

Why didn't the government arrest and jail the CM's brothers when a former sarpanch in the CM's village Kondareddypally died declaring that he was dying due to harassment by the CM's brothers? The CM should reveal whether justice is different for the CM and his family and others. Did Congress leaders console the families of the students who died eating contaminated food in residential schools? Did the government take responsibility for the students who died eating worm-infested rice and due to snake bites? Revanth should stop seeking vengeance. Or else it will suffer the fate of the BRS

- Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs

India, Kuwait elevate ties to strategic partnership

NITA AMBANI TO CHAMPION NATION'S GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Rashmika Mandanna dominates blockbuster CHART OF 2024

DON'T MISS...

41 percent crime surge in Hyderabad

Hyderabad witnessed a 41 per cent rise in crime in 2024 with 35,944 cases registered compared to 25,488 in 2023. Convictions stood at 68 per cent, with 3,904 convictions and 5,765 disposed cases. Cybercrimes caused Rs 296.32 crore in losses from 4,042 cases, but convictions remained low at two. Key cyber crimes included investment fraud (926 cases, Rs 60.02 crore lost), trading fraud (563 cases, Rs 136.66 crore lost), and OTP fraud ...

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ISRO to study how crops grow in space

Demonstration of seed germination in outer space, a robotic arm to catch a tethered debris there, and testing of green propulsion systems are some of the experiments planned on the POEM-4 -- the fourth stage of ISRO's PSLV rocket that remains in orbit after launching a satellite. The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an year-end launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to ...

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'BIT and FTAs are two separate pacts'

Demands of certain developed countries from India to negotiate 'investment protection' elements under an FTA is inappropriate as negotiating the matter as part of a separate chapter under the trade pact could have larger and detrimental implications, source said. Legally speaking, they said, the investment protection element provides a wide range of obligations and commitments bestowed upon foreign investors, which are expansive in ...

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Rohit should change his tactics: Shastri

With skipper Rohit Sharma struggling to decipher a way to score runs in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, former India coach Ravi Shastri says the stylish batter should go in with a clear mindset, change his tactics, and attack the bowlers. Rohit missed the opening Test Down Under to be with his family for the birth of his second child. He was expected to reclaim the opener's spot but KL Rahul's impressive 77 in India's win at Perth prompted a rejig of the batting order with Rohit ...

-SPORTS

Like in Bengal, BJP eyeing Telugu film stars



PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 The BJP is ramping up efforts to court popular Tollywood stars to boost its influence in Telugu states. Sources reveal that the party is actively working to bring leading actors, including Allu Arjun and Nagarjuna, into its fold. With its existing ally Pawan Kalyan already being projected as a prominent Hindutva face in South India, the party appears determined to expand its influence in the Telugu film industry. A senior BJP leader from Telangana, who hails from the

Banking on the latest tussle between the Congress admin and Telugu film stars, the BJP has jumped into the scene to win the support of prominent film stars to strengthen its base in both Telugu states and also to bag youth support. As it successfully lured Bengali film stars to counter Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, in the Telugu states too, the BJP is reportedly making moves so as not to miss the bus. As the star power in West Bengal helped it enormously during elections and eroded the clout of Mamata, the BJP strongly thinks that the same technique can be used successfully in the Telugu states if it can secure the support of Telugu film stars

same community as Allu Arjun, is reportedly spearheading these efforts. This leader, who holds a prominent position in the party, has received the high command's nod to intensify engagement with Tollywood stars. Efforts are also underway to attract other prominent Telugu actors into the BJP. Meanwhile, the Congress has found itself at odds with the Telugu film industry. The demolition of the N-Convention Centre issue involving Nagarjuna has further strained the



CM calls for tough action
 Condemns attack incident

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy condemned attack and directed the state Director General of Police and the city police commissioner to be tough in maintaining law and order. In a post on X, the CM said any laxity in law and order will not be tolerated. Police said that one of the protesters who arrived at Allu Arjun's

house, mounted the compound wall and started throwing tomatoes. When the security staff objected and persuaded them to get down from the wall, they manhandled the security staff and damaged some flower pots, the release said. The protesters raised slogans for a while and spoke to the media waiting at the gate, police said.



Venkat demands Allu's apology
 Ridiculing film hero Allu Arjun's statement that his legal team did not allow him to console Sri Tej by visiting KIMS hospital where Sri Tej is getting treated, the R&B and Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy asked Allu Arjun to apologise to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy immediately. He said that it is not proper for Allu Arjun to counterattack the CM saying that the CM had spoiled his image.

Continued on Page 2

Allu Arjun's Hyd residence attacked

A group claiming to be members of the Osmania University Joint Action Committee, on Sunday damaged flowerpots and other things at the residence of Telugu actor Allu Arjun here. The protesters threw stones and tomatoes at the house of Allu Arjun, barged into the premises

and destroyed flowerpots. They climbed the house's boundary wall and created trouble at Allu Arjun's residence. They also staged a dharna at the gate. The protesters raised slogans against the actor and sought justice for the woman who died in a stampede

Continued on Page 2



OU JAC leaders indulges in vandalism at Allu Arjun's residence on Sunday

'Express feelings responsibly'

Pushpa star's appeal to fans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
 Telugu cinema star Allu Arjun on Sunday appealed to his fans to not resort to any kind of abusive language or behaviour, both online and offline, amid fresh allegations against him in the Sandhya Theatre stampede case. A 35-year-old woman died and her eight-year-old son was injured on December 4 during a stampede-like situation at the cinema hall in Hyderabad when thousands of fans jostled to have a glimpse of the actor at the premiere of his recent release 'Pushpa 2: The Rule'.

atre during the film's screening despite police permission being denied, a charge that the actor denied. On Sunday, Arjun shared a word of caution for his fans on social media. "I appeal to all my fans to express their feelings responsibly, as always and not resort to any kind of abusive language or behaviour both online and offline," he said in a statement posted on X. "Misrepresenting as my fans with fake IDs and fake profiles, if someone indulges in abusive posts, strong action will be taken against them. I request the fans not to engage with such posts," the actor further said in the post.

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Saturday alleged that Arjun visited the the-

Continued on Page 2

Is justice different for CM's family and others?: Bandi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 Demanding Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to explain why he did not arrest and jail his brothers when a former sarpanch of the CM's village, Kondareddypally, died declaring that he was dying due to harassment by the CM's brothers, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, asked the CM

whether justice is different for the CM and his family. In a statement issued on Sunday, Sanjay said, "It is shameful on the part of the CM to create a problem again by making a AIMIM Member ask a question in the Assembly about the Sandhya Theatre issue. The Congress government is conspiring to destroy the Telugu cinema industry by making the Assembly a forum

for that along with the AIMIM, a party which has no values." Sanjay said the CM's comments are intended to character-assassinate Allu Arjun. The CM is behaving vengefully towards the Telugu film industry even after everyone condemned the death of a woman in the Sandhya Theatre incident. Everyone is praying for Sri Tej's recovery and supporting Revanth's family, he said. "Allu Arjun says that he came to Sandhya Theatre after informing the police. Since the last 50 years, all film heroes come to RTC Cross Roads on the opening day of the movie. Moreover, it is also common for pan-India cinema benefit shows to have huge audiences. Knowing this, the admin should have made advance security arrangements. It is a shame to blame others if an innocent woman fell victim to the Congress Government's negligence and her son is left in coma. Arresting Allu Arjun is nothing but revenge and keeping him in jail for a night although he was granted bail by the High Court is proof of the Congress Government's intentions," Sanjay said.

Continued on Page 2

Not fair to target cine industry: DK Aruna

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 MP DK Aruna strongly criticized the attack on actor Allu Arjun's residence. The BJP takes strong exception to this attack. Nobody will tolerate it, she added. Law and order has deteriorated in the Congress rule. The police machinery has to take stringent action against such incidents, she said. The seems to be the hand of the Congress in this attack, she alleged and told the Congress leaders not to show their intolerance to the BRS against the actors. It is not fair on the part of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to target the cinema industry, she added.



'Confine yourself to AP'

Ponnam tells Purandeshwari

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 Transport Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar on Sunday commented that the statement of Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar on the Allu Arjun issue is up to Bandi Sanjay's wisdom. On the other hand, Ponnamp Prabhakar condemned the comments of the BJP MP from Andhra Pradesh, Purandeshwari, and APTDP chief Palla Srinivasa Rao.



Ponnamp said that it is better for Srinivasa Rao and Purandeshwari to look into their state's affairs. He suggested Srinivasa Rao and Purandeshwari to watch international classes on social media and think about service confining themselves to AP. "Purandeshwari should

answer the attempt to murder case filed against Rahul Gandhi in connection with the Parliament attack incident if she has such a human touch. Why is the BJP not responding to the remarks of Amit Shah made in Parliament? Should Purandeshwari remain quiet if someone comments against NTR? Sanjay and Purandeshwari should respond to Amit Shah's comments if they have the guts," Ponnamp said.

Modi receives Kuwait's highest honour



'Resist Congress's betrayal of Rythu Bharosa scheme'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 In a strongly worded open letter, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao (KTR) called upon Telangana's farmers to unite against the Congress Government's "deceptive and restrictive" actions regarding the Rythu Bharosa scheme. He accused Chief Minister Revanth Reddy of avoiding critical questions about the scheme during the Assembly session. "Instead of addressing the concerns of farmers, he diverted the discussion to irrelevant issues," KTR said. He expressed concern over the Congress govern-

ment's plans to align Rythu Bharosa with the Centre's PM-Kisan guidelines, which he said would exclude over half of Telangana's farmers from receiving benefits. "This is a deliberate attempt to cut benefits and betray the farming community," KTR said. Highlighting the achievements of



Continued on Page 2

Naidu, Revanth to join over 100 Indian CEOs in Davos

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
 At least three chief ministers -- Devendra Fadnavis, Chandrababu Naidu and Revanth Reddy -- will join over 100 CEOs and other leaders from India in Davos next month for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025. Naidu will also be joined by his son and senior Andhra Pradesh minister Nara Lokesh, while Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, Tamil Nadu Minister T R B Rajaa and Uttar Pradesh minister Suresh Khanna will also be there for the five-day annual congregation in the Swiss ski resort town starting on January 20, 2025.

Some senior Union ministers are also expected to attend the meeting, but their names are still being finalised. Those who attended the last WEF annual meeting from the central government included Ashwini Vaishnav, Smriti Irani and Hardeep Singh Puri. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also attended the meeting in the past, but there is no official word so far about his participation in the

high-profile summit, for which the main theme this time would be 'collaboration for the intelligent age'. Expected to be attended by nearly 50 heads of states and governments from across the world, the annual meeting would take place in the backdrop of a change of regime

Meeting in 2018 for the first time as India's Prime Minister and the US President, respectively. While Modi became Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive term ear-

Andhra Pradesh CM Naidu have been at Davos multiple times, while Telangana CM Reddy attended the WEF Annual Meeting in January 2024 as well. Besides government leaders and civil society members, the Indian presence would comprise of top executives of business conglomerates like Reliance, Tata, Adani, Birla, Bharti, Mahindra, Godrej, Jindal, Bajaj and Vedanta groups. Besides Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, the next-generation leaders from their groups are also expected to present, while technology leaders including Salil Parekh of Infosys, Rishad Premji of Wipro, as also Sumant Sinha of ReNew, Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Paytm and Adar Poonawalla of Serum

Naidu will also be joined by his son and senior Andhra Pradesh minister Nara Lokesh, while Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, Tamil Nadu Minister T R B Rajaa and Uttar Pradesh minister Suresh Khanna will also be there for the five-day annual congregation in the Swiss ski resort town starting on January 20, 2025



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Monday Mirchi

REVANTH REDDY GIVES SMITA SABHARWAL A RARE CHANCE TO SHINE

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has done what even ex CM K Chandrashekar Rao didn't—he gave Smita Sabharwal the opportunity to sign Telangana's first-ever tourism policy. For the bureaucrat who spent the last ten years as the CM's secretary, this marks a rare moment, as secretaries are typically not signatories of any policies. The tourism policy, for the state, has Smita's stamp all over it. She drafted the policy from scratch and discussed its key points directly with Revanth Reddy, who not only approved it but also ensured that she would be the one to officially sign it. Smita's happiness is evident—after a decade of working behind the scenes, this moment represents a significant shift in her role. The tourism policy now stands as a milestone, both for Telangana and for Smita Sabharwal's career.

PRAVEEN PRAKASH'S YOUTUBE LEAP LEAVES BUREAUCRATS TALKING

When Praveen Prakash took VRS in July, the buzz was all about his next move. But no one saw this coming—a YouTube channel! Yes, the former bureaucrat, known for his sharp administrative skills, is now sharing tips and tales on PP Talks. From GST debates to IIT/IIM dilemmas, Praveen is covering it all. And while some find his candid takes refreshing, others in bureaucratic circles are raising their eyebrows. Whispers in corridors of power are that he traded files for fame. The timing of the channel's launch—right after his retirement—has only added fuel to the gossip. Was this always his plan? Whatever the case, one thing's for sure: Praveen isn't looking back, and his colleagues are glued to his next upload!

PRATIK JAIN FACES BUREAUCRATIC BACKLASH AMID DIVIDED OPINIONS

The bureaucratic circles in Telangana are

abuzz with whispers over the Pratik Jain Lagacherla issue, with opinions sharply divided. While the attack on the collector has drawn widespread condemnation, not everyone is rushing to defend Pratik himself. In fact, several senior bureaucrats are quietly questioning his intentions, pointing out that collectors in the state traditionally command immense respect—making his situation a rather unusual one. Adding to the murmur is Pratik's recent meeting with Tirupathi Reddy, brother of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. The meeting hasn't sat well with many bureaucrats, who are now openly discussing Pratik's missteps. It's not just about the attack anymore, insider remarked. It's his conduct and decisions that have raised eyebrows. For now, the chatter continues, with the bureaucracy seemingly at a crossroads—support a peer or call out what they see as his mistakes. Either way, Pratik finds himself in the eye of a very stormy debate.

REVANTH REDDY'S "DIALOGUE, NOT MONOLOGUE" APPROACH WITH BUREAUCRACY

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy seems to be on a mission to redefine how official meetings are held. Unlike his predecessor K Chandrashekar Rao, known for his authoritative and often one-sided interactions, Revanth's style is turning heads. Word in the corridors of power is that he's met with almost everyone—friends, foes, and even those bureaucrats who were once labeled as BRS loyalists. One senior official, with a sly smile, couldn't help but spill, "With Revanth Reddy, it's dialogue and not monologue." Quite a loaded statement, isn't it? The buzz is that even those who've been on the receiving end of loopy postings are now seeing hope of being brought back into the fold.

--Yours truly

Govt committed to providing quality edu for all, says Uttam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy reaffirmed the Congress government's commitment to making quality education accessible to all sections of society. He emphasised the need for government-driven initiatives to uplift disadvantaged groups and address the long-standing gaps in the education system.

Uttam was addressing the alumni meet of Dr BR Ambedkar Educational Institutions in Baghingampally on Sunday, organised as part of the institution's golden jubilee celebrations. The event coincided with the 10th death anniversary of Gaddam Venkatswamy, the institution's founder.

Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad, Transport Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar, MLAs Nagaraju and Vivek Venkatswamy, MP Gaddam Vamsi Krishna and Correspondent Dr Saroja Vivek attended the event.

Uttam highlighted the Congress Government's initiatives to overhaul the education system in Telangana. He spoke about the launch of Young India Integrated Residential Schools, which aim to provide English medium education up to Standard 12 on par with international standards. These schools, established on campuses spanning 20 to 25 acres, cater to students from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and other underprivileged communities.

"We have launched these schools in 60 constituencies and plan to establish one in all the 119 Assembly constituencies. The government will spend around Rs 5,000 crore on this," he said.

Focusing on primary education, Uttam criticised the BRS government for neglecting it. "They did not recruit a single teacher in the last 10 years. Within six months of coming to power, we recruited 11,000 teachers and gave promotions and transfers. We've also appointed full-time Vice-Chancellors in all universities," he said.

Arjun didn't leave despite being told about woman's death: Hyd police

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun did not leave the theatre during the screening of 'Pushpa-2' on December 4 despite being told to do so in view of a stampede in which a woman died, police officials claimed on Sunday.

Speaking at a press conference on the annual round-up of 2024, city police commissioner C V Anand showed a video, made by police, on the situation that prevailed when the stampede occurred.

The video was made by collating footage, including from news channels and cell phone clips. It suggests the actor remained in the theatre till the midnight.

Anand did not make any comment on the video, but said the media can draw its own conclusions.

A police official talked about the sequence of events on the fateful night of December 4.

He said that he and other police officials informed a manager of Allu Arjun about the death of the woman and told him that the situation was out of control. He indicated that they were not allowed to meet the actor.

Allu Arjun's staff members told them that they would convey the matter to the actor but did not do so, he said.

The official said he later managed to reach the actor, told him about the woman's death and asked him to leave the theatre so that the fans don't harm each other while trying to catch a glimpse of him.

The official also told the

actor that security arrangements would be made for his exit.

However, the actor said he would go only after watching the film, the police official said.

Later, accompanied by a senior officer, the official went inside and brought the actor out, he said.

Amid allegations that bouncers hired by Allu Arjun pushed crowds as well as policemen when the stampede occurred at the cinema hall, the police commissioner warned that stringent action as per law would be taken if the bouncers indeed misbehaved with the police on duty

Amid allegations that bouncers hired by Allu Arjun pushed crowds as well as policemen when the stampede occurred at the cinema hall, the police commissioner warned that stringent action as per law would be taken if the bouncers indeed misbehaved with the police on duty.

The VIPs would be made responsible for the behaviour of the bouncers hired by them, he said. Asked if the police would appeal against the interim bail granted to Allu Arjun, the commissioner refused to give a direct response.

CM must explain why he spoke about Allu Arjun in Assembly: BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BRS asked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to explain why the CM spoke about the Allu Arjun issue in the Assembly after skipping the Lagacherla farmers' issue.

Addressing the media on Sunday at the Telangana Bhavan, BRS leaders Ponnala Laxmaiah, Dasoju Sravan and others asked the CM how he could speak about an issue which is sub-judice.

The BRS leaders asked the CM, who is now shedding crocodile tears, to tell why he did not pay ex-gratia to the affected family.

If Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy can help the victim's family through his Pratheek Foundation, why can't the CM do the same, they asked.

The BRS leaders asked the CM to reveal whether he had no hand in the death of Revathi. "Who gave permission to the benefit show? The CM who failed to protect Revathi," they said.

Moreover, the CM spoke against the law in the Assembly. "How can the CM speak on issues that are sub-judice in the Assembly," they asked. The BRS leaders said the CM is misleading people on the Lagacherla farmers' issue. "The people of Lagacherla ensured the victory of the CM but the CM jailed them," they said.

"The CM said that the Formula E Race issue is in court and it is not possible to discuss that in the Assembly. How can the same CM speak about the Allu Arjun issue which also is in court?"

Sanjay visits Sri Tej at KIMS Hospital

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, visited Sri Tej, a child who is being treated at KIMS Hospital after suffering serious injuries in the 'Sandhya' theatre stampede, on Sunday.

Sanjay enquired about the condition of Sri Tej with doctors and also spoke to Tej's father and his family. The Union Minister inquired about the Sandhya Theatre stampede.

Later, Sanjay spoke to the media along with J. Sangappa, the BJP's state official spokesperson, and local BJP leaders. Sanjay said that he hoped that Sri Tej would recover fast.

Asking everyone to stop criticising each other about the Sandhya theatre issue, he requested everyone to pray for Sri Tej's recovery.



Union Minister Bandi Sanjay enquiring about the incident in Sandhya theatre with Sri Tej's father at KIMS hospital on Sunday

LAXMAN ASKS CM TO LET GO ALLU, FOCUS ON ADMIN

The BJP's Rajya Sabha Member Dr K. Laxman said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is behaving vengeful towards the Telugu film

industry. He alleged that the CM framed Allu Arjun in criminal cases and is targeting him.

The CM should leave unnecessary issues and concentrate on the state's interests, he said.

Allu Arjun draws heavy flak for speaking against CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Government Whip Adi Srinivas criticised Allu Arjun for not showing any remorse over the Sandhya Theatre incident in which a woman died and her son was injured seriously.

"How far is it right on the part of Allu Arjun to criticise Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's statement in the Assembly without showing even minimum concern towards the family of Revathi," Adi Srinivas asked.

Adi released a video message saying that Allu Arjun didn't listen when the police tried to inform him about the death of a woman on December 4. Allu Arjun left for his residence waving to his fans only after the DCP asked him to leave the theatre.

Adi said that it is painful that Allu Arjun did not think at all about the victim's family and was busy protecting his image during his Saturday press conference. He asked whether name and fame is more important for Allu

Arjun instead of the victim's family.

"Why does Allu Arjun's father Allu Arvind who said that Allu is depressed and sad after the incident, is not thinking about Sri Tej, who is in a coma in hospital. Is it right on the part of Allu Arjun to criticise the CM instead of expressing regret, Adi said.

Meanwhile, the Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, said that Allu Arjun is not concerned about the public but is worried only about his 'cinema' collections."

"The government allowed to increase ticket rates as producers made the film working hard for three years. However, Allu Arjun did not show any concern about what was happening outside when an ambulance came when he was watching the film.

Allu Arjun read the script like a reel hero instead of a real hero when he reacted to the CM's statement in the Assembly. Allu's explanation

has no clarity and it was reflected in his press conference," Kiran said.

MLC Venkat Balmoor said that this is not the way to show 'Telugodi Satha' (Telugu's strength) and added one has to show sympathy when tragic incidents like the one at Sandhya Theatre take place.

"Everyone thought that Allu Arjun would express regret at his press conference. However, it was not right to speak against the admin. All videos show how Allu Arjun entered the theatre and left. However, he told lies saying that he came to know about the woman's death only the next day," Venkat Balmoor said.

He said that Allu Arjun burst crackers at his residence the day after Revathi's death. Allu's comments against the CM are not right, Venkat Balmoor said and demanded that Allu should withdraw his comments against the CM and introspect himself.

own without any external support of oxygen or inotropes, as reported on Saturday.

Following the incident on December 4, the city police registered a case against Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on the complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family.

The actor was arrested by the city police in connection with the death of the woman on December 13. The Telangana High Court granted him a four-week interim bail on the same day and Arjun was released from a prison here on December 14 morning.

Allu Arjun's...

Continued from page 1

at a movie theatre here earlier this month on the occasion of the screening of the actor's latest film 'Pushpa-2'. The protesters were taken away by the police. A placard left by them said crores are made by making films while those watching films are dying.

Addressing the media, the OU JAC leaders said that cinema people are looting public funds and earning crores. They criticised film directors and producers for not speaking about Revathi's death.

Film industry people should be ashamed of criticising the Congress Government which is speaking for the poor, they said.

Venkat demands ...

Continued from page 1

Venkat said that Allu Arjun had said that his image would be damaged if his issue is mentioned in the Assembly. It is not right for Allu Arjun to speak against the Chief Minister and there is no question of allowing benefit shows in future, he said.

"Allu Arjun should apologise to the CM. It is not proper for Allu Arjun to speak against the CM. However, we respect all cine actors. We will encourage them if they make good films. The government is committed to the development of the film industry. But there would be no future benefit shows henceforth," Venkat said.

He said that Allu Arjun went to Sandhya theatre even after the police refused permission and declared that Allu Arjun is the reason for the death of Revanti. Losing a life is not a small issue.

However, it is more shocking that Allu Arjun did not console the victim. It is surprising that big film heroes consoled Allu Arjun after he was arrested. All are equal before the law. There are no exemptions for film stars. Allu Arjun behaved arrogantly towards the police when they went to his house to arrest him.

Naidu, Revanth ...

Continued from page 1

Institute are expected in the Swiss Alpine resort town.

Geneva-based WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation, will convene leaders from government, business and civil society as well as scientific and cultural thinkers for its 55th annual meeting under the theme of 'Collaboration for the Intelligent Age'.

According to the WEF, the meeting will serve as a trusted global platform for dialogue and cooperation, bring together a diverse community of stakeholders, seek to connect the dots in an era of complexity and be firmly future-oriented -- both in terms of insights and solutions.

Several sessions are expected to be attended by Indian leaders, including one on 'India's Economic Blueprint'.

As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India

has been growing at over 8 per cent and this growth has been buoyed by a focus on promoting local innovation and startups in technology and manufacturing, representing a departure from traditional export-oriented models.

The leaders would deliberate how has India capitalised on this new blueprint and to what extent can it continue to drive global growth.

According to the WEF, the annual meeting will take place at a time when geo-economic fragmentation, geopolitical polarisation and divisions over values continue to impact countries and communities across the world.

At the same time, exponential innovation and deployment around whole sets of interconnected technologies -- from AI and quantum to energy tech, biotech and health tech -- offer an unprecedented opportunity to increase productivity and hence standards of living.

'Resist Congress' ...

Continued from page 1

The BRS Government he said, "Rythu Bandhu revolutionised Telangana's agriculture sector, turning farming into a festival. Over ₹73,000 crore has been credited directly to farmers' accounts during 11 seasons, ensuring transparency and eliminating corruption."

He also pointed out that ₹28,000 crore was allocated for loan waivers, resulting in nearly ₹1 lakh crore being pumped into the hands of farmers to rejuvenate agriculture.

He criticised the Congress

for failing to fulfil its pre-election promise of giving ₹15,000 per acre annually as per the Rythu Bharosa scheme. "It's been a year since, but instead of delivering, they have reduced the amount and imposed unnecessary conditions, betraying the farmers once again," he said.

He dismissed Congress' allegations that funds from Rythu Bandhu were diverted to real estate as "baseless propaganda aimed at discrediting farmers and the BRS Government."

KTR urged farmers to rise

against the Congress's duplicity. "Question their broken promises, challenge their leaders in your villages, and demand accountability. Farmers must unite to protect their rights and ensure that no injustice is done to them," he stated.

The letter concludes with a rallying cry to farmers to reject the Congress's attempts to dismantle the support systems provided by the BRS government. "Let's protect the shields of support provided by KCR and resist Congress's betrayal," KTR said.

Like in Bengal ...

Continued from page 1

relationship between the party and Tollywood. Apart from this, Konda Surekha's comments against the Akkineni family have not

gone down well with the industry. Speculations are rife that Nagarjuna is already in touch with BJP leaders.

The BJP's focus on Tollywood is seen as part of a larger strategy to connect with youth and the Telugu

population, leveraging the immense popularity of film stars. With the green signal from the high command, BJP's moves in this direction are expected to gain momentum in the coming months.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | MONDAY | DECEMBER 23, 2024

03



Transgenders recruited as traffic assistants in a pilot project perform demo at ICCC on Sunday

39 transgenders to take up traffic assistants' job

DEEPIKA PASHAM
deepikapasham2015@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

In a one of a kind initiative, Hyderabad City Police has recruited 39 transgenders as traffic assistants in a pilot project who would take charge starting Monday in few traffic zones of Hyderabad City Police limits.

The group which was trained for last 10 days has performed their demo at ICCC as Commissioner CV Anand welcomed them to the police department. "I welcome everybody and urge you all to perform duties with commitment. On the performance standard they will be given postings in the police department and currently they are given opportunities at home guard level," said Anand.

P Viswa Prasad, Additional CP, Traffic Branch told 'The Pioneer', "The purpose is to bring dignity to the transgender community as they are indulging in many other jobs of begging for money. Transgender Traffic Assistants will receive an honorarium of Rs 921 per day."

The criteria were to must be a citizen of India with between 18-40 years, SSC (10th standard) passed, must have a transgender ID card issued by the District Collector, should be medically fit and of satisfactory character. Running (100m and 800m/400m) and long jump based on gender category with detailed time were conducted. They will manage traffic flow, enforce traffic rules, assist during events and promote traffic awareness, he added.

Group of recruited, speaking to 'The Pioneer' said, "We are happy to get recruited as traffic assistants. As the police officers detailed it is dignity towards our community and we are paid nearly Rs 28,000 monthly which will open doors for us to prepare for further studies if one wants to pursue. We will be independent."

HYD ANNUAL CRIME ROUND-UP

41 percent crime surge, drones to be used for surveillance

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad witnessed a 41 per cent rise in crime in 2024 with 35,944 cases registered compared to 25,488 in 2023.

Convictions stood at 68 per cent, with 3,904 convictions and 5,765 disposed cases. Cybercrimes caused Rs 296.32 crore in losses from 4,042 cases, but convictions remained low at two.

Key cyber crimes included investment fraud (926 cases, Rs 60.02 crore lost), trading fraud (563 cases, Rs 136.66 crore lost), and OTP fraud (361 cases, Rs 10.20 crore lost). Bodily crimes rose by 65.74 per cent, from 5,098 cases in 2023 to 8,447 in 2024. Property crimes increased from 3,551 to 5,328 cases.

Bodily crimes witnessed a rise of 65.74 per cent, increasing from 5,098 cases in 2023 to 8,447 in 2024. Grave bodily crimes also surged from 563 cases in 2023 to 700 in 2024. Property crimes followed an upward trend, jumping from 3,551 cases in 2023 to 5,328 in 2024. Crimes against women grew by 2.39 per cent, while crimes against children surged by 21.02 per cent.

Police Commissioner CV Anand emphasised night policing, inducted 1,127 new constables and announced plans to acquire drones for traffic monitoring and establish a Drone Maintenance Wing. Efforts by SHE Teams



resulted in 1,201 cases, with 2,280 offenders caught red-handed and 425 petty cases resolved. H-NEW seized drugs worth Rs10.56 crore

in 2024, including 2,668 kg of ganja and other narcotics. Hyderabad recorded 2,745 road accidents in 2024 as opposed

to 2,548 last year. The city saw over 227 deaths in 76 fatal accidents in 2024. During the drunk and drive checks in 2024, 8,40,084 people were checked, 52,080 cases were booked and 46,468 chargesheets were filed. In 2023, 3,49,917 people were checked, 43,940 cases were booked and 45,327 chargesheets were filed.

In 2023, 19,29,698 violations were recorded for riding without a helmet, which jumped to

22,74,662 in 2024. In 2023, 1,878 people were booked for minor driving, which increased to 2,976 in 2024.

Enhanced patrolling, CCTV coverage and safety measures are planned for 2025 to curb rising crime, said Commissioner Anand.

The figures were released during the annual round-up meeting by the Police Commissioner at the Integrated Command Control Centre at Banjara Hill on Sunday.

CRIME CASES REGISTERED COMPARED

Year	Cases
2024	35,944
2023	25,488



CITY EVENTS

Zinda Dilan-e-Hyderabad

Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
December 23
(6 pm to 10 pm)

All India Crafts Mela

Kathak performance by Parkhi School Of Performing Arts
Venue
Shilparamam
December 23 (5:30 pm)

Selection Trails for boys & girls

(Under 8 to 12) By Medchal District Athletics Association
Venue
CRPF Public School
December 23 (8 am)

1st Chakravayuh Chess Tournament

By Sarvahtrah Foundation
Venue
Shilparamam
December 23 and 24
(10 am)

SBI Property Show Hyderabad 2024

Venue
HITEX
December 23 and 24
(10 am)

NYU CARNIVAL

With singer KARTHIK
Venue
Boulder Hills, Hyderabad
December 31

Weekend kids cooking camp

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

Gaddam Mallesham elected as vice-president of TGO

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prof Gaddam Mallesham, former Dean, development and UGC affairs and vice-president of OUTA has been elected as vice-president of the Telangana Gazetted Officers Association (TGOs), the central executive body of the Telangana Gazetted Officers Association (TGOs).

Prof Mallesham has been dedicatedly working towards addressing the issues of teaching and non-teaching staff in



Telangana universities as the president of the Telangana All Universities Teachers Association (TAUTA) and has

been a relentless advocate for the problems of students and employees.

On this occasion, Prof Mallesham pledged to persuade the government to fill up the vacant teaching positions in all universities immediately and also enhance the age of superannuation for university professors to 65 years, further will also focus on providing medical benefits and resolve pending pension related issues of employees of the Telangana universities.

HM warns against govt docs' private practice

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Health Minister C Damodar Rajanarasimha expressed concern over government doctors prioritising private practice over their duties in district hospitals. Speaking at the inauguration of newly constructed MCH and Critical Care Units worth Rs 38.75 crore in Nizamabad, he emphasised the need for doctors to show commitment to government service.

Rajanarasimha warned that negligence of duties by government doctors would not be tolerated. He urged medical officials to work towards making Nizamabad



Health Minister Damodar Rajanarasimha inaugurating a Primary Health Centre in Renjal mandal on Sunday

a medical services hub by providing quality healthcare.

The Minister assured that vacancies in government hospitals would be filled and nec-

essary facilities would be provided. He also inaugurated a new Primary Health Centre building in Renjal mandal, built at a cost of Rs 1.56 crore.

Telangana shooters shine at National Championship with multiple medals

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Rifle Association (TRA) announced its medal winners from the 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSCC) 2024. The championship, organised by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), showcases events in rifle, pistol and shotgun (Skeet & Trap) disciplines across venues in India.

The rifle events will take place at the MP Shooting Academy, Bhopal, from December 15-31, 2024, featuring 152 shooters. Pistol events will be held at Dr Karni Singh Shooting Ranges, New Delhi, from December 13, 2024, to January 5, 2025, with 85 competitors. Shotgun events will also take place at Dr Karni Singh Shooting Ranges from December 11, 2024, to January 19, 2025, involving 54 participants.

TRA president Amit Sanghi, who is also vice-president

of the NRAI and Telangana Olympic Association, congratulated all participants. He encouraged athletes to continue their hard work and dedication, expressing confidence in their potential to secure more medals.

The medal winners include: 50M Pistol Women (Individual & Team) Gold goes to Pranjali P Dhumalmahi - 542-6x. Silver: KM Priyanka Patel - 541-3x. Bronze: Karnika - 537-7x.

Coming to 10M Pistol Master Women, Gold: Padma D. Rail - 568-10x. Silver: Suman CHD - 555-9x. Bronze: Malabika Baruah (TRA) - 551-9x. Later, for the 25M Pistol Master Women, the Gold medal went to Malabika Baruah (TRA) - 558-10x. Silver: Balesh Devi - 550-10x. Bronze: P Sofia Lawren - 539-10x.

Finally, for the 10M Standard Air Pistol (Para Category), the Silver medal went to Kondakrindi Sandesh Reddy (TRA) - 333/400.



10M Standard Air Pistol silver medal winner Sandesh Reddy from TRA seen at the 67th National Shooting Championship



CITY REMAINS FASTEST-GROWING MAJOR URBAN CENTRES

Hyd to witness drop in housing sales by 47%

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The real estate market in Hyderabad is projected to witness a 47% decline in housing sales during October-December 2024, according to a report by PropEquity, a real estate analytics firm. Housing sales in the city are expected to drop to 12,682 units during this period, compared to 24,044 units in the same quarter last year.

Despite this decline, Hyderabad has demonstrated significant progress in the real estate sector, recording a 10% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) in residential launches over the past decade. Samir Jasuja, CEO and Founder of PropEquity, shows the annual drop to a high base effect but anticipates quarter-on-quarter growth.

The report also forecasts a 21% drop in housing sales across nine major cities, with

total sales likely to fall to 1.08 lakh units compared to 1.37 lakh units last year. Declines are expected in Bengaluru with 13%, Chennai with 9% and Mumbai with 27%.

Hyderabad remains the fastest-growing city among six major urban centres in India, with rapid infrastructure development and thriving real estate. Continuous investments in urban planning are expected to support further market growth.

Expired food products found in dairy houses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Task Force Team of Telangana's Commissioner of Food Safety inspected dairy houses in Sultan Bazar and Amberpet and found multiple violations.

The Task Force Team inspected Dugra Dairy Products in Sultan Bazar and found several issues. Expired food products, including artificial vanilla flavouring (500 ml, expired 10/2020) and lemon flavouring (500 ml, expired 12/2020 and 18.05.2024), were dis-

covered and discarded. The ceilings were flaky, flooring was patchy and the unit lacked proper drainage. Doors were not fitted to prevent pest entry and food handlers were working without hair caps. Employee health records and FOSTAC certificates were not provided.

The team also inspected NR Milk House in Amberpet and found numerous hygiene violations. Rusty iron sheets were used in internal structures and the flooring was uneven, waterlogged and

emitted a foul smell. A toilet opened directly into the manufacturing area, posing contamination risks. The premises were unhygienic, with pests like flies, mosquitoes and cockroaches. Waste material was dumped on the floor and food handlers lacked proper attire. Spitting was observed and pest control records, FOSTAC certificates, and employee health records were missing.

The Task Force Team stated that a notice will be issued and further action will be taken accordingly.



Task Force Team inspecting dairy houses in Hyderabad

Govt committed to stand by farmers at every stage, says Komatireddy

PNS ■ YADADRI BHUVANGIRI

"In the BRS government's tenure, input cost on agriculture has increased, but the aid has decreased. We are working to fix this issue," said Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy here on Sunday.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Villages are the backbone of this country. However, with the arrival of corporates, half of the villages in this country have already lost their rural identity and have become mere settlements," he pointed out.

Today, the "Pudami Putra Award" was awarded to 115 progressive farmers from 10 states, who practice organic farming without fertilisers and pesticides. Additionally, 35 officials, scientists, and journalists working in agriculture-related sectors are being honoured with the "Kisan Seva Ratna Award," which brought great joy.

Currently, input costs on farming have increased, and the aid provided to farmers has decreased, putting them in a difficult situation. Once, farming was a source of happiness, but today it is in a cri-



Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy speaking at a meeting in Yadagirigutta on Sunday

sis. This is why the Congress party's government is striving to improve the lives of farmers. We have provided a farm loan waiver for 25 lakh families. The Congress party is also provid-

ing free electricity to farmers, a scheme launched by late chief minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, Venkat Reddy said.

"In yesterday's Assembly debate on farmers' welfare, I proposed that we must ensure that farmers have access to land and security as a right, not out of charity. The government will make arrangements to provide investment support under Rythu Bharosa with effect

from Sankranti Sankranti." "Though politics can be played in many matters, I believe that doing politics in the name of farmers is inhuman. My 30-year-long struggle has always been for the well-being of farmers. The issues faced by farmers in Nalgonda, who have suffered due to fluoride contamination and inability to sell their crops, are beyond words," he said.

Due to industrialisation over the past 30 years, the Musi River has become polluted, threatening Nalgonda. The hardships that each farmer is facing are unimaginable. Therefore, the government is committed to eradicating the fluoride problem permanently and purifying the Musi River. Once these two issues are addressed, the farmers in the undivided Nalgonda district can reap benefit.

The government already allocated a budget for the Pillaipally Dharmareddy Canal. Water would be brought from Mallanna Sagar and Kondapochamma projects to Baswapur and Gandhamal and this would turn the district into a flourishing agricultural hub, Venkat Reddy remarked.



Governor Jishnu Dev Varma visiting Medak Church in Medak on Sunday

GUV Jishnu Dev Varma visits historic Medak Church

PNS ■ MEDAK

Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma visited the Medak Church, known for its century-long history, on Sunday.

The Governor was warmly received at the Collectorate by Collector Rahul Raj, Superintendent of Police, District Additional Collector Nagesh, Medak MP M Raghunandan Rao, MLC Seri Subhash Reddy and MLA Mynampally Rohit Rao.

The Governor then visited the Medak Church where he was welcomed by Press Secretary In-charge Shantaiah and members of the church committee. As part of his visit, he signed the church's VIP register and offered special prayers in the historic building.

The church priests extended their blessings to the Governor on this occasion.

Municipal Chairman Chandrapal, Revenue Divisional Officer Ramadevi, Mandal Revenue Officer Laxman Babu, and church members Ganta Sampath, Samson Sandeep, and Joy Murray were also present, adding to the significance of the event.

Earlier, Jishnu Dev Varma visited Medak participated in a face-to-face interaction session with the students of Telangana State Girls' Social Welfare Residential School and Junior College at the Kolparam mandal.

During the event, the college students warmly welcomed the Governor. On the occasion, the students performed various cultural and traditional dance presentations. The Governor appreciated the thoughtful questions asked by the students, saying they brought him immense joy.

SBI heist: Police yet to recover entire stolen gold

PNS ■ WARANGAL

The bank robbery case that created a sensation across the State has the police struggling to make headway. Efforts to trace the burglars have been intensified in multiple ways. The robbery took place on November 18 at the SBI branch at Rayaparathi in Warangal district, where the criminals made away with 19 kilograms of gold.

So far, the police have apprehended four individuals in connection with the robbery. On December 6, three of the accused were arrested, and 2,520 grams of gold was recovered from their possession, the police said.

Recently, the main accused in the case, Mohammed Nawab Hassan, was taken into custody three days ago. During questioning, no gold was found with him. However,



SBI branch at Rayaparathi in Warangal district

when the police inquired further about the missing gold, he confessed that his brother, Sajid Khan, has stashed away 10.48 kilograms of the stolen gold somewhere, according to police sources.

The police have identified a total of seven accused in the case. While four have been arrested, three others are still on

the run. The police are continuing their efforts to track down the absconding suspects. Despite a month having passed since the bank robbery, the investigation has yet to come to conclusion. The fact that Nawab Hassan, the main accused, was caught but no gold was found with him remains a puzzling aspect of the case.

Govt aims to provide healthcare, edn to all

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha said on Sunday that the government's primary goal is to provide better education, healthcare, and social security to the people. On Sunday, he inaugurated a newly constructed Primary Health Center (PHC) building in Renjal mandal, Nizamabad district. The PHC was constructed with an expenditure of Rs 1.56 crore. The Minister also inspected the medical facilities available at the health centre.

Speaking at the event, the Minister emphasised that the government is moving forward under the guidance of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy with the goal of providing high-quality education, healthcare, and social security to the people.

As part of this initiative, the government is establishing



health sub-centres, PHCs, Community Health Centers (CHCs), Area Hospitals, and District Hospitals according to the needs of each region. Additionally, the PHCs are being upgraded to CHCs. The Minister mentioned that there is a need to establish more than 300 health sub-centres and around 170 Primary Health Centres across the state. Priority will be given to setting up these facilities in remote rural and tribal areas. He also recalled that the government recently inducted 213 new ambulances and plans are afoot to induct 85 more.

ALLEGED SEXUAL ATTEMPT ON MINOR GIRL

Several policemen were injured in violence in Adilabad dist

PNS ■ ADILABAD

In a horrific incident that took place on Saturday night in the SC Colony of Gudihatnoor village, a minor girl was allegedly the victim of an attempted sexual assault by a young man. In retaliation, the minor girl's relatives, along with the colony residents, attacked the accused, Chattla Poshetti, and set fire to his house.

Following the incident, violence erupted in the village after the relatives of a young girl, who was reportedly abducted, launched an attack on the home of the suspect. The villagers also clashed with police, injuring several officers, including a Circle Inspector. The mob also set fire to the suspect's house and two police vehicles.

While trying to control the



A policeman being treated at Adilabad RIMS on Sunday

protesting residents, the police resorted to a lathi charge. The protesters retaliated by pelting stones at the police, resulting in severe injuries to Circle Inspector Bheemesh on his

head. A sub-inspector suffered an injury to the leg. Three constables too were injured. Two police vehicles were damaged in the attack. The injured police officers were shifted to Adilabad RIMS Hospital. The minor victim was also moved to a hospital for medical care.

The police have arrested the accused and have filed cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Adilabad Deputy Superintendent of Police Surender Reddy and Utnoor DSP Nagender, along with police forces, are conducting patrolling in the Gudihatnoor village. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 banning the assembly of more than five persons in public places have been imposed.

Two die as container hits two-wheeler

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

In a road accident on Sunday afternoon on the national highway at Isnapur under Patancheru mandal in the district, two persons died when a container rammed into a two-wheeler from behind.

On Sunday morning, Ashok Kumar, along with his younger brother Ganesh (17) and wife

Nag Shyamala (26), set out on a scooter from Kishitareddy Peta to Sangareddy. When they reached the U-turn at Isnapur Chowrasta on the national highway in Patancheru mandal, a container lorry coming from behind hit the scooter.

In the incident, Nag Shyamala and Ganesh died on the spot, while Ashok Kumar suffered minor injuries.

MLA Shankar assures disheartened farmer of justice

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

A heart-wrenching plea by Mal Reddy, a poor farmer from Reddypalem village under the Mallapur Gram Panchayat in Kothuru mandal of Rangareddy district, brought attention to a troubling land dispute. Mal Reddy, who sold 10 acres of land in survey number 410 five years ago, is now grappling with a clerical error that incorrectly showed that he had sold 20 acres in official records.

Despite relentless efforts over the past four years, Mal Reddy's attempts to rectify the issue with the District Collector and Tahsildar's offices have been unsuccessful. On Sunday morning, he met Shadnagar MLA Veerlapalli Shankar at the camp office. The farmer expressed his agony, explaining how this error has severely impacted his livelihood and has left him in a state of despair.

Responding with compassion, MLA Veerlapalli Shankar assured Mal Reddy of his immediate intervention. He

promised to take up the matter with the relevant authorities to ensure the rightful restoration of the farmer's 10 acres of land to him.

The MLA also emphasised the need to address similar issues faced by farmers across the region. Highlighting the government's Bhu Bharati initiative, he assured that steps would be taken to streamline land records and prevent such disputes in the future, ensuring that farmers do not face unnecessary hardships.



Farmer Mal Reddy pouring out his woes to MLA Veerlapalli Shankar in Shadnagar on Sunday

Plans afoot for development of Khammam City: Tummala

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Minister for Agriculture Tummala Nageswara Rao on Sunday announced that plans are afoot for the development of Khammam city in a systematic manner.

Along with Lok Sabha member Ramasahayam Raghuram Reddy, Mayor Poonokollu Neeraja, Municipal Commissioner Abhishek Augusty and Additional Collector P Srinivasa Reddy, the Minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of cement concrete roads and stormwater drains in the 57th division of Khammam Municipal Corporation, at Ramana Gutta. The TUFIDC (Telangana Urban Finance and Infrastructure Development Corporation) released Rs 85 lakh for the cement concrete roads.



Minister for Agriculture Tummala Nageswara Rao laying the foundation stone for the construction of CC roads and stormwater drains in the 57th division in Khammam on Sunday

During the occasion, the Minister expressed special thanks to Madan, who had provided land for the road construction. He said that good roads would increase land prices. He

further said that the government would continue to help the poor to the best of its ability. The Minister emphasised that the government was fulfilling the promises made to the poor. He

said that starting from Sankranti, the government would ensure that houses are allotted to the landless poor under the Indiramma Housing scheme. Since the Housing Department is under the

control of the Minister, who hailed from the district, he sought a higher allocation of houses in Khammam as the city's population has grown and the number of poor people has increased.

The Minister also stated that in the next four years, the government would build houses for the poor in colonies, similar to previous programmes. If any welfare benefits were not reaching the people, local people's representatives and the Commissioner should be approached, and the government would ensure that all eligible people received the benefits of welfare schemes.

He also mentioned that under the AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) scheme, works would be initiated with Rs 220 crore to improve the water supply to

Khammam city. To prevent flooding in the city due to heavy rains, Rs 250 crore has been sanctioned, and measures will soon be taken to ensure there will be no flooding in the coming rainy season.

The government has also decided to construct retaining walls on both sides of the Munneru River, and a team of experts is currently preparing an assessment based on recent flood situations. Additionally, Rs 1.15 crore has been allocated for road widening near the dumping yard, and Rs 8 crore for the construction of a slaughterhouse.

The event was attended by 57th Division Corporator MD Rafeeza Begum, Corporator Kamarathapu Murali, public representatives, and officials from Public Health, Municipal Engineering, and other departments.

DURING THE OCCASION, THE MINISTER EXPRESSED SPECIAL THANKS TO MADAN, WHO HAD PROVIDED LAND FOR THE ROAD CONSTRUCTION



Former MLA Shakeel Ahmed (file photo)

BRS losing ground in Nizamabad district

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

Former BRS MLA from Bodhan constituency used to have a special place in the state. His activities always attracted the attention of those in power. However, after losing the recent elections, he has disappeared, and as a result, the pink party (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) seems to have no direction in the region, leaving the workers in a state of uncertainty. He has been absent for over a year, leaving the party activists high and dry.

In Bodhan constituency of

Nizamabad district was once the stronghold of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) party. The former MLA Shakeel Ahmed, who served two terms, gained fame as the minority MLA in the state government.

However, Shakeel Ahmed has now disappeared from the constituency. For the past year, he has not been visiting the constituency. This is due to legal cases involving Shakeel and his son Raheel. Since then, Shakeel has not returned to India. Meanwhile, the state police has issued lookout notices for Shakeel and his son Raheel.

ACROSS THE STATES



Three-day rituals to mark Ram Lalla's consecration

Three-day rituals beginning January 11 will be held at the Ayodhya Ram temple to mark the first anniversary of the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol. Ram Lalla will be anointed and a grand aarti performed at 12:20 pm on January 11 -- Paush Shukla Dwadashi, according to the Hindu calendar. The 'pran pratishtha (consecration)' ceremony at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple was held on January 22 this year. Champat Rai, general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, told reporters that seers who could not be invited or attend the consecration programme would be invited for the ceremony. Arrangements have also been made for the general public to participate, both inside and outside the temple complex. Programmes will be held at five locations to commemorate the consecration. The second and third events will be held at the Yajna Mandap and pilgrim facility centre in the temple complex, respectively.



Delhi's air quality turns 'severe'

Delhi's air quality turned 'severe' on Sunday, with the 24-hour average AQI recorded at 409, officials said. The national capital's Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the 'very poor' category with a reading of 370 on Saturday. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. The maximum temperature was recorded three notches above normal at 24.1 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature had settled a notch below normal at 7.3 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The city experienced fog in the morning, with humidity levels ranging between 68 per cent and 97 per cent, it said. The IMD has forecast cloudy skies with light rain for Monday. The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to settle at 20 and 7 degrees Celsius, respectively.



Teen commits suicide as mother refuses to buy phone

A 15-year-old boy allegedly committed suicide after his mother refused to get him a mobile phone on his birthday in Maharashtra's Sangli district, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred in Miraj city on Saturday night, an official said. Vishwajeet Ramesh Chandanwale allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself at his house while his mother and sister were asleep, he said. The official said Vishwajeet celebrated his birthday two days ago and had asked his mother for a mobile phone. The mother denied the request due to some financial problems. The boy's family found him hanging the next day, he said. The official added an accidental death report (ADR) has been registered, and further investigation is underway.

Special drive against child marriage in Assam; 431 held

Assam Police have arrested more than 430 people and registered 345 cases in its third special drive against child marriage, a top officer said on Sunday. He added that some more arrests are likely to be made. Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) MP Gupta, addressing a press conference here, said, "The third special drive was conducted across the state last night, in which 431 accused were apprehended and 345 cases registered." "Among those arrested are men who had married underage girls, family members and also two kakis, one each in

Sonitpur and South Salmara districts," he added. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in a post on X on Sunday morning, said, "Assam continues its fight against child marriage. In Phase 3 operations launched on the night of Dec 21-22, 416 arrests were made and 335 cases registered. The arrested individuals will be produced in court today. We will continue to take bold steps to end this social evil." The number of arrests and cases has increased since the post was made. Gupta said that in the first special drive against the social evil in February 2023, 3,425 arrests were made and 4,387 cases registered.

India, Kuwait elevate ties to strategic partnership

Modi holds talks with top Kuwaiti leadership

PNS ■ KUWAIT CITY

India and Kuwait on Sunday elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held extensive talks with Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah that focused on giving new momentum to the overall bilateral ties.

In their meeting at the majestic Bayan Palace here, the two leaders especially deliberated on boosting cooperation in areas of information technology, pharmaceuticals, fintech, infrastructure and security.

Modi thanked the Emir for



ensuring the well-being of over one million Indians in

Kuwait while the Kuwaiti leader expressed appreciation for the contribution of the community in the developmental journey of the Gulf nation.

In a post on 'X', Modi described his meeting with the Emir as "excellent".

"Excellent meeting with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. We discussed cooperation in key sectors like pharmaceuticals, IT,

FinTech, Infrastructure and security," he said.

"In line with the close ties between our nations, we have elevated our partnership to a strategic one and I am optimistic that our friendship will flourish even more in the times to come," he added.

On his arrival at the Bayan Palace, Modi was given a ceremonial welcome and received by Kuwaiti Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



Modi receives Kuwait's highest honour

Kuwait on Sunday conferred its highest honour - 'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer' - on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his role in strengthening the good relations between the two countries.

Prime Minister Modi received the honour from Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the Bayan Palace here.

"I am honoured to be conferred the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. I dedicate this honour to the people of India and to the

strong friendship between India and Kuwait," Modi said in a post on X.

The 'Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer' is a knighthood order of Kuwait.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that the conferment of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order on Prime Minister Modi is a proud moment for all Indians.

The honour recognises Prime Minister's steadfast commitment and leadership in strengthening linkages with the Gulf region. Also showcases the depth of India-Kuwait historic ties and people to people relations," he said in a post on X.

NC rules out joining BJP-led NDA

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

The National Conference on Sunday ruled out joining the BJP-led NDA and dismissed as baseless a media report in this regard.

This news being peddled by certain so-called journalists is nothing but a blatant lie, driven by malicious intent to mislead the people of Jammu and Kashmir, National Conference chief spokesperson Tanvir Sadiq said.

He was reacting to a report published in a newspaper that claimed Jammu and Kashmir's ruling party might be preparing grounds for a return to the

BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in exchange for the Union Territory's statehood.

"It is disgraceful and irresponsible for anyone to spread such baseless rumours... Let me challenge the individual behind this fabrication: name the so-called 'top BJP leadership' that Omar Abdullah alleged to have met, or immediately retract your claim and issue a public apology," he said in a post on X.

Sadiq also said Abdullah's meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi was held in full public view.

Orchestra dancer shot dead in broad daylight

PNS ■ MEDININAGAR (JHARKHAND)

A 30-year-old orchestra dancer was shot dead by an unidentified assailant in Jharkhand's Palamu district on Sunday afternoon, police said.

The dancer, identified as Pooja Kumari, was shot in the head at her home in Nartaki Mohalla near Harihar Chowk

in Hussainabad police station area. She was taken to a hospital, where doctors declared her dead, a police officer said.

Six people have been detained in connection with the incident and their interrogation is underway, Hussainabad police station officer-in-charge Sanjay Kumar Yadav said, adding police suspect the culprit is

UP CMO reaches 6 million followers on X

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The number of followers of the official handle of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's Office on microblogging platform X reached 6 million on Sunday.

This milestone was made possible by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's "proactive approach in addressing public concerns and providing solutions", an official statement issued here said.



Besides his effective communication with the masses, the chief minister remains highly active on social media platforms, it said.

The official X handle of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's Office (CM Office, GoUP) has reached the impressive milestone of 6 million (60 lakh) followers, the statement said.



V-P Dhankhar calls for accountability of MPs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of Parliament witnessing poor productivity due to disruptions, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday called for accountability of lawmakers and said people would force them to think why they were sent to Parliament.

He also said that for any democracy to succeed, expression and dialogue must go hand in hand with great responsibility on both sides. Dhankhar is the Rajya

Sabha's ex-officio chairman.

Calling for accountability among parliamentarians, he said, "... Make no mistake, I am referring to parliamentarians. People have learned to take disorder as order. There is no sense of revulsion."

Hopefully, people will write and their thoughts will move, the vice-president said, according to an official statement.

"People will force you to think, why did you go there (Parliament)?" he said.

Addressing awardees of the Chaudhary Charan Singh

Awards - 2024, the vice-president said agriculture was the spine of rural development.

"Unless agriculture develops, the rural landscape cannot be changed. And unless the rural landscape changes, we cannot aspire to have a developed nation," he said.

For India to be a developed nation by 2047, people's income must increase eightfold that, he said, was a "daunting challenge".

Dhankhar also laid stress on the need for strengthening the village economy.

CPI(M) demands withdrawal of election rule amendment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) on Sunday demanded the immediate withdrawal of an election rule amendment preventing public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage.

In a statement, the CPI(M) Politburo expressed its strong objection to the amendment, restricting the access of political parties and candidates to electronic records, including video and other digital trails.

The government tweaked the election rule to prevent public inspection of certain

electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage of candidates to check their misuse.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission (EC), the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

The CPI(M) said these steps were initially introduced by the EC in consultation with political parties to ensure greater transparency, and described as "retrograde" the move to amend the rule.

Proper consultations were not carried out with political parties on the issue, it alleged.

"Media reports suggest that the government held consultations with the Election Commission of India while drafting the new rules. However, the Election Commission's reported concurrence was not preceded by any consultation with political parties, contrary to the established precedents over the years," the CPI(M) said.

The government's argument, which questions the locus standi of the petitioner on the conduct of the electoral process, is specious.

PSLV-C60 MISSION

ISRO to study how crops grow in space

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Demonstration of seed germination in outer space, a robotic arm to catch a tethered debris there, and testing of green propulsion systems are some of the experiments planned on the POEM-4 -- the fourth stage of ISRO's PSLV rocket that remains in orbit after launching a satellite.

The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an year-end launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to demonstrate the space docking technologies that are crucial for building India's space station.

The PSLV Orbital Experiment Module (POEM) will carry 24 experiments -- 14 from various ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and start-ups -- to demonstrate various technologies in space.

ISRO plans to grow eight cowpea seeds from seed germination and plant sustenance until the two-leaf

stage in a closed-box environment with active thermal control as part of the Compact Research Module for

The PSLV Orbital Experiment Module (POEM) will carry 24 experiments -- 14 from various ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and start-ups -- to demonstrate various technologies in space

Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre.

The Amity Experimental Module in Space (APEMS), developed by Amity University, Mumbai, plans to study the growth of spinach in a microgravity environment.

Two parallel experiments will be carried out simultaneously -- one on POEM-4 in space and one on the ground at the university. The experiment's outcome will provide insights into how higher plants sense the direction of gravity and light.

The Debris Capture Robotic Manipulator, developed by VSSC, will demonstrate the capturing of tethered debris by a robotic manipulator using visual servoing and object motion prediction in the space environment.

The robotic manipulator will be capable of capturing free-floating debris and refuelling tethered and free-floating spacecraft in future POEM missions.



84 sq km decrease in Meghalaya's forest cover

PNS ■ SHILLONG

Meghalaya lost over 84 sq km forest cover between 2021 and 2023, according to the latest India State of Forest Report (ISFR).

Except for Sikkim, which reported an increase of 2 sq km forest cover, all other states in the northeast region witnessed a reduction of the area under forests, it said. The region, with 7.98 per cent of land area, collectively contributes 21.08 per cent of India's forest and tree cover, the ISFR, 2023, said.

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupendra Yadav, had launched the report at the Forest Research Institute in Dehradun on Saturday.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Outreach to Kuwait

With a focus on economic cooperation and cultural exchange, PM Modi's Kuwait visit strengthens the ties between the two nations

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a historic moment, as he became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the Gulf nation in over four decades. The visit, at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, underscores a renewed commitment to strengthening the ties between India and Kuwait. With a focus on economic collaboration, cultural exchange, and mutual prosperity, the visit paves the way for a deepened strategic partnership. India and Kuwait share a relationship that dates back centuries, built on the foundations of trade and cultural exchanges. Over time, this bond has evolved into a robust partnership, encompassing energy, trade and people-to-people connections. Today, Kuwait is a significant energy supplier for India, while Indian expertise and manpower have become indispensable for Kuwait's development. Prime Minister Modi highlighted the enduring solidarity between the two nations, citing instances of mutual support during times of distress. With over one million Indian expatriates residing in Kuwait, the Indian diaspora has played a crucial role in Kuwait's growth, contributing to various sectors including healthcare, engineering and education.



Addressing the expatriate community, Modi praised their efforts, stating, "Their energy, love, and unwavering connection to India are truly inspiring. Proud of their role in strengthening ties between our nations." The economic relationship between India and Kuwait is ripe for expansion. Kuwait, as a key energy supplier, holds strategic importance for India's energy security. Simultaneously, India, with its burgeoning market and investment opportunities, offers Kuwait an attractive destination for its sovereign wealth fund. During his discussions, PM Modi noted the shared aspirations of both nations: building a prosperous 'New Kuwait' and transforming India into a developed nation by 2047. By aligning these goals, the two countries can establish a partnership that drives mutual growth. Modi's visit was not limited to economic discussions; it also celebrated the cultural ties that bind the two nations. The Prime Minister met with individuals who have contributed to fostering Indo-Kuwaiti relations, including Abdullah Al-Baroun, a translator who brought Indian epics like the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' to Arabic-speaking audiences. As India and Kuwait look to the future, the visit has set the stage for a relationship that goes beyond traditional energy ties. The integration of India's technological expertise with Kuwait's developmental ambitions holds the promise of transformative progress. Furthermore, the strong presence of the Indian diaspora serves as a bridge, fostering deeper connections and mutual understanding. By strengthening this partnership, India and Kuwait are not only enriching their bilateral relationship but also contributing to stability and development in the region.

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PICTALK



A woman plucks aster flowers at an orchard, in Nadia

Guardians of nature: Saving the planet



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, the wisdom of indigenous communities shines as a vital resource for environmental preservation

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Combating Climate Change: A Legacy of Hope The discourse on climate change dominated discussions at COP 2024, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22, 2024. Rising global temperatures, depleting natural resources, and rampant environmental degradation have emphasised the urgency of adopting sustainable practices and advancing conservation efforts. Amid this pressing crisis, the role of indigenous communities in preserving the environment emerges as a beacon of hope. Often referred to as the "guardians of nature," these communities have safeguarded ecosystems for centuries through their traditional knowledge, sustainable practices, and deep connection to the land. One exemplary figure embodying this harmonious relationship with nature was Padma Shri Tulsi Gowda. Known as the "Encyclopedia of the Forest" and affectionately called the "tree goddess" by her Halakki Vokkaliga tribe in Karnataka, Tulsi Gowda's life and work illustrate the profound impact of indigenous wisdom on environmental preservation. With an unwavering commitment to nature, she planted 30,000 saplings during her lifetime, nurturing them with meticulous care. Tulsi Gowda passed away on December 16, 2024, at the age of 86, leaving behind an inspiring legacy of environmental stewardship. Growing up in poverty, Tulsi Gowda's love for plants and forests remained unparalleled. From an early age, she worked in plant nurseries, demonstrating extraordinary skill in nurturing saplings. Her unique ability to identify the "mother tree" of any species exemplified her deep ecological understanding. Tulsi Gowda herself believed, "It's not important how many plants you have planted; what matters is how much care you've taken of those saplings." The contribution of indigenous communities to environmental conservation extends far beyond



India. Globally, these communities represent less than 5 per cent of the world's population but protect 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity, according to the United Nations. Their traditional ecological knowledge, passed down through generations, serves as a crucial tool for sustainable resource management. For instance, the Kayapo tribe in Brazil has successfully defended the Amazon rainforest from logging, mining, and industrial agriculture, preserving a vital carbon sink. Brazilian environmentalist and politician Dr. Marina Silva emphasised, "The Kayapo teach us that protecting forests is not just about climate, but about life itself." Similarly, the Sámi people of Scandinavia maintain ecological balance in Arctic regions through sustainable reindeer herding practices. In New Zealand, the Maori concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) promotes a cultural commitment to environmental stewardship, influencing national policies. The Ogiek of Kenya, through sustainable honey harvesting, continue to conserve the Mau Forest, a critical water catchment area. This echoes Wangari Maathai's belief that "The future of our forests lies in the hands of those who understand them best - indigenous communities."



THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT OF THE 1970S, WHERE VILLAGERS IN UTTARAKHAND HUGGED TREES TO PREVENT DEFORESTATION, DREW INSPIRATION FROM THE BISHNOI'S SACRIFICE. IN 2021, A SIMILAR INITIATIVE SAVED OVER 500 SACRED OAK TREES IN JAAKHNI VILLAGE, UTTARAKHAND, NEAR FORESTS DEDICATED TO THE LOCAL GODDESS OF JUSTICE

India, too, has a rich tradition of indigenous environmental stewardship. The Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, one of the earliest champions of conservation, exemplifies this ethos. Their sacrifice during the 1730 Khejarli Massacre, where 363 Bishnois gave their lives to protect sacred Khejri trees, remains a cornerstone of ecological movements. Similarly, the Dongria Kondh tribe of Odisha has valiantly defended the Niyamgiri Hills from destructive mining activities, preserving their sacred land and biodiversity. The Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh showcases innovative sustainability through wet-rice cultivation and fish farming, while the Soliga tribe of Karnataka safeguards the Biligiriranga Hills using indigenous forest management techniques. Such efforts have inspired broader environmental movements. The Chipko Movement of the 1970s, where villagers in Uttarakhand hugged trees to prevent deforestation, drew inspiration from the Bishnoi's sacrifice. In 2021, a similar initiative saved over 500 sacred oak trees in Jaakhni village, Uttarakhand, near forests dedicated to the local Goddess of Justice. From the hills of Uttarakhand to the sacred groves of Meghalaya, these movements highlight India's enduring envi-

ronmental heritage. Despite their invaluable contributions, indigenous communities face significant challenges, including marginalisation, land dispossession, and exploitation. Empowering indigenous communities to take leadership roles in environmental management has already shown promising results. For example, joint forest management initiatives have demonstrated effective resource management and biodiversity conservation. Combining indigenous knowledge with modern scientific approaches can create innovative strategies for addressing environmental challenges. Practices like the Zuni tribe's waffle gardens in New Mexico, which conserve water in arid regions, exemplify the sophistication of indigenous ecological wisdom. In an era of environmental crises, humanity must embrace the profound knowledge of indigenous communities to forge a sustainable future. Their traditions, deeply rooted in respect for nature, hold the key to restoring ecological balance. By integrating their wisdom into global conservation strategies, we can create a world that honors the delicate harmony between humanity and the natural world. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SC CONDEMNS WITCHCRAFT PRACTICES

Madam — Recently the Supreme Court reprimanded the Patna High Court for staying proceedings in a case involving the abuse of women accused of witchcraft, highlighting the issue as a violation of Constitutional values. The Court condemned the practice of witchcraft as rooted in superstition and patriarchal control, urging for protective measures and social change to combat such discrimination against vulnerable women. The Supreme Court took a strong stance against the victimisation of vulnerable women under the guise of witchcraft, calling it a "blot" on the constitutional spirit.

SC has rightly said that the incident that took place in the 21st century was shocking and underlined the failure of legislative, executive and judicial measures to protect vulnerable sections of society. In India, witchcraft allegations are often directed at women who are either widows or elderly. The Court has also observed that the incidents against women accused of witchcraft go against the spirit of the Constitution because they undermine dignity. SC has expressed shock at cases where women have been physically abused and directed in public over witchcraft allegations. The number of witchcraft-related cases reported to the NCRB has been increasing in recent years. The Prevention of Witch Practices Act in Jharkhand criminalises accusations of women as witches. Criminalisation and punishment of those involved in witch hunting is the most appropriate way to end superstition and harmful practices and provide redress to victims.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

DELHI NEEDS DEVELOPMENT

Madam — Apropos of the news 'BJP shortlists candidates for Delhi as manifesto campaign gains momentum' (Dec 21), it is a welcome sign and heartening that BJP prioritises and takes the lead to frame Sankalp Patra, as they call it a political manifesto, with public opinion. BJP has got over 40,000 suggestions, which shows public

Dhaka takes anti-India stance



India's relations with Bangladesh are passing through a difficult phase after the Sheikh Hasina government succumbed before violent protests led by students in the first week of August. All development after her fall is quite worrisome for New Delhi. No doubt it was a foregone conclusion that Dhaka will no longer follow a pro-India policy. But Bangladesh is hell-bent upon destroying the cordial and bilateral relations that New Delhi crafted with the Sheikh Hasina regime. The ouster of the liberal Sheikh Hasina regime has embold-

ened Jamat-e-Islami-led Islamic extremists who are now targeting not only religious minorities but also Sufi shrines and the press. Unfortunately, the Muhammad Yunus government is only interested in fanning up anti-India sentiments in the country instead of containing sectarian violence. The arrest of Hindumonk Chinmoy Krishna Das on sedition charges shows its true colours. Internationally too, Dhaka is interested in joining hands with anti-India forces, particularly China and Pakistan, and Yunus's second meeting with Shahbaz Sharif in the last four months. The anti-India approach of the Yunus government can be measured by a post of Yunus' close aide, Mahfuz Alam, in which he threatened to "annex" parts of India. Before Dhaka intends to go to Islamabad's way, it must not forget that New Delhi holds significant leverage over it in terms of both economy and geopolitics.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

association with its manifesto. BJP has a large number of MLA aspirants, so the delay in the declaration of candidates is directly proportional to the number of candidates. The manifesto should target the new generation and focus on implementations of the New Education Policy 2000, which echoes in the Lt. Governor's initiative in Samvad/Rajnivasi. DDA, MCD and NDMC may be associated in setting up government libraries across Delhi for students and teachers. Traffic jam is the perennial issue for Delhiites, and it is easy to spot the trouble areas. Delhi needs more flyovers across Dwarka and East Delhi. The pollution in Delhi is also a serious concern, and anti-fogging machines need to be installed on major roads. The waste and garbage dumps, particularly in Gazipur Chowk and Janakpuri, deface and stink Delhi. Delhi Government needs to implement the plans. The beggar problem at road crossings is a nuisance. Illegal colonies and Bangladeshi and Rohingya immigrants are a big bane for Delhi. Delhi is not a poor state, and per capita income is much high-

er than in other states, so the freebies like free rations and electricity are not required, and the funds should be allocated to building the infrastructure of flyovers, schools, and hospitals.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATES

Madam — The parliamentarian should understand that they need to be more productive, constructive, and prolific during the start of the session of the houses. As the winter session of the 18th Lok Sabha ended with the least possible outcomes that Parliamentarians could deliver, causing a scuffle between the members themselves. It should be the moral and fundamental duty to abide by the constitution to uphold the dignity of the Parliament houses and meant it for possible constructive discussion on each and every issue rather than politicising them on personal and party grounds.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Challenges in CSR accounting: Pathways to meaningful impact



RAJESH SHAH

Implementing CSR initiatives effectively presents significant challenges, ranging from a lack of clear objectives to complexities in measuring their impact

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a fundamental aspect of modern business strategy, reflecting a company's commitment to social equity, environmental sustainability and ethical practices. In India, CSR became a legal requirement in 2013, and companies are now expected to integrate these principles into their operations. However, while CSR initiatives are vital for societal and environmental progress, accounting for them presents unique challenges that businesses must address to achieve compliance and maximise impact.



ing suppliers or customers, leading to low adoption and minimal impact.

3. Limited Resources Smaller businesses face budget constraints and lack expertise to implement effective CSR programmes. A local coffee shop, for example, might abandon a recycling initiative due to insufficient funds for bins or awareness campaigns, missing the chance to enhance its brand.

4. Fund Utilisation Issues Companies often face compliance challenges regarding the disbursement of funds to implementing agencies. Under Section 135(5), mere fund transfer does not qualify as CSR spending unless the implementing agency utilises the funds appropriately. Companies must plan and monitor fund utilisation effectively.

5. Difficulty in Measuring Impact: Assessing the out-

comes of CSR initiatives is complex, as many lack standardised metrics to measure their social and environmental impact. For example, a manufacturing firm may struggle to quantify carbon emission reductions from a green energy project, making it harder to demonstrate success.

6. Reputation Risks Greenwashing or poorly executed initiatives can damage a company's credibility. For instance, a beverage company that markets itself as environmentally friendly while engaging in unsustainable practices risks losing consumer trust and suffering long-term reputational harm.

Strategies to Overcome CSR Challenges

1. Define Clear Objectives Companies should set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for their CSR initiatives.

2. Engage Stakeholders Early Regular engagement with stakeholders ensures CSR initiatives address their needs and receive their support.

3. Start Small and Scale Up Small businesses can begin with low-cost, high-impact

projects and expand as they gain experience. A local restaurant might start with a composting programme and later adopt a broader sustainability plan, including local sourcing and reduced waste.

4. Utilise Metrics and Reporting: Establishing clear metrics allows companies to measure and report their CSR progress effectively. For instance, a tech firm could publish an annual report detailing energy savings, employee participation, and community engagement outcomes.

5. Communicate Transparently: Openness about successes and challenges builds stakeholder trust.

Conclusion: Proactively addressing these issues helps businesses enhance their reputation, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and make meaningful societal contributions. Successful CSR initiatives ultimately benefit both companies and communities, driving sustainable growth.

(The writer is partner Audit and Corporate Tax, Bhuta Shah and Co.; views are personal)





FIRST COLUMN

MAKE A DIRECT CONNECT WITH GOD

Our approach to the Divine has been shackled by rituals, often muddling the true essence of spiritual connection



RAVI VALLURI

As a monolithic organisation, railway bureaucracy was once fossilised and adopted an ostrich-like approach while dealing with its internal and external customers and also with rivals till it adopted technology in attracting passenger and freight segments. This cardinal principle of competitive advantage and adaptability also applies in our relationship with religion, spirituality and almighty God. Humans have been prisoners to an outdated pedagogy while approaching God. The transaction between the Divine and the bhakta has been constrained as the transmission of knowledge and blessings have been clogged in drain pipes, as the seeker and the devout feels impotent and weak. Can we recall two path-breaking movies from a few years back, OMG – Oh My God! and PK, wherein the relationship of humans and God was explored?

In OMG a petty trader, Kanji challenges the orthodoxy of the religious establishment by suing the Creator for the ruination of his business, much to the chagrin of the priestly and spiritual class. Similarly, PK – an alien who is marooned on planet Earth, as his spaceship leaves without him – questions various religious and spiritual institutions with his childlike curiosity, only to attract disapprobation.

If it was Lord Krishna's flute and discus in the case of Kanji, it became the symbolic wrong number in the case of PK to dispute the indurate thought processes of a shambolic order. A distraught PK was unable to connect with the Divine forms of various religious denominations and all his trials ended in a sandbox of wrong numbers. So, what is the right number? It is a Wi-Fi to God.



Let us for a split second assume that human beings and all the other manifestations of this grand design are like computers, smartphones or other electronic devices. Almighty God can be likened to the World Wide Web possessing the repository of knowledge, of course with the faculty of creation and destruction.

In the wired world all gizmos are connected to the internet through a Wi-Fi. Aberrations or disruptions in the communication do take place, when the battery power is low, or due to software glitches (this can be attributed to low prana levels). The intermediaries, in the form of the priestly class, astutely blame these muddles faced by the gizmos, either in the hands of God or lack of tapas by the seeker. For centuries across the world, as humans evolved from the inception as mere nature worshippers, to established religions, the febrile human mind has always been inquisitive about the acceptable and bizarre theories of existence. Almighty God in all his manifestations and myriad forms is approachable to bestow benedictions. However, tragically it is the gizmo (humans) and the channel (Wi-Fi) that have transfigured and remodeled since perhaps, the Big Bang!

The Wi-Fi is symbolic of a direct connection with the Divine. A true bhakta does not require an emergency quota to board the heavenly train. There is no need to perform rituals, consult tarot card readers, visit places of worship out of fear, beseeching for mercy or boons. A chip is embedded in the DNA to ensure the divine communion which needs to be activated. The regular practice of yogic postures is essentially Hatha Yoga and a tonic for the physical body. The meditation that humans practice is to fortify and safeguard the comfort of our minds, but it is our true inner self, which pines for nourishment. The ordinary mortal today too can be in this state of spiritual reverie through the power of breath. This brings us closest to our inner self. This is the unalloyed Wi-Fi to connect with the Divine.

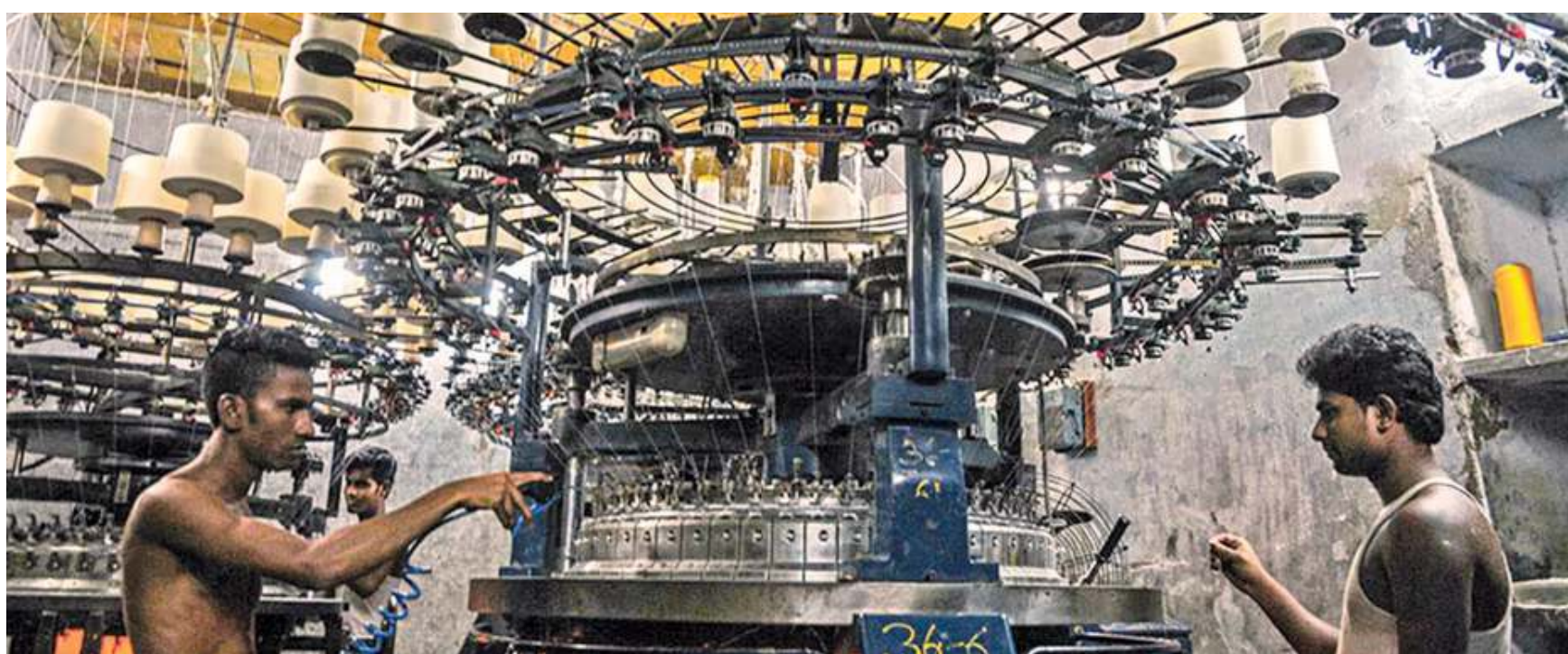
(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Slowdown in growth: Is it a temporary blip?



UTTAM GUPTA

This temporary slowdown, attributed to reduced government spending, raises broader concerns about the structural challenges underpinning India's growth story



The GDP (gross domestic product) growth during the second quarter of the current financial year (FY) ending September 30, 2024, decelerated to 5.4 per cent down from 8.1 per cent achieved during the corresponding period of FY 2023-24. It was the lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. It was even lower than the 6.7 per cent recorded during the first quarter of the current FY ending June 30, 2024.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman observed that deceleration was not a "systemic slowdown"; that it was a temporary blip caused by a reduction in government expenditure (courtesy, elections ended in the June quarter when many projects came to a standstill due to the model code of conduct). She exuded confidence that expansion during the third quarter would make up for the lost momentum. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) expects full-year GDP growth to be 6.5 – 7 per cent. Coming on top of growth of 8 per cent plus achieved during the previous three consecutive years, 6.5 – 7 per cent during the current FY is indeed impressive. Even at this lower level, the Indian economy continues to be the fastest-growing in the world. Then, why should it worry us?

Nearly 70 per cent of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption; the remaining 30 per cent is driven by investment and export. Domestic consumption includes government consumption and private consumption. Likewise, investment consists of capital spent by the government and private investment. During the last five years, the Central Government has done the heavy lifting especially when it comes to investment. An idea of this can be gauged from its budget outlay 2020-21: Rs 30.42 lakh crore; 2021-22: Rs 34.83 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 39.45 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 45.03 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 48.20 lakh crore.

The Centre's capital spend during these years was 2020-21: Rs 4.39 lakh crore; 2021-22: Rs 5.54 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 7.50 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 10.01 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 11.11 lakh crore. The Central government has also been helping the states



UNION FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA SITHARAMAN OBSERVED THAT DECELERATION WAS NOT A "SYSTEMIC SLOWDOWN", THAT IT WAS A TEMPORARY BLIP CAUSED BY A REDUCTION IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans.

During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current FY, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore. It has also given incentives to promote investment in the private sector. The mother of all incentives was a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 per cent to 35 per cent.

The Centre has also done its bit to give a boost to private consumption. In the budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman has given relief in personal income tax (PIT) of around Rs 17,500/- annually by changing the tax slabs under the New Income Tax regime and increasing in standard deduction by Rs 25,000/-. Less tax means higher disposable income in the hands of the people hence the scope for more spending. But, initiatives by the government alone can't ensure high growth on a sustainable basis. To achieve high sustainable growth, it is necessary to give a boost to private consumption. The dip to 5.4 per cent during the second quarter of the current FY when the decline in urban demand took a toll even as heavy lifting by the Centre was not available (due to elections) should serve as a warning signal. This brings us to a systemic problem that has hampered growth for decades.

This has to do with inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth. According to an Oxfam report, 'Inequality Kills', the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people in 2021 hit a record high of US\$ 775 billion or over 25 per cent of India's GDP. In conversation with ET Now at the recently held

Times Network India Economic Conclave, Arvind Panagariya, Chairman, of the 16th Finance Commission said: "The inequality in the sense of the top 1 per cent as a proportion of the bottom 5 percent, yes, that inequality has gone up". Thomas Piketty, a professor at the Paris School of Economics (he is known for his groundbreaking research on economic inequality, wealth distribution, and the dynamics of capitalism) says "the share of India's top 10 percent population is currently at 55-60 per cent". According to him, this should be 30-40 per cent. Whichever source one looks at, we can't wish away the fact that India is home to glaring inequalities in income distribution.

This, in turn, has to do with the manner in which fruits of development are shared amongst the people. Unambiguously, the sharing is unequal. According to an analysis of the financials of India's largest companies – those comprising the BSE 500 index – over five years, the profits of corporations included in this index more than doubled from Rs 480,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 1,000,000 crore during 2021-22, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent.

This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital such as to employees/workers, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits. A big slice of these profits has gone to the pockets of the shareholders of these firms.

Thus, the aggregate dividend paid by them increased from Rs 176,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In those five years, cumulatively, they paid 34 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. This is an unusually high payout ratio – even higher than 30 per cent paid by the

world's largest companies in America's S&P 500. Whether profits to the firms or high dividends to shareholders, it has been paid for or come at the cost of millions of others. Rs 1,000,000 crore profits of firms in the BSE 500 index during FY 2021-22 came at the cost of undermining the purchasing power of millions of consumers.

Likewise, the mammoth dividend fills the coffers of a few – the money that merely adds to their idle cash balances or is spent on a few luxury items – denying millions of workers decent income. The tendency to appropriate a disproportionate share of the proceeds of wealth generation by a few persons at the top can be seen even amongst the owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who ape large enterprises when it comes to making payments to their workers.

The SMEs being employment intensive, a general belief is that giving a boost to them would help in creating more jobs hence, lead to a more equitable income distribution. But, their owners' paying less to workers militates against this objective.

Even the millions of small and marginal farmers who by nature of their occupation play the role of owner as well as worker don't get to earn a good income as a handful of traders buy their crops at throwaway prices even as the minimum support price (MSP) notified by the government remains mostly on paper. When, the enterprise-owning class no matter which occupation it is in and the scale of its operation is intrinsically prone to sharing less with those who are at the receiving end, inequalities are inevitable. In such a scenario, how can we expect a big push to the demand needed for sustained growth?

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

The allure and impact of Reels: A double-edged sword

In an age where digital connectivity reigns supreme, short-form content like reels has taken centre stage, captivating millions with its addictive allure

In today's digital era, people from all walks of life are increasingly drawn to the virtual world, spending countless hours glued to their screens rather than engaging in real-world activities. Social media platforms, online gaming, and streaming services have created an engaging yet addictive digital ecosystem. Among these, reels have emerged as a dominant form of entertainment, captivating users with short, visually stimulating content that ranges from dance challenges and comedy skits to educational snippets and senseless videos. While initially sought as a break from daily routines, reels often trap users in an endless cycle of mindless scrolling that detracts from productivity and long-term goals.



GURDEEP KAUR

Reels are crafted with algorithms and driven by artificial intelligence to provide instant gratification. However, this seemingly harmless indulgence is contributing to a concerning decline in social and emotional wellbeing. The short bursts of content, typically lasting a few seconds to a minute, are often paired with catchy music, effects, and filters

to maximise engagement. These features captivate both creators and viewers, fostering an obsession that has surpassed earlier trends like the selfie craze.

The statistics are staggering. In 2023, India had approximately 24 crore Instagram users, accounting for nearly 17 per cent of its population—the highest globally. Children as young as five years old are consuming reels, while parents take pride in showcasing their kids' talents online. Although reels highlight creativity and talent, they come with significant risks. Overexposure to adult themes, unsolicited criticism, and the pressure to perform for likes and shares can severely impact a child's self-esteem and emotional health. For parents, the drive

for online validation often overshadows the responsibility to provide age-appropriate environments for their children.

The dopamine rush triggered by watching reels creates a cycle of instant gratification, making it difficult for users to focus on meaningful achievements that require sustained effort. The infinite scroll feature exacerbates this issue, leading to binge-watching that consumes valuable time and energy. For youth, who are particularly vulnerable, this translates to lost opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and building genuine relationships.

Reels and Social Dynamics
The cultural impact of reels extends beyond individual habits, influencing societal



norms and behaviors. Content creators often sensationalise material to attract more viewers, blurring the lines between private and public domains. This trend has led to the normalisation of inappropriate content, including vulgarity, obscenity, and indecent practices, which are being readily adopted by impressionable audiences. The effects are troubling. Incidents of cyberbullying, harassment, and social media-

driven disputes are on the rise. The dopamine-induced focus on short-term gratification undermines hard work and perseverance, fostering a culture of mediocrity. Youth, in particular, are losing precious productive years to the reel marathon, trading real-life interactions for virtual validation.

Physical and Cognitive Consequences

The overconsumption of reels is not only detrimental to mental health but also poses physical and cognitive risks. Prolonged screen time leads to issues such as poor concentration, memory deficits, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic or professional performance. Lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are becoming

more prevalent, exacerbated by sedentary habits encouraged by excessive reel consumption.

Breaking the Cycle

Addressing the negative impact of reels requires a collective effort. At an individual level, self-discipline is crucial. Setting clear limits on screen time and prioritising meaningful activities can help break the cycle. Families play a pivotal role, as parents must lead by example, fostering environments that encourage "family time" and shared activities. Introducing hobbies and alternative forms of entertainment can also reduce reliance on digital distractions.

From a societal perspective, stringent regulations are necessary to monitor and control the type of content being created and shared. Governments

and tech companies should collaborate to design features that promote responsible platform usage.

The Way Forward

They must be used responsibly to avoid their harmful consequences. Striking a balance between virtual and real-world experiences is essential for leading a fulfilling life. Individuals need meaningful relationships, emotional support, and real-life achievements to thrive.

By fostering awareness and adopting healthier digital habits, we can harness the benefits of technology without compromising our wellbeing. *(The writer has an experience of 17 years of teaching the under graduate students of Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce; views are personal)*

MONEY MATTERS



TN achieves milestone with 10,000 DPIIT regd startups

Tamil Nadu has achieved a milestone by registering over 10,000 startups with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the state government said on Sunday. StartupTN has played a crucial role in nurturing the ecosystem by implementing various schemes and initiatives like funding programmes, mentorship opportunities and incubation support, StartupTN Mission Director and CEO Shivaraja Ramanathan said. The state's startup ecosystem has been 'thriving' with 9 regional hubs and a metro hub in Chennai, providing a robust infrastructure for budding entrepreneurs to grow, he said. "Tamil Nadu has achieved a remarkable milestone of 10,000 DPIIT registered startups, a significant jump from 2,300 in March 2021. This exponential growth can be attributed to the revival of StartupTN under the leadership of Chief Minister M K Stalin focusing on supporting startups and fostering innovation," Ramanathan said in a social media post. He said the government-promoted agency has encouraged entrepreneurship among the youth, who drive innovation and growth.



Akasa Air expects to add few more planes

Akasa Air is in continuous discussions with Boeing on aircraft deliveries and expects to add a few more planes to its fleet in the current fiscal ending March 2025, the airline's chief Vinay Dube has said. The carrier, which started flying in August 2022, currently has a fleet of 26 Boeing 737 MAX planes and 200 aircraft are on order. In a recent interview to PTI, Dube said that 2024 has been a good year for the airline and will continue to build on it in 2025. "On the service excellence we have provided, I think consumers look at Akasa as being a kind and gentler airline, little more empathetic. We will continue to treat our travellers in a kind, gentle manner," he said and added that the airline also continues to make sure its employees feel loved and respected. Earlier this month, some pilots flagged concerns about alleged training and safety issues, and the airline had rejected them as baseless and untrue. This year, the carrier has inducted 4 planes into its fleet. When asked whether there are any concerns regarding aircraft deliveries, Dube said there are no supply chain issues at Akasa Air and also that the airline has a great relationship with Boeing.



IOC probes allegation of US firm bribing its officers

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has begun a probe into allegations of a US speciality chemicals firm bribing its officials 15 years back to obtain contracts to supply catalysts, according to a company's regulatory filing. Albemarle Corporation, a global speciality chemicals supplier that develops and sells catalysts used in the operation of oil refineries, allegedly "paid approximately USD 1.14 million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately USD 11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," according to a US SEC order dated September 28, 2023. Albemarle was caught for bribery by the US authorities in 2017 and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than USD 198 million to avoid prosecution. In a filing, IOC said it is "neither party to nor is there any allegation against the company in relation to the proceedings" in the US SEC.



'BIT and FTAs are two separate pacts'

Should continue to remain so: Sources

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Demands of certain developed countries from India to negotiate 'investment protection' elements under an FTA is inappropriate as negotiating the matter as part of a separate chapter under the trade pact could have larger and detrimental implications, source said. Legally speaking, they said, the investment protection element provides a wide range of obligations and commitments bestowed upon foreign investors, which are expansive in nature. "Recently, a lot has been heard about countries that are desiring India to negotiate 'investment protection' elements vis-a-vis investment chapter as part of the free trade agreement (FTA). However, this is incorrect," one of the sources said. For instance, the European Union (EU) has been negotiating a separate investment protection agreement or treaty with India, and not as part of the India-EU free trade agreement. "Having 'investment protection

' as a chapter of a FTA could have larger and detrimental implications even on the trade agreements' structure, especially when FTAs have specialised dispute settlement mechanisms which shall allow countries to take retaliatory measures in unrelated sectors, even for investment disputes," the source said. However, such a concern would not arise when investment protection agreements are negotiated independently and free from FTAs. While prior to its Model BIT (Bilateral Investment Treaty) of 2016, India has negotiated investment chapters in FTAs with countries like Japan, Korea, and Singapore, but there is a need for a caution as such provisions carry the perpetual risk of disputes spilling over the trade realm when matters are escalated to a country-country level of dispute resolution. "India has argued that trade and investment protection agreements should remain separate to ensure better clarity in regimes

and minimize risks that might arise out of regime interactions, that is, trade and investments," sources said. Another matter of concern has been the 'asks' of developed countries for arbitration as a dispute resolution mechanism for investor-state disputes in a treaty, they said, adding, interestingly the developed countries themselves, by way of their national policies, have been seen opting out of investor-state arbitrations as a dispute resolution mechanism. This is evident from their recently negotiated treaties, for example the UK-New Zealand, UK-Australia, USA-Canada under United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) do not have investor-state arbitration as a dispute settlement procedure. Recently, many European nations as well as the UK have openly withdrawn from the energy charter treaty which provided for an arbitration mechanism for investor-state dispute settlement.

Solar91 Cleantech SME IPO to open tomorrow

Sets price band at Rs 185-195/share

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

EPC solutions provider Solar91 Cleantech on Sunday said it has fixed a price band of Rs 185-195 per equity share for the Rs 106 crore initial share sale, which will hit markets on December 24. The initial public offering (IPO) will close on December 27. The bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on Monday, the company said in a statement. The shares of the company will be listed on the SME platform of BSE. At the upper end of the price band, the company is going to fetch around Rs 106 crore, it added. The proposed IPO is entirely a fresh issue of 54.36 lakh equity shares with a face value of Rs 10 each, according to the red herring prospectus.

FRONT-RUNNING CASE

Sebi bans 9 entities from mkt, impounds illegal gains

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has uncovered a front-running scheme involving PNB MetLife India Insurance Company equity dealer Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities, who generated illegal gains of Rs 21.16 crore. The front-running by these entities continued for more than three years. Sebi, through an interim order, prohibited Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities from the securities market and impounded the unlawful gains made by them. In a statement on Sunday, PNB MetLife stated that it has fully cooperated with Sebi in the investigation and taken disciplinary action against the individual involved. "In line with our internal processes, we have taken disciplinary action. PNB MetLife is committed to upholding the highest standards of corporate



governance, transparency, and integrity," the statement noted. Sebi had conducted an examination into the suspected front running of the trades undertaken by the Big Client, PNB MetLife India Insurance, by certain entities. The focus of the investigation was to ascertain whether the suspected entity(ies) had front-run the trades of Big Client in connivance with other entities, including dealers and/or fund managers, if any, and thereby violated the provisions of the SEBI's PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) rules and SEBI Act.

Global trends, FIIs' move to dictate trends in markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stock market participants would track global trends and foreign investors' trading activity in a holiday-shortened week ahead, amid lack of any major domestic trigger in sight, analysts said. Equity markets will remain closed on Wednesday for Christmas. "Looking ahead, no major events are scheduled. However, a few global economic indicators will be pivotal in shaping the



market direction, including the US bond yields, dollar index performance, initial jobless claims, new home sales data. "Amid heightened volatility and persistent FIIs (Foreign

Institutional Investors) selling pressure, investors are likely to adopt a cautious stance. Despite recent weakness, the market outlook remains cautiously optimistic. However, relentless selling by FIIs has added to market pressure," Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said. Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 4,091.53 points or 4.98 per cent, and the Nifty slumped 1,180.8 points or 4.76 per cent. "The sudden change in FII strategy from buying to selling has impacted markets," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

CII seeks reforms in priority sector lending framework

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII has proposed reforms in India's Priority Sector Lending (PSL) framework, suggesting inclusion of emerging sectors and high-impact sectors like digital infrastructure, green initiatives, healthcare, and innovative manufacturing. Arguing that current Finance Institutions (DFIs) like SIDBI and NaBFID (National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development) have their roles cut out as they have earmarked sectors to finance, the chamber also suggested setting up of a

high level committee to look at the revision of PSL norms and explore the need for any new DFIs to cater to some of the new and emerging sectors. Priority Sector Lending is a policy tool aimed at ensuring that key sectors crucial to the nation's development receive adequate financial support. Mandated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), PSL obligates banks to allocate a specified proportion of their loans to sectors such as agriculture, education, housing, and small industries. The framework ensures equitable credit distribution, contributing to the socio-economic growth of underserved areas.



Despite its massive success, the PSL framework requires regular recalibration to remain relevant. This recalibration is essential to ensure that the financial resources are optimally distributed, in harmony with our vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, CII stated. For instance, while agriculture contributes 14 per cent of the GDP today, its PSL allocation remains at 18 per cent, unchanged from when its GDP share exceeded 30 per cent. Similarly, sectors like infrastructure and innovative manufacturing lack adequate PSL focus despite their potential to drive economic growth, the

chamber pointed out. Chandrajit Banerjee remarked, "Sectors like agriculture have reduced contribution to GDP from 30 per cent in 1990s to about 14 per cent now. Hence, it is time that Priority Sector Lending (PSL) framework be reviewed every 3-4 years to align based on emerging priorities and PSL allocations should be in line with GDP contributions and sectoral growth potential. For instance, we could look at inclusion of emerging and high-impact sectors, including digital infrastructure, green initiatives, healthcare, and innovative manufacturing."

Govt to infuse Rs 500 cr in IFCI to improve its financial health

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has decided to infuse Rs 500 crore capital in state-owned IFCI to improve its financial health ahead of the company's proposed restructuring and consolidation into a group. With the infusion, the government of India's holding in the company is expected to further increase from existing 71.72 per cent as on September 2024. The capital infusion plan for

IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in Lok Sabha last week. The Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 made an allocation for an additional amount of Rs 499.99 crore for 'Subscription to the Share Capital of Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI)'. "Taking into account savings of Rs 50.07 crore available in the same section of the grant, the



remaining amount of Rs 449.92 crore will be met from surrender of savings available in the capi-

tal section of Demand No.30-DEA and it will not entail any additional cash outgo," the Supplementary Demand for Grants said. Earlier this year, IFCI had raised Rs 500 crore capital through the issuance of equity shares to the government. The Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up by the government on July 1, 1948 as the first Development Financial Institution in the country.



'India has potential to be key aviation fuel producer'

PNS ■ GENEVA/NEW DELHI

India has the potential to be a key producer of sustainable aviation fuel by utilising its ethanol supplies and availability of lipids feedstocks like non-edible industrial oils, according to a senior official at the global airlines' grouping IATA. With decarbonisation in focus, efforts are being made to reduce emissions and over the years, Indian carriers have operated some flights with a blend of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and traditional Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF). Hemant Mistry, Director of Net Zero Transition at the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said the ecosystem for SAF has developed but there is more work to be done.

"There are some very good opportunities for India right now. One is in terms of SAF feedstocks like agricultural waste... there is a growing understanding on what to do for SAF production. We are talking to a number of companies to understand how we can collaborate... oil companies," Mistry told PTI in a recent interview in Geneva. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) represents around 340 airlines, including Indian carriers, that account for more than 80 per cent of the global air traffic. "India, the third largest ethanol producer and consumer today, has the potential to emerge as a key SAF producer utilising its existing and advanced ethanol supplies.

INDIA CONFERENCE AT HARVARD

Nita Ambani to champion nation's global influence

PNS ■ BOSTON

The India Conference at Harvard (ICH) announced on Sunday that Nita Ambani, a trailblazer in philanthropy, education, and culture, will take centre stage at the highly anticipated India Conference at Harvard, scheduled for February 15-16, 2025, in Boston. "As one of India's most influential voices, Ambani has profoundly impacted over 80 million lives through her social equity initiatives and continues to advocate for India's global potential," a statement by the organisers said. Her recent achievements --

including hosting the International Olympic Committee (IOC) session in India after four decades and championing India's bid for the 2036 Olympics -- symbolise the nation's growing influence on the global stage. The India Conference at Harvard is one of the largest and most influential student-led India-focused conferences in the US. An annual event hosted jointly at Harvard Business School and Harvard Kennedy School fosters dialogue on India's evolving role in global affairs, bringing together thought leaders, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and cultural icons.



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This year, the conference will feature over 80 distinguished speakers from diverse fields over two days, exploring how Indian ideas and innovations are reshaping

global narratives. Highlights of the conference include a fireside chat with Nita Ambani, Chairperson of Reliance Foundation, showcasing her

vision for India's role on the world stage. The conference this year will also feature a policy Hackathon addressing climate challenges

and financial inclusion in rural India and a startup pitch competition. Ambani's keynote aligns perfectly with this year's theme, 'From India to the World', celebrates India's emergence as a global leader, shaping pathways for peace, prosperity, and innovation," the statement said. Ayush Shukla, one of the conference co-chairs, commented: "The India Conference has always strived to push the boundaries of dialogue around India's growth story. This year's theme, 'From India to the World', captures the essence of India's transformative journey - where local ingenuity meets global impact".

Rent shock: Hyderabad rises, affordable living falls

Hyderabad's rental market is experiencing a dramatic shift, propelled by the city's rapid economic growth and the influx of migrants drawn to its thriving IT sector and quality of life. While the city continues to attract professionals and businesses at an unprecedented pace, rents have soared, leaving middle-class families and new residents struggling to find affordable housing. With post-pandemic economic trends, rising construction costs and urban migration, Hyderabad is facing the dual challenge of sustaining growth while maintaining livability.

A rising demand fueled by the IT boom

The technology sector remains Hyderabad's biggest growth engine, with the city emerging as a prime hub for IT and related industries. High-paying jobs in the tech corridors of HITEC City, Gachibowli and the Financial District have led to surging demand for housing, particularly among migrant professionals who prefer to live close to their workplaces.

Prakash Yadav, Chief Operating Officer at INDIS Group, explains the phenomenon: "With the influx of professionals from across the country, particularly from cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow and Bengaluru, there is an increased demand for housing in close proximity to workplaces. While local residents may not mind commuting from more distant areas, migrants often prefer to live near their offices, further driving up demand and rental prices in areas like the Financial District and HITEC City."

For migrants like Aniket Sharma, an IT professional who relocated from Lucknow, rising rents have begun to limit housing options. "When I moved to Hyderabad two years ago, a decent 2BHK was within my budget. Today, the same apartment costs nearly 25% more. I'm now looking at places farther from the tech hubs, but the commute will be tough," he says.

The emergence of ancillary industries, such as retail and hospitality, has further compounded demand. "The creation of additional jobs in sectors like hospitality—with the rise of new star hotels—has created exponential demand for both residential and service-oriented accommodations," Yadav adds.

The city's rental prices are not just a reflection of demand but also increasing development costs. The pandemic disrupted the supply chain, driving up the prices of construction materials like cement and steel while creating labor shortages. Developers are passing these costs onto buyers and renters alike.

Rajasekhara Reddy, President of the Telangana Builders Association, underscores this critical aspect: "Construction costs have increased by over 30% in the last two years, driven by inflation in raw materials and a shortage of skilled labour. Developers have little choice but to adjust pricing, which ultimately impacts renters."

At the same time, changes to Floor Space Index (FSI) regulations have encouraged high-density projects, but the supply of affordable housing remains limited. The



Soaring rents and shrinking affordability: As Hyderabad rises as an economic powerhouse, middle-class renters struggle to keep pace.

bulk of new developments cater to premium buyers or high-income tenants, leaving a growing section of middle-class families in the lurch.

Migration and market dynamics

The affordability that once distinguished Hyderabad from cities like Mumbai and Bengaluru is gradually eroding. Rents in the western corridor—traditionally a preferred zone for IT professionals—are now catching up with metro benchmarks.

Prakash Yadav reflects on this trend: "Compared to cities like Mumbai and Delhi, Hyderabad still offers a lower cost of living. However, rental costs are steadily catching up, reflecting the broader transformation of Hyderabad into a cosmopolitan city."

For example, a 2BHK apartment in Gachibowli or HITEC City now commands monthly rents of Rs35,000—half of what similar apartments cost in Mumbai—but that figure represents a 20% hike over the past year alone. For new migrants to Hyderabad, these numbers are a reality check. "Migration into the city, both from within India and abroad, has surged," Reddy observes. "Hyderabad's infrastructure, climate, and work opportunities are key attractions, but with every new resident, competition for affordable rental properties intensifies."

The shift in demographics has reshaped neighbourhoods. Localities like Banjara Hills and Jubilee Hills cater to premium clientele, while areas like Miyapur and Kukatpally—once known for affordability

—are becoming increasingly expensive. The result is a growing affordability crisis, pushing lower and middle-income tenants to the city's outskirts.

For renters like Preeti Menon, a marketing executive who relocated from Bengaluru, this has been an unexpected challenge. "I came to Hyderabad for better opportunities and a better quality of life, but I didn't expect rents to escalate so quickly. Co-living spaces help for now, but I wonder how sustainable it is," she shares.

In response to soaring rents, co-living spaces have emerged as an attractive alternative for young professionals and singles. These shared housing arrangements offer amenities and flexibility at relatively lower costs.

"As the cost of living rises, co-living spaces have emerged as a potential solution, particularly for younger professionals," Yadav explains. "However, even co-living units are feeling the pinch, with property owners converting apartments to capitalize on short-term rentals. This trend, while innovative, does not address the deeper need for affordable housing."

The co-living boom may temporarily cushion the rental surge for some, but it underscores Hyderabad's transformation. The city's rising costs, once unthinkable, are now a defining feature of its real estate market.

A city at the crossroads

Despite these challenges, Hyderabad continues to hold a competitive edge over

Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru, where the cost of living remains significantly higher. Yet the city risks alienating its growing migrant workforce if rents remain unchecked.

Rajasekhara Reddy believes that targeted policies can help: "To sustain Hyderabad's growth, there needs to be a focus on affordable housing. Incentivising developers, regulating construction costs and expanding infrastructure to the city's outskirts can ease the current pressures on renters."

Experts argue that unless supply catches up with demand, Hyderabad's affordability advantage will fade. In areas like Kompally and Bachupally, newer projects are catering to budget-conscious buyers, but these localities still lack the connectivity and infrastructure of central tech hubs.

Hyderabad's real estate boom is a testament to its economic ascent, but the city now faces a critical test: Can it sustain its growth while remaining livable for its expanding population? The city's future hinges on policies that bridge the gap between supply and demand, ensuring housing options for all income groups.

As Prakash Yadav concludes: "Hyderabad's transformation into a premium real estate destination is undeniable, but this growth must be inclusive. Without affordable housing solutions, renters will face increasing hardship in what is otherwise a city of immense opportunity."

For now, Hyderabad stands at the crossroads—its soaring rents a reflection of its success but also a warning that unchecked growth can come at a cost.



Unlocking your babies happy tummy

Has your baby recently started to grunt, cry, or lift their legs towards the tummy, or seem to be excessively fussy? These could be possible symptoms of constipation, a condition that most infants get at some point. Constipation is quite uncomfortable for a baby and they show it by pulling away the bottom and tightening the upper half of their body while feeding or smothering their face into the bed while excessively crying, or even holding back from eating completely.

Other possible symptoms include bowel movements less than three times a week, difficulty passing soft stools or stools that are hard and shaped like little balls, swollen tummies and stools with traces of blood due to excessive straining. If you recognize all or some of these signs, it will allow you to treat the condition in its early phases thereby allowing the infant to receive treatment as fast as possible and in due time. For parents and caregivers constipated infants are a bit of a worry. An infant getting constipated is a concern not only for the caregivers but also for the offspring and while it is not uncommon for an infant to be constipated once or twice lasting constipation does require some form of treatment.

Diet changes can result in an infant getting constipated and that is one of the primary reasons. It can be difficult for infants to digest infant formula when they are moving on from a diet limited to breast milk as such formula milk has a considerably harder texture. Also, adding solid foods into an infant's diet may temporarily lead to constipation as the baby's body gets used to the new foods. In most instances it is not a problem and the infant's body gets used to the new food in 3 to 4 days, but if it extends beyond that duration, seeking a doctor's advice may be needed.

Dehydration is another common cause of constipation. When fluid loss exceeds intake, dehydration can occur, making stools harder and more difficult to pass. Illnesses such as vomiting, diarrhea, or fever can reduce fluid levels in the body, increasing the risk of constipation. Similarly, reduced fluid intake during illnesses or excessive sweating can also contribute to this condition. Different medications and dietary supplements are known to slow down bowel action resulting in constipation; iron, anticonvulsants, anticholinergics, or narcotic pain relievers are some examples. Parents are advised to speak to their physician if they suspect a medication to be the source of the digestive trouble.

Constipation can also be caused by several health conditions such as spina bifida, intestinal obstructions, celiac disease, or even hypothyroidism. In some rare proceedings other factors such as suffering from conditions like Hirschsprung's disease which affects nerve control in the colon can be a cause. Extreme measures such as babies who are a little older intentionally holding onto their stools due to the worry of pain or hate being disrupted while playing can increase

cases of constipation. To diagnose constipation, doctors rely on a combination of medical history, physical examination and diagnostic tests. They would pose questions to caregivers like how often does the child defecate, the texture of the stool, how does their diet look like and do see touching routine. Routine checkups would include checking if the child had tempered skin, having an aching stomach or lumps in the tummy, and at times even checking the rectum. Diagnostic tests such as blood tests, stool analysis and imaging may be used if a more serious condition is suspected. Treatment for constipation depends on its cause. For mild cases, increasing fluid intake is often sufficient to soften stools. Babies eating solid foods can benefit from fiber-rich options such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Gently exercising such as cycling using the legs of the baby or tummy massage also helps to relieve the bowels.

If constipation is noted to be due to certain medicines, the physician would alter the medicine or dosage. If the constipation issues are persistent, counter medications like laxatives, enemas and glycerin suppositories are suggested under medical supervision. For older children, particular behavioral strategies such as sitting on the potty after meals, rewarding children for trying to use the potty and taking a break from potty training may be effective in reducing constipation.

To avoid constipation, babies need to be fed and drink enough water especially when sick or in hot climates. Solid food fed babies are supposed to be consuming enough bulk foods to aid digestion. Setting a habit of frequent and regular passing of stools may also help in avoiding constipation. Consistently seeing a physician would be helpful in case there is an ongoing stomach or stomach associated illnesses such as nausea, anal bleeding, or despair that does not respond to home care measures. Broadly it is an indication for concern and signs of underlying illness which needs more attention.

Constipation is a common issue in infants, often caused by dietary changes, dehydration, medications, or health conditions. Mild cases can typically be managed through simple lifestyle adjustments such as hydration, diet and gentle exercises. However, persistent or severe cases may require medical intervention. By promoting healthy hydration, balanced nutrition and routine, caregivers can help prevent constipation and support their baby's overall well-being. Always consult a pediatrician if you are concerned about your baby's bowel habits or notice unusual symptoms.

(The author, Dr. Srinivasa Murthy C.L., is the Lead Paediatrics, Consultant - Paediatrics and Neonatology, at Aster Women & Children Hospital, in Bengaluru.)

From iconic actors and legendary musicians to influential figures across, 2024 has been a year marked by the profound loss of these personalities, whose departures have left a void that feels impossible to fill. While their legacies will live on through their work, their absence is deeply felt by fans, colleagues and loved ones around the globe. Here's looking back at their incredible lives, the joy they brought and the legacies they've left behind, even as we continue to feel their loss.

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USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN

The loss of Ustad Zakir Hussain, the legendary tabla maestro, has left an irreplaceable void in the world of music. Renowned for his unparalleled mastery, innovative spirit and charismatic stage presence, he elevated Indian classical music to global acclaim. Beyond his technical brilliance, Ustad Zakir Hussain was a bridge between cultures, collaborating with artists worldwide and bringing diverse musical traditions together. His passing marks the end of an era, but his legacy will endure through his timeless performances and the countless musicians he inspired.

ROHIT BAL

The passing of Rohit Bal at the age of 63, marks a profound loss in the fashion industry. Renowned for his unique blend of traditional Indian patterns with modern sensibilities, Bal's designs captivated audiences both domestically and internationally. His pioneering work in the 1990s redefined Indian fashion, inspiring generations of designers. Despite health challenges, including a heart



condition diagnosed in 2010, Bal continued to influence the fashion world until his recent passing.

SHARDA SINHA

The passing of Sharda Sinha, affectionately known as the 'Bihar Kokila', at the age of 72, marks a significant loss in the realm of Indian folk music. Renowned for her soulful renditions in Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi, she played a pivotal role in bringing regional folk traditions to a broader audience. Her iconic Chhath and traditional wedding songs became an integral part of cultural celebrations, resonating deeply with listeners. Her demise, shortly after the loss of her husband, underscores the profound bond they shared. Sinha's legacy as a



Padma Bhushan awardee and her contributions to preserving and popularising Indian folk music will continue to inspire future generations.

RATAN TATA

As the former chairman of Tata Group, Ratan Tata was an instrumental in transforming the conglomerate into a global powerhouse, overseeing significant acquisitions such as Tetley, Corus and Jaguar Land Rover. His visionary leadership not only expanded the company's international footprint but also modernized its management practices. Beyond his corporate achievements, Tata was renowned for his philanthropy, contributing extensively to healthcare, education, and rural development in India. His death is a



profound loss to the nation, leaving behind a legacy of innovation, integrity, and social responsibility.

RAMOJI RAO



The passing of Cherukuri Ramoji Rao marks the end of an era in Indian media and entertainment. His visionary creation of Ramoji Film City, the world's largest film production facility, provided a monumental platform for filmmakers and significantly boosted the Indian film industry. Rao's entrepreneurial spirit extended beyond media, with successful ventures in hospitality, finance, and food industries. His contributions earned him the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian honour.

PANKAJ UDHAS

Renowned for his soulful ghazals and emotive playback singing, Pankaj Udhas's



career spanned over four decades, during which he captivated audiences with his melodious voice and poignant renditions. His iconic song *Chitti Aayee Hai* from the film *Naam* became an anthem for expatriates, evoking deep emotions and nostalgia. Honored with the Padma Shri in 2006 for his contributions to the arts, Udhas's legacy is etched in the annals of Indian music history. His demise leaves a void that resonates with fans and fellow musicians alike, but his timeless melodies will continue to inspire and soothe generations to come.

SUHANI BHATNAGAR



The untimely passing of Suhani Bhatnagar, at the age of 19, deeply saddened the Indian film industry and her admirers. Best known for her portrayal of young Babita Phogat in the acclaimed film *Dangal*, Suhani's performance left an indelible mark on audiences. Her life was tragically cut short by dermatomyositis, a rare inflammatory disease that causes muscle weakness and skin rash. Despite her brief career, Suhani's talent and dedication shone brightly, and her loss is profoundly felt by colleagues and fans alike.

'DELHI' GANESH



Renowned for his versatile performances, 'Delhi' Ganesh appeared in over 400 films spanning four decades, earning acclaim for his roles in classics like *Sindhu Bhairavi* and *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*. His portrayal of characters in both comedic and dramatic genres showcased his exceptional talent and adaptability. 'Delhi' Ganesh's contributions to Tamil cinema have left an indelible mark and his legacy will continue to inspire future generations of actors and filmmakers.

what's brewing?



Celebrity hairstylist Amjad Habib has launched the Amjad Habib Salon Academy in the city, offering training in the lucrative business of hair beautification and styling. To mark the occasion, Habib inaugurated the academy's first and largest outlet, a 12-room facility featuring a spa, yoga studio, salon and more.

● Faria Abdullah



Sridevi Vijaya Das, founder of Hasthakala Artisans Foundation, inaugurated the 9-day National Silk Expo 2024 at Kalinga Cultural Hall in Banjara Hills, Road No. 12. The expo, organised by Jagdishwar Hastkala, aims to showcase the rich heritage of Indian silk and provide a platform for artisans to display their exquisite creations.



● Kavita

● Dr Sudheer

● Naga bhavani

● Tanuja

● Annapurna

The TVC for Manada Embroidery Machine Solutions was unveiled at Prasads Labs in Banjara Hills, with several prominent Tollywood personalities in attendance. Senior actors Annapoornamma and Kavitha, along with ad film director Yamuna Kishore and television actors Kaushik, Selva Raj and Gireesh were among those, who unveiled the TVC, which was launched in the presence of MD Manoj and ad film maker Dr. Sudheer.



Dr. Ravindran Kishore, Chairperson of GV Group, a conglomerate with diverse interests in education, financial services, gold loans, publishing, production and philanthropy, was honoured by the Governor of Telangana, Jishnu Dev Varma, at Taj Deccan in Hyderabad. The recognition came in the form of a felicitation for being named the "National Public Speaker of the Year", a testament to Dr. Kishore's exceptional oratory skills and his ability to inspire and engage audiences.



PARTY



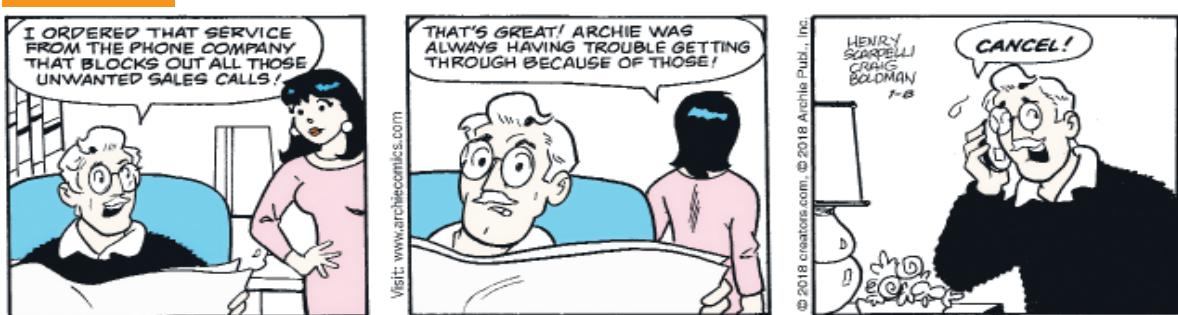
Photos by- SV Chary

Deepshikha Mahila Club celebrated its Diamond Jubilee on Saturday, marking 60 years of tireless community service. Since its inception in 1964, the club has been dedicated to empowering underprivileged women and providing quality education to disadvantaged children. One of its notable achievements is the management of Kanya Gurukul High School since 1987, which currently educates around 1,400 children. The Diamond Jubilee celebrations, led by President Radhika Malani, were held at Malani House in Begumpet and attended by distinguished guests, including Jayesh Ranjan, Manish Saboo and Prashant Garg, among others.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



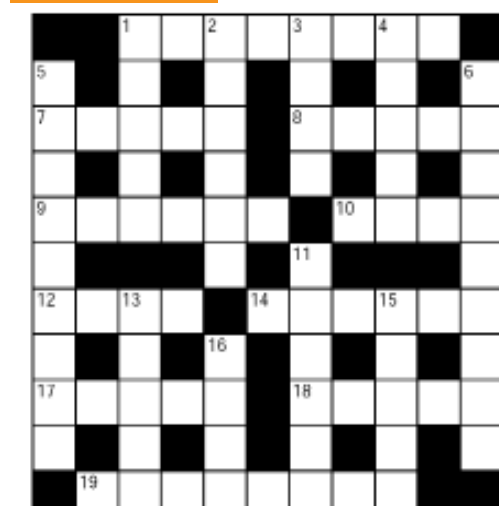
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

2			8		3			
3		1	7	5				8
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Yesterday's solution

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

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

- 1 Made or became larger
- 7 A month
- 8 An item of furniture
- 9 One of the continents
- 10 A graceful water bird
- 12 Give assistance
- 14 Purchased
- 17 Sample by mouth
- 18 Tiny
- 19 Bewildered

DOWN

- 1 Mistake
- 2 A building for a king or queen
- 3 Short letter
- 4 Where your arm bends
- 5 A skydiver wears this
- 6 Jack climbed this in a story
- 11 Buildings for people
- 13 A rope thrown by a cowboy
- 15 Keep watch over
- 16 A green thing growing on a tree



GINGER MEGGS



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Allu Arjun's controversial streak on the rise

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Allu Arjun's film *Pushpa 2: The Rule* has created a sensation in Hindi, standing as the highest-grossing cinema in the region. However, the actor has been unable to celebrate this success due to his involvement in a legal controversy. Allu Arjun seems to be making mistakes one after another, with each public statement leading to further controversy. The actor has repeatedly claimed that he only learned about the woman's death in the stampede at Sandhya Theatre two days after the incident, which is contradictory to the widespread media coverage of the event on the same night. This raises questions about the effectiveness of

his PR team. With the incident being extensively reported on social media and regular media outlets, it is surprising that Allu Arjun was unaware of it. A source from the industry suggests that his PR team should have informed him about the incident and advised him to post a condolence message on his social media, which could have mitigated the criticism.

When the issue is sensitive and involves a tragic incident at a theatre he visited, Allu Arjun should have reacted promptly. His delayed response has been perceived as a reflection of his attitude, according to the industry source.

Another significant mistake made by the actor was forgetting the name of the Telangana Chief Minister and failing to thank the Telangana Government for

issuing a GO regarding the ticket price hike. Instead, he thanked the AP government and only later acknowledged the Telangana government after being criticised by a politician.

Furthermore, after his release from Chanchalguda jail, Allu Arjun's PR team made the mistake of sending a live link of the actor being consoled by industry people at Geetha Arts Office and his home. This live coverage created a negative publicity.

In addition, when Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy discussed the Sandhya Theatre stampede incident in the Assembly, Allu Arjun should have maintained silence for a few days. Instead, he held a press conference the same evening, indirectly blaming the police for the incident, which was another mistake.

The police have since released videos and evidence showing that Allu Arjun was accompanied by police personnel during his visit to

THE ACTOR SHOULD SACK HIS PR TEAM FOR NOT ADVISING HIM PROPERLY, LEADING TO A SERIES OF MISTAKES

the theatre. The actor's repeated mistakes have raised questions about who is advising him. If he had responded promptly and appropriately after the incident, this controversy may not have escalated.

It appears that Allu Arjun's PR team is weak and not providing him with proper guidance. As a result, the actor's intentions, although good, are being misinterpreted due to his ineffective communication. The Allu Arjun controversy has become a widely discussed topic, with many questioning his approach to addressing the situation.



Rashmika Mandanna dominates blockbuster chart of 2024

Rashmika Mandanna has emerged as the leading lady of 2024, with two of her films achieving massive blockbuster success. Despite minimal competition, with only Sai Pallavi's dubbed Tamil film *Amaran* achieving significant success, Rashmika's Hindi film *Animal* opposite Ranbir Kapoor and directed by Sandeep Vanga, became a huge blockbuster nationwide. The film not only gave Ranbir Kapoor a career-best performance but also catapulted Rashmika to the status of National Crush. In *Animal*, Rashmika showcased her versatility by portraying two distinct shades, delivering a brilliant performance and exuding glamour simultaneously. Before the year concluded, her other film, *Pushpa 2*, also became the highest-grossing Hindi cinema. In this film, she starred opposite Allu Arjun, receiving equal importance in the narrative. Her performance was exceptional in several scenes and she proved her prowess in dancing and romantic scenes alongside Allu Arjun. Undoubtedly, 2024 belongs to Rashmika Mandanna, thanks to these two blockbuster successes. According to sources, she is also poised to become the highest-paid actress in Telugu cinema. In her upcoming films, Rashmika plays the lead role in *The Girlfriend*, with the recently released teaser already generating significant curiosity. Additionally, she is working with Salman Khan in the Hindi film *Sikandar*, directed by AR

'Pawan Kalyan's compliments gives me confidence'

Ananya Nagalla, a talented Telugu actress, has been steadily making a name for herself in the industry. She made her debut with the critically acclaimed film *Mallesham* and subsequently showcased her acting chops in films like *Vakeel Saab* and *Pottel*. Her upcoming film, *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes*, where she plays the female lead, is slated to release on December 25.

"When director Mohan narrated the story, I felt it was something new and unique. The way he weaves the narrative, where an incident is seen from each person's perspective, really intrigued me," said Ananya Nagalla. She confidently stated that the audience will definitely appreciate this film, citing its unconventional storyline.

Ananya plays the role of Bhramaramba in the film. "My character in this film is very distinct from the roles I've played in my previous films," she noted. She further emphasised that the story

is extraordinary, revealing that it is inspired by real-life events.

"The story revolves around a small incident that occurs simultaneously with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. While everyone's attention is focused on the larger event, someone pursues this smaller case, uncovering shocking truths along the way. That's essentially the story," Ananya explained. She also mentioned that the film features a cute love story. Ravi Teja Dasyam stars alongside Ananya in the film. "I appreciated his dedication to giving his best performance in every scene," she said of her co-star.

Ananya had the opportunity to work with Pawan Kalyan in *Vakeel Saab*. "During the court scene, he complimented my performance, saying he could see real pain and emotion in my acting. I was thrilled to receive his praise," she recalled. The actress expressed her willingness to take on female-centric films. "I'm currently working on a Telugu film and another Hindi project, both of which feature strong female leads," she revealed.

Ananya is pleased with her career trajectory and the opportunities that have come her way. "After *Pottel*, I received numerous compliments and started getting more scripts. I've even signed two new films," she shared.

Regarding her upcoming projects, Ananya mentioned that *Kathakali* and *Lechindi Mahila Lokam* are ready to hit the screens soon.



Ram Charan begins *Game Changer* promotions in Dallas Puram



While Allu Arjun's recent controversy continues to be a major talking point in the industry, his cousin Ram Charan has begun promoting his upcoming film *Game Changer* in Dallas, USA. The film is directed by Shankar and produced by Dil Raju. On Saturday night, several personalities from the film unit attended the promotional event in Dallas. Addressing the gathering, Ram Charan joked, "It feels as if we never left India. Maybe that's why Dallas is now called Dallas Puram." The actor expressed his gratitude to work with Shankar, saying, "I always dreamed of asking him to direct a Telugu film, but I never imagined I'd get to work with him. It's been a beautiful three-year journey of learning and growth." Ram Charan compared Shankar to Indian cinema, likening him to Sachin Tendulkar in cricket. He termed Shankar the number one commercial filmmaker. "This is my first solo film in five years and it's special," said the actor.

In a lighthearted moment, Ram Charan imitated producer Dil Raju's style, saying, *Meeku enni Venumo, Anni Irrukinga*. Sukumar, director of *Pushpa*, attended the event as a special guest. He praised the Telugu audience in the USA for their support of Telugu cinema. "I cannot thank Dil Raju enough in my life. When many producers hesitated to work with new directors, he trusted me with *Arya*," said Sukumar. Sukumar revealed that he received his first Filmfare Award from Shankar. Speaking about Ram Charan, Sukumar said, "He is like my brother and working with him is always a delight." Sukumar shared that he watched *Game Changer* with Chiranjeevi. "After the likes of Shankar sir's *Gentleman* and *Bharateeyudu*, I enjoyed this film a lot. I thought Charan would win a National Award for *Rangasthalam*, but after watching this film's climax, I am certain he will win it this time," said Sukumar.

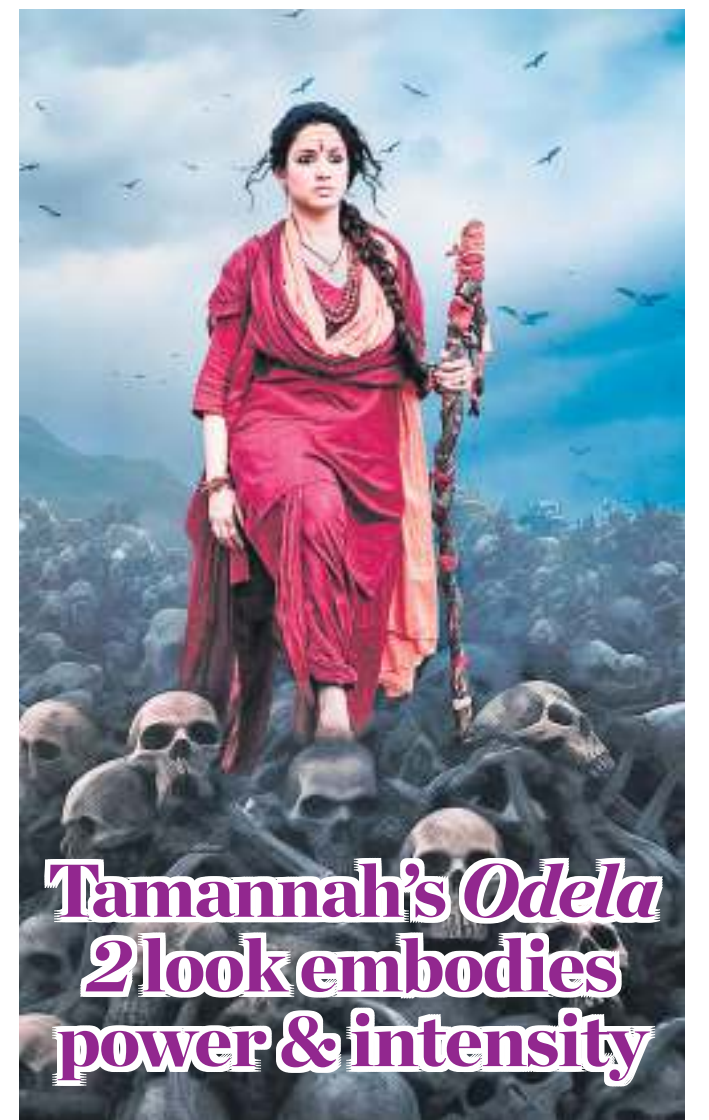
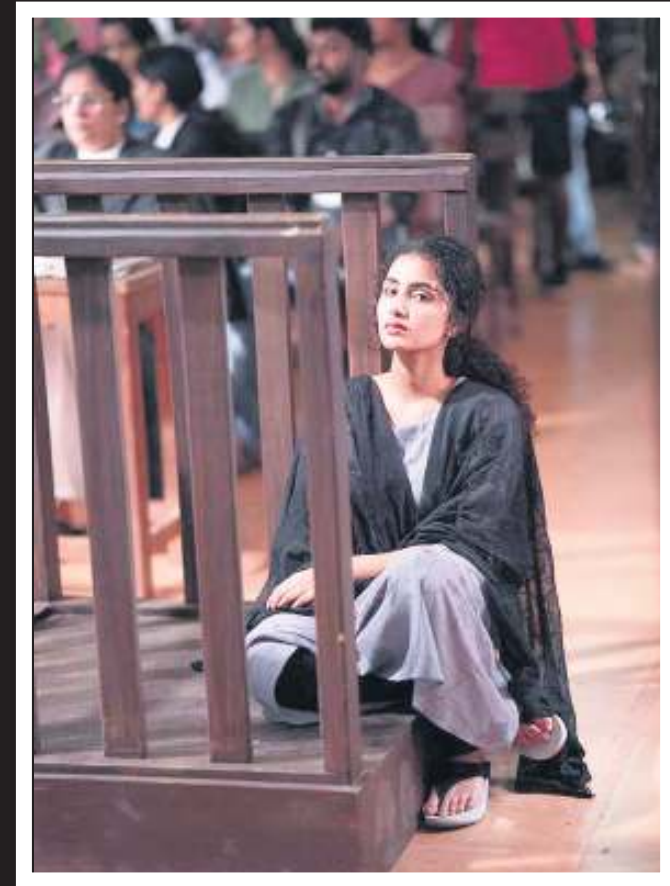
ANUPAMA'S COURT ROOM DRAMA IN TELUGU

Anupama Parameswaran's year has been a mixed bag, with her film *Tillu Square* achieving blockbuster success alongside Siddhu Jonnalagadda, despite her character taking a negative turn towards the end. On the other hand, her film *Eagle* with Ravi Teja as the lead actor, failed to impress at the box office.

Although Anupama originated from the Malayalam film industry, she has focused more on Telugu and Tamil projects in recent years. However, she seems to be revisiting her Malayalam roots, with several films in the pipeline, including *Janakai Vs State of Kerala (JSK)*, slated for release in February.

In *JSK*, Anupama plays the role of Janaki, with Suresh Gopi starring as her lawyer. The film, directed by Praveen Narayana and produced by J Phanindra Kumar, is an intense courtroom drama based on a real-life incident.

The story revolves around Janaki's fight for justice in the face of courtroom injustice.



Tamannaah's *Odela 2* look embodies power & intensity

Tamannaah Bhatia stars as the lead actress in the upcoming film *Odela 2*, directed by Ashok Teja. The first installment, *Odela Railway Station*, achieved significant success on OTT, prompting the creation of this sequel. While Hebah Patel played the female lead in the first part, Tamannaah takes on the role in *Odela 2*. To coincide with Tamannaah's birthday, the filmmakers released her look from the film, generating substantial interest.

Popular director Sampath Nandi is producing *Odela 2*, which has already sparked considerable curiosity. Tamannaah portrays the intriguing role of Naga Sadhu, a character that has garnered attention with its captivating posters.

The striking poster hints at the intense and powerful nature of her character in the film.

To prepare for her role, Tamannaah underwent rigorous training, including extensive rehearsals to perfect the breathtaking stunts that will captivate audiences. *Odela 2* is being crafted on an impressive scale, boasting a massive budget and meticulous attention to detail in every aspect of production. The film promises an exhilarating cinematic experience, focusing on the intense clash between good, embodied by Tamannaah and evil, portrayed by Vasishtha.

Ajaneesh Loknath, renowned for his work on *Kantara*, serves as the music director for *Odela 2*.

Rohit should change his tactics, be more attacking batting at No. 6: Shastri

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

With skipper Rohit Sharma struggling to decipher a way to score runs in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, former India coach Ravi Shastri says the stylish batter should go in with a clear mindset, change his tactics, and attack the bowlers. Rohit missed the opening Test Under to be with his family for the birth of his second child. He was expected to reclaim the opener's spot but KL Rahul's impressive 77 in India's win at Perth prompted a rejig of the batting order with Rohit moving down to No.6.

"I would like to see Rohit Sharma, his tactics change a bit because he can still be extremely dangerous at that number (six)," Shastri opined on ICC Review. "I think he's got to be very clear in his mindset to go out there and take the attack to the opposition and not worry about anything else," the cricketer-turned-commentator added. Shastri felt Rohit should shun the defensive mindset. "The last thing you want is him to be in two minds whether to defend or attack. In his case, it should be attack. He picks up length quickly, he should take the opposition on at that number. "Because if he gets away in the first 10-15 minutes, in any way, he's not got past that 15-20 minutes, half an hour. So why don't you play a natural game, go and take the attack to the opposition and take it from there?" Shastri felt it's the best way for



Rohit to get back into form and win games for India, adding that the best No.6 batters in the world are those who have the ability to counter-attack. "I think that is his best way of not just coming back into form, winning a game for India as well. Because that number is a crucial number." "The best No.6s in the world are the guys who know how to have the ability to counter-attack. They read the situation well. Yes, if a lot of wickets have fallen, maybe for a little while. You might have to be circumspect, but the intent has to be far sooner than later. "Especially when you have that kind of ability and especially when you open the batting for India and you have all the shots for Australian conditions." Rohit had made his Test debut in 2013 at No. 6 position, marking the occasion with a century. Shastri backed Rahul to retain the

opener's slot in the fourth Test following his two half-centuries so far in the five-Test series. "I would have asked him (Rohit) to open in the last Test match (Brisbane) but then the way Rahul has batted, he was a joy to watch and the way he's batting, I believe he struck a purple patch," Shastri said. "It could be a position he might just want to keep and enhance the way he's playing because his technique was faultless," said Shastri. The former India captain said Rahul was currently at the top of his game and his confidence level too was very high. "The way he left the ball, the way he allowed the ball to come onto the bat, some of his cover drives were as good as any played by anyone in world cricket at the moment. And so I think when there's that much confidence there, you know, let it be."



Wasn't looking to save the follow-on that day in Brisbane: Akash Deep

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Akash Deep and Jasprit Bumrah saved India the blushes during the Brisbane Test with a resolute 10th wicket partnership but the rookie pacer on Sunday said his focus was on wholesome contribution to the team rather than looking to "merely save the follow-on." With the Indian batters, barring KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, failing once again, the obstinate 47-run partnership between Bumrah and Akash took India past the follow-on mark during the Gabba Test, which ended in a draw. "We come to bat lower down the order, so contributions of 20-25-30 runs are very valuable. My mindset is just to contribute. I wasn't looking to save the follow-on that day; I was just looking not to get out. My mindset was this, God willing, we were able to save the follow-on," Akash told reporters here. Akash smashed Pat Cummins for a four to avoid the follow-on as the Indian dressing room broke into celebrations on day four. "When you save the match from such a situation, the entire team gets the confidence and our dressing room reflected just that. Everyone was having fun and enjoying." Salvaging a draw after being on the brink of losing in Brisbane, the Indian team is now filled with confidence, feels Akash.

"If you look at it, it's 50-50, even though we were behind in the last match. But the confidence we built on the last day, we still have that confidence. So, I can say it's 50-50, and this Test match (Melbourne) is very important for both the teams." Akash did not feature in the playing XI for the first two Tests against Australia but made his way into the team for the third Test. The 28-year-old gave a good account himself, and was unlucky to miss out on the wicket of veteran batter Steve Smith, whom he troubled no end. The pacer, who is playing on foreign soil for the first time, revealed tips from Bumrah helped him. "This is my first time playing in Australia. Jassi bhai keeps on telling us things about how we can go about our job; it makes our job easy." "He told me one thing, 'Don't get too excited. Just focus on your discipline. How you go about your job in Indian conditions, repeat that here.' He told me just this." Short-pitched balls against Head: Akash Travis Head continues to be a thorn in India's flesh. After being dismissed for 11 in his first innings of the series, he has gone on to score 89, 140 and 152 in his next three outings. Obviously, he did not detail the plans, but hinted at a bouncer strategy against the left-hander.

Joe Root returns to England's ODI squad for India tour, Champions Trophy

PTI ■ LONDON

Veteran batter Joe Root's return to 50-over format after more than a year headlined England's squad announcement for the ODI tour to India and the ICC Champions Trophy. Root's previous assignment in the format was the 50-over World Cup held in India in 2023. All-rounder and Test skipper Ben Stokes was not considered for selection as he has been recovering from a left hamstring injury sustained during the third Test against New Zealand earlier this month. Seasoned batter Jos Buttler will lead the side, and the Lancashire man will also captain England in the T20I series against India, which precedes the ODIs. England will play five T20Is and three ODIs during the



white ball tour to India. Leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed, who made his Test debut against India earlier this year, was included in the T20I squad. In-form Harry Brook will get another chance to play international bilateral cricket in India after pulling out of the Test series earlier this year due to personal reasons.

England ODI squad: Jos Buttler (Captain), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood. England T20I squad: Jos Buttler (Captain), Rehan

Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood. India vs England Schedule: T20I: 1st T20I: January 22, Eden Gardens, Kolkata. 2nd T20I: January 25, MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai. 3rd T20I: January 28, Niranjan Shah Stadium, Rajkot. 4th T20I: January 31, MCA Stadium, Nagpur. 5th T20I: February 2, Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai ODIs: 1st ODI: February 6, VCA Stadium, Nagpur. 2nd ODI: February 9, Barabati Stadium, Cuttack. 3rd ODI: February 12, Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad.



Atletico Madrid stuns Barcelona with a 2-1 win

AP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone ran down the touchline in joy while Barcelona players sunk to the turf in dismay. Super sub Alexander Sorloth struck again deep in stoppage time to hand Atletico a 2-1 comeback win at Barcelona and ensure Atletico will spend La Liga's short winter break on top of the table. Atletico's 12th straight win in all competitions lifted it three points above Barcelona. Barcelona has only two wins in its last nine games and could find itself third on Sunday if Real Madrid beats Sevilla. Simeone, coaching Atletico since 2011, celebrated winning at Barcelona for the first time. "We finally did it," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. "We are playing well, we started poorly but we knew our chances would come. And in the last minute Sorloth came through. Thanks to him we finally won here. He is the striker we needed." It was a much more impressive performance from Barcelona, which dominated for long periods and took a deserved lead in the 30th minute. Pedri started and ended the move, playing a one-two with Gavi, and firing an angled shot into the bottom right corner. Raphinha almost doubled Barcelona's lead in stunning

fashion in the 57th when he lobbed the goalkeeper but the ball came off the crossbar. Robert Lewandowski got to the rebound but sent it onto the head of Axel Witsel, who needed treatment. Barcelona was made to rue its missed opportunities when Atletico levelled just three minutes later, partly thanks to a defensive blunder. Barcelona midfielder Marc Casadó tried to clear Julián Álvarez's cross but passed it straight to Rodrigo De Paul, who fired into the bottom right corner. Casadó put his hands to his head and dropped to his knees in dismay. Worse was to come for Barcelona as, in the sixth minute of stoppage time, Nahuel Molina made a fantastic run to latch onto a through ball and cross in for Sorloth to fire into the back of the net. It was Sorloth's eighth goal of the season, five of them after he's come off the bench. BILBAO'S UNBEATEN RUN Athletic Bilbao came from behind to beat Osasuna 2-1 and extend its unbeaten run to 14 matches and remain just five points behind Atletico. Gorka Guruzeta and Alex Berenguer sealed the comeback win for fourth-placed Bilbao after Lucas Torro gave Osasuna a 25th-minute lead at El Sadar. Guruzeta headed Bilbao level in the 31st and Berenguer struck the winner in the 74th. Mallorca won at Getafe 1-0 and moved up to fifth.

Women's players arrested over racist incident in Brazil soccer semifinal

AP ■ SAO PAULO



Four River Plate women's players were arrested by Sao Paulo police and accused of making a racial slur, Sao Paulo's public security secretariat told The Associated Press. On Friday, a Brazil Ladies Cup soccer semifinal between Argentina's River Plate and Brazilian team Grêmio was stopped in the first half after River Plate's Candela Diaz was accused of making monkey gestures to a ball boy, according to broadcast footage and local media reports. Diaz was detained along with teammates Juana Cangaro, Milagros Naiquen Diaz, and Camila Ayelen Duarte, the players' lawyer, Thais Sankari, told The AP. They remained in custody on Saturday. Sankari said the River Plate players reacted only after being provoked. "We see in this decision a

great arbitrariness and the Brazilian judiciary's desire to send a message. They used this case for that purpose," she said. After Diaz's gestures on Friday, the Grêmio players walked off in protest. The referee showed red cards to six River Plate players following an on-field fight and ended the match because there was no longer the minimum number of players required to continue. The score was 1-1 but the

referee awarded the match to Grêmio, which will play in the tournament final on Sunday. The Brazil Ladies Cup banned River Plate from the tournament for two years on Saturday. Tournament organizers said in a statement on Saturday that future editions will immediately ban any participating team whose athletes or staff "engage in racist gestures on the playing field."

"The organisation reaffirms its anti-racist stance and emphasises that it will never tolerate such incidents." Grêmio said on X it was supporting its players, who would file a police report. "We regret what happened and condemn any discriminatory acts," the team said in the statement. Grêmio coach Thaisan Passos said her players told her River Plate players had previously called them "monkeys." "Incidents like this cannot keep happening. How long will we keep pretending racism doesn't exist?" she told local broadcaster SporTV. Diaz has not commented publicly. River Plate also condemned the discriminatory gestures. The club said in a statement on X it was "taking the appropriate disciplinary measures and will continue working to eradicate such behavior."

Manchester City crisis deepens after losing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City's stunning slump deepened after losing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League. Goals from Jhon Duran and Morgan Rogers at Villa Park consigned the four-time defending champion to a ninth defeat in 12 games in a season that is unravelling. Pep Guardiola's team has won just once during that run. "We don't have a defense for the results. They are not good," Guardiola said. Third-placed Arsenal closed the gap on league leader Liverpool to three points with a 5-1 win at Crystal Palace, but has played two games more. City dropped to sixth in the standings, nine points below Liverpool, and has played two games more. "It's about what I can do with my people to get the results back and continue," Guardiola said. "If there is a moment that I cannot overthink, it is right now. Try to be simple, stick to my principles

and give certainty to the team." TITLE HOPES FADING After winning six titles in seven years and an unprecedented four in a row, City's remarkable fall shows little sign of stopping. Guardiola admitted last week he had not been good enough to turn his team's form around. City was without a win in any of its last eight away games in all competitions. While it looks unlikely to win a fifth straight title, a place in the top four and Champions League qualification could also be in jeopardy after fourth-placed Nottingham Forest won at Brentford 2-0 to move four points clear of City. Only once under Guardiola has City managed to win the title when losing six times in the league. That was in 2021, when it lost two of its last three games, having already been confirmed as the champion. City lost nine times when Liverpool won the title in 2020, but its sixth defeat didn't come until February. Guardiola also lost six times in his first season in English soccer in 2016-17 and



City finished third. The latest defeat could have been even more emphatic from a dominant Villa, which moved up

to fifth. Duran scored his sixth goal in as many starts in the 16th minute from Rogers' assist. Duran had a

goal disallowed for offside in the second half and Rogers hit the post before doubling Villa's lead in the 65th.

Phil Foden pulled a goal back for City in stoppage time, but it wasn't enough to spark a late comeback. "We have to stay positive, even though it's difficult, and we have to keep working hard," City striker Erling Haaland said. JESUS STREAK It's five goals in a week for Gabriel Jesus against Crystal Palace. After scoring a hat trick in Arsenal's 3-2 comeback win against Palace in the English League Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday, the Brazil striker hit another two goals when the teams met again on Saturday. Going into Wednesday's game, Jesus had only scored once for Arsenal since the end of January. Jesus struck twice in a frantic start at Selhurst Park. He opened the scoring in the sixth, with Ismaila Sarr leveling five minutes later. Jesus restored Arsenal's lead in the 14th and was denied back-to-back hat tricks when hitting the post and then having another close range effort saved by Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson. Kai Havertz, Gabriel Martinelli

and Declan Rice also scored for Arsenal. FOREST FLYING HIGH If City's demise is a surprise story of the season, so is Forest's rise. After battling relegation for much of last term, Forest is in contention to qualify for the Champions League and possibly more. Facing a Brentford team that was unbeaten at home, goals from Ola Aina and Anthony Elanga secured another statement win on the road for Nuno Espirito Santo's side, having already won at Anfield and Old Trafford this year. ISAK TREBLE Alexander Isak hit a hat trick in Newcastle's 4-0 win at Ipswich. The Sweden international, who has 10 goals in his last 11 games, wrapped up his treble inside 54 minutes at Portman Road, including one in the opening minute. Jacob Murphy also scored. Brighton was 1-0 up at West Ham through Mats Wieffer, but Mohammed Kudus levelled for the draw.