



NTR CP oversees security for 'Bhavani Deeksha Viramana'

As part of the inspection, Commissioner Rajasekhar Babu, accompanied by senior officers, visited several locations such as Durga Ghat, Kummariapalem, Sitara Talkies Centre, Milk Project Centre, Chittinganar, Srinivas Mahal Centre, Brahma Veedhi, and Ratham Centre. He supervised the arrangements and emphasised providing a hassle-free experience for devotees while preventing any untoward incidents.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

City Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu personally supervised security arrangements for the relinquishment ceremony of Bhavani devotees on December 23. The Commissioner visited the Command Control Room at the Model Guest House near Durga Ghat, monitoring the crowd at key locations through CCTV cameras. He issued directives to officers and staff across various sectors to ensure robust security. The Commissioner reviewed live drone footage of vital locations, including the Vinayaka Temple, Seethamma Padalu, Bus Station, and Railway Station. Traffic management was closely monitored via the Astra App, with instructions provided to traffic officers to ensure smooth vehicular flow and vigilance. As part of the inspection, Commissioner

Rajasekhar Babu, accompanied by senior officers, visited several locations such as Durga Ghat, Kummariapalem, Sitara Talkies Centre, Milk Project Centre, Chittinganar, Srinivas Mahal Centre, Brahma Veedhi, and Ratham Centre. He supervised the arrangements and emphasised providing a hassle-free experience for devotees while preventing any untoward incidents. The Commissioner also inspected holding areas near Seethamma Padalu, reviewing the facilities arranged for devotees. He suggested extending the holding area to accommodate the large influx of participants and directed the setup of barricades to ensure smooth movement. The inspection was conducted with the participation of DCP Gautami Shali, ADC P J Ramakrishna, ACPs, Inspectors, and other police personnel.

NTR DC: Nodal officers should focus on grievance resolution

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr. G. Lakshmi has instructed nodal officers to prioritise the quality of grievance resolution through the Public Grievance Redressal System (PGRS) introduced by the state government. He emphasised that once grievances are addressed, they should not be reopened. On Monday, Dr. Lakshmi, along with other officials, participated in the PGRS programme held at the Collectorate Meeting Hall. He first inspected the reception, information counters, registration desk, help desk, and Aadhaar centres related to the programme. Later, the Collector, along with District Revenue Officer M. Lakshminarasimham, DRDA PD K. Srinivas Rao, Special Officer for Village and Ward Secretariats P. Jyothi, and other officials, received grievances from the public. A total of 85 grievances were submitted during the programme, including 42 related to revenue, 8 to municipal and urban development, and 7 to the police department. Other grievances were submitted for departments such as APCPDCL, DRDA,

and the cooperative sector (four each), Panchayat Raj, education, and registration and stamps (two each), along with other departments like social welfare, BC welfare, civil supplies, skill development, health, housing, roads, and rural water supply (one each). The Collector instructed officials to thoroughly examine each grievance and ensure that the issues are resolved to the applicants' satisfaction. Dr. Lakshmi also visited the Vermi Compost sale centre set up by the district Panchayat Office in connection with the PGRS programme. He observed the sales of vermicompost produced at the Waste-to-Wealth Centre in Gunturpalli village panchayat, Ibrahimpatnam mandal. The compost, priced at Rs 20 per kilogram, is available in packet sizes of 500g, 1kg, and 2kg. The Collector praised the vermicompost for its significant benefits in promoting fast and healthy plant growth. He highlighted that the district is focusing on solid and liquid waste management, with the waste-to-wealth centres operating successfully. The programme also saw the participation of DPO P. Lavanya Kumari and other officials.



Dy CM inspects quality of road works

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj K. Pawan Kalyan inspected the ongoing road reconstruction and drinking water project works in the district on Monday, ensuring quality standards were met. Accompanied by Minister for Excise Kollu Ravindra, MLAs Bode Prasad, Mandali Buddha Prasad, and Varla Kumar Raja, Pawan Kalyan visited Godavaru village, where roadworks worth Rs 3.75 crore are underway. The Deputy Chief Minister was briefed by Panchayat Raj Commissioner Krishna Teja and engineers on the progress and quality of the work. Pawan Kalyan also reviewed the Kankipadu-Godavaru-Royyuru road reconstruction, a project initiated after

the road's poor condition was highlighted during the Palle Panduga programme. The five-kilometre stretch was rebuilt with SDRF funds and serves over 21,000 people. The remaining works are expected to be completed by Sankranti. During his inspection, Pawan Kalyan personally checked the quality of the road by directing workers to dig a half-metre deep section to examine the mix of gravel and bitumen. He emphasized that public money should be spent efficiently and without compromise on quality. The Deputy Chief Minister also inspected drinking water projects at Mallayapalem village, where repairs are ongoing in 44 villages. Responding to concerns raised by Gudivada MLA Venigandla Ramu, Pawan Kalyan sanctioned Rs 3.80 crore for urgent repairs.



Union Minister distributes job letters to 630 persons

■ Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu highlights youth empowerment, developmental projects and progress on key initiatives in Uttarandhra region

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu has praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives aimed at empowering youth and fostering employment opportunities. On Monday, the Minister distributed job appointment letters to 630 individuals during a programme held at the Port Sagarmala Convention Hall in Visakhapatnam. Highlighting the government's commitment to youth empowerment, Minister Ram Mohan stated that both the Central and State governments are working to uplift the younger generation. He expressed confidence that the appointments would bring happiness and fulfilment to the recipients and emphasised the importance of engaging with newly employed individuals to understand their journeys and challenges. The Minister commended the resilience and dedication of Uttarandhra's youth, who he said are willing to work anywhere in service to the nation. He also highlighted the success of the Rozgar Melas, noting that 13 such events have provided employment to 7.79 lakh people so far. Speaking on developmental projects, Naidu discussed the progress made on the



long-pending South Coast Railway zone under the NDA government. He criticised the previous YSRCP administration for failing to allocate sufficient land for the project and noted that significant strides have been made under the "double engine" government. The Minister also identified Bhogapuram Airport as a key initiative that will drive growth in the Uttarandhra region. Ram Mohan Naidu assured the public that the State government is prioritising the completion of stalled projects and called for industrial investments to further the region's development. He cred-

ited AP HRD and IT Minister Nara Lokesh for efforts in bringing companies like TCS and Lulu back to the State. On the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, the Minister reaffirmed the Central government's commitment to retaining it in the public sector, putting to rest concerns about its privatisation. The event concluded with the distribution of appointment letters to unemployed youth who secured jobs in various government sectors. Visakhapatnam MP M. Sriharath, Visakhapatnam North MLA Vishnu Kumar Raju, and senior CISF officials were present.

TTD to issue darshan quota tokens on Jan 5

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

As per the decision taken in the last meeting of the TTD board, the locals will be given darshan of Srivaru on the first Tuesday of every month. For darshan on January 7 (Tuesday), tokens will be issued at the counters in Tirupati Mahathi Auditorium and Tirumala Balaji Nagar Community Hall on January 5 (Sunday). The residents of Tirupati Urban, Rural, Chandragiri, Renigunta mandals as well as Tirumala must show their original Aadhaar cards to get these tokens.



Minister Lokesh's gesture to ailing TDP worker

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, Electronics, RTGS, and IT, Nara Lokesh, has extended his support to Telugu Desam Party (TDP) activist Mallikarjun Reddy and a student facing critical health issues, demonstrating his commitment to public welfare. Mallikarjun Reddy, a TDP activist from Nellore, has been struggling with severe health challenges due to diabetes and recurrent strokes. A long-time member of the TDP and known for his charitable work through the Nara Lokesh Seva Committee, Reddy suffered a stroke over a year ago, which significantly affected his health. Despite treatment, he suffered another stroke a month ago, leading to severe complications. Recently, an infection required surgery at Narayana Hospital, resulting in the amputation of one of his legs. He is now unable to walk due to the complications. The situation came to Minister Lokesh's attention through social media posts by con-



cerned TDP leaders. Responding swiftly, Lokesh expressed his hopes for Reddy's recovery and assured full support from the party. Following Lokesh's intervention, Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, P. Narayana, reached out via video call to inquire about Reddy's condition and promised a personal visit to offer his support. Mallikarjun Reddy expressed his heartfelt gratitude for Lokesh's prompt and empathetic response during this difficult time. In another instance, Minister Lokesh's quick intervention helped first-year engineering student Anusha Murapala from Srikakulam, who suffered a sudden brain stroke. She was rushed to a nearby hospital in critical condition. Concerned individuals appealed for assistance on the social media platform X, prompting Lokesh to act quickly. Through his team, he ensured that Anusha received the necessary medical care and financial assistance to stabilise her condition.

IIA Visakhapatnam delegation for amendment to building by-laws

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A delegation from the Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) Visakhapatnam Centre has met with B. Sreenivasulu, Additional Director at the Directorate of Town and Country Planning (DTCP), Mangalagiri. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss proposed amendments to building by-laws in Andhra Pradesh and advocate for policies that prioritise sustainability and safety in development projects. Speaking about the initiative, Ar. Rajesh Nagula, Chairman of the IIA Visakhapatnam Centre, said, "Architects play a pivotal role in shaping the urban landscape. It is essential to involve their expertise in planning and execution to ensure that cities are sustainable, safe, and well-designed." Prominent architects from across Andhra Pradesh participated in the discussions, presenting their observations on the draft Government Order related to building by-laws. They emphasised the importance of incorporating architectural expertise to enhance design quality and achieve compliance with safety and environmental standards. One of the delegation's primary recommendations was to mandate the involvement of architects in large-scale horizontal developments, such as group housing, industrial complexes, hospitals, and tourism projects exceeding a specific site extent. "These are projects that significantly impact urban growth and infrastructure. Architects must be part of the approval process to ensure they align with design and safety norms," said a member of the delegation. The architects also proposed extending the scope of existing building by-laws to require architectural oversight for projects above 500 sq.m. Besides, they suggested empowering architects to report deviations from approved plans. "Granting this authority to architects will ensure greater accountability and adherence to approved designs," explained another delegate. Another notable proposal was the creation of a unified, single-login registration system for architects, linked to their Council of Architecture (COA) credentials. This system will streamline approval processes across Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Urban Development Authorities (UDAs) in Andhra Pradesh. "A unified system will not only simplify procedures, but also ensure uniform standards across the State," added Ar. Nagula.





Collector urges people to adopt organic farming

It is heartening that an organic farm produce sales outlet has been inaugurated on the Collector's office premises to mark National Farmers' Day. Every Monday, visitors submitting grievances at the office will have the opportunity to purchase fresh organic vegetables," the Collector noted.

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has urged the public to adopt organic farming for better health. On Monday, the Collector, accompanied by Joint Collector T. Rahul Kumar Reddy, inaugurated an exclusive sales outlet for organic farming products on the premises of the Collector's office. The outlet features produce cultivated using natural farming methods, brought in by 14 farmers for direct sale. The Collector and Joint Collector purchased organic vegetables from the stall to encourage the initiative. Speaking on the occasion, Nagarani emphasised the importance of incorporating organic produce into daily diets for improved well-being. She also highlighted the connection

between a farmer's prosperity and the nation's progress and extended her wishes to farmers on the occasion of National Farmers' Day. "It is heartening that an organic farm produce sales outlet has been inaugurated on the Collector's office premises to mark National Farmers' Day. Every Monday, visitors submitting grievances at the office will have the opportunity to purchase fresh organic vegetables," the Collector noted. She directed officials to promote the cultivation, sale, and consumption of organically grown produce. Among those present at the event were DRO M. Venkateswarulu, District Agriculture Officer Z. Venkateswara Rao, District Organic Agriculture Produce Project Manager Y. Nukaraju, and Coordinator M. Aruna Kumar.

Chaos prevails at Kadapa Municipal Corporation council meeting

PNS ■ KADAPA

Chaos prevailed in the Kadapa Municipal Corporation council meeting held on Monday when a chair was not provided to MLA Madhavi Reddy on the podium. As the Council meeting commenced, TDP Kadapa MLA Madhavi Reddy arrived at the meeting hall but found that no chair had been arranged for her on the dais. Furious over the omission, the MLA questioned why she, as the elected representative of the constituency, was not given a chair on the podium. Mayor Suresh Babu, a YSRCP leader, was present at the meeting. MLA Madhavi Reddy engaged in a heated argument with the Mayor, accusing him of humiliating a



woman MLA. She also criticised the YSRCP government for halting the development of Kadapa city. The TDP MLA was seen arguing with the Mayor while standing in front of his podium, and soon, TDP corporators joined her in protest, leading to chaos in the council meeting. Both TDP and YSRCP corporators raised slogans, further

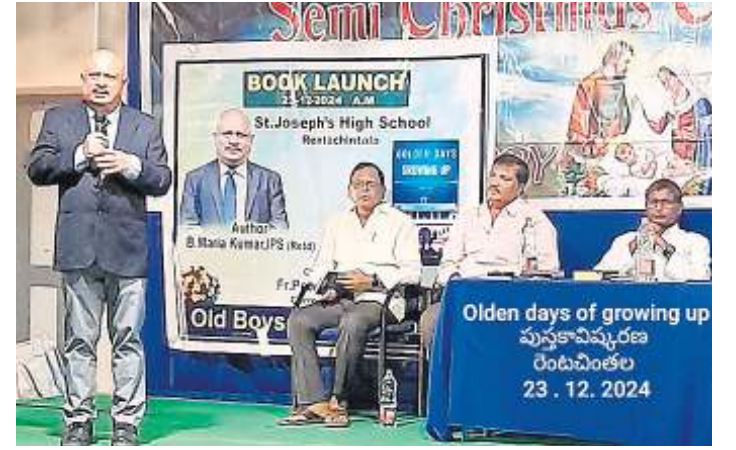
intensifying the uproar. At one point, YSRCP and TDP corporators jostled each other. The YSRCP corporators then squatted on the floor, demanding an apology from the TDP MLA and corporators to the Mayor. In an interesting turn of events, Mayor Suresh Babu suspended seven corporators for obstructing the proceedings. All seven suspended corporators had recently joined the TDP from the YSRCP. Amid the disruption, Mayor Suresh Babu adjourned the Council meeting, though the YSRCP-led Mayor managed to pass the meeting agenda. Later, MLA Madhavi Reddy and her supporters staged a protest in front of the municipal corporation office, raising slogans against the Mayor for not providing her a chair on the dais.

Ex-DGP's memoir on school days released

PNS ■ RENTACHINTALA

Rentachintala witnessed a nostalgic evening on Monday as the much-awaited memoir 'Golden Days of Growing Up' by B. Maria Kumar, former Director General of Police (DGP) of Madhya Pradesh, was launched at his alma mater, St. Joseph's High School. The book, a heartfelt chronicle of Kumar's school days and rural life, was unveiled by the school's Correspondent, Fr. Peter Pappiah, who was the chief guest. A proud alumnus of the school and a native of Rentachintala, Maria Kumar takes readers down memory lane, capturing unique moments from his formative years. The book vividly portrays the cultural essence of rural life and timeless education-

al values, offering a glimpse into a bygone era. The launch turned into a heartwarming reunion as several of Kumar's classmates and friends, including Thumma Lourdu Reddy, Kondasani Anjaneya Reddy, and others, attended to celebrate the milestone. Adding to the book's charm is a foreword by the author's classmate, Fr. Putty Sundar Raju, now Rector in Guntur. As part of St. Joseph's 75th-anniversary celebrations, Kumar's work resonates with a deep sense of gratitude and reflection. Fr. Pappiah lauded the memoir as an inspiring tribute to the power of education and the enduring values it instills, urging young minds to strive for excellence with curiosity and kindness.



Former DGP of Madhya Pradesh, B Maria Kumar, addressing a function on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his alma mater St. Joseph's High School at Rentachintala in Palnadu district on Monday.

Speaker inaugurates ₹4.53-crore development projects

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Legislative Assembly Speaker, Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu, inaugurated development projects worth Rs 4.53 crore on Monday. The foundation stone was also laid for projects totalling Rs 1.10 crore, including roadworks in Kasimkota, Gopalapuram, and Sampathi Puram. During the event, Speaker Patrudu sharply criticised the governance of the past five years, labelling it as "catastrophic" and accusing the previous administration of leaving Andhra Pradesh in a debt-trap due to financial mismanagement. He lamented being constrained in voicing his concerns earlier despite being appointed as Speaker by then-Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. "I am a public leader first and foremost. As someone elected by the people, it is my duty to speak the truth," Patrudu remarked.



He praised the efforts of former minister Konathala Ramakrishna, who secured Rs 65 crore for the constituency in just six months. Patrudu emphasised the importance of these projects amidst ongoing efforts to repay debts while prioritising welfare and infrastructure. He criticised the previous administration for neglect-

ing basic infrastructure, highlighting the current government's allocation of Rs 850 crore for pothole repairs and Rs 860 crore for the Sujala Sravanti irrigation project. Calling for unity, the Speaker urged leaders with shared ideologies to work together and discouraged accepting Opposition leaders who had previously criticised or filed cases against the coalition. "We have no shortage of capable leaders within our alliance," he asserted. The event witnessed the participation of notable political figures, including former ministers and legislators Konathala Ramakrishna, MP CM Ramesh, TDP Anakapalli in-charge and former legislator Pila Govinda Satyanarayana, BJP district president Dwarapureddy Parameswara Rao, former MLC Buddha Naga Jagadish, and State Urban Corporation Chairman Malla Surendra.

Police identify body delivered in parcel to family

PNS ■ YENDAGANDI

The police on Monday said that the decomposed body received by a family in a box in West Godavari district was of B Parlayya, hailing from Gandhi Nagar. On December 19, the corpse of the 45-year-old man was delivered to Mudunuri Rangaraju's home at Yendagandi village in the district in a wooden box, with a ransom letter demanding over Rs one crore. "He (Parlayya) used to consume alcohol daily, which led to

frequent quarrels with his wife and they had been living separately since 15 years," West Godavari Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi said, adding that later Parlayya lived like a tramp on the roadside and at temples. Based on the clothing found on the deceased person's body, relatives and neighbours identified him while police are also proceeding with a DNA test to further solidify the established identity with documentary evidence. According to police, Parlayya was engaged by Sridhar Varma to

work in his field to clear debris and weeds. The victim worked at Varma's field on December 17. He was last seen with Varma, who reportedly took him on his bike. Parlayya has been missing since Varma's body arrived in a box at Raju's home. Meanwhile, police have identified as Lakshmi the person who handed over the body to an auto driver for delivery at Raju's home. Moreover, the SP said Raju's family was not cooperating with the probe. Investigation is on, they said.

Minister, DC take part in Christmas celebrations

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy and Prakasam District Collector A Thameem Ansariya participated in the Christmas celebrations held at the Collectorate here on Monday. Along with the Minister, Collector, Joint Collector R Gopal Krishna, and Mayor Gangada Sujata, they cut the cake during the event.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Bala Veeranjanya Swamy remarked that the teachings of Christ are practical and that Jesus, the merciful God, shed His blood for humanity. He added that Jesus represents love, affection, tolerance, and compassion. "The government headed by Naidu from 2014-19 constructed churches, and the current government remains committed to safeguarding the rights of

minorities," he noted. Collector Thameem Ansariya stated that the government had ordered the celebration of Christmas as part of a programme organised by the Minorities Department. The Collector extended his wishes to all Christians on the occasion. Mayor Gangada Sujata and Joint Collector R Gopal Krishna also spoke at the event. Later, prayers were offered by the pastors.



Harish attributes increased crime rate to Revanth's failure

PNS ■ MEDAK

Former minister T Harish Rao alleged a sharp rise in the crime rate during the Congress government's rule, citing a 41% increase in Hyderabad city alone. Speaking at the BRS party office in Medak, Harish Rao criticised Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for failing to maintain law and order, calling him a "failure as both Chief Minister and Home Minister." "Under Revanth's one-year administration, Hyderabad saw an increase of 10,000 cases, with crimes like murders, rapes, chain snatching, robberies, and land disputes surging. From 25,000 cases in a year during BRS rule, the city now reports 35,000 cases annually. This is clear evidence of his failure," Harish Rao stated, referencing a report recently issued by the Hyderabad Police Commissioner. He also pointed out that communal clashes in the State have risen, with nine such incidents reported in the last year alone. "There is no peace or safety under this administration. Citizens are living in fear, while Revanth's government is busy suppressing opposition

and filing false cases against critics," he remarked. Harish Rao accused the Congress government of breaking promises, including those made to farmers, self-help groups, and students. "This government failed to deliver on loan waivers, delayed Rythu Bandhu payments, and canceled welfare programs like Dalit Bandhu and Bathukamma sarees. Farmers and citizens feel betrayed," he said. He further challenged Revanth Reddy's claims about loan waivers. "Revanth talks about Rs 49,000 crore in waivers but has only released Rs 12,000 crore. Farmers are still burdened with debts, and suicides have increased," Harish Rao alleged, citing recent incidents of farmer suicides in Medak and other districts. Calling for accountability, Harish Rao demanded immediate resolution of pending issues, including Rythu Bandhu payments, bonus announcements for crops, and completion of farmer loan waivers. He warned that the BRS would organize statewide protests if the government continues to neglect its responsibilities.

3 kg of ganja seized, 4 held in Guntakal

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The police seized three kilograms of cannabis and arrested four drug peddlers in Guntakal. CI Manohar informed the media on Monday that, acting on the directions of SDOP A Srinivas, a police team led by Guntakal 1 Town CI conducted a raid at the railway station and arrested the four individuals for illegally transporting the cannabis in a car. The arrested peddlers were identified as Ganga Ramu, Rachakonda Venkata Sai, Chetragudi Ramakrishna, and Shikari



Durgesh. The accused had brought the ganja from Bhubaneswar by train and were transporting it to Bellary in Karnataka. The police seized the cannabis and the car used for transportation.

3 red sanders logs seized, one smuggler arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti Smuggling Task Force personnel seized three red sander logs and arrested one smuggler at Balapalli village in Annamayya district. DSP G Balareddy told the media here on Monday that a task force team led by Railway Koduru sub-control RI Krupanand and RSI K Allibasha conducted combing in the forest area. They noticed the accused moving suspiciously in the forest area. When he was questioned, he confessed to the crime. The task force team seized 3 red sander logs concealed there in the buses and arrested the smuggler.



Police raid cockfight den, 5 held, 8 roosters seized

PNS ■ NELLORE



The police conducted a raid at a cockfight gambling den at Batepadu village in Atmakur mandal on Monday. CI Gangadhar said that on a tip-off, a police team conducted a raid at the cockfight gambling den and arrested five cockfight gambling organizers. The police also seized 8 roosters and 19 motorcycles. Many punters fled the scene after

notifying the police. Meanwhile, a few weeks before the Sankranti festival, cockfight gambling began in the district. The gamblers organize the bloody gambling at the remote villages for which hundreds throng to stake on cockfight gambling. The police warned of stringent action against the cockfight gambling organizers if cockfights and poker gambling are organized in the division.

Notorious burglars arrested, ₹15 lakh booty recovered

PNS ■ PUTTAPARTHI

The police arrested three notorious burglars, including a woman, at a crossroads in Hindupur and recovered gold jewellery worth Rs 15.20 lakh. Informing the media on Monday, SP V Ratna said that the arrested burglars—S. Allabakshi, Sayad Nurullah, and T. Bhuvaneshwari—had committed several offences. The police recovered 197 grams of gold jewellery, valued at Rs 15.20 lakh. The accused were involved in multiple burglaries in the Hindupur 1 Town and 2 Town Rural police station limits. Their modus operandi involved observing locked houses during the day and breaking into them at night. Three other members of the gang are absconding, and a search is underway to arrest them, the SP added. The arrested burglars, who had become addicted to vices and liquor, resorted to thefts, burglaries, and other crimes to make quick money, the SP said. A special team led by Inspectors G. Abdullah Karim and Anjaneyulu was formed to nab the culprits. The team arrested the burglars at Auto Nagar crossroads in Hindupur and recovered the stolen jewellery.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Attack and aftermath

Christmas market attack in Germany reigniting polarising debates about immigration and national security

A recent attack on a Christmas market in Magdeburg, Germany, has reignited contentious debates about immigration and national security, with far-right groups seizing the moment to push for mass deportation of immigrants. The tragedy, which claimed the lives of five individuals and left dozens injured, has sent shockwaves across Germany, leading to both solemn remembrances and polarising political rhetoric. On the evening of December 20, a car driven by Taleb al-Abdulmohsen, a 50-year-old psychiatrist originally from Saudi Arabia, careened into a crowded Christmas market. The attack lasted three harrowing minutes, during which over 200 people were struck, leaving 40 with critical injuries. Authorities arrested al-Abdulmohsen at the scene, and he now faces multiple charges of murder, attempted murder, and grievous bodily harm. Despite living in Germany for nearly two decades, the suspect's motives remain unclear. Investigators have yet to establish any ideological or political motivations.



In the wake of the tragedy, far-right groups have amplified their calls for stricter immigration controls and mass deportations. On December 21, approximately 2,100 demonstrators gathered in Magdeburg to voice their outrage. Protesters, some wearing black balaclavas, carried banners with slogans like "Reimmigration Now" and "migration kills." The term "reimmigration" has become a rallying cry for far-right factions advocating the forced removal of immigrants and individuals deemed non-ethnically German. Chants such as "Anyone who doesn't love Germany should leave" and "We must take back our cities, our villages, and our homeland" echoed through the streets. The incident has deepened divisions within Germany over immigration and integration policies. Critics argue that far-right groups are exploiting the tragedy to stoke xenophobia and advance their anti-immigrant agenda. Meanwhile, local communities have sought to counter the rhetoric of hate with acts of solidarity. A silent vigil was held at Magdeburg's Cathedral Square on the same evening as the protest, with participants lighting candles in memory of the victims. German authorities have called for calm and emphasised the need for a thorough investigation. Chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed condolences to the victims' families and condemned both the attack and the use of such tragedies to spread divisive ideologies. The attack has reignited debates over Germany's approach to immigration and the balance between openness and security. While far-right voices call for stringent measures, advocates for multiculturalism warn against the dangers of collective punishment. This incident underscores the fragility of Europe's social cohesion in times of crisis. As Germany mourns, the challenge lies in addressing security concerns without succumbing to fear-driven policies that erode the values of inclusivity and tolerance that underpin the nation's democratic fabric.

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PICTALK



People dressed as Santa Claus during Christmas celebration, in Chennai

Navigating the intersection of technology, law and human rights

In a world increasingly shaped by digital technologies, the concept of 'digital arrest' has emerged as a controversial tool in cyberspace

The term 'Digital Arrest' often referred to as the restriction, monitoring, or apprehension of individuals through online mechanisms extends beyond the confines of traditional legal systems to encompass actions in cyberspace, such as freezing digital assets, blocking online accounts, or limiting access to certain platforms or limiting individual freedom in a virtual or online environment.



As technology permeates every aspect of life, the implications of digital arrest have grown even more significantly, offering both opportunities and challenges in governance, security, and individual rights in dismantling operations such as ransomware groups, hacking collectives, and online marketplaces for illegal activities. For instance, international efforts have led to the closure of dark web platforms such as Silk Road and the apprehension of their operators. Also, Cryptocurrencies and digital financial assets have brought about new forms of digital arrest, where govern-

ments or agencies freeze digital wallets associated with criminal activities thereby preventing the illicit flow of funds and supporting global financial regulations. While the concept is still evolving, digital arrest encompasses aspects of cybersecurity, legal frameworks, and the social consequences of living in a highly digitised world. At its core, this kind of arrest involves leveraging technology to enforce restrictions or punish actions taken in the digital sphere. Various government agencies, corporations, and even individual users can

participate in acts akin to digital arrest, raising questions about authority, power dynamics, and accountability in cyberspace. To balance security and individual rights in the digital era, taking measures such as establishing transparent and enforceable regulations that define the scope of digital arrest; overseeing the use of digital arrest mechanisms to ensure accountability and prevent misuse; developing universal guidelines for promoting fairness and consistency across jurisdictions and most importantly raising public awareness about digital rights and responsibi-



SHAINY SHARMA

ties can equip individuals with the knowledge and tools needed to engage effectively and securely in the digital world. As the digital world continues to evolve, so too will the methods of enforcement and resistance. New technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, may influence how digital arrests are carried out and challenged. Transparency in enforcement, the right to appeal, and global cooperation on ethical standards are essential steps in creating a just digital society. There is no denying that digital arrest represents the intersection of technology, law, and human rights in the digital age. While it offers tools for enforcing order and combating crime, it also poses risks to freedom and privacy. As society becomes increasingly reliant on digital infrastructure, the concept of digital arrest will likely continue to evolve, demanding thoughtful and ethical approaches to its implementation. (The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Macau: The glittering gem in Xi Jinping's China



SANTHOSH MATHEW

For the Chinese Communist Party, Macau is a beacon of controlled capitalism, showcasing the potential of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework

When Chinese President Xi Jinping landed in Macau, the world's gambling capital, the air was thick with anticipation. Macau, often dubbed the "Las Vegas of the East," is much more than a beacon of wealth and opulence. For Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it is a sparkling gem in the palm of China's vast and complex economic system—a model of the "One Country, Two Systems" framework that allows capitalist practices to thrive under the watchful eye of a socialist regime. Xi's visit underscored the stark contrasts between theory and practice in the CCP's governance and the lessons it offers not only for China's neighbours but for the world at large. Macau's significance lies in its unique identity. A former Portuguese colony, it returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1999 under the promise of autonomy. Today, its glitzy casinos, luxury hotels, and sprawling Special Economic Zone (SEZ) generate billions annually, contributing substantially to China's GDP. But while the dice roll and fortunes are made on Macau's gaming tables, the CCP's control remains unyielding.



The irony is palpable. The CCP, a party built on anti-capitalist ideology, oversees the largest SEZ in the world in Shanghai, nurtures capitalism in Hong Kong, and allows gambling—once condemned as a moral vice—to flourish in Macau. This duality reflects the pragmatic philosophy first espoused by Deng Xiaoping: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice." This approach has been pivotal in transforming China into the world's second-largest economy. Yet it also lays bare the contradictions at the heart of CCP rule. Xi Jinping's Macau visit was not merely ceremonial. It was a reaffirmation of the CCP's ability to adapt and wield capitalist tools while maintaining a tight grip on power. In Macau, Xi emphasised stability and loyalty to the central government. This aligns with his broader strategy of tightening control over regions that might

veer toward autonomy or dissent, as evidenced in Hong Kong. The "One Country, Two Systems" model—once lauded as a masterstroke of governance—has increasingly become a tool for consolidating Beijing's authority. Hong Kong's story is a cautionary tale. A vibrant hub of multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs), it has been at the forefront of economic globalisation. However, its recent struggles with political dissent and Beijing's heavy-handed responses reveal the limits of the "Two Systems" promise. The CCP's crackdown on pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong has sent a clear message: economic freedom does not translate to political autonomy. Macau, in contrast, has largely avoided such conflicts, partly due to its economic dependence on Beijing and the absence of a robust pro-democracy movement. Yet, this does not make Macau immune to the inherent tensions of "One Country, Two Systems." As Xi extolled Macau's success, he also warned against complacency and stressed the need for "long-term stability," a euphemism for unwavering allegiance to the CCP. For the CCP, Macau and Hong Kong are not just economic engines; they are experiments in controlled capitalism. The success of these regions bolsters the



MACAU'S SIGNIFICANCE LIES IN ITS UNIQUE IDENTITY. A FORMER PORTUGUESE COLONY, IT RETURNED TO CHINESE SOVEREIGNTY IN 1999 UNDER THE PROMISE OF AUTONOMY

party's narrative that socialism with Chinese characteristics can coexist with, and even benefit from capitalist mechanisms. The underlying contradictions are hard to ignore. The CCP's insistence on ideological purity clashes with its pragmatic embrace of market-driven policies. This duality is reflected in Xi's leadership, which combines Maoist centralisation with Dengist pragmatism. For Maoists, Naxalites, and urban Naxals in India, as well as other ideologues clinging to rigid dogmas, Macau stands as a testament to the power of adaptation. The CCP's ability to evolve, to reconcile its Marxist-Leninist roots with the demands of a modern, globalised economy, has been the cornerstone of China's rise. This is a far cry from the ideological purism that often paralyzes leftist movements elsewhere. India, too, can draw inspiration from Macau. As the world's largest democracy grapples with its development challenges, it must consider the role of SEZs, MNC headquarters, and even industries like gambling in driving economic growth. While gambling remains taboo in much of India, the success of Macau shows how regulated gaming can become a major revenue source. Similarly, expanding SEZs and creating hubs for MNCs can

transform India into a global economic powerhouse. At the heart of this debate is the question of whether ideology should dictate policy. The CCP's approach—that opinion is not an iron rod—offers a compelling case for pragmatism. Yet, the party's intolerance for dissent, as seen in its suppression of Mao's "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign, highlights the dangers of unchecked authority. The CCP's success in economic management is undeniable, but its human rights record and stifling of democratic aspirations serve as stark reminders of the cost of its iron-fisted rule. As Xi Jinping departed Macau, the world was left pondering the paradoxes of modern China. Under his leadership, the CCP has doubled down on centralisation, curbing dissent while championing economic liberalisation. Macau's glittering casinos and towering skyscrapers are symbols of this duality, where capitalism thrives under the shadow of socialism. For Xi, Macau is more than a gem in China's palm; it is a symbol of the CCP's ability to adapt and endure. Whether in the neon-lit streets of Macau or the corridors of power in Beijing, the CCP's experiment in controlled capitalism continues to shape the future of China—and the world. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONTROVERSY OVER AMBEDKAR

Madam—The row over the insult to Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar is neither factual nor logical since the home minister never insulted Dr Ambedkar in his speech by words or intention; rather, the fact is that no leader from the BJP has ever insulted Dr BR Ambedkar publicly or in Parliament or state assemblies, whereas Congress has a documented history of opposition to Ambedkar. It is no secret that the first PM, J.L. Nehru, was never on good terms with Dr Ambedkar, and MK Gandhi too had an uncomfortable equation with Ambedkar, while it may be argued that the twin Congress leaders (Gandhi and Nehru) were right when it comes to national interest and the movement of Indian independence to oppose Dr Ambedkar. Unfortunately, the national politics has reached the spot where Dr BR Ambedkar has been established as a godly figure, though he never participated in any struggle for Indian independence for which the Congress claims sole credit and abuses Bharatiya JanaSangh and BJP for their nonparticipation, never mentioning Ambedkar for his nonparticipation because that would be politically incorrect. Neither making Ambedkar the god nor considering the Constitution a heavenly document would be democratically or even constitutionally correct.

Jai Prakash Gupta | Ambala Cantt

APATHY AT ITS WORSE

Madam—This is our modern India. When a Jaipur gas tanker explosion left motor mechanic Radheyshyam Choudhary with 85 per cent burns. He bravely walked 600 meters while engulfed in flames, even calling his brother before succumbing to his injuries at SMS Hospital. Shockingly, by mid-morning, videos of the aftermath of the gas tanker explosion on the national highway were circulating online, with more than one showing a burning man struggling to stay on his feet as he scamped for help amid

Indian diaspora remits \$129 billion



In 2024, Indian expatriates achieved a historic milestone by sending \$129 billion in remittances. This amount not only surpasses India's vast defence budget and foreign direct investment but also exceeds the combined budgets of Pakistan and Bangladesh. This flow of funds symbolises not just economic support but also the hard work, dedication, and unwaver-

ing love of Indians for their homeland. Remittances have unlocked new avenues for development in rural and urban areas, fostering investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. It has provided stability to rural economies while empowering small and medium enterprises.

Indians living abroad establish their identity on foreign soil through resilience and courage. By dedicating a significant portion of their income to the development of their families and nation, they exemplify cultural values and familial commitment. This inflow strengthens India's foreign exchange reserves and energises local businesses. With strong policy measures, the government can further enhance this success. Remittances are not merely economic contributions; they represent the collective effort and national pride of Indians across the globe.

RK Jain | Barwani

the cacophony unleashed by the accident, but bystanders just filmed his suffering rather than offering aid. Pathetic. People believe in publicity rather than providing succour and relief. No wonder, actually; these days people do anything for a short time of fame. They will upload such videos to garner views and likes, maybe monetise. They keep refreshing their page to see like and comment status anxiously. It's more horrible that in the quest for social media, people have forgotten to be human! Shame on us. People want to know that this is the reality of our Sanskar. We have read many cases like these where precious lives could have been saved by the onlookers instead of taking useless videos. It's high time that YouTube and Instagram stop paying people for videos. Moreover, big vehicles like tankers and buses should be given a separate lane. It's there in all developed countries. It's important to react with improvements so that such foolish mishaps don't happen.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

ACTION AGAINST MINING MAFIA

Madam—The operation of the mining mafia is a well-known fact for a long time to both the governments of Rajasthan and Haryana, including the efforts put forth by the general public in complaining against such acts with no stoppage of the bringing down of the Aravalli hills. However, a common man hesitates to lodge an FIR, as he is aware of the consequences he will face with negligible police protection for a limited time and the creation of animosity with the mafia, resulting in a threat to his life and discouraging him from fighting with such a large force. Sending inspecting teams to the blasted site from both the government is purely an eyewash in the eyes of the public until concrete action is taken at a national level involving the NIA. A strategic policy with amendments to the existing mining rules is required to be pondered upon to make it pragmatic and not theoretical to be effective.

R S Narula | Patiala

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN SUCCESS THROUGH WORKPLACE INTELLIGENCE

It is the ability to adapt to the work environment through emotional and cognitive intelligence



SAKSHI SETHI

In today's dynamic work environment, workplace intelligence has become a cornerstone for achieving personal growth, team cohesion, and organisational excellence. Workplace intelligence refers to the ability of individuals and organisations to navigate, adapt, and thrive in the professional environment through effective understanding, communication and decision-making. It encompasses emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and cognitive intelligence blended together with technological advancements thereby creating a comprehensive approach towards addressing the root causes of toxicity and fostering a positive workplace culture. There is no denying that such intelligence not only plays a pivotal role in creating a healthy, harmonious and productive professional environment but also equips individuals and organisations with the tools to identify, mitigate and prevent toxic behaviours that can undermine morale, collaboration and overall success.

It is often believed that employees with high workplace intelligence can manage their tasks efficiently and adapt to new challenges with minimal disruption. By leveraging cognitive and emotional intelligence, they can prioritize effectively and maintain focus, leading to improved productivity. Also, social and emotional intelligence enables them to work harmoniously with others, promoting effective communication and minimizing conflicts. Strong teamwork followed by leaders with workplace intelligence inspires trust, and motivation and navigate through complex challenges with clarity and empathy. It even enhances creativity, innovation and the achievement of their collective goals and even reduces stress, boosts morale, and contributes to overall job satisfaction. In an era of rapid technological advancements and shifting market dynam-



ics, workplace intelligence equips employees and organisations with the resilience and adaptability needed to stay competitive. By fostering emotional and social intelligence, workplace intelligence helps identify and mitigate toxic behaviours, thereby ensuring a positive and respectful work environment.

By promoting training and development, organisations can invest in training programmes that focus on emotional intelligence, communication skills and technological proficiency. Open and constructive feedback mechanisms help the employee grow and refine their workplace intelligence over time. Emphasising diversity and inclusion helps individuals develop social intelligence by interacting with people from different backgrounds and perspectives. Encouraging continuous learning and adaptability ensures that employees remain agile and open to new ideas and methods. Remember, a workforce with high workplace intelligence is more likely to generate creative solutions and drive innovation. Employees are more likely to stay in organisations where they feel valued, supported, and empowered. Today, companies such as Heineken, Cooley, Cruise Automation, Urban Company, Amazon, Chipotle and many more are known for fostering workplace intelligence to attract top talent and build trust with stakeholders.

By investing in the development of workplace intelligence, organisations can create environments that promote collaboration, innovation, and sustainable success, ensuring they remain agile and competitive in an ever-evolving world. As organisations continue to navigate the complexities of globalisation and digital transformation, the importance of workplace intelligence will only grow. Artificial intelligence, remote work and diverse teams are shaping new paradigms that demand a more nuanced understanding of interpersonal and technological dynamics but organisations that invest in fostering workplace intelligence will gain a competitive edge, as their employees will be better equipped to adapt, innovate, and lead in an ever-changing world.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

A roadmap for financial sustainability of India Post



SUBHASH CHANDRA AGARWAL

India Post is at a crossroads. As private courier services continue to expand their market share with speed and convenience, it must adapt to stay competitive



India Post, a vital lifeline in connecting citizens across the country, needs to undergo a comprehensive review of its services. This reform should focus on introducing innovation, ensuring greater revenue generation for the Department of Posts (DoP), and maintaining affordability for the public. As private courier services continue to gain traction due to their convenience and efficiency, India Post must adapt to remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing environment.

Rationalising Postal Tariffs and Eliminating GST on Select Services

The current structure of postal services includes highly subsidised offerings, such as postcards priced as low as 50 paise. While such subsidies aim to make communication accessible, they are often exploited. For instance, during Lok Sabha elections in 2019, political parties used postcards extensively, resulting in significant costs to the public exchequer. Similarly, postcards are frequently misused for commercial purposes, such as reminders by chit-fund companies. These subsidised services, rarely used by the common man, burden taxpayers without corresponding benefits.

To address this, printed or rubber-stamped postcards should be discontinued unless they are sponsored. The introduction of sponsored Meghdoot postcards priced at Re1 and printed postcards priced at Rs10 could ensure a sustainable revenue model. Similarly, the tariff for registered newspapers could be rationalised to Rs1, reflecting the increased cost of inputs for small newspaper production.

Additionally, while normal postal services are exempt from GST, applying GST on premium services like Speed Post is counterproductive. It results in a redundant transfer of funds between government departments. Rationalising tariffs for Speed Post to Rs 20 or Rs 30 per 50-gram weight slabs and aligning other domestic and international postal tariffs in multiples of Rs 10 would streamline the system and reduce inefficiencies. International postal rates could follow a consistent structure, with uniform tariff increases per weight slab for air and sur-

face mail. **Generating Revenue Through Sponsored Postal Stamps**

To boost revenue, the DoP should introduce sponsored postal stamps. These stamps, carrying advertisements or approved messages, could be issued in bulk to sponsors at a fixed charge per printed stamp. This initiative could attract businesses, encouraging them to utilise postal services over private courier companies.

Additionally, a new series of definitive postal stamps and stationery could be launched annually on the first day of the financial year. These stamps should maintain consistent color schemes for specific denominations while showcasing new designs based on a selected theme. Commemorative stamps, previously issued in arbitrary denominations like Rs 12 and Rs 41, should be standardised to denominations in multiples of Rs 10. Furthermore, the practice of printing stamps of different denominations on the same sheet, except for miniature sheets, should be discontinued as it complicates usage. Miniature sheets, being collectible items, should be priced higher than the face value of the stamps they contain. Such measures could not only enhance revenue through philately but also rekindle public interest in postal services.

Replacing "My-Stamp" with Sponsored Stamps

The "My-Stamp" initiative, which allows individuals to print personal images on postage stamps, has been misused. Reports indicate instances of notorious individuals obtaining stamps with their photos, tarnishing the program's credibility. Since no robust mechanism exists to screen applicants' backgrounds, the programme is susceptible to abuse. Discontinuing the "My-Stamp" concept in favor of sponsored stamps could address this issue. Sponsored stamps would

not only ensure better regulation but also offer a significant revenue stream.

Enhancing Consumer Convenience with Sticker Receipts

Currently, receipts issued by the Postal Department include a sticker only on the portion retained by the Department, leaving the consumer without one. Adding stickers to consumer receipts would eliminate the need for gum to paste them onto dispatch registers or documents. This small change could save public resources and improve the user experience, especially for organisations that rely heavily on postal services.

Introducing RTI Stamps and Rationalising Postal Orders

Postal orders in low denominations such as Rs 1, Rs 2, Rs 5, and Rs 7 were discontinued due to high handling costs. For example, the handling cost of a postal order in 2011-12 was Rs 37.45, far exceeding its value. To minimise losses, higher denominations like Rs 100, Rs 200, and Rs 500 could be introduced. Furthermore, RTI-specific stamps in denominations of Rs 2, Rs 10, and Rs 50 could replace postal orders for fees under the RTI Act, streamlining the payment process. This approach aligns with recommendations from the Central Information Commission and addresses the issue of unfeasible copying charges below Rs10 due to the absence of lower-denomination postal orders.

Managing Inoperative and Matured Accounts

Unclaimed deposits in post office accounts often remain unnoticed due to deceased account holders failing to inform legal heirs. This creates a risk of fraud, as unscrupulous individuals may attempt to claim such funds in collusion with postal employees. To mitigate this risk, the Postal Department should send registered letters to account holders who have not operated

their accounts or claimed matured deposits for over three years. If no response is received within three months, the funds should be frozen in fixed accounts and made accessible only after rigorous verification. Publishing details of such accounts could help legal heirs claim their rightful amounts, subject to stringent scrutiny. The introduction of successive nominations, as practiced by LIC of India, would further safeguard deposits and simplify inheritance processes.

Expanding Postal Services Through Bank Counters

The closure of post offices in key commercial areas, such as Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi, has caused inconvenience for businesses that rely on Registered and Speed Post services. With banks increasingly adopting government savings schemes, their branches could be utilised for booking postal services. Offering banks a nominal commission for hosting these services would not only enhance accessibility but also integrate postal and banking ecosystems more effectively.

Revamping the Postal Ecosystem for Sustainability

India Post's transformation should emphasise efficiency, innovation, and customer-centricity. Rationalising tariffs, eliminating wasteful subsidies, and leveraging sponsored services are crucial steps toward financial sustainability. Additionally, addressing operational inefficiencies and improving service delivery will help India Post reclaim its position as a trusted and competitive communication medium.

By embracing these changes, India Post can not only secure its financial future but also continue serving as a cornerstone of India's communication network.

(The writer is a Guinness World Record holder and RTI Consultant; views are personal)



THE 'MY-STAMP' INITIATIVE, WHICH ALLOWS INDIVIDUALS TO PRINT PERSONAL IMAGES ON POSTAGE STAMPS, HAS BEEN MISUSED. REPORTS INDICATE INSTANCES OF NOTORIOUS INDIVIDUALS OBTAINING STAMPS WITH THEIR PHOTOS, TARNISHING THE PROGRAM'S CREDIBILITY

India's math geniuses shine bright in international math competition 2024

India, a nation with a rich legacy of mathematical brilliance, added another feather to its cap by triumphing at the UCMAS International Competition 2024

India has long been a land of great mathematicians, from Aryabhata to Ramanujan to Bhaskara, each leaving an indelible mark on the world with their mathematical ingenuity. Today, India continues to excel in the field, as evidenced by its stellar performance at the Universal Concept of Mental Arithmetic System (UCMAS) International Competition 2024 in New Delhi, where the country bagged both the highest individual and team trophies.

The competition, the world's largest event for Abacus and Mental Arithmetic, brought together over 6,000 students from nearly 30 countries. Participants faced the challenge of solving 200 arithmetic questions in just eight min-



SARIKA JHA

utes, relying solely on the Abacus or mental math techniques—a feat that truly felt like magic. For the second time, the World's Largest Abacus & Mental Arithmetic Event- UCMAS International Competition 2024 was held in India at the Delhi University Multipurpose Hall. Students from across the world competed with each other showcasing their men-

tal prowess in solving a very large number of mathematics problems in the quickest possible time to win the awards. This landmark event reaffirms its global significance in nurturing young minds in mathematics.

The competition aimed at promoting brain development, enhancing cognitive skills, and demonstrating the incredible abilities students can achieve through Abacus and Mental Arithmetic. Presenting the trophies to top performers, former Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi rightly said, "Smart brain produces smart solutions for every problem and prosperity is moving forward only when we have smart brains." Commending the efforts of the young participants, Lekhi emphasised

the importance of such initiatives and said, "UCMAS is enhancing cognitive skills and academic excellence." The blend of the ancient tool of the Abacus with modern teaching methodologies creates a unique educational experience.

Over 3 million children across the world have benefited from the Abacus and Mental Arithmetic curriculum, which encourages creativity, visualisation, and focus while developing strong arithmetic abilities. In today's competitive academic environment, maintaining mental wellbeing has become an uphill battle for many children. The relentless pressure to excel often leads to stress, anxiety, and even depression. In some heartbreaking cases,



it drives students to take extreme steps, as seen in recent reports from Rajasthan's Kota district—a hub for competitive exam preparations. However, innovative educational programmes like the Abacus and Mental Arithmetic course are emerging as a ray of hope, helping children manage stress while fostering mental stability and

self-confidence. According to Dr Snehal Karia, CEO of UCMAS India, the course is designed to enhance children's mental stability by boosting their concentration, focus, and memory. It equips them with the confidence to understand and embrace their individuality, effectively reducing anxiety and depression. The Abacus & Mental Arithmetic program's key lies in its structured approach to building self-assurance through innovative teaching methods.

The encouragement and skills imparted during the training play a pivotal role in shaping a child's bright future. The program comprises eight levels, each lasting three to four months. Children attend weekly classes guided by

trained instructors, working through specially designed books and activities. Unlike conventional education, the course serves as a supplementary learning system to enhance cognitive abilities. There is an urgent need to complement the school's curriculum by focusing on brain development. The course improves memory, sharpness, and alertness.

As a result, students perform better academically and approach challenges with greater confidence. In a world where competition often overshadows creativity and self-worth, programs like Abacus & Mental Arithmetic provide children with the tools they need to thrive—mentally, emotionally, and academically. Alexan Wong, CEO of

UCMAS International Corporation, said, "The competition not only tests their skills but also serves as a platform to demonstrate their creativity, visual memory, and focus—all of which will shape their future success." The competition itself is a testament to the transformative power of such programs, where students not only test their math skills but also demonstrate the broader cognitive benefits that shape their academic and personal growth.

Ultimately, the world needs such initiatives to nurture well-rounded individuals who are prepared to face the challenges of the future with confidence and creativity. (The author is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal)

TABU RECALLS GETTING INDIAN FOOD ON SETS OF DUNE: PROPHECY

Bollywood star Tabu, who plays the role of Sister Francesca in the final two episodes of the series *Dune: Prophecy*, shared that she got her cast members to taste Indian food on the sets. The actress said that working on *Dune: Prophecy*, which is inspired by *Sisterhood of Dune* by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson is set 10,000 years before the events of *Dune*, had many firsts including working with people who I never met before. The series follows two Harkonnen sisters as they combat forces threatening humankind's future while establishing what will become the Bene Gesserit order, reports Variety. Alison Schapker serves as showrunner and executive producer, with Diane Ademu-John co-developing the series and serving as executive producer.

Anna Foerster executive produced and directed multiple episodes. "I just got an email one day from my agents and my managers telling me that Alison and Anna were the showrunners and the directors on the show wanted to cast me for this particular role, whose international credits include Mira Nair's *The Namesake*, *A Suitable Boy* and Ang Lee's *Life of Pi*," said Tabu. The actress first reviewed two scenes from the script and then got to a Zoom meeting the following day where the creative team detailed her character's involvement in the final two episodes. "I just loved the character and the potential of this character. I knew that this is my world and this I would enjoy doing." Talking about the many firsts with the

project, which has been shot in Budapest, Tabu said: "I think it's the first time ever in my career, or at least in the past 20 years or so, that I was working with people who I never met before, who have never worked with before, (in) a place that I've never been to before." Tabu also brought flavours of India to the set. "I was getting Indian food on set and feeding Josh and everyone. I had this restaurant in Budapest, they would send me lunch, dinner, everything to set. And we would sit outside our trailers, and eat," Tabu said. "And apart from that, I got myself and when I come, India comes and my home comes and my work in India comes with me. So it's the whole package." Meanwhile, for Tabu, building the character came with specific considerations.

"I was conscious of the world that Francesca belongs to. I wanted her to feel like she belongs to the world of the Bene Gesserit, but because she has such a strong personality and strong story of her own, which is not connected to the others and the other characters, it was interesting to straddle both these things," Tabu said. "It's a very, very strong premise for me to build a character on, but also, the interesting part was because it was a romantic association that I was supposed to have with the Emperor. It gave this character its own space and its own potency to explore." "Also wearing that costume, wearing that veil, just being different and looking different from how I have looked. I have never had this. It is such a distinct look," she added.



JAIDEEP AHLAWAT RETURNS IN PAATAL LOK SEASON 2

The crime-thriller series *Paatal Lok* is set to return with its second season on January 17 on OTT. The series, which stars Jaideep Ahlawat, Ishwak Singh and Gul Panag, delves deep into the underbelly of Indian society. The new season also sees the entry of new characters essayed by Tillotama Shome, Nagesh Kukunoor and Jahnu Barua. Sudip Sharma, creator and showrunner of the series, said in a statement, "I am thrilled to continue our long-standing association with Prime Video and present the much-awaited second season of *Paatal Lok*, a series which has been highly appreciated by viewers and has truly redefined the entertainment landscape. The overwhelming response to the first season filled me with immense gratitude



and inspired me to craft stories that are raw, relatable, and intensely gripping." He further mentioned, "The streaming service also acted as a perfect medium to bring out unique storytelling to life, offering our team a platform to expose and expand our horizons in terms of visual representation. Collaborating with an

exceptional team has been a privilege and together we've elevated this drama to new heights, amplifying the themes of crime, mystery and suspense." The show is directed by Avinash Arun Dhaware and the new season plunges lead character of Hathi Ram Chaudhary (played by Jaideep Ahlawat) and his team into an uncharted territory, a perilous 'fresh hell' that will test them like never before. Created and executive produced by Sudip Sharma, *Paatal Lok* season 2 is a Clean Slate Filmz Production in association with Eunoia Films LLP. The show is set to drop on Prime Video on January 17.

Fateh promises a cybercrime action saga like no other

With Sonu Sood's *Fateh* explosive action meets the digital battlefield, where he takes the fight to cybercriminals with unrelenting intensity. The trailer for this international action extravaganza has dropped, delivering a pulse-pounding glimpse into a world under siege. Directed by Sonu Sood in his debut behind the camera, this high-octane thriller promises to catapult Bollywood action to international heights. Set against the backdrop of cybercrime, *Fateh* dives into the shadows of the digital age, where the stakes are as high as the action is relentless. Sonu Sood stars as an ex-special ops officer with a lethal skill set, a dark past and a mission to dismantle a sprawling network of digital terror. The trailer teases a gripping narrative where one missing woman becomes the spark for an all-out war—a battle fought with fists, firepower and unyielding resolve. With an unmissable swagger and time-like precision, Sood's character is armed

and dangerous—ready to debug the corrupt and execute a system wipe of the criminals threatening innocent lives. The stellar cast, featuring Jacqueline Fernandez, Vijay Raaz and Naseeruddin Shah adding layers to this adrenaline-fueled extravaganza. Sonu Sood says, "The excitement for *Fateh* has been incredibly humbling. This film is more than my directorial debut—it's a reflection of a world we're all connected to but rarely understand. I wanted to bring that pulse-pounding reality to life with raw action that grips you and keeps you on the edge of your seat. *Fateh* is a battle cry for everyone who has faced these invisible threats—and for those who stand up and fight back." Produced by Sonali Sood of Shakti Sagar Productions and Umesh KR Bansal of Zee Studios and co-produced by Ajay Dhama, *Fateh* a gripping action tale of courage, resilience and the fight against cybercrime is slated to release on January 10, 2025.

Sachet and Parampara become parents to a healthy baby boy

Singers and music composers Sachet-Parampara have welcomed their first bundle of joy, a baby boy. The couple posted a reel video featuring a video montage on a collaborative post on Instagram to make the announcement. The video montage showed their baby's tiny hands and feet. The clip ended with "The heart of Sachet-Parampara has arrived! It's a Boy!" For the background, the couple used their song *Maiyya* from *Do Patti* starring Kriti Sanon and Kajol. The couple captioned the post: "With the blessings of Mahadev, we are overjoyed

to announce the arrival of our precious baby boy. We seek your blessings and good wishes in this beautiful time Namah: Parvati Pataye har har mahadev. Jai Mata Di." Sachet-Parampara are known for their work in Hindi films including *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*, *Bhoomi*, *Yamla Pagla Deewana: Phir Se*, *Batti Gul Meter Chalu*, *Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas*, *Kabir Singh*, *Tanhaji* and *Jersey*. They started their journey together in singing with *Subah Ki Train* picturised on Akshay Kumar and Bhumi Pednekar from the 2017 film *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*, a comedy drama directed by Shree Narayan Singh.



Neena Gupta's Hindi Vindi set to premiere on Feb 27, 2025

Hindi Vindi, the hotly awaited Australian Bollywood feature film starring Neena Gupta, Mihir Ahuja, and Australian music icon Guy Sebastian in his acting debut, is poised to captivate audiences when it premieres in cinemas on February 27, 2025 through The Backlot Films. With a deeply moving narrative that explores themes of identity, family, and the universal language of music, *Hindi Vindi* not only marks a milestone for Australian and Indian cinema, but also stands as one of the first feature films setting the precedent for the recently signed India-Australia Co-Production Treaty. Created by 24Six Films in association with Sydney based Executive Production Company Drishya Sharma Productions, *Hindi Vindi* tells the story of Kabir (played by rising Bollywood star Mihir Ahuja), a teenage musician on a journey of self-discovery as he races against time to create a song in a language he doesn't speak. Kabir is conflicted about his cultural identity and struggles with a language barrier when his Indian grandmother - portrayed by legendary Indian actor/filmmaker Neena Gupta - comes to live with him in Sydney. The film has development support from Screen Australia. The film's music is set to be a defining feature of the movie, blending a mix of contemporary and classical tunes to create a rich auditory experience. Javed-Mohsin and Guy Sebastian himself, have composed soundtracks that reflects the emotions and themes central to the story. A 24Six Films production, *Hindi Vindi* was shot on location across Sydney, Australia and is directed by Ali Sayed and written by Jay Sharma with Sayed. Produced by Aniket Deshkar, Jay Sharma, Anil Sharma and Sunny Shah (SEM Films Mumbai), *Hindi Vindi* will release through The Backlot Films on February 27, 2025.

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

CROSSWORD

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Yesterdays solution

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

ACROSS

- A curved wooden thing thrown by an Australian Aboriginal
- The steps on a ladder
- Inexpensive
- Manufactured
- Say again
- Thief
- Ripped
- The skin on top of the head
- Fortunate
- Family members who lived long ago

DOWN

- Possessed
- A tall pole on a yacht
- More wealthy
- A female relation
- Comments
- Things made of kiln-baked clay
- Humans
- You remember and think with this body organ
- Happen
- Apartment

SOLUTION

P	R	A	O	E	D			
A	P	R	I	L	I			
U	G	A	T	O	A			
A	F	R	I	C	A			
C	E	H	S					
H	E	L	D	B	O	U	G	H
U	A	L	U	A				
T	A	S	T	E	S	M	A	L
E	S	A	E	R				
C	O	N	F	U	S	E	D	

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

'I've always been hungry for good roles and *Kisko Tha Pata* offered just that'

TEJAL SINHA
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Ashnoor Kaur's journey from a child artist to a leading lady in the entertainment industry is a testament to her immense talent, unwavering dedication, and passion for her craft. Known for her captivating performances and infectious energy, she has become a beloved figure in the hearts of audiences across the country. In this exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Kaur opens up about her remarkable rise to fame, the challenges she's overcome and the experiences that have shaped her career. With her latest project, *Kisko Tha Pata*, set to release this Christmas, we take a closer look at the journey of this rising star whose future in the industry looks brighter than ever.

Reflecting on her career, she describes her journey as "incredible" but acknowledges the ups and downs that have come with it. "There have been so many challenges and experiences that have only made me grow, not just as a performer but also as a person," she says thoughtfully. Growing up on sets, being surrounded by a vibrant and dynamic work environment, has deeply shaped her both professionally and personally. "It's really impacted the kind of person I am today," she admits.

When asked about her latest project *Kisko Tha Pata*, which she worked on while still in her second year of college, Ashnoor recalls how it came her way during a break from a long-term project. "It was a month-long schedule and I remember getting a call to meet the team," the *Jhansi Ki Rani* fame says. The narrative, centered around the character Shreya, drew her in immediately. Shreya's journey of finding love, facing dilemmas and navigating her career struck a chord with Ashnoor. "I've always been hungry for good roles and this one offered just that—an engaging storyline, a relatable character and the opportunity to showcase different facets of her journey."

Playing Shreya was an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for her. "It was a lovely experience," she shares. The *Bade Achhe Lagte Hain* actress recalls how she joined the project at the last minute, yet managed to immerse herself deeply in the role, thanks to her close collaboration with Ratnaa Sinha, the director. Shreya, Ashnoor explains, is a bubbly, relatable character—"the girl next door" who yearns for true love but faces challenges along the way. She embarks on a journey of self-discovery and career growth, balancing her love life with her passion for bikes and technology. "She develops her own apps, and there's a whole track in the story revolving around that," she explains.

There were plenty of memorable moments from the shoot that Kaur cherishes. "I remember a horse-riding sequence where the horse just wouldn't stay steady! It was quite a challenge," she laughs. There were also serene moments, like when she filmed a drone shot in the forest, capturing the calmness of nature. "We had some downtime there, just spending time on our own, which was very refreshing," the *Patiala Babes* star recalls. The team also shot at Raipur's Marine Drive, where Ashnoor enjoyed a bike ride with her co-star, Akshay, adding a personal touch to the shoot. "We bonded a lot during the outdoor shoots, staying in the same hotel, it felt like a family," she

reflects.

The camaraderie with her co-stars, Akshay and Aadil, was another highlight for Ashnoor. She describes Akshay as a beautiful human being with great talent, while Aadil took a little time to break the ice with. "Once we did, it was like we were buddies. We shared a very close bond, and the three of us had a blast shooting together," she shares with a smile.

The Pari Hun Main star describes the project as a perfect family entertainer, ideal for a holiday watch. "It's a full entertainment package, with drama, romance, action—everything," she says. The story is relatable, "especially for today's youth," and Ashnoor believes the audience will connect with the characters and their journeys. The movie is set to release around Christmas, making it an excellent choice for families to enjoy together.

When asked about the project releasing directly on TV, well, she is enthusiastic. "I think it's great because TV has such a wide reach. It's an excellent medium to connect with more people and bring our work to a larger audience," she says.

One of the most iconic roles Ashnoor has played is in *Saath Nibhana Saathiya*, where she portrayed a young girl called Panna. Offlate, a scene from the show where she runs behind Gopi and Ahem's car shouting "Gopi Ben..." has been all over on social media. Ashnoor reflects on it with a sense of amusement. "When I first did it, no one knew how big it would get. It's funny to see how people still enjoy it every few months. It's become such a trend," she chuckles.

When it comes to choosing her roles, she is particular about the content. "Content is king today. There's more supply of content than demand, so it's important to choose projects wisely," she explains. She looks for roles that challenge her as an actor, "Something that pushes me to perform, something tricky and enjoyable," she says. Ashnoor is passionate about working with a good team, believing that the environment on set plays a significant role in shaping her craft and her understanding of the project.

Looking ahead, Ashnoor expresses interest in exploring genres she has yet to dive into. "I'd love to do a fantasy action drama, like something with a Disney setting. I think it would be really fun and challenging," she says eagerly.

As for what's next, Ashnoor is busy with multiple projects. "I'm currently working on a show, and there's another OTT project in the pipeline that will be out next year, possibly in May," she shares. While she can't reveal much about it yet, she is excited for what the future holds. "There's a lot more to come, and I'm looking forward to what's next," she concludes, her enthusiasm for her craft shining through.

Ashnoor Kaur's journey continues to inspire fans and her dedication to her craft promises an exciting future ahead.



Known for her infectious energy and captivating performances, Ashnoor Kaur is all set to woo the audience yet again with her upcoming project *Kisko Tha Pata*. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, she speaks about her remarkable journey in the entertainment industry, her experiences working on her latest project and more

ROLE OF DEI IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is a cornerstone for elevating performance in the corporate world. And now, its strategic relevance for the higher education ecosystem is also becoming apparent by the day. Best Colleges survey revealed that 75% of students supported efforts to promote DEI which testify to the appeal of the philosophy among learners. DEI leadership brings together diversified groups, creates equal opportunities and empowers stakeholders to achieve success milestones. Including DEI principles in the operating philosophy of universities also catalyses creativity, innovation and shared learning among students. With such multifaceted benefits on offer, hiring DEI leaders is becoming the first choice of higher education institutes across the globe. If you too are planning for DEI leadership then the guidelines mentioned below can come in handy for the hiring process:



Make DEI priority: Just like a compelling vision statement, educational institutions must underscore DEI as one of their strategic guiding principle of operations. The recruitment campaigns, outreach and communication must highlight the University's DEI policy and its intent to hire inclusive leaders from across cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. This strategy will attract potential candidates from diversified backgrounds and encourage them to apply for leadership positions in institutes that follow DEI as one of the core tenets of their operating philosophy.

Train selection teams: DEI hiring is significantly different from conventional hiring, mandating the need for trained professionals to conduct the selection process. Selection committees trained for hiring DEI leadership must undergo rigorous training to avoid any implicit bias during the selection process. Further, the selection team must be fully aware of DEI hiring priorities and should have representation from across socio-economic, gender, ethnic and racial denominations. Experts suggest that universities should encourage stakeholders such as parents, policymakers and student committee representatives to observe the selection process and share their opinions on how to make the hiring process more effective.

Hire non-traditional candidates: To truly champion DEI, universities can opt to hire leaders from other professional backgrounds or industries. This unconventional approach can help by bringing a completely new perspective to the table. For example, leadership recruitment from the consultancy space can help education institutes reinvestigate their research, innovation and Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). Universities can also hire former bureaucrats, administrators, or policymakers for leadership positions to strengthen their global accreditation, benchmarking compliance and administrative efficiency while boosting their DEI credentials significantly.

Make data-based decisions: Technology can be a great enabler for effectively implementing DEI policy while hiring for leadership positions in higher education. Especially while filtering candidates in preliminary rounds of selection, insights offered by data can be of immense use. AI and ML can be used to get into the depths of the cultural backgrounds, ethnic orientations, and socio-economic conditions of potential candidates. This information can be shared with the selection committee so that the right candidates representing the true values and ethos of DEI pass through.

Collect and integrate feedback: Not only collecting but also integrating feedback on the hiring process is critically important for improving DEI integration in the leadership selection process. Universities should segment the feedback into different categories and then extract the actionable information to aid the decision-making process. It's important to collect the responses from every interviewed candidate as the information can play a crucial role in optimising the selection process in the future. The feedback from the students, employees and other stakeholders should also be integrated to refine DEI goals and make them one of the KPIs of the university.

(The author, Kalpesh Banker, is a Managing Partner at EduShine Search Partners.)

GROOVING TO THE BEATS OF 2024

2024 HAS BEEN A YEAR FULL OF VIBRANT AND GROOVY TRACKS THAT HAVE SET THE TONE FOR PARTIES, CELEBRATIONS, AND DANCE FLOORS AROUND THE WORLD. FROM INFECTIOUS BEATS TO CATCHY RHYTHMS, THIS YEAR'S MUSIC SCENE HAS DELIVERED A PERFECT BLEND OF HIGH-ENERGY DANCE NUMBERS AND FEEL-GOOD ANTHEMS.



Nain Matakka

Nain Matakka is a vibrant and electrifying dance number that brings together the infectious energy of Varun Dhawan and the elegance of Keerthy Suresh. The song is characterized by its peppy beats, catchy lyrics, and a rhythmic composition that blends traditional Indian sounds with modern musical elements. Its high-octane tempo and foot-tapping rhythm make it a perfect addition to festive playlists, ensuring it resonates with audiences as both a cinematic highlight and a dancefloor favorite.

Aaj Ki Raat

Aaj Ki Raat, featuring Tamannaah Bhatia, is a sizzling and vibrant track



that radiates energy and glamour. The song's infectious beats, pulsating rhythm and modern composition make it a quintessential dance number, perfect for high-energy party scenes. Tamannaah's captivating screen presence and electrifying dance moves add an extra layer of charm and dynamism to the song, making it a visual delight. The track's irresistible vibe ensures it remains a favorite for music lovers and dance enthusiasts alike.

Tauba Tauba



Vicky Kaushal's effortless charm and dynamic dance moves combined with Karan Aujla's composition, brings a vibrant energy to the visuals, making the track an engaging watch. The composition combines modern beats with desi influences, creating a soundscape that is both contemporary and rooted in fun, youthful exuberance. With its lively choreography and infectious rhythm, *Tauba Tauba* is a track that leaves listeners humming along and tapping their feet, adding an undeniable spark to any playlist.

Aayi Nai



Aayi Nai from *Stree 2*'s eerie melody, paired with pulsating beats, creates an atmosphere of suspense and intrigue while retaining a quirky, playful undertone that matches the spirit of the *Stree* franchise. Its lyrics cleverly intertwine humor and fear, reflecting the movie's signature blend of horror and comedy. The haunting visuals and sharp choreography add depth to the track, making it both a narrative-driven piece and

a standalone highlight. *Aayi Nai* serves as a chilling anthem for the film, leaving audiences captivated and eager to unravel the mystery that it hints at.

Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya



Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya, featuring Kriti Sanon and Shahid Kapoor, is not just a romantic ballad but a track that effortlessly makes us groove with its infectious rhythm and heartfelt lyrics. The playful yet emotional lyrics capture the complexity of love, and the subtle groove in the music mirrors that emotional tug, creating a magnetic energy. Kriti and Shahid's chemistry adds a layer of warmth to the visuals, as their effortless movements sync with the track's rhythm, making it visually captivating. It's a perfect combination of romance, rhythm, and energy, making *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya* a track that's bound to get stuck in your head and on your feet.

Naina

Naina from *Crew* is a captivating dance number that expertly blends



emotional depth with an infectious rhythm. Despite its introspective lyrics, the song's music is designed to get people on their feet, with a balance of energetic percussion and catchy melodies that make it ideal for dance floors. The rhythmic energy and fluid dance moves in the visuals add to the track's dynamic appeal, showcasing its versatility as both a reflective and celebratory anthem. *Naina* strikes a unique balance, offering a compelling mix of emotional expression and irresistible energy that makes it a dance number with an emotional twist.

What Jhumka

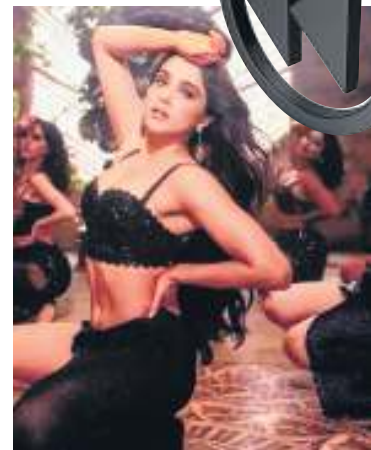
What Jhumka from *Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani* is an exuberant dance number that effortlessly blends traditional Indian sounds with modern beats, making it a perfect track for the dance floor. The catchy chorus and whimsical lyrics, centered around the



charm of the jhumka, add a fun and cheeky element to the track, while the energetic choreography and vibrant visuals elevate its celebratory mood. With a perfect mix of foot-tapping beats, colorful visuals and spirited dance moves, *What Jhumka* is designed to get everyone up and dancing, making it the ultimate party anthem. Its fusion of old-world charm with contemporary music gives the song a timeless appeal, ensuring that it will have audiences swaying to its rhythm.

Taras

Taras from *Munjya*, featuring Sharvari, is an exhilarating dance number that effortlessly combines rhythm, energy and emotion. While the song conveys a sense of longing through its lyrics, the upbeat, rhythmic music gives it an energetic and playful twist, making it ideal for a dance floor. Sharvari's dynamic performance and smooth choreography bring the track



to life, blending grace with energy, and creating a visually captivating experience. The song's upbeat tempo, catchy hooks, and high-spirited vibe make *Taras* a standout dance number, one that merges emotional expression with irresistible rhythm, ensuring it becomes a crowd favorite.

Jimmy Jimmy



Jimmy Jimmy's playful and peppy vibe makes it impossible to resist moving to its groove. Jacqueline Fernandez's charismatic presence and impeccable dance moves elevate the track, bringing an added layer of charm and excitement.



Shami not fully fit yet, ruled out of remaining two Tests in Australia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India pacer Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of the last two Tests against Australia as he is yet to regain full fitness, the BCCI said on Monday. Shami, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final in November, 2023, made a comeback from his right heel surgery during Bengal's Ranji Trophy match against Madhya Pradesh last month. With calls for his selection growing, Shami played all nine games for Bengal in the subsequent Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy. He is also part of Bengal's squad for the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy but did not play the opening game on Saturday against Delhi. His fitness has been a subject of intense debate and

speculation, so much so that India skipper Rohit Sharma had asked the physios at the National Cricket Academy to provide clarity on the matter following the Brisbane Test. Shami had developed swelling in his knees while playing the SMAT, and the clarification in that regard finally came on Monday. "Based on the current medical assessment, the BCCI Medical Team has determined that his knee requires more time for controlled exposure to bowling loads. Consequently, he has not been deemed fit for consideration for the remaining two Tests of the Harmanpreet Kaur-led team," said the BCCI in a release. "Shami will continue to undergo targeted strength and conditioning work under the guidance of the medical staff at BCCI's Centre of Excellence



and build his bowling loads needed to meet the demands of the longest format of the game. His participation in the Vijay Hazare Trophy will depend on the progress of his knee." The medical team said the veteran fast bowler has fully recovered from the heel injury that kept him out of action after the ODI World Cup. "The BCCI Medical Team at the Centre of Excellence has been working closely with Indian fast bowler Mohammed Shami on his recovery and rehabilitation after his right heel surgery. Shami has completely recovered from this heel problem. However, his left knee has exhibited minor swelling due to increased joint loading from his bowling workload.

The swelling is on the expected lines, owing to the increased bowling after a prolonged period," the BCCI said. Shami bowled 43 overs in his comeback game in the Ranji Trophy. Following that, he played in all nine games of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT), where he also "engaged in additional bowling sessions on the sidelines to build his bowling volume in order to get ready for the Test matches." The 34-year-old has taken 229 wickets in 64 Tests, 195 scalps in 101 ODIs and 24 wickets in 23 T20 Internationals. With India relying heavily on Jasprit Bumrah in Australia, Shami's presence in the bowling attack would have provided a much needed boost.



Momentum on their side, India eye series win against West Indies

PTI ■ VADODARA

Coming off one of their biggest wins in terms of runs, fancied India will look to guard against complacency when they take on a beleaguered West Indies side with an aim to bag the three-match series in the second Women's ODI here on Tuesday. India will be entering the game on the back of a massive 211-run victory over the visitors in the series opener in which the Harmanpreet Kaur-led team ticked almost all the boxes. Every match the teams play in the coming months will be significant as the ICC World Cup is scheduled to be held in the country next year. India, who have never won a women's World Cup, are desperate to end their ICC title drought at home and they are aware that a strong build-up is extremely important for them to head into the mega event as one of the contenders alongside the 'usual suspects', Australia and England. Though India have not begun their preparations for the big tournament in earnest, having suffered a 0-3 whitewash in Australia, they bounced back in style, albeit against a much weaker opposition in the West Indies.



In between the ongoing ODI series and the one against Australia, India registered a 2-1 victory in a T20I rubber against the team from the Caribbean islands, which was their first home series win in the shortest format in over five years, but their failure to qualify for the semi-final of the last T20 World Cup has left a lot to be desired. The team has been on an experimentation spree since the debacle in the UAE and has handed international debuts to as many as seven players, including Titas Sadhu, Priya Mishra and Pratika Rawal. Playing in her first ever international match, Delhi's Pratika impressed with a 40-run knock off 69 balls during a

century-plus opening partnership with vice-captain Smriti Mandhana. The lone worry for India before the series opener was the fitness of Kaur, who missed the last two T20Is with a knee niggle, but with her clean hitting and running between the wickets, the skipper has laid all concerns to rest. Mandhana, who led India in Kaur's absence and struck three fifties in a row in the T20Is, was again in her element in the first ODI and made a classy 91 off 102 balls while laying the foundation for an imposing total. The left-handed opener will be keen to continue in the same vein in the remaining one-dayers as well.

Play of the Match in the first ODI, Renuka Singh will be high on confidence having returned a five-for and she will once again look to inflict maximum damage on the Windies with the new ball. As far as the West Indies are concerned, they will have to lift their game several notches and the likes of Hayley Matthews, Deandra Dottin, Shemaine Campbelle and Afy Fletcher, the squad's senior players with years of experience, will need to lead from the front. Teams (from): India: Harmanpreet Kaur (captain), Smriti Mandhana (vice captain), Pratika Rawal, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Richa Ghosh (WK), Uma Chetry (WK), Tejal Hasabnis, Deepti Sharma, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwer, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakur, Renuka Singh Thakur. West Indies: Hayley Matthews (captain), Shemaine Campbelle (vice captain), Aaliyah Alleyne, Shamilia Connell, Nerissa Crafton, Deandra Dottin, Afy Fletcher, Shabika Gajrani, Chinelle Henry, Zaida James, Qiana Joseph, Mandy Mangru, Ashmini Munisar, Karishma Ramharack, Rashada Williams.

Indians unhappy with 'used' practice pitches

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The Indian team has expressed dissatisfaction with the practice pitches ahead of the fourth Test against Australia here, blaming their variable bounce for the hit that Rohit Sharma took on his knee but MCG curator Matt Page has defended the tracks by saying that "standard protocol" has been followed. Rohit developed swelling on his left knee as he tried to play a throwdown from support staff member Dayanand Garani and didn't take further part in the nets on Sunday. The side opted not to practice on Monday. It was learnt the skipper needed icing at night and the team think-tank held the used pitch's uneven bounce responsible for the injury scare. The Indian team had sent its training schedule two months ago but the MCG curator stuck to the standard operating procedure of giving a new practice track only three days prior to the Test match, which begins on December 26 in this case. "So for us, three days out, we prepare pitches for here. If teams come and play before that, they get what pitches we've had," Page told reporters about why India didn't get a pitch that would resemble the centre strip. "So today, we're on fresh pitches. If we needed to play this morning, they would have been on those fresh pitches. Stock standard procedure for us, three days out. We do our pitches that we're going to have for our Test match," Page defended the move. When asked if he has had the Indian schedule and BCCI had correspondence with Cricket Australia, he responded in affirmative. "Yes, they gave us schedule. There has been correspondence between CA and Indian board and the extent of those conversations, I don't know," Page informed. Pitch will help fast bowlers The iconic MCG won't have the bounce of Perth or the seam movement of Gabba but it will still be pace-friendly with 6mm of grass covering.

Strike rotation and solid defence key to face Bumrah, says Simon Katich

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former cricketer Simon Katich has advised Australian batters to concentrate on rotating the strike and maintaining a solid defence to succeed against the peerless Indian pacer Jasprit Bumrah. Katich noted that since Bumrah rarely bowls loose deliveries, the Australians must be strategically good in their approach. "I know all the talk is around having more positive intent, and I think that's all well and good and it is certainly something they have to be mindful of. But against someone like Bumrah intent is not about just blazing him for fours, because he doesn't bowl many bad balls," Katich told SEN 1116. "So a lot of that intent has to be about rotating strike and being able to defend really well, because you're not gonna be able to play with any intent if you aren't there after the tenth over. That's the challenge for all of these guys," Katich added. To illustrate his point, Katich made a reference to Australia's second innings in the third Test at Brisbane, where the hosts attempted an aggressive approach but ultimately lost their wickets. "We saw it in the second innings in Brisbane. Australians came out with

really positive intent, trying to score more quickly and look what happened, 7/80 in no time. "It's not easy to do against the red ball that moves around off the seam in a wearing wicket which the Gabba was starting to become with cracks. "The top order has to be very careful and mindful of how they go about it. You're not going to score many runs if you're trying to take him on off the length, because he is so good," he added. For the remaining two Tests, Australia has opted to place their trust in teenage sensation Sam Konstas, replacing opener Nathan McSweeney, who was given a maiden call-up ahead of the series. "I know the young kid's (Konstas) got a lot of potential, and a lot of ability, but it'll be a challenge because not many guys around the world have been able to do that to that quality of bowling," Katich said. Marsh should make way for Webster Katich also felt Mitchell Marsh's inability to bowl the expected volume of overs suggests he isn't "100%" fit and should be replaced by uncapped rookie Beau Webster for the Boxing Day Test against India. Marsh has been dealing with recurring back stiffness

since the white-ball tour of the UK in September. During the Perth Test, he bowled 17 overs in total, taking two wickets on the opening day but later pulled up sore. In Adelaide, he bowled four overs while in Brisbane he rolled his arm for two overs. "I've been saying for a couple Tests, Mitch Marsh has not been able to bowl the volume of overs that everyone expected of him. Given the conditions and given he is a wicket taker," Katich said on 'SEN Breakfast'. "We saw that in Perth, he bowled well on day one. Took some key wickets and then struggled to back up. I mean obviously the Aussie hierarchy know better than we do around where his fitness is at. "But for him to bowl two overs the other day after Josh Hazlewood went down, that to me indicates something's not 100% right with him." After Marsh had pulled up sore, 30-year-old Tasmania all-rounder Webster was added to Australia's squad. "At the end of the day, Beau Webster deserves to be in that squad," Katich said. "He's done very well for Tassie in the last few years, he's a genuine all-rounder given what his role is for Tassie and he plays that dual role with bat and ball," Katich added.

Tanush Kotian replaces recently retired Ashwin in India's squad

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Mumbai off-spinner Tanush Kotian is set to join the India squad in Australia as a replacement for the recently retired Ravichandran Ashwin. It is understood that the 26-year-old Kotian, who was part of India's tour of Australia, has also been added as a cover for Washington Sundar. "Kotian has been added as a safety net and also to keep the squad number intact for the last two games. He only comes into the picture if either among Washy or Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja) gets injured," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. Kotian, who is currently in Ahmedabad for Vijay Hazare Trophy, is expected to leave Mumbai on Tuesday and will reach



Melbourne before the start of Boxing Day Test. The bowling all-rounder picked two wickets and scored an unbeaten 39 for Mumbai in their Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Hyderabad on Monday.

Kotian has fond memories of the Melbourne Cricket Ground where he scored 44 batting at No. 8 for India A and looked the part. He already has 101 wickets to his name and 1525 runs with two centuries in 33 first-class games. Originally, Axar Patel was supposed to be summoned to Australia but as per sources, the left arm spinner had sought a break after first two matches of Vijay Hazare Trophy due to a family commitment. Kotian has been added to the squad following Ashwin's surprise retirement from international cricket following the draw Test in Brisbane. The 38-year-old ended his glorious career as the second highest wicket taker for India behind Anil Kumble.

The ability to take 20 wickets is not that good in Indian team: Cheteshwar Pujara

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The Indian team in Australia lacks a bowling attack that is good enough to take 20 wickets in a Test, Cheteshwar Pujara said on Monday and called it the side's biggest concerns heading into the last two matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The five-match series is currently levelled at 1-1 with everything to play for in the Tests in Melbourne and Sydney. The visitors have been relying heavily on pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah to get them wickets and while he has been a great success with both the red and pink ball, the peerless fast bowler has not received enough support from the other end, something that has plagued India besides their top-order batting woes. "My biggest question and the reason for a little bit of concern is that the Indian bowling is looking a little weak," Pujara told Star Sports. "Batting is a little better, like the top five didn't do well, but the

middle order and lower middle order, Ravindra Jadeja, Nitish (Reddy), and even tailenders, Bumrah and Akash Deep contributed with the bat. "Now, there is a weakness in the bowling, so what will you feed the team? That is the biggest question, because you can't drop Nitish, you can't drop Jadeja, so what will be the team combination?" Pujara felt that Nitish Reddy and Ravindra Jadeja are not able to do the job of being the side's fourth and fifth bowler. "Ashwin has taken retirement, so two spinners, I don't think they will play in Melbourne. So, how will you strengthen the bowling? Because the three seamers are very good, but their supporting role, fourth and fifth seamer, Nitesh Kumar is the fourth seamer and Ravindra Jadeja is the fifth bowler. If you add both of them together, the bowling is not that good. "We will have to think about that, because if you want to win a Test match, then you have to take 20 wickets, and the ability to take 20



wickets is not that good, the supporting role of the other bowlers is not good, so we will have to improve that as soon as possible, and how that will be, I don't know, but that is a big question." With the exception of opener KL Rahul, the top-order batting has also been a big letdown so far in the series, and Pujara said it has got to do a lot with their inability to see off Mitchell Starc's initial spells with the new ball. "He has been the best bowler for them in this series. And the way Mitchell Starc has played in the last 1-1.5 years, he has brought a lot of improvement. And he has a lot of ability. "If I talk about my personal experience, when he used to play in the last series in 2018 or 2021, I used to feel that if he plays against me, I will get runs. "And now, it feels like he will take wickets. So what is the difference? The difference is that his line length, his accuracy has increased a lot. He is bowling very less loose deliveries. He is playing on the

stump. Every ball is hitting on the good length spot. He is getting swing." Starc has so far taken 14 wickets in the series, the most by an Australian bowler and only behind Bumrah across two teams. Pujara observed, "The change he has brought in his game has made him a different player. And he is looking more dangerous than Cummins and Hazlewood. So we will have to take care of his game, especially from the new games. "In the first five overs, his first spell, he has taken the most wickets there. So if there is a good batting in the first five overs, bring him for the second or third spell. Because he gets tired. So the batting of the top order so far, our top order has never played in the third or fourth spell. "The ones who have played are the lower middle order and the tail enders. And there we saw that when Bumrah and Akash were batting, when Mitchell Starc was bowling, he was not that effective. So they will have to play their new game."



Producer Naga Vamsi, ahead of the release of *Daaku Maharaaj*, speaks to the media and refutes the talks of the industry shifting to Andhra Pradesh.

THE INDUSTRY WON'T SHIFT TO AP: PRODUCER

NAGA VAMSI

discuss possibilities.

On Monday, producer Naga Vamsi held a media conference regarding his film *Daaku Maharaaj*, starring Nandamuri Balakrishna and directed by Bobby Kolli. When asked whether the industry is shifting to Andhra Pradesh, he clearly said, "no." "We have built our houses here with a lot of money, so what can we do if we go to Andhra Pradesh?" asked producer Naga Vamsi. He also added that he has no idea about meeting the AP CM. "I don't have any information regarding a meeting with the Andhra CM," said Naga Vamsi.

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There have been reports over the last few days that the Telugu Film Industry is planning to shift to Andhra Pradesh. With numerous incidents, including a stampede at Sandhya Cinema theatre, a woman's death, an actor's arrest, and the industry's consolation of the actor after his release from jail. Under these circumstances, there are reports that industry representatives plan to meet with AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu to

Government's decision on the price hike, Naga Vamsi gave a diplomatic answer. "The FDC Chairman Dil Raju's film *Game Changer* is releasing first, and whatever benefits he receives for his film will automatically apply to my film, which is releasing afterward," said Vamsi.

The producer later clarified that his intention is not to entirely shift to Andhra Pradesh. "We will give equal importance to both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. We will shoot here and there as well," he said.

Director Bobby Kolli said that he portrayed Balakrishna in a different way in *Daaku Maharaaj*. When asked whether showing Balakrishna, an elected leader, in a negative light might prompt criticism from the audience, Kolli replied, "We all know that Balakrishna represents Hindupur, and we have shown how he reacts

when someone from his constituency needs help."

The producer was reluctant to discuss the incidents that occurred over the last few days. However, he acknowledged that an unfortunate incident happened at Sandhya theatre. Some fans damaged chairs and screens in several theatres and when asked about his film's release in many theatres during Sankranti, he said, "We will be more careful." He added, "Generally, such incidents happen in a moment, and it's not possible to prevent them. Since the film is releasing in numerous theatres, we cannot monitor each theater individually."

Now, all eyes are on Dil Raju, the new chairman of the Telangana Film Development Corporation, who returned to Hyderabad last night. A significant task lies ahead for him after taking charge as Chairman.

TELANGANA EXHIBITORS WELCOME REVANTH REDDY'S DECISION

The Telangana Exhibitors Association on Monday welcomed the decision of Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's decision, where he said that in the near future, there will not be any hike in ticket prices of any film. "This will definitely help single theatres to run for a longer period," said Vijayender Reddy, president, Telangana Exhibitors Association. He added that he welcomes the Chief Minister's decision not to hike ticket prices in the future. "We welcome the decision and will give full support for it," he said. He added that if single theaters also hiked ticket prices, audiences wouldn't come to see the films. "There are two different sections of the audience, where one section watches films in multiplexes and the second section watches in single theatres. When single theatres too hiked prices, this section of people stopped coming; now, with the CM's decision, we can run theaters for a longer time," said Vijayender Reddy.

Gorantla Srinivasa Rao, EC Member of Andhra Exhibitors Association, said that they are going to give a memorandum to the AP Government to reduce ticket prices. "We are planning to meet AP Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan and appeal to them to reduce ticket prices in single theatres," said Srinivasa Rao. He added that single-screen theaters will survive only if ticket prices are normal. "We welcome the Telangana CM's decision and we want to implement the same in Andhra Pradesh," he said. He added that the recent film *Pushpa 2* had hiked ticket prices, and people didn't come to see it. "In the first week, many theaters were vacant because of the high ticket price. The audience didn't come to see it in the first week for this film," he said.

Ram Prasad, President of AP Exhibition Association, said that he has full confidence in Pawan Kalyan, who always supports the development of cinema. "If ticket prices are fixed and normal, there is a chance that the film may run for many days. People will definitely come to theatres to watch films, even in the fourth week," said Ram Prasad.



Rahul Ramakrishna takes back his statement in Allu Arjun case

Actor Allu Arjun's controversy has still been a talk-of-the-town. The actor was arrested a few days back, in relation to the Sandhya theatre stampede where a woman passed away. However, later he was released on bail. The film industry personalities visited his house to give their support. Actor Rahul Ramakrishna also posted a big note on his social media in support of Allu Arjun and questioned the authorities.

Later, the police commissioner CV Anand in a media conference presented the videos about what happened on the day of the Sandhya theatre stampede, Rahul Ramakrishna changed his opinion. The actor didn't delete the old posts and keep them in his social media, but posted another note that he was terribly uninformed about the entire event that took place.

"I was terribly un-informed about all the events that took place. I take back my statements that I made previously," said Rahul Ramakrishna in his social media.

Will other film personalities change their opinion on Allu Arjun arrest just like Rahul Ramakrishna?

'It was Mega Star Chiranjeevi, who encouraged us'

Dharma and Aishwarya Sharma will be seen as the lead pair in *Drinker Sai*, which is produced by Basavaraju Laharidhar. Kiran Tirumalasetti is the director and the movie is based on real events. The film is releasing on December 27. Producer Basavaraju Laharidhar talks about his film and the inspiration.

Basavaraju said that he doesn't have any experience in the film industry, but his father knows Chiranjeevi very well. "My father, Basavaraju Srinivas, was a key member in the PRP party floated by Chiranjeevi and he has long association with him. We shared this film story with Chiranjeevi and after hearing it, he gave us his blessings to go ahead. With his encouragement, we began work on the film," said Basavaraju. He added that he showed the songs to Chiranjeevi and got good appreciation.

Laharidhar said he started working on this film in 2019, but because of the pandemic he had to put it on hold. "We started again last year with few modifications to the story," said the producer. He added that director Kiran worked earlier with Maruthi and made his debut as director with this one. Talking about the lead pair, he said Dharma trained at Satyanand in Vizag and roped in Aishwarya with an audition. He said that the theatrical and OTT business for small films is somewhat sluggish at present. "However, we are confident that our film's content will be appreciated and confident about the success," he said. He added that his main focus is on *Drinker Sai* and once it's released, he will begin preparations for his next project.



Siddharth lends his voice for *It's Okay Guru*

Actor Siddharth is known for his best performances as an actor and has also occasionally proved to be a great singer. The actor first began singing with his film *Chukkallo Chandrudu*, nearly 18 years back and continued his singing in Telugu and Tamil films. Now, he has lent his voice for the film *It's Okay Guru*.

Charan Sai and Usha Sri are playing the lead roles in this film, produced by Suresh Anapurapu and Baswa Govardhan Goud.

Manikanta M is the director and the film is set to hit the screens soon. The lyrical song *Naa Swase Nuvvai*, sung by actor Siddharth, was released on Monday.

The song has been beautifully composed by music director Mohit Rahmani with lyrics penned by Rahul Red Infinity. Siddharth gave his energetic and mellifluous voice. The song expresses intense emotions of love, with lyrics that convey the depth of devotion. The song exudes a beautiful, heartfelt love vibe.

Anandhi's *Garividi Lakshmi* inspired by real-life

Telugu girl and actress Anandhi has made her mark both in Telugu and Tamil films. She is known for her powerful performance in films like *Poriyaalan*, *Kayal* and many other Tamil films. She was last seen in *Itlu Mareduvilli Prajaaneekam* and *Vidhi*. Now, the actress's new film was launched in style, not in Hyderabad, but in Adoni, in Andhra Pradesh. She brings depth to her characters, is set to deliver another impactful portrayal in this film, produced by TG Vishwa Prasad and TG Krithi Prasad. The title is also interesting. Gowri Naidu Jammu is the director.

The ceremony saw the presence of actors from the film including Anandhi, VK Naresh, Rag Mayur present for the launch. The film portrays the inspiring story of the iconic Burra Katha artist Garividi Lakshmi from North Andhra and tackles the theme of women's identity theft. The shooting is scheduled to commence in the third week of January in Adoni.

TG Krithi Prasad, the daughter of renowned producer TG Vishwa Prasad, is making her debut as a producer with this film.

