


Equip youngsters with skills in emerging technologies: PM Modi



SUSTAINING GROWTH REQUIRES DEEPER COMMITMENT: FINMIN



Dooradarshini is a period drama SET IN 90s



QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The pioneer
 AICC should think strategically considering the emerging situation in which south Indian states would be losers with fewer increases in parliamentary constituencies upon delimitation of parliamentary constituencies on the basis of population. AICC should move cautiously to ensure that the south Indian states would not experience loss in regard to increases in the number of parliamentary constituencies
 - Revanth Reddy, CM



DON'T MISS...

All set for CM Cup 2024 sports festival

The prestigious CM Cup 2024 State-level sports competitions, organised by the Telangana government to strengthen rural sports, are all set to begin. Scheduled to be held from December 27 to January 2, the event aims to identify hidden talent from rural Telangana, nurture their skills and shape them into global champions. The competitions, being held for the first time from the grassroots level, have completed village, mandal and district-level rounds. The upcoming State-level contests promise to be a ...

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'Situation at LAC stable but sensitive'

The overall situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is "stable" but "sensitive" and broad consensus was reached to restore ground situation based on principles of "equal and mutual security", the defence ministry said on Thursday, weeks after Indian and Chinese militaries disengaged from last two friction points in eastern Ladakh. In an year-end review, the ministry referred to the understanding reached between the two sides on October 21 on disengagement and said patrolling activity has commenced...

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India initiates anti-dumping probe

India has initiated a probe into alleged dumping of LNG fuel tanks from China following a complaint by a domestic player, according to a commerce ministry notification. The commerce ministry's investigation arm, Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), is probing the dumping of liquefied natural gas (LNG) fuel tanks as imports are allegedly hurting the margins of the domestic industry. Inox India Ltd has filed an application seeking the imposition of anti-dumping duty, stating that the cheap...

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India needed Rohit to open: Nayar

India's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar on Thursday defended axing Shubman Gill from the Boxing Day Test, saying it was in team's best interest to not only have Rohit Sharma back to his usual opening slot but also add some sting to the attack by drafting in spin all-rounder Washington Sundar. Gill, who missed the first Test due to a finger injury, scored 31 and 28 in the Pink Ball Test and looked the most assured among Indian batters. He, however, got out for a duck in Brisbane. With Rohit Sharma opening the...

-SPORTS

No question of withholding Group 1 results: HC

Dismisses petition of aspirants

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 The Telangana High Court has dismissed a petition filed by candidates concerning the Group-1 examination results to be announced by the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC). The candidates had approached the Court on several issues, including finalization of reservations. They requested that the Group-1 results be put on hold until matters concerning reservations were resolved. They filed multiple petitions in this regard. The Court was asked to issue orders to suspend declaration of the results. However, after hearing the petitions, the Court rejected the request to put on hold the results. The Group-1 mains examinations were held from October 21 to 27 of this year. Recently, TSPSC Chairman Burra Venkatesham announced that the Group-1 results would be declared by March of next year. The Group 1 aspirants took to X and posted remarks. "They simply cancelled and they don't go through arguments on local non-local issues and reservation" said one aspirant.

ARCHITECT OF ECONOMIC REFORMS

Manmohan no more

Manmohan Singh's last rites to be conducted with full state honours; national mourning of 7 days to be observed: Govt sources.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, widely regarded as the architect of India's economic reform program and a landmark nuclear deal with the United States, has died. He was 92.

Singh was admitted to New Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences late Thursday after his health deteriorated due to a "sudden loss of consciousness at home," the hospital said in a statement.

Singh was being treated for "age-related medical conditions," the statement said.

A mild-mannered technocrat, Singh became one of India's longest-serving prime ministers for 10 years and leader of the Congress Party in the Parliament's Upper House, earning a reputation as a man of great personal integrity. He was chosen to fill the role in 2004 by Sonia Gandhi, the widow of assassinated Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

But his sterling image was tainted by allegations of corruption against his ministers.

Singh was reelected in 2009, but his second term as prime minister was clouded by financial scandals and corruption charges over the organization of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. This led to the Congress Party's crushing defeat in the 2014 national election by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of Narendra Modi.

Singh adopted a low profile after relinquishing the post of prime minister.



Prime Minister Modi, who succeeded Singh in 2014, called him one of India's "most distinguished leaders" who rose from humble origins and left "a strong imprint on our economic policy over the years." "As our Prime Minister, he made extensive efforts to improve people's lives," Modi said in a post on social platform X. He called Singh's interventions in Parliament as a lawmaker "insightful" and said "his wisdom and humility were always visible."

Rahul Gandhi, from the same party as Singh and the opposition leader in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, said Singh's "deep understanding of economics inspired the nation" and that he "led India with immense wisdom and integrity." "I have lost a mentor and guide. Millions of us who admired him will remember him with the utmost pride," Gandhi wrote on X. Born on Sept. 26, 1932, in a village in the Punjab province of undivided India, Singh's brilliant academic career took him to

"He was brought to the Medical Emergency" at 8:06 p.m., the hospital said, but "despite all efforts, he could not be revived and was declared dead at 9:51 PM."

Cambridge University in Britain, where he earned a degree in economics in 1957. He then got his doctorate in economics from Nuffield College at Oxford University in 1962.

Singh taught at Panjab University and the prestigious Delhi School of Economics before joining the Indian government in 1971 as economic advisor in the Commerce Ministry. In 1982, he became chief economic adviser to the Finance Ministry. He also served as deputy chair of the Planning Commission and governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

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Govt announces 7-day mourning

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union government on Thursday declared a seven-day mourning in honour of former prime minister Manmohan Singh, officials said here. They said the Cabinet will meet at 11 am on Friday to pay tributes to him. Singh's last rites will be conducted with full state honours, the officials added.

Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died here on Thursday night at the age of 92. He was the prime minister during 2004-14.

'Congress MLAs hurting feelings of Andhra settlers'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Kukatpally BRS MLA MAdhavaram Krishna Rao commented that the Congress MLAs and Ministers are speaking in a manner that hurt the feelings of Andhra settlers and peace of Hyderabad city.

Krishna Rao on Thursday asked the Congress MLAs and Ministers to tell who they are to ask the Andhra settlers and cinema people to vacate Hyderabad city? He made it clear that he will not tolerate such comments, which are provoking regional differences, made by not only Congress and BJP leaders but also BRS leaders. He asked whether the Congress MLAs learnt this in the training classes held recently at MCRHRD.

Krishna Rao said that former chief minister late Marri Chenna Reddy strived hard to bring Telugu film industry to Hyderabad city from Chennai. He said that lakhs of people are now depending upon the film industry.

LINKING NUMBER OF LS SEATS IN STATES TO POPULATION

CM to AICC: Think strategically

Cautions south Indian states would be losers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has suggested that the All India Congress Committee should think strategically, considering the emerging situation in which south Indian states would be losers with fewer increases in MP seats upon eventual reorganization of parliamentary constituencies on the basis of population.

The Chief Minister said that AICC should move cautiously and ensure that the south Indian states would not experience loss in regard to increases in the numbers of parliamentary constituencies.

Addressing Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting at Belagavi on Thursday, Revanth Reddy said that the Congress party should campaign vigorously on the Women's Bill introduced by it during the erstwhile Congress regime and bring it to a logical conclusion. The Chief Minister said that the Congress should be very



CM Revanth Reddy at CWC meeting at Belagavi on Thursday

careful in this regard as there were chances for the BJP to turn reservations in its favour through the Women's Bill.

The Chief Minister claimed that the ongoing caste census in Telangana had become a 'guide for the nation'. He suggested that a movement be waged demanding the Centre to take up caste census along with population census. He urged the CWC meeting to pass a

resolution in this regard and send the same to the Centre. After approving the proposal of the Chief Minister, the CWC later passed a resolution unanimously in this regard.

It may be mentioned here that the Congress is in power in two states--Karnataka and Telangana in south India. Other than these two states, the party is in power only in Himachal Pradesh.

CM MEETS FILM INDUSTRY BIGWIGS

Revanth takes full control of Tollywood

Ticket price hikes and benefit shows off the agenda



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
 sureshkavirayani@gmail.com
 ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has made it clear to Tollywood bigwigs that under no circumstances, benefit shows and ticket price hikes will be allowed in the state. Taking full control of the situation, the Chief Minister suggested that film personalities must participate in social service activities and anti-drug campaigns without fail.

Although the meeting was widely expected to discuss the raging controversy over the recent Sandhya theatre stampede and the consequent arrest of actor Allu Arjun as well as demolition of N-Convention belonging to film star Nagarjuna Akkineni, none of these items came up for discussion. It was a meeting that apparently followed the agenda set by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, with the participants finally agreeing to come to terms with the state government on all aspects. After the meeting, Tollywood representatives expressed their happiness over the 'positive' manner in which the talks were held and hoped that the currently soured relations between the industry and the state government would improve soon.

The Telugu film industry, represented by Telangana Film Development Corporation (TFDC) Chairman Dil Raju, met Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Thursday morning. This meeting scotched speculations about the perceived 'gap' between the government and the film industry.

"The Chief Minister shared his vision for the development of the Telugu Film Industry and expressed his ambition to make Hyderabad a hub for not only Indian cinema, but also Hollywood," said Dil Raju. Nearly 40 people from the industry, including producers, actors, and directors, attended the meeting. Prominent figures like K.

"We didn't discuss the Allu Arjun issue at all in the meeting. Those are very small issues and were never discussed. Ticket price hikes are a producer's individual choice, and whoever wants it can request the government"
 - Dil Raju, TFDC Chairman

Cabinet sub-panel to boost film industry

HYDERABAD: The Telangana government has announced the formation of a Cabinet subcommittee to address challenges faced by the film industry and propel it to the next level of growth. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy made the announcement during his meeting with prominent members of the film fraternity. Highlighting the pivotal role of the Telugu film industry in shaping Telangana's cultural identity and its potential to grow as a global brand, the Chief Minister observed. "We have always encouraged the film industry, and our government is determined to create a global identity for Telugu cinema," he said. As part of the government's initiatives, TFDC chairman Dil Raju has been tasked with acting as a bridge between the government and the industry.

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AMID POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE

6,000 inmates escape from prison in Mozambique

PNS ■ MAPUTO

At least 6,000 inmates escaped from a high-security prison in Mozambique's capital on Christmas Day after a rebellion, the country's police chief said, as widespread post-election riots and violence continue to engulf the country.

Thirty-three prisoners died and 15 others were injured during a confrontation with the security forces, the police chief Bernardino Rafael added.

The prisoners fled during violent protests, that have seen police cars, stations and general public infrastructure destroyed after the country's Constitutional Council confirmed the ruling Frelimo party as the winner of the Oct.9 elections.

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DONATIONS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

BJP got over Rs 2,600 cr, Cong Rs 281 cr: EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP received contributions of over Rs 2,604.74 crore during 2023-24 while the opposition Congress got Rs 281.38 crore in its kitty, according to contribution reports of the two parties put in public domain by the Election Commission (EC).

The donations listed in the reports were received till March 31, 2024 ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.



The BJP had declared donations worth over Rs 740 crore ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, while the Congress had claimed to have received over Rs 146 crore in 2018-19.

During 2023-24, while the BJP received over Rs 723 crore worth of donations from Prudent Electoral Trust, it also got over Rs 127 crore from Triumph Electoral Trust and over Rs 17 lakh from Einzigtarig

Electoral Trust. The Congress got over Rs 150 crore from the Prudent Electoral Trust, which was the sole trust donor to the party.

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BRS surpasses Cong in political donations

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) has emerged as the second-highest recipient of political donations in 2023-24, surpassing the Congress in funds received from contributions of Rs. 20,000 and above.

According to data released by the Election Commission of India, BRS

secured Rs. 580 crore in donations; leaving the Congress (Rs. 289 crore) far behind.

The BJP, however, remained the top recipient, garnering Rs. 2,244 crore in the same period. Despite this, the BRS's performance underscores its growing prominence, particularly as a regional party with ambitions of expanding its influence nationally.

A significant contributor to both the BRS and the Congress was the Prudent Electoral Trust, which donated Rs. 85 crore to the BRS and Rs. 156 crore to the Congress.

The disparity in overall donations between the two parties highlights the increasing financial strength of the BRS under its leader, K Chandrashekar Rao.

Revant, Kishan mourn demise of Manmohan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Union Ministers G Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay Kumar and BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao and several other leaders on Thursday consoled the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died in New Delhi on Thursday night. He was 92.

Describing Singh as one of the greatest economists, leaders and reformer, Revanth Reddy said the former PM is one of the true architects of new India.

"He showed how decency and class are much needed aspects of political & public life. He is a legend in whose passing away, India has lost a great son," Reddy said on 'X'.

Kishan Reddy, the Union Coal Minister, said Manmohan Singh's contributions to the country's growth

and development, including the implementation of key economic reforms, will always be remembered.

Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS (Home), said the former PM's contributions to the country would never be forgotten.

Chandrasekhar Rao, also known as KCR, recalled his tenure as Union Minister during the UPA regime and the association with Manmohan Singh. Singh had extended complete support to the cause of Telangana statehood, having understood the sentiments of people, KCR said in a statement.

He also hailed Singh's stellar contributions as Finance Minister in the government headed by Former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao and later premier himself.

Singh's death was announced by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, where he was admitted in the Emergency ward around 8.30 PM in a critical condition.

'Constitution faces its gravest threat; Shah must resign'

PNS ■ BELAGAVI

Congress adopts political resolution at CWC meet

Alleging that the Constitution faces its 'gravest threat yet', the Congress on Thursday said Home Minister Amit Shah's "denigration" of B R Ambedkar in Parliament is the latest instance of the RSS-BJP's decades-long project to undermine the Constitution.

In its political resolution, the Congress Working Committee reiterated the demand for the home minister's resignation as well as an apology to the nation from him.

Two resolutions were passed at the 'Nava Satyagraha Baithak' here attended by top Congress leaders, including party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, and general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal, among others.

"Unfortunately, as we enter the 75th year of our Republic in exactly a month's time, the Constitution faces its gravest



threat yet. Jawaharlal Nehru had said that 'there is no doubt that no one took greater care and trouble over Constitution making than Dr. Ambedkar', the resolution read.

"The Union Home Minister's denigration of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in Parliament is

the latest instance of the RSS-BJP's decades-long project to undermine the Constitution. The CWC reiterates the demand for the Union Home Minister's resignation as well as for an apology to the nation from him," it said.

The CWC said it is dis-

tressed by the "ongoing degradation" of democracy.

"Institutions such as the judiciary, the Election Commission, and the media have been politicised through executive pressure. Parliament has been gutted, as shown by the unprecedented obstruction of its proceedings by the treasury benches in the recently-concluded Winter Session of 2024," the Congress said.

The CWC alleged that the Constitution's federal structure continues to be under attack, most recently from the government's 'One Nation, One Election' bill.

The CWC condemned the Centre's amendment to the Conduct of Election Rules 1961 undertaken on the recommendation of the Election Commission which restricts public access to crucial sections of poll documents.

India's 'reforms' man and politician with a difference



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

He drew the roadmap of India's economic reform, unshackled it from the licence raj and pulled it back from the brink when even all its gold reserve was pledged. Former prime minister Manmohan Singh was the scholar and architect of the India of today who evolved into a stubbornly resolute politician.

Unassuming, erudite, soft-spoken and a consensus builder, Manmohan Singh died on Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He was 92.

The Congress leader, who steered the country for 10 years from 2004-2014 and helped set up the country's economic framework as finance minister before that, was a renowned name in the global financial and economic sectors.

The man who famously spoke of studying under the dim light of kerosene lamps in his village without electricity and went on to become a storied academic was the copybook reluctant politician, almost stumbling into the rough and tumble of mainstream politics.

He was the proverbial dark horse when Sonia Gandhi stepped back from taking the prime minister's post, ignoring the clamour from her party, and chose him instead. And so Manmohan Singh the academic bureaucrat became the 14th prime minister of India in 2004.

Theirs was a partnership that lasted 10 years, the equation between Sonia Gandhi and Singh often cited for its equanimity and an example of how a working relationship should really be. Notwithstanding the inevitable tensions, Singh also had to balance the interests of the United Progressive Alliance's coalition partners.

N N Vohra, a former Jammu and Kashmir governor, said Singh always "stood firm as a rock in pursuing the ethical path even if he got into trouble with the political party he represented".

In 2014, the UPA was voted out in a cloud of corruption scandals, establishing BJP's unbroken rule since then. Hailed for putting India on the road to liberalisation and privatisation in the early 1990s, Singh was

criticised for turning a blind eye to charges of corruption. The going often got tough.

During his first tenure as prime minister, the coalition began to unravel when India signed a civil nuclear deal with the US. It almost cost his government with the Left parties pulling out of the UPA coalition. However, his government survived.

On July 22, 2008, the UPA faced its first confidence vote in the Lok Sabha after the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led Left Front withdrew support over India approaching the IAEA for Indo-US nuclear deal. The UPA won the confidence vote with 275 votes to the opposition's 256, with a record thin 19-vote victory after 10 MPs abstained.

During the fag end of his tenure as prime minister, when he was seen defending his government's record and the Congress' positions on controversial issues such as the 2G scam, Singh spoke up and declared he was not weak.

"I honestly hope history would be kinder to me than the contemporary media, or for that matter, the opposition parties in Parliament," he had said famously in January 2004.

More than two decades later, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge reacted to Singh's death with a poignant post on X: "Undoubtedly, history shall judge you kindly, Dr. Manmohan Singh ji!"

The decade with Singh at the helm of affairs is widely believed to be an era unprecedented growth and prosperity.

His journey to the acme of India's governance and political power is unique in the annals of India's politics.

Singh, always seen in a powder blue turban, was appointed India's finance minister in 1991 in the Narasimha Rao government. His role in ushering in a comprehensive policy of economic reforms is now recognised worldwide.

In January 1991, India struggled to finance its essential imports, especially of oil and fertilisers, and to repay official debt. In July 1991, the RBI pledged 46.91 tonnes of gold with the Bank of England and the Bank of Japan to raise \$400 million.

Manmohan Singh soon steered the economy well and was quick to repurchase it months later.

BJP got ...

Continued from page 1

Interestingly, the Congress received multiple donations of Rs 1.38 lakh including those from top leaders including Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K C Venugopal and Digvijaya Singh, among others.

Multiple donations were made to the Congress under the heading "Happy Birthday to our leader—JKB".

The contributions declared by the BJP and the Congress do not include the donations received through electoral bonds as these have to be declared in the party's annual audit reports and not contribution statements.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is also a recognised national party, received contributions of over Rs 11.06 crore during the fiscal.

Another recognised national party, Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), received donations worth over Rs 7.64 crore.

IG objects to presser by BRS leader Narendra, cites impact on probe

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Inspector General Satyanarayana has raised objections to a press conference conducted by BRS leader and former Kodangal MLA Patnam Narendra Reddy, who is currently out on conditional bail. Addressing the media at the Parigi CI office in Vikarabad district, the IG criticised the timing and nature of the press conference, alleging it could adversely affect the ongoing investigation.

The IG stated that such actions are inappropriate and confirmed his intention to approach the court to request the cancellation of Narendra Reddy's bail. He emphasised the need for cooperation in the investigation and expressed concern about the lack of compliance by Narendra Reddy and others involved.

Commenting on the incident, the IG revealed that a security force of 230 policemen had been deployed in

Lagacharla as part of the investigation. "Claims that police intelligence failed are unfounded. The arrests made were in connection with the attack on the collector, not the pharma land acquisition case," he clarified.

Satyanarayana further stated that the investigation has been conducted in phases, releasing those uninvolved while detaining suspects. He condemned false narratives being spread through the media, stressing that no government would support actions that harm farmers.

He also disclosed that Suresh, another key individual in the case, planned the attack and confirmed having voice recordings to substantiate this claim. "We will reveal the details at an appropriate time," he added. The IG accused both Narendra Reddy and Suresh of not cooperating with the investigation, with Narendra Reddy reportedly refusing to provide access to his phone password.

Hyd Congress accuses BJP of undermining Ambedkar's legacy

Dismiss Amit Shah for disrespecting Ambedkar, demands Hyd DCC Chief Sameer

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad District Congress Committee (DCC) president Mohammed Waliullah Sameer on Thursday demanded the immediate dismissal of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his recent remarks on Dr BR Ambedkar, terming Shah's comments as an insult to the architect of the Indian Constitution and the democratic values it represents.

Waliullah Sameer, who led a sit-in-protest organised by the Hyderabad DCC at Bada Bazar, Yakutpura, in the Old City on Thursday, accused Amit Shah of lowering the legacy of Dr Ambedkar by his alleged derogatory utterances. He described Amit Shah's remarks as an attempt to blur

the principles enshrined in the Constitution.

Speaking to the media, Sameer maintained that this act of the BJP shows some intentional agenda towards downgrading the contribution of Dr Ambedkar while promoting some regressive ideas. "Dr Ambedkar gifted us with a Constitution that protects justice, equality and dignity for all, most importantly, the marginalised ones. While making such remarks, Amit Shah has not only insulted Dr Ambedkar but has also disrespected the whole country that worships his ideas," he said.

Sameer further alleged that the BJP was trying to replace the ideals of the Constitution with those that were in tune

with Manusmriti, which he described as fundamentally opposed to the vision of equality and social justice that Dr Ambedkar championed.

He said the Congress would not rest until action is taken against Amit Shah. "Insulting Dr Ambedkar is equivalent to insulting the soul of India. The Congress will fight tirelessly to ensure that Amit Shah is held accountable for his words and is removed from office," he said, adding that the remarks had hurt the sentiments of millions of Indians who revere Dr Ambedkar's legacy.

Underlining the transformative role of the Constitution, Sameer said that it has empowered marginalised communities to assert their rights and live with dignity.

Revant takes full control ...

Continued from page 1

The recent controversy surrounding the arrest of actor Allu Arjun has been making headlines and amplified across social media and other platforms. However, Dil Raju clarified, "We didn't discuss the Allu Arjun issue at all in the meeting". He acknowledged that some participants briefly mentioned it as an unfortunate incident but stressed that it was treated as a passing cloud.

Addressing expectations of the meeting focusing on ticket price hikes and benefit shows, Dil Raju remarked: "Those are very small issues and were never discussed. Ticket price hikes are a producer's individual choice, and whoever wants it can request the government."

The meeting was held in a

cordial atmosphere and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy responded positively to the discussions. Dil Raju noted that the Chief Minister reiterated his commitment to making Telangana a "drug-free state". To support this endeavour, he requested actors to use their influence to create awareness about the dangers of drug abuse. "Most actors have a huge fan following. The CM requested them to include a small video message on drug awareness to inspire their fans," said Dil Raju.

Dil Raju emphasized that the discussions revolved around the industry's overall growth rather than minor issues like ticket pricing or benefit shows. "The agenda of the meeting was to explore Telugu cinema's potential on national and international scales. The CM wants

Hyderabad to become a hub for cinema, much like it is for the IT and Pharma sectors," he said.

The state government asked the industry to also support key initiatives, including holding the 'Gaddar Film Awards' annually. The TFDC will play a key role in facilitating these events, ensuring collaboration between the industry and the government.

Addressing another rumour, Dil Raju clarified that the police did not show any videos related to the Sandhya theatre incident during the meeting.

However, the Director-General of Police has requested that the industry hold itself accountable for the behavior of bouncers. A committee comprising film industry representatives and government officials will be formed to enhance

coordination. "As TFDC Chairman, I will act as a bridge between the industry and the government to ensure seamless collaboration. From now on, any industry needs will be routed through the TFDC," said Dil Raju. Notable attendees at the meeting included actors Murali Mohan, Nagarjuna, Venkatesh, and Kiran Abbavaram; directors Koratala Siva, Trivikram Srinivas, Anil Ravipudi, Sai Rajesh, and Vamsi Paidipalli; and producers Shyam Prasad Reddy, Suresh Babu, Allu Aravind, Gemini Kiran, KL Narayana, and others.

The meeting marked a significant step towards strengthening the somewhat strained relationship between the government and the Telugu film industry, with a shared vision to elevate the industry to greater heights.

Cabinet sub-panel to boost ...

Continued from page 1

The Chief Minister urged the industry to establish its own committee to work in tandem with the government subcommittee. Revanth Reddy also emphasized the state government's focus on promoting Telangana's natural and cultural wealth for film production. "With eco-tourism and temple tourism thriving, we are positioning Hyderabad as a cosmopolitan hub for all industries, including films," he

added. Acknowledging past contributions, the Chief Minister noted that initiatives such as Film Nagar, Chitrapuri Colony, and worker housing were started under erstwhile Congress regimes. He assured that his administration would continue this legacy. The Chief Minister reiterated his government's resolve to create a conducive environment for filmmakers, encouraging shoots across Telangana with seamless connectivity to Hyderabad.

Manmohan no ...

Continued from page 1

As finance minister, Singh in 1991 instituted reforms that opened up the economy and moved India away from a socialist-patterned economy and toward a capitalist model in the face of a huge balance of payments deficit, skirting a potential economic crisis.

His accolades include the 1987 Padma Vibhushan Award, India's second-highest civilian honor; the Jawaharlal Nehru Birth Centenary Award of the Indian Science Congress in 1995; and the Asia Money Award for Finance Minister of the Year in 1993 and 1994.

Singh was a member of India's Upper House of Parliament and was leader of the opposition from 1998 to 2004 before he was named prime minister. He was the first Sikh to hold the country's top post and made a public apology in Parliament for the 1984 Sikh Massacre in which some 3,000 Sikhs were killed after then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by Sikh bodyguards.

Under Singh, India adopted a Right to Information Act in 2005 to promote account-

ability and transparency from government officials and bureaucrats. He was also instrumental in implementing a welfare scheme that guaranteed at least 10 paid workdays for Indian rural citizens.

The coalition government he headed for a decade brought together politicians and parties with differing ideologies that were rivals in the country's various states.

In a move hailed as one of his biggest achievements apart from economic reforms, Singh ended India's nuclear isolation by signing a deal with the U.S. that gave India access to American nuclear technology.

But the deal hit his government adversely, with Communist allies withdrawing support and criticism of the agreement growing within India in 2008 when it was finalized. Singh adopted a pragmatic foreign policy approach, pursuing a peace process with nuclear rival and neighbor Pakistan. But his efforts suffered a major setback after Pakistani militants carried out a massive gun and bomb attack in Mumbai in November 2008.

6,000 inmates escape ...

Continued from page 1

The escape from the Maputo Central Prison, located 14 km southwest of the capital, started around midday Wednesday after "agitation" by a "group of subversive protesters" nearby, Rafael said, adding that prisoners at the facility snatched weapons from prison wardens and started freeing other detainees.

"A curious fact is that in that prison we had 29 convicted terrorists, who they released. We are worried, as a country, as Mozambicans, as members of the defense and security forces," said Rafael.

"They (protestors) were making noise demanding that they be able to remove the prisoners who are there serving their sentences," said Rafael, adding that the

protests led to the collapse of a wall, allowing the prisoners to flee.

He called for the voluntary surrender of the escaped prisoners and for the population to be informed about the fugitives.

Videos circulating on social media show the moment inmates left the prison, while other recordings reveal captures made by military personnel and prison guards. Many prisoners tried to hide in homes, but some were unsuccessful and ended up being detained.

One prisoner still with handcuffs on his right wrist says, in an amateur video, that he was in the disciplinary section of the maximum prison and was released by other inmates.

I will argue Allu Arjun's case if need be: BJP MP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Finding fault with the police for grilling actor Allu Arjun for conducting a press meet, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Medak constituency M Raghunandan Rao stated that conducting press meet by City Police Commissioner CV Anand was also a mistake as the case is in trial. Raghunandan Rao made it clear that he will argue cine hero Allu Arjun case in the Court if need arises. Expressing anger over Congress leaders' comments that the BJP leaders are politicising Allu Arjun issue, Raghunandan Rao on Thursday commented that one rule for cinema actor who committed a mistake and another rule for commissioner if he committed a mistake?

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Dwadashi: Dec 27 12:44 AM to Dec 28 02:26 AM
 Trayodashi: Dec 28 02:26 AM to Dec 29 03:32 AM
Nakshatram: Vishaka: Dec 26 06:09 PM to Dec 27 08:28 PM
 Anuradha: Dec 27 08:28 PM to Dec 28 10:13 PM
Rahukalam: 10:55 AM to 12:17 PM
Yamagandam: 3:01 PM to 4:24 PM
Variyam: 12:46 AM to 02:29 AM
Gulika: 8:10 AM to 9:32 AM
Amritakalam: 10:49 AM to 12:34 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:55 AM to 12:39 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER
Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 27°C
Humidity: 75%
Sunrise: 6:44 AM
Sunset: 5:50 PM
Updated: December 26, 2024 5:00 PM

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | DECEMBER 27, 2024

03



Mock drill tomorrow for emergency power restoration

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Grid India has announced a mock exercise to be conducted on December 28, 2024, between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., as part of its annual preparedness for emergency power restoration in the event of a total power supply failure across the Southern Region.

The exercise will focus on providing start-up supply to NTPC Ramagundam Generating Station through the HVDC Bhadravati-Ramagundam Inter-Regional link in coordination with PGCIL, TGTANSO, and NTPC Ramagundam.

As part of this exercise, there will be a planned power interruption lasting approximately 30 minutes in areas fed by the 220KV Jagtial Substation. Affected areas include Korutla, Metpally, Medipally, Kathalapur, Raikal, Jagtial Rural, Kodimyal, Mallial, Vemulawada Rural, Gangadhara, Ramadugu, Choppadandi (part), and Nandagiri feeders.

Consumers in these areas are requested to cooperate and bear with the inconvenience caused during the exercise. The initiative aims to strengthen the region's ability to handle power supply emergencies effectively.

The Chairman and Managing Director of TGTANSO expressed regret for the temporary disruption and emphasized the importance of such preparedness measures for ensuring long-term reliability and resilience of the power grid.



CITY EVENTS

Musical Programme

by Kala Vedika Magazine

Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
December 27
(9 am to 1 pm)

Monthly Drama

by Rasaranjani

Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
December 27 (6 pm)

Geeta Pariwar

By Harinarayan Vyas

Venue
Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
(Cultural Venue)
December 27
(4 pm to 10 pm)

Live Musical Orchestra

By Upcoming Singers
Music Academy

Venue
Sri Thyagaraja Gana Sabha
December 27 (4:30 pm)

Christmas Bazaar

Exhibition-cum-Sale

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

NYU CARNIVAL

With singer KARTHIK

Venue
Boulder Hills, Hyderabad
December 31

Weekend kids cooking camp

Master cooking and baking in 09 fun weekends

Venue
Culinary Guru Institute,
Hyderabad.
Till January 11, 2025.

No official notification on traffic fine discounts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A false message on traffic fine discounts is misleading the people. There is no notification, clarified by the Hyderabad Traffic Police on Thursday.

The official clarification is being issued regarding the fake online messages on traffic e-challan discounts by Telangana Police, which is under circulation.

Hyderabad Traffic Police said that no discounts are provided on pending traffic challans. Any claim of discount on pending traffic e-challans is fake, mischievous and fraught with fraudulent motive.

The citizens are requested not to believe or act upon any such fake and misleading claim or information.

All official announcements are made exclusively through the Telangana Police verified platforms and its official social media accounts.



Kishan Reddy to garland Ambedkar statue today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana BJP president and Union Minister of Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy is going to garland the 125 feet Ambedkar statue located besides the Secretariat on Friday, December 27.

According to a statement issued by the BJP State general secretary Gujjula Premender Reddy on Thursday, Kishan Reddy is going to garland the Ambedkar statue marking 75 years of Indian Constitution.

Premender Reddy said that BJP MPs, MLAs, MLCs, former MLAs, former MLCs, corporators and BJP leaders would participate in the programme.

A MISSION TO PROMOTE TALENT

All set for CM Cup 2024 State-level sports festival

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The prestigious CM Cup 2024 State-level sports competitions, organised by the Telangana government to strengthen rural sports, are all set to begin. Scheduled to be held from December 27 to January 2, the event aims to identify hidden talent from rural Telangana, nurture their skills and shape them into global champions.

The competitions, being held for the first time from the grassroots level, have completed village, mandal and district-level rounds. The upcoming State-level contests promise to be a grand affair, celebrating the spirit of sportsmanship.

With over two lakh athletes participating, the Telangana Sports Authority has streamlined operations using a Games Management System. This system ensures seamless services, modern technological support and a structured approach to managing the massive event.



Special attention is being given to ensure all facilities are in place to avoid any inconvenience for participants.

One of the unique highlights of CM Cup 2024 is the inclusion of para-sports, emphasising inclusivity and equality.

"This is not just a competition but a mission to promote talent without any discrimination," stated officials from the Sports Authority. The event, likened to a movement, has seen overwhelming support from sports associations, physical education teachers, directors, voluntary organisations and sports enthusiasts across Telangana. Their collective efforts aim to make the CM Cup 2024 a resounding success.

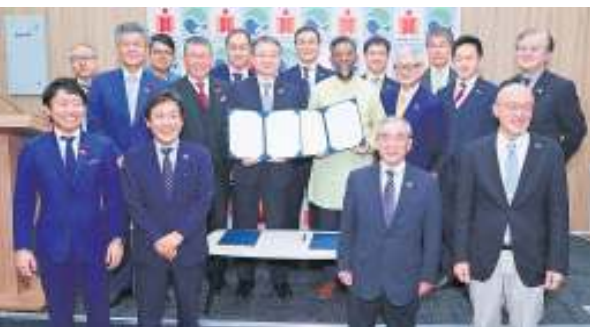
IIT-H, Hamamatsu City tie up to drive innovation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad (IIT-H) and Hamamatsu City, Japan, have formed a key partnership to drive innovation and talent exchange. On Thursday, Prof. BS Murty, Director of IIT Hyderabad, and Yusuke Nakano, Mayor of Hamamatsu City, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote personnel and economic collaboration between the two regions.

The partnership focuses on three key areas, such as Human Resource Exchange: Facilitating Indian tech talent in science and engineering to work in Japan. R&D Collaborations: Promoting academic and industrial research through open innovation.

Ecosystem Development: Helping Indian professionals adapt to life in Hamamatsu City. This collaboration began in January 2023 with discussions between IIT Hyderabad and Hamamatsu City's former mayor. The MoU builds on this



Director of IIT Hyderabad Prof. BS Murty and Yusuke Nakano, Mayor of Hamamatsu City, seen exchanging copies of MoUs on Thursday

groundwork, enabling practical initiatives to start soon.

Prof. Murty emphasised the historic significance of this collaboration, highlighting Japan's investments in IIT Hyderabad's infrastructure and the strengthening ties through JICA's "Friendship" programme. He expressed confidence that this partnership would boost innovation, research and economic growth, supporting India's "Viksit Bharat" vision.

Meanwhile, Mayor Nakano expressed excitement about

introducing Japanese culture and technology through this partnership. He appreciated IIT Hyderabad's reputation for producing exceptional talent, emphasising the potential for deeper collaboration between Hamamatsu industries and the institute.

The MoU aims to strengthen ties, promote research and facilitate talent exchange for mutual growth. Dignitaries from Japan, including Torii Noritaka, Chairman of Hamamatsu City Council, attended the signing ceremony.

12 Hyd students rank high in SAT, IELTS exams

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Twelve students from Hyderabad have achieved outstanding scores in the SAT and IELTS exams, paving the way for admission to top global universities like MIT, Harvard, Stanford and Oxford. These students were felicitated at a ceremony held at Resonance Global Campus, Madhapur, on Thursday.

Resonance Global, a Centre of Excellence for foreign university admissions, played a crucial role in their success. The students' achievements highlight both their talent and the quality of education provided by the institution. Top SAT scorers include Abhignya Mukka (1540/1600) and K Shaurya Sreekar (1500/1600). IELTS achievers include Abhignya Mukka and B. Kailash Nandan, both scoring 8/9.

Meanwhile, managing director Purnachandra Rao expressed pride in the inaugural batch, noting their exceptional performance in just 20 months of preparation, even with another year left to attempt these exams.

New Charlapalli terminal to open tomorrow

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Ashwini Vaishnav, Minister of Railways, Information and Broadcasting, Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India, will inaugurate Charlapalli railway station 2nd entry and new railway Terminal on December 28.

G Kishan Reddy, Minister of Coal & Mines, Government of India; public representatives and senior railway officials will participate in the programme. The development works for Charlapalli railway station 2nd entry and new railway terminal have been completed with an expenditure of Rs 413 crore. The trains in the Hyderabad - Secunderabad twin cities region are mainly served by three main terminals: Secunderabad, Hyderabad and Kacheguda.

To meet the growing needs of the city, Lingampalli on the western part of the twin cities was developed as another terminal station. Taking this forward, Charlapalli railway station has been developed as



another terminal station. Charlapalli is located on the eastern side of Hyderabad, an area experiencing rapid development and is conveniently situated near the Outer Ring Road.

Accordingly, the station was identified for developing as a terminal station, not only to reduce the congestion on other existing rail terminals in the twin cities region but also to particularly serve passengers on the eastern part of the city. The 2nd entry and the new railway terminal building with modern architectural facade has been constructed to handle the passengers.

The station building comprises six booking counters, separate waiting halls for ladies

and gentlemen, as well as an upper-class waiting area and an executive lounge on the ground floor. Additionally, the first floor will house a cafeteria, restaurant and restroom facilities. The design will feature spacious concourse areas and a modern elevation with illuminated facade lighting. Two spacious new foot-over bridges, one 12 metre wide, and another 6 metre wide, to facilitate seamless inter platform movement. Further, all 9 platforms would have escalators and lifts, total 7 lifts, 6 escalators for facilitating passenger movement. It will also have coach maintenance facilities for facilitating originating and terminating of trains at the station.



Solar adoption still leaves a large untapped market

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Highlighting the 60% rise in electricity tariffs over the past decade, Radhika Choudary, Co-Founder of Freyr Energy, emphasises the rapid growth of India's solar industry. She mentioned that while solar adoption has surpassed 3 million households, a large untapped market of over 300 million potential consumers remains.

She noted that affordable solar solutions, financing options, and government subsidies are driving this growth. Companies prioritizing quality products and customer-centric initiatives, such as Solar Experience Centers, are poised to lead the transformation, create jobs, and drive innovation.

Meanwhile, CEO & Co-Founder of Marut Drones, Prem Kumar highlights the Indian drone industry's remarkable growth, fueled by innovation, supportive policies and a strong ecosystem. However, challenges like certification delays, subsystem reliability and cost competitiveness must be addressed. He noted that investments in AI,

autonomous navigation, better batteries and workforce training can unlock breakthroughs, expanding drone applications across industries. He also mentioned small startups face hurdles competing with China's low-cost production, but government support can make 2025 transformative for Indian drone manufacturers.

Later on, CEO of ByteXL, Karun Tadepalli, highlighted 2024's technological strides and the rise of Gen AI. To realise India's tech potential, investing in engineering education, updating curricula, and driving industry-academia partnerships is vital. Karun also mentioned supporting startups and research will accelerate breakthroughs, empowering youth to position India as a global tech leader.

CEO of CriticalRiver, Anji Maram reflects on AI's impact on workforce dynamics. He noted that automation enhances efficiency and enables human focus on creative tasks. CriticalRiver's Digital Science Innovation Lab helps integrate AI, creating human-AI synergy for innovation and productivity.

City, parts of TG witness rains

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The mornings and evenings on Thursday have witnessed spells in various parts of Telangana as India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted isolated showers over the city, experiencing light to moderate rain or thundershowers.

According to IMD, mist or hazy conditions are very likely to prevail during morning hours at isolated pockets in a few districts of Telangana during the next five days. Minimum temperatures are likely to be above normal by 20 Degrees Celsius to

40 Degrees Celsius during the next five days.

Light rains are due to cyclonic activity in the Bay of Bengal weakening and causing easterly winds prevail in Telangana. These winds are further with local moisture wetting the parts of Telangana.

December 27 will also see light to moderate rain or thunder showers at isolated places over Telangana.

According to Telangana Planning Development Society, the highest Rainfall of 10.0 mm recorded was at Duggondi (Warangal). The State day average rainfall is 0.8 mm against 0.0

mm normal. The lowest minimum temperature of 15.2 Degrees Celsius was recorded at Arli (T) (Adilabad). The other mandals recorded rainfall after Warangal were Jangaon-Ganpur 7.5 mm, Mulugu-6.0 mm, Mahabubabad-5.9mm and Jayashankar-5.7mm.

Under GHMC areas- highest rainfall of 2.0 mm was recorded at Hayathnagar (Rangareddy). The GHMC average rainfall is 0.6 mm against 0.0 mm normal. The lowest minimum temperature of 19.6 Degrees Celsius was recorded at Kapra (GHMC Office) (Medchal-Malkajigiri).

Plan to send human into deep sea in early 2026

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Centre is planning to send a human into the deep sea with the mission likely to coincide with the human space mission in early 2026, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science, Jitendra Singh, said on Thursday.

Speaking at the 'Commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami' at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), he recalled that Prime Minister

Narendra Modi had mentioned the Deep Sea Mission in the past Independence Day address.

"We are also planning to send a human into the deep sea. I was telling Ravichandran (Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences) that it would be a strange coincidence - one human in space and another in the deep sea. This will happen almost simultaneously," Singh said. The human space mission, initially planned for 2025, may not take place next year, but is now expected in early 2026, he added.

Housing sales dip, Hyd sees moderate decline

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

India's top residential markets, including Hyderabad, witnessed a decline in housing sales in 2024, reflecting the dampening impact of general and State elections coupled with rising property prices. According to ANAROCK data, overall sales across the top seven cities dropped by 4%, with approximately 4,59,650 units sold in 2024 compared to 4,76,530 units in 2023.

Hyderabad recorded a 5% decline in sales, with approximately 58,540 units sold in 2024, down from 61,715 units the previous year. This places the city among the markets experiencing moderate

declines, alongside NCR (-6%), Pune (-6%), and Chennai (-11%). Kolkata faced the steepest fall of 20% in housing sales, highlighting broader challenges across regions.

Despite the sales dip, Hyderabad continued to play a significant role in the national housing market, with substantial contributions in both sales and new launches. The city added approximately 58,335 new units in 2024, accounting for a notable share of the overall supply, though this represented a 24% decline from the 76,345 units launched in 2023.

Average residential prices in Hyderabad surged by 27%, increasing from Rs 5,750 per sq.ft. in 2023 to Rs 7,300 per



sq. ft. in 2024. This growth in prices reflects the robust demand for larger and better-quality homes, a trend observed across most major cities. While the overall sales value of housing units across India jumped by 16% to Rs 5.68 lakh crore in 2024, the

decline in sales volumes points to the challenges posed by slow project approvals and the uncertainties of the election year. Cities like Bengaluru and MMR managed to buck the trend, recording slight annual increases in sales, underscoring regional vari-

ances in market performance. Hyderabad, along with other key markets, is expected to see a stronger performance in 2025 as new supply pipelines are replenished and elections conclude, paving the way for renewed growth momentum.



Tigers' movement haunt people in Asifabad district

PNS ■ KUMRAM BHEEM ASIFABAD

The residents of Kumram Bheem Asifabad district are living in fear with rise in the movement of tigers. As many as eight tigers are roaming in the Kagaznagar corridor and it has sparked fears among the people.

Forest officials have identified four male tigers and two female tigers in the corridor area.

As a result of the tigers' movement, people living in nearby forest villages are in fear for their lives. To track and protect the tigers, modern technology such as drone cameras and tracking cameras are being used. Tigers from Maharashtra's Tadoba, Tipeshwar, and Kanherghat Tiger Zones are entering the district via the Pranahita river and moving around the forests of Kagaznagar.

The Kagaznagar forest area, being connected to the Tadoba, Indravati, and Abhayaranyas corridors, allows

tigers to freely move in and out. The dense forests, abundant water sources, and wildlife are the reasons for the tigers' presence in the region. Recently, two people were attacked by tigers in the district, resulting in the death of a woman and severe injuries to another.

Several animals have also fallen victim to tiger attacks, with some being killed and others injured. In light of this, forest officials are preparing reports on the possibility of establishing a Tiger Corridor in the region.

Currently, there are 42 tigers and 187 leopards in Telangana, according to Forest officials.

The Amrabad Reserve Forest is a suitable habitat for tigers, and in 2017, there were eight tigers there. The number has now increased to 34, including 15 female tigers, 11 male tigers, and eight cubs. In the old Adilabad district area, eight tigers are currently roaming.

2 cops, computer operator die by suicide

The bodies of Sub-inspector Saikumar, woman constable Shruti and computer operator Nikhil were found after a painstaking underwater search at a lake

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

Three bodies, including that of a woman police constable and a sub-inspector, were found under mysterious circumstances in a lake in Kamareddy district on Thursday.

The police launched a search operation after learning that the three individuals had been missing since late Wednesday afternoon.

Based on mobile phone location data, they discovered the bodies of the woman constable and a computer operator in a lake in Sadashivnagar mandal during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

The body of the sub-inspector of Bhiknoor police station was subsequently found in the lake on Thursday morning, according to Kamareddy District

Superintendent of Police Sindhu Sharma told the media.

The deceased were identified as Saikumar, constable Shruti (33) and Nikhil (29).

Mystery shrouds the death of the police personnel and the computer operator who was the out-sourced employee in the lake. The bodies of constable Shruti and computer operator Nikhil were retrieved from the lake at midnight on Wednesday. Later, on Thursday morning the body of the sub-inspector Saikumar was found after a painstaking underwater search.

The sub-inspector, along with Shruti and Nikhil, had been missing since Wednesday. Their belongings were found near the Addluru Yellareddy Pedda Lake under Sadashivnagar mandal, prompting the police to launch a search.



Sub-Inspector Saikumar and constable Shruti

According to police, the mobile phone of Shruti stopped working. Based on mobile phone location data, the phone was found at Addluru Yellareddy Pedda Lake in Sadashivnagar mandal.

The police rushed to the lake on Wednesday night. They were

shocked to find the sub-inspector's car, slippers, and the constable's phone. It is suspected that Nikhil, who works as a computer operator at the Bibi Peta Society, also committed suicide. Currently, the deaths of sub-inspector Saikumar, constable Shruti, and Nikhil came

as a shock.

District Superintendent of Police Sindhu Sharma reached the lake to gather details. Police teams from Sadashivnagar, Bhikanur were deployed.

The woman constable, Shruti, hailed from Gandhari mandal. She had been working as a constable for 10 years. Her family consists of her parents, a sister, and a brother. According to her brother Nataraj, Shruti was very brave and there was no way she could have committed suicide. She had been living alone since then.

Only investigation can shed light on the relationship between the sub-inspector, Sai Kumar, and the constable, Shruti, and what led to them committing suicide. It is also yet to be known why the computer operator Nikhil joined the duo in allegedly committing suicide.

Death of pregnant woman sparks protest in Nagarkurnool

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The death of a pregnant woman while undergoing treatment at a private hospital sparked a protest here on Thursday. The deceased was identified as 35-year-old Ramulamma.

A social organisation organised a protest in front of the private hospital, demanding that a criminal case be registered against those responsible for the death of the woman.

Ramulamma from Alair under Telkapalle Mandal, came to Nagar Kurnool for treatment at a private nursing home. After receiving treatment there, the staff referred her to another hospital, and from there, she was referred to Raghavendra Private Hospital.

Upon admission to Raghavendra Hospital, the medical staff provided treatment, but her condition worsened by evening. The doctors then informed the family that she should be shifted to Gayathri Hospital and discharged her.

The family then transferred the pregnant woman to



Social activists, along with relatives of the deceased pregnant woman, staging a protest at a private hospital in Nagarkurnool on Thursday

Gayathri Private Hospital at Kollapur crossroads. There, doctors conducted tests and informed the family that her condition had deteriorated, so they referred her to the District Government Hospital.

On the way to the Government Hospital, she died. The family confirmed this and, feeling helpless, returned the body to Raghavendra Hospital. They expressed anger, blaming the negligence of the hospital staff for her death. After informing the public, Left party leaders arrived and supported the grieving family. They staged a

protest on the hospital premises, demanding justice for the victim's family and calling for action against the hospital that provided the treatment.

Dr Lakshmareddy, the physician at Raghavendra Hospital, however, stated that the death was caused by uncontrolled hypertension.

Meanwhile, local MLA K Rajesh Reddy met the relative of the woman and enquired about the incident. He assured the woman's relatives that he would support the family in every way. He promised to ensure that justice is served.

Sanjay inspects NITI Aayog's programmes

PNS ■ NARAYANAPET

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, as part of the 'Samagatha Abhiyan,' visited Narva and Balichakra mandals, identified as Aspirational Blocks under NITI Aayog's initiative, along with Yadgir, an Aspirational district in Telangana and Karnataka. The visit focused on reviewing the implementation of NITI Aayog's programmes related to education, healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture, and economic development.

Accompanied by Mahabubnagar MP DK Aruna and officials from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar began his tour at the Narva mandal Centre in Makhthal constituency, where he was greeted by people and BJP workers.

District Collector Snigdha Patnaik, the local SP, and other senior officials also welcomed him.

During his visit, Sanjay Kumar interacted with residents to understand their challenges. At an Anganwadi Centre, he engaged with children, reviewed the nutritional food provided, and hosted a baby shower for pregnant women, distributing fruits and gifts. He also planted a sapling to commemorate his visit.

He inspected a Primary Health Centre (PHC) and directed the District



Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar feeding a baby in Narayanpet district on Thursday

Collector to appoint a regular doctor and ensure the availability of essential facilities. Addressing local concerns about road connectivity to the Mandal Centre, he promised that steps would be taken. Visiting a school, he interacted with students during their mid-day meals and instructed officials to arrange utensils for cooking.

Later, Sanjay and DK Aruna met with the Narayanpet District Collector, urging measures to transform Narva Mandal Centre as part of its Aspirational Block status. He stressed the need for comprehensive development and assured residents that progress would be reviewed during his

next visit.

The Union Minister of State continued his 'Samagatha Abhiyan' tour by visiting Balichakra Taluka Centre in Karnataka's Yadgir District, an Aspirational Block under NITI Aayog's initiative. He was warmly welcomed by the Yadgir District Collector, SP, and senior officials, receiving a guard of honor from the local police.

During his visit, he inspected a government school, interacted with students, and asked about their career aspirations. When he jokingly inquired if anyone aspired to become a leader or MLA, a student enthusiastically replied, "I want to become an MLA, sir," earning

applause. The students highlighted issues like the lack of clean drinking water, a boundary wall for the nearby college, and shortages of science, English, and Hindi teachers. Bandi Sanjay directed the District Collector to address these concerns promptly.

He announced plans to revisit Yadgir District in March or April, urging visible improvements in the Aspirational Blocks by then. While reviewing the progress, he questioned discrepancies in program implementation, such as low Antenatal Care (ANC) registration rates compared to the state average, incomplete soil sample collections, and reports claiming 100% target achievement in some areas. He sought explanations from officials and emphasized the need for thorough implementation of the "Samagatha Abhiyan" programmes.

Later, Bandi Sanjay visited the BJP District Party Office in Yadgir, accompanied by senior BJP leaders, to review party development efforts. He criticised the Karnataka Congress government for its failures and urged party workers to hold it accountable for unfulfilled election promises. Reflecting on his tenure as BJP Telangana State President, he recounted struggles, including multiple cases filed against party workers and himself, and encouraged them to remain fearless.

Strangers perform last rites of woman after adopted sons disown body

PNS ■ JAGTIAL

In a shocking incident in Jagtial, the family members of an old woman, who died after a brief illness, refused to perform last rites for her though they enjoyed the property she shared with them.

The body of the old woman, identified as Sattamma, was left unattended in the ambulance for over six hours before the police intervened. Though the family members allowed her body inside the house, they refused to perform the last rites.

According to sources, Sathula Sattamma (85) and her husband Lakshman lived in the Tinkhani area in Jagtial. Her husband died 20 years ago, and the couple had no issue. Sattamma gave her

properties to her husband's brother's sons, Prasad and Ravi. Both of them have been taking care of Sattamma in turn.

Recently, Sattamma was admitted to the hospital due to ill health and passed away on Tuesday night. When the hospital staff brought her body to the colony in an ambulance, both of her adopted sons refused to take her body into the house.

After the body was left in the ambulance for six hours, residents and police broke open the locks of Sattamma's old house and took the body inside.

As her adopted sons did not come forward to conduct the last rites, the funeral was held with private individuals on Wednesday.

6 take ill after consuming toddy

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Six persons took ill after consuming toddy at Perika Kondaram village under Shaligowaram mandal on Thursday. The today was suspected to be an adulterated beverage.

Those who fell ill were shifted to the Government Hospital.

The condition of P Pitaiah, one of the patients, is said to be critical.

Those who fell ill were identified as D Achaiah, G Rama Chandra, V Lingaiah, M Biksham and K Naresh. The Excise Department officials are investigating the case.



Shadnagar MLA Veerlapalli Shankar presenting prizes to winners in haudharyguda premier league in Shadnagar on

Chaudharyguda Premier League winners presented prizes

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Shadnagar MLA Veerlapalli Shankar attended the closing ceremony of the 5th season of the Chaudharyguda Premier League and presented prizes to the winners.

Addressing the players, the MLA emphasised the importance of embracing both vic-

tories and defeats equally. He also highlighted the growing recognition of cricket, mentioning the possibility of the sport being included in the Olympics in the near future.

Encouraging the players, Veerlapalli Shankar urged them to excel not only in sports but also in academics, striking a balance between the

two. The event witnessed active participation from Mandal President Raju, former MP Tanauddu Anjaneyulu, BC Cell Taluka President Chandrasekar, former vice MPPs Ijaz and Chandra Babu, former sarpanches Balaraju, Salim, Narsimlu, and Gopal, along with leaders and activists, including Ravi.

Minister urged to take steps for development of Nallamala forests

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

Minister for Endowments Konda Surekha was warmly welcomed by the local MLA Vamsikrishna at Mannanur village under Amrabad mandal in the district on Thursday. She was visiting Sri Mallikarjuna Swamy temple in Srisailem. Vamsikrishna urged the Minister to focus on the devel-

opment of the Nallamala forest and the temples located within the forest. He urged for the speedy construction of the elevated corridor over the Nallamala forest. Additionally, Vamsikrishna appealed to the Minister to bring to the attention of the government the need for a bridge across the Krishna River at Maddimadga.

DIET College declared 'Centre of Excellence'

The State government allotted funds for its development thanks to Agriculture Minister Tummala Nagdeswara Rao

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The DIET College in Khammam district has received major funding. With the Congress government prioritising education, several development and welfare programmes have recently reached the grassroots across the State.

Two colleges in the State have been given the Centre of Excellence status, one of which is the DIET College in

Khammam. In this context, it can be said that Agriculture Minister Tummala Nagdeswara Rao persuaded the government to allot funds for the development of the institution.

The District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) was established in Khammam in 1990-91 with the aim of promoting educational training programme at the district level. Initially, the TTC (Teacher Training Course), a one-year pro-



gramme, was introduced. It had 150 seats. Since then, the institution has focused on teacher training and con-

tributed to establishing a quality educational system.

In 1990, it was named DIET. In 2000, the Diploma in

Education (DED) course was introduced, a two-year programme with 100 seats each year.

Subsequently, changes occurred in the 2014-15 academic year, when the DED course was renamed as DEED (Diploma in Elementary Education). This course also had 100 seats each year, with 50 seats for Telugu medium and 50 for English medium students.

Currently, the DIET offers

only the DED course. However, a new course called Diploma in Pre-School Education (DPSE) will be introduced with the help of the CEO (Chief Education Officer). This course is meant for Anganwadi for Anganwadi teachers.

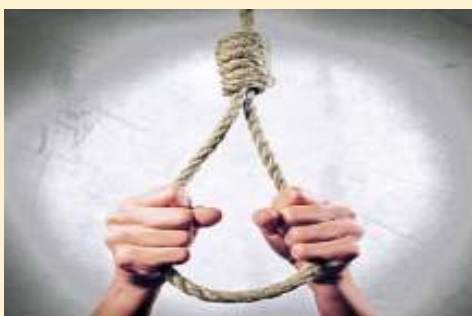
Minister Nagdeswara Rao secured funding for the DIET college. As a result, a budget of 8.62 crores has been approved, and proposals for various works have been prepared.

ACROSS THE STATES



Woman stabbed to death by jilted lover

A 27-year-old woman was stabbed to death in broad daylight on Thursday by her estranged lover, a married man, in the capital city of Assam, police said. The incident took place at Nahoroni Path in the Hatigaon area, the police said. The victim, identified as Mousumi Gogoi, was going out for some work from her rented accommodation when a man stabbed her multiple times just outside the housing complex, Assam Police Inspector General Parthasarathi Mahanta said. The lady was taken to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) for treatment, but she succumbed to her injuries, he added. "The special operation group was immediately activated and the attacker was caught. He has been admitted to GMCH with self-inflicted injury," Mahanta said. Another senior official said that preliminary investigations revealed that the accused was in a relationship with the woman. "The attacker is a married man and the woman had come to know about it a few days ago. After that, she started maintaining a distance from him, but he wanted to continue with the romantic relationship," he said.



Crop loss pain takes lives of two farmers

Two farmers died in two different places in Odisha as they were allegedly upset over Kharif crop loss due to the recent unseasonal rainfall. One farmer allegedly died by suicide in Ganjam district, while the second suffered a heart attack in Kendrapara district, their family members claimed. In the first incident, a 64-year-old farmer allegedly died by suicide after unseasonal rainfall damaged his crops in Barang village under Ganjam district's Chhatrapur police station limits on Thursday. The deceased was identified as Banamali Penthei. He allegedly died by suicide after returning from his field, where the near-to-harvest paddy crops were submerged due to the untimely rainfall, his family members claimed. Ganjam collector Dibya Jyoti Parida said an inquiry will be conducted into the incident by an executive magistrate to find out the cause behind his death. Police will also conduct an investigation separately. The district administration will provide assistance of Rs 30,000 to the family members of the deceased from the district Red Cross fund, he said.



MP govt approves 16 projects

The Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday gave approval to a group of 16 works that had been left out of the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal (PKC) river linking project with an estimated cost of Rs 28,798 crore. The approval was given in the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, an official said. "The approved projects will create new irrigation capacity in land measuring 4.73 lakh hectares in 1865 villages of Guna, Shivpuri, Morena, Ujjain, Sehore, Indore, Dewas Agar Malwa, Shajapur and Rajgarh of Malwa and Chambal region. The modernization of Chambal right main canal system will ensure irrigation facilities in 3.62 lakh hectares in 1205 villages of Bhind, Morena and Sheopur," state water resources minister Tulsiram Silawat told reporters. "An MoU was signed on January 28 this year between the Union government and governments of MP and Rajasthan to prepare a detailed project report of revised Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal River Link Project cum Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project. The Centre will bear 90 per cent of the cost of the project, while the remaining will be contributed by the two states," he added.

National parties bag over 63% of vote share in 2024 LS polls



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The six national parties bagged over 63 per cent share of the total valid votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections held this year. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and National People's Party

(NPP) are the six national parties. Besides the six recognised national parties, 47 recognised state parties and 690 registered, unrecognised political parties contested the parliamentary polls, according to statistical data issued by the Election Commission (EC) on Thursday. According to the data, 3,921 independent candidates contested but only seven of them were elected.

Besides, 3,905 independent candidates forfeited the deposits. Their vote share stood at 2.79 per cent of the total valid votes. Out of the 3,921 independent candidates, 279 were women, the EC noted. The none of the above (NOTA) option got 63,71,839 or 0.99 per cent votes in 2024 compared to 1.06 per cent in 2019. Over 97.97 crore citizens had registered themselves as

electors as compared to over 91.19 crore in 2019 - an increase of 7.43 per cent. Out of these registered electors, 64.64 crore had cast votes in 2024, compared to 61.4 crore in 2019, the EC said. According to the poll panel, any Indian citizen who registers in the electoral roll is defined as an elector. The elector who eventually votes is called voter.

Equip youngsters with skills in emerging technologies: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday stressed the need for a futuristic approach to equip youngsters with skills in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning, as he highlighted the crucial role they play in the country's progress.

Speaking at an event to mark Veer Bal Diwas, Modi underscored the need to adapt to rapid changes and challenges across various fields, emphasising the government's "youth-centric" policies and efforts to move in that direction with the start of the new education policy.

With his government marking the journey of the Constitution's 75 years in a major way, Modi said the Constitution's principle of equality aligns with the teachings of gurus who advocated the welfare of all. Modi said his government is committed to supporting young talent and fostering their self-confidence.

"This era has moved beyond machines to machine learning. AI is taking centre stage, and we can see its application replacing conventional software. It is essential to make our youth future ready to tackle these challenges," he said.

He urged the youth to work

"More than 300 years ago, on Dec 26, the Sahibzadas, despite their tender age, displayed unparalleled bravery and sacrificed their lives. They rejected every temptation and endured unimaginable torture, showing that for them, the nation's cause was supreme."



towards making their respective sectors, be it railways, semiconductors, travel or astronomy, the best.

Remembering the "unparalleled" sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh's sons, the Sahibzadas, he said they chose "unwavering courage and faith over submission to the Mughal Empire's oppression".

He noted that Veer Bal Diwas teaches an enduring lesson: "No matter how adverse the circumstances, nothing is greater than the nation's cause. Every act done in the interest of the nation is an act of valour."

"More than 300 years ago, on December 26, the Sahibzadas, despite their tender age, displayed unparalleled bravery and sacrificed their lives. They rejected every temptation and endured unimaginable torture,

showing that for them, the nation's cause was supreme," he said, urging youngsters to draw inspiration from their legacy.

He said India's strong democracy was built on the bravery and sacrifice of the Sahibzadas.

"The Constitution teaches us that no one is small or big in the country," he said, adding that this principle aligns with the teachings of our gurus, who advocated for the welfare of all.

The prime minister also interacted with the winners of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar. Seventeen children from 14 states and Union Territories were honoured for their exceptional contributions in fields like art and culture, bravery, innovation, science and technology, social service, sports, and environment. Congratulating the awardees,

Modi said, "These children have demonstrated what India's youth are capable of achieving. I extend my best wishes to all the winners on behalf of the nation." He elaborated on the government's focus on empowering the youth through targeted policies.

"From startups to science, sports to entrepreneurship, a new wave of transformation is happening. Our policies prioritise giving strength to the youth. Whether it is the startup ecosystem, the future of the space economy, or sports and fitness, all our initiatives are youth-centric," he said.

On the occasion, Modi launched the 'Suposhit Gram Panchayat Abhiyan', a programme aimed at improving nutritional outcomes through active community participation.

Controversy erupts over 'incorrect Indian map' during Cong session

PNS ■ BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA)

A controversy has erupted over the alleged misrepresentation of the India map on the posters displayed by the Congress to commemorate the centenary of 1924 Congress session in Karnataka's Belagavi, with the BJP dubbing it as "vote bank" politics by the national party.

The ruling Congress has put up these posters throughout Belagavi town as part of celebrations for the centenary event.

According to BJP and its ally JD(S) in Karnataka, the Indian map featured on the posters omits the Gilgit region of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir as well as the Aksai Chin region, currently under the Chinese administration, which are integral parts of Jammu

and Kashmir. Reacting to the controversy, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also the Congress Karnataka unit president, said the posters would be removed if there is any mistake.

"Some leaders might have made some mistake, we are removing everything. Don't try to pick a small stone in the curd... We have done according to Indian tradition and values of those days... BJP is there to attack us, they can't digest. There is no medicine for jealousy. Let them do what they want..." he told reporters in Belagavi.

The national unit of BJP strongly criticised the Congress. In a post on 'X' it said, "RaGa's Mohabbat ki Dukaan is always open for China! They would break the nation. They've done it once. They'll do it again."

Worker dies due to suffocation at dairy

PNS ■ HIMMATNAGAR

A 25-year-old worker died of suffocation after he went to clean an area close to a boiler at a milk processing facility near Himmatnagar town of Gujarat's Sabarkantha district, officials said on Thursday.

Two others who also fainted after they tried to rescue the worker, Kirpalsinh Zala, are being treated in a hospital. The exact cause of the death is yet to be ascertained, they said. Officials from Sabar Dairy, where the incident took place, have denied the possibility of any gas leak.

"We visited the spot upon learning that three persons were hospitalised after they fainted while working near the boiler. One of them has died and the other two are under treatment. Further investigation is underway," said Deputy Superintendent of Police AK Patel.

Annamalai vows to not wear sandals till DMK regime is dislodged

PNS ■ COIMBATORE

BJP Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai on Thursday said he would not wear sandals and walk barefoot until the DMK regime is dislodged.

Further, he said he would lash himself six times with a whip on December 27 at 10 am outside his residence here to draw people's attention over the tragic sexual assault of the Anna University student. Also it was to condemn the police, and the state government for its "apathy" in handling such matters.

Addressing a press conference, Annamalai alleged that the accused, Gnanasekaran was a DMK office-bearer, which was denied by the ruling party. The BJP leader, showing photographs of the accused with DMK leaders, alleged that he



was a ruling party's student wing office-bearer.

Tamil Nadu Law Minister S Regupathi asserted that the accused in the varsity student sexual assault case was not even a primary member of the DMK. The BJP leader alleged that the accused committed the crime emboldened by his affil-

iation to the ruling party. "This is very simple," he told reporters here. Since, the accused was associated with the DMK, police did not act against him, he alleged and wanted to know about the use of Nirbhaya funds to prevent such crimes.

Annamalai also questioned the way the FIR was written and said it was drafted as if the victim had committed a crime. "The DMK (government) should be ashamed of disclosing the identity of the victim."

Announcing that he would not wear footwear till such time the DMK government is ousted, he said he would go on a 48-day 'Viratham' (spiritual vow) by worshipping Lord Muruga, offering prayers at all the six 'Aarupada' temples in the state by February, 2025.

Situation at LAC stable but sensitive: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The overall situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is "stable" but "sensitive" and broad consensus was reached to restore ground situation based on principles of "equal and mutual security", the defence ministry said on Thursday, weeks after Indian and Chinese militaries disengaged from last two friction points in eastern Ladakh.

In an year-end review, the ministry referred to the understanding reached between the two sides on October 21 on disengagement and said patrolling activity has commenced in traditional areas in Depsang and Demchok. "Overall situation along the LAC is stable but sensitive," it said.

Broad consensus has been achieved to restore the ground situation based on principles

of equal and mutual security following prolonged negotiations at diplomatic and military levels, the ministry said on the understanding.

"Consensus achieved includes disengagement and relocation of troops from the friction areas of Depsang and Demchok followed by joint verification," it said.

"Currently, blocking positions have been removed by both sides and joint verifica-

tion has been completed. Patrolling activity has commenced to traditional patrolling areas in Depsang and Demchok," the ministry said in a brief on Indian Army's activities in 2024.

It said the Army maintained a high state of operational preparedness to ensure stability and dominance along all the frontiers including LAC and Line of Control (LoC).

British rulers distorted India's history, says Mohan Bhagwat

PNS ■ NAGPUR

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Thursday said the British rulers of India distorted the country's history to propagate the message that the local populace was unfit to govern by themselves.

"In 1857, the British rulers of India realized that despite innumerable castes, sects, languages, geographical disparities and Indians fighting among themselves, they stay united till they evict foreign invaders from the country," Bhagwat said. He speaking at an event on the occasion of 70th foundation day of Somalwar Education Society in Nagpur on the role of teachers in the 21st century.

"The British rulers decided to do something that will end this trait of Indians to ensure that the British rule lasted forever. Their objective was to make Indians forget their history, ancestors and proud heritage. Towards this objective, the British, under the garb of facts, implanted several untruths in our heads," the RSS chief said. "The biggest lie was that most of the people in India had



come from outside. One such untruth was that India was invaded by Aryans who fought Dravidians, he said. They propagated that it is not in the Indians' blood to govern by themselves and that people here live like those staying in dharmshalas," Bhagwat said. The RSS chief said teachers will continue to play a very important role in the 21st century even in an era of Artificial Intelligence. The present generation is exposed to a lot of knowledge because of technology, but teachers can transform lives, he said. "Seeing and observing is learning. We can get information through reading and listening...How to use information you possess is learnt from seeing and observing," Bhagwat said.

North India continues to be in grip of cold wave conditions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Several parts of north India continued to be in the grip of intense cold wave conditions on Thursday with minimum temperatures settling several degrees below the freezing point in some cities of Kashmir valley.

Weather was mostly dry across Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand during the last 24 hours.

Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan experienced severe cold wave conditions with mercury falling several notches below normal.

Officials said there is a possibility of light snowfall over the

higher reaches of Kashmir on Friday and Saturday as a western disturbance is set to impact the region.

The night temperature dropped at most places in Kashmir as the valley continued to reel under freezing conditions. The fall in the mercury led to the freezing of water supply lines as a thin layer of ice covered the surface of several water bodies including the Dal Lake.

Srinagar recorded a low of minus 7 degrees Celsius (C) on Wednesday night, slightly up from the previous night's minus 7.3 degrees C, the meteorological department said.

Gulmarg, a tourist resort

town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6 degrees C, up from minus 6.6 degrees C the previous night.

Pahalgam, the base camp for



the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 8.6 degrees C, slightly down from the previous night's minus 8.4 degrees C, it said.

Qazigund, the gateway town

to Kashmir, logged a minimum temperature of minus 7 degrees C, while Konibal, a hamlet in the Pampore area, was the coldest recorded place in the valley at minus 9 degrees C, it said.

The meteorological department has said an active western disturbance is set to impact Jammu and Kashmir from Friday afternoon to Saturday afternoon.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said people in the valley were facing difficulties due to intense cold conditions but the government would be able to provide uninterrupted electricity only after 100 per

cent metering is achieved. "As far as winter preparedness is concerned, there is an intense cold and there has been a dry spell. I pray to God for snowfall so that this dry spell ends.

"Our endeavour is to minimise the power cuts and ensure water supply even as pipes freeze due to the low temperature. Despite difficulties, our endeavour is that the government functions smoothly," Abdullah told reporters in Srinagar.

The chief minister said the complaints of unscheduled power cuts would continue "because there is pressure on the system".



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A blow to regional peace

The fragile peace of South Asia faced a severe setback when Pakistan conducted airstrikes in Afghanistan

On the night of December 24, 2024, a series of airstrikes conducted by Pakistan in Afghanistan's Barmal district of Paktika province claimed the lives of at least 15 civilians, including women and children. The strikes targeted seven villages, causing significant destruction, particularly in areas like Murg Bazaar and Laman, where an entire family of five was killed. This incident has further strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, raising serious concerns about the stability of South Asia. The airstrikes appear to be a direct response to Pakistan's growing concerns over the activities of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan has justified the strikes as a necessary measure to eliminate TTP hideouts and secure its borders. However, the Afghan Taliban strongly denies these allegations, claiming instead that the airstrikes targeted civilians, including Waziristani refugees who had previously fled military operations in Pakistan's tribal areas. The implications of this attack extend far beyond the immediate violence, casting a shadow over peace and security in South Asia. The airstrikes, coupled with the Taliban's vow to retaliate, risk escalating into a broader conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such hostilities could destabilise the region, which is already grappling with insurgencies, cross-border terrorism, and long-standing disputes.



In addition to the geopolitical ramifications, the humanitarian impact is profound. Afghanistan, a nation still recovering from decades of war, now faces further devastation. Civilian populations, particularly refugees, are bearing the brunt of this violence, with villages like Murg Bazaar reduced to rubble and countless families displaced. The destruction exacerbates an already dire humanitarian crisis, highlighting the urgent need for international aid and support. This conflict also undermines ongoing peace efforts in the region. Dialogues involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other stakeholders, essential for fostering stability, risk being derailed by such incidents. Additionally, it hinders cooperative initiatives against terrorism, a shared threat that requires coordinated regional action. The situation further complicates geopolitics in South Asia, prompting countries like India, China and Iran to reassess their strategies. Pakistan's actions, though driven by immediate security concerns, may strain its relationships with traditional allies and global powers advocating for peace in the region. To address this growing crisis, both countries must prioritise dialogue and cooperation. Constructive bilateral engagement is crucial to resolving mutual concerns, particularly regarding the TTP and border security. Neutral mediators, such as the United Nations, could play a vital role in facilitating these discussions. Beyond bilateral efforts, regional cooperation is essential. A unified initiative led by organisations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could encourage collective action against terrorism and promote economic interdependence, reducing the incentives for conflict.

PICTALK



The Badrinath Dham covered with snow during fresh snowfall, in Chamoli

India's hidden crisis: Battling malnutrition for a healthier future

Malnutrition among children in India stands as a pressing public health challenge, intricately linked to poverty, systemic inequalities and environmental hurdles

Malnutrition among children remains a critical public health issue in India, deeply intertwined with poverty, systemic inequalities, and environmental challenges. Despite the nation's economic progress, the persistent issues of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies continue to hinder India's overall growth and development, casting a shadow over its aspirations for a healthier future. The 2023 Global Hunger Index paints a grim picture, with India ranked 111th out of 125 countries and a score of 28.7, indicating a "serious" hunger situation. Although there has been marginal improvement from a score of 29.2 in 2015, the pace of progress lags behind peer economies. Disturbingly, India records the world's highest rate of child wasting at 18.7 per cent, while 35.5 per cent of children under five are stunted. These figures highlight the long-term health and developmental implications of malnutrition. Several interconnected challenges exacerbate this issue.



Poverty remains a significant factor, with India contributing nearly 40 per cent to the global poverty rate and 389 million people living in poverty across South Asia. Millions of children are left vulnerable to malnutrition due to limited resources. Compounding this is inadequate nutrition and sanitation, as poor dietary intake, restricted access to clean water, and insufficient healthcare facilities worsen the situation. The health and cognitive impacts of malnutrition are profound, weakening immune systems, increasing susceptibility to diseases, and impairing cognitive development. These effects

ripple through to academic performance and future opportunities, trapping many in a cycle of poverty. Regional disparities further intensify the problem, with states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh shouldering a disproportionate burden of malnourished children. Higher poverty rates and systemic challenges in these regions make addressing the issue even more complex. To combat malnutrition, the Government of India has implemented various programs. POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to enhance the nutritional status of children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program offers supplementary nutrition, education, immunisation, and health check-ups. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme addresses hunger and malnutrition among school-going children, while the National Food Security Act (NFSA) provides subsidised food grains to economically vulnerable populations. Other initiatives, such as the Pradhan Mantri Matru

Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) and the National Health Mission (NHM), include financial incentives for pregnant women and specialised care through Nutrition Rehabilitation and Lactation Management Centres. While these efforts have yielded positive outcomes, more comprehensive strategies are needed to address the root causes of malnutrition. Tackling poverty, improving education, expanding healthcare access, and ensuring sanitation are critical steps toward sustainable progress. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and local communities are essential to create meaningful change. True progress is reflected in the wellbeing of every individual, especially the youngest members of society. By prioritising nutrition and equity, India can foster a healthier, well-nourished generation and pave the way for sustainable development. (The writer is Kapel Barsaiyan, President, Buddhi Jyoti Foundation; views are personal)



KAPEEL BARSAIYAN

Jordan's ambivalent stance on Palestine

While maintaining a façade of solidarity, Jordan's actions often reveal a pragmatic, if controversial, approach to safeguarding its own interests in a volatile region



BHOPINDER SINGH

Jordanian reality towards the Palestinians/Jordanians have had a wounded, complicated, and manipulative history. House of Hashim or the Hashemite dynasty rules Jordan with the current King Abdullah II, as the 41st generation of the direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad. While Hashemites were the Sharif and Emir of Mecca with rule over larger Hejaz, they were violently ousted from the control over the same by the rival Saud family. This military loss led to the loss of the symbolically vital title of the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" to the Saud family, of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Hashemites were also to lose monarchical claim of rule on lands of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq and were left with only the Jordanian swathes - which unlike other Arab lands was bereft of oil, natural resources, ports, or any other meaningful lever of power. They had to be creative in dealing with the situation and remaining relevant and protected. Geographical contiguity to Palestinian lands led to Jordan demonstrating fluctuating concern that oscillated from supporting the Palestinian cause to willy-nilly, acting against the same. During the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Jordan occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem (which it annexed in 1950), only to lose the same to Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967. Historians often note the unique culture of "back channels" (facilitating clandestine meetings) between the Jordanians and Israelis that led to counterintuitive accommodations, even amid war. In the subsequent Arab-Israeli War of 1973 (Yom Kippur War), Jordan had curiously avoided joining Arab ranks against Israel. Jordanian King Hussein had secretly flown to Tel Aviv to warn Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir of the impending Arab plans to attack Israel. Ultimately when Jordan was morally forced to support the war against Israel, declassified accounts confirm that it was only to preserve Jordan's image in the Arab world and that it had already entered into a tacit agreement with Israel that it would not attack Israeli elements. By 1994 the two countries



It wasn't the first time the Jordanians had worked duplicitously against the Arab or Palestinian cause, as just a couple of years earlier, the infamous and bloody "Black September" (Sep 1970 - July 1971) had occurred. Jordanian Army had surrounded camps and townships with Palestinians fidayeen of various groups and brutally cut them down to size. Nearly 3500 were killed in the purge and the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) fighters were expelled to neighbouring Lebanon. Again, the Jordanians had aligned with Israel before commencing this attack. Importantly Syrian forces that had intervened on behalf of Palestinian fighters were repulsed leaving 600 Syrians dead and a loss of 120 tanks. Interestingly, like the historically insincere support of Jordanians towards the Palestinians, one important figure who participated along the Jordanian forces in massacring the Palestinians was a then Pakistani Brigadier (later dictator) Zia-ul-Haq, who was on deputation. In 1987 Jordanian King Hussein and Israeli foreign affairs minister (later President) Shimon Peres met secretly to work on a peace treaty which was followed up with Jordanians forsaking their claim on the West Bank, the subsequent year.



IN THE SUBSEQUENT ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF 1973 (YOM KIPPUR WAR), JORDAN HAD CURIOUSLY AVOIDED JOINING ARAB RANKS AGAINST ISRAEL

signed a formal Peace Treaty (the second Arab nation after Egypt) and normalised relations with Israel. Odd public bickering on issues like Al Aqsa Mosque aside, the top leadership of both countries kept meeting discretely, whilst Jordan kept maintaining the façade of support towards Palestine. Practically, they engaged and operated as allies. Post the Hamas terror attack (7th Oct 2023) on Israel and the subsequent and disproportionate bludgeoning of the Gaza Strip, the Jordanians had no choice but to expel the Israeli ambassador to maintain face in the Arab world. However, as it was only Iran and its proxies like the Syrian Bashar Al Assad government and the Lebanese Hezbollah who were offering any meaningful resistance to the Israelis - then the Jordanians did the unthinkable in favour of the Israelis when they shot down Iranian drones attacking Israel. Practically, the Jordanians weighed in favour of the Israeli military (all perfunctory concerns towards the beleaguered Palestinians, notwithstanding). Jordanians watched silently as Southern Lebanon was attacked and as the Syrian regime was overrun by forces born out of Al Qaeda, ending the last possible faction that had taken on the Israelis in favour of the Palestinians. For

a long, Jordanian King Abdullah had warned against the spectre of a rising "Shia Crescent" (assertion of Shiite rule in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon). He therefore would be presumably pleased to see the decimation of the sectarian rivals, which coincidentally also ended the last modicum of challenge to the Israelis. Beyond vacuous words, the practical conduct of the Jordanians has been suspiciously two-faced on the ostensible redlines as defined by King Abdullah i.e., "No to abandoning the guardianship of Jerusalem and the holy sites, no to the one-state solution, and no for Jordan to be an alternative homeland for the Palestinians". The picture has perhaps never been further from the so-called Jordanian redlines, as now, the fate of Palestinians, Jerusalem, and the possibility of a two-state solution, is at its lowest. History will judge the conduct of Arab monarchies and their lip-serving commitments towards Palestine, but perhaps none as ambidextrously as the Jordanians, who often fancy themselves to be of the highest order. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SOLVING INDIA'S WATER CRISIS

Madam - Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa river linking project, the first initiative under the national river linking policy, at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh. It is really a welcome step in solving the water crisis in India. Nearly 65 lakh people of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh will get drinking water, and more than 7 lakh farmer families of 2000 villages will benefit from the project. Also, it has been proposed to generate 103 MW of hydropower. The project aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken River in Madhya Pradesh to Betwa in UP to irrigate the drought-prone Bundelkhand region. Under the project, a 77 m high and 2.13 km long Daudhan dam and two tunnels will be constructed on the Ken River. Interlinking rivers can control both floods and droughts. This river linking project can have significant ecological consequences, can impact the biodiversity of the region, and can affect Panna Tiger Reserve too. Even then the project will create many employment opportunities as well as boost the rural economy. Ken-Betwa is the first river linking project under the National Perspective Plan (NPP) for the linking of rivers. The National Water Development Agency should identify a few more river linking projects to avoid floods and to cultivate more lands in drought-prone areas in India.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

DEBATE ON CONSTITUTION

Madam - The recent debate commemorating 75 years of the Constitution's adoption left the citizens highly disappointed. The expectation from our parliamentarians was of a healthy debate and an academic discussion. Instead what we saw was a brownie point scoring match between our parliamentarians, who decided to nitpick on what our founding fathers had said and when without providing the context in which it was said.

One Nation, One Subscription



The Government of India's One Nation-One Subscription (ONOS) initiative aims to transform education, research, and innovation by ensuring equitable access to academic resources. Announced in 2022 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to create a knowledge-based society. With a Rs 6,000 crore budget allocated for 2025-2027, ONOS will provide subscriptions to international research

journals, academic databases, and other resources, addressing disparities in education and research. The initiative will empower students and researchers, especially from rural and smaller institutions, by granting them access to resources previously limited to well-funded universities. This inclusivity will bridge the rural-urban divide and foster innovation by enabling access to global advancements. Additionally, its focus on digital platforms reduces dependency on physical materials, supporting environmental sustainability and the objectives of the Digital India campaign. Despite its promise, ONOS faces challenges, including concerns over its high cost and limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, which could restrict access. Critics caution that without transparent implementation, the initiative may primarily benefit larger institutions.

RK Jain | Barwani

Our parliamentarians decided to cherry-pick the words of our founding fathers, like B R Ambedkar, J L Nehru, K M Munshi, etc., to suit their own narrative. The constituent assembly had various members with varying views. Each motion was debated and voted in favour of or against, and ultimately the majority carried, but to now selectively pick up each and every sentence and comma from their speeches to paint a narrative is a disservice to the memory of our founding fathers. It is necessary to remember the words of two members of the Constituent Assembly who went on to forge different paths later in life - one Minoo Masani, a parsi who joined Savantartar Party and became Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha who said, "Where the state belongs to the people, the state is subordinate to the people and only then does the state serve the people" and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, a devout hindu who served in Nehru's cabinet who said, "We shall go ahead with our work in spite of all obstacles and help to create that great India, united and strong

which will be the motherland of not this community and that, not of this class Or that but of every person, man, woman and child inhabiting this country. " May these words of our founding fathers guide our parliamentarians in securing a bright future for India, and may their sacred constituent be their conscious keeper.

Gurnoor Grewal | Chandigarh

KHEL RATNA CONTROVERSY

Madam - It is baffling that Manu Bhaker, who made history by bagging two medals in a single Olympics in Paris, is absent from the list of Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna awardees. If any athlete deserves to be given this award this year, it is Manu Bhaker. Her father is absolutely right: Manu has done her part by giving huge laurels to the country where we have only a handful of individual medal winners; now it is up to the GoI to recognise her feat and reward it.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



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Achievers are not born but forged by their ability to ignite their natural talents over time



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

Jack Croushore was a charismatic leader, a successful steel magnate and an achiever, who never called it quits, regardless of the situation that confronted him. He was also equally adept in adopting the strategy of using kid gloves when situations so required. Over a period, his mind learnt that situational factors influence leadership effectiveness. Successful leaders are high-end achievers, those who do not quit. They are blessed with halcyon days in life, which provide them with joyful moments, and there may be woebegone incidences that fortuitously do not cripple their passion to climb the ladder of prosperity. Nancy Gibbs says, "High achievers, we imagine, were wired for greatness from birth. But then you must wonder why, over time, natural talent seems to ignite in some people and dim in others." Recall the talismanic movie 3 Idiots. Aamir Khan, Sharman Joshi and R. Madhavan essayed the principal roles.

They were euphemistically called the 3 idiots by the director of the institute. Among them, Rancho (Aamir Khan) was an achiever blessed with natural talent, out-of-the-box thinking and revolutionary ideas. There is a poignant scene in the movie where Ali Fazal, who played the role of Joy Lobo, snuffs out his life as he was unable to meet the deadline for completing the assigned project work and thus became a laggard. He was working on a battery-operated 'flying machine', which could capture various events through its magical eyes and features. Alas, his attempts were abortive, while the consummate Rancho was successful in designing the machine... and during a test flight, he and the entire college were witnesses to the shocking tragedy of Joy Lobo taking his life. Dismayed at the turn of events, Lobo prominently wrote on the walls of his room - I QUIT.



The scene graphically recorded the miscarriage of the project and the abject subjugation of the character who was not an achiever. Once, some superiors decided to cashier an employee for a lacklustre performance. He decided to quit all relationships and his spirituality, and in sheer desperation informed God that he had decided to abandon his life. God asked him to look around in a forest for ferns and bamboo. When God planted ferns and bamboo seeds, he took special care of them and protected them from all the vagaries of weather. Within a year the ferns became resplendent and iridescent, covering the entire floor space, while the bamboo seeds showed no growth.

Over the following four years, the forest became verdant with the ever-expanding ferns and yet there was no sign of the bamboo growing or developing into a tree. In the fifth year, the bamboo seeds began to sprout. Within the next six months, the bamboo shoots rose to a height of a hundred feet, lording over the fern plantation. God smiled at the man and said that he never gave up on the bamboo seeds over five years. During this timeframe, the roots of the bamboo tree were growing. Our period of struggle is akin to the development of the roots of the bamboo tree. Both the fern and the bamboo grew at their own pace, as willed by the universe and nature. They complemented each other's growth and were not competitors. Happiness makes us sweet and trials fortify us; sorrows when encountered should make us strong and success ought to make us grateful and radiant. In the ultimate analysis, it is only a positive disposition and thoughts that keep us ticking so that achievers do not lower their guard and thereby do not quit.

(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)

The key to shaping inclusive future

As automation, artificial intelligence and globalisation reshape industries, lifelong learning and adaptability are essential to staying competitive



DINESH SOOD

In an era of rapid technological advancements and shifting economic landscapes, the conversation around skill development has never been more relevant. Skills are no longer just tools for employment; they are the chisels and hammers that sculpt our collective future, shaping individuals and nations. Historically, skills were tied to tradition and geography. A farmer learned the trade from generations before, and an artisan honed their craft through years of apprenticeship. But the 21st century has shattered these boundaries. Today, the Advent of automation, artificial intelligence, and globalisation demands a workforce that can continuously adapt, innovate, and learn. Skills are not static; they evolve, and the pace of this evolution is accelerating. At the heart of this transformation lies the understanding that skill development is no longer a one-time event but a lifelong journey. The future belongs to those who embrace this mindset. A software engineer may need to transition to being a data analyst tomorrow. A marketer should delve into behavioural psychology or artificial intelligence. The world is moving toward a gig economy, where flexibility, creativity, and adaptability are not just assets but necessities. Those who rest on their laurels risk being left behind in a world where change is the only constant. India has the brain power needed to rise in the skilled world. Governments, educational institutions, and private enterprises all play a role in fostering a skill development culture.

Traditional education systems, built to serve industrial-era needs, must undergo a radical shift. The focus should be more than rote learning or degree acquisition, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and technical competencies. Initiatives like coding boot camps, vocational training, and online learning platforms have already begun to disrupt the status quo, democratising access to quality education. But more must be done to ensure inclusivity and widespread reach. When we talk of skills, we mean making one employable and decently. As per the National Policy of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015, We had the target to impart various skills to 40 crore people by the end of 2022. However, around 4 crore people have been trained. Still, there is a massive opportunity for varied stakeholders to come forward and arm our men and women with employable skills. It is nothing but aligning the entire skilling ecosystem with the demands of employers. Today, a considerable gap exists between the demand for a skilled workforce and their availability in the market.

Among 150 million young people in developing countries, around 33 per cent are skilled but unemployed, as their employability quotient could be better. Government policy interventions can bridge the gap between demand and supply in the workforce market. Incentivising employable skill development through subsidies, tax benefits, or public-private partnerships can empower citizens to upskill or reskill. Furthermore, governments must create frameworks encouraging lifelong learning, such as subsidised courses or learning credits for professionals looking to update their skills. Meanwhile, industries must recognise their role in creating agile workforces.



AMONG 150 MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, AROUND 33 PER CENT ARE SKILLED BUT UNEMPLOYED, AS THEIR EMPLOYABILITY QUOTIENT COULD BE BETTER. GOVERNMENT POLICY INTERVENTIONS CAN BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN DEMAND AND SUPPLY IN THE WORKFORCE MARKET

Corporate training programs, mentorship initiatives, and collaborations with educational institutions are not just investments in employees but investments in the future of the business itself. Companies that foster a culture of continuous learning often enjoy higher productivity, better employee retention, and a competitive edge in their industries. Moreover, the private sector can lead the way in identifying future skills by analysing market trends and technological advancements, ensuring training programmes remain relevant and forward-looking. However, skill development is not just about economic progress but also a tool for social empowerment. In many developing nations, lack of access to education and skills has perpetuated cycles of poverty. Equipping marginalised communities with in-demand skills can uplift entire populations, ensuring more inclusive growth. A young woman in a rural village learning coding or a displaced worker mastering digital marketing are potent examples of how skills can change lives. These stories highlight the transformative potential of skill development, turning adversity into opportunity and fostering hope where it is needed most. This empowerment extends beyond individuals to communities and entire societies. Skilled populations are better equipped to address local challenges, from improving infrastructure to boosting small businesses. In this way, skill development catalyses innovation and self-reliance, reducing dependency on external aid and fostering sustainable growth. Communities investing in their human capital often see a ripple effect, where increased productivity and prosperity lead to better healthcare, education, and quality of life. As we champion skill development, addressing the challenges it pre-

sents is also critical. The digital divide, for instance, threatens to exclude those who lack access to technology or internet connectivity. Rural areas and underserved regions often bear the brunt of this inequity, leaving millions without the tools to participate in the modern economy. Bridging this gap requires a concerted effort from the public and private sectors, including infrastructure investments, affordable technology, and localised training programs catering to specific regional needs. Similarly, a one-size-fits-all approach to skills training is likely to fail. Each individual's journey is unique, shaped by their aspirations, context, and potential. Personalised, learner-centric approaches must become the norm. Adaptive learning technologies powered by artificial intelligence can significantly tailor educational content to suit individual needs and learning styles. This ensures that skill development is essential, practical, engaging, and relevant. Moreover, we must shift the narrative around failure in skill acquisition. Learning a new skill often involves trial and error, and creating an environment where individuals feel encouraged to experiment and grow without fear of judgment is essential. Employers and educators must foster a culture that values resilience and continuous improvement over perfection. The metaphor of skill as a sculptor is apt. Like marble, raw talent has limitless potential. But becoming something remarkable requires the right tools, guidance, and effort. Skill development chisels away ignorance, carves out opportunities and polishes the rough edges of human potential. It bridges the gap between dreams and reality, between where we are and where we aspire to be. As we look to the future, let us remember the power

of skills to redefine what is possible. Whether combating climate change, revolutionising healthcare and wellness, or exploring the frontiers of space, skilled individuals will be at the helm of every breakthrough. By investing in skill development today, we are not just preparing for tomorrow but shaping it. The urgency of this investment cannot be overstated. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a wake-up call, highlighting the vulnerabilities of unskilled or under-skilled workers in a volatile economy. Millions faced job losses, and industries struggled to adapt to new remote work and digital operations norms. Yet, it also demonstrated the resilience of those equipped with the right skills to pivot and thrive in uncertain times. The lessons learned must guide our approach, emphasising the importance of resilience, adaptability, and future-proof skills. Furthermore, as technology evolves, ethical considerations must be integrated into skill development. Understanding the implications of artificial intelligence, data privacy, and sustainability is as crucial as mastering technical competencies. This holistic approach ensures rapid and responsible progress, fostering a future where innovation aligns with human values and societal well-being. In conclusion, skill development is more than a response to economic demands; it is a transformative force that shapes our world. It empowers individuals, drives innovation, and fosters inclusive growth. By investing in skills, we invest in people, and by investing in people, we invest in the future. (The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation and a network member of India International Skills Centres. The views expressed are personal)

Witch-hunting in India: A persistent plague claiming women's lives

Despite legal interventions, witch-hunting remains a grim reality in parts of India, targeting marginalised women

In 2014, Partners for Law in Development (PLD), a legal resource group working on social justice and women's rights, carried out a study to understand the reasons behind rising violence against women in the name of witch hunting in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. They found that women were blamed for illness, death and even a bad crop and branded as witches.



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

there was complicity in the community. Their study also revealed that although laws in Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh criminalising acts/offences particular to witch hunting, such as 'identifying' any person as a witch along with the mental and physical torture accompanying such identification existed, the apathy of the state led to the continuation of witch hunting practices.

Ten years later, nothing seems to have changed. Witch hunting continues to claim women's lives even in 2024. Over 663 were killed for allegedly practising witchcraft during 2015 and 2021 according to the National Crime Research Bureau (NCRB). Worryingly, the main perpetrators of this violence also remain the same, says Nirantar Trust, a NGO working on gender and education. Findings of the Trust's recent survey on witch hunting in 114 villages across 10 districts in Bihar showed 43 per cent of the victims were targeted by members from their own family. Their study, released earlier this month, also found a significant proportion of the

women victimised as witches were between the age group 45 to 60. Moreover, 73 per cent of the victims had never been to school. Nirantar also found that more than single women or widows, it was married women who were branded as witches, corroborating the findings of the 2014 PLD study. In many instances, perpetrators were related to the male kin of the husband and thus negated the traditional belief that married women were safer than single women. Another grave concern raised in the 2024 study is the targeting of women from marginalised backgrounds who have shown agency and the courage to raise their voices against the



deeply entrenched patriarchy. The inability of the government to sensitise men while pushing for women's empowerment has endan-

gered many women in leadership roles. One of the easiest ways to show the woman her place has been to brand her as a witch. Of the 44 per cent of women who faced

accusations of witchcraft from castes other than their own, the majority were from the upper caste. Nirantar found that most women preferred not to report this mental and physical assault as they were afraid it would lead to increased violence, a greater social ostracisation and humiliation. They also lacked trust in the sincerity and efficacy of law enforcement agencies. The inability to provide timely justice can be fatal was found by Action Aid Association. The NGO, which detailed 102 case studies from Odisha's 12 districts reporting maximum witch-hunting incidents in 2021, found that despite the law, more than 30 per cent of the total cases had led to the death of the

woman branded as a witch. Chhutki Mahto, the fire-brand social activist from Jharkhand, who received the Padma Shri in 2021 for her role in rescuing over 100 women accused of witchcraft, knows the pain because she too, was targeted as a witch. She survived and embarked on a mission to help others. But why is the onus only on survivors? NCRB data shows that since 2000, over 2,500 women have been killed for being witches. How many more women need to die before action against such inhuman acts is given the priority it deserves? (The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



RBI sets up panel on ethical use of Artificial Intelligence

The Reserve Bank on Thursday announced the setting up of an eight-member committee to develop a framework for responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence (FREE-AI) in the financial sector. Headed by IIT Bombay professor Pushpak Bhattacharyya (Department of Computer Science and Engineering), the panel will assess the current level of adoption of AI in financial services, globally as well as in India. It will also review regulatory and supervisory approaches on AI with focus on the financial sector globally. The panel will also identify potential risks associated with AI, if any, and recommend an evaluation, mitigation and monitoring framework and consequent compliance requirements for financial institutions, including banks, NBFCs, FinTechs, PSOs, etc. The committee will recommend a framework including governance aspects for responsible, ethical adoption of AI models / applications in the Indian financial sector, the RBI said.



Gold rises Rs 250 to Rs 78,850/10g; silver climbs Rs 300

Gold prices increased Rs 250 to Rs 78,850 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a firm global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 78,600 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Silver extended its rally for the third straight session by climbing Rs 300 to Rs 90,800 per kg on Thursday. The metal had ended at Rs 90,500 per kg in the previous close. The commodities market was closed on Wednesday on the occasion of Christmas. The price of 99.5 per cent purity advanced Rs 250 to Rs 78,450 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 78,200 per 10 grams. Traders attributed the climb in gold prices to firm trends in the overseas markets which aided in bullion prices. In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCE), gold contracts for February delivery advanced Rs 442 or 0.58 per cent to Rs 76,712 per 10 grams. "Gold prices edged higher on Thursday, supported by a slightly weaker dollar as markets resumed trading post-Christmas."



HC stays AGM of Religare Enterprises

Madhya Pradesh High Court has stayed the annual general meeting of Religare Enterprises Ltd (REL) scheduled for December 31 amid a tussle between the company's Chairperson Rashmi Saluja and the Burman family over the open offer. "Till further orders, the notice dated December 9, 2024 and the Annual General Body Meeting of Respondent No. 7 (Religare Enterprises) which is scheduled to be held on December 31, 2024 shall remain stayed," Madhya Pradesh High Court said in its order. Religare Enterprises in a regulatory filing on Thursday said, "The company is in receipt of an email forwarding letter dated December 26, 2024 from the Counsel for the petitioner in Writ Petition (WP 40618/2024) (Vijayant Mishra vs RBI & Others) before the High Court of Madhya Pradesh at Jabalpur, forwarding an order dated December 18, 2024. Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved the open offer of the Burman family -- the promoters of FMCG major Dabur -- to acquire an additional 26 per cent stake in NBFC firm REL."

'New manufacturing golden age for India beckons'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With global supply chains continuing to shift in India's favour as the world's largest businesses strike a new balance between resilience and efficiency, manufacturing has the potential to transform the country's economy, Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Thursday.

In his New Year message to employees of the salt-to-software conglomerate, Chandrasekaran termed it as "a new manufacturing golden age for India" and said he was looking ahead to 2025 "with a sense of hope and optimism" after 2024, a year marked by the loss of Tata Group Chairman Emeritus Ratan Tata.

"While AI-led breakthroughs in healthcare and mobility can help the whole of humanity, manufacturing has the potential to transform our economy in India," he wrote.

Elaborating, he said, "Global supply chains continue to shift in India's favour as the world's largest businesses strike a new balance between resilience and efficiency. What might have seemed like a

Sustaining growth requires deeper commitment: Finmin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sustaining growth will require a deeper commitment from all economic stakeholders as newer uncertainties mostly driven by global factors have emerged, a finance ministry report said on Thursday.

India recorded a moderation in GDP growth to 5.4 per cent for the second quarter ended September 2024.

After a moderation in Q2 of FY25, the outlook for Q3 appears bright, as reflected in the performance of High Frequency Indicators (HFIs) for October and November 2024, the finance ministry said in its Monthly Economic Review for November.

An increase in Minimum Support Price (MSP) for rabi crops, high reservoir level and adequate fertiliser availability bodes well for rabi sowing, it said, adding, industrial activity is likely to gain traction.

"There are good reasons to believe that the outlook for growth in H2 of FY25 is better than what we have seen in H1.

At the same time, the possibility that structural factors may also have contributed to the slowdown in H1 should not be ruled out," it said.

The combination of monetary policy stance and macro-prudential measures by the central bank may have contributed to the demand slow-

down, it said.

It is good news that the central bank lowered the cash reserve ratio from 4.5 per cent to 4 per cent in its policy meeting in December 2024, it said. "That should help boost credit growth, which has slowed a little too much and



quickly in FY25. Hiring and compensation practices in the corporate sector have also played their part in slowing urban consumption growth," it said.

Looking into FY26, it said, newer uncertainties have emerged and global trade growth is looking more uncertain than before.

Elevated stock markets continue to pose a big risk, it said, adding, the strength of the US dollar and a rethink on the path of policy rates in the United States have put emerging market currencies under

pressure.

In turn, it said, that will make monetary policymakers in emerging economies think more deeply about the path of policy rates.

"Recent exchange rate movements may have lowered their degrees of freedom. In sum,

sustaining growth will require a deeper commitment from all economic stakeholders to growth," it said.

With regard to PMI, the report said, the October and November indicators remained firmly in the expansionary range, supported by new business growth, strong demand, and advertising efforts.

The conclusion of the monsoon season and the expected increase in government capital expenditure are expected to support the cement, iron, steel, mining, and electricity sectors, it said.

Rupee depreciation may push import bill by \$15 bn: GTRI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The depreciation of Indian rupee against the US dollar is expected to push the country's import bill by about USD 15 billion, think tank GTRI said on Thursday.

Compared to December last year, the Indian Rupee (INR) has depreciated 2.34 per cent against the US dollar, moving from Rs 83.25 to Rs 85.20, while the Chinese Yuan has weakened by 0.06 per cent, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

It added that this depreciation of the INR will negatively impact gold imports, especially as gold prices have surged 27 per cent from USD 2,066.26 per ounce in December 2023 to USD 2,617.11 per ounce in December 2024.

India's oil imports, mostly

priced in USD, could have been significantly costlier due to the rupee's depreciation, however, the impact has been mitigated by a 5 per cent drop in Brent crude prices, from USD 77.6 per barrel in December 2023 to USD 73.7 per barrel in December 2024, it said.

"Overall India's import bill will increase by about USD 15 billion due to the INR depreciation impact," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said, adding that the most significant effect of the INR's depreciation will be on India's USD 100-billion worth of industrial goods imports from China.

Since both the INR and the yuan have weakened against the US dollar, the dual depreciation amplifies the cost of these imports, further straining trade balances, he said.



Unimech Aerospace IPO subscribed 174.93 times

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The initial public offer of Unimech Aerospace and Manufacturing Ltd received a whopping 174.93 times subscription on the last day of bidding on Thursday.

The Rs 500-crore initial share sale got bids for 82,28,93,040 shares against 47,04,028 shares on offer, as per NSE data.

Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) garnered a mammoth 317.63 times subscription while the portion for non-institutional investors got subscribed 263.40 times. The category for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) received 56.16 times subscription. The IPO has a fresh issue of up to Rs 250 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of up to Rs 250 crore.

Price range for the offer has been fixed at Rs 745-785 per share.

Exporters seek Rs 750 cr to tap \$25 bn export potential

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Exporters on Thursday sought a fund of Rs 750 crore for three years to tap USD 25 billion export potential in the US, aiming to seize potential opportunities that may arise as the US President-elect, Donald Trump, has threatened to impose high tariffs on Chinese goods.

In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman here, Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President Ashwani Kumar has also demanded extension of the five per cent Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES).

"A marketing scheme to focus on the US with a corpus of Rs 250 crore per year (Rs 750 crore overall) for three years may be launched to generate additional exports of USD 25 billion," Kumar said.

He said that higher tariffs on China can create a significant opportunity for Indian exporters,



particularly in sectors where China has previously been a dominant supplier.

Based on a study undertaken by FIEO, India can replace China in sectors like electronics and electrical equipment (USD 10 billion additional export potential), textiles and garments, toys, chemicals, auto components, footwear, furniture and home decor.

He added that India's marketing strategy for exporting products to the US should focus on several key areas, particularly on marketing and forming strategic partnership.

"We have already started contacting key trade associations to present India's sourcing opportunity," Kumar said, adding, "We should focus on participating in a large number of exhibitions in these sectors".

On interest rates, the President said that the IES is currently available only till December 31, 2024, and that too to manufacturers in MSME (micro, small and medium enterprise) with an annual cap of Rs 50 lakh per IEC (import-export code) holder, which is insufficient for many MSMEs.

He said India experiences higher domestic interest rates compared to its competitors, especially advanced economies or countries with export-driven economies like China, Japan, South Korea, Euro Zone, Thailand or Malaysia.

This makes financing for Indian exporters more expensive than for exporters from these countries.

Stock markets close flat amid lack of global triggers

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended flat in listless trading on Thursday amid a lack of near-term triggers and unabated foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 0.39 points to settle at 78,472.48 in a muted trade. During the morning trade, it had jumped 425.5 points or 0.54 per cent to 78,898.37.

The NSE Nifty eked out gains of 22.55 points or 0.1 per cent to 23,750.20 on the monthly expiry day.

From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Zomato, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finserv were among the lag-



gards. Adani Ports, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti, Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel and Tata Motors were among the gainers.

"On the last expiry day of the year, the domestic market remained flat throughout the day amidst holidays in peer markets and a lack of major domestic or global triggers.

Auto shares saw gains from recent corrections.

"However, concerns over FII outflows and the depreciating rupee persist, given the strengthening US dollar index and worries about potential adverse tariffs and concerns over rate cuts in 2025, held the muted market trend," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge dipped 0.24 per cent while midcap index went up marginally by 0.11 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, the BSE services jumped 1.80 per cent, auto climbed 0.81 per cent, power (0.45 per cent), healthcare (0.45 per cent), realty (0.39 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.23 per cent).

BSE commodities dipped 0.30 per cent, industrials (0.12 per cent), telecommunication (0.16 per cent), metal (0.14 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.04 per cent) and bankex (0.04 per cent).

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Seoul ended lower. US markets were closed on Wednesday for Christmas.

FUEL TANKS IMPORTS FROM CHINA

India initiates anti-dumping probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has initiated a probe into alleged dumping of LNG fuel tanks from China following a complaint by a domestic player, according to a commerce ministry notification.

The commerce ministry's investigation arm, Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), is probing the dumping of liquefied natural gas (LNG) fuel tanks as imports are allegedly hurting the margins of the domestic industry.

Inox India Ltd has filed an application seeking the imposition of anti-dumping duty, stating that the cheap imports are causing material injury to the domestic industry.

The tanks are used to contain and carry methane gas in large vehicles such as trucks.

"On the basis of the duly substantiated written application submitted by the domestic industry and having reached satisfaction based on the prima facie evidence submitted by domestic industry about dumping of subject goods...the Authority, hereby, initiates an anti-dumping investigation," the DGTR has said in a notification.



If it is established that the dumping has caused material injury to domestic players, the DGTR would recommend the imposition of anti-dumping duty on these imports. The finance ministry takes the final decision to impose duties.

Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt

because of a surge in cheap imports.

As a countermeasure, they impose these duties under the multilateral regime of the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO). The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters.

India has already imposed anti-dumping duty on several products to tackle cheap imports from various countries, including China.



short-term reaction to the pandemic has proved much more enduring."

Amid relentless geopolitical instability, Chandrasekaran said, "The equation has tilted firmly toward resilience and India, with our vast talent pool and growing manufacturing capacity, is poised to

benefit."

Reiterating Tata Group's plans to create 5 lakh manufacturing jobs over the next half decade, he said these will come in part from investments in facilities across India's "factories and projects that will produce batteries, semiconductors, electric vehicles, solar equipment and other critical hardware destined to play a central role in the economy of tomorrow".

He said ground-breaking ceremonies and construction began at over seven new manufacturing plants, including India's first semiconductor

fab in Dholera, Gujarat, and a brand new semiconductor OSAT plant in Assam.

"There is the electronics assembly plant in Narasapura, Karnataka, an automotive plant in Panapakkam, Tamil Nadu, and new MRO facilities in Bengaluru, Karnataka," Chandrasekaran said.

He further said, "We also have new battery cell manufacturing factories in Sanand, Gujarat, and in Somerset, UK. We inaugurated the C295 final assembly line (FAL) in Vadodra, Gujarat, and began solar module production in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu."

'Walking down the streets of Paris feels like stepping into a movie'

IMMERSING HERSELF IN ITS RICH CULTURE, HISTORIC STREETS AND ARCHITECTURAL MARVELS, AISHA SHARMA OPENED UP ABOUT HOW PARIS HAS DEEPLY INSPIRED HER, LEAVING A LASTING IMPACT ON HER JOURNEY AS BOTH A TRAVELLER AND AN INDIVIDUAL



PNS| HYDERABAD

For Aisha Sharma, travelling isn't just about visiting new destinations—it's about immersing herself in different cultures, drawing inspiration from unique experiences, and returning home with a new perspective. "Walking down the streets of Paris feels like stepping into a movie," she says, recounting her trip. "The most exciting thing about Paris for me is its culture. It's so multicultural. There's inspiration in every corner of the city and every work of architecture has a story to tell."

For Aisha, visiting Paris was a long-cherished dream. She wanted to take her time exploring the city like a local, savouring its beauty and rhythm without rushing through it. Her journey took her to some of Paris' most iconic and charming spots. Among her favorites was La Maison Rose, a picturesque café known for its rosy façade and cozy atmosphere. She also highly recommends the Bateaux Parisiens cruise, which offers a unique perspective of Paris from the Seine River. "Dining at La Société in Saint-Germain des Prés was another highlight," she shares, mentioning the escargots as a must-try. Her explorations also led her to Location de Barques du Lac Daumesnil, where she enjoyed renting a boat to experience a more tranquil side of Paris. And, of course, Aisha couldn't resist the

allure of Parisian bakeries. "You can't beat the boulangeries of Paris! My favourite is La boulangerie du Chef Christophe Michalak," she says.

Aisha believes that every destination has the power to change you if you're open to the experience. "Places change you forever if you allow them to. Paris has impacted me greatly, and I think once I get back, I won't be the same individual. That's the beauty of travel—it fills you with inspiration and helps you grow like never before."

As someone who loves to travel, Aisha is always prepared for her adventures. Her travel essentials include sunscreen, skincare products, perfume, a travel adapter, her journal, a credit card and medicines. For her, these items are non-negotiable, ensuring she feels comfortable and confident wherever she goes. When asked about her dream destinations, Aisha mentions Tahiti as a place she'd love to visit, especially for a passion project. Though she hasn't been there yet, the island's serene beauty and unique culture have captured her imagination.

Aisha describes herself as an easygoing traveler who prefers to experience places like a local. "I like to explore, slow down and soak in as much as I can," she explains. She enjoys picking up a few phrases in the local language and connecting with people on a deeper level. For her, travel is not about ticking off tourist attractions but about truly understanding and appreciating the essence of a place.

While she loves exploring new destinations, Aisha also dreams of settling down in the countryside someday to embrace the simplicity of slow living. "At some point in my life, I'd love to move somewhere quiet and enjoy the slow life," she says. As for how she chooses her travel destinations, Aisha shares that it's a mix of spontaneity and planning. Annual trips to the United States to visit family are pre-planned, but other destinations are chosen based on her need for inspiration and rejuvenation.

Aisha Sharma's approach to travel is a reflection of her personality—thoughtful, inspired, and deeply curious about the world around her. Her journeys remind us of the transformative power of exploration and the endless stories waiting to be discovered in every corner of the globe.



Bone loss in women athletes

In athletes, osteoporosis is a common anomaly and is attributed to certain underlying factors or medical conditions that may contribute to both low bone mass and fertility issues in some cases. Hormones play a crucial role in both bone health and reproductive function. Hormonal imbalances lead to compensatory mechanisms that in turn increase the risk of bone fracture. Endurance athletes often experience reduced food intake which results in reduced energy leading to decreased levels of sex hormones, which can cause physiologic changes that lead to relative osteoporosis despite the loading of the bone during exercise, which would normally increase bone mineral density. Inadequate intake of essential nutrients like calcium and vitamin D, which are crucial for bone health, is also a major contributor to low bone mass. Athletes may have higher nutritional needs due to increased energy expenditure.

Where does anabolic steroids play a part in it?

Anabolic steroids, which are synthetic variations of the male sex hormone testosterone, can have both positive and negative effects on bone health, depending on various factors such as dosage, duration of use, and individual susceptibility. Androgen primarily stimulate bone forming osteoblasts causing an increase in bone formation through androgen receptors in bone tissue.

Consequences and other risk factors?

Anabolic steroids cause elevated Renal parameters. It also causes acute renal failure, focal segmental glomerulosclerosis and membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis. Anabolic steroids can cause hypertension and cardiac hypertrophy. These steroids also may adversely affect serum lipids and increase the coagulability of blood, which may lead to a high incidence of myocardial infarction (heart attack) due to spasms, coronary thrombus and coronary atherosclerosis. Lastly, the use of anabolic steroids has been indicated to develop dependency due to feelings of well-being leading to withdrawal symptoms such as depression and fatigue when they stop taking the same.

How can they manage it?

Nutrition counselling, exercise counselling and psychological therapy may all be necessary aspects of treatment. Athletes at risk for bone loss, such as those with a history of stress fractures or hormonal imbalances, may benefit from regular bone density monitoring. This can help identify potential issues early on.

To optimise bone health, adequate nutrition, appropriate weight-bearing exercise, strength training and adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D are necessary throughout life. Dairy products, leafy green vegetables and fortified foods are good sources of nutrition. In females, addressing the hypoestrogenic state by considering estrogen replacement has to have beneficial effects on bone mass. Maintain a healthy hormonal balance through proper nutrition, adequate calorie intake and regular menstrual cycles. It is important to avoid the non-medical use of anabolic steroids, as they can disrupt hormonal balance and negatively impact bone health. For stress fractures with delayed healing adjunctive medications like nasal calcitonin, bisphosphonates and recombinant parathyroid hormone are used to address low Bone mineral density. For athletes engaging in high-impact activities, wearing proper footwear with shock absorption can help reduce the stress on bones and joints. Anabolic steroid abuse can be managed by psychological therapies, endocrine therapies, antidepressants, pharmacological and psychosocial treatments, and overall awareness.

Surge in pectoralis major muscle injuries linked to sports and steroids

Rupture of the pectoralis major muscle used to be a rare injury. But recently we have seen an increase in the same with the majority needing surgical intervention. It is stated that this increase in incidence can be attributed to the increased participation in competitive-contact sports and weightlifting training in combination with the use of anabolic steroids, which probably resulted in stiffer tendons with less collagen elongation, increased vascularisation and cellularity and associated microdamage of collagen fibers following repetitive loading stress.

Nutrition and mental well-being

Our eating habits have an impact on our mental well-being. According to the American Dietetic Association, depression or other mental health issues cause people to eat excessively or insufficiently. Eating too little can result in low energy levels. Low energy levels in the body can be harmful to both bones and the ability to perform long-term tasks. Energy is required for bone formation and remodeling. An athlete requires adequate energy levels to support optimal body functions, macronutrient and micronutrient intake and body composition maintenance. Women experience mood swings during menstruation or in the days leading up to menstruation, which are caused by hormonal fluctuations and can hurt a female's appetite control and eating behaviour. Athletes who eat too little or improperly may lose bone density. Athletes use the majority of their energy from eating to push their bodies through various exercises and activities. To maintain proper bone health, energy is required and some of the energy obtained from eating will be used for this purpose. Aside from menstruation, another factor contributing to improper eating is women's perception of maintaining a healthy body weight. Women who participate in sports that emphasise leanness, weight class, or endurance are more likely to eat too little. However, to maintain body weight, only a small proportion of food is required; thus, diet intake should be carefully planned so that, in addition to small proportions, it meets nutritional requirements. Foods high in vitamin D and calcium are essential for maintaining strong bones. A menstruating woman athlete should ensure that she consumes enough vitamin D and calcium. Inadequate energy intake, due to eating disorders can cause suppression of the normal hypothalamus pituitary axis leading to low bone mass and amenorrhea, commonly referred to as female athlete syndrome. Early detection and multimodal treatment with focus on nutrition is required to maintain the bone health of women Athletes and should be given priority by woman athlete coaches and health care providers as well as educating female athlete on early detection and correction should be given utmost importance.

(The author, Dr. Ayyappan V Nair, is a consultant - shoulder surgery, sports medicine and Aarthoscopy, at Manjula Hospital Whitefield, Sarjapur and Jayanagar.)

Women in uniform lead the charge in 2024

As 2024 comes to an end, a defining trend in Bollywood has been the rise of female actors taking on powerful roles in uniform, portraying police officers, soldiers, and other resilient characters. These performances shattered stereotypes, placing actresses at the forefront of action-packed narratives and highlighting their strength and determination. With commanding portrayals both on OTT platforms and the silver screen, these roles not only showcased their versatility but also brought inspiring stories of courage and perseverance to life, marking a significant shift in how women are represented in Indian cinema.



Saiyami Kher- Agni

Saiyami Kher added another remarkable achievement to her career with her portrayal of a firefighter-turned-action heroine in *Agni*. Known for her versatility, Saiyami embraced the physically demanding role with immense dedication, delivering a performance that radiated strength and resilience. The high-octane action drama highlighted her ability to perform daring stunts while portraying a character marked by bravery and determination. Her rigorous preparation, including intense fitness training, was evident on screen, making *Agni* one of the standout films of 2024. Saiyami's powerful performance reinforced her reputation as a dynamic and talented actor in Bollywood.

Kajol-Do Patti



Kajol delivered a compelling performance as a determined police officer in *Do Patti*, a riveting investigative drama delving into themes of justice and morality. The film followed her character through a high-stakes case intertwined with political intrigue, showcasing Kajol's exceptional ability to embody both strength and emotional depth. Known for her commanding presence, she brought nuance to the role by seamlessly por-

traying the professional and personal challenges faced by her character. Her performance added complexity to the narrative, solidifying *Do Patti* as one of the year's standout films and reaffirming Kajol's status as one of Bollywood's most talented actors.

Shilpa Shetty-Indian Police Force



Shilpa Shetty made an impressive comeback as a fearless and committed police officer in Rohit Shetty's web series *Indian Police Force*. The action-packed series showcased her executing intense stunts and hand-to-hand combat scenes, setting a new benchmark for female actors in Bollywood's action genre. Her exceptional fitness and agility were evident, earning widespread acclaim from critics and audiences. Beyond the adrenaline-pumping sequences, Shilpa's performance captured the emotional challenges of law enforcement, making her character both relatable and inspiring. With *Indian Police Force*, Shilpa reaffirmed her ability to evolve and take on bold, dynamic roles, further solidifying her versatility as an actor.

Deepika Padukone-Fighter



Deepika Padukone made a spectacular return to the big screen with *Fighter*, portraying an Indian Air Force pilot alongside

critic Hrithik Roshan. Her character embodied the spirit of breaking barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field, delivering a powerful message of empowerment. From executing rigorous flight training scenes to depicting the emotional challenges of serving in the defense forces, Deepika showcased remarkable versatility. She prepared intensively for the role, including working closely with real-life pilots to grasp their discipline and commitment. *Fighter* not only reaffirmed her position as one of Bollywood's top stars but also paid tribute to the bravery and sacrifice of women in uniform.

Kritika Kamra-Gyaarah Gyaarah



Kritika Kamra delivered a standout performance as a no-nonsense police officer in *Gyaarah Gyaarah*, a gripping time-bending thriller that unraveled a series of mysterious crimes spanning past, present and future. Renowned for her commanding screen presence, Kritika seamlessly embodied the role of a dedicated law enforcement officer, undergoing extensive combat training and a significant physical transformation to bring authenticity to her character. Her portrayal masterfully balanced the resilience and vulnerability inherent in the profession, earning her widespread acclaim. With *Gyaarah Gyaarah*, Kritika showcased her ability to tackle complex and challenging roles, solidifying her position as a versatile and compelling actor.

Manushi Chhillar-Operation Valentine

Manushi Chhillar delivered a captivating performance as Wing Commander Aahna "Eva" Gill in *Operation Valentine*, marking a significant milestone in her career. Portraying an accomplished fighter pilot, Manushi brought strength and grace to the role, capturing the essence of courage and dedication synonymous with the armed forces. Her character navigates the high-stakes world of aer-



ial combat and personal challenges, showcasing resilience and emotional depth. Manushi's rigorous preparation for the role, including understanding military protocols and undergoing physical training, added authenticity to her portrayal.

Kangana Ranaut-Tejas



Kangana Ranaut delivered a riveting performance as IAF officer Tejas Gill in *Tejas*, embodying the valour and determination of a fighter pilot serving the nation. Her portrayal of Tejas Gill was both inspiring and authentic, capturing the grit and emotional fortitude required in the defense forces. Kangana brought her trademark intensity to the role, seamlessly transitioning between high-octane action sequences and moments of profound emotional depth. With *Tejas*, Kangana not only celebrated the heroism of women in uniform but also reaffirmed her position as one of Bollywood's most fearless and talented actors.

what's brewing?

ONE WEEK, ZERO REGRETS

As the year winds down and the holiday cheer ramps up, the corporate grind takes a backseat to visions of epic New Year's Eve plans. Let's face it—December 25th to January 1st is practically an unofficial out-of-office season. The office buzz shifts to whispers of who's sneaking in leave requests and who's still debating if they should take the plunge. This year, BookMyShow, taps into this relatable festive spirit with its cheeky new campaign, 'You Make the Excuse, We'll Make the Plan!'

Here's the plan of the ultimate year-end bash curating the ultimate lineup of spectacular events in Hyderabad to ensure your holiday season is packed with fun, laughter and memories to cherish.

NYE carnival W/ Karthik & Sunitha Upadrasta

Embark on a melodic journey with chart-topping hits and soulful classics live. This evening promises electrifying performances from the most celebrated voices in Indian music. Dance, sing and celebrate the arrival of 2025 with unmatched festive vibes.

Where: Boulder Hills, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 7 PM

Hyd biggest open door NYE 2025 Vol-8

Step into the eighth edition of Hyderabad's grandest open-door celebration. Featuring larger-than-life performances, dazzling décor and an exhilarating atmosphere, this event is designed to make your New Year's Eve truly unforgettable.

Where: Om Convention, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

Ultimate NYE Bash

Celebrate with friends, family and loved ones at the Ultimate NYE Bash. Enjoy endless celebrations, amazing vibes and unforgettable moments as you welcome 2025 in high spirits. With top-notch entertainment and a lively crowd, this is the ultimate destination for creating timeless New Year memories.

Where: GBR Cultural Association, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

NYE 2025

Join the biggest New Year gathering of Hyderabad at Novotel HICC for a grand celebration infused with cinematic grandeur. Spread joy and celebrate the magic of films with

an evening packed with festive cheer, luxury dining and stellar entertainment for a truly unforgettable experience.

Where: Novotel HICC, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

New Year Eve 2025 by DJ Emily

Groove to the beats of DJ Emily at Sandhya Junction as she sets the stage on fire with her electrifying music. A night of high-energy vibes and non-stop dancing awaits, making it the perfect way to bid farewell to 2024. Let the music take over as you welcome the New Year in style and spirit.

Where: Sandhya Junction, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

The Prism Circus 4.0

Step into a carnival of wonder and excitement at Prism Circus 4.0. This dazzling New Year's celebration features vibrant performances, thrilling acts and a kaleidoscope of festive fun. Experience the joy and magic of a circus-themed extravaganza designed to make your New Year's Eve truly spectacular.

Where: Prism Club and Kitchen, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

New Year Party with DJ Chetas

Experience a feisty celebration at the world's largest film city as DJ Chetas takes centre stage! This epic party combines stellar music, a vibrant atmosphere, and the cinematic grandeur of Ramoji Film City for an unforgettable start to 2025. Fireworks, live performances, and pulsating beats will make this a celebration like no other.

Where: Ramoji Filmcity, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

Madhur Sharma NYE '25 Live - Bollywood & Sufi

Celebrate the New Year with the soulful voice of Madhur Sharma in a live performance that promises to touch hearts and uplift spirits. Enjoy a night filled with musical magic, festive vibes and heartfelt melodies that set the tone for a joyous and promising 2025.

Where: Yolo Arena, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

New Year royal ghazal night

Welcome the New Year in royal style at Palace Heights with an enchanting Ghazal night. Immerse yourself in soulful music, savour a sumptuous unlimited feast, and bask in the luxurious ambiance of this regal celebration. Experience a blend of culture, elegance, and celebration that is truly one of a kind.

Where: AN Palace Heights, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad

When: Tuesday, December 31st, 2024 at 8 PM

PARTY

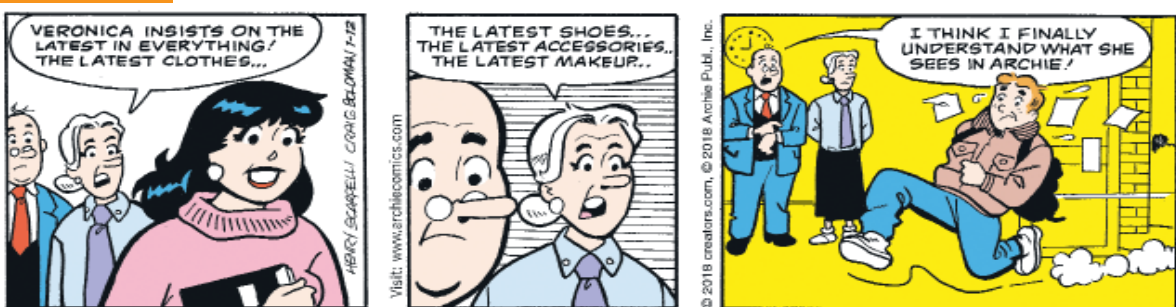


Abhinav Tej, son of Paruchuri Ramakoteswara Rao and Kothapalli Geetha, tied the knot with Akshatha, daughter of Madhavi and Kotapali Seetharama Rao, in a grand wedding ceremony held at the Hyderabad JRC Convention on December 25. The event was attended by several prominent personalities, including Union Minister for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union Minister for Civil Aviation Rammohan Naidu and former Union Minister and BJP MP Anurag Thakur, among the rest.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



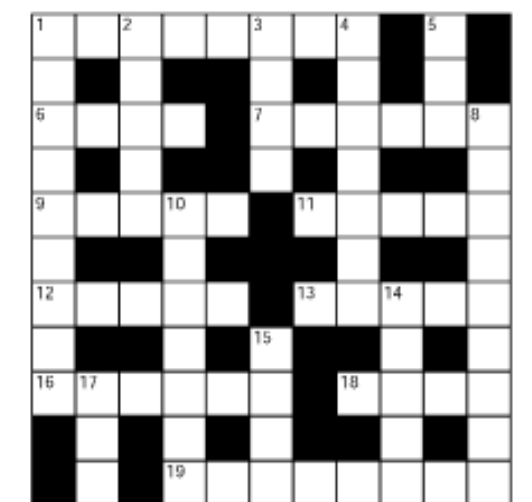
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- Squashes completely
- A red gemstone
- Make tea in this
- Words by which people or places are known
- A striped animal
- Donates
- Defeats
- A red fruit for sandwiches
- A song performed by one
- Sick or injured people are cared for in this place

DOWN

- Two weeks
- A book for photographs
- Has a meal





'Mana Cinema First Reel' is a must read: Trivikram Srinivas

Renowned journalist-writer and Nandi Awardee, Dr Rentala Jayadeva, the man who unearthed the correct release date of the first full-length Telugu talkie *Bhakta Prahlada* with his meticulous research, has now authored the book, *Mana Cinema... First Reel*. The book represents his 25 years of research and presents the history of South Indian cinema. The book launch was held at the ongoing Hyderabad Book Fair.

Eminent director Trivikram Srinivas launched the book and handed over the first copy to IRS officer Krishna Koundinya. On this occasion, Trivikram Srinivas speaks and remembers the time when he met Rentala Jayadeva for the first time in Chennai. He loved the way Jayadeva passionately wrote about the movies and articles when he worked

for India Today. He remarked that their friendship remained intact from such a long time despite the differences in opinions. "It is said that the first reel, interval and climax are very important for a movie. The book is titled *First Reel*, because it talks about the early days of Telugu Cinema. This book is as interesting as the first reel of a film, like how the first reel takes you into the story within ten minutes of the movie, this one also takes into the history of cinema within the first ten pages. Hats off to Jayadeva for such a gripping narrative," said Trivikram. He further stated, Jayadeva has proved how authentic a person who loves cinema can write a book about cinema. "I sincerely wish he spends more time writing books before he becomes a film writer.

Jayadeva told the story of the first talkies in South Indian languages like Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. This book is like a novel," he said. Talking about writer Jayadeva, Trivikram said that he definitely has all the qualities a writer should have. Such a person never tried to become a writer like his father and sister. "Jayadeva's father Rentala Gopalakrishna was a great poet. He wrote more than 200 books. Jayadeva's elder sister Kalpana Rentala is an author. I have read *Tanhai* and other novels and stories written by her. I just wish Jayadeva will write more books like *First Reel* further too," said Trivikram. Author, Nandi awardee Dr Rentala Jayadeva said, "My third elder sister Kalpana, my third elder brother Rentala Ramachandra, who supported me like a mother after mother, patted me on the back and encouraged me to come out with this book. Although I have been writing about movies for over three and a half decades, this is my first movie book. There were many teachers who taught me alphabets. I am very happy that our Master Chandrasekhar Reddy is here," said Jayadeva. He thanked everyone present at the event and bowed to them with respect. 'Emesco' Vijay Kumar, Mamidi Harikrishna, Director of Telangana Language and Culture Department, Acharya D Chandrasekhar Reddy, noted poet-critic Afsar, writer Kalpana Rentala, director Dasharath, senior journalist Indira Parimi and others participated in this event.



Naveen Polishetty makes his hilarious return with Anaganaga Oka Raju

Naveen Polishetty, one of the most promising young actors in the industry, is back with a fresh and exciting project, *Anaganaga Oka Raju*. Known for choosing a variety of scripts, Naveen has delivered three consecutive blockbusters, making him one of the most in-demand stars in the current generation. After a brief hiatus due to multiple fractures, he has recovered and is now ready to entertain audiences once again. On the occasion of his birthday, the makers of *Anaganaga Oka Raju* unveiled a unique pre-wedding video teaser that highlights Naveen's signature comic timing

and charming personality. The video introduces Raju, played by Naveen Polishetty, as he prepares for his wedding. During a photoshoot, he shares screen space with the lively and talented actress Meenakshi Chaudhary, who plays his bride. The teaser showcases their adorable chemistry, with their hilarious and fun-filled photoshoot poses adding to the charm. The film, produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, is directed by debutant Maari. Music for the film is composed by Mickey J Meyer. *Anaganaga Oka Raju* promises to be another entertaining addition to Naveen Polishetty's filmography.

Venky revives his singing talent in Sankranthiki Vasthunnam

Senior actor Venkatesh, who first showcased his singing talent with the hit song *Shingidi* from the film *Guru* in 2017, is returning as a playback singer after seven years. This time, he lends his voice for a song in his upcoming film *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*, directed by Anil Ravipudi and composed by Bheems Ceciroleo. The film is set to release on January 14, during the Sankranti festival, aiming to capitalise on the Pongal holiday season. In a behind-the-scenes video shared by the team, director Anil Ravipudi, actors Venkatesh, Aishwarya Rajesh, Meenakshi Chaudhary, producer Shirish and music director Bheems Ceciroleo spoke about this exciting development. Originally, Ravipudi had planned to hire a popular Bollywood singer for the film's special festival track. However, Venkatesh himself expressed a strong desire to per-



form the song. Known for his charisma and versatility, the actor's enthusiasm convinced the team to go ahead with his idea. The third track of *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* is currently being filmed at Ramoji Film City (RFC). It is a vibrant festival number, choreographed by Bhanu Master, promising high energy and captivating visuals. In the film, Venkatesh takes on the role of a former police officer. Aishwarya Rajesh plays his wife, while Meenakshi Chaudhary portrays his ex-girlfriend, adding layers to the film's intriguing storyline. The film is being produced by Dil Raju and his brother Shirish under their banner. With the festival season fast approaching, Venkatesh's return as a singer, paired with the film's star-studded cast and team, has heightened anticipation among fans.

Dooradarshini is a period drama set in 90s

Suvikshith Bojja and Geethika Ratan are playing the lead pair in the upcoming film *Dooradarshini*. Directed by Karthikeya Kommi and produced by B Sai Pratap Reddy and Jaya Shankar Reddy, the film promises a heart-warming love story that resonates with the audience. Renowned music director RP Patnaik unveils the teaser of this film and talks positively about the film. "I have known Suvikshith for a long time. The film carries a lot of positive vibes and will take everyone back to the 90s, stirring memories of their own love stories," said RP Patnaik about the film. The female lead actress Geethika expressed her excitement and said that this film is an incredible one that will undoubtedly remind everyone of their unforgettable days. "I am thrilled to have this opportunity in such a meaningful project. The love story between Vani and Hari is fascinating to watch," she said.

Lead actor Suvikshith emphasized the film's connection to the audience, saying the story unfolds against the backdrop of the 1990s. "It is a narrative that everyone can relate to. We all conducted extensive research, and the director has created a detailed portrayal. The emotions embedded in this movie are its strong point," said Suvikshith.



Another controversy surrounds Allu Arjun



Actor Allu Arjun and his *Pushpa 2* has been in the news since the time it has been released. Currently, the actor is surrounded by controversies with his comments on the Sandhya Theatre incident. Now, he is in another controversy and this time it is about a song *Dammunte Pattukora* from *Pushpa 2*. Though the film is doing well in the Hindi belt continuously, at the same time, the makers couldn't take the success as the actor is in legal trouble. To add more salt to the wound, controversy struck after the release of the song

Dammunte Pattukora. Devi Sri Prasad is the music director and the song was released by the T-Series on December 24. In the movie, Pushparaj played by Allu Arjun, challenged the police officer Shekhawat to see if he could catch him red-handed when he smuggled red sander. The song was released on the promotional part of the film, but shortly after they uploaded the song, they got trolled and negative comments about it. The time of the song release isn't the right, claimed netizens. Thus, the makers pulled down the song from their channel and other mediums.

SHRUTI HAASAN ON PARENTS' DIVORCE: 'Learnt the importance of standing on my feet'

Actor-singer Shruti Haasan, known for her candidness and introspection, recently shared insights into how her parents' divorce shaped her understanding of independence and resilience. In an interview, Shruti reflected on growing up in a creative and privileged household with her parents, legendary actors Kamal Haasan and Sarika and how their eventual separation in 2002, followed by their divorce in 2004, became a turning point in her life. Opening up about the emotional and practical challenges she faced, Shruti revealed how these experiences instilled in her the importance of self-reliance and independence, especially as a woman. Born into a family that celebrated art and creativity, Shruti acknowledged the privileges she grew up with. "I was born in a very beautiful family—artistic, intelligent parents and by the grace of God, lots of comforts," she shared. However, life took a different turn when her parents decided to separate in 2002, eventually divorcing in 2004. For Shruti, this pivotal moment was an eye-opener. "When my parents split up, everything changed," she reflected. "That's when I realised the value of financial independence and personality-driven independence. Especially being a daughter and seeing that my mum walked out of a marriage, it taught me an important lesson on why it is crucial for a woman to stand on her own feet." The divorce wasn't without its emotional toll and Shruti didn't shy away from discussing the pain it caused. "It hurts. Not just the children but parents feel the pain, too," she explained. "This is a normal part of many homes today. It's not just about parents getting divorced or separated and feeling the pain—there are homes where, for the sake of society, parents stay together and sometimes there is even more pain in those homes because it is hidden." Shruti's reflections serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of emotional and financial independence, as well as the resilience required to navigate challenging family dynamics. Through her honesty, she continues to inspire many by shedding light on the complexities of relationships and the lessons they bring.



Top order helps Australia score 311/6, Bumrah keeps battle alive

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Jasprit Bumrah's knack of coming up with magic deliveries in crunch situations kept India alive after Australia's top-order, headlined by teen debutant Sam Konstas' stroke-filled half-century, guided the hosts to 311 for 6 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Thursday.

If Konstas' audacious 60 off 65 balls enthralled the near sell-out crowd of over 80,000 at the MCG during a humid morning session, Bumrah's (3/75 in 21 overs) deception of length to dismiss Travis Head (0) also had its takers as chants of 'Boom, Boom, B o o o m r a a a a h' reverberated through the stands.

Coming into the Test with back-to-back hundreds, Head couldn't judge the length of a Bumrah delivery that was pitched slightly fuller than what the batter expected. He shouldered his arms trusting the bounce but the 66.2 overs old Kookaburra nipped back to clip the off-ball.

In the next over, he removed an out-of-form Mitchell Marsh (4), having got Usman Khawaja (57 off 121 balls)

with the half-tracker in the post-lunch session.

The first two sessions, however, belonged to Australia with senior players Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne (72 off 145 balls) and Steve Smith (68 batting, 111 balls) scoring half-centuries.

The final session was all about Bumrah magic. The Indian spearhead didn't let the hosts completely walk away with the game which they threatened to do at one stage.

He now has 24 wickets in the series. With Mohammed Siraj (0/69 in 15 overs) off-colour, Bumrah didn't have much support save off-spinner Washington Sundar (1/37 in 12 overs), who bowled a containing line.

Akash Deep (1/59 in 19 overs) though got Alex Carey with the second new ball at the fag end of the day. Even Ravindra Jadeja (1/54 in 14 overs) leaked runs despite getting Konstas out and Nitish Reddy, the batting all-rounder, was only used before the second new ball was taken.

'Sam Jams at the G' The morning was owned by the precocious 19-year-old



from New South Wales. Konstas didn't show any nerves during his scintillating knock, which comprised of two sixes off Bumrah. He also didn't mind a good scrap with India's superstar Virat Kohli, whose shoulder

brush with the 19-year-old led to a brief confrontation. In fact, Bumrah was hit for a six for the first time in a Test since Cameron Green hit him for one back in 2021. The gap between Konstas' first six, which was a lap scoop, and

the one that Green hit three years ago was 4000 legal Test match deliveries. After a conventional lap scoop for maximum, Konstas also hit a reverse lap scoop towards third man for another boundary. The

second six was pummeled over mid-on. The way he attacked the Indian bowling with gusto gave his veteran opening partner Khawaja a chance to get back to form with a patient half-century.

But Khawaja would be really annoyed with himself as he couldn't time a pull shot off a Bumrah half-tracker, which went straight into KL Rahul's hands in the post-lunch session.

The duo added 89 runs in such quick time that Labuschagne and last match's centurion Smith didn't need to show any urgency.

For Konstas, it all began with a few play and misses off Bumrah's opening over but as soon as the teenager got his first couple of runs, things changed dramatically.

The fearlessness of youth stood out on the big stage as Konstas pulled off the lap-scoop against Bumrah before smashing him over mid-on for another maximum.

The fans and experts alike were forced to think the last time Bumrah (1/50 in 15 overs) was hit for two sixes in his first spell of a Test match. They couldn't because it never happened in a first spell.

The stump mic caught Bumrah saying "Beginner's Luck" but Konstas seemed to have enough wares to answer his probing queries. And it was laced with a lot of spunk as he got into a verbal duel

with Kohli after their shoulders brushed while crossing each other. He often shuffled towards leg-stump to make room and on one occasion, crunched Bumrah past cover.

Mohammed Siraj was welcomed into the attack with a loud round of boos as he sledged the youngster due to his unconventional hitting style.

In all, Konstas hit six fours apart from the two maximums. Only Akash bowled a good channel among the pacers as Siraj was guilty of going too full or too short.

As Australia scored at more than a fair clip, skipper Rohit Sharma had to introduce Ravindra Jadeja (1/33 in 11 overs) in the 16th over to at least stem the flow of runs before it went out of hand.

The decision did pay dividends as the seasoned spinner got an arm ball to skid through with the angle to trap Konstas in front.

Khawaja and Labuschagne then added 65 for the second wicket with the Pakistan-born opener hitting Akash for a couple of boundaries to complete his first fifty of the series.



Indian women on course for clean sweep against West Indies

PTI ■ VADODARA

India would aim to push their boundaries in the batting department when they face a down-and-out West Indies in the third and final Women's ODI here on Friday.

Following another series loss against the mighty Australia, India have been able to dominate the West Indies in home conditions.

What has stood out is their ability to put scores in excess of 300 consistently in the series, something they must do against the likes of Australia to get themselves out of the doldrums.

Pratika Rawal, who has been opening the innings alongside Smriti Mandhana, did not set the stage on fire in her maiden international appearance but improved her play considerably in the second ODI to raise hopes for the future.

The Delhi-based cricketer was able to clear the ropes once, which is expected considering she has replaced Shafali Verma in the team.

Harleen Deol has been around for a long time but it was only in the previous game that she was able to record her maiden ODI hundred. She stuck at a 100 plus strike rate batting at number three and she would like to carry the momentum in the final game of the series.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has looked good since regaining full fitness but is yet to get a big knock. With series in the bag, the skipper will have another reason to play freely and get a substantial knock under her belt.

On the bowling front, Renuka Thakur has once again led the pace attack well with the young Titas Sadhu also chipping in with the wickets.

Leg-spinner Priya Mishra has impressed in her fledgling career and would be eyeing another productive outing.

With the game being a dead rubber, India can also afford to test a few fringe players including Tanuja Kanwar

and Tejal Hasanbis. West Indies will need to pull something out of the bag to upset India. Having conceded 300 plus run in both the games, the Hayley Matthews-led side needs to improve on all fronts.

Matthews is the lone West Indies batter who has made an impact. That will need to change on Friday.

Squads:
India: Smriti Mandhana, Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Deepti Sharma, Saima Thakor, Titas Sadhu, Renuka Thakur Singh, Priya Mishra, Uma Chetry, Minnu Mani, Tejal Hasanbis, Tanuja Kanwar.
West Indies: Hayley Matthews (c), Qiana Joseph, Rashada Williams, Deandra Dottin, Nerissa Crafton, Shemaine Campbelle (wk), Aaliyah Alleyne, Zaida James, Karishma Ramharack, Shamilia Connell, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajinabi, Chinelle Henry, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar.

Arjun Erigaise looking to qualify for next Candidates through World Rapid and Blitz

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Grandmaster Arjun Erigaise will have to tackle obstacles to retain his chances of becoming the first Indian to enter the 2026 Candidates' tournament when he opens his campaign at the World Rapid and Blitz chess tournament here.

Erigaise, who currently trails Fabiano Caruana of the United States in the list of players slated to qualify from 2024, will have a tall order to win the World Rapid chess championship that gets underway here.

It may be noted here that the last time an Indian won the crown here was in 2019 when Koneru Humpy triumphed and in 2017 Viswanathan Anand had defied all odds to win the



United States is easier said than done, given the proficiency of the trio in quick chess.

The participants list is a virtually who's who of the chess world and the only big name missing is D Gukesh, who withdrew after winning an exhausting world championship match against Ding Liren of China just a

couple of weeks back in Singapore.

From India, much can be expected from R Praggnanandhaa as well. He is well rested and must be looking for this event to end the year on a high note.

Apart from Erigaise and Praggnanandhaa, Raunak Sadhwani and Aravindh Chithambaram are the other two Indians to take note of in the open section.

In the women's section, Humpy will start yet again as favourite amongst the Indians. R Vaishali and Divya Deshmukh are the two emerging stars and have been doing pretty well in the last one year.

Vaishali, in fact, had taken the chess world by surprise by qualifying for the Women's Candidates in 2023.



Andy Pycroft completes 100 Tests as match referee

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former Zimbabwe captain Andy Pycroft on Thursday became only the fourth official in the history of men's Test cricket to complete 100 games as a match referee with the Boxing Day contest between India and Australia that began here on Thursday.

The exclusive list is led by former Sri Lanka player Ranjan Madugalle as the most experienced match referee with 225 Tests, followed by New Zealand's Jeff Crowe (125) and England's Chris Broad (123). The 68-year-old Pycroft played three Tests and 20 ODIs for Zimbabwe from 1983-1992.

'Pycroft, who has also officiated in 238 men's ODIs, 174 men's T20Is and 21 women's T20Is since 2009, said he has enjoyed every minute of the journey to 100 matches as a match referee,' the ICC said on its website.

Pycroft said touching the mark is a great honour and he is thankful to have been afforded the opportunity to officiate all over the world, "embracing different cultures."

"It has been a rewarding journey and I have treasured every moment of it," he added.

India needed Rohit to open, Washington's variation at MCG, says Nayar on axing Gill

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar on Thursday defended axing Shubman Gill from the Boxing Day Test, saying it was in team's best interest to not only have Rohit Sharma back to his usual opening slot but also add some sting to the attack by drafting in spin all-rounder Washington Sundar.

Gill, who missed the first Test due to a finger injury, scored 31 and 28 in the Pink Ball Test and looked the most assured among Indian batters. He, however, got out for a duck in Brisbane. With Rohit Sharma opening the innings and KL Rahul coming at No. 3, Gill had to make way for a third specialist all-rounder in Washington.

"Yes, Rohit will come up in the order and more likely than not, he will open the innings. That was the thought process. Unfortunately for Gill, just how things



spanned out, he had to miss out," Nayar said at the end of the day's play.

"I just feel for a young player in a position like that, a big day, he wants to make his mark. He understands it's the team's requirement and it's unfortunate, but I wouldn't say that he's been dropped per se. It's just unfortunate that he couldn't find

his place in this game," the former Mumbai stalwart said but the explanation lacked conviction.

He elaborately explained why playing Washington at the MCG made sense ahead of Gill.

"A lot of the decisions when they are made, and the process of it being made, the communication is always there and transparency is there. It's pretty obvious that we felt in these conditions, looking at the pitch, having Washy in the bowling attack will give us that variation, especially towards the end once the ball gets old," he said.

"Post the 50 overs, we felt that was an area that we wanted to get better at. We felt Washy could give us that solidarity with Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja), especially the way Travis Head and Alex Carey were getting runs lower down. So we felt having an offie in the ranks will provide us with that."

Virat Kohli fined 20 per cent match fees for altercation with Sam Konstas

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Virat Kohli and Australian youngster Sam Konstas were on Thursday involved in a physical altercation because of which the Indian superstar was fined 20 per cent of his match fee and handed a demerit point even though it was played down as an accidental bump by the 19-year-old debutant.

The brief showdown took place after the 10th over of the Australian innings on the opening day of the fourth Test here when the players were crossing over. Kohli and Konstas bumped shoulders while moving across the pitch in the face off that was initiated by the travelling star.

Kohli was eventually charged with breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct by on-field umpires Joel Wilson and Michael Gough, third umpire Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid and fourth umpire Shawn Craig.

He accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft at the end of day's play.

"Virat Kohli has been fined 20

percent of his match fee and awarded one demerit point for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct," the ICC said in a statement.

"No formal hearing was needed as Kohli accepted the sanctions proposed by Match Referee Andy Pycroft," it added.

After the physical contact, both players quickly turned around to glance at each other and engage in a heated exchange of words before Konstas' teammate Usman Khawaja stepped in to separate them. The on-field umpires also had a word with the two and things cooled down rather quickly.

Speaking to reporters after stumps, Konstas said Kohli bumped into him but it wasn't deliberate.

"I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. I think that's just cricket and can happen with tension," said the teenager.

"I think the emotions got to both of us," Konstas had told 'Channel 7' during the second session.

The ICC's Code of Conduct states



that "any form of inappropriate physical contact is prohibited in cricket. Without limitation, players will breach this regulation if they deliberately, recklessly

and/or negligently walk or run into or shoulder another player or umpire."

Kohli's match fee for the game was to be Rs 15 lakh but that amount

would be reduced to Rs 12 lakh owing to the fine. This is the first demerit point that Kohli has logged since 2019. Four demerit points over a period of two years

lead to a suspension of one Test.

Konstas, who was batting on 27 at the time, went on to hit Jasprit Bumrah for two boundaries and a six in the next over. The teenager scored a stunning fifty on debut before Ravindra Jadeja trapped him leg before wicket.

India assistant coach Abhishek Nayar, who addressed the media in the end-of-day press conference, also brushed aside the incident as nothing big.

"When you play a game, there will be emotions but it is not as big as it seems. I wasn't aware of what happened and don't know what was said," he said in response to queries.

Kohli criticised for his actions Konstas might have dismissed it as routine but former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting blamed Kohli for instigating the exchange. He went to the extent of saying that Kohli could face disciplinary action for it.

"Have a look where Virat walks. Virat's walked one whole pitch over to his right and instigated that confrontation. No doubt in my mind whatsoever," Ponting

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