

the pioneer

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Give up arms or face strong action



KICKIN' IT
OLD SCHOOL: KARATE GIRLS PACK A PUNCH




Veteran actor Rajendra Prasad steals the show in HARIKATHA

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The pioneer

As Revanth suffered imprisonment after being caught red-handed with a bag of cash, he seems to want everyone else to experience the same. Which Chief Minister, in his right mind, would openly threaten the CXO of a reputed company like L&T with jail simply for airing an opinion about a government scheme that had impacted his organisation? What message is Revanth sending to business with such statements?



- KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA

DON'T MISS...

2 MPs elected to AIIMS-M'giri body

In a notable development, Vijayawada MP Kesineni Shivanath, popularly known as Chinni, and Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashowry have been unanimously elected as members of the governing body of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Mangalagiri. The announcement was made by the Lok Sabha Secretariat. The two MPs secured their positions under the Lok Sabha quota. Initially, five MPs — Chinni, Balashowry, BJP MP Daggubati Purandeswari, TDP MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu, and YSR Congress MP...

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Tenali woman dies in US mishap

A young woman from Tenali in Guntur district lost her life in a road accident in Memphis, Tennessee, USA. The victim has been identified as Nagasri Vandana Parimala (26), daughter of Ganesh and Ramadevi. According to reports from the US, Nagasri was returning home from work on Friday night when the car she was travelling in, along with two friends, collided with a truck near National Street and Rockwood Avenue in Memphis. She sustained critical injuries and was rushed to a local hospital...

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India excels in mental math skills

India has emerged as the top performer at the Universal Concept of Mental Arithmetic System (UCMAS) International Competition 2024, securing the highest number of awards in both individual and team categories across various age groups of 6-13 years. According to a statement issued by UCMAS India, the two-day event organised by it concluded in Delhi on Sunday in which 6,000 students from 30 countries took part with Indian participants winning over 1,250 trophies in recognition...

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Money isn't the reason I play chess

The "multi-millionaire" tag does "mean a lot" to new world champion D Gukesh but he doesn't play the game for material gains but for that unbridled joy, which he has been able to retain since the time a chess board used to be the "coolest toy" for him. Gukesh, the 18-year-old from Chennai, is now richer by Rs 11.45 crore which he will receive from FIDE as prize money for beating Ding Liren of China in the final. Gukesh's father Rajnikanth gave up his career as an ENT surgeon to accompany his son...

-SPORTS

CM assures stable governance

SAYS TELUGU UNIVERSITY NAMED AFTER POTTI SRIRAMULU TO BE SET UP IN AP SOON

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced on Sunday the establishment of a new Telugu University in the state, which will be named after the legendary freedom fighter and self-sacrifice icon, Potti Sriramulu. The announcement was made during a programme at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada, marking the anniversary of Sriramulu's sacrifice that led to the creation of Andhra Pradesh.

Along with Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, the CM paid homage to the statue of Potti Sriramulu and a portrait of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on their respective death anniversaries. The Chief Minister also announced that the state will celebrate the 125th birth anniversary of Potti Sriramulu on a grand scale, with the development of memorials both at his birthplace and in Amaravati.



Paying tribute to the valiant freedom fighter, the Chief Minister highlighted that the spirit of Potti Sriramulu's selflessness and dedication were fundamental to the vision of good governance in the state. "The formation of Andhra Pradesh owes its existence to the sacrifices of Potti Sriramulu, whose 58-day hunger strike eventually led to the creation of linguistic states in India. His contribution to the Telugu people will always be remembered in our history," Naidu stated.

Continued on Page 2

- The announcement was made at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Sriramulu's 'Atmarpana Dinotsavam', the death anniversary of Amarajeevi on Sunday.
- CM paid tribute to Sriramulu, highlighting his role in the formation of Andhra Pradesh.
- The State will celebrate Sriramulu's 125th birth anniversary with grand memorials in his birthplace and Amaravati.
- Naidu highlights the 'Swarnandhra-2047' vision document and his commitment to the development of the State.
- CM criticised the previous government's disruption of development projects, particularly the three capitals issue and Polavaram.
- Naidu credits Pawan Kalyan for the successful organisation of Grama Sabhas.
- He reiterates the TDP-led NDA government's commitment to good governance and State development.

Amarajeevi made supreme sacrifice: Dy CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister and Panchayat Raj Minister K Pawan Kalyan paid rich tributes to freedom fighter Potti Sriramulu, recalling his supreme sacrifice for the creation of a separate Andhra Pradesh state. Speaking at an event alongside Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday, Pawan Kalyan lauded Sriramulu as a leader who transcended caste and creed, embodying the spirit of unity and selflessness.

Sriramulu's historic fast unto death paved the way for Andhra Pradesh's formation, Pawan Kalyan said.

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Naidu to visit Polavaram today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu is set to visit the Polavaram project site on Monday, marking his second visit since assuming office following the 2024 Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections. His previous visit was on June 17, 2024, shortly after his electoral victory.

The focus of Naidu's upcoming visit will be to gather detailed updates on the construction, with particular attention on the diaphragm wall, a critical component of the project. Work on the new diaphragm wall is set to begin on January 2, 2025, and the Chief Minister is expected to engage with engineers and officials involved in the project.

Continued on Page 2

3 of a family hacked to death over land row

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In a horrific incident, three members of a family were hacked to death and three others critically injured at Vetapalem village in Samalkot mandal on Sunday. Kuradala Pandu was constructing a house at the SC colony on the outskirts of the Cheruvu area in Vetapalem.

However, Bacchala Chakrayya strongly opposed the construction of the house at the site, leading to a bitter dispute between the two families. Both sides had lodged complaints with the village Panchayat regarding the matter.

Tensions escalated when a group of assailants attacked and killed Karadala Prakash Rao (50), Karadala Chandra Rao (60), and Karadala Yesubabu (45). Bacchala China Subba Rayudu, Karadala Pandu, and Baby were severely injured in the attack and were rushed to the Government General Hospital (GGH).

The victims and the accused belong to the same community.

Family members of the deceased claimed that about 20 people attacked them, stabbing and hacking them indiscriminately, before fleeing the scene. Tension remains high in Vetapalem following the killings. The condition of two of the injured is said to be critical, and they have been transferred to GGH.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Srihari Raju and other officials visited the crime scene, where knives and sticks were seized. Additional police forces have been deployed to maintain order in the village.

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain in ICU with heart problems

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain has been admitted to the ICU of a San Francisco hospital with heart related problems, his friend and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia said on Sunday.

The 73-year-old US-based musician, who has taken the tabla to the global stage, had been having blood pressure issues, added Hussain's manager Nirmala Bachani.

"He has been admitted to a hospital in San Francisco for a heart related problem for the last two weeks," Bachani said.

"He is unwell and admitted in the ICU right now. We all are worried about the situation," Chaurasia told PTI.

The eldest son of legendary tabla player Allah Rakha, Hussain has followed in the footsteps of his father, becoming a marquee name in India and across the world. Hussain has received five Grammy Awards in his career, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year.

Continued on Page 2

12-YR-OLD BOY FOUND HANGING AT HOME

MACHILIPATNAM: Mystery shrouds the death of a 12-year-old boy who was found hanging from the ceiling fan in his house in Gudivada town on Sunday. Police said that the deceased, Katragadda Keshava Sai Harsha (12), was a 6th-grade student at a private school. His mother, who works at a private institution, returned home to find her son hanging from the ceiling fan. With the help of neighbours, the boy was rushed to the GGH, where doctors pronounced him dead. The exact reason for the death is yet to be ascertained, police said. The One Town police have registered a case and sent the body for post-mortem.

'Will meet the family soon'

Allu Arjun says he is deeply concerned about boy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telugu star Allu Arjun on Sunday said he is "deeply concerned" about the young boy who was injured in a stampede at a cinema hall in Hyderabad during the premiere of his film "Pushpa 2: The Rule" and is undergoing treatment at a hospital.

The actor's statement came a day after he was released from jail following his arrest in connection with the death of the boy's mother in the December 4 stampede at the Sandhya Theatre.

While the 35-year-old woman died, her eight-year-old son was seriously injured as fans thronged the theatre to catch a glimpse of Arjun.

"I remain deeply concerned about young Sri Tej, who is under constant medical care after the unfortunate incident," Arjun said in an Instagram post on Sunday.

The actor, who is currently out on interim bail, said he has been advised not to visit the boy and his family "due to the ongoing legal proceedings".

"My prayers remain with them and I remain committed to taking responsibility for addressing the medical and family needs. I wish him a speedy recovery, and I look forward to meeting him and his family at the earliest," Arjun said.



No thaw in Manchu family feud

Manoj alleges sabotage, threats from brother Vishnu

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The tension in the Manchu family touched new heights on Sunday after Manchu Manoj accused his brother, Vishnu Manchu, of a dangerous act that could have jeopardised the safety of his entire household.

The controversy began with an attack on a journalist working for a regional language media outlet, which led to Mohan Babu visiting the journalist in hospital, to offer his well-wishes and to apologise to him on Sunday.

However, the underlying family conflict took a disturbing turn. Manchu Manoj recounted a harrowing experience on December 14. He said that while he was on a shoot and his wife was at their son's school event, Vishnu and his associates, including Raj Konduru, Kiran (previously accused of theft), Vijay Reddy and a group of bouncers, entered Manju Manoj's residence saying that they wanted to deliver a birthday cake from their mother.

What followed was an act of deliberate sabotage. Manoj said that Vishnu and his team tampered with the main generators in his house by pouring a mixture of diesel and sugar into them.

This act was intended to make the generators malfunction, which they did later that night causing dangerous electrical fluctuations. The safety of everyone in the house — including Manoj's elderly mother, his young daughter and other relatives — was put at risk.

As the intruders left, they not only caused destruction but escalated tension by forcibly removing the last remaining loyal staff member from the house. They also threatened Manoj's Dargal coach, warning him not to intervene or report the incident.

With a call for swift action from the police, Manoj urged Pahadi Shareef to ensure justice in the matter.



Mohan Babu meets journalist, offers apology

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Veteran Telugu actor Mohan Babu, who was booked on the charges of attempt to murder for allegedly assaulting a journalist here, met the latter on Sunday, who is undergoing treatment at a hospital and offered an apology.

The former Rajya Sabha member along with his elder son Manchu Vishnu termed the incident as unfortunate, said the injured TV journalist M Ranjith Kumar. "He (Mohan Babu) offered an apology to me, my family and the entire journalist fraternity," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Centre defers jamili polls Bill

LS to take up financial business first

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has deferred the introduction of bills related to 'one nation one election' in the Lok Sabha till after the completion of financial business, sources said.

Earlier, the two bills — The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill — were listed for introduction in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The sources in the government said the bills could be brought later this week after the House passes the first batch of supplementary demands for grants listed for Monday.

The revised list of business, issued by the Lok Sabha secretariat, does not have the two bills on the agenda for Monday.

However, the government can always bring in legislative agenda to Parliament at the last minute through 'Supplementary List of Business' with the permission of the Lok Sabha Speaker.

The two bills related to implementation of the simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies have been circulated among members last week as per the rules of procedure.

The Winter session of Parliament is scheduled to conclude on December 20.

'Jamili polls key to nation's growth'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communications, Dr Pemmasani Chandrasekhar, has emphasised the importance of Jamili (simultaneous) elections, stating that a coordinated electoral process would significantly contribute to the nation's development.

He also lauded Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for his forward-thinking approach towards simultaneous elections.



Dr Chandrasekhar, along with Tadikonda MLA Tenali Sravan Kumar, unveiled a statue of Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR) at the Thullur mandal centre in Amaravati on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, he remarked, "Those who desire the development of Amaravati and the state wish to see TDP and Chandrababu Naidu in power.

The statue of the great leader NTR symbolises Amaravati's spirit. Our city stands as a testament to the realisation of Anna's (NTR's) vision through CM Naidu's leadership."

Reflecting on the state's transformation, Dr Chandrasekhar pointed out that, five years ago, Amaravati was plagued by barren lands and potholed roads. He highlighted that Rs 15,000 crore of central government funds are being utilised to rebuild Amaravati, ensuring roads are repaired and infrastructure restored.

In another event, Dr Chandrasekhar laid the foundation stone for the two-storey expansion of the Dr Podila Prasad GMCANA Super Specialty Block at the Government General Hospital (GGH), Guntur, at an estimated cost of Rs 10 cr.

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Stress on image-guided musculoskeletal interventions

■ TWO-DAY WORKSHOP AT AIIMS MANGALAGIRI CONCLUDES

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AIIMS Mangalagiri hosted a highly successful two-day Cadaveric Workshop and Hands-On Training on Image-Guided Musculoskeletal (MSK) Interventions on December 14 and 15. Organised by the Departments of Radio-Diagnosis and Anatomy, in collaboration with the Indian Radiological and Imaging Association (IRIA) and the Musculoskeletal Society (MSS), India, the workshop drew widespread participation from medical professionals eager to enhance their expertise in cutting-edge MSK treatments.

Over 80 delegates from across the country, including radiologists, clinicians, and medical practitioners, attended the event to improve their skills in advanced MSK interventions. The workshop featured 10 internationally renowned faculty members who delivered expert sessions on the latest techniques for

treating a wide range of musculoskeletal disorders. These image-guided interventions are increasingly recognised for their ability to offer minimally invasive alternatives to traditional surgeries, significantly reducing recovery times and enhancing patient outcomes.

The hands-on training was conducted on eight cadavers with active participation from AIIMS Mangalagiri's Department of Anatomy. The event made use of 20 high-resolution ultrasound machines, providing delegates with invaluable practical exposure. Such specialised workshops are rare, yet critical, in helping radiologists master the skills needed for image-guided MSK procedures. These procedures are not only cost-effective but also enable treatment in outpatient settings, minimising patient discomfort and recovery time.

Dr Madhabananda Kar, Director of AIIMS Mangalagiri, officially inaugurated the workshop, empha-

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sising the importance of such training initiatives in enhancing medical education and improving patient care. He expressed his pride in AIIMS Mangalagiri's role as a leading institution in advancing medical research and innovation.

The workshop was also attended by several distinguished guests, including Dr Shreemant Kumar Das, Dean of Academics; Dr Varaprasad, National President of IRIA; Dr Jayraj Govindaraj, President of MSS; Dr Joy Ghoshal, Head of the Department of Anatomy; and Dr Prudhvinath Reddy, Head of the Department of Radio-Diagnosis. Their presence reinforced the importance of continued collaboration between professional associations, academic institutions, and medical practitioners to foster advancements in medical practice.

Dr Varaprasad, while addressing the gathering, highlighted the significance of adopting modern

techniques in musculoskeletal interventions and the potential for such workshops to improve healthcare standards in India. He reiterated the growing need for such training programs to bridge the gap between traditional methods and emerging technologies in medical practice.

This event underscores AIIMS Mangalagiri's ongoing commitment to advancing medical education and promoting innovative, minimally invasive treatment techniques. By hosting such workshops, the institution aims to equip healthcare professionals with the necessary skills to improve patient care, thereby contributing to better health outcomes across the country.

The success of this workshop serves as a stepping stone in the continued development of specialised medical training programs at AIIMS Mangalagiri, which remain at the forefront of medical education in India.

Key leaders vying for NSP Committee Chairman post

■ Leadership will meet within two days and finalise president and vice-president candidates

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Two prominent TDP leaders, Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao from Krishna district and Kota Veera Babu from NTR district, seem to be in competition for the coveted Nagarjuna Sagar Project (NSP) Committee Chairman post. Interestingly, both leaders are strong followers of former minister Devineni Uma Maheswara Rao.

Under the Nagarjuna Sagar Project (NSP) irrigation system, there are 17 Distributory Committees (DCs) in the Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal. Of these, there are around 104 Water Users' Associations (WUA) and their committees were elected unanimously in the recently held elections.

As per the schedule, all 104 WUA presidents will elect 17 DC presidents and vice-presidents in an election to be conducted on December 17. Most of the DC elections will be held unanimously. After that, the Nagarjuna Sagar Project Committee election will be conducted on December 20. In this election, all 17 DC presidents will



Kota Veera Babu



Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao

elect a Project Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

At this stage, both the prominent TDP leaders are focusing on the Chairman post. The issue will be discussed among the MLAs of Krishna, NTR, and Eluru districts. The NSP Ayacut is covered by the Jaggayyapeta, Nandigama, Mylavaram, Tiruvuru, Nuzvid, Gannavaram, and Denduluru

Assembly constituencies.

According to sources, Minister Kolu Parthasarathy, MLAs Sriram Rajagopal alias Tataiah, Tangirala Sowmya, Vasantha Krishna Prasad, K Srinivasa Rao, Yarlagadda Venkata Rao and Chintamaneni Prabhakar will hold a meeting within two days and finalise the president and vice-president candidates. Four-time DC president Alla Venkata Gopala

Krishna Rao, who also has experience as the APEX Council member, is seeking the position.

Rao has been unanimously elected to the Water Users' Association (WUA), Rangannagudem, for the fourth consecutive time. He earlier served as the Bapulapadu DC Chairman, and as an APEX committee member from 2016 to 2019. Meanwhile, Kota Veera Babu was elected as WUA president from Chandralapadu mandal.

They are senior leaders in the party and are very dedicated. However, Rao is knowledgeable about the NSP Ayacut and water distribution between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and the party sources expect that the post will be allotted to him.

The party sources added that the majority of DCs under the Left Canal are in the NTR district. Also, there are no key positions for leaders from the NTR district in the government. So, they are asking the party leadership to allot the Chairman position to Kota Veera Babu. However, the party's decision is final in this regard, the sources added.

Young woman from Tenali dies in US road accident

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A young woman from Tenali in Guntur district lost her life in a road accident in Memphis, Tennessee, USA. The victim has been identified as Nagasri Vandana Parimala (26), daughter of Ganesh and Ramadevi.

According to reports from the US, Nagasri was returning home from work on Friday night when the car she was travelling in, along with two friends, collided with a truck near National Street and Rockwood Avenue in Memphis. She sustained critical injuries and was rushed to a local hospital, where she succumbed.

MPs Chinni and Balashowry on AIIMS-M'giri governing body

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a notable development, Vijayawada MP Kesineni Shivanath, popularly known as Chinni, and Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashowry have been unanimously elected as members of the governing body of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Mangalagiri. The announcement was made by the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

The two MPs secured their positions under the Lok Sabha quota. Initially, five MPs — Chinni, Balashowry, BJP MP Daggubati Purandeswari, TDP MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu, and YSR Congress MP Gurumurthy — had filed nomi-

nations for the two available slots. However, the withdrawal of Purandeswari, Krishnadevarayalu,

and Gurumurthy on Friday paved the way for the unanimous election of Chinni and Balashowry.

The election process was conducted smoothly, reflecting cooperative efforts among the candidates. After the results were declared, MP Chinni expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for their support.

The governing body of AIIMS, Mangalagiri, plays a crucial role in shaping the policies and administration of the institute, which is a key healthcare hub in Andhra Pradesh.



'Potti Sriramulu lives in hearts of Telugu people'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leaders paid rich tributes to Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu on his death anniversary at the party's central office in Tadepalli. Party leaders garlanded Sriramulu's portrait and recalled his unparalleled contributions to the nation and the Telugu-speaking community.

Taking to X, YSRCP president and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy wrote, "Heartfelt tributes to Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu, who sacrificed his life for a separate state and remains eternally in the hearts of Telugu people". Speaking on the occasion, MLC Lella Appireddy said that Potti Sriramulu was a towering figure in India's history, who played a

pivotal role in the country's freedom struggle. He added that Sriramulu's selfless sacrifice for the formation of a Telugu-speaking State through his hunger strike serves as an inspiration to generations.

Appireddy emphasised that Sriramulu's ideals and sacrifices remind everyone of the value of unity and selflessness. He assured that Jagan Mohan Reddy and the YSR Congress Party are committed to upholding and advancing the aspirations of Potti Sriramulu for the betterment of society.

Other prominent leaders, including party State general secretary Ankamreddy Narayanamurthy and Student Wing State president Ravichandra, participated in the event.



Governor pays tributes to Potti Sriramulu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer has paid tributes to Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu on his death anniversary, observed as 'Atmarpana Day'. The Governor offered flowers to the portrait of Amarajeevi Potti Sriramulu at a programme held at Durbar Hall, Raj Bhavan, here on Sunday.

Abdul Nazeer said that Sriramulu was a freedom fighter widely remembered by the people for his supreme sacrifice and the pivotal role played by him in the creation of separate Andhra State, by fulfilling the long-cherished aspirations of the people. P Suryaprakash, Joint Secretary to Governor, and other officers were also present.



Farmers pin hopes on Revenue Conferences to resolve D-patta crisis

■ In 2023, Jagan government enacted 9/2023 Freehold Act, but its implementation faced criticism for lack of clarity

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Farmers across Andhra Pradesh are anxiously awaiting outcomes from the ongoing revenue conferences, which aim to resolve the decades-old challenges surrounding D-patta lands. Rooted in policies established in 1956, these unresolved issues have left countless farmers in a soup.

Under the Andhra Pradesh Revenue Board Standing Orders (BSO) 15, approximately 54 lakh acres of land was distributed to weaker sections. Beneficiaries received up to five acres of dryland and two-and-a-half acres of wetland with strict provisions, including restrictions on sale and conditions for reclamation if the land remained uncultivated for three years. However, these safeguards failed to prevent widespread alienation of D-patta lands, as many farmers were unable to cultivate their plots.

"The alienation of D-patta lands has been a persistent issue because governments have failed to enforce existing laws or maintain accurate revenue records," said a senior agricultural policy expert. To address unauthorised transfers, the State implemented the 9/77 Andhra Pradesh Assigned Lands (Prohibition of Transfers) Act in 1977. Yet, enforcement remained weak, leaving room for political exploitation and poor awareness among farmers. Post-bifurcation, the issue worsened as inconsistent record-keeping led to many lands being incorrectly added to prohibited lists, particularly during the Telugu Desam Party's tenure from 2014 to 2018.

Urbanisation added another layer of complexity, turning D-patta lands into high-value assets. The



resulting conflicts between legal frameworks and on-ground realities deepened farmers' woes. "Urbanisation has turned D-patta lands into high-value assets, creating a tug-of-war between legal frameworks and ground realities. The failure to maintain clear records has left both farmers and governments in a fix," remarked a senior revenue official.

In 2023, the Jagan government enacted the 9/2023 Freehold Act, granting full ownership rights to D-patta holders after 20 years. While the Act was hailed as a significant step, its implementation has faced criticism for lack of clarity. Current revenue estimates suggest only 35 lakh acres qualify for freehold status under the new legislation. "While the Freehold Act is a step in the right direction, its success hinges on clear implementation. Farmers need clarity on how this law applies to lands alienated decades ago," noted a farmer leader from Vizianagaram district.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court recently ruled in favour of D. Suramma, declaring that D-patta lands in Sabbavaram mandal should not be classified as assigned lands and must be removed from prohibited lists. Legal experts argue that alienated lands over 20 years old should be regularised for current owners, with new grants governed by stricter provisions to avoid repeating past mistakes. "If governments act decisively by identifying eligible D-patta lands and removing them from prohibited lists, it will not only benefit farmers, but also boost registration revenue significantly," suggested a legal analyst.

Farmers now look to the State's leadership for solutions that will address both historical injustices and modern challenges. Experts agree that resolving the D-patta land issues is not just about rectifying the past, but about securing the future of Andhra Pradesh's agricultural economy. "Addressing the D-patta land issues is not just about justice for farmers—it's about securing Andhra Pradesh's agricultural and economic future," emphasised a senior policy advisor.

The decisions made in the coming weeks could shape the future of millions of farmers and the State's economic trajectory.

Over 15K runners take part in Vizag Navy Marathon

■ A highlight of the event was inclusion of several schools supporting children with special needs

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam witnessed an electrifying event as the ninth edition of the Vizag Navy Marathon took place on Sunday. The city's Beach Road was transformed into a vibrant hub of energy as over 15,000 participants from across the country and nine other nations enthusiastically ran along the scenic coastal stretch.

Vice Admiral Rajesh Pendharker, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, officially flagged off the marathon from RK Beach. The event, part of the Navy Day celebrations, continues to be a flagship tradition for the city.

District Collector M.N. Harendhira Prasad hailed the hosting of South India's largest marathon in Visakhapatnam as a milestone achievement, emphasising its significance in showcasing

the city's tourism potential and fostering community engagement. Local businesses, from hotels and restaurants to souvenir shops, experienced a significant boost during the marathon weekend.

The marathon offered categories for all fitness levels, including a 42-kilometre full marathon, a 21-kilometre half marathon, and shorter runs of 10 and five kilometres. Families, fitness enthusiasts, and professional runners all came

together to celebrate the spirit of health and community.

One of the highlights of the event was the inclusion of several schools supporting children with special needs. "We are thankful to the Navy for giving us a platform to showcase our abilities and participation in such a prestigious event," a participant expressed. Another runner echoed the sentiment, stressing the event's core values: "The idea behind the marathon is to showcase

the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how activities like walking and running contribute to overall well-being."

A standout moment was the participation of 102-year-old retired Navy Commander V. Sriramulu, who became the centre of admiration and inspiration. "Age is just a number when you have the determination to stay active," Sriramulu said, drawing applause from the crowd.



Draw inspiration from ideals of Amarajeevi: SW Minister

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare, Dola Balaveerjaneya Swamy, urged the people to draw inspiration from the ideals of freedom fighter Potti Sriramulu.

The Minister, accompanied by Collector A. Thameem Ansariya, Tourism Development Corporation Chairman Nukasani Balaji, and Mayor Gangada Sujata, paid tributes to the late freedom fighter. They garlanded the statue of Potti Sriramulu at the CVN Reading Room here on Sunday. A meeting, titled 'Atmarpana Sabha', was organised on the occasion.

In his address, Minister Dola Balaveerjaneya Swamy recalled that the formation of a separate Andhra Pradesh state was the result of the supreme sacrifice made by Potti Sriramulu. He highlighted that Potti Sriramulu fought not only for India's independence but also for the entry of Dalits into temples. The



Minister further emphasized Potti Sriramulu's strong connection with Prakasam district.

"Potti Sriramulu undertook a fast unto death, sacrificing his life with the firm belief that the Telugu people must have their own identity. He was also deeply concerned about the state's development. In line with his vision, the government led by Chandrababu Naidu is work-

ing tirelessly to develop the state across all sectors," the Minister stated.

He also recalled that Mahatma Gandhi admired Potti Sriramulu for his significant role in the freedom struggle. The Minister praised Sriramulu's dedication to the cause despite personal challenges, including family issues.

The Minister further extolled

Potti Sriramulu's efforts to ensure that Dalits could enter temples, as he believed that alongside the country's independence, Dalits should also attain economic and social freedom. He noted that the Naidu-led state government has formulated the 'Swarnandhra 2047 Vision Document' to carry forward the ideals of Potti Sriramulu and to ensure the overall development of the state.

Tourism Development Corporation Chairman Balaji stated that everyone should feel proud of Potti Sriramulu and emphasized the need to educate future generations about his supreme sacrifice. He urged the Collector to install a Potti Sriramulu statue at the Collector's office premises.

District Revenue Officer B. China Obulesu, BC Welfare Officer Anjala, BC Corporation Director Venkateswara Rao, and District Education Officer Kiran Kumar attended the programme.

Chelluboyina accuses govt of misusing power

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Former minister Chelluboyina Srinivasa Venugopalakrishna has accused the coalition government of abusing power and undermining democratic values in the recently concluded water users' society elections. Addressing a press conference in the city on Sunday, alongside former MLA Jakkampudi Raja, the ex-Minister alleged widespread misuse of administrative machinery, police intimidation, and deliberate hindrance of YSRCP candidates during the elections.

"The coalition government has reduced these elections to a farce by denying farmers their rightful chance to contest," said Venugopalakrishna.

He alleged that No-Dues Certificates (NOCs) were deliberately withheld, while Village Revenue Officers (VROs) were confined to mandal offices under police supervision, rendering



them unable to assist candidates. "This was a calculated move to ensure unopposed victories for the TDP and its allies," he added.

Criticising the government for disregarding court directives mandating secret ballot elections, he said, "The government's actions show their fear of a fair fight." He described the episode as a "dark chapter in Chandrababu Naidu's career," calling the election process undemocratic and the claims of victory misleading. Jakkampudi Raja also condemned the alleged violence and intimidation during the elections, claiming that YSRCP supporters were harassed, nomination papers were destroyed, and false cases were filed against farmers. He criticised attacks on journalists who attempted to report irregularities, calling it an assault on press freedom and democracy.

Both leaders warned that officials involved in the malpractices would be held accountable.

"This is not governance but an attack on democracy," they asserted, urging people to stand united against the government's oppressive tactics.

FREE MEDICAL CAMP HELD

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Aster Ramesh Hospitals marked its 36th anniversary with a free mega super-specialty medical camp in Ongole, serving over 800 people from the region. The event is part of a larger initiative offering healthcare services across Prakasam, Krishna, Guntur and West Godavari districts. Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu, Chief Cardiologist and Managing Director of Aster Ramesh Hospitals, announced plans to expand the Ongole facility by adding 100 more beds to its existing 200-bed capacity. The hospital is now the largest private healthcare provider in the district and remains committed to delivering high-quality medical services. Dr Ramesh Babu also revealed the upcoming introduction of Dr NTR Vaidya Seva and Aarogyasri services at Ongole. As part of its expansion, the hospital will soon offer paediatric cardiac care, heart bypass surgeries, valve replacements, and advanced cardiac electrophysiology services. The event was attended by Unit Head Dr Nalluri Nithin, Medical Superintendent Dr Vamsi, Strategy Head Dr Kalyan, and Group Business Head Dr Karthik Chowdary.

Naidu's Vision-2047 a gimmick, says Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP president and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has criticised TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu's Vision-2047 document, terming it a gimmick lacking substance. Jagan accused Chandrababu of misleading the public with hollow promises and alleged that his past initiatives, like Vision-2020, were equally deceptive.

Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Jagan wrote, "@ncbn governance has always revolved around deceit and manipulation," and referred to the Vision-2020 initiative as a dark chapter in the history of united Andhra Pradesh.

He said that during Naidu's tenure, the State saw widespread farmer suicides, mass migrations, and rising unemployment. "Instead of resolving these crises, Naidu sold valuable public assets to his associates under the guise of privatisation, indulging in rampant corruption," Jagan stated. He also recalled a remark by Switzerland's then-Finance Minister Pascal, who

reportedly said that leaders making such empty promises would face imprisonment or mental evaluation in their country.

Jagan also mocked Naidu's Vision-2020 as "420" and criticised Vision-2029 for being another instance of unfulfilled propaganda. "Despite launching three different 'visions,' Chandrababu failed to implement a single impactful project. Did he establish a government medical college, hospital, or school? Did he create ports or improve agriculture? The answer is no," Jagan asserted. He further accused Chandrababu of leading the state into consistent revenue deficits and making baseless claims, such as promising Andhra Pradesh a \$2.4 trillion economy by 2047.

Contrasting his government's achievements, Jagan highlighted transformative initiatives by the YSRCP government. He pointed to the introduction of CBSE and IB curricula, tablet distribution for students, Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs), e-crop systems, and ensuring MSP at farm gates.

NTR district police harnesses drone tech for better results

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The NTR district police have embraced technological advancements by introducing drones to enhance policing operations. At a programme held at the Police Command and Control Centre, drones were distributed to all police stations under the NTR District Police Commissionerate.

Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu presided over the event, which saw the participation of dignitaries, including MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), Municipal Commissioner Dhyana Chand, and MLAs Gadde Rammohan, Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao, and Vasantha Krishna Prasad. Senior police officers, including DCPs Gautami Shali and Thirumaleswar Reddy, were also present.

Commissioner Rajasekhara Babu highlighted that drones would play a crucial role in crime prevention, traffic management, and crowd control. He emphasised that the technology would enable efficient surveillance of high-risk areas, aid in crime scene analysis, and facilitate live traffic monitoring. Additionally, drones can be used for crowd dispersal and controlling unrest through tear gas deployment. He described this as a step



towards "invisible policing," ensuring public safety with minimal manpower.

MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) expressed satisfaction at donating 10 drones, with contributions from other donors bringing the total to 15. He announced that over 500 women police officers would be trained in drone operations, with 100 already completing their training. Municipal Commissioner Dhyana Chand

noted that Vijayawada's traffic congestion has been reduced using AI tools at traffic junctions, complemented by drones for crowd regulation during the recent Dasara festival.

The event concluded with the distribution of drones to 28 police stations, marking a significant milestone in the NTR District Police's efforts to integrate technology into policing, thereby ensuring a safer and more efficient city.

UNREST AT VSP OVER UNPAID WAGES; UNIONS PLAN PROTEST

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) is facing growing unrest as workers struggle with months of unpaid wages, even as allegations of lavish spending by senior officials emerge. Despite achieving a daily production of 14,000 tonnes of steel, surpassing its capacity by 10%, employees are grappling with severe financial hardships.

"The management preaches austerity to workers but permits excessive spending," said a VSP worker, requesting anonymity. "It's disheartening to see our efforts go unrecognised while others enjoy luxury."

Anger has intensified over reports of the extravagant lifestyle of a female Officer on Special Duty (OSD) from NMDC in the Finance

Department. She is reportedly residing in luxury hotels such as Novotel and The Park, incurring daily expenses of Rs 10,000 for accommodation and Rs 5,000 for transportation in an Innova.

This alleged extravagance stands in stark contrast to the plight of the workers. Salaries for September were only partially disbursed, and just 35% of October wages have been paid. November dues remain unpaid, leaving employees struggling to support their families.

"It's ironic that those ensuring maximum production are unable to meet basic needs, while top officials remain unaffected," said a local union leader.

Workers have criticised VSP's top management, particularly CMD Saxena, deputed from Manganese Ore (India) Limited (MOIL), accus-

Workers struggle without salaries while officials face allegations of extravagance

ing him of ignoring their plight. "The CMD collects his salary from MOIL without addressing our issues," said a union representative. Similar criticism has been directed at the OSD, who reportedly enjoys all facilities while receiving her

salary from NMDC.

Visakhapatnam MP M Sriharat has raised the issue with Union Steel Minister Kumaraswamy, but no significant action has followed. In protest, employees and their families, led by the Visakha Ukku Parirakshana Porata Committee, plan to stage a dharna on December 18 from 3 pm to 6 pm at the VSP administrative office.

"We urge all employees and their families to participate. Timely payment of wages is a fundamental right," said a committee leader.

The protest will also demand the long-pending merger of VSP with SAIL, which unions believe will bring financial stability. "This is just the beginning. If our demands remain unmet, we will escalate our agitation," warned a senior union member.



Police raid cockfight den; seize bikes and roosters

PNS ■ GUDIVADA

A month ahead of the Sankranti festival, organizers in Krishna district have begun preparing for the controversial tradition of cockfighting. On Sunday, the police conducted a raid at a cockfight den located near the Sri Bhimeswara Swamy temple, on the bypass road in Gudivada town, and arrested five individuals involved in organizing the event.

During the raid, the police seized 25 motorcycles, two auto-rickshaws, and two roosters. They also confiscated sharp-edged blades, which are typically tied to the legs of the roosters during cockfights. Upon noticing the police, the punters quickly fled the scene, abandoning their vehicles.

The police have registered cases against the accused, and investigations are underway.

TDP leaders have miraculous escape as dais collapses

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP), BJP, and JSP leaders, including former ministers Yenamala Ramakrishna and N. Chinaraajappa, had a miraculous escape when the dais they were standing on collapsed here on Sunday.

The incident occurred during a programme to mark Tummala Rama Swamy Babu's swearing-in as the Chairman of the Kakinada Urban Development Authority (KUDA). As TDP, JSP, and BJP leaders, including Yanamala Ramakrishnu, Nimmakayala Chinaraajappa, and KUDA Chairman Tummala Babu, stood on the stage, it suddenly gave way.

The mishap took place just as Yanamala Ramakrishnu was about to begin his



address. The leaders were taken aback by the unexpected collapse of the dais. Activists present at the event

rushed to help the leaders, guiding them out of the wreckage. Fortunately, no one was injured in the incident.

KTR slams CM for threatening to jail Hyderabad Metro CEO

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA KTR launched a sharp attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on X, criticising his alleged remarks about ordering the arrest of Hyderabad Metro Rail CEO in connection with the Metro's losses. The remarks, made during an interview with 'India Today', have drawn widespread criticism, with KTR questioning Revanth's leadership and the impact of such statements on Telangana's investment climate.

Revanth's remarks, made in response to a question about Hyderabad Metro's losses, cited the free bus travel scheme for women as a contributing factor. The CM suggested that he may order the police to arrest the L&T CEO and jail him.

"As Revanth suffered imprisonment after being

caught red-handed with a bag of cash, he seems to want everyone else to experience it," KTR said, referring to some past controversies involving the CM.

KTR questioned the rationale behind targeting a reputed company like L&T, which operates the Hyderabad Metro, for voicing concerns about the free bus travel scheme impacting its finances.

"Which Chief Minister, in his right mind, would openly threaten the CXO of a reputed company like L&T with jail simply for voicing his opinion about a government scheme?" KTR wrote, highlighting the damaging message this sends to industry.

"What message is Revanth sending to the business fraternity with such frivolous statements? Is this your disruptive strategy to woo investments, @RahulGandhi Ji?"

ACROSS THE STATES

AMIT SHAH TO NAXALS

Give up arms or face strong action

PNS ■ JAGDALPUR (CHHATTISGARH)

Jagdarpur (Chhattisgarh), Dec 15 (PTI) Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday appealed to Naxals to give up arms and join the mainstream, or else they will have to face the strong action of security forces.

He said the rehabilitation of the surrendered Naxals is the responsibility of the government. Addressing a sporting event 'Bastar Olympics' in Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur, Shah also said the country would be free of Maoists by March 2026.

"I appeal to Naxals, please forward. Give up arms, surrender and join the mainstream. Your rehabilitation is our responsibility," he said. He said if the Maoists do not listen to the appeal of surrender, they will be crushed by the security forces. "Chhattisgarh Police is committed to fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve to make India Naxal-free by March 31, 2026," he said. The Union home minister said the Chhattisgarh government's rehabilitation policy is the best in the country.

"If you surrender and join the mainstream, you will contribute for the development of



"CHHATTISGARH POLICE IS COMMITTED TO FULFILLING PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S RESOLVE TO MAKE INDIA NAXAL-FREE BY MARCH 31, 2026," HE SAID. THE UNION HOME MINISTER SAID THE CHHATTISGARH GOVERNMENT'S REHABILITATION POLICY IS THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY

Chhattisgarh and India," he said. Shah said when the was in power in Chhattisgarh

before the BJP assumed charge a year ago, the action against the Maoists became slow.

"But after our government came to power in Chhattisgarh, action against the extremists

speeded up resulting in killings of 287 Naxals in last one year, arrest of 992 Naxals and surrender of 836 others," he said.

Shah said since the Modi government assumed charge, there has been a 73 per cent reduction in the casualties in security forces and 70 per cent decline in civilians' deaths.

"If Naxalism ends in Bastar (Chhattisgarh), it will attract more tourists than Kashmir due to its natural beauty," he said. He further said those who know the process of change taking place within the society also know that it is not limited to only 1.5 lakh people participating in the Bastar Olympics. "Everyone is saying that Bastar is changing. I assure you that when I will come to the 2026 Bastar Olympics, I will say that Bastar has changed," he said, adding that this change has been initiated by the Bastar Olympics.

The Union home minister said this event will write a new saga of development of Bastar in the coming days and will become a strong basis for the complete eradication of Naxalism. He also said many development works are being done, through which Naxalism is being defeated.



BJP has 'no CM face', no vision for Delhi: Kejriwal

AAP releases final candidates' list

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After AAP released its final list of candidates for the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, party supremo Arvind Kejriwal, who will contest from the New Delhi constituency, took a swipe at the BJP, alleging that the saffron party has no chief ministerial face.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday released its final list of 38 candidates for the Assembly polls due in February, fielding Kejriwal from New Delhi besides repeating Chief Minister Atishi from Kalkaji.

In a post on X in Hindi, Kejriwal said, "The party is contesting the elections with full confidence and full preparation. BJP is missing. They have no CM face, no team, no planning, and no vision for Delhi."



AIADMK picks arrogance pitch to target CM

In its executive committee and general council meeting here, the AIADMK on Sunday accused Chief Minister M K Stalin of being arrogant and said the ruling party-led government's days are numbered. AIADMK leader and former minister B Valarmathi accused Chief Minister Stalin of being at the 'peak of arrogance' and mocking at opposition parties. She claimed that the DMK government's 'days are numbered,' and added that the chief minister's chair has become ready for Edappadi K Palaniswami, her party chief. Recently, Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam chief and actor Vijay had accused the DMK of being arrogant by claiming to win 200 seats and had also said that people will 'minus' the 'selfish alliance calculations' of the ruling party. Valarmathi used the same Tamil word (Irumappu) used by Vijay to level her allegation of arrogance against Stalin. ADMK's Villupuram strongman C Ve Shanmugam said the frequently asked question of forging alliance with parties will happen at the right time and recalled that the AIADMK won Assembly polls hands down in the years.



Delhi's minimum temp drops ; air quality 'poor'

The minimum temperature dropped to 4.9 degrees Celsius in Delhi on Sunday, though cold wave conditions did not prevail, according to the weather department. No cold wave conditions prevailed, as per the data, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The minimum temperature in Delhi dropped to 4.9 degrees Celsius on Sunday, 3.1 notches below the normal nighttime temperature. Earlier on Saturday, the minimum temperature was recorded at 8 degrees Celsius. Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 23.2 degrees Celsius on Sunday, 0.2 notches below normal, the IMD said, adding that humidity levels ranged between 91 per cent and 45 per cent. The IMD has forecast moderate fog for Monday, with the maximum and minimum temperatures expected to remain at 23 degrees Celsius and 5 degrees Celsius, respectively. Meanwhile, Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) was in the 'poor' category, with a reading of 294 at 4 pm.



Over 22 lakh devotees in 29 days at Sabarimala

Over 22 lakh Ayyappa devotees visited Sabarimala in 29 days till December 14, an increase of 4.51 lakh pilgrims from the corresponding period last year, Travancore Devaswom Board president P S Prashanth said on Sunday. Addressing reporters at Sannidhanam, he said the total revenue at the temple had increased by Rs 22.76 crore from the same period last year. A total of 22,67,956 Ayyappa devotees visited Sabarimala in 29 days till December 14, he said. The total revenue received in the period amounted to Rs 163.89 crore. Of this, the revenue from Aravana (prasadam) sales was Rs 82.67 crore, while income from the offering box was Rs 52.27 crore. The income from Aravana sales increased by Rs 17.41 crore from the Rs 65.26 crore received last year, he said, while the collection from the offering box brought in Rs 8.35 crore more than the amount received during the same period last year, he said. He said all facilities have been arranged for the pilgrims to have a smooth darshan at the temple this year and thanked all the departments, including the police who cooperated with the Devaswom Board.

Sambhal temple represents truth of our history: UP CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As authorities reopened a temple in Sambhal locked since 1978 following communal riots, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said the temple did not reappear overnight and represents "our enduring heritage and the truth of our history".



tors of the massacre not been brought to justice even after decades?"

Speaking at a private event on Kumbh, the chief minister highlighted the tragic incidents that took place 46 years ago in Sambhal where innocent people lost their lives to "barbaric violence", and questioned, "Why have perpetra-

He criticised those who seek to 'suppress the truth and tarnish cultural events' like the Kumbh, asserting that voices of truth often face threats and efforts to silence them.

Maha ministry expanded, 39 ministers take oath

PNS ■ NAGPUR

The 10-day-old BJP-led Mahayuti alliance ministry in Maharashtra was expanded at Nagpur on Sunday, with 39 ministers being sworn in, taking its strength to 42.

In the expansion, BJP got 19 ministerial berths, followed by 11 to Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and 9 for Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party.

While 33 legislators were sworn in as cabinet ministers, six took oath as ministers of state. Governor P C Radhakrishnan administered the oath to the new ministers at the ceremony held on the eve of the state legislature's winter session being held in Nagpur from December 16 to 21. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and deputy CMs Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, who took oath in Mumbai on December 5, were present.

The new cabinet includes state BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule



and Mumbai BJP president Ashish Shelar. Results of the state assembly elections, held on November 20, were declared on November 23.

THOSE LEFT OUT TO GET CHANCE LATER: AJIT

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Sunday said the ruling Mahayuti will also give a chance to other legislators, who have not found a place in the current ministry, during this government's

tenure. "We will give an opportunity to others also for two-and-a-half years," NCP leader Pawar said addressing a gathering of his party workers in Nagpur before the cabinet expansion. Everybody wants to become a minister and deserves an opportunity, but the ministerial berths are limited, he pointed out.

Among the prominent leaders left out of the ministry include NCP's Chhagan Bhujbal and Dilip Walse Patil and BJP's Sudhir Mungantiwar.

Modi invokes Nehru to distract attention from his 'failures': Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, alleging that defamation of Jawaharlal Nehru and minimum democratic governance was his model.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said PM Modi has an "obsession" with Nehru as he invokes the country's first prime minister to distract the nation's attention from his "own failures" and current challenges on which he maintains a "complete silence".

The Congress attack on the prime minister came a day after Modi attacked the party during the debate on the 'Glorious 75-year journey of India's Constitution'.

"It was the famous French philosopher Voltaire who had first said that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him. For our self-anointed divinity -- if Nehru had not existed -- it would have been necessary to invent him,"



Ramesh said. The Congress leader asked what would the prime minister do without Nehru, for whom he has a pathological obsession. "Nehru is necessary to distract the nation's attention from his own failures. Nehru is necessary to divert the nation's attention from current challenges on which he maintains a complete silence," Ramesh said. He also said that Nehru was necessary to deny the nation's many achievements before May

2014. In another post on X, Ramesh said, "In his rant in the Lok Sabha yesterday, the PM attacked Nehru on the First Amendment to the Constitution of India -- which was carried out with effect from June 18th, 1951." Explaining why this amendment was brought, the Congress leader said, it was carried out for three reasons.

"One, to deal with communal propaganda at a most sensitive time. Two, to protect Zamindari abolition laws that were being struck down by the courts. Three, to protect reservations in education and employment for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs that had been rejected by the courts" he said.

A select committee, in which Nehru, Rajagopalchari, and Ambedkar were among the members, examined the Bill in detail, Ramesh said, noting that even after the panel tabled its report, Nehru listened to his critics and modified his stance.

Maywati urges parties to support ONOE bills

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

BSP chief Mayawati on Sunday attacked the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, saying they should not speak on reservations as they colluded in opposing legislation giving quota in promotions to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) when the Congress-led UPA was in power.

Addressing a press conference, she also backed the Centre's bills on 'one nation-one election', stressing it will reduce expenses and ensure public welfare works continue uninterrupted. She urged other



parties to also support the measure. Mayawati demanded that reservations for SC, ST and OBC be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent any tampering. Central and state laws listed in the Ninth Schedule are exempt from judicial review. During the

discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha, the ruling side and the opposition, especially the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, to woo Dalit and OBC voters, have said a lot of "baseless" things about reservation issue in which there is "not even an iota of truth", she told reporters. "And it would have been better if these two parties (Congress, SP) had remained silent on this issue in Parliament, because during the time of the Congress party's government at the Centre and

with the connivance of this party, SP had strongly opposed the Constitutional Amendment Bill related to reservations in promotion of SC and ST communities. "This bill was torn and thrown away by SP in the Parliament itself and ... is still pending in the Parliament," she lamented.

The BSP chief also targeted the ruling BJP and said, "The anti-reservation mentality of the BJP is also clearly visible, due to which they are in no mood to get the bill passed."

No room for factional politics in party: K'taka BJP chief

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka BJP president B Y Vijayendra on Sunday said there is no room for factional politics in the party, and organising meetings was unacceptable.

He urged party leaders holding any such meetings and conferences to immediately stop their activities. Pointing out at the media reports about preparations for a show of strength event being organised by a section of party leaders in his favour, Vijayendra said, "There are no factions in the



BJP and everyone in the organisation is a staunch party worker." "I urge all our former legislators and party leaders who have gathered in Davangere that already our conducts have created a lot of confusion among party workers and supporters in the state."

India excels in mental math skills

SECURES MAXIMUM AWARDS AT UCMAS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has emerged as the top performer at the Universal Concept of Mental Arithmetic System (UCMAS) International Competition 2024, securing the highest number of awards in both individual and team categories across various age groups of 6-13 years.

According to a statement issued by UCMAS India, the two-day event organised by it concluded in Delhi on Sunday in which 6,000 students from 30 countries took part with Indian participants winning over 1,250 trophies in recognition of their exceptional skills. The event witnessed over 15,000 visitors, including parents and support-

ers from across India and abroad, the statement said. Speaking at the event, Alexan Wong, CEO of UC International Corporation, said, "The UCMAS competition has grown to be the largest and most impactful of its kind. It is inspiring to see students from around the world showcasing their creativity, visual memory, and focus -- skills that are critical for their future success."

Stating that UCMAS combines the traditional abacus with modern teaching methodologies to create an innovative educational experience, Wong said, "More than three million children worldwide have benefited from the UCMAS cur-

riculum, which emphasises creativity, visualisation and focus while developing strong arithmetic abilities."

The competition format required students to solve 200 arithmetic problems in just eight minutes, a process designed by UCMAS to test not only mathematical skills, but also visual memory, concentration, and overall academic performance, the statement said. Snehal Karia, CEO and President of UCMAS India, expressed pride in hosting the event in Delhi, marking 25 years of UCMAS operations in India. "This platform highlights the extraordinary talent of our students and inspires the next generation of leaders



equipped with essential skills for the future," Karia said. She added that the organisation is committed to build a strong foundation in mathematics for young learners, preparing them for a competitive global envi-

ronment. Former Union minister Meenakshi Lekhi attended the awards ceremony and commended the efforts of the young participants, the statement said. Emphasising the importance of such initiatives,

Lekhi said, "UCMAS is enhancing cognitive skills and academic excellence." Incepted in the country in 1999, UCMAS India is a global leader in Abacus-based mental math education.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Modi's mantra

PM Modi's resolutions give roadmap for progress but its realisation requires collaborative efforts from the government and civil society

During the Constitution debate in the Lok Sabha on December 13, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated 11 resolutions to guide India's future development. These resolutions, inspired by the spirit of the Constitution, aim to address critical aspects of governance, societal values and national development. PM Modi emphasised the need for citizens and government officials to uphold their duties. This aligns with the Constitution's emphasis on Fundamental Duties, but its implementation requires widespread public awareness and institutional accountability. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development through his vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." While significant progress has been made in sectors like infrastructure and digital access, challenges like regional disparities and social inequality persist. Addressing these requires targeted policy interventions and efficient resource allocation. Corruption, which undermines public trust and economic efficiency, was also highlighted by PM Modi, who called for societal rejection of corruption. His stance complements ongoing measures like digital transparency and anti-corruption legislation. However, robust enforcement mechanisms and judicial efficiency are essential for achieving this goal. Fostering respect for laws and traditions was another critical resolution aimed at strengthening social cohesion. This requires not only stricter enforcement of laws but also cultural campaigns to educate citizens about the value of India's legal and cultural heritage.



In a similar vein, PM Modi's call to instill pride in India's heritage seeks to dismantle colonial-era mindsets. This involves promoting indigenous knowledge systems, decolonising education curricula and celebrating India's achievements globally. Modi also stressed the importance of respecting the Constitution and avoiding its exploitation for political gains. This underscores the need for political integrity and constructive discourse in legislative processes. Another pivotal resolution was the preservation of reservations without introducing religion-based quotas. PM Modi's emphasis on the importance of maintaining the status quo while opposing religion-based reservations. Balancing social justice with meritocracy remains a contentious issue, necessitating careful policy considerations to address evolving societal needs. The mantra of "development of the country through the development of states" underscores the importance of cooperative federalism. Strengthening state capacities and ensuring equitable resource distribution are critical for this resolution's success. The feasibility of these resolutions hinges on several factors such as upholding duties and require active citizen engagement. Effective implementation of these resolutions largely depends on robust institutions and governance mechanisms and efficient use of resources by the government itself along with a civil society which is alert and aware.

sets. This involves promoting indigenous knowledge systems, decolonising education curricula and celebrating India's achievements globally. Modi also stressed the importance of respecting the Constitution and avoiding its exploitation for political gains. This underscores the need for political integrity and constructive discourse in legislative processes. Another pivotal resolution was the preservation of reservations without introducing religion-based quotas. PM Modi's emphasis on the importance of maintaining the status quo while opposing religion-based reservations. Balancing social justice with meritocracy remains a contentious issue, necessitating careful policy considerations to address evolving societal needs. The mantra of "development of the country through the development of states" underscores the importance of cooperative federalism. Strengthening state capacities and ensuring equitable resource distribution are critical for this resolution's success. The feasibility of these resolutions hinges on several factors such as upholding duties and require active citizen engagement. Effective implementation of these resolutions largely depends on robust institutions and governance mechanisms and efficient use of resources by the government itself along with a civil society which is alert and aware.

PICTALK



A woman protects her child from cold during a foggy winter morning, in Nadia

Beyond the screen: The hidden truths of our social media lives

Social media is a tool to make life more connected and interesting, it is not a measure to judge worth and success of family and friends

Ever since social media sneaked into our lives, we have made it a shelf to display our lives' wares. We paint our digital walls with milestones, memories, smiles, and sorrows. It's a vibrant collage of life's varied hues, yet what we post is often a curated version of reality. The smiles are brighter, the love is deeper, the vacations are grander, and the heartbreaks are more dramatic. But behind this veneer of filtered perfection, the raw and unfiltered truth often lurks quietly, hidden from the world's gaze. For a month, I posted pictures from my holiday—pristine landscapes, cheerful meals, and stylish getups—giving the impression that I was the happiest and luckiest person on earth. From the outside, it looked like life was a seamless tapestry of joy and contentment. But behind each post was a personal battle being waged in silence. While my timeline radiated unbridled joy, I was working on myself to remedy a tough health challenge. Why did I choose to post happy pictures when my reality was tumultuous? Was I pretending? Was I



seeking validation? No. I was trying to reassure myself. I was reminding myself that happiness exists, that moments of beauty and joy still punctuate my life. Those posts were not deceit; they were lifelines. Glimpses of joy that I clung to as I navigated the storm within. And in sharing those moments, I was also hoping to pass on slivers of hope to others who might be fighting unseen battles. This is the duality of social media. The laughter we see might be tears in disguise. The grand celebrations could be cloaked in anxiety. The tears shed publicly may be crafted for effect. What appears authentic can be artifice; what looks carefree can be layered with burdens. This is why we should not judge others based on what we see on their profiles. Why do people disguise their struggles and pre-

sent happy pictures? It's not necessarily deceit or a desire to mislead others. Sometimes, it's a way of keeping hope alive. When life's challenges weigh heavily, projecting happiness can feel like a self-fulfilling prophecy. By sharing joy, even when it feels out of reach, we try to manifest it. We tell ourselves that happiness is not an illusion—it's around the corner and within our grasp. We also do it for others. Social media can be a dark and overwhelming place filled with negativity, comparison, and distressing news. By sharing moments of beauty, love and humour, we offer small doses of positivity to those who might need them. But here-in lies the trap. When we view others' lives through the glossy lens of social media, we risk falling into the pit of comparison. We measure our own lives against the seemingly perfect lives of others and wonder where we went wrong.

We feel envious, resentful, or inadequate. But this comparison is unfair—because it's based on incomplete information. What you see on social media is a highlight reel, not a documentary. To compare your behind-the-scenes reality to someone else's carefully chosen highlights is to set yourself up for needless suffering. So, how should we approach social media with clarity and kindness? First, partake in others' happiness without envy. Celebrate their joys as you would want them to celebrate yours. Let their happiness be a reminder that good things are possible, even if they haven't yet arrived in your life. Second, lend support in difficult times without judgment. If someone shares their struggles, resist the urge to undermine or dismiss them. Behind their words could be a pain far deeper than what they've expressed. Offer empathy, not assumptions. Be the steady presence that reminds them they're not alone. Finally, take social media for what it is—a tool to make life more connected, more interesting and occasionally more fun. It's not a measure of worth, success, or happiness.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)

A forgotten crisis amid global turmoil



SUDHIR HINDWAN

In a world dominated by geopolitical rivalries, economic uncertainties and environmental degradation, food security concerns are relegated to background

World politics today faces a myriad of challenges, including cyber fraud, widespread corruption, transnational terrorism, and the relentless use of weapons of mass destruction in regional conflicts such as the West Asian crises and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war. These issues are compounded by a refugee crisis of enormous proportions, environmental degradation, and the growing frequency of natural disasters. Among these pressing concerns, food security remains a critical yet often overlooked challenge that affects nations worldwide. Food security, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations at the 1996 Rome World Food Summit, exists when "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." This definition underscores the importance of not only physical availability but also economic access to food, emphasising both quantity and nutritional quality.



According to the FAO's Food Insecurity Scale, over half of the population in low-income countries lives under food-insecure conditions, with about one-third facing severe crises. Globally, approximately 789 million people lack adequate food, and this number rises to an alarming 2.4 billion when micronutrient deficiencies are considered. Food security issues can be categorised into two broad areas: quantity and quality. These challenges encompass five key dimensions: food availability, price volatility, inclusive access, proper utilisation, and stability. Price volatility, particularly in low-income countries, exacerbates food insecurity as most people lack the resources to access nutrient-rich food. Recognising the severity of global food insecurity, the United Nations included food security among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2015 '2030 Agenda'. The second SDG aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and

improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture." Complementary goals, such as SDG 6 ("Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all") and SDG 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"), further emphasize the need for sustainable practices in achieving food security. Governments worldwide have been urged to align their food and agriculture policies with these goals to ensure their populations receive adequate, nutritious food in a sustainable manner. Food insecurity leads to numerous problems at both household and societal levels. Household food insecurity, for instance, has been linked to suboptimal sleep patterns and reduced immunity against diseases. To address these issues, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to safe and nutritious food access during the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. This commitment was encapsulated in the 'Future We Want' document. The conference also saw the launch of the 'Zero Hunger Challenge' (ZHC) by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, aiming to eliminate hunger and malnutrition globally by 2030. A cornerstone of the ZHC is the goal to make "all food systems sustainable," encompassing clean

ACCORDING TO THE FAO'S FOOD INSECURITY SCALE, OVER HALF OF THE POPULATION IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES LIVES UNDER FOOD-INSECURE CONDITIONS, WITH ABOUT ONE-THIRD FACING SEVERE CRISES

water, sustainable energy, responsible food consumption and production, and climate action—achievable through national policies and international cooperation. The 1987 Brundtland Report, titled Our Common Future, defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." India, since its independence in 1947, has made significant strides in building food security by establishing agricultural institutions such as the Indian Agricultural Research Institute under the guidance of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Advancements in genetic engineering and biotechnology hold promise for addressing agricultural challenges, improving food quality, and increasing global food availability. However, concerns persist about biosafety risks posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Proper handling, transfer, and disposal of these organisms, as recommended by global institutions like the World Bank, are critical to ensuring safety. The world is currently mired in geopolitical rivalries, with nations prioritising dominance over addressing pressing issues such as hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and

unemployment. Biotechnology, if harnessed effectively, can address these challenges by creating opportunities for producing higher-quality food, reducing pollution, generating jobs, and fostering economic growth. This, in turn, could promote international cooperation and reduce global tensions, paving the way for peace. Investments in research and development can yield innovative solutions to hunger, malnutrition and food adulteration, transforming biotechnology into a force for global good. However, two major apprehensions regarding biotechnology persist. First, it may deepen the divide between developed and developing nations. Second, globalisation could threaten the survival of indigenous food industries. Despite these concerns, the potential benefits of biotechnology in transforming global food and energy systems into a philanthropic movement cannot be overlooked. Food security initiatives must rise above geopolitical rivalries, embracing inclusivity and shared responsibilities. India, with its emphasis on inclusive diplomacy, has the potential to play a pivotal role in this endeavor. (The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor, HOD, and an expert on strategic affairs. Views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Madam — It will be the most precious gift to the nation amidst political anarchy and election extravaganza. The people will be stupendously relieved by single elections for multiple reasons. The Model Code of Conduct stalls development projects and decision-making of the governments. The alleged sale of party tickets, defections by politicians, experimenting with the disruptive agendas, noisy debates on TV channels, spoiling harmony in the country, poll violence, foreign interference, the game of opinion and exit polls losing credibility, betting on elections, saving billions of rupees for the government on election machinery including deployment staff and police forces, huge resource mobilisation by the political parties, and people's contribution for multiple elections, etc., are a few to quote in favour of one nation, one election. The former President, Ram Nath Kovind's recommendation of holding municipal elections along with the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections should also be considered by the Union Government in the next phase. It may also be contemplated by the government that those candidates who lose elections in parliamentary or Assembly elections and are rejected by the people should not get entry in the Rajya Sabha and legislative councils where only elected representatives are allowed to vote. In fact, the state assemblies don't need legislative councils. The number of Lok Sabha and state assembly seats should be optimally increased so that there is wider and appropriate representation of people. There should be a dedicated cadre of the Civil Services for elections. It will facilitate the continuity of updating electoral rolls, EVM maintenance, election reforms as and when required, create a data bank and an archive on elections, training, delimitation, dedicated teamwork to contest election-related litigation, and work on a constitutional framework for elections-related issues.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

SC says no survey of worship places



By halting the surveys of places of worship, the Supreme Court's recent order bars all courts nationwide from registering fresh suits or issuing any interim or final orders, including those permitting surveys in ongoing cases concerning existing structures, until the validity of the Places of Worship Act 1991 is decided. SC's order means that in pending suits such as those pertaining to the Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi mosque and Krishna Janmabhoomi-Idgah dis-

putes, courts cannot pass any effective or final orders. The order is timely and a welcome move. The 1991 Act was enacted to prevent conflicts that may arise from disputes with historical ties and to protect the equality of faiths, a constitutional value.

The Act also prohibits converting a place of worship to a different denomination or section and mandates that history and its wrongs should not be used to oppress the present and future. But recently many petitioners have approached lower courts as well as the Supreme Court against the 1991 Act, alleging that the law has created an arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date of August 15, 1947, for maintaining the character of the places of worship.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

REFORMING INDIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Madam— The Indian judicial system has long struggled with the issue of delayed justice, raising concerns about its credibility and effectiveness. The principle that "delayed justice is equivalent to injustice" emphasises the importance of timely and accessible justice. The backlog of cases, complex procedures, and delays in decision-making have caused significant mental, social, and moral harm to victims and society at large. Currently, around 44 million cases are pending in district courts, 6.1 million in high courts, and over 82,000 in the Supreme Court. This backlog has led to questions about the system's efficiency, impacting not just the legal system but also the democratic fabric of the country. The Nirbhaya case highlights the detrimental effects of delayed justice, eroding public trust in the system. To address these issues, the central government has introduced judicial reforms, including three new criminal laws aimed at improving timeliness, transparency, and efficiency. These reforms introduce fixed time limits for

resolving cases and create a framework for expediting the disposal of long-pending cases, offering relief to victims and ensuring justice.

R K Jain | Barwani

GUKESH DEFEATS DING LIREN

Madam— Carrying on chess dominance, hitting Gukesh displayed a high level and proved that he is not second in the FIDE World Championship 2024 in style. India's D Gukesh achieved the landmark in a crucial game and in a cliffhanger manner, beating titleholder China's Ding Liren in the 14th and last game of the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024 in a clinical way. India's D Gukesh masters moves and makes them in a calculative way. He played to plan to eat humble pie. The 18-year-old had Gukesh play a great game of chess. Three cheers for golden boy Gukesh.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

BRIDGING DIVIDES IN THE WORKPLACE

This growing divide can hinder teamwork, erode trust and undermine organisational effectiveness



SAKSHI SETHI

With the advent of the 21st generation, the division of people into sharply opposing groups has increasingly infiltrated workplaces, reflecting the broader societal divides in politics, culture and values. In professional settings, it is often referred to as polarisation and can hinder collaboration, damage relationships, and undermine organisational effectiveness. Addressing workplace polarisation requires proactive leadership, open communication, and an emphasis on shared goals. Polarisation often stems from various sources such as divergent personal values where the employees bring their political, cultural and social identities into the workplace.

Differences in beliefs particularly on sensitive issues such as gender, race and political ideologies lead to conflicts. On the other hand, media coverage, political campaigns, or social movements heighten tensions among employees with differing viewpoints. A lack of open dialogue within teams fosters echo chambers, where employees interact only with like-minded individuals, reinforcing biases and misunderstandings. Also, differences in work styles, priorities and values between generations can create friction. Younger employees may prioritise social activism, while older colleagues might value traditional workplace norms.

The impact of this kind of polarisation on organisational health and employee wellbeing can be significant. It can hamper teamwork, as employees will become less willing to cooperate with those holding opposing views which will stifle innovation and productivity. Disagreements on personal or political issues can also lead to distrust among colleagues, creating a toxic work environment. Employees who feel alienated or marginalised due to their beliefs may seek opportunities elsewhere, result-



ing in talent loss. Workplace conflicts rooted in polarisation can lead to stress, burnout and decreased job satisfaction.

By encouraging respectful conversations that allow employees to express their perspectives without fear of judgment; by implementing structured initiatives, such as facilitated discussions or conflict resolution workshops; by emphasising organisational objectives that unite employees and by highlighting common ground, such as shared values or team missions, can be a few measures that can reduce the focus on divisive issues and can help bridge divides. Last but not least that play a crucial role in setting the tone for workplace interactions is that of the leader. There is no denying that inclusive leaders model respectful behaviour, encourage diverse viewpoints, and mediate conflicts effectively. Developing guidelines that outline acceptable workplace behaviour, particularly concerning discussions on sensitive topics; making policies that promote mutual respect while preserving freedom of expression or taking initiatives such as team-building exercises, mentorship programs, or cross-department projects can help reduce silos and foster connections between employees with differing viewpoints. Undoubtedly an organisation's culture significantly influences how polarisation manifests and is addressed. A culture that values respect, inclusivity, and open-mindedness can mitigate the effects of polarization.

Conversely, a culture that tolerates favouritism or discrimination can exacerbate divisions. Leaders must prioritise cultivating a culture where employees feel valued and heard, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds. Workplace polarisation reflects the broader societal divides but has unique challenges and opportunities within professional settings. While it risks collaboration, trust, and productivity, it can also catalyse growth if managed effectively. By fostering a culture of respect, promoting open dialogue, and emphasising shared goals, organisations can navigate polarisation and create environments where diverse perspectives thrive.

(The writer is an educator; views expressed are personal)

Syria's collapse: Foreign meddling and economic ruin



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

As allies like Iran pressured Assad for reforms, and Western nations explored conditional sanctions relief, Syria became a battleground of competing geopolitical manoeuvring



By the end of November, the situation in Syria was dire. Government forces were on the brink of exhaustion, stretched thin by an economic crisis that spiralled out of control. Soldiers earned a paltry \$7 a month, with even high-ranking officers receiving only \$40. This was in blunt contrast to militia fighters funded by external powers, who earned up to \$2,000 monthly. This glaring disparity revealed not just economic fault lines but the extent of foreign intervention sustaining these militias. Meanwhile, protests erupted across Suwayda province, historically a stronghold of Assad support, highlighting widespread famine, collapsing services, and the devaluation of the Syrian pound. Discontent was palpable, threatening to upend the regime's fragile grasp on power.

Iran, Syria's long-time ally, reportedly pressured Assad to address these challenges. Tehran's warnings accentuated the erosion of public trust and a crumbling economy, urging decisive action. Yet Assad seemed increasingly aloof, allegedly seeking new alliances with Gulf nations, hoping these relationships would secure his future. By December, reports emerged that the United States and the United Arab Emirates were considering lifting sanctions on Assad—but only if he severed ties with Iran and halted arms transfers to Hezbollah. This diplomatic manoeuvre was a calculated strategy to weaken Assad's regime further. Relief from Caesar sanctions was an unlikely prospect given Washington's decade-long effort to dismantle the Assad family rule. The outcome was preordained: Assad was isolated, and the geopolitical chessboard advanced. The trajectory of Assad's downfall mirrors a broader pattern in Western foreign policy. Leaders once celebrated as reformers—from Saddam Hussein to Muammar Gaddafi—are vilified when their geopolitical utility wanes. Assad, who was once lauded for fostering coexistence among Syria's religious and ethnic groups, became the West's pariah.

In 2010, Syria was a stable nation, ranked seventh on *The New York Times*'s "31 best places to visit." Assad met with Queen Elizabeth, hosted Nancy Pelosi, and welcomed Pope John Paul II. Yet the West's affection was



BY DECEMBER, REPORTS EMERGED THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES WERE CONSIDERING LIFTING SANCTIONS ON ASSAD—BUT ONLY IF HE SEVERED TIES WITH IRAN AND HALTED ARMS TRANSFERS TO HEZBOLLAH. THIS DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRE WAS A CALCULATED STRATEGY TO WEAKEN ASSAD'S REGIME FURTHER

short-lived. As geopolitical calculations shifted, Assad's regime was recast as the antithesis of democracy, paving the way for intervention. The Syrian conflict was never just a civil war. It was a proxy war fueled by external actors. Over 100,000 jihadists were funnelled into Syria, backed by a coalition of nations. The United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar allegedly provided financial and logistical support.

Turkey and Jordan facilitated arms shipments and fighter transport. Western media amplified anti-Assad narratives, while the UK-backed White Helmets shaped public perceptions. Each player pursued its agenda, yet all converged on a singular goal: regime change. The motivations driving this coalition were diverse. The United States and Israel sought regional hegemony, neutralising perceived threats while advancing the Greater Israel project. Qatar's pipeline ambitions clashed with Assad's preference for an Iranian alternative, further entrenching divisions.

These dynamics turned Syria into a battleground for competing interests, with devastating consequences for its people. By late 2013, the influx of foreign fighters intensified. Western nations grappled with their citizens joining extremist groups in Syria. The UK reported approximately 600 fighters, while France contributed around 1,200. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden also faced significant outflows. However, the greatest contributions came from West Asia and North Africa, with Tunisia leading at 3,000 fighters, followed by Saudi Arabia at 2,500.

Russia's involvement, particularly from regions like Chechnya, underscored the conflict's global reach. The arms supply chain further exacerbated the war. Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia allegedly supplied weapons, supported by over 160 military cargo flights.

These arms, transported through Turkey and Jordan, sustained rebel factions. European nations, such as Croatia, indirectly contributed by routing surplus weapons through Jordan. This complex web of arms smuggling empowered extremist groups, further destabilising Syria. Western hypocrisy was stark.

While denouncing Assad's regime, the United States supported "moderate rebels" aligned with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Declassified documents revealed this duplicity. In 2012, General Michael Flynn's memo to the Pentagon warned that the opposition included jihadist factions. Similarly, Hillary Clinton's advisor, Jake Sullivan, acknowledged in an email that "Al Qaeda is on our side in Syria." The West's support for these groups undercut its claims of promoting democracy, revealing a strategy rooted in destabilisation. Atrocity propaganda became a central tool in the anti-Assad narrative. Staged chemical attacks, amplified by the White Helmets, justified military intervention.

Western media perpetuated these fabrications, obscuring the reality on the ground. Idlib province, under "rebel" control, became a dystopian preview of Syria's potential future: public executions, forced veiling of women, and sectarian slogans. This grim reality highlighted the consequences of regime change. Operation Timber Sycamore, the CIA's covert programme, exemplified Western duplicity. Billions of dollars in weapons were funnelled to extremist factions, prolonging the war.

The irony was stark: the West, claiming to combat terrorism, empowered the very groups destabilising the region. Syria's devastation became a witness to the destructive nature of interventionist policies. Syria's collapse parallels other Western interventions. Iraq's 2003 invasion, justified by the false pretext of weapons of mass destruc-

tion, left the nation in tatters. Libya, once Africa's wealthiest country, descended into anarchy following Gaddafi's overthrow—these interventions, framed as humanitarian missions, unleashed chaos, empowering extremist factions and creating power vacuums. The broader motivations behind these actions lie in geopolitics.

Syria's strategic location, its role as a buffer between Iran and Israel, and its proximity to oil-rich regions made it a prime target. The West's desire to reshape the region's political structure has driven decades of intervention, often with catastrophic consequences. Meanwhile, allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite their human rights abuses, remain central to Western strategy, exposing the moral bankruptcy of interventionist policies. Syria's tragedy is a miniature of a global pattern. The collapse of nations like Iraq, Libya, and Syria reflects a broader system where sovereignty is sacrificed for strategic interests. Foreign interventions, far from promoting democracy or stability, have left legacies of destruction, displacement, and despair.

The narrative of "humanitarian intervention" serves as a veneer, masking the true motives of power and greed. As the 50th anniversary of Iran's 1979 revolution approaches in 2029, the stakes are higher than ever. Iran's defiance of Western hegemony remains a critical factor in the region's future. The forces shaping West Asia—Israel, Turkey, and Western powers—are poised to challenge Iran's resilience. Syria's collapse serves as both a warning and a call to scrutinise the ethics of intervention. The legacy of these actions is clear: a world shaped by greed, ambition, and the devastating cost of unchecked power.

(The writer is a senior journalist and a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

Can INDIA bloc resolve its leadership disputes and put to rest its internal strife

With Mamata vying for the leadership of the INDIA bloc supported by a number constituents, chances of the bloc succumbing to internal disputes are high

The INDIA bloc, a coalition of 26 ideologically diverse parties, was created to counter the BJP's electoral dominance. In the 2024 general elections, the bloc achieved a significant milestone, reducing the BJP's tally to below 240 seats. However, this success has been tempered by internal discord, which now threatens the alliance's fragile unity.

A key figure in this unfolding drama is Mamata Banerjee, the dynamic leader of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). Her aspirations for leadership within the coalition have both galvanised and fractured its members. Mamata Banerjee's National Ambitions Mamata Banerjee's bid for prominence within the INDIA bloc stems from her desire to extend her



K S TOMAR

influence beyond Bengal and play a decisive role in shaping national politics. Her assertive style has invigorated some allies but has alienated others, exposing the persistent challenge of reconciling regional ambitions with a unified national strategy. Earlier, Banerjee proposed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge as the bloc's chairperson, a strategic move to diminish

the influence of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, one of the coalition's key architects. This proposal, supported by leaders like Akhilesh Yadav and Arvind Kejriwal, showcased Banerjee's ability to consolidate support. However, her growing clout has sparked unease among other leaders. For instance, Lalu Prasad Yadav, a staunch Congress ally, appears to be rethinking his loyalties. Such dynamics highlight the alliance's precarious balance and the potential for further fractures. Lessons from the Past: UPA2

The INDIA bloc's current challenges echo the struggles faced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA2) during its tenure. In 2012, Mamata Banerjee's dramatic exit from the UPA over policy disagree-

ments underscored the inherent instability of coalition politics. Scandals and policy paralysis plagued UPA2, eroding its credibility and paving the way for Narendra Modi's rise. As Banerjee's ambitions take center stage, the INDIA bloc risks repeating history. If it fails to address its internal contradictions, it could suffer the same fate as UPA2, jeopardising its ability to present a united front against the BJP.

BJP's Advantage Amid Opposition Discord The BJP stands to benefit from the INDIA bloc's internal strife. While Banerjee wields considerable influence in West Bengal, Congress retains a broader national presence. A fragmented opposition could split anti-BJP votes, a scenario that would play into the



saffron party's hands. Recent BJP gains in Maharashtra and Haryana underscore the bloc's challenges, particularly for Congress, which has struggled to maintain dominance in key states. Seat-sharing disputes within the bloc further illustrate its lack of strategic coherence. For instance, the Aam Aadmi Party's unilateral candidate announcements in Delhi and Haryana have fueled tensions,

revealing the alliance's inability to present a united strategy.

Mamata vs Congress: Mamata Banerjee's leadership ambitions pose a paradox for Congress. Her energy and charisma could revitalise the bloc, but her assertiveness risks overshadowing Congress's central role. This tension is particularly pronounced in states like West Bengal and Kerala, where Congress directly competes with the TMC and the Left. Seat-sharing negotiations in overlapping constituencies could exacerbate divisions, straining the alliance further. For Congress, retaining relevance within the INDIA bloc will require a delicate balancing act: accommodating Banerjee's influence without

compromising its identity. Key Challenges for the INDIA Bloc The alliance faces several hurdles that could determine its survival:

Leadership Struggles: The lack of consensus on a prime ministerial candidate risks deepening divisions.

Unified Campaign Narrative: A focus on governance, economic policies, and social justice can resonate with voters more effectively than personal rivalries.

Effective Coordination: Mechanisms for conflict resolution and decision-making must be strengthened.

Balancing Regional and National Goals: Respecting regional aspirations while pursuing a cohesive national agenda is critical.

A Test of Political Maturity:

Mamata Banerjee's ambitions underscore her political acumen and the complexities of coalition politics. While her leadership could energise the INDIA bloc, it also risks deepening divisions. Navigating this intricate web of regional and national aspirations will test the bloc's political maturity.

The upcoming state elections and the 2029 general elections will be pivotal in determining whether the INDIA bloc can overcome its internal strife and emerge as a credible alternative to the BJP. Resolving leadership disputes, crafting a compelling narrative, and presenting a unified front are critical to its success.

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

IN BRIEF



CIL's CSR expenditure crosses Rs 5,570 cr

Coal India Ltd (CIL) has spent Rs 5,570 crore in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives over the past decade, a top official said on Sunday.



Country's coal imports rose by 4 pc at 162 MT

The country's coal import rose by 4.2 per cent to 162.45 million tonnes (MT) in the April-October period of the current financial year compared to 155.87 MT in the year-ago period.



Aurobindo Pharma, Glenmark recall products in US

Drug makers Aurobindo Pharma, Glenmark and Zydus are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, according to the US health regulator.

India's import of Russian oil drops on shrinking discounts

India's import of Russian crude oil dropped in November to its lowest level since June 2022 but the Kremlin continues to be the biggest source of oil for India, according to a monthly tracker report of a European think tank.

The rise was primarily because the Russian crude oil was available at a discount to other internationally traded oil due to the price cap and the European nations shunning purchases from Moscow.



"China has bought 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, followed by India (37 per cent), the EU (6 per cent), and Turkey (6 per cent)," CREA said without giving absolute numbers.

HIGH SEAS FISHING

India seeks strong WTO subsidy rules

India has pitched at the WTO for stricter regulations on subsidies granted by countries engaged in high-seas fishing activities, an official said.

India has asked for a moratorium on subsidies at the present level for 25 years," the official said.



On these demands, India was supported by countries like Indonesia and other developing countries, the official added.

Move to boost cargo movement via waterways

Govt unveils 'Jalvahak' incentive scheme

The Union government on Sunday launched the 'Jalvahak' scheme to incentivise cargo movement via inland waterways, marking a major step towards promoting sustainable and cost-effective transportation across National Waterways 1 (Ganga), 2 (Brahmaputra), and 16 (Barak river).



up to 35 per cent reimbursement on operating costs. The scheme will remain valid for three years and is designed to optimise supply chains for major shipping companies, freight forwarders, and trade bodies.

Shipping Ltd (ICSL), a subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India.

Kolkata-Patna-Varanasi and Kolkata-Pandu (Guwahati) routes, demonstrating the readiness of waterways for efficient and eco-friendly cargo transportation.

Mkts to be guided by WPI inflation, global trends

The US Fed interest rate decision, inflation data and FIIs are the key factors that are expected to drive stock markets this week, analysts said.

Also, global trends will also be tracked by investors for further cues, they added.

Bihar sees surge in big ticket investments



Bihar, once seen as less industry-friendly, has seen a surge in big ticket investments from the likes of Adani Group to Coca-Cola as it packages its vast resources with progressive policy to lure investors.

In recent months, Adani Group has announced investment of Rs 8,700 crore in the state, Ambuja Cements is setting up a Rs 1,200-crore unit, and Coca-Cola is expanding its bottling capacity.

India Inc raises record Rs 1.21 lakh crore via QIPs

Fundraising through qualified institutional placements (QIPs) reached an all-time high in 2024, surpassing the Rs 1 lakh crore-mark for the first time ever in a calendar year, fuelled by strong stock market conditions and higher valuations.



ly from institutional investors without the need to submit any pre-issue filings to market regulators.

ly from institutional investors without the need to submit any pre-issue filings to market regulators.

Hindujas hope to take over RCAP by Jan-end

Hinduja Group company IIHL is expecting to complete the acquisition of debt-ridden Reliance Capital (RCAP) by next month and aims to ramp up banking, financial services, and insurance (BFSI) business more than three-fold to USD 50 billion in the next five years.



Ashok P Hinduja said. With the acquisition of RCAP, he said IndusInd International Holdings Ltd (IIHL) is targeting a valuation of USD 50 billion by 2030 as against the current valuation of USD 15 billion (as on

above the bid amount. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Mumbai, on February 27, 2024, approved IIHL's resolution plan and subsequently extended the deadline for completion of the transaction to January 31, 2025.

FPIs return to Indian equities; infuse Rs 22,766 cr

Foreign investors have made a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in the first two weeks of December driven by expectations of rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out a net Rs 21,612 crore in November and a massive Rs 94,017 crore in October - the worst monthly outflow on record.

what's brewing?

WHEN SHRADDHA DIDN'T 'CONSIDER ANYTHING ELSE' BUT STREE 2

Shraddha Kapoor is one of the most cherished actresses in the industry, known for her stellar performances and magnetic charm. Over the years, she has not only proven her acting prowess but also established herself as a visionary artist. With *Stree 2*, Shraddha once again delivered a blockbuster performance, solidifying her place as a trailblazer in Indian cinema.

any other film or even consider anything else. I was so personally invested in *Stree 2* that I told myself, 'Right now, I just want to do *Stree*.' That's how confident I was." Shraddha's bold decision to pause all other projects during this time speaks volumes about her dedication to delivering quality cinema. But her ambitions go far beyond just one film. While reflecting on her larger aspirations for Indian films, Shraddha shared: "If I'm being honest, I did get some offers, but nothing felt exciting to me. My approach with Hindi films has always been that if I don't find something exciting, I don't do it. I truly

feel that the current phase of Hindi cinema is really good. There's a lot of expansion happening on OTT as well. I want to be like Shah Rukh Khan, to take our films to international markets and make them global films. That's what I want." With her stellar performance in *Stree 2*, Shraddha has become a box-office queen and an inspiration for many. She is not only driving the narrative of Indian cinema forward but also aiming to take it beyond borders, making her one of the most forward-thinking actresses of her time.



Sonu Sood vows to donate Fateh's earnings to old age homes and orphanages

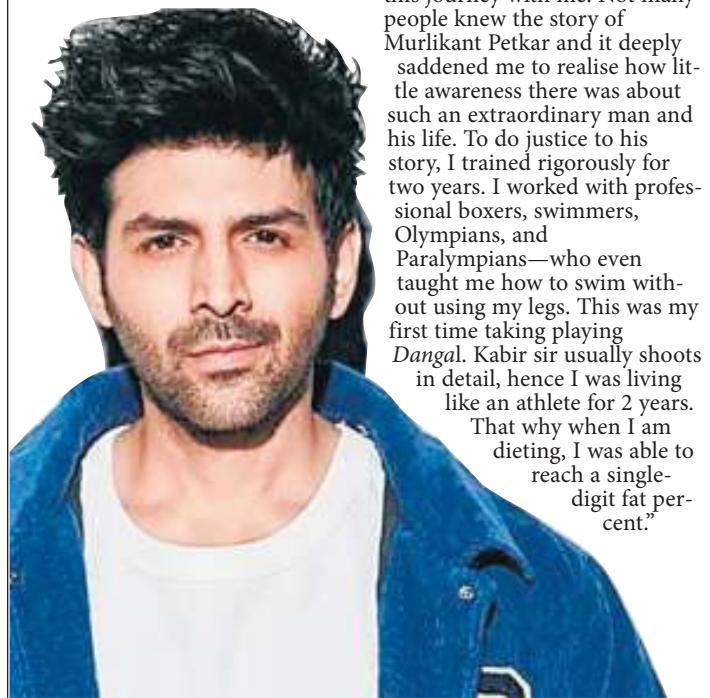


Actor Sonu Sood joined the Gift City Run in Ahmedabad on Saturday to support the third season of #DrugFreeFuture, an initiative aimed at raising awareness and tackling the issue of drug abuse. The actor had shared, "It feels great to see people, to see such fit people early in the morning. You can see the enthusiasm among them... It feels proud to see so many people run, you feel like running with them." Sood, who will be seen next in the upcoming action film *Fateh*, also shared plans to donate the film's collection to old age homes and orphanages. "Fateh is based on cyber-crime, where people face cyber fraud every day. So, it is an action film on that... It will make people aware of how to stay safe from cybercrime... Fateh is a film made for the people of the country. We will try to send the film's collection to old age homes and orphanages," said Sood. Meanwhile talking about *Fateh*, the film is a gripping tale of courage, resilience and the fight against cybercrime. It is based on real-life instances of cybercrime experienced by people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

'I was living like an athlete for 2 years'

Kartik Aaryan, known for his charm, wit, and acting talent, has turned 2024 into a career-defining year. With his critically acclaimed performance in *Chandu Champion* and record-breaking success in *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3*, Kartik has proven

he's more than just an on-screen star—he's a powerhouse of talent and determination. In a new chat, the *Chandu Champion* star said, "Every time I talk about *Chandu Champion*, I can't help but praise the incredible team that's been on this journey with me. Not many people knew the story of Murlikant Petkar and it deeply saddened me to realise how little awareness there was about such an extraordinary man and his life. To do justice to his story, I trained rigorously for two years. I worked with professional boxers, swimmers, Olympians, and Paralympians—who even taught me how to swim without using my legs. This was my first time taking playing *Dangal*. Kabir sir usually shoots in detail, hence I was living like an athlete for 2 years. That's why when I am dieting, I was able to reach a single-digit fat per cent."



LOOKBOOK
 Bollywood's biggest stars aligned to pay tribute to the one and only Raj Kapoor, the iconic filmmaker who left an indelible mark on Indian cinema. The star-studded celebration, held at PVR Infinity Mall, saw the entire Kapoor clan, including Randhir Kapoor, Ranbir Kapoor, Karisma Kapoor, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Alia Bhatt, pay tribute to the iconic filmmaker. The event was attended by a galaxy of Hindi cinema's luminaries, including Rekha, Jeetendra and Prem Chopra, who walked the red carpet. The evening's festivities included vintage-themed decor, live music and a unique touch—media personnel donning customised T-shirts and hats as a tribute to Raj Kapoor.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



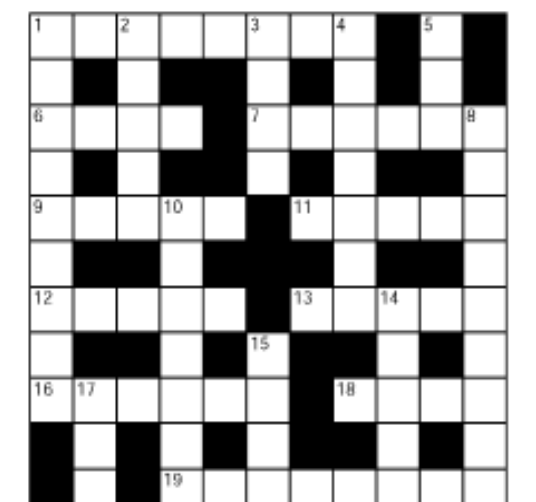
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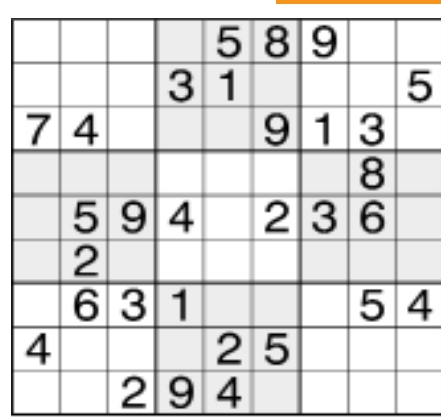
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS

- These cover birds
- Small animals that followed the Pied Piper
- Ride on these animals
- Opposite of best
- Not as many
- Circular in shape
- Below
- A story in episodes
- A planet
- Gave jobs to

DOWN

- Entertaining explosives watched at night
- Change
- Sound coming back again
- A person who does operations in hospital
- Stuff for colouring cloth
- Startled
- A day's beginning
- A book written in daily
- Strike with an open hand
- A long type of fish



Destination 'I do' Redefining the wedding experience

As the destination wedding industry flourishes worldwide, India emerges as a key player, with its segment poised for a remarkable growth rate of 23.1% CAGR. *The Pioneer* delves into this evolving trend with insights from leading industry experts



In a sun-dappled courtyard of a restored Rajasthani palace, a bride twirls in a lehenga embroidered with her love story, as a band plays a medley of folk tunes and chart-toppers. Hundreds of miles away, another couple exchanges vows on a secluded Greek island, their families watching on a live stream while sipping cocktails named after their favourite moments together.

Welcome to the world of modern weddings, where grandiosity and personalisation converge. Destination weddings and bespoke trousseaus are no longer niche indulgences; they have become defining trends, reshaping the \$300 billion global wedding industry. Couples today aren't just walking down the aisle—they are curating a deeply personal experience that tells their unique story.

The allure of destination weddings

From the beaches of Bali to the vineyards of Tuscany, destination weddings have become the preferred choice for millennial and Gen Z couples looking to break away from traditional hometown ceremonies. According to a latest survey by The Knot, nearly one in four weddings now takes place in a destination outside the couple's home city.

"Destination weddings allow couples to combine the intimacy of a vacation with their nuptials," says wedding planner Gunjan Bansal of Lamore Weddings whose clientele includes global entrepreneurs and Bollywood celebrities. "It's a way to escape the cookie-cutter mold and immerse guests in an unforgettable experience."

"As a destination wedding planner, I see Indian weddings as a symphony of tradition, culture and unmatched grandeur. Each celebration is a journey, weaving timeless rituals with the charm of breathtaking destinations—from the majestic palaces of Rajasthan to serene beaches in Europe. Every detail is curated to reflect the heritage while embracing the uniqueness of the locale," adds Bansal.

The pandemic may have momentarily paused globe-trotting weddings, but it also amplified their appeal. "Couples now want to make up for lost time with extraordinary, one-of-a-kind experiences," explains Upendra Bahadur Srivastava of United Hoteliers Of Udaipur Society. And they're willing to splurge—the average destination wedding costs 20-30% more than a local ceremony, with planners, stylists and concierge services adding personalised touches.

Over the years, weddings have also become either minimalist or extravagant. The idea of



luxury while subjective has evolved over the time. Jumeirah Carlton Tower, London is the epitome of luxury and personalisation for destination weddings and bespoke trousseau experiences. Situated in the heart of Knightsbridge, the hotel offers stunning venues, including a grand ballroom and picturesque views of Cadogan Gardens, creating an elegant setting for intimate celebrations. "With tailored services, the hotel brings every couple's vision to life, from personalised decor and gourmet catering to seamless accommodations for guests. It excels in hosting multicultural weddings, blending diverse traditions with a sophisticated London charm. Beyond weddings, Jumeirah Carlton Tower enhances the bridal journey with exclusive trousseau experiences. Its proximity to iconic boutiques like Harrods and Sloane Street provides access to world-class designers for crafting unique wedding attire," shares Andrew Booth, Hotel Manager, Jumeirah Carlton Tower, London.

Brides also enjoy pre-wedding rituals, including private fittings, beauty consultations, and indulgent spa treatments at their award-winning Peak Fitness Club & Spa.

Personalisation of the trousseau

While the venues have expanded across continents, the trousseau—the collection of clothing, accessories and memorabilia assembled for the bride—has undergone a quiet revolution. Once a showcase of family heirlooms and fine silks, today's trousseaus are deeply personal, blending tradition with modernity.

Indonesia offers a captivating setting for Indian destination weddings, blending its natural beauty with rich cultural experiences.

From Bali's tranquil beaches to Yogyakarta's historic temples, these locations provide a stunning backdrop for a traditional yet exotic celebration. Couples are incorporating Indian wedding rituals, such as a Hindu ceremony with Balinese blessings, creating a seamless fusion of cultures.

For personalised trousseaus, Indonesia's artisanal heritage plays a pivotal role. The intricate patterns of batik and ikat textiles can be woven into bridal outfits, adding a unique, cultural flair. Brides can select saris or lehengas crafted from Indonesian fabrics, or choose contemporary designs inspired by the region's craftsmanship. Handcrafted accessories such as silver jewelry from Bali or pearl jewelry from Lombok can complement the bridal attire, making it even more special.

Eco-friendly, handcrafted packaging made from bamboo or rattan enhances the trousseau experience, reflecting Indonesia's commitment to sustainability. By blending the beauty of Indonesian landscapes with Indian wedding traditions, couples can enjoy a wedding that is as memorable as it is unique, creating a perfect harmony of cultures, elegance, and timeless memories," says Erny Wahyuni, social and cultural affairs at the Indonesian Embassy.

Sustainability, too, is shaping this trend. Conscious brides are increasingly opting for repurposed vintage fabrics, renting luxury pieces, or commissioning outfits that can be worn beyond the wedding day. "My trousseau is about creating memories, not waste," says entrepreneur Megha Sharma, who wore a saree stitched from her grandmother's wedding lehenga for her reception.

Grooms, often overlooked in traditional

trousseau planning, are also stepping into the spotlight. Personalised sherwanis, embroidered pocket squares and monogrammed cufflinks have found a place in contemporary trousseaus, reflecting the groom's personality.

Social media: A silent architect

Behind this shift lies the invisible hand of social media. Pinterest boards, Instagram reels and TikTok trends have turned wedding planning into a spectator sport, pushing couples to raise the bar.

Over 80% of wedding planning now happens online, with couples leveraging apps, websites, and hashtags to organise and personalise their ceremonies. This trend is reshaping the industry by enhancing visibility and access to diverse venues.

"Couples want their weddings to be 'Instagrammable,' but not in a generic way," says luxury wedding photographer Vivek Saparia who shot Ambani's functions in the recent past. "They're seeking moments that look stunning but also feel authentic—like a barefoot beach ceremony or a cake inspired by their favourite travel destination."

This digital-first approach also extends to trousseaus. Brides are documenting the unboxing of their personalised wardrobe with as much care as the actual ceremony, often collaborating with influencers and stylists for pre-wedding shoots.

"At Narain Niwas, we understand that weddings today are not just personal milestones but moments shared widely, thanks to social media. The way people celebrate, document and share their big day has redefined modern weddings. We have observed that people are attracted to the royal charm of heritage properties creating picturesque backdrops that resonate with couples seeking both timeless elegance and shareable memories," says, Thakur Prithvi Singh Kanota, managing director, Narain Niwas Palace in Jaipur.

Despite these modern flourishes, tradition remains at the heart of these celebrations. Destination weddings and personalised trousseaus are often vehicles for reviving heritage innovatively.

For instance, couples marrying in heritage venues often incorporate local customs into their ceremonies. A South Indian couple tying the knot in Udaipur included Rajasthani folk dances, blending their family's and the locale traditions. Similarly, trousseaus now frequently include regional crafts, from Pashmina shawls to Banarasi sarees, customised with the bride's initials or wedding date.

Kickin' it old school: Karate Girls packs a punch

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

PLOT:

In the vibrant city of Nashik, a tale of rivalry and self-discovery unfolds. At its core are two vastly different individuals: Komal (played by Ashlesha Thakur), a rough-around-the-edges firecracker and Abha (played by Celesti Bairagey), an accomplished social media influencer. Their worlds collide when Komal reluctantly joins Navodaya, a prestigious karate academy run by Abha's father, Ajay Kadam (played by Manav Gohil). As the Nashik Karate Federation Tournament looms, the team faces unexpected challenges, including a heated rivalry between Navodaya and the opposing dojo, Firebolt, led by the enigmatic JD (played by Meiyang Chang). As tensions rise, Komal and Abha must navigate their differences and learn to work together, both on and off the mat.

HIGHLIGHTS

The storyline of *Karate Girls* is undeniably captivating, thanks in large part to the authentic performances of its young leads. The camaraderie between Abha, Komal and Vicky is genuinely heartwarming, with their playful banter and immature rivalries evoking a sense of nostalgia for carefree school days. As their friendship blossoms, it's impossible not to smile along with them. Meanwhile, the adult characters, particularly Ajay, grapple with more serious concerns, such as saving the dojo and confronting past disappointments. These storylines add a poignant layer of depth, making the characters' struggles feel relatable and intensely personal.

DRAWBACKS

While *Karate Girls* shines with its engaging narrative and endearing characters, the series' implicit and predictability hold it back from reaching its full potential. The storyline unfolds with ease, lacking complex conflicts or unexpected twists, relying instead on familiar tropes. Nevertheless, the show's execution is commendable and its concise runtime ensures a breezy, entertaining watch that keeps you invested in the characters' journeys.

Karate Girls presents a compelling package for young audiences, boasting uplifting themes and relatable characters that resonate deeply. While it excels in its dramatic and interpersonal storytelling, the series stops short of attaining the

iconic stature of revered martial arts classics. Regrettably, the martial arts aspect, which initially sparks interest, gradually takes a backseat to the dramatic narrative and character relationships, leaving viewers craving more intense action and karate-centric storytelling.

PERFORMANCES

The cast of *Karate Girls* delivers impressive performances, elevating the series to new heights. Manav Gohil shines as Ajay, bringing depth and nuance to the complex character. Meiyang Chang's portrayal of the cunning JD adds an intriguing layer to the narrative. Ashlesha Thakur impresses as Komal, showcasing her range as a courageous and determined young karateka. Celesti Bairagey's Abha is a reliable and endearing character, perfectly capturing the essence of a Gen Z influencer-turned-karate enthusiast. The romantic subplots, featuring Rohan Joshi and Chirag Katrecha, add a charming touch to the story.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The production values are decent, with good cinematography and editing. The background score and music, composed by Udayan Dharmadhikari, beautifully complement the drama. While the training sequences led by Sensei Ajay offer valuable insights, they may feel overly lengthy for viewers seeking high-octane action.

VERDICT

Karate Girls is a heartwarming and engaging series that shines with its uplifting themes, relatable characters and commendable performances. Although it falls short of achieving iconic status due to its simplicity and predictability, the show's concise runtime and breezy narrative make for an entertaining watch. With its positive portrayal of female empowerment, friendship and perseverance, *Karate Girls* is a delightful addition to the world of Indian web series.

REVIEW



Directed by: Victor Mukherjee
Created by: Dice Media
Cast: Ashlesha Thakur, Celesti Bairagey, Manav Gohil and Meiyang Chang, Chirag Katrecha and Rohan Joshi
Written by: Gaurav Patki, Neha Pawar, Tannay Dhadopkar
Streaming on: Amazon MX Player
Rating: 3.5/5



Nose troubles? How a deviated septum can wreak havoc on your health

For some, a deviated septum is something they're born with, while for others, it might be the result of an injury during birth or from trauma over the years. Some childhood accidents like falls and hitting your nose might appear trivial but, taken together, these tiny incidents could result in nasal cartilage shifting over time. Thus, this may cause one of your nostrils to be narrower than the other because the septum—the wall that divides them—bends toward it.

In several ways, having a deviated septum can greatly impair your life. One finds breathing more difficult which usually makes him/her resort to mouth breathing which is less efficient and comes with its own problems like dry mouth and sore throat. It also interferes with sleep at night causing snoring or even sleep apnea resulting in daytime fatigue and inability to concentrate properly. Additionally, clogged air flow can lead to frequent sinus infections culminating in headaches as well as facial pain thus reducing your comfort levels and productivity. You may also experience decreased sense of smell that would take away enjoyment from food and other sensual experiences you normally relish in life. Besides, voice sound nasal due to nasal obstruction hence making you uncomfortable in social gatherings where confidence matters most.

Physical activities can become more challenging due to breathing difficulties, potentially leading to a more sedentary lifestyle. Over time, the constant discomfort and health issues can contribute to stress and anxiety, affecting your overall mental well-being.

How can you tell if you have a deviated septum? Typically, it shows up when you struggle to breathe through one nostril while the other seems fine. Everyone experiences natural breathing cycles where one nostril might be more open than the other for a short time before it switches. However, with a deviated septum, one side is consistently more difficult to breathe through. A visit to the doctor often reveals this condition during a simple nasal examination.

Why consider surgery?

If you find it tough to breathe through one side of your nose, surgery could make a significant difference. The procedure, called a septoplasty, realigns the septum to the center, giving you more even airflow. But there's more to it. Inside your nose, you have structures called turbinates, which help warm and humidify the air you breathe. If these turbinates are swollen—due to allergies or living in a place with poor air quality—they can further block your nasal passages. During septoplasty, it's common to also reduce the size of these turbinates to maximise the breathing improvement.

How bad does it need to be for surgery?

The decision to have surgery depends on how much the deviated septum impacts your life. Some people notice a big improvement with just a small adjustment, while others with a more severe deviation might only feel partial relief. It's also possible that issues like a narrow internal nasal valve—the area where bone meets cartilage—could be contributing to your breathing difficulties. This can be corrected during surgery by grafting cartilage from another part of your nose.

Is it worth it?

In most cases, septoplasty is worthwhile. While it may not completely solve nasal obstruction, it should greatly improve it. Breathing through your nose is more efficient than breathing through your mouth and many patients report better sleep and easier exercise after surgery. Overall, if you have trouble breathing through one side of your nose and a deviated septum is the cause, the surgery is likely to make a positive difference in your life.

(The author, Dr. Jyotirmay S Hegde, is the HOD & Lead Consultant ENT, at Aster Whitefield Hospital, in Bengaluru.)

Head dominates Indian attack for back-to-back centuries

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India's nemesis Travis Head smashed his second hundred in as many games to help Australia gain a distinct advantage in the third Test here on Sunday. Australia, who were put under pressure by India in the morning session, gathered 130 runs in the afternoon without the loss of a wicket. Head (103 batting off 118) made the difference in Adelaide and his successive hundred took the hosts to 234 for three at tea on day two. Returning to form, Steve Smith (65 batting off 149) stood solid at the other end as the duo shared an unbeaten 159-run stand for the fourth wicket. The southpaw, who made a match-winning 140 in the previous Test, once again

lorded over the Indian bowlers who ran out of ideas against him. Even the field placements were questionable with the visitors having a deep point and deep square leg early in Head's innings, allowing the explosive batter pace his innings. The short balls were attempted when Head was well set and he duly put them away with disdain. His unconquered effort comprised 13 fours. Akash Deep bowled well, especially to Smith, but could not get a breakthrough. Struggling for runs, Smith reverted to his trademark exaggerated shuffle, to keep the Indians at bay. He found it tough to get going initially before gaining the confidence to go for horizontal bat shots. Earlier, India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah extended his



dominance over the Australian openers before Nitish Reddy got into the act to leave the visitors at 104 for three at lunch. Despite the pressure exerted by the Indian pacer, Australia were able to muster 76 runs in the session. With the majority of day one lost due to rain, play started half an hour earlier than scheduled time and it did not take long for Bumrah what he has done thus far in the series. Resuming at 28 for no loss, Australia lost Usman Khawaja (21 off 54) in the fourth over of the day when Bumrah had him caught behind with a ball that straightened slightly to take a faint outside edge. It was the third time Bumrah had got rid of the left-handed opener in the series. In the following over, Bumrah

sent back Nathan McSweeney (9 off 49) for the fourth time in three Tests, drawing a thick outside edge from an angle that travelled fast to Virat Kohli at second slip. India were able to maintain pressure after the early breakthroughs with under pressure Smith and Marnus Labuschagne (12 off 55) looking to occupy the crease. Smith, batting with a different stance for the third time in as many games, was tested by the Indian pacers repeatedly as they tried to target his stumps. Akash Deep and Mohammed Siraj did a pose a few questions to both Smith and Labuschagne but could not get the desired results. Reddy, who got the ball to swing, ended Labuschagne's vigil in the 34th over of the innings. The India all-

rounder drew the Australian number three to drive off a full ball and Labuschagne took the bait only to be caught by Kohli at second slip, leaving Australia at 75 for three. Two overs later, there was a major scare in the Indian camp as Siraj walked off the field after feeling discomfort in his left leg in the middle of his over. He was seen holding his left knee but returned to the field much to India's relief. The injury scare came after Siraj and Labuschagne shared a light moment as the Indian pacer walked towards the batter to swap the bails only for them to be swapped back. Runs started flowing with-inform Head joining Smith in the middle. His cover drive off Bumrah was easily the shot of the morning.



New Zealand leads England by 340 runs in the 3rd test

AP ■ HAMILTON

New Zealand showed off its presumptive new ball attack as it took control of the third test against England on the second day Sunday. Matt Henry and Will O'Rourke shared seven wickets as New Zealand bowled out England for 143 in a session and a half to take a 205-run first innings lead. O'Rourke then had to bat for the second time in the day as nightwatchman when Will Young was out for 60 within 20 minutes of the close. He couldn't last to stumps at which New Zealand was 136-3, having increased its lead to 340. Kane Williamson completed his 38th half century just before the close and was 50 not and Rachin Ravindra was 2. Henry and O'Rourke likely will become New Zealand's new ball attack when Tim Southee retires at the end of this, his 107th test. They previewed that partnership Sunday as Henry took 4-48 and O'Rourke took 3-33 in an outstanding New Zealand bowling performance. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner took 3-7 including the wickets of Ollie Pope and Ben Stokes after leading a defiant last wicket stand with O'Rourke which occupied the first hour of the day until New Zealand's last wicket fell at 347. O'Rourke, a classic No. 11 with only 13 runs in nine

tests at a strike rate of eight, gave Santner stalwart support in a partnership with frustrated England for 77 minutes at the end of the first day and the start of the second. Santner reached his fourth half century with a six from the last ball of the first day. He carried on, taking the majority of the strike, before being bowled by Matthew Potts with the first ball after the morning drinks break. O'Rourke faced 30 deliveries and was five not out, having taken 25 balls to get off the mark and having hit his first boundary in international cricket, a leg glance from the bowling of Gus Atkinson. The duration of the partnership between Santner and O'Rourke was enough to cause England discomfort as it lifted New Zealand from 303-9 to 315-9 at stumps Saturday and on to 347. O'Rourke went on to play a key role as New Zealand dismantled England's first innings in 35.5 overs. He bowled at pace and found a disconcerting bounce on a drying second day wicket at Seddon Park. O'Rourke took the wickets of Jacob Bethell (12) and Harry Brook (0) with consecutive deliveries, then removed Joe Root (32) in his next over. He first worked over Bethell with a series of short balls then offered him a full ball wide of off stump which Bethell sliced to Glenn Phillips in the gully.

Money isn't the reason I play chess: Gukesh on being 'new multi-millionaire'

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The "multi-millionaire" tag does "mean a lot" to new world champion D Gukesh but he doesn't play the game for material gains but for that unbridled joy, which he has been able to retain since the time a chess board used to be the "coolest toy" for him. Gukesh, the 18-year-old from Chennai, is now richer by Rs 11.45 crore which he will receive from FIDE as prize money for beating Ding Liren of China in the final. Gukesh's father Rajnikanth gave up his career as an ENT surgeon to accompany his son on the circuit while mother Padmakumari, who is a microbiologist, became the sole earner of the family. Asked what exactly does being a multi-millionaire mean to him, Gukesh said, "It means a lot. When I got into chess, we (as a family) had to make some hard decisions. My parents had gone through financial and emotional hardships. Now, we are more comfortable and parents don't need to think about those



things," Gukesh told FIDE in an interview. "Personally, money isn't the reason I play chess," he said. He always tries to remember why he started playing the game when he got his first chess board. "I am still the kid who loves chess. It used to be the coolest toy," the reticent world champion explained. For him, his parents mean the world. Gukesh's dad doubles up as his manager by taking care of all the off-board activities and allowing him to concentrate on the game, while his mother is the

emotional and spiritual pillar of strength. "She (mother) still says, I will be happy to know that you are a great chess player but I would be happier to hear that you are a greater person," Gukesh said. Still in his teens, Gukesh feels that as a student of the game, the more he learns about chess, the more aware he will become of how little he knows. "Even the greatest of players make a lot of mistakes. Even though technology is so advanced, there is still a lot to learn about chess. I strongly

believe that the more you learn something, more you realise that you don't know that thing. "Whenever I am on the chess board, I feel I learn something new. It's a process of unlimited beauty." Journey and Destination both are "important" The process of the journey is very important but for Gukesh, it is even more important to be clear about the destination. "For example, I played a beautiful game and lost, I will feel sad. And if I win despite not playing a great game, I will be happy. I tend to look at the result," he said. Desire to win is more than the fear of losing The quality of games in the final was found to be pretty drab by experts but Gukesh doesn't believe that his desire to win is trumped by fear of losing. "My desire to win is stronger than the fear of losing," he said, while expressing a bit of surprise as to how Liren easily agreed to a draw in the second game.



India needs to get better with old ball between overs 50-80, accepts bowling coach Morkel

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Bowling coach Morne Morkel on Sunday accepted that Indian bowlers failed to execute plans against Australian century-maker Travis Head and exhorted them to tidy up their act with the old ball between overs 50 and 80. Head and fellow centurion Steve Smith helped the hosts to clobber 171 runs in 31 overs in the third session on the second day of the third Test here, adding to a wicketless post-lunch segment. Australia closed the day at a highly satisfying 405 for seven. "First of all, we can say he's (Head) in pretty good form. But I think for us with the ball, if you look at it from overs 50 to 80, even in the last game, is where we fall short, leaking (runs) a little bit. So, that's one area I think we need to get better at," Morkel said in the post-day press conference. Morkel said the Indian bowlers could not sustain the momentum after taking three wickets in the morning session. "First up with the ball this morning, we were pretty good, at 3 for 70, but took nothing away from two world-class players, Smith we know, he's a guy who also can bat long and score runs. They (Smith and Head) put us under pressure with a softer ball. "It's definitely an area that we need to focus on, maybe

deeper in the innings. Yes, we've got the game plans, but are we executing those game plans with a softer ball from both ends? That's something we need to get better at," getting added. The former South African quick explained the pre-set plan against Head, though it eventually fell flat on its back. "Our plan going into this game was to bowl a little bit more over the wicket, a straighter line. We felt he played it quite nicely in Adelaide when we came around (the wicket). The margins to him are just so small and like I said, once he's in, what is the best way for the team and for you (is) to maybe slow down the scoring rate because you know he's going to be aggressive. "The best way (of controlling Head) is bringing a little bit of control into the game and like I said, from over 50 with that softer ball, that's where we're leaking (runs). When Head comes on straight, the pitch kind of feels to (be favourable) a side," he added. "I'm not taking anything away from that, but it is a venue where getting used to bowling the right length and trusting that, it does take a bit of time." Pacer Jasprit Bumrah singlehandedly shepherded India's bowling with a fifer and Morkel did not read too much into the rather underwhelming efforts of other seamers Mohammed Siraj and luck-less Akash Deep.

Siraj is getting stick from 'saints' of Australian cricket, writes sarcastic Sunil Gavaskar

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has lashed out the double standards of the Australian cricket pundits for their criticism of Mohammed Siraj's aggressive send-off to Travis Head in the Day/Night Test in Adelaide. Siraj and Head were at loggerheads after the Indian pacer got the Australian centurion bowled and gave him a send-off. While Head said that Siraj's reaction was uncalled for, the Indian pacer on his part countered that the southpaw never said "well bowled" which he claimed to have told the media. ICC warned Head and Siraj was fined 20 percent of his match fee but what has irked Gavaskar is the holier than thou attitude of some former Australian players. "Siraj is getting the stick from all the 'saints' in Australian cricket who, of course, were known for their



impeccable behaviour on the field. It may have incensed Australian fans that Siraj's fiery send-off was directed at Head, who scored a magnificent century and was also the local boy," Gavaskar wrote in his column for

Sydney Morning Herald. Gavaskar took a dig at the double standards about how the same people support boorish behaviour from their own. "But the same people will cheer if an Aussie quick gives a similar send-off to an English batter during next summer's Ashes." "There were some suggestions in the media that the Australians should get back to being the mongrels they once were. So, do mongrels simply purr, or do they bark, too?" He was however surprised at Siraj's outburst considering that IPL had lessened the animosity among players. "Siraj's outburst was surprising because if the Indian Premier League has done one thing, apart from making Aussie cricketers and coaches millionaires, it has also taken away to a huge extent the animosity that previously existed in the game."

India to host maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event on August 10 next year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event - a bronze level global meet - in Bhubaneswar on August 10 next year, the national federation said on Sunday. The announcement was made by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) while releasing the competition calendar for 2025. The Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics and it forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the prestigious Diamond League. "The Continental Tour will be a good opportunity for the Indian team to showcase their potential on home ground before the World Championships in September," AFI President Adile Sumariwalla said. The meet will be a chance for Indian athletes to earn world ranking points (category C) in home conditions for the 2025 World Championships to be held in Tokyo from September 13-21. The bronze level Tour meet is below the gold and silver levels. This will be the first global athletics meet to be hosted by India after the

international permit meets, held in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s. India has also hosted World Half Marathon Championships in 2004 in New Delhi. "This will be the first time and most prestigious global athletics event after the permit meets in the 80s and 90s and the World Half Marathon in 2004. This is a big achievement and will help athletics grow in the country," an AFI official told PTI. He said that India is also likely to host a "big" global level javelin meet next year. "We are trying for a big global javelin event and hoping to get it," he added. Riding on Olympic gold and silver medallist Neeraj Chopra's success, India is emerging as a global javelin powerhouse in the world. Currently, the country has more than half a dozen javelin throwers who can throw more than 80m. A World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze Level Meet can only be held in a facility which has a minimum sitting capacity of 3000 with a minimum class 2 certified track with six lanes. The equipment to be used will have to be World Athletics-certified.



There will have to be fully automatic timing obtained from a Photo Finish System, two clocks, two electronic infield boards and minimum one video screen. The warm up area will have to be adequate for all disciplines. The Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar is one of the best

facilities in the country and it has hosted several national championships and the Asian Championships in 2017 during which it had earned praise from the current World Athletics President Sebastian Coe. To host a Continental Bronze Level Meet, the organisers shall provide

adequate medical and emergency services on site, including ambulance service, and minor stitching; physiotherapy facilities at the stadium and at the Athletes' hotel. A minimum of five dope tests must be conducted at the event and samples shall be collected in strict

accordance with World Athletics Anti-Doping Regulations using qualified doping control personnel. Samples shall be shipped to and analysed by a WADA-accredited laboratory. The organisers must stage a minimum of 12 events, with minimum five per gender including at least one jumping and one throwing event. They shall make every effort to stage the main programme within two and a half consecutive hours. The participating athletes will have to be kept at a minimum three-star hotel and a total prize money purse of USD 25,000 must be offered for the meeting. Regarding the 2025 calendar, the season will start with the National Cross Country championships on January 12. The national race walking competition will be organised on April 19 in Chandigarh. The Senior National Federation Cup is scheduled for April 21-24 in Panchkula, Haryana, and will act as a qualification event for the Asian Athletic Championships to be held from May 27 to May 31 in Korea. The National Inter-State Senior Championships will be held from August 20 to 24 in Chennai, while

the National Open Championships will be organised either in Pune or Bengaluru from September 27 to 30. The AFI president said elite Indian race walkers will not compete in the Asian Race Walking competition in Nomi, Japan in March as the main focus will be the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. "The core group of Indian race walkers clocked a good time in March but aren't able to repeat the performance later in the season," Sumariwalla explained. "Since the main focus in 2025 is the global competition in September, we have decided not to send the elite team to Japan in March." The national team will also compete in international events to prepare for the World Athletics World Championships from September 13-21, the AFI president said. "The AFI has also introduced regional competition from next year to give more exposure to athletes on the fringes. The regional competitions will commence from April." The AFI's flagship event - National Inter-District Athletics Meet (NIDJAM) - will take place in February.

Veteran actor Rajendra Prasad steals the show in *Harikatha*

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Senior actor Rajendra Prasad acted in a web series titled *Harikatha*, streaming on Disney + Hotstar. Maggi directed this web series, while popular producer TG Vishwaprasad produced it. Sriram, Divi Vadthya, Pujitha Ponnada, who are doing regular films, also acted in this web series. Suresh Bobbili is the music director. The web series has a mythological touch, and here is the story and how it fares.

STORY

The story takes place in a village near Araku between the 1980s and 90s. A lower-caste boy, Dasu (Suman Jha), was arrested in a murder case and sent to a juvenile home. Rangachari (Rajendra Prasad) is a theater artist who, along with his troupe, stages mythological plays, especially those featuring Lord Vishnu's avatars, in the village. Whenever he plays an avatar, a murder takes place in the village, in the same manner as Rangachari narrated in his *Harikatha*. The villagers strongly believe that God has come down to punish the bad men in different avatars. A police officer, Virat (Sriram), came to the village to find the killer of his friend (Arjun Ambati), also a police officer. Virat suspects Rangachari, but when the murder took place, he was performing *Harikatha*. Actually, who is behind these murders? Why are these people eliminated one after another? What is the story



REVIEW

Director: Maggi **Producer:** TG Vishwaprasad
Cast: Rajendra Prasad, Sriram, Divi Vadthya, Suman Jha, Pujitha Ponnada, Preeti Nigam and others
Music director: Suresh Bobbili **Cinematography:** Vijay Ulaganath
Streaming on: Disney Plus Hotstar **Rating:** 3/5

behind these people? If you want to know the answers, watch *Harikatha* on Disney + Hotstar.

ANALYSIS

In olden days, people used to watch *Harikatha* in villages. They narrated mythological stories, top leaders' life histories and many good stories to give a good message to the village people. In this *Harikatha* web series, the director mixed *Harikatha* and a murder, which is quite interesting. Whenever Rangachari plays an avatar of Lord Vishnu, a murder happens in the same manner in that village. When he narrates the Varaha avatar, many varahas kill a person; when he narrates the Narasimha avatar, another man is killed by the Narasimha avatar. The director keeps the suspense till the last episode about these murder mysteries, like who is doing it.

Credit goes to director Maggi for coming out with this nice idea, but if he could concentrate more on some characters and the story, it would be more interesting. The director's focus was mainly on Rajendra Prasad, so he didn't write strong characterisations for others. For example, the lower-caste mother and child episodes are like overacting, and there is no emotion in it. Similarly, Dasu's narration of a story lacks strong emotion. Moreover, the director is banking more on violence and gore, which can definitely be reduced. Pujitha Ponnada plays a journalist, but her character is not written properly. Ditto with Sriram and his friend, played by Arjun Ambati's characters, which are under-written.

The director narrated those mythological stories interestingly and the way the murders took place was also shown in a way that gives curiosity. The atmosphere and ambience are good, but the web series ends with a typical revenge drama without proper emotion.

PERFORMANCE

When it comes to performance, Rajendra Prasad steals the show with his performance. He is a senior artist and carried it in a very natural way. He is good, especially when he plays mythological characters, where he showcases his experience and those scenes come out well. He is the backbone of this web series. Sriram plays another lead and plays his part well, but his character should be strong and more intense. Divi Vadthya is there as a tribal girl. Pujitha Ponnada plays a video journalist. The actress who played Rajendra Prasad's granddaughter performed well, and also the actor who played Dasu. There are many other actors who supported well. The music by Suresh Bobbili is good. The cinematography by Vijay Ulaganath captured beautiful locations and also the mythological plays.

VERDICT

Finally, the *Harikatha* web series is a blend of mythological touch in a revenge drama. The way the murders took place in a *Dasavathara* narrative is interesting, but at the same time, it has more violence and gore. Though there are flaws, the *Dasavathara* plays give goosebumps and still, you can watch this.

Srikanth opens up about his power-packed role in *Game Changer*

Srikanth, who plays a significant role in the highly anticipated film *Game Changer*, directed by Shankar and starring Ram Charan, has opened up about his experience working on the project. The film, set to release on January 10, 2025, has generated immense buzz, and Srikanth's role is one of the most talked-about aspects.

"Working with director Shankar is a dream for many actors, and I consider myself fortunate to have such a significant role in his film," said Srikanth. For his role, the team used prosthetics, and for the first time in his career, Srikanth looks completely different in this film.

"When they first narrated the first half, I questioned why they thought of me for this role and whether I could pull it off," Srikanth recalled. "However, after hearing the second half, I knew I had to take on the role no matter what. Once the prosthetics were done and I got into the look, I felt confident that I could do justice to the role."

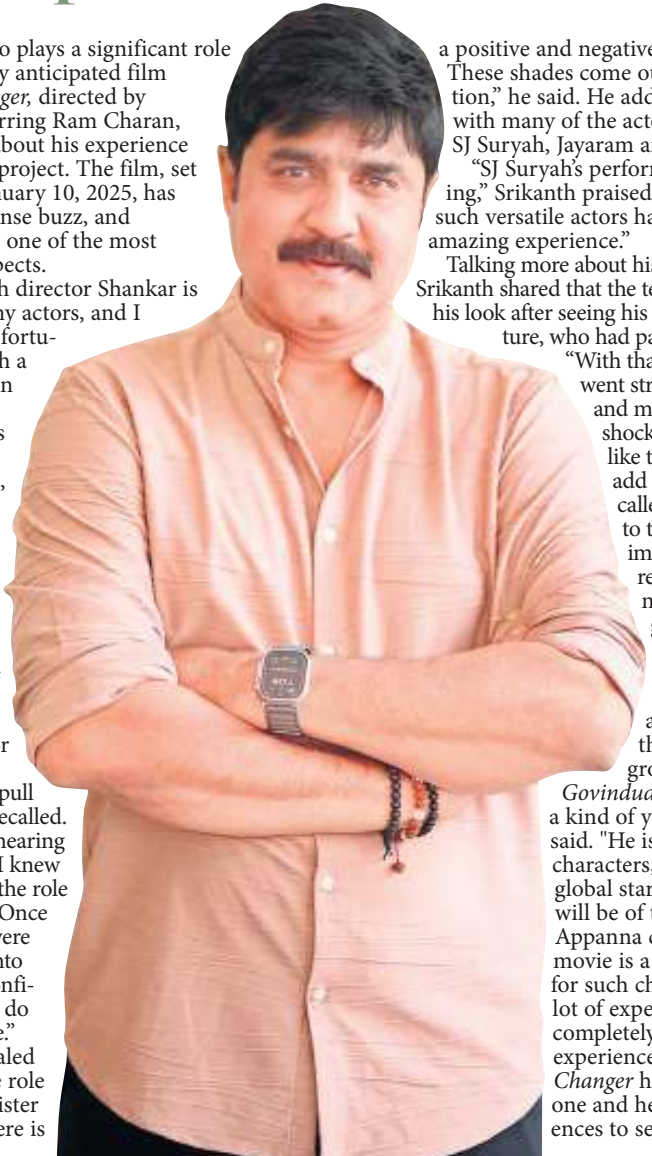
Srikanth revealed that he plays the role of the chief minister in the film. "There is

a positive and negative side to my character. These shades come out as per the situation," he said. He added that he has scenes with many of the actors, including Charan, SJ Suryah, Jayaram and Samuthirakani. "SJ Suryah's performance is outstanding," Srikanth praised. "Working with such versatile actors has been an amazing experience."

Talking more about his character, Srikanth shared that the team created his look after seeing his father's picture, who had passed away.

"With that setup, I went straight home and my mother was shocked to see me like that," he said. "To add to her surprise, I called her 'Baby' just to tease her. I never imagined I would resemble my father so much until I put on that getup."

Srikanth has worked with Ram Charan previously, and he shared his thoughts on the actor's growth. "When we did *Govindudu Andarivadele*, it was a kind of young character," he said. "He is now doing matured characters, and he became a global star too, so the characters will be of that level. Playing the Appanna character in this movie is a challenging one, and for such characters, one needs a lot of experience. He aced it completely." Overall, Srikanth's experience working on *Game Changer* has been a memorable one and he is eager for audiences to see the film.



Vishnu Manchu joins forces with Will Smith

The Manchu family has been in the spotlight recently due to differences among family members. However, there is some positive news emerging from the family, particularly from Vishnu Manchu. The actor has announced that his company, Taranga Ventures, a media and entertainment tech fund, is in advanced talks with Hollywood superstar Will Smith to join as a key partner.

The \$50 million fund, with a potential extension of another \$50 million, aims to drive innovation in the media and entertainment sector. The fund plans to invest in game-changing technologies and industries such as OTT platforms,

animation, gaming, blockchain and advanced technologies like AR, VR and AI. Additionally, it seeks to support mergers, acquisitions, and growth opportunities in the ever-evolving entertainment landscape. Apart from Vishnu Manchu and Will Smith, other key personalities involved with Taranga Ventures include Addishree, a finance expert; Pradyuman Jhala, a Canadian investor in real estate; Vinay Maheshwari, a senior executive in the Indian media industry; and Devesh Chawla and Satish Kataria, specialists in investor relations and fund operations.

"This fund is a significant step toward reshaping the future of media and entertainment," said Vishnu Manchu, emphasising the importance of combining creativity with technology to drive innovation.

Lavanya Tripathi returns to cinemas with *Sathi Leelavathi*

Lavanya Tripathi has finally announced her new film, *Sathi Leelavathi*, marking her return to the silver screen. The actress, who married actor Varun Konidela, had not signed any films offlate, leading many to assume that she was no longer interested in acting. However, as Varun had mentioned earlier, Lavanya was waiting for the right project and *Sathi Leelavathi* has fit the bill.

On the occasion of her birthday, Lavanya revealed her new film, which will be directed by Tatineni Satya. The movie is jointly produced by Nagamohan Babu M and Rajesh T. Tatineni

Satya is known for his diverse filmography, including *Bheemili Kabaddi Jattu* and *S.M.S (Shiva Manasulo Shruthi)*, both starring Natural Star Nani.

With *Sathi Leelavathi*, Lavanya Tripathi is set to impress audiences once again by taking on a different role in an exciting storyline. The shooting of this film is slated to begin soon, and the makers will reveal more details about the project in the coming days.

The music for *Sathi Leelavathi* will be composed by Mickey J. Meyer, while Binendra Menon will handle the cinematography.



Mega family feud seems to end; Allu Arjun meets Chiru

The Telugu Film Industry has been in the news for the past few days. The industry was left stunned after Allu Arjun was arrested in connection with the Sandhya Theater stampede, which resulted in the death of a woman. Although he was granted bail on the same day, the Chanchalguda Jail authorities did not receive the bail papers in time, leading to his overnight stay in jail. The next morning, he was released, and the entire Tollywood fraternity rallied around him, offering their support.

Several actors, including Venkatesh, Vijay Deverakonda, Rana Daggubati, Naga Chaitanya and Sudigali Sudheer, visited Allu Arjun's house to express their solidarity. Many producers and directors also paid him a visit. However, Chiranjeevi, who had visited Allu Arjun's house when he was at the police station, did not visit after his release. Notably, other Mega actors and cousins of Allu Arjun, such as Ram Charan, Varun Tej, Sai Durgha Tej and Vaishnav Tej, also did not visit his house, sparking speculation about the reasons behind their absence. In a surprising move, Allu Arjun, accompanied by his wife Sneha Reddy, visited Chiranjeevi's

house and met with him. This gesture has raised eyebrows, given the reported differences between Allu Arjun and the Mega family, particularly after his visit to Nandhyal. However, it appears that Allu Arjun has chosen to extend an olive branch to Chiranjeevi.

Interestingly, there are reports suggesting that Chiranjeevi was instrumental in responding to Allu Arjun's arrest and ensuring his bail. Apparently, Chiranjeevi entrusted Niranjan Reddy, a lawyer and producer of his earlier film *Acharya*, to argue Allu Arjun's case and secure his release. Notably, Niranjan Reddy is also a close friend of Ram Charan and has represented the legal team for former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The outcome of Allu Arjun's visit to Chiranjeevi's house remains to be seen. Will they patch up their differences, or was this simply a courtesy call? Did Allu Arjun apologise to Chiranjeevi for his visit to Nandhyal, despite being advised against it? Only time will tell. The fans are eagerly waiting to see how this development unfolds and whether they will ultimately patch up their differences.



THE RAGE OF DAAKU MAHARAJ BEGINS!

Nandamuri Balakrishna is poised to continue his success streak with his upcoming film, *Daaku Maharaj*. Following the super success of his last three films, *Akhanda*, *Veerasingha Reddy* and *Bhagavanth Kesari*, the actor has begun promoting *Daaku Maharaj* aggressively. The teaser, released a few days ago, hints at an action-packed movie, with Balakrishna once again showcasing his calibre.

Now, the lyrical video of "The Rage of Daaku" from the film has been unveiled, delivering the thunderous energy fans have been eagerly awaiting. The song serves as a powerful introduction to the film's intense action and drama, perfectly setting the stage for its grand release in January 2025. Composed by Thaman S, with lyrics penned by Anantha Sriram, the track is poised to become a chartbuster anthem, amplifying the excitement for the film among Balakrishna's fans and beyond.

The song features the graceful presence of Pragya Jaiswal, adding emotional depth and providing a perfect contrast to the action-packed visuals. Directed by Bobby Kolli, *Daaku Maharaj* is set to be a high-budget extravaganza. Produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, the film is slated for a theatrical release on January 12, 2025, on Sankranti.



Ghaati is coming! Anushka Shetty & director Krish unite for a thrilling ride



It's been over a year since actress Anushka Shetty's last film, *Miss Shetty Mr Polishetty*, was released in September 2023 to great success. Now, the actress has reunited with director Krish Jagarlamudi for a new project titled *Ghaati*. The makers have announced the film's release date as April 18, 2025. After catching a glimpse of *Ghaati*, many were left stunned by Anushka Shetty's portrayal of a fiercely violent character in this highly anticipated film. Rajeev Reddy and Sai Babu Jagarlamudi are producing the film. Following the excitement generated by the film's initial

glimpse, the makers have revealed the release date as April 18th, perfectly timed for a summer release. This announcement was made through a fun video featuring Krish, Anushka, and the producers.

According to the makers, *Ghaati* promises an unconventional narrative that delves into humanity, survival, and redemption. The film is set to be an intense, gripping exploration of the grey areas between right and wrong, where true legends are forged. *Ghaati* will be released in multiple languages, including Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi, ensuring a wide reach and appeal.

Sreeleela makes her way into Tamil cinema with Sivakartheeyan's next

Sreeleela, the sensational South Indian actress and gracious dancer, is making waves in the entertainment industry with her recent projects and upcoming ventures. Known for her captivating performances, versatile acting skills and graceful dance moves, Sreeleela has quickly become a favorite among audiences and filmmakers alike. In a significant move, Sreeleela is set to star in Sivakartheeyan's 25th film, directed by Sudha Kongara and produced by Aakash Bhaskaran under Dawn Pictures. This collaboration has generated a lot of excitement among fans, as Sivakartheeyan is a well-established actor with a strong fan base. The official pooja for the movie was held on December 14, adding to the anticipation. The official pooja for the movie

saw notable personalities like Jayam Ravi, Atharva Murali, Dr. Swarna (Sreeleela's mother), GV Prakash, and Ravi K Chandran in attendance, highlighting the project's high-profile nature. As Sreeleela continues to expand her horizons, her involvement in Tamil cinema is a testament to her growing influence and talent. With each new project, she is proving that she is a force to be reckoned with in the South Indian film industry. Fans eagerly await the release of Sivakartheeyan's 25th film, and Sreeleela's performance is sure to be a highlight. As she makes her mark in Tamil cinema, Sreeleela's star is only set to rise, and we can expect many more exciting projects from this talented actress in the future.

