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'New criminal laws becoming protectors of civil rights'

6



JOBS, FARM PRODUCTIVITY, FUNDS FOR INFRA BOOST FIGURE

8



Dharma proves his father WRONG!

P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY



The scrutiny of 80 lakh Indiramma Indlu applications will be completed by the first week of January. Later, the government will complete the selection of beneficiaries and start the construction of houses by Sankranti. The government would provide houses even if the Centre rejects the applications of some people. The state will take Central funds after accepting its guidelines

—Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Minister, Telangana

P4

DON'T MISS...

Min offers to address issues of quarry workers

Minister for Mines and Excise Kollu Ravindra assured to address the problems being faced by the napa raya quarry works and owners. The napa raya blackstone slabs are widely used for flooring of houses. Minister for BC Welfare Janardhan Reddy met Minister for Mine Kollu Ravindra here on Tuesday, accompanied by Mine Department Principal Secretary Mukesh Kumar Meena, Director Pravin Kumar and owners of napa raya quarries, brought to his notice the problems being faced by the napa raya quarry workers and owners. He explained...

-PAGE: 4

I am a victim of chit fund scam: Majhi

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday claimed that he was also a victim of chit fund scams and urged people to be aware of the activities of ponzi firms to save their hard-earned money. Majhi said this while addressing a function to celebrate the State Level National Consumers Day here. "I was also a victim of chit fund scams. Two firms had duped me in 1990 and 2002," the chief minister said, adding that he could not get back his money as the process of recovering the money...

-PAGE: 5

'Economy on recovery path'

The Indian economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum witnessed in the September quarter, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand, according to a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bulletin released on Tuesday. An article on the 'State of the Economy' in the December Bulletin noted that the global economy continues to exhibit resilience with steady growth and moderating inflation. "High frequency indicators (HFIs) for the third quarter of 2024-25..."

-PAGE: 8

Champions Trophy schedule announced

India will play all their matches of the Champions Trophy in Dubai with the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan scheduled on February 23, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Tuesday. PTI had reported last week that India will play all their matches in Dubai including the semifinal and final if they qualify. As has been the case with ICC events, India and Pakistan have been clubbed in the same group which also has New Zealand and Bangladesh. Group B comprises South Africa, Australia...

-SPORTS

Educated women should not remain as housewives: CM

Work-from-home system and coworking centres can provide massive employment opportunities

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu is of the firm opinion that educated women should not remain as housewives and that they should be provided good employment opportunities.

Chairing a review meeting at the State Secretariat on Tuesday on development of co-working space and neighbourhood working space, the Chief Minister said that human resources can be effectively utilised with co-working space and work-from-home systems. Chandrababu told the officials to impart proper training to all those educated women living in rural and semi-urban areas in the State and provide employment opportunities to them. Working space should be created for such persons, the CM said.

Chandrababu Naidu said that educated women should not confine themselves to their houses as the work-from-home system and coworking centres can provide massive employment opportunities to them.

Continued on Page 2



CM leaves for New Delhi for key events

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu left for national capital New Delhi in a special flight on Tuesday evening. On Wednesday, the CM will participate in the birth centenary celebrations of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. This national-level event will be attended by representatives from the Central government, various State governments, political leaders and public representatives. The event aims to honour

Vajpayee's political leadership, patriotism and numerous contributions to the nation. During the celebrations, CM Chandrababu will pay tribute to Vajpayee. Discussions will revolve around strengthening the economic, social and political policies of India in alignment with Vajpayee's political ideals. Vajpayee is credited with solidifying the BJP's international standing and leading several

development programmes during his tenure. The event will also feature a review and discussion of national politics with participation from chief ministers and senior officials from various States, as well as BJP leaders, all of whom are part of the NDA coalition. Given TDP's significant role in national and State politics, political analysts anticipate that CM Chandrababu will propose several initiatives to further strengthen the NDA coalition during this meeting.



Strengthen Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System: CS

Directs Police Dept to procure necessary software, equipment, and security-related devices

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad has instructed the Police Department to take necessary steps to robustly manage the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) in the State. On Tuesday, a State-level apex committee meeting related to CCTNS and the Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) was held at the secretariat under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary.

During the meeting, Prasad stressed the importance of adhering to the guidelines and regulations set forth by the Central government. He directed the Police Department to procure necessary software, equipment, and other security-related devices required for the implementation of the system. Moreover, he clarified that procurement should only proceed following the recommendations of a technical committee review.

Chief Secretary Prasad also informed the officials that a Southern Zonal Council meeting is scheduled for January 31, where he plans to discuss the robust implementation of the CCTNS project and request further support from the Centre. He suggested sending a State action plan regarding the implementation of this project to the Central government, emphasising strict compliance with the rules and guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

CCTNS nodal officer and Vijayawada Police Commissioner Rajasekhara Babu delivered a PowerPoint presentation detailing the implementation status of the CCTNS and ICJS projects. The action plan submitted by the State to the Ministry of Home Affairs includes an estimated cost of ₹238 crore, out of which ₹88 crore has been sanctioned for the procurement of various security and software-related equipment.

Continued on Page 2

Coalition govt is a failure: YS Jagan

Coalition gave impractical promises during elections and is now going back on them

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP president and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has criticised the coalition government for failing to fulfil the poll promises in the name of Super Six and Super Seven, and said that times will change for good in the days to come.



410 employees dismissed in AP Fiber Net Ltd

They were hired without proper authorisation or investigation: Fiber Net Chairman

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP Fiber Net Limited Chairman GV Reddy has announced the dismissal of 410 employees due to alleged violations of recruitment regulations in the Corporation. He announced the removal of 410 employees who were hired without proper authorisation or investigation, often based solely on WhatsApp messages.

He said that the previous administration had appointed a significant number of employees over the last five years, exceeding the actual



needs of the organisation. He claimed that many of these appoint-

Continued on Page 2

3 killed, 2 injured in road accident in Srikakulam

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Three people, including two women, died and two others were injured after the car they were travelling in ramed into an electric pole at Peddakojirra in Srikakulam district on Tuesday. The deceased were identified as Kadiriseti Someswara Rao (48), M Lavanya (43), and Sneha Gupta (18), residents of the Seethammadhara area in Visakhapatnam. The family was en route to the Durga Mata Temple in Jajpur, Odisha, from Vizag when the accident occurred.

According to sources, the driver lost control of the vehicle due to over-speeding, causing it to collide with a roadside cement electrical pole. Upon receiving information about the incident, National



Highway staff and local police rushed to the scene and transported the injured to the government hospital in Sompeta for treatment.

District In-charge Minister Kondapalli Srinivas directed District Superintendent of Police Maheswar Reddy to ensure all necessary arrangements for the

injured. Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Kinjarapu Atchannaidu also expressed his condolences and instructed district officials to provide the best possible medical care for the injured victims. Authorities are investigating further to understand the exact cause of the accident.

Governor, CM extend Christmas greetings

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor S Abdul Nazeer has conveyed wishes on the occasion of Christmas. "I convey my hearty greetings to all the Christian brothers and sisters of Andhra Pradesh on the auspicious occasion of Christmas festival. Christmas is a time of commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ and His joyous remembrance. It is also an occasion to cherish the teachings of Jesus of peace, love, tolerance and compassion among all people in the world. The life of Jesus Christ is a source of inspiration to all of us to lead a life of virtue and faith. On this happy occasion, I join my Christian brothers and sisters to pray for peace and harmony in the world. I wish you



all a Happy and Merry Christmas." Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu also extended his greetings to the Telugu people on the occasion of Christmas. He explained that the birth of the creator of the world, Jesus Christ, is a festival day for the world. Chandrababu said that Jesus Christ proved through his life that anyone's heart can be won through the path of love. He added that we should pray to the Lord Jesus for the welfare of all humanity. Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan said, "A loving Christmas greetings to all Christians who follow the path of Christ. Love, goodwill, peace, and forgiveness are the virtues that Jesus Christ gave to humanity. Continued on Page 2

AP, Toyama sign new MoU to strengthen ties

Process began in 2015 with multiple reciprocal visits between the two regions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A 14-member delegation, led by Hachiro Nitta, Governor of Toyama, Japan, has visited Andhra Pradesh. The team signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the APIIC in Mangalagiri on Tuesday, aimed at strengthening the cooperative relationship that began in 2015. This agreement is designed to further enhance ties between the two regions.

The key points of the agreement are mutual cooperation in commerce and business sectors, promotion of cultural relations, collaborative programmes between students and researchers, technological cooperation in the digital sector, and collaboration in the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector.

The process began in 2015 with multiple reciprocal visits between the two regions. The cultural exchange programmes for students through the Sakura Science Programme improved employment opportunities for Andhra Pradesh students in Toyama. Discussions were held on the pharmaceutical manufacturing sector and establishment of a Japanese language



centre at Andhra University. Following the signing of the MoU, Dr N Yuvraj, Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department, highlighted that over 25 Japanese companies are currently operating in Andhra Pradesh, making it one of the largest Japanese industrial hubs in India. He emphasised that the State government places special importance on

Japanese investments, particularly in the pharmaceutical sector.

Governor Hachiro Nitta announced that he would continue in his role for the next four years and pledged support for the establishment of a Japanese Zen Garden in Andhra Pradesh. He also mentioned that the focus would be on enhancing cooperation between universities and technology exchange.

Kona Shashidhar, Secretary, School Education, proposed the formation of joint task forces in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and defence. He also discussed the possibility of starting Japanese language schools at State universities. To effectively monitor the implementation of the agreement's provisions, both parties will establish a dedicated execution team.

Senior IPS officer accused of misappropriation of ₹1.75 cr Govt funds

N Sanjay accused of manipulating tender processes and facilitating fraudulent payments

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has registered a First Information Report (FIR) against senior IPS officer N Sanjay and others for alleged misappropriation of government funds amounting to ₹1.75 crore. The FIR, filed by the ACB, cites violations of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) and relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code.

N Sanjay, formerly the Director General of Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Response & Fire Services and Additional Director General of Police (CID), is accused of manipulating tender processes and facilitating fraudulent payments during his tenure.

According to allegations claim that the officer awarded a contract for the development and maintenance of the AGNI-NOC portal and related hardware to Sauthrika Technologies & Infra Pvt. Ltd., violating standard procurement procedures. Despite minimal progress on the project, the company received ₹59.93 lakh within a week of signing the agreement on February 15, 2023.

Continued on Page 2

Why BRS leadership is presently on shaky ground

Going by the concatenation of recent events, and those that are likely to follow in the days ahead, the Bharat Rashtara Samithi's leadership appears to be on a shaky ground.

Let us begin with the situation that BRS working president and former minister K Taraka Ramarao (KTR) has been facing. What would happen if KTR is arrested in connection with the alleged irregularities in the Formula E race case? Will such eventualities translate into sympathy for him or BRS? The ongoing probe into the case has revealed details that cannot be wished away. The case has drawn wide attention in political and other quarters.

In the absence of former chief minister and BRS presi-



dent Chandrasekhar Rao's active role of late in Telangana's political space, KTR has become, by default, a synonym for the voice of BRS, whether within the Assembly or outside the House. KCR is Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Telangana Legislative Assembly. So, his non-participation in the proceedings of the House is visibly felt by leaders and cadre of the party.

After undergoing a hip surgery following a fall in the bathroom of his farmhouse a few months back, KCR has elected to remain confined to home. Desertions from the party appear to be a consequence of KCR's absence in the public life. Rubbing salt into his wounds, former Speaker of

For all practical purposes, KCR has handed over the reins of the party to KTR. In fact, KTR became more popular than his sister K Kavitha within BRS after she was arrested in the Delhi liquor scam case. That apart, KCR's nephew and a stalwart in BRS T Harish Rao has been marginalised within the party.

Assembly Pocharam (Parigi) Sreenivasa Reddy, who once emotionally appealed to leaders and cadre to stick with KCR through thick and thin, switched to the Congress.

For all practical purposes, KCR has handed over the reins of the party to KTR. In fact, KTR became more popular than his sister K Kavitha

within BRS after she was arrested in the Delhi liquor scam case. That apart, KCR's nephew and a stalwart in BRS T Harish Rao has been marginalised within the party.

In a way, Harish-KTR duo can be compared with Shiv Sena's Raj Thackeray-Uddhav Thackeray duo in Maharashtra. A nephew of Siva Sena chief Bal Thackeray,



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

scene and took the reins of the party, virtually forcing Raj to leave the very party he had nurtured. Harish Rao too had worked hard for the party under the influence of his uncle KCR even at a time when KTR did not think about entering politics. At the time of BRS formation (then TRS) in 2001, KTR was employed in a firm in the US. Harish was sidelined after KTR took a plunge into TG politics. After inducting his son into cabinet, KCR had given clear signals to party functionaries and the official machinery about his successor. Harish had to swallow a bitter pill and declare his continued loyalty to KCR.

Although the Bharatiya Janata Party in Telangana had tried to take advantage of the situation by inviting him into its fold, Harish publicly reiter-

ated his confidence in KCR's leadership.

Now, the Congress government headed by A. Revanth Reddy has decided to probe the alleged irregularities concerning the execution of Formula E race. Initially the BRS had downplayed the scam, but later KTR expressed his readiness to go to jail. He said he would practice yoga in jail and take out padayatra after his release, perhaps believing that whoever goes on statewide padayatra would stand a chance to become the chief minister, going by the examples of Chandrababu Naidu and YS Jaganmohan Reddy in Andhra Pradesh.

Now that the party is reconciled to KTR's possible arrest, the future of the party's leadership is not clear, should

the BRS working president be jailed. Of course, there is talk that KCR would resume his political activity in the New Year. That is, KCR may come out of his elective 'political hibernation' to fill the gap that may be caused by the arrest of his son. In that case, the next question is: Will KCR continue as the party chief? Or, will he make his nephew to lead the party? For, the chances of making his daughter Kavitha the party chief are bleak, considering she has returned from Tihar jail in Delhi, out on bail after spending five months there in connection with the Delhi liquor scam.

In these circumstances, resolution of the leadership vacuum in BRS in the eventuality of KTR's arrest would be keenly watched by political and other circles.

NTR dist to hold awareness campaign on PMEGP

Scheme useful in employing another 10 people

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni and NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha have stated that the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) will be useful to employ another 10 unemployed people in addition to self-employment. In this regard, the NTR district administration will organise extensive awareness programmes in all Assembly constituencies in the district in January, they said.

On Tuesday, Kesineni Chinni and Lakshminsha convened a special meeting with Industries, Skill Development, District Rural Development Agency,



and other related departments on the PMEGP at the collectorate in Vijayawada. They discussed several opportunities for the proposed PMEGP.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Chinni said that people's representatives and officials should work together for the Vikasit Bharat, Vikasit Andhra Pradesh and the Vikasit NTR district. Comprehensive development will be possible only when the youth are given self-employment opportunities as per their interest. Officials

should create awareness of the credit-linked subsidy scheme PMEGP in the district in urban and rural areas, he added.

Further, he mentioned the concept of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu -- One Family -- One Entrepreneur. People's representatives and officials should work collectively towards the realisation of the scheme. Also, he said that he will strive to bring NTR district to the Number 1 position in all sectors.

The PMEGP campaign will be conducted starting from business

ideas, project preparation, the application process, bank loans, subsidies and others, the Collector said. The district administration is mainly focusing on MSMEs as they are the main pillars for the development.

The MP and the District Collector released a poster of the Vikasit Bharat Job Mela on the occasion. The job mela will be conducted at the VP Siddhartha Public School at Mogalrajapuram on December 28. More than 50 companies will participate in the fair to offer around 3,000 jobs to those having educational qualifications of SSC, Inter, Diploma, ITI, Degree, Engineering, PG and others. NTR District Industries Officer B Sambiah, LDM K Priyanka, DRDA PD K Srinivasa Rao, Skill Development Officer S Srinivasa Rao, Vikasa PD K Lacharao and others were present.

Hearing in Obulapuram case adjourned to January 8

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Special Court of Public Representatives in Vijayawada has adjourned the hearing of the case registered against those who went to inspect illegal mining in the Obulapuram Iron Ore Mines in the United Andhra Pradesh on July 21, 2007, to January 8 next year. A case was registered against 21 people; however, three of them died during the investigation stage. Following the directions from the Magistrate during the previous hearing, all the remaining accused appeared for the hearing on Tuesday.

Several TDP, Congress, and BRS leaders, including current ministers and former public representatives, attended the court hearing. Interestingly, these leaders who now serve in different political parties were all TDP activists once. During

AP Minister Atchannaidu, Telangana CM's Advisor Vem Narendra Reddy among those who appeared before court



the Congress regime, all these leaders of TDP went to inspect the Obulapuram Iron Ore Mines in D Hirehal Mandal of Anantapur district on July 21, 2007. After that, the police registered a case against these leaders.

Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries, Cooperation, and Dairy

Development K Atchannaidu, former ministers Devineni Uma Maheswara Rao, Nimmakayala China Rajappa, Amarnath Reddy, Nagam Janardhan Reddy, Errabelli Dayakar Rao, Padala Aruna, and Telangana State Chief Minister Advisor (Public Affairs) Vem Narendra Reddy were among those who attend-

ed the court hearing.

Chinnam Babu Ramesh, Kollal Lalitha Kumari, Bommadi Narayana Rao, Masala Padmaja, Pula Nagaraju, Mullangi Ramakrishna Reddy, Veeranki Guru Murthy (currently AP Gowda Corporation Chairman), Mettu Govinda Reddy and YVB Rajendra Prasad, also appeared before the Special Court Magistrate.

The Magistrate recorded 313 statements from the leaders, who claimed that a false case had been charged against them and that they had not committed any crime as mentioned in the FIR. After the hearing, they said they had faith in the court and that justice would prevail.

Educated women...

Continued from Page 1

He expressed serious concern that several educated women are still remaining at home. "Women are very efficient and talented, but confine themselves to their homes due to certain family issues and responsibilities," the Chief Minister said. "If proper opportunities are provided to such women, economic activity will grow."

The officials informed the Chief Minister that they have set a target to bring into existence coworking centres by the end of December, and these centres will be set up at government and private buildings depending on the availability of space. Till now, 22 lakh square feet space has been identified for the purpose in both government and private buildings in different parts of the State, the officers informed Chandrababu.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to identify the necessities of those who are on work-from-home. He also said that necessary buildings be identified at least in five places for establishing the Ratan Tata Innovation Hubs. Also, the education institutions and industries in those areas will be interlinked to these Innovation Hubs, the CM said.

Senior IPS...

Continued from Page 1

It is reported that 10 laptops were purchased from the same firm at an exorbitant cost of ₹17.89 lakh, without calling for tenders or obtaining competitive quotations.

In another case, while serving as Additional Director General, CID, the officer allegedly conspired to award a ₹1.19 crore contract for conducting SC/ST awareness workshops to a non-existent firm, Kritvyap Technologies Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad.

The workshops were reportedly conducted by government officials, while the payment was fraudulently made to the company.

The FIR was filed under Sections 13(1)(a) read with 13(2) and Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, along with Sections 409, 420, 477A and 120B of the Indian Penal Code. The case was initiated after obtaining government permission under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Deputy Superintendent of Police TVV Pratap Kumar, who filed the complaint, stated that investigations are going on. The case has been registered and further details are awaited.

Christmas celebrations held at Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer participated in the celebrations held on the eve of Christmas at Durbar Hall in Raj Bhavan here on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor said that Christmas is eagerly awaited by billions of people around the world, to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The Governor said that people celebrate Jesus's teachings of love, forgiveness, and compassion. "It is the time for healing and renewed strength, and a season to rejoice. It is an event of utmost importance for all the followers of Christianity and creates last-



ing memories and reinforces the bonds that hold us all together, and gives us an opportunity to thank for the love, hope and joy found in Jesus," he added.

Earlier, the programme commenced with the singing of Christmas carols, opening prayer and Bible reading by

Rev I Karunanidhi, Bishops Chaplain, CSI.

The Christmas message was delivered by the Rt Rev Dr T George Cornelious, Bishop of CSI, Vijayawada. The programme concluded with felicitation of the Governor by the heads of various Christian Missions, cake cutting, Closing Prayer by Major Paul Tumati, Divisional Commander, followed by Benediction by the Rt Rev Dr B Ebenezer of Bishop of Metropolitan Mission and prize distribution to children.

Dr M Hari Jawaharlal, Secretary to Governor, and other officers and staff members of Raj Bhavan participated in the programme.

BPCL to set up ₹6,100-Cr Greenfield refinery, petrochemical complex in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has decided to set up a Greenfield refinery along with a petrochemical complex in the State, with an investment of ₹6,100 crore. This decision was taken during a board meeting held on Tuesday, as confirmed by BPCL. The corporation has also informed the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) through official letters.

The refinery is planned to be established on the East Coast of Andhra Pradesh. BPCL officials clarified that the pre-project activities have already begun. These include preliminary studies, land identification and acqui-

sition, preparation of feasibility reports and environmental impact assessments. The corporation stressed that all aspects of the project, including engineering packages and designs, are currently under review.

The project will be a significant addition to Andhra Pradesh's industrial landscape and is expected to contribute greatly to the State's economy. The new refinery and petrochemical complex will not only boost local industry, but also generate employment opportunities and support the growth of the petrochemical sector.

The investment is seen as a crucial step in expanding India's refining and petrochemical capacities.

TODAY ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: DASHAMI: Dec 24 07:52 PM to Dec 25 10:29 PM

Ekadashi: Dec 25 10:29 PM to Dec 27 12:44 AM

Nakshatram: CHITRA: Dec 24 12:17 PM to Dec 25 03:22 PM

Swati: Dec 25 03:22 PM to Dec 26 06:09 PM

Rahukalam: 12:16 PM to 1:38 PM

Yamagandam: 8:09 AM to 9:31 AM

Variyam: 09:37 PM to 11:24 PM

Gulika: 10:54 AM to 12:16 PM

Amritakalam: 08:08 AM to 09:57 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Scattered Showers

Temp: 28°

Humidity: 80%

Sunrise: 6:33 AM

Sunset: 5:42Z PM

Updated: December 24, 2024 5:00 PM

410 employees...

Continued from Page 1

He further emphasised that many employees were integrated into the payroll without any appointment letters, essentially recruiting them directly onto the payrolls without due process. The Chairman made it clear that the identification of these 410 individuals, deemed unnecessary and improperly appointed, is just the beginning. He indicated that if further unqualified personnel are found, they too will be removed. Reddy pointed out that around 70-75 per cent of the workforce was hired unnecessarily under the previous administration, which he claims led the organisation into significant financial distress.

"We have no animosity towards the employees. However, those without appointment letters are being removed immediately.

Strengthen Crime...

Continued from Page 1

Rajasekhar Babu noted that the CCTNS project, initiated in Andhra Pradesh in 2012, facilitates data sharing among various government departments and agencies.

Rajasekhar Babu elaborated that the CCTNS connects the State database with the National Data Centre for secure data management and enables the entry of

FIRs, charge sheets, court documents, and arrest records, which are updated in real-time. Other functionalities facilitated by the CCTNS include verification of antecedents, job and passport verifications, identification of habitual offenders, comparison of unidentified bodies with missing persons, and crime analytics using the AP police mobile app for on-spot incident verification.

The meeting was attended by Secretary of the Law Department G Pratibha Devi, CID IG Vineeth Brij Lal, APIIC VC and MD Abhishikt Kishore, and special secretaries from the Home and Finance Departments, along with virtual participation from officials such as AP DGP Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao and representatives from various departments.

Coalition Govt is a failure...

Continued from Page 1

Addressing party district leaders on the first day of his Pulivendula tour on Tuesday, he said the coalition government has given impractical promises during elections and is now going back on them, which shows the character of the ruling dispensation. "We are in a position to go to any house and proudly tell the welfare activities we have taken up, but Chandrababu Naidu has no ground to speak as he could not fulfil any of the promises he made during elections," he said.

Giving a confidence boost to the cadre, he said that the present phase will not last long. "We should all work unitedly as we had done much good during our term while Chandrababu Naidu has assumed office by giving promises which he cannot keep. We have changed the order of throwing a manifesto into the dustbin and had honoured all the promises made in it and given more welfare than promised.

TTD Board approves panel formation to oversee global expansion

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The TTD Trust Board convened a crucial meeting at Annamaiah Bhavan in Tirumala on Tuesday, chaired by BR Naidu. The meeting saw several significant resolutions aimed at enhancing services and expanding the global presence of TTD. As per the directives of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, the Board approved the formation of a committee of experts to oversee the global expansion of TTD temples and properties.

The Board gave its nod to the construction of Sri Venkateswara Swamy temples in key locations across the

country, based on the recommendations from the expert committee. The Board also decided to request the Andhra Pradesh State Government to recommend granting National Status to the Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS). This would help secure special funds from the Central Government, enabling better medical services at the Superspecialty Hospital for underprivileged patients. A proposal was approved for the provision of necessary civil assistant surgeons, nurses, para-medical staff, and state-of-the-art medical equipment to ensure high-quality medical services for pilgrims visiting Tirumala on foot.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH PANCHAYAT RAJ ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

Tender Notice No. 07/2024-25 Dt. 21.12.2024.

Online tenders are invited for One WORK with an Est. Cost. Rs. 900.00 Lakhs sanctioned under PRR (TSP) Grant in PR Clyde, Vizianagaram. Availability of Bid Documents: Dt. 30.12.2024, 11.00 AM to Dt. 16.01.2025 up to 4.00 PM.

Further details can be seen at e-procurement market place i.e. <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in>. Ph: 9493519456. Sd/- Superintending Engineer. P.O.No: 1485/CLM/VI/11221-22. Dt. 24.12.2024. PR Circle, Vizianagaram.

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Patrudu lays stone for Rs 2.05-cr road works

Plans announced for irrigation, tourism, and tribal welfare in Nathavaram mandal

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Legislative Assembly Speaker Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu has laid the foundation stone for a road construction project in Sarugudu Sundarakota panchayat, Natavaram mandal, marking his first visit to the village. The Rs 2.05-crore project aims to improve infrastructure in the region, fulfilling an election promise made by Patrudu.



Addressing the gathering, Speaker Patrudu expressed satisfaction in delivering on promises made during the elections. "Enhancing infrastructure is key to progress, and we remain dedicated to continuous development under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan," he stated. He also highlighted efforts to address drinking water shortages in villages through solar-powered solutions and shared that Rs 26.80 crore has been invested in the mandal over the past six months for various developmental projects.

Patrudu outlined several new projects during the event. Among them is the repair of the Tandava reservoir gates and canals, with Rs 1.80 crore allocated for the project over the next five years. This initiative aims to provide irrigation water to 53,000 acres. He also discussed strategies to divert Polavaram water to the Tandava reservoir.

In the education sector, Rs 38 lakh has been earmarked to renovate three hostels in Nathavaram mandal. Besides, Patrudu unveiled plans to develop Sarugudu Waterfall as a tourist destination to boost local employment opportunities.

Addressing the tribal community's concerns, Patrudu assured that eligible families would

receive land titles within a month. "We are committed to addressing the concerns of all sections of society, including our tribal brothers and sisters," he added. RDO VV Ramana, Natavaram MRO Venugopal, Tandava Project Chairman Karaka Satyanarayana, TDP president Nandipalli Ramana, and local leaders were present.

Minister Savitha visits Amaravati AP Flower Show

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC, EWS Welfare, and Handloom & Textiles S Savitha visited the fifth Amaravati AP Flower Show at Siddhartha Hotel Management College in Mogalrajapuram, Vijayawada, on Tuesday. The Minister toured the event extensively, exploring a vibrant array of floral, fruit, and botanical exhibits presented by numerous stalls.

The Amaravati AP Flower Show, renowned for its diverse collection of flowers and horticultural displays, aims to foster environmental awareness and encourage a love for nature. Featuring decorative plants, rare species, and creative floral arrangements, the event attracts participants and visitors from across Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring States, enhancing regional environmental consciousness and aesthetic values.

During her visit, Minister Savitha interacted with stall owners and exhibitors, including Garimella Janakiram, expressing keen interest in the diverse plant species and innovative floral arrangements on display.

Over 3 lakh Bhavani devotees visit Durga Temple in four days

Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment to end after Maha Poornahuthi today



Bhavani devotees visiting Karaka Durga Temple on Tuesday

Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Arla Devasthanam, located atop Indrakeeladri, in Vijayawada witnessed a massive influx of Bhavani devotees from Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring States on Tuesday. Despite the cold weather conditions, devotees have shown unwavering enthusiasm as they gather for the Bhavani Deeksha Viramana ritual, marking the conclusion of their 41-day Deeksha period.

The temple premise was abuzz with devotional fervour, as devotees clad in traditional red attire ascended the hill to offer prayers and fulfil their vows. The temple authorities have made extensive arrangements to manage the crowd and ensure the smooth conduct of rituals. Additional facilities, including queue lines, drinking water, and medical aid, have been set up to accommodate the large number of pilgrims.

More than three lakh devotees thronged the Durga temple in the first four days, of the five-

day Bhavani Deeksha Viramana Mahotsavam. Before the commencement of the Mahotsavam, the temple authorities expected more than 6 lakh devotees would influx the festival. Also, 12.92 lakh Laddu Prasadam were sold in the first four days and 1.06 lakh people had the Anna Prasadam in the morning tiffin, afternoon lunch and night tiffin.

When compared to the previous year's Bhavani Deeksha Relinquishment, the devotees' participation is poor this year. As per the estimations, one lakh devotees are expected every day, however, on the first day, around 42,000 devotees thronged the temple. Around 86,000 devotees on day 2, 85,997 on day 3 and the fourth day of the Deeksha Viramana Mahotsavam, the footfall of the devotees was 60,000.

The five-day festival will end on December 25 and on the final day of the Bhavani Deeksha Viramana, over one lakh Bhavani Devotees are expected. Durga Temple Executive Officer (EO) KS

Rama Rao is making the necessary arrangements to overcome the huge crowd. With directions from NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminisha and Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu, additional arrangements will be provided to the devotees, said EO Rama Rao.

Meanwhile, he announced that the five-day Bhavani Deeksha Viramana would be concluded by offering Maha Poornahuthi at 10.30 am on December 25. He said that as many as 800 bathing showers were arranged at Seethammavari Padalu, Punnami Ghat, and Bhavani Ghat on the river Krishna. The temple has already introduced a special app for the Bhavani devotees during the five-day event, he said.

Further, he said with the support of the police, extensive security was arranged in the city and it is being supervised through drone visuals, CCTV and metal detectors from the Integrated Command Control Room that was arranged in the Model Guest House.

Pregnant woman, unborn child die at Narsipatnam Hospital

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A pregnant woman and her unborn child died at the Narsipatnam Area Hospital on Tuesday morning, sparking outrage and grief among her family and raising concerns about the quality of medical care provided at the facility.

Syed Mahara Munisa (Devi), a resident of S. Rayavaram Mandal, Chinnagummuru village, was admitted to the hospital on Monday for the delivery of her second child. According to her aunt, Lakshmi, Munisa experienced excruciating pain and repeated-

Family accuses hospital of negligence



ly requested a caesarean section. However, her pleas were allegedly ignored by the hospital staff, who continued to

insist on a normal delivery. "She kept asking for a caesarean, but no one listened," Lakshmi said. "The staff was-

n't even around when we needed them. I had to wake them up at 3 a.m." Lakshmi also claimed that despite Munisa's deteriorating condition, including leaking amniotic fluid, the hospital staff dismissed her concerns.

"She was screaming in pain, asking for help, but no one responded," a relative stated. Despite her desperate cries for help, Munisa tragically passed away, along with her unborn child, at 7 a.m. on Tuesday. Furious family members confronted hospital staff, accusing

them of negligence in patient care. They claimed that Munisa's vital signs were not monitored properly and that she was not transferred to the delivery ward despite her critical condition.

The grieving relatives demanded accountability and justice for the loss of their loved ones. Dr. Satyanarayana, the superintendent of the area hospital, denied the allegations of negligence. "We did everything in our power to save her," he said. "Our doctors and staff followed protocol." Police were called to the hospital to manage the situation as tensions escalated.

Debts mounting under TDP rule: Ambati

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Former minister and YSRCP Guntur district president Ambati Rambabu has said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's governance in the last six months has burdened the State with massive debts, instead of creating wealth as promised.

Speaking at a press meet here on Tuesday, Rambabu criticised the TDP-led government for misleading people with hollow assurances.

He said that in just six months, the TDP government incurred debts amounting to Rs 65,000 crore. Additionally, Rs 31,000 crore was raised in the name of Amaravati, with another Rs 21,000 crore debt in the pipeline. He questioned how such borrowings could benefit the public, labelling the Chief Minister's promises of wealth creation as deceptive.

Highlighting the TDP's failure to deliver on key promises,



Ambati pointed out that unemployment benefits of Rs 3,000 per month, pledged to jobless youth, remain unfulfilled. Instead, over 2.6 lakh workers, including health workers and volunteers, have been laid off.

He also accused the government of backtracking on its promise to provide 20 lakh jobs over five years, claiming that not only has this target been ignored, but existing jobs are being eliminated.

On the issue of electricity, Ambati criticised the government for hiking power charges by 25-55 per cent, imposing a burden of Rs 15,485 crore on consumers in six months.

Company asked to pay Rs. 8.2 lakh to heirs of deceased policyholder

District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission says insurance company's refusal was unjustified

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a significant ruling on Tuesday, the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission ordered an insurance company to pay a health insurance claim of Rs. 8,17,973 to the heirs of a deceased policyholder. The Commission, led by Chairperson G. Venkateswari and member Karaka Ramanababu, also awarded six per cent interest, Rs. 20,000 for distress, and Rs. 10,000 for case-related expenses.

"The insurance company's refusal was unjustified," stated G. Venkateswari. "Consumers must be protected, and we hope this ruling serves as a reminder of the importance of

Experts advise consumers to take essential precautions when making purchases, specifically to obtain receipts for all transactions, verify that warranty and guarantee cards are correctly filled out with the seller's and manufacturer's addresses, and safely store all documentation for future reference in case of potential disputes or claims.

consumer rights in all transactions, including insurance claims." This ruling coincides with National Consumer Rights Day, celebrated annually on December 24. The day aims to raise awareness about consumer rights and the legal protections available.

Experts advise consumers to take essential precautions when making purchases, specifically to obtain receipts for all transactions, verify that warranty and guarantee cards are

correctly filled out with the seller's and manufacturer's addresses, and safely store all documentation for future reference in case of potential disputes or claims. When filing a complaint, consumers should include their full name, address, a detailed description of the issue, and all supporting documentation. The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission handles disputes involving goods or services valued up to Rs. 50

lakh, and claims must be filed within two years of discovering the service deficiency.

"Consumers should be aware of their rights and the precautions they should take during any transaction," said G. Venkateswari.

The Commission encourages consumers to stay informed, be proactive in protecting their rights, and seek justice when faced with unfair practices. The government has established national helplines for consumer-related issues: 1915 and 1800114000. Besides, the District Legal Service Authority offers free legal sessions to help consumers understand their rights and the steps they can take to protect themselves.

SC sub-classification: Panel to visit erstwhile Krishna on Dec 28

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The one-man Commission headed by retired IAS officer Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, constituted to inquire into the sub-classification within Scheduled Castes in the State, will visit the erstwhile Krishna district on December 28. As per the communication from Officer-on-Special Duty (OSD) to the chairman of the Commission, Sk Shahid Babu, the Krishna, NTR and Eluru district collectors have made all necessary arrangements for his visit.

The Supreme Court, in its judgment in a civil appeal and a writ petition, had ordered the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes. Subsequently, the State government formed the Commission headed by Rajiv Ranjan Mishra to inquire into the sub-classification.

During the district visits, the Commission will conduct a

meeting at the ZP Convention Hall in Machilipatnam on December 28. During the meeting, it is proposed to receive memorandums and representations from the individuals or institutions that are familiar with the matter. According to Krishna District Collector DK Balaji, the submissions could be made by representatives from both erstwhile Krishna district and the newly-formed NTR and Eluru.

He said that those who are unable to submit representations or memorandums may submit the same in the office of the Commission at its office at Koneru Lakshmaiah Street, Moghalrajapuram, in Vijayawada.

Also, he stated that they can submit their memorandums either in person or through registered post with acknowledgement or via email at omccsubclassification@gmail.com on or before January 9.

Coalition govt vindictive: Sajjala

Visits Nandigama Suresh at the Guntur jail

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YxSRCP State coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has slammed the TDP-led coalition government as vindictive, targeting political opponents and sympathisers by false cases on hand and attempting to close the cases pending against the ruling party leaders.

Speaking to the media after visiting former MP Nandigama Suresh at the Guntur jail here on Tuesday, he condemned the government for its harsh treatment of the former MP, including denial of basic amenities like access to drinking water. Sajjala stated that the government is misusing its power to settle political scores against YSRCP leaders, activists, and supporters.

Ten underpasses for Vijayawada West Bypass

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr Pemmasani Chandrasekar, Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communications, conducted an inspection of the ongoing Vijayawada West Bypass construction works on Tuesday. His visit aimed to assess the progress and address any potential delays in project implementation.

Dr Pemmasani stated that while underpasses were to be constructed every two kilometres as per the National Highway Authority of India regulations for the Vijayawada bypass works, the Telugu Desam government during 2014-19 made arrangements with full permissions to construct one underpass every kilometre for public transport as part of the capital construction. He deplored that after the Jagan government came to power, the permissions were trampled on and the authorities were instructed to continue with the old rules.

Dr Pemmasani pointed out that 10 underpasses were given

as per the proposals for Vijayawada West Bypass given by the authorities for the convenience of the people and this was supposed to be completed by April, but due to the decisions of the Jagan government, these constructions are being delayed for another year and a half. He lamented that this is a direct example of how a person like Jagan Mohan Reddy, who lacks understanding of administration and vision, becomes the Chief Minister, and this wastes public money of Rs. 400 crore and valuable time. "We have undertaken this tour with the intention of avoiding such delays and difficulties in the coming days. Even if there are any small problems, we will talk to the officials and Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and resolve the problems," he said.

MLA Tenali Sravan Kumar, CRDA Additional Commissioner GS Sai Praveen Chand, National Highways Project Director Parvatheesham, Amaravati Development Corporation CEO Prabhakar and others were present.

CPI centenary celebrations from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI State secretary K. Ramakrishna has urged the public to actively participate in the CPI's centenary celebrations, commencing Statewide on December 26. Speaking at Dasari Bhavan in Vijayawada on Tuesday, he unveiled the centenary poster alongside party State secretariat members Jalli Wilson, KVV Prasad, and G Eswaraiah.

The celebrations, part of a nationwide initiative by the CPI national council, will honour 100 years of the party's formation. They will span a year, cul-

minating in Telangana on December 26 next year. The CPI will pay homage to the late Chandra Rajeswara Rao at his statue in Vijayawada to officially launch the celebrations in Andhra Pradesh.

While addressing a press conference, Ramakrishna highlighted the CPI's historic contributions, including sacrifices by its leaders during India's freedom struggle and its ongoing efforts toward social justice, workers' rights, and land reforms. He emphasised the party's unique legacy alongside the Congress, which also has a centenary history.



CPI State secretary K Ramakrishna, secretariat members KVV Prasad, Jalli Wilson and Eswaraiah releasing the party's centenary celebration poster at Dasari Bhavan in Vijayawada on Tuesday

TENT CITY AT PRAYAGRAJ

IRCTC ready to welcome pilgrims at 'Mahakumbh'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Indian Railway Catering And Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) - the Professional Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Arm of Indian Railways and a Schedule 'A' Miniratna PSU is all set to welcome the pilgrims at the Mahakumbh Gram - IRCTC Tent City at Prayagraj.

Nestled at a distance of just 3.5 Kms from the Triveni Sangam at Sector-25 Arail Road, Naini, the Kumbh Gram offers unparalleled access to the bathing ghats and other attractions.

Kumbh Gram is a state of art accommodation facility specially crafted for the tourists and equipped with all modern amenities. Proximity of the Tent City to the Triveni Ghat is an added advantage for the guests desirous to have Snan, The IRCTC said here on



The Super Deluxe Tents and Villa Tents with ensuite bathrooms, round the clock running hot and cold water facilities, access to hospitality team throughout the day, room blower, bed linen, towels and toiletries etc are at an attractive tariff, inclusive of all meals. The guests of the Villa Tents will additionally enjoy a separate cozy sitting area and television.

CCTV surveillance ensures the safety and security of the guests. Maha Kumbh Gram will also have First Aid

Facilities and Round The Clock Emergency Assistance.

IRCTC has already opened the bookings for its Kumbh Gram Tent City on its website www.irctctourism.com/mahakumbhgram. IRCTC is also promoting the Mahakumbh Gram - IRCTC Tent City through banners on its ticketing website www.irctc.co.in as well as through Push Notifications and Mailers to its humongous customer base. The Tent City will be promoted on the websites of the Ministry of Tourism and U.P. Tourism.

Further bookings of Mahakumbh Gram will shortly open on the websites of IRCTC's booking partners MakeMyTrip and GoBibo. For queries and bookings, please contact IRCTC's customer support team at 8076025236 or email at mahakumbh@irctc.com.

Minister Nimmala distributes 27 mini-tractors for garbage removal

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Management Nimmala Ramanaidu distributed 27 mini-tractors to the municipalities and panchayats to carry out sanitation works. The 27 mini-tractors, worth Rs 1.67 crore, were distributed by the Minister, flanked by MLA Bolishetti Srinivas at a programme held in Tadepalligudem on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu said that during the previous TDP government, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu created wealth from garbage. However, during the YSRCP regime, the wealth centers were closed and the State had inherited 45 lakh metric



tons of garbage, he criticised. The Minister said that there was no development or funds

for gram panchayats and recalled that the gram panchayat sarpanches expressed their

protests by begging. "The YSRCP regime had diverted Rs 2092 crores of the Swachh

Andhra Corporation funds to other programmes. The YSRCP Government had imposed tax on the garbage and the people rejected the government," he revealed.

Whip and MLA Bholiseti Srinivas said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan were extending mini-tractors to the municipalities and village panchayats to carry out sanitation works. As part of it, 27 mini-tractors were distributed.

The Whip assured of providing more equipment and machinery to remove garbage and carry out sanitation works. TDP in-charge E Tataji, tractor company dealer K Vinod, BJP, TDP and JSP leader attended the meeting.

Minister offers to address issues of quarry workers



PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Mines and Excise Kollu Ravindra assured to address the problems being faced by the napa raya quarry works and owners. The napa raya blackstone slabs are widely used for flooring of houses.

Minister for BC Welfare Janardhan Reddy met Minister for Mine Kollu Ravindra here on Tuesday, accompanied by Mine department Principal Secretary Mukesh Kumar Meena, Director Pravin Kumar and owners of napa raya quarries, brought to his notice the

problems being faced by the napa raya quarry workers and owners. He explained to him various issues and difficulties prevailing in the napa raya quarry industry in the State.

Minister Janardhan Reddy explained to Mining Minister Kollu Ravindra the problems being faced in the napa Raya mines located in Banaganapalle and surrounding areas. Minister Janardhan Reddy told the Excise Minister about the protests being organized by the napa raya quarry workers at Bandlapalli crossroads and urged him to take steps to

resolve the issue.

He explained that the existing policy was badly affecting not only the mine owners but also the workers and underlined the need of taking immediate steps to resolve the crisis. The BC Welfare Minister submitted a representation to the Mines Minister in this regard.

Minister Kollu Ravindra responded positively and promised to take steps to resolve the problems of the napa raya quarry workers and owners. He also assured to take the issue to the notice of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

TTD board resolves to form committee for Global expansion of TTD temples

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Trust board, the highest decision-making body of the world-famous Tirumala temple, in its meeting here on Tuesday decided to form a committee with experts for 'Global Expansion of TTD temples and properties as per the directives of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

The meeting which was held at Annamayya Bhavan in Tirumala here under the Chairmanship of BR Naidu, also decided to construct Sri Venkateswara Swamy temples in some important places across the country following the recommendations made by the Committee under the instructions of the Chief Minister.

It resolved to request the State Government to recommend to the Central Government for National Status for SVIMS to provide better medical services to the poor patients at the Superspecialty Hospital, thereby the Central Government allocates special funds to SVIMS.

The board also approved the provision of necessary civil assistant surgeons, nurses, para-medical staff, and state-of-the-art medical equipment to provide adequate medical facilities to the pilgrims on foot. To set up a

Feedback Management System to provide better services to the devotees, the Board also decided to take feedback from the devotees in collaboration with AP Digital Corporation.

Besides the implementation of a new system in the issuance of canteen management licenses to leading companies in the country to provide more quality food products to the visiting pilgrims at affordable prices, the board also resolved to hire 258 catering staff in various departments on a contract basis through SLSMPC to provide better quality Annaprasadam in the Tirumala to devotees.

It was approved to provide financial assistance of Rs. 2 crores from SV Vidyanada Trust to the traditional school run in Tirupati under the auspices of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. The Board decided to establish a Food Safety Department in TTD to inspect food items keeping in view the health and hygiene of the multitude of devotees coming for Srivari Darshan and correspondingly approval to fill the post of Senior Food Safety Officer by SLSMPC Corporation. TTD Executive Officer J Syamal Rao, Trust Board members, Additional Executive officer Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, and other officials were also present.

Amenities being provided to 23 SW hostels at a cost of Rs 1.29 cr

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has said that 23 Social Welfare hostels are being provided amenities by spending Rs 1.29 crore.

The Collector held a meeting with the officials of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, EWIDC, social welfare and panchayat raj and reviewed the amenities being provided to social welfare hostels and educational institutions in the district.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Nagarani instructed the officials concerned to expeditiously complete the infrastructure development works undertaken in colleges, schools and welfare hostels. Under the 'Palle Panduga' programme the Panchayatr Raj wing had completed the construction of 176 CC roads, out of the 394 CC roads, in the district, she said and ordered the officials to complete the remaining works by January 15 maintaining quality standards.

The Collector said that Rs 1.29 crore has been allocated for the repairs and development of infrastructure of 23 social welfare hostels in WG district and directed that the Housing Department should take up the work.

The EWIDC has to undertake the construction of six blocks of Fisheries University at Saripalli near here, but only three blocks had been completed so far, she said, adding that the construction of two blocks have been at the foundation level, she stated.

The required infrastructure was provided to Penukonda Degree College at a cost of Rs 2 crore, she highlighted. Works to provide facilities to the



Degree colleges of Ganapavaram and Palakollu are being taken up.

Under the 'Palle Panduga' programme the Panchayatr Raj wing had completed the construction of 176 CC roads, out of the 394 CC roads, in the district, she said and ordered the officials to complete the remaining works by January 15 maintaining quality standards.

Collector Nagarani asserted that under the 'Mana Badi-Mana Bhavishyat' programme, development works were taken up in 154 schools in Palakollu rural, Bhimavaram rural, Kalla, Attili and Yelamanchili manuals and instructed the officials complete the works expeditiously. The Collector also reviewed the construction of ramps for differently-abled persons and

the development works being carried out in 14 junior colleges. Five chemistry laboratories were being set up in selected schools and work would be completed soon, she asserted.

Play grounds would be developed in 21 schools at a cost of Rs 2 lakh each, she revealed, adding that libraries, toilets, RO drinking plants and solar panels were sanctioned to various educational institutions in the district and the works of the same would begin soon.

District Panchayat Raj Engineer officer K Srinivasa Rao, district RWS officer Nageswera Rao and EWIDC EE B Rangnath Swamy and Samagra Siksha Deputy DE B Sektheswa Rao were among those who attended the meeting.

Miscreants desecrate Annamayya statue by putting Santa Claus cap

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In a shocking incident, some miscreants desecrated the statue of Tallapaka Annamacharya, popularly known as Annamayya, at RC road here on Monday, by putting a cap on the head of the statue.



Tallapaka Annamacharya was a musician, composer and also a Hindu saint, who composed over 32,000 Samaritans praising the Lord Venkateswara.

Some miscreants desecrated the statue by putting a cap of Christmas Santa Claus on the head of the statue. Some people who noticed it registered their protest. However, the Santa Claus cap was later removed from the statue. Some miscreants intentionally put the cap on the head of Annamayya statue to create trouble as such incidents never took place in the city, locals told the media.

A large number of activists, affiliated to various Hindu outfits, including the Bajrang Dal, registered their protest at the statue raising slogans condemning the incident. The police pacified the agitating activists by assuring them to arrest the culprits at the earliest.

BJP official Spokesperson Samanchi Srinivas demanded the police to examine the CCTV footage and arrest the culprits. He also demanded the elders of Christian religion to condemn the desecration of Annamayya statue.

Former chairman of TTD Board Bhumana Karunakar Reddy demanded the arrest of the culprits immediately.

CPM leader K Murali alleged that in order to create communal hatred among people some vested interests put the Christmas Santa Claus cap on the head of Annamayya statue.

MLA Anji Babu lays stone for developmental works

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

MLA and State Public Accounts Committee Chairman Pulaparti Ramanjaneyulu laid the foundation stone for the development works at various places on Tuesday.

MLA Ramanjaneyulu laid the foundation stone at Nadamuri Guruvu and Madugu Polavaram villages for development works being carried out at a cost of Rs 52 lakh. He also laid the stone for the micro filter water tank construction work, to be taken up at a cost of Rs 40 lakh, at

Mrityavarupalem village.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, the TDP MLA said that works were being carried out in a big way to develop the villages and provide basic amenities. The MLA asserted the Government's commitment to beautify the villages. The MLA highlighted that the works to provide facilities in the rural areas began as soon as the coalition government came to power.

Ramanjaneyulu announced that the assurances given to the people under 'Super Six' scheme are being fulfilled one after one and reiterated the



Government's stand to fulfill all the assurances.

"The village sarpanches are now getting not only funds for the development of their respective village panchayats but due respect. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan are leading the State towards progress in such a way the entire country looks towards AP," he observed. MLA Ramanjaneyulu pledged to develop every village in his constituency. A large number of TDP, BJP and JSP leaders and activists attended the programme.

69 red sander logs seized; 5 woodcutters arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti Smuggling Task Force (RSATF) personnel seized 69 red sander logs, weighing 479 KGs and arrested five woodcutters at Reppalathippa village in Nagalapuram mandal in the district.

Superintendent of police L Subba Rayudu told the media here on Tuesday that a Task Force team led by Inspector M Suresh Kumar and RSI Naresh conducted a raid at Reppalathippa village and found 69 red sander logs in the forest area which were kept ready to be loaded into a transport vehicle. The police seized the 69 red sander logs worth Rs 20 lakh. The police also seized a motorcycle.

Minister Ponguleti cautions officials

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Revenue and Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy warned officials that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy would not object if he took action against officials who make mistakes while selecting Indiramma Housing Scheme beneficiaries.

Addressing the media after attending a review meeting on Indiramma Houses on Tuesday, Ponguleti said that he will not hesitate to take action against officials who committed mistakes in implementing the Indiramma Housing Scheme.

He said the government would appoint a vigilance team to ensure the Indiramma Housing Scheme is implemented in a transparent manner. People should file complaints on the website if they find any irregularities in the selection of



beneficiaries and other issues, he said.

He said that they had appointed 33 Executive Engineer-level officers in all the 33 districts as project directors to supervise the construction of Indiramma houses.

He said the government had examined 32 lakh applications by December 23, that is, by examining 4.5 lakh to 5.5 lakh applications a day.

He said the checking of 80 lakh applications would be

completed by the first week of January. Later, the government will complete the selection of beneficiaries and start the construction of houses by Sankranthi, Ponguleti added.

He said that the Congress Government is going to strengthen the Housing Corporation as the BRS government weakened it totally. He said the government had already brought back 95 per cent of employees to the Housing Corporation.

He said that the construction of Indiramma Houses is a continuous process and the government would give first priority to the handicapped and widows. The government's objective is to help the poorest of the poor first, he said.

The Minister reiterated that the government would give houses even if the Centre rejected the applications of some peo-

ple. He said the State will take Central funds accepting the Centre's guidelines and made it clear that the government will not go back on constructing houses for all the poor and the homeless.

He said that they would set up special wings in the CM's office and in his own office and in the offices of important officials.

The Minister said that the government will announce rules for the construction of Indiramma Houses soon and that they would also set up a special wing to accept public complaints.

He appealed to journalists to inform the government if they found any discrepancies in the implementation of the scheme.

He said the government would set up a special website and provide toll-free phone numbers soon.

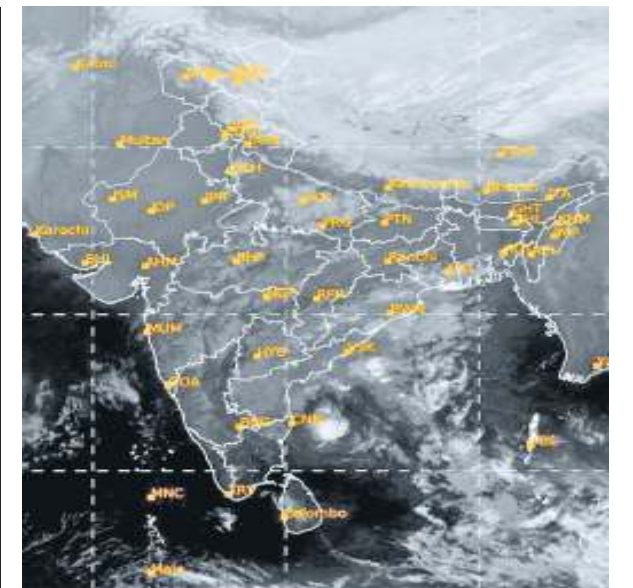
1600 litres of jaggery wash destroyed

PNS ■ NANDYALA

The police and excise personnel conducted a raid on an illicit liquor brewing unit and destroyed 1600 litres of jaggery, meant for distilling illicit liquor at Kollabavapuram village in, Nandikotkur mandal on Tuesday.

On the directions of deputy commissioner of excise department Sridevi, monitored by district excise officer Ravi Kumar, a team of police and excise personnel conducted a raid on an illicit liquor distil unit at Kollabavapuram village and found 1,600 liters of jaggery wash hoarded to brew illicit liquor.

They destroyed the jaggery wash by breaking open the tins and seized 20 liters of country-made liquor.



Well-marked low pressure area to weaken over south AP coast

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Well Marked Low Pressure Area lies over the Bay off South Andhra Pradesh coast and weaken gradually into a Low Pressure area in the next 24 hrs.

Some parts of North coastal districts are expected to receive heavy rains for two days from tomorrow. The Met office on Tuesday said yesterday's Well Marked Low Pressure Area over Southwest and adjoining Westcentral Bay of Bengal lay-over Southwest Bay of Bengal off South Andhra Pradesh-North Tamil Nadu coasts at 0530 of today and persisted over the same area at 0830 hrs today.

However, the associated cyclonic circulation now extends upto 4.5 km above mean sea level tilting southwest with height.

It is likely to move west-southwestwards and weaken gradually into a Low Pressure Area over the same region during the next 24 hours. Heavy rain is likely to occur at isolated places over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema. Thunderstorms and lightning is likely to occur at one or two places over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema for two days.

Fishermen are advised not to venture into Westcentral and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal and along and off south Andhra Pradesh coasts for the next two days. Meanwhile, rainfall occurred at a few places over Coastal Andhra Pradesh; at one or two places over Rayalaseema while dry weather prevailed over Telangana.

ACROSS THE STATES



President Murmu greets citizens on eve of Christmas

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday greeted citizens on the eve of Christmas and hoped that the "forces of trust and forgiveness" will be strengthened around the world, bringing people closer to each other. "As we celebrate this sacred day, let us imbibe Jesus Christ's message of love and harmony in our lives. His teachings of brotherhood and welfare of all continue to light the path to a better world. This festival inspires us to foster unity and peace," she said. In this season of peace, "I hope the forces of trust and forgiveness will be strengthened around the world, bringing people closer to each other," Murmu said. The President extended her warmest greetings and best wishes to all Indians, especially Christians, according to a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



Jharkhand hikes DA of employees by 3 pc

The Jharkhand government on Tuesday hiked the dearness allowance (DA) of its employees to 53 per cent of basic pay from the existing 50 per cent, effective from July 1 this year, an official said. The dearness relief to pensioners was also increased by 3 percentage points to 53 per cent. The proposal regarding the hike in DA to state government employees and dearness relief to pensioners was approved at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Hemant Soren. The hike will benefit over three lakh employees and pensioners in the state, officials said. A total of 10 proposals were passed by the cabinet, including administrative approval of Rs 99.56 crore for the multi-disciplinary education and research university (MERU) in the campus of Vinoba Bhawe University (VBU), Hazaribag, under the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) "We are ready to move ahead with a visionary mindset for Jharkhand's betterment," Soren said.



Snake in Mumbai courtroom disrupts proceedings

A snake was found on a heap of files in a courtroom in Mumbai on Tuesday, disrupting the proceedings for about an hour. It was business as usual in room number 27 of the magistrate court in Mulund till noon when a policeman spotted a 2-foot-long snake while going through files. A lawyer present in the courtroom said the incident caused panic among persons present in the courtroom, forcing the judge to temporarily stop the proceedings. Snake-catchers were called and they diligently rummaged through the courtroom packed with loads of old files and cavity-ridden walls and floor. But the snake was not found, the lawyer said, adding that it might have slithered into one of the holes in the room. The court proceedings resumed after an hour. Interestingly, the spotting of snakes in this courtroom, surrounded by vegetation, was not an isolated incident.

'New criminal laws becoming protectors of civil rights'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said the three new criminal laws - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam - are becoming protectors of civil rights and the basis of 'ease of justice'.

Chairing a review meeting here on the implementation of the three criminal laws in Uttarakhand, Shah asked Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama to put into effect the new laws 100 per cent as soon as possible.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, which came into effect on July 1, replaced the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 respectively.

During the discussion in the meeting, Shah said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the three new criminal laws are becoming the protectors of civil rights and the basis of 'ease of justice', an official statement said.

Shah said the new laws are victim and citizen centric and they need to be implemented promptly with this spirit.

He said the Uttarakhand government should make efforts to fill the gaps in technology and other areas for 100 per cent implementation of the new laws.



The home minister said the Uttarakhand government should give priority to 100 per cent implementation of the new laws in all police stations and jails in areas where more FIRs are registered.

The meeting reviewed the implementation and current status of various new provisions related to police, jails, courts, prosecution and forensics in Uttarakhand, the statement said.

Emphasising on the use of technology, Shah said more than one forensic mobile van should be available in every district of the state.

He said for forensic visits, teams should be divided into three categories - serious, normal and very normal, so that resources can be utilised better. Along with this, the home minister also emphasised that a protocol should be made to decide the designated place for video conferencing and the cameras installed at all places should be of excellent quality.

He said there should be regular and continuous monitoring of how many of the accused named under the Zero FIRs registered have been brought to justice and how many FIRs have been transferred to the states.

Shah asked Dhama to review the progress of implementation of the three new laws every 15 days and the chief secretary and DGP once a week with the officials of all the departments concerned.

He suggested to the DGP of Uttarakhand to ensure that all the Superintendents of Police investigate the cases within the prescribed timelines.

Besides Shah and Dhama, top officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Uttarakhand government attended the meeting.

'BSF to step up surveillance at India-Bangla border'

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The BSF will step up surveillance along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas, Nadia and Murshidabad districts with an increased focus on the unfenced stretches, its Director-General Daljit Singh Chaudhary said on Tuesday. Chaudhary said this after chairing a high-level meeting of the border-guarding force near Kolkata. "It has been decided that in districts such as Nadia, Murshidabad and North 24 Parganas, surveillance will be increased and unfenced stretches of the border will be under increased scrutiny," he said.



"There will be more CCTV surveillance and patrolling will be intensified, particularly along sensitive spots, and intelligence networks will be further strengthened," he added. Chaudhary said the BSF was working in perfect coordination with Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) to prevent illegal border crossings.

The DG was visiting Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas to meet the 20 female BSF personnel who completed the 53-day Ganga River Rafting Expedition, covering 2,500 km from Gangotri to Gangasagar -- where the river meets the Bay of Bengal. It was organised by the BSF and the National Mission for Clean Ganga. The all-women expedition started on November 2, to spread the message of women empowerment and keeping the Ganga clean, and concluded on December 22.

'Notice for my removal was a rusted knife'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday said one should not use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery and asserted that the notice for his removal from the post was actually a "rusted" tool.

In his first reaction on the notice submitted by the opposition INDIA bloc, Dhankhar said, "Just look at the notice against the vice president. Just look at the six links they have given."

"You'll be shocked. Chandra Shekhar ji once said, 'Never use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery'. The notice wasn't even a vegetable-cutting knife; it was rusted. There was haste."

The notice was rejected by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chair Harivansh. "When I read it, I was aston-



ished. But what surprised me more was that none of you read it. If you had, you wouldn't have been able to sleep for days," he told a group of women journalists.

Dhankhar said any constitutional position has to be vindicated by commitment to sublimity, sterling qualities and constitutionalism. "We are not in a position to set the scores. Because for the success of democracy, two things are inalienable: expression and dialogue," he said, according to an official statement.

Cautioning against orchestrated efforts to harm national interests, the vice president said these are fuelled in an orchestrated manner by forces that are determined to be inimical to the interest of the country.

'Give up stubbornness, talk to farmers'

■ PUNJAB CM MANN TO CENTRE

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday urged the Centre to give up its "stubbornness" and hold talks with farmers who are protesting at the state's border over various issues, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops. Farmers led by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

Farmer leader from Punjab Jagjit Singh Dallewal has been on a hunger strike at the Khanauri bor-

der since November 26 to put pressure on the Centre to accept the farmers' demands.

Doctors have described Dallewal's health condition as "critical" as his fast entered the 29th day on Tuesday. In a post on X, Mann said the central government should give up its "stubbornness" and open the way for talks with the farmer organisations. "If Modi ji can stop the war between Russia and Ukraine, then can't he talk to the farmers sitting 200 kilometres away (from Delhi)? What time are you waiting for?" he asked.

Later, in a statement, Mann slammed the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Union government for "meting out step-motherly treatment to the farmers by not



even giving them an opportunity to air their genuine demands".

The chief minister alleged that "self proclaimed global leader Narendra Modi is more worried about intervening in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine but is apathetic towards the food growers of the country". Mann said the Union government has been "blatantly ignoring" the genuine demands of the farmers of the country which is highly "deplorable".

"It is unfortunate that the prime minister is more worried about emerging as 'global leader' by intervening in international affairs rather than resolving the issues faced by the countrymen," the AAP leader said.

I am a victim of chit fund scam too: Odisha CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday claimed that he was also a victim of chit fund scams and urged people to be aware of the activities of ponzi firms to save their hard-earned money.

Majhi said this while addressing a function to celebrate the State Level National Consumers Day here. "I was also a victim of chit fund scams. Two firms had duped me in 1990 and 2002," the chief minister said, adding that he could not get back his money as the process of recovering the money



was too cumbersome and too lengthy.

Claiming that he lost the investment in two ponzi firms, the chief minister said he was influenced by the sweet talks made by the firm agents and arranged money to deposit in certain schemes. "However, when the maturity period came, I could not find the companies where money was deposited," he said.

The chief minister said there has been a lot of change now as the Centre has formulated and strengthened regulations to stop cheating and duping of consumers.

Bengal Governor gives convocation a miss amid row

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose on Tuesday gave a miss to the convocation of the prestigious Jadavpur University with the Raj Bhavan maintaining that due formalities were not followed in organising it.

Bose, who is the chancellor of the state-run varsity, on Monday had written to officiating vice-chancellor Bhaskar Gupta, stating that the convocation was convened flouting several rules and laws, and was "illegal".

Chancellor's nominee to JU's Executive Council Kazi Masum Akhtar told PTI after attending the convocation that the Raj Bhavan was "frustrated" and the governor was "upset and felt insulted" by the rules not being followed. "With no permanent VC at the helm, and no prior



notice given for the mandatory court meeting, the governor considers the convocation -- the date of which was decided at the meeting of Executive Council, as illegal and fraught with malpractices," he said. Akhtar said that though December 24 has been the date for the convocation for years, there are provisions to defer it in exceptional situations.

"I have come to today's event after seeking permission from the governor," he said.

He said the allegations of some mass communications students that their exam papers were not properly evaluated should also have been addressed before the function. A similar situation happened last year as well and then interim vice-chancellor Buddhadev Sau had to finally resign from his post.

People struggling with rising prices: Rahul

■ Says govt sleeping like 'Kumbhakaran'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said that the people are struggling with rising prices and are forced to compromise on small things of daily needs while the government is sleeping like 'Kumbhakaran'. Gandhi shared a video on his social media handles on his recent visit to a vegetable market in Giri Nagar here and interaction with housewives who narrated their ordeal due to rising prices of food items.

"A few days ago, I went to a local vegetable market and while shopping with customers, I talked to the vendors to know how the budget of the common people is deteriorating and how inflation has troubled everyone," Gandhi said in his post accompanying the video.



BJP launches counter-attack on Congress

PNS ■ JAMMU

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on the Congress, accusing the party of repeatedly disrespecting Dr B R Ambedkar, both before and after Independence.

Chugh alleged the Congress forced Ambedkar to resign, citing his resignation letter as evidence of the "mindset" of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru towards Ambedkar.

He also criticised the Omar Abdullah-led government, accusing it of losing the trust and support of the people by failing to deliver on its promises. "I was reading a newspaper report (about protests). The Congress party has a long history of disrespecting Dr Ambedkar—during his lifetime and even after his passing (away). This is evident from their actions before and after Independence, including forcing him to resign."

"If you analyse his resignation letter, it exposes the biased mentality of Pandit Nehru, who, as Prime Minister and Congress president, consistently opposed Ambedkar's ideology," Chugh told reporters on the sidelines of a function here.

Shyam Benegal: A look at 10 pathbreaking movies by the filmmaker

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Filmmaker Shyam Benegal, who passed away in Mumbai at the age of 90, heralded a parallel cinema movement in the 1970s and 1980s with his realistic portrayal of societal issues.

Here's a look at some of the most iconic movies of the legendary director.

Ankur (1974): Benegal made a powerful debut in 1974 with "Ankur", a searing and impactful portrayal of class, caste, power and exploitation in rural India. It also marked the first feature film of Shabana Azmi, who went on to become Benegal's frequent collaborator.

The film follows the story of an

upper caste son of the village landlord, played by Anant Nag, who becomes involved with his lower caste servant's wife (Azmi). It explores themes of oppression, infidelity, and retaliation by the oppressed.

Nishant (1975): Once again set in a village, "Nishant" revolves around a group of powerless villagers who are unable to take a stand against the corrupt feudal system.

This movie reunited Benegal with Azmi and introduced another stalwart of Indian cinema, Naseeruddin Shah, who went on to work with the director in many of his later films.

How women were the main victims of village politics and patriarchy was a theme Benegal touched



upon in the movie. Also starring Girish Karnad, Amrith Puri, Mohan Agashe, Nag and Smita Patil, the film was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival.

Manthan (1976): It was inspired by the groundbreaking milk cooperative movement by Dr Verghese

Kuriyan that transformed India into one of the largest milk producers in the world.

"Manthan", or "Churning" in English, was financed by 5 lakh farmers of Gujarat 48 years ago who contributed Rs 2 each. The opening credits of the movie read: "500,000 Farmers of Gujarat presents."

Shyam Benegal cremated with full state honours

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal, the pioneer of the parallel cinema movement in Indian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, was cremated on Tuesday with full state honours and a three-gun salute here. Benegal, known for films such as "Ankur", "Mandi", "Nishant", and "Junoon", died on Monday at a hospital here due to chronic kidney disease. The last rites of the filmmaker, who celebrated his 90th birthday on December 14, were held around

3 pm at Dadar's Shivaji Park crematorium. His body was wrapped in the national flag and decked with garlands. Benegal's cinema contemporaries, colleagues and younger generations of actors and artists accompanied wife Nira and daughter Pia in paying their last respects to the icon, whose movies captured the many realities of India. Naseeruddin Shah, Rajit Kapoor, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, and Ila Arun, who starred in many of Benegal's films, were present to bid adieu to the director.



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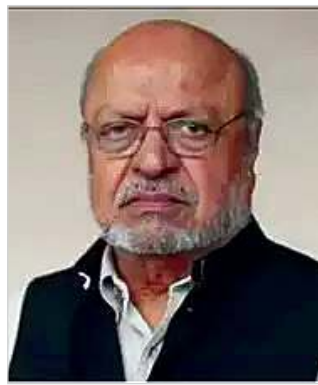
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Adieu Shyam Benegal

With passing of Shyam Benegal, Indian cinema has lost a luminary, but his films will continue to illuminate and educate

The curtains have fallen on one of the most illustrious chapters in Indian cinema. Shyam Benegal, the pioneering filmmaker who redefined storytelling in Indian cinema, passed away at the age of 90 on December 23, 2024. He succumbed to chronic kidney disease at Wockhardt Hospital in Bombay Central. Known as the father of Indian parallel cinema, Benegal's legacy remains etched in the heart of Indian filmmaking, his films celebrated for their realism, depth, and transformative impact on society. Born on December 14, 1934, Benegal celebrated his milestone 90th birthday just days ago, surrounded by close family and friends. Yet, even in his twilight years, the veteran filmmaker remained deeply connected to his art. Benegal's career was marked by his groundbreaking contribution to the Indian New Wave movement in the 1970s and 1980s. With films like 'Ankur' (1974), 'Nishant' (1975), 'Manthan' (1976), and 'Bhumika' (1977), he charted a new cinematic course that delved into realism and social commentary, a stark contrast to the formulaic escapism of mainstream Bollywood.



His films gave voice to the marginalised and explored themes of gender, class struggles, and rural India, bringing to light the unseen facets of Indian society. 'Nishant', a harrowing tale of oppression and resistance, and 'Manthan', inspired by Dr. Verghese Kurien's milk cooperative movement, became cult classics. The latter, crowdfunded by 500,000 farmers, stands as a testament to Benegal's ability to connect with grassroots realities. The film, India's official entry for the 1976 Academy Awards, exemplified his commitment to blending art with advocacy. Benegal's films also became a platform for some of India's finest acting talents. Actors like Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, and Om Puri found their early footing in his films. Azmi, who debuted in Benegal's 'Ankur', recently shared a poignant moment from his 90th birthday celebrations, underscoring the indelible bond they shared. His collaboration with screenwriter Vijay Tendulkar produced narratives that were both poignant and thought-provoking, winning multiple National Awards. From Junoon to 'Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero', Benegal's oeuvre showcased an unmatched versatility, spanning historical dramas, rural sagas, and contemporary commentaries. Earlier this year, 'Manthan' was restored and screened at the Cannes Film Festival under the Cannes Classics segment, reiterating the timeless relevance of Benegal's vision. Despite his declining health, the event underscored his enduring influence on global cinema. Benegal's storytelling was never confined to entertainment. His films were instruments of change, questioning societal norms and sparking dialogues. His pioneering approach laid the foundation for generations of filmmakers who sought to marry art with social responsibility. Rest in peace, Shyam Benegal, the maestro who showed us the soul of India through his lens.

Rest in peace, Shyam Benegal, the maestro who showed us the soul of India through his lens.

India recalibrates Myanmar strategy

The stakes are high for India, balancing its Act East policy, border security and competition with China, all against the backdrop of a fractured Myanmar



ASHOK K MEHTA

After four years of civil war in Myanmar, India has quietly changed its policy towards the Junta from one of total and unflinching support following its coup against democracy to one of nuanced support. Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing has been advocating holding elections for the last four years but only now with China's assistance, they are slated for 2025. China is playing with both sides: supporting the Junta as well as some EAOs (Ethnic Armed Organisations) especially in the north contiguous with its Yunnan province. India too has shifted the goalposts but less perceptibly and engaging some EAOs and the National Unity Government (NUG) after the Junta lost its control in the Rakhine and Chin territories along India and Bangladesh borders.

Last week the Junta's control of the ground began crumbling further with the loss of Ann, Headquarters Western Military Command, the second military command to fall to resistance groups. Junta has lost two airports - Thandwe (Rakhine) and Lashio and 75 towns and cities out of some 340 of them. It has also lost control of six border trading posts. 40 of 70 towns in Rakhine have been captured by the Arakan Army which is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, the other two being MNDAA and TNLA.

Two critical seaports on the west coast - India-operated Sittwe and Chinese-owned Kyaukphyu - are on AA's target list next year unless Beijing can dissuade it from attacking Kyaukphyu though the loss of Ann has opened the gates to it. Magaung is the other target in Rakhine. On the Thailand border, the Karen National Union took Manerplaw, the Junta losing possession after 30 years. A humanitarian corridor with Thailand has existed with the help of the Junta. In the North, TBA has been persuaded by China to go slow against the Junta, and not support NUG and the People's Defence Force. The Kachin Independence Army has seized Bemo and Mansi, popular tourist areas in the



northeast. In the central Sagaing region, Mandalay, the second largest city after Yangon, came under rocket attack last month and National Highway 3 from Mandalay to China border, was under resistance control. In sum, the Junta controls less than 50 per cent of the land but has the majority of the population in it. These are Bamar-predominant areas in Sagaing, Irrawaddy Delta, the new capital Naypyidaw and Yangon. They are likely to lose more ground next year despite pressure from the Chinese on EAOs. Beijing is the key player in Myanmar's economy and is deeply invested in business and industry. Beijing is nursing the Junta and its leader, Hlaing.

He was invited to meet PM Li Qiang after attending the Greater Mekong Subregional Summit at Kunming last month. China is replenishing the Junta's military arsenal - so is Russia - including three fighter jets with assured ammunition supply. It wants to locate a private security company (like in Pakistan) for the protection of its strategic assets like China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) containing oil and gas pipelines along with a railway link from Kunming to Kyaukphyu. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is a frequent visitor to Myanmar though most people resent Chinese support for the Junta and its presence. The Chinese consulate in



LAST WEEK THE JUNTA'S CONTROL OF THE GROUND BEGAN CRUMBLING FURTHER WITH THE LOSS OF ANN, HEADQUARTERS WESTERN MILITARY COMMAND, THE SECOND MILITARY COMMAND TO FALL TO RESISTANCE GROUPS

Mandalay came under attack recently. Theoretically, an election could be held contingent upon the ground situation in November next year. Even with low turnout and rigging an election will be manipulated. ASEAN's problem is Myanmar after the failure of its five-point consensus peace formula. Many meetings have been held with and without Myanmar representation without any light at the end of the tunnel. During the 18 December talks in Bangkok, with Myanmar's neighbouring countries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, a former Ambassador in Myanmar, discussed prospects for elections with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Shwe.

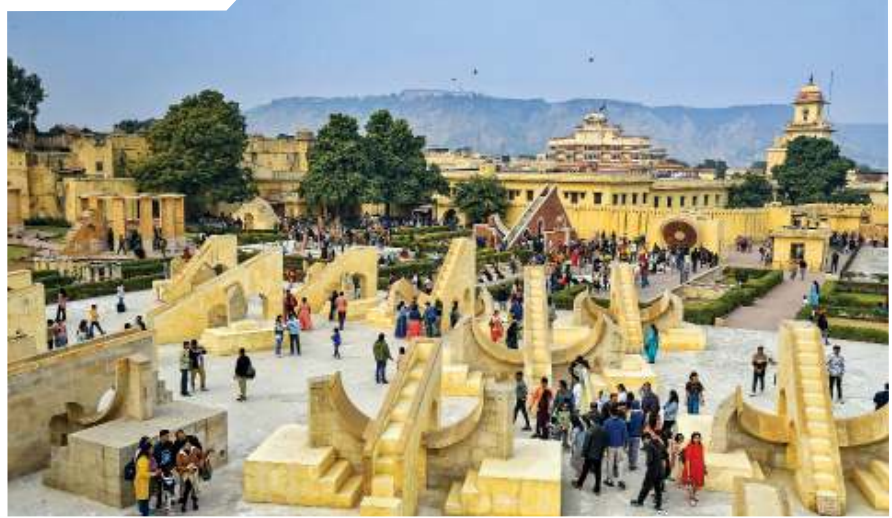
There was a separate set of talks with stakeholders from non-neighbouring countries. India's stakes are high given competition with China, a disturbed situation in its northeast and a troubling relationship developing with Bangladesh. Myanmar is a pivotal land bridge for its Act East policy, the Asean Trilateral Highway and the security of its Eastern frontier. The Junta's loss of control in Rakhine and Chin states has created an adverse situation along the border with Mizoram and a broken Manipur. While India is not proactive like China, its new policy pronouncement - old wine in a new bottle - is "immediate cessation of violence, peaceful resolution of

the ethnic issue through a genuine federal democracy where the process should be Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-driven. While Delhi has taken its time to engage resistance groups, it did organise one-and-a-half track meetings with select EAOs and Junta separately. In November, it first engaged Junta officials followed by EAOs who met the Joint Secretary (Bangladesh-Sri Lanka-Myanmar) at the Indian Council for World Affairs. In September, it had met representatives from Chin, Rakhine, Sagaing and Magwe who are already in refugee camps in Mizoram.

While India has not opened humanitarian corridors to these areas it is providing food, fuel medicines across the border. But that is not enough as they also want weapons and cash. Delhi does not want to annoy the Junta with which it has little leverage, unlike China. NUG was not invited to Delhi though it is being engaged back channel. India has to get real; be proactive, take risks and support AA and Chin rebels as its Act East policy is pivoted in areas under their control. It can't dump the Junta as it will be a key constituent of any outcome.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

PICTALK



Tourists visit the historical Jantar Mantar, in Jaipur

PTI

Across cultures and ages: The beauty of unexpected friendships

The unexpected joy of forging meaningful friendships in middle age defies the common belief that the best opportunities for connection are behind us

Your hat is fantastic. It makes you look more Bavarian than any of us, the concierge quipped as I entered the venue for the coffee-and-cake event at a resort in southern Germany. Although he was stretching the truth - I have neither blonde hair nor blue eyes - I accepted the compliment with a coy smile. "Danke schön," I said, tipping my woolen hat. Just then, another guest remarked, "That's a pretty pin on your hat," pointing to the delicate hand-crafted Edelweiss flower. A cherished gift from my friends, Wolfgang and Amelie, the pin symbolised a friendship that began just a year ago, in this very Bavarian town of Schliersee.



For youth. Our paths crossed serendipitously during an evening walk. A casual exchange of pleasantries evolved into deeper conversations about life, culture, and shared interests. What began as polite conversation in an Alpine countryside ended with an exchange of coordinates and it continued with texting in the months after. It is widely held that the friends we make in our formative years are the ones who stay, while those forged later in life are fleeting, superficial, or driven by necessity. This belief may hold some truth; adulthood brings with it obligations, scepticism, and wariness. We become cautious in extending ourselves. The

innocence of youthful camaraderie gives way to guarded interactions, and we convince ourselves that the window for profound friendship has closed. Yet, the Wolfgangs remind me that this window is not sealed shut - it merely takes a little more effort to open. Friendships formed in middle age are special not despite our life experiences, but because of them. We bring to these connections a deeper sense of self-awareness, empathy, and appreciation. There's no rush to impress or to conform. The pressures of youthful identity-building are gone. In their place, we find sincerity, authenticity, and the willingness to value people for who they truly are. They remind us of the universality of human warmth and curiosity. Meeting someone from another country - someone whose life, traditions, and language are different - can feel like discovering an entirely new world. And when such encounters lead to genuine friendship, they break down the invisible walls that geography and culture often build around us. There is also a profound joy

in the intentionality of these connections. In our younger years, friendships are often born of proximity - classmates, neighbours, or college roommates. As adults, friendships require deliberate effort. This intentionality infuses middle-aged friendships with a depth and resilience that can be even more rewarding than the bonds of our youth. I think back to the pin on my hat - that delicate Edelweiss - and I see it as a metaphor for these kinds of friendships. The Edelweiss, a rare Alpine flower, thrives in challenging conditions. It symbolises courage, devotion, and the willingness to climb new heights. Like the flower, friendships made in middle age might take more effort to cultivate, but they are hardy, resilient, and precious. A year after that first meeting, I found myself once again in Schliersee last month, sharing coffee and cake with the Wolfgangs, laughing over our language blunders and cultural quirks. It is never too late to make friends.

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



ASHA KUMAR IYER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STRENGTHENING INDIA-KUWAIT TIES

Madam - The two-day visit of PM Narendra Modi to Kuwait will further boost the bilateral ties between two historically friendly nations. This is the first visit by any Indian prime minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years. Though India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, which date back to the pre-oil era of Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy, India and most Arab countries, especially Kuwait, have enjoyed very cordial relations based on mutual trust and people-to-people contact, nurtured over several millennia. Till 1961, the Indian rupee was the legal currency tender of Kuwait till it introduced its currency, the Kuwaiti Dinar (KWD). This was a symbol of enduring economic and cultural centuries between two brother nations. PM Modi was conferred with Kuwait's highest civilian honour, the prestigious "Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer. The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer" is a knighthood order of Kuwait. It is awarded to heads of state and foreign sovereigns and members of foreign royal families in a sign of friendship and has been previously awarded to foreign leaders like Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, George Bush, King Salman Bin Saud, and King Hussein of Jordan. This visit of PM Modi holds great significance as current global volatility requires better cooperation and stability among nations, especially among regional players, for energy security, and India's desire for stability in the Gulf region, beside Kuwait, holds significant strategic importance. The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has the world's oldest and fifth largest sovereign wealth fund, valued around US \$1 trillion, which has US \$969 billion in assets under its management. This visit of PM Modi has heralded a new era of friendship, which will further boost trade, cooperation, and peace at a time when economic concerns and regional stability dictate are of the foremost importance in the formation of political alliances.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

PV Sindhu marries Venkata Datta Sai



Indian badminton star Pusarla Venkata Sindhu, a two-time Olympic (silver and bronze) medalist, is married to Venkata Datta Sai in Udaipur. Sindhu, a five-time World Championship medalist, a few days ago, clinched the Syed Modi India International title and announced her engagement via an Instagram post on December 14, 2024, that captured a memorable moment with the couple holding their rings and smiling from ear to ear. The wedding festivities began on December 20th

in the lake city of Rajasthan at the reclusive and majestic Raffles Udaipur Resort. Pre-wedding festivities included sangeet, haldi, and mehendi ceremonies. The families, long-time acquaintances, planned the wedding swiftly to accommodate Sindhu's training schedule.

Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (shockingly, he was wearing a black kurta in an auspicious ceremony, even as a Hindu party leader) shared a captivating photo of the couple, offering his blessings. Now the reception is scheduled in Sindhu's native city, Hyderabad, on December 24. Congratulations to the darling daughter of Mother India, P.V. Sindhu, and her husband, Venkata Datta Sai. Best wishes to the newlyweds for a wonderful & eternal married life. Whatsoever, the first image of the wedding has already captivated hearts, setting the tone for the couple's happily ever after.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

POPCORN PRICING DEBATE

Madam - The recent decision by the GST Council has turned popcorn from a simple snack into a focal point of economic debate. Under the new rules, salted popcorn is taxed at 5 per cent, packaged popcorn at 12 per cent, and sugar-flavoured popcorn at 18 per cent. This decision raises questions about the priorities of the tax structure while adding complexity to people's daily lives. Will samosas, tea, and water also be classified into tax categories based on taste and packaging? The tax determination for popcorn signals that the government is exploring every possible avenue to increase revenue. The aroma of popcorn in cinemas might now bring concerns about tax slabs before the joy of taste. Popcorn, once a symbol of social equality, has now become a marker of class division due to the 5 per cent and 18 per cent tax differential. This decision could negatively impact the Rs 1,200 crore popcorn industry, pushing people toward cheaper alternatives. The government must recognise that such decisions add to the burden on citizens already grap-

pling with inflation. Popcorn is no longer just a snack but a representation of the complexities of policymaking.

RK Jain | Barwani

TRIBES PROTECT NATURE

Madam - It is a great irony that all the well-educated and better-placed-in-life populations are destroying nature and damaging the environment; it is the indigenous tribes across the world who are supposedly backward and primitive who are doing their best to protect it. The bond between nature and her people has all but broken down in all urban centres, and the city dwellers do not think twice about their lifestyles, which is slowly destroying the environment. After all, we, the human race, are not the sole inhabitants of the planet, and other living creatures are co-inheritors too. It is time for all the nations with tribal populations to learn from them on how to care for and protect the planet.

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN THE ETHERAL WISDOM OF SUNDAR KAND

Sacred texts and mantras hold a timeless power to uplift the soul



RAVI VALLURI

The faithful recognise the profound benefits of chanting or reading sacred texts, mantras, and scriptures like the Hanuman Chalisa and Sundar Kand. These practices are especially embraced by large numbers on auspicious days such as Tuesdays and Saturdays. The vibrations generated by reading these sacred books and meditating on the mantras foster positive thoughts, beautify the mind, and empower us to overcome internal obstacles and dispel negativity clouding our perspective. Yet, many of us struggle to engage in these practices regularly, often citing demanding schedules and lack of time.

As spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar observes, "The time given to the Divine is the least." Consequently, we neglect to devote quality time to the Lord, remembering Him only in moments of distress. Even when time is found, many face difficulties focusing, maintaining clarity, or chanting with proper intonation. The mind frequently drifts into worldly concerns.



To aid this practice, here is a simple version of Sundar Kand:

Ram Ram Jai Ram
Ram Jai Ram Ram

Peaceful, Compassionate, Sinless,
One served by Brahma and Shambhu,
One who appears in human form by Maya,
O Raghuvhar, I bow to you.
You are my innermost Self.
Liberate me, O Lord,
Instill devotion within me.

O Lord Hanuman, epitome of strength, knowledge, and wisdom, emboldened by Jambavanth's counsel, set out to cross the mighty ocean in search of Sita. He triumphed over the demoness Surasa and reached Lanka under the cover of night. Guided by divine intuition, he discovered Sita and presented her with Lord Ram's ring, bowing at her feet and seeking her blessings. Hanuman then wreaked havoc in Ashok Vatika—eating fruits, breaking branches, and shaking trees.

Allowing himself to be captured by the asuras, he was taken to Ravana's court. There, he urged Ravana to repent and return Sita to Lord Ram. Ravana, consumed by ego, refused and instead set Hanuman's tail ablaze. In response, Hanuman used the fire to destroy Lanka's golden city. Before departing, Hanuman comforted Sita and took her Chudamani (jewel) as a token for Lord Ram. On returning, he presented it to Ram, who embraced him, deeply moved by his devotion and bravery. When asked how he accomplished the task, Hanuman humbly replied that nothing is impossible with the grace of Lord Ram. Lord Ram then instructed Sugreev to assemble the army and seek the ocean's permission to cross into Lanka. Meanwhile, Mandodari, Ravana's queen, warned him of the dire consequences of his actions and implored him to release Sita, but he refused. Ravana's virtuous brother Vibheeshan also advised him to repent, cautioning that even Lord Shiva would disapprove of his deeds.

Ignoring all advice, Ravana's stubbornness led Vibheeshan to abandon Lanka and seek refuge at Lord Ram's feet. Recognising his righteousness, Lord Ram crowned Vibheeshan as the future king of Lanka. Ravana sent spies disguised as messengers to gather information on Lord Ram's plans. They returned with alarming news and urged Ravana to free Sita, but he remained defiant. With the help of Nal and Neel, Lord Ram constructed the Setu bridge to cross the ocean. Along the way, he released the river Sarayu from its curse and advanced toward Lanka. This timeless Sundar Kand, penned by Tulsidas, continues to inspire and guide devotees on their spiritual journey.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Atal ji: The statesman with vision and resolve



NARENDRA MODI

Today, as we mark the 100th Jayanti of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, we celebrate the life and legacy of a statesman whose vision and leadership continue to inspire generations



Today, 25th December is a very special day for all of us. Our nation marks the 100th Jayanti of our beloved former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji. He stands tall as a statesman who continues to inspire countless people.

Our nation will always be grateful to Atal Ji for being the architect of India's transition into the 21st century. When he took oath as PM in 1998 our nation had passed through a period of political instability. In about 9 years we had seen 4 Lok Sabha elections. The people of India were getting impatient and also sceptical about governments being able to deliver. It was Atal Ji who turned this tide by providing stable and effective governance. Coming from humble roots, he realised the struggles of the common citizen and the transformative power of effective governance.

One can see the long-term impact of Atal Ji's leadership in so many sectors around us. His era marked a gigantic leap in the world of Information Technology, telecom and communications. This was particularly important for a nation like ours, which is also blessed with a very dynamic Yuva Shakti. The NDA Government under Atal Ji made the first serious attempt to make technology accessible to the common citizens. At the same time, there was foresight in connecting India. Even today, most people recall the Golden Quadrilateral Project, which connected the length and breadth of India. Equally notable were the Vajpayee Government's efforts to enhance local connectivity as well through initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Similarly, his Government gave a push to metro connectivity by doing extensive work for the Delhi Metro, which stands out as a world-class infrastructure project.

Thus, the Vajpayee Government not only boosted economic growth but also brought distant regions closer, fostering unity and integration. When it comes to



ATAL JI PRESIDED OVER THE CREATION OF THE NDA, WHICH REDEFINED COALITIONS IN INDIAN POLITICS. HE BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER AND MADE NDA A FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL PROGRESS AND REGIONAL AMBITIONS

the social sector, an initiative like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan highlights how Atal Ji dreamt of building an India where modern education is accessible to people across the nation, particularly for the poor and marginalised sections. At the same time, his government presided over many economic reforms which set the stage for India's economic surge after several decades of following an economic philosophy which encouraged cronyism and stagnation.

A wonderful example of Vajpayee Ji's leadership can be seen in the summer of 1998. His Government had just assumed office and on 11th May, India conducted the Pokhran tests, known as Operation Shakti. These tests exemplified the prowess of India's scientific community.

The world was stunned that India had done the tests and expressed their anger in no uncertain terms. Any ordinary leader would have buckled, but Atal Ji was made differently. And what happened? India stood firm and resolute with the government calling for another set of tests two days later, on 13th May! If the tests of the 11th showed scientific skill, the ones on 13th showed true leadership. It was a message to the world that gone were the days when India would buckle under threats or pressure. Despite facing international sanctions, the then NDA government of Vajpayee Ji stood firm, articulating India's right to safeguard its sovereignty while simultaneously being the strongest proponent of world peace.

Atal Ji understood Indian democracy and also the need to make it stronger. Atal Ji presided over the creation of the NDA, which redefined coalitions in Indian politics. He brought people together and

made NDA a force for development, national progress and regional ambitions. His Parliamentary brilliance was seen throughout his political journey. He belonged to a party with a handful of MPs but his words were enough to rattle the might of the all-powerful Congress Party that time. As Prime Minister, he blunted the criticisms of the Opposition with style and substance. His was a career spent largely in the Opposition benches but never carried any trace of bitterness against anyone, even though the Congress stooped to new lows by going to the extent of calling him a traitor! He was also not one to cling on to power through opportunistic means. He preferred to resign in 1996 instead of following the path of horse-trading and dirty politics. In 1999, his Government was defeated by 1 vote.

A lot of people told him to challenge the immoral politics happening then but he preferred to go by the rules. Eventually, he came back with another resounding mandate from the people. When it comes to commitment to protecting our Constitution too, Atal Ji stands tall. He was deeply impacted by the martyrdom of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Years later, he was a pillar of the anti-Emergency movement. In the run-up to the 1977 elections after the Emergency, he agreed to merger of his own Party (Jan Sangh) into the Janata Party. I am sure it would have been a painful decision for him and the others, but safeguarding the Constitution was all that mattered to him.

It is also noteworthy how deeply rooted Atal Ji was in Indian culture. Upon becoming India's External Affairs Minister, he became the first Indian leader to speak in Hindi at

the United Nations. This one gesture showcased his immense pride in India's heritage and identity, leaving an indelible mark on the global stage.

Atal Ji's persona was magnetic and his life was enriched by his love for literature and expression. A prolific writer and poet, he used words to inspire, provoke thought, and even offer solace. His poetry, often reflective of his inner struggles and hopes for the nation, continues to resonate with people across age groups.

For so many Bharatiya Janata Party Karyakartas like me, it is our privilege that we were able to learn and interact with a person like Atal Ji. His contribution to the BJP was foundational.

In those days to spear-head an alternative narrative to the dominant Congress showed his greatness. Alongside stalwarts like Shri L.K. Advani Ji and Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi Ji he nurtured the party from its formative years, guiding it through challenges, setbacks and triumphs. Whenever the choice came between ideology and power, he always chose the former. He was able to convince the nation that an alternative world view from the Congress was possible and such a world view could deliver.

On his 100th Jayanti, let us rededicate ourselves to realising his ideals and fulfilling his vision for India. Let us strive to build an India that embodies his principles of good governance, unity, and progress. Atal Ji's unwavering belief in the potential of our nation continues to inspire us to aim higher and work harder.

(This tribute to the visionary statesman late former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been penned by PM Narendra Modi)

Dreaming of a White Christmas in New York City

The first snowfall and the twinkle of lights on the Rockefeller tree—there's a certain magic that makes Christmas in New York unforgettable

The first time I saw New York City during the holidays, I was 19, a college freshman on a whirlwind trip with my friends. It was my first real taste of winter—snow, bitter cold, and the kind of brisk air that turns your cheeks red. Coming from a place where Christmas meant palm trees with twinkle lights, the sight of NYC blanketed in snow felt like stepping into a new world. I didn't know it then, but that trip would spark a love affair with the city that would eventually bring me back here five years later.

My First Snow, My First NYC Christmas
I still remember how the snow caught me off guard. It wasn't the gentle, picture-perfect kind I'd imagined from movies. It was harsh, relentless, and



SHREYA DOYAL

absolutely freezing. Walking through Times Square that Black Friday, bundled up in layers that still didn't feel like enough, I saw the city come alive in a way that felt electric. It wasn't just the towering billboards or the endless sales signs luring shoppers into stores at all hours of the night.

It was the energy—the palpable hum of people chasing holiday deals while dodging each other in the snow. It was chaotic, overwhelming, and unforgettable. Somewhere in the madness of flashing lights and icy sidewalks, I knew I wanted to come back someday—not as a visitor, but as someone who belonged here.

The Magic of NYC's Holiday Icons

During that trip, we did all the things you're supposed to do when you're experiencing Christmas in New York for the first time. We saw the Rockefeller Center tree, towering above the skating rink, every inch of it glowing like it had been plucked from a fairytale. The cold bit at my fingers as we stood there, taking it all in. For a moment, the crowds

and the cold faded away, leaving only the soft twinkle of the lights and the awe of standing in front of something so iconic.

The Met was another world entirely. As someone who'd only read about it in books, stepping into its grandeur felt surreal. Wandering through the exhibits, I found myself captivated by the way history and art came alive here. Outside, the snow was falling again, but I was too caught up in the beauty around me to notice the cold.

The Broadway Moment That Changed Everything

That trip wasn't just about the sights; it was about the moments that stayed with me long after I left. One of those moments was seeing Phantom of the Opera on Broadway.



Sitting in that theater, watching the chandelier crash and the Phantom's haunting story unfold, I felt a kind of magic I couldn't quite explain. It was more than just a show—it was a moment that made me feel alive in a way I hadn't before. Walking out of the theater into the snowy night, the sounds of

the orchestra still echoing in my mind, I felt a connection to the city that I couldn't shake. It was as if New York had opened its arms to me and whispered, "Come back."

Coming Full Circle

Five years later, I did come back. I'd dreamed of living in New York ever since that first

trip, and now here I was, not as a wide-eyed tourist, but as someone calling the city home. It's funny how those early memories still feel so vivid, like they're a part of me.

Walking through Times Square today, I still think about that freezing Black Friday night when I braved the snow for the first time. Seeing the Rockefeller tree now brings back flashes of that first trip—standing in awe of its beauty and dreaming about a future that somehow feels like the present now. Even when I catch a Broadway show, I can't help but remember how Phantom of the Opera made me fall in love with this city in the first place.

The Spirit of a NYC Christmas
There's something timeless

about Christmas in New York. No matter how many years pass or how many times you see it, the magic never fades. The snow still glistens, the lights still dazzle, and the city still hums with that unmistakable holiday energy.

For me, it's not just about the sights or the snow—it's about how this city makes you feel. It's about the way it wraps you up in its chaos, its beauty, and its magic, and leaves you with memories that last a lifetime. A White Christmas in New York City isn't just a holiday—it's a story. And for me, it's the story of a 19-year-old who fell in love with the snow, the lights, and the city that would one day become home!

(The writer is a researcher at Johns Hopkins University; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Gold falls to Rs 78,600 per 10 gm; silver jumps Rs 500

Gold price slipped Rs 100 to Rs 78,600 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 78,700 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. However, silver jumped Rs 500 to Rs 90,500 per kg against the previous close of Rs 90,000 per kg. The price of 99.5 per cent purity gold dipped Rs 100 to Rs 78,200 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February rose Rs 35 or 0.05 per cent to trade at Rs 76,179 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for March delivery went lower by Rs 87 or 0.1 per cent to Rs 89,031 per kg. Globally, Comex gold futures traded flat at USD 2,628.30 per ounce. "Gold traded steady in a holiday thin session with prices seen consolidating last week's fall but remained weighed by a stronger dollar in the overseas market," Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research, JM Financial Services Ltd, said.

'Will come out with recommendations for satcom spectrum soon'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom regulator Trai will issue recommendations on rules for satellite spectrum allocation very soon, an official said on Monday.

The government will evaluate recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) and thereafter decide on allocating spectrum to satellite communication companies, which will pave the way for satellite-based broadband services in the country.

In response to a question on the recommendation on satcom spectrum rules during an event on National Consumer Day, Trai Chairman A K Lahoti said it will be issued "very soon". Trai concluded an open-house discussion on the terms and conditions for the assigning spectrum for certain satellite-based commercial communication services in the second week of November.

Telecom service providers like Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel want spectrum for full mobility across the country should be allocated through auctions only. However, Elon Musk's Starlink and global peers like Amazon's Project Kuiper and other satellite communication companies back an administrative allocation of



satcom spectrum. With battle lines between terrestrial players and satellite aspirants clearly drawn, Trai's marathon open-house discussion stretched for several hours and saw telcos banding together and speaking in unison about the need for a level-playing field as India works out the norms for satcom spectrum.

Jio, which has made a case for the auction of satellite spectrum, on Friday said it is "not afraid of competition" but that 'same services same rules' must apply.

FIEO seeks govt support to boost exports to US

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Apex exporters' body FIEO on Tuesday said it has formulated a strategy to boost India's exports to America, aiming to capitalise on potential opportunities that may arise as the US President-elect, Donald Trump, has threatened to impose high tariffs on Chinese goods.

As part of its plan, the body has urged the government to provide financial assistance for Indian exporters to participate in exhibitions across the US, FIEO (Federation of Indian Export Organisations) Vice President Israr Ahmed told reporters here.

"We have identified five key sectors in the strategy -- apparel, electronics, toys, footwear, and organic chemicals -- as areas of focus to drive growth in exports to the American market," he said. Ahmed emphasised the need for aggressive promotion and visibility in the US market, stating that increased financial support would enable Indian exporters to showcase their products effectively and tap into emerging opportunities created by the shifting trade dynamics.

PM-ECONOMISTS MEET

Jobs, farm productivity, funds for infra boost figure

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Job creation, improving farm productivity, and mobilising public funds for infrastructure development were some of the issues that figured during the interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and economists ahead of the 2025-26 Union Budget.

The Prime Minister on Tuesday met eminent economists and sectoral experts at NITI Aayog to hear their views and suggestions for the upcoming Budget.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Budget for 2025-26 in the Lok Sabha on February 1, 2025.

According to an official statement, the Prime Minister emphasised that Viksit Bharat can be achieved through a fundamental change in mindset, which is focused towards making India developed by 2047.

The participants shared their views on several issues, including navigating challenges posed by global economic uncertainties and



geopolitical tensions, strategies to enhance employment particularly among the youth, and create sustainable job opportunities across sectors. Suggestions were also made on aligning education and training programmes with the evolving needs of the job market, enhancing agricultural productivity and creating sustainable rural employment opportunities, attracting private investment and mobilising public funds for infrastructure projects to boost economic growth.

Suggestions were also made for promoting financial inclu-

and boosting exports and attracting foreign investment, as per the statement.

Renowned economists and analysts present at the interaction included Surjit S Bhalla, Ashok Gulati, Sudipto Mundle, Dharmakirti Joshi, Janmejaya Sinha, Madan Sabnavis, Amita Batra, Pritam Desai, Chetan Ghate, Bharat Ramaswami, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Siddhartha Sanyal, Laveesh Bhandari, Rajani Sinha, Keshab Das, Pritam Banerjee, Rahul Bajoria, Nikhil Gupta, and Shashwat Alok, the statement added.



Subscribers warned against unfamiliar intl calls

The government has warned telecom subscribers against unfamiliar international calls and also asked mobile service providers to tag such calls for awareness of their customers, an official statement said on Tuesday. The Department of Telecom said that within 24 hours of launching 'International Incoming Spoofed Calls Prevention System' on October 22, about 1.35 crore or 90 per cent of all the incoming international calls with tempered Indian phone numbers were identified as spoofed calls and blocked by telecom service providers (TSPs) from reaching Indian telecom subscribers. The fraudsters, thereafter, have shifted their tactics and are using international numbers for their deceptive practices, the official statement said. "The DoT advises citizens that they should show caution with respect to answering calls from unfamiliar international numbers which are not starting with +91 and which claim to be from government authorities of India.

Swiggy plans to onboard 1 lakh women delivery partners

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Food delivery platform Swiggy on Tuesday said it is planning to onboard at least 1 lakh women delivery partners with the NSE literacy programme for delivery partners, with special focus on women workforce.

The company signed the MoU at an event, attended by Swiggy MD and Group CEO Sriharsha Majety, NSE Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Ashish Kumar Chauhan, and Amruta Fadnavis, banker and wife of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Ten women delivery executives, who completed the highest number of orders in 2024, were felicitated during the event, with each recipient receiving a cheque of Rs 11,000. "Earlier this year, when we launched 'She the Change' programme, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman ji, made a very pertinent observation when she said in areas where women are visibly seen to be running more enterprises such as food and beverage businesses, crime and anarchy will gradually reduce.

'Economy on recovery path'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Indian economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum witnessed in the September quarter, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand, it said.

The prospects for agriculture and hence rural consumption are looking up with brisk expansion of rabi sowing, said the article authored by a team led by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra. India's GDP growth slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent during the July-September period of the current fiscal year. The RBI said the views expressed in the bulletin are of the authors and do not represent the views of the central bank.



slowdown in momentum witnessed in Q2, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand," it said.

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low of 5.4 per cent during the July-September period of the current fiscal year. The RBI said the views expressed in the bulletin are of the authors and do not represent the views of the central bank.

'Sops by states may divert funds away from infra development'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sops announced by several states in their 2024-25 Budgets may divert resources away from critical social and economic infrastructure development, an RBI article said on Tuesday.

The gross fiscal deficit as per cent of budget estimate moderated in April-September 2024-25 over H1:2023-24 in case of both Centre and states, primarily on account of robust receipts, deceleration in their revenue expenditure growth and decline in capital expenditure, the article published in December RBI Bulletin said.

This provides fiscal room to them to boost capex in the latter half of 2024-25 which would aid in sustaining the post pan-

demographic gains in expenditure quality and support medium-term growth prospects.

However, several states have announced sops in their 2024-25 Budgets; such spending may divert resources away from critical social and economic infrastructure development, it said.

Many states, including Haryana, Punjab, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand have announced sops including free electricity to agriculture and households, free transport, allowances to unemployed youth and monetary assistance to women.

The views expressed in the article are of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India, a disclaimer said.

According to the article, the Centre recorded higher tax collections, both direct and indirect, and the buoyancy is expected to continue.

Non-tax revenues of the Centre were boosted by the large surplus transfer by the Reserve Bank, it said.

The government spending, of both Centre and states, was dampened in H1:2024-25 reflecting the impact of model code of conduct for general elections and is expected to pick up pace in H2:2024-25.

Overall, it said, the Centre has achieved more than half of its budgeted revenue in H1:2024-25 while containing its expenditure to less than half of what it had projected for the entire financial year.



IOC to invest Rs 61,000 crore for naphtha project in Odisha

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) will invest Rs 61,000 crore to set up a naphtha cracker project at Paradip in Odisha, a statement said on Tuesday. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for this will be signed between the Odisha government and the IOCL in January during the 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha 2025' summit, it said. The foundation stone of the IOC's upcoming Rs 4,352 crore yarn project at Bhadrak will also be laid at that time, it added. The decisions were taken at a meeting between Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and IOCL Chairman AS Sahney in Bhubaneswar. "The Naphtha Project in Paradeep has received in principle approval and IOCL will invest over Rs 61,000 crore for the project. It is likely to be one of the largest projects in the sector in the country. The State Government is an equity holder of this project, and will earn dividends in addition to taxes," said the statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office.

'Provide tech support for kirana stores: FRAI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Federation of Retailer Association of India on Tuesday asked the government to provide enhanced technology platform to Kirana stores to enable them to compete with quick commerce firms.

"Such support would enable the kirana stores to remain competitive amidst the increasing encroachment into their space by quick commerce companies like Swiggy Instamart, Blinkit or Zepto," said Federation of Retailer Association of India (FRAI), which says that it represents about 80 lakh micro, small and

medium retailers from across the country with a membership of 42 retail associations.

Providing local kirana stores with a technology platform would allow them to compete on equal terms with quick commerce players, effectively creating a level-playing field, it added.

"With new technologies brought in by the government, like ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce), what is now required is a more focused approach in creating a specific solution for kirana stores that makes them as discoverable and accessible to customers, much like the way



quick commerce companies are operating," FRAI Honorary Spokesperson Abhay Raj Mishra said.

Essentially, the kirana stores should remain competitive by being empowered to tap into the growing digital market and meet new customer needs," said Mishra, who is

also Member & National Coordinator, Indian Sellers Collective.

Kirana stores are facing steep challenges due to the rise of quick commerce players, Lok Sabha member Praveen Khandelwal said.

"For shopkeepers, it is crucial to stay updated and embrace all channels to meet the evolving expectations of customers," he added.

FRAI said quick commerce platforms have "unfair advantage" over Kirana stores, which cannot match the heavy discounts offered by quick commerce giants who benefit from deep pockets, large warehouses and a huge customer base.

'Office leasing across top 6 cities hit record 66.4 mn sq ft'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Office space demand remained strong this year with gross leasing of workspace rising 14 per cent to a record 66.4 million square feet across six major cities, according to Colliers India.

Gross leasing of Grade A office spaces stood at 58.2 million square feet in 2023 calendar year.

Real estate consultant Colliers India on Tuesday released the data for India's six major office markets. The gross absorption does not include lease renewals, pre-

commitments and deals where only a letter of intent has been signed.

Among cities, Bengaluru saw a record office leasing of 21.7 million square feet in 2024, up 39 per cent from 15.6 million square feet in the preceding calendar year.

The gross office space leasing in Hyderabad rose 56 per cent to 12.5 million square feet from 8 million square feet.

Mumbai witnessed a 43 per cent increase in demand to 10 million square feet from 7 million square feet, while Pune saw a modest 4 per cent increase in office space leasing

from 11.6 million square feet in the previous year.

The demand was driven mainly by technology firms and engineering and manufacturing companies, besides financial services providers.

On the outlook, Arpit Mehrotra, Managing Director, Office services, India, Colliers, said the demand for office space in 2025 might "potentially stabilize at elevated levels".

"An annual space uptake exceeding 60 million sq feet is likely to be the new norm over the next few years," he added. Madhusudhan G, CMD of Bengaluru-based developer

Sumadhura Group, said large office spaces have seen a significant uptick in leasing activity, driven by sustained interest from GCC and global clients seeking strategic footprints in India's growing commercial hubs.

"This demand is a testament to the resilience of the sector, with both international and domestic occupiers investing in long-term workspace solutions. As we move forward, the continued influx of global capital and businesses is expected to bolster the demand for expansive, flexible, and future-ready office spaces," he added.

BOOST TO CONSUMER PROTECTION

Govt launches AI-enabled helpline, e-commerce safety measures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday launched several initiatives to strengthen consumer protection, including AI-enabled helpline and tools to detect deceptive marketing practices, while major e-commerce players pledged to enhance online shopping safety.

Leading platforms, including Reliance Retail, Tata Sons and Zomato adopted a safety pledge as the government rolled out new consumer protection measures like AI-enabled National Consumer Helpline (NCH), e-maap portal and Jago Grahak Jago mobile application.

"Significant progress has been made in expediting resolutions of consumer disputes," Joshi said at the National Consumer Day event.

The minister, who attended the event online, highlighted that 3,628 cases were filed with National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission between January and November this

year and 6,587 cases were disposed of through the country's three-tier consumer court system at district, state and national levels.

The government's e-Daakhil Portal, launched in 2020 and expanded nationwide in June 2023, has achieved 100 per cent adoption for online complaint filing in Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan.

"Virtual hearings of grievances is giving consumers digital access to justice," he said and lauded the digitalization of consumer grievance redressal efforts.

The minister outlined various measures the consumer protection regulator CCPA has taken through class action suit and issue of sector-specific guidelines to protect the interest of consumers.

Addressing the growing concerns about the e-commerce sector, Joshi said: "While this digital revolution offers incredible opportunities, the Indian government believes it is equally important for our consumers to feel confident and make informed choices."

FILMING FOR BORDER 2 OFFICIALLY BEGINS!

The cameras are rolling for the much-anticipated sequel *Border 2*, marking the official start of its production journey. Excitement is at an all-time high as the star-studded lineup—featuring Sunny Deol, Varun Dhawan, and Diljit Dosanjh and Ahan Shetty prepare to step onto the battlefield.

Border 2 is backed by a powerhouse production team comprising Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, JP Dutta and Nidhi Dutta. Presented by Gulshan Kumar & T-Series in association with JP Dutta's J.P. Films and helmed by Anurag Singh the sequel is set to carry forward the legacy of the iconic original while delivering a grand cinematic experience.

Set against a backdrop of patriotism and courage, *Border 2* promises to deliver unparalleled action, gripping drama, and emotional depth. The film is already one of the most awaited cinematic events of 2026.

Border 2 is slated for a grand release on January 23, 2026. As filming progresses, fans can look forward to a high-octane, emotionally charged narrative that celebrates heroism like never before.

Anupam Mittal reveals how early setbacks shaped his entrepreneurial success



As *Shark Tank India 4* prepares to premiere on Sony LIV on January 6, 2025, one of the Sharks, Anupam Mittal founder and CEO, People Group (Shaadi.com), shares a fascinating story of his journey to success. Anupam revealed that he could have been a multi-millionaire in his early twenties, but things didn't quite go as planned.

Anupam Mittal said, "I was very close to becoming a multimillionaire in my early twenties, but there was a dotcom bust and the world markets came crashing down, but I am happy with whatever happened because it taught me a lot of valuable lessons that have helped me become the person I am today. If I had continued down that path, I might have become complacent and not taken the risks that I did, which ultimately led to the success I've achieved."

He further added, "I believe that failure is an essential part of the entrepreneurial journey and it's how you respond to those setbacks that define your character. I'm proud of the fact that I've been able to build a successful business from scratch and I'm excited to share my experiences and insights with the pitchers on the *Shark Tank India* stage."

As one of the Sharks on the show, he will be joined by Aman Gupta, co-founder and CMO, boAt Lifestyle, Namita Thapar, executive director, Emcure Pharmaceuticals, Ritesh Agarwal, founder and group CEO, OYO, Peyush Bansal, co-founder and CEO, Lenskart, Vineeta Singh, co-founder and CEO, SUGAR Cosmetics, Azhar Iqbal, co-founder and Chairman, Inshorts, Varun Dua, founder and CEO, ACKO, Kunal Bahl, co-founder, Snapdeal and Titan Capital, Promoter Unicommerce, Viraj Bahl, founder and managing director of Veeba/VRB Consumer Products.

Shark Tank India 4 streaming from January 6, 2025 only on Sony LIV!



ANIL KAPOOR'S BIRTHDAY GETS A BOOST WITH SUBEDAAR'S FIRST LOOK

Prime Video, in collaboration with Opening Image Films and Anil Kapoor Film & Communication Network (AKFCN), treated fans to a spectacular surprise on the occasion of Anil Kapoor's birthday—a sneak peek into the highly anticipated original movie, *Subedaar*. The film, set against the backdrop of India's heartland, delves into the gripping journey of Subedaar Arjun Maurya, who now faces the turbulence of civilian life. Featuring the dynamic Anil Kapoor, alongside the talented Radhika Madan, who plays his daughter, *Subedaar* is helmed by the acclaimed director Suresh Triveni. An Opening Image Films and Anil Kapoor Film & Communication Network (AKFCN) production, this masala action-packed drama recently wrapped an intense outdoor shoot in UP and is set to commence its last leg of filming in January. The first look kicks off with gritty visuals, accompanied by an adrenaline-pumping *Subedaar* theme track that captivates from the very beginning and keeps you hooked until the end. Anil Kapoor's commanding presence is electrifying as he embodies a rugged and intense persona with absolute finesse. The video, with its escalating tension, offers a glimpse into what can only be described as a full-throttle, powerhouse performance by Kapoor.

Anil Kapoor shares, "Subedaar is special!!! It's much more than just an action film; it's about resilience, honour, family and the relentless fight we face in life. I could not have asked a better director than Suresh to captain this film and it is equally special to partner with Vikram and team as we bring this story to life. Revealing this first glimpse of Subedaar Arjun Maurya on my birthday is my gift to the fans who have supported me all these years!" *Subedaar*, is an Opening Image Films and Anil Kapoor Film & Communication Network (AKFCN) production. Directed by Suresh Triveni, the original movie is produced by Vikram Malhotra, Anil Kapoor, and Suresh Triveni. The compelling narrative is written by Suresh Triveni and Prajwal Chandrashekar.

B'wood's leading ladies turned Nitanshi's inspiration for Laapataa Ladies

The three female leading actresses of Indian cinema—Deepika Padukone, Kiara Advani and Alia Bhatt—are undoubtedly among the most talented and popular names. With their craft and performances, they not only have made a vast fan following but have also inspired several young aspiring actors. A recent example was witnessed when *Laapataa Ladies*' fame actress Nitanshi Goel billed the above-mentioned actresses as her inspiration. Nitanshi remembered her first day of shooting for Kiran Rao's directorial *Laapataa Ladies* and said that she had to give a shot for an emotional sequence in the film on Day 1. She was hesitant to shoot the sequence and said, "The entire night I googled Kiara Advani's crying scene, Deepika Padukone's crying scenes, Alia Bhatt's crying scenes. How do they cry like this?" She added, "I wanted the breakdown to look amazing. I then heard some emotional songs in the morning and then something happened during the take. When I saw myself in the mirror, I started crying on my own, and then Kiran ma'am had to ask me to stop crying."



Nikki Tamboli's Punjabi debut with Badnaam

Former *Bigg Boss 14* contestant Nikki Tamboli is all set to make her debut in the Punjabi film industry with an item song for the upcoming film *Badnaam*, which is set to release in February.

"I'm absolutely thrilled to be a part of *Badnaam*! It's a song that's going to make you want to get up and dance, and I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with such an amazing team," Nikki said.

Nikki believes "in taking risks and trying new things".

"*Badnaam* is just another example of that. I hope my fans enjoy the song as much as I enjoyed working on it," Nikki Tamboli said, speaking about her experience working on the song," she said.

The song is sung by Sunidhi Chauhan. *Badnaam* is scheduled to be released in February 2025. It is a romantic drama starring Jayy Randhawa, Jasmine Bhasin and Mukesh Rishi.



SHARAD KELKAR ON GOING 'AS CLOSE TO REALITY' WITH DOCTORS

The upcoming medical drama series, *Doctors* is all set to stream exclusively on JioCinema from December 27. The show brings Sharad Kelkar in the role of a neurosurgeon, showcasing a side of the medical profession rarely explored in Indian entertainment. Directed by Sahir Raza, the series dives deep into the lives of doctors, portraying their professional challenges, personal sacrifices, and everyday realities with striking authenticity.

Reflecting on the show's unique approach, Sharad Kelkar says, "There's nothing like *Doctors* made in India; it's super detailed and looks incredibly real. With this show, we've gone as close to reality as possible and that's exactly what Indian OTT or the entertainment circuit needed. After watching *Doctors*, people might change their perspective on the medical profession. While we often praise doctors or criticise them, we rarely see what really goes on in their lives."



Highlighting the show's appeal to all audiences, he added, "This isn't just for mature viewers; it's for everyone, especially the younger generation. It might even inspire some to pursue medicine. What makes the show stand out is its authenticity. Real doctors were on set every single day, guiding us through the smallest details whether it was about medical terminology, procedures, or even how to portray doctors accurately. Their involvement wasn't limited to the sets, they were there through the editing process too."

Speaking about his character, Sharad said, "Playing a neurosurgeon with such an interesting storyline was a refreshing experience. We had rigorous training with two highly skilled doctors who helped us understand basic medical terminologies and how to behave and look like doctors. That training was crucial, and we thoroughly enjoyed the process it was a fun and rewarding experience to play doctors on *Doctors*."

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



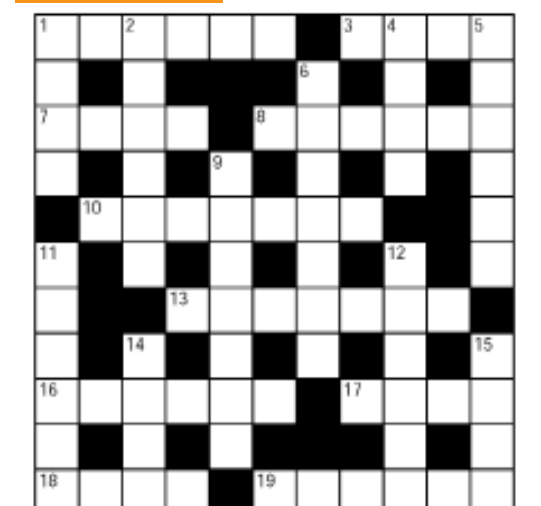
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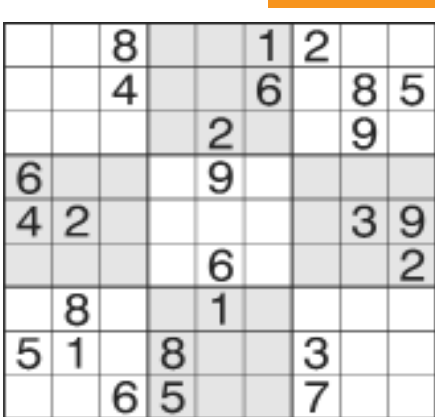
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

6	1	8	4	9	3	7	2	5
4	2	9	7	5	1	8	6	3
3	7	5	6	8	2	9	4	1
9	5	6	1	7	8	2	3	4
7	4	3	2	6	9	5	1	8
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- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Sour-tasting
- A fruit with a stone
- Hit with your hand open
- Ran after trying to catch
- Assistants
- Went in
- Having a doze
- Very small
- Scramble, boil or fry these
- A light wind

DOWN

- Finest
- Go on a journey
- Mislaidd
- Noon

- Reduce the length of
- Loosen or tighten nuts with this tool
- Store a car in here
- Make up your mind
- A slimy creature that eats lettuce leaves
- A rubber cover on a wheel



GINGER MEGGS



Sonnalli Seygall is currently 'enjoying' motherhood with 'no projects planned' till Feb

With a grounded perspective and an unwavering focus on her new role as a mother, Sonnalli Seygall is currently enjoying her motherhood phase. Her upcoming project, *Zindagi Milegi Dobaara* which she had already worked on previously, is having a direct-to-tv release. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Sonnalli Seygal opens up about the joys and challenges of embracing motherhood while balancing her career in the entertainment industry, her journey in the industry, her upcoming project and more

TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

With a diverse range of roles under her belt, she continues to impress with her versatility, carving a distinctive space for herself and earning recognition as one of the most promising actresses of her generation. Sonnalli Seygall is a captivating Indian actress whose talent and charisma have made her a rising star in both Bollywood and television. She shot to fame with her unforgettable performance in the *Pyar Ka PUNCHAMA* franchise, where her natural charm and impeccable acting skills quickly won over audiences. Known for her striking beauty, elegance and effortless style, Sonnalli has become a sought-after name in the entertainment industry.

In one of her first interviews since embracing motherhood, Sonnalli Seygal opened up about the whirlwind experience of balancing life as a new mom and her illustrious acting career. The actress, known for her versatile performances, shared

insights on her evolving priorities, her reflections on her journey in Bollywood, and her latest project that delves into the complexities of the digital world.

Sonnalli begins in this chat with *The Pioneer* and her voice brimming with the excitement of a new mother, "I'm slowly getting into a routine. There's slightly more free time now that I know her sleeping patterns, but it's still hectic—and amazing, of course."

When asked about how she plans to juggle motherhood and her career, the *Jai Mummy Di* fame had a pragmatic approach. "It's just a part of life," she explained. "Like any other profession, you take maternity leave. The beauty of our industry is that we can choose how long we want to take a break. For now, I know I won't be taking on any new projects until at least February. After that, I'll reassess, but right



I'VE LEARNED TO MOSTLY IGNORE THE NOISE UNLESS IT COMES FROM A CREDIBLE SOURCE. CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IS WELCOME, BUT BASELESS OPINIONS DON'T BOTHER ME

now, I'm fully immersed in this phase of life."

Looking back on her career, Seygall expressed pride in her achievements. "I feel like I've had quite a journey, playing different kinds of roles in various genres. The opportunities were limited in the beginning, but they grew as I kept working and gained recognition. Getting the parts I truly wanted to play wasn't always easy as someone from outside the industry, but I'm proud of everything I've done."

She acknowledged the challenges of navigating the entertainment industry, particularly as an outsider. "More than the actual acting, getting those roles was often the bigger challenge. But I look back at it as a beautiful journey, filled with learning and growth."

When it comes to criticism, she revealed that she's been fortunate not to face too much negativity regarding her work. "Of course, there have been films that didn't do well, and that affects everyone involved, from the cast to the crew. But criticism and rejection are part of the profession. I've learned to mostly ignore the noise unless it comes from a credible source. Constructive criticism is welcome, but baseless opinions don't bother me."

Her upcoming project, *Zindagi Milegi Dobaara* marks a significant departure from her previous roles. "The genre itself is so refreshing. It's a topic I'm deeply passionate about—the impact of the digital world on our lives. While technology was created to bring ease and progress, it's often doing more harm than good. This film explores that duality in a relatable way."

Sonnalli plays Maria, a woman who runs a reform home aimed at helping individuals disconnect from the overwhelming influence of the digital world. "Maria is someone

who believes in reconnecting with nature and fostering real connections. She starts the home because of a personal loss and is determined to help others escape the digital trap. It's a character that resonates deeply with me."

The film, which will premiere on Zee Cinema HD, is a unique blend of entertainment and introspection. "It's unlike anything I've done before—there's no romantic angle, no songs or dances. It's an intense yet breezy narrative that I believe will appeal to audiences across age groups, especially Gen Z and Gen Alpha, who are deeply entrenched in the digital world."

The *Aseel* actress hopes the film serves as a wake-up call. "The digital world has brought immense convenience, but it's also taking away a lot from our lives. I hope this film helps people realise the importance of balancing their digital consumption and staying connected to reality. It's something I consciously work on myself, especially as a mother. Small changes, like switching off Wi-Fi or using a basic phone around my daughter, make a difference. We can't escape the digital world, but we can become more mindful about how we engage with it."

Looking ahead, Sonnalli is open to exploring diverse roles. "I'm eager to take on everything the world has to offer. An action film is definitely on my bucket list. I'd love to dive into a physically demanding role once I feel agile enough for it. Reinvention is key and I'm excited about what the future holds."

With her grounded perspective on life and career, she continues to inspire as she navigates the complexities of motherhood, acting, and self-discovery. As she puts it, "Life is about embracing every phase with grace and passion."



REVOLUTIONISING EDUCATION!

Technology is the greatest leveler. The COVID 19 pandemic was a testament to this fact when all of a sudden everyone had to operate from restricted spaces and make do with only virtual interactions. It was almost like a tech pilot study where people realised how technology can be supportive and productive when myriad kinds of educational set ups went completely online right from the conduction of the classes to the conduction of exams. There were side effects too but the world discovered many more productive aspects of technology as well. Needless to say that the technology revolution is going to be constantly expanding and deepening its hold on all our lives in the days to come. With regards to India, this expansion is now spreading its roots and tentacles in tier 2 and tier 3 cities in a homogenous way, especially in the education sector. There are many key trends that drive this forceful and impactful change. Factors like a renewed focus on regional languages, hybrid learning models, personalisation through technology, the fact that people now want to take up lifelong learning and upskilling, leading to market resilience and its growth potential contribute immensely to the development of the ed-tech sector. One of the ways, a country as diverse as India, attempts to close the digital divide is by encouraging the development of content in regional languages. This is true for educational as well as non-educational content. This method caters to people from various backgrounds as they are able to access quality educational content in the language of their choice thereby blurring the boundaries of privilege. This is a critical shift and increases accessibility for learners who might otherwise struggle with content that is dominated by one specific language – English, in the case of India. Availability of educational content in local languages empowers learners to continue their learning journey in their native language, consequently also making the whole set

up of education more inclusive. This also enhances the effectiveness of the learning that is being undertaken. The biggest plus of such an approach is that it not only caters to linguistic diversity but also deeply resonates culturally with learners from diverse backgrounds. In addition to the above, another major advantage that the edtech sector leverages on is an integration of learning models that allow both online and offline methodologies. A hybrid learning model also gives allowance for a more rewarding educational experience by combining the convenience of resources available online along with the elements of a face-to-face interaction. Different learning styles could be blended as well thereby helping maintain student engagement. Not only this but the needs and preferences of a broad range of students could also be accommodated through a hybrid model. The usage of artificial intelligence and machine learning hold within them the key to revolutionising how content is delivered within the edtech sector. They enable the curation of personalised learning experiences that are tailored to the needs of individual students and even customise their learning paths for them keeping in view their learning styles. Using the important insights offered by data analytics, areas of struggles can be identified by edtech platforms and offerings could be considerably improved. With the job markets continually evolving according to the rapid technological advancements, learners are also required to constantly upskill and reskill. The edtech sector can provide for this relevant and perennial need of training programs to help learners adapt to a job environment that is ever in flux. Learners do not even need to disrupt their ongoing careers in order to do these online courses and certifications.

(The author, Dominic Tomalin, is the Founding Headmaster, of Shrewsbury International School, India.)

'I do': Love, traditions and glamorous celebrations

The year 2024 has been a spectacular one for celebrity weddings, with many high-profile couples exchanging vows in intimate yet grand celebrations. The mix of traditional rituals, modern glamour and the presence of close family and friends has made these unions unforgettable, with social media lighting up with heartfelt wishes and behind-the-scenes glimpses.



Rakul Preet Singh and Jacky Bhagnani

Rakul Preet Singh and Jacky Bhagnani, who made their relationship public in 2021, tied the knot on February 21 in a stunning ceremony in South Goa. The couple took to social media to share pictures from their traditional Hindu wedding, captioning them, "Mine now and forever 21-02-2024 #abdonobhagna-ni." The intimate celebration, set against the scenic beauty of Goa, was a perfect blend of love, tradition and joy, leaving fans and well-wishers delighted.

SONAKSHI SINHA AND ZAEHER IQBAL

Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal, who dated for nearly seven years, tied the knot in a private ceremony in Mumbai on June 23. The civil wedding was an intimate affair, attended by their closest friends from the film industry, including actors Huma Qureshi and Saqib Saleem. The couple kept the celebrations simple yet elegant, cherishing the presence of loved ones as they embarked on their new journey together. The understated charm of the event reflected their close-knit bond and low-key approach to their special day.



KEERTHY SURESH AND ANTONY THATTIL

Tamil actor Keerthy Suresh and Antony Thattil tied the knot on December 12 in a picturesque wedding ceremony in Goa. The couple, who reportedly dated for 15 years, celebrated their union with both a traditional Hindu ceremony and a beautiful Christian ceremony, embracing their diverse cultural heritage. The intimate affair was attended by close family and friends, with Tamil superstar Vijay being one of the few notable guests present. The serene beaches of Goa provided the perfect backdrop for the celebrations, making it a memorable event filled with love, joy and heartfelt moments.

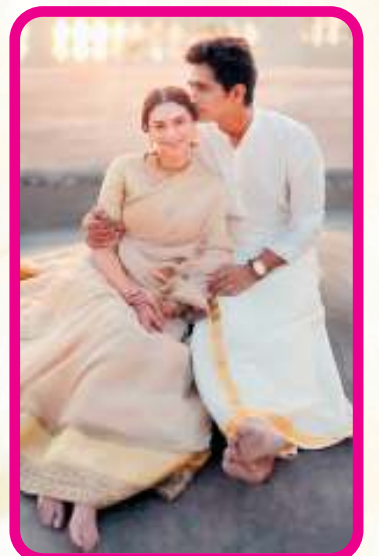


TAAPSEE PANNU AND MATHIAS BOE

Actor Taapsee Pannu married her longtime boyfriend, Danish badminton player Mathias Boe, in an intimate wedding ceremony on March 23 in Udaipur, Rajasthan. Fans discovered the news when a leaked video of Taapsee, adorned in bridal attire, walking towards her groom, surfaced online. The Udaipur celebration was a beautiful culmination of their journey, blending tradition and romance in a serene setting.

KRITI KHARBANDA AND PULKIT SAMRAT

After winning everyone's hearts as Bollywood's cutest couple, Pulkit Samrat and Kriti Kharbanda tied the knot on June 15, 2024. The couple exchanged vows in a beautiful beach wedding in Goa, surrounded by their close friends and family. The intimate ceremony was filled with love, laughter and the serene backdrop of the beach, making it a memorable celebration. Fans were thrilled to see their favourite couple begin this new chapter of their lives, as the newlyweds shared glimpses of their magical day on social media.



ADITI RAO HYDARI AND SIDDHARTH

Another surprise wedding for fans was that of Aditi Rao Hydari and Siddharth. The couple tied the knot on September 16 in a 400-year-old temple in Wanaparthy, Telangana, in a traditional South Indian ceremony. Embracing their love for heritage and culture, they later hosted a second wedding ceremony in December at the stunning Aila Fort Bishangarh in Rajasthan. The dual celebrations beautifully combined tradition and grandeur, leaving fans and well-wishers in awe of their picturesque and heartfelt union.



Modern-day greats figure out their own path: Rohit backs Kohli

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

With a smile, India captain Rohit Sharma on Tuesday played down concerns around Virat Kohli's struggles outside the off-stump in Australia and backed his longtime teammate to the hilt, saying "modern-day greats figure out their own path."

Kohli's five innings in this series Down Under read 5, 100 not out, 7, 11 and 3 for a total of 126 runs at an average of 31.50, not something the team or the batting maestro himself had hoped for before embarking on the challenging tour.

But Rohit, who is also battling poor form, is not losing his sleep over the lack of runs and is confident of a turnaround. When a question about Kohli's struggles was posed to him with some sugar-coating, the skipper added a dash of his own humour in his response.

Do you say something or leave a modern-day great alone, the scribe asked.

"You only said he is a modern-day great. Modern-day greats figure out their own path," said a smiling Rohit as others broke into a peal of laughter.

Kohli was one of the earliest to enter the nets at MCG and Rohit was last among the recognised batters to get a knocking. The India skipper played just two shots in the last 20 minutes and left everything else, as he tried to curb his natural instinct to push forward.

The desperation to control his conditioned reflex of moving hands towards the fourth stump delivery was evident.

"Harshit, is jagah se jaa rahi hai (the ball is landing here)?" he pointed out at an imaginary fourth stump line while trying to know from the young pacer about the line which looked just around six inches outside off-stump. This line has been Kohli's Achilles Heel in the ongoing tour.

When Prasidh Krishna came on, he was told to bowl on the "channel" as he wanted to leave balls. Prasidh dug one short and



he just about defended. Then, the lanky Karnataka man hit the channel, and the batter withdrew his willow in the nick of time.

The 500-odd people present inside would let out a collective sigh. They made noise and once Kohli was also seen telling them to

keep quiet and let him concentrate.

When Rohit batted, he was heard telling throwdown specialist

Raghavendra, "Tappa sahi pakadna padega (get the length right)." He also got beaten by a throw that reared from length.

"Rohit bhai, pull maaro naa (play the pull shot)," yelled one of the demanding young fans from outside. Rohit just left the next delivery.

With the chatter about his form gaining decibels and rumours about an imminent retirement post Sydney gaining traction, Rohit's answers about himself were short. When someone has one double digit score in five innings, he wants to be left alone but then commitments needed to be honoured.

Asked about his batting position, he was borderline irritated.

"Let's not worry about that. I think who bats where, we should be discussing that within ourselves and I shouldn't be answering this question in every press conference," the skipper said, trying to hold his composure.

At the onset, he informed that his knee which was hurt while batting on an old practice track, was

"fine".

Then next question was a "flighted query" on where he stood with regards to his batting form.

"After last Test (in Brisbane) we had two sessions. What could have possibly changed in two days?" he countered with a wry smile.

As usual, he didn't give away anything about whether playing two spinners while factoring in the Melbourne heat was feasible or not.

The inimitable Rohit was back lacing everything with a bit of humour when asked what led to the selection of Tanush Kotian over Kuldeep Yadav.

"Well Kuldeep didn't have visa," he smiled before informing that the wrist spinner is still not hundred percent fit.

"Axar couldn't travel as he has had a baby. I am not saying Tanush is bad but he is here more as a cover," he said.

The five-match series is levelled at 1-1 with all to play for in the remaining two matches in Melbourne and Sydney.



Gill needs to back himself, he's changed things up too much: Ricky Ponting

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India top-order batter Shubman Gill has made far too many changes in his batting approach, which is hindering his run-scoring ability on away tours, feels former Australian captain Ricky Ponting, adding that the way out for the young cricketer is to trust his instincts.

Gill missed the opening Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Perth due to a thumb injury he suffered during India's simulated training game. In the second Test at Adelaide, he failed to convert good starts into big scores as Australia levelled the series 1-1.

The third Test at Brisbane saw him getting out for one in the first innings, putting India in a spot of bother before KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja struck half-centuries to halt the slide.

"I love watching him bat. When you're watching him bat and bat well, he looks as good as anyone in world cricket. But the numbers don't really stack up, do they, away from home?" Ponting said on ICC website on Tuesday.

Ponting said he had observed several changes in Gill's technique during the second Test at Adelaide, which were impeding his ability to score runs.

"I watched him a little bit in Adelaide and it almost looked like he changed things up too

much.

"Scott Boland was bowling and he changed his guard, he moved across to the off stump, presented his front pad to Boland, and Boland got him out with a full straight one," he said.

The Australian legend added that rather than making wholesale changes in his technique, Gill should fall back upon trusting his instincts to improve his batting.

Gill's composed 91 at the Gabba during the 2021 tour had helped India clinch a historic series win, but since then he has scored just one Test ton away from home - in Bangladesh in 2022.

Gill averages 23.8 across nine Tests in England, Bangladesh, the West Indies, South Africa and Australia but at home he has accumulated 1,177 runs and four centuries across 17 Tests at an average of 42.03.

"If anything, I think he needs to back himself a little bit more, needs to back his defensive technique a little bit more here in Australia and still find a way to be able to score and score quickly," Ponting said.

"I'm sure when he's at home or when he's generally scored runs anywhere around the world, he scores them in a nice, attacking mode and almost to the point where he's not really thinking about getting out - he's only thinking about scoring runs."

ICC announces Champions Trophy schedule, India-Pakistan clash on Feb 23

PTI ■ DUBAI

India will play all their matches of the Champions Trophy in Dubai with the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan scheduled on February 23, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Tuesday.

PTI had reported last week that India will play all their matches in Dubai including the semifinal and final if they qualify.

As has been the case with ICC events, India and Pakistan have been clubbed in the same group which also has New Zealand and Bangladesh.

Group B comprises South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan and England.

The tournament opener will be played in Karachi on February 19 when hosts Pakistan face New Zealand and the final is scheduled for March 9. The premier 50-over event, last played in 2017, will have 15 matches with at least 10 games scheduled in



Pakistan. Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi will be the three hosting venues in Pakistan with the second semifinal to be staged at the refurbished Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

"Lahore will also host the final on 9 March, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and the final will have reserve days," said the ICC in a statement.

India will open their campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 before taking on Pakistan three days later. Their final league fixture will be against New Zealand on March 2.

Group B action begins on February 21 when Afghanistan square up against South Africa in Karachi.

A big weekend then kicks off with rivals England and Australia clashing in Lahore on February 22.

The eight sides in the Champions Trophy are the teams that finished in the top

eight in the points table at ODI World Cup in India last year.

The ICC has kept reserve days for both the semifinals and the final.

The schedule was announced after a deadlock over the hosting of the tournament ended with the ICC keeping India's games at a neutral venue as desired while having a similar arrangement for Pakistan for ICC events in India till 2027.

The hybrid arrangement will also apply to the 2025 women's ODI World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026 in India and Sri Lanka before being extended to the 2028 Women's T20 World Cup which Pakistan will host.

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was back in 2012.



Respect first half an hour: Gavaskar's advice to Pant

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Legendary cricketer Sunil Gavaskar has advised India's flamboyant wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant to "respect" the conditions before launching into his attacking strokes in the remaining two Tests of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia.

Pant, who famously scripted a match-winning knock at the Gabba in 2021, has shown flashes of brilliance but has struggled to make a significant impact in the ongoing series.

The 27-year-old has managed scores of 37, 1, 21, 28, and 9 in his five innings across three Tests so far.

Known for his aggressive approach, Pant has often prioritised attacking shots regardless of the match situation. His adventurous decision to charge down the pitch against pacer Scott Boland on the very first ball of his innings in the Adelaide day-night Test drew considerable attention.

"What Rishabh Pant has to do, like everybody else, respect the first half an hour; respect a little bit when he gets in there, whatever the position, unless, of course, India is 525 for 3; then he can tee off," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

Commenting on the challenges posed by

Australian bowlers, Gavaskar added, "... They get the ball to angle across. Pat Cummins and even (Josh) Hazlewood give him a little bit of a problem; a little bit will give him a little bit of a problem because Boland bowls around that area as well."

He should have no fear in these conditions: Hayden Australian legend Matthew Hayden, a self-confessed admirer of Pant, urged the Indian batter to embrace his fearless approach, saying it could be a game-changer for the visitors.

"I have always been a fan of his. He's kind of a different cheese; there is no doubt about it. And I would like to just see him explore that as well because he should be coming in a situation where, as I mentioned before, there are lots of runs; and if so, that's a perfect scenario for him to be in."

"But it's also the perfect scenario for Team India. A little bit like Rohit Sharma, I think we haven't seen some counter-punching efforts from Rishabh, but he should have no fear in these conditions. I think in the absence of fear comes a great opportunity for Rishabh and Team India," said Hayden.

India will face Australia in the third Test at the MCG starting December 26.

Shaheen Afridi had requested PCB to not include him for Tests against SA

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan's premier fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi had requested the team management and national selectors to not consider him for the Test matches in South Africa because of workload management since he wants to be "100 percent fit" for the ICC Champions Trophy in February-March.

After the Pakistan squad was announced for the two Tests in South Africa without Shaheen, the interim head coach and senior selector, Aaqib Javed, said that the left-arm pacer's workload is being managed to keep him fresh for the Champions Trophy.

"The truth is Shaheen



himself requested he not be considered for Test matches until the Champions Trophy is over," a source said.

He said Shaheen had also apparently informed the team management and

Pakistan board that he had got a lucrative offer from a franchise in the Bangladesh Premier League and he assured that he would manage his workload during the T20 league which will be

held from December 30 to February 7.

"He assured the management and board the money was very good and he would look after his fitness and workload during the event so he should be permitted to play in the league," the source said.

During this period Pakistan is playing two Tests in South Africa and two Tests at home against West Indies.

"Shaheen said he would be fully fit in time for the tri-series ODIs against New Zealand and South Africa followed by the Champions Trophy at home," the source said.

"Shaheen told Aaqib he can be selected for tests once the Champions Trophy is completed," he added.

McDonald defends dropping McSweeney for Konstas, says teenager will throw new challenge to India

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald on Tuesday defended the selection committee's decision to drop Nathan McSweeney in middle of the series for Sam Konstas, saying the talented teenager will post a "new challenge" for India.

McSweeney, a makeshift opener, was dropped because of a string of low scores in the first three Tests.

Former Australia skipper Michael Clarke was very critical of the decision to sideline McSweeney. However, McDonald said tough calls have to be taken at times.

"We wanted to throw a new challenge at India. We believe Nathan is good enough for the Test level. We weren't sure about how the top order is functioning. So yeah we challenged ourselves with that decision," said the head coach ahead of the fourth Test.

"Whether it works or not, time will tell. There will be debate around this should he or shouldn't he. Selections are highly

debated."

Konstas, 19, will become the 468th Australian men's Test cricketer to don the Baggy Green when he takes the field in the Boxing Day game beginning on Wednesday.

Konstas, 19, will become the youngest Test debutant for Australia since 18-year-old Pat Cummins broke into the squad in 2011.

"We wanted clarity for our batting unit before the team meeting," McDonald said.

Selector Tony Dodemaide informed Konstas about his inclusion during training at the MCG here on Thursday.

Dodemaide informing Konstas about his inclusion was a departure from protocol as traditionally it's the Australian skipper who confirms the playing XI on match eve.

"It's (breaking the news) something we don't usually do because haven't had too many moving parts, but we thought we'd get that out of the way so everyone knows that he's in the



team," said McDonald.

"He (Konstas) has been very similar to what I've seen on the outside within (the team) - composed, relaxed, knows his game. And what he's shown is an array of shots, the ability to put pressure back on to opponents and he gets his opportunity," he added.

Khawaja will get runs McDonald also brushed aside

concerns over Usman Khawaja's form.

"I think Usman is not a concern. The way he is preparing runs will come. He knows his methods and any good player following methods will return among runs." Head clear for coach but medical team nod needed

Head, one of the in-form batters in the series with two centuries, experienced "a small strain to the quad" during the last day of the third Test at the Gabba.

The 'player of the match' in the last two Tests faced only throw-downs from assistant coach Brad Hodge rather than his fast-bowling teammates at the nets on Tuesday.

"I thought he looked good with the bat in his hands so obviously the skills are in good order. It will just be what risk is associated with that," said McDonald.

"But no concerns from my end, he's been able to do his running so I think he'll be functional come game time."

The coach did not speculate on who could fill the spot in the

middle-order if Head fails to prove his fitness. The uncapped pair of Josh Inglis and Beau Webster are the stand-bys in the squad.

However, pacer Scott Boland has been all-but confirmed to replace Josh Hazlewood, who is nursing a calf strain.

McDonald said with temperatures expected to soar to over 40 degrees during the Boxing Day Test, the pitch could end up being more batter-friendly.

"This wicket might offer the batters a little bit more in terms of the surface as the game draws on. If we didn't pick Scotty (Boland) here - and I know I'm not allowed to declare the team because that's Pat's (Cummins) job tomorrow - but I don't think I'm coming to the ground Boxing Day if Scotty's not in the eleven."

"We've got great depth in our bowling, and (all-rounder) Mitch Marsh is fully fit and able to bowl. But he (Boland) is ready to go and he'll play a role in this Test match with the ball more so than the previous ones."

Chiranjeevi severs ties with PR managers over financial discrepancies

Mega star Chiranjeevi has sacked his public relations managers, GK Mohan and Bobby, who also serves as his personal manager. This sudden move has been a hot topic in the Telugu film industry for the past few days. According to a source, the reason behind this decision is attributed to financial discrepancies involving the two individuals. Chiranjeevi reportedly asked them to leave immediately after discovering the issues.

In recent years, several events have taken place, including the documentation of Chiranjeevi's life. During these projects, the Mega star allegedly found irregularities in the financial management handled by GK Mohan and Bobby. It was infact discovered that they had failed to compensate their subordinate staff adequately.

"A few employees working under them brought this to Chiranjeevi's notice and he conducted an inquiry, which revealed the fault lying with GK Mohan and Bobby," added the source.

Furthermore, GK Mohan is allegedly involved in a personal relationship with a popular contestant from the Telugu reality show *Bigg Boss*. "There are some issues between the two and Chiranjeevi doesn't want these personal matters to affect his reputation, which is another reason he sacked GK Mohan," added the source. Notably, GK Mohan's wife holds a prominent position as business head at a Telugu channel and his daughter has recently worked as an assistant director in an upcoming film under a well-known director.



DIL RAJU, TURNS INTO A MESSIAH?

Top producer Dil Raju is back from the USA and has straightaway went to meet Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. The producer went to the USA for his upcoming film *Game Changer* promotional event. After the recent case of Allu Arjun, the Telugu Film Industry has been looking for different alternatives to solve the problem as early as possible. The Telangana Chief Minister and the Cinematography Minister declared that they don't give permissions to benefit shows and they also said that they don't give ticket price hike. Three big films will be releasing in the coming Sankranti and Dil Raju is the producer for two of those films.

Now, Dil Raju is the new Chairman for Telangana Film Development Corporation, so, his first assignment is a big task. Now, the producer is trying to mediate between Allu Arjun and the Telangana Government, says a source.

"I met Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and on his instructions I visited KIMS hospital to enquire about the health of Sri Tej, who was hurt at the S a n d h y a

Theatre Stampede," said Dil Raju. He said that Sri Teja health is improving and added that the incident was very unfortunate and these kind of incidents happened sometimes.

"Revanth Reddy appointed me as FDC Chairman to bridge the gap between the industry and the Government. I came back to the city last night and on Tuesday, I straightaway met the Chief Minister," he said. He added that FDC will take care of Bhaskar, the husband of Revathi. "We will provide a job in the industry and we will take care of him and his family," said Dil Raju.

Well, he also stated that he would soon go and meet Allu Arjun. "Now, I'll be going to meet Allu Arjun," said Dil Raju. "It seems like this Allu Arjun issue may be solved in a few days as Dil Raju is going to mediate," said a source.



DHARMA PROVES HIS FATHER WRONG!

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Not just his father, but many of his friends initially suggested Dharma not to get into acting. But it was his zeal and confidence he had about himself that turned him into an actor. After making his mark with *Sindhooram*, the actor is back with another film, *Drinker Sai*, where he will be seen playing the lead. The film directed by Kiran Thirumalasetti, is releasing on December 27.

Now, Dharma has his fingers crossed for this film as he has worked hard for his role in *Drinker Sai*. "I wanted to be an actor since my childhood. I used to participate in many cultural events in my school. While growing up, many people told me that your father can make a film with you," said Dharma.

Initially, Dharma wasn't aware about his father Kakani Venkateswara Rao, being a producer in the Telugu Film Industry. "I don't know, but later I got to know that he produced many films and also distributed them," said Dharma. He produced a film *Punya Dampathulu* that stars Sobhan Babu and Suhasini. "He stopped producing films long back, but I don't know, he never encouraged me when I wanted to become an actor. He asked me to study first and later look after my business," said Dharma about his father. His father felt that acting is not an easy job and if a film flops, many go into depression. "I feel that's the reason, he never encouraged," said Dharma.

After completing his schooling in Hanuman Junction, Dharma completed his Engineering in Guntur. "Just post that I started a small business with my friends for my pocket money and luckily it did very well," he said. He added that his father owned a few theatres in Hanuman Junction. His grandfather had the first theatre there and his father expanded it. "I decided to look after the theatres as I want to be an actor," he said.

Dharma is a huge Prabhas fan; so much that he even researched on where Prabhas got his training for acting. "I got to know that he trained at Satyanand sir school in Vizag and somehow I got his number and joined his school for training," said Dharma. "It was Satyanand sir, who suggested me to do *Drinker Sai*," said Dharma.

The producer of this film called Satyanand and asked for the lead actor and Satyanand suggested Dharma's name. "Producer Basavaraju and Satyanand sir were good friends, so he called Satyanand

sir," said Dharma. This film's story is based on some real incidents, said the makers. "Yes, it is true and I spoke to the person, where my director took the story," said Dharma.

Dharma also did his kind of homework before getting into the character. In his training institute they told him that for any character it is better to observe the real characters. In this film, the director told me that he should smoke a lot and his character is a drinker. "I never drink and smoke, so I went to many liquor shops, belt shops and bars to observe the people. With this I get to know how a drinking person behaves, talks and his attitude," said Dharma.

For another question, Dharma said that the movie is not completely about a person drinking. "There is a good message in the film and there is some interesting story in the film. To attract the youth, we put the title like this, but the film has some good content and I am confident that this film definitely tastes successful," said Dharma.

The actor said don't judge with the title as this film is not a negative one and the film has some message. "Once you watch the film, you definitely liked it and also appreciated it," said Dharma.

Asked about his father's response, he shared, "I showed the film to my father and he appreciated it. He never praises me till now, but after watching this film, he praises me and asks me to continue my work in the film industry."

The actor has big inspiration from Chiranjeevi for the songs. "He has the grace, when you watch Chiranjeevi garu songs, it's not like dancing and it's like watching music and the way he dances, simply superb. I really admire Chiranjeevi garu in dancing," said Dharma.



Actor Dharma is all set to once again entertain the audience with his upcoming film *Drinker Sai*. Ahead of the release of his film, he speaks to the media here sharing insights about the film and his journey.



Saiee's first look from *The India House* is 'aww'dorable

Saiee Manjrekar, made her Telugu debut with Ghani and then acted in the Pan Indian film *Major* opposite Adivi Sesh. After that she got another chance to play a key role in Ram Pothineni's *Skanda*, but the film didn't do well at the box-office. Now, the actress gets another big chance, where she is playing the lead actress in the film *The Indian House*. This film is a period drama and Nikhil Siddhartha is playing the lead, while Ram Vamsi Krishna is the director.

Celebrating her birthday on Tuesday, the makers released her look from the film. The interesting thing about this film is, Abhishek Agarwal is producing this one with top actor Ram Charan. Presently the shooting is going on. Saiee Manjrekar plays the character of Sati and her traditional avatar perfectly complements the name. Draped in an elegant saree and adorned with jewellery, Saiee is seen sitting gracefully, gazing into the distance. She looks absolutely stunning in this captivating pose.

This period drama is set in 1905 and it delves into themes of love and revolution. Nikhil and Saiee Manjrekar's love story is going to be one of the biggest attractions. Anupam Kher will be seen in a pivotal role in the movie.

Telugu cinema's forgotten legend, Krishnaveni turns 101!

Chittajallu Krishnaveni, popularly known as Krishnaveni, a renowned actress and producer, celebrated her 101st birthday on Tuesday. Krishnaveni holds the distinction of introducing the legendary Nandamuri Taraka Ramarao (NTR) to the film industry with the movie *Mana Desam*. She not only launched NTR's career but also paid him a remuneration for the film. Additionally, Krishnaveni introduced many other actors through her films.

As the only living legend associated with Telugu cinema, Krishnaveni's life spans a period even longer than the history of the Tollywood industry itself. Born on December 24, 1924, she began her career as an actress, appearing in both Telugu and Tamil films. In 1939, she married the Mirzapur Zamindar and later produced films under the banner of Sobhanachala Studios, which belonged to her husband.

Krishnaveni's daughter, Anuradha, followed in her mother's footsteps and produced several films featuring prominent stars like Akkineni Nageswara Rao and Murali Mohan. Anuradha expressed her pride in her mother's achievements, stating, "I am proud that my mother introduced a legendary actor like NTR. My father was also a



producer and a generous person, who donated many acres of land for the Gannavaram Airport at that time."

Regrettably, the Telugu film industry failed to acknowledge and celebrate Krishnaveni's remarkable milestone. Anuradha noted, "Only Murali Mohan called me and conveyed his wishes to my mother on her birthday." Ironically, the industry is currently celebrating the centenary of late NTR, while overlooking the 101st birthday of Krishnaveni, who not only introduced NTR to the industry but is also still in good health.

Mohan Lal in city promoting *Barroz*

Malayalam superstar Mohan Lal is in Hyderabad promoting his film *Barroz*. After many years in the industry, the legendary actor of Malayalam Cinema is making his debut as director with this film. "For the last four decades, I was part of the film industry and I always feel it is an honour. As an actor, I have been part of different stories, different roles and had become close to many people. Now, I am directing a film *Barroz* and it is a 3D film," said Mohan Lal.

The actor said that the film is

made with Native 3D and from the last 40 years, no one tried in this format to make a film. "In this film the story telling is different and everyone can watch this one. This is a children-friendly movie," said Mohan Lal. He added that one of the best cinematographers Satosh Sivan has worked for this film. The actor specially mentioned about the background Score which is very good for this film. "I definitely assure you that you can enjoy watching this film," said Mohan Lal. Mythri Movie Makers are releasing the film in Telugu.

