

Former chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao is giving 'farewell' parties to his MLAs at his Erravalli farmhouse. Why didn't the same KCR open the gates of Pragathi Bhavan to BRS MLAs when he was in power? KCR's 'get together parties' indicate that they are conspiring to topple the Congress government

— Makkah Singh, Ramagundem MLA P4

'India won't see Emergency again in any circumstances'

'UNLEASHING AI FOR NEXT WAVE OF ENTERPRISES' PRODUCTIVITY IS A BIG CHALLENGE

Allu Sirish: The hero of Buddy isn't me but TEDDY BEAR

'Simple and effective governance my policy'

CM Naidu asks officials to immediately put an end to illegal activities in Kuppam

PNS ■ KUPPAM

On the second day of his visit to Kuppam constituency, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu said that 'simple government and effective governance' is his policy. The CM received grievances from the people directly at the R&B guest house on Wednesday. Later, he held a review meeting with the officials at Kuppam Degree College in the afternoon. He spoke to the officials about the development works in the constituency.

Chandrababu directed all the officers to be prepared for the virtual and physical working system. Taking serious view of the incidents of rowdiness, violence and ganja abuse in Kuppam segment, Chandrababu directed the officials to immediately put an end to such illegal activities. The Chief Minister also ordered the police officials to immediately withdraw the cases against innocent persons registered under political compulsions. Giving the roadmap for the officials on the schemes that are to be implemented in Kuppam in the coming days, Chandrababu made it clear that the poverty elimination will begin at Kuppam.



CM Chandrababu Naidu holding a meeting with officials in Kuppam on Wednesday

"The first step to build a poverty-free society will be taken from Kuppam and the entire constituency will be first turned into a property-free village, mandal and poverty-free segment," the Chief Minister told the officials and asked them to formulate an action plan immediately. Making it clear that there will be a vast difference between the previous government and the present administration, Chandrababu said that there will be no forcible mobilisation of the public for meetings, no heavy convoys and sirens. "I have already informed the cabinet ministers not to hold any kind of meetings after 6 pm any day and the officers, too, should react fast to

perform their duties more effectively," he added. The Chief Minister is very particular that the law enforcement agencies should act firmly against those who are violating norms and indulging in rowdiness. Recalling that the officers have functioned under several compulsions in the past five years, he said that the situation was so alarming that he could not visit his home constituency and interact with the local people. "Even an attempt to murder case and several other cases were registered against me though till 2019 there was no single case filed against me," Chandrababu pointed out.

Continued on Page 2

Birla elected LS Speaker by voice vote

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NDA nominee Om Birla was elected as speaker of the Lok Sabha for a second consecutive term by voice vote on Wednesday, capping days of intense battle on the issue with the opposition in a rare move proposing its candidate.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who moved the motion for Birla's election as speaker, lauded the balance he showed in maintaining decorum of the House during his previous term. Several opposition leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav, congratulated Birla too, stressing "impartiality" and hoping he would allow them to raise the people's voice and not apply his restraint orders only to opposition benches.



Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab made the announcement of Birla's election after the opposition, which had forwarded the name of eight-term Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh as its candidate, did not press for votes to the motion.

As he assumed charge, Birla read out a resolution condemning the Emergency imposed by then-prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 and asked members to observe a moment's silence, triggering a wave of protests by the opposition.

Hope voice of Oppn will be allowed in LS: Rahul

Congratulating Om Birla for being elected Speaker of the Lok Sabha for a second term, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and other opposition MPs on Wednesday hoped they would be allowed to raise the 'voice of people' in the House and suspension of MPs will not be done again. Gandhi also countered the government over claims of high productivity of the Lok Sabha and said the question is not how efficiently the House is run, but how much of India's voice is being allowed to be heard. While the opposition pushed a contest for the post of Speaker by pitching K Suresh against Birla, who was announced elected by a voice vote, Gandhi went and congratulated Birla on the floor of the House.

Continued on Page 2

Modi hails Birla for condemning Emergency

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for his condemnation of the Emergency in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday and said it was a wonderful gesture to stand in silence in honour of all those who suffered during those days. Birla read out a resolution condemning the Emergency in the Lok Sabha, shortly after he was elected speaker, and flayed the then-government headed by prime minister Indira Gandhi. A large number of MPs stood in silence for a few moments amid protests by Congress MPs and some other opposition members. Modi said in a post on X, "I am glad that the Honourable Speaker strongly condemned the Emergency, highlighted the excesses committed during that time and also mentioned the manner in which democracy was strangled."



DON'T MISS...

No political interference in...

Slate Education, IT and Electronics Minister Nara Lokesh has directed the officials to make teacher transfers transparent. On Wednesday evening, the Minister held a review on the changes to be undertaken in school education and the measures to be taken to improve the standards, with the top officials of the School Education Department. Pertaining to teacher's transfer, the commissioner was directed to formulate procedures without political pressures like in the past. He said that the suggestions of teachers unions...

PAGE: 3

50% adults in India insufficiently...

Almost 50 per cent of adults in India engaged in insufficient levels of physical activity in 2022, according to a study published in The Lancet Global Health journal. Far more women in India (57 per cent) were found to be insufficiently physically active, compared to men (42 per cent), in line with trends across the South Asian region, the study found. The insufficient levels of physical activity in women in the region were, on average, 14 per cent higher than those in men, it said. The South Asian...

PAGE: 5

Narrowing trade deficit, rise in...

India's current account surplus in the fourth quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal was aided by narrowing of the merchandise trade deficit, an increase in remittances and a surplus in services trade, according to a CRISIL report released on Wednesday. The country's current account recorded a surplus of USD 5.7 billion, which is 0.6 per cent of the GDP, in the fourth quarter of the last financial year. It was in deficit of USD 8.7 billion, equivalent to one per cent of GDP, in the third quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal, the...

PAGE: 8

India look to beat knockout stage...

With a refreshingly aggressive batting approach, India would look to avoid the knockout stage jitters plaguing them for over a decade when they take on defending champions England in the semifinals of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday. The last time these two teams met at this stage, it turned out to be a no contest as England outplayed an outdated India in the 2022 edition's semifinal. However, India have finally been able to shed their conservative approach at the top of the order since...

SPORTS



Pinnelli arrested as HC dismisses anticipatory bail

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former YSR Congress Party MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy was arrested by the police on Wednesday in connection with the case of damaging an EVM on the polling day, May 13.

The police detained Pinnelli at Narasaraopet and took him to the SP's office, from where the former MLA was moved to the Macherla court. Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy was arrested after the High Court dismissed his anticipatory bail petitions in the case of the smashing of EVMs and attacking those who obstructed him.

Pinnelli filed four petitions seeking anticipatory bail. Arguments concluded in the High Court on June 20, and the verdict was delivered on Wednesday. Advocate Ashwin Kumar argued on behalf of the police as Special Counsel, while Adv Posani Venkateshwarlu represented the complainant, Namburi Seshagiri Rao.

HM calls for curbing drug abuse

Stresses use of technological innovation to achieve results

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha has emphasised the need for a committed effort from lower-level officials rather than relying solely on senior IPS or IAS officers in arresting the drug abuse. Speaking at an awareness programme organised by the city police on the eve of the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, Minister Anitha stressed the need for synergising ever growing technology to develop an app to curb



drug abuse and illicit trafficking in a smart way.

Expressing concern over the limited infrastructure to control drug flow in the port city, Minister

Anitha emphasised the augmentation of requisite infrastructure such as check-posts with more CCTVs and engagement of more sniffer dogs.

Continued on Page 2

Locals protest against Anakapalli toll gate, demand its closure

Protestors stopped toll collection and allowed vehicles to pass freely

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Tension erupted at Aganampudi Junction on Wednesday, as a large number of residents and supporters of the TDP-BJP-JSP alliance staged a demonstration demanding the closure of the toll gate. The protestors, including some activists, stopped toll collection and allowed vehicles to pass freely. They also informed motorists that the toll gate will be

shut down completely in the coming days. Police were deployed to maintain order and appealed to the protestors not to disrupt traffic flow.

The protestors voiced their discontent with the high toll taxes levied, particularly on local residents, especially middle-class families.

They argued that the toll gate's location between Anakapalli and Gajuwaka creates an unnecessary financial burden for those who frequently travel the route.

ECI hopes no one will dare to disrupt poll process in future

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Election Commission of India has made it clear in a statement that anyone who disrupts the election process will be punished. The case of Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy, the former legislator of Macherla, is an example. The Election Commission has reacted to the arrest of Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy after the AP High Court dismissed the anticipatory bail petition in connection with the vandalism of EVMs.

Excise 'scam' Court sends Kejriwal to 3-day CBI custody

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Wednesday sent Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to the CBI's custody for three days after the central agency arrested him in a corruption case related to the alleged excise scam. Special Judge Amitabh Rawat passed the order on an application moved by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which formally arrested Kejriwal after obtaining permission from the court.

"The CBI's application is allowed for three days. The accused be produced before 7 pm," the judge said.

The application seeking Kejriwal's arrest was moved by the CBI after the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader was produced before the court from the Tihar jail, where he was lodged in judicial custody in a money-laundering case linked to the excise "scam" being probed by



the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Kejriwal will remain in the CBI's custody until his custodial interrogation in the corruption case comes to an end, which can go on for a maximum of 15 days. If he fails to secure bail in both the cases being probed by the CBI and ED, he will go back to judicial custody once his police remand ends in the present case.

Continued on Page 2

AI-based model tool to predict Alzheimer's onset

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A new AI-based model could predict the onset of Alzheimer's disease by analysing an individual's speech, the developers said.

Trained on audio recordings of patients with mild cognitive impairment -- early stages of memory loss, the model achieved 78.5 per cent accuracy in forecasting whether patients would remain stable or progress to dementia within six years, according to the researchers.

The researchers at Boston University, US, used recordings of initial interviews of 166 patients aged 63-97 and trained the model using machine learning to discern patterns



Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia and impacts one's everyday activities by impairing memory and thinking.

between speech, demographics, diagnosis, and how their condition was worsening. The model analyses interview

content such as spoken words and sentence structure, rather than speech features such as enunciation or speed, showed the study published in the journal Alzheimer's and Dementia.

"We combine the information we extract from the audio recordings with some very basic demographics - age, gender, and so on - and we get the final score," said Ioannis C. Paschalidis, a professor of engineering and the study's corresponding author.

"You can think of the score as the likelihood, the probability, that someone will remain stable or transition to dementia. It had significant predictive ability," said

Paschalidis. The researchers said that the model was able to perform well, despite challenges like low-quality recordings and background noise.

The researchers emphasised that early prediction is crucial as current diagnostic tests often identify Alzheimer's disease only after significant cognitive decline has occurred such as memories starting to slip away and personality traits beginning to shift.

The team aims to make their model accessible through an app to make it accessible for patients in remote areas, potentially increasing the number of people getting screened.

"You can think of the score as the likelihood, the probability, that someone will remain stable or transition to dementia. It had significant predictive ability."

Less than 50% road repair works done: Janardhan Reddy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Roads, Buildings, Investment and Infrastructure BC Janardhan Reddy has made it clear that his primary goal is to repair the damaged R&B roads on a war-footing and make them pothole-free. He took charge as the minister at the State secretariat on Wednesday, amidst the chanting of Vedic pundits.

On the occasion, Minister Janardhan Reddy said that out of Rs 14,970 crore allocated to the R&B department in 2014-19, Rs 12,64 crore, i.e. 80 per cent, was spent on road repairs. During the previous government's tenure, Rs 19,428 crore was allocated in the budget and only Rs 9,015 crore (46 per cent) was spent. Moreover, due to non-payment of bills of Rs 2,261 crore, the contractors are facing a lot of trouble even though the works are being done, Janardhan Reddy said. The minister said that there are 8,164 km of national highway roads, 12,653 km of State highway roads, 27,062 km of main district roads, 5,663 rural roads and a total of 53,542 km roads in the State, out of which 45,378 km are within the State. In the last five years, due to non-releasing of funds, repairs to the roads and filling of pot-

Poor maintenance of roads by previous government led to bad condition and potholes



holes have not been done. Based on priority, the roads should be laid with a layer of black top (Bitumen) once every five years, which was not done. The minister said that at present, around 9,080 km of roads are in bad condition and there are immediate proposals for 8,161 km of main district roads and 3,340 km of State roads to be repaired. He said that the government has decided to repair the damaged roads and make the roads free of potholes. They have received proposals of Rs 284 crore for filling potholes and emergency repairs from

the district authorities and are considering the sanction. Minister Janardhan Reddy disclosed that two projects with the financial assistance of New Development Bank have been sanctioned in the State with the financial assistance of Rs 6,400 crore, of which 70 per cent is New Development Bank's loan and 30 per cent is State government's share. Under the first phase of Rs 3,014 crore, works are being done in 13 packages, and so far works worth Rs 510 crore have been done. The Minister said that the previous government

did not pay the advance loan given by the New Development Bank to the contractors on time, so the work was going at a snail's pace.

Similarly, under the Central Road Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) scheme, 115 works of 1,605 km are being carried out at a cost of Rs 1,959 crore, while already 39 works of 350 km have been completed at a cost of Rs 428 crore and 76 works of 1,255 km at a cost of Rs 1,531 crore are in progress, said the Minister.

Minister Janardhan Reddy explained that if the Central government releases Rs 483 crore for the payment of CRIF works in 2023-24, only Rs 253 crore was paid by the previous government for CRIF works and about Rs 230 crore was diverted without payment to the contractors.

State Investment Infrastructure Department Secretary Dr Yuva Raj, R&B ENCs K Naimulla, Venugopal Reddy, CEs Srinivasulu Reddy, Ramachandra, Venkateswara Rao, Sukanya, Buchiraju, other public representatives and officials were present.

'Simple...'

Continued from Page 1

Mentioning that the drinking water problem is grave in Kuppam constituency, the Chief Minister told the officers to prepare an action plan for early completion of the canal works of Handri-Neeva.

"Priority should be given to dairy, silk and honey products," he said, and declared that food processing units will be invited to Kuppam and the constituency will be transformed as an education hub.

The Chief Minister made it clear that a special programme will be taken up to sharpen the skills of the youth and provide employment to them. Chandrababu Naidu also directed the officials to focus on extending subsidies to farmers and that within a few months the entire shape of Kuppam should take a total transformation.

Main political parties in AP back NDA at the Centre

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

Irrespective of Assembly results, the main political parties are continuing the same position that was before the Assembly elections in extending support to the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, as it was revealed in the Lok Sabha speaker's election.

The only change was the change in power in the Andhra Pradesh. It appeared that the YSR Congress led by former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is against TDP-led "NDA" government in the State and not against the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre. Before the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections Jagan Mohan Reddy has become an unofficial partner of the NDA supporting the Central government

in the crucial times in Parliament and outside. Earlier, as an Opposition party in the State, the TDP led by N Chandrababu Naidu had also become a supporter of the NDA. During the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections, the TDP joined the NDA and contested in the Assembly elections along with the Jana Sena and the BJP in an alliance. In the Assembly elections, the TDP-led alliance swept and the ruling YSR Congress was confined to only 11 seats which won 151 seats out of 175 in the previous Assembly elections.

As partners of the NDA, the TDP and the Jana Sena supported the BJP candidate in the Lok Sabha speaker's election. Interestingly, the YSR Congress also announced its support to the BJP candidate though the

NDA has sufficient strength in the Lok Sabha for the victory of its candidate in the Lok Sabha speaker's election. Before the simultaneous elections to Andhra Pradesh Assembly and to the Lok Sabha, the BJP expected the support from the YSR Congress at the Centre though it has an alliance with the TDP. The decision of YSR Congress in the Lok Sabha speaker's election was to reinforce its support to the BJP. Now the BJP, as far as it is concerned with national politics, it has no opposition from the main political parties in Andhra Pradesh.

In Telangana, BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao's role was nothing in the Lok Sabha speaker's election because in the recent Lok Sabha elections, the BRS did not win even a single seat out of the total 17 in the State.

RPO Vijayawada receives Best Passport Office Award

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Regional Passport Office, Vijayawada, has been chosen for the award for the best office in its category for providing extraordinary standards of service delivery to the citizens during 2023-24. Regional Passport Officer (RPO) Siva Harsha received the award from Kirti Vardhan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs.

Speaking to the media persons on Wednesday, RPO Siva Harsha said that the award was received on Monday from Union Minister Kirti Vardhan Singh and thanked the contribution of all the stakeholders including Department of Posts, Andhra Pradesh Police, TCS and Team RPO for their support in delivering 3,70,123 passport-related services during the period. The Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) in



Vijayawada and Tirupati, and 13 Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSKs) come under its jurisdiction. He said that on a working day, they provide services to about 600 citizens and it will be expanded to 1,200 a day soon after the ongoing expansion work at the Vijayawada Passport Seva Kendra is complete. He said that the slot

booking time was also reduced to one week and Tatkal was reduced by one day. One can complete the formalities in the Passport Seva Kendra in less than an hour by furnishing all the details and the passport will be delivered in a week. He also underlined the leveraging of the power of latest technologies to further improve the services.

Will stand by people...

Continued from Page 1

Alapati Suresh Kumar of Undavalli appealed to provide financial assistance to his daughter who is studying MBBS abroad through the Abroad Education scheme. S Ramesh, visually disabled that he be given a four-wheeled two-wheeler. ASHA workers in Mangalagiri town demanded equal work for equal pay, steps to reduce work pressure and leave. Lokesh assured them that he will solve all the problems.

Ramoji Rao's condolence meet at Anumolu Gardens today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Anumolu Gardens, located adjacent to the Tadigadapa-Enikepadu 100-foot road, will host a condolence meeting for Eenu Group Chairman, Ch Ramoji Rao, on Thursday. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and several Central ministers, State ministers and others will attend the programme. The government has constituted a Ministers' Committee to make the arrangements.

Minister for Housing and I&PR Kolu Saradhi, Minister for Water Resources Nimmala Rama Naidu, Minister Mines and Geology and Excise Kollu Ravindra, Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendra Manohar, and Minister for Health, Medical and Family Welfare Satya Kumar Yadav inspected the arrangements in the main dais on Wednesday. Minister KP Saradhi said that Ramoji Rao helped poor people.

CM Chandrababu Naidu, several Union and State Ministers to attend programme



Also, Rao served the cine industry by taking many low-budget pictures by educating farmers and society, which he lauded. Penamaluru MLA Bode Prasad, APCRDA Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar, Krishna Collector DK Balaji, NTR District Collector Dr G Srijana, IG GVS Ashok Kumar, Krishna SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi, Joint Collectors Geethanjali Sharma, Dr P Sampath Kumar, Protocol Director Balasubrahmanyam,

Additional Director Vani, I&PR Additional Director L Swarna Latha, Joint Directors Kiran, and Kasturu, CEE Madhusudan, RI Krishna Reddy and others were present. Meanwhile, Krishna District Collector DK Balaji and SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi conducted an Advanced Security Liaisoning (ASL) meeting at the Sri Chaitanya Women's Junior College meeting hall at Tadigadapa on Wednesday.

BJP pushes for revival of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a decisive move to restore the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd, the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, to profitability, BJP State president Daggubati Purandeshwari met with Union Minister of Steel, HD Kumaraswamy, in New Delhi on Wednesday. The high-profile meeting aimed to formulate an urgent action plan to revive the ailing steel plant, which has been a cornerstone of Andhra Pradesh's industrial landscape.

During the discussions, Minister Kumaraswamy addressed prior appeals and underscored the plant's significance, rooted in the iconic slogan "Visakha Ukku, Andhra Haku" ("Visakha Steel is the Andhra People's Right"). This slogan reflects the deep emotional connection the people of Andhra Pradesh have with the

Party State chief Daggubati Purandeshwari meets Union Minister of Steel HD Kumaraswamy



plant, symbolising their industrial pride and economic aspirations. Kumaraswamy emphasised the necessity for policies aimed at efficient management and operational excellence to bring the plant back to profitability. Purandeshwari urged the minister to consider every possible measure to rejuvenate the plant. She highlighted the

importance of modernising infrastructure, enhancing operational efficiencies, and exploring new markets to boost the plant's financial health. Kumaraswamy responded positively, committing to a follow-up meeting in two months after detailed consultations with officials. He assured that the ministry would leave no stone unturned in its efforts to restore the plant's former glory. The meeting saw the participation of several key figures, reflecting the significance of the issue at hand. Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries Bhupathiraju Srinivasa Varma, Anakapalli BJP MP CM Ramesh, and SAIL Independent Director Sagi Kasi Viswanatha Raju were present. During the session, a petition concerning the steel plant's revival was also submitted, detailing the critical steps needed to ensure its sustainable future. The plant's revival is seen as a vital step in bolstering Andhra Pradesh's economy, providing employment opportunities, and reaffirming the region's industrial prowess.

Court sends...

Continued from Page 1

The court had, on June 19, extended Kejriwal's judicial custody in the money-laundering case till July 3. In the application seeking the AAP leader's custody, the CBI told the court that he was required to be quizzed for unearthing the larger conspiracy in the matter.

It said Kejriwal was required to be confronted with the other accused and evidence in the case. Kejriwal claimed innocence before the court.

ECI hopes no one...

Continued from Page 1

It expressed the hope that no one will dare to commit such misdeeds in the future in order to conduct peaceful elections as per the Constitution.

The ECI had considered the incident involving the deliberate damage of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) by a sitting MLA as not just a criminal act, but also an egregious attack on the democratic process. EVMs are central to ensuring free and fair elections, which are the cornerstone of any democracy. Damaging these machines undermines the integrity of the electoral process, potentially disenfranchising voters and casting doubt on the legitimacy of the election results.

The ECI, tasked with overseeing the conduct of elections in the country, had taken the offence very seriously. In response to the incident, the panel had directed that exemplary action be taken. After examining the video recording, the ECI on May 21 directed the CEO of Andhra Pradesh to get the MLA arrested immediately.

A case was registered under Sections 143, 147, 448, 427, 353, 452, 120-B of the IPC, 1860 read with

Section 149 of IPC, Section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984 and the Sections 131 and 135 of the Representation of the Peoples Act 1951. By that time the accused had absconded, and the police had to launch a manhunt in AP and the neighbouring States to arrest him. Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy approached the High Court, which on May 23 granted an interim protection to the candidate to enable him to participate in the counting process. The same protection was extended till Wednesday.

The High Court, in its final order in Crp No 3775/2024 filed by Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy as petitioner, observed that those people entrusted with public office are expected to uphold exemplary standards of conduct, regrettably the actions attributed to the petitioner are perceived to have fallen short of these expectations.

The intention of the ECI of exemplary action reached its logical conclusion with the arrest of the MLA responsible for the EVM damage. It reinforces the principle that no one, regardless of their position or status, is above the law.

HM calls for curbing drug...

Continued from Page 1

Calling for more awareness, Minister Anita said early intervention is more important and motivation should start from the school level. "Students from class V to XII are increasingly attracted to drugs, so I am involving the education department to raise awareness and curb this menace," she added. Encouraging citizen vigilance, she urged the youth and the public to support these efforts by providing information to the police through the toll-free number 14500. Additionally, she emphasised the importance of offering rehabilitation programmes to help those struggling with addiction reintegrate into society. She stressed the importance of youth awareness about the harmful effects of drugs from a young age.

Police Commissioner Dr A Ravi Shankar echoed the minister's concerns, noting the rapid increase in drug and ganja use. He called for a coordinated effort among various departments, including Transport, Health, and Education, and the involvement of parents and teachers to tackle the growing problem. Commissioner Ravi Shankar informed that the high demand in neighbouring States for the Shilavati variety of ganja, cultivated in the Vizag agency areas, has led to increasing supply and persistent illegal activities. "To counter this trend, we need to create awareness about the risks associated with this trade among unemployed youth who get involved for financial gain without understanding the severe consequences of illicit transportation through courier agents," he added.

Locals...

Continued from Page 1

The protestors further highlighted that the alliance parties, during their election campaign, had promised to relocate the toll gate within a month of assuming power.

Karri Dashendra, president of TDP's GVMC 85th ward, emphasised that the toll gate's operation within city limits is a violation of regulations and unfairly burdens residents. He criticised the toll gate's reopening after a High Court order mandated its closure in 2019. He accused the YSRCP administration of exploiting the people through the toll gate.

The protest continued for over an hour until National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) officials were informed.

Pinnelli arrested as HC...

Continued from Page 1

Ramakrishna Reddy, candidate for Macherla Assembly constituency, allegedly barged into the polling station with his supporters and broke VVPAT and EVM machines. On May 28, the High Court granted conditional anticipatory bail to him in the cases registered against him. On June 3, the Supreme Court barred Ramakrishna Reddy from entering the vote counting station of Macherla constituency on June 4.

The CCTV footage of the May 13 incident was widely circulated on social media. It showed Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy, the then sitting MLA from Macherla constituency, walking into the Palwai Gate polling centre and going into the enclosed area where the EVM is kept. He then picked up the VVPAT and smashed it to the ground. The machine broke into pieces.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH PANCHAYAT RAJ DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTIFICATION
No.02/2024-25, NIT No.02 to 10/2024-25 Date: 25-06-2024
The Superintending Engineer, Panchayat Raj Circle, Guntur is inviting tenders from 01-07-2024 onwards through www.pmgstendersap.gov.in for execution of nine works in various constituencies under Guntur limits with Rs 5371.00 Lakhs of PMGSY Batch-1 grant. Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Panchayat Raj Circle, Guntur
E.O.No: 1999/CLAD/NT/2024-25, Dt: 26.06.2024

No political interference in teacher transfers: Lokesh

Reduce the burden of unnecessary apps on teachers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



He said that steps should be taken to reduce the burden of non-teaching work and unnecessary apps on teachers, and focus on full-fledged teaching. He sought the complete details of closed schools to be submitted by the next review meeting.

State Education, IT and Electronics Minister Nara Lokesh has directed the officials to make teacher transfers transparent. On Wednesday evening, the Minister held a review on the changes to be undertaken in school education and the measures to be taken to improve the standards, with the top officials of the School Education Department. Pertaining to teacher's transfer, the commissioner was directed to formulate procedures without political pressures like in the past. He said that the suggestions of teachers unions should be taken into consideration in this regard.

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to be submitted by the next review meeting. As part of the mid-day meal scheme, several suggestions were made on the steps to be taken to provide quality meals to the students. The authorities were briefed on the issue of how much funds are required for the provision of complete infrastructure in schools. The minister instructed the

officials to find out the reasons for a large number of students transferring from government schools to private schools in the last five years and submit a comprehensive report. The officials were asked to study and submit a report on where the best policies are being implemented in the country to raise the standard of education. On the occasion, the

Minister referred to the educational systems of many developed countries including Germany and Austria. School Education Secretary Kona Shashidhar, School Education Commissioner S Suresh Kumar, Comprehensive Education State Project Director B Srinivasa Rao and others were present.

Stringent action against corrupt: Minister Atchannaidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Agricultural, Marketing, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, and Fisheries, K Atchannaidu, has stated that the government will be launching an investigation into the multi-crore rupees scam that took place in the District Cooperative Central Banks (DCCBs) of Eluru, Kakinada, Guntur, Srikakulam, and Chittoor, as well as in several Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS). He emphasized that after confirming the irregularities and corruption, appropriate action will be taken against those responsible as per the law.

In a press release here on Wednesday, Minister Atchannaidu stated that his government is going to be cleansing the cooperative system in the state. As per the cooperative system aim, it should be used for the overall development of the farmers, however, during the past five years, the system was stuck with corruption and irregularities, he commented. Many pickpockets fell into the cooperative sector, as a result, it lost its accountability, he said.

Further, he said "the District Cooperative Central Banks of Eluru, Kakinada, Guntur, Srikakulam and Chittoor and many other PACS have faced severe corruption allegations. Our government will conduct a probe into these allegations and corruption accounts. Also, stringent action will be taken against individuals who were involved in corruption".



GVMC launches round-the-clock control room to combat diarrhoea

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has established a 24/7 special control room at its headquarters to combat the spread of diarrhoea. GVMC Commissioner CM Saikanth Varma unveiled this vital initiative during a review meeting on the Stop Diarrhea Campaign-2024 held on Wednesday. The session, attended by Additional Commissioner (Development) KS Vishwanathan and other senior officials, laid out an aggressive action plan to curb diarrhoea outbreaks in the city.

Commissioner Varma emphasised the urgent need for proactive measures, announcing that the special control room at the City Operation Centre will be operational around the clock. Citizens can report issues such as contaminated water, overflowing drains, and cases of malaria, diarrhoea, and dengue by calling 0891-2869109.

Running from July 1 to August 31, the Stop Diarrhea

Citizens can report issues such as contaminated water, overflowing drains, and cases of malaria, diarrhoea, and dengue

Campaign aims to implement comprehensive public health strategies. Varma directed officials to conduct intensive door-to-door awareness campaigns through ward secretariat ANMs, focusing on educating parents of children under five about diarrhoea prevention. Key campaign measures include promoting cleanliness, waste collection, daily cleaning of public and community toilets, regular water quality testing, and ensuring a safe drinking water supply.

Highlighting the need for heightened vigilance, Varma stressed the importance of removing silt from drains and boosting public awareness about diarrhoea and other seasonal diseases. He advised residents to drink boiled and cooled water and maintain strict hygiene practices.

To ensure continuous monitoring, daily reports on diarrhoea, malaria, and dengue will be submitted to Chief Medical Officer Dr Naresh Kumar.

Additionally, Varma instructed Deputy Project Officer MVD Phani Ram to organise large-scale awareness programmes in collaboration with self-help groups (SHGs) and to utilise hoardings and banners for public education on diarrhoea prevention. Inspections of public and community toilets will also be conducted to ensure proper facilities.

The review meeting saw active participation from senior officials including Additional Commissioners Dr Y Srinivas Rao and SS Varma, Chief Engineer Ravi Krishnamurthy, Supervising Engineer KVN Ravi, and Biologist Sambamurthy.

YSRCP moves HC against razing of office

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Against demolition of YSRCP office buildings in all district headquarters by the TDP-led NDA government under the pretext of illegal construction, YSRCP on Wednesday moved the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

The petition was filed by YSRCP's Srikakulam unit, which received a notice from the State government on June

24 proposing to demolish the party office. Justice B Krishna Mohan of the High Court ordered the status quo on the demolition proceedings against the YSRCP office in

Srikakulam. He instructed the Government Pleader to obtain further instructions by Thursday and maintain the status quo until then.

Senior counsel Veera Reddy, representing the party, argued that demolition is never the first resort. He stated that the land was leased to YSRCP through a Government Order (GO) for 33 years, and the land was handed over to the party in 2022. He added that the site was

inspected and all necessary permissions were obtained before starting construction, thereby making it impossible to deem the construction illegal.

The counsel further cited Section 90-A of the Andhra Pradesh Metropolitan Region and Urban Development Authorities Act and Section 455A of the Municipal Corporation Act, 1955, which empower authorities to regularise construction.

Applications invited for Padma Awards

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Vice Chairman and Managing Director (VC MD) of the Andhra Pradesh Sports Authority (SAAP), PS Pradyumna, has invited eligible players to apply for the Padma Awards. The Ministry of Home Affairs has called for nominations and recommendations for the Padma Awards, which will be pre-

sent on next Republic Day. In a press release issued on Wednesday, VC and MD Pradyumna invited outstanding sportspersons to apply for the awards. Those interested can apply on www.padmaawards.gov.in or incentives.schemes@gmail.com, and the deadline for applications is August 1.

VMC Commissioner inspects beautification works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar conducted a field inspection on Wednesday to check the beautification works being conducted under the Benz Circle Flyover. He enquired about the progress of greenery development along the National Highway. The Commissioner had instructed the officials to increase greenery at the Benz Circle Junction to reduce pollution due to its significance as a major junction.

During the inspection, Pundkar emphasised the need to remove silt from the side

drains to prevent flooding during rains and to ensure that there are no obstructions to water flow in the drains. He expressed dissatisfaction with the maintenance of the greenery belt and instructed the officials to take action to improve it on the spot. Furthermore, he warned the officials to be vigilant in their work and stated that any negligence will invite strict action.

Additional Commissioner (Projects) K Satyavati, Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) G Srujana, and Executive Engineer ASN Prasad were part of the team.

Nellore Railway Station upgradation works continue at fast pace

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

85 % construction of subway on the west side of the station complete

The upgradation works of Nellore Railway Station, which have been taken up under EPC mode, have been steadily progressing. The station located on the Grand Trunk route is being upgraded to provide world class amenities with elegant features. The station redevelopment works have been awarded under EPC mode to M/s. SCL-GCPL Joint Ventures, Hyderabad in August 2022.

As part of the redevelopment, a new building is being constructed on the west side, while existing buildings on the east side and north side are being extended to meet the needs of rail users. Simultaneously, refurbishment and facade improvements of



the buildings are also underway. In the first phase, site offices, a concrete testing lab, storage sheds and temporary sheds for the Railway Court and GRP offices have already

been completed. The framed structures of station buildings on the east, west, and north sides have also been completed, and masonry work is in progress now. Further,

Overhead tank construction is in progress for the east and west side buildings.

With regards to other works, Erection of Cover over Platforms stanchions on all

platforms and 90 per cent of Galvalume sheet works have been completed.

Simultaneously, construction of the permanent court building, ground level reservoir of 6

lakhs litres capacity, and sewage treatment of 870 kilo litres are nearing completion.

Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager of SCR, has emphasised the importance of meticulous execution at every stage to ensure the timely completion of the station redevelopment. He also instructed the project team to carry out the works by taking all necessary safety precautions, while ensuring least inconvenience to the rail users. He said the redeveloped station will have a range of modern amenities designed to enhance the passenger experience including spacious waiting areas, state-of-the-art digital information displays, advanced security systems, green building practices, etc.

Kollu Ravindra launches special sanitation drive in Machilipatnam



Minister Kollu Ravindra distributing books to students at the Panduranga High School at Chilakalapudi in Machilipatnam on Wednesday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Mines & Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, initiated a special sanitation drive in Sarada Nagar, located in the 31st division of the Machilipatnam Municipal Corporation on Wednesday. Minister Ravindra and other officials and people's representatives participated in the special drive, as part of which, they swept all roads at Sarada Nagar.

During the event, he stressed the significance of sanitation and emphasised the need to improve the city's drainage system. He underscored the government's commitment to addressing this issue soon. The State government will be cleansing the drainage system in

Machilipatnam city, he said.

Further, he stated that as per the requirement, sanitation workers and supervisors were appointed in Machilipatnam Municipal Corporation. Many areas in the city were filled with weeds and garbage; hence the authorities are advised to clean the roads on a war-footing.

Meanwhile, he referred to the water scarcity in the major reservoirs. The people of Machilipatnam should use the water sparingly. In the coming days, the government will provide adequate drinking water facilities to resolve the water problem in the city, he added.

He explained that around Rs.13 crore funds are required as per the proposals of the Water Resources Department to

clean canals and drains in the Machilipatnam Lok Sabha constituency. Due to the financial crunch, the State government allotted Rs.2 crore for taking up immediate works, he said.

Minister Ravindra, along with DEO Tahera Sultana, distributed textbooks, notebooks, uniforms and student kits at the Panduranga High School at Chilakalapudi, and urged the students to utilise the facilities provided by the government.

Machilipatnam Municipal Commissioner Bapi Raju, former Municipal Chairman Baba Prasad, Krishna Zilla Grandhalaya Samstha ex-Chairman Gorripati Gopichand, Jana Sena leader Bandi Ramakrishna, corporators and others were present.



Minister Kollu Ravindra participating in the special sanitation drive at Sarada Nagar on Wednesday

SWACHHA ANDHRA CORPORATION GOT RS 239 CRORE IN FY 2023-24

Pawan dismayed over just Rs 7 cr fund left in Swachh account

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj K Pawan Kalyan expressed dismay over the Swachha Andhra Corporation having only Rs 7.04 crore in its account.

Pawan Kalyan held a meeting with the officials of Panchayat Raj, rural development, RWS, environment and forest in his camp office on Wednesday and reviewed various issues.

Speaking on the occasion, the deputy Chief Minister said that the Swachha Andhra Corporation had Rs 2,092.65 crore in its account in the financial year of 2020-21, and questioned why there is a paltry Rs 7.04 crore in the account now. He asked the officials where the funds of Swachha Andhra Corporation were diverted.

Pawan Kalyan pointed out that during the financial year 2020-21, the Corporation had



Pawan Kalyan held a meeting with the officials of Panchayat Raj, rural development, RWS, environment and forest in his camp office on Wednesday and reviewed various issues.

utilized Rs 728.35 crore and Rs 508 crore was spent during the financial year 2021-22. The Swachha Andhra Corporation had Rs 1066.36 crore funds at the end of the 2021-22 financial year but the Corporation had only Rs 3 crore in its account at the beginning of 2022-23 financial

year. The deputy Chief Minister directed the officials concerned to give an explanation on the diversion funds from the Swachha Andhra Corporation. He said that during the financial year 2022-23, the Centre had sanctioned Rs 70 crore while the

state government extended Rs 20 crore funds to the Swachha Andhra Corporation of which Rs 46 crore was spent.

During the financial year 2023-24, the Swachha Andhra Corporation got Rs 239 crore funds of which Rs 209 crore was spent. Now the Swachha Andhra

Pradesh Corporation has only Rs 7.04 crore in its account, he regretted.

"If the funds of Swachha Andhra Corporation are utilized properly, the objectives set for this organization can be achieved. Swachh Andhra was established as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission, brought by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with good intentions for public health. Keeping the funds, extended by the Centre in bank accounts for months and not using them, even if interest is earned from those funds, and then diverting them to other needs is an unfortunate process done by the previous government rulers," Pawan Kalyan deplored.

He underlined the need of examining deeply the diversion of Swachha Andhra Corporation funds to other purposes, adding that who is responsible for the same should be ascertained.

MLA offers to address ASHA workers' problems



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Rajahmundry City MLA Aadireddy Srinivas assured the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers of taking steps to resolve their problems.

MLA Aadireddy Srinivas held a meeting with the ASHA workers here on Wednesday. The ASHA workers took their problems to the notice of the MLA and urged him to take steps to resolve them.

The ASHA workers complained to the MLA that they are not allowed into the Government hospital when they take pregnant women. Moreover, there are no facilities for them in the GGH. The government hospital doctors and staff rebuked them for taking pregnant women to the

government hospital for testing, the ASHA workers told the MLA. They are not allowed into the gynecology block, they informed the MLA.

Responding to the ASHA workers' complaints and problems, the MLA assured to resolve their every problem. He said that priority is being given for the health sector in the new government. He asserted that he is committed to create a healthy Rajahmundry and sought the cooperation of ASHA workers.

MLA Aadireddy Srinivas recalled that when his father Aadireddy Appa Rao was the MLA, the gynecology ward was set up in the GGH. The onus of pregnant women's health lies on the ASHA workers, he said and pointed out that the GGH Superintendent

stated that the birthrate in the district had come down.

The MLA informed the ASHA workers that he would convene a meeting every 15 days and discuss all the issues. All the problems which the ASHA workers brought to his notice would be resolved, the MLA promised.

GGH Superintendent Lakshmi Suryapraha gave some suggestions to the ASHA workers on the care to be taken regarding the pregnant women's health. She also assured of allocating a room in the GGH especially for the ASHA workers. She directed the ASHA workers to wear uniforms and tag identity cards. DMHO K Venkateswara Rao and other officials were among those who were present.



Vetri Selvi takes charge as Eluru district Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

K Vetri Selvi here on Wednesday took charge as Eluru district Collector in the Collectorate.

She was accorded a warm welcome by Joint Collector B Lavanya Veni, ITDA PD M Surya Teja, DRO D Pushmani, RDOs NS K Khajavali, K Aaddayya and Administrative Officer K Kashi Viveswara Rao at the Collector's office.

Speaking on the occasion,

district Collector Vetri Selvi said that expediting the construction of Polavaram project is her priority.

She asserted that she would strive for the comprehensive development of the district and take steps to resolve the grievances of people.

Steps would also be taken to improve the sanitation in the district; she said adding that she will strive hard to keep the district at top in all sectors.

Veeranjaneya Swamy takes charge as Social Welfare Min

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr.Dola Bala Veeranjaneya Swamy on Wednesday took charge as the Minister of Social Welfare in the Secretariat on Wednesday.

After performing pooja, amid the priests reciting vedic mantras, he took charge as the Social Welfare Minister in the first floor of the third bloc of the Secretariat.

The Minister said that he would perform duties and do justice to the ministry as Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu allocated the portfolio with confidence in him.

On the occasion, the Minister made three signs on three files sanctioning additional 80 seats in the art group (CEC) and 40 MPC seats and 40 Bi-PC seats to the Dr.Ambedkar Gurukula College, located at Singarayakonda in Prakasam district, sanctioning



a cold storage to girl high school located at Nagulapalem in Bapatla district to preserve vegetables, eggs and fruits. The cold storage will be constructed as a pilot project.

He also made a sign on the file providing solar water

heaters to the school.

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar, village and ward secretariat principal secretary Ajay Jain and social welfare secretary K Harshavardhan met the minister and conveyed their wishes on the occasion.

Police crack major heist in Subramanyeswara temple



PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

The police cracked the major heist in the Subramanyeswara temple at Kotanka village in Garladinne mandal by arresting four notorious burglars and recovered silver, gold and cash totaling Rs 16.55 lakh.

DSP BV Shiva Reddy told the media that on the night of June 20, the four notorious burglars broke open doors of the temple and made away with silver ornaments weighing over 16 Kgs, 8 tulas gold

jewellery and Rs 15,000 cash from the temple coffer.

The offenders took away the CC Camera hard disc to do away with evidence. The police arrested C Pawan Kumar, Avula Ramu, Venkata Ramana and E Srinivasulu in connection with the temple burglary. Two of the arrested Pawan Kumar and Avula Ramu were involved in a number of burglary cases at various places including in Karnataka.

The police recovered silver ornaments weighing 16.261

KGs worth Rs 13 lakh, gold jewelry, two motorcycles worth Rs 2,500 cash, an iron rod, cutting pliers and CC camera's hard disc.

On the directions of SP Gowthmi Sali, three special teams were formed under the supervision of DSP BV Shiva Reddy and led by CI Sridhar and CCS Ismail.

The police arrested the offenders on Wednesday. The SP appreciated the police teams for arresting the notorious booty and recovering the booty.

Rally taken out to highlight ill-effects of drugs

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A rally was taken out here on Wednesday to create awareness among the people on the ill-effects of drug consumption.

The awareness rally was taken out on the occasion of the 'International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking'.

Prakasam district Additional SP (Admn) K Nageswara Rao flagged off the rally at the police office here. A large number of College students participated in the awareness rally which went via Kurnool road, bus station and later a human chain was formed at Junction centre.

The students were administered a pledge that they maintain distance from drugs. Speaking on the occasion, the Additional SP said that people



should stay away from prohibited drugs and should know

the ill-effects. He advised the youths not to ruin their lives by

being addicted to drug intoxication, lamenting that some

youths are spoiling their future by getting addicted to drugs and ganja.

The additional SP suggested that the youth should build a golden life by adopting and following a healthy lifestyle. The police have taken up district-wide awareness programmes among the students and public about the ill-effects of drugs, the SP stated.

The Additional SP warned of taking stringent action if anybody found selling, transporting or consuming drugs in the district. He appealed to the people to inform them about the selling or consumption of cannabis to 91211 02266, 112/100 or toll free number 14500. SEB ES Ravi Kumar, DSP Kishore Babu, Cls Jagadish, Suryanarayana and other officials were present.

Patrolling intensified to curb criminal activities in Old City

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad Police has stepped up patrolling during nights in order to curb criminal activities. The police personnel frisked commuters to check for weapons. Intense patrolling is likely to continue for a few days in the Old City, apart from patrolling. Police are ensuring that shops and business establishments close by midnight. Earlier, the cops issued a clarification on shop closing times after misleading claims went viral on the social media. It said, "The recent social media news making rounds

that city police are closing shops by 10:30 pm or 11 pm is totally misleading. The shops and establishments will open/close as per the already existing rules only. Hence, the same may be noted by all."

A video of the police personnel chasing youth in the Old City and using expletives was shared on X by activist Srinivas Kodali. The activist tagged the National Commission for protection of Child Rights and said, "How can you allow Hyderabad Police to misbehave with children this way? Prolonged policing of youngsters will affect their psychological well-being."



'KCR giving 'farewell' parties to BRS MLAs'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Congress Legislature Party (CLP) said that BRS supremo K. Chandrasekhar Rao is giving 'farewell' parties to BRS MLAs at his Erravalli farmhouse.

Speaking to the media at the CLP office here on Wednesday along with Ramagundam MLA Makkan Singh, Government Whip Adi Srinivas said that KCR is hosting parties for BRS MLAs.

"Why didn't KCR open the gates of Pragathi Bhavan to BRS MLAs when he was in power?" he said. Srinivas said that BRS MLAs are joining the Congress as they are happy with Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's schemes.

Declaring that BRS Working President KT Rama Rao has been shedding crocodile tears on

defections from his party, Srinivas asked KTR to explain why he did not criticise KCR when KCR made TDP MLA Talasani Srinivas Yadav a Minister.KTR should explain what happened to democracy when KCR inducted 12 Congress MLAs into the BRS in 2019, he said.

Srinivas said the BRS will get washed away by the Revanth cyclone. The BRS is a 'sinking boat' and no one will remain in that. KCR behaved cheaply towards BRS MLAs when he was in power, he pointed out and said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy respects all public representatives.

He said ultimately only four people will remain in the BRS.

MLA Makkan Singh said that KCR is showing fake concern for BRS MLAs by inviting them to his 'get-together parties' at his farmhouse. KCR failed to show them the same regard all these days. KCR's 'get together parties' gives the impression that they are conspiring to topple the Congress government, he said.

He asked KTR to reveal whether he didn't remember the words 'constitution', 'injustice' and 'illegal' all these days.

He said that when KCR ruled the state he did not allow anyone even to touch the fence of Pragathi Bhavan. KCR's attitude signals that he is planning to construct 'Gadis' again, he added.

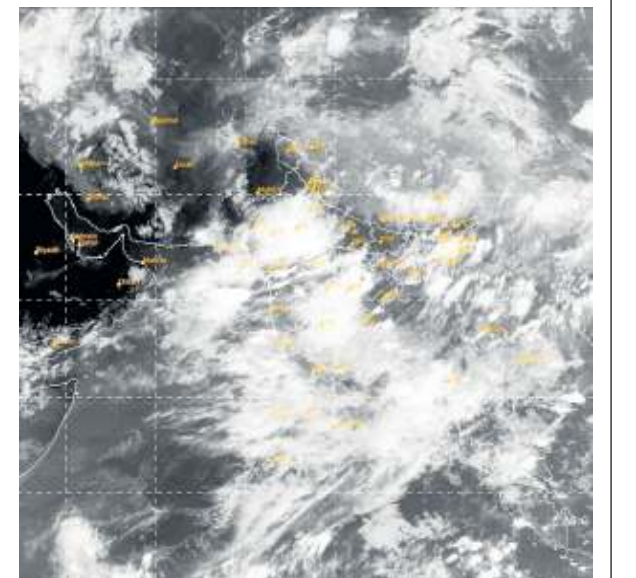
PNS ■ GUNTUR

The cyclonic circulation over East-Central (EC) Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood now lies over west-central adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal between 1.5 and 5.8 km above mean sea level, tilting southwestwards with height, Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

In a daily weather report here, it said that heavy rain is likely to occur at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next three days and in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next 48 hours.

Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and strong winds with speeds of 40-50 kmph are likely to occur at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, and Rayalaseema during the next five days.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers is likely to



occur at a few places or at one or two places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, and Rayalaseema during the next seven days.

Heavy rainfall occurred at Srungavarapukota in

Vizianagaram district during the last 24 hours. Rainfall occurred at a few places over Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, and dry weather prevailed during the same period, the report added.

INDIA CORNER

Bengaluru court rejects bail plea of Revanna in sexual harassment case

Bengaluru court on Wednesday rejected the bail plea of former JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of rape and sexual harassment in multiple cases. The Additional City Civil and Sessions Court Judge had reserved his ruling on the plea on Monday and passed the orders today rejecting it. The 33-year-old is presently in the custody of the Special Investigation Team, formed to probe his alleged sex crimes. Revanna was on Monday remanded to judicial custody till July 8, but a day later was sent to the SIT custody till June 29 by the Magistrate court judge, after the SIT sought a body warrant through the Special Public Prosecutor (SPP). Four separate cases have been registered against the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, all of which are being investigated by the SIT. Revanna had failed in his bid to retain the Hassan parliamentary constituency in the recent polls.



Gender-neutral toilets at Kerala college trigger social media debate

Gender-friendly toilets that can be used irrespective of sex in a state-run college in Kerala have triggered a raging debate on social media platforms. The gender-neutral toilets, which have been present for years on the campus of the well-known Government Maharaja's College here, have suddenly become a topic of debate, with some netizens expressing support for the idea and others opposed. A recent Facebook post by writer-columnist Ram Mohan Paliyath about his experience using the gender-friendly toilet during his visit to the campus initiated the debate on social media platforms. In the FB post, the writer, also an alumnus of the college, was all praise for the initiative and said it was the first time in the past 57 years that he was using such a facility. A large number of persons commented below his Facebook post, both supporting and opposing the gender-friendly toilets.



6 Assam Police personnel sentenced to life imprisonment for murder

Six police personnel were on Wednesday awarded life imprisonment by a local court in Tinsukia district of Assam for beating one person to death in an open market 11 years ago. Tinsukia District and Sessions Judge Dipankar Bora sentenced the six policemen to life term under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code. The incident dates back to October 7, 2013, when a person named Ajit Sonowal was beaten at Ambikapur market. Subsequently, he was transferred to the Assam Medical College and Hospital in Dibrugarh for treatment. However, he had succumbed to his injuries. Sonowal's father filed an FIR at Sadiya Police Station on October 9, 2013. After a thorough investigation, the chargesheet was filed and the trial began in the Tinsukia District and Sessions Court. The court, considering the evidence, witness testimonies and the arguments presented by government advocate Ashok Chaudhary, found the six police personnel guilty.



EAM flags concern over impact of Myanmar violence on India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday conveyed to his Myanmarese counterpart U Than Shwe India's deep concern over the impact of violence and instability in Myanmar on Indian border and sought cooperation for early return of Indians trapped in Myanmar town. Jaishankar met Shwe, also Myanmar's deputy prime minister, as he transited New Delhi as part of a visit. In a post on X following the meeting, the external affairs minister said he pressed for "credible security" to India's ongoing projects in Myanmar and called for early return to the path of democratic transition in that country. Jaishankar particularly pointed out the impact of continuing violence and instability in that country on the



Indo-Myanmar border. Several parts of Myanmar have been witnessing intense fighting between the military junta and resistance forces. The resistance forces have already captured several towns. The anti-junta forces seized control of several military bases and a command centre at Myawaddy in April. In the meeting, Jaishankar also told Shwe that India is open to engaging all stakeholders to address the situation in

Myanmar. "Met with Deputy PM and FM of Myanmar U Than Shwe as he transited New Delhi today. Discussed our deep concern at the impact of continuing violence and instability in Myanmar on our border. India is open to engaging all stakeholders in addressing this situation," Jaishankar said on X. "Particularly flagged illegal narcotics, arms smuggling and trafficking in persons as priority challenges. Sought cooper-

ation for early return of Indian nationals trapped in Myawaddy," he said. "Pressed for credible security protection for our ongoing projects in the country. Urged early return to the path of democratic transition in Myanmar. India stands ready to help in any manner," he added. The resistance forces have already captured many key trading points along the borders with India, China and Bangladesh. Myanmar has been witnessing wide-spread violent protests demanding restoration of democracy since the military seized power in the coup on February 1, 2021. Rakhine state and many other regions have reported severe fighting between armed ethnic groups and the Myanmar military since October last year.

Assam: Village panchayat secretary shot dead

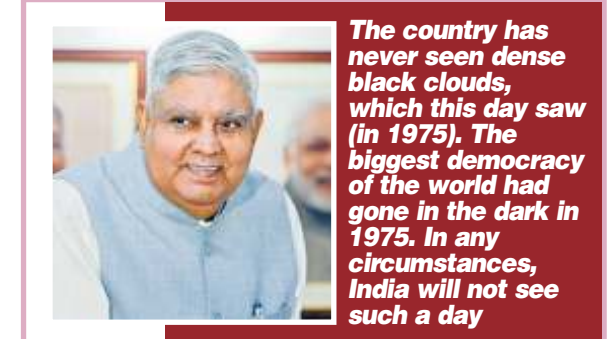
PNS ■ GUWAHATI

A village panchayat secretary was shot dead in Assam's Bongaigaon district on Wednesday, police said. According to a police officer, two motorcycle-borne assailants fired at the village panchayat secretary from a tea stall at Kashidoba market in the afternoon. "The victim had tea and was about to leave the shop. At that moment, the two attackers who were waiting there fired at him, killing him on the spot," the officer said. He was immediately rushed to a nearby hospital, where he was declared dead, he added. The deceased has been identified as Chandrakanta Das (55) and he was the secretary of Chipansila 'gaon' (village) panchayat, police said. Bongaigaon's District Commissioner and Superintendent of Police have visited the site and taken stock of the situation.

'India won't see Emergency again in any circumstances'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Remembering the Emergency imposed in the country in 1975, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Wednesday that in any circumstances such a day will not be witnessed in the country now. Addressing the golden jubilee celebrations of Central Electronics Limited (CEL) in Ghaziabad district, Dhankhar said, "The country has never seen dense black clouds, which this day saw (in 1975). The biggest democracy of the world had gone in the dark in 1975. In any circumstances, India will not see such a day. We are strong. The foundation of Indian democracy has become so strong that there is democracy in villages, Nagar Palika and districts," he said. On June 25, 1975, at midnight, the then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed declared a state of Emergency in India following advice from



The country has never seen dense black clouds, which this day saw (in 1975). The biggest democracy of the world had gone in the dark in 1975. In any circumstances, India will not see such a day

the then prime minister Indira Gandhi. Dhankhar, who reached the CEL campus and planted a sapling first, said as Rajya Sabha Chairperson he has asked the MPs to plant 100 saplings. "I follow this. I remember the prime minister on an occasion when I was planting a sapling here that 'Ma ke naam ek ped' (A sapling in the name of mother) should be

our mission because it will impact our lives," he said. Hailing the work of CEL officials and employees, he said, "The world is changing very fast. We are on the cusp of another industrial revolution. It is required of us to focus incrementally on technological innovations. You are part of it and will move ahead in this regard," the vice president said.

Not enough internal demand for satellite launch market in India yet: ISRO chairman

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ISRO Chairman S Somanath on Wednesday said there is not enough internal demand for the satellite launch market in India but it can be created through more work on the application of satellite technology. Addressing the India Space Congress 2024, he said big companies are willing to enter the space sector but they are concerned about the timeline for breaking even and securing orders. "When I talk to many of those industries who are willing to come and set up facilities, they are all very ready to do it. But they are asking when they are going to break even and where the orders are so that they can safely invest in this. I think this is a big question. It is the bigger challenge of convincing investors to come in a big way in big state projects," the leading space scientist said. At a press conference on the sidelines of the Space Congress, he said, "We need to create more internal demand. That implies internal demand is not enough. All of us are working towards that. The demand will come from the

user side, from the communication segment, which, of course, includes big satellite builders." "We would like to find orbital slots and frequencies which can be given to industry to build satellites and launchers. This is the first step towards creating internal demand. InSpace has already announced a funding plan to create a new earth observation constellation. That's another step towards creating internal demand." Somanath also said although the cost of accessing space has decreased significantly globally, largely due to SpaceX, India's rocket costs have not seen similar reductions. Reducing costs could boost small satellite launches and attract new participants in the space sector, he said. Somanath mentioned that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for Amrit Kaal includes extending human space activity beyond the Gaganyaan mission, with the goal of landing on the moon by 2040. However, he said India's current rockets are not sufficient for round trips to the moon.



3 suspected JeM terrorists killed in gunfight

PNS ■ BHADERWAH/JAMMU

Three terrorists, suspected to be affiliated with the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit, were killed in a gunfight that lasted for more than six hours in a forest area in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district on Wednesday, police officials said. A policeman was also injured in the gunfight that broke out in Bajaan village in the Gandoh area around 9:50 am amid an intensified cordon-and-search operation launched by the police, Army and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), following twin terrorist attacks in the hill district on June 11 and 12, the officials added. Six security personnel were injured when terrorists attacked a joint check post at Chattargalla on June 11, while a policeman was hurt in a gunfight with terrorists at the Kota top in Gandoh the next day. After the twin attacks, the security forces intensified their anti-terrorist operations and announced a cash reward of Rs 5 lakh each on information about four Pakistani terrorists believed to have infiltrated into the district. During an operation in a village in Sinoo panchayat, the forces came under heavy fire from the terrorists hiding in a "dhok" (mud house) on a slope, the officials said.

NEET-UG IRREGULARITIES JNU students detained for protesting at Jantar Mantar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over a dozen students were detained when the Jawaharlal Nehru University's students' union along with other outfits staged a protest at the Jantar Mantar here on Wednesday against the NEET-UG fiasco, police officials said. The students demanded the scrapping of the NTA and the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan against the alleged irregularities in the medical qualifying examination. Scores of students belonging to different outfits, including the Left-backed All India Students Association (AISA) and Delhi University's Krantikari Yuva Sangathan participated in the protest. The students carried posters and placards, with slogans such as "Dharmendra Pradhan istifa do (Dharmendra Pradhan resign)" and "Scrap NTA" written over them. They also demanded re-examination for the NEET-UG examination and ending the centralisation of exams. The protestors were detained because they were planning to continue their protest for the entire night. However, according to a court's order, protests are not allowed at the Jantar Mantar beyond 5 pm, a police officer said. "The students started putting tents at the site to continue their protest for the entire night. We had to detain them as it is not allowed to sit there (at Jantar Mantar) beyond 5 pm," the officer said.



and Delhi University's Krantikari Yuva Sangathan participated in the protest. The students carried posters and placards, with slogans such as "Dharmendra Pradhan istifa do (Dharmendra Pradhan resign)" and "Scrap NTA" written over them.

Prez to address joint sitting of Parl today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu will address the joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, where she is expected to unveil the priorities of the newly-elected government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Murmu's address to the joint sitting of Parliament will also be the first after the constitution of the 18th Lok Sabha. The first session of the 18th Lok Sabha began on Monday and the 264th session of the Rajya Sabha will begin on June 27. The President will reach the Parliament in a



procession from the Rashtrapati Bhawan, escorted by the horse-mounted presidential bodyguards. She will be received by Prime Minister Modi and the presiding officers of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha at the Gaja Dwar of the Parliament building from where she will be escorted to the Lower House chamber with the traditional sceptre 'Sengol' in the lead. According to Article 87 of the Constitution, the President is required to address a joint session of Parliament at the beginning of the session after each Lok Sabha election.

Child trafficking racket busted in Karnataka with arrest of seven; five children rescued

PNS ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)

The Karnataka Police busted a child trafficking racket, arresting seven persons and rescuing five children who were allegedly sold by the accused to childless couples, officials said on Wednesday. The matter came to light after a complaint was filed by a couple on June 9 alleging that their 11-month-old infant was allegedly kidnapped by some miscreants at night while they were asleep at their home in Gubbali taluk here, they said. A special team was constituted to rescue the kidnapped child and, acting on a tip off, accused Ramakrishna (53) and his accomplice Hanamantha Raju (45) who allegedly kidnapped the infant were arrested. Based on information provided by them, a third accused Mahesh UD (39) who was previously working as a staff nurse at a government hospital in Kunigal was arrested. The accused allegedly sold the kidnapped infant to another accused, Mubarak, for Rs 1.75 lakh, a senior police officer said. Subsequently, 44-year-old Mubarak was also arrested and the kidnapped 11-month-old

infant was rescued by the police, he said. Investigation has revealed that Mahesh used to find women who got pregnant out of wedlock and illicit relationships. He then got the children from such women and sold them to childless couples for a price of Rs two-three lakh per child, he added. Another accused Mehboob Sharif (52) who was also involved in the racket used to run a medical facility in the name of his wife at Huliya and worked as a pharmacist at a Primary Health Centre, the police official said. "Out of the nine children sold by the accused, five children have been rescued and one was found dead. Out of the rescued, one of them has been reunited with his family while the remaining four rescued children are currently at an adoption centre on the orders of the Child Welfare Committee," Ashok K V, Superintendent of Police (Tumakuru), said. Another accused, Poornima (39), who was a contract worker at a Primary Health Centre, and Soujanya (48), who was a staff nurse at a hospital, allegedly cooperated in selling the infants.



50% adults in India insufficiently physically active

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Almost 50 per cent of adults in India engaged in insufficient levels of physical activity in 2022, according to a study published in The Lancet Global Health journal. Far more women in India (57 per cent) were found to be insufficiently physically active, compared to men (42 per cent), in line with trends across the South Asian region, the study found. The insufficient levels of physical activity in women in the region were, on average, 14 per cent higher than those in men, it said. The South Asian region also ranked the second highest in terms of adults being insuffi-

ciently physically active after high-income Asia Pacific region, an international team of researchers, including those from the World Health Organization (WHO), said. Globally, the authors found that about a third of the adults (31.3 per cent) were insufficiently physically active -- defined as not performing at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week. This was up by five per cent from 26.4 per cent of the adults worldwide insufficiently engaging in physical activity in 2010, they found, and if the 2010-2022 trends continued, the authors said that the global tar-



get of improving physical activity engagement by 15 per cent would not be met. In India, a little over 22 per cent of the adults engaged in insufficient physical activity in the year 2000, while in 2010, close to 34 per cent of the adults were insufficiently physically active, the researchers

based surveys to estimate the number of adults performing insufficient physical activity for 197 countries and territories from 2000 to 2022. The team also found that around the world, older adults, both men and women, aged 60 years and above, were increasingly engaging in insufficient physical activity. Physical inactivity is known to heighten risk of developing non-communicable diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. Rising levels of physical activity, along with an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, are contributing to increase in cases of these diseases and burdening healthcare systems around the world, according to the WHO. They projected that in 2030, 60 per cent of the adults could be insufficiently engaging in physical activity, should current trends continue. For the study, the researchers analysed data of physical activity reported by adults (aged at least 18 years) in population-

based surveys to estimate the number of adults performing insufficient physical activity for 197 countries and territories from 2000 to 2022. The team also found that around the world, older adults, both men and women, aged 60 years and above, were increasingly engaging in insufficient physical activity. Physical inactivity is known to heighten risk of developing non-communicable diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. Rising levels of physical activity, along with an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, are contributing to increase in cases of these diseases and burdening healthcare systems around the world, according to the WHO.

BJP-led NDA MPs, ministers protest against Congress over Emergency

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP MPs, including Union ministers, held a protest in the Parliament Complex on Wednesday, targeting the Congress over the imposition of Emergency in 1975 and demanding the opposition party's apology for violating the Constitution. With the Congress and its allies in the INDIA bloc persistently targeting the Narendra Modi government for its alleged attack on constitutional values, the ruling alliance has sought to turn the tables by launching a frontal counterattack over the



Emergency issue against the backdrop of its 49th anniversary on June 25. Soon after Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla adjourned the House after reading out a resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency and flaying then prime minister Indira Gandhi for her attack on the Constitution, a large number of BJP-led NDA MPs

assembled outside, carrying placards and raising slogans. "Emergency ke live Congress sharm karo" and "emergency ke liye maafi mango" were among the slogans raised by them. Union ministers Ashwini Vaishnav, Pralhad Joshi, Kiren Rijju and Lalan Singh joined other MPs in attacking the Congress. BJP MP and the party's national spokesperson Sambit Patra said, "It is necessary to show the mirror to those who are talking about saving the Constitution and holding its copies in their hands. They were those who tried to erase the Constitution."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Optimistic outlook

Indian economy continues to grow despite facing hurdles like inflation and unemployment

In his second term, Prime Minister Modi had given a call to make India a 'five trillion economy.' Though the dream is still to be realised, it gave a sense of direction and hope to India's entrepreneurs and stakeholders. But every goal has a meandering path one must negotiate to reach it. Indeed, as the world's fifth-largest economy, India continues to capture the attention of global investors and economists alike. It is a key player in the global economic landscape. However, several impediments need to be done away with to reach the goal. Recently, Shaktikanta Das, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), expressed confidence in India achieving a 7.2 per cent GDP growth rate for the current fiscal year. This assertion is significant from the policy point of view and needs scrutiny of the factors contributing to this optimistic outlook. No doubt, India's economy has shown resilience in the face of various challenges, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and global geopolitical tensions. Several economic indicators reveal a mixed yet promising picture. In recent years, the Indian economy has been touted as the fastest-growing economy in the world. The Indian economy has demonstrated robust growth in recent years, recovering from the pandemic. Its GDP grew by 7.8 per cent in the first quarter of FY 2023-24, indicating a strong economic momentum.



But on the downside, price rise and Inflation are a big cause of concern. Right now, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation stood at 4.6 per cent in May 2024, within the RBI's comfort zone of 4%±2% which could be counted as a positive indication for the growth.

Another grey area of the economy has been unemployment. The unemployment rate remains a critical issue, with urban unemployment at 7.8 per cent and rural unemployment at 7.4 per cent in June 2024. Despite improvements, job creation in key sectors like manufacturing and services remains low. Jobs are essential for sustaining growth which is a red flag for growth right now. Sincere efforts need to be made to tackle this menace as it can mitigate all the positive indicators. On positive side, India continues to attract significant FDI, which totalled \$55.3 billion in the first half of 2024. Besides, the growth of the digital economy has had a good impact on the ease of doing business. India's digital economy is booming, with a projected value of \$1 trillion by 2025. Not to forget the contribution of India's young population which presents a significant demographic advantage. With over 50 per cent of its population under the age of 25, India has a large and dynamic workforce that can drive consumption and innovation. The confidence expressed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das in achieving a 7.2 per cent growth rate this year highlights the resilience and potential of the Indian economy. However, addressing the challenges of inflation, global economic uncertainties, and climate change will be crucial in ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

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PICTALK



Devotees visit the Karnakhyia temple that opened for prayers after the four days of Ambubachi Mela, in Guwahati PTI

India will be a true welfare state when it eliminates discrimination

India's genuine progress will be reflected in its dedication to inclusivity, especially in upholding the dignity of individuals with disabilities

In the vibrant tapestry of India's democracy, the concept of a welfare state has been a cornerstone since its establishment. Embedded in the Constitution, the commitment to justice, equality, and the promotion of general welfare forms the foundation of India's identity. However, within this grand vision lies a harsh truth often neglected - the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Despite the existence of legal frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and international obligations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the everyday experiences of disabled individuals paint a different picture.



education, employment, and healthcare - the pillars of a welfare state - often remain inaccessible dreams for them. Education is frequently highlighted as a key to progress and empowerment. However, for many disabled students in India, quality education is an elusive reality. Despite the National Education Policy and the Right to Education Act, educational institutions often lack the necessary support systems and infrastructure to accommodate diverse needs. The disparity in the national enrolment average between disabled and non-disabled students is stark, with the national average for non-disabled students at 28.4% and less than 2% for disabled students. Government data from UDISE+ shows a dropout rate exceeding 75% for students with disabilities in higher education.

Similarly, the employment scenario for persons with disabilities is bleak. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, the private sector remains largely indifferent, often citing concerns about productivity, costs, and a perceived lack of talented resources. Consequently, unemployment rates among the disabled population are disproportionately high, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and reliance on social welfare schemes. Healthcare, another critical aspect of a welfare state, presents its own set of challenges for persons with disabilities. Limited access to specialized care, the high cost of assistive devices, and stigma within healthcare settings contribute to their marginalized status. Amidst these challenges, the notion of India as a welfare state falls short for millions of disabled citizens. The true measure of a welfare state lies not in lofty ideals or legislative frameworks alone but in tangible improvements in the lives of its most vulnerable members. It is crucial for the government, civil society, and the private sector to bridge the gap between rhetoric and

reality and ensure the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Firstly, disability should be viewed not as a deficit but as a diversity that enriches the social fabric. Secondly, significant investment is needed in accessible infrastructure and services across sectors. From barrier-free buildings to inclusive technology, creating an environment that accommodates diverse abilities is essential for fostering equal participation. Proactive measures such as affirmative action policies, vocational training programs, and sensitization initiatives for employers are necessary. To achieve a truly inclusive society, concerted efforts are needed on multiple fronts. India's journey towards becoming a welfare state must prioritize the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Disability should not be an afterthought but an integral part of policy and decision-making processes. (The writer is the assistant program manager at the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People; views are personal)



AKSHAY JAIN

The dark days of India's Emergency

This period saw the suspension of civil liberties and the censoring of the press leaving an indelible mark on the nation's political landscape



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Vinashakale Viparith Budhi (Sanskrit for 'as doom approaches mind reverses') is what Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan told his friends when he was arrested and was being led off by the cops on 25th June 1975 after the proclamation of internal emergency across the nation by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Even members of her cabinet came to know about the proclamation of emergency from the next day's newspapers and the Akashvani bulletins. Jagmohan Lal Sinha, a judge of Allahabad High Court heard the election petition filed by socialist party leader Raj Narayan against Indira Gandhi alleging that she had violated all rules specified in the statute book while fighting the 1971 Lok Sabha election from Rae Bareilly. There was a nationwide belief among the leaders of the opposition parties that chemically treated ballot papers were used in the election. These ballot papers were supplied by the then USSR and they bore the symbol of Congress (Indira) but remained invisible at the time of voting. It was said that the voter's original mark would disappear after voting, and the Congress mark would appear. (Ref: Courting Destiny, A Memoir by Shanti Bhushan, who appeared for Raj Narayan in the case). But Shanti Bhushan decided not to go ahead with the charge of the fake ballot paper and preferred the allegation that Indira had misused government machinery in fighting the poll. The court was convinced of the charge that she had misused her position and power while fighting the poll. Justice Sinha set aside Indira's election and disqualified her for six years. But Sinha stayed his judgment to enable Indira Gandhi to appeal to the Supreme Court. Shanti Bhushan says in his memoirs that there had been several precedents before in which the election of sitting chief ministers had been set aside and they stood disqualified for the commission of corrupt practices and the Courts had never granted a stay to them during the pendency of their appeals. V R Krishna Iyer, the vacation judge



of the Supreme Court who heard Indira Gandhi's appeal challenging the High Court verdict ruled that she could continue as Prime Minister though she was not permitted to her exercise her right to vote in Parliament. The decision of Justice Iyer was seen as an attempt by him to help Indira Gandhi come out of her predicament. Iyer was known for her servility to the then Prime Minister, having served as minister of home and jail in the first elected Communist government in Kerala under E M S Namboodirippadu. In his autobiography 'Wandering in Many Worlds' Iyer has disclosed how EMS was instrumental in getting him appointed as a judge in Kerala High Court. The Communist infiltration of the Indian judiciary and other constitutional establishments is nothing new. Immediately after the proclamation of the emergency, the Constitution was amended by both houses of Parliament to put the election of the Prime Minister and President of India beyond the powers of Courts with retrospective effect. This was the infamous 39th Amendment of the Constitution (which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court). What happened during the Emergency is known to most of the literate people. State Governments not friendly to



TO DATE, INDIA HAS NOT EXPERIENCED THE KIND OF DICTATORSHIP THAT WAS IN FORCE DURING THE DAYS OF INTERNAL EMERGENCY. THE CONSTITUTION WAS DISTORTED AND MISINTERPRETED WHILE COURTS OF LAW WERE STERILISED

the Centre were summarily dismissed making use of the provisions under Article 356 of the Constitution. Press Censorship was imposed which made newspapers get prior sanction from censoring officers to publish news. To date, India has not experienced the kind of dictatorship that was in force during the days of internal emergency. The Constitution was distorted and misinterpreted while Courts of law were sterilized. The Preamble of the Constitution itself was amended unconstitutionally and terms like Socialism, secularism and unity of the Nation were inserted in it. This was done after putting all opposition members of parliament in prison under the DIR (Defense of India Rule 1962) and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1974, the statutes that gave power to the government to jail anyone daring to question Indira Gandhi's superiority. Lal Prasad Yadav named his daughter Misa Bharati to commemorate his arrest under the said Act during the emergency. Now Lal and his family members are singing a paean to the Nehru-Gandhi clan! Indira Gandhi and the Congress failed to learn anything from the drubbing they got for subverting the Constitution. In 1984, the Congress again derailed peo-

ple's mandate by getting the N T Rama Rao-led TDP government in Andhra Pradesh dismissed and anointing a faction led by Bhaskara Rao as chief minister. But NTR succeeded in getting his chair back thanks to the initiative by the opposition parties that included Janata Party, BJP and anti-Indira forces. Rajiv Gandhi during his tenure as Prime Minister tried in vain to muzzle the media by attempting to enact a legislation "Defamation Bill" to curb any kind of reports against the Government. This had to be dropped midway through due to massive protests against the same. One has lost count of the number of times State governments were dismissed by the Congress-led Government at the Centre misusing the provisions of the Constitutions. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was against the terms socialism and secularism for obvious reasons. Though we claim in the preamble of the Constitution that it was adopted on 26th November 1949, what we cover-up is the date on which it was amended by including the terms socialism and secularism in 1976. Congress pontificating the Constitution could be described as the devil quoting the scripture. (The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUBSTANCE OVER SPECTACLE

Madam — The Prime Minister's call for consensus underscores his commitment to respecting the people's mandate. It is now imperative for the Opposition, especially the INDIA bloc, to collaborate with the Prime Minister. In the previous Lok Sabha, minimal opposition hindered effective governance due to disarray among opposing parties. The unity demonstrated by the INDIA alliance resonated with voters, who expect them to serve as a robust check-and-balance in Parliament. Despite ideological differences and occasional conflicts, their parliamentary performance should mirror the electorate's expectations. The Prime Minister rightly stresses the need for decisive actions over theatrics, aligning with the public's demand for effective governance amidst concerns like unemployment and inflation. Despite ambitious promises such as curbing black money and promoting initiatives like Make-in-India and Viksit Bharat, tangible improvements in people's lives remain scarce. The central government must prioritize substance over spectacle to effectively address these pressing challenges.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE

Madam — Drug abuse and the illegal drug trade have grown into serious, intractable problems. Substance use disorder affects all age groups, but it is particularly prevalent among the youth. The United Nations observes the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADAIT) on June 26 to highlight the grave dangers posed by drugs. Drug awareness campaigns are central to addressing these issues. A society's socioeconomic status cannot be improved with unhealthy and unproductive members, which is why the dangers of drug abuse are numerous. Drugs bring hazardous diseases and are

Record crop but prices rising



Every year, food grain production in India reaches new record levels, yet retail prices continue to climb. In the 2023-24 period, rice production reached a record high of 1,367 lakh tonnes, and wheat production also hit a record

with 1,129 lakh tonnes. Despite these increases, the government's Department of Consumer Affairs reports that retail wheat prices have risen by about 6%, with rice prices increasing even more sharply. Additionally, the prices of pulses have seen a significant spike over the past year. This paradox of high production and rising prices is largely due to low procurement. As of June 2024, the wheat stock in the central pool stood at 299.05 lakh tonnes, a 5% decrease from June 2023, when it was 313.88 lakh tonnes. This year, the wheat procurement target was set at 310 lakh tonnes, but only 260.71 lakh tonnes were procured. This shortfall threatens to destabilize the entire government-run procurement system, which could lead to cascading effects on the Public Distribution System (PDS) and ultimately cause further escalation in market prices of food items. SK Khosla | Chandigarh

often linked to crime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) monitors global drug addiction trends. Making healthy choices and valuing oneself can significantly reduce the risk of drug abuse, which has been a recurring theme of the UN on IDADAIT. Unfortunately, substances like cannabis, cocaine, and heroin are easily accessible in many countries due to lax laws, and their medicinal and recreational benefits are often overstated, overshadowing the harmful consequences of their use. A strong bond between parents and children can help mitigate the risk of drug abuse in the younger generation.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

ROOF LEAKAGE AT RAM TEMPLE

Madam — It's disheartening to note that just five months after the inauguration of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya, the newly constructed Ram Mandir experienced leaking from its roof following heavy rainfall. Head priest Acharya Satyendra Das men-

tioned that the temple's roof lacks adequate drainage, exacerbating the issue. It raises questions about the rush to inaugurate the temple before completion, possibly driven by electoral considerations. This incident echoes a trend where everything, from examination papers to infrastructure like the Pragati Maidan underpass, seems to suffer under the Modi-led NDA government. Unlike ancient Indian temples that stood for centuries due to devotion rather than political expediency, the Modi government's haste in inaugurating the temple without ensuring its readiness for the monsoon season is evident. The leaking roof of a globally renowned temple raises serious concerns. Fortunately, after senior officials were alerted, Nripendra Mishra, chairman of the temple construction committee, promptly instructed repairs. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN BENEFITS OF REMAINING IN SHELTER OF GOD

By seeking refuge in the divine, we can navigate the complexities of life with ease



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

All of us wish for a pleasant life ('theek chale'). But we don't know how. We try different things, but something or other keeps on going wrong. Is it an impossible dream? No, it is not. God, being very merciful, has indicated how this can be done. Lord Krishna guides, "This 'maya' (illusory energy) of Mine is divine and very difficult to overcome. Only those, who take shelter in Me, they are able to transcend this maya." (7.14) We get in trouble repeatedly because we are naturally attracted to harmful sense objects. Useful sense objections are fine but how do you know which these are? God gives this intelligence if we remain in His shelter, just like a mother stops her little child from harming himself. God is that eternal mother for us.

Lord Krishna informs, "After efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise, and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus everything is very rare." (7.19) We can get started on this journey beginning from now and God will begin to protect us. We must allow some time for it as instructed by Lord Krishna, "Steadfast in yoga, such people while always glorifying Me and endeavouring, having firm vows worship Me with devotion, offering obeisance." (9.17) Then, what happens? God promises, "These people, who worship Me with undivided attention, meditating on Me, for these practitioners of yoga, I help in getting what one does not have and provide security of what one has." (9.22) We get started and God gets started. It is that simple. Then, what happens? Lord Krishna states, "Fix your mind in Me only; engage your intelligence in Me; thus hereafter you will remain in Me only; there is no doubt about this." (12.8) We get to live in God.

What does this mean? God takes care of us as our mother. Our lives will be micromanaged. One will benefit like one can never imagine, because, as indicated earlier, God is everything, not helpless like our bio-



logical mother. Over some time our consciousness will change, as detailed by Lord Krishna, "Through consciousness offering all activities to Me; practising buddhi-yoga, having taken My shelter be always in My consciousness." (18.57) Our consciousness, which otherwise is essentially material will change to God consciousness; it will turn spiritual. When this happens, a big change will take place in our lives, as explained by Lord Krishna, "Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My 'kripa' (grace)." (18.58) In the same verse, Lord Krishna warns, "If you will not heed on account of feeling of being the doer, you will perish."

This is what normally happens to us human beings. We must curb our egos; God and ego do not go together. Can you imagine what privileged status we would have achieved if we heed God's instructions? Life will become smooth (theek chalegi). We will wholeheartedly take shelter in God, as instructed by God. In all respects take shelter of God only. We neither get any peace nor liberation at some stage in our eternal journey due to our refusal to surrender to God. We will do so now. What will we do then? We will follow God's instructions as detailed in verse #18.65, which is, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me. You will attain Me only. This I truly promise to you, because you are dear to Me."

The last verse sheds light on the biggest benefit of all, in which the Lord promises, "Take My shelter only; I shall release you from all sins. Do not worry." (18.66) Why do we get repeatedly in trouble? Why are we always worried? Because our bad karmaphalas keep on manifesting. Now what will happen? They will make their appearance and God will forgive us, and we will not be troubled much. This is like being liberated while still in our material bodies. This is simply unbelievable to even think about. I won't stop trying to remain in the shelter of God as much as possible as fast as convenient.

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

A young mother becomes a symbol of hope



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

Arti, a child bride whose education was cut short, now shines as a local hero, transitioning from e-rickshaw driver to Amal Clooney Award winner, embodying resilience and empowerment



Her face is bathed in sweat and her hair is dishevelled. But neither the scorching June heat nor the humidity can wear down the wide smile on Arti's face. Even the power cut at the Aga Khan Foundation's Project Lehar Centre, where she has been coming for entrepreneurial training, cannot dim her joy. She has just admitted her young daughter to one of the top English medium schools in Bahraich district in Uttar Pradesh.

This is a dream come true for the 19-year-old single mother whose own education came to an end after being married off as a child. What has made this feat even more special for her is that it was the school that expressed keenness to admit her four-year-old daughter. The telephone call from its founder inviting her to fill out the form came soon after Arti was returning from the school having been told admissions for the session were closed. While the call and offer to waive all tuition fees came as a big surprise to Arti, it was not totally unexpected.

Ever since Arti, an e-rickshaw driver, hit the national headlines for winning the prestigious Amal Clooney Women's Empowerment Award in May this year, she has become a celebrity in Bahraich. Given to young women around the world in recognition of their determination and ability to overcome challenges and make a difference, the international award has catapulted Arti from being just another pink e-rickshaw driver to the official brand ambassador for women's empowerment in Bahraich, an aspirational district with low socio-economic indicators.

The buzz around her has been non-stop since her return from London where she went to receive the award from the King's Trust International founded by King Charles. There has been unrelenting attention by local and national media to know more about her remarkable jour-



WHEN THE TEAM MET ARTI, SHE WAS LIVING WITH HER MOTHER IN BAHARAICH'S RISIA BLOCK HAVING LEFT AN ABUSIVE MARRIAGE, ARTI WAS DIRECTIONLESS MARRIED AT 13 AND A MOTHER AT 14, ARTI LACKED BOTH SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

ney, including her ride in a pick-rickshaw to meet King Charles at the award reception in Buckingham Palace. She has also been publicly felicitated by top leaders and officials of the district. But all this would have never been possible had Arti not met the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) Project Lehar team. Instituted to provide vocational training, entrepreneurship, and life skills courses to marginalised young women, Project Lehar run by AKF in partnership with The King's Trust International, enables girls and young women from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn, earn, and thrive. When the team met Arti, she was living with her mother in Baharaich's Risia block Having left an abusive marriage, Arti was directionless. Married at 13 and a mother at 14, Arti lacked both skills and confidence. On her mother's insistence, she agreed to join Project Lehar. Little did she know that her life was about to change. Not far away, in Lauki, another village in the same block a young widow with three children was struggling to make two ends meet after the death of her husband. She was only 20 when she came in touch with the Lehar team.

Left to fend for her children alone, Bitti wanted to do something other than supporting her family as a daily wagger and registered for the project. Here she would meet Megha, Saira Bano and Bhagyalakshmi, all young widows with similar backgrounds and living in difficult circumstances. Fate was about to give these four and Arti a collective second chance at life. In June 2023, when Seema Shukla Project Coordinator, state programme

manager Sudhir and the AKF team were mulling over the possibility of teaching them to drive and using this skill as a means of livelihood on the lines of the popular Sakha cabs driven by only women, it was Monika Rani, the dynamic Bahraich district magistrate, who turned this idea into reality.

"We were considering how to make the girls economically self sufficient and hit upon the idea of launching the pink e-rickshaw initiative under the government Mission Shakti scheme to empower women and expand their income earning opportunities. We wanted to give single mothers, widows and women separated from their husbands the first chance to come out of the house, increase their mobility and regain their confidence," says Monika Rani. So on October 2, 2023, these five girls were chosen as the first recipients of a batch of 10 girls from Project Lehar to be given the pink e-rickshaws under this innovative scheme.

A loan of Rs 1.66 lakh was provided and repayable in 38 months at an EMI of Rs 4500. Since then, there has been no looking back. Not only have the women paid eight instalments already, but they are also transforming their lives. From eating just one meal a day, Saira Bano can now give her children proper nutritious food. "I have seen days where my two children and I ate just namak and roti.

Now I earn enough to fulfill every need of my children. I want to do better so that I can build my own house and get an electric connection so that my children don't have to study under a lamp and I don't have to pay to charge

my e-rickshaw," shares Saira. The confidence Bitti has gained has given her the courage to demand her right to the family land. She has filed a case in the civil court and wants her father-in-law to put her deceased husband's share in her son's name. "I am paying the fees for the lawyer from the money I earn as a e-rickshaw driver. I never thought I would be able to take such a big step," reveals Bitti. Bhagyalakshmi has opened a tiny kiosk selling biscuits, sweets and pencils for her mother from her earnings. "I want to expand my business. My dream is to make my elder daughter a doctor and the younger one a policewoman. When my income increases I will shift them to an English medium school. I want my children to have a bright future," she says.

For Megha too, the e-rickshaw has been life-changing. "I am happy because my economic situation has changed for the better. Now I can give my children better food. I have admitted the two children to private English medium school and can the monthly fee of Rs 250 for both of them. Education will ensure they never have to live on charity like I did." While association with Project Lehar and the opportunity to become self-reliant thanks to the pink e-rickshaws has turned their lives around, it has been their confidence that has helped them hold their heads high in a male-dominated profession.

This is inspiring other village women to step out of their homes and fulfil their dreams.

(Swapna Majumdar is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)

Battling the heat and hatred: The ongoing fight for LGBTQIA+ rights

There is widespread violence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, fueled by a deeply ingrained prejudices against 'transgressive' love

Be-Loved - Celebrating Pride Month through TheatreKhushi Pahuja In the scorching heat of June 2024, I, along with a lesbian couple, have been shuttling from police station to police station, all to protect their fundamental rights to life and equality. The constant torment for the three of us stems from society's disdain for 'transgressive' love and an unquestioned acceptance of violence against women by family members. Familial and domestic violence is perpetuated and reinforced each time someone scrutinizes and polices one's queerness through one's body. Hope often dwindles with seemingly unending cycles of individual, systemic, and systematic violence. Especially, when



KHUSHI PAHUJA

community members like Prerna (name changed), a 23-year-old lesbian woman says, "We are investing so much money, time, and energy for protecting my rights, is it even worth it? Will things ever change?" In the face of such questions, social workers not only provide a safe listening space and support in bureaucratic procedures; but also share the responsibility of holding on to the beacon of

hope. History reminds us that hope, and perseverance lay the foundational stones for advocacy, action, and change. One history of hope is that of Pride Month. Each Year, June is celebrated as pride month around the globe, commemorating the Stonewall Uprising. On June 28, 1969, like many other days in New York City, the police raided a small bar called the Stonewall Inn. Taking advantage of the laws against crossdressing, the police would raid bars to arrest queer and transgender persons. When the same happened at Stonewall Inn, the people protested. Days of riots against police brutality acted as a catalyst for the LGBTQIA+ rights movement. Following this, the movement for LGBTQIA+ rights has

expanded, bringing relief to many within the community. Various events like theatre, music, poetry, sensitisation programs, etc. happen during June all over the world, including India. Such programs are particularly important as they present possibilities for intersectional dialogue through non-conventional sensitisation methods. An example of this approach is 'Be-Loved', a theatre play by Mumbai-based Theatre Group 'Tamaasha', which was recently co-organized by Nazariya Foundation and SAATHII (Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India) on June 9 at the Bipin Chandra Pal Auditorium in Delhi. Be-Loved is a musical and satirical drama directed by Sapan



Saran and penned by 17 prominent writers, including artist Bhupen Khakhar, poet Josh Malihabadi, and LGBTQIA+ rights activists Maya Sharma and Saleem Kidwai. Recalling the journey

of making this play, Sapan shares, "Be-Loved is a collaborative effort. It took us about three months to put it together. We opened the play last year in June after rigorous rehearsal for 45 days." "The play dealt with a very sensitive issue with a lot of care, especially in a context where talking about sex and sexuality is a taboo. They emphasize, "You cannot forget about the issue once you have seen this play. It forces you to think and reflect when you come out of the theater hall." Resonating with this perspective, Urvashi Butalia, feminist publisher and writer says, "The play took stories on queerness by many writers and connected them with real life cases. People can dismiss stories, but it is difficult to dismiss lived realities."

As Rituparna Borah (she/they), Director, Nazariya Foundation pens, "Events like this are the best ways to show to the world that advocacy can be done in various ways either through UN mechanisms, through the government, or plays like this. With collective power we can challenge any hate, discrimination, and violence against the queer-trans community." "Such events help us to reach an audience that is generally not approachable for training sessions, or for whom training sessions are not accessible. Therefore, when we engage with allies through well-accepted mediums like theater, music, etc., the much-needed information gets conveyed to a huge audience," adds Randhoni Lairikyengbam, Assistant Director, SAATHII.

The echoing sentiments of audience members about how the play moved them to highlight the importance of collective efforts toward sensitization using multiple advocacy mediums. It restores hope that change is possible when we create spaces where people can critically reflect on their actions, thoughts, and behaviour, and feel part of the collective. Pride Month, therefore, is not only a time to celebrate queerness and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights but also an opportunity to look back into history and remind ourselves of the perseverance of those who fought for the rights and then move into the future with hope, care, and kindness. (The author is a social worker and a sexuality educator; views are personal. Charkha Features)

MONEY MATTERS

Vedanta Resources to sell 2.6 % stake in Indian unit

Vedanta Resources will sell a 2.6 per cent stake in its Mumbai-listed mining conglomerate to cut debt and support growth plans, the firm said on Wednesday. Vedanta Resources will sell the stake through its unit Finsider International, which held a 2.63 per cent stake in Vedanta Ltd. Finsider International Company Ltd, a subsidiary of Vedanta Resources Ltd (VRL), has accepted a proposal from one of its banks yesterday evening to sell 2.6 per cent shareholding in Vedanta Limited to a group of reputed Institutional investors, a company spokesperson said. Post the repayments made from money garnered from this transaction, Vedanta Resources would have reduced its debt by over USD 650 million since the start of the current fiscal year in April. Stock exchange data showed 18.5 crore shares of Vedanta Ltd changing hands in a block deal. The number of shares that changed hands in the block deal amount may be worth Rs 7,967.8 crore at Rs 440 per share price.



Zee Media board approves fundraise of up to Rs 200 cr

Private news broadcaster Zee Media on Wednesday said it has plans to raise up to Rs 200 crore from an issue of equity shares or other eligible securities through various modes. The company's board in its meeting held on Wednesday "granted its approval for exploring available options for raising of funds" through all permitted instruments, according to a regulatory filing from Zee Media. The approval is "for an amount not exceeding Rs 200 crore, in one or more tranches", which will be subject to approvals from shareholders/ regulatory and statutory approvals, it added. The company will explore the issuance of equity shares or preference shares. It will also explore other eligible securities, including by way of private placement or qualified institutions placement or preferential issue.



Gold down Rs 250; silver tumbles Rs 900

Gold prices declined Rs 250 to Rs 72,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid fall in precious metal rates globally, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 72,550 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver also tumbled Rs 900 to Rs 90,600 per kg. It had closed at Rs 91,500 per kg on Tuesday. "In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are trading at Rs 72,300 per 10 grams, down by Rs 250 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,316 per ounce, down USD 8 from the previous close. Gold came under pressure following the latest hawkish comments from a Federal Reserve policymaker, which dashed investors' hopes of an impending shift to monetary policy easing, Gandhi said.



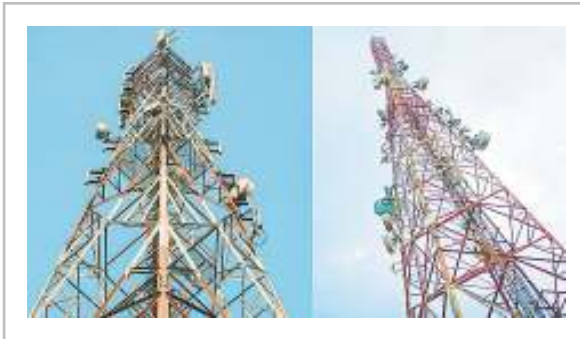
India's spectrum auction fetches over Rs 11,300 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's spectrum auction concluded within a few hours of bidding on day-2, with telcos buying over Rs 11,300 crore worth of radio waves in all, which is just 12 per cent of the Rs 96,238 crore minimum value that government had estimated for the spectrum on offer.

The auction, where a total of 10 GHz of spectrum ranging between 800 MHz to 26 GHz was placed on the block, fetched total bids worth Rs 11,340 crore, sources with knowledge of the matter said. In all, only 140-150 MHz are estimated to have been sold in seven rounds.

Five rounds of bidding happened on the opening day on June 25, but Wednesday did not see much action, leading to officials declaring the end of the auction at around 1130 hrs. The 2024 auction - that was



The auction, where a total of 10 GHz of spectrum ranging between 800 MHz to 26 GHz was placed on the block, fetched total bids worth Rs 11,340 crore, sources with knowledge of the matter said. In all, only 140-150 MHz are estimated to have been sold in seven rounds

held after a gap of nearly two years - saw radio waves in 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz,

2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300 MHz and 26 GHz on offer.

On expected lines, the auction this time around has been low-key as market watchers had anticipated limited bidding, with telcos primarily focusing on spectrum renewals, and selective sprucing up on radio waves for boosting their coverage.

Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea (VIL) are vying for the radio waves that support high-speed mobile services, in these auctions. The operator-wise break-up of the bids, or exact amount that telcos dish out individually, is not immediately clear and will be known once an official announcement comes.

As per the day-one spectrum auction report issued by the Department of Telecom on Tuesday evening, bidding took place mainly in the 900 and 1800 MHz bands. The operator also placed bids for the 2100 Mhz band spectrum in three circles.



SBI General Insurance appoints Naveen as MD & CEO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

SBI General Insurance Company on Wednesday announced the appointment of Naveen Chandra Jha as its new Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer.

He was nominated by the parent company, State Bank of India, for the position. He succeeds Kishore Kumar Poludasa. Jha has been associated with the State Bank of India since 1994 and has held several key positions during his tenure. Prior to his current role at SBI General Insurance, Jha served as Deputy Managing Director of SBI.

'India needs additional 1.7-3.6 GW data centre capacity'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will require an additional 1.7-3.6 GW data centre capacity by 2028, over and above 2.32 GW capacity already under construction and planning stage, to meet growing demand, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

Real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield on Wednesday released a report 'Is India Building Enough to Power its Digital Transformation?'

The report conservatively estimates the potential data centre capacity India will require to align with other major economies. There will be a requirement of an additional 1.7-3.6 GW data centre capacity, over and above the planned development of 2.32 GW Colo capacity.

At the end of 2023, India's installed colocation (Colo) data centre capacity stood at 977 MW (IT load). About 258 MW came in 2023 across its top seven Indian cities.



This is a formidable number and surpassed the capacity addition in 2022, which stood at 126 MW, the report said.

The consultant noted that at over 19GB, Indians have been the highest consumers of data per month among comparable nations.

Despite this, India today lags in internet and smartphone penetration, reflecting the scale and extent that the data centre segment is headed towards.

India's current under-construction Colo capacity addition stands at 1.03 GW for 2024-2028, with an additional 1.29 GW being planned, taking the total projected capacity to 3.29 GW by 2028.

This exponential growth is propelled by a confluence of factors, including a significant increase in data consumption fueled by rising digital penetration and adoption of data-intensive technologies, the consultant said.



"The pace at which everything around us is evolving is dizzying. A big challenge of our time is to unleash AI for the next wave of productivity for enterprises. We have had a head start on that journey and are keen to share the learning and value with our clients," Nilekani said

Unleashing AI for next wave of enterprises' productivity is a big challenge: Nilekani

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Unlike AI uses for consumers, the next generation technology for enterprises will unfold over several years and the biggest challenge is to unleash AI for next wave of productivity for businesses, Infosys chairman Nandan M Nilekani said on Wednesday.

While speaking at 43rd annual general meeting (AGM) of Infosys, Nilekani said the initial AI doomism has quietened down and people have accepted that, like any other general-purpose technology -- electricity, nuclear energy, the internet etc, gen AI (generative artificial intelligence) has enormous potential for good when advanced with-

in the guardrails of responsibility.

"World is at very early stage of AI development. Unlike consumer AI which will roll out quickly...enterprise AI will take several years to unfold. Infosys is well positioned for that.

"The pace at which everything around us is evolving is dizzying. A big challenge of our time is to unleash AI for the next wave of productivity for enterprises. We have had a head start on that journey and are keen to share the learning and value with our clients," Nilekani said.

He said that the rise of powerful open-source AI models has also accelerated the deployment of AI to solve tough business and societal challenges.

Markets on record rally; Sensex, Nifty settle at new all-time high levels

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rallied for the third straight session and ended at their fresh all-time high levels on Wednesday in tandem with Asian peers and buying in Reliance Industries.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 620.73 points or 0.80 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 78,674.25. During the day, it rallied 705.88 points or 0.90 per cent to hit a fresh all-time high of 78,759.40.

Nifty went up by 147.50 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at a record closing peak of 23,868.80. Intra-day, it surged 168.6 points or 0.71 per cent to



hit the fresh lifetime high of 23,889.90.

In the past three days of rally, investors' wealth have risen by Rs 2.53 lakh crore.

Among the 30 Sensex com-

panies, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, UltraTech Cement, Sun Pharma, Adani Ports, Axis Bank, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were the biggest gainers.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra and JSW Steel were among the laggards.

"The domestic market hit a new peak, bolstered by a rally in large-cap stocks, where the valuation is relatively fair. In contrast, mid and smallcap stocks saw profit-taking due to valuation concerns. Currently, the financials & consumption stocks are catching up driven by improved balance sheets, a strong GDP growth forecast, and softening inflation.

"Global market sentiments reflected similar trends, with a consensus on imminent rate cuts," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

SEZ developers can install solar power panels under existing norms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Commerce Ministry has asked development commissioners of SEZs to consider requests of developers of these special economic zones for installation of solar power panels under the existing SEZ guidelines for power generation, transmission and distribution norms.

In a communication to the Development Commissioners (DCs) of all special economic zones (SEZs), the Department of Commerce said that various requests have been received from EPCEs (Export Promotion Council for EOUs and SEZs)

as well as SEZ developers for installation of solar power panels as capital goods in



these zones for solar power generation for captive use. "The matter has been exam-

ined in consultation with DGEP, CBIC. Accordingly, the DCs are requested to consider such requests from developers/co-developers" under the power guidelines issued on February 16, 2016 by the department, the communication said.

The Directorate General of Export Promotion (DGEP) is an extended arm of Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC). Under those guidelines, a power plant, including non-conventional energy power plant, to be set up by developer/co-developer in an SEZ as part of an infrastructure facility will be in the non-processing area of the SEZ only.



Economy expected to achieve higher than 7 per cent growth: NCAER

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's economy will grow higher than 7 per cent, even closer to 7.5 per cent, in the current fiscal on the back of expectations of above normal monsoon and absence of any known global risks so far, economic think tank NCAER said in its monthly review.

It said high-frequency indicators reveal that the domestic economy has remained resilient and growth projections for 2024-25 have also been revised upward by all the agencies.

The range of projections for India for the current fiscal year is between 7.2 and 6.2 per cent, NCAER said. NCAER director general Poonam Gupta said, "GDP

growth during 2024-25 may turn out to be higher than 7 per cent and even closer to 7.5 per cent."

This outlook is underpinned by the buoyancy in economic activity witnessed in the first quarter, a keen policy focus on investment, growth, and macroeconomic stability and the expectations of normal monsoon, Gupta added.

With inflation seemingly having peaked, monetary policy is unlikely to be tightened any further, she said. "Finally, global environment seems benign as well in the absence of any known global risks so far."

Gupta said that taming food prices remains a challenge.

Narrowing trade deficit, rise in remittances aid current account surplus: CRISIL

PNS ■ KOLKATA

India's current account surplus in the fourth quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal was aided by narrowing of the merchandise trade deficit, an increase in remittances and a surplus in services trade, according to a CRISIL report released on Wednesday.

The country's current account recorded a surplus of USD 5.7 billion, which is 0.6 per cent of the GDP, in the fourth quarter of the last financial year.

It was in deficit of USD 8.7 billion, equivalent to one per cent of GDP, in the third quar-



ter of the 2023-24 fiscal, the report said. In the corresponding fourth

quarter of 2022-23, the country's current account was also in deficit of USD 1.3 billion,

which was 0.2 per cent of the GDP.

"The improvement in current account balance to 0.6 per cent of GDP surplus in Q4 fiscal 2024, from a deficit of 0.2 per cent of GDP a year ago reflects improvement on all three fronts i.e. merchandise trade deficit narrowed, services trade surplus increased and remittances rose," the CRISIL report said.

Financial flows also increased leading to accretion in foreign exchange reserves during the fourth quarter amounting to USD 30.8 billion, it said. The country's foreign reserves, as of June 14, 2024,

stood at USD 652.9 billion.

The report said even though the FDI inflows continued, there has also been a rise in outward FDI, leading to a reduction in net flows, the report said.

Healthy momentum in goods exports and expected moderation in imports suggest that the current account deficit (CAD) is likely to remain manageable this financial year (2024-25) as well.

Strong external buffers are crucial at this juncture because of global risks stemming from geopolitical uncertainties, tariff and trade wars have heightened, the report added.

Participatory-note investment surges to Rs 1.49 L cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investments through participatory notes in the Indian capital markets rose to Rs 1.49 lakh crore at the end of March from the previous year's level driven by a strong domestic macroeconomic outlook.

The latest data includes the value of P-note investments in Indian equity, debt, and hybrid securities.

Participatory notes (P-notes) are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to overseas investors who wish to be part of the Indian stock market without

registering themselves directly. They, however, need to go through a due diligence process.



According to the latest data from markets regulator Sebi, the value of P-note investments in Indian markets -- equity, debt, and hybrid secu-

rities -- stood at Rs 1,49,120 crore at the end of March 2024, way higher than Rs 88,600 crore in March-end 2023.

On a month-on-month basis, the investment number slightly slipped from Rs 1,49,517 crore at the end of February. The growth in P-notes generally aligns with the trend in FPI flows. When there is a global risk to the environment, investment through this route increases, and vice-versa.

Market experts said that the influx in March can be attributed to positive economic growth.



SHILPA-RAJ'S ADVOCATE ISSUES STATEMENT ON DEFRAUDING INVESTOR

The police officials are required by a Mumbai court to look into a charge filed earlier this month against Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty Kundra, her husband Raj Kundra and other individuals for allegedly scamming an investor in a gold scheme.

Additional Sessions Judge N.P. Mehta stated earlier this month that "prima facie cognisable offense is made out" against the Kundra pair, Satyug Gold Private Limited, the company they formed, two of its directors, and one of its employees.

The couple's advocate, Prashant Patil, has issued a statement regarding the same. It reads, "The complainant had filed a criminal complaint against my clients Raj Kundra and Shilpa Shetty in the year 2022. This complaint was thoroughly investigated by the police in 2022 by adopting due process of law. After thorough investigation, it was found that the complainant had in fact received the entire alleged amount of Rs 90 lacs through legitimate means of payment."

The statement added, "My clients bona fide submitted these documents to the police department. After finding out the truth of the matter, the police delivered justice to my clients. After this inquiry, the complainant opted to file a private complaint

under Sec. 156(3) CrPc before the Honourable Court. After almost 2 years, the Honourable Court has directed the police to investigate the case again. We have complete faith in the independence and fairness of the investigation. The truth shall prevail. My

clients have not committed any offense and this has been established through documents in their possession. The invoice between the competitor and my clients clearly reflects that there is an arbitration clause in the said contract."

what's brewing?

Richa Chadha signs a comedy film

Richa Chadha is said to have signed her next contract, and work on the untitled film is set to begin soon. The script of the film, which is in the comedy genre, is already ready and has been written by Amitosh Nagpal. It is set in North India.

Richa Chadha commented on her work during her maternity break: "While I can't speak for all women, because it depends on each individual what their journey is like, I am determined to get back to work as soon as possible and not take a long break, as I have pending commitments. I take immense inspiration from my mother, who managed both roles gracefully and efficiently. I believe I can handle both duties effectively as well, because it depends on the kind of support system you have around you and how hands-on your partner is. In my case, I feel blessed to have both of those things figured out. I also don't think it is out of the ordinary. I have seen the badass women take local trains well into their ninth month, heading to work, looking perfectly groomed with their gajras intact. I am very inspired by the average Indian woman and don't want this to be treated as a medical condition; it is not. It is a natural part of life." The source close to the film's production said, "Richa has loved the script and it's a really fun concept. The pre-production work is set to take place in August and will go on the floors in October. The film is meant to be shot on the brink of winter in the north."



'Unless you plead, you don't get help in this industry'

Rimi Sen has now discussed her departure from Bollywood. The actor, who has acted in movies such as *Hungama*, *Dhoom* and *Deewane Huye Paagal*, among others, has been out of the public eye for a long time. During an interview, the actresses expressed being tired of comic movies. She remarked, "I am tired of doing comedy films. I used to have furniture roles. I had a good role in only a few, like *Hungama* and *Johnny Gaddaar* (2007). The latter didn't work and that's the kind of work I wanted to do." In 2015, Sen made a comeback to television with the reality series *Bigg Boss 9*. She acknowledged that she has worked with well-known actors like John Abraham, Ajay Devgn and Akshay Kumar, but she said she doesn't know anyone in the business. "I am not. I can't ask anyone for help. Unless you beg, you don't get help. Why won't other people look out for their own benefit? Why will someone go out of their way to help someone?" she questions. At the height of her career, Rimi cut ties with the film industry. She had previously expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of significant roles for women and nepotism, among other things. She appeared in numerous well-known movies, yet she never got the credit she deserved for her roles.

The Notebook fame Gena diagnosed with Alzheimer's



The cult film *The Notebook* commemorates 20 years since its 2004 premiere. It was disclosed at the film's celebrations that Gena Rowlands has been afflicted with Alzheimer's. She portrayed an elderly Rachel McAdams in the movie, who likewise had Alzheimer's, so it's a full circle. Director and actor Nick Cassavetes, who is also the son of the 94-year-old actor, revealed that his mother had Alzheimer's for the past five years. As reported, Cassavetes drew parallels between her mother and her character from the 2004 film *Allie* when he mentioned both suffering from the neurodegenerative disease.

He said, "I got my mom to play older Allie and we spent a lot of time talking about Alzheimer's and wanting to be authentic with it and now, for the last five years, she's had Alzheimer's." He further explained, "She's in full dementia. And it's so crazy—we lived it, she acted it and now it's on us." Rowland's character in the romantic movie also suffered from dementia.

According to reports, Rowland's mother was also afflicted with Alzheimer's illness, so the subject matter was delicate for her. In a 2004 interview with *O* magazine, she stated that seeing her mother suffer from Alzheimer's disease affected her choice to play Allie in the film. This enactment was "particularly hard" for her; "I went through that with my mother and if Nick hadn't directed the film, I don't think I would have gone for it—it's just too hard. It was a tough but wonderful movie."

BRAD PITT IS SORRY!



Brad Pitt purposefully bumped Angelina Jolie's B shoulder when she adopted her first child, Maddox, in 2005. The couple dated for a number of years and had six children together before getting married in 2014. They had no idea that would be the first step toward their demise. Is the Hollywood hottie willing to make amends with his long-lost family after a highly publicised legal dispute and family drama? According to a source close, Brad's children "now want nothing to do with him." On June 16, while Angelina Jolie and her daughter Vivienne were enjoying themselves greatly at the 77th annual Tony Awards, the actor was allegedly left alone in Los Angeles. The source adds, "He's sorry for everything that went down and he knows he wasn't a model husband or dad during the time they were together. Never in a million years did Brad imagine this years-long fight and rivalry. He's willing to throw his hands up and surrender! The kids' dropping Brad's name is just the tip of the iceberg. Brad spent a lot of time and money trying to do what he thought was the right thing for his kids, but now he's wondering if it was worth it." The reported physical altercation between Brad Pitt and Maddox on a private jet in 2016 sparked rifts and prompted Angelina Jolie to seek divorce. Shortly after the tragedy, he stopped mentioning his father.

ANTONY STARR TEASES WHAT'S NEXT WITH THE BOYS

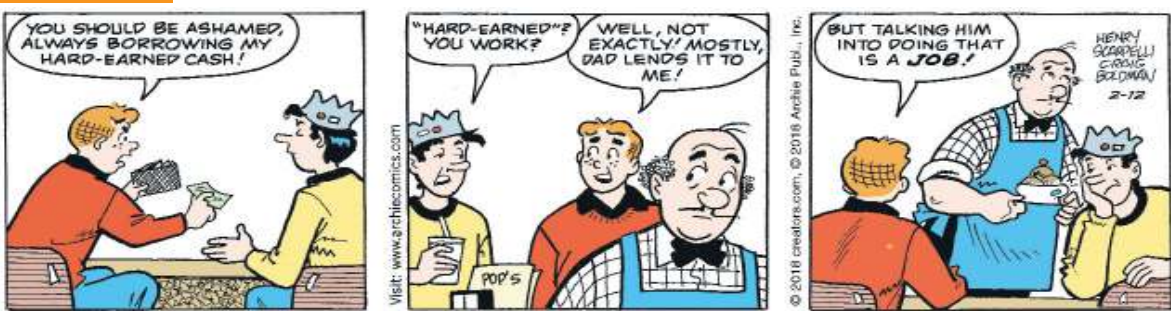
It's been almost a week since the release of *The Boys* Season 4 Episode 4 on Amazon Prime Video and viewers are still in shock at the grisly scene of dead bodies that Homelander (Antony Starr) left in the "bad room" of the Vought Tower labs following his dramatic return to his former haunts. "When that episode script came out, I saw the sequence of scenes and I went to [showrunner Eric Kripke] and we retooled them a little bit just to give more freedom on the day," Starr told. "Originally, they were scripted very specifically. There wasn't a lot of room for me to move during the day. I went to Eric and I said, 'I think there's other places we can go and that I'd like to try and go.' So we rejigged things. Eric's awesome; he is so open and so together we nipped out a few scenes. On the day, it was just about showing up, going for it and seeing what worked and what didn't. I wanted those scenes to be very



conflicted. On the one hand, there was some sense of nostalgia and a little melancholy and incredible trauma coming up, but also just a whole mix of different things. I didn't know when, where or how, so we created a template that we could just go into those days and in that environment and just go for it." The result of all that planning for how to have a bloody mental breakdown on screen: "It was actually really fun." "As dark and fucked up as that seems now, that was probably one of the most enjoyable sequences I've had on the show," he said. "I had a ball doing it. It can't get weird enough or dark enough for me and I love that. We get to do things on screen that we never get to do in real life, so it was a huge amount of fun." We'll soon find out if this season of *The Boys* stays wicked and twisted enough for Starr from here on out as episode 5 of season 4 premieres on Thursday.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



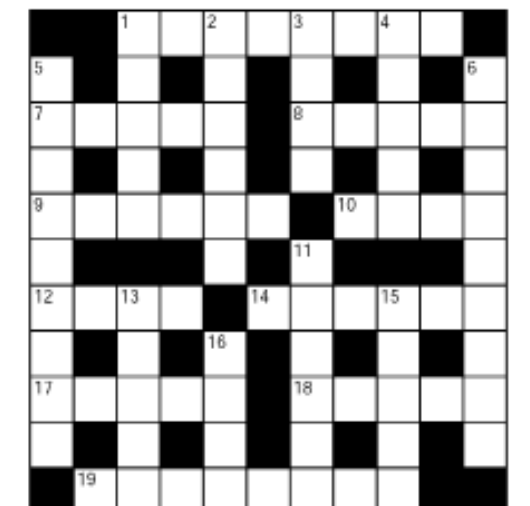
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution
 9 8 1 3 6 4 7 5 2
 6 5 2 7 1 8 4 3 9
 7 3 4 9 5 2 8 6 1
 1 6 7 2 4 9 3 8 5
 4 9 3 5 8 1 2 7 6
 8 2 5 6 3 7 1 9 4
 2 7 8 1 9 5 6 4 3
 3 4 9 8 2 6 5 1 7
 5 1 6 4 7 3 9 2 8

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

- 1 Replied
- 7 A tool for boring holes
- 8 Part of a poem or song
- 9 Required
- 10 Closed
- 11 Carry your money in this
- 13 Higher than
- 15 A body organ
- 16 The number nothing

DOWN

- 2 Similar
- 4 Worked out the solution to
- 3 Jealousy





By and for the hospitality in Telangana

SHRADDHA NEWARE

With an aim to protect the interest and welfare of the hospitality industry, Hotels and Restaurant Association of Telangana State, takes lead role as a single voice organisation representing the hotel and restaurant industry of the Telangana state.

Originally, it was founded by a group of hoteliers who wanted to combine various hotels for their mutual advantage and to safeguard their interests. The association was founded as a joint body that included the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, according to Pankaj Sampat, who is the president of the association currently.

The executive committee member Pradeep Kumar Dutt, who has been involved with the association for a long time, then talks to us about the goal: "It was started by a group of seven hotels to address concerns related to the hospitality industry. Issues pertaining to various hotels were deliberated upon and escalated to the government's level of power. The problems were resolved more quickly back then because there weren't as many hotels involved."

The organisation has around 106 members includ-

HRATS, which represents Telangana's hotel and restaurant sector, has been promoting the sector's advancement. The Pioneer engages in conversation with association members, offering insights into their objectives and undertakings.



ing, earlier seven. Members are from various restaurants, three-star, four-star, five-star and five-star deluxe hotels and resorts, as of now and has exponentially grown. Stating the need to start this organisation, he further says, "The city was growing and hotels were coming up. Business travelling was increasing. People who were travelling to Hyderabad from outstation, they wanted a place within their budget to stay. Hotels came up and the need to protect their interests through the organisation was of importance."

He shares that there is a constant participation in terms of the way forward as



to how they keep on improving the overall tourism footprint in Telangana. Executive Committee members also meet regularly to understand what is happening around and discuss burning issues.

Meanwhile the president in the same call shares, "It is not just the members' issues, but industry issues that we take up with the local government here. As the president of HRATS, you are also on the governing council of two national colleges Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) Hyderabad as well as National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality Management." The organisation is in a bid to attain industry status for the state of Telangana. The president talks to us about the organisation's struggles in this regard, "There are already eleven states that have granted industry status to the hospitality industry. We had prepared a paper on this as to why the government of Telangana predominantly needs to give industry status to the hospitality industry."

He adds that his role is to liaise with other states, understand what the governments are doing there, benchmark some of the good initiatives taken by the government to promote tourism in those states, identify those good decisions that they have taken, bench-

mark them and then start looking at implementing them in Telangana.

Going ahead, according to the executive committee member, there needs to be a proper infrastructure set up before they think about the tourism aspect. Therefore, they are actively looking at what the government does in terms of investing in places in need of infrastructure, creating a public-private partnership and getting investments from corporations to invest in such places. HRATS also organises training programs for employees working in smaller hotels.

According to area director of Taj Krishna Hyderabad, most governments today realise the power of tourism because it predominantly creates a lot of jobs and improves the overall GDP of the state. Talking about their vision going ahead, the president shares, "It is to have a proper tourism policy for Telangana, due for quite some time now. Having an industry status for the hospitality industry is also overdue. While many states have done that, it's something that we are working hard towards. Along with the development of tourism in the state, it's also equally important to look at new skilling centers, which is extremely important to support the growth of tourism in the state."

Prioritising ovarian health

Women's reproductive health is a crucial aspect of their overall well-being. It encompasses various aspects such as menstrual health, fertility, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. Maintaining good ovarian health involves adopting healthy lifestyle habits, regular gynaecological check-ups and prompt medical attention for any unusual symptoms or changes in menstrual cycle. It is also essential to have access to comprehensive sexual education, family planning services and safe abortion care. Women's reproductive health plays a significant role in their social, economic, and political empowerment.

Ovarian tumours are growths that originate from the cells of the ovaries. This growth can be cancerous or non-cancerous. The tumours vary in size, symptoms and impact on health. Various factors like genetics, age, reproductive history and lifestyle choices can affect their occurrence. Symptoms can be similar to many less severe conditions like abdominal bloating, pelvic pain and changes in bowel or bladder habits.

According to recent data ovarian cancer is rated as the third most common type of cancer among Indian women, approximately 6.8 per 100,000 women. Unfortunately, it is detected in the later stages because of its asymptomatic nature, due to which early detection and effective treatment are delayed and complicated. Some common factors are changes in lifestyle, delayed childbearing and genetics. Every year, approximately 25,000 new cases rise in India, which highlights the need to improve screening & prevention to manage the increasing healthcare burden.

A unique case of a 13-year-old girl experienced significant abdominal distention and mild discomfort, that had been ongoing for approximately three months. Despite these symptoms, the patient was able to maintain a good appetite and perform her daily activities normally. Upon evaluation, an initial ultrasound revealed a large mass occupying much of her

abdomen. To further evaluate the situation, a CT scan was conducted, which confirmed the presence of large mass. Decision to proceed with surgery was taken. Exploratory laparotomy was performed, to successfully remove 8.5 kg mass from her ovary. This surgical procedure was essential for directly examining the abdominal organs and to determine the extent and spread of the disease. During the operation, a specific procedure called Salpingo-oophorectomy was performed on the left side, which involved the removal of the ovary and fallopian tube. This step was critical in addressing the underlying cause of the distention and ensuring that any pathological tissues were effectively managed. Thus alleviating the symptoms and preventing further complications related to the mass. Remarkably, the other ovary and fallopian tube, as well as her liver and rest of the abdominal cavity, were found to be normal. This case highlights the critical importance of imaging in diagnosing significant ovarian masses and underscores the effectiveness of timely surgical intervention.

Maintaining ovarian health is crucial for women's overall well-being, fertility and hormonal balance. To promote healthy ovaries, women can adopt practical tips such as consuming a balanced diet rich in antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, engaging in regular physical activity, avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, managing stress levels, and getting adequate sleep. Additionally, women should undergo regular gynaecological check-ups to detect any potential issues early on and seek medical attention promptly or if they experience any unusual symptoms or changes in their menstrual cycle. By prioritising ovarian health, women can enhance their quality of life and prevent various reproductive and hormonal disorders.

(The author, Dr. Sharmila Solanki, is a Consultant, Obstetrics & Gynecology, at Manipal Hospital.)



MAKING WAVES WITH UNIQUE 'FOLKTRONICA' MUSIC

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Following the tremendous popularity of their hit song *Dilbar*, which went viral on YouTube and Instagram and won over hearts all over India, the dynamic musical duo Rusha and Blizza have reached a major milestone by appearing on the famous Times Square Billboard in New York. With their avant-garde 'folktronica' music, they are making waves in the middle of the commercial sounds that are taking over the music landscape. Their most recent album, *Gal Mukdi*, conveys a deep message about the search for inner peace and the truth, highlighting the elimination of ego as a means of achieving these spiritual objectives. The 'folktronica' pioneers have always taken a risk-taking approach to their music! Their initial sound went viral, bringing about a radical change in the music industry and positioning them as cutting-edge trendsetters. Their unconventional approach to music creation has brought in a new wave of sounds, breaking conventions and changing the Indian music scene's sonic landscape. Rusha and Blizza are a unique ten-year journey that began in 2010 with an accidental meeting in a gym. They flawlessly merge experimental soundscapes with the rich fabric of Indian musical traditions. A few snippets from an exclusive interview with them are provided here:

Just a while ago, you guys were featured on the Times Square billboard! What was the experience like?

RUSHA: For us, appearing on the Times Square billboard was a huge accomplishment and a dream come true. It was a noteworthy accomplishment that shows how far we've come from our modest origins. This international recognition encouraged us to keep aiming for greatness while also honouring our previous accomplishments. It was really motivating and it served as a

reminder of the global influence that our music may have.

A distinctive genre known as "Folktronica" combines electronic components with traditional folk music. Could you describe the initial thought process?

BLIZZA: Seeing musicians all around the world fusing folk and electronic music inspired us to start experimenting with 'folktronica'. By fusing sound design with folk components, we aimed to expand on this idea and give this genre a new direction. Our intention is to always develop our sound by constantly experimenting and pushing the envelope. We believe that by taking a fresh perspective, we can motivate other musicians and further the continuous development of music.

***Gal Mukdi*, your most latest release, explores deep subjects. What gave you the idea?**

RUSHA: *Gal Mukdi's* message is that eradicating ego from our hearts is the only way to pursue inner peace and the truth. The song highlights how crucial it is to move past individualistic viewpoints in order to promote a community's connection to the cosmos. It is based on poems by Bulleh Shah and questions conventional ideas of religious devotion by emphasising the need to give up ego in order to find true peace. In order to foster harmony inside and unification outside of oneself, this message invites listeners to embrace a more accepting and altruistic viewpoint.

What kind of creative process did you go through when working with *Mitika*?

BLIZZA: The process of working with *Mitika Kanwar* on *Gal Mukdi* flowed naturally. Her skill as a vocalist and capacity to emotive effectively made her the ideal candidate for this song. It was motivating to work with her because she gave the song a certain depth and vitality that improved its overall impression.



RUSHA AND BLIZZA, A DYNAMIC MUSICAL DUO, HAVE BEEN MAKING WAVES WITH THEIR UNIQUE FOLKTRONICA MUSIC. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE PIONEER, THEY DISCUSSED BEING FEATURED ON A BILLBOARD IN TIMES SQUARE, THEIR 'FOLKTRONICA' SOUND AND THEIR MOST RECENT SONG, GAL MUKDI.

There was a lot of back-and-forth during the creative process as we all contributed ideas to make our styles combine together.

Bulleh Shah's poetry is heavily featured in *Gal Mukdi*. How do his teachings align with your artistic vision?

RUSHA: The lessons of Bulleh Shah stress the value of selflessness and inner serenity, which strongly align with our own values and aesthetic vision. His poetry encourages us to write music that goes beyond individualism and fosters a sense of oneness with the cosmos. We work hard to infuse these deep ideas into our music, inspiring listeners to see beyond themselves and adopt a more accepting viewpoint.

What difficulties did you have in establishing this genre in a market where more commercial sounds predominate?

BLIZZA: It has been difficult to introduce and popularise folktronica in a market where commercial sounds predominate. Audiences and industry insiders used to conventional or mainstream music initially opposed our efforts. But listeners eventually came to appreciate our commitment to originality and genuineness. In order to become known and accepted, we concentrated on developing a strong online presence and interacting with our audience directly on social media platforms.

RUSHA: 'Folktronica' appears to have a bright future as more musicians investigate this genre and contribute new sounds and viewpoints. The combination of traditional and electronic music is becoming more and more appreciated in India. 'Folktronica' is becoming more and more popular around the world as people look for distinctive and avant-garde musical experiences. We think that this genre will keep developing and influencing upcoming audiences and performers.

Your journey started with an impromptu encounter at a gym. Could you elaborate on how your musical collaboration came to be as a result of that first meeting?

RUSHA: In 2010, our partnership started out of the blue. We've created a distinctive sound over the last ten years by fusing Indian musical traditions with experimental components. Some of the highlights of our journey have included working on the dance theatre music video series album *Vision One*, which will be released in 2024 and taking on major business endeavours. Our friendship has grown stronger with time and our joint endeavours have continuously pushed the limits of music production.

What tactics do you use in an industry where convention is frequently enforced to remain faithful to your unconventional approach?

BLIZZA: By always experimenting with new sounds and concepts, we stay faithful to our unconventional approach while making sure that our music is still approachable and relatable. Our goal is to establish a deep bond with our audience by using thought-provoking content and important messaging. We keep our distinctive style while appealing to a wide audience by striking a balance between creativity and relatability.

What part do social media sites play in your audience engagement?

RUSHA: Social media channels are essential to our approach to connecting with and interacting with our audience. We can distribute our music, interact with fans and reach a worldwide audience thanks to these platforms. We utilise Instagram for updates and behind-the-scenes information, reels for quick, interesting videos and YouTube for music videos. By allowing us to interact with our listeners directly and have a strong online presence, social media promotes a feeling of connection and community.

Could you take us through Sanson Ki Mala's creative process?

BLIZZA: *Sanson Ki Mala's* artistic journey started with an exploration of the rich tradition of Indian devotional music. We wanted to transfer the spiritual essence of traditional bhajans into a modern setting since we were moved by their ageless charm. The idea changed as we experimented with fusing these classic tunes with cutting-edge electronic components to produce a unique and emotive atmosphere. We made a conscious effort to keep the song true to its original form while including fresh rhythms and textures that would appeal to a modern listenership. The last track, which reflects our dedication to upholding tradition while pushing musical frontiers, is a tasteful fusion of the old and the new.

RUSHA: *Sanson Ki Mala* was inspired during a period of self-examination and spiritual contemplation. The concept of commitment and how it transcends geography and time struck a chord with us. The song's trajectory was determined by this epiphany, which brought us to themes of love, spirituality and inner calm. With the intention of crafting a song that connects with our listeners deeply on an emotional level, the inspiration enabled us to imbue the track with a sense of reverence and tranquility.

The duo is currently working on *Vision One*, their future dance theatre music video series album, which will be released in 2024. They are working on big business projects that will have a big influence on the music industry in addition to this enormous initiative. The inventiveness and distinctive synthesis of musical elements that characterize Rusha & Blizza's journey bear witness to their constant commitment to pushing artistic limits and making a lasting impression on the world music landscape.

INDIA LOOK TO BEAT KNOCKOUT STAGE NERVES

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

With a refreshingly aggressive batting approach, India would look to avoid the knockout stage jitters plaguing them for over a decade when they take on defending champions England in the semifinals of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday. The last time these two teams met at this stage, it turned out to be a no contest as England outplayed an outdated India in the 2022 edition's semifinal. However, India have finally been able to shed their conservative approach at the top of the order since that 10-wicket hammering in Adelaide and have become the team to beat in this competition. On paper, Rohit Sharma and his men look the stronger bunch for the conditions expected at the Providence Stadium and look primed for revenge. The spinners have enjoyed bowling here since the opening game and the likes of India's Kuldeep Yadav and England's Adil Rashid would be itching to flaunt their skills in the knock-out fixture. Spinners are not the only ones who will come into play, the pacers too have got success at the venue with Afghanistan

speedster Fazalhaq Farooqi producing a match-winning spell against New Zealand at the start of the competition. Interestingly, no match has been staged here since June 8 when the West Indies breezed past Uganda in a day game, giving the curators extra time to prepare a suitable pitch for the high-profile game. India were clinical in the Super 8 stage but the extreme pressure of a semi-final tends to produce unforced errors. At the top of the order, India will be hoping for runs from the bat of Virat Kohli, who has had an underwhelming tournament by his high standards. On the contrary, his opening partner and skipper Rohit has set the benchmark for other batters when it comes to fearless cricket. His blazing 41-ball 92 against Australia is the sort of knock that won't be easily forgotten for some time to come. For both Rohit and Kohli, it is probably their last shot at winning the T20 world title in India colours and the two would be desperate to leave a mark. Rohit has already made it clear that he intends to go ballistic in the powerplays without a care for personal milestones, which was evident in the game

EYE REVENGE AGAINST ENGLAND IN T20WC SEMIS



against Australia. Shivam Dube has not batted as per expectations in the middle-order and it will be interesting to see how he fares against wily leg-spinner Rashid. India are likely to go

unchanged into the game even though they have Yuzvendra Chahal in the squad who can come in handy against England's right-handers including Phil Salt, Jos Buttler, Harry Brook and Jonny

Bairstow. Chahal is yet to get a game in this competition and it is set to remain that way with India expected to continue the trio of Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep, who was the

team's trump card in Super 8s. Jasprit Bumrah is in a league of his own and England will need to do something special to score off him. Hardik Pandya's all-round show has helped India

immensely thus far and the management will be hoping it stays that way. England, on the other hand, have not had the smoothest of campaigns. They stuttered into Super 8s where they lost to South Africa before turning things around. Skipper Buttler was back among the runs against USA in England's final Super 8 game and considering the familiarity with the Indian attack, he is well-placed to come up with a game-changing knock. His opening partner Phil Salt can take the game away from opposition very quickly and India will need to dismiss him in the powerplay. More runs are expected from Bairstow and Moeen Ali, whose off-spin could be useful against India's left-handers. Liam Livingstone, who bowls both leg and off spin, too can bowl his full quota of overs like he did against USA the other night. Rashid's four overs can also prove decisive in the all-important fixture. In his first high-profile event since returning from injury, pacer Jofra Archer has done well in the seven games so far and would be backing himself to trouble Rohit and Kohli with the new ball. Having taken a hat-trick in the

last game, the confidence of Chris Jordan too will be sky high. "Obviously, when we left England a few weeks ago, we left to come and obviously try and defend the title. There's been a few bumps in the road along the way, but I think you kind of described them as good bumps because they've really narrowed down our focus and really made our direction really clear," said Jordan after the win over USA. There is also a likelihood of rain impacting the game with chances of showers in the lead up to the semi-final and also on match day.

SQUADS:
India: Rohit Sharma (c), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj.
England: Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood.

SA, Afghanistan look to rise above deep scars to seal T20 WC final berth

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Tournament story-makers Afghanistan will be up against perennial dark horses South Africa in the first semifinal of the T20 World Cup here, a much-anticipated showdown that will be historic irrespective of the outcome. Without belittling the poised run of the Proteas, Afghanistan have been the revelation of this ICC showpiece. They found life and fighting spirit to rise above the ravages of war back in their country, best exemplified by an astounding win over 2021 winners Australia, whom they had never beaten before. There were multiple heroes -- skipper Rashid Khan has been immense throughout, pacers Fazalhaq Farooqi and Naveen-ul-Haq have given early breakthroughs, Gulbadin Naib conjured a miraculous spell against the Aussies while Mohammad Nabi remained perseverant. Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz leads the batting chart with 281 runs, while Farooqi is on top of the bowling list with 16 scalps. It is a story in itself as how two Afghanistan players have raced past some marquee names to the top of the stats table. But all of it can come to nothing if they falter at the Brian Lara Academy, a venue named after the West Indian legend who has supported Afghanistan to the hilt. The Afghans are a skilled set of cricketers, on whose back the team rose brilliantly from the low-tier obscurity of the early 2000s. So, they are not unfamiliar to intense competition and T20, more than any other format, offers them the chance to challenge the big brothers. But they have never competed in the semifinal of a World Cup, and the Afghans now need to control their nerves to overcome a fancied opponent. Head coach Jonathan Trott affirmed his side was not perturbed by the big occasion. "We go into the semifinal with no scarring or no history. This is uncharted territory for us. But, by no means, do we feel like we're going into the semifinal just to compete. We're there to win the semifinal. We've beaten some major teams," Trott said after the win over Bangladesh. South Africa's scars also run deep but they are purely of cricketing nature.



In the past, the Proteas have assembled some high-velocity squads but never managed to enter the title round of a T20 or 50-over World Cup after their re-admission into world cricket in 1991. To change that long-running show of misfortune, South Africa need to tame not just Afghanistan but also the demons in their own minds. The signs have so far have given hope. In this event, they have shown a propensity to win the clutch moments, their Achilles Heel in previous global tournaments, that often prop up without any warning. But here, they have notched up victories as close as one-run (vs Nepal), four-run (vs Bangladesh) and three wickets (vs West Indies). South Africa of old could have bungled in those situations, but Aiden Markram's side has displayed remarkable fortitude. They seem to have escaped the hackneyed C-Word. Experienced left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj explained his team's run in this World Cup. "If you look at previous World Cups, the small moments, we haven't really won. It's good to see that all the games have come really close and we've found a way, so it's building the character within the team. "It prepares us for certain opportunities that we could get and cross over the line in those small moments. These are things that we've never done before. So, it's good to see us get-

ting into that," said Maharaj. His words offer a true reflection of the collective effort South Africa have made here. "There is only one South African player in top-10 batters' list. Quinton de Kock is placed sixth with 199 runs from seven matches, while none of their bowlers feature inside the first 10. But here they are, playing in the semifinal and they will have to negate those small, key moments against Afghanistan, perhaps in the next match too. For once, South Africa might not feel overwhelmed by that thought. If Afghanistan too can keep their heartbeats in check, a classic for the ages seems well on the cards.

SQUADS:

Afghanistan: Rashid Khan (c), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Ishaq, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Nangyal Kharoti, Muejeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad Malik. Reserves: Sediq Atal, Hazratullah Zazai, Saleem Safi.
South Africa: Aiden Markram (c), Otttniel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs.

I was in tears laughing, Australia skipper Marsh sees the funny side of Naib's theatrics

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA)

Australia captain Mitchell Marsh saw the funny side of Afghanistan all-rounder Gulbadin Naib's theatrical complaining of cramps in a T20 World Cup match against Bangladesh, terming it as "one of the funniest things" he has ever seen on a cricket field. Naib, who was fielding in the slip, fell on his back while clutching his thighs during the 12th over, just after coach Jonathan Trott signalled to slow down the proceedings as rain was imminent with Afghanistan ahead in the proceedings in the must-win Super Eights game. "I was almost in tears laughing and at the end of the day it had no bearing on the game. So, we can laugh about it now - but, gee, it was funny. It was outstanding," Marsh told cricket.Com.Au. Bangladesh were chasing 115 for a win then, and fell behind the DLS par score of 83 at the end of the 12th over at 81 for seven.



However, Naib later bowled two overs and participated with vigour in Afghanistan's victory celebrations without showing any hint of 'cramps'. The ICC's playing conditions stipulate that a player can get up to two-match ban for "deliberate or repetitive" time wasting tactics, but that Naib might just escape with a first and final warning by the match referee. With the win, Afghanistan knocked Australia out of the T20 World Cup, and

Marsh said the 2021 champions have only themselves to blame for the exit. "We watched it (the match) as a group. It was obviously a pretty amazing game, wasn't it? A lot of twists and turns. "Obviously, you want to keep playing this tournament and that was our only way of doing it. But there's also the element that it was completely out of our control and we only had ourselves to blame for that," said Marsh. The all-rounder said the team was dejected after the fall of the final Bangladesh wicket. Pacer Naveen-ul-Haq trapped Mustafizur Rahman in front of the wicket to signal a famous win for the Afghans. "We were all flat (when the final wicket fell). We were desperate to continue on in the tournament. But fair play to Afghanistan - they beat us and they beat Bangladesh and they deserve to be in the semifinals," added Marsh. Afghanistan will face South Africa in the first semifinal of the T20 World Cup at Trinidad on Thursday.

I can't see India losing this time, England will need something extraordinary: Collingwood

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

England will have to come up with an extraordinary performance to beat an in-form India in the T20 World Cup semifinal, according to former all-rounder Paul Collingwood, who feels that the 'Men in Blue' are unlikely to lose the grudge match against the defending champions. India and England are set to clash on Thursday in a repeat of the 2022 last four stage match in Adelaide which Jos Buttler and his men won by 10 wickets. "Honestly, I can't see India losing this time. England will need something extraordinary to beat them," Collingwood

said on Star Sports Press Room. Jasprit Bumrah has been in sensational form with teams including the likes of former champions Australia and Pakistan struggling to score against him. Collingwood reckons the pacer's four overs would decide the complexion of the game. "India, with their well-rounded squad, stands out particularly for Jasprit Bumrah's current form. He's fit, accurate, fast, and highly skilled. No team seems to have an answer for him. "In a 120-ball game, having someone like Bumrah with his pace for 24 balls makes a huge difference. India has looked confident even in tough



situations and on difficult pitches in America. "Their batters, like Rohit Sharma who played a magnificent innings against Australia, seem to be back in form," he added. The pitch in Guyana has

favoured the bowlers in the past by slowing down as the game goes on. Spinners have dominated at this venue, and the pacers get some help early on but teams have reached scores of 170-180 in the ongoing World Cup. "The match-up will be magnificent, with both sides adopting an ultra-aggressive approach. The surface in Guyana will be crucial. On a flat pitch, England has the upper hand with their ability to overpower teams. However, a slow, turning pitch would favour India." Collingwood feels India have moved on from their conservative approach, which led to their downfall at the 2022 edition.

We still haven't played our best game yet: SA coach Rob Walter

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Asserting that their best is yet to come, South Africa coach Rob Walter said the team is not bogged down by near misses of the past and will "take confidence" from its performance in crunch moments on way to the ongoing T20 World Cup semifinals. In the first semifinal of the tournament here on Thursday, perennial dark horses South Africa will take on an Afghanistan team that has caused a flutter with its heroics in the tournament, the highlight of which has been the sensational win over heavyweights Australia. In the press-match press conference, Walter was asked if this could be South Africa's time after having battled their way past tricky opponents in testing conditions over the last few weeks. "Definitely it's always great to dream and I think everyone in South Africa dreams of the time when a trophy gets lifted. No doubt that will happen. Whether it's going to be this week, that remains to be seen. "We're just going to try and play

the best game of cricket that we can. And we still haven't played our best game yet," Walter told reporters. South Africa's success in prevailing in tricky situations, their Achilles Heel in the past, bodes well for the side chasing a maiden World Cup title triumph. "From the closeness point of view, yeah, we've managed to get over the line in quite a number of close games in the lead up to the semifinal, which for a team has been great for us. "We've potentially missed out on a few of those moments in the past, and this time around we managed to get over the line. So, we certainly take confidence out of that. "We still want to play our best cricket in the key moments of the game tomorrow." Right from the 1992 World Cup, their first since readmission into international cricket after the apartheid ban, South Africa have either choked in those big semifinals of ICC tournaments or luck deserted them. Needless to say, the subject was broached during the interaction. "Look, I said, the near misses in



the past, they belong to the people who missed them. To be honest, this team is a different team. We own whatever is ours to own. And

so, our nearest reflection point is this tournament where we've managed to get over the line. So that's what we think about."

Walter made no effort to play down the pressure and excitement of playing in a World Cup semifinal.

"It's never just another game. I think that sort of rhetoric around semifinals is always untrue, or people trying to downplay the occasion. Certainly, we don't do that. It is a semifinal of a World Cup, and we appreciate that and we're looking forward to it." Instead, he played down the luck factor. "I don't think you can win a cricket game because of luck. I think potentially a few things can go your way but there's a few things that might not. So, skill will always trump luck, that's for sure. So, I'd like to think that." He lavished praise on Afghanistan's incredible run to the semifinals, the war-ravaged nation's first in a World Cup. "We're seeing Afghanistan in a T20 semifinal. It's awesome for the game of cricket. I love the way they play the game and the way they support it." How well does he know the Afghanistan team? Walter said, it's not difficult to study teams in modern cricket, with plenty of technology at its disposal. "Look, I mean, a number of their players play in a number of the leagues around the world. In this

day and age, there's not too many players where there's no footage or no information about. "So, from an Afghanistan player point of view, we do have that sort of information. We've also got an entire World Cup, which they've also played seven games in. "So, from that point of view, we've had the opportunity to watch games of cricket as near as last night and then also in the different leagues that the guys have played and played together. So, we're comfortable with our knowledge in it." Walter is wary of the threats Afghanistan could pose in the semifinal. "I think you, yeah, you would have seen it all in the last two days. I think they are a well-rounded team. Gone are the days where there is an area of the team that is not strong. They wouldn't be in a semi-final if that was the case. "You're talking about some world-class spinners. Everyone knows about the world-class spinners led by Rashid Khan. I mean, he's a top-class T20 spinner anywhere in the world. So, we know about that. But as I said, it's not a one-man show anymore. That's for sure," Walter said.

ALLU SIRISH: THE HERO OF BUDDY ISN'T ME BUT TEDDY BEAR

PNS | HYDERABAD

Actor Allu Sirish's upcoming film *Buddy* has been in talks ever since its inception. As the makers released

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Allu Sirish's upcoming film *Buddy* is set to captivate audiences with its unique blend of adventure and romance, as revealed during its trailer launch event held on Tuesday night. Scheduled for a theatrical release on July 26, the movie promises to be a refreshing addition to the Indian cinema landscape.

Directed by Sam Anton and produced by KE Gnanavel Raja, Adhana Gnanavel Raja under the Green Films banner, *Buddy* stars Allu Sirish alongside talented actresses Gayatri Bharadwaj and Prisha Rajesh Singh. Neha Gnanavel Raja serves as the co-producer, ensuring a seamless production process.

Reflecting on the journey, Allu Sirish shared his initial apprehensions and eventual excitement

about the project. "When the poster for *Buddy* was released last year, there were speculations about it being a remake or similar to an OTT film," Allu Sirish explained. "I let people assume, but I also had my doubts, especially about how an adventure-action film featuring a teddy bear would be received."

However, after watching the trailer, Allu Sirish expressed newfound confidence in the film's potential. "Our audience has always embraced new and different narratives," he remarked. "This movie is not conventional; it's fresh and unique. My collaboration with Sam Anton, whose previous works I admired, solidified my decision to be a part of *Buddy*."

Highlighting the unconventional protagonist of the film, Allu Sirish emphasised, "The hero of *Buddy* isn't me but the teddy bear. This film is about showcasing that character rather than traditional hero-

ism." He also acknowledged the significant investment made by the producers in bringing this vision to life. "Gnanavel Raja spared no expense in making a big action-adventure film, which is a rare opportunity." When asked about the speculation surrounding his involvement in *Pushpa 2*, Allu Sirish chose to focus on *Buddy* and invited audiences to judge for themselves. "I won't talk about *Pushpa 2* now. Let the teaser and trailer speak for themselves," he concluded.



Nagarjuna makes amends after airport incident, meets fan

Nagarjuna recently found himself in the spotlight for an unfortunate incident involving his bodyguard's overzealous actions towards a differently abled fan in Mumbai. Apologising promptly on social media, he later met the fan at the airport to personally address the issue.

In a video captured by paparazzi, Nagarjuna was seen engaging with fans at Mumbai airport, posing for photographs. During one interaction, photographers pointed out that the fan he was posing with had been unintentionally pushed earlier by his security personnel. Nagarjuna, visibly empathetic, acknowledged

the incident was not the fan's fault. After posing with other fans, he approached the fan again, offering a reassuring hug and saying, "It's not your fault," before proceeding indoors.

Currently, Nagarjuna is busy shooting for Sekhar Kammula's bilingual film *Kubera* alongside Dhanush, Rashmika Mandanna and Jim Sarbh. The team recently wrapped up a schedule in Mumbai.

This film marks Dhanush's debut in Telugu cinema and Nagarjuna's first look, unveiled in May, portrays him in a composed yet intense demeanour, dressed in a blue shirt, dark trousers and glasses.



Artists are citizens of the country who have every right to hold the authorities to account, said veteran star Kamal Haasan, admitting there is a risk in making films that question the government.

The trailer for *Indian 2* was launched on Tuesday night amidst much fanfare. It kicks off with Siddharth, a young man battling against the systemic corruption plaguing the nation. Facing overwhelming odds, Siddharth seeks a solution to the problems of unemployment, corruption and lack of development that plague society. This is where Senapathy, the legendary freedom fighter from the original *Indian*, steps in.

Kamal Haasan, embodying the spirit of Senapathy, declares a "second war of independence" and embraces a "Netaji" approach, in contrast to the "Gandhian" approach of the past. His return is a powerful reminder that the fight for justice is a continuous battle and sometimes extreme measures are necessary to combat the forces of evil.

Shankar, the director, has once again delivered a visual spectacle, showcasing breathtaking action sequences and grand production values. Kamal Haasan's performance is nothing short of mesmerising, seamlessly shifting between the roles of Siddharth and Senapathy with his signature intensity and charisma. The actor was speaking at the trailer launch of his upcoming film *Hindustani 2: Zero Tolerance*. Titled *Indian 2: Zero Tolerance* in Tamil, the upcoming movie is a sequel to Kamal's hit 1996 film *Indian*, which featured him in a dual role. Shankar is returning to direct the second part of the franchise.

Kamal Haasan says 'there's risk in making films that question govt'

Asked whether it's tough to make films that question the government today, the actor said this problem has persisted since the British era.

"People were making films even then. We will continue to make those kinds of films; it doesn't matter who is at the top of the establishment. That's not just the filmmaker; that's the citizen's right to ask those questions."

We, as artists, represent so many of you. Thanks to the applause, we believe that we are your representatives; hence, we talk boldly without thinking of the guillotine. Yes, there is a risk; the government can get angry, but your applause puts out that fire, so make it louder," Kamal told reporters.

The 69-year-old said not only politicians but also citizens are to blame for the corruption plaguing the country. "We are all responsible for the corruption and we must all change our



minds. And the best time to change our minds is during elections! These are just reminders of how corrupt we have become.

Nothing has changed thanks to corruption. Everything will change thanks to the collective conscience," he added.

The actor-filmmaker said that while he is a fan of Mahatma Gandhi, he doesn't subscribe to the ideology of tolerance. Kamal also directed and starred in the 2000 film *Hey Ram*, which was set against the assassination of Gandhi.

"I am a great fan of Gandhiji. They say he taught you tolerance: 'What do you think about tolerance?' I say I am not a great fan of that tolerance business. Gandhiji is my hero, but who do you tolerate? Not a friend. I want friendship to grow in the world. What you tolerate is a headache. Anything that's a headache for society, you must have zero tolerance for. Find a medicine; put it out," he said. Also starring Kajal Aggarwal, Siddharth and Rakul Preet Singh in key roles, *Hindustani 2* will hit the screens on July 12.

Nikhil's Swayambhu resumes filming in Maredumilli

Maredumilli, renowned for its picturesque landscapes, has become the latest backdrop for the ambitious pan-India project *Swayambhu*, featuring Nikhil in the lead role.

Directed by Bharat Krishnamachari, the film has entered a crucial phase with its latest shooting schedule set amidst the dense forests of Maredumilli. This phase promises to capture pivotal moments essential to the narrative, leveraging natural beauty and challenging terrain to enhance the film's authenticity and intensity.

Swayambhu marks a significant milestone as Nikhil's 20th film, portraying him in the role of a legendary warrior. The character demands extensive preparation and Nikhil's dedication and rigorous training are expected to deliver a

compelling and dynamic performance on screen.

Joining Nikhil are talented actresses Samyuktha and Nabha Natesh, portraying pivotal roles in the narrative. The film's music is composed by Ravi Basrur, known for his impactful compositions, while KK Senthil Kumar, renowned for his expertise in cinematography, captures the grandeur of the project on camera. M Prabhakaran's intricate production design further enriches the visual experience.

Produced by Bhuvan and Sreekar under Pixel Studios, with Tagore Madhu serving as presenter, *Swayambhu* upholds high production values and technical standards, promising audiences a cinematic spectacle of epic proportions.

As filming progresses amidst the lush surroundings of Maredumilli, anticipation builds for *Swayambhu* to deliver an unforgettable cinematic experience.

RASHMIKA MANDANNA TO STAR ALONGSIDE AYUSHMAN NOW

Dinesh Vijan's horror comedy universe might soon expand with the addition of *Vampires of Vijay Nagar*, featuring Ayushmann Khurrana and Rashmika Mandanna in lead roles. As the title suggests, the film will delve into the realm of vampires.

According to a report, Ayushmann Khurrana and Rashmika Mandanna have been finalised to headline this unique horror comedy, helmed by Dinesh Vijan and Aditya Satpodar (*Munjya*). The duo, known for their creative synergy from their collaboration on *Bala*, has been discussing *Vampires of Vijay Nagar* for some time and plans to commence filming by the end of this year.

"The film is set to kick off in November this year," quoted a source. If these reports hold true, this project will mark the first on-screen collaboration between Ayushmann Khurrana and Rashmika Mandanna. The source also revealed, "Both actors will portray very distinct characters that will surprise audiences. The script is currently in development and will soon progress to the pre-production phase." Ayushmann Khurrana, prior to beginning work on *Vampires of Vijay Nagar*, will wrap up filming for Karan Johar's untitled spy-thriller and the Anurag Singh-directed *Border 2*, alongside Sunny Deol. Meanwhile, Rashmika Mandanna is slated to complete her commitments for *Pushpa 2: The Rule* with Allu Arjun, recently rescheduled for release on December 6, 2024.



VARUN TEJ'S MATKA SETS STAGE FOR FILMING AT RFC

Ramoji Film City (RFC) has become the canvas for the ambitious pan-India film *Matka*, featuring Mega Prince Varun Tej in a pivotal role. Currently in its third schedule, this elaborate production boasts a staggering budget of 15 crores allocated for a comprehensive 35-day shooting stint.

Directed by Karuna Kumar and produced under the banners of Vyra Entertainments and SRT Entertainments, *Matka* is not just a film but a visual spectacle meticulously crafted to transport audiences to vintage Vizag. The production team at RFC has spared no expense in recreating authentic sets that mirror the essence and allure of Vizag from a bygone era. The decision to invest significantly in these vintage sets underscores the filmmakers' commitment to delivering a cinematic experience that blends authenticity with grandeur. The making video showcases the meticulous pre-production efforts and the scale of production, offering glimpses of Varun Tej immersed in his character.

Varun Tej, celebrated for his versatile performances, is set to embody a character pivotal to *Matka*'s narrative. His portrayal is poised to resonate across diverse audiences, cementing his reputation as a versatile actor capable of delivering memorable performances. Adding to the film's allure is Meenakshi Chaudhry as the leading lady and the inclusion of Bollywood actress Nora Fatehi in a crucial role, promising a compelling ensemble cast.

The makers of *Matka* are confident that their unique narrative, combined with lavish production values and intricate set design, will captivate audiences nationwide. Beyond entertainment, their goal is to create a cinematic milestone that leaves a lasting impression on Indian cinema. As *Matka* continues its journey at the RFC, anticipation mounts for its release, marking a significant chapter in Varun Tej's illustrious career and setting new benchmarks in Indian filmmaking.



Atlee's film with Varun Dhawan to release in Dec

Atlee, Jio Studios, A for Apple Studios and Cine1 Studios next big action entertainer, *Baby John* starring Varun Dhawan, is one of the most highly anticipated films of the year. The makers have now announced a new worldwide release date of December 25, 2024, this Christmas, adding to the festive cheer.

The movie is pushed to a later date given its heavy reliance on visual effects and action sequences.

The team requires additional time to perfect every detail, ensuring that *Baby John* meets the high expectations of the audiences. The Christmas release makes it a perfect time for this out-and-out massy entertainer.

The film marks the Hindi film debut of Keerthy Suresh and also features Wamiqa Gabbi, who is making her silver screen debut. The electrifying starcast also includes Jackie Shroff and Rajpal Yadav as action entertainers. *Baby John* is an S Thaman musical. Jio Studios presents *Baby John* in association with Atlee and Cine1 Studios. For Apple Studios and Cine1 Studios Production, the film is produced by Murad Khetani, Priya Atlee and Jyoti Deshpande. Directed by Kalees, *Baby John* is set to theatrical release on December 25.



S.S. Rajamouli & Rama Rajamouli among 487 new invitees to the Academy

S S Rajamouli and Rama Rajamouli are among the 487 members who will be part of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. They have been counted among the distinguished artists and executives.

Rajamouli has been chosen for his directorials *RRR* and *Eega*. On the other hand, his wife has been chosen from the costume designers category for her works in *RRR* and *Baahubali: The Beginning*. "Membership selection is based on professional qualifications, with an ongoing commitment to

representation, inclusion and equity. This year, there are 71 Oscar nominees, including 19 winners, among the invitees," the Academy's website says.

Rajamouli will direct Mahesh Babu's next film, which is yet to be launched. MM Keeravani is going to compose its music.