



the pioneer

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PM Modi to visit Russia, Austria from July 8 to 10

OOMPHING UP HER GLAM WITH SUNKISSED VIBES IN MAURITIUS

Niharika NM set for Tollywood DEBUT!

QUOTE OF THE DAY

BRS MP Keshava Rao resigned from the RS after joining the Congress. We welcome his decision. What about the BRS MLA who defected and contested to the Lok Sabha on a Congress ticket? What about the half a dozen other BRS MLAs who defected to the Congress? Rahul, is this how you are going to uphold the Constitution? If you can't make the BRS MLAs resign, how can the nation trust that you are committed to scheduling the 10th amendment as per the Congress manifesto? Yeh Kaisa Nyay Patra Hain.

- K Taraka Rama Rao, BRS MLA P4

DON'T MISS...

Naidu holds talks with 6 Union...

In a move to address the pressing issues of Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu visited New Delhi on Thursday and met with six Union Ministers. During these meetings, he brought multiple issues to the attention of the respective ministries, seeking timely intervention and action from the Government of India. CM Chandrababu Naidu met with Home Minister Amit Shah to discuss several critical issues. He requested the release of 7385 crore for land costs and 727.54 crore for operational costs to establish the...

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Battles of Tololing, Tiger Hill proved...

Barely four months into his service, a young Lieutenant Balwan Singh led the Indian Army's Ghatkhat Platoon in a strategic assault on Pakistani intruders during the Kargil war and was among the brave soldiers who captured Tiger Hill on July 4, 1999. "There was no looking back from there. It was victory after the capture of the Tiger Hill," recalls Singh, now a colonel with the famed 18 Grenadiers, who was injured while fighting the enemy but continued to fight. He was honoured with...

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Cement sector sees marginal growth...

The cement sector has witnessed a muted growth of 2-3 per cent in the first quarter of current fiscal on account of a slowdown in construction activity because of the Lok Sabha polls, according to a report from rating agency Icria. However, the overall volumes for the FY2024-25 are likely to expand by 7-8 per cent driven by a healthy demand from the infrastructure and housing sectors. "Nevertheless, the government's focus on infrastructure projects, sanction of additional houses under the Pradhan...

-PAGE: 8

Bopanna-Ebden move to second...

India's Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden moved into the second round of the Wimbledon men's doubles event with a smooth win over Robin Haas and Sander Arends here. Bopanna and Ebden sailed past their Dutch opponents 7-5, 6-4 in an hour and 11 minutes in a rain-interrupted match on Wednesday. The second seeds, who are the current Australian Open champions, will face Germany's Hendrik Jebens and Constantin Frantzen in the second round...

-SPORTS

DEVELOPMENT OF AP

CM seeks PM's support

Naidu highlights challenges faced by State after bifurcation

PNS ■ DELHI/VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the latter's residence in New Delhi on Thursday. Naidu congratulated PM Modi on his election to a third consecutive term and expressed confidence in his leadership. He noted that the recent NDA coalition victory represents a significant mandate from the people of Andhra Pradesh, reflecting their trust in the Union government.

CM Naidu highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by Andhra Pradesh as a result of the 2014 bifurcation, which was exacerbated by poor governance under the previous administration. He pointed out that the State's fiscal situation has deteriorated due to the previous government's mismanagement and lack of strategic development planning. This has led to a decline in growth, revenue receipts, and an increase in liabilities.

Naidu said that Andhra Pradesh is struggling with severe financial constraints, as committed expenses such as salaries, pensions, and debt servicing exceed the State's revenue.

This has left no room for productive capital investment. The situation has worsened due to indiscriminate borrowing and mismanagement of state finances by the previous administration.

Continued on Page 2



NAIDU'S WISH LIST

- Short-term financial support to stabilise state finances.
- Assistance in the commissioning of the Polavaram National Irrigation Project.
- Financial backing for the completion of the Amaravati government complex and trunk infrastructure.
- Incentives for industrial development.
- Support for backward regions of Andhra Pradesh, similar to the Bundelkhand package.
- Development support for the Dugarajapatnam port.
- Additional allocation under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for capital investment in essential sectors like roads, bridges, irrigation, and drinking water.

Govt to probe Tanuku TDR bonds irregularities

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister P. Narayana has announced an investigation into irregularities associated with the Tanuku TDR bonds. He stated that numerous issues have emerged, causing significant trouble for bondholders. On Thursday, the minister highlighted irregularities in granting permissions for the Nellore and Kadapa layouts. A committee has been established to investigate these discrepancies, and further actions will be based on the committee's findings.

Narayana revealed that there were considerable irregularities with the Tanuku TDR bonds, including a report indicating that over Rs 700 crore was disbursed instead of the allocated Rs 36 crore. He assured that detailed information would be disclosed following a thorough investigation. The minister emphasized that the fault lies with the sellers, not the bondholders.

The minister also addressed financial issues related to housing projects managed by the urban authority. He mentioned that discussions with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu would determine the next steps.

Narayana criticized the previous government for mismanaging finances and diverting funds meant for municipalities.

He noted that during the TDP administration, Rs 5,300 crores were secured from the Asian Infrastructure Bank in February 2019, but the current YSRCP government has not utilized Rs 240 crore of these funds, with the deadline having expired on the 30th of last month. He argued that even partial utilization of these funds could have significantly improved municipal infrastructure. A request to extend the project deadline has been sent to the Bank authorities.

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MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME DURING JAGAN GOVT Egg, chikki suppliers' dues remain unpaid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During a review of the mid-day meal scheme on Thursday by Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics Nara Lokesh, disturbing revelations emerged about the implementation of the programme over the past five years.

The review highlighted that former chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, who had pledged to ensure the wel-

fare of all children, had failed to deliver on his promises. Key findings from the meeting at the State Secretariat revealed that eggs, which are supposed to be included in students' lunches, were not provided in several schools within the Guntur Municipal Corporation limits.

A significant issue uncovered was the outstanding payment to contractors: Rs 112.5 crore for egg supply since December 2023, which led to



Education Minister Nara Lokesh addressing a review meeting on Thursday

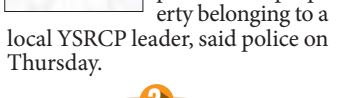
a halt in deliveries. Additionally, the payment arrears for the chikki con-

tractor amount to Rs 66 crore from the previous year. **Continued on Page 2**

Kolikapudi booked

PNS ■ KHAMBAMPADU (NTR DIST)

A case has been registered against ruling TDP MLA Kolikapudi Srinivasa Rao here for allegedly demolishing a portion of a property belonging to a local YSRCP leader, said police on Thursday.



2

CM Naidu creating fear psychosis: Jagan



PNS ■ NELLORE

YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday accused Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu of creating a fear psychosis among people who did not vote for him.

The former chief minister also charged that people who did not vote for Naidu's TDP were being targeted across the state with their assets being destroyed, apart from physical attacks and false cases.

"Across the State, just because some people did not vote for the TDP and Naidu, their assets are being destroyed and false cases are being filed. They (ruling party cadres) are beating up their opponents (YSRCP supporters) and filing cases against the victims," Jagan Mohan Reddy told reporters outside the Nellore Central Jail.

Reddy met YSRCP leader P Ramakrishna Reddy in the Central prison.

Ramakrishna Reddy is in jail for allegedly attacking a police inspec-

tor at Karampudi village on May 14. He was also booked for smashing an EVM in Macherla Assembly constituency on polling day (May 13).

Further, the opposition YSRCP leader alleged the statues of the late YS Rajasekhara Reddy were being damaged.

Noting that the politics of creating a fear psychosis will not take TDP far in the long term, Reddy compared the present government in the state with the erstwhile YSRCP regime which he had led and asserted his government did not discriminate against anybody.

Reddy claimed that "the YSRCP lost after doing good to people. It lost because of the deceptive promises of Naidu. People got swayed..." he added.

Instead of allegedly focusing on creating a fear psychosis, Reddy advised Naidu to concentrate on delivering the promises he made to people in the run-up to the polls.

2



Demolitions only if buildings affect public safety: HC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has addressed a series of writ petitions filed by the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) challenging demolition notices issued to party offices in 10 districts. The court ruled that no demolition order should be confirmed without first hearing the party's concerns. Justice B. Krishna Mohan stated that demolitions could only be carried out if the building in question posed a risk to public safety.

The YSRCP argued that their offices were being targeted following a change in the state's governance. The contested notices were issued on June 24, and the petitions were filed on June 26.

It was argued that the notices were not issued by a competent authority.

Additionally, the petitioners contended that demolition orders should be a last resort and not executed whimsically at the behest of the ruling party.

2

Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah

BY B KRISHNA PRASAD

Our ancient Puranas and Vedas proclaim 'Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah' (If you protect Dharma, then Dharma will protect you). This age-old adage found resonance during a recent press conference held by former chief minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy in Nellore, following his visit to former MLA Pinnelli Ramkrishna Reddy in prison.

Several interesting points emerged during the event. Firstly, Jagan Mohan Reddy surprised many by attributing Pinnelli's four-time election as an MLA to his inherent goodness, suggesting that merely being elected as an MLA is a virtue. This comment overlooks the fact that current Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has



been elected as an MLA eight times, surpassing Pinnelli's record.

Secondly, Jagan Mohan Reddy remarked that power is not permanent and vowed to rectify things once he returned to power. In contrast,

Following his defeat at the hustings recently, Jagan Mohan Reddy has not addressed criticism regarding his handling of key issues. Instead, his first public appearance focused on defending a tainted MLA who was caught on camera tampering with EVMs, actions widely broadcast on TV. This raises questions about his priorities.

Chandrababu Naidu, who has served as Chief Minister four times and as Leader of the Opposition three times, has never claimed that power is everlasting. Notably, it was Jagan Mohan Reddy himself

who once declared he would remain in power for 30 years, making his current comments on the dynamics of power seem contradictory and ridiculous.

Following his defeat at the hustings recently, Jagan Mohan Reddy has not addressed criticism regarding his handling of key issues such as Amaravati, Polavaram, and the Special Category Status for the State. Instead, his first public appearance focused on defending a tainted MLA who was caught on camera tampering with EVMs, actions widely broadcast on television. This raises questions about his priorities and underscores the need for him to review his actions and responses towards the government, aiming to fulfil a constructive Opposition role.

'35,404 MT of PDS rice worth Rs 159 cr seized'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Civil Supplies Minister Nadendra Manohar reiterated that the Public Distribution Rice scam is very big in AP and that such a scam had not taken place in any State in the country.

Addressing a press conference in the Civil Supplies office at Kanuru near here on Thursday, the Minister said that 35,404 metric tonnes of PDS rice, worth Rs 159 crore had been seized in one week. A former MLA and his family extended patronage to the PDS rice mafia in all districts in the state, he alleged.

The Minister warned of taking stringent action against the culprits in the PDS rice illegal export scam.

"All steps are being taken to contain the PDS rice mafia. Intense checking is being carried out in every district to find out stocks of rice. The govern-



"We have seen the organized PDS rice mafia in Kakinada. We will not tolerate the food mafia. The Godowns which are located adjacent to the seaport were seized. For the first time, the officials entered the godown and inspected the stock."

ment is determined to eradicate the PDS rice mafia," he announced.

"We have seen the organized PDS rice mafia in Kakinada. We will not tolerate the food mafia. The Godowns which are located

adjacent to the seaport were seized. For the first time, the officials entered the godown and inspected the stock," the Minister stated.

The erstwhile YSRCP government did not pay Rs 1659 crore to the farmers for the paddy produce, which was purchased by the government. "Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has sanctioned Rs 1000 crore to disburse to the farmers for the paddy produce," Nadendra Manohar disclosed, adding that over 50,000 farmers will get money for their paddy produce.

Industry bodies laud CM's economic vision

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With N Chandrababu Naidu back at the helm as Chief Minister, industrial bodies are anticipating a rejuvenated era of economic growth across Andhra Pradesh. Expectations are high that his pro-corporate stance will pave the way for a thriving investment climate, transforming Visakhapatnam into a burgeoning economic powerhouse and Amaravati into a hub for education and tourism.

Leaders from prominent industrial associations such as the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), and AP Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation express confidence in Naidu's ability to replicate past successes. They anticipate Visakhapatnam evolving into a dynamic economic hub and Amaravati emerging as a centre for education and tourism under his stewardship.

In his inaugural address,



newly appointed Industries, Commerce, and Food Processing Minister TG Bharat outlined ambitious plans to emulate Gujarat's economic model. Bharat criticized the previous administration for industry exodus, pledging to foster an environment conducive to industrial growth over the next five years.

Speaking to The Pioneer, CII Visakhapatnam zone Chairman, Grandhi Rajesh, emphasised the pivotal role of industry-friendly policies in driving investments across diverse sectors. Rajesh proposed a comprehensive New Industrial Policy, advocating

for three key categories of fiscal incentives. These include Capital Linked Incentives for subsidies on fixed capital investments and interest subsidies on loans, Expenditure Linked Incentives for exemptions on electricity duties and tariff rebates, and Sales Linked Incentives tied to GST reimbursements and turnover-based incentives.

Rajesh further stressed the importance of supporting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through financial aid and exemptions to enhance their global competitiveness. He also highlighted the potential for Andhra Pradesh to attract global R&D investments, proposing financial assistance for independent R&D projects and support for establishing R&D centres in strategic sectors. With a strategic focus on reviving the Sunrise Partnership Summits and offering attractive incentives, Naidu's administration aims to position Andhra Pradesh as a premier investment destination.



Service activities to mark YSR's 75th birth anniversary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and YSR Congress leader Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) announced that the YSR Congress Party will celebrate the 75th birth anniversary of the late chief minister Dr. YS Rajasekhara Reddy on July 8 by organising large-scale service programmes across the State.

He stated that the party aims to continue the noble spirit with which it was founded by engaging in various charity works. As part of these initiatives, all members of the YSRCP family are encouraged to choose and undertake service programs such as blood donation drives, distribution of books in schools, and tree planting in roads and colonies. Perni Nani said that following the vision of YSRCP State president and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, every YSRCP member should organize voluntary service activities. He urged all party members to participate with renewed vigour in these activities in remembrance of Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Demolitions only if...

Continued from Page 1

The High Court directed the State not to take any coercive actions against the petitioner party without giving them an opportunity to explain and sufficient time to file a reply.

The Court emphasized that 'public safety' was the only criterion under which a demolition order could be justified.

Previously, the Bench had sought to resolve the writs by instructing government officials to follow the procedure established by law.

However, the petitioners opposed this, citing a similar case where the State demolished a construction the day after agreeing to comply with the court's orders.

Lokesh performs special pooja at Mahankali temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

IT Minister Nara Lokesh on Thursday visited the Goddess Mahankali temple in Kantharaja Kondur, located in Duggirala mandal of Guntur district. During the visit, a saree was offered to the presiding deity, and a special pooja was performed. Following the rituals, the temple priests presented the minister with Tirtha prasadam and a portrait of the goddess. Vedic scholars also offered their blessings to the minister.

In addition to his visit to the temple, Minister Lokesh inspected the newly constructed temple structures in Duggirala Mandal.

He inquired about the progress of the construction and emphasised the need for



further development. Given the influx of visitors from various districts across the state, Lokesh stressed the importance of improving facilities such as roads, parking, and

other amenities to enhance the convenience of devotees. He directed officials to prepare a comprehensive plan for the development of the surrounding areas of the temple.

Anti-narcotic task force to be established in AP Special toll-free number to combat ganja: Home Minister Anitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Home and Disaster Management Minister Anitha Vangalapati announced the government's decision to appoint an anti-narcotic task force to control the trafficking of ganja (cannabis) and other drugs. The Minister also mentioned that a special toll-free number would soon be set up to assist in this effort.

This announcement was made during the first meeting of the ministerial sub-committee for controlling ganja and other narcotics in the state, held on Thursday at the state secretariat.

The sub-committee, chaired by Minister Anitha, included State Education, IT and Electronics Minister Nara Lokesh, State Mines and Mineral Resources and Excise Minister Kollu Ravindra, State Health and Family Welfare Minister Satyakumar Yadav, and State Tribal Welfare



Minister Gummidi Sandhyarani, along with other officials. The meeting focused on discussing robust measures to curb the use and distribution of ganja and other drugs in Andhra Pradesh.

Minister Anitha stated that, under the guidance of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, Andhra Pradesh is committed to becoming a drug-free state. She emphasized the importance of adhering to a structured plan, noting that drug addiction can irreparably damage the lives and families of young people.

The Minister reiterated the

government's firm stance, highlighting that no permissions have been granted to the Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) for the past two years to destroy cannabis crops. She stressed that strict actions will be taken against those involved in the cultivation and transportation of ganja.

Additionally, plans are in place to establish de-addiction and rehabilitation centers, and to educate students about the dangers of drug use from an early age. Surveillance will be increased to monitor those investing in cannabis cultivation and those out on default

baill. A task force will be formed within 100 days, and individuals providing information on ganja cultivation will be rewarded by the government.

Minister for Tribal Welfare, Women and Child Welfare, Gummadi Sandhyarani, remarked that while eradication is a long-term process, immediate control is essential. Awareness seminars will be conducted to educate tribal communities about the adverse effects of cannabis cultivation and consumption on government-allocated lands. Minister Sandhyarani urged the public to collaborate with the government in eradicating ganja and drugs, assuring them that their information would remain confidential and they would receive appropriate assistance.

State Director General of Police Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao and CID Chief Ravi Shankar Ayyannar were also present at the meeting.

AP Chambers submits roadmap for AP's growth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation from AP Chambers, led by its general secretary B. Raja Sekhar, met with the Minister for Industries and Commerce, TG Bharath, to submit the 'Roadmap for the Rapid Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh'. The meeting took place at the minister's office in Mangalagiri on Thursday.

Raja Sekhar stated that the roadmap outlines the current scenario of each sector in Andhra Pradesh and provides detailed suggestions for their development.

The delegation highlighted major issues faced by various sectors and requested the Minister to address these



issues to promote industrial growth in the state. The Minister responded affirmatively, assuring the delegation that he would look into the issues presented.

Alongside General Secretary B. Raja Sekhar, the meeting included members P. Koti Rao, T. Pardhasaradhi, Saku Madhavi, Bayana Venkat Rao, M.S. Ramachandra Rao, G. Radhika, Aparna, G. Vijay

Kumar, V. Vamsi Krishna, and Phanindra. These members represent sectors such as engineering, food processing, textiles, and MSMEs.

Associations affiliated with AP Chambers, including the AP Textiles Mills Association, AP MSME Industries Association, and AP Food Processing Industries Federation, also participated in the meeting.

Kolikapudi...

Continued from Page 1

Tiruvuru MLA Rao allegedly led the demolition of the sunshade of YSRCP leader K Nagalakshmi's under-construction building recently.

"Alleging that it was an illegal construction on an encroached land, he (Rao) came with TDP cadres and demolished it partially," the official said.

A case has been registered against Rao and his followers under BNS sections 329 (1), 189, 324 (1) read with 190.

An investigation is on to identify others involved.

Meanwhile, local revenue department officials took possession of the disputed structure.

The local panchayat also served a seven-day notice demanding an explanation from the owners of the building.

Govt to probe...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, Minister Narayana criticized the YSRCP government for the improper use of funds for the Amrit-1 and Amrit-2 drinking water projects.

He pointed out that despite receiving over Rs 500 crores from the central government under the 15th Finance Commission, there are issues with bill submissions and Rs 1150 crores remain pending. He also noted that while 9 lakh TIDCO houses were developed, the YSRCP government has largely neglected them.

TODAY	
ALMANAC	
Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Amavasya	Jul 05 04:58 AM to Jul 06 04:27 AM
Sukla Paksha	
Pratipada:	Jul 06 04:27 AM to Jul 07 04:26 AM
Nakshatram:	
Ardra:	Jul 05 03:54 AM to Jul 06 04:06 AM
Punarvasu:	Jul 06 04:06 AM to Jul 07 04:48 AM
Rahukalam:	10:43 AM to 12:20 PM
Yamagandam:	3:35 PM to 5:13 PM
Varjyam:	04:27 PM to 06:06 PM
Gulika:	7:28 AM to 9:05 AM
Amritakalam:	06:01 PM to 07:38 PM
Ahijit Muhurtham:	11:54 AM to 12:46 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER	
Forecast:	Mostly Cloudy
Temp:	35°
Humidity:	65%
Sunrise:	05:40 AM
Sunset:	18:44 PM
Updated:	July 4, 2024 5:00 PM

OPPOSING ANY BID TO CANCEL EXAM...

Successful NEET-UG candidates move SC for direction to Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 50 successful Gujarat-based NEET-UG candidates, including several who have been ranked first, have moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to restrain the Centre and the National Testing Agency from cancelling the controversy-ridden exam.

They have sought a direction from the top court to the Union Education Ministry to probe, identify and take strict action against students and others who indulged in unfair practices like paper leak and impersonation in the NEET-UG exam conducted on May 5 this year.

The fresh plea by 56 students has been filed days before a top court bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud is scheduled to hear as many as 26 petitions seeking reliefs like re-test and probe into the conduct of the examination plagued by allegations of malpractices. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) is conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) for admission to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in government and private institutions across the country. NEET-UG, 2024 was held across 4,750 centres on May 5 and around 24 lakh candidates appeared in the exam.

Allegations of irregularities, including paper leaks, have led to protests in several cities and sparring between rival political parties.

The pleas seeking cancellation of the exam, re-test and high-level probe are listed for hear-



ing on July 8 in the SC. The fresh plea of Sidharth Komal Singla and 55 other students was filed through lawyer Devendra Singh.

It said "The Hon'ble court may further direct the respondents (Centre and the NTA) not to re-conduct NEET-UG ... as that would not only be unreasonable and harsh for the honest and hardworking students but also would lead to the infringement of the Right to Education and therefore violative of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution."

The plea sought a direction to the Centre and the NTA to identify and punish the examinees who adopted unfair means, identify the centres and take appropriate action where any "compromise to the established guidelines for NEET-UG 2024 examinations has been done."

The Petitioners are young students around 17-18 years of age, and to achieve their dream of becoming a doctor, they have given their 100 per cent and have cleared the exam after consistent hard work of more than 3-4 years, it said.

Manyam Veeru Alluri Seetharamaraju on his birth anniversary in Delhi.

Additionally, CM Naidu met with several Union Ministers, including Amit Shah, Piyush Goyal, Nitin Gadkari, and Dr. Arvind Panagariya, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission. He also had meetings with Union Ministers Manohar Lal Khattar and Hardeep Singh Puri.

CM seeks PM's support...

Continued from Page 1

The meeting concluded positively, with a focus on achieving beneficial outcomes for Andhra Pradesh. Earlier in the day, CM Naidu, along with Andhra Pradesh ministers and MPs, paid tribute to the portrait of

Fee hikes in Vizag's private schools roil parents

Fee hike, ranging from 20 to 30 per cent, affects schools offering corporate, CBSE/ICSE syllabus

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Private schools across the city have implemented significant fee hikes, leaving parents reeling from the financial strain. This surge, ranging from 20 to 30 percent, primarily affects schools offering corporate, CBSE/ICSE syllabus, and IIT/NEET foundation courses. For average families, enrolling their children in these schools means an annual expenditure of over Rs. 1 lakh, with an additional Rs. 50,000 spent on books, uniforms, shoes, and supplies. Schools with air-conditioned facilities charge even more, predominantly situated in the city's suburbs.

Out of the district's 1,389 schools, 780 are private institutions. Last academic year, 3.9 lakh students attended classes from 1 to 10, with about 90,000 in government schools and three lakh in private schools. This year, many first-graders are being enrolled in private schools, aggravating parents' concerns as management increases fees.

Sashibhusan Rao, a wholesale fruit merchant in Poorna Market, highlighted the additional burden placed on parents as schools increasingly monopolise the sale of study



Out of the district's 1,389 schools, 780 are private institutions. Last academic year, 3.9 lakh students attended classes from 1 to 10, with about 90,000 in government schools and three lakh in private schools. This year, many first-graders are being enrolled in private schools, aggravating parents' concerns as management increases fees.

materials. Despite availability in the open market, textbooks and other essentials are often mandated for purchase on school premises, with little transparency on costs. One parent reported spending Rs. 5,500 on notebooks and study materials alone, with textbooks for a ninth grader adding another Rs. 1,100, further straining household budgets.

Kameswar Rao, a retired principal of a government school, expressed concern over the regulatory vacuum left by the State government's inaction. While a district-level committee theoretically oversees fee regulations, its efficacy has been stymied by bureaucratic inertia. Critics point to allegations of corruption within mandal education offices,

alleging that recognition for private schools is contingent on under-the-table payments, further undermining the efforts to control fees.

Renuka Rao, a guardian with children in corporate schools, lamented the lack of proactive measures from education officials. "If there had been early dialogue and firm directives from the outset," she remarked, "perhaps this situation could have been averted." Such sentiments echo across the city as families increasingly feel exploited by opaque fee structures and rising costs. Recently, notices were issued for recognising private schools in the district, but allegations suggest that many mandal education officials demand bribes for granting

recognition, thus neglecting fee regulation.

Parents across the city are voicing their concerns and frustrations. "It feels like we're being taken advantage of," said one parent. "The costs are becoming unbearable, and there's no transparency." As the new academic year begins, the burden on parents continues to grow, highlighting the urgent need for regulatory intervention to address the spiraling costs of private education in the city. The collective outcry from parents underscores a pressing issue: the need for a well-defined and enforced regulatory framework to protect the interests of students and their families from exploitative practices in private education.

Minister lauds Indla's hospital

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Noted doctors Dr Indla Ramasubba Reddy and Dr Vishal Indla welcomed Minister for Transport, Sports and Youth Affairs M Ramprasad Reddy to Indla's Hospital at Suryaraopet in Vijayawada on Thursday. The doctor duo felicitated the minister on his visit to Indla's Hospitals in Vijayawada today.

The Minister congratulated Dr Indla Ramasubba Reddy and his son Dr Vishal for coming from Kadapa and starting the first psychiatric hospital at Vijayawada 42 years back serving the people and bringing name to his native district and people. He congratulated both father and son for all the services in the field of mental health and alcohol and drug addiction. Interestingly the minister also hails from the place where the doctor was from.

Rich tributes paid to Alluri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the occasion of the 126th Birth Anniversary of Freedom Fighter Alluri Sitarama Raju, tributes were paid across various locations in Andhra Pradesh. At Vidyut Soudha in Vijayawada, Special Chief Secretary of Energy and APTRANSCO Chairman & Managing Director K. Vijayanand, along with top officials from power utilities, honoured Raju's memory by garlanding his portrait. Vijayanand urged power sector employees to honour Raju by embodying his ideals and values in their work for the betterment of society and the nation.

At the police headquarters, DGP Ch. Dwaraka Thirumala Rao paid homage to Alluri Sitarama Raju's portrait, emphasising the importance of remembering those who sacrificed their lives for the country. The DGP highlighted Raju's fight against British rule and his dedication to the welfare of the people of Manyam.

The 127th birth anniversary



of Alluri Sitarama Raju was also celebrated with grandeur at the RTC Headquarters. Executive Director (Admin) KS Brahmananda Reddy, the chief guest, offered floral tributes to Raju's portrait. Deputy CPM (HRD) Kumari Samrajyam presided over the event, where she praised Raju's revolutionary efforts and his commitment to the freedom struggle. She noted Raju's role in uniting and mobilizing oppressed tribal communities against British oppres-

sion, marking him as a memorable figure in India's history.

In the NTR district, Police Commissioner Ph. D. Ramakrishna, DCP K. Srinivasa Rao, and ADCP Krishnamurthy Naidu paid their respects to Alluri Sitarama Raju. The Police Commissioner reflected on Raju's significant role in India's independence movement, describing him as a formidable force who fought against the British with limited resources and a strong sense of sacrifice.

SRM signs MoU with ASPIRE BioNEST

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University-AP has signed an MoU with the Association for Scientific Pursuits in Innovative Research BioNEST (ASPIRE BioNEST) of the University of Hyderabad, facilitating a dynamic transformation in the innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem of the institute. Prof S Rajagopal, Director ASPIRE BioNEST and Dr R Premkumar, Registrar, SRM University, signed the MoU in the presence of Dr Anil Kondreddy, COO, ASPIRE BioNEST, Prof. Jayaseelan Murugaiyan, Associate Dean-Sciences, SRM University-AP, and Dr Pitthai Cherkuri, Assistant Professor, SRM University.

The agreement will ensure guidance and support from ASPIRE BioNEST in establishing, operating and maintaining the best innovation and incubation practices at the SRM University-AP incubation centres. ASPIRE BioNEST will also provide support in selection of incubates/start-ups, finalising facilities/designs, procurement of instruments and help in formulating guidelines and policies for operating



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incubation centres at the university.

The MoU is a significant milestone for the young innovators and venturers at SRM as ASPIRE BioNEST will furnish internship opportunities with

incubatees and startups at ASPIRE, mentor support for startups, collaboration in applying for grant proposals and raising funds, and training and skill development programmes.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Manoj K Arora expressed his ardour on the collaboration. He stated that ASPIRE BioNEST is one of the best bio-incubators where most of the innovative research is translated into technologies. "As an institute to prioritise innovation and entrepreneurship, this MoU will stimulate and enrich SRM University's entrepreneurial culture, helping us to become one of the preferred incubation and innovation centres in Andhra Pradesh," he said.

FOUL PLAY ALLEGED IN GIRL'S DEATH

Parents lodge complaint with State Women's Commission



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The parents and relatives of Karishma (17), a madrasa student of Vijayawada's Ajit Singh Nagar Luna Centre who died under suspicious circumstances a few days ago, approached the State Women's Commission office in Mangalagiri on Thursday. They lodged complaints with Commission Chairperson Gajjala Venkata Lakshmi regarding suspicions about Karishma's death. They said that they are from Angaluru in Gudlavalluru mandal of Krishna district and their daughter Karishma has completed seventh standard. Less than a year ago, Karishma was admitted to a madrasa to study a three-year Arabic course.

The parents expressed suspicion that their daughter took her life due to some violence. They explained that when they protested at the

madrasa that they would not take the body until they got justice, the police forced them to stop the dharna. They submitted a petition to find out the reasons behind the madrasa administrators taking their daughter to the hospital after she died, as injuries were visible on the girl's body.

Gajjala Venkata Lakshmi assured them of justice. She said that they have already taken a suo moto case regarding the incident and have also ordered the DGP to find out the causes of Karishma's death by conducting a thorough investigation considering this case as a sensitive matter. The women's panel chief said that the Police Department is conducting an effective investigation and dispelling the suspicions of the victim's parents, and those who have committed the crime will be punished. She assured that she will stand by the victim's family until justice is done.

CREDAI hails State govt's free sand initiative

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) Andhra Pradesh chapter has expressed appreciation for the state government's recent decision to provide sand free of charge. CREDAI President YV Ramana Rao, Chairman Alla Siva Reddy, and General Secretary B Srinivas Rao hailed the move as a significant boost and encouragement for the construction and real estate sectors.

In a release on Thursday, they

highlighted that they had recently met with Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, IT Minister Nara Lokesh, and Mines Minister Kollu Ravindra to discuss the challenges faced by the construction and real estate sectors over the past five years. The government officials assured their support for the sector. The Mines Minister K. Ravindra responded positively to their concerns, announcing that a new sand policy would be implemented, with sand supplied free of cost by the state government.

Adani Krishnapatnam Port CEO receives Lifetime Achievement Award

PNS ■ NELLORE

Adani Krishnapatnam Port Limited (AKPL), a part of Adani Ports and SEZ Limited, has announced that its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), GJ Rao, has been honoured with the prestigious Southeast Cargo and Logistics Lifetime Achievement Award 2024. The award, instituted by Exim India Shipping Times, recognises Rao's outstanding contributions to the cargo and logistics sector.

The award ceremony took place during the 15th edition of the Southeast CEO Conclave & Awards (SECC) in Chennai. The event brought together industry experts, pro-



fessionals, thought leaders, policymakers, regulators, shippers, and consignees to discuss pressing issues affecting the region and beyond, exchange ideas, and foster valuable con-

nections. Currently, Rao serves as the Managing Director and CEO of Adani Krishnapatnam Port Ltd (AKPL) in SPSR Nellore district, Andhra

Pradesh, and Kattupalli & Ennore Ports in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He holds overall responsibility for port operations, management, and business profitability.

Leaking roof at Chintapalli birth waiting room poses risk

The roof of the dormitory was damaged over a year ago

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Expectant mothers at the birth waiting room managed by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) in Chintapalli are facing severe discomfort and potential health risks due to a leaking roof. The facility, which plays a crucial role in providing care to women awaiting delivery, has been plagued by rainwater seeping through numerous breaches, flooding the room and creating an inhospitable environment.

The roof of the dormitory was damaged over a year ago, and despite numerous appeals to authorities for repairs, the issue remains unresolved. Speaking to The Pioneer, District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Jamal Basha said, "The waiting room needs renovation. We have requested officials to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the location and will submit renovation proposals."

A glimmer of hope emerged in 2018 with the Telugu Desam Party's proposal to establish birth waiting rooms in tribal areas to provide suitable accommodation close to hospitals, ensuring timely delivery for pregnant women. However, these proposals were largely ignored until 2021, when Ronangi Gopalakrishna, the project officer of Paderu ITDA, allocated Rs 7.5 lakh from ITDA funds to construct the birth waiting room in Chintapalli. The Tribal Welfare Department's engineering officials repurposed the Kalyana Mandapam at Santabayalu to accommodate pregnant women.

Since its inauguration, the facility has been operational under ITDA supervision, accommodating 10 to 15 pregnant women daily. Three staff nurses attend to them in shifts, providing nutritional meals and

ensuring an ambulance is on standby for prompt transportation to the area hospital when labor begins.

Hospital Superintendent Dr S Chandrashekar noted that the birth waiting room staff failed to inform officials about the leaking roof issues promptly. As the rainy season intensifies, addressing these infrastructural challenges becomes increasingly urgent to ensure the safety and comfort of the expectant mothers who rely on this essential service.

The situation at the birth waiting room has reached a critical point, with rainwater continuing to seep through the roof, soaking mattresses and pooling on the floor. This not only creates an uncomfortable environment but also poses serious health risks to the women and their unborn children. In addition to the physical discomfort, there are concerns about the potential spread of waterborne diseases.

Efforts to resolve the issue have been hampered by bureaucratic delays and a lack of resources. The local community has expressed frustration over the slow response from authorities, highlighting the need for immediate intervention. The birth waiting room, intended to be a safe haven for expectant mothers, now stands as a testament to the neglect and challenges faced by tribal communities in accessing basic healthcare facilities.

Every day of delay prolongs the suffering of women like Jartha Kasulamma and M. Daramalleshwari, who face these challenges with courage. Their resilience highlights the critical need for healthcare infrastructure in underserved areas. As the monsoon season continues, ensuring safe conditions for Chintapalli's pregnant women becomes more urgent.

Apitoria Pharma managers celebrate graduation

They completed GITAM Management Development Programme for experienced professionals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Middle-level managers from Apitoria Pharma Ltd., a subsidiary of Aurobindo Pharma, donned their graduation caps and gowns on Thursday, in celebration of completing the GITAM Deemed to be University's Management Development Programme (MDP). Designed for experienced professionals, the programme equipped participants with advanced leadership skills and strategic management knowledge. The curriculum included intensive coursework, practical case studies, and collaborative projects, focusing on areas like organisational behaviour and financial management. This prepared the managers, all in their 40s, to navigate complex business environments and drive posi-



itive change within Apitoria Pharma. The ceremony was a joyous occasion filled with camaraderie. Graduates highlighted the programme's impact on not only knowledge acquisition,

but also fostering professional connections and personal growth. "We are incredibly proud to celebrate the accomplishments of our middle-level managers," said GITAM School of Business Dean Prof. Raja

P.Pappu. He spoke about the unique learning experience for faculty and the university's commitment to tailoring programmes to specific industry needs. He commended the managers for their dedication

to continuous learning. Ravinatha Shetty, Head of Operations at Apitoria Pharma, expressed appreciation for the programme's quality and the ongoing partnership with GITAM. He observed a posi-

tive impact on the performance of Apitoria Pharma's middle management. Other Apitoria Pharma officials echoed this sentiment.

Dr Srilalitha, MDP Chairperson at GITAM School of Business, and Som Bhatt, Deputy Director of GITAM Consultancy Wing, elaborated on the programme's diverse teaching methods. These included classroom training, case studies, simulations, role plays, group discussions, project-based learning initiatives, and industry connect sessions. The programme even offered sessions on yoga, building workplace relationships, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and personal branding.

Graduates expressed their gratitude for the programme's comprehensiveness and supportive environment.



Minister pays tributes to freedom fighter Alluri

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Tourism and Cinematography Kandula Durgesh paid rich tributes to freedom fighter Alluri Sitarama Raju on his 127th anniversary.

The Minister paid tributes by garlanding the statue of Alluri Sitarama Raju in Nidadavolu at Gandhi Centre on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister hailed Sitharama Raju as a great freedom fighter who fought against the British government and solved the problems of the tribal people.

Alluri Sitarama Raju fought intending to give freedom to the people of India who were under the shackles of slavery under British rule, he said, adding that his fighting spirit was an ideal for the youth.

Alluri Sitarama Raju fought with the British rulers to make India a democratic republic, the Minister recalled.

Despite Alluri Sitarama Raju living only 27 years, his name would remain for centuries for his battle against British rule, Kandula Durgesh praised.

Naidu holds talks on AP issues with six Union Ministers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a move to address the pressing issues of Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu visited New Delhi on Thursday and met with six Union Ministers. During these meetings, he brought multiple issues to the attention of the respective ministries, seeking timely intervention and action from the Government of India.

CM Chandrababu Naidu met with Home Minister Amit Shah to discuss several critical issues. He requested the release of ₹385 crore for land costs and ₹27.54 crore for operational costs to establish the Greyhounds Training Centre. Additionally, he addressed the division of assets under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014, the bifurcation of institutions under Schedule X, and the resolution of financial disputes between APGENCO and Telangana Discoms. The Chief Minister also emphasized the need for an early IPS cadre review to increase the strength from 79 to 117, a request pending since 2015.

In his meeting with Nitin Gadkari, the CM highlighted several infrastructure projects crucial for the state's development. He pushed for the reconsideration and immediate sanction of the Outer Ring Road (ORR) project for Amaravati.



Other projects discussed included the 6/8-laning of the highway from Hyderabad to Vijayawada, the development of a greenfield express highway from Hyderabad to Amaravati, and the Vijayawada Eastern Bypass. The CM also urged the expeditious completion and sanction of the DPR by NHAI for these projects, as well as the development of 4-lane greenfield highways from Kuppam to Hosur and from Mulapeta to Visakhapatnam.

With Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, the CM sought financial assistance in the form of grants for essential external infrastructure for four industrial nodes within the state. He also requested the transfer of

Government of India Salt Lands to the state government for port-led industrial development.

During discussions with Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, CM Naidu emphasized the need for an integrated aqua park in Andhra Pradesh. He also requested increased subsidies for horticulture farmers and the release of the balance central share of ₹125.52 crore under the PDMC Scheme of RKVY for 2023-24.

Additionally, he sought approval for ₹165 crore from the GoI and a matching state share of ₹110 crore to implement MIDH programs across all 26 districts. The release of a committed liability of ₹111.29 crore

under the NMOOP scheme was also requested.

In his meeting with Minister of Power Manohar Lal, the CM called for expediting the approval process for the HVDC ISTS line from Kurnool to Vizag and requested relaxation of additional prudential norms. He also proposed promoting Vizag-Kakinada as a Green Hydrogen manufacturing hub.

CM Naidu urged Hardeep Singh Puri to establish a BPCL refinery in Andhra Pradesh as per Section 93(4) of the APR Act 2014. He suggested that an announcement regarding the refinery in the upcoming Full Budget Address by the Finance Minister would significantly contribute to increasing the country's refinery capacity and support India's vision of becoming a developed nation by its centenary in 2047.

The Chief Minister also had a fruitful discussion with Arvind Panagariya, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission, furthering his efforts to address the financial and developmental needs of Andhra Pradesh.

These meetings mark a proactive approach by CM Chandrababu Naidu to ensure the best interests of Andhra Pradesh are met through coordinated efforts with the central government.



Pawan performs 'Suryaradhana'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister and Jana Sena Party (JSP) chief K Pawan Kalyan performed special pujas to Surya Bhagavan on Thursday, invoking the Lord for the welfare of society.

Pawan Kalyan has embraced Varahi Deeksha. He performed a special puja as part of Varahi Ekadashi Deeksha in the JSPs State office at Mangalagiri.

Pawan Kalyan worshipped Surya Bhagavan sitting in front of the Aditya Yantram while the priests recited hymns.

Check harassment of women at workplace: DC



PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi emphasized the need to curb harassment of women at the workplace.

A district-level awareness programme was organized here on Thursday by the women's welfare department on the steps to prevent sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

Addressing the awareness meeting, district Collector K Vetri Selvi advocated setting up committees in every office to contain the harassment of women employees. The Collector lamented that women face harassment everywhere including in the office.

The Government, in 2013, enacted a law to prevent sexual harassment of women at the workplace and the act is part of

the protection of women's rights, the Collector stated. As part of implementing the law, a four-member committee should be set up in every government office to prevent sexual harassment of women, the Collector directed the officials, adding that two of the members in the four-member committee must be women. Inquiry should be conducted expeditiously on the complaints of harassment, she observed. She warned of stringent action if anybody resorts to sexual harassment of women at the workplace. Collector Vetri Selvi underlined the need to create awareness among women employees about the anti-harassment laws and how to protect themselves from harassment.

There is a need to infuse self-confidence among women employees in resisting sexual

harassment at the workplace. A peaceful atmosphere should be created at the workplace to ensure that women employees work without fear, the Collector asserted.

Additional SP Swaroop Rani explained about the punishments if a case is proved in the court. In the case of sexual harassment, the delinquent employee can be sacked from service, she said. Later they released wall posters on the creation of awareness against harassment of women at the workplace. State-level resource person Kuna Krishna Rao, ZP CEO K Subba Rao, RDO NSK Khajavali, DRDA PD R Vijayaraju, Municipal Commissioner S Venkata Krishna and medical officer Dr. Malathi were among those who attended the meeting.

Venkata Murali takes charge as Bapatla Collector

PNS ■ BAPATLA

J Venkata Murali here on Thursday took charge as Collector and Magistrate of Bapatla district.

He took charge from in-charge Collector Chamakuri Sridhar. Talking to the media, Collector Venkata Murali called upon the people's representatives, the officials and the employees to work in a coordinated manner to develop the district further.

All should work as per the directions and policies of the state government, he stated. He underlined the need for the officials and employees to work like a team to implement the welfare schemes efficiently.



The government machinery should work as per the aspirations of the government and the people with diligence and accountability, the Collector observed. Superintendent of Police Vithaleswara Rao, DRO Ch Sattibabu and a host of officials congratulated the Collector and conveyed their wishes.

BRS MLA KTR'S POSER TO RAHUL GANDHI

Ask BRS MLAs who joined Congress to quit Assembly

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

On the lines of Jeevan's statement, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao also posted on X a comment welcoming the act of Keshava Rao and demanding that BRS MLAs who joined the Congress should resign their posts.

"BRS MP Keshava Rao submitted his resignation after joining the Congress. I welcome his decision. What about the BRS MLAs who defected and contested to the Lok Sabha on a Congress ticket? What about the half a dozen BRS MLAs who defected to the Congress?"



@RahulGandhi is this how you are going to uphold the Constitution? If you can't make BRS MLAs resign, how would the nation believe you are committed to scheduling the 10th Amendment as per the Congress manifesto? Yeh Kaisa Nyay Patra Hain?" KTR said in his post.

Major cigarette smuggling racket busted; fags worth Rs 2.46 cr seized

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A major cigarette smuggling operation was thwarted by the Anti-Evasion team of the Guntur Central GST Commissionerate. The officers seized 4,920,000 cigarette sticks valued at approximately Rs 2.46 crore.

According to the Guntur Central GST Commissionerate, Joint Commissioner Upendra Kumar Dhruv acted on specific intelligence about illegal cigarettes being transported through DTDC Express Limited. On July 3, officers from the Anti-Evasion unit, Vijayawada, inspected the DTDC hub located in Gannavaram, Vijayawada. They discovered that the goods stored there were Indian-made cigarettes branded as GOLD STEP and GOLD VIMAL, manufactured by M/s Gold Step Tobacco Private Limited.

Upon thorough inspection, it was found that the cigarette packages, valued at Rs 2.46 crore, were falsely declared on invoices as Rs 8 lakh under the category "Chat Birri." The illegal cigarettes lacked essential markings, such as manufacturing and expiry dates, and no



E-way bills were available, raising suspicions about the legality of the transportation. As a result, the Anti-Evasion unit of the Guntur Central GST Commissionerate seized the entire consignment. These cigarettes were found to violate the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 and were being transported unlawfully.

The investigation is ongoing. So far in the financial year 2024-25, the Guntur Central GST Commissionerate has seized approximately Rs 2.73 crore worth of 5,706,000 illegal cigarette sticks. The Commissionerate remains committed to enforcing GST tax laws, ensuring compliance, and combating evasion.



Collector inspects watershed works

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam district Collector A Thameem Ansariya on Thursday inspected the watershed works at Konijedu village in Tanguturu manal. The Collector inspected the watershed works being carried out by the DWMA. The Collector inquired with the officials about the total area in which these works were undertaken, the cost incurred for this purpose, the benefit of these works and other details.

She also inspected the irrigation tank in the village. The villagers urged the Collector to ensure that the tank is filled with the Nagarjunasagar canal water. She assured them of taking the matter to the notice of the government.

MOTHER SEEKS MEA'S INTERVENTION Hyd woman tortured by hubby in Saudi Arabia

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In an incident of torture, the mother of Ayesha Rumana, a Hyderabad woman based in Saudi Arabia, has sought help from the Ministry of External Affairs.

In an appeal to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Rehana Begum stated that her daughter and five grandchildren are being prevented from travelling to India by her son-in-law Khazi Saifullah Khalid. Majlis Bachao Tehreek (MBT) spokesperson Amjedullah Khan took to X and highlighted the issue. "My daughter, Shaikh Ayesha Rumana, resident of H.No.

18-1-514/C/21, Naseeb Nagar, Phool Bagh, Hyderabad, Telangana State, was married to Khazi Saifullah Khalid, holder of Indian passport No. U3159006, in January 2013, as my son-in-law was studying some Islamic studies in Madina, Saudi Arabia," Rehana stated in the letter.

After six months of marriage, the victim moved to Saudi Arabia and has been tortured since. Rehana further said, "Sometimes he behaved like a psychopath. My daughter was not allowed to come back home for five years. When my daughter came back to Hyderabad, she disclosed how she was tortured there."

Establishment of mango market yard in Nuzvid assured

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathi assured of establishing a Mango Market Yard in Nuzvid and exhorted the mango farmers to adopt techniques in raising mango crops.

A meeting was organised by the mango farmers, traders and scientists on the premises of the market yard in Nuzvid on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Parthasarathi stressed the need to expand the export facilities to the mango farmers.

"A Mango Market Yard will be established in Nuzvid which will be made available to the mango farmers in the next mango season. The mango farmers should adopt modern techniques in raising the mango crop. There is a need to expand the export potential of Nuzvid mango produce," the Minister asserted.

He promised to take steps to resolve the insurance problems of mango farmers. When brought to his notice that the Mango Research Centre, located in Nuzvid is lacking a sufficient number of scientists and staff, he assured to take steps to resolve the issue.



"Let us strive unitedly to bring world recognition to the Nuzvid mango. Scientists should research to discover quality seeds to enhance the produce. The scientists should go to the fields and give suggestions to the mango farmers on increasing the mango production and quality of mango," the Minister said, adding that mango farmers will be imparted training on using modern techniques and yielding more produce.

The mango farmers discussed the problems they were facing in the meeting and explained them to the Minister. The farmers were appealed to the Minister to take steps to supply fruit cov-

ers to protect mangoes on trees. They also complained to the Minister that fake pesticides are flooding the market and requested him to take measures to curb the menace. Water should be supplied to the mango farmers by modernizing the Chintalapudi lift irrigation scheme, the mango farmers told the Minister.

The mango farmers urged the minister to establish a mango processing unit in Nuzvid. Horticulture Director Venkateswara Rao, AP MIP Project Officer P Ravi Kumar, Market Yard Secretary Srinivas and scientist Dr Kanakamah Lakshmi were among those who were present.

AP's IT sector seeks policy overhaul for increased investments

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Key stakeholders in Andhra Pradesh's IT and ITES industry are urging the state government to revisit its current IT policies. Their goal is to attract major investments and foster an environment that cultivates innovation. Industry leaders have expressed concerns about the existing framework, advocating for revisions that could propel the state towards becoming a hub for fintech and technology-driven enterprises.

Criticism has mounted against the current policy, implemented by the previous administration, citing significant delays in delivering promised incentives. Sridhar Kosaraju, CEO of Nimaisoft, emphasized the critical need for timely incentives to sustain industry momentum. He proposed the establishment of new electronic clusters strategically located near Bhogapuram International Airport and Mulapeta Port in Srikakulam district. Kosaraju believes these initiatives could replicate the success of the Sri City model, stimulating economic activity across the state.

Despite successes like attracting Infosys to Visakhapatnam and launching the Adani Data Park project, stakeholders express frustra-



tion over sluggish progress in key initiatives such as the Madhurawada business district and the IT Concept City. There is a growing consensus among industry leaders that bolstering social infrastructure, including enhancing nightlife options, is crucial to attracting and retaining top talent in cities like Visakhapatnam.

Recent discussions between representatives from the IT Association of Andhra Pradesh (ITAAP) and IT Minister Nara Lokesh have shown promise. Minister Lokesh has signalled openness to industry concerns and plans to undertake a comprehensive policy review with department officials. An upcoming interactive session is anticipated to serve as a platform for addressing critical policy revisions.

Drawing parallels with Hyderabad's IT boom under former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, O Naresk Kumar, CEO of Symbiosis Technology, underscored the necessity for visionary leadership in Andhra Pradesh. Kumar highlighted the potential of strategic policy adjustments to attract substantial investments across various IT sectors.

Proposals include the establishment of a new IT park in Visakhapatnam through a public-private partnership (PPP) model. This initiative aims to incentivize immediate investments with offerings such as zero-cost entry and tax waivers. Additionally, there is growing support for a revamped IT policy akin to those in neighbouring states such as Odisha, which provides attractive capital and interest subsidies.

Looking forward, industry leaders advocate for regular consultations with local businesses and the introduction of specialised skill development centres.

These initiatives are designed not only to bolster Andhra Pradesh's IT infrastructure but also to position Visakhapatnam as a premier destination for technology-driven enterprises nationwide.

INDIA CORNER

High court asks ASI to submit Bhojshala survey report by July 15

The Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Thursday granted 10 more days to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to submit its survey report of the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula mosque complex in the state's Dhar district. The court ordered the ASI to present the complete report of the nearly three-month-long survey on the premises of the disputed 11th-century monument, the subject of a wrangle between Hindus and Muslims, by July 15. According to the previous order of the high court, the ASI was required to submit its complete survey report of the complex by July 2, but the agency moved a plea on the last day seeking another four weeks for the report submission. ASI contended that the Hyderabad-based National Geophysical Research Institute had sought three weeks to study the huge data collected during the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)-Geographic Information System (GIS) survey.



4 killed in car accident in Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad

Four persons, including a man and his two sons, were killed and three others were injured when the car they were travelling in collided with a bus here on Thursday, police said. Superintendent of Police (City) Akhilesh Bhadauria said, "A car carrying seven persons, including the driver, lost control and collided with another vehicle before crossing over to the opposite lane where it was hit by a bus on Thursday." Ashraf Ali (60), his wife Zaitoon Begum and their sons Khappe Ali (40), Arif alias Mehboob Ali (38), Intekaf Ali (30), Asif Ali (20) and the car driver Ehsan Ali (30) along with two other family members were travelling in the vehicle. All the occupants were residents of Mukarampur of Swar Kotwali area in the Rampur district where they were returning from Delhi. "Ashraf Ali and his sons Khappe Ali and Arif alias Mehboob Ali were killed on the spot while the car driver Ehsan Ali succumbed at the hospital," said the officer.



After her India visit, Bangla PM Hasina to travel to China next week

China on Thursday announced that Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit Beijing early next week and meet China's top leadership, including President Xi Jinping, which will facilitate political mutual trust, and push bilateral relations to a new level. Hasina's visit from July 8 to 10, days after her India visit, is being seen as an apparent attempt to balance ties between India and China, one of Dhaka's biggest investors. "This is her (Hasina's) first visit to China since she started her new term. It is also her second visit to China in five years," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here. During her visit, she will meet President Xi, Premier Li Qiang and attend the signing ceremony of cooperation documents together, Mao said. The leaders of the two countries will have an "in-depth exchange of views" on deepening traditional friendship, expanding mutually



PM Modi to visit Russia, Austria from July 8 to 10

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a visit to Russia from July 8 to 9 to hold the 22nd India-Russia annual summit that will review the entire range of multifaceted ties between the two countries, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Thursday. After concluding the trip to Russia, Modi will travel to Austria, which will be the first visit by an Indian prime minister to that country in 41 years, it said. It will be Modi's first visit to Russia in nearly five years. His last visit to Russia was in 2019 when he attended an economic conclave in the Far East city of Vladivostok. The annual summit between the prime minister of India and the president of Russia is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two countries.



So far, 21 annual summits have taken place alternately in India and Russia. The last summit was held on December 6, 2021 in New Delhi. President Vladimir Putin had visited India to attend the summit. The summit saw both sides sealing 28 MoUs and agreements besides coming out with a joint statement titled "India-Russia Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity". Modi and Putin last held

world," Modi had said. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Modi has held several telephonic conversations with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In reflection of its strong friendship with Russia, India has not yet condemned Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and it has been maintaining that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. India's import of Russian crude oil has also gone up significantly notwithstanding the G7 price cap and increasing disquiet over the procurement in many Western countries. In December 2022, the G7 grouping and its allies announced a cap on the price of Russian oil as part of a series of punitive measures against Moscow in view of its invasion of Ukraine. The price cap restricts countries to pay more than USD 60 a barrel.

LK Advani discharged from hospital

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP veteran and former deputy prime minister Lal Krishna Advani was discharged from the Apollo Hospital here on Thursday evening, sources said. The 96-year-old was admitted to the hospital on Wednesday, days after being discharged from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) following a night-long stay there. Advani was discharged from the Apollo Hospital around 5 pm, the sources said. The sources had said his condition remained stable after being admitted to the hospital on Wednesday night. Advani was brought to the facility around 9 pm on Wednesday. He was accompanied by his daughter Pratibha Advani.



'CBI geared up to help states implement new criminal laws'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

CBI Director Praveen Sood on Thursday said the central agency is geared to help states and other stakeholders implement the three new criminal laws which came into force earlier this week. He also said that the CBI is working with the Law Ministry to successfully implement the three new laws. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) replaced the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Indian Evidence Act respectively from July 1. Addressing an event at the CBI academy, Ghaziabad where Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal presented the President's Police Medal (PPM) for Distinguished Service and Indian Police Medal (IPM) for Meritorious Service to 39 CBI personnel, Sood said the agency and the Law Ministry are working in synergy to prioritise more efficient prosecution along with investigation. According to a ministry statement, he noted that CBI's role has been evolving with the passage of time, from handling primarily anti-corruption cases in the beginning to special and economic crimes, cyber crimes and bank frauds. Addressing the gathering, Meghwal said the new criminal laws will usher in "ease of living" with citizenry contributing to the progress and development of the nation. Appreciating CBI, he observed that its importance is being recognised in the society

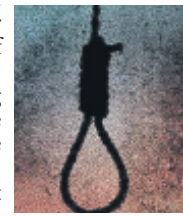


due to its investigative skills which is reflected in the high conviction rate. Referring to the new criminal laws, Meghwal asserted that they will bring in ease of living in a big way for the citizenry and will expedite delivery of justice and save crucial time of all the stakeholders spent in litigation. The minister stressed that this will prove highly productive for the nation as the energies would be channelised towards the process of development of the society and eventually lead to higher progress.

13th SUSPECTED SUICIDE THIS YEAR JEE aspirant from Bihar hangs self in Kota

PNS ■ KOTA

A 16-year-old engineering aspirant allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan inside his PG room here, police said on Thursday. This is the thirteenth case of suspected suicide by a coaching student in Kota since January. The number of student suicides in Kota stood at 26 in 2023. Sandeep Kumar Kurmi, a native of Bihar's Nalanda district, was taking coaching for the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) in Kota for the last two years and lived in a paying guest (PG) room in Mahaveer Nagar - III, the police said. At around 7 am on Thursday, the teen's classmate went to his room. When he did not get any response, he peeped through the window and found Kurmi hanging from the ceiling fan, Mahaveer Nagar SHO Mahendra Maru said. Kurmi's classmate informed the PG caretaker who then informed the police, he said. According to the SHO, the student committed suicide on the intervening night of Wednesday



and Thursday. No suicide note was recovered from the room, the police said. Kurmi's brother, Sanjeet, is taking coaching for the medical entrance exam NEET in Kota and lives in a separate PG room in Dadabari area, Head Constable Mahaveer Prasad said. The two brothers reportedly lost their parents four years ago and their uncle was funding for their education, he added. During a preliminary probe it was found that Kurmi was an average student and would often miss his coaching classes, the SHO said. According to the police, the PG room where Kurmi lived did not have any anti-suicide device installed on the ceiling fan. The district administration has made it mandatory for all hostels and PGs in the coaching hub to install anti-suicide devices in their rooms to prevent such cases. An anti-suicide device is a spring-like structure which is attached to the ceiling fans. When an object weighing more than 20 kilos is hung from the fan, the spring attached to it expands and a siren goes off.

DMK using NEET to oppose BJP, claims TN BJP president

PNS ■ TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (TAMIL NADU)

Tamil Nadu BJP on Thursday accused the DMK and other parties of using the NEET as a tool to target the BJP government at the Centre. It also reiterated that the ruling dispensation should furnish a white paper on the performance of students from the state in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET). BJP state chief K Annamalai sought to know what prevented the Tamil Nadu government, which passed resolutions in the Assembly seeking exemption from NEET on three occasions, from revealing the details. "The state government should present the data on the students' performance ten years before and after the test came into existence. Let the government say if any particular section like OBC, SC/ST has been affected due to the test," Annamalai told reporters here. Wondering why the DMK government was not revealing the data, he said views even if they opposed the screening test would last if they were expressed on a scientific basis, he said. "They are opposing NEET only because they want to oppose the BJP.

Soren takes oath as 13th CM of Jharkhand

PNS ■ RANCHI

JMM executive president Hemant Soren on Thursday took oath as the 13th chief minister of Jharkhand. He was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor C P Radhakrishnan at the Raj Bhavan here, an official said. Soren's father and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha supreme Shibu Soren, his mother Rupi Soren, his wife Kalpana Soren and senior leaders of the JMM-led alliance were present at the swearing-in ceremony. Chamapai Soren, who

resigned as the chief minister on Wednesday, was also present on the occasion. Hemant Soren was released from jail on June 28 after the High Court of Jharkhand granted bail to him in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. He had resigned as the CM shortly before his arrest on January 31 by the Enforcement Directorate. After taking the oath, Soren said former CM Champai Soren discharged his duties well. The court order is in the public domain for all to see, the



JMM executive president said, adding that he would discharge his duties with commitment. In a video message to people, Hemant Soren said that a

conspiracy was hatched against him by the opposition which had succeeded in their "evil designs" and he had to spend about five months behind bars. "I was arrested on January 31... I had given a message to you about how the opposition hatched a conspiracy against me and how they succeeded in their evil designs. They attempted to keep me in jail for a long time but I chose to take resort of the legal battle. You supported me on the streets. Finally, justice was delivered and I was released clean," Soren said in the video clip. The JMM leader said he was

given an opportunity to serve the people in 2019 but "the conspirators could not digest that a tribal youth could reach such heights and finally on January 31, I was removed on false charges. There could be delay in God's plans but ultimately truth prevails". Soren said he was ready to serve the people of Jharkhand with dedication. Former Jharkhand CM Champai Soren extended good wishes to Chief Minister Hemant Soren. JMM legislator Kalpana Soren said welfare work would be expedited in the state.

Dissolve Assembly and hold polls now Yediyurappa challenges K'taka CM Siddaramaiah

PNS ■ BENGALURU

BJP stalwart B S Yediyurappa on Thursday challenged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to dissolve the Karnataka Assembly and go for elections now and claimed that the saffron party will win 140 to 150 seats. He said the people of the state have rejected the 'useless guarantees', money and muscle power of the Congress government and opted for the BJP in the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections. "I challenge Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, if he has guts, then dissolve the Assembly and go for elections again. Then only you will know what your

position is. If the elections are held, BJP will win 140 to 150 seats," the Lingayat strongman said during the BJP state special executive meeting organised at the Palace Grounds here. Karnataka has 224 Assembly and 28 Lok Sabha seats. The former chief minister said in the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP-JD(S) alliance won 19 seats and the BJP got a majority in 142 assembly segments. Just a year ago, the Congress had come to power by winning 134 seats, but now the ruling party has trailed in places which are represented by Chief Minister

Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar and several ministers, he said. "This shows how Congress has lost its popularity in the state within a year by indulging in corruption and ignoring public interest. It has no moral right to continue in power. People overlooked the money and muscle power of the Congress and showed their confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the BJP stalwart said. He said the state is heading for bankruptcy. "Due to the useless guarantees, Congress has increased the prices of all the commodities and laid the foundation for inflation.

Over 7 pc of daily deaths in 10 Indian cities linked to PM 2.5 pollution: Lancet study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On average, 7.2 per cent of all daily deaths in 10 of the largest and most polluted cities in India, including Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai, were linked to PM2.5 levels higher than World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for safe exposure, according to a study published in The Lancet Planetary Health journal. Delhi was found to have the largest fraction of daily and yearly deaths attributable to PM2.5 air pollution, caused by particles sized 2.5 micrometres or less in diameter. Sources of such pollution include vehicular and industrial emissions. Researchers said that daily exposure to PM2.5 pollution in Indian cities is linked with a higher risk of death, and locally created pollution could be possibly causing these deaths. The international team included researchers from Varanasi's Banaras Hindu University and the Centre for Chronic Disease Control, New Delhi. They found that an increase of 10 micrograms per cubic metre in the average of fine particulate matter

(PM2.5) pollution measured over two days (short-term exposure) was related to 1.4 per cent higher daily mortality. The death risk was found to be doubled (2.7 per cent) per a 10 microgram per cubic metre increase, when the researchers restricted their analysis to observations below Indian standards of air quality, less stringent than WHO guidelines for safe exposure, which prescribe 15 micrograms per cubic metre of PM2.5 over a 24-hour period. Indian air quality standards prescribe 60 micrograms per cubic metre of PM2.5 over a 24-hour period. City-wise, the authors found a 0.31 per cent rise in daily mortality per a 10 micrograms per cubic metre increase in PM2.5 in Delhi, while in Bengaluru, the rise was 3.06 per cent. The links between daily exposure to PM2.5 pollution and locally created pollutants were found to be stronger in models which the researchers used to explore cause-and-effect relationships. Therefore, it was possible that the locally generated pollutants were causing these excess deaths, the authors said.

Battles of Tololing, Tiger Hill proved to be decisive

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Barely four months into his service, a young Lieutenant Balwan Singh led the Indian Army's Ghatak Platoon in a strategic assault on Pakistani intruders during the Kargil war and was among the brave soldiers who captured Tiger Hill on July 4, 1999. "There was no looking back from there. It was victory after the capture of the Tiger Hill," recalls Singh, now a colonel with the famed 18 Grenadiers, who was injured while fighting the enemy but continued to fight.

He was honoured with Maha Vir Chakra for his valour. Raised in 1976, the 18 Grenadiers played a pivotal role in the war. The battalion was conferred with 52 honours, including a Param Vir Chakra, two Maha Vir Chakra, six Vir Chakra, several Sena Medals and a Commendation Card of the Chief of the Army Staff. On Wednesday, Col Singh and many other Kargil heroes from the battalion recalled the heroics of its bravehearts in Operation Vijay. The war was declared over on July 26, 1999, after the Indian forces successfully



pushed back the Pakistani forces which had stealthily occupied important heights in Ladakh. On the night of July 3, 1999, soldiers of 18 Grenadiers, also called the Pole Star Battalion, embarked on their mission to capture Tiger Hill and had accomplished the task by the next morning, said Brig

(Retd.) Khushal Thakur, who commanded the battalion during the crucial battles of Tololing and Tiger Hill. "On June 12-13, 1999, we won Tololing and it was a big turning point in this war. It boosted the morale of our armed forces and the countrymen and dipped the morale of the Pakistani side. One by one, we kept capturing the peaks in Mushkoo or Batalik sector and the next task was Tiger Hill," Brig (Retd.) Thakur, who was a colonel during the war, told PTI. "For the Tiger Hill, I had adequate time for reconnais-

sance. I had artillery guns, multi-barrel rocket launchers and high-altitude warfare equipment... Despite all the losses suffered, the morale of the men of 18 Grenadiers was sky high and our brave men captured the Tiger Hill, planting the Indian flag on top," he said. There weren't many TV channels back then but the defining images of the Indian soldiers celebrating the conquest of the Tiger Hill became a symbol of their bravery. Col Singh said the battles of Tololing and Tiger Hill were decisive battles.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Litmus test

With the UK deeply divided on key issues, the outcome of this election could alter its direction and shape its future

The UK voted yesterday to elect 650 representatives to the House of Commons who in turn would elect its next prime minister. The UK is at a crucial juncture. It is battling myriad issues ranging from economic downslides, healthcare and post Brexit hardships. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made a fervent appeal to voters, urging them to put an end to what he describes as Labour's dominance in British politics. Interestingly, for the last 14 years, the Conservative Party has been in power but has not delivered on its promises in full measure. The centre-right Conservatives took power amid the global financial crisis. However, their tenure has been plagued by economic stagnation, declining public services, and multiple scandals, leaving them vulnerable to criticism from both the left and right. The general election marks a pivotal moment in UK politics, with the Conservative Party, led by Rishi Sunak, pitted against the Labour Party under the leadership of Keir Starmer. The two parties have diametrically opposite views on



tackling the country's problems. The UK is still coming to terms with Brexit which did not go well for it and led to many hardships for the Government and the people. Besides, once a world power, the UK is reduced to just another ally of the US in the world arena seriously jeopardizing its international standing. So the battle is not just for seats in Parliament but for the very direction of the nation.

Rishi Sunak's campaign has centred on themes of stability and continuity. He has emphasised the need for a steady hand to navigate the complex challenges facing the UK, including economic recovery post-COVID-19, ongoing trade negotiations, and maintaining national security. Sunak's message to voters is: build a stronger, more prosperous Britain together. Sunak has vehemently criticised Labour's policies, which left the country vulnerable and economically fragile. He has positioned himself as the leader capable of delivering a balanced approach that protects jobs, supports businesses, and ensures a sustainable path to growth. The Conservative manifesto promises tax cuts, increased investment in infrastructure, and a commitment to maintaining a firm stance on immigration and national security. This of course is a litmus test for Rishi Sunak himself. He became the first Prime Minister of colour itself speaks volumes about his calibre as a politician. But right now the biggest challenge for him is to manage the economy and relieve people of tax burden. On the other side, Keir Starmer's Labour Party is campaigned for change and renewal. Starmer has highlighted the need for comprehensive reform of the welfare system and has promised to tackle the cost-of-living crisis through targeted support for low-income families and significant public sector pay rises. For Rishi Sunak, the election is a chance to solidify his leadership and set a course for a post-Brexit Britain that he believes can thrive globally. The results of this election will not only determine the next government but will also shape the trajectory of the UK for years to come.

PICTALK



Villagers catch fish in flood water, in Morigaon district

The rise of radical rebels in Pakistan

This alarming rise in extremism has prompted Pakistan to initiate Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, an ambitious effort aimed at eradicating terrorism



BHOPIINDER SINGH

Clergy has always played a pivotal role in the Pakistani narrative. The indelible impact of the 'Mullahs' has historically cut across institutions of power like the Military 'establishment', political parties, civilian society, academia et al. Each has, in their own way succumbed to puritanical displays and appropriations to posture alignment befitting the 'land of the pure' or Pakistan. However, it must be said that many of these institutions have also privately harboured the exact opposite instincts and preferences, from what has been prescribed by the clerical order. These institutions have pandered to religiosity only to tick in the box their own false, and publicly fronted sense of piety to legitimise their relevance, whilst indulging in vices, degeneracies, and excesses. A cursory look at the long list of the Pakistani infamous in the Pandora Papers or Panama List is a veritable who's-who of the Pakistani elites, who posture simplicity, austerity, and god-fearing honesty in the public sphere. This has led to the elites leading notoriously duplicitous lives with ill-gotten properties and excesses across the world, whilst injecting toxic-religiosity and religious extremism back home. The bunny of religion is essentially for public consumption to be invoked whenever everything else fails e.g., beseeching Arab Sheikhs or Turkey for life-sustaining aid in the name of a "brotherly muslim nation". The personal lives of the ruling Sharif family and the feudal Bhuttos are hardly the modicum of religious idyls, and the same discomfort applies to the Westernised Generals who are increasingly facing the wrath of the angry, long-bearded, armed, and madrasa-educated tribals. Today, it seems the ability of Pakistan's ruling elite to successfully play the patented double game has run its course. Not only have the radicalized masses (generously fanned by the elites in 'Olive Green' or Servants) refused to take orders, but far worse, they have turned on their begetters! Creations like the "Taliban" which was a joint



project between the wily politicians, amoral Generals, and unhinged clergy, simply refuse to take orders from their progenitor. The product i.e., Taliban, which was made for the export market, is getting unwelcomed back to its original source. The elite finally realise that it cannot differentiate between "Good Taliban" and "Bad Taliban", for at the end of the day it is "Taliban", an unhinged outcome of affording extra generous space to religion in governance. Terrorism has gripped Pakistan with elements 'within', going rogue. Elites now sense that not only must they take on the terror elements directly (as they have done multiple times, still terrorism worsened), but it must also snuff out the oxygen that breeds and nurtures the terror industry i.e., religious insinuations and outreach, in every sphere of Pakistani reality. Pakistani dispensation has come up with Operation Azm-i-Istehkam which seeks to eradicate terrorists, and religious extremism, and deradicalize society, in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It is easier said than done, given the deep-rooted grip of religiosity. This refreshing acceptance (though time will tell if it is sincere or posturing) of religious overload needs to be unloaded. For starters, it will diminish the



THE ELITE FINALLY REALISE THAT IT CANNOT DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN 'GOOD TALIBAN' AND 'BAD TALIBAN', FOR AT THE END OF THE DAY IT IS 'TALIBAN', AN UNHINGED OUTCOME OF AFFORDING EXTRA GENEROUS SPACE TO RELIGION IN GOVERNANCE

role of Islamist political parties like Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), or even the various militias and formations of sectarian denominations who have contributed to the morass. Such parties have not only imported strains of alien Wahhabism or Salafism but have been instrumental in ensuring that the Pakistani 'establishment' goes slow on anti-terror operations in restive areas. Caught between offering perfunctory platitudes towards the integrity of Pakistan and the safety of its citizens - they are also simultaneously offering mealy-mouthed suggestions to not partake in militaristic operations. They are truly caught between the devil and the blue sea, for their wishy-washy stand will neither endear them to the frustrated Pakistani Government (which they are no longer a part of the ruling coalition), nor to organisations like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who would want them to be bolder and indulge in plain-speak in favour of religious and radical bodies. Nonetheless, these religious parties are mulling putting together an ostensible 'resistance movement' against Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, and they are unlikely to find too many partners to go along with them. Forces that are key to bailing out Pakistan eco-

nominally from sure 'failed-state' status e.g., China, international multilateral agencies (IMF, World Bank etc), Western Powers or even Arab Sheikhdoms are pitted against the agendas and outcomes of religious parties. The so-called 'iron brother' Chinese have invested over \$62 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridors (CPEC) and they cannot allow the religio-extremist Baluch insurgents to attack Chinese interests as part of their 'sacred' duties. Middle Eastern countries too have had their own tryst with the likes of the Muslim Brotherhood and their offshoots from Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait to Saudi Arabia, and have clamped down on the same. Now with the Taliban Government in Kabul hawking relations with outsiders and no longer surviving on Pakistani doles, Afghans also cock a snook at historical equations and madrasa-fed ranks from Pakistan. All this diminishes the relevance of religious parties in Pakistan and if the Pakistanis grasp the opportunity, they may just be able to overcome their history and instincts. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM'S REMARKS ON MANIPUR

Madam — The Congress has strongly criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his remarks in the Rajya Sabha, where he claimed that the situation in Manipur was returning to normal. The Congress argues that this statement is far from the reality on the ground, pointing out that the Prime Minister has yet to visit Manipur since violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities in May of the previous year. Congress MP Jairam Ramesh accused the Prime Minister of making light of the situation and not acknowledging the continuing violence and tension in Manipur. Despite more than 200 deaths and thousands of people displaced due to ongoing ethnic violence, the Prime Minister's comments suggested a lack of serious engagement with the issue. The Congress also criticized the Prime Minister for not listening to voices from Manipur and for focusing more on political jobs than addressing the concerns of those affected by the violence. The party emphasized that the Prime Minister's response is insufficient given the severity of the crisis in Manipur and accused him of turning a blind eye to the plight of the state's residents.

Bhagwan Thadanji | Mumbai

HATHRAS TRAGEDY

Madam — The recent stampede in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, resulting in numerous deaths, is a tragic reminder of the consequences of poor crowd management. A stampede, or crowd crush, occurs when an area becomes dangerously overcrowded and mismanaged, leading to fatal accidents. If crowd densities exceed four to six people per square meter, the risk of such incidents significantly increases. Authorities must not downplay their role in these tragedies by labeling them as mere accidents. Effective crowd management requires meticulous planning, including venue

Bowling to elders is a sign of respect



Recently, political strategist Prashant Kishore criticized Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for touching the feet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, describing it as a "sale of dignity of the people of Bihar." While Kishore's comments reflect a certain perspective, it's important to recognize that showing respect to elders, even political rivals, is a personal choice deeply rooted in Indian culture. Touching the feet of elders is a gesture of humility and respect, irrespective

of the individual's public standing or knowledge. It's a tradition that underscores the significance of age and wisdom. Such practices are part of a cultural ethos that teaches younger generations to respect their elders. In a recent incident, opposition leader Rahul Gandhi criticized Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, for bowing before Prime Minister Modi, claiming it compromised the dignity of the Speaker's office. Gandhi cited Mahatma Gandhi's views on the impartiality and dignity of the Speaker. However, the gesture by Birla was a personal one, reflecting respect for an elder, not a political statement. It's crucial to separate personal respect from political actions. In Hindu culture, it's customary for the younger to show respect to the older, irrespective of their positions. Rahul Gandhi's criticism may stem from a place of political rivalry, but it overlooks the cultural context of such gestures.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

Balancing motivation and misuse in India's research landscape

Many students opt for PhD programme for reasons unrelated to research. This hinders the nation's intellectual progress



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

A higher academic degree like a PhD is often considered a symbol of quality. PhD training emphasizes innovation and the ability to tackle complex problems. Graduates are expected to think independently, identify gaps in existing knowledge, and propose novel solutions, making them valuable assets in both academic and industry settings. The more PhD holders a country produces, the more productive a country will be. Countries with more PhD holders tend to produce more scientific publications and patents. This intellectual output can lead to technological advancements and improvements in various industries, driving innovation and economic growth. Despite having the advantages of higher enrolments for the nation, the current system of registering for PhD as an escapism will not reap any benefits for the student or the country. Many students register for PhD as a stop-gap arrangement before their marriage, a permanent government job, or as a fashion to be called 'Dr.'. They never assess their moti-



vation for pursuing a PhD degree. Are they passionate about the research topic? Or have they reflected on their career goals? If the alignment is strong, it might justify pursuing a research degree that is highly demanding and time-consuming. The most successful PhD candidates are often driven by intrinsic motivations such as intellectual curiosity, passion for their field of study, and a desire to contribute new knowledge. These motivations sustain them through the challenges of research work. Recently, it has been observed that many scholars registering for PhD through national-level competitive fellowships like CSIR, UGC etc, try to prolong their study for the sake of fellowship amount.

In many colleges in Tamil Nadu, college teachers work for a salary as low as Rs. 4000- 8000 per month. Qualifying for a national test will at least provide a scholar with a decent salary for 3 to 5 years. The sole motive of the scholar is financial support. For some, the academic environment may provide a refuge from societal expectations of marriage, family responsibilities, and other traditional roles. Unfortunately, even today, female students are not provided the freedom to make decisions. Our society gives a girl's marriage more importance than acquiring knowledge. Earning a doctorate requires extensive study, self-sufficiency, and intellectual development, which are priceless assets to the community. Even in a highly literate society like Kerala, many women, even after getting a PhD degree, are forced to stick to societal norms and move away from active research. Many students with PhD degrees ultimately land in job sectors where their research has no role, like clerical jobs in

government sectors, banks, or even as a school teacher, to cite a few. To change people's minds, we must keep fighting for equal rights for women, spreading the word that education should be accessible to everyone and dispelling myths about women's abilities and goals. It's essential for prospective PhD candidates to carefully consider their motivations and the potential impact of their research. Pursuing a PhD solely for recognition or prestige, without a genuine commitment to contribute meaningful research or knowledge, offers little benefit to society or the nation. People who do research for name sake are involved in many unethical practices, like outsourcing the work and outsourcing their thesis writing and paper writing to other agencies. Unfortunately, these people reach higher positions through their influence, overtaking genuine researchers who have toiled their lives for research. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)

port staff since 2011, specializing in throwdowns to help batsmen practice against fast bowling. Raghu's ability to deliver balls at speeds exceeding 150 km/h using a sidearm device has been instrumental in preparing Indian batsmen for international challenges. While his name may not be widely recognized, his contributions to the team's success are immense. Raghu represents the behind-the-scenes dedication and skill that supports every win by Team India. His work exemplifies the importance of support roles in sports, highlighting how essential unsung heroes are to the success of prominent athletes and teams. As India celebrates its cricketing triumphs, it's important to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of individuals like Raghu, who play a crucial role in these victories.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN STRATEGIC DYNAMICS AT THE SCO SUMMIT

As China asserts its influence within the SCO, the interplay of geopolitics becomes increasingly visible



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or SCO held its 24th meeting for heads of State this week. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, otherwise known for promoting Bharat to crucial allies at bilateral and multilateral forums, skipped this regional dialogue citing parliamentary responsibilities back home. However, many also point out that, the frosty relationship with Pakistan and China both of whose top leadership were present for the SCO summit, was one of the reasons PM Modi avoided travelling to Astana in Kazakhstan. India was represented by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for the summit, where he held separate bilateral meetings with several SCO Central Asian member countries.

The SCO as a Eurasian intergovernmental group was announced in China in June 2001. India and Pakistan joined the SCO as full members in 2017. Currently, SCO has 9 member states, 3 observer states and 14 dialogue partners, which represent an entire swathe of emerging economic geographies, that occupy the theatre of current geopolitical developments. Russia and China along with four neighbouring Central Asian states form the founding members. However with Iran later joining in as a member state along with Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Bahrain, Myanmar, and Maldives as dialogue partners, one can see why, SCO is an important platform for shaping the current geo-political landscape. Russia is engaged in a long war with Ukraine, while much of Middle Eastern and West Asia nations are intimately engaged in the Israel-Hamas war. China has been trying to dominate the dialogue since its inception and could be seen by many, as one of the diplomatic extensions of its sovereignty-threatening foreign policy. In the past few years, it has managed to bring a weakened Russia under its wings and is portraying SCO as an alternate multilateral dialogue platform challenging the US control of world affairs. In the run-up to the Astana SCO summit, the Chinese state mouthpiece Global Times carried a few reports extolling the virtues of the summit. "It sends a message to the Western world that there are many different voices from the emerging economies that need to be heard and represented, and the mainstream trend of global cooperation won't



be reversed by their obstruction," wrote Zhou Rong, a senior researcher at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China. "Chinese President Xi Jinping also clubbed the SCO summit with two state visits to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, thereby, expanding its footprints in the Central Asian states. State media reminded global audiences that Kazakhstan, was where China's Belt and Road initiative was proposed in 2013, which in the past decade managed to get China to secure strategic infrastructure footprints in landlocked Central Asia. Quoting a few analysts Global Times reported "Central Asia, as one of the key areas in the implementation of the BRI, offers a vivid example of how the China-proposed global public good has been transforming the landlocked region into a land-linked region, transforming it into a bridge connecting the Eurasian continent." Central and West Asia has been PM Modi's focus in the past decade. Even though PM Modi avoided the Astana summit, he is expected to travel to Russia for a 'post-Ukraine' bilateral meeting with President Putin, followed by a stopover in Austria, a first in nearly four decades.

The meeting with President Putin and PM Modi, both of whom have returned to power after elections would be closely followed, since, it would be one of the first face-to-face meetings post Russia's isolation by Western countries following the Ukraine war. It will also be the first, where regional issues including the ongoing Israel offensive on Gaza and, the evolving geo-political situation in a conflict-ridden, post-COVID world are likely to be taken up. From a regional platform perspective, India China and Russia, also interact closely at BRICS. The unfolding engagement in the next few weeks will be closely followed.

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

Railway accidents expose neglect, systemic failures



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The latest report from the CAG highlights a troubling decline in funding for crucial track renewal projects amidst an alarming rise in train accidents



Railway accidents not only cause significant loss of lives and severe financial setbacks but also undermine public confidence in the system. A recent incident near New Jalpaiguri, where a train collided with another, resulting in eleven fatalities and 40 injuries, has once again highlighted the issue of signal failures. The railways have received less scrutiny since the decision to discontinue the presentation of a separate Railway Budget. This change has allowed many faults within the railways, including outdated equipment and complex signal failures, to go unnoticed. While accidents draw attention, derailments are equally frequent and damaging.

The full extent of the losses is challenging to estimate, as they not only impact the railways but also disrupt the movement of goods and people, with far-reaching consequences. The CAG audit found that while the Gross Budgetary Support of Rs 15,000 crore had been contributed, the Railways' internal resources fell short of the target for funding the remaining Rs 5,000 crore per year to Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK), set up in 2017. The report highlighted a decline in the allotment of funds for track renewal works, from Rs 9,607 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 7,417 crore in 2019-20. The railways' Rs 2.55 trillion budget is self-generated. Ignoring critical signal and track safety issues has allocated Rs 24470 crore to be spent for 508 of the 1300 stations planned to be demolished and rebuilt in 16 states.

The buildings may need some repairs and refurbishing but demolition is outrageous under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Many stations are already on the block though these hardly need demolition. The railways should have prioritised its operational safety issues and utilised the station rebuilding funds for safety. According to the CAG report 2022, an Analysis of 1129 'Inquiry Reports' of derailment accidents in 16 Zonal Railways (ZRs) revealed 24 factors



THE KAVACH SYSTEM OF BRINGING THE TRAINS TO A HALT HAS A COST OF RS 50LAKH PER KM AND RS 70 LAKH PER LOCOMOTIVE. IT MAY TAKE LONGER THAN THE RAILWAY HAS PLANNED

responsible for derailments in the selected cases/accidents. The total damages/loss of assets in these cases was reported as Rs 32.96 crore. The report adds that nearly 75 per cent of the consequential train accidents between 2017-18 and 2020-21 were caused by derailments. Out of 217 consequential train accidents, 163 (around 75 per cent) were due to derailments. The goods train ramming into the Kunchenjunga Express between Rangapani and Chatter Hat, off New Jalpaiguri, has almost the same pattern as the triple train accident near Balasore that killed 296 persons and injured 1100 people a year back. Like the Balasore, this one is also blamed on manual failure at the initial stages.

It was routine for Rail Board chairman Jaya Varma Sinha and two zonal chief public relations officers to blame it on the deceased train driver for "disregarding" signals and speed limits. The signal failure in both cases is responsible for the accidents as scrutiny of the system reveals. The Rangapani goods train was issued a manual authorisation paper chit signal, called a paper-line clear ticket (PLCT). It allowed goods train drivers to pass all inoperative automatic signals.

As per procedure the driver should have stopped for a minute at each signal and restricted speed at 10 to 15 km. Now it is being told that restriction should have been imposed on each of the trains in the section. The document of the railways says that all trains had the PLCT issued suggesting major signal failure. The rail officials said that the track circuits had failed due to the lightning and thunderstorms,

rendering the automatic signals defunct since 5.50 am.

In such a situation absolute block comes under restriction. When signals are not operational it is covered with paper or a piece of cloth. Railway Minister Ashwani Vaishnav had told Rajya Sabha on July 21, 2023, that the rear collision at Balasore was due to lapses in the signalling-circuit alteration carried out in the past and during the execution of the signalling work related to the replacement of the electric lifting barrier for a level-crossing gate. Two months before this, the Railway Board had flagged the issue of signalling staff resorting to short-cut methods.

Referring to five alarming incidents where trains entered the wrong path due to short-cut methods adopted by the signalling staff, the Railway Board in a letter to General Managers of Zonal Railways expressed "serious concern" that despite repeated instructions the ground situation was not improving and "signalling staff continue with short-cut methods for clearing signals".

In another incident of collision between two passenger trains, the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) has found the Indian Railways administration at fault for not implementing, and harmonising safety norms and protocols, the lack of which led to the collision of two passenger trains in Andhra Pradesh on October 29, 2023. The collision claimed 17 lives including three crew members. The CRS noted that senior officers continuously overlooked such violations in the recent past. The CRS found five flaws in the safety system:

1. Officials Overlooked Multiple Violations Earlier,

2. Employees in Crucial Safety Posts are Incompetent, and not aware of basic safety rules, and assistant loco pilots should be trained on simulators even on brake use,

3. Mismatch of Two Sets of Rules - general rules peg speed at 10km in case of signal failure and subsidiary rules at 15 km,

4. Every Passenger Train's Last Two Coaches Need Crash-Worthy Features, 5. Record Walkie-Talkie Conversations Between Station Masters and Loco Pilots In yet another incident the South Western Railway Zone official wrote: "on 08.02.2023 the loco pilot of Up Train No: 12649 Sampark Kranti Express, had stopped the train before Point No: 65 A, while observing that the point was set to down main line (wrong line), while as per PLCT, the train was supposed to pass through Up main line."

An audit report of the last year flagged serious lapses in rail safety. In a 2022 report focusing on derailments within Indian Railways, the CAG sought to investigate how preventive measures were implemented by the railway ministry against derailments and collisions.

The Kavach system of bringing the trains to a halt has a cost of Rs 50lakh per km and Rs 70 lakh per locomotive. It may take longer than the railway has planned. The eastern region alone needs Rs 3000 crore. Even if Kavach implemented the railways to improve on signal and track maintenance, accidents would not be easy to prevent. Even now it is not too late to divert funds from station demolitions to safety aspects.

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

Women suffer in silence as violence against them keeps increasing

Despite the high prevalence of such crimes, many women are unable to report these incidents due to societal pressures and lack of support

Violence against women remains a critical issue in our society, hindering both their physical development and mental well-being. According to the 2022 annual report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), crimes against women increased by four per cent in 2022 compared to 2021. Over 5.8 million cases of crime were registered across the country in 2022, with nearly 450,000 involving crimes against women. The report highlights that the highest number of cases of violence against women were recorded in Delhi, the capital city, while Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan,



KAVITA DHAMEJA

was listed as the fourth most unsafe city for women. Rajasthan is the third state with the highest number of cases of violence against women in 2022. Notably, Rajasthan had the highest number of recorded rape cases, with over 31,000 incidents reported across the country and 5,399 cases registered in the state. The report also reveals that most incidents of violence or discrimination against women are

perpetrated by their husbands or close relatives. Gender-based violence encompasses physical, mental, sexual, and economic abuse, with intimate partner violence being the most widespread form. Women often experience sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

Despite the prevalence of violence, many women do not report these incidents due to several factors. First, the burden of the family's honour is disproportionately placed on women, instilling fear and preventing them from reporting the abuse, even to close family members. Second, many women lack access to support groups where they can confide and seek help. Third, and perhaps most crucially,

there is a widespread unawareness of the support systems and legal frameworks established by the government to aid women affected by violence. However, some women - who are a little aware and have found support groups - raise their voices against the violence they face and report it to the police.

One example of this courage is found in Baba Ramdev Nagar Kachhi Basti in Jaipur, Rajasthan, where gender discrimination and violence are prevalent. Meena Devi (name changed), a 38-year-old resident, shared her experience: "I collect trash, and my husband works as a laborer. We have six children, including four daughters. Our financial situation is dire, and my husband sometimes does not find work.

To contribute to the household income, my two daughters and I collect trash daily, and I had to stop their schooling." She further revealed, "My husband used to beat me after getting intoxicated, which also affected my daughters. One day, I gathered the courage to call the police, and since then, he has significantly reduced the violence." This settlement, predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, is located about 10 kilometres from the city in the Gurjar Ki Thadi area. With a population of over 500 people, many residents engage in occupations such as blacksmithing, scavenging, drumming at weddings, bamboo crafting, and daily wage labour.

Meena mentioned that it is so common for women to be subjected to violence by their husbands that it does not bother anyone in the settlement. Most men indulge in substance abuse and mistreat their wives. Although several non-government organizations are working in the area to raise awareness among women to stand up against this violence, the problem has not been completely eradicated. Another woman, who preferred to remain anonymous, recounted her story: "My husband works as a scrap dealer, while I stay busy with household chores." She explained that her husband gets intoxicated every day and abuses her. Her hands bore burn marks, evidence of the physical violence she endured. She said that other women in the settlement often protect her from her husband's violence and have advised her to seek help from the police, but she does not wish to do so. Such control by partners leaves women without access to a safe space to share their experiences and seek advice.

Social worker Akhilesh Mishra, who has been working on the health of women and children in this area explains, "The government has enacted several laws to protect women from gender-based violence and women can file complaints against the violence they face. Various NGOs are also working here to raise awareness among women about gender discrimination and violence."

This effort has started showing results, as women in the settlement have now started to stand up against the violence and seek support from the police. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach. Cultural norms that place the burden of family honour on women must be challenged and redefined.

Efforts to increase awareness of support groups and governmental resources must be intensified, ensuring that all women have access to the help they need. Only through collective societal effort can we hope to build a capable, equal, and violence-free society for all women.

(The author is a social worker; views expressed are personal. Charkha Features)

MONEY MATTERS

Karnataka government signs MoUs with two Korean firms

The Karnataka government on Tuesday signed two MoUs worth Rs 1,040 crore with DN Solutions and EMNI Company Limited in Seoul, South Korea. The MoUs were signed on the second day of the delegation's visit, led by Karnataka Minister for Large and Medium Industries and Infrastructure Development M B Patil. He participated in the 'Roadshow on Investment Opportunities in Karnataka' in Seoul, South Korea, which was organised by the Karnataka government and Embassy of India. A statement issued by his office said these strategic partnerships are set to advance the state's manufacturing, research and development, and battery technology sectors. "Karnataka secures Rs 1,000 crore investment from DN Solutions and has committed from the company for an investment of Rs 1,000 crore towards establishing machine manufacturing facilities, a research and development centre, and a technical support centre for Indian manufacturing companies," the statement read.



Gold jumps Rs 530, silver bounces Rs 1,200 on firm cues

Gold prices jumped by Rs 530 to Rs 73,080 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday tracking a bullish trend in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 72,550 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver prices also leapt Rs 1,200 to Rs 92,500 per kg. In the previous session, it closed at Rs 91,300 per kg. "In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are trading at Rs 73,080 per 10 grams, up by Rs 530 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,355 per ounce, up USD 16 from the previous close. Additionally, silver was quoted higher at USD 30.25 per ounce against USD 29.80 per ounce in the previous session. "Gold prices rose more than 1 per cent to a nearly two-week high while silver was up by more than 2 per cent, on the back weak US economic data which increased rate cut bets by Fed, fall in the dollar index and rally in industrial metals," Manav Modi, Senior Analyst - Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.



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

Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Sun Pharma are recalling products in the US due to manufacturing issues, as per the latest Enforcement Report by the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA). According to the report, Dr Reddy's Laboratories is recalling drugs to treat insomnia and gout in the American market. New Jersey-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Inc., a unit of Hyderabad-based drug major, is recalling 13,752 bottles of Eszopiclone tablets, the USFDA stated. The affected lot has been produced at Dr Reddy's Bachupally plant in Telangana. As per the USFDA, the drug firm is recalling the affected lot due to "Failed Impurities/Degradation Specifications". The company issued the Class III nationwide recall on June 4 this year. As per the USFDA, a Class III recall is initiated in a "situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product is not likely to cause adverse health consequences".



RBI's bumper payout to limit big ticket divestment

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend payout by the Reserve Bank of India will limit the need for big-ticket divestment, a domestic rating agency said on Thursday.

Care Ratings said the new government will retain the interim budget's Rs 50,000 crore target on receipts from divestments.

"With a bumper dividend from the RBI, the central government's fiscal position remains comfortable, which may limit the urgency to push ahead with big-ticket divestments," it said.

If there is a shortfall in the resource accretion, the government will prefer asset monetisation, it added.

Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) sales expected to be completed during the year will make it easy sailing for the government on the FY25 target, the agency said.

Govt to maintain Rs 50k cr target: Report



"After the demerger of land assets of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), its possible divestment looks likely in FY25, provided favourable market conditions prevail. If the government offloads its entire

stake in SCI, it could generate Rs 12,500-22,500 crore as divestment proceeds," according to the report. The other plausible candidates include CONCOR and Pawan Hans, the rating agency said, adding that they continue

to be on the slow burner.

In the last ten years, the government has raised Rs 5.2 lakh crore from the divestment initiatives.

According to the report, the government can raise Rs 11.5 lakh crore by selling stakes in state-owned companies without getting the stake below 51 per cent. Selling stakes in central public sector enterprises can contribute Rs 5 lakh crore, while the remaining Rs 6.5 lakh crore can come from stake sales in insurance firms and banks, it said. The government may not opt to divest all its potential, and the decision to divest these listed firms may be influenced by the industry's strategic nature, the companies' profitability, financial market conditions and welfare/social considerations, the agency added.

Govt plans to streamline visa process for Chinese, foreign experts in non-PLI sectors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is working to streamline the visa process for experts from China and other countries for non-PLI beneficiaries in key sectors, a senior government official said on Thursday.

The government has already streamlined the visa process for professionals and experts for industries getting the benefits under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme.

Replying to queries about what kind of easing of visa process is being considered for China and other countries under the PLI scheme, DPIIT Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said the government is working on the matter. He said there is already a streamlined visa process for PLI beneficiaries.



"We are trying to get it extended to other non-PLI beneficiaries which are operating in those same strategic sectors since we felt...one is getting a subsidy and a visa clearance. The other is not getting a subsidy but at least he should also get a streamlined process," Singh said. He further said that the government is in the process of

drawing up a similar streamlined process for non-PLI beneficiaries in the PLI sectors as well.

"The final decision has not been taken but we are moving in that direction and we are hopeful that it will be done," the Secretary said, and added initially the streamlined process will be for 14 PLI sectors.

The Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs will take the final call, Singh said.

The central government had announced the PLI scheme in 2021. When asked if more sectors will be included in the PLI scheme, he said internal consultations keep taking place. Industry keeps demanding for extension of the scheme to other sectors, he said.

On a question related to price indices, the DPIIT Secretary said his department deals only

with the wholesale price index (WPI), and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) looks at other statistical indicators, including the consumer price index (CPI).

"I suppose you could expect some kind of updation of the base year eventually...So it is an ongoing process again unless we have a decision I can't really tell," Singh said. The Secretary also informed that the e-commerce policy is on the anvil.

On industry demand for the removal of angel tax, Singh said that based on the consultation with the startup ecosystem "we have recommended that in the past as well and I think we have recommended it this time also".

But ultimately an integrated view will be taken by the Ministry of Finance, he said.

Coal recorded 10.2 pc growth among 8 key infra sectors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The coal sector has registered a growth of 10.2 per cent among all eight core industries of the economy in May, the government said on Thursday.

The index of coal industry has reached 184.7 points during May as compared to 167.6 points during the same month last year. "The coal sector has demonstrated highest growth of 10.2 per cent (provisional), following the electricity industry among the eight core industries for the month of May, 2024 as per the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) (Base Year 2011-12) released by Ministry of Commerce & Industries," the coal ministry said in a statement.

The driving force behind growth can be attributed to a considerable rise in coal production during May.

Mcap of BSE-listed firms hit all-time high of Rs 447.40 lakh cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms hit a record high of Rs 447.30 lakh crore on Thursday with the benchmark Sensex closing at a fresh all-time high of 80,392.64 in early trade. The 30-share BSE Sensex scaled an intraday record high of 80,392.64 in early trade. The index pared most of the gains later due to volatility and profit-taking by investors and settled 62.87 points or 0.08 per cent higher at 80,049.67.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of BSE-listed firms hit a record peak of Rs 447,30,452.99 crore (USD 5.36 trillion).

Of the total 4,021 traded stocks, 2,185 stocks advanced while 1,742 declined and 94 remained unchanged on the BSE. "Indian stock markets opened higher on Thursday, extending their record-breaking rally amid expectations that the Federal Reserve could begin

lowering borrowing costs sooner following weak US economic data.

"Despite an initial surge, benchmark equity indices ended the day largely unchanged from Wednesday's close, as gains in technology shares were offset by losses in HDFC Bank," Avdhut Bagkar Technical and Derivatives Analyst at StoxBox, said. Overall, the market and momentum breadth remained positive. In terms of sectors, Pharma, Healthcare, and IT stood out as the highest gainers compared to their peers, Bagkar added.

In the broader market, the BSE Smallcap gauge jumped 0.62 per cent and the midcap index climbed 0.60 per cent.

Benchmark BSE Sensex breached the historic 80,000 level intraday for the first time while Nifty raced more than 162 points to close at a fresh lifetime high of 24,286.50 on Wednesday.

BoM logs 19 pc loan growth in Apr-Jun

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) on Friday reported a 19 per cent growth in credit to Rs 2.09 lakh crore for the April-June quarter.

The outstanding credit was Rs 1.75 lakh crore at the end of June 30, 2023, BoM said in a regulatory filing.

The Pune-headquartered lender reported a 9.44 per cent increase in total deposits to Rs 2.67 lakh crore as against Rs 2.44 lakh crore at the end of the first quarter of the previous financial year. During the quarter, it said, Current Accounts and Savings Accounts declined to 49.86 per cent of the total deposits as against 50.97 per cent.

The Credit Deposit ratio increased to 78.18 per cent at the end of June 30, 2024, as against 71.89 per cent in the year-ago period.



Mahindra Lifespace eyes Rs 2050cr revenue from 2 new projects

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd on Thursday said it has acquired land in Bengaluru and bagged a redevelopment project in Mumbai with a combined revenue potential of Rs 2,050 crore.

In a regulatory filing, the company informed about the "closure of two deals aggregating to Rs 2,050 crore in Gross Development Value (GDV)".

These strategic moves include securing a third redevelopment project in Mumbai and acquiring a prime land parcel in Bengaluru, it added.

Mumbai neighbourhood.

The company has recently acquired 2.37 acres of land in Singasandra, South Bengaluru. The land is estimated to have a developable potential of approximately 0.25 million square feet, with a Gross Development Value of around Rs 250 crore.

Amit Kumar Sinha, Managing Director & CEO, Mahindra Lifespace Developers Ltd, said, "These strategic moves in Mumbai and Bengaluru, with a combined GDV potential of Rs 2050 crore, mark a significant milestone in our growth trajectory. Our third redevelopment project in Mumbai, with a GDV of Rs 1,800 crore, reinforces our commitment to urban renewal by creating value in established neighbourhoods."

Mahindra Lifespaces has been chosen as the preferred partner for the redevelopment of seven residential societies in the prestigious Borivali West,

SBI announces 11 new initiatives to mitigate risks in agri loan portfolio

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest lender SBI on Thursday announced 11 new initiatives -- including enhancement of its digital banking features and opening of 35 new Agricultural Centralised Processing Cells - to mitigate risks in its agricultural loan portfolio.

On the occasion of the 69th Foundation Day, State Bank of India announced these initiatives to widen the bank's accessibility to address the banking needs of its potential customers, the lender said in a statement.

SBI has enhanced its digital payment experience, with the introduction of two exciting features like tap-and-pay on the BHIM SBI PAY app and end-to-end digital loans against mutual funds on the YONO app, it added.

The bank has also announced an initiative, which is a fully digital end-to-end journey for SBI Surya Ghar Loan, it said, adding that the users can opt for credit to install solar rooftops under the central government's PM



Surya Ghar Scheme, offering loans for up to 10 KW capacity.

The entire process will be managed on SBI's digital platform from applicant registration on the MNRE/REC portal to loan disbursement.

Acknowledging the significant contributions and global presence of the Indian diaspora in shaping the nation's growth story, SBI opened a second Global NRI Centre (GNC) in Patiala, Punjab. To enhance its service to NRI clients, its Chairman Dinesh Khara inaugurated the second Global NRI Centre (GNC) in Patiala on Bank Day.

SBI's dedicated GNCs reflect the bank's unwavering commitment to strengthening its ties with the global Indian community.

Cement sector sees marginal growth of 2-3 pc in Q1FY25: Icra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The cement sector has witnessed a muted growth of 2-3 per cent in the first quarter of current fiscal on account of a slowdown in construction activity because of the Lok Sabha polls, according to a report from rating agency Icra.

However, the overall volumes for the FY2024-25 are likely to expand by 7-8 per cent driven by a healthy demand from the infrastructure and housing sectors.

"Nevertheless, the government's focus on infrastructure projects, sanction of additional houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), and the industrial capex is expected to meaningfully improve cement volume offtake in H2 FY2025," it said.

The report also projects further consolidation in the cement industry by the top players to increase their capacity.

The sector has witnessed consolidation by leading players such as Aditya Birla group firm UltraTech Cement and Adani group firm Ambuja Cements.



Besides, the sector is also expected to continue its organic growth in the medium term as makers continue to invest to expand capacity.

"While organic growth is expected to continue in the medium term, cement companies are also preferring the inorganic route to boost capacities rapidly," it said.

Icra estimates that the market share of the top five cement companies witnessed a steep rise to 54 per cent as of March 2024 from 45 per cent as of March 2015.

Now it "projects it to further increase to 58-59 per cent by March 2026, resulting in consol-

idation in the cement industry", it said.

Moreover, the cement companies may also witness an improvement in their operating profit by 1-3 per cent due to softened raw materials prices.

"While the cement prices are projected to largely sustain at previous-year levels, some softening of cost-side pressures -- primarily power and fuel costs along with an increasing focus on green power, is likely to result in an improvement in OPBIT-DA/MT by 1-3 per cent YoY to Rs 975-1,000/MT," Icra Corporate Ratings Vice President and Co-Group Head Anupama Reddy said.

Sensex, Nifty close at fresh lifetime highs on gains in ICICI Bank, Infosys

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher to close at fresh all-time high levels on Thursday, following buying in market heavyweights ICICI Bank, Infosys and TCS amid a largely positive trend in global equities.

The 30-share BSE Sensex scaled an intraday record high of 80,392.64 in early trade. The index pared most of the gains later due to volatility and profit-taking by investors at record levels. Sensex closed 62.87 points or 0.08 per cent higher at 80,049.67, its all-time closing high.

The broader Nifty also hit an intra-day record high of 24,401 in early trade before closing almost flat. The 50-issue index rose by 15.65 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at a record 24,302.15 with 23 of its shares closing higher and 27 with losses.

"The defensive bet on large caps like IT and pharma gained momentum due to the



diminishing US inflationary pressure, improvement in QoQ earnings outlook and a resultant sharp fall in the US 10-year bond yield.

"The buoyancy in government spending and the green shoots in corporate earnings are now supporting the premium valuation. Return of FIIs to the domestic market and expectation of a rate cut in September are supporting market sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Among Sensex shares, HCL Technologies, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra and Mahindra were the gainers.

'L&T using Generative AI to enhance processes'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) is using generative artificial intelligence to enhance its processes across the project life cycle, company's Chairman and Managing Director S N Subrahmanyam said on Thursday.

To fuel this innovation, the company has launched a collaborative platform connecting aspiring data scientists with domain experts and technology champions to develop cutting-edge, future-proof solutions, Subrahmanyam said during 79th Annual General Meeting.

"Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has emerged as a game-changer, and the company is leveraging its power to enhance its processes across the project life cycle - from tendering to contract management to design, execution, and operation & amp; maintenance," he said.



Cargo traffic at 12 major Indian ports rises 6.8 pc to 69.8 MT in Jun

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Cargo traffic across 12 major Indian ports rose 6.8 per cent to 69.08 million tonnes (MT) in June from 64.69 MT in the year-ago month, with ten ports showing positive growth while the remaining two witnessed a decline.

Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Maharashtra recorded the highest growth in cargo handling at 15.12 per cent during the reporting month, followed by Cochin Port with 15.12 per cent, Kamarajar Port (10.70 per cent), Deendayal Port (8.57 per cent) and New Mangalore Port (8.53 per cent), according to the data released by the major ports apex body Indian Ports Association (IPA).

The 12 major ports are

Deendayal (Kandla), Mumbai, Mormugao, New Mangalore, Cochin, Chennai, Ennore (Kamarajar), Tuticorin (V O Chidambaram), Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Kolkata (including Haldia) and Jawaharlal Nehru Port.

According to the IPA, VO Chidambaram Port's cargo traffic grew 7.73 per cent and Paradip Port 7.41 per cent growth, respectively, during the previous month. SMP Kolkata Port registered a 6.66 per cent growth in traffic handling, followed by Chennai Port (6.09 per cent) and Mormugao Port (3.75 per cent). On the other hand, Mumbai Port witnessed a 6.59 per cent decline in cargo traffic, and Visakhapatnam Port saw a 0.27 per cent year-on-year drop in June this year, as per the IPA.

FAWAD KHAN RETURNS TO B'WOOD

After an eight-year break from the Hindi film industry, Pakistani actor Fawad Khan is returning to the industry with a Bollywood film. He will star with actress Vaani Kapoor in Aarti Bagdi's yet-to-be-titled romantic comedy, which is a major IMF production.

While the specifics of this collaboration are still being worked out, a report from the Free Press Journal indicates that the entire film will be shot in the UK. The film's main character is Fawad Khan, a well-liked actor worldwide whose notoriety has been further bolstered by his roles in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The film will also be presented in Hindi.

An industry insider talked about the impending project starring Vaani Kapoor and Fawad Khan. The insider

mentioned that the makers will make an official announcement after filming in the UK commences.

The romantic comedy tells the story of an unusual love story between two people who are struggling with personal issues. By coincidence, their paths cross and as they become closer and encourage one another, they eventually fall in love. Rumour has it that Vaani Kapoor was chosen for this project due to her ability to remain calm and take an impartial position in the industry.

Prominent Pakistani actors like Fawad Khan and Mahira Khan had their careers in India restricted after the URI attack in 2016. The Bombay High Court reversed this ruling in a momentous move that opens up opportunities for Pakistani artists to rejoin the Indian entertainment sector.



what's brewing? Vivek Oberoi recalls his 'victim' times

Vivek Oberoi talked candidly about his experiences feeling victimised in the film business. During an event, the actor was talking about personal disappointments when he mentioned that, during the height of his fame, some "powerful people" had decided to shape his destiny.

At the India Global Forum in London, Vivek gave a speech about navigating his most trying period. He claimed that although his family would support him, he would still feel angry and upset. "I had a lot of success and was winning a lot of awards in my career, but all of a sudden it vanished because some powerful people in Bollywood said, 'You are not going to work here.'"

He spoke about allowing his happiness to shine through the suffering. The *Saathiyaa* actor said that his mother, Yashodhara Oberoi, was his greatest source of support. "I felt like a victim, filled with a great deal of grief, fury and rage and I wasn't sure how to handle it. I have a lot of respect for my mom. My hero is her. The only way to go from being a victim to a hero is to be a hero to someone else, she said. 'Put your attention into being a hero to someone else and you will feel like a hero, you will feel like a winner.' Thus, you begin



looking for someone to whom you can show heroism," he remarked.

The actor's latest venture includes *Indian Police Force*, a web series directed by Rohit Shetty that debuted earlier this year on Amazon Prime Video. He is working hard right now to get ready for *Masti 4*.

Raghav shot hard-core action scenes for Kill, despite his knee surgery

Raghav Juyal has taken on a leading role in the high-octane action film *Kill*, produced by Karan Johar and Guneet Monga Kapoor, despite undergoing serious knee surgery before the shoot. Advised by his doctors to rest for at least six months and avoid strenuous activities, Raghav embraced the challenge to showcase his versatility as an actor and his unwavering commitment to his craft.

Kill is an action film that demanded intense physical performance, but Raghav, known for his dynamic dance moves and charismatic screen presence, was undeterred by his medical condition. With the support of a team of medical experts on set, he executed some of the most demanding action sequences in the film.

"When I was offered the role of the villain in *Kill*, I saw it as a golden opportunity to push my boundaries and explore new dimensions as an actor," says Raghav Juyal. "Despite the advice from my doctors to take it easy for six months post-surgery, I couldn't pass up this incredible chance. I knew it would be a challenge, but I was determined to prove that I could overcome any obstacle. The medical team on set was phenomenal, ensuring my safety and well-being throughout the shoot. Every high-adrenaline action scene was a testament to their expertise and my dedication. This experience has taught me the true meaning of perseverance and has deepened my love for the art of filmmaking. I hope my journey inspires others to never give up, no matter the odds." *Kill*, directed by Nikhil Nagesh Bhat, features Lakshya as a protagonist and Raghav Juyal in a villainous role that highlights his resilience and talent.



Salma Hayek looks back on facing racism for being Mexican

Salma Hayek is a well-known Hollywood star and an actress of Mexican lineage. She first encountered racism due to her initial days in the industry. She talked about it in the interviews, describing how people repeatedly informed her that she would never play anything other than conventional representations of Mexican women, discouraging her from trying. She is currently among the most significant Latina actors in the business! Salma's career began with *Mexican telenovelas*, from which she eventually moved to Hollywood. With roles in films such as *Desperado*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Dogma* and *Wild Wild West*, the actress rose to prominence in Hollywood. She played Frida Kahlo, the painter, in the 2002 movie *Frida*. She received a nomination for an Oscar in the Best Actress category for her role in *Frida*. However, she did not have an easy life. When Salma Hayek was interviewed by Drew Barrymore a few years ago, the actress talked candidly about her experiences with racism in business. Salma recalled, "You will never make it in this town; there are no other roles for you. You will only play a prostitute, a drug dealer's wife or girlfriend and a housekeeper. And then here comes Robert Rodriguez, who gave us the chance for Latinos to have other kinds of roles. That's how my career started."

Salma Hayek stated that studios were hesitant to make films with minority casts during her early professional years in the 1990s. She also disclosed that despite the sizeable Latino population in the US, studios were unwilling to produce films for this demographic. Salma Hayek continued, "I once recall speaking with a studio executive who said to me, 'You know what? The wrong side of the border is where you were born. If you had been born on the correct side of the border, you would most likely be the most famous person on the planet. However, regardless of how stunning people find you to be or how skilled an actress you are, the moment you speak, the audience is just going to be reminded of their maids.' And that's what he said to me. But they smartened up."

Cole Tucker & Vanessa Hudgens welcome their first baby

Cole Tucker and Vanessa Hudgens have even more cause for celebration. They were spotted carrying their newborn as they left the hospital. Tucker, who turned 28 on Wednesday, has an especially special birthday because the baby is said to have arrived on Wednesday. Before getting married in Mexico in 2023, Vanessa and Cole began dating in 2020. Photographs show Vanessa Hudgens and Cole Tucker leaving a Los Angeles hospital with their little munchkin; however, details like the baby's sex and birthdate are unknown. Hudgens, who was last seen in Santa Monica, was released in a wheelchair, accompanied by a nurse. Cole Tucker (the man in the hoodie), a happy father, drove up behind them and took care of the car's stuff. Although Vanessa's actual delivery date is unknown, hospital stays following childbirth are generally thought to be influenced by the baby's health and the mode of delivery. To make Tucker's birthday even more special, they are undoubtedly taking their little one home.



During quarantine, the *French Girl* star discovered love in the most unlikely place: a virtual meditation session. Their relationship courtship culminated in marriage in 2023 and was full of passionate gestures, getaways, and supporting one another.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



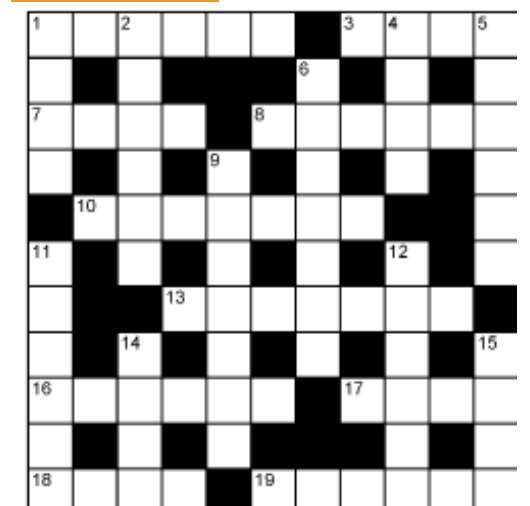
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

	6		4		5			
7	4			6				3
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3				4		5		9
			5		2			
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Yesterday's solution

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

- 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

- The least dangerous
- Become larger
- A great river in Egypt
- A black symbol on playing cards
- Alters
- A bright red colour
- An archer fires at this
- Do a sketch
- The capital city of Italy
- Every twelve months
- Cleaned with soap and water
- Comes into sight
- Bumped
- Quicker
- Extreme fear
- A percussion instrument
- Absent

DOWN

- _____ and daughters
- Extremely dirty
- Very impolite



GINGER MEGGS



OOMPHING UP HER GLAM WITH SUNKISSED VIBES IN MAURITIUS

Actress Nikita Rawal adorned her Instagram page with a few sizzling pictures from her trip to Mauritius. Today, *The Pioneer* shares with you some BTS moments and her travelogue from the trip through an exclusive discussion with her.

TEJAL SINHA

It's not an unknown thing to know about Nikita Rawal. She's been a big-time travel buff. She's been someone who constantly makes it a point to take time out to satisfy her wanderlust whenever she gets a break from the hectic schedule of her normal life. Speaking of her travel journals, the bubbly bombshell and stunner visited Mauritius and her spicily hot Instagram feed is glaring proof that she had a great time there.

Well, it was no less than an enriching experience, for sure. While she enjoys her trips, be it with family and friends or solo, she personally believes solo travel opens up various perspectives about life.

Talking of Mauritius, the place boasts beaches, lagoons and reefs, so what did she observe? And as we connect with her for an exclusive Travelogue segment, she enthusiastically shares, "Since the island is volcanic in origin, it is surrounded by coral reefs everywhere. I loved the coral reefs that occur in the shallow waters near land. They encircle the island and protect it from the sea. I personally love the beaches and in fact, I am more of a beach person than a mountain person. All the beaches were a treat to be on. I love the waterfalls and I love to surrender myself to the tempting beauty of water whenever I am on the beach. Crystal clear water and incredible weather made it a really fascinating experience."

A trip to Mauritius was always on her cards and finally, she got to tick it off her bucket list.

However, as far as outfits are concerned, she went out of her comfort zone with the slit bodycon gowns, co-ord sets and monotone outfits, swimsuits, monokinis and everything casual that kept her cool, easygoing and comfy. For her, fashion is always about comfort and that's always been her top priority. Well, gotcha, Nikita!

Meanwhile, she recalls that the culture is influenced by a blend of African, Asian and European cultures combined together. As far as hospitality is concerned, "The locals there were very friendly and protective towards the tourists. I loved the curry that I had there, and just like us, even for them, good meals are a good way of celebrating an occasion for family and friends. People voluntarily wanted to help in terms of place suggestions and other things; that's all that made the travel experience memorable."

Her 'gram feeds' describe her as a

water baby, but does she too? Well, definitely yes, because she calls herself a 'beach person' and a 'water baby' any day. "I like mountains too, but the sun-kissed vibe and vivacious presence that I get at beaches is something mind-blowing. I love the sea and swimming pool and I always carry my swimming attire anywhere I travel. So yes, I would be a beach person who's also a water baby."

Kashmir, beyond any doubt, stands out as the most distinctive place for her in India, with the beauty and serenity that it offers. No wonder it's called 'Heaven on Earth'.

A trip without a stay that doesn't make it feel like a staycation can certainly make your trip feel so incomplete. And so at Mauritius, she was putting up in one of the finest luxurious 7-star hotels there and the hospitality, she recalls, was simply outstanding.

To pick out one place for her quick rejuvenation, we ask and for her, it's Goa for its hippie vibe, laid-back lifestyle and scenic beaches.

Meanwhile for her, she says, "Delayed flights are scary. I have unfortunately been the victim of many super-delayed flights that mess up your entire schedule. So the only thing I can complain about here is this. I hope that never happens again for me."

Well, "I am a sucker for beaches and hence, if I get pretty beaches as per my liking, I am quite sorted there as well. However, apart from that, I also explored quite a lot. I loved the yacht ride chill moment. I also visited the Seven Coloured Earths, La Vanille Nature Park, Casela Nature Park and quite a few interesting beaches. I loved the Chamarel Waterfall and Tamarind Falls as well. Also, the food is so special. If anyone visits there, they have to try the special, yummy *dhol-puri* and *roti*. It's an Indian-origin delicacy, but the best you get of this is in Mauritius. It's primarily seafood-heavy and the stews, curries and everything is so delicious."

And on a concluding note, guess what Nikita brings into a hypothetical revelation for her travel: "I would love it to be Tom Cruise and Rihanna. That would be quite an interesting trip."



Stirring up opulence in travel

Remember when flying meant cramped seats, long security lines and stale peanuts? Those days are fading fast as a new era of luxury travel takes wing. Welcome to the world of private jets and exclusive experiences, where comfort isn't just an afterthought—it's the whole point.

The evolution of luxury travel

Luxury travel has come a long way since the golden age of ocean liners. Back then, first-class meant fancy dinners and ballroom dances. Today, it's all about personalisation, privacy, and getting the most out of your precious time.

India's skies are buzzing with this trend. With the country's aviation market set to double by 2030, hitting a whopping \$26 billion, there's a growing hunger for travel that goes beyond just getting from A to B. We're talking experiences that make you feel like a VIP from the moment you leave your front door!

Time: Ultimate luxury

Let's face it—in our always-on world, time is the one thing money often can't buy. That's where private aviation really shines. Imagine skipping those endless TSA lines and crowded terminals. No more sprinting through airports or praying your connecting flight isn't delayed.

With a private jet, you're the boss. Fly when you want, where you want. Need to hit three cities for meetings in one day? No problem. Want to squeeze in a round of golf before that big presentation? You got it. Guarantee to the kids you'll be home the same day? For sure. It's not just travel; it's time travel—giving you hours of your life back, for you, for your business, for your family.

Private jet experience: More than just a flight

Stepping onto a private jet is like entering an exclusive club. Forget about fighting for overhead bin space or elbow room. We're talking plush leather seats, gourmet meals, and maybe even a bedroom or shower on larger jets. It's your own flying five-star hotel.

But the real magic happens before you even take off. Private terminals are oases of calm. You can drive right up to the plane in some cases. No luggage carousels, no waiting. Just you, your bags, and the open sky.

Off beaten path: Accessing remote destinations

Here's where private aviation gets really exciting. Those smaller jets aren't just for show—they can land at airports commercial

flights can't reach. This opens up a whole new world of travel possibilities.

Imagine touching down on a tiny island for a secluded beach getaway, or landing near a remote wildlife reserve for an unforgettable safari. Private jets turn those "wouldn't it be nice" daydreams into "pack your bags, we're going" realities.

The future takes flight

The next chapter in luxury travel is already being written, and it's called Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). This isn't science fiction—it's happening now, and it's set to revolutionise how we move, especially for shorter trips.

Picture electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft zipping between or around cities or whisking you from downtown to the airport in minutes to connect to your jet. Several companies are already making moves in this space, partnering with cutting-edge aircraft developers. These new air taxis promise to be quieter, greener, and more flexible than anything we've seen before. Stuck in soul-crushing traffic? Not anymore. AAM could turn your dreaded cross-town commute into a breezy, aerial hop. And it's not just about urban areas. Regional air mobility is set to connect smaller cities and towns like never before. Hybrid-electric aircraft with ranges up to 800km could make those critical site visits or weekend getaways a breeze, all while significantly reducing emissions.

The road (sky) ahead

Of course, this bright future comes with some turbulence. India's recent proposal to curb imports of private jets and helicopters has raised eyebrows in the industry. While aimed at addressing trade deficits, it could impact the growth of luxury aviation.

Then there's the infrastructure challenge. For urban air mobility to really take off, we need a network of "vertiports" and charging stations. It's a big task, but one that could transform our cities and how we move through them.

Despite these hurdles, the future of luxury travel looks incredibly exciting. From personalized jet experiences to emission-free urban air taxis, we're entering an age where the journey truly can be as rewarding as the destination.

So fasten your seatbelts and get ready for take-off. The dawn of a new era in luxury travel is here, and the sky is no longer the limit—it's just the beginning.

(The author, Kanika Tekriwal, is the Founder and CEO, of JetSetGo.)

Forget Baguette, Brö's here to serve up a musical feast

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Brö cultivates her distinctiveness and makes a statement. She outperforms rappers in vintage skirmishes while wearing a coat over her shoulders and a glass of chardonnay in her hand. On record, she effortlessly conveys her sexuality and women's yearning in between songs and raps.

Her name, Elisa Broli, is an unconventional thinker. In an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*, the genius shining through her music acquaints us: "My mixed-race family has always encouraged me to combine items that wouldn't often go together. I've witnessed a lot of similar things happening in India, where I've noticed that traditional music is frequently mixed with contemporary hip-hop or pop. I find that to be really inspiring and I really like that approach to art."

Well, "I'm making an effort not to define my style but rather to be who I am, which is a mix of several identities." This young woman's DNA comes from her Italian and Savoyard father and her Algerian Amazigh mother. She has a cool brain and a

flaming heart due to her Mediterranean and Alpine origins. A dichotomy that blends sensual desires with the dread of love can be seen in her writings. However, she had a different perspective while in India. "The Indian audience is especially considerate. They listen to the music intently and it makes them feel wonderful. That's not always the case in the West, depending on where you live, hehe. Because the Bhopal show was followed by an Indian dancing show, I found it especially enjoyable. It was the ideal opportunity to bring our cultures together on this unique music day."

She pours her heart and soul into her songs, never afraid to be vulnerable in the process. She creates music that takes listeners on a unique trip with each track! In sooth, "The majority of what makes me a very serious and meticulous artist is my academic background. It has also introduced me to a particular line of inquiry and questioning in my thoughts. I think my lyrics demonstrate that."

Another one of Brö's peculiarities is this. She expresses her victories and delights in crass language, utilising codes used by men. Brö's

world is humorous even if the tone is purposefully cynical. Lisa, who has a master's degree in both criminology and law, likes to explore the boundaries of morality and dissect virtue to defy expectations and live freely once more. "I think my music is approaching the category of 'alternative pop.' Although jazz, hip hop and electronic music are influences, the primary objective is to create music that is listenable. Folk music is something I'm interested in for my next project," the songstress shares.

Since releasing one album in 2023 (*Grande*) and two EPs (*Klaus* and *Cassandre*) in 2019 and 2021, her style has drawn attention in every way. She has been chosen for numerous initiatives both domestically and internationally since joining Keychange in 2022. For the past two years, she has been travelling nonstop, performing at events and festivals in France as well as in Brussels, Montreal and Oslo. She also put in the picture, "I think I know what my priorities are, but I also enjoy the challenge of the industry, so I don't mind making a compromise to further my professional goals. I believe I'm just shar-

ing my personal narrative—that of a liberated woman. I am not just free to do as I want, but also free in the sense that I have responsibilities and enjoy attempting to fulfill them. My intention is to convey the idea that equality extends to all ages."

She believes there isn't another way, hehe. She dislikes paths so much! She believes that trying to depict the world as it is would be too unpleasant because it is such a mess. She therefore likes to make it funnier by being ridiculous and humorous. She considers that it makes the audience happy to watch her laugh at herself. Through the Keychange program, she has made

amazing friends and as a blessing, now she has contacts all around the world. She was able to perform in Oslo thanks to the program; seeing Norway was a dream come true. With a string of French and international features (including forthcoming features in Germany, Norway, Belgium and Quebec), she is returning to those bygone days. "Fall 2024 will see the release of my next EP. As previously mentioned, I'm working on a second album with more folk influences. I want to continue touring the globe with my amazing team and my music," she declared at the end of our exclusive interview with her.

French pop singer Brö, who captivated the crowd at Hyderabad's "Fête de la Musique 2024" with her songs, talks exclusively with *The Pioneer* about her influences, style of music and musical philosophy.





Rajawat stuns Gemke, enters second round of Canada Open

PTI ■ CALGARY (CANADA)

Promising Indian shuttler Priyanshu Rajawat stunned higher-ranked Rasmus Gemke of Denmark in a hard-fought three game contest to advance to the second round of men's singles event at the Canada Open here.

World No.39 Rajawat had to dig deep to get the better of eighth seed Gemke of Denmark 17-21 21-16 21-14 in

his opening round match that lasted one hour and 10 minutes on Wednesday night.

Rajawat, thus, remained the only Indian surviving player in the men's singles competition and will take on Takuma Obayashi of Japan in the next round.

The two other Indians in the fray, Ayush Shetty lost 14-21 11-21 to sixth seed Koki Watanabe of Japan, while S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian was shown the

door by France's Alex Lanier 16-21 17-21.

In the women's singles, Tanya Hemanth and Anupama Upadhyay also progressed to the second round.

While Tanya beat Jackie Dent of Canada 21-13 20-22 21-14, Anupama defeated Rachael Darragh of Ireland 21-11 21-11. Tanya will be up against third seed Busanan Ongbamrunphan of Thailand, while Anupama will play Canada's Michelle Li.

Moreeng appointed as USA women's cricket team coach



PTI ■ NEW YORK

Former South Africa cricketer Hilton Moreeng has been appointed as the coach of USA's national women and Under-19 teams, the country's governing body announced.

Moreeng will take over from West Indian legend Shivnarine Chanderpaul, and will prepare the team for the T20 World Cup which will be held later this year in Bangladesh.

The 46-year-old, who served as South Africa women's team coach for over a decade, said he wanted to contribute to the growth of cricket in the USA. "I am eager to collaborate with both current players and emerging talent. My goal is to methodically build a competitive squad capable of

rivaling the best in women's cricket globally," said Moreeng, who stepped down as SA coach this March.

USA Cricket Chairman of the Board, Venu Pisike said Moreeng's vast experience will benefit the nation's progress at top-flight cricket.

"Hilton brings a rich background and vast experience to USA Cricket having been a critical part of the transformation of South African women's cricket.

USA women are also at the beginning of a transformative period with an Olympics in four years' time and we believe Hilton's successes, diverse experiences and understanding of challenges in an emerging cricket nation is well-suited for our program," he added.



Plenty of intrigue, even if Messi, Vinicius can't participate

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Lionel Messi's leg injury was the only major obstacle that fell into Argentina's path while it rolled through group play and into the Copa America quarterfinals.

Bigger challenges await the defending champions, and they're hoping Messi will be there to lead the way in perhaps his final international tournament.

The 15-time Copa America champion Albiceleste are still the undeniable favorites in the Americas' biggest soccer tournament when quarterfinal play gets underway, but the other 15-time Copa champs - Uruguay - top the list of challengers capable of taking them down.

With the host Americans and Mexico eliminated in group play, the spotlight shifts firmly to the South American powerhouses determined to raise the trophy.

ARGENTINA VS ECUDAOR In Houston, it's unclear whether Messi will play in the opening quarterfinal due to a leg injury that sidelined him in the team's most recent match against Peru. Coach Lionel Scaloni said Messi's availability will be a game-time decision.

"Depending on how he responds, we will decide," Scaloni said Wednesday before training. "There are ramifications when Leo is not able to play. We'll try to make sure that he can play. If not, we'll try to find the best solution for the team. I will talk

to him today. It's only fair that he can take his time and be able to train as much as he can."

Argentina has been sturdy even without a goal from Messi in the tournament, winning all three group stage matches by a combined 5-0.

Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez has four goals in a spectacular effort despite coming off the bench twice, while Manchester City's Julián Alvarez got the other goal. If Scaloni decides to play both center forwards together, it could be more than enough to make up for Messi - and a nightmare for underdog Ecuador, which earned its unexpected quarterfinal spot by holding Mexico scoreless last weekend.

VENEZUELA VS CANADA In Arlington, Texas, it is a matchup of pleasant surprises. Venezuela has enjoyed an outstanding tournament so far, winning its three matches by a combined 6-1 with offensive leadership from Salomon Rondón and Eduard Bello.

Canada got out of Copa group play for the first time despite scoring just one total goal in three games before losing Inter Milan's Tajon Buchanan to a broken leg in training Tuesday. Reaching the semifinals would be a massive achievement for either of these teams.

COLOMBIA VS PANAMA In Glendale, Arizona, the quarters move west for a pair of games held in air-conditioned stadiums amid a continent-wide heat wave. Colombia is now unbeaten in

26 consecutive matches after holding Brazil to a draw to win its group. Led by veteran star James Rodríguez, Los Cafeteros will be favored to eliminate Panama, which knocked off the host U.S. Team to advance from group play.

BRAZIL VS URUGUAY The Sin City will host easily the most tantalizing matchup of the round, featuring a faltering powerhouse against a team known for perennially punching above its weight. No quarterfinal team looked as shaky as Brazil, which stumbled into the next round with a thoroughly unimpressive effort. Colombia and Costa Rica both held the Seleção to draws, and fan discontent is roiling.

Even worse, Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior is suspended for the quarterfinal after accumulating two yellow cards. Yet Brazil is still laden with individual talent that's barely touched the field in this tournament, so it's far too early to write off the five-time World Cup winners.

Uruguay looks just as good as advertised under brilliant coach Marcelo Bielsa, winning three times by a combined 9-1 in group play led by Liverpool striker Darwin Núñez.

After beating Brazil and Argentina in recent World Cup qualifying matches, La Celeste probably would be the tournament favorites if not for Argentina's similarly strong form - but Brazil has the pure talent to end those dreams in a hurry.

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag signs contract extension until 2026

AP ■ MANCHESTER (ENGLAND)

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag has signed a contract extension through to 2026, the Premier League club said Thursday. The Dutchman has won back-to-back trophies in his first two years at Old Trafford, but faced uncertainty over his position after leading it to its worst league finish in 34 years last season.

After a performance review, United decided to stick with Ten Hag and he has now agreed on a new deal, which is a one-year extension on his previous contract, which was due to expire at the end of the upcoming season. "Looking back at the past two years, we can reflect with pride

on two trophies and many examples of progression from where we were when I joined," Ten Hag said. "However, we must also be clear that there is still lots of hard work ahead to reach the levels expected of Manchester United, which means challenging for English and European titles.

"In my discussions with the club, we have found complete unity in our vision for reaching those goals, and we are all strongly committed to making that journey together." Ten Hag joined United from Ajax in 2022 and won the English League Cup in his first year in England. He followed that up last season with a victory over Manchester City in the FA Cup final.



He stays on in the face of a major overhaul of United's soccer operations by new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe.

British billionaire Ratcliffe bought a 27.7% stake in the club in February and has hired a new CEO, sporting director

and technical director in a bid to return the 20-time English champions to the top of European soccer.

"With two trophies in the past two seasons, Erik has reinforced his record as one of the most consistently

successful coaches in European football. While the club's review of last season highlighted areas for improvement, it also reached a clear conclusion that Erik was the best partner for us to work with in driving up standards and outcomes," said United Sporting Director Dan Ashworth.

"This group of players and staff have already shown they are capable of competing and winning at the top level; now we need to do it more consistently. "With our strengthened football leadership team now in place, we are looking forward to working hand-in-hand with Erik to achieve our shared ambitions for this football club.

Spain face hosts Germany in quarterfinals with a potential record on line



AP ■ STUTTGART (GERMANY)

Spain meet host nation Germany on Friday in the quarterfinals of the European Championship in an eagerly-anticipated match between two of the best performing sides at the tournament.

There is also a potential record on the line as Spain and Germany have each won three European Championships, better than any other nation.

Two of the most exciting talents will be on show in Spain teenager Lamine Yamal and 21-year-old Germany forward Jamal Musiala.

MATCH FACTS: The winner will advance to face France or Portugal in the semifinal in Munich on Tuesday.

Spain and Germany are the leading scorers at Euro 2024, having netted nine and 10 goals respectively in their four matches. They have also conjured the most attempts on target.

Spain has never eliminated a host nation, either at a European Championship or at the World Cup. La Roja is the only team to

have won all its matches at Euro 2024, beating Croatia, Italy and Albania in the group stage before thumping Georgia 4-1 in the round of 16.

Germany beat Scotland and Hungary but drew against Switzerland before eliminating Denmark.

Germany hasn't beaten Spain in a major tournament since a group-stage victory at Euro '88.

TEAM NEWS: Lamine Yamal, Nico Williams and Fabian Ruiz all missed Spain's training session on Tuesday, while Americ Laporte only jogged once around the field. However, all are expected to be fit for Friday's match.

Germany defender Jonathan Tah returns from suspension and coach Julian Nagelsmann has reported no injury concerns.

BY THE NUMBERS: Spain and Germany have only conceded three goals between them. The only time Spain goalkeeper Unai Simón had to pick the ball out of his net was against Georgia, while Germany conceded against Scotland and Switzerland.

The teams have met 26 times, with Germany winning nine to Spain's eight. Spain edges Germany slightly on goals scored with 32 compared to 31.

Three of the last four encounters have finished in a 1-1 draw with the exception being a 6-0 thrashing of Germany by Spain in a UEFA Nations League match in November 2020.

Germany has won all six of its European Championship quarterfinals. Spain has lost five of its nine.

Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer will likely make a national record 39th appearance in a major tournament, having matched Bastian Schweinsteiger's mark in the previous round.

Germany has won the last six penalty shootouts it has been involved in, losing only its first in the 1976 final. Spain has won seven of its 13.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING: "I am not at all nostalgic and I don't feel like this will be my last-ever match." - Germany midfielder Toni Kroos, who will be retiring after the tournament.

"We're aiming for the trophy and even though it's been a pleasure playing with Toni Kroos - because he's been a teammate at Real Madrid) and a friend - I'd still like to retire' him on Friday!" - Spain forward Joselu.

"I don't know if Spain are all that happy having to face Germany; likewise, there could have been easier opponents for us. If you want to win this tournament, you have to go through Spain." - Germany midfielder Joshua Kimmich. "Both are amazing players, they are young talents who will be the best in the world in the future. The wrong thing that everybody does is compare players. I think we only have to enjoy them.

Tvesa T-24, Diksha T-46 in London Aramco Series

PTI ■ LONDON

Tvesa Malik Sandhu was unable to hold on to her early gains and finished at even-par 73 to be tied-24th at the end of the first round of the Aramco Team Series London here.

Fellow Indian Diksha Dagar, who will play in the Major Evian Championships next week, shot 2-over 75 to be tied-46 at the Centurion Club, while Pranavi Urs carded a disappointing 7-over 80 and looks unlikely to make the cut.

Tvesa, who lost a play-off last week and missed out on a maiden win on the Ladies European Tour (LET), began well from the 10th tee. She had a bogey on 12th but it was followed by an eagle, her third in her last three rounds. She



had eagles in the second and third rounds of last week's Swiss Ladies Open. She added a birdie on the 18th to turn in 2-under. She dropped three shots on the second, third and seventh but got one back with a birdie on

the eighth to close at 73. Diksha had three birdies, three bogeys and a double-bogey.

Ireland's Leona Maguire led the individual standings, while her team comprising Solheim Cup winner, England's Liz Young, Spain's Marta Sanz Barrio and amateur Yana Wilson, was joint leader after day 1 at 14-under. Leona's team shared the lead with Team Nuria Iturriz and Team Georgia Hall.

Leona sits at the top of the leaderboard after producing a bogey-free first round. The two-time LPGA winner rolled in back-to-back birdies on her fifth and sixth holes, before making three on the trot from holes 8 to 10 before adding further birdies on the 13th and 15th for her round of seven-under par.

AP ■ LONDON

Coco Gauff likes No. 1 Court at Wimbledon. It's where she beat Venus Williams back in 2019 when Gauff made her Wimbledon debut at age 15.

On Wednesday, Gauff beat qualifier Anca Todoni 6-2, 6-1 to advance to the third round at the All England Club. "This is the court where I first started here at Wimbledon. Court 1 is always a special place for me to play on," the 20-year-old Gauff said in her on-court interview.

The victory also allows Gauff, the No. 2 seed, to move another step away from last year's first-round exit. "Overall, I just learned about life a lot," the U.S. Open champion said when asked about putting that three-set loss to Sofia Kenin behind her. "I just realized that, yes, what I do I'm very passionate about, but it's not ever that serious and sometimes the world can make you feel like there's so much pressure, there's so much expect-

Coco Gauff and Carlos Alcaraz advance at Wimbledon. Naomi Osaka loses



old Spaniard replied with a smile: "I'm going for him." "We played a really good match



in the U.S. Open," the No. 3 seed said of their 2022 semifinal that Alcaraz won at Flushing

Meadows. In other results, four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka was eliminated in the second round by No. 19 Emma Navarro by a score of 6-4, 6-1, while No. 1 Jannik Sinner got past 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (3), 7-6 (4), 2-6, 7-6 (4) at Centre Court in an all-Italian contest.

"I knew that I had to raise my level today," Sinner said. "He is a grass-court specialist. ... I'm very happy how I handled the situation."

No. 11 Danielle Collins completed her first-round match - a 6-3, 7-6 (4) win over Clara Tauson. It had been suspended Tuesday night at 4-4 in the second set. No. 20 Beatriz Haddad Maia advanced to the third round by beating Magdalena Frech 7-5, 6-3.



Spaniards Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar. Martinez and Munar won 6-2, 6-2 in one hour and seven minutes. India will have further representation in men's doubles first round through N Sriram Balaji and Yuki Bhambri later on Thursday. Balaji will partner Britain's Luke Johnson and will face fourth seeds Mate Pavic of Serbia and Marcelo Arevalo of El Salvador. On the other hand, Bhambri and France's Albano Olivetti will take on the Kazakh duo of Alexander Bublik and Alexander Shevchenko.



Vishwambhara dubbing begins

Megastar Chiranjeevi's eagerly awaited socio-fantasy extravaganza, *Vishwambhara*, has commenced its dubbing process as part of its preparation for a Sankranti theatrical release. The film, known for its extensive VFX, is currently undergoing simultaneous production and post-production activities to ensure its timely completion. In *Vishwambhara*, Megastar Chiranjeevi portrays a devout follower of Lord Hanuman, with the movie promising intense action sequences crafted under the meticulous direction of Vassishta. Produced by UV Creations, known for their blockbuster hits, the film boasts a stellar cast and a crew of renowned technicians. Joining Chiranjeevi are Trisha Krishnan and Ashika Ranganath as the leading heroines, with Kunal Kapoor set to deliver a powerful performance in a pivotal role. Vikram, Vamsi, and Pramod are spearheading the production efforts, while the acclaimed MM Keeravani, fresh off an Oscar Award, composes the music and Chota K Naidu handles the cinematography. *Vishwambhara* is scheduled for release on January 10th, 2025, promising an enthralling blend of fantasy and action for audiences to look forward to.



NIHARIKA NM SET FOR TOLLYWOOD DEBUT!

Niharika NM, well-known for her engaging social media presence, is set to make her debut in Tollywood under the banner of Geetha Arts. Celebrating her birthday, Geetha Arts warmly welcomed her into the Tollywood family with a special announcement on social media. Born in Chennai and raised in Bangalore, Niharika pursued her MBA at Chapman University in California, USA. Her passion for theater arts sparked early, leading her to begin her career as a YouTube influencer while still in high school. Niharika captivates her audience with Instagram reels where she shares

her unique perspectives on various topics. Having earned the moniker of social media's entertainment and comedy queen, Niharika boasts a substantial following of 6 million subscribers. She recently represented India for the second consecutive year at YouTube's Creators for Change program, highlighting her commitment to addressing vital social issues through her content. Her remarkable career trajectory is even studied as a case study at Chapman University. As Niharika NM ventures into Tollywood, her expertise in creating relatable and impactful content is poised to pave the way for a successful film career. Her transition from social media sensation to Tollywood star holds immense promise, driven by her talent, charm, and unwavering dedication. Niharika NM is set to leave a significant mark on Tollywood with her upcoming endeavors.

Satyadev's look from Zebra hints at his intense character

Satyadev's debut look in the film *Zebra*, directed by Eashvar Karthic and produced by SN Reddy, S Padmaja, Bala Sundaram and Dinesh Sundaram under Padmaja Films Private Ltd and Old Town Pictures, was revealed on his birthday. Alongside Kannada star Daali Dhananjaya, Satyadev plays a prominent role in this crime action entertainer. In the unveiled poster, Satyadev appears in a sleek suit, exuding a serious demeanour with an intense gaze. He is depicted walking assertively, carrying a bag and holding a pen in his other hand, set against a backdrop featuring currency notes. This glimpse hints at the intense character portrayal by Satyadev in the film. Titled *Zebra*, the movie is completed with shooting wrapped up, and it is currently undergoing post-production. The tagline "Luck Favours The Brave" underscores the theme of the movie. The film's release date will be announced soon. Joining Satyadev and Daali Dhananjaya are Priya Bhavani Shankar and Jennifer Piccinato as the leading ladies, with veteran actor Sathyaraj in a pivotal role. Sathya Akala and Sunil round out the prominent cast. Ravi Basur, known for his work in *KGF* and *Salaar*, composes the music, while Satya Ponmar handles cinematography. S Sriakashmi Reddy serves as the co-producer, Anil Krish manages editing, and Meeraq pens the dialogues.

Sathyaraj joins Sikandar



The announcement of uniting these three powerhouse figures—producer Sajid Nadiadwala, superstar Salman Khan, and director AR Murugadoss—has heightened excitement to its peak and now, another potent personality has joined the team: Sathyaraj. Renowned for his role as Kattappa in the iconic *Baahubali* franchise, Sathyaraj brings his talent to *Sikandar*. The actor started filming for the film recently along with Prateik Babbar. This update adds to the film's exhilarating progress. Having portrayed diverse roles on screen, witnessing Sathyaraj alongside other prominent figures of the entertainment world in *Sikandar* promises a thrilling experience. The production house took social media to announce the same. Produced by Nadiadwala Grandson, *Sikandar*, directed by AR Murugadoss, stars Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna in leading roles. This action-packed entertainer guarantees an unparalleled cinematic experience, slated for the Eid 2025 weekend.

Ari gearing up to deliver a big hit!



The trend of mythology-themed films continues to dominate Indian cinema, with productions exploring epic and divine narratives achieving blockbuster success nationwide. Movies such as *Karthikeya 2*, *Hanuman*, *Kantara* and *Oh My God* have all found substantial acclaim and box office success in recent times. Prabhas' *Kalki 2898 AD*, drawing from the epic Mahabharata, is the latest testament to this trend, breaking records globally. In sync with this wave, *Ari* emerges as an eagerly anticipated film centered on the concept of Arishadvargala and the magnificence of Lord Krishna. This unique narrative angle has stirred considerable interest, making *Ari* a standout project in the mythology genre. Presented by RV Reddy and produced by Srinivas Ramireddy, Thimmappa Naidu Purimetla, and Seshu Maram Reddy under ARVY Cinemas, *Ari* carries the intriguing subtitle "My Name is No Buddy." The film stars Vinod Varma, Surya Purimetla, Anasuya Bharadwaj, Sai Kumar, and Srikanth Iyengar in pivotal roles. Directed by Jayashankar, known for his previous success with *Paper Boy*, *Ari* is gearing up for its theatrical release. Moreover, there is buzz about Bollywood star Abhishek Bachchan showing interest in a Hindi adaptation of *Ari*.



SIVAKARTHIKEYAN, RASHMIKA MANDANNA'S FILM TITLED BOSS

In an exciting development for fans of south cinema, Sivakarthikeyan gears up for his next big project under the direction of Cibi Chakaravarthi. Sources confirm that the film has been titled *BOSS*. The film marks a significant collaboration set to ignite screens with its dynamic storyline and star-studded cast. Joining Sivakarthikeyan in the lead role is the talented Rashmika Mandanna, adding to the anticipation surrounding the project. Notably, seasoned actor SJSurya is set to portray the formidable antagonist, promising electrifying confrontations on screen. Produced by Passion Studio, *BOSS* is slated to commence filming by the end of October, promising a blend of action, drama and intrigue that audiences have come to expect from Sivakarthikeyan's ventures. As details continue to unfold, expectations soar for this upcoming cinematic treat that aims to leave a lasting impact on south cinema enthusiasts worldwide.



Krithi Shetty onboard film Kaantha

Recently there have been announcements about Dulquer Salmaan next major project, which is a highly anticipated pan-India film *Kaantha*. Following his recent successes, Dulquer is set to captivate audiences once again with his versatile acting prowess in this upcoming venture. Joining Dulquer Salmaan in the lead role is Krithi Shetty, whose rising popularity and impressive performances have garnered attention across the industry. Together, they promise to bring a fresh dynamic to the screen, creating anticipation among fans eager for this

cinematic treat, say sources. Scheduled to commence shooting in September, *Kaantha* is poised to be a significant release following Dulquer's forthcoming film *Lucky Bhaskar*. As details continue to emerge about the film's plot and production, expectations soar for *Kaantha* to make a lasting impression on audiences across India.

Shalini's social media post raises concern

Shalini, the former actor and wife of Tamil superstar Ajith Kumar, recently caused concern among fans after sharing a picture from the hospital on her Instagram. The photo, which quickly went viral on social media, shows Shalini dressed in beige hospital scrubs with black dots, lying in a hospital bed. She is seen holding Ajith Kumar's hand, her hair tied back in an updo, and wearing hospital wristbands. Ajith Kumar is seated next to her in a blue striped shirt. Alongside the picture, Shalini expressed her affection with the caption, "Love you forever." The image has sparked worry among her followers, accumulating over 158K likes. Concerned fans flooded the comments section, with one asking, "Any problem,



Shalini?" Another fan praised their enduring relationship, commenting, "Evergreen Couple of Kollywood," while a third sent well wishes, saying, "Get well soon, Shalini ma'am." Meanwhile, Ajith Kumar is currently occupied with his film *Vidaa Muryarchi*, filming in Azerbaijan alongside Trisha. Reports suggest he hurried back to Chennai upon learning of Shalini's health condition.

Second single Aadapilla song from Peka Medalu out

Peka Medalu is a film, introduced by Vinod Kishan, as a hero who acted in hit films like *Na Peru Shiva* and *Andhagaram* and Anusha Krishna is playing the heroine. After establishing the company Crazy Ants Productions with the movie *Evvariki Cheppoddu*, now coming forward to audience with the crazy movie *Peka Medalu*. Previously, the first song and teaser of this movie got an excellent response. Recently, the innovative promotional video made by hero Vinod Kishan impressed the audience. Now the second single *Aadapilla* song from this movie has been

released. Bhargava Karthik penned the lyrics of this song which is sung by singer Sakae Rajashekar and says 'Anandam Attaku Swaha Manasshanti Mamaku Swaha Aadanani Janmanta Swaha'. The music given by Smaran Sai is very attractive and new. It seems that this song has been portrayed in a new and different way. As a story with a good concept and content, this movie will definitely be a success. Movie team said that this movie is releasing on July 19 grandly.



Actress Varalaxmi Sarathkumar and Nicholai Sachdev, recently celebrated their marriage with a grand wedding ceremony on July 3, followed by a lavish reception. The event was graced by numerous eminent personalities from the South Indian film industry, adding to the glamour and excitement of the occasion. The wedding festivities of Varalaxmi Sarathkumar and Nicholai Sachdev have taken social media by storm, with photos and videos capturing memorable moments shared by the couple and their esteemed guests. Among those in attendance were icons such as Rajinikanth, Mani Ratnam, Balakrishna, AR Rahman, S Thaman, Siddharth, Trisha Krishnan, Kichcha Sudeep, among many others, each contributing to the joyous atmosphere with their presence. Varalaxmi radiated elegance in a heavily embellished lehenga, complemented by Nicholai's traditional sherwani attire. Memorable snapshots from the occasion included superstar Rajinikanth posing with Sarathkumar and Himani, as well as actor-politician Nandamuri Balakrishna warmly engaging with Sarathkumar's family and other guests.