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Stronger ties will greatly benefit our people: PM Modi in Moscow

'I COULD PLAY A THOUSAND CHARACTERS, BUT NOT RONA-DHONA LACED MOMMY ONES'



South Korean actor likely to play villain IN SPIRIT



QUOTE OF THE DAY

In 2029, YS Sharmila will become the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and Rahul Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India. If there is a by-election for the Kadapa Parliament seat, I will campaign for the Congress. Andhra Pradesh doesn't have an opposition. It has only the ruling BJP, that is, Babu, Jagan and Pawan, who are all on the side of Modi.

— Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister, TG

DON'T MISS...

Gear up to face flood threat, officials...

District Collector K Vetri Selvi directed the officials concerned to prepare plans to face the flood threat without waiting till the rivers receive heavy flood water. Collector Vetri Selvi held a meeting with the officials here on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, she said that even though there is no flood threat at present, the Godavari River is likely to receive flood water during the monsoon season in the coming days. She ordered the officials to take precautionary measures as soon as the first danger signal was hoisted at Bhadrachalam when the Godavari River...

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Rath Yatra: Chariots reach...

The chariots of the sibling deities, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra, reached the Gundicha temple on Monday, with which the first leg of the Rath Yatra celebrations in Odisha's Puri concluded. Thousands of people pulled the chariots, while lakhs of devotees gathered on the roadside to watch the procession on 'Badadanda' amid heat and humidity. The 'yatra' began on Sunday evening, but halted a few metres later due to sunset. It resumed the 2.5 km journey from the 12th-century...

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Budget should focus on tax relief...

The Union Budget FY25 should focus on offering relief to taxpayers, especially in the lower income brackets, to stimulate consumption, industry players suggested. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the full Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on July 23 which will be the first major policy document of the new government. The industry also urged the finance minister to lower corporate tax, phase out tax exemptions, and broaden tax base to boost economic growth. "Rationalise and..."

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India eye improved bowling show in...

Desperate to level the three-match series after the second game was washed out, India would hope weather doesn't play spoilsport, besides eyeing a much-improved bowling effort in the final women's T20I against South Africa here on Tuesday. India are trailing the three-match series 0-1 after losing the opener by 12 runs. Their problems compounded after the second game here on Sunday was washed out midway due to persistent drizzle. And with 30 to 40 per cent of rain forecast for Tuesday, the Indians...

-SPORTS

Cong makes strong pitch to deny Jagan the YSR legacy

Telangana CM Revanth predicts Rahul as PM & Sharmila as AP CM in 2029

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy declared his commitment to campaign for Congress candidate YS Sharmila in the event of a by-election for the Kadapa Lok Sabha constituency.

At a Congress event held on Monday in Mangalagiri to celebrate the 75th birth anniversary of former chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, Revanth Reddy stated he would take responsibility for YS Sharmila's victory, pledging his full support in her campaign.

This announcement comes amid speculation that former chief minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy might resign from his MLA position, potentially prompting Kadapa MP YS Avinash Reddy to step down as well.

The speculation suggests that Jagan Mohan Reddy plans to contest the by-election in Kadapa to secure a parliamentary seat and avoid entering the Andhra Pradesh Assembly.

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Telangana CM Revanth Reddy vows to campaign for Sharmila in the event of Kadapa LS bypoll.

• Congress celebrates 75th birth anniversary of YSR at a grand event in Mangalagiri.

• Speculation suggests former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy might resign to contest the by-election and secure a parliamentary seat.

• Revanth Reddy criticised the current political opposition in AP and highlighted YS Sharmila's potential role.

• Revanth Reddy compared YS Sharmila's leadership potential to that of her late father, YS Rajasekhara Reddy.



Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy addressing a meeting held to commemorate the 75th birth anniversary of Late CM YS Rajasekhara Reddy at Mangalagiri on Monday. (Right) APCC president YS Sharmila Reddy and other prominent Congress leaders are seen on the dais. Pix by Ch Vijaya Bhaskar

RAHUL HAILS YSR AS DEVOTED PUBLIC SERVANT

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the 75th birth anniversary of former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, honoured his legacy as a devoted public servant. Rahul Gandhi highlighted Rajasekhara Reddy's commitment to the welfare of the people, describing him as a revolutionary leader whose impact is still felt today.

In a tribute posted on 'X,' Gandhi reflected on how Rajasekhara Reddy's continued presence might have shaped Andhra Pradesh differently. He shared



a video on the platform featuring himself with YS Sharmila Reddy, daughter of the late Chief Minister and current APCC chief.

2



Free sand policy back in AP Naidu-led NDA govt issues GO No. 43; delivery begins in 20 districts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP-led NDA government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, has reintroduced the Free Sand Policy by issuing Government Order (GO) Ms No 43, signed by N Yuvaraj, Principal Secretary (Mines) (FAC) on Monday. This GO cancels the previous sand policies of 2019 and 2021. The new guidelines aim to provide sand to consumers free of cost.

The government has mandated the formation of district-level committees for sand mining, chaired by the district collector.

These committees will include district-level officials from various departments, including the district SP and Joint Collector.

2

- Previous sand policies of 2019 and 2021 have been cancelled.
- District-level committees for sand mining will be formed. District collectors to head the panels.
- 49 lakh metric tonnes of sand available at various stock points in the state.
- De-siltation processes in water bodies will be decided by district-level committees.
- Payments for sand loading and transportation to be made digitally.
- Strict action to be taken against the resale or interstate transportation of sand.
- Free sand is to be used solely for building constructions.
- Bank accounts in 16 districts are set up for digital payments, with QR codes provided.
- Details about sand stock and sales are available on the Department of Mines' website.



Labour Minister visits injured cement plant workers in hospital

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Labour Vasamsetti Subhash visited injured workers at the hospital on Monday following a boiler explosion at Ultratech Cement Factory. The explosion, which occurred on Sunday in Jaggayyapet, about 40 km from here, resulted in one worker's death and left 16 others injured. Eight of the injured workers were admitted to Manipal Hospital, while the remaining eight were taken to Andhra Hospital in Vijayawada.

During his visit, the Minister spoke with the injured workers and consulted with doctors regarding their conditions. Addressing the media, the Labour Minister announced that the cement factory management has agreed to pay Rs 50 lakh ex gratia to the family of the deceased worker. The government will also provide financial assistance to the injured workers and the bereaved family.

The Minister shared that doctors informed him of the critical condition of three injured workers, namely Swamy, Arjun Rao, and Gopi Naik. Additionally,

Rs 50 L given to kin of deceased worker

VIJAYAWADA: NTR District Collector Dr G Srijana handed over a cheque for Rs 50 lakh toward compensation to the family of a deceased worker following an accident at the Ultratech Cement factory in Budavada, Jaggayyapet Mandal on Monday. She assured that Rs 25 lakh would be provided to those severely injured and Rs 5 lakh to those with minor injuries who are currently undergoing treatment in various hospitals.

worker Shivanarayana has sustained 95 per cent damage to his eyes.

Labour Commissioner M. Sheshagiri Babu, RDO B.H. Bhavani Shankar and DMHO Subhasini accompanied the Minister during the visit. Vijayawada MP Keshineni Shivanath also visited the injured workers in the hospital.

2

Jagan pays homage to YSR

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Monday paid tributes to his father, the late Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy, at YSR Ghat in Idupulapaya, marking the 75th anniversary of Dr Reddy's birth. Joining him were his mother Vijayamma, his wife Bharathi Reddy, and leaders of the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP). Emotions ran high as Vijayamma, who had arrived at the ghat earlier to offer her respects, was moved to tears upon seeing her son, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, at the memorial. Their embrace was a poignant moment,



reflecting their deep bond and shared reverence for the late leader.

This occasion marked the first public meeting between Vijayamma and YS Jagan since the recent state assembly and Lok Sabha elections. During the election period, some

attempts were made to create divisions within the YSR family. Vijayamma had supported her daughter Sharmila, the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) chief, which led to speculation about family discord.

2

AP Assembly sessions likely from July 22

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Assembly sessions are expected to commence on July 22. Currently, the Finance Department is deliberating on introducing a full-scale budget. Proposals are being considered for issuing an ordinance to extend the Vote-on-Account budget.

It appears that the Finance Department aims to extend the Vote-on-Account for an additional four months. **Continued on Page 2**

'Simple govt, effective governance is our policy'

Lokesh presents laptops to 25 differently-abled students

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, Information Technology (IT), and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, said on Monday that a simple government and effective governance are the cornerstones of Chandrababu Naidu's administration.

Addressing a gathering of meritorious physically challenged students, Lokesh expressed his delight in meeting them. "I assure you all that within a year, I will develop Andhra Pradesh in such a way that the entire country will take notice," the IT and Electronics Minister stated. **Continued on Page 2**



2

Relief to Kodali in High Court

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani), was granted relief by the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday. The High Court has barred police from acting against him until further notice.

Recently, a case was filed against Nani by the Gudivada town police after a group of former volunteers from different gram ward sachivalayams (Secretariat) had alleged that he had forced them to resign from their posts just before the elections in the state. **Continued on Page 2**

V'wada lad in Indian archery team for Paris Olympics

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bommadevara Dhiraj, an international archer, has been selected to represent the Indian contingent in the upcoming Olympics in Paris. He left for Paris with the Indian Archery team on Monday. Hailing from Andhra Pradesh and Vijayawada, this will be his first time representing India at the Olympics. His selection follows an impressive performance in the Archery World Cup last year. Dhiraj, based in Vijayawada City, will compete in the Men's Recurve



event at the Olympics. He will participate in both the team event, alongside Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav, and the individual category. Following in the footsteps of the late Kamineni Eswara Rao from the Krishna district, Dhiraj is the second person from Andhra Pradesh to represent India at the Olympics. Kamineni Eswara Rao participated in weightlifting in the early 80s. Dhiraj received his training at the Cherukuri Volga Archery Academy in Vijayawada. **Continued on Page 2**

2

Indian Navy unveils AI Experience Hub in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a significant stride towards embracing cutting-edge technologies, the Indian Navy inaugurated an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Experience Hub on Monday. The state-of-the-art facility was unveiled by Vice Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOC-in-C) of the Eastern Naval Command, at the Maritime Reference Library in Visakhapatnam.

The AI Hub is designed to equip naval personnel with advanced AI tools and applications, fostering a culture of innovation and technological proficiency within the force.

The initiative is a part of the Indian Navy's broader efforts to integrate transformational advances in Artificial Intelligence



across its operations. "The inauguration of this AI Experience Hub marks a new chapter in our quest for technological excellence," Vice Admiral Pendharkar said during the event. "We aim to provide our personnel

with the best resources to enhance their capabilities and keep pace with the rapid advancements in AI." "The facility is poised to serve as a centre for exposure and learning, encouraging the

"The facility is poised to serve as a centre for exposure and learning, encouraging the development and implementation of AI use cases across multiple domains."

development and implementation of AI use cases across multiple domains," stated Vice Admiral Pendharkar. "From operational planning to logistics and administrative functions, the AI Hub is expected to revolutionize various aspects of naval operations, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness."

The AI Experience Hub is equipped with a range of AI tools and applications, providing hands-on experience and fostering a deep understanding of AI technologies. This initiative is expected to inspire personnel to explore and leverage AI capabilities, driving innovation within the Navy.

The establishment of the AI Hub underscores the Indian Navy's commitment to staying ahead in the technological arena, ensuring that its personnel are well-equipped to meet the challenges of modern warfare. By embracing AI, the Navy aims to enhance its operational readiness and maintain a strategic edge. The inauguration ceremony was attended by senior naval officers and personnel, who expressed their enthusiasm and support for the new initiative. The AI Experience Hub is set to become a cornerstone of the Indian Navy's technological infrastructure, paving the way for future advancements and innovations.

APEPDCL pushes for 24/7 power supply in villages

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Prithvi Tej Immadi, the CMD of Eastern Power Distribution Company of Andhra Pradesh Limited (APEPDCL), has announced comprehensive efforts to ensure a 24/7 power supply to every village under EPDCL's jurisdiction. In an exclusive interview with "The Pioneer" on Monday, he elaborated on the development projects undertaken by DISCOM over the past year, emphasizing the priority of the PM Surya Ghar Yojana scheme.



To provide an uninterrupted nine-hour electricity supply to agriculture, 900 dedicated feeders are being set up. These feeders will be upgraded to provide three-phase electricity to villages, with plans to identify and replace overloaded feeders under a Rs. 1,600 crore initiative funded through the central scheme RDSS.

CMD Prithvi Tej highlighted the increase in subsidies for the rooftop solar scheme from Rs. 16,000 per kilowatt to Rs 78,000 for the first three kilowatts. This significant enhancement aims to encourage widespread utilization of the program. Registered electricity consumers can avail themselves of this benefit through the relevant app, with the scheme now extending up to ten kilowatts without requiring a feasibility report. Banks are offer-

ing loans with a minimal down payment of Rs. 10,000 for rooftop solar installations.

In addition to solar initiatives, CMD Prithvi Tej announced that underground cable works will soon commence in the remaining parts of Visakhapatnam city. Over the past year, 13,000 farmers received free electricity connections for agriculture under DISCOM, with an additional 2,400 connections pending due to election code

restrictions but expected to be sanctioned soon.

To provide an uninterrupted nine-hour electricity supply to agriculture, 900 dedicated feeders are being set up. These feeders will be upgraded to provide three-phase electricity to villages, with plans to identify and replace overloaded feeders under a Rs. 1,600 crore initiative funded through the central scheme RDSS.

Moreover, a total of 35,000 homes from Seethampet in

Srikakulam district to KR Puram in West Godavari district have been identified to receive electricity under a Rs. 150 crore initiative for tribal villages. To date, 32,000 houses have been connected with meters installed, all provided as free services.

As part of a central government directive, smart meters will soon be introduced, with an estimated need of ten lakh meters. In the initial phase, 3,000 feeders, 1.3 lakh transformers, 1.4 lakh government services, and subsequently commercial and industrial meters will be installed.

These smart meters, operating on a prepaid system, will be mandatory for high electricity consumers. The central government has instructed that there should be no power cuts or disconnections between 10 pm and 6 am, designating this period as 'Happy Hours.' With these extensive measures, APEPDCL is poised to transform the power landscape in Andhra Pradesh, ensuring a reliable and sustainable electricity supply for all.

Bangladesh delegation explores trade opportunities at Visakhapatnam Port

Significant step towards Bangladesh's goal of expanding its Exim trade with India

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A 10-member delegation from Bangladesh, led by SM Mostafa Kamal, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Shipping, and Sheikh Saleh Ahmmed, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, visited the Visakhapatnam Port Authority (VPA) on Monday. This visit marks a significant step towards Bangladesh's goal of expanding its Export-Import (Exim) trade with India, specifically through eastern coast ports, following Colombo and Singapore as key trading partners.



The delegation aimed to assess the commercial and technical viability of using eastern Indian ports, particularly focusing on potential trade benefits for both countries. Discussions centered on critical issues like ease of doing business, turnaround time, customs clearance, port connectivity, transshipment facilities, cruise passenger han-

dling, congestion management, and dredging activities. They aimed to identify areas for collaboration and improvement to smoothen trade operations.

Dr. M Angamuthu, Chairperson of the VPA, welcomed the delegation and presented a detailed overview of Visakhapatnam Port's facilities and infrastructure. He highlighted the port's strategic initiatives, commitment to supporting Bangladesh trade, cargo handling capabilities, advanced mechanisation, and green practices. Dr. Angamuthu assured the delegation of VPA's dedication to

strengthening bilateral trade relations.

SM Mostafa Kamal expressed appreciation for the hospitality and emphasised Bangladesh's keen interest in facilitating Exim trade. He envisioned a mutually beneficial relationship that enhances trade efficiency and economic growth for both nations. Commending the informative and welcoming environment, Kamal stressed the importance of addressing logistical challenges to streamline trade operations.

This visit signifies a pivotal move towards strengthening India-Bangladesh trade ties.

Both parties acknowledged the immense potential for increased collaboration and the need to overcome logistical hurdles for smoother trade. The delegation appreciated the insights shared and looked forward to future engagements for a robust trading partnership. The visit concluded with a reaffirmed commitment from both sides to work towards increased trade and explore new avenues for cooperation.

Dr. Angamuthu assured continued support and collaboration to facilitate trade growth and improve connectivity between the two nations.

Disclose details of Telugu CMs' meet, demands Ambati Rambabu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Ambati Rambabu has demanded that details of the recent discussions between Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy be made public.

Rambabu questioned the secrecy surrounding the meeting between the two leaders. He revealed that the Telangana government has proposed the return of seven mandals to Telangana and has requested a share in the revenue from Tirumala, as well as access to ports and Krishna waters. Rambabu accused Chandrababu of preparing to commit severe injustices against the people of Andhra Pradesh.

Speaking at the party's central office on Monday, Rambabu highlighted that a decade has passed since the bifurcation of the state, yet many issues remain unresolved. He criticised Chandrababu Naidu for



failing to leverage the opportunity presented by the inclusion of Hyderabad as the joint capital for ten years, during his five-year tenure as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

Rambabu condemned Naidu for fleeing Hyderabad and betraying the

people of Andhra Pradesh after being implicated in the Cash-for-Vote case. He accused Naidu of abandoning the transfer of properties under Schedules 9 and 10 of the Reorganisation Act and moving to the newly formed Andhra Pradesh without any negotiations.

He praised current Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for resolving issues related to the Polavaram project with Chhattisgarh and Odisha. Rambabu blamed Chandrababu for the injustices faced by the people of Andhra Pradesh concerning the Polavaram project, which is a national initiative. He asserted that it was YS Jagan who reclaimed Andhra Pradesh's share of the Nagarjuna Sagar reservoir during his administration. Rambabu pledged that if Naidu's promises remain unfulfilled, YS Jagan will stand as the voice of the common man and fight for the rights of the state's people.

TET exams rescheduled from October 3 to 20

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has made some key changes in the AP TET schedule on Monday. The government has released a notification to conduct TET exams from October 3 to 20 instead of the earlier TET notification. It is known that the Andhra Pradesh State government once conducted the Mega DSC to fill 16,347 teacher posts across the State.

Although the TET notification was released on July 2, it has recently decided to give some more time for the candidates to prepare for TET and DSC as requested. In this background, a revised notification was released on Monday with many changes in the TET schedule.

According to the old notification, the TET exams were to be held from August 5 to 20, but it has been decided to conduct them from October 3 to 20. It is known that TET has 20 per cent weightage in DSC

Bangla team visits Krishnapatnam Port



PNS ■ NELLORE

A 13-member Bangladesh delegation visited Adani Krishnapatnam Port as part of a broader initiative to explore opportunities for closer maritime cooperation and trade between the two countries and also the Coastal Shipping Agreement.

The agreement underscores a commitment to enhancing mutual maritime trade and ensuring smoother and more efficient navigation. The delegation was

accompanied by senior officials from the Government of India, including representatives from the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Directorate General of Shipping, and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs.

During their visit, the delegation received detailed presentations on the Krishnapatnam port's technical operations, commercial opportunities, and compre-

hensive infrastructure.

They toured key facilities to gain insights into the port's capabilities in handling maritime commercial navigation and the potential for Exim trade. The delegation will visit ports in Visakhapatnam, Haldia, and Kolkata very soon.

The visit underscores the commitment of both India and Bangladesh to enhancing maritime commercial navigation and fostering greater cooperation in the trade and logistics industry.

V'wada lad...

Continued from Page 1

Dhiraj began his archery journey at the age of six when he joined the Volga Archery Academy. Under the guidance of the late coach Cherukuri Lenin, he honed his skills and went on to compete in various state, national, and international events, ultimately earning a spot on the Indian Archery team for the Olympics.

In recognition of his achievement, Cherukuri Volga Archery Academy president and chief coach Cherukuri Satyanarayana, AP Archery Association treasurer Bommadevara Sravan Kumar, Technical Committee Chairman B. Venkata Ramana, and others extended their congratulations to Dhiraj.

NTPC Simhadri marks Raising Day with celebrations, new initiatives

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

NTPC Simhadri marked its 27th Raising Day with a grand celebration that highlighted its remarkable journey, commitment to sustainability, and dedication to employee well-being. Unfurling the NTPC flag, Head of Project, NTPC Simhadri, Sanjay Kumar Sinha commended the team's exceptional performance in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, acknowledging their ability to overcome challenges and achieve remarkable progress over the years. Sinha set ambitious goals for 2024-2025, motivating the workforce to maintain their momentum.

A cake-cutting ceremony was held on the occasion. The ceremony also recognised employees who excelled during Swachhata Pakhwada



(Cleanliness Fortnight), World Environment Day, and International Yoga Day competitions, underlining NTPC Simhadri's commitment to sustainability and employee wellness. Adding to the celebratory spirit, balloons in NTPC's colours were released by Sinha and other dignitaries, symbolising a bright future for

the organisation. Furthermore, emphasising the importance of knowledge and innovation, Sinha unveiled the idol of goddess Saraswati at the Regional Learning Institute (RLI) Simhadri.

A significant operational milestone was achieved with the inauguration of the first dry ash silo lift in the southern region,

with a capacity of 1,000 kg, by Sinha. The day's highlight was the inauguration of the 'Srijanam Child Development Centre' at Jeevan Rekha Hospital, NTPC Simhadri. This centre caters to children with autism and developmental delays, reflecting NTPC Simhadri's commitment to social responsibility and employee well-being. The presence of Sanjay Kumar Sinha as the chief guest underscored this dedication.

The celebratory event culminated in a musical evening at the Shakuntalam Auditorium. The 27th Raising Day commemoration not only celebrated past success, but also set the stage for future accomplishments, solidifying NTPC Simhadri's position as a leading force in the energy sector.

Free sand...

Continued from Page 1

The committees are instructed to manage the stock points in the districts, where it has been revealed that 49 lakh metric tonnes of sand are available.

Orders have been issued to carry out the de-siltation process in reservoirs, ponds, and other water bodies. The district-level committees will decide the locations for de-siltation and will also be responsible for determining loading and transportation charges. All payments at stock points must be made digitally. Strict action will be taken against the resale or transportation of sand to other states, and the free sand must only be used for building construction. Taxes will be imposed if sand is smuggled or misused.

The free sand policy began on Monday across the State. Arrangements have been made to collect nominal fees such as seigniorage, sand excavation, and transportation expenses through digital mode. The NDA government has implemented a transparent system accepting only digital payments, eliminating cash transactions. This policy will be implemented in all districts except Parvathipuram Manyam, Kakinada, Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema, West Godavari, Krishna, and Anantapur. Bank accounts have already been opened in 16 districts for digital payments, with respective banks providing QR codes on Monday.

Details about sand storage centres and available quantities have been made available on the official website of the Department of Mines from Sunday. Information on daily sand sales and remaining stock will be updated regular-

'Simple govt, effective governance...

Continued from Page 1

Lokesh presented laptops to 25 differently-abled students who secured admissions in prestigious educational institutions like the IITs, IIITs, and NITs, acknowledging their remarkable achievements. "Gaining admission to such institutions is no easy feat, and you have successfully passed all the exams set by the Almighty," the Minister remarked. These 25 students had come to thank Lokesh following their admissions, which were facilitated by the GO 226 issued under his directives.

The Minister credited the officers who promptly responded to the challenges faced by these students. "Our government's goal is to create five lakh jobs for the youth every year to build a poverty-free state. We will implement reforms in the education sector from KG to PG, ensuring no injustice is done to anyone," he added. Lokesh mentioned that his friends advised him against accepting the Education portfolio due to its challenges. "I love facing challenges, which is why I accepted the portfolio. I studied at Stanford University, and if I were afraid to accept this role, who would take it?" he said. Encouraging the students to serve the state after completing their education, Lokesh assured them of employment opportunities. "Our sole aim is to transform the state into the centre of a trillion-dollar economy," he declared, urging the students to offer assistance to those in need. The Secretary (Education), Kona Sasidhar, and other

AP Assembly...

Continued from Page 1

This extension is anticipated as the department requires more time to assess the financial situation and the flexibility of various departments. A full-scale budget is planned for introduction in September, following a clearer understanding of the financial scenario. The Finance Department is awaiting Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's approval for the ordinance proposal, according to reports.

Relief to...

Continued from Page 1

Nani's associates Dukkupati Sasibhushan and Gorla Srinu were also booked by the police under Sections 447 and 506 of the penal code. Following this, the former minister filed an anticipatory bail petition with the court. Hearing the argument of Kodali's counsel, the court ordered the police to comply with the norms of section 41-A of the penal code and follow the guidelines of the Supreme Court in their investigation. Later, it adjourned the further hearing for four weeks.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Tritiya: Jul 08 04:59 AM to Jul 09 06:09 AM
Chaturthi: Jul 09 06:09 AM to Jul 10 07:52 AM
Nakshatram: Ashlesha: Jul 08 06:02 AM to Jul 09 07:52 AM
Magha: Jul 09 07:52 AM to Jul 10 10:15 AM
Rahukalam: 3:36 PM to 5:13 PM
Varagandam: 9:06 AM to 10:44 AM
Yamijyam: 09:04 PM to 10:49 PM
Gulika: 12:21 PM to 1:58 PM
Amritakalam: 06:09 AM to 07:52 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:55 AM to 12:47 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Scattered Thunderstorms
Temp: 32°C
Humidity: 77%
Sunrise: 5:41 AM
Sunset: 6:44 PM
Updated: July 8, 2024 5:00 PM

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE (1st Call)
T.N. No. 1-35/2024-2025 Date: 03-07-2024
Tenders called for 35 works of Operation & Maintenance of CPWS Schemes in Erstahli East Godavari District under 15th Finance grant with an estimate cost of Rs.2170.20 Lakhs. The tender details are available in the portal www.tender.e-procurement.gov.in and the schedules can be downloaded from 08.07.2024 at 10.30 AM. Last date and time will be 5.00 PM on 22.07.2024. Sd/- Superintending Engineer RWS & S Projects Circle, Kakinada.

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CEMENT FACTORY BLAST

NTR Collector pulls up RDO, Tahsildar for late response

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Srijana, accompanied by Jaggayyapet MLA Sriram Rajagopal (alias Tataiah), Joint Collector Dr P Sampath Kumar, and Nandigama RDO A. Ravindra Rao, on Monday visited the cement factory where a boiler blast resulted in the death of a worker injuries to over 20 workers

The Collector held discussions with the factory management and the victims' families. A cheque for Rs. 50 lakh was handed to Avula Venkatesh's wife and family, along with an agreement document from Ultratech Cement.

Addressing the media, Dr Srijana expressed her commitment to supporting the victims' families and assured that financial support from the government would be distributed soon. She highlighted directives from Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and discussed with the factory management ways to ensure justice for the victims' families.

Moreover, she promised employment opportunities in the cement factory for Venkatesh's wife or other fami-



Collector Srijuna on Monday handed over a cheque for Rs 50 lakh toward compensation to the family of the worker who died in a boiler explosion at a cement factory at Budavada, near Jaggayyapet on Sunday.

ly members. She also mentioned educational support for children in Gurukul Schools, as well as the compensation for the injured workers.

Dr Srijana announced the formation of a committee, with the presence of MLA Sriram Rajagopal, to address issues such as drinking water, roads, and pollution in Budavada village. She mentioned a coordination meeting would be conducted at the district level following discussions with the factory management and the victims' families.

Furthermore, she stated that the district administration would conduct a medical camp in Budavada village, offering specialist consultations in Urology, Nephrology, Cardiology, Dermatology, and other fields. She urged the victims' families and villagers to plan for their future without overreliance.

MLA Sriram Rajagopal reported that 16 people were injured in the incident and mentioned that CM N. Chandrababu Naidu, along with Ministers Nara Lokesh and Kollu Ravindra, were closely

monitoring the situation. He assured that the state government is taking all necessary steps to provide compensation to the victims following the law.

Collector Srijana expressed her dissatisfaction with Nandigama RDO A. Ravindra Rao and Jaggayyapet Tahsildar G.V. Seshagiri for their delayed response to the incident. She criticized the handling of the situation, including the police lathi charge at the factory, and pointed out Tahsildar Seshagiri's apparent prioritization of sand over people's concerns.



Minister makes surprise inspection at BC hostel

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BC Welfare, Handloom & Textiles Minister S Savitha made a surprise inspection at the BC Welfare Boys Hostel in Mylavaram Municipality. The minister inspected the neatness of the children's restrooms as well as the kitchen and bathrooms. The students were asked how the food was served on the hostel menu. The students replied to the minister that there were no such problems. On this occasion, the minister announced that the school shall be provided with additional sections for Classes 8 and 9 at the request of the principal. Minister Savitha said that all possible support will be provided to the artisans and bring back the past glory. The minister visited Kondapalli toy manufacturing centres in the Kondapalli NTR district and inquired about their problems.



Minister Nimmala Rama Naidu, MP Kesineni Chinni, MLA Venigandla Ramu, former minister Devineni Uma and others offering 'Jala Harathi' at the Pavitra Sangamam in Ibrahimpatnam mandal in NTR district on Monday

PLIS holds testimony to Naidu's vision: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Water Resources, Nimmala Rama Naidu, praised the Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (PLIS) as a visionary project and a testament to the effective leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. The initiative aims to interlink rivers Godavari and Krishna through the Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme and the Polavaram Right Main Canal (PRMC), presenting a solution to address the country's drought conditions.

During an event at the Pavitra Sanghamam, attended by Nimmala Rama Naidu, Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni, Gudivada MLA Venigandla Ramu, former minister Devineni Uma Maheswara Rao, and others, the 'Jala Harathi' ceremony was conducted as Godavari water entered River Krishna from PLIS through the Polavaram Right Main Canal.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Rama Naidu commended the Chief Minister's efforts to utilise surplus Godavari water by diverting it into Krishna through the PLIS,

Goal is to interlink rivers Godavari and Krishna through Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme and Polavaram Right Main Canal

thereby contributing to the stabilisation of the ayacut of the Krishna Delta.

Additionally, Minister Rama Naidu announced that around 6,100 cusecs of Godavari water is being released into the Polavaram Right Main Canal by 17 pumps out of a total of 24, with plans to operate the remaining seven pumps to release 8,000 cusecs of water, ultimately irrigating around 13.07 lakh acres of Krishna Delta in the current Kharif season.

"The Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme was constructed by spending Rs.1,300 crore. During the TDP regime (2014-19), as many as 30 lakh acres were irrigated by Godavari water for four years, i.e. 2015 to

2019. Also, farmers earned Rs.50,000 crore in income. It was nothing but a creation of wealth. Not only irrigation water, but also drinking water is being supplied by the Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme," Nimmala stated.

Further, Minister Rama Naidu emphasised the essential role of the Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme in providing water for Kharif cultivation and drinking water, eliminating the need for the people in the Krishna Delta to migrate.

Former minister Devineni Uma Maheswara Rao also praised CM Naidu's foresight in providing Godavari water to the Krishna Delta through the PRMC before the completion of the Polavaram Project, particularly through initiatives like Pattiseema, Purushottapatnam, Pushkara, and Tadipudi, contributing to the well-being of the Delta people. The event was attended by Water Resources Department Advisor Mamidi Venkateswara Rao, Engineer-in-Chief C Narayana Reddy, Superintendent Engineers TJH Prasad Babu, Uma Maheswara Rao, KC Division Executive Engineer PVR Krishna Rao, and others.



MLC Hari Prasad receives certificate of confirmation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Pidugu Hari Prasad, the Jana Sena Party (JSP) candidate for the MLA quota MLC, was unanimously elected and received a certificate of confirmation from the Returning Officer, M Vijaya Raju, at the

Legislative Assembly in Velagapudi on Monday. The newly elected MLC, Hari Prasad lauded the late Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy as a remarkable leader who infused humanity into welfare and development programs. Vishnu was the chief guest at a program organized on the 75th birth anniversary of YSR, held at Rajiv Nagar on Monday. Floral tributes were paid to the portrait of the beloved leader.

Until he was elected an MLC, Hari Prasad worked as

a Political Secretary to the Deputy Chief Minister and JSP Chief K Pawan Kalyan. He hails from Eluru in the combined West Godavari and worked as a journalist. Soon after the inception of the JSP, Hari Prasad joined as a political secretary to Pawan Kalyan.

Celebrate Vinayaka Chavithi using clay Ganeshas: Pawan Kalyan

The Deputy CM receives suggestions and opinions from NGOs and experts on environmental protection

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has been reviewing the Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Environment, Forestry and Science and Technology Departments giving constructive suggestions and directions for public benefits on forest conservation and environmental protection. In this context, many suggestions and opinions from voluntary organisations, experts and people from different sections have been received by the DyCM's office. They are sending reports sharing their experiences.

The other day, the Deputy CM met natural farming and environmentalist Vijaya Ram in Mangalagiri. He suggested that without disturbing and harming the environment, things should be used and reduce the use of plastic. Govinda Bhog, Ratna Chodi, Mappillai Samba and other varieties of paddy grown through natural farming were shown and discussed with the DyCM.

On this occasion, Pawan Kalyan said, "Using non-environmental polluting materials in celebrations festivals will be beneficial. As Vinayaka Chavithi is fast approaching, worshipping clay Ganesh idols benefits the



environment so that water pollution can be prevented. Awareness should be created among people on performing pujas to clay Ganesh idols."

The Dy CM said as a part of this, it has been decided to make suitable arrangements for worshipping Ganesh idols made of clay in Pithapuram constituency. "Similarly, prasadam are offered in temples in covers

made of butter paper. Many experts suggest minimising the use of butter paper. If such covers are replaced with small palm baskets and straws made of leaves, they will also make waste management easier. We are going to create an activity to take up the use of these on an experimental basis in temples in Pithapuram constituency," said Pawan.



Malladi highlights YSR's impact on Telugu soil

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP Vijayawada city president and former MLA Malladi Vishnu lauded the late Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy as a remarkable leader who infused humanity into welfare and development programs. Vishnu was the chief guest at a program organized on the 75th birth anniversary of YSR, held at Rajiv Nagar on Monday. Floral tributes were paid to the portrait of the beloved leader.

Malladi Vishnu highlighted that YSR holds the unique distinction of making 50 official visits to the joint Krishna district as Chief Minister. He credited YSR with transformative projects in Vijayawada, such as JNNURM housing for the poor, establishing a triple IT in Nuzvid, constructing a flyover at the milk factory, and developing the inner ring road.

Vishnu contrasted YSR's contributions with those of Chandrababu Naidu, noting

that while Naidu dismissed agriculture as a waste, YSR's reforms brought joy to farmers. YSR introduced Jala Yagnam, a major irrigation initiative, and launched a free electricity scheme for agriculture, a first in the region.

Under YSR's leadership, the erstwhile Krishna district became an agricultural hub. Vishnu emphasized YSR's revolutionary changes in the health sector, which ensured free medical services for the poor in corporate hospitals. The 108 emergency services were initiated to provide immediate medical assistance to the sick and accident victims.

Additionally, YSR's Arogyashri scheme covered treatments for 942 procedures, including cancer and heart diseases. Vishnu also mentioned the implementation of a fee reimbursement scheme aimed at enabling the poor to pursue higher education and a 4 per cent reservation for minorities.

Gitam University opens Araku Coffee sales centre



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Coffee lovers visiting Gitam University can now experience the internationally acclaimed flavours of Araku coffee. The Araku Coffee Sales Centre was inaugurated on Monday under the guidance of the Tribal Cooperative Organisation by Gitam University President and Visakhapatnam MP M Sriharat.

Sriharat expressed his enthusiasm about bringing Araku coffee, a brand praised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, to the university campus. "It's a moment of immense pride for us to enter the world of Araku coffee," he declared.

Cultivated organically by

tribal communities in Alluri district of Andhra Pradesh, Araku coffee has garnered global recognition for the State. Prime Minister Modi recently highlighted its significance, urging everyone to discover its unique taste. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has also publicly expressed his desire to share a cup with the Prime Minister, further solidifying the coffee's growing prominence.

The promotion of Araku coffee by the Grijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) during the TDP government is credited with playing a key role in its international acclaim. Sriharat commended the GCC's commitment to natural products and expressed his delight about

launching the coffee centre at Gitam University. "The efforts of the tribals in cultivating such high-quality coffee have brought immense pride to our State," he added.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by the presence of GCC Managing Director G. Suresh, along with other dignitaries. The establishment of the Araku Coffee Sales Centre marks a significant step in promoting the rich flavours and heritage of Araku coffee, further solidifying its global reputation.

With this launch, Gitam University aims to provide its visitors with an authentic taste of Araku coffee, celebrating the hard work and dedication of the tribal communities behind its cultivation.

CPI leader Modumudi remembered

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI State secretary K. Ramakrishna paid floral tribute to the late Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Modumudi Srihari Rao at the 25th-anniversary memorial held in Machilipatnam on Monday. Ramakrishna recalled Srihari Rao's dedicated struggle for the rights of the SC, ST, BC, and underprivileged people in the Krishna district.

Speaking on the occasion, Ramakrishna emphasized that Rao's life was marked by ongoing struggle. With a political career spanning about 60 years,



Srihari Rao consistently advocated for the rights and upliftment of the poor and middle-class people. He extended the influence of Communism

across the combined Krishna district, Ramakrishna noted. He added that public service and family life were equally important to Rao.

Minister Veeranjanyulu receives petitions from public

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Social Welfare, Disabled & Senior Citizen Welfare, Sachivalayam and Village Volunteer, Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanyulu Swamy has stated that the government is aiming to resolve all the issues of the people in the state. He received petitions from the people at the secretariat at Velagapudi on Monday.

Gram, Ward Sachivalayam Association representatives, submitted their petitions to Minister Veeranjanyulu and asked to resolve their issues. Also, the Differently-Abled People's Association and others submitted their representations to the minister. Later, Minister Veeranjanyulu said that soon after holding a detailed study on the Gram/Ward Sachivalayam system, the state government would frame the rules and regulations.



Min inaugurates free sand scheme in Prakasam dist

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy launched the distribution of free sand at Chatukapadu village in Jarugumalli mandal in Kondapi constituency on Monday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that as per the aspirations of the people, the State Government is implementing many schemes and today it launched the free distribution of sand.

The Minister clarified that 16,044 Metric Tonnes of sand are stocked at the Chilakapadu 1 stock point, 24,972 Metric Tonnes of sand are stocked at the Chatukapadu 2 stock point and 1,818 Metric Tonnes of sand are stocked at the Ongole stock point

The Minister stated that including the transport charges, seigniorage charge and GST, one tonne of sand is supplied at Rs 247. There is no need to pay any money, espe-



cially for sand, he made it clear. "Digital payment mode is being implemented for the payment in the sand distribution. Permission has been given to transport sand from 6 am to 6 pm only. One person can take a maximum of 20 tonnes of sand per day," the Minister stated. "If the sand available in the stock points runs out, steps will

be taken to bring sand from the nearby rivers and make it available to the consumers," Minister Bala Veeranjanya Swamy explained. The free sand policy would give a fillip to the construction sector and help to generate jobs, he hoped. The government is committed to making sand available to the common men, who require sand to con-

struct their houses, he claimed. The Minister highlighted that the Chandrababu Naidu-headed government has made a free sand policy within one month of forming the new government. Joint Collector R Gopal Krishna, Mines Department DD B Jagannatha Rao and RDO GV Subba Reddy were among those who were present.

Three killed as car rams stationary truck

PNS ■ ELURU

In a tragic road accident, a woman, her mother and her son were killed when the car, in which they were travelling, rammmed a stationary truck at Lakshmi Nagar in Dwarakaturamala mandal in the district in AP on Monday.

Police said that the deceased Rachabattuni Bhagyasri (26), her mother Bomma Kamaladevi (53) and her son Naga Nithin Kumar (3) were going to Rajavolu village from Hyderabad. The car rammmed a stationary truck on the roadside killing the three persons



instantaneously. Bhagyasri's elder son Naga Shammukha and car driver Durga Vameshi were injured in the accident and they were admitted to the ASRIMS hospital where their condition is said to be critical.

The deceased Bhagyasri went to Hyderabad to attend an interview with a software company and the accident took place when they were going to their native village. Superintendent of Police Mary Prashanthi rushed to the scene and visited the accident scene. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH in Eluru for postmortem.

Over 200 PDS rice bags seized

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The SEB officials conducted a raid on a building, located at Mastan Vali Swamy Dargah in Kambham town, and seized over 200 bags of rice meant to be distributed under the Public Distribution System.

Official sources said that on a tip-off that a huge quantity of PDS rice was hoarded in a building in Kambham town, the SEB officials and deputy Tahsildar Prasad con-

ducted a raid on the building. They seized over 200 bags of PDS rice and an Ashok Leyland transport vehicle.

Tahsildar Prasad told the media that an unknown person had given a tip that a huge quantity of ration rice was hoarded in the building. He said that the seized PDS rice would be shifted to the government godown and a thorough investigation would be launched on who hoarded the PDS rice.



Rice, dal at reduced prices in Rythu Bazaars from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Civil Supplies Minister Nadendra Manohar has announced that from Thursday, essential commodities such as Rice, Toor Dal, and Steamed Rice will be available at reduced prices in Rythu Bazaars. The announcement followed a meeting with wholesale traders, millers, and suppliers at the Civil Supplies Commissioner's office in Vijayawada, where discussions on price stabilization and control were held.

Minister Manohar emphasized the importance of providing essential commodities at affordable prices across the state to offer relief to the public. He

detailed the new prices: Toor Dal, which is currently sold at Rs 181 per kg in the open market, will be available at Rs 160 per kg; Rice, normally priced at Rs 52.40 per kg, will be reduced to Rs 48 per kg; and Steamed Rice, which is usually Rs 55.85 per kg, will be offered at Rs 49 per kg.

Special counters will be established in Rythu Bazaars to facilitate the sale of these commodities at reduced prices. Joint Collectors have been directed to ensure proper arrangements for this initiative.

Civil Supplies Commissioner Siddharth Jain and Civil Supplies Corporation MD Veerapandian were also present at the meeting.

YSR was a visionary: YV Subba Reddy

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a heartfelt tribute to the late Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy on his 75th birth anniversary, Rajya Sabha MP YV Subba Reddy extolled the former Chief Minister's unparalleled welfare schemes that have left an indelible mark on the nation. Subba Reddy emphasized that Rajasekhara Reddy's initiatives provided immense benefits to countless families, forever etching his name in the hearts of the people.

"Rajasekhara Reddy revolutionized welfare and development programs, setting a new benchmark for future leaders," Subba Reddy remarked. "Despite his absence, his legacy lives on through the numerous families he supported with free quality education and healthcare." He further highlighted that Chief Minister Jagannathan Reddy, committed to his father's vision, has continued these schemes to ensure a better life for the poor.

Expressing his sorrow, Subba Reddy criticized the new coalition government for its destructive policies and the undemocratic acts of TDP activists, who have been demolishing and burning Rajasekhara Reddy's idols. He praised the swift action of YCP workers in reinstalling



Reddy's statue in Vemuru, Guntur district, urging party members to maintain their fighting spirit.

Former minister Gudivada Amarnath highlighted the global celebrations and service programs held in honor of

Rajasekhara Reddy's birth anniversary. He noted that Rajasekhara Reddy's deep affection for farmers is celebrated by designating his birth anniversary as Farmers' Day in the state. Amarnath pledged to uphold Rajasekhara Reddy's vision, inspired by the leadership of Jagannathan Reddy, and strive for victory in future elections.

Rajya Sabha member Golla Baburao praised Rajasekhara Reddy's dedication to uplifting marginalized communities and his enduring legacy in education and healthcare. He called on everyone to draw inspiration from Reddy and stand up for the people. City Mayor Hari Venkata Kumari reiterated the significance of Reddy's welfare initiatives and the party's responsibility to re-elect Jagannathan Reddy as Chief Minister, ensuring the continuation of YCP's commitment to public welfare. Party district president Kola Gurus re-affirmed that Jagannathan Reddy has upheld YSR's legacy and urged party members to work diligently and maintain close ties with the people. The commemorative event served as a poignant reminder of Rajasekhara Reddy's impact on the state and the enduring influence of his visionary welfare schemes.

14 red sanders logs seized, one smuggler arrested



PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The task force police seized 14 red sander logs and arrested one red sander smuggler at Manchalamanda village in KV Palle mandal in the Peleru forest division.

Police said that on the directions of SP V Harshavardhan Raju, a task force team led by RI Suresh Kumar Reddy conducted combing in the forest area.

The police team saw some red sander smugglers carrying

red sander logs on their heads near the Pincha river bank.

On noticing the police, the smugglers dumped the red sander logs and started fleeing.

The police chased and apprehended one smuggler and he was identified as Balaraman Periya Swamy belongs to Tamil Nadu. The police seized 14 red sander logs. A massive search was launched for the escaped red sander smugglers. SI CH Ravi registered a case and investigated.

Demand for cancelling GST on LIC premiums

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Member of Parliament Keshineni Sivnath has assured that he will do his best to cancel GST on the LIC premium. The leaders of the Insurance Corporation Employees Union met Vijayawada MP in NTR Bhawan, Guru Nanak Nagar on Monday and handed over a representation.

On this occasion, MP Sivanath said that for the solution of the problems brought to his notice by the leaders of the Insurance Employees Union, he would take the issue to the notice of party president Chandrababu Naidu and mention this matter in the Parliament as per his instructions. He said that the problems brought to his notice by the leaders of the insurance union

were legal and due to this, the policyholders would get financial benefits. He said that insurance companies will also be able to do business well.

Later, Union Secretary G Kishore Kumar said that they had brought to the notice of Vijayawada MP Keshineni Sivnath to cancel the GST levied on LIC, medical and other payments and he responded positively. He said that earlier this issue was brought to the notice of Parliament. He demanded that the GST levied on insurance companies by the government should be cancelled besides four existing public sector general insurance companies should be merged into one company.

Insurance union leaders Ch Kaladhar, Joint Secretary MD Rahimuddin, EVS Sai, Gurram Srinivas and others met the MP.

1.5 kg ganja seized, 7 peddlers arrested

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

The police seized 1.5 kg of ganja and arrested seven peddlers at Apparaopet village in Pamidimukkala mandal on Monday.

CI Kishore Babu told the media that on a tip-off that some

persons were selling ganja, they conducted a raid and seized 1.5 kg of ganja. The police arrested seven drug peddlers and seized 4 mobile phones and a motorcycle from them. However, the main accused Vivek who sold huge quantities of ganja to the drug peddlers is at large.



Corruption scandal rocks District Treasury Office

Several senior and junior accountants accused of demanding illegal payments to process bills submitted by various departments

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A recent inquiry by Director of Treasuries and Accounts (FAC) N Mohana Rao has unearthed a massive corruption scandal at the District Treasury Office. Several senior and junior accountants stand accused of demanding illegal payments to process bills submitted by various government departments.

The probe was prompted by numerous complaints from various departments, including Medical and Health, Revenue, Civil Supplies, Police, Roads, Buildings, and Animal Husbandry. Shockingly, even routine payments like GPF, leave encashment, and medical reimbursement were not spared from these illicit practices. The allegations suggest substantial bribery and procedural violations, casting a shadow over the integrity of the treasury office.

A critical issue under scrutiny is the handling of bills, including salaries. Protocol dictates that senior accountants must audit each bill before it is uploaded by junior accountants.

However, it is alleged that many bills bypass this essential check. Employees, when questioned, frequently cite work pressure as an excuse for these discrepancies. Concerns have been raised about the reluctance of employees to correct and re-upload errors, leading to significant delays. The Medical and Health Department has accused the Treasury Office of delaying file uploads and demanding bribes for timely processing.

There are also claims regarding the mismanagement of the 'flyleaf' process, which involves recording details with token numbers. It is alleged that lower-level employees handle this task, while senior accountants focus on files where money has exchanged hands. Reports suggest that employees charge different amounts to check and upload bills, depending on the individual involved.

"It is alleged that some employees were brazenly demanding payments in exchange for processing bills through CFMS," stated the inquiry report. One instance highlighted involved a demand for a Rs 20,000

bribe to clear a bill worth Rs 2 lakh, underscoring the severity of the malpractice.

Further deepening the scandal, a senior official in a government department was accused of taking substantial bribes five or six months ago. This matter, however, was reportedly kept confidential. Additionally, there are reports of employees purchasing flats in upscale areas despite having less than 10 years of service, raising questions about the source of their wealth.

The inquiry revealed a lax approach to absenteeism and disciplinary actions, pointing towards broader management issues. Director Rao has asserted a "zero tolerance" policy for corruption and vowed to implement stricter measures to ensure accountability and transparency. The exposé has caused widespread outrage, with employees from multiple departments demanding a thorough clean-up of the treasury office. This investigation represents a crucial step towards restoring public trust and ensuring the integrity of financial processes within the district.



Gear up to face flood threat, Eluru Collector alerts officials

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi directed the officials concerned to prepare plans to face the flood threat without waiting till the rivers receive heavy flood water.

Collector Vetri Selvi held a meeting with the officials here on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, she said that even though there is no flood threat at present, the Godavari River is likely to receive flood water during the monsoon season in the coming days.

She ordered the officials to take precautionary measures as soon as the first danger signal was hoisted at Bhadrachalam when the Godavari River started receiving flood water. The precautionary measure should be taken without waiting until the Godavari River is flooded, she said.

"Once the River Godavari starts receiving heavy inflows,

there will be no time to take measures to alert people living in the low-lying areas. When the first, second and third danger signals are sounded, the villages which are prone to submerge in the flood water, should be identified and steps should be taken to evacuate the villagers," she instructed the officials.

The Collector said that there are 69 pregnant women, post-natal women, children and bed-ridden people at Velerupadu village. They should be explained about the flood threat and prepared to evacuate the village, in case of heavy floods to the river Godavari, the Collector said.

"The officials should also identify the place where the flood relief centres should be set up for the flood victims. Essential commodities like rice, red gram and edible oil should be stocked sufficient for three months," she told the officials, adding that lifeboats,

lifejackets, transport vehicles and expert swimmers should be kept ready to face any eventuality in case of heavy flood to the Godavari.

She also instructed the officials to identify the houses which are in dilapidated condition in Kukkunur and Velerupadu mandals and the people living in the building must be evacuated. The weak embankments of rivers, canals and rivulets should be identified and steps should be taken to strengthen them, Collector Vetri Selvi ordered the officials.

"All required measures should be taken to avoid loss of life and property during the river Godavari floods," the Collector told the officials. ITDA Project Officer M Suryateja, RDO K Aaddayya, Deputy Transport Commissioner Santha Kumari and DPO T Srinivas Viswanath were among those who attended the meeting.

INDIA CORNER

Tremor of 3.3 magnitude recorded in Kutch; no report of damage

A tremor of 3.3 magnitude with its epicentre in Gujarat's Kutch district was recorded late Monday afternoon, an Indian Seismological Research official said. The epicentre of the tremor was 10 km east north east (ENE) from Dudhai in Kutch district, the ISR said in its update. "It was recorded at around 4:10 pm and was located at a depth of 30 kilometres. This is the third earthquake of over 3 magnitude recorded in the state's Saurashtra-Kutch region so far this month," as per the ISR update. Officials said there are no reports as yet of injuries to anyone or loss of property. As per information provided by Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA), the earthquake risk is very high in the state, with nine major ones taking place in the last 200 years. The earthquake on January 26, 2001 in Kutch, measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale, was the third largest and second most destructive earthquake in the country in the last two centuries, the GSDMA said.



EC allows Sharad Pawar-led NCP-SP to accept donations

The Election Commission on Monday allowed the Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar to accept donations keeping in mind the forthcoming assembly polls in Maharashtra. The Sharad Pawar-led outfit had requested the commission to certify the status of the party for it to accept voluntary contributions from the public. The poll panel has authorised the party to "accept any amount of contribution voluntarily offered to it by any person or company other than a government company" under the relevant sections of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which govern the contribution to all political parties. An eight-member delegation of the NCP-SP party led by its working president Supriya Sule met the commission on Monday. In July last year, Ajit Pawar led a rebellion against his uncle Sharad Pawar and claimed the symbol as well as the party name Nationalist Congress Party.



Six-foot-long Indian Rat snake rescued from toilet in Agra Fort premises

A six-foot-long Indian Rat snake was rescued from a toilet of Agra Fort premises, an official said on Monday. The incident occurred on Thursday last week when the staff at the Agra fort found the snake coiled in the toilet seat and called an NGO to rescue it, they said. Kalandar, Conservation Assistant (CA) at Agra Fort, said the snake was found in a toilet near the office premises and not in the one used by the tourists. "We informed the NGO Wild Life SOS team, and then the two skilled staff rescued the snake without harming it," Kalandar said. Kartick Satyanarayan, Co-founder and CEO of Wildlife SOS said, "People must understand the importance of coexistence with wild animals and report these incidents swiftly." Baiju Raj M.V, Director of Conservation Projects at Wildlife SOS, said, "The Rapid Response Unit was involved in rescuing the 6-foot-long Indian rat snake from an unexpected location, the toilet of Agra's Lal Quila."



Stronger ties will greatly benefit our people: PM Modi in Moscow

PNS ■ MOSCOW

In his first trip since the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday began a two-day high-profile visit to Russia to hold summit talks with President Vladimir Putin with a focus on boosting bilateral ties in areas of energy, trade and defence.



Shortly after landing in Moscow, Modi said he is looking forward to deepening bilateral partnership in futuristic areas and that stronger ties between India and Russia will "greatly benefit our people".

Modi was received at the Vnukovo-II airport by Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov. The Russian first deputy minister also accompanied the Indian prime minister to his hotel from the airport in the same car, officials said.

Manturov had received Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit to Russia as well.

"Landed in Moscow.

Looking forward to further deepening the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between our nations, especially in futuristic areas of cooperation," Modi said on 'X'.

"Stronger ties between our nations will greatly benefit our people," he said.

It is Modi's first trip to Russia since 2019, the first after the start of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022 and the first in Modi's third term as the prime minister.

Russian President Putin is set to host a private dinner for Modi tonight ahead of Tuesday's talks at the 22nd

India-Russia summit in Moscow.

Modi will co-chair the 22nd India-Russia annual summit with President Putin, and will also interact with the members of the Indian community.

"PM is set to hold substantive discussions with President Vladimir Putin to take forward the special partnership between the two countries. He will also interact with the Indian community in Russia," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on 'X'.

The Indian prime minister was accorded a guard of hon-

our at the airport. He was given a warm welcome outside The Carlton Hotel in Moscow by members of the Indian diaspora and a group of Russian artists who danced to the tune of Hindi songs.

In his departure statement, Modi said India seeks to play a supportive role for a peaceful and stable region.

After concluding his engagements in Russia on July 9, Modi will leave for Austria in the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to that country in over 40 years.

The focus of the Modi-Putin summit talks is expected to be on further boosting bilateral cooperation in trade, energy and defence. The Ukraine conflict is set to figure in the discussions. "The special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia has advanced over the past 10 years, including in the areas of energy, security, trade, investment, health, education, culture, tourism and people-to-people exchanges," Modi said in his departure statement.

Octogenarian waits for 3 hours for wheelchair at Delhi airport

PNS ■ MUMBAI

An 84-year-old Parkinson's disease-affected woman had to wait for over three hours for a wheelchair at the tarmac of Delhi airport after her arrival from Jaipur on an Alliance Air flight on Sunday, an incident which the airline said is being investigated.

The government-owned airline also said it is in touch with family members of the woman passenger, who was travelling with her son, and has already "apologised" to her for the incident.

Separately, Alliance Air is taking up the matter with AI-SATS, who is also the ground handling services operator for Air India at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi.

"There was some mess up... We are looking at the incident from several angles. Besides, we are taking up the matter with the ground handling agency AI-SATS, which was supposed to provide wheelchair to the passenger," Alliance GM M Tufchi said.

Heavy rain cripples Mumbai, Maha CM reviews situation

Rahul Gandhi seeks relief for flood-hit Assam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Heavy rain in Mumbai on Monday affected local train services and flight operations, prompting Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde to review the situation while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi visited flood-hit Assam and sought the Centre's help for the state.

The rain mayhem led to the inundation of several low-lying areas in Mumbai, impacting vehicular movement, while all schools in the city, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts remained shut.

Both Houses of the Maharashtra legislature were adjourned as many members and officials could not reach the Vidhan Bhavan due to the downpour.



walked on the tracks for some distance, a video of which went viral.

Chief Minister Shinde took stock of the heavy rain situation by chairing a meeting at the Mantralaya and visiting the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) control room. Train services on the fast line of the Central Railway's (CR) main corridor between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) in south Mumbai and neighbouring Thane were suspended for a few hours due to waterlogging at various places and later resumed, officials said.

The CR officials asked people to avoid travelling unless unavoidable. Heavy rain and low visibility led to the suspension of runway operations at the Mumbai airport from 2.22 am to 3.40 am on Monday and the cancellation of 50 flights, according to sources.

A spokesperson of the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking in the morning said at least 40 bus routes in the city and suburbs were either diverted or curtailed due to waterlogging.



Congress slams govt over 'private investment plans slumping to 20-year low'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Expressing concern over new private investment plans reportedly slumping to a 20-year low in the first quarter of this fiscal, the Congress on Monday alleged India has suffered due to "random policy changes" and an atmosphere of "fear and intimidation".

Congress general secretary, in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh, in a statement alleged that everyday in the "Modi-Made Anyak Kaal" is a new record of economic failure.

"We have already seen a 45-year high unemployment rate, a 50-year low household savings rate, and the first-ever decrease in real rural consumption. Now, we have another disturbing fact to reckon with. The Hindu reports that in the April-June quarter of this 2023/24 fiscal year, fresh investments announced by corporates is

just Rs. 44,000 crore. This is a 20-year low," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"Compare the decade of Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister with that of the non-biological PM. Investment as percentage of GDP (average over time) was 33.4% during the UPA and 28.7% in the Anyak-kaal," he said.

The FDI as percentage of GDP rose from 0.8% in 2004 to 1.7% in 2014 under Manmohan Singh's stewardship, Ramesh said, adding that as of 2022, it is now 1.5%.

Manufacturing as percentage of GDP (average over time) fell from 16.5% in UPA to 14.5% under the current government, he said.

Ramesh said Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) in India, or the total investment in fixed assets, has been lower for the entire Modi regime than the lowest point of the UPA.

Four soldiers injured as terrorists ambush security vehicle in J-K

PNS ■ KATHUA/JAMMU

At least four army personnel were injured on Monday when terrorists ambushed their vehicle in the remote Machedi area of Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, officials said.

The terrorists hurled a grenade and opened fire targeting Army vehicles which were on a routine patrol on the Machedi-Kindli-Malhar road at around 3.30 pm near Badnota village in Lohai Malhar, 150 km from Kathua town.

Security forces retaliated but the terrorists fled into the nearby forest, the officials said, adding an intermittent exchange of firing was going on between the terrorists and security forces when the last reports were received.

They said reinforcements had been rushed to the area to neutralise the terrorists, who are believed to have recently infiltrated from across the border and were moving to the higher reaches.

"The four troopers who have been injured were in the vehicle which came under grenade attack and firing by the terrorists," an official said. They said the injured were shifted to a military hospital, where the condition of two of them was stated to be "critical".

National policy at advanced stage: Centre to SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The national policy on distribution of menstrual hygiene products to adolescent school-going girls is at an advanced stage of formulation, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Monday.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justice J B Pardiwala took note of the submissions of Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, and allowed her plea for grant of

DISTRIBUTION OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS

two more months for framing of the policy.

The top court was hearing a plea of Congress leader and social activist Jaya Thakur seeking directions to the Centre and the states to provide free sanitary pads to girl students of class 6-12 and ensure separate female toilet facilities in all government-aided and residential schools.

The framing of the national policy on the issue is at an advanced stage and two more months' time may be granted, the ASG said.



"We will keep this matter on the first Monday of September month," the bench said.

The plea highlighted the difficulties faced by adolescent females from poor back-

grounds in the schools.

The Centre had earlier said that it was in the process of collating all necessary material to form a national policy on the distribution of menstrual hygiene products to school-going girls in terms of the orders dated April 10, 2023 and November 6, 2023.

The top court had directed the Centre to lay down a national model for building toilets commensurate with the number of girl students in all government-aided and residential schools across the

country. While emphasising uniform procedure, it also asked the Union government about the policy it has formulated for the distribution of sanitary napkins to female school students nationally.

During an earlier hearing, the Centre had informed the apex court that a draft national policy for the distribution of sanitary napkins free of cost to school-going girls has been formulated and sent to stakeholders to elicit their comments.

Rath Yatra: Chariots reach Puri's Gundicha temple

PNS ■ PURI

The chariots of the sibling deities, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra, reached the Gundicha temple on Monday, with which the first leg of the Rath Yatra celebrations in Odisha's Puri concluded.

Thousands of people pulled the chariots, while lakhs of devotees gathered on the roadside to watch the procession on 'Badadanda' amid heat and humidity.

The 'yatra' began on Sunday evening, but halted a few metres later due to sunset. It



resumed the 2.5 km journey from the 12th-century shrine to the Gundicha temple around 9.30 am on Monday and concluded at 2.35 pm.

The three majestic chariots will remain outside the

Gundicha temple on Grand Road. The deities will be taken inside the temple on Tuesday in a ceremonial procession. The deities will remain at this temple for a week.

"The chariots have reached their destination. We have put cordons around the three chariots and are regulating the crowd. Adequate traffic arrangements have been made for smooth flow of vehicles," said DGP Arun Sarangi, who also participated in pulling the chariots. Rath Yatra is a two-day affair this time, after 53 years, due to celestial arrangements.

Migratory birds, crows suspected in spread of bird flu to Kerala farms

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Migratory birds and crows from the forests in Kerala are suspected to be the carriers of the avian influenza virus, causing its spread to domestic duck and poultry farms in the state, according to a study by a government-appointed panel of experts.

The panel submitted its report to state Animal Husbandry Minister J Chinchurani on Monday. The team was appointed in view of rising cases of bird flu in the state, particularly in Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts, causing

heavy losses to duck and poultry farmers.

The minister said that the government will carefully review the report's recommendations and take appropriate action. The expert team included specialists from the Animal Husbandry Department and scientists from the Veterinary University.

"The team found that the disease may have spread through the movement of birds from one place to another. These birds were likely infected by migratory birds and also spread the disease through their sale," a government release, quoting the study, said.

11 INCLUDING EX-CM CHAMPAI SWORN IN AS MINISTERS

Hemant Soren govt wins trust vote

PNS ■ RANCHI

Former Jharkhand chief minister Champai Soren and 10 other leaders of the JMM-led coalition took oath as ministers in the Hemant Soren government after it won a trust vote in the assembly amid a walkout by opposition members on Monday.

A total of 45 MLAs, including nominated member Glen Joseph Galstaun, voted in favour of the confidence motion.

BJP and AJSU legislators walked out of the House as the headcount for voting started. The BJP-led opposition has 24 legislators of the saffron party and three of the AJSU party.

After winning the trust vote, Hemant Soren said, "Today, everyone again got to witness the unity and strength of the ruling alliance. I thank the Speaker and all the alliance MLAs."

He said the JMM-led alliance has been performing strongly since coming to power in 2019 by following the constitutional procedures and it was again witnessed during the day.

During his speech on the confidence motion in the assembly, the chief minister said, "One could see the conduct of BJP legislators after seeing me again in the House."

"The BJP doesn't have any agenda for the state. The country's people held a mirror to the BJP in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls. In the upcoming assembly elections, they will face strong resistance from the JMM-led alliance," the CM said.

Speaking on the confidence motion, Leader of Opposition Amar Bauri alleged that the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance government did not fulfill a single promise in the last five years.



Telecom infrastructure spruced up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) on Monday announced significant improvements in telecom infrastructure for Amarnath Yatra to ensure seamless mobile connectivity for pilgrims.

In collaboration with major telecom operators, including Airtel, BSNL, and Reliance Jio, the infrastructure has been upgraded to provide continuous coverage along the yatra routes, according to an official release.

To ensure seamless mobile connectivity, a total of 82 sites (Airtel, RJIL and BSNL) will be



active, an official release said. "A total of 31 new sites have been installed along the Yatra routes, increasing the total number from 51 in 2023 to 82 in 2024. This enhancement aims to provide seamless mobile connectivity to the pilgrims and public," it

said. The routes from Lakhapur to Qazigund and from Qazigund to Pahalgam and Baltal are fully covered with 2G, 3G, 4G, including 5G technology, at many places for pilgrims and the public.

Further, some key points of SIM distribution centres have been added to extend telecom facilities to pilgrims, it said.

"The DoT remains committed to ensure a smooth and connected experience for all participants of the Shri Amarnathji Yatra 2024, leveraging advanced telecom technologies to support this important pilgrimage," the release said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Macron makes it

From the UK to Iran and now France, progressive voices and inclusive thinking is making a comeback

France has just about managed to keep the ultra-right at bay. ultra rightwingers have lost to the liberals in the snap poll ordered by French President Emmanuel Macron. France has a rich history of liberalism and social progressivism, yet in recent years, the country has seen a rise in far-right nationalism. However recent elections and political movements indicate a resurgence of progressive values. A left-wing alliance secured the most seats in the French parliament after tactical voting in Sunday's second-round election thwarted Marine Le Pen's far-right party. But the victory of the Left is not decisive. France now faces political uncertainty, as no party achieved an absolute majority in the National Assembly. President Emmanuel Macron's gamble seems to have worked as he had ordered a snap poll and decided to go to elections despite his waning popularity. He has championed a centrist approach that blends liberal economic policies with progressive social reforms. His administration has focused on addressing climate change, promoting gender equality, and fostering a more inclusive society. His surprise win, despite predictions to the contrary, suggests that people across the globe are moving towards liberal values and giving them prominence over reactionary forces.



This shift could have far-reaching implications for the European Union and beyond. However, to take a pragmatic approach, France has just about managed to defeat the far right who went on a rampage after the elections did not go in their favour as was widely expected. In the time to come, the challenges for President Macron may multiply as no one has secured a simple majority in the lower house of 577 seats. So now France enters the uncharted waters of coalition politics. The new government would be anything but stable and may give right-wingers a chance to discredit it. President Macron would face several significant challenges. Politically, he would need to navigate a fragmented landscape with diverse parties, address low public trust, and manage frequent protests. Economically, tackling inequality, unemployment, and high public debt while balancing social spending demands would be critical. Right now, France is struggling to pull back its economy from crisis. So far annual growth has been 0.7 per cent in 2024 after a significant slowdown in the second half of 2023 but may gain momentum in 2025 (1.3 per cent). Socially, issues like immigration integration, pension reforms, and the housing crisis would require careful attention. Finally, Macron would have to address sensitive cultural issues, including secularism, religious freedom, and debates around national identity and multiculturalism. To effectively tackle the far right, President Macron would have to focus on reducing socioeconomic disparities to address the economic grievances that fuel extremism.

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PICTALK



The chariots of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra prepared for annual Rath Yatra festival, in Puri PTI

Paving the way for India's own Green Silicon Valley

Climate change offers an opportunity to create an international market for green products, capital and goods through cooperation and collaboration

Growth, Employment and Climate Change, the trifecta of modern economic challenges, have rekindled the interest of policymakers in bringing back the craft of industrial policymaking right at the centre of the discussion table. Ominous estimates highlight climate change as a critical factor negatively impacting growth and employment, whereby ~18% of GDP and labour productivity equivalent to 72 million jobs might be lost, therefore the argument by Nicholas Stern and Joseph E. Stiglitz that "the only long-run growth trajectory is a green trajectory" echoes loudly for adaptation by industrial policymakers globally. Fashionably rechristened as Green Industrial Policy, the craft embeds within itself a series of government intervention measures (supply and demand focussed subsidies, regulations, incentives and standards) that aim at achieving economic development while simultaneously cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Globally leading nations have com-



binated different elements of the Green Industrial Policy craft for building national competitive advantage towards catalysing economic growth, increasing skilled employment and climate action: **Japan:** Introduced five policy tools of Grant funding, Tax incentive, Guidance policy on transition finance, Regulatory reforms and international collaboration, targeting over 18 trillion yen for fourteen green growth sectors such as wind power, nuclear power, mobility & battery etc. **The US:** manufacturing, strengthening national security through supply chain resilience and accelerating the energy transition by supply and demand side spending and tax cuts of ~\$400 billion that aims to create ~1.5 million jobs.

India has made some formidable moves towards a green future by focusing on domestic market formation and localization of components. Its Long Term-Low Emission Development Strategy submitted at COP27 articulates seven transitions to low-carbon development such as electricity systems, transport systems, sustainable urbanization etc. The production-linked incentive schemes in renewable energy equipment space and technology-focused national missions on hydrogen and energy storage are steps in the right direction that can be aptly followed by a broader green industrialisation policy for catalysing investments in manufacturing of decarbonisation technologies which are foundational in the short run can trigger the Schumpeterian process of innovation and discovery in the medium term towards high-carbon growth and employment. In this regard, the thrust on clean energy

entrepreneurship through industrial policy and a green R & D policy can foster breakthrough innovations and patents that can create and monetise new solutions. Japan and Korea have acknowledged this potential of startups as open innovation resources and introduced industrial policy support that encourages them to partner with larger conglomerates to propel the innovativeness of the economy at large and compete with their European, Chinese and American competitors. Green startups with their agility and Conglomerates with their market power and experience can aspire to create our own green Silicon Valley. Climate change offers an opportunity to create an international market for green products, capital and goods through international cooperation and collaboration. These initiatives can catalyse a virtuous cycle of growth, employment and carbon neutrality. *(The writer is a Chevening Scholar and an International Development expert; views are personal)*



SAIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Indians dying on the Russian frontline

The presence of Indian nationals on the Russian side of the Ukraine conflict raises broader questions about the ethics of foreign combatant recruitment.



BHOPINDER SINGH

The issue of Indians fighting along with the Russian forces in the Ukraine War is particularly piquant, given India's historic relations with the Soviet Union earlier and Russia now. The fact that many had claimed to have been 'forced' to fight had forced the Indian Government to intervene. It is a claim that hasn't been conclusively confirmed as the Indian Embassy was aware of many Indians having signed up for support jobs in the Russian Army. Pending confirmation that their terms of service had been unfairly and involuntarily extended to fight on the frontline, the Indian authorities had formally sought their discharge. It further advised Indians to "exercise caution" and "stay away from this conflict" - diplomate for dissuading Indians from joining any Russian Army, in any capacity, given the situation. But as it routinely happens e.g., as it happened with advisories to Indian students to leave Ukraine before the full-fledged assault, some heeded the call and some didn't, till the situation became desperate and inextricable for them. The Russians have been particularly keen to swell their ranks with foreigners given the heavy loss of lives in the bloody stalemate and the accompanying sense of fatigue and despondency amongst its combatants.

The inclusion of private militias like the 'Wagner Army' is under that impulse. But the inclusion of individual foreigners is a formalized initiative that can be traced back to Law 29 March 1998 'On Military Obligation and Military Service' - which has since then been made increasingly attractive and lenient to attract new intake. Talks of individuals from Central Asian Countries (for the Soviet Union), Cuba, Afghanistan, Nepal, Syria, Somalia etc., have been doing the rounds. For these foreign inductees, besides the relatively lucrative salary (\$2000-\$3000), the additional lure of Russian citizenship is dangled. Estimated to be numbering in thousands, BBC reported that as of last year's end, 254 foreigners had been killed in the conflict. How many of them had enlisted



for support jobs and how many were forcibly taken for active combat, remains a matter of conjecture.

The tact of enlisting 'mercenaries' is an old and convenient practice, as besides the relatively low levels of accountability, they also come with the plausible option of deniability. Under the International Criminal Court and the International Humanitarian Law, the status of 'mercenary' does not constitute a specific crime. But they are not entitled to the status of 'prisoner of war' and its necessities. The idea is to discourage mercenaries as material greed-based and amoral entities as opposed to soldiers of the nation who are driven by a sense of national purpose, patriotism, and professional excellence. To qualify as 'mercenaries', six criteria need to be fulfilled. Firstly, the person is specially recruited internally/abroad. Secondly, the belligerent participates in conflict. Thirdly, he/she is motivated by private gain, as promised by one side in the conflict. Fourthly, they are not national, resident or interested party in the said conflict. Fifthly, they do not belong to the militaries of either side. Sixthly and lastly, they have not been sent by a non-interested state on any official duty as a member of their military. Therefore, it could be pre-



THE RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY KEEN TO SWELL THEIR RANKS WITH FOREIGNERS GIVEN THE HEAVY LOSS OF LIVES IN THE BLOODY STALEMATE AND THE ACCOMPANYING SENSE OF FATIGUE AND DESPONDENCY AMONGST ITS COMBATANTS

sumed some Indians who are unfortunately caught in a form of combat that they probably had not imagined whilst signing up, and may still qualify as 'mercenary'.

Such a scenario does not reflect well on the nation as it is suggestive of limited job opportunities domestically and therefore suggests societal desperation which is understandable for broken nations like Somalia or Syria, but not India. Sadly, portents of 'cannon fodder' or even 'human trafficking' are rife, but given the opaqueness that surrounds the Russian reality, nothing can be confirmed. Such times birth human trafficking networks that paint a very different picture to recruit the gullible when the truth is starkly different.

There have been gut-wrenching pleas from some Indians beseeching the Indian authorities to secure their release, with some losing their lives, soon after that. The Indian External Affairs Minister is believed to have reiterated his concern to his Russian counterpart during a recent bilateral in Astana, Kazakhstan. To the query, if S Jaishankar had taken up the issue of stranded Indians, he assured, "Very clearly and strongly... several Indians have been pressed into service with the Russian Army. Only when they come back will we know the full cir-

cumstances. But whatever the circumstances are, to us it is unacceptable that Indian citizens find themselves in the army of another country in a warzone. I told him that we seek their cooperation and that they are our friend and partners. We have to find a way so that these people can return to India as quickly and effectively as possible." Thankfully, despite the ostensibly pro-Ukraine position taken by Delhi, it has maintained a parallel and strong relation with Russia, replete with non-linear moves as part of its 'strategic independence'. However, while the government had initiated the needful from Russian authorities, there is a reciprocal expectation of Indians abroad to heed advisories, and not wait for situations to deteriorate.

No right-thinking country would encourage its citizens to partake in conflicts given the diversity of complex geopolitical and societal ramifications, amongst which guaranteeing their safety would be paramount.

For Russians, foreign recruitment makes practical sense - for Indians to be availing the same, reflects poorly. *(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

HOPE FOR INDIA'S FUTURE

Madam - Observing Rahul Gandhi's political trajectory reveals his focused objectives: welfare for the poor, social justice, MSME development, and job creation. Once dismissed with derisive labels, he now stands as a pivotal opposition figure and a national benefactor. In Parliament, he champions crucial issues like poverty rights, constitutional protection, and unemployment, spotlighting concerns from the Agniveer scheme to NEET. We trust he will persist in combating corruption for India's bright future. Rahul Gandhi's tenure as Leader of the Opposition has been marked by a transformation from skepticism to significance. Initially dismissed, he has emerged as a pivotal voice, advocating for the marginalized and pressing critical issues in Parliament. His agenda emphasizes welfare for the poor, social justice, MSME development, and job creation. Gandhi's relentless pursuit of transparency and accountability has kept the government accountable on issues ranging from poverty alleviation to constitutional protection. His proactive stance on national challenges like unemployment and inflation underscores his commitment to India's future, positioning him as a proactive and influential leader in the opposition ranks. *Masood Ahmad |Barabanki*

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE BUDGET

Madam - Amidst anticipation of the upcoming budget session, national attention is fixated on its contents. India Inc. hopes to retain production incentives, while salary earners seek raised exemption limits and improved tax slabs. The common man yearns for relief from economic hardships, and farmers seek guaranteed minimum returns. Senior citizens anticipate travel benefits and healthcare subsidies. Supporters are poised, their lists ready, crucial for the government's survival. The budget's essence lies in who gains and by how much from this vul-

Implications of Iran's election



The untimely demise of Iran's conservative President Ebrahim Raisi has necessitated an election amidst regional tensions, Dimple Wadhawan |Kanpur

nerable government. The common man eagerly anticipates budgetary relief through increased exemption limits, revised tax slabs, and measures to alleviate everyday financial burdens. Expectations include provisions for healthcare subsidies, travel benefits for senior citizens, and incentives supporting livelihood stability, reflecting hopes for tangible improvements in quality of life. *AG Rajmohan |Anantpur*

KEIR STARMER'S VISION FOR CHANGE

Madam - Apropos, "Now we get to work, Starmer to cabinet," The Pioneer, July 7. The British election results that led to Labour leader Keir Starmer's entry into 10 Downing Street mark a pivotal moment in the country's politics, promising to steer the nation through the turbulent aftermath of 14 years of Conservative governance. The enormity of Labour's victory cannot be overstated. Achieving a massive majority in Parliament, Labour has been given a clear mandate to implement change. His

exacerbated by the Gaza conflict and disputes over Iran's nuclear program. India anticipates evolving bilateral ties under reformist President-elect Pezeshkian. Despite historical ties spanning language, culture, and commerce, both nations face a crucial juncture. With shared roots and significant strategic interests, India and Iran navigate a relationship poised for new dynamics. The future of Iran under liberal leadership holds promise for significant domestic and international shifts. Potential reforms could ease tensions, particularly regarding Iran's nuclear program, fostering better relations with the West. Internally, liberal policies may encourage socio-economic progress and cultural openness, reshaping Iran's global image and regional dynamics. *Dimple Wadhawan |Kanpur*

acknowledgment of the public's lack of trust in politics is a refreshing departure from the often defensive posture of recent administrations. His promise to heal this mistrust through actions rather than words is a step in the right direction. The British public has grown cynical after enduring repeated scandals, including the infamous Downing Street parties during the Covid-19 lockdowns, which eroded confidence in government integrity. Economically, Mr Starmer inherits a nation grappling with significant challenges. The tax burden is at its highest since the post-World War II era, and public services, particularly the National Health Service, are under immense strain. His government's ability to deliver on ambitious promises, such as green spending initiatives and public service improvements, will be a key measure of success. *N Sadhasiva Reddy |Bengaluru*

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Embracing life's challenges with a grateful heart leads to a profound awakening



RAVI VALLURI

Almighty divinity, through the prowess of nature, and the resplendent and ever-mutating cosmos is eternally showering bounties on humans. However, the human mind is not wakeful or grateful to accept this materiality. A question of attitude is primarily and predominantly our attitude which reinforces gratitude within our personalities. The word gratitude strikes its roots in the word the Latin word gratis, meaning to be thankful. It is always sagacious to recite a short prayer before a meal. Language is no trammel. Annadata Sukhi Bhava. By remembrance of these lines (Sanskrit), we express our gratefulness and indebtedness to the agrarian community and the cook for producing and preparing the meal respectively. Body: a divine instrument Nature has gifted us with something incomparable and priceless, the human body. We have been provided with a supercomputer of a brain.

Prowess of the breath Next humans are blissfully unmindful of the power of our breath. It can be likened to a cell phone which nature has provided to connect us with divinity. Breath is perhaps the most potent form of effervescence and pizzazz of our personalities. Humans are insensible to the fact that ninety per cent of toxins get expropriated from our bodies through the potency of breath. If we delve deep into the ancient practices like pranayama or the unique rhythmic technique of Sudarshan Kriya (imparted in various bouquets of courses of the Art of Living) the primacy of breath is under-



stood by us. An inestimable nun Aeons ago lived an exalted and celebrated Zen nun. There were far and few like her. It was believed that few women could attain the venerable state like this pious lady. Once she had undertaken an arduous pilgrimage and arrived at a village as the sun sank in the horizon.

In all humility, she begged for lodgings for the night. However, the villagers slammed their doors and were unwilling to accommodate her in the village. They were opposed to the tenets of the Zen school of thought. They thought it to be exceedingly revolutionary. Thus, the clichéd and conformist individuals were unwilling to accept the nun into their fold even for a night. The traditionalists banished her from the village and she was compelled to wage the battle against inclement weather out in the cold. At the stroke of midnight, she woke up abruptly, unearthed the cherry tree which fed her ravenous body with sweet fruits, talking to the full moon which lightened up the sky.

Immediately she was engulfed with waves of emotions and suffused with love and affection for all those who had exiled and expropriated her from the village. She experienced the quintessential silence of an awakened one. She was extremely grateful to the villagers who had not accommodated her, to the cherry tree that fed her, the meditative silence that encompassed her body, all of which had wily nicely contributed to her awakening, an almost celestial spectacle. "Thus, a stock individual, a savant, a sage or a nun becomes a Buddha the moment he/she accepts all that life brings with its variegated, paradoxical situations.

The one who accepts these situations which gratitude and gratefulness, without admonishing anyone or carping verily becomes an awakened one." – The Buddha. "Good men and bad men differ radically. Bad men never appreciate kindness shown them, but wise men appreciate and are grateful. Wise men try to express their appreciation and gratitude by some return of kindness, not only to their benefactor, but to everyone else," said Gautama Buddha.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living)

The cost of freebies and the legal quagmire



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite a Supreme Court ruling highlighting the impact of freebies on election fairness, political parties continue to leverage public funds for electoral gain



In the Maharashtra Budget for 2024-25 presented by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, the BJP-led MahaYuti has announced financial assistance of Rs 1,500 per month for eligible women between 21 to 60 years of age, a stipend up to Rs.10,000 per month for youth in industrial and non-industrial sectors, electricity bill waiver for farmers etc. Unambiguously, these are freebies - an acronym for something given by the State free of charge - aimed at garnering votes during the State assembly elections later this year.

In a July 2013 order in S Subramaniam Balaji vs Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors, the Supreme Court (SC) had said that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people; that "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree". Yet, it had held that promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as "corrupt practice" under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state assembly. In the same order, it directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) "to frame guidelines that could govern the contents of the election manifesto of all the recognized political parties as when it had acted while framing guidelines for general conduct of the candidates, meetings, processions, polling day, etc". Further "this can also be included in the model code of conduct - under a separate head for guidelines for election manifesto - for guidance of political parties and candidates". The ECI never came out with any such guidelines. Emboldened by ECI inaction, the political parties who in the past, were placing freebies in a corner of their manifestos, have started catapulting them to the centre stage.

Now, freebies hold the key to winning elections. In February 2020, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) led by Arvind Kejriwal mesmerized Delhi, voters, by promising free or heavily subsidized electricity and free water, free bus rides for women, free Wi-Fi, and so on. In 2022 in Punjab, AAP promised free electrici-



NOW, FREEBIES HOLD THE KEY TO WINNING ELECTIONS. IN FEBRUARY 2020, THE AAM AADMI PARTY (AAP) LED BY ARVIND KEJRIWAL MESMERISED DELHI, VOTERS, BY PROMISING FREE OR HEAVILY SUBSIDISED ELECTRICITY AND FREE WATER, FREE BUS RIDES FOR WOMEN, FREE WI-FI, AND SO ON

ty to each household for consumption up to 300 units per month, waiver of all outstanding power bills, Rs 1000 per month to every woman aged 18 or above etc. The party won the state with a thumping majority. In Uttar Pradesh also in 2022, BJP promised 20 million smartphones for poor students, two free LPG cylinders every year, Rs 100,000/- for the marriage of girls from poor families, and so on. Meanwhile, the matter came up before the SC through a public interest litigation (PIL).

On January 25, 2022, it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue. Budget for freebies is going above the regular budget". It also reiterated that "this disturbs the level playing field". On August 3, 2022, it gave a sense that it is for Parliament, besides the ECI, to take the initiative to enact a law on curbing freebies. It also sought suggestions on the composition of a committee that could go into the issue "dispassionately" and make recommendations.

But, the above decisions haven't been acted upon. Although, on its part, the ECI had sent out questionnaires asking parties to give 'specifics' of what they intend to promise voters, financial impact and how this will be funded, there hasn't been any follow-up. Meanwhile, the freebies continue to proliferate. In Karnataka elections in May 2023, the grand old party (GOP) promised five guarantees viz. Gruha Jyoti, Gruha Lakshmi, Sakhi programme, Yuva Nidhi, and Anna Bhagya. The trend continued during elections in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana held in November/December 2023. While, in Rajasthan, Congress promised Rs 10,000 every year to the female head of the family under the Gruha Lakshmi Yojana, in MP, BJP increased the grant to Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli

Behna Yojana; the amount to be hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. Additionally, in MP, under Ladli Lakshmi Yojana, the BJP promised girls Rs 200,000/- till they get married. In Chhattisgarh, it promised Rs 12,000 per year to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Scheme'.

In Telangana, the GOP beat all promising 10 grams of gold besides Rs 100,000/- cash to women getting married. In the run-up to the general elections, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on December 23, 2023 supply of free foodgrain under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) to over 800 million persons, Congress gave ten guarantees in its manifesto "Nyay Patra" released in April, 2024. Meanwhile, in Delhi, Kejriwal promised Rs 1000 per month to all women above the age of 18 years under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY). For State elections later this year, parties are readying to give another round of big doles.

As mentioned earlier, the BJP-led MahaYuti has already announced a bountiful package for Maharashtra. For others viz. Haryana, and Jharkhand, parties will follow suit.

The SC assertion on January 25, 2022 "Budget for freebies is going above the regular budget" is confirmed by facts on ground zero. Whereas, in Delhi, these cost the exchequer around Rs 12,500 crore annually, in Punjab the impact is close to Rs 20,000 crore.

In Karnataka, at over Rs 60,000 crore, the cost of five guarantees exceeds the existing fiscal deficit. Redeeming the guarantees promised in GOP's "Nyay Patra" could cost the Central Government a mammoth around Rs 46,00,000 crore.

In Maharashtra, Rs 1,500 per month to eligible women alone

would cost Rs 46,000 crore a year. When the top court says freebies are bad, why doesn't it ban them? A big deterrent is none other than the SC order of July 2013 which says "... it can't be construed as corrupt practice..."

Within the meaning of section 123(1)(A) of the RPA, 1951, the expression 'bribery' has been defined to mean any gift, offer or promise by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent of any gratification with the object of inducing an elector as a reward to his candidature. The irony is, that when a candidate uses his own pocket money to bribe the voter, it is treated as corrupt practice, but when the party on whose symbol he is seeking election bribes voters using 'public money', the top court doesn't treat it that way.

The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognized policy or custom".

The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognized policy/custom nor it is sanctioned in a court of law. It is a blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely to gain electoral advantage. The SC should change its stance to recognize this and force the Parliament to enact a law if it feels existing laws don't provide for it.

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

Transforming healthcare with digital technologies

The health-tech sector is poised for exponential growth, reshaping the future of healthcare for all its citizens

Digital technologies are anticipated to offer swift and personalized clinical services to each patient through their handheld devices. New Age Technologies (NATs), including Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), mobile technologies, cloud computing, Big Data, and 5G, are becoming essential tools in the realm of "Smart Health." Smart Health refers to an interconnected healthcare system that utilizes NATs for clinical analysis, treatment, medical setups, and hospital management. Examples of Smart Healthcare systems include surgical robots, RFID-based supply chains, and integrated health management platforms or Health-stacks. These Smart



CHARRU MALHOTRA

Healthcare systems provide real-time connectivity to doctors, reduce treatment costs, and offer predictive, personalized information to patients. For example, IoT-based wearable smart devices can track patients' progress, help manage medical emergencies, and promptly notify healthcare providers. India's National Health Policy 2017 aims to achieve "Universal Health Coverage for all citizens," grad-

ually transitioning from fragmented healthcare systems to a holistic approach using digital technologies.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme, launched in September 2018, is a notable nationwide public health insurance program that provides health coverage of up to 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization through the 'Abha-ID' for each patient. Additionally, the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), launched on August 15, 2020, aims to create an integrated healthcare system linking practitioners and patients digitally, allowing real-time access to health records. Driven by these national initiatives, along with the rise of health startups, increased

healthcare spending, and growing demand for high-quality healthcare services, the health-tech sector in India is experiencing significant growth.

According to recent reports, the health-tech industry in India is expected to reach \$6.5 billion by 2024 and \$78.4 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.67% during this period. India has already implemented initiatives such as the National Health Portal and the Health Management Information System (HMIS), with several state-level initiatives as well. Programs like the CoWIN Vaccine Platform, the Aarogya Setu contact tracing app, and the eSanjeevini National Telemedicine Service Platform



deserve special mention. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, private equity firms are increasingly investing in health tech companies. The health startup ecosystem in India primarily consists of six segments: telemedicine, pharmacy, fitness, wellness, IT healthcare, and home healthcare. Leading telemedicine startups such as Practo, Img, mFine, iCliniq, Digi-Doctor, and myUpchar are reporting impressive increases in tele-consultations.

These systems provide information on health indicators, identify individuals, verify them, and connect their health records with informed consent. However, the adoption of these technologies presents significant technical, legal, and socio-economic challenges. There is a lack of a cohesive and robust legal and regulatory framework, particularly in the health-tech domain. Security in smart healthcare is crucial, as it is an ecosystem susceptible to attacks or infiltration by individuals or hackers. The privacy of patients' sensitive health data requires an extra layer of protection beyond what is currently available through India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act. Data interoperability and dig-

ital connectivity are essential for the seamless exchange of health data. The emerging 5G communication network in India can address this gap, but technological constraints hinder the widespread adoption of in-home health monitoring services. Healthcare specialists also face challenges such as limited access to and adaptability to digital technologies. These issues are further compounded by inadequate logistics support, a shortage of skilled manpower, and a tech-resistant attitude among various stakeholders. Drawing inspiration from the globally recognized Unified Payment Interface (UPI), a digital public infrastructure (DPI) for healthcare should be made accessible to all. Our anganwadi workers, in partic-

ular, should be supported by additional tech-savvy personnel. Capacity building for our healthcare providers and ensuring their access to digital devices and connectivity should be prioritized through common service centers (CSCs) and Public Health Centers (PHCs). Additionally, it is time for India to expand the scope of its Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, by including special provisions for handling the sensitive health data of patients. With these efforts, every Indian will not only have easy access to but also trust the "Digital Doctor in their pocket."

(The writer is a professor at Indian Institute of Public Administration, New-Delhi; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Torrent Power arm to set up solar projects to supply power to ARS Steels

Torrent Power's subsidiary Torrent Urja 14 (TU14) will set up solar projects of up to 50 MW to supply clean power to ARS Steels & Alloy International (ARS), a BSE filing said on Monday. As per the Subscription and Shareholders' Agreement (SSSA) signed on Monday, ARS will also have an equity stake in the TU14 -- an arm of Torrent Power. The SSSA has been signed by Torrent Power, ARS and TU14 for the supply of power from by development of up to 50 MW solar power generating projects in Tamil Nadu through open access from the project of TU14 to the production units of ARS, the filing said. "Significant terms of SSSA include that ARS shall at all times during the subsistence of the power supply and offtake agreement hold not less than 26 per cent of the aggregate equity shares of TU14," Torrent Power said. Torrent Power is into generation, transmission and distribution of power. The company is also engaged in the manufacturing and supply of power cables.



Gold rises Rs 100; silver rallies Rs 870 amid strong global cues

Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 73,410 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with strong global trend, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal closed at Rs 73,310 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also rallied Rs 870 to Rs 94,270 per kg. It had settled at Rs 93,400 per kg in the previous session. "In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are quoted at Rs 73,410 per 10 grams, up by Rs 100 from the Friday's afternoon price. "Gold prices at Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) traded lower amid risk-averse sentiment and profit booking after surging in the week gone by," Diip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was US\$ 2,373 per ounce, up US\$ 10 per ounce from the previous close. "Gold and silver prices rose significantly as the dollar retreated amidst mixed jobs data, increase in rate cut expectations and geo-political updates."



PM to chair NITI Aayog Governing Council meet on July 27

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair NITI Aayog's ninth Governing Council meeting on July 27, which will discuss the "Viksit Bharat@2047" document to make India a developed nation, a senior government official said on Monday. The council, the apex body of NITI Aayog, includes all state chief ministers, lieutenant governors of Union Territories, and several Union ministers. Modi is the Chairman of NITI Aayog. NITI Aayog's Governing Council will meet on July 27. "Ahead of the Council meeting, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will likely give a glimpse of the Viksit Bharat vision and action plan in the Budget on July 23," the official said. A vision document is being prepared for India to become a developed economy of US\$ 30 trillion by 2047, the 100th year of its independence. In 2023, NITI Aayog was entrusted with the task of consolidating the 10 sectoral thematic visions into a combined vision for Viksit Bharat @2047.



IBM to launch GenAI Innovation Center in Kochi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tech giant IBM on Monday announced the launch of its GenAI Innovation Center in Kochi which, it said, will enable enterprises, startups, and partners to explore and build generative AI technology. The centre will accelerate AI innovation, boost productivity and strengthen GenAI expertise in India, the company said in a release. "As organisations transition from AI experimentation to deployment for adding business value, they often find AI projects too complex or difficult to integrate due to limited skills or expertise," it said. According to the release, the centre would provide organisations with access to IBM experts and technologies geared to help build, scale and accelerate adoption of enterprise-grade AI.

SBI report: Time to push divestment of state-owned banks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government should go ahead with divestment of public sector banks (PSBs) as they are in good condition, SBI said in its research report on Monday. The report also pitched for the consolidation of existing government-owned banks. "As banks are in good condition, the government should take stance on divestment of PSBs," the report titled 'Prelude to Union Budget 2024-25' said. With regard to the privatisation of IDBI Bank, it said the government and Life Insurance Corporation of India are selling an almost 61 per cent stake in the lender. "They invited bids from buyers in October 2022. In January 2023, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) received



The report also recommended that the government should tweak the tax on deposit interest and make flat tax treatment across the maturity ladder in line with mutual fund and equity markets

several expressions of interest for the IDBI Bank stake on offer. We expect the government to clarify this in the Budget," it said. Presently, the government owns over 45 per cent stake in

across the maturity ladder in line with mutual fund and equity markets. "Household net financial savings has declined to 5.3 per cent of GDP in FY23 and is expected to be 5.4 per cent in FY24. If we make deposit rate attractive in line with MFs, then this could push up household financial savings and CASA," it said. As this amount will be in the hands of depositors, the report said, it could unleash additional spending and thereby, more GST revenue to the government. "Increase in bank deposits will bring not only stability in core deposit base and financial system but also financial stability in household savings as the banking system is better regulated and having a superior trust as compared to other alternatives with high volatility/risk," it said.

'India's high public debt offers limited space for welfare spending'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's high public debt offers limited fiscal space to undertake welfare measures which can help stimulate the economy, a foreign brokerage said on Monday. In a report that comes weeks ahead of the presentation of the budget, Goldman Sachs said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman may continue on the fiscal consolidation roadmap, sticking to the 5.1 per cent fiscal deficit target announced in the interim budget. It said investors are expecting from the budget some relaxation in fiscal consolidation path and a shift in focus to welfare spending from capital expenditure. However, the same is not plausible, the brokerage hinted.

"There is limited fiscal space in our view to stimulate the economy given high public debt, (and) India's infrastructure upgrades have created long-term positive growth spillovers which policymakers may not be willing to give up," it reasoned. It said that the final fiscal deficit target may also be lowered from the present 5.1 per cent, and Sitharaman may further reduce the number to 4.5 per cent in FY26. Even if there is "some expenditure allocation" towards welfare

spending, it may not require a reduction in capex given the Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend transfer from the Reserve Bank, it said. There is a limited fiscal space for stimulus in FY25, it said, pointing out that interest expense constitutes a large share at 5.4 per cent of GDP in the general government's budget. "Our fiscal impulse calculations also show that general government fiscal policy has been a drag on growth since FY22 and will remain so in FY25 and FY26 given the fiscal consolidation target of the central government," it said. Capex grew at a healthy 31 per cent between FY21-24, giving a boost to growth, it said. The brokerage said the upcoming budget may go beyond just fiscal numbers, and lay emphasis on job creation.



Skoda gears up to introduce new Kodiaq, Octavia in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Czech carmaker Skoda is looking to drive in new models, including the latest version of its premium SUV Kodiaq, in India to bolster its presence in the country. The automaker has already announced plans to introduce a sub-4 meter compact SUV in the country early next year. Skoda already has a presence in the mid-sized SUV segment with Kushaq. In an interaction with PTI,

Skoda Auto India Brand Director Petr Janeba said the auto brand is also looking to re-introduce premium sedan Octavia in the market later this year. He stated the test mules of the new Kodiaq would probably be reaching Indian shores by the end of this year and the model could be introduced by this time next year. Janeba noted that Skoda has a huge portfolio of cars globally but in India, it wants to introduce models "which have a big chance to be successful".

Markets end on flat note amid muted trade

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended almost flat on Monday amid a lacklustre trade as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines in the absence of any fresh trigger. Weak cues from Asian markets also added to the muted trend in domestic equities. After beginning the trade on a weak note, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 36.22 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 79,960.38. During the day, it went lower by 264.77 points or 0.33 per cent to 79,731.83. The NSE Nifty dipped 3.30



points or 0.01 per cent to 24,320.55. Among the Sensex pack, Titan, Adani Ports, Tata ITC, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle, HCL Technologies and Tata Motors were among the

valuation in the near term, prompting investors to book some profits. The earnings season is around the corner, and the initial expectation is subdued," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.22 per cent while midcap dipped 0.14 per cent. Among the indices, consumer durables tanked 1.46 per cent, metal (0.80 per cent), telecommunication (0.78 per cent), services (0.69 per cent), auto (0.63 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.53 per cent).

SEBI puts SK Finance's Rs 2,200 cr IPO in abeyance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has kept in 'abeyance' the proposed initial share sale of vehicle finance and business loan-focused non-bank lender SK Finance. Without disclosing the reason SEBI said the "issuance of observations (has been) kept in abeyance" regarding the IPO of SK Finance,

an update showed on the regulator's website on Monday. The Jaipur-based lender had filed its preliminary papers with SEBI in May. According to the draft papers, the Initial Public Offering (IPO) of SK Finance is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 1,700 crore by promoters and investor shareholders.



Securitisation volumes surge 17 pc to Rs 45,000 cr: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Securitisation volumes rose 17 per cent to Rs 45,000 crore in the April-June quarter of this fiscal compared to the year-ago period, a report said on Monday. The report by domestic rating agency Crisil said the latest quarterly figure is adjusted for the exit of a large housing finance company, though it did not mention the name of the lender. In March, the RBI asked

IIFL to cease a slew of activities including securitisation, which seems to have impacted the volume. There was also a growth in the number of lenders accessing the market, wherein a lender bundles a bunch of future receivables and sells it to other to manage its funding needs, the report said. It said 95 originators, including NBFCs and banks, tapped the market to diversify funding sources, compared with 80 in the previous fiscal. Banks were

also more active in the market as originators, with transaction volumes reaching Rs 8,500 crore in the first quarter against Rs 10,000 crore for the entire FY24. "With banks now maintaining higher risk weights on credit exposure to NBFCs, availability of bank funding at optimal cost will be a key monitorable for them to diversify their resource raising beyond bank loans," Crisil's senior director Ajit Velonice said.

'Two-wheeler sales volume growth to continue'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The two-wheeler industry is expected to sustain a steady volume growth this fiscal driven by improved domestic sales and good traction in executive and premium segment motorcycles, a report said on Monday. According to CareEdge Ratings, post-Covid, sales volume of two-wheelers had consistently declined during FY20, FY21 and FY22 before starting to recover from FY23, with sales momentum continuing in FY24 as well. "CareEdge Ratings anti-

pates two-wheeler sales volume growth to continue in FY25 and it would be more driven by improved domestic sales, higher EV sales, launch of CNG powered two-wheelers and good traction in executive and premium segment motorcycles," said Hardik Shah, Director at CareEdge Ratings. The growth in the two-wheeler segment in FY25 is also expected to be aided by the likely interest rate cuts in the second half of FY25, strong demand for new model launches coupled with recovery in exports from its low base



and favourable monsoon which is likely to improve rural consumer sentiment and income levels, said Arti Roy, Associate Director at CareEdge Ratings. In FY23, the Indian two-wheeler industry recorded sales of 19.51 million units, an 8 per cent growth compared to the

previous fiscal year's 18.01 million units. In FY24, the industry continued its upward trajectory, achieving 9.8 per cent growth with a total sales volume of 21.43 million units. However, this was still short of the peak sales volume recorded in FY19, when annual sales volume had reached 24.46 million units, it said. During FY24, the domestic two-wheeler industry witnessed total sales volume of 17.97 million units, reflecting a growth rate of 13 per cent, while the exports volume experienced a decline of 5 per cent.

Labour min rebuts Citigroup's report on employment in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The labour ministry on Monday rebutted a recent report by Citigroup which forecast that India will struggle to create sufficient employment opportunities even with a 7 per cent growth rate. The ministry in a statement said the report "fails to account for the comprehensive and positive employment data available from official sources such as Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and the Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS data." The recent research report by Citigroup on employment in India, quoted by some of the print and electronic media, forecast that India will struggle to create sufficient employ-



The recent research report by Citigroup on employment in India, quoted by some of the print and electronic media, forecast that India will struggle to create sufficient employment opportunities even with a 7 per cent growth rate.

ment opportunities even with a 7 per cent growth rate. Ministry of Labour and Employment strongly rebuts

such reports which do not analyse all official data sources available in the public domain, it said. According to PLFS and RBI's KLEMS data, India has generated more than 8 crore (80 million) employment opportunities from 2017-18 to 2021-22. This translates to an average of over 2 crore (20 million) employment per year, despite the fact that the world economy was hit by COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-21 which contradicts Citigroup's assertion of India's inability to generate sufficient employment. This significant employment creation demonstrates the effectiveness of various government initiatives aimed at boosting employment across sectors, the statement added.

Employment in 27 sectors rises 3.31%

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The number of persons employed in 27 sectors, including agriculture, trade and financial services, increased by 3.31 per cent year-on-year to 59.66 crore in 2022-23, according to data published by the RBI on Monday. During 2021-22, the employment in these 27 sectors stood at 57.75 crore. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has placed on its website an update on 'Measuring Productivity at the Industry Level-The India KLEMS [Capital (K), Labour (L), Energy (E), Material (M) and Services (S)] Database'. The database covers 27 industries comprising the entire Indian economy.

Budget should focus on tax relief to boost consumption: India Inc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget FY25 should focus on offering relief to taxpayers, especially in the lower income brackets, to stimulate consumption, industry players suggested. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the full Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on July 23 which will be the first major policy document of the new government. The industry also urged the finance minister to lower corporate tax, phase out tax exemptions, and broaden tax base to boost economic growth. "Rationalise and simplify the tax system to improve compliance and promote investment. Consider measures such as reducing corporate tax rates, phasing out tax

exemptions, and broadening the tax base to make the tax regime more efficient and equitable," Assocham said. Rating agency ICRA said the government is likely to set a fis-



cal deficit target at 4.9-5 per cent for FY25, as against 5.1 per cent estimated in the Interim Budget on February 1, without compromising the capital expenditure target of Rs 11.1 lakh crore. "While favourable develop-

ments on the revenue front portend positively for the fiscal dynamics in FY2025, ICRA believes that fiscal consolidation will turn quite challenging beyond the current fiscal," the rating agency said. Mayank Gupta, co-founder and COO of Zopper Insurtech said the Budget is expected to focus on policies to promote economic growth and offer relief especially for the lower income brackets to stimulate consumption. "From the point of view of insurance, we suggest amending section 80C of the Income Tax Act to permit a greater limit on insurance premium payments, thereby encouraging more individuals to buy insurance products. Additionally, there should also be an allowance of deduction for term life insurance under the new tax regime," he said.

Anushka Ranjan to star in *Mixture* with Aahana Kumra



Renowned actress Anushka Ranjan is set to captivate audiences in the upcoming action thriller series titled *Mixture*. Produced by Pinaka Entertainment and directed by Hanish Kalia, this gripping series delves deep into the world of crime and suspense. Alongside Anushka, the series also stars the talented Aahana Kumra. *Mixture* unfolds against the scenic backdrops of Goa and the bustling streets of Mumbai, promising viewers an edge-of-the-seat experience with its intricate plot and dynamic action sequences. Anushka Ranjan shared her excitement about her role in the series: "I am thrilled to be a part of *Mixture*. This action thriller is unlike anything I've done before and it challenged me in ways I never anticipated. The character is complex and the storyline is filled with twists that kept me on my toes throughout the shoot. I can't wait for the audience to embark on this thrilling journey with us. Working with such a talented team and shooting in such diverse locations has been an incredible experience."

A source close to the production added, "Anushka brings a unique intensity to her role that perfectly complements the fast-paced and gripping narrative of *Mixture*. Her dedication and enthusiasm have been a driving force behind the energy of the series."

Set to release later this year, *Mixture* promises to be a standout addition to the crime thriller genre.



EMRAAN HASHMI SAYS HE'D LOVE TO WORK WITH MALLIKA SHERAWAT AGAIN

Emraan Hashmi and Mallika Sherawat have a reputation for being open and honest. Soon after their sensational erotic thriller *Murder* was released in 2004, they started saying nasty things about one another. They were recently seen chatting with the paparazzi and running into each other at a wedding. Emraan stated he would love to collaborate with Mallika once more in an interview.

"Back then, we were naive and impressionable. There comes a time in your life when you are incredibly impulsive and have very little ability to make thoughtful decisions. She said some hurtful things and I said some as well. That's all bygones, though. All of that

was set aside. That was a very long time ago. It was a pleasure to meet and see her. Both she and I were really warm," Emraan remarked. "She's a co-actor I wish I could have worked with again."

"It was so kind and nice. It was a very long time before I saw her. We haven't interacted like this in a very long time." He also said, "I had her a few times after the release of *Murder*," mentioning how he had run into her last month at producer Anant Pandit's daughter's wedding. Emraan will be next seen on *Showtime*. Mallika was last seen in *Pambattam*.

Cara Delevingne looks back on getting drunk at the age of 8!

Model-actress Cara Delevingne talked back about how, when she was just eight years old, she became wasted at her aunt's wedding. In an interview, the 31-year-old celebrity discussed her aunt's 2001 wedding while thinking back on her decades-long battle with substance misuse. According to reports, Delevingne, who has been sober since 2022, admitted, "I got drunk that day." "What a crazy age to get drunk at—eight years old," Delevingne said that she used drugs as a coping mechanism when things got tough. "I used to believe that using booze and drugs helped me deal. However, they didn't, and they made me feel extremely melancholy." She remarked, "I feel like I've regained my power and am no longer under the influence of outside forces."



In an interview, the *Suicide Squad* actress told in the United Kingdom that she feels like she has reclaimed her authority and is no longer dominated by external factors. She also attributed the aforementioned paparazzi photographs of herself acting erratically during the Burning Man festival to giving her a reality check that helped her sober up. "I would never have been Sally Bowles in the West End; I'm super proud of that," Delevingne remarked, referring to her part in *London's Cabaret* and crediting the paparazzi photos.

Kevin Feige reveals Hugh Jackman being rejected for *Wolverine*

Hugh Jackman was initially rejected for the role of Wolverine as the Australian actor was deemed too tall to play the mutant superhero.

He was hired back after Scottish actor Dougray Scott dropped out at the last minute, according to Marvel Studios CEO Kevin Feige. Scott was initially set to play the clawed superhero in the 20th Century Fox mutant franchise, but Jackman flew to Toronto to audition for the lead role of *Wolverine*. But Tom Cruise did not want the actor to play both the villain in *Mission: Impossible 2* and *Wolverine*. Scott opted out of the role and the team decided to bring the Australian actor back.

In an interview, Feige, who was an assistant to producer Lauren Shuler Donner at the time, shared what went on behind the scenes before Jackman was hired. "There was a scramble to get our Wolverine. Lauren was very excited about this Australian guy, who had been rejected initially. In my memory, one of the main reasons was that he was too tall. Wolverine in the comics is called 'Lil' Fireplugs' sometimes. He's a short guy. But they were desperate."

Jackman, who is 6 feet, 3 inches tall, was flown into Toronto for another audition, but after the reading he did with screenwriter Tom DeSanto and director Bryan Singer, the actor thought he didn't stand a chance. Not wanting to send Jackman "out into the cold," Feige bought him dinner before taking him to the airport. "I said, 'Kevin, we all know I'm not getting the part. You don't have to do dinner', Jackman said.

"But no, he sat in there and had a steak dinner with me and then drove me to the airport. I'll never forget it. That was the nicest thing. I thought, 'I'll never see him again.' But Jackman was unaware of what was happening behind the scenes with Scott's exit at the last moment.

Jackman had announced his retirement from the character after 2017's *Logan*, but he reunited with Feige for the upcoming *Deadpool & Wolverine* as Fox merged with Disney in 2020.

He also gets to collaborate with Ryan Reynolds, who has been trying to convince Jackman to return as Wolverine for years.

"The notion that, all these years later, we're in a world where [Jackman] is Wolverine and Deadpool and all of those X-Men characters are together under the same roof, is a pretty amazing quarter-of-a-century experience," said Feige. *Deadpool & Wolverine* releases on July 26.



Shyamalan opens up on directing 'real concert' for *Trap*

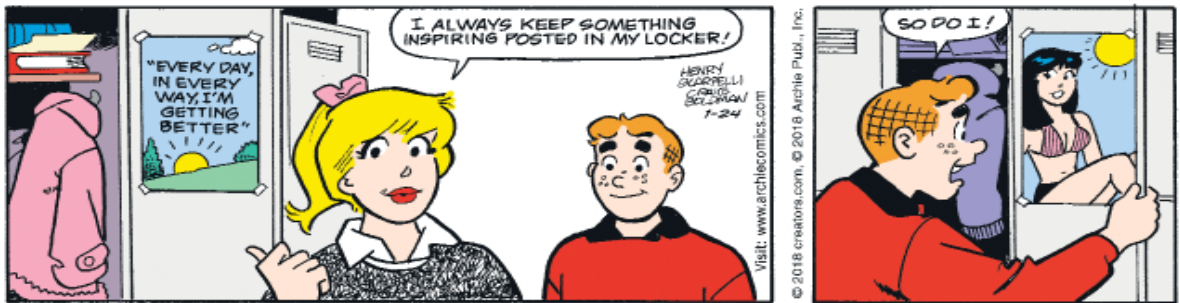
Filmmaker M Night Shyamalan says the concert at the centre of his upcoming suspense thriller *Trap* will feel like a real one, as he likes the idea of "cinema as windows within windows." The thriller master's new film has taken some of its ideas from a real-life sting operation from 1985 conducted by U.S. Marshals and DC Metro Police, who convinced many fugitives to attend an NFL match with free tickets. *Trap* revolves around Josh Hartnett's serial killer trying to evade a trap laid out for him at a pop concert that he is attending with his teenage daughter.

In an interview, Shyamalan said viewers would be getting an actual concert film in addition to the mystery. The director remembers pitching the film as What if 'The Silence of the Lambs' happened at a Taylor Swift concert? The director's daughter, Saleka, a budding musician, is playing pop singer Lady Raven in the movie. "I directed an entire concert! And it wasn't just a thing in the background. It's equally important. There is no pretend concert going on. I love the idea of cinemas as windows within windows. One of the reasons to come see the movie at the movie theatre is because there's literally a real concert that you can see nowhere except in that movie."

The filmmaker, known for directing movies such as *The Sixth Sense* and *The Village*, said he wanted the film to be a unique experience, the concert included. "I really do believe in the original movie. I want the industry to move towards more original storytelling. I think audiences would really like it. Look, I know there's safety in IP. But it's really important that we come to the movies and see something we've never seen before. I'll keep fighting for that," he said.

FUN

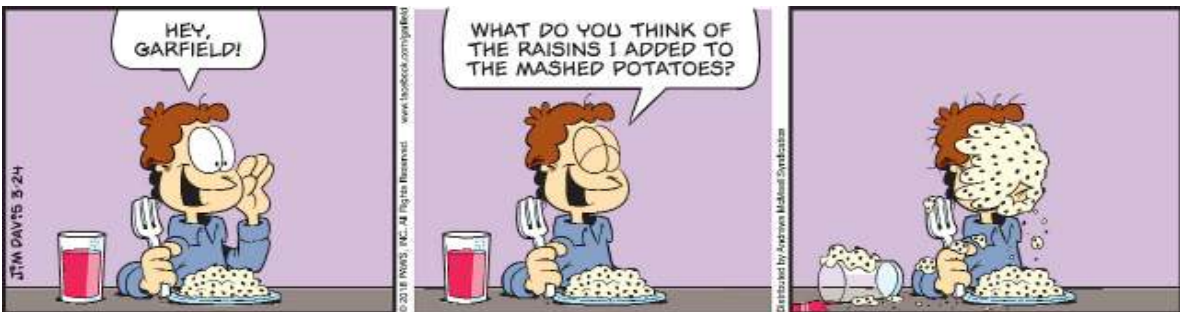
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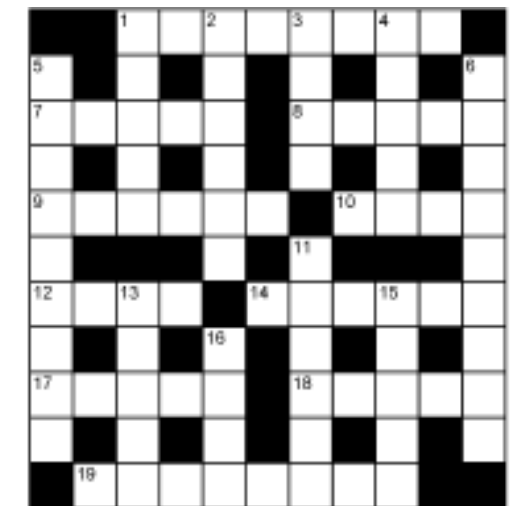
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

- ACROSS**
- Expecting a baby
 - Similar
 - Eat soup with this
 - Reply
 - A large furry animal
 - A snake's noise
 - Overtakes
 - A dentist repairs these
 - Living
 - A game of jumping a rope
 - A skydiver wears this
 - Without clothing
 - Honolulu is the capital of this American island state
 - Say something
 - A wasp's weapon
 - Cut with an axe
- DOWN**
- Sets of two
 - The number of players in a cricket team
 - Smell with this
 - A rope loop
- SOLUTION**
- | | | | | | | | | |
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| 4 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 7 |
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GINGER MEGGS



'I could play a thousand characters, but not rona-dhona laced mommy ones'

Actress Kitu Gidwani is frequently praised for her in-demand roles. During a brief telephonic conversation, *The Pioneer* spoke with her about her most recent Teleplay *Time Please* and the ageism prevalent in the industry.

TEJAL SINHA

Keeping up with her sass to date is none other than Kitu Gidwani. One who has been an avid Doordarshan viewer would recall seeing her effortlessly essay Jane Austen's Lydia Bennet in *Trishna* (1985), the hugely popular Indian adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Moving forward, projects like *Saahil*, *Swabhimaan*, *Shaktimaan* and then working alongside Kamal Haasan in *Aalavandhan*, brought the veteran actress to a whole different picture. *Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na*, *Fashion*, *Wedding Pulav*, *Ok Jaanu*, *Fitrat* and *Ghost Stories* have been a few of her much-acclaimed projects, creating an image of hers more than just as a "Television actor".

And to her, the journey has been no less than an educational, interesting and quite fulfilling one. These days, the *Shaktimaan* fame is seen in Zee Theatre's teleplay *Time Please* and the project was a challenge for her, which eventually intrigued her enough to get onboard for the project. "I am a theatre actress, and it wasn't easy to shoot a whole teleplay in just three days. It was quite challenging. The challenge was that the director, Homi Wadia, thought I would not be able to do the play in just three days. I wanted to prove him wrong! Finally, he did say, 'Yes, you did it very well!' We had to learn so many lines. It was not easy because I'm not a Hindi-speaking person in real life. The only other time I had to do this kind of work was during *Swabhimaan*, where we would do 10 scenes a day and just memorise scene after scene. I would have liked more time to shoot, but budgets were tight. So, it was a challenge but quite rewarding in the end."

In the teleplay, she's seen playing an opinionated woman, Manini, who thinks she knows everything about life. Sharing in more details on the same, she says, "When she meets this boy from a totally different social stratum, her defenses go down and she realises her life is a bit of a mess. It's always interesting to play a character that has ups and downs and comes to a new understanding. In real life, we rarely come to new realisations; we just stick to the same ideas until we die."

Having been in the industry for so long, she believes that over the years, now one gets to play diverse characters, which is very exciting, especially for an older woman. "You don't necessarily have to play a mother's role. I was

offered a role where I play a normal woman from a poor strata who is in touch with a big don! It's a very exciting role, full of emotion, drama and crime," says the *Fashion* fame. While many feel that as time passes, age becomes a barrier for one, especially an actress, she has a different perspective on it. "I think the older an actress gets, the better she gets. However, there is definitely a lack of roles for older women and I don't understand why. I feel like maybe the directors are scared to cast older women in their films and TV projects. There's a lot of ageism. If a 50-year-old Shah Rukh Khan can play a young man, then why can't an older woman be sexy and play interesting roles? I look as good today as I did 20 years ago. I'm doing the same activities, you know. It's ridiculous that people don't write roles for older women because older women are much more interesting. I'm much more interested now than when I was in my twenties! Older women are treated very unfairly. Acting is not just about looks and a youthful body."

Acting, she says, is just not about your soul, your spirit, your eyes, the way you speak and the way you emot. That's what an actor is! "Women should be empowered at every age of their lives. I don't believe in retiring at all. Today, we have more roles for older women, but only in a small amount. It's not like in the West, where older women are playing fantastic roles, whether it's Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman, Helen Mirren, or Judi Dench. In India, we just discard women once they pass a certain age. It's completely ridiculous. We treat older women like have-beens. The loss is society's, not the women's."

Over the years, beyond any doubt, she has portrayed diverse characters. However, there have been roles that she has turned down too. For instance, "I have said no to a mother who sits in the background, weeps copiously and is portrayed as a hero. There is nothing to build on here. They might as well take some two-dimensional actresses for that. But there are not many projects I have said no to. I mean, unless it's for a daily soap. That I refuse all the time."

Today, for her, it doesn't matter what type of character she's supposed to play, as long as it's a well-rounded human being. "I could play a comedic role—a bank robber, a detective, a drug dealer, a politician—I could play a thousand different characters. It doesn't matter. Anything apart from a rona-dhona-laced mother's character is okay with me."

According to *Dance of the Wind* fame, playing 'mean' characters is just like playing a good one. "It doesn't matter; as long as you play it well and if the audience believes it, you've succeeded. There is no taboo about playing mean characters! You cannot play a good character all the time because the world is full of mean people. So why should you not play a mean character? Where would a hero be without a villain?"

Also known for her portrayal of multiple characters in television shows, she exclusively speaks out on a concluding note, "I don't watch televisions. There may be some projects that are good, but definitely, it's been in a black hole for the last 20 years."



I FEEL LIKE MAYBE THE DIRECTORS ARE SCARED TO CAST OLDER WOMEN IN THEIR PROJECTS. THERE'S A LOT OF AGEISM. IF A 50-YEAR-OLD SHAH RUKH KHAN CAN PLAY A YOUNG MAN, THEN WHY CAN'T AN OLDER WOMAN BE SEXY AND PLAY INTERESTING ROLES?

Popping the 'triangle of death' pimples? Here's the dark side of it!

The human face has various zones that are more sensitive and prone to complications when it comes to skin issues, and one of the most critical areas is known as the "Triangle of Death." This term may sound dramatic, but it underscores the significant health risks associated with improperly treating skin problems in this region.

WHAT IS THE TRIANGLE OF DEATH?

The Triangle of Death refers to the area of the face that encompasses the bridge of the nose to the corners of the mouth, forming a triangle. This area is medically significant because it is densely populated with blood vessels that directly connect to the brain. The veins in this region do not have valves, meaning any infection here can easily spread to the brain, leading to severe complications such as cavernous sinus thrombosis, meningitis, or brain abscess.

WHY IS IT DANGEROUS TO POP A PIMPLE IN THIS AREA?

Popping pimples is generally discouraged by dermatologists due to the risk of infection and scarring. However, doing so within the Triangle of Death carries additional, more severe risks. The blood vessels in this area drain into the cavernous sinus, a large vein at the base of the brain, and an infection here can spread to the brain, causing life-threatening conditions. Squeezing or popping a pimple can introduce bacteria from the skin's surface into the bloodstream, potentially leading to serious infections such as meningitis or a brain abscess. One of the most severe risks is cavernous sinus thrombosis, a rare condition where a blood clot forms in the cavernous sinus, potentially causing stroke-like symptoms, vision loss, and other neurological complications, and it is often fatal if not treated promptly. Additionally, popping pimples can lead to permanent scarring and hyperpigmentation, particularly in sensitive areas like the face.

CAUSES OF PIMPLES IN THE TRIANGLE OF DEATH

Pimples, also known as acne, can occur due to several factors, including hormonal fluctuations, bacterial infection, excess sebum production, and diet and lifestyle. Hormonal changes during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, or conditions like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) can increase oil production in the skin, leading to clogged pores and pimples. The bacterium *Propionibacterium acnes* (P. acnes) is commonly associated with acne, and when pores are clogged, this bacterium can multiply and cause inflammation. Overactive sebaceous glands can produce too much oil, clogging pores and creating an environment conducive to acne. Additionally, diets high in refined sugars and dairy products, stress, lack of sleep, and poor skincare habits can all contribute to the development of acne.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Treating pimples within the Triangle of Death requires caution. Recommended approaches include using topical treatments with benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, or retinoids to reduce acne by killing bacteria, drying excess oil, and promoting cell turnover. For severe cases, a dermatologist may prescribe oral antibiotics, hormonal treatments like birth control pills, or isotretinoin (Accutane). Professional extraction by a dermatologist is advisable for pimple



removal, as they use sterile techniques to minimize the risk of infection and scarring. Maintaining a regular skincare routine with gentle cleansing, moisturising, and non-comedogenic products can help prevent acne. Additionally, identifying and avoiding triggers such as certain foods, stress, and poor hygiene practices can also help manage acne.

PRECAUTIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Hands off: Avoid touching or picking at pimples, especially within the Triangle of Death. This reduces the risk of introducing bacteria into the pores and bloodstream.

Seek professional help: If acne is persistent or severe, seek the help of a dermatologist. They can provide effective treatments and advice tailored to your skin type and condition.

Cleanliness and hygiene: Regularly wash your face with a gentle cleanser, avoid harsh scrubbing, and keep your hands and face clean to reduce the risk of infections.

Healthy lifestyle: A balanced diet, adequate hydration, regular exercise, and stress management can all contribute to healthier skin and fewer acne breakouts.

While the Triangle of Death may seem like an exaggerated term, it aptly highlights the potential dangers associated with popping pimples in this area. Understanding the risks and adopting safer skincare practices can help prevent serious health complications and ensure your skin remains healthy. Always prioritise professional medical advice and treatments over DIY methods to mitigate risks effectively.

(The author, Dr Sunil Kumar Prabhu, is a Consultant-Dermatologist and Aesthetic Physician, at Aster RV Hospital.)

FROM BUILDING HOUSES TO BREAKING BATTLES

Bboy Pappu is here for 'breathing' and 'breaking' dance

AARTI SREENATH

A few names stand out in the breaking world, like Bboy Pappu. His journey, marked by resilience and an undying passion for the art form, shines as a beacon of hope for Manipur's breaking culture. Despite the challenges, his story is one of perseverance and unyielding dedication.

Reflecting on the current state of breaking, Pappu Khundrakpam acknowledges the progress but also points out the limited improvement. "There has been an increase, a rise, but there is very little improvement," he says. When asked about the program *Red Bull BC One* and its impact on breaking culture, Pappu highlights its motivational benefits. "Because there is *BC One*, we want to practice every day. We have motivation because of this," he shares.



BBOY PAPPU KHUNDRAKPAM, ALSO KNOWN AS PAPPU, BEGINS BY EXCLUSIVELY EXPRESSING HIS EXCITEMENT FOR THE COMPETITION AND HIS BREAKING PATH. PAPPU IS GETTING READY FOR THE RED BULL BC ONE FINALS!



His excitement about the opportunities brought by *BC One* is palpable. "Yes, we have been waiting for this chance and I am very excited," he says with immense excitement. However, he also notes the lack of recent competitions, mentioning the absence of breaking battles. "In recent times, there haven't been many competitions in my hometown. There are no battles happening here. We can't publicly have 'breaking battles'; so we have to go outside and perform. This is a struggle," he explains.

Despite these hardships, Pappu and his peers remain committed to their craft. When asked about their motivation and how they promote breaking in states like Manipur, Pappu's response is resolute. "We are Red Bull. We keep waiting for battles and we are now preparing for them," he states, emphasising their unwavering dedication.

Balancing his pursuits in engineering and breaking, Pappu has clear personal goals. "Both of them are my priorities. I also want to become an engineer. I used to work before and I want to invest and grow in order to do well in that field too," he says, showcasing his ambition and determination.

Looking ahead, the breaking star has a hopeful vision for breaking in Manipur. "I do see people doing their best; children are also actively participating. With this spirit, I think my vision for Manipur's breaking popularity will become a reality," he concludes. He notes the growing interest among young kids, who have started teaching others, and mentions an upcoming small battle in Manipur as a sign of progress. "There will be progress," he affirms, filled with optimism.

Bboy Pappu's story is a testament to the power of passion and perseverance. His commitment to breaking, despite the obstacles, inspires a new generation of dancers in Manipur. As he continues to balance his dual pursuits, his vision for the future of breaking in his state is one of hope and growth.

INDIA EYE IMPROVED BOWLING SHOW IN FINAL WOMEN'S T20I AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Desperate to level the three-match series after the second game was washed out, India would hope weather doesn't play spoilsport, besides eyeing a much-improved bowling effort in the final women's T20I against South Africa here on Tuesday.

India are trailing the three-match series 0-1 after losing the opener by 12 runs. Their problems compounded after the second game here on Sunday was washed out midway due to persistent drizzle.

And with 30 to 40 per cent of rain forecast for Tuesday, the Indians are left on the mercy of weather gods.

In both the matches, the Indian bowlers cut a sorry figure as South Africa amassed 189 for 9 and 177 for 6 respectively.

Barring Pooja Vastrakar, who picked up two wickets each in both the games, and spinner Deepti Sharma, most of the Indian bowlers failed to shine against the Proteas women. Renuka Singh leaked runs in

the first game and was subsequently replaced by Sajeevan Sajana in the second T20I but the latter also didn't her cause.

Shreyanka Patil and Radha Yadav picked up a wicket each on Sunday but continued to leak runs.

India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur would want her bowlers to pull up their socks with the series at stake.

On the batting front, it has been a decent show by the Indians in the first game. The likes of Jemimah Rodrigues (53 not out), Smriti Mandhana (46), Harmanpreet (35), Shafali Verma (18) and Daylan Hemalatha (14) all making double digit scores.

Uma Chetry, who made her T20I debut on Sunday, is likely to persisted with as Harmanpreet and the team management would like to see her exploits with the bat.

South Africa, on the other hand, has been rock solid with the bat with Tazmin Brits, who hit consecutive half-centuries, leading the charge.

Besides Brits, skipper Laura Wolvaardt, Marizanne Kapp



and Anneke Bosch have contributed with the bat as well for the visitors.

South Africa's only concern is Chloe Tryon, who has scored identical 12 runs in the two games.

And with the upcoming T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in mind, Tryon will be desperate to prove her detractors wrong.

TEAMS (FROM):

India Women: Harmanpreet Kaur(c), Smriti Mandhana(vc), Uma Chetry(wk), Richa Ghosh(wk), Dayalan Hemalatha, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Sajeevan Sajana, Deepti Sharma, Asha Sobhana, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh, Shabnam Shakil, Pooja Vastrakar and Radha Yadav.

South Africa Women: Laura Wolvaardt(c), Tazmin Brits, Mieke de Ridder(wk), Sinalo Jafta(wk), Anneke Bosch, Nadine de Klerk, Annerie Dercksen, Marizanne Kapp, Sune Luus, Chloe Tryon, Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, Eliz-Mari Marx, Nonkululeko Mlaba and Tumi Sekhukhune.



Mentor Yuvraj was very happy when I got out for duck, he must be proud now: Abhishek Sharma

PTI ■ HARARE

India opener Abhishek Sharma has revealed that his mentor Yuvraj Singh was delighted when he got out for a duck on his T20I debut against Zimbabwe here as the swashbuckling former all-rounder, for reasons best known to him, felt it was a "good start".

Making his India debut, Abhishek was out on duck as the Men in Blue lost the first T20I against hosts Zimbabwe by 13 runs on Saturday. But the 23-year-old came back strongly to set the stage ablaze with a blistering maiden century (a 47-ball 100) to fashion India's 100-run win in the second game a day later.

"I spoke to him yesterday (Saturday) also, and I don't know why he was very happy when I got out on zero. He said that's a good start but he must be very happy and proud just like my family," Abhishek said in a video posted by BCCL. He credited the hero of India's 2011 World Cup triumph for not only helping him hone his skills on the cricket field but also supporting him in his life away from the field.

"It's all because of him as well, the hard work he has put in (shaping) me. (For) two-three years, he has worked really hard not only on my cricket but off the field (life) as well."

After Sunday's game, Abhishek called Yuvraj, who couldn't be happier for the youngster. "Well done very proud, you deserve it. Many more (such innings) to come this is just the start," Yuvraj said. Since there was no rest day in between the first two games, the visitors didn't get a lot of time to think about the opening loss and that worked in India's favour as they levelled the five-match series 1-1.

"We lost yesterday but I felt, today is my day and I should take the match to the end, the positive was that we didn't have much time to think about the next game," he pointed out. Abhishek combined with Ruturaj Gaikwad (77 not out off 47 ball) for a match-winning 137-run stand for the second wicket. "I was in a flow, and just wanted to express myself. I spoke to Ritu as well, he said the same thing that 'don't think much about the balls and hit what you think you can'," he said.

He once again thanked India skipper on the tour and his Punjab teammate Shubman Gill for lending him his bat. "Special thanks to Shubman who timely gave me his bat, this was a much-needed innings for me and the team."

"This has been going on from U-14 times. Whenever I play with his bat I have done well, today also, the same happened. I played with his bat only, which I got after a lot of difficulty, he doesn't give it easily. That is like my last option when I feel I have to play with his bat for a comeback," he quipped.

Have been living a dream for past few days, filled with gratitude: Bumrah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday said he has been "living a dream" for the past few days as he expressed gratitude for the stupendous reception that he and the rest of his teammates got for winning the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean.

The 30-year-old, who picked up 15 wickets in the mega-event that concluded on June 29 in Barbados, was a key figure in India's second overall and first in 17 years world trophy in the shortest format. He was adjudged Player of the Tournament for his performance.

"I am so thankful for the last few



days. I've been living a dream and it has filled me with happiness and gratitude." Bumrah posted on X, along with a video of him enjoying the rapturous homecoming that included a breakfast meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a victory parade attended by lakhs of fans in Mumbai.

The 42-second clip featured the audio of Virat Kohli's speech during the felicitation function after the parade last Thursday where the champion batter had lauded Bumrah's contribution. The fast bowler had combined with all-rounder Hardik Pandya to turn it around wonderfully for India in the final.

The two were brought in for their second spell in the match at a time

when South Africa needed 30 off 30 balls. They wreaked havoc to ensure that the Proteas eventually fell short by seven runs.

Kohli had called Bumrah a "once in a generation" player during the speech at the Wankhede Stadium, prompting the assembled crowd to chant the bowler's name in appreciation.

"What I would like everyone to do is to applaud a guy who brought us back into games again, and again, and again. It was phenomenal. He is a once in a generation bowler. I am so glad he plays for us," Kohli, who retired from T20 Internationals at the end of the World Cup, had said.

Bumrah was welcomed with flower petals after arriving at his Ahmedabad home recently.



Jayasuriya named Sri Lanka's interim coach ahead of limited-overs series against India

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Former captain Sanath Jayasuriya was on Monday named the interim head coach of Sri Lanka's cricket team ahead of this month's white-ball home series against India with the country's board saying that he is "well-positioned" to guide the side till a "permanent solution" is found in the next few months.

The Indian team will be touring Sri Lanka for three T20 Internationals and as many ODIs, starting July 27. Jayasuriya, who has also served as a chief selector in the past, will continue in the post till Sri Lanka's Test tour to England in August-September, comprising three games.

"Sri Lanka Cricket wishes to announce the appointment of Mr. Sanath Jayasuriya as the 'Interim Head Coach' of the national team. He will function in the position until the completion of Sri Lanka's tour of England in September 2024," the SLC said in a statement.

The 55-year-old, a swashbuckling opener in his prime, was named for the interim post after Englishman Chris Silverwood resigned last week as Sri Lanka head coach.

Silverwood stepped down in the wake of the country's disastrous T20 World Cup campaign, during which it was ousted from the league stage itself.

One of the most attacking batters of his time, Jayasuriya had recently been a consultant for the team during this year's T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean.

"Jayasuriya is currently serving as the full-time 'Cricket Consultant' of Sri Lanka Cricket. His new appointment comes into immediate effect." "Sanath with his wealth of international cricketing experience is well positioned to guide the national team, until we find a permanent solution," said SLC CEO Ashley De Silva.

Jayasuriya featured in 110 Tests between 1991 and 2007, scoring 6973 runs at an average of 40.07, with the help of 14 centuries and 31 fifties. In the 445 ODIs he played, the left-hander struck 13,430 runs at an average of 32.36, with 28 hundreds and 68 half centuries.

He was a key member of the Sri Lankan team that won 1996 ODI World Cup. He also served as Member of Parliament from 2010-15.

Maldives' tourism body invites T20 world champ Indian team to celebrate trophy there

PTI ■ MALE

The recently-crowned T20 world champion Indian cricket team has been invited to celebrate its triumph in Maldives by the country's tourism association and its marketing and public relations corporation.

The Rohit Sharma-led Indian team won the trophy in Barbados after beating South Africa by seven runs in the final on June 29.

"Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC/ Visit Maldives) in collaboration with the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) have jointly extended a special and open invitation to the Indian National Cricket Team," the two bodies said in a joint statement.

Ibrahim Shiuree, the CEO and Managing Director of MMPRC, and Ahmed Nazeer, Secretary General of MATI, said they look forward to



hosting the team, which returned to India on Thursday last week.

It was welcomed by frenzied fans in both Delhi and Mumbai, which also played host to a victory parade featuring lakhs of supporters.

"We would be honoured to host you and ensure that your stay is filled with memorable moments, relaxation, and bespoke experiences," Shiuree and Nazeer said in the joint statement.

They said the invitation also highlights the strong and long-standing cultural and sporting ties between the Maldives and India.

Cricketers Ashwin buys team in Global Chess League

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has become a co-owner of the American Gambits, a new team which will feature in the second edition of the Global Chess League, a joint venture between Tech Mahindra and the International Chess Federation.

The League on Monday unveiled the six franchises for the second edition to be played in London from October 3 to 12.

American Gambits, owned by prominent business leaders Prachura PP, Venkat K Narayana and Ashwin, will replace Chingari Gulf Titans.

"We're thrilled to introduce the American Gambits to the chess world. With a blend of strategic brilliance and unwavering determination, our team aims to redefine the game. As co-owner, I'm excited to witness their journey and contribute to their success," Ashwin was

quoted as saying in a media release.

The five other franchise -- Alpine SG Pipers, PBG Alaskan Knights, Ganges Grandmasters, defending champions

Triveni Continental Kings and Mumbai Masters will return for a second season.

Sameer Pathak, CEO, Global Chess League, said, "We are thrilled to welcome the teams for the second season of the Global Chess League. We have found the right partners to strengthen the league's global reach and look forward to bringing an exciting season of chess to fans worldwide."

"The teams made season one a huge success and we believe that their impact and popularity will continue to expand in the world of chess."

The players will compete in a unique joint team format consisting of six players, including two top women chess players and a prodigy player per team.

Adding to the excitement and anticipation among fans, this innovative format will be aired on major OTT and broadcast platforms worldwide.

In the tournament, each team will play a total of 10 matches in a double round-robin format, with the winner of each match being decided in a best-of-six board scoring system.

Each team will play 10 matches across black and white pieces. The sides will play five matches, with all six players in each team initially playing with the white or black pieces against their opponents, followed by a reverse round in which the entire team will play five matches with the reversed colour pieces against the same opponent.

The winning team for every match will be determined by the points aggregated from wins and draws across all six games played in the match. The top two sides will advance to the final round.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian women's cricket team fielding coach Munish Bali lauded Uma Chetry for her fielding skills, and said the young wicket-keeper is a "truly hard-working cricketer".

Chetry, 21, made her T20 International debut against South Africa in the abandoned second game of the three-match series here on Sunday, and inflicted a stumping off Deepti Sharma's bowling to get rid of a well-settled Tanzim Brits. This was after Chetry had earlier missed a similar chance against Brits as she collected the ball ahead of the stumps.

But Bali backed the youngster and recalled how she had bravely fielded at the short-leg during the Test match against South Africa last week.

"I was happy when she was handed her debut cap. During the Test, she fielded for around 70-80 overs -- she is a brave girl," he said during the post-match press conference.

"Standing at the short-leg is not easy. She got hit by the ball, but she stood there in pain. She has great attitude and is a truly hard-

Chetry is a truly hard-working cricketer: Indian women's fielding coach Bali

working cricketer. I was so happy for her to have stumped Brits." Rain washed out the second T20I between India and South Africa with the tourists setting the hosts a target of 178 to level the series.

Despite some slip-ups on the field, Bali was overall content with the team's effort. "It's difficult to grip the ball when it's drizzling. But still, we fielded very well.

We are working on it (fielding) and it's in progress as we keep getting better slowly. "No one drops catches intentionally. The players have been practising hard during our (training) sessions, giving their best. At times, things click, and sometimes, it doesn't. Errors happen during matches. So, we keep telling them to keep giving their best and results will follow," he said.

Bali also praised the bowling effort of spinner Deepti Sharma, who returned with with figures



of 2 for 20. "She (Deepti) is an experienced bowler. Having played all three formats, she knows where her strength lies, and she keeps backing herself. Also, her experience of bowling at the death is immense, which makes her a truly good bowler."

I TRY TO BE PRESENT IN THE GAME AND DO THE BEST I CAN: ANNEKE BOSCH: Meanwhile, South Africa all-rounder Anneke Bosch is not bothered about her selection for the T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in October. "... But, you still cannot be sure if you will get a chance or not and it's never guaranteed," said Bosch, who scored a 32-ball 40 on and shared a 38-run stand with Brits on Sunday. "So, it helps, but I don't focus on that too much. I try to be present in the game and try to do the best I can at that moment. Whatever is meant to be, it will be."

SOUTH KOREAN ACTOR LIKELY TO PLAY VILLAIN IN SPIRIT

Anticipation is soaring for Prabhas' upcoming film *Spirit*, directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga of *Animal* fame, marking the superstar's 25th cinematic outing since its announcement in 2021. The latest buzz reveals that South Korean-American actor Ma Dong-seok, renowned for his roles in *Train to Busan* and *Eternals*, among others, is set to play the antagonist in this highly anticipated thriller.

Ma Dong-seok, also known as Don Lee, has garnered acclaim for his commanding presence and martial arts prowess, having portrayed memorable characters in both South Korean blockbusters and Hollywood hits. The inclusion of Korean stunt choreographers further underscores the film's ambition to appeal to a pan-Asian audience.

While details are yet to be officially confirmed by the makers, the prospect of Ma Dong-seok

sharing screen space with Prabhas has already stirred excitement among fans worldwide. Sandeep Reddy Vanga has previously hinted at unveiling the first look of *Spirit* on October 23, 2024, coinciding with Prabhas' birthday, adding to the fervor surrounding the project.

Spirit promises to deliver a gripping narrative centered around a dedicated police officer, featuring Prabhas in a compelling, hard-hitting role. Produced by T-Series and Sandeep Vanga, the film is slated for release in multiple languages, including Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Japanese, Chinese and Korean, aiming to captivate audiences across diverse cultural landscapes.



SKN: Celebrating passion and success in Tollywood

July 8 marks a milestone for Sreenivas Kumar, affectionately known as SKN in the Telugu film industry, as he celebrates his birthday amidst acclaim for his prolific career. From humble beginnings as a journalist to becoming one of Tollywood's prominent producers, SKN's journey is a testament to perseverance and passion. Starting his career on a website and later joining TV9, SKN transitioned into the role of a successful PRO before venturing into production. His collaboration with UV Creations on films like *Mahabubhavudu* and *Prathi Roju Pandage* laid the foundation for his eventual leap into production.

Partnering with director Maruthi, SKN co-founded Good Cinema Group, further establishing his influence in the industry. Their collaboration bore fruit with the Vijay Deverakonda starrer *Taxiwalla*, a pivotal moment that propelled SKN's career to new heights. His subsequent projects with Maruthi, Geetha Arts and UV Creations solidified his reputation as a producer with a keen eye for success. Last year, SKN's production of the blockbuster *Baby*, directed by Sai Rajesh, crossed the 100 crore mark, showcasing his prowess as a solo producer. Known for his dynamic speeches and impactful presence at movie events, SKN has garnered a strong following on social media, bolstered by his charismatic persona and philanthropic efforts.

Looking ahead, SKN remains committed to pushing boundaries with ambitious projects. His upcoming ventures include the Hindi remake of *Baby* titled *Cult Bomma* and a collaboration with acclaimed director Sandeep Raj. With projects like Rashmika Mandanna's *The Girlfriend* and the eagerly anticipated *Raja Saab* featuring Prabhas, SKN continues to shape the landscape of Tollywood with his innovative vision. As SKN celebrates another year of life, he stands as a beacon of inspiration in Tollywood, embodying the spirit of passion, perseverance, and success.



MANCHU MANOJ INTRODUCES DAUGHTER 'DEVASENA SHOBHA MM' TO WORLD

In a heartwarming moment of joy and gratitude, actor Manchu Manoj shared a glimpse of his newborn daughter, 'Devasena Shobha MM', with the world. Named in honour of his late mother-in-law and Lord Subramaniam Swamy's wife, the announcement was met with utter delight from fans and well-wishers alike.

Accompanied by his wife Mounika Bhuma Manchu, the couple expressed deep appreciation for their families and friends who have been unwavering pillars of support throughout their journey. This special occasion marks a milestone for both the Manchu and Bhuma families, celebrated with immense love and gratitude.

"We are grateful beyond words for the love and blessings showered upon us. 'Devasena Shobha MM' brings immense joy into our lives, and we are thankful to everyone who has stood by us through thick and thin," shared Manchu Manoj, visibly touched by the outpouring of affection from their circle.

As the couple embarks on this new chapter, their heartfelt appreciation resonates with fans, friends and the entire film fraternity. The introduction of 'Devasena Shobha MM' is not just a moment for the Manchu and Bhuma families but a cherished occasion for their extended community, marking a beautiful beginning filled with love and happiness.



Meet hilarious duo Chatur & Vithur from Ari

Ari emerges as an eagerly anticipated film centered on the concept of Arishadvarga and the magnificence of Lord Krishna. 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 Primatea, Anasuya Bharadwaj, Sai Kumar and Srikanth Iyengar in pivotal roles.

Now, on Monday, the makers unveiled the characters of the hilarious duo Chatur and Vithur from the film. Directed by Jayashankar, *Ari* is gearing up for its theatrical release.

Ram Charan wraps up shooting for *Game Changer*

Ram Charan's upcoming film, *Game Changer*, has been a topic of great anticipation among moviegoers ever since its announcement. Despite facing various challenges and delays during production, the film has now completed shooting, as confirmed by the actor himself through BTS pictures shared on social media.

Taking to Instagram, Ram Charan posted snapshots from the film's first and last shooting days, alongside helicopters that play a significant role in the movie. His caption read, "THE GAME IS ABOUT TO CHANGE! #GAMECHANGER That's a wrap! See you at the cinemas."

Directed by S Shankar, *Game Changer* casts Ram Charan in the role of Ram Nandan, an IAS officer dedicated to combating corruption in

politics and advocating for fair elections. The film promises to be a gripping political thriller, supported by a stellar ensemble including Kiara Advani, Anjali, SJ Suryah, Srikanth, Jayaram, Sunil and Samuthirakani.

Earlier this year, the makers released the film's first single, *Jaragandi*, on Ram Charan's birthday, which received widespread acclaim for its energetic composition featuring Ram Charan and Kiara Advani.

With S Thaman handling the music and Tirru on cinematography, *Game Changer* boasts a reported budget of Rs. 200 crore, ensuring high production value and thrilling action sequences. While the official release date is yet to be announced, speculations suggest the film may hit theatres in September or October this year. As excitement mounts for its release, *Game Changer* is poised to deliver an engaging cinematic experience, showcasing Ram Charan in a role that promises to redefine the genre of political thrillers.



Shanmukha first look hints at a divine social thriller

Sapbro Productions proudly announces the release of the first look of their upcoming film *Shanmukha*, featuring a stellar cast including Aadi Saikumar, Avika Gor, Ariyana Glory, Chirag Jani and Shanmugam Sappani. This cinematic endeavour promises to captivate audiences with its thrilling narrative centered around the character Surya, portrayed by Aadi Saikumar.

Shanmukha is set to deliver an edge-of-your-seat experience, blending elements of mystery and suspense against a backdrop of divine intrigue. The story delves deep into centuries-old secrets, unveiling a new saga in the cinematic universe of *Shanmukha*. The film's commitment to excellence is underscored by the involvement of top-notch technicians, music directors, cinematographers and a high-end CG VFX team, ensuring a visually immersive experience.

Renowned music director Ravi Basrur, celebrated for his work in blockbusters like *KGF Chapter 1 and 2* and *Salaar*, joins the project to create a captivating musical landscape. *Shanmukha* is poised to feature three standout songs that are expected to



make a significant impact on the audio charts.

Penned by talented writer Sathish Akethi, the screenplay delivers a power-

ful message relevant to contemporary audiences. Aadi Saikumar's portrayal of Surya promises to be a highlight, supported by the stellar performances of Chirag Jani and the entire cast.

Director and producer Shanmugam Sappani expressed his pride and gratitude for the dedicated efforts of the team, working tirelessly to bring this ambitious project to fruition. With a substantial portion of the film featuring advanced CGI, *Shanmukha* aims to set new visual standards in filmmaking.

"I am thankful to our co-producers, Tulasiram Sappani and Ramesh Yadav, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey," added Shanmugam Sappani, emphasizing the collaborative effort behind the film.

As Sapbro Productions gears up for the release of *Shanmukha* before winter this year, audiences can expect a cinematic spectacle that pushes the boundaries of storytelling. Stay tuned for more updates, including the official release date, as Sapbro Productions continues its legacy of delivering innovative and compelling cinema to audiences worldwide.

Vijaya Bhaskar's Usha Parinayam releasing on Aug 2

Renowned for his creative finesse in Telugu cinema, director K Vijaya Bhaskar is set to charm audiences once again with his latest offering, *Usha Parinayam*. Known for classics like *Muve Kavali*, *Manmadhudu* and *Malleeswari*, Vijaya Bhaskar returns with a heartwarming family entertainer subtitled 'Love is Beautiful'.

Produced under Vijaya Bhaskar Kraft, the film stars Vijaya Bhaskar's son Sree Kamal in the lead role, alongside Telugu debutante Tanvi Akaanksha as the heroine. Promising a blend of new-age romance and timeless emotions, the film is poised to resonate with audiences of all ages.

The eagerly awaited *Usha Parinayam* is slated to hit screens on August 2, as confirmed by the director himself. Speaking about the film, Vijaya Bhaskar expressed, "This is a beautiful love story filled with emotions that will resonate with everyone. For me, this film encapsulates the essence of love and promises to be a delightful treat for moviegoers."

With its recently released songs and teaser garnering positive responses, *Usha Parinayam* is set to captivate audiences with its heartfelt narrative and captivating performances.



Third single *Amma Lalo Ram Bhajana* from *AAY* out now

G2 Pictures, renowned for their successful productions, presents their upcoming film *AAY* starring the dynamic Narne Nithiin and the stunning Nayan Sarika, directed by debutant filmmaker Anji K Maniputhra. This highly anticipated project is produced by Bunny Vas and Vidya Koppineedi, promising an engaging entertainment experience that has already piqued audience interest with its intriguing promotional campaign.

The latest update from *AAY* comes in the form of its third single, *Amma Lalo Ram Bhajana*, which is now available for audiences. Aptly referred to as the *Srinivasuni Song*, this piece beautifully narrates the story of Srinivasa Kalyanam through the traditional art form of Burra Katha. It eloquently weaves together elements of rich tradition and culture, depicted vividly in its lyrical video.

Director Anji K Maniputhra's lyrical prowess



shines through in the song's composition, capturing the essence of the age-old tale. Penchal Das' soulful vocals and Ajay Arasada's enchanting musi-

cal arrangement add a magical dimension to the *Burra Katha* narrative, promising a deeply resonant experience for listeners.

With previous releases already becoming chart-busters and gaining popularity across social media platforms through reels and shorts, *AAY* is shaping up to be the ultimate fun entertainer of the season. Scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release on Independence Day, August 15, the film promises to deliver wholesome family entertainment against the picturesque backdrop of Godavari.

Presented by the esteemed Allu Aravind, *AAY* brings together top-notch talents including art direction by Kiran Kumar Manne, cinematography by Sameer Kalyani, and music composed by Ram Miryala.

As anticipation builds, audiences can look forward to more exciting updates from this ambitious project in the days to come.