

# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From: VIJAYAWADA HYDERABAD DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN



Rahul indulging in fear-mongering: **BJP**

5

**GOYAL CALLS FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERN**



8

Chandrika Ravi embodies the sizzling spirit of **SILK SMITHA**



PIZ

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**Chief Minister Revanth Reddy holds the Education portfolio himself but lacks vision regarding the sector. This reflects poorly on his leadership. At least give the Education Department to Kodandaram. If everything is fine in Gurukulas, why is the government blocking our study teams? What are they trying to hide?**

- Jagadish Reddy, BRS MLA, TG

P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**Fengal damages crops in Nellore, Chittoor**

Farmers in Chittoor and Nellore districts are facing significant losses as crops were inundated by rainwater under the influence of the Fengal cyclone. The two districts have experienced heavy rain for two days due to the cyclone. Paddy crops, ready for harvest, have been submerged in rainwater across thousands of acres. The worst-hit area is Nellore district, where large swathes of paddy fields and nurseries are under two to three feet of water. Govinda Reddy, a farmer from Kodavaluru village, shared his despair: "The paddy..."

-PAGE: 4

**Delhi's air quality improves**

Delhi has received a respite from toxic air in the first two days of December as the city's AQI remained in the "poor" category on Monday, recording a reading of 280. The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) of the city was recorded at 280 at 4 pm, registering a slight improvement from 285 on Sunday. The air quality shifted from "poor" to "very poor" on October 30, after which it intermittently remained in the "very poor" and "severe"...

-PAGE: 5

**Centre reviewing India-US trade ties**

The commerce ministry is reviewing various aspects of India-US trade relations focusing on implications of statements made by US President-elect Donald Trump during his election campaign and after the results, an official said. The official added that there are no irritants in the relations between the two countries that can lead to discriminatory tariffs against India. Trump, during his election campaign, has called India an 'abuser' of import tariffs, a claim that echoed his...

-PAGE: 8

**We have found the right mix: Hardik**

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has expressed his delight at the way things panned out for them in the IPL mega auction in Jeddah and said the franchise has "found the right mix" of players. The star all-rounder said they had a clear plan of having a blend of youth and experienced players. "I was in touch with the table as well, exactly who we are going for, and I think we came out pretty well from the auction and how the team is looking," he said in an MI video posted on social media. "We have found the right mix..."

-SPORTS

**RICE SMUGGLING AT K'NADA PORT**



**Dy CM urges CM to order probe**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has urged Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu to initiate a comprehensive investigation into rice smuggling activities centred around Kakinada Port.

During a two-hour meeting at the CM's residence in Undavalli on Monday, Pawan Kalyan raised concern over a powerful rice mafia operating in the State for the past five years. He warned that these illegal activities posed a significant threat to national security. The discussion focused mainly on the illegal rice exports from Kakinada Port.

The Deputy CM emphasised the extent of the issue, revealing that a vast network stretching from Chittoor to Srikakulam is diverting public resources worth crores of rupees. He cited figures

showing that in the past three years alone, rice exports valued at Rs 48,537 crore had passed through Kakinada Port, underscoring the scale of the mafia's operations.

Pawan Kalyan urged the government to take stringent measures to curb the PDS rice mafia. He also shared his concerns over restricted access to Kakinada Port during his visits over the last five years. He alleged that illegal rice exports, particularly to African countries, had been routed through Kakinada Port under the previous government, in contrast to other ports in the state.

The meeting also covered other topics, including development projects in Amaravati, recent political updates, and the potential release of the fourth list of nominees for appointed positions.

**AMARAVATI DEVELOPMENT**

**CRDA okays Rs11,467 cr projects**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major step towards the development of Amaravati, the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) has approved tenders for various infrastructure projects worth Rs 11,467 crore. The approval was granted during the 41st CRDA meeting, chaired by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Monday. The meeting also saw the sanctioning of key proposals aimed at bolstering the capital city's infrastructure, which include the construction of major buildings, roads, and flood mitigation systems.

Among the approved projects is a 360-km trunk road development valued at Rs 2,498 crore, as well as flood mitigation works worth Rs 1,585 crore to improve the Pala Vagu, Kondaveeti Vagu, and Gravity Canal systems. Additionally, the CRDA has allocated Rs 3,523 crore for the construction of residential complexes for various government officers, including gazetted, non-gazetted, Class-4, and All India Service officers. A further Rs 3,859 crore has been earmarked for infrastructure projects in farmers' residential layouts.

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, P. Narayana, confirmed that tenders for these projects would be issued immediately, with work expected to begin in January 2025. *Continued on Page 2*



- **KEY PROJECTS:** Include a 360-km trunk road (Rs 2,498 cr), flood mitigation works (Rs 1,585 cr), and construction of residential complexes for government officers (Rs 3,523 crore).
- **FARMER LAYOUTS:** Rs 3,859 cr allocated for infrastructure in farmers' residential layouts.
- **TENDERS:** Tenders for these projects will be issued immediately, with work starting in January 2025.
- **INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS:** Infrastructure to meet international standards, including drainage, street lighting, and water supply.
- **ICONIC BUILDINGS:** Tenders for designs of five iconic towers, the Assembly, and High Court buildings already invited; construction tenders by December 2024.
- **CRITICISM OF PREVIOUS GOVT:** Minister Narayana and Chief Minister Naidu criticised the previous YSRCP government for hindering Amaravati's development through the three-capital proposal.
- **DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE:** Naidu affirms commitment to fully develop Amaravati within three years.

**AP govt to crack down on illegal export of PDS rice**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has resolved to take stringent measures to combat the organised crime of illegally exporting Public Distribution System (PDS) rice meant for the poor. A Cabinet Sub-Committee, including Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar and Agriculture Minister K. Atchannaidu, convened a meeting on Monday at the State Secretariat to address the issue.

Officials from various departments, including the Vigilance and Enforcement DG, IG of Security, Civil Supplies Secretary, Civil Supplies Corporation MD, Maritime Board CEO, Customs officials, and representatives from Kakinada Port and the Transport Department, participated in the discussions. It was decided to bolster security

**SECURITY TO BE BEEFED UP AT KAKINADA PORT**



Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar and Agriculture Minister K Atchannaidu at a review meeting at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Monday.

at Kakinada Port by appointing a Chief Security Officer dedicated to its safety. Additionally, strict actions will be taken against those involved

in the illegal transport of PDS rice. Surveillance in and around Kakinada Port will be intensified to prevent such activities.

The meeting also reviewed ongoing export operations at Kakinada Anchorage Port. The vessel Stella, suspected of involvement in the illegal export of rice, will face legal action.

The committee highlighted the installation of Sortex machines in five warehouses at Kakinada Port. Ministers questioned maritime and port officials regarding the machines' installation and ordered an inquiry to identify those responsible, promising stern action based on the findings.

Reiterating its commitment to protecting resources meant for the underprivileged, the state government urged all departments to work in unison to tackle this issue effectively.



**HC restrains police from taking coercive steps against RGV**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a breather to filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday restrained the State police from taking coercive steps in cases registered against him in the state, for a week.

Several cases have been registered in Andhra Pradesh against Varma accusing him of posting morphed photographs of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan and their family members in an "indecent" manner on social media. *Continued on Page 2*

**CM reviews Fengal relief efforts**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu conducted a review meeting on Monday to assess the impact of Cyclone Fengal and the State government's relief measures. The meeting, held at his residence in Undavalli, was attended by Chief Secretary Nirabh Kumar Prasad and other senior officials.

Officials reported that the State received 31 cm of rainfall over the past five days due to the cyclone. Areas severely affected include Tirupati with 178 mm of rainfall, Chittoor with 93 mm, Nellore with 88 mm, and Annamaya with 65 mm. A total of 53 mandals have been impacted, and relief camps have been established in heavily affected areas to evacuate residents to safety.

Preliminary assessments indicate that crops over 6,824 hectares have been damaged. The Chief Minister directed officials to expedite the enumeration process and ensure prompt compensation for affected farmers. He also instructed officials to facilitate the purchase of rain-damaged paddy without causing inconvenience to the farmers.

The Chief Minister emphasised the need for vigilance, urging authorities to remain alert and take necessary actions until weather conditions normalise completely.

**Rs 15K cr addl burden on consumers: YSRCP**

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has criticised the coalition government for hiking power charges, alleging that it has reneged on its election promises. The party demanded that the State government bear the additional costs to avoid burdening the public.

Speaking to the media on Monday, Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Botsa Satyanarayana, along with former



ministers Gudivada Amarnath and Karumuri Nageswara Rao and former MLA Karanam Dharmasri, said the coalition government, within six months of assuming power,

had increased power charges by Rs 1.25 per unit, burdening the public with an additional Rs 15,000 crore.

"We demand that the government pay the amount to DISCOMs so that the public is not affected by the hike. The coalition partners had promised before the elections not to raise power charges, but this decision contradicts their assurances," he said.

Botsa accused Chandrababu Naidu and other leaders of frequently criticising the loans taken by the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led govern-

ment. "However, in just six months, the coalition has borrowed Rs 70,000 crore, and there is no transparency on how the funds have been utilised," he remarked.

He contrasted this with YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's tenure, where schemes were implemented transparently through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). "Now, there are no adequate budget allocations for the Super Six schemes, and the minimal amounts assigned do not fully cover even the Deepam scheme. *Continued on Page 2*

**DeepTech Conclave on Dec 5-6 in Vizag**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The DeepTech Conclave 2024 is set to take place on December 5 and 6 in Visakhapatnam, bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, and innovators for groundbreaking discussions and live demonstrations that will shape the future of the deep tech industry.

The event will begin on December 5 with an exclusive invite-only DeepTech Roundtable, offering a platform for open dialogue between startups, policymakers, and industry leaders. The roundtable will focus on fostering a collaborative ecosystem for technological advancements. On December 6, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu will inaugurate the conclave, highlighting the government's commitment to advancing technological innovation in the region.

**AP BIFURCATION ACT**

**High-level panel focuses on key issues of division**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant development, a high-level committee of officials from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana convened in Andhra Pradesh for the first time to address unresolved issues arising from the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act.

The meeting, chaired by the Chief Secretaries of both states, focused on critical aspects of the division, including the allocation of assets and institutions under Schedules 9 and 10 of the Act. Key points of

discussion included settling electricity dues, reimbursing expenditures of shared institutions, and addressing the cash reserves of undivided organisations. A major item under review was the Rs 8,000 crore that remains unallocated following the bifurcation.

This meeting is a continuation of the dialogue initiated during the July 5 meeting in Hyderabad by the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, N. Chandrababu Naidu, and Telangana, K Revanth Reddy, at Pragathi

The committee agrees on the allocation of Rs 861 crore in labour cess between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

The issue of Rs 81 cr arrears owed by TG to the AP Excise department was resolved, with AP confirming repayment



Bhavan. The current discussions aim to resolve long-standing division issues and reach amicable solutions. The committee agreed on the dis-

tribution of Rs 861 crore in labour cess between the two states. Further meetings are expected to be held by the respective state departments to

finalise decisions related to taxes. However, issues surrounding the assets and liabilities of institutions under Schedules 9 and 10 remain unresolved.

A lengthy discussion also took place regarding the transfer of employees between the two states. The issue of Rs 81 crore arrears owed by Telangana to the Andhra Pradesh Excise Department was resolved, with Andhra Pradesh confirming that the amount had been repaid.

In a significant decision, the committee agreed to form a joint committee to address drug prevention, involving officials from both the Police and Excise Departments of both states. The Chief Secretaries also agreed on two other issues and

decided to convene another meeting to continue discussions on the bifurcation-related matters.

Representatives from Andhra Pradesh included the Chief Secretary, Secretaries of Finance and Home Departments, the Principal Secretary of the Excise Department, the CMD of APGENCO, and the Commissioner of Commercial Taxes. Telangana's delegation included the Chief Secretary, and the Special Chief Secretaries of Finance and Home Departments, among others.

This crucial meeting underscores the ongoing efforts of both states to resolve the lingering challenges resulting from the bifurcation process.



# Rs 59K cr I-T from AP, TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

“The Income Tax collection target for Telangana & Andhra Pradesh during the current fiscal is Rs 1,21,000 crore. We have already collected Rs 59,000 crore and we hope to achieve the target, said Mitali Madusmita, the Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax of AP and Telangana.

The growth of tax collection compared to last year is 15%. Telangana is showing a good growth rate, however, that is not the case with Andhra Pradesh. Last year Telangana posted 22% growth, the officer added while interacting with the media.

Around Rs 2 lakh crore is pending as tax in both states put together and is under dispute, she said.

Mitali was speaking at an interactive meeting on ‘Faceless Assessment under Income Tax and Vivad-Se-Vishwas Scheme’ on Monday organised by the Federation of Telangana Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FTCCI). The Direct Taxes Committee of FTCCI organ-



ised the interactive programme.

India has the most progressive tax regime in the world, she said. The motto of the Income Tax department under the Union Ministry of Finance is voluntary compliance and it aims to facilitate business, she added. Our duty is to collect more tax for the government.

Speaking about the Faceless Income Tax Assessment, Mitali said that Faceless Assessment is a system in which Income Tax assessments are conducted electronically without any direct interaction between the taxpayer and the assessing officer and is here to stay. It is irre-

versible and there is no going back. The scheme which was introduced in 2019 to impart efficiency, transparency and accountability to the assessment process by inter alia eliminating the interface between the Assessing Officer and the assessee is now five years old and is going well.

The response of assesses to our notices is not very satisfactory. She urged people to cooperate with the Income Tax Department and respond to notices issued by the department seeking more information.

Unfortunately, the response to Vivad se Vishwas and the Dispute Resolution Committee (‘DRC’) is lukewarm. We anticipated getting

inundated with cases, but, unfortunately, that has not happened.

Shravan Kumar Gotru, the Principal Commissioner of Income Tax (Review Unit-1), urged people to use the opportunity.

The Direct Tax Vivad se Vishwas Rules, 2024, aim to streamline the resolution of direct tax disputes, ensuring an amicable closure of long-pending litigations. These rules, in continuation of the government’s initiative through the Vivad se Vishwas Scheme, provide taxpayers with a straightforward mechanism to settle disputes by paying specified amounts.

The DRC is a committee constituted by the Centre as per provisions of the Income-tax Act to resolve tax disputes. Under this scheme, taxpayers meeting specific criteria outlined in the relevant section of the Act can electronically submit an application to the designated DRC of the region overseen by the Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-tax with jurisdiction over the taxpayer, he added.



# Formation Day of Nagaland and Assam celebrated

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Formation Day celebrations of Nagaland and Assam were held at the Durbar Hall of Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada on Monday, with Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer presiding as the Chief Guest. The event was organised as part of the ‘Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’ programme.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Abdul Nazeer highlighted the uniqueness of

Nagaland, which observed its Formation Day on 1st December. He noted that Nagaland is home to 17 major tribes, each distinct in its customs, language, and attire. He also spoke about the Hornbill Festival, often called the ‘Festival of Festivals,’ which showcases the rich culture, lifestyle, and culinary traditions of the state.

Referring to Assam, which marks its Formation Day on 2nd December, the Governor

praised its lush greenery and vibrant culture. He emphasised that the Bihu festival stands as a hallmark of Assamese traditions. He remarked that the ‘Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat’ initiative fosters cultural exchange, enhancing mutual understanding and bonding among states, thereby promoting national unity and integrity.

The programme included video messages from Nagaland Governor La

Ganesan and Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya. It featured cultural performances, including songs and folk dances from Nagaland and Assam, presented by students from SIMS Guntur and Vignan University.

Dr M Hari Jawaharlal, Secretary to the Governor, officers and staff of Raj Bhavan, and students from Nagaland and Assam studying in Vijayawada participated in the event.



# Sindhu set to tie the knot on Dec 22

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler PV Sindhu will tie the knot on December 22 in Udaipur.

The former world champion, who ended a long title drought with victory at the Syed Modi International in Lucknow on Sunday, will marry Hyderabad-based Venkata Datta Sai, who is an executive director at Posidex Technologies.

“The two families knew each other but it was only a month ago that everything was finalised. This was the only possible window as her schedule will be hectic from January,” Sindhu’s father, PV Ramana, told PTT.

“So that is the reason the two families decided to have the marriage ceremony on December 22. The reception will be held in Hyderabad on December 24. She will start her training soon after as the next season is going to be important.”

The wedding-related events will begin on December 20.

Sindhu is regarded as one of India’s greatest athletes with five world championship medals, including a gold in 2019, besides her silver and bronze at the Olympic Games. The champion badminton player won back-to-back Olympic medals at Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020, and achieved a career-high world ranking of No. 2 in 2017.

# Govt failed to check PDS rice smuggling: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Reiterating that the fiasco at Kakinada Port has brought the inefficiency of the coalition government to the fore, Former minister Ambati Rambabu said if the smuggling of PDS rice cannot be stopped it is the failure of the State.

Speaking to media here on Monday, he said that Kakinada is full of Jana Sena leaders, from the Deputy Chief Minister to the Civil Supplies Minister to the local MLA and civil Supplies Corporation Chairman and still they are blaming the smuggling of PDS rice is going on unabated which sounds ridiculous.

They have brought in the name of the Aurobindo group



alleging that after it took over, smuggling activity has gone up in the port. In fact, Aurobindo’s 41 per cent share is in the Kakinada deep sea port and the one in discussion is the second port in Kakinada which is the anchor port, he said.

States like Telangana, Chhattisgarh and Odisha send

their stock through this anchor port as it is cost-effective and thousands of families are dependent as there is a big workforce at the anchor port where Pawan Kalyan enacted the seize the ship episode. The PDS rice was seized by the Collector the previous day.

If rice is going out despite three check-posts of the Civil Supplies Department, whom to blame and how is the ring of corruption moving on, he asked, adding that commission rates have gone up after Pawan Kalyan visited the Port.

Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar says there is smuggling of PDS rice from this port which is unabated, it is the duty of his ministry to check and seize the material.

The top exporter of rice in the State is the kin of the State Finance Minister and his ship is anchored in the high seas half-loaded. If they have guts let them search the ship for PDS rice, he challenged.

Meanwhile, former Minister Purni Nani echoed the same points in a separate press conference and said why Pawan Kalyan and the Collector did not inspect the second vessel Ken Star which is anchored in the same port and enacted the drama at the vessel Stella. There are 36 exporters for 35,000 tons in Stella.

However, the Ken Star vessel belongs to the kin of Payyavula Kesavulu and a single person is exporting 42,000 tons, he said.

# TTD chief issues tokens to locals for darshan



PNS ■ TIRUPATI

TTD Chairman BR Naidu, along with Executive Officer J Syamala Rao, initiated the issuance of tokens for locals’ darshan at the Mahati Auditorium in Tirupati on Monday.

Speaking to the media, the TTD Chairman expressed gratitude to Chief Minister, N

Chandrababu Naidu, and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan for reintroducing darshan for locals over the past few years.

He stated that, following their directives, the TTD Board had resolved during its first board meeting on 18th November to facilitate Srivari Darshan for residents on the first Tuesday of every month.

The EO informed that seven counters have been set up at the Mahati Auditorium in Tirupati and three counters at the Community Hall in Balaji Nagar, Tirumala. A total of 2,500 tokens will be distributed in Tirupati and 500 in Tirumala. The tokens are available to residents of Tirupati Urban, Tirupati Rural, Chandragiri,

Renigunta, and Tirumala, upon presentation of their original Aadhaar card.

From now on, darshan tokens will be issued on the first Sunday of every month at these centres in Tirupati and Tirumala. The EO also commended the TTD officials for making elaborate arrangements within the stipulated timeframe.

Additionally, local devotees will be eligible for their next darshan only after a 90-day gap following their previous visit. Queue lines and basic facilities have been arranged to ensure a smooth token issuance process.

Tirupati MLA A. Srinivasulu and Chandragiri MLA Pulivarthi Nani were present at the programme, along with TTD Board Member Dr. M. Santharam, Additional EO Venkaiah Chowdary, CVSO Sridhar, Deputy EO Lokanadham, and other TTD officials.

# YSRCP MPs urge Centre to reconsider VSP privatisation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) MPs met Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries HD Kumaraswamy in New Delhi, urging the government to reconsider the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) and withdraw divestment plans.

The delegation included YV Subba Reddy, the YSRCP Parliamentary Party Leader, along with Rajya Sabha Floor Leader V Vijaysai Reddy, Lok Sabha Floor Leader PV Mithun Reddy, and MPs Pilli Subhashchandra Bose, Golla Babu Rao, Alla Ayodhya Ramireddy, Maddala Gurumurthy, Meda Raghunath Reddy, and G Tanuja Rani.

The MPs highlighted that the



absence of captive iron ore mines has severely impacted VSP’s profitability. They explained to the Union Minister that this challenge has been a significant barrier to the plant’s growth. In their memorandum, they requested the central government’s support for the turnaround of the plant, stating that with continued assis-

tance for another two years, its financial situation could improve. The delegation also emphasised that allocating captive mines to Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) would reduce input costs and address cost inefficiencies, paving the way for the plant’s profitability with government backing.

# Hefty fines on illegal liquor activities

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has decided to curb illegal liquor activities by issuing a notification enforcing hefty penalties.

As per the new rules, selling liquor at prices higher than the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) will attract a fine of Rs 5 lakh. If the violation is repeated, the government has decided to revoke the liquor shop’s licence. Additionally, if ‘belt shops’ are operated within the premises of a licensed liquor store, a fine of Rs 5 lakh will also be imposed.

This notification has been issued under Section 47(1) of the Andhra Pradesh Excise Act.

# Two notifications issued for doc posts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has announced the recruitment of doctors for various government hospitals, issuing notifications to fill 280 vacancies for Civil Assistant Surgeons and 97 posts in secondary health services.

The Andhra Pradesh Medical Services Recruitment Board (APMSRB) has released a notification to fill 280 Civil Assistant Surgeon posts under the Directorate of Public Health and Family Welfare. These include both regular and backlog positions. Selected candidates will be appointed in Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and other med-

ical institutions. Eligible candidates may apply online through the APMSRB website at [apmsrb.ap.gov.in/msrb/](http://apmsrb.ap.gov.in/msrb/) from December 4 to 13.

Additionally, another notification has been issued to recruit 97 Civil Assistant Surgeons (Specialist/General) under the Directorate of Secondary Health (APVVP). These positions also include regular and backlog vacancies. Detailed eligibility criteria and guidelines are available on official websites such as [apmsrb.ap.gov.in/msrb/](http://apmsrb.ap.gov.in/msrb/), [hmfw.ap.gov.in](http://hmfw.ap.gov.in/), and [cwf.ap.nic.in](http://cwf.ap.nic.in). Applications for these posts can be submitted online from December 4 to 13.

# ‘Shobha Yatra’ held in Tiruchanoor



PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The ‘Shobha Yatra’ of Tirumala Srivari Lakshmi Kasula Haram was conducted in Tiruchanoor on Monday with grandeur. TTD Additional EO Venkaiah Chowdary accompanied the procession of the sacred ornament, which was brought from Tirumala and reached the Pasupu Mandapam in Tiruchanoor. From there, TTD Chairman B.R. Naidu carried the ornament and, after performing special pujas, it was taken to the temple in a grand procession.

Speaking on the occasion, the TTD

Chairman stated that the Lakshmi Kasula Haram is one of the most significant ornaments of Lord Srivari. It is adorned on Lord Malayappa Swamy during the Garuda Seva at Tirumala and is also used during the Gaja and Garuda Vahana Sevas at Tiruchanoor as part of the annual Brahmotsavams. “This evening, the Haram will be decorated on Sri Padmavati Devi during the Gaja Vahana Seva,” he added.

JEO Veerabrahmam, Temple Deputy EO Govindarajan, other officials, and a large number of devotees took part in the programme.

# HC restrains...

Continued from Page 1

Justice Harinath N posted the matter to December 9 for hearing, granting relief until then to the filmmaker.

Varma’s advocate Rajagopallavan Tayi argued that pictures posted on social media platform ‘X’ are posters in promotion of a movie he made. The Director committed no offence and the complainants are not aggrieved persons to lodge a complaint.

Tayi said that on behalf of his client, he moved the HC seeking it to club all the cases against Varma and treat them as one.

The petition is likely to come up on December 11.

Prakasam district police served two notices to Varma asking him to appear before them for questioning in connection with the case against him. However, Varma failed to show up, but expressed his willingness to appear “digitally” before the authorities.

# CRDA okays...

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister has also directed that infrastructure projects adhere to international standards, including underground drainage systems, street lighting, potable water supply, and landscaping.

In addition to these developments, the CRDA has already invited tenders for the designs of five iconic towers, along with the new Assembly and High Court buildings. Tenders for the construction of these buildings are expected to be finalised by December 2024.

Addressing the media after the meeting, Minister Narayana criticised the previous YSRCP government for hindering Amaravati’s growth through its three-capital proposal, which he claimed delayed the city’s development for the past five years. He stressed that the current government, following a thorough review of the situation, is moving forward with the development plans based on committee recommendations. Chief Minister Naidu echoed this sentiment, reaffirming his commitment to fully developing Amaravati as the state capital within the next three years.

“The previous government caused immense difficulties for farmers and women and sought to undermine Amaravati’s establishment as the state capital,” Naidu remarked. “We are committed to fulfilling the aspirations of the state’s five crore people by ensuring Amaravati’s complete development.”

# Rs 15K cr addl...

Continued from Page 1

Had our government been in power, Rs 18,000 crore would have been directly deposited into beneficiaries’ accounts during these six months,” he added.

Highlighting financial discipline during the YSRCP’s governance, Botsa said, “We cleared the pending dues left by Chandrababu and enhanced people’s purchasing power through welfare schemes. Now, declining GST collections indicate reduced business activity, which is alarming.”

He also alleged growing factionalism among MLAs in the coalition government. “MLAs are coming to blows over sharing the spoils, and Chandrababu himself is acting as a mediator. The new liquor policy has introduced chaotic bidding, and the number of belt shops has increased,” he claimed.

Responding to Pawan Kalyan’s comments on the Kakinada port episode, Botsa dismissed them as “outlandish.” He added, “The Minister of Civil Supplies is his nominee, yet he questions the local MLA. If there are irregularities, the government should act, but resorting to dramatic theatrics like in films reflects poorly.”

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.



# 'Traffic Ambassadors' to assist police

## They will provide on-ground information about road congestions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a bid to address the traffic congestion in the city, Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu has taken a proactive step by appointing responsible locals as 'Traffic Ambassadors'. These individuals will provide on-ground information about traffic issues, which will be relayed to the Command and Control Centre for swift resolution. The Commissioner has also implemented innovative solutions through modern technology by integrating live drone cameras with the Command and Control Centre and the utilisation of the Astra app to monitor and manage traffic disruptions in real-time. This platform enables direct communication between them and traffic authorities. The Ambassadors can report incidents such as vehicle breakdowns, road accidents, protests, rallies, processions, or natural calamities that may disrupt traffic. The authorities will



Commissioner Rajasekhar Babu stressed the challenges posed by traffic disruptions and their impact on the general public. He highlighted that the introduction of the Astra app has significantly reduced traffic interruptions since October. He also stressed the importance of public cooperation and the pivotal role Traffic Ambassadors play in supporting the police

then promptly deploy personnel to resolve the issue and restore normalcy. Commissioner Rajasekhar Babu stressed the challenges posed by traffic disruptions and their impact on the general public. He highlighted that the introduction of the Astra app has significantly reduced traffic interruptions since

October. He also stressed the importance of public cooperation and the pivotal role Traffic Ambassadors play in supporting the police. "When citizens encounter traffic disruptions during their commute, such as vehicle breakdowns, accidents, or other incidents, they can promptly report them via

WhatsApp. This small act of cooperation can often save lives, facilitate timely medical assistance, and ensure that individuals reach their destinations on time," the Commissioner said. He urged Traffic Ambassadors to view this initiative as a social responsibility and contribute to making Vijayawada a city with

seamless traffic. Law and Order DCP Gautami Shali, Traffic DCP Krishna Murthy Naidu, Crime DCP Tirumaleswar Reddy, Additional DCPs of Traffic and Law and Order, and other ACPs, Cls, SIs, staff members, and the newly appointed Traffic Ambassadors were present.



# Drone startups to receive Rs 5 lakh incentives

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government will provide incentives of up to Rs 5 lakh to youth and aspiring industrialists who venture into the drone sector to set up startups, said K Dinesh Kumar, Managing Director, AP Drone Corporation. He was the chief guest at the Advanced Atal Faculty Development Programme on 'A Deep Dive into Autonomous Vehicle Theory to Practice', a 12-day training programme, held at Dhanekula Engineering College in Vijayawada on Monday.

## 'Vast opportunities for youth in drone manufacturing and services'



drone manufacturing sector. The State is also planning to establish a drone hub on a 300-acre area in Orvakallu. He highlighted that the global drone industry is undergoing rapid changes, with significant technological improvements every day, and drones are increasingly being used to provide better services to people. Consequently, there will be abundant opportunities in this field. He urged technical institutions to educate students about the latest technological developments in drones. The State government is ready to provide necessary support to educational insti-

tutions that come forward to offer training in drone technology. Additionally, Centres of Excellence related to drones are being set up in ITIs and polytechnics, along with skill development centres focused on the practical use of drones. He encouraged youth, technical students, and educational institutions to make use of these resources. The event was attended by Dr Pradeep, Head of the Centre for Drone Technology at IIT Guwahati, Dhanekula Engineering College Chairman Dhanekula Ravindranath Thakur, organising secretary Bhavani Prasad, and Principal Dr Ravi Kadiyal.

# Works worth Rs 300 cr underway: Kondapalli

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Minister for MSME, SERP, and NRI Affairs, Kondapalli Srinivas, has unveiled a series of development projects worth approximately Rs 300 crore to accelerate infrastructure growth in the district. During a review meeting held at the Collectorate on Monday, the Minister urged officials to prioritise the completion of these projects, with special emphasis on works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGN-REGS).



**The meeting focused on progress in critical sectors, including the District Water Management Agency (DWMA), Rajiv Vidya Mission, Rural Water Supply (RWS), Irrigation, and sand supply. "The development works must be completed at the earliest to ensure the local population benefits from enhanced infrastructure," Srinivas said. "We have adequate funding, and utilising these resources effectively is crucial for the district's progress."**

The meeting focused on progress in critical sectors, including the District Water Management Agency (DWMA), Rajiv Vidya Mission, Rural Water Supply (RWS), Irrigation, and sand supply. "The development works must be completed at the earliest to ensure the local population benefits from enhanced infrastructure," Srinivas said. "We have adequate funding, and utilising these resources effectively is crucial for the district's progress."

ed. Key initiatives include road construction, canal development, and Gokul buildings. Dr Ambedkar directed officials to fast-track additional projects, such as check dam construction, to address critical infrastructure needs. "Preparations for the irrigation society elections, scheduled for December 8, are also on track, with notifications to be issued on December 5," he said. Srinivas reiterated the State government's commitment to timely execution, citing the sanction of Rs 250 crore for material component works in

the district under 2021 Central government guidelines. "We are starting the work a month ahead of schedule to ensure swift completion," he noted. "These projects are based on decisions taken in village assemblies and will be executed with community input." The Minister also assured that once road projects are finalised, attention will shift to addressing other infrastructure requirements in rural areas. DWMA in-charge PD A. Kalyana Chakravarthy and Panchayati Raj SE M. Srinivas attended the review meeting.

# Centre clarifies over GST on fruit paper bags

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Central government has clarified that an 18% Goods and Services Tax (GST) is currently applicable nationwide on paper bags used for fruit protection. This clarification was provided in a written reply on Monday to questions raised by TDP MP Kesineni Sivanath regarding the GST on these bags. The Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, explained that there has been no specific Harmonized System (HS) code for fruit protection paper bags, mak-

ing it challenging to access GST data for the past five years. However, these paper bags are classified under HS code 4819. The Minister further confirmed that there are no plans at present to reduce the GST rate on these bags. Decisions on GST rates are made based on recommendations from the GST Council. However, the Minister pointed out that, to date, no such recommendations have been received regarding a rate reduction for these products.

# Police seize 122 kg of ganja; 4 held

## Arrested individuals hail from Vaishali and Patna in Bihar



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a major operation against drug trafficking, the Visakhapatnam police conducted a raid in Atchiyampeta, Allipuram, and seized a significant quantity of ganja here on Monday. Four persons were arrested. Acting on a tip-off, the police, in the presence of mediators, raided the premises and recovered 122.042 kilograms of ganja packed in 64 packets. Among the seized items were two courier-labelled boxes containing 20 packets weighing 43.278 kilograms, destined for Delhi. Additionally, three yellow plastic bags with 44 packets weighing 78.764 kilograms were recovered. The arrested individuals, identified as Dhanjay Kumar (23), Praduman Ray (29), Indradev Ray (39), and

Santhosh Kumar (36), all hailing from Vaishali and Patna in Bihar, were involved in various roles within the smuggling network. While Kumar and Ray were peddlers, Indradev and Santhosh acted as transporters. They were charged under the NDPS Act and sent to judicial remand. The police have identified three additional suspects: Shankar Pujari from Machkandh, Odisha, and Rajeshwar and Parvez, both from Delhi. Efforts are underway to apprehend them as they are believed to be key players in the smuggling network. A senior police officer stated, "This raid exposes the far-reaching network of inter-State drug smugglers. We are intensifying our efforts to track and dismantle this chain while ensuring that the apprehended suspects face the law."

# Rammohan Naidu seeks Central funds for Sun Temple

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu has urged the Union Minister for Tourism and Culture, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, to include the historic Arasavalli Sun Temple in the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) scheme. During a meeting held in New Delhi on Monday, the Minister highlighted the temple's architectural and spiritual significance, particularly its celestial alignment that illuminates the deity during specific times of the year. "The Arasavalli Sun Temple is not just a marvel of ancient architecture, but also a symbol of our cultural heritage. Its inclusion in the PRASAD scheme will help preserve this historic site while providing a much-needed boost

## Plans to transform the temple into a world-class pilgrimage site



to tourism and the local economy," he stated. Naidu proposed a Rs. 100-crore master plan to develop infrastructure, enhance facilities for devotees, and create a robust tourism ecosystem

around the temple. "Our vision is to transform the Arasavalli Sun Temple into a world-class pilgrimage site that reflects the rich heritage of Srikakulam district while creating sustainable livelihoods for the locals," he added. The Minister also expressed gratitude to the Central government for its ongoing support to Andhra Pradesh, acknowledging the Rs. 113.75-crore allocation under the Special Assistance Scheme for Capital Investments and the Ministry of Tourism's Rs. 2,000-crore fund for national projects. He highlighted the Rs. 78 crore allocated for the Gandikota Tourism Project and the Rs. 94 crore for the Akhanda Godavari Project.

"We are grateful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his commitment to Andhra Pradesh's development. These initiatives demonstrate the Central government's dedication to strengthening our State's infrastructure and cultural landmarks," Naidu remarked. He further expressed his determination to collaborate with Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu to propel Srikakulam district toward becoming a hub of development and progress. "By leveraging such projects, we aim to place Srikakulam at the forefront of Andhra Pradesh's growth story," Naidu added. The inclusion of the Arasavalli Sun Temple in the PRASAD scheme has the potential to attract more pilgrims and tourists, making it a transformative step for the district's socio-economic advancement.

# Sainik School cadets visit Hindustan Shipyard

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) hosted a group of nearly 100 cadets and staff members from Sainik School Korukonda on an educational visit here on Monday. The aim was to inspire the next generation of maritime and defence leaders by showcasing the intricacies of shipbuilding and ship repair. During the visit, the cadets toured HSL's state-of-the-art facilities, witnessing the various stages of shipbuilding and ship/submarine repair. They were impressed by the precision and expertise involved in these

processes, which contribute significantly to the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and other maritime sectors. Interactive sessions with HSL engineers and officers provided the cadets with valuable insights into the organisation's rich history and its vision for India's maritime future. Cmde Hemant Khatri, C&MD of HSL, himself an alumnus of a Sainik School, expressed his pride in hosting the young cadets. "It is inspiring to see the enthusiasm and curiosity of these young minds. They are the future leaders and innovators of our nation," he said. He emphasised HSL's commitment to nurturing talent and invited more students to explore the shipyard. "HSL is dedicated to inspiring the next generation to contribute to India's Vision 2047," he added. Cmde Girideep Singh (Retd), an alumnus of Lucknow Sainik School, and Capt (IN) Ravi Kumar, an alumnus of Korukonda Sainik School, accompanied Cmde Hemant Khatri during the interaction. This visit aligns with HSL's broader educational outreach initiative launched during the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. Under the initiative, students from 75 schools were invited to visit the shipyard.





# Fengal damages crops in Nellore, Chittoor districts

PNS ■ NELLORE

Farmers in Chittoor and Nellore districts are facing significant losses as crops were inundated by rainwater under the influence of the Fengal cyclone. The two districts have experienced heavy rain for two days due to the cyclone.

Paddy crops, ready for harvest, have been submerged in rainwater across thousands of acres. The worst-hit area is Nellore district, where large swathes of paddy fields and nurseries are under two to three feet of water.

Govinda Reddy, a farmer from Kodavaluru village, shared his despair: "The paddy fields, including nurseries, are submerged in two to three feet of water. Our hopes were shattered by the cyclone. All the crops that were ready to be harvested have been severely damaged as rainwater stagnated in the fields."

In the Nellore district, particularly in Kovur, Kodavaluru, Vidavaluru, Buchireddypalem, and Alluru mandals, paddy fields and nurseries are inundated. Farmers' union leaders reported that in the Kovur constituency, 60 per cent of the paddy crop in 1.1 lakh acres has been submerged by rainwater.

The farmers are unable to drain the water, leading to significant losses. In the Alluru



delta area, over 500 acres of paddy have been marooned. With no hope of replanting, farmers are unable to replace the damaged crops.

In coastal Andhra Pradesh, farmers had kept their harvested paddy in the fields and along roadsides to dry. However, the unexpected rain soaked the paddy, further exacerbating the loss. The farmers have appealed to the government to expedite the paddy purchase process, as the persistent rains and cloudy weather have made it impossible to save their produce.

Horticultural crops in Railway Koduru constituency, Annamayya district, have also been damaged, especially in

Penakaluru, Chitveli, and Koduru mandals. Overflowing streams, nalas, and canals have worsened the situation. The Errakaluvu strain is in spate, causing severe flooding, and many roads are impassable.

The Swarnamukhi River is also swollen, with floodwater spilling over the causeway on the Srikalahasti-Papanaidupet-Gudimalla highway, disrupting traffic. A school teacher, Ratna Kumar, was swept away along with his motorcycle, but villagers rescued him. Police, with villagers' assistance, also rescued six people trapped in floodwaters in the Penna River near Jammipalem village, Kovur mandal.

Home Minister V. Anitha reviewed the flood situation in Rayalaseema and spoke with collectors, urging them to take necessary precautions.

Meanwhile, the deep depression over northern coastal Tamil Nadu and Puducherry weakened into a depression as it moved west-northwest. By the morning of December 2, it had turned into a well-marked low pressure area over North Interior Tamil Nadu. The system is expected to move westwards, emerging into the southeast and adjoining east-central Arabian Sea near the north Kerala-Karnataka coasts by December 3, 2024. The situation is being closely monitored.

## Chocolates made of ganja seized, one arrested

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Police seized 400 chocolates reportedly made with cannabis in a raid on Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team raided a shop and discovered 400 ganja chocolates.

During the raid, the police also seized 175 grams of ganja from the shop. One person, identified as Udayanand from Odisha, was arrested in connection with the case.

The police are investigating the source of the ganja chocolates and their intended destination.



## Rs 38.65 cr allocated for road repairs in Palnadu: Minister



PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Minister for Roads and Buildings (R&B) and Infrastructure Development, B.C. Janardhan Reddy announced that Rs 38.65 crore has been earmarked for repairing pothole-ridden roads in Palnadu district.

During an inspection of road repair works in Petlurivaripalem village, Narasaraopet mandal, on Monday, the Minister stated that the government aims to make all state roads pothole-free by January 2025.

The government has undertaken 133 road repair projects across the district, covering 935

kilometres, at a cost of Rs 38.65 crore," he said. Plans have also been made to repair or reconstruct 3,300 kilometres of roads under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode and to construct four-lane roads, subject to feasibility reports.

He revealed that Rs 861 crore has been allocated for road repairs across the state, with a target to complete the works by Sankranti. "The government is committed to ensuring pothole-free roads across Andhra Pradesh," he added.

Criticising the previous YSRCP government, the Minister blamed the poor condition of roads on its failure to

reimburse contractors, leaving roads neglected and unrepaired.

The Minister also highlighted ongoing National Highway projects in the state, valued at Rs 76,000 crore.

Later, he inspected road repair works in the Chilakaluripet constituency and interacted with villagers. "Road repair works covering a 19-kilometre stretch in Chilakaluripet are being undertaken at a cost of Rs 5 crore, with 18 projects currently underway," he noted. Plans to develop the Narasaraopet-Chilakaluripet highway into a four-lane road are also in progress, he added.

## Man sentenced to life for sexually exploiting minor girl

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A man was sentenced to life imprisonment for sexually exploiting a minor girl here on Monday. The accused Sk. Mohammad worked as a Mathematics teacher at a school in Kambham town.

He lured a student, a 15-year-old minor girl, and used to send her messages through a mobile phone. The parents of the minor girl complained to the headmaster of the school who sacked following which he was sacked.

However, the accused Basha continued to lure the girl. On August 6, 2017, he eloped with the girl and spent some days in Hyderabad and Narasaraopet where he sexually exploited the minor girl.

The police registered a case against the accused Mohammad Basha under POCSO and arrested him. Public Prosecutor N Vasundhara under the supervision of the special monitoring wing of POCSO cases, probed the case before the court.

POCSO Court in-charge Judge T Raja Venkatadri sentenced the accused Mohammad Basha to life



**POCSO Court in-charge Judge T Raja Venkatadri sentenced the accused Mohammad Basha to life imprisonment. He must be in prison until his death, the Judge ordered in the judgment. The Court also imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on the accused**

imprisonment. He must be in prison until his death, the Judge ordered in the judgment. The Court also imposed a fine of Rs 25,000 on the accused.

The POCSO court also ordered the district Legal Services Authority to ensure that the rape victim is paid Rs 7 lakh ex gratia. Prakasam district SP AR

Damodhar appreciated the then Ongole DSPs Guntupalli Srinivasa Rao, B Srinivasa Rao, Special Public Prosecutor N Vasundhara and court liaison ASI EV Swamy for their efforts to punish the rape accused by the court. This court judgment should be a lesson and a warning to those who exploit minor girls sexually, the SP said.

## 3 killed as bus collides with auto



PNS ■ KADAPA

Three persons lost their lives, and two others sustained injuries in a tragic collision between a private bus and an auto-rickshaw at Porumamilla on Monday.

According to the police, the accident occurred when a speeding private bus collided with the auto-rickshaw. Two individuals died on the spot, while another succumbed to injuries at the Government General Hospital (GGH). The deceased were identified as

Rosaiah (55), Subbaiah Achari (65), and the auto-rickshaw driver, whose identity is yet to be established.

Eyewitnesses alleged that the bus driver's rash and negligent driving caused the mishap. The injured were rushed to RIMS Hospital in Kadapa, where their condition remains critical.

The police have registered a case and shifted the bodies to GGH, Porumamilla, for post-mortem examination. Further investigation is underway.



## 14 red sanders smugglers arrested, hacksaws, axes seized

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) personnel arrested 14 red sander smugglers and seized two vehicles, hacksaws and axes from them at Yerpedu village in Krishnapuram forest section.

Though vigil and combing have intensified in the forest area to prevent the felling and illegal transport of red sander logs, the influx of smugglers continues as the RSASTF teams arrested 14 red sander smugglers when they entered the forest.

DSP G Balireddy told the media here on Monday that RSASTF teams led by RI K Suresh Kumar Reddy and RSI Lingadhar conducted a check on vehicles at the entry point in the Krishnapuram forest section.

The teams found some red sander smugglers entering the forest in two vehicles. Since they appeared suspicious as the area was prohibited from entering without permission, the police inspected the vehicles and found hacksaw blades and axes. When questioned, they confessed to the crime stating that they were going into the forest to fell red sander trees and export the logs.

After noticing the police, some tried to flee into the forest but the police chased and apprehended them. Of the 14 arrested, 13 smugglers belonged to Tamil Nadu State and another to Chittoor district. Task Force CI Suresh Kumar registered a case and shifted the arrested smugglers to the task force police station.

## AU explores collaboration with Japanese university

Delegation visits AU; focus on academic exchange, research, student mobility



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a significant step towards internationalising education, Andhra University (AU) welcomed a delegation from Toyama Prefectural University, Japan, on Monday. The visit aimed to explore potential collaborations in areas such as academic exchange, joint research, and student mobility.

AU Vice-Chancellor Prof G. Sasibhushan Rao expressed enthusiasm about the partnership. "Andhra University has always been at the forefront of academic excellence and innovation. We are excited

to explore this potential partnership with Toyama Prefectural University, which could open new avenues for our students and faculty."

Prof Tetsuo Hatakeyama, leading the Japanese delegation, emphasised the mutual benefits of the collaboration: "We are looking forward to working with Andhra University, which is a leading institution in the region, particularly in the field of research. We hope to foster cooperation between our two universities in various aspects, including joint research projects and student exchange initiatives."

Key areas of focus for collaboration include engineering, information technology, and nursing.

Both institutions are optimistic about the potential for joint research projects, faculty and student exchange programmes, and other academic initiatives.

Prof Challa Ramakrishna, Media Relations Director at AU, highlighted the benefits of such partnerships: "This partnership has the potential to transform the academic experiences of our students and faculty, providing them with global exposure and fostering innovation."

## Changing lives despite his own challenges

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In the coastal village of Muthanagar in Kakinada, a remarkable person is transforming lives despite his own challenges. Gangadhar, a 35-year-old visually impaired man, has emerged as a pillar of strength for the local fishing community, proving that true vision lies in the ability to uplift others.

Life has not been easy for Gangadhar and his wife, Nookaratnam, who is also physically challenged. Their modest existence is sustained by a government disability pension and the unwavering support of Gangadhar's parents. Yet, his personal struggles have only fueled his resolve to serve his community.

Since 2013, Gangadhar has been collaborating with Reliance Foundation to support the fish-



ermen of Muthanagar. Using helplines and voice messaging services, he shares critical information about weather patterns, sea conditions, and optimal fishing zones. This guidance has not only safeguarded lives but also enhanced the livelihoods of many. The partnership, supported by the Indian National

Centre for Ocean Information Services and the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, has been a game-changer for sustainable and profitable fishing practices along India's coastline.

Gangadhar's contributions go beyond weather updates. He plays a crucial role in resolving entitlement issues for fisher-

men, assisting with biometric card registrations and pension applications. He also mentors young members of the community, encouraging them to acquire new skills and avail government subsidies for better opportunities.

His dedication has made him a local hero, embodying the spirit of resilience and service. As the world observes the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, Gangadhar's story resonates with this year's theme: amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Gangadhar's journey stands as a testament to the profound impact one individual can make, reminding us that true leadership is defined not by circumstances but by the courage to inspire and uplift.

## Allot education ministry to Kodandaram: MLA Jagadish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS demanded that the government allot education portfolio to Professor Kodandaram Reddy. BRS MLA Jagadish Reddy criticised the government for neglecting key departments, particularly the absence of a dedicated education minister. "Revanth Reddy holds the education portfolio himself but lacks any vision for the sector. This reflects poorly on his leadership. At least allocate education department to Kodandaram," he remarked.

Former minister Jagadish Reddy, former MLA Balka Suman, and BRS Vidhyarthi president Gellu Srinivas Yadav sharply criticised the Congress government, accusing

it of failing to govern effectively in its first year.

Jagadish Reddy lambasted the Congress administration for allegedly using police as a tool for governance, stating, "Revanth Reddy's government has shown its incapability within just one year. Governance is limited to police interventions, and they are blocking even our educational visits."

The leaders expressed concern over the condition of Gurukula schools under the Congress government. Jagadish Reddy pointed out, "During KCR's tenure, under RS Praveen Kumar's leadership, Gurukulas flourished. Students scaled Mount Everest and Kilimanjaro. But now, the Revanth-led government is systematically destroy-

ing this legacy."

The leaders questioned the government's motives behind obstructing BRS Vidhyarthi teams from visiting the schools. "If everything is fine in Gurukulas, why is the government blocking our study teams? What are they trying to hide?" asked Jagadish Reddy.

Highlighting administrative failures, Jagadish Reddy said, "The Congress government is incapable of addressing core issues. Farmers are committing suicides, students are on the streets, and governance has collapsed. Even basic facilities in schools, like proper meals for students, are missing. What has this government achieved to celebrate?"

## Collector launches Water Health Scheme

PNS ■ PADERU

District Collector Dinesh Kumar has inaugurated the Samagiri and Porlubanda Water Health Scheme, a groundbreaking initiative aimed at providing clean drinking water to remote villages in Alluri district. The project, funded by the Visakha District Navnirman Samiti, leverages gravity-based technology to ensure a reliable water supply.

During the inauguration ceremony in Samagiri, Collector Kumar expressed his dedication to serving the people of the district. "This water scheme is a small but significant step in providing basic necessities like clean drinking water to every village," he emphasised. "This will improve our health and quality of life," said a local tribal leader.

Collector Kumar stressed the importance of the public's involvement in managing the water supply. He urged the formation of village committees to oversee the sustainable management of the scheme. "It is crucial that every village has a committee to ensure the smooth functioning of the water supply system," he added.



ACROSS THE STATES



Modi to attend Assam investor summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the Assam Investor and Infrastructure Summit in Guwahati in February next year, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said here on Monday. The chief minister also extended an invitation to the prime minister to attend a mega performance of Jhumur dance of Assam's Adivasi community. "Today in New Delhi, I had the privilege to receive Adarniya Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji's guidance on various developmental issues. On behalf of the people of Assam, I also had the pleasure to invite him to bless the Assam Investor & Infrastructure Summit and Mega Jhumur Performance in February 2025 which he has kindly accepted to grace," Sarma said in a post on X. The summit in Guwahati will be held on February 24 and 25, 2025. The Jhumur performance will be also held during this time.



Man booked for posing as IAS officer

A man has been booked for allegedly posing as an IAS officer and threatening to kill an LLB student if she did not marry him, police here said on Monday. The case was filed against Deepak Kumar at the Chinhat police station on November 30 based on a complaint filed by the victim's mother. According to the complaint, Kumar first contacted her daughter in 2020 through WhatsApp. He had said that he hailed from Bihar's East Champaran district and sent his Aadhar details. Kumar claimed to have completed his B.Tech from Haryana. He also said he had been selected as an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer and was undergoing training in Delhi. However, the victim later discovered that Kumar actually worked in a private company in Delhi, specialising in computer-related work. He allegedly hacked mobile phones of girls and pressured them to marry him.



Cyber fraudsters swindle Rs 125.63 cr from people

Cyber fraudsters have swindled Rs 125.63 crore from people of Odisha during the last three years (2021 to 2023), Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi told the state Assembly on Monday. While replying to a question from BJD legislator Prasanta Behera in the House, Majhi said that a total of 6,368 cyber fraud cases were registered in the state and 1,388 persons have been arrested during the period. The police were able to return only Rs 2.77 crore to the victims, he said. The Odisha police have registered 2,037 cyber fraud cases involving cheating of Rs 40.39 crore in 2021, of which, Rs 27.56 lakh was refunded to the victims, he said. In 2022, the cyber fraudsters duped victims to the tune of Rs 37.28 crore, of which Rs 97.30 lakh was returned to the victims. The police have registered a total of 1,983 cyber crime cases in the year, Majhi stated. The chief minister, in his statement, said, cyber fraud to the tune of Rs 47.94 crore was reported in 2,348 cases during 2023. Out of the total amount, Rs 1.52 crore was returned to the victims.

'Sabarmati Report' reveals hidden truths: Hema Malini

PNS ■ MATHURA

BJP MP and renowned actress Hema Malini has said that the Hindi film 'The Sabarmati Report' exposes the truth behind the 2002 train burning incident at Godhra in Gujarat that was kept hidden for years.



While visiting her parliamentary constituency Mathura on Sunday during a break from the Winter Session of Parliament, Malini watched the matinee show of the film

at Roopam Cinema Hall. Talking to reporters later, she said "The Sabarmati Report" was "a very good film" and cleared several misconceptions about the event. Produced by Ekta Kapoor and directed by Dheeraj Sarna, 'The Sabarmati Report' was released on November 15 this year. The film is based on the 2002 Godhra train incident and features Vikrant Massey, Raashi Khanna and Ridhi Dogra in key roles.

Government, oppn break impasse in Parliament

Constitution debate to be held in LS, RS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government and opposition parties on Monday reached an agreement to break the impasse in Parliament with dates announced for discussions on the Constitution in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The Lower House will take up the discussion on the Constitution to mark its 75th year of adoption on December 13 and 14, and the Upper House on December 16 and 17. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, who announced the dates, expressed confidence that both Houses will function smoothly from Tuesday. The breakthrough came at a meeting of Speaker Om Birla with floor leaders of different parties.

The opposition parties had demanded discussions in both Houses of Parliament to mark the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution by the Constituent Assembly. Several opposition leaders, who attended the meeting, also echoed similar sentiments. Asked about the opposition raising other issues such as Sambhal violence and Manipur, Rijiju said a decision will be taken in accordance with the rules. The Congress has been



THE CONGRESS HAS BEEN PERSISTENT IN RAISING THE ISSUE OF THE INDICTMENT OF US PROSECUTORS OF ADANI GROUP CHAIRPERSON GAUTAM ADANI AND OTHER COMPANY OFFICIALS ON BRIBERY AND FRAUD CHARGES

persistent in raising the issue of the indictment of US prosecutors of Adani group chairperson Gautam Adani and other company officials on bribery and fraud charges. This coupled with vociferous opposition protests over matters such as

the Sambhal violence and Manipur unrest have resulted in constant adjournments of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha since the Winter Session began on November 25. However, some other opposition parties, especially the

TMC, have not attached the same priority to the Adani row and want Parliament to discuss a host of different issues, including unemployment, price rise and the Centre's alleged discrimination against opposition-ruled states in fund allocation. The TMC has skipped opposition meetings to formulate the INDIA bloc's joint strategy during the Session.

A TMC source said his party cannot be there just to stamp its approval on the Congress' agenda.

INS Vikrant is fully operational, says Vice Admiral

PNS ■ KOCHI

The INS Vikrant, India's indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC), has achieved full operational status after completing its final operational clearance this year, Vice Admiral V Srinivas, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief (FOCINC), Southern Naval Command, said on Monday.

Speaking to the media aboard the naval ship INS Shardul in Kochi, Srinivas said that INS Vikrant completed its final operations clearance this year. "With the completion of various trials



and the ship's fleet integration, INS Vikrant is now fully operational and is operating under the Western Fleet," he added. Srinivas emphasised that the ship, which is a sym-

bol of pride for the country and the Navy, is fully capable of undertaking all operations and commitments of the Indian Navy. Commissioned by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi in 2022, INS Vikrant is now under the Western Naval Command and is capable of handling naval assignments.

Designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau (WDB) and built by Cochin Shipyard Limited, Vikrant is the largest ship ever constructed in India's maritime history, the official release said. It boasts of state-of-the-art automation features and houses around 2,200 compartments, designed to accommodate a crew of about 1,600, including women officers and sailors, it added.

Delhi's air quality improves

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi has received a respite from toxic air in the first two days of December as the city's AQI remained in the "poor" category on Monday, recording a reading of 280. The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) of the city was recorded at 280 at 4 pm, registering a slight improvement from 285 on Sunday.

The air quality shifted from "poor" to "very poor" on October 30, after which it intermittently remained in the "very poor" and "severe" categories. On Sunday, for the first time in 32 days, the capital's AQI dipped below 300, aided by dry northwesterly winds and ample sunlight.

Of the 38 monitoring stations in the city, 12 recorded the air quality in the "very poor" category on Monday, while 25 recorded it in the "poor" category and one station reported "satisfactory" results, according to the Sameer app. The Central Pollution



Control Board (CPCB) classifies AQI between 0 and 50 as "good", between 51 and 100 as "satisfactory", between 101 and 200 as "moderate", between 201 and 300 as "poor", between 301 and 400 as "very poor", and above 400 as "severe".

The primary pollutant on Monday was PM2.5, with levels recorded at 106 µg/m<sup>3</sup> at 3 pm. These fine particles pose significant health risks as these can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the

bloodstream. Vehicular emissions, as reported by the Centre's Decision Support System (DSS) for Air Quality Management, are typically updated at 12 noon every day.

However, the data for Saturday, Sunday and Monday was unavailable on the website until 4 pm, with the most recent estimate reflecting Friday's contribution, which accounted for 21.4 per cent of Delhi's pollution.

SUPPLY OF RICE THROUGH PDS

Yet to get Rs 14,000 crore from Centre, says Bengal CM

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said the state has yet to receive Rs 14,000 crore from the Centre for rice supply through the Public Distribution System (PDS).

"For giving rice through PDS we get 60 per cent of the amount as subsidy from Centre which is yet to reach us," the CM said at the assembly. "Still the state continues to bear the expense through its coffers so that the poor are not deprived," she claimed.

Banerjee said the Khadya Sathi scheme of the state also covers people who are deserving but strictly don't belong to the criteria set up by the Centre. The Khadya Sathi Scheme is a food security programme in



West Bengal that aims to provide rice and wheat at a subsidised rate to the state's population. About the price of potato, she said, "We are second in potato production but some people are exporting the potato grown here outside creating a scarcity in the market which

will not be allowed." "In the past most of the potatoes used to be exported but during our tenure we have stopped that. Similarly, we have ensured 75 per cent of the onions grown here must be consumed within the state," she said.

'Pursue careers in science & technology'

ISRO chief Somanath urges youths

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman S Somanath on Monday exhorted youths to engage themselves with scientific and technological advancements being made by the country so that India can emerge as a global leader in the years ahead. He urged them to pursue careers in science and technology and contribute to the growth in these fields.

Somanath was speaking at a 'Student Science Interactive Program - Face to Face with New Frontiers in S&T', as part

of the four-day India International Science Festival (IISF) at IIT-Guwahati, which will conclude on Tuesday.

The ISRO chairman interacted with school students, inspiring them to explore careers in science and technology and pursue innovation in the field of space research, a release said.

"As students, you are the torchbearers of the future in science and technology. It is essential for you to grasp the remarkable innovations and advancements taking place in these fields today," he said. "By recognising their poten-

tial and the opportunities they present, you can draw inspiration to pursue similar paths and contribute to building a brighter tomorrow," Somanath added.

He maintained that engagement of the youth in the country's current scientific and technological endeavours is pivotal in realising the vision of making India a global leader.

The release said industry-academia collaboration, knowledge-sharing technical sessions and initiatives to inspire students and teachers in creative, knowledge-based learning have been organised as part of the



IISF.

The event also brought policymakers and scientific leaders together under one roof to discuss sustainable practices

across science, agriculture, manufacturing and healthcare, it added.

A key highlight of IISF 2024 was the lab-to-life initiative,

where Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) signed three technology transfer Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to promote sustainability and technological advancements.

Speaking about technology transfer, Anandharamakrishnan, director, CSIR-NIIST, Thiruvananthapuram said, "Young innovators like you have already begun building rockets and satellites in colleges, efforts that are nearing commercial success. By understanding these advancements and the opportunities in the field of space, science and technology, you can be inspired to pursue similar paths and shape a brighter future."





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Musical chairs

While the BJP-led Mahayuti emerged victorious in Maharashtra, the post-election scenario has been anything but smooth

The Maharashtra Assembly elections have delivered a decisive yet politically tumultuous mandate. The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance scripted a powerful comeback in state Assembly elections by winning 230 seats in the 288-member House. Shinde's Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP also performed well. Sena won 57 while NCP won 41 seats. It was indeed a big disappointment for Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). The grand old party registered one of its worst performances in the state Assembly polls after it won only 16 seats. Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP) won just 10 seats, whereas Uddhav Thackeray's (UBT) won 20 seats. Despite this success, the post-election landscape has been anything but smooth, as a fierce tussle erupted between the two allies over the chief ministerial position. The post-election scenario has turned into a high-stakes political drama. Devendra Fadnavis, the BJP's chief minister candidate finally got the post as Eknath Shinde stepped



aside and his son is likely to be deputy chief minister; allegedly on the pressure of the BJP central command. His leadership has been credited with delivering key infrastructure projects and steering the state through various challenges such as agrarian distress and urban expansion.

As the BJP's top leader in Maharashtra, Fadnavis was widely expected to retain the chief ministerial post. The Shiv Sena made significant contribution to the alliance's victory and wanted to retain the CM post for Eknath Shinde. But after days of negotiations he finally agreed to give way to Fadnavis while maintaining that his tenure saw exponential development in the state and he made it number one. The party has pointed out that its cadre worked tirelessly to mobilise grassroots support, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where the BJP's influence has traditionally been weaker. It is also understandable that the BJP should lead the government, citing the party's larger mandate but it will still need NCP and Shiv Sena support to remain in power. The impasse between the BJP and Shiv Sena created an air of uncertainty in Maharashtra's politics. As of now, Devendra Fadnavis appears poised to be the chief minister, backed by the BJP's central leadership. Though, for now the BJP has prevailed and got the plumb post for its man, make no mistake. Shinde's Shiv Sena is not very happy about it and knows once they are marginalised in the game the chances of their party splitting and merging with the BJP are rather high. It has happened in the past and could well be repeated in Maharashtra as well. It would be interesting to watch how Maharashtra politics shapes up. The decisions taken now, the composition of the cabinet and indeed the say Shinde has in the administration would not only shape Maharashtra's governance for the next five years but also redefine the dynamics of India's financial hub.

For them, the commitment is too little and too late. Against the estimated cost of about USD 7 trillion required to implement current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), developing countries demand more than USD 1 trillion per year of public finance from developed countries. By 2035 the ambition of NDCs is likely to be revised upward twice and total implementation costs would increase substantially. In this context, the Presidency's proposal shatters any hopes of raising ambition consistent with the goal agreed at the Paris Agreement. The current policy commitments are likely to lead to a temperature rise of a minimum of 2.7 degrees Celsius compared to the aspiration target of 1.5 degrees Celsius. In a surprising departure, the proposed target of mobilising USD 1.3 trillion is to be achieved by 'all actors' instead of 'all Parties' to the UNFCCC. Since a COP decision cannot be binding on 'all actors', the target holds little value beyond a half-hearted appeal. The G77 and China rejected the Presidency proposal followed by a strong letter from the civil society organisations supporting the rejection. The COP29 may still deliver a decision keeping the negotiation process alive as the negotiations are in extended hours searching

## COP29: Stalemate on climate finance

The 29th annual Climate Summit in Azerbaijan reached an impasse as developed and developing nations remained divided over climate finance commitments

The negotiation process at the 29th annual Climate Summit (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan came to a halt as both developed and developing countries did not agree with the proposed quantum of climate finance, and its mobilisation approach. The COP29 Presidency had two quantitative targets before the negotiating countries. A USD 1.3 trillion of total annual climate investments in developing countries by 2035 and USD 250 billion of annual climate finance from developed to developing countries by 2035. These targets are to be met through a variety of sources and actors. While it is learnt informally that developed countries, after initial rejection, are willing to commit to USD 300 billion per year by 2035, developing countries rejected the Presidency proposal.

Throughout COP29, developed countries left no stone unturned to shift responsibility onto emerging economies, including China, India, Brazil, and South Africa. They pressed for emerging economies to be considered ineligible for receiving climate finance, except in the form of debt. Additionally, they suggested including emerging economies' domestic investments and climate-friendly South-South cooperation in accounting for climate finance, urging them to voluntarily contribute. Outside the negotiation process, a group of developed countries, including the UK and Australia, signed a pledge to have "no new unabated" coal-based power plants. This may



be a response to the ongoing energy crisis in some developed countries, indirectly pledging to continue using coal with expensive carbon capture and storage technologies, expecting emerging economies to do the same. Adaptation Marginalised The Second Needs Determination Report (NDR) by the UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) estimates that more than USD 200 billion per year of adaptation finance is needed till 2030. So far, adaptation has received little finance from non-public sources. Even if the developed countries agree to USD 300 billion per year by 2035 as some reports suggest, it will categorically leave the adaptation needs on the margins of global climate governance. On a parallel negotiation track on the Adaptation Fund, the USA and EU sparred with the Arab Group on the need to scale up mobilisation beyond USD 300 million. While the financial commitments to developing countries are likely to remain meagrely, the Global Goal on Adaptation negotiations expect the developing countries to develop, implement, track, and report their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) commensurate with the projected tempera-



ture rise. Equity Under Siege The principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibility and respective capability (CBDR&RC) is the soul of global climate governance through the UNFCCC. The primary responsibility of creating enabling conditions for an equitable transition to a climate-resilient and low-carbon world, including through means of implementation, rests with the developed countries. By trying to shift the burden on emerging economies and keeping the interests and needs of the vulnerable populations on margin, developed countries have aggressively pushed to open the negotiations on equity principles at COP29. Irrespective of the number finally agreed at the COP29, the intent made abundantly clear by developed countries is alarming. It can potentially make any discussion on the quantum of finance irrelevant. It will certainly leave the vast vulnerable population unprotected—a marker of an unequal world. (The writer is a Senior Fellow and Associate Director, Earth Science and Climate Change Division, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI); views are personal)

## PICTALK



Artistes perform during the 35th Konark Dance Festival 2024, in Puri

PTI

## The power of touch: A sense that defines us

Touch is the first sense we develop and one that shapes our lives in profound ways. It connects us to each other, fostering love, compassion and resilience

We have read the story of five blind men and the elephant. Each man touched a part and described the animal differently. They would have correctly visualised the pachyderm if they also had sight. There is no denying that all five senses combined define how we live from birth to death. The absence of any will make us feel incomplete. Touch is probably foremost. Scientists say touch is the first of the senses we develop. It is not a single feeling. It consists of several distinct sensations communicated to the brain through neurons in the skin. Touch plays an important role in shaping us. It also conveys compassion from one human to another.



joy and pain alike will forever remain with me. I also recall the happy gurgling sounds of my younger cousins as I patted or tickled them.

The feeling I had as I held my fiancé's hand while putting the engagement ring on her finger was different. It gave me a sense of love and belonging to someone for the rest of my life. We got married and in time had children. Touch was important to nurture and cherish our love for each other and the children.

As we held our children close, I could visualise the bliss that my parents might have felt when they held me or my younger siblings. Touch plays an equally important role in grief due to

loss. We are so conditioned to the societal norms of engaging the bereaved in an almost endless conversation, that we often forget their need to sit quietly with their thoughts to contemplate the life lived together and mourn the loss. A warm hug is all that the grieving person needs at that moment. I also visit the temple, not often, but occasionally.

A sense of peace pervades me when the priest touches my forehead in blessing. We have heard about the power of healing only through the touch of a saint or even the statue of a revered person. It is the faith people have in the power of touch.

It is not unusual to see people across the globe reaching out to their leaders or stars to touch them and shake hands with them. Leaders and stars also feel connected when they are physically close to people. Leaders from different countries, separated by geographies and language, are also seen hugging each other, indicating friendship and camaraderie. We see sportspersons hugging each other after an achieve-

ment. It motivates them to perform better. COVID left us feeling bereft of several human emotions. Many lost their lives away from their loved ones. Both, the dead and those who survived missed the familiar touch. There were unanswered questions in everyone's mind. We were afraid of the unknown future. We did not know if touch, the most elementary of our senses that defines our personality, would be a thing of the past for future generations. We faced the unthinkable feeling of living and dying in the sterile 'Don't Touch Me' environment of social distancing. Touch keeps us alive. It imparts within us the ability to love and be loved. Emily Dickinson wrote in one of her poems, almost two centuries earlier. "He touched me, so I live to know... And now, I'm different than before."

(The writer is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator and strategy consultant. He conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives.; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

## TRUMP'S THREAT IS FOR REAL

Madam — This refers to the editorial, 'Trump's tariff threat'. Trump is an emotional activist. He decides his course based on his momentous decisions and emotions. Most of his decisions do not carry convincing logic or rationality. His earlier tenure had seen several such decisions, but none could help the people in terms of employment or faster economic recovery. Trump's challenges to finish the domination of China and the quixotic actions he took could not make anything tangible in the status. The Indian situation is vulnerable, with its export value being \$73 billion versus imports to the tune of \$119 billion. Any hostile imposition of tariffs will have serious adverse impacts on the balance of trade, which is already tilting against India's favour.

Moreover, India needs political will and moral courage to face such a situation of Trump imposing tariff hurdles. As of now the leadership does not have such a shield. During the pandemic period, the US had placed orders for hydroxychloroquine with Indian manufacturers. But the Prime Minister banned the export of this medicine as it was recommended as one of the drugs to treat Covid. Having learnt this, Trump reacted sharply and said if India does not honour orders placed for this drug, the country will have to face the wrath. Immediately, without wasting any time, our Prime Minister revoked the ban and attended to the order. As known to all, the Republican Party is a party of the affluent in the US, Trump, being a Republican leader, would not have any sentiments in safeguarding the interests of the rich in America. He will go all out to re-establish the supremacy of America in terms of international affairs or the power of the U.S. dollar. But he should realise that the world order is changing fast and undergoing sweeping changes in many respects.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

## FADNAVIS WINS THE RACE

Madam — The selection of the Chief Minister of Maharashtra appears to be

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Taj Mahal bears the brunt of pollution



The Taj Mahal, which is known for its stunning beauty, has suffered dramatically from the effects of air pollution over the years. Once a shimmering white monument, it now bears the marks of environmental degradation. This decline is primarily due to pollution from industrial activities and the increasing vehicle emissions in Agra, as well as the pollution of the Yamuna River, which runs behind this UNESCO World

Heritage site. Importantly, the toxic gas emanating from the Yamuna has been doing greater harm, and it is said to be the main culprit behind the discolouration of the Taj's glorious white marbles. For over two decades, various Indian research institutes have explored restoration methods to reverse the discolouration of the Taj and revive the monument to its past glory, but all their efforts proved unsuccessful. The 17th-century Mughal architecture, which is a symbol of India's rich history, needs swift and decisive action to get back its legendary lustre. Involving national and international experts can provide comprehensive solutions to safeguard this magnificent monument for future generations.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Urpakkam

tougher than winning elections for the Bharatiya Janata Party while going by the race between Devendra Fadnavis and Eknath Shinde to occupy the CM's chair. The hunger for power by the BJP keeps Eknath Shinde in the second line over Fadnavis.

The swearing-in ceremony of the new government is likely to take place on December 5, though there's not yet an official report from Raj Bhavan on this issue. Meantime, Eknath Shinde had headed for his hometown after his meeting with the Home Minister Amit Shah with the Mahayuti members. The disappointment of Shinde is wide open and he is in consultation with the NCP leadership and likely to put forth his demands for a cream of portfolios. The BJP is learnt to have offered a Union Cabinet to Shinde if he is unwilling to be a deputy CM also, the speculation is doing the rounds. Whatever may be the reasons, the delay in forming the government for their own benefits shouldn't cost the man-hours. The welfare of the people is more important than witnessing warfare between the elected alliance part-

ners, which doesn't augur well for the centre to justify their action.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

## PROTECT SEWER WORKERS

Madam — In India, the poor sewer system has dried the citizens' lives with spreading disease, stinks and even taking lives in the cleaning process. Over the last 15 years, across India, 1,288 sewer deaths have been recorded by the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis. Only in the capital city, Delhi, 95 deaths recorded so far. The desperate issue is yet not to halt; on the contrary, it is increasing dreadfully. In the era of access to technology and digital India, the government's failing to launch any well-designed resource to facilitate the way of cleaning is concerning; maybe, due to particular caste, the government is still giving the cold shoulder. It's not tolerable, at any cost. The authorities must address it and ensure the safety of citizens and cleaners.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN

## WORKPLACE GOSSIP: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

It thrives in organisational environments as a form of informal communication



SAKSHI SETHI

Workplace gossip is an enduring phenomenon in organisational environments, involving informal communication with others, often without their knowledge. While it is frequently dismissed as harmless chatter, workplace gossip can have profound implications for individuals, teams and organisational culture. It is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can serve as a bonding tool and provide informal channels of communication while on the other hand, it can breed mistrust, damage reputations and create a toxic work environment. Determining whether workplace gossip is harmless, or harmful depends on the nature, intent and consequences of the gossip.

The term stems from various psychological and organisational factors. Human curiosity and the desire for social connection often drive employees to share information, even if it is speculative. In many cases, gossip becomes a way to establish or strengthen bonds within a team. Another cause is ambiguity or lack of transparency in communication. Employees feel uncertain about organisational changes, leadership decisions, or colleagues' actions, and may resort to gossip to fill information gaps.

Moreover, competitive workplaces can foster gossip to gain leverage or influence perceptions. Though often vilified, gossip is not inherently negative. Looking at the positive perspective, it can foster social cohesion by creating shared narratives and providing an outlet for



employees to express concerns informally. It can also act as an informal feedback loop, alerting leadership to potential issues like toxic behaviours or dissatisfaction that may remain hidden. However, the negative consequences of workplace gossip often outweigh the positives. Gossip can damage reputations, lower morale and lead to feelings of mistrust and resentment.

Employees who are the targets of gossip may experience stress, anxiety and a decline in productivity. Additionally, pervasive gossip can erode an organisation's culture creating a hostile work environment where collaboration and trust are undermined. It is very often that stressful work environments, complaining about coworkers, personality clashes, or misunderstandings stem from unmet expectations and a lack of effective communication channels. It can exacerbate the urge to vent frustrations informally.

While airing grievances may feel like a release or an attempt to bond with others, it rarely resolves underlying issues. Instead, it creates a cycle of negativity. Organisations and leaders can adopt proactive strategies such as promoting open communication, fostering a positive work culture, leading by example and moreover empowering employees can be a few steps to mitigate the harmful effects of gossiping. Today the term gossiping isn't limited to celebrities and family reunions. When discussing the workplace, it has become a way not to take responsibility for any actions or reactions they create. By focusing on someone else, an individual can shift the focus from the circumstances. Complaining about colleagues behind their backs is a detrimental habit that harms relationships, morale, and workplace culture. By choosing direct, empathetic communication and focusing on solutions, employees can foster a more positive and productive environment. Eliminating backdoor complaints is not just about professionalism rather it is about creating a culture of mutual respect where everyone feels valued and heard.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

## Bullet train: A dream derailed by delays and cost overruns



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The Bullet Train, heralded as a landmark in India's infrastructure ambitions, is now bogged down by repeated delays, spiraling costs and environmental concerns



The ambitious Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project, once a symbol of India's leap into advanced infrastructure, is now mired in delays, cost overruns, and environmental controversies. Japan, a key investor through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has grown wary of the project's trajectory due to escalating costs and inadequate environmental safeguards. Approved in December 2015, the Rs1.08 lakh crore high-speed rail project initially aimed for a 2023 launch. However, land acquisition hurdles, especially in Maharashtra, and financial constraints have pushed deadlines repeatedly, with only a partial launch from Surat to Bilimora now targeted for 2026. The project's cost has surged by Rs15,000 crore, a steep climb for an economy grappling with a seven-quarter GDP slowdown to 5.4 per cent. Despite Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's efforts, including a visit to Japan in September, progress remains sluggish.

Japan's reluctance to commit to revised timelines has prompted India to explore European alternatives for suppliers and technology. This shift, coupled with internal directives to float global tenders, underscores India's urgency to salvage the project. Environmental and Social Concerns The project's compliance with environmental and social norms remains under scrutiny. Environmentalists have criticised the absence of comprehensive environmental impact assessments and advisory committees mandated by JICA for "Category A" projects, which involve significant societal and ecological disruptions. Reports highlight violations, including inadequate public consultations and the bypassing of legal requirements for social and environmental evaluations. Gujarat's 2016 amendments to land acquisition laws and the Supreme Court's relaxation of environmental



JAPAN'S RELUCTANCE TO COMMIT TO REVISED TIMELINES HAS PROMPTED INDIA TO EXPLORE EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVES FOR SUPPLIERS AND TECHNOLOGY. THIS SHIFT, COUPLED WITH INTERNAL DIRECTIVES TO FLOAT GLOBAL TENDERS, UNDERSCORES INDIA'S URGENCY TO SALVAGE THE PROJECT

clearance norms have further exacerbated concerns. Activists argue these changes undermine safeguards meant to protect displaced communities and fragile ecosystems.

The central government is keen to showcase progress before the Gujarat Assembly elections in 2027. However, delays in resolving critical issues threaten this timeline. Critics speculate that the project if completed, might end up being a costlier version of the existing Vande Bharat trains rather than a transformative leap in Indian rail infrastructure.

While the Bullet Train remains a flagship vision, its current state reflects broader challenges in balancing infrastructure growth with environmental and financial sustainability. Studies have found that expensive trains have poor ridership. Vande Bharat and similar trains often go half-empty. Comparable travel cost on the bullet is estimated to be high and not remunerative for bullet trains. The railways are considering having indigenous coaches of Vande Bharat type to replace the Japanese high-tech Shinkansen coaches. The bullet train is not the first example of a foreign-funded infrastructure project that has run afoul of international social and environmental standards.

In Gujarat itself, the Tata Power-owned Mundra Ultra Mega Power Project in Kutch has been in the midst of such a controversy since 2011. The US-based International Finance Corporation funded the project with an aid of US dollars 450 million, but villagers living around the power plant have now sued the IFC for alleged large-scale environmental damages caused by the project.

In 2015, a lower court in the United States held that international funding organisations are entitled to "absolute immunity" from lawsuits in that country. However, in May this year, the US Supreme Court agreed to take up an appeal case by the project-affected villagers. With an annual outgoing EMI of Rs 6,802 crore but a lower estimated revenue, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project is set to become a big liability to the exchequer.

The JICA loan is given in Japanese Yen (JPY) and has to be paid back in JPY. "If the Yen appreciates the loan amount will increase significantly in rupees, if the rupee appreciates, the loan amount will decrease significantly. For example, if 12 years ago, Re 1 was 1.39 JPY and today it has depreciated to 1.86 JPY, now if it appreciates again and goes back to 1.4 JPY, then the loan amount simply goes up by Rs 52,571 crore. Even though it looks like a low-interest loan, currency fluctuation can change the whole game. The analysis also factors in the total number of passengers that will travel along the entire Mumbai to Ahmedabad route, as well as the Surat to Mumbai or Surat to Ahmedabad route, which could be double 17,900 passengers, considering passengers travel to and fro.

The proposed fare for one side travel was Rs 3,000, which is 1.5 times the rate of a first-class train ticket. In a best-case scenario where all passengers are travelling from Mumbai to Ahmedabad and back, the bullet train will generate an annual revenue of Rs 3,920 crore, but the yearly loan liability is Rs 6,802 crore, so there will be a shortfall of Rs 2,882 crore. Conservative esti-

mates peg revenue at Rs 2,499 crore per year, revenue shortfall of Rs 5,103 crore in the first year itself.

The estimated cost of operations was Rs 412 crore per year in 2014, but by 2028 it will become more than double, at over Rs 800 crore. It further goes on to say that Indian Railways with all 13000 passenger trains including First Class, 2AC, 3AC, Rajdhani, Shatabdi, and Vande Bharat could only earn Rs 63,300 crore in the last year. Delhi metro with a daily ridership of 46 lakh people clocked revenue of Rs 3,088 crore last year.

If we look at bookings of last summer, most cheaper trains are fully booked, and Vande Bharat and Tejas Express have lots of seats available. Already, 33 trains running on the route. Moreover, a ticket price of Rs 3,000 was determined when the cost of construction was Rs 1.1 lakh crore. There are problems. The new plan is to produce coaches and have signalling systems of Indian railways instead of Shinkansen. Still, there are three years.

There are international commitments to JICA and diplomatic issues with Japan. What is being discussed are partial truths.

The project could get a bit more delayed but the Indian Railways expects that most of the original plans would be on track with some modifications.

The project may be completed beyond 2027 and may be on time for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections. The operation cost is likely to go up and the railways have to reconfigure the fares to be charged to make it more affordable and sustainable.

(The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

## Breaking the stigma: Prioritising mental health for a happier, resilient future

Depression, anxiety and other mental health challenges must be taken seriously. They affect one in five people worldwide

Depression in mental health is a feeling of low, sad and unhappy. Which can lead to loss of appetite, loss of sleep, loss of interest, and negative thoughts. Mental health is about how we think, feel and cope with life's challenges. Just like we take care of our physical health, looking after our mental health is equally important. Parents play a key role in creating a happy, supportive, and understanding environment at home.

Mental health issues such as anxiety, fear and depression are common, and they can arise due to bullying, family conflicts, changes in school or life, academic stress, or even harsh punishments. These challenges can make children feel isolated, angry, or lose



RESHMA A SANGODKAR

focus on their studies. It's crucial to understand that seeking help from counsellors, therapists, or trusted adults like parents or teachers is a sign of strength, not weakness. Today, one in five people faces mental health challenges. Professional support, such as therapy, can significantly improve emotional wellbeing. Activities like yoga, sports,

and meditation are also effective for calming the mind and reducing stress. Additionally, practising mindfulness—focusing on the present moment—can help children feel more peaceful and focused. Good habits, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy food, and staying hydrated, support both mental and physical health. Engaging in enjoyable hobbies can boost happiness and reduce stress.

Schools and families need to work together to provide children with positive environments, where they feel safe and supported. In our society, mental health issues are often overlooked, and stigma prevents many from seeking help. Depression in mental health is a feeling of low, sad and

unhappy. Which can lead to loss of appetite, loss of sleep, loss of interest and negative thoughts. World Mental Health Day is celebrated on October 10 every year. Many people are affected by depression in the world. Very common in today's world. Campaigns like World Mental Health Day aim to break these barriers and encourage open conversations. And encourages those affected to seek help from a Psychiatrist. Teachers should be trained to identify early signs of mental health problems in children and provide guidance. Parenting is also a key factor in shaping a child's mental health. Parents should avoid unhealthy comparisons and ensure their children feel emotionally secure. Building a

strong, friendly relationship with children helps them share their feelings without fear. Simple practices like mindfulness, meditation and breathing exercises can also help children and adults stay calm and focused. As Lord Buddha said,



strong, friendly relationship with children helps them share their feelings without fear. Simple practices like mindfulness,

meditation and breathing exercises can also help children and adults stay calm and focused. As Lord Buddha said,

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."

This profound phrase highlights the essence of mindfulness—focusing fully on the present and giving your complete attention to whatever you are doing. Mindfulness means being fully present in the moment, whether eating, studying, or walking. Meditation, on the other hand, is about dedicating time to relax the mind and focus on breathing. Both practices help reduce stress and improve sleep, allowing children to perform better in school and other activities. Engaging in activities like participating in marathons, running 5 kilometres, or setting personal fitness goals can help reduce depression and improve mental well-being. Yogic exercises like Surya namaskars help in boosting our prana level to stave off depression.

Welcoming an idol of Lord Buddha into your home or workplace, reading positive affirmations each morning, and offering gratitude to those around you and God are wonderful practices to keep the mind happy and at peace. By creating supportive environments and normalising mental health discussions, we can ensure that children grow up to be emotionally strong, happy, and resilient individuals. The key is to break the stigma and make mental health a priority for everyone.

(The writer is an author and freelance writer; views are personal)



IN BRIEF



Operations resume at Swan Energy shipyard

Diversified group Swan Energy Ltd (SEL) on Monday said it has resumed operations at its shipyard. Formerly known as Reliance Naval and Engineering Ltd (RNEL), Swan's Pipavav Shipyard in Gujarat has also commenced refit of ships while it is also gearing up to commence its shipbuilding operations at the facility, Swan Energy said. Indian Coast Guard's fast patrol vessel Raj Ratan was the first vessel to undergo refit exercise, it said, adding that the refit work on the vessel, which began on September 4, has been completed on November 30, ahead of the schedule, it said. The refit project was executed in association with Sadhav Offshore Engineering, it added. The dry docking and refit of this ship marks a significant milestone in the revival of the shipyard, after SEL took over its management control earlier this year through NCLT, the company said.



Gold falls Rs 200 to Rs 79,200 per 10 gm

Gold prices fell Rs 200 to Rs 79,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak trends in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 79,400 per 10 grams on Friday. Silver also plummeted Rs 2,200 to Rs 90,000 per kg due to reduced offtake by industrial units and coin makers. It had closed at Rs 92,200 per kg in the previous trading session. Price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 200 to Rs 78,800 per 10 grams. The precious metal ended at Rs 79,000 per 10 grams on Friday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for December delivery fell Rs 478, or 0.63 per cent, to trade at Rs 75,896 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for December delivery slumped Rs 574, or 0.65 per cent, to Rs 88,307 per kg. During the day, the white metal declined Rs 1,081, or 1.22 per cent, to hit an intra-day low of Rs 87,800 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).



SBI plans to open 500 new branches

The State Bank of India (SBI) is planning to open 500 new branches across India during the current financial year, Parliament was informed on Monday. Of this, 135 new branches have already been opened till October 31, 2024, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha. Currently, the endeavour of the government is to ensure availability of a banking outlet (bank branch/business correspondent/ India Post Payments Bank) within 5 kilometres of all inhabited villages in the country, he said. Availability of banking outlets is monitored by a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based app, namely, Jan Dhan Darshak (JDD) app, he said. To another question regarding shortage of staff in SBI, Chaudhary said, public sector banks (PSBs) including SBI are board governed commercial entities. The requirement of manpower in each PSB is determined by the respective PSB keeping in view various factors which include, inter-alia, business requirement, spread of activities, superannuation and other unplanned exits, he said. Appointment of officers and staff is done accordingly by the bank and it varies from year to year based on their requirements, he said.

Goyal calls for sustainable consumption pattern

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday called for promoting sustainable consumption patterns to cut carbon footprint and resolve issues of environment.

He said that people of the world would have to focus on consuming products which are environmentally sustainable.

"We need to be conscious of the waste and carbon footprint due to our current lifestyle patterns. This is going to be a core of a better future for the world. Unless we address the consumption patterns, we are not going to resolve sustainability and environmental challenges," Goyal said. The minister was addressing CII's Partnership Summit here.

He added that environmental challenges are not a function of the carbon emitted through manufacturing, but "it is a greater function of the carbon caused by (our) consumption because manufacturing comes only because there is a consumption demand".

He suggested managing that demand in a better and more sustainable way.

Speaking at the event, M K Nir Barkat, Minister of



"We need to be conscious of the waste and carbon footprint due to our current lifestyle patterns. This is going to be a core of a better future for the world. Unless we address the consumption patterns, we are not going to resolve sustainability and environmental challenges," Goyal said. The minister was addressing CII's Partnership Summit here.

Economy and Industry, Israel, said the trade and economic relationship between the two countries is growing.

A corridor, spanning from India through the UAE, Israel, and extending to Europe, would help in further strengthening economic ties, he added. Goyal also said that the

Global South is not responsible for global environmental damage but it has been caused by the developed countries who enjoyed the benefit of low-cost energy.

Senior ministers from Italy, Israel, Bhutan, Bahrain, Algeria, Nepal, Senegal, South Africa, Myanmar, Qatar and

Cambodia were the partner countries at the summit.

Each of the partner countries have shared responsibilities towards environment and sustainability, but countries present at the summit are not responsible for the damage to the environment, Goyal said adding Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation will have an impact on the future of employment.

"Consumption waste is not going to make the world a better place to live in and the world will have to reflect on lifestyles and a circular economy," he added.

About 29,200 MW thermal capacity under construction in India: MoS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As much as 29,200 MW thermal capacity is being installed in the country, while 51,520 MW capacity is under various stages of planning and development, Parliament was informed on Monday.

The government's aim is to have an installed power generation capacity of around 777.14 GW by 2029-30. India's overall power generation capacity was at 454.452 GW as of October 2024.

The Ministry of Power, in consultation with states, has envisaged a plan to add thermal capacity of a minimum 80,000 MW by 2031-32, Union Minister Shripad Naik said in a written reply to Rajya Sabha.

"Against this target, 29,200 MW thermal capacity is already under construction, while 51,520 MW is at various stages of planning & development," the Minister of State (MoS) for Power said.

In addition, 13,997.5 MW of hydro electric projects and 6,050 MW pumped storage projects (PSPs) are under construction, while 24,225.5 MW



of hydro electric projects and 50,760 MW of PSP are under various stages of planning and are targeted to be completed by 2031-32, he said.

The minister further said there are also 7,300 MW of nuclear capacity under construction and 7,000 MW is under various stages of planning and approval.

In view of increasing power generation capacity, Naik said about 1,91,474 circuit kilometer (ckm) of transmission lines and 1,274 GVA of transformation capacity is planned to be added (at 220 kV and above voltage level) during the ten year period from 2022-23 to 2031-32. The country's peak demand met figures were at 219,222 GW up October 2024.

RBI lifts restrictions on Sachin Bansal's Navi Finserv

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Monday lifted the restrictions on sanction and disbursement of loans by Sachin Bansal's Navi Finserv with immediate effect.

On October 17 this year, the RBI had issued directions to Navi Finserv Limited, Bengaluru (and three other NBFCs) to cease and desist from sanction and disbursement of loans, effective from close of business of October 21, 2024.

The restrictions were based on material supervisory concerns observed in the pricing policy of these companies in terms of their Weighted Average Lending Rate (WALR) and the interest spread charged over their cost of funds, which are found to be excessive and not in adherence with the regulations.

Subsequently, RBI on Monday said it had several rounds of interaction with Navi Finserv for rectification of deficiencies.

'In discussions with potential local partner'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Skoda Auto Volkswagen India on Monday said it is in discussions with a potential partner regarding possible collaboration in India, refuting speculation that it has halted the process of finding a local collaborator after the investigation over alleged customs duty fraud.

The company, which is leading the German automotive group Volkswagen's India operations, asserted that finding a local partner in India and the show cause notice by authorities for alleged customs duty fraud to the tune of Rs 11,000 crore (about USD 1.4 billion) over import of cars as completely knocked down units, are completely separate and unrelated.

"To fully explore the country's growth potential, we are always considering new business opportunities and are evaluating various options to ensure the best possible solution to implement our strate-



gy in the highly dynamic Indian market. We are currently in discussions with a potential partner regarding possible collaboration," Skoda Auto Volkswagen India said in a statement.

The company was responding to a query on whether it has halted the process of finding a local partner in India after the alleged customs duty fraud investigation.

On the show cause notice, the company reiterated that

being a part of a global group, it "is a responsible organisation, fully complying with all global and local laws and regulations. We are analysing the notice and extending our full cooperation to the authorities".

Earlier this year, Skoda Auto Chairman of the Board of Management Klaus Zellmer stated that the company is looking to collaborate with an Indian partner in order to grow its presence in the country.

'Second half GDP number expected to be much better'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth on Monday said second quarter GDP growth at 5.4 per cent is lower than the potential but exuded confidence that the second half to be better.

Several high-frequency indicators in the month of October are pointing towards that, he told reporter here.

Seth also said that quarterly estimates have been revised upwards in the past when full GDP numbers are available.

"Numbers are lower than

what our potential is but not alarming...GDP growth will be much higher in the third and fourth quarter," he said.

The Economic Survey projected India's GDP to grow at 6.5-7 per cent in 2024-25, down from a high of 8.2 per cent in the preceding financial year.

India's economic growth slowed to near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of this fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors as well as weak consumption.

Sebi orders attachment of bank, demat accounts of Reliance Big Entertainment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Monday ordered the attachment of bank accounts as well as shares and mutual fund holdings of Reliance Big Entertainment to recover dues of Rs 26 crore.

Before this, the markets watchdog on November 14 sent a notice to Reliance Big Entertainment Pvt Ltd (now known as Rbep Entertainment Pvt Ltd) and asked the entity to pay dues within 15 days in

a case pertaining to illegal diversion of funds in the matter of Reliance Home Finance Ltd (RHFL).

The attachment notice came after Reliance Big Entertainment failed to pay the fine imposed on it by the markets watchdog.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has ordered the attachment of bank, demat accounts and mutual fund folios of the entity to recover the pending dues.

'Up to 75 pc of GST revenue comes from 18 pc slab'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

About 70-75 per cent of GST revenues collected in 2023-24 fiscal year came from the 18 per cent slab, while just 5-6 per cent came from the 12 per cent bracket, Parliament was informed on Monday.

Only 6-8 per cent of the FY24 goods and services tax (GST) revenues were from the 5 per cent slab, while the highest tax slab of 28 per cent contributed 13-15 per cent to the revenues in the last fiscal year.

Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary shared the details of the proportion of GST collected (excluding compensation cess and other payments) under various tax slabs in 2023-24 in the Lok Sabha.

The GST Council has constituted a six-member Group of Ministers (GoM), under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, to suggest rationalisation of GST rates as well as merger of slabs to increase GST revenues.

Currently, GST is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent.

Under GST, essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lowest slab, while luxury and demerit items attract the highest slab. Luxury and sin goods attract cess on top of the highest 28 per cent slab.

The average GST rate has fallen below the revenue neutral rate of 15.3 per cent, prompting the need to start discussions on GST rate rationalisation.

The committee headed by former chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian on possible tax rates under GST was of the view that the Revenue Neutral Rate (RNR) should be between 15 and 15.5 per cent.

Based on current data of GST returns as available with Goods and Service Tax Network, the average GST rate for 2023-24 was 11.64 per cent, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in reply to a separate question in the Lok Sabha.

IMPLICATIONS OF TRUMP STATEMENTS

Commerce ministry reviewing India-US trade relations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry is reviewing various aspects of India-US trade relations focusing on implications of statements made by US President-elect Donald Trump during his election campaign and after the results, an official said.

The official added that there are no irritants in the relations between the two countries that can lead to discriminatory tariffs against India.

Trump, during his election campaign, has called India an "abuser" of import tariffs, a claim that echoed his October

2020 statement labelling India the "Tariff King".

Trump on Saturday also warned BRICS countries against any move to replace the US dollar and has sought a commitment from the nine-member group that includes India, Russia, China, and Brazil.

In the wake of such statements, brainstorming is fundamental to discuss the trade relations as the US is the largest trading partner of India.

Trade experts have time and again stated that Trump's claim that India is an "abuser" of import tariffs is unfair as many



nations including America protect their domestic industries by imposing high customs duties on certain products.

According to WTO's World

Tariff Profiles 2023, the US also imposes high duties on items like dairy products (188 per cent), fruits and vegetables (132 per cent), coffee, tea,

cocoa and spices (53 per cent), cereals and food preparations (193 per cent), oilseeds, fats and oils (164 per cent), beverages and tobacco (150 per cent), fish and fish products (35 per cent), minerals and metals (187 per cent), and chemicals (56 per cent).

An expert said that if the US would seek a cut in customs duties for some of their products, India should also demand a similar reduction to get greater market access for domestic items.

The US was the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at USD

77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at USD 42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has recently stated that the US President is a "friend of India" and India-US friendship will only continue to blossom and grow further.

India's trade relations with the US will continue to grow irrespective of the change in regime in America and according to the commerce ministry data, India's exports to the US jumped to USD 39.2 billion in October against USD 21.46 billion in October 2015.





## VIKRANT MASSEY STEPS AWAY FROM SPOTLIGHT; ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Bollywood star Vikrant Massey declared his retirement from acting in the early hours of Monday. The actor from *The 12th Fail* expressed gratitude to his fans for their support and mentioned that he now wishes to "return home" as a husband, father, and son. Vikrant also revealed that the

two movies set for release in 2025 would be his final ones. Vikrant took to his Instagram to announce his decision to step back from showbiz. "The last few years and beyond have been phenomenal. I thank each and every one of you for your incredible support. But as I move forward, I realise it's time to recalibrate and go back

home. As a husband, father and a son. And also as an actor," he wrote. "So coming 2025, we would meet each other for one last time. Until time deems right. Last 2 movies and many a year of memories. Thank you again. For everything and everything in between. Forever indebted," he concluded. According

to reports, Vikrant's net worth ranges from Rs 20 crore to Rs 26 crore. The actor is said to demand between Rs 1 crore and Rs 2 crore for each project. The majority of his earnings are derived from movies and online series, as well as brand partnerships and social media accounts.

## 'WE COULDN'T HAVE MADE TANAAV 2 WITHOUT THE KASHMIR LOCALS'

*Tanaav 2* is poised to grip audiences with its intense, action-packed storyline, weaving together themes of courage, betrayal, ambition, love and retribution. As Kabir and the Special Task Group (STG) confront the deadly threat of Al-Damishq, a vengeful young man, the fate of Kashmir hangs in the balance. But beyond the high-octane drama, the show's heart also lies in the stunning backdrop of Kashmir, which has left a lasting impact on the cast, especially Manav Vij, who plays a key role in the series. Reflecting on his time filming in the region, Manav shared how the breathtaking beauty of Kashmir was a constant source of inspiration throughout the shoot. "Every day felt like a privilege," he said. "Pahalgam, in particular, remains my favoUrte spot—its beauty is unmatched and it has left a deep mark on my heart."



He further praised the warmth and hospitality of the locals, who played an integral part in making the filming experience memorable. "The locals were extremely helpful and welcoming. We couldn't have brought this ambitious project to life without their support. I salute their generosity and spirit," he added. Beyond the natural beauty and hospitality, Manav also embraced the local culture, particularly the delicious Kashmiri cuisine. "The flavoUrS of Kashmiri dishes, especially Rajma, and mutton, have become my absolute favourites. The aromas are unlike anything I've ever experienced." As a token of his time in Kashmir, he brought back exquisite carpets, remarking, "Kashmir is renowned for its stunning carpets and I'm happy to have a piece of it with me." Produced by Applause Entertainment and directed by Sudhir Mishra and E. Niwas, *Tanaav* is the official Indian remake of the Israeli series *Fauda*. The show features a stellar ensemble cast including Manav Vij, Gaurav Arora, Satyadeep Misra, Rajat Kapoor, Shashank Arora, Kabir Bedi, Sahiba Bali, Ekta Kaul, Soni Razdan and Sukhmani Sadana.

## Modern Family star Sarah Hyland caught in legal crossfire!

Sarah Hyland, widely recognised for her role as Haley Dunphy on the beloved sitcom *Modern Family*, has encountered difficulties due to her previous manager. According to a report from *In Touch*, Richard Konigsberg has filed a lawsuit against the actor for failing to pay his debts.

"(Richard) capably and faithfully guided (Sarah) in her career and private life for a decade-and-a-half, only to then be unceremoniously dismissed by (Sarah) in April 2024 — in an apparent attempt by (Sarah) to avoid fulfilling her obligation to pay (Richard) a 10% commission on very substantial monies (Sarah) is expected to shortly receive on a project sourced during her relationship with (Richard)," his lawsuit stated. He asserted that Sarah declined to pay him his outstanding commissions, except for one from a secured Broadway project. He mentioned that she won't even compensate him with a commission for the royalties she earns by appearing in *Modern Family* from 2009 to 2020.

Sarah's official response to her former manager's lawsuit stated, "(Richard's) claims are barred, in whole or in part, because the purported agreement was made for an illegal purpose, namely, for (Richard) to act illegally as unlicensed talent agents in violation of California Labor Code." "The damages suffered by (Richard), if any, were directly and proximately caused by the acts, omissions, carelessness, or negligence of (Richard). (Richard's) recovery, if any, should be diminished to the extent that his alleged damages are attributable to his own acts, omissions, carelessness, or negligence," her lawyer added, as per the report. Sarah had submitted a petition to the California Labor Commissioner, requesting the court to declare the agreement made with Richard in the past as invalid and to order him to return a portion of the commissions he received from her. The court has not yet made a decision on her motion.



## Elton John's world goes blind; singer announces loss of sight after infection

Music legend Elton John has revealed a sorrowful truth about his health, stating that he has gone blind as a result of a serious infection. The 77-year-old revealed the news during a recent public event at the charity gala for *The Devil Wears Prada: The Musical*, leaving fans and admirers shocked and worried. The startling declaration follows shortly after he disclosed that he is losing vision in his right eye.

During the Sunday night gala, Sir Elton John addressed the audience, revealing, "As some of you may know, I have had issues and now I have lost my sight. I haven't been able to see the performance, but I have enjoyed listening to it," as reported by the BBC. The eagerly awaited musical version of *The Devil Wears Prada*, which debuted at the Dominion Theatre, featured several A-list celebrities, including Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour, Lily Collins and Elizabeth Hurley. Sir Elton John acknowledged his husband, David Furnish, present at the event, for being a steadfast support and assisting him through the challenge. "To my husband, who's been my rock, because I haven't been able to come to many of the previews, as you know, I've lost my eyesight, so it's hard for me to see them, but I love to hear them," John continued. "And, boy, it sounded good tonight! OK! Thank you for coming!" In early September, the *Rocket Man* artist shared details about his eyesight, revealing that he experiences "limited vision in one eye" due to a "severe eye infection" he suffered during the summer. By November, he shared more about his condition, admitting, "It kind of floored me and I can't see anything. I can't read anything. I can't watch anything." Elton John explained that his "left eye's not the greatest," which has made it difficult for him to read lyrics or watch performances.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



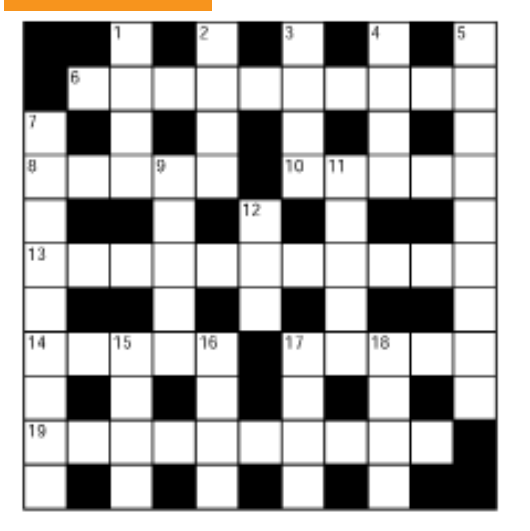
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU



**Yesterday's solution**  
 2 7 4 5 1 6 3 9 8  
 1 8 3 4 9 2 7 5 6  
 9 5 6 3 8 7 1 2 4  
 6 9 1 8 5 3 2 4 7  
 4 2 7 1 6 9 5 8 3  
 8 3 5 2 7 4 9 6 1  
 5 6 8 7 2 1 4 3 9  
 3 1 9 6 4 5 8 7 2  
 7 4 2 9 3 8 6 1 5

**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**  
 6 Transport for someone who cannot walk  
 8 With nothing in it  
 10 The outside ends of something  
 13 Vanished  
 14 Opposite of outer  
 17 The country with Tokyo  
 19 In all places

**DOWN**  
 1 A large boat  
 2 Extremely  
 3 A throbbing pain  
 4 The sound of an explosion  
 5 The leader of the USA  
 7 Large-lettered words above items in a newspaper

**SOLUTION**  
 SHUTTLE KINIL  
 A A P B I  
 I A S T O U T I E R  
 E I A L S E I  
 W E A L T H Y N  
 S R E L I S O T  
 T W O U N D E R  
 A M E D I C A L  
 P A Y D O R A  
 S A Y S A N C H O R

#### GINGER MEGGS





## Kicking down barriers and turning into gold



TEJAL SINHA  
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

In a country where sports are often synonymous with cricket and football, Rupa Bayor's extraordinary journey is redefining the landscape of Indian athletics. This 23-year-old Taekwondo sensation has single-handedly put India on the global martial arts map, becoming the nation's first athlete to shatter the glass ceiling of the top 10 World Poomsae rankings. Currently ranked No. 9 by World Taekwondo, her remarkable ascent is a testament to her unwavering passion, unwavering dedication and unrelenting pursuit of excellence. With every kick, punch and victory, she is boldly scripting a new chapter in Indian sports history, inspiring generations to come.

Bayor's introduction to martial arts began with karate, which she practiced with her uncle, a karate master. "I began karate with my uncle, who was a master in the sport. He saw my potential and recommended that I take up Taekwondo, as it is an Olympic sport," recalls Rupa. She started Taekwondo in 2015 but only began competing at a professional level in 2021.

Her journey was not without its challenges, as she had to balance her sports career with family responsibilities. "There were times I had to put my game aside and go help my mom. I used to somehow manage, taking leaves from my training to help with our family's *Khetti-baadi*. We had to work and also look into my professional life and manage my time," shares the Taekwondo champion. Despite these challenges, she proudly adds, "We didn't have an option but to face these challenges. Because of this, there were times I wasn't able to concentrate properly."

Her family has been supportive of her Taekwondo career, but financial constraints made it difficult for her to pursue her dreams. That's when the Welspun programme stepped in, providing her with the necessary financial support.

Expressing her gratitude, she says, "If this programme wouldn't have been there, I wouldn't have been able to play Taekwondo. This programme has been helping women so well... I'm thankful to Welspun Sports for helping me throughout. Giving the opportunity to my talent at the right time, I'm grateful to them." Welspun Super Sports Women is a programme focused on empowering female athletes from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The initiative helps them pursue their sporting dreams and aims to foster change-makers within their communities.

Since associating with Welspun in 2021, she has made significant progress in her Taekwondo career. She credits the programme for her success, stating, "It's that support that has helped me throughout... Training and all of it is all secondary. If you don't have financial support, then things don't get easy. I got immense support."

Her approach to Taekwondo is straightforward – hard work and practice are key to success. She believes, "I don't believe in any sort of strategies. I believe that the amount of strength and practice it all leads to the end result in the championship. Mentally, it's just not before the championship but the years of training. It is the strength that leads you to where you shall be." Going ahead, she also emphasises the importance of focusing on one's strengths and weaknesses, saying, "Every player has their own strength and weaknesses in their skills and I make sure that I do not let my opponent know my weaknesses."

Her achievements in Taekwondo have earned her recognition, including being the first Indian Taekwondo athlete to achieve a significant milestone. She humbly acknowledges the appreciation, saying, "I feel so grateful when such appreciations come in and I feel to do more big and better." Her

goal is to reach the top three in the world rankings and she credits her coach for her progress. "My journey is still going. I wish I could do what I've wished for. I credit all of it to my coach for reaching where I am today."

As she prepares for the upcoming World Championship, she is focused on her training. When asked about her advice to aspiring athletes, she shares, "Be it in sports or other fields, whatever you like, be it small or big, if you keep your thinking professional, then don't make any excuse. Problems will come but don't take that as an excuse... *Joh bhi karro acha karro* (Whatever you do, do it well)."

Rupa Bayor's remarkable journey is a shining testament to her unwavering dedication, unrelenting passion and unshakeable perseverance. As India's top-ranked Taekwondo athlete, she has not only made a name for herself in the sport but has also paved the way for future generations of Indian athletes.

With her sights set on the top three world rankings, Rupa continues to inspire and motivate others with her remarkable story. As she prepares to take on the world's best at the upcoming World Championship, one thing is certain – Rupa Bayor is a force to be reckoned with, and her legacy will continue to inspire and empower aspiring athletes for years to come.



In a sport dominated by giants, Rupa Bayor's name echoes as a light of hope and inspiration. India's first-ever Taekwondo athlete to break into the top 10 World Poomsae rankings, her remarkable journey is a testament to her unwavering dedication, unrelenting passion and unshakeable perseverance. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Rupa Bayor opens up about her fascinating story, from the early days of struggle to her current status as a world-ranked champion



## Nurturing life skills through early music education

Picture this: a room full of toddlers, eyes wide with wonder, tiny hands clapping along to a catchy tune. It's not just adorable – it's brain-building magic in action! Music education in early childhood isn't just about creating the next Mozart (though that would be cool). It's about giving kids a turbo boost in their overall development.

The plasticity of our brain is how magic happens. Humans literally have the ability to rewire their brains, which helps them learn difficult things, adapt to new environments and navigate tricky situations. This is exactly what happens when kids engage in music – and the numbers back up this brain-boosting party. Just 1-2 years of music training can boost auditory and language development by 20%! It's almost like their brains are throwing an epic concert, where different areas light up and start grooving together. The frontal lobe, hippocampus and auditory cortex are all invited to this neural shindig, leading to a remarkable 25% improvement in working memory and attention skills. The best part? This mental mosh pit helps build stronger connections in young brains, with even six months of early musical exposure correlating to 25% better auditory memory retention into adulthood.

Research shows that exposure to music allows young minds to soak up a range of notes, tones, and words they'll use later. Additionally, it strengthens the corpus callosum – the brain's information pathway – which can lead to better problem-solving skills and emotional resilience. And all this simply comes from bopping along to some tunes.

Despite all the benefits, some questions still pop up in every parent's mind: Does my kid really need to know how to play the sitar? Do I have to put them through rigorous piano classes? Well, no child must be a maestro at either playing an instrument or even training to be a singer. The benefits of simply being exposed to some kind of music education are more than enough to make a compelling argument for parents contemplating exposing their child to some kind of music education.

Music education is like a Swiss Army knife for child development, packing a punch in multiple areas. It fine-tunes language skills, helping kids process sounds and rhythms that boost vocabulary and even aid foreign language learning. On the emotional front, it's a mood-changing superpower, teaching kids to express feelings in healthy ways. Physically, it's a full-body workout, developing both fine and gross motor skills. Socially, it's a crash course in teamwork and cooperation. And cognitively? It's a mental gym, improving memory, concentration, and even math

skills. Who knew that singing all those nursery rhymes would be so beneficial?

Remember the 90s craze about playing Mozart to make babies smarter? Well, it turns out there might be something to it – but not in the way we thought. While blasting classical tunes won't automatically turn your child into a genius, there is evidence that engaging with music does have positive effects on brain development.

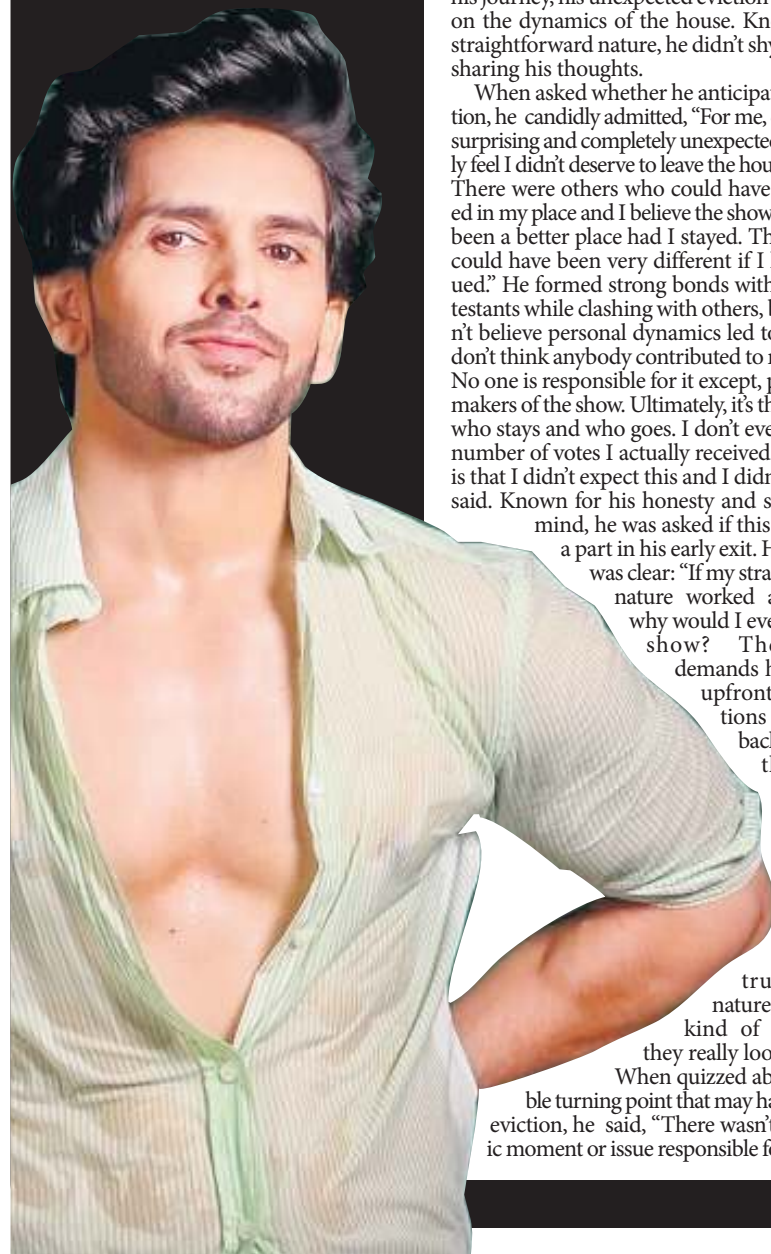
So, when should you start introducing your little one to music? Well, learning music has its own benefits for kids of different age groups. Even babies and toddlers can benefit from musical experiences. For the littles ones, ages 0-2, simple songs, lullabies and rhythmic games are perfect. It's all about bonding and introducing basic musical concepts. As they grow, kids aged 2-6 enter prime time for exploring different instruments, singing songs and incorporating music into daily routines. It's less about perfection and more about exploration and fun. For the older crowd, ages 7-11, if your child shows interest, this can be a great time to start more formal music lessons. But remember, keeping it enjoyable is key!

Incorporating music into early childhood education isn't just a nice-to-have – it's a must-have. Schools that prioritise music education give their students a significant advantage in multiple areas of development. According to it's not about creating a generation of rock stars (though that would be awesome), but about nurturing creative, confident and well-rounded individuals. Music education teaches discipline, boosts confidence and provides opportunities for teamwork and self-expression. At its core, early childhood music education is about much more than learning to carry a tune; it's about equipping kids with tools for success in all areas of life. From enhancing brain power to fostering emotional intelligence, the benefits of early music education are truly music to any parent's or educator's ears. All this is living proof that music education needs to become a part of children's education. Not only will it improve their cognitive functions but will also help them excel in different beats of life, helping them become emotionally resilient and well-rounded individuals. Whether it is through formal lessons or learning music as a hobby, it is the best gift parents can give their children. After all, life is better with a soundtrack, especially when you're equipped to create one yourself.

(The author, Ashish Joshi, is the founder and CEO of Artium Academy.)

## 'My individuality is non-negotiable; I take pride staying true to myself'

Shehzada Dhami's *Bigg Boss* journey came to an abrupt end, a few weeks back. Now, in an exclusive and explosive conversation, he lifts the lid on his eviction, the house dynamics and more



AARTI SREENATH  
 aarti.sreenath9@gmail.com

With his unapologetic attitude, fearless honesty and a heart that beats to its own drum, Shehzada Dhami captured the hearts of millions during his stint on *Bigg Boss*. As a true original, he dared to be himself, even in the face of adversity, inspiring a generation with his courage and conviction. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Shehzada Dhami, who was evicted from India's most controversial reality show, opened up about his journey, his unexpected eviction and his take on the dynamics of the house. Known for his straightforward nature, he didn't shy away from sharing his thoughts.

When asked whether he anticipated his eviction, he candidly admitted, "For me, eviction was surprising and completely unexpected. I genuinely feel I didn't deserve to leave the house this soon. There were others who could have been evicted in my place and I believe the show would have been a better place had I stayed. The dynamics could have been very different if I had continued." He formed strong bonds with some contestants while clashing with others, but he doesn't believe personal dynamics led to his exit. "I don't think anybody contributed to my eviction. No one is responsible for it except, perhaps, the makers of the show. Ultimately, it's their decision who stays and who goes. I don't even know the number of votes I actually received. All I know is that I didn't expect this and I didn't like it," he said. Known for his honesty and speaking his mind, he was asked if this trait played a part in his early exit. His response was clear: "If my straightforward nature worked against me, why would I even be on the show? The format demands honesty and upfront conversations instead of backstabbing. If the makers or the audience don't appreciate someone who speaks their heart and stays true to their nature, then what kind of person are they really looking for?"

When quizzed about a possible turning point that may have led to his eviction, he said, "There wasn't any specific moment or issue responsible for this. I was playing my game, expressing myself honestly and addressing issues head-on." Reflecting on his time in the house, he stood firm in his choices. "I have no regrets. I've always stood for what's right and called out what's wrong. That's who I am and I won't change myself – not for a show or for anything else. My individuality is non-negotiable and I take pride in staying true to myself," he stated emphatically.

Now that he's out of the house, who does he think has the strongest chance of winning? He refused to single anyone out: "I don't think there's a clear strongest contestant. The dynamics change every day, as do the relationships and the atmosphere. It's hard to say who will ultimately come out on top." While his journey on the show was cut short, his candid and unapologetic attitude is sure to leave a lasting impression on fans. For now, he's focused on what lies ahead and remains proud of the honesty and integrity he displayed during his time in the house.

Known for his unfiltered honesty and straightforward approach, sharing insights into his strategy during his time on the reality show, how he managed the pressures of the house and the lessons he's taking forward.

When asked about the pressure he faced, he revealed, "The only real pressure I experienced was the lack of sleep and food. It made me feel irritated at times, but that's where self-control came in. I think I managed to handle myself well under these circumstances. Whenever there was an issue in the house, I always expressed my point of view clearly. There was never a moment where I said something just out of stress or pressure. I'm proud that I didn't let those challenges get the better of me."

On how life has changed after the show, he shared a valuable takeaway: "I've learned to be more vocal. Staying silent might be a good idea sometimes, but not always. Silence can hold you back and I've realised the importance of speaking up when needed. That's something I'll carry forward in my life."

The conversation turned to the topic of alliances in the house, or as Shehzada described them, "gangs." He firmly stated, "I don't want to comment much on the gangs in the house. I've never been a part of any gang and I don't like the idea of fighting in groups. I've always fought my battles single-handedly and that's been my strategy from day one. I believe in standing on my own." As for his plans post-eviction, he has left fans intrigued: "You'll find out soon. Keep an eye out for my articles – they'll reveal what's coming next!" With his characteristic blend of confidence and mystery, Shehzada has set the stage for an exciting journey ahead. Whether it's his newfound vocal clarity or his independent spirit, he's ready to make his mark beyond the confines of the house.



# Bumrah will go down as one of the greatest pacers: Head

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Australia batter Travis Head feels Jasprit Bumrah will go down as "one of the greatest fast bowlers to play the game" and said he'll proudly tell his grandchildren about the formidable challenge of facing the Indian pace maestro. Bumrah reinforced his status as the best bowler in the world with a stunning performance in the opening Test in Perth which India won by 295 runs. "Jasprit will go down as probably one of the greatest fast bowlers to play the game. I think we're finding that at the moment -- how challenging he can be, and it's nice to play against that," Head told reporters on Monday. "It's gonna be nice to go back and look at your career and go tell the grandkids that you faced him. So not a bad series of playing with him. Hopefully I'll face a few more times, but he has been challenging," he added. Bumrah, who was captaining the visiting side, led from the front with a match-haul of 8/72,

including several pivotal wickets, showcasing his exceptional form. His stellar performance was a testament to his remarkable consistency this year. Earlier this year, he was named Player-of-the-Series in the T20 World Cup, where he played a key role in India's title-winning campaign. Head was the sole Australian batter to get a fifty in Perth as the top order comprising the likes of Steve Smith, Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne struggled but the explosive middle-order batter is certain his teammates won't be approaching him for tips. "They are not coming to me for batting tips, that's for sure. Everyone goes about it in different ways. We'll have a chat over the next three or four days. "(Bumrah) is so unique, and that's with any of the bowlers, really. Every (batter) picks up different cues and goes about it in a different way." The Australian squad reconvened on Monday after a short break. The two sides will now play a pink ball Test in Adelaide from Friday



at the same venue where India were all out for 36 in their previous visit in 2020. Recalling that match, Head said, "I

remember that it was a quick test, so it was good. We got to enjoy all of the bits of Adelaide afterwards. "It'll be nice to do that again.

Don't know if we can revisit. It wouldn't take very long to watch it. I don't think that will happen this week."

While India played a day-night pink-ball game against the Prime Ministers XI over the weekend, Australia last played a pink ball Test in January. "It's been a long time since we played one (pink ball), India got another look at it last night. Everyone's well experienced enough, especially that team as well, that in your international level. "I think you can accustomed to things pretty quickly. I don't think it'll take them long to be prepared for it, and same as us." No divide in the team Head asserted that there is no "divide" between Australia's struggling batting and the bowling unit. A possible rift within the team was suggested following a comment from Josh Hazlewood during the first Test. "We hold high expectations for both sides (batting and bowling) and it's a very individualised sport," Head said. "So batters, we want to hold our own - we know how good our bowlers have been for us in the past and they've got us out of

trouble a lot. As a batting group, we know that if we get enough runs on the board, we put ourselves in a great position. "As a batter myself, I try to take a whole lot of pride in what I do, and knowing that if I can set it up for the big boys, that they can knock it down for us, so definitely no divide," Head said. Australia have dealt with adversity well Head backed the Australians to bounce back from their horror show in Perth. "This team has dealt with adversity well. The small amount that we have had in the last three or four years, we have played well. "We've had some challenging times and a couple of challenging Tests last year. We didn't have a very good week. That's fine. But we have got four more opportunities to do it, we will crack on as we do, as we have done for the last few years. "Over the last couple of years, there's a lot of teams that lost the first Test or gone down in the series and brought it back and played really well."



## We have found the right mix: Hardik Pandya

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has expressed his delight at the way things panned out for them in the IPL mega auction in Jeddah and said the franchise has "found the right mix" of players. The star all-rounder said they had a clear plan of having a blend of youth and experienced players. "I was in touch with the table as well, exactly who we are going for, and I think we came out pretty well from the auction and how the team is looking," he said in an MI video posted on social media. "We have found the right mix, which is experienced players, like Boult (Trent Boult) is back, Deepak Chahar, who has been around, and at the same time, young guns like Will Jacks, Robin Minz and Ricketon, who are fresh. "So, I think we have done pretty well. We have covered all the bases." Explaining the auction dynamics, Pandya admitted that while the entire process is thrilling, it is important to keep the emotions in check, especially while going for a particular player the team desperately needs. "The auction dynamics are always tricky. When you are watching it live, it is very exciting, and the emotions are

always up and down because you want this player," he explained. "But sometimes, you just lose. (So), it's very important to not be very so emotional, and in the end, we have to create a whole team." "Mumbai Indians has the facility to make them flourish" MI bought quite a few uncapped young players -- Naman Dhir, Robin Minz, Vignesh Puthur, Arjun Tendulkar, Bevan John Jacobs, Venkata Satyanarayana Penmetsa, Raj Angad Bawa, Shrijith Krishnan and Ashwani Kumar. Referring to these youngsters, Pandya urged them to work hard and said that MI possesses the best facilities to help them develop into top cricketers. "My message to all the young guys who are joining Mumbai Indians this year is that if you are here, you have that spark, you have that talent, which the scouts have seen," he stated. "They found me, they found Jasprit, they found Krunal, they found Tilak. They all eventually played for the country. "All you have to do is show up, train, work hard, and the best part is that Mumbai Indians has the facility to make them flourish."

## Australia quashes rumours of divide in their camp ahead of pink ball Test

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

Australian big-hitter Travis Head on Monday asserted there is no "divide" between his team's struggling batters and its potent bowling attack as they geared up to bounce back in the pink-ball Test against India, starting here on December 6. Australia suffered an embarrassing 295-run loss as their batters struggled to cope with the bouncy Perth pitch, managing just 104 & 238 in their two innings. On day three of the Test, pacer Josh Hazlewood, who picked four wickets in first essay, made a comment that seemed to suggest frustration with the team's batters. Triggering speculation of tensions in the dressing room. Head said there was no reason to doubt the dressing room dynamics. "It can be put to bed. We hold high expectations for both sides (batting and bowling) and it's a very individualised sport," Head said. "So batters, we want to hold our own - we know how good our bowlers have been for us in the



past and they've got us out of trouble a lot. As a batting group, we know that if we get enough runs on the board, we put ourselves in a great position. "As a batter myself, I try to take a whole lot of pride in what I do, and knowing that if I can set it up for the big boys, that they can knock it down for us, so definitely no divide," he explained. Hazlewood was questioned about Australia's approach to day four, given they were 12/3 in pursuit of 534. "You probably have to ask one of the batters that question

probably, I am sort of relaxing and trying to get a bit of treatment, and I am looking mostly to next Test, Hazlewood had said. The Australian top-order comprising the likes of Usman Khawaja, Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne crumbled at Perth. Labuschagne, in particular, has been woefully out of form and several former players have called for his exclusion from the side but Head backed him to get some big runs. "Knowing Marnus, he would have worked on a few things over the last few days and it

would have been hard to probably keep him out of the nets," he said. "No doubt over the next few days we'll see him working hard again. He's a guy that has played well over a long period of time. He would like some more runs -- so would everyone." Trailing the five match series 0-1, Australia have their backs against the wall as the race for the World Test Championship final has also intensified. However, Head backed his team to bounce back from the horror show in Perth. "This team has dealt with adversity well. The small amount that we have had in the last three or four years, we have played well," he said. "We didn't have a very good week. That's fine. But we have got four more opportunities to do it, we will crack on as we do, as we have done for the last few years. "Over the last couple of years, there's a lot of teams that lost the first Test or gone down in the series and brought it back and played really well," he added.

## Rohit will either open or bat at No. 3, reckons Harbhajan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Captain Rohit Sharma will either open or bat at number three in the Adelaide Test against Australia, reckoned former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh on Monday while ruling out the possibility of a senior star coming in at number five or six. KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal added a record 201 runs for the opening stand during the second innings of the Perth Test, which the visitors won by 295 runs with plenty of time left in the match. "I don't see Rohit coming in at number five or six. Either Rohit will open with Yashasvi Jaiswal, with KL Rahul coming in at number three, or he will bat no later than number three," Harbhajan told PTI on the sidelines of the inauguration of the World Tennis League here. "Number six for Rohit wouldn't be in best interest of the team. Your top four in batting order should be the four pillars and someone like Rohit at the top would only



add greater fillip." The second Test, a day/night affair to be played with the pink ball, will begin at Adelaide Oval on Friday. Harbhajan described the move to play Washington Sundar over R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja in the series opener as a massive step. "Washington had showed during the New Zealand series that he is ready to take over the mantle from Ashwin in coming days," the "Turbanator" said. When asked if Ashwin's age is a factor, he said :I don't think 38 is old. He is not a 58-year-old. But yes, after so many years, the shoulders do experience fatigue and wear and tear, so the zip can just be a bit less."

## India beat Japan by 211 runs in Under-19 Asia Cup

PTI ■ SHARJAH

Mohamed Amaan led from the front with an unbeaten century, while KP Karthikeya and opener Ayush Mhatre made fifties to hand India a comfortable 211-run victory over minnows Japan in the Under-19 Asia Cup here on Monday. Amaan slammed an unbeaten 122 off just 118 balls, a knock studded with only seven boundaries, after India were invited to bat. Besides Amaan, Karthikeya made 57 off 49 balls with the help of five fours and one six, while Mhatre's fiery 29-ball 54-run knock featured six boundaries and four hits over the fence. C Andre Siddarth (38), Hardik Raj (25 not out), and Vaibhav Suryavanshi (23) also played useful knocks to help India post a mammoth 339 for 6 in their 50 overs. Hugo Kelly (2/42) and Kiefer Yamamoto-Lake (2/84) took two wickets each for Japan. It was an easy outing for the Indians, as they restricted Japan to 128 for 8, securing their first win in Group A. However, the Indians will be a little disappointed, as they failed to bowl out Japan.



After picking up two wickets earlier in the day, Kelly returned as Japan's top-scorer with a gritty 50 off 111 balls. Charles Hinze remained unbeaten on 35. For India, Karthikeya (2/21), Hardik Raj (2/9), and Chetan Sharma (2/14) shared six wickets between them. India had lost to arch-rivals Pakistan by 43 runs in their tournament opener. India will play United Arab Emirates in their final group game on Wednesday. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semifinals, scheduled for December 6, with the final slated for December 8.

## Hosts India open against Hong Kong in 20th Asian Women's Handball Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hosts India will look to make a strong start when they face Hong Kong in their opening match of the 20th Asian Women's Handball Championship, which kicks off here on Tuesday. India is hosting the tournament for the first time, and the 25-member squad, captained by Diksha Kumari, faces a tough challenge against some of Asia's top teams. India is placed in Group B alongside powerhouses Japan, Iran, and Hong Kong. In addition to their opener against Hong Kong, India will take on Iran on December 4 and Japan on December 6 at the Indira Gandhi Arena here. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals, with the top four securing spots in the 2025



World Women's Handball Championship. As part of their preparation, the team underwent a rigorous training camp at the NCO SAI Centre in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, under head coach Sachin Chaudhary. "Our focus in the training camp was on addressing the gaps from our previous outings and building a cohesive, unified team. We worked hard to strengthen our

collective game," said Sachin, who also led India in the 2022 AWHC, in a release. The team features standout players like Menika, who was named in the Team of the Tournament at the 7th Asian Women's Club League Championship, Bhawana Sharma and Priyanka Thakur from India's historic 2022 Asian Women's Junior Championship gold-winning team.

## Women's Asian Champions Trophy win was important for India for LA 28 buildup, says Rani Rampal

PTI ■ ROHTAK

Former captain Rani Rampal believes the Asian Champions Trophy title was an important feat for the Indian women's hockey team as it kick started its preparation for the Los Angeles Olympics on a rousing note. The Indian women's hockey team produced a dominant show to win its third Asian Champions Trophy title after struggling to win matches the entire year, which culminated in its failure to qualify for the Paris Games. "The Asian Champions trophy win was very important for our women's hockey team in terms of build up. It started the buildup for 2028 LA Olympics. It's a good start. Under coach Harendra Singh

the team will do well," Rani told PTI. The-29-year-old signed off her career as one of India's most decorated hockey players after leading the women's team to its best-ever finish at the Olympics -- a fourth show at the Tokyo Games in 2021. She was roped in as the national coach for sub-junior women's team before she officially announced her retirement last month. "My experience was great, learnt a lot while working with the sub juniors. They were young girls who were coming from similar background as me, it was easy to understand their issues and to guide them," Rani said. "I told them 'if I can do it (be successful) then all of you can also do it.' They need



guidance and I tried to give that to them by sharing my experience with them," she

said of her experience as a mentor for the Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming Hockey India

League, which will also have a women's tournament for the first time.

As a mentor for the Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming Hockey India

the future, she said "One task at one time, I want to focus on the role I have for the next two months." Hockey was among sports like badminton, wrestling and cricket that were axed from the official programme for the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow, Scotland, a decision that has left Rani disappointed. "It is quite said hockey has been removed from the CWG because when hockey wins a medal it's not one but 18 medals. Imagine 18 players come from different places, villages. Even if they come from 8 different states they inspire so many children from those states. "This tournament is good and the CGF (Commonwealth Games Federation) should think about the decision," she said.

As a mentor for the Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming Hockey India



## SRINU VAITLA COMPLETES 25 YEARS AS DIRECTOR



Popular Telugu film director Srinu Vaitla has completed 25 years in the industry. He made his debut with *Nee Kosam*, starring Ravi Teja and Maheswari as the lead pair. The film was released on December 3, 1999. "I was disappointed when my first film was halted. At that time, Ravi Teja, who is a close friend of mine, had immense confidence in my talent," recalls Srinu Vaitla about his debut project. Determined to make his mark, he wrote a story that suited a budget-friendly film, with Ravi Teja playing the lead. "New producers took up the project, but the film faced several hurdles. Thanks to Ravi Teja's support, I was able to complete it," he said. Media baron and producer Ramoji Rao saw the film, liked it and purchased it outright. "He actually stepped in like a real producer, settled some dues related to the film and ensured its release," said Srinu. Actor Nagarjuna also watched the film and later offered him a directorial project. *Nee Kosam* went on to win seven Nandi Awards, including Best Debut Director, Best Actress and Best Screenplay Writer. At the time, Ravi Teja had been playing small roles and was introduced as a lead actor in Krishna Vamsi's *Sindhooram*. "He is a talented actor and that's why I chose him as the lead for my debut film," said Srinu. The duo

worked hard on *Nee Kosam* and it performed reasonably well at the box office. Ramoji Rao's contribution to its release led to Srinu's second project, *Anandam*, which he directed under Rao's banner. "Ramoji Rao appreciated my debut work and offered me another opportunity," said the director.

Reflecting on his journey, Srinu expressed happiness at completing 25 years as a filmmaker. "From my childhood, I wanted to be a director. After graduating, I moved to Chennai to pursue my dream," he recalled. "My passion for cinema and direction has driven me all these years. I never imagined I would complete 25 years in this industry. My career is filled with magical and memorable moments," he added.

When asked to name his top films, Srinu listed *Anandam*, *Venky*, *Ready*, *Dookudu* and *Dhee*. Addressing the speculation about directing a Tamil remake of *Dookudu* with Ajith, he clarified, "I was working on *Badshah* back then, which turned out to be a huge blockbuster. As a result, I couldn't take up the remake. However, I don't regret it."

Srinu also emphasised staying updated with the latest technology and trends in cinema. "Technology evolves rapidly, and I make an effort to keep up with it. Filmmaking is much easier now compared to earlier times," he remarked. Talking about his upcoming project, he shared, "I have completed 70% of the story and will announce the project details soon."

With a career spanning two and a half decades, Srinu Vaitla continues to evolve, cementing his legacy as one of Telugu cinema's leading directors.



### Ariaana, Viviana Manchu shine in *Kannappa's* new poster

Vishnu Manchu has been consistently sharing updates from his prestigious film *Kannappa*, slated for release on April 25, 2025. Directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh, the film boasts an ensemble cast of seasoned actors. As part of the promotional strategy, the makers have been unveiling first-look posters and updates every Monday.

Now, on this Monday, coinciding with their birthday, the first look of Ariaana and Viviana Manchu was revealed. The twin girls are seen in tribal attire, enacting Lord Shiva's iconic pose. They will appear in a song that delves into the story and significance of Sri Kalahasti and its legend.

Expressing his pride and joy, Vishnu Manchu shared, "I can't wait for everyone to witness the magic my little mummies create on screen," he added. Vishnu Manchu's father and versatile actor Mohan Babu is also playing a significant role in it. Alongside him, Sarath Kumar, Arpit Kumar, Prabhas, Akshay Kumar, Mohanlal and Kajal Agarwal will be seen playing important roles.

### Chandrika Ravi embodies the sizzling spirit of Silk Smitha

Silk Smitha, a legendary actress known for her iconic special songs across South Indian cinema, remains an enduring figure in Indian film history. Having starred in numerous Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam films, her untimely death in 1996 under mysterious circumstances left an indelible mark on the industry.

On Monday, on the occasion of Silk Smitha's birthday, STRI Cinemas has announced an official biopic titled *Silk Smitha - Queen of the South*. The film will star Chandrika Ravi in the titular role and will be directed by Jayaram Sankaran. Produced by SB Vijay Amirtharaj, the project aims to celebrate Silk Smitha's life and legacy.

To mark this special announcement, the makers unveiled an exclusive video offering audiences a glimpse into the essence of Silk Smitha. Production is set to begin in early 2025 and the film promises to delve deep into the captivating life of the beloved actress.

Fans and cinephiles are eagerly awaiting this tribute to an icon who left an unforgettable legacy in Indian cinema.



### Nagababu's tweet targets Allu Arjun?

Allu Arjun's much-anticipated film *Pushpa 2* is set to hit the screens on December 5, with many premiere shows scheduled for December 4 at increased ticket prices. However, a notable absence has caught fans' attention — members of the Mega family have not posted anything on social media about the film.

Adding fuel to speculation, Nagababu, Chiranjeevi's brother, shared a quote by Swami Vivekananda that seemed to take a dig at Allu Arjun. The quote read: "If you realise you have taken the wrong path, correct your course immediately. The longer you wait, the harder it becomes to return to where you truly belong" (sic).

The context behind this strained dynamic dates back to the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections when Allu Arjun visited his friend and YSRCP candidate Shilpa Ravi Chandra Reddy's house in Nandyal. Reportedly, this visit

occurred despite Chiranjeevi advising him against it. At the same time, Ram Charan was in Pithapuram to support his uncle Pawan Kalyan's Assembly constituency campaign. Since then, reports suggest a growing distance between Allu Arjun and the rest of Chiranjeevi's family.

This rift became a hot topic not only within the film industry but also among fans.

Adding to the tension, Allu Arjun defended his visit to Nandyal during a public event, emphasising that he would always stand by his friends, even as chief guest at another movie's event. His steadfast stance reportedly further irked Chiranjeevi and his family. As the release of *Pushpa 2* approaches, fans are left wondering if this family discord will overshadow the celebrations.

### SANCHARI SANCHARI SONG FROM SARANGAPANI IS OUT

Director Mohanakrishna Indraganti is coming up with *Sarangapani Jathakam*, starring Priyadarshi and Roopa Koduvayur. The film is an entertainer and the teaser released a few days back hints at loads of comedy. Sivalenka Krishna Prasad is producing the film, which hits the screens on December 20.

Before the film's release, the second song, *Sanchari Sanchari*, has been released. Sanjith Hegde has sung the song, written by Ramajogayya Sastry, with music composed by Vivek Sagar.

Talking about the song, director Indraganti said, "Whether you write an entertainment or a full-length comedy story, emotion is essential for any story. My film *Sarangapani Jathakam* is a complete comedy, but it also has many emotional scenes."

He added that the main theme of his movie is love. "It's the story of a man torn between the woman he loves dearly and his beliefs," said Indraganti. The song *Sanchari* comes at a point where he loses the woman he loves dearly due to his beliefs.

"It will appear in the second half and change the course of the story," he added. There are only four songs in this film and its *Sanchari* that directs the narrative of the story.



### YADHA YADHA SAVVADI FROM KANYAKUMARI IS A MELODIOUS DELIGHT

The lyrical song *Yadha Yadha Savvadi* from the upcoming movie *Kanyakumari*, starring Geeth Saini and Sree charan Rachakonda, has been released. Directed and produced by Srujan Attada under the banner of Radical Pictures, *Kanyakumari* is set against a

village backdrop and is gearing up for a grand theatrical release.

The film has completed all preparations, and this song release marks an exciting milestone for the project. The lyrics for *Yada Yada Savvadi*. were penned by Srujan Attada, with Anurag Kulkarni and Jayasri Pallem lending their beautiful voices to the track. The music, com-

posed by Ravi Nidamarthi, beautifully complements the song's vibe.

The teaser for *Kanyakumari*, which was released by actor Vijay Deverakonda, has already garnered a positive response. Additionally, the song *Kathilanti Pillave*, has also been well-received. The team will soon announce the official release date for the film.



### Filmfare honour for SDT's Satya

Actor Sai Durgha Tej and Swathi Reddy starred in a short film titled *Satya*. The film received appreciation from all corners and the makers submitted it to the Filmfare Short Film Awards. Now, the film has won the award in the People's Choice category at the Filmfare Short Film Awards 2024. The team shared the joyous moment of winning this award on social media. Sai Durgha Tej thanked the Filmfare jury and the audience who voted for the film. The team took a picture together with the black lady. The entire team expressed their gratitude for this special accolade.

Swathi Reddy portrayed the leading actress in the short film. Harshith and Hanshita are the producers. Naveen Vijay Krishna, a childhood friend of Sai Durgha Tej, directed the film. The film's story is based on the sacrifices and challenges faced by soldiers.

