet of acting. The actress explained, "Playing a traditional character allows me to delve into a new dimension of performance. While *Spy* was modern and action-oriented, *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* presents a chance to portray a grounded and emotionally nuanced character."

Working alongside Kartikeya Gummakonda, the lead actor in the film, Iswarya commends Kartikeya's commitment to his craft, and his friendly demeanour, creating a positive working environment on set.

Director Prashanth Reddy's vision for the film has also left a lasting impression on Iswarya. She

noted, "Prashanth's clarity of vision and meticulous approach to storytelling have been instrumental in shaping the narrative of the *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*." Despite not dubbing for her character in the film, Iswarya trusts the director's judgment and believes in his ability to deliver a compelling cinematic experience. Lastly, reflecting on her journey in the industry, Iswarya acknowledges her humble beginnings and the determination that has propelled her career forward. "From a small town in Tamil Nadu to the glitz and glamour of the film industry, it has been a fulfilling journey. I'm grateful for the recognition I've received and remain committed to exploring diverse roles and making meaningful contributions to cinema," she concluded. This UV Creations' production, *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*, is set to hit theatres on May 31.

## SAMYUKTA MENON'S B'WOOD DEBUT MADE OFFICIAL

Charan Uppalapati, known for his remarkable cinematic vision, is venturing into Hindi cinema with this high-budget extravaganza, featuring a star-studded cast including Kajol, Prabhudeva, Naseeruddin Shah, Jisshu Sengupta, and Aditya Seal. Notably, this film marks the reunion of Kajol and Prabhudeva after 27 years, adding to the anticipation surrounding the project.

While there were long-standing rumours about Samyukta Menon's Bollywood debut, it's now confirmed that she will be making her entry into Hindi cinema with *Maharagni: Queen of Queens*, alongside the stellar ensemble cast.

The first schedule of the film has already been completed, and on Tuesday, the makers unveiled the official teaser, offering a glimpse into the action-packed narrative. The teaser sets the tone for the film with Prabhudeva's grand entrance and Samyukta Menon's intense pursuit, followed by Kajol's powerful presence as *Maharagni* and

Naseeruddin Shah's poignant appeal from a hospital bed. The teaser promises a captivating blend of furious action and compelling storytelling.

*Maharagni: Queen of Queens* boasts a team of top technicians, including GK Vishnu as cinematographer, Harshvardhan Rameshwar as music composer, and Navin Nooli as editor. With a screenplay by Niranjan Iyengar and Jessica Khurana, Saahi Suresh will handle the visual aesthetics as the production designer.

Director Charan Tej Uppalapati expressed his excitement about the project, highlighting the collaboration with actors and their contributions to bringing the characters to life on screen. Produced by Harman Baweja and Venkata Anish Dorigillu under Baweja Studios and E7 Entertainment, *Maharagni: Queen of Queens* is set to be a pan-India release, hitting theatres in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam languages.



## Kalyan gives a glimpse into his next film

Nandamuri Kalyan Ram, along with director Pradeep Chilukuri, offered a glimpse of their highly anticipated 21st film on the birth anniversary of his legendary grandfather, Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao. Titled *#NKR21*, the film is produced by Ashok Vardhan Muppa and Sunil Balusu under the banners of Ashoka Creations and NTR Arts, presented by Muppa Venkaiah Chowdary.

The teaser, titled "The Fist of Flame," packs a punch with its action-packed scenes, showcasing Kalyan Ram in a striking new avatar. His powerful portrayal hints at the strength and depth of his character in the movie, leaving viewers intrigued and eager for more. With visuals hinting at the film's grandeur, the teaser has set the stage for what promises to be a high-budget entertainer.

Joining Kalyan Ram is a stellar cast, including the acclaimed Vijayashanthi, making a comeback after her blockbuster performance in *Sarileru Neekevvaru*. Her role in *#NKR21* is touted to be dynamic and impactful, adding

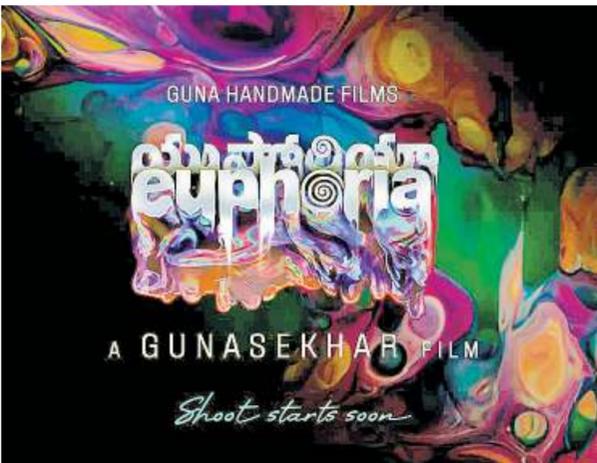
depth to the narrative. The film also features Sohel Khan, Saiee Manjrekar, and Srikanth in pivotal roles, further raising anticipation among fans.

As the shoot progresses in Hyderabad, the movie boasts a talented team of technicians. With Ram Prasad behind the camera and Ajaneesh Loknath handling the music department, the film promises top-notch visual and auditory experiences.

Thammiraju's editing expertise and Srikanth Vissa's screenplay add further depth to the project.



## Gunasekhar's next titled Euphoria



Renowned for his distinctive storytelling and blockbuster hits, director Gunasekhar is all set to helm his next project, a youthful social drama titled *Euphoria*. With a track record of delivering diverse and impactful films, Gunasekhar's upcoming venture is generating significant buzz in the industry.

Under the banner of Guna Handmade Films, *Euphoria* will be produced by Neelima Guna. The film's pre-production is currently in full swing, ensuring meticulous planning and execution of all aspects. Anticipation is mounting as the shooting for *Euphoria* is scheduled to commence soon. Fans and industry insiders are eagerly awaiting the announcement of the cast and technical crew, eager to see the talent that will bring this compelling project to life.

With Gunasekhar's directorial expertise and a dedicated production team, *Euphoria* promises to be a noteworthy addition to contemporary cinema. Combining youthful energy with thought-provoking social commentary, the film is poised to resonate strongly with audiences.

## First look poster for Pani from Joju's directorial debut is out

*Pani* is the directorial debut of Joju George, who has become a favourite of the audience with his extraordinary performance and memorable characters. Being a film directed by Joju, who has given a handful of good films through his acting, *Pani* is a film that the audience is eagerly waiting for. The crew has finally released the first-look poster for the much-awaited film. The film, written by Joju himself, is being prepared in a mass thriller and revenge genre. The first-look poster for *Pani*, which has reached the audience waiting for Joju films, is getting a good response. Joju is the lead actor of the film, which is about to hit theaters after a 100-day shoot. Abhinaya is the heroine. And the film has a huge star cast, including former *Bigg Boss* fame Sagar and Junais.

After an acting career of 28 years, Joju is donning the role of director. Joju, who shone as a junior artiste, co-star, and hero, has made rare achievements in his name since he switched to director. Apart from Karthik Subbaraj-Suriya combo's Tamil film, Joju is also a Malayalee actor who is rising to pan-Indian level with Anurag Kashyap's Bollywood film. The project is being produced by MM. Riyas Adam and Sijo Vadkan under the banner of Joju's own production company, Appu Pathu Pappu Productions, AD Studios, and Gokulam Movies. Music by Vishnu Vijay and Sam CS. The film is distributed by Dream Big Films.



## SEERAT KAPOOR TO SHAKE A LEG WITH SHARWANAND



Renowned for her stellar performances, Seerat Kapoor is all set to surprise her fans with a special guest appearance in *Manamey*, alongside the talented duo of Sharwanand and Kriti Shetty, under the direction of Sriram Aditya. Seerat Kapoor's versatile acting chops and recent string of successes position her as one of the most sought-after actresses in the Telugu film industry today. Adding to the excitement, the makers of *Manamey* will treat audiences to a delightful duet song choreographed by the

master Raju Sundaram, promising an enchanting visual spectacle. With a slew of projects in her repertoire, 2024 marks a significant year for Seerat Kapoor, fresh off the heels of her back-to-back hits on OTT platforms like Hotstar and Aha, including blockbuster films like *Save the Tigers 2* and *Bhramakalapa 2*.

The reunion of Seerat Kapoor and Sharwanand, who previously shared screen space in the acclaimed film *Run Raja Run*, is sure to evoke nostalgia while offering a fresh

perspective on their on-screen chemistry. The makers have capitalised on their undeniable rapport, creating anticipation among their loyal fan base.

Fans eagerly anticipate Seerat's return alongside Sharwanand in a heartwarming duet song, promising a visually spectacular experience. The makers are thrilled to showcase the undeniable chemistry between Seerat and Sharwanand on the silver screen, culminating years of anticipation and excitement.