

INDIAN CHRONICLE

Expired, insect-infested food articles, other food safety violations found at Lulu Hypermarket in Hyd

Hyderabad: Food safety inspections were conducted at the Lulu Hypermarket in Kukatpally on Wednesday. Besides discarding food articles with insect infestation, houseflies were found hovering near meat storage. In the bakery unit of the store, 10 kg Atta Bread Mix, and 15 kg loose Baguette Bread Mix were found to be infested and discarded. Moreover, expired products including Sesame Seeds (20 kg), Toned Milk (20 liters), Biscuit packets, Glaze (7.5 kg), Gems (five kg), and Fruit Juice (two packets) were also discarded by the food safety officers.

Constable held for sexually assaulting minor girl in Hyd

Hyderabad: A police constable who was allegedly blackmailing and sexually assaulting a minor girl was taken into custody by the Rajendranagar police on Thursday. Pradeep, a 2020 batch constable working at a police station in Shamshabad, met the girl two years ago. He befriended the girl and shot her nude videos using his mobile phone. "The constable was threatening the victim by showing the nude videos and photographs and sexually assaulting her. On a complaint, a case is registered and investigation is on," said an official of Rajendranagar police station.

KCR should apologise for engineering defections: Revanth Reddy



Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday demanded that Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) president K. Chandrasekhar Rao apologise for engineering defections of legislators when he was the chief minister. Stating that KCR has no moral right to speak about defections, Revanth Reddy claimed that it was KCR who started this and "bought" 61 MLAs and MLCs. Addressing a news conference in Delhi, the Chief Minister demanded that the BRS supremo should come to Telangana Martyrs' Memorial and apologise for encouraging defections. Revanth Reddy was replying to a question about the BRS finding fault with the defection of its five MLAs to the Congress. The Chief Minister recalled the statements by BRS leaders K. T. Rama Rao and Harish Rao that the Congress government would collapse within 100 days. He said the BJP leaders had also made similar statements. The Congress leader remarked that KCR's eyes have not opened even after BRS drew a blank in recent Lok Sabha elections.

He mentioned that the vote share of BRS has plunged to 16 per cent. He reiterated that KCR helped BJP win Lok Sabha seats to defeat the Congress party. Revanth Reddy remarked that KCR, who was not even allowing his MLAs to come closer to him till recently, had now opened the doors of his farmhouse. He slammed the former chief minister for not accepting the invitation to attend state formation day celebrations.

"Is there any tradition of the leader of the opposition speaking at state formation day celebrations," he asked while responding to a statement by BRS leaders that KCR did not attend the ceremony as he was not given an opportunity to speak. The Chief Minister said the Congress party would benefit from the experience and services of senior Congress leader T. Jeevan Reddy. He alleged that the opposition tried to take advantage of Jeevan Reddy's reported unhappiness. Jeevan Reddy, a member of the Legislative Council, had come out openly against the Chief Minister's move to admit BRS MLA M. Sanjay Kumar into the party without consulting him. The Congress leadership summoned the senior leader to Delhi to pacify him. Revanth Reddy, who is also the president of Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC), said that the term of PCC president was three years and he had already requested the high command to appoint a new president. The Chief Minister, who is camping in Delhi for three days, said with the formation of new government at the Centre, he was trying to secure pending funds for the state. He reiterated that the state government would work with the Centre for the state's development. Revanth Reddy said he was meeting central ministers to request adequate budgetary allocations. He also plans to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Trial run of first pump of Seetarama LIS completes successfully



Hyderabad: The trial run of the first pump of 25 MW capacity of the Sitarama Lift Irrigation Scheme was successfully completed by on Thursday. The Minister for Agriculture Thummala Nageshwar Rao switched on the pump at 9 am in the presence of the senior irrigation officials and local elected representatives. Only two of the six pumps of the project were ready for the wet run. Four other pumps of the pump houses will also be ready for operations very soon to commence water draw from Godavari river. This marks a significant milestone for the project, which aims to provide irrigation and drinking water to over seven lakh acres in Bhadradi Kothagudem, Khammam and Mahabubabad districts. The successful trial run indicates that the pump house is ready for operational use, bringing the project closer to its goal of improving water supply and agricultural productivity in the area.

EVM has passed every test, we should denounce attempts to undermine democracy: President

GNS News Agency, June 27

EVM President Droupadi Murmu takes salute of her bodyguards as Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi look on, at Parliament during the joint sitting of both Houses, in New Delhi on Thursday. In her first address to Parliament after the formation of the 18th Lok Sabha, President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said Indians had shown trust in democracy and that the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) had passed every test. "We should also feel proud when India conducts such a large election exercise without any major violence and disorder. Today, the whole world respects us as the Mother of Democracy. The people of India have always demonstrated complete trust in democracy and expressed full faith in the electoral institutions,"



the President said. She thanked the Election Commission for the conduct of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, in which around 64 crore voters participated. "We need to preserve and protect this trust to sustain our robust democracy. We must realise that hurting the faith of people in democratic institutions and the electoral process is like cutting the very branch on which we all are sitting. We should collectively denounce every attempt to undermine the credibility of our democracy. We all remember those times when ballot papers were snatched and looted. To ensure the sanctity of the electoral process, it was decided to use EVMs. The EVM has passed every test, from the Supreme Court to the people's court, in the last few decades," Murmu said. The President's comments come in the wake of legal challenges to the use of EVMs, VVPATs and other electoral procedures. In one such case, the Supreme Court in April rejected the demand for a return to ballot papers or 100% counting of VVPAT

slips. In the past, Presidential addresses have mentioned the recently-conducted elections, but have not included a defence of EVMs. After the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, then-President Pranab Mukherjee congratulated the Election Commission for conducting the polls successfully. In 2019, after the Lok Sabha elections that year, then-President Ram Nath Kovind too congratulated the EC. In his address, Kovind said India's democracy had matured and that frequent elections were impacting the pace and continuity of development works. He said there was a need for simultaneous elections. Incidentally, as former President, Kovind, chaired the government-appointed high-level committee on simultaneous elections which recommended ways to implement "one nation, one election" in March this year.

Congress, BJP conspiring to privatise Singareni coal mines, says KTR



GNS News Agency, June 27

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao charged the Congress and the BJP of colluding with each other and auctioning Telangana's coal mines to privatise the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL). Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had joined hands with the BJP-led government at the Centre to undermine the profitable State-run enterprise, he said.

"By not allocating coal mines, they aim to push Singareni into losses and eventually privatise the company. Every Singareni worker understands the conspiracy by the Congress and the BJP whose representatives were seen smiling at the auction of coal mines," he said. In a meeting with the leaders of BRS and its affiliated Telangana Boggu Gani Karmika Sangham (TGBKS) from the Singareni area at Telangana Bhavan on Thursday, Rama Rao remembered the role of employees and workers of Singareni and other public sector organisation in the Telangana Statehood movement. He recalled that during the Sakala Janula Samme, the stalling of operations in Singareni mines affected coal supplies to five States, grabbing the attention of the entire nation. He stated that strengthening public sector undertakings has always been a policy of the BRS. "We resisted private pressures and opted for LIC for implementing Rythu Bima and other life insurance coverage schemes. Similarly, we assigning works to PSUs like BHEL for building thermal power and irrigation projects, over private entities," he noted.

Rama Rao said during the BRS's nine and a half years regime, they worked tirelessly for Singareni's development and expansion. He said former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao opposed auction of coal mines in Telangana for over nine years. "Even when the Central government auctioned two mines to private companies, we could successfully stop them from mining," he added. The BRS working president criticised both the Congress and the BJP over their attempts to privatise the Singareni coal mines within a short span of coming to power. "They put Telangana coal mines up for auction under the illusion that Telangana's voice is absent in Parliament. But BRS has always fought for Singareni and will continue its fight notwithstanding its presence in the Parliament," he said. He vowed that the BRS would safeguard the interests of Singareni workers under any circumstances.

'No love lost for BJP', says Uddhav Thackeray on lift ride with Devendra Fadnavis

GNS News Agency, June 27

Mumbai: Shiv Sena (UBT) president and ex-Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday categorically declared that his 'lift-ride' with MahaYuti ally and Bharatiya Janata Party's Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis was a "sheer coincidence" and nothing more. Reacting to the wildfire political speculation and flutter in Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) circles, Thackeray cited a popular Bollywood song from the film 'Jab Jab Phool Khile' (1965), and said: "... na, na, karte pyar tumhi se kar baithe'...nothing like that is going to happen with the BJP... you can rest assured."

On political suspicions about why the 'elevator meeting' and what transpired in the closed metal box with several BJP leaders around him, Thackeray jocularly shot back: "It is said that walls have ears... so henceforth, any secret conversations must be held only in lifts!" About BJP Minister Chandrakant Patil - who 'dropped' in for a surprise meeting at the SS (UBT) office in the legislature building -- when journalists questioned as to who winked at whom -- Thackeray dismissed the query with a retort: "... from tomorrow, I shall sport goggles." The Parliamentary Affairs and Higher Education Minister Patil presented a large packet of milk chocolate to Thackeray, while Leader of the Opposition (Council) Ambadas Danve whipped out a box of 'pedas' (milk-sweetmeat) and offered it to the visitor, saying "this is for our victory in the Lok Sabha elections" amid much laughter and bonhomie. Later, Thackeray took potshots at Patil saying that, like the free higher education for girls, the BJP Minister (Patil) should stop doling out 'free chocolates' as the people of the state are tired of the MahaYuti government.

Describing the ongoing legislature sitting as "the farewell session of the MahaYuti government", Thackeray trained guns on Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and recalled how the 'illegal regime had promised that there would no more farmers' suicides in the state."

IT Hub to come up at Kothagudem; Supercritical thermal power plant in Ramagundam

GNS News Agency, June 27

Kothagudem: Efforts will be made to establish an Information Technology (IT) Hub in Kothagudem town, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said here on Thursday. The matter would be discussed with the SCCL management seeking to arrange the required land for the construction of an IT Hub. Similarly IT Minister D Sridhar Babu would be apprised about the necessity of setting up an IT Hub here for the development of Kothagudem as a tier-II city, he said, also announcing that the State government was planning a supercritical thermal power project (SCTPP) in Ramagundam as there enough land, water and coal were available. A decision with regard to the project would soon be taken, he said.

The Deputy Chief Minister along with district in-charge minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, ministers Tummalala Nageswara Rao and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy laid the foundation stone for a drinking water supply improvement scheme here on Thursday. Addressing the gathering later, he said the Congress government was committed to deliver its promise of the crop loan waiver before August. The government had deposited Rs.7,500 crore in the farmers' account at once towards Rythu Bandhu and in a similar way, the crop loan would be waived off. With regard to Rythu Bharosa, the government was collecting public opinion about beneficiary selection and how it should be distributed. After formulating the procedures, the matter would be discussed in the As-



sembly to make a law as the government did not want to waste the public money, Vikramarka noted. He promised to look into the possibility of forming a municipal corporation by connecting Kothagudem and Paloncha towns by taking the matter to the notice of the State Cabinet. He also assured to complete the pending bypass road in Kothagudem. The land acquisition for the construction of the bypass road was over and Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy had sanctioned funds for the construction of a road over bridge as part of the bypass road, Vikramarka revealed. The government had identified all the projects which could be completed within six months, in one year, in three years and in a five year period to ensure irrigation facilities to farmers. The projects would be completed in order of priority, he added.

BRS demands job calendar, two lakh government jobs within a year

GNS News Agency, June 27

Hyderabad: Giving a fresh boost to the ongoing fight of the government job aspirants, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) issued an ultimatum to the Congress government, demanding for immediate redressal of the genuine issues raised by the candidates. The main opposition party also demanded that the Congress fulfill its electoral promises by releasing a job calendar and filling two lakh government posts within a year. Following a meeting with government job aspirants at his residence on Thursday, BRS working president KT Rama Rao came down heavily on the State government over its unfulfilled promises. "Before the elections, the Congress government advertised about job calendars and even announced dates for about 10 exams. Not a single notification has been issued even after seven months," he said, demanding that the government release these notifications immediately. Rama Rao criticised Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for failing to deliver on promises made during the election campaign, including increasing Group-2 jobs by 2,000 and adding a few thousand more jobs in Group-3. "In the first Cabinet meeting itself, they deceived the unemployed by claiming to conduct a Mega DSC. Rather than giving notification for 20,000 jobs as promised, the government added only 5,000 more posts compared to the previous notification," he added. Highlighting the lack of progress on Group-1 jobs, the BRS working president pointed out that only 60 positions were added since the previous notification issued during the BRS regime. "When asked to increase jobs, they are trying to escape by citing technical reasons. BRS will not tolerate



this. We will question the government in the Assembly and stand by the unemployed in their fight for justice," he asserted. Rama Rao called for fair selection in Group-1 Mains, reminding Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka of his past demand for a 1:100 selection ratio from the prelims. "Why is this not being implemented now to benefit the candidates?" he asked. Rama emphasized the need for adequate gaps between exams such as TET, Group-1 Prelims, DSC, Group-2, Group-1 Mains, and Group-3 to accommodate students who write multiple exams. "Exams should be scheduled with enough time in between to ensure fair preparation for all candidates," he stated. He warned that if these demands are not met, the BRS leaders would fight alongside the unemployed youth. Speaking on the occasion, the Groups aspirants made it clear that they had no political affiliations as was being propagated by the ruling Congress and were fighting only for their future.

'PM Modi used same consultant for 2047 vision document': Karnataka minister counters BJP's 'East India Company' jab



GNS News Agency, June 27

Karnataka Industries minister M B Patil questioned the BJP's criticism for engaging an international consultant to assist the government in bringing investments and revenue generation. The minister said the services of the same consultant was taken by Prime Narendra Modi to prepare a Vision 2047 document. The Congress government in Karnataka has come under attack from the BJP state president B Y Vijayendra for awarding a Rs 9.5 crore consultancy contract to the Boston Consulting Group to assist the government in investment and revenue planning for the state.

"Outrageous decision by the Siddaramaiah government to hire a foreign consultant to oversee our State's finances. This is akin to handing over the reins to the East India Company! The Siddaramaiah government is disrespecting the State electorate and insulting them for electing this government," Vijayendra said on social media on Friday. "The Congress government is effectively declaring itself unfit and incompetent. When the state government operates under the directions of an external agency, the welfare of the people takes a backseat, and innocent citizens are the ones who suffer!" the BJP state chief added. In response to the criticism, a senior minister in the Congress government pointed out that the Boston Consulting Group were consultants for the vision 2047 document of PM Modi and to the Karnataka government when Vijayendra's father B S Yediyurappa and his suc-

cessor Basavaraj Bommai were the BJP chief ministers of Karnataka between 2019 and 2023.

"BCG is an advisor for investments in Karnataka. Earlier when the BJP was in power the same company was an investment consultant. When Yediyurappa and Bommai were the CMs the same BCG was advising the BJP government. They have again applied for a state tender and have qualified for a contract," Patil said. "BJP state chief Vijayendra is saying that it is an 'East India Company' but it will be good if he speaks with some understanding. Narendra Modi's central government works with the same BCG that the state BJP chief is calling it an 'East India Company'. It is the same BCG that has worked on the PM's vision 2047 document," Patil said. "Let Vijayendra first question Narendra Modi," he said on Friday.

"Basically, it is a multinational company and he is speaking without knowledge about the company. Companies like the BCG, Ernst and Young, KPMG, and Deloitte are international companies," whose consultancy services are used in the public and private sectors, he said. Incidentally, the BCG has been a long time advisor to the industries ministry in Karnataka and has played a pivotal role in helping the state attract global investment in areas like battery manufacturing while the Karnataka government attempted to create an electric vehicle manufacturing cluster in and around Bengaluru during the BJP tenure in the state. One of the consultants for the signing of an MOU in 2021 for a Rs 4,015 crore lithium ion battery technology plant to be set up by the US-based firm C4V in Karnataka - during the tenure of former industries minister and senior BJP leader Jagadish Shettar - was the BCG group. The group has now won a consultancy contract with the state Finance department. The consultancy will reportedly help the state government "raise additional non-tax revenues from sectors such as mining, advertisements in urban areas, naming rights, etc" to help meet pro-poor initiatives which cost annual outgo of Rs 50,000 crore. "Further, the focus of the global consultant is on rapid development of large industrial townships and urban amenities by tapping private investments," the state government said in an official statement.

BJP deceiving Marathas, OBCs on reservation issue, claims Congress leader Patole



GNS News Agency, June 27

Maratha reservation OBC Nana Patole "Conducting a caste-wise census through social, economic, and educational surveys and removing the 50 per cent limit is the only solution to the reservation issue," Nana Patole said. Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Saturday said the BJP was deceiving the Maratha community and Other Backward Classes over reservations.

Addressing a press conference, Patole claimed Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and state BJP president Chandrashekar Bawankule have different positions on the reservation issue. "The Bharatiya Janata Party is deceiving the Maratha and OBC communities on reservations. Bawankule says reservations above 50 per cent cannot be maintained. Fadnavis says reservations above 50 per cent can be given.

There are two different opinions on the reservation issue among BJP leaders. They should clarify their exact stance," he said. The Patna High Court's decision has made it clear that reservations above 50 per cent will not hold, therefore, the true face of the BJP is exposed due to the different positions of Bawankule and Fadnavis, the Congress leader said. "Conducting a caste-wise census through social, economic, and educational surveys and removing the 50 per cent limit is the only solution to the reservation issue," he said. Since the BJP is in power at the Centre and in Maharashtra, it should start a caste-wise census to do justice to quota demands of Marathas, OBCs, Dhangars, tribals, Halbas and other groups, Patole asserted.

Migrant labourer's death sparks protest, stone pelting in Gurgaon

GNS News Agency, June 27

In the videos that went viral soon after the accident, many people could be seen vandalising buses and vehicles in the area. (Photo: ANI/ Screengrab) In the videos that went viral soon after the accident, many people could be seen vandalising buses and vehicles in the area. Workers resorted to protest and even pelted stones after a migrant labourer died while a bus was being reversed in Gurgaon's Sector-35 on Saturday.

"Upon receiving the information (of the accident), a police team arrived at the spot... The police team informed the higher authorities about the agitation. Considering the situation, Siddhant Jain, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South), arrived at the spot," said Gurgaon police spokesperson ASI Sandeep. As per the complaint by an eyewitness at the accident site, "Around 8.20 am, the company bus arrived with employees, and all employees alighted from the bus. Monu also alighted from the bus and was walking towards me. Suddenly, the bus driver, due to negligence, reversed the bus at high speed and hit Monu. Monu fell and the bus tyre ran over him, causing his immediate death." In the videos that went viral soon after the accident, many people could be seen vandalising buses and vehicles in the area. The police said the bus driver fled after the incident. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered at Badshahpur



police station under IPC Sections 279 (driving a vehicle in a negligent manner) and 304A (causing the death of any person by doing any rash or negligent act not amounting to culpable homicide). The situation at the accident site is now completely peaceful and under control, the police said. "As per protocol, the police team will conduct a post-mortem of the deceased Monu and hand over his body to his family. The bus driver responsible for the accident has been identified. Various police teams have been deployed to apprehend the driver, who will soon be arrested as per the law," the ASI added.

Human-leopard conflict: State forest dept, Wildlife SOS step up awareness, mitigation methods

GNS News Agency, June 27

While human deaths as a result of attacks by big cats are rare, an analysis by the State forest department has recorded 11 deaths due to the human-leopard conflict in the last three years in Junnar, Ambegaon, Shirur and Khed taluka in Pune district. Due to this rise in human-leopard conflicts in Junnar, Wildlife SOS, in collaboration with the Maharashtra Forest Department, has expanded awareness sessions within the region.

The combined team actively addresses human-leopard interface scenarios in the state through a variety of initiatives aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence between leopards and local villagers. State forest department officials said leopards in Maharashtra often face agitations and conflicts with humans, responding with either a "fight or flight" reaction. Unfortunately, this often leads to negative outcomes, with leopards either being vilified or ending up trapped, incarcerated, or even killed by angry mobs.

Wildlife SOS officials also pointed out that the root cause of this conflict stems from human activities such as deforestation, encroachment, and poaching, which disrupt leopard habitats and force them to adapt to living near human settlements. "This close proximity increases the risk of retaliatory killings, severely impacts leopard survivability and increases conflict incidences," the official said. From 2022 to 2024, 11 persons died in this human leopard conflict. Another 25 persons suffered injuries according to state forest department data. An ongoing Wildlife Institute of India survey indicates that there are approximately 400-450 leopards in Junnar, Shirur,



Khed and Ambegaon region. To combat this issue, Wildlife SOS, along with the forest department, focus on public awareness and education campaigns. Operating out of the Manikdoh Leopard Rescue Centre in Junnar, the organisation works closely with local farmers and villagers to train and sensitise them about leopard avoidance behaviour. "This hands-on approach further minimises negative interactions between leopards and humans, ensuring a safer environment for both," Mahendra Dhore, project manager Wildlife SOS said. Recently, an awareness session was conducted at R P Sabnis Vidyalaya in Narayangaon in Junnar, Maharashtra by Wildlife SOS in collaboration with the forest department, addressing the escalating human-leopard conflict in Junnar region. The session, attended by approximately 1,200 students, aimed to educate the community on the do's and don'ts in conflict-prone areas.

11-year-old boy found dead in Pune district's Shirur; probe on as family alleges leopard attack

GNS News Agency, June 27

Hours after an 11-year-old boy was found dead in a sugarcane farm in a village in Shirur in Maharashtra's Pune district, a probe is on to confirm the cause of death as family members and villagers suspect that he was killed by a leopard. The incident took place in Dahiwadi village. Yash Gaikwad, a Class 5 student, was found dead with injuries on his body at a farm in the Devmala area of Dahiwadi on Friday evening. When the boy, who left his house to answer nature's call in the afternoon, did not return home, his family members started searching for him. With leopards being frequently spotted in the area, the villagers informed the forest department. A team led by range forest officer Pratap Jagtap reached the spot. Yash was found lying unconscious in a sugarcane farm. Though he was taken to a hospital, he was pronounced dead.

"So far, our investigation has revealed that there are no signs of an animal attack in this case. We are waiting for the post-mortem report. Nevertheless, considering it



to be a leopard attack case, we have laid six trap cages in the area. Trap cameras have also been installed and drones are being used to track leopard movements. The police are conducting a parallel investigation," Jagtap said. Meanwhile, an accidental death case was registered at the Shikrapur police station. "The post-mortem report is awaited. Investigation is on," Police Inspector Deepratna Gaikwad said.

Pune civic body gives another chance for resident owners to apply for property tax concession; deadline August 15

GNS News Agency, June 27

Pune property tax concession, Pune Municipal Corporation, PMC property tax discount, Pune property tax scheme, PMC deadline extension, Pune property tax benefit, Pune self-occupied residential properties, PT-3 form submission, PMC survey, Pune door-to-door survey, Pune property tax documents, eligibility verification, residential properties, Khadakwasla dam flooding, Mutha river flood, state audit objections, state government approval, property tax bill, PMC facilitation centre, civic staff survey, property tax eligibility, property tax concession documents, Madhav Jagtap, Prithviraj B P, PMC Property Tax department, merged villages properties, property tax application, property tax extension, concession scheme application, property tax NOCThe PMC urged the residents to submit all documents to prove their eligibility for availing themselves of the benefit of the scheme, the deadline for which was extended multiple times.

With many eligible citizens failing to avail the 40 per cent concession in property tax of their residential premises by the end of the previous deadline of March-end, the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has once again extended the deadline to apply for a concession till August 15 while undertaking a survey to verify the beneficiaries' eligibility through a door-to-door survey. The discount scheme was applicable since 1970 after the general body had passed a resolution, citing damage to properties due to flooding of the Mutha river due to a breach in the Khadakwasla dam in 1961. The PMC withdrew the 40 per cent discount in 2019 after objections were raised over it by the state audit department. Meanwhile, the civic body approached the state government following severe opposition from the public. In April last year, the state government decided to allow the PMC to continue with the decades-old 40 per cent concession scheme on property tax for self-occupied residential properties. Consequently, the scheme was restored. The citizens have to submit at least two documents from a list that includes LPG connection, Aadhaar Card, Voters ID card, Passport, Driving Licence or No Objection Certificate of housing society along with PT-3 form to the civic staff doing survey or civic facilitation centre. Finally, when the deadline to submit papers got over in March, many citizens complained that they were being made to suffer unnecessarily and sought more time to apply for the scheme.

The eligible property owners have to claim tax concession by submitting the PT-3 forms along with the documents. According to the Pune Municipal Corporation, the concession scheme is only for self-occupied residential property and for only one property. "The civic staff has begun the survey of residential properties. Those eligible will have to submit their documents along with PT-3 form by August 15. The fees of Rs 25 for the purpose would be recovered in the property tax bill next year," said Prithviraj B P, PMC additional municipal commissioner. Madhav Jagtap, in-charge of civic Property Tax department, said the PMC will also soon publish the list of residential properties that have not been given concession in property tax, he said. In 2018, the PMC, while withdrawing the scheme, had cancelled the benefit to old 96,122 properties and did not apply the scheme to 1,98,296 new properties as well as 1,68,771 old properties from 23 villages merged in civic jurisdiction. Of the total 4,63,189 residential properties not being given the benefit of scheme, only 90,749 applied to avail the ben-



efit last year while 3,72,440 properties are yet to take the benefit of the scheme.

Security arrangements tightened ahead of Amarnath Yatra

GNS News Agency, June 27

Srinagar/Jammu: With the Amarnath Yatra set to begin in a week, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday said security arrangements have been tightened and facilities improved for the successful conduct of the pilgrimage. Jammu Additional Director General of Police Anand Jain has reviewed security arrangements along the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, emphasising the need for the highest level of alertness to scuttle any attempt by terrorists to disrupt the pilgrimage, officials said. Taking part in the virtual 'Pratham Puja' of the Amarnath Yatra at the Raj Bhavan in Srinagar on Saturday morning, Sinha said, "Darshan for the pilgrims across the country will begin from June 29. The (Shri Amarnath) Shrine Board and the J-K administration have made special arrangements for the pilgrims. In the last two years, the facilities for the yatra have improved a lot." Sinha said the roads leading to the cave shrine have been upgraded and some stretches have been widened by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) this year. "I think the yatra will be able to undertake a smoother pilgrimage this time," he said at Raj Bhavan after the puja. The LG said people from all religions have always supported the yatra.

"I appeal to the people of J-K, especially those in the areas from where the yatra passes through, to keep alive the tradition of supporting the yatra and taking care of the pilgrims this year also. Peaceful and smooth pilgrimage helps create a good image of J-K across the world," he added. The 52-day pilgrimage will begin from the two tracks - the traditional 48-km Nunwan-Pahalgam route in Anantnag and the 14-km shorter but steep Baltal route in Ganderbal - on June 29, a day after the first batch of pilgrims will leave Bhagwati Nagar base camp in Jammu for the valley. Over 4.5 lakh pilgrims performed the pilgrimage last year and offered their prayers at the naturally formed ice-shivlingam inside the cave shrine.

Karnataka court remands actor Darshan to judicial custody till July 4 in Renukaswamy murder case

A court here on Saturday remanded Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa to judicial custody in the Renukaswamy murder case till July 4. His four alleged accomplices too were sent to judicial custody. The Special Public Prosecutor prayed the court for a direction to lodge the accused persons separately and in different jails across Karnataka, which was opposed by Darshan's lawyers. A huge number of his fans gathered at the court and raised slogans in favour of Darshan. The actor too waved at them from the caged police van. Thirteen other accused, including the actor's friend Pavithra

Gowda, were remanded to 14 days' judicial custody two days ago. A total of 17 people are accused in the murder case. According to police sources, Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor, had sent obscene messages to Gowda, which enraged Darshan, allegedly leading to his murder. Renukaswamy's body was found near a stormwater drain adjacent to an apartment in Sumanahalli here on June 9. According to the post-mortem report, Renukaswamy's death was caused due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of multiple blunt injuries sustained.

Driver, owner of vehicle held after viral clip shows kids tumbling out of school van in Vadodara



GNS News Agency, June 27

A day after a video of two schoolgirls falling out of a moving van went viral on social media, the Makarpura police station in Vadodara city, on Saturday, arrested two persons, including the owner of the van and the driver, for rash and negligent driving and also for endangering the life of persons.

The alleged incident occurred at noon on Wednesday when the driver of the school van was dropping off students of a private school in the Makarpura area. The FIR, lodged by police sub-inspector R J Kalsava of the Vadodara city traffic department at Makarpura police station states that on examining the viral CCTV footage, it turned out to be that of Tulsidham society on Novino Road. The driver of the vehicle has been identified as Pratik Padihyar while the owner has been identified as Jigneshkumar Joshi. In the video, two schoolgirls are seen tumbling out of the van with their school bags as the vehicle moves ahead. The clip further shows residents rush-

ing to help the students, one of whom is seemingly in discomfort.

Another student from the van as well as the driver are seen rushing into the frame a few seconds later even as a resident picks up one of the students — an eight-year-old girl — and takes her inside a house to administer first aid.

Kalsava, in his FIR said, "After identifying the driver, when he was called for questioning, he told the police that he had forgotten to lock the rear passenger door of the school van (a Maruti Eeco model) and therefore, as the door suddenly slid open, two students fell off the moving van along with their bags. On being questioned, the driver shared the details of the two students. When we contacted the mother of one eight-year-old, she said that since the child had only sustained minor injuries, they did not report to the police." The FIR further states that Padihyar had no permanent license and was driving the van on a learners' license while the owner of the van had not sought an RTO permit to ferry school students.

The complaint further reads, "The driver, aged 23, has a learner's license that is valid from January 1, 2024 to July 3, 2024. He produced his application number for a permanent license. On inquiring about an RTO permit to use the van for ferrying school students, it came to light that the owner of the vehicle did not apply for one." The two accused have been booked under Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections 336 (act rashly or negligently as to endanger human life or the personal safety of others), 337 (causing hurt to any person by doing any act rashly or negligently as to endanger human life, or the personal safety of others) and 114 (abetter present when crime committed) as well as relevant sections of the Motor Vehicle Act.

Speaker refused to give time to speak about Kallakurichi hooch tragedy: K Palaniswami

GNS News Agency, June 27

Chennai: AIADMK party general secretary and Leader of the Opposition, Edappadi K Palaniswami on Saturday, staged a walkout alleging that Speaker M Appavu has refused to allot time to speak about the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy. "Speaker M Appavu refused to give time to speak about the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy. The government is so lethargic. According to the information we have, 55 people died and 183 people are affected by the hooch tragedy," Palaniswami alleged. "The Minister says people died because they came for treatment with delay. But what is the reason for that? Government is the reason. The first day the District Collector denied the illicit liquor in Kallakurichi," he said.

"As this is people issue what would be important than this to discuss in assembly? Each day people are losing their life. So we asked for time. CM says we are doing drama. We are just explaining what is happening. If CM really had guts he would have given an explanation yesterday when we asked for. AIADMK asks for demand for resignation of CM M K Stalin," Palaniswami said. The opposition leaders staged a walkout after Speaker M Appavu rejected AIADMK leaders' demand to adjourn the Question Hour to discuss the issue. On Friday, AIADMK MLAs were evicted from the House after they staged a sit-in protest. Meanwhile, the death toll in the Kallakurichi Hooch tragedy has risen from 50 to 53, officials said on Saturday.

Kallakurichi District Collector MS Prasanth said that out of the total 193 patients, who consumed illicit liquor, 140 are currently safe. "193 people who have consumed illicit liquor have come to the hospital. Out of which 193, 140 are currently safe, while few of them are on ventilators. Right now, 53 people have passed away," he



said. "So far, seven people have been arrested in the case. The case has been given to the CBI CID branch of Tamil Nadu Police. The patients are being given best treatment. Special doctors were mobilised in the initial stage. About 56 doctors were brought in from different medical colleges. Many patients who had respiratory problems, have recovered too," the Kallakurichi Collector said. Earlier, the Tamil Nadu government had ordered a judicial inquiry into the tragedy. The inquiry will be led by retired Madras High Court judge Justice B Gokuldas. Justice Gokuldas will submit a report within three months. Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin announced Rs 10 lakh each for the family of the deceased and Rs 50,000 each for the persons under treatment. A one-man commission, comprising former judge Justice B Gokuldas, announced for probing the matter, and the report to be submitted within 3 months. Victims are undergoing treatment at the Kallakurichi Government Medical College and Hospital and in hospitals in Salem, Villupuram, and Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (Jipmer) in Puduchery.

Demands for banning exit polls childish, says Axis My India chief



GNS News Agency, June 27

New Delhi: Facing opposition fire for exit polls allegedly being used for stock market manipulation, Axis My India's chief Pradeep Gupta has said he is open to facing all kinds of investigations and it would help do business in a much better way if the government frames specific regulations for pollsters. Opposition parties and several civil society groups have been asking for thorough investigations, including by capital markets regulator SEBI and a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), after the stock markets witnessed a massive rally when exit polls gave a huge majority to the BJP but fell sharply after the actual results showed the ruling party falling short of a clear majority on its own. In an interaction with PTI, Gupta said he has been demanding formulation of norms and regulations for pollsters since five years.

Gupta, the chairman and managing director of Axis My India that had predicted 361-401 seats for the BJP-led alliance as against the actual tally of 240 seats, also termed as "childish" the demands for banning exit polls, saying every single citizen and organisation wants to know the election results and banning exit polls would serve no purpose. "We have no connection with stock market whatsoever but I am happy to know these allegations because our data and system is so foolproof that any probe will give me an opportunity to showcase all of that is used to predict exit polls to the world. In a way it is an opportunity for us, I support the demand as it will give us a chance to show our credentials," he said. Asked about whether he is open to a probe by a JPC or SEBI, the pollster said, "I am open to facing all kind of investigations." "As far as me deriving any benefit from stock market jump is concerned... Axis My India has no demat account. It is a limited company, not listed and till

today not a single external investment is there in the company. There is no investment by promoters. My personal investment in stocks since April has been merely Rs 35,000. Where have I benefited?" he asserted. The pollster also responded to allegations of Axis My India also conducting exit polls for foreign investors and sharing different results with them. "We have never been approached by any FII, neither we have worked for any foreign investors, we have not conducted any exit poll survey for them ever," Gupta, 55, said. Terming the demands for banning exit polls as "childish", Gupta said specific regulations for pollsters will not only help us do business better but also add more credibility to the exit polls. He also said Axis My India's 70 per cent clients are corporate clients including bigwigs like Bill Melinda Gates Foundation and denied any conflict of interest with exit polls. "First they used to call exit polls unscientific, now they want exit polls to be banned. These are childish talks. Every single citizen and organisation wants to know the election results and banning exit polls would serve no purpose. Exit polls are not just to tell who is winning and losing, it also helps political parties analyse the result," he said. "As far as we are concerned, I mentioned 70 per cent of my clients are corporate clients. Even if they are banned, it won't impact our business. I am with the law whatever is decided," he added. Questioned about whether the dent in image caused by 2024 poll results has also impacted his corporate clients, Gupta said, "They give us business for the work we do for them and not on basis of how rightly we predict election results." "Since the last five years, I am running from pillar to post seeking some regulations. When our people go on ground, they are seen with a suspicious mindset. We have to convince that we are not salespersons, we aren't frauds and we are not sent by a political party. We are often asked who gave you permission? And we ask please tell where we need to take permission?" "We wrote to the home ministry, we were guided to the law ministry that there is no law so first we need a law. From there we were referred to the information and broadcasting ministry that you get yourself registered there and set up a cell. We were told that you will publish a survey but who will monitor who is right and wrong... nothing has moved but I strongly believe that we need regulations," he said. Axis My India has been conducting exit polls since 2013 after Gupta returned from the Harvard Business School and claims a track record of predicting 61 out of 65 elections correctly.

IGI police bust fake passport racket in Delhi, 3 held



GNS News Agency, June 27

Three persons were held by the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport police in Delhi, including two on June 18 and one on June 19, for being a part of a syndicate that creates fake Indian documents, the police said on Saturday. On June 18, three male passengers — Mohammad Mehdi Khan, 27, Mohedul Shekh, 33, and Mohammad Sozib Khan, 24 — arrived at the IGI Airport to fly to Bangkok. Upon inspection during immigration clearance, their Indian passports aroused suspicion.

Further scrutiny and questioning revealed that all three were allegedly Bangladeshi nationals in possession of birth certificates issued by Bangladeshi authorities. Their true identities were disclosed as Mohammad Mehdi Hasan, 25, Mohedul Mir, 33, and a 16-year-old minor, who had allegedly fraudulently obtained Indian passports. Consequently, a case was registered, and an investigation commenced. During the investigation, Hasan and Mir were interrogated and arrested. Hasan allegedly revealed that he was a Bangladeshi national who came to India illegally in 2019 with the help of his brother, Rezaul Khan alias Rezaul Karim who had been living in Noida for 10-12 years with fake Indian

documents. Khan, the police say, is a part of the gang that helps Bangladeshis with fake Indian documents so that they can travel abroad.

Khan had allegedly facilitated Hasan's illegal entry and obtained a fake Aadhaar card and passport for him, enabling Hasan to travel to Kuwait in 2020 and visit Bangladesh multiple times. Khan had also allegedly arranged the journey to Bangkok for Hasan and two other Bangladeshi nationals in exchange for a substantial fee. Hasan reportedly disclosed that Khan had helped several Bangladeshis obtain Indian documents and passports for international travel. Mir reportedly told the police that he entered India illegally in 2016 with the assistance of a Bangladeshi agent and started working in Bengaluru. With the help of agents, he obtained fake Aadhaar and PAN cards. He reportedly frequently travelled back to Bangladesh, where he was introduced to Khan, who promised to arrange an Indian passport and facilitate his travel abroad for Rs 1 lakh. Khan updated Mir's address on his Aadhaar card and secured an Indian passport from Ghaziabad. Through local intelligence and technical surveillance, the police arrested Rezaul Khan from Noida. Khan allegedly confessed to his crimes, revealing that he came to India illegally 10-12 years ago and began working in Noida with fake Indian documents. He eventually started working as an agent and allegedly began creating fake Indian documents and arranging passports for Bangladeshi nationals to travel abroad. Khan reportedly admitted to facilitating his brother's illegal entry and travel, as well as assisting other Bangladeshi nationals in exchange for money. Khan has been booked under Sections 419 (cheating by personation), 420 (cheating), 468 (forgery for cheating), 471 (using forged documents), and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code, sections 12 of the Passport Act, and section 14 of the Foreigners Act.

The 'bad' word that is good: Two Pune artists talk about consent and boundaries through an exhibition

GNS News Agency, June 27

An exhibition, "No Positive", at Sudarshan Kaladalan from June 22 will feature this video of Harlalka dancing as well as photographs of her. An exhibition, "No Positive", at Sudarshan Kaladalan from June 22 will feature this video of Harlalka dancing as well as photographs of her. In a circle of light, encroached by darkness, the dancer moves on the floor speaking in gestures of conflict, resistance, and release. Shadows pass through her body like moments of anxiety. The effect is a visceral awareness of what artists, Karishma Harlalka, who is the dancer, and photographer-videographer Sugat Gaikwad want to tell the people of Pune about — a fundamental but less-spoken concern about power dynamics: consent and boundaries.

An exhibition, "No Positive", at Sudarshan Kaladalan from June 22 will feature this video of Harlalka dancing as well as photographs of her. "I have faced issues because I could not say no to things. Ghar pe sikhaya jata hain, 'Na nahin bolte'. (We are taught at home not to say no.) I wanted to say no many times but felt pressured to say yes," says Gaikwad, who has been shooting theatre and dance productions in the city for several years. Gaikwad had to face multiple social challenges and realised that many friends had troubled lives because refusal was made impossible. "I talked to them and realised that we consider 'No' to be a negative word due to social conditioning. The truth is that setting boundaries and refusing to do something that you do not want is ok," says Gaikwad, who has conceptualised this project. Harlalka, co-founder of Artsphere and Soulsphere, Pune, a space for performing arts and therapy, mental health services, and mental wellness, was already working with the concept of boundaries in terms of mental health "and how it is difficult for most people to say No even if it is healthy for them" when Gaikwad approached her for this piece. "The idea that saying No makes one a bad person is why most people struggle with it. People, who usually say no, are also looked at as not being



friendly and warm. The idea behind the dance piece was to break that ideology and talk about first taking care of oneself," says Harlalka. The dance, a fully embodied and felt experience, was unrehearsed and performed impromptu as Gaikwad shot it in one take.

When consent came into the limelight during the Me Too movement in India, with models, journalists, and artists taking to social media to share their experiences of sexual exploitation, it prompted many regular women and men, too, to overcome shame and speak among themselves. The movement, however, was short-lived and did not create a healthier living and work environment in society. Gaikwad has extended the theme of boundaries to understand consent and refusal in a variety of situations, for instance, when parents decide the careers of their children and juniors unwillingly agree with bosses. "It is not important if what you want is right or wrong. Our concern is that your wish should be respected.

I am not a mental health professional. I wanted to create an artist's take on a conversation about boundaries," he says. Harlalka says her powerful dance emerged from her experience of anxiety that starts "after one has not been honest to oneself and has said yes or done something that will please others but not themselves."

Punjab inks MoU with Microsoft to enhance skill of 10,000 youths

GNS News Agency, June 27

Punjab's Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training Minister Aman Arora said that this collaboration will pave the way to inculcate skills to 10,000 youth in the state. (File Photo) Punjab's Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training Minister Aman Arora said that this collaboration will pave the way to inculcate skills to 10,000 youth in the state. Punjab Skill Development Mission (PSDM) on Friday inked a memorandum of understanding with Microsoft to ingrain essential skills to at least 10,000 youth of the state in a year.

The MoU was signed here by PSDM Director Amrit Singh and Country Head Education Microsoft Corporation (India) Sanjay Dhingra, said an official statement.

Punjab's Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training Minister Aman Arora said that this collaboration will pave the way to inculcate skills to 10,000 youth in the state with essential digital productivity skills, employabil-



Punjab's Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training Minister Aman Arora said that this collaboration will pave the way to inculcate skills to 10,000 youth in the state with essential digital productivity skills, employability skills, English communication skills, entrepreneurship skills, and technology skills, including cloud, artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security and sustainability.

ity skills, English communication skills, entrepreneurship skills, and technology skills, including cloud, artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security and sustainability. The department has not been leaving any stone unturned to facilitate employment opportunities for the youth of Punjab, he said. Elaborating on the

collaboration, Singh said the comprehensive future skills collaboration with Microsoft for 2024-25 includes multiple targeted initiatives designed to address the specific needs of diverse learners catered by PSDM, aiming to enhance their skills and competence according to global needs and provide them with employment opportunities in an AI-enabled economy for

better livelihoods. He also emphasised that the Department of Employment Generation, Skill Development and Training is determined to cater to the manpower requirements of the industry by providing them the skilled youth from Punjab.

More MoUs will be signed with other companies in the near future, she added.

Israeli strikes kill at least 42 in Gaza, enclave's government media office says



CAIRO GNS News Agency, June 27, - At least 42 people were killed in Israeli attacks on districts of Gaza City in the north of the Palestinian enclave on Saturday, the director of the Hamas-run government media office said. One Israeli strike on houses in Al-Shati, one of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps, killed 24 people, Ismail Al-Thawabta told Reuters. Another 18 Palestinians were killed in a strike on houses in the Al-Tuffah neighborhood. The Israeli military released a brief statement saying: "A short while ago, IDF fighter jets struck two Hamas military infrastructure sites in the area of Gaza City." It said more details would be released soon.

Hamas did not comment on the Israeli claim to have hit its military infrastructure. It said in a statement the attacks targeted the civilian population and vowed in a statement "the occupation and its Nazi leaders will pay the price for their violations against our people." Footage obtained by Reuters showed dozens of Palestinians rushing

ing out to search for victims amid the destroyed houses. The footage showed wrecked homes, blasted walls, and debris and dust filling the street in Shati refugee camp.

Israel's ground and air campaign in Gaza was triggered when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. The offensive has left Gaza in ruins, killed more than 37,400 people, of whom 101 were killed in the past 24 hours, according to Palestinian health authorities, and left nearly the entire population homeless and destitute. More than eight months into the war, Israel's advance is now focused on the two last areas its forces had yet to seize: Rafah on Gaza's southern edge and the area surrounding Deir al-Balah in the centre. Residents said Israeli tanks deepened their incursion into western and northern Rafah areas in recent days. On Saturday Israeli forces bombed several areas from air and the ground, forcing many families living in areas described as humanitarian-designated zones to leave northwards. The Israeli military said forces continued "precise, intelligence-based" targeted operations in Rafah, killing many Palestinian gunmen and dismantling military infrastructure. On Friday, the Gaza health ministry said at least 25 Palestinians were killed in Mawasi in western Rafah and 50 wounded. Palestinians said a tank shell hit a tent housing displaced families. The Israeli military said that the incident was under review. "An initial inquiry conducted suggests that there is no indication that a strike was carried out by the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) in the Humanitarian Area in Al-Mawasi," it said. Reporting and writing by Nidal al-Mughrabi. Additional reporting by Jaida Taha and Ari Rabinovitch. Editing by Sharon Singleton and Frances Kerry. A senior correspondent with nearly 25 years' experience covering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict including several wars and the signing of the first historic peace accord between the two sides.

With roots in India, Yoga unites people with its values of balance, mindfulness, peace: UN chief Antonio Guterres

GNS News Agency, June 27

"Yoga has roots in India and is now embraced globally, uniting people with its values of balance, mindfulness and peace," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said. In his message on the 10th International Yoga Day, Mr. Guterres urged people to be inspired by the ancient practice's timeless values and its call for a more peaceful and harmonious future. In December 2014, the UN proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga, recognising its universal appeal. The draft UN General Assembly resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 member states. "The International Day of Yoga recognises the ancient practice's unmatched power to deliver healing, inner peace and physical, spiritual and mental well-being," Mr. Guterres said in his message on June 21 as the world celebrated the 10th International Yoga Day. "With roots in India but now embraced worldwide by people of all faiths and cultures, Yoga unites people with its values of balance, mindfulness and peace with people and planet alike," Mr. Guterres said in the message posted on X by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN.

He noted that this year's theme 'Yoga for Self and Society' reminds "us of Yoga's important role in enhancing people's lives and the wider community. On this important day, let us all be inspired by Yoga's timeless values and its call for a more peaceful and harmonious future," the UN chief said. The Permanent Mission of India to the UN organised the commemoration of the 10th International Yoga Day at the North Lawn Area of the UN Headquarters, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the Yoga Day last year in a historic celebration, nine years after he proposed from the UN General Assembly podium for June 21 to be marked as International Yoga Day.

The event was attended by UN envoys, personnel, officials and members of the diaspora as well as yoga enthusiasts and practitioners. UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed greeted the attendees with a 'Namaste' and said that at its heart, yoga is about unity, the unity of mind, body and spirit. "It is about you, it is about me, it is about us. And at the UN today, we see how it unites people across cultures and countries," she said.

Ms. Mohammed added that since the UN General Assembly declared June 21 as the International Day of Yoga 10 years ago, the celebration and momentum have grown steadily. "Today, it brings millions of us together of all ages and diverse backgrounds to honour this ancient tradition," Ms. Mohammed said as she referred to the Guinness World Record created at last year's Yoga Day commemoration for most nationalities practising Yoga together. At least 135 countries were represented at the 2023 Yoga session.

U.S. aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea as show of force against nuclear-armed North Korea

GNS News Agency, June 27

A nuclear-powered United States aircraft carrier arrived on June 22 in South Korea for a three-way exercise stepping up their military training to cope with North Korean threats that escalated with its alignment with Russia. The arrival of the USS Theodore Roosevelt strike group in Busan came a day after South Korea summoned the Russian Ambassador to protest a pact reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this week that pledges mutual defence assistance in the event of war. South Korea says the deal poses a threat to its security and warned that it could consider sending arms to Ukraine to help fight off the Russian invasion as a response — a move that would surely ruin its relations with Moscow. Following a meeting between their defence chiefs in Singapore earlier in June, the United States, South Korea and Japan announced Freedom Edge. The new multidomain exercise is aimed at sharpening the countries' combined response in various areas of operation, including air, sea and cyberspace. The Theodore Roosevelt strike group will participate in the exercise that is expected to start within June. South Korea's military didn't immediately confirm specific details of the training. South Korea's navy said in a statement that the arrival of Theodore Roosevelt dem-



onstrates the strong defence posture of the allies and "stern willingness to respond to advancing North Korean threats." The carrier's visit comes seven months after another U.S. aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, came to South Korea in a show of strength against the North. The Theodore Roosevelt strike group also participated in a three-way exercise with South Korean and Japanese naval forces in April in the disputed East China Sea, where worries about China's territorial claims are rising. In the face of growing North Korean threats, the United States, South Korea and Japan have expanded their combined training and boosted the visibility of strategic U.S. military assets in the region, seeking to intimidate the North.

UN envoy defends failure to include Afghan women in upcoming meeting with Taliban in Qatar



GNS News Agency, June 27

The United Nations' (UN) top official in Afghanistan defended the failure to include Afghan women in the upcoming first meeting between the Taliban and envoys from 22 countries, insisting that demands for women's rights are certain to be raised. UN special envoy Roza Otunbayeva was pummeled with questions on June 21 from journalists about criticism from human rights organisations at the omission of Afghan women from the meeting in Qatar's capital, Doha, on June 30 and July 1.

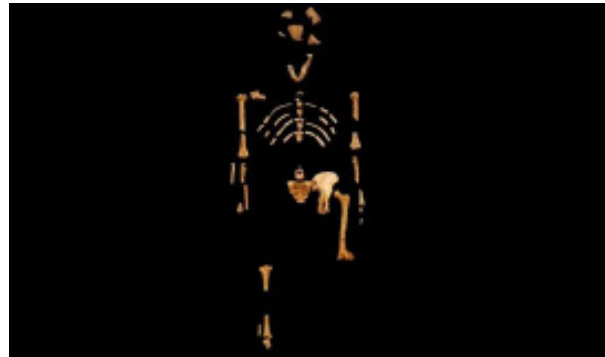
The Taliban seized power in 2021 as United States and NATO forces withdrew following two decades of war. No country officially recognises them as Afghanistan's government, and the UN has said that recognition is almost impossible while bans on female education and employment remain in place. Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said that, in the face of the Taliban's tightening repression of women and girls, the UN plans to hold a meeting "without women's rights on the agenda or Afghan women in the room are shocking." Amnesty International Secretary General Agnes Callamard said, "The credibility of this meeting will be in tatters if it doesn't adequately address the human rights crisis in Afghanistan and fails to involve women human rights defenders and other relevant stakeholders from Afghan civil society."

Ms. Otunbayeva, a former president and Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan, insisted after briefing the United Nations Security Council that "nobody dictated" conditions to the United Nations about the Doha meeting, but she confirmed that no Afghan women will be present. "UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo will chair the meeting," Ms. Otunbayeva said. She will attend and a few of the 22 special envoys on Afghanistan who are women will also be there. The meeting is the third UN-sponsored gathering on the Afghan crisis in Doha. The Taliban weren't invited to the first and Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said they set unacceptable conditions for attending the second in February, including demands that Afghan civil society members be excluded from the talks and that they be treated as the country's legitimate rulers. Undersecretary-General DiCarlo visited Afghanistan in May and invited the Taliban Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, to attend the upcoming meeting. The Taliban accepted and said they are sending a

delegation. "We do hope that delegation will be led by de facto Foreign Minister Muttaqi," Ms. Otunbayeva said, but the Taliban may send another Minister. "Just before the Doha gathering, there will be a hybrid meeting with Afghan civil society representatives from inside and outside the country," Ms. Otunbayeva said. And on July 2, immediately after Doha, "we'll be meeting all the civil society people." The Taliban have used their interpretation of Islamic law to bar girls from education beyond age 11, ban women from public spaces, exclude them from many jobs, and enforce dress codes and male guardianship requirements. Ms. Otunbayeva said the upcoming gathering will be the first face-to-face meeting between the Taliban and the envoys and will focus on what she said were "the most important acute issues of today" — private business and banking, and counter-narcotics policy. Both are about women, she said, and the envoys will tell the Taliban, "Look, it doesn't work like this. We should have women around the table. We should provide them also access to businesses." She added that "if there are, let's say, five million addicted people in Afghanistan, more than 30% are women."

Ms. Otunbayeva told the Security Council the UN hopes the envoys and the Taliban delegation will speak to each other, recognise the need to engage, and "agree on next steps to alleviate the uncertainties that face the Afghan people." The UN expects a continuation of the dialogue at a fourth Doha meeting later in the year focused on another key issue: the impact of climate change on the country. Lisa Doughten, the UN humanitarian office's finance director, told the council that "the particularly acute effects of climate change" are deepening Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis, saying more than 50% of the population — some 23.7 million people — need humanitarian aid this year, the third-highest number in the world. "Extreme weather events are more frequent and more intense," she said. "Some areas in Afghanistan have warmed at twice the global average since 1950" with the country experiencing increasing droughts and deadly flash flooding. Ms. Otunbayeva said another outcome from the Doha meeting that the UN would like to see is the creation of working groups to continue talks on how to help farmers replace poppies producing opium with other crops, how to provide pharmacies with medication to help addicted people, and how to address crime and improve banking and private businesses. As for what the UN would like to see, she said, "we need badly that they will change their minds and let girls go to school." Ms. Otunbayeva said Afghanistan is the only country in the 57-nation Organisation of Islamic Cooperation that doesn't let girls go to school, which she called "a big puzzle." "Afghanistan has been very male-dominated and 'we want to change the minds' of young people from such a traditional society towards women," Ms. Otunbayeva said. The humanitarian office's Doughten told the council "the ban on girls' education is fueling an increase in child marriage and early childbearing, with dire physical, emotional and economic consequences." She also cited reports that attempted suicides by women and girls are increasing.

What the 3.2 million-year-old Lucy fossil reveals about nudity and shame



GNS News Agency, June 27

San Francisco: Fifty years ago, scientists discovered a nearly complete fossilized skull and hundreds of pieces of bone of a 3.2-million-year-old female specimen of the genus Australopithecus afarensis, often described as "the mother of us all." During a celebration following her discovery, she was named "Lucy," after the Beatles song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." Though Lucy has solved some evolutionary riddles, her appearance remains an ancestral secret. Popular renderings dress her in thick, reddish-brown fur, with her face, hands, feet and breasts peeking out of denser thicket. This hairy picture of Lucy, it turns out, might be wrong.

Technological advancements in genetic analysis suggest that Lucy may have been naked, or at least much more thinly veiled. According to the coevolutionary tale of humans and their lice, our immediate ancestors lost most of their body fur 3 to 4 million years ago and did not don clothing until 83,000 to 170,000 years ago. That means that for over 2.5 million years, early humans and their ancestors were simply naked. As a philosopher, I'm interested in how modern culture influences representations of the past. And the way Lucy has been depicted in newspapers, textbooks and museums may reveal more about us than it says about her. The loss of body hair in early humans was likely influenced by a combination of factors, including thermoregulation, delayed physiological development, attracting sexual partners and warding off parasites. Environmental, social and cultural factors may have encouraged the eventual adoption of clothing.

Both areas of research — of when and why hominins shed their body hair and when and why they eventually got dressed — emphasize the sheer size of the brain, which takes years to nurture and requires a disproportionate amount of energy to sustain relative to other parts of the body. Because human babies require a long period of care before they can survive on their own, evolutionary interdisciplinary researchers have theorized that early humans adopted the strategy of pair bonding — a man and a woman partnering after forming a strong affinity for one another. By working together, the two can more easily manage years of parental care. Pair bonding, however, comes with risks. Because humans are social and live in large groups, they are bound to be tempted to break the pact of monogamy, which would make it harder to raise children. Some mechanism was needed to secure the social-sexual pact. That mechanism was likely shame. In the documentary "What's the Problem with Nudity?" evolutionary anthropologist Daniel M.T. Fessler explains the evolution of shame: "The human body is a supreme sexual advertisement... Nudity is a threat to the basic social contract, because it is an invitation to defec-

tion... Shame encourages us to stay faithful to our partners and share the responsibility of bringing up our children." Boundaries between body and world, humans, aptly described as "naked apes," are unique for their lack of fur and systematic adoption of clothing. Only by banning nudity did "nakedness" become a reality.

As human civilization developed, measures must have been put in place to enforce the social contract — punitive penalties, laws, social dictates — especially with respect to women. That's how shame's relationship to human nudity was born. To be naked is to break social norms and regulations. Therefore, you're prone to feeling ashamed. What counts as naked in one context, however, may not in another. Bare ankles in Victorian England, for example, excited scandal. Today, bare tops on a French Mediterranean beach are ordinary.

When it comes to nudity, art doesn't necessarily imitate life. In his critique of the European oil painting tradition, art critic John Berger distinguishes between nakedness — "being oneself" without clothes — and "the nude," an art form that transforms the naked body of a woman into a pleasurable spectacle for men. Feminist critics such as Ruth Barcan complicated Berger's distinction between nakedness and the nude, insisting that nakedness is already shaped by idealized representations. In "Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy," Barcan demonstrates how nakedness is not a neutral state but is laden with meaning and expectations. She describes "feeling naked" as "the heightened perception of temperature and air movement, the loss of the familiar boundary between body and world, as well as the effects of the actual gaze of others" or "the internalized gaze of an imagined other." Nakedness can elicit a spectrum of feelings — from eroticism and intimacy to vulnerability, fear and shame. But there is no such thing as nakedness outside of social norms and cultural practices. Regardless of her fur's density, then, Lucy was not naked. But just as the nude is a kind of dress, Lucy, since her discovery, has been presented in ways that reflect historical assumptions about motherhood and the nuclear family. For example, Lucy is depicted alone with a male companion or with a male companion and children. Her facial expressions are warm and content or protective, reflecting idealized images of motherhood. The modern quest to visualize our distant ancestors has been critiqued as a sort of "erotic fantasy science," in which scientists attempt to fill in the blanks of the past based on their own assumptions about women, men and their relationships to one another. In their 2021 article "Visual Depictions of Our Evolutionary Past," an interdisciplinary team of researchers tried a different approach. They detail their own reconstruction of the Lucy fossil, bringing into relief their methods, the relationship between art and science, and decisions made to supplement gaps in scientific knowledge. Their process is contrasted with other hominin reconstructions, which often lack strong empirical justifications and perpetuate misogynistic and racialized misconceptions about human evolution. Historically, illustrations of the stages of human evolution have tended to culminate in a white European male. And many reconstructions of female hominins exaggerate features offensively associated with Black women. One of the co-authors of "Visual Depictions," sculptor Gabriel Vinas, offers a visual elucidation of Lucy's reconstruction in "Santa Lucia" — a marble sculpture of Lucy as a nude figure draped in translucent cloth, representing the artist's own uncertainties and Lucy's mysterious appearance.

GST Council meet: Uniform rate of 12% on milk cans and carton boxes; no tax on platform tickets, hostels



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday said the 53rd GST Council Meeting has taken numerous decisions on trade facilitation, easing compliance burden and providing relief to taxpayers. It also decided on key issues related to Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates, exemptions and clarifications. Addressing media after the meeting, Sitharaman added that these decisions will benefit traders, MSMEs and taxpayers.

The Council has recommended a uniform GST rate of 12 per cent on all milk cans. It also recommended a uniform GST rate of 12 per cent on all carton boxes, and clarified that all types of sprinklers, including fire water sprinklers, will attract 12 per cent GST. The Council also recommended to prescribe 12% GST on all solar cookers whether it has single or dual energy source. Meanwhile, services provided by the Indian Railways such as the sale of platform tickets, facility of retiring rooms, waiting rooms, cloakroom services, battery operated car services are exempt from GST. Further, intra-railway supplies are also being exempt.

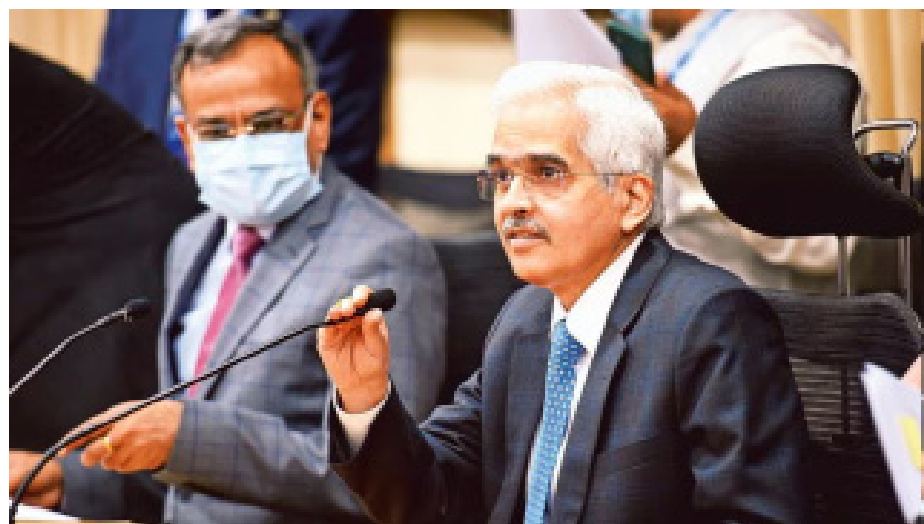
Hostels, which are for students outside of educational institutions are also exempt from GST. The Council has also recommended exempting accommodation services having a value of supply up to Rs 20,000 per person per month. "These services are supplied for a minimum continuous period of 90 days," Sitharaman said. Stating that the intention of the Central government has always been to bring petrol and diesel under GST, Sitharaman said it is now up to the states to come together and decide on the rate. The GST Council also recommended waiving interest and penalties for demand notices that have been issued under Section 73 of the

GST Act, including cases not involving fraud, suppression or misstatements, the minister said. "For all those notices which were issued under Section 73 for the Fiscal Years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20, the Council has recommended waiving interest and penalties on the demand notices which have been served," she added. In order to reduce government litigation, the minister said the Council has recommended a monetary limit of Rs 20 lakh for GST appellate tribunal, Rs 1 crore for High Court and Rs 2 crore for Supreme Court for filing of appeals by the department. The Council has also recommended that the maximum amount for pre-deposit for filing appeal before the appellate authority be reduced from Rs 25 crore CGST and 25 crore SGST to Rs 20 crore CGST and Rs 20 crore SGST, which is the maximum amount of pre-deposit for filing appeals before the appellate authority. Further, in order to help small taxpayers, the Council has recommended extending the time limit to furnish the detail and the returns in the form GSTR 4 from April 30 to June 30, Sitharaman said, adding that this will apply for returns for the Financial Year 2024-25 onwards. The Finance minister also informed the rolling out of biometric-based Aadhaar authentication on a pan-India basis. "This will help us to combat fraudulent input tax credit claims made through fake invoices in the cases," she said. At the pre-budget meeting with state finance ministers earlier in the day, Sitharaman had underlined Centre's support to states through timely tax devolution and GST compensation arrears to stimulate growth. She also nudged states to take advantage of the scheme under which the Centre gives 50-year interest free loan to states for undertaking specified reforms.

Food inflation behind grudgingly slow pace of disinflation: RBI Governor Das

Slow pace of disinflation is mainly due to the elevated food inflation which has been impacted by recurring supply-side shocks, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said in the minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting held from June 5 to 7. Of the six-member rate setting panel, four voted to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent and policy stance as withdrawal of accommodation as higher food inflation is affecting disinflation process. Two external members of the MPC - Ashima Goyal and Jayanth Varma, however, voted for a 25 basis points cut in the repo rate as higher interest rates could hurt growth. They also voted to change the policy stance to neutral from withdrawal of accommodation.

Das said headline consumer price-based inflation is moderating but at a very slow pace. Headline inflation has moderated by around 30 basis points (bps) from 5.1 per cent in February 2024 to 4.8 per cent in April 2024. In May 2024, inflation softened to 4.7 per cent and food inflation remained unchanged at 7.9 per cent. "Food inflation is the main factor behind the grudgingly slow pace of disinflation. Recurring and overlapping supply-side shocks continue to play an outsized role in food inflation," Das wrote in the minutes. In the monetary policy, Das voted for keeping the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent and to continue with the stance of withdrawal of accommodation. "With persistently high food inflation, it would be in order to continue with the disinflationary policy stance that we have adopted. Any hasty action in a different direction will cause more harm than good," he said. It is important that inflation is durably aligned to the target of 4 per



cent, the Governor said, adding that price stability is the bedrock for high and sustainable growth.

Going forward, the baseline projections show inflation moderating to an average 4.5 per cent in 2024-25. In the immediate months, however, the impact of exceptionally warm summer months on output of certain perishables; a likely rabi production shortfall in some pulses and vegetables - particularly potatoes and onions; and the upward revisions in milk prices, warrant close monitoring, Das said. On economy, the Governor said domestic growth outlook for 2024-25 remains upbeat as economic activity continues to maintain momentum. The RBI has projected real gross domestic product (GDP) at 7.2 per cent in the current financial year.

RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra, who voted for keeping the policy rate and the stance of withdrawal of accommodation unchanged, said the speed of the easing of inflation has been disappointing so far, even from a cross-country perspective. "The Indian economy remains hostage to intersecting food price shocks. Their repetitive occurrence calls for intensifying monetary

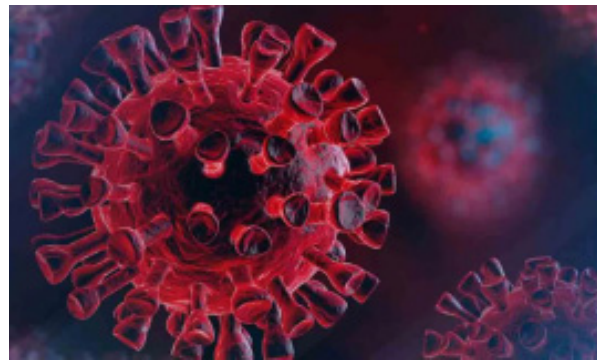
policy vigil to ward off spillovers to other components of inflation and to expectations," he said. MPC member Ashima Goyal said the experience of the past year shows supply shocks no longer have persistent effects on inflation or on inflation expectations. "We have waited for one year to watch the impact of these shocks, now it is time to move on," Goyal wrote in the minutes. A durable approach to the inflation target is consistent with a transient rise in inflation, she said. It is necessary to avoid the mistake of 2015 when international crude oil prices fell substantially but the fear that they would rise again prevented an adequate cut in the policy rate. "Real interest rates rose substantially and hurt growth," Goyal said.

Jayanth Varma said that the maintenance of restrictive policy for unwarrantedly long will lead to a growth sacrifice in 2025-26 as well. Professional forecasters surveyed by the RBI are projecting growth both in 2025-26 and in 2024-25 to be lower than in 2023-24 by more than 0.75 per cent, and lower than the potential growth rate (of say 8 per cent) by more than 1 per cent. "This is an

unacceptably high growth sacrifice considering that headline inflation is projected to be only about 0.5 per cent above target, and core inflation is extremely benign," Varma said. MPC member Rajiv Ranjan said headline and core inflation have moderated on anticipated lines. There is, however, little comfort in the near-term with inflation projected to remain sticky at around 4.9 per cent in Q1 of FY2024-25.

While we can draw some comfort from headline inflation running within the tolerance band successively for eight months in a row, we cannot drop our guard as the headline inflation is still not aligned to the target," Ranjan said. Repeated incidence of food price shocks is delaying the final descent of inflation to the target, he said. According to Shashanka Bhide, the moderate inflation rate will have to be durable to be an effective condition for sustained growth. In this context, the policy would have to continue its focus on maintaining the inflation rate aligned to the target over the medium term. He also voted for keeping policy rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent and keeping policy stance as withdrawal of accommodation.

Persistent Covid infections may be more common than thought: Study



New Delhi: A high proportion of COVID-19 infections in the general population lead to persistent infections lasting a month or more, according to a study.

It has long been thought that prolonged COVID-19 infections in immunocompromised individuals may have been the source of the multiple new variants that arose during the pandemic and seeded successive waves of infection, the researchers said. However, until now, the prevalence of persistent S-CoV-2 infections in the general population and how the virus evolves in these situations remained unknown, they said. The study, published in the journal *Nature*, used data from the UK Office for National Statistics COVID-19 Infection Survey (ONS-CIS), which tested participants monthly.

Of the over 90,000 participants, 3,603 provided two or more Covid positive samples between November 2020 and August 2022. Of these, 381 individuals tested positive for the same variant over a period of a month or longer. Within this group, 54 individuals had a persistent infection lasting at least two months. "Our observations highlight the continuing importance of community-based genomic surveillance both to monitor the emergence and spread of new variants, but also to gain a fundamental understanding of the natural history and evolution of novel pathogens and their clinical implications for patients," said

study co-lead author, Mahan Ghafari from the University of Oxford, UK.

The researchers estimate that between one in a thousand to one in 200 of all infections may become persistent, and last for at least 60 days. In some cases, individuals remained infected with viral variants that had gone extinct in the general population, they said. In contrast, the researchers found that reinfection with the same variant was very rare, likely due to the host developing immunity to that variant and the strain reducing in frequency to very low levels after a few months. Of the 381 persistent infections, 65 had three or more PCR tests taken over the course of their infection. Most (82 per cent) of these individuals demonstrated rebounding viral dynamics, experiencing high, then low, then high viral load dynamics. According to the researchers, this demonstrates that the virus can maintain the ability to actively replicate during prolonged infections.

In the study, people with persistent infections were 55 per cent more likely to report having Long COVID symptoms more than 12 weeks since the start of the infection than people with more typical infections. Certain individuals showed an extremely high number of mutations, including the ones that define new coronavirus variants, alter target sites for monoclonal antibodies, and introduce changes to the coronavirus spike protein, which the virus uses to enter and infect human cells.

However, most individuals did not harbour a large number of mutations, suggesting that not every persistent infection will be a potential source for new concerning variants. "Although the link between viral persistence and Long Covid may not be causal, these results suggest persistent infections could be contributing to the pathophysiology of Long Covid," said study co-lead author Katrina Lythgoe from the University of Oxford. "Indeed, many other possible mechanisms have been suggested to contribute to Long Covid including inflammation, organ damage, and microthrombosis," Lythgoe added.

Obesity, depression link found in middle-aged and older adults

New Delhi: New research has found a significant association between obesity and depression among middle- and older-aged adults in Ireland, with severe depressive symptoms likely among younger women having type 2 diabetes or less physical activity. Researchers said that a possible reason behind the link could be poorer self-esteem, self-image and body satisfaction, all known risk factors for depression, and could be exacerbated socially through prejudice, discrimination and stigma. Chronic pain conditions as a direct effect of obesity, such as joint and back pain, and fibromyalgia, too are known to result in depressive symptoms, they said.

Further, the researchers from University College Cork, Ireland, also said that biologically, obesity and depression share similar pathways, primarily through neurotransmitter imbalances, inflammation abnormalities and disturbances in energy production. Other factors include genetics and hormonal imbalances.

The positive relationship between obesity and depression is independent of lifestyle factors and disease conditions, they said, and that targeted interventions to address depression should include weight management measures. For the study, the researchers included more than 1,800 Caucasian-European individuals in the 46-73 years age bracket from urban and rural settings.

The participants were asked to respond to general health and lifestyle questionnaires. Their depression and well-being were assessed using the Centre for Epide-



miologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) and the World Health Organization-Five (WHO-5) Well-Being Index, respectively. The researchers used two indices for measuring obesity - Body Mass Index and waist-height ratio. BMI was calculated as weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in metres and physical activity among them was measured through the International Physical Activity Questionnaire. All the data were statistically analysed.

Can ash gourd juice improve skin and digestion with 21-day consumption?



It's essential to note that individual responses to ash gourd juice can vary, and it's advisable to consult with a healthcare professional before making significant dietary changes

Ash gourd juice is believed to offer various health benefits, including potential positive effects on skin and digestive health. If nutritionist Kiran Kukreja is to go by, consuming ash gourd juice for at least 21 days may contribute to improved skin health due to its rich content of vitamins and antioxidants. "Ash gourd juice is known for its detoxifying properties, helping to flush out toxins from the body," said Kukreja in an Instagram post. Dr Rinky Kapoor, consultant dermatologist, cosmetic dermatologist, and dermatologist, The Esthetic Clinics shared that the nutrients help combat oxidative stress, reducing the risk of premature ageing and promoting a healthier complexion.

Ash gourd juice is rich in vitamins C, B1, B3, and B6, as well as minerals like calcium, phosphorus, iron, and protein. "These nutrients play crucial roles in maintaining skin health. Vitamin C, in particular, is known for its antioxidant properties, which can help combat free radicals and prevent premature ageing. Additionally, ash gourd juice contains properties that may help in detoxifying the body, which indirectly contributes to healthier skin by eliminating toxins," said Dr Ekta Singhwal, dietician, Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals.

Additionally, ash gourd is known for its hydrating properties, which can benefit the skin by maintaining adequate moisture levels. "Proper hydration is crucial for skin elasticity. The presence of vitamins A and C in ash gourd further supports skin regeneration and collagen synthesis, contributing to a more youthful appearance," said Dr Kapoor. Ash gourd juice may have a soothing

effect on the digestive system. Dr Singhwal shared that it is often recommended for managing digestive issues such as acidity and indigestion. "Ash gourd juice is known for its high water content and fibre, both of which are essential for maintaining good digestive health. Fibre helps regulate bowel movements, prevent constipation, and promote overall digestive regularity," said Dr Singhwal.

Moreover, ash gourd is considered a low-calorie vegetable with potential diuretic properties, helping in flushing out toxins from the body. "This detoxification process may indirectly contribute to better skin health by reducing the burden on the body's elimination systems," said Dr Kapoor. Dr Singhwal added that ash gourd juice is low in calories and fat, making it a suitable beverage for those looking to manage their weight. "Additionally, its high fibre content can promote a feeling of fullness, reducing the likelihood of overeating," said Dr Singhwal. It's essential to note that individual responses to ash gourd juice can vary, and it's advisable to consult with a healthcare professional before making significant dietary changes.

While incorporating ash gourd juice into your routine, ensure a balanced diet and consider any pre-existing health conditions. In conclusion, the regular consumption of ash gourd juice for at least 21 days may offer benefits for both skin and digestive health, thanks to its nutrient composition and potential therapeutic properties. "However, it's crucial to approach such dietary changes mindfully and consult with a healthcare professional for personalised advice," said Dr Kapoor.

Ahmed Khan defends Tiger Shroff against criticism for his acting: 'Usse kaunsi Ardh Satya karni hai'



Usko kaunsi Ardh Satya karni hai, ya Garam Masala jaisi art film karni hai." "He does commercial films. This is what is called learning. Every hero has gone through this journey, and everyone learns this way. He will bounce back next year, because this is a phase every actor goes through, there's no reason to panic. Tiger Shroff is just one turn away," Ahmed added.

While Heropanti 2 was a washout, Baaghi 3 delivered the biggest opening of 2020 before the pandemic cut its run short. The filmmaker said that everyone was "hurt" with the performance of the film, but the team had no control over the result due to COVID. "When the promos were out, I got calls saying that this is a golden jubilee film! Trade was predicting a big opening. We were confident, but we never knew what's coming. Seven days before the release, COVID hit India. Three days before the release, COVID hit Mumbai. We were in slight depression. We were expecting a huge opening, we got fifty percent. And what hit us hard was six days after the release, theatres started getting shut. After a week, cinema halls were completely shut. For a year, Baaghi 3 posters were in cinemas, because it was the last big film to have released." The filmmaker said he is happy that the film still did Rs 90 cr in six days despite having its run cut short. "But I was hurt and depressed for the first time. Tiger was broken, because we had worked extremely hard. What soothes me though, is the fact that it was the highest opener of 2020 despite COVID restrictions and would have had a great run had the pandemic not broken its knees," the filmmaker added. Tiger Shroff will be next seen in a special appearance in Singham Again—the third instalment of Ajay Devgn-led cop actioner. The film is gearing up for a Diwali release.

What does actor Tiger Shroff need to do to emerge from the career funk that he is currently in? Filmmaker Ahmed Khan said that there is no need to "panic," as the actor is just one film away from bouncing, back and shouldn't be written off in the way that he is. Khan has directed Tiger in films like Baaghi 2, Baaghi 3 and Heropanti 2. Tiger Shroff is witnessing a disastrous run at the box office, with three consecutive big-budget bombs—Heropanti 2, Ganapath and Bade Miyan Chote Miyan.

In an interview with Siddharth Kannan, when asked what the actor is doing wrong and if he needs to do something drastically different, Ahmed said the audience has the right to feel let down, but added that Tiger checks every box when it comes to superstardom. "Usually, people say, 'You have to work hard, but for Tiger you have to say, 'Mehnat mat kar!' Now what advice would you give him? He comes on time, he has got no problem on sets, he will do whatever you ask him to. Ek actor ko kya chahiye? Does he have a body? Yes. Looks? Yes. Can he dance? Yes. Can he do action? Yes. Acting?

Paatal Lok creator Sudip Sharma says Amazon doesn't share data with creators so they can't ask for bigger budgets: 'Information is power'



shows) is a small part of the beast, it's a hobby. If I was the richest man in the world, I would also want a few Hollywood stars to come to my party, it's that..." Sudip said that based on the information that Amazon has given him about Paatal Lok's viewership, he has no idea if it was a hit or not. He said that no platform is entirely transparent with numbers, but Amazon is extremely secretive. "Netflix shares more information than Amazon does. Amazon shares no information. I honestly have no idea how big a hit Paatal Lok was," he said.

He speculated that the reason behind this lack of transparency is to not allow creators to have a bargaining room. "There's a deliberate reason why they don't tell you. Information is power. I would ask for a bigger budget if I knew how big a hit it was. By that, I mean I'd ask for the right budget. I would have more bargaining power. Also, I would be comparing like-for-like, that comparison is not available to me. I cannot ask them why they gave another show a bigger budget even though it did fewer numbers."

In a recent interview on The Comment Section, Sacred Games creator Vikramaditya Motwane revealed that he wanted Sudip as a writer on the show as a writer, but Netflix put their foot down because he was working with Prime Video. Vikram told them that this isn't how they're going to make progress, because there is anyway a small talent pool to choose from. Sudip is now gearing up for the release of the second season of Paatal Lok, which will be released over four years after the first one. He didn't discuss the reasons behind the delay, but admitted that the process was 'tough' and has 'aged' him. He did, however, tease that it's the best thing he's ever done. After Paatal Lok 2, he'll begin work on the second season of Kohrra.

Sudip Sharma, the creator of acclaimed shows such as Paatal Lok and Kohrra, spoke about the differences in collaborating with the two major international streaming platforms in India, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Sudip co-created the crime drama Kohrra for Netflix last year, and created Paatal Lok for Prime Video in the first wave of Indian streaming nearly half-a-decade ago. In an interview, he appeared to prefer working with Netflix, because he finds Prime Video to be too guarded with crucial data.

Chatting with Suchin Mehrotra on The Streaming Show, Sudip was asked if he'd want to highlight the differences in his experience working with the two platforms. He said, "Beyond a point, they're all the same... They have different cultures, and the personality of the person you're dealing with... Because the systems and processes aren't well defined, they're still finding their space in India. The processes at Netflix are more attuned to doing this, they take their role of being a media company very seriously, because that's all they are. If s**t happens to these processes, s**t goes down, that's how they look at it. Compared to Amazon, where (producing films and

'I wanted Shah Rukh Khan for Dawood's role in Company': Ram Gopal Varma reveals why he didn't cast 'hyperactive' SRK

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma revealed that he didn't always have Ajay Devgn and Vivek Oberoi in mind while casting for his 2002 gangster drama Company. He said that he approached none other than Shah Rukh Khan to play the film's version of the underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, while he initially wanted Abhishek Bachchan to play the Chhota Rajan character. Additionally, he thought of Kamal Haasan in the role that eventually went to Mohanlal.



In a video shared on his YouTube channel — RGV has revisited several of his films in a similar manner — the filmmaker spoke about several key scenes in Company, and discussed the casting process.

In a video shared on his YouTube channel — RGV has revisited several of his films in a similar manner — the filmmaker spoke about several key scenes in Company, and discussed the casting process. Asked if Ajay Devgn was always the first choice for the role of Malik, RGV said, "At one point of time, I wanted Shah Rukh. I met Shah Rukh, he was excited. I wanted Shah Rukh for Dawood. But I felt that he's very hyper; his energy, the way he is... That's what people like. I thought, to make him very subtle — not moving at all and very silent — I thought it would

look very odd on screen. Which is the reason I didn't pursue. I just had one meeting with him, but I didn't pursue him because I just felt that his body language is wrong for the part." He continued, "There is an actor and there is a performer. Shah Rukh is a performer. He's hyperactive, which is what endears the audience to him. So, this lazy guy, sitting in the back... This is Ajay's natural body language. So, that's when I thought Ajay is more per-

fect for the role, and that's when it happened." For the role of Chandu, RGV said that he wanted Abhishek, but he was occupied with other projects. Even the role of the Mumbai police commissioner wasn't designed for Mohanlal. "Very initially, I actually wanted to approach Kamal for that role. I met him also. But there also I felt the same problem I had with Shah Rukh. Their natural stardom, in a realistic film, it'll just look

off. Because of that I changed my mind, and then I approached Mohanlal," he said. Company was the second instalment in the filmmaker's spiritually connected trilogy of gangster movies, which began with Satya and continued with D, which was directed by Vishram Sawant. Shah Rukh went on to play a gangster in the film Raees, which opened to mixed reviews and under-performed at the box office.

'You carry on, I'm off to eat tandoori chicken': How Javed Akhtar would excuse himself when Shabana Azmi was on hunger strike in the '80s



Actor Shabana Azmi spoke about her activism, and what drew her to joining a hunger strike in support of slum dwellers in the 1980s. She said that as the daughter of a card-carrying communist, poet Kaifi Azmi, she was always exposed to certain social realities as a child, but her mother was very concerned about her when she decided to step up and join the protests. In a chat with filmmaker Mira Nair, the veteran actor recalled how her husband, writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar reacted to her demonstration, and the sole Bollywood personality who silently supported her from the sidelines.

Shabana and Mira chatted with each other at the New York Indian Film Festival, where the actor spoke about her youth, and what drew her to raising her voice against injustice. She said that she was moved when she heard a group of slum dwellers speak about their homes

being demolished by the government, and no compensation being offered in return. "Instinctively, I decided that I would like to go as well," she said. She continued, "I was supported by Javed. And without thinking, I joined the strike, and then, of course, we were in the limelight. My mother was really, really scared. My father was in Patna at that time. My mother sent a message to him, saying, 'Your daughter is doing this, please put some sense into her head'. And I got a telegram from my father, saying, 'Best of luck, comrade'. My mother would come, all white in the face, but then she would say, 'Inqilab zindabad'."

Shabana said that the experience transformed her, because she realised the level of misinformation that was being fed to the people. "I had support from Javed. Javed and Tanvi, my sister-in-law, would come to the hunger strike and sit with us, and then say, 'Achcha Gandhi ji, aap strike kariye, hum tandoori chicken kha ke aate hain (you stay here, we'll go have tandoori chicken)'. But they were very supportive." But while the entire industry shunned her, it was Shashi Kapoor who used his connections to get the slum dwellers what they wanted. "He went to the CM at the time, and said,

"We're always there for you, to support every cause that you ask us to, and now an important member of our fraternity is on this hunger strike, so you have to listen to her". Then the housing minister came and said that they accept all our demands, but when we went up to the podium, I wanted to thank Shashi Kapoor, but he just slunk away, taking no credit for it."

Sara Ali Khan opens up about being sued for Rs 5 crore by Kedarnath director Abhishek Kapoor while they were still making the film



Actor Sara Ali Khan recalled the legal matters that she was embroiled in even before she made her debut. Sara said that she was sued by the makers of her first film, Kedarnath, for some scheduling conflicts that had arisen after she signed Rohit Shetty's Simmba. In an interview, Sara said that she was 'shattered' by the experience, and had no idea how to handle it because she was all by herself and her mother and brother were not in the city. She said that the situation was resolved when Rohit Shetty agreed to surrender three days from her Simmba schedule to Abhishek Kapoor. Abhishek Kapoor and KriArj Entertainment were embroiled in a legal battle, which led to a delay in production. During this time, Sara signed Simmba, which caused further problems. She attributed this to her management, and said in an interview with mid-day that she sent them to represent her in court when she was sued by Abhishek Kapoor. Asked what went down, she said, "In May 2018, I was supposed to do Simmba. Kedarnath was the first film I signed, Kedarnath was the first set I went on, Kedarnath was everything. Then some dates went upar-neeche, and I also signed Simmba. But now, there were three or four dates that were coinciding. And yeah, so I got sued for Rs 5 crore. I was very nervous, because I didn't have Rs 5 crore. My grandfather, my mother's father, was dying, in Delhi. My mother was with him. Ibrahim was in school. And I was served a 'vakalatnama' at home. I didn't know what to do."

She continued, "So, I sent the management to court, because I had to go to shoot, which the makers were aware of because they were also at the shoot. Then we

shot, what else? I knew there were two ways that this could go, so I just went to Gattu sir (Abhishek Kapoor), and asked him if he'd like my spot girl to make her famous coffee, and he said yes. After that, the shoot was smooth. He also must've had his reasons. But it's all good now. It's all water under the bridge." Asked if her management was sued and not her, Sara said that she doesn't know. She said that the matter was resolved when the two filmmakers had a meeting to hash things out. "Then Rohit sir and Gattu sir met in a room. Ranveer came in and said, 'Okay then', and quickly left. They wanted only three days, and Rohit sir said, 'Le lo'. And it was done. It was a bit tricky because I spent a lot of time flying from Hyderabad to Mumbai, because I was shooting for them simultaneously." In an interview with Siddharth Kannan, Abhishek was asked about this episode, and he said, "Those days, my dates (from her) were given to somebody else by some overenthusiastic management that was running her. It was just unacceptable to us. I had to finish my film, I could not afford to let go of the dates because I had a big set standing... I had to fight her, but at the same time on the same days we were shooting together also. To get my dates back, we had to go to court. While we are fighting in court during the day, Sara and I are shooting important scenes the same evening in a temple!" Kedarnath was released in the first week of December 2018, and Simmba debuted at the end of the month. In the end, Sara had two box office hits under her belt, but when asked if she was flattered to be in such high demand, Sara joked that she was 'shattered' instead.

Ram Gopal Varma recalls casting Vivek Oberoi in Company, but their stories don't match: 'Suresh Oberoi showed me pictures'

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma said that he cast actor Vivek Oberoi in the film Company after Vivek's father, veteran actor Suresh Oberoi, showed him pictures of the aspiring actor. Varma said that when he saw the photos, he "instantly" knew Vivek would be right for the gangster drama. In a video posted on his YouTube channel, RGV was asked about casting Vivek in the role of a local gangster. Ram Gopal Varma said, "First it was Abhishek Bachchan, but the dates were not there. I was making Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya at that time, and Suresh Oberoi was there. One day he came and showed me pictures of Vivek and I instantly felt he was right for the choice."

Previously, Suresh Oberoi had opened up to Bollywood Hungama about the 'second struggle' of his career, which was finding work for his son. "I would sit outside offices with his photos in my hand. Ram Gopal Varma's office and all these other offices. It was a second struggle for me. Then, ultimately, Ramu (Ram Gopal Varma) gave him his first film," he said.

Vivek's version of bagging Company, as told to Indianexpress.com previously, was slightly different. The actor said, "He saw my pictures and everything. He said, 'No, you're not the guy'. I asked him, 'Why?'. He said, 'You are polished. You have studied in New York, and you have come back. I need somebody from the slums. Somebody from the underbelly of Mumbai, a rough and unpolished guy.' I said, 'Can you give me another appointment in 15 days?' He said okay and then he forgot about me." Vivek recalled how he "checked into a slum" for 15 days, and sleeping on the floor with "mice all around." He said that he studied the locals and wore chappals, a torn shirt, a vest, tight pants, and looked unclean. He then went to meet the filmmaker. In an interview with Curly Tales ME, Vivek said that he adopted a nom de plume while trying to bag his first role, to avoid being thought of as Suresh's son. He also claimed that RGV had no idea who his father was until after he was cast for Company. "

