

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
 The pioneer

There was a feeling of insecurity when the new government took charge in Andhra Pradesh. However, that ended after the floods in Amaravati. Investors are now afraid of investing in Amaravati and everyone is now coming to Telangana. Hyderabad real estate prices have not fallen. In fact, it has increased in the last three months

**-Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Revenue Minister**

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**Need to expand trade between India, Armenia:**  
**Murmu**

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**GOVT LAUNCHES**  
**RS 1,000-CR CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME**

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**Upendra's 'lifelong dream' gets fulfilled with Rajnikanth's**  
**COOLIE**

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**DON'T MISS...**  
**Govt to relax detention policy**

Telangana Health Minister C Damodar Raja Narasimha on Monday said that the detention policy for students in engineering colleges in Telangana will be looked at to get relaxed for one year. He has conducted meetings with the officials of the education department at the Secretariat and found out details regarding to the Detention Policy impact on engineering students. The Minister's statement comes following ...

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**BJP likely to place bets on fresh faces**

The BJP candidates' list for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, expected around last week of this month, is likely to have a significant number of fresh faces, party leaders said on Monday. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has announced its candidates on all the 70 constituencies for the polls due to be held in February next year. The Congress too has announced 21 candidates so far. The final round of ...

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**Air India revamps int'l network**

Air India will revamp its international network by deploying retrofitted A320 neo aircraft, erstwhile Vistara's A321 neo and B787-9 planes on certain routes as well as optimise schedules for flights from Delhi to Paris and Frankfurt. The Tata Group-owned airline, which is undergoing an ambitious five-year transformation plan, will deploy its retrofitted A320 neos for all flights between Delhi and Bangkok from January 16, 2025. These planes will ...

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**Jasprit Bumrah defends Indian team**

Jasprit Bumrah on Monday defended the struggling Indian team in Australia and played down talk of additional pressure on him, saying it's a side in transition and given his experience, it's his "job" to shoulder extra responsibility. Having taken a seemingly erroneous call of bowling first in the third Test at the Gabba here, India conceded a huge first-innings total of 445 despite Bumrah returning 6/76. In response, the visitors ...

-SPORTS

**Tabla wizard Zakir Hussain no more**



**Dies in US hospital due to idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain died in a hospital in San Francisco, US, his family said on Monday. He was 73. Hussain died from complications arising out of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, the family said in a statement. He had been in hospital for the past two weeks and was shifted to the intensive care unit (ICU) after his condition deteriorated. Hussain's sister Khurshid Aulia said he passed away "very peacefully". "He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy cherished by countless music lovers around the globe, with an influence that will resonate

The family said in its statement, "He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy cherished by countless music lovers around the globe, with an influence that will resonate

Regarded as the greatest tabla player of his generation, Hussain is survived by his wife Antonia Minneola, and their daughters -- Anisa Qureshi and Isabella Qureshi. Born on March 9, 1951, he was the son of legendary tabla master Ustad Alla Rakha.



**One of a kind musician**  
 Nation mourns Zakir's demise

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, English guitarist John McLaughlin, renowned flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia and other personalities from different walks of life paid rich tributes to Zakir Hussain, remembering the percussionist as the 'King' of tabla, a one-of-a-kind musician, and one of the most loved artists around the world.

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**'Formula probe as per law'**

**ACB to probe KTR and Arvind Kumar soon: Ponguleti**  
**Says govt to send Governor approved file to ACB any time**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The investigation into the Formula E-Car Racing case is going on as per law, Revenue, Housing and Information and Public Relations Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said. He said the government had got the Governor's permission to probe BRS Working President KT Rama Rao. He said the Governor gave permission to the government after seeking legal advice.

The Chief Secretary will send the file that the Governor approved allowing KTR to be investigated to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Monday night or Tuesday. The ACB will conduct a probe as per law, Ponguleti said.

He said the Chief Secretary had given permission to probe IAS officer Arvind Kumar in the same case.



"We gave a letter to the Governor much earlier but the Governor gave permission only now. The money went to foreign countries during the Formula E-Car Racing. The BRS Government did not take RBI permission. The probe will reveal where the money has gone. Money transfer in E-Car racing is nothing but match-fixing. Corruption worth crores took place. The ACB will start its probe and facts will come out. It is up to BRS leaders to decide whether they should launch a padayatra or not after coming out of jail. The BRS leaders' statements that the state will become a fireball reveal their arrogance. Action will be taken as per law," Ponguleti said.

He was speaking to the media



after the Cabinet meeting held for five hours in the Assembly Committee Hall on Monday. He said the Cabinet discussed the Governor's approval for prosecuting KTR and the looting that took place during the Formula E-Car Racing event.

"I cannot say about KTR's arrest. The law will take its own course. BRS leaders said recently that Ponguleti's political bombs were defused. If my bombs were defused, then why did KTR run to New Delhi? BRS MLAs behaved like goons in the Assembly. They disturbed the House by displaying placards and chanting slogans as they don't have anything to speak in the House," Ponguleti said.

He said the government will make the ROR Act-2024 law in this session and would not take any vengeful acts.

**BRS, AIMIM walkout from BAC meeting**

**BAC to hold Assembly session till Dec 21**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Telangana Assembly's Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting decided to continue the Assembly session till December 21. However, the BRS and the AIMIM staged a walkout from the BAC meeting. The BRS announced that they walked out from the BAC meeting as the government did not give clarity on working days and the subjects for debates.

A heated argument took place between the BRS and the Congress at the BAC meeting on wearing T-shirts by BRS MLAs. Reacting to it, Harish asked the government to clarify whether Rahul Gandhi went to Parliament wearing a T-shirt or not.

Later, speaking to the media, Harish expressed unhappiness over the BAC meeting. The government failed to give clarity on the Assembly's working days even though the meeting was held for an hour and so the BRS staged a walkout.

Harish said the BRS asked the government to run the house for 15 days, however, the government

wanted to run the House for just five days. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister said at the meeting that the opposition leaders need to give only advice. The AIMIM too staged a walkout on this issue.

Harish said they had informed the Speaker that the government was not following protocol. He said that they had asked the government to explain how it would introduce Bills without conducting the BAC meeting and how the government was not running the House citing marriages.

He said they also asked the government to allow Zero Hour every day.

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**BAC is nothing but 'Biscuits And Chai': Harish**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The BRS staged a walkout from the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting on Monday, protesting over the government's failure to clarify the duration of the Assembly session.

Senior BRS leader Harish Rao strongly criticized the proceedings, accusing the BAC of functioning like a "biscuits and chai" meeting without taking concrete decisions.

Harish demanded that the session should run for at least 15 days to address critical issues, particularly the Lagcherla farmers' issue.

"We insisted on a discussion regarding the inhuman treatment of Lagcherla farmers, who were handcuffed for protecting their lands. This is a crucial matter that cannot be sidelined," he asserted.

He emphasised the importance of dedicating a day for the government and another for the opposition to maintain parliamentary traditions. "The handcuffing of farmers is a key issue for us,"

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**There is no delay in arresting actor Mohan Babu: CP Sudheer Babu**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

There was no delay in arresting actor Mohan Babu and an investigation regarding the three FIRs connected to disputes in the family of actor Manchu Mohan Babu is underway, Rachakonda Police Commissioner G. Sudheer Babu said.

Addressing the media on Monday, the Commissioner said that Mohan Babu's statement is yet to be recorded as the actor has approached the High Court and has an order until December 24 to appear before the police.

"We had issued notices to him earlier. We will issue another notice



seeking his appearance before investigation officials and approach the High Court if we can proceed before December 24," Sudheer said.

Responding to Mohan Babu's hospital visit to meet the TV journalist who was injured in his attack and travelling to Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh while claiming that he had medical problems, the Commissioner said, "I do not want to read between the lines. The visit was personal and the police will go by rules."

Regarding weapons, Sudheer said that Mohan Babu has no weapons in Rachakonda police limits and whatever he has in another place he was told to hand over.

**Will issue 10 lakh new white ration cards after Sankranti: Uttam**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Telangana Government will issue 10 lakh white ration cards after Sankranti. This is expected to benefit an estimated 31 lakh people, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy said.

Replying to a query during Question Hour in the Legislative Council on Monday, he said the state government will use data obtained from the recent caste census to decide eligibility for the new ration cards.

This decision is projected to add a financial burden of Rs 956 crore annually to the exchequer. He said that over 18 lakh applications to add names to existing ration cards have been pending at Mee Seva centres



for over a decade. The issue of new ration cards is meant to tackle this backlog and replacing old ration cards with smart cards would

enhance efficiency.

Uttam said the new white ration card scheme was conceptualised under Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's leadership. A sub-committee, chaired by the minister himself and including Damodar Raja Narasimha and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, held many meetings to finalise the eligibility criteria.

These recommendations, based on the Sachchidananda Saxena Committee guidelines, as well as input from MLAs, MLCs and MPs have been submitted to the cabinet for approval.

In addition to the new cards, the government is addressing gaps in fair-price shop operations. Steps are being taken to fill vacancies in these shops, and

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**Power utilities gear up to meet summer demand**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Southern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited has taken steps to meet the demand for power during the next summer season.

The Chairman & Managing Director, Musharraf Faruqi, IAS, visited field units and inspected the work being done to meet the summer surge in demand for power. The CMD inspected the 132 KV sub-station in Bowrampet, the work on the tower and inaugurated the new 8 MVA transformer installed at the Bourampet 33/11 KV sub-station.

Among the works undertaken as part of summer readiness in Greater Hyderabad are the separation/interlinking of 35 11 KV feeders, upgrading and adding

**Among the works undertaken as part of summer readiness in Greater Hyderabad are the separation/interlinking of 35 11 KV feeders, upgrading and adding 149 distribution transformers in the Hyderabad Central Circle, separation/interlinking of 90 11 KV feeders, and separation/interlinking of 14 33 KV feeders**

149 distribution transformers in the Hyderabad Central Circle, separation/interlinking of 90 11 KV feeders, and separation/interlinking of 14 33 KV feeders.

Other works are interlinking 14 upgrading/addition of transformers, 545 upgrading/addition of distribution transformers in Habsiguda circle, splitting/interlinking of

127 11 KV Feeders, splitting/interlinking of 33 KV feeders, upgrading/addition of 25 power transformers, upgrading of distribution transformers in Cyber City Circle, separation/interlinking of 49 11 KV feeders, separation/interlinking of seven 33 KV feeders, upgrading/addition of 23 power transformers, upgrading/addition of 309 distribution transformers in Saroor Nagar Circle, interlinking of 46 11 KV feeders, upgrading/addition of 73 DTRs in Banjara Hills Circle, 67 11 KV

feeders separation/interlinking, separation/interlinking of nine 33 KV feeders, upgrading/addition of 24 power transformers, upgrading/addition of 171 distribution transformers in Rajendra Nagar Circle, separation/interlinking of 18 11 KV feeders, upgrading/addition of six power transformers, and upgrading/ addition of 137 distribution transformers in Hyderabad South Circle.

In Rangareddy zone, where there is a possibility of huge increase in electricity demand, 254 11 KV feeders will be divided/interlinked, 26 33 KV feeders will be divided/interlinked, 81 power transformers will be upgraded/added, and 1,252 distribution transformers will be upgraded/added.

The demand for electricity is expected to increase significantly in the GHMC area compared to last year's dry season.

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**'MISLEADING THE HOUSE ON DEBT'**  
**BRS seeks Speaker's nod for privilege motion**

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The BRS Legislative Party has urged Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad to approve a privilege motion against the Finance Minister for allegedly presenting misleading debt figures in the Telangana Assembly.

The BRS accused the Congress government of inflating the state's debt to Rs 7 lakh crore, while the RBI cited it at Rs 3.89 lakh crore in the RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian States.

"The Finance Minister's misleading statements misled the Assembly and the people of Telangana," said BRS Working President KT Rama Rao.

He emphasised legislative traditions, recalling a similar motion permitted under then-Speaker Manohar against former Chief



Minister Kiran Kumar Reddy. The BRS demanded that accurate debt figures should be presented or a privilege motion debate be allowed.

The BRS slammed the Congress Government for prioritizing a discussion about tourism over the

critical Lagcherla farmers' issue. KTR criticized the administration for ignoring the imprisonment of farmers of Vikarabad, the Speaker's home district, and called for an immediate debate on the matter.

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## Hyd real estate prices didn't crash, says Ponguleti

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Hyderabad real estate industry has not crashed. In fact, real estate prices have increased in the last three months, Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said.

He said that there was a feeling of insecurity when a new government was formed in Andhra Pradesh. However, that feeling disappeared after the floods in Amaravati. Investors are now afraid of investing in Amaravati and they are coming to Telangana now, the Minister said during a chat with journalists in the Assembly lobby on Monday.

He said the revenue from stamps and registrations has increased compared to the last three years and that things will settle down in the next two or three years. There is no ill will against the Congress Government, he added.

The Minister said the government will give Rs 12,000 crore to poor people who have no land. The government is thinking of releasing Rs 1000 crore for this scheme and about 15 lakh families will benefit.

He said the government

will give Rythu Bharosa to farmers on Sankranti and that the government is trying to pay Aasara pensions.

He said that there is no meaning in moving a privilege motion against Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka. Corporations under the government are unable to earn a single rupee on their own, he said and added that it is a fact that the BRS Government ran up debts amounting to Rs 7 lakh crore. However, the same BRS is now trying to blame the Congress Government, he said.

He asked BRS leaders to make the loan transactions of government corporations public. KTR should know that the loans taken by corporations would also be included in the government account, he said.

The BRS is creating unwanted hoo-ha in the House only to prevent a debate, he said and that it would be good if BRS leader K. Chandrasekhar Rao came to the Assembly.

Ponguleti said that there is now no fear of HYDRAA although people had some fear in the beginning. The people now know about

## GHMC POLLS Tickets only for strong leaders: Ponnam



Hyderabad in-charge Minister Ponnam Prabhakar addressing the GHMC elections review meeting on Monday

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Congress will give party tickets to strong leaders during the upcoming GHMC elections, Hyderabad in-charge Minister Ponnam Prabhakar said.

He said the party will recognize leaders working at the field level and will give tickets

to leaders who mingle with people.

Addressing the Hyderabad Congress review meeting on Monday, Ponnam suggested that leaders should be close to caste organizations in Hyderabad city. The Minister said the party would recommend suitable leaders for nominated posts in

Hyderabad.

"The Congress should become strong in Hyderabad by the time of GHMC elections and only then can the party win elections. Hyderabad Congress leaders should take the GHMC elections as a matter of prestige as it is very important for the party. Congress leaders should take the party's welfare programmes to people effectively," he said.

AICC in-charge General Secretary Deepa Das Munshi appealed to Hyderabad leaders to win back the party's lost sheen. The party will become strong if all leaders and activists work together in Hyderabad, he said.

"Our party which is in power in the state should also gain a foothold in the GHMC area. Leaders will not get results if they work in a non-serious manner. Division-wise meetings should be held to strengthen the party. Youth and women should participate in all meetings," he said.

TPCC chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud said the party's target is to win a majority of seats in the GHMC elections.

He said that BRS leaders grabbed lands in Hyderabad as they liked during their 10-year rule. Hundreds of tanks and lakes were grabbed, he said and added that HYDRAA's objective is to end land grabbing.

He said that some parties won a majority by inciting people using caste and religion during the last GHMC elections.

## Rs 31,000 crore allotted for NHs in Telangana

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Centre has allocated Rs 31,000 crore to Telangana for the development of National Highways (NHs) from 2014. This information was revealed in a reply by Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, to an unstarred question in the Lok Sabha.

Replying to a question by Telangana MP Raghunandan Rao, Gadkari detailed Telangana's extensive NH network, highlighting their lengths and the districts they pass through. The state has seen significant investment in roads aimed at improving connectivity and boosting economic growth.

With over 30 National Highways crisscrossing the state, districts like Adilabad, Khammam, Hyderabad, Warangal, Nalgonda and Mahbubnagar have major road projects.

## Lagcherla farmers tortured, given electric shocks: KTR

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao lashed out at the TG Congress Government over the alleged injustices against the tribal and Dalit farmers of Lagcherla.

Speaking to the media at the Telangana Bhavan, KTR accused the Congress Government of resorting to "barbaric tactics" to forcibly seize lands from marginalized farmers in the name of industrial projects.

"The Congress Government showed its true colours by jailing the tribal, Dalit and weaker section farmers of Lagcherla for over a month simply because they refused to give up their lands. False cases were filed, third-degree was used and even electric shocks were given," KTR said.

He accused the government of inhumane acts. "It is shameful that the Revanth family enjoyed watching this torture through video calls. This is the state of the Congress Government

today," he said, adding that the farmers were subjected to harassment not just in custody but also outside with their families being targeted.

KTR criticised the Congress for prioritizing land acquisitions for industrial corridors over addressing farmers' rights.

"After cancelling the Pharma City project, the same government is now forcibly grabbing lands elsewhere for industrial purposes. This double standard shows their utter disregard for the poor," he said.

Criticising Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, KTR said, "Instead of addressing this critical issue, Revanth discusses tourism in the Assembly. He has turned a blind eye to the plight of his own constituency people. He avoided a debate on the Lagcherla issue in the Assembly, revealing his inability to take responsibility."

Her said that the Congress leadership was running away from accountability. "This is not Telangana or Kodangal's

jagir for Revanth Reddy to dictate terms. We will ensure justice for the 40 farmers currently languishing in jail, as well as for our former MLA Narendra Reddy, who has been wrongly implicated," KTR declared.

He reiterated BRS's commitment to stand by farmers and take the fight to the courts and the Assembly. "The courts will deliver justice, and we will not rest until the government withdraws the false cases and apologises to farmers," KTR said.

Highlighting Congress's failure, KTR said, "They promised to return the 14,000 acres of Pharma City land to farmers but are now grabbing other lands. This is nothing but systematic oppression of the poor."

KTR ended by stating that the BRS would relentlessly pursue the issue in the Assembly and ensure justice for the tribal and Dalit farmers of Lagcherla. "The fight will continue until every false case is withdrawn, and the CM offers an apology," he concluded.

## Former MP Anjan demands minister post

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Former Secunderabad MP Anjan Kumar Yadav asked the Congress to give him a minister post. Addressing the party's review meeting held at the Gandhi Bhavan on Monday, Anjan asked the party to give him a minister post come what may.

However, many party leaders objected to Anjan Kumar Yadav's demand saying that the party gave him an Assembly ticket and Rajya Sabha Member post to his son Anil Kumar Yadav.

## BRS, AIMIM ...

*Continued from page 1*

"We also asked the government to explain why it is not allowing them to wear T-shirts. We reminded the government that Rahul Gandhi is also going to Parliament wearing T-shirts. The government made the BAC just a Chai-Biscuit meeting," he said.

However, Legislative Affairs Minister D. Sridhar Babu lashed out at the BRS and the AIMIM for walking out from the BAC meeting.

He said a discussion will be held on how the House functioned in United Andhra Pradesh and in the last 10 years during BRS rule. He said the Speaker would decide how many days the House would function.

"BRS leaders had 'biscuits and chai' during the BAC meetings held in the last 10 years. The BRS and the AIMIM insulted the Speaker," Sridhar said.

## 12 Indians found dead at restaurant in Georgia

**PNS ■ TBILISI**

Twelve Indian nationals were found dead at a restaurant in Georgia's mountain resort of Gudauri, according to the Indian mission here.

Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs said in a statement that no signs of injuries or signs of violence were detected in an initial inspection. All victims died from carbon monoxide poisoning, local media reported, citing police.

The Indian mission in Tbilisi said that all 12 victims were Indian nationals. However, Georgia's internal affairs ministry statement said 11 were foreigners while one victim was its citizen.

It added that the bodies of all victims, employees in the same Indian restaurant, were found in bedrooms on the second floor of the facility.

"Mission has just learned about the death of 12 Indian nationals in Gudauri, Georgia. Deepest condolences to the bereaved families. Mission is in touch with the local authorities to get details of the Indian nationals who lost their lives. All possible assistance will be given," the Indian mission here said in a statement.

## KCR not coming to Assembly as he knows BRS will not come to power again: Venkat

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Former Chief Minister BRS leader K. Chandrasekhar Rao is not coming to the Assembly as he knows that the BRS will not come to power again, Roads and Buildings (R&B) Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy said.

During a chat with journalists in the Assembly lobby on Monday, Venkat said that KCR has no confidence of coming to power again and so he is not coming to the Assembly. The Minister said the Congress will not consider KCR's son, nephew and daughter.

He said that Assembly seats will increase by 34 and Lok Sabha seats by seven after

delimitation and that the ONOE Bill draft is ready.

The Minister said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Ministers are available to the public. Mallikarjuna Kharge and Adir Ranjan Choudhary are attending Parliament every day even though the party has no opposition status, he said.

He said the new cabinet will be ready by the budget session and that nobody can predict who will get minister posts when the cabinet is expanded. The high command and Chief Minister will take care of that, he added.

"However, I can definitely say that Vakiti Srihari will get a Minister post from Palamuru district," Venkat said.

**TODAY ALMANAC**

**Month & Paksham:** Krishna Paksha

**Tithi:** Dec 16 12:27 PM to Dec 17 10:56 AM

**Tritya:** Dec 17 10:56 AM to Dec 18 10:06 AM

**Nakshatram:** Punarvasu: Dec 17 01:13 AM to Dec 18 12:44 AM

**Pushya:** Dec 18 12:44 AM to Dec 19 12:58 AM

**Rahukalam:** 2:56 PM to 4:19 PM

**Yamagandam:** 9:27 AM to 10:50 AM

**Varjyam:** 08:48 AM to 10:25 AM

**Gulika:** 12:12 PM to 1:34 PM

**Amritakalam:** 10:23 PM to 11:57 PM

**Ahijit Muhurtham:** 11:50 AM to 12:34 PM

**HYDERABAD WEATHER**

**Forecast:** Partly Cloudy

**Temp:** 29°

**Humidity:** 43%

**Sunrise:** 6:40 AM

**Sunset:** 5:45 PM

**Updated:** December 16, 2024 5:00 PM

## BRS seeks Speaker's ...

*Continued from page 1*

Taking a swipe at the Congress leadership, KTR coined the terms "Delhi Tourism" and "Jail Tourism," accusing the government of frequent trips to Delhi while unjustly jailing dissenters, including the Lagcherla farmers, social media activists and opposition leaders.

The BRS raised concern about the unpaid Rs 600 crore due to sarpanches and said that the government is selectively favouring large contractors and ignoring the hardships of local representatives. He appealed to the Speaker to intervene and ensure that funds are disbursed to village heads who are struggling to provide even basic services.

KTR expressed outrage over new restrictions preventing former MLAs from entering the Assembly, contrasting it with the BRS regime's inclusiveness, where former legislators had free access to Ministers and the Chief Minister.

"During our tenure, symbols of protest like dried crops, nooses, and lanterns were allowed. Today, even placards are being restricted," he stated,

accusing the Congress of suppressing the opposition.

He criticized Congress leader Bhatti Vikramarka for announcing an aid of Rs 12,000 crore for tenant farmers outside the Assembly. He termed it a violation of legislative norms, stating that such announcements should be made in the House.

"If Bhatti had made the announcement in the Assembly, we could have questioned it. His decision to bypass the House reflects the government's disregard for legislative procedures," KTR said.

Questioning the credibility of the Congress's welfare promises, KTR remarked, "People no longer trust Sankranti schemes or votes given in the name of deities. The Congress government has failed to fulfil its commitments and has lost the confidence of the public."

The BRS reiterated its decision to hold the government accountable for its failures, vowing to continue its fight for transparency, farmer rights and legislative propriety.

## Power utilities...

*Continued from page 1*

The peak demand of 3,756 MW in 2023 increased to 4,352 MW this year, that is, a growth of around 16%. Consumption touched 90.68 million units from last year's 81.39 million units.

It is predicted that in the summer of 2025, the demand for electricity will record significant growth.

As per the government's orders to ensure that there is no disruption in the supply no matter how much demand increases, the managements of power utilities are engaged in making appropriate arrangements at the section level.

TGSPDCL Chief Engineer Medchal Atluri Kamesh, Transco Chief Engineer Y. Chiranjeevulu, Transco Superintending Engineer Sri Ranji, Medchal Superintending Engineer Sri Ravi Kumar and other officials participated in the inspections.

## Tabla wizard ...

*Continued from page 1*

for generations to come." In a career spanning six decades, Hussain worked with several renowned international and Indian artists but it was his 1973 project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar and percussionist TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together Indian classical music and elements of jazz in a hitherto-unknown fusion.

Starting at the age of seven, he went on to collaborate with virtually all of India's iconic performers, including Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan and Shivkumar Sharma, in his career.

His groundbreaking work with Western musicians such as Yo-Yo Ma, Charles Lloyd, Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, Mickey Hart and George Harrison brought Indian classical music to an international audience, cementing his status as a global cultural ambassador.

Hussain received four Grammy Awards in his career, including three at the 66th awards ceremony earlier this year.

The percussionist, one of India's most celebrated classical musicians, received the Padma Shri in 1988, Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

## One of a kind ...

*Continued from page 1*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he is "deeply saddened" by Hussain's passing.

"He will be remembered as a true genius who revolutionised the world of Indian classical music. He also brought the tabla to the global stage, captivating millions with his unparalleled rhythm. Through this, he seamlessly blended Indian classical traditions with global music, thus becoming an icon of cultural unity."

"His iconic performances and soulful compositions will contribute to inspire generations of musicians and music lovers alike. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and the global music community," the PM wrote on X.

McLaughlin, Hussain's bandmate of the Grammy-winning group Shakti, posted a picture of himself performing with the tabla maestro on Instagram.

"The King, in whose hands Rhythm became Magic, has left us... RIP my dearest Zakir. We will meet again," he wrote.

Chaurasia, who collaborated with Hussain for a number of musical projects, including 1999's live album "Remembering Shakti", is yet to come to terms with the musician's death.



## IPF-COVID-19 VACCINE LINK Zakir's death sparks debate

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Renowned tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, aged 73, passed away on Sunday (December 15) due to complications arising from Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF), a chronic, progressive lung disease. Zakir's death once again sparked discussions about potential links between IPF exacerbations and COVID-19 vaccinations in susceptible individuals.

Zakir Hussain received his first COVID-19 vaccination on January 28, 2021, followed by a second booster dose in February 2021. The vaccine used was the Pfizer-BioNTech one.

Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF) is a rare, debilitating condition characterised by progressive scarring of the lung tissue. It impairs lung function by thickening and stiffening the alveolar walls, resulting in difficulty in breathing and reduced oxygen exchange. While the exact cause of IPF remains unknown, potential triggers are genetic predisposition, aging, smoking and environmental exposure. The typical symptoms of IPF are a persistent dry cough, shortness of breath, fatigue and unintended weight loss. In advanced stages, patients may suffer cyanosis, respiratory failure and clubbing of fingers. The Role of Lung Transplantation and Stem Cell Therapies

**LUNG TRANSPLANTATION:** For patients with severe IPF, lung transplantation remains a life-saving intervention. It can significantly improve survival rates and the quality of life, although challenges like organ rejection and immunosuppressive complications persist. Candidates for transplantation should undergo rigorous screening, as the procedure involves substantial risks, especially in older patients.

**STEM CELL THERAPIES:** Emerging research into mesenchymal stem cell (MSC) therapy offers hope for IPF patients. These therapies aim to reduce inflammation and fibrosis, potentially slowing disease progression. However, clinical trials are going on, and these treatments are not yet widely available or considered curative.

**THE COVID-19 VACCINE CONNECTION** Recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 vaccination, while critical in controlling the pandemic, may trigger acute cases of fibrotic lung diseases in rare cases. According to research, immune-mediated responses post-vaccination could act as potential triggers in susceptible individuals. These observations highlight the importance of monitoring IPF patients after vaccination to detect early signs of worsening symptoms. Research to understand the interaction between vaccination and underlying pulmonary diseases.

## Will issue 10 lakh ...

*Continued from page 1*

new outlets will be established in the recently created gram panchayats and tandas, he said.

Acknowledging criticism of 'Doddu rice', a coarse rice variety distributed through fair-price shops, he admitted that it is under-utilised and is likely to be diverted. The government will now distribute finer rice to all white ration cardholders to improve quality and usage rate.

Uttam also described the changes in ration card distribution before and after the formation of Telangana. Before bifurcation, Telangana region had 91.68 lakh ration cards for 3.38 crore people. After the state's formation, 2.46 lakh cards were cancelled as their owners went to Andhra Pradesh.

Between 2016 and 2023, Telangana issued 6.47 lakh new food security cards, benefiting 20.69 lakh people. Simultaneously, 5.98 lakh cards were cancelled after being deemed ineligible, leading to a net addition of 86,000 beneficiaries over a decade. Now, the state has 89.95 lakh white ration cards covering 2.81 crore beneficiaries.

Under the National Food Security Act, the Central Government provides 54 lakh ration cards for 1.91 crore people. The state supplements this with 35 lakh food security cards, benefiting an additional 89 lakh people.

Uttam said the new initiative aims to modernise the food distribution system and address long-standing gaps in food security.

## BAC is nothing ...

*Continued from page 1*

and we will not relent until it is listed for a debate," he added.

The BRS also objected to the Chief Minister's remark that the BAC has only advisory powers. "The BAC's decisions should dictate the Assembly's proceedings, but no clarity was given on how many days the session will last. This compelled us to walk out," Harish said.

The BRS called for the formation of House Committees to address legislative matters and questioned the Speaker on decisions being made without consulting the party regarding the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

The Speaker assured BRS members that issues like protocol violations against MLAs would be addressed and prevented in future.

Harish criticized the introduction of Bills in the Assembly without prior discussion in the BAC. He also objected to the Assembly being adjourned for reasons like birthdays and weddings, terming it as an insult to legislative procedures. The BRS objected to Congress leader Bhatti Vikramarka's announcement of a compensation of Rs 12,000 for tenant farmers without discussion in the House. The party demanded a dedicated zero hour every day and time allocation proportional to their members' strength in the Assembly.

Expressing anger over restrictions imposed on their members, the BRS asked why they were stopped from wearing T-shirts with slogans while Rahul Gandhi was allowed to do similar things in Parliament. "How can you stop us while allowing others to protest similarly?" they asked.

The BRS vowed to persist in its demand for a detailed discussion on the Lagcherla issue and other key concerns in the Assembly.

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# City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | TUESDAY | DECEMBER 17, 2024

03



## CITY EVENTS

### Pensioners Day

Telangana Government Pensioners Association

#### Venue

Ravindra Bharathi December 17, 9 am to 1 pm

### All India Crafts Mela

Carnatic vocal recital by Vara Veena Music Academy

#### Venue

Shilparamam December 17, 5:30 pm

### Book release function

Nava Telangana Publishing House

#### Venue

Conference Hall, Ravindra Bharathi December 17, 6 pm to 10 pm

### Christmas Bazaar

Exhibition-cum-Sale

#### Venue

Lulu mall Till December 31, daily at 10:00 am

### NYU CARNIVAL

With singer KARTHIK

#### Venue

Boulder Hills, Hyderabad December 31

## Bengaluru, Hyd account for half of leasing activity

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Bengaluru and Hyderabad dominated India's real estate market from January to September, driving nearly 50% of the leasing activity, according to the Colliers India report.

Both cities maintained strong demand for Grade A office spaces, with sectors like BFSI, engineering, manufacturing, and Global Capability Centres (GCCs) playing key roles. The ongoing demand for flexible workspaces also fueled leasing activity, with Bengaluru and Hyderabad leading the way.

The report also shows new office supply mirrored demand, with these two cities contributing significantly to the 37.4 million sq ft of completions by Q3 2024. Total Grade A absorption across India is expected to surpass 60 million sq ft for the year. Rentals in both cities are forecasted to grow by 5-10%, reflecting strong market fundamentals.

In 2025, Bengaluru and Hyderabad are expected for further growth, with GCCs driving 40-50% of leasing. Sustainable, green-certified buildings will play a central role, ensuring these markets remain highly competitive.

## Govt to relax detention policy for engineering students

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Health Minister C Damodar Raja Narasimha on Monday said that the detention policy for students in engineering colleges in Telangana will be looked at to get relaxed for one year.

He has conducted meetings with the officials of the education department at the Secretariat and found out details regarding the Detention Policy impact on engineering students.

The Minister's statement comes following a request and suggestion by All India Majlis e Itthadul Muslimin (AIMIM) leader and Chandrayangutta MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi to reconsider the detention policy mostly pertaining to students of Osmania University and Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU) affiliated colleges in the State.

Raja Narasimha stated that the government will hold a meeting at the earliest with the management of educational institutions, including engineering colleges in

Telangana, to discuss issues of detention, credits, reexaminations, autonomous, readmission and fee reimbursement.

Addressing AIMIM MLA's concerns about the detention of students, he stated, "This detention policy has been in place for 40-50 years across educational institutions and had been relaxed for a few years during the pandemic. In principle, the detention policy will be relaxed this year too."

Akbaruddin Owaisi had raised questions and concerns in the Assembly that the varied credit system in universities and the detention policy is hampering the progress of students, especially in the engineering stream.

The autonomous colleges have no restrictions in passing the students. They also have different syllabus from state colleges, this is not right. Every college must have a similar syllabus and a rule for statewide.

An official, speaking with The Pioneer said, "The relaxation is nothing new. The education department has been accepting the



university's requests every time. For instance in 2022 a decision was taken in relaxing the 50 per cent to 30 per cent as many stu-

dents wrote letters that they may not qualify due to Covid-19."

Autonomous colleges have an opportunity to include, make

changes to the syllabus. Discussions have been made to holistic approach but not moved forward, added the officials.

## Villages in wildlife zones being relocated: Min Konda Surekha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Forest, Environment and Endowments Minister Konda Surekha informed the Legislative Council on Monday that villages in wildlife zones, particularly in the Kawal Tiger Reserve Forest, are being relocated to ensure the safety of both wildlife and local communities. She emphasised that Kawal has already been declared a Conservation Reserve Forest, and focused measures are being implemented in the region.

Highlighting the challenges faced during the winter season, the Minister said, "With increased wildlife movement in forest areas during this time, residents - particularly tribal and Chenchu communities - are experiencing difficulties. To address this, some villages in the forest zones have



been relocated, ensuring minimal disturbance to wildlife habitats."

Konda Surekha explained that forest officials have been directed to carry out the relocation process carefully. "We are providing all necessary amenities to those being relocated, including housing, water supply, and sustainable livelihood opportunities. Residents who have lived in these areas

for generations are being sensitized and convinced to move voluntarily," she added.

The Minister assured that no displaced family is left unsupported. "The government is offering comprehensive facilities, including homes, water resources, and economic rehabilitation measures to ensure a stable livelihood. Many families have already been relocated successfully to new areas with improved infrastructure."

Konda Surekha reaffirmed the government's commitment to developing the Kawal Tiger Reserve on par with the Amrabad Tiger Reserve. "We are dedicated to enhancing conservation efforts while prioritizing the welfare of local communities. The Kawal Reserve will emerge as a model forest reserve with both ecological balance and community well-being," she stated.

## OpenText ties up with Nirmaan to improve four villages in Mulugu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

OpenText India, an information management company, has partnered with Hyderabad-based Nirmaan Organisation under the 'One Corporate - One Village' initiative led by Minister Dr D Anasuya Seethakka. This collaboration aims to transform four villages in Telangana's Mulugu district, which are: Chandru Thanda, LB Nagar, Kodishalakunta and Jagannapet. The MoU was signed during the Nirmaan Social Impact Conclave-2024 at the Radisson Hotel on Monday.

The project seeks to develop rural and tribal communities into model villages. With a budget of approximately Rs1 crore, interventions will include building Anganwadi centres, installing water tanks, borewells



Minister Seethakka seen exchanging the MoU at the Radisson Hotel on Monday

and solar lights, repairing schools, distributing bicycles to students and organising health camps. These efforts will impact over 5,000 individuals, particularly benefiting the

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). Meanwhile, Manoj Nagpal, MD of OpenText India, emphasised the company's commitment to empowering

rural communities through sustainable development. He noted that this initiative aims to create long-term socio-economic benefits and improve the quality of life in tribal areas.

## 50% year-on-year growth in overseas education loans in TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

There is an impressive 50 per cent year-on-year growth over the last three years in overseas education loans in Telangana.

The most sought-after courses include Master's in Computer Science, Information Systems, Business Administration, Business Analytics and Data Science, said NBFC Auxilio Finserve in its report.

Shweta Guru, Chief Business Officer - Overseas Loans at Auxilio, stated, "We are committed to supporting students, particularly in semi-urban areas, by expanding our branch network and specialised teams. With advanced technologies streamlining our processes, we aim to make education financing faster and more efficient, empowering students to pursue their global education dreams."

Approximately 65,000 students from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana travel abroad annually, with an increasing preference for countries like the US, UK, Canada, Ireland and Australia.

## MIC Electronics completes train display board project

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

City-based MIC Electronics Limited, a leader in LED video displays and electronic solutions, has completed a project for the Ratlam Division of the Western Railway Zone. The company received a Letter of Completion/Installation Certificate, for its collaboration with Indian Railways. The project included replacing five-line train display boards at Indore, installing new Coach Guidance Display Boards (CGDB) at NMH (Nimach) Platform 2, and adding information display boards and GPS clocks at 33 stations under MEA. Additionally, MIC replaced information display boards at seven stations, installed at-a-glance display boards at four stations, and replaced analog/GPS clocks at 67 locations.

CEO Rakshit Mathur expressed pride in the achievement, stating, "This project highlights our commitment to providing innovative, reliable solutions designed to client needs.

## TG govt promotes 12 ASPs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government issued orders for the promotion and transfer of 12 police officials on Monday. Additional Superintendents of Police (Non-Cadre) were promoted to the rank of Superintendents of Police (Non-Cadre).

The promoted officers have been posted to key positions across the State. Among them, K Gunasekhar has been appointed as DCP, Traffic, Cyberabad, G Narasimha Reddy as DCP, Traffic, Rachakonda, S Mallareddy as DCP, Crimes-I and Maddipati Srinivasa Rao as Superintendent of Police, CID.

## SBI's Mega Property Expo at Hitex from Dec 20 to 22



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

State Bank of India, the market leader and first choice for home loans is organising a Mega Property Expo at Hitex from December 20th to 22nd. SBI, having its presence with over 22,500 branches across the country, has crossed Rs 7.95 trillion mark in home loan business as on 30.11.2024.

Rajesh Kumar, Chief General Manager, SBI, Hyderabad Circle, explained the recent initiatives of the bank at a Press Meet held at the local head office.

The bank is having 27 exclusive home loan centres across the State of Telangana

for processing & sanction of home loans. It has put in place various digital enablers in YONO App whereby customers can apply for home loans without visiting the bank branch. Also "Insta Top up Loan" is available in YONO for housing loan customers, who can avail a top up loan with a click of button in YONO app.

In this Mega Property Expo, more than 50 big builders of Hyderabad city will showcase their ongoing and upcoming projects. Concessions in processing fee and interest rates will be offered to those who book their home in this property show.

## New Relic, T-Hub for boosting startups

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

New Relic, an Intelligent Observability Platform, announced the expansion of its Hyderabad Innovation Centre and a new partnership with T-Hub. The newly upgraded 500+ seat office will support teams in product development, design, engineering and operations, helping drive innovation for its growing customer base. Also, New Relic is the first global observability platform to partner with T-Hub, a significant step in supporting the local tech ecosystem.

Through its partnership with T-Hub, New Relic will offer startup mentorship, events and discounted access to its platform via the New Relic for Startups programme. This initiative provides access to 30+ observability tools, empowering startups to build scalable solutions.

In 2024, New Relic saw rapid growth in India. In May, it launched a 200+ seat Innovation Centre in Hyderabad, which grew to a 500+ seat facility within six months, reflecting a 2.5x capacity increase. The company's overall headcount in India has also quadrupled since early 2024.

New Relic CEO Ashan Wily highlighted India's importance in the company's global strategy.

## 665 applications for 2BHKs top Prajavani submissions

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In the Prajavani programme held at the Hyderabad Collectorate conference hall on Monday, a total of 728 applications were received from various parts of the district. The majority of requests, 665, were related to the Housing department, particularly for the double-bedroom housing scheme.

Additional Collectors Mukunda Reddy and Kadirivan P directed officials to resolve all pending applications within a week. They emphasised the importance of promptly addressing grievances raised under both the CM Prajavani



and Collectorate Prajavani programmes.

Apart from housing-related issues, applications included 25 for pensions, four each for the District Education department and DSO, 3 for District Adi Kalpana Adhikari, 2 for the District Welfare Officer, 2 for the HMC Commissioner and 23 miscellaneous requests.

Officials were instructed to examine the applications immediately and ensure quick resolution. The Additional Collectors stressed that district officials must prioritise attending the public hearing sessions regularly to address citizens' concerns effectively.

## GHEE PROCUREMENT

# Bhadrachalam temple draws controversy

PNS ■ BHADRACHALAM

There were allegations of adulteration in the ghee (clarified butter) used for making Tirumala Lord Venkateswara's laddus, which became a nationwide topic of discussion. In this context, the Telangana government has taken a crucial decision regarding the ghee used in the preparation of laddus in temples. The government issued orders stating that ghee should only be purchased from the government dairy, Vijay Dairy, for making laddus, and that purchases from private companies should be stopped.

Amidst this, the Bhadrachalam temple's ghee contract has become a controversial issue. Despite the government's directive to award the ghee contract to Vijay Dairy, the authorities at Bhadrachalam temple ignored the orders. They changed the rules and, under the sealed cover method of e-tenders, awarded the ghee supply contract to an allegedly disqual-



qualified company, which has become a topic of discussion. The government order to procure ghee for making laddus and other prasads from Vijay Dairy was disregarded by the Bhadrachalam temple authorities, who awarded the contract to a private dairy instead. Reliable sources suggest that this private dairy was disqualified in the initial e-tenders.

The ghee contract at Bhadrachalam temple expired in June of this year, prompting the authorities to issue e-tenders for ghee supply. In these tenders, a dairy from Telangana and another dairy from Andhra Pradesh, participated. The dairy in Telangana quoted Rs 610 per kg of ghee, including GST, while the dairy in Andhra Pradesh quoted Rs 534.24 per kg. As a

result, the dairy located in Andhra Pradesh was considered the lowest bidder. However, the tender conditions required that participating dairies should have at least two years of experience in supplying to major temples and an annual turnover of Rs. 10 crore. Due to a lack of experience, the Andhra Pradesh dairy did not meet the criteria and was disqualified. It is reported

that the note regarding the Andhra Pradesh dairy's disqualification was written in the file, but later, the page was allegedly torn by one of the temple officials.

This time, the temple authorities called for sealed cover tenders. The conditions regarding turnover and experience with major temples were removed. As a result, the same two dairies quoted the same prices again.

Amidst the controversy over the adulterated ghee issue in Tirumala, the Department of Endowments issued orders on August 22 to ensure that only ghee from Vijay Dairy should be used. Despite these orders, the temple authorities placed a work order for ghee supply to the Andhra Pradesh dairy on August 28. The fact that the Bhadrachalam temple authorities issued a work order to the dairy despite the directives from the Department of Endowments has now become a matter of public debate.



# Historical Nizam-era school lies in ruins

Students are forced to study under trees as three rooms in the educational institution were demolished recently

GUDUPALLI SRINIVAS ■ RANGAREDDY

The Farooq Nagar Government High School, a historic institution built during the Nizam period, is facing severe neglect and is now in decrepit condition. Situated in Shadnagar town in Rangareddy district, this school, known for its glory in the past, now stands as a stark reminder of administrative apathy.

Established in 1935 under the guidance of Kishan Prasad Bahadur, a minister during the Nizam era, the school was once a beacon of education. It was upgraded to a high school in 1954 by the then Chief Minister Burgula Ramakrishna Rao. Initially an all-boys school, it became co-educational in the 1990s. Over the years, it has produced numerous leaders and professionals who fondly recall their time spent under its roof.

However, the current state of the school is a far cry from its illustrious past. The buildings constructed during the Nizam's time are now in ruins, posing a threat to the safety of students.

Despite its historic significance, the school lacks basic facilities. The existing structures are in decrepit condition, forcing students to study under trees. The hasty demolition of old rooms has only worsened the situation, as new rooms are

yet to be constructed. The school urgently requires six new classrooms, along with modern facilities such as a dining hall, science lab, library, staff room, stage, and a kitchen.

With 430 students currently enrolled, the school is also short on toilets and essential resources, leading to unhygienic and unsafe conditions. The lack of proper infrastructure has taken a toll on students' health and education.

Shadnagar Congress leaders, after a recent visit, highlighted the dire condition of the school and called for immediate government intervention. They criticised the negligence of previous administrations and urged the current rulers to act promptly.

As student enrollment rises steadily, from 400 in 2021-22 to 430 this year, the need for comprehensive modernisation becomes more urgent. The school currently has 13 sections in both Telugu and English medium but requires 24 teachers and four non-teaching staff to function effectively. The Farooq Nagar Government High School is not just a building but a symbol of the region's rich educational legacy. It stands as a temple of learning for generations, and its preservation is crucial. Immediate action by the authorities can restore its former glory and provide students with a safe and nurturing environment.

# Collector asks officials to redress public grievances promptly

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

District Collector C Narayana Reddy has directed officials to address the 67 complaints received during the Prajavani programme without delay. He emphasised the importance of timely resolution, instructing officers to ensure that public grievances are handled efficiently and transparently.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector stressed that officials from all departments concerned must respond immediately to requests made by citizens during the Prajavani programme. He urged them to review and resolve applications regularly to avoid unnecessary delays. Among the 67 applications received, 52 pertained to the Revenue Department, while the remaining 15 to other departments.

Later, the District Collector chaired a coordination meeting with district officials to



Rangareddy Collector C Narayana Reddy receiving petitions from people at Prajavani programme at the Collectorate in Rangareddy district on Monday

review department-wise progress. He highlighted the importance of completing the survey for the Indiramma Housing Scheme by the end of December. The Collector instructed officials to conduct house-to-house surveys meticulously, ensuring strict adherence to guidelines. He emphasised the need for accuracy and transparency in collecting and uploading data to the online system.

Additionally, Narayana Reddy urged officials to implement the newly introduced diet plans in welfare hostels and residential schools, ensuring all educational institutions under the programme. The meeting was attended by District Additional Collector Pratima Singh, municipal officials, Mandal Tehsildars, Collectorate Superintendents, and various other district officers.

# 'Honey trap' led to SI committing suicide in Mulugu dist

PNS ■ WARANGAL

It is known that the Sub-Inspector at Wajedu Police Station in Mulugu district, Rudrarapu Harish, committed suicide. On the morning of December 2, he shot himself with his service revolver near the Mullakatta Bridge under Wajedu mandal at the Ferido Resort. This incident caused a stir across the State. On the same morning, an encounter took place in Aeturu Nagaram in which seven Maoists were killed. As a result, people initially speculated that there might be a link between the Sub-Inspector's suicide and the encounter. However, new developments in the investigation have revealed that he had committed suicide as he unwittingly walked into a honey trap.

According to the details provided by the police, the police took Banothu Anasuya alias Anusha from Dudyatanda village under Chilukoor mandal in Suryapet district, into custody for questioning in connection with the suicide by the Sub-Inspector. About seven months ago, she was introduced to the Sub-Inspector through a wrong call. She came in contact with Sub-Inspector Harish, and she trapped him.

The young woman thought that marrying a Sub-Inspector would help her settle down in life and she had a clear plan. She frequently called Harish and developed a close relationship



with him. Later, they became physically intimate, the police said.

On weekends, Anusha would visit Harish, and they spent time together at a resort. Over time, Anusha pressured Harish to marry her. However, he refused, telling her that his family had already arranged a marriage with another young woman, and the engagement was scheduled for December 14.

This made the woman angry. She threatened to expose Harish to the media and higher authorities, claiming that he had used her physically and was now rejecting her. She even said that if he did not marry her, she would make his life miserable. She even warned that if he did not marry her, she would cause him severe trouble, stating, "You will die if you don't marry me." This created significant distress for Harish. He took the extreme step. The police filed a case against Anusha, arrested her and remanded her in judicial custody.

# Pregnant woman experiences labour pains while taking exam

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

A pregnant woman took Group-2 examinations while in labour here on Monday.

In the past there were instances of candidates taking the examination forgetting the death of near ones, holding back their tears. Also, there were instances of young mothers taking the examination soon after giving birth to a child.

But, perhaps in the first ever case in the annals of recruitment tests of Telangana state, a woman in her advanced months of pregnancy took the examination and experienced labour pains.

She was identified as Revati of Banalavillage under Balmurumandal of Nagarkurnool district. She took the Group-2 examination at the ZP High School centre in the district headquarters.

She experienced labour pains while she was taking the examination. Officials made arrangements to shift her to the government hospital. But, the woman did not agree to go to hospital and offered to take the examination. Everyone became upset there as doctors gave the date of delivery on Monday.

Upon her insistence to continue to take the examination, the authorities took the matter to the notice of the District Collector. An 108 ambulance has been kept ready near the examination centre on the directions of the Collector with medical personnel remaining stand-by.

All arrangements have been made to shift her to hospital immediately in case if the labour pains were to intensify. Revathi's husband and her mother have been waiting near the exam hall in case of any assistance to her.

# Healthcare staffing shortage at community centre

PNS ■ BHUPALAPALLI

The community hospital at Mahadevpur is in urgent need of attention. With only one doctor to serve a 30-bed facility, many patients are forced to seek expensive private healthcare. Key posts such as gynaecologists, anaesthetists, and paediatricians remain vacant, limiting the hospital's capacity to provide comprehensive care. The hospital serves surrounding areas, but its services are hampered by staff shortages and poor infrastructure. Essential medical equipment like ECG, X-ray, and mobile X-ray units are underutilised,

and there are ongoing sanitation issues, including a lack of a proper drainage system and the presence of stray animals. Additionally, critical facilities like an oxygen plant, birth waiting room, and blood storage center are yet to be set up. Patients also face challenges due to the unavailability of medicines for dialysis and HIV care.

Besides the posts of two gynaecologists and anaesthesia specialist, the posts of medical officer (general medicine), medical officer (forensic medicine), pediatrician remained vacant. The hospital has vacancies of three staff nurses, includ-

ing two paediatric nurse, posts, class-VI employees and ANM posts.

The ECG, X-ray, digital X-ray, mobile X-ray, urine culture, blood culture units remained unutilised. The hospital drainage system needs urgent repairs, emitting stink. For want of maintenance of sanitation, there is unbearable stink near the labour ward.

For want of a compound wall around the hospital, dogs and pigs have been straying into the hospital premises.

An oxygen plant, and blood storage centres are yet to be started. The patients complain of not availability of medicines.

# Temperature drops to 6.8 C

PNS ■ MEDAK

Residents of the undivided Medak district are enduring a sharp drop in temperatures with the mercury plummeting to as low as 6.8°C in Kohir in Sangareddy district, on Sunday. The cold wave has intensified health concerns, particularly among the elderly and children, many of whom are battling cold-related illnesses such as coughs, colds, and fever. Hospital visits due to these symptoms have been steadily increasing.

Medical experts are urging the elderly and children to avoid unnecessary outdoor activities and take precautions to safeguard against the harsh cold.

In addition to Kohir, Sivvampeta in Medak district recorded a temperature of 8°C, while

several other areas in the region reported minimum temperatures below 10°C. Cold winds began sweeping through the district from around 5 p.m., and by 7 p.m., the chill had become more severe. Residents are reluctant to venture outdoors during

the early morning and evening hours, with children going to school and vendors of milk and vegetables particularly affected. Dense fog has been lingering over the region until 8 a.m., severely reducing visibility, especially on national highways 44, 65, 161, and 765-D. Vehicles were observed driving with headlights on, as the fog hindered safe travel. Experts have issued warnings to motorists, advising them to take extra care to prevent accidents and to avoid traveling during the night and early morning hours,

# Tiger movements disrupting farm activities in Hudkili

PNS ■ KUMRAM BHEEM ASIFABAD

A tiger sighting in the forests and agricultural fields of Hudkili village under Sirpur (T) mandal has sparked panic among local people. The sighting was reported on Monday with villagers expressing concerns over the big cat's movement in the area. The fear of tiger is disrupting farming activities.

Residents of the village said the tiger has been spotted roaming both the forests and nearby farms, which has significantly impacted agricul-

tural work. Many villagers are postponing their farming tasks due to the tiger's presence and have urged forest authorities to take immediate action to ensure human safety. They also called for steps to divert or track the tiger's movements to prevent potential conflicts.

Forest officials have suggested that the tiger, which is believed to be a female, might have strayed from the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve and entered the forests of Sirpur (T). To monitor the tiger's movements, authorities have deployed animal trackers and

installed CCTV camera traps in the area. Villagers have been advised to avoid farms before 10 am and to leave the fields by 4 pm. Additionally, they are encouraged to move in groups for safety.

The recent sighting follows a tragic incident on November 29 when a 21-year-old woman, Morle Lakshmi, was killed by a tiger while plucking cotton at Easgaon village in Kazanagar mandal in the district. The same tiger is suspected of attacking Rauthu Suresh at Dubbagudem village in Sirpur (T) mandal on November 30.

# Tanker smuggling diesel from Karnataka seized

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

In a significant operation, the Task Force police intercepted a tanker lorry smuggling diesel from Karnataka to the Gandhi Maisamma area. The tanker, suspected to be part of an illegal fuel racket, was handed over to the local police for further investigation.

The smuggling operation reportedly exploits the price difference of diesel between Karnataka and Telangana, with diesel being Rs 10 cheaper in Karnataka. The illegal trade is estimated to generate a profit of Rs 1 lakh per tanker for those involved.

# Robbers truss up woman, flee with gold jewellery, cash

PNS ■ JAGTIAL

Four masked miscreants entered a house, trussed up a woman, gagged her with a cloth, and locked her in the bathroom. Eshwarayya woke up and came outside. The robbers attacked him, injuring him severely with the firearms. The stole gold jewelry, including a bracelet, two rings, a chain, his wife's mangalsutra and earrings, as well as 10 tolas of gold, 10 tolas of silver, and Rs 10,000 cash before quietly fleeing.

According to the police, the victims, Eshwarayya and his wife, live in Beerpur and run a grocery store. On the morning of December 14, around 5 am, the wife woke up and was on her way to the washroom when four criminals wearing monkey caps sneaked up behind her. They

bound her hands and legs, gagged her with a cloth and locked her in the bathroom.

Hearing some noise, Eshwarayya woke up and came outside. The robbers attacked him, injuring him severely with the firearms. The stole gold jewelry, including a bracelet, two rings, a chain, his wife's mangalsutra and earrings, as well as 10 tolas of gold, 10 tolas of silver, and Rs 10,000 cash before quietly fleeing.

The police have registered a case and are investigating. The police examined the CCTV footage and a sniffer dog was pressed into service.

# Collector inspects cancer, diabetic centre at govt hosp

PNS ■ NALGONDA

District Collector Ila Tripathi has directed the officials to provide all necessary medical facilities to people at the "National Cancer, Diabetes, and Cardiac Care centre established on the premises of the Government General Hospital.

On Monday, she inspected the National Cancer, Diabetes, and Cardiac Care Center set to be inaugurated at the District General Hospital and reviewed its facilities.

She emphasised that the centre should have a physician, oncologist, cardiologist, and all essential infrastructure and specialists. She assured the people that necessary funds would be sanctioned for this purpose.

Later, the District Collector inspected various sections in the Government Hospital, including the casualty, CT Scan, SNCU (Special Newborn Care Unit), Emergency, and ICU wards. She wanted doctors to be available round the clock in the



Nalgonda Collector Ila Tripathi inspecting diabetic centre at the Government Hospital in Nalgonda on Monday

ICU and emergency wards and that efforts should be made to ensure better services through the hospital. She inquired about the details of outpatient visits and the services provided through ICU and SNCU. Additionally, she reviewed diagnostic and

laboratory testing facilities. Government General Hospital Superintendent Aruna Kumari, DMHO Putla Srinivas, Deputy DMHO Venugopal Reddy, and other hospital doctors were present during the inspection.

ACROSS THE STATES

# Three-pronged strategy adopted to root out Naxals: Amit Shah



## Youtuber held for alleged pond explosion

A social media influencer was arrested for allegedly causing an explosion using sodium in an agricultural pond in the district, police said on Monday. N M Prathap, also known as Drone Prathap, was arrested on Friday evening after police received a video of the incident that he had uploaded to his YouTube channel, they said. The video, which went viral on social media platforms, showed the explosion occurring at Sree Rayara Brundavana farm in Janakaloti, Madhugiri taluk. However, when questioned, 27-year-old Prathap claimed that it was a science experiment performed as part of a promotional video for his YouTube channel. He later deleted the video, a senior police officer said. Based on the video, a case was registered against Prathap under relevant sections of the Explosive Substances Act and Section 288 (negligent conduct with respect to explosive substance) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the officer said.

PNS ■ JAGDALPUR (CHHATTISGARH)

A comprehensive three-pronged strategy is being adopted by the government to free all Naxal-affected areas in the country from the menace, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday. Paying tributes here to all those who laid down their lives fighting Naxalism, Shah said as part of this strategy, first, those who are willing to renounce violence and ready to return to the mainstream are being welcomed. Secondly, he said, efforts are being intensified to apprehend those who refuse to abandon the path of violence. "Lastly, strict action will be taken against individuals intent on harming others, ensuring they face the full force of justice," he added. The home minister emphasised that this menace must be completely uprooted

**Underscoring the government's unwavering resolve to restore peace in Chhattisgarh and other Naxal-affected states, Shah said the achievements of the past year in combating Naxalism in Chhattisgarh are unprecedented**



Chhattisgarh Police and central security forces who have launched a robust operation guided by a clear and focused plan. The home minister also commended the Chhattisgarh government for establishing a memorial to honour the 1,399 martyrs who made the supreme sacrifice in the struggle against Naxalism. He said this memorial would not only pay tributes to these heroes but also inspire future generations. Shah highlighted that the current Chhattisgarh government, since its formation last year, has been steadfast in its commitment to eradicate Naxalism. Expressing optimism about the future, he assured that after March 31, 2026, not a single drop of blood will be shed in the name of Naxalism on the sacred land of Maa Danteshwari (Bastar in Chhattisgarh). He highlighted that the

Chhattisgarh government has devised a phased plan to accelerate development in areas previously affected by Naxalism. This plan focuses on the welfare of villages and the upliftment of the affected communities, he said. Shah emphasised that these initiatives are being implemented with the strong support and cooperation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has approved the construction of 15,000 houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in the Naxal-affected regions. Additionally, efforts are underway to achieve 100 per cent saturation of government welfare schemes in every village, ensuring priority assistance to families impacted by Naxal violence, he said. Shah said the campaign for a Naxal-free India, led by Prime Minister Modi, is gaining significant support from the affected families.

## ATROCITIES AGAINST HINDUS IN BANGLA

# Cong MPs stage protest in Parliament premises

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Several Congress MPs led by Priyanka Gandhi Vadera staged a protest in the Parliament premises on Monday, demanding justice for Hindus facing atrocities in Bangladesh and the alleged removal of a photo of Pakistan surrendering to India from the Army headquarters. Priyanka Gandhi said she had given a notice to talk about Vijay Diwas in the Lok Sabha. The Wayanad MP claimed that after initial approval, she was allegedly told that she could not talk on it as the government would.



"Till then, they did not remember and I guess then they gave a chance to Nishikant Dubey who raised the issue and said something. Then I spoke. I was raising only two issues. First, I wanted to pay tributes to all the martyred soldiers and the people who stood by the Army," she told reporters in the Parliament premises. "I also wanted to remember Indira Gandhi because of her ability to act decisively. Under her leadership, we fought the war and won," she said. Priyanka Gandhi also raised the issue of atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh.

"The fight that we had fought (in 1971) was about principles, for democracy, against the atrocities that were being committed. These principles made India great. Our independence struggle was also based on these principles. We were alone at that time. 'She (Indira Gandhi) travelled across the globe, saying this atrocity must be stopped. Nobody stood up but our country did. Indira ji did, our army did and our people stood up,' she said. The Congress MP asserted that she wanted to say atrocities were being committed against minorities in Bangladesh. "Our government should raise its voice, speak with the Bangladesh government and ensure their security," Priyanka Gandhi also raised

the issue of the alleged removal of a photograph of Pakistan surrendering to India from the Army headquarters. "In that picture, there is Field Marshall Sam Manekshaw, Lt Gen JS Aurora... they are being insulted today. Why is politics being played over it?" she posed. The Congress MPs also walked out of the Lok Sabha, saying Priyanka Gandhi was not allowed to raise the 'Vijay Diwas' issue in the House. "Today, we walked out of the Lok Sabha because our leader Priyanka Gandhi was not allowed to raise the 'Vijay Diwas' issue and the matter related to the photographs (of the 1971 war victory) in the Army chief's lounge being removed.

## Six newly elected Rajya Sabha MPs take oath



Six newly elected Rajya Sabha MPs, including former National Commission for Women chairperson Rekha Sharma and industrialist Sana Sathish Babu, took oath as members of the Upper House of Parliament on Monday. BJP's Sharma and Telugu Desam Party's (TDP) Babu were elected opposed to the Rajya Sabha from Haryana and Andhra Pradesh respectively last week. TDP's Beeda Mastan Rao and BJP's Ryaga Krishnaiah were also among those who took oath on Monday. Both of them were elected opposed from Andhra Pradesh. BJP's Sujet Kumar and TMC's Ritabrata Banerjee, who was elected from West Bengal, also took oath. The newly elected MPs signed the members register and greeted Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar.



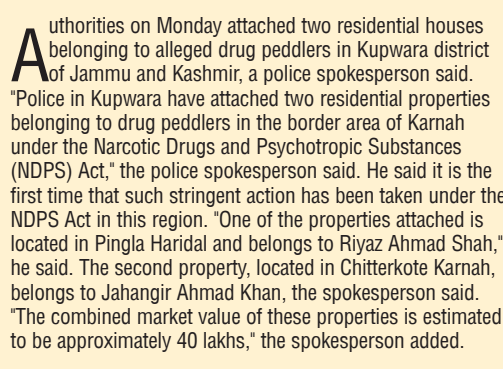
## Need to expand trade between India, Armenia: Murmu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Recalling centuries-old cultural linkage between India and Armenia, President Droupadi Murmu said on Monday that there is a need to expand bilateral trade between the two countries. During a meeting with a parliamentary delegation from Armenia, she noted the close cooperation between the two countries at global multilateral fora and appreciated Armenia's membership of the International Solar Alliance and its participation in all three Voice of Global South Summits. The delegation, led by Alen Simonyan, the president of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, called on Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan here. Welcoming the delegates, the President recalled the centuries-old cultural linkages

between India and Armenia and the multifaceted contemporary relationship based on shared values of democracy, according to an official statement. Murmu expressed India's willingness to continue contributing to capacity building and skill development in Armenia through "our various development partnership programmes", it said. She also highlighted the need to expand bilateral trade and enhance both physical and financial connectivity between the two countries, according to the statement issued by the President's office. President Murmu noted that regular parliamentary dialogue plays an important role in enhancing understanding of each other's systems of governance and laws, and said this visit by the Armenian parliamentary delegation would "further strengthen our bilateral ties".

## Properties of drug peddlers attached in J-K



Authorities on Monday attached two residential houses belonging to alleged drug peddlers in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir, a police spokesperson said. "Police in Kupwara have attached two residential properties belonging to drug peddlers in the border area of Karnah under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act," the police spokesperson said. He said it is the first time that such stringent action has been taken under the NDPS Act in this region. "One of the properties attached is located in Pingla Haridal and belongs to Riyaz Ahmad Shah," he said. The second property, located in Chitterkote Karnah, belongs to Jahangir Ahmad Khan, the spokesperson said. "The combined market value of these properties is estimated to be approximately 40 lakhs," the spokesperson added.



## Freed from begging, children take part in sports

Two-day sports meet commenced at the Raj Bhavan on Monday for children from Lucknow, Ayodhya and Kushinagar who have freed from begging, the governor's house said. Organised under the 'From Begging to Education' campaign being run by Umeed Sanstha, an NGO, the event saw the participation of 455 children from Lucknow, 80 from Ayodhya, and 18 from Kushinagar on the first day on Monday. The competitions included athletics events, kho-kho, kabaddi and tug-of-war, among others, the Raj Bhavan said in a statement. Inaugurating the event, Uttar Pradesh Social Welfare Minister Asim Arun sought everyone's co-operation to eradicate begging from the society, saying his department is trying to connect people associated with begging with the mainstream by implementing the Smile Project of the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in Kushinagar and Ayodhya districts through Umeed Sanstha.

## Cong amended Constitution to help "family, dynasty": Sitharaman

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a no-holds-barred attack on the Congress in the Rajya Sabha, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday accused the grand old party of carrying out major amendments to the Constitution "brazenly to help the family and the dynasty". She also alleged that it was "anti-woman" for failing to get the women's reservation bill passed when it was in power. Initiating the discussion on the 'Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India' in the Rajya Sabha, the senior BJP leader said the economic policies of the previous Congress governments for about 50 years did not strengthen



India's economy and restricted growth. She noted that the living document the Constitution has faced many amendments in the last seven decades. In her nearly 80-minute speech, she mentioned various amendments to the Constitution during the era of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, which were aimed at strengthening the "family" and failed on the other tests of economic and social good besides constitutional spirit and processes.

## DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS

# BJP likely to place bets on fresh faces

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP candidates' list for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, expected around last week of this month, is likely to have a significant number of fresh faces, party leaders said on Monday. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has announced its candidates on all the 70 constituencies for the polls due to be held in February next year. The Congress too has announced 21 candidates so far. "The final round of meetings on candidates selection by the national leadership is yet to take place. These meetings will be held after the



Parliament session concludes on December 20," said a top functionary in Delhi BJP, adding the party may release the lists from the last week of this month. The BJP leaders said the

process for candidates' selection was in an advanced stage and three probables on each constituency were already shortlisted. "This time chances are that the party will place bets on fresh faces, including

women and youngsters, who have strong ground connect and reach among the people in the constituencies although they have yet not contested the elections," said another senior Delhi BJP leader. Those experienced party leaders, who have lost the elections twice or more may not be lucky this time and a lot of scrutiny of those who lost in close contests in the previous polls is likely to happen this time, he added. "Winnability will be the prime factor with top leaders taking the final call with inputs from authentic feedback mechanisms like surveys and reports from the ground," he said.

# 72% of urban wastewater flows into water bodies: Report

**"Wastewater reuse can be a key part of the strategy to address these concerns and promote water circularity and sustainability." "In fact, there is an opportunity for turning wastewater into water again and this is what our report's title 'Waste to Worth'—is referring to," Narain added**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A meagre 28 per cent of the urban wastewater and sewage generated in India undergoes treatment while the rest flows directly into rivers, lakes and land, according to a report by the think tank Centre for Science and Environment. India's urban water crisis could ease if all the wastewater is treated and reused, the report released here on Monday said. Rajiv Kumar Mital, Director General of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), said, "Using and disposing of treated water

without harnessing its potential means we are losing out on utilising an important resource. The challenge is to scale up and ensure that the work we do in this sector is impactful." Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) Director General Sunita Narain said India faces significant water scarcity challenges due to rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, population expansion and, most importantly, climate change. "Wastewater reuse can be a key part of the strategy to address these concerns and promote water circularity and sustain-

ability." "In fact, there is an opportunity for turning wastewater into water again and this is what our report's title -- Waste to Worth -- is referring to," Narain added. The Jal Shakti Ministry has mandated that cities must recycle and reuse at least 20 per cent of the water they consume. Subrata Chakraborty, senior programme manager, water programme, CSE, said, "This is in line with the belief that promoting a circular economy is essential for achieving a sustainable and climate-resilient future and for managing the ever-growing demand for freshwater."





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Economy slowing down

### India, celebrated as the fastest-growing economy in the world, is showing signs of slowdown

India is facing a pivotal moment as it navigates a notable slowdown. Between July and September 2024, the country's GDP growth rate fell to 5.4 per cent, its lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. While this growth rate remains enviable compared to developed economies, it highlights significant structural challenges that could impede India's long-term economic ambitions. The implications of this slowdown are multifaceted. A decline in consumer demand and muted private investment have curtailed economic momentum. Sales of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) have dropped, wage bills of publicly traded firms have shrunk, and urban spending has softened. In November alone, car sales plunged by 14 per cent, underscoring the waning strength of urban consumption. Rising inflation adds another layer of complexity. In October 2024, inflation surged to 6.2 per cent, exceeding the RBI's target ceiling of 4 per cent. Escalating food prices, driven by climate disruptions and inefficiencies in supply chains, have inflated costs across sectors, further squeezing disposable incomes.



The slowdown has also placed pressure on India's exports, which account for just 2 per cent of global goods trade. A stronger dollar and rising tariffs have eroded the competitiveness of Indian products in international markets. Compounding the issue is stagnant job creation, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing, and small-scale industries. Collectively, these factors are eroding confidence in India's growth narrative, despite the government's optimistic outlook. The roots of this economic deceleration lie in several factors. Demand weakness is a central issue. While rural demand remains relatively resilient thanks to a favourable monsoon, it alone cannot offset the broader slowdown. Restrictive monetary policies have further constrained growth. To combat inflation, the RBI has kept interest rates steady for two years, leading to high borrowing costs that discourage both business investment and consumer spending. Global and domestic challenges compound the problem. Slowing global demand and climate-related disruptions in agriculture have adversely affected exports and food production. Additionally, the RBI's interventions to stabilise the rupee by selling dollars have inadvertently tightened liquidity, slowing economic growth. A stronger rupee, while stabilising in some respects, makes Indian exports more expensive and less competitive internationally. Addressing these challenges requires targeted solutions. Boosting consumption through wage growth could be a key strategy. Policy measures that reduce bureaucratic hurdles, provide tax incentives, and simplify labour and land laws can unlock the potential of small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of the economy. Tackling inflation and strengthening supply chains will also play a critical role in stabilising the economy.

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### PICTALK



An artist paints a wall at Lodhi Road area, in New Delhi

## Overcoming fear to unlock limitless possibilities

### Embracing the unknown is essential for innovation, resilience and realising our true potential

Humans possess four basic emotions — happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Each has a unique place in our lives and shapes much of our responses to situations. The unknown is probably one entity that invokes all four emotions and spurs us into action. However, it is the fear of what we project onto the unknown that often paralyzes us into inaction. Action is built into our psyche. We must necessarily move, even though we do not know the results of our endeavours. Instead of focusing on the happiness we will derive from success, we let this uncertainty bog us down. We procrastinate terrified of failure and refuse to take the next step. This is an all too familiar phenomenon that we encounter every day of our lives. As we start going up the professional ladder, many of us follow time-tested formulae, handed down to us by predecessors. We hesitate to make decisions contrary to the established norms, even though such decisions may result in sub-



stantial gains, within the framework of certain acceptable risks. All our efforts are guided by that one decision in 10 which did not click. We do not look at the nine that did. We forget that as a child we had no fears when we started exploring the universe around us. We fell, as we tried to get on our two feet, but were encouraged, or even forced, to keep trying till we mastered the art of walking; or for that matter everything. We also forget that we were not scared to take up a job after college, even though we knew nothing about the work we had to do. We learned from our mistakes. The worst was that we failed the first time, and the best

was that we succeeded eventually. Ah! The joy of success! We forget that humans evolved due to an inherent desire to explore the unknown, without a care for failure or success. New worlds were found, and new inventions and scientific discoveries were made. All because a few dared to venture into the unknown. We deny ourselves the endless new opportunities that each new day brings. It is not that we do not possess this spirit. It is just that generations of conditioning have made it dormant, till we are in a situation with our backs to the wall. Nowhere is it more in evidence, than in jugaad, the flexible approach to solve a problem innovatively when one has limited resources. In our personal lives, we are told to pursue our dreams but are often guided towards the more tried and safer options. We do not even try to think of the endless possibilities and the heights that society can reach if everyone is encouraged not to fear the failure of the unknown, but

to think about success, and is free to follow his or her heart! This is the contradiction that most of us from the earlier generation, specifically from the middle class, face when teaching the young. Fortunately for our race, the young of today are better prepared for the unknown with the availability of much better sources of information which were also created by a few who dared to dream. We should teach the young to step out in the rain without an umbrella and get drenched. Let the sky be the roof. They should not regret that they might have led a better life if they had not feared the unknown. Esmeralda Santiago sums it up so well. "How can you know what you are capable of, if you do not embrace the unknown?" (The writer is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator and strategy consultant. He conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. The views expressed are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

# South Asia: Two decades of turmoil

### December marks two pivotal anniversaries — Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and Kandahar Hijacking — that changed South Asia's geopolitics



SANTHOSH MATHEW

December marks two pivotal anniversaries that significantly influenced South Asia's geopolitical landscape: 45 years since the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan and 25 years since the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 from Kathmandu to Kandahar. Despite occurring two decades apart, these events underscore the fragility of South Asia and the profound influence of external powers and non-state actors in shaping the region's trajectory.

On December 24, 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan to support the struggling communist regime in Kabul, led by Babrak Karmal. This intervention, ostensibly aimed at stabilising Afghanistan, set off a decade-long occupation and transformed the country into one of the Cold War's fiercest battlegrounds. The repercussions extended far beyond Afghanistan, triggering global, regional and internal upheavals that persist to this day. The Soviet invasion catalysed a chain of events that hastened the disintegration of the Soviet Union and radicalised South Asia. The mujahideen-fighters armed and financed by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other allies became a formidable force against the Soviets. This external patronage laid the groundwork for militant extremism, which would later engulf the region. The Soviet intervention underscored Afghanistan's strategic importance as the fulcrum of great power politics. Pakistan emerged as a critical player, acting as a frontline state in the anti-Soviet effort. Two decades later, on December 24, 1999, South Asia faced another defining moment when Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 was hijacked en route from Kathmandu to Delhi. Five armed men commandeered the aircraft, eventually forcing it to land in Kandahar, then under Taliban control. What ensued was a week-long standoff that exposed the vulnerabilities of regional counter-terrorism strategies and marked a turning point in how nations approached security and terrorism.



The Kandahar hijacking exposed the evolving nexus between terrorism and geopolitics in South Asia. The Taliban's willingness to shelter the hijackers highlighted its transition into a state sponsor of terrorism. For India, this incident was a stark reminder of the threats posed by cross-border terrorism, often enabled by Pakistan's support for extremist proxies in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The release of Masood Azhar not only emboldened groups like JeM but also underscored the growing influence of non-state actors in undermining regional stability. Although the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking may seem unrelated, they are deeply interconnected in shaping South Asia's trajectory. The destabilisation of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation created fertile ground for militancy, enabling the rise of networks that facilitated events like the Kandahar hijacking. Pakistan's role as a key US ally during the Soviet-Afghan war and as a sanctuary for groups like JeM has perpetuated instability in the region. Its support for extremist proxies has strained relations with India and exacerbated internal security challenges. Addressing South Asia's fractured security landscape requires collective action. Countries in the region must transcend historical animosities to combat terrorism and address shared challenges like extremism and socio-economic disparities. Both the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking highlight the need

ADDRESSING SOUTH ASIA'S FRACTURED SECURITY LANDSCAPE REQUIRES COLLECTIVE ACTION. COUNTRIES IN THE REGION MUST TRANSCEND HISTORICAL ANIMOSITIES TO COMBAT TERRORISM AND ADDRESS SHARED CHALLENGES LIKE EXTREMISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

Both events marked the ascendancy of non-state actors in South Asia's security dynamics. The mujahideen's success against the Soviets emboldened militant groups across the region, while the Kandahar hijacking demonstrated their ability to exploit state vulnerabilities for political gains. The Kandahar episode underscored the inadequacy of India's counter-terrorism infrastructure at the time. It led to significant reforms, including the establishment of specialised counter-terrorism units like the National Security Guard (NSG) and the strengthening of aviation security protocols. Pakistan's dual role in these episodes—as a US ally during the Soviet-Afghan war and as a sanctuary for groups like JeM—has perpetuated instability in the region. Its support for extremist proxies has strained relations with India and exacerbated internal security challenges. Addressing South Asia's fractured security landscape requires collective action. Countries in the region must transcend historical animosities to combat terrorism and address shared challenges like extremism and socio-economic disparities. Both the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking highlight the need

for strong democratic institutions and accountable governance. Weak states are particularly susceptible to external manipulation and internal subversion, further destabilising the region. The lessons from these pivotal episodes remain crucial as South Asia navigates the 21st century. The radicalisation fueling terrorism often stems from socio-economic deprivation. Investments in education, healthcare, and employment can help counter extremist ideologies. Strengthened regional cooperation and robust international partnerships are essential to addressing the complex interplay of geopolitics and terrorism. Much like the Grand Trunk Road connecting distant regions and histories, these events remind us of the intersecting paths of interventionism and terrorism in shaping modern South Asia. They were not mere crises but turning points that redefined the region's political, social, and economic trajectories. As South Asia confronts new challenges, the enduring lessons of these anniversaries emphasize the importance of resilience, cooperation, and proactive governance in securing a stable future. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DEBATE ON CONSTITUTION

Madam — The two-day debate on the Constitution, which began on 13th December, has seen heated discussion on the historical and contemporary significance of the Constitution. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh initiated the debate, emphasising the collective efforts behind the creation of the Constitution. Though he accused Congress and Indira Gandhi for imposing an emergency and supersession of Supreme Court judges to charge Congress with violating constitutional principles, he lauded the progressive and transformative nature of the Constitution that allows individuals from humble backgrounds to rise to the highest positions of power in India. The newly elected MP, Priyanka Gandhi, an articulate and combative speaker, accused the government of undermining the constitutional promises of social, economic and political justice over the past decade. Without mentioning the name of Jawaharlal Nehru, she lauded his contribution in creating so many public sector as well as government firms. She also warned the present government that his role in the freedom struggle and Independent India could never be erased from Indian history. Concluding the debate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the role of women members of the constituent Assembly in making the Indian Constitution. He also hailed Indian democracy and reminded the journey of the Constitution. P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

### INDIA'S GDP RISES

Madam — Forbes India estimates India's GDP to be \$3.94 trillion in 2024. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India rose to the 11th largest economy in the world in seven decades of independence, but in just the last decade, India has risen to the 5th largest economy while addressing a gathering at the Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre after the inauguration of the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024. He attributed this growth

### Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain passes away



The four-time Grammy Award winner, Indian tabla maestro and an innovative music fusion creator, Zakir Hussain is no more with us. The silence on his tabla is a huge loss for Hindustani classical music and jazz fusion. Zakir was truly an indelible gem in the world of music. The list of his national and international accolades is really long, as he had always made India proud with his tireless contribution in

taking Hindustani classical music to collaborate and fuse with world music. Like his father, Ustad Alha Rakha, Zakir always attempted to proceed to the legacy footprint of his father. His tabla virtuoso legacy had been curated in the golden letters in the history of Indian music because of his glorious contribution to music. Taking an Indian, 18th-century membranophone percussion instrument (tabla) to the world stage is truly an incredible achievement, and history will credit this legendary maestro, Zakir Hussain, for his pertinacious contribution towards Hindustani classical music. He will always stay alive in our hearts and continue to inspire the upcoming generations of music and instrument lovers. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

to the exceptional efficiency of his government. Nevertheless, the story would be incomplete without a mention of the economic growth across different regions. Southern states, which occupy 19.34 per cent of India's land area and 20.76 per cent of its population, contributed about 30.5 per cent of the GDP. Western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, which together occupy 15.32 per cent of India's land area and 14.27 per cent of its population, added another 21.4 per cent. On the contrary, the NDA-BJP-ruled states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which cover 34.09 per cent of the area and have 38.95 per cent of the population, together contributed only 22.4 per cent to the GDP. This is despite the fact that the five BJP states received a significantly higher share of funds from the central divisible revenue pool. They received a 45.29 per cent share, whereas the five southern states got only 15.81 per cent. Further, according to the IMF World Economic Outlook

(October 2024), India is currently ranked 144th among 194 economies in terms of GDP (nominal) per capita at \$2698 at current prices. This suggests that the standard of living and quality of life in much of India improved at a snail's pace, even though the economy expanded rapidly. Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

### PM MODI SLAMS CONGRESS

Madam — Modi lambasted the first parivar as the killers of the constitution during the debate on the constitution in parliament. Right from Nehru's letter in 1951 to the state CM's, Indira's emergency, Rajiv's dealing with the Shah Bano case, and Rahul's tearing of an ordinance, Modi spoke the truth. It is a big blow to the Congress since they were at fault in their earlier tenure. It should introspect. Secondly, Modi has drawn up an 11-point Sankalp like the 20-point programme of Indira Gandhi. N R Ramachandran | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

As remote work redefine workplaces, businesses are increasingly turning to employee monitoring



SHAINY SHARMA

In the modern workplace, the rise of remote and hybrid work has led to significant shifts in how businesses operate, manage and monitor their employees. Among the most controversial developments is the growing use of tattleware or brassware, the common nicknames of software applications that monitor employees' activities during work hours.

With the advent of normalised remote work, employer surveillance of workers has accelerated. Today, such tools can track a wide range of data, including keystrokes, mouse movements, screenshots, and even video or audio feeds from an employee's device. Not only this, but the much-advanced systems may also use artificial intelligence to analyse patterns, flag unproductive behaviour, or even detect potential security breaches. Employers claim these tools provide valuable insights into work habits, protect sensitive data, and improve overall efficiency. It allows businesses to track productivity metrics thereby ensuring that the employees meet deadlines and work efficiently, especially in remote setups where physical supervision is absent.

Also, such surveillance tools help prevent data breaches or intellectual property theft by monitoring unauthorised activities. Moreover, these wares provide evidence in disputes about working hours or performance, thereby offering an objective record of employee activity. When implemented transparently and ethically, these tools even foster accountability and help underperforming employees improve. Despite the above-mentioned benefits, the use of tattleware raises significant ethical concerns wherein the most



common one talked about is privacy. Employees believe that privacy is a fundamental right, and excessive surveillance can infringe upon it. A survey conducted recently found that nearly 78 per cent of employers use monitoring software to track employee performance or online activity.

When employees are monitored constantly, they often feel dehumanised, as though they are untrusted or reduced to mere data points resulting in eroding trust between employers and their teams, making it harder to foster collaboration and loyalty. Additionally, the psychological impact often leads them to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Employees may feel pressured to overwork or engage in performative productivity - appearing busy rather than genuinely contributing. Over time, this can harm creativity, innovation, and overall job satisfaction. Not only this, but the use of tattleware has also resulted in legal challenges, including claims of unpaid wages for work performed away from computers or intrusion upon privacy. Some employers face allegations of unfair labour practices if monitoring interferes with protected activities, such as union organising? To adhere to the challenges posed by tattleware, businesses must strive to balance productivity goals with respect for employees' rights. As rightly said transparency is the key to success.

Only when employees are informed about them being monitored, the necessities for the use of such tattleware or how the data will be used can help build trust and foster a sense of shared responsibility. As businesses navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid work, they must adopt a thoughtful and balanced approach to workplace monitoring. Only by prioritising transparency, fairness, and respect for individual rights, companies and business organisations can create an environment that values both productivity and human dignity.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

## Call for fast-tracking WTO agricultural negotiations



UTTAM GUPTA

In a recent WTO meeting, India urges prioritisation of issues, including a permanent solution for public stockholding and special safeguard mechanism



In a meeting of the Committee on Agriculture (CoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held in Geneva on December 4, 2024, India insisted that negotiations on unresolved/previously mandated issues in agriculture, including a permanent solution to public stockholding, special safeguard mechanism (SSM) and elimination of trade-distorting cotton subsidies by rich countries etc, be 'prioritised' and 'fast-tracked' by treating them as standalone issues instead of clubbing them with other issues.

The US, on the other hand, criticised the prioritisation of certain issues over others, stating that this was the primary cause of the longstanding stalemate in agriculture. India also rejected a new proposal presented by Guyana to advance agricultural negotiations ahead of the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) tentatively scheduled to take place in Cameroon in 2026) by adopting a so-called 'non-traditional approach based on convergence'. India reiterated that any facilitator-led process should be 'consensus-based' and respect WTO's multilateral principles. It emphasised on Text-based negotiation (TBN). TBN refers to the process of working up the text of an agreement that all parties are willing to accept and sign. Negotiating parties may begin with a draft text prepared by the Chair of the particular committee dealing with the subject.

The draft is based on discussions amongst the member countries and is fine-tuned till all the nations are in agreement with it. This is in sharp contrast to a convergence-based approach that involves superimposition of non-multilateral trade regimes on the multilateral trading system (MTS). The theorists dealing with international trade in particular, WTO-related issues describe it as a process of 'gradually aligning different trade regimes, in particular preferential trade agreements (PTAs) and the MTS'. Others define convergence as requiring 'greater coherence between trade rules and policies, norms and standards in other areas of international cooperation'. Shorn of jargon, this is a well-orchestrated attempt by the developed countries - the US, the European



THE DRAFT IS BASED ON DISCUSSIONS AMONGST THE MEMBER COUNTRIES AND IS FINE-TUNED TILL ALL THE NATIONS ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH IT. THIS IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO A CONVERGENCE-BASED APPROACH THAT INVOLVES SUPERIMPOSITION OF NON-MULTILATERAL TRADE

Union (EU), the UK, Australia, etc (they exercise disproportionately greater influence during actual confabulations at the WTO, set the agenda of meetings, float proposals more often through small countries such as Guyana and get away with what they want) to scuttle the standard practice of taking decisions by consensus where every member country has an equal voice.

Therefore, India has rejected this approach, rightly so. But, what happens to India's demand for 'prioritising' and 'fast-tracking' negotiations? In a meeting of the CoA held on October 2, 2023, in Geneva, the EU agreed to consider India's demand for a permanent solution to the public stock-holding (PSH) program for food security. Accordingly, India had urged WTO members to start TBN on the issue as soon as possible and get this deliberated at the WTO MC-13 slated to be held in Abu Dhabi from February 26-29, 2024. But, that was not to be. The Ministerial Conference ended in a deadlock. On the issue of finding a permanent solution to the (PSH) for food security, India's stance was vehemently opposed by the USA/EU. Earlier attempts by India also met with the same fate. At the Trade Policy Review (TPR) meeting held at WTO in January 2021, India insisted that the three issues should be taken up on a priority basis at the MC-12. But, in that Ministerial Conference held in Geneva on June 12-17, 2022, the issues were not even put on the table. The deadlock has existed for more than two decades despite India taking up these issues at WTO under what has come to be known as the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). Developed countries had junked DDA at MC-10 held in Nairobi (2015). On the most contentious issue of a permanent solution for PSH, a ray of hope emerged when in the WTO-General Council (GC) meeting in Geneva (July 31, 2014),

India insisted on a time-bound action plan on the subject matter to be executed before the end of 2014 co-terminus with approval of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) - an area of great interest to developed countries. This was a good strategic move but it was abandoned mid-stream. In December 2014, even as the developed countries got away with the TFA, the developing countries got an "extension of the peace clause till a permanent solution was found." Put simply, India had literally surrendered its right to secure a permanent solution; that it was "Ok" with "the benefit of peace clause."

### What is the peace clause?

To understand this, let us look at the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the WTO. Under it, a developing country cannot give aggregate measurement support (AMS) - an acronym for subsidies - over 10 per cent of the value of its farm production.

The AMS includes "product-specific" subsidies and "non-product specific" subsidies on agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seed, irrigation and power. The "product-specific" subsidy is the excess of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) paid to farmers over the External Reference Price (ERP) multiplied by the quantum of agri-produce. Whereas the MSP is taken for the relevant year, say, 2023-24, the ERP is the average of the global price prevailing during 1986-88 fixed in rupee terms. If the subsidy given by a developing country exceeds 10 per cent, it will be treated as a violation of its WTO commitment. This has been a major worry as India could face action in a situation of AMS exceeding the 10 per cent threshold. In this backdrop, the MC-9 in Bali (2013) had agreed to a "peace clause" under which "if a developing country gives AMS in excess of 10 per cent, no member will challenge this until 2017, when the WTO would look for a permanent

solution to address their food security concerns." It came with several riders such as submission of data on food procurement, stockholding, distribution and subsidies. These also include establishing that subsidies are not "trade distorting." Besides, programs implemented after 2013 are not covered under the ambit of the 'peace clause'. In December 2014, the WTO-GC modified the above decision to provide for "extension of the peace clause till a permanent solution was found." Unfortunately, India concurred with this modification. This took away the sanctity of the 2017 deadline by which time members were to find a permanent solution as per the MC-9 mandate.

A decade since then, India is still looking for a solution! In regard to SSM - it allows members to temporarily raise tariffs beyond the "bound levels" (this is the maximum permissible duty that a member country can impose under a bound rate agreement) to counter surges in import or price drops. The 2015 MC-10 in Nairobi recognized that developing countries will have the right to take recourse to SSM as envisaged under the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration. That was at MC - 6 (December 2005).

Since then, it has been almost two decades. Even now, these countries can't take recourse to SSM. They haven't also been able to prompt developed countries to eliminate their cotton subsidies. To conclude, despite the deft handling of negotiations at the WTO and representing the majority of the developing countries (India leads about 80 countries - the G33 including India, African, Caribbean and Pacific countries or ACP) so far, India hasn't succeeded in securing the intended outcomes. Given the intransigence of developed countries and their clout at WTO, there is little hope from the MC - 14.

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

## Persisting Central Information Commission vacancies challenge transparency claims

### Eight vacancies of Information Commissioners undermine the cause of transparency and accountability

Recently on December 10, Dr. Jitendra Singh, MoS (Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension) made a pitch for Vikashit Bharat, 2047 while addressing the 16th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission at Bharat Mandapam in Pragati Maidan. Ironically, it was the last date allowed by the Supreme Court for the central government to file a status report on the eight posts of Information Commissioners lying vacant out of a total of ten in the Central Information Commission (CIC) for the last year. It might be remembered in October 2023 Anjali Bharadwaj had brought to the notice of the Supreme Court that whereas seven posts were already lying vacant in the



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

CIC, four incumbents were due to retire within a week. Sadly, the situation has worsened over the last year, notwithstanding the government's claim to transparency and accountability. At present, there are two Information Commissioners viz. Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari in addition to Chief Information Commissioner viz. Heeralal

Samariya. As per the Pending Cases Report available on the website of CIC, there were a total of 3134 cases - comprising 2310 second appeals and 824 direct complaints with the Commission as of November 1, 2023.

A year later on November 1, 2024, the total number of pendency has risen to 20,437 - comprising 17,717 second appeals and 2,720 direct complaints. At the time of writing this piece, the total pendency clocked 22,957. This figure is not quite a compliment to the government's alleged commitment to transparency and accountability. A recent RTI application filed by Commodore Lokesh Batra (Retd) elicited the reply that 161 applications were received for filling eight vacancies in

CIC in response to the DoPT's advertisement dated August 14, 2024. Under Section 12(3) of the RTI Act, 2005 the appointments are to be made by a committee chaired by the Prime Minister, and comprising the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and another Union minister nominated by the Prime Minister. Filling these positions before the 16th Annual Convention on the RTI would have been a favourable gesture.

However, the government did not prioritize the task. A second appeal from this columnist filed on September 13, 2023, is indicated at no 18162 in the list of pendency. The matter was transferred to IC Vinod Kumar Tiwari, after IC Ms. Saroj Punhani retired on November 11, 2023. The high



amount of pendency incentivizes the CPIOs/ Appellate Authorities in the ministries/departments to display a cavalier attitude towards applications filed under the RTI Act, 2005. This columnist, however, was able to obtain the information through a fresh application. The Appellate Authority within the division, who in an IAS officer colluded with the CPIO,

in one of his decisions he stated that the reason for denying information was that the file was under submission with the Joint Secretary.

The columnist filed a third application under the RTI Act, 2005 asking the CPIO whether the Joint Secretary had been 'exempted' from the obligation to provide information under the RTI Act, 2005. If the Joint Secretary had been 'exempted', the CPIO must produce the necessary official order, and further inform who else in the ministry had been similarly 'exempted'.

Any claim that a Joint Secretary has been 'exempted' from the obligation to provide information would have become controversial for the government. It could have sullied the service record of the

officer attracting a minor if not major penalty for disregarding a Parliamentary statute. The RTI Act, 2005 provides no authority-wise 'exemption'. Exemption under Section 8 of the Act applies only to certain well-defined matters based on merit like security/diplomatic/trade secrets, matters expressly forbidden by court from publication, or cabinet papers etc. This time the CPIO quickly provided the information. The episode, however, underscores a few grievous lapses. First, had the Central Information Commission (CIC) been working at full strength, the second appeal would have been decided within a few months, and the delinquent CPIO might have to pay the monetary penalty for denying information.

Second, it underscores that Appellate Authorities, who are part of the department, actually help the CPIOs to suppress the information, where it is in their interest. Instead of this obligation, they can manipulate the CPIOs in other matters. The high amount of pendency in CIC could be attributed to the devious behaviour of the Appellate Authorities. The RTI Act, 2005 should have provision to penalize not just the CPIO but also the First Appellate Authority if the Information Commissioner declares him/her guilty of deliberate suppression of information.

(The writer is an author and an independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are his personal)

## IN BRIEF



### '73 lakh smart meters installed across country'

Around 73 lakh smart prepaid meters have been installed across the country till November, according to the official data which also showed 'nil' installations in 11 states and two Union Territories. As per the data shared in the Parliament on Monday, around 73 lakh smart prepaid meters have been installed till November 29 in various states under the RDSS scheme. Around 25 crore smart prepaid metres are to be installed by March 2025 under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), launched in July 2021, at an outlay of Rs 3.3 lakh crore. Around 19.79 crore smart meters have been sanctioned and 72.97 lakh devices installed in various states as on November 29, Minister of State for Power Shripad Naik said in a reply to Rajya Sabha. As per the data shared by the minister, smart meter installations were 'nil' in states like Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Rajasthan and Punjab against the sanctioned number of devices in these states at 3 crore, 5.47 lakh, 1.42 crore and 87.84 lakh, respectively.



### India's exports contract to USD 32.11 bn

India's merchandise exports in November dipped by 4.85 per cent to USD 32.11 billion against USD 33.75 billion a year ago, according to government data released on Monday. Imports increased by 27 per cent to USD 69.95 billion in November compared to USD 55.06 billion in the year-ago month. The trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, widened to USD 37.84 billion during the month under review. India's merchandise exports had increased by 17.25 per cent to USD 39.2 billion in October this year. During April-November this fiscal, exports increased by 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion and imports by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion.



### Laxmi Dental gets Sebi's go ahead to float IPO

Dental products company Laxmi Dental Ltd has received Sebi's go-ahead to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO), an update with the markets regulator showed on Monday. The proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 150 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of 1.28 crore shares by promoters and other shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). As a part of the OFS, investor OrbilMed Asia II Mauritius Ltd will offload shares of the IPO-bound company. Besides, the company may consider raising Rs 30 crore in a pre-IPO placement round. If such placement is completed, the fresh issue size will be reduced. As per the update, Laxmi Dental, which filed preliminary IPO papers with Sebi in September, obtained its observation on December 12. In Sebi's parlance, obtaining observation means its go-ahead to float the public issue. Going by the draft papers, proceeds from the fresh issue will be kept aside for investment in subsidiary Bizdent Devices, purchase of new machinery for the company, payment of debt and for general corporate purposes.

## US lauds India's 'bold goals' for renewable energy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Like the resilience of a palm tree that grows notwithstanding the "strongest storm" and "biggest wind", the India-US relationship will continue to thrive and benefit the world, US Ambassador Eric Garcetti said on Monday.

In an address at an event, the envoy specifically lauded India's "bold goals" for renewable energy and said it will emerge as the "shop floor" globally in the sector in the next 30 years.

"India's ambitious targets and policies are making it a leader in solar and wind capacity, not just for this country, but

to be able to manufacture at cost for the world -- the solar panels that we need, the electrolyzers that we want, the batteries that are critical," he said.

"India will, mark my words, in the next 30 years, be the shop floor for the renewable energy revolution," he said.

The outgoing ambassador was speaking at the South Asia Women in Energy leadership summit hosted by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF).

The ambassador narrated an episode of a hotel in Kerala requesting him to plant a coconut palm sapling at the end of his stay.

"And I said something, I said



how long will it be till the coconuts come from this tree and they said, well, it's about eight years."

In the larger context of India-US ties, he said: "May we each day, plant that coconut, may we each day, find a way to

make things a little bit better."

"I'm confident that the US-India relationship is just like that planting, something that will continue to grow, something that will be resilient as we know the palm tree, the strongest storm can't knock it down, the biggest wind can't take it away."

"But that it will continue to provide not just for itself, but for the world around it, and that is our mission," he said.

Garcetti suggested he would deliver speeches covering "four Ps -- peace, prosperity, planet and people" on India-US relations before leaving New Delhi and the first one on Monday was focused on the planet.

The US ambassador is set to demit office ahead of the inauguration of the second tenure of Donald Trump as the US President on January 20 to facilitate the new administration to pick its choice.

"The central government here has set bold goals and I'm seeing India pour more into renewable energy than nearly any other country on the face of the earth. But it will come down to community work that we do," he said.

The ambassador also listed various initiatives between India and the US in the clean energy sector and said the partnership will continue to grow.



### Godavari to invest Rs 130 cr for ethanol production

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Godavari Biorefineries on Monday announced a Rs 130-crore investment to enhance ethanol production.

The investment will be in a corn/grain-based distillery to further strengthen its ethanol production capabilities, the company said in a statement.

The Rs 130 crore investment will be done in a new 200 KLPD corn/grain-based distillery to add to its existing operations, enhancing flexibility through dual-feedstock capability, it said.

The new facility will be commissioned by March 2026, the statement said, adding that the capital expenditure will be financed through internal accruals and debt.

Samir Somaiya, its chairman and managing director, said the new capacity will complement the existing sugarcane-based operations.

"This will give us a dual-feedstock capability and will ensure more resilient ethanol production, even during climate-related disruptions, and position us to meet the growing demand under India's ethanol blending programme," he added.

The new facility will offer operational fungibility, enabling the use of alternative feedstocks such as maize to mitigate disruptions caused by factors like poor monsoons and policy changes, the statement said.

### Gold slumps Rs 1,150 to Rs 78,350 per 10 gm Silver declines Rs 300

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices slumped for the second straight session by Rs 1,150 to Rs 78,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday on frantic selling by stockists and retailers, the All India Sarafa Association said.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 79,500 per 10 grams on Friday.

Silver also declined Rs 300 to Rs 92,500 per kg.

The white metal finished at Rs 92,800 per kg in the previous trading session. In the last two trading sessions, it had plummeted Rs 4,500 per kg.

The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 1,150 to Rs 77,950 per 10 grams on Monday. Traders said the sentiment was downbeat largely with uncertainty over the implications of concerns about US

President-elect Donald Trump's economic policies that could act as a tailwind for the US dollar.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 143, or 0.19 per cent, to trade at Rs 77,279 per 10 grams.

During the day, the yellow metal hit an intra-day low of Rs 76,904 per 10 grams and a high of Rs 77,295 per 10 grams, respectively. "Gold traded within a volatile range, continuing last week's up-and-down swings as markets brace for a series of major economic events this week," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Silver contracts for March delivery climbed Rs 319, or 0.35 per cent, to Rs 91,320 per kg on the commodities exchange.

### Govt launches Rs 1,000-crore credit guarantee scheme

#### POST HARVEST LOANS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union food minister Pralhad Joshi on Monday launched a Rs 1,000 crore credit guarantee scheme to help farmers easily access post-harvest loans by leveraging electronic warehouse receipts.

The scheme aims to reduce banks' reluctance to lend against electronic negotiable warehouse receipts (e-NWRs) issued by Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA) registered repositories.

"We have provided a corpus fund of Rs 1,000 crore. The objective is to encourage banks to lend loans with a liberal approach," the minister said at the scheme's launch.

Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra highlighted the signifi-



cant potential for expansion, noting that current post-harvest lending stands at just Rs 40,000 crore out of total agricultural lending of Rs 21 lakh crore. Currently, lending against e-NWRs is a mere Rs 4,000 crore.

"We are hoping that post-harvest lending will grow to Rs 5.5 lakh crore over the next 10 years," Chopra said, emphasising that the target is achievable with coordinated efforts from the banking and warehousing sectors.

The secretary also stressed the need to streamline the e-Kisan Upaj Nidhi online platform, create awareness among farmers about pledge financing, review depository charges and increase warehouse registrations beyond the current 5,800.

B L Verma and Nimuben Jayantibhai Bambhaniya, who are ministers of state for food and consumer affairs, were present at the event. WDRA Chairperson Anita Praveen was also present.

The scheme aims to make agricultural financing more accessible and supportive of farmers' economic needs.

## LIC's unclaimed maturity amounts at Rs 881 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) has unclaimed maturity amounts of Rs 880.93 crore in 2023-24, Parliament was informed on Monday.

As many as 3,72,282 policyholders did not claim maturity benefits during FY2024, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

During the previous year, he said, the amount worth Rs 815.04 crore belonging to 3,73,329 policyholders remained unclaimed.

As many as 10 death claims worth Rs 14 lakh remained unclaimed during 2023-24, he said.

In order to reduce the Unclaimed and Outstanding Claims, LIC has undertaken several measures, including

print media and digital media advertisement apart from radio jingles for policyholders to claim their due amounts.

Outstanding amounts lying in unclaimed accounts are settled in favour of respective policyholders or claimants upon receipt of claim request, he said.

Reminder letters are sent through ordinary/speed post as well as through email where available and also SMS are sent where mobile numbers are available, he said.

The claim settlement process is simplified and only valid NEFT is required to settle the claim, he said, adding that continuous follow-up is made with the policyholders through agents and development officers to comply with the requirement and claim the amounts.

In reply to another question,



As many as 3,72,282 policyholders did not claim maturity benefits during FY2024, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha. During the previous year, he said, the amount worth Rs 815.04 crore belonging to 3,73,329 policyholders remained unclaimed

Chaudhary said the Foreign Exchange Reserves (FER) decreased by 2.63 per cent for the week ended November 15, 2024, against the previous week.

However, in percentage terms, the highest decline till date in the last 20 years was observed in the week ended October 24, 2008, with FER declining by 5.65 per cent over the previous week, he said.

The value of the Indian Rupee (INR) is market-determined, with no target or specific level or band, he said.

Apart from capital flows (which include equity flows as well), the factors that influence the exchange rate of INR include movement in the dollar index, level of interest rates, movement in crude prices, current account deficit, etc, he said.

Further, it said, RBI intervenes in the forex market to curb undue volatility in INR.

There are 5,728 Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) and Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) whose Certificate of Registration (CoR) has been cancelled by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as on June 30, 2024, he said in another reply.

## Air India revamps int'l network; to optimise flight schedules

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Air India will revamp its international network by deploying retrofitted A320 neo aircraft, erstwhile Vistara's A321 neo and B787-9 planes on certain routes as well as optimise schedules for flights from Delhi to Paris and Frankfurt.

The Tata Group-owned airline, which is undergoing an ambitious five-year transformation plan, will deploy its retrofitted A320 neos for all flights between Delhi and Bangkok from January 1, 2025. Currently, it has three daily services on this route.

Further, the carrier will deploy erstwhile Vistara's A321 neos and B787-9s on certain routes.

Delhi-Frankfurt and Mumbai-Frankfurt services are



Monday.

Air India will also start a fourth daily flight between Delhi and Bangkok from January 1, 2025. Currently, it has three daily services on this route.

Further, the carrier will deploy erstwhile Vistara's A321 neos and B787-9s on certain routes.

Delhi-Frankfurt and Mumbai-Frankfurt services are

now operated with B787-9s while twice-a-day Mumbai-Singapore flight will be operated with A321 neos from January 1, 2025.

The release said from January 1, 2025, B787-9 will be deployed for a daily flight between Delhi and Singapore, and A321 neos will be operated for two daily flights on the same route.

As part of Tata Group consolidating its airline business, Air India has merged Vistara with itself and AIX Connect has been integrated with Air India Express.

From February 1, 2025, Air India will also optimise the schedule of its flights on the Delhi-Frankfurt and Delhi-Paris routes.

"The new flight times now offer both daytime and nighttime departures on each route in both directions, providing greater flexibility to travellers. Air India has also retimed its daily flights on the Delhi-Sydney and Delhi-Melbourne routes to enable seamless two-way connectivity between Europe and Australia or points in Southeast Asia via Delhi.

"This means travellers from London, Paris, and Frankfurt can now easily take one-stop connections to Sydney and Melbourne in Australia, and to points like Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Ho Chi Minh City in Southeast Asia via Delhi," the airline said in the release.

## Markets decline amid weak global trends

### Sensex falls 385 points

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday as investors turned cautious ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision amid weak global cues.

Besides, selling pressure in metal and IT counters amid a weak rupee and sluggish Chinese economic data hit investors' sentiment, traders said. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 81,748.57. During the day, it dropped 581.84 points or 0.70 per cent to 81,551.28.

The NSE Nifty lost by 100.05 points or 0.40 per cent to 24,668.25. Domestic equities took cues from Asian and European indices and ended negative, as investors await the outcome of the US FOMC meeting on rate decision later this week.

"Although a rate cut is on the

cards, there is a lack of confidence amongst the investors due to the sluggish Chinese economy and concerns ahead of Trump's decision on import tariffs on key economies," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. There is heightened action in the primary markets, with five IPO listings and seven new IPOs opening for subscription in this week, he added.

From the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Titan, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and JSW Steel were the biggest laggards.



## Rs 16,000 cr capex needed to meet EV charging demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India needs capital expenditure to the tune of Rs 16,000 crore to meet the country's growing public charging demand for electric vehicles (EVs) and achieve the mission of over 30 per cent electrification by 2030, according to a report released on Monday.

The FICCI report on "Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure: 2030 Roadmap" reveals that the current financial

viability for public charging stations in India remains low with utilisation rates of less than 2 per cent, and to achieve profitability and scalability, "we need to aim for an 8-10 per cent utilisation by 2030".

"For instance, the current cost structure of electricity tariffs with fixed charges regardless of energy consumption combined with low utilisation at public charging stations is making it challenging to achieve break



even. States like UP, Delhi and Gujarat have no/low fixed tariffs but there are other states where fixed tariffs are high, thereby challenging the viability," FICCI said. The report called for action by key stakeholders, including policymakers, industry players, and government bodies, to enable India's transition towards clean energy and sustainability.

It also outlined five key challenges that need to be addressed to scale up public charging infrastruc-

ture. These include limited financial viability; DISCOM or power-related issues; land-related issues; operational challenges; and standardisation and interoperability. The report further suggested standardising GST rates for EV charging services from 18 per cent to 5 per cent in line with taxation across the EV value chain. It also called for a shift from two-part tariff to single-part tariff with consistent pricing across states.

**GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA**  
**IRRIGATION & CAD DEPARTMENT**  
**E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**

Tender Notice No: 10/2024-25 (1st Call) Dt: 15-12-2024

Name of the Work: IBCADD - TGIC-Kakatiya Mega Textile Park - Warangal District - Strengthening of local Nala in Kakatiya Mega Textile Park to avoid inundation in rainy season at Shyamapet V, Gausaiguda/JR, Warangal District., Estimated Cost Value: Rs. 13197.87 Lakhs.

Tender Documents Available: From 17.12.2024 at 3.00 PM onwards. For more details and for downloading tender documents please visit <https://tender.telanganagov.in>. Office Email ID: [seic\\_wgl@gmail.com](mailto:seic_wgl@gmail.com), Contact No(s): 9490999434 (SE, JC, WGL), 9959870904 (AEE, IC, WGL), [seic\\_wgl@gmail.com](mailto:seic_wgl@gmail.com).

Sel: Superintending Engineer, IBCADD, Irrigation Circle, K.C. Colony, Warangal.

R.O.No: TPOC-18/2024-25, Date: 15-12-2024



# Hyderabad

## SHIFTING GEARS FROM 'CODES' TO 'ROADS'

TEJAL SINHA  
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In a world where passions and professions often seem worlds apart, Michael Sylvester, aka SJ Michael, is a shining testament to the power of embracing multiple identities. By day, he harnesses his technical prowess as a Senior Systems and M365 Engineer, but as the weekend sun rises, he transforms into a free-spirited rider, fuelled by an insatiable thirst for adventure. "During weekdays, I'm an IT engineer and on weekends, as a rider," he says with a smile, perfectly encapsulating his dual identity. His fascination with bikes began early, but circumstances kept him from exploring it as a hobby. That changed dramatically when a friend invited him as a pillion for a breakfast ride organized by Royal Enfield—an event exclusively for their bikes. "That ride was an eye-opener for me. Experiencing the camaraderie among bikers and the thrill of the open road was something I'd never felt before," he recalls. From that moment, he knew biking would become an integral part of his life. His first ride was for a cause organised by Astar Hospital in Nampally. Initially a pillion rider, he eventually got to take control of the bike on the way back. "It was a disaster," he admits adding, "I struggled to balance and quickly realised my lack of fitness and riding skills. But instead of being discouraged, I felt a deep urge to improve." That challenging ride marked the beginning of his journey as a rider. Like many, Sylvester did face daily stresses and health challenges. "The demands of work would sometimes spill into weekends," he shares. "I turned to physical activity, fresh air and sunlight to relieve that stress. Biking became my way to escape and recharge." He also struggled with weight issues, due to which, he began going to the gym inconsistently and not seeing results. "I wasn't monitoring my health properly—my BMI, diet, or habits. I faced body shaming, bullying and I didn't like it." A pivotal moment came during a ride when he met a fellow biker who was also a certified trainer. "He listened to my goals and crafted a plan to help me lose weight and get fit. It wasn't an instant transformation, but a process. I learned to be patient and consistent." The journey took 240 days, during which Michael transformed from 116 kg to 92 kg. "It's still a work in progress, but I'm proud of how far I've come. My mantra is simple: If not now, then when?" A few years after that initial ride, his dream of owning a bike came true when his mother gifted him his first two-wheeler.

"That bike was incredibly special to me," he says, reflecting on the moment. "It wasn't just a mode of transport; it was the foundation of my biking journey." This heartfelt gift fuelled his passion and determination to develop his skills. He spent months mastering basic bike handling skills, practicing on local trails and gradually increasing the distance and difficulty of his rides. "Every ride was a lesson. From managing tricky terrain to understanding my own limits, those early days were all about learning and growing." About a year and a half into his biking journey, he joined a local biking community, a decision that profoundly impacted him. "Being part of a community introduced me to so much. New trails, techniques and people who shared the same passion. Every rider brought something unique to the group and I learned so much from them." The sense of belonging and shared enthusiasm for biking became a driving force in his journey. With his growing skills and confidence, he began exploring new trails and destinations. Each ride was a chance to discover diverse landscapes, meet new people and experience different biking styles. As Michael gained experience, he felt a strong desire to give back to the biking community. He began leading group rides, sharing his knowledge, and encouraging others to embrace the joy of riding. "There's nothing more rewarding than seeing someone else's excitement when they discover biking for the first time," he says. "It's a privilege to be part of that journey for others." Despite his achievements, his passion for biking remains as fresh as ever. He continues to attend skills clinics, workshops and conferences, constantly seeking to improve his riding, maintenance and safety knowledge. "Riding is a journey, not a destination," he emphasises. "There's always something new to learn, and that's what keeps it exciting." Michael's journey into biking was influenced by a combination of personal, environmental and psychological factors. "Health and fitness were a big motivator. I was looking for a new way to stay active and improve my overall well-being. Biking seemed perfect since it's low-impact and adaptable to different fitness levels." Beyond the physical benefits, biking became a form of stress relief. "During a stressful period in my life, biking helped me clear my mind and relax. It became my escape from the daily grind." Environmental influences also played a role. A friend, an avid biker, introduced him to the sport. "He lent me his bike, took me on my first ride and showed me the ropes. That support made all the difference," he recalls. Living near local trails made it even easier to explore biking and discover its joys. Psychologically, biking ignited Michael's sense of adventure. "I've

always loved trying new things and exploring new places. Biking offered a sense of freedom and challenge that I was looking for," he says. "The idea of setting goals and achieving milestones on my bike has been an incredible motivator." He credits his ability to overcome these challenges to preparation, mindfulness, and support. "Researching routes, planning ahead and keeping my bike in top condition minimise risks. Practicing mindfulness and taking care of my mental health help me stay focused. Connecting with other riders and sharing experiences is incredibly motivating. The encouragement from friends and family keeps me going." One of Michael's standout experiences was riding to the India Bike Week (IBW) with Hero. "This was my first ride to IBW and it was incredible. Hero covered the stay, entry parade, food and goodies, while we took care of our bikes and fuel. The camaraderie with fellow bikers and the challenges along the way made it unforgettable." Passing through the ghats was a highlight. "The roads were breathtaking and the quick breaks became impromptu photo sessions as people stopped to admire our bikes. At IBW, I saw everything from customised and vintage bikes to superbikes. The stalls, the energy, the sheer diversity—it was the best experience ever." He believes biking events like IBW are essential for the community. "They bring people together, creating opportunities for networking and building a sense of belonging. These events foster personal growth, offering workshops and challenges that push you to improve. They raise awareness about biking safety and infrastructure while encouraging a healthy lifestyle. For newcomers, these gatherings are a source of inspiration and for seasoned riders, they're a celebration of achievements." His story is a testament to the power of passion and perseverance. Whether it's navigating complex IT systems during the week or conquering challenging trails on weekends, he approaches life with the same dedication and enthusiasm. For Michael, the road ahead is endless and he's determined to ride every mile with purpose and joy.



Defying conventions and fueling his passions, Michael Sylvester's extraordinary journey is a powerful reminder that life is too short to choose just one path. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, he opens up about his extraordinary journey of embracing dual passions, transforming his life by defying the odds and more

### RISE OF THE DIGITAL ARREST

## Beware of getting trapped in a digital dragnet!



It starts innocuously—an unexpected phone call. The voice on the other end is calm, authoritative and chillingly familiar: "We've intercepted your package in Mumbai. It contains prohibited substances. You are under arrest." For countless individuals across India, this is not just a hypothetical scenario but a terrifying reality. Known as the 'digital arrest' scam, this evolving cybercrime targets an age of convenience where package deliveries are ubiquitous and vulnerabilities lie just beneath the surface of an unsuspecting populace. In one such case, a Hyderabad resident lost nearly one crore rupees (10 million INR) to scammers who manipulated him into believing he was implicated in a drug-trafficking operation. The scam, which exploits both human psychology and digital impersonation, has now become so prevalent that Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed it during his *Mam Ki Baat* radio program.

### AS DIGITAL FRAUD ESCALATES, THE PIONEER LOOKS AT THE GROWING THREAT OF THE 'DIGITAL ARREST' SCAM, SPEAKING WITH EXPERTS ON ITS IMPACT AND PREVENTION

The scammers, using the guise of law enforcement, interrogate the victim, instilling fear and panic. Under duress, victims are often pressured into transferring large sums of money to 'clear their name' or settle the issue. "Social engineering lies at the heart of this scam," explains Karnnika A. Seth, a Supreme Court advocate and cyberlaw expert. "By exploiting fear and leveraging fake law enforcement identities, these criminals dupe people into compliance." For many, the concept of a digital arrest feels plausible—particularly for individuals already navigating a barrage of online transactions, package deliveries,

and courier services. The scam thrives on a single moment of doubt, a second of panic. Praveen Kumar Tangella, a cyber expert, describes the modus operandi: "The scam specifically targets the business community—those frequently shipping goods or managing online sales. For instance, saree merchants and small-scale entrepreneurs have been prime victims." The criminals count on two factors: ignorance of legal processes and the innate fear of authority. According to Tangella, the simplest preventive measure is rooted in common sense: "As per Indian law and the IPC (Indian Penal Code), there is no such thing as a digital arrest. Legal formalities cannot and will not be conducted over a video call." He further advises victims to counter the scam by asserting that they will contact local police or visit the nearest station. "This alone will likely deter most scammers," he adds. Behind the façade of uniforms and morphed logos lies a maze of criminality. "This is organized crime," Seth emphasises. "It involves cheating by personation, criminal intimidation and extortion." Under Section 66C and Section 66D of the Information Technology Act, 2000, identity theft and cheating by personation are punishable by up to three years of imprisonment and fines. Meanwhile, extortion under the BNS Act carries a potential sentence of seven years. But the real weapon against such crimes, Seth argues, is awareness. "Educating people about cyber safety is imperative. We must empower individuals with knowledge

to protect themselves." Having said that, the police is treating these crimes as any other digital financial fraud. "The police invokes the sections pertaining to cheating, forgery and criminal intimidation etc. In most of the cases the police is not able to make any headway in the investigation because most often the accused uses fake SIMS and fake bank accounts," accentuates Ashwin Reddy from Telangana court.

**Escalating menace**  
The sheer scale of this scam has led to coordinated efforts by Indian authorities. Victims are encouraged to report incidents to the government's cybercrime helpline (1930) or online at cybercrime.gov.in. Law enforcement agencies, in partnership with the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), are actively tracking and blacklisting numbers associated with such fraudulent activity.

However, challenges persist. These scammers are often part of transnational networks, making enforcement a daunting task. "It's a cat-and-mouse game," admits Tangella. "But every case reported is a step towards dismantling these operations."

Experts like Tangella and Seth agree that public vigilance is the most effective deterrent. "Verify any package-related claims. Ask yourself: Am I even expecting a delivery? Cross-check with courier services. And most importantly, never transfer money to strangers under duress," advises Tangella.

Seth echoes this sentiment, calling for a national effort to promote cyber literacy. "Creating awareness is not just a preventive measure—it's the need of the hour."

The digital arrest scam is emblematic of our times—a sinister confluence of technological sophistication and human gullibility. By targeting the cracks in a hyper-connected world, these scammers reveal a sobering truth: the weakest link in cybersecurity is often human trust.

As part of the ongoing initiative, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has successfully blocked over 6.69 lakh SIM cards and 1.32 lakh IMEIs associated with fraudulent activities like the digital arrest scam. Additionally, 1700 Skype IDs and 59,000 WhatsApp accounts linked to spoofed international calls have been blocked to prevent further deception. These measures, scammers continue to exploit victims by using technology such as fake video calls and morphed police logos, creating an illusion of a real 'digital arrest.'

As scams evolve, so must public awareness. In the words of Tangella: "The antidote to panic is knowledge. The more we understand the tactics of these fraudsters, the less power they hold over us."

## SAY GOODBYE TO LIPSTICK SMUDGES

Lipsticks make a statement in every mood, fit and style. As it is embraced across nations and cultures, its worldwide market was valued at USD 17.49 billion this year and is likely to grow at a CAGR of 4.7% from 2025 to 2030. Akin to this swelling trend, in the current year, the Indian market generated a revenue of USD 572.2 million and is anticipated to extend to USD 858.0 million by 2030. These figures showcase the increasing global and local demand for lipsticks. In line with this, there has been a clear shift towards smudge-free lipsticks in the recent past. Nowadays, consumers desire products that offer a flawless, long-lasting finish, attributed to long work days and the growing influence of the 'selfie' culture. Meeting this demand, several smudge-proof lipstick brands owe their effectiveness to advanced silicone-based polymers or film-forming agents, which create a flexible and non-transferable layer that ensures the colour stays vibrant all day. To make the most of this trend, pairing the right products with expert tricks is essential, as it guarantees a smudge-free pout that meets aesthetic and practical desires. Let's dive deeper into it.

**Exfoliate and hydrate**  
To begin with, the word for attaining flawless lips is a smooth base that sets the tone for an even look. Before applying any product to the lips, it is vital to exfoliate them and remove dead or dry skin. It can be done by using DIY lip scrubs containing honey and sugar. Besides, one must allow the scrub to settle down for a few minutes and then wipe it off with a clean, damp cloth.

**Prime the lips**  
Just like the face, lips too need a primer to reduce their rough patches and dryness. Additionally, lip primers contribute to extending the wear time of lipsticks, creating an even barrier between the lip and the product. In case, one doesn't have a primer, a concealer or foundation can do the trick to smoothen the lips and lock the colour.

**Apply lip liner**  
To keep the lipstick in place and reduce feathering, lining the lip is extremely vital. Lip liners define the lips and act as a base to prevent any unnatural damage. When picking a lip liner, one must go for a shade darker than the lip colour to create a defined base and crisp finish. This simple hack pre-

vents a washed-out appearance of the lips, in case the lipstick starts to fade out.

**Pick the right lip formula**  
While creamy and satin lip shades are the top choice for many, they often transfer quickly. Thus, to achieve a fresh look, choosing a matte formula is the best bet. Not only do they stay in place but are designed for ultimate durability. Hence, shades with waterproof specifications and liquid matte qualities are highly recommended.

**Layer the lip**  
To achieve a smudge-free look, layering the lip is an effective technique. One should start by putting a thin layer first using a lip brush.



Then, gently blot the lips with a tissue to remove excess product. Afterwards, a thick second layer must be applied to lock the colour. Adding to this, a clear lip balm can be used as a sealant on the lipstick to create a light, non-sticky barrier that reduces transfer.

**Powder through tissue**  
Once the lipstick is in place, one can place a tissue over the lips and then dust translucent powder over the tissue. This trick sets the lipstick without dulling its colour. Moreover, applying a small amount of makeup setting spray over the lips is the final seal for a transfer-proof finish.

**Opt for high-quality**  
Among a range of variants available in the market today, it is crucial to choose the right set of non-transfer lipsticks. These are instrumental in reducing the chances of colour fading, despite the activities one undertakes in the day.

**Stay away from oil**  
Oily foods are antagonists to smudge-free lipsticks since they break down their formulas. Hence, one must avoid indulging in excessively greasy foods, especially in social settings. Likewise, it may be worthwhile to carry a mini touch-up kit including blotting paper, lip liner and lip shade to maintain the overall look.

Undeniably, long-lasting, smudge-free lips are the ultimate confidence booster. With high-quality products and proven hacks, everyone can embrace the lip shades of their choice. In the end, a polished lip look is only a few thoughtful practices away, be it through a lip liner or a transfer-resistant formula.

(The author, Nitin Panjwani, is the Co-Founder, of Colors Queen.)

# what's brewing?

## CELEBRATE FESTIVE SEASON WITH 'THE NAUGHTY LIST BASH' FOR CHRISTMAS

This holiday season, SOCIAL is bringing the magic of winter alive with an unforgettable line-up of indulgent experiences. From December 19, 2024 to January 01, 2025, guests are invited to immerse themselves in the warmth of Winter Menu, toast to the season with an irresistible 1+1 drinks offer and revel in the spirit of the holidays with the much-anticipated 'The Naughty List Bash'—a Christmas celebration like no other.

The Winter Menu is a celebration of hearty flavours and comforting dishes that promise to warm your soul and make the season truly special. Drawing inspiration from bold, winter-perfect ingredients, the menu offers a medley of vibrant flavours, from the velvety Pop Corn Soup, a rich broth topped with scallions, fried onions and popcorn, to the irresistibly crispy K-Krispy Lotus Stems, tossed in signature SEXO sauce. The indulgence continues with highlights like the Dirty Thread Chicken, featuring strips of fried chicken coated in crispy vermicelli and served with Schezwan-tomato chutney and chili sour cream, and its vegetarian counterpart, the Dirty Thread Paneer, which delivers the same bold flavours. For cozy bowls, the Momo Ramen



festive feast. **Raise a toast - 1+1 on drinks**

Adding to the holiday cheer, 1+1 drinks offer makes every gathering even more memorable. This offer is an invitation to raise a toast to the season, creating memories over clinking glasses and shared laughter.

### Naughty list bash

On December 25, it takes the celebration up a notch with 'The Naughty List Bash', a bold and irreverent twist on the traditional Christmas party. This isn't your average holiday gathering—it's an unapologetically fun, over-the-top affair for those who like to break the rules.

The decor reimagines the season's aesthetics, blending traditional Christmas elements with cheeky twists like pillows featuring playful phrases such as "All I want for Christmas is a nap" and "Dear Santa, define nice". Guests can expect a high-energy evening filled with live music, festive games, and indulgent food and drinks from SOCIAL's Winter Menu.

It's a celebration that promises to delight, surprise and bring people together for a night of unrestrained fun.

offers steamed chicken or plant-based momos in a spicy kimchi-infused broth, while the soulful Nihari Ramen features tender mutton braised in a flavourful nihari broth, evoking the essence of winter comfort. For dessert, the Sizzling Christmas Cake, served with warm boozy custard, marshmallows and ice cream, offers the perfect sweet ending to this



Hyderabad played host to the highly anticipated and vibrant K Party, hosted by Lion Kiron, CEO of Suchirindia Group and Honorary Consul of Bulgaria for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The grand celebration, themed in opulent Royal British Style, was a perfect blend of sophistication and excitement, attracting a dazzling array of celebrities, prominent businessmen and influential personalities.



PARTY



Kranthi Reddy, the younger son of renowned film financier Bangaru Babu (E.V. Raja Reddy), got engaged to Sirisha, daughter of industrialist Seetha Ramireddy and Rama Seetha, in a grand ceremony at Hotel Taj Krishna on December 15.



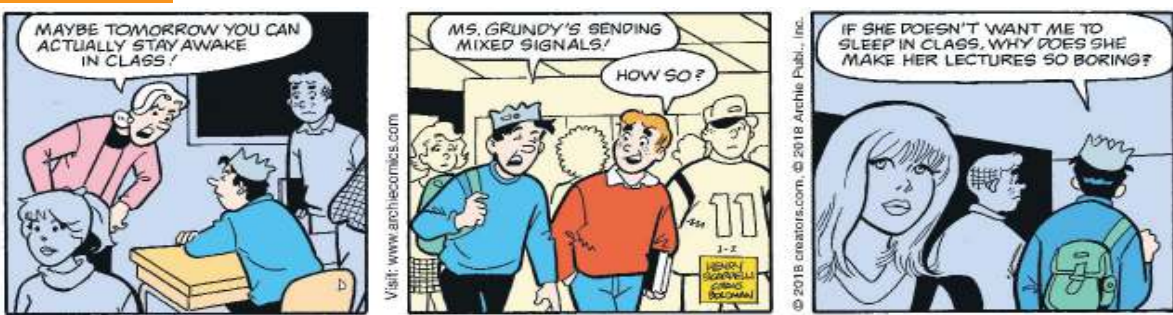
The National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) mourns the loss of the legendary maestro Zakir Hussain, a revered member of their Council and a friend to the institution for several decades. The NCPA expresses its profound sorrow at the passing of this iconic musician, whose contributions to the world of music are immeasurable.



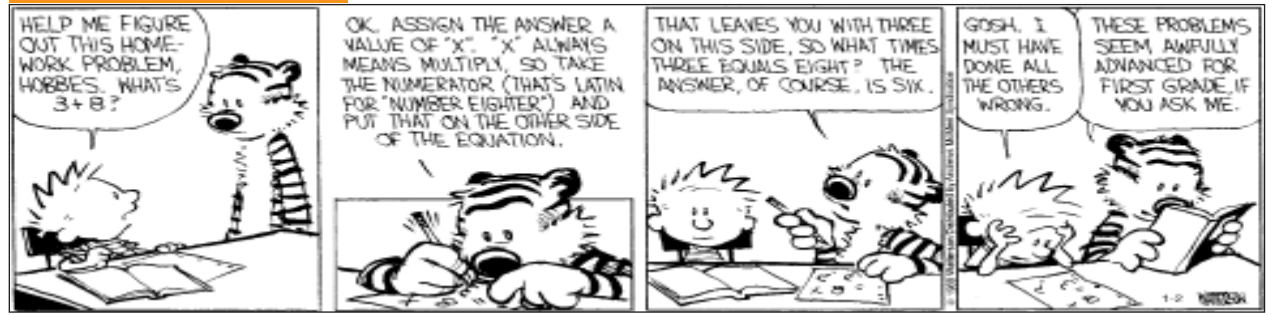
Hyderabad's Hitec Exhibition Center hosted a significant EV exhibition, featuring prominent companies like Varcas, Ryoto and Aman High Speed. A notable highlight of the event was the presentation of the Aman Hyspeed EV Scooter to Brahmarshree RamaKrishna Charyulu by Bollywood actor Naga Anvesh and company CEO Ram Vemiri Reddy. This gesture recognised Charyulu's devoted services.

## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



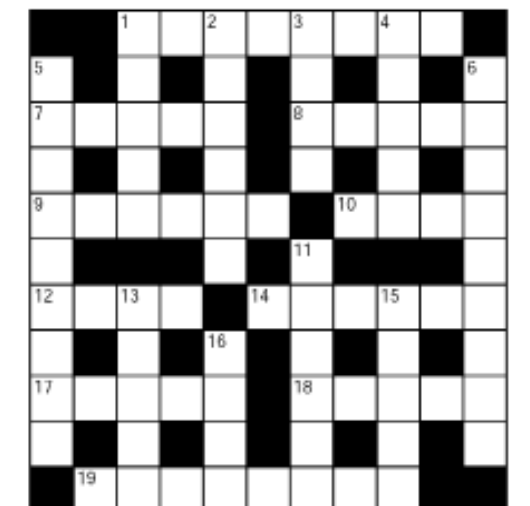
### REALITY CHECK



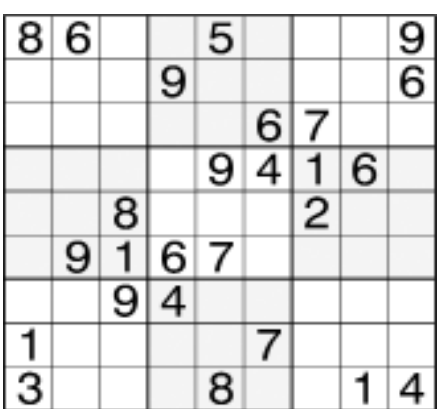
### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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

- Wear these on the lower part of your body
- Furious
- A large spoon for serving food
- Grow flowers here
- The capital city of Italy
- A speed competition
- Graceful kind of dancing
- Opposite south
- One quarter of twenty-eight
- A writer of music
- A song for one
- Listen to music on this
- Used instead of butter
- Choosing
- Overtakes
- Goods carried on a ship
- A body organ
- Buy things here

### DOWN

- A large striped wild cat
- We need this gas to live



# Ajay Arasada finds his inspiration in Devi Sri Prasad

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The talented and young music director, Ajay Arasada, is on the rise. He began his musical journey as a keyboard player for Adivi Seshi's starrer *Goodachari* and post that, worked on a few films. However, Ajay worked independently for the film *Aay* and the latest web series *Vikkatakavi*. "Goodachari film director Srirachan Pakala is my childhood friend and he offered me the opportunity to contribute keyboard programming for his film," said Ajay Arasada. "Later, I worked on films like *Ksheera Sagara Mathanam*, *Nede Vidudala*, *Missing*, and *Sriranganeethulu*." He also worked on the web series *Save the Tigers* season one and two.

Born and brought up in Visakhapatnam, Ajay Arasada watched keenly as his aunt and sisters played the Veena. "I started liking music from my childhood, watching them. Initially, I wanted to learn the guitar, so I learned the basics for about two and a half months under Sharath Master," said Ajay. He completed his engineering degree from GITAM and then worked at TCS as a software programmer. "I quit my job and decided to focus on music," said Ajay.

While working at TCS from 2011 to 2018, Ajay worked simultaneously on short films. "This gave me some practice and improved my music skills," he said. During that time, he met director Pradeep of the *Jagannatakam* film. "He saw my work and offered me the opportunity to work on his film. That's how my



entry into films happened," said Ajay. Working on the recent hit *Aay* was a good experience, said Ajay. He met producer Bunny Vas at an event related to that film. Bunny Vas said he liked the music of the *Missing* film, composed by Ajay. "Initially, he asked me to compose only two songs, but after seeing my work, they were impressed and I was given the opportunity to compose music for the other songs and the background score," said Ajay about the *Aay* movie.

He said that giving the background score for a comedy movie like *Aay* was not a small task. "However, when the film became a hit, all the hard work felt worthwhile," said Ajay.

Ajay says that directors are his mentors. "They are my greatest mentors in learning music. Collaborating with them helps me explore and learn new dimensions of music," he said. Ajay's recent web series *Vikkatakavi* is doing well, and he is receiving praise for it. "I simply delivered the output that the director Pradeep needed for the series. Being a periodical series, it required a unique musical approach. As a technician, my priority is always to deliver the output the directors seek, regardless of the genre—be it a film or a series. I'm always ready to adapt and create music for any kind of project," said Ajay.

When asked about his inspiration, "I have great admiration for Devi Sri Prasad sir. He is truly an inspiration to me," said Ajay Arasada. Talking about his upcoming projects, he said he is working on *Three Roses Season 2*, along with two other web series for Aha. Additionally, discussions are ongoing for a few movie projects, he added.

# Upendra's 'lifelong dream' gets fulfilled with Rajnikanth's Coolie

Kannada actor Upendra is well-known to the Telugu audience, having acted in numerous Telugu films. His last film was *S/O Satyamurthy*, where he starred alongside Allu Arjun and was directed by Trivikram Srinivas. "Allu Arjun is my favourite actor and I am a big fan of him," said Upendra. He also expressed his admiration for director Trivikram. The actor hasn't appeared in any Telugu films since then due to his busy schedule. "There have been a few scripts that came my way, but I was busy with my Kannada films, so I couldn't devote time to them," said Upendra.

Now, his film *Ul* is set to release on December 20. Upendra not only stars as the lead actor but also directed, provided the screenplay, and wrote the film. It's a science fiction action film and Upendra is confident about its success. "In our education system, we were taught 'A' for apple and 'B' for bat and we memorised them. However, they didn't provide additional information about 'A' or 'B', which limited our thinking capacity. If they had provided more information, our thinking would have been different. I wanted to convey a unique thought through my films," said Upendra about his film *Ul*. He added that the idea for this film aligns with his vision.

Upendra believes that the audience is the real star, and their thoughts surpass those of a filmmaker. "The audience is more connected to this film and they interact with it," said Upendra. Upendra's films are known for offering something unique compared to other movies. "The audience accepts and encourages my films, which is why I've been able to come up with innovative subjects," he said. He added that he

spent a year completing the script and another year finalising the look and character design. "For this film, we also erected special sets, and art director Sivakumar created a surreal world for this film," he said. He added that the sets appear strange at first glance, but upon closer inspection, the meaning behind them becomes clear. "But when you decode them later, you can understand the meaning behind them," said Upendra. The actor emphasised that he doesn't intend to convey any messages through his films. "Cinema is an entertainment medium and the audience visits the theater for that purpose alone. We need to incorporate commercial elements like songs, fights and good music, and this film has all those ingredients. I neither give nor take any messages; I try to convey the same in this film," said Upendra. Upendra is currently working with Superstar Rajnikanth on the film *Coolie*. "It's been a lifelong dream to work with Rajnikanth and it's a wonderful experience for me," said Upendra.



# Prabhas suffers leg injury, misses Japan promotions

Darling actor Prabhas, who recently appeared in the hit movie *Kalki 2898 AD*, incurred an injury while filming. Directed by Nag Ashwin, the film attained remarkable success, earning more than Rs 1100 crore globally.

The filmmakers have confirmed that *Kalki 2898 AD* will be released in Japan on January 3 next year. To celebrate this event, promotional activities were organised in Japan, where Prabhas was anticipated to take part. Nonetheless, the actor

notified his fans that he cannot attend because of his injury.

In a heartfelt message, Prabhas shared: "I am deeply grateful for your love and support. I have long wished to meet my fans in Japan, but unfortunately, I sustained an injury to my leg during a film shoot, which prevents me from traveling to Japan. I kindly request your understanding in this matter."

Following this announcement, fans expressed their disappointment but also extended their well wishes for Prabhas' speedy recovery.



# Vishwaksen's Laila promises romantic action-packed entertainer on February 14

Vishwaksen is set to wow audiences with his upcoming film *Laila*, where he takes on a unique dual role, showcasing his impressive range as an actor.

Directed by Ram Narayan and produced by Sahu Garapati under Shine Screens, *Laila* promises to be a captivating romantic action entertainer. The film's striking eye look has already generated buzz, with Vishwaksen embodying the character with undeniable charm. As the release date approaches, excitement is building.

*Laila* will hit screens worldwide on Valentine's Day, February 14, perfectly timed to coincide with the season of love.

The release date poster features

Vishwaksen in a stylish avatar, teasing his character's intriguing persona. The makers have also announced that the 'First Rose' (first look) will be unveiled on New Year's Day, 2025.

Vishwaksen's transformation into the woman character is a highlight of the film, marking the debut of Akanksha Sharma as the heroine. With a talented team behind the camera, including Vasudeva Murthy's screenplay, Richard Prasad's cinematography, Leon James' music and Brahma Kadali's art direction, *Laila* is poised to deliver a visually stunning cinematic experience. As the promotional activities gear up, fans can expect a thrilling ride in the lead-up to the film's release.

# WHEN AMRITHA AIYER'S BRIEF DISAPPEARANCE GOT BACHCHALAMALLI TEAM WORRIED

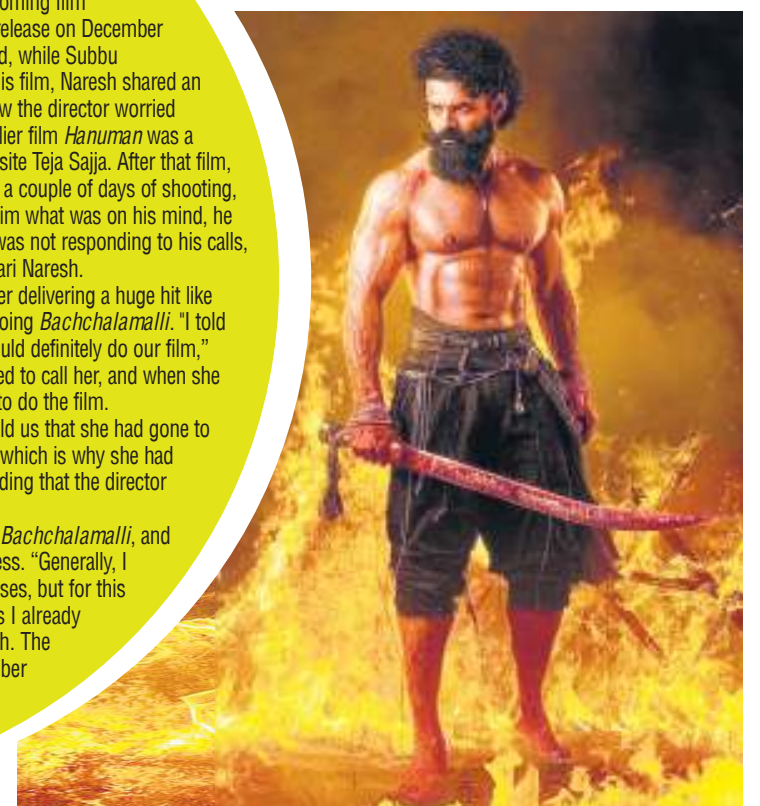
Allari Naresh is playing the lead in the upcoming film *Bachchalamalli*, which is scheduled to release on December 20. Amritha Aiyer stars as the female lead, while Subbu Mangadevi directs the film. Talking about this film, Naresh shared an interesting anecdote about the film and how the director worried about the female lead. Amritha Aiyer's earlier film *Hanuman* was a huge blockbuster, where she played opposite Teja Sajja. After that film, she signed on for *Bachchalamalli*. "After a couple of days of shooting, our director was worried. When I asked him what was on his mind, he said that the lead actress, Amritha Aiyer, was not responding to his calls, and her phone was switched off," said Allari Naresh. He added that the director thought that after delivering a huge hit like *Hanuman*, she might not be interested in doing *Bachchalamalli*. "I told the director not to worry about it, as she would definitely do our film," Naresh recalled. However, the director still tried to call her, and when she didn't answer, he assumed she was not going to do the film.

"But after a few days, Amritha called back and told us that she had gone to the USA for the promotion of her *Hanuman* film, which is why she had switched off her phone," said Allari Naresh, adding that the director was relieved after she called back.

Allari Naresh plays an intense role in *Bachchalamalli*, and he is confident about the film's success. "Generally, I feel tense before any of my film releases, but for this film's release, I feel a sense of joy, as I already sense its success," said Allari Naresh. The film is hitting the screens on December 20 and Ramesh Danda is producing it.



# SDT Impresses with his warrior-like physique in Sambarala Yetigattu



Mega Supreme Hero Sai Durgha Tej is starring in his highly anticipated Pan-India project, *Sambarala Yetigattu*. The transformation Sai Durgha Tej has undergone for this film is leaving everyone amazed. Recently, the SYG Carnage released by global star Ram Charan, has been receiving an overwhelming response.

In the video, Sai Durgha Tej captivates audiences with his warrior-like physique. Sai Durgha Tej has dedicated himself to this role through a strict diet and rigorous

exercise regimen. His commitment to doing complete justice to both the intense action sequences and his character has been widely praised. It's clear that Sai Durgha Tej is set to create a major sensation with this film.

Produced by K Niranjan Reddy and Chaitanya Reddy under the Primeshow Entertainment banner, *Sambarala Yetigattu* marks Sai Durgha Tej's 18th film. The movie is directed by newcomer Rohit KP. SYG is scheduled to release in theatres on September 25, 2025.

# Mohanlal as Kirata's first look from Kannappa is a visual treat

Vishnu Manchu's *Kannappa* is gearing up for an extraordinary launch in April 2025. The multi-stellar ensemble features strong cameos from actors within a distinct mythological storyline helmed by Mukesh Kumar Singh. Now, the creators revealed the initial glimpse of superstar Mohanlal, who will portray a significant cameo in the movie.

Taking to X (previously Twitter), the creators released the initial poster of Mohanlal as Kirata from *Kannappa*. The senior star achieved a striking tribal persona and his legendary role, representing both godliness and magnificence.

Along with it, the makers penned, "The wait is over! Behold the stunning full look of Lalettan, The Legend, Shri @Mohanlal, as 'Kirata' in #Kannappa. His dedication and brilliance illuminate this sacred tale of valor and devotion to life. Feel the divinity and grandeur unfold! #HarHarMahadev."

For the unversed, beside Mohanlal, other actors including Prabhas, Kajal Aggarwal and more are also supposed to portray special cameos in the film. However, the rest of their looks are yet to be unveiled by the makers, thereby keeping up with the excitement amongst the fans.



# Jasprit Bumrah defends struggling Indian team in Australia

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Jasprit Bumrah on Monday defended the struggling Indian team in Australia and played down talk of additional pressure on him, saying it's a side in transition and given his experience, it's his "job" to shoulder extra responsibility.

here and it's not the easiest place to play cricket. Over here, it's a different atmosphere with this wicket being a different challenge so yeah, we are not looking at that." Bumrah, who leads the bowling chart in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 18 wickets so far, defended the Indian attack amid chatter that he is not getting adequate support from fellow bowlers.



come into the side. We have to be considerate and give them that cushion that they will learn from experience," he said. "Nobody is born with all the experiences, nobody is born with all the skills. You keep learning, you keep finding new ways (and) you keep learning about your own game," he continued.

others to come up with the solutions. "I look at how do I solve it, what can I do in this scenario rather than whinging or complaining or looking at someone else or pointing fingers that I need this from this person," he said.



## Marsh admits being nervous at gully, hails team's bowling on Day 3

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australian all-rounder Mitchell Marsh on Monday conceded that fielding at gully makes him the "most nervous", particularly because of Cameron Green's excellent reputation in that position.

innings. "I think when you get sent in and you make 450, it's always positive, and then I guess you earn the right to attack, especially early with the ball. Like I said before, now it's just about how do we try and take 20 wickets. We've got six more to get, and then we just assess from there."

## Mohammed Siraj bowling with a niggle

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday revealed that Mohammed Siraj has been bowling with a niggle and praised him for fighting through pain during the ongoing third Test against Australia here.



little bit of a niggle but he still kept on bowling and still helped the team because he knew if he goes inside and he doesn't bowl, then that team will go under pressure.

field and Siraj then left the field as Akash Deep completed the over. The 30-year-old, however, returned to the field on Day 2 and ended up taking the wickets of Australia skipper Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon.

best on the field. And even when he is not 100% fit, when he has got a niggle, he is still fighting for the team. So that is a great attitude. "Keep running in, keep having a smile on your face"



## Gavaskar urges Virat Kohli to refrain from playing cover drive

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Monday urged India superstar Virat Kohli to draw inspiration from Sachin Tendulkar's monumental 241 against Australia in Sydney in 2004 and refrain from playing cover drive in order to end his persistent struggle against deliveries outside off-stump.

look at his hero, Sachin Tendulkar. The way in which he (Tendulkar) had kept his patience and control on his off-side game, scoring those 241 runs at Sydney," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

## Isa Guha calls Bumrah a 'primate', apologises for her remark later

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Former England player and commentator Isa Guha, who referred to Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah as a "primate" during the third Test between India and Australia here, apologised for her racist remark on Monday.



slammed her and forced the 39-year-old to issue an apology. "Yesterday in commentary I used a word that can be interpreted in a number of different ways. I'd like to apologise for any offence caused," Guha said on air at the start of day three.

admire greatly." Guha, who is of Indian heritage and has been in Fox Sports' broadcast team for several years, said there was no malice in her comments.

# Kane Williamson makes 156 as New Zealand sets a target of 658 for England

AP ■ HAMILTON

Kane Williamson made 156 as New Zealand amassed a lead of 657 runs before both England openers were dismissed to leave the hosts in a commanding position at the end of the third day of the third cricket test on Monday.

opener charged the veteran seamer who is playing his final test. Zac Crawley (5) was dismissed by Matt Henry for the sixth time in the series, trapped lbw one over before stumps. Jacob Bethell 9 not out and Joe Root had yet to score were at the crease at the close.

injury to his left hamstring while playing in The Hundred in August for the Northern Superchargers against the Manchester Originals. He was on crutches for some time and forced to miss England's test series against Sri Lanka and the first test of the subsequent series against Pakistan.



resumed at 1.30 with New Zealand 136-3, Williamson 50 not out and Ravindra 2. Williamson scored fluently throughout the day, hitting 14 fours and a six in his century.

He was typically powerful square of the wicket, particularly in his use of the cut shot. Ravindra was sometimes bogged down, at the start of the day when he added only a handful of runs in the first hour and later when he found his scoring options limited.

7.30pm, under lights if necessary, because of the loss of the morning session. It led by 600 at 6.10pm but no declaration came. England took the second new ball after 93.4 overs when the lead was 604 and put in the hands of off-spinner Shoib Bashir who took 2-170, the most expensive bowling figures against New Zealand.