

Repeated polls not good for country, says
Rajnath

NO PROPOSAL
MADE TO MALDIVES
FOR FTA: INDIA

Vishwak Sen: I refuse to be pigeonholed as a Telangana
ACTOR

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer
Prajapalana is missing in the Congress government. Was public opinion taken before deciding to change the Telangana State Emblem or the State Anthem? There is no difference between the BRS and the Congress. Both are resorting to diversion tactics instead of addressing the real issues of grain procurement, fertilizer supply, seed purchase and phone tapping
— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, BJP MP P4

DON'T MISS...

Contaminated water triggers...
A diarrhoea outbreak has been reported in Patamatavari Street in the Mogalrajapuram area of the city due to water contamination. The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) is taking measures to control the situation. VMC Water Supply officials identified that the contamination was due to borewells along the Bandar Canal at Fakeerugudem in the city. Unconfirmed reports say four people have died from symptoms of diarrhoea after consuming contaminated water. Unconfirmed reports say four people have died...

When speeding luxury cars...
The death of a 19-year-old in a Punjab town after being hit by a BMW is the latest in a series of accidents caused by speeding uber luxury automobiles, the lengthening list speaking of the horrors of rash driving and recalling the many times the thrill of speed spelt destruction. There have been four such incidents in the country just this month. On Tuesday night in Punjab's Zirakpur town, three youngsters were tossed into the air after the car rammed their motorcycle, killing one on the spot...

'E-commerce, BFSI, hospitality...
E-commerce, BFSI (banking, financial services, and insurance), and hospitality sectors witnessed an increased demands for talents in the first four months of 2024, indicating a recovery in overall job market, a report said on Thursday. Driven by economic recovery, the demand for workforce in BFSI increased the maximum by 21 per cent during the first four months of this calendar year. The e-commerce sector saw an increase of 17 per cent, services and hospitality industries reported a growth of 13 per cent...

Wearing India jersey is different...
It would be 527 days since his life-threatening accident when Rishabh Pant dons the India jersey on June 5 at the Nassau County ground for the opening T20 World Cup match against Ireland and he can't wait for it. On March 23 this year, Pant wore the blue of Delhi Capitals while making an emotional comeback after the horrific car crash in 2022 but he is more eager to wear a different shade of blue -- the 'India Blue' to be specific. "Getting back on the field with an Indian jersey on is a different feeling altogether..."

POSTAL BALLOTS

CEO authorised to relax norms: ECI

Meena withdraws 2 memos issued on counting

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In response to allegations by YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leaders regarding the relaxation of certain norms in the counting of postal ballots by Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) MK Meena, the Election Commission of India (ECI) clarified on Thursday that no violation had occurred. While the YSRCP moved swiftly by filing a motion petition in the State High Court, the ECI issued a statement affirming the validity of the CEO's circular. The circular in question permits the consideration of postal ballots as valid even without the presence of certain details like name, designation, or seal alongside the authorized officer's signature.

ECI's Principal Secretary, Avinash Kumar, stated, "The circular issued by the CEO aligns with existing protocols, and hence, is deemed appropriate." Moreover, on the same day, Andhra Pradesh Chief Election Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena withdrew two memos related to the counting of postal ballots, one entirely and the other partially. Nevertheless, the YSRCP promptly challenged the CEO's latest circular in the High Court, citing deviations from ECI guidelines and the potential for disputes during the counting process. Lella Appireddy, a YSRCP leader filing the motion petition, expressed concerns over the divergence from established norms. Meanwhile, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leaders intervened in support of the ECI's clarification, highlighting the endorsement of the CEO's circular by the ECI itself. The High Court adjourned the proceedings, scheduling further arguments for Friday.

- Challenge filed in High Court by YSRCP against CEO's circular.
- Intervention by TDP supporting ECI's endorsement of CEO's circular.
- Case adjourned to today by High Court for further arguments.

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Perni slams EC's 'double' standards

VIJAYAWADA: Former minister and YSRCP leader, Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani), has criticised both the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the AP Election Commission, accusing them of operating under the influence of the BJP at the Centre. He specifically pointed out the Commission's contradictory stance on the handling of postal ballot votes and recent developments in the High Court. Nani alleged that State Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena had violated postal ballot rules by issuing a memo allowing the acceptance of ballots without proper stamps or designations. **Continued on Page 2**

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Jagan confident of YSRCP's victory

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Five years ago, on May 30, 2019, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy marked a new era in public governance, ending the previous administration under Chandrababu Naidu. In the general election preceding his term, the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) secured a significant victory, winning 151 Legislative Assembly seats and 22 Lok Sabha seats. On that same day, YS Jagan took the oath of office at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada.

To commemorate five years in office, CM Jagan Mohan Reddy tweeted about the milestone. He attributed the YSRCP's rise to power to divine grace and the people's historic verdict. He emphasised that his government has worked for the welfare of every family, regardless of caste, religion, region, or political affiliation. He expressed confidence that the YSRCP, with the continued support and blessings of the people, would be re-elected and further advance the State's comprehensive development.

Reflecting on the past five years, YS Jagan's administration has been noted for its focus on welfare and development, even amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Minister's leadership is described as a significant chapter in the state's history. The YSRCP remains optimistic about its support in the current elections, with political analysts predicting an even greater victory than in previous elections.

CM to return from Europe tour today

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is set to return from his European tour with his family on Friday morning. After a hectic four-month-long election campaign, CM Jagan, along with his family, left for a foreign tour on the night of May 17. The primary purpose of the trip was to visit his daughters who are studying in London. Senior party leaders and Cabinet colleagues will welcome the Chief Minister at Gannavaram Airport. During his break from the rigorous election campaign and numerous public meetings, CM Jagan visited several destinations in Europe. After starting in London, the family also toured France and Switzerland. The YSRCP chief will return just days before the Assembly and Parliamentary election results are declared on June 4.



Campaigning for final phase of LS polls ends

PNS ■ VARANASI/CHANDIGARH

The high-pitched campaigning for the seventh and final phase of Lok Sabha elections in 57 states and the Union territory of Chandigarh on June 1 ended Thursday evening.

Polling is scheduled in all 13 seats of Punjab and four of Himachal Pradesh, 13 constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, nine in West Bengal, eight in Bihar, six in Odisha and three seats in Jharkhand besides Chandigarh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third consecutive term from Varanasi.

Voting is already over in 486 seats in 28 states and Union territories. The turnout in the first six phases was 66.14 per cent, 66.71, 65.68, 69.16, 62.2 and 63.36 per cent respectively. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

The campaigning saw BJP leaders led by Modi accusing the Congress and the INDIA alliance of being corrupt, anti-Hindu and engaging in loot, appeasement and dynastic politics. **Continued on Page 2**

PINNELLI CASES



HC seeks CEC response over probe officials by today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP High Court has issued orders to the CEC on a lunch motion petition filed by Macherla MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy to change the investigation officers in the cases registered against him during the elections. The High Court directed the Central Election Commission to take a decision on Pinnelli's petition by tomorrow (Friday).

The High Court has issued an order granting interim anticipatory bail to Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy in three cases registered by the police two days ago. It ordered the police not to take any hasty action against Pinnelli including arrest.

The alleged conspiracies hatched by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the police to prevent Ramakrishna Reddy from getting interim anticipatory bail suffered a big blow when the court announced that the bail would be granted till June 6 to monitor the counting process.

Be alert in counting halls: Sajjala to agents

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government Advisor on Public Affairs and YSRCP State general secretary, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, has urged the party's election agents to ensure that every valid vote cast for the party is accounted for. Addressing the party's counting agents at a meeting on Thursday, he emphasized the importance of vigilance and prompt action. "You must be vigilant and ready to object whenever necessary. It's crucial to thwart any attempts to invalidate our votes," Sajjala emphasized.

He urged chief agents to impart the necessary knowledge to the counting agents, emphasising the need for diligence in protecting the party's interests. Sajjala underscored the necessity for unwavering determination, stating, "Those unwilling to advocate when required aren't suited for the role of counting agents."

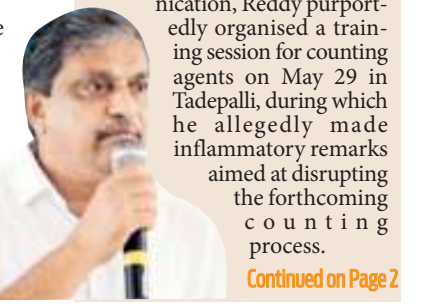
"Our opponents don't adhere to fair play. We must utilize our expertise to counter their tactics," he advised the agents. Sajjala expressed confidence in the YSRCP's victory and anticipated the swearing-in of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy as the Chief Minister on June 9th.

TDP files police complaint

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP Legal Cell general secretary D. Lakshminarayana has lodged a formal complaint with the Inspector of Tadepalli Police Station against YSRCP State general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy. The complaint alleges that Reddy's statements were not only provocative but also carried a malicious intent to incite unrest, sow discord among social groups, and disrupt the integrity of the electoral process, all in clear violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

According to Lakshminarayana's communication, Reddy purportedly organised a training session for counting agents on May 29 in Tadepalli, during which he allegedly made inflammatory remarks aimed at disrupting the forthcoming counting process. **Continued on Page 2**



CRUELTY AGAINST WOMEN

Jilted lover kills woman, attempts suicide

PNS ■ ELURU

In a gruesome incident, a young man hacked a woman to death after she allegedly rejected his marriage proposal, and later attempted suicide by slitting his own throat near the Saibaba temple in the Satrapadu colony of Eluru city on Thursday afternoon.

Police identified the accused as Thottiboina Yesuratnam (23), who had reportedly been harassing the victim, Jakkula Ratna Grace (22), for several months, pressuring her to marry him. When she refused, he ambushed her near her house and attacked her with a sword, fatally wounding her in the throat.

Following the attack, Yesuratnam tried to kill himself at the scene by slitting his throat. Both the victim and the assailant collapsed in a pool of blood. Grace, who was a lecturer at a private college, had recently been engaged to another man on May 26, according to her family.

She resided in the MRC colony, while Yesuratnam lived in Musunuru village. The brutal attack, occurring in a densely populated residential area in broad daylight, has sent shockwaves through the community.

The Three Town Police have registered a case and transported Grace's body to the Government General Hospital (GGH) for a postmortem examination. Yesuratnam, critically injured, was initially admitted to the local GGH and later transferred to the GGH in Vijayawada for advanced treatment.



Woman raped in front of lover

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In a distressing incident, a 20-year-old woman was raped in front of her lover by acquaintances on the outskirts of Damarai village in Sullurpet mandal on Wednesday night.

Police reported that the victim and her partner, who are in a live-in relationship and work at a private company, had befriended the accused, Yedumalai and Balaji. Yedumalai called the victim's partner and invited them to celebrate the victim's birthday. Trusting them, the couple met Yedumalai and Balaji.

The group went to Damarai village near Pulicat Lake. At a secluded spot, Yedumalai and Balaji attacked the couple. They tied the hands of the victim's partner and Yedumalai raped the woman in front of him.

The assailants then robbed them of their money and mobile phones before fleeing. The victim subsequently complained to the Sriharikota police station.

Responding to the heinous crime, Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission (APWC) Chairperson Gajjala Venkata Lakshmi spoke to the Superintendent of Police of Tirupati district, directing swift and rigorous action against the accused.

She also coordinated with the project director to ensure the victim receives the necessary support and assistance.

Share of Rs 500 notes jumps to 86.5% as Rs 2k notes withdrawn

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The share of Rs 500 denomination currency notes in overall currency has jumped to 86.5 per cent at the end of March 2024, as against 77.1 per cent in the year-ago period, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Thursday.

The central bank annual report attributed the surge primarily to the withdrawal of the Rs 2,000 denomination notes announced in May 2023. Share of this denomination has reduced to 0.2 per cent from 10.8 per cent in the year-ago period.



The value and volume of bank notes in circulation increased 3.9 per cent and 7.8 per cent, respectively, in FY24 as compared with an increase of 7.8 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively, during the previous fiscal year, it said. The growth in the number of bank notes in circulation in value terms is among the lowest in recent years.

Monsoon sets in early over Kerala, northeast

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Southwest monsoon made an early onset over Kerala and northeastern region on Thursday, setting the stage for the four-month rainy season crucial for India's agriculture-based economy.

Weather scientists said cyclone Remal, which ripped through West Bengal and Bangladesh on Sunday, had pulled the monsoon flow to the Bay of Bengal, which could be one of the reasons for early onset over the northeast.

On May 15, the weather office had announced the onset of monsoon over Kerala by May 31. The simultaneous onset of monsoon over Kerala and the northeast is quite rare and has happened on four occasions earlier, in 2017, 1997, 1995 and 1991.

"Southwest monsoon has set in over Kerala and advanced into most parts of northeast India today, the 30th May, 2024," the India



Meteorological Department said. The weather office said southwest monsoon has also covered most parts of the northeast region including entire Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam. Between 1971 and 2024, the

earliest onset of monsoon over Kerala was in 1990 when the annual rains reached the coastal state on May 18. The onset of monsoon over Kerala happened on May 22 in 1999, and on May 23 in 1974 and 2009. Kerala has been receiving heavy rains for the past few days resulting

HEAVY RAIN FORECAST IN AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The India Meteorological Department on Thursday forecast thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and gusty winds in parts of Andhra Pradesh for the four days.

Parts of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh (NCAP), Yanam, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh (SCAP) and Rayalaseema are expected to receive rainfall,

accompanied by strong winds. Winds up to speeds of 40 km per hour (kmph) have been forecast, according to a Meteorological department release. Besides thunderstorms, the department predicted heavy rain in parts of Rayalaseema on June 2. Meanwhile, a Met department official noted that the Southwest Monsoon has set in over Kerala and advanced into most parts of Northeast India on Thursday.

in a surplus May rainfall, the weather office data showed.

The normal monsoon onset date for Kerala is June 1 and for Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Assam is June 5. The IMD declares onset of mon-

soon over Kerala when over 14 stations in the state and neighbouring areas receive 2.5 mm or more rainfall for two consecutive days anytime after May 10, the Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR) is low, and the direction of the winds is southwesterly.

HEALTH INSURANCE CASHLESS CLAIMS

IRDAI mandates one-hour decision time for insurers

Insurers are to grant final authorisation within three hours of receiving a discharge authorisation request from the hospital

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has introduced a new mandate requiring health insurers to decide on "cashless" payout claims within one hour. This directive was outlined in a master circular issued on Wednesday, detailing specific time limits insurers must adhere to for cashless authorisations.

"The insurer shall decide on the request for cashless authorisation immediately, but not more than one hour after receipt of the request. Necessary systems and procedures shall be put in place by the insurer immediately and not later than July 31," the circular stated.

Furthermore, insurers are required to grant final authorisation within three hours of receiving a discharge authorisation request from the hospital. The circular adds that if this three-hour window is exceeded, any additional charges imposed by the hospital will be covered by the insurer using

the shareholders' fund. In the event of a patient's death during treatment, IRDAI has instructed insurers to promptly process the claim settlement request and ensure

service providers they have partnered with for cashless claim settlements. Industry insiders acknowledge that this new time limit may pose a challenge for many play-

offer a wider choice of health insurance products with flexible options for riders and add-ons tailored to customers' medical needs. The regulator also specified that a health insurance policy cannot be denied based on claims made in previous policy years. Policyholders will have the option to choose their no-claim bonus either by increasing the sum insured or by receiving a discount on the premium. "The circular has brought in place the entitlements in a health insurance policy and also emphasises measures towards providing seamless, faster, and hassle-free claims experience," said IRDAI. Bhaskar, head of the health administration team at Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, remarked, "The circular consolidates some interim instructions and focuses on customer-friendly initiatives like time-bound cashless authorisation, easier claim settlement, and a wider choice of products and riders among others. Policyholders stand to benefit from these."

"Sometimes the exchanges between TPAs (third-party administrators) and insurers may take time. With a time limit directed by the regulator, everyone would be on their toes," commented an industry source. IRDAI also mandated monitoring TPA performance, stating that payments should only be made to TPAs after satisfactory service discharge, with any drawbacks based on customer feedback benefiting policyholders. Among other changes, insurance companies must

the swift release of the mortal remains from the hospital. "Every insurer shall strive to achieve 100 per cent cashless claim settlement in a time-bound manner. The insurers shall endeavour to ensure that the instances of claims being settled through reimbursement are at a bare minimum and only in exceptional circumstances," the circular noted. Additionally, insurers are required to prominently display on their websites a list of hospitals and healthcare

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Realtors and investors eagerly await poll outcome on June 4

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With the eagerly awaited election results in Andhra Pradesh set to be unveiled on June 4, realtors and property investors across the State are holding their breath in anticipation. From the bustling streets of Visakhapatnam to the strategic landscapes of Amaravati, stakeholders in the real estate sector are poised for pivotal decisions that could shape their future ventures.

Experts assert that the upcoming election outcome will catalyse definitive business strategies in the real estate domain. "Realtors await the election results to make final decisions on their business activities," elucidates industry insiders. They anticipate a surge in demand across residential, commercial, retail, and office space markets once the new government takes office.

Of particular interest is the potential real estate boom in Visakhapatnam, especially if it

secures its position as the Executive Capital of Andhra Pradesh. "Visakhapatnam is primed for development, especially if designated as the Executive Capital," predict experts. This sentiment is

ing, "We expect positive growth in Visakhapatnam post-election, with development spanning various sectors including IT, defence, seafood exports, food processing industries, tourism, hospital-

ity, and medical tourism." Property investors are also keenly monitoring the electoral outcome, ready to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

Nirmal Kumar, a Graphic Designer from Vijayawada, expresses his intent to invest in Visakhapatnam, citing its promising prospects under

potential leadership. Similarly, Konda Rao, a marketing professional from Nellore, eyes investments in Amaravati's vicinity, leveraging existing holdings. The envisioned Bhogapuram-Visakhapatnam express highway further fuels optimism among realtors, heralding accelerated development in the region over the next five years.

With speculations rife among YSRCP supporters about a favourable outcome for the incumbent party and plans for the Chief Minister's swearing-in ceremony slated for June 9 in Visakhapatnam, anticipation is at its peak. However, opposition voices remain resolute, asserting their readiness to form the government, buoyed by discontent with the incumbent administration.

As the countdown to June 4 begins, all eyes remain fixed on the electoral horizon, where the fate of Andhra Pradesh and its burgeoning real estate sector hangs in the balance.

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Nirmal Kumar, a Graphic Designer from Vijayawada, expresses his intent to invest in Visakhapatnam, citing its promising prospects under

echoed by political rhetoric, with the YSRCP emphasizing a focus on Visakhapatnam under its leadership, while the TDP-JSP-BJP alliance underscores plans for Amaravati's development as the state capital.

Vice-president of CREDAI, A Ashok Kumar, articulates the industry's optimism, stat-

ity, and medical tourism." Property investors are also keenly monitoring the electoral outcome, ready to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

Nirmal Kumar, a Graphic Designer from Vijayawada, expresses his intent to invest in Visakhapatnam, citing its promising prospects under

ACA mulls 'Fan Parks' for live screening of T20 World Cup matches

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As anticipation builds for the upcoming T20 World Cup, cricket enthusiasts in Andhra Pradesh are in for a treat as the Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) contemplates setting up 'Fan Parks' across various locations. These parks would facilitate live screenings of India's matches during the T20 World Cup, slated to commence from June 2 in the USA and the West Indies.

When questioned about the feasibility of such screenings, ACA Secretary S.R. Gopinath Reddy expressed keen interest, citing the previous positive response from cricket aficionados. However, he highlighted that the final decision hinges on several factors, notably the prevailing political climate, the approval of the new government, and arrangements for police security. A senior ACA official elaborated that the scheduling of matches after June 4 coincides with potential oath-taking ceremonies for



the next Chief Minister, necessitating careful consideration of security measures.

The T20 World Cup, spanning from June 2 to 29, sees India placed in Group A alongside Pakistan, the USA, Ireland, and Canada. India's campaign kicks off against Ireland on June 5 in New York, with the highly anticipated showdown against Pakistan slated for June 9. ACA officials disclosed that if circumstances permit, they aim to commence live screenings from the India-Pakistan clash on June 9, extending to matches in the

Super 8 and subsequent stages. Recalling the overwhelming response garnered during the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 screenings last October-November, particularly for the semi-final between India and New Zealand, as well as the final against Australia, ACA emphasizes its commitment to providing a memorable viewing experience for cricket enthusiasts. Notably, in Visakhapatnam, thousands of spectators flocked to RK Beach for live screenings, underscoring the popularity and appeal of such events.



Mad scramble for water as Delhi faces severe shortage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The water crisis has become too real to ignore in Delhi as people across areas were seen scrambling with empty buckets to water tankers, some even jumping the queue to get to the top of them to fill their vessel.

While the Delhi government has announced a slew of emergency measures, including a ban on usage of potable water for car washing and its use at construction sites, people in Sanjay Camp in Chanakyaपुरी were seen lining up on footpaths to fill water from tankers.

As soon as an NDMC tanker arrived, people, carrying pipes, rushed towards it and some climbed on its top to fill their buckets.

Former Miss Vizag accuses husband of bigamy

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Tension escalated in Visakhapatnam as startling accusations emerged from within the film industry. Nakshatra, former winner of the beauty pageant Miss Vizag, publicly accused her husband, Ventaka Sai Teja, of engaging in an extramarital affair. The situation reached a boiling point when Nakshatra claimed to have caught Teja red-handed, further alleging that he had married another woman without obtaining a divorce.

According to the police, Nakshatra and Teja tied the knot in 2017 after meeting on the set of a movie 11 years ago. However, their marital bliss was short-lived as conflicts arose over Teja's alleged involvement with another woman.

Nakshatra contended that arguments on this matter became a constant in their rela-



tionship. The dramatic climax occurred when Nakshatra, aided by media reporters, confronted her husband while he was in the company of another woman on Thursday. A heated exchange ensued, leading to a minor altercation before the police intervened and escorted Nakshatra away from the scene. Teja vehemently denied Nakshatra's accusations, asserting that she had fabricated the claims against him. He maintained that the indi-

viduals frequenting his office were aspiring actors seeking opportunities in the film industry.

Nakshatra's allegations didn't stop at infidelity; she also accused Teja of luring women, even while playing online games like PUBG. She claimed to possess incriminating audio and video evidence of Teja's conversations with her. In a bold move, Nakshatra protested outside her husband's residence, demanding justice for what she described as a betrayal of their marital vows.

TDP files...

Continued from Page 1

The letter further asserts that Reddy's actions blatantly flouted electoral regulations, as he allegedly encouraged counting agents to disregard established rules and laws governing elections.

Lakshminarayana emphasised the gravity of Reddy's alleged transgressions, asserting that they amount to a premeditated attempt to intimidate public servants tasked with overseeing the electoral process statewide, particularly on the day of the vote count scheduled for June 4.

Consequently, the demand is for legal action to be taken against Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy under pertinent sections of the Representation of People Act, 1951 (Sections 125, 123(2), and 123(0)), as well as under relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including Sections 153A, 505(2), 171F, and 171J. The call is for stringent punitive measures to be pursued against him following the law.

'Will waive farm loans, scrap Agniveer scheme'

PNS ■ BALASORE

Alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has turned "jawans" into "mazdoor" through the Agniveer scheme, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said the BJP insulted the people of Odisha after one of its leaders recently claimed that Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Modi.

Addressing an election rally at Simulia in Bhadrak Lok Sabha seat, he vowed to save the Constitution and democracy and announced that the INDIA bloc government would legalise MSP on foodgrains, waive farm loans and scrap the Agniveer scheme.



"We are going to scrap the Agniveer scheme. The PM has turned jawans into 'mazdoors'. We will turn jawans to soldiers again," Gandhi told reporters on the sidelines of the public meeting here.

He said all jawans will get pension, canteen facilities and the dignity of "shaheed" in case of their death.

Alleging that the BJD works in partnership with the BJP,

Gandhi said he has been fighting against the saffron party for which the Centre has filed 24 defamation and criminal cases against him.

"The ED questioned me for 50 hours, BJP snatched my Lok Sabha membership and even took away my official residence. If Naveen Babu is actually fighting against the BJP, why there is no such case," Gandhi asked.

He also alleged that both the BJP and the BJD work for "arabpatis" and not for the poor people. "Here the government is run by Patnaik's close aide VK Pandian and not by the chief minister. Odisha's wealth is being looted by both

the BJD and the BJP," he said. "In Telangana, there was an alliance between the BRS and BJP. Congress fought against both parties and broke their backbone," Gandhi said, adding that today a people's government is functioning in the southern state.

"Crores of rupees is being provided to poor people and women are travelling in buses for free. We are going to replicate it in Odisha. We want to oust the BJD-BJP partnership," he said.

He said the BJP government has waived Rs 16 lakh-crore of 'arabpatis' and the Congress will waive the loans of farmers.

Perni slams EC's 'double'...

Continued from Page 1

Despite bringing this matter to the attention of the Election Commission, there was no response, prompting them to file an urgent petition in court. He said that such stringent rules were being enforced only in Andhra Pradesh, not elsewhere in the country.

In a significant turn, CEO MK Meena informed the court

on Thursday of his decision to withdraw the controversial memo, which Nani interpreted as an acknowledgement of error. He criticised the Election Commission's rationale, deeming the memo unjust. Nani affirmed their determination to contest the relaxation granted by the Central Election Commission, expressing confidence in the judicial process. Regardless of the tactics

employed by Chandrababu and the BJP, Nani asserted that righteousness would ultimately prevail in court.

Moreover, Nani reiterated his stance that both the state EC and ECI are under the undue influence of the ruling BJP at the centre, a concern repeatedly raised by his party. He lamented the Election Commission's apparent disregard for their complaints and

evidence of wrongdoing by the TDP. Nani highlighted a double standard in the treatment of news articles, alleging biased actions against the YSRCP while sparing the TDP and BJP from scrutiny. He accused the opposition of intimidating District Collectors and Returning Officers and orchestrating a barrage of cases against his party.

Nani demanded equal treatment under the law, emphasising that no preferential treatment should be given to the TDP and BJP.

Campaigning for final phase of LS polls...

Continued from Page 1

The Opposition parties have been claiming that the BJP is anti-farmer, anti-youth and will change and scrap the Constitution if they win the elections. At a rally in Odisha, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also claimed that BJP leaders were trying to project Modi as the "eleventh avatar" of Lord Vishnu but the people of the country will not accept.

On Thursday, former prime minister Manmohan Singh accused Modi of lowering the dignity of public discourse and the gravity of the office of the prime minister by giving "hateful speeches" during the poll campaign.

In an appeal to voters of Punjab, Singh asserted that only the Congress can ensure growth-oriented progressive future where democracy and Constitution will be safeguarded. He also hit out at the BJP government for imposing the "ill-conceived" Agniveer

scheme on the armed forces.

On Thursday evening, Modi headed to Kanyakumari where he will meditate till June 1 at the site associated with Swami Vivekananda. Modi had 206 public outreach programmes, including rallies and roadshows, since the Election Commission announced the Lok Sabha election schedule on March 16. In Punjab, where the ruling AAP and its INDIA bloc partner Congress are fighting separately in a multi-cornered contest, the high-decibel campaign saw the participation of senior BJP leaders from Modi to Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Nirmala Sitharaman to BJP chief J.P. Nadda and chief ministers of BJP-ruled states.

For the Congress, Kharge and party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra led the campaign. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, out on interim bail in the excise policy case, also led an aggressive campaign for his

party candidates along with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. On the final day, Modi while addressing a rally at Hoshiarpur in Punjab, attacked the Congress for "ranting" about the Constitution when it was the one that "strangled" it during the Emergency and not care about it when Sikhs were killed in the 1984 riots. At the rally in favour of his party's Hoshiarpur candidate Anita Som Parkash and Anandpur Sahib nominee Subhash Sharma here, the prime minister also touched upon the issues of reservation, corruption and the Ram Temple.

Hitting out at the opposition for questioning the Agniveer scheme, he accused the INDIA bloc of making the Army a "weapon of politics" and said there cannot be a "bigger sin than this".

In Uttar Pradesh, while the BJP claimed that the INDIA bloc will bring in Muslim reservation and put a 'Babri lock' in the Ayodhya temple in their speeches, the Opposition urged

the people vote to save the Constitution. In West Bengal, Modi took out a rally in Kolkata on Tuesday in support of candidate for Kolkata Uttar seat Tapas Roy. TMC supremo and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also held rallies for party candidates almost in each of the nine Lok Sabha constituencies.

On Thursday, Banerjee walked a rally of 12 km from the southern part of the city's Jadavpur area to Gopalnagar. Party leader Abhishek Banerjee also participated in two rallies on the final day of campaigning.

The BJP while campaigning alleged the Mamata government was involved in many scams related to coal and cattle smuggling, and irregularities in school recruitment among other issues. It also alleged how the state government was not implementing the welfare schemes of the Centre and depriving the common people of their benefits.

On the Rs 2,000 note withdrawal, it said about 89 per cent of notes under the denomination introduced following demonetization in 2016 had been around for over four years and were due for replacement, and were not commonly used for transactions, it said. The withdrawal also seems to have had an impact on the counterfeit notes detection, the annual report said, adding that the number of fake Rs 2,000 pieces detected jumped to over 26,000 from 9,806 in the year-ago period.

The same for Rs 500 notes declined to 85,711 pieces in FY24 from 91,110 a year earlier. On the recently launched central bank digital currency (CBDC) or e-rupee pilot, the annual report pegged the overall outstanding value at Rs 234.12 crore as against Rs 16.39 crore in March 2023.

Over Rs 164 crore, or 70 per cent of the e-rupee, is in the Rs 500 denomination, while Rs 200 denomination comes second at Rs 32 crore, or 13.7 per cent. As of March 31, 97.7 per cent of the Rs 3.56 lakh crore in outstanding Rs 2,000 denomination notes were returned by the public, the annual report said. In FY24, the RBI spent Rs 5,101 crore on security printing as against Rs 4,682 crore in the year-ago period.

The RBI annual report said it also carried out a survey on currency usage among the public, where over 22,000 respondents across the country indicated that cash is "prevalent" even though digital modes of payments were gaining traction.

Share of Rs 500 notes...

Continued from Page 1

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Contaminated water supply triggers diarrhoea outbreak

Unconfirmed reports say 4 people died, 40 hospitalised

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A diarrhoea outbreak has been reported in Patamatavari Street in the Mogalrajapuram area of the city due to water contamination. The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) is taking measures to control the situation. VMC Water Supply officials identified that the contamination was due to borewells along the Bandar Canal at Fakeerugudem in the city.

Unconfirmed reports say four people have died from symptoms of diarrhoea after consuming contaminated water. However, VMC authorities have not yet confirmed these deaths as being caused by diarrhoea and water contamination. More than 40 people are currently receiving treatment at various hospitals. The outbreak was first noticed three days ago.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) tested the water from these borewells and confirmed the contamination. Consequently, on Thursday, VMC officials halted the water supply from these points. Around 20,000 people reside in this area, so the authorities arranged for drinking water to be supplied from the VMC Headwater Works through the 46 MLD plant at Gangireddula Dibba, Gunadala, to address further problems.

Additionally, VMC is supplying potable drinking water through tankers. The VMC water supply authorities are also removing unused water pipelines and drainage pipelines. The water wing authorities found that around 100 water pipeline connections had leaks due to their proximity to drainage lines. All these 100 connections, along with the unused water pipeline collections, are being removed.



Municipal workers repair the drinking water pipelines at Patamatavari Street in Mogalrajapuram area of Vijayawada on Thursday. Pic by Ch Vijaya Bhaskar

Meanwhile, the NTR District Medical & Health Department continued the medical camp at Patamatavari Street, and the FSSAI is conducting ongoing water tests. Officials from the Medical and Health Department are treating people for symptoms of diarrhoea and referring individuals to the government general hospital if necessary.

NTR DM & HO Dr. M Subasini is monitoring the situation by continuing the medical camp at the CPM office. Adequate doctors and supporting staff, including ASHA workers, are providing medical services. Additionally, medical teams are conducting door-to-door visits to check on residents' health conditions. FSSAI officials are conducting

on-the-spot water sample testing at Patamata Vari Veedhi and Mogalrajapuram by collecting water samples from all bores in and around Mogalrajapuram. The authorities collected around 67 samples from residents' tap connections and confirmed the water contamination by changes in water colour. Upon receiving the reports from the FSSAI, and following their suggestions, VMC officials halted the water supply from the Bandar Canal borewells points. The authorities have taken steps to supply water from the 46 MLD plant at Gangireddula Dibba in the Gunadala area, and also through tankers. However, FSSAI authorities are continuing their on-the-spot water sample testing with the support of VMC staff.

VMC chief urges public not to panic

VIJAYAWADA: The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) has urged the public not to panic over the recent social media messages regarding water contamination. Extensive sample tests conducted by the corporation at the sources of drinking water, i.e. for Krishna River water, the borewell water, the overhead tanks and the distribution pipelines and all tests have shown negative results for any contamination. In a press release, on Thursday, Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar said they assured residents that the drinking water supplied by VMC is safe. There is no need for concern, he added. Please disregard the unfounded rumours and trust the official reports provided by the municipal authorities, he said.

New cases

New cases have emerged in Rajiv Nagar, 64th division, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation. Local reports indicate a senior citizen and a boy died from diarrhoea symptoms in Rajiv Nagar, though unconfirmed by health officials.

Twenty-five people are receiving treatment in hospitals across Payakapuram, Prakash Nagar, Rajiv Nagar, and Ajith Singh Nagar. Residents blame water contamination and criticize VMC officials for inaction.

CPM leaders, led by Ch Babu Rao and Sri Devi, visited affected homes, demanding a medical camp and steps to ensure clean drinking water.

CEO happy with steps for counting in Krishna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena inspected the arrangements for vote counting at Krishna University in Machilipatnam on Thursday. He consulted with District Election Officer (DEO) and Collector DK Balaji, Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma, and Superintendent of Police (SP) Adnan Nayeem Asmi about the counting halls, strongrooms, and postal ballot counting areas.

Addressing the media at Krishna University, CEO Mukesh Kumar expressed satisfaction with the vote-counting arrangements. He commended the Krishna district administration for organising all necessary facilities, including internet connectivity, barricading, security, and CCTV surveillance, for the upcoming vote counting on June 4.

He also mentioned that there would be up to 14 counting tables for each assembly constituency to tally the votes cast. Additionally, he high-



AP Chief Electoral Officer Mukesh Kumar Meena enquiring from Krishna District Collector Balaji and SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi steps for the upcoming vote counting on June 4, at Krishna University in Machilipatnam on Thursday.

lighted the round-the-clock security in the strong rooms, which are constantly monitored by CCTVs.

Furthermore, he warned that anyone causing disruptions to the vote-counting process would be arrested and sent to jail. Any candidate or agent violating the Election Commission of India (ECI)

rules and regulations would be expelled from the counting hall, he added.

He also stated that Section 144 would be implemented at the counting hall until the vote tally is completed. He emphasized that there would be no permission to conduct rallies or processions immediately after the election results

are announced.

DRO K Chandrasekhar Rao, Returning Officers M Vani, P Padmavathi, P Venkata Ramana, Sri Devi, G Bala Subrahmanya, R Raju, Postal Ballot Nodal Officer Shahid Babu, and Survey and Land Records AD Manisha Tripathi were among those who accompanied CEO Mukesh Kumar.

AP DEECET-2024 results declared

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The results of the Andhra Pradesh Diploma in Elementary Education Common Entrance Test (AP DEECET) 2024, conducted for admission to teacher training colleges in the State, have been released. AP DEECET-2024 Convener and Joint Director, Dr. Mary Chandrika, announced the results at the office of the Commissioner of School Education. She reported that out of 4,949 candidates who appeared for the exam, 3,191 candidates passed.

TOP PERFORMERS

Mathematics: Bulusu Grishmita (Hall Ticket No. 24057013) from Vizianagaram district
Physical Science: Kesana Meenakshi (Hall Ticket No. 24057063) from West Godavari district
Biological Science: Sheikh Ruksana (Hall Ticket No. 24059914) from Kadapa district
Social Science: Gutta Sunil Kumar (Hall Ticket No. 24057923) from Chittoor district

AP ICET - 2024 results announced

42,984 students qualify in the examination

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE) has declared the Andhra Pradesh Integrated Common Entrance Test (AP ICET 2024) results for admission to first-year MBA, and MCA courses. A total of 42,984 students who wrote the exam passed the AP ICET exam in 2024. Candidates will be able to check their scores through the official website, cets.apsche.ap.gov.in. A total of 112 observers and 35 special observers were appointed for the AP ICET exam in 2024. As per the ICET results 2024, 20,296 boys and 22,688 girls qualified for the MBA state-level entrance exam. Sri Krishnadevaraya University, on behalf of APSCHE, conducted the AP

ICET exam for the second time this year. The ICET 2024 exam was held on May 6 in two sessions. A total of 48,828 students registered for the exam, out of which 44,447 students appeared in 113 exam centres and recorded 91.03% attendance. Last year, 49,162 students registered for the exam and 44,343 appeared in the exam.



The AP ICET provisional answer key 2024 was issued earlier and two questions were found to be wrong. Those who attempted these questions were given full marks. The council will be conducting AP ICET counselling 2024 to offer admission to qualified candidates in order of merit. As per the latest announcement, ICET counselling starts on July 22. Students will have to apply for counselling before August 12.

SCR SENIOR DCM HOLDS REVIEW

'Optimise commercial ops, improve customer satisfaction'



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vavilapalli Rambabu, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Vijayawada, South Central Railway, conducted a comprehensive review meeting on commercial performance at the Divisional Conference Hall, Vijayawada, on Thursday. Commercial Department Officials, inspectors and staff took part in the review meeting. Rambabu discussed at length the revenue growth

strategies and initiatives to enhance passenger experience. He reviewed passenger earnings, freight loading, and parcel loading performance, and asked the staff to devise ways and means to shore up the earnings, especially in the areas like non fare revenue and sundry earnings.

Rambabu emphasised on optimising commercial operations and improving customer satisfaction by focusing on expediting service delivery.

He also stressed resolving passenger grievances, other coach complaints and tending to the needs of elderly passengers. The Senior DCM encouraged the commercial team to strive for excellence and achieve the targets laid down by the Zonal Railways.

Md. Ali Khan, DCM, V Ravi Varmna, ACM, Shailesh Kumar Singh, ACM, Inspectors and staff attended the performance review meeting.

DECADE-LONG NORTH ANDHRA ILLEGAL LAND DEALS

A tale of allegations, inaction, and accountability

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

For over a decade, the contentious issue of illegal land transactions in Uttarandhra has sparked fierce debates and political accusations. The scandal, involving encroachment, occupation, and forgery of thousands of acres, has implicated numerous officials and political figures, raising serious questions about governance and integrity within Andhra Pradesh's administration.

Successive governments, both the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP), have taken steps to investigate the rampant illegal land transactions in Visakhapatnam. Special Investigation Teams (SITs) were established by both parties, amassing extensive details and producing comprehensive reports. Yet, the findings of these investigations have been consistently kept from public scrutiny, fuelling accusations of corruption and administrative failure.

In 2017, the TDP government, led by IPS officer Vineet Brijlall, formed an SIT to delve into the land grab cases. Key



Both the TDP and YSRCP now face intense criticism for their apparent inability to combat corruption and protect public interests. The pervasive lack of transparency and accountability has left citizens disillusioned, casting a shadow over the credibility of their leaders and the state's governance.

figures in this investigation included then Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner T Yoganand and then Joint Collector G.Srijana. The team's thorough thousand-page report confirmed irregularities worth thousands of crores. However, despite the report's damning conclusions, the TDP government chose not to release it, allegedly due to the involvement of high-ranking

IAS officers. At that time, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, then the opposition leader, vociferously demanded the report's release and called for accountability, but his appeals were ignored.

Upon YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's ascension to Chief Minister, the expectation was that the YCP government would take decisive action. Instead, the 2017 SIT report

remained undisclosed, and a new SIT, led by retired IAS officer Vijayakumar, was commissioned to reexamine the issues. Despite extended deadlines and significant expenditures, this new investigation's findings were also withheld from the public, and no tangible actions were taken based on its conclusions.

The revelations implicating several IAS officers in the land

scams have intensified scrutiny. Allegations against various political leaders, government officials, and collectors suggest a systematic obstruction of justice and favouritism towards the ruling party. Visakhapatnam residents argue that transparency regarding the SIT reports and subsequent punitive measures against culpable officials could have averted the current crisis.

Both the TDP and YSRCP now face intense criticism for their apparent inability to combat corruption and protect public interests. The pervasive lack of transparency and accountability has left citizens disillusioned, casting a shadow over the credibility of their leaders and the state's governance. As the issue continues to unfold, the residents of Visakhapatnam and Uttarandhra at large are left to grapple with the implications of a decade's worth of alleged corruption and administrative negligence. The demand for justice and accountability grows louder, with the hope that a resolution might finally bring an end to this prolonged saga of political and bureaucratic malpractice.

Oppn spreading false info on lands: Nagarjuna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister Meruga Nagarjuna has come down heavily against the false allegations of Opposition parties regarding illegalities in the assigned lands in Visakhapatnam and North Andhra. The minister said that the YSRCP government led by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy provided full rights on assigned lands and did not take back the lands. He further said that Jagan Mohan Reddy will become chief minister for the second time as all sections of the society supported YSRCP in the elections for the welfare and development agenda.

Speaking to the media on Thursday, the minister alleged that TDP-BJP-JSP alliance, with the support of a section of the media, is spilling venom against CM Jagan and YSRCP, unable to

digest the growing support. Recalling the Amaravati lands scam, the minister further pointed out that a majority of TDP leaders were involved in the scam of assigned lands in the Amaravati region. He alleged that TDP leaders snatched assigned lands of Dalits in Amaravati for throw-away prices illegally, which showed the anti-Dalit and anti-assigned land attitude of TDP and its leaders.

The minister stated that CM Jagan treated SCs, STs, BCs, and minorities as his own community. Chandrababu is anti-Dalit. He criticised Dalits, who threw Chandrababu in the trash in the elections. The YSRCP government has worked with the lofty goal of bringing Dalits to a higher position socially and economically for the past five years.

Artificially ripened mangoes pose health risks, say experts

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the heat of summer is on, mangoes become a must-have fruit for many. However, this year's reduced yield has led to a scarcity in the market. To meet the high demand, traders are resorting to artificial ripening methods, raising health concerns. Typically, mangoes take several days to ripen, during which some spoilage occurs. To minimize losses, traders are using chemicals like ethylene to hasten the ripening process. Ethylene gas, derived from Ethephon, can change the color of the fruit within 24 to 48 hours. While ethylene is naturally occurring and can be safe in controlled amounts, traders often misuse it by spraying it directly on the fruits in liquid form, which is highly dangerous.

Ethylene application should not exceed 100 parts per mil-

lion (ppm). However, direct spraying significantly surpasses this limit, leading to potential health hazards. In addition to ethylene, some traders continue to use calcium carbide, despite its known risks. Calcium carbide, when reacting with oxygen, releases acetylene gas, commonly used for welding, to artificially ripen mangoes. Consuming fruits ripened this way can lead to serious health issues, including cancer.

Doctors warn that consuming chemically treated fruits can cause immediate and long-term health problems. These include digestive issues, headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, memory loss, insomnia, and even cerebral oedema.

Long-term effects may include severe body system disruptions and an increased risk of cancers. Consumers



can identify chemically treated mangoes by their unnatural

dark colour, bland taste, and reduced juice content. Fruits

ripened with calcium carbide often cause a burning sensation

in the mouth and can lead to stomach pain, diarrhoea, and sore throats. The Food and Safety Standards Department already launched a special drive to inspect mango sales from May 28.

Speaking to The Pioneer, District Food Safety Officer GAB Nandaji stated that ten samples have already been collected and sent for testing. If ethylene levels exceed 100 ppm, or if calcium carbide use is detected, strict actions including fines and imprisonment will be imposed.

Exceeding ethylene limits could lead to fines and up to two years in prison while using calcium carbide could result in six months of imprisonment and fines up to two lakh rupees. Consumers are urged to be vigilant and prioritize naturally ripened mangoes to avoid health risks associated with chemically treated fruits.

Area within 2 km radius of counting centre declared Red Zone, says SP

PNS ■ TIRUPATI
District Superintendent of Police Harshvardhan Raju has said that an area within a 2 km radius of a counting centre has been declared as a Red Zone and an order in this regard has already been issued.
Talking to the media here on Thursday, the SP said that the counting of votes would take place on the campus of SPME College. Collector Pravin Kumar issued orders declaring 2 km around the SPME College as a Red Zone area, the SP added.
The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.
All needed arrangements have already been made in the district to conduct the counting in a peaceful environment.

As part of that, the District Collector has issued an order regarding the area of two km around the premises of Shree Padmavati Women's Engineering College, where the counting of votes takes place, as a Red Zone, the SP stated.
SP Harshvardhan Raju said that flying drones in this Red Zone is prohibited keeping in view the safety of the counting centre. The police instructions apply to every person and politician, he added. The District SP has warned that if anyone flies drones violating the rules, the police will seize the drones and take legal and criminal actions against him.
The SP appealed that the people of the district and the political leaders should cooperate with the police department to ensure that the counting of votes takes place in a peaceful environment. As part of making poolproof security arrangements for the counting of votes to avoid violence and untoward incidents, cordon and search operations and Naka Bandi were conducted in



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the district at various places, the SP added.
A strict vigil has been laid against the trouble mongers and several anti-socials were bound over as precautions in the district, the SP observed. Group admin is fully responsible, if anyone posts inciting and misleading messages, the SP warned, adding that no post should be made after exit polls in social media and WhatsApp groups. The SP appealed to the political leaders, activists and people to cooperate with the police and officials during the counting of votes.

Do not respond to provocations by YSRCP: Nagababu to cadre

PNS ■ GUNTUR
Jana Sena general secretary K Nagababu has appealed to the Jana Sena Party cadre not to respond to the provocations of YSRCP activists during the counting of votes.
In a video message here on Thursday, Nagababu said that the YSRCP cadres are frustrated, leading them to indulge in provocative and violent acts. He told them that the Jana Sena activists and the 'Veera Mahilalu' should not respond to the provocations of YSRCP cadres during the counting of votes.
"The TDP-JSP-BJP alliance



is very near to the election victory, and at the same time, the YSRCP is going to suffer a debacle. Those who are near defeat will usually be in frustration. They prepare to resort

to violent acts and create trouble during the counting of votes," he told the cadres.
Nagababu said that the JSP cadres, especially in Pithapuram, should exercise restraint and should not respond to the provocations of the YSRCP cadre.
"Let us cooperate with the election officials and the police during the counting of votes. Let us respect democracy and uphold the spirit of democracy," Nagababu told his cadres. Nagababu thanked the leaders and activists of the TDP, BJP and JSP alliance for working for the election victory of the candidates of the alliance.

1,000 counting personnel to be deployed in Bhimavaram

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM
Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena inspected the arrangements made for the counting of votes here on Thursday.
The CEO, accompanied by Collector Sumit Kumar and SP Ajitha Veendla, inspected the arrangements for the counting of votes on the campus of SRKR Engineering College. Mukesh Kumar Meena expressed satisfaction at the arrangements made for the counting of votes. He also inspected the three-tier security being provided to the EVM strong room. He also saw the media centres at the counting hall.
Collector Sumit Kumar explained to the CEO that over 1000 counting staff including Counting Supervisors, Counting Assistants, and Micro Observers from various government departments are being deployed for the counting of votes.
He told the CEO that strict security arrangements are being made at counting centres. Without any confusion anywhere, proper barricad-



ing, setting up of display boards, parking of vehicles, setting up of media centre, round wise result disclosure plan, necessary arrangements for candidates and counting agents have been set up as per the guidelines of ECI.
The Collector said that arrangements would be made for officers, staff, counting agents and candidates for breakfast, lunch and drinking water. The Collector Sumit Kumar explained that proper training was imparted to the counting supervisors, counting

Rs 90 lakh worth of gold seized

PNS ■ ONGOLE
The police seized 1.280 kg of gold while being taken in a car by a couple at Tangutur toll plaza on Thursday.
The police also seized Rs 58,000 cash.
Police said that they conducted a checking of vehicles at Tanguru toll plaza. They found 1.280 kg of gold and Rs 58,000 cash being taken in a car by a couple Medishetti Mallesh and Medishetti Chandrakala.
The gold is worth Rs 90 lakh. The couple was going to Chennai from Miryalaguda in Telangana state. They failed to produce documents regarding the gold. The seized gold and cash were handed over to the Income Tax officials.



BJP urges release of Rs 10,000 to fishermen for sustenance

PNS ■ KAKINADA
A delegation of the district unit of the BJP headed by party fishermen cell district convener Sangani Satyam and party district General Secretary Kokkiligadda Gangaraju on Thursday called on the district fisheries officer and requested him to immediately release Rs 10,000 each to the fishermen towards sustenance during the 45 days Ban on fishing period.
They told the media that the sustenance amount during the fishing ban is not part of any welfare scheme but only compensation. The BJP leaders regretted that the government was paying only

Rs 223 daily as compensation during the fishing ban period. The BJP leaders further urged that all those attained 18 years of age should be paid the fishing ban period compensation based on the Aadhaar card.
The BJP leaders demanded the compensation amount for the fishing ban period be enhanced to Rs 20,000 and hoped the new government would come to the rescue of the fishermen by hiking the compensation. Jana Sena fishermen cell Kakinada city unit President Gampala Kalyan and Karri Kamesh and other leaders presented a memorandum to the district fisheries officer listing out their demands.



Plastic ban in Tiger Reserve from July 1

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
In exercise of powers conferred U/S 28 & 33 (C) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Elusing Meru, Pr. Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden is hereby ordered that, there shall be total ban of plastic (single use plastic, multi layer plastic and PET bottles of 1 liter and below) in Amrabad Tiger Reserve (ATR) with effect from July 1, 2024. Alternate drinking water facilities shall be provided for the visitors at convenient locations inside the ATR. Visitors carrying food items in plastic wraps shall be advised to dispose of the wraps in garbage bins and not litter the Tiger Reserve area.

Ensure fire safety at gaming zones, exhibitions: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
In view of the fire mishap that occurred at a gaming zone in Rajkot, Gujarat, NTR District Collector Dr S. Dilli Rao has directed all gaming zones and exhibition organisers in the district to adhere to fire safety standards.
He warned that stringent action would be taken against those responsible for management if any violations are found in maintaining fire safety norms.
Collector Dilli Rao convened a district-level meeting virtually along with Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Punkdar and others from his camp office in Vijayawada on Thursday.
Speaking on the occasion, Dilli Rao sought a detailed



report regarding inspections of the fire safety standards at all gaming zones, exhibitions, educational institutions, shopping malls and multiplexes. He asked them what steps have been taken so far to prevent fire accidents. Also, he sought

details of the violations found during the inspections on a war-footing, he said.
Meanwhile, he spoke to the officials of the Revenue, Police, Municipal, Panchayat Raj, Electricity, R&B, Fire and other departments regarding the implementation of fire safety norms. He directed that a mock drill should be conducted at all multi-storey buildings to create awareness on preventing fire accidents. All government officials should focus on centralised AC buildings, as there are more chances of fire accidents there, he said.
Vijayawada RDO Bh Bhavani Sankar, Nandigama RDO A Ravindra Rao, Tiruvuru RDO K Madhavi, District Fire Officer AV Sankara Rao, all Municipal Commissioners and others were present.

'Cong, BRS trying to deflect attention from phone-tapping, seed distribution'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
The Congress and the BRS are trying to divert public attention from issues like phone tapping, problems in the distribution of seeds and other matters by criticising each other regarding the TG state emblem, BJP general secretary Sanjay said.
Responding to the changes in the TG state emblem through 'X' on Thursday, Sanjay asked whether there is

a peoples' government in Telangana. He asked the state government to reveal whether the government considered public opinion regarding changing the state emblem or not.
Sanjay said that there is no difference between the BRS and the Congress. Both parties are trying to divert public attention from

paddy procurement, fertilizer distribution, seed distribution, phone tapping and other issues by engaging in criticism against each other regarding the state's emblem.
"KTR has been

saying that Hyderabad means Charminar. That applies only to KTR. Hyderabad means Bhagyalaxmi Temple to us and it is well known. Who prevented KTR from having darshan at the Bhagyalaxmi Temple?" he said.



He asked the state government to reveal whether the government considered public opinion regarding changing the state emblem or not.

Grievances of UoH students to be redressed

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
As per the University Grants Commission (redressal of grievances of students) Regulations, 2023, Prof D Ravinder, former Vice-Chancellor of Osmania University, was appointed as Ombudsman for redressal of grievances of students of the University of Hyderabad on Thursday with immediate effect for a period of three years or till attainment of 70 years.

Food safety, hygiene ratings for Hyd restaurants mooted

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
After recent violations of food safety norms by food and beverages establishments in the city which were highlighted by the Food Safety Department's raids, the National Restaurant Association of India's (NRAI) Hyderabad Chapter, the restaurant body in the country, has taken immediate steps to address the issue.
The task force met with State Food Safety Commissioner RV Karnan on Thursday to discuss collaboration with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the GHMC to improve food and hygiene standards. Karnan suggested



adding hygiene ratings to restaurants and displaying them for customer awareness. Both parties agreed to host a larger event in the coming months to further

promote required protocols.
The special NRAI Food Safety Task Force was formed chaired by NRAI Hyderabad Chapter Head Sampath Tummala comprising 15 members on May 27.
According to the NRAI Food Safety Task Force, it aims to organise multiple FSSAI awareness workshops and training classes for restaurant members across the city, where the first training was held on Thursday.
The taskforce also plans a big Food Safety Week in association with FSSAI, the government and the GHMC in the next few weeks to implement a hygiene audit programme with third-party auditors to ensure quality and safe food.

AUDIT PROGRAMME TO BE IMPLEMENTED
Multiple violations in Hyd Old City restaurants
The Telangana Food Safety Commission conducted inspections at various establishments in the Old city and found multiple violations. The Task Force conducted inspections at the Hotel Shadab and seized improperly labelled Eagle brand cutting coconuts, dried rose petals, cardamom and jeera. They also found semi-prepared and raw food stored without proper labelling. The FSSAI licence was not displayed on the premises of the restaurant. The officials found the kitchen exposed to the environment with open dustbins and flaking plaster. The medical fitness certificates for food handlers were also not found. The Task Force later conducted inspections at the Arabian Restaurant where they found that the FSSAI licence not displayed in the premises. The officials also found out the food handlers without haircaps, gloves and aprons, along with the kitchen being exposed to the environment, with open dustbins, stagnant water and unhygienic conditions.

V'wada CP holds meet with candidates, party reps

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
NTR District Police Commissioner PHD Ramakrishna has convened a meeting with all candidates and their representatives in the district, ahead of the counting of votes on June 4 smoothly, transparently and without any untoward incidents. The meeting was held at the Police Command Control Room in the city on Thursday and 115 persons from Vijayawada Lok Sabha and Tiruvuru, Mylavaram, Jaggayyapet, Nandigama, Vijayawada East, West and Central assembly constituencies attended it.
During the meeting, Commissioner Ramakrishna gave instructions regarding the conduct of candidates and their



representatives at the voting-counting halls. He made it clear that no person should be allowed directly in their own vehicles to the counting halls at Nova and Nimra Engineering Colleges. There are three parking places arranged for vehicle parking, he said. Candidates and their agents should park their vehicles at the parking and later, the district administration would take them to the counting hall in specially arranged buses, he added.
Further, he stated that the special buses would be started from Ferry, Kethanakonda and

NTTPS-A colony. So, the candidates and their agents should park their vehicles at the nearest parking places, he said. Vehicles which are coming from the Vijayawada East, West, and Central constituencies are advised to park their vehicle at Ibrahimpatnam Ferry, he said. However, Vehicles coming from Nandigama and Jaggayyapet were advised to park at the Kethanakonda hill area and the Mylavaram and Tiruvuru vehicles should be parked at the NTTPS-A Colony, he explained.
Meanwhile, he said that Section 144 CrPC and Section 30 Police Act would be imposed at the counting centres and that area was announced as a Red Zone. So, people and political party leaders and cadres should not be gathered in one place and ban orders are imposed, he said. Furthermore, he said candidates are requested to obtain passes from the district administrations. Later, he instructed the police officials that they should check candidates and agents including police staff are allowed into the counting halls, he explained.
He conducted a meeting with police officials regarding security on the day of counting on June 4. As per the instructions given by the Election Commission of India, all departmental officials should coordinate with each other and succeed in the polled vote counting process, he requested.

Hyd CP holds review ahead of Lok Sabha poll results

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Hyderabad Commissioner of Police Kothakota Sreenivas Reddy on Thursday reviewed the preparations ahead of Lok Sabha election results on June 4.
District Election Officer Ronald Rose explained the various arrangements to be made at the counting centres. Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers were instructed on who could

be allowed inside the counting halls, setting up of media centres and facilities to be provided to the counting agents.
The Commissioner stressed on the security arrangements to be made at the counting centres. Instructions were given to DCPs and sub-nodal ACPs regarding three-tier security. He further specified that guidelines by the Election Commission of India will be strictly implemented at the counting centres.



INDIA CORNER

BJP workers booked for singing 'political bhajans' in temple

The police on Thursday registered an FIR against BJP office bearers for singing "political bhajans" on premises of Maa Shoolini temple in Himachal's Solan district. The FIR was registered against BJP state vice president Rashmi Dhar Sood, Deputy Mayor of Solan Municipal Corporation Meera Anand and others. The complainant Poonam Bansal alleged that the BJP women activists came to the temple and started 'Bhajan and Kirtan' in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the famous Shoolini temple on Wednesday evening. FIR was lodged under sections 188 (causing danger by disobedience), 505(3) (spreading rumours), 34 (criminal act done by several persons with common intention) and sections of the Religious Institution (Prevention and Misuse) Act 1988, police said. Condemning the incident, Solan district Congress president, Shiv Kumar said that the BJP was converting the temples into a den of politics.



Meghalaya govt seeks UGC recognition for state university

The Meghalaya government has written to the Centre to officially accord recognition to the state-run Williamson Sangma University by the University Grants Commission, officials said. Education Commissioner and Secretary Syed Md A Razi said that the state government has written to the University Grants Commission (UGC) for 2F notification, which will put the university on the list of universities recognised by the UGC. "We are hopeful we will receive the 2F notification very soon," Razi said. The state government is hopeful that once the UGC recognises the university, all colleges affiliated with North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) can be shifted to it, he said, explaining that private colleges will have to exercise their choice regarding the matter. He also said that the government is hopeful the Williamson Sangma University, a state university, will become functional by next year.



Jharkhand court sentences five persons to life for double murder

A local court on Thursday sentenced five persons to life imprisonment in connection with a three-and-a-half-year-old double murder case in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district. The court of additional sessions judge-II sentenced Roya Rai Purty, alias Doli, Budhram Tiriya, alias Lal Tiriya, Bamun Tiriya, alias Motu, Raghunath Tiriya, and Jaipal Tiriya under Section 302 (murder)/34 IPC for the murders of Bishnu Purida and his wife Phurgun on January 3, 2021, in Totetopa village under Noamundi police station, due to a land dispute. Additionally, the court imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on each of them. Police had arrested the accused and placed them in judicial custody after registering a case. Police filed a chargesheet in court. In a separate incident, the principal district and sessions judge sentenced two men to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment under Section 15 (B) of the NDPS Act for drug peddling.



Repeated polls not good for country, says Rajnath

PNS ■ KUSHINAGAR (UP)

Union minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said frequent elections are not good for the country and efforts will be made to install the "one nation, one election" system in the next five years.



Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believe that the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls should be held simultaneously across the country.

"In five years, we will try our best to make provisions for one nation, one election," the defence minister said, addressing a rally in support of Vijay Kumar Dubey, the BJP's Lok Sabha poll candidate from Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh. Singh heaped praise on Modi for his leadership and taking the country to new heights.

"When India speaks today, the world listens," he said,

adding that even politicians in Pakistan are praising India, but those in the Congress and Samajwadi Party (SP) do not understand this.

"They (SP and Congress) are opposing Modi," he said.

Hitting out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Singh said his great grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru, grandmother Indira Gandhi and father Rajiv Gandhi were prime ministers.

"Rahul Gandhi says he has seen the system very closely. He says the system that was

there was anti-backward, anti-poor. He is talking about the governments of his great grandfather, grandmother and father, and saying the system during their times was anti-backward and anti-poor.

"Rahul Gandhi himself is saying all these things, which means he is accepting that his government was against Dalits, the poor and backward classes. Tell me, have you seen such a leader anywhere? He is a strange leader," the senior BJP leader said.

Referring to former Union

minister R P N Singh, who quit the Congress and joined the BJP, Rajnath Singh said, "Any sensible man will kick the Congress."

R P N Singh was seated next to the defence minister on the dais.

Rajnath Singh claimed that the BJP does not indulge in "Hindu-Muslim politics".

"We consider everyone a citizen of India. Be it Hindu, Muslim, Christian... We never discriminate and neither does our prime minister. Our party's ideology is also not like this," he said.

The BJP leader pointed out that India has become the fifth-largest economy in the world and credited Modi for it.

"By 2027, India will become the third-largest economy. I have no doubt that India will become a developed country by 2047, but if our government continues like this, India will become the largest economy in the world by 2070," he said.

IPS officer undergoes medical test as per EC order

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Senior IPS officer Ashish Kumar Singh on Thursday underwent a medical examination at the AIIMS here, as per directions of the Election Commission.

The poll panel had ordered a detailed examination of Singh, IG (CM Security) by a "special medical board" constituted by the director of AIIMS-Bhubaneswar.

The medical report of Singh, who has been on medical leave since May 4, should reach the commission latest by May 31, it had said in an order. The 2010-batch IPS officer reached the AIIMS-Bhubaneswar around 8.30 am and left the medical facility at 1 pm, sources said.

In view of conducting free and fair elections in the state, the EC had on April 2 removed Singh from the post of IG-Central Range Police and ordered him to refrain from taking part in poll-related activities. Subsequently, the Odisha government appointed him as IG (CM Security).

India supporting 65 community development projects in Maldives

Both sides review progress

PNS ■ MALE

India is supporting 65 community development projects worth USD 23 million in the Maldives and steady progress has been achieved in implementing them, the Indian mission said here on Thursday.

Of the 47 High Impact Community Development Projects in Maldives under grant aid by the Government of India approved till November 2023, as many as eight are already completed.

Notwithstanding the diplomatic row in recent times, India is supporting 65 community development projects worth MVR 360 million (USD 23 million) in the archipelagic nation, the High Commission of India said.

"While the grant is being provided by the Indian government, the projects are selected in order of priority as set by the Maldivian government. Implementation of these projects are also undertaken by



institutions appointed by the Maldives government," news portal Edition.mv said.

"Happy to note steady progress of Greater Male Connectivity Project, being implemented with Indian grant and concessional credit @USD 500 million. GMCP is a transformational infrastructure project which will stimulate economic growth and improve ease of living in Maldives." The Indian High Commission posted on its official X handle on Wednesday.

The post on X came after Maldives' Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and the High Commission of India in Maldives held a two-day meeting to review the ongoing projects when it was discussed that even as eight projects are completed, the rest of the High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) remain at different levels of progress.

These include a wide variety of projects spread throughout the atolls. Some initiatives included are the establishment of fish processing plants, drug detoxification centres, cultural centres, youth centres and sports complexes, Edition.mv reported.

RAJKOT FIRE ACCIDENT

Gujarat BJP leader claims he paid bribe to get fire NOC

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Senior BJP leader and Rajya Sabha member from Gujarat, Ram Mokariya, has claimed that he had paid a bribe of Rs 70,000 to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Rajkot Municipal Corporation's fire department.



His statement came days after 27 persons were charred to death after a massive fire gutted TRP Game Zone, a Rajkot-based recreation centre, which was allegedly being operated without any fire NOC.

Speaking to the media on Thursday Mokariya shared his "personal experience to high-level widespread corruption" in Rajkot.

The BJP leader from Rajkot

also clarified that he gave the bribe to deputy fire officer BJ Theba nearly five years ago when he was just a businessman and not elected to Rajya Sabha.

Mokariya is the founder-chairman of a well-known courier company and was elected to the upper house of Parliament from Gujarat in 2021.

"I gave Rs 70,000 nearly five

years ago to Theba to get a fire NOC for a project. I have learnt he is now being questioned by police for his alleged role in the game zone fire. I just wanted to highlight that corruption is widespread and I have made representations about it in the past too," Mokariya told reporters.

According to the BJP leader, the fire officer had returned the bribe money to him after he became a Rajya Sabha member.

"Everyone knows that corruption is everywhere. I have been exposing corrupt officials for a long time. In the past, I had openly said that Rajkot's town planning officer had been indulging in corruption for the last 10 years," Mokariya said.

EXCISE CASE

Court issues notice to ED on Kejriwal's regular bail plea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday issued notice to the ED on Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking regular bail in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise scam.

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja, who initially directed the central probe agency to file its response to Kejriwal's plea by Saturday, later fixed the matter for June 7 after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) sought more time to respond.

The judge, however, directed the ED to file its response by Saturday on Kejriwal's



another plea seeking interim bail for a week on medical grounds.

Kejriwal is currently out on interim bail, granted by the

Supreme Court, in the case till June 1.

The Supreme Court registry on Wednesday refused urgent listing of Kejriwal's

plea seeking extension of his interim bail by seven days for undergoing certain medical tests, saying since he was given liberty to move the trial court for regular bail, the plea was not maintainable.

The AAP leader had sought extension of his interim bail by seven days to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan, in view of "sudden and unexplained weight loss coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer.

The chief minister, in his fresh plea filed before the apex court on May 26, said he

wanted to surrender before the Tihar jail authorities on June 9 instead of June 2, the scheduled date for his return to prison.

The top court had on May 10 granted 21-day interim bail to the chief minister to enable him to campaign during the Lok Sabha polls.

It had directed him to surrender on June 2, a day after the last phase of the seven-phase poll gets over.

The matter relates to the alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

PORSCHE CRASH

Juvenile's blood samples replaced with those of woman: Pune cops

PNS ■ PUNE

The blood samples of the 17-year-old involved in a crash of Porsche car that claimed two lives in the city were replaced with those of a woman in a bid to show that he was not drunk at the time of the accident, police told a court on Thursday.

The sessions court granted the police's plea and extended till June 5 the custody of two doctors and an employee of the Sassoon General Hospital here arrested in this connection.

While the police told the



court that they wanted to identify the woman whose blood was used as a replacement, a government source said that she was none other than the juvenile's mother.

Dr Ajay Taware, then head of the department of forensic medicine at Sassoon hospital, medical officer Dr Shrihari Halnor and employee Atul Ghatkamble, arrested after the alleged swapping of samples came to light, were produced before the court as their initial custody ended.

Seeking their further custody, police said that Dr Halnor did not throw away the juvenile's blood samples -- as was believed earlier -- but handed it over to someone, and they wanted to recover them.

Court in Bengaluru rejects Prajwal's anticipatory bail plea in rape case

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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) supreme 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.

However, later the SIT arrested his father and JD(S) MLA H D Revanna, who is allegedly involved in kidnapping the woman. All eyes are on Kempegowda International Airport where Prajwal is expected to arrive on May 31, and the SIT is likely to arrest him the moment he lands.

21 killed, 47 injured as bus falls into gorge in Jammu

PNS ■ JAMMU

Twenty-one people were killed and 47 injured after a bus carrying pilgrims skidded off the road and rolled down into a gorge in Jammu district on Thursday, officials said.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha has expressed anguish at the loss of lives in the accident.

The accident took place at the Tungi-Morh in the Chowki Chora belt of the district, the officials said, adding that the bus rolled around 150 feet down into the gorge.

A police spokesperson said at about 12:35 pm, the bus bearing registration number UP81CT-4058 fell into the gorge, killing 21 passengers and injuring 47.

The bus was carrying devotees from Haryana's Kurukshetra and was headed towards Shiv Khori in the Pouni area of Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district. It had started its journey from Uttar Pradesh.

The bodies have been shifted to the Akhnoor sub-district hospital, the police spokesperson said, adding that of the injured, seven have been admitted in the Akhnoor hospital and 40 in the Government Medical College (GMC) hospital in Jammu.

The rescue operation is going on, the official added.



the injured people undergoing treatment at the Akhnoor hospital, said.

Those who sustained injuries in the incident said they had come for a pilgrimage to Shiv Khori. Senior Superintendent of Police, Traffic, Faisal Qureshi, the transport commissioner, along with other officials, visited the spot and supervised the operation. The SSP said it seems there was no overloading of passengers in the bus.

The SSP and the deputy commissioner of Jammu visited the GMC hospital to inquire about the injured.

When speeding luxury cars wrecked death...

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The death of a 19-year-old in a Punjab town after being hit by a BMW is the latest in a series of accidents caused by speeding uber luxury automobiles, the lengthening list speaking of the horrors of rash driving and recalling the many times the thrill of speed spelt destruction.

There have been four such incidents in the country just this month. On Tuesday night in Punjab's Zirakpur town, three youngsters were tossed

into the air after the car rammed their motorcycle, killing one on the spot and leaving the others seriously injured. The car's driver, a resident of Mohali, was arrested and then released on bail.

Eleven days ago, two IT professionals on a motorcycle in Pune were mowed down by an overspeeding Porsche allegedly being driven by a drunk 17-year-old boy. Anish Awadhya and Ashwini Koshta were killed.

Speeding cars have too often been involved in accidents that



turned fatal for those involved, including the occupants of the vehicles.

Two days before the May 19

accident in Pune, a speeding BMW rammed into an e-rickshaw in Noida, leaving two dead, including a nurse, and three injured at 6 am on May 16. The Uttar Pradesh city saw another fatal accident on May 26 morning as an Audi car hit a 64-year-old man, killing him on the spot, before speeding away.

The victim, Janak Dev Shah, a resident of Gijhor village in Sector-53, was crossing the road to buy milk.

Uttar Pradesh's Gautam

Noida and Greater Noida, witnessed 1,176 road crashes last year that resulted in the deaths of 470 people and injuries to 858.

The district had recorded 437 such deaths and injuries to 856 people in 2022, according to official data.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in its report Road Accidents in India 2022 stated that 4.61 lakh road accidents were reported across the country in 2022, killing 1.68 lakh people and injuring 4.43 lakh.



FIRST COLUMN TURNING A BOLD NEW LEAF IN FOREIGN POLICY

India's geopolitical strategy is poised for transformation



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

In a week from now, a new central Government would be in place, picking up from where the last Government had left. If the BJP comes back to power for a third time, India's foreign policy push would be towards enhancing its stature globally. In a couple of interviews with various media, PM Modi has stressed a confident India now actually mediating on critical global affairs, than the earlier practise of being an observer. In most of the interviews, he mentions the role India played or continues to play, behind the scenes in the Ukraine situation, a sensitive topic. India has a historical relationship with Russia, which has never attempted to alter the relationship, however, Russia has of late started getting into a tighter embrace with China, cooperating on several critical projects including hydrocarbons and technology partnerships.

Meanwhile, India has grown closer to the US and has been rightly projected as a key ally for the Indo-Pacific region. PM Modi has also highlighted that his third term would ensure, that the Indian PM would be the senior most among democratically elected leaders, serving as he would post a decade of tectonic shifts in geo-political affairs. He hinted that a more confident India has to act more responsibly with its allies while expanding the network, especially with an aggressive China in the neighbourhood. It was no coincidence that external affairs minister S Jaishankar while delivering a key note on the Nikkei Future of Asia forum mentioned "The world is undergoing a flux - driven by geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-technological developments. In the last four decades, economic and political rebalancing accelerated by globalisation has been driving us towards multipolarity.



Today, the global order is visibly under stress, with Asia and the Indo-Pacific very much part of this transformation. But it is not just change we are seeing; there is also much greater risk-taking. It is visible in the conflict in Ukraine, in violence in the Middle East and the disregard for international law and agreements in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. This has economic facets, perhaps even more concerning. The supply chain challenge, over-concentrations stemming from globalisation and the use of economic coercion by States have put a premium on resilience and redundancy. Equally important is the technology challenge that has created a new level of inter-penetration and inter-dependence." Mr Jaishankar underscored India's future foreign policy roadmap with a firm focus on neighbours in the East, West and the Indian Ocean. He also highlighted the centrality of the Indo-Pacific in India's progress. Cross-border road infrastructure and integrated port facilities have found traction in India's external policy in the recent past.

The Iran-based Chabahar port, whose long-term maintenance contract India secured a few weeks back, providing access to crucial landlocked Central Asian countries and beyond is a recent example. External Affairs minister highlighted in his speech the pace at which road and rail networks are getting built in India, even when one of the largest democratic exercises in the world, India elections are underway. He said "The transformation of India is critical to strengthening multipolarity in Asia itself, a pre-requisite for a multipolar world. India's growing weight will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order. Equally, its greater sense of responsibility and more contributions are also making a difference. Indian naval ships are currently operating in the Red Sea to protect maritime shipping. India has been a First Responder for natural disasters across the Indian Ocean, sometimes even beyond." Without speculating for next week, it would be safe to assume a huge diplomatic outreach, awaits the new Government.

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

RBI dividend aids Government finances



UTTAM GUPTA

The RBI's dividend transfer provides a substantial fiscal cushion to the cash-strapped Government, but it must be prudent in fiscal management and resource allocation



In the amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act through the Finance Bill 2018-19 (the amendment was based on the recommendations of Dr N K Singh's committee mandated to review the FRBM Act (2003)), the Modi - the Government had pledged to achieve fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts) of 3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by the FY 2020-21. Following the Corona pandemic that played havoc with the economy leading to plunging revenue and ballooning expenditure during 2020-21 and the resultant zooming of FD to 9.1 per cent, it changed this fiscal glide path.

In her budget speech for FY 2021-22, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the Government's decision to achieve FD of 4.5 per cent by FY 2025-26. From 9.1 per cent during 2020-21, the FD descended to 6.7 per cent during 2021-22; 6.4 per cent during 2022-23 and 5.8 per cent during 2023-24. For 2024-25, in the interim budget presented by her on February 1, 2024, she has set the target at 5.1 per cent. If the Government can achieve this target, then 4.5 per cent for 2025-26 should be within easy reach. Against this backdrop, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come up with a bonanza for the Centre. The RBI Board has approved a record dividend transfer of Rs 210,000 crore to the Centre for its (read: RBI) FY 2023-24. This will be reflected in the accounts of the central Government for the FY 2024-25. This amount is 2.4 times the dividend transfer of about Rs 87,400 crore made by the RBI for its FY 2022-23 and available for use by the Centre during 2023-24.

Even when compared to the provision of about Rs 80,000 crore made by Sitharaman in the interim budget for 2024-25, the dividend amount available from the RBI i.e. Rs 210,000 crore for use by the central Government during the year will be over two-and-a-half times. This gives a cushion of Rs 130,000 crore (210,000-80,000). This translates to about 0.4 per cent of the GDP.

While this should give substantial leeway



UNLIKE A PUBLIC SECTOR BANK (PSB) OR ANY OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR UNDERTAKING (PSU), THE RBI IS NOT A COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE AND HENCE, IS NOT EXPECTED TO PAY ANY DIVIDEND. INSTEAD, IT IS A 'FULL SERVICE' CENTRAL BANK

to the Government in managing its fiscal situation and ensuring easy compliance with the 5.1 per cent target, there is no room for complacency.

First, it shouldn't forget that the new glide path of 4.5 per cent for 2025-26 is way behind the original FD target of 3 per cent for 2020-21 as per the FRBM (Amendment) Act 2018. The Corona pandemic of 2020 was once in a lifetime event. Its impact was transitory and it won't be logical to use it as a basis for altering the medium-term fiscal trajectory. This is all the more when from 2021-22 onward, the economic situation was more or less back to normal.

The Government ought to be aiming at an FD target of 3 per cent by 2025-26 and going by this benchmark, it has still a long way to go. Second, we need to assess things from the RBI perspective. Unlike a public sector bank (PSB) or any other public sector undertaking (PSU), the RBI is not a commercial enterprise hence, is not expected to pay any dividend. Instead, it is a "full service" central bank.

Apart from managing the currency and payment systems and keeping inflation/prices in check, it is also mandated with managing the borrowings of the Union Government and State Governments; and supervising or regulating banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs). While carrying out these functions or operations, it generates a surplus. Typically, the RBI's income comes from the returns it earns on its foreign currency assets (FCA) — which could be in the form of bonds and treasury bills of other central banks or top-rated securities and deposits with other central banks. It also earns interest on its holdings of local rupee-denominated Government bonds or securities and while lending to banks for very

short tenures, such as overnight. Its expenditure is mainly on the printing of currency notes and staff, besides the commission it gives to banks for undertaking transactions on behalf of the Government across the country and to primary dealers, including banks, for underwriting some of these borrowings. The excess of income over expenditure is the "surplus".

After making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contributions to staff and superannuation fund, etc. and for all matters provided for under the RBI Act (1934), the balance of surplus is paid to the Union Government by Section 47 (Allocation of Surplus Profits) of the Act. Apart from this routine stuff, the financial crisis in the early 90s, when India's foreign exchange reserves had plummeted to a level barely enough to buy two weeks of imports, brought to the fore a dire need to prepare the RBI for dealing with 'unexpected' and 'unforeseen' events by enhancing its capacity to absorb financial shocks, ensure financial stability and provide confidence to the markets. So, it started transferring part of the surplus to a 'Contingency Fund'. This was in line with the recommendation of a committee to build contingency reserves (CR) of 12 per cent of its balance sheet.

In 2013, a panel led by Y H Malegam, then a member, of the RBI board, also reiterated the need for building CRs. Subsequently, in its annual report for 2015-16, the central bank alluded to a "draft economic capital/provisioning framework to assess its risk-buffer requirements in a structured and systematic manner." Meanwhile, in 2018, the RBI set up a Committee on Economic Capital Framework (ECF) under Dr Bimal Jalan. The Committee recommended that the RBI should maintain a minimum

contingency risk buffer (CRB) of 5.5 - 6.5 per cent of its balance sheet as risk buffer. The ECF was to remain in force for five years. The RBI adopted the ECF on August 26, 2019. During accounting years 2018-19 to 2021-22, it determined the surplus transferred to the Union Government taking the CRB at the lower end of the range i.e. 5.5 per cent of its balance sheet. For arriving at the transferrable surplus during 2022-23, the CRB was increased to 6 per cent. However, for calculating the amount for 2023-24, it has used the higher end of the band prescribed by the Committee i.e. 6.5 per cent. The surge in dividend transfers for 2023-24 over 2022-23 despite the increase in CRB is due to the substantial increase in the RBI's interest income from foreign securities as well as exchange gain from foreign exchange transactions (according to the State Bank of India (SBI), these two factors accounted for 60 - 70 per cent of the increase in income of the RBI from Rs 235,000 crore during 2022-23 to around Rs 375,000 - 400,000 crore during 2023-24). This in turn was due to a sharp hike in interest rates by the US Fed and central banks of other developed countries; the hikes were prompted by the dire need to bring down high inflation in those countries. But the situation may not be sustained as the US Fed prepares to move the interest rate 'south' from the latter half of 2024 and other central banks follow suit. Even if it doesn't happen so soon and RBI repeats its performance during 2025-26, it would do well to retain more surplus with itself in the CRB. As a matter of prudent policy, the Centre should avoid riding piggy-back on the RBI for managing its

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

EU roots for a shift from free trade to fair trade on global stage

EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EUCSDDD) sparks a global trade paradigm shift

Free Trade Agreements or Sustainable Trade Agreements? The EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EUCSDDD) raises this crucial question of choices, challenging the norms of international commerce in vogue for the last few decades. Imagine a world where every product purchased carries a hidden story—a tale of the well-being of the farmers and their families, environments preserved and corporate integrity maintained. The European Union's proposed Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (UCSD) is a landmark piece of legislation towards that direction. It compels European companies to identify and mitigate environmental and human rights risks throughout



SHATADRU CHATTOPADHAYAY

their supply chains. It also underscores living wages and incomes as human rights, insists on responsible management of supplier relationships and emphasises the necessity of meaningful stakeholder engagement to enhance transparency and accountability in human rights and environmental practices. However, the EUCSDDD's impact could extend far beyond Europe's

borders. It has the potential to become a catalyst for a global race to the top, pushing democracies around the world to adopt stricter sustainability standards. India stands at a crossroads, poised to not just adapt to these standards but also lead the way in demonstrating how integral sustainable trade is to the ethos of modern democracies.

Democracy: The Bedrock of Sustainable Trade
Democracy and sustainable trade are not merely compatible; they are inextricably linked. The interconnection between democracy and sustainable trade is rooted in the principles of equity, participation and long-term accountability. Democratic systems, by their nature, promote inclusive decision-making and public

accountability, which are essential for sustainable trade practices. For instance, democracies are more likely to implement and enforce regulations that ensure trade does not lead to environmental degradation or exploitation of workers, which are key aspects of sustainable trade (Hickel, 2020). Closer home, scholars like Amartya Sen have shown through his works that sustainability legislation ensures that economic decisions consider the environmental and social impact on future generations, a core tenet of responsible governance.

Moreover, sustainable trade often requires international cooperation and agreements that are robust and equitable. Democracies are better positioned to engage in such agree-

ments because they are based on principles of transparency and public participation. This openness allows for more effective and fair negotiations that consider the diverse needs and impacts on all stakeholders involved, from local communities to international partners. Reputed international scholars like Hickel (2020) and Rockström and Klum (2015) suggest that this democratic approach supports a form of globalisation that is not only about free trade but also about fair trade, where the benefits and responsibilities of trade are widely and fairly distributed. This is crucial for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it ensures that trade supports broader societal well-being and envi-

ronmental sustainability rather than contributing to inequality and ecological degradation. **Impact on Global Trade**
Some critics fear the EUCSDDD could encourage trade toward countries with lax regulations, creating a race to the bottom rather than the top. However, the European Union has emerged in the past five decades as a powerful force in shaping the global conversation around sustainable international trade. The EU's early environmental regulations, like clean air and water directives, weren't just about protecting its citizens. By making stricter environmental standards a prerequisite for access to its vast market, the EU created a ripple effect. Companies worldwide adapted to comply and other countries followed

suit, leading to a global shift towards cleaner practices and a higher bar for environmental responsibility. Other landmark legislation like the Conflict Minerals Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2017/821), which aims to eradicate conflict minerals from supply chains, demonstrates the bloc's commitment to ethical trade practices. This, in turn, has spurred international discussions and collaborations on human rights and responsible sourcing practices throughout global supply chains. **Navigating the EUCSDDD:**
The India-EU bilateral trade in goods is valued at €115.3 billion in 2022 and services contribute an additional €39.9 billion; the EU stands as India's second-largest trading partner (EPRS, 2024). The UCSD pre-

sents a unique opportunity for India to solidify its position as a responsible player on the global trade stage. While initial concerns exist regarding potential cost increases for Indian businesses complying with the directive's standards, there's a significant upside. Aligning with the EUCSDDD can elevate India's image as a sustainable and ethical sourcing hub, attracting more European investment and boosting exports of responsibly produced goods. This, in turn, strengthens India's negotiating position in the ongoing Free Trade Agreement talks with the European Union.

(Shatadru is the founding Managing Director of Solidaridad in Asia; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

EMS reports 36 pc jump in standalone net profit at Rs 46.34 crore

EMS Limited has reported a nearly 36 per cent jump in standalone net profit to Rs 46.34 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024, as against Rs 34.07 crore in the same period last year, on the back of a surge in operating income driven by higher awards of tenders. Ghaziabad-based EMS provides various services, ranging from EPC and O&M, in sewerage solutions, water supply systems, and waste water schemes for government authorities and local bodies. Its revenue from operations grew by 37.57 per cent at Rs 233.94 crore during the fourth quarter as compared with Rs 170.05 crore in the same period last year. EBITDA grew by about 42 per cent at Rs 65.43 crore during the quarter under review, as against Rs 46.06 crore in the same period last year. For the year ended March 31, 2024, EMS registered 45.32 per cent growth in standalone net profit at Rs 149.96 crore, as against Rs 103.19 crore in 2022-23.



Seino Holdings enters India market in a JV with Mahindra Logistics

Japanese logistics firm Seino Holdings Co on Thursday announced its entry into the domestic market in a joint venture with Mahindra Logistics and expects to create a Rs 1,000-crore business model over the next five years. The joint venture would offer comprehensive logistics solutions supported by digitisation, innovation, and a customer-centric approach, allowing the two partners to manage the end-to-end supply chain, Mahindra Logistics said in a statement. Under the terms of the agreement, the companies will form a JV owned by Mahindra Logistics and Seino Holdings, the company said, adding, the JV will focus on providing Japanese automotive and strategic non-auto customers with integrated logistics solutions covering auto outbound, warehousing and transportation, and a comprehensive technology suite. This partnership aims to offer integrated logistics solutions to leverage Seino's global relationships with Japanese automotive customers.



Sun Pharma, Dr Reddy's recall drugs in US market: USFDA

Sun Pharma and Dr Reddy's Laboratories are recalling products in the American market due to manufacturing issues, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) has said. In its latest Enforcement Report, the US health regulator stated that a US-based unit of Sun Pharma is recalling 35,069 bottles of medication used to treat high pressure inside the eye due to glaucoma or other eye diseases. New Jersey-based Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Inc is recalling the affected lot of Xelpros (latanoprost ophthalmic emulsion) due to 'out of specification for particulate matter test'. The company initiated the voluntary Class III recall in the US on April 22 this year, the USFDA stated. In a separate filing, the USFDA stated that a US-based arm of Dr Reddy's Laboratories is recalling 1,176 bottles of an immunosuppressant medication. Dr Reddy's Laboratories Inc is recalling the affected lot of Sirolimus Tablets due to 'Failed Impurities/Degradation Specifications', the USFDA said.



India to grow 7% in FY25: RBI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Indian economy is projected to grow at 7 per cent -- the fastest among major economies across the world -- in the current fiscal year, underpinned by a sustained strengthening of macroeconomic fundamentals, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its latest annual report on Thursday.



The RBI's balance sheet size surged 11.08 per cent to Rs 70.48 lakh crore (about USD 845 billion) as of March 31, 2024. This was nearly 2.5 times that of Pakistan's entire GDP of close to USD 340 billion.

While the central bank expected headline inflation to moderate further, it flagged risks to food inflation saying that it remains vulnerable to supply-side shocks. The RBI's balance sheet size surged 11.08 per cent to Rs 70.48 lakh crore (about USD 845 billion) as of March 31, 2024. This was nearly 2.5 times that of Pakistan's entire GDP of close to USD 340 billion. The Indian economy, it said, expanded at a robust pace in 2023-24 (April 2023 to March 2024 financial year), with real GDP growth accelerating to 7.6 per cent from 7.0 per cent in the previous year -- the third consecutive year of 7 per cent or above growth pace. The economy showed

resilience in FY24 (2023-24 fiscal) despite persistent headwinds.

The GDP growth is robust on the back of solid investment demand which is supported by healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates, the govern-

ment's focus on capital expenditure and prudent monetary, regulatory and fiscal policies, it said, adding the Indian economy is navigating the drag from an adverse global macroeconomic and financial environment.

Also, MSPs for both kharif and rabi seasons 2023-24 ensured a minimum return of 50 per cent over cost of production for all crops, it said.

Indian economy, the report said, is well-placed to step up growth trajectory over the next decade in an environment of macroeconomic and financial stability.

"As headline inflation eases towards the target, it will spur consumption demand especially in rural areas," it said.

It further said the external sector's strength and buffers in the form of foreign exchange reserves will insulate domestic economic activity from global spillovers.

The report, however, added that geopolitical tensions, economic fragmentation, global financial market volatility, international commodity price movements and erratic weather developments pose downside risks to the growth outlook and upside risks to the inflation outlook.

"The real GDP growth for 2024-25 is projected at 7.0 per cent with risks evenly balanced," it said.

RBI's dividend transfer may ease deposit rates if govt spends it

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) on Thursday said the Rs 2.11 lakh crore dividend transfer by the RBI is likely to ease liquidity pressure and bring down deposit rates in the banking system if the government spends the amount.

It said the mega dividend will give a fillip to the central government's fiscal position, which may lead to additional spending or fiscal consolidation or a combination of both. However, the structural challenges for banks in terms of deposit accretion will continue in the medium to long term.

"The agency expects the RBI's Rs 2.1 trillion dividend transfer to the government will improve the liquidity conditions and alleviate heightened pressure on the banking system deposit, leading to the easing of pressure on cost of liabilities for banks in the near term," Ind-Ra said in a statement.

No proposal made to Maldives for FTA: India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday said it has not made any proposal to the Maldives for a bilateral free trade agreement (DTA) and that it was ready to consider if the island nation expresses interest for such a pact.

"No specific proposal for a bilateral FTA with the Maldives has been made by the Government of India," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"If the Government of Maldives expresses interest in having an FTA with India, we will give it due consideration," he said.

Jaiswal's comments came in response to a question at his weekly media briefing.

Last week, Maldivian Minister for Economic Development and Trade Mohamed Saeed indicated that India has initiated efforts to have an FTA between the two countries.

"They (India) want there to



"No specific proposal for a bilateral FTA with the Maldives has been made by the Government of India," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said

be a Free Trade Agreement with Maldives, in addition to SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement)," Saeed told a press conference in Male.

The Maldives President has offered this opportunity to all countries, Saeed said, adding that the government aims to enter into such agreements with as many countries as possible to offer ease in trade activities.

The ties between India and the Maldives came under strain since November last year when President Mohamed

Muizzu, known for his pro-China leanings, took the oath. Within hours of his oath, he had demanded the withdrawal of Indian military personnel from his country.

The last of the Indian military personnel were replaced by civilians earlier this month.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male.

Capital needs to remain high for corporates: Moody's

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Ratings on Thursday said capital requirements will remain high for Indian corporates as they go in for capacity expansion and inorganic growth spending.

Moody's estimates that 16 of the 23 rated companies will require USD 70-100 billion of funding annually in the next two years for growth spending, refinancing requirements and shareholder payments.

While improving domestic liquidity and companies' internal cash flows can cover a large portion of their capital needs, offshore funding will remain an important funding channel, it said.

"Capacity expansion, inorganic growth spending, refinancing and working capital needs, along with shareholder

payments, will keep capital requirements high for non-financial corporates in India," Moody's Ratings said in a statement.

It said capital spending by non-financial corporates will remain high as they expand their capacities to cater to the strong consumption growth expected in the country, at a time when their capacity utilization is already high.

Expectations of strong consumption growth are driven by India's growing population, rising disposable incomes and favourable demographic trends, including a young population and rising urbanisation, Moody's said.

The government's ongoing infrastructure spending also results in a multiplier effect on demand across industrial sectors including steel, cement, automobiles and oil and gas.

Sensex, Nifty tumble nearly 1 pc; extend losses to 5th day

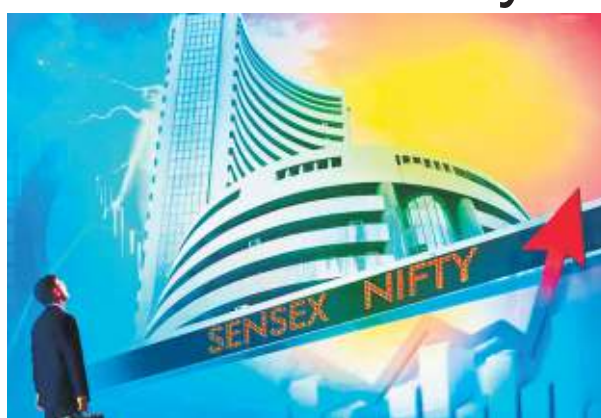
PNS ■ MUMBAI

Falling for the fifth day in a row, benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled nearly 1 per cent each on Thursday due to heavy sell-off in metal, consumer durables and select IT shares amid the monthly expiry of derivatives contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged by 617.30 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 73,885.60. The barometer hit the day's low of 73,668.73 due to selling in blue-chips. In the five days of fall, the barometer tanked 1,532 points or 2 per cent. The index has been on a downtrend since May 23 when it closed at its lifetime high level.

The NSE Nifty dropped by 216.05 points or 0.95 per cent to close at 22,488.65. The index has lost 479 points in the five sessions to Thursday.

Analysts said investors remained cautious, ahead of the 2024 general election results, which are set to be announced next week. The electioneering halted on Thursday ahead of the last



phase of polls to be held on June 1. The results will be declared on June 4.

"The benchmark index is taking cues from the US market as treasury yields continue to climb following the stickiness of global inflation, delaying the central bank's interest rates cut policy," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Titan, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Nestle India, Tata Motors and JSW Steel were the

biggest laggards.

ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, State Bank of India and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the gainers.

"The broader market continued the weak trend, led by profit booking, due to feeble closing of monthly expiry owing to lack of interest to hold short-term positions, as exit poll is slated in the weekend," Nair said.

Sensex and the NSE Nifty have experienced their fifth consecutive session of losses, resulting in investors losing

nearly Rs 10 lakh crore in market wealth.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 1.21 per cent, while smallcap index plunged 1.33 per cent.

Among the indices, metal dropped 2.67 per cent, consumer durables and Commodities went lower 2.05 per cent each, IT (1.97 per cent), healthcare (1.64 per cent), Teck (1.54 per cent), Auto (1.37 per cent), and Services (1.25 per cent).

Bankex was the only gainer. As many as 2,622 stocks declined while 1,190 advanced and 105 remained unchanged on the BSE.

According to market experts, weak global cues, rising US bond yields, and waning hopes of early interest rate cuts have also contributed to the recent rout in the stock markets.

Shares of Edelweiss Financial Services tumbled nearly 12 per cent after the Reserve Bank imposed business restrictions on Edelweiss Group's lending and asset reconstruction arms on concerns over evergreening of loans.

Investors bought Rs 27,000 cr of sovereign gold bonds: RBI report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sovereign gold bonds have caught the fancy of investors who bought Rs 27,031 crore worth of the bonds last fiscal, an amount more than four times invested in 2022-23 on the prospects of higher returns and tax benefits.

The bonds bought by investors represented a whopping 44.34 tonne of gold during 2023-24. In 2022-23, Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs) represent-



ing 12.26 tonne of gold were purchased for Rs 6,551 crore.

"The aggregate sum raised during 2023-24 amounted to Rs 27,031 crore (44.34 tonne)," said the annual report of Reserve Bank, which issues the bonds on behalf of the central government.

During the fiscal ended March 2024, the bonds were issued through four tranches.

Since the inception of SGB scheme in November 2015, a total of Rs 72,274 crore (146.96 tonne) has been raised through 67 tranches.

The price of 24 karat per 10

gram of gold has gone up from about Rs 62,300 to Rs 73,200 in one year.

SGBs are government securities denominated in grams of gold. They are substitutes for holding physical gold. These bonds are exempt from capital gains tax.

Besides, the bonds bear interest at the rate of 2.50 per cent (fixed rate) per annum on the amount of initial investment.

SGBs are issued in denominations of one gram of gold and in multiples thereof.

Minimum investment should be one gram with a limit of 4 kg subscription for individuals, 4 kg for Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities notified by the government from time to time per fiscal year (April - March).

SGBs are sold through offices or branches of nationalised banks, Scheduled Private Banks, Scheduled Foreign Banks, designated Post Offices, Stock Holding Corporation of India Ltd. (SHCIL) and the authorised stock exchanges either directly or through their agents.

Rooftop solar installations fall 26 pc to 367 MW: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rooftop solar capacity installations in India registered a 26 per cent year-on-year decline to 367 megawatts during January-March period, mainly on account of rise in input cost, according to Mercom Capital.

The country had witnessed 485 megawatt (MW) of rooftop solar installations during the first quarter of 2023, the research firm said in a report on Friday.

India added 367 MW of rooftop solar in the March quarter.

Installations fell nearly 10 per cent quarter-over-quarter from 406 MW and dropped over 24 per cent year-on-year from 485 MW, the report titled 'Q1 India Rooftop Solar Market' said.

India's cumulative rooftop solar capacity was 10.8 GW as of March 2024.

"The drop in installations was largely a result of application

processing delays faced by residential customers due to over-subscription under the PM SURYA GHAR: MUFT BIJLI YOJANA programme. The rise in module prices to comply with domestic content requirements (DCR) further contributed to reduced capacity additions under the SURYA Gujarat program," it said.

The industrial segment led quarterly capacity additions, comprising almost 57 per cent of installations. Commercial, residential, and government segments accounted for around 28 per cent, 14 per cent, and 1.1 per cent of capacity additions, respectively.

Mercom Capital Group CEO Raj Prabhu said, "Although rooftop solar is off to a slow start, 2024 could be a breakout year if the government's residential rooftop programme with attractive incentives.

Sebi launches settlement calculator

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Thursday launched a beta version of the settlement calculator to simplify the process of arriving at the indicative settlement amount, and provide more transparency in the system.

This settlement calculator contains fields that the applicant can identify in terms of the violations.

It also enables the applicant to select appropriate options with respect to their past regulatory track record on the basis of actions of Sebi as well as the details of other ongoing proceedings as on date of filing the settlement application. Besides, a user-friendly guide video has been included in the settlement calculator for the ease of understanding the process of arriving at the indicative settlement amount.

FDI inflows decline 3.5 pc to \$44 billion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows in India declined 3.49 per cent to USD 44.42 billion in 2023-24 due to lower infusion in sectors such as services, computer hardware and software, telecom, auto and pharma, according to the government data.

FDI inflows stood at USD 46.03 billion during 2022-23. Inflows during January-March FY24, however, rose by 33.4 per cent to USD 12.38 billion as against USD 9.28 billion in the year-ago period.

The total FDI -- which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital -- declined marginally by one per cent to USD 70.95 billion during 2023-24 from USD 71.35 billion in 2022-23, data from Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) showed.

In 2021-22, the country

received the highest ever FDI inflows of USD 84.83 billion.

During the last fiscal, FDI equity inflows decreased from major countries, including Mauritius, Singapore, the US, the UK, UAE, Cayman Islands, Germany, and Cyprus.

However, inflows increased from the Netherlands and Japan.

Sectorally, inflows contracted in services, computer software and hardware, trading, telecommunication, automobile, pharma and chemicals.

In contrast, construction (infrastructure) activities, development and power sectors registered healthy growth in inflows during the period under review.

FDI equity inflows into India declined 22 per cent in 2022-23. The data also showed that Maharashtra received the highest inflow of USD 15.1 billion during the last fiscal. It was USD 14.8 billion in 2022-23.

'E-commerce, BFSI, hospitality sectors driving job market'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

E-commerce, BFSI (banking, financial services, and insurance), and hospitality sectors witnessed an increased demands for talents in the first four months of 2024, indicating a recovery in overall job market, a report said on Thursday.

Driven by economic recovery, the demand for workforce in BFSI increased the maximum by 21 per cent during the first four months of this calendar year. The e-commerce sector saw an increase of 17 per cent, services and hospitality industries reported a growth of 13 per cent, according to a report by professional networking platform Apna.

The report is based on the data on Apna platform during 2023 and 2024.

It also found that the job market in the southern part of India saw a growth of 23 per



the forefront of the growth in the job landscape. This trend showcases the strength of southern India's job market and underscores the expanding opportunities fuelled by digitalisation.

"From bustling metropolitan areas to emerging tier II and tier III cities like Lucknow, Coimbatore, and Gwalior, our platform reflects a dynamic landscape, offering promising prospects for job seekers nationwide," apna.co CEO and founder Nirmitt Parikh said.

The platform has registered a 21 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of job applications from freshers and an 18 per cent rise from women job seekers during the reporting period.

The total number of applications received during the period reached approximately 1.7 crore, up 15 per cent from a year ago, the report added.



Sunny Deol accused of cheating & extortion

Film producer Sorav Gupta (of Sundawn Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.) has accused actor-MP Sunny Deol of cheating, extortion, and forgery. In a press conference, Gupta, a real estate developer turned producer, claimed that Sunny Deol took money from him in advance to do a film in 2016, continued to take more money while promising to start the film, but never finished it after his recent film *Gadar 2* became a huge success.

In an interview, Gupta shared that in 2016, he signed a deal with Sunny Deol as the lead for his film for a fee of 4 crore. "We gave him 1 crore in advance, but instead of starting my film, he opted to shoot for *Poster Boys* (2017). He kept asking me for more money, and by now my 2.55 crore is in Sunny's account. He also made me give money to another director, book a film studio, and get an executive producer," Gupta tells.

The producer also alleges that Deol forged an agreement with his company in 2023. "When we read the agreement, *humne dekha ki unhonein toh panna hi change kar diya beech wala, jahan par fees ka amount 4cr ko badha kar 8cr kar diya aur profit to 2cr kar diya*," he shares.

Blackout trailer out now



JioCinema has announced the exclusive premiere of the much-anticipated thriller film *Blackout* on its platform on June 7, 2024. This gripping tale of comedy, suspense, and intrigue, starring Vikrant Massey, Mouni Roy, and Sunil Grover, promises audiences an unforgettable cinematic experience.

Written and directed by Devang Shashin Bhavsar and produced by Jyoti Deshpande under Jio Studios and Niraj Kothari under 11:11 Productions.

The unveiling of the official trailer for *Blackout* offers viewers a sneak peek into the heart-pounding suspense and thrilling narrative that await. *Blackout* takes viewers on a thrilling journey through the streets of Pune, where a single night of darkness engulfs the city in mystery. As crime reporter Lenny, played by Vikrant Massey, gets entangled in a web of greed and misfortune, the film unravels a series of unexpected twists and turns that will keep audiences on the edge of their seats.

ZEE5 brings a unique marriage with *Luv Ki Arrange Marriage*

ZEE5 presents *Luv Ki Arrange Marriage*, an unforgettable rollercoaster of joy, masti, and pandemonium! Prepare for a love comedy directed by Ishrat Khan and produced by Bhanushali Studios Limited. This beautiful story offers a new perspective on love stories and typical arranged marriages. The multi-starrer film, starring Sunny Singh, Anveet Kaur, Annu Kapoor, Supriya Pathak, and Rajpal Yadav, promises to be the most amusing wedding celebration of the year.

Luv Ki Arrange Marriage, set in a small city, tells the story of a young couple, Luv (Sunny Singh) and Ishika (Anveet Kaur). With its distinct eccentricities, the film

demonstrates that love knows no age, and the lines between family and romance blur in the most delicious yet chaotic way. The launch poster for *Luv Ki Arrange Marriage* depicts a sweet scenario between Anveet and Sunny, highlighting a budding affection. In the picture, they have an intimate hug with a tiny pink rose between them, and their beaming smiles pique fans' interest and anticipation. The chemistry between Anveet and Sunny is evident, implying a passionate on-screen relationship. Anveet looks stunning in deep pink attire, while Sunny compliments her with a soft baby pink outfit. The predominance of pink tones results in a visually appealing and intriguing poster.



'Dalljiet's impulsive posts caused distress for those around Nikhil'

Nikhil Patel, TV actor Dalljiet Kaur's former spouse, has confirmed their split in his most recent statement. He also responded to Kaur's charges that he was unfaithful.

On May 25, Dalljiet accused Nikhil of cheating on her in an Instagram post. She described Nikhil as 'shameless' and alleged he degraded the family.

Nikhil's team released a statement confirming their relationship coming to an end that read, "In January of this year, Dalljiet chose to leave Kenya with her son Jaydon to return to India, which led to their separation. This decision came after both Nikhil and Dalljiet realised that the foundation of their blended family was not as strong as they had hoped, making it difficult for Dalljiet to settle in Kenya."

"In March 2023, Nikhil and Dalljiet had an Indian wedding ceremony in Mumbai, and while this was significant culturally, it was not legally binding. It was intended to provide comfort and assurance to Dalljiet's family about her moving to Kenya. Despite their best efforts, Dalljiet struggled to adjust to life in Kenya, missing her life and career in India, and the complexities of their family dynamics became increasingly evident," it continued.

It further read, "Nikhil acknowledges that the concept of a blended family can be complex and challenging, particularly in cultures where it is less common. This proved to be challenging for them due to cultural clashes, different values and beliefs, and this was something that began to develop as the relationship matured. He emphasises that his daughters have a mother who remains irreplaceable regardless of the status of the relationship between them."

The statement also claims that in January, Dalljiet Kaur left Kenya with no intentions to return, except to collect her belongings. "On the day Dalljiet decided to leave, she informed Nikhil, her son's school, and others that she did not intend to return to Kenya, except possibly to collect her remaining belongings. Nikhil has since stored these belongings safely for her. Her departure marked the end of their relationship for Nikhil, and while the subsequent social media activity over the past five months has been concerning, he has found closure and solace and continued to move forward positively," it stated.

The statement further adds that Nikhil Patel is 'distressed' because of Dalljiet's recent post. "However, Dalljiet's recent assumptions and impulsive posts on social media have really caused a lot of confusion and distress for those around Nikhil, and she has now indicated her desire to return to Nikhil's life, and continues to overstep boundaries. Her posts have been misconstrued, leading to unnecessary harassment by family and friends who have no involvement in this situation, and Nikhil



wishes for her to stop," it read.

Nikhil Patel has said, "I have always believed in addressing misunderstandings with clarity and respect. It is important to set the record straight, not just for myself but for everyone involved. I sincerely wish Dalljiet all the best and hope we can all move forward positively."

Rumours of their separation first surfaced in February this year, 10 months after their wedding. This started when Dalljiet deleted all her wedding pictures from Instagram and dropped 'Patel'.

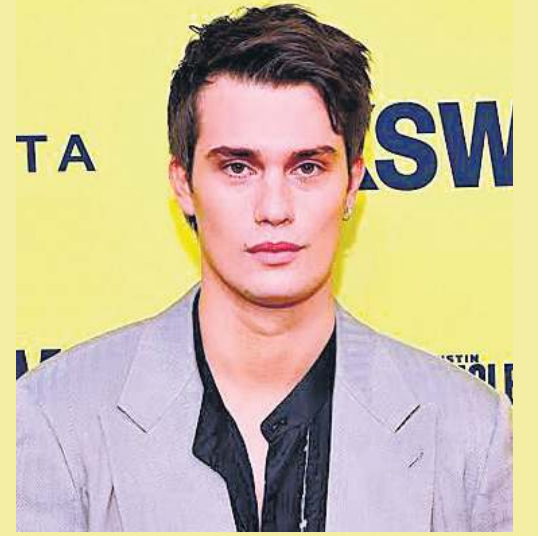
Nicholas Galitzine to play 'He-Man' in *Masters of the Universe*

British actor Nicholas Galitzine will play He-Man in Amazon Studios' highly anticipated film *Masters of the Universe*. Mattel Films will co-produce the movie.

Bumblebee director Travis Knight will direct the film, which will be released in theaters on June 5, 2026.

Masters of the Universe has been a work in progress for more than 20 years. The film was first developed by Warner Bros. and Sony before being sold to Netflix, which dropped it due to financial constraints.

The plot of the film has not yet been revealed. According to an undisclosed narrative from the studio, *Masters of the Universe* follows Prince Adam, a.k.a. He-Man is a youngster who falls into Earth in a spaceship and returns decades later to defend his home planet from the evil forces of the villain Skeletor. But in order to overcome the great adversary, he must uncover the mysteries of his past and transform into He-Man, also known as 'the most powerful man in the universe.'



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



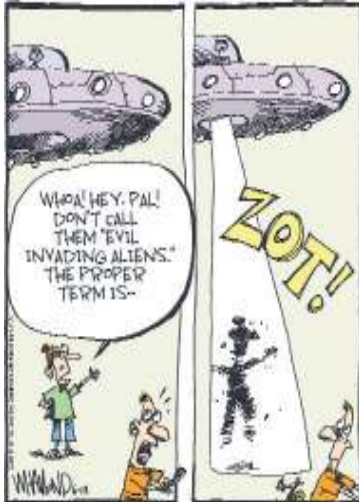
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



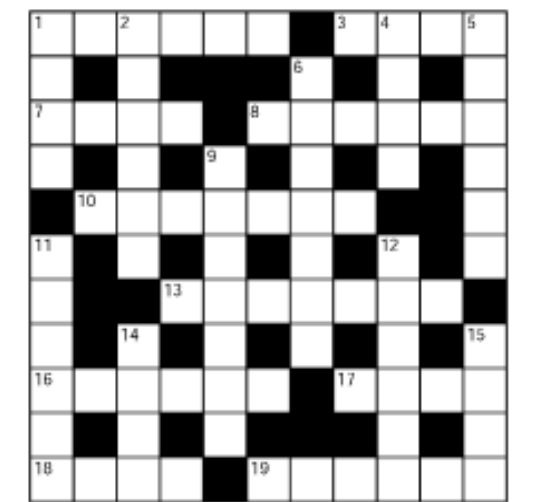
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- Pepper might make you do this
- Use needles and wool to make something
- Quick
- Spread this on bread
- Rich
- Injured
- Repaired
- Factual
- Utters
- A weight to stop a boat drifting
- A short letter
- Wearing
- Shovelling
- Permitted
- Postage stickers
- Look carefully for
- Jealousy
- Expensive

DOWN

- Not in danger
- Less difficult



'I would love to travel with Taapsee Pannu'

TEJAL SINHA

There is so much beauty in London that you will want to stay longer than you expected. It is one of the world's most popular tourist and travel destinations. Every street and lane in London is carefully designed to reflect the city's long history.

ACTRESS DEEPTI SADHWANI, WHO IS NO LESS THAN AN AVID TRAVELLER, TAKES THE PIONEER THROUGH HER RECENT TRAVELS TO LONDON AND SHARES HER MEMORIES FROM THE TRIP.



But you know what? London isn't a new destination for Deepti Sadhwani because there was a time when she was working in London as an investment banker. "I'm very well aware of the culture, how things go around there, the places, the roads, and everything. I'm very comfortable with that place," begins the *Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah* fame for our weekly segment of Travelogue.

Recalling her recent trip to the beautiful land where she was for a shoot, she recalls, "It was a bright sunny day, and we did around 3 looks. We were shooting for a celebrity hairstylist, Dar, along with Daniel, who was the photographer, so it was so much fun around shooting in London, also because at that time a lot of shoots were going on, so I met Aamir Khan, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, and Rohit Shetty, so it felt like being in almost India with almost all of them around."

Talking of London, something that she really enjoys is its heritage. The fact that it's so British and so English, be it the buildings, the monuments, or the or the culture, is something much mesmerising for her. One gets to witness the old culture and heritage there, with its scenic beauty.

Travelling without experiencing the authentic cuisine of the place makes the trip feel incomplete. And talking of London, she shares, "At every corner, you have an Indian restaurant; you get Lebanese, Chinese, Thai, and Continental. You name it, and you have it! The tourism there is so diverse that people from every part of the world live in London. I have a lot of friends there and have spent a lot of time there, and that's not like a new city for me, and I actually meet a lot of locals, and it's very common for me to interact with locals over there."

Deepti, in our chat, reveals herself as a water baby who enjoys nothing but water. And so, boat rides are something she loves the most, more than road rides. "Life on water and in the in the sea is very different from living on land. I like the observations, the dos and don'ts, how they live, and the spirits are really high," she shares as she goes on to recall a memorable boat ride

in London: "There was this saxophonist who was there with me on one of the boat rides. So the boat was a very English kind of boat, and I was on the Thames River. That day, the weather was not good, so there were no other boats. There was just this boat that was sailing that day, and it was drizzling. The saxophonist was playing these beautiful songs, and it was amazing being there at the Thames."

India, no doubt, holds a special place in her heart, especially for its diverse culture, language, and cuisine. "I love travelling in India as well, and not only across the globe. I feel first that you should complete your own country. How many of us would have visited all the places in India? We haven't. From Kerala to Kashmir, there's so much. From Assam to Bombay to Kolkata to the hills and valleys in Kashmir to Delhi to down south, there's so much in our country."

Sometimes choosing the right hotel feels like a staycation in itself, and our guest for the day couldn't agree much to us as she shares, "Yes, choosing the right hotel is very important for your stay. It makes or breaks your vacation or travel. I also have the habit of choosing a lot of Airbnbs during my travels in European countries because I feel that they are better kept than the hotels and are more spacious. There are good hosts around. Even in London, I had this 2BHK Airbnb right at the Beckingham gate. So I feel it's not necessary to be in a hotel, but choosing the right kind of hotel and knowing the facilities that are there. I am someone who loves to swim and workout. So I want the hotel that has these facilities."

We are sure many would agree with Deepti, as she shares that her home is her rejuvenation place and that she finds peace there. "I love to travel and explore. I have travelled to multiple countries. I have three passports, which I have completed by now, but the place that gives me that peace is my home. I have my dog with me and have a massage at home only. I would do so many things around, but I feel there's nothing better than your home."

For any avid travelling, experiencing something

unexpected can turn out to be a nightmare. Sometimes these experiences also teach you, especially about being modest and about the little space you occupy on this big Earth. However, for her, it was not actually like a nightmare, but she did experience something: "I was travelling from London to Amsterdam, and I was at the train station and was just going to get a trolley for my bags, and in that one minute of time, somebody took off my trolley bags that had my laptop and all my cosmetics in them. I tried to file a complaint, but it was my mistake that I didn't have an air tag on it. The bag just went away, and I never found it. These things definitely make you feel bad, and the next day I had to accept and not spoil the rest of my trip."

For her, travel is all about meeting yourself, especially when you travel solo. Deepti, who prefers making friends on the trip rather than pre-deciding who to go with, shares on a concluding note, "I would love to travel with Taapsee Pannu because I have seen her travel vlogs with her sister. They both like to travel a lot, and they explore a lot of places. I think she will be an amazing travel partner because she loves and enjoys travel."



Travelogue

Stay shielded with breathing easy

SUBODHINI PUROHIT

Jai Dhar Gupta, motivated by his own fight with bronchial asthma caused by pollution, established Nirvana Being in 2014 to pioneer life-saving clean air solutions in India. His constant pursuit of Switzerland-quality air has propelled him to the forefront of clean-air technologies, transforming both outdoor and indoor environments across the country.

They have now pioneered anti-pollution masks in India! The World Health Organisation (WHO) does not have particular guidelines for indoor air quality, but the American Society for Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) and the Indian Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ISHRAE) do. These organisations develop rules for ventilation and filtration in interior areas. Proper ventilation and filtration are essential for the health and well-being of interior environments.

Nirvana Being was created, not out of inspiration but out of need, and Jai explains, "I recognised the need of maintaining a clean air environment both indoors and outdoors in order to continue living there. This led to the formation."

In order to get more traction in the health and wellness industry and to improve human processes organically, they have developed this range of nutraceutical confectionery. Rather than encouraging consumers to drink unhealthy and high-sugar energy drinks, they concentrated on giving a natural energy boost. Even Indian Premier League cricket players take energy gum, but they discovered that lozenges—which dissolve more gradually in the mouth are more comfortable and

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, we bring to you our interaction with Jai Dhar Gupta, the founder of Nirvana Being that brings together science and sustainability with the aim of protecting others through the polluted air.

convenient. They offer the advantages of a cup of coffee without the risk of spilling, making them ideal for lengthy car rides when individuals might feel weary.

Concerns about women's safety in rapidly urbanising India and environmental degradation drove them into the non-lethal weapons area. Young people frequently experience low pay and subpar housing circumstances when they re-

locate to cities in pursuit of greater prospects, which causes anxiety and raises security concerns, particularly for women and children. The collaboration with MACE was ideal. Additionally, they have worked with the Delhi police to modernise their forces by supplying them with non-lethal Sten guns and take-down sprays, enhancing security in the city. "I am really passionate about wellness and clean energy. However, I believe that accepting the urgency of the situation is more important than trying to strike a compromise. The declining quality of the air we're experiencing just strengthens my resolve to change things through clean air projects," he says.

Because of intensive monitoring, regions have a high level of public knowledge regarding the detrimental effects of air pollution. However, this problem goes far beyond. Consider Mumbai, where a large number of individuals are ignorant of how serious their air quality issues are. It faces severe pollution despite being a seaside city because of things like constant building and a dense population. He adds, "I've come to the conclusion that traditional activism is insufficient to address emission concerns. For this reason, I've changed my emphasis to growing forests in order to create carbon sinks. In just five to six years, this bold project seeks to create mature forests with zero carbon footprints. Not only are we combating air pollution by planting thousands of trees every year in the buffer zones of tiger reserves and national parks, but we're also protecting biodiversity and habitats that are at risk from land change. This multimodal strategy enables us to address environmental degradation from various perspectives, resulting in a significant impact on air quality, biodiversity, and habitat preservation."

Elevate your culinary experience with the art of cheese pairing

Cheese – who doesn't love it? It's a food that's both simple and fancy, perfect with crackers, bread, fruits, wine, or as an ingredient in countless dishes. This National Cheese Day, we celebrate the rich history, intricate process, and delightful pairings that make cheese a beloved staple in our culinary repertoire.

Basics of cheese making

The magic of cheese lies in its simple yet transformative process. First, they introduce bacteria or enzymes to sour the milk, causing the milk proteins to separate as curds. These curds are then pressed, salted, and shaped, before embarking on a fascinating journey of aging. This aging process, which can last from days to years, is where the cheese develops its unique character - from the creamy comfort of brie to the sharp bite of cheddar. During this time, cheesemakers meticulously control factors like temperature, moisture, and the addition of herbs or spices, resulting in a stunning variety of textures and flavours.

Nutritional benefits of cheese

Cheese isn't just delicious, it's a valuable source of protein, calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin A. Some varieties even boast probiotics, friendly bacteria that promote gut health and immunity. However, moderation is key. Cheese can be high in fat, calories, sodium, and cholesterol. Additionally, those with lactose intolerance or milk allergies may need to steer clear.

Top cheese pairings

Cheese truly becomes a symphony of flavour when paired with the right complements. Let's explore some classic pairings:

- Cheese and crackers:** A timeless combination! Soft, spreadable cheeses like ricotta or brie find perfect partners in crisp, neutral-flavoured crackers. These crackers provide the perfect platform for the cheese's creamy texture to take center stage

- Cheese and bread:** A match made in heaven-bread offers a delightful textural contrast to cheese. Crusty baguettes pair beautifully with semi-firm cheeses like Gruyere, while softer breads complement creamy cheeses like Camembert.

- Cheese on-the-go:** For those of us with busy lives, single-serving cheese packets are a lifesaver. Handy little packs come in a variety of flavours and are perfect for picnics, lunchboxes, or whenever a cheese craving strikes. Pair them with crackers, bread slices, or even fruit for a quick and satisfying bite

- Cheese and fruits:** This pairing might surprise you, but it's an explosion of flavours! Sweet and juicy fruits like grapes, pears, or figs create a delightful contrast to the savoury notes of cheese. Think creamy goat cheese with sliced pears or sharp cheddar with sweet grapes.

- Wine and cheese:** There's a reason this pairing has stood the test of time. The right wine can take your cheese experience to a whole new level. For example, a bold red wine complements sharp cheeses like cheddar, while a light and fruity white wine pairs beautifully with milder cheeses like brie. This National Cheese Day, take the time to explore these pairings and discover new ways to enjoy your favourite cheeses. Whether you're a cheese connoisseur or just beginning your journey into the world of cheese, there's always something new and exciting to learn and taste.





WEARING INDIA JERSEY IS DIFFERENT FEELING, HOPE TO MAKE IT COUNT: RISHABH PANT

PTI ■ NEW YORK

It would be 527 days since his life-threatening accident when Rishabh Pant donned the India jersey on June 5 at the Nassau County ground for the opening T20 World Cup match against Ireland and he can't wait for it. On March 23 this year, Pant wore the blue of Delhi Capitals while making an emotional comeback after the horrific car crash in 2022 but he is more eager to wear a different shade of blue -- the 'India Blue' to be specific. "Getting back on the field with an Indian jersey on is a different feeling altogether. This is something I missed a lot... Hopefully I (can) make it count and make it better from here," Pant told BCCLTV on the sidelines of India's first net session ahead of the warm-up

game against Bangladesh on June 1. Pant, who underwent an intense 15-month rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy, had teammate Suryakumar Yadav for company during this interaction and recalled the time how his presence helped him cope with the loneliness of his injury management programme in the NCA. "Seeing the team here and meeting them again, spending time, having fun with them, having a conversation with them, I really enjoyed," a beaming Pant said. Having scored 446 runs in 13 IPL games, Pant is slowly getting back into the groove. The leaner and fitter Pant looked in nice touch at the India nets at the Catiague Park on the outskirts of New York City.

Pant also spoke about the prospects of cricket gaining popularity in the USA going forward. He felt the T20 World Cup could be the start of an eventful chapter. "We are used to playing in certain countries but this is a different prospect. It has opened up a different channel for sport because I feel cricket is growing around the world and... Getting the exposure here would be nice for cricket as well as USA cricket," he said. He spoke about the drop-in pitches that will be used during the tournament and also the bright sunshine that he and the rest of the team is getting used to. "New pitches are there. I'm just getting used to the conditions. The sun is a little bit brighter here, so just getting used to the conditions over here. Let's see how it goes," Pant concluded.

Ponting picks IPL top performers Bumrah, Head to dominate T20 World Cup

PTI ■ DUBAI

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting has picked Indian Premier League (IPL) top performers Jasprit Bumrah and Travis Head to excel among the bowlers and batters respectively in the T20 World Cup starting June 2. India's pace spearhead Bumrah stood tall among the bowlers with 20 wickets in 13 matches for Mumbai Indians despite the five-time winners enduring their worst-ever campaign in 17 editions of the IPL, while Australian Head struck 567 runs in 15 matches. Despite MI's all-round struggles, Bumrah shone brightly with his supreme control with the ball, maintaining an enviable economy rate of a mere 6.48 in a tournament wherein each of the top 10 bowlers went for at least eight runs per over. "My leading wicket-taker for the tournament will be Jasprit Bumrah. I just think an outstanding performer, contributor for a number of years now. He's just come off an outstanding IPL," Ponting was quoted as saying in 'The ICC Review'.



"What he can do with the new ball, he swings the new ball, he has the seam up. But at the end, his economy rate at the end of the IPL was less than seven runs an over. "He takes wickets. He does bowl a lot of the hard overs too. When you bowl the hard overs in T20 cricket, it gives you a chance to pick up a lot of wickets along

the way. So, I'm going with him," said Ponting, who coaches Delhi Capitals in the IPL. Even though Head finished fourth in the list of those with most runs in this IPL, it was the manner he got them which impressed the most. Head's strike rate remained in excess of 200 for a large part of the IPL, with the

left-handed batter eventually finishing at 567 runs in 15 matches at 191.55, average of 40.50, and featuring one century and four fifties. "My prediction for the leading run-scorer will be Travis Head. I just think everything he's done, whether it be red-ball or white-ball in the last couple of years, has been of the highest quality. I think he's playing fearless cricket at the moment," said Ponting of his compatriot. "It'll be exactly the same for Australia. He might not be the most consistent on the way through this tournament, but he'll be right up there with the leading run scorers. As I've said, if he spends any amount of time at the wicket for Australia, he'll win more games than ever." The T20 World Cup will be held in the West Indies and the USA from June 2 to 29.

Story of Uganda's inspirational rising stars

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An estimated 60 per cent of Ugandan population lives in slums and fast bowler Juma Miyagi is a cult figure in these impoverished areas. These usually football-loving people would be keenly following him and the Ugandan cricket team's debut at the ICC T20 World Cup, trying to live a sporting dream through his exploits. Miyagi grew up in the slums of Naguru, located on the outskirts of Kampala, and two years after representing Uganda at the U-19 level in the Caribbean, the 21-year-old will be shouldering the

senior team's bowling attack at the ICC showpiece that kicks off on June 1. Uganda qualified for their maiden cricket World Cup last November. Miyagi, who has 34 wickets in 21 T20 Internationals, grew up in the slums and continues to live there with his family to date. The same is the case for other T20 World Cup squad members including Simon Ssesazi and travelling reserve Innocent Mwebaze. They have grown up in areas which lack clean water, sewage systems and have little or no access to health care in poorly constructed pigeonholes that pass for rooms. Their fellow slum dwellers

From slums of Kampala to T20 World Cup



look up to them as all three of them have given hope to the struggling community. Their story of hardship even moved Uganda's Indian head coach Abhay Sharma, who took charge of the team ahead

of the ICC event beginning on Saturday. Sharma is not completely unaware of slums as India has one of Asia's biggest slums in Dharavi, Mumbai but being in Kampala was eye-opening

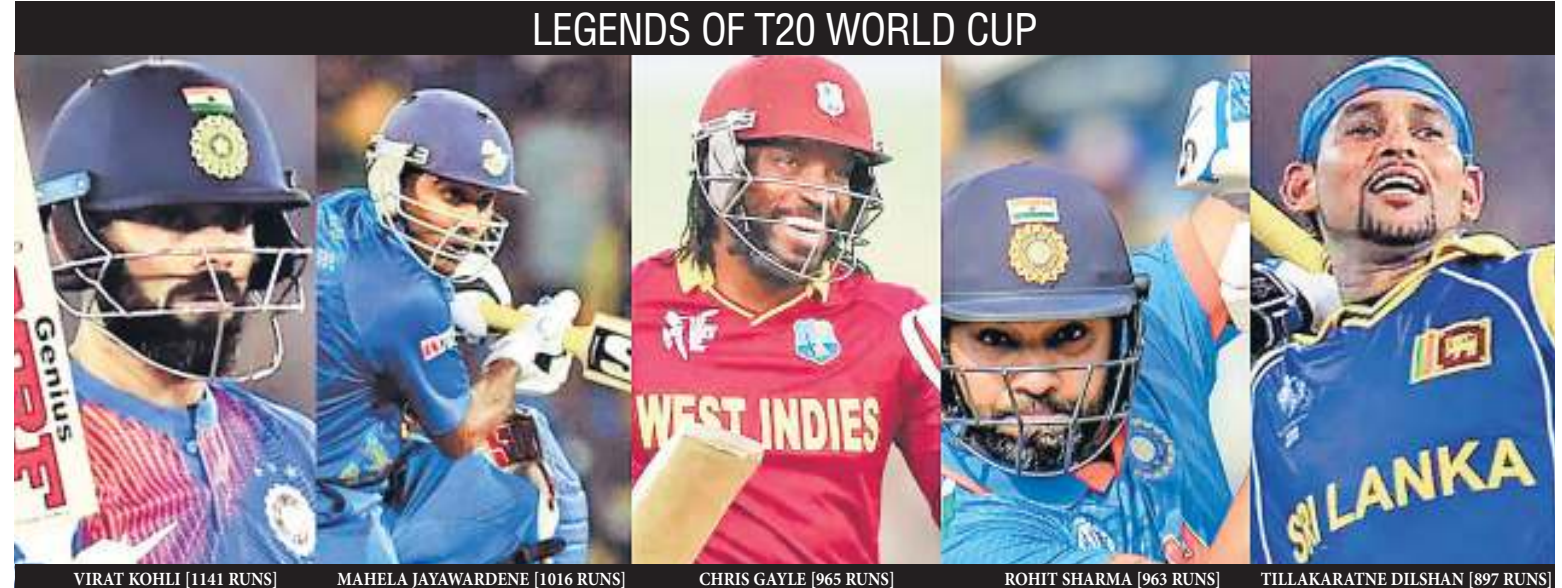
even for him. Having spent some time with the players on and off the field, Sharma's respect for the players has increased manifold. "Some of the players come from very humble backgrounds and it is inspiring to see them play for the national team. "I didn't expect them to live in such conditions before I arrived. Their respect for coaches is also immense. The players think we can change their lives," he told PTI from Trinidad, where the team is based at the moment ahead of its World Cup opener against Afghanistan in Guyana on June 3.

Leading run-getters and batters with best strike rates

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With cricket's slam-bang version set for its ninth World Cup, PTI gives a rundown on the leading run-getters and the ones with best strike rates in the T20 showpiece. **LEADING RUN GETTERS** **Virat Kohli [1141 runs]:** Who else at No. 1 but the King himself? The talismanic Indian batter has been an absolute beast in the marquee event, scoring over a thousand runs across five editions. His ability to thrive under pressure and deliver match-winning performances has cemented his reputation as one of the finest batters in T20 cricket. He holds the record for most runs in a single edition of the tournament — 319 in 2014. He was also sensational in the 2016 edition, scoring 296 runs. **Mahela Jayawardene [1016 runs]:** The now retired Jayawardene's performances in T20 World Cups have been

instrumental in former champions Sri Lanka's success in the tournament. He was a consistent scorer across the five editions he played. **Chris Gayle [965 runs]:** One of the most prolific and entertaining hitters in cricket history, Gayle is widely regarded as one of the most destructive batters, particularly in T20s. No longer competing for the West Indies, his performances in T20 World Cups have been nothing short of spectacular, making him a fan favourite and an important player for the West Indies when they won their maiden title in 2012. **Rohit Sharma [963 runs]:** The current India skipper has been a key player for his team in the T20 World Cups, especially after taking on the opening position. His ability to score big runs and provide stability at the top of the order has been crucial for India's success in the tournament. He has played all editions,



scoring 963 runs, including 91 fours at a strike rate on 127.88. **Tillakaratne Dilshan [897 runs]:** The leading run-scorer in the 2009 edition with 317 runs from seven matches, the

retired Dilshan, with his aggressive batting style and ability to provide quick starts at the top of the order, was a vital cog in the Sri Lankan team's lineup across six

editions. **HIGHEST STRIKE RATES** **Jos Buttler [144.48]:** Regarded as one of the most dynamic and destructive batters, Buttler's greatest

strength lies in his ability to score rapidly and that is why he has the best strike rate in the T20 World Cup history that fetched him 799 runs in 27 matches.

AB de Villiers [143.40]: The now retired South African has had an outstanding strike rate in T20 World Cups. His ability to score quickly and decisively made him one of the most

feared batters. De Villiers collected 717 runs in 29 innings with the help of 51 fours and 30 sixes. **Chris Gayle [142.75]:** Gayle's unparalleled level of fearlessness and confidence helped him to an amazing 142.75 strike rate in the T20 World Cups. The Jamaican always backed himself to take on any bowler. Gayle is the only player to have scored two centuries in the event, both of which were match-winning efforts. **Mahela Jayawardene [134.74]:** Jayawardene had an impressive average of 39.07 and a strike rate of 134.74, a fine reflection of his ability to score quickly while maintaining consistency. **David Warner [133.22]:** Warner's aggressive approach will once again be crucial for Australia. His ability to score runs quickly and efficiently has made him one of the most exciting and effective batters in T20 World Cups.

Indian women's hockey team gets rousing welcome in London

PTI ■ LONDON

The High Commission of India here gave a rousing welcome to the country's women's national hockey team as dignitaries sang paens to the players for their achievements in the sport after overcoming obstacles on the road to success. The women's team, along with the senior India men's squad, is in the United Kingdom for the FIH Pro League fixtures starting this weekend. The Indian men's and women's sides are scheduled to play their counterparts from Germany here on Saturday. "Each one of them represents every part of India and every region and community of India. Their stories are the most wonderful stories of what is possible in India," said Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami, in his address at the reception. The reception was held at the India House on Wednesday evening. "Each one of these girls is a story of sacrifice and struggle by their parents, and also a story of triumph and of spirit. "These young ladies inspire every one of us today because what they have achieved tells us that there is no ceiling to human ambition, there is no ceiling in a country like India - where anything and everything can be possible," Doraiswami added. The team, led by captain Salima Tete and coach Harendra Singh, were greeted by cheering supporters as



community leaders and sports fans gathered at a special reception in their honour. Their first fixture will take place when they play Germany in London on Saturday and members of the Indian diaspora were encouraged to turn out in large numbers to support the team. The Indian teams are coming to the UK after playing some difficult Pro League matches in Belgium against sides such as Argentina, Ireland and the hosts.

The Indian envoy, himself a hockey player, reflected upon how playing England on their home soil will bring back some memories for the women's team after narrowly losing to them in the last Olympics' playoff. "We really look forward to being able to come and support you and to tell everybody what great stuff is happening in Indian hockey and what great stuff Indian women are doing in changing India. "Every goal that you score, every

game that you play and every day that you train and get better, India becomes a better country. And for that thank you very, very much," he said. The Australian High Commissioner to the UK, Stephen Smith, was among the special guests at the event, and he said India "taught" Australia how to improve their hockey and become a heavyweight in the sport. "The reason that Australia has become so good at hockey is because

the Indians taught us everything," said Smith in his address. "In Australia, as in every continent in the world, there is a large Indian diaspora and in the 1950s and 1960s that Indian diaspora taught Australians how to play hockey. It is the case that we adjusted to the artificial turf game, and what I call the horizontal game, better or more quickly than India. "But that doesn't mean that India is not a hockey playing country to be admired, both in the men's game and in the women's game," he added. The Deputy High Commissioner of India to the UK, Sujit Ghosh, indulged in light-hearted conversations with some of the players and their coach and discovered the many hidden talents of the team. In his address in Hindi, coach Harendra said, "India taught the whole world how to play hockey... If there is a vishva guru in hockey, then that's India. "Yes, there are ups and downs in this journey, but I am extremely proud to see what our women's team has achieved in the last few years." He added, "Winning or losing aside, whenever our team is on the pitch there is a certain fear among the opponents. This reflects the changing landscape of our country as a whole, where women have a large share in the rise of India today." Over the next couple of weeks, the Indian teams will play their matches at the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

FC Goa, midfielder Brandon Fernandes set to part ways

PTI ■ MARGAO

Indian Super League side FC Goa on Thursday said midfielder Brandon Fernandes will leave the club after his contract ends this summer. The 29-year-old Fernandes, who joined FC Goa in 2017, netted 17 goals in 130 outings for the club. He helped the Gauris win the Indian Super Cup in 2019, the ISL League Shield in 2019-20 and the Durand Cup in 2021. Fernandes also holds the record for most assists in the club's history (31). Having begun his youth career in 2002, Fernandes played for Goa United and Salgaocar FC and made his senior debut with ASD Cape Town in 2013. Fernandes made his senior debut in India in 2015 with Sporting Goa FC, which was followed by his debut in ISL for Mumbai City FC in 2015-16. He also represented Mohun Bagan (in 2016 on loan) and Churchill Brothers (2017) before joining FC Goa. FC Goa CEO Ravi Puskar said in a statement released on the club's website, "He became ingrained into the fabric of the club and was one of the pillars upon which sporting success was built in the seasons he was with us."



Puskar said the club will be open to have Fernandes back in their fold in any capacity. "While he leaves us today, Brandon will always be welcomed back to FC Goa in whatever capacity he may choose with open arms." Fernandes, who has also played 25 matches for India since 2019, helped the national side win the SAFF Championship in 2021. He is expected to join Mumbai City FC for the next season.

Vishwak Sen: I refuse to be pigeonholed as a Telangana actor

AHEAD OF THE FILM'S RELEASE, ACTOR VISHWAK SEN, OPENED UP ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE PORTRAYING THE LEAD CHARACTER IN *GANGS OF GODAVARI* WITH US IN A QUICK CHAT.

RAMYA SREE

This week, at the box office, three films have had a tug of war. Of the three films, *Gangs of Godavari* is one of the most ambitious films that actor Vishwak Sen is releasing. Directed by Krishna Chaitanya, the film stars actress Anjali and Neha Sshetty play female leads.

Bankrolled by S Naga Vamsi, the film has now hit cinemas. Ahead of the film's release, actor Vishwak Sen, renowned for his dynamic on-screen presence, opened up about his experience portraying the lead character in *Gangs of Godavari* with us in a quick interview. He shared, "When I signed on for *Gangs of Godavari*, I anticipated a film catering primarily to the youth. However, upon viewing the first cut, I realised its broader appeal transcends age groups. This film doesn't rely on vulgarity or

cringe-worthy moments. While some may find certain dialogues in the trailer distracting, one's perception of a film is shaped by their individual taste and perspective on life."

The actor also delved into the evolving landscape of Telugu cinema, drawing parallels with global cinematic trends as he expressed, "There's been a lot of buzz about Telugu cinema's global reach. Audiences today appreciate raw, unfiltered storytelling akin to classics like *The Godfather* and *Scarface*, or popular series like *Game of Thrones*. *Gangs Of Godavari* too embraces this ethos, featuring an intense pre-intermission fight devoid of slow motion or bombastic background scores. It's a calculated risk, but filmmaking is about pushing boundaries and evolving with the times."

Reflecting on his portrayal of the Godavari slang, he emphasised, "I was particularly mindful of nailing the Godavari dialect. I wanted to ensure my performance

felt genuine and avoided any criticism. Having seen the film, I believe I've done justice to the role and will not disappoint. I refuse to be pigeonholed as a Telangana actor. *Gangs Of Godavari* marks a pivotal moment in Telugu cinema, and I say this with confidence after a recent screening."

He also hinted at the potential for a sequel as he spilled, "While a sequel is on the cards, unlike *Hit*, I'll be reprising the lead role. *Gangs Of Godavari* isn't just a standalone film; it's the beginning of an enduring cinematic journey."

As anticipation mounts for its release, *Gangs Of Godavari* promises to redefine Telugu cinema, driven by Vishwak Sen's transformative performance and a narrative that transcends conventional boundaries.



It's official! Ranveer Singh exits Prasanth Varma's project

Rumours have been going around that the film *Rakshas*, which was said to be directed by Prasanth Varma and headlined by powerhouse Ranveer Singh, the duo, decided to part ways on the project due to creative differences. Amid speculations from various industry sources, the makers and actors

Singh mentioned, "Prasanth is a very special talent. We met and explored the idea of a film together. Hopefully, we will collaborate on something exciting in the future."

Prasanth Varma said, "Ranveer's energy and talent are rare to find. We shall manifest our forces, combining soon, sometime in the future."

Prasanth Varma, Mythri Movie Makers, and Ranveer Singh have now clarified their official statements. Talking about it, Ranveer

Both parties, including Mythri Movie Makers, agree that everyone's intentions were right to make it happen, but sometimes things weren't meant to be at that time. The team shook hands with a promise to associate in times to come.



Vijay Antony's poetic action film *Toofan* teaser launched



Hero Vijay Antony, well-known to South audiences through various films, is set to appear before the audience with the film *Toofan*. Recently, his movie *Love Guru* achieved significant success in Telugu. *Toofan* is being produced by Kamal Bora, D. Lalitha, B. Pradeep, and Pankaj Bora under the banner of Infinity Film Ventures. This company previously produced *Raghavan* and *Hathya*, both starring Vijay Antony. Directed by Vijay Milton, *Toofan* is a poetic action entertainer. The story revolves around a man who changed the future of a society that once looked down on him. Currently, the shooting of *Toofan* is in its final stages. The filming, set on an island, took place in Andaman and Diu Daman. The film is scheduled for a grand theatrical release in June. Recently, the teaser for *Toofan* was released at Hyderabad's Prasad Labs. During the event hero Vijay Antony said, "*Toofan* is an action-packed movie. It will appeal to all sections of the audience. Our producers have invested significantly, ensuring high production values without compromising anywhere. Our director, Vijay Milton, has worked

on many films as a cinematographer. He was the cinematographer for the Telugu film *Premitsa*. It was a pleasure working with Vijay. Bhashyasree has been continuously traveling with me. This movie will also bring him good recognition. Producer Vamsi Nandipati, who will be associated with *Bicchagadu 2*, has my appreciation for attending this program. *Toofan* features a cast of well-known actors like Sathyaraj, Sarath Kumar, and Daali Dhanunjaya. We are planning to release it in June. I hope you all like it. My recent words about reviewers were not intended for everyone. The movie is our baby. Just as you would get angry if someone insulted your baby, we feel hurt when someone criticises our hard work. We mentioned that our movie could suffer due to reviews from a few people with bad intentions. It was a personal response. The media has the right to review movies, and I respect that freedom. Recently, some Telugu movies haven't been well received in theatres, but films like *Hanuman* and *Tillu Square* did well at the box office. If the content is good, the audience will surely come to the theatres."

Action packed trailer of *Weapon* out now

Weapon, directed by Sathyaraj, is not your average action film. A spectacular mix of drama, suspense, and action, it's likely to delight fans of action films. A fascinating trailer for the upcoming action-thriller *Weapon*, starring Sathyaraj and Vasanth Ravi, has been released by the film's directors. The film, which is directed by Guhan Senniappan, stars Rajiv Menon, Tanya Hope, and Rajeev Pillai among its impressive cast. In the teaser, Sathyaraj is portrayed as an unstoppable superhuman, and Vasanth Ravi and his group are assigned the difficult task of defeating him. Produced by Million Studio's MS Manzoor, *Weapon* showcases a remarkable cast of actors, including Benito Franklin, Mime Gopi,

Kaniha, Gajaraj, Syed Subhan, Baradwaj Rangan, Maya Krishnan, Shiyas Kareem, Mime Aannand, and Raghu Esakki. *Weapon* is a visually engaging film, thanks to its throbbing Ghibran soundtrack, gorgeous cinematography by Prabhu Raghav, and sharp editing by Gopi Krishna. The plot of *Weapon* centers on a superhuman named Sathyaraj and the frantic attempts to apprehend him. Vasanth Ravi shows up as the last hope after many gangs fail in their goals, assembling a group to take on the strong enemy.



Harom Hara trailer offers riveting action thriller with unique story

Sudheer Babu, known for his versatility in choosing roles, is all set to enthrall audiences with his upcoming film *Harom Hara*. Directed by Gnanasagar Dwaraka of *Sehari* fame, this intense action thriller is produced by Sumanth G Naidu under the banner of SSC (Sree Subrahmanyeshwara Cinemas). As anticipation mounts, the makers unveiled the theatrical trailer on the auspicious occasion of Superstar Krishna's birth anniversary on Thursday. The trailer offers a glimpse into the intriguing narrative of *Harom Hara*, set against the backdrop of 1989 in the Kuppam region of Chittoor district. Sudheer Babu portrays the role of Subrahmanyam, a gunslinger who seizes a golden opportunity amidst escalating violence in the city. As Subrahmanyam delves into the clandestine world of gun-making, he finds himself entangled in a web of danger and intrigue, with law enforcement hot on his trail. Director Gnanasagar Dwaraka's bold choice of subject matter sets *Harom Hara* apart, marking a departure from conventional narratives in Tollywood. The trailer is a testament to his directorial prowess, with powerful dialogues and captivating visuals that promise an immersive cinematic experience. Sudheer Babu's portrayal of

Subrahmanyam is hailed for its depth and authenticity, with the actor seamlessly slipping into the skin of his character. His command over the Kuppam dialect and commanding screen presence add layers to the narrative. Sunil's impactful performance and Malvika Sharma's convincing portrayal as Sudheer Babu's love interest further enhance the film's appeal. Technically, *Harom Hara* shines, with Aravind Vishwanathan's breathtaking cinematography capturing the essence of the narrative. Chaitan Bharadwaj's evocative score adds to the film's intensity, while the production design by SSC Banner elevates the visual aesthetic.



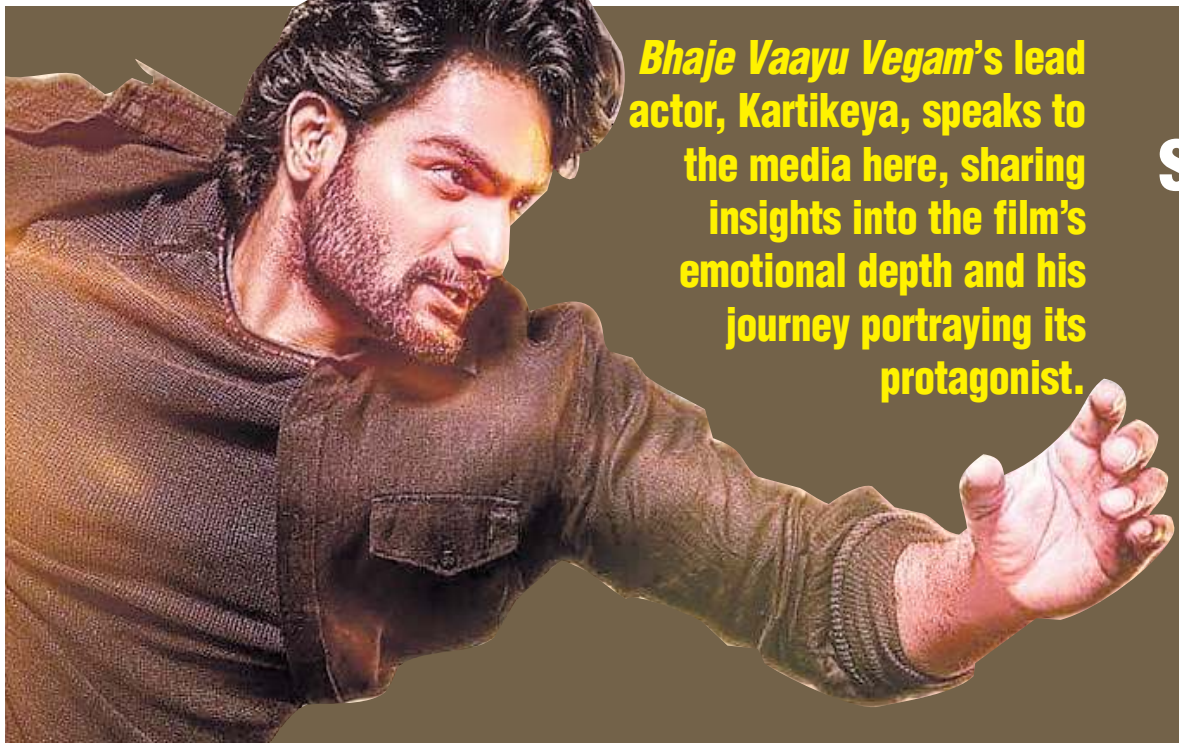
I MADE A NEW ATTEMPT IN MY CAREER WITH *SATYABHAMA*: KAJAL AGGARWAL

The highly anticipated crime thriller *Satyabhama* is all set to hit the silver screen on June 7, promising an enthralling cinematic experience for moviegoers. Presented by the esteemed production company Aurum Arts, the film features Kajal Aggarwal in the lead role, with Naveen Chandra portraying a pivotal character. Directed by Suman Chikkala, *Satyabhama* delves into the intricate world of crime investigation, blending action and emotion seamlessly. At a press meet held in Hyderabad on Thursday, the cast and crew shared their insights into the making of the film and what audiences can expect.

Of them, Kajal Aggarwal expressed, "I made a new attempt in my career with the movie *Satyabhama*. This is the first time I am doing such a character and movie. When I heard the story, I liked it and felt it was new, so I decided to do the movie. I didn't have a specific type of story or character in mind. I will do any genre if the content is good. Before *Satyabhama*, I had many offers for female-oriented movies, but I wanted to take them on only when I was confident enough. I feel a sense of responsibility rather than pressure when doing lady-oriented movies. This film has many new emotions." The actress further continued, "For the first time in my career, I did action and performed huge stunts, working hard for them. *Satyabhama* is not my second innings, but one can think my career will go in another new direction. Acting is my passion, and that's why I returned to movies after focusing on my personal life. In this film, my character balances both personal and professional lives. During the making of this film, we met a senior police officer who explained how criminals today are committing crimes using technology such as gaming and virtual reality. We found his insights very interesting and incorporated them into the story. I've always wanted to do a full-length action movie, and I feel that desire has been fulfilled with *Satyabhama*."

KD - *The Devil's* 'Satyavati' aka Shilpa Shetty, wraps up shooting

Earlier in 2024, Shilpa Shetty enthralled the audience with her performance in the *Indian Police Force*. And now, she is set to impress all as Satyavati in *KD - The Devil (Part 1)*. Shilpa Shetty has wrapped up the last schedule for the Dhruva Sarja and Sanjay Dutt film in Mysore. In March, it was announced that the actress would be joining KD's battlefield as Satyavati. In the poster, Shilpa was seen sporting a retro look, she wore a polka-dot sari and oversized glasses. *KD - The Devil's* director Prem had called Shilpa a powerhouse and wrote, "A war is between kingdoms, and a kingdom needs a powerful Satyavati." While Shilpa has worked in Kannada films before, in this one she will also be joined by Sanjay Dutt and Nora Fatehi. A period action entertainer based on true events from 1970s Bangalore, *KD - The Devil Part 1* also stars V Ravichandran. KVN Productions presents *KD-The Devil* directed by Prem. The pan-India multilingual is all set to release in Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Hindi.



Bhaje Vaayu Vegam's lead actor, Kartikeya, speaks to the media here, sharing insights into the film's emotional depth and his journey portraying its protagonist.

'BVV offers a blend of heroism, action, sentiment and emotion,' says Kartikeya

RAMYA SREE

In anticipation of the worldwide theatrical release of *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam*, lead actor Kartikeya Gummakonda sat down with the media to share insights into the film's emotional depth and his journey portraying its protagonist. Presented by UV Creations, and produced under the banner of UV Concepts, *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* is directed by Prashant Reddy, featuring Iswarya Menon alongside Kartikeya. Reflecting on his decision to take on the role, Kartikeya remarked: "Prashanth Reddy narrated the script of *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* to me during the lockdown and the emotional resonance of the story struck a chord with me instantly. Despite initially commencing another project, I was drawn back to this film due to its compelling narrative. We took our time with production to ensure we delivered the best possible version to our audience, hence the noticeable change in my appearance throughout the film." Kartikeya emphasised the film's thematic relevance to his current image as an actor: "*Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* aligns perfectly with my evolving persona as an actor. I believe a hero should embody relatable qualities and confront challenges in an inspiring manner. This film offers

a blend of heroism, action, sentiment, and emotion, which resonates deeply with me. While it may not feature the same intensity of action as *Khaidhi*, its emotional drive and gripping storyline captivated me from the start." Regarding the film's musical elements, Kartikeya shed light on the strategic integration of songs within the narrative: "*Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* deviates from the conventional approach to song placement in cinema. Instead of disrupting the flow of the narrative, each song serves to advance the story organically. While one particular song from the film has garnered attention, our focus remains on seamlessly integrating music to enhance the overall storytelling experience." In closing, Kartikeya expressed his appreciation for the collaborative effort behind the film. He shared, "I attribute the success of *Bhaje Vaayu Vegam* entirely to the vision of director Prashanth Reddy. While I offer input on matters close to my heart, the creative direction of the film rests solely with him. Working alongside Rahul Tyson has been a rewarding experience and his involvement adds a fresh dynamic to our on-screen chemistry. As I look ahead, I remain committed to exploring diverse roles and collaborating with talented filmmakers like Prashanth in the future."