



**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
 The pioneer  
 There will be a Cabinet expansion towards the end of December. The government enrolled 2.32 lakh applications via the Indiramma Indlu app. The government will provide houses to all beneficiaries, though there could be some delay. The government will restore the VROs and VRAs system in the villages again.  
 - Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy



**GNPA of PSBs declines to 3.12% from 14.58%: FinMin**  
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**FROM LONDON TO SPAIN, SOUNDARYA SHARMA'S 'FUN' EUROPEAN ESCAPE**  
 9



**Sai Pallavi to sue rumour MONGERS**  
 PTI



**DON'T MISS...**  
**Plan to expedite H-CITI Project work**  
 In order to complete the H-CITI project work swiftly, M Dana Kishore, Principal Secretary of the State Municipal Administration and Urban Development department, instructed officials to prepare an action plan for fast-track implementation. On Thursday, at the National Institute of Urban Management (NIUM), Dana Kishore provided guidance to officials regarding the fast commencement and completion of 38 road development and infrastructure projects, worth Rs 3,500 crore and junction beautification works ...  
 -PAGE: 3

**TGOs demand DA in cash, reinstating OPS**  
 The Telangana Gazetted Officers' Association (TGO), Hyderabad District branch, held its executive committee meeting on December 12 at the Metro Water Works Building in Khairatabad. The meeting, presided over by President MB Krishna Yadav and inaugurated by Secretary Mohammed Abdul Khader, was attended by state leaders, including Association President Eluri Srinivas Rao and General Secretary A Satyanarayana, as chief guests. Several critical resolutions were ...  
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**India, UK talks on trade pact may start soon**  
 India and the UK are expected to hold the next round of talks for a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) in January to resolve the pending issues and close the negotiations, a senior official said on Thursday. The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles. In November, an official statement said that the dates for the FTA talks in early 2025 would be finalised through diplomatic channels. The negotiations would...  
 -PAGE: 8

**Rohit must return to opening: Shastri**  
 Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who knows a thing or two about winning Test rubbers in Australia, on Thursday asked India skipper Rohit Sharma to return to the opening slot "if he has to throw the first punch" on an opponent brimming with confidence. Shastri was serving as team director when India won their maiden Test series in Australia in 2017-18 and was the head coach when the side rallied brilliantly to stun the hosts in the last tour in 2020-21. The move to slot Rohit at number six did not...  
 -SPORTS

**Gukesh scripts history Becomes youngest world chess champion**  
 Born on May 29, 2006, in Chennai, D Gukesh hails from a Telugu family.  
 The succession line of world champions in chess is now 18-men-long dating back to 1886. It has names like Bobby Fischer, Garry Kasparov, Viswanathan Anand, and Magnus Carlsen among them. But no one was a teenager when they became a world champion



**Gukesh scripts history Becomes youngest world chess champion**

**PNS ■ SINGAPORE**  
 Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Thursday became the youngest world chess champion at 18 years after beating title-holder Ding Liren of China in the 14th and last game of a roller-coaster showdown that went right down to the wire.  
 Gukesh secured the requisite 7.5 points as against 6.5 of Liren after winning the last classical time control game of the 14-game match that seemed headed for a draw for most part. As title winner, he will get a major share of the USD 2.5 million prize purse.  
 "I was dreaming this moment for the last 10 years. I am happy that I realised the dream (and made it) into reality," the soft-spoken Chennai-lad told reporters after the historic triumph here.  
 "I got a bit emotional because I was not expecting to win. But then I got a chance to press on," he added.  
 The reticent teenager grinned widely and raised his arms in celebration after the triumph, a stark contrast from the poker face he usually sports while playing.  
 Before Gukesh's feat on Thursday, the legendary Garry Kasparov of Russia was the youngest world champion when he won the title at the age of 22, dethroning Anatoly Karpov in 1985.  
 Gukesh had entered the match as

the youngest ever challenger to the world crown after winning the Candidates tournament earlier this year.  
 He is the second Indian after the legendary Viswanathan Anand to win the global title. Anand, a five-time world champion, had last held the title in 2013 before going down to Magnus Carlsen.  
 "Every chess player wants to live this dream. I am living my dream," said Gukesh.  
 Gukesh, who won the 14th game against Liren after 58 moves in four hours, is the 18th world chess champion overall.  
 Continued on Page 2

**I am just living my dream: Gukesh**  
**PNS ■ SINGAPORE**  
 "I am just living my dream," said newly-crowned world chess champion D Gukesh on Thursday, his unassuming persona shining through even after a history-scripting performance that made him the youngest ever to achieve the triumph.  
 Continued on Page 2

**Let people decide if I am wrong: Mohan Babu**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 Actor Manchu Mohan Babu has released an audio message to the public on his attack on a vernacular journalist.  
 Mohan Babu has not applied but asked the people, his admirers to decide what he has done was right or wrong. He questioned how the media can be in the surroundings of his house for the last four

days. "How do I believe it if the media entered my house or it was somebody else. In the night, I was already holding my hands saying N a m a s k a r a m . Meanwhile, a man with a mike came on to my face. It also hurt my eye. If the media was outside my house, I would not hit and if I did, then they could file any number of complaints in the police station."

**Farmer handcuffed in jail: Jail superintendent suspended**  
 PAGE: 2




**VRO, VRA system to be restored: Ponguleti**  
**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 Revenue and Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said that the government will restore the VROs and VRAs system in the villages. He said the government is providing a chance to the poor to apply for Indiramma Houses though the people failed to apply for Indiramma houses in the Praja Palana programme.  
 There will be a Cabinet expansion towards the end of December. The government enrolled 2.32 lakh applications via the Indiramma Indlu app. The government will provide houses to all beneficiaries, though there could be some delay. The government will restore the VROs and VRAs system in the villages again.  
 Continued on Page 2



**Cabinet nod to jamili polls**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
 The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved two bills, including one to amend the Constitution to implement "one nation, one election", and the draft legislations are likely to be introduced in Parliament in the ongoing winter session, sources said.  
 As of now, the Cabinet has given its nod to draft legislations to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies only, the sources said.  
 While a high-level committee led by former president Ram Nath Kovind had also proposed holding the municipality and panchayat polls along with the national and state elections in a phased manner, the Cabinet has decided to stay away, 'as of now', from the manner in which local body elections are conducted.  
 The Constitution amendment bill to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the states, the sources noted.  
 Another Constitution bill proposed by the Kovind panel was aimed at creating provisions to hold simultaneous elections to municipalities and panchayats, along with the elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, by inserting a new Article 324A.  
 Continued on Page 2

**Opposition raises concerns, BJP defends**  
**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Opposition parties on Thursday raised concerns over bills cleared by the government for holding simultaneous elections and said larger consultations are required while ruling NDA leaders asserted the burden on the exchequer will be lessened. The Union Cabinet approved bills to implement 'One Nation, One Election' and sources said the draft legislations are likely to be introduced in Parliament in the ongoing Winter session.  
 Opposition MPs questioned if the country is logistically ready to hold simultaneous elections, pointing out that recent polls in Maharashtra and Jharkhand could not be held together with that in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.  
 Continued on Page 2



**CM seeks Rs 1.63 L cr from Centre**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has requested Union Minister for Coal and Mines Kishan Reddy to extend central support for the execution of critical infrastructure projects in the state involving an outlay of Rs. 1.63 lakh crore.  
 During a meeting on Thursday evening at the Minister's official residence, Revanth Reddy outlined key demands including approvals for the Regional Ring Road (RRR), Metro Phase 2 expansion, sewerage and drainage systems in Hyderabad and Warangal, and allocation of coal blocks for Singareni.  
 Revanth Reddy emphasized the need for immediate approvals for both the northern and southern stretches of the RRR. He highlighted that 94% of land acquisition for the northern section had been completed and urged the Union Minister to expedite permissions pending with various central departments. He proposed the construction of 10 radial roads connecting the Outer Ring

Road (ORR) with the RRR to foster industrial hubs and logistics parks.  
 The Chief Minister elaborated on the proposed Metro Phase 2 plan, covering 76.4 km with key routes such as Nagole to Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, and Rayadurgam to Kokapet Neopolis. Estimated to cost Rs. 24,269 crore, the project is proposed to be executed on a 50:50 funding model between the state and central governments.  
 Revanth Reddy also reiterated the need for central funding for the Musi Riverfront project, which includes Gandhisagar development and heritage bridge constructions. He called for the transfer of 222 acres of defence land required for this project and estimated the total cost at Rs. 14,100 crore.  
 Continued on Page 2



**Harish pans Rs 3 lakh cr State budget**  
 Says govt can't provide even proper meals to students

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 In a scathing critique of the Congress-led Telangana government, Bharat Rashtira Samithi legislator Harish Rao highlighted the woeful neglect of welfare measures for SCs, STs, BCs, and minority students in the state.  
 Former minister Harish Rao, during a surprise inspection of the Prashanth Nagar Integrated Government Hostel in Siddipet District, condemned Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for failing to release

mess charges for hostels for six months, leaving students and hostel staff in dire straits.  
 Harish Rao urged the government to release all arrears relating to mess charges and hostel rents immediately.  
 Continued on Page 2



**Cold weather to grip TG: IMD issues yellow alert**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 Cold weather is set to affect Telangana over the next five days. On Thursday, a very cool morning was reported, with 7 degrees Celsius recorded in Adilabad and 10.9 degrees Celsius in BHEL Hyderabad.  
 According to Telangana Weatherman, north Telangana will experience very cold conditions, starting Friday night, affecting the entire state, including Hyderabad.

However, south Telangana will have slightly cooler weather. North Telangana will continue to experience very cold conditions for the next five days. The winter chill will be more intense compared to that felt in the last two weeks of November.  
 The IMD has also issued a yellow alert for cold wave conditions very likely to prevail at isolated pockets in Adilabad, KomaramBheem Asifabad, Mancherla, and Nirmal districts of Telangana.



**TG personal loans up by 154 bps points in 10 yrs**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 Telangana is witnessing a dynamic shift in its economic and social landscape, with urbanization and personal loans driving growth even as agricultural resilience is tested by climate extremes.  
 A research report from the State Bank of India's Economic Research Department titled 'Contours of Inflation' underscores a significant 154 basis points (bps) increase in personal loans in Telangana over the past decade, rising from 6% in 2014 to 7.5% in 2024. This marks the state as a key contributor to urban credit demand, reflecting its expanding urban footprint. Personal loans, largely an urban phenomenon, highlight the shift towards higher consumption and economic activities in urban areas.  
 Maharashtra (198 bps) and



**Telangana ranks third among states most affected by climate extremes, with eight heat or cold wave days recorded in 2022. Over the past decade, climate shocks have consistently impacted the state, leading to a -0.42 correlation between food grains production and extreme weather events. This positions Telangana among the six states with the most significant negative impacts of climate change on agriculture**  
 Gujarat (185 bps) lead the charts, but Telangana's growth, at third position in the country, is high, given the fact that its urban population was just 33.36% as per the 2011 Census. The surge in loans mirrors the state's rapid urbanization, making it a focal point of economic momentum.  
 As per the report, Telangana ranks third among states most affected by climate extremes, with eight heat or cold wave days recorded in 2022. Over the past decade, climate shocks have consistently impacted the state, leading to a -0.42 correlation between food grains production and extreme weather events. This positions Telangana among the six states with the most significant negative impacts of climate change on agriculture.  
 These extremes severely disrupt food grains production, with studies indicating that every 1°C rise in temperature beyond 30°C during the grain-filling period reduces wheat yields by 3-4%. This emphasizes the need for robust climate adaptation strategies in Telangana to mitigate the adverse effects of such events on agriculture.  
 Continued on Page 2

**ACB questions officer owning Rs 100 cr worth assets**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
 Telangana's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Thursday began questioning Nikesha Kumar, Assistant Executive Engineer of the Irrigation department, who was arrested earlier this month in a case of disproportionate assets case.  
 Day after a court granted the ACB custody of the tainted official for four days, the sleuths of the anti-graft agency took him into custody from Chanchalguda prison.  
 He was brought to the ACB office in Nampally, where investigating officers were questioning him.  
 Continued on Page 2

# 61 of 119 MLAs attend training programme

## Sports events and study tours for legislators mooted

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A two-day orientation programme on legislative procedures and rules of conduct, organized by Telangana Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly members at MCRHRD, Jubilee Hills, concluded on Thursday evening.

The event was aimed at enhancing the understanding of legislative responsibilities among MLAs and MLCs.

The programme was attended by 17 Legislative Council members and 61 Assembly members. The sessions focused on legislative rights, duties, and practical implementation. Future initiatives include organizing sports for legislators and study tours.

Council Chairman Gutta Sukhender Reddy announced plans to complete the formation of all Assembly and Council committees soon and to organize study tours for legislators. Reddy expressed his gratitude to all attendees and emphasized the importance of practical application of the knowledge gained.

The closing session witnessed the participation of Legislative Council Chairman Gutta Sukhender Reddy, Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar, Deputy Chairman Banda Prakash



Mudiraj, Legislature Minister D Sridhar Babu, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, and Transport Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar Goud. Government advisors, including Vem Narender Reddy, Legislative Council Chief Whip Patnam Mahender Reddy, and Legislature Secretary Dr. V Narasimhacharyulu, also attended the event.

Speaking at the ceremony, Gutta Sukhender Reddy highlighted the government's innovative approach in organizing such orientation programs for legislators. "This marks the

beginning of a new tradition in Telangana, where MLAs and MLCs are provided insights into legislative duties and procedures. Such initiatives will continue in the future with the government's support," he said.

Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar expressed his joy over the successful organization of the program, stating, "For the first time since Telangana's formation, such an official orientation program was conducted for Council and Assembly members. Members attended with great enthusiasm to understand legislative processes, which is truly commendable". He urged legislators to imple-

ment the knowledge gained during the program in future sessions, adding, "Theory gains value only when implemented practically. Applying what you have learned will enhance your reputation and respect as public representatives." Prasad Kumar also extended gratitude to PRS Research Institute experts for their training and lauded MCRHRD for its national reputation in organizing such programs. He appreciated the coordination between MCRHRD and the Legislature Secretariat, led by Dr. V Narasimhacharyulu, in making the program a success.

# Farmer handcuffed in jail: Jail superintendent suspended

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The investigation into the incident involving the handcuffing of tribal farmer Hiryanayak at Sangareddy Central Jail has concluded. IG Satyanarayana, along with the SPs of Vikarabad and Sangareddy districts, questioned the jail staff for four hours as part of the probe.

Speaking to the media, IG Satyanarayana clarified that the handcuffing of the farmer was due to the negligence of

Sangareddy Central Jail staff. He noted that the jail authorities failed to inform the Vikarabad Police in advance when Hiryanayak was being shifted from the jail to the hospital, instead directly informing Cyberabad Police.

Satyanarayana further stated that Hiryanayak was not an accused in the Lagacherla case but was involved in a separate case in Balanagar. The investigation also revealed that Suresh, identified as A2 in the Lagacherla case, had used the

jail phone to contact someone, allegedly stating that Hiryanayak could secure bail if he claimed to have a heart attack. The authorities are now investigating who Suresh communicated with during the call. In response to the incident, Prisons DG Soumya Mishra has issued an order suspending Sangareddy Jail Superintendent Sanjeeva Reddy for negligence in handling the case. Further action is expected as the investigation progresses.

# Historic and exemplary...

Continued from Page 1

"His triumph has not only etched his name in the annals of chess history but has also inspired millions of young minds to dream big and pursue excellence. My best wishes for his future endeavours," the prime minister said.

# Harish pans...

Continued from Page 1

He called for an end to the government's alleged negligence and suppression of critics. He observed: "Governance is about feeding students, not filing false cases against those who speak up." Harish Rao shared a meal with students and voiced his concerns, stating, "Despite a Rs. 3 lakh crore budget, this government cannot ensure proper meals for students. Thousands have fallen ill due to poor conditions, and tragically, 49 students have lost their lives due to this administration's neglect."

For the June to November period, mess charges for hostels across the state have not been paid, forcing wardens to borrow money and pawn valuables to provide meals. In Siddipet alone, Rs. 9.5 lakh in mess charges are overdue. Students have also raised concerns about the lack of basic supplies, including plates, towels, and uniforms-items previously provided in time during former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao's tenure.

Rao criticized the government's failure to pay hostel rents and salaries of part-time staff for over eight months, causing immense distress to employees and their families. Cosmetic charges for SC Gurukul Schools had been pending for six months, reflecting the government's indifference, he stated.

Harish Rao accused Revanth Reddy of focusing on self-serving projects like building the 'Fourth City' and building six-lane roads to his properties, while ignoring pressing welfare issues. "Governance is about fulfilling promises, not grand announcements or silencing dissent," he remarked.

# BRS slams arrests of leaders visiting Tandur Tribal Hostel



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The arrests of former ministers Sabitha Indra Reddy and Satyavathi Rathod, along with former MLA Methuku Anand and other senior party leaders, while they were on their way to visit children who had fallen ill due to food poisoning at the Tandur Tribal Hostel, have sparked widespread outrage.

Condemning the incident, Bharat Rashtira Samithi working president KT Rama Rao criticized the government's actions

as "reminiscent of the Emergency era under Indira Gandhi". "This inhumane government cannot even ensure proper food for innocent children. Instead of addressing the real issues, they are resorting to arrests, evoking memories of an authoritarian past," KTR observed.

KTR questioned the government's definition of governance, commenting: "Is public administration all about arresting people's representatives illegally? This inhumane attitude of pre-

venting leaders from consoling affected children is deplorable."

KTR demanded that the government focus on providing nutritious food and adequate facilities to the children instead of obstructing the opposition's efforts to highlight these issues. "We strongly condemn the arrests of our public representatives and party leaders. The government's priority should be the welfare of these vulnerable children, not silencing the voices that remind it of its responsibilities," KTR remarked.

# Cabinet nod to jamili ...

Continued from Page 1

It would have required ratification by half of the state assemblies. But the Union Cabinet has kept the local body polls out of as of now.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The second bill will be an ordinary one to amend provisions in three laws dealing with Union territories that have legislative assemblies -- Puducherry, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir -- to align the terms of these Houses with other legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha as proposed in the Constitution amendment bill.

The statutes it proposes to amend are the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act-1991, the

Government of Union Territories Act-1963 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act-2019.

The proposed bill will be an ordinary legislation not requiring a change in the Constitution and will also not need ratification by the states.

The government is keen on holding wider consultations on bills that are likely to be referred to a parliamentary committee.

The sources said the government also wants to consult the speakers of various state legislative assemblies through the committee.

Moving ahead with its "one nation, one election" plan, the government in September accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee for holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies in a phased manner.

# Opposition raises concerns...

Continued from Page 1

Minister of State for Agriculture Bhagirath Chaudhary welcomed the move and said, "One nation, one election will be good for the nation. It will help in saving people's money."

He also dismissed the reservations expressed by opposition, and said, "they are in a habit to oppose everything."

BJP's ally Lok Janshakti Party (RV) MP Shambhavi Choudhary also welcomed the move.

"This is an ambitious bill, IJP has supported it... Every six month there is election in some state and leaders focus on that. Many times representatives are also not able to give time in Parliament, resources are wasted," she said.

"One Nation one election

sounds good, if the nation can go in that direction, nothing like it. But what is the reality? Is the Election Commission ready for it? Do we have enough forces, infrastructure?" Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Anil Desai said.

"J&K, and Haryana elections could have been held together with Maharashtra but it was not done. Even the Jharkhand election was held in two phases... If government has some solution it can be discussed, but in present situation it does not appear they can do it," Desai said.

Congress Lok Sabha member K Suresh said his party has already made its stand clear, and it is opposed to simultaneous polls.

"Our party has already cleared our stand from the beginning, our stand has not changed. We are opposing it. Entire opposition is opposing it," he said.

# CM seeks Rs 1.63 L cr ...

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister requested the sanction of Rs. 4,170 crore for an underground drainage system in Warangal, Telangana's second-largest city, under AMRUT 2.0 or the launch of a special scheme. Additionally, he sought Rs. 7,440 crore for linking Godavari water to Musi to help supplement Hyderabad's drinking water needs.

Revanth Reddy highlighted the economic significance of Singareni Collieries Company Limited, which directly employs 43,000 people and supplies coal to thermal power plants in southern India. He urged the allocation of coal blocks in the Godavari valley

to ensure the company's long-term sustainability. Furthermore, the Chief Minister proposed Telangana's inclusion in the Semiconductor Mission, citing Hyderabad's skilled workforce and infrastructure as key advantages.

In a separate meeting with Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Revanth Reddy expressed gratitude for the allocation of seven Navodaya schools to Telangana but pointed to the lack of Kendriya Vidyalayas in the state.

He requested their establishment in districts currently without Navodaya schools and urged streamlining of the process for deemed university approvals in Telangana.

Continued from Page 1

The ACB officials had found assets valued at Rs 17.73 crore owned by Nikesh Kumar and his family members which are disproportionate to his known sources of income. In one bank locker, they found gold jewellery weighing 1.5 kg.

# ACB questions officer owning ...

shocked to find the value of the disproportionate assets.

The questioning by the ACB officials is likely to bring out more facts relating to the sensational case. The agency will also try to find out if Nikesh Kumar was acting as a 'bena-

# FGG SEEKS GUV'S INTERVENTION

## Present SFC reports in legislature'

'Over nine years, BRS govt did nothing'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Forum for Good Governance (FGG) has written to the Governor of Telangana, urging immediate action to ensure the presentation of the reports of the State Finance Commission (SFC) in the state legislature, as mandated by Article 243-I of the Constitution. The SFC, constituted via G.O. Ms. No. 31 on March 16, 2015, was tasked with reviewing the financial position of panchayats and urban local bodies (ULBs) and recommending the distribution of tax proceeds between the state and local bodies.

FGG president M Padmanabha Reddy expressed concern in the letter over the government's inaction, stating, "In the past nine years, the

government has neither acted upon the SFC recommendations nor placed a single report in the state legislature. This lack of transparency has left the recommendations and subsequent government actions unknown to the public."

The letter highlighted the urgency of the matter, as the 15th Central Finance Commission has warned that grants to local bodies will cease after March 2024 if states fail to constitute finance commissions and act on their recommendations.

For the past two years, the Telangana government has not released funds to Gram Panchayats, leaving them financially support from either the state or the central government, it stated.

# Gukesh scripts ...

Continued from Page 1

If Thursday's game was also drawn, winner was to be decided in shorter duration tie-breaks on Friday.

Gukesh had won the third and 11th rounds before Thursday's decisive game, while the 32-year-old Liren emerged victorious in the opening and 12th games. All other games were drawn in the match.

# I am just living my dream...

Continued from Page 1

"I was dreaming this moment for last 10 years. Happy I realised this dream," Gukesh said after his incredible victory.

"I got a bit emotional because I was not expecting to win. But then I got a chance to press on," he added.

"I've been dreaming about this and living this moment since I was 6 or 7. Every chess player wants to live this moment. I'm living my dream. I'd like to thank God from candidates till the championship."

He also praised his opponent Liren. "To me Ding is a real world champion. He fought like a true champion and I'm sorry for Ding and team. I would like to thank my opponent," Gukesh said.

Regarding his parents' contributions, Gukesh said, "The dream of winning world chess championship is bigger for them than for me." Liren, on his part, said, "It took while to realise that I blundered. I think I played my best tournament in the year."

# VRO, VRA system to be...

Continued from Page 1

Speaking to the media on Thursday at the Secretariat, Srinivas Reddy said that the government added 10 new items in the Indiramma housing App. He said that the government removed survey offi-

cials' 'recommendation' option from the App and enrolled 2.32 lakh applications in the App.

Srinivas Reddy said that the government will provide houses to all beneficiaries though some delay takes place.

TODAY	
<b>ALMANAC</b>	
Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Trayodashi:	Dec 12 10:26 PM to Dec 13 07:40 PM
Chaturdashi:	Dec 13 07:40 PM to Dec 14 04:58 PM
<b>Nakshatram:</b>	
Trayodashi:	Dec 12 10:26 PM to Dec 13 07:40 PM
Chaturdashi:	Dec 13 07:40 PM to Dec 14 04:58 PM
Rahukalam:	10:48 AM to 12:10 PM
Yamagandam:	2:55 PM to 4:17 PM
Variyam:	08:32 PM to 10:00 PM
Gulika:	8:03 AM to 9:25 AM
Amritakalam:	03:36 AM to 05:03 AM
Ahhijit Muhurtham:	11:48 AM to 12:32 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER	
Forecast:	Partly Cloudy
Temp:	28°
Humidity:	45%
Sunrise:	6:37 AM
Sunset:	5:43 PM
Updated:	December 12, 2024 5:00 PM

# 32 political parties supported proposal, 15 opposed: Kovind

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

During the consultation process on 'one nation, one election', 32 political parties supported the idea while 15 did not, according to former president Ram Nath Kovind, who headed a high-level committee that studied the proposal.

Delivering the 7th Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lecture on Simultaneous Elections on October 5, Kovind had said that many among these 15 parties supported simultaneous elections at some point in past. The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved bills to implement 'one nation, one election', and the draft legislations are likely to be introduced in Parliament

in the ongoing Winter session.

"During our consultation process, 47 political parties presented their views to the Committee. 32 out of these 47 parties supported the idea of simultaneous elections. 15 parties did not. However, many among these 15 parties have supported simultaneous elections in the past, at one time or another," Kovind had said. Among the national parties, the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) opposed the proposal, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the National People's Party (NPP) supporting it.

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# City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | DECEMBER 13, 2024

03

'CMRF proves a lifeline for the needy'

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
The Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) has become a lifeline for those in distress, said Government Advisor (Protocol) Harakara Venu Gopal Rao. On Thursday, he handed over CMRF cheques to Sri Krishna from Saroornagar and Bhanu Prasad from Ameerpet, at his office in the Secretariat. Venu Gopal Rao emphasised that the government is committed to public welfare, with a special focus on health. He highlighted the proactive steps taken by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, such as increasing the AarogyaSri health insurance coverage from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh, as a testament to this commitment.



## CITY EVENTS

### Kuchipudi Dance

by Srivari Paadalu  
Venue  
Ravindra Bharathi,  
Lakdikapul  
December 13, from 9:00  
am to 1:00 pm

### Gazal programme

By Swaravallari  
Venue  
Conference Hall-  
Ravindra Bharathi  
December 13, from 6:00  
pm to 8:00 pm

### Speech On Entrepreneurship

By Abhay Egoor  
Venue  
ICBM School Of  
Business Excellence,  
Attapur  
December 13, at 11:00

### Tajmahal Ka Tender

Hindi comedy play  
Venue  
Ranghoomi Spaces and  
Events, Gachibowli  
December 13, at 8:00 pm

### Elena Gabriele - OK!?

Venue  
KLN Prasad  
Auditorium,  
December 13, 8 pm  
onwards

### Self-confidence and character building

Venue  
Swamy Vivekananda  
Institute Of Human  
Excellence, Hyderabad  
Till December 15,  
at 6:00 pm.

### NYU CARNIVAL

With singer KARTHIK  
Venue  
Boulder Hills, Hyderabad  
December 31

### Weekend kids cooking camp

Master cooking and baking  
in 09 fun weekends  
Venue  
Culinary Guru Institute,  
Hyderabad.  
Till January 11, 2025.

## Min orders to address RTC service removal cases

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

In response to complaints received through the Prajavani grievance platform, Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnamb Prabhakar has announced the formation of a three-member committee to resolve service removal cases involving RTC employees. The committee will be chaired by Principal Secretary for Labour and Employment Sanjay Kumar, with RTC MD Sajjanar and Prajavani Nodal Officer Divya as its members. The committee has been tasked with reviewing past service removal cases within the RTC and addressing related grievances filed through Prajavani. Minister Prabhakar stated that the committee would examine the merits of each case and provide recommendations to the RTC management for resolution.

## Action plan to expedite H-CITI Project work

**OPNS ■ HYDERABAD**

In order to complete the H-CITI project work swiftly, M Dana Kishore, Principal Secretary of the State Municipal Administration and Urban Development department, instructed officials to prepare an action plan for fast-track implementation.

On Thursday, at the National Institute of Urban Management (NIUM), Dana Kishore provided guidance to officials regarding the fast commencement and completion of 38 road development and infrastructure projects, worth Rs 3,500 crore and junction beautification works worth Rs 150 crore under the H-CITI initiative in the Greater Hyderabad area.

The Principal Secretary also advised that the tendering process for the construction of six flyovers and underpasses around KBR Park, part of H-CITI Phase 1, be initiated immediately with a budget of Rs 1,230 crore. He instructed officials to provide a report on



**The Principal Secretary advised that the tendering process be initiated for the construction of six flyovers and underpasses around KBR Park, part of H-CITI Phase 1**

land acquisition and compensation related to the project. Additionally, he emphasised relocating 4,100 electric poles obstructing 125 traffic junctions within three months to

ensure the timely execution of junction development and beautification works.

To expedite the work, the Principal Secretary recommended setting up an H-CITI Project Implementation Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee with representatives from Engineering, Traffic Police, Electricity, Water Board, Telecom, Town Planning and other government departments concerned. This committee will help ensure smooth coordination among all stakeholders. He further directed engi-

### Virinchi Junction - Pension Office link road inspected

After conducting a meeting at NIUM regarding the implementation of the H-CITI project, Dana Kishore, along with officials, inspected the Virinchi Junction and Pension Office Link Road on Thursday. To address traffic issues, the Principal Secretary directed officials to focus on road-widening and development at Virinchi Junction and the shifting of electrical poles. He also held discussions with officials regarding the feasibility of constructing a link road in the Pension Office area.

neers to design road development plans for each project and evaluate existing utilities at the work sites, ensuring that necessary relocations occur before agency work commences.

## Guv unveils revamped Para-Sports Academy



**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Governor Jishnu Dev Varma inaugurated the revamped high-performance Para-Sports Academy on Thursday, a facility designed to empower para-athletes with advanced training and rehabilitation resources. The academy features state-of-the-art equipment and world-class coaching to meet the unique needs of para-athletes, creating excellence and inclusivity.

Later, the Governor felicitated Arshad Shaik and Jyoti

Gaderiya, who represented India at the Paralympics, Prashant Arkal, who won silver at the Asian Paracycling Road Event in Kazakhstan, Yogesh Ahire, who secured bronze at the same event, Aryavardan Cheelampalli and Pawan Kanoji, who earned multiple medals at the Asian Cycling and Track Championships.

Young athletes from JNV Rangareddy also won 16 medals at the World Ability Games, showcasing India's emerging talent. The event featured distinguished guests,

including Special Chief Secretary for Sports and IT, Jayesh Ranjan, who emphasised the academy's vision for inclusivity and global excellence.

Aditya Mehta, Founder of Aditya Mehta Foundation (AMF), highlighted the academy's mission to propel athletes toward glory, particularly at the Paralympics 2028. Recently, the foundation's para-athletes brought pride to India by excelling at the World Ability Games in Thailand and other international events.

## TG govt to use AI-powered mikes in official meetings

**SAMUEL JOSHUA**  
samueljoshuamjmc@gmail.com  
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government plans to use AI-powered microphones in official meetings and the judicial system, said Naveen Sridhara, Director of Sales and Business Communication at Sennheiser India.

The AI-Censored TruVoicelift system, designed for automated hands-free audio and video, was introduced to improve communication in professional settings. Sennheiser and Crestron showcased the TruVoicelift system and AI-enabled visual speaker camera switching at ITC Kohenuur on Thursday.

Demonstrating the Voicelift system, Naveen Sridhara explained that TruVoicelift is a touchless microphone system designed as a ceiling solution. It captures voices using ceiling microphones with a height range of 5 meters and a coverage area of 40 square meters. He mentioned that the system uses a single channel with frequen-



The AI-Censored TruVoicelift for automated hands-free audio and video being demonstrated at the ITC Kohenuur on Thursday

cy shutters to eliminate unwanted noise.

Naveen described TruVoicelift as a hybrid solution offering flexibility of movement, no need for extra microphones and a hygienic, touch-free user experience with even sound coverage. He noted that it does not require battery recharging and promotes sustainability through sensor-based auto shut-off features. This voice lift system can be surface-mounted, suspended or flush-mounted.

Meanwhile, Gagan Verma, Vice-President - India &

SAARC, Crestron, highlighted the Crestron I-12 series cameras enable 360-degree tracking of speakers using built-in visual AI.

Naveen shared a successful proof of concept (POC) showcasing a 150-seater training room with 12 ceiling microphones. He mentioned that TruVoicelift is now used by Deloitte Hyderabad, other IT companies and educational institutions such as GITAM and Manipal. He also pointed out that judicial systems have adopted TruVoicelift for virtual sessions, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Space for packaging units assured

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

IT Department Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan emphasised that the Government of Telangana can allocate space for packaging companies in industrial parks. He was the chief guest at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Telangana's fourth edition of Packcon 2024, a two-day event focused on future-ready packaging at The Park on Thursday.

Addressing the summit, Jayesh emphasised that the government is moving towards achieving net zero target, primarily driven by packaging sector, citing India's goal of achieving net-zero by 2070. He said it demands the packaging



Special Chief Secretary for the IT Department Jayesh Ranjan speaking at the CII Telangana's fourth edition of Packcon 2024 on Thursday

industry to innovate and adopt the latest technologies. He noted the sector's adaptability and highlighted the government's readiness to allocate space for packaging companies

in industrial parks, enabling them to co-locate with other industries. Jayesh also stressed the importance of integrating with the Young Indian Skills University to design industry-specific curriculums and ensure a skilled workforce.

With the theme 'Innovating Today for Tomorrow's Global Market Challenges - Packaging & Beyond', the summit provided a platform for networking, knowledge-sharing and showcasing innovative packaging strategies.

Former chairman of CII SR, Anil Epur, highlighted the role of rising population, higher incomes and changing lifestyles in boosting packaging demand. He advocated for sustainable packaging to

promote a circular economy, extending product usefulness through recycling and regeneration.

Chakravarthi AVPS, Chairman - CII TG PackCon 2024, stressed the need for durable, biodegradable and recyclable packaging solutions. He called for authenticity to counter counterfeiting and drive sustainability.

Meanwhile, Raja Bhanu, Director General, Pharmexcil, highlighted packaging's role in India's \$54 billion pharma sector, which heavily exports to regulated markets.

He emphasised integrating AI and machine learning for efficiency as Telangana strengthens its position as a pharma hub.

## IITH student wins first prize in Naval Hackathon

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

IITH-Hyderabad student Rishabh Bhattacharya won the first prize in the Naval Hackathon.

Held as part of the Indian Navy's Innovation and Indigenisation seminar 'Svavalamban 2024' in October, the competition aimed to address real-world operational challenges with innovative tech solutions.

Participants formed teams of 1-5 and chose from problem statements ranging from application load balancing on OpenStack to drone swarm coordination and AI-driven speech separation.

Inspired by his research at the IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA) 2023, Rishabh developed an optical flow tracking algorithm for precise navigation and real-time tracking of flying



IITH-Hyderabad student Rishabh Bhattacharya pose after receiving the prize from Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

objects. His solution focused on sub-pixel accuracy, working in varying lighting and movement conditions, making it suitable for drones and embedded systems.

The main challenge was the lack of diverse datasets on flying objects, which Rishabh addressed by combining datasets from Sekilab and

Kaggle. He also created a synthetic dataset to simulate motion scenarios, enhancing the algorithm's performance. Additionally, Rishabh used a framework from his research paper, "GDIP: Gated Differential Image Processing," to improve object detection in challenging environments like low lighting or fog.

## Marijuana kingpin Angoori Bai arrested

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Angoori Bai, known as the marijuana kingpin of Dhoolpet, was arrested on Thursday in the Karwan area by the Special Task Force (STF) and Excise Police.

Angoori Bai has been involved in marijuana trade worth crores of rupees. She is the accused in three cases filed by the Dhoolpet Excise police station, four cases under the Mangalath police station and 10 other cases across Asif Nagar and Gowramma police stations.

Despite being under constant surveillance, Angoori Bai managed to evade arrest several times. She has already faced charges in 13 different cases and has served time in jail. She continues to navigate the court system.

Family members of Angoori Bai are also implicated in several cases.

## CM Revanth unveils Santosh Trophy poster in New Delhi

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy unveiled the poster for the prestigious Santosh Trophy football tournament at his residence in New Delhi. The tournament, set to begin in Hyderabad on December 14, marks the return of this historic event to the city after 57 years.

The unveiling ceremony was organised under the leadership of Sports Authority Chairman Shiva Sena Reddy and witnessed the participation of notable leaders, including Members of Parliament Anil Kumar Yadav, Dr Mallu Ravi, Chamal Kiran Kumar Reddy, Balram Naik and Jitender Reddy, the State's sports advisor. Other dignitaries, such as Khairatabad

DCC president Dr Rohin Reddy and G Vamsi, were also present.

Speaking on the occasion, Revanth Reddy expressed joy over Hyderabad hosting the iconic tournament. "It is a proud moment for Hyderabad to host the prestigious Santosh Trophy after 57 years. This event will further elevate the city's reputation in the world of sports," he said.

Sports Authority Chairman Shiva Sena Reddy announced that all arrangements for the event, which will feature 37 teams from various states, have been completed under the Telangana Sports Authority's guidance. The tournament will run from December 14 to December 31, showcasing the best of Indian football talent.

## T-Hub selects seven semiconductor startups

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

AIC T-Hub, a leading startup incubator, has selected seven promising semiconductor startups for its latest cohort under the Semiconductor Programme. This initiative focuses on innovation in key areas like automotive, 5G communication, biomedical devices and semiconductor design.

The chosen startups were evaluated on technology readiness, scalability, team strength and alignment with programme goals. Over six months, they will receive mentorship from industry experts, access to resources like Multi-Project Wafer (MPW) shuttle services and opportunities to collaborate with semiconductor companies.

AIC T-Hub has supported 205 startups, resulting in 54 commercialised products, Rs 69.09 crore in investments and 141+ patent applications. Its vision is to establish a Semiconductor Innovation Lab, strengthening India's position as a global leader in semiconductor technology.

## 'Climate change a test to growing plants'

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Due to climate change, agriculture is facing so many biotic and abiotic stress and also challenges in managing plant protection, said Dr G Chinnareddy, Vice-Chairman, Telangana Planning Board, at a conference in PJTSAU.

The two-day national conference on 'Recent Advances in Plant Pathology and Plant Innovative Approaches in Plant Disease Management (RAP-PID)' began at Professor Jayashankar Telangana Agricultural University on Thursday.

Dr Chinnareddy said, "Due to climate change, agriculture



is facing so much biotic and abiotic stress and also challenges in managing plant protection."

He emphasised that though conventional methods are available, practicing new tech-

nological interventions/methods such as CRISPR / Cas technology, use of resistant genotypes, biological control, use of organic formulations etc are essential for mitigating present day challenges in crop

production. Further, he stated that we need to ensure nutritional and food security.

He advised the scientists that the research gaps should be addressed and disseminated to the farming community. He suggested the scientists to actively participate in the deliberations and have fruitful discussions during the two-day event.

Dr R Sharada Jyalaxmi, (VC-ANGRAU) congratulated the organisers for conducting the programme. She highlighted the importance of detection and diagnosis of plant pathogens, which helps in deciding the management strategies.

# TGOs demand DA in cash, reinstating OPS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Gazetted Officers' Association (TGO), Hyderabad District branch, held its executive committee meeting on December 12 at the Metro Water Works Building in Khairatabad. The meeting, presided over by President MB Krishna Yadav and inaugurated by Secretary Mohammed Abdul Khader, was attended by state leaders, including Association President Eluri Srinivas Rao and General Secretary A Satyanarayana, as chief guests.

Several critical resolutions were passed during the meeting, emphasising the association's concerns over pending issues and future plans for government employees.

The key resolutions included the immediate release of pending Dearness Allowance (DA) arrears in cash and the implementation of the Employees Health Scheme (EHS) with equal contributions from employees, pensioners, and the government. The association also demanded representation for employees in the EHS trust.

Abolishing the CPS and UPS pension schemes and reinstating the old pension system (OPS) was a major highlight of the meeting. Additionally, the association called for the immediate implementation of the Second Telangana PRC Report with enhanced fitment and urged the government to clear all pending bills, including GPF, medical reimbursements, and arrears.



Telangana Gazetted Officers' Association holding its executive committee meeting in Hyderabad on Thursday

The association raised concerns about the increased workload on Hyderabad district employees due to bifurcation without sufficient recruitment in new districts. They demanded fresh appointments to reduce the burden and ensure smooth functioning of district offices.

Another significant resolution was the demand for advanced skill development training for Hyderabad district officers, with opportunities for international exposure as part of the 4th Future City project. The association also sought the allocation of at least 1,000 square yards of land in Hyderabad for constructing the association's office building.

In a symbolic gesture, the association resolved to have its annual diary and calendar unveiled by Chief Minister Anumula Revanth Reddy by the end of December.

The meeting was attended by several prominent members, including Central Association Treasurer M Upender Reddy, Women Representative Deepa Reddy, Associate President G Ashanna, Treasurer Maduguri Venkata Ramana, Vice Presidents Dr. N Surender and Aluvula Rajender, and other key office-bearers and executive members.

representatives of the Tammali community sought the removal of terms such as "Non-Brahmin" and "Sudra Caste" from their designation, citing social discrimination and humiliation associated with these terms.

Leaders including Are Ramulu, Murali Krishna, and Vatapatra Sai voiced their anguish before the commission, explaining how these terms have subjected their communities to ridicule and disrespect in society. The hearing was presided over by BC Commission Chairman G Niranjan and attended by members Rapolu Jayaprakash, Thirumalagiri Surender, and Bala Lakshmi Rangu, along with Deputy Director U Srinivasa Rao, Special Officer G Satish Kumar, and Research Officer Lakshmi Narayana.

## Kavitha demands Bayyaram Steel Plant for TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha reiterated that establishing the Bayyaram Steel Plant is the right of the people of Telangana. She urged the BJP-led Central government to take immediate steps to set up the plant if it truly cares about the state. Expressing her anger over Union Minister Kishan Reddy's statement in the Lok Sabha that a steel plant at Bayyaram is not feasible, Kavitha criticised the announcement as a betrayal of Telangana's aspirations. "It is unfortunate that none of the eight BJP MPs from Telangana have raised their voices on this issue. Even former MP Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, who once supported the demand for the steel plant, has now chosen to remain silent," she remarked.

Kavitha emphasised that the establishment of the Bayyaram Steel Plant is a commitment made under the Telangana Reorganisation Act and must be fulfilled irrespective of the ruling party at the Centre. She recalled how Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao had written to the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2013, even before the formation of Telangana, to demand the steel plant.



## NFDB wants additional land to expand fisheries

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A meeting chaired by Special Chief Secretary of the State Animal Husbandry Department Sabyasachi Ghosh, and Chief Executive of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) Dr Bijay Kumar Behera, was held today at the Secretariat. Officials from the Telangana Fisheries Department also participated in the discussion, focusing on enhancing the fisheries wealth in Telangana through coordinated efforts by central and state agencies.

NFDB officials urged the State government to allocate an additional 10 acres of land adjacent to the NFDB office

building in Rajendranagar to expand fisheries development activities. Furthermore, it was decided to hold a meeting with field-level fisheries officials on January 7 and 8 to raise awareness about NFDB schemes and funding opportunities. It was decided to utilise funds allocated under PMMSY 2024-25, available in the SNA-SPARSH account, by the end of the financial year. A proposal was made to establish a specialised facility for carp fish breeding at Yellampalli Reservoir in Mancherial district with a 100 per cent grant of Rs 25 crore under the PMMSY Central Sector Scheme 2024-25. Additionally, Rs 2 crore has been proposed for recre-

ational fisheries at Shamirpet Lake in Medchal-Malkajgiri district. The meeting also emphasised clearing all pending cases under the Group Accident Insurance Scheme related to the Fisheries Department. To promote fish consumption and value-added fish products, the NFDB and Fisheries Department proposed organizing the "Fish Festival 2025" at People's Plaza, Necklace Road, Hyderabad, in February/March 2025.

The meeting was attended by Dr Bijay Kumar Behera, Chief Executive of NFDB, P. Nehru, Executive Director of NFDB, and officials from the Telangana Fisheries Department.

## Feudal castes only played Bathukamma, says Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging that some feudal castes played Bathukamma and others respected it, Telangana Congress leaders said. Tribal people, Dalit, Muslim, Christian, Buddhists and Backward Classes (BCs) never played Bathukamma.

Speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday, along with Telangana State Scheduled Tribes Co-operative Finance Corporation Limited (TriCor) chairman Belliah Naik and TPCC general secretary Addanki Dayakar, Mahabubnagar MLA Yennam Srinivas Reddy commented that Dalits, tribal people and several BCs did not play Bathukamma.

Srinivas Reddy said that former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao's family would do anything to protect their sinking BRS boat. "The BRS party's fall is certain if it depends on social media," Srinivas Reddy said, and added that "BRS working president KT Ramarao has the culture of



Congress leaders Yennam Srinivas Reddy, Belliah Naik and Addanki Dayakar addressing the media at Gandhi Bhavan in Hyderabad on Thursday

changing wives but it is not the culture of Telangana".

Bellaiah Naik said that they never played Bathukamma. In fact, Girijan, Madiga, Christian and Bouddhas never played Bathukamma. "However, some feudal castes played Bathukamma. Bonalu is the main festival in Telangana. Feudalism is linked with Bathukamma. I will tell you the history at an appropriate time. Pink color is a symbol of Nizam Rule", Bellaiah Naik said. Addanki Dayakar said that

Bathukamma is Telangana culture, however, majority people will not play Bathukamma. He said that KCR's wife Shobhamma, daughter Kavithamma never wore crowns and questioned BRS party to tell why it failed to install Telangana Thalli statue in the last 10 years. BRS party betrayed Telangana Thalli by changing their party name. KCR is conspicuous by his absence. What is the need of the position to KCR when he did not come to the Assembly?, Addanki Dayakar asked.

## BC Commission records petitions on caste name changes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Backward Classes Commission conducted public hearings across the 10 erstwhile districts and at its headquarters to address requests from caste representatives regarding changes to caste names.

Today, the Commission recorded opinions and proposals from various caste representatives, including those of Dommara, Vamsaraj, and Tammali communities. During the hearings, representatives expressed their concerns and challenges associated with their caste names.

Dommara community members requested a change in their caste name to "Gada Vamshi", while Vamsaraj representatives appealed to remove the term "Picchiguntla" from their caste name entirely. Similarly,



## Harish slams CM for going back on promises to SSA staff

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former minister T Harish Rao has launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, accusing him of failing to deliver on promises made to Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) employees and betraying various sections of society. Addressing a relay hunger strike by SSA employees at the Siddipet Collectorate, Harish Rao challenged the Chief Minister's claim of resolving their issues "as quickly as drinking a cup of tea," highlighting that no progress has been made nearly a year into his tenure.

Harish Rao reminded the people of Revanth Reddy's promise to regularise SSA employees' jobs, particularly during a protest in Warangal on September 13. Despite repeated assurances, no action has been taken. Rao criticised the government for allocating only 7.4% of the budget to education instead of the promised 15%.



Former minister T Harish Rao speaking at a podium

He condemned the closure of 2,500 schools and the tragic deaths of 49 Gurukula students due to contaminated food. The delay in releasing funds for mid-day meals further highlights the government's neglect of education.

Rao also pointed out the failure to implement the Right to Education Act and the dismissal of education volunteers. He described the Congress government's celebrations amidst public struggles as "shameful".

Harish Rao urged the people of Telangana to decisively defeat the Congress in the upcoming Graduate MLC elections. He encouraged SSA employees and other sections of society to unite in holding the government accountable. "As long as promises remain unfulfilled, I will continue to call Revanth Reddy 'Revanth the Betrayer,'" he declared, emphasizing that no legal actions against him can suppress the truth.

## BRS betrayed, looted people: CLP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging that Razakars emerged in every village and town in Telangana during previous regime, the Telangana Congress Legislature Party (CLP) alleged that it was the BRS party that betrayed Telangana people. The CLP alleged that BRS was the party that betrayed and looted the people.

Speaking to the media at CLP Media Hall on Thursday, Thungathurthy MLA Mandula Samuel alleged that former Minister T Harish Rao has been speaking without knowing as to who betrayed the people. Congress is the party that made Harish Rao as a Minister before being elected as an MLA, he said.

Mandula Samuel alleged that the previous BRS government failed to give a single drop of water through the Kalashwaram project.

Moreover, the Medigadda barrage piers sank..

Mandula Samuel said, "There is a freedom in the Congress party. However, there was no freedom in the BRS party even for Ministers. Now Kalvakuntla Kavitha also came. BRS is a burial ground party. Nobody knows why KCR changed the party name. KCR should tell the people as to why he went to Sonia Gandhi's residence with family?"

Thungathurthy MLA alleged that Ministers also behaved atrociously during the BRS regime. He suggested that the BRS leaders give advice to the government or else keep quiet.

Mandula Samuel said that the previous BRS government handcuffed Khamma farmers when they demanded support prices but the Lagacharla incident is different as farmers attacked officials.

## Komuravelli Mallanna Swamy Jathara to be held from December 29

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Endowments, Forest, and Environment Minister Konda Surekha has instructed the Siddipet District Collector and Komuravelli temple authorities to ensure the Komuravelli Mallanna Swamy Kalyanam Jathara is organised on a grand manner. The Jathara, which will take place from December 29, 2023, to January 19 will feature 10 Sundays of vibrant celebrations. During a review meeting held via video conference at the Telangana Secretariat, Minister Surekha emphasised the importance of elaborate arrangements to ensure devotees face no inconveniences. She also reviewed the funds allocated for temple development activities and discussed the preparations for the event.

Konda Surekha said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will soon be invited to the grand Sri Mallanna Swamy Kalyana Jathara. To enhance the experience for devotees, the Minister directed officials to maintain high standards in the preparation of prasadam, including addus, and to complete all arrangements at least a week before the festival. She also instructed the Culture Department to organise traditional folk performances, such as Oggukatha, every evening during the Jathara. Highlighting the anticipated arrival of thousands of devotees, Smt. Surekha stressed the need for elaborate arrangements based on previous experiences.

## Kavitha remembers BCs only after losing power: TPCC

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) alleged that the BRS MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha is remembering Backward Classes (BCs) and Most Backward Classes (MBCs) only after losing power.

Speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday, TPCC official spokesperson Lingam Yadav alleged that the BRS party has the history of reducing the reservations for the BCs in local body elections. He slammed



Lingam Yadav speaking at a podium

that former Ministers KT Rama Rao, T Harish Rao and Kavitha have been speaking as they wished out of frustration after losing power.

Lingam Yadav criticised BRS leaders, alleging that they had looted the people of Telangana for the past 10 years. He recalled that former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao had acknowledged that Telangana's formation was due to Sonia Gandhi.

He made the statement in the very first Assembly session of the state. Yadav also pointed out that Harish Rao

seemed to have forgotten this fact in his recent speeches. He further questioned whether the opposition leader's role was merely to "sleep in a farmhouse."

He also said that the BRS leaders are obstructing caste census due to upper caste arrogance.

He questioned the BRS leaders to tell why they conducted the Comprehensive Family Survey and why it did not make the details public. The irregularities committed by the BRS leaders have been coming out one after the other, he said.



Thungathurthy MLA Mandula Samuel addressing the media at CLP Media Hall on Thursday

## BJP condemns govt for handcuffing of farmer

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana BJP has accused both the Congress and BRS governments of treating farmers the same way when it comes to arrests. Under the previous BRS government, Khammam farmers were handcuffed and imprisoned, and now, under the current Congress government, a farmer from Lagacharla was similarly handcuffed and taken to the hospital. The BJP has called on civil rights organisations to speak out against these actions.

On Thursday, Telangana BJP General Secretary Kasam Venkateshwarlu condemned the Congress government for its treatment of farmers, calling the handcuffing of a farmer from Lagacharla an example of the government's brutal approach. A farmer, who had complained of heart problems, was also restrained in the same manner and taken to the hospital. Venkateshwarlu described inci-

dent as outrageous and strongly criticised the Congress government's actions towards farmers.

Kasam Venkateshwarlu said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who has been promising that he would bring Rythu Rajyam, would face the ire of the farmers following the incident of handcuffing the farmer. Moreover, CM Revanth Reddy has been enacting drama giving an impression that he has directed the officials to initiate action against the officials concerned. Stop enacting dramas and do Praja Palana, he warned.

He wondered whether farmers were terrorists to be handcuffed. It is atrocious on the part of the Congress government to treat the farmer similar to terrorists and anti-social elements to jail. It is an example of dictatorship. What is the need to take the farmer with handcuffs while knowing that the farmer got a heart attack?.

**GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**  
e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE  
Date: 11/12/2024  
No. of Works: SV work -1. Estimate Amount: Rs. 77.00 Lakhs, Bid Submission Start Date: 13/12/2024 @ 03.30 P.M., Bid Submission Closing Date: 20/12/2024 @ 03.30 P.M. Address Officer Cell No.: SE (KZ), GHMC, Phone No. 8790522144. Further details can be seen at e-procurement @ www.eprocurement.gov.in Sd/- Superintending Engineer (KZ) GHMC

**GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA MISSION BHAGIRATHA DEPARTMENT**  
e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE  
Tender Notice No.: 02/SE/MB/KNR/2024-25 (2nd call) Dt: 09.12.2024  
Name of the work: "Improvements to drinking water supply at Madaka Hio Madaka of Odala (M)" in Peddapalli District ("Invited under earmarked works - SC community community Societies and individuals are only eligible to participate"). ECV: Rs. 20,82,421.00.  
Tender Notice No.: 03/SE/MB/KNR/2024-25 (2nd call) Dt: 09.12.2024  
Name of the work: "Improvements to drinking water supply at Potkappali of Odala (M)" in Peddapalli District. ECV: Rs. 32,22,701.00.  
Tender Notice No.: 04/SE/MB/KNR/2024-25 (2nd call) Dt: 09.12.2024  
Name of the work: "Improvements to drinking water supply at Odala Hio Odala of Odala (M)" in Peddapalli District. ECV: Rs. 13,66,120.00.  
Tender Documents are available in e-Procurement Market: 13.12.2024 04:00 PM to 27.12.2024 up to 03:00 PM. Tenders accepted dates: 13.12.2024 04:00 PM to 27.12.2024 up to 04:00 PM. Technical bids Opening Date: 27.12.2024 at 4:15 PM. Financial bids opening Date: 31.12.2024 at 03:00 PM. Officer Concerned: Superintending Engineer, MB Circle, Karimnagar, Telephone Number: 9109122213.  
The bidders are requested to furnish their experience and other details in Zip format. Further details can be obtained from e-procurement market place on https://tender.telangana.gov.in. Sd/- Superintending Engineer, MB Circle, Karimnagar  
DIPR R.O.No: 7821-PP/CLAD/T/12/24-25, Date: 12-12-2024

ACROSS THE STATES



Four girl students killed in road accident in Kerala

Four school students died and several others were injured after being mowed down by a truck at Kalladikode in this district on Thursday evening, police said. According to the police, the victims were girl students of a Higher Secondary school located near the accident spot. The accident occurred at Panayampadam near Kalladikode on Palakkad-Kozhikode National Highway, when a truck transporting cement lost control, ran over the students returning home after school, and subsequently overturned. More details are awaited. The injured students were soon rushed to nearby hospitals for treatment. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan expressed deep sorrow over the incident at Kalladikode, calling it both "shocking" and "tragic." He assured that government departments would work in coordination to ensure emergency medical care for all injured students. "A detailed investigation will be conducted, and necessary action will be taken," the CM said in his condolence message.



ISKCON to set up intl. varsity in Vrindavan

ISKCON will set up an international university, which will impart the teachings of the Bhagavad Geeta and the Sanatan Dharma, Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister Yogendra Upadhyay said. "The first university of ISKCON will become the future of the country," Upadhyay, the Minister of Higher Education in the UP government, said while talking to reporters at Gurukul, ISKCON Vrindavan. "Teaching of Lord Krishna has been propagated by late Bhaktivedan Swami and the followers of ISKCON. The proposed university will reach the heights of the Nalanda University, which catered to 10 thousand students over a thousand years ago," the minister said. "The basic culture of India will remain protected by developing Sanskrit and 'sanskriti' (culture)," the minister said. Welcoming the minister at the Gurukul, ISKCON Vrindavan PRO Pawan Dubey earlier said, "We are going to develop the first university of ISKCON in Vrindavan."



Delhi records coldest December day in 3 years

The city recorded its coldest December day in the last three years on Thursday as the minimum temperature dropped to 4.5 degrees Celsius. The forecast predicts cold wave conditions to persist at isolated places until the weekend. The city recorded a low of 4.5 degrees Celsius on Thursday, 0.4 degrees below normal, compared to 4.9 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The temperature had dropped sharply from 5 degrees Celsius on Wednesday. According to data, the minimum temperature did not drop below 4.9 degrees Celsius in December 2023 and 2022. The lowest minimum temperature recorded in December last year was 4.9 degrees Celsius on the 15th, while the lowest in 2022 was 5 degrees Celsius on the 26th. Cold wave conditions were observed at isolated places in Delhi, including Ayanagar and Pusa, where the temperatures dropped to 3.8 and 3.2 degrees Celsius respectively.

Chhattisgarh: 11 Naxalites surrender in Sukma

PNS ■ SUKMA

Eleven Naxalites surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Thursday, a police official said.



Of the 11, Jogendra Yadav was 'agriculture committee president' under 'Peddabodkel revolutionary party committee' of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), while Hemla Deva was head of the movement's 'public relations committee', Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said. "The other nine are lower rung cadre. The 11 decried the

hollow Maoist ideology and hailed the state government's Naxalism elimination policy as well as Sukma's police's 'Niyad Nellanar' rehabilitation drive. They will get benefits as per the state government's surrender and rehabilitation policy," the SP added.

CASES OF RELIGIOUS PLACES

'No court to entertain, pass directions till further orders'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an important development, the Supreme Court on Thursday restrained till further directions the courts in the country from entertaining fresh lawsuits and passing any effective interim or final orders in pending ones seeking to reclaim religious places, especially mosques and dargahs (a muslim shrine).

"As the matter is sub-judice in this court, we deem it appropriate that no fresh suit would be registered and proceedings are undertaken till further orders of this court," the CJ-led bench said.

The direction of a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan stalls proceedings in about 18 lawsuits filed by various Hindu parties seeking survey to ascertain original religious character of 10 mosques including Gyanvapi at Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Masjid at Mathura and Shahi Jama Masjid at Sambhal where four persons' lives were snuffed out in clashes.

The special bench was hearing about six petitions, including the lead one filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay, challenging various provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The 1991 law prohibits conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. However, the dispute relating to Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was kept out of its purview. There are several cross petitions which seek



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strict implementation of the 1991 law to maintain communal harmony and to preserve the present status of mosques, sought to be reclaimed by Hindus on the ground that they were temples before invaders razed them. The bench made it clear that it would be examining the "vires (legality), contours and ambit" of the 1991 law and it was imperative to ask other courts to 'stay off their hands' till it passed any further orders.

"In pending suits, the courts will not pass any effective interim or final order, including order of survey, till further orders," the bench said. Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, appearing for a Hindu party, opposed

the order restraining all other courts and said the parties should have been heard before such a direction. The CJ said it was quite natural to ask courts to not to pass any order as the Supreme Court was hearing the larger issue. The bench said if parties insisted then, the matter could be sent to a high court. "Can the trial courts overreach the Supreme Court," asked the bench and said the apex court was already dealing with the validity of the law.

Observing the court couldn't decide the matter without the Centre's response, it asked the government to file its reply to the pleas and cross ones in four weeks. It also granted a further of four weeks to other

parties to file their rejoinder after the Centre filed its reply.

Notably, the bench had issued notice to parties, including the Centre, on the lead petition in September, 2022.

The bench also appointed nodal counsel for assisting it in the hearing on the pleas which would be listed after eight weeks. During the hearing, the bench asked, "How many suits are pending now".

One of the advocates said a total of 18 suits pertaining to 10 mosques were pending in several courts across the country. "Ultimately, we will have to hear the arguments," the bench said, observing the primary issue was with regard to Section 3 and 4 of the 1991 law.

BJP's list of probable ministers ready: Fadnavis

SAYS CENTRAL LEADERS TO TAKE FINAL CALL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said the names of the probable ministers from the BJP in his cabinet have been shortlisted and the final decision will be taken by the party's central leadership.

Fadnavis, who was on a two-day visit to Delhi, held discussions on the expansion of his cabinet with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president J P Nadda and senior party leader B L Santosh here on Wednesday night. Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule was also present during the meeting.

"We are yet to decide on a date for the cabinet expansion. The formula has been decided and you will know about it



Pawar were sworn in as deputy chief ministers in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a galaxy of leaders from the arenas of politics, industry and entertainment.

Fadnavis also brushed aside reports of differences among the ruling alliance over the power-sharing agreement.

"There is no issue with the expansion of the cabinet. I had come here to meet my party leaders and discuss who could be the ministers from the BJP. Eknath Shinde will decide on the ministers from his party, Ajit dada will decide on his ministers," he said. Fadnavis said he and Ajit Pawar have come to the national capital for their respective meetings. "Ajit dada has come for his work, I have come to meet my party leaders. I have not even met Ajit dada in Delhi," he said.

Congress trying to bring in 'anarchy', says Nadda

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda on Thursday accused the Congress of trying to bring in "anarchy", as he condemned the charges levelled against Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Thakkar by opposition leaders. Speaking to reporters in Parliament complex, Nadda, who is also the leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha, accused the Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and the Congress of not cooperating in functioning of the House.

Condemning the press conference held by opposition leaders on Thursday where they accused the Chairman of being 'partisan', Nadda said, "Kharge ji is a senior leader, he should know the ruling of the Chairman is final and unquestionable. Levelling such allegations outside the House is condemnable. We condemn it, and it is unfortunate".

"Kharge ji has been given enough opportunities to speak in the House, it is on-record that he refused... He was also invited to come to the Chairman's chamber, but he refused to go," Nadda said.

"It is clear the Congress does not want to cooperate in the House. They do not believe in democratic and Parliamentary systems, and they are trying to bring in anarchy," he alleged. Nadda charged that the Congress was trying to create a situation where working in Parliament becomes difficult. "It is ridiculous they are talking about Parliamentary traditions," Nadda said.

He also alleged that the Congress was trying to divert attention from the questions being raised on the party's links with investor George Soros. Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi should come clean on the issue, he demanded.

Nepal's Chief of Army Staff calls on Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nepal's Chief of Army Staff General Ashok Raj Sigdel on Thursday called on Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, a meeting that served as a 'significant opportunity' to reinforce the long-standing and strategic defence ties between the two nations. General Sigdel's visit to India, which

spans from December 11-14, underscores the ongoing efforts to further strengthen and deepen the defence cooperation between Kathmandu and New Delhi.

The highlight of the day was President Droupadi Murmu conferring the honorary rank of General of the Indian Army on General Sigdel at an investiture ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

"This special honour reflects the long-standing and exceptional bond between the Nepali and Indian armies, a tradition that dates back over 70 years and symbolises the close military cooperation between the two nations," the Defence Ministry here said.



BP changes linked to increased risk of cognitive problems

"With our ageing society and the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease, identifying prevention strategies to slow the decline of cognitive skills in older adults has become a public health priority," Anisa Dhana, from Rush University and an author of the study published in the journal Neurology, said

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A fluctuating blood pressure in adults aged 65 years or above could increase chances of problems with thinking and memory, a study has found. Researchers from Rush University, US, found that individuals whose blood pressure varied the most had lower cognitive scores, compared to

those showing the least changes. Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a known risk factor for cognitive function.

"With our ageing society and the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease, identifying prevention strategies to slow the decline of cognitive skills in older adults has become a public health priority," Anisa Dhana, from Rush



University and an author of the study published in the journal Neurology, said. "Managing

blood pressure and its fluctuations is emerging as an essential risk factor that can be

modified," Dhana said. The researchers looked at 4,770 people with an average age of 71, who had blood pressure tests at the study's start and then every three years for an average of 10 years. Thinking and memory tests were done at the start and end of follow-up period of 18 years. About 66 per cent of the participants were Black and the rest were white. The participants were divided into three groups based on how much their blood pressure varied over time.

For the Black participants, those with the most variability in their blood pressure had lower scores on the cognitive tests, compared to those with the least variability, the

researchers said -- on average, their systolic blood pressure varied by 18 mmHg, compared to 16 mmHg among the white participants.

The difference in scores was found to be the equivalent of 2.8 years of cognitive aging. "These results suggest that fluctuation in blood pressure is a risk factor for cognitive problems beyond the negative effects of high blood pressure itself," Dhana said.

"Older adults should be routinely monitored for their blood pressure and any changes over time so we can identify people who may have this issue and work to alleviate it, which could potentially help to prevent or delay cognitive problems," the author said.



Need to develop aerodynamic test facilities in India: ISRO

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

ISRO chairman S Somanath on Thursday said that there was a lack of sufficient aerodynamic testing facilities in India and therefore, huge investments need to be made to create such facilities.

Speaking at the SAROD 2024 event organised here by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Somanath emphasised the importance of scaling up the country's computational capability. The ISRO chairman said that with the advancements in Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), there was an initial line of thought that aerodynamic testing facilities were no longer required as most of the problems could be identified and solved computationally through simulations.

"So, many of the test programs that were required to be done for the future aero vehicles were actually cut down and at one point we were told to do more simulations than testing. But, as time goes by, we realised that this is not the case. It became clear that the complementary nature of analysis and simulation with testing will continue. I think the present understanding is that it will continue stronger and more rigorously," Somanath said in his speech. He said that ISRO has a certain degree of test facilities, but

only 30 per cent of the test requirements could be carried out internally for the Gaganyaan program.

"Much of the test requirements were not able to be met even with the national facilities and we had to go outside the country seeking help from many other testing agencies in the world to generate data," he said. Somanath said that many of the testing, including jet simulations, "could not be achieved with sufficient confidence in India".

He also said this lack triggered the need to create such capabilities over a longer period of time, and for that, "we need to invest a huge amount of money". The ISRO chairman further said that the CFD capability of the country needs to be scaled up and for that more people are required in that field. Symposium on Applied Aerodynamics and Design of Aerospace Vehicles (SAROD) is a biennial event organised to provide a common platform to share the experiences of aero and fluid dynamics involved in flow-related studies and aerospace vehicle design in India as well as abroad, according to a VSSC statement.

Somanath said that SAROD has been providing an excellent platform for enriching everyone involved in the domain of aerodynamics.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Empowering young innovators

Prime Minister Modi highlights the role of young minds in tackling real-world challenges with creativity and technology

The best way to predict the future is to invent it, said Alan Kay. And indeed how true it is for a nation. A nation that invents and finds solution to its problems marches on the path to progress. Echoing the same sentiment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the pivotal role of innovation in nation-building during his interaction at the Smart India Hackathon (SIH) 2024, emphasising how young minds are shaping the future through creativity and technological ingenuity. The event, which included participation from over 1,300 student teams across India, showcased groundbreaking ideas aimed at solving real-world challenges. The SIH is a testament to the transformative power of education and innovation in building a self-reliant India. The event not only bridges the gap between academia and industry but also fosters a culture of collaboration and problem-solving. At the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar, which hosted the grand finale of the software edition for the first time, 25 exceptional teams from 21 states convened to present their innovative solutions.



The hackathon addressed 250 problem statements submitted by 54 ministries, departments, state governments, public sector units (PSUs), and industries, covering sectors like healthcare, sustainability, education, disaster management and agriculture. With a 240 per cent increase in participation compared to the previous year, SIH 2024 is the largest edition to date, involving over 86,000 teams at the institute level and 49,000 at the national level. Among the standout participants was the 'Big Brains Team' from NIT Srinagar, led by Syeeda Aiemen D Saleem. The team worked on an AI-powered Virtual Reality Friend, a tool designed to assist children with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities. The project, developed under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, aims to help children enhance social and interactive skills in a simulated environment. PM Modi lauded the team's empathetic approach, emphasising the global relevance of such solutions and their potential to transform lives. PM Modi's interaction with the participants highlighted his vision of leveraging local innovation to address global challenges. He stressed that solutions tailored for India's unique needs could resonate globally, contributing to the world's progress. "Every child has the right to grow and prosper, and innovative solutions like these ensure no one is left behind," he remarked. By providing a platform for young minds to explore, collaborate and innovate, the Smart India Hackathon is shaping the next generation of problem-solvers and leaders. As India aims to establish itself as a global innovation hub, initiatives like SIH play a crucial role in realising this vision, reaffirming the transformative power of education and technology in nation-building.

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# AI's boost to the spirit of service

## From streamlining efforts to enhancing inclusivity, AI is reshaping how volunteers connect, contribute and make an impact



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Volunteering has long been a vital pillar of community development, social change, and global solidarity, offering individuals a meaningful way to contribute to society while fostering personal growth. In today's interconnected and fast-paced world, the concept of volunteering is undergoing a dynamic transformation, largely driven by advances in technology. The International Volunteer Day (IVD), celebrated globally on December 5, 2024, under the theme "Economic and Social Development," highlighted the pivotal role of volunteers in shaping a better world. Sub-themes emphasised their contributions to alleviating crises and supporting underprivileged populations affected by natural disasters, man-made crises, or socio-economic challenges. Volunteers have consistently been on the frontlines of crisis management, stepping in where governments and organisations often encounter limitations. Whether during pandemics, natural disasters, or humanitarian emergencies, their role remains indispensable, particularly for vulnerable populations. The advent of advanced technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), is significantly reshaping the landscape of volunteerism. AI enhances the efficiency, inclusivity, and accessibility of volunteering initiatives, ensuring they have a far-reaching impact. By leveraging AI-driven tools, organisations are creating platforms that align volunteer skills with opportunities, reduce mismatches, and optimise efforts. This transformation not only improves the volunteer experience but also amplifies the positive outcomes for communities in need. AI-powered platforms such as "HelpFinder" are revolutionising how volunteers are matched with organisations. By analysing data on individual skills, interests, and locations, these platforms ensure that volunteers are placed where they can make the most meaningful contributions. This precision reduces mismatches, boosts retention rates, and fosters a sense of accomplishment among volunteers. During crises, AI-powered systems can quickly



ly analyse data to identify affected areas and volunteer availability, enabling swift deployment to critical zones. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, AI-driven platforms like "OneRescue" coordinated volunteer initiatives for contact tracing, mental health support, and supply distribution, proving invaluable in mitigating the crisis. Corporate social responsibility initiatives also benefit from AI. Tools like "Benevity" facilitate employee engagement by connecting them with volunteer opportunities that align with organisational goals. These solutions ensure streamlined coordination, impactful volunteering, and sustained enthusiasm among participants. AI-powered chatbots further enhance volunteer experiences by providing instant support, answering queries and assisting with training. In India, a nation of 1.45 billion people, the ethos of service is deeply ingrained in its culture. Family values, religious teachings, and community traditions emphasise the importance of helping others. Today, AI is augmenting these efforts. Chatbots are used to handle volunteer queries related to vaccination drives, maternal health, women's and children's safety, and more. In the UK, AI-driven systems have optimised food bank logistics and facilitated grocery deliveries to vulnerable indi-



AI ENHANCES THE EFFICIENCY, INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF VOLUNTEERING INITIATIVES, ENSURING THEY HAVE A FAR-REACHING IMPACT. BY LEVERAGING AI-DRIVEN TOOLS, ORGANISATIONS ARE CREATING PLATFORMS THAT ALIGN VOLUNTEER SKILLS WITH OPPORTUNITIES, REDUCE MISMATCHES AND OPTIMISE EFFORTS

viduals, demonstrating how technology empowers volunteers to make a tangible difference. Innovative applications like "Be My Eyes" enable volunteers to assist visually impaired individuals remotely, while platforms like "GoodSAM" connect trained volunteers with emergency services in real time. For example, volunteers alerted through GoodSAM can provide critical assistance such as CPR or use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) before professional help arrives. Virtual volunteering has further expanded opportunities for professionals to contribute their expertise remotely. Platforms like "Catchafire" and the UN's Online Volunteering Service facilitate mentoring, legal advice, language translation, and more, breaking geographical barriers and making volunteering more inclusive. Digital tools have eliminated traditional obstacles to volunteering, such as physical distance, time constraints, and accessibility issues. People with disabilities, caregivers, or those in remote locations can now volunteer from their homes. This inclusivity aligns with the 2024 IVD theme, fostering collaboration among diverse communities toward the shared goal of economic and social development. By harnessing the right technology and resources, volun-

teers can work together to address pressing global challenges. In natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods, volunteers equipped with drones and AI tools can map affected areas and deliver supplies more efficiently. Apps like "Zello" enable seamless communication during emergencies, transforming smartphones into walkie-talkies for coordination. In efforts to combat poverty and hunger, volunteers support food banks, organise community kitchens, and deliver resources. Digital tools like "ShareTheMeal," a United Nations World Food Programme crowdfunding app, empower individuals to donate meals with a simple tap, making a significant impact on global hunger. Education is another critical sector where volunteering, supported by technology, has made remarkable strides. Online platforms have democratised access to education, reaching remote and underserved communities. Initiatives like "Code.org" empower volunteers to teach coding skills, equipping students with the tools needed for a technology-driven future. Gender-focused volunteer programmes address inequality by providing legal aid, counseling and advocacy for women's rights, further demonstrating the transformative power of volunteering. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are

### PICTALK



Young women visit a snow covered park after snowfall in Shimla

PTI

## The transformative role of interactive learning in education



AARUL MALAVIYA

This modern approach is not just a shift in teaching strategies but a leap toward preparing students for the dynamic demands of the future workforce

The landscape of education has evolved significantly, with technological advancements and the integration of AI, making interactive learning a favoured approach. Because interactive learning fosters engagement, critical thinking and long-term memory, it makes it possible for knowledge to be assimilated more thoroughly. This is unquestionably an improvement over the conventional approaches, which mostly emphasise rote memory and depend largely on textbook-based techniques. The abilities needed in today's dynamic environment are better suited for interactive learning. Passively absorbing knowledge using conventional teaching approaches results in surface learning, which is ultimately counterproductive. According to National Training Laboratories research, passive learning techniques like reading and lectures only have recall rates of 5-10 per cent. The Advent of Interactive Learning: A more hands-on approach is provided by interactive learning, which combines technology, teamwork,



and real-world problem-solving. This increases engagement and extends retention. Digital tools, project-based learning, and group discussions are all included in this approach's scope. Students in interactive classrooms outperformed those in traditional lectures by 6 per cent on examinations, according to Harvard University research. Here are some ways that interactive learning approaches work better than conventional strategies: 1. Enhanced Retention: According to National Training Laboratories research, active learning strategies like practice-by-doing and group discussions had higher retention rates, ranging from 50 to 75 per cent. Students may directly apply STEM principles

through hands-on experiences. According to research from the American Society for Engineering Education, pupils who participated in interactive STEM activities learned much more than those who received standard instruction. 2. Encouraging Critical Thinking: Interactive learning promotes creativity and critical thinking by allowing students to investigate other viewpoints and pose questions. According to a McKinsey & Company research, interactive learning environments foster critical thinking and reflection while increasing student engagement and fostering productive social interactions. Another immersive method of student engagement is gamification, which boosts students' incentive to tackle challenging issues and permits in-depth learning. 3. Real-World Application: Project-based learning, which links education to real-world issues and increases the applicability of information in practical contexts, is a crucial element of interactive learning. In contrast to students who studied using tradi-

al techniques, students who participated in project-based programs demonstrated superior application of information to real-life circumstances, according to a 2022 research by Edutopia. 4. Future Ready: Through more engaging and relevant instruction, interactive learning equips students to overcome obstacles more effectively than traditional approaches ever could. To educate students for the uncertain and constantly changing times, education must emphasise abilities like problem-solving, teamwork, and flexibility in today's competitive labor market. Interactive approaches also boost motivation and encourage teamwork, which aids students in honing their communication and teamwork abilities. The global EdTech market is expected to grow to \$404 billion by 2025, according to EdTechXGlobal. Students that use an interactive learning technique not only perform better academically but are also better prepared to handle problems in the real world. (The writer is Founder Zamit; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### INDIA'S SOFT POWER POLICY

Madam — The ongoing conflict in Gaza and Israel's military action against Hamas have drawn global attention. In this context, Israeli Ambassador to India, Reuven Azar, praised India's soft power policy, underlining its relevance in international diplomacy. He acknowledged that Israel, due to its heavy reliance on military strength, has lagged in areas like information management and public relations. India has strengthened its global position through diplomacy, cultural influence, and dialogue as key tools of soft power. Initiatives like yoga, cultural exchanges, and multilateral diplomacy have not only earned India international goodwill but also enhanced its global image. Despite its firm stance against terrorism, India has effectively combined dialogue and public relations to make its policies inspirational for the global community. In contrast, Israel's excessive reliance on military power weakens it in ideological battles, further complicated by adversarial propaganda from Arab media. Military strength alone is insufficient; tools of soft power, such as dialogue, empathy, and media management, are essential for long-term success. India's example demonstrates that balancing soft and hard power not only safeguards national interests but also garners global acceptance. Israel should take inspiration from India's strategy to refine its policies and strengthen its information and public relations framework. R K Jain | Barwani

#### UNEP honours Madhav Gadgil



India's veteran ecologist and nature scientist Madhav Gadgil has been named as one of the six 'Champions of the Earth' by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for 2024. He is renowned for his seminal work in the ecologically fragile Western Ghats region of India, which is a unique global biodiversity hotspot. Gadgil made an extensive study on the Western Ghats region, chairing the Western

Ghats Ecology Expert Panel in 2011, and came out with a list of grim and grave findings for the Western Ghats region. The panel's report, which is popularly known as the Gadgil report, recommended in 2011 that the entire hill range be declared an ecologically sensitive area and recommended a ban on mining, quarrying, industries, new thermal power plants, hydropower projects, and large-scale wind energy projects. Gadgil's bold and honest recommendations faced opposition from some of the state governments, political bigwigs, industries, and local communities. Braving all odds, he championed the protection of the earth and the environment. Gadgil's research has helped to protect marginalised people, promote community-driven conservation of ecosystems and influence policymaking at the highest level. M Pradyu | Kannur

demonstrations against atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh and Bangladeshi illegal immigrants. The issue of illegal immigrants, whether from Bangladesh, African countries, or any other country, being detrimental to the integrity of the country, law and order, and social fabric and homogeneity poses potential challenges of demographic change, crime control, drug menace, security, and anarchy. However, this is a very formidable challenge for the government to work out the strategy and implement it in view of the opposition from the immigrants and their local political harborers. A question will certainly arise why only in Delhi and why not in the entire country. There may be a spate of court cases as well in view of the large-scale illegal issue of identity cards of Aadhar, PAN, or BPL. It is, therefore, imperative that a nationwide strategy should be evolved and implemented firmly. Of course, the political parties following an appeasement agenda and vote bank politics will leave no stone unturned to disrupt it, but

it is a national priority and a security threat. Vinod Johri | Delhi

VOTERS' NAME DELETED

Madam — The deletion of the eligible voter's name before the election has encroached about the entire country and is intensifying terrifically. The senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh highlighted an application for the deletion of 3,800 voters' names in just the RK Puram constituency. Such incidents are frequently observed before polls, which wrest the voting rights and thwart them to contribute to choosing preferred leaders. It's an out-and-out violation of the Universal Adult Franchise" in the largest democratic country. It's a grave issue that demands urgent action. The EC must not turn into a complaint tool instead of a neutral body and deploy every effort to address it and ensure the voter's right. Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

### INDIA SHARES ITS VISION FOR WEST ASIA

The Manama Dialogue provided India with a platform to outline its vision for regional stability



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

Even as Syria was undergoing huge regime change, with a possibility of leaving a long-lasting impact on the geo-political mix of West Asia, India's external affairs minister was delivering a lecture on the changing dynamics of international cooperation at the Manama Dialogue. The Manama dialogue is a platform to bring policy makers, and ministers to discuss and debate the strategic defence, security and foreign challenges of West Asia. The dialogue happening against the backdrop of the fast-changing narrative in Syria provided India with a unique opportunity to weigh on its most pressing concerns in and for the region. Syria has been ruled by the Assad dynasty for nearly 50 years. However, this dynastic rule converted the country, on the border of Turkey and Jordan into a brutal police state. Russia and Iran had been supportive of the Assad dynasty, for strategic reasons. Iran supported the regime, to build its axis of resistance against Israel, while Russia, has air force and naval bases in Syria. Global leaders are watching the Syria theatre closely even as Israel continues its war in the neighbourhood. The storming of Israeli troops in Gaza and Ukraine, distracted Iran and Russia, which led to the exit of Bashar Al Assad last week. However, what is of concern to many would be, the rise of rebel leader Abu Mohammed al-Jawfani, an ex-AI Qaeda member.

Syria despite the dynastic rule managed to maintain a secular political outlook where minorities and diverse groups did not feel any discrimination. Many fear that the rebel leader with Al Qaeda credentials, may push the state to a hardline Islamist nation. Almost every nation in the neighbourhood including Israel is watching the unfolding situation care-



fully. Delhi has been agnostic to the regime change, even though the Assad dynasty has been supportive of India's position on Kashmir, and its stance with Islamabad. Any unfriendly regime in the region would weaken India's position and could be a security concern as well. Against this backdrop, the Manama dialogue, with several leaders from the West Asia and the Indo-Pacific, provided an important platform for engagement. Mentioning the ongoing conflicts impacting the region S Jaishankar said, "And this today would extend from Gaza to Lebanon and now to Syria as well. But at the same time, we have to be realistic about competing interests in this region... The second political-diplomatic cooperation that we can think of is really at a time when the world is polarised if not downright violent, how do you prevent an escalation of tensions, how do you prevent conflict from spreading further. In recent times, for all of us, the relationship or absence of it between Israel and Iran has been particularly a source of concern, so some of our diplomatic efforts has focused on that particular aspect. There has been the situation in the Red Sea as well. On a more positive note, the third aspect of the political-diplomatic, I would say, we are also looking at certain trend lines coming out of this region. We have been a supporter of the Abraham Accords and some years ago, we started a grouping called I2U2, which involves India, Israel, the US and the UAE. It is still at a relatively early stage and we certainly hope that in the coming days that its a group that will grow."

India in the past decade, has a trade-oriented foreign policy outlook, where, it knows that nothing binds countries more than an economic partnership. Mr Jaishankar mentioned that India has nearly \$170- 180 billion with the ten-member Gulf Cooperation Council and significant economic relations with countries in the Mediterranean. A new US president from January would also be a key benchmark to watch out for days to come. The relationships are most likely to be economic and based on mutual interests.

*(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)*

# The dawn of a new era: Syria's path forward



NISHAKANT OJHA

As Syria comes to terms with Assad's departure, the road ahead promises opportunities for renewal but is fraught with risks that will test the resolve of its new leadership



The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the appointment of Mohammed al-Bashir as Syria's Prime Minister on December 10, 2024, mark a watershed moment in the nation's history, offering a mix of promise and uncertainty. This transition signals the end of an era defined by authoritarian rule, civil war and foreign interventions, ushering in a period of both opportunity and immense challenge. Assad's departure, driven by a combination of Russian withdrawal and external pressures, has created a power vacuum with significant implications. Mohammed al-Bashir, a moderate politician known for his diplomatic acumen, has pledged to prioritise national reconciliation and reconstruction. His leadership represents a shift from the autocratic governance of the past toward a more inclusive and reform-oriented approach. However, stabilising Syria remains an uphill battle.

Despite al-Bashir's efforts, large swathes of the country remain fragmented, with control divided among Kurdish forces, remnants of opposition groups, and radical elements. Moreover, millions of Syrians continue to suffer from displacement, poverty and inadequate access to basic services, underscoring the dire need for humanitarian aid and international support. Compounding these challenges is Syria's shattered economy, which demands both immediate stabilisation and long-term rebuilding strategies. The role of covert operations by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the fall of Assad's regime cannot be overlooked. Since the early years of the Syrian Civil War, the CIA has employed programmes such as Operation Timber Sycamore to train and arm select rebel factions, aiming to counter Assad's government, which had strong backing from Russia and Iran. These operations evolved



PRIME MINISTER AL-BASHIR HAS OUTLINED A ROADMAP FOR SYRIA'S RECOVERY, FOCUSING ON POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL REFORMS

to include intelligence gathering, cyberattacks, and psychological warfare. Although they played a critical role in destabilising Assad's regime, the complexities of such interventions also fueled unintended consequences, such as the empowerment of extremist factions. For the US, this strategy yielded key geopolitical advantages, including weakening Iranian influence, reducing Russia's foothold in the region, and bolstering counterterrorism efforts.

Prime Minister al-Bashir has outlined a roadmap for Syria's recovery, focusing on political, economic, and social reforms. Politically, his plans include forming a transitional government representing Syria's diverse ethnic and political groups and drafting a new constitution that decentralises power and protects minority rights.

On the economic front, his administration is prioritising infrastructure development, attracting international investments, and combating corruption to lay the foundation for sustainable growth. Socially, reintegration programs aim to facilitate the return of displaced Syrians and rehabilitate former combatants, while expanded healthcare and education services seek to address the needs of the war-affected population.

The fall of Assad and the emergence of al-Bashir have far-reaching implications for the broader West Asia. Regionally, these developments could recalibrate power dynamics, reducing Iran's influence in Syria while opening avenues for normalisation with Israel, partic-

ularly in areas of border security and economic cooperation. On a global scale, Russia's diminished role in Syria marks a strategic loss for Moscow, while China may see opportunities to extend its Belt and Road Initiative into the region's reconstruction phase.

Russia's longstanding support for Assad, which began with its military intervention in 2015, faced significant challenges in recent years. Strained by its involvement in Ukraine and Western sanctions, Moscow has grappled with resource constraints, prompting a recalibration of its Middle Eastern strategy. Domestic criticism of prolonged military engagements has further pressured the Kremlin to scale back its commitments in Syria, leaving Assad vulnerable to internal and external pressures.

Globally, the Syrian transition carries profound security implications. The power vacuum left by Assad's fall risks a resurgence of extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, which could exploit the instability to regain strength and pose threats beyond Syria's borders. The ongoing refugee crisis also looms large, with continued instability potentially driving more Syrians to seek asylum abroad, challenging neighboring countries and Europe alike.

Additionally, proxy conflicts fueled by regional rivalries and superpower tensions threaten to entangle Syria in broader geopolitical frictions. The transition from Assad to al-Bashir represents a pivotal juncture in Syria's history, offering a chance for renewal amid deep-seated

challenges. While the road to stability and prosperity is fraught with obstacles, a coordinated international effort combined with meaningful domestic reform holds the potential to guide Syria toward a more peaceful and resilient future. The coming months will be decisive in determining whether this new chapter in Syria's turbulent narrative leads to lasting progress.

The transition from Bashar al-Assad's regime to Mohammed al-Bashir's leadership marks a critical turning point in Syria's history, offering a glimmer of hope amid a legacy of conflict and instability. Al-Bashir's vision for political reform, economic recovery, and social inclusion aims to chart a new course for a nation shattered by years of war. However, the challenges are immense: fragmented control, a dire humanitarian crisis, and a collapsed economy require urgent attention and sustained international support.

On the global stage, the fall of Assad has reshaped regional dynamics, reducing Iranian influence and opening new avenues for diplomacy while exposing Syria to the risks of renewed extremism and geopolitical competition. Whether Syria's new leadership can successfully navigate these complexities and steer the nation toward stability depends on the cohesion of its domestic efforts and the willingness of the international community to provide coordinated and meaningful support.

*(The writer is an eminent expert on counter terrorism and West Asian affairs; views are personal)*

## Bridging India's urban-rural divide: Empowering rural learners through skilling

India's vast diversity extends beyond culture and language, manifesting in unequal access to education, skilling and employment opportunities

India is a country with great linguistic, cultural, racial, social and economic diversity. People living in urban areas have access to opportunities for skilling, education and employment that are not easily available to people in semi-urban and rural areas. Over the last decade or two, there has been considerable growth and development in the skilling and education ecosystem due to a multitude of factors. Governments – both central and state – have realised that the only way India can benefit from its tremendous demographic dividend is by ensuring that individuals in the working age are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to thrive in increasingly global workplaces.



NAGESH SINGH

Central and state skilling entities have created massive systems that reach every district around India and make top-quality resources available to hitherto underserved audiences.

The corporate sector, leveraging the prevalent Corporate Social Responsibility laws, has also contributed significantly to this by collaborating with government agencies and supporting them with co-

funding, content, certification and job opportunities. The Directorate General of Training (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship) manages a network of tens of thousands of institutions that collaborate with the corporate sector and civil society to make high-quality skilling available to hundreds of thousands of learners every year. All India Council for Technical Education, through its network of thousands of engineering institutions, offers cutting-edge training and internship opportunities to learners around India, irrespective of their location or socio-economic limitations. Edunet Foundation, for example, makes courseware and skills across the IT spectrum

available to learners across engineering colleges, National Skills Training Institutes and Industrial Training Institutes nationally, directly working with lakhs of learners every year.

These programs are offered in blended mode, leveraging classroom learning, synchronous video, online content and hands-on project work. While there is availability of skilling and education opportunities, there are several issues that limit the benefits of these programs.

The foremost problem is access to technology. Since the courses are offered in blended mode, learners need access to computers with high bandwidth internet connectivity and not just mobile phones. Almost every household in



India has access to mobile phones but larger devices that are more conducive to experiential learning in technology are not widely available. Both government and corporate stakeholders can make a huge difference by making current technology platforms available to learners in rural areas by donating and/or set-

ting up labs and digital libraries within the premises of existing educational institutions in these areas. The second issue is access to local employment. Most jobs – especially the technology-centric ones – are centred around major cities and towns. For learners who are unable to migrate for employ-

ment, this is a huge barrier. Additionally, of course, there are many problems associated with mass migration to urban areas. There is a need to create local career opportunities that allow people to gainfully work wherever they are, without the need to migrate to a larger city or town.

This may be done by a steady focus on entrepreneurship that creates jobs locally and helps in the development of rural areas. Rural micro-entrepreneurship, especially focused on agriculture and associated areas, can solve many of the problems associated with mass-migration and lopsided economic development. Local businesses, thus created, will drive the local economy and create local

employment. A stronger focus on rural enterprise will help India by ensuring inclusive economic development. There are several programs by the government and the corporate sector that are trying to achieve this, but they need to be enhanced and made more potent with support from civil society. In an environment where rural learners have access to technology and employment opportunities, skilling initiatives by the government and the corporate sector will make a bigger impact. Learners will be able to learn and earn locally, thereby bridging the urban-rural divide.

*(The writer is chairman, Edunet Foundation; views are personal)*





## From London to Spain, Soundarya Sharma's 'fun' European escapade

Straight out of shooting for the upcoming film *Housefull 5*, Soundarya Sharma had the best of her best time shooting in the picturesque locations across London, France and Spain. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, she shares her unforgettable experiences, from discovering hidden gems to embracing new cultures and how this work-cum-leisure trip was a journey of self-discovery and growth

TRAVELOGUE



TEJAL SINHA  
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From the charming countryside of London to the sun-kissed landscapes of Spain, Soundarya Sharma's latest European escapade was a journey of discovery, growth and unforgettable experiences. Basically, it was a work trip to Europe, where she filmed for *Housefull 5* in various locations, including London, France and Spain.

"I had an amazing time," she exclaimed in an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*. "The countryside of London and everything was just so beautiful. We've been shooting for *Housefull 5* and it's been an amazing experience. It was a fun ride, a laughter ride and I have so many memories and beautiful places to discover."

When asked what she enjoyed most about the trip, the *Bigg Boss* fame emphasised the joy of living her dream and working while travelling. "That's what makes me happy. I'm travelling and on top of it, I'm working and in good company. This is the best thing that could have happened to me at this point in time."

The trip was also a welcome surprise, as Soundarya had resolved not to travel anywhere except for work. "It came as a big surprise and I needed it the most. The weather was so lovely. What could I have asked for more?"

During her travels, she did discover several hidden gems and lesser-known spots too: "We went to places like Normandy and Gexto in Spain and many more small towns and villages that I had never even heard of. It was really a revelation. I always wondered how people live in different parts of towns and different countries, in smaller areas. It's so peaceful, so beautiful, so nice."

Her hotel experience was also top-notch, thanks to good recommendations and accommodations. "It makes a whole lot of difference, you know. That's what creates good memories for you. We were in Central London, living the best life around all the celebrities and amazing people of my production. I met

a few friends too, went out for good dining places, amazing shopping places and the countryside also."

Despite all the language barriers, this trip made her realise that human connections can transcend cultural differences. "I think human beings are almost the same, on every part of the planet, I feel. But, yeah, the weather is different. Because, honestly, I speak for myself. I didn't get to spend too much time with the locals because we were shooting. So we only got to go out to check out the places, shopping complexes and areas."

Soundarya had never been to London previously and this trip was her first discovery of the city and its countryside. There are many places where I have not been to previously, but it was a work trip, a leisure trip, everything. It was amazing. So that was the first time I was discovering London and the countryside," she said.

When it comes to recharging and managing pressure, she relies on her personal sanctuaries. "I think it has to be the temple," she said, because that is where she gets her succour. "Or being at home with my dog and just being around my mom and dad. I usually don't go on trips without my family."

Soundarya's life has been a whirlwind of activity, with most of her time spent in LA, Bombay and Delhi. "I've not been out much. You would be very surprised to know. I've only spent most of my time, the time of my life, either in LA or in Bombay and in Delhi. So for me, even when I'm under pressure, it has to be here. I have actually learned to live with pressure."

For Soundarya, the key to managing

pressure is having her loved ones around her. "I have accepted it to be in this profession. But what makes it special is when you have your own people around you; I think that is what gives you the gravitas and comfort. So my go-to place is actually my dog, temple and my home. So no matter where they are, that becomes my comfort place."

As for India, she believes that the country has its own unique charm. "India is India no matter what. The food, the people, the comfort, the respect—everything. But, I'm yet to travel to Kashmir. I have heard that it's very heavy. I'm looking forward to it. But whichever part I've been to, I think I've also been to Sikkim, Indo-China border. All are very beautiful places. India, especially now, has come to the standards and this thing of, you know, worldly this thing. Especially with the ongoing scenario. People are so well-read and aware, and sanitation is taken care of. There are so many places in India, I would say. India is truly incredible too."

Her enthusiasm for exploring new places is evident and she's open to discovering more destinations. "Maybe you never know, maybe more. Well, I don't know what work holds for me. And what if one fine day I sit and plan some unusual place to travel? I would, but I don't know what's special for now, but this is surely on my bucket list."



## Despatch promises scoop, delivers snippet

Plot

Joy Bag (Manoj Bajpayee), a crime reporter at a news organisation called *Despatch*, finds himself at a crossroads as print media struggles to stay relevant in the age of digital news. His work is perilous, his ethics questionable, and his personal life in disarray. Joy's interactions with sources, colleagues, and adversaries reveal a man driven by the adrenaline of uncovering scandals, often at the cost of moral boundaries.

Facing pressure to deliver sensational stories, Joy takes matters into his own hands when a tip from a trusted source leads him to a high-stakes murder investigation. However, what initially seems like gang-related violence quickly spirals into a complex web of conspiracies, forcing Joy to confront challenges far beyond his expectations.

Highlights

In a time when media—particularly print—is a hotbed for OTT and cinematic exploration, *Despatch* offers a unique perspective on the world of crime reporting. Unlike typical hero-driven narratives, Joy Bag is deeply flawed and that's what sets the show apart. He isn't the ideal journalist we root for—in fact, we know he's far from it. This audacity in its portrayal of an imperfect protagonist is where *Despatch* shines, offering a refreshing departure from conventional storytelling.

Drawbacks

The movie's attempts to explore the grittier side of investigative journalism are undermined by an overreliance on familiar crime-thriller clichés. Scenes meant to be tense or revelatory often fall flat, relying on shock value rather than a deep, introspective look at the consequences of the profession. Joy's moral dilemmas—how he navigates the murky waters of truth, power, and personal ambition—are glossed over, leaving little room for the audience to connect with his internal struggles. This lack of emotional resonance is a major flaw, as the film's surface-level approach never allows us to fully understand the weight of Joy's decisions.



REVIEW

**Written by:** Kanu Behl & Ishani Banerjee  
**Produced by:** Ronnie Screwvala  
**Starring:** Manoj Bajpayee, Archita Agarwal, Shahana Goswami  
**Directed by:** Kanu Behl  
**Cinematography:** Siddharth Diwan  
**Streaming on:** ZEE5  
**Rating:** 2/5

ing the bustling, chaotic environments of India's major cities, thanks to cinematographer Siddharth Diwan's energetic shots. The dynamic camera work keeps the pace brisk, but it isn't enough to salvage the broader narrative's lack of focus. Sneha Khanwalkar's score, meant to evoke the tension of the story, falls flat at times, lacking the punch necessary to elevate the stakes.

Performances

Manoj Bajpayee is, as always, a magnetic presence, bringing gravitas to his role even as the script falters. His portrayal of Joy Bag is compelling, but the film's inability to provide sufficient psychological depth limits the impact of his performance. Bajpayee's extensive filmography raises high expectations and while he does his best to salvage the material, one can't help but feel this project was a misstep.

Archita Agarwal and Shahana Goswami lend some energy and nuance to their roles, but their characters remain peripheral to the larger narrative. Agarwal, in particular, shines in a few moments, yet her efforts are undermined by the film's disjointed storytelling.

Verdict

Despite its intriguing premise, *Despatch* fails to live up to its potential. The disjointed storytelling and reliance on familiar tropes render it a lackluster experience. With stronger alternatives available, this one is an easy pass.

Technical Aspects

Visually, *Despatch* succeeds in captur-

## Much-anticipated pairings of 2025 with fresh dynamics

Pairings in the entertainment industry have always been a crucial factor that audiences eagerly look forward to. While these pairings bring different narratives of love and romance to films, they also add an intriguing twist to the storyline. Over the years, we have seen various on-screen pairings, and 2025 is set to introduce even more, surprising us with fresh dynamics. Let's take a look at some of the most anticipated pairings of 2025:

**Junaid Khan & Khushi Kapoor**

Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor are set to star together in a romantic drama. Although the film's title is yet to be revealed, fans are eagerly awaiting this exciting new pairing because the poster looked really intriguing.

**Prabhas & Malavika Mohanan**

Prabhas and Malavika Mohanan will share the screen for the first time in *The Raja Saab*. This highly anticipated film promises to be an entertaining blend of horror and comedy.

**Vicky Kaushal & Rashmika Mandanna**

Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna will unite in the much-anticipated *Chhaava*. Directed by Laxman Utekar, this historical action film is based on the life of Maratha King Sambhaji, portrayed by Vicky and Yesubai Bhonsale, played by Rashmika.

**Hrithik Roshan & Kiara Advani**

Hrithik Roshan and Kiara Advani will star in the much-awaited sequel, *War 2*. With the film already announced, everyone is excited to witness this dynamic duo in one of the year's biggest entertainers.

**Aditya Roy Kapur & Sara Ali Khan**

Aditya Roy Kapur and Sara Ali Khan will appear together in Anurag Basu's *Metro... In Dino*. This anthology film comprises four heartwarming stories about contemporary couples, and fans are looking forward to seeing Aditya and Sara's on-screen chemistry.



The Purple Pop-Up exhibition, held at Babyland in Jubilee Hills Road No. 10, captivated women with its unique clothing products designed by renowned designers from various states and countries. The exhibition was inaugurated by Amur MLA Paide Rakesh Reddy. Students from the Fine Arts College also showcased their products, adding to the exhibition's appeal. Additionally, the Ankapur Spices stall was also inaugurated, offering over 50 organic spice products to city residents.



The Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) Hyderabad, a prestigious Central Government institute with a legacy of over 50 years and consistently ranked among Indias finest by leading hotel chains, hosted a spectacular Christmas Gala Lunch, at its DD Colony campus. The festive celebration marked the joyous spirit of Christmas while ushering in the New Year with grandeur and cheer.



# STEP INTO WORLD OF ART AND APPETITE

Step into a world where elegance meets eccentricity. Amelia, the newest culinary gem to grace vibrant food scene. More than a restaurant, it's a space for connection and conversation, where every detail, from the art-inspired décor to the innovative cuisine, tells a story.

Drawing inspiration from the elegance and spirit of European art, founder Geeta Amin, together with Deepak Amin and co-founder Timanshu Mokul set out to create a dining experience that would redefine culinary landscape. The result is Amelia—a captivating restaurant that marries classic European flavours with a modern twist, destined to become a must-visit destination in the city.

"The name 'Amelia' resonated with us instantly. It is elegant, playful and full of character, much like Picasso's muse. We wanted a name that captured the essence of our restaurant: a place where sophistication meets fun. It does just that. It is a name that reflects our vision: a timeless classic with a modern twist," said Geeta Amin.

From the light and refreshing Poached Pear Salad to the indulgent Burrata and Truffle Ravioli and the classic comfort food of Brie and Berry, a timeless combination that never fails to satisfy, the menu offers a diverse range of flavours and textures. Meat lovers can savour the tender New Zealand Lamb Rack, while seafood enthusiasts will delight in the flavourful Amelia's Gambas Cube. For a truly indulgent experience, the Pistachio Decadence is a must-try. This decadent dessert is the perfect way to end a memorable meal.

The star of the show is the pizza menu, which features unique creations named after Picasso's famous muses. Savor Sylvette's Classic, a timeless masterpiece inspired by the serene beauty of the young model Sylvette David. Dora's Truffle Delight, a luxurious indulgence, pays homage to the enigmatic and passionate Dora Maar. And finally, Jacqueline's Spicy Kick, a bold and fiery sensation, is a tribute to the vibrant and spirited Jacqueline Roque. Each pizza is a work of art, a fusion of flavours and textures that captures the essence of Picasso's muses.

It's cocktail menu is a journey through Europe, a celebration of the continent's rich history and culture. From classic cocktails with a modern twist to inventive non-alcoholic concoctions, each drink, a masterpiece in its own right, elevates the dining experience. Savour the elegance of the Quarto, a refreshing blend of whisky, melon, ginger honey shrub and truffle air.



For a taste of Dutch history, try the Pineapple Pits, a unique combination of toasted pineapple whisky, thyme rosso and bitters. Or perhaps indulge in the creamy and complex Creation of Adam, a gin-based cocktail with coconut cream, Campari and lime. For those seeking a non-alcoholic experience, it offers equally enticing options. The Moldovian Hangover Cure, inspired by traditional remedies, blends Seedlip, lemon juice and Zeama, while We Believe in Elves, a refreshing beetroot juice and rhubarb shrub-based drink, celebrates Icelandic folklore.

PARTY

Century Mattress has launched its new experience store at Governerpetta, Vijayawada. The store was inaugurated by the director Uttam Malani, along with PS Ramesh of Hosanna Ministries and B. Chandrashekar Rao of Pavan Enterprises, among many others.



## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



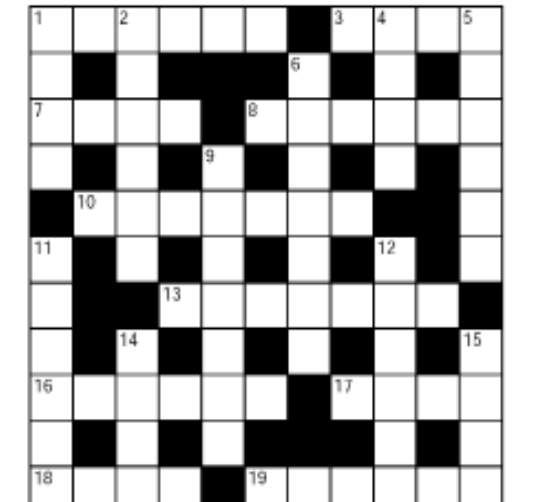
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
  - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

### ACROSS

- Completely quiet
- Scheme
- Plenty
- A covering for fried fish
- Begged
- Inquisitive
- Middle
- Utters aloud
- One third of ninety
- A type of spear thrown by an athlete
- A month
- These tell the time
- The writer of a book
- Jealousy
- Don't go away

### DOWN

- Sprinkle this on food
- Small
- Overdue
- Opposite of wide



# RAJENDRA IS HERE TO STAY!

SURESH KAVIRAYANI  
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**T**here have been many young directors who have been coming up with new concepts in Tollywood. Ko Ve Ra (Konda Venkata Rajendra), adding to the list, is coming up with a different story and with an interesting title.

"*Lopalaki Ra Chepta* is the title of my film," said Venkata Rajendra. "It's a horror film. Not only acting, but I am also directing the film."

It was in 2018 when he made his debut film with *U*. While that film had an underworld mafia backdrop, that film and now he is coming up with a horror one. "Now, the horror genres are going successfully. Look at *Street 2*, which collected huge money at the box-office and even Prabhas's upcoming film, *The Raja Saab*, is in the same genre. There's huge demand for horror films in OTT, so I decided to come up with a horror one," said Rajendra.

Well, not just directing and acting, but he is also producing this film along with Lakshmi Ganesh Chedella and also provided the story. "I want to make the film within my budget limits, so I can't afford a director. Thus, I decided to direct my own film," he said.

Speaking of his six-year hiatus, he shares, "When I made my first film, I didn't have any awareness about distribution and the business of a film, so I distributed two films, *Slumdog Husband* and *Mr Pregnant*, in these years and now I have ideas about them," he said. He added that he also directed an animated film, *Funstatic Thara*, in these years.

Talking about the title *Lopalaki Ra Chepta*, Rajendra said that it is apt for his story. "It's an interesting title, as my film is also a horror genre. When I was at a crossing signal, a girl gave her number to me. When I called, she asked me to come to her house, and then the story revolves around after the incidents," said Rajendra.

This film's audio rights was acquired by popular Saregama music, which Rajendra feels is his

**Konda Venkata Rajendra, aka Ko Ve Ra, is now coming up with his second film *Lopalaki Ra Chepta*, which is touted as a horror comedy. He talks about this film, his struggles and why he chose direction and also acting for this film**



first win. "Recently, we released the first song from the film and it also garnered five lakhs views on YouTube," he said. The song is also released in a variety of plans. "I am playing a delivery boy in this film and I wanted to release the song with a real-life delivery boy, so I ordered something online and when the delivery boy came, I asked him to release it," said Rajendra about his different plans for the song release. It's not just this song; in the coming days he is planning to promote his film differently. "People definitely surprised after seeing the promotional content of my film," he said. There are five songs in the film and now one song has been released and the remaining four songs will be released in the coming days. "Sahiti Chaganti of *Kurchi Madathupatti* fame has sung one song in my film; it came out really well," he said. Davzand is the music director for this film.

Rajendra wanted to market him-

self with this film. "With my first film I didn't know anything, but now I want to focus on acting and direction. After this film release, definitely people will approach me and I will do acting in other people's direction and also I want to direct other actors," he said. There are three female leads in this film. Anala Susmitha, Manisha Jashnani and Sanchi Rai are the female leads.

Venkata Rajendra worked earlier with popular writer and Rajamouli's father, Vijayendra Prasad. "Yes, I learned the screenplay, story writing and editing also at that time. I am still in touch with him, as I recently met him and told him about my upcoming film," said Rajendra.

The film is now in post-production work and he wanted to release it in the second week of February. "I feel that's the ideal time and before that, I wanted to complete the business of Hindi dubbing rights and also OTT business," he said.



## Mohan Babu breaks silence on media person altercation

Senior actor Mohan Babu has released a new audio message, this time addressing the recent incident in which a media person was injured. He posed a poignant question: Can anyone justify intruding into another person's family issues? Mohan Babu urged politicians and the public to ponder this question after witnessing the disturbing visuals.

"My son, Manoj, entered the house at around 8 pm; whether his entry was right or wrong, it's my family matter. How can the media forcefully enter my house? From the last few days onwards, they stayed in front of my house. Is this action justified?" asked Mohan Babu in his audio.

The senior actor questioned the way people entered his house without his permission. "When they come, are they the media? Are they coming to attack me for some personal vendetta? But I don't know and I did not want to hurt anyone intentionally. Everyone has to do their job; we are all labour," said Mohan Babu.

The actor said that many are accusing him and criticising him for attacking a media person but emphasised that the situation was not as simple as it seemed. "You are not seeing the way he put his mike on my

face. I almost lost my eye," he said.

He added that he came out with folded hands and suddenly someone put a microphone in front of his face. "In that darkness, I took that microphone and in that heat of the moment, he was injured. I genuinely feel sad that he got hurt and his wife and family also feel bad about it. But what about me? I felt very bad in the hospital," said Mohan Babu.

The actor said that if he had come out and beaten anyone, they could have filed a number of cases. "If I really did, I myself would go and surrender to the police station, but it didn't happen like that," said the actor. "I was already going through a lot of things because of my son Manoj, but we will sit and sort out our family matters. However, at that time, these people forcefully entered and broke my peacefulness, which is not right," said Mohan Babu. He added that he doesn't want outside people to interfere in his family matters. "We will discuss and sort out our own," he said. The senior actor requested everyone to think about the issue of his altercation with a media person.

"Consider the circumstances under which I reacted. You all think about it. I felt very bad that the person got hurt," he said.

## KEERTHY SURESH & ANTONY THATTIL'S 'FOREVER AFTER' BEGINS!



**I**t's marriage time in Tollywood. Just a few days back, Naga Chaitanya married actress Sobhita Dhulipala, and now on Thursday, actress Keerthy Suresh tied the knot with her longtime boyfriend, Antony Thattil. The marriage was held in Goa and it was a completely traditional ceremony. The actress posted some of her wedding pictures on her Instagram social media and now those pictures are going viral. She added the hashtag #ForTheLoveOfNkye.

After seeing the pictures she posted, it was clear that the marriage took place in a complete Hindu tradition with the Mangalsutra ceremony. Antony also looked dashing in Malayali attire, while Keerthy appeared stunning in a green saree. Antony is Keerthy's childhood friend and they have been in a relationship for the past fifteen years. Close family and friends gathered for her wedding, which took place in Goa. Many celebrities from all industries sent messages to the newlywed couple after seeing her pictures on social media.

On the professional front, her debut Hindi film, *Baby John*, is hitting the screens on December 25. She played the female lead opposite Varun Dhawan, and it is directed by Kales. The film is a remake of the Tamil hit film *Theri*, directed by Atlee. Vijay is the lead actor in this Tamil film.

## Aamir Khan lauds Upendra's *UI*



**K**annada actor Upendra is known to Telugu audiences too, as he has acted in many Telugu films and his Kannada films are also dubbed into Telugu. The actor is now coming up with a film titled *UI*, which is a science fiction action film. The film is completed and has also received a censor certificate as U/A. The film is releasing on December 20.

Not only acting in the film, but Upendra has also provided the story and screenplay, along with the writer and director. The trailer was a few days back released and it is not just the Kannada or Telugu film fraternity that's buzzing about this film. Bollywood's superstar Aamir Khan has now expressed his admiration for the film after watching its trailer.

"I'm a huge fan of Upendra and I was completely blown away by the trailer of *UI The Movie*," said Aamir, adding, "The trailer is just mind-blowing. Upendra, what a trailer you've made! It's going to be a huge hit. Even the Hindi audience is going to love it. When I saw the trailer, I was shocked. Wishing you all the very best."

Aamir's words are not just a testament to Upendra's exceptional talent as a filmmaker but also an endorsement that could propel the film to greater heights. The project is particularly significant due to its enormous production scale and innovative concept. As both the lead actor and director, Upendra has invested tremendous creative energy into crafting a story that is as visually stunning as it is thought-provoking. It is one of the highest-budget Kannada films, with nearly Rs 100 crore spent to make a major impact on both regional and national audiences. The film's Telugu release will be supported by Allu Aravind's renowned Geetha Arts.

## Nithiin's *Robinhood* may get postponed

**N**ithiin and Sreeleela are the lead pair in their upcoming film *Robinhood* directed by Venky Kudumula. Mythri Movie Makers are the producers of this film and they announced that they wanted to release the film on December 25 to cash in on the Christmas holidays. But now, according to a source, they are now planning to postpone the film for a later date. They don't want to release it on Sankranti, because there are many other films releasing on that day. So, they may opt for a February release or go for a summer.

"If Nithiin insists on releasing the film, they don't have any other choice to release on December 25 as announced, otherwise the film may be postponed to either in February or March," said a source. The film promotions also started recently and they released a song from the film too. Interestingly, the second song from the film was supposed to be released a couple of days back, but it didn't happen. "With this many thought that they are planning to postpone the release," added the source. The film was initially announced to release on December 20, but later postponed to December 25. Now, it seems once again it may be postponed to another date.

This is the second time that Nithiin and Venky Kudumula joined hands after their earlier film *Bheeshma* was successful.



## Sai Pallavi to sue rumour mongers

**M**any film celebrities keep silent when rumours or gossip appear in the news. A few of them deny and generally, they don't take legal action. But actress Sai Pallavi has now decided to fight legally if anyone writes rumours or gossip about her or her films. The actress is quite busy, not only in the South but also in a big mythological Hindi film, *Ramayan*, where she is playing the main character of Sita. One of the Tamil media outlets wrote about her, claiming that she had completely changed her food habits for this mythological role. It was reported that "She doesn't eat food in hotels and when she tours abroad, she takes chefs with her and maintains a completely vegetarian diet until the film shoot is completed."

Sai Pallavi pissed over this news refuted to these claims. She stated that she doesn't want to keep silent and will take legal action against these media houses. "Most of the time, almost every time, I choose to stay silent whenever I see baseless rumours, fabricated lies, or incorrect statements being spread with or without motives (God knows), but it's high time that I react, as it keeps happening consistently and doesn't seem to cease, especially around the time of my films' releases, announcements, or cherishable moments of my career!" said Sai Pallavi on her social media page. She added, "Next time I see any 'reputed' page or media/individual carrying a cooked-up, crappy story in the name of news or gossip, then you will hear from me legally! Period!"



# Rohit must return to opening if he has to throw the first punch: Shastri

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who knows a thing or two about winning Test rubbers in Australia, on Thursday asked India skipper Rohit Sharma to return to the opening slot "if he has to throw the first punch" on an opponent brimming with confidence. Shastri was serving as team director when India won their maiden Test series in Australia in 2017-18 and was the head coach when the side rallied brilliantly to stun the hosts in the last tour in 2020-21. The move to slot Rohit at number six did not yield the desired results for India and they were hammered by 10 wickets in the second Test at Adelaide, leaving the five-match clash locked at 1-1 and with everything to play for in what Shastri believes could decide the fate of the series. "That's where he's (Rohit) been at his best over the last eight or nine years," Shastri was quoted as saying by "The

Age". "It's not that he's going to set the world on fire - he could - but that's the place that's best for him...If he has to do damage, if he has to throw the first punch, that's the best place from where he can do it." Rohit had only one fifty in his last 10 innings heading into the Pink-ball Test last week when Shastri, interestingly, advised against changing the opening combination of Yashasvi Jaiswal and KL Rahul after their success in the position while backing the captain to bat in the middle-order. Shastri said he has no doubt the winner of the third Test, starting here on Saturday, could go on to claim the series. "I feel whichever team wins this Test match will win the series. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind. So it is very, very important that India get the balance right, because Australia have got the confidence back," the former captain said.



The triumph of 2021 is considered one of the greatest in the history of

Indian cricket and Shastri, while speaking at the first annual Usman Khawaja



Foundation lunch at the Gabba, said the unity showed by the team, despite

restrictions due to COVID-19, played a big part in the historic win.

"In COVID, the first Test match you start with five bowlers and the same five bowlers don't play the last Test. That says it all, it's like Australia playing without these five bowlers in the last Test of the series, it's a different ball game. Plus you didn't have quite a few batsmen as well. So it's a tribute to the players. "You can only do so much as a coach from behind the scenes. At the end of it, it's the players who have to go out there and do their job and they were magnificent." Four years ago, after getting bundled out for their lowest Test total of 36 in Adelaide, India made a magnificent comeback to win two of the remaining three games and emerge winners. Shastri fondly recalled a conversation between Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill, who was helping out the latter with some useful tips right after his dismissal, as India went for the jugular to score 140 odd runs in the final session of play to shock

the hosts at the Gabba, which was until then the home team's fortress. "I'll never forget it," Shastri said. "Last session, 140 runs to get. We had two different change rooms because of COVID. I went down from the coaches' room to have a chat with either Rishabh or (Chateshwar) Pujara. When I was about to reach the toilet, I heard a conversation between Gill and Pant. "Seventy-one overs bowled, Gill had got out for 91, and they were the two youngest players in the side, 21 and 22. 'Nine overs left, they need the new ball, they'll bring (Marnus) Labuschagne on with his leg spin, you've got to score 45-50 runs there.' "They are planning how they can reach closer to the end score, and no way was I going to stop them. I don't want to change that mindset. So I just walked past and said 'do what you have to do'. In the end, we chased down nearly 150 in that last session."



## Virat Kohli addresses team ahead of 3rd Test in Brisbane

PTI ■ BRISBANE

He used to be the cynosure of all eyes at training sessions during his captaincy days and Virat Kohli was once again the centre of attention as he addressed his teammates here on Thursday. After the demoralising 10-wicket defeat in the Adelaide day/night game, the visitors needed a bit of inspiration going into the crucial third Test of the series, and the youngsters in the side couldn't have got a better mentor than 'King' Kohli himself to guide them with his words of wisdom. The team huddles before the start of the training session has been a constant feature for years now and Kohli used to do a lot of talking during his days in charge. He did take a back seat once he left captaincy but with skipper Rohit also under immense pressure after four straight defeats, the senior-most player (in terms of Test debut) had to take the initiative ahead of the match starting here on Saturday. With vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah by his side, Kohli was

seen speaking animatedly to the group and everyone, including Rohit, listened to him with rapt attention. Rohit faces both new and semi-new ball in nets. Unlike before the pink ball Test, Rohit looked in far better shape during his net session at the Gabba but question marks remain over whether he would be back to opening the innings or stay put at No. 6, which isn't his preferred slot. On the day, while KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal once again faced the new ball at the nets, Rohit took on a slightly older Kookaburra at the beginning. Having faced that for some time, he did change nets with Rahul and also played a brand new red cherry for a while. The Gabba pitch has a decent grass cover and has always been one of the most traditional Australian wickets with both seam and bounce being on offer. Rohit's susceptibility has been against the moving deliveries more than bounce, and hence, it would be interesting to see if he takes on the challenge head on. After his session, Rohit and

head coach Gautam Gambhir were immersed in a lengthy chat and a from a distance, it looked like they were discussing technique. Gambhir was seen shaping up for some shadow drives, with Rohit watching him intently. Akash Deep looks better but will Gambhir drop Harshit? Akash Deep is believed to be the most consistent bowler in the Indian net session but that is no indicator that he will replace the young Harshit Rana, who was taken to task by Travis Head during the second Test in Adelaide. After four wickets on Test debut in Perth, Harshit was smashed for 86 in 16 overs but skipper Rohit came firmly to the youngster's defence. The burly Harshit can bowl the heavy ball and Gabba, just like the Optus Stadium track, could suit his style of bowling although he has been losing steam in subsequent spells after the opening one. Akash Deep at the other hand troubled Jaiswal twice, getting the outside edge of his bat, and those were clear catches in the slip cordon. He also got a pat on the back from the skipper.

## Gujarat Giants appoint Pravin Tambe as bowling coach; Marsh takes over as batting coach

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Giants on Thursday appointed former leg-spinner Pravin Tambe as their bowling coach, while Australian Daniel Marsh joined the side as batting coach ahead of Women's Premier League 2025. Michael Klinger, who joined the team last season, will continue as the Giants' head coach. Tambe, who made his IPL debut at the age of 41 back in 2013 for Rajasthan Royals, brings substantial coaching experience, having worked with Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super Giants. "I'm eager to work with this talented group of players to sharpen their skills and help



them excel," said Tambe. Marsh carries loads of experience, having served as head coach of the Tasmania men's team from 2013 to 2017 and was appointed as

the assistant coach of the Australian women's cricket team in 2022. "I look forward to developing a fearless approach to our batting with the aim of

making our team one of the strongest batting units of the WPL," said Marsh. Ahead of the WPL 2025 auction to be held in Bengaluru on Sunday, the Giants had retained players such as Ashleigh Gardner and Beth Mooney. Gujarat Giants' retained players: Ashleigh Gardner, Beth Mooney, Dayalan Hemalatha, Harleen Deol, Laura Wolvaardt, Shabnam Shakil, Tanuja Kanwer, Phoebe Litchfield, Meghna Singh, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Mannat Kashyap, Bharti Fulmali, Sayali Satghare. Released players: Sneha Rana, Kathryn Bryce, Trisha Poojitha, Veda Krishnamurthy, Tarannum Pathan, Lea Tahuhu.

## Prasar Bharati to broadcast Hockey India League

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming Hockey India League, which is being revived after seven years, will be telecast live on the country's national broadcaster, Prasar Bharati. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard was signed in a ceremony between Abhishek Agarwal, Deputy Director General Sports, Prasar Bharati, and Hockey India Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh. Set to commence on December 28 in Rourkela, HIL will be broadcast live across the nation through Doordarshan and Prasar Bharati's new OTT platform -- Waves. This edition of the HIL is path-breaking because it will feature the inaugural season of the women's league alongside the men's competition. While the men's competition will be played in Rourkela, a four-team maiden tournament for the women will be hosted at Ranchi. Navneet Sehgal, chairman Prasar Bharati, emphasised the importance of this partnership. "This is a proud moment for hockey, a sport that has captured the hearts of millions of Indians, and for Prasar Bharati, as we come together to bring the Hockey India League to every corner of the country. Our goal is to showcase this prestigious league to households across India, including remote towns and villages where future hockey stars are emerging. "With Doordarshan's extensive reach and our OTT platform, Waves, we will ensure that the Hockey India League becomes a national celebration, inspiring a deeper connection between the sport and its fans. Together, we aim to elevate hockey's prominence and turn it into a true festival for the entire nation," he said.

## Momentum is with Australia after win at Adelaide, says Sunil Gavaskar

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar feels Australia will have the momentum in the third Test against India starting on Saturday thanks to their victory in the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide last week. Australia levelled the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy 1-1 with a 10-wicket win in the day-night Test after losing the first Test at Perth by 295 runs. "The momentum that the Indian team got in Perth was lost during the 10-day gap. Now, the momentum is with Australia because they have won this Test match," Gavaskar told Star Sports. "After the Adelaide Test, a few days later, you are playing at The Gabba. So, the momentum is now with the



Australian team," he added. Speaking to the same channel, former spinner Harbhajan Singh said India should try to play their best cricket to register a win at the 'Gabba' before travelling to more favourable venues in Sydney and Melbourne. "Their best chances will be, I

think, in Sydney and Melbourne. Anyway, if you play your best cricket at The Gabba and win there, then you will definitely win one match out of Melbourne or Sydney," Harbhajan said. He said India have the ability to make a comeback into the series despite the heavy loss

in Adelaide. "The equality of the first two Tests shows that both teams have the ability to come back. Australia has come back; now maybe it's India's turn to turn the tables," he said. The owner of 711 international wickets too agreed that the long interval between the first and second Test resulted in India losing the momentum. "This series is tough because both teams have had losses. What happened with Australia in Perth, maybe they didn't expect it. And what happened with India in Adelaide, maybe India also didn't expect it. "Although there was a very long gap in the middle between the two Tests, sometimes such a gap spoils the momentum, and it happened here," he said.

# Manchester City crisis deepens with loss to Juventus in Champions League

AP ■ PARIS

Manchester City plunged deeper into trouble in the Champions League by losing 2-0 at Juventus, the latest setback in a scarcely believable run of poor results for the ailing English champions. City dropped to 22nd place in the 36-team standings, with only the top 24 advancing. Progressing to the next round of the new-look format looked a certainty before the season for a team that was European champion in 2023 and has won the last four Premier League titles. But not anymore as City manager Pep Guardiola battles injuries and an apparent loss of belief among his players. City has won just one of its last 10 matches in all competitions, with goals by Dušan Vlahovic and Weston McKennie inflicting the latest defeat and igniting Juventus' qualification hopes. City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan described the team's problem as a "mental issue." Opponents "are able to break our rhythm with the smallest of things," Gundogan said on

Wednesday. "They don't even need to do much and it has such a big effect on us right now." Barcelona jumped into second place in the league standings, behind Liverpool, and is guaranteed to advance after a 3-2 win at Borussia Dortmund. Raphinha and Ferran Torres, with two goals, scored for Barca. Arsenal beat Monaco 3-0 mainly thanks to two goals by Bukayo Saka to move into third place and be the highest of six teams on 13 points. The top eight qualify directly for the last 16 and the teams placed No. 9-24 go into a two-legged playoff. Danger for City City has two games to save its faltering Champions League campaign and the first is against Paris Saint-Germain, another giant in trouble in 25th place — one spot out of the qualifying positions. Vlahovic put Juventus ahead in the 53rd when he powered a header goalward straight at City goalkeeper Ederson, who could only parry the ball over his own line. Two American substitutes



sealed the win for Juve, with McKennie volleying home from Timothy Weah's cross. Juventus moved into 14th place. Super-sub Torres Ferran Torres came off the bench to inspire Barcelona to a fifth win

in six games and push Dortmund, last season's runner-up, out of the top eight. Torres came on in the 71st to replace Robert Lewandowski, who had a quiet game against his former club. Just four minutes

later, Torres scored a goal on the rebound from Dani Olmo's shot. Serhuy Guirassy's second goal of the game leveled the score at 2-2 but Torres scored again in the 85th off Lamine Yamal's pass on the counter.

Antoine Griezmann scored

Raphinha gave Barcelona the lead before Guirassy equalised from the penalty spot. Raphinha and Guirassy are tied for second place in the scoring chart on six goals, behind Lewandowski's competition-high seven. Home comforts for Arsenal Arsenal secured a third straight home win without conceding in the league stage, with Saka scoring in the 34th and 78th minutes and sending in a shot that was turned into the net by substitute Kai Havertz in the 88th. Arsenal is ahead of Bayer Leverkusen, Aston Villa, Inter Milan, Brest and Lille on goal difference. Lille won 3-2 at home to Sturm Graz on Wednesday. In-form Alvarez Man City could sure do with Julian Alvarez at the moment. With a brilliant curling finish to open the scoring, the Argentina striker helped Atletico Madrid beat Slovan Bratislava 3-1 and provide a timely reminder of what City is missing after selling him for more than USD 100 million in August. Alvarez has 12 goals for the season, with four coming in the Champions League. Antoine Griezmann scored

Atletico's other two goals at Metropolitan stadium as the Spanish team climbed to 11th place after a 10th straight win in all competitions. Tribute to grieving teammate When Lukasz Lakomy gave Young Boys the lead against Stuttgart, he ran toward the sideline and held up teammate Meschack Elia's jersey as others gathered around him. The gesture was a tribute after Elia's son died unexpectedly this week after a short illness. Elia wasn't playing as he was on his way to his native Congo, where his son died, to be with his family. Both teams wore black armbands and there was a moment of silence before the game, which was won 5-1 by Stuttgart. Late winner Tammy Abraham scored an 87th-minute winner as AC Milan beat Red Star Belgrade 2-1 to move one point off the top eight. Milan lost Alvaro Morata and Ruben Loftus-Cheek to muscle injuries in the first half. Benfica's five-match winning streak ended with a 0-0 home draw against Bologna, and Feyenoord had a 4-2 win over Sparta Prague.