

sunday pioneer

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Decision to transform J&K into UT is 'temporary': Modi



EAM reaffirms India's COMMITMENT to boost ties with BIMSTEC




Smita Sabharwal: The QUINTESSENTIAL bureaucrat

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The pioneer

In Telangana, the BJP got 77 lakh votes in the Lok Sabha elections and eight LS seats. It is not tough to complete the 50 lakh membership when the party bagged 77 lakh votes. BJP posts will be given to leaders who enrol more members. Leaders should take up local issues apart from the membership drive.



- JP Nadda, BJP National President

DON'T MISS...

VMC Commissioner reviews Dasara...

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has directed officials to ensure all necessary arrangements are in place for the upcoming 'Dasara Sarannavaratri' festivities at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam. He also urged them to take appropriate measures to avoid any lapses in providing facilities to the devotees. As part of his city-wide inspections, Commissioner Dhyanchandra visited several areas, including the Vinayaka Temple, Ratham...

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Jagan has no right to speak...

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) politburo member and MLA Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy strongly criticised YSRCP chief and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for his comments on Hinduism. Somireddy questioned whether Jagan Reddy had lost his mental balance. Addressing a press conference on Saturday, Somireddy asked if Jagan Mohan Reddy truly understood what he had said. Launching a sharp attack on senior YSRCP leaders, he alleged, "Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy hasn't set..."

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Trustees seek ban on laddu sale in...

The trust managing a famous temple dedicated to Vindhyavasani Beejasa Devi has submitted a memorandum to the collector of Sehore in Madhya Pradesh seeking a ban on the 'laddus' being sold by a self-help group on the premises. Devotees have been complaining that the laddus are smelling and tasting different so a ban was sought, temple trust chairman Mahesh Upadhyaya said on Saturday. The temple is situated on a 800-foot high hillock in Salkampur, some 70 kilometres from state capital Bhopal. The move comes...

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Majority of employees feel...

Even as the corporate sector in India is taking steps to address mental health issues at workplaces, a majority of employees believe companies could do more to improve their overall well-being, a survey report said on Saturday. Over 79 per cent of those participated in the survey opined their organisations could do more to address mental health issues and well-being, according to the report by HR services and workforce solutions provider Genius Consultants. "We must recognise that employee well-being is not just a trend, but a crucial aspect of organizational success. The data reveals that a significant number of employees are grappling with anxiety and feeling overwhelmed in their work environments..."

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CM invites ideas to make AP \$2.4 trillion economy

e-certificate to be given for suggestions as a token of appreciation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday called for suggestions from the people of the State for 'Swarna Andhra Pradesh' (golden state) with a GSDP of US\$ 2.4 trillion by 2047.

The Chief Minister also invited ideas for the future vision of the southern state for achieving a per capita income of over US\$ 43,000 by 2047. "Our target is to lead India with a GSDP of \$2.4 trillion and a per capita income of over \$43,000 by 2047. As we embark on this journey towards Swarna Andhra Pradesh @ 2047, we're inviting suggestions from our fellow citizens on shaping a brighter AP (Andhra Pradesh)," said Naidu in a post on X.

Emphasising that every suggestion counts, the CM said people can directly share ideas with the Government of Andhra Pradesh and receive an e-certificate as a token of appreciation for their contribution.



Naidu assures solution to all public grievances

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu received petitions from the public at the TDP central office in Mangalagiri.

The CM patiently listened to the concerns raised by individuals from various people, including persons

with disabilities and students who had come from across the state seeking assistance. He assured them that he would address the issues and complaints presented to him. The CM also paid floral tributes to the portrait of Gurrum Jashua on his birth anniversary.

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Lulu Group International chairman MA Yusuf Ali meets Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at the latter's residence in Undavalli on Saturday.

Lulu explores investments in Vizag, V'wada & Tirupati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Lulu Group International Chairman MA Yusuf Ali met Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday at the CM's residence in Undavalli. The meeting lasted about two hours, focusing on investment opportunities in Andhra Pradesh. They discussed plans to build a mall and multiplex in Visakhapatnam, as well as a hypermarket and multiplex in Vijayawada and Tirupati.

The Lulu Group has also expressed interest in investing in the food processing industry in the state. Previously, during the tenure of the Telugu Desam government, the Lulu Group had agreed with the state to invest in Visakhapatnam. However, the company withdrew its plans due to changes

in the government. With Naidu returning as Chief Minister, the globally renowned Lulu Group is once again keen on investing in the state. The Chairman was accompanied by his team for the meeting.

During discussions, the Chief Minister addressed various issues related to investments, emphasising the government's commitment to facilitating ease and speed of doing business. He expressed his satisfaction over the Lulu Group's renewed interest in investing in Andhra Pradesh. Naidu noted that the entry of prominent companies like Lulu Group would stimulate further interest in investments among industrialists, which would ultimately benefit the state. He elaborated on the new policies aimed at promoting investment.

Hezbollah leader Hassan killed in Beirut: Israel



PNS ■ TEL AVIV

Israel said Saturday that it killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, dealing its most significant blow to the Lebanese militant group after months of fighting. There was no immediate confirmation from Hezbollah.

If the claim is true, Nasrallah is by far the most powerful target to be killed by Israel in weeks of intensified fighting with Hezbollah. Ali Karki, the Commander of Hezbollah's Southern Front, and additional Hezbollah commanders, were also killed in the attack, the Israeli military said. The military said it carried out a precise airstrike on Friday while Hezbollah leader Dahiye, south of Beirut.

Israel's Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi, said Saturday that the elimination of Nasrallah was "not the end of our toolbox," indicating that more strikes were planned. He said that the strike targeting Hezbollah leadership was the result of a long period of preparation.

The Lebanese Health Ministry said six people were killed and 91 injured in the strikes Friday, which leveled six apartment buildings.

Houses for all eligible poor: Kolusu

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for Housing and I&PR, K. Parthasarathy, has reiterated that the government aims to build houses for every eligible poor person in the coming days.

Accompanied by Collector D.K. Balaji, the Minister participated in the 'Mana Illu- Mana Govravam' programme organised at Movva village on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, he stated that the government is taking housing construction for the houseless poor seriously and is working diligently to complete all the houses.

The Minister noted that during the previous term under Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Rs 2.50 lakh was allocated for each house, but the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government reduced this to Rs 1.80 lakh. "The Chief Minister believes that there should be no poor family without a house," he emphasised.

He further instructed officials



that if a sanctioned house is not constructed, it would not be sanctioned again, urging beneficiaries to be made aware of this policy.

The Minister also mentioned that the assurance of free gas cylinders would be fulfilled on Deepavali. MLA Kumar Raja encouraged beneficiaries to expedite the construction of their houses using the benefits provided by the government,

assuring them that all necessary facilities would be made available. Collector D.K. Balaji urged the beneficiaries to complete their house construction as soon as possible to ensure immediate clearance of bills. State Housing Department MD P. Raja Babu also addressed the gathering. EE Venkata Rao and Sarpanch T. Purnachandra Rao were among those who attended the programme.

'Jagan offering lame excuses for dropping Tirumala visit'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Home Minister V Anitha has clarified that former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy was not stopped from visiting the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple.

Speaking at a press conference at the TDP State office in Mangalagiri on Saturday, the Home Minister stated that Jagan Mohan Reddy, lacking faith in Hinduism, had chosen not to visit the temple, despite now offering other excuses.

She criticised him, alleging that during his tenure as Chief Minister, adulterated ghee was used to prepare the sacred 'Laddu Prasadam' at the Tirumala temple. According to her, the National

Development Board (NDDB) confirmed that the ghee contained animal fat, and she accused Jagan of trying to divert attention from the issue by launching counterattacks against the current government.

The Home Minister also addressed the rumours circulating on social media, claiming that Jagan Mohan Reddy intended to visit Tirumala with 10,000 followers and activists. In response, the police enforced Section 30 of the Police Act in Tirupati as a precautionary measure and notified Jagan Mohan Reddy, after which he cancelled his visit. Anitha accused him of misleading the public about the reason for his cancellation.

Continued on Page 2

'Massive military expansion in India'

Pakistan PM raises Kashmir issue at UN

PNS ■ UNITED NATIONS

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday accused India of "massive expansion of its military capabilities" and issuing threats to cross the LoC for taking over Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, as he raised the Kashmir issue again in his address at the United Nations General Assembly. Sharif demanded that New Delhi

should reverse the 2019 abrogation of Article 370, which gave Jammu and Kashmir a special status, and also charged India of trying to subjugate its Muslim population and obliterate its Islamic heritage. Pakistan routinely raises the Kashmir issue at the annual UN debate. India was expected to exercise its right of reply to counter Sharif's allegations. Sharif said "like the people of Palestine," the people of Jammu and Kashmir have "struggled for a century for their freedom and right to self-determination".

FIR registered against FM Nirmala

PNS ■ BENGALURU

A case was registered on Saturday against Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and others on the directions of a court here, following a complaint relating to the now-scrapped electoral bonds scheme.

According to police, an FIR was registered under IPC sections 384 (punishment for extortion), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) against Union Minister

COMPLAINTS ON ELECTORAL BONDS

Nirmala Sitharaman, ED officials, office-bearers of the BJP at state and national level, based on the order of a special court. The complaint was lodged by Adarsh R Iyer, Co-President of 'Janaadhikara Sangharsha Parishath' (JSP) alleging that the accused "committed extortion under the guise and garb of electoral bonds and benefitted to the tune of 8,000 and more crore of rupees."

The complainant further alleged that Sitharaman through the clandestine aid and support of ED officials facilitated extortion of thousands of crores of rupees for the benefit of others both at the state and national levels. "The entire extortion racket under the garb of electoral bonds has been orchestrated hand in glove with officials of BJP at various levels."

Jagan must not back down on Tirumala visit

BY B KRISHNA PRASAD

With Andhra Pradesh's former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy deciding on Saturday to postpone his planned visit to Tirumala, it is now amply clear that he neither has proper advisors who can give him appropriate advice on sensitive matters nor does he heed his advisors. At a time when the Tirumala Srivari laddu controversy has attracted global attention with tens of millions of deeply hurt devotees anxious to know whether their prasadam had indeed been prepared with ghee adulterated with fish oil, lard and beef tallow as established by lab reports; Jagan has apparently backed down in the face of stiff opposition to his visit unless he declares his faith

by signing the mandatory declaration under Rules 136 and 137. After internal deliberations, he has used an excuse to postpone the visit.

In this episode, we have to understand that, before announcing his visit to Tirumala, he did not even think of giving the declaration at TTD office regarding his faith. This again reflects lack of planning on the part of his advisors or his own inclination to heed his advisors, as the case may be.

The twist to the Tirumala laddu issue also makes it clear that Jagan has not learned his lessons from the disastrous defeat in the recent Assembly polls. He just had a golden chance of going to Tirumala, signing the declaration, offering prayers and may be going for a tonsure to make a strong political statement and win the



deeply hurt hearts of millions of devotees of Lord Venkateshwara across the globe. Instead, he has chickened out and taken a step backward. That is not all. He has the cheek

He just had a golden chance of going to Tirumala, signing the declaration, offering prayers and may be going for a tonsure to make a strong political statement and win the deeply hurt hearts of millions of devotees of Lord Venkateshwara across the globe. Instead, he has chickened out and taken a step backward.

to cite his previous visits to Tirumala when he was not required to sign the declaration of faith.

What Jagan has forgotten or ignored is the fact that the very rule requiring signing of declaration of faith by non-Hindus was introduced at Tirumala after his controversial visit in 2012. Subsequently he has visited Tirumala about three times. Since he did so as then chief minister, it is but

natural that no official in his senses would have dared to ask him to sign the declaration. Today, when he is asked to sign the declaration like any common non-Hindu, he cannot cite those visits for his non-willingness to sign the declaration during the proposed visit. His logic is like, "Yesterday night, I ignored the red light and crossed the signal. Why am I being stopped today?" As Leader of the Opposition, he cannot question lawkeepers' adherence to rules now.

It is of course possible that tomorrow, he may choose to visit Tirumala and do the needful to strike a chord with the devotees, if not political circles. But the damage is already done. He has lost a golden chance to make a strong political retort and win the hearts of millions of devotees of Lord Venkateshwara.

OBTUSE ANGLE



'When was the last time that BJP pulled off a statewide protest?'

When was the last time that the Bharatiya Janata Party pulled off a statewide protest? This is one question that even die-hard saffron party loyalists might struggle to answer. For, ever since the Congress government took over, the BJP has been noticeably quiet. It has not organized any major protest across the state, though occasionally the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha continues to hold demonstrations and token protests here and there. The absence of BJP's voice (let alone garjana) in the larger political landscape is striking. Although the Congress has staged protests against the BJP, there have been no counters, no significant response, and certainly no large-scale protests concerning people's issues. The once active and vocal party appears to have taken a back seat now. As political watchers begin to interpret the silence in a differing manner, many people are left wondering whether the BJP has an undeclared plan or if the Congress government has managed to tame what was once an opposition eager to hit the streets at the drop of a hat.

Bhavan, raising suspicions of an orchestrated visit. At the end of the day, what cannot be denied is the authenticity of the victims' plight. BRS working president KT Rama Rao could not meet the victims as he was stated to be down with viral fever. Aside from politics and compulsions of civic needs over HYDRRA ops; the distress of those affected by the rehabilitation issues was palpable. Sharp-eyed newshounds see this as a pilot for BRS activists and leaders to translate into action KCR's July 3rd words urging his party to stay strong and remain engaged with public concerns.

Punctuality exception rather than the rule in government events

Punctuality seems to have become the exception rather than the rule in Telangana government's official func-

REPORTERS' DIARY

KCR's prediction coming true?

Back on 3rd July, when Bharat Rashtia Samithi chief and former chief minister K Chandrasekhar asserted "Soon, people will come with torch lights looking for BRS leaders", few would have believed his studied statement would turn prophetic. It then seemed like a remote possibility and the rant of a CM who had lost power. KCR had then emphasized that BRS leaders should focus on public issues and keep the party intact, awaiting the time when people would inevitably seek them out. Fast-forward to 28th September, KCR's words found an echo in reality when victims of the Musi rehabilitation project trooped in at Telangana Bhavan, headquarters of the BRS, for garnering support. While it did not appear to be a conducted visit, the buzz in political circles suggests that it might not have been entirely coincidental. For, despite having the option to approach Praja Bhavan or Gandhi Bhavan, the victims came to Telangana

rather, he is quite accommodating despite his crucial position as the vital link between the state party unit and the state government currently led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. While Mahesh was chit-chatting with invited scribes on Saturday, newshounds noticed that he has the habit of always lending his ears to all. For, even while engaged in conversations with media persons, he took incoming calls on his phone without any qualms. That is not all. He gave room amidst scribes to party leaders who had come to Gandhi Bhavan to meet him. What did not go unnoticed was the fact that former TPCC presidents, including Revanth Reddy and N Uttam Kumar Reddy, used to keep their phones on silent mode while chit-chatting with scribes. At the end of the day, Mahesh, given his multi-tasking skills, left a lot to be desired among media persons. Scribes did not get much in edgeways from the TPCC president though the chit-chat session lasted half an hour.

Nizam Club's food for thought baffles FSSAI officials

In a bizarre turn of events, just a day after the 140-year-old Nizam Club in Hyderabad was raided by food safety offi-

cially, the Congress party chose to hold a pre-planned event right there. Following the raid, which had caught many off-guard, it was found that the prestigious club, where food and drinks are regularly served for the city's elite, had never obtained a food safety licence! The club's technicalities-based claim that it is 'not running a business' has baffled food safety officials. With the Secunderabad Club and the Fateh Maidan Club so far not under the lens of food safety officials, the well-heeled ones across the twin cities are wondering how come the Nizam Club managed to avoid scrutiny for so long.

Multi-tasking TPCC chief leaves much to be desired for scribes

Recently appointed Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president B Mahesh Kumar Goud is quite unlike his immediate predecessors, when it comes to dealing with scribes. It is not that he is unapproachable; rather, he is quite accommodating despite his crucial position as the vital link between the state party unit and the state government currently led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. While Mahesh was chit-chatting with invited scribes on Saturday, newshounds noticed that he has the habit of always lending his ears to all. For, even while engaged in conversations with media persons, he took incoming calls on his phone without any qualms. That is not all. He gave room amidst scribes to party leaders who had come to Gandhi Bhavan to meet him. What did not go unnoticed was the fact that former TPCC presidents, including Revanth Reddy and N Uttam Kumar Reddy, used to keep their phones on silent mode while chit-chatting with scribes. At the end of the day, Mahesh, given his multi-tasking skills, left a lot to be desired among media persons. Scribes did not get much in edgeways from the TPCC president though the chit-chat session lasted half an hour.

(With inputs from Naveena Ghanate and Venkateshwarlu)

VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' DEMANDS

Nara Lokesh assures action

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Art, Work, and PET teachers working under the Samagra Shiksha programme met Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh, urging him to prioritise their role in classroom teaching. S Sivakumari Reddy, State president of the Samagra Shiksha Unity Welfare Association, along with other members, submitted a representation to the minister on Saturday, seeking his intervention in addressing their long-pending issues.

In a press release, Sivakumari stated that the teachers, designated as part-time instructors for the past 12 years, are being burdened with administrative work, limiting their involvement in classroom teaching. She requested the minister to have SCERT prepare textbooks for vocational education and ensure that part-time instructors are promoted to full-time vocational teachers. Furthermore, she



urged the government to provide student kits and textbooks related to vocational education from the next academic year. The association also appealed to the minister to implement GO No. 73 and extend ESI and EPF benefits to contract employees. Sivakumari emphasised that

the minimum time scale should be applied, as many teachers are still not receiving adequate wages despite years of service. She also requested timely salary disbursement by the 1st of every month. The minister reportedly assured them that the coalition government would pri-

oritize vocational education courses and review the curriculum, teaching materials, and other related matters to address their concerns.

NTR district president Gayatri, and committee members Madhavi, Aruna, Vijayalakshmi, among others, were present during the meeting.

4,02,935 candidates download TET hall tickets

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Director of School Education, V Vijay Rama Raju, has announced that the state government will conduct the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) from October 3 to 21, except on the 11th and 12th. Of the 4,27,300 candidates who applied for the exam, 4,02,935 have already downloaded their hall tickets. In a press release on Saturday, Director Vijay Rama Raju mentioned that 24,365 candidates are yet to download their hall tickets and urged them to do so at <https://aptet.apcfss.in>. He also advised candidates to rectify any errors in their hall tickets by submitting original certificates at the examination centres. For queries or concerns, candidates may contact the following mobile numbers: 9398822554, 9398810958, 6281740160, 8121947387, 8125046997, 7995789286, 7995649286, 9963069286, and 9398822618. The helpline will be available from 10 am to 10 pm.



Rs 1L donated to CMRF

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu lauded the services of Dr Arul Thomas for his humanitarian efforts in supporting the poor and needy through his ministry. The Chief Minister honoured Dr Thomas with the Hall of Fame Award 2024 on Friday. On the occasion, Dr Thomas donated Rs1 lakh to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) for flood victims. Dr Thomas stated that he has been serving human-

ity through his 'Dahinchuagni Ministries'. He played a crucial role during the recent heavy rains and floods in Vijayawada, extending aid to more than 2,000 flood-affected victims. He has been relentlessly supporting the underprivileged through his ministry for over 34 years. Vijayawada Lions Club organisers P. Christopher and Fr Bellamkonda Ennaiah, Correspondent of Victoria Pharmacy College, Guntur, along with others, were present

Excel in chosen field, students told

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna University's Prof. MV Basaveswara Rao has said that students should excel in the fields of arts, sports, and literature alongside their studies. He urged students to choose an area of interest and strive for excellence in it. "One should set a goal in life and work sincerely to achieve it. With determination, perseverance, and a clear goal, you can accomplish anything in life," he stated. Prof. Basaveswara Rao was the chief guest at the fresher's day event of Nalanda Degree College, held at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Saturday. He highlighted the importance of excelling in various fields beyond academics and stressed the need for social responsibility along with education. He commended the services rendered by Nalanda students to flood victims during the Budameri floods, noting that many colleges under Krishna University are actively working for the welfare of society.

'Jagan offering...

Continued from Page 1

She also acknowledged the massive preparations being made by the TTD for the upcoming 'Brahmotsavams' next week. Criticising Jagan's accusations against the government for allegedly obstructing his visit, Anitha stated that if Jagan Mohan Reddy truly wished to visit Tirumala, he could do so as a regular devotee, and the government would arrange for his darshan. The Home Minister further mentioned that several spiritual organisations had announced their opposition to Jagan's visit to Tirumala, and highlighted his previous behaviour during visits when he was in power. "No YSRCP leader has been arrested or taken into preventive custody, nor has the police been deployed to any YSRCP leader's house," Anitha asserted, adding that no official had told Jagan Reddy not to visit the temple. She questioned why Jagan hesitated to submit the declaration at Tirumala, in line with the temple's norms and accused him of engaging in divertive politics instead of addressing the adulterated ghee issue directly.

YSRCP leaders perform 'Suddhi Pujas' across AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leaders and activists across the State performed special pujas at various temples in protest against the alleged false propaganda by TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu. Naidu had claimed that animal fat was mixed in the ghee supplied to Tirumala for the preparation of the famous 'Laddu prasadam's'. In response to a call given by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, YSRCP leaders and cadre organised 'Suddhi Pujas' on Saturday. In Tirupati, senior YSRCP leader and former TTD chairman B Karunakar Reddy, Tirupati MP M Guru Murthy, and Deputy Mayor Bhumana Abhinay Reddy participated in prayers at the Gangamma temple at Tatayya Gunta. Former Irrigation Minister Ambati Rambabu offered prayers at

the Venkateswara Swamy temple in Guntur, while former minister RK Roja took part in purification rituals at the Sundareswara temple in Tamil Nadu. Pujas were also conducted at the Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Guntur by Vidadala Rajani. In Vijayawada, Devineni Avinash and Malladi Vishnu led similar rituals. Former MP Marghan Bharat in Rajahmundry, former MLA Katsani Ram Bhupal Reddy in Panyam, and Venkatarami Reddy in Anantapur also performed purification ceremonies. Special pujas were also organised by YSRCP supporters in Eluru district. B Karunakar Reddy strongly condemned Naidu's allegations, calling them baseless and politically motivated. "Chandrababu Naidu is misleading the public for his political gain and hurting

the sentiments of millions of devotees," he said. Tirupati MP M. Gurumurthy highlighted the steps taken by the YSRCP government to ensure the quality of ghee used by the TTD, including the establishment of a Goshala with over 1,000 desi cows to meet the dairy needs of Tirumala. It may be recalled that Naidu had recently alleged during an NDA legislative party meeting that substandard ingredients, including animal fats, were used in the preparation of laddus at the Sri Venkateswara temple during the YSRCP's tenure. His remarks sparked widespread controversy, hurting the sentiments of millions of Hindus. In response, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy accused Naidu of lying and called on party members to conduct atonement rituals to counter the allegations.

Botsa challenges CM over Tirumala 'Prasadam' scandal

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, Botsa Satyanarayana, has asserted that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is responsible for the allegations regarding adulterated ghee in the TTD laddus. He stated that all evidence points to Naidu's involvement and challenged him to prove his innocence. Speaking to the media at the party's central office in Visakhapatnam, Botsa demanded that Naidu take responsibility for his role in the Tirumala prasadam issue. He urged the Chief Minister to stop misleading the public and instead face an inquiry to resolve the mat-



ter. Botsa noted that petitions have already been filed in the Supreme Court by their party MP YV Subba Reddy and BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, demanding a thorough investigation. He called on the government to approach the court with the same determination if they were genuinely sincere about resolving the issue. Additionally, Botsa explained that Jagan Mohan Reddy's visit to Tirupati was postponed to

ensure peace and order due to conspiracies by TDP and BJP to create unrest. Notices were issued to leaders from Rayalaseema, and police inaction regarding BJP workers' activities led to Jagan deferring his visit, he stated. Alongside the Tirumala controversy, Botsa raised concerns about the ongoing privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. He claimed that this was the reason behind the dismissal of 4,000 contract workers, as the privatisation process is progressing rapidly. He questioned the government's silence on the issue and demanded a clear stance from the ruling coalition regarding the future of the steel plant.

YSRCP to oppose Wakf Amendment Bill

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has strongly opposed the Wakf Amendment Bill, with former MLA Hafeez Khan stating that a written representation has been submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) Chairman Jagdambika Pal. The submission was made by JPC member V Vijayasai Reddy and himself, outlining their reasons for the party's stance. Addressing the media in Hyderabad on Saturday, Hafeez Khan explained that the party is against the Bill as it could adversely affect the Muslim community. He said the Bill seeks to transfer the authority over 'Wakf' lands to district collectors, bypassing the Wakf Tribunal, which would lead to severe chal-

lenges for the community. Hence, the YSRCP firmly opposed the move. Khan further mentioned that YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has made the party's position clear, with both Mithun Reddy in the Lok Sabha and Vijayasai Reddy in the Rajya Sabha strongly voicing their opposition to the Bill, elaborating on the reasons for their resistance. He also criticised the TDP for its alleged double standards on the issue, accusing them of supporting the Bill in Parliament while creating confusion at the JPC level. Khan asserted that if the TDP had genuinely opposed the Bill, it would not have reached the JPC stage. He urged the Muslim community to be vigilant of the TDP's stance and repeated betrayals on such matters.

Naidu assures...

Continued from Page 1

T. Samrajyam, a disabled woman from Gorantla in Guntur town, met the CM and shared her predicament. She explained that although she had been receiving a pension under the disabled quota, it was stopped after the YSRCP government took office, citing that her electricity consumption exceeded 300 units. She expressed difficulty in making ends meet and requested the restoration of her pension. G. Srinivasa Rao from Pamidimaruru village in Palnadu district, a victim of YSRCP actions, stated that his father had distributed two acres of land to each of his sons. However, YSRCP leaders encroached upon that land during the previous government, and when they lodged a complaint, they faced an attack. Members of the Krishna Dharma Rakshana Samithi appealed to the Chief Minister to establish a Gosala on the Guntur-Vijayawada highway, as several cows are being illegally transported from the area. Additionally, several attendees at the party office donated to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF). The Chief Minister expressed his appreciation for their contributions to the CMRF.

Home Minister's charges baseless: YSRCP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a fierce rebuttal, YSRCP Women's Wing State president, Varudu Kalyani, strongly criticised Home Minister, Vangalapati Anitha, for what she called "baseless and disgraceful remarks" against former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy concerning the Tirumala laddu controversy. Kalyani, addressing the media in Visakhapatnam, made it clear that such unfounded accusations would not hold up over time, and accountability would soon catch up with those responsible for spreading misinformation. "Anitha, in her capacity as Home Minister, has crossed the line by making false allegations against Jagan Mohan Reddy," Kalyani said. "These lies will not endure; the truth will prevail, and those responsible will be held accountable. It's only a matter of time before the deception is exposed." Drawing a parallel between Anitha's accusations and those made by former chief minister



Chandrababu Naidu in the past, Kalyani noted the similarities. She recalled Naidu's earlier claims regarding the sacred Tirumala laddus, which were disproven with clear evidence. Yet, Kalyani pointed out that both Naidu and Anitha have continued to spread misinformation. "If Chandrababu Naidu truly believes in these claims, he should have the courage to demand an

independent investigation," Kalyani challenged. "But instead, both he and Anitha continue to deceive the public. It's disappointing but predictable." Kalyani's criticism did not stop there. She aimed at the government's handling of YS Jagan's recent visit to Tirupati, accusing the authorities of double standards. "While YSRCP leaders were prevented from attending the event, BJP workers from other states were allowed to enter the area freely," she charged. "The Home Minister's failure to act in these circumstances is nothing short of disgraceful." Turning her attention to PCC President Sharmila, Kalyani dismissed her as a mere puppet of Chandrababu Naidu. "Sharmila is reading from a script written by Naidu himself. She lacks originality and is simply repeating what she's been told to say," Kalyani remarked, further intensifying her attack on the opposition.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Dwadashi: Sep 28 02:50 PM to Sep 29 04:47 PM

Trayodashi: Sep 29 04:47 PM to Sep 30 07:06 PM

Nakshatram: Magha: Sep 29 03:37 AM to Sep 30 06:18 AM

Rahukalam: 4:33 PM to 6:02 PM

Yamagandam: 12:06 PM to 1:35 PM

Varjyam: 04:58 PM to 06:45 PM

Gulika: 3:04 PM to 4:33 PM

Amritakalam: 03:38 AM to 05:25 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:42 AM to 12:30 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Scattered Showers

Temp: 33°

Humidity: 78%

Sunrise: 5:57 AM

Sunset: 5:58 PM

Updated: September 28, 2024 5:00 PM

VMC Commissioner reviews Dasara festival arrangements

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has directed officials to ensure all necessary arrangements are in place for the upcoming 'Dasara Sarannavaratri' festivities at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam. He also urged them to take appropriate measures to avoid any lapses in providing facilities to the devotees.



VMC Commissioner Dhyanchandra discussing Dasara arrangements with officials in Vijayawada on Saturday.

The Commissioner said the VMC would provide 32 lakh water packets across 26 key areas to ensure adequate drinking water supply. Additionally, arrangements are being made for 150 temporary toilets in eight prominent locations. He also mentioned that six cloakrooms will be set up for the convenience of devotees.

As part of his city-wide inspections, Commissioner Dhyanchandra visited several areas, including the Vinayaka Temple, Ratham Centre, Canal Road, and other locations on Saturday, to review the preparations for the festival.

Speaking on the occasion, the Commissioner said the VMC would provide 32 lakh water packets across 26 key areas to ensure adequate drinking water supply. Additionally, arrangements are being made for 150 temporary toilets in eight prominent locations. He also mentioned that six cloakrooms will be set up for the convenience of devotees.

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Dhyanchandra further directed the officials to conduct field inspections as per the plan to ensure seamless arrangements throughout the nine-day festival, ensuring devotees face no inconvenience.

VMC Chief Medical Officer Dr P Ratnavali, SE Rammohan, Zonal Commissioner Ramya Keerthana, EE Prasad, and other officials were present during the inspection.

Painting expo marks Jashua's birth anniversary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Language and Culture Department commemorated the 129th birth anniversary of renowned Telugu poet and literary icon, 'Gurram Jashua', at the Pingali Venkaiah Meeting Hall on the premises of the NTR District Collectorate in Vijayawada.

The event was attended by Minister for Tourism, Culture, and Cinematography, Kandula Durgesh, NTR District Collector Dr. G. Srijana, Tourism and Culture Department Secretary V Vinay Chand, and other dignitaries, who paid tribute to 'Jashua'.

A painting exhibition was held as part of the celebrations at the collectorate, which the Minister inaugurated. He honoured Karri Sanjeeva Rao (Sikhmani), Dugginapalli Ezra Sastry, T. Vara Prasad, and P. Ramaiah with the 'Gurram Jashua Gaana Kokila Puraskaram 2024.' Each awardee received a cash prize of Rs 50,000 along with mementoes.



Speaking on the occasion, Minister Durgesh highlighted Jashua's immense contribution to Telugu literature, particularly his writings focused on social welfare. He praised Jashua for his fearless critique of social issues and urged the public to draw inspiration from his works.

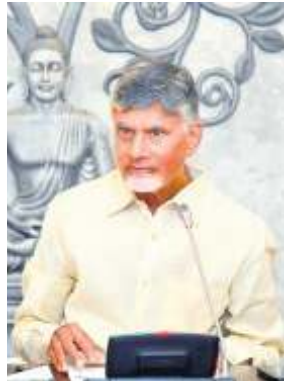
The Minister also recalled Jashua's famous poem, 'Gabbilam,' in which the poet appealed to Lord Kashi Vishwanath against the ban on Dalit entry into temples. He further noted that Jashua's

lection as MLC in 1964 marked his foray into politics. AP Language and Culture Department Director A. Srinivas, former Director Mallikharjuna, and several others were present at the event.

AP Chambers thanks CM for support to tourism sector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce has expressed its gratitude to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for the important announcements made on Tourism Day. In a release on Saturday, AP Chambers president Potluri Bhaskara Rao and secretary B Raja Sekhar stated that granting industry status to the tourism sector is a significant move that the organisation has been advocating for over the past five years.



The Chambers also appreciated the Chief Minister for addressing their request to allow restaurants to remain open until midnight. This change is expected to improve the dining experience for both locals and tourists, contributing positively to Andhra Pradesh's tourism landscape.

Looking ahead to the tourism policy announcement on October 15, the Chambers requested that it include an attractive beverage and liquor policy to appeal to both international and domestic tourists.

They also urged the government to focus on developing Buddhist circuits and to work towards securing World Heritage status for key sites such as Lepakshi, Gandikota Fort, and Belum Caves, to showcase Andhra Pradesh's rich cultural heritage.

The Chambers further suggested a 'Beach Shacks Policy' covering the entire coastline from Srikakulam to Nellore, addressing issues like CRZ/CZMA regulations, beach cleanliness, waste disposal, and promoting responsible tourism practices.

The Chambers praised the government's efforts to enhance tourism and look forward to continued cooperation for the state's development.



Corporate efforts lauded in flood recovery initiative

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rammohana Rao commended corporate companies for their efforts in assisting two-wheeler riders affected by the recent floods in Vijayawada. He expressed his gratitude while participating in a two-wheeler exchange programme organised by Shriram Finance Company at PVP Mall, Bandar Road, on Saturday.

role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes in aiding flood victims to swiftly return to normalcy.

He urged Shriram Finance to provide relaxed loan terms not only to flood-affected motorists but also to general buyers, making the recovery process smoother.

Shriram Finance representatives M Venkateswara Rao and MS Chowdhary announced a special plan to assist people in flood-hit areas with vehicle exchanges, assuring attendees that simplified procedures were being followed to ease the process.

The event saw the participation of authorised dealers of various two-wheeler brands, alongside finance company executives KV Prasad, R Chakradhar, Nagendra, and Phani Kumar.

Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rammohana Rao inaugurated the two-wheeler exchange mela for flood-affected motorists at the event.

ANU to host 2-day national meet from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Prof K Gangadhara Rao, Vice-Chancellor of Acharya Nagarjuna University, announced that Padma Vibhushan Professor Kotha Satchidananda Murthy will be recognised as one of the world's philosophers during the centenary celebrations of his life and work. To mark this occasion, the Centre for Afro-Asian Philosophies at Acharya Nagarjuna University is organising a two-day national conference on September 30 and October 1. The Vice-Chancellor shared the details of the conference at a press conference held in his office on Saturday, stating that former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Nara Lokesh, Minister for Human Resource Development, IT,

Electronics, and RTG, will attend the inaugural session.

During the press conference, Prof Gangadhara Rao highlighted that Satchidananda represents the self-respect of the Telugu people in the realm of philosophy. He confirmed that Venkaiah Naidu will be the chief guest at the event, with other notable attendees including Nara Lokesh, Anagani Satya Prasad (Minister for Revenue), Narendla Manohar (Minister for Civil Supplies), and MLAs Mandali Buddha Prasad and Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar. Former UPSC members, Prof KS Chalam and others, are also expected to participate in the two-day conference. Additionally, Ashok Vohra, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Delhi, will deliver the keynote address.

Preventive care key to healthy heart: Cardiologist

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In observance of World Heart Day, Dr. Lankapalli Bullayya College collaborated with Apollo Hospitals to host a heart-health-focused event, promoting awareness about cardiovascular disease (CVD) and emphasising preventive measures. The event featured a medical camp offering free health check-ups for college staff, including blood pressure, diabetes tests, and electrocardiogram (ECG) screenings. Dr G Madhu Kumar, Secretary and Correspondent of the college, inaugurated the camp, stating, "This initiative provides our staff an opportunity to assess their heart health and detect potential issues early, crucial for long-term well-being."

Hospitals delivered a lecture on "Preventive and Diagnostic Research Methods in Cardiovascular Disease." Dr. Baruah stressed India's need for increased awareness, saying, "While European countries have made progress in controlling CVD through public awareness, India still lags behind." He highlighted the alarming statistic that "60% of individuals with heart-related issues in India do not reach the hospital in time for treatment."

Leading cardiologist Dr Ditya Kumar Baruah from Apollo Hospitals emphasized Indians' genetic predisposition to heart disease, making awareness crucial. He identified stress as a significant contributor to heart ailments and advocated for preventive measures. "Managing stress, following a balanced diet, and staying active are key to preventing heart disease," he advised.

GVMC lifeguards save two tourists from drowning at RK Beach

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a daring act of bravery, lifeguards from the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) rescued two tourists from drowning at RK Beach on Saturday. The victims, Somhuri Rangarao and Kompili Chaitanya, both 21 years old, were caught in a rip current while swimming with friends.



Lifeguards M Dhanaraju and M Naveen sprang into action after spotting the pair struggling in the water. They swiftly pulled them to safety, reuniting them with their relieved friends. This rescue serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of swimming in areas prone to strong currents.

Rip currents are unpredictable, and despite multiple warning signs, some visitors ignore them, risking their lives. Ramanamurthy urged tourists and locals to heed warning signs and avoid venturing into the sea. "We want everyone to enjoy Visakhapatnam's beaches and pleasant weather, but it's crucial to respect the dangers the sea can pose. Please refrain from swimming in the sea to ensure your safety." The police provided counselling to the group, emphasising water safety. This incident highlights the importance of vigilance and prompt action in preventing tragedies.

Cashew apple juice to boost farmers' income

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Andhra Pradesh's thriving cashew industry is on the cusp of a major transformation with the large-scale introduction of fresh cashew apple juice. This innovative initiative is poised to substantially boost the incomes of cashew farmers, particularly those in tribal and agency areas. For decades, cashew apples – the fleshy part of the cashew fruit – have been discarded after the nuts are extracted, resulting in wasted resources and missed opportunities for farmers. However, industry leaders and stakeholders are now recognizing the untapped value of this accessory fruit.

resulting in robust plant growth and consistent yields. Despite India's dominance in global cashew production and processing, the cashew apple remains largely underutilized. Gandham Agro CEO, G Sunitha, is determined to change this. "We have recognized the immense potential in cashew apples, and we are taking concrete steps to harness it," she said. Gandham Agro is establishing a cashew apple juice manufacturing plant, with plans to secure a Rs 2 crore loan from NABARD Bank to fund the project. Sunitha recently met with cashew farmers in Golugonda mandal to discuss the initiative and garner their support.

"This is an opportunity for farmers to increase their income by using what was previously considered waste," Sunitha explained. "We are working on building the necessary infrastructure and collaborating with the community to make this a success." As the cashew industry continues to expand, the introduction of cashew apple juice could become a game-changer for farmers in Andhra Pradesh. With the potential to generate an additional revenue stream while minimizing waste, this initiative is poised to unlock new potential for the industry.

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Jagan has no right to speak on Hinduism: Somireddy

PNS ■ NELLORE

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) politburo member and MLA Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy strongly criticised YSRCP chief and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for his comments on Hinduism. Somireddy questioned whether Jagan Reddy had lost his mental balance.

Addressing a press conference on Saturday, Somireddy asked if Jagan Mohan Reddy truly understood what he had said. Launching a sharp attack on senior YSRCP leaders, he alleged, "Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy hasn't set foot in his Punganur constituency, and PV Mithun Reddy has been absent from his Rajampet Lok Sabha constituency. Kodali Nani and Vallabhaneni Vamsi are avoiding their districts, while Vijayasai Reddy hasn't visited



TDP MLA Somireddy suspected that Jagan Reddy, fearing the loss of Christian votes, hesitated to give the traditional declaration at the Tirumala temple. He accused Jagan Reddy of ruining the state during his five-year tenure and said he had no right to speak on Hinduism, India, or Chandrababu Naidu

Visakhapatnam."

Somireddy further criticised that Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and Dhanunjay Reddy were in exile, while Vasudeva Reddy and Venkata Reddy are behind bars. He also questioned why Jagan Reddy had not visited Tirupati.

Referring to Jagan Reddy's remark about the country, Somireddy stated, "If Jagan Reddy finds it hard to visit

constituencies in Andhra Pradesh, he might as well go to Saudi Arabia or Dubai. Does Jagan Reddy still consider himself Indian?"

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had no right to speak on Hinduism, India, or Chandrababu Naidu.

"I have been in politics since my youth, but I've never seen a leader like Jagan Reddy, who has distanced himself from his own mother and sister," Somireddy remarked. He demanded that Jagan Reddy apologise to Hindus and the people of Andhra Pradesh for his offensive comments.

Students urged to excel in English and Hindi

PNS ■ ONGOLE

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) member Jatolu Hussain urged students to focus on gaining proficiency in English and Hindi, assuring them that all necessary facilities would be provided to support their education.

Hussain conducted a surprise inspection at the Government Tribal Residential School in Garikamitta, Chimakurthy mandal, on Saturday. School Principal Pravin Kumar briefed him on the meal menu and other facilities available at the school. During the inspection, Hussain checked the attendance register and inspected the water pitcher, store, and toilets.

Interacting with the students, Hussain tested their learning abilities and inquired about the facilities, food, and education being provided at the residential school. He emphasised the importance of education, especially in English, stating that it is essential even for securing small jobs. He urged the students to improve their skills in English, Hindi, and Telugu.

Hussain also advised the teachers to enhance the facilities provided to students and ensure the delivery of quality education. He suggested organising special study hours alongside the regular syllabus to help students strengthen their



During his visit, the NCST member Jatolu Hussain inspected a newly constructed building on the premises. He was informed that the government had sanctioned the conversion of the dormitory into a residential school in 2016, but some works remained incomplete due to the non-release of full funds.

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The school has a sanctioned student strength of 320, but currently, there are only 134 students across all classes. Principal Pravin Kumar informed Hussain. He also highlighted the shortage of permanent teachers, with most teaching staff being appointed on an outsourcing basis. NCST district member Kalyan Reddy and District Tribal Welfare Officer Jagannath Rao accompanied Hussain during the inspection.

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Build houses on allocated sites, DC tells beneficiaries

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has urged beneficiaries to commence construction of houses on the sites allocated to them by the government.

A programme titled 'Mana Illu-Mana Gowravam' was held at the Vissakoderu layout near here on Saturday. Speaking at the event, Collector Nagarani emphasised the importance of taking full advantage of the housing scheme to build their homes.

Currently, 2,558 houses in the district are at the roof and lentil level, and beneficiaries are expected to complete these constructions by the end of December 2024. Additionally, there are 18,097 houses at various stages of construction that must be completed by March 2025. The Collector cautioned that the Central government would halt funding for the scheme after March 2025.

"A special officer has been appointed for each mandal,



along with a layout special officer for each layout and a secretariat special officer for each secretariat. These appointed officers will oversee the construction of the houses. Essential materials such as cement, sand, and iron will be made available to the beneficiaries," stated the Collector. She instructed the concerned officials to ensure prompt processing of bills without any delay.

MLA Pulaparti Ramanjaneyulu reiterated the

government's commitment to providing housing for eligible individuals and encouraged beneficiaries to utilise the scheme by building their homes as soon as possible. The MLA also announced that Housing 2.0 would be launched in April 2025. Housing Construction Department EE B. Venkataramana, AE Sambashiva Rao, Municipal Commissioner Ramachandra Reddy, and other officials were present at the event.

'Efforts on to boost coffee and pepper yield in tribal areas'

PNS ■ PADERU

Principal Secretary of the Tribal Welfare Department, K Kannababu, has highlighted ongoing efforts to improve the productivity of coffee and pepper grown by tribal farmers. During his visit to Modapalli village on Saturday, Kannababu inspected coffee plantations and spoke with local farmer Korra Venkata Rao about his annual income from coffee and pepper farming.

Kannababu stated, "Araku coffee, grown organically by tribal farmers, has gained international recognition. It is important to support these farmers in maintaining and increasing their yields to improve their livelihoods."

He also noted that farmers have positively responded to requests for essential equipment. "We are looking into providing baby pulpers, trussers, and tarpaulins to help with post-harvest processes. These tools will significantly assist farmers in managing their operations," he added.

Later, he visited the Kandamamidi Government Tribal Welfare Girls Ashram School, where he attended a medical camp for skin diseases. During this visit, he distributed soaps and medicines to affected students and inspected the school's facilities.



NTR District Collector Dr Srijana signing the register at the EVM security godown at the Gollapudi Agriculture Market near Vijayawada on Saturday.

NTR district Collector inspects EVM strong room

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G. Srijana on Saturday inspected the strong room for Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) located at the Gollapudi Agriculture Marketing Yard in Vijayawada. During her visit, she inquired with officials about the security arrangements for the EVMs and ensured compliance with the guidelines set by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The Collector emphasised the

importance of submitting a detailed report to the ECI after verifying the EVMs and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs). She also instructed the security personnel stationed at the godown to remain vigilant in their duties. Dr Srijana signed the register at the security godown to document her inspection.

The inspection was conducted in the presence of political party representatives, and NTR District Collector Election

Cell Superintendent M. Durga Prasad, along with other officials, participated in the event.

Meanwhile, Kavuri Chaitanya, who was recently transferred from the position of Chinturu Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO), officially assumed charge as the Vijayawada RDO at the Sub Collectorate on the same day. Following his takeover, Sub Collectorate Administrative Officer Hema Kumari and others met with the new RDO.



Expedite resolution of revenue cases in courts: DC

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi has instructed officials to expedite the resolution of revenue cases in courts.

During a video conference with RDOs, Tahsildars, deputy Tahsildars, and other officials on Saturday, the Collector reviewed pending court cases related to lands, freehold properties, and the losses incurred due to floods.

In her review of the pending court cases concerning the Revenue Department, the Collector examined writ petitions, contempt of court cases, document management, and implementation issues.

The Collector directed the relevant officials to submit a report on court cases to the Collectorate. She also emphasised the need to verify the freehold lands in the district and submit a detailed report.

Furthermore, she urged officials to accelerate the process of enumerating flood losses and to complete it as soon as possible. The enumeration report is to be submitted to the Collectorate.

Meanwhile, the Collector commended the government machinery for its efficient and tireless efforts during the floods. She particularly praised Eluru RDO NSK Khajavali and Nuzvid RDO Y Bhavani Shankar for their dedicated service in managing the flood situation. RDO D. Pushmani and other officials were also present at the meeting.

Call to work towards cleaner India



PNS ■ KAKINADA

Sreerama Murthy Kandala, District Field Publicity Officer, Government of India, underscored the significance of collective efforts towards achieving a cleaner and more hygienic India. The Central Bureau of Communication, under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, organised a mini ICOP (Interpersonal Communication Outreach Programme) on cleanliness at the Ideal College of Engineering and Technology, Kakinada.

He appealed to students, parents, and citizens to actively participate in the ongoing 'Swachhata Hi Seva' campaign, which is being observed from

17th September to 2nd October. He stressed the importance of maintaining cleanliness in our surroundings, workplaces, villages, and towns, in order to ensure a cleaner Kakinada, a cleaner Andhra Pradesh, and ultimately a cleaner India.

Kandala also highlighted the significance of conducting the programme near Gandhinagar, a place associated with Mahatma Gandhi's legacy.

He recalled that 103 years ago, on 2nd April 1921, Mahatma Gandhi visited Cocanada (now Kakinada) and addressed a gathering of 40,000 people at Elwinpeta. The place where he spoke later became known as Gandhi Nagar.

Venkat Reddy, District Labour

Publicity Officer, Government of Andhra Pradesh, noted that the 'Swachhata Hi Seva' programme, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's ideals, is focused on achieving clean villages through improved sanitation. The slogan 'Swabhav Swachhta - Sanskar Swachhta' (Cleanliness in Nature and Culture) reflects this vision.

Krishnam Raju, Director of the Institution, mentioned that 'Swachhata Hi Seva' programmes under the Swachh Bharat Mission are being organised across the country to honour Mahatma Gandhi's legacy and promote cleanliness as a way of life. Subhramanya Murthy, Vice Principal, remarked that Swachh Bharat Divas not only engages citizens in cleanliness efforts but also transforms them into active participants in maintaining clean environments.

During the event, aprons were distributed to sanitation workers in recognition of their dedicated service. Subsequently, Shri Sreerama Murthy, Shri Krishnam Raju, and Shri Venkat Reddy planted saplings as part of the Prime Minister's 'A Sapling in Mother's Name' initiative. Students and lecturers also participated in raising slogans promoting 'Swachhata Hi Seva' and encouraging collective action for cleanliness.

'Water tap connections to 22,000 households'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A recent survey by the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has found that about 22,000 households in the city still lack household water tap connections. To tackle this problem, the GVMC has launched several initiatives under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).

The survey indicates that the main reasons for this shortage are the absence of necessary supply infrastructure in some areas and issues with property assessment numbers or permission statuses. The GVMC plans to connect these households to the city's water supply network within the next six months.

Highlighting the urgency of the matter, GVMC



Commissioner P Sampath Kumar remarked, "The state government has instructed us to provide a detailed report on the households without water tap connections and the deficiencies in water supply infrastructure. We carried out a thorough gap analysis through a door-to-door survey, which allowed us to pin-

point the 22,000 households that remain unconnected. While some regions lack the required infrastructure, others encounter problems related to assessment numbers and permissions. We are actively working to expand the network and address these technical challenges."

Currently, the GVMC provides approximately 115 litres per capita daily (LPCD) to residents, which is slightly below the recommended 135 LPCD. Nevertheless, this figure still represents the highest per capita water supply among civic bodies in Andhra Pradesh.

"Our water supply system, which is supported by surplus reserves and various sources, delivers around 400 million litres per day (MLD) to the city, with most of it designated for drinking water. We are also

reviewing and reassessing the city's 8,000 public water tap connections," added Sampath Kumar.

To protect public health, the GVMC has recently moved pipelines that cross city drains to help prevent waterborne diseases. With rising concerns about these diseases throughout the state, the civic body has also increased its water sampling efforts. They now analyze samples from raw water sources, treated water, and supply points three times a day to ensure quality. Additionally, the GVMC tests 2,000 tail-end points every day to uphold water safety standards. These actions demonstrate the corporation's dedication to tackling the water supply issues in Visakhapatnam and ensuring that every household has access to clean, safe water.

Be active in membership drive, get party posts: Nadda

Asks leaders to launch movements on local issues

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP President JP Nadda said that party posts will be given to leaders, who add more members during the membership drive. He said that BJP leaders have to launch movements on local issues besides participating in the membership drive, he added.

He directed BJP leaders to com-

plete the 15-day scheduled membership drive's goal.

Nadda held a meeting with party leaders including MPs, MLAs, MLA candidates and the BJP's Executive Committee Members at the Hariha Plaza on Saturday.

Addressing BJP leaders, Nadda said that he has been roaming across the nation in connection with the membership drive. As part

of it, he said he came to Hyderabad from Patna on a special flight. He enquired about the party's membership drive.

Nadda directed the leaders to launch the membership drive so that the party can have more than the expected 50 lakh membership in Telangana. He said the BJP got 77 lakh votes in the Lok Sabha elections and eight LS seats from TG.

He said that it is not tough to complete the 50 lakh membership as the party had bagged 77 lakh votes. He said that party leaders have to complete the membership drive along with all sections of the people.

It is learnt that Nadda enquired about the prevailing political conditions and the steps needed to strengthen the party.



BJP national president JP Nadda in a meeting, along with MLAs, MPs held on membership drive issue on Saturday at Hariha Plaza

ACROSS THE STATES



Man, four daughters found dead in Delhi

The decomposed bodies of a 46-year-old man and his four daughters, two of them differently-abled, have been found from their rented accommodation in southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj area, police said on Saturday. The deceased have been identified as Heeralal Sharma, who worked as a carpenter at the Indian Spinal Injury Centre in Vasant Kunj for the last 28 years, and his four daughters -- Neetu (26), Nikki (24), Neeru (23) and Nidhi (20). The bodies, found on Friday afternoon, did not have any injury mark. Police found three packets of cephos poison, five glasses and a spoon containing a suspicious liquid from the house. Police suspect it to be a case of suicide as no evidence of any foul play has been found. While police said the two youngest daughters of the man were differently-abled, neighbours claimed that all four were physically challenged.



Govt mulling tuition stipend for new lawyers: Fadnavis

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday said the state government is considering a proposal to provide tuition stipend to new lawyers. He was speaking after laying the foundation stone of the Advocate Academy and Research Centre in Talaja in neighbouring Raigad district. "It is a pleasure that the country's first advocate academy is coming up in Maharashtra. I congratulate the Maharashtra and Goa Bar Council for taking the lead in this initiative. The state government has earmarked Rs 10 crore for this academy," the Deputy CM said. This academy will be a transformative force in legal education and practice, he added. "There is a proposal being considered by the Maharashtra government to provide tuition stipend to lawyers entering the profession," Fadnavis said.



Punjab CM Mann tests positive for leptospirosis

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was on Saturday diagnosed with bacterial infection leptospirosis, with doctors saying he is being given antibiotics. The 50-year-old AAP leader was admitted to the Fortis Hospital Mohali on Wednesday for a routine check-up. "At present, all vitals of the Chief Minister are completely stable. As suspected at the time of admission for tropical fever, his blood tests for leptospirosis came back positive," according to a health bulletin issued by the hospital. It said the chief minister has already been put on appropriate antibiotics. "All clinical features and pathological tests have shown satisfactory improvement." According to the WHO, leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects both humans and animals. Humans become infected through direct contact with the urine of infected animals or with a urine-contaminated environment. The bacteria enter the body through cuts or abrasions on the skin, or through the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose and eyes.

ENCOUNTER IN J&K

Two terrorists killed, five security personnel injured

Two unidentified terrorists were killed and five security personnel, including an officer, sustained injuries in an encounter in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district, police said on Saturday. The gunbattle broke out in Adigam village in the Devsar area of the district after security forces launched a cordon-and-search operation there early in the morning. In the early exchange of fire, Additional Superintendent of Police (Traffic) Mumtaz Ali suffered minor injuries due to a stray bullet near the encounter site, officials said. They said four security personnel involved in the anti-terrorist operation sustained injuries in the encounter. Two terrorists were killed, police said, adding that searches are being carried out in the area. The identity and group affiliation of the slain terrorists are being ascertained.



Decision to transform J&K into UT is 'temporary': Modi

PNS ■ JAMMU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the decision to transform Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory is "temporary" and the BJP-led government will restore the statehood to the region.

Launching a scathing attack on the opposition Congress, National Conference (NC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), he accused them of 'inflicting wounds' on the people by depriving them of their rights.

The prime minister said it is the BJP, which has ended discrimination and is providing balm on the wounds of the victims of the three families.

Addressing a massive election rally at M A M Stadium in the heart of Jammu a day before the conclusion of campaigning for the final phase of the assembly polls on October



1, Modi said the decision to transform Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory is temporary.

"BJP is the only party which will restore statehood to the region," he reiterated.

Escalating his attack, the prime minister said the "Congress, NC and PDP are

annoyed by the changes in Jammu and Kashmir because they do not like your development".

"They are saying they will form the government to revive the old system - the same discriminatory approach which led Jammu to be the biggest sufferer," he added.

Modi said the Jammu region in particular faced "decades of injustice" at the hands of the three parties which not only defamed the Dogra legacy but also their rulers.

"The most corrupt Congress family is accusing the Dogra rulers to be corrupt," he said, adding it was the BJP which ended the "historic discrimination" and provided justice to the region during the last 10 years.

Referring to the setting up of various education and health institutions, including the IITs and AIIMS and infrastructure projects like tunnels, the prime minister said the Congress, NC and PDP inflicted "wounds on the people" by depriving them of their rights but the BJP reached them, irrespective of their religion, and rubbed balm on their wounds by giving them voting rights, reservations and empowering women.

Urban voter apathy matter of concern: CEC Rajiv Kumar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Saturday expressed his concern over the urban voter apathy, and said efforts are being made to ensure maximum polling in the ensuing Maharashtra assembly elections.



Addressing a press conference in Mumbai after reviewing poll preparedness for the Maharashtra assembly elections, Kumar singled out areas like Colaba and Kalyan in and around Mumbai which recorded "among the lowest" voter turnout in the Lok Sabha polls held this year. Daily wage earners and others in the unorganised sector should be informed by the administration that voting day will be a paid holiday for them, he said.

"Our effort will be to ensure that there is maximum enrolment and voting in Maharashtra assembly elections," he said.

"We have asked Maharashtra Government to shift officials who have served in their home district or current posting for

over three years," Kumar said, adding he has asked for a compliance report for the same in the next couple of days.

The CEC said it is the right of voters to know if any candidate has criminal background. The political parties should also inform people reasons for fielding such candidates, he added.

"There will be checking of all helicopters (during electioneering) to ensure inducement-free assembly elections in Maharashtra, he said.

Wrapping up his two-day visit to the state, Kumar said those spreading fake news and using deep fake tech on social media ahead of Maharashtra polls will be dealt with sternly.

'Viksit Bharat not possible without women and education'

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday underlined the importance of women education, saying the dream of a developed India was incomplete without women and education.

"Women and education are the two wheels of the chariot that will drive the nation," Dhankhar said while interacting with the students and teachers at the India International School in Jaipur. "Education is the biggest leveller in society and it brings equality and it is a necessity for democracy to flourish in any society. Education brings about equality, education cuts into inequities," he added.

Dhankhar said, "If we look into our Vedas, great emphasis was laid on education and participation of women. We lost our way somewhere in between."



The vice president said that during the Vedic era, women were on the same footing and were policy and decision makers and were guiding forces.

He also praised the recently enacted Women Reservation Bill that mandates one third reservation in Parliament and state legislatures.

Underlining India as the most happening place globally in terms of investment and opportunity, he stated, "The country has seen historic exponential development, economic upsurge unknown to us. The world class

infrastructure, our opportunity basket is increasing day by day." Lauding the National Education Policy, the vice president said there can be no change without education.

He said that education has to be beyond degree. "Pursuit of degrees one after another is not the right approach to education and that is why after three decades the country came to have a national education policy that allows students full exploitation of their talent," he added. Drawing attention to the equal application of law in the country, Dhankhar said, "Equality before law, provided by the Constitution, had eluded us for long, some people thought they are more equal than others, some thought we are beyond the reach of the law, we are above the law but a big change that has taken place is equality before law is now a ground reality."

6-7 K'taka Ministers will have to resign if documents are released

H D Kumaraswamy hits out at Siddaramaiah govt

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Hitting out at the Siddaramaiah-led government in Karnataka on a host of issues, including 'corruption', JD(S) leader and Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Saturday said if he released the documents in his possession, six to seven state Ministers will have to resign.

He claimed that the Congress administration was trying to "fix" him in some cases, after he began cornering the state government in connection with some alleged irregularities and started discussing them in public.

"Siddaramaiah had accused (previous BJP government) of being 40 per cent commission govt and came to power. Today his own party is saying after this



government coming to power it is more than 40 per cent (commission). Mr Siddaramaiah, did people give you power for this?" Kumaraswamy asked.

Addressing reporters here, he said, "I have things (with me), I'm not running away. If I release the documents I have, six to seven Ministers will have to resign...I will release, will not run away with fear, no hit and run..."

Targeting the CM on the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment case, the JD(S) state president asked, "If he (Siddaramaiah) had no role in the Mysuru (MUDA) scam, then why are certain decisions are being made by the cabinet hurriedly?" citing the government withdrawing general consent given to CBI to investigate cases in the State.

Accusing the government of bringing in a new kind of legal system in the state as per which arrests are being made in several cases just because someone gives a complaint, he said, "but in your (Siddaramaiah) case despite 48 hours, after the court issued directions, FIR was not registered."

Paper leak cases will be probed if BJP voted to power in Jharkhand: Shivraj

PNS ■ MEDININAGAR

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday said the alleged "paper leak" cases that took place during the tenure of the JMM-led government will be investigated if the BJP is voted to power in Jharkhand.

Addressing a rally in Palamu district as part of the BJP's 'Parivartan Yatra', Chouhan claimed question papers were leaked 17 times during the tenure of the JMM-led government, and subsequently, the examinations were cancelled.

"The JMM government is cheating youths. Papers leaked 17 times in Jharkhand and examinations were cancelled. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has now become 'paper leak morcha'. We will conduct a probe into paper leak cases," said Chouhan, one of the BJP in charge of the state.

He said that if the BJP is voted to power, graduate and postgraduate students would



be provided financial assistance for Rs 2,000 per month for two years so that they could prepare for government jobs.

"When the BJP comes to power in the state, the decision to fill 2.87 lakh vacant posts in government departments will be taken in the very first cabinet meeting," he said.

Chouhan said Rs 2,100 would be credited to the bank accounts of women every month if the BJP is voted to power in the state.

He reiterated that Jharkhand's 'matr' (land), 'beti' (daughter) and 'roti' (bread) were under threat due to infiltration from Bangladesh.

RAHUL TO JAISHANKAR

Press Sri Lanka for release of TN fishermen

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday raised with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar the issue of the arrest of 37 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and urged him to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities to ensure the early release of the Indian nationals and their boats.

In a letter to Jaishankar, Gandhi said the "recurring incidents of small and marginal Indian fisherfolk being apprehended by Sri Lankan authorities and the unjust seizure of assets and imposition of hefty fines by them warrants strict condemnation".

Referring to the arrest of 37 Tamil fishermen and the seizure of their boats by Sri Lankan authorities on September 21, 2024, the Congress leader said,



"R Sudha, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from Mayiladuthurai Parliamentary Constituency informed me that the arrested fishermen are small-scale fisherfolk operating close to the coast, and that on the day of the incident they had attempted to rescue a Sri Lankan boat in distress."

It was stated that despite contacting Sri Lankan authorities for assistance with the rescue, the fishermen were arrested on the grounds of crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line, he said.

Furthermore, the fishing boats seized were community property purchased through pooled resources, he said.

"A copy of Adv. R. Sudha's representation is enclosed herewith...", he said.

16 years on, victims of 2008 Malegaon blast await justice

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sixteen years have passed since a blast rocked Maharashtra's Malegaon on a quiet September day in 2008, killing six people and injuring more than 100, and the trial in the case has just about reached the concluding stages.

While the prosecution has presented its final say in the case, the defence is likely to commence its closing arguments on September 30.

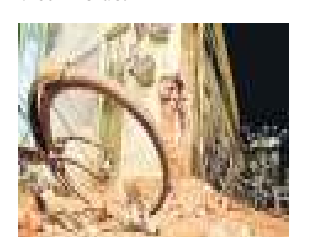
However, for the victims and families who lost their loved ones, it has been a long-drawn battle for justice.

Six people were killed and more than 100 injured when an explosive device strapped to a motorcycle went off near a mosque in Malegaon, a town about 200 km from Mumbai in north Maharashtra, on September 29, 2008.

Lt Col Prasad Purohit, BJP leader Pragna Thakur-Major (retired) Ramesh Upadhyay, Ajay Rahirkar, Sudhakar Dwivedi, Sudhakar Chaturvedi and Sameer Kulkarni are facing trial under the provisions Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad initially began a probe into the case before it was transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2011.

"The trial is finally nearing the end, and we can expect the court to conclude it soon," said advocate Shahid Nadeem, representing the victim side.



Trustees seek ban on laddu sale in MP temple after devotees flag 'different' taste, smell

PNS ■ SEHORE

The trust managing a famous temple dedicated to Vindhyavasni Beejasa Devi has submitted a memorandum to the collector of Sehore in Madhya Pradesh seeking a ban on the 'laddus' being sold by a self-help group on the premises.

Devotees have been complaining that the laddus are smelling and tasting different so a ban was sought, temple trust chairman Mahesh Upadhyaya said on Saturday.

The temple is situated on a 800-foot high hillock in Salkanpur, some 70 kilometres from state capital Bhopal.

The move comes amid a raging row over the alleged



Devotees have been complaining that the laddus are smelling and tasting different so a ban was sought, temple trust chairman Mahesh Upadhyaya said on Saturday. The temple is situated on a 800-foot high hillock in Salkanpur, some 70 kilometres from state capital Bhopal

use of animal fat in the laddus given as prasad at the

renowned Tirupati temple in the southern state of Andhra

Pradesh. "We want a ban on the sale

of these laddus on the temple premises," Upadhyaya said.

The memorandum called for a ban saying any sort of adulteration will bring a bad name to the trust and the temple.

When contacted, Sehore collector Praveen Singh said, "The memorandum was received when I visited the temple two-three days ago. A meeting was held between the trust and the self help group. It involved the employment of many women in the SHG. The issue is almost settled."

The temple is patronised by thousands of people, who climb more than 1000 steps to reach it. A grand fair is held during Navratri.

A TASTE OF HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Durga Puja brings feeling of home for everyone. For those in Delhi, *Oh! Calcutta* offers the flavours of Bengal. It Celebrates 25 years, serving authentic Bengali food, making it a perfect spot to enjoy the festival in all its grandeur, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Photos: Pankaj Kumar



Durga Puja is more than just a festival; it's an emotion, a time when everyone feels an irresistible pull towards home. The smell of incense, the rhythm of the 'dhak' and the sight of the majestic idols fill hearts with nostalgia. For those who find themselves far from Kolkata during this time, there's a place that offers a slice of home: *Oh! Calcutta*.

Oh! Calcutta has been serving the flavours of Bengal for 25 years. As the city prepares to welcome Durga Maa, this iconic restaurant remains a favourite for all those hoping for the familiar taste of home-cooked Bengali food. Recently celebrating its silver jubilee, *Oh! Calcutta* has not only kept the essence of Kolkata's cuisine alive, showing that the spirit of Bengali food remains strong and proud, no matter where you are.

Established in 1992, *Oh! Calcutta* was born from a passion to showcase the unique flavours of Kolkata's 300-year-old culinary traditions. The restaurant's menu is a tribute to the city's gastronomic legacy, influenced by British, Armenian, French and Mughal cultures. This blend of influences captures Kolkata's essence as a melting pot of communities. The founder, *Anjan Chatterjee* and his team of chefs envision their cuisine as a tribute to the rich and diverse culinary heritage of Kolkata, which has been shaped over centuries. As they say, "Kolkata's khabar mane sudhu peth bhora noi, eta hridayo bhora" (In Kolkata, food is not just about filling the stomach but the heart).

As part of its silver jubilee celebrations, *Oh! Calcutta* has introduced a special anniversary menu that beautifully captures Kolkata's culinary heritage. The menu, curated by *Chatterjee*, marries traditional recipes with a contemporary touch, ensuring that the authenticity of Bengali cuisine remains at its heart. Signature dishes such as *Aam Ada Grilled Bhetki*, *Jackfruit Tikki* and *Prawn Malai Curry* are shining examples of the restaurant's dedication to preserving the old while embracing the new.

One of the highlights is the crispy *Hilsa Fish Fingers*, served with a tangy mustard mayo that brings back memories of home-cooked meals. The *Calcutta Fish Fry* is another star, with its tantalising blend of spices that capture the essence of family gatherings. And, of course, there's the *Bhetki Machher Paturi*,



"KOLKATAY Khabar mane sudhu peth bhora noi, eta hridayo bhora"
(In Kolkata, food is not just about filling the stomach, but the heart)

where fish marinated in mustard and coconut, wrapped in banana leaves, and steamed to perfection.

Mutton dishes hold a special place in Bengali cuisine, and *Oh! Calcutta's* offerings don't disappoint. The rich, slow-cooked *Kosha Mangsho* (mutton curry) is simmered with spices that warm the soul, while the *Railway Mutton Curry*, inspired by the classic railway-style preparation, evokes nostalgia and comfort. These are dishes that remind you of home-cooked meals during Pujo and family journeys. The vegetarian fare at *Oh! Calcutta* is

equally delightful. Dishes like *Mochar Ghonto* (Banana Floret Subzi) and *Cholar Dal* (Bengal gram lentils cooked with coconut and spices) highlight the rich vegetarian tradition of Bengal. And let's not forget the *Begum Bhaja*, deep-fried slices of eggplant that are the perfect accompaniment to the *Cholar Dal*.

For seafood lovers, there's the *Prawn Malai Curry*, a creamy and indulgent prawn dish cooked in coconut milk and lightly spiced. And for those seeking something lighter, the *Maacher Dom Jhol* (fish curry) with *luchi* offers a delicate blend of spices with fresh

vegetables and fish. This simple yet heartwarming dish is a staple in Bengali households and is often served during Durga Puja feasts.

No Bengali meal is complete without a sweet ending, and *Oh! Calcutta* makes sure this tradition is upheld. The restaurant offers a range of traditional sweets, including *Sandesh*, *baked Rasgulla* and *Mishi Doi* is a staple at the end of every Bengali meal. As they say, "Bangalir mishti priyo, eta tog shobar jana" (Everyone knows that Bengalis love sweets).

What sets *Oh! Calcutta* apart is its tireless commitment to authenticity. The restaurant sources key ingredients directly from Kolkata, ensuring that every dish retains its traditional flavour.

From the *Kakra Chingri Bhapa* to the fragrant *Gobindobhogher Bhaat* (a special variety of rice), every ingredient is carefully chosen to maintain the integrity of Bengali cuisine. This attention to detail ensures that each dish not only tastes authentic but also evokes a sense of nostalgia.

The atmosphere at *Oh! Calcutta* further enhances the dining experience. The decor, featuring traditional Bengali art and nostalgic photographs of Kolkata, creates a warm and inviting setting. The staff, always attentive and knowledgeable, make sure that guests feel at home, guiding them through the menu and sharing the stories behind each dish.

As the festivities unfold, the connection between food, culture and family shines brightly at *Oh! Calcutta*. It's a place where both Bengalis and non-Bengalis can celebrate the rich and diverse cuisine of Kolkata. This Durga Puja, let the flavours of Kolkata fill your heart and your plate as you indulge in the culinary brilliance that has delighted guests for 25 years. As they say, "Bangalir khabar mane sudhu taste noi, eta hridayo er kotha" (Bengali food is not only about taste, but it's also a matter of the heart).

So, this Pujo, if you find yourself longing for the flavours of home, head over to *Oh! Calcutta* in GK-2, New Delhi. With dishes like *Kosha Mangsho*, *Mochar Chop* and *Gol Morich Chicken*, you will be treated to a culinary journey that's as close to Kolkata as you can get without leaving Delhi. Let the food fill your heart with joy, warmth, and a taste of home, reminding you that the spirit of Durga Puja can be felt wherever you are.



SIP THE ESSENCE OF ASIA: A UNIQUE BEVERAGES EXPERIENCE

Yauatcha's 'Asia In A Glass' is more than just a cocktail menu, it is an homage to the traditional flavours and modern techniques that define Asian cuisine, says **SHARMILA CHAND**

Yauatcha, the well-known contemporary Dim sum Tea House in Bengaluru is celebrating a unique cocktail menu, 'Asia In A Glass'. It is a vibrant celebration of Asian ingredients, masterfully crafted into exquisite cocktails that promise to transport guests on a sensory journey across the continent. I was thrilled to see how they have gone beyond their culinary fare to extend their philosophy seamlessly into the heart of their bar program, where mixology transforms into an art form.

THE DRINK'S NARRATIVE

Ranging from classic cocktails with a unique twist to refreshing fruit-forward and tea-infused concoctions, each libation at this London-style bar is a meticulously crafted narrative. The carefully designed cocktail menu embodies innovation and sophistication in showcasing Asian ingredients.

"When I was working on the 'Asia In A Glass' article, I had the pleasure of meeting with Merwyn and gained a deeper understanding of the evolution of Yauatcha's cocktail scene. Yauatcha has always been at the forefront of mixology trends, being one of the pioneers in implementing an innovative ice program. Sitting down with Merwyn provided invaluable insights that helped shape the story. It's truly gratifying to see this meticulously crafted menu come to fruition with this article," said *Aslam Gafoor*,



who inspired the creation of this cocktail menu with his article in the *Yauatcha Life* magazine, titled 'Asia In A Glass'. As the name suggests, Asian ingredients take the spotlight in Yauatcha's cocktail program philosophy, turning every cocktail into a distinctive masterpiece. From the invigorating zing of lemongrass to the comforting warmth

of ginger, Yauatcha's Head Mixologist, Merwyn Alphonso, has curated a sensory experience that reflects Asian culinary heritage in every sip. Furthermore, the glassware and ice story transform into canvases for expression, enhancing visual allure and turning the bar into a dynamic masterpiece where flavours dance and evolve. Sharing his

excitement about the launch of the new cocktail menu, Merwyn said, "Discussing the beverage program at Yauatcha, it's clear that it's more than just a dim sum restaurant. When Allen Yau founded Yauatcha, it was built on the four pillars of hospitality, patisserie, dim sum, mixology and tea. To this day, these pillars guide us in crafting every cocktail

that we put on our menus. The 'Asia In A Glass' menu was created with this ethos in mind, and we hope our guests enjoy these beautiful libations. The cocktails draw inspiration from across the Asian continent, incorporating traditional Asian ingredients such as Yuzu, Lychee, Pandan and Lemongrass. The result is a series of exclusive beverages that are as visually stunning as they are delicious, each one

telling a story of its own."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MENU

- **Tian Shang:** A refreshing blend of Gin, Vodka, raspberry liqueur, lemon, fresh raspberries, elderflower foam.
- **Jian Mei:** A tea twist with Gin, sake, floral tea liqueur.
- **Around The World:** A delightful concoction of White rum, limoncello, Aperol, lychee, homemade apricot compote, rosemary twig.
- **Ginger Martini:** A zesty, aromatic blend with White rum, ginger, green apple, orgeat, lime.

Each cocktail is a testament to the skill and creativity of Yauatcha's mixologists, who have drawn inspiration from the diverse culinary landscapes of Asia. Experience the vibrant flavours and innovative creations that set Yauatcha apart. The drinks echo Yauatcha's ethos, embodying innovation and sophistication in showcasing Asian ingredients. The concoctions are more than just drinks, they are conversation starters and memory makers. Step in, have your pick from the 'Asia In A Glass' menu and see how a world of flavours is waiting to be explored by you! Cheers!

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Sharmila Chand is an author and consulting editor. She writes on food, travel, lifestyle, Culture.



MOSCOW

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME: FROM SOVIET SHADOWS TO MODERN MARVELS

From the historical depths of Red Square to the majestic Kremlin, each corner of this sprawling metropolis reveals layers of history - burnt, rebuilt and revived - beckoning travelers to explore its rich tapestry of culture and heritage, writes GYANESHWAR DAYAL

As I step off the plane at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Alexander S. Pushkin International Airport, the brisk, cold breeze is a refreshing change from the humid warm air of Delhi. This is my second trip to Moscow; my first visit occurred shortly after the Soviet Union disintegrated and Russia emerged as a new entity. Indeed, Moscow has transformed significantly since then. The city's infrastructure has improved dramatically, making it almost unrecognisable; the roads and the cars on them wear a fresh look. Yet, amidst this change, Moscow retains its unique character—invisibly yet inherently private.

Over its 877-year history, the city has withstood a lot. Moscow lives fully, with its history woven into every brick and stone. Each regime has left its imprint, manifesting in monuments and relics scattered throughout the city, which now stand in contrast to modern architecture.

Moscow, the capital of Russia, boasts a rich and complex history that spans over 800 years. Founded in 1147 by Prince Yuri Dolgoruky, the city initially served as a minor trading post. Its strategic location on the Moskva River facilitated trade and communication, contributing to its gradual rise in importance. By the 15th century, under Ivan III (Ivan the Great), Moscow emerged as a significant political and cultural centre, ultimately overthrowing Mongol dominance.

In 1547, Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) was crowned as the first Tsar of Russia, marking the official establishment of the Tsardom. This period was characterized by territorial expansion, the consolidation of power, and the construction of iconic structures like St. Basil's Cathedral, which symbolizes Moscow's architectural heritage.

Red Square, the iconic heart of Moscow, was established in the late 15th century, specifically during the reign of Ivan III (Ivan the Great). Originally, the area served as a marketplace and a central hub for various activities, but it gradually evolved into a political and cultural centre. It is now a must-visit tourist attraction. And if one wants to understand Moscow brace up for a long walk.

Red Square transports you to the 15th century. Our guide, an enthusiastic and energetic lady tells us Red is not for colour though the bricks and stones used are Red. Red in Russian means beautiful so it is a beautiful square and I couldn't agree less. You have colourful St. Basil's Cathedral overlooking the square, commissioned by Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) in 1555 to commemorate the conquest of Kazan. Done in Disney style (or maybe it is the other way round). This style of structure painting is categorised of Russia and is called "Russian patterning." It is the place to click selfies.

Red square is also the place where Lenin's embalmed body is kept and many other Generals were buried. We don't get a chance to go inside as it is closed by the time we reach. Vladimir Lenin, leader of the October Revolution and the first leader and founder of the Soviet Union, died in Gorki aged 53 after falling into a coma on January 21,



1924. It has been 100 years since he died. The GUM Department Store is a major shopping destination nearby. It is beautiful no doubt and has best brands on offer. I buy nothing but being it is an experience; the aura of the place is awesome. Nearby there is a souvenir shop which has a good collection of memorabilia and offers discounts and prices are negotiable, feels like home. I buy a few souvenirs. Red Square has been the site of numerous significant events throughout Russian history, including military parades, public gatherings, and political demonstrations, making it a symbol of both the historical and contemporary Russian state. Then there is a change of guards where every two hours Presidential guards change their duty. They say you have to be the best to be presidential guards. Three tough



a smoking burning building. They were restored and did not look burnt now. We moved on to the churches where Tsars were baptised, crowned and laid to rest. All have shining brass tops. Don't know how they keep them so shiny. I can't keep my small Buddha statue that shiny anyway.

Moscow became the capital of the new socialist state, undergoing rapid industrialisation and significant urban development, exemplified by the construction of grandiose structures like the Seven Sisters skyscrapers. These seven huge buildings still stand tall and are landmarks. They now house a university, a government ministry, a hotel and no idea about the others. Interestingly the underground in Moscow was used as bunkers by the Muscovites during the second world war. The stations are indeed nothing short of a palace with large murals exquisitely done and preserved. We decide to take a ride. The coaches are neat and people are friendly. We exchange smiles with fellow passengers. Our short but sweet journey comes to an end we are back to our hotel.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked another pivotal moment in Moscow's history. The city transitioned from a socialist regime to a market economy, leading to significant social and economic changes. Modern Moscow has seen extensive urban development and globalisation. Moscow has now become a business hub and opened to inter cultural relations and tourists from all over the world. Today, Moscow stands as a vibrant metropolis that beautifully blends its rich historical heritage with modernity, attracting millions of visitors each year who come to explore its vast cultural treasures, including historic churches, museums, and vibrant neighbourhoods. Each brick and stone of this ancient city tells a story of resilience and transformation, reflecting the enduring spirit of its people.

Moscow is a foodie's paradise. I enjoyed Zhivago's food, excellent food served with a charming smile. Apart from Dr Zhivago there are many restaurants that dot the city and have amazing food and vibes. Moscow is a vibrant city where culinary culture thrives, offering a rich tapestry of dining experiences that

reflect both tradition and innovation. From elegant restaurants serving classic Russian fare like 'borscht' and 'pelmeni' to trendy eateries embracing global influences, the city's food scene is diverse and sophisticated.

In the heart of Moscow, Café Pushkin stands as a symbol of elegance, offering a nostalgic ambiance reminiscent of 19th-century aristocratic Russia. For those seeking modern Russian cuisine with a twist, White Rabbit is a must-visit, famous for its innovative take on local ingredients and breathtaking views of the city.

For a more casual yet equally delightful experience, LavkaLavka, a farm-to-table restaurant, emphasizes sustainable dining, offering dishes made from fresh, locally sourced ingredients. Meanwhile, Dr. Zhivago of course presents a chic, contemporary take on traditional Soviet-era dishes in a stylish setting. For travellers and locals alike, these eateries are more than just places to dine—they offer an immersive experience into Moscow's rich cultural heritage and evolving modern palate.

Moscow has a good number of Museums too; they are a must visit if you have taste beyond Malls and Restaurants which Moscow has plenty. The guides are funny and knowledgeable at the same time. Moscow has a huge collection of paintings from bygone eras. Mostly of the Christ, kings but also of the people their life and woes. One could spend a day just watching the masterpieces. For the intellectually inclined, Moscow has a number of libraries with excellent collection of books.

Russian libraries are not just repositories of books but vital cultural institutions that embody the country's rich literary and intellectual tradition. The most iconic among them is the Russian State Library in Moscow, one of the largest in the world.

Founded in 1862, it holds millions of volumes, including rare manuscripts, maps, and other historical documents, making it a treasure trove for researchers and scholars. The library's architectural grandeur reflects its significance, with vast reading rooms and meticulously curated collections covering a wide range of disciplines. Beyond the Russian State Library, Moscow is home to numerous other libraries, such as the Lenin Library, which is also highly regarded for its expansive catalogue of works. But the best thing about Moscow is its people; friendly courteous and always willing to help.

The warmth of the Russian people is often a pleasant surprise for those visiting the country for the first time. Once you break through the initial formalities, you'll find that Russians are deeply hospitable, warm-hearted, and generous, especially when it comes to welcoming guests into their homes. The tradition of hospitality runs deep—guests are treated with great respect, and hosts often insist on sharing hearty meals and meaningful conversations, making you feel genuinely at home. As we pack bags, they are filled with souvenirs and memories one would share back home. As you board the flight and bid goodbye to Moscow you are still yearning for more.

“MOSCOW, THE CAPITAL OF RUSSIA, BOASTS A RICH AND COMPLEX HISTORY THAT SPANS AROUND 800 YEARS. FOUNDED IN 1147 BY PRINCE YURI DOLGORUKY, THE CITY INITIALLY SERVED AS A MINOR TRADING POST. ITS STRATEGIC LOCATION ON THE MOSKVA RIVER FACILITATED TRADE AND COMMUNICATION, CONTRIBUTING TO ITS GRADUAL RISE IN IMPORTANCE”

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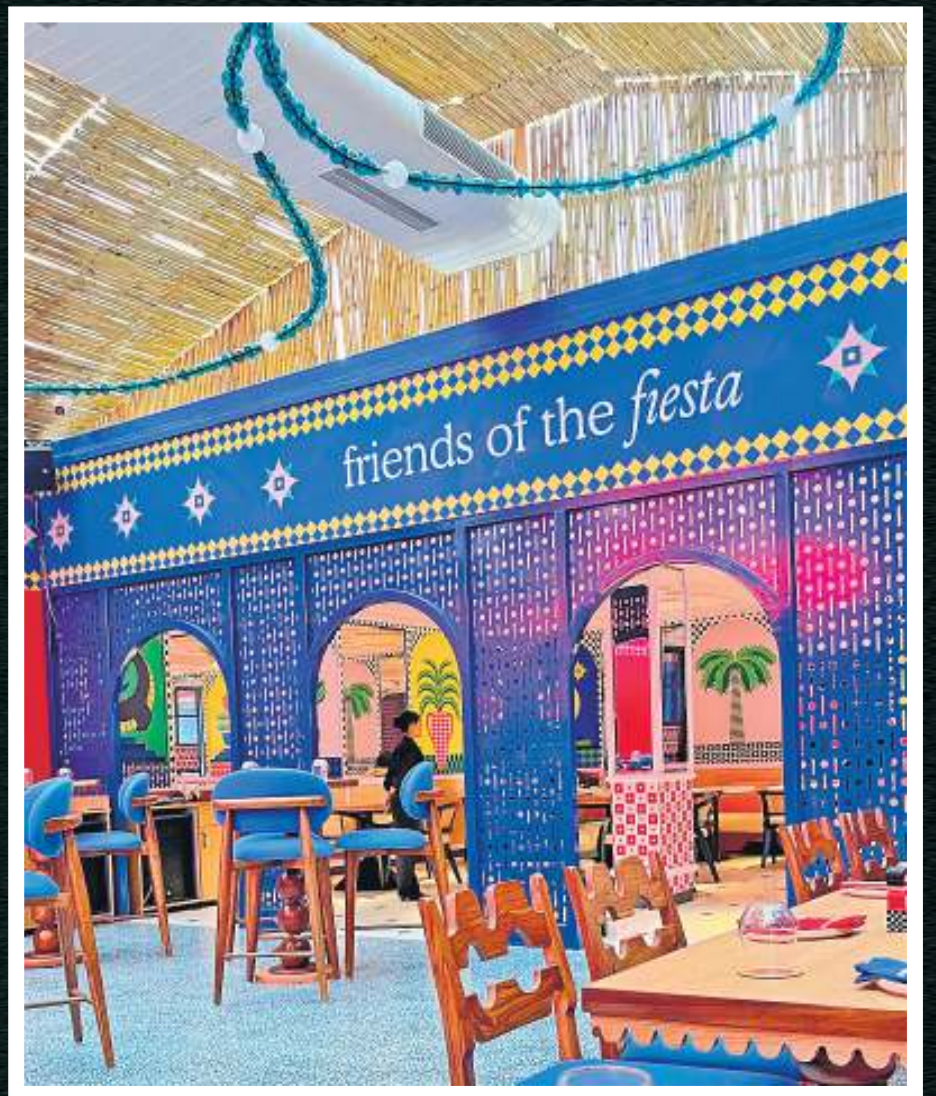
Taco 'Bout Mexican fiesta!

AARTI SREENATH
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Stepping into Mexarosa was like being whisked away to a wild Mexican fiesta where every dish was a celebration and each cocktail was a toast to good times. The air hums with the energy of sizzling fajitas and the guacamole arrives like it knows it's the star of the show – smooth, creamy and a total scene-stealer. Tacos? They're more like tiny edible adventures, with flavours that dance the cha-cha on your taste buds. And the churros? Let's just say, if heaven had a dessert, this would be it.

At Mexarosa, every bite felt like a vibrant celebration and by the time you hit the tequila, you'll be convinced this is where happiness lives, wrapped in a tortilla and topped with salsa. The ambience was a vibrant fusion of Mexican charm and festive energy. The space was adorned with an explosion of colours, each corner exuding warmth and character. The walls were painted in bold

hues reminiscent of traditional Mexican art, with patterns and textures adding depth to the lively decor. The flooring, with full stone tiles, gave a rustic touch, evoking a cozy, earthy feel. Intricate details, from the colourful sombreros hanging on the walls, completed the immersive experience. The food matched the atmosphere delectable, rich in flavours and deeply tied to the authenticity of Mexican cuisine. Dining was like being teleported to a fiesta where the food danced on your taste buds and the cocktails gave you the courage to join in (even if you're rhythmically challenged). Let's kick things off with the Mexarosa Corn Ribs—I'm pretty sure these corn ribs were once the life of the party. Grilled to perfection, they were paired with the guac so smoothly it felt like witnessing a salsa duet in slow motion and those nacho chips? Crispy backup dancers. But the real firestarter? Mexarosa Prawn Fiesta—these prawns were fried so crisp you could hear their crunch before they hit the table. Tossed in a fiery hot sauce and lemon chili seasoning, they were hotter than the salsa on a summer day in Mexico. Thank goodness for the cooling sour cream; without it, I might've needed a fire extinguisher. For a true test of patience and flavour, the Mojo Pork Carnitas and Lamb Birria won the slow-cooking Olympics, with the pork smoked for eight hours and the lamb simmering for five. Honestly, after tasting those melt-in-your-mouth bites, I'm thinking of slow-cooking everything in my life, including my morning coffee. Now for the cocktails—the liquid courage to



match the menu's heat! La Unión Latina was like a cultural exchange program in a glass. Rum, pisco, coconut and coffee teamed up to connect the Caribbean and South America, while mole bitters brought the warmth (and a little spice) that made me feel festive with every sip. El Son del Mezcal was like a smoky tango on your palate. Mezcal,

ancho chile and charred bell pepper created a fiery yet balanced concoction that hit me with enough boldness to make you want to shout, "Viva México!" By the end of the night, I left Mexarosa full, happy and possibly fluent in taco. This place didn't just serve food—it served a fiesta for the senses and I'll be back to RSVP soon.

FORK LORE

SMOOTH & PORELESS SKIN

Say goodbye to disturbing excess sebum, unconcealable enlarged pores, white flakiness and achieve smoother, more refined skin with Innisfree's Super Volcanic Pore Clay Mask. Harnessing from the natural wonders of Jeju, this powerhouse mask combines volcanic clusters and AHA to absorb excess sebum and impurities, purifying your skin from the inside out. The dual-action formula works as a chemical and physical exfoliate, removing dead skin cells and evening out your skin texture for a radiant glow.

Price: INR 1,100



NEW HYDRATING JELLY TINTS

Type Beauty has launched their stunning collection of hydrating, exfoliating and brightening jelly tints! Designed to give your skin the ultimate nourishment, these tints deliver a flawless, dewy glow that radiates perfection—all with zero compromises. It added another feather to their beauty hat by launching the most hydrating jelly tints.



WHAT'S NEW

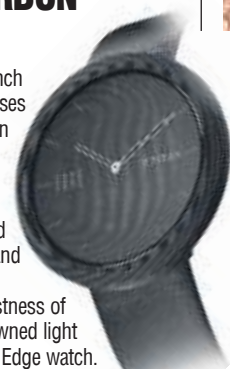


GARNIER ENTERS SUNCARE CATEGORY

Garnier has forayed into the suncare category with the launch of its ground-breaking Super UV Invisible Serum Sunscreen. The lightweight formula offers broad-spectrum protection with SPF50 and PA++++ that safeguards the skin from 99% sun damage. Enriched with Vitamin C, this sunscreen not only protects but also helps correct dark spots.

EDGE BY TITAN INTRODUCES CARBON FIBRE WATCH

Edge by Titan is delighted to launch an ultramodern timepiece that fuses the lightweight strength of carbon fibre with its iconic minimalist aesthetics to bring together unparalleled durability and style. Originally used in automotive and aerospace engineering, the dial and the case of this watch have been crafted in it to enhance the robustness of the watch coupled with the renowned light weight experience of wearing an Edge watch.



ELEVATE YOUR TABLE SETTING

AMARA, the first tableware product in the OG green gold, Bamboo, with cotton piping in various colours. Made using strips of bamboo that are woven into sheets with a handloom, the mat is held in shape by stitching on a cotton border. Make mealtimes more graceful as you use these as soft tablemats, either directly for your crockery or as a layered base for your chargers.

Price: 2,350.00/-



BLING STRIPE AURORA BUBBLEGUM PINK CO-ORDS

The Terra Luna CO-ORDS in bling stripe aurora bubblegum pink bring together effortless style and comfort. The Elba top, with its flattering V-neck, cap sleeves and ruching details, pairs perfectly with the Drai shorts, featuring an elasticated waistband and side slits for a relaxed fit. Made from 100% organic Khadi cotton, this set is both eco-friendly and chic, offering a versatile look those transitions seamlessly from beach to brunch or bar.

Price: ₹6,999



GARDEN OF JOY EARRINGS

Crafted from 14kt gold, the Garden of Joy earrings feature natural diamonds that sparkle brilliantly, complemented by vintage-inspired rose cut diamonds. South Sea pearls add a touch of opulence, while vibrant emeralds provide a splash of colour and symbolise renewal. Inspired by a blooming garden, each element is carefully chosen to evoke a sense of joy and harmony, making these earrings a cherished addition to any collection.



VAI RA'S NEW COLLECTION

Each earring boasts 14 exquisite stones, featuring a delightful blend of princess, baguette, and pear cuts, for a total of 2.8CT of stunning moissanite and lab diamonds. Their graceful half-hoop design is not just about beauty; it's crafted for comfort, with a secure pushback closure that can easily be converted to a Bombay screw for added peace of mind. Available in 925 silver, solid 10KT, 14KT, or 18KT gold and in breathtaking finishes of white, rose, or yellow gold, these hoops are perfect for celebrating special moments or for simply adding a touch of sparkle to your everyday look.

BLUSH FOR PERFECT FLUSHED LOOK

Achieve a radiant, natural glow with Anastasia Beverly Hills Blurring serum blush. This hydrating, liquid blush offers a soft-matte, blurred finish, enriched with skin-loving ingredients like niacinamide and pomegranate peel extract. Its lightweight, gel-like formula grips the skin for a "flushed-from-within" effect, while the precision applicator ensures easy, flawless application.



MYNDSHROOM

Introducing Awshad Myndshroom, a superfood designed to elevate your brainpower! It offers high levels of energy, focus and mental clarity with its powerful blend of Cordyceps, Lion's Mane and L-theanine. Safe and easy to consume, Myndshroom provides cognitive support and enhanced mental performance with minimal side effects. Perfect for today's fast-paced world, it is your non-prescription solution for boosting brain health!

PRICE: ₹2400



HOROSCOPE

ARIES

(March 21 - April 19)

You'll meet someone attractive this week. Be persistent, avoid high expectations, and embrace your strengths. Manage stress wisely and communicate effectively, and success will follow.



TAURUS

(April 20 - May 20)

You'll feel drawn to new connections. Stay harmonious, be patient with career delays and trust your instincts. Avoid rash decisions and channel your energy into meaningful work.



GEMINI

(May 21 - June 20)

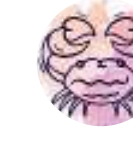
Your attraction to beauty will lead to new opportunities. Stay resilient despite setbacks, focus on your goals, and trust your co-workers. Maintain a positive mindset for success.



CANCER

(June 21 - July 22)

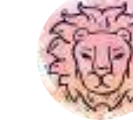
Be gentle with yourself and your loved ones. Resolve misunderstandings, balance your principles and embrace support. Stay loyal and focused. Your efforts will bring success.



LEO

(July 23 - August 22)

You'll attract someone who opens your heart easily. Stay calm amid family pressures. Offer support and focus on meaningful work. Your energy and encouragement will bring success.



VIRGO

(August 23 - September 22)

Your guiding nature benefits loved ones. Balance your personal growth with obligations. Stay calm, avoid emotional blowups, and focus on projects. Manage stress and practice self-control.



LIBRA

(September 23 - October 22)

Your drive and resilience will overcome setbacks. Strengthen relationships and address minor suspicions with your spouse. Obstacles may delay your project. Stay positive and focused.



SCORPIO

(October 23 - November 21)

You'll face financial pressure but remain calm. Support from friends will aid success. Embrace others' ideas and stay determined. Recognition will follow. A pleasant trip brings joy.



SAGITTARIUS

(November 22 - December 21)

You will find a stimulating partner and should express your feelings before it's too late. Stay confident despite setbacks and focus on your future. Success and good health await.



CAPRICORN

(December 22 - January 19)

You'll feel attracted to someone and enjoy harmony this week. Strengthen relationships, nurture your body and communicate effectively. Students need to focus on their studies.



AQUARIUS

(January 20 - February 18)

You'll feel attraction this week; persist despite initial rejections. Address emotional struggles, communicate with your spouse and don't let work hinder your plans. Recognition is on the way.



PISCES

(February 19 - March 20)

Embrace unexpected attractions that could transform your life. While seeking beauty and harmony, avoid overindulgence. Prioritize quality time with loved ones to boost your relationship.



"The best way to approach Navratri is in a spirit of celebration. This is the secret of life: to be non-serious but absolutely involved"
- Sadhguru



Over the centuries, Durga Puja has evolved from a private affair of Zamindars to a mass celebration on a global scale. It is now much more than just a religious festival – it's a cultural spectacle, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

DURGA PUJA

A SYMPHONY OF TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

Some September and everyone is busy making plans for the 'Puja', a festival dedicated to Goddess Durga, in eastern India. Of course it is Kolkata which is the epicentre of all celebrations. Over the years, *Durga Puja* has evolved into a pan-Indian and global festival. With unmatched fervour and devotion, people across the world now come together to honour the goddess, celebrating her victory and divine power.

Durga Puja, one of the most revered and vibrant festivals in India, particularly in West Bengal, celebrates the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura, symbolising the triumph of good over evil. Rooted in Hindu mythology, the festival commemorates the goddess as the embodiment of Shakti, or divine feminine power. Over the years, *Durga Puja* has transformed from a primarily religious observance into a grand socio-cultural extravaganza that has few parallels. *Durga Puja* marks the victory of Goddess Durga, a fierce yet compassionate deity, over Mahishasura, who threatened to disrupt the balance of the universe. According to legend, Mahishasura received a boon that no man could defeat him. As he unleashed terror, the gods united to create Durga, a divine warrior goddess, who fought and eventually killed Mahishasura. The festival celebrates Durga's strength, resilience, and protective nature, while also invoking blessings for peace, prosperity, and protection against evil forces. That is mythology for one and all but it is a metaphor which might have fewer takers but nevertheless the message is crystal.

The metaphor and hidden message of Goddess Durga lie in her embodiment of divine feminine power, resilience, and protection. As a multi-armed warrior goddess, Durga symbolises the shakti (cosmic energy) within all beings, representing the strength needed to overcome life's obstacles. Each weapon she holds signifies various tools required to defeat inner and outer evils like fear, ignorance, pride and injustice. Metaphorically, Durga's battle with Mahishasura, the demon king, is a reflection of the ongoing struggle between good and evil, not just in the cosmic realm but within individuals and society at large. Her victory underscores that evil - be it oppression, greed or violence - can only be defeated through righteous action, courage and the collective strength of the divine and human will.

It is the triumph of dharma (righteousness) over adharma (immorality), a reminder that good eventually prevails even in the face of insurmountable odds. Furthermore, Durga, as a motherly figure, embodies compassion and protection, highlighting the balance between fierceness and nurturing, teaching that strength does not negate love and compassion. Goddess Durga conveys the message of empowerment, particularly for women, demonstrating that power and authority lie in embracing one's true self and purpose. In a broader sense, Durga's story speaks to the need for balance between action and patience, destruction and creation, power and empathy.

The festival is observed during the Hindu Calendar month of Ashwin



DURGA PUJA IS AN ELABORATE AND COLOURFUL FESTIVAL, TYPICALLY SPANNING FIVE DAYS - SHASHTHI, SAPTAMI, ASHTAMI, NAVAMI AND VIJAYADASHAMI. EACH DAY IS MARKED BY RITUALS, PRAYERS, CULTURAL EVENTS AND, OF COURSE, THE UNVEILING OF THE IDOL OF GODDESS DURGA IN PANDALS (TEMPORARY, ARTISTICALLY DESIGNED STRUCTURES). THE CELEBRATION BEGINS WITH THE RITUAL OF BODHON, OR THE WELCOMING OF THE GODDESS, ON THE SIXTH DAY



(September-October), culminating on Vijaydashami, the tenth day when Durga's victory is celebrated and her idols are immersed in water, symbolising her return to Mount Kailash, her celestial home. *Durga Puja* is an elaborate and colourful festival, typically spanning five days - Shashthi, Saptami, Ashtami, Navami and Vijaydashami. Each day is marked by rituals, prayers, cultural events and, of course, the unveiling of the idol of Goddess Durga in pandals (temporary, artistically designed structures). The celebration begins with the ritual of Bodhon, or the welcoming of the goddess, on the sixth day.

FROM ZAMINDAR PUJA TO PUBLIC CELEBRATIONS

Historically, *Durga Puja* was a private affair, celebrated within the homes of wealthy zamindar (landlord) families. However, during the late 18th century, it began to shift towards community-based celebrations. In Kolkata, the first publicly organised *Durga Puja*, known as the Barowari Puja, was held in 1790, and since then, the practice has spread across Bengal and beyond. The first major move toward a community-based *Durga Puja* or Barowari Puja, took place in 1790 in Hooghly district, near Kolkata. A group of twelve friends organised this puja to make the festival more inclusive and community-oriented, free from the exclusivity of the zamindar class. This concept of collective worship was revolutionary at the time and set the foundation for public celebrations of the festival. The term "Barowari" comes from baro (twelve) and yari (friends), representing this group's efforts to democratise *Durga Puja*. Raja Nabakrishna Deb, an influential zamindar of the Shobhabazar Rajbari in Kolkata, played a critical role in popularising *Durga Puja* beyond the private confines of aristocratic families. In 1757, following the British victory at the Battle of Plassey, Nabakrishna Deb invited British officers, including Robert Clive, to his *Durga Puja* celebration, creating a hybrid of Indian tradition and colonial influence. In the late 19th century, Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission also played a pivotal role in giving *Durga Puja* a broader, more public dimension. Through the Ramakrishna Mission, *Durga Puja* became associated with nationalistic and cultural identity, with an emphasis on social service and community welfare. Swami Vivekananda himself performed

Durga Puja at Belur Math in 1901, marking the festival as both a spiritual and community event.

PANDAL HOPPING

The centrepiece of the festivities is the pandals, where elaborate idols of Durga, along with her children - Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartikeya and Ganesha - are displayed. These pandals often feature intricate themes that range from mythological tales to contemporary social issues. *Durga Puja* pandals have evolved far beyond simple religious displays, becoming powerful platforms for artistic expression and social commentary. Every year, these temporary structures turn into creative masterpieces that reflect not just devotion to Goddess Durga but also highlight contemporary issues ranging from politics to global events and pressing social concerns. Some pandals artistically engage with local and national politics, offering thought-provoking critiques or support for political movements. For example, some recent themes have explored elections, portraying the goddess battling forces of greed and dishonesty, metaphorically addressing societal upheaval. Several pandals focus on international matters, such as climate change, world peace or refugee crises. They utilise innovative materials and designs to depict how these global challenges affect humanity. For instance, some recent installations have depicted the Amazon rainforest fires, the pandemic or refugee struggles, merging Durga's fight against evil with the global battle for environmental protection or humanitarian aid. Many pandals are now powerful vehicles for raising awareness about social issues. They have addressed women's rights, child labor, education and even mental health. Some pandals creatively use Durga's weapons to symbolise the tools needed to fight social evils like gender inequality or poverty, aligning the goddess's mythology with contemporary societal struggles. Themes such as women empowerment, gender justice and communal harmony are depicted with a blend of artistry and symbolism. In recent years, with growing awareness about environmental conservation, eco-friendly pandals have gained popularity. Artists use biodegradable materials like clay, bamboo and jute to create these installations, while themes often focus on

sustainability and environmental consciousness. These efforts not only contribute to reducing pollution during idol immersion but also send a strong message about the urgent need to protect nature. These innovative pandals transform *Durga Puja* into not just a religious celebration but a cultural forum where tradition and modernity intersect, sparking dialogue on critical societal and global issues. Through artistry, they encourage introspection, inspire change, and bring communities together in shared reflection.

RITUALS AND PRAYERS

Devotees perform elaborate rituals, such as the pushpanjali (flower offerings) and aarti (lamp offerings), invoking the goddess's blessings. On Ashtami, the main day of the festival, the Sandhi Puja, symbolising the transition from Ashtami to Navami, is performed with great fervour. Kumari Puja, where young girls are worshiped as manifestations of the goddess, is also a key ritual.

CULTURAL PERFORMANCES AND FEASTING

Beyond its religious aspect, *Durga Puja* is also a cultural celebration. Communities organise music and dance performances, theatrical productions and art exhibitions. The festival is a time for feasting, with special foods like bhog (a sacred offering) and traditional Bengali sweets such as sandesh, rasgulla, and mishti doi adding to the festive charm. While *Durga Puja* retains its core religious significance, the festival has undergone significant transformations over the centuries, evolving into a social, artistic, and commercial spectacle.

GLOBALISATION OF DURGA PUJA

Today, *Durga Puja* is not confined to Bengal. Thanks to the global Bengali diaspora, the festival is celebrated with grandeur in cities like London, New York and Dubai. Modern technology, social media and live streaming of rituals have expanded the reach of *Durga Puja*, allowing devotees from across the globe to participate. *Durga Puja* has also seen commercialisation, with sponsorships and advertisements driving the festival economy. The shopping, food, and tourism sectors receive a massive boost during this time, as people from across the country and the world flock to experience the grandeur of the celebration. *Durga Puja* is more than just a religious festival; it is a vibrant, living tradition that has evolved with time. While the core message of the triumph of good over evil remains intact, the festival has grown to embody the cultural and social heartbeat of Bengal, touching the lives of millions across the globe. As *Durga Puja* continues to transform, it serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring strength of faith, community and creativity. In today's society, with the increasing disregard for women's dignity, the timeless message of Goddess Durga appears to be lost in the din. People seem more focused on indulging in the festive revelry rather than embracing the deeper significance of Durga's empowerment. Yet, this is the fate that most festivals eventually meet - a shift from reflection to celebration.

CHAT-O-CINO



RAMP TO REIGN: Sophiya Singh dolls up for MISS ASIA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL '24

her career as a wealthy entrepreneur with her role as an actress in hit serials. We were curious to find out how she is thriving in both artistic and entrepreneurial jobs. The model continues, "I was determined to establish a name for myself in the Indian television industry when I was eighteen years old. I was the youngest ever Femina Miss India pageant winner. Look at me now—my passion for participating in these pageants hasn't faded. Nonetheless, my modelling career began in the city of Egypt! You could say I was overrun by consignments from the media industry because I was getting them one after the other. Under the tutelage of none other than the television tycoon Ekta R Kapoor, I worked for Balaji Telefilms for about a year." Principally, she made a life-changing detour to pursue her true passion—beauty pageants. This sparked her entrepreneurial spirit too, leading her to establish a business. Her institute offers comprehensive training in makeup and self-grooming, empowering women to shine in pageants. The journey hasn't been easy, but after nine years, she has established herself as a reputable figure in the pageant world.

Contemplating social causes to champion at Miss Asia Pacific International, she highlights women's empowerment through education and financial autonomy, challenging societal norms and promoting self-acceptance, saying, "Beauty pageants are about more than just physical appearance; they're also about advocating for meaningful causes. As a competitive individual, I'm drawn to addressing a pressing global issue: violence against women. This isn't just an Indian problem; it's a pervasive, worldwide crisis. Sexual assault and human trafficking persist, affecting women every minute. It's imperative we acknowledge this ongoing struggle and take action."

Singh expressed her excitement and nervousness: "India is already an incredible nation, renowned globally for its rich heritage. Many international individuals are eager to experience our vibrant culture. As a melting pot of diverse religions coexisting harmoniously, India stands unique. Then, stereotypes are shaped by our surroundings. Social media can be a powerful tool for change. I've seen many girls struggle with body image and mental health issues due to the beauty industry. Rather than shattering stereotypes, I aim to normalise female empowerment—with or without beauty. I'm committed to learning and promoting inclusivity, inspiring other girls to do the same." Cheers to that!

"Participating in a popular reality show unexpectedly boosted my confidence, preparing me for the camera and glam appearances. However, my ultimate goal remained representing India, proudly wearing the national flag. Leaving acting to pursue this dream was a risky decision, but I'm driven to make a difference. I'm open to exploring politics to achieve this vision, alongside other passionate individuals," highlights the beauty pageant holder. On the other hand, the entertainment industry is undergoing a transformative shift, prioritising inclusivity and shattering

stereotypes. But there's a flip side to it too! She shares her perspective: "Be prepared for the ultimate test of resilience if you're entering this industry. You'll face a myriad of challenges, from intense scrutiny and exploitation to fierce competition and cultural scrutiny. Additionally, you may encounter unforeseen negative publicity or find yourself at the center of controversy—all under the media's relentless spotlight."

Driven by societal standards and media influences, women strive to enhance their physical attractiveness from a young age. This perpetual pressure links beauty to self-confidence, making grooming essential for success across all industries. And then there are people who can't afford how to understand doing make-up, so, "I founded my institute for those in need since there are many who cannot afford to learn how to apply make-up. Makeup and styling are quite expensive in our field. Some are demanding lakhs for it! I give poor girls free education and all of these things for a very minimal price."

Anticipating to display her uniqueness in the pageant, she hopes, "Through the Miss Asia Pacific pageant, I aim to highlight India's rich cultural heritage and unique beauty. Winning is crucial for me, as it will enable me to share my culture globally. My community's expectations are high and I feel the weight of responsibility. Preparing for this competition feels like training for the Olympics—I'm striving for gold. With just eight days left, I'm nervous but determined to make my country proud."

In this same pageant, Zeenat Aman and Dia Mirza have both brought pride to India. Their approach inspires our very own Sophiya too: "Zeenat Aman's acting career took off after winning Miss Asia Pacific International 1970 at 19, making her the first Indian to claim the title. She initially secured the 'First Princess' title in Femina Miss India before triumphing in the Philippines. This victory launched her as Bollywood's leading lady, setting glamorous trends. Decades later, Dia Mirza replicated this success in 2000, winning Miss Asia Pacific International with elegance and charm. Notably, Dia defied convention by wearing a one-piece swimsuit, standing against objectification. I vow to reclaim the crown for India after a 24-year hiatus, reminiscent of 2000's triumphant haul of three international titles."

At the end of the interview, an adamant Sophiya desists, "Participating in pageants helps develop essential skills like communication, public speaking, confidence and poise, while also teaching valuable lessons in handling pressure, competition and criticism. As a titleholder, I'll serve as a role model, utilising my intelligence, knowledge and social skills to drive positive change. Pageants have evolved, prioritising cultural and social awareness, inclusivity and diversity, looking beyond physical beauty. Although physical appearance remains significant, the focus has shifted towards empowering individuals to make a meaningful impact. Inspired by Angelina Jolie and Princess Diana, my ultimate goal is to become a social activist, leaving a lasting legacy."

ACTRESS AND MODEL SOPHIYA SINGH IS GEARED UP TO REPRESENT INDIA AT THE PRESTIGIOUS MISS ASIA PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL 2024 PAGEANT. AS A TALENTED MULTI-HYPHENATE, SOPHIYA'S MODELING CAREER HAS CATAPULTED HER TO THIS MILESTONE. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE PIONEER BEFORE HER DEPARTURE, SHE EXPRESSES HER ENTHUSIASM AND SHEDS LIGHT ON PRESSING ISSUES ON A GLOBAL SCALE

SHIKHA DUGGAL
shikhaduggalwork@gmail.com

Nothing short of remarkable is Sophiya Singh's journey from winning back-to-back major beauty pageant crowns to her brilliant career today. Her success has been defined by her steadfast faith, hard work and dedication. She has also inspired countless others with her path. Sophiya discusses the great points and difficult moments that have moulded her incredible journey—from her time as a top model to her candidacy as Miss Asia Pacific International 2024—in this exclusive conversation. Come along as we take a closer look at the life of this versatile individual, examining the events that have influenced her career and the experiences that have made her who she is today.

Who knew that watching her on a contentious reality show would lead to an interview for the opportunity to represent India at Miss Asia Pacific International, just like Zeenat Aman and Dia Mirza? Before the competition, she shares, "As everyone knows, competing for Miss India is not an easy feat; thus, I come from a very long journey in the beauty pageant world! There's fierce rivalry. Undoubtedly one of the most challenging pageants in which I have ever competed. Without a doubt, my charm and self-assurance helped me to win. That's what made me want to represent my nation in the international pageants. Miss Asia Pacific International is a pageant that attracts girls from fifty different nations and let me explain to you that international delegates are also involved."

Oh, the woman is well-known for juggling

TRENDING

DWAYNE BRAVO

PERSON



Former West Indies captain and legendary all-rounder Dwayne Bravo, took to Instagram on Thursday to confirm his retirement from cricket.

BHAANG BLUNDER

VIDEO



Something rather shocking has recently taken place involving British internet personality and influencer Sam Pepper, who postponed his India tour after being hospitalised with severe digestive issues, allegedly from drinking bhang.

DEVARA PART 1

Jr NTR's fans vandalised Venkateswara theatre at Paloncha in the district on Friday over the delay in screening the first show of Devara movie.

MOVIE



MERE MEHBOOB

SONG



Internet feels sorry for Triptii Dimri getting 'cringe' steps in Mere Mehboob! While the catchy tune and beats have had fans tapping their feet along, the choreography has evoked mixed reactions.

MELONI, MUSK'S PICTURE WENT VIRAL

PICTURE



Tesla CEO Elon Musk has reacted to dating rumours with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni after his fan club posted their picture from an event that sent the internet into an overdrive.

Fuel your fertility with preconception nutrition!

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Studies have indicated that preconception nutrition is linked to fertility health for both women and men. Moreover, some substances can impede fertility. Eating a diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and dairy products can help you meet your recommended intake of vitamins and minerals for optimal reproductive health. Preconception nutrition refers to the dietary and nutritional adjustments that women make before attempting to conceive, either naturally or through assisted reproductive technologies like IVF.

IMPORTANCE FOR WOMEN PLANNING IVF

Dr. Spoorthy Chennamaneni, IVF Specialist, Fert9 Fertility Center, Kukatpally, highlights that for women planning to undergo IVF treatments, preconception nutrition plays a significant role in multiple ways:

Hormonal balance: A well-balanced diet helps regulate hormones, which are critical for ovulation and maintaining a healthy endometrial lining for embryo implantation.

Egg quality: Adequate intake of nutrients such as folic acid, omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, vitamins (like D, E, and B complex), and minerals (such as zinc and selenium) is known to improve egg quality, which is vital for successful fertilisation and embryo development in the female body.

Reducing inflammation: A nutrient-rich diet with anti-inflammatory properties can

improve the body's environment, reducing conditions that may affect fertility.

Enhancing uterine environment: Proper nutrition ensures the uterine lining is healthy and receptive, enhancing the likelihood of embryo implantation and increasing the chances of successful pregnancy.

BALANCED DIET FOR SUCCESS RATE OF IVF TREATMENTS

A balanced diet significantly influences the success rate of IVF treatments by supporting various aspects of reproductive health. "Firstly, it improves hormonal function by ensuring a stable supply of essential nutrients that help regulate hormones such as estrogen and progesterone, which are crucial for a successful IVF cycle. A good balanced diet also enhances egg and sperm quality; diets rich in antioxidants, healthy fats, lean proteins, and whole grains are linked to better egg quality in women and improved sperm health in men, both of which are directly correlated with higher IVF success rates," shares Dr. Spoorthy. Maintaining a balanced diet also helps in preventing weight-related complications.

KEY NUTRIENTS IN PRECONCEPTION DIET

"A balanced preconception diet for women preparing for IVF should be rich in essential nutrients that support reproductive health and overall well-being of the women," explains Dr. Vaishali Chaudhary, Director-IVF & Fertility, Sahyadri Hospitals MomStory, adding the key nutrients to focus on include the following:

Folic acid (Vitamin B9): is crucial for preventing neural tube defects in the developing fetus. Women should aim for 400-800 mcg daily, ideally starting at least three months before conception.

Having a healthy diet before getting pregnant is a suggested factor that can be changed to reduce the risk of infertility. Nevertheless, there is no formal advice available for women during the preconception phase on which dietary strategies could enhance fertility. Worry not! *The Pioneer* brings you a detailed analysis as we connect with health experts



Iron: Anaemia is more common in women and it is vital to prevent it, which can affect energy levels and the health of the reproductive system also.

Calcium and vitamin D: essential for bone health and the proper functioning of the reproductive system. These nutrients support the healthy development of the fetus and help maintain maternal bone density during pregnancy.

Omega-3 fatty acids: important for regulating hormones, improving egg quality, and reducing inflammation in the body.

Zinc: plays a role in cell division, which is vital for embryonic development.

Antioxidants (Vitamins C, E, and Selenium): These protect the reproductive cells from oxidative stress, which can damage eggs and sperm.

Protein: Essential for cell growth and development, especially during the formation of the embryo.

SPECIFIC FOODS TO BE PRIORITISED:

Dr. Vaishali further explains, "Whole grains like brown rice, millets (such as ragi, bajra, and jowar), and whole wheat are excellent sources of fiber that help regulate blood sugar levels and maintain hormonal balance. Including seasonal and local fruits and vegetables like palak, methi, bhindi, lauki, amla, and guava ensures a wide range of essential vitamins, antioxidants, and fiber that support reproductive health. For lean proteins, incorporating dal, chana, rajma, paneer, and lean meats like chicken and low-mercury fish (such as rohu and pomfret) is beneficial. Healthy fats are crucial and can be sourced from ghee (in moderation), nuts (almonds, walnuts), seeds (flaxseeds, chia seeds), and oils

like mustard or coconut oil. Dairy products like milk, yogurt (dahi), and buttermilk (chaas) provide calcium and vitamin D, which are essential for bone health and fetal development."

On the other hand, certain foods should be avoided to optimise preconception health for IVF. Processed and refined foods such as white bread, instant noodles, sugary snacks, and deep-fried items like samosas, pakoras, and namkems are high in sugars and unhealthy fats, leading to inflammation, hormonal imbalances, and potential weight gain. Trans-fats found in street foods, bakery items, and processed snacks can impair fertility by affecting ovulation and hormone production. Limiting caffeine intake from strong tea (chai) and coffee and avoiding alcohol is important, as both can affect fertility and increase the risk of miscarriage. Similarly, high-sugar foods and beverages, including tradition-

al sweets (mithai) and sugary sodas, should be minimized to prevent insulin resistance, which is linked to infertility and poor egg quality. By focusing on nutrient-rich foods and avoiding potential dietary pitfalls, women can better prepare their bodies for IVF success.

POOR DIETS IMPACT ON EGG QUALITY

Dr. Arati Adhe Rojekar, Consultant-Gynecology at P.D. Hinduja Hospital and MRC, highlights that it's not only your diet but whatever you consume, like fruits, vegetables, nuts, non-vegetarian food, or even addictions like tobacco, alcohol, anabolic steroids and recreational drugs. She further shares, "After consumption, it doesn't get completely absorbed by the body. The nutritive portion will get utilised while harmful products called oxidative radicals are managed by antioxidants. Still, some portion remains in our body as oxidating radicals and can be harmful for the DNA of our cells, particularly gametes like sperm and eggs. These oxidative radicals have a negative impact on the structure and motility of sperm and ultimately the fertilising potential of our gametes. Supplements such as zinc, selenium, Omega 3 fatty acids, vitamins A, C, and E, coenzyme Q10, and folic acid can counteract the free radicals, hence called the antioxidants and ultimately prevent sperm and egg damage and preserve its fertilising potential."

DIETITIAN/NUTRITIONIST IN PREPARING A NUTRITIONAL PLAN

The nutritionist should take down a complete history of the couple undergoing infertility treatment, or IVF. Their daily requirements, their daily-required allowances, consider their diet. Also note down addictions and then suggest the diet accordingly. If their diet is not sufficient, then medicinal nutrition supplements should be provided.

Smita Sabharwal, a senior IAS officer, who proudly calls herself a 'classic textbook bureaucrat', is known for her grounded and methodical approach to governance. In an interview with **Naveena Ghanate** of *The Pioneer*, Smita shares vignettes of her life's journey from childhood, being IAS topper, working in fields as well as family and children

Smita Sabharwal: The quintessential bureaucrat



CHILDHOOD AND EARLY MEMORIES

Being an Army brat, I grew up in a very secure environment of cantonment where we kids could play until late in the evening without a care in the world. Sundays were all about endless cycling and swimming. Academically, I did well, but I would not say I was overly studious. I excelled in school from an early age and topping my class wasn't something extraordinary at home. My father would never make a big deal over it. We lived in a typical Bengali household, filled with music, movies and rich cultural discussions. My father, in particular, had a love for classic Hollywood films—he wasn't too fond of Bollywood flicks. So, we grew up watching films like *Ben-Hur* and *The Ten Commandments* and classics rather than popular Hindi movies of the time. It was a very intellectually stimulating and holistic environment like most Bengali families. My mother is a strict disciplinarian and growing up under her watchful eye shaped much of who I am today. As a child, there were no shortcuts when it came to academics, thanks to her.

WANTED TO JOIN MILITARY

A lot of the raw guts comes from dad and mom. As the eldest daughter, I always carried a sense of responsibility. My sister is much younger than me, so I was the one who had to take charge of things. Even when it came to scheming pranks, I was the one in command (smiles). Growing up in an army household, I naturally admired my father's uniform and the discipline it represented. For years, I dreamt of joining the military myself as we were hardly into the civilian world. At that time, in the late 90s, there was a lot of talk about women entering the armed forces and the Short Service Commission had just opened up. Many young women from army families, like mine, were joining. It seemed like a natural path for me. But my father had a different perspective. One day, he sat me down and told me about the civil services. I didn't even know about it then. He explained, "In military, you'll retire by 27, but in the civil services, you can serve the nation for a much longer time and have a greater impact. You have the brain and the innovation to do something bigger." It was the first time I had even thought about a career in civil services.



TOPPER IN CIVIL SERVICES

The civil services exam was notorious even then for being one of the toughest exams in the country. Most people who cleared it were older, around 27 or 28. But I didn't let that intimidate me. I've always loved a challenge and this was no different. I was 21. Instead of heading to Delhi, which is where most people go for coaching, I stayed in Hyderabad and studied with whatever resources I could find. I cleared it on my second attempt and ranked 4 among the toppers. The media attention that followed was a bit overwhelming, but what truly mattered to me was cracking that exam. Even this, my father told me not to get it to my head and that kept me grounded through out my career. In my interview for IAS, I said 'no' to a few questions and didn't even take wild guesses. I was possibly one of those who got the highest marks in an interview that year. One of the biggest lessons I've learned in life is the importance of saying "no". I've always known when to step away and that clarity has guided me throughout my life. If I didn't make it in my second attempt, I wouldn't have pursued further and gone for MBA.

BALANCING WORK DURING PREGNANCY

A significant challenge I faced was managing my work during my pregnancies. Sometimes your worst experiences are from your own bosses! Mine was a very borderline case and I almost lost my first baby. It was so bad and because my husband is a doctor, he managed the situation at the last moment. I should have just said no to my bosses and relaxed. But I being me, I was like, I must do my best. I used to get up at seven in the morning, go on the field tours. And some days it was not my choice. I was instructed to do certain things. So, this is totally avoidable. In fact, it nearly resulted in premature labour due to the stress I was under. Looking back, I regret not taking the time to step back and relax when I should have. It was a tough lesson, but one I took to heart. By the time I was expecting my second child, I learned my lesson. I had a much more peaceful and comfortable pregnancy and I took the necessary time off. Coincidentally, my daughter and I share the same birthday—June 19—so I took leave on the day she was born and this time, I made sure to focus on my wellbeing.



FAILED TELUGU EXAMINATION

One of my biggest fears in my career was learning Telugu. During my stint as sub-collector Madanapalle, I failed twice and it became a headline that IAS topper failed in Telugu! It was frustrating because language is a critical aspect of administrative work, especially in connecting with the local population. After my failure, my father nudged me. The fear of not mastering Telugu would come every evening to help me, but I was so anxious that I stopped absorbing what she was teaching. Eventually, she realised I needed practical exposure and pushed me to start speaking Telugu with local people. I learned the language by interacting with the community, slowly overcoming my fear. It took me two years.

MY FAVOURITE INITIATIVES

Of all the initiatives I've worked on, *Amma Lalana* remains closest to my heart. It focused on reducing unnecessary Caesarean deliveries in government hospitals. It initially appeared headed for failure, but it picked up pace. Childbirth became happy event as private hospitals were charging exorbitant fees for C-sections, draining families financially. Several people from Karimnagar would tell me how this initiative helped them. Another initiative I am particularly proud of is the *Nutrition Kit* scheme, *Breakfast Scheme* in Telangana. I've always believed that education and health go hand in hand and the scheme played a crucial role in improving both. I also take great pride in the *Mission Bhagiratha* water supply project I oversaw. While it was more of a supervisory role, the impact it had on people's lives was profound. Clean water at their doorstep improved sanitation, health and overall well-being. It wasn't just about drinking water; it was about improving people's everyday lives. During Covid, handwashing became convenient and a narrative on good sanitation and health. In some ways it was health infrastructure. SHE Teams and CCTV cameras in city, the idea for it came during a trip to Singapore, where I learned about their strict laws and enforcement measures to ensure public safety, especially for women. Singapore is known for its safety and I was intrigued by how they maintained such discipline. I realised that deterrence played a significant role and that was something we could apply back home.

EARLY CHALLENGES IN FIELD

The first 6-7 years of my career were spent learning the realities of fieldwork. It wasn't easy. I had to deal with land disputes, visit rural areas to listen to people's problems and settle conflicts. I remember a particular incident that left a lasting impression on me when I was sub-collector Madanapalle. One evening, after a long day, I was heading home when I saw an old woman waiting by the office gates. She looked desperate and was crying uncontrollably. She fell at my feet and begged me to sanction her old-age pension. She said her daughter-in-law would throw her out of the house if she didn't get the pension today. That moment changed me. It made me realise how vulnerable people are and how much they rely on even the smallest interventions from the government. Another heartbreaking experience was when a village fire broke out and several younger children died. When I went to meet a grieving mother, the first thing she said was, "How much compensation will the government give us?" She had just lost her child, but her mind was focused on survival and making sure the government didn't forget about her. It was a sobering reminder that for many people, survival is the first priority, even in the face of immense personal tragedy.

CARTOON CONTROVERSY AND SUPREME COURT CASE

In 2015, a magazine published a cartoon that was not only deeply offensive but also misrepresented my role as an IAS officer and involved the sitting Chief Minister. The caricature targeted me in a way that felt highly inappropriate and disrespectful, both as a woman and as a public servant. It wasn't just a personal attack—it was an attack on the dignity of all women in professional roles and I knew I had to take a stand. It was a reminder that women, no matter how senior or accomplished, are often judged harshly in ways that men aren't. I made a lot of noise as women had to be respected for the job. The Telangana government decided to file a defamation case, given that the cartoon also reflected poorly on the state's leadership at the time and also had an image of the Chief Minister. The then government's cabinet passed a resolution allowing Rs. 15 lakh to be provided to cover legal expenses in official capacity. This amount was deposited in court and I pursued the case as a matter of principle. The case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, where the high court's earlier directive to return the legal fees was stayed. While there were reports that claimed the case didn't go in my favour, the Supreme Court intervened, recognising that the money wasn't given to me personally, but rather as part of the state's legal representation. The case has since been under the purview of the Supreme Court, which upheld the stay, and as of today, the matter remains unresolved but firmly in the courts' hands. As a matter of principle, didn't agree for an out-of-court settlement.

MY HUSBAND AKUN: IDEAL PARTNER

Akun, my husband, is an incredible person. There are times when I wonder if I truly deserve such a wonderful partner. He's always been extremely supportive of my career, though he does sometimes express concern over how seriously I take my work. Sometimes he jokes that I'm too immersed in my work and says "duniya yaad nahi rakhti hai, tum apna khoon maat jalaad". He has taught me an important life lesson: never get too comfortable. He's someone who thrives on pushing boundaries and I truly admire that about him. We decided early in our marriage that we would never interfere with each other's career paths. Both of us come from defense backgrounds—he's an Air Force brat and I'm an Army brat. Only in Vizag, we have been together. Right now, he's posted at the Northeast Frontier, ITBP, a role where he's defending the country's borders firsthand. I never interfere with his decisions and I support him fully because I know that's where his heart is. For us, it's always about the opportunities and what's best for both of us in our careers. We've always kept that understanding and it's what has made our relationship work so well over the years.



BENEVOLENT MOTHER

One of the toughest personal sacrifices I've had to make throughout my career is choosing between my work and my children. There were days when my kids were unwell and they needed me by their side. I was fortunate that my children grew up to be incredibly mature and understanding. They always knew that "Mama is busy," and they accepted it. But even as they grew up quickly, I've come to realise that some days it's just not worth prioritising work over their wellbeing, as it can lead to regrets later. At home, my husband Akun and I balance our parenting roles well. While he is the stricter parent, often playing the "bad cop," I'm more of the benevolent mother, the "good cop". My children know they can come to me for comfort and to share their thoughts. My own mother, who was quite strict, had a huge influence on me, and she has played an important role in my children's academic lives. They never take chances with her because when Nani gives them homework, they know it has to be done! I've always tried to be the parent they can talk to, cuddle up and come to when they need someone to listen. I'm proud to say that whenever something happens in their lives, I'm the first person they want to share it with. It's a bond I've worked hard to nurture and it means the world to me.



Honestly, I've never understood why certain people make casual comments about me or my work and the chopper rides. I don't take them too seriously because, at the end of the day, what truly matters is your body of work. Sometimes, I think people don't fully grasp the requirements of the job. For example, when you're overseeing projects in remote areas, like deep forests, road travel simply isn't feasible, so helicopter travel becomes necessary. It was the decision of the government of the day. Chopper rides are far from glamorous—they're risky and I often found myself wondering, "Why am I putting myself through this?" But the job demanded it and the government trusted me to get it done. I've travelled in all sorts of modes of transport, from hours in my car to helicopters, depending on the need. While certain aspects of my work might get attention, like the chopper rides, the countless hours spent on the road or in meetings are rarely discussed.



MEMBER SECRETARY FINANCE COMMISSION IS AN HONOUR

When I received the posting to the Finance Commission, I knew it was going to be a big shift. This position is usually reserved for very senior officers, often retired chief secretaries. So, when I was chosen, I felt honoured that the government believed in my ability to take on such a responsibility. While I've always been involved in fieldwork, development projects and supervision, the finance domain is completely new to me. But I love challenges and I see this as an opportunity to expand my knowledge. I'm trying to sharpen my skills, especially when it comes to understanding and working with financial numbers. Even as my career progressed and I took on more senior administrative roles, my heart remained in the field. It's where I feel most effective and connected to the real purpose of public service—making a tangible difference in people's lives. My true passion in public service has always been being out in the field. There's something deeply fulfilling about being on the ground, interacting with people directly and witnessing the immediate impact of the policies and initiatives you're implementing. At this point of time, if you say do that you want to go as collector again, I'd say yes. I truly love that. Yeah.



MY CHILDREN: NANAK AND BHUVI

My children, Nanak and Bhuvi, have been my greatest sources of joy and pride. Nanak, my eldest, is currently pursuing his studies in computer science in the United States. He's a calm, thoughtful and easy-going boy, very different from me in that sense. While I've always been goal-oriented and driven, Nanak is more relaxed and believes in living in the moment. His serene approach to life has taught me so much about slowing down and appreciating the little things. He's truly my soul child and I admire his ability to take life as it comes, without getting caught up in unnecessary pressures. Bhuvi, my younger daughter, is quite the opposite. She's fiercely ambitious and driven, much like me. Currently in her 12th grade, Bhuvi is a perfectionist who takes her studies and goals very seriously. She's highly focused, and sometimes I joke with her, trying to convince her to take a break from studying, but she's always determined to get things done. Both of them have such distinct personalities, yet they balance each other out perfectly. Neither wants to be an AIS officers.

Hobbies: I am obsessive gardener
Goal: I want to retire knowing that I made a significant impact in public life.
Tea or coffee: Tea, definitely. Darjeeling
Current book: *The Idea of India*
Favourite actor: Shah Rukh Khan
Favourite movie: I have several, but *Andaaz Apna Apna* is one I can watch anytime.
What are you watching: I am into sports documentaries. Journey of athletes, fighting their odds and continuous perseverance even when there's nobody clapping and they make it inspires me
Sports: I used to be a 100m sprinter in my earlier days. I played badminton for state level.

Something about you that people would be surprised to know: I'm a very carefree, very fun person and I'm nothing like my bureaucratic image of a stiff role model.
Are you going to Central Deputation: NO
Spiritual: I am very spiritual and sometimes, I feel I am very detached to world
Night owl or morning person: Total night owl! I function best late at night.
Favourite vacation spot: Goa.
Favourite colour: I love all colours, but white and beige have a special place for me.
Favourite singer: Lata Mangeshkar is my all-time favourite. Her voice is like no other.
Song I keep humming: Lately, since my son is away from me, it's been *tujha jahaaj chahlega, mera saayaa saath hogaa*.
Hidden talent: I'm a trained classical singer. I learned Hindustani classical for 15 years.
Fashion sense: I am fashionista and I've always taken fashion seriously. In my initial career days, I used to dress up to look older, so people took me seriously. I feel best in a saree at work, but my personal style changes with the occasion.