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Removing roadblocks in path of youth by introducing reforms:

Modi



'RBI WILL REMAIN ALERT AND AGILE TO MEET CHALLENGES'



The 'Manchu' drama

CONTINUES...



QUOTE OF THE DAY

Revanth's behaviour is like a cat embarking on a pilgrimage after eating 100 rats. Not once did Revanth say 'Jai Telangana' or place a flower at the Martyrs' Memorial. He was never a part of the TG Movement. While we were in jails facing 350 cases, where was Revanth? Not a single case was filed against him during the TG movement. Revanth's history is one of betrayal, not transformation. His opportunism and ignorance have no place in the true story of Telangana's struggle

- Harish Rao, BRS MLA, Telangana

P4

DON'T MISS...

Man gets lifer for killing woman

A man was sentenced to life imprisonment for killing a woman. Ongole PDJ court judge A Bharati sentenced the accused in a murder case to life imprisonment and also imposed a fine of Rs 5000. The accused Naguluri Yacob belongs to Gadipartivariapalem in Chimakurthi mandal. He developed intimacy with M Lakshmi (30) and continued the relationship with her for one year. Later, he started quarrelling with her. On February 22, 2020, he hit her on the head with a stick. She suffered a bleeding injury on head and died later. The police registered...

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RS Chairman 'biggest disruptor'

The Congress and several Opposition parties on Wednesday accused Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhanekar of being the "biggest disruptor" in the House and alleged he was acting as a government spokesperson for his "next promotion", as they defended their move to seek the removal of the Vice President. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge launched a no-holds barred attack against the Vice President, who is the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, saying his "partisan" conduct in the...

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'Agri has tremendous opportunity to grow'

There is a 'serious concern' over food and nutrition security across the world, and it is among the factors that are making food inflation 'sticky', ITC Chairman & Managing Director Sanjiv Puri said on Wednesday. The agriculture sector has a "tremendous opportunity" to grow vertically but there is a need to build resilience with sustainable farming and use technology to provide such solutions. The sector has to increase productivity and quality, and at the same time it also has to deal with the newer...

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India loses to Australia

Opener Smriti Mandhana's elegant century went in vain as India lost to Australia by 83 runs in the third Women's ODI to suffer a 0-3 series whitewash here on Wednesday. Opting to field after winning the toss, India had Australia on the ropes at 78 for four before middle-order batter Annabel Sutherland's scintillating 95-ball 110, and brisk half centuries from Ashleigh Gardner (50) and skipper Tahlia McGrath (56 not out), lifted the hosts to a competitive 298 for six in the allotted 50 overs at WACA...

-SPORTS

'People first': CM's vision for AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu stressed the 'People First' policy as the cornerstone of governance in Andhra Pradesh, during a meeting with district collectors and departmental heads at the State Secretariat on Wednesday. He urged officials to act as public servants, addressing people's issues with empathy and ensuring that the administration prioritises the welfare and happiness of the citizens.

The Chief Minister directed district collectors to engage actively with public opinion to understand and resolve issues promptly. He highlighted the government's progress since the previous meeting six months ago, stating that while the State faced significant challenges, efforts to stabilise the administration and economy have shown promising results.

Chandrababu pointed out the severe debt burden of over ₹10 lakh crore inherited from the previous government and their misuse of funds earmarked for the next two years. Despite this, the State is now on a path of recovery, with a focus on welfare and development initiatives.

Addressing key concerns, Chandrababu stressed eradicating illegal activities, including land grabbing, liquor smuggling, sand mining, and red sanders smuggling. He tasked the district collectors with combating these issues and safeguarding the State's reputation.

Asks officials to ensure that administration prioritises welfare and happiness of citizens



- The severe debt burden of over ₹10 lakh crore inherited from the previous government and their misuse of funds earmarked for the next two years.
- The key achievements and plans for creation of over ₹4 lakh crore in investments have been secured, expected to create four lakh jobs. For the development of Amaravati, ₹31,000 crore has been mobilised with Polavaram expected to be completed by 2027.
- Addressing key concerns, Chandrababu stressed eradicating illegal activities, including land grabbing, liquor smuggling, sand mining, and red sanders smuggling.
- Pensions are being distributed to 64 lakh beneficiaries, and 40 lakh gas connections have been provided under the Deepam-2 scheme.

He also outlined priorities such as poverty eradication, job creation, water conservation, and enhancing farmers' income.

The Chief Minister announced a significant milestone - the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Google to establish a unit in Visakhapatnam. He credited

the achievement to the recent visit of Minister Nara Lokesh to the United States. Chandrababu expressed confidence that this development, along with advancements in artificial intelligence and data centres, will transform Visakhapatnam into a global hub and a game-changer for the State.

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Collectors' role crucial

Pawan on the implementation of govt policies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan addressed the collectors of 26 districts and heads of 40 departments here on Wednesday, for the second time within six months of the formation of the coalition government. He congratulated Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for bringing Google to Visakhapatnam, the financial capital of the State.

"Everything the previous government did during the past five years has shaken the foundation of democracy. But we have to protect democracy. We, as political parties, set aside our differences and joined hands, and people respected our alliance, the rest is history," he said. The Deputy CM said that the people had huge expectations from the government. "We can make good policies, but only collectors can take them to the people," he observed.

Pawan Kalyan recalled that the past government hurt the bureaucracy by using revenue staff to sell movie tickets.

"There were so many fiscal irregularities. As outsiders, we used to wonder. Eventually, unrest comes onto streets like in Sri Lanka or Syria when people are disappointed," the DCM pointed out. By reiterating that the cost of being unable to say 'no' will be vast, he said that the State is facing a huge fiscal crisis. "I remember how our CM saw an opportunity in Hyderabad where the Hitech city stands now. We saw only boulders there," he said.

He sought cooperation from the collectors. "We need your support; it is your fundamental responsibility. For instance, the Kakinada illegal rice export issue. The collectors and the SP will be responsible. The 'Let Go' attitude resulted in an attack on Mumbai," the Deputy CM said.

He warned stern action against the officials who are unable to control illegal sand distribution. He alleged that the State under the stewardship of Chandrababu Naidu earned its name of efficient bureaucracy which was destroyed during the past five years.



People lost faith in coalition govt: Jagan

CM engaging in diversion politics to cover up coalition's failures

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP president and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has reiterated that people are vexed with the coalition government in just six months as it has failed on all fronts. "It is time we speak up against the false propaganda and diversion politics," he stated.

Addressing local bodies' leaders from Prakasam district here on Wednesday, Jagan accused Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu of engaging in diversion politics to cover up the coalition's failures. "We have taken up the agitation path to highlight the anti-peo-

ple policies," he added. "The coalition has failed to implement election promises and make budgetary allocations. In our term, we gave an annual welfare calendar with dates and strictly followed it in the DBT format to avoid corruption and middlemen.

The coalition, on the other hand, has done away with all the welfare schemes we implemented, with farmers not getting MSP and paddy procurement not being taken up. Fees reimbursement was not given affecting the students and power charges are increased burdening the people," Jagan said.

Continued on Page 2

HC grants relief to actor Mohan Babu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court has granted relief to veteran actor Mohan Babu in connection with a notice served on him by the Rachakonda Police in a breaching of peace case regarding an incident that occurred on Tuesday.

Hearing a lunch motion petition filed by the actor, the court deferred the notice and stated that Mohan Babu need not appear before the police until December 24.

Acknowledging the matter as a family dispute, the court directed the police to ensure peace in the area. It ordered Blue Colt personnel to regularly monitor the situation at Mohan Babu's residence.

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GOOGLE PARTNERS WITH AP

Visakhapatnam poised to be a tech hub

Collaboration will empower the State: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a landmark development, the Andhra Pradesh government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with tech giant Google to launch its operations from Visakhapatnam.

The announcement was made by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu during the district collectors' conference on Wednesday. Applauding the efforts of HRD Minister Nara Lokesh in facilitating the agreement, the Chief Minister described the MoU as a game changer for the State.



"Visakhapatnam is poised for transformative growth," the CM remarked, highlighting the potential of this collaboration to reshape the region's industrial and technological landscape. Taking to X (formerly Twitter),

Chandrababu elaborated on the government's progressive industrial policies that have fostered a business-friendly ecosystem attracting investments and creating employment opportunities.

Continued on Page 2

Sorry for attack on journo: Manchu Vishnu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Actor Manchu Mohan Babu has been admitted to a private hospital with severe body pains and high blood pressure.

The Continental Hospitals explained that Mohan Babu will undergo diagnostic tests including a CT scan. However, his two sons have addressed the media and apologised for attacking a vernacular journalist on Tuesday.

Manchu Vishnu said, "Don't blow the situation out of proportion. We feel sorry for the attack on the jour-

- Manchu brothers apologise
- Vishnu submits one lakh bond to maintain peace



nalist. Irrespective of anybody I strongly condemn it but if my father

invited the media and raised a hand then I would hang my head in shame.

However, the situation was not that and the house is my father's, if anybody has to get permission it is from him and not anybody else."

On the families issues, we would like to give time to the outsiders who are creating the ruckus to apologise and as my father said we are upright in providing education, he added.

Later, Manchu Vishnu who has visited Rachakonda Police and submitted a one lakh bond to maintain peace, addressed the media, "I sincerely apologise and it is my mistake to bring media along with me but I was helpless as my daughter was inside my father's house."

All the allegations against me in the viral audio by my father are competent and false my wife is being dragged unnecessarily. She has no parents and I am her parent, husband and everything. In such scenarios how can a woman be blamed, he added.

AP to offer 153 services via Whatsapp: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a groundbreaking move towards digital governance, Minister for Education, IT, Electronics and RTGS, Nara Lokesh announced plans to deliver 153 citizen services through WhatsApp. Speaking at a conference for district collectors,

Lokesh stressed the government's efforts to streamline information dissemination and improve service delivery via digital platforms. Lokesh presented the initiative at the Collectors' Conference, highlighting that the government is working on addressing challenges, including

those faced during the issuance of the Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAR) ID in the Education Department. He noted that while digitisation of procedures is underway, the aim is to completely re-engineer processes for greater efficiency.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, speaking at the conference, encouraged officials to be user-friendly as the State introduces WhatsApp as a platform for service delivery. "We are bringing a system of providing services through WhatsApp for the first time in the country."

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ESI Hospital construction crawls along

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

400-bed hospital project was initiated in 2016 under TDP government

The construction of the ESI hospital, designed to provide modern healthcare services to thousands of workers, continues to drag on at a snail's pace. Despite the project's launch eight years ago, completion still seems distant, with officials estimating that it could take at least two more years before the facility is ready. "We've been waiting for far too long. Although construction has restarted, the pace remains alarmingly slow," said a member of a local workers' union. The project was first initiated in 2016 under the TDP government, with plans to build a 400-bed hospital in Sheelanagar at an estimated cost of Rs. 400 crore.

The then Gajuwaka MLA, Palla Srinivasa Rao, played a pivotal role in securing land for the project. "The foundation stone for the hospital was

laid with great enthusiasm on April 11, 2016, in the presence of key figures from both the Central and State governments," he recalled. However,

since the YSRCP government took charge, progress on the hospital has stalled once again. Despite all required site permissions being in

place, there has been little political will to push the project forward. After years of protests by Opposition parties, trade unions, and civil



Site for the ESI hospital at Sheelanagar

Once completed, the hospital is expected to offer crucial services, including an Outpatient Department (OPD), Casualty, Women's Department, Surgery Rooms, Blood Bank, Radiology, and E.C.G. facilities. "The workers have been waiting for this hospital for a long time. We hope it will be functional soon so they no longer have to travel long distances for basic medical care," said another local leader.

groups, construction resumed in April of the previous year. However, with a year and a half already passed, progress remains limited.

"Only basic groundwork has been completed, with the construction of walls, pillars, and beams far from finished," a senior official admitted. "We are hopeful that the work will speed up, but it may still take another two years to complete." Once completed, the hospital is expected to offer crucial services, including an Outpatient Department (OPD), Casualty, Women's Department, Surgery Rooms, Blood Bank, Radiology, and E.C.G. facilities. "The workers have been waiting for this hospital for a long time. We hope it will be functional soon so they no longer have to travel long distances for basic medical care," said another local leader.

Ensure all necessary facilities for public: VMC Commissioner

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has instructed officials to ensure that all necessary facilities are provided to the public in order to maintain a 'clean and green Vijayawada'. During an inspection tour on Wednesday, the Commissioner visited various areas in the city, including Mallikharjunapeta, Upparavagu Centre, and other locations in the 52nd division of the VMC.



The visit focused on assessing the current conditions and addressing issues to improve sanitation, greenery, and infrastructure in these areas. Dhyanchandra emphasised the importance of consistent efforts to enhance the city's livability and appeal.

During the tour, he highlighted the necessity of providing residents with a reliable drinking water supply through pipelines, emphasising that there should be no lapses in

this service. He also instructed officials to repair any leaks in the pipelines and take measures to prevent water contamination.

Later, the Commissioner inspected the drains and provided appropriate instructions to VMC staff, urging them to regularly clear the drains of waste and garbage. He encour-

aged sanitation staff to raise public awareness about the importance of not dumping waste into canals and drains.

Meanwhile, local citizens requested the VMC Commissioner to provide parking facilities for their vehicles. They also asked for gratings on canals where necessary and the construction of a com-

munity hall.

The Commissioner was accompanied by VMC's 52nd Corporator Ummadi Venkateswara Rao, Chief Engineer R Srinath, In-Charge CMHO Dr Suresh, SE (Works) P. Satyanarayana, EE Venkateswara Reddy, Sanitary Supervisor Sivaram Prasad, and others.

AU engineers working on hyperloop rail using Maglev technology

Hyperloop system to offer faster and more efficient travel options

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam is on the verge of a ground-breaking technological development, as senior engineers from Andhra University (AU) Engineering College are working on a plan to establish a hyperloop rail network powered by Magnetic Levitation (Maglev) technology. The project aims to provide seamless connectivity between the city and the Greenfield Bhogapuram Airport.

Hyperloop technology is considered a revolutionary advancement in sustainable transportation. It involves passenger pods that travel at near-supersonic speeds through low-pressure tubes. Led by Prof. P. Mallikarjuna Rao, Head of the Electrical Engineering Department at AU Engineering College, the team has already developed a tabletop model of the hyperloop system. This model envisions high-speed trains capa-



ble of reaching speeds between 600 km/h and 1,000 km/h.

Speaking to The Pioneer, Prof. Rao explained: "This project aims to improve regional connectivity, stimulate economic growth by significantly reducing transit times, and solidify Visakhapatnam's status as a global hub for technological and industrial innovation." He emphasised that this hyperloop system will offer faster and more efficient travel options, contributing to the city's broader economic and developmental goals.

Prof. Rao also discussed the uniqueness of their model. "This is the first project of its kind in the world," he said. "Unlike other systems that operate in a vacuum, our model uses electromagnetic induction, offering a more innovative and practical solution for high-speed transit."

The hyperloop system utilizes a combination of cutting-edge technologies, including Maglev, vacuum tubes, linear electric motors, and sophisticated safety controls. While similar systems have been implemented in countries like China, this version stands apart with its focus on

energy efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

"The hyperloop system consumes 20 per cent less power than regular metro rails and requires significantly less space for operation," Prof. Rao explained. "This translates into lower operational costs, which could ultimately lead to affordable ticket prices for passengers." The system is also designed to be eco-friendly, relying on renewable energy and producing zero direct emissions. It features segmented vacuum systems that activate only the necessary sections, helping to minimise energy consumption. Dynamic pressure management further enhances safety and operational efficiency.

Prof. Rao pointed out that this technology goes beyond typical metro systems. "Unlike metro-focused initiatives, this hyperloop technology is scalable for intercity and even long-distance routes," he said. "Our work is positioning Visakhapatnam as a leader in next-generation transportation solutions."

HC displeased with non-implementation of helmet rule

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of enforcement of the mandatory helmet rule, criticising the Police Department for not taking the matter seriously. The bench pointed out that many fatalities in road accidents from June to September this year occurred due to the non-use of helmets as reported by the petitioner.

The court questioned who is responsible for these deaths and why the helmet mandate is not being strictly implemented. It also raised concerns over the shortage of personnel in the traffic department. While 8,000 staff members are required, only 1,800 are currently available, according to the police counsel.

The counsel further informed the court that despite imposing fines, many vehicle owners fail to pay them. Taking note of this, the bench ordered the Transport Commissioner to be impleaded suo motu in the case and directed the submission of a counter-affidavit within a week. The court adjourned the hearing to next week.

2,000 general coaches added for EWS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The South Central Railway (SCR) has added 2,000 general coaches to improve unreserved passenger travel, focusing on accessibility for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). Secunderabad trains with additional general coaches in Phase I are: 12706/12705: Guntur - Secunderabad - Guntur (1 rake), 12757/12758: Secunderabad - Sirpur Khagaznagar - Secunderabad (1 rake), 12791/12792: Secunderabad - Danapur - Secunderabad (4 rakes) Additional general coaches in Phase II are: 12704/12703: Secunderabad - Howrah - Secunderabad, 12710/12709: Secunderabad - Gudur - Secunderabad, 12797/12798: Tirupati - Secunderabad - Tirupati.



Mega Job Fair in Nuzvid on December 20

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC), under the guidance of State Minister for Housing and Information Kolu Parthasarathy, will conduct a Mega Job Fair in Nuzvid on December 20. The initiative aims to provide employment opportunities

to the youth in Eluru district. Parthasarathy officially unveiled the poster for the event on Wednesday, and urged the youth to make the most of this opportunity.

The job fair is scheduled to take place at the Student Activity Centre Auditorium within the IIIT Nuzvid campus. Approximately 40

companies are set to participate in the programme.

Opportunities are available for individuals who have completed SSC, Intermediate, ITI, Diploma, B Tech, B Pharmacy, and Degree courses. Companies from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Chennai will be providing employment opportunities as part of this fair.

AP Chambers lauds new Tourism Policy

'Chambers has been involved in tourism development in State by giving policy suggestions'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry Federation (AP Chambers) has hailed the recently announced Andhra Pradesh Tourism Policy-2024. The Chambers thanked the State government for according industry status to the tourism sector across all segments.

Chambers president Potluri Bhaskara Rao said, "The AP Chambers has been involved in the development of the tourism sector in the State by giving policy suggestions to the government periodically. It has a separate State-level

Tourism Committee that has been actively giving inputs and suggestions to the State government for the development of the tourism sector. Many of the suggestions have been incorporated in the new Tourism Policy. The new policy is much better than the 2014-19 policy."

"The tourism sector has huge potential to offer employment opportunities. With the announcement of the new policy, the sector is poised to grow thereby offering many jobs to the youth of the State," he added.

As the State has tremendous potential for beach tourism, the Chambers requested the State

government to develop major beaches to attract tourists from across the world. "The government should focus on completing the development of beach destinations within a year to capitalise on their potential. There are certain other areas that need to be addressed. We will bring these to the notice of the government soon," Bhaskara Rao said.

The AP Chambers thanked the State government for organising the Tourism Investors Engagement Programme in Vijayawada on December 17 to deliberate on the new tourism policy and investment opportunities in the sector.

Sajjala urges party cadre to join campaign for farmers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP State coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy urged party cadres to actively join the Statewide "YSRCP in Support of Farmers" rallies and memorandum submission to the district collectors programme on December 13. The initiative launched by party chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy aims to address the government's negligence in ensuring fair paddy procurement and prices for farmers.

In a Zoom conference with district party presidents, Sajjala emphasised the importance of standing by farmers during these difficult times. He called for peaceful rallies across all district headquarters, culminating in the submission of memorandums at Collector offices to demand justice.

Visakhapatnam...

Continued from Page 1

"Andhra Pradesh has been identified as a key partner by Google, and this collaboration will empower the State, contributing to India's digital growth story," he said.

Following the MoU, the Chief Minister met with a delegation led by Google's Vice President Bikash Koley in Amaravati. During the meeting, the delegation provided an overview of their operations and outlined their ambitious plans for India. "I am confident that collaborations with global technology leaders such as Google will help us bring transformative initiatives to fruition," he added. Bikash Koley expressed optimism about the collaboration. "Andhra Pradesh's commitment to digital transformation aligns perfectly with Google's vision. We look forward to working closely with the State to develop cutting-edge solutions and build a thriving ecosystem for innovation," he stated.

Nara Lokesh underlined the government's strategic focus on leveraging technology to drive socio-economic growth. "This partnership with Google is just the beginning. We aim to bring in more such investments to Visakhapatnam and beyond, ensuring our youth have access to world-class opportunities," he noted. Industry analysts predict that the MoU will pave the way for significant advancements in digital infrastructure, skilling initiatives, and the creation of high-quality jobs in the State.

Allu Arjun moves HC in stampede case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Actor Allu Arjun has approached the Telangana High Court in regard to the death of a woman and a boy who was seriously injured in a stampede-like situation during the Pushpa-2 Premiere show at Sandhya Theatre at RTC crossroads on December 4.

The petition is seeking to quash the case registered against him by the Chikidapally Police.

The Police have registered a case against Allu Arjun under Sections 105 and 118 of the IPC in connection with this incident.

A case has also been registered against the theatre owners for not taking security precautions when Allu Arjun arrived at the theatre.

Intermediate exams from March 1, Class X exams from March 17

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Board of Intermediate Education released the schedule of the Intermediate Examination in March-2025 on Wednesday. The first-year examinations will take place from March 1-19, and the second-year exams from March 3-20. Meanwhile, the Board of Secondary Education announced that the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations will be conducted from March 17 to 31.

On Wednesday, Education, IT and HRD Minister Nara Lokesh, in his message to Class X students, stated, "The March 2025 10th class public examination schedule is out now! To help you prepare better and reduce stress, we have planned exams on alternate days. Make the most of this extra time to study and aim for excellent scores! Wishing all my brothers and sisters the very best!" Similarly, addressing Intermediate students, he said, "Dear Students, Intermediate Exam Schedule is released!! It's time to focus and properly plan your preparation. Stay stress-free, take care of your health, and give your best effort. Wishing you all the success!"

The Board of Secondary Education has out-

lined the timetable for SSC Examinations, including for Academic OSSC and Vocational candidates, both regular and private. The detailed schedule is as follows:
Date & Day-Subject & Paper-Maximum Marks-Time
17.03.2025-First Language (Group-A)- 100- 09:30 AM to 12:45 PM
17.03.2025-First Language Paper-I (Composite Course)- 70-09:30 AM to 12:45 PM
19.03.2025-Second Language-100-09:30 AM to 12:45 PM
21.03.2025-English-100 - 09:30 AM to 12:45 PM
22.03.2025-First Language Paper-II(Composite Course)-30-09:30 AM to 11:15 AM
22.03.2025-OSSC Main Language Paper-I (Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian)-100-09:30 AM to 12:45 PM
24.03.2025-Mathematics -100-09:30 AM to 12:45 PM
26.03.2025-Physical Science-50-09:30 AM to 11:30 AM
28.03.2025-Biological Science-50-09:30 AM to 11:30 AM
29.03.2025-OSSC Main Language Paper-II (Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian)-100- 29.03.2025-SSC Vocational Course (Theory)-40/30-09:30 AM to 11:30 AM
31.03.2025-Social Studies-100-09:30 AM to 12:45 PM

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Dwadashi: Dec 12 01:09 AM to Dec 12 10:26 PM
Trayodashi: Dec 12 10:26 PM to Dec 13 07:40 PM
Nakshatram: Ashwini: Dec 11 11:48 AM to Dec 12 09:52 AM
Bharani: Dec 12 09:52 AM to Dec 13 07:50 AM
Rahukalam: 1:32 PM to 2:54 PM
Yamaganadam: 6:40 AM to 8:02 AM
Varjyam: 06:39 PM to 08:07 PM
Gulika: 9:25 AM to 10:47 AM
Amritakalam: 03:26 AM to 04:54 AM
Vijay Muhurtham: 11:47 AM to 12:31 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly Cloudy
Temp: 31°C
Humidity: 64%
Sunrise: 6:26 AM
Sunset: 5:36 PM
Updated: December 11, 2024 5:00 PM

AP to offer 153 services...

Continued from Page 1

When new technology becomes available, problems arise, and we must solve them as we move forward," the CM said. Lokesh also mentioned that Andhra Pradesh's initiative will be one of the first in the world to provide citizen services via WhatsApp, with only the UAE offering similar services on a unified platform. The State government plans to integrate information into the official website, <https://www.ap.gov.in>, and offer 153 different services through WhatsApp.

AP Drone Corporation Chairman Dinesh Kumar further explained that an agreement was signed with Meta on October 22 this year to provide these services to citizens. He highlighted that WhatsApp, with over 590 million users in India, offers a powerful communication tool, with the average user checking the app 30 times a day.

Kumar outlined potential services, such as emergency alerts, infrastructure updates, and tailored information for farmers, including advice on crop management and market conditions. Additionally, vital documents like income certificates, family member certificates, caste certificates, and study certificates will be made available to the public through WhatsApp.

This initiative marks a significant step in making government services more accessible and efficient through the use of modern technology.

'People first': CM's...

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Pensions are being distributed to 64 lakh beneficiaries, and 40 lakh gas connections have been provided under the Deepam-2 scheme. In all, 199 Anna canteens have been established to serve affordable meals to the poor and a parent-teacher meeting involving 1.2 crore participants across 43,000 schools was a resounding success. Additionally, a Mega DSC will soon recruit 16,000 teachers. Chandrababu highlighted rapid progress in grain procurement, plans to repair all roads by Sankranti, and the abolition of the Land Tiling Act. To address land-related grievances, the Land Grabbing Prohibition Act has been implemented, with revenue Sadasubus being organised for effective resolution.

HC grants relief to actor...

Continued from Page 1

The actor had earlier sought police security and a picket at his residence amid escalating tensions. The court also expressed concern over the media and social media platforms intruding into the family matter and spreading misinformation, emphasising that such disputes should not be sensationalised. The hearing in the case has been adjourned to December 24. This order provides temporary relief to Mohan Babu as legal proceedings continue.

People lost faith in...

Continued from Page 1

He underscored the YSRCP's governance record, which focused on transparency, welfare, and infrastructure development, including the RBKs, door-to-door rice distribution reforms, and infrastructure projects like medical colleges, Ramayapatnam Port and Veligonda irrigation tunnels.

Addressing the controversy over rice distribution, Jagan questioned how the Opposition could spread false claims when the Central and State machinery, including customs and security, remains under their control. He accused Finance Minister P. Keshav's relatives of monopolising rice exports while misrepresenting facts. Under the YSRCP, rice was directly delivered to beneficiaries, eliminating corruption. He noted that the current government has reversed these reforms, reintroducing dealer-based distribution, low-quality rice, and ration

mafia practices. He blamed the coalition government for burdening people with taxes and escalating electricity tariffs by over Rs 15,000 crore. "Chandrababu's idea of wealth creation is exploitation and burdening the common man," Jagan remarked, referring to the CM's governance as "tax-heavy and oppressive." He accused Chandrababu of privatising public assets like ports and medical colleges.

The YSRCP also announced a series of campaigns, including a farmers' support programme on December 13, a protest against electricity tariffs on December 27, and a rally on January 3 to address fee reimbursement delays. Jagan urged party members to strengthen grassroots connections and actively counter misinformation through social media.

"This fight is against a machinery of lies," Jagan said, affirming his confidence in the YSRCP's return to power through trust and credibility.

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Jessy Raj bags silver in Roller Skating Championship



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Matrapu Jessy Raj, an emerging skating champion from Mangalagiri in Guntur district, excelled at the 62nd National Roller Skating Championship held at Keshava Vidya Mandir in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, from December 5-10. She showcased her talent by earning a silver medal in the under-17 girls' category.

Jessy Raj has recently achieved a remarkable milestone by earning her 50th medal. At the 62nd National Roller Skating Championship, organised by the Skating Federation of India, around 1,000 skaters participated. Representing the Andhra Pradesh team, Jessy showcased her exceptional talent and secured a silver medal.

In recognition of her success, Pradip K. Malwai, chairman of Artistic Indian; Akula Praveen Kumar, chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Artistic Skating Association; Thomas Chowdhary, secretary of the AP Roller Skating Association; and senior coach Simhadri commended Jessy Raj for her accomplishment.

New Sports Policy 2024-29 approved

Sports schools to come up in Vijayawada, Vizianagaram

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has recognised sports as an effective means of improving the health and well-being of society. To foster sports development in the State, there is a need for a new comprehensive policy framework that provides top-quality infrastructure for athletes. After careful consideration and a detailed examination of various issues related to sports, the government has approved the Andhra Pradesh Sports Policy 2024-29. It aims to build excellence in sports by nurturing talent, establishing world-class infrastructure, and ensuring accessibility for all.

In this regard, V Vinay Chand, Secretary of the Youth Advancement, Tourism and Culture Department (Sports and Youth Services), issued G.O. Ms.No.18. The new Sports Policy emphasises 12 strategies and 93 programmes, highlighting the State's vision of creating a culture of sports for everyone. The G.O. said that the policy will come into operation from the date of issue of the order

and remain in force for a period of five years or till a new policy is formulated.

According to the new Sports Policy, the State government will promote the grassroots development of sports by building at least one ground in each village. The endeavour is aimed at fostering sports culture in rural areas and identifying talent. There is a plan to develop walking tracks in every village and cycling tracks in urban areas.

As per the new policy, the State government intends to provide a three-per cent reservation in direct recruitment across government departments, local bodies, and Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) and uniform services such as Police, Excise, and Forest department for meritorious and eligible sportspersons. Also, the Sports Policy proposed appointing 50 per cent of Grade 3 coaches in the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) from national, and international medallists and based on merit through the selection board. For that, the government will constitute a

Meritorious Sportspersons Selection Board to ensure direct recruitment without exams.

Additionally, the government has decided to establish a Sports School for every three districts in the State. It will deliver quality sports coaching alongside the regular curriculum. Initially, the SAAP will establish sports schools at Vijayawada and Vizianagaram (Tribal), besides the one at Kadapa. Also, the new policy proposes to establish one sports academy in medal-oriented disciplines of the State under the Public Private Partnership model in a phased manner.

It also proposed to conduct national games besides international games in the State. Also, the government proposed to organise corporate leagues, walkathons, and marathon competitions to encourage players. The policy focused on earning revenues by collecting a three-per cent additional cess on property taxes by urban local bodies in the State to utilise the proceeds for the creation of sports infrastructure in urban areas.

Enhanced facilities for Bhavani devotees: Durga Temple EO

Bhavani deeksha relinquishment from December 21-25; Kalasha jyothulu utsavam on Dec 14

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

KS Rama Rao, the Executive Officer (EO) of Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, convened a review meeting on Wednesday to plan two significant events at the temple. The meeting centred around the Bhavani Deekshas relinquishment ceremony, scheduled to take place from December 21 to 25, and the 'Kalasha Jyothulu' Utsavam, set for December 14.

The 'Kalasha Jyothulu' Utsavam will begin at Sivaramakrishna Kshetram in Satyanarayanapuram and proceed to the Durga Temple. Both events hold great spiritual significance, and the temple authorities engaged in detailed discussions to finalise the arrangements to ensure the smooth conduct of these key programmes.

During the meeting, EO Rama Rao emphasised that, based on previous years' experiences, the temple will provide enhanced facilities for the Bhavani devotees during the relinquishment ceremony. A large number of devotees are expected to visit the temple from various parts of the State to receive the darshan of Goddess Durga as well as to



Durga Temple Executive Officer Rama Rao addressing a meeting held to discuss the arrangements for Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment, at the Mallikharjuna Maha Mandapam on the temple premises in Vijayawada on Wednesday

participate in the Deeksha relinquishment, he stated.

He also reviewed the queue lines from the Vinayaka temple to the Om turning point uphill and discussed arrangements for lighting, drinking water supply, sound systems, Irumudi Viramama points, sanitation, Homa Gundam, barricading, police security, and other logistical details. EO Rama Rao clarified that during the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment, the temple will provide free darshan

for all visitors. There will be no Antaralaya Darshan, and tickets will not be sold. Additionally, he announced that Arjitha Sevas will be suspended from December 21 to 25.

On the first day of the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment, devotees will be allowed to take darshan of the presiding deity starting at 6.30 AM. Darshan will be allowed from 3 AM to 11 PM from December 22 to 25. Referring to the Kalasha Jyothulu on December

14, he mentioned that it will commence from the Sivaramakrishna Kshetram. The temple authorities will coordinate with all relevant departments, including the police, to ensure the success of these events.

The meeting was attended by Durga Temple Deputy EO M Ratna Raju, Executive Engineers KVS Koteswara Rao, T Vykunta Rao, Vedic Committee members, AEOs, and others.

YSRCP's 'Annadataku Andaga YSRCP' campaign tomorrow



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Malladi Vishnu, former MLA and YSRCP Central constituency coordinator, has announced a Statewide campaign, 'Annadataku Andaga YSRCP' (YSRCP to Support Farmers), on December 13 to highlight the failures of the coalition government in addressing farmers' issues. Speaking at an event in Vijayawada on Wednesday, Vishnu unveiled the campaign's wall posters.

Vishnu criticised the current government, accusing it of deceiving all sections of society, particularly farmers. He claimed that promises made before the elections had not been fulfilled. "Before the elections, they promised Rs 20,000 assistance to farmers, but failed to deliver even a rupee. Such negligence towards farmers cannot be ignored," he said, adding that the government had allocated Rs 10,700 crore for farmers in the budget, but did not release any funds.

Under the previous YSRCP administration, farmers had benefited from welfare schemes like YSR Rythu Bharosa and free crop insurance, Vishnu stated. "The YSRCP has promised to

increase farmers' support from Rs 12,500 to Rs 13,500. In contrast, the coalition government has completely neglected its promise of Rs 20,000 support, leaving farmers in despair," he alleged.

Vishnu highlighted the YSRCP's achievements during its tenure, including the procurement of 3.53 crore tonnes of grain worth Rs 67,906 crore between 2019 and 2024, compared to 2.65 crore tonnes worth Rs 40,237 crore procured during the TDP government's tenure from 2014 to 2019. He also mentioned the direct disbursement of Rs 7,802 crore in crop insurance compensation to 54.55 lakh farmers during YSRCP's rule, along with the payment of Rs 3,022 crore in insurance premiums on behalf of farmers.

As part of the 'Annadataku Andaga YSRCP' campaign, the YSRCP will submit petitions to district collectors on December 13, drawing attention to the farmers' grievances.

Vishnu called for public participation in the rally, scheduled to begin at 9 AM from the old party office on Besant Road, Vijayawada, and culminate at the District Collectorate.

EO offers silk robes to Srirangam Temple

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

TTD EO J Syamala Rao, on Wednesday, offered Pattu Vastrams to the famous Vaishnavite shrine of Sri Ranganatha Swamy at SriRangam in Tamil Nadu.

TTD has been offering Pattu Vastrams to some ancient and important shrines across the country since 2008.

On his arrival at the main entrance of the temple, the EO and his entourage were received by Mariappan, Joint Commissioner of Rangan Temple. Later, the EO offered silk clothes to the presiding deity and had darshan of Mula Virat and other sub temples



located within the main temple complex.

Usually, the Srirangam Temple authorities offer vas-

trams to Tirumala temple on the auspicious day of Anivara Asthanam every year while TTD offers Pattu vastrams to

Rangan temple on the Ekadasi day in Kathika month. Temple DyEO Lokanadham and other staff of TTD were also present.

'Swarnandhra @ 2047' Vision Document to be unveiled tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Commissioner of State Taxes, Babu A, has called upon officials from various departments to work in coordination for the successful unveiling of the 'Swarnandhra @ 2047' Vision Document. This ambitious document outlines the State's developmental goals and strategies for achieving excellence by 2047. The Chief Minister, N Chandrababu Naidu, will officially release the Vision Document during a grand event at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada on Friday.

Babu A convened a review meeting with the State-level officers at the collector camp office in Vijayawada on Wednesday. He reviewed the arrangements at the IGMC stadium in Vijayawada for the vision document launching



programmes.

Speaking on the occasion, Babu emphasised the importance of meticulous planning and execution to ensure the event's success, reflecting the State's commitment to shaping a prosperous future. For the smooth functioning of the programme, he ensures uninterrupted power supply in the city. More than 25,000 people will come to the city to take part in the launching pro-

gramme, he said.

Further, he asked respective officials to provide parking facilities to the buses which will be coming from various districts. Also, a separate parking facility arena should be provided for the VIP vehicles, he said. Later, he spoke to the police officials regarding the security and traffic diversion in Vijayawada.

Mines & Geology Department Commissioner

and Director Praveen Kumar, Finance Department Additional Secretary J Nivas, Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Vice Chairman and Managing Director Girisha PS, NTR District Dr Nidhi Meena, Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Bhau, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra and others were present.

Road Traffic Accident Victim Assistance Centre wins applause

Centre streamlines support for accident victims, enhances road safety, and improves insurance claim processes

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The recent launch of the State's first Road Traffic Accident Victim Assistance Centre in the Port City by the city police has garnered widespread praise from residents. The initiative, designed to offer comprehensive support to road accident victims, simplify insurance claims, and prevent future mishaps, is seen as a vital step towards improving road safety and victim welfare.

Speaking to The Pioneer, Commissioner of Police (CP) Shanka Brata Bagchi highlighted the importance of the centre in addressing the challenges faced by accident victims. "Many people have reported difficulties in receiving payouts from insurance companies. This initiative will ensure that victims get their rightful benefits," Bagchi stated.

The new centre will offer services such as assistance with insurance claims, legal guidance, and accident documentation to expedite the claims process. Victims, their families, or relatives can reach out to the centre during office hours through a toll-free number (795095793) or via WhatsApp.

The initiative also includes a training programme aimed at enhancing road safety, particularly for auto drivers in the city. "We aim to train 4,000 auto drivers over 15 sessions to foster better relations between them and the police,



which will ultimately improve road safety," Bagchi noted. The full-day training, targeting 250 drivers daily, will cover essential traffic guidelines and accident prevention strategies. The police have also launched an online registration system for auto drivers, which will help in better monitoring of crimes and offenses involving them.

Bagchi stressed the important role auto drivers play in people's safety. "They are often the first responders or witnesses to various incidents," he remarked.

The opening of the centre comes at a crucial time, as road safety remains a pressing issue for Visakhapatnam. Police statistics show an average of 4-5 road traffic accidents daily, totalling approximately 1,500 accidents annually, with 300-350 fatalities. In 2024 alone, between January and October, 790 fatal and non-fatal cases were reported, including 85 hit-and-run incidents.

VMRDA unveils projects to develop connectivity, tourism, infra

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) has announced a slew of transformative projects aimed at improving regional connectivity, bolstering infrastructure, and positioning the city as a key hub for tourism and sports. During a crucial meeting chaired by VMRDA Chairman MV Pranav Gopal and Metropolitan Commissioner

KS Viswanathan, the authority approved 15 new roads under the Bhogapuram Airport master plan. These roads are set to significantly enhance access to the upcoming airport, a vital

project for the region's economic growth.

"These roads will be a critical step in enhancing connectivity to the upcoming airport, a project that will significantly boost regional growth," Pranav Gopal emphasised. The projects are to be funded through the sale of VMRDA-owned lands.

The meeting also marked a major step toward urban integration with the approval of a master plan for 13 newly merged mandals. To be developed by IIT Kharagpur, the plan will focus on seamless integration and infrastructure development in these areas. "Our goal is to ensure seamless integration of these areas into

Approves 15 new roads under Bhogapuram Airport master plan



the metropolitan framework with a strong focus on infrastructure and development," stated Commissioner Viswanathan.

VMRDA allocated Rs. 9 crore for infrastructure upgrades in Elamanchili, Narsipatnam, and Nellimarla gram panchayat. Additionally, the Coastal Erosion Project, a Rs. 200-crore initiative aimed at mitigating shoreline damage, was greenlit. "This initiative reflects our commitment to protecting the coastline while fostering sustainable development," said the Chairman.

In a move towards innovation and sustainability, the authority approved the con-

struction of roads using waste plastic, a pioneering effort expected to reduce costs by five-eight per cent while extending road longevity by five to six years. "Such experimental methods are steps toward a more sustainable and efficient future," Gopal added.

VMRDA's vision for positioning Visakhapatnam as a hub for sports and tourism includes the approval of an Olympic-standard sports complex and an international Habitat Centre. "Sports and tourism are vital components of a vibrant city, and these projects will position Visakhapatnam as a hub for both," emphasised Commissioner Viswanathan.

Minister Nimmala hands over financial assistance from CMRF

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu has handed over financial assistance from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to some beneficiaries.

The Minister handed over the cheques of the financial assistance worth Rs 8.20 lakh to the beneficiaries in Palakollu on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu lauded Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu stating that he is extending financial assistance from the CMRF with a human face keeping in view the problems of the poor.



The farmers were given the option of selling their paddy produce to rice mills on their wish. The Naidu headed Government had cleared Rs 1,674 crore dues to the farmers for their paddy produce as the previous YSRCP did not pay the money. The Government, for the first time, provided e-crop facility to the tenant farmers in the State, he mentioned.

that the paddy produce purchase from the farmers is in full swing and the payment is being made for the procured paddy within 24 hours. "The farmers

are buoyant at the manner in which their paddy produce is being purchased expeditiously and the manner in which the payment is made to them. The

farmers now feel the Sankranti festival has come in advance," the Minister claimed.

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Taking a dig at the YSRCP leaders, Ramanaidu asserted that the Opposition leaders have no right to talk about the welfare of farmers. "The State achieved progress only in

Ganja cultivation. Youth addicted to the Ganja during Jagan Reddy's five years regime," the Minister ridiculed.

Nimmala Ramanaidu announced that a 2K run would be organized in Palakollu on December 15 in the name of 'Save the girl child'. He said that special programmes would be organized to eradicate the feticide. He described the girl child as the wealth of the nation.

He called upon all to come forward to protect the girl child. The Government had set up an eagle team especially to provide protection to the girl and massive steps were taken to check the drug menace, he acknowledged.

An army man of Prakasam killed in landmine blast in J&K

PNS ■ ONGOLE

An army man from Prakasam district was killed in a landmine blast in Jammu and Kashmir and pall of gloom descended at Ravipadu village.

The deceased soldier Varikuntla Subbaiah (43) was working in the Rashtriya Rifles as Havildar in the army. When he was on the combat duty in the Poonch sector, near LOC, he stepped on a landmine. He immediately alerted the other soldiers by shouting to go away. However, while trying to escape from the landmine, it exploded killing him instantaneously.

The deceased Subbaiah belonged to Ravipadu village in Kambham mandal of Prakasam district. The family



members were informed about the death of Subbaiah. V Venkata Subbaiah, the father of the martyr, died a few days ago and her mother Galamma is with his family at the village.

A pall of gloom descended on the village with the death of middle aged soldier Subbaiah. His mother was seen grieving

inconsoably by holding his married photo on her lap. The deceased soldier was survived by wife Leela, a son and a daughter. The last rites of the deceased soldier Subbaiah would be held at Narsala village in Tadipatri mandal in Anantapur district, the family members said.

Harish Rao questions Revanth's role in Telangana movement

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

At a media interaction held at the Sangareddy MLA camp office, former minister T Harish Rao launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, questioning his contribution to the Telangana movement and accusing him of betraying the cause. Harish Rao compared Revanth's behavior to "a cat embarking on a pilgrimage after devouring a hundred rats," criticising his attempts to rewrite the state's history.

Harish Rao highlighted Revanth's lack of involvement in the Telangana movement, stating, "Not once did Revanth say 'Jai Telangana' or lay a flower at the martyrs' memorial. He was never a part of the movement. Claiming that Telangana was granted out of someone's kindness is an insult to the sacrifices of our martyrs and the aspirations of Telangana's people." Rao blamed the Congress party for repeatedly betraying Telangana, citing instances from history, including the suppression of the 1969 Telangana agitation during Indira Gandhi's regime. "The Congress has a legacy of betrayal, from merging Telangana into Andhra against Fazal Ali Commission's recommendations to suppressing movements with iron fists," he said.

Referring to the events leading up to the creation of



Former minister T Harish Rao speaking to the media in Sangareddy on Wednesday

Telangana, Harish Rao credited K Chandrashekar Rao's (KCR) relentless struggle for the state's formation. "The December 9 announcement by Chidambaram was the result of KCR's fast-unto-death protest, not any act of charity by Congress. Claiming otherwise is a distortion of history," Harish Rao asserted.

Harish Rao accused Revanth of being a political opportunist with no moral right to speak about Telangana. "While we were in jails facing 350 cases, where was Revanth? Not a single case was filed against him during the movement. He betrayed the cause and now speaks about Telangana as if he played a role," Harish Rao remarked.

He also dismissed Revanth's claims about Telangana Thalli

statues, calling them baseless. "The Telangana Thalli statue was inaugurated on June 2, 2015, at Sangareddy Collectorate, in the presence of the MLA, Collector Rahul Bojja, and myself. Revanth's ignorance on this matter is shameful," he added.

Rao criticised Revanth Reddy's governance, alleging that welfare schemes like KCR Kit and Dalit Bandhu were stalled, while deaths in welfare schools and other lapses had increased. He concluded by asserting that no amount of distortion could erase KCR's contributions to Telangana.

"Revanth's history is one of betrayal, not transformation. His opportunism and ignorance have no place in the true story of Telangana's struggle," Harish Rao declared.

Akkagarla Gudi pooja to be solemnized on Dec 13

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The annual Puja ceremony at Akkagarla Gudi located on the First Ghat Road will be observed on December 13. On this occasion, Special Puja will be performed under the aegis of TTD Transport department on Friday.

A TTD release here on Wednesday said that when TTD was constructing first Ghat Road (Down Ghat Road) in the early 1940s, several

incidents occurred that hampered the construction process when they removed the seven bricks.

After coming to know about the significance and power of the cave temple by the locals TTD has enshrined these Seven Bricks underneath a huge rock on the First Ghat Road and thereafter the Ghat Road works completed without any hitch.

The locals strongly believe that these Seven Bricks of this



Cave temple are incarnations of "Sapta Matrukas" - Brahma, Indrani, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Maheshwari and Chamundi as mentioned in Puranas. In the local language they worship them as Saptha Gangammas or Eduguru Akkagarlu.

The locals strongly believe that these Folk Deities are the sisters of Sri Venkateswara Swamy and the Guardians of the pilgrims trekking this route and protect the pilgrims to reach their destination safe-

ly avoiding road accidents and untoward incidents during their pilgrimage to Tirumala.

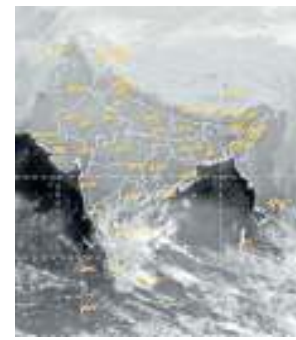
However, TTD has introduced the annual Puja officially in 2008 and since then has been regularly observing this fete in a grand manner. On this auspicious day in the sacred month of Karthika, the employees, locals, and devotees offer prayers to these seven folk goddesses seeking their divine blessings.

Well-marked low-pressure area over southwest Bay of Bengal

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Yesterday's Well Marked Low Pressure Area over the Southwest and adjoining Southeast Bay of Bengal lay over southwest Bay of Bengal off Sri Lanka coast with the associated upper air cyclonic circulation extending up to mid-tropospheric levels.

The system is very likely to continue to move west-north westwards towards the Sri Lanka-Tamil Nadu coasts during the next 24 hours, the Met office on Wednesday said. The well-marked low-pressure area that was positioned over the southwest Bay of Bengal on Tuesday now lies over the same region of the Sri Lanka coast. The associated upper-air cyclonic circulation extends up to mid-tropospheric levels.



The system is expected to move west-north westwards towards the Sri Lanka-Tamil Nadu coasts over the next 24 hours, the Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

A daily weather report here, said that heavy rain is likely to occur at isolated places in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh

and Rayalaseema during the next 48 hours. Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning are likely to occur at isolated places in the same area during the same period.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers are likely to occur at a few places in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next seven days. The same situation is likely to prevail in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh & Yanam during the next 48 hours and December 17. Dry weather is likely to prevail in the same areas from December 13 to 16.

Rainfall occurred at one or two places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh & Yanam and dry weather prevailed in Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours, the report added.

Realtor allegedly kidnapped, Rs 2 cr ransom demanded

PNS ■ GUNTUR



A realtor E Nageswara Rao was allegedly kidnapped and Rs 2 crore was demanded to free him. According to the police, E Nageswara Rao was asked by Duggem Nagireddy to board his car. As Narireddy was a familiar to him he boarded the car without any suspicion.

Nagireddy took the victim to the Kailasagiri area near

Perecherla and demanded Rs 2 crore to free him.

When he refused to give money, he tried to kill him. However, he escaped with the help of locals.

The kidnap victim Nageswara Rao was admitted to the GGG here. Interestingly, Both the accused Nagireddy and the kidnap victim are the sympathizers of the YSRCP. The police registered a case.

Court sends Vijay Paul to police custody



PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Guntur Special Court granted police custody of retired Additional SP of CID Ravela Vijay Paul for questioning in connection with the custodial torture of the then MP K Raghurama Krishna Raju.

The police registered cases

against Vijay Paul in the custodial torture of Raghurama Krishna Raju. Investigation office and Prakasam district SP AR Damodhar questioned Vijay Paul but he answered 'I do not know and I did not remember, according to sources.

The police filed a special petition in the Guntur court

seeking custody of Vijay Paul for further questioning to extract the exact information from him.

The court granted the police custody of Vijay Paul on December 13 and 14. The retired CID additional SP Vijay Paul is at present in the Guntur jail as a remand prisoner.

Man gets life imprisonment for killing woman

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A man was sentenced to life imprisonment for killing a woman. Ongole PDJ court judge A Bharati sentenced the accused in a murder case to life imprisonment and also imposed a fine of Rs 5000.

The accused Naguluri Yacob belongs to

Gadipartivaripalem in Chimakurti mandal. He developed intimacy with M Lakshmi (30) and continued the relationship with her for one year. Later, he started quarrelling with her. On February 22, 2020, he hit her on the head with a stick. She suffered a bleeding injury on head and died later.

The police registered a case Cr.No.35/2020 u/s 302 IPC in Chimakurthy police station. The then Ongole CI P Subba Rao arrested the accused and investigated the case. He filed a charge sheet in the court. Public Prosecutor N Vasundhara argued on behalf of prosecution and succeeded in prov-

ing the case before the court with evidence.

The Court on Wednesday convicted the accused Yacob to life imprisonment.

SP AR Damodhar appreciated the CI P Subba Rao, ASI M Veeraswamy and constable V Raghava Rao for their efforts to prove the case in the court.

4 notorious bike lifters arrested, 29 motorcycles recovered



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

The police arrested four notorious bike lifters and recovered 29 motorcycles from them.

DSP K Ramesh Babu told the media here on Wednesday that since stealing motorcycles were rampant in the surrounding areas of Rajahmundry, special teams were formed in all police stations to arrest the thieves.

A police team led by sub-inspector V Appala Raju con-

ducted checking of vehicles at the Gamon Bridge. On seeing the police, the four accused tried to escape. The police chased and apprehended them. During the questioning, they confessed to stealing 29 motorcycles.

The police recovered 29 motorcycles worth Rs 11.60 lakh. All the four accused are aged between 16 years to 19 years and the police gave the name of one of the arrested bike lifters as Kuppan Teja and other three were minor

boys. The minor boys were produced before the Juvenile court. The accused concealed some of the bikes in a quarry pit on the outskirts.

The accused were addicted to vices and to fund their vices they started stealing two wheelers, the DSP said. They sold the stolen bikes with fake register numbers and enjoyed the money, the DSP said. SP DN Kishore appreciated the police team for arresting the notorious bike lifters.

Lorry rams army truck laden with explosive substances

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A lorry rammed container truck, loaded with explosive substances, belonging to the Indian army, at Bottuvanipalem village in Korishapadu mandal on Wednesday.

Police said that 18 container trucks, belonging to the Indian army, were transporting explosive substances from Maharashtra to Chennai. When the container trucks were stopped at a petrol filling station, a lorry rammed one of

the container trucks from the rear end.

The lorry was transporting rice to Chennai. After the accident, flames erupted in the lorry. The fire brigade rushed there and extinguished the flames.

When the army officers were informed about the accident, they directed the local police to isolate the truck and ensure that there would be no one in the 100 metres radius of the truck. The Korishapadu police registered a case and began an investigation.



Journalists protest against attack on scribe by Mohan Babu



PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Journalists, affiliated to various unions, took out rallies at various places on Wednesday in protest against the attack on a scribe in Hyderabad by veteran film actor M Mohan Babu.

The journalists holding placards and raising slogans took out a rally in V Kota from Ambedkar Circle in Tirupati district.

They demanded the Telangana Government to order the police to register a

murder attempt case against Mohan Babu. "It is inappropriate of Mohan Babu to indulge in a physical attack on an electronic media journalist."

"The abusive remarks made by Mohan Babu should be condemned by all. The Centre should withdraw the awards given to him," the agitating journalist demanded.

V Kota press club president Rajesh, general secretary Giribabu and vice president Roshan were among those who took part in the rally. In

Rajahmundry, the journalists took out a rally holding flexi banners and denouncing Mohan Babu's act from the press club to the Gandhi statue centre.

Addressing the gathering, advocate Muppala Subba Rao vehemently condemned the heinous act of Mohan Babu and demanded his arrest. Press club president Parthasarathi demanded the T Government to take stringent action against Mohan Babu to ensure that such attacks recur in the future.

ACROSS THE STATES



Developing new app for passenger services: Vaishnav

The railway ministry is developing a mobile application that will let users book unreserved train tickets, lodge complaints, and track trains, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday. Telugu Desam Party MPs B K Parthasarathi and Bastipati Nagaraju raised the issue of the government's plan to launch a 'super app' for rail services. They also wanted to know the timeline by which the app will be launched for commercial usage along with the cost of developing the app. Responding to these queries, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said, "Indian Railways is developing a passenger service focussed app. Passengers will be able to avail unreserved ticketing, lodge complaints, check train availability and many more functions in a single app."



Need to give rights to all sections of society: Soren

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Wednesday said there was a need to give rights to all sections of society, especially the deprived and the exploited. Soren addressed the extended meeting of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) central committee here. Later, in a post on X, Soren said, "A strong 'Abua Sarkar' (our government) was formed in Jharkhand due to the hard work of hardworking leaders, workers and blessings of crores of people of the state." Stating that the JMM was born out of struggle, he said the roots of the party would be strengthened in the coming times. "This is the reason why we have always fought for our rights. We have won by fighting. We have never accepted defeat," he said. Soren said party workers will have to work to strengthen the roots of the JMM by reaching every corner of the state in the coming times.



Thailand's e-Visa system to be effective from Jan 1

The Thai Embassy here announced on Wednesday the implementation of Thailand's Electronic Visa system in India that will be effective from January 1. In its announcement, the embassy also said applications for all types of visas must be sent through the website thaimvisas.go.th. "The Royal Thai Embassy in New Delhi wishes to announce the implementation of Thailand's Electronic Visa (e-Visa) system in India with the offline payment method," it said. The e-Visa system will be effective from January 1, 2025, the embassy said. It said the processing time will be approximately within 14 working days from the date the receipt of the visa fee is issued. Ordinary passport applications submitted at designated visa processing companies will be accepted until December 16, 2024. Diplomatic and official passport applications submitted at the Embassy or Consulate-General will be accepted until December 24, 2024. "The 60-day visa exemption for tourism and short business purposes for Indian ordinary passport holders remains effective until further announcement," it said.

Removing roadblocks in path of youth by introducing reforms: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is introducing reforms to remove roadblocks in the path of the country's youth, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told young innovators on Wednesday, asserting that the future of the world will be driven by innovation and knowledge. Interacting with the innovators during the grand finale of the 'Smart India Hackathon (SIH)', the prime minister said the youth today is developing a feeling of ownership towards finding solutions for the country's challenges. "India's strength is its innovative youth and technology power. We have introduced a new National

Education Policy to nurture a scientific mindset. The government is removing roadblocks in the path of the country's youth by introducing reforms," Modi said while addressing more than 1,300 student teams via video conferencing. "The future of the world will be driven by innovation and knowledge and India's youth today is developing a feeling of ownership towards finding solutions for the country's challenges," he added. The seventh edition of the SIH concurrently began at 51 nodal centres nationwide on Wednesday. The Software Edition will



run nonstop for 36 hours, while the Hardware Edition will continue from December 11 to 15. Like past editions, the student teams will work on either the problem statements given by ministries, departments or industries or submit their ideas under the Student Innovation category against any of the 17 themes linked to sectors of national importance. These sectors are - healthcare, supply chain and logistics, smart technologies, heritage and culture, sustainability, education and skill development, water, agriculture and food, emerging technologies, and disaster manage-

ment. According to the Ministry of Education, this year, more than 250 problem statements have been submitted by 54 ministries, departments, state governments, PSUs and industries. "A 150 per cent increase has been recorded in internal hackathons at the institute level, growing from over 900 in the SIH 2023 to around 2,247 in SIH 2024, making this the largest edition so far. "More than 86,000 teams have participated in the SIH 2024 at the institute level and around 49,000 student teams (each consisting of 6 students and 2 mentors) have been recommended by these institutes for the national level round," a ministry official said.

'Working on policy of 'zero casualties' during disasters'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is working on the policy of "zero casualties" during disasters in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pledge of making India a developed country by 2047, Union Minister Nityanand Rai said in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. Moving the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 for consideration and passage, Rai said that since the Modi government has come to power, losses have come down due to able disaster management techniques. Members of the opposition expressed reservations on the bill during the discussion, alleging that it would lead to centralisation of power in the hands of the Union government, but the minister asserted that the legislation was framed to address the difficulties flagged by the states. "India faces a

variety of disasters across seasons. The government is working on the policy of "zero casualties" in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pledge of making India a developed country by 2047," Rai said. The minister of state for home said in the recent cyclones, there was zero loss of lives as compared to the super cyclone (of 1999) in which thousands had perished. "States faced difficulties in implementing the Disaster Management Act of 2005. The proposed amendment is based on overcoming the difficulties flagged by states to the Union Home Minister," he

said. Initiating the debate, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor claimed that the legislation is constitutionally untenable as it lacks on various fronts, is "ill thought out" and will lead to "overlapping". He said the bill would bring greater centralisation of power in the hands of central government. Tharoor said the legislation seeks to weaken the national executive committee and state executive committees related to disaster management. He lamented that the Kerala government's demand for declaring the rains, floods and landslides in Wayanad, that took place in July, as a national disaster was rejected by the central government. Asking the central government to withdraw the bill, the Congress MP said that the MPs will have no voice in disaster management once the legislation is passed. Supporting the bill, BJP MP Trivendra Singh Rawat said that the legislation will help the states in handling all disasters in a better way. He said the bill took care of the concerns of the people living in remote areas of hill states like Uttarakhand, which has seen many natural disasters over the years.



Rahul urges LS Speaker to expunge remarks against him

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi met Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday and urged him to expunge remarks made by BJP MPs against him, and ensure the House functions smoothly. Gandhi said the BJP has been making "baseless" allegations against him to "distract" attention from the Adani issue, but he would not be provoked by any of these charges. He also said he and his party wanted a discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha starting December 13, and asserted they will ensure the House functions properly, even though it is not their responsibility. "I had a meeting with the Speaker and I told him that our party is saying that derogatory comments against me be expunged. The Speaker said he will examine them. They (the BJP) continue to make all kinds of baseless allegations, but we have decided that we want the House to function. "Whatever provocation they do,



we will allow them. But we will try and run the House. We would want that somehow the House functions. We want there should be a debate and discussion. We want that there should be a debate on the Constitution on December 13," Gandhi told reporters outside Parliament. He said BJP MPs can speak against "me on whatever issue, but the debate on the Constitution should happen". "It is very simple, they do not want a discussion on the Adani issue and want to distract from the Adani issue. You know, we will not leave them at the end," he said.

Much needed to completely eradicate manual sewer cleaning: Supreme Court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Observing much needed to be done, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to file an action taken report on the compliance of its direction for ensuring manual sewer cleaning was completely eradicated in a phased manner. A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Aravind Kumar asked additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, to call a meeting of the central monitoring committee with all the stakeholders within two weeks. The committee reviews the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (MS Act, 2013).



RS Chairman 'biggest disruptor' in House: Kharge

● Defends Opposition no-confidence motion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress and several Opposition parties on Wednesday accused Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar of being the "biggest disruptor" in the House and alleged he was acting as a government spokesperson for his "next promotion", as they defended their move to seek the removal of the Vice President. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge launched a no-holds barred attack against the Vice President, who is the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, saying his "partisan" conduct in the House prompted them to move a notice for his ouster and that it has harmed the country's dignity. It was for the first time in Parliament's history that a move has been initiated by the Opposition to remove the Chairman through a no-confidence motion. Addressing a press conference along with leaders of other opposition INDIA bloc parties, Kharge alleged that Dhankhar was acting like a school headmaster, often ser-



monising experienced Opposition leaders and preventing them from speaking in the House. "We have no hesitation in saying that the biggest disruptor in the Rajya Sabha is the Chairman himself," he said, adding, "His loyalty is towards the ruling party, instead of the Constitution and constitutional traditions. We can see that he is acting as a government spokesperson for the sake of his next promotion." Alleging that politics has taken precedence over rules in the Upper House of Parliament, Kharge said the Chairman's conduct has been contrary to the dignity of the high post he holds.

Meanwhile, Dhankhar, who was addressing a programme in Jaipur, said there are forces in the country and outside who are unable to digest India's progress but made no reference to the ouster move by the Opposition. "This act of fragmenting the country, dividing the country, insulting the institutions of the country is being done in a planned manner. We must neutralise every anti-national narrative," Dhankhar said. The Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day without transacting any business amid uproar by the treasury and opposition benches over the no-trust notice against the House Chairman and the George Soros issue.

INDIA: NEPAL DISCUSS DEFENCE COOPERATION, REGIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nepal's Chief of Army Staff General Ashok Raj Sigdel on Wednesday engaged in an "in-depth interaction" with Indian Army Chief General Uendra Dwivedi during which they discussed various aspects of bilateral defence cooperation and "regional security concerns". General Sigdel commenced a "significant" official visit to India on Tuesday, marking a key step in further strengthening the defence ties between the two nations, the Defence Ministry said. The Chief of Army Staff of Nepal also met Chief of the Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.



'No possibility of alliance with Cong for Delhi polls'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday once again ruled out the possibility of an alliance with the Congress for the Delhi Assembly polls, amid reports that the two parties could join hands for the election in the capital. In a post on X, Kejriwal said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will contest the election on its own strength in Delhi. "There is no possibility of any alliance with the Congress," the former Delhi chief minister said. His remarks came amid media reports that the two parties are likely to have a tie-up for the polls to the 70-member Delhi Assembly due in February. Earlier this month also, Kejriwal had ruled out the possibility of an alliance between his party and the Congress for the Delhi election. The recent buzz over an alliance between the two Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) partners was fuelled by the

cancellation of the Congress's "Nyay Chaupal" event scheduled for Wednesday. Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi was supposed to participate in the event to mark the culmination of the "Nyay Yatra" taken out by the party ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.



Kejriwal met Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Tuesday amid a rising demand in the INDIA bloc to appoint West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the head of the alliance that is currently chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. However, neither Kejriwal nor the AAP has so far commented on the discussions that took place at the meeting with Pawar. These developments are being seen as the Congress and the AAP making their moves cautiously in view of the upcoming Delhi polls, so that future options remain open, sources said. AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha said reports suggesting any possible alliance between his party and the Congress are "completely baseless". "There is no scope for any alliance in Delhi. I urge everyone not to propagate such baseless rumours. The AAP is fully prepared to contest the election independently," Chadha asserted.

Centre must act, protect minorities in Bangla: Mamata

PNS ■ DIGHA (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said the Centre must give protection to minorities in violence-hit Bangladesh, and bring back "those willing to return". Banerjee also claimed that fake videos were being purposefully circulated, as certain sections were trying to foment communal tension. "We want protection for minorities in Bangladesh. The Union government must act. It should also bring back those who want to return to India," she told reporters here. Bangladesh's minority Hindus,

who constitute about 8 per cent of the 170 million population, have faced attacks in 50-odd districts since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5. "I have already said in the assembly (regarding Bangladesh)... Several fake videos are being circulated and people are getting misled. The Indian government has sent a representative, it is their responsibility. I have information that issuance of visa has been increased so that more people from that country can return," Banerjee said. "The CM is on a three-day trip to Digha to review the construction of the Jagannath temple. She said that Muslim clerics, too, have criticised the attacks on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh and sought protection for them. "We are getting information that flights and trains are operating, and people with visas and passports are arriving... Not a single India-Bangladesh border has been closed," the chief minister asserted.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Race for Delhi

With the Delhi Assembly elections on the horizon, the political temperature in the capital is rising

As the Delhi Assembly Elections 2025 draw closer, the political landscape of the national capital is abuzz with activity. Major players—the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Congress—are gearing up for what promises to be a fiercely contested battle. With 70 seats at stake, every party is refining its strategies to sway the electorate in its favour. The Aam Aadmi Party, led by Arvind Kejriwal, remains a dominant force in Delhi politics. In the 2020 elections, AAP swept the polls, securing 62 out of 70 seats, while the BJP managed only 8, and Congress failed to open its account. However, the 2025 elections present new challenges for the party, including anti-incumbency sentiments and a more aggressive opposition. One of the most intriguing aspects of AAP's strategy is the decision to field senior leader Manish Sisodia from the Jangpura constituency. Political analysts suggest this move reflects a calculated attempt by AAP to strengthen its presence in



South Delhi, which has traditionally been a mixed battleground. Sisodia's administrative acumen and popularity could be pivotal in securing a win in this crucial region.

Yet another aspect is Kejriwal's decision to go solo. Despite initial speculations about a possible alliance between AAP and Congress, Arvind Kejriwal has now said that AAP would have no electoral alliance with Congress. The strained relationship between the two parties, fueled by ideological differences and a history of rivalry, seems to have outweighed any potential advantages of a partnership. Additionally, AAP's leadership might perceive a tie-up with Congress as a liability, given the latter's diminished presence in Delhi politics. But it also diminishes its own chances as vote split in this scenario is imminent. Congress has dedicated vote bank in Delhi and that could hurt AAP. On the other side, the BJP, aiming to reclaim its footing in Delhi, is expected to focus on its core voter base and polarising issues to galvanise support. The party has intensified its outreach efforts and is likely to emphasise nationalistic themes and the central government's achievements under Prime Minister Modi. However, its challenge remains breaking through AAP's stronghold on key urban constituencies. Congress faces an uphill battle as it tries to regain relevance in Delhi's political scene. The party's lack of significant organisational groundwork and leadership issues have kept it on the sidelines in recent years. However, Congress might attempt to consolidate minority vote and traditional voters to make a dent in the electoral outcome. The decision to avoid an alliance with Congress underscores AAP's confidence but also raises questions about its ability to counter a potentially consolidated opposition. As candidates hit the campaign trail, the capital is set to witness a clash of ideologies, promises and personalities. For now, all eyes are on the unfolding strategies as Delhi gears up for another defining electoral battle.

PICTALK



Monkeys huddle together on a chilly day, in New Delhi

For Joe Biden it is family first

Biden's decision to pardon his son is rooted in political and emotional complexities, with far-reaching implications for presidential clemency



KALYANI SHANKAR

Last week, Americans and people worldwide were stunned by the news that President Joe Biden pardoned his son, Hunter Biden. This clemency controversy was significant because Hunter Biden, a family member, contributed to the debate surrounding the pardon. The pardon ensures that Hunter will not be sentenced for his alleged crimes and will not go to prison.

The judges handling his cases will likely cancel the sentencing hearings scheduled for December 12 for the gun case and December 16 for the tax case. Also, the President is no longer running for office. He made his no-pardon pledge before dropping out of the June presidential race. Presidential pardons in the United States have often sparked controversy; however, some decisions—such as President Biden pardoning his son—have led to more criticism than others. Constitutionally, the President can grant pardons, a power previous presidents have used. Traditionally, US presidents dole out pardons as they leave office.

However, Joe Biden's 'complete and unconditional' pardon of his son adds a layer of complexity and public scrutiny to the issue, a historical context that is important for the public to understand. It is important to understand why Joe Biden acted as he did. Joe Biden has faced many difficulties in his life. He has faced significant personal challenges. He was caught between saving his son and the public criticism. Everyone knows that he is loyal to his family. His baby daughter and first wife died in a car accident, which also injured his sons, Beau and Hunter. Biden wanted Beau to become President, but Beau sadly died from brain cancer in 2015. This focus on the Biden family's struggles aims to create empathy from the public. According to the American media, Biden's second wife persuaded Joe to make a final decision. The public reaction to the Presidential pardon is both critical and supportive.



While some think it is fair, others consider it not justified. This mixed reaction from the public, as well as from Biden's party colleagues, adds a layer of complexity to the issue. Presidents from both parties have used their pardon power, which has raised eyebrows.

George Washington used the power to pardon some people. Presidents often use their pardon powers for friends and allies. A controversial case was former President Richard Nixon, who Gerald Ford pardoned on September 8, 1974. Nixon faced possible prosecution for the Watergate scandal.

In late 1992, President George H W Bush pardoned six men implicated in the Iran-contra affair, including former Defense Secretary Weinberger. Bill Clinton, who, despite stating he would not, pardoned his half-brother Roger for past cocaine charges. Similarly, Donald Trump pardoned his son-in-law Jared Kushner's father for tax evasion and for retaliating against a cooperating witness.

Both had already served their prison sentences. During the latter part of his first term, Trump issued pardons to various individuals who had engaged in wrongdoing. A relieved Hunter

THE PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PARDON IS BOTH CRITICAL AND SUPPORTIVE. WHILE SOME THINK IT IS FAIR, OTHERS CONSIDER IT NOT JUSTIFIED. THIS MIXED REACTION FROM THE PUBLIC, AS WELL AS FROM BIDEN'S PARTY COLLEAGUES, ADDS A LAYER OF COMPLEXITY TO THE ISSUE

said in a statement, "I have admitted and taken responsibility for my mistakes during the darkest days of my addiction — mistakes that have been exploited to publicly humiliate and shame me and my family for political sport."

The case against Hunter Biden has spanned several years, involving allegations of tax crimes and gun fences. He was convicted in June and pleaded guilty to tax evasion in September. Biden said Hunter was 'selectively and unfairly prosecuted' and pointed out that the charges were politically motivated. The immediate impact of the pardon is that it makes it harder for Democrats to criticise Trump.

Also, it has given Trump a chance to pardon people charged with the January 6 events. Biden's change of heart after initially declaring he would not pardon Hunter had his reasons. One of them was his wife, who persuaded Biden to do so.

He stated Hunter was singled out only because Hunter was his son. President Biden has pardoned 25 individuals, none directly connected to him. Typically, presidents approve several clemency requests toward the end of their terms. Still, The pardon "damages the public's trust in the presidency. President Bill

Clinton signed 140 pardons on January 20, 2001—his final day in office. Many lawmakers are worried about the potential bad precedent for the future.

One way of solving the problem could be to amend the Constitution. Still, it is a lengthy process, and neither party has the number to carry it through in Congress. The critics argue it could set a dangerous precedent and erode public trust in the justice system. Recent Supreme Court rulings have made it more difficult to charge a president for actions taken while in office.

They limit the avenues for holding a president accountable for any potential misuse of the pardon power. After Hunter's clemency, President Biden is considering granting broad pardons to protect his aides and officials. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre stated that before leaving the White House, Biden plans to issue additional Pdonns.

However, in his second term, Trump declared he would pardon the 2021 clash in Congress while Biden took the oath. Trump must be careful before doling out Presidential pardons if they respect public opinion.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SYRIAN REBELS CONQUER DAMASCUS

Madam —The manner in which Islamic rebels conquered Syria's capital Damascus and forced President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country is not only surprising, but it may also mark the start of a new era of uncertainty for West Asia as a whole. The excitement with which Syrians welcomed the opposition soldiers demonstrates that Bashar al-Assad has become even more unpopular. His disfavour stemmed from his brutal governance over Syria. Syria has been dealing with insecurity and upheaval for nearly 13 years. Iran has suffered a significant setback with the seizure of Syria by rebel forces. It is dubious that Iran will sit in peace after the demise of the administration it sponsored in Syria.

Even if the rebels win Syria without massive violence, the chances of durable peace are slim because Turkey wants to administer the country its way. Although India's economic ties with Syria have not grown significantly, both countries have joined forces in the battle against terror. Not only that, but Bashar al-Assad has always supported India about Kashmir. Syria has even stated that the elimination of Article 370 in Kashmir is a domestic matter for India and that any country has the right to take the necessary steps to safeguard its residents on its territory. It remains to be seen what kind and how much Syria's posture will alter considering the new circumstances. Indian-Turkish relations have recently improved. While its attitude on Kashmir has softened, India has not attempted to block Turkey's membership in BRICS.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

LEGACY OF SHAKTIKANTA DAS

Madam—The outgoing pro-reformist RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das leaves a legacy of stability and consistency in monetary policy in the most difficult and challenging times of COVID and geopolitical turbulence consequent upon the trade and tariff war of the US and China while the country is poised to be the third largest economy. The persuasive approach and preemptive policy decision-making with

Congress faces challenges



The knives are out in Opposition to INDIA bloc, especially after the drubbing suffered by the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi at the hands of the BJP-helmed Mahayuti in Maharashtra. The grand old party's poor show has dented its predominant position in India, prompting West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to throw her hat into the ring. Dissatisfied with the bloc's functioning, Mamata has signalled her

intention to take charge of the alliance if given the opportunity. She has found support from NCP stalwart Sharad Pawar, who has called her a "prominent leader" of the nation.

It's apparent that Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, is losing ground as the face of INDIA. There are three Gandhis in Parliament now—with Priyanka being the latest entrant—but this dynastic milestone has not enthused the voters or Congress' allies. Though party president Mallikarjun Kharge is also the chairperson of the bloc, it is no secret that the Gandhi family is calling the shots. But this arrangement is strengthening neither the Congress nor INDIA. The Congress has no option but to pay heed to its partners. In case of no course correction, the alliance might implode sooner or later, leaving the field open for the BJP and PM Modi.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

immediate action marked the success story of the outgoing RBI Governor. Issuing perfunctory warnings and advisories was not his work culture.

The economic impact of demonetisation on trade and business was smoothly handled in his tenure. In such a vast country facing multiple challenges, the new RBI Governor faces the toughest test of the sustaining economy and people expect a daring chief banker who sails against the winds. The new incumbent Revenue Secretary, Sanjay Malhotra, as RBI Governor, knows his job well, as he is already at the helm of economic affairs and is fully conversant about how the economic policies of the government and RBI move and work at ground level. The new RBI Governor faces the trilemma of growth, inflation, and stabilisation of rupees while keeping banks' NPAs low, controlling the mis-selling of health and life insurance policies, maintaining FDI and FPI inflows, and managing the impacts of US-China confrontations. The new US President, Donald Trump, may also throw significant challenges on RBI's monetary policy and val-

uation of the rupee. Cryptocurrency is also one of the major concerns for RBI.

Vinod Johri | Jalandhar

RBI MOOTS FOR BETTER WAGES

Madam — The Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) to the Government of India has emphasised the need for better employee compensation growth, especially when India Inc is experiencing record profit growth. With the rising prices of education fees, medical fees, vegetables, grocery items, and daily necessities, there is a strong need to raise the compensation growth of employees, as their salary/wages are their primary source of living. This downfall in compensation growth is also affecting GDP growth, as employees are controlling their expenditures for survival. Government agencies need to address this issue by implementing policies that promote fair compensation practices for the overall well-being of India.

Shreyanshi Jain | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Bridging the educational divide through computer-based testing

A successful classroom isn't just about books and resources; it's about creating an environment where students feel valued, heard and empowered to succeed

In populous and diverse countries like India, the educational landscape often mirrors the stark contrasts between urban and rural regions. Urban areas benefit from advanced infrastructure and access to extensive educational opportunities, while rural regions often struggle with limited resources and opportunities. This disparity significantly affects students in rural communities, restricting their career prospects and perpetuating cycles of poverty. However, innovative solutions like computer-based testing (CBT) hold the potential to bridge this divide, fostering enhanced employability and socioeconomic progress.



initiatives by enabling a broader range of courses and certifications, including technical skills like coding and data analysis and soft skills such as communication and leadership. Certifications that are nationally or globally recognised add value to individuals' skillsets, making them more competitive in the job market. As more people upskill and secure employment, communities experience economic upliftment. Educated individuals often share knowledge within their communities, creating a ripple effect that promotes continuous learning and development. **Addressing Skills Gaps:** The demand for tech skills is on the rise globally. The World

Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023 highlights that technology and IT roles constitute 16 of the top 100 rising jobs, reflecting the growing importance of tech-related expertise. Conversely, the Global Talent Shortage report by Manpower Group reveals a significant skills gap, with 77 per cent of employers struggling to find qualified talent. Bridging this gap is critical to meeting current and future market demands, particularly through IT and tech-focused courses.

According to Pearson VUE's 2023 Value of IT Certification Candidate Report, professionals who earned IT certifications gained confidence in their abilities, with 81 per cent feeling empowered to explore new job opportunities. Educational centres with CBT capabilities enable individuals in rural areas to acquire certifications that align with market needs, thereby promoting quality education and employability across the nation.

The Broad Reach of Computer-Based Testing: The flexible nature of CBT offers unique advantages over traditional testing methods.

Candidates can choose convenient testing locations and time slots, reducing stress and improving performance. This approach proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing individuals to take exams remotely. The 2023 Value of IT Certification Report underscores the tangible benefits of certifications: 35 per cent of Indian candidates experienced job promotions, while 37 per cent secured new opportunities within their industry, and 20 per cent transitioned to different fields.

Bridging Urban-Rural Disparities: The increasing availability of CBT centres in remote areas is a step toward addressing regional disparities in education and employment. These centres provide a pathway for individuals to upskill, earn recognised certifications, and improve their career prospects. As India continues to expand its CBT infrastructure, the nation moves closer to realising equitable educational opportunities and fostering inclusive socioeconomic growth.

(The writer is Vice President EMEA and Asia, Pearson VUE; views are personal)



MATHEW POYIADGI



FIRST COLUMN

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT LIFE

Our journey through birth and death is inevitable, we must therefore detach ourselves



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We should do it because evidence is overwhelming that we are eternal souls. We are in a birth and death cycle getting different bodies life after life. What will you say about Shanti Devi's rebirth? She was born in Delhi but recalled details of her past life in Mathura. Her recollections were so compelling that Mahatma Gandhi got interested. He appointed a committee of 15 prominent persons to study the case. They took Shanti Devi to Mathura and she was able to recollect all the relevant details even though she had never been to Mathura in her present life. Dr Ian Stevenson, a leading authority on reincarnation, came to India to interview her. He wrote that at least 24 statements of her memories matched verifiable facts.

These days TV channels have become interested in the rebirth phenomenon. They are producing evidence from all over the world to confirm the same. Then, the Bhagavad-Geeta – the book of eternal wisdom is full of detailed information about us being souls. I will cite just one verse. 'Just as childhood, youth and old age are changes in the body of this soul, getting another body is a similar change. (2.93) And the ultimate confirmation is God saying it. Isn't He omniscient, who knows past, present and future also? Having convinced ourselves of this reality, let us see how we can prepare for a transfer or relocation from our present life. There are two main parts. The first one is getting mentally ready. Personally speaking, when the time came for me to go to the USA for higher



studies, I visualised how my life would change for the better in the coming years. I also realised that there will inevitably be many challenges in the new country. The second was to take with me whatever I could to make my life there as comfortable as possible. I took the necessary clothes and a little money, which was allowed at that time. But mainly it was my certificates and what I had learnt by that time. Similar preparations are required for the bodily change, though they are quite different in detail. The first one has to be the mental preparation for such a change. We should accept the fact that such a change is inevitable. And it can be a lot better than our present. Lord Krishna has assured, "Those who have begun their spiritual journey take birth in a family of pure and prosperous." (6.41) Therefore, it is essential that we do so too before our time comes to leave the present body. We must be in the shelter of God at that time by doing spiritual activities. Surely, we must be following dharma in our activities as far as possible. We should be mainly in the mode of goodness, which is illuminating and free from diseases on account of purity. (14.6) We should be in control of bad emotions like lust, greed, anger, hate, etc. We should have accumulated a lot of good 'karmas' (acts) because this is all we are allowed to take with us. But we shouldn't put too much pressure on ourselves because we can make improvements gradually only. Whatever, we are presently doing, we should do it better. As the present determines the future, the present has to be safeguarded fully. Are we inclined to make the necessary preparations? We should get started right away at least mentally. It will be such a shame not to do so when we have time to do so. Those wanting to do so are encouraged by God; one will succeed.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

Rebel forces oust Assad as Damascus falls



B K SINGH

The fall of Assad's regime signals a new chapter in Syria's tumultuous history, raising critical questions about the country's path to stability



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government has been fighting rebel groups with the support of Russia, Iran, Lebanese and Hezbollah right from 2011. Within ten days of rebels getting control over northwestern city of Aleppo and further capturing Hama and Homs, the capital Damascus also fell under their control on December 8. President Assad along with his wife and three children fled the country before rebel forces could reach him. He has been granted asylum in Moscow. His younger brother was tipped to succeed his father as President, died in a road accident.

He was called back from London, where he was practising ophthalmologist, to succeed his father as President of Syria. In the initial months after taking over the Presidency in the year 2000 he was seen as a reformist and pro-people in sharp contrast to his father Hafez al-Assad's three-decade rule with iron hands. Once pro-democracy protests erupted in 2011, he followed the brutal tactics of his father to crush dissent. The conflict escalated into civil war and he was seen unleashing his military to blast opposition-held territories. All supporters of the Assad regime have considerably weakened their backing on account of the ongoing war they are engaged in. Russian forces have a challenging battle in Ukraine. Owing to the high level of casualties of soldiers in the battle, Russia has withdrawn its forces from Syria partially and is even further recruiting foreign nationals in the force to keep the war going, which has already been continuing for a quarter to three years. Hamas's terror attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and Israel's response to Gaza opened several dimensions of the West Asia conflict.

Iran's supported terror groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Houthis in Yemen have denounced Palestinians suffering in Gaza on account of Israeli bombardment and it opened additional fronts for Israel in the conflict. This has also weakened Iran and Hezbollah to provide adequate support to Assad's regime. In addition, 13 years of Syrian civil war has exhausted the Syrian Army. Owing to the corruption in the bureaucratic and political circle of the Syrian government, and the series of Western sanctions, the economy



THE CONFLICT ESCALATED INTO CIVIL WAR AND HE WAS SEEN UNLEASHING HIS MILITARY TO BLAST OPPOSITION-HELD TERRITORIES. ALL SUPPORTERS OF THE ASSAD REGIME HAVE CONSIDERABLY WEAKENED THEIR BACKING ON ACCOUNT OF THE ONGOING WAR. THEY ARE ENGAGED IN

has been hardly afloat. Further President Erdogan in Ankara, is facing the heat on account of three million Syrian migrants living in Turkey and more so because Syria dismisses his proposal for deportation of migrants alleging that his country has illegally occupied Syrian areas along the border.

There was an option for Assad to join the Arab League last year, but he did not accept making Arab nations also opposed to him. Earlier with the help of Iran and Russia, he had survived the Arab Spring Rebellion against him, which originated in Tunisia in 2011. The next question is about the future of Syria. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is a Sunni Islamist militant group, that played an important role in the Syrian civil war. It is this group that has led other rebel groups to occupy Damascus.

The US, UK and UN have designated it as a terrorist organisation. A bounty of \$10 million was on its chief Abu Mohammad al-Golani's head. UK has indicated lifting the ban on HTS if it delivers on promises like protecting minorities and people's rights. Turkey has backed some other rebel groups in the Syrian civil war, which do not have good ties with HTS. US-backed Kurdish YPG militia has established control in Syria's northeast, also known as the Kurdish democratic union party (PYD) does not enjoy good and workable relations with HTS. There are separate rebels in Syria's southwest.

It is quite difficult for all the groups to come together and be partners in Syria's new regime. 900 strong military men are maintained by the US in northeastern Syria. The US has maintained this presence in the name of countering ISIS, but its actual goal was the regime change in Syria. The US has now emerged clear winner. As rebels have asserted control over Syria and its capital Damascus, uncertainties remain about the future of the country.

The first day was marked by arsenals, looting of shops and banks, and emptying prisons followed by a night curfew, but the second day saw normalcy slowly returning to the capital and other cities. The main rebel commander al-Golani met Assad's PM Mohammad Jaleel and Vice President Faisal Mekdad to install a transitional government in Syria. Further, Golani has announced publicly that they would bring out a list of government officials responsible for torturing the citizens.

In the meantime, there have been air strikes in Syria by Israeli, US and Turkey forces to protect each of their interests. Iran and Russia have suffered major setbacks with the fall of Assad's government. Both countries have lost their key allies. As Sunni Islamic groups are going to be in control of Syria, Iran a predominantly Shia population is more vulnerable to Israeli attacks. When rebel forces took control of Aleppo about a week earlier, both Iran and Russia could not extend adequate defence leading to the fall of even Damascus. Iran was exposed in recent Israeli direct attacks, and Hezbollah was also decimated, no significant support came from Assad. In recent months, Assad's Syria and Iran could not support each other when exigencies arose. Syria is the only state that had joined Iran's 'Axis of resistance' against the US and Israel.

The axis has become weak; even Hezbollah's downfall could not be prevented. Hezbollah has signed a ceasefire deal with Israel ahead of any Gaza deal. The action of the state of Iran and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to defend Assad did not go well with the people of Iran. It had political and economic costs. The fall of Assad sends a disturbing signal to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who now understands that the axis of resis-

tance can no longer protect the allies. Assad's fall has also emboldened opposition groups in Iran. Besides these, women are protesting for their rights.

All these may lead to regime change in Iran too. If the Supreme Leader realigns himself with the US by reviving/softening its stand on the 2015 nuclear deal, then regime change in Iran can be avoided. The last two weeks of violence that culminated in Assad's fleeing Syria, also saw the Shia population enthusiastically taking measures to secure the tomb of Sayyeda Zainab, the daughter of Hazrat Ali and Fatima and granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad. This holy site signifies great importance for Shia Muslims worldwide. To guarantee the security of this precious shrine, Shias from Iran, Iraq and Pakistan are also moving to Syria. The shrine is located in al-Sitt, south Damascus.

Since 1979 Iranian government has provided financial support for the management of the shrine. Several Shia scholars and celebrities are buried in the shrine and surrounding cemeteries. Since 2012 the town has been under attack from armed militants in neighboring Sunni towns. Many Shia families were driven out of their homes in southern Damascus.

Rockets landing on random places was quite common. Sunni Muslims comprise 74 per cent of Syria's population, whereas Shias are only 3 per cent. Shias hold quite a strong sentiment for the shrine; the issue can be a potential flash point between the two sects and would also determine the rivalry between rebel groups.

Will Syria's transition to democracy be smooth? It is possible only when different rebel groups learn to share power.

(The writer is Principal Chief Conservator of Forests-Head of Forest Force- Karnataka; views expressed are personal)

Empowering India's solar revolution: Navigating challenges and embracing opportunities

As energy demands are set to double by 2030, addressing these gaps is essential to transforming India's solar aspirations into reality

India has been declared as the third-largest energy-consuming country, thanks to the rising income and improving standards of living. In response to the escalating energy demand, India has set ambitious targets for solar energy capacity, aiming to reach 280 GW by 2030 (the highest among all renewable sources). And owing to the rise in awareness surrounding solar energy solutions, the country has achieved 70.10 GW of solar energy capacity by June 2023, which is 70.1 per cent of the target of 100 GW set in the year preceding. The rising awareness of solar solutions among consumers, particularly rooftop solar solutions, is a notable trend in the solar energy market. This trend has been driven by



PREETI BAJAJ

various factors, including technological advancements, innovation, digital revolution to unlock more of the sun's potential and support from the Central Government. Community leaders, particularly in rural and non-metro areas, have also emerged as crucial drivers in promoting the adoption of solar energy solutions. However, despite this awareness, a significant gap exists between the aware-

ness of the advantages of solar energy and its widespread adoption. The adoption rate remains relatively low. Reportedly, the country fell short of its renewable energy target for 2022 by 32 per cent, with an installed capacity of 119 GW compared to the target of 175 GW. Financial and cost considerations, geographical limitations, and perception issues further cause a challenge to solar energy adoption in India. To understand the potential consumers, Luminous initiated a large, nationwide survey to delve further into the perceptions, awareness, adoption, and challenges concerning solar energy among respondents in India. The initial analysis of the survey data suggests that while

people are increasingly aware of alternatives to traditional energy sources, a majority of consumers in India face three primary challenges in their adoption: Accessibility, Skill shortage, and Perceived cost implication, as discovered in the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' research. For instance, over two-quarters of the respondents (54 per cent) in the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' research rate their knowledge about solar energy solutions as high, however, nearly a quarter of the respondents (24 per cent) say solar energy solutions are inaccessible to them. In fact, according to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), 59 per cent of respondents do not possess



even a basic understanding of solar energy. Therefore, while awareness is spreading, concerns linger about the accessibility of solar infrastructure. Another challenge that came to the fore, is the shortage of specialised skills in the solar energy sector.

The boost in the solar energy sector is facing a shortage of trained personnel for the effective implementation and maintenance of solar infra-

structure. According to the COO of the Skill Council of Green Jobs, there will be a requirement of 30,000 skill-certified human resources in the manufacturing segment by the end of FY 2024, and only 10,000 skill-certified jobs will be added by the end of this financial year. As per the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' survey data also, despite the acknowledgement of skill requirements, nearly half of the respondents (45 per cent) believe that skilled labour for implementing solar energy solutions is unavailable in their area, suggesting a mismatch between demand and supply of qualified personnel. While the government has introduced various policies and incentives to promote solar adoption- including

financial incentives, tax advantages, subsidies for solar power generation, net-metering regulations, basic customs duty, Production Linked Incentive (PLI), and the Aatmanirbhar campaign, perceived costs remain a significant deterrent for many individuals. Thus, the Solar Spectrum of New India presents both challenges and opportunities on the path towards a sustainable energy future. By addressing issues of accessibility, skill shortages, and perceived costs, stakeholders can work together to accelerate solar adoption trends and pave the way for a brighter, cleaner future for India.

It's also imperative because the demand for reliable power in urban and rural areas will double by 2030. This surge in

demand will be powered by increased industrial, economic, and domestic consumption activities throughout the country. Moreover, according to the National Electricity Plan, the projected all-India peak electricity demand and electrical energy requirement is 277.2 GW and 1,907.8 BUs for the year 2026-27 and 366.4 GW and 2,473.8 BUs for 2031-32, respectively. However, the absence of power line infrastructure and distribution utilities' lag in supplying power around the clock indicates the need for significant changes in existing energy infrastructure and the availability of alternate sources.

(The writer is MD & CEO of Luminous Power Technologies; views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Coca-Cola to sell 40% stake of bottling arm HCCBL

Global beverage major Coca-Cola on Wednesday announced sale of 40 per cent stake in its India bottling business Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd (HCCBL) to Jubilant Bhartia Group. Through the company has not disclosed the amount of the deal, some media reports have pegged it at around Rs 10,000 crore for 40 per cent stake in Hindustan Coca-Cola Holdings (HCCH). The Bhartia family-led group in a statement said "they have entered into a definitive agreement for a strategic investment whereby Jubilant Bhartia Group will be acquiring a 40 per cent equity interest in Hindustan Coca-Cola Holdings Pvt Ltd, India (HCCH) through its entity Jubilant Beverages Limited. HCCH is the parent company of HCCBL, the largest Coca-Cola bottler in India. The transaction is subject to regulatory approval. Jubilant Beverages Ltd is a new entity incorporated this year in October by Jubilant Bhartia Group.



American Express launches 3-yr initiative for sustainability

Global payments company American Express on Wednesday introduced a three-year initiative to promote sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. The programme aims to support India's climate and sustainability goals by empowering local communities, restoring ecosystems in collaboration with safe water network, the company said in a statement. In the Aravalli region, reforestation and ecosystem restoration will be central, including the planting of 15,000 trees and land restoration across 10,000 hectares. These actions will increase green cover, boost biodiversity, and support the region's climate resilience efforts. Solar-powered solutions will also be implemented in key public areas, reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy.



One MobiKwik Systems IPO subscribed 7.3 times

The initial public offering (IPO) of fintech company One MobiKwik Systems got subscribed 7.3 times, receiving an overwhelming response from retail investors, on the first day of sale on Wednesday. This is the second attempt by the Gurugram-based firm for the public issue following its first attempt in July 2021. Earlier, the company shelved its IPO plans and withdrew the draft papers due to unfavourable market conditions. The share sale received bids for 8,68,26,031 shares, as against 1,18,71,696 shares on offer, as per data available on the National Stock Exchange (NSE). The Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) part got subscribed 26.71 times, while non-institutional investors category received 8.97 times subscription, and the quota for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) received a mere 2 per cent subscription. MobiKwik has reduced its IPO size from its earlier plans of Rs 1,900 crore in 2021 to Rs 700 crore in January this year to Rs 572 crore now.



Logistic cost in India to come down to 9 pc in 2 years: Gadkari

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday said the logistics cost in India will come down to 9 per cent within two years. Speaking during bauma Conexpo India, the Road Transport and Highways Minister said that "presently our logistics cost is 14-16 per cent... I assure you that within two years... our logistics cost will be 9 per cent. So we will be more competitive in the international market." In China, the logistics cost is 8 per cent and in the US and European countries it is 12 per cent, the minister said. The minister further said the automobile industry is one of the important industries that is giving maximum revenue as part of GST to the state governments and the Centre.

Focus would be trust, growth & stability, says Malhotra

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sanjay Malhotra took charge as the 26th Governor of Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday, and promised to focus on deepening trust, growth and ensuring stability.

Malhotra, 56, takes over as the central bank governor at a critical time where inflation has shot above the comfort level, growth has declined to a 7-quarter low and rupee is at all-time low level against US dollar.

"I can assure that we will put in the best foot forward in public interest to deliver what the public of India looks forward to, which is trust, which is growth and which is a stable and certain policy," he told reporters at his maiden interaction as a RBI Governor.

The career bureaucrat arrived at the RBI headquarters at the Mint Street around 1000 hours and completed formalities of taking charge in the presence of Deputy Governors M Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar and Swaminathan J.

Michael Patra, Deputy Governor in-charge of the critical monetary policy function, was not present. Malhotra said, "We are in

Takes over as 26th RBI Guv



a very dynamic world right now fraught with geopolitical tensions, climate change risks and political uncertainties", and affirmed that the RBI will remain "alert and agile" to meet the challenges.

RBI is a prestigious institution which has done commendable work over its history courtesy the diligence and hard work of its staff members and senior officials, said Malhotra, specifically mentioning his predecessor Shaktikanta Das' name.

"I will continue to uphold the legacy (of the RBI) and take it forward," he affirmed, outlining his thoughts on the key focus areas.

On growth, he said it is a "huge responsibility" to ensure that the expansion in economic activity continues.

Although there was no explicit mention of inflation in his remarks, Malhotra stressed that the focus will be on "stability" and "trust".

Policy certainty can be among the factors which can ensure stability, Malhotra said, adding that in his earlier assignment as the Revenue Secretary he focus was on stability in policy.

As an institution, he said, the RBI is what it is because of the "trust" it has earned for working with the public's interest in mind, and added that it would be his endeavour to strengthen it.

Whatever decisions are taken will be done with public interest in mind, Malhotra said. He, however, declined to take any specific questions from the media.

Labour Min mulls scheme for gig, platform workers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Labour & Employment is working on a scheme to provide various benefits like social security to gig and platform workers in the country, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Addressing the CII Global Economic Policy Forum, Union Labour Secretary Sumita Dawra said the labour code on social security has outlined social security benefits for them.

"We are putting together the scheme for the gig and platform economy workers because there is no traditional employer-employee relationship defined for the gig and platform workers but we need to bring social security coverage for them so that they can be more productive and support the country's economy and the e-commerce and services sector more effectively," she said.

In October, Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandavaya said that a policy for providing social security benefits like pension and health services to gig and platform workers is under process.

He had also said that Niti Aayog has estimated 65 lakh gig and platform workers in the country, but the number is likely to be over 2 crore as this segment is growing very fast.

Dawra also stated that by 2030, the ministry expects more than 3 crore workers in the gig and platform economy.

She also acknowledged that the ministry is aware that almost a crore workers are there in the gig and platform economy and it is going to grow further.

For the first time, the definition of 'gig workers' and 'platform workers' has been provided in the Code on Social Security 2020.



Need active participation of MFs, pension funds in corp bond mkt: SBI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State Bank of India chairman C S Setty on Wednesday called for active participation by mutual funds and pension funds in the corporate bond market.

"I am sure that a lot of corporates would like to issue bonds. I believe that if household/corporate savings are finding ways into these three investment categories, it is important that insurance and mutual funds also actively participate in the corporate bond market. I don't see that kind of participation actively coming in," Setty said.

He said the pension/mutual funds are making invest-

ments in AAA-rated bonds and this is not going to help deepen the corporate bond market. Setty said the corporate bond market has to come into financing of infrastructure as well as balance sheet funding of corporates.

He said the investments are happening not only in equity but also in mutual funds, pension funds and insurance funds.

"We have been debating on depth of the corporate bond market for many years. We could not achieve that depth," Setty said, adding that SBI is the largest issuer of corporate bond and has issued Rs 50,000 crore worth of bonds this year.

'Agriculture has tremendous opportunity to grow'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is a 'serious concern' over food and nutrition security across the world, and it is among the factors that are making food inflation 'sticky', ITC Chairman & Managing Director Sanjiv Puri said on Wednesday.

The agriculture sector has a "tremendous opportunity" to grow vertically but there is a need to build resilience with sustainable farming and use technology to provide such solutions.

The sector has to increase productivity and quality, and at the same time it also has to deal with the newer challenges such as climate change, he said here at a CII function here.

"It has to deal with the newer challenge, a very severe challenge that this sector faces, of climate change. It is a sector that is most vulnerable to erratic weather patterns, and all these issues are no more things



of the future. They are live and with us today," he said.

More importantly, India has a large number of small and marginal farmers. "How can we work with them? How can we enable them and make them productive, make them future-ready? These are certain areas that I think offer a great oppor-

tunity for growth ...," he said.

Puri also said, that while dealing with productivity, there is also a need to think about sustainability, as how the whole practice of farming has to transform such that it's more environmentally friendly, said Puri.

There is a need to harness

new-age digital technologies to provide innovative and comprehensive solutions to farmers, and purposeful government support over the years for startups has enabled tremendous progress in this.

"No doubt progress has been made, but we still have challenges. And more importantly, I think it's important to recognise the quantum of opportunity that is available now," he said.

There are various estimates on how much world food production needs to increase by 2050, and this has to be done at a time when natural resources are depleting.

"There lies a big opportunity and given the potential that India can grow vertically from about 2 to 3 per cent of global trade.

That is an, indeed, tremendous opportunity. There is a growing requirement for traceability, sustainable farming, etc," he said

Sensex, Nifty edge up in restricted trade ahead of US inflation data

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher in restricted trade on Wednesday as investors awaited key US inflation data for further cues.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 16.09 points or 0.02 per cent to close at 81,526.14 even as 17 of its constituents declined and 13 advanced.

Snapping its three-day losing run, the broader NSE Nifty advanced 31.75 points or 0.13 per cent to settle at 24,641.80.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance, Nestle India, Bajaj Finserv, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Maruti, Bharti Airtel and Hindustan Unilever were among the gainers.

JSW Steel, Adani Ports, NTPC, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank, Titan and HDFC Bank were the laggards.



"The Indian market exhibited subtle movements, reflecting mixed sentiments prevailing in global markets ahead of the US CPI inflation data release, which could influence the Fed policy," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.35 per cent and the midcap index gained 0.25 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Consumer Durables rose 0.59 per cent, Industrials by 0.40 per cent, Auto by 0.37 per cent, IT and Teck by 0.35 per cent each and FMCG by 0.34 per

cent.

Utilities, Bankex, Power and Services were the laggards.

Meanwhile, shares of PNC Infratech surged 12 per cent to close at Rs 347.90 apiece, after the company announced the early completion of a key highway project in Uttar Pradesh, boosting investor sentiment.

During the day, the scrip of the company climbed 15 per cent to hit intraday high of Rs 357.15 apiece on the BSE.

On the other hand, stock of food delivery and quick-commerce major Swiggy fell 4 per cent to close at Rs 522.70 apiece, as investors booked profits after the one-month lock-in period for anchor investors expired.

As many as 2,146 stocks advanced, 1,840 declined and 110 remained unchanged on the BSE. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms climbed by Rs 91,110.2 crore to Rs 4,60,46,637.96 (USD 5.43 trillion).

SEBI to launch survey on increasing retail participation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Market regulator SEBI will conduct a pan India survey on how to bring more people into the capital market, create risk awareness and bridge the gaps in the ecosystem, a Sebi official said on Wednesday.

Sebi whole time member Ananth Narayan G said that volatility in the Indian markets is low and USD 14 billion FPI outflow in October-November was matched by an equivalent amount of inflow by the domestic investors, like mutual funds.

He, however, cautioned that there is no room for complacency.

"While we celebrate the growth of domestic investors, it does not mean we do not need foreign investments.



Gold reclaims Rs 80,000-mark

Silver rally extends for third day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rallied to reclaim the Rs 80,000-level in the national capital on Wednesday driven by increased buying from jewellery and stockists, amid a strong global trend, as per the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity jumped Rs 620 to touch nearly a three-week high of Rs 80,400 per 10 grams. It settled at Rs 79,780 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Extending the rally for the third straight day, silver surged Rs 1,450 to hit a one-month high of Rs 96,300 per kg. The white metal closed at Rs 94,850 per kg on Tuesday.

Price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 620 to Rs 80,000 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The yellow metal finished at Rs 79,380 per 10 grams in the previous trading session.

Traders attributed the rise to increased demand from

jewellers and retailers in local markets.

In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 112, or 0.14 per cent, to trade at Rs 78,450 per 10 grams.

During the day, the yellow metal bounced Rs 640, or 0.82 per cent, to hit a high of Rs 78,978 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded with minor gains as Comex prices once again approached the USD 2,700-mark, recovering strongly from the USD 2,600 support range seen a week ago.

"In MCX, gold is expected to trade within a range of Rs 77,400-79,250, with volatility likely to remain elevated ahead of the data release," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst -- Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Silver, however, declined Rs 396, or 0.41 per cent, to Rs 95,129 per kg on Wednesday.

'FMCG sector needs to reignite volume expansion'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The FMCG sector needs to reignite volume expansion and embrace strategic innovation to maintain growth, Pidilite Managing Director Bharat Puri said on Wednesday amid the FMCG companies reportedly facing subdued growth during October and November hit by the slowdown in urban demand.

"To maintain growth, the FMCG sector must focus on reigniting volume growth and embracing strategic innovation. Companies have shown that market outperformance is possible through product and distribution innovation," said Puri at a Summit on the FMCG sector hosted

by the CII here.

Noting that modern trade and quick-commerce channels are thriving, offering new growth avenues, he said insurgent brands are capturing significant growth by winning the hearts of underserved customers.

"To stay competitive, companies must innovate, invest in digital capabilities, and adopt entrepreneurial operating models, while maintaining robust data strategies for personalized engagement," Puri, who is also the chairman of the CII, FMCG National Committee, added.

The summit was attended by representatives from leading brands such as Tata Consumer Products, Britannia Industries, Pidilite



Industries, Godrej Consumer, HUL, among others.

"We expect overall FMCG industry revenue growth to return to con-

sistent lower double digit growth in over the next 3-5 years; relatively higher contribution from volume growth compared to prior years,

varying across categories," said Joydeep Bhattacharya, Partner at Bain & Company.

Stating that Indian FMCG has a great potential to achieve volume growth, Sudhanshu Vats, Managing Director Designate, Pidilite Industries said, "Margin expansion is likely to continue in the days to come. There is a huge potential for brands to benefit given macro fundamentals remain very strong."

"Modern channels are now contributing over a quarter of packaged FMCG sales in over one million towns, and growing rapidly. Shopper missions are becoming more frequent, and 60 per cent of these missions are now unplanned.

To stay competitive, companies must innovate, invest in digital capabilities, and adopt entrepreneurial operating models, while maintaining robust data strategies for personalized engagement

YEH KAALI KAALI ANKHEIN SEASON 3 IS ON CARDS

Soon after finishing the second season, fans of *Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein* had one inquiry: Is a third season on the horizon? Now, here's some good news. Just three weeks after the release of the film featuring Tahir Raj Bhasin, Shweta Tripathi Sharma and Aanchal Singh, Netflix India has announced its next installment. Sidharth Sengupta, the writer-creator, is genuinely thrilled about advancing the dark thriller. It illustrates the chaos that ensues when Singh's character Purva becomes infatuated with Bhasin's Vikrant. "The response has been overwhelming. Considering how the second season ended, things are bound to get more intriguing as we witness how the characters evolve with the circumstances. The audience can expect significant trans-

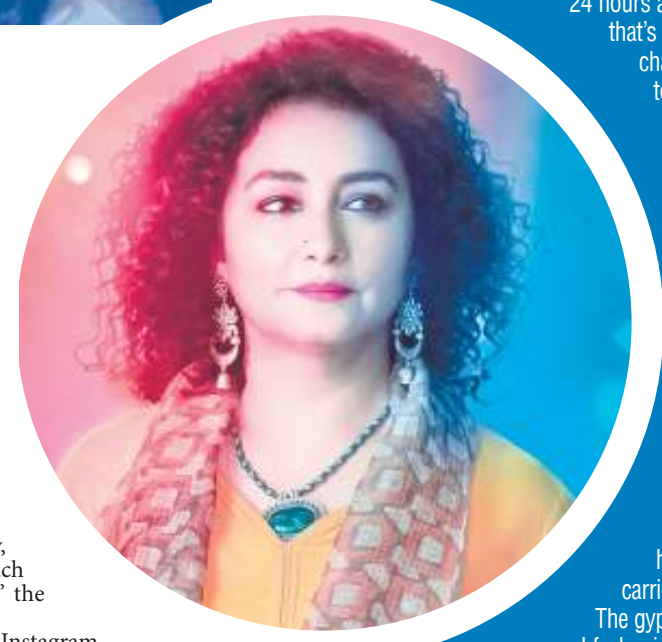
formations in the lives of Vikrant (Tahir), Shikha (Tripathi), Guru (Gurmeet Choudhary), Janan (Arunoday Singh), Akheraj (Saurabh Shukla) and Akhil (Nikhil Pandey)," says Sen. The most recent season focused on the protagonist's effort to eliminate Purva, to whom he was compelled to wed.

When it concluded with a cliffhanger, featuring Vikrant hurt and Purva expecting, fans celebrated the chance of a third installment. During its first season in 2022, *Yeh Kaali Kaali Ankhein* emerged as a surprising success, as critics felt its pulp qualities render it an enjoyable viewing experience for the general audience. By narrating the tale of an apparently average couple, the series also emphasises how far individuals can go when they are cornered.



Divya Dutta on joining Bandish Bandits Season 2 as Nandini

Actor Divya Dutta, known for her compelling performances and ability to bring depth to diverse characters, opens up about her character Nandini joining *Bandish Bandits Season 2* as a music teacher. Playing Nandini, a complex and layered character with a unique philosophy of music and mentorship, Divya shares fascinating insights about how the role evolved and the creative collaboration with director Anand Tiwari. In her own words, she reveals the meticulous thought process behind Nandini's persona and the emotional resonance of embodying a character inspired by real-life influences. Divya recalls the story behind her character Nandini and how it came to life. She shared, "I think this look, first of all, is very interesting. This character was initially a male character. Then, Anand and I got talking. Of course, I totally loved the season 1 of *Bandish Bandits* first season and during our discussion, he asked, 'Would you do it?' I said, 'Of course, I'd love to; why not?' Anand said, 'Give me 24 hours and I will get back'. I think that's when he realised that this character was always meant to be female and it worked beautifully. Everything about it came together so organically from his side. The character of Nandini was carefully crafted and the credit for her belongs entirely to Anand. I just held his hand and trusted his vision."



Divya further adds, "Nandini's philosophy of music as a mentor is unique and it reflects in how she dresses, how she carries herself and who she is. The gypsy vibe in her personality, I feel, mirrors her own free spirit—flying high, yet empathetic towards her students, which you can also see in the trailer. Without giving away too much of the story, yes, Nandini is fair-minded. Anand said something beautiful: who he sees in Naseer Sahab in real life is who Nandini is for Shreya, Rohan and everyone else. That thought really resonated with me." Created by Amritpal Singh Bindra and Anand Tiwari, who have also directed the series, *Bandish Bandits* is a Leo Media Collective Private Limited production and is written by Tiwari alongside Atmika Didwania and Karan Singh Tyagi. The new season will see the return of its versatile cast, including Ritvik Bhowmik, Shreya Chaudhry, Sheeba Chaddha, Atul Kulkarni, Rajesh Tailang and Kunaal Roy Kapur, along with new cast members Divya Dutta, Rohan Gurbaxani, Yashaswini Dayama, Aaliyah Qureshi, and Saurabh Nayyar in pivotal roles. *Bandish Bandits season two* is set to premiere exclusively on Prime Video on December 13 in India and over 240 countries and territories worldwide.

Selena Gomez opens up on 'loneliness' in H'wood

Actress-singer Selena Gomez, who has earned the best supporting actress Golden Globe nomination, is embracing the moment. She has also spoken up on the issue of the feeling of loneliness and getting isolated in Hollywood, reports 'People' magazine. Talking about her Golden Globes nomination, she told 'People', "I'm overwhelmed, very, very honoured and grateful. I can't wait to see what happens".

Nominated in the same category as actress-singer Ariana Grande, 31, the actresses sat next to each other at the luncheon, held in Los Angeles at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. As per reports, the two awards season favourites separately grew to fame as child stars on television, Gomez in Disney Channel's *Wizards of Waverly Place* and Grande on Nickelodeon's *Victorious*. In her keynote speech, Selena emphasised how she's found community in more recent years. "I know firsthand how isolating this industry will feel at times, but moments like this and rooms like this and talking to all these amazing women, just remind me that I'm not alone and we aren't alone," she said, gesturing to her table where Grande sat along with stars including Amy Adams, Pamela Anderson, Awkwafina, Gal Gadot, Rita Wilson, Mila Kunis and Olivia Wilde.

On the red carpet, Selena added that she stays positive amid moments of negative discourse by looking at the lighter side of things. "It's humour for me," she told. "I know people say it's a defense mechanism; however, I think it's a great distraction from all of the noise sometimes. And just to have a laugh with your friends or do something that can bring you a little bit of light". For others feeling lonely in Hollywood, Selena is ready to offer a helping hand.

"To the young women watching us, I just want you to know that you are heard and you are seen, and your perspective matters deeply. And if you ever feel lonely at any event, I'm usually on my phone, playing some sort of weird game. Just come up to me and I'll be happy to chat, she grinned on stage. "When we share and we stand together, we create a ripple effect that stretches far beyond our own lives. That's why events like (this) are so important; they're a celebration of our collective achievements, but they're also a reminder of the work we still have to do," she added.

Megan Fox and Machine Gun Kelly break up amid pregnancy

Just a month back, actor Megan Fox and her fiancé, rapper Machine Gun Kelly, revealed that they are expecting to become parents. According to a TMZ report, they have allegedly broken up.

According to sources, the split occurred while Megan and Machine Gun Kelly were on vacation in Bali, Indonesia over the Thanksgiving weekend last month.

"We're told the reason for their split is that Megan found material on MGK's phone that was upsetting and it made her want him to leave the trip early. MGK dipped out of the trip early, and since then, the former couple hasn't seen each other, and they are not together at this time," the report states.

On November 12, Megan posted on her Instagram account and announced the "good news" of her pregnancy. She posted a photo showing her cradling her baby bump while covered in black liquid, tagging Kelly in the image. "Nothing is truly lost. welcome back," she wrote in the caption, quoting lyrics from Kelly's song Last November, which reflects on his and Fox's previous experience of pregnancy loss. Megan shared a photo of the positive pregnancy test. She had been four or five months pregnant when she announced it last month. The couple is expecting their baby in March.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



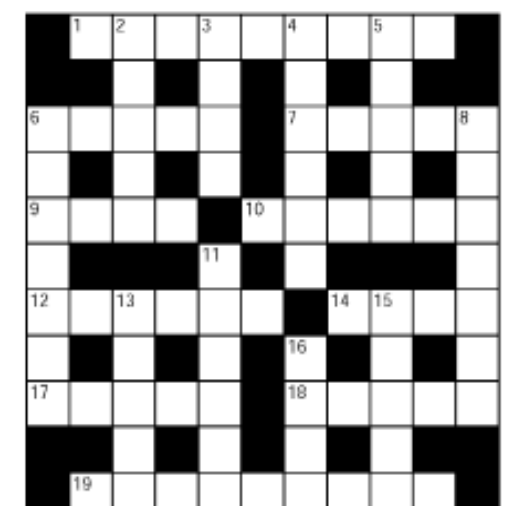
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

- Got better after illness
- A money-holder
- The parts along the end or sides of something
- A group of people in a court who decide if someone is guilty or not
- Film theatre
- Going to live elsewhere
- Trip over
- A tube used for drinking
- Approximately
- Extremely frightened

DOWN

- Mistake
- Follow an order
- This covers an eye
- A large bird of prey
- Clothes worn in bed
- A bright red colour
- Reply
- Part of a song or poem
- By yourself
- Fifty percent

SOLUTION

C	O	S	O	E	F				
A	P	T	E	R	S	M	A	L	L
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GINGER MEGGS



In a heartening tale of social change, the Bangarutalli Foundation has emerged as a ray of hope for marginalised girl children in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

The Pioneer interacts with the founder, **MV Mallikarjuna Reddy**, as he shares insights about their initiatives and creating a better community



communication.” With Prerana, the foundation aims to empower children by providing them with quality education and opportunities for personal growth. BBG works tirelessly to ensure that children of all backgrounds have the opportunity to receive an education that enables them to reach their full potential as part of its motto of “Empowering the girl child.” They actively work towards warriors’s awareness sessions like memory skills, good touch and bad touch, citizen’s responsibilities and the importance of education and study skills.

As a part of its Bharosa program, which aims at empowering women and children for a safer tomorrow, the foundation announced the inauguration of its twin Bharosa Centres in Shamshabad and Bhongir. “The new ‘Bharosa’—Support Centre for Women and Children—is BBG’s latest initiative, offering integrated assistance in areas such as police, medical, legal, prosecution Services and psychotherapeutic counseling. The centres, located in Ranga Reddy and Yadadri districts, aim to provide a safe haven for women and children to seek support and address various issues. Equipped with conference rooms, counselling facilities and medical counselling rooms, and staffed with trained professionals, the Bharosa Centres will serve as vital hubs for the community.”

Meanwhile, Aahlada is on a mission to foster student happiness through education and growth, recognising the vital role of a positive environment in a student’s academic success.

“In our efforts, we provide essential school supplies such as desks and blackboards. But our commitment extends further—we adorn school premises with vibrant paintings to ignite creativity, offer toys for children and build sports courts to promote both mental and physical development. Through our Aahlada program, we have enhanced government schools in numerous ways, including the construction of facilities like toilets and beautification projects. Additionally, we have initiated various development programs with the same enthusiasm and dedication.”

With immense pride, he speaks of one of his successful community-led projects: Prerana, their 5th initiative, which aims to empower underprivileged children by providing them with access to quality education and opportunities for personal growth. “We understand that education is a powerful tool that can help break the cycle of poverty and pave the way for a better future. Therefore, we work tirelessly to ensure that children from all backgrounds have the opportunity to receive an education that will enable them to reach their full potential as part of our purpose, under the slogan ‘Girl Child Empowerment’.

Girls, he says, have proved their mettle everywhere in the world and it happened only because of the right kind of opportunities and resources. “On the other side, in our country, the majority of girls lack the facility of education in rural and remote areas, even though they have the complete right to it. To address this huge issue, which has a significant impact on the country’s future, Bangarutalli Foundation has been striving to empower girls through education in schools. It has provided various educational facilities to many government schools by breaking the barriers that girls face in accessing education and helping them get empowered.”

Recognising that education is key to a brighter future, they assist economically disadvantaged girls with their studies and equip them with essential life skills such as critical thinking and communication.

“As we continue to work towards our goals, Bangarutalli Foundation’s initiative Bharosa is near to complete and in December we are about to launch the Bharosa centres,” concludes the founder, bringing an end to this chat.

CREATING BRIGHTER TOMORROW FOR BANGARUTALLI’S

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

In the heart of India, a quiet revolution is unfolding. The Bangarutalli Foundation, a pioneering non-profit organisation, is transforming the lives of marginalised girl children in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Since its inception in 2019, the foundation has been dedicated to enabling and empowering the girl child, aligning with Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of women as instruments of social change. The foundation’s mission is to empower 2 million girl children by 2040 and it has already made a significant impact in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

“Bangarutalli Foundation was born with a wondrous worldview: one daughter empowered, entire family empowered,” says MV Mallikarjuna Reddy, founder of Bangarutalli Foundation in an exclusive chat with **The Pioneer**. “And with the aim to assist and educate the marginalized section, the foundation has relentlessly endeav-

oured to stand up for social causes and the development of the girl-child.”

Through its five initiative programs—Aahlada, Swashakti, Suraksha, Prerana, and Bharosa—they have transformed the lives of nearly 200,000 girls in its twin states. These programs address critical aspects of girl child empowerment, from education and personal safety to life skills and career development. Sharing more in-depth insights on these programs, Reddy highlights, “Suraksha aims at securing the future of the girl child with safety being paramount and we provide workshops and training sessions on personal safety and self-defense to empower these girls to protect themselves. Bangarutalli Foundation is committed to empowering underprivileged girls, unlocking their potential and providing them with the tools they need to succeed. Then comes Swashakti, empowering underprivileged girls to soar towards self-sufficiency. Recognising that education is key to a brighter future, we assist economically disadvantaged girls with their studies and equip them with essential life skills such as critical thinking and



CONSTIPATION AWARENESS MONTH

Tame the tummy trouble!

Constipation is a common yet often overlooked health issue that affects people of all ages. To promote better understanding and awareness, the medical community observes Constipation Awareness Month annually. The initiative emphasises the importance of recognizing symptoms early, addressing potential underlying causes and adopting preventive measures to maintain optimal digestive health.

Understanding constipation

Constipation refers to infrequent bowel movements, typically fewer than three times a week, accompanied by difficulty in passing stools. It can manifest as bloating, abdominal pain, or the sensation of incomplete evacuation. While occasional constipation is normal, chronic constipation can lead to complications such as hemorrhoids, anal fissures, or even psychological stress.

Causes of constipation

Constipation arises from a variety of factors, including dietary habits, lifestyle choices and medical conditions. Common causes include:

- **Low fiber intake:** Diets lacking fruits, vegetables and whole grains can slow digestion.
- **Dehydration:** Insufficient water intake leads to hard, dry stools.
- **Sedentary lifestyle:** Physical inactivity can reduce gut motility.
- **Medications:** Certain painkillers, antidepressants and antacids may contribute to constipation.
- **Underlying health conditions:** Disorders like diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, or pelvic floor dysfunction can impair bowel movements.

Recognising the signs

While occasional constipation is typically harmless, chronic constipation warrants medical attention. Warning signs include:

- Persistent abdominal pain
- Rectal bleeding
- Unintended weight loss
- A sudden change in bowel habits lasting more than three weeks

Prevention and management

Most cases of constipation can be

effectively managed through lifestyle changes and medical guidance. Here are key strategies:

1. Increase fiber intake

Dietary fiber adds bulk to stools, making them easier to pass. Aim for at least 25–30 grams of fiber daily by incorporating foods like whole grains, beans, lentils, and leafy vegetables.

2. Stay hydrated

Drink at least 8–10 glasses of water a day. Proper hydration softens stools and promotes smooth bowel movements.

3. Exercise regularly

Physical activity stimulates the natural contraction of intestinal muscles. Simple exercises like walking, jogging, or yoga can significantly improve digestion.

4. Practice good bathroom habits

Avoid delaying the urge to pass stools, as this can exacerbate constipation. Establishing a routine, such as visiting the restroom at the same time daily, can help regulate bowel movements.

5. Consider medical help

For chronic or severe constipation, doctors may recommend laxatives, stool softeners, or other medications. Diagnostic tests like colonoscopy or motility studies may also be necessary to rule out serious conditions.

Role of awareness

Constipation Awareness Month aims to dispel myths and reduce stigma surrounding bowel health. Many people feel embarrassed discussing constipation, often resorting to self-medication instead of seeking professional advice. This awareness campaign encourages open conversations and promotes education about preventive measures.

A healthier future

Constipation may seem minor, but its impact on physical and emotional well-being can be significant. With proper awareness, proactive lifestyle adjustments, and timely medical intervention, constipation is both manageable and preventable. This Constipation Awareness Month, take the opportunity to prioritize your gut health — because a healthy digestive system is the cornerstone of overall well-being.

(The author, Dr. Amit Yelsangikar, consultant-medical gastroenterology, at Aster CMI Hospital in Bangalore.)



Serving up strife: Restaurants vs aggregators

PNS| HYDERABAD

In India’s booming dining and food delivery industry, a new conflict is brewing. The National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) has issued a stark warning to its members, urging them to reconsider their reliance on food aggregators like Zomato and Swiggy. These platforms, once seen as enablers of growth, are now under fire for practices that restaurants say are undermining their sustainability and autonomy. Central to the debate are aggregator-controlled payment gateways and the allure of deep discounting.

How discounts and delivery platforms are reshaping the restaurant industry

The restaurant industry stands at a crossroads, balancing the benefits of delivery platforms with the challenges they bring. For many, the online food delivery revolution offered a lifeline during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing an alternative revenue stream when dine-in operations were disrupted. However, as the dust settles, the true cost of this reliance on aggregators is becoming increasingly clear.

“Online food ordering was a revolution,” says Sampath Tummala, President of the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), Hyderabad Chapter and owner of The Spicy Venue. “During COVID and post-COVID times, it helped us build

a parallel alternative to increase turnovers. But now, with commission percentages hiked, it’s becoming harder to sustain. Once started, it’s difficult to come out of the game.”

Rising costs and shrinking margins

For restaurants, operating costs have surged across the board. “All costs have gone up—real estate, food, remuneration. At the same time, our establishment costs have increased, and margins are becoming thinner,” explains Tummala. Delivery aggregators, which initially appeared as a partnership opportunity, are now being criticised for practices that cut into profitability. With commission rates as high as 30%, many restaurateurs find themselves struggling to maintain viable margins.

“Dine-in was always the strength of restaurants,” Tummala notes. “Legendary places still see huge rushes because their product is strong. But when you factor in discounts of 20–50% and additional gateway fees for payments processed through platforms, the economics simply don’t add up.”

Pitfalls of dine-in discounting

In recent years, some delivery platforms have extended their influence into the dine-in space, promoting steep discounts that many restaurateurs find unsustainable. Kavitha Mantha, Secretary of the NRAI National Committee and owner of Sage Farm Café, warns that this practice erodes the value of the din-

Amid rising fees and deep discounts, NRAI urges restaurateurs to reassess reliance on food aggregators.



The Pioneer speaks to Hyderabad Restaurant Association and Industry Stakeholders more in detail

ing experience. “Diners may start choosing restaurants based solely on discounts, pushing those that cannot afford price cuts to the margins,” she observes.

Tummala echoes these concerns, highlighting how such discounts can distort customer expectations and harm a restaurant’s reputation. “Every place has its own set of guests. But when discounts attract a different audience, their perceptions can backfire,” he explains. “For example, comparing biryani at an Irani café with biryani at a fine-dining restaurant doesn’t make sense. The former focuses on taste and quantity, while the latter offers ambience and presentation. A bad online review from someone who doesn’t understand the difference can impact a restaurant’s rating.”

Celebrity chef Rakesh Sethi, reflecting on these challenges, emphasises the delicate balance between maintaining profitability and delivering value. “As chefs, we pour our passion into every dish, striving to create a memorable experience for diners. However, deep discounting undermines this effort. While it might drive short-term footfall, it erodes the margins we need to innovate and sustain quality. More importantly, it devalues the artistry of dining, conditioning customers to expect cuts at the expense of authenticity. Hefty commissions from aggregator payment gateways only add to the strain, leaving restaurants vulnerable. Instead, the focus should shift to nurturing direct relationships with patrons, offering fair pricing, and emphasising the true value of the culinary experience.”

Walking away from aggregators

Recognising these challenges, the NRAI Hyderabad Chapter has taken a firm stance against aggregator-driven dine-in discounts. “As a body, we’ve decided to stay away from the dine-in vertical of aggregators,” says Tummala. “We don’t want to get into the game of giving more commissions and spoiling our organic customer growth. Our focus is on protecting our ongoing business and maintaining the integrity of our offerings.”

This decision reflects a broader concern about the long-term viability of over-reliance on delivery platforms. “Deep discounts are not just unsustainable; they also condition customers to expect lower prices,” adds Mantha. “It’s a race to the bottom that ultimately hurts the entire industry.”

Preserving soul of dining

Despite the challenges, industry leaders believe in the resilience of the dine-in experience. “The product should always be strong,” Tummala emphasises. “Restaurants that focus on quality and service will continue to thrive, even without discounts or aggregator support.”

Mantha agrees, noting that the connection between food creators and their customers remains central to the hospitality industry. “We need to safeguard the soul of the dining experience,” she says. “That personal connection is what makes restaurants special—and we cannot afford to lose it.”

As restaurants navigate this evolving landscape, the focus is shifting back to fundamentals: quality, service, and direct customer engagement. It’s a strategy that may not promise overnight success, but it’s one that ensures long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive market.

India loses to Australia, suffer 0-3 whitewash

PTI ■ PERTH

Opener Smriti Mandhana's elegant century went in vain as India lost to Australia by 83 runs in the third Women's ODI to suffer a 0-3 series whitewash here on Wednesday.

Opting to field after winning the toss, India had Australia on the ropes at 78 for four before middle-order batter Annabel Sutherland's scintillating 95-ball 110, and brisk half centuries from Ashleigh Gardner (50) and skipper Tahlia McGrath (56 not out), lifted the hosts to a competitive 298 for six in the allotted 50 overs at WACA.

In reply, India were bowled out for 215 in 45.1 overs.

In pursuit of a stiff target of 299, the stylish Mandhana anchored the innings beautifully during her 105 off 109 balls and as long as the southpaw was at the crease, the visitors were in with a chance.

However, her dismissal at a crucial juncture put paid to India's hopes of earning a consolation win.

The problem with the Indian innings was that the senior batter lacked support from the others after Alana King ended a 118-run partnership between Mandhana and Harleen Deol (39 off 64 balls) by dismissing the latter.

During her stay in the middle, Mandhana found the fence 14 times



and cleared it once, leading the team's recovery after the swashbuckling Richa Ghosh's (2) early departure.

Spin bowling all-rounder Gardner completed a fine match by taking five wickets for 30 runs after her contribution with the willow.

Besides Ghosh, captain Harmanpreet Kaur (12 off 22 balls)

and Jemimah Rodrigues (16 off 11 balls) failed with the bat, and it did not help India's cause.

Senior all-rounder Deepti Sharma too flopped, getting out for a duck. Earlier, Australia survived a stellar spell from India pacer Arundhati Reddy to post a challenging total in the final match of what has been a one-side series dominated

thoroughly by the formidable home team.

Sutherland led Australia's recovery after Reddy struck four times in quick succession for career-best figures in limited-overs cricket.

Having already lost the series, India opted to bowl at the iconic WACA ground but did not get the required breakthroughs in the first

powerplay with Phoebe Litchfield (25 off 33) and Georgia Voll (26 off 30) going strong.

However, Reddy, playing only her fifth ODI, changed the course of the game in one over by removing the openers in a space of four balls.

Unlike Renuka Thakur and Saima Thakor, Reddy got the ball to swing back from a fuller length which led to the fall of last match's centurion Voll, who saw her stumps disturbed.

Left-handed Litchfield was caught behind chasing an away swinger and all the momentum gained by Australia was suddenly lost.

Next to depart was star all-rounder Ellyse Perry who had no answer to a beauty from Reddy that held its line to hit the top of off-stump. When Beth Mooney departed, Australia were reduced to 78 for four from 58 for no loss.

Sutherland and Gardner then showed the enviable depth of the Australian batting by sharing a 96-run stand for the fifth wicket.

Sutherland was the aggressor in the partnership and especially pounded the spinners, smashing two fours and a six off Deepti in the 40th over. India's catching left a lot to be desired as they grassed three tough chances.

McGrath joined Sutherland in the 35th over and the duo pushed the score towards 300.



Entire Australian top-order is under pressure: Warner

PTI ■ BRISBANE

It's not just Usman Khawaja but the entire Australian top-order that is feeling the "pressure" despite the series-leveling win in Adelaide, reckons former opener David Warner.

While the under-fire Marnus Labuschagne found form with a resolute fifty, batting mainstay Steve Smith and rookie opener Nathan McSweeney continue to search for runs in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"I think the pressure is on all the top order, not just 'Uzzie', the former Australian left-hander was quoted saying by Fox Cricket.

Travis Head smashed a memorable hundred at home as Australia bounce back to level the five match series after a crushing loss in Perth.

"Travis came out and counter-punched and scored a brilliant hundred, and we know he's capable of doing it. But it's everyone else around supporting that," said Warner.

"It's not just one player in particular, it's the top six scoring bulk runs and making sure you're giving rest to the fast bowlers. It was a fast-paced Test in the first game, but this last one was Mitchell Starc at his best as usual with the pink ball.

"Come Brisbane, we need to see some big runs from the top order," he said about the third Test beginning here on Saturday.

McSweeney had a forgettable debut in Perth being trapped LBW by Jasprit Bumrah in both his innings for 10 and 0, while

in Adelaide he managed 49 runs.

Khawaja has 34 runs in the first two Tests and in his last 16 innings he has reached fifty only once.

Former skipper Smith is also in the middle of a woeful run, having scored 19 in his three innings of the series.

On McSweeney, Warner said: "He's had four of probably the five hardest jobs when it comes to an opening batsman, and I think he's handled it well," Warner said.

"We saw glimpses the other day of the intent that you show when you're scoring, and there are a lot of question marks around why they chose him, but the glimpses that you've seen, we now know why."

"He's got a good temperament, I like the way he sets up, and I think he's got a good future ahead of him. It's just this bowling attack from India is relentless if they bowl in partnerships."

On whether Sam Konstas should replace the struggling Khawaja, Warner said: "They would have picked him if they thought he was ready by now. That's up to the selectors."

There have also been talks about a Test comeback for gun all-rounder Glenn Maxwell but Warner feels the white ball specialist "doesn't deserve that opportunity."

"If you're not being picked for your Shield team, then why do you deserve it? You've got to actually want it, to want to play four-day cricket," Warner told CODE.



Gabba pitch to have traditional pace and bounce, says curator

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The pitch for the third Test between India and Australia at the Gabba is expected to have traditional pace and bounce considering the game is scheduled in the early part of the summer and not post Christmas.

India's famous win at the Gabba on their previous tour came when the game was scheduled in the second half of the series. A Rishabh Pant special ensured India a back-to-back series win Down Under with Australia left licking their wounds. It was the hosts' first loss at the venue since 1988.

Since then Australia have lost to the West Indies at the 'fortress' and no wonder the players prefer to play at the Gabba at the start of the summer and not at end of it.

"Different times of year definitely makes it different, it can be a slightly different pitch," Gabba curator David Sandurski was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.Au ahead of the third Test beginning Saturday.

"Pitches later in the season might have a bit more wear and tear while ones early in

the season usually are a bit fresher and might have a bit more in them.

"Generally speaking, we still prepare the pitch the exact same way every time to try and get the same good carry, pace and bounce that the Gabba is known for. We are just trying to make a traditional Gabba wicket like we do each year," he said.

The five-match series is locked at 1-1 following Australia's comprehensive win in the pink ball Test at Adelaide.

As many as 15 wickets fell on the opening day of a domestic pink ball game last month and the curator said the surface would be similar to that.

"The aim is to be similar to that wicket where there was a good balance between bat and ball. Hopefully there is a bit in it for everyone," Sandurski added.

Indian teams lands in Brisbane

The BCCI on Wednesday posted a video of the India players' arrival in Brisbane from Adelaide.

India won the opening Test in Perth by 295 runs before succumbing to the moving pink ball in Adelaide.

West Indies win ODI series against Bangladesh

AP ■ BASSETERRE

The West Indies won a one-day international series against Bangladesh for the first time in 10 years.

The West Indies shot out Bangladesh for 227 in 46 overs and strolled to 230-3 in 37 overs on Tuesday.

The host won the series with a game to spare.

"It's great to see the bowlers bounce back the way they did," captain Shai Hope said. "Gotta tick boxes and keep improving. We were clinical. We've been struggling to win series at home (so) hope to finish 3-0 now."

On the same pitch where the West Indies won by five wickets on Sunday, the par score was 300. But fast bowler Jayden Seales undercut Bangladesh with three wickets in the first powerplay. Seales returned to bag Mahmudullah for 62 in the 45th over and



finish with a match-deciding 4-22 in nine overs.

The chase was almost a formality. Brandon King and Evin Lewis opened with a 109-run partnership in 21 overs. King led with 82 and Lewis and Keacy Carty were out just short of half-centuries.

Bangladesh was 115-7 in the 26th over when Tanzim Hasan Sakib joined Mahmudullah

and they rescued the innings.

While they were batting with increasing ambition, Bangladesh could dream of 270-280.

Mahmudullah reached a fifty off 84 balls, and Tanzim was closing on his when he was out caught and bowled by off-spinner Roston Chase. Tanzim had 45 off 62 and the partnership reached 92 runs

from 106 balls.

Mahmudullah was out in the next over for 62 off 92.

In the chase, Lewis was slower to get in a groove than King and was dropped on 28.

King and Lewis were both hit on the body in the 40s while attempting pulls at Nahid Rana.

King's eighth boundary brought up his fifty off 52 balls but Lewis was out for 49, to a tame caught and bowled by Rishad Hossain.

King's best shot was a six when he came down the track at Tanzim and sent the ball back over the medium-pace's head and rebounding off the roof.

He was eventually yorkered by Rana, out for 82 off 76 balls, including eight boundaries and three sixes.

He'd combined for 66 in eight overs with Carty, who would fall for 45 off 47 with victory just 31 more runs away.

Matthew Hayden advises Indian bowlers to target fourth, fifth stump

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Former Australia opener Matthew Hayden has advised the Indian bowlers to target the "fourth, fifth stump line" and make use of the natural bounce offered by the Gabba surface in the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy starting here on Saturday.

The five-match series is locked at 1-1 after Australia's emphatic win in the pink Test in Adelaide. India won the opener by 295 runs at Perth.

Hayden shared his views on how to dismiss the Australian batters at Gabba. "India, when they do get a chance to bowl, they need to rely on hovering in that fourth, fifth stump line a bit more. And most importantly, they need to use their bounce," Hayden told Star Sports.



"It's a key arsenal as part of a fast bowling unit in Brisbane. Under a day, unacceptable. Has to be in that 350 zone. India should bat first even if there are challenging conditions," Hayden said.

"Brisbane, different ball game! It's a home game, but it's actually a very good game for India as well because they've got memories of the last time they encountered Australia in the BGT."

bat a day of Test match cricket.

Under a day, unacceptable. Has to be in that 350 zone.

India should bat first even if there are challenging conditions," Hayden said. "Brisbane, different ball game! It's a home game, but it's actually a very good game for India as well because they've got memories of the last time they encountered Australia in the BGT."

Brook displaces Root at top of Test batter rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Charismatic England batter Joe Root's reign at the top of the ICC Test batting rankings ended on Wednesday with compatriot Harry Brook taking the No.1 spot, while India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and spinner Ravindra Jadeja held on to their top positions in the bowlers' and all-rounders' charts respectively in the longest format.

Brook, 25, overtook Root following his eighth Test century against New Zealand in Wellington last week, with the right-handed player now enjoying a slender one-point advantage over his more experienced teammate at the top of the latest ICC rankings.

Brook has a total of 898



while Root had innings of 3 and 106 in the same Test.

"If you're asked me, Brooky is by far and away the best player in the world at the minute," Root said following England's victory in Wellington.

"He has such an all-round game, he can absorb pressure, he can apply it, he can whack you over your head for six, he can scoop you over his head for six, he can smack spin, he can smack seam. He's so hard to bowl to."

Bumrah maintained his No.1 position at the top of the Test bowlers' rankings with 890 rating points. The Indian has some tough competition from South Africa quick Kagiso Rabada (856) and Australian pace bowler Josh Hazlewood (851).

rating points, one more than Root, and joins Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar with the equal 34th highest rating of all time for Test batters.

Root had held on to the top spot since July this year when he displaced former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson from the No.1 position.

Brook scored 123 and 55 in England's massive 323-run victory over New Zealand,

Alcaraz has best of Nadal, Djokovic, Federer, but he can't do what they did: Agassi

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Legendary Andre Agassi said Carlos Alcaraz combines the best qualities of Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal but cautioned the tennis world against expecting the Spaniard to repeat the incredible feats of the "Fab Three."

Federer, Nadal and Djokovic have a combined tally of 66 Grand Slams and Alcaraz, 21, has so far bagged four majors.

"I'm not a genius and I don't have a crystal ball. What I can tell you is Alcaraz defends like Novak, has power and spin like Nadal and has hands and finesse like Federer," said Agassi during a talk session during the Marathon Mindset at the TIE Global Summit.

Agassi, himself an eight-time Slam champion, then outlined the reason to not place a massive load of expectations on Alcaraz. "Just because he has the best of all those three doesn't mean he can do what they did because there're so many other parts to the game,

which mean decision-making, injuries, you know, luck," he said.

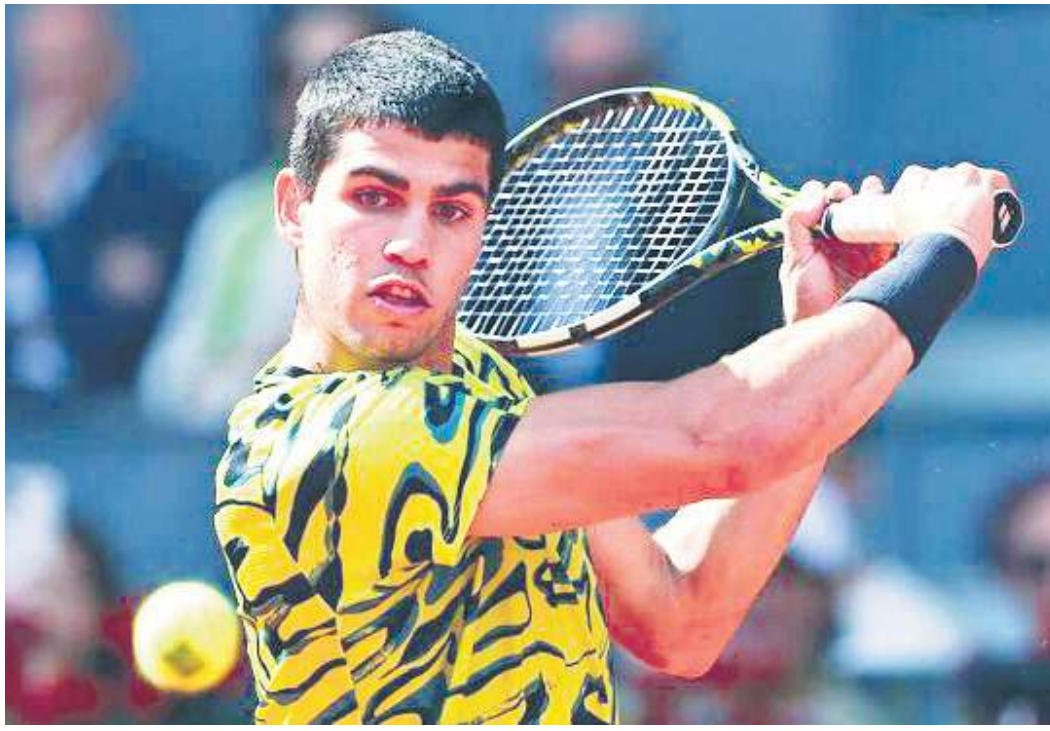
At 37, Djokovic too is closer to his retirement and Agassi said the Serbian will now find it even tougher to remain competitive in the absence of the retired Nadal and Federer.

"He's already done so much, so long, and it's hard to imagine longer. I think he'll run out of the energy for it, more than the capability of it, I would imagine. "It cannot be easy, especially when the people you came to the dance with have left."

The American explained his thoughts further.

"When Pete (Sampras) retired, it was a blow to me. It set me back a little bit. It made me have to rediscover my inspirations on some level.

"And he's (Djokovic) lost the guys that he's made history with. So, it's probably emotionally going to get tougher and tougher quickly, but I would never bet against him. Bet against him at your own peril," said Agassi.



To prolong his career, Djokovic has hired former British player Andy Murray as his coach, and Agassi remained curious about the future of their alliance.

"They've been fierce rivals on court, and now Murray will be coaching Djokovic. Well, in any coaching student relationship, you need trust. Trust can take time. "I think there's an asset to their history as competitors, but any success of a relationship is based on (9-07) complete buy-in."

Agassi backs American players

The 54-year-old from Las Vegas said the new generation of American players have the ability to bring the country back to the top layers of the tennis world, like it was in the 80s and 90s.

"I was the first one to turn pro. I made (Michael) Chang, Pete, (Jim) Courier believe they could do it. And then Chang was the first one to win (Grand Slam), Pete believed that he could win, and made Courier believe that he could win, and then Courier said, well, I can not only win, I can be

number one in the world.

"And I was saying, wait a second, what the hell about me? So we all helped each other in a lot of ways, and I think these Americans now are starting to prove to the other Americans that not only they can do it," he detailed.

Agassi also reminisced how he clawed back from a series of setbacks in life to find a second wind in the latter half of his career.

"I hit rock bottom probably at a time when people thought I was on top of the world. And then I just spiralled. I gave up on myself. But one thing that's good about rock bottom, you can bounce off something."

"So, I kind of recognized that, well, tennis wasn't my choice. So, I turned my attention towards helping kids that don't have choice or any hope. So, I forced myself to use tennis."

"I think that was an underlying inspiration and reason for me having a second chance at my career," he signed off.

THE 'MANCHU' DRAMA CONTINUES....

The Manchu family feud seems to have no end in sight. On Wednesday, Vishnu organised a press conference, where he expressed his thoughts on his father's upbringing. He stated, "My father gave a lot of love to all of us, which I think is a big mistake." This comes after his father, senior actor Mohan Babu, was hospitalised and is currently stable.

"We are a joint family and I wanted to continue that way, but unfortunately, this incident happened, which makes us all feel terrible. I hope this issue will resolve soon. My father loves my brother, sister and me too much and that's the big mistake he made," said Vishnu.

Regarding the incident where Mohan Babu attacked a journalist, he stated, "It was not a deliberate attempt by my father to hurt anyone. It was unfortunate and he didn't want to hurt anyone. He came out with folded hands and suddenly someone put a microphone in his face. He reacted impulsively in the heat of the moment."

The *Ginna* fame added that he spoke to the journalist's family and assured them of his support. "We never invited the media into our home; they entered forcefully. In that heated situation, everything happened suddenly."

The *Denaikana Ready* actor stated that his mother is also unwell due to the situation at home and has been hospitalized. "If I were in India, the situation would be different and the letters and audio files might not have been leaked," he said. He explained that he was in Los Angeles for the post-production work of his film *Kannappa*.

He requested the media to refrain from sensationalising the issue. "My humble request to all media personnel is to please leave this issue alone. Don't make our lives a circus. I will meet the Commissioner of Police and take legal action," he said. He emphasised that he respects his father's words. "If he asks me not to stay in his house, I don't have the right to stay. He struggled hard to

My humble request to all media personnel is to please leave this issue alone. Don't make our lives a circus. I will meet the Commissioner of Police and take legal action!



build everything we have and people respect us because we are Mohan Babu's sons."

Regarding his family members, he further mentioned that he has differences with his sister Lakshmi, but they respect each other. He also defended Vinay, who attacked his brother Manoj, saying, "He's a good person. My father always says Vinay is like his elder son. He worked for reputable organisations earlier."

The *Mosagallu* actor advocated for resolving issues with love rather than quarrels. "I don't want to talk about my family anymore."

Meanwhile, Manchu Manoj also addressed the media, apologising on behalf of his father. "It's not true that my mother is in the hospital. They're spreading false news," he said. He had also met the Commissioner of Police and submitted a bond of Rs 1 lakh. Manoj, however, said that he is ready to have a conversion on the issue. Manchu Lakshmi, too had shared a post where she captioned it as "peace".



Amritha Aiyer wants it all—romance, drama and action

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Amritha Aiyer has become a pan-Indian actress after the stupendous success of *Hanuman*, where she played the female lead opposite Teja Sajja. "When we started filming, it was purely a Telugu film, but once it was released, it became a huge success all over India," said actress Amritha Aiyer. The actress revealed that while shooting for *Hanuman*, she accepted the offer to star in *Bachchalamalli*, where she played the female lead opposite Naresh. "When this script came to me, I liked it because my character has a lot of importance in it, so I didn't want to let it go," she said about her role in *Bachchalamalli*. The film is scheduled to release on December 20. "The story is set in the 1980s and I play a city girl who is very sensitive and emotional," said Amritha about her role. She added that some of the scenes between her and Naresh are very emotional. Talking about her co-star Naresh, she said, "He is very aggressive on screen in his role, but off screen, he is very quiet."

The actress stated that her criteria for selecting projects are the story and her role. "From the beginning of my career, I have always wanted to do meaningful characters and luckily, I got a good role in *Bachchalamalli*," she said. She added that, like *Hanuman*, she wishes for *Bachchalamalli* to be a big hit. "If the content is good, everyone will like it and the movie will definitely be successful," she said. Amritha clarified that the success of *Hanuman* did not change her approach to selecting stories. "It's not true that I would have done *Bachchalamalli* only after *Hanuman*. I wanted to do it because of my character and the story," she said.

The Telugu songs *Neeli Neeli Akasam* from *30 Rojulo Preminchadam Ela* and *Poolamme Pilla* from *Hanuman* were very popular and remain chart-toppers even today. Amritha believes that the music in *Bachchalamalli* will also gain popularity after the film's release. "When I found out that Vishal Chandrasekhar was composing the music for this film, I was thrilled. He had earlier worked on *Sita Ramam* and I am confident that the songs in *Bachchalamalli* will be just as popular once the film is released," she said. Talking about her dream roles, Amritha mentioned that she would like to play princesses, queens and dream girls. "I would also like to do action-oriented films," she added. When asked about her upcoming projects, Amritha revealed that she is working on a Tamil and Kannada film. "I am also listening to Telugu scripts," she said.

Amritha Aiyer, the talented actress who rose to Pan-Indian fame with her impressive performance in the blockbuster film Hanuman, is now gearing up for her next release, Bachchalamalli. Ahead of the release, Amritha opens up about her experience working on Bachchalamalli, her dream roles and her future projects.



Samantha's Instagram post, is she ready to move on?

Samantha Ruth Prabhu is making headlines with her latest Instagram post, where she shared predictions for Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn zodiac signs in 2025. The post hints at her desire for a "loyal and loving partner" in the new year. This comes after her ex-husband Naga Chaitanya tied the knot with Sobhita Dhulipala on December 4.

In her latest story, the actress shared a post of 2025 predictions of zodiac signs for Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn. It was predicted that the year is going to be a very busy year for the three mentioned signs and progress in your craft and earning more money on it. There are also predictions about financial stability, multiple streams of income, completion of goals, relocations and better mental and physical health. Along with these predictions, it also says, 'A

very loyal and loving partner.' Sharing the predictions of the 2025 story on her Instagram, Samantha wrote, 'Amen.' Now, this post is going viral. Samantha's post has gone viral, with fans speculating about her personal life.

According to our sources, Samantha is dating director Raj Nidimoru (Raj & DK), who is one of the directors of *Family Man* and *Citadel*.

On the professional front, the actress has not signed any films down South, but she is doing another web series, *Rakt Brahmand—The Bloody Kingdom*, which is directed by Rahi Anil Barve of *Tumbbad* fame. Interestingly, this web series is produced by Raj & DK, which is Samantha's third collaboration with them.

VISHWAK SEN JOINS HANDS WITH JATHI RATNALU DIRECTOR

Vishwak Sen, known for his penchant for diverse scripts and characters, is set to collaborate with acclaimed director Anudeep KV, of *Jathi Ratnalu* fame, on an upcoming family entertainer titled *Funky*. The film, produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, was officially launched in Hyderabad on Wednesday, with esteemed directors Nag Ashwin and Kalyan Shankar gracing the occasion as chief guests.

In line with the film's lively spirit, the team unveiled a vibrant poster on the auspicious day. According to the makers, *Funky* promises to deliver a perfect blend of witty humour, cleverly crafted by Anudeep and Vishwak's impressive performance skills, ensuring an entertaining experience for audiences of all ages. Noted music director Bheems Cecireleo will be composing the music for the film.

Production on *Funky* is slated to commence post-Sankranti 2025, with the team gearing up to bring this exciting family entertainer to life on the big screen.



Mohanlal's directorial debut Barroz promises visual spectacle

With a career spanning nearly 47 years and over 360 films, Mohanlal has brought to life numerous iconic characters across genres and languages, carving a special place in the hearts of audiences worldwide. Now, he embarks on a new journey to elevate Indian cinema to a global level by stepping into the director's chair with *Barroz*. Mounted to be a cinematic marvel, the film is shot entirely in 3D. Director-actor Mohanlal released the Hindi trailer of the film in the presence of Chief Guest Akshay Kumar. He also launched their coffee table book at the event, introducing Akshay Kumar to the fascinating world of *Barroz*. The trailer takes you on an enchanting journey into the

world of *Barroz* with stunning 3D visuals that are set to captivate audiences across the globe. It's a timeless tale where the past and present intertwine, and the magic of friendship and loyalty holds the key to breaking ancient curses. *Barroz* stars the legendary actor Mohanlal alongside Mayo Rao West and June Vig. With Santosh Sivan's masterful touch in cinematography, *Barroz* promises to be a visual extravaganza. Produced by Antony Perumbavoor of Aashinward Cinemas in association with Pen Studios, Mohanlal's directorial debut *Barroz*, is set to release in 3D across Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada languages. The film is set to hit theatres on December 27 in the Hindi language.

Dhandoraa launched in style

Aclaimed producer Ravindra Banerjee Muppaneni, known for his National Award-winning film *Colour Photo* and the successful *Bedurulanka 2012*, is set to unveil his latest project, *Dhandoraa*. The film, directed by Muralikanth, was officially launched on Wednesday at Ramanaidu Studios in Film Nagar.

Dhandoraa is a rural drama set in Telangana, exploring age-old customs and traditions with a satirical twist. The makers

promise wholesome entertainment, boasting a stellar ensemble cast, including Sivaji, Navdeep, Rahul Ramakrishna, Ravi Krishna, Manika Chikkala and Anusha. Renowned music composer Mark K Robin will score the film's music. Confident that *Dhandoraa* will captivate audiences, just like his previous films, Ravindra Banerjee Muppaneni announced that shooting will commence soon. He plans to reveal more details about the film in the coming days.



Akhanda 2 heads for Dasara 2025 release

Balakrishna is now a busy actor with many films lined up for him. The actor has just completed the film *Daaku Maharaj* with Bobby Kolli as director; he has now started shooting for another of his films, *Akhanda 2*.

This is the sequel to his earlier successful *Akhanda*, directed by Boyapati Srinu. Interestingly, Boyapati and Balakrishna combination films are huge blockbusters, beginning with *Simha*, *Legend* and *Akhanda*. This is the fourth combination from them and fans expected more from this film. Ram Achand and Gopi Achanta are producing this sequel on their 14Reels Plus banner.

On Wednesday, they announced that the film's shoot started. "The protector of Dharma will wage a powerful battle. *Akhanda 2 - Thaandavam* shoot begins," said the makers. The interesting part is that they announced the release date of this film as September 25, on the occasion of Dasara. SS Thaman is providing music for this one.

