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Prez, PM, leaders pay tributes to tribal icon Birsu Munda



'DEDICATED' FREIGHT CORRIDOR IS JEWEL OF INDIAN RAILWAYS'



'Working with 3 music directors for lone film is not healthy situation'

THAMAN



QUOTE OF THE DAY

The pioneer

KT Rama Rao and T. Harish Rao will not remain in the same party in the coming days. We have information that there are differences between them. The Congress and the BJP will remain in the fray in Telangana. But the BRS will disappear. The BRS may merge with the BJP or most leaders of the BRS may join the BJP

— Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC Chief



DON'T MISS...

TG to form new panel for tourism promotion

In a move to boost tourism, Telangana's Excise, Tourism, Culture and Archaeology Minister Juppally Krishna Rao announced the formation of a new committee to promote the State's rich cultural and historical heritage. The initiative aims to attract domestic and international visitors to explore Telangana's tourism hotspots. Speaking at the Travernia Fest held at HICC, Madhapur, Minister Krishna Rao highlighted the government's commitment under Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's leadership to position Telangana as a prime tourism ...

-PAGE: 3

Maha tiger lurks into Adilabad forests

There is a tiger, named Jani, in the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra. Last month, during an auspicious moment, the tiger felt the need to find a mate. However, it found no one in the vicinity, so it began its journey in search of a companion, according to official sources. Jani travelled all the way, walking a staggering 200 kilometres, and reached the forests in Adilabad district. In October, Jani went about from place in the ...

-PAGE: 4

ED seizes Rs 8.8 cr from 'lottery king'

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday seized Rs 8.8 crore in cash from the corporate office of Chennai-based 'lottery king' Santiago Martin, officials said. Martin was the single biggest donor to political parties with over Rs 1,300 crore in now-scrapped electoral bonds. The searches were carried out in multiple states as part of a money laundering investigation against the 'lottery king', officials said. The action comes after the Madras High Court recently allowed the ED to ...

-PAGE: 5

Rahul aim is to get back into T20 team

The beleaguered KL Rahul is seeking to use the next IPL as a vehicle to stage a comeback to the Indian T20 side as he wants to remain involved in all three formats of the game. The 32-year-old is in line to open the innings if skipper Rohit Sharma does not play in the first Test of the upcoming five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy series at Perth. Rahul's form has been a cause of concern for the Indian team as he was recently dropped for the last two Tests against New Zealand at home with Sarfaraz...

-SPORTS

KTR committed mistakes: PCC chief

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress and the BJP will be the only two parties in the reckoning in Telangana in future and the BRS will disappear, TPCC President B. Mahesh Kumar Goud said. The BRS may merge with the BJP or most BRS leaders and activists may join the BJP, he added.

Mahesh said that BRS Working President KT Rama Rao and his cousin T. Harish Rao will not remain in the same party in future as there are serious differences between them.

He reiterated that many BRS MLAs are going to join the Congress soon as they are showing interest to join the Congress. However, the Congress has not yet taken a final decision, Mahesh added.

Addressing the media on Friday, he said that KTR is repeatedly saying that he will go to jail as he has committed offences. Mahesh asked KTR to reveal why KCR is not coming out and said that KTR has detained KCR due to his politics.

Mahesh said the party will give posts to its senior leaders even though BRS MLAs have joined the Congress. He said that the fol-

lowers of BRS MLAs who joined the Congress will have to wait for some time to get posts.

He said that consultations have been completed regarding cabinet expansion. He said that it is those who had no land in Lagacharla village who had attacked the officials and so KTR thinks that he had made a mistake. KTR also knows that he committed offences in the Formula E-Car race and so he is saying that he will go to jail.

He said that people are asking the Congress government to explain why it is not sending KTR to jail. However, the government will act as per law, he said.

He said that people are asking the Congress government to explain why it is not sending KTR to jail. However, the government will act as per law, he said.



44% of TG survey completed: Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy emphasised the importance of conducting the ongoing socio-economic, educational, employment, political and caste survey across Telangana in a manner that sets a national benchmark.

Reviewing the survey progress at his camp office on Friday evening, the Chief Minister directed officials to ensure the survey is completed within the stipulated timeline without any delays. The state-wide survey, which began on November 6, ...

Continued on Page 2



Officials at BRS MLC Kavitha's residence for the caste survey on Friday

CM to inaugurate Kaloji Kalakshetram in Warangal

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will visit Warangal on November 19 as part of the Congress Government's Praja Palana Vijayotsavulu, marking one year in office.

During the visit, the Chief Minister will inaugurate the Kaloji Kalakshetram and launch development projects. He is also scheduled to distribute assets to women's self-help groups and address a public meeting on the Arts College grounds. Preparing for the visit, Endowments and Forest Minister Konda Surekha, Advisor to ...

Continued on Page 2

ROW OVER CENSUS

TG making history, but Centre 'failed'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hailing the cast survey underway in Telangana, the Congress on Friday said what the state government has achieved is all the more impressive when it is considered that the Centre has "failed" to host the decadal population census that was due in 2021.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jai Ram Ramesh said while Telangana is making history, the Union government has failed to honour a tradition that every government since Independence has upheld.

"A caste survey is not just a revolutionary step towards social justice, it is also an exercise that requires tremendous administrative competence. It is a mammoth task: in Telangana, it will involve 80,000 enumerators surveying 1.17 crore households across 33 districts," Ramesh said on X.

To survey each and every family -- amidst the diversity of cultures, landscapes, and economies -- requires the government to work in mission mode, right from the village and ward level to the CMO, he said.

"Some glimpses of this exercise in Nalgonda district, where over 55% of the population has already been surveyed. In Miryalguda Municipality, officers have developed a GIS map of all 288 enumeration blocks, spread across 44 wards. This technology is bound to enable the Municipality to better plan for municipal services in the future," he said.



To ensure confidentiality of the filled-out schedules, officers in Nalgonda District have also procured cast-iron trunks to store them securely, he pointed out.

The integrity of the Caste Survey parallels that of the election process, Ramesh stressed.

"What the Government of Telangana has achieved under the leadership of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu is all the more impressive when we consider that the Union Government has failed to host the decadal population census that was due in 2021," he said.

The Congress last week asserted that a nationwide caste survey and the lifting of the Supreme Court's "arbitrary ceiling" of 50 per cent on reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes are central to its vision for the country.

Lendi project will be taken up after polls: Uttam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Civil Supplies and Irrigation Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy while campaigning along with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in Mukhed, said that he is confident of a sweeping victory for the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance in the Maharashtra Assembly elections.

Uttam announced plans to launch the Lendi inter-state irrigation project after the elections, emphasising its importance for farmers in both Telangana

and Maharashtra. "This project is a priority, and we will resolve all pending issues to benefit farmers," he assured.

Speaking at the rally, Uttam Kumar Reddy, who is also the AICC's Senior Observer in Marathwada, assured voters that the MVA, comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT faction), and the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction), would deliver on all its guarantees.

Highlighting the coalition's strength, he predicted the MVA would secure over 200 seats, citing its

Continued on Page 2



Congress alliance will form Govt in Maharashtra, asserts Venkat

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Roads, Buildings and Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, currently on a whirlwind election campaign in Maharashtra, received an overwhelming response from the Telugus of Solapur. The

Minister, accompanied by Jadhchela MLA Janareddy Anirudh Reddy, is campaigning for the Congress alliance.

Venkat met Union Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde and Solapur MP Praniti Shinde and shared his experiences and strategies for the campaign.

Continued on Page 2

KTR craving for sympathy: Sridhar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao's repeated talk of arrest is aimed at gaining public sympathy, IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu said. The Congress government is not planning to arrest KTR, he added.

Sridhar said that BRS leaders are saying that KTR had a hand in the Lagacharla incident. Facts will come out during the probe which is being conducted by a senior officer, he said.

Speaking to the media at the Secretariat on Friday along with Agriculture Minister Tummalala Nageshwara Rao, Sridhar said that attempts were made to kill the Collector and a Group-I officer during the Lagacharla incident. Some people launched attacks claiming to be farmers, he said and added that the BJP and the BRS are trying to destabilise the Congress government.

Continued on Page 2



Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy at a ginning mill near Bhainsa in Adilabad district. He interacted with farmers and advised agriculture and marketing officials to ensure proper grading and moisture content in crops

1,000 MW solar power plants for women SHGs: Minister Seethakka

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Panchayat Raj, Rural Development and Women and Child Welfare, Dr Dhanasari Anasuya Seethakka, proposed the allocation of 1,000 megawatt solar power plants to women self-help groups (SHGs) under the Indira Mahila Shakti Scheme in the current financial year.

Following Seethakka's directive, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Secretary Lokesh Kumar submitted detailed proposals to the Energy department, emphasising the plan's potential to boost rural women's livelihoods. The proposal includes identifying suitable land for the solar plants, which will be leased to SHGs or federations.

Each megawatt solar plant is esti-



ated to cost Rs 3 crore. SHGs will contribute 10% of the cost, while the remaining 90% will be financed through bank loans. Once operational, each plant is projected to generate an annual income of Rs 30 lakh. If approved by the Energy department, installations can be complet-

ed within a week, enabling SHGs to reap the benefits immediately. Seethakka highlighted that this initiative aligns with the government's commitment to women's empowerment. "By providing solar plants, we are creating sustainable income sources for rural women. This is not just about energy; it's about strengthening the economic foundation of our communities," she said.

The Indira Mahila Shakti Scheme, introduced by the government, aims to enable women to explore various income-generating opportunities. Seethakka's efforts have already resulted in the identification of 17 business ventures for SHGs, including stitching uniforms for government school students and running Mahila Shakti canteens.

Continued on Page 2

India wins series with SA

PNS ■ JOHANNESBURG



India beat South Africa by 135 runs in the fourth and final T20 International to clinch series 3-1 here on Friday. Opting to bat, India posted a massive 283 for 1, thanks to unbeaten centuries from Tilak Varma (120 not out off 46 balls) and Sanju Samson (109 not out off 56 balls), and then bowled South Africa out for 148 in 18.2 overs. Tristan Stubbs top-scored for South Africa with 46 while David Miller contributed 36. For India, pacer Arshdeep Singh was the most successful bowler with figures of 3/20 while Varun Chakravarty (2/42) and Axar Patel (2/6) got two wickets each. Hardik Pandya, Ramandeep Singh and Ravi Bishnoi got a wicket each. Brief Scores: **INDIA:** 283 for 1 in 20 overs (Sanju Samson 109 not out, Tilak Varma 120 not out; Lutho Sipamla 1/58). **SOUTH AFRICA:** 148 all out in 18.2 overs (Tristan Stubbs 46, David Miller 36; Arshdeep Singh 3/20).

Is it right time for new ideas on representation?

W e are only a few weeks away from celebrating the 75th anniversary of our Republic. On 26th January 1950, we, the People of India, adopted the Constitution that gave every Indian the right to vote and made us the masters of our destiny. Being familiar with the British system, we chose a multi-party Parliamentary form of democracy with a bicameral Legislature, where in parties enjoying a majority in the lower house - House of People or the Lok Sabha - form the Executive with members from either House of the Legislature. By 2027, when we celebrate the 75th anniversary of completing our first-ever elections to the lower houses of our Parliament and State legislatures, we will, in all likelihood, either complete or be in the middle of an exercise that will recast our legislatures.

These changes, especially for the lower houses of the legislatures - Lok Sabha and State Assemblies - could include synchronised elections and increased number of constituencies with new boundaries, with one-third of the final expanded count reserved exclusively for women.

A national debate about these possible changes is currently underway, making it an excellent time to discuss at least a few more ideas that could strengthen our democracy. Currently, all the members of the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies are elected directly through the first-past-the-post system, with contestants fighting independently or representing a party. Among many, this system of electing members to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies is one aspect that can benefit from new ideas.

An electoral system that still relies on the current first-past-the-post system to elect members with the ability to nominate a small additional percentage of members to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies through nomination by the political parties based on their vote share in the General Election seems worthy of our consideration.

In the first-past-the-post system, the candidate winning the most votes wins the election automatically, even if they do not win a majority of the votes polled. In practice, the number of independents winning elections has been minimal and diminishing by the day, making our elections mainly a fight among parties. At the same time, parties that win a considerable share of votes across the state or nation could end up with only a few or even zero seats, based on

how geographically concentrated or dispersed their support is. For example, in the recent Lok Sabha elections, the Bharata Rashtra Samiti (BRS) could not win a single seat from the seventeen Lok Sabha constituencies from Telangana, even though they won a substantial 16.68% of the votes across the state. On the contrary, the AIMIM party won one seat, securing only 3% of the votes polled in the state.

One idea often raised is the possibility of moving to a



KISHORE POREDDY

proportional representation wherein parties get to nominate members based on the share of votes they receive in the election. This idea has gained little traction because it introduces an entirely new system of voting and also because of the complex voting process for some of its forms.

Additionally, it could disadvantage independent candidates and small regional parties who have acceptability only in focused geographies limited to only a few seats or a small sub-section of society.

On the other hand, a system that still relies on the current first-past-the-post system to elect members with the ability to nominate a small additional percentage of members to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies through nomination by the political parties based on the vote share they receive in the general election seems worthy of our consideration. This idea has the benefit of not introducing a process that the voters are unfamiliar with and also recognising the importance of the popular vote. In the current Lok Sabha, the Congress would benefit more than the BJP because the Congress

converted less of its vote share into seats than the BJP.

Firstly, it could provide seats for parties receiving support from many voters, but their voters are dispersed geographically across constituencies. It could help many states get representation in the party ruling at the Center and not feel left out from the dispensation ruling the nation. Tamil Nadu is a classic example. Though the ruling party at the Center, the Bharatiya Janata Party, received a substantial 11.24% of the vote share, it has not elected member from the state.

Secondly, unlike in the Presidential form, in our Prime Ministerial form of Democracy, Citizens who either could not be elected or are disinterested in electoral politics cannot serve the nation as members of the Executive. Today, parties use upper-house membership to

achieve this. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is a classic example; the Congress made him a Rajya Sabha member from Assam based on its strength in the state Assembly. Similarly, every major party in the country sent leaders to the Rajya Sabha to be able to use their services for the nation - many a time from states where they never lived or even understood the local language. With the proposed change, parties can send such leaders to the Lok Sabha and leave the Rajya Sabha to really represent the States.

Finally, given the role of religion, caste, and economics in today's elections, the proposal could provide a way for parties to nominate worthy people from sections that are considered electorally weak.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson)

Rs 500 bonus leads to jump in fine rice cultivation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The state government's decision to provide a bonus of Rs 500 per quintal of fine rice has significantly influenced rice cultivation patterns and procurement trends in Telangana.

This season, the cultivation of fine rice varieties has increased by 61%, marking a shift from coarse varieties, which saw a decline in cultivation area.

The Agriculture Department said that rice cultivation expanded from 65.94 lakh acres in the 2023 Kharif to 66.77 lakh acres in 2024. The estimated rice production has also risen from 146 lakh tonnes last year to 153 lakh tonnes this year.

This year, fine rice varieties were cultivated on 40.44 lakh acres, compared to 25.05 lakh acres last year, reflecting a significant increase. Meanwhile, the cultivation of coarse rice varieties dropped from 40.89 lakh acres to 26.33 lakh acres.

The Civil Supplies Department has projected that 80 lakh metric tonnes of rice will be procured this season. The government has set up 7,411 procurement centres across the state ensuring accessible and efficient operations for farmers.

While procurement centres were operational from early October, initial sales were sluggish due to higher prices in the open market. However, with market prices stabilizing, procurement gained momentum in early November.

As per officials, by November 14, nearly 9.58 lakh tonnes of rice had been procured from 1.41 lakh farmers. This includes 7.49 lakh tonnes of coarse rice and 2.09 lakh metric tonnes of fine rice. The government has allocated an additional Rs 33 crore for fine rice bonus, ensuring timely payments to farmers.

Compared to 9.35 lakh tonnes procured during the same period last year, this year's numbers reflect a steady increase.

The government has implemented measures to prevent farmer grievances at procurement centres and issued clear instructions to take strict action under ESMIA against millers or traders found harassing farmers.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy reiterated the government's commitment to farmer welfare, ensuring smooth operations at procurement centres and timely payments. Official sources said that the bonus for fine rice varieties has not only benefited farmers but also encouraged a shift towards high-quality cultivation, boosting rural incomes and agricultural sustainability.

CM Revanth to campaign for two days in Maharashtra

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy will participate in the election campaign in Maharashtra for two days on Saturday and Sunday. The CM will leave Hyderabad on Saturday morning and reach Nagpur at 10 am.

From Akkan to Chandrapur, the CM will participate in campaign activities with the local leaders. After that, the CM will participate in campaign meetings and road shows in Rajura, Digress and Warda constituencies respectively and will return to Nagpur at night. On the second day Sunday morning, the CM will reach Nanded from Nagpur. He will participate in the election campaign in Nayagaon, Bhokar and Sholapur constituencies.

Minister Ponnampalath proposes sports complex at Sikh village

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Transport and BC Welfare Minister and Hyderabad in-charge Ponnampalath, accompanied by Cantonment MLA Ganesh, visited the Dohhi Ghat ground in Secunderabad Sikh Village to explore its potential for development into a sports complex. The visit also included key officials, including Cantonment CEO Madhukar Naik, and other leaders.

Addressing the media, Ponnampalath highlighted the government's commitment to the comprehensive development of the region, emphasising the synergy between the Defence Ministry and the Telangana State government.

"The elevated corridor project from Marredpally to Alwal, integrated with Metro connectivity, will address traffic woes and enhance urban mobility," he said. He also noted Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's personal involvement and understanding of the area's needs. "The elevated corridor will significantly reduce travel time for people commuting from areas like Karimnagar, Adilabad and Siddipet to Alwal," Ponnampalath added. Ponnampalath assured residents that the Cantonment area would not be left behind in Telangana's development. "We have ensured underground drainage systems, better roads

and other civic infrastructure in the area. The CM has taken steps to allocate funds for these projects instead of diverting resources elsewhere," he said. He emphasised that the Dohhi Ghat ground would be developed into a modern sports complex under the state government's Sports Authority. "This facility will benefit young athletes in the region, and we aim to make Secunderabad a hub for sports excellence," Ponnampalath added. On the ongoing caste survey, the Minister assured transparency and inclusivity, stating, "This survey is not against anyone. It aims to address social disparities and ensure justice for all eligible beneficiaries."

Singareni records over Rs 1,000 cr profit

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL), a government-owned enterprise, has reported over Rs 1,000 crore higher gross profit compared to the same period last year, marking a 36% growth in the first half of the current financial year. Despite challenges posed by heavy rains, SCCL has bounced back strongly, driven by strategic management and daily reviews by Chairman and Managing Director N Balaram.

In the April-October period, SCCL achieved a turnover of Rs 17,151 crore from coal sales and Rs 2,286 crore from power sales, generating a gross profit of Rs 4,000 crore before taxes. This represents a significant increase from last year's Rs 2,932 crore during the same period.

The company is targeting an annual production of 72 million tonnes, with efforts already yielding a substantial recovery in coal production, transportation, and overburden removal. Daily production, which had dropped to 1 lakh tonnes during the rainy season, has now surged to 2.2 lakh tonnes and is expected to increase further.

BRS: Why is Sanjay not reacting to Lagacharla incident?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress government is promoting misgovernance and suppressing dissent, BRS MLA KP Vivekanand said. Addressing a press conference at the Telangana Bhavan on Friday, he said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and BJP leader Sanjay were colluding to destabilise the state and target BRS leaders.

It is learnt that Sanjay is ill and that he came to his home in Hyderabad putting off his journey from Nagpur to Nagaland.

He questioned Sanjay's silence on incidents in Revanth's constituency including the alleged misuse of the police to suppress dissent. "Why didn't Sanjay speak up when BJP MP DK Aruna was prevented from visiting Lagacharla or when tribal farmers were arrested for protesting against land grabs?" he asked.

Vivekanand criticised the Congress government's failure in governance. "For 11 months, we have witnessed nothing but authoritarian rule. Every section of society feels betrayed, and Revanth has failed to make his mark as a leader. Instead, he specialises in filing false cases and making illegal arrests," he said. He accused Revanth of conspiring with BJP leader Sanjay to weaken the BRS.

"Revanth and Sanjay have a Fevilcol bond. While targeting the BRS, they remain silent on issues like the police interference in the Lagacharla protests and the harassment of tribal farmers," Vivekanand added.

Erolla Srinivas echoed similar concerns, highlighting the alleged atrocities in Kodangal constituency. He questioned the provision of security vehicles for Revanth Reddy's brother, Tirupati Reddy, who, he claimed,

doesn't hold any official post. "Why is Tirupati Reddy, a non-elected individual, receiving special privileges while elected representatives are denied security?" he said.

Srinivas said that Congress leaders orchestrated attacks on tribal farmers in Lagacharla. "This is reminiscent of Razakar rule. The Congress is attempting to turn Lagacharla into another Nandigram by creating unrest and blaming it on the BRS," he said.

Both leaders praised the BRS government's 'progressive' policies, including issuing land title deeds to tribal farmers and implementing the 2013 Land Acquisition Act. "Under KCR's leadership, we protected tribal lands and ensured justice for farmers. Revanth Reddy's administration, in contrast, has failed even in basic governance," Srinivas said.

44% of TG survey...

Continued from Page 1

has already marked 1,16,14,349 households during the initial phase of house listing. As of November 15, the survey has covered 44.1% of the households, amounting to 5,24,542 homes. A workforce of 87,807 personnel, including 8,788 supervisors, is actively engaged in the process. The survey is being conducted across 92,901 blocks, divided into 52,493 rural and 40,901 urban blocks. CM Revanth Reddy instructed officials to ensure that no household is left out and every home is comprehensively covered in the survey. The questionnaire includes 56 primary questions and 19 sub-questions, making a total of 75 questions aimed at the welfare and development of the state's citizens.

The Chief Minister recalled that the survey was inaugurated by the Governor and acknowledged the enthusiastic participation of the public, who are willingly sharing their details. "Any attempt to disrupt the survey will not be tolerated," he asserted, adding that officials at the state and district levels should closely monitor the process and take proactive steps to prevent any interruptions.

CM to inaugurate Kaloji...

Continued from page 1

The Chief Minister Vem Narendar Reddy, and Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari convened a high-level meeting at the Secretariat. The discussions covered the route map, stage setup, parking and other logistical aspects.

Surekha emphasised the need for proper parking arrangements to minimise inconvenience for attendees, particularly women. She urged officials to take all precautions and to address gaps to ensure smooth execution. "Let us work together to make this visit a grand success," she said. Vem Narendar Reddy highlighted the importance of showcasing the government's achievements over the past

year. "The welfare initiatives and development programs undertaken for women and children should be presented visually to create awareness among the public. A massive publicity campaign through print, electronic and social media is essential to inform people about the event," he said. Officials were directed to coordinate and ensure that no obstacles arose during the Chief Minister's visit. The government has taken significant steps to establish Telangana as a role model in the country through development projects costing thousands of crores, he said. The meeting was attended by Special Chief Secretary for Roads and Buildings Vikas Raj, Government Advisor Srinivas Raju and others.

1000MW solar power plants...

Continued from Page 1

The government has also been providing interest-free loans through bank linkages to support SHGs. Plans are underway to introduce more ventures, including allotting RTC buses to women SHGs. By linking women to the solar

energy sector, the government is setting a new benchmark for empowerment. Seetalka emphasised that the Energy department's approval will mark the beginning of this transformative project, which has the potential to generate significant income and uplift rural women economically.

Congress alliance...

Continued from page 1

Speaking to the media, he said that he is confident that the Congress alliance will secure a majority and form the next government in Maharashtra.

He highlighted the demand of locals for the implementation of Telangana's welfare schemes in Maharashtra. "People here are impressed by Telangana's initiatives and are vocal about wanting similar programmes in their state. This is a testament to the effectiveness of our governance," he noted.

During his campaign, Venkat interacted with Telugus, including weavers and shepherds, who have settled in Solapur.

"Their warmth and enthusiastic welcome were moving," he said, adding that the strong cultural and social ties between Telangana and Solapur were evident throughout his visit.

KTR craving...

Continued from page 1

Sridhar said the government will extend a bonus of Rs 500 for fine variety paddy within a week. He asked the opposition to stop their campaign of lies regarding farmers. He said that around 140 lakh tons of paddy was produced from 66 lakh acres. This 140 tons of paddy came without using Kaleshwaram waters, he pointed out and said that the BRS government engaged in false campaigns about the Kaleshwaram Project. He also asked the BJP to make the Centre relax rules regarding procuring paddy.

Sridhar said the BRS government gave Rythu Bandhu funds to even hills and mounds. However, the Congress government will not give money for such lands, he said and added that the Congress government will give Rythu Bharosa funds only to real farmers.

Tummala said that this year, Telangana topped the country in paddy production and that "Telangana beat Punjab by cultivating one and a half million acres."

TODAY ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Pratipada: Nov 16 02:58 AM to Nov 16 11:50 PM
Dwitiya: Nov 16 11:50 PM to Nov 17 09:06 PM

Nakshatram: Krithika: Nov 15 09:55 PM to Nov 16 07:28 PM
Rohini: Nov 16 07:28 PM to Nov 17 05:22 PM

Rahukalam: 9:13 AM to 10:37 AM
Vamagandam: 1:24 PM to 2:48 PM
Varjyam: 10:04 AM to 11:32 AM
Gulika: 6:25 AM to 7:49 AM
Amritakalam: 05:18 PM to 06:45 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:38 AM to 12:23 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Sunny
Temp: 32°
Humidity: 50%
Sunrise: 6:22 AM
Sunset: 5:40 PM

Ponguleti for strict measures to protect Govt lands

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Revenue, Housing and Information Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy emphasised the need for strict measures to protect government lands and ensure hassle-free procurement of paddy and cotton. Chairing a high-level meeting on Friday at the R&B Guest House in Bhainsa, he reviewed issues with Collector Abhilash Abhinav, Additional Collector Kishore Kumar and officials from revenue, engineering, marketing, and agriculture departments.

The Minister directed officials to conduct a comprehensive survey of forest and

government lands, demarcate boundaries, and take action against encroachments. "Submit detailed survey reports in record format to ensure transparency and accountability," he said.

Ponguleti stressed the importance of expediting paddy and cotton procurement while ensuring facilities at procurement centres to prevent inconvenience to farmers. "The process must be transparent, and farmers should receive payments promptly in their bank accounts," he said, reaffirming the government's commitment to purchasing every grain.

Highlighting the government's support, he reminded officials about the Rs 500 per quintal bonus for fine paddy varieties and urged farmers to sell their produce only at government centres. He also warned them against trusting middlemen. Ponguleti assured the distribution of Indiramma houses to all eligible beneficiaries and reviewed the status of two-bedroom houses distributed and under construction in the district. "The selection process will be completely transparent to ensure every deserving individual gets a home," he said.

On the Integrated Household Family Survey, he discussed its progress and urged officials to educate the public about its goals. "Explain the survey's objectives clearly and involve people to make it successful," he advised.

Congress & BRS won't...

Continued from page 1

The Waqf Board is an atrocious joke. One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. Some are grabbing lands like Aurangzeb using the Waqf Act," Vishweshwar said.

The MP said that the Congress created the Waqf Board violating the Constitution and entrusted powers to the Waqf Board making it more powerful than the Supreme Court. This is against the Constitution and the spirit of democracy, he said and added that he is confident that the Waqf Board Amendment Act would come into force during the Parliament's winter session.

Vishweshwar said that a politician is going around carrying the Constitution. However, its pages are empty. He asked Congress leaders, who are speaking about the caste census, to reveal how many SCs, STs and BCs were made CMs by their party. He also asked Congress leaders how many SCs and STs are there in the Rajiv Gandhi Trust and added that the Congress is using AICC President Mallikarjuna Kharge like it used former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Kharge is only a toy in the AICC, he said. Vishweshwar said that there is no word "Waqf" in the Quran and that Waqf does not come under religion in any other country.

Lendi project will be...

Continued from page 1

Lok Sabha success as proof of public trust. Uttam drew parallels between the Congress-led governments in Karnataka, Telangana and Himachal Pradesh and the vision for Maharashtra under MVA.

He highlighted Telangana's initiatives like free bus travel for women, subsidized LPG cylinders and free electricity for millions. "These welfare schemes reflect the Congress's commitment to fulfilling promises. Maharashtra will experience a similar wave of progress under the MVA," he stated. He accused the BJP-led state government of 'divisive' politics and economic mismanagement, including relocating key industrial projects to Gujarat.

"The BJP has betrayed the people of Maharashtra by sacrificing its economic interests. This election is a fight to restore justice, unity and democracy," he said. He emphasised that the five guarantees uphold Maharashtra's legacy of reformers like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, and Dr BR Ambedkar.

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CITY EVENTS

Vault Brewery Hyderabad

Get ready for an epic night of beats! DJ Oliver Huntemann is taking over Vault Brewery on Saturday.

Venue

Vault Brewery, Hyderabad
November 16 | 7pm onwards - November 17 | 12noon

Geetha Madhuri live

Geetha Madhuri Live at 360 Club and Kitchen. Get ready for a mesmerizing evening with the renowned Telugu playback singer, Geetha Madhuri!

Venue

360 Club & Kitchen, Hyderabad
November 16 | 8pm - November 17 | 12noon

Open Mic By Kya Bolte Hyderabad

Comedy: Join Kya Bolte Hyderabad for an open mic happening. Hosted by our favorite host Neha!

Venue

Redbrick Offices - Maximus 2A, Hyderabad
November 16 | 6:30pm

Shaam-e-Rekhta Festival

A magical evening dedicated to rich heritage of Urdu poetry and culture hosted by Rekhta Foundation.

Venue

Paiga Palace, Hyderabad
November 16, 6 pm onwards

Comic Con India

This year for the first time, the Hyderabad Comic Con will extend across three action-packed days, offering an extraordinary experience for anime, gaming, and pop culture lovers.

Venue

HITEX Exhibition Centre, Hyderabad
November 15, 16 and 17

Entrepreneurs Meetup

By We Founders Collab, Hyderabad

Venue

The Headquarters, Space Orbit, Hyderabad
November 23

Dimsum & Bao

Exiting selection of steamed buns

Venue

Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel, Hyderabad
Till November 24th. 3pm to 6.30 pm.

Property offenders who committed robbery held

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The KPHB and CCS Balanagar Police arrested property offenders involved in robberies targeting night-time pedestrians. The accused are Beerbal Singh Beebanu, Bhagender Singh (alias Bablu Singh), Ravi Singh Bowri and Dandu Nagesh (alias Bablu). The accused threatened victims with knives and stole mobile phones, cash and gold chains.

According to the Police, two cases were registered under KPHB police station limits. The accused worked in two groups, targeting isolated areas to commit these crimes for easy money to support their lavish habits. Seized property includes mobile phones and bikes. The apprehension was made by SHO M Venkateswara Rao, DI K Ravi Kumar, DSI Abdul Samad, and their team under the supervision of ACP Kukatpally K Srinivas Rao and DCP Balanagar K Suresh Kumar.

The Police advised citizens to report property offences by dialing 100 or contact KPHB police station.

City Pioneer



HYDERABAD SATURDAY | NOVEMBER 16, 2024

03

PLAN TO PROMOTE STATE AS A GLOBAL TOURIST DESTINATION

TG to form new panel for tourism promotion, says Minister Jupally

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a move to boost tourism, Telangana's Excise, Tourism, Culture and Archaeology Minister Jupally Krishna Rao announced the formation of a new committee to promote the State's rich cultural and historical heritage. The initiative aims to attract domestic and international visitors to explore Telangana's tourism hotspots.

Speaking at the Travernia Fest held at HICC, Madhapur, Minister Krishna Rao highlighted the government's commitment under Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's leadership to position Telangana as a prime tourism destination. "Our goal is to ensure that every visitor to Telangana gets the opportunity to experience our historical monuments, cultural heritage and scenic tourist spots," the Minister stated while inaugurating the event.

Jupally announced that a comprehensive action plan is being drafted to streamline tourism efforts. The soon-to-



be-formed committee will focus on organising visits for tourists, officials and delegates attending national and international conferences and meetings in Telangana. "We are working to turn every opportunity into a platform to showcase

heritage and lifestyle practices. It featured exhibits showcasing historical landmarks, cultural traditions, culinary practices and the lifestyles of various regions worldwide.

Prominent attendees included UN Tourism Ambassador Carl Joshua, historian Dr Sinharaja Thammita and Travernia Fest founder Dr Anthony Vipin Das. Representatives from the transportation and travel industries were also present, offering support to Telangana's tourism initiatives.

Jupally emphasised that the government has placed tourism at the forefront of its agenda. "New schemes are being implemented to ensure that Telangana becomes a preferred destination for tourists. Every effort is being made to promote the State as a hub for cultural and heritage tourism," he said.

The Minister concluded by inviting attendees to explore Telangana's iconic tourist spots and join hands in promoting the State as a global tourism destination.



Prez, Guv and CM to attend Lok Manthan programme

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy said that the Lok Manthan programme will be held from November 21 to 24 at Shilpakala Vedika. President Droupadi Murmu, Governor Jishnu Dev Varma, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, former vice-president M Venkaiah Naidu, RSS chief Mohan Bhagavath and several Union Ministers will attend the programme, Kishan Reddy said.

Speaking to the media on Friday, Kishan Reddy said that the delegates will come from 12 nations, 100 speakers, 350 varieties of programmes and 1,500 artists will participate in it. He said that the Lok Manthan will take place every two years and this time the programme is taking place in Hyderabad for four days.

Kishan Reddy said that Indian culture will spread unity. He said that Lok Manthan will be held in the manner that takes place similar to sea-storming. He said that the amalgamation of tribal, urban and rural people will be called a nation. However, unfortunately, a conspiracy is going on to divide the people on the basis of castes. He said that the Centre is conducting Birsa Munda birth anniversary as Tribal Honorary Day.

He said that Venkaiah Naidu will inaugurate exhibition stalls on November 21. President Droupadi Murmu will start the Lok Manthan programme on November 22. He appealed to the people to attend all the programmes.

Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak birth anniversary

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Sikhs across Telangana celebrated the 555th Prakash Utsav (birth anniversary) of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and founder of Sikhism, with devotion. The celebrations focused on peace and communal harmony, that concluded on Friday. Thousands of Sikh devotees and people from other faiths participated in prayers to Sri Guru Granth Sahibji, recitations of Gurbani Keertans and enjoyed Guru Ka Langar (free community kitchen).

Major events took place at Gurudwara Saheb,

Secunderabad and Gurudwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Ashok Bazar, drawing over 25,000 devotees at the 'Vishaal Deewan' (mass congregation) at Exhibition Grounds, Nampally.

Renowned Ragi Jathas, including Bhai Lakhwinder Singh and Bhai Amarjeet Singh, delivered hymns emphasising values like unity and communal harmony.

Preachers highlighted Guru Nanak's teachings on equality, oneness of God, truth and service.

The celebrations ended with Guru-Ka-Langar, creating unity and fraternity.



Eight special trains for Sabarimala pilgrims

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The South Central Railway (SCR) has announced eight additional pre-Sabarimala special trains to cater to the increased demand during the pilgrimage season. These services will connect Moula Ali and Machilipatnam with Kollam, offering pilgrims enhanced convenience.

Moula Ali-Kollam Specials -Train No. 07143/07144 will make four trips, stopping at key stations such as Cherlapalli, Kazipet, Vijayawada, Coimbatore and Kottayam. Machilipatnam-Kollam Special-Train No. 07145/07146 will make four trips and will halt at major stations, including Gudivada, Renigunta, Tiruppur and Chengannur.

Both services will operate in both directions and feature a mix of First AC, 2AC, 3AC, Sleeper Class and General Second Class coaches.

NO SONGS RELATED TO ALCOHOL, DRUGS Diljit Dosanjh asked not to use kids during live show

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana government has issued notices to Diljit Dosanjh not to use children on stage during live shows in Cyberabad and not to sing alcohol, drugs or violent gun culture songs.

This was in response to representation received from Panditrao Dharenavar, Welfare of Women and Children, Disabled and Senior Citizens Department that the live show to be held at GMR Arena

Airport Approach Road, Shamshabad, Cyberabad. The directives were that Children must not be used on stage during the live show. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines, peak sound pressure levels above 120 db are harmful to children and such exposure must be avoided.

The singer, Diljit Dosanjh, is directed not to perform



songs that promote alcohol, drugs, violence, or gun culture during the event. The representation includes video evidence of similar performances during his previous live shows at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, New Delhi, on October 26th and 27th, where songs like CASE, Pancharatna and Patiala Peg were performed.

FGG urges CM to constitute Municipal Building Tribunal

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Forum for Good Governance (FGG) has written to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, urging immediate action to constitute the Municipal Building Tribunal to address the issue of unauthorised constructions across Telangana.

In a letter dated November 15, FGG president M Padmanabha Reddy emphasised the pressing need to implement the High Court's order in W.P. (PIL) No. 113 of 2019. The letter highlighted that unauthorised constructions are severely hampering the planned development of cities and causing significant community challenges.

The Municipal Building Tribunal was established in 2016 to curb such constructions and expedite related cases. However, the tribunal remains non-functional due to the absence of a Chairperson and technical members. Reddy pointed out

that despite the High Court disposing of a PIL in April 2022 with the assurance from the Government Pleader that the tribunal would be constituted within four weeks, no progress has been made in over two years.

The letter also referenced the recent actions of the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Management Authority (HYDRAMA), which has been demolishing illegal structures, sparking political controversies and legal challenges. "Had the tribunal been made functional, the need for HYDRAMA's intervention could have been avoided," Reddy stated.

FGG noted that the High Court has already suggested the names of three retired judges for the Chairperson role, which should simplify the process. The letter concluded with an appeal to the Chief Minister to take swift steps to appoint the necessary personnel and make the tribunal operational.

8 held for duping investors through fake buyback and double gold schemes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cyberabad EOW Police arrested eight people for cheating investors through fake buyback and double gold schemes. The accused collected deposits under 12 Wealth Capital Services Pvt. Ltd. and other companies, promising high returns but failed to pay interest or return the invested amounts.

According to the Police, the

arrested were booked under various Sections in Crime No. 85/2024, individuals include Kalidindi Pavan Kumar (MD of the company), Ravula Sathyanarayana, Boddulu Hari Krishna, Valluru Bhasker Reddy, Pagadala Ravi Kumar Reddy, Kollati Jyothi, Kuralla Mounika and Kurkula Lavanya.

The Police stated that their modus operandi involved offering schemes like a 25-

month Buyback Open Plots scheme with monthly returns of 4% and a Double Gold Scheme promising double returns in gold after a year. They also ran a Gold Chits Scheme, misleading investors with false promises, ultimately defrauding approximately Rs 300 crore from 3,600 people.

The Cyberabad EOW Police advised people to avoid unauthorised schemes to prevent fraud.

'Jharkhand Formation Day' hosted at Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a colorful and culturally rich event, Governor of Telangana Jishnu Dev Varma commemorated the Formation Day of Jharkhand State as part of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative at the Durbar Hall, Raj Bhavan, Hyderabad, on November 15.

Jharkhand, established on November 15, 2000, celebrates its Foundation Day to honour the visionaries and leaders instrumental in its creation.



The date also marks the birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, the iconic tribal leader and freedom fighter, whose contributions

remain a beacon of inspiration. In his address, Governor Varma extended heartfelt greetings to the people of Jharkhand

and paid rich tributes to the architects of the State. Highlighting Birsa Munda's extraordinary sacrifices, the Governor praised the decision to observe his birth anniversary as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, a fitting tribute to tribal freedom fighters. "The formation days of states celebrate our diversity and strengthen the unity of India. It is through such occasions that we appreciate and understand the unique cultures enriching our nation," the Governor said.

200 electric autos transported on NMG rakes from Hyd to Delhi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Automobile traffic was loaded utilising New Modified Goods (NMG) rake from Balanagar on November 14. A total 200 electric autos were transported on NMG rakes covering a distance of 1,770 kms from Balanagar station in Hyderabad to Bijwan station in Delhi, Northern Railway, generating revenue of Rs 17.5 lakh.

The South Central Railway said that it has been undertaking various initiatives to improve freight traffic in recent years.

Business development units have also been set up across the six divisions of the zone to strengthen the freight basket and undertake extensive marketing efforts to bring freight customers.

Accordingly, KETO Motors, having their plant at

Rajpur village in Jadcherla, have come forward for transportation of automobiles from Balanagar station. Further, another 6 to 7 rakes of automobile traffic is expected to be loaded from Balanagar railway station by the same consignor.



SPECIAL CAMP ON CHILDREN'S DAY NIMS performs free cleft surgeries

DEEPIKA PASHAM
deepikapasham2015@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

The Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) screened 40-50 children during a special camp held from November 1 to 9 for Children's Day. Four children underwent free cleft surgeries, while other cleft surgeries are being planned soon.

Dr R Parvathi, HOD of the department, told The Pioneer: "We had screened various cases, including cleft lip and palate, ear, hand, face and skull deformities and conditions like Birth Palsy, resulting from nerve damage during delivery."



For comprehensive cleft surgeries, Smile Train India supports children with costs covering admission, food, surgery and travel. Other surgeries for economically weaker families are provided through Aarogyasri or the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF).

Dr Parvathi explained that some surgeries, like ear reconstruction, depend on age and are advised at later stages. She added that NIMS is dedicated to raising awareness about craniofacial surgeries, which

are complex but successfully performed at the hospital at no cost for the underprivileged. This year until November, five such surgeries have been completed at NIMS, where private hospitals charge Rs 4-5 lakh.

The department urged gynaecologists to guide parents early, as advanced 3D ultrasound scanning can detect conditions requiring intervention. A 12-year-old girl was born with Syngathia, a rare

craniofacial condition where her lower jaw was fused to her cheekbone, leaving her unable to open her mouth. This caused severe feeding difficulties, undernourishment and asymmetry in her face. Diagnosed through a 3D CT scan, her case was particularly complex, with fewer than 120 cases reported globally by 2018.

171 grievance applications received at Prajavani

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A total of 171 grievance applications were received in Prajavani on Friday at the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Praja Bhavan.

According to the officials, 41 applications were received for BC welfare department, 30 for the Panchayati Raj & Rural Development department, 21 for Electricity department, one for Pravasi and 45 for other departments. Deputy Chairman of the State Planning Commission Dr G Chinna Reddy and Special Officer of Public Administration D Divya participated in the programme and received the applications.



Need to check transportation of drugs stressed

PNS ■ MULUGU

District Superintendent of Police Shabarish P directed the police that constant surveillance should be maintained at national highway 163 to prevent anti-social activities. He also emphasized the importance of curtailing marijuana transportation and the production of illicit liquor.

On Friday, as part of the annual inspection, Shabarish conducted an inspection of the Tadwai Police Station. He reviewed the records in the station and inquired about the cases registered, their status, and directed the speedy closure of pending cases. He also inspected the weapons, and the proficiency of the staff.

During the inspection, the SP discussed issues related to anti-social activities with the staff and emphasised that since the surrounding areas of the Tadwai Police Station are adjacent to the Bhadradi Kothagudem and Bayyaram forests, surveillance on Maoist movements must be strengthened. He also instructed that awareness programmes should be conducted for the people belonging to Gutthi Koya tribes. Special attention should be given to curtail the transportation of ganja, especially since the area is Maoist-affected, and measures should be taken to ensure the safety of the people.

The Superintendent of Police was accompanied by Mulugu DSP Ravinder, Circle Inspector Pasra Ravinder and others.

Five engineering students caught using cannabis

TGANB personnel raided the SR University and found marijuana hidden in hostel rooms

PNS ■ WARANGAL

In a hostel room at SR University Engineering College on the outskirts of Warangal city, five students were caught smoking marijuana in their hostel rooms. This incident occurred on Thursday night, according to officials.

The Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau (TGANB) police team received information about a student consuming marijuana in the hostel room and immediately searched the college premises. The five students were found using cannabis. Upon further inspection of the room, marijuana packed in sachets was discovered. It was revealed that two second-year B.Tech students and three third-year students were among the arrested.

In the past also, students from SR University had been caught with marijuana and large quantities of contraband were also seized, the officials said.



This latest incident, where students were caught red-handed, has raised concerns among the parents. Parents are urging the management to intervene and ensure such incidents do not recur.

Emphasising the need for professional counsellors in educational institutions, official sources pointed out that the incident showed that the youth are increasingly drifting away from the right path. Instead of prioritising their education and striving toward a brighter future, many are falling prey to drugs and jeopardising their whole future.

In this context, the drug bust at SR University once again showed that cannabis is freely available. The Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau (TGANB) police raided the university and apprehended the five students. The searches conducted in the hostel rooms revealed that the marijuana was found hidden in the hostel rooms. The arrested students were handed over to a local police station. The incident, with students caught openly using marijuana on campus, has sparked a heated discussion. The police are now investigating who is supplying the drugs to the students and how long this activity has been going on.

Meanwhile, the Telangana government is committed to making the state drug-free and taking various steps in this direction. However, despite all these efforts, the youth continue to ruin their bright futures by falling into the trap of addiction.

Stray dogs injure many in Rajanna Sircilla dist

PNS ■ RAJANNA SIRICILLA

In YellareddyPet mandal in the district, stray dogs attacked four people in two separate incidents. According to local reports, a woman named Mehrreen was sitting outside her house near the new bus station, rolling beedis, when a stray dog from the same street attacked her, injuring her. When the woman screamed in pain, locals rushed to her aid and chased the dog away.

MLA distributes safety kits to toddy tappers

PNS ■ MUNUGODE/NALGONDA

In an important initiative aimed at ensuring the safety of toddy tappers in Munugode constituency, MLA Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy on Friday distributed Kattamayi Safety Kits to toddy tappers in the constituency. The event, which was held in the Munugode mandal, was organised in coordination with the Prohibition and Excise Department and the Backward Classes Welfare Department.



Congress MLA Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy distributing safety kits to toddy tapper at Munugode in Nalgonda district on Friday

This distribution is part of an effort to improve the safety of toddy tappers who often face dangerous conditions while climbing trees to tap toddy.

The safety kits provided to these workers include essential protective equipment to prevent accidents, especially from falls, which are common in this line of work.

During the event, Komatireddy Rajagopal Reddy spoke about the importance of safety and shared a personal story of his childhood friend Anjamma Goud, who tragically fell from a tree while tapping toddy and suffered severe injuries.

He highlighted the importance of using the safety kits to prevent such accidents and urged the workers to refrain from consuming alcohol while working, as it can increase the likelihood of falls and injuries.

As part of the first phase, a total of 200 safety kits were distributed to the toddy tappers. The kits, which contain six essential safety items, come with instructions on how to use them effectively.

The workers have already been trained on how to use the equipment, with a live demonstration to ensure proper use of the kits.

In addition to the safety kit distribution, Rajagopal Reddy also participated in the Kartika Purnima celebrations at Chillapuram in the Santana

Narayanapuram Mandal. The MLA, who visited the Sri Ramalingeshwar Swamy Temple, offered prayers and conveyed his best wishes to the people on this auspicious occasion. Local leaders and devotees warmly welcomed him, and special prayers were held at the temple.

Furthermore, he laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Ambedkar Bhavan at Janagam Village under Narayanapuram Mandal. This marks the beginning of fulfilling a 40-year-long wait for the community. Funds to the tune of Rs 6 lakh has already been allocated for the project, and additional funds will be provided in the future.

Renuka Yellamma Kalyana Mahotsavam celebrated with fervour

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The Renuka Yellamma Kalyana Mahotsavam was celebrated with fervor in Lingandana village of Keshampet Mandal. Speaking at the event, MLC Nagar Kunta Naveen Reddy emphasised the importance of worshipping God with devotion rather than fear. MLC Naveen Reddy actively participated in the event, offering special prayers to the goddess and seeking her divine blessings. He was accompanied by various notable personalities, including PACC Chairman Jagdish Goud, former Market Committee Vice Chairman Lakshminarayana Goud,

and former MPTC Yadaiah. Other prominent attendees were Single Window Director Madhusudan, former Lingandana Sarpanch Pratap, and Papireddy Guda's former Sarpanch Vishnu Vardhan Reddy. The ceremony witnessed the participation of several village residents and local leaders such as Nagilla Ramaiah, Nagilla Krishna, Jangaiah, Venkat, Krishnaiah, Purushottam, Bhaskar, Balaswamy, Kanugula Srinu, Tirupati Reddy, Lingam, Shekhar, Manikantha, Babu, Chinna Ramulu, Upasarparch Ram Reddy, Purushottam, Kishore, Mallesh, Anjaneyulu, and Narasimha, among others.



MLC Nagar Kunta Naveen Reddy taking part in Renuka Yellamma Kalyana Mahotsavam in Lingandana village in RR district on Fridays

Looking for a mate, Maha tiger goes 500 km into Adilabad forests

PNS ■ ADILABAD

There is a tiger, named Jani, in the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra. Last month, during an auspicious moment, the tiger felt the need to find a mate. However, it found no one in the vicinity, so it began its journey in search of a companion, according to official sources.



Jani travelled all the way, walking a staggering 200 kilometres, and reached the forests in Adilabad district. In October, Jani went about from place in the Boath mandal area of Adilabad district and attacked and killed a cow. Afterwards, the tiger moved into the Sarangapur mandal in the Nirmal district, but it could not settle down. The tiger then moved back to the Maharashtra border.

Jani kept roaming and moving across different regions. In the past 10 days, the tiger came back and entered the Kuntala mandal and killed two livestock. Just five days ago, it was seen at the Mahabub Ghats, along the Adilabad-Nirmal border at night, scaring the locals.

On the following day, Jani attacked a cow in the forest area under Mamda mandal and killed it. Currently, Jani is still roaming around the same region, continuing its search for a mate and a den.

Forest authorities have set up tracking cameras to monitor Jani's movements and have issued warnings to the public to stay alert. They are advising people not to venture into the forest alone, warning against any harm to the tiger. It is being emphasised that tigers are different from other animals. During the mating season, they can travel long distances in search of a mate and a den. So far, Jani has travelled 500 kilometres.



Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar holding a review meeting in Sircilla on Friday

Officials told to make arrangements for CM's visit to Sircilla on Nov 20

PNS ■ RAJANNA SIRICILLA

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy will visit Sircilla on November 20. Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar on Friday directed the officials to make all arrangements for the Chief Minister's visit to the district for the first time after becoming the Chief Minister.

At the review meeting, Minister Prabhakar, along with Government Whip and Vemulawada MLA Aadi Srinivas, Malkondu MLA Kummampally Sathanarayana, emphasised that the officials of all departments should work in coordination with each other.

A review meeting on preparations for the CM's visit was held on Friday at the auditorium of the Integrated District Office Complex.

The Minister inquired in detail about the performance of government departments and the implementation of welfare and developmental programmes at the grassroots.

The Minister said that under the leadership of the Chief Minister, the government is implementing numerous developmental and welfare programs to benefit the people. He emphasised that the government is working with a strong commitment to improve the living standards of the people.

The Minister clarified that the state government's prestigious Comprehensive Family Survey, which includes social, economic, education,

employment, political, and caste data, should not be misunderstood by the public. He urged the people to cooperate with enumerators and provide the required details during the survey. He also instructed government officials to respond to any misconceptions and explain the necessity of the survey.

The Minister stated that welfare schemes would not be snatched away from any eligible family due to caste survey.

Prabhakar directed to official to ensure that farmers do not face any difficulties while selling their paddy. He instructed the officials that arrangements should be made to collect the paddy and ensure payment within two days.

He also emphasised that there should be no problems in the sale of low-grade paddy and if rice millers do not cooperate, warehouses should be arranged for storing the paddy.

The Minister directed the concerned authorities to identify land for the construction of an Integrated Hostel, a prestigious project by the state government. He instructed that the concerned departments move forward with the necessary steps.

Government Whip and Vemulawada MLA Aadi Srinivas requested the government to take action to sanction 10,600 houses for the displaced people of the Mid Manair area in the Vemulawada constituency under the Indiramma Housing Scheme.

MBBS student's death shrouded in mystery

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

A tragic incident has unfolded in Patancheru. A student who had gone to the Philippines for medical studies died under suspicious circumstances. A pall of gloom descended on the family.



MBBS course at Perpetual Health University in Manila, Philippines. It is reported that Snihdha died on her birthday under suspicious circumstances. Fellow students informed her parents that Snihdha had died around 3 am on Friday. Her parents are devastated by the news of her death.

According to sources, Chinta Snigda (17), daughter of Chinta Amruth Rao, a resident of Indresham Gram Panchayat in Sangareddy district, was studying in the second year of the

The deceased student's father, Amruth Rao, works as a Deputy Engineer in the Electricity Department.

'TG govt to preserve tribal heritage'

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

District Tribal Development Officer Vijayalakshmi has stated that steps are being taken to preserve tribal culture heritage, national honor, and inspire future generations.

On Friday, during the Tribal Honor Day celebrations held at the local Tribal Bhavan to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda, the District Tribal Development Officer participated in the event. She garlanded the portrait of Bhagwan Birsa Munda and paid tribute.

On this occasion, the District Tribal Development Officer said that the government of India celebrates November 15th as National Tribal Honor Day to recognise the contribution of tribal communities in the nation's history and culture. She added that the celebrations are held on the birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda. She also mentioned that this year marks the



District Tribal Development Officer Vijayalakshmi paying floral tributes to the portrait of Bhagwan Birsa Munda at the Tribal Bhavan in Khammam on Friday

4th National Tribal Honor Day celebrations, and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has taken special measures for the welfare of the tribal community. The government has allocated Rs 17,056 crore under the special development fund for Scheduled Tribes in the state budget, she said. The cultural programmes organised during the event were appreciated by the attendees.

The event was attended by Assistant Tribal Welfare Officers Zaheeruddin, Satyavathi, Tribal Association President Bhukya Veerabhadram, Sant Sevala Sena State President B. Kishan Nayak, ACOM Ramulu, GCC Manager, Tribal Organization Leaders Mangya Nayak, B. Shoban Nayak, Srikant, and others.

STORING GROUP-3 EXAM PAPERS

Collector inspects strongroom set up

PNS ■ NALGONDA

District Collector Ila Tripathi has directed the officials to ensure tight security around the strong room where the Group-3 examination materials are stored. She emphasised the importance of safeguarding the question papers and other confidential materials at the designated strong room.

On Friday, the Collector inspected the strong room set up at NG College in Nalgonda town, where the materials for the Group-3 examination are being securely stored. During the inspection, she provided specific instructions to the Revenue Court Officers (RCOs) and Chief Superintendents regarding the



District Collector Ila Tripathi inspecting the strong room set up for the Group-3 exams at NG College in Nalgonda on Friday

safety protocols for handling the exam materials. The Collector stressed that the confidentiality and security of all

examination-related documents must be maintained at all costs. Further, the Collector

instructed the Chief Superintendents to provide comprehensive training to the invigilators responsible for conducting the exams, ensuring they are well-prepared to handle the exam day procedures effectively.

The Collector was accompanied by Additional Collector J Srinivas, Revenue Divisional Officer Ashok Reddy, Nalgonda DSP Shivarami Reddy, Tahsildar Srinivas, and other district officials.

This inspection is part of the district administration's efforts to ensure a smooth and transparent conduct of the Group-3 examinations with an emphasis on maintaining strict security measures for all examination-related materials.

ACROSS THE STATES



100 underprivileged kids given solar lanterns

One hundred underprivileged children were given solar lanterns as part of a public awareness drive about the use of green energy at a programme by Science City, a unit of the National Council of Science Museums. The children got hands-on experience and fabrication of solar lanterns at the programme and acquired a new skill, organisers said in a statement on Friday. Science City, Kolkata Director Anurag Kumar said, "This event has provided us with an opportunity to engage the community in discovering the potential of solar energy, equipping participants with the skills and insights needed to embrace green energy solutions." The solar lanterns were distributed to the little ones on November 14 on the occasion of the Children's Day at the programme themed 'Green Energy, Clean Energy'. The 100 underprivileged children, hailing from different parts of West Bengal, were brought by civil society organisations.



'SIT formed to probe into tab fund diversion scam'

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said that her government has formed a Special Investigating Team (SIT) to probe into a fraud in which government funds sent to bank accounts of students for purchasing tabs or mobile phones were diverted elsewhere. Six people were arrested in this connection, she said while speaking to journalists at the Bagdogra airport in the northern part of the state before flying back to Kolkata. The government had sent Rs 10,000 to the bank accounts of each higher secondary student of government schools to purchase a tablet or mobile, but several of them did not receive the money due to alleged malpractices. "An SIT has been formed. Our administration is very strong. They have already arrested six people and will do whatever is required. The group (involved in the case) is from Maharashtra and Rajasthan."



Women voters outnumber men in Jharkhand polls

Women voters outnumbered men in phase 1 of the Jharkhand assembly elections with 37 of 43 seats recording a higher women turnout. Election Commission said on Friday. The phase 1 of polls held on November 13 also saw a voter turnout of 66.65 per cent, which was 2.75 per cent higher than the turnout recorded in the 2019 assembly polls in these 43 seats. "Women voters participated enthusiastically, surpassing the overall male turnout by 4.8 per cent, underscoring their increasing involvement in shaping the democratic process," EC said. Jharkhand chief electoral officer has confirmed that all polling parties have returned safely and scrutiny has been completed in the presence of the candidates or their authorised agents. Final votes polled will be available post-counting with the counting of postal ballots. Postal ballots include those given to service voters, absentee voters — those above 85 years of age, persons with disability, those deployed in essential services and voters on election duty.

Parivarvaad: Oppn on kin of VIPs packed in UP House

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Following an expose by a leading English daily, according to which one fifth of the vacancies in Uttar Pradesh Assembly and Council were filled with kin of VIPs, the opposition parties have accused the BJP of 'parivarvaad (dynastic politics)', a charge that the ruling party has often hurled at the opposition.

According to an expose by The Indian Express at a time when aspirants of the Provincial Civil Services and Review Officers (ROs) and Assistant Review Officers (AROs) preliminary exams, of the 186 vacancies for the posts of ROs and AROs, 38 candidates who were selected had links with officials and politicians.

An estimated 2.5 lakh aspirants had applied for the post. Their tests were held in two rounds in 2020-2021 to fill up administrative posts in the UP Legislative Assembly and UP Legislative Council.

The newspaper report claimed that those who successfully made it to the coveted list included the then UP Speaker's



PRO and his brother, a former minister's nephew, son of Legislative Council secretariat in-charge, four relatives of Legislative Assembly secretariat in-charge, son of Deputy Lokayukta, son and daughter of Department of Parliamentary Affairs in-charge and son of former OSD to two chief ministers.

When contacted, the then Speaker of the UP Assembly Hriday Narayan Dixit told PTI,

"The matter is pending in the court and hence, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this."

Principal Secretary to the UP Assembly Pradeep Dubey could not be contacted for comments despite repeated efforts.

Member of UP Legislative Council (MLC) of the Samajwadi Party (SP), Ashutosh Sinha told PTI, "The matter is

pending in the court and it is all a matter of probe. But it seems that the BJP indulges in 'parivarvaad' (dynastic politics) when it comes to distribution of tickets during elections or when selecting candidates for jobs."

UP Congress leader Ashok Singh said, "The matter is pending in court and it should be fairly probed. All those guilty must be identified and given befitting punishment."

Prez, PM, leaders pay tributes to tribal icon Birsa Munda

PNS ■ PATNA/NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders across political parties on Friday paid tributes to tribal icon Birsa Munda on his 150th birth anniversary, which is celebrated as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas.

Birsa Munda, known as 'Dharti Aba' (father of the land), was born in Jharkhand on November 15, 1875. He had led the tribal uprising against the British and died at the age of 25 while in custody.

Modi took to social media, describing Munda as a national hero who sacrificed everything to protect the honour of the motherland. "My deepest respects to him on the auspicious occasion of his birth anniversary," Modi posted on X.

"Bhagwan Birsa Munda ji sacrificed everything to protect the honour and glory of the motherland. My deepest respects to him on the auspicious occasion of his birth anniversary," Modi posted on X.

The PM also greeted the people of Jharkhand on the state's foundation day, acknowledging the sacrifices of the tribal community in shaping the state and its development.

In another post on X, Modi said, "Many best wishes to all my brothers and sisters of Jharkhand on the foundation



day of the state. This land irrigated by the struggles and sacrifices of the tribal community has always made the country proud. I wish that this state, full of natural resources, moves ahead at a fast pace on the path of development."

Addressing a rally in Bihar's Jamui, Modi charged previous Congress governments in the country with having tried to undermine the contributions of tribal leaders to the freedom movement "so that only one party and one family got away with the credit".

Modi asserted that he worshipped the 'Adivasi Samaj' and his government took the decision to celebrate Munda's birth anniversary as 'Janjatiya Gaurav Divas' (the day of glory for tribals) because the community never got its due.

"Tribals have played their role in preserving the country's cultural heritage since times immemorial. It was the 'Adivasi Samaj' that helped the evolution of Lord Rama from a prince to a god," the PM said.

"Tribals also played a significant role in the struggle for Independence. But the previous governments deliberately tried to suppress this fact so that all credit was given to one party and one family," alleged Modi, who spoke in the presence of BJP allies like Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Union minister Chirag Paswan.

President Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla offered floral tributes at the statue of Birsa Munda at the Prerna Sthal in Parliament complex.

BIHAR BRIDGE COLLAPSE INCIDENTS

PIL petitioner seeks to bring on SC records news reports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A PIL petitioner has moved the Supreme Court seeking its nod to bring on record various news reports and additional documents to highlight dilapidated conditions of bridges in Bihar.

A bench comprising the then Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, since retired, and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra had on July 29 this year sought responses from the Bihar government and others, including the National Highway Authorities of India (NHAI), on the PIL filed by lawyer Brajesh Singh.

On November 4, the top court agreed to consider listing for hearing the PIL that raised concerns about the safety and longevity of bridges in Bihar after several of them collapsed in recent months.

The plea is likely to be heard on November 18. Singh on November 14 filed an interim application in his pending PILs seeking to bring on record as many as 15 news reports relating to poor conditions of bridges in the state.

"I have filed an IA (interim application) for placing additional documents before the concerned bench as in the state of Bihar the bridges and culverts



are still in dilapidated conditions and they are collapsing on a routine basis," Singh said.

He referred to a recent incident of Bihar's Nalanda district where one 18-year-old boy died after falling into the river from a dilapidated bridge.

The lawyer said the state government and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) have not filed their responses till date despite the top court issuing the notices in July.

He claimed recently on November 3 one under-construction bridge collapsed in Darbhanga district and the company concerned was seen removing that debris in the night secretly.

a structural audit and setting up of an expert panel to identify bridges that can be either strengthened or demolished based on its findings.

Besides the state and the NHAI, the top court had also issued notices to the road construction department's additional chief secretary, Bihar Rajya Pul Nirman Nigam Limited chairperson and rural works department's additional chief secretary.

Ten incidents of bridge collapse have been reported in Bihar's Siwan, Saran, Madhubani, Araria, East Champaran and Kishanganj districts during May, June and July this year. Many claimed that heavy rainfall might have led to the incidents.

Punjab Police bust narco smuggling, arms cartel

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Amritsar police have busted trans-border narco smuggling and arms cartel with the arrest of two persons.

Police have seized over 8 kg heroin, 6 kg opium, 13.1 kg chemical and four pistols along with 17 cartridges from their possession, said Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav on Friday.

Those arrested have been identified as Aditya Pratap alias Kaka (23), a resident of Bhalla Colony in Chheharta, Amritsar and Shambhu Kabir (35), a resident of Prem Nagar, Tarn Taran Road

in Amritsar, he said.

DGP Yadav said that both the accused have criminal history as cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and Arms Act are registered against them, while, accused Shambhu Kabir is also wanted in a murder case, according to an official statement.

He said that further investigations are going on to establish backward and forward linkages in this case.

Meanwhile, Commissioner of Police, Amritsar, Gurpreet Singh Bhullar said that following reliable inputs about the involvement of



accused Aditya alias Kaka in smuggling of weapons, police teams from Islamabad (Amritsar)

police station laid a trap and arrested him from Band Bhattha at Prem Nagar Road in Kot

Khalsa, Amritsar and recovered two pistols, including .32 bore and .30 bore, and 13 live cartridges from his possession.

He said that during follow-up investigations in this case, name of other accused Shambhu Kabir was also cropped up, following which an operation was launched to nab him.

Kabir was arrested from Old Gas Godown at Guru Ki Wadali Road in Kot Khalsa, Amritsar.

Police teams have recovered 275 gm heroin, 11.1 kg chemical (used to mix with heroin) and one .32 bore pistol from his possession, Bhullar said.



MHA approves first all-women battalion in CISF

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has approved the establishment of the first all-women battalion of CISF, aimed at enhancing women's role in the central forces.

Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has been a preferred choice for women who wish to serve the nation, constituting over seven per cent of the force at present.

The addition of a "Mahila Battalion" would encourage more aspiring young women across the country to join the force and serve the nation, a CISF official said on Friday. It will give a new identity to women in CISF.

The CISF headquarters has started preparations for the early recruitment, training and selection of locations for the headquarters of the new Battalion.

The training is being specially designed to create an elite Battalion capable of performing multifarious roles as commanders in VIP security and also security of airports and Delhi Metro Rail duties.

BONE OF CONTENTION IN MARITAL DISPUTE

1951 Rolls Royce ordered by Nehru for Baroda 'maharani'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A 1951 model antique hand-made classic Rolls Royce car, a single model till date valuing more than Rs 2.5 crore at present and ordered by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru for the erstwhile 'maharani' of Baroda, has become a major bone of contention in a matrimonial dispute in the Supreme Court.

The dispute of the estranged couple has reached the apex court after the Gwalior bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court quashed a case lodged by the woman against her husband for

alleged dowry demand and cruelty.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan, which on Wednesday heard the plea of the woman through senior advocate Vibha Datta Makhija, asked both the parties to explore the possibility of settlement through mediation.

"If both settle the dispute amicably then there is nothing like that," Justice Kant observed, and asked the parties to give one more try to settle the dispute.

It noted, "Senior counsel/counsel for the parties jointly state that though media-



tion had earlier failed before different forums, however, it is worth trying under the aegis of

the Supreme Court Mediation Centre to give one more opportunity to the parties for amicable resolution of their dispute."

Considering Makhija's request, which was agreed to by the other side, the bench appointed senior advocate R Basant as a mediator.

"We, accordingly, appoint R Basant, senior advocate and former judge of the High Court of Kerala to be the mediator. The parties may contact R Basant to fix a date for interaction, as may be convenient to all sides," the bench ordered and posted the matter for further hearing on

December 18. The woman, who is a permanent resident of Gwalior, claimed that she belongs to a highly reputed family whose ancestor was admiral in the navy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and was declared ruler of Konkarn region.

The husband belongs to a family which has an Army background and runs an educational institution in Madhya Pradesh.

The woman claimed that her estranged husband and his family had continuously harassed her with dowry demands of Rolls Royce car and a flat in Mumbai, a charge denied by the man.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Right to breathe

As Delhi air turns toxic, Delhiites face severe health risks; the capital needs long-term solutions, not knee-jerk reactions

Delhi's air quality has plummeted to hazardous levels, with the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) soaring to a staggering 428, marking the worst pollution levels in the country. As a result, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has announced the enforcement of stringent Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)-3 restrictions starting at 8 AM on Friday. On Thursday, the 24-hour AQI for the city reached 428, signaling a "severe" air quality category, which poses serious health risks to the population, especially children, the elderly and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions. The current AQI level of 428 puts Delhi in the "Severe" category, indicating that the air is dangerously polluted and immediate action is required to prevent further deterioration of public health. In response to the deteriorating air quality, the CAQM has imposed the following GRAP-3 restrictions to mitigate the pollution levels: All non-essential construction and demolition activities in Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region (NCR) are suspended to prevent dust and particulate matter from exacerbating the pollution. Vehicles that do not meet the latest emission norms are banned from the roads. Specifically, petrol vehicles that do not comply with BS-III (Bharat Stage III) standards and diesel vehicles that fall under BS-IV norms are prohibited from operating within Delhi and parts of NCR.



These measures are expected to significantly reduce the amount of pollutants being emitted into the air, especially from construction sites and older vehicles, which are major contributors to air pollution. The current spike in pollution levels to a combination of factors. The calm winds and a sharp drop in temperature have trapped pollutants in the air, preventing them from dispersing. The weather conditions have created a 'smog blanket' over the city, intensifying the effects of vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and the burning of crop stubble in neighbouring states. The Supreme Court of India has taken note of the deteriorating air quality and has scheduled a hearing on November 18 to discuss further enforcement measures. The court has emphasised that every citizen has the fundamental right to breathe clean air, as protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Delhi's pollution crisis has now drawn significant national and international attention. While the immediate focus is on enforcing short-term measures like the GRAP-3 restrictions, experts argue that lasting solutions require systemic changes, including stricter emissions standards, better waste management, and a push for cleaner public transportation options. As the city continues to grapple with the toxic smog, Delhi residents are urged to stay indoors as much as possible, avoid strenuous outdoor activities, and wear N95 masks to protect themselves from the harmful effects of the air pollution. In the coming days, it is hoped that both weather conditions and Govt interventions will bring some relief, but the long-term health of the city's residents depends on sustained efforts to curb the sources of pollution.

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PICTALK



Devotees take a holy dip in the Ganga river at a ghat on the occasion of 'Kartik Purnima' festival, in Varanasi

US-Iran tensions: War clouds over West Asia



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

With regional stability hanging in the balance, the world watches anxiously as West Asia braces for the potential fallout of escalating hostilities

On July 3, 1988, the US Navy's USS Vincennes, in an act of brazen military overreach, shot down Iran Air Flight 655, a civilian airliner carrying 290 passengers, over the Persian Gulf. The Navy's justification—that this was an "unintentional error"—belyes the harsh reality: this was not a mistake, but rather an emblematic instance of Western indifference to the lives of those deemed expendable.

The Navy mistook a commercial flight for an enemy fighter jet, launching two surface-to-air missiles and killing all aboard. Yet, the US response was not to acknowledge a moral failing, but to double down on its denial, offering neither a genuine apology nor reparations to the victims' families. This tragedy was a grim reminder of the West's long-standing practice of dehumanising the peoples of West Asia in its relentless pursuit of geopolitical dominance. For the Iranian people, it was not merely a military blunder; it was a stark dismissal of their humanity, reinforcing the deeply entrenched belief in Western circles that the lives of those beyond its borders are, at best, collateral damage in the pursuit of power.

The echoes of this tragedy persist today, amplified by the volatile relationship between the US and Iran. Just days after Donald Trump's re-election, the US government claimed to have uncovered a plot by Iran to assassinate the president. Iran vehemently rejected these allegations, with Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi dismissing them as a "third-rate comedy" and accusing the US of fabricating a narrative to justify further aggression. Araqchi's derision—mocking the absurdity of an assassin "sitting in Iran and talking online to the FBI"—renewed the deep mistrust that defines the US-Iran relationship.

Now that Trump has secured a second term and will become the 47th President of the USA, it is clear that his foreign policy, especially towards Iran, could become far more aggressive, with disastrous consequences. His planned appointments of hawkish figures



such as Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defence, Steven C Witkoff as Special Envoy on West Asia Affairs and Mike Huckabee as Ambassador to Israel - suggest that peace in the West Asia is more distant than ever. These choices reflect a growing alignment with Israel's interests, further inflaming tensions and laying the groundwork for a catastrophic conflict—one that could see a war against Iran as the ultimate culmination of decades of Western intervention.

This looming disaster cannot be divorced from the historical legacy of Western interference in West Asia. Iran's relationship with the West has been shaped by centuries of betrayal and manipulation. A defining moment in this fraught history was the CIA-backed coup of 1953, which ousted Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he sought to nationalise Iran's oil industry.

This act, orchestrated by Western powers, reinstated the Shah's brutal regime, sowing the seeds for the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This history of intervention, driven by oil and geopolitics, instilled a deep sense of betrayal in the Iranian consciousness—a sentiment that still defines Iran's foreign policy today.

Divided along sectarian lines and often opportunistic in their foreign policy, Iran's



DIVIDED ALONG SECTARIAN LINES AND OFTEN OPPORTUNISTIC IN THEIR FOREIGN POLICY, IRAN'S NEIGHBOURS HAVE REPEATEDLY FAILED TO PUT REGIONAL UNITY AHEAD OF EXTERNAL PRESSURES

neighbours have repeatedly failed to put regional unity ahead of external pressures. Yet, the geopolitical manipulations that have shaped this region's history are part of a broader pattern: the West's refusal to recognise the sovereignty of nations it deems strategically irrelevant.

The Iranian people have grown ever more resolute in their refusal to capitulate to external demands. This isolation, initially born of necessity, has also transformed into a profound existential struggle. In response, Iran has sought alliances with nations like China and Russia and forged relationships with non-state actors in the region. These alliances—born not of ideology, but of pragmatic necessity—have allowed Iran to exert regional influence, shifting the balance of power in ways the West never anticipated.

In his first term, Trump used a two-pronged strategy to weaken Iran: connecting other Arab nations in favour of Israel through the Abraham Accords, a treaty engineered by his Jewish-origin son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and secondly, targeting key personalities who enabled Iran's influence in the region while funding efforts by Iranians living abroad working against Iran.

In his second term, which could be more refined and sharpened by the experiences he earned in the last eight years—both in office and out-

side the White House—his actions could become far more unpredictable. Consequently, the potential for war against Iran is no longer a distant fear; it is a rapidly approaching reality. It would affirm the West's view that the lives of Iranians, like those across the Global South, are expendable in pursuit of geopolitical dominance, making this a war of choice, not necessity, with existential stakes for Iran. In this context, the responsibility to avoid war does not lie solely with the U.S. or Iran, but with all the nations of the region, including those of the Arab world.

Despite their differing beliefs, histories, and alliances, it is incumbent upon Arab nations to take a united stand against the spectre of war. The voices of Arab leaders, particularly those who have long been caught in the geopolitical crossfire of the US-Iran conflict, must rise in defence of regional peace and stability. Divisions must be set aside in favour of collective action that prioritises the preservation of life and sovereignty over ideological differences. The world, and particularly the nations of West Asia, must strive to find a path of diplomacy and dialogue, to avoid yet another destructive war that will further tear apart the very fabric of the region.

(The writer is a journalist and author; Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SIMPLIFY TAX SYSTEM

Madam — The article on simplifying tax structures presents an acceptable argument (14-11-24). The successive governments seem to be under utter confusion and all the changes are found to be further complicating the tax structure rather than making it simple to understand and comply with. GST is further a complicated one in every aspect. The government is not clear even in a matter like what is to be taxed. Essentials are taxed; condoms and bangles are exempted. Falling sick is taxed. Medicines, diagnostic devices and insurance premiums are taxed as if falling sick is a matter of comfort and luxury. Even in the case of direct tax, the government's sense of vengeance over the salaried section is clearly displayed. This section is earning money to spend and save.

Both are good and help build a better economy of the country. But they are made to pay not less than 30 per cent as income tax besides GST on every spending. Besides forgoing a huge part of salary, they have to manage the hardships caused by untamed inflation also. There is no answer on the relevance of toll collections. A road is laid and its expenses are met with one year of toll collection. But collections are carried on for decades and they are never closed. It is this confusion in the mind of the government that drives earners to seek ways and means to avoid tax and accumulate black money. It is high time for the government to overhaul the entire tax system and make it people-friendly.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

STOP ILLEGAL DEMOLITIONS

Madam — The Supreme Court intervened that no government is allowed to rule with a bulldozer, by blazing the houses of the miscreants and culprits like this. The Supreme Court guidelines pace respect to the dreams of the home of every single individual, despite

Ensure doctors' safety



Violence against doctors and medical staff by patients' relatives is a serious issue that has been on the rise. Hospitals often deal with life-and-death situations, leading to heightened emotions; for example, when a patient's health condition worsens or dies, relatives may react violently out of grief and frustration. This can be avoided by informing the patient's condition when it wors-

ens, to prepare the relatives for the worst situation. Sometimes families believe that adequate and proper treatment was not provided, which can be cleared by informing them about the disease and line of treatment being provided. Clear and compassionate communication is crucial to satisfying and pacifying them.

Some patients or their relatives may have mental health issues or be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which can lead to violent tendencies, which need to be noticed and taken care of by the attending medical staff. Overcrowded hospitals, long waiting times, and inadequate basic facilities add to the frustration of patients and their families, resulting in violence. Hence, a multifaceted approach is required to tackle violence against medical professionals in hospitals.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

that he was the been charged culprit under some legal allegations. So far, the UP government has been popularising itself with the Bulldozer Raaj.

The use of bulldozers to demolish the house of the culprits, to give them a lesson, is turning into the way of governance in Uttar Pradesh. The demolishing of the houses and illegal land encroachment must be followed by a legal procedure of waving official legal notice at least 15 days prior and with full opportunity to appeal by the affected party. The move by the apex court will add more transparency to the justice mechanism, and this intervention by the judiciary will assist the innocent to save the sweet home from the red tape bureaucrats and political leaders, who many times hurt the innocent to show their political status and power.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

POLLUTION FROM WASTE

Madam — Instead of resolving environmental problems, Delhi's ambition to convert garbage into energy is creating

health risks. The factory is releasing harmful smoke and ash into the surrounding neighborhoods, despite its goal of reducing landfill waste through rubbish incineration. Significant pollution has resulted, exposing locals to dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals like lead, cadmium, manganese, and arsenic—up to 19 times higher than what the EPA recommends.

Cardiovascular and respiratory disorders, as well as developmental hazards for children, are among the health effects. The absence of crucial safety measures at the plant is criticised by experts. Respiratory problems are common among the locals, and ash contamination has reached neighboring residences, schools, and parks. The intended "green" solution might make Delhi's pollution problem worse if regulatory action is not taken.

Divyansh Pal | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Wooden pallets: Turning timber into treasure



JAY DEEPAK SHAH

Circular economy practices are changing the future of wooden pallets, from innovative recycling methods to tech-driven solutions

Wooden pallets are indispensable in modern logistics, widely used to support the transportation and storage of goods across various industries, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), pharmaceuticals, automotive, chemicals and more.



One of the most effective ways to enhance sustainability in the wooden pallet industry is through repair and refurbishment. While pallets generally have a lifespan of 12 to 18 months, many can be used longer with regular maintenance.

Instead of discarding damaged pallets, companies can inspect and repair them by replacing broken slats and restoring their structural integrity. This process helps conserve raw materials and lowers the carbon footprint associated with manufacturing new pallets. Adopting repair programmes also reduces the demand for fresh timber, which helps prevent deforestation and minimises waste.

Repair and Refurbishment: Repurposing, Upcycling, and Recycling

When wooden pallets are no longer fit for their primary purpose, they can still serve a wide range of functions through repurposing, upcycling, or recycling. Repurposing transforms discarded pallets into furniture, decor, or art, extending their lifespan and keeping them out of landfills. This also supports local economies by providing artisans with reclaimed wood to create unique, eco-friendly products. When repurposing or upcycling are no longer options, recycling can turn pallets into products like particleboard or mulch, which conserves resources and reduces the need for new timber. Together, these strategies help minimise waste and lower environmental impact, encouraging responsible use of resources.

Sustainable Sourcing as a Foundation for Circularity To fully align with circular economy principles, the wood used in pallet manufacturing should be sustainably sourced. Certification programmes, such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), play a

crucial role in ensuring responsible forest management. These certifications verify that forests are managed sustainably, protecting biodiversity, preventing illegal logging, and minimising environmental impact.

The Role of Technology in Enhancing Circularity

Technology is increasingly central to the transformation of wooden pallets, with advancements like the Internet of Things and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) improving pallet management. These technologies allow pallets to be embedded with sensors, which enable real-time tracking of location, condition, and usage. This visibility optimises inventory management and reduces losses. By tracking pallets through their entire lifecycle, businesses can maximise reuse, ensuring that pallets are returned, repaired, and repurposed efficiently. Such technology-driven strategies extend the lifespan of pallets, ensuring they remain in the supply chain as long as possible.

(The writer is CEO & MD at Jay Wood Industry; views are personal)





FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE AND FALL OF EGO

True success lies not in fame or power but in humility and understanding one's purpose of life



RAVI VALLURI

A challenging task or an idea normally releases endorphins, which stimulate the human mind to think out of the box, and when endowed with such an attitude, we scale high altitudes and reach the summit. But there is a flip side. We become attached to the product or the activity flow; consequently, the mind gets entrapped by the adulation. A vivacious model with gravitas, known for scorching beauty and success. At her peril, she ignored the alarm bells, the death knell knocking at her door. She got hooked on alcohol, money, drugs and sex. The talented artiste lost her equanimity, equipoise and equilibrium in a state of feverishness and in the process attracted opprobrium.

The actress was bestowed with several honours and in the process bagged prestigious roles. It was indeed a heady feeling. She was feted at various parties and became a celebrity overnight. However, there was no end to her avarice as her mind and body craved more attention. The "I, Me" syndrome dominated her mind and she spent hours before the mirror, taking selfies, adoring her ravishing beauty and success. At her peril, she ignored the alarm bells, the death knell knocking at her door. She got hooked on alcohol, money, drugs and sex. The talented artiste lost her equanimity, equipoise and equilibrium in a state of feverishness and in the process attracted opprobrium.

The meteoric rise of the artiste was short-lived and her obnoxious behaviour was not acceptable to the industry she was soon stripped of meaty roles and sure enough, lost power and fame. Tragedy struck



in a cruel form as her life was snuffed out at a tender age when she succumbed after a car crash in an inebriated state. Who was to be blamed for this irrational behaviour? False egos play havoc on human minds when the power of discrimination gets obfuscated in the razzmatazz and dazzle of "doership". The breed of such people extends among politicians, entrepreneurs and seekers as they are entrapped by doership and cannot let go and remain humble.

They focus on certain immediate outcomes and in the bargain, lose the plot and larger picture. In the political sphere too, parties become dependent on the success and megalomania of an individual and lose their core strengths of inner democracy and grassroots contact. The spiritual world is not spared either. Seekers, to begin with, tread the path with great courage and conviction and have immense faith in the Master and the path. They unflinchingly participate in sadhana, seva, Satsang, meditation and other activities of the organisation. The Master (Guru) in his magnanimity encourages all his followers. Some progress on the path and others fall aside as the rigour and regimen of spirituality are arduous and crammed with disturbances before the seeker obtains peace of mind. Soon the feverish mind of the seeker feels proximity to the Master and in the process, rubs fellow seekers the wrong way. Some seekers "like" these photographs on Facebook to ingratiate themselves with those purportedly "close", in anticipation that it could act as a passport to have a glimpse of the Guru. A true spiritual leader or Master cautions the faithful not to be trapped in the quagmire of Guru Mandal. "Under the influence of false ego, one thinks himself to be the doer of activities, while all the activities are carried out by nature as a natural process," expounds Lord Krishna to Arjuna. A genuine seeker should realise that we are infinitesimal in this vast universe. Our acts and deeds, if truly positive and humble, will automatically draw us closer to the Guru and the Laws of the Universe.

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

Bangladesh: A nation's press under pressure



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Attacks on media houses and journalists continue notwithstanding the interim Govt's claim that it is committed to upholding media freedom

The media's independence is under severe attack in Bangladesh under the interim government headed by chief advisor Muhammad Yunus. The attack is two-pronged. One of these is directed against media houses and journalists perceived to have been supporters of the Awami League and the government when Sheikh Hasina headed both. The second targets non-aligned media establishments, editors and journalists, including those known for standing up to the Awami League government's repressive media regime. The objective is to pressure them into toeing the line laid down by the young sparks dominating the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) and rabidly anti-Awami League and fundamentalist Islamist elements in sections of the media and the interim government.

Coming to media houses, eight channels were attacked on August 5, 2024, itself, when Sheikh Hasina left for India. Among them was Ekattor TV's office in Baridhara, Dhaka, which was vandalised and burnt down; also attacked on the same day in Dhaka were the premises of Samay TV, and ATN Bangla. On August 19, an armed mob attacked and severely damaged the establishment of East West Media group, which runs Kaler Kantha (Voice of the times) Bangladesh Pratidin (Bangladesh daily), both Bengali-language newspapers, Daily Sun, an English-language daily, News24BD, a television news channel, Radio Capital, a radio station, and Banglanews24, an online Bengali daily. The mob assaulted journalists, injured a woman journalist and harassed women employees.

As for journalists, according to Reporters Without Borders, a globally-respected international NGO headquartered in Paris, "baseless accusations of killing protesters have been brought against nearly 140 journalists. Twenty-five have been charged with 'crimes against humanity. Many of them have gone into hiding because they fear being arrested and jailed."

A number of journalists have been arrested and jailed. Their ranks include Shakil Ahmed, former head of news at television channel Ekattor TV, and Farzana Rupa, its former chief correspondent, who were arrested from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, on August 21, 2024, when they were about to board a Turkish Airlines flight to Paris via Istanbul, along with their daughter. The two of them remain in prison, as do Mozammel Haque Babu, chief executive officer of Ekattor TV and Shyamal Datta, editor of Bhorer Kagaz (Paper at Dawn) who were arrested on September 15. In a letter emailed recently to Muhammad Yunus, Jodie Ginsburg, chief executive officer of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a respected NGO promoting press freedom and defending the rights of journalists worldwide, urged him to ensure, among other things, respect for the "procedural rights of four incarcerated pro-Awami League journalists: Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, Mozammel Babu and Shyamal Dutta, including their right to a free trial." The arrests are hardly surprising. According to a report in the Dhaka Tribune dated September 19, 2024, the ADSM leader, Nahid Islam who, besides his other hats, is advisor in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, thundered at a press conference on the previous day that the "instigators" of the July-August massacre



EIGHT CHANNELS WERE ATTACKED ON AUGUST 5, 2024, ITSELF WHEN SHEIKH HASINA LEFT FOR INDIA. AMONG THEM WAS EKATTOR TV'S OFFICE IN BARIDHARA, DHAKA, WHICH WAS VANDALIZED AND BURNT DOWN; ALSO ATTACKED ON THE SAME DAY IN DHAKA WERE THE PREMISES OF SAMAY TV, AND ATN BANGLA

[of protesters] would be brought to justice no matter whether they identified themselves as journalists, writers and artists. Doubtless, the interim government was to decide as to who were to be brought to justice.

Just two examples would show how utterly arbitrary and vindictive such decisions have been. The one is the continued incarceration of Shahriar Kabir, an internationally-respected human rights activist, champion of secular humanism, advocate of the bringing war criminals of 1971 to justice, author and journalist. The second is the arrest, on November 6, 2024, of the noted television actor, Shomi Kaiser, daughter of Shahidullah and Panna Kaiser. Shahidullah, a noted writer and journalist, disappeared after being abducted by Pakistani army personnel and their collaborators from the ranks of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and allied organisations like al-Badr, al-Shams and Razakars. His brother, Zaheer Raihan, also disappeared while looking for him. Panna Kaiser was an Awami League Member of Parliament (1996-2001) who worked in the area of youth welfare. Apart from arrests on false charges, the cancellation of accreditation cards, which has reached a total of 167 at the time of writing, is being used as a weapon against journalists. Such cards are important for identifying oneself as a journalist, and securing entry into restricted areas, government offices and meetings. Referring to the matter, Celia Mercier, Head of South Asia Office of Reporters Without Borders,

another globally-respected NGO whose mission is to act for freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism, and defend those who embody these ideals, has said,

"The decision to rescind the accreditation cards of journalists considered close to the previous government is politically-motivated and punitive, and has the effect of intimidating the press. It encourages self-censorship and threatens the very existence of opposition media. This decision by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry [of Bangladesh] is incomprehensible, coming just a week after it took a positive step by establishing a mechanism for reporting cases of harassment against journalists. We urge the ministry to return to this more constructive path by establishing a regulated procedure for issuing and rescinding press cards, by ensuring that cases of harassment are examined impartially, and by putting a final stop to political reprisals against media professionals."

As for pressures on independent media establishments, editors and journalists, the aim is to make them toe the line laid down by the young sparks dominating the ADSM, and rabidly anti-Awami League and fundamentalist Islamist elements in sections of the media and the interim government. The weapons are threats and harangues. At a meeting to discuss "Role of Media in Creating Fascist Narrative: A Review," Mahmudur Rahman, editor of Amar Desh (My Country) criticized two national newspapers, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, for their coverage and com-

mentary on Sheikh Mujib and Sheikh Hasina, suggesting that these outlets are paving the way for fascism by creating contrasting narratives. He further said that the media had fostered hatred towards Islam, misrepresented societal divisions, and perpetuated a narrative of eternal gratitude towards India for its role in Bangladesh's liberation. Significantly, Mahmudur Rahman said this in the presence of Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus' press secretary, Shafiqul Alam.

Events like this have been creating a climate in which channels and publications, including the two of Bangladesh's leading paper which Rahman criticised, are sought to be put under compulsion to conform to the kind of reportage and comment the interim government expects of them.

All this makes a mockery of the interim government's assertions that it is for the freedom of the press and its moves like the setting up of a commission for hearing allegations of harassment by journalists. An editorial in The Daily Star, dated November 7, 2024, delivered a damning indictment of the situation and the interim government's role when it said, "In our pursuit of a fair, anti-discriminatory Bangladesh, few values are as vital as press freedom. We are, therefore, concerned by the persistent intimidation, harassment, and censorship faced by journalists, which shows how the media landscape remains fraught with obstacles."

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer; the views expressed are personal)

Punjab by-elections: A Stage for dynastic politics, defections and defamatory rhetoric

In the run-up to the Punjab Assembly by-elections 2024, political leaders seem to have sidestepped pro-people issues

Elections are usually a good opportunity for political leaders to make public statements and seek public feedback on their pro-people works and policies. But the scene in the Punjab Assembly by-elections 2024 eludes the expectation.



SUKHDEV SINGH

Along with other states in India, there are by-elections in four Assembly constituencies of Punjab for which voting is to be held on November 20, 2024. In the absence of any public-interest manifestos, political parties rely on the 'candidate-winnability' supporting political apostasy and dynastic politics. Most political leaders in the campaign are relying on defamatory garrulous speeches and irresponsible false claims. The trust deficit of the people in politi-

cal parties and the confidence deficit in their leaders is so high that the oldest and traditionally strongest political party of the state, Shiromani Akali Dal, has preferred to not contest the elections. A conglomeration of its disgruntled leaders, the Akali Dal Reform Movement, is also out of the election contest. The contest is triangular among the ruling party in the state- Aam Aadmi Party, the ruling party

in the centre- Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress. In one constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate is a cousin of the Akali Dal chief and has been a minister in the Akali and the Congress governments. He has apostatised three political tastes before joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Aam Aadmi Party candidate left the Akali Dal shortly before the current by-elections.

The Congress party candidate is the wife of the Congress State party president and a 2024-elected Member of Parliament. In another constituency, the Aam Aadmi Party candidate is the son of a 2024-elected Member of Parliament from the same party; the MP had defected

from the Congress just before the 2024 parliamentary elections to contest and win as an Aam Aadmi Party candidate, while the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate has defected Shrimoni Akali Dal; he has been a minister in the SAD government.

In the third constituency, the Congress party candidate is the wife of its party MP and a former Deputy Chief Minister. In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate is a former Akali MLA and the son of a Punjab Assembly speaker in the SAD government. In the fourth constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate has been a former senior Vice-President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and a Congress MLA before deserting the Congress to join



the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Aam Aadmi Party candidate is said to be a favourite of an MP and a former minister, ignoring its former district chief who is contesting as a rebel.

The four vacancies arose because the MLAs in all four contested and won parliamentary elections held in June 2024. In three of the four, the

contesting candidates are the immediate family members of the 2024-elected MPs. As the family members of the MPs, they are assumed to be the 'winning' candidates because their mentors have already proved it by winning the Assembly and then parliamentary elections sequentially.

The question arises whether the political parties do not have any other members from any other section of society who can be 'winning' candidates or if some leaders have turned electoral politics into a family monopoly aka 'nepotism', in which there is no room for other party workers, however sincere and hard-working they may be.

The current situation is so ridiculous that these leaders

and the political parties criticize each other for dynastic politics, nepotism and party defection. Still, when the opportunity arises, they play the game and present their spouses, children and relatives as the only 'winning' candidates and strengthen political dynasticism justifying it in various ways.

Claiming himself the next Chief Minister of the state during his campaign for the BJP candidate, a Government of India Minister compared 'the peasant leaders in protest' with 'Talibans' and threatened action against them after the elections. Not only his threat is defamatory and against the spirit of a democracy, but also an unbecoming rambling coercing votes for the candidate of his party.

Addressing an election meeting in favour of an Aam Aadmi Party candidate, its supreme dubs the sitting Congress MP as "corrupt Randhawa" inviting defamatory threat from him. Further he charges him with 'dynastic politics' ignoring the similar practice by AAP in another constituency where he has campaigned for the candidate on the same day.

Thus the Punjab 2024 By-elections are riddled with defection, dynasticism, defamatory rhetoric, irresponsible rambling, bringing with it a sense of deterioration in democracy which both the people and political parties must address.

(The writer is retired professor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; views are personal)

IN BRIEF

Niti Aayog's WEP partners with Urban Company to empower women

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Niti Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) has partnered with Urban Company to empower women salon and beauty parlour owners, an official statement said on Friday.

According to the statement, WEP, under its award-to-reward initiative, launched the pilot to support women MSMEs to scale up their businesses in the beauty and wellness sector.

Women entrepreneurs will be offered training across six key ecosystem needs, including skilling, legal and compliance, access to finance, market, and business development services, along with mentorship and networking, it added.

A baseline study conducted by MicroSave Consulting identified four key sectors with more than 1,00,000 women MSMEs -- beauty & wellness, textile manufac-

turing, retail trade and food & beverages.

The statement said this pilot initiative aims to develop process templates by leveraging insights and learnings gathered through the programme and upscaling women MSMEs nationwide.

Urban Company will spearhead the programme, collaborating with other key stakeholders to identify women working in micro-units and support their business growth, it noted.

WEP, incubated in Niti Aayog in 2018 as an aggregator platform, transitioned into a public-private partnership in 2022.



Setco Automotive logs consolidated Q2 net loss

Setco Automotive Ltd, a manufacturer of medium and heavy commercial vehicle clutches, reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 34.83 crore for the July-September 2024 quarter, the company announced on Friday. This marks an improvement compared to the consolidated net loss of Rs 40.62 crore recorded during the same quarter of the previous financial year.



230 weekly flights from Kolkata, Bagdogra announced

Air India Express on Friday announced expansion of its services from West Bengal's Kolkata and Bagdogra, increasing the number of weekly flights to over 230 this winter, from 168 in the same season last year. The growth includes new direct routes connecting Kolkata with Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair) and Indore, and Bagdogra with Chennai, the airline said.



HCLTech, ServiceNow inaugurate AI lab in Noida

Company HCLTech in collaboration with American software firm ServiceNow on Friday inaugurated a dedicated AI lab at its Noida campus. Customers can test, navigate and expand innovative solutions tailored to specific challenges within their industry at the facility, a company statement said.

Imports from UAE up 70 pc in October to USD 7.2 bn: Comm min data

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's imports from its free trade agreement partner UAE have jumped by 70.37 per cent year-on-year to USD 7.2 billion in October, leaving a trade deficit of about USD 3.5 billion during that month, according to the commerce ministry data.

The deficit, the difference between imports and exports, was USD 2.47 billion in September.

Cumulatively also, the imports from the UAE during April-October rose by 55.12 per cent to USD 38.64 billion against USD 24.91 billion in the same period previous fiscal, while exports were up by 15.86 per cent year-on-year to USD 20.93 billion compared to USD 18 billion in April-October 2023-24.

The trade deficit during the seven-month period has widened to USD 17.71 billion



from USD 6.85 billion in the same period a year ago.

The FTA between India and the UAE came into effect in May 2022.

According to the data, India's imports from UAE rose by 49.22 per cent to USD 5.38 billion in September and 72.7 per cent to USD 6.38 billion in August.

Exports, on the other hand, increased by 23.75 per cent to USD 2.91 billion in September and 3.16 per cent to USD 2.84 billion in August.

'Dedicated freight corridor is jewel of Indian Railways'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dedicated freight corridor is a very important infrastructure project of the Indian Railways which has made a positive impact on the country's logistics sector, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday calling it "the jewel of Indian Railways".

Congratulating the office bearers of DFCCIL on the occasion of its 19th Foundation day, Vaishnaw said more than 350 goods trains are being operated on the corridor at present and this has improved the efficiency of logistics transportation in the country.

"The timings of cargo transportation have been reduced to half as compared to earlier. The speed of freight trains has made significant improvement. In every way, the DFC has played a crucial role to reduce the logistics cost in the country," Vaishnaw said in a video message that was played during the celebration at Bharat Mandapam here.

Expressing hope that DFC would continue to serve the country, Vaishnaw said that a good integration has taken place in the network of the Indian Railways.

"We have to take it further so that DFC can serve the



country better," he added. The Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Ltd. (DFCCIL) commemorated its 19th Foundation Day celebrating nearly two decades of its service and initiatives for the country's rail freight infrastructure.

Railway Board Chairman and CEO Satish Kumar, DFCCIL Managing Director Praveen Kumar and important representatives from the Railway Board, Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and other stakeholders were present on the occasion.

"DFCCIL has advanced its mission as one of Independent

India's largest infrastructure projects. The corporation has taken monumental strides toward its goal of increasing the railways' share in India's freight landscape, aiming to lower logistics costs from 15% to below 9% and to bolster India's economic growth by stimulating both domestic and international trade," said a press statement issued by DFCCIL on the occasion.

"Today, DFCCIL operates across seven states -- Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra -- positively impacting various industries along its routes, promoting

MSME sector of India and generating jobs for the youth," it added.

According to DFCCIL, its two major corridors -- the Eastern and Western Dedicated Freight Corridors -- are transforming the transportation in India by linking the hinterland with the consumer centres and overseas markets.

The 1,337-km Eastern DFC connects Ludhiana in Punjab with Sonagarh in Bihar and the 1,506-km Western DFC runs from Dadri in Uttar Pradesh to the JNPT Port in Navi Mumbai.

"Both corridors boast cutting-edge rail infrastructure, managed efficiently through state-of-the-art Operation Control Centres (OCCs) in Prayagraj and Ahmedabad. In 2024, DFCCIL reached a significant milestone with over 96% of its project completed & commissioned," the DFCCIL said.

"Moving from construction to full-scale operations, DFCCIL has already taken on over 13% of Indian Railways' total freight load, despite covering just 4% of the rail network. The daily movement of more than 350 trains across DFCCIL's network marks a new phase of operational excellence," it added.

E.I.D. Parry logs consolidated Q2 PAT at Rs 591.66 cr

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Sugar manufacturer E.I.D. Parry India Ltd has recorded a consolidated profit after tax for the July-September 2024 quarter at Rs 591.66 crore, the company said.

The city-headquartered Murugappa Group company had registered a consolidated profit after tax of Rs 781.85 crore in the corresponding quarter of last financial year. For the six months period ending September 30, 2024, the consolidated profit after tax fell to Rs 817.53 crore from Rs 1,106.75 crore registered year ago. The total income during the quarter under review went up to Rs 9,399.73 crore, from Rs 9,210.31 crore registered in the year ago period. For the half year ending September 30, 2024, the consolidated total income stood at Rs

16,206.71 crore, as against Rs 16,225.58 crore registered during the corresponding period of last financial year.

Commenting on the financial performance, company Wholesale Time Director and Chief Executive Officer Muthiah Murugappan said, "the standalone profit of sugar segment was lower in Q2 2024-25 as compared to the corresponding quarter of previous year on account of lower cane volume, a drop in recovery from cane, higher input costs in distillery segment and lower sales volume in sugar on account of lower release quota."

The sugar operations including refinery business reported a loss before interest and tax of Rs 38 crore as compared to profits of Rs 24 crore registered in the same quarter of last financial year.

Shriram Properties posts net loss of Rs 99 lakh in Q2

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Shriram Properties has posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 99 lakh in the September quarter. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 20.15 crore in the year-ago period. Total income declined to Rs 155.1 crore in the July-September period of 2024-25 from Rs 231.24 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding year, according to a regulatory filing on Thursday. Shriram Properties CMD Murali M said, "Q2, FY25 is short-term aberration for the sector that witnessed reduced launches. Long-term prospects for the sector remains positive and our strong market presence and success of our strategic initiatives will enable us in maintaining growth and delivering on promises even in the coming years."

Unifi Asset Management receives SEBI nod to launch mutual fund operations

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Unifi Asset Management Pvt Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Unifi Capital, has received approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to launch its mutual fund operations, a senior official announced on Friday.

Established in 2001 as a portfolio manager, Unifi Capital manages assets worth Rs 27,000 crore as of October 31, 2024, across equity and debt through its Portfolio Management Services (PMS) and Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) platforms in India and abroad. "After 23 years as a portfolio manager, this is a logical milestone in our journey to establish a mutual fund that complements our time-tested services.

IAC pushes for adoption of auto LPG as 'Net Zero Hero'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Auto LPG Coalition (IAC), a nodal body for the promotion of LPG as an auto fuel in the country, has urged the government and OEMs to adopt auto LPG as a 'net zero hero' as it is cleaner and more economical fuel alternative.

With LPG Week 2024, organised by the World Liquid Gas Association (WLGA) in Cape Town, South Africa, fast approaching, Suyash Gupta, Director General of the IAC, highlighted the transformative environmental and economic benefits of auto LPG, describing it as a 'Net Zero Hero' in the journey toward a cleaner energy landscape in the automotive sector, according to a statement issued by the association.



Running from November 18-22 in Cape Town, LPG Week 2024, hosted by WLGA, will gather global industry leaders to discuss key advancements and regulatory trends in LPG and Autogas.

Representing over 300 companies across 125 countries, WLGA promotes Liquid Gas as a sustainable energy

solution through global partnerships. Highlighting its potential, Gupta said, "Auto LPG emits 20 per cent less CO2 than petrol, 60 per cent less than diesel, and produces minimal particulate matter (PM) with significantly lower NOx emissions, making it a powerful tool to reduce air pollution and public health issues."

Weighted avg rate of new housing projects in Delhi-NCR jumps over 2-fold since 2019-end: PropEquity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The weighted average price of new residential projects launched in Gurugram, Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad have more than doubled in the last five years, according to PropEquity.

In a statement on Friday, real estate data analytic firm PropEquity said that "between 2019 and September 2024, Noida saw the highest rise at 152 per cent to Rs 14,946 per sq ft from Rs 5,910 per sq ft.

In Ghaziabad, the weighted average rate has risen 139 per cent from Rs 3,691 per sq ft to Rs 8,823 per sq ft.

Gurugram has seen 135 per cent increase in weighted average price of new projects to Rs 19,535 per sq ft in September 2024 from Rs 8,299 per sq ft in 2019. In Greater Noida, the rates quoted by developers for new projects rose 121 per cent to Rs 8,601 per sq ft from Rs 3,900 per sq ft. Samir Jasuja, Founder and CEO of PropEquity, said: "The NCR is witnessing an infrastructural metamorphosis

never seen in decades with developments like Noida International Airport, Dwarka Expressway, Delhi-Meerut expressway, Rapid rail, metro expansion among others providing the much-needed fillip to all segments of real estate."

The pandemic further gravitated investors' money and homebuyers' sentiments towards real estate, he added. Gurugram-based property consulting firm InfraMantra founder Shiwang Suraj said the return on investment from real estate has surpassed returns from all other investment tools.

"Demand continues to be robust even at elevated price points as is evident from the fall in property conversion time," he added. Abhishek Trehan, Executive Director of Trehan Iris, said, "The significant rise in housing prices across NCR since 2019, reflects the region's growing appeal and evolving real estate landscape."

As demand continues to outpace supply, he said, "We have witnessed a surge in homebuyers who are increasingly looking for long-term investments in robust, well-connected locations in Delhi NCR."



Matrimony.com offers wedding loans

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Matchmaking service provider Matrimony.com has launched its financial technology platform weddingloans.com aimed at providing financial assistance for marriages, the company said on Friday. The company has partnered with leading financial institutions such as IDFC, Tata Capital, Larsen and Toubro Finance, to offer a comprehensive loan solution. "This platform will go beyond selling loans, it will help customers make the right decision with special focus on their financial well-being,"



Matrimony.com said in a company statement on Friday. "Matrimony has been a gateway for happy marriages for over two decades now. We are the trusted partners for millions who

wish to find the right match. With WeddingLoan.com, we wish to extend our services to make the process of wedding planning, budgeting and execution simpler," company CEO

Murugavel Janakiraman said. According to WeddingLoans website, many couples are opting for personal loans for their marriages as wedding prices have continued to rise over the past decade and social media has popularised elaborate weddings.

These wedding loans are unsecured personal loans that are structured for a couple to receive the funds in a single lump sum and then make fixed payments to repay the wedding loan over time, it said. "Our transparent advisory led processes will ensure we protect consumer interests fully," Janakiraman added.

Mumbai Airport's Oct passenger traffic rises 4 pc

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Airport's total passenger traffic increased 4 per cent year-on-year to over 4.42 million in October, helped by festive travel demand, Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL) said on Friday.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA), the country's second busiest airport -- 74 per cent-owned by Adani Group and the remaining 26 per cent by the state-run airports operator AAI -- had handled a total of

4.25 million passengers in October 2023.

Significantly, this year, three major festivals -- Dussehra, Dhanteras and Diwali -- fell in October. "CSMIA facilitated travel for over 4.42 million passengers -- 3.16 million domestic and over 1.25 million international -- in October. This festive season saw a marked surge in both domestic and international traffic, as travellers flocked to celebrate the festival of lights," the private airport operator said in a statement.

'Hyderabad dreams with you and grows with you'



AARTI SREENATH
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When Appalla Saikiran, founder and CEO of SCOPE, speaks about Hyderabad, he doesn't just recount memories; he shares a deep-rooted connection that has shaped both his personal and professional journey. Growing up here, Saikiran was profoundly influenced by his father, A.V. Prabhakar, who works as the group head in clinical data acquisition management at Novartis.

"My family has always been based here and seeing my father's dedication to his work in Hyderabad inspired my own

GROWING UP IN HYDERABAD, APPALLA SAIKIRAN DISCOVERED THE PERFECT BLEND OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION THAT WOULD SHAPE HIS FUTURE. TODAY, HE SHARES HIS HEARTFELT CONNECTION WITH THE CITY!

path," he says. For him, Hyderabad isn't just a hometown; it's the foundation of his entrepreneurial drive and sense of belonging.

He acknowledges that Hyderabad has been incredibly supportive of his ambitions. "The city offers an unmatched blend of culture and technology, making it the ideal environment for growth and innovation," he says. He feels Hyderabad has opened doors for him in unexpected ways, providing access to a vibrant ecosystem filled with talent, opportunities and

mentorship that have fueled his progress.

Although he never needed to migrate elsewhere, he understands why Hyderabad is so attractive for others. "I've travelled to many cities, but Hyderabad combines a unique warmth with ambition," he reflects. He admires how the city welcomes dreamers with open arms, offering a nurturing ground for anyone looking to build something meaningful. "Hyderabad is forward-thinking yet deeply rooted in tradition making it a perfect balance of past and future."

For him, Hyderabad's biryani is more than a dish; it's a reminder of the city's harmonious blend of tradition and flavour. "It represents Hyderabad's ability to keep heritage alive even as it embraces modernity," he explains, capturing the cultural richness that defines his hometown.

Reflecting on his younger years, one of his fondest memories is walking

through the campus of his old school. "My childhood was filled with exploration, ambition and big dreams," he recalls. Growing up in Hyderabad, with a family that always supported his curiosity and passion, he found the seeds of his love for technology and entrepreneurship early on.

Hyderabad's rapidly advancing tech infrastructure and business-friendly government policies have played a key role in the company's expansion. "The talent pool here, especially in tech, is exceptional," he says proudly. Building a team that understands both global trends and local dynamics has allowed his company to thrive and grow.

The city's advanced healthcare infrastructure is another point of pride for him. It's one of the reasons his father's career in clinical data and healthcare has prospered in Hyderabad. "We have top-tier hospitals, research facilities and a strong network of healthcare professionals," he notes, adding that the city's healthcare resources are a great reassurance to anyone living here.

When asked what he loves about Hyderabad, he points to the city's openness and diversity. "It has a charm that's both welcoming and aspira-

tional," he says. However, as Hyderabad continues to expand, he hopes it will develop more green spaces to balance urban growth with natural beauty.

As a native, he has seen Hyderabad evolve from his childhood to today. "I didn't move here; I grew up here and that's why I've seen the city transform firsthand." From exploring as a child to returning with fresh perspectives as an entrepreneur, he's witnessed Hyderabad flourish as both a tech and startup hub, all while preserving its soul.

When friends and family come to visit, he enjoys showing them the two sides of Hyderabad. "Everyone wants to bring back Hyderabad's famous biryani and pearls," he says with a smile. "Charminar is always a must-see and they love the contrast between the old city's charm and HITEC City's energy." His guests experience Hyderabad as a place where traditional and modern worlds coexist seamlessly.

To him, Hyderabad is more than just a city; it's his partner in dreams. "Hyderabad is a nurturing ground for ideas," he says warmly. "It's where I started my entrepreneurial journey, supported by my family and where I learned that no dream is too big. This city dreams with you and grows with you."

Breathe easy! Combating India's smog crisis with preventive measures



As the seasons change in India, a familiar haze begins to settle over the cities, especially in the northern region. This smog, a blend of smoke and fog, intensifies as winter approaches, posing a serious health risk to millions. The rise in pollution levels and the associated respiratory hazards has become a recurring issue, triggering concerns among health professionals and residents alike.

Speaking on the issue, Dr. Piyush Goel, Consultant, Pulmonology, Manipal Hospital, highlights, "Respiratory infections are surging as winter arrives, coinciding with increased levels of air pollutants, especially in North India. There are several contributing factors to it, high pollen counts, low humidity, which stagnates the air, causing its inability to disperse pollutants and, therefore, results in the formation of smog. Elevated levels of PM2.5 and PM10 particles are very porous as well as deeply penetrating the lungs, which aggravates existing lung conditions. Breathing in polluted air can irritate the airways, resulting in shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing, asthma attacks and chest pain. Excessive exposure to air pollution is linked to several acute and chronic respiratory illnesses, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, respiratory allergies, and in extreme cases even lung cancer. Additionally, it can contribute to the rapid progression of chronic illnesses as well."

Dr. Goel advises having a prepared plan of action beforehand, an inhalator one can refer to, especially in patients with asthma and regular inhalation therapy; monitoring your lung condition through a peak flow meter can be another step in maintaining care for your condition better as well.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO MINIMISE SMOG EXPOSURE

Taking precautions against smog is essential for everyone, particularly for those in urban areas where pollution levels reach alarming heights. Here are some effective strategies to protect yourself and reduce your exposure to polluted air:

- **Limit outdoor activities:** Avoid going outdoors when pollutants are in high concentration, usually during peak hours, in the early morning and late evening. Avoid strenuous exercises like jogging or cycling since exercising causes one to breathe faster and take in more of pollutants. If outdoor activity is required, schedule it for the afternoon, when the air quality may improve slightly.
- **Improve indoor air quality:** Use HEPA filters in air purifiers and HVAC systems to remove pollutants from the air. Do not burn candles, incense, or use a wood-burning fireplace since all those can increase indoor air pollutants. It is advised to keep the windows open for ventilation if the outdoor air quality is acceptable.
- **Monitoring your health:** It is of utmost importance to observe your respiratory health. If you notice some symptoms, such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, or irritation in your eyes, visit your doctor. Patients with other underlying respiratory diseases, such as asthma or COPD, must be more vigilant about this condition and strictly adhere to recommended treatment plans.
- **Wear N95 masks:** If you need to go outside, wearing an N95 mask can help filter out some of the pollutants, offering a protective barrier. Unlike regular masks, N95 masks are designed to capture fine particles in the air, which can be particularly harmful. It protects your respiratory system entirely since N95 respirators filter at least 95 percent of airborne particles as small as 0.3 microns, which is significantly more than regular cloth masks.
- **Stay hydrated:** Drinking plenty of water helps to keep your respiratory system moist and can aid in clearing out pollutants. Hydration is crucial for overall health and can support your body's natural defenses.
- **Portable air purifier:** As advised by doctors, a few precautions can be taken for people with an already infected lung disorder. It is advisable to carry a portable air purifier - this can help reduce the amount of polluted air inhaled, especially in closed spaces.

Trishna Ray's rise to Miss Teen Universe 2024

With her dazzling smile, infectious confidence and a heart full of passion, Miss Teen Universe 2024 Trishna Ray sits down with *The Pioneer* as she opens up about her incredible journey, from her humble beginnings to her triumphant win, personal struggles and her vision for a brighter future.

TEJAL SINHA
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Representing the vibrant spirit of youth and excellence, Trishna Ray, Miss Teen Universe 2024, is a talented and driven individual who has captured the hearts of millions. As she embarks on her reign as Miss Teen Universe, she aims to inspire positive change, promote cultural exchange and empower young women to pursue their dreams, leaving a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Trishna, the newly crowned Miss Teen Universe 2024, is still basking in the glory of her historic win. In an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*, she opens up about her incredible journey, from her army background to her passion for fashion technology and shares valuable advice for future contestants.

Her win is an attestation to her dedication and perseverance. When asked about her initial reaction to being crowned Miss Teen Universe 2024, she exclaimed, "It feels like a dream I've been working towards for a very long time. Achieving it now is surreal and it's taking time to sink in." She recalled the moment her name was announced, saying, "My first thought was, 'Did I hear it right?' I was praying to God and my heart dropped. It was a moment I had been waiting for so long, and my parents had been waiting for. It was surreal when they announced India."

Born into an Army family, she has moved every two years, adapting to new environments and learning new skills along the way. "I come from an army background and I'm from Cuttack, Orissa," she shared. "I've kept moving every two years, and every place I went to, I started to learn something new. All those skills added up to this one moment." Trishna is also pursuing a degree in fashion technology, which she believes helped her in the pageant. "Everything that I've been working on has helped me to this moment in life."

Her journey to the crown wasn't without its challenges. She faced difficulties obtaining a visa to participate in the competition. After being rejected once, she chose to work twice as hard and eventually made it to the pageant. "I think that's what got me here," she said. "I didn't give up, and I made sure that when I did go, I would bring it home." Her determination and resilience are an inspiration to many.

One of the most memorable moments for her was when she was announced as the win-

ner and her fellow contestants, who had become like family, were overjoyed. "They started crying, and when I went back, they all came to hug me," she recalled. "It made me feel like I truly won. I didn't have anyone else from India there, no team or parents. That moment made it feel like I was still at home." How overwhelming!

Going ahead, she credits her mentor, Ritika Ramtri, from the Tiara Pageant Studio, for her success. "She has been my mentor for two years and has taught me everything from walking to conducting interviews and etiquette. She stuck by me through all my times, and I couldn't have asked for a better mentor." Of course, her training and preparation played a significant role in her win.

As the new Miss Teen Universe, her plan is to focus on body positivity and teaching dance to underprivileged children. "I want to help teenage girls overcome unrealistic beauty standards and focus on their inner potential," she emphasised, also stressing the importance of self-positivity, sharing how she used to stand in front of the mirror and tell herself positive affirmations to combat criticism. "I used to receive criticism about my weight, but I trained my mind to make everything into a positive notion," she said.

Participating in the pageant has helped the teen beauty queen grow as a person, gaining skills she wouldn't have otherwise acquired. "I completed my foundation course at Anupam Kher's institute, started freelance modeling and pursued my interest in dance again," she said. "I became more conscious about my health and well-being. I started paying attention to my academics and eating healthily. These are things I probably wouldn't have done if it weren't for the pageant."

Representing India on the global stage is an honour Ray cherishes deeply. "It's a feeling I don't think I'll ever be able to describe," she said. "When I put on the sash with India's name, I had tears in my eyes. It gave me the motivation to work harder and bring the crown home." She believes that people outside of India celebrate the country's diversity and culture more than Indians themselves. "I was happy to see that my fellow contestants wished me a Happy Diwali," she shared.

Her experience at the pageant was enriching, and she has valuable advice for future contestants. "Never give up and always try to convince your parents to support your dreams. If you have your parents' support, there's no force that can stop you from achieving your dreams. My parents left no stone unturned in sending me to South Africa and that's why I'm here today."



what's brewing?

Spandana
Sasikala
Maahi
Himaja

The 3-day Sutraa exhibition was inaugurated at Taj Krishna in Banjara Hills. The expo was inaugurated by MD of Vaarahi Silks Dr. Spandana Maddula and Bigg Boss fame Himaja on Friday.

Hyderabadis had a blast on Day 1 of Maruti Suzuki Arena Hyderabad Comic Con 2024. Comic Con India commenced this season with Hyderabad being the first, to bring together fans of comic books, anime, gaming and pop culture from all over this year to the Hitex Exhibition Centre.

Converse has introduced Harsh Varrdhan Kapoor and Khushi Kapoor as the latest brand ambassadors in India. Harsh represents self-expression while Khushi brings a strong sense of individuality.

Arias Kids, founded by celebrity Lara Dutta, has been awarded the 2024 Vegan Fashion Award for Best Vegan Kids Fashion by PETA India.

Muthoot Exim (P) Ltd., announces the grand opening of its newest Gold Point Centre in Guntur. This marks the 32nd centre of Muthoot in India and is the fourth branch in Andhra Pradesh

Iconic personalities Karanam Malleswari, legendary Indian Weightlifter and first Indian Womens Olympic Medal Winner and Murali Sharma, Tollywood Actor; addressed and inspired the students on day 2 of the ResoFEST 2024, the largest junior college fest in the twin cities, hosted by Resonance Hyderabad Centre, experts in JEE (Mains & Advanced) & other Engineering, Medical, Commerce, Law entrance examinations at Gachibowli Stadium. Over 5,000 students from Resonance campuses across Hyderabad joined the event

Aura Hearing Care announced the opening of three new clinics in Hyderabad, located in Secunderabad, Chanda Nagar and Mehdiapatnam respectively. The event marked the presence of Avinash Pawar, CEO of WSA Audiology, Piyush Jain, CEO of Hear.com, Jane Tham, Senior Director of APC HR at WSA and the founder of Aura Hearing, Natic Shah.

FUN

ARCHIE

SEEMS LIKE I FORGOT TO DO SOMETHING THIS MORNING!
HENRY GEMMELL (GEMMELL) SAYS: BOUCHMAN
TO TAKE YOUR VITAMINS?
THAT'S IT!

CALVIN AND HOBBS

HELLO, I'M WONDERING IF YOU SELL KEGS OF DYNAMITE...
YOU DON'T? HOW ABOUT PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES?
YOU'RE KIDDING. WELL, WHAT ABOUT LAND MINES? DO YOU SELL THOSE? ... YOU DON'T?
LOOK, I'M TRYING TO SEND A GIRL I KNOW INTO DEEP SPACE. PERHAPS YOU COULD SUGGEST SOMETHING.

GARFIELD

IS THERE ANYTHING BETTER THAN FINE DINING...
AND FASCINATING CONVERSATION?
HUH? IS THERE? HOW SHOULD I KNOW?

REALITY CHECK

I MEAN, WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING SO SUPER ALL THE TIME IF NO ONE EVEN KNOWS MY IDENTITY?

SPEED BUMP

THIS SCENT IS YOUR? YOU DON'T LOOK AT ALL LIKE I PICTURED YOU!

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	

NANCY

WE WIN THE COUNTY ROBO-FAIR IF OUR ROBOT FINISHES THE OBSTACLE COURSE FIRST
WE'LL NEED IT TO BE ABLE TO MOVE AND LIFT THINGS
THAT'S IT??
YOUR STANDARDS FOR ME ARE TOO HIGH

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATINGS: ★★★★★

ACROSS

- Train stops
- Tumble over and over
- Young cows
- Complete quiet
- Tell a fib
- A feeling of rage
- A tall type of building
- People unknown to you
- The late part of the day
- A machine that can record television programmes
- One third of twenty-one
- A type of blood vessel
- Instructions for cake making
- Poise
- The part along the side or end of something
- Always ready to give away or share what you have

DOWN

- A thing with handles for carrying an injured person
- Let
- Say this when you get hurt

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

SOLUTION

A	R	T	H	E	D			
T	R	I	B	I	T	I	O	N
P	O	R	N	A	M	O	R	
E	L	B	O	W	M	A	J	O
R	A	D	P	E				
S	K	Y	S	C	R	A	P	E
P	T	Y	L	S				
I	R	I	S	H	E	E	S	
R	O	A	D	A	E			
E	V	E	N	E	S	S		
O	A	R	S	T				



'Balakrishna didn't use body double; everything you see is real'

Nandamuri Balakrishna and director Bobby Kolli have teamed up for a new film and the makers have officially announced the title and release date. On Friday, they revealed the film's title as *Daaku Maharaj* and released an action-packed teaser. The teaser showcases Balakrishna in a complete mass-appeal avatar, delivering intense action sequences and punch dialogues. Director Bobby promised to present Balakrishna in a stylish, rugged and massy avatar like never before and he has kept his word. "Whatever you see on the screen is real; there's no body double," he

confirmed.

The film features challenging action scenes, including one where Balakrishna rides a horse. "He didn't want to use a body double for any of the action sequences. He insisted on doing everything himself," shared the director. He recalled an incident during a late-night shoot: "We were working at 2 a.m. and I had arranged for a body double to ride the horse for a stunt. But Balakrishna immediately asked why someone else was doing it. He said, 'I should be there. I don't like using a body double. That shows his stamina and dedication to cinema.'" Director Bobby also praised Balakrishna for his respect towards filmmakers. "I read an interview where Balakrishna said he treats his directors like a father figure. True to his words, he treated me with utmost respect on the sets," said Bobby.

The teaser promises stunning visuals and high-voltage action sequences, designed to thrill Balakrishna's fans.

"This is Balakrishna's most stylish avatar in recent times," the makers stated. Thaman's powerful background score enhances the teaser and is expected to be a major highlight in the film.

Bollywood actor Bobby Deol plays the antagonist in *Daaku Maharaj*, which is produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya. The film is set to hit theatres on January 12, 2025, just in time for the Sankranti festival. "There are many more surprises waiting for fans in theatres. I'm proud to be directing such a big star," concluded Bobby. Meanwhile, Telugu cinema fans have reason to celebrate as Pragna Jaiswal joins Nandamuri Balakrishna for another much-anticipated release, *NBK 109*, now titled *Daaku Maharaj*. Following their blockbuster collaboration in *Akhanuda*, which captivated audiences and broke box office records, this film marks their second venture together, stirring excitement for fans eager to see them on screen again.



'Working with three music directors for lone film is not healthy situation'

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Music director SS Thaman is one of the most sought-after personalities in Tollywood, collaborating with top stars like Pawan Kalyan, Prabhas, Ram Charan, Allu Arjun and Balakrishna, while also working with younger talents like Siddhu Jonnalagadda. "With stories spanning different genres, it's not difficult for me to adapt," says Thaman.

Reflecting on his journey, Thaman admits to a period of routine compositions. "Around 2013-2014, I was criticised for doing stereotypical music. That made me more selective now," he shares. He is particularly proud of his work in Pawan Kalyan's *OG*. "Many criticise Telugu films and their music, but *OG* will stand as proof of what we can achieve musically," he asserts.

Thaman draws inspiration from the stories he scores. "When directors narrate their stories, that becomes my starting point. Later, the film's visuals guide me in crafting the background score," he explains.

For the upcoming Sankranti, two of Thaman's projects—*Daaku Maharaj* and *Game Changer*—are slated for the release. Working with director Shankar on *Game Changer* was a dream come true for Thaman. "At the *Vakeel Saab* event, producer Dil Raju shared the news of me meeting Shankar in Chennai. I was initially scared—it took me 20 years to work with him. He introduced me as an actor in *Boys*, but my dream was always to compose music for him," he recounts.

Thaman describes *Game Changer* as a milestone in his career. "It's the fastest composition I've done. We are planning a major event in the USA, releasing songs in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil and English," he reveals.

Thaman also worked on *Pushpa 2* by composing background music for specific portions. "Due to my friendship with Bunni (Allu Arjun), I agreed. Although working with multiple composers isn't ideal, it was necessary here. We coordinated well, but the timeline was tight—I had just 15 days to complete my part," he says.

Having completed 160 films over 29 years, Thaman is now focusing on taking Telugu cinema to global audiences. "For Prabhas' upcoming film, we're collaborating with Korean artists to promote it internationally," he reveals.

Thaman credits AR Rahman as his biggest inspiration. "At 57, Rahman sir competes with young composers like Anirudh. It amazes me how he connects with audiences even now," he says. Thaman candidly admits to early career missteps, including being trolled as a "copycat." "I wasn't mature then. People trolled me because I wasn't smart enough to hide it. Now, I've learned and grown," he admits.

Unlike many top composers, Thaman prefers working from Hyderabad. "I want to stay close to directors and producers. Hyderabad also has great cricket facilities, which I love," he says. His passion for cricket doubles as his stress buster, often inspiring fresh tunes after matches.

Thaman's vision for Hyderabad includes building a world-class studio and establishing an affordable music school. "I'm in talks with the government for affiliation. Music spaces reduce crime rates drastically," he says.

On a personal note, Thaman's son is studying at IIT Chennai and his wife manages his accounts while pursuing her musical interests. They plan to shift to Hyderabad next year. Celebrating his birthday on Saturday, Thaman plans to spend the day in Tirupati, reflecting on his remarkable journey and future goals.



Music director Thaman talks about his upcoming projects, stress busters, love for Hyderabad and plans for a world-class studio

'Unscripted & unedited,' contends Rana

Rana Daggubati is coming up with a talk show called *The Rana Daggubati Show* which is going to stream on Amazon Prime from November 23, with each episode being telecast on every Saturday. Talking about the show, Rana said that his show is completely different from many talk shows. "This is unscripted and unedited and an authentic show," he said.

There are many celebrities sharing their views with Rana in this show, including Rajamouli, Nani, Sreeleela, Siddhu Jonnalagadda,

Dulquer Salmaan, Rishabh Shetty and Rana's wife Miheeka. A glimpse of this show was released on Friday at an event. In that glimpse, Naga Chaitanya's answer to a question is interesting. When Rana asked Chaitanya about how he wants his family, Chaitanya replied, "I wanted to get married and then have children."

"Four kids like Venky Mama," asked Rana and then Naga Chaitanya laughed. Rana Daggubati and Naga Chaitanya are real cousins and Chaitanya is getting married to Sobhita Dhulipa

on December 4. Venkatesh is Naga Chaitanya's uncle (mother's brother). So, Naga Chaitanya's answer is now going viral everywhere.

The difficult interview was with Rishabh Shetty, reveals Rana. "He doesn't know Telugu and I know only a little bit of Hindi, so we managed in Tamil," said Rana. He added that the celebrities who appeared on this show were his friends. Asked about his wife Miheeka, who is also there in the show, he said, "Some of the answers she gave were edited because of me."

Rajamouli and Ram Gopal Varma are also there in the talk show. "I went to Rajamouli's place to shoot the episode. Sometimes it is good to travel to their place and talk with them," he said.



Kubera teaser: The wait ends, anticipation begins

The wait is over! The first glimpse of *Kubera*, featuring the powerhouse trio of Nagarjuna Akkineni, Dhanush and Rashmika Mandanna, has struck like a bolt of lightning, creating a thunderstorm of anticipation nationwide. Directed by the National Award-winning Sekhar Kammula, *Kubera* is shaping up to be an unforgettable cinematic spectacle.

The teaser released by Mahesh Babu, a whirlwind of stunning visuals and intriguing story hints, has fans buzzing. Posters had

previously depicted Dhanush with a rugged, beggar-like look, complete with long hair and a beard. But the teaser revealed a striking transformation: Dhanush appears in a clean-shaven, polished avatar, exuding wealth and mystery. This unexpected shift has left fans eager to uncover the story's layers.

Meanwhile, Nagarjuna Akkineni takes on a complex role, bringing a fresh dynamic to the narrative. Rashmika Mandanna's involvement adds further star power, mak-

ing *Kubera* a true cinematic juggernaut.

Crafted as a Pan-India film, *Kubera* will release simultaneously in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Hindi. This socio-drama, with its ambitious narrative and compelling characters, is set to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Adding to the cinematic storm is Devi Sri Prasad's electrifying soundtrack, which will undoubtedly amplify the film's impact.



VD recalls initially sidestepping *Sahiba!*

In an industry where music videos are commonplace, Vijay Deverakonda has long been an outlier—until now. The *Arjun Reddy* star has teamed up with singer-composer Jasleen Royal for the song *Sahiba*, marking his first foray into this popular medium. In an interview, Deverakonda shares how his initial reluctance was no match for Royal's determination and the song's undeniable appeal.

"From the moment I heard it, I knew it was something special," he says, admitting he recognised *Sahiba* as a hit right away. However, appreciation didn't mean he was ready to jump in. "I usually don't like doing music videos, but Jasleen is this persistent, stubborn girl who wouldn't take no for an answer," he laughs, sharing how Royal's hit *Heeriyee* had already become a household favourite, played daily at his home.

VD has yet again showcased his lover-boy charm on screen, and it's absolutely captivating. However, Deverakonda recounts how he initially tried to sidestep the project, even cutting his hair to avoid fitting Royal's vision. "But she just wouldn't let up. At some point, I gave in," he recalls with a chuckle.

It was ultimately the passion of Royal and director Sudanshu Saria that won him over. "They were so genuinely excited—it reminded me of how I feel when working on a film," Deverakonda reflects. Their enthusiasm made him realise that sometimes, stepping out of one's comfort zone is the best choice.

As for romancing on camera in a music video? Deverakonda found it easier

than expected. "With a clear script, a director and a storyline, it was actually pretty simple," he explains. *Sahiba*, he concludes, was a chance worth taking, and he hopes fans feel the same.



My aim is to get back into T20 team: KL Rahul

PTI ■ PERTH

The beleaguered KL Rahul is seeking to use the next IPL as a vehicle to stage a comeback to the Indian T20I side as he wants to remain involved in all three formats of the game. The 32-year-old is in line to open the innings if skipper Rohit Sharma does not play in the first Test of the upcoming five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy series at Perth. Rahul's form has been a cause of concern for the Indian team as he was recently dropped for the last two Tests against New Zealand at home with Sarfaraz Khan replacing him. But the batter, who is pleading to watch when in full flow, remains unperturbed by his lean run of form. "My aim is to obviously get back into the T20 team. I've always wanted to be an all-format player, and that desire and drive haven't changed over the years. I want to still play for India in all three formats and have done that



for many years," Rahul told Star Sports. "I've been out of the T20 team for a while, and I know where

I stand as a player and what I need to do to get back. So, I look forward to this IPL season to give me that

platform to enjoy my cricket and play the way I want to," he added. Since 2022, he has scored 514

runs in Tests from 12 matches (21 innings) at an average of 25.7, having registered three half-centuries and a century. During the interaction, Rahul emphasised on always keeping the team ahead of his individual aspirations. "All of us as players want to play with freedom, and everyone would think that the way I batted, I'm enjoying playing that. But like I said, my thought process and motivation have always been team first. It doesn't matter what I want to do or what my natural game is. "We play a team sport. If I played tennis, it would be different; I could stick to saying, "This is my natural game." But in a team sport, it's very different. Each game, you'll have a different role and responsibility given to you to find a way to deliver for the team," he said. The Bengaluru man's last Test hundred was against South Africa at Centurion in December 2023 and since then made just two fifties in nine innings.

Prajnesh Gunneswaran announces retirement from professional tennis

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Asian Games bronze medal winner Prajnesh Gunneswaran on Friday announced his retirement from professional tennis. The 35-year-old Indian, who won singles bronze in the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games, wrote on his Instagram account: "Hanging up my racquet. Thank you." Gunneswaran, who rose to world No.75 in the ATP rankings in 2019, expressed his deep gratitude for being able to compete at the top level for several years. "As I write this, my heart swells with gratitude, pride, and a touch of nostalgia. Today, I step off the competitive tennis court for the last time. "For over three decades, this game has been my sanctuary, my greatest teacher, and my most faithful companion. From the first swing of my racquet to representing India on the grandest stages, the journey has been nothing short of extraordinary," he wrote. The Chennai-born player, who turned pro in 2010, finished with a singles record of 11-28 and a doubles record of 1-1. His highest doubles ranking was 248 which he attained in 2018. Gunneswaran also competed



in all four Grand Slams, bowing out in the opening round in all instances. The Australian Open was the only Slam in which he competed on multiple occasions -- 2019 and 2020. "Every drop of sweat, every victory, every setback - it's all woven into the fabric of who I am. Tennis taught me discipline, resilience, and the power of dreaming big," he further wrote in his post. "It gave me friendships that transcend borders and memories that will last a lifetime. It challenged me to dig deep, to grow, and to be better - not just as a player but as a human being," he noted. He had success in the ATP Challenger Tour and in ITF Futures Tour, possessing a record of 2-7 and 9-9

respectively in the singles category. He won only a title in the doubles -- Egypt F25, Sharm El Sheikh (ITF Futures Tour) -- in 2018 with his Egyptian partner Issam Haidhawi. Gunneswaran's biggest win against a top-20 player came in 2019 when he beat the then-18th-ranked Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia during the Indian Wells Masters in the second round. "To my coaches, teammates, and most of all, my family -- you have been my backbone. To my fans who cheered me on through the highs and lows - I'm deeply grateful. "And to the sport that gave me everything - I owe you my heart. Thank you, tennis, for the ride of a lifetime," he concluded.



Ajaz Patel, hero of New Zealand's clean sweep in India, dropped for England series

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Spinner Ajaz Patel, whose 11 wickets in the third Test against India this month helped New Zealand to an unprecedented clean sweep of that series, has been omitted from the Black Caps squad for the upcoming Test series against England. Patel had match figures of 11/160 as New Zealand won the third Test by 25 runs to become the first team to sweep India in a three-match Test series at home. The selectors have found no place for him in a 14-man squad named Friday for the three-Test series against England. Mitchell Santner, who took 13-157 in the second Test against India, is the only frontline spinner in the squad, though he will play only in the second and third Tests. "Mitch has performed superbly since his recall to the Test team last year and I am sure he will take a lot of confidence out of his match-winning performance in the Pune Test," selector Sam Wells said. Wells said it was difficult to leave out Patel but Santner had been preferred for his

recent form and all-round ability while Glenn Phillips provides another spin option. Patel has often been overlooked for Test series in New Zealand conditions. After taking 10/119 in an innings against India in 2021, he also was left out of the following home series against Bangladesh. In other squad features, Kane Williamson, who missed the India series with a groin injury, returns, but Tom Latham retains the captaincy, and uncapped all-rounder Nathan Harris has been called in. "Nathan is an exciting talent with a proven first-class record," Wells said. The opening Test at Christchurch begins on November 28. The second Test is scheduled for December 6 in Wellington and the third for December 14 in Hamilton. New Zealand squad for England Tests: Tom Latham (c), Tom Blundell, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nathan Smith, Tim Southee, Kane Williamson and Will Young.

Slovakia beats United States to advance in Billie Jean King Cup Finals, Japan defeats Romania

AP ■ MALAGA (SPAIN)

Ashlyn Krueger and Taylor Townsend saved six match points but ultimately lost the decisive doubles match as the United States was defeated 6-3, 3-6, 10-8 by Slovakia and was eliminated 2-1 in the first round of the Billie Jean King Cup Finals early Friday. Krueger and Townsend lost after rallying from 9-2 down in the third set against Tereza Mihalikova and Viktorija Hrucakova in a match that ended close to 1 a.m. In Spain. Townsend have given the U.S. The first point by defeating 17-year-old Renata Jamrichova 7-5 6-4, but Rebecca Sramkova evened the tie with a 6-2, 7-5 win over Danielle Collins in the second singles match. Slovakia will face Australia in the quarterfinals on Sunday. Japan reached the quarterfinals for the first time since 2013 after rallying to defeat Romania 2-1. Japan advanced when Eri Hozumi and Shuko Aoyama defeated Monica



Niculescu and Elena Ruse 6-1, 7-5 in the deciding doubles match. Ana Bogdan had put Romania ahead with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Nao Hibino in the first singles match of the day but Ena Shibahara pulled Japan level with a 6-4, 7-6 (2) victory over Jaqueline Cristian. Japan will face Italy in the quarterfinals. The first match between Japan and Romania had been moved back two hours because of a severe weather alert that was in effect in the Malaga region until early in the day.

The weather alert had already forced the opening meeting between Spain and Poland to be pushed back from Wednesday to Friday, when Germany is also facing Britain. The Billie Jean King Cup Finals is taking place about two weeks after a powerful storm caused flash floods that killed more than 200 people in the Valencia region, east of Malaga. The International Tennis Federation announced a donation to the Spanish Red Cross to support relief and recovery efforts in the region, and Spanish player Paula Badosa said she will donate half of her prize money to help the victims. Both the Billie Jean King Cup Finals and the Davis Cup Finals are taking place in the southern Spanish city, with the men's competition beginning next week, also at the Palacio de Deportes. It is the first time that the women's team tournament is taking place at the same venue as the Davis Cup and with overlapping dates. And for the second year in a row, it will offer equivalent prize money to the men's competition.



Snooker player Mark King banned for five years for fixing match, providing inside information

AP ■ SHEFFIELD (ENGLAND)

English snooker player Mark King was handed a five-year ban on Friday after being found guilty of match-fixing and providing inside information in the latest corruption scandal to blight the sport. The punishment for the 50-year-old King, who reached a career-high ranking of No. 11 in 2003, related to a match against Joe Perry at the Welsh Open played on Feb. 13 last year that was flagged following suspicious betting patterns. King was suspended by snooker's world governing body a month later and an independent disciplinary commission has ruled that he fixed the result of a match, while giving information to others about that match for betting purposes. He had denied the charges. His ban ends after March 17, 2028, and King was also ordered to pay more than 68,000 pounds (\$86,000) in costs. King's suspension comes after Chinese players Liang Wenbo and Li Hang were handed lifetime bans from snooker last year for their role in a match-fixing scandal involving eight more of their countrymen. "I have known Mark King since he was very young, he is a very experienced player who has enjoyed great success, and I am deeply saddened to read the finding in this case," said Jason Ferguson, a former player who is now chairman of the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association. "However, the integrity of this sport will always be our No. 1 priority." King had also been charged with fixing the outcome of a match against John Higgins played on Dec. 13, 2022, and for providing inside information on it. Those charges were dismissed. The governing body said Perry and Higgins were not accused of any misconduct related to the case.

France coach says Mbappé's dip in form is due to both psychological and physical reasons

AP ■ PARIS

France coach Didier Deschamps said that there are both physical and psychological reasons for Kylian Mbappé's rough patch of form. After France drew 0-0 with Israel in the Nations League, Deschamps was again asked about the reasons behind the Real Madrid striker's absence from his squad. "It's a fact that he is in a difficult situation," Deschamps told broadcaster TF1. "Obviously, he is going through a period which is not the happiest of his career."



Mbappé was not included in Deschamps' list for the match against Israel and a game in Italy later this week. Mbappé was also absent from the previous France gathering because of a minor thigh injury. This time he is not

injured. "He wanted to come," Deschamps said. "I think it's better for him (not to be selected) at the moment. Everybody can go through a difficult period. There is a physical element, and a

psychological one." Mbappé's performances have been below par in recent weeks after he joined Madrid from PSG this summer. He has one goal in his last seven club games and hasn't added to his 48 goals for France since June. Deschamps last week did not elaborate about his choice to do without Mbappé but said it was not related to recent reports in Swedish media that the former Paris Saint-Germain star was the subject of a rape investigation in Stockholm. Mbappé's representatives have rejected the reports as "false and irresponsible."

Messi, Vinicius have frustrating nights as Argentina loses, Brazil draws in World Cup qualifying

AP ■ ASUNCION (PARAGUAY)

Argentina's Lionel Messi and Brazil's Vinicius Junior had frustrating nights in South American World Cup qualifying. While Messi could not help his team avoid a 2-1 defeat at Paraguay, Vinicius Junior missed a second-half penalty as Brazil was held to a 1-1 draw at Venezuela on Thursday. Argentina will remain on the top of the 10-team round robin competition with a 22 points in 11 matches. Brazil is provisionally in third place in the standings with 17 points. Also on Thursday, Ecuador beat Bolivia 4-0. The Ecuadorians remain in fifth position with 16 points, while Bolivia is in eighth place with 12 points. The 11th round of South

American World Cup qualifying will continue on Friday with second-place Colombia visiting Uruguay and the bottom two teams in the standings, Peru and Chile, facing off in Lima. Argentina played at Paraguay with the hosts having banned local fans from wearing any Messi shirts in the home crowd. TV footage of the match in Asuncion showed that the vast majority of the local crowd was wearing Paraguay's red and white colours, with no Messi shirts visible in the local broadcasts. Messi had few opportunities to touch the ball during the first half, but saw Lautaro Martinez open the scoring in the 11th minute with a crossed shot. The goal was allowed after a video review. Paraguay scored the equalizer

with a bicycle kick by Antonio Sanabria in the 19th minute, shortly after defender Gustavo Gomez hit the bar with a header. The hosts continued to apply pressure, and gave the Argentine star some heavy marking. Messi showed he was upset with Brazilian referee Anderson Daronco for not sending off Paraguay's Omar Alderete for his aggressive tackles. It was Alderete who scored Paraguay's winner with a header in the 47th minute, which puts Paraguay back in contention for a spot in the next World Cup. "We came to a hard place where the national team always struggled," said Martinez. "We have to correct a lot of things we did wrong in this match, but generally speaking we are playing well. We are still in the lead, and

we have to look forward." Vinicius Junior is still without a goal in six matches of World Cup qualifying. He had the chance to score a potential winner after he earned the penalty in the 67th minute but his low spot kick was saved by goalkeeper Rafael Romo and the Brazil forward then shot wide from the rebound. Brazil had the best chances in the first half, with Vinicius hitting the post once after dribbling three Venezuelans and shooting from the edge of the box. But it was Raphinha who opened the scoring from a free kick in the 43rd minute. Venezuela brought on 21-year-old Telasco Segovia at half time and the substitution had an immediate effect as he equalised in the 46th minute with a powerful shot from



the edge of the box. Venezuela went down to 10 men in the 89th minute after Alexander Gonzalez was sent off for hitting both Gabriel Martinelli and Vinicius Junior in the face. The irrigation system then came on two minutes before the final whistle at the Monumental Stadium in the city of Maturin, 500 kilometers (310 miles) west of the capital Caracas, which angered Brazil players. "When we don't win I leave the pitch a bit disappointed, we deserved to win this one," Raphinha said after the match. "But it is an important point playing away, we are working hard to win the next one at home." Ecuador beat Bolivia with goals by Enner Valencia (26th minute), Gonzalo Plata (28th and 49th) and Alan Minda (61st).