



sunday pioneer

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EAM hails military and diplomacy for India-China pact



'Govt committed to PROVIDE future-ready skills training'



Beating asthma to BECOME a breathtaking shuttler



QUOTE OF THE DAY

Families of police personnel are protesting due to the Chief Minister's failure in managing home affairs. Due to the lack of Home Minister, constables are unable to share their woes. Protesting in uniform is unprecedented in Telangana

- Sabita Indra Reddy, BRS MLA



DON'T MISS...

TDP aiming at record...

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), has announced that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) is targeting record membership enrolment across all seven assembly constituencies in the NTR district. He highlighted that new members, joining by paying a Rs. 100 membership fee, will receive Rs. 5 lakh in accidental insurance coverage. Additionally, the party promises support in health, education, and employment for its members. MP Chinni launched the TDP membership enrolment...

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Bomb threats to 4 hotels in ...

Four well-known hotels in Tirupati received bomb threat emails on Saturday, which were later found to be hoaxes by the police. Police officials reported that among the targeted hotels were the Raj Park Hotel and Vicario Hotel, both located within the Alipiri police station limits. The emails warned that bombs had been planted in the hotels, prompting immediate alerts from hotel management to the police. A police team led by DSP Venkata Narayana conducted thorough inspections of the...

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Borders should not be changed by...

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Saturday said borders should not be changed by "war or force", and Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses the biggest threat to international peace today as "it is about changing borders". Inviolability of national borders is the basis for peace, he said, interacting with the students of Birla Institute of Technology And Science (BITS) Pilani at Vasco during a visit to Goa during which he also visited the German Naval ship FGS Baden-Wuerttemberg docked at Mormugao Port. The chancellor, on a three-day...

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SBI and India Exim Bank filling trade...

The State Bank of India and the India Exim Bank are helping businesses in African countries to fill the gap in trade finance, the South African heads of the two organisations told the India Entrepreneurs Forum (IEF) here. The event was initiated by Consul General of India Mahesh Kumar who said it is the first of a series of ongoing engagements with the IEF. "We did this to assist all companies doing trade or some form of other business with India in their capacity building because generally for bigger businesses they are able to sort out their trade financing needs. For smaller business, a lot of issues look very difficult and insurmountable and they find the complexities of the trade world very bewildering sometimes." Kumar...

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Naidu: TDP lifted Telugu pride

Calls TDP a 'political university' where many senior leaders have their roots

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister and TDP supremo Chandrababu Naidu stated on Saturday that the global recognition of the Telugu community came only after the formation of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which he termed a "political university".

After renewing his membership at the TDP central office in Mangalagiri, Naidu expressed that almost all senior leaders in the two Telugu states have roots in the TDP. Receiving his membership card from State unit president Palla Srinivasa Rao, he said the journey of Telugus can be understood in two phases: before and after the establishment of TDP.

Recalling the contribution of TDP's founder, the late NT Rama Rao, he said, "NTR's vision brought global recognition to Telugu people when he became the Chief Minister of united Andhra Pradesh." Naidu lauded NTR's message, "society is a temple and people are gods," as an inspiration that continues to guide the party. Through a virtual meeting, Naidu also reached out to console families who had lost members in attacks by YSRCP leaders.

Addressing party workers, Naidu celebrated the launch of the membership drive, calling it a day of pride, as TDP membership has come to represent respect and recog-



- Naidu celebrates the launch of TDP membership drive by renewing his own
- Late NT Rama Rao, TDP founder, remembered for elevating Telugu pride worldwide during his tenure.
- Membership in TDP viewed as prestigious, with party members gaining respect and recognition in society.
- TDP prioritises opportunities for educated youth and promotes activists into leadership roles.
- TDP introduced an insurance scheme, offering Rs 5 lakh coverage for a Rs 100 membership fee.
- Naidu announces new policies including 'Job First,' pension revisions, and free gas cylinder scheme starting Deepavali.
- Recent development projects worth Rs 4,500 cr launched, with full-scale Amaravati work starting in December.
- Naidu promises land for railway zone, and housing sites will soon be allotted to eligible beneficiaries.
- TDP to legally assist activists with false cases and encourages grassroots connection with people for recognition.

nitiation in society. "Carrying a TDP membership card is seen as prestigious," he added.

Highlighting TDP's support for the

downtrodden, Naidu emphasised that the party consistently provides opportunities for educated youth in the Assembly and Parliament. "Our

party has been the only one to conduct special training for activists, striving to groom them as leaders," he noted. **Continued on Page 2**

SHARMILA'S JIBE AT JAGAN

Is dragging mom to court 'ghar ghar ki kahani'?

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Coming down heavily on YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy over his remarks that the rift with his sister YS Sharmila is 'ghar ghar ki kahani' (every household's story), the Andhra Pradesh Congress chief on Saturday sought to know whether dragging a mother to court justifies the phrase.

Addressing a press conference, she said the shares of Saraswati Power and Industries, which Jagan promised to transfer to her at a later date were never attached by the



Enforcement Directorate in the former CM's "quid pro quo" cases and hence could have been transferred long ago. **Continued on Page 2**

YSRCP labels Sharmila a political rival

PNS ■ ONGOLE/VISAKHAPATNAM

Former MLA and president of the YSRCP SC Cell, TJR Sudhakar Babu, has stated that while they once held Sharmila in high regard as the daughter of YSR and sister of YS Jagan, her recent actions—such as collaborating with political opponents and engaging with media critical of the YSRCP—have led them to consider her a political adversary.

Speaking to the media in Ongole, Sudhakar Babu expressed his deep disappointment, saying her recent comments about YS Jagan were disrespectful and demonstrated a disregard for her father's legacy. **Continued on Page 2**

Lokesh woos US investors to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, Electronics, and IT, Nara Lokesh, emphasised Andhra Pradesh's potential for rapid growth by harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) opportunities, akin to the advancements seen in Hyderabad and Bengaluru during the Y2K boom. Currently, on a tour of the United States, Minister Lokesh is engaging with prominent industrialists to attract investments to the state, showcasing its favourable investment climate and investor-friendly policies.

During a meeting with business leaders in San Francisco, Lokesh highlighted the transformative changes occurring in India and projected significant advancements over the next 25 years.



Under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who is currently serving his fourth term with a renewed cabinet, Andhra Pradesh is actively implementing its P-4 policy (public-private-partnerships) to drive industrial development and alleviate poverty. Lokesh identified key

investment sectors such as manufacturing, renewable energy, bio-energy, aquaculture, and petrochemicals, which the government is positioning for high growth. As the Education Minister, Lokesh also addressed the reforms aimed at aligning the education sector with industry needs. **Continued on Page 2**

No APDPMS service in AP up to Nov 4

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Director of Town and Country Planning for the Andhra Pradesh Government, Ravuri Vidyullatha, has announced that the AP Development Permission Management System (APDPMS), also known as the Online Building Permission System (OBPS), will be unavailable from October 26, 2024, to November 4, 2024. This temporary outage is due to server migration and data migration issues.

Vidyullatha explained that the current system operates on Amazon cloud server space, and plans are in place to transition the servers to the Andhra Pradesh State Data Centre (APSDC) to enhance data security. She urged all members of the public, including LTPs, builders, developers, engineers, and applicants, to take note of the service unavailability and to cooperate with the government during this transition period.

APGENCO, NREDCAP achieve ISO 9001:2015 Certification

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an important achievement, the Andhra Pradesh Power Generation Corporation Limited (APGENCO) and the New & Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP) have completed the ISO Audit and been awarded the ISO 9001:2015 certification.

Special Chief Secretary for Energy, K Vijayanand, along with KVN Chakradhar Babu, Managing Director of APGENCO and VC & MD of NREDCAP, and JMD APTRANSCO Kirthi Chekuri, met Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu

and Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar at the AP Secretariat in Amaravati to discuss this accomplishment.

The Chief Minister praised the relentless efforts of APGENCO and NREDCAP in adopting the ISO 9001:2015 standard, which enhances organizational credibility and reputation, improves operational efficiency, ensures compliance with international standards, provides a competitive advantage, and fosters better risk management and decision-making. This certification reflects the strong commitment of both organizations to quality and efficiency. **Continued on Page 2**



India needs revolutionary growth to become developed economy: ISRO



P5

Staff shortage plagues GVMC Ward Secretariats

JAVVADI LAKSHMANA RAO lakshmana123@gmail.com ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A critical staff shortage is impacting ward secretariats across Visakhapatnam.

According to a survey conducted by The Pioneer, a number of empty seats were vacant even at 11 a.m. on Saturday. Originally staffed with nine employees, these secretariats are now struggling to maintain adequate personnel due to a series of resignations and inconsistent attendance.

The ward secretariat system, introduced by the previous YSRCP government, established 578 secretariats under the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) to enhance access to essential government services. Residents were assured

they could easily apply for birth and death certificates, ration cards, social pensions, housing, and other welfare programmes through these local offices. However, many secretariats

are now operating below required staffing levels, significantly impacting their efficiency and accessibility. Frustration among residents is mounting. "I visited my local secre-

tariat for assistance with a birth certificate, but was told the officer was 'out in the field,'" shared one local. "This happens frequently, and people are losing confidence in the system."

Each ward secretariat is supposed to be staffed by a team, including an Administration Secretary, Education and Data Processing Secretary, and Welfare and Development Secretary, among others.

Initially, the 5,022 appointed employees worked from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., but a lack of government oversight has led to some employees arriving late or failing to maintain regular hours.

Ward secretariat employees are required to be present by 10 a.m., and those needing to leave for official duties must log their departures in a movement register.

Nonetheless, inspections have shown that some offices are not opening until as late as 11 a.m., with only one or two staff members present at the official start time. **Continued on Page 2**



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OBTUSE ANGLE



'TDP aiming at record membership in NTR dist'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

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MP Chinni launched the TDP membership enrolment drive at Paipula Road in Vijayawada Central and at Chittinagar Centre in Vijayawada West on Saturday, where he presented membership cards to the newly enrolled. The event commenced with tributes to the late former Chief Minister Dr. NTR, with MP Chinni, Central MLA Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao, and other



party leaders in attendance.

Speaking at the campaign events, Chinni stated that public interest in joining the TDP is strong, as the party has been addressing various issues faced by the people. He expressed the leadership's ambition to achieve the highest membership figures in

the NTR district, with a particular focus on Vijayawada Central and West. Chinni encouraged local party leaders to keep up the momentum in the membership drive, which is being facilitated via QR codes, until further directives from the party. Confident in TDP's strength-

ening presence in Vijayawada, Chinni attributed this to the effective governance of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. The event also saw participation from former MLC Buddha Venkanna, TDP leader MS Baig, and several other prominent party leaders.

Importance of cyber security in digital age stressed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Women's Cell at Andhra Loyola College organised an insightful guest lecture on Cyber Security on the college premises in Vijayawada on Saturday. Inspector Prakash from Machavaram Police Station and Sub-Inspector Valli Padma from the Cyber Crime Police Station attended as guest speakers, educating the female students about cyber law enforcement.

During the lecture, SI Valli Padma discussed the crucial importance of cyber security



in today's digital age, with a focus on the rising risks of cyber threats, hacking, and

data breaches. She outlined common cybercrimes like phishing, identity theft, and

ransomware, explaining their impact on individuals and organisations.

The session saw enthusiastic participation, with over 250 students attending and engaging actively with CI Prakash and SI Padma. Students asked questions about current cybercrimes and ways to protect themselves against these threats. The programme was attended by Women's Cell Coordinator Dr. D. Tabitha, Dean of Student Activities Dr. L. Subha, and lecturers Mary Manjula, and Miriyam Kamala, among others.

Govt committed to uplift of tribals: Minister

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

Minister for Women, Child, and Tribal Welfare, Gummidi Sandhya Rani, has reaffirmed the government's commitment to improving the lives of tribal communities in the Parvathipuram Manyam district. During a recent review meeting, she highlighted the government's focus on addressing critical needs in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. "Our government is dedicated to uplifting tribal students and their families," said Sandhya Rani. To support this, the government has allocated Rs 10 crore to provide essential supplies for hostel residents and has approved increased mess charges, laundry facilities, and improved sanitation in tribal welfare hostels.

A mega teacher-parent meeting is scheduled for November 14 to encourage stronger collaboration between parents, teachers, and officials. "This meeting will address the holistic development of students, covering education, health, and sports," explained Sandhya Rani. She



also directed officials to ensure clean, well-maintained toilets in all hostels and schools.

The minister highlighted the high rates of anaemia among children and pregnant women in tribal areas and emphasized the need for accessible healthcare. "There should be no shortage of doctors, and medical supplies must always be available," she instructed. A new 100-bed government hospital in Saluru is under construction to further support healthcare in the district. Clean drinking water was identified as a top priority, with Sandhya Rani urging officials to expedite the remaining 10% of water supply projects within 30 days, particularly in areas facing water scarcity.

MP urges CM to address key issues affecting V'wada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Vijayawada MP Kesinani Sivanath met Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu at the TDP central office on Saturday to discuss pressing issues affecting the residents of Old Rajarajeshwaripet and the development of a logistics park.

During the meeting, Sivanath highlighted the challenges faced by residents in Old Rajarajeshwaripet, where occupants of Railway Department land have received eviction notices requiring them to vacate within fifteen days. Many residents are anxious about the potential demolition of their homes, which has raised concerns of public protests. Sivanath

called for immediate intervention from the Chief Minister to halt the eviction process and find a permanent solution for those affected.

Additionally, Sivanath urged the Chief Minister to support the establishment of a logistics park near the Kondapalli railway station. He requested that the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) collaborate with APGENCO to transfer the necessary land to the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA), a move that would facilitate the proposed logistics park project. In response, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu assured Sivanath of the government's support and commitment to resolving these matters promptly.

BJP SC Morcha condemns Rahul's remarks on reservations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State President of the BJP-affiliated SC Morcha, G. Devanand, has strongly condemned recent remarks by Congress opposition leader Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of intending to eliminate reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Backward Classes (BC), and minorities.

Addressing the press at the BJP office in Vijayawada on Saturday, Devanand criticised Rahul Gandhi's stance, stating that it reveals a disregard for the rights and welfare of historically marginalised communities who rely on reservation policies. He asserted that such comments pose a threat to the progress and empowerment of

SCs, STs, BCs, and minorities, who depend on these policies for equal opportunities in education, employment, and social upliftment. Devanand reaffirmed the BJP's commitment to safeguarding reservation policies as essential to ensuring social justice and equality.

Devanand also noted that the Congress party has failed to give priority to its own president, Mallikarjun Kharge, pointing to a lack of respect for leadership within the party. He credited Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for establishing reservation policies that benefit SCs, STs, BCs, and minorities across the country, and called on Congress leaders to hold Rahul Gandhi accountable for his remarks on reservations.

Collector lauds Gurudeva Trust's services

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

District Collector Dr. B.R. Ambedkar underscored the tremendous value of selfless service during his visit to the Sri Gurudeva Charitable Trust in Mangalampalem, Kothavalasa Mandal, on Saturday. He commended the trust's founder, Jagdish Babu, for his unwavering dedication to helping those in need. "The work being done here is invaluable," Dr. Ambedkar stated. "Selfless service without any expectation of reward is what truly strengthens our community."

During the visit, the Collector inspected the artificial organs manufacturing center, a 50-bed hospital, various depart-



ments of the hospital, and the under-construction cancer hospital. Jagdish Babu guided him through each section, explaining the services offered. Interacting with patients and individuals seeking artificial limbs, the Collector expressed his appreciation for the trust's efforts. He later distributed artificial organs, hearing aids, and crutches to those in need. "The Gurudeva Trust is a bea-

con of hope for the disabled and impoverished," Dr. Ambedkar noted. "For the past 27 years, Jagdish Babu has shown that exceptional contributions to society require a blend of humanity, patience, and perseverance." Dr. Ambedkar likened community service to a significant yajna, praising those who persist despite obstacles. "Courage is essential in this line of work," he emphasized. "The number of impoverished, disabled, and ill individuals seeking help from the trust is a testament to its credibility."

In response, Jagdish Babu shared the trust's achievements over the years. "We have provided artificial organs to approximately 250,000 people," he revealed.



Cycling tournament for school students gets underway

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Senior General Manager of Power Grid Corporation of India for the Southern Region K. Naga Mohana Rao, has emphasised the importance of continuous effort for students to excel in academics, sports, and life. He highlighted perseverance as essential to success, adding that achievements in sports can propel students to higher positions in their careers. Rao urged parents and teachers to encourage students in sports alongside academics, noting that accomplishments at state, national, and international levels can open doors to better opportunities in education and employment.

He shared this message at the inauguration of the School Games Under-14, 17, and 19 Boys' and Girls' cycling tournament, held over two days on the six-lane bypass of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) in Nunna, Vijayawada Rural Mandal, NTR district. Organised by the School Games Federation Krishna and NTR District units under the aegis of the School Games Federation of India (SGFI) and the School Games Federation of Andhra Pradesh (SGFAP), the event saw the participation of around 300 cyclists from all 13 combined districts of Andhra Pradesh. K. Naga Mohana Rao, Vijayawada Rural ZPTC Member K. Suvarna Raju, and other digni-

taries flagged off the tournament. Special traffic arrangements were made by NHAI officials, Megha Engineering Company, and local police to ensure the smooth conduct of the tournament.

TWO GOLD MEDALS FOR KRISHNA ON DAY 1

Krishna district cyclists excelled on the first day of the competition, securing two gold medals. V. Vennela clinched gold in the Under-14 Girls' Time Trial category, while K. Charan earned gold in the Boys' category. Additionally, the Krishna district team claimed a silver and a bronze medal, showcasing their talent in this inter-district event.



Differently-abled kids light up Diwali season handmade creations

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In the spirit of Deepavali, Prajwal Vani, a local NGO, is showcasing the extraordinary talents of 35 differently-abled children through their handcrafted 'deepams' (diyas). This initiative, part of the Visakha Kushi Project, is not only brightening homes but also empowering young lives.

"The idea behind involving the children in decorating diyas was not only to create something beautiful for Deepavali but also to encourage them to explore their creativity and improve their motor skills," shares KVL Suchitra, founder of Prajwal Vani Welfare Society with The Pioneer. "The process is more than just an artistic endeavor. It is also an empowering experience for the children."

The initiative not only fos-

ters creative expression but also builds vital skills, bringing a sense of pride and achievement to each child. As one child, Lakshmi, shared, "I love painting the diyas. It makes me feel happy and proud." Under this project, children have handcrafted a range of products including candles, deepam candles, and deepams in various shapes and designs. Each item is lovingly hand-painted and decorated by the children, offering unique, heartfelt gifts for the festive season.

Beyond the artistry, the project stands as a step toward self-employment and financial inclusion. The children's efforts are rewarded when proceeds from the sales are presented to their families on Dhanteras, symbolizing a bright moment of contribution and independence.

Kolusu extends aid to kin of drowned couple

PNS ■ NUZVID

Housing and I&PR Minister Kolusu Parthasarathi has provided financial assistance to the family of Konda Rama Rao and Prashanthi, who tragically drowned on Saturday while watering their cattle in a pond in Pothureddypalli village, Nuzvid mandal. On learning about the accident, Minister Parthasarathi expressed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and offered Rs 25,000 to help with funeral expenses.

Wild elephants sighted, villagers cautioned

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

The District Forest Officer, GAP Prasuna, has issued a stern warning to villagers in Parvathipuram district following the sighting of two groups of wild elephants within its boundaries. A herd of seven elephants has been spotted near Dibagudivalasa village in Parvathipuram mandal, while another group of four is roaming near Jamiguda village in Bhanini mandal.

"Villagers are advised to avoid venturing into fields when elephants are nearby," Prasuna cautioned. "These wild animals can be unpre-

dictable, and it's crucial to exercise caution in elephant-prone areas." She appealed to village leaders, sarpanchs, and local authorities to collaborate with the forest department in spreading awareness. "It's a collective responsibility to protect both humans and wildlife," she emphasized.

Prasuna expressed concern over the growing trend of people gathering to observe or feed the elephants. "Elephants are wild animals, and their behaviour can be erratic. Any interference with their natural behaviour can lead to dangerous situations," she warned. The forest department has

made it clear that any attempt to approach or disturb the elephants will be met with strict legal action. These elephants have been inhabiting the region for the past five to six years and are accustomed to the local environment. They often move between villages in search of food and water. Prasuna urged the revenue and police departments to enforce Section 144 in affected villages to restrict movement and minimize the risk of human-elephant conflict. "It's essential for all departments to work together to ensure the safety of both people and wildlife," she concluded.





Police host 'Open House' to showcase modern equipment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To raise public awareness and commemorate Police Martyrs' Week, the District Police organised an 'Open House' at the Police Armed Reserve grounds on Saturday. NTR District Police Commissioner S.V. Rajasekhara Babu inaugurated the two-day event, which aims to honour police martyrs and educate citizens about modern policing tools and techniques. The significance of the event was underscored by October 21, a day dedicated to honouring police personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty.

The Open House was designed to engage the public, particularly youth and students, by showcasing advanced equipment and methods used to combat cybercrimes, terrorism, and Maoist activities. Various police units, including the OCTOPUS commando team, NDRF, SDRF, city security wing, and fingerprint bureau, set up displays to demonstrate their operations

and technological capabilities.

Visitors were introduced to methods of crime scene evidence collection and the role of fingerprint analysis in investigations, with additional awareness sessions focused on cybercrime prevention. Demonstrations featuring vehicles and equipment, such as water cannons, Vajra riot control vehicles, fire engines, and a mobile command control room, offered a hands-on experience of police resources.

The OCTOPUS team's bomb disposal units, dog squads, drones, body-worn cameras, and other specialized tools attracted significant interest, especially from students. Practical demonstrations of vehicles, including the Falcon and Vajra, provided insight into crowd management and public safety measures. A dog show emerged as a particular highlight, captivating students while educating them about the diverse operations within the Police department.



CPM protests against additional electricity charge burden

Leaders burn copies of APERC order

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) Vijayawada city committee staged a protest at Dharma Chowk in Vijayawada on Saturday. The protestors opposed the imposition of an additional electricity charge burden of Rs 6,072 crore on power consumers, termed 'true-up charges'. During the protest, CPM-M leaders burned copies of the Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulation Council (APERC) order in a symbolic act of opposition.

Addressing the gathering, CPM State Secretariat member Ch Babu Rao criticised the TDP-led NDA government for failing to deliver on its 'Super Six' promises, despite four months in power in Andhra Pradesh. He

accused the State government of adding financial burdens on the public instead of offering relief, noting that beyond the current Rs 6,072 crore, an additional Rs 11,000 crore in electricity charges is anticipated, further straining the public. Babu Rao recalled how the previous YSRCP government faced strong public backlash and was eventually voted out due to similar electricity charge hikes. He warned that the current NDA government could meet the same fate if it continues imposing such charges. Furthermore, he alleged that rather than addressing the irregularities of the YSRCP administration, the NDA government has opted to continue similar policies, leaving the public disappointed.

'YSRCP rule indulged in graft over power, coal purchases'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar has blamed the previous YSRCP regime for the increase in power tariffs during its five-year rule, alleging corruption in power and coal purchases.

Speaking to the media in the Secretariat on Saturday, the Energy Minister stated that the imprudent decisions made by the YSRCP government resulted in multiple hikes in power tariffs throughout the YSRCP's tenure.

He noted that the previous government, headed by Jagan Reddy, cancelled the Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) signed by the then TDP-led government. Ravi Kumar alleged that the YSRCP administration damaged the reputation of AP Genco, which was known for its power generation, by borrowing



'The Jagan Reddy-led government failed to maintain transparency in power purchases during its five-year rule. These purchases were made on a 'quid pro quo' basis, allowing funds to be siphoned off to the Tadepalli palace'

loans from private individuals at high interest rates. "The Jagan Reddy-led government failed to maintain transparency in power purchases during its five-year rule. These purchases were made on a 'quid pro quo' basis, allowing funds to be siphoned

off to the Tadepalli palace," he claimed.

He further alleged that both the then Chief Minister Jagan Reddy and Energy Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy managed not only the electricity purchases but also

the coal procurement in secrecy, leading to a burden of steep power tariff hikes on consumers. Minister Ravi Kumar revealed that electricity charges have been increased nine times in the past five years due to Jagan Mohan Reddy's misguided policies.



Bomb threats to 4 hotels in Tirupati turn out to be hoax

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Four well-known hotels in Tirupati received bomb threat emails on Saturday, which were later found to be hoaxes by the police.

Police officials reported that among the targeted hotels were the Raj Park Hotel and Vicario Hotel, both located within the Alipiri police station limits. The emails warned that bombs had been planted in the hotels, prompting immediate alerts from hotel management to the police.

A police team led by DSP Venkata Narayana conducted thorough inspections of the hotels. Bomb squads and sniffer dogs were deployed, and extensive searches were carried out; however, no explosives or suspicious items were found. Police have since launched an investigation to determine whether the threats were the work of terrorist groups or merely a prank.

This incident follows similar bomb threats on Thursday, when three other hotels in Tirupati received threatening calls.

Tourism Minister flags off bus on spiritual tour

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh, accompanied by MLAs Battula Balaramakrishna and Nallamilli Ramakrishna Reddy, flagged off the bus meant for spiritual tours at Saraswati ghat here on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, Kandula Durgesh revealed that a one-day spiritual tour package of the combined East Godavari district has been launched under the auspices of APTDC to promote State tourism.

The Tourism Minister said that in spiritual tourism, people could visit famous temples



during the day and return to their homes on the same day. The current tourism policy would come to an end in March 2025 and the new

tourism policy would be unveiled in April 2025, he announced, adding that endeavours began to formulate a new tourism policy. The fill-

ing of vacant direct posts in the Tourism department is being considered, he disclosed.

"It has been decided to develop eco, adventure, wellness and temple tourism in the State with the Central government schemes such as Swadeshi Darshan and PRASAD schemes and we hope to achieve successful results by combining all these into tourism circuits," the Tourism Minister asserted.

He highlighted that a Cabinet sub-committee was constituted to develop tourism in the State coordinating the forest, endowment and tourism

departments. Taking a dig at the erstwhile YSRCP regime, the Tourism Minister deplored that the tourism sector was ruined during the five years previous government.

Minister Durgesh stated that Rishikonda Beach has been certified as a Blue Flag Beach and Kakinada Beach, Suryalanka Beach, Ramapuram Beach and Maipadu Beach in the Nellore district would be upgraded into Blue Flag Beaches. MLA Adireddy Srinivas and State tourism board member Ganta Swaroop Devi were among those who were present.



Eluru MP Putta appointed member of Jal Shakti

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar has been appointed as a member of the consultative committee of the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti.

The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs of the Government of India has issued an order to this effect. In a statement on Saturday, MP Putta Mahesh Kumar expressed his commitment to securing the necessary funds for the completion of irrigation projects, particularly the Polavaram Irrigation Project, and ensuring drinking water facilities for every household in Andhra Pradesh.

MP Putta Mahesh Kumar extended his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chair man of the Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Jal Shakti, CR Patil, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Konidala Pawan Kalyan, and Minister Nara Lokesh for their support in his appointment. Currently, MP Putta Mahesh Kumar also serves as a member of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Standing Committee.

26 red sanders logs seized, four smugglers arrested

PNS ■ KADAPA

The Red Sanders Anti Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) seized 26 red sander logs and arrested four red sander smugglers at Sanipai village on Bolluvandla road in Annamaya district.

DSP L Balireddy said that the RSASTF team led by RI Chiranjeevulu conducted combing in the forest area. The Task Force personnel noticed four persons moving suspiciously in the forest area. When they were nearing them, the red sander smugglers started running away.

However, the Task Force personnel chased and apprehended them. On the information provided by them, the Task Force team seized 26 red sanders logs. Suresh Kumar registered a case and the arrested smugglers were produced before the court.



AP tops in aqua product exports: Tripura Guv

PNS ■ ELURU

Tripura Governor N Indrasena Reddy has announced that Andhra Pradesh has earned a reputation as the leading state in aqua product exports in the country. The Governor made this remark during his visit to an aqua exhibition organized at Gopinathapatnam in Unguturu mandal on Saturday. He noted that Andhra Pradesh, particularly West Godavari district, boasts optimal conditions for aquaculture development.

Indrasena Reddy highlighted that Tripura imports up to 20 lorries of aqua products from Andhra Pradesh every day. He mentioned learning from local aqua farmers about the measures they have implemented to achieve high yields. He expressed optimism about the extensive suitability of land in the district for aquaculture.



The Governor also shared that the Tripura State government is actively promoting the aqua industry by enacting special laws. Despite being a small and hilly region, Tripura engages in aqua cultivation in artificial ponds on less than an acre of land. He acknowledged the state government's efforts to ensure the welfare and safety of aquaculture farmers.

Indrasena Reddy explained that initiatives are being taken to promote the aqua industry through a commercial cooperative approach, encouraging farmers to form groups to cultivate larger areas of land. He added that the prevailing conditions in Andhra Pradesh would be studied to train Tripura's aqua farmers in effective farming practices.

GITAM's STI Project empowers tribals

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

GITAM Deemed University's Department of Biotechnology has launched a pioneering initiative, the Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) project, to enhance the socio-economic status of tribal communities in Araku Valley and Paderu Mandals. The project, launched in March 2023, aims to empower over 1,000 beneficiaries through agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship.

"Our goal is to provide sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by these communities," said Dr. I. Sarat Babu, Principal Investigator. "The establishment of STI hubs and modern agricultural techniques are key to achieving long-term socio-economic upliftment." The project has established four STI Hubs, two in Araku Valley and two in Paderu Mandala, providing training on modern agricultural practices, beekeeping, and entrepreneurship.



"The training we provide is practical and focused on the local context," said Dr. Raja Phani Pappu, co-investigator. "We ensure communities can thrive by leveraging available resources and teaching effective marketing strategies." The project emphasizes women and youth empowerment, fostering economic independence and entrepreneurship within the community.

The project's infrastructure includes Honey Processing

Units, Niger Seed Oil Mill Units, Solar-based Cold Storage Units, and Vegetable Processing Units, improving productivity and marketability of local agricultural products. Dr. P. Manjushree, co-investigator, highlighted the importance of community engagement: "We're not only teaching agricultural techniques but also raising awareness about health and nutrition, fundamental to overall well-being."

Dr. I. Sarat Babu acknowledged GITAM Management's unwavering support and expressed gratitude to Dr. Konga Gopikrishna from DST-SEED. "The success of this project wouldn't have been possible without consistent encouragement and financial support." As the project progresses, it promises to continue driving positive change through science and technology, creating a self-sustaining, thriving community.



42 kg ganja seized, 4 peddlers arrested

PNS ■ PADERU

The police seized 42 kg of ganja while being transported illegally on two bikes at Chintoor village in the ASR district.

Mothugudem Sub-inspector Siva Narayana on Saturday said that on a tip-off, a police team conducted a checking of vehicles at the Chintoor near Motugudem police station.

The police found 24 kg of ganja being transported in two motorcycles. The police seized ganja worth Rs 2.10 lakh and arrested four drug peddlers. The ganja was being taken to Hyderabad.

The SI said that the ganja menace is being oppressed with an iron hand in the district and the checking of vehicles is being conducted at various places to curb the transportation through the ASR district.

ACROSS THE STATES



Ten hotels in Rajkot receive bomb threats

At least ten hotels in Gujarat's Rajkot city received bomb threat emails on Saturday, which turned out to be a hoax, police said.



EAM hails military and diplomacy for India-China pact

PNS ■ PUNE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday credited the breakthrough agreement with China on patrolling along the Line of Actual Control to the military which worked in "very very unimaginable" conditions and deft diplomacy.

mit, it was decided that the foreign ministers and National Security Advisors of the two countries would meet and see

If today we have reached where we have... One is because of the very determined effort on our part to stand our ground and make our point

of the very determined effort on our part to stand our ground and make our point. The military was there (at LAC) in very very unimaginable conditions to defend the country, and the military did its part and diplomacy did its part," Jaishankar said.

Over the decade, India improved its infrastructure. Part of the problem is that in the earlier years, the border infrastructure was really neglected, he added.

Borders should not be changed by force: German Chancellor

PNS ■ PANAJI

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Saturday said borders should not be changed by "war or force", and Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses the biggest threat to international peace today as "it is about changing borders".



Inviolability of national borders is the basis for peace, he said, interacting with the students of Birla Institute of Technology And Science (BITS) Pilani at Vasco during a visit to Goa during which he also visited the German Naval ship FGS Baden-Wuerttemberg docked at Mormugao Port.

war for aggression that Russia started against Ukraine.

The chancellor, on a three-day visit to India, referred to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war while replying to a question.

"This is because of one single aspect of this attack," he said, adding, "It is about changing borders. And the agreement that we had in the United Nations and in many other regional agreements on peace and security, for instance also for Europe, is that never borders should be changed by war and force, again."

if you are a small country," Scholz said.

The German Chancellor recalled that a Kenyan ambassador to the United Nations once said in the Security Council that the borders of African countries were drawn by officials of colonial powers, and "if we would all try to find the right border and are going to war, we will have hundred years of war in Africa".

India needs revolutionary growth to become developed economy: ISRO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India must undergo a revolutionary transformation to rise as a developed economy, said ISRO Chairman S. Somanathan, stressing the importance of technological advancements and product development to drive economic growth.



remarks while addressing students at the 13th convocation ceremony of the Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) in Delhi here on Saturday.

work in the space sector, noting that Musk's achievements have inspired global efforts, including those within ISRO. Somanathan made these

If India aspires to become the third, second, or even the first-largest global economy, a revolutionary change is needed. Growth will not be driven by trade and resources alone.



Clerk booked for siphoning off Rs 1.3 crore in Thane

Police have booked a 50-year-old woman for allegedly embezzling about Rs 1.3 crore from a credit cooperative society in Thane, an official said on Saturday.



Gujarat man held for giving sensitive info to Pak spy

The Gujarat Anti Terrorist Squad arrested a Porbandar resident for allegedly sharing sensitive information about Indian Coast Guard vessels to a Pakistani agent posing as a Mumbai-based woman, an official said on Saturday.

Inequities have no place in a society ruled by dharma: Dhankhar

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday said dharma is the most fundamental concept of Indian culture, guiding all aspects of life and that inequities have no place in a society governed by dharma.



inclusivity," he added.

Addressing the gathering at the 'Namah Shivaya' Parayan organised by Sringeri Sri Sharada Peetham as part of their Suvarna Bharati Mahotsava here, Dhankhar described "Mantra

Cosmopolis" as a rare and spectacular event that resonates deeply, engaging the mind, heart, and soul, with everyone in harmony.

He emphasised that Vedic chanting, one of humanity's most ancient and continuous

oral traditions, serves as a living link to our ancestor's profound spiritual wisdom. The precise rhythms, intonations, and vibrations of these sacred mantras create a powerful resonance that brings mental peace and environmental harmony.

"The systematic structure of Vedic verses and the intricate recitation rules reflect the scientific sophistication of ancient scholars. This tradition, preserved without written records, demonstrates the remarkable capacity of Indian culture to transmit knowledge orally across generations, with each syllable meticulously articulated in mathematical harmony," he stated.

AAP alleges 'conspiracy' to kill Kejriwal

Says BJP will be responsible if anything happens to him

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday alleged a "deep conspiracy" to eliminate its convenor Arvind Kejriwal and warned that the BJP will be responsible if anything happens to him.



BJP over Singh's allegations. The AAP leader, however, said that despite the Vikaspuri incident, Kejriwal will continue to undertake 'padyatra' campaign as per the schedule.

AAP leaders on Friday claimed Kejriwal was attacked by "BJP goons" during his 'padyatra' campaign in west Delhi's Vikaspuri. In a press conference, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh charged, "Police complicity in the incident clearly shows a deep conspiracy to kill Kejriwal. The BJP has become an enemy of his life."

No immediate reaction was available from the police or the

Modi govt systematically throttling MGNREGA: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Saturday accused the Modi government of "systematically throttling" MGNREGA, and demanded a hike in its budget as it is the "lifeline" of crores of India's poorest communities.

on technology, workers are being denied their right to work and their right to fair payment," Ramesh said in a statement.



The Congress leader who served as the Union rural development minister in the UPA-2 government, said that in January 2024, the rural development ministry man-

dated the nationwide implementation of Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS) for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

To be eligible for ABPS, workers must meet several conditions, including linking Aadhaar to their job card with the name matching in both, and mapping the Aadhaar-seeded bank account with the National Payments Corporation of India, he said.

"Ten months later, we now have data on the catastrophic impact of this policy shift," he alleged.

BJP accuses Priyanka of not disclosing full info about her, Vadra's assets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday accused Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of "non-disclosure of essential information" regarding her and her husband Robert Vadra's assets in her affidavit to contest the Lok Sabha bypoll from Kerala's Wayanad.

outcome. If somebody furnishes wrong information in the affidavit, they have no right to contest elections," Bhatia told reporters here.

The date for a scrutiny of the nominations by poll officials is October 28 and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been targeting the Congress general secretary over her affidavit in the run-up.

"The Supreme Court order is binding on all citizens. The Gandhi family is not above law. There can be only one



Will demolish unauthorised buildings in Bengaluru: DK

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday said the drive to demolish unauthorised and dilapidated buildings was underway in Bengaluru.

Shivakumar, who holds the Bengaluru development portfolio, said the registration of unauthorised properties will be halted and encroachments will be removed.

Further, more powers will be given to civic agencies and planning bodies. "We have decided to stop unauthorised construction of buildings. The previous government had curtailed the powers of officials to take action against unauthorised construction," the Deputy CM told reporters here.

"Our government has decided to give powers to BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike), BDA (Bangalore Development Authority) and BMRDA (Bengaluru Metropolitan Region Development Authority) to stop unauthorised construction. The registration of unauthorised properties will also be stopped. At the same time, we are also focusing on clearing encroachments," he said.

HOAX BOMB THREATS

Govt issues advisory to social media platforms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a spate of hoax bomb threats to multiple airlines, the IT Ministry has asked social media platforms to observe due diligence obligations and promptly remove or disable access to misinformation within the strict timelines prescribed under IT rules.

The Government, in an advisory, reminded social media intermediaries that they are obligated under IT rules to

within stipulated timeline of up to 72 hours.

The move assumes significance as more than 275 flights



provide information under their control or possession and assist investigative agencies

operated by the Indian carriers have received hoax bomb threats in the past 12 days.

Most of the threats were issued through social media. On Friday alone, over 25 domestic and international flights operated by Indian carriers received bomb threats.

"In addition to the above, the IT Rules, 2021 obligates the intermediaries to provide information under its control or possession, or assistance to the Government agency which is lawfully authorised for investigative or protective or cyber security activities, for the purposes of verification of identity, or for the prevention, detection, investigation, or prosecution, of offences under any law for the time being in force, or for cyber security incidents, well within the stipulated timeframes (as soon as possible but not later than 72 hours)," the advisory issued by IT Ministry said.

CENTRE TO STATES

Boost stubble management plans as Delhi air crisis looms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Saturday urged states to strengthen implementation of existing micro-level action plans for crop residue management, as authorities race to prevent the annual air quality crisis in the national capital.

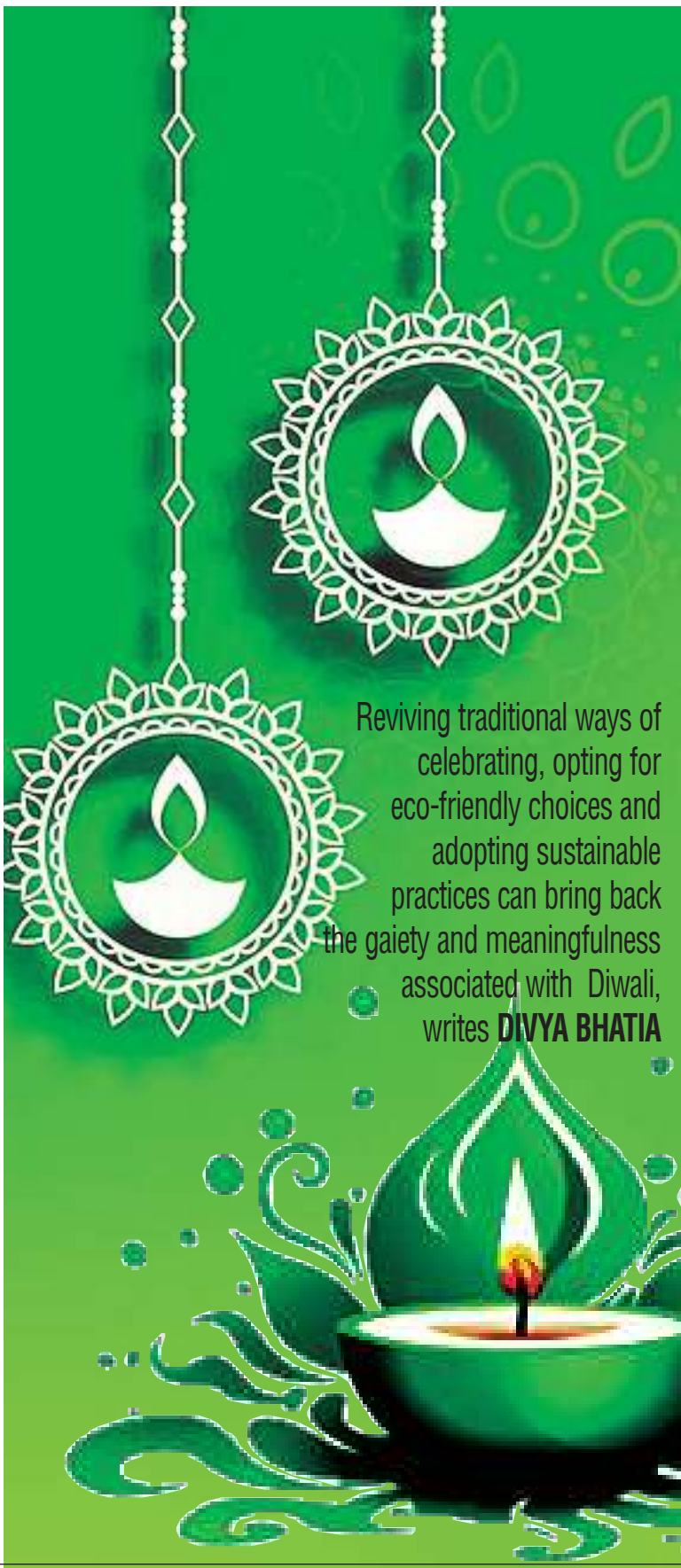


tributed to farmers with government subsidies.

"Sustained attention is crucial," Chauhan said in the meeting, despite noting progress in reducing farm fires.

The official data shows stubble burning incidents have decreased 35 per cent in Punjab and 21 per cent in Haryana compared to last year, with overall cases down 51 per cent since 2017.

The meeting, which included state agriculture ministers from Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, along with Delhi's environment minister, outlined a multi-pronged strategy to tackle the crop stubble burning, an official statement said.



Reviving traditional ways of celebrating, opting for eco-friendly choices and adopting sustainable practices can bring back the gaiety and meaningfulness associated with Diwali, writes **DIVYA BHATIA**

GO GREEN THIS DIWALI

Diwali, the festival of lights, is one of the most anticipated and cherished celebrations in India. Traditionally, Diwali has been a time for family gatherings, sharing sweets, lighting oil lamps (diyas) and engaging in heartfelt festivities. However, in recent years, the essence of Diwali has been overshadowed by excessive noise, air pollution and a culture of pomp and show. Remember the days when Diwali was celebrated with genuine joy - families dressed in new clothes, shared homemade sweets, and children delighted in simple fireworks like chakris and phuljharis? But today, Diwali has become a commercial spectacle, where promotions overshadow tradition.

THE NEED FOR HEALTHIER CELEBRATION

During Diwali, health concerns often spike due to increased air pollution, skin allergies and burn injuries, largely from firecrackers and chemical-based rangoli colours. *Dr Vaibhav Kubal*, Consultant in Respiratory Medicine at Holy Family Hospital, notes, "Every year, we see a noticeable increase in hospital admissions, especially due to respiratory issues and firecracker-related injuries." Likewise, *Dr P Venkata Krishnan* from Artemis Hospitals advises that those with respiratory conditions stay indoors during peak pollution hours and use air purifiers. Advocating for animal safety, *Tarujeet Pattan*, an animal welfare advocate, passionately encourages a cracker-free Diwali. "Firecrackers were never part of our tradition and are harmful to both animals and humans," she shares, urging people to comfort pets and welcome stray animals seeking shelter.

THE DIFFERENCE GREEN CRACKERS CAN MAKE

Green crackers offer a viable alternative to conventional firecrackers. Developed with a reduced chemical composition, these eco-friendly options are designed to produce less smoke, lower noise levels, and minimise harmful emissions. Unlike traditional crackers, which release high levels of pollutants such as carbon dioxide, sulphur oxides, and nitrogen oxides, green crackers contain non-toxic materials that



THE JOY CAME FROM TOGETHERNESS, NOT FIRECRACKERS OR EXTRAVAGANT DISPLAYS. TODAY, MANY SEND WHATSAPP MESSAGES INSTEAD OF VISITING LOVED ONES, AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES HAVE REPLACED PERSONAL CONNECTION. REVIVING OLD CUSTOMS LIKE LIGHTING DIYAS TOGETHER AND SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY CAN RESTORE THE TRUE SPIRIT OF DIWALI

EMBRACING SUSTAINABLE GIFT-GIVING

Diwali is traditionally marked by gift exchanges as a gesture of goodwill. To help conserve the environment, opting for sustainable, eco-friendly gifts can make a big difference. Instead of plastic-wrapped sweets or mass-produced decorations, choose alternatives like reusable jute bags, handmade products, plantable stationery, bamboo decor, artisanal candles, or potted plants. *Pronay Pasricha*, Brand Head of Pakka Limited suggests opting for gifts that offer genuine value and support the environment, such as reusable cloth bags, stainless steel bottles, or items made from agri-residue. "Choosing sustainable gifts not only reduces waste but also reflects a deeper commitment to the planet," says Pasricha.

EAT HEALTHY THIS DIWALI

Diwali sweets once captured the festive spirit with a blend of wholesome, homemade ingredients and traditional flavours. Today, however, mass-produced treats often come laden with sugars and unhealthy additives, which can lead to

increased health risks. *Chef Arokiya Doss*, Head Chef at The Malabar Coast, highlights the importance of mindful ingredient choices, saying, "Festive food tempts us with indulgent flavours, but balancing these with wholesome options is entirely possible. Opting for whole grains, legumes, and fresh vegetables adds fibre and reduces calorie density." *Chef Aditi Dixit* from CYK Hospitalities recommends "sweets that bring both indulgence and nutrition, like ladoos or halwas made with jaggery, or dates instead of refined sugar. Baked guryas filled with coconut and dry fruits keep the festive spirit alive with less oil, and ragi or millet-based barfis offer fibre and wholesome ingredients."

TAKE CARE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Diwali offers the comforting sense that some things remain unchanged. Talking about handling this mental burden, *Jasneet Kaur*, CB-Founder & CEO of Unfazed Therapy Solutions, shared, "While it's natural to miss loved ones, taking time to appreciate what we have can uplift our mood. Finding ways to celebrate meaningfully, even through community activities or volunteering, can restore a sense of purpose."



A Night of Dandiya and Festive Cheer

This Diwali, Rajasthan Club brought the festive spirit to life with Dandiya Raas: Rhymes of Diwali at Major Dhyan Chand Stadium, featuring music, dance and vibrant celebrations.

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Diwali - the festival that brings people together in joy, light and celebration - came alive in the heart of Delhi this year in a spectacular way. A grand cultural program, *Dandiya Raas* (Rhymes of Diwali), was organised by the Rajasthan Club, one of the city's leading social and cultural organisations, at the *Major Dhyan Chand Stadium*, also known as the National Stadium at India Gate. This vibrant event attracted thousands of people, turning the stadium into a lively hub of music, dance and festive cheer. From the moment you entered the stadium, the festive spirit enveloped you. Strings of lights decorated every corner, casting a warm glow that seemed to reflect the happiness in everyone's faces. Families, friends and even complete strangers came together to celebrate the essence of Diwali. The sounds of laughter and conversation filled the air, but it was the music that truly set the mood. As captivating tunes played, with singer and artist *Rahul Vaidya* setting the stage ablaze, people couldn't help but move to the rhythm. The beauty of this event lay in its ability to bring everyone together - no matter where you were from or who you were with, you were part of the same celebration. *Dandiya Raas* is more than just a dance;



it's a cherished tradition. Dressed in colourful ethnic wear, people of all ages twirled and clashed their Dandiya sticks in perfect harmony. There was a certain joy in the simplicity of it all. The bright colours of lehengas and kurtas, the clatter of sticks, and the smiles on people's faces created an atmosphere that was truly unforgettable. It didn't matter if you were an expert or a first-timer; the excitement was infectious, and everyone found themselves joining in the fun.

Beyond the dancing, the stadium was filled with the sights and smells of Diwali. Food stalls, with their tempting aromas of traditional sweets and savoury treats, were a popular spot throughout the night. Whether you were grabbing a plate of *hot jalebis* or a *bowl of spicy chaat*, the food was as much a part of the experience as the dancing. It added to the warmth of the evening, as people shared meals and stories, deepening the sense of community that Diwali always brings. What made this night truly magical was the feeling of unity. Diwali is a festival that symbolises the victory of light over darkness, and this event was a shining example of that. The energy of the crowd, the shared joy of dancing together, and the simple pleasure of being part of something bigger than yourself all came together to create an unforgettable Diwali experience. *Anurag*



Garg, the head of the Rajasthan Club, along with General Secretary *Sunil Prakash*, highlighted how the organisation, founded 56 years ago in 1968, has always aimed to carry forward cultural traditions while providing healthy entertainment to the community. As the night went on, the dancing only seemed to grow more lively. With every beat and every twirl, the crowd became more in sync, moving as one in celebration. It was a reminder of the beauty of togetherness and how, in moments like these, the true essence of Diwali shines through. Everyone left the event with full hearts, knowing that this night had captured the true spirit of the festival. This Diwali, Delhi didn't just light up with lamps and fireworks - it lit up with the smiles, laughter and joy of people coming together for a night of unforgettable celebration.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar



Dubai's Real Estate Boosting India's Tourism Industry This Diwali

BY TEAM AGENDA

As Dubai's real estate market reaches new heights, the benefits are spilling over to India's tourism sector. Real estate companies from Dubai are organising major events across various regions in India, leading to significant growth in both the hotel and tourism industries. A notable real estate event was hosted by *Tesla Properties*, a renowned Dubai-based company, at the *Royal Plaza Hotel in Connaught Place, Delhi*. Esteemed developers from Dubai showcased their projects and provided investors with comprehensive information on the advantages of investing in Dubai's real estate, which offers freehold ownership, excellent profitability, and attractive rental returns. Additionally, those residing in Dubai can obtain golden visas for their entire families. *Satish Balyan*, CEO of *Tesla Properties*, emphasised the company's commitment to contributing to India's development while residing in Dubai. "Delhi holds a special place in our hearts, which is why we choose it for our Dubai property events," he stated. He further explained that their team comprises citizens from various countries, whom they bring

to India to promote tourism and familiarise them with the local cuisine and culture. Interactions with Indian attendees help enhance the country's positive image globally. During the event, *Tesla Properties* experts highlighted how Indian investors can secure substantial returns by investing in Dubai. They addressed all real estate needs for individuals looking to start businesses, both residential and commercial. Moreover, the property management services offered ensure excellent appreciation in value. Investors benefit from a tax-free, crime-free, and pollution-free environment, coupled with a stable currency in Dubai. Various other developers, including the well-known Dubai-based firm *Binghatti*, also showcased their projects. *Tesla Properties* team members Persian from Iran savored the rich flavours of Indian cuisine, while *Marta from Poland* was left craving more after trying the local dish "soya chaap" in Connaught Place. The events in Dubai's real estate sector are consistently providing profits to India's aviation, food, hotel, and tourism industries, contributing to the nation's goal of achieving a five trillion-dollar economy.

CELEBRATE INDIA'S DIVERSE CULINARY LANDSCAPE

A culinary destination for a fusion of traditional Indian flavours and modern innovation, is perfect for festive dining, says **SHARMILA CHAND**

IDYLL known for serving Regional Indian plates & craft cocktails in its most rustic, nostalgic & idyllic state, presents a unique dining concept that celebrates the essence of India's rich culinary heritage. The restaurant's menu, inspired by the diverse flavours of Rajasthan, Kashmir, Lucknow, Orissa, and Maharashtra, perfectly complements the festive spirit of Diwali. Each dish is a testament to the restaurant's commitment to honouring traditional recipes while infusing them with contemporary flair. The IDYLL experience goes beyond mere sustenance, offering a holistic sensory journey that resonates with the joyous atmosphere of Diwali. From the moment guests step in, they are enveloped in an ambience that pays homage to Jaipur's celebratory structures. The interplay of textures, from polished surfaces to rough finishes, and the warm, earthy tones create an intimate setting ideal for festive gatherings.

Talking to **Namokar Jain**, the co-owner of IDYLL, I got to understand the philosophy that drives their innovative approach to Indian cuisine, as he explains their logo and what it stands for. "The five circles in the logo are reminiscent of the rings of a tree trunk. They symbolise the depth and richness of our commitment to reconnecting with tradition through food and beverages. Just as the ageing process of a tea trunk is slow and steady, so is our approach to crafting the perfect dining experience." He continues to explain, "At the heart of IDYLL's appeal is a reflective insight into the depth of Indian cuisine. Drawing inspiration from the age-old technique of fermentation, the menu offers a range of gut-friendly delights that are perfect for the

THE IDYLL EXPERIENCE GOES BEYOND MERE SUSTENANCE, OFFERING A HOLISTIC SENSORY JOURNEY THAT RESONATES WITH THE JOYOUS ATMOSPHERE OF DIWALI. FROM THE MOMENT GUESTS STEP IN, THEY ARE ENVELOPED IN AN AMBIANCE THAT PAYS HOMAGE TO JAIPUR'S CELEBRATORY STRUCTURES

indulgent Diwali season. From tangy handcrafted pickles to complex kombuchas, every dish and drink is designed to please both the palate and the gut."

FESTIVE AMBIENCE

The restaurant's two-level layout provides versatile spaces for different types of Diwali celebrations. The lower level offers an intimate fine dining experience, while the upper floor houses a vibrant cocktail room. Here, an open circular island bar becomes the epicentre of festivity, serving meticulously crafted cocktails that incorporate regional Indian ingredients, perfectly complementing the celebratory mood of Diwali.

IDYLL's commitment to nostalgia and tradition makes it an excellent choice for multi-generational Diwali gatherings. The culinary team, led by expert chefs, has infused the menu with their childhood favourites, creating dishes that evoke fond memories while offering a fresh, modern twist. This blend of the familiar and the innovative ensures that there's something for every family member to enjoy during the Diwali feast.

TO CONCLUDE

IDYLL offers a dining experience that honours tradition while embracing the new. With its thoughtfully crafted menu, ambient setting, and commitment to creating memorable experiences, IDYLL stands ready to make your Diwali celebration in Bangalore truly extraordinary. "It was our endeavour to create a space that would offer a sense of calm to our diners. We hope our IDYLL is that space - rustic and nostalgic, offering a holistic sensory experience! Echoing a story of tradition, innovation, and passion," quip **Namokar Jain** and **Jai Sharma**, the co-founders of the restaurant. (*Sharmila Chand is an Author, Columnist and independent Journalist, who writes on Food, Travel and Lifestyle*)

A HEALTHY DIWALI!

WHOLESOME RECIPES FOR FESTIVE INDULGENCE

TEAM AGENDA

With Diwali approaching, it's the perfect time to enjoy homemade treats that are both delicious and healthier. This festive season, why not try recipes that bring a balance of taste and wellness to your table? Here are four simple and flavourful dishes that will brighten your celebrations and keep the indulgence guilt-free.

ALMOND DATE CHOCOLATE BALLS

(by Australian Almonds)

These Almond, Date and Cranberry Balls are a perfect energy-boosting snack. Easy to prepare, they're rich in nutrients, with a festive touch of dark chocolate and edible gold dust.

- INGREDIENTS**
- ½ cup whole blanched almonds
 - 1 cup Medjool dates (seeds removed)
 - 1/3 cup cranberries
 - 3 tsp cacao or Dutch cocoa powder
 - ¼ cup desiccated coconut
 - 3 tsp almond butter

- Method**
- Blend almonds, dates, cranberries, cacao, coconut and almond butter in a food processor.
 - Roll small portions into balls and coat with chopped or flaked almonds.
 - Refrigerate before serving. For a special touch, drizzle melted dark chocolate and sprinkle it with gold dust.



SPECIAL COCONUT LADDOO

(by Bristhi Kumari, on behalf of Chilean Prunes)

A Diwali classic, these laddoos get a unique twist with prunes, adding a rich flavour to the traditional coconut and condensed milk combo.

- Ingredients**
- 1 tsp ghee
 - 1 cup desiccated coconut
 - ½ cup condensed milk
 - 2 tsp milk
 - ¼ tsp cardamom powder
 - Prunes and chopped pistachios for garnish

- Method**
- Heat ghee in a pan, fry the coconut on low heat until lightly coloured.
 - Add condensed milk, 2 tsp milk and cardamom powder, and mix well.
 - Shape the mixture into small balls, placing a prune in the centre.
 - Refrigerate for 30 minutes before serving.



PISTACHIO BAKLAVA CAKE

(by Chef Najmieh Batmanglij, on behalf of American Pistachio Growers)

This cake is a delightful fusion of Baklava and cake, combining the flavours of pistachio, cardamom, and rose water for a unique Diwali dessert.

- Ingredients: Glaze**
- 1 cup honey
 - ¼ cup rose water
 - Zest of 1 orange
 - 2 tsp fresh lime juice

- Cake**
- 3 eggs, separated
 - ¾ cup sugar
 - 2 tsp cardamom powder
 - 2 tsp rose water
 - ½ cup milk (or almond milk) and ½ cup oil
 - 1 cup flour (with 1½ tsp baking powder)
 - 1½ cups ground pistachios
 - 1 apple, peeled, cored and chopped (optional)

- Garnish**
- Pistachios, almonds and dried rose petals
- Method**
- Mix all glaze ingredients and set aside. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
 - Whisk egg yolks and sugar until creamy, add cardamom, rose water, milk, and oil. Fold in flour, pistachios, and apple.
 - Whip egg whites to soft peaks and fold into the batter.
 - Bake for 40-45 minutes, then pour half the glaze over the cake. Garnish with pistachios, almonds, and rose petals.



CARAMEL WALNUT KHEER

(by Chile Walnuts)

A rich and creamy kheer with a caramel twist, this dish is the perfect blend of traditional and modern flavours, enhanced with crunchy Chilean walnuts.

- Ingredients**
- 7-8 Chilean walnuts (roughly broken) + 3-4 for garnish
 - 3 tsp rice (soaked for 2 hours)
 - 1 litre milk (divided)
 - 1/3 cup sugar and 1 tsp butter (optional)
 - Water

- Method**
- Cook soaked rice with ½ cup milk in a pressure cooker for 2 whistles.
 - For caramel, heat sugar with water until golden brown, then stir in butter (optional) and 2 tsp warm milk.
 - Boil the remaining milk, add the cooked rice, and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in walnuts and caramel.
 - Garnish with more walnuts and serve.



These festive recipes not only bring vibrant flavours to your Diwali celebrations but also add a healthy twist to traditional treats. By incorporating wholesome ingredients like almonds, prunes and walnuts, you can enjoy the best of both worlds - delicious sweets and mindful indulgence. So, light up your home with joy and fill your table with these delightful dishes that everyone will love, guilt-free. Wishing you a bright, flavourful and health-conscious Diwali!

A Taste of Italy at Farmer's Basket

Chef Francesco Calvani showcased his finest creations at Farmer's Basket in Pullman. **GYANESHWAR DAYAL** describes the authentic Italian dishes as simply irresistible



Pullman New Delhi Aerocity is a culinary gem that recently unveiled an exclusive Italian pop-up that promises to whisk guests away to Italy through the exquisite flavours of its cuisine. The hotel's all-day dining restaurant, **Farmer's Basket at Pluck**, welcomes the esteemed **Chef Francesco Calvani**, renowned for his artistic flair in Italian cooking.

As I stepped into **Farmer's Basket**, the ambience was inviting, infused with a warmth that hinted at the culinary delights to come. The collaboration with **Chef Calvani** is a testament to **Pullman's** commitment to offering memorable dining experiences, and I was eager to see how his mastery would shine through in the menu. **Chef Francesco Calvani**, a distinguished graduate of **Le Cordon Bleu**, possesses an impressive background in both Italian and French cuisines. His culinary journey began at the renowned **Gordon Ramsay's Bread Street Kitchen** in London, where he honed his skills and developed a passion for creating unforgettable dishes. Known for his dedication to quality ingredients and an elegant culinary style, **Chef Calvani's** approach is rooted in the belief that great ingredients can transform any dish into a masterpiece.

During my visit, I had the pleasure of sampling a signature menu which was specially curated for the dinner buffet and the exclusive Sunday Brunch, both showcasing **Chef Calvani's** culinary expertise. The dinner buffet was a lavish spread, featuring highlights such as **Corn Fed Chicken with Mixed Bell Peppers**,

Porcini Mushrooms Risotto, and the classic **Spaghetti Alla Carbonara**. Each dish was a celebration of authentic Italian flavours, infused with **Chef Calvani's** unique twists that elevated the dining experience to new heights. One standout was the **Pistachio Crusted Tuna Fillet**, perfectly seared and complemented by a delicate sauce that highlighted the fish's natural flavours. **The Walnut and Gorgonzola Gnocchi** was another revelation, with its rich, creamy texture enveloping the soft pillows of pasta - truly a dish that lingered in my memory long after the meal.

As I savoured each bite, it became evident that **Chef Calvani's** philosophy of using the finest ingredients

was at the heart of this dining experience. The attention to detail and the passion infused into every dish were palpable, making this not just a meal but a journey through the diverse landscapes of Italy. The exclusive pop-up at **Farmer's Basket** is not merely about dining; it is a celebration of Italian culture and culinary tradition. Reservations are highly recommended for those wishing to indulge in this exquisite gastronomic experience.

For an unforgettable evening that transports you to the heart of Italy, visit **Farmer's Basket at Pluck, Pullman New Delhi Aerocity**. Reserve your and prepare to embark on a

culinary adventure that showcases the very best of Italian cuisine. Strategically located near IGI Airport and the bustling business hubs of Gurgaon and New Delhi, **Pullman New Delhi Aerocity** stands as a stylish and modern destination. Combined together with **Novotel Aerocity** as a part of the same complex, the hotel boasts of 670 elegantly appointed rooms and suites, along with a state-of-the-art convention space featuring 13 meeting rooms and one of the largest ballrooms in the Delhi NCR region.

With six innovative dining outlets, the hotel draws on international and local culinary specialties, ensuring that every meal is a celebration. Leisure facilities, including a spa, a fully-equipped health club, and an outdoor swimming pool, complete the experience, making it a true sanctuary for both business and leisure travellers.



AMORE IN HYDERABAD

AARTI SREENATH
aarti.sreenath9@gmail.com

When Via Milano decided to waltz back into Hyderabad's Jubilee Hills, they didn't just open their doors; they opened a portal. One step in and you're transported from the busy streets of Jubilee Hills straight to a cozy corner somewhere between Florence and Milan, where indulgence is an art form, and every bite whispers the language of amore.

The theme of bottle green and gold was as comforting as a slow sunset over the Tuscan countryside. Chandeliers cast a soft, warm glow over wooden furniture that balanced rustic charm with minimalist chic, while natural light from large windows streamed in, offering diners a glimpse of the world outside without a sense of urgency. Intimate, warm, and elegantly laid-back, it's ambiance is the perfect prelude to the culinary affair that awaits.

You don't just eat at Via Milano; you take a journey through Italy. Here, chefs take pride in crafting everything in-house: no shortcuts, no preservatives, just love and authenticity. This commitment to freshness is perhaps most evident in their 'Aglie Olio', a deceptively simple dish where al dente spaghetti meets perfectly sautéed garlic and a kiss of olive oil. It's a dish that owner Roger confessed he could "literally eat every day" and I can see why. Whether enjoyed vegetarian or with chicken and mushroom, the flavours come alive in an unpretentious harmony.

The 'Chicken Scallopini', thin slices of tender chicken bathed in a delicate white wine and mushroom sauce, served alongside creamy mashed potatoes, was another personal favourite. If you're in a sharing mood (or just feeling particularly indulgent), the 'Mixed Grill Platter', laden with chicken, lamb and beef, is a carnivore's

'FORK'LORE



FOOD TO TRY
Pane Aglio e Formaggio, Gelato and Sorbet

DECOR
A cozy, well-lit modern dining with warm white lighting

PRICE
1300 for two

VERDICT
★★★★★

dream, an invitation to savour charred perfection with friends. Rotoli di Peperone alla Griglia 'V', a vibrant Italian starter, these grilled bell pepper rolls are generously stuffed with creamy goat cheese and dressed with zucchini stewed in tangy red wine vinegar. 'Rosa di Salmone Affumicato Smoked salmon' was delicately rolled with mascarpone, capers, dill and onion, creating an elegant



KHOPRA PAK – TRADITIONAL INDIAN DELIGHT

INGREDIENTS:

- Saffron: 3 strands ● Water: 40 ml ● Sugar: 50 gm ● Mawa (Khoya): 150 gm
- Coconut Powder: 50 gm ● Dry Fruits (chopped): 10 gm ● Dried Rose Petals: 2 gm

METHOD:

- 1. Prepare sugar syrup:** Take a heavy-bottom pan and combine water, sugar, and saffron. Heat the mixture on medium flame, stirring occasionally. Continue cooking until the syrup reaches the 3-string consistency (thick and sticky).
- 2. Incorporate mawa:** Add mawa to the syrup and stir well. Cook until the mixture turns into a smooth, thick paste.
- 3. Add coconut powder:** Gradually add the coconut powder in small batches, mixing thoroughly each time. Remove the pan from heat once all the coconut powder is incorporated.



Category: Confectionery.
Meal period: Lunch/dinner
Preparation time: 10 minutes.
Cooking time: 30 minutes
Finishing time: 4 hours

- 4. Shape mixture:** Grease a tin or flat tray with ghee. Pour the prepared mixture into the tin and spread it evenly.
- 5. Garnish:** Sprinkle the top with chopped dry fruits and a few dried rose petals for a fragrant, decorative touch.

6. Set and serve: Let the 'Khopra Pak' cool completely for around 4 hours. Once firm, cut into small squares or diamonds and serve.

KARACHI HALWA – CLASSIC SWEET TREAT



Category:

Confectionery

Meal period:

Lunch/dinner

Preparation time:

10 minutes

Cooking time:

25 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

- Cornflour: 120 gm ● Ghee: 120 ml ● Sugar: 120 gm
- Water: 240 ml ● Chopped Nuts/Fruits: As desired

METHOD:

- 1. Prepare base:** In a thick-bottomed pan, mix cornflour and ghee over low heat. Stir continuously until the mixture turns brown.
- 2. Add sugar syrup:** In the same pan, add sugar and water. Mix well until the ingredients blend smoothly.
- 3. Cook mixture:** Continue cooking on low flame until the mixture thickens and becomes glossy and transparent. This ensures the halwa achieves the desired texture.
- 4. Enhance with nuts/fruits:** Remove the pan from heat and stir in chopped nuts or dried fruits as per your preference.
- 5. Set and serve:** Pour the halwa mixture into a greased tray and allow it to cool. Once set, cut into desired shapes.
- 6. Enjoy:** Serve and savor the delicious Karachi Halwa – perfect for festivals or a sweet indulgence!

GULAB KI KHEER – FRAGRANT INDIAN DESSERT

Category: Indian Confectionery
Meal Period: Lunch/Dinner
Preparation Time: 5 minutes
Cooking Time: 25 minutes



INGREDIENTS:

- Rose Petals: 10 gm ● Milk: 500 ml ● Sugar: 15 gm
- Gulkand (Rose Preserve): 7 gm
- Almond Flakes: 3 gm ● Crushed Cashews: 3 gm

METHOD:

- 1. Prepare the rose petals:** Rinse the rose petals thoroughly and pat them dry. Set aside.
- 2. Boil the milk:** In a heavy-bottomed pan, pour the milk and bring it to a boil over medium heat.
- 3. Infuse with rose petals:** Add the rose petals to the boiling milk and let it simmer until the milk reduces to half its original volume.
- 4. Sweeten the kheer:** Add sugar and gulkand to the reduced milk. Stir well to blend the flavors.
- 5. Finish cooking:** Bring the mixture to a boil once again. Turn off the heat and stir in the almond flakes and crushed cashews.
- 6. Cool and serve:** Allow the kheer to cool completely, then chill in the refrigerator. Serve cold, garnished with additional nuts for a delightful presentation.

Attributes: Mordhwaj Singh Chandrawat, chef & food influencer, Belle Patisserie

DIWALI SPECIAL

As Diwali approaches, it's time to light up hearts and homes with gifts that go beyond the usual sweets and candles! This festive season, why not add a dash of creativity to your gifting list? Move over traditional treats and embrace unique surprises that bring a smile to every face and light up their faces too.



DIWALI DESERVES BETTER

Bored with gifting the usual basket of assorted dry fruits and traditional sweets to your loved ones? This Diwali, elevate your celebrations with the innovative and unique Pataka Popcorn Range by 4700BC, the ultimate gourmet snacking brand. It combines irresistible flavours like chocolate, caramel and cheese, creating a delightful blend of sweet and salty goodness.

Price: Rs 524/- onwards

ELEVATE YOUR DIWALI STYLE

As we prepare for the vibrant Diwali festivities, what better way to celebrate than by adorning yourself with exquisite jewellery that perfectly complements your style and captures the spirit of the season? Experience the allure of perfectly coordinated jewellery sets that effortlessly elevate your festive look. The matching sets have been meticulously curated to harmonise with your style, adding a touch of sophistication to your ensemble by ORRA.

PRICE ON REQUEST

GIFT WITH LOVE

This festive season, make your gifting truly special with VAHDAM India's newly launched most exquisite gift set. Perfect for elevating any Diwali celebration, it captures the essence of the season—spreading warmth, gratitude and the joy of giving in every beautifully curated hamper.

Price: INR 2599



FLOWERS THAT LAST OVER A YEAR!

As the festive season approaches, RocoCo is redefining the luxury gifting experience with their unique collection of forever flowers—exquisite blooms that last over a year with no need for water, sunlight, or plant food. A statement arrangement of 30 lush forever roses in a porcelain vase, this piece transforms any setting with its grandeur, ideal for gifts or as a centerpiece for any luxurious home.

ENDLESS NEW WAYS TO CELEBRATE FESTIVE SEASON

New beginnings call for delicious new experiences. Usher in Diwali with a truly Indian chocolate experience, rooted in the flavours, the collective celebrations and the craftsmanship of India. Presenting the Manam Chocolate - Diwali Edition 2024, a delightful selection of Indian craft chocolate, carefully curated to capture the essence of our festive season. Indulgent bonbons, ganache-filled palettes and creamy truffles crafted with fine flavour chocolate, promise to elevate your festive gifting, while sweet and savoury chocolate snacks make perfect accompaniments at your taash parties and intimate gatherings, and freshly baked dessert boxes complement Diwali dinners.

CELEBRATE DIWALI WITH KIKO MILANO COLLECTION

This Diwali, embrace the spirit of celebration with Kiko Milano's Hydra Pro Matte face moisturiser, coloured lip balm and lip plumper in transparent. Crafted to nourish and enhance, these essentials offer a radiant glow and irresistibly soft lips, making them perfect for festive gatherings.



INDULGE IN FESTIVE LUXURY WITH EXQUISITE CHOCOLATE GIFT HAMPERS

Enhance your Diwali celebrations with the Läderach Garnet Diwali gift box, thoughtfully designed to capture the essence of togetherness and tradition. The hamper includes a set of card deck curated specially for the festive season. The assortment includes assorted pralines & truffles, assorted frisch Schoggli, popcorn, assorted tart, napolitans and two deck of cards which makes for the perfect gift.

GOLD-TONE MEENAKARI JHUMKAS



Imitation Jewellery Indulge in the timeless charm of Shagna's gold-tone meenakari jhumkas, meticulously crafted on brass material. The vibrant hues of meenakari add a pop of colour, perfect for any party or wedding season. Complete your Diwali look with these stunning gold-plated earrings, exuding elegance and charm.

Price: 699/-

CELEBRATE THIS FESTIVE SEASON WITH SEAGRAM'S LIMITED EDITION PACKS

As we step into the festive season, a time for togetherness and celebration, Seagram's 100 Pipers presents The Legacy Project Limited Edition Packs—a tribute to India's rich cultural heritage through the art of calligraphy. This year's exclusive range celebrating another artform, calligraphy, brought to life through the beauty of five distinct Indian scripts—Bengali, Devanagari, Gurmukhi, Telugu and Kannada—making it the perfect addition to your festive gatherings. RINGS OF EVOLUTION (Telugu calligraphy) conveys the wisdom of nurturing nature for future generations, brought to life through calligraphy in Telugu.

Price: 5999/-

PINK SEQUIN STRAPLESS DRESS WITH CUTOUTS

Step into the spotlight with stunning Sobella sequined strapless evening dress! Featuring chic cut-out details on the sides, it exudes glamour. With an elegant ankle-length silhouette, this dress is perfect for evening soirées and parties, ensuring you dazzle with every step.

Price: 5999/-





"O Goddess Maa Lakshmi, you are aware of everything; you bestow blessing upon all and defend us from the evils"

As we illuminate our homes with lights and laughter, let us also extend our warmth to those who may feel isolated. This Diwali, let us celebrate not only the joy of togetherness but also the resilience of the human spirit, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

DIWALI

FESTIVAL THAT UNITES HEARTS AND HOMES

Where there is light, there is life." This sentiment resonates deeply during Diwali, a festival that holds unparalleled significance in the hearts of millions, especially in India. As homes begin to sparkle with twinkling lights and the scent of sweets fills the air, Diwali transforms into so much more than just a holiday. It becomes a celebration of life, love and togetherness, reuniting families eagerly awaiting the return of their loved ones. The festivities start with Dhanteras, the day dedicated to wealth and prosperity, when people purchase new items, often precious metals, to bring good fortune. This year, after much speculation and confusion about the dates, Diwali will be celebrated on the 31st of October. The thrill of homecoming resonates throughout the country, as people prepare to light up their homes and hearts. Each diya lit represents a moment of togetherness, a shared memory and the promise of brighter days ahead. Amidst the hustle and bustle, Diwali serves as a powerful reminder that the connections we cherish with family and friends illuminate our lives like nothing else. For many, Diwali is the one time in the year where homecoming is guaranteed. Students travel back from distant universities, workers journey long hours to be with their families and travel tickets are secured well in advance. In hostels, laughter and conversation fade as students depart, while homes come alive with the buzz of preparations, cleaning and decorating. The excitement of being together during this time makes the festival unforgettable.

DIWALI'S SPIRITUAL ESSENCE

Diwali, rooted in deep spiritual and religious traditions, marks Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, symbolising the triumph of light over darkness. The festival also honours Goddess Lakshmi, the deity of wealth and Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Devotees seek their blessings for prosperity and joy. A key Diwali ritual is Lakshmi Puja, held on Amavasya, the new moon night. Families clean their homes, light diyas and offer prayers to welcome the Goddess. A clean, well-lit home is believed to attract her blessings for a prosperous year ahead.

A MONTH OF CLEANING AND SHOPPING

The excitement for Diwali builds up weeks, even months, in advance. The first step towards celebrating the festival is the traditional cleaning, known as Diwali safai. Families deep-clean their homes, shops, and offices, as it is believed that cleanliness is essential for welcoming Goddess Lakshmi. This act of cleaning is not just about tidying up; it symbolises getting rid of negativity and making space for positivity, peace and prosperity. From dusting the furniture to repainting the walls, no task is left undone. Many also take the time to paint their houses, creating a fresh and inviting environment.

Once the cleaning is complete, the shopping begins. Markets and shopping centres come alive with eager customers, browsing through colourful clothes, decorations, gifts, and sweets. The atmosphere is vibrant, filled with laughter and chatter, as families prepare to celebrate this joyous occasion together, ensuring that their homes are not just clean but also adorned with love and warmth. The spirit of Diwali resonates through the bustling crowds, as everyone eagerly gathers items to make their homes shine bright during this special festival.

CHANDNI CHOWK: THE HEART OF DIWALI CELEBRATIONS

As Diwali approaches, Delhi's famous Chandni Chowk becomes a lively and colourful marketplace filled with excitement. The narrow streets are bustling with people looking for lights and



was Suresh, a warm-hearted artist who welcomed me into his place, where the air was rich with the earthy scent of clay, a scent that spoke of history and tradition. My grandparents started making diyas from scratch," he shared, his eyes sparkling with pride and a hint of nostalgia. "We've kept this tradition alive and it feels like a true blessing that the diyas we create will light up homes. Each diya carries a piece of our heart and our family's legacy." His words resonated deeply, reminding me that these diyas are more than just decorations, they are symbols of love, hope and the warmth of family gatherings. As I watched Suresh skillfully shape each diya, I felt the passion and devotion radiating from his every move. He and his family create thousands of these beautiful diyas daily, pouring their hearts into each piece. For them, Diwali is not just about making money; it's about spreading joy and contributing to the happiness of families celebrating together. Witnessing their craftsmanship was a humbling experience. The red diyas, adorned with intricate designs, symbolise the very essence of Diwali. The warmth of their hospitality and the richness of their tradition illuminated my understanding of Diwali. This festival is not just about the lights; it's about the hearts and souls that create them, the love they pour into each diya and the joy they bring to countless homes filled with laughter and celebration. As Diwali approaches, let us honour artists like Suresh, whose selfless dedication ensures that the spirit of the festival shines brightly, lighting up not just their own homes but thousands of others, filling them with hope, love, and the promise of togetherness.

SPREADING LIGHT AND KINDNESS

With Diwali just around the corner, the vibrant festivities stir a mix of emotions. For many, it's a time of joy, family reunions and shared traditions. Yet, there are those among us who find themselves away from home, whether due to work commitments, distance or other circumstances. To those individuals, remember: it's okay to feel a sense of longing during this time. Your feelings are valid and you are not alone. While the lights may not shine in the familiar corners of your childhood home, the spirit of Diwali can still flicker brightly within your heart. This festival is about more than just being physically present; it's a celebration of love, hope and the connections we share, no matter the distance. You can still find joy in the little things, perhaps by lighting a diya in your own space, reaching out to loved ones through video calls or even creating new traditions with friends and colleagues who are nearby.

As we prepare for the celebrations, it's essential to remember the well-being of our furry companions, both at home and on the streets. The loud noises of fireworks can be distressing for pets and street animals alike. Let us ensure a safe Diwali for them by creating quiet spaces away from the sounds of firecrackers. A comforting environment can help ease their anxiety and allow them to feel secure during the festivities. For those who are able to gather with family and friends, let us not forget those who are unable to join in the celebrations. A simple gesture, a call, a message or even a small gift - can make a world of difference to someone feeling isolated this Diwali. As we light up our homes with lights and laughter, let's also shine on the hearts of those who may feel left out. This Diwali, let us embrace the spirit of kindness and generosity, extending our hearts to those in need, whether human or animal. It's a time to celebrate not just the joy of togetherness but also the resilience of the human spirit. Wishing you all a safe, joyful and love-filled Diwali!

decorations to brighten their homes for the festival of lights. The energy is visible, with every corner filled with the sounds of bargaining, laughter and excitement. Upon entering Chandni Chowk, visitors are greeted by rows of vendors showcasing beautifully painted diyas. Classic red diyas are available in sets of six for just ₹60, while glittery designs in sets of twelve cost ₹120. These diyas are essential for every home during Diwali, accompanied by colourful candles and rangoli stickers featuring auspicious symbols like 'Shubh Laabh'.

In Chandni Chowk, the lighting options are endless. You can find warm yellow lights that create a cosy atmosphere or bright, multi-colored LED strings. Prices start as low as ₹80 for simple string lights and can go up to ₹300 or more for elaborate pieces. Many shoppers enjoy video calling family members to show them different lighting options, making sure everyone is involved in the preparations, even if they're far away. This year, a unique find in Chandni Chowk is the water diya, which lights up when you pour water into it. These creative diyas are

not only beautiful but also practical, adding a modern touch to traditional Diwali decorations. Vendors promote these eco-friendly options, encouraging customers to use them year after year. Chandni Chowk is always busy, but during Diwali, it truly comes alive. Shops and corners burst with colours and lights. Vendors and shoppers alike share in the excitement. The crowded streets, lively sounds and delicious smells make it a unique, festive experience. This is what makes Diwali in Chandni Chowk so special - it's a time of togetherness and joy as families, friends and even strangers come together to celebrate the festival of lights. Each diya tells a story of hope and every smile shared adds to the festive spirit of Diwali.

THE ARTISTRY OF DIWALI

The streets of Chandni Chowk shimmer with vibrant lights and colours, but it was in Uttam Nagar that I discovered the heart and soul behind Diwali, the artisans whose hands craft the beloved diyas that illuminate homes each year. Among them

THE FESTIVITIES START WITH DHANTERAS, THE DAY DEDICATED TO WEALTH AND PROSPERITY, WHEN PEOPLE PURCHASE NEW ITEMS, OFTEN PRECIOUS METALS, TO BRING GOOD FORTUNE. THIS YEAR, AFTER MUCH SPECULATION AND CONFUSION ABOUT THE DATES, DIWALI WILL BE CELEBRATED ON THE 31ST OF OCTOBER

AS WE PREPARE FOR THE CELEBRATIONS, IT'S ESSENTIAL TO REMEMBER THE WELL-BEING OF OUR FURRY COMPANIONS, BOTH AT HOME AND ON THE STREETS. THE LOUD NOISES OF FIREWORKS CAN BE DISTRESSING FOR PETS AND STREET ANIMALS ALIKE. LET US ENSURE A SAFE DIWALI FOR THEM BY CREATING QUIET SPACES AWAY FROM THE SOUNDS OF FIRECRACKERS



CHAT-O-CINO

MAHIMA CHAUDHRY:

I AM AN ACTOR, NOT JUST '90s HEROINE

SHIKHA DUGGAL
shikhaduggalwork@gmail.com

Despite facing unthinkable challenges, actress Mahima has come out stronger, bolder and more radiant than before. Her experience has served as evidence of the resiliency, optimism and bravery of the human spirit. Every obstacle surmounted, every treatment received and every difficult day triumphed over serves as a badge of honour and a reminder that she is, in fact, a warrior. Her story serves as an inspiration to others, a ray of hope during the darkest hours and a reminder that life is beautiful, fleeting and valuable. She is a champion, a thriver and a bright example of what it is to live life to the fullest! Now that she is back in the spotlight, audiences were enthralled by her ability, passion and resolve as she inspired a new generation with her fortitude and tenacity. This is one of the most emotional and exclusive interviews with none other than Mahima Chaudhary, who debuted with Shah Rukh Khan in *Pardes*. Back then, the movie was a huge hit!

"For *The Signature*, we included my own stories into the character because, as I remember, Anupam Kher didn't know I had cancer when he sought me for the part! He adds, 'Oh, so we will continue to shoot with you and with just the way you are,' as soon as I calmly break the news to him. He stated, 'I have come to draw strength from you!' In order to portray authenticity on screen, he was certain that he wanted to film with me during the treatment," Mahima said in the conversation with *The Pioneer*.

"I remember being on the sets of Kangana Ranaut's *Emergency*—and as we all know, Anupam Kher and the late Satish Kaushik were dear friends," *Pardes* fame says, who was quite keen to share this anecdote with us. "I also have close friendships with both of them. My one-liner for the film was well appreciated by Satish Kaushik, who sadly passed away a month later. Let me simply state to the readers that I really did not want to seem like this on screen during my treatment. I was so confused! I simply lacked confidence in myself, even if Anupam Kher was persuading me every day. *Mai bina baal ke 500 picture kar chuka hoon, tum kyun nahi kar sakti?* he remarks. He did not want me to rely on my appearance! It had nothing to do with appearances; all he wanted was for me to evoke strong feelings in the audience. I wanted to wear my wig even though I was finally persuaded."

However, Mahima's decision to appear without the wig made the following day's events on the sets of *The Signature* much more poignant. Without it, she was doing just fine—completely fine. She was swollen and without eyebrows on the first day, which was the worst physical space of her life and she was pretty terrified to see herself on the monitor again because she was taking a lot of medication. "It might be the worst time for an actress to work on a movie. Anupam wanted me to trust him, so he didn't let me see the shots. I gave up gradually. I also recall asking my makeup artist to slightly contour my head and he did, although he was not sure why. Even he was surprised when I told him that I would administer the remaining shots without the wig because he simply did not anticipate this happening! During *The Signature*'s journey, he became emotional. Perhaps that's just the way life is."

She had spent the last few days travelling nonstop. She makes sure to explain how she has noticed a significant shift in her filmography during this interview from Ludhiana. She used to be complimented on how well they remembered her for a specific scene, but now it was the other way around. It was all about individuals approaching her and sharing their own experiences as cancer survivors! "When I normally do films, I get very different reactions. Hearing and seeing how individuals are discussing difficulties makes me happy! With me, they were offloading. Anupam Kher was really kind to me as well! After Kangana Ranaut learned about it, she offered me a role in her own movie, *Emergency*. Sanjay Mishra then contacted us and we collaborated on another movie. When Karan Johar's production company called, they were certain they wanted me to play Suniel Shetty's opposite. The amount of support I was receiving from my film industry astounded me. I had no idea how loved I was!"

The famous movie star from *Dil Hai Tumharaa* has now let

From the silver screen darling of the 90s to a fierce warrior battling life's toughest challenges, Mahima Chaudhry's journey is nothing short of extraordinary. Once hailed for her beauty and grace in films like *Pardes*, she now stands as a symbol of strength, defying every stereotype about aging heroines. Cancer survivor, actress, mother—Mahima is proving that reinvention is not just about returning to the limelight, but about rewriting the narrative. As she says herself, she's not just a 90s heroine; she's an actor, real and redefining her legacy on her own terms

go of all her inhibitions. Now, she receives reassurance at every turn in her life! She also gave us the following viewpoint: "You know what's the most positive thing right now? I was a little bewildered, vulnerable and relying only on what other people thought was right. However, I was pleasantly surprised when I visited Karan Johar's production company later and discovered that half of the crew was women. I had never seen this as an actress from the 1990s before in my life," she shared. That essentially made her very happy. Her entire life, she had only ever seen men doing makeup; now, the roles had been reversed. She even spotted a woman who designed the set! Additionally, she saw the type of scripts being written, the language being utilised and the manner in which an actress is directed in the modern era. She also saw a significant shift in the type of entourage that each actor brought, which included a large number of staff members. She chuckled, feeling like a lone ranger.

With all of the theoretical questions we were imposing on her, the *Daag* fame is still going strong! "A lot of topics have been explored in my most recent film, such as the significance of health insurance," she stated. "In some way, this conversation transports me back to the 1990s, when I was one of the most well-liked and well-known faces. Additionally, I had a tragic car accident during the peak of my career, which left me with physical injury. A picture of me was

featured on the cover of a magazine, which publicly criticised my accident and called me a "scarface." Back then, the journalism industry was incredibly cruel—these journalists were doing what modern-day "trollers" do. Thank heavens, I can choose whether or not to join the paparazzi today!"

She doesn't feel pressured to be a certain size or to look a certain way as she does today. She is certain! In that sense, if readers notice, even her return is rather unusual. She should have ideally followed a six-month exercise regimen, used numerous face treatments, glowing her face and did something with her hair, but she turned that strange return into her greatest strength. Instead of being a heroine, she wants to stay an actor! "There is only positivism and no resilience. I have my negative thoughts and that's just okay! When I doubt myself, my sister always tries to cajole me. However, the fact that Anupam Kher cries just as much as I do makes me very pleased these days! *Kis liye, mujhe naam kaamana hai? Yaad nahi rakhta koi apka naam*. My only concern is what I will leave behind for my daughter; I want her to have a positive disposition." With a boom, the actress Mahima Chaudhary concludes the interview.



TRENDING

SANJIV KHANNA



Justice Sanjiv Khanna has been appointed the next Chief Justice of India by President of India Droupadi Murmu after Chief Justice DY Chandrachud named him his successor.

BOOKING AN UNUSUAL TRANSPORT

VIDEO



A fascinating video circulating on Instagram shows two women stuck in a desert in Dubai, desperately seeking rescue. In a bizarre twist, one of them opened her Uber app, only to find an unexpected ride option: a camel.

AMARAN

MOVIE

The highly anticipated trailer for *Amaran*, a biographical action war film directed by Rajkumar Periasamy, was released on October 23, offering audiences a glimpse into an emotional and action-packed narrative.



RAANJHAN

SONG



The sizzling chemistry between Kriti Sanon and Shaheer Sheikh has set the screen on fire. The song's lyrics and soothing music wonderfully reflect the agony and desire that come after a breakup.

AMARAVATI DRONE SUMMIT 2024

PICTURE



Andhra Pradesh hosts India's largest drone show at Amravati Drone Summit 2024, setting 5 Guinness World Records with 5,500 drones, including a stunning display of the national flag, mesmerizing thousands along Krishna River.

SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL BUTT LIFT

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In a world obsessed with "having it all," it turns out we're quite literally aiming for well, all the curves. From squats at the gym to the elusive search for the perfect pair of jeans, the quest for the ideal derriere is a tale as old as time or at least as old as Instagram. But if your booty dreams are stuck in a rut and gravity is winning the battle, fear not, science and a little artistic flair have

your back(side). Welcome to the age of the butt lift, where expert surgeons aren't just lifting spirits, they're lifting posteriors with precision and pizzazz. Whether you're looking for a subtle perk or a full-on transformation, these modern-day sculptors are here to tell you that a better behind is just a consultation away. But remember, it's not just about the lift; it's about the lifestyle, the commitment and the perfect fit. Because in the world of bootylicious dreams, not all glutes are created equal!

At CK Birla Hospital, Dr. Anmol Chugh, Lead Consultant in Plastic & Aesthetic Surgery, has honed his skills for over a decade. Specialising in buttock procedures, his repertoire includes Brazilian Butt Lifts (BBL), augmentations with implants and gluteoplasties. For him, no two procedures are alike. "The key to a successful butt lift lies in understanding each patient's unique anatomy," he explains. "My goal is to enhance their natural curves while ensuring safety and longevity in results." He emphasises the importance of precision, particularly when it

comes to BBLs. The procedure involves transferring fat from one area of the body to the buttocks through liposuction, a delicate process that demands accuracy to prevent complications like fat embolism.

"We use ultrasound-guided fat injections to make sure the fat is placed safely, minimising any risks," he says. His careful attention to detail ensures not just a more contoured shape but also a natural look that stands the test of time. "For patients with less fat, buttock augmentation with implants is a great alternative. And when skin laxity is an issue, we can remove excess skin through gluteoplasty."

For him, the process begins long before surgery. He conducts thorough evaluations, assessing factors like skin quality, fat distribution and the patient's overall health. "I also consider their lifestyle habits," he adds. "It's important to set realistic expectations, helping patients understand the limitations and potential of the procedure." Not all patients, however, are ready for surgery, which is where non-invasive techniques come into play. At Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, Dr. Shishir Agrawal, Director of Plastic, Cosmetic & Reconstructive Surgery, offers subtle enhancement through dermal fillers and radiofrequency treatments. These methods, while less dramatic than surgery, can still provide a significant lift, giving patients a natural look with minimal downtime. "During consultations, I focus on understanding my patient's goals," he shares. "Non-surgical treatments are perfect for those seeking gradual, natural improvement." For example, fillers like Sculptra stimulate collagen production, creating volume over time. "The results aren't immediate, but they build gradually over months and with proper maintenance, they can last up to two years," he explains. He is meticulous in educating his patients about the science behind each option. "Radiofrequency helps tighten the

skin by stimulating collagen, but it requires regular sessions to maintain the effect," he says. "Many people think that one treatment will give them permanent results, but it's a process." These procedures are low-risk but require commitment to maintain their effectiveness. "The results are subtle but definitely noticeable. We keep everything looking natural."

While the procedure itself is critical, post-operative care is just as important for optimal results. Dr. Vijay Singhal, Senior Consultant in Dermatology at Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, highlights the role skin plays in the healing process. "Patients often experience swelling, bruising, or even changes in skin texture after a butt lift," he says, adding that proper care can make all the difference. "Compression garments help manage swelling and reduce the accumulation of fluids, while scar-reducing creams can keep scarring to a minimum." He also emphasises the significance of skin elasticity in determining the procedure's outcome. "Patients with good skin elasticity tend to have smoother results, as their skin adapts better to the new contours," he explains. "For those with looser skin, I recommend complementary treatments like radiofrequency or laser therapy post-surgery to enhance the final look."

The post-surgery journey doesn't end there. Maintaining the lifted shape requires dedication. "Healthy lifestyle habits are crucial," he advises. "A diet rich in proteins and antioxidants, staying hydrated and regular strength training, especially for the glutes, are essential to preserve the results." He also stresses sun protection, as UV exposure can darken scars and slow the healing process. "Use sunscreen with at least SPF 30 once the area is ready for direct sun exposure," he recommends. In the end, whether surgical or non-surgical, the butt lift is more than just a trend.



With the rise of butt lift procedures, expert surgeons are transforming posteriors with precision and flair. From subtle enhancements to full-on transformations, the options are endless. Join us on a journey to explore the art and science of butt lifts, where individualised care and realistic expectations come together to create a more confident you

FYI

Parupalli Kashyap's badminton journey is a smash hit in every sense, an inspiring tale that could rival the plot of a Tollywood blockbuster. Deeply rooted in Telugu culture, this ace shuttler has turned personal hurdles into high-flying victories, proving that the only thing more potent than a well-placed smash is unyielding determination. He was diagnosed with asthma in his adolescence. When people thought he would toss in the towel, this would-be Olympian grabbed his racquet and doubled down on his game of life with a double dose of tenacity. His Olympic debut was nothing short of sensational, as he became the first Indian male player to soar to the quarterfinals in men's singles at the London Olympics—sending shockwaves through the badminton community and leaving his competitors gasping for breath. Then came the 2014 Commonwealth Games, where he did not just play, but performed a badminton symphony; clinching the gold medal in men's singles and breaking a 32-year drought for India in this category. Talk about a comeback! With a string of honours that includes victories at the Syed Modi International, the Austrian International Challenge, and the Indonesia International Challenge, the best ranked world no 6 champion is more than just a player: he's a phenomenon. Awarded the Arjuna Award in 2012, his accolades are as impressive as his gameplay. In a conversation with *The Pioneer's* Aarti Sreenath, he shares the high points of his journey as a shuttler, mirroring the power of grit and the undying spirit of a Telugu warrior, smashing through a procession of barriers, one shuttlecock at a time.



Beating asthma to become a breathtaking shuttler



FATHER'S TRANSFERS SHAPED HIS CHILDHOOD

I would not say I was an introvert; at home, I was all over the place during my childhood. My dad had a transferable job in the pharma industry, due to which he was always on the move, taking up new roles every time he relocated. I was born in Mumbai and then we initially stayed in Hyderabad. From there, we moved to Kanpur and after a while, we headed back to Hyderabad. I spent a few years in Bengaluru, but my schooling for third and fourth grade was in Nigeria! After that, I was back in Hyderabad for grades 4 to 7 and then moved to Bengaluru again for grades 8 to 10. By the time I was 15 or 16, I was back in Hyderabad. My fondest childhood memories are a mix of fun, pressure and growth. Like many, I enjoyed playing cricket on the streets and I loved going to school. I was good at academics and thrived on the grind my mom put me through. She made sure I studied early in the mornings, revising everything I needed to. Those early days were filled with the joy of learning and the thrill of training.



TOUGH LOVE AND BADMINTON

My childhood was shaped by a relaxed approach at home. Since my dad was always busy with his work, my mom used to take care of me largely and she played a crucial role in my life. An athlete herself, she pushed me into badminton, wanting me to become a sports person. My mom was strict and focused on helping me become a good player—not necessarily to achieve big results but to compete. I, on the other hand, was laidback and did not care much about the pressures of competition. I guess you could say I was the lazy one.

BLOSSOMING UNDER PRESSURE

My time at the training center with my initial coaches, RF Sir and Govardhan Sir, was significant. I remember the excitement of preparing for state and district tournaments across (undivided) Andhra Pradesh and travelling to various places for taking part in competitions. Back then, I was not very good at competing—I was scared, really scared of losing. I often found myself thinking about what my mom would say if I did not perform well. I was not mentally prepared for the pressure; I enjoyed training, but when it came to matches, I lacked that killer instinct. That sense of competition developed slowly, especially as I grew older. It was not until I was around 17 or 18 and had a coach who taught me how to prepare for matches that I started to feel the weight of competition. It was also around that time when the reality hit me—there was no money at home and I needed to secure a job to sustain my badminton journey. The pressure and crunch time brought a pivotal change in my life and career.



ENGINEERING DREAMS VS. BADMINTON SCHEMES

Up until the eighth standard, I was one of the toppers, often ranking in the top 1, 2, or 3. I was not absolutely brilliant, but I was doing well compared to my friends. I found that if I spent a lot of time studying, I could maintain those ranks. However, as I started playing more and more tournaments, I realised that I could not juggle academics and sports effectively. While some of my colleagues managed to excel in both—becoming engineers as well as national champions—I quickly realised that I had to make a choice.



FACING FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS

I completed my Intermediate studies in Hyderabad, focusing on Maths, Physics and Chemistry (MPC). I would say I was decent—got average to above average marks. However, when it came to the engineering entrance exams, I was completely unprepared and that hit me hard. I started feeling like I had missed the mark. At that moment, I realised that I might be closer to a significant goal in badminton, especially since I had been the runner-up in the junior national championships the previous year. I thought to myself, "Maybe this is what I should pursue". During the counselling session, when my name came up in the sports quota line, things took a dramatic turn. The college I was being offered—Sreeni B College—was not appealing to me. I knew that Gopichand was starting an academy nearby in Gachibowli and I felt it would be a waste of money and time to go through with this engineering seat. So, I turned to my mom and said, "I can't do this". She was taken aback. We had spent over an hour in that line and now I was telling her I wanted to back out. "What am I supposed to tell your dad?" she asked, visibly stressed. I told her, "You manage it, I don't know. Just give me a year. If I don't progress, I can always pursue B.Com. I'll figure it out from there". By that time, I was acutely aware of our financial struggles. There was no money—zero. We had been in a good financial position before, but my dad had made some unfortunate decisions regarding savings and investments. With that realisation, I knew I had to make a choice. I saw a potential path through badminton; if I pushed a little harder, I might land a job in sports. Luckily, things began to fall into place when Gopichand opened his academy. He hired an excellent coach who supported me both physically and mentally. That year also saw me diagnosed with asthma, but with the right guidance, I was able to manage it.



HARSH REALITY OF SPORTS ECONOMICS

This became especially clear during my engineering entrance examination. Even though I was dedicated to badminton, I was not yet a national champion. At that stage, junior national champions could secure jobs, while even being second place would not guarantee any offers unless you were in the top five at the senior level. This realisation came to a head in 2004, after I finished my 11th and 12th grades. I had to decide whether to fully commit to badminton or pursue engineering.

HOW INDIAN OIL BECAME HIS SAFETY NET

In 2004 and 2005, everything changed for the better. I physically improved, started winning tournaments and eventually made it to the senior circuit, being placed in the top 3 or 4. I secured a job with Indian Oil. I am still with them. I have to mention how grateful I am to the PSU companies like Indian Oil; they played a pivotal role in shaping my career. They provided me with a stable job and supported me through tough times, including injuries. Joining Indian Oil allowed me to sort out my career while also supporting my family. I was not saving much; whatever I earned went toward my tournaments and household expenses. From 2004-2005 onward, I was balancing my responsibilities at home while also focusing on my career in badminton, which has been an incredibly fulfilling journey.



LOVE AT FIRST SERVE WITH SAINA NEHWAL

Oh, the memories from my marriage with Saina are really special. Our journey together began back in 2004-2005, which was a pivotal time for both of us as we were both focused on our badminton careers. At that time, she was just my girlfriend, but we quickly became each other's support system in a highly competitive environment. Initially, our relationship felt quite childish. We were young sports persons who shared a deep bond as friends, navigating the challenges of our sport together. I found it difficult to connect with my male colleagues since they were also competitors and I think Saina felt the same way. She did not have many close friendships either; so, we often confided in each other. Our connection deepened as we travelled together for tournaments, which allowed us to share our experiences and support one another. We trained side by side and celebrated each other's achievements. During those years, I realised how valuable it was to have someone who understood the pressures of being an athlete. After a long relationship, we decided to get married in 2018. By then, it felt like a natural progression. We had been through so much together—sharing our aspirations, struggles, and victories. Our bond had grown strong and I knew we could build a future together as both partners and sports persons.

NAVIGATING LIVES AS TWO SPORTSPERSONS UNDER ONE ROOF

Managing life as two sports persons under one roof has its own unique challenges and rewards. Both Saina and I are quite strict with our routines. This means there is a shared discipline in our household. However, it can be tough at times because our lives revolve around badminton—literally all the time. In the beginning, we both loved being so immersed in the sport. But sometimes it feels a bit overwhelming. Saina has achieved immense success and while that is incredibly inspiring, it has not always been easy for me. I found my success a bit later and, to be honest, I have always felt like I was in her shadow. There have been moments when I wished I could achieve as much as she has and while jealousy is a normal feeling, I have learned not to dwell on it. Instead, I try to use those feelings as motivation to push myself harder in training. We both understand each other deeply, which helps a lot. If one of us is having a rough day or mood is off, we can sense it right away. Even the slightest change in tone can be a signal that something is not right. A simple conversation often helps us get back on track. We motivate each other, whether it is pushing to hit the gym or encouraging each other through tough training sessions. So, while it is not always easy being two competitive sports persons together, our mutual understanding and support have been crucial in navigating those dynamics.

ASTHMA DIAGNOSIS

In 2004, I was diagnosed with asthma, which posed a significant hurdle to my badminton aspirations. Initially, it was quite alarming for me. I remember thinking, "Oh no, what does this mean for my career? Am I going to struggle to breathe during matches? Is my life at risk?" I had little understanding of asthma at the time, and the diagnosis felt overwhelming. But I refused to let it define my journey. With the help of my doctors, I began to adapt my training regimen. They educated me about asthma, teaching me how to manage it effectively. I learned to monitor my breathing and recognise triggers, which became crucial for my training and competition. Integrating breathing exercises and proper warm-ups into my routine helped me cope with the condition. I also focused on maintaining a healthy lifestyle, which included conditioning my body to be more resilient.

COMMONWEALTH GAMES JOURNEY

Winning the gold medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow was not just a personal achievement; it was a historic milestone for Indian badminton. My journey to that moment was paved with challenges and emotions that I can still vividly recall. Reflecting back, my first significant outing was at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, where I earned a bronze medal after a tough semi-final match against Rajiv Desepph from England. I remember the intensity of that encounter and the disappointment of not advancing to the final. Fast forward to 2014 and I found myself facing Rajiv again in the semi-finals. The stakes were high and the pressure was palpable. I was on the verge of losing, but somehow, I managed to pull through from a tough situation. Those semi-finals are always daunting; knowing that a victory guarantees a medal while a loss leads to the pressure of a bronze medal match shortly after, adds to the intensity of the competition. The next day, I stepped onto the court for the final, which was equally challenging and intense. It was not my best performance, but I held my ground and ultimately clinched the gold. The relief that washed over me was indescribable. Winning that medal felt like the culmination of years of hard work, dedication and sacrifice.

PULLELA GOPICHAND CONNECTION

We were fortunate to have a connection in the sports world—Gopichand was a tenant in one of our flats. Through my mom's connection with his parents, I often visited their place and marvelled at his trophies and national championships. He was already a national champion by then and seeing all his achievements inspired me. Eventually, he invited me to join his badminton center in Hyderabad. But shortly after, he moved to Bengaluru for a training camp to prepare for the national championship. Even though his parents were still in Hyderabad, he rarely came back because Bengaluru became his training base. I am excited about my future in the sport; for as a player working with Gopichand has been an instrumental part of my career, shaping not only my skills but also my mindset. His influence has been nothing short of transformative. He fundamentally changed the culture at the training center, instilling a sense of belief in us that we were meant to achieve greatness on the world stage. Gopichand consistently emphasized that India is a strong country with immense potential, and he challenged us to aim for bigger things. Gopi created an environment that allowed sports persons to develop and thrive, even in a country like India, which does not have a robust sporting culture. He navigated the bureaucratic and political hurdles to set up a proper system and it is fortunate that someone believed in him and his vision. He managed to secure land from (then Chief Minister) Chandrababu Naidu, which was crucial for establishing the Academy.

REAL WINS IN BADMINTON TRAVEL

When I think about my international travels, I would say every experience was memorable. I had a fantastic group of players around me, but many of them became coaches and stepped away from playing, which I really miss. The entire journey is what I cherish most. The results and achievements might seem few, even for the best players, but the journey itself is incredibly rewarding. Traveling with the team, experiencing the grind of training and simply sharing those moments together was special. We often explored the cities we visited, even if it was just briefly. Our schedule typically revolved around hotel and stadium life—training or competing and not much else. Sometimes we only had a day to see the city and we were usually too tired to do much more than take in one or two sights. But it was the camaraderie with my fellow players that stood out. I was fortunate to have my then-girlfriend Saina with me throughout most of my travels and later, my wife.



KNEE INJURY AND OLYMPICS DREAM SHATTERED

In 2016, I was world number six when a knee injury struck, forcing me to undergo surgery and miss the Olympics. Later, I was again close to qualifying, but the unexpected lockdown hit and my performance suffered. I fell short of meeting the qualification criteria, which was disheartening. Yet, despite these setbacks, I embraced the journey. Competing has always been my passion, and the values I have learned from my experiences since 2005 are invaluable.

LOVE AFFAIR WITH FOOTBALL

I do have interests beyond badminton; football, for one. I'm a big fan of Manchester United and closely follow the Premier League. I keep an eye on La Liga as well, constantly checking results and following emerging talents. I do play football, but I have not had much time to do so, especially after the knee injury. Different muscles are at work and I realised that playing football at a competitive level is not quite the same as badminton; there is no relaxed approach when I try to play like I do in my main sport. I am part of a fantasy league with about 20 to 25 badminton players, which keeps us in touch with football. Most of my friends are also into playing FIFA on their consoles, but I have never been a video game fan—just not something I have gotten into. But football? That is definitely a sport I follow closely!

CHERISHED MOMENTS

When I think back on my time competing for India, there have been definitely cherished moments that stand out. Over the years, I played so many tournaments and while I had my share of wins, I can count the significant victories on my fingers. Winning the Lucknow tournament a couple of times, earning Commonwealth medals and making it to the Olympics were among those highlights. I won once and that was something I had wished for deeply. Those five or six defining moments brought me immense happiness, no doubt. But on hindsight, I realise those moments were fleeting. You win, celebrate and then that evening, you are feeling okay, but by the next day, you are back on the road travelling home. Two days later, it is time to train again. Suddenly, you are the defending champion gearing up for another tournament. If you lose that one, the disappointment feels just as heavy as if you had not won the week before. The joy of victory can be incredibly short-lived. What I found lasting joy in were the small, daily victories. Each time my coach acknowledged my hard work in training, that felt rewarding.

RAPID FIRE

What's your favourite holiday destination?
Oh, we have just started traveling again in the last year and a half. I really enjoyed our trip to America, but I have to say Rome was a standout for me.

Are you religious?
I do believe in God and some sort of supreme power, but I would not call myself very religious. I follow my coach's teachings and have practiced some yoga nidras. I have not delved deeply into spirituality, so I cannot comment much on it.

Are you a foodie? If yes, what is your favourite dish?
Home-cooked Andhra dishes are my favorite. When I go out, I order a variety of dishes, but I would not really call myself a foodie. Lately, I have been strict about my diet because I am trying to avoid putting on weight, so my choices are a bit limited.

What is your favourite colour?
Blue!

Your idol in the sports world?
There was no particular idol I would say. Growing up my biggest idol was Gopi, who was like a national champion in front of my eyes. I idolized him and took his advice very seriously—almost like a second parent!