



In Telangana it is 104 of 524 candidates, 112 of 507 candidates in West Bengal and 115 of 496 candidates in Bihar. For Jharkhand it is 69 of 242 candidates, Odisha it is 52 of 207 candidates and Kerala it is 67 of 189 candidates.

Rs 107.96 crore seized; 7,305 persons arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Director General of Police Harish Kumar Gupta, in a release on Wednesday, stated that the Police Department has stood at the forefront in curbing all illegal activities during the elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies across Andhra Pradesh.

The police were particularly vigilant related to the inducement and gratification of the items such as illegal cash, liquor, drugs, precious metals and freebies. Therefore, the department focused on curbing the flow of Non-Duty Paid Liquor (NDPL) from States such as Odisha, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Puducherry. A total of 150 check-posts were established on the border, including 31 integrated check-posts manned by the police, SEB, Commercial Taxes, Transport and Revenue



The department is working closely and gathering intelligence inputs, and various strategies tailored to different regions to prevent illegal movement of cash, liquor, drugs, precious metals and freebies, including cross-border smuggling.

departments. Even 35 Border Mobile Patrolling Parties and 15 temporary check-posts were established to curb all types of inducements.

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metals and freebies, including cross-border smuggling.

During the 2019 elections, illicit money to the tune of Rs 41.80 crore was seized. However, this time, Rs 107.96 crore was seized and 7,305 persons were arrested.

During the 2019 elections, illicit liquor (NDPL, DPL, FJ Wash) worth Rs 8.07 crore was

seized. However, in the 2024 elections, liquor worth Rs 58.70 crore (Police- 15.80 crore, SEB - 42.90 crore) was seized and 61,543 people were arrested.

Meanwhile, drugs worth Rs 5.04 crore were seized during the 2019 elections. This time, the value of drugs seized is Rs 35.61 crore (Police- 7.16 crore and SEB - 28.45 crore) and 1,730 persons were arrested.

During the 2019 elections, precious metals worth Rs 27.17 crore were seized, too. However, in the 2024 elections, the value of precious metals seized is Rs 123.62 croe. As many as 42 persons were arrested.

During previous elections, freebies and other items worth Rs 10.63 crore were also seized. However, in the 2024 elections, the value of freebies seized was Rs 16.98 crore and 233 persons were arrested.

As many as 3,466 vehicles have also been seized.

Goa a heaven away from home: Governor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Abdul Nazeer has extended greetings and hearty felicitations to the people of Goa on the occasion of Goa Formation Day, celebrated on May 30 every year. Goa became India's twenty-fifth State on May 30, 1987.

"Goa is a heaven away from home and is known for its famous beaches, culture, climate, places of worship and historical monuments. Goa is full of lush greenery, breathtaking beaches and it is a perfect blend of Portuguese and Indian culture and architecture. People get attracted to this place to experience world-class music, dance, and sunset.

"Occasions like Formation Day of different States and Union Territories forge a strong relationship and bonding among people of the country, and promote mutual understanding, spirit of fraternity, and universal brotherhood," the Governor said.

CS conducts review meeting

Discusses action taken on various subjects considered during 3rd national-level of CSs meeting

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy has conducted a review meeting with the officials concerned to discuss the action taken on various subjects considered during the third national-level Chief Secretaries' meeting, which took place from December 27 to 29 last year in New Delhi. The review meeting was held at the Chief Secretary's meeting hall at the secretariat in Velagapudi on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, CS Jawahar Reddy instructed all officials to take action on the discussed subjects on time and submit a detailed report. Particularly the 'Theme' report to be submitted to the Niti Aayog on land, assets, electricity, drinking water, Medical and Health and Education departments, he said.

Further, he stated that the governing council meeting of Niti Aayog will be held in July and a review will be conducted on various subjects discussed in the previous meeting.



Chief Secretary Dr KS Jawahar Reddy convening a review meeting with officials of various departments at his chamber at the secretariat at Velagapudi on Wednesday

Meanwhile, CS Jawahar Reddy underlined the importance of including a chapter in school books about drinking water. As a result, students will have to get awareness about water conservation, he said.

Also, steps are needed for water source geo-tagging, he said. "Take all necessary steps to supply potable water to all villages by using solar power and for that appropriate action plan is required," he explained. Later, a review of the Medical and Health Department was

conducted and instructions issued.

Planning Board Secretary Girija Sankar, Medical and Health Department Special Chief Secretary MT Krishna Babu, Finance Department Special CS SS Rawath, Energy Special CS K Vijayanand, Agriculture Department Special CS Gopalakrishna Dwivedi, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Principal Secretary Sashibhushan Kumar, IT Secretary K Sashidhar and others were present.

TDP suspects plot by YSRCP to manipulate complaint made to poll panel

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP leader P Ashok Babu, on Wednesday, said that the TDP has made a request to the Election Commission on the postal ballot on something while the YSRCP leaders complained to the poll panel on something totally different.

Why were the YSRCP leaders manipulating the circular issued by the Election Commission on postal ballots in their favour, he asked. "It is not right to pass such comments on an organisation like the Election Commission," he remarked.

Without knowing the facts how the YSRCP leaders can pass comments that TDP and the poll panel have joined hands, Ashok Babu asked. "We only have made an appeal to the poll panel that there is no rule whatsoever to reject the votes if the ballot does not have the signature of the RO. This request we have made only to make sure that the votes should not be rejected on the counting day declaring it as invalid," he added.

The poll panel should ensure that the ballot carries the stamp of the gazetted officer and if the ballot does not carry the stamp it is not the fault of the voter, he said and added that the poll panel should give the clarification in such issues and thus TDP made a request to release a circular on this. The Election Commission responded positively and released the circular on May 25, he said.

However, YSRCP, in its letter submitted to the poll panel, said that the postal ballot should be rejected without even opening the inner cover if the declaration is not duly signed by the elector or is not attested by the officer concerned, he said and stated that the TDP has asked for something while the YSRCP has complained on totally something else.

Probably, the YSRCP leaders might not have gone through the letter submitted by TDP to the poll panel and thus made a complaint which is totally irrelevant, he said.

Changes in POLYCET-2024 admission schedule

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Commissioner of Technical Education Chadalavada Nagarani has said that as Section 144 was imposed across the State in the first week of June, changes have been made in the admissions process of POLYCET-2024 to avoid inconvenience to the students and the amended notification regarding the admission was released on Wednesday.

Nagarani said that various issues were discussed in a high-level meeting regarding POLYCET-2024 admissions at the State Technical Education Department office in Amaravati. She said that the revised schedule was decided as per the requests received from the students and their parents and said that there is no change in the online process dates for payment of admission fees, verification of certificates, etc., and it will be possible till June 2. It is stated that the verification of the certificates on 3rd will be conducted on 6th and the same will be applicable for special category candidates as well. She said that there will be an



opportunity to register for optional from June 7 to 10. She said that there will be a possibility of change of options on June 11.

The Commissioner explained that the allotment of seats will be completed on June 13. Students whose admissions have been finalised within six days from June 14 to 19 will have to report to the respective polytechnics in person and online. Nagarani stated that the classes will start all over the state from June 14.

Joint Director of Technical Education Department Velaga Padma Rao, State Technical Education and Training Council Secretary Ramana Babu, Cheap Camp Officer Vijaya Kumar, Deputy Director Vijaya Bhaskar and others participated in the meeting.

GANNAVARAM-NUZVID SECTION

Automatic Block Signaling system commissioned

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Making giant strides towards infrastructure upgrade in full scale, Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway, has commissioned an advanced Automatic Block Signaling System for a stretch of 21.21 Km between Gannavaram - Pedda Avutapalli - Telaprolu - Nuzvid Stations. This commissioning aims to enhance safety and efficiency along the Divisional Railway network. This ambitious project in the most congested Gannavaram - Nuzvid Section was executed in 12 months with an investment of Rs 31.81 Crore by the Gati Shakti Team of Vijayawada Division.

The Automatic Block Signalling (ABS) system in Indian Railways is a method of railway signaling that divides a railway line into successive track sections or blocks. The system controls the movement of trains between these blocks using automatic signals. ABS operation allows trains to operate automatically, enhancing



safety and sectional capacity. It helps to accommodate more trains in a section thus reducing the detention of trains and swift movement of rail traffic than regular Intermediate Block or Absolute Block Signalling System working.

A total of 22 automatic signals were set up between Gannavaram-Nuzvid Section. Total 2 ABS huts in the mid-section and four ABS equipment hut at Gannavaram, Pedda Avutapalli, Telaprolu, Nuzvid stations respectively were constructed with pre-stressed precast technology for housing the ABS Equipment. All the signals were also provided with illuminated 'A' markers.

Narendra A Patil, Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada Division, SCR congratulated Ch PR Vital, Chief Project Manager, Gati Shakti; R Viswanath Reddy, Dy CSTE, Gati Shakti; Ramesh Kamulla, DSTE, Gati Shakti and Team for commissioning the Automatic Block Signaling System in the busiest section of Gannavaram-Nuzvid Section of Vijayawada Division.

The DRM stated with ABS, train movement is automated, reducing human error and minimising risk of accidents. He further added that it reduces congestion in critical sections by enabling real-time monitoring and optimising train speeds.



Supreme Court Judge visits Durga Temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Justice Sandeep Mehta, Supreme Court Judge, and his family members had darshan of goddess Durga Devi at the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

Durga Temple Executive Officer (EO) KS Rama Rao accorded a warm welcome to the judge and his family and provided the darshan as per temple etiquette.

Justice Sandeep Mehta and his wife performed special pujas on the occasion. They

participated in the 'Khadgamalarchana'.

Later, Vedic Scholars gave blessings to them at the Veda Ashirvachanam Mandapam. EO Rama Rao presented him with a Seshha Vastram, Laddu Prasadam and a portrait.

Meanwhile, EO Rama Rao started the construction works of a shed worth Rs.8 lakh at Smardha Vedic School at Poranki in Krishna district. For this construction, Chandrasekhar, a resident of Poranki, donated Rs.8 lakh. Temple EE L Rama and other officials participated.

Final Haj flight departs with 48 pilgrims

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The third and final flight carrying 48 Haj pilgrims left for Jeddah from the Gannavaram airport on Wednesday. Andhra Pradesh Dudekula Corporation MD Gouse Peer flagged off the bus carrying the pilgrims from the Haj camp to the airport.

In all, 692 Haj pilgrims from across the State have left for Jeddah in the last three days. As many as 644 pilgrims left in the first two flights. The last flight from the Gannavaram Airport to Jeddah departed with 48 pilgrims at 7.10 am on Wednesday.



Haj pilgrims at the Haj camp on the premises of Eidgah Jama Masjid near the Gannavaram airport

Earlier, the pilgrims gathered at the Haj camp on the premises of the Eidgah Jama Masjid near the airport. Haj Committee members talked to them.

Andhra Pradesh Wakf Board CEO and Haj Committee EO Abdul Khadir and several members of the committee were present.

Niranjan expresses...

Continued from Page 1

He said the EC guidelines are clear that the Form 13 A postal ballots should not be considered if it is not clearly signed by the gazetted authority and put an official seal on it.

The YSRCP leader added that the relaxation given by the poll body would lead to clashes. He said due to these guidelines, there would not be any vote secrecy. He demanded that the EC officials reconsider the decision. The Opposition party's cadre unleashed chaos and launched a series of violent attacks during and after the polls on May 13 in the State, he said.

YSRCP poised for landslide victory: YV Subba Reddy

Substantial voter turnout a compelling indicator of forthcoming victory

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) Rajya Sabha member YV Subba Reddy has expressed strong confidence that the ruling party will decisively reclaim power in Andhra Pradesh after the Assembly election results are announced on June 4. Reddy highlighted the substantial voter turnout, particularly among women beneficiaries of YSRCP's welfare schemes, as a compelling indicator of their forthcoming victory.

Reddy emphasised that the enthusiastic participation at polling stations suggests that YSRCP is on track to secure nearly all 175 Assembly seats. "This overwhelming support reflects not just our party's confidence but also the voters' determination to re-elect YS Jagan Mohan Reddy as their chief minister for a second term," he declared. Projecting a landslide victory, Reddy announced, "We are confident that the party will return to power with a resounding mandate. The Jagan 2.0 government will continue its transformative welfare schemes. CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will be sworn in by the Governor between 9 am and 11 am on June 9, Sunday."

In addressing concerns over



"We are confident that the party will return to power with a resounding mandate. The Jagan 2.0 government will continue its transformative welfare schemes. CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will be sworn in by the Governor between 9 am and 11 am on June 9, Sunday."

a recent directive from the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) regarding postal ballot counting, Subba Reddy revealed YSRCP's plans to approach the high court. He criticised the CEO's directive, which permits postal ballots to be counted without the Returning Officer's (RO) signature and seal, as contrary to Election Commission of India norms. "The party is dissatisfied with CEO Mukesh Kumar Meena's decision to relax postal ballot guidelines. If the

Election Commission does not rectify this, we will seek intervention from the high court," Reddy asserted.

The YSRCP's stance underscores ongoing tensions over electoral procedures as the state anticipates the final election results. The party remains optimistic about securing a decisive mandate from the electorate, buoyed by widespread support for its welfare initiatives. The high voter turnout, particularly among women, is seen as a direct endorsement of the welfare schemes implemented by the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government. These schemes have been pivotal in garnering widespread support from the electorate, ensuring that key demographics remain loyal to YSRCP.

The controversy over the postal ballot counting process has added a layer of complexity to the electoral process. Subba Reddy's announcement of potential legal action highlights the party's commitment to ensuring that election procedures adhere strictly to established norms. YSRCP's challenge is rooted in concerns over the integrity of the voting process, aiming to maintain transparency and fairness in the election.

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Robust arrangements in place for peaceful vote counting: Collector

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Election Officer and Collector Dr A Mallikarjuna has announced meticulous arrangements to ensure a peaceful and orderly vote counting process in the district. During a review meeting on Wednesday, held via video conference by Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Nitesh Kumar Vyas, Dr Mallikarjuna highlighted the robust security measures in place at the strong rooms. These measures are supported by a three-tier security system involving both civil police and central forces. The installation of 134 CCTV cameras, linked to a central monitoring room, will oversee the entire counting process, ensuring strict surveillance.

For the parliamentary constituency, Dr Mallikarjuna stated that seven halls at Andhra University (AU) have been allocated for vote counting, with 98 tables arranged—two per constituency. The



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counting will occur over 140 rounds, with each table staffed by a counting supervisor, counting assistant, and micro-observer. Postal ballot counting for the Parliament will take place in three rounds across two halls, utilising 18 tables. These tables will be manned by 18 counting superintendents, 36 counting assistants, and 18 micro-observers.

In the district's assemblies, arrangements are in sync with

the parliamentary counts, with an additional three rounds specific to the Pendurthi constituency. For Assembly postal ballots, five halls with 33 tables will handle the counting across 15 rounds. These will be staffed by 24 additional AROs, 33 counting superintendents, 57 counting assistants, and 33 micro-observers. Dr. Mallikarjuna noted that training for officials and staff has commenced, with the first

round of randomisation completed on May 25 and the second round scheduled for June 2.

Police Commissioner Dr A Ravi Shankar reported that 140 sensitive areas in the district have been identified and are under close monitoring to prevent any disturbances. Regular patrols and the installation of CCTVs connected to a command control room ensure comprehensive sur-

veillance. The police are also maintaining a vigilant watch over the homes of political leaders and candidates, reinforcing the security arrangements.

This extensive preparation underscores the district administration's commitment to ensuring a smooth and fair election process, with all necessary measures taken to uphold the integrity of the vote counting.

Nandigama result expected to be released first

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR and Krishna districts have made extensive arrangements to ensure that the counting of votes on June 4 is conducted smoothly, transparently, and accurately. The erstwhile Krishna district consists of two Lok Sabha constituencies: Vijayawada (NTR district) and Machilipatnam (Krishna district). Each Parliamentary constituency comprises seven Assembly constituencies.

Vote counting for Machilipatnam Parliamentary constituency and the Assembly constituencies in Krishna district will be held at Krishna University in Machilipatnam. Meanwhile, vote counting for Vijayawada Lok Sabha and Assembly segments will be conducted at Nimra and Nova Engineering Colleges at Jupudi of Ibrahimpatnam mandal in NTR district.

According to the election officials' predictions, Nandigama Assembly constituency's result may be announced first in NTR district. Subsequently, the results of either Pedana or Machilipatnam Assembly constituency will be released. The announcement of the elec-

tion result will depend on the number of candidates.

Compared to the previous election in 2019, the results are expected to be announced earlier this time. The district election authorities have made elaborate arrangements to ensure the counting process is completed as quickly as possible. The counting officials will count the 14 Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) Control Units (CU) in each round, and the CUs will be counted round-wise based on the total polling centres to announce the results of the Assembly constituencies.

The first result in NTR district is expected to be out within four hours after the commencement of the counting process. In Nandigama, a total of 11 candidates are contesting, and the total polled votes will be conducted on 14 tables, completing 16 rounds. Each round is expected to take approximately 15 minutes.

Following the Nandigama segment, the result of Jaggayapet Assembly constituency will be announced, estimated to take about five to six hours due to the number of candidates. Counting of Mylavaram and Vijayawada

East assembly constituencies will be completed in 22 rounds, and the announcement of these two segments will take around 10 hours.

Vijayawada Central Assembly constituency has a large number of candidates, so the announcement of results may take more than 10 hours, according to election officials. The results of Pamarru constituency will be released first in Krishna district, followed by Machilipatnam and Pedana. The counting for Machilipatnam Assembly constituency will be concluded in 15 rounds. However, due to the high number of candidates, it will take more time to display the secured votes on the screen, leading to a delayed announcement of the result. Similarly, Penamaluru constituency results will take approximately 11 hours to be announced, with the total polled vote counting being conducted in 22 rounds. Vote counting in Guddivada Assembly constituency will be completed in 17 rounds, and the result for this segment will be announced within seven to eight hours after the commencement of the vote-counting process.

City police crack down on traffic violations with wheel locking initiative

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The city police are taking a tough stance on illegal parking to combat worsening traffic congestion. The growing number of vehicles in the city is outpacing road expansion, leading to crowded streets and a lack of designated parking spaces, especially in commercial areas. Despite repeated warnings, motorists continue to engage in indiscriminate on-street parking, contributing to bottlenecks and hindering traffic flow. To tackle this persistent issue, the police department has initiated a targeted enforcement strategy utilizing "striking forces."

The new initiative involves the deployment of wheel clamps on vehicles found to be parked in violation of traffic regulations. The department has recently procured 200 wheel locks to immobilise vehicles found in violation. A clear notification detailing the offense and a dedicated contact number for the nearest police station will be affixed to the clamped vehicle. Offenders will be subject to a fine of Rs. 1,035 for the parking

violation. The vehicle's release will be contingent upon successful payment of the fine.

Police Commissioner Dr Ravi Shankar Ayyannar underscored the severity of the traffic congestion and the strategic nature of the new enforcement programme. He emphasised a specific focus on congested areas with a history of rampant illegal parking. The wheel locking system aims to serve as a deterrent, encouraging motorists to utilise designated parking spaces. The inconvenience of a locked vehicle and associated fines are expected to incentivise a shift towards responsible parking practices.

The Police Department plans to establish dedicated "striking forces" in commercially dense areas to ensure sustained enforcement. These specialized units will maintain a continuous presence and deploy wheel locks on illegally parked vehicles. The Visakhapatnam City Police Department anticipates that these stringent measures will significantly alleviate traffic congestion and enhance overall traffic flow within the city.

Professor presents plasma-based wastewater treatment technology

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Dr K Rama Mohan Rao, an Assistant Professor at GITAM Deemed to be University's Chemistry Department, highlighted the potential of plasma processes as a cost-effective and environmentally friendly alternative for wastewater treatment, particularly targeting pharmaceutical residues and industrial chemicals. He shared his insights during a scientific talk held at the GITAM School of Science.

"Plasma is not just essential for various applications in our daily lives, but it's also estimated to make up over 99 per cent of the visible universe," Dr. Rao said during his presentation. He elaborated on the crucial role plasma plays in various



industrial and technological processes, including coating aircraft components, fabricating microprocessors, converting waste to energy, and treating water. Additionally, plasma technology is being explored in medical applications, agriculture, and the energy sector. Highlighting the broader

implications, Dr. Rao added that plasma-based processes are also being explored for applications in medical fields, agriculture, and energy sectors. He pointed out the essential role of plasma technology in advancing sustainable resource utilisation and promoting the electrification of the economy.

Prof NVS Venugopal, Head of the Chemistry Department at the GITAM School of Science, provided additional context by mentioning that plasma was first introduced by Irving Langmuir in 1928. He encouraged researchers to delve deeper into the potential of plasma processing, underscoring its transformative power across various industries.



Vizag Film Society hosts screening of Oppenheimer

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Vizag Film Society (VFS), affiliated with the Federation of Film Societies of the Southern Region (FFSSR), delighted cinema enthusiasts with a special screening of the Oscar-winning film Oppenheimer on Wednesday. The event took place at the Visakhapatnam Public Service, drawing a large crowd of film aficionados eager to experience Christopher Nolan's cinematic masterpiece.

Oppenheimer, directed by the acclaimed filmmaker Christopher Nolan, has garnered critical acclaim and numerous accolades since its release. The film provides a gripping portrayal of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the theoretical physicist who is often called the "father of the atomic bomb" for his role in the Manhattan Project during World War II. Nolan's direction, combined with stellar performances, particularly by lead actor Cillian Murphy, has made "Oppenheimer" a standout in contemporary cinema.

The VFS, known for its dedication to promoting film culture in the region, organised the screening as part of its ongoing effort to bring significant cinematic works to the local audience. This event underscores the society's commitment to not only showcasing mainstream cinema but also films that have substantial artistic and historical value.

YSRCP govt created history in five years: Vellampalli

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and MLA Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao said that during the past five years of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government, the welfare schemes were successfully implemented. In a release on Wednesday MLA Srinivas said on the completion of five years of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's government, he said that lakhs of crores of rupees have been directly deposited in the accounts of the beneficiaries through DBT, irrespective of caste, religion, region and party.

In a release on Wednesday MLA Srinivas said on the completion of five years of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's government, he said that lakhs of crores of rupees have been directly deposited in the accounts of the beneficiaries through DBT, irrespective of caste, religion, region and party.

that every poor family gets some or the other scheme. In the history of the country, CM Jagan after taking the reins of the state government has sanctioned 2,06,638 permanent government jobs, 37,908 contract jobs and 3,71,777 outsourcing jobs across the state. CM Jagan Mohan Reddy's rule should come again if the schemes that are currently being implemented are to be continued, he said, adding that people have already given a verdict in favor of YSRCP on June 4. MLA Vellampalli said that YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will once again take oath as Chief Minister in Visakhapatnam on June 9.



Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar addressing a meeting of Planning Secretaries and staff on Wednesday

Unauthorised hoardings to be removed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar chaired a crucial meeting on Wednesday with Planning Secretaries and planning staff to discuss the ongoing issues related to hoardings in the city. In the previous meeting,

Planning Secretaries were directed to identify unauthorised hoardings. Following the Commissioner's directions, it was highlighted that 224 empty framed hoardings were removed in the city, said officials. Also, notices were issued to the concerned agencies to obtain Structural Stability Certificates for all their hoard-

ings within a stipulated period of 10 days, they explained.

The Commissioner reiterated the importance of maintaining structural stability for all hoardings within the city. He instructed the Planning Secretaries to expedite the process of removing all unauthorised hoardings. Furthermore, he emphasised

that hoardings lacking the required structural stability certificate must be removed if the notice period has expired.

Chief City Planner GVGSV Prasad, and Deputy City Planner Jubin Cheeran Roy, along with all departmental heads and Planning Secretaries, participated in the meeting.

Man kills mother

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A man has brutally killed her mother using an axe while drinking alcohol. The incident took place at Vallampatta of A Kondur mandal in NTR district on Wednesday.

According to the A Kondur police, Srikakulapu Venkatesh was quarrelling with his wife and

his mother Bujamma intervened in the issue. This angered Venkatesh and he attacked Bujamma with an axe. She died on the spot. A Kondur police rushed to the spot and shifted the body for post-mortem. Later, the police registered a murder case against Venkatesh and the investigation is on.

HSL MILESTONE

Successful Sea Trial of Diving Support Vessel

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a significant stride towards strengthening India's naval capabilities, Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) has successfully completed the sea trial of a Diving Support Vessel (DSV). The successful trial comes shortly after HSL began constructing five Fleet Support Ships for the Navy, a project valued at Rs 19,000 crore. The DSV, which commenced its maiden sea trial on Monday, has been hailed as a pivotal milestone for HSL. "The ship has successfully completed maiden sea trials with no major defect, marking a pivotal achievement for HSL. This milestone is particularly noteworthy as it represents the shipyard's first warship construction for the Navy in three decades, the last being INS Sujatha built in 1993 with Korean assistance," the company declared on Wednesday.

SRM Foundation establishes free tuition centre at Nidamarru



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A free tuition centre was established in Nidamarru village on Wednesday under the auspices of SRM Foundation. Dr R Prem Kumar, Registrar of SRM University-AP and Revathi Balakrishnan, Associate Director - Directorate of Student Affairs, jointly inaugurated the centre.

Dr Prem Kumar addressed the students and their parents on this occasion, stating that "SRM Foundation of SRM

University (Chennai), which is internationally renowned as a leading educational institution in teaching and research, is also active in social service schemes and programmes in the States of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. This tuition centre is a testament to the Foundation's philosophy of development for the societal cause."

The Foundation's spokesperson, Suresh Kannan, stated that the Foundation set up the first rural tuition centre

to provide free education to rural students in Tamil Nadu. SRM AP Media Public Relations Officer Venugopal Gangisetty further remarked that 22 tuition centres have been established in Tamil Nadu, with 570 students being taught the curriculum. This is the first free tuition centre to be established in Andhra Pradesh.

Elamaram, Senior Consultant of Puthiyathalaimurai Foundation, said that students

studying in sixth to tenth standard from economically backward families will be taught free of charge at the tuition centre. Many students of the villages and their parents were overjoyed as this was a remarkable hope to guarantee quality education and support for their children. SRM AP Chief Liaison Officer Poolla Ramesh Kumar, Assistant Manager Ramachandra Reddy and the residents of Nidamarru village participated in this programme.

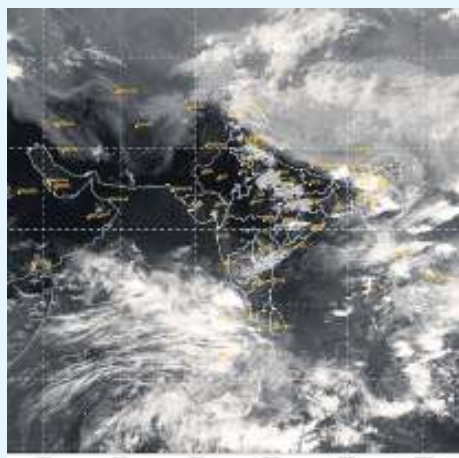
Conditions favourable for onset of southwest monsoon

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The conditions continue to become favourable for the onset of the Southwest Monsoon over Kerala during the next 24 hours, Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

According to Meteorological weather report here, the conditions also continue to become favourable for further advance of the Southwest Monsoon into some more parts of the South Arabian Sea, remaining parts of Maldives and Comorin area; some parts of Lakshadweep area, Kerala, some more parts Southwest & Central Bay of Bengal, Northeast Bay of Bengal and some parts of Northeastern states during the same period. Strong winds with a speed

of 30-40 Kmph are likely to occur at isolated places in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next five days. Thunderstorms accom-



Andhra Pradesh on June 1 and 2.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers is likely to occur at one or two places in Rayalaseema from May 31 to June 4 and in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh & North Coastal Andhra Pradesh from June 1 to 4.

Dry weather is likely to prevail in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh & North Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next three days and in Rayalaseema during the next 48 hours. Dry weather prevailed over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours. The highest maximum temperature of 41.6 degree Celsius was recorded at Ongole in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, the report added.

Who will have the last laugh over guarantees?

The gruelling seven-phase Lok Sabha polls as well as the Assembly elections in some states are about to be over. Going by the voter turnout in various phases, it is difficult to predict the results this time.

The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party and the opposition bloc are very confident of their victories, though there is no palpable wave that can help any party sweep the polls; leave alone the massive crowds at public meetings addressed by various leaders. We cannot take it for granted that the huge responses to public meetings addressed by various leaders indicate success of the respective parties. There have been many examples in support of

this view. The significance of the Lok Sabha polls this time is that not only was there huge attendance of people at public meetings, but the polling percentages were very high in most of the states, compared to those of the previous elections.

As per political indications and considering other factors, it will not be a cakewalk for either BJP or INDIA bloc as the elections this time were held based on very sensitive and key issues that would deeply impact the outcome of the elections. The BJP's Ram astra in the last phase of the poll and the Congress party's Agniveer and other issues to counter went deep into the minds of people.

The staggered election

schedule this time has given political parties enough time to assess their performance in various phases and take remedial steps to enhance their chances of victory based on the feedback.

A party coming to power three times consecutively, particularly at the national level, is indeed a rare phenomenon, given the fast-changing socio-economic issues and other factors. In the backdrop of changing aspirations and expectations of the people during the last decade, the political parties this time resorted to guarantees so much so that people have begun to think that those promises are no longer empty, but backed by the parties' studied resolve to implement



**BUDDHAVARAPU
RAJESWARA PRASAD**

them. Both the incumbent BJP and the opposition bloc competitively tried to lure and bring people into their fold. How far they will be successful in implementing the

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crucial; and whichever party comes to power, the nation's progress, development, and fulfilling of people's aspirations should be the guiding factors. Every party that aspires to come to power will have its agenda of making the nation progress. There should not be any doubt about this factor. But it is accelerated progress and significant developmental activities that matter for a huge nation like India, which still struggles to bring the majority of people out of the poverty line. The sure way for it to happen will be ensuring and enhancing employment opportunities to make people progress in their efforts, rather than giving them economic benefits that will not last long.

Clamouring for power is the natural right of political parties. But how successful they are in implementing the commitments made in their manifestoes will decide their credibility.

During the present Lok Sabha elections, the fight for power at the Centre reached a crescendo with all parties, in a competitive spirit, making guarantees relating to their promises. In this dance of political guarantees, who will have the last laugh is to be seen and whose tune will click finally is generating an interest that has never been seen in any election held so far.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

‘Expedite steps for counting of votes’

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam district Collector AS Dinesh Kumar directed the officials concerned to complete the arrangements for the counting of vote by May 30.

The Collector held a meeting with the Assembly constituencies Returning Officers and Assistant Returning officers here on Wednesday. He reviewed the arrangements for the counting of votes and made suggestions to the officials.

The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4 on the campus of RISE Engineering College. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that the arrangements for the vote counting process should be completed by May 30 th and the returning officers concerned should take action accordingly.

Regarding the counting process, the arrangement of tables, erecting of barricades,

The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4 on the campus of RISE Engineering College. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that the arrangements for the vote counting process should be completed by May 30 th and the returning officers concerned should take action accordingly.



installation of CCTVs, public address system and data entry of election results should be made expeditiously. The details of the counting of votes of Parliament and Assembly constituencies should be recorded carefully from time to time, he directed them.

Collector and District Electoral Officer Dinesh

Kumar directed the Returning Officers to take measures to ensure constant vigilance by setting up staff to carefully record the election results round by round and another team to cross-check the details.

"In accordance with the guidelines issued by the Election Commission, the counting arrangements should

be carried out properly without any mistakes. The postal ballot counting arrangements should be made robustly and signboards should be set up so that the personnel attending the counting duties and the agents of the political parties can easily go to the counting centers of the respective constituencies," he told the officials.

Later the Collector, accompanied by Joint Collector R Gopal Krishna, inspected the arrangements being made for the counting of votes. A host of official's including Markapuram sub-collector Rahul Meena, DRO Srilatha and other officials were among those who were present.

Software engineer dies of snake bite



PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

A software engineer died of snake bite at Pedapudi colony at Movva village in Krishna district on Wednesday.

Police said that the deceased Surya Manikantha was working as a Software engineer at a software company. He had been working from home for the last few months for the company.

On the night of Tuesday, he went to the toilet and was bitten by a snake. However, he did not notice that a snake bit him due to darkness and went to bed. The family members noticed in the morning froth oozing from his mouth and they took him to the government hospital.

The doctors examined him and found that he was bitten by a snake. He was declared dead. A pall of gloom descended with the death of a young software engineer who was working on a huge salary at a multinational company.

Revanth pressurised from Delhi not to act on phone-tapping: BJP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr K Laxman, national president of the BJP OBC Morcha and member of Rajya Sabha, raised concerns about the ongoing controversy surrounding phone-tapping, alleging that the Congress-led State government is sitting silently on the issue.

He questioned the motives behind not arresting a former chief minister. He said phone-tapping case amounts to sedition and such people shouldn't be spared. "The

Chief Minister is taking a step back due to pressure from Delhi biggies. Despite being a victim of phone-tapping, Revanth Reddy is unable to do anything. This proves that the BRS and the Congress are one."

He condemned the alleged misuse of phone-tapping for political gains and emphasised the need to safeguard democratic principles. He said, phone-tapping is not

just a matter of privacy but a threat to national security. He said, those accused of wrongdoing should face consequences. Dr Laxman demanded action against those responsible for the alleged misuse of phone-tapping. Dr Laxman called for police authorities to uphold the law without succumbing to political pressure.

Home guards contribute one day salary to families of deceased colleagues

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The Home guards extended a helping hand to their colleagues by contributing one day's salary to the families of eight home guards- who retired and died on duty.

Superintendent of Police S Sathish Kumar presented the cheques to the family members of the deceased and retired at a brief function held at the district police office here on Wednesday.

The SP presented a cheque for Rs 34 lakh to S Jayalakshmi, widow of Home Guard Yesurathnam, Rs 4,55,110 to home guard M

Rajeswari who retired, Rs 4,75,790 to M Sai Ravi Teja son of home guard KVV S Kumari who died recently, Rs.4,60,790 to Y D Krishna retired home guard, Rs.2,03,770 to N Sakunthala widow of home guard N Yedukondalu, Rs.2,00,930 to SMK Ali retired home guard, Rs.1,94,540 to KBV Lakshmi retired home guard and Rs.1,94,540 to P Venkata Lakshmi widow of home guard Balakrishna.

The SP promised the home guards' families of further assistance in future for their speedy rehabilitation.

4 youths drowned in Nallamada stream, 2 bodies retrieved

PNS ■ BAPATLA

In a tragic incident, four youngsters were drowned in the Nallamada stream at the outskirts here on Wednesday.

The bodies of two of the boys have been fished out from the stream.

Police said that a group of six youngsters went to Suryalanka beach from Hyderabad for holidaying. While going back to Hyderabad from Suryalanka, they stopped at the Nallamada stream.

They entered the stream

for a bath. One of them slipped and started drowning and the three went to his rescue all the four drowned in the stream.

The bodies of Sunny and Sunil were fished out of the stream.

A massive search has been on to trace the two bodies of Nandu and Giri.

Poignant scenes were witnessed at the stream with the wailing parents and relatives of the deceased youths. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies of Sanny and Sunil to the GGH for postmortem.

Clashes over a piece of land allotted to Army officer

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Tension prevailed at Ravipadu village in Pentapadu mandal as two groups clashed over a piece of land that was allocated to army personnel.

According to official sources, the state government has allocated three cents of house site to Palivela Nageswara Rao, who is working as Major Subhedar in the Indian Army and he was also issued a possession certificate.

The Army Officer started construction of a house on the site. However, the revenue officials told the Army personnel that the house site was allocated to him at another place and ordered him to stop construction. The revenue officials warned of demolishing the house.

Disgruntled with the controversy on the house site, the wife of army officer attempted suicide by pouring kerosene on her. However the DSP and other police personnel prevented her. The army officer said that he has served 30 years in the Indian Army and is going to retire in two months. He lamented that he was



humiliated by issuing a notice to stop the construction of his house. It is alleged that a local leader stoked some people belonging to a particular community with an intention to grab the piece of land, allocated to the Army officer.

Meanwhile, District Collector Sumit Kumar said that three cents of land was allocated to the army officer at Ravipadu village in Pentapadu mandal in March, 2024. The armyman started constructing a house on the site. A group of people went to the place and put a statue of BR Ambedkar on the foundations of the

house and demanded to stop the construction in the site which led to a jostle between people belonging to two groups.

Some people attacked the ex-serviceman and his wife. Section 144 was clamped at Ravipadu village. Cases were registered against those who attacked the army officer and his wife, the Collector said. The Collector ordered the officials to find a suitable place for installing the Ambedkar statue. He warned of stringent action against those who post stoking posts on social media.

Filling stations instructed not to sell petrol in bottles

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam district SP Garud Sumit instructed the petrol filling station managements not to sell petrol and diesel in bottles keeping in view the counting of votes and warned of stringent action if the same are sold in bottles.

The SP held a meeting with political party leaders, their representatives and village elders in Kanigiri on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, the SP warned of stringent action against those who resort to violence and vitiate tranquility during and after the counting of votes.

Asking the political party leaders to exercise restraint even if the result is in their favour or against, the SP warned of stringent action including imposing Rs 2 lakh fine against those who indulge in violent incidents. Moreover they would also be sent to prison, the SP added.

The SP instructed activists not to post fake photos, videos, and provoke people on caste and religion basis. He asked the political parties to direct their



Admins of WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Social Media groups to take pre-emptive measures without sharing false information.

SP Garud Sumit warned of action against the persons who post inflammatory posts on social media. Section 144 will be in force on the day of counting, and after the election results, he informed.

The political parties must take prior permission from the concerned authorities to hold victory rallies and meetings, the

SP made it clear.

Lauding the political parties, officials and people of the district for their cooperation for conducting polling on May 13 peacefully, the SP appealed to them to extend the same cooperation during counting day. SP Garud Sumit asked the villagers to inform the police, if they notice strangers at their village and movements of people in suspicious manner. Kanigiri DSP Ramaraju and other officials were among those who were present.

Tetra packs with liquor seized; one arrested

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

The police seized a huge quantity of tetra liquor packets here on Wednesday while being brought illegally from Karnataka state.

Sub-divisional Officer Rajagopal Reddy told the media here on Wednesday that a police team led by CI K Ulasaiah and SI T Prasad conducted a raid at Tenebanda area near Anjaneyaswamy temple and seized 12 carton boxes.

The carton boxes contained tetra liquor packets worth Rs



75,000. The tetra liquor packets were brought from Karnataka state illegally and are being sold here. The

police arrested A Lokesh in connection with the case. The accused Lokesh was involved in several criminal

cases including robbery and thefts previously. The accused was produced before the court.

SCS to AP is possible only with Congress: Chinta Mohan

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Congress party senior leader and former Union Minister Chinta Mohan reiterated that Special Category Status (SCS) would be accorded to AP, if the Congress is voted to power.

Talking to the media in Delhi on Wednesday, he said that the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on February 25 announced that SCS would be granted to AP.



However, the BJP was voted to power in 2014. The BJP has meted out a raw deal to AP by not granting the SCS, he slammed.

"Andhra Pradesh has been stuck in a debt trap. Jagan Mohan Reddy headed government has borrowed lakhs of crores of money. In order to come out of the debt trap, Andhra Pradesh requires SPC. If the SCS is granted, several major industries will be established which helps to improve

the financial position of the state and it also churns out employment," Chinta Mohan asserted.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has already assured of making the first sign on granting SCS to AP, the ex-Union Minister recalled.

Chinta Mohan opined that Tirupati should be made the capital city of AP as it has all needed resources including international airport and abundance of land.

INDIA CORNER

Ten Naxalites including four minors surrender in Chhattisgarh

Ten Naxalites including four minors surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Wednesday, police said. The surrendered Naxalites were residents of Rekhawaya village in neighbouring Narayanpur district and worked under the Indravati area committee of the Maoists in the south Bastar region, said Dantewada Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai. With this, 815 Naxalites -- including 180 who were carrying cash rewards on their heads -- have so far quit violence in the district under the 'Lon Varratu' (return to your home) campaign launched in June 2020 by the police, officials said. These ten cadres turned themselves in before senior police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officials while stating that they were impressed by the 'Lon Varratu' drive and disappointed with the hollow Maoist ideology, SP Rai said. Most of them were members of the Janata sarkar militia of the Maoists, he added.



Meghalaya, Nagaland students exempted from CUET in state

The Central Government has exempted undergraduate students of Meghalaya and Nagaland seeking admissions to colleges affiliated to central universities in the two states from CUET, officials said on Wednesday. The North Eastern Hill University in Meghalaya and Nagaland university in Nagaland are central universities. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma has thanked Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for exempting undergraduate students of Meghalaya seeking admission in colleges affiliated with North Eastern Hill University, a central varsity. "Happy to inform our students that admissions to affiliated colleges to Central University's in Meghalaya have been exempted from CUET for this academic year. I thank @dpradhanbjp ji for his continuous support and understanding," the Meghalaya CM said in a post on X.



Prajwal Revanna's anticipatory bail plea in rape case rejected

A Special Court here on Wednesday rejected the anticipatory bail plea of suspended JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, who is facing allegations of sexually abusing several women, in a rape case. The special court for Elected Representative dismissed the bail application moved by his advocate Arun. According to official sources, Prajwal has booked a return flight ticket to Bengaluru from Munich on May 30, and is expected to land in the city in the small hours of May 31. Prajwal, grandson of JD(S) supremo H D Deve Gowda, is accused in an alleged rape and sexual harassment case involving a 47-year-old woman. He reportedly left for Germany on April 27, a day after Hassan Lok Sabha segment went to polls, and is still at large. On May 18, the Special Court for Elected Representatives had issued an arrest warrant against Prajwal Revanna, following an application moved by the SIT.



Modi hints at 'conspiracy' behind Naveen's 'deteriorating' health

Odisha CM says 'I am in perfect health'

PNS ■ BARIKAPADA/BALASORE (ODISHA)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday hinted at a "conspiracy" behind the "sudden deterioration of the health condition of Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and said if the BJP formed the government in the state, it will constitute a special committee to probe the facts.

"Is the lobby that is currently running the Patnaik government on his behalf responsible for it?" Modi said while addressing election rallies in Mayurbhanj and Balasore Lok Sabha seats in Odisha.

Reacting strongly, Patnaik said: "Let me assure the PM that I am in perfect health and I have been campaigning in the state for the last month. He has stated publicly earlier that I am his good friend. All he had to do was pick up the telephone and ask me about my health.



But a number of BJP people from Odisha and Delhi are spreading rumours about my health.

Patnaik also posted on X that "4.5 crore people of Odisha are my family. My dear mothers, the youth must give a proper response to this disrespect by voting on June 1st."

Modi, in his rally just days ahead of the last phase of the

Lok Sabha election, also said that well-wishers of Naveen babu are worried over his deteriorating health condition.

"It has been worsening over the last one year. Is there a conspiracy behind this? Is the lobby that is currently running the Patnaik government on his behalf responsible for it? If the BJP forms the government in Odisha after the ongoing

assembly elections, it would constitute a special committee to ascertain the reason behind the deterioration of Patnaik's health," Modi said.

He also added that the "mystery behind Naveen babu's deteriorating health condition should be revealed as the people of the state have the right to know the reason."

The PM's remark on Patnaik's health condition came a day after Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma alleged that bureaucrat-turned-politician V K Pandian was "controlling" even the hand movements of the Odisha CM.

Sharing a video showing Patnaik's hand shaking while delivering a speech at a meeting and Pandian putting it on a table, Sarma said in a post on X, "This is a deeply distressing video. Shri V K Pandian ji is even controlling the hand movements of Shri Naveen babu."

Missing Kashmiri poet traced to police custody in PoK

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

A missing Kashmiri poet has been traced to be in the custody of police in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the Islamabad High Court was informed on Wednesday, two weeks after he disappeared from Rawalpindi.

Ahmad Farhad's wife had filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) claiming that he had been abducted from his home.

When neither police nor any intelligence agency claimed responsibility for his custody, Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, who was hearing the case, on May 24 issued an eight-page written order, summoning Law Minister Azam Tarar along with the sector commanders of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Military Intelligence (MI) and director of Intelligence Bureau (IB) as well as the defence and interior secretaries in person before the court on May 29.

Rahul, Akhilesh will blame EVMs for poll defeat: Shah

PNS ■ MAHARAJGANJ (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday took a jibe at the Samajwadi Party and Congress, saying they have decided to blame electronic voting machines for their defeat in the Lok Sabha polls.

At a public meeting in support of party candidate Pankaj Chaudhary here, he also claimed that the BJP has crossed the majority mark in the first five rounds of polls.

"The counting is on June 4. In the afternoon the two 'shehzade' (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) will hold a press conference and say we lost the election because EVM was defective," he said.

"Modi has crossed 310 seats in five rounds. Rahul baba you will not get even 40 seats and the other 'shehzade' (Akhilesh Yadav) will just get four seats," he said.

He said the opposition does not have a PM candidate and say that they will have five PMs in five years.

"This is not a general store but a nation of 130 crore peo-



"This is not a general store but a nation of 130 crore people. Can such a PM work?" he asked. Targeting the opposition, he said Congress leaders say that Pakistan has an atom bomb but BJP people are not scared of atom bombs

ple. Can such a PM work?" he asked.

Targeting the opposition, he said Congress leaders say that Pakistan has an atom bomb but BJP people are not scared of atom bombs.

"Pakistan occupied Kashmir is and will remain part of India and we will take it back," he asserted.

Referring to the Sahara scam, Shah claimed it occurred when the opposition was in power.

"Arre Akhilesh (Akhilesh Yadav) the scam took place in your government. Modi ji started the process of refund," he said.

Sahara group firms were accused of circumventing regulations with Ponzi schemes. The group has denied the charges.

Seeking to strike a chord with farmers, Shah said, "It is the death anniversary of Chaudhary Charan Singh today. Narendra Modi did the work of giving him Bharat Ratna and gave respect to all the farmers of Uttar Pradesh."

Shah also accused the previous governments of shutting down sugar mills and promised that a new mega sugar mill will be constructed in Maharajganj if the BJP comes to power again.



HC NOTICE TO BBC ON DEFAMATION PLEA

BJP govt harming tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh, alleges Priyanka Gandhi

PNS ■ SHIMLA/MANDI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday accused the BJP government at the Centre of harming small and medium businesses, including the tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh.

Claiming that demonetisation and Goods and Service Tax (GST) implementation hit the tourism industry of the state, she promised to strengthen the sector with a focus on small and medium businesses if the Congress was voted to power in the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing an election rally in Kullu, Gandhi accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of handing over public property of the country such as ports, airports and coal mines to "his industrialists friends."

"Even in Himachal today, maximum cold stores are

owned by Adani who decides the rate of apples and the fate of apple-growers," the Congress general secretary alleged.

In addition, Gandhi claimed that import duty on apples coming from the US has been reduced, while local producers have to pay the GST imposed on agricultural implements and equipment. Due to this, apple-growers in the state are affected by the imported apples from the US that have flooded the markets, she added.

Gandhi also alleged that people are now "dying due to the Covid vaccine" and that the BJP had taken a Rs 52-crore donation from a manufacturer.

Despite being in power for 55 years the Congress could not become the richest party but the BJP has become the richest party in the world in just 10 years, she said.

RAILWAYS LAND-FOR-JOB CASE

Court pulls up CBI for delay in filing "conclusive" charge sheet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Wednesday pulled up the CBI for the delay in filing a "conclusive charge sheet" in the alleged land for job scam in the Indian Railways involving RJD chief Lalu Prasad and several of his family members.

Special Judge Vishal Gogne expressed displeasure over the CBI seeking more time "on every date" to file the charge sheet.

The judge directed the central probe agency to file the final report by June 7.

The CBI had filed a supplementary charge sheet against three accused-two candidates, Ashok Kumar and Babita, and Bhola Yadav, who was the personal secretary to Lalu Prasad when he was the railway minister, in March.

The court had on February 28 granted bail to Prasad's wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi and their daughters Misa Bharti and Hema Yadav in the case.

The CBI has alleged that several people were appointed to Group 'D' positions in various zones of the Indian Railways from 2004 to 2009.

Rajkot fire: FIRs against owners of 18 illegal game zones

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

In the aftermath of the Rajkot game zone fire tragedy, Gujarat Police has launched a crackdown and booked owners of 18 such recreation facilities which are allegedly operated without valid permissions, officials said on Wednesday.

Gujarat Minister of State for Home, Harsh Sanghavi, on Tuesday, directed all police commissioners and superintendents of police to register FIRs against the managements of illegal game zones after holding a meeting with state DGP Vikas Sahay and other

senior officers in Gandhinagar, an official release said.

At least 27 persons, including children, were killed in a massive fire at TRP Game Zone on May 25.

Sanghavi instructed the police officers to register FIRs against the owners of the game zones running without fire NOCs or other mandatory licenses and permissions, it stated.

In Rajkot city, police sealed eight game zones, including a water park, and registered cases against their owners for operating without any permission, police said, adding FIRs were



registered under section 336 (Act endangering life or personal safety of others) of the IPC and under provisions of the Gujarat Police Act.

In Ahmedabad, police sealed four such illegal game zones and filed cases against their

police by showing these NOCs. None of these four game zones had acquired our permission before starting their operations," said Malik.

In Surat, a total of six game zones situated in Rander, Pal, Umara and Vesu areas were sealed and complaints were registered against their owners for running these facilities without valid permissions, police said.

The Rajkot fire incident is being probed by the Special Investigation Team set by the state government and the city police, who have arrested five persons so far.

Does PM believe Lord Jagannath to be his devotee, asks Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi whether he was withholding Rs 7,000 crore of paddy procurement funds to West Bengal and if the CBI case against BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari has got "washed away" in the ruling party's "washing machine".

Raking up the BJP candidate Sambit Patra's recent remarks that even "Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Modi", Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh also asked if the PM believes Lord Jagannath to be



his devotee.

Ramesh said that the Patra's remarks are "deeply insulting" to crores of Lord Jagannath's devotees across the world.

"The outgoing PM himself

has claimed that he was not biologically born but sent to Earth by the Creator himself. Can he tell us where he claims to fit in the pantheon of Indian Gods? Does he truly believe Lord Jagannath to be his devotee?" he asked.

Ramesh also asked if the prime minister prioritised his PR over vaccines and funds under the National Health Mission.

"Today's questions for the outgoing PM's West Bengal visit: Is the outgoing PM withholding Rs 7,000 crore of ration funds so that his face is plastered on ration shops?"

SIBAL ON MODI'S MEDITATION

Good if he is going for 'prayashchit'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Raising questions over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meditation at Rock Memorial from May 30 to June 1, Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Wednesday said it is good if he is going to Kanyakumari for "prayashchit" (atonement).

"The person who does not understand the meaning of 'vivek' (wisdom), what 'dhyani' (meditation) he will do. If he is going for 'prayashchit', then it is a good thing or if he is going to take inspiration from writings and speeches of Swami Vivekanand, even then it is good," said Sibal.

The prime minister will meditate from the evening of May 30 to the evening of June 1 at Dhyani Mandapam, the place where Vivekananda — a spiritual icon admired by PM Modi — is believed to have had a divine vision about 'Bharat Mata', BJP leaders said on Tuesday.

Sibal alleged the BJP-led government at the Centre does not talk about its achievements because it has "nothing to show". "What have they done for the last 10 years? Has the prime minister said during his speeches what he did during 10 years? What are their achieve-

TMC to complain to EC, if PM Modi's meditation is televised: Mamata

PNS ■ BARUIPUR (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that the Trinamool Congress will complain to the Election Commission if Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meditation in Kanyakumari is televised, alleging that it would amount to violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). PM Modi is scheduled to meditate at Vivekananda Rock Memorial, a monument built in tribute to Swami Vivekananda, in Kanyakumari following the culmination of the Lok Sabha polls campaign on May 30, according to BJP leaders. "We will complain. He can meditate, but televisions cannot show it," she said, alleging that this will amount to "violation of the MCC." "Does anyone have to get cameras for doing meditation?" she asked, claiming that it was a way of campaigning.

ments," Sibal said in a press conference here.



'Exposure to air pollution linked to poor mental health'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Children exposed to air pollution could be at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems, including depression and psychosis, as youths, a new research has found.

The study examined the long-term effects of children being exposed to air and noise pollution while in mother's womb, early childhood and teenage.

The effects on three common mental health problems were analysed -- anxiety, depression and psychosis, a mental state in which an individual loses touch with reality and can experience halluci-

nations. Researchers, led by those at the University of Bristol, UK, found that for every 0.72 micrograms per cubic metre increase in PM2.5 pollutants in the air during pregnancy, the chances of experiencing psychosis increased by 11 per cent, while those of experiencing depression increased by 10 per cent.

For the same exposure during childhood, the chances of psychosis were found to increase by 9 per cent.

The findings are published in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open.

"This is a major concern,



because air pollution is now such a common exposure, and rates of mental health problems are increasing globally," the study said.

"Given that pollution is also a preventable exposure, interventions to reduce exposure,

such as low emissions zones, could potentially improve mental health," said lead author Joanne Newbury from the University of Bristol.

Exposure to pollution could be rapidly reduced by making targeted interventions available

for vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and children, Newbury said.

For the study, the researchers analysed the data of over 9,000 participants from the Children of the 90s birth cohort, founded in Bristol. The cohort includes more than 14,000 pregnant women, recruited in 1991 and 1992, and were subsequently followed-up, along with their children.

The researchers compared the participants' mental health reports when they were 13, 18 and 24 years old against outdoor air and noise pollution in Bristol at those points in time.

"An increase of 0.72 micro-

grams per cubic centimetre in PM2.5 levels during pregnancy and during childhood were associated with elevated odds for psychotic experiences. Pregnancy PM2.5 exposure was also associated with depression," the authors wrote.

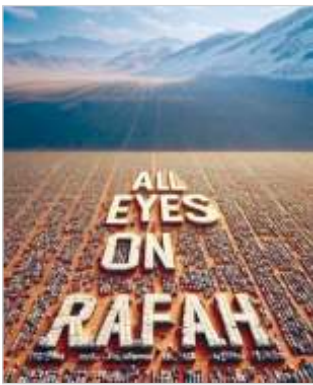
Further, being exposed to higher noise pollution in childhood and teenage was linked with raising the chances of anxiety by 19 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively.

"Childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood are critical periods for the development of psychiatric disorders: worldwide, nearly two-thirds of those affected become unwell by the age of 25.

Heed caution

All may seem lost in the Israel-Palestine war, but there is still time to save humanity in Gaza

The city of Rafah, which translates into wellbeing or prosperity in Urdu, experienced the trauma of seeing at least 45 people — including children — killed at a refugee camp in its midst following an Israeli airstrike in Gaza. Understandably, the act caused international indignation and further isolated Israel over the war with Palestine, coming only days after the International Court of Justice ordered the Jew nation to cease its operation in Rafah. Although the top UN court ordered Israeli forces last week to stop their operations, they persisted in their assault on the border town, which was long thought to be the last remaining shelter in the territory. Meanwhile, as international solidarity poured in for the Palestinians impacted by the Israeli strikes, the slogan “All Eyes On Rafah” has become popular on social media. The expression alludes to the continuous slaughter occurring in Gaza city, and several famous people have posted condolences along with the hashtag #AllEyesOnRafah. The cry for awareness of the ongoing battle has



gained traction with the use of this slogan. Prior to Israel intensifying its military operation on the Gaza side of the border earlier this month and seizing control of the crossing, Rafah served as a primary port of entry for humanitarian aid. Over one million Palestinians have fled the fighting in Rafah; the majority of them were already displaced due to the conflict between Israel and the Hamas. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden does not seem to be changing his stance on Israel, according to the White House, because the incident “did not cross a red line” that would require adjustments in US support.

This is despite the fact that Israeli tanks have been seen rolling down central Rafah for the first time since the war began on October 7 last year. In another setback to Israel globally and perhaps as part of a larger signal for it to stop bloodying the Gaza Strip with the murder of innocent people — nobody actually minds if only the Hamas terrorists are annihilated — Spain, Norway and Ireland have acknowledged Palestine's independence. The three countries did not recognise the existence of a State; they just acknowledged its potential. As a result of the change, the Palestinian Authority and the three nations will have closer diplomatic ties. Everyone has declared that they will acknowledge Palestine based on its pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem serving as its Capital. Already, 143 of the 193 members of the UN General Assembly have recognised Palestine. The latest acknowledgments are the most compelling proof to date that the concept might be gaining support in the economically and diplomatically powerful western European States. The West Bank, which Israel has occupied, and the Gaza Strip, which is under siege and where Israel is conducting a war that has claimed more than 36,000 lives, make up what is left of ancient Palestine. However, it must be recorded to his credit that Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the Rafah incident was a “tragic mishap”.

PICTALK



Lovebirds at their enclosure on a hot summer day, in New Delhi

PTI

Electric vehicles lead eco-friendly commute

Electric two-wheelers, with their zero tailpipe emissions, are providing an efficient and sustainable transport option for urban mobility

In the 1980s, the introduction of Maruti 800 changed the landscape of the automobile industry in India for decades to come. Cut to 2024 and we are heading towards a similar revolution in the years to come - but with a little twist. Countries worldwide are addressing climate change by striving to reduce their carbon footprints. The adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), particularly electric two-wheelers (E2Ws), has emerged as a significant step in this effort. Understanding the environmental impact of E2Ws compared to conventional counterparts is crucial. There is compelling evidence supporting their widespread adoption as part of the transition towards sustainable transportation systems. Traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) motorcycles and scooters contribute to air and noise pollution. E2Ws have zero tailpipe emissions and thus, help in mitigating pollution levels significantly. In urban settings, they help in alleviating



noise levels as well. Another advantage is that their powertrain is more efficient when compared to ICE vehicles. Since the conversion of electrical energy into mechanical energy is more effective, E2Ws have minimal energy wastage and a diminished carbon footprint. E2Ws also operate quietly and without vibrations or petrol fumes. There is ongoing innovation to close the performance gap between electric and their conventional fuel-powered counterparts. While ICE engines require warm-up for optimal perfor-

mance in cold weather, E2Ws operate at full capacity instantly. This makes the ride hassle free in any condition. Their advanced features like Android-based instrument clusters and mobile app connectivity further enhance the overall experience. In contrast with conventional ICE vehicles, there is a notable difference in the energy efficiency of E2Ws. The electric motors are great at converting a larger portion of electrical energy from the grid into power at the wheels. This makes them highly effective in utilising

energy. The heightened efficiency indicates that they require less energy to travel the same distance, thereby reducing their environmental footprint even more. The production and upkeep of electric two-wheelers requires fewer resources and less energy. Their minimal maintenance requirements lead to decreased energy usage and a smaller environmental footprint. E2Ws are a promising solution for reducing carbon footprints and advancing towards a more sustainable transportation paradigm. There is a need to address certain challenges such as those around infrastructure and accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources. This will help realise the full potential of E2Ws in mitigating environmental impact. With concerted action from policymakers, industry stakeholders and consumers, E2Ws are set to play a significant role in shaping a greener, more sustainable future for transportation. (The writer is Founder & CEO, Motovolt Mobility; views are personal)



TUSHAR CHAUDHARY

Spiritual institutions under attack in Bengal

The assaults on the Ramakrishna Mission raise serious concerns about the State's political climate and its impact on religious harmony



PRAFULL GORADIA

West Bengal is again in the news and again for the wrong reasons. The premises of the venerable Ramakrishna Mission at Jalpaiguri have been vandalised by the goons of the State's ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC). That hasn't been the only incident of attacking a religious or spiritual centre. The ISKCON temple premises in the State have also been the target of the TMC brigade, as the State's chief minister Mamata Banerjee suspects the organisation's monks of being BJP sympathisers. So too have the premises of the Bharat Sevashram Sangh (BSS) at Beldanga in the district of Murshidabad suffered the ire of the ruling party's roughnecks. One of the BSS monks Kartik Maharaj has drawn Mamata Banerjee's ire as he is thought to be working towards influencing voters in favour of the BJP. Banerjee also believes that the ISKCON is playing a similar role.

The Ramakrishna Mission or RKM, as it is also known, headquartered in Kolkata's Belur Math was founded in 1897, by the great spiritual Ramakrishna Paramahansa's most renowned disciple, Swami Vivekananda. The latter was truly a global icon of modern Hinduism and planted the flag of Sanatana Dharma in the West, beginning with his spiritual conquest in Chicago in 1893 at a conference of the World Parliament of Religions. Though the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in New York, its founder Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada or Srila Prabhupada was born in Calcutta and ventured to the US only in his old age, at 69, to spread the message of Krishna to America and the rest of the world. To vandalise such highly regarded institutions such as the venerable Ramakrishna Ashram and the internationally respected ISKCON, which has over 160 temples across the globe and that too by some citizens of a country that is predominantly Hindu, is unthinkable and unpardonable. It is possible that the perpetrators of these attacks are not



Hindus but people belonging to another religion. Nevertheless, the message that comes out from these recent episodes of temple vandalism is of the Hindus as a people being religious-suicidal. This is all the more unfortunate for two reasons. The Ramakrishna Mission is world famous since it was Swami Vivekananda who single-handedly informed the world of the wonder that Hinduism is. It is ISKCON that enables so many countries, with its magnificent temples, to worship in the Hindu way of “Hare Rama, Hare Krishna”. Secondly, it has been only a few years since the image of Hindu India began to shine, after centuries of suppression. We now have the sordid spectacle of temple and ashram premises being attacked by goons with guns, in West Bengal of all places. It was just over a century ago that Congress leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale had said, “What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow”. It signified the province of Bengal was a leader. Is this what leaders do and that too for winning some seats in four or five constituencies? Just look back at the Renaissance, which in many ways, was comprehensively

“ONE COULD GO ON AND ON ABOUT BENGAL'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COUNTRY. MODERN INDIA'S GREATEST POET WAS RABINDRANATH TAGORE, AGAIN A GIFT OF BENGAL. HIS LYRICS ARE TODAY'S NATIONAL ANTHEM

led by Bengal. But before that, let us not forget Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who is considered by many to have been an avatar of Krishna. Chaitanya saved at least a part of Bengal for Bharat; but for him, the whole of the province would have been swallowed by Pakistan and then ruined. He stood between the conversion of the poorer Bengalis to Islam and saving them so that today they can worship Krishna. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was also a divine gift of Bengal, who himself had a glimpse of the divine. One could go on and on about Bengal's contributions to the country. Modern India's greatest poet was Rabindranath Tagore, again, a gift of Bengal. His lyrics are today are national anthem. One cannot ever forget Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and his stirring song Vande Mataram, which became the freedom anthem of India's national movement and inspired countless revolutionaries to armed action for combating the colonial raj, as well as to embrace the gallows in their supremely inspired quest. Bengal is a virtual encyclopaedia of the 19th and 20th-century, greats of India. It would need an entire volume to describe how and when the

saga began to sour. From the climbing of lofty heights of art, culture, literature and industry, Bengal began to slip towards an existence that wouldn't be envied in the least. The late Nirad Chaudhari, one of the finest writers the English language world has seen, gave vent to this angst by saying that the people of his are the “finest virtuosi of factiousness”, not a flattering comment, though this writer, having being raised in Bengal and able to speak fluent Bengali, is wont to take a much more positive view. The sense of being Bengali is of course very pronounced, but the unity a common language can foster cannot stand before the pull of religion, as has been the historical experience throughout most significant parts of the world. That the State that led India's renaissance in the 19th century has fallen into this travesty is a sad tale, but Bengal has been known to come back strongly towards nationalism every time it is felt that the province might have gone astray. Perhaps therein lies the silver lining. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TAIWAN STAYS STRONG AMID TENSIONS

Madam — Apropos the news story “Taiwan tracks dozens of Chinese warplanes and navy vessels off its coast on the 2nd day of drills,” published on May 24, this is my response. It's concerning to witness the escalation of tensions between Taiwan and China. Taiwan's tracking of Chinese military activity showcases their vigilance in the face of increasing pressure from Beijing. Despite the provocative displays from China's People's Liberation Army, Taiwan remains steadfast, with President Lai Ching-te affirming the nation's commitment to freedom and democracy. The ongoing dispute in Taiwan's parliament underscores the internal challenges they face, yet life continues in Taipei uninterrupted. China's aggressive stance, citing the one-China principle, only adds to the volatility of the situation. The international community must closely monitor these developments to ensure stability in the region and uphold Taiwan's sovereignty. Avani Singhania | Kolkata

TACKLING E-WASTE THROUGH ACTION

Madam — Apropos the news story “Mitigating the e-waste crisis,” published on May 28, this is my response. As technology advances, our reliance on electronic devices deepens, yet the consequences of our digital age loom large. E-waste, a byproduct of our tech obsession, poses a multifaceted threat to both environment and health. The toxic cocktail of substances found in discarded electronics, if not handled properly, can seep into soil, water and air, wreaking havoc on ecosystems and human well-being alike. The staggering statistics from the Global E-Waste Monitor 2020 paint a grim picture of our unsustainable habits. However, solutions are within reach. Governments must enforce stringent regulations on e-waste management, while manufacturers bear responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their products.

Hospital fire prompts safety overhaul



Apropos the news story “Once burned, Govt orders fire audit of all hospitals,” published on May 28, this is my response. Reading about the tragic fire at the neonatal hospital in Delhi, which resulted in the deaths of seven newborns and injuries to five others, is heartbreaking. This incident starkly highlights severe lapses in hospital management and safety protocols. The hospital was operating on an expired license and lacked fire department clearance, which is both shocking and unacceptable.

Investing in innovative recycling technologies and promoting eco-friendly design can mitigate the e-waste crisis. Ultimately, individual action is paramount. From conscientious disposal practices to advocating for systemic change, each of us holds the key to a cleaner, greener future. Let's embrace the challenge of recycling our e-waste and pave the way for a more sustainable tomorrow. Aryan Malhotra | Chandigarh

SCIENCE ARCHIVES DRIVE PROGRESS

Madam — Apropos the news story “Science Archives Preserve Our Scientific Legacy,” published on May 28, this is my response. As an ever-evolving discipline, science continually shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. Reading the newspaper daily, I'm constantly reminded of how each discovery and innovation contributes to our present and builds the foundation for future generations. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, highlighted the power of scientific advancements in real-

The prompt action by the Delhi Government to mandate a fire audit for all hospitals by June 8 is a necessary step to prevent such tragedies in the future. However, it's deeply concerning that previous directives for fire preparedness and audits were not enforced rigorously. The revelation that the hospital was refilling oxygen without proper authorisation further underscores the negligence. It's encouraging to see the authorities committing to stringent new safety regulations and inspections, but these measures should have been in place long before this tragedy occurred. The bravery of the nurses and locals who risked their lives to save the babies deserves commendation, but such heroism should not be necessary in a properly regulated and safe environment. This tragic event serves as a grim reminder of the critical importance of strict compliance with safety standards in healthcare facilities.

Anaya Patel | Pune

time, transforming our lives and becoming a part of history. Scientific knowledge is inherently cumulative, with each generation of scientists building upon the work of their predecessors. This continuity drives not only intellectual progress but also economic and societal growth. The significance of preserving scientific archives cannot be overstated, as they store invaluable materials—research notes, experimental data and historical correspondence—that offer insights into the development of scientific thought. In India, initiatives like the Archives at NCBS play a crucial role in preserving our scientific heritage. However, with the risk of losing digital data, systematic conservation efforts are vital. Governments should mandate the periodic submission of research documents to ensure the longevity and impact of scientific work, safeguarding it from becoming lost to time.

Devika Menon | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

MICROMANAGEMENT AND UNDERMANAGEMENT

It is crucial to balance these extremes by ensuring employee empowerment



SAKSHI SETHI

In the realm of leadership and management, micromanagement and under management represent two extreme ends of a spectrum posing significant challenges to organisational success. While micromanagement leads to decreased autonomy, innovation and job satisfaction, under management results in a lack of direction, motivation and accountability. By understanding the impacts of these management styles and implementing strategies that balance oversight with empowerment, organisations can foster a productive, innovative and satisfying work environment. Micromanagement involves excessive control and oversight while under management is characterised by a lack of adequate supervision and support.

In the spectrum of management styles, micromanagement and under management represent two extremes, each with distinct characteristics and consequences for the workplace. In an organisation, if one is micromanaging the team and not giving its employees the freedom to work, will eventually drive away great talent while settling for mediocrity resulting in fostering anxiety and ultimately leading to negative impacts on overall organisational productivity and job satisfaction. Along with this, decreased employee morale, reduced creativity and innovation, lower productivity, increased stress and burnout, high turnover, poor performance and accountability are some of the impacts of both micromanagement and undermanagement that can be detrimental even though they manifest differently. Various research studies have shown that micromanagement stifles creativity and innovation.



It is negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with stress and burnout. Employees under micromanagement reported lower engagement and higher intentions to leave their jobs. While on the other hand, the effects of under management found that employees lacking adequate supervision and feedback exhibited lower job satisfaction and performance.

It becomes of utmost importance to strike a balance between the two by adopting management practices that provide appropriate oversight while empowering employees. Balancing between micromanagement and under management involves adopting a management style that provides appropriate oversight while empowering employees. By fostering a culture of trust and empowerment; setting clear goals and expectations; and promoting a results-oriented culture can help the organisation create a positive and productive workplace where both managers and employees thrive. There is no denying the fact that balancing micromanagement and undermanagement is crucial for creating a productive, positive and effective workplace. By finding the middle ground, managers can provide the necessary support and oversight while empowering employees to take initiative and innovate.

Remember, be it micromanagement or undermanagement, both can have far-reaching negative effects on both the employees as well as the organisation. By understanding the causes and impacts and then implementing strategies to promote trust, autonomy and effective communication, organisations can create a more positive and productive work environment. Moving away from micromanagement not only enhances employee satisfaction and performance but also contributes to the long-term success and health of the organisation. Micromanagement and undermanagement, as opposite ends of the management spectrum, both present significant challenges to organisational effectiveness and employee well-being. While micromanagement stifles autonomy and innovation through excessive control, under management leaves employees directionless and unsupported. Both styles can lead to significant issues within an organisation, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to effective leadership.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

The dawn of AI: Balancing innovation and prudence

As AI advances, it is essential to strike a balance between harnessing its advantages and addressing its challenges to ensure a sustainable future

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ex-novo computer technology that essentially deals with developing machines capable of imitating human behaviour. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines AI as the "ability of a computer or robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings such as perception, critical thinking and decision-making". As far as the human mind is concerned, first, it processes the information, analyses the processed information from various angles and finally arrives at a logical conclusion. On the contrary, AI is a software programme that solely relies on pre-fed computer data to answer a query. In the entire process, the computer system behaves like



M J WARS

a human mind. AI is the order of the day and admittedly, holds the potential to bring about revolutionary changes in communications, defence, healthcare and agriculture. In fact, till recently, the task that was considered impossible even for a machine to perform now AI has turned into a reality. AI has considerably brought computers very close to imitating the human mind, thus, diminishing the gap

between man and machine. Today AI has found its application in a variety of fields such as education, finance, defence, agriculture and healthcare. Leading medical research institutions use AI for experiment, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of deadly diseases. AI facilitates high-quality tissue sample analysis that paves the way for precise prognosis. In this day and age pharmaceutical companies are using AI for drug discovery and chemical analysis. With the help of AI doctors and healthcare professionals can precisely diagnose serious medical conditions such as cancer and stroke. In the education sector too, AI plays an important role. AI has proved to be an extremely handy tool to develop study material, student

evaluation, grading and monitoring. Thus, teachers save their precious time which they can utilise in productive academic pursuits as well as engage in meaningful discussions with students. AI-powered virtual educator robots substantially improve teaching and learning outcomes. Now let us see some of the imminent dangers of AI. The picture is not as rosy as it appears for the AI. Widespread indignance use of AI in almost every sphere of human activity is bound to raise some serious concerns concerning privacy, data security and transparency. Psychological well-being and social issues warrant our immediate attention. Companies are gradually replacing humans with AI-powered robots to perform

specific tasks at the workplace. This causes anxiety among employees and adversely affects their mental and emotional well-being. The technical dexterity of computers also is a major challenge for humans in the workplace. Of late AI AI-driven Deepfake videos and online Bots have spread at an alarming pace. Deepfake videos and online Bots are capable of orchestrating a fabricated consensus and manipulating public opinion. Fake news spreads like wildfire disturbing peace and leading to social unrest. Another disadvantage of AI is that it makes it extremely tough to distinguish between the original and the fake. AI-induced human rights violations should be stopped at the earliest. AI-powered changing

technology landscape has jeopardised data security, privacy, dignity, employment, equality, political rights and secrecy. Experts and sociologists have expressed reservations regarding the detrimental impacts of over-reliance on AI and human robots in important sectors like healthcare, law, marketing, accounting, education, management, technology and workplaces. AI's technological diligence, incredible analysis power and the ability to perform repetitive tasks may lead to huge layoffs. Consequently, this gives rise to a disproportionately high unemployment rate. Employees and the labourers may be subjected to discrimination and disparities and their professional and social security may be at stake. To

check the AI misuse a well-defined and comprehensive technological-labour policy is the need of the hour. Some of the measures that help workers survive in the AI-driven landscape are regular up-gradation of employee skills through appropriate training, honing up of technical skills and developing Soft skills. Lo and behold! Let's not lose sight of the fact that AI is completely devoid of human temperament, comprehension and creativity. The human mind is blessed with infinite creative power and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). These supreme attributes propel human beings to an elevated plane and place them on a higher pedestal than machines. On the contrary, AI is data-driven and follows a defined tra-

jectory, thus, fails to capture human emotions, perception and the ability to perform tasks by adapting to a given environment. Since AI is in its nascent stage, therefore, it is too soon to assume that AI can take over humans shortly as humans continue to be the *fons et origo* of originality and innovation. Another threat that scares us is that if ever in the future technologically advanced machines take Man as their enemy then the entire human race may face existential crises. Pre-empting these dangers the US and the European countries have taken a locus standi to oppose AI and have taken stringent legal measures to curb AI's capricious use.

(The writer is a professor; views are personal)

Relevant skill sets can combat unemployment



DINESH SOOD

The rapid digital shift necessitates comprehensive strategies to address skill gaps and ensure inclusive growth. Public-private partnerships are essential



The service sector has undeniably been the primary driver of India's growth since 2000. The exceptional performance of certain modern services has unequivocally contributed to the creation of more productive and decent employment. The reliance on services for economic growth unequivocally demands a fully developed job market, enabling a free flow of the workforce. The absence of such mechanisms will undoubtedly lead to rigidity in the services sector, curtailing growth against the backdrop of the increasingly important position of the services sector. The key focus areas include the pivotal role of technology in shaping the services sector and stimulating job growth in other sectors through multiplier effects.

The momentous transformation of the Indian economy is irrefutably being spearheaded by the service sector, which unequivocally contributes more than 50 per cent of the GDP. The sector's expansion is not happening in isolation but is deeply intertwined with global technological advancements. Technological progress has undeniably been a catalyst for efficiency, customer satisfaction, market expansion and data-driven decision-making within firms. It has also undeniably given rise to new service categories, such as e-commerce and other tech-based services like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT), revolutionising the sector.

The relationship between the service sector's growth and technological innovation is undeniably mutually beneficial. As the service sector expands, it undeniably fuels further innovation in technology-based solutions. New ventures and their technological needs undeniably push for continuous technological advancements to gain the competitiveness needed to maintain their foothold in the dynamic industry. This competition and need for differentiation undeniably lead to increased investments in research and development (R&D) and open innovations, benefiting both the firms involved and the public.

The introduction of 5G and the ongoing development of 6G technologies have significantly enhanced connectivity, service



THE SERVICE SECTOR UNEQUIVOCALLY OFFERS BOTH ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES AND FORMIDABLE CHALLENGES ADDRESSING CHALLENGES DEMANDS A RESOLUTE, COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH WITH ASTUTE POLICIES AND UNWAVERING IMPLEMENTATION

delivery speed and overall efficiency in India. Efforts to improve digital literacy have further accelerated technology adoption, with 70 per cent of businesses identifying as "Digital Businesses" and the country exhibiting the highest fintech adoption rate at 87 per cent. The application of AI in business operations has markedly improved operational efficiency, customer satisfaction and decision-making, positioning India as a global leader in AI adoption. However, the rapid digital transformation necessitates a balance between creating employment and providing the relevant skill sets for technology-demanding jobs for a new generation is a national need.

The service sector unequivocally offers both abundant opportunities and formidable challenges. Addressing challenges demands a resolute, comprehensive approach with astute policies and unwavering implementation. Public-private partnerships and policies aimed at bridging the skill gaps must be executed with unwavering effectiveness. Educational institutions must urgently revamp their curriculum to directly align with the market's skill demands.

Technological advancement, while propelling economic growth, undeniably necessitates relentless skill development. To fully exploit technological progress, educational institutions must steadfastly ensure their curriculum is consistently updated and in sync with the latest innovations.

Skill Gap: In India, the skill gap in the labour force is a significant challenge, with only 51 per cent of the youth deemed employable due to a lack of necessary skills. This issue is exacerbated by the country's diverse socio-economic conditions, particularly affecting those in rural areas and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who lack

access to quality education and training. This situation perpetuates cycles of poverty and aggravates wage inequality. Moreover, inadequate emphasis on developing non-technical skills such as communication, critical thinking and leadership, which are increasingly in demand, further compounds the problem. The absence of these skills from the curriculum of most educational institutes compels employers to choose candidates only from a handful of premier institutes. Additionally, there is a significant mismatch between the skills taught and those required by employers, leading to unemployment even among the formally educated.

Efforts to bridge this gap must include public-private partnerships (PPPs), such as the initiative to upgrade Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to train 150 million people by 2024. These initiatives are crucial steps toward aligning educational outcomes with market needs, emphasising the vital importance of both technical and non-technical skills development to enhance employability.

Gender Inequality: Female employability in India has consistently exceeded male employability from 2020 to 2023, but there was a drop in 2024. Furthermore, it has been higher for seven out of eleven years of the Wheelbuz India Skills Reports. However, there has been a persistent gap between female and male labour force participation, indicating a clear bias against employing women over men. This bias is diminishing as female labour force participation has risen over the years, but substantial improvement is still necessary.

The Indian Government has implemented various initiatives to foster gender-inclusive employment, aim-

ing to bridge the gender gap in the workplace, making employing female labourers more lucrative while also ensuring it does not come at the cost of pay disparity. One significant legislation is the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, designed to eliminate the wage gap between genders by ensuring equal pay for equal work. However, the act faces challenges, such as the narrow interpretation of the same work or work of a similar nature and the onus on employees to prove discrimination, which is difficult due to workplace power dynamics and legal complexities.

Additionally, the Government has launched schemes like Mission Shakti and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojna-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), focusing on women's skill development and employability. These initiatives include exclusive training institutes for women, industry-oriented courses and partnerships with private sector bodies and NGOs. To encourage female participation in skill development, 30 per cent of seats in ITIs and ITCs are reserved for women.

These measures represent a comprehensive and assertive approach to promoting gender equality in employment, highlighting the crucial importance of legislative support, skill development and financial empowerment in achieving a more inclusive workforce. These unwavering steps will guarantee the complete realisation of the Indian economy's potential and the equitable distribution of the benefits of skills development.

(The writer is Co-Founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Network Member, of India International Skill Centres, an initiative of GoI. Views expressed are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Lauritz Knudsen to invest Rs 850 cr in next 3 years

Lauritz Knudsen, formerly known as L&T Switchgear, on Wednesday said it will invest Rs 850 crore on technologies, products and expansion of its manufacturing capabilities in the country over the next three years. Larsen & Toubro (L&T) had in 2020 sold its electrical and automation business to Schneider Electric for Rs 14,000 crore and is now a part of Scheider Electric Group. Schneider Electric Chief Executive Officer Peter Herweck said the new company 'aims to strategically invest Rs 850 crore over the next three years, further establishing its role as a significant player in India's rapid growth trajectory in the electrical sector'. He was speaking during the launch of its new brand identity, 'Lauritz Knudsen Electrical and Automation'. Deepak Sharma, Zone President, India, MD & CEO, Schneider Electric India, said the investment is 'to bring the next phase of our technologies and products and of course expanding our manufacturing capabilities in the country.'



Rupee falls 21 paise to close at 83.39 against US dollar

The rupee settled 21 paise lower at 83.39 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking a negative trend in domestic equities and elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs) also weighed on the rupee. However, foreign inflows in the bond markets ahead of inclusion on India's government bonds in global bond index cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.22 and finally settled for the day at 83.39 (provisional), down 21 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee pared initial gains to settle 5 paise lower at 83.18 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on month-end dollar demand from OMCs and importers to meet their obligations. Risk aversion in global markets and a strong US dollar may further pressurize the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.



Hindalco shares climb nearly 4 pc; hit record high

Shares of Hindalco Industries jumped nearly 4 per cent to hit a record high on Wednesday as the US-based Novelis Inc, part of the company, will launch an initial public offer to raise up to US\$ 945 million. The stock climbed 3.64 per cent to settle at Rs 705.35 apiece on the BSE. During the day, it rallied 4.82 per cent to a record high of Rs 713.40. On the NSE, shares of the company went up by 3.52 per cent to Rs 705.30 each. Novelis Inc 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, announced the launch of its roadshow for the IPO of 4,50,00,000 (45 million) common shares held by its sole shareholder.



S&P ups India's outlook to positive

Raises hope for ratings upgrade in 2 years

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a gap of about 10 years, S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday upped India's outlook to positive from stable on robust growth prospects for next three years and public spending, and raised hopes for an upgrade in two years provided the government continues reforms and policies to keep fiscal deficit under check.

While retaining India's sovereign rating at the lowest investment grade of 'BBB-', S&P said its expects broad continuity in economic reforms and fiscal policies, irrespective of the election outcome.

Results of the ongoing gen-



eral elections will be announced on June 4. "India outlook revised to positive on robust growth and rising quality of Government spend," S&P said, while affirming long-term rating at 'BBB-'. The ratings are looked at by investors as a barometer of the country's creditworthiness and has impact on borrowing costs. Last in 2014, S&P had upped India's outlook to stable from

negative. "Our positive outlook on India is predicated on its robust economic growth, pronounced improvement in the quality of government spending, and political commitment to fiscal consolidation. We believe these factors are coalescing to benefit credit metrics," S&P said. Irrespective of the June 2024 general election results, S&P expects the incoming govern-

"Our positive outlook on India is predicated on its robust economic growth, pronounced improvement in the quality of government spending, and political commitment to fiscal consolidation. We believe these factors are coalescing to benefit credit metrics," S&P said.

ment to carry on economic reforms to support the "growth vigor", continued infrastructure investment drive, and commitment to fiscal consolidation. The finance ministry has been pushing for a rating upgrade on the back of improved fiscal management and strong economic fundamental, including high foreign exchange reserves.

AES seeks shareholders' nod to raise Rs 12,500 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Energy Solutions will seek shareholders' approval to raise Rs 12,500 crore in its annual general meeting on June 25.

The company is looking to raise funds by way of qualified institutions placement (QIP) to eligible investors through issuance of equity shares and/or other eligible securities.

The board of Adani Energy Solutions on Monday approved the proposal to raise up to Rs 12,500 crore through issue of equity shares on QIP basis or other modes.

According to the notice for the AGM, the company will seek the approval of the shareholders at the ensuing annual general meeting scheduled to be held on June 25, 2024.

RURAL BANKING OUTREACH

Centre to enlist dairy, fishery co-operatives



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is planning to launch a nationwide programme to rope in dairy and fishery cooperative societies as banking correspondents to expand financial services in rural areas, a top official said on Wednesday.

Ministry of Cooperation Secretary Ashish Kumar Bhutani said the programme would leverage the existing network of dairy and fishery cooperatives to act as "bank mitras" or banking agents by offering services such as

micro-ATMs and lower-interest farm loans. "The pilot has been rolled out at the state level in Gujarat. We intend to nationally roll out shortly," Bhutani said while addressing a cooperative summit organised by PHDCCI here.

The plan follows a pilot project launched in two districts of Gujarat where members of dairy and fishery cooperatives were able to access banking services closer home, including doorstep delivery of microloans and facilitating other transactions.

Under the nationwide pro-

gramme, these cooperative societies will be engaged as banking correspondents of district and state cooperative banks, official sources said.

To enable delivery of branchless banking services, the cooperatives will be provided with micro-ATMs with support from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the state agency tasked with development of rural India. Cooperative members will also be issued Kisan Credit Cards, which typically offer farm loans at lower interest rates.

Irdai to health insurers: Decide on cashless authorisation in 1hr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Regulator Irdai on Wednesday released a master circular on health insurance specifying that an insurer will have to decide on cashless authorization within one hour of request.

The master circular on Health Insurance products reveals 55 circulars issued earlier and it is a significant stride towards reinforcing the

empowerment of policyholders and bolstering inclusive



health insurance, Irdai said in a statement.

"The circular has brought in one place the entitlements in a health insurance policy available to a Policyholder/prospects for their easy reference and also emphasizes measures towards providing seamless, faster and hassle-free claims experience to a policyholder procuring health insurance policy and ensuring enhanced service standards across the health insurance sector, it said.

'North-East states, J&K lead in Aadhar-enabled transactions'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

North-eastern states and Jammu & Kashmir are increasingly adopting Aadhar-enabled financial services, according to a report.

Meghalaya topped the list with a 1000 per cent growth in AePS (Aadhaar Enabled Payment System) transaction value and a 712 per cent increase in the number of

transactions, followed by Nagaland and Assam, the



report by fintech firm PayNearby said. Retail stores in Jammu and

Kashmir witnessed a growth of over 134 per cent in value and 89 per cent in the volume of Aadhar-enabled payment transactions in FY24.

The 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Digital Empowerment' report by PayNearby, a company that offers branchless banking and digital network, drew insights from transactions across 12 lakhs plus retail touchpoints throughout the country.

ADB commits US\$ 2.6 billion in sovereign lending to India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed US\$ 2.6 billion (about Rs 21,500 crore) in sovereign lending to India in 2023 for various projects.

The fund is aimed to strengthen urban development, support industrial corridor development, promote power sector reforms, build India's climate resilience, and

enhance connectivity. ADB also extended US\$ 23.53 million in technical assistance and US\$ 4.1 million in grants under the sovereign portfolio.

In addition, ADB committed over US\$ 1 billion for private sector projects during the past year, the Manila-based multi-lateral development bank said in a statement.



Investor wealth erodes by Rs 5.12 L cr in 4-day fall in markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth eroded by Rs 5.12 lakh crore in four straight days of fall in the equity markets which witnessed profit-taking after a record-breaking rally and caution ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 667.55 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 74,502.90 on Wednesday. It fell below the 75,000-mark during the day and tanked 715.9 points or 0.95 per cent to 74,454.55.

The barometer fell amid selling in bank stocks and weak global trends. In four sessions since May

24, the benchmark gauge dropped 915.14 points or 1.21 per cent amid profit-taking by cautious investors. The BSE benchmark Sensex hit an all-time high of



76,009.68 on May 27. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 5,12,921.96 crore to Rs 4,15,09,713.94 crore (USD 4.98 trillion) in the four ses-

sions to Wednesday. From its all-time peak, the BSE benchmark is down 1,506.78 points or 1.98 per cent.

The combined market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies hit the USD 5-trillion milestone for the first time on May 21.

The NSE Nifty declined 183.45 points or 0.80 per cent to 22,704.70.

"Nifty dropped by 183 points, marking the fourth consecutive decline as election jitters triggered intense selling. The Sensex fell by nearly 668 points to 74,503," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd..

Silver continues to glitter, hits lifetime high of Rs 97,100 per kg

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Silver prices hit a lifetime high levels of Rs 97,100 in the local market on Wednesday, while gold prices rose Rs 250 in line with strong trends in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

Continuing its winning run for the third straight session, silver soared Rs 1,150 to Rs 97,100 per kg. It had closed at Rs 95,950 per kg on Tuesday. In the futures trade, silver also hit a lifetime peak of Rs 96,493 per kg on the Multi

Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the gold prices climbed Rs 250 to Rs 73,200 per 10 grams in the national capital.

In the previous session, the precious metal prices had settled at Rs 72,950 per 10 grams.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 73,200 per 10 grams, up Rs 250 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.



TEPC exploring global markets for exports of Indian telecom products

PNS ■ SINGAPORE

The Telecom Equipment & Services Export Promotion Council (TEPC) is exploring global markets and has set up a regular participation schedule in international trade shows to promote Made in India products, its Director General Arun Gupta said on Wednesday.

He further said the region-wise market development focus is on ASEAN, Africa, Europe and other developing economies. TEPC has been set up by Government of India to promote and develop export of telecom equipment and services.

Gupta said the aggressive marketing campaign is aimed at

generating 15 per cent year-on-year annual growth to achieve US\$ 100 billion telecom equip-



ment exports by 2047. He was speaking at ATX Enterprise exhibition being held here from May 29-31, 2024.

TEPC has over 160 members and the industry is averaging at US\$ 8 billion a year.

"Our member companies are exporting to over 75 global markets," Gupta told PTI adding that optical fibre, network and 4G & 5G equipment manufacturers are being put in the forefront of TEPC export campaign.

Amit Pasari, a governing council member of TEPC, said India is being represented by 27 companies and 110 delegates at the exhibition.

He underlined the government-initiated R&D in the telecom equipment manufacturing sector, pointing out the importance of ongoing development of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

Ctrl-S AI-ready datacenter inaugurated in Hyderabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

With Artificial intelligence ready along with advanced cooling technologies, built to seismic zone 2 standards, fully flood-proof, and featuring 9-layer physical security, CtrlS Datacenters Ltd, Hyderabad DC3 has a built-up area of 1.34 lakh sq. ft and a 13 MW IT load capacity. It is a ground plus 5-storeyed facility aiming for LEED Platinum certification by using renewable energy and advanced water recycling along other sustainable initiatives. CtrlS Datacenters is the first and only Google Cloud Partner Interconnect provider in Hyderabad, offering cloud connect services from Google, Oracle, Azure, and AWS via CtrlS Cloud Connect.

Datacenter announced that it operates three facilities in Hyderabad, one in HITEC City and two in the Gachibowli financial district. According to the CtrlS Datacenters Ltd, Hyderabad DC3 has a built-up area of 1.34 lakh sq. ft and a 13 MW IT load capacity. It is a ground plus 5-storeyed facility aiming for LEED Platinum certification by using renewable energy and advanced water recycling along other sustainable initiatives. CtrlS Datacenters is the first and only Google Cloud Partner Interconnect provider in Hyderabad, offering cloud connect services from Google, Oracle, Azure, and AWS via CtrlS Cloud Connect.

67% startup employees prefer to move to established firms: CIEL HR report

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Nearly 67 per cent of employees working in startups prefer to move to established firms on account of job security, better pay, and financial stability, a study conducted by CIEL HR Services said.

The report also revealed that the startup sector has been facing a severe high attrition rate, with an average tenure being 2-3 years.

Some of the key findings undertaken by the city-based human resource solutions provider CIEL HR Services indicate that a secured job ranks high on the list of concerns for employees in the

"Startups play a vital role as key catalysts for growth, fuelling innovation and generating employment in diverse sectors. With 65 per cent of companies planning to increase hiring in the coming months, the future looks promising for the startup ecosystem"



startup sector with 40 per cent of the respondents expressing "unease".

Similarly, 30 per cent of participants commented that the promise of better pay was another factor in moving towards established firms, as it ensures financial stability.

About 25 per cent of the candidates have also attributed a lack of work-life balance in startups as a factor for their decision to join reputed concerns.

Commenting on the CIEL Works-Startup Report 2024, CIEL HR Services Managing Director and CEO Aditya Narayan Mishra said, "Startups play a vital role as key catalysts for growth, fuelling innovation and generating employment in diverse sectors. With 65 per cent of companies planning to increase hiring in the coming months, the future looks promising for the startup ecosystem."

For women travellers, IndiGo introduces new feature for seat selection

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Women booking tickets in an

IndiGo flight can now know about the seats that have already been booked by other female passengers at the time of web check-in, with the airline introducing the new feature after a market research.

IndiGo is the country's largest domestic airline with a market share of over 60 per cent and carried 80 lakh passengers in April, as per an official data. In a release on

Wednesday, the airline said it has introduced a new feature that aims to make the travel

experience more comfortable for female passengers.

"This has been introduced basis market research, and is currently in pilot mode

aligning with our #GirlPower ethos.

The feature offers visibility of seats booked by female passengers, only during web check-in. It is specifically tailored to PNRs with women travellers - solo as well as part of family bookings," it said.



Preserving the dying tradition of the Lambani community

SHIKHA DUGGAL

A one-of-a-kind community effort known throughout the country that showcases the beauty of the Lambani community to metropolitan audiences, Banjara Kasuti is winning over fashionistas and others' hearts. People in the country refer to them as a mix of trending fashion and tradition with ecological ethics! Most importantly, during an exclusive chat with the founder, we learn that their objective is not just to preserve the dying tradition of the Lambani ladies but also to uplift them financially and socially.

"I've always been captivated by the Lambani community (*Banjaras*). As a child, the extensive use of mirrorwork, along with brilliant hues in harmony with nature, as well as the distinctive artwork on the outfits worn by the Lambani women, was oftentimes the highlight of my day. However, when I returned to my hometown after decades, the colours that marked the 'Banjaras' were missing; the community was progressively slipping away from its

own art form. Furthermore, huge seasonal migratory patterns in recent years have brought a gradual end to the Lambani artform, with them fleeing to cities for better prospects," Asha Patil thinks back on. In light of this, Seema and Asha decided to start Banjara Kasuti, an effort aimed at reviving the art form while also strengthening the community, particularly Lambani women!

Our interview allowed us to shed light on how, for the past seven years, they have supported the entire ecosystem while also empowering Lambani ladies and khadi weavers through their fashion industry initiative. The founder continued, "We advance the trend by combining current fashion with local culture through the use of Lambani embroidery on organic textiles. We place a strong emphasis on combining traditional artistry and contemporary designs to not only promote the use of handwoven materials but also to ensure financial security for local artisans without sacrificing their identity. In fact, we have proudly empowered over 120 women since its beginning, and we hope to empower another women too."

You may call it an initiative that not only seeks to provide dignity, social security, and financial independence to Lambani women but also to maintain their clothing customs by instilling their legacy! Moreover, "While empowering the these women to rediscover their love and admiration for their art form, the initiative also promotes financial stability for both the them and local cotton and khadi weavers by providing a consistent monthly income, as well as access to banking services, education, and healthcare for all community members. Several ladies from the

community have come out to share their experiences with us. One example of perseverance and empowerment is Leela (name changed), a young woman who would do odd jobs as needed—even if it meant working at 40°C—to help her family's finances. However, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, Leela's husband lost his job as well, forcing her to bear the full burden alone. Leela gained a second chance at life after being introduced to our community initiative by her community members. With a set monthly income, Leela was finally able to leave her odd occupations and establish a stable foundation for her family, ensuring that her children's education continued. Such incidents continue to motivate us to work tirelessly for the benefit of the 'Banjaras' and to alter their lives."

Asha Patil, who lives with the large Lambani population, saw that the women in this community were abandoning their traditional garb in favour of synthetic saris. She then established the goal of reviving the magnificent Lambani handwork while also uplifting the women's community. At the same time, the founder had been doing the following: "In the organisation, there is a practice of incorporating Lambani community members in the design decision-making process. We connect with them in an open and mutually respectful manner, valuing their diverse culture and knowledge. We collaborate with participants to create one-of-a-kind designs that honour their cultural history while also reflecting artistic traditions. This means that by working together, we want to accurately depict this community."

They currently provide regular monthly wages to more than 60-80 women from the Lambani community. It only utilises handwoven fabrics, which benefits the weaver

community. As a result, the communities are gradually becoming self-sufficient, and the members are proud of their newly acquired weaving and embroidery skills. With this effort, they hope to reach 120 women by mid-2023 and ensure that all families in the Lambani neighbourhood have access to banking, education, and healthcare.

What more? "Beyond financial support, our initiatives aim to empower individuals to become responsible, self-sufficient members of the community. Women artisans are prepared to progress and become leaders in their communities after receiving assistance from mentorship and leadership education programs, as well as gaining skills and knowledge through skill-building seminars and training programs. Furthermore, we have provided them with a platform from which to speak out and expose people to the culture they represent, all while campaigning for social change and the enrichment of Lambani traditions." Fundamentally, they seek to support the Lambani ladies, whose handicrafts have been playing the game in all their textures and brilliant colors even before the term 'sustainable' became popular. They hope to provide Lambani craftspeople with an excellent opportunity to earn a living by producing comfortable silhouettes while also preserving and revitalising the tradition by seamlessly blending hand-woven fabrics!

On the call, the founder sounded overjoyed and expressed it to us, saying, "Recognising our role in empowering the 'Banjaras', we are only trying to foster a powerful sense of community for these women, providing them with a safe space to not only work together but also share their joys and burdens. Furthermore, from a history preservation standpoint, we continue to strive to promote the Lambani art form."

BANJARA KASUTI, A ONE-OF-A-KIND COMMUNITY INITIATIVE NOT ONLY AIMS TO PRESERVE THE VANISHING CULTURE OF THE 'LAMBANI' LADIES BUT ALSO TO UPLIFT THEM, FINANCIALLY AND SOCIALLY. THIS WEEK, *THE PIONEER* CONNECTS WITH THE FOUNDER TO DISCUSS MORE IN DETAIL ABOUT THEIR MISSION AND WELFARE FOR THE COMMUNITY.



Fitness is more than just appearing muscular and ripped!

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

Yogesh Bhateja's journey from the busy streets of Delhi to the glittery world of Mumbai has been nothing short of extraordinary. Little did he know that this leap of faith would take him to the dazzling world of Bollywood.

He has been drawn to difficulties since he was very young. He began by playing soccer alongside older players and competing in various events. As he earned a bachelor's degree in physical education, he focused on becoming a soccer player and even coached school teams. He says, "However, I wanted more, so I delved into bodybuilding, transforming from a 56 kg boy to a 75 kg bodybuilder. While competing in the bodybuilding competition, I finished in top five, but I quickly realised my true passion was coaching and assisting others in their transformation."

He had already coached hundreds of people in leading fitness clubs and was enjoying a successful career when a buddy, a celebrity trainer, asked him to manage his gym.

Embracing the challenge, he recalled, "I moved to Mumbai in 15 days. There, I met my first Bollywood client, Sonu Sood, and worked on films like *Rajkumar* and *Happy New Year*. This opportunity led to training other superstars, such as Farah Khan, Kapil Sharma, Esha Gupta, Tamannah Bhatia, Neetu Singh Kapoor, and Sunil Grover. My journey from a youngster to a superstar fitness coach in Bollywood exemplifies my adaptability and desire to take on new challenges, finally finding fulfillment in improving lives."

Moving from a secure career to a competitive climate was one of the most difficult tasks he experienced, he admits. "Working with celebrities presented unique chal-

lenges such as erratic schedules, long working hours, and high expectations. However, my adaptability enabled me to overcome these challenges." He learned to construct successful training plans on the fly, based on their physical, mental, and emotional states, ensuring they received the best possible instruction even under difficult circumstances.

Working with celebs like Sonu Sood, Kapil Sharma, and Kangana Ranaut has been extremely rewarding, he says. "Each transformation is meaningful, and seeing them achieve their fitness goals is deeply satisfying. Training Sonu Sood for *Fateh* was especially noteworthy owing to the irregular shoot schedules and inclement weather, but his dedication made it a memorable experience." He explains, "Sonu Sood introduced me to Kapil Sharma, whose hectic schedule made frequent exercises difficult. However, his hardworking spirit shone through, and we frequently practiced late at night. Many stars praised his stunning metamorphosis on *The Kapil Sharma Show* and in his films."

He proceeds to say that training Kangana Ranaut has always been both enjoyable and difficult. During

Manikarnika, she gave him only 21 days to assist her in acquiring a size zero figure for Cannes, and they were successful. For *Panga*, she needed a robust, heavy appearance, but for *Thalaivi*, she gained 20 kg safely. Following *Thalaivi*, they concentrated on shedding the weight for *Dhaadak*, ensuring she was fit and flexible for action scenes. Her commitment to functional training is amazing!

He also believes it is critical to always study and stay current with the latest trends and techniques in the fitness industry, and explains, "To accomplish this, I often attend workshops, gain new certifications, and stay informed about improvements in fitness training."

He combines functional training and classical bodybuilding to improve speed, flexibility, explosiveness, and overall agility, helping clients create a leaner, stronger physique, he claims. "For Sonu Sood's preparation for *Fateh*, I designed two training splits that featured movements like archers, clap push-ups, human flag, front lever, cossack squats, explosive lunges, and box jumps. These workouts dramatically improved his performance and recovery, ensuring that he was physically ready for the demanding part."

Throughout his life, he has been committed to discovering innovative training methods. As a full-time soccer player, he gained a thorough understanding of the human body, sport-specific training techniques, and methods for improving physical performance. He adds, "My path into bodybuilding expanded on this knowledge. I learned about body adaptation to different diets and nutrition strategies, whether for muscle gain or competitiveness, using calorie deficit diets."

At this point in his career, he feels a great deal of professional obligation. He wants to help and reach out to the masses in order to alter their lives and guide them, as a lot of misinformation and

phony influencers are deceiving these innocent people. He has devised some highly affordable, sensible, and feasible exercise regimens for people, taking into account a variety of factors such as age, gender, lifestyle, work culture, eating habits, health problems, and so on, to assist people who do not have access to or the luxury of time to visit gyms. The fitness business is continuously changing with new innovations.

Even social media has a huge impact on individuals. It has made individuals more concerned with their appearance, which has both positive and negative consequences. Many people aim to look fit and healthy and are cognizant of eating appropriately. He continues, "However, there has been an upsurge in drug addiction, with young individuals turning to steroids to obtain a more muscular body in a shorter period of time. I've even been approached by 16- to 17-year-olds inquiring about steroid cycles." To avoid this, the application must be monitored and modified regularly. Feedback and modifications are based on each person's specific preferences and progress. Periodic evaluation of progress and goal changes are required, as initial plans may not always function flawlessly due to the body's limits. It is critical to keep the customer on track by implementing plan improvements on schedule, as suggested by the interviewee.

He ends by stating that fitness is more than just appearing muscular and ripped. He always makes sure his customer is in a healthy mental state. For him, completing a scheduled routine is unimportant. He only wants a pleasant session that ends with a big smile on celebs' face, which does not always come with an aggressive workout. Sometimes it's a solid moderate-intensity session, sometimes it's HIIT, and many times it's just trying out a new tough and complex activity. He focuses on appropriate posture and breathing patterns while working out, which leads to a successful session!

Celebrity fitness coach Yogesh Bhateja, who has had a remarkable journey, who moved from a secure career to a competitive path, interacts with *The Pioneer* over an exclusive chat taking us through his journey, and transforming his B'wood clients, among many more.



A closer look at Sarcomas!

Sarcomas are a rare group of cancers that begin in the bones or soft tissues of the body. It accounts for about 1% to 2% of all cancers that affect children, adolescents, and even adults. Although bone cancer can develop anywhere in the body, it mostly develops in the arms and legs.

Since it develops deep in the body and becomes evident after the appearance of a lump, one might not be able to see any significant signs or symptoms. This makes, early diagnosis of sarcoma very crucial.

How bone sarcoma is diagnosed?

Sarcoma of bone is a type of cancer that requires various tests for accurate diagnosis, although not all tests are necessary for every individual. When selecting diagnostic tests, doctors take into account several factors such as the suspected type of cancer, the patient's signs and symptoms, age, general health, and the results of previous medical tests.

Here are the tests commonly used to diagnose and determine the stage of bone sarcoma:

Bone scan: A bone scan aids in determining the stage of a bone sarcoma. A small amount of radioactive tracer is injected into a patient's vein, which collects in areas of the bone. A special camera detects the radiation emitted by the tracer, creating images. Healthy bone appears lighter, while areas affected by cancer cells or fractures stand out.

Blood tests: Laboratory blood tests alone cannot diagnose sarcomas. However, in some cases of osteosarcoma or Ewing sarcoma, elevated levels of alkaline phosphatase and lactate dehydrogenase may be present. It's important to note that these substances can also be elevated due to non-cancerous causes, such as normal growth in children or healing broken bones.

X-ray: X-rays use a small amount of radiation to create images of the body's internal structures. They provide a visual representation of the bones and can help identify any abnormalities or tumors.

Computed tomography (CT or CAT) scan: CT scans utilise x-rays taken from different angles to create detailed 3-dimensional images of the body. They can measure tumor size

and identify abnormalities or tumors. Contrast medium, a special dye, may be administered to enhance the image's clarity.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI): MRI employs magnetic fields instead of x-rays to produce detailed body images. It can measure tumor size and detect involvement of nearby soft tissues. Contrast medium may or may not be used to enhance the image's quality.

Positron emission tomography (PET) or PET-CT scan: A PET scan is often combined with a CT scan to determine the stage of a bone sarcoma. A radioactive sugar substance is injected into the body, which is absorbed by cells that actively use energy, including cancer cells. The scanner detects this substance, producing images of organs and tissues.

Biopsy: A biopsy involves the removal of a small tissue sample for microscopic examination. While other tests may suggest cancer, only a biopsy can provide a definitive diagnosis. A pathologist analyzes the sample to confirm the presence of cancer. Biopsies can be performed through a needle or by making a small incision, depending on the tumor's location. It is crucial to undergo the biopsy process in a specialised center, as the procedure is extremely



important both in diagnosis and proper treatment outcome. Additionally, an expert pathologist should review the tissue sample to ensure an accurate diagnosis of sarcoma.

After conducting the necessary diagnostic tests, the doctor will discuss the results with the patient. In the case of a cancer diagnosis, these results assist in describing the cancer and determining its stage and grade. Staging and grading help guide the appropriate treatment approach. It is crucial for individuals with bone sarcoma to seek care at a sarcoma specialty center, where experts can ensure accurate diagnosis and provide appropriate treatment.

(The author, Dr. Anmol Chugh, is a Consultant, Plastics & Aesthetics Centre, at CK Birla Hospital.)

FINAL CHANCE FOR KOHLI, ROHIT TO GIVE INDIA ICC TROPHY AFTER 13 YEARS

PTI ■ BENGALURU

It's tough to find two cricketers who are so different from each other yet so closely intertwined by the same thread of fate as Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. Rohit's initiation into top-flight cricket came at the idyllic Belfast in 2007 and Kohli's a year later at the more conventional Dambulla. Another intriguing chapter of this journey together will potentially come to an end next month in the stunning Caribbean Isles. The next T20 World Cup is in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, but Rohit would be touching 40 then and Kohli would be 38. The 50-over version is a further one year away. It's hard to see them playing in any of those, considering the increasingly strike-rate oriented nature of the game. So, both Rohit and Kohli will want to leave the stage with the winner's medal around their neck next month. Should they achieve that, it would be their second each after the 2007 T20 World Cup (Rohit) and the 2011 50-over showpiece (Kohli). And it will be a perfect send off for two players who have had an immeasurable impact on India's white-ball fortunes in the last 17 years.

However, the Kohli-Rohit story is not one of bromance. It's based more on mutual respect and the awareness that they should not step into each other's space. Kohli has talked about the admiration he has had for Rohit since the very beginning of their careers. "I was filled with curiosity about a player. People kept on saying - 'This is one player who is rising rapidly'. I used to wonder that even though I am a young player, no one talks about me, then who is this player. "But when he (Rohit) stepped out to bat, I was all quiet. It was amazing to watch him play. In fact, I haven't seen a player time the ball better than him," Kohli had said in 'Breakfast With Champions'. Contrasting in nature, their batting has been high art for the masses to which they added a dash of modernity later. Of the two, Kohli is the more all-format batter, who has adapted more fluently with the changing face of the game. He has scored in every corner of the cricketing world in a show of consistency that was rarely witnessed after the halcyon days of Sachin Tendulkar. While Rohit built his own edifices in white-ball formats, the Mumbai-man remained a



reluctant visitor in Test cricket's elite corridors for the better part of his career. A move up to the opener's role helped Rohit unshackle himself a bit in Tests in the later part of his career. But for now, Kohli and Rohit will have to lean on their vast experience in T20 cricket to fuel India's run in the World Cup. Rohit will certainly open and if his approach in last year's World Cup and in the just-concluded IPL can be taken as a sign, the skipper will continue his selfless, aggressive approach. Herein, Rohit has an inherent advantage. His natural big-hitting abilities will help him pursue his batsmanship without many improvisations. That one-legged pull of his is a cosy meeting point between elegance and malevolence. But Kohli's game is slightly different. He can pull off those occasional big hits - a swat-flick six or a flat-bat smash over bowler's head. A quick rewind to his pick-up shot off Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf during the 2022 T20 World Cup will vouch for that. Still, there is a sore point. Kohli has often struggled to score off spin, especially against the left-arm variety. His career strike-rate against slow bowlers hovers around mid-120s in T20s.

Several times, it has impeded his progress in the middle innings but during this year's IPL, he seemed to have found a solution. He brought out the slog-sweep against spinners, and it had a healthy influence on his strike-rate as Kohli made 260 runs from 188 balls and struck 15 sixes against them. His strike-rate against spin touched 139, a marked improvement from his overall IPL strike-rate of 124. "It was me mentally putting myself in that situation. I did not practice that at all," he explained. "I know I can hit it because I have played that shot a lot in the past. So, I just felt like I needed to take a bit more risk," Kohli said of his new approach against spin. This might come in handy for him in the T20 World Cup where the pitches are expected to become progressively slow, increasingly bringing spinners into the game. Beyond the realm of cricket, the two veterans' final charge at an ICC trophy — personally and for the team — would be a captivating sight. For the fans, this World Cup would be about drinking it in as much as they can because once this duo leaves the stage, there will be an immense emptiness.

Only Bumrah is executing yorkers consistently: Lee

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legendary Australia speedster Brett Lee feels apart from Jasprit Bumrah, pacers are failing to nail yorkers effectively in the death overs and he wants them to master the pivotal delivery. Bumrah is one of the most complete bowlers in world cricket at the moment. He can bowl wicket-taking deliveries without leaking runs but the most lethal weapon in his armoury is his toe-crushing yorker, which he, more often than not, executes perfectly in the death overs. "On a general rule, other than Bumrah, we haven't seen enough fast bowlers nailing their yorkers recently. "I want to see fast bowlers bowl more yorkers. I still don't reckon they execute enough yorkers at the death," Lee said at the launch of the Legends Intercontinental T20 league recently. With the recently concluded IPL featuring scores in excess of 200 regularly, Lee believes the fast bowlers would be more economical had they nailed yorkers. "If you look back at 17 years of Indian Premier League, on average a yorker goes for a strike rate of less than 100. Which tells me that one run or less per bowler that's executed. "Now, when you bowl a yorker and you've got guys who can go down and scoop you over the head, well that puts pressure on you as a bowler. "You've got to set in the right field and put two men back, third man fine and back and then bowl," Lee added. As T20 cricket progresses, the game is tilting more and more towards the batters. With the 'Impact Player Rule' and flat decks, bowlers struggled in the IPL. Lee, like several other former players, called for a balance between bat and ball. "I'm all for batters smacking the ball all over, but there has got to be something for the bowlers too. I'm not asking for a green top, where teams bowled out for 110, because that's not good for cricket either. "You want a good total, I think. Anywhere around that 185 mark to 230 is a good score. We've seen scores now of 265, 270, 277. "It's really hard because most bowlers now are going for 45 to 50 off their four overs," he said. **WARNER HAS EARNED THE RIGHT TO GO ON HIS OWN TERMS:** Australia's charismatic young batter Jake Fraser-McGurk set the stage ablaze in his debut IPL season with many calling for his inclusion in Australia's T20 World Cup squad.



However, the selectors decided to go with veteran opener David Warner, who is set to retire after the tournament, Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh in the top-order. McGurk, who is a top order batter and Warner's Delhi Capitals teammate, though has been named as a travelling reserve. "David Warner has earned that right to go out on his own terms. And if things don't happen for whatever reason, then he's (McGurk) definitely there to take part," Lee said. Although Warner did not have a particularly great IPL as he missed several matches due to an injury, the Southpaw has scored 834 runs in T20 cricket since 2021 at a strike rate of around 150. He was woefully out of form ahead of the 2021 T20 World Cup but ended up being the player of the tournament, playing a vital role in Australia's maiden World Cup win in the shortest format. On the other hand, 22-year-old McGurk, who was called in as a replacement for Lungi Ngidi at Delhi Capitals, gave an excellent display of explosive batsmanship, smashing four half-centuries in nine games at an astronomical strike rate exceeding 234. "I think if you go over there as a reserve batsman, you definitely have a chance to get an opportunity. "That happened this year with the Delhi Capitals, he wasn't even picked in the squad. "Ricky Ponting rang him up late night and said come in and had a few injuries. So right time, right place. "But the advice to him, and he articulated it beautifully to say that he's only 22 years of age (aram se aram se) - He's got time. There's no point rushing it," Lee said.

ABD laments racial quota chatter around SA T20 World Cup squad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As de Villiers is not surprised that just days before South Africa renews its quest for an elusive World Cup, the talk back home is all about racial quota in the team. It's a rinse-and-repeat sort of situation and de Villiers, who retired in 2018, is glad that he is a mere spectator to the situation now. "...It's a shame going into a tournament to have the focus on that. I mean it's nothing new, it's just a shame," lamented one of the greats of South African cricket. "Luckily this time around, I've had nothing to do with anything over there. I'm just a spectator," the 40-year-old said in an interaction with PTI facilitated by 'Jio Cinema'. The cause of outrage is the presence of just one black player in the squad for the T20 showpiece that will take place

in the Americas from June 1. Considered the perennial bridesmaids, who tend to choke in crunch situations, South Africa somehow are always in the pre-tournament favourites bracket without actually living up to the tag. And having a deeply divisive topic take centre-stage just days before they begin their campaign is a far-from-ideal build-up for a country that has a troubled past when it comes to race relations. The Proteas will start off against the Netherlands in New York on June 8. Over the course of a season, six players of colour are required to be in the South Africa playing eleven including two from the black African community as per the policy introduced in 2016. With Kagiso Rabada being the only black African in the T20 World Cup squad, the national team is set to miss its target.



Another black-African, Lungi Ngidi, is part of the travelling reserves. The other players of colour include Reeza Hendricks, Bjorn Fortuin, Keshav Maharaj, Tabraiz Shamsi and Ott Niel Baartman. "There are controversial moments back home as per usual with the South African squad just before a World Cup," de Villiers said. "I think it's a good team. It's a shame about Lungi... (he) lost a

bit of form, had a couple of injuries. Otherwise, he most probably would have been in the squad and there wouldn't have been any controversial stuff back home," he added. At the moment, Cricket South Africa doesn't have a committee of selectors and the team is picked by head coaches Shukri Conrad (Tests) and Rob Walter (white-ball cricket). "Sometimes these things happen and it puts you under a

bit of pressure as a selection panel and as a coach and a captain," de Villiers said. "From what I remember is with the quota system, it's an average team, an average number over the season and they don't really look at every series, but as journalists sometimes enjoy steaming up things a bit," he tried to put things in context. Following the selection of the squad earlier this month, former Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula and former CSA and ICC president Ray Mali questioned the composition of the side. "Only one African player selected in the Proteas Team for the upcoming T20 World Cup 2024 Team. Definitely a reversal (reversal) of the gains of transformation and doesn't reflect fair representation of all South Africans in the national cricket tea," Mbalula wrote on X.

PTI ■ PORT OF SPAIN

Short of players, a nine-man Australia Sneed as many as four support staff members on the field, including chief selector and head coach, in their T20 World Cup warm-up against Namibia but that did not change the expected outcome of the game. Australia won the game by seven wickets with impressive performances from David Warner (54 not out off 21 balls), fit again Josh Hazlewood (2/5) and leg-spinner Adam Zampa (3/25). They chased down Namibia's 119 with 10 overs to spare. With the likes of Pat Cummins, Travis Head, Mitchell Starc, Cameron Green, Marcus Stoinis and Glenn Maxwell given extra time at home following the two-month long IPL, chief selector and former captain George Bailey and head coach Andrew McDonald were among

Selector, head coach take field for nine men Australia in T20 World Cup warm up

the support staff who were forced to take the field. 46-year-old fielding coach Andre Borovec also took the field alongside Bailey when skipper Mitchell Marsh opted to bowl against Namibia. When Marsh and Hazlewood went back to the dressing room, McDonald and 49-year-old batting coach Brad Hodge had to step on the field. Hazlewood, playing hist first game in three months, looked in good rhythm. "Obviously, we didn't have a full quota of players but the guys who played, probably a few of us needed to coming off a big layoff," Hazlewood told



cricket.Com.Au after the game on Tuesday. "I know a number of the bowlers were coming off a long break which is pretty unusual in our system, but it's good to get out there, playing is always different to training. "The wicket looked a little bit tough early, a little bit slow, which is probably what we're going to encounter here in the West Indies. "So a nice hit out, got the result and we move onto the West Indies in a few days." Australia Test and ODI skipper Cummins, Head and Starc were part of the IPL final played in Chennai on Sunday.

India getting used to cooler temperatures, playing white ball games in morning

PTI ■ NEW YORK

After two months of intense competitive cricket under night lights, the Indian cricket team, sans Virat Kohli, began its preparations for the T20 World Cup with a morning training session here, keeping in mind the 10.30am starts for all its preliminary games. Kohli took a break for personal work after RCB's IPL ouster and in all likelihood, he will join the squad by Friday. But it is not clear if he would be able to take part in the only warm-up game against Bangladesh on Saturday after a long flight. Having played 90 per cent of the matches under lights in the scorching Indian summer, the idea would be to adjust to pleasant mornings where temperatures will hover between 25 to 27 degree celsius with very less humidity. A white kookaburra in slightly windy mornings could be a challenge and to be prepared for that, the severely jet-lagged bodies need to get used to morning conditions.

And this is why the support staff, before initiating the skills training (net sessions) on the practice pitches at a ground on the outskirts of the city, have decided to help the players acclimatise with the conditions. With 14 players checking in, there was light jogging, routine shuttle runs, and a bit of foot volley to get into the groove. "They have been away two and half months from us and getting to know where they stand and what needs to be done before the World Cup is the goal. The (first) goal is to spend 45 minutes in the heat to get going," Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai told bcci.Tv. "We came in the day before yesterday and we just eased into our routines here, the players are just getting used to the time zone. Today we are having our first ground session," he added. As far as the players are concerned, there is an element of curiosity about playing cricket in New York. The Indian teams, over the years, have played primarily in Florida at the Fort Lauderdale ground during



their tours of the West Indies. "First time we are going to play cricket in New York, it's going be

fun," all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja said. "We have not yet played cricket,

came here for a team activity today. Hopefully, it will be good. The weather is really good, so we

are looking forward to it." Skipper Rohit Sharma's deputy Hardik Pandya seemed excited

with the "bright sunshine" and "good vibes" while Suryakumar Yadav wanted to know more about the diaspora's cricket interests. "I heard cricket is growing here in the US. So we are really excited and the first day here was amazing, so very excited for the few days coming up," Surya stated. India, the 2007 T20 World Cup champions, will start their campaign here on June 5 against Ireland, followed by the big game against arch-rivals Pakistan on June 9. They take on hosts USA on June 12 before the cricket caravan moves to familiar Lauderdale in Florida for the game against Canada on June 15. India are supposed to be clubbed A1 irrespective of where they finish in the group and will then proceed to the Caribbean islands for the Super 8 phase of the tournament where they would meet Australia, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. None of the Indian main squad players featured in the IPL finals held on May 26 in Chennai.



'If *GOG* turns out to be a hit, I'll write its sequel story in a month'

With *Gangs of Godavari* nearing its release, the anticipation around the film has only been going high. Now, ahead of the release, the director, Krishna Chaitanya, shares insights and the creative vision behind the project.

K. RAMYA SREE

Vishwak Sen, the dynamic actor known for his versatile performances, is set to embark on a thrilling journey with his upcoming project, *Gangs of Godavari*. Teaming up with actresses Anjali and Neha Sshetty, Vishwak is poised to deliver yet another powerful portrayal in this intense gangster drama, which is directed by Krishna Chaitanya and bankrolled by Sithara Entertainments.

With each film, Vishwak Sen has been redefining his craft, and *Gangs of Godavari* promises to be no exception. Set against the backdrop of the Godavari region, the film delves into the murky world of organised crime, showcasing Vishwak's ability to inhabit complex characters with depth and nuance.

In anticipation of the film's release on May 31, director Krishna Chaitanya engaged with us, offering insights into the making of *Gangs of Godavari* and the creative vision behind the project.

Speaking about why he chose to tell the story of violence that happens in the Godavari region, he shared, "Just like you see in Rayalaseema and Telangana, there are murders and conflicts in Andhra as well. Showing Godavari in a picturesque way every time felt very cliché for me. We are not that; there is more to Godavari than just its nature. I wanted to be real. Through this movie, I got the opportunity to show a good story paired with good emotions. From production to the whole cast and crew, everyone supported my story. The entire story is fictional."

He added, "*Gangs of Godavari* unfold the saying, 'You are your own enemy.' I made this film within the limits of the liberty I had. Personally, this story is very close to mine. Everyone can take action, but emotions can be shown only if you feel them. In this film, the last 20 minutes will be an emotional rollercoaster. It will hit people hard, and I am very confident about it. This movie will be very emotional."

The director further reveals that he didn't make any changes to the story of the film after Vishwak came on board. The only apprehension he had was the accent. He further goes on: "Vishwak speaks Telangana, and our story was set against an Andhra backdrop. So I told him to focus a little more on the dialect. We hired a tutor. He learned for 15 days, and within a month, Vishwak did a good job. On this occasion, I also want to clarify that this movie has so many gangs in it, but this is not a gangster story, and I request that people not consider it a gangster film. There are no gangsters in this movie."

While there are rumours that this film will have a sequel, the director clarified that he wants to make a sequel for this movie; however, nothing has been finalised yet. "If this movie turns out to be a hit, then I will write the sequel story in a month and make the film. I write stories very quickly, good or bad. The only advantage with it was that there was no delay because of me in any way. I am not here to please people. I do what I like, but I will be accommodating," he laughed.

About the special song in the film, the director and Vishwak shared a funny banter. When Vishwak asked Chaitanya how he was performing, the director had only one thing to say, and in his words, "I told Vishwak, 'Vishwak, you dance however you want to; nobody is going to look at you anyway in this item song.' I feel that in a special song, if the attention goes to the hero, then we failed. Ayesha Khan performed extremely well in the song, and I was very happy about it."

On the other hand, for the director, the film *Powerbat* is one of his most awaited films, which he wrote in two parts already. Giving clarity on when that movie will take off, he shared, "When I wrote the story for *Powerbat*, the first part was 2,280 shots. I have divided it, and this is a story that I like very much, but because of the limitations, I cannot do *Powerbat*. I need a hit for producers to put their trust in me. It's a big story, so it will be in two parts whenever it materialises."

PIC TALK

Megastar Chiranjeevi and actor Ajith met recently on the sets of *Vishwambhara*. Actor Ajith, who was in Hyderabad shooting for his upcoming film *Good Bad Ugly* for the next 20 days, took some time out to meet Megastar, who was shooting for *Vishwambhara* in the vicinity.

As the duo recalled some eventful memories, Megastar took to his Instagram account, where he shared their picture and wrote: "Had a surprise Star guest on the sets of *#Vishwambhara* last evening. The very affectionate Ajith Kumar who's shooting next doors visited and we spent some great time chatting up and fondly recollecting the time of his debut film *Prema Pushtakam* whose music launch was done by me. And what's more, his better half, Shalini acted as one of the endearing kids in my film *Jagadekaveerudu Athiloka Sundari*. Clearly there were memories galore to cherish. I was so delighted at the peaks of stardom Ajith has attained over the years and yet how he remained a beautiful soul at heart! (sic)."



Second single from *Bharateeyudu 2* out now

Superstar Kamal Haasan's *Bharateeyudu 2* has become one of the most anticipated films of 2024. Adding to the excitement, the second single from the film was released on Wednesday.

The song, *Chengaluvu* offers a melodious journey into romance, showcasing the undeniable chemistry between talented actors Siddharth and Rakul Preet Singh. Crafted with poetic lyrics by Rama Jogaiah Sastry, this enchanting track, sung by Abby V and Shruthika Samudhrala, beautifully captures the essence of love, contrasting the powerful and period-driven vibe of the previous single, *Souraa*. With the film's audio rights secured by the renowned label Sony Music, fans can expect a grand launch event scheduled for June 1 at Nehru Stadium, Chennai,

offering a glimpse of the *Indian 2* cast and crew in person.

Scheduled for release on July 12, *Bharateeyudu 2* (*Indian 2*) promises a captivating cinematic experience, boasting an ensemble cast that includes Siddharth, SJ Suryah, Kajal Aggarwal, and a host of other talented actors. Directed by S Shankar, the sequel to the 1996 hit film *Indian* is produced by Lyca Productions and Red Giant Movies, featuring stunning cinematography by Ravi Varman and Rathnavelu, complemented by the expert editing of A Sreekar Prasad. As anticipation builds, mark your calendars for the release of *Bharateeyudu 2* (*Indian 2*), a film set to mesmerise audiences with its gripping narrative, stellar performances, and visual splendour, promising an unforgettable cinematic journey.



Sathyaraj denies acting in PM Modi's biopic

Actor Sathyaraj refuted speculation that he might feature in a biography about Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a pre-release event on Wednesday, May 29.

The veteran actor mockingly implied that if his friend, the late filmmaker Manivannan, who supported the anti-caste icon Periyar, had directed the picture, he would have been in it. Sathyaraj also made a jest, saying that if modern Tamil anti-caste filmmakers like Vetrimaaran, Pa Ranjith, or Mari Selvaraj directed the Modi biopic, it would "come out well."

He clarified, "Nobody has approached me [to play the role of Modi]. Even if they do ... I may have acted in it if it were directed by my friend, the late director Manivannan, who used to show characters 'as they were'." Sathyaraj joked that he was prepared to play the lead role in the biopic, even if Vijay Milton, the director of Mazhai Pidikatha Manithan, didn't use any propaganda. Continuing in the same spirit, he declared that if Vetrimaaran, Pa Ranjith, or Mari Selvaraj were to direct Modi's biography, he would be willing to play the role! The directors listed above are all against the right-wing. Meanwhile, if the reports are to be believed, he will be playing the chief antagonist in AR Murugadoss' *Sikandar* with actor Salman Khan.

Ananda Krishnan's *Non Violence* set to hit screens soon

Non Violence, a refreshing cinematic venture backed by AK PICTURES Lekha, is all set to grace the silver screen under the directorial prowess of Ananda Krishnan, renowned for his work in the acclaimed film *Metro*. Featuring a stellar cast including Metro Shirish, Bobby Simha, and Yogi Babu in pivotal roles, this project is poised to enthrall audiences with its captivating storyline.

Set against the backdrop of Madurai in the 1990s, *Non Violence* delves into the events unfolding within the confines of Madurai prison during that era. Director Ananda Krishnan, known for his adept storytelling, has meticulously crafted a screenplay that promises an engaging cinematic experience. With the consecutive success-

es of *Metro* and *Kodiyil Oruvan* under his belt, expectations are high for Ananda Krishnan to achieve yet another triumph with this film.

Given the film's historical setting, the production team has spared no effort to authentically recreate the ambience of the 1990s on screen. From meticulously curated props and wardrobes to carefully selected filming locations, every detail has been attended to, ensuring a truly immersive experience for viewers.

In addition to Metro Shirish, Bobby Simha, and Yogi Babu, the film features a talented ensemble cast including Aditi Balan, Garuda Ram, Aditya Kathir, and many others in pivotal roles.

As the shooting of the film nears its final stages, fans eagerly await the official announcement of the teaser and trailer release dates. *Non Violence* is scheduled for release in multiple languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Hindi, promising to reach a diverse audience across the country.





Folk singer Nernala Kishore's *Dachanna Darilo Thyagala Paata* launched

On the occasion of 10 years of achieving Telangana state, Nernala Creations is coming up with *Dachanna Darilo Thyagala Paata*, which was launched grandly in Prasad Lab on Wednesday. This song was shot to commemorate the sacrifices of the martyrs who breathed life into the Telangana movement and laid down their lives for a separate state. It was conceptualised, written, sung, and directed by popular folk singer Nernala Kishore. This song was shot at the famous Kothagattu and Molangur hillocks of Karimnagar district, with more than 200 artists acting in it.

The motivations of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the Telangana state were shown heart-touchingly. A.D.M.S. Shivaji impressed in the special role of legendary poet and singer Gaddar.

He said that this song is being dedicated to the families of Telangana martyrs. Nernala Kishore asked everyone to cherish this song, which was released by the families of Telangana martyrs.

MLC Mahesh Kumar Goud, professors Haragopal, Kodandaram, senior journalist Pasham Yadagiri, High Court advocate Gopal Sharma, film directors N Shankar, Hero Sanjosh, Arunodaya Vimalakka, and Vimala Gaddar (Vennela) participated as guests in the song launch event. This song was choreographed by D.O.P. Shantiraj.



ALLU ARJUN, RASHMIKA MANDANNA EXHIBIT ADORABLE CHEMISTRY IN *SOOSEKI*

The pan-Indian action spectacle *Pushpa 2* has been generating immense buzz with its captivating promotional content. Following the resounding success of the teaser, which garnered boundless adoration from fans, the film's first song, *Pushpa Pushpa*, emerged as a mesmerising title track with widespread appeal.

Now, the spotlight is on the second single, *Sooseki*, which promises to capture hearts with its enchanting melody. Titled differently in various languages—*Angaaron* in Hindi, *Soodaana* in Tamil, *Nodoka* in Kannada, *Kandaalo* in Malayalam, and *Aaguner* in Bengali—the track encapsulates the romantic essence shared between the protagonists, Pushpa Raj and Srivalli, portrayed by Allu Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna, respectively.

While the first song showcased the hero's robust persona, *Sooseki* unfolds a different charm. Chandrabose's lyrical prowess, coupled with Shreya Ghoshal's soulful rendition, elevates the on-screen chemistry to new heights. Ganesh Acharya's choreography adds to the song's allure, offering an addictive visual treat.

Interestingly, the lyrical video is crafted from behind-the-scenes footage of the song's creation, hinting at a surprise in Allu Arjun's appearance.

Conceptually, the song delves into Srivalli's perspective, highlighting her unwavering belief in Pushpa Raj's inherent goodness despite potential misunderstandings. Director Sukumar's meticulous attention to detail ensures that each element exceeds audience expectations. Produced by Mythri Movie Makers and Sukumar Writings on a grand scale, the film boasts stellar technical expertise, with cinematographer Miroslav Kuba Brozek poised to deliver his finest work yet. The production design by S Rama Krishna and N Monica further adds to the film's visual splendour.

Pushpa: The Rule is slated for a worldwide release on August 15, 2024, promising an immersive cinematic experience in multiple languages. With its captivating storyline, stellar performances, and captivating music, the film is poised to captivate audiences across the globe.