

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

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

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

A large number of pilgrims from Telangana visit TTD, contributing significantly to Andhra Pradesh's revenue. Earlier, funds from TTD were allocated to temples and marriage halls in Telangana. This has now stopped. Andhra Pradesh should revive these contributions to help the development of Telangana's ancient Hindu temples and facilities

- Konda Surekha, Endowments Minister P4

'Singh's reforms transformed India, unshackled economy'

'WALKING DOWN THE STREETS OF PARIS FEELS LIKE STEPPING INTO A MOVIE'

Thammareddy slams Allu Arjun; holds him responsible for industry's APOLOGY TO CM

DON'T MISS...

Property row behind 'body parcel' case

The sensational 'body parcel' case, which has been solved by the West Godavari district police, has exposed a shocking conspiracy. Addressing a press conference here on Friday, WG district SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi revealed chilling details after interrogating the three accused. According to the investigation, the case revolved around a property dispute within the family of one Ranga Raju, a resident of Yendagandi village in Undi mandal. Ranga Raju, who owned 2.5 acres of land and other assets, had two daughters, Tulasi and Revati, both...

-PAGE: 4

US issued over 1 mn nonimmigrant visas

The US mission in India on Friday said it issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas, underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the US. Washington is also working to formally establish a US-based to renew H-1B visas in that country in 2025 that is expected to benefit a significant number of Indians. In the past four years, visitor ...

-PAGE: 5

NCLT to proceed against Hero Electric

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has directed initiation of insolvency proceedings against Hero Electric after admitting a plea filed by Metro Tyres, an operational creditor claiming a default of Rs 1.85 crore. As per provisions of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC), NCLT has appointed Bhoopesh Gupta as Interim Resolution Professional to run the company after suspending the board of Hero Electric. The Delhi-based bench of NCLT rejected the contentions of Hero...

-PAGE: 8

India whitewash West Indies 3-0

Senior off-spinner Deepti Sharma did the star turn with career-best figures of 6/31 before doing her bit with the bat as India completed a 3-0 whitewash of the West Indies with a five-wicket victory in the final Women's ODI here on Friday. Having bowled out West Indies for 162 after Deepti's superlative performance and pacer Renuka Singh's (4/29) excellent show with the new ball, India recovered after a top-order wobble to reach the target of 163 in 28.2 overs. India were in a spot of bother at 73/4 but ...

-SPORTS

EQUITABLE SHARING OF KRISHNA WATER

TG slams AP's 'delaying' tactics

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a strongly worded rejoinder submitted to the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal, Telangana accused Andhra Pradesh of employing deliberate delay tactics to block the equitable distribution of Krishna River waters. Telangana has called for the consolidation of evidence and simultaneous hearings under the two references currently before the tribunal, emphasizing that its people are suffering grave hardships due to the deadlock in water-sharing agreements.

The rejoinder, filed on December 27, was submitted in response to objections raised by Andhra Pradesh over Telangana's plea to combine proceedings under Section 89 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014 (APRA), and the broader "Further Terms of Reference" under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956.

Telangana asserted that adjudicating these references separately would waste judicial time, lead to duplicate arguments and risk contradictory outcomes. "An equitable allocation of water is not just a procedural matter but a pressing humanitarian issue. The people of Telangana continue to suffer from inadequate water access due to historical inequities," the state argued in its submission.

- TG alleges AP diverts 72% of Krishna waters, including 200 TMC from Srisaillam, and exploits lack of formal sharing arrangements.
- AP's procedural moves, including appeals to the SC, criticised as obstructionist.
- TG emphasises equitable water allocation as a pressing issue, urging the tribunal to treat evidence under both references as common.



Telangana said the equitable allocation of Krishna waters remains unresolved after the bifurcation of AP in 2014. Despite filing a formal complaint in July 2014, it took nearly a decade for the matter to be referred to the tribunal under the "Further Terms of Reference," issued in October 2023.

Telangana said the equitable allocation of Krishna waters remains unresolved after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014. Despite filing a formal complaint in July 2014, it took nearly a decade for the matter to be referred to the tribunal under the "Further Terms of Reference," issued in October 2023. Telangana contends that these references cannot be meaningfully adjudicated in isolation, as the issues and evidence overlap signif-

icantly. The state stressed that Andhra Pradesh has no objection to using documents and evidence from Section 89 proceedings in hearings under the broader terms. However, AP opposes the reverse approach, which Telangana claims is a clear attempt to delay and derail the resolution process. Moreover, Telangana accused Andhra Pradesh of exploiting the lack of formal water-sharing

arrangements to its advantage. It said that Andhra Pradesh diverts over 72 per cent of Krishna waters, including 200 TMCs from the Srisaillam reservoir, far more than its share. Telangana criticised Andhra Pradesh for continuing unauthorized constructions and diverting water outside the basin, actions that undermine the equitable distribution of resources.

Continued on Page 2



Naidu leads AP in paying tribute to Manmohan

Says nation has lost a great economic reformer

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has expressed deep sorrow over the passing of former prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, describing him as a great economic reformer.

The CM visited Delhi to pay his respects to the late leader's mortal remains and offer condolences to his family on Friday. Along with Naidu, Union Ministers Rammohan Naidu and Dr. Pemmasani Chandrasekhar, TDP MPs Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) and Sabari also paid their tributes. Speaking to the media, Naidu praised Dr Singh for his tireless service to the nation and his visionary economic reforms. "His death is a great loss," Naidu

said, recalling the former Prime Minister's many contributions. "Dr. Manmohan Singh was a leader who brought about crucial economic reforms with foresight and served the nation in various capacities with great efficiency," he added.

"Deeply saddened by the demise of Dr. Manmohan Singh, an intellectual statesman. His humility, wisdom, and integrity were his hallmarks. From his economic reforms in 1991 as Finance Minister to his leadership as Prime Minister, he uplifted millions. His passing is a huge loss to the country. My heartfelt condolences to his family, loved ones, and admirers," Naidu expressed.

Continued on Page 2

Allu Arjun appears before court virtually, bail plea posted to Dec 30

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun, accused in the case booked over the death of a woman in a stampede here during the premiere of his latest film 'Pushpa-2', appeared through a video conference before a local court on Friday. The regular bail petition filed by the actor, who was named as accused no 11 in the case, came up for hearing on Friday, and the police sought time on the matter after which the court posted it to December 30.

Allu Arjun was arrested on December 13 in connection with the incident and produced before the Nampally court, which remanded him to a 14-day judicial custody. Shortly after Allu Arjun was shift-



ed to jail, the Telangana High Court granted him interim bail for four weeks and he was released from the jail on December 14.

Since Nampally court's 14 day remand was ending on Friday, Allu Arjun appeared in the court through video conference citing security reasons and to avoid any inconvenience to the public coming to the court.

Continued on Page 2

YSRCP stages protests against power tariff hike in State

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) organised protests across the State on Monday, opposing the increase in electricity tariffs and demanding an immediate rollback. Party leaders alleged that the hike, amounting to Rs 15,485.36 crore, had imposed an undue financial burden on domestic consumers during Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's tenure.

Protests were held in all 175 constituencies, with YSRCP leaders submitting memorandums to local electricity offices.

In Vizianagaram, constituency in-charge Dr Rajesh and ZP Vice-Chairman Sriprurupu Jagan Mohan Rao led a rally to the Electrical ADE office. Similarly, in Visakhapatnam South, former MLA Vasupalli Ganesh and senior leader Konda Rajiv Gandhi



spearheaded a protest. Konaseema district saw constituency in-charge Vipparti Venugopala Rao leading a rally, while in Eluru, Puppala Vasu Babu mobilised significant public participation. In Nandyal, district president Katasani Rambhoopal Reddy led a robust demonstration, and in Prakasam district, Markapuram coordinator Anna

Venkata Rambabu submitted a memorandum at the D.E.E. office. Prominent leaders such as Devineni Avinash in NTR district, Donthi Reddy Vema Reddy in Mangalagiri, and Gopireddy Srinivas Reddy in Narasaraopet led similar protests. In Sri Sathya Sai district, former minister Ushashri Charan highlighted residents' hardships during a protest.

Gottipati blames Jagan for power sector collapse

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar strongly criticised former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, holding him responsible for the steep rise in electricity tariffs and the collapse of the state's power sector. Minister Ravi Kumar clarified that the coalition government has not increased electricity charges since taking office and attributed the current burden to the decisions made during Jagan's tenure.

Continued on Page 2

TDP gears up for 'Praja Vedika' from Dec 30 to Jan 11

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has announced the schedule for its 'Praja Vedika' programme, set to take place at the party's central office, NTR Bhavan, in Mangalagiri. Under the directions of TDP chief and Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, the programme aims to facilitate direct interaction between party leaders and the public to address grievances and strengthen ties with the cadre.

The schedule begins on Monday, December 30, 2024, with Minister

Vasamsetti Subhash, TTD Board Member Mallela Rajasekhara Goud, and AP Warehousing Corporation Chairman Ravi Venkateswara Rao participating in the programme. On January 2, 2025, MLA Arimilli Radha Krishna and MLC Bhoomireddy Ramgopal Reddy will engage with the public, followed by TDP State President Palla Srinivas, Minister Kollu Ravindra, and TDP National General Secretary Kambhampati Rammohan Rao on January 3.

Minister Ponguru Narayana, NTR Medical Services Chairman Seetharama Sudhakar, and Palla Srinivas will partic-



ipate on January 4, while Minister Vangalapudi Anitha, MLC Kancherla Srikanth, and AP Settibailaja Corporation Chairman Kudipudi Sattibabu are scheduled for January 6. Other key participants include Minister Nimmala Rama Naidu,

MLC Vepada Chiranjeevi, and Swachh Andhra Pradesh Mission Chairman Kommareddy Pattabhiram on January 7; Minister NMD Farooq, AP Tourism Development Corporation Chairman Nukasani Balaji, and Consumer Protection Council Chairperson Peethala Sujatha on January 8; and Minister Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy, Government Chief Whip Panchumarthi Anuradha, and Women Cooperative Finance Corporation Chairperson Kavali Grishma on January 9.

The programme will conclude with sessions on January 10 and 11.

Govt to build memorial to Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union government has decided to make a memorial to former prime minister Manmohan Singh in the national capital, official sources said on Friday, as they accused the Congress of doing politics over the issue.

The sources said the decision on the memorial has been conveyed to the Congress, but added that it will take a few days to find an appropriate venue for building a memorial. "The government's decision to build



a memorial in honour of Manmohan Singh has been conveyed to the Congress.

Continued on Page 2



Nepal, AP sign historic tourism pact

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a historic move to enhance tourism ties, the Embassy of Nepal and the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) have signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This is the first-ever agreement between Nepal and an Indian state, marking a new chapter in tourism collaboration.

Nepal's Ambassador to India, Dr Surendra Thapa, called it a landmark in tourism diplomacy.

"This MOU creates a strong foundation for cultural exchanges and tourism promotion between Nepal and Andhra Pradesh," he said. The partnership will focus on joint marketing of tourist destinations, cultural attractions, and eco-tourism, benefiting both regions.

APTDC Chairman, Nukasani Balaji, highlighted the importance of such international partnerships. "This collaboration with Nepal will open new tourism opportunities and strengthen ties between the two regions," he remarked.

Continued on Page 2

Drones to enhance greenery in capital Amaravati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Amaravati is taking strides towards becoming a lush green capital. The Amaravati Development Corporation (ADC) has introduced innovative measures, including the use of drones, to promote greenery and ensure the healthy growth of trees in the city.

As part of a pilot initiative, drones were deployed to spray nutrients along a one-kilometre stretch of the Seed Access Road on Friday. ADC Chairperson and Managing Director D Lakshmi Parthasarathy, along with Horticulture Department Head V Dharmaja and other officials, supervised the opera-



tion. The project primarily targets flowering plants and trees, enhancing their health and

appeal to visitors. A specialised 13-0-45 (Multi K) nutrient formula is being applied to these

species. Currently, the focus is on a 10-kilometre stretch along the Seed Access Road, with

plans to extend the initiative across Amaravati's greenery corridors.

Drones have proven to be a game-changer, allowing efficient nutrient spraying even on tall trees, a task that traditionally posed significant challenges.

Each drone can operate for about 25 minutes, covering 36 kilometres per hour and servicing hundreds of trees in a short period.

This method also reduces nutrient wastage and water usage, making it 20 times more cost-effective than conventional techniques. Encouraged by these results, the ADC plans to utilise drones for maintaining greenery along 35 major roads in Amaravati in the coming years.

Drones have proven to be a game-changer, allowing efficient nutrient spraying even on tall trees, a task that traditionally posed significant challenges. Each drone can operate for about 25 minutes, covering 36 kilometres per hour and servicing hundreds of trees in a short period.

Minister Sandhyarani criticises YSRCP stand on power charges

YSRCP spreading propaganda against TDP-led government's initiatives

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Women & Child Welfare Gummadi Sandhyarani has come down heavily on the YSRCP for crying foul over the increase in electricity charges. Speaking at a press conference at the Telugu Desam Party headquarters on Friday after receiving grievances from the people, she accused the YSRCP of spreading false propaganda against the TDP-led government's initiatives.

"The developmental strides made by N Chandrababu Naidu's administration within just six months of governance have left Jagan and his party seething with jealousy. It is evident in their baseless criticisms," she remarked. She pointed out that during the previous YSRCP rule, electricity charges were raised 10 times, imposing a burden of ₹32,000 crore on consumers.

Minister Sandhya Rani stressed that Andhra Pradesh



transitioned from a 22.5-million unit electricity deficit State in 2014 to an electricity surplus State by 2019 under the TDP's governance.

She alleged that meanwhile, the YSRCP government mismanaged the electricity sector during their tenure. "The YSRCP

cancelled Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with solar and wind energy producers, disrupted renewable energy projects, and failed to effectively utilise thermal power plants," she said. These actions, she claimed, resulted in financial losses for the State and discouraged invest-

ments in renewable energy. Sandhya Rani also accused the previous YSRCP government of imposing financial burden on the public through repeated hikes in electricity charges. She highlighted that over five years, electricity tariffs were raised 10 times, affecting residential, commercial, and industrial consumers. "The YSRCP's mismanagement left consumers with exorbitant bills, creating unnecessary financial strain," she added.

The Minister also showcased the TDP government's welfare schemes as a testament to their commitment to the people. "We are providing ₹4,000 monthly pensions to the elderly, which is unmatched by any other State. Differently-abled individuals receive ₹6,000, and those who are bedridden are supported with ₹10,000. Despite inheriting a financially strained system, we are ensuring these benefits reach the needy," she stated.

Sandhya Rani further criti-

cised the YSRCP's actions during their tenure. She accused the party of engaging in corrupt practices, including allocating land and funds worth ₹14,000 crore to Hindujas for questionable purposes. "Despite multiple allegations and evidence of misconduct, YSRCP leaders remain untouched by the law," she alleged. She also criticised their misuse of public funds, pointing to unnecessary expenditures like painting public properties in party colours and excessive spending on personal luxuries.

The Minister reiterated Chandrababu Naidu's commitment to ethical governance and people-centric policies. "Under TDP, we aim to provide quality electricity, free solar installations, and uninterrupted power supply while reducing the financial burden on the public. Unlike the YSRCP, our focus is on constructive governance and delivering tangible benefits to the people," she concluded.

Congress leaders pay tributes to ex-PM Manmohan Singh



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Congress party leaders paid rich tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away in New Delhi on Thursday.

APCC vice-president Kolanukonda Shivaji and other leaders paid tributes to Manmohan Singh by garlanding his portrait in the Congress office here on Friday. Kolanukonda Sivaji recalled that Manmohan Singh introduced and implemented eco-

conomic reforms when the country was facing a financial crisis. "The death of Manmohan Singh is an irreparable loss to the country. He will remain in the hearts of millions of people as he is the architect of modern India. How he led the country from 2004 to 2014 as the Prime Minister is unforgettable and it will remain in history," he stated.

Shivaji reminisced that the 3G and 4G services began when he was the Prime Minister. The MGNREGA

scheme and Direct Cash Transfer were also introduced by him, he extolled.

Before he became the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh held many key portfolios including RBI Director, Director of Industrial Bank and Secretary in the financial department. The Congress leader recalled. Kolanukonda Shivaji emphasized the need to teach students about Dr. Manmohan Singh's life story and his services to the country as an economist.

Jagan solely responsible for power tariff hike: Savitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BC Welfare, EWS, Handlooms and Textiles Minister S Savitha has accused former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy of being solely responsible for the increase in electricity tariffs due to his incompetence and corruption. Speaking at a press conference at the Velagapudi Secretariat on Friday, she claimed that the public no longer trusts Jagan's 'Tughlaq drama'.

Challenging Jagan to a debate, she said, "Let's settle the blame for the power tariff hike, if he has the courage, let him come for a

discussion." She accused Jagan of imposing an additional burden of ₹17,000 crore in power tariff hikes. "The agreements you made then are the reason for the current tariff hikes. Wasn't it you who instructed the Electricity Regulatory Commission (ERC) to increase power charges after the elections," she asked. Minister Savitha criticised Jagan for protesting against the tariff hike, calling it ironic and bizarre. She claimed that Jagan's corruption and inefficiency have led to a debt burden of ₹1,29,503 crore on the State and power distribution companies (DISCOMs).

GVMC gears up for stricter single-use plastic ban from Jan 1

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Buoyed by the success of its 'Eco-Vizag' campaign, the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) is set to reinforce its ban on single-use plastics starting January 1, 2025. This renewed push comes after a brief lull following elections and administrative changes, with a focus on public awareness and stricter enforcement.

The GVMC has been active in engaging the public through various awareness campaigns, including rallies, walks, and celebrity endorsements, high-

lighting the detrimental effects of plastic pollution. This renewed effort builds upon previous initiatives and aims to solidify sustainable practices within the city.

"This isn't our first attempt at eliminating single-use plastics, but we are more determined than ever," stated GVMC Commissioner P. Sampath Kumar. "We've launched a 45-day action plan to spread awareness and ensure the public is fully prepared for the implementation."

The GVMC's fight against plastic pollution dates back to



2022 with the innovative 'Cloth Bag Challenge', which garnered significant traction among students and youth,

even receiving recognition from Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Mann Ki Baat program. This success paved the way for the 'Eco-Vizag' campaign, launched in June 2022 under former Commissioner G Lakshimisha, who implemented strict enforcement measures and promoted alternatives like paper and jute bags.

Citizens responded positively, with many adopting sustainable practices such as using steel containers for groceries and meat purchases. The campaign continued under former Commissioner

C.M. Saikanth Varma, expanding its focus to encompass cleanliness, greenery, water conservation, and pollution reduction.

Recognising the need for a renewed push, the GVMC has enlisted the support of prominent figures, including Olympic medalist PV Sindhu and actors Allari Naresh and Anasuya Bharadwaj, to amplify their message and inspire citizens to embrace eco-friendly practices. "Plastic pollution is a pressing issue that affects us all. I urge everyone in Vizag to support the GVMC's initiative for a greener future,"

PV Sindhu remarked in a recent campaign video.

Environmental organizations, GVMC staff, and Sachivalayam teams have been conducting targeted outreach programs in schools, public spaces, and commercial establishments. Despite previous successes, plastic usage has seen a recent resurgence. "The challenge lies not just in enforcement but in changing mindsets," noted a GVMC official. "We are committed to tackling this issue through continuous education and strict penalties for violations."

DC: High prevalence of anaemia in Parvatipuram linked to poor nutrition

Emphasising the importance of nutritious food through Anganwadi centres to combat anaemia, officials confident of mitigating the issue.

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM

District Collector A Shyam Prasad has expressed concern over the high prevalence of anaemia in Parvatipuram district, calling for a concerted effort to address this public health issue. During a meeting of the anaemia prevention committee at Panasabada village in Makkuva mandal, the Collector emphasized the need for coordinated action by various departments. He attributed the high prevalence of anaemia in the district to poor nutritional intake, stressing the importance of consistent consumption of nutritious food provided through Anganwadi centres. He expressed confidence that by identifying and addressing anaemia cases, the issue can be significantly mitigated.

To combat anaemia, the Collector assured that necessary medical interventions, including injections and medications, would be made available to those affected. He also highlighted the dedicated shelter for pregnant women in Salur, where they receive balanced nutrition and regular monitoring by healthcare professionals.

The Collector instructed



Collector A Shyam Prasad outlines strategies to prevent anaemia in pregnant women

ANMs to ensure pregnant women in the village fully utilize the Salur shelter and recommended bi-monthly tests to assess the adequacy of food provided by Anganwadi centres. "No pregnant woman should suffer from anaemia, and every delivery should be a joyful occasion," he emphasized, urging Asha workers, ANMs, and doctors to continuously monitor women and ensure their daily consumption of green vegetables, milk, and eggs.

In addition to addressing anaemia, the Collector also announced various initiatives to support the villagers, including the provision of homes under the PMAY scheme, construction of toilets, and employment opportunities under government schemes including lamb breeding, cow farming, oil palm cultivation, check dams, and sheds. He mentioned that farmers who collaborate could benefit from a 50:50 funding scheme from ITDA for the

construction of borewells to irrigate their fields.

Later, the Collector made a surprise visit to Parvatipuram Pedabondapalli Zilla Parishad High School to assess academic standards. He expressed satisfaction with the students' responses and encouraged teachers to strive for excellence. He also inspected the school's kitchen garden and commended the school for adhering to the government-prescribed menu for meals.

Vizag CP issues guidelines for New Year's eve celebrations

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the city gears up to welcome the New Year, the Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner, Dr Shankhabrata Bagchi, has issued a set of stringent guidelines on Friday to ensure the safety and security of citizens. These guidelines, effective from December 31, 2024, to January 1, 2025, aim to minimize potential risks and ensure a peaceful and responsible celebration.

Dr. Bagchi emphasized that the primary goal of these guidelines is to ensure that festivities are conducted in an orderly and secure manner. "Our primary focus is to ensure that the New Year's Eve celebrations are conducted peacefully and responsibly," he stated.

Under the new rules, all establishments planning to host events that extend beyond midnight are required to seek prior permission from the Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner's office. This permission is crucial for police to effectively monitor and regulate events, ensuring that they do not pose safety risks. In addition to obtaining permission, event organizers are mandated to install CCTV cameras at all entry and exit points, as well as in parking areas, to enhance security surveillance. This is aimed at



With a focus on security, crowd control, and responsible celebrations, the guidelines mandate event permissions, CCTV surveillance, and noise regulations from December 31, 2024, to January 1, 2025

ensuring that every aspect of the event is closely monitored. A strong police presence will

also be deployed at major city junctions to assist citizens, manage traffic, and maintain law and order.

The guidelines further emphasize the importance of maintaining robust security measures at event venues. Organizers are instructed to provide adequate security personnel for crowd control, traffic management, and supervision at entry points. Multiple entry and exit points are required to prevent overcrowding and ensure smooth and safe movement of attendees.

In a bid to reduce disturbances and potential hazards, the guidelines set clear regulations regarding noise pollution, alcohol consumption, and ticket sales. Noise levels during events must not exceed 45 decibels, ensuring a quieter and more controlled environment for all. Alcohol consumption must strictly follow the timings established by the Excise Department, and organizers are prohibited from overselling tickets beyond the venue's official capacity to avoid dangerous overcrowding.

Additionally, the Visakhapatnam Police have deployed 'SHE-Teams' across key locations to offer immediate support to women in distress or facing issues during the celebrations. Citizens are also urged to be cautious with their valuables in crowded areas to avoid thefts or accidents.

Appeals invited on categorisation of SCs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshimisha announced on Friday that the one-man commission, headed by retired IAS officer Rajeev Ranjan Mishra, appointed by the government to examine the sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SC) as per the Supreme Court's directives, will visit Machilipatnam on Saturday.

The Commission will hold a session at the ZP Convention Hall in Machilipatnam from 11 AM to 2 PM. During this session, individuals and organisations from the newly formed districts, carved out of the erstwhile Krishna district, can directly present their opinions, memorandums and appeals related to SC sub-categorisation. The Collector stated that organisations, public representatives, employees and leaders of various caste associations from the NTR district can submit their views and requests. Those unable to attend in person can send their submissions to the one-man Commission's office at the Tribal Welfare Department Headquarters, 1st Floor, Koneru Lakshmaiah Street, Moghalrajpuram, Vijayawada-520010. Submissions can also be sent via registered post with acknowledgment, or emailed to omccsubclassification@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions is January 9, 2025, the Collector added.

Panchayati Raj teachers seek 20 pc promotions in govt depts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Navya Andhra Teachers Association has formally requested the State government to allocate 20 per cent of promotions available in the Panchayat Raj Department and other government sectors to Panchayati Raj teachers. In a letter addressed to the Chief Secretary of the State, the association's State president Karanam Hari Krishna and general secretary Maganti Srinivasa Rao emphasised the need for equitable promotional oppor-

tunities in line with recent government decisions favouring non-teaching staff.

The association leaders pointed out that among the six lakh employees in the State, many Panchayat Raj teachers possess notable qualifications, including professional degrees. They stressed the importance of recognising these dedicated educators, who collectively represent 25 per cent of the total workforce, especially considering their lack of promotional opportunities over the past 30 years.

Call for community campaigns to prevent child marriages

PNS ■ PADERU

District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar emphasized the need for a collective effort to eradicate child marriages in the district, citing alarming numbers of teenage pregnancies and child marriages, particularly among PVTG communities and school dropouts.

During a District Level Child Marriage Committee meeting on Friday, Collector Kumar expressed concern over the issue. "We have identified 357 teenage pregnancies and 174 other minor pregnancies in the past two years, despite preventing 25 child marriages," he



Collector emphasises role of police and village associations in ensuring marriage registration and raising awareness

said. "It's crucial that we work together to address this critical issue."

To tackle the problem effectively, Collector Kumar instructed officials to conduct village-level meetings to identify the root causes and challenges contributing to child marriages. He also issued a stern warning, emphasizing that both the state government and the Supreme Court have implemented stringent measures against child

marriages. "I urge authorities, including ICDS, to take these matters seriously," Collector Kumar said. "Show-cause notices will be issued to committee members if child marriages occur in their respective villages."

To raise awareness and prevent child marriages, Collector Kumar suggested community campaigns and active involvement of law enforcement agencies. He highlighted the impor-

tance of registering all marriages within the village and ensuring that village associations pass resolutions against child marriages. The Collector also directed special attention towards school dropouts, particularly in grades 8 and 9. A pilot training program will be launched in GK Veedhi Mandal, a region with a high dropout rate, starting on January 3.

To monitor progress, the Collector mandated monthly

reports on child marriages to every secretariat. Women police officers will be responsible for data collection. Additionally, hostel students will be closely monitored, and special squad teams will be formed to oversee these initiatives. The meeting was attended by key officials, including DRO Padmalatha, DEO Brahmaji Rao, DMHO Dr. Jamal Basha, DSDO Dr. Rohini, and Police Inspector Deenabandhu, among others.

Property row surfaces in WG 'dead body parcel' case

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

The sensational 'body parcel' case, which has been solved by the West Godavari district police, has exposed a shocking conspiracy.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, WG district SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi revealed chilling details after interrogating the three accused. According to the investigation, the case revolved around a property dispute within the family of one Ranga Raju, a resident of Yendagandi village in Undi mandal.

Ranga Raju, who owned 2.5 acres of land and other assets, had two daughters, Tulasi and Revati, both married. Tulasi's husband, Sagi Srinu Babu, went missing in 2012, and she had been living with her parents since then. Disputes over land and property between Tulasi and Revati had escalated in recent years.

On December 19, Tulasi received a parcel from the 'Kshetriya Foundation.' Suspecting something amiss due to a foul smell emanating from the parcel, she alerted the police. Upon opening it, the



police discovered the decomposed body of a middle-aged man.

A special team led by DSP RG Jayasurya and CI V Jagadeswara Rao was constituted to probe the case. Their investigation led to the arrest of Tirumani Sridhar Varma, Penumatsa Sushma, and Chekuri alias Tirumani Revati. The trio had conspired to intimidate Tulasi into relinquishing her share of the property.

They targeted Parlaiah, a middle-aged man estranged from his family, and lured him to an agricultural field, where they strangled him with a wire while he was in an intoxicated state. They placed his body in a wooden box and sent it as a parcel to Tulasi, accompanied by a threatening letter warning her of similar consequences if she did not cede the land.

In a surprising twist, police discovered over Rs 2 crore in Sridhar Varma's bank account.

Woman harassed by loan app agents

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The police arrested two persons who are the recovery agents of a Non-banking Financial Company (NBFC) for harassing and threatening a woman for not paying loan instalments.

Superintendent of Police L Subba Rayudu told the media here on Friday that a woman software engineer, who is working in a firm in Bangalore, took a loan from a Loan App in Hyderabad for her financial needs. She failed to pay the six instalments of her loan.

The recovery agents of the Finable Technology Loan App Company abused her, her mother and her brother for not paying the loan instalment. They morphed the photos of the woman in an objectionable manner and sent them to her via WhatsApp. The recovery agents threatened her to send



the morphed photos to all her friends and contacts.

However, she paid the instalment for her loan. The women SWE complained to the Sullurpet police on December 25 about the harassment and

sending of morphed photos to the police.

The police team supervised by DSP G Chenchubabu and led by CI Muralikrishna arrested Finable Technology branch college team manager Maraka

Bharat Yadav and Collection team member Puttamshetti Ramakrishna. The SP warned of taking stringent action against NBFC or Loan APP recovery agents for their resort harassment of loan recovery.

SEEDAP to provide free training for minority youth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Law and Minority Welfare, NMD Farook, has urged the youth from minority communities across the State to apply for free training programmes aimed at enhancing employability and self-employment opportunities in the industrial sector. The Minister said that this initiative is being organised under the aegis of the Society for Employment Generation and Enterprise Development in Andhra Pradesh (SEEDAP).

Speaking to the media, Minister Farook said the government is committed to empowering youth through industry-based skills training, which aims to provide suitable employment opportunities in organised sectors. "Our efforts are directed towards creating industrialists and self-employment scenarios by equipping



residential training free of charge to those lacking the necessary qualifications.

Minister Farook said, "Participants of the free training programmes will benefit from various support services, including transport, career counselling, uniforms, accommodation, food, study materials, and job training. Additionally, certification will be provided through the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), alongside support for job placements and post-employment assistance."

The Minister encouraged minority youth to submit their applications (biodata) at the Minority Welfare/Minority Finance offices located in all district headquarters across the State. "I urge the youth to take advantage of this valuable opportunity," Farook concluded.

New land registration policy causes backlog, confusion

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A recent overhaul of land registration policies in Andhra Pradesh has thrown the system into disarray, particularly in Visakhapatnam. The new rules mandate the District Registrar approval for all property sales involving government-owned land, effectively halting numerous transactions.

The revised system, implemented through updated software and the uploading of government land records, automatically rejects registration attempts for properties under sections 22-A and 22-A-1-C (Endowment Department). This has created a backlog, with individuals struggling to navigate the new approval process amidst a lack of clear guidance. "I've been trying to register my property for days, but the system keeps rejecting it," complained a frustrated citizen.



AP aims to become global tourism destination: APTDC Chairman

New tourism policy to guide efforts to develop world-class tourism infrastructure

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), Dr Nukasani Balaji, has reaffirmed the State government's commitment to positioning Andhra Pradesh as a premier global tourism destination. During a two-day visit to various tourism projects in Visakhapatnam, Dr. Balaji emphasised the significance of the newly formulated tourism policy, envisioned by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

"This policy will guide our efforts to develop world-class tourism infrastructure and attract international visitors," Dr. Balaji stated. He assured that capable stakeholders will be carefully selected to drive the success of these ventures, focusing on enhancing facilities at the Rishikonda Blue Flag Beach to meet international standards.

Dr. Balaji highlighted the Chief Minister's vision, saying, "Each tourism unit should operate at its full potential while achieving financial self-reliance for the corporation." He also participated in a programme organised by the Nepal Embassy in Visakhapatnam, reaffirming AP Tourism's commitment to providing necessary facilities to Nepalese tourists.

The Chairman criticised the previous administration's mismanagement of funds, particularly regarding the Rushikonda Palace project. He assured that the current government will carefully consider the best utilisation of this asset to maximise its potential.

During his tour, Dr. Balaji visited several key sites, including the Pema Wellness Centre, Rishikonda Palace, and the Mangaripeta Visakhapatnam Transport Unit.

SEX DETERMINATION TESTS Programme Officers directed to inspect scanning centres



PNS ■ GUNTUR

District Collector S. Nagalakshmi has instructed Programme Officers to inspect scanning centres to prevent sex determination tests.

The Collector convened a district-level meeting of the Multimember Appropriate Authority Committee on Friday to discuss measures against sex determination tests. She directed the Programme Officers to inspect online-registered scanning centres and take strict action if any violations of rules are found.

The Collector also ordered Programme Officers to conduct decoy operations at scanning centres and gather feedback from pregnant women visiting these centres regarding the determination of the fetus's sex.

DM&HO Dr. Vijayalakshmi informed the Collector that

decoy operations had been carried out at 24 scanning centres in the district, but no violations were found during these operations.

Dr Vijayalakshmi further reported that there are a total of 296 fetal sex determination testing centres in the district, of which four have applied online for registration renewal, nine centres for modification, and one for cancellation.

She also updated the Collector on the registration of three new scanning centres, which had been inspected by the committee members and Programme Officers. The committee approved the new scanning centres, along with those for renewal, modification, and cancellation.

Second Additional Judge Dr Y. Nagaraju, committee members Dr Sujata, Dr Nageswara Rao, Dr Ravindra Naik, and ICDS PD Umadevi were present at the meeting.

Minister lays stone for Rs 3 cr worth of works



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu laid the stone and unveiled the plaques for various development works to be carried out at a cost of Rs 3 crore. The Minister performed the bhoomi pooja at Pedamamidipalli Digamaru and Kothapet villages in Palakol mandal for various development works to be taken up at a cost of Rs 3 crore.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister revealed that 60 percent of the funds would be spent for the construction of protected drinking water projects at the three villages. All the development works would be completed by the Sankranti festival, he announced.

He attributed the hike of power tariff to the inheritance of Rs 18,000 crore worth arrears to Discoms by the erstwhile YSRCP. The flawed power policy adopted by the YSRCP regime forced the incumbent government to impose charges on the consumers, he slammed.

Ramanaidu alleged that the power tariff was hiked nine times during the five years of the YSRCP regime. Moreover, the YSRCP put an additional burden of Rs 16,000 crore on the power consumers in the form of True up charges. When the Genco was offering power at Rs 5 per unit, the YSRCP purchased power by spending Rs 8 to Rs 14 from private companies, he lashed out.

Nimmala Ramanaidu listed out the achievements of the coalition government highlighting the hike of social security pension to Rs 4000, issuing notification for mega DSC to fill over 16,500 teacher posts and hiking of input subsidy from Rs 16,000 to Rs 25,000 per hectare.

SC SUB-CLASSIFICATION

Rajiv Ranjan Mishra holds meet with officials in Eluru dist

PNS ■ ELURU

The one-man commission headed by retired IAS officer Rajiv Ranjan Mishra held discussions with District Collector Vetri Selvi, Superintendent of Police KP Shiva Kishore, Joint Collector P Dhatri Reddy and other officials here on Friday.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh appointed Rajiv Ranjan Mishra as a man commission to enquire on the sub-classification within Scheduled Castes following the Judgment of the Supreme Court.

He held a meeting with the Collector, JC, SP and other officials and discussed the matter of the sub-classification. He directed the Collector to con-



vene a special meeting with the officials of various departments and elicit their views.

He also ordered the Collector to send him the details on the implementation of welfare schemes for the Scheduled Castes and sub-castes. DRO V Visweswara

Rao, Social Welfare JD V Jayaprakash, ZP CEO K Subba Rao, DRDA PD R Vijayaraju, DEO Venkata Lakshamma, DWMVA PD Subba Rao and horticulture officer S Rammohan Rao were among those who attended the meeting.

Historical sculptures, inscriptions in utter neglect in Palnadu

Sculptures, including depictions of Mahishasuramardini, Brahma, Kumaraswamy, Bhairava and Nandi, belong to 10th century

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Several sculptures and inscriptions, dating from the 10th to the 14th centuries CE, are languishing in neglect at Rompicherla in Palnadu district of Andhra Pradesh. Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, an archaeologist and CEO of the Pleach India Foundation (PIF), highlighted the plight of these invaluable historical artifacts during a recent survey conducted as part of the 'Preserve Heritage for Posterity' campaign.

Dr Reddy identified several sculptures, including depictions of Mahishasuramardini, Brahma, Kumaraswamy, Bhairava and Nandi, all of which belong to the 10th century. Additionally, inscriptions from different periods were found amidst roadside bushes and unkempt areas. Among them, one inscription dated 1245 CE, issued by Kota



Bhimraya and others issued by Kakatiya rulers Ganapatideva and Prataparudra (dated 1320 CE), document historical donations of land for temple upkeep and religious offerings.

The Mahishasuramardini sculpture is a testament to the Vengi Chalukyan art style, while the remaining sculptures

featuring Brahma, Kumaraswamy, Bhairava and Garuda are characteristic of the Kakatiya style. These artifacts were intended for the worship of deities in temples such as Ananta (Madana) Gopinatha and Kesavadeva.

Expressing concern over the neglect, Dr Sivanagi Reddy

appealed to temple authorities and local residents to take immediate steps to preserve these priceless relics. He recommended erecting the artifacts on pedestals with proper labelling to ensure their protection and to educate future generations about their cultural significance.

Restore TTD's aid to TG temples: Konda Surekha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Forest, Environment, and Environment Minister Konda Surekha has urged the Andhra Pradesh Government to address the difficulties faced by devotees from Telangana visiting the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD).

She expressed the hope that discussions would ensure a hassle-free experience for pilgrims.

"A large number of devotees from Telangana visit TTD, contributing significantly to Andhra Pradesh's revenue. In the past, funds from TTD were allocated for temples and wedding halls in Telangana. This has now stopped. Andhra Pradesh should revive these contributions to help the development of Telangana's ancient temples and facilities," she said.

On Thursday, Minister Surekha, along with her family, visited the Sri Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple at Srisailem, one of the 12 Jyotirlingas. Speaking on the occasion, she said her family's vow was



fulfilled through their visit.

"My daughter had prayed to Lord Mallikarjuna for a son and had vowed to visit the temple if her wish was granted. Today, we have come as a family to fulfil that promise," the Minister said, reflecting on the steadfast faith in the deity's blessings.

Surekha acknowledged that while the Srisailem Temple is now in Andhra Pradesh, the faith and the regards of the people of Telangana remain unchanged. She emphasised

the need for Andhra Pradesh to actively resolve the problems faced by Telangana pilgrims at the TTD.

She said that a committee has already been set up to look into these matters, and the positive responses from both the Chief Ministers are a step in the right direction.

Surekha also prayed for good times for both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, with bountiful harvests, the well-being of farmers, and adequate funds for both governments.

ACROSS THE STATES



Two held by Odisha Police for cyber fraud

The Odisha Police has arrested two persons from Jaipur and Jodhpur in Rajasthan for allegedly duping a resident of Rourkela city, a police officer said on Friday. The complainant, Arun Kumar Mandal, had alleged that the duo cheated him of Rs 23 lakh through online transactions, they said. A special team of the Rourkela Police visited Rajasthan and arrested the two, residents of Jaipur and Jodhpur, a police officer said. "After initial investigation, we found that this is the handiwork of an organised gang, which is operating all over India and internationally. In the first phase, we have apprehended two persons and the probe is underway," SP Nitesh Wadhvani said.



54-year-old man jumps to death at Delhi hospital

A 54-year-old man died on Friday after allegedly jumping from the window of a fifth-floor washroom at Jamia Hamdard Hospital in south Delhi, police reported. No suicide note has been recovered. The police received information about the incident at 1:21 am on Friday, an officer said. The victim, Mushtaq Ali, used to work at the hospital as a ward boy and was a resident of the staff quarters at the Jamia Hamdard campus, he added. Ali had been admitted to the orthopedic ward of the hospital on Monday due to a fracture in his foot, the officer said. Ali lived alone and his family members reside in Odisha, police said, adding that further investigation is underway.



Research positions: PM urged to suspend recruitment

A member of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's (ICAR) Governing Body on Friday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to suspend ongoing recruitment for research management positions, citing concerns over transparency and procedural irregularities. In a statement, Venugopal Badaravada questioned the sudden transfer of Srinivasa Rao from his position as Director of ICAR-NAARM to Director of ICAR-IARI, calling for the appointment to be revoked. Badaravada alleged recruitment rules were modified without Governing Body's approval, with the Agriculture Scientists Recruitment Board (ASRB) failing to object to the changes. He demanded suspension of ongoing research management position interviews and called for a Supreme Court judge or CBI-led investigation into recruitment practices over the past five years. "India's agricultural future depends on the integrity of institutions like ICAR. The current trajectory of corruption within ICAR jeopardizes national goals," Badaravada said.

ECONOMISTS HAIL EX-PM'S CONTRIBUTION

'Singh's reforms transformed India, unshackled economy'

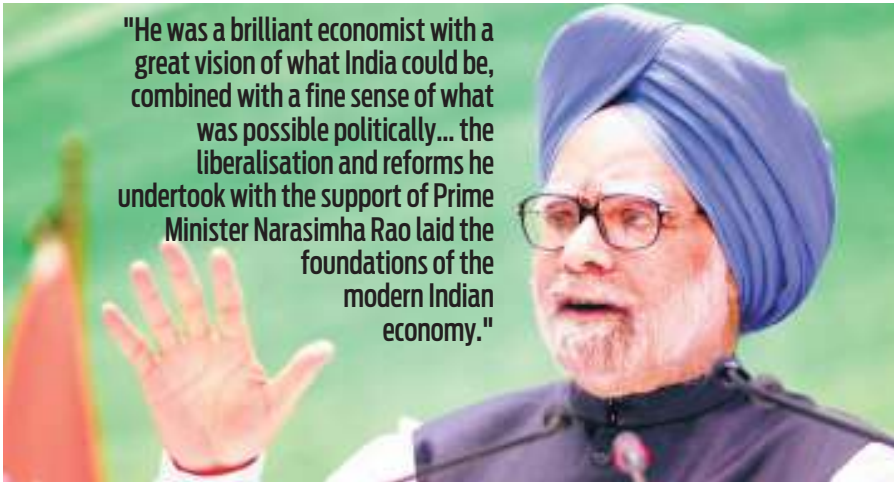
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's 1991 budget unshackled India's economy, significantly enhancing the economic prospects for hundreds of millions of Indians, first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Gita Gopinath said on Friday.

In a social media post on X, Gopinath further said Singh's visionary reforms inspired countless young economists like her. "Dr Manmohan Singh's 1991 budget unshackled India's economy, significantly enhancing the economic prospects for hundreds of millions of Indians. His visionary reforms inspired countless young economists like me. Rest in peace, Dr Manmohan Singh," she said.

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died here at the age of 92 late on Thursday. He served as the prime minister for two terms -- from 2004 to 2014.

Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan said Singh was a brilliant economist with a visionary outlook on India's potential, combined with a fine sense of political feasibility.



Rajan described Singh as understated and soft-spoken, qualities that enabled him to attract some of the brightest minds to his team, including Montek Singh Ahluwalia, C Rangarajan and Rakesh Mohan. "He was a brilliant economist with a great vision of what India could be, combined with a fine sense of what was possible politically... the liberalisation and reforms he undertook with the support of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao laid the foundations of the modern Indian

economy," he told PTI. Rajan, the 23rd Governor of the Reserve Bank of India between September 2013 and September 2016, recalled that Singh was always curious. "Most persons with his experience and achievements would hold forth their views. Instead, Dr Singh heard others out and then tried to make use of what they conveyed, including criticism.

"And he was a man of great integrity, never using any of his offices for personal gain," Rajan noted. Former World Bank chief economist Kaushik Basu said Singh, admired for his sharp intellect, innate modesty, and personal integrity - qualities rarely found in politics, will be remembered as one of the greatest political leaders not only in India but also globally. Basu, who was Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) to the government in 2009-12, further said Manmohan Singh's modesty came from a deep sense of courage and self-confidence.

'As PM, I cannot let any Indian go without food': recounts Manmohan Singh's agriculture secretary

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the nation mourns the loss of one of its most respected statesmen Manmohan Singh, his former food and agriculture secretary T Nanda Kumar on Friday shared his memories of working with the former prime minister during some of India's most challenging times. Manmohan Singh, whose leadership was defined by compassion and intellect, passed away in New Delhi on Thursday night at the age of 92.

Recalling his first one-on-one meeting with Singh in 2006, Nanda Kumar said India was facing a shortage of what at that time and it was decided to import it, sparking criticism from several quarters. Nanda Kumar said he went to the prime minister to talk over the issue. "He heard me patiently and explained, like the professor he was, the need to augment supplies when demand outstripped availability. He told me, 'as prime minister, I cannot let any Indian go without food'. That summed up the basis of his decisions," Nanda Kumar recounted to PTI.

"This ethos guided Singh's leadership during crises," Kumar said. "In 2007, when I

raised concerns about recurring shortages, Prime Minister Singh encouraged me to develop solutions."

The outcome was the launch of several key initiatives such as the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana to boost agricultural productivity, the National Food Security Mission to enhance rice and wheat yields, and an increase in buffer stock norms by five million tonnes to prepare for emergencies, he added.

During the 2008 global food crisis, Nanda Kumar had to propose a ban on non-basmati rice exports to secure domestic supplies. He said PM Singh firmly supported the move despite resistance. "I have to take care of the needs of my countrymen and women before sending food to other countries," Nanda Kumar recalled the prime minister having said.

According to Kumar, this decision proved critical during the 2009 drought, ensuring food security without resorting to imports.

Nanda Kumar also fondly remembered Singh's discussions with C Rangarajan, who was the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the PM, on food and agriculture policy.

Skipped meals at times or ate sixpence bar of chocolate

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

While studying in Cambridge University on a scholarship in the mid 1950s, money was the only real problem for Manmohan Singh and there were times when he had to skip meals or live on a sixpence bar of Cadbury's chocolate, according to his daughter Daman Singh.

Singh earned a First Class Honours (Tripos) degree in Economics in 1957 from

University of Cambridge.

Daughter Daman Singh came out with a book "Strictly Personal: Manmohan and Gursharan", published by HarperCollins in 2014, to tell the "story of her parents".

She also mentioned that her father often spoke about his early years, of the hard life in the village as well as the charm of a simpler existence. Singh was born in Gah in Punjab province's western region, which now falls in Pakistan.

Daman recalled that when once her sister Kiki asked Singh if he wishes to go back to Gah, he replied mildly, "No, not really. That is where my grandfather was killed."

Writing about her father's days at Cambridge, Daman said money was the only real problem that bothered him as his tuition and living expenses came to about 600 pounds a year while the Punjab University scholarship gave him about 160 pounds.

"For the rest he had to depend on his father. Manmohan was careful to live very stingily. Subsidized meals in the dining hall were relatively cheap at two shillings sixpence. He never ate out, and seldom indulged in beer or wine," she wrote.

Yet he would be in crisis if money from home fell short or did not arrive in time. "When this happened, he skipped meals or got by on a sixpence bar of Cadbury's chocolate. He would

never borrow money his entire life, but this was when he came closest to doing so. The only person he could think of turning to was Madan (close friend Madan Lal Sudan)," the book said.

After the results of the first-year Tripos examination were declared and Singh came first, he wrote to Madan asking not to send him any money from then on. "I think I will get some prize worth about 20 pounds and if I press I might get an

Exhibition (an allowance or scholarship), but I am not so greedy. I prefer to wait till next year," Singh wrote.

Daman also mentioned how her father used to sing at family get-togethers and picnics. "Whenever we went on a picnic, people used to sing. He knew a couple of songs. He sang 'Lagta nahin hai ji mera' and 'Amrita Pritam's poem

'Aakhn Waris Shah noon, kitey kabran vichon bol', she wrote.



Ropeway project protestors launch hunger strike

PNS ■ REASI/JAMMU

A shutdown in Katra, the base camp for the Vaishno Devi pilgrimage in Jammu and Kashmir, against a proposed ropeway project entered its second day on Thursday, with the protesters sitting on a hunger strike to press for the release of those detained by police the day before.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti has called for a 72-hour shutdown, which commenced on Wednesday, announcing that all activities in Katra would remain suspended during the bandh. "The bandh will continue until the government shelves the ropeway project. It is an assault on the livelihoods of most Katra residents,

who are dependent on the pilgrimage economy," a samiti spokesperson said.

Last month, the board decided to install the ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children and others who find it difficult to climb the 13-km-long track to the cave shrine. The samiti which claims to represent shopkeepers, pony operators and palanquin owners, claimed that the ropeway would destroy the livelihoods of local business owners and demanded that the project be scrapped. For the second consecutive day on Thursday, all shops, restaurants and business establishments remained closed and traffic was off the roads in the holy town.

Two injured in gunfight in Manipur

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

At least two persons, including a policeman, were injured in a gunfight with armed men in Manipur's Imphal East district on Friday, police said.

Armed men from the hills launched gun-and-bomb attacks in Sanasabi and Thamnepokpi villages in the district, to which security forces retaliated, leading to a fierce encounter, a senior police

officer said.

Two persons suffered injuries in the gunfight in Sanasabi village. The policeman, identified as 37-year-old K Haridash, suffered bullet injuries on his left shoulder and was rushed to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences around 3.30 pm, the officer said.

He will undergo a minor surgery, officials at the hospital said.

Another 'village volunteer' suffered minor injuries on his hands during the gun battle was also taken to a private hospital, where his condition is out of danger. The village volunteers had joined the security forces in the gun battle against the armed men from the hills.

"Armed men from the hill-tops started firing indiscriminately and hurling bombs around 10.45 am at Sanasabi village and adjacent areas, forcing

security personnel to retaliate," the officer said.

Locals ran helter-skelter as the gunfight broke out.

"Armed men also launched attacks at Thamnepokpi village around 11.30 am, creating panic among the residents," the officer said.

Security forces, including CRPF personnel, rescued several women, children and elderly people, who were caught in the crossfire.

Punjab: Eight killed, many injured in Bathinda bus accident

PNS ■ BATHINDA

Eight people died and many were injured on Friday when a private bus crashed through the railing of a bridge here and plunged into a drain a few feet below, police said.

The bus had over 45 passengers and it fell in Lasara drain at Jeewan Singhwala village, officials said.

The accident occurred when the bus was enroute to Bathinda from Talwandi Sabo. Locals rushed to the spot immediately to help the passengers, they said, adding that eight people lost their lives.

Police and district administration also launched a rescue operation and took the injured to a hospital. A team

of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) also reached the spot to provide assistance, they added.

Expressing condolences, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X "Saddened by the loss of lives in the bus accident in Bathinda, Punjab. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon."

He also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) to the next of kin of each deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

According to officials the weather was inclement in the area however the exact cause of the accident is yet to be ascertained.

Issued over 1 million nonimmigrant visas to Indians for 2nd year: US embassy



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The US mission in India on Friday said it issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas, underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the US.

Washington is also working to formally establish a US-based to renew H-1B visas in that country in 2025 that is expected to benefit a significant number of Indians.

In the past four years, visitor numbers from India have increased by five times, and more than two million Indians travelled to the US in the first 11 months of 2024, a 26 per cent increase over the same period in 2023, it said.

Over five million Indians already have a nonimmigrant visa to visit the US and each day the mission issues thousands more, the embassy said.

"The US mission to India issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas,

underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the United States for tourism, business, and education," it said in a readout.

The embassy noted that the State Department completed a successful pilot programme to renew H-1B visas in the US States this year.

This allowed many specialty occupation workers from India to renew their visas without leaving the US.

"This pilot program streamlined the renewal process for thousands of applicants, and the Department of State is working to formally establish a US-based renewal program in 2025," it said.

The US mission to India issued tens of thousands of immigrant visas, facilitating legal family reunification and the migration of skilled professionals, according to the readout.

These immigrant visa holders became permanent residents upon their arrival, adding to the already rich and sizable Indian diaspora community in the US, it said.

SC directs Punjab govt to ensure medical aid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed concern over the condition of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite hunger strike, and directed the Punjab government to ensure he was given medical assistance.

A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia issued a notice to the Punjab government on a contempt petition against its chief secretary and the director general of police (DGP) for non-

compliance of an order directing medical aid to Dallewal.

"If there is a law and order situation, you have to deal with it with iron hands. Somebody's life is at stake. You need to take it seriously. Medical aid has to be given and the impression is that you are not following it," the bench said.

The apex court directed the state government to file a compliance report by December 28, when it would again hear the matter and ordered the Punjab chief secretary and the DGP to



virtually remain present during the hearing.

During the hearing, Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh submitted a delegation of eight cabinet ministers along with the Punjab DGP visited the protest site to convince Dallewal to move to a hospital but the farmers resisted it.

"We have provided everything on site. If there is physical jostling, we cannot take that risk," he added.

The bench however responded, "We have serious doubts about those farmers,

those who are not conscious and aware and concerned about his life."

Singh said the state government was "very earnestly" following up on the issue.

When the bench wondered if the Centre could offer assistance to the state government, solicitor general Tushar Mehta said its interference might lead to complications.

"Few people cannot keep him (Dallewal) hostage. One man's life is in danger. The state government can take measures," said Mehta.



www.dailypioneer.com

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

PAPER WITH PASSION

A silent crusader

Dr Manmohan Singh a reluctant politician yet a resilient leader and a gentleman is no more but his legacy lives on

The man with the vision and selfless dedication to the nation, Dr Manmohan Singh is no more. Dr Singh passed away on December 26, 2024, at the age of 92. Dr Singh, a towering figure in Indian politics and economics, breathed his last at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. His demise marks the end of an era defined by humility, intellect and steadfast dedication to nation-building. Dr Manmohan Singh's contributions to India's economic and political landscape are unparalleled. Widely regarded as the architect of India's 1991 economic reforms, Singh's tenure as Finance Minister under Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was transformative. At a time when the Indian economy teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, Singh introduced a series of bold measures that liberalised the economy, dismantled the license raj and opened the doors to foreign investment. These reforms not only rescued India from an economic crisis but also set the stage for decades of robust growth and development. During his tenure,



Singh's policies prioritised the devaluation of the rupee, moderation of taxes, privatisation of public sector enterprises and encouragement of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). These initiatives catalysed India's transition into a globally integrated economy and solidified his reputation as one of the nation's most accomplished economists.

Known as a reluctant politician, Dr Singh's foray into politics was driven by a profound sense of duty rather than ambition. When he assumed the role of Prime Minister in 2004, heading the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, he brought the same commitment and vision that had defined his career as an economist. Serving two consecutive terms until 2014, Singh's leadership was marked by both humility and resolve. One of the most defining moments of his tenure was the Indo-US nuclear deal in 2008, a landmark agreement that underscored his courage and conviction. Despite staunch opposition from the Left Front, which led to their withdrawal of support, Singh's government survived a vote of confidence, thanks to the support of the Samajwadi Party. The deal elevated India's status on the global stage and symbolised his unyielding dedication to the nation's strategic interests. Dr Singh was often described as a 'gentleman leader,' a man of integrity who preferred dialogue over confrontation. His humility was legendary, yet he was resolute when it came to principles. Throughout his career, he commanded respect across party lines, not just for his intellect but for his moral rectitude. His tenure as Prime Minister may have been criticised for perceived passivity, but his calm demeanour and quiet determination left an indelible mark on Indian governance. A seven-day period of mourning is a fitting tribute by the nation to a great visionary. His last rites will be conducted with full state honours. While his absence leaves a void, his contributions to India's progress and his example of selfless service will continue to inspire generations. Om Shanti.

PICTALK



Tourists enjoy paragliding after fresh snowfall, in Solang valley in Manali

Why RSS chief's push for large families is out of step



K S TOMAR

By advocating outdated solutions to demographic trends, Bhagwat's vision risks deepening societal divisions and ignoring the socio-economic realities of today

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's recent appeal for larger families, framed as a response to perceived demographic challenges, reveals a worldview rooted in traditionalism. This perspective clashes with the progressive social, cultural, and economic ethos of modern India. While presented as a solution to counter declining population trends, Bhagwat's remarks have ignited debates over their communal undertones, potential to deepen gender inequality, and disconnection from contemporary realities. Bhagwat's remarks are part of a larger discourse on demographic imbalances, often aimed at minority communities. This rhetoric fosters fear, undermines social harmony, and contradicts India's pluralistic traditions. Today's youth prioritise quality of life over larger families, influenced by rising living costs, career aspirations, and financial stability. Bhagwat's appeal appears disconnected from these realities, highlighting a gap between traditionalist agendas and contemporary Indian values.

The RSS chief's observations clash with India's family planning efforts from the late 1960s and 1970s when the emphasis was on small families. Even former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, during her tenure, highlighted the dangers of unchecked population growth, stressing the need for planned families. Bhagwat's outdated stance ignores this historical context and the progress India has made in population stabilisation through education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. Bhagwat's proposal for families to have more children is based on the argument that declining fertility rates threaten the survival and dominance of certain communities. This narrative, often accompanied by alarmist rhetoric about population imbalances, underscores divisive politics. Although demographic trends warrant attention, his suggested solution disregards socio-economic realities and entrenches regressive norms. Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has echoed similar sentiments, advocating for larger families in his state.

However, such approaches seem out of step with modern India's aspirations. India is not experiencing a population decline but rather a slowdown in growth.

According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped to 2.0, below the replacement level of 2.1. This trend reflects advancements in education, healthcare, and women's autonomy. While policymakers globally view such developments as markers of progress, Bhagwat's remarks frame this demographic shift as a cultural and religious issue, perpetuating communal narratives that risk deepening societal divisions.

Bhagwat's outdated stance ignores this historical context and the progress India has made in population stabilisation through education, healthcare, and women's empowerment. The RSS's vision aligns with traditional family structures, where women are expected to prioritise domestic roles.

By advocating for larger families, Bhagwat inadvertently reinforces these outdated norms, perpetuating cycles of

dependency and limiting women's agency. Central to Bhagwat's argument is a patriarchal notion that reduces women to their reproductive roles. His call for more children disregards women's aspirations, autonomy, and wellbeing, placing an undue burden on them.

Resource Constraints With a population exceeding 1.4 billion, India faces severe resource constraints, including food insecurity, water scarcity, and unemployment. Increasing family sizes would exacerbate these issues, placing further strain on public services and natural resources. India's youth population, often hailed as a demographic dividend, grapples with high unemployment rates.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reports that unemployment among those aged 15-29 exceeds 20 per cent. Without job creation, additional population growth risks turning this dividend into a liability. India is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Global policymakers advocate for sustainable development, making Bhagwat's vision seem misaligned with contemporary priorities.

Cultural and Ethical Disconnect India's ethos is rooted in diversity, balance, and individual

choice. Bhagwat's remarks dismiss these values, echoing authoritarian tendencies that clash with Indian democracy. Family planning decisions are deeply personal and should not be influenced by socio-political agendas.

Intervening in such choices undermines personal freedoms and contradicts the principles of modern India. In a country where maternal mortality remains a concern and reproductive healthcare is uneven, urging women to have more children intensifies existing vulnerabilities. Instead of alarmist rhetoric, India's leadership should focus on forward-looking policies to address demographic concerns constructively. Improved access to education, particularly for girls, is key to stabilising population growth. Educated women are more likely to make informed reproductive choices, contributing to sustainable demographics and enhancing healthcare. Investing in maternal and child healthcare can reduce mortality rates and improve quality of life.

Policies empowering the youth and enhancing employability can transform India's demographic potential into an asset. (Writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)



BHAGWAT'S OUTDATED STANCE IGNORES THIS HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THE PROGRESS INDIA HAS MADE IN POPULATION STABILIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MANMOHAN SINGH PASSES AWAY

Madam — The sad demise of former PM Dr Manmohan Singh is an irreplaceable loss to the nation. Singh will be remembered as the statesman who saved the Indian economy from going over the edge. When he took over as finance minister in the minority government of Narasimha Rao in 1991, the Indian economy was very close to sovereign default. Foreign exchange reserves were barely enough to cover a month of imports, and the country had to suffer the ignominy of having to ship its gold reserves to England.

All of that would change with the famous 1991 Budget which Manmohan Singh presented, and the industrial deregulation that accompanied the Budget. Hailed as an architect of India's economic liberalisation, he served as Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014. During his tenure, he spearheaded transformative policies that shaped India's modern economic landscape. His leadership saw India achieve its highest GDP growth rates, and his role in the Indo-US nuclear deal significantly enhanced India's global stature. India is on its way to becoming the third-largest economy in the world in a couple of years, and the seeds of India's growth story were sown during the economic reforms. More than three decades later, there is as big a consensus for reforms in India as there was opposition to it when the process started.

N Sadasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGE FOR INDIA

Madam — A formal request by Bangladesh to India to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India after she was ousted by mass student-led protests, poses a severe diplomatic challenge for India. Dhaka has chosen her path, and it does not seem to be interested in normalising ties with India; hence this extradition path. The extradition request and the political developments around Hasina's asylum in India have the potential to influence India-Bangladesh relations significantly, and it requires deft diplomatic handling by both nations. Hasina's presence

ICC fines Virat Kohli



Virat Kohli found himself in an awkward situation when he was in the midst of a controversy over an altercation with Australian debutant Sam Konstas. It was a lucky escape for Virat Kohli on day 1 of the fourth test at Melbourne, which otherwise would have ended as a typical 'Boxing' Day episode. The 19-year-old teenager has not spared the Indian bowlers, including Jasprit

Bumrah, in his attacking 60 runs, which was a treat to watch. It was an intentional act captured in-camera when Kohli appeared to be dashed against Konstas in the middle while walking across, which sparked an encounter. Watching this, the Aussie legend Ricky Ponting and England's Michael Vaughan were quick to voice their opinions, calling for ICC action.

Kohli has been slapped with a fine of 20 per cent of his match fee and given one demerit point by the ICC as well. This is not the expected behaviour from a batter who played 121 tests, 295 ODIs, and 125 T20s. If Kohli was baffled by Konstas belligerence, he should have proved his worth as a batter in the middle rather than engaged himself with the intimidating tactics, which can be construed as cheap for all his calibre.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

in India and her public statements against the interim government have strained relations between the two countries, which have further been worsened by the persecution of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh.

India is examining the request on legal grounds, but India can refuse extradition, citing political nature or justice-related concerns, but ultimately it is going to be for purely political reasons. The ball is firmly in India's court, and if India sends her back, we would seal her fate as she is bound to face the death penalty in Dhaka, and if it rejects this request, then we should be ready for more hostility from our neighbour, and our ties would go from bad to worse. Whatever India chose to do will have long-term ramifications on this whole region.

Bal Govind | Noida

EMPOWERING RURAL ECONOMY

Madam — The government is committed to revitalising the rural economy through cooperation, recently inaugurating 10,000 Multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit

Societies (PACS). These societies not only generate employment but also ensure optimal resource availability and connect farmers' produce to international markets, aligning with the vision of "Prosperity through Cooperation."

PACS, as the cornerstone of the cooperative three-tier structure, play a pivotal role in rural upliftment by addressing needs like credit, fertilisers, storage, and water management. The government aims to establish 2 lakh PACS in five years, strengthening rural infrastructure and promoting unity, harmony, and self-reliance. To revive dormant PACS and establish new ones, a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed, targeting the setup of PACS in 15,000 villages. These societies are evolving into hubs of multifaceted services, including digital amenities like ticket bookings and financial inclusion via RuPay Kisan Credit Cards and micro-ATMs.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Homeschooling: Affordable and holistic education option

Homeschooling is transforming its image from an unconventional option to a widely accepted educational route as many parents opt for this affordable choice

With the rising costs of living, an increasing number of parents are reevaluating the conventional approach to education. An increasing number of families nationwide are viewing homeschooling as a legitimate and empowering option compared to traditional education systems.

The choice is influenced not only by financial considerations but also by a commitment to nurture the child in a manner that aligns with their unique needs and the family's values. For many years, traditional educational institutions have been the cornerstone of childhood learning. However, nowadays, an ever-growing number of parents are questioning whether the significant expenses associated with private education, or even the costs of public schooling, truly justify the investment. The homeschooling movement presents a compelling argument: education can occur beyond the confines of traditional classrooms. The main factor driving this change is the expense involved. Education, particularly in private schools, often



presents a challenging list of costs: tuition, uniforms, transportation, extracurriculars, and supplies. Homeschooling greatly alleviates these financial burdens. Parents now have the opportunity to invest in essential resources such as top-notch educational materials, online courses, or tailored coaching—all designed to cater to their child's unique needs.

Moreover, homeschooling encourages families to tap into their creativity and resourcefulness. Libraries, free online resources, and community programmes provide abundant learning opportunities with minimal or no expense. In a time filled with numerous digital resources, parents have the ability to craft a curriculum that is both cost-effective and thorough. In addition to reducing expenses, there are numerous

other factors contributing to the rising popularity of homeschooling. Parents hold the view that homeschooling can significantly enhance a child's personal and academic development. In contrast to conventional educational institutions, homeschooling offers remarkable flexibility, allowing lessons to align with a child's interests, learning pace, and preferred methods of engagement.

A student passionate about science, for instance, can dedicate additional time to experiments and practical activities, while those with a flair for the arts can unleash their creativity free from the limitations of a rigid schedule. Another key factor is the importance of comprehensive development. Homeschooling transcends traditional textbooks and offers genuine, real-world learning experiences. Cooking transforms into a blend of maths and chemistry; gardening embodies principles of biology and sustainability; a visit to the museum or park imparts lessons in history and ecology. These activities, along with practical knowledge, foster

family connections—something that seems rare in today's world. Certainly, homeschooling comes with its drawbacks. Concerns have been voiced by critics regarding socialisation and the stress it imposes on parents. Nevertheless, families who choose to homeschool have found innovative ways to address these issues, including forming co-op groups, engaging in community sports, and coordinating group field trips. This signifies a movement towards appreciating cost-effectiveness, adaptability, and personal expression in education—a tendency expected to expand as households adjust to financial circumstances. Ultimately, homeschooling transcends being merely an educational option; it embodies a declaration of empowerment. For parents aiming to reshape education in a way that resonates with their values, this journey offers not just information but a profoundly rewarding experience for both themselves and their children.

(The writer is a motivator and a freelance writer; views are personal)



RACHNA LAKHPATRI



FIRST COLUMN

HUNGER FOR POWER

Lure for power is a universal phenomenon but in the capital, it is at next level



APS MALHOTRA

I have come to seek your support and valuable vote, as I have decided to stand for re-election, declared the bespectacled, heavy-set, middle-aged man—dressed in an off-white safari suit—rather pompously, as he stood with folded hands at the door of my house, surrounded by a bevy of churches and churches, who suitably nodded their head in unison. “Vote for which re-election?” I muttered under my breath, irritated at the uncalled-for intrusion into my privacy on a rather lazy Sunday morning. “I am the President” he replied sheepishly, maybe taken aback at my nonchalant reply. “I had decided not to stand for this year’s election due to increased professional and personal commitments—actually I had desired to give someone younger a chance to bear the responsibility, and take a backseat— but had to relent under the immense pressure from fellow residents, who want my leadership for a further period of three years” he continued, his voice a cocktail of benevolence and beneficence for his ‘supporters’, and the seasoned politician’s chicanery. “But isn’t Mrs. Draupadi Murmu the President?” I retorted, further trying to pull his leg. “Malhotra jee, I am the President of our Resident Welfare Association (RWA) for the past several years,” he said, flabbergasted, a tad angry and certainly deeply offended at my failure to recognize him, and worse, acknowledge his self-perceived exalted status. Although I had recognised him the moment he pressed the doorbell of my house, and I opened the front door to face him,



my innate aversion to people who like to throw their weight around and flaunt uncalled-for appellations came forth with all its bitterness.

Nonetheless, realizing that the man was getting increasingly exasperated at my manoeuvrings, I salvaged the situation by promising to cast my vote in his favour and profusely apologized to him for my failure to identify his ‘Excellency’, with the pretext that my better half is the face of our family for outside interactions, while I busy myself in mundane things, like reading and writing. Not too surprisingly, denizens of my beloved Dilli, sitting on the centre of power since the dawn of history, have a deeply ingrained fascination for posts and titles— which proliferate dime a dozen— and take a macho and perverse pride in flaunting them, with the same exuberance with which a child displays his or her toy, albeit not with the same innocence.

This fact is borne out in the form of roadside boards and car number plates, which often bear vague titles— such as ‘Secretary, Youth Media Cell, ABC party, B-block, Village XYZ’. A carryforward from the era of the Mughals and British imperialists, this is a desperate shot to seek the much-desired VIP status, at least in the circle one operates in. Thus, it is not unknown to find members of RWAs who run virtual fiefdoms in their associations, maybe as recompense for the voluntary service rendered in serving the community. The perks could include a free car wash and laundry facility, use of funds near the residence where the self-styled Maharajas live, et al.

One can only speculate as to what would happen if this manic lure of titles and appellations invaded the next, and perhaps the last bastion of community living, the home. Then, it would be no surprise to see name boards outside individual residences read like this: 1/103, Beverly Park: APS Malhotra, President; Sonia Malhotra Vice President; Dr. Mehak Malhotra, Secretary (in absentia). In families with matriarchal tendencies, the designations could be reversed. Well, worth a thought!

(The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)

India must stand firm against Sheikh Hasina’s extradition



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

India faces a pivotal decision as it considers Bangladesh’s request to extradite Sheikh Hasina, former Prime Minister and a steadfast ally



Sheikh Hasina must not be sent back to Bangladesh in response to the note verbale received from that country’s interim government calling for her extradition. Dhaka’s move has followed the issue of an arrest warrant by Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) against her and a number of her former ministers, advisers, military and civil officials. The allegation? “Crimes against humanity and genocide”. There are two broad reasons why India should not send her back. As prime minister of Bangladesh, she has been a steadfast friend of India whereas other heads of that country’s government, except her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, have tended to be unfriendly. Second, she will, by no means, receive a fair trial in Bangladesh and perhaps even be lynched, given the intense hostility of the current rulers of Bangladesh harbour towards her.

There will be solid legal basis for India’s stand. Article 8 (1) (a) of the ‘Treaty Between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh Relating to Extradition’, says that a person may not be extradited if “he satisfies the Requested State that it would, having regard to all the circumstances, be unjust or oppressive to extradite him” because, in the words of Article 8 (1) (A) (iii), the accusations against him “have not been made in good faith in the interests of justice.” Besides Article 8 (2) reads, “A person who has been convicted of an extradition offence may not be extradited therefor unless he was sentenced to imprisonment or other form of detention for a period of four months or more.” Sheikh Hasina has yet to be sentenced to any period of imprisonment or detention. Also, she can very well claim that it would be “unjust or oppressive” to extradite her because the accusation against her had not been made in “good faith in the interest of justice”, and are a result of pure vindictiveness. That she would be justified in saying so becomes clear on considering the diatribes unleashed against her by the advisers of the interim government and the relentless persecution, including involving in hundreds of false cases, of



SHEIKH HASINA HAS YET TO BE SENTENCED TO ANY PERIOD OF IMPRISONMENT OR DETENTION. ALSO, SHE CAN VERY WELL CLAIM THAT IT WOULD BE “UNJUST OR OPPRESSIVE” TO EXTRADITE HER BECAUSE THE ACCUSATION AGAINST HER HAD NOT BEEN MADE IN “GOOD FAITH IN THE INTEREST OF JUSTICE”, AND ARE A RESULT OF PURE VINDICTIVENESS.

Awami League’s leaders and ministers in the party’s government. According to a report in The Daily Star carried under the headline, “No option but to succeed: Yunus” on August 18, 2024, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus had said during a “Meet and Greet” session with foreign diplomats in Dhaka, “In their efforts to stay in power, the Sheikh Hasina dictatorship destroyed every institution of the country. Judiciary was broken. Democratic rights were suppressed through a brutal decade-and-a-half long crackdown. Elections were rigged blatantly. Generations of young people grew up without exercising their voting rights. Banks were robbed with full political patronisation. And the state coffer was plundered by abusing power.”

Referring to a proposed Awami League rally on November 10, 2024, Muhammad Yunus’ press secretary, Shafiqul Alam, had written in a Facebook post on November 9, “The Awami League in its current form is a fascist party. There is no way this fascist party will be allowed to hold protests in Bangladesh. Anyone who would try to hold rally, gathering and processions by taking orders from the mass murderer and dictator Sheikh Hasina will face full force of the law enforcing agencies.” Leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM), formed on July 1, 2024, to carry the students’ struggle forward, and Jatiya Nagarik Committee (National Citizens Committee), formed on 8 September, 2024, to consolidate the movement’s message and political goals, have spoken in a similar strident and denunciatory vein.

According to a report by Ashibul Islam Rifat in the Dhaka Tribune (23 October, 2024) appearing

under the headline “Nahid: Awami League will never be allowed back into politics in our lifetime,” Md Nahid Islam, an ADSM leader who is now advisor, in charge of information and broadcasting and other ministries, said at a discussion, that the Awami League’s return to politics in the manner and ideology it previously adhered to would be tantamount to “a betrayal to the martyrs of the uprising. And certainly, as long as we are alive, we will not allow this to happen.” Leaders of political parties like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) have also denounced the Awami League.

One can argue that the ICT, and any other court where Sheikh Hasina and other accused may be tried, will ignore such vituperations and pronounce its judgment on the basis of the evidence and arguments placed before it. A horse would guffaw on hearing this. The judiciary has been brought to heel through forced resignations and dismissals. The process began as early as August 10, 2024, when chief justice Obaidul Hassan of the Supreme Court and five judges of the appellate division, resigned as hundreds of students affiliated to the ADSM gathered on the court premises demanding that they quit, and threatened to besiege their residences if they did not. On October 16, the new chief justice, Syed Rezaat Ahmed, sent 12 High Court judges, appointed during the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League rule, on leave following a demonstration in the court premises by adherents of the ADSM led by Hasnat Abdullah and Sarjis Alam. According to a report in Bangladesh’s The Business Standard on October 16 itself, announcing the plan, Hasnat

Abdullah, had written in a Facebook post on October 15, “In demand of the resignation of the fascist judges of the Awami League, we will besiege the High Court tomorrow (Wednesday) at 11am.”

The ICT itself was reconstituted on October 15, 2024, with Justice Md Golam Mortuza Majumder from the High Court Division of Bangladesh Supreme Court as its new chairman, and Justice Md Shafiul Alam Mahmud and retired District and Sessions Judge Md Mohitul Haque Enam Chowdhury as members of the panel.

The result is a pliant judiciary and the use of the justice system to persecute not only those associated with the Awami League but civil society activists, writers, journalists and human rights activists. A shocking example is the levelling of a false murder charge against a highly-respected senior advocate of Bangladesh’s Supreme Court, ZI Khan Panna. Referring to the case, The Daily Star wrote in an editorial titled “This weaponisation of legal cases must stop” and published on October 21, 2024, “Over the two months and a half since August 5, we have published multiple reports and editorials on the indiscriminate filing of such murder cases without any evidence, mostly implicating the leaders, activists, and suspected supporters of the Awami League regime. Even journalists and rights activists were not spared. In many cases, fabricated FIRs were filed. There were also instances of the names of accused in cases predating August 5 being replaced. This is nothing but a weaponisation of the legal process for harassment and political vendettas.” Will Sheikh Hasina get justice in such a situation?

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

Unlocking economic potential: Bridging the gender gap in public procurement

In India, strides in gender budgeting and supportive policies are fostering greater opportunities for women entrepreneurs

How much of the goods and services purchased by government departments and public sector enterprises come from women-owned businesses? This crucial question is rarely asked, and it underscores the need for gender-responsive procurement policies in India and across South Asia. With government procurement “accounting for an average of 12 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in OECD countries, and up to 30 per cent of GDP in many developing countries,” the untapped economic potential for women entrepreneurs to contribute as suppliers of solutions to governments is immense. Yet, globally, women-owned enterprises still win only 1 per cent of this significant public

procurement market. WEConnect International is actively working to bridge this gap. Our efforts are making headway, especially in countries such as India, where policy frameworks are beginning to reflect a greater emphasis on gender inclusivity. The central government has increasingly prioritised women-centric policies, evident from the substantial rise in gender budget allocations, which is another way to support women and girls in addition to buying their products and services. For example, in 2013-14, Rs 97,134 crore was earmarked for women’s welfare and empowerment. By 2024-25, this figure had reached Rs 3.27 lakh crore, marking a 19 per cent increase over the actual gender budget expendi-



ELIZABETH A VAZQUEZ

ture of 2023-24 and a 218.8 per cent increase since 2013-14. For 2024, the Gender Budget accounts for 6.5 per cent of the Union Budget, the highest since the Gender Budget Statement was introduced in 2005-06. The Statement serves as a vital tool for ministries reviewing programmes from a gender perspective to ensure that more resources are being allo-

cated to benefit women and girls. In the last year (2023-24), the actual expenditure on gender budgeting was 16 per cent higher (Rs 2.75 lakh crore) than the total budgeted amount (Rs 2.38 lakh crore). The Indian government’s Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Order, 2018, exemplifies this progress. The policy mandates that every central ministry, department, and PSU must procure at least 25 per cent of their needs from MSEs, with 3 per cent specifically reserved for women-owned micro and small enterprises. There has been progress since the mandated 3 per cent procurement target for women-owned MSEs was introduced in 2018. Public procurement from these enter-

prises has risen from almost zero in 2017-18 to 1.8 per cent in 2023-24. The number of women-owned (owned and controlled by women having the minimum financial interest of 51 per cent of the capital and with women constituting at least 51 per cent of generated employment) MSEs benefiting from public procurement grew from 1,410 (accounting for Rs 232.56 crore) to 21,128 (Rs 3056.4 crore) in six years. While the evidence is encouraging, there are still gaps and

challenges that, if addressed, could help India achieve a more gender-inclusive public procurement ecosystem. For example, there is currently no independent body to resolve complaints in the procurement system, leaving unhappy bidders with only two options: filing complaints directly with the purchasing entity or taking them to arbitration or court as outlined in the General Financial Rules (GFR) 2017. Generally, there is a pressing need for transparency, well-defined processes, and a robust mechanism for addressing grievances in tender and procurement procedures so that women-owned businesses receive constructive feedback if their bids are unsuccessful. This would enable them to

refine their future proposals and compete more effectively. Such measures would help mitigate biases in tendering and procurement processes that disproportionately disadvantage women-owned enterprises. The government could also pass procurement legislation to standardise bidding processes using a central law that sets national standards and state laws that fit specific needs, with the central government providing comprehensive oversight. Public authorities could also sensitise officials on the need to counteract gender biases that may influence the design of procurement processes. A strong starting point would be to appoint more women to oversee public procurement in government departments.

Public procurement from women-owned enterprises in India over the past six years has grown at an average annual growth rate of 70.5 per cent, while the number of beneficiary women entrepreneurs has increased at an average annual rate of 77 per cent because the baseline was close to zero. In 2023-24, total public procurement in India reached Rs 1.70 lakh crore, highlighting a growing opportunity for women to engage with the expanding public procurement market in the world’s fastest-growing economy. (The writer is CEO and Co-Founder of WEConnect International. With inputs from Erosan Alagaretnam, Regional Director for South Asia, WEConnect International. Views are personal)



SHALINI PANDEY BEGINS DUBBING FOR DABBA CARTEL



Shalini Pandey, one of the most talented and versatile actresses in Indian cinema, continues to win hearts with her incredible performances. After receiving widespread acclaim this year for her portrayal of Kishori in the critically praised series *Maharaj*, audiences and fans alike are eagerly anticipating her next project. In a recent post, Shalini teased her fans with an exciting update regarding her forthcoming project *Dabba Cartel*. The actress shared a picture from a dubbing studio, hinting that she has already started work on the much-awaited project. Along with the image, Shalini wrote a caption that read, "Strangely like to dub now. And this one's special #dabbacartel." This simple yet intriguing

message has left fans buzzing with excitement as they look forward to seeing Shalini in a completely new and fresh avatar in *Dabba Cartel*. The picture has sparked a wave of anticipation, and many are eager to witness Shalini's performance in a role that promises to showcase her wide range of acting abilities. But that's not all—Shalini's slate is packed with more exciting ventures. She will also be seen in the upcoming film *Bandwale*, which has generated a lot of buzz and there's even an unannounced project that is sure to keep fans on their toes. With her growing popularity and impeccable talent, Shalini Pandey is undoubtedly one of the most exciting names to watch out for in the Indian entertainment industry in 2024 and beyond.

The Secret of the Shieldars starring Rajeev Khandelwal on Jan 31

Disney+ Hotstar on Friday announced that its upcoming series *The Secret of the Shieldars*, headlined by actor Rajeev Khandelwal, will start streaming on its platform from January 31.

Helmed by Aditya Sarpotdar of *Munhya* fame, the series is touted as a first-of-its-kind treasure hunt-based series and also stars Sai Tamhankar, Gaurav Amlani and veteran actor Ashish Vidyarthi in pivotal roles.

The Secret of the Shieldars narrates the story of the Shieldars, who were members of military units in the Maratha Empire. Sarpotdar said it was his curiosity about stories of adventure and history that led him to *The Secret of the Shieldars*.

"The concept of 'Shieldars', The Guardians, hasn't been explored before, making it intriguing yet fulfilling. I believe that *The Secret of the Shieldars* is



the project that challenged me and made me move out of my comfort zone and I am so glad that I could embark on this journey with Rajeev Khandelwal as he has truly given his heart and soul to it and I am sure it will reflect on screen," the filmmaker said in a statement.

The upcoming series is produced by Nitin Vaidya under the banner of Dashami Creations LLP. Khandelwal praised the director for his "crafty and futuristic vision."

"I believe that *The Secret of the Shieldars* chose me and not the other way round. I was a bit sceptical about playing such a different and evolving character... but (Aditya) made everything easy and lucid. Like most of us who are fascinated by history, I was left spellbound when Aditya narrated the script and it ignited the curiosity within me to be on board for such a fun and insightful project," said Khandelwal.

Junaid Khan & Khushi Kapoor's Loveyapa set for February 2025 release

The much-anticipated theatrical debut of Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor has finally been unveiled and fans are already buzzing with excitement. Produced by Phantom Studios and AGS Entertainment and directed by the visionary Advait Chandan, the film is titled *Loveyapa*, a romantic comedy that promises to captivate audiences with its youthful energy, sparkling chemistry and heart-

warming storyline. *Loveyapa* is a modern-day tale of love and its complexities, intertwined with humor and lighthearted moments that are bound to leave audiences in splits. With the rising stars Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor leading the charge, their on-screen chemistry is expected to be one of the highlights of the film. Both actors are set to bring fresh and dynamic performances, elevat-

ing *Loveyapa* to new heights within the rom-com genre.

Backing this promising project are two powerhouse production houses: Phantom Studios and AGS Entertainment. Phantom Studios, known for its critically acclaimed content, and AGS Entertainment, a name synonymous with commercial successes, bring their unique strengths to the table, ensuring a movie that balances artistic vision with mass appeal. The collaboration between these two studios has created an exciting synergy that has already raised expectations for the film. Set against the backdrop of modern romance, *Loveyapa* offers more than just a love story—it's a celebration of love in all its forms. With lively music, breathtaking visuals, and unforgettable performances, the film aims to strike a chord with audiences of all ages, making it a cinematic treat that promises to resonate deeply with viewers.

Slated for release on February 7, 2025, *Loveyapa* is shaping up to be one of the most exciting films of 2025. The combination of fresh talent, a compelling narrative and the expertise of its production team guarantees that this romantic comedy will be one to watch.



SARA OR TRIPTII: Who will be Ayushmann Khurrana's next leading lady?



Rajshri universe, which Barjatya is famous for cultivating in his films. The source said, "Sara has the charm and mainstream appeal that could align with the Rajshri universe." Sara's proven success in commercial films makes her a strong candidate for the role.

On the other hand, Triptii Dimri's performances in *Bulbul* and *Qala* have earned her critical acclaim for her ability to bring depth and nuance to her characters. The source added that Triptii could bring a more layered approach to the role, making her another strong contender. "Triptii's performances in *Bulbul* and *Qala* make her a strong candidate to bring a layered approach to the character," the source noted.

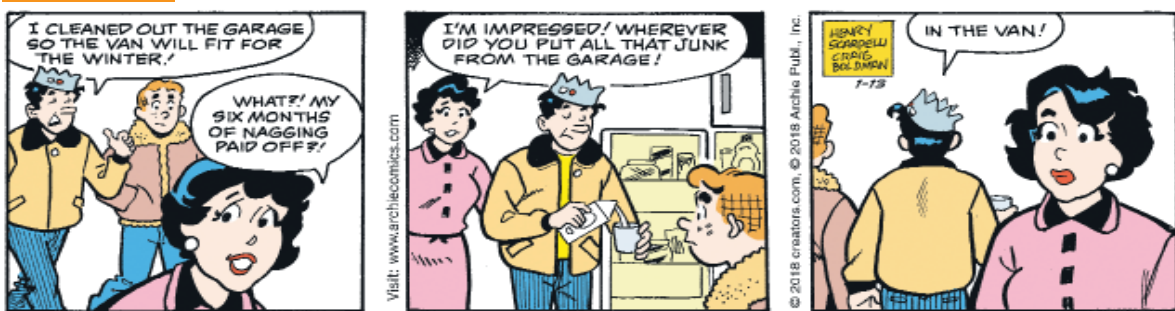
A key consideration in casting is the chemistry between Ayushmann Khurrana and his co-star. The source explained that Ayushmann has already worked with Sara in a previous film, whereas pairing him with Triptii would create a fresh dynamic. However, Triptii's packed schedule next year could complicate the casting decision. "Triptii is busy for a good part of next year with Vishal Bhardwaj's film on Hussain Ustara and two other projects," the source said.

Sooraj Barjatya plans to meet both actresses in January, with a look test to help finalise the decision. The chemistry between Ayushmann and the leading lady will also play a crucial role in the casting process. "Their chemistry with Ayushmann will also be another factor," the source added. Once the lead actress is confirmed, filming is set to begin in the summer of 2025, marking an exciting new chapter in Sooraj Barjatya's career and bringing a fresh pairing to the big screen with Ayushmann Khurrana. Fans are eagerly awaiting further details about the project, which promises to be a heartwarming addition to the world of romantic Bollywood cinema.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



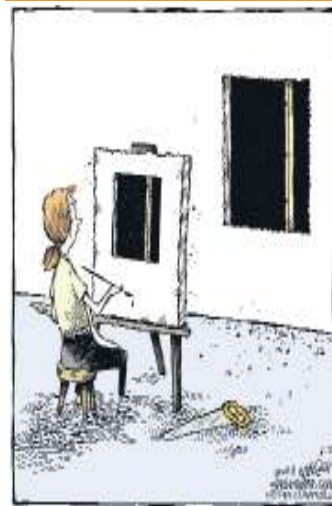
GARFIELD



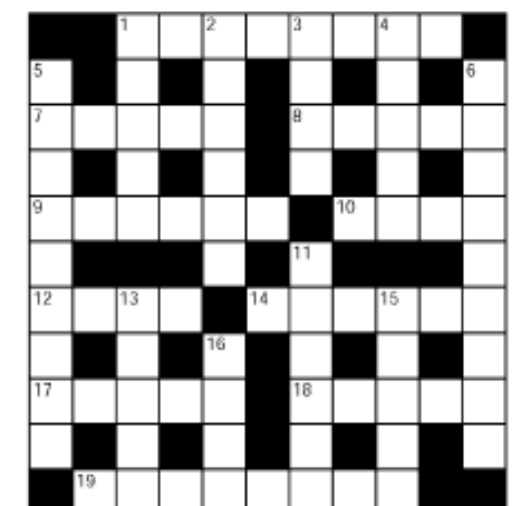
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

- 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

- Replied
- A tool for boring holes
- Part of a poem or song
- Required
- Iranians live here
- A horse's fastest pace
- By yourself
- Liked very much
- Someone who writes news for a newspaper
- One of the planets
- Exactly the same
- A small creature with many legs
- Carry your money in this
- Higher than
- A body organ
- The number nothing

DOWN

- Similar
- Worked out the solution to
- Jealousy



GINGER MEGGS





'THE CITY SUPPORTS CREATIVITY LIKE NO OTHER'

IN AN EXCLUSIVE CHAT WITH THE PIONEER, AWARD-WINNING INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLER AND EDUCATIONALIST DEEPA KIRAN OPENS UP ABOUT HER ENDURING BOND WITH HYDERABAD—A CITY THAT HAS NOT ONLY SHAPED HER CRAFT BUT ALSO HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE IN HER HEART

HYDERABOND

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Hyderabad is more than just a city; it's a feeling, a warm embrace of cultures, flavours and stories that leave an indelible mark on everyone who walks its streets. Known for its rich heritage, delectable cuisine and the iconic blend of tradition and modernity, Hyderabad is a city where diversity thrives. It's a place where Irani chai fuels endless conversations, where ancient rocks whisper timeless tales and where the warmth of its people makes you feel at home instantly.

For Deepa Kiran, Hyderabad is more than a city; it's an endless source of inspiration that fuels her storytelling. The vibrant mix of cultures, the comforting aroma of Irani chai and the shared warmth of its people have all found their way into her tales. From intimate gatherings atop ancient rocks to lively workshops filled with eager listeners, the city's charm and openness have shaped her journey. "Hyderabad has a way of making you feel seen, supported, and celebrated," Deepa says. With its rich history and modern vibrancy, Hyderabad continues to be the perfect backdrop for the stories she crafts and the memories she cherishes.

"I'm not a big fan of biryani," she confesses with a laugh. "I can't include it on my list. But I loved waiting for boorelu—an Indian sweet made of rice flour stuffed with jaggery—and pulihora, offered by my neighbour aunty while I was in Hyderabad. She introduced me to some amazing local dishes."

Her exploration didn't stop there. "I absolutely loved sipping Irani chai in those cozy Hyderabad cafes. And all the dosas, idlies, chutneys, and podis here are just

mouth-watering. The city's food has a unique way of staying with you."

Kiran's path to becoming a storyteller was anything but conventional. "Back then, courses weren't as accessible as they are today," she recalls. "I completed my B.Sc. in Nutrition and applied for M.Sc., only to be told that I couldn't be admitted without an MBBS degree. It was a turning point—I had to decide on the go."

This unexpected hurdle led her to literature. "A neighbour encouraged me to study literature. I applied to the University of Hyderabad and topped the entrance test," she shares with pride.

Storytelling came later, but it was a natural fit for her. "I wanted to bring something unique to my storytelling. I started incorporating jingles, shank, ektara, duff and even a little bit of dance. My idea was simple: if I enjoy what I do, the audience will too."

She recalls a memorable moment when a senior storyteller praised her style. "They told me I had a unique way of telling stories, and the way I added dance made it all the more interesting. That encouraged me to keep evolving my craft."

One of her fondest memories is a storytelling session organised by Hyderabad's rock conservation team at Lotus Park in Banjara Hills. "The audience sat on the rocks and I stood below them, sharing my story. A month later, a parent approached me at another event. He told me his son, usually restless, had sat still for 45 minutes during my session. The child even developed a newfound love for rocks and started participating in conservation programs," she recalls with a smile.

Her love for Hyderabad extends beyond its food and events. "This city is one of the friendliest in India," she says. "People here are so open to experiences. In a profession like

storytelling, I've found immense support from the theatre community."

She's also received exciting projects in the city. "People have asked me to perform stories about *Dashavatara*, *Ithihasas* and *Puranas* for children of NRIs. Workshops and commissioned projects keep coming my way here," she shares.

Hyderabad's central location, rich cultural mix and pleasant weather add to its appeal. "You find people here mingling easily, regardless of language or food preferences. It's such a beautiful intermingling of cultures," she remarks.

For Deepa, Hyderabad's safety is another standout feature. "This city allows me to return home safely, even at 2 a.m.," she says. However, like every Hyderabadi, she admits to being frustrated by the traffic. "The roads can get really busy, but that's a small price to pay for living in such an incredible city."

Deepa Kiran's journey from a nutritionist to a storyteller is a testament to embracing change and finding joy in one's passion. Hyderabad, with its warmth and vibrancy, continues to inspire her as she weaves stories that leave a lasting impact.

B'wood's fresh faces who stole the show



ABHAY VARMA

Abhay Varma, who previously impressed audiences with his performances in web series, made a striking Bollywood debut this year. His lead role in the horror-comedy *Munjya* truly catapulted him into the limelight. Released in June 2024, *Munjya* became a commercial success, emerging as one of the highest-grossing Hindi films of the year. Varma's portrayal of the titular character was lauded for its charm and comedic timing, solidifying his status as a rising star in Bollywood.



JUNAID KHAN

Aamir Khan's son, Junaid Khan, took his first step into Bollywood with a compelling role that highlighted his dedication to the craft in *Maharaj*. Steering away from the glitz of being a star kid, Junaid opted for a project that allowed him to prove his acting chops. His subtle yet impactful performance resonated with audiences and critics alike, establishing him as an actor to watch.

2024 HAS BEEN A LANDMARK YEAR FOR BOLLYWOOD, WITH FRESH FACES BRINGING A WAVE OF TALENT, CHARISMA, AND PROMISE TO THE BIG SCREEN. THESE DEBUTANTS HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT IMPRESSION AND THEIR PERFORMANCES HINT AT A BRIGHT FUTURE IN THE FILM INDUSTRY. HERE'S A LOOK AT SOME OF THE MOST NOTABLE BOLLYWOOD DEBUTS OF THE YEAR.



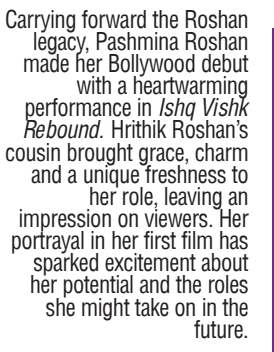
PRATIBHA RANTA

Pratibha Ranta made a remarkable breakthrough debut in 2024 with the film *Laapataa Ladies*, where she played the role of Jaya. This film, directed by Kiran Rao, has gained significant attention for its unique storytelling and Pratibha's portrayal has received praise for its depth and nuance. Her debut performance showcases her immense talent and sets the stage for a promising career in the industry.



ANJINI DHAWAN

Anjini Dhawan, niece of Bollywood actor Varun Dhawan, made her acting debut with the film *Binny and Family* in 2024. The film, which also stars Pankaj Kapur, Himani Shivpuri, Rajesh Kumar and Charu Shankar, had its theatrical release in September 2024. Following her debut, Anjini secured a role in Salman Khan's upcoming film *Sikandar*, set to release in 2025.



PASHMINA ROSHAN

Carrying forward the Roshan legacy, Pashmina Roshan made her Bollywood debut with a heartwarming performance in *Ishq Vishk Rebound*. Hrithik Roshan's cousin brought grace, charm and a unique freshness to her role, leaving an impression on viewers. Her portrayal in her first film has sparked excitement about her potential and the roles she might take on in the future.



LAKSHYA

In 2024, Lakshya made his Bollywood debut with the film *Kill*, directed by Nikhil Nagesh Bhat. The film is a high-octane action thriller that has been described as one of the most intense Indian movies to date. Lakshya's performance in *Kill* has been lauded for its depth and intensity, marking a significant milestone in his acting career.



NITANSHI GOEL

Nitanshi Goel, a 17-year-old Indian actress, made a remarkable Bollywood debut in 2024 with the film *Laapataa Ladies*, produced by Aamir Khan Productions. In the film, she portrayed the lead character, Phool Kumari, delivering a heartwarming performance that earned her critical acclaim. Her portrayal was so impactful that she received the IMDb Breakout Star Starmeter Award, becoming the youngest recipient of this award globally.

Platinum ring styles to wear now and for always

A shift in preferences: Why platinum?

The demand for platinum love bands has surged in recent years, driven by a new generation of buyers who value individuality and permanence. According to industry insights, platinum is increasingly favoured during not just weddings, but also to celebrate relationship milestones.

The reason for this is two-fold

Platinum is widely regarded as the ultimate symbol of love, celebrated for its rarity, purity and remarkable resilience. These qualities make it an exceptionally precious metal, often chosen to commemorate life's most significant milestones. Its natural white luster endures over time, maintaining its brilliance. This timeless appeal, coupled with the metal's intrinsic purity, makes platinum an ideal choice for rings that are worn daily, offering both luxury and practicality, while being gentle on the skin.

Further, its understated brilliance aligns perfectly with modern aesthetics

For weddings, platinum's strength and durability resonate deeply with the values of commitment and partnership. Many couples are choosing matching platinum wedding bands to symbolize their unity, while engagement rings set in platinum continue to be a popular choice for their ability to enhance the brilliance of diamonds and gemstones.

Marking milestones with platinum

Platinum love bands are not just for weddings. They are increasingly chosen to celebrate significant milestones such as anniversaries, promotions, and personal achievements. The versatility of platinum allows for a variety of styles, from minimalist designs to intricate motifs, catering to every individual's taste. One of the key reasons behind this trend is the emotional value associated with platinum. Its rarity—30 times rarer than gold—makes it a unique and meaningful gift. Platinum also stands out for its purity, with most jewellery crafted from 95% pure platinum, a higher standard than other precious metals.

Styles that endure

Platinum love band designs seamlessly blend contemporary trends with timeless appeal. Sleek bands with brushed or polished finishes are perfect for those who prefer minimalist styles, while intricate designs featuring

engraved patterns or pavé diamonds add a touch of sophistication.

For couples seeking matching rings, dual-tone platinum love bands with complementing textures offer a modern twist on tradition. Platinum's malleability also makes it ideal for custom designs, allowing wearers to create pieces that reflect their personal stories.

The ultimate choice for now and always

What makes platinum love bands so special is their ability to remain relevant across time. Platinum love bands are not only a reflection of the wearer's present style but also a store of value and meaning for the future. As trends evolve, platinum's understated elegance and durability ensure it continues to shine, making it the ultimate symbol of love and celebration.

(The author, Pallavi Sharma, is the Business Director - India, at Platinum Guild International.)

WHEN IT COMES TO CHOOSING JEWELLERY THAT IS AS ENDURING AS THE MEMORIES IT REPRESENTS, PLATINUM HAS BECOME THE PREFERRED CHOICE FOR MANY. FROM WEDDINGS AND FESTIVE OCCASIONS TO EVERYDAY WEAR, PLATINUM LOVE BANDS OFFER UNMATCHED VERSATILITY AND TIMELESS ELEGANCE. THE GROWING DEMAND FOR PLATINUM IS A TESTAMENT TO ITS APPEAL AS A SYMBOL OF STRENGTH, RARITY AND AUTHENTICITY



Thammareddy slams Allu Arjun; holds him responsible for industry's apology to CM

Producer and director, Thammareddy Bharadwaj, criticised Allu Arjun for the manner in which he went to watch *Pushpa 2*, accompanied by a huge convoy and waving to the public. He stated that because of this mistake, the entire industry is now bowing down before the Chief Minister with folded hands. He attributed the situation to one man's ego and error.

PNS|HYDERABAD

Producer and director Thammareddy Bharadwaj, known for his straightforward approach to addressing issues, has now spoken about the incident involving Allu Arjun and its repercussions on the film industry. He heavily criticised the actor's actions and how they have allegedly led the entire industry to bow down before the Chief Minister.

"Who is responsible and what circumstances have led to the industry now bowing down to a Chief Minister?" questioned Thammareddy Bharadwaj. He specifically criticised Allu Arjun for the way he went to watch *Pushpa 2*. Thammareddy expressed disapproval of the actor's decision to visit the theater with a massive convoy of cars and to wave to the crowds, calling it unnecessary.

"Earlier, many stars like Chiranjeevi, Nagarjuna and Balakrishna watched films quietly in multiplexes and returned home without any fanfare. But now, I don't know who advised Allu Arjun to watch a film in such a manner, especially at Sandhya Theatre, which is very congested. He didn't go silently. Messages were circulated on social media about his visit, and he created a huge commotion there," said Thammareddy on his YouTube channel.

The producer and director also criticised the people advising Allu Arjun, stating, "Even if they advised him, he should have

thought for himself before making such a decision. If he wanted to watch the film, he could have gone quietly before the screening started and left silently. Such incidents could have been avoided."

Allu Arjun mentioned in a media briefing, not long ago that he aims to take Telugu cinema to an international level but lamented that some people are not supporting him. Thammareddy criticised these remarks, saying, "Don't claim you made this film for the country. You made it for yourself. Many great films, like *Dangal*, have achieved massive success because they were genuinely good films. If you look at the story of *Pushpa 2*, the police officer, who is actually a good person in the film, is projected as the villain. His role is to catch the thief (Pushpa), but the narrative turns him into a villain."

Thammareddy also criticised the people surrounding the actor, stating, "They are giving him wrong advice. Today, the entire industry is standing before the Chief Minister with folded hands and this is all because of Allu Arjun's mistake. He didn't commit a crime like murder, but knowingly or unknowingly, he made a mistake during his roadshow."

"Fans show their love for you. They spend a lot of money on your films despite their financial struggles and are willing to do anything for you. Yet, you end up making mistakes that harm them. Whether this mistake was made on his own or due to someone's influence, I don't know, but it was a mistake. To cover up this mistake, he lied and now, because of his ego, the entire industry is facing problems in front of the Chief Minister," said Thammareddy. "For a single person's mistake, the entire industry is now suffering," he added.

Thammareddy further criticised the mentality of seeking publicity. "You earn money and if you want to help others, you can. If not, that's your choice. But you cannot harm people. When you feel the need to prove you are not a normal person through publicity stunts, these incidents occur. If you consider yourself a normal person, these situations can be avoided," he stated. He also raised concerns about bouncers and their handling of the public. "I don't know how many of these bouncers are genuine or who certified them," questioned Thammareddy.

MEGA STAR' NO-SHOW AT INDUSTRY MEETING

On Thursday, Telangana Film Development Corporation Chairman Dil Raju led a delegation of the Telugu film industry to meet Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. Prominent film personalities such as K. Raghavendra Rao, Suresh Babu, Murali Mohan, K.L. Narayana, Shyam Prasad Reddy, Nagarjuna, Venkatesh and many others attended this meeting. However, the absence of Mega Star Chiranjeevi and any actor from the Mega family raised many eyebrows.

Reports suggest that Chiranjeevi was in Chennai on Thursday and therefore couldn't attend the meeting. There are also speculations that his absence was deliberate, as he chose not to be in Hyderabad to avoid attending the meeting. Adding to this, some reports claim that Chiranjeevi, rumoured to be leaning closer to the BJP, may have intentionally distanced himself from the Congress-affiliated Chief Minister of Telangana.

Interestingly, it wasn't just Chiranjeevi who was missing; no actor from the Mega family attended the meeting either. Sai Dharam Tej, known to have a good rapport with Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, was notably absent. Similarly, Ram Charan, Varun Tej, Vaishnav Tej and Nagababu were also missing, leaving the Mega family entirely unrepresented.

Even Allu Aravinid, who is no longer seen as part of the Mega compound, did not attend. This lack of participation from the Mega family has sparked intense debate within the industry since Thursday. Adding to the intrigue, Chiranjeevi was reportedly back in Hyderabad on the same day and was seen attending a wedding that evening. It's worth noting that this is not the first instance where the Mega family's absence has raised questions. When Allu Arjun was released from Chanchalguda Jail and returned home, many industry members visited him to show their support. However, none of the Mega actors were among them, further highlighting the ongoing distance within the family.



ALLU ARJUN'S SUDDEN VISIT LEAVES CHIRU STUNNED

After his release from Chanchalguda Jail, Allu Arjun reportedly visited Chiranjeevi and Nagababu. "Chiranjeevi had no prior knowledge of Allu Arjun's visit," Arjun went directly to Chiranjeevi's house, leaving him with no option but to welcome him since he is his nephew," revealed a source close to Chiranjeevi. Interestingly, Allu Arjun arrived at Chiranjeevi's residence with media personnel and his PR team. He even drove himself and deliberately rolled down the car window to ensure everyone could see him at Chiranjeevi's house. "This act put Chiranjeevi in an embarrassing situation," the source added.

The same scenario unfolded at Nagababu's house. "Neither of the brothers had any clue about Allu Arjun's visit," said the source. However, the visits were strategically planned, as Allu Arjun aimed to convey the message that any differences between him and the Mega family has been resolved. "Chiranjeevi was genuinely shocked when Arjun showed up unannounced," the source further revealed. These developments have added to the ongoing speculations and discussions about the strained dynamics within the Mega family.

REVIEW

'Dream Catcher is a psychological thriller'

Another thriller is on the way to hit the screens on January 3. *Dream Catcher* is the title and it is directed and produced by Sandeep Kakula with Prashanth Krishna and Anesha Dama as the lead pair. It is a psychological thriller and the director says it gives something new to the audience.

"My dream was to make a film and this *Dream Catcher* started with the idea of creating a film about dreams. Hollywood films like *Inception* were my inspiration," said the director Sandeep Kakula. He wanted to attempt something at a Hollywood level with this one and he shot this film entirely in Hyderabad. "After seeing the trailer, people are asking where the film was shot. I can confidently say that no film based on dreams has been released in Telugu until now," said the director. He added in this film he didn't put any song or action scenes, as he focused only on the story. The director feels that he never wanted to release it on OTT. "I believe if we made a good film, it would be appreciated anywhere," he said.

Lead actor Prashanth Krishna said that director Sandeep called him for an audition for this film four years back. "He made this film with passion, involving everyone in the team. This film will give you a fresh experience as a psychological thriller," said Prashanth. After the trailer, he received compliments that he resembles Adivi Sesh and Rana. "They are both incredible actors and self-made stars. I'm happy to be compared to such talented and passionate actors," said Prashanth.



Jr NTR champions road safety in Andhra Pradesh

If you've watched Jr NTR's recent films, you might have noticed a heartfelt video about road safety and accident prevention that plays before the main feature begins. This message holds deep personal significance for the actor, as he lost both his elder brother, Janaki Ram and his father, Hari Krishna, in road accidents. Jr NTR frequently emphasises road safety, often requesting his fans at public events to drive safely and return home to their families.

Now, his impactful message has transcended cinema screens and reached the streets of Andhra Pradesh. In a pioneering initiative, the Andhra Pradesh government has adopted Jr NTR's iconic road safety message, incorporating it into traffic signals across the state. This poignant message, which plays at major intersections, serves as a vital reminder:

"Drive safe and don't speed, risking your life because your family is waiting for you. There have been a couple of tragedies in my family that claimed my father's and brother's lives. Such things should not happen to anyone. Be careful." This unprecedented move highlights the government's recognition of Jr NTR's influence and their trust in his ability to inspire change. The actor's sincere words now echo at major traffic signals, underscoring his role as not just a cinematic icon but also a voice of care and responsibility.

Drinker Sai feels like watching the Mukesh ad on repeat for two hours

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

The year 2024 concluded with the release of a small film titled *Drinker Sai* on December 27. This film features upcoming actor Dharma Kakani in the lead role, while Aishwarya Sharma makes her debut as the female lead. Despite being a small-budget film, the makers promoted it well. Directed by debutant Kiran Tirumalasetti, the film attempts to deliver a message but falls short in execution. Here's a breakdown of the story and its performance.

Story:

Sai, also known as Drinker Sai (played by Dharma Kakani), is a wealthy young man who becomes alcoholic after the death of his parents. His days revolve around drinking incessantly, picking fights, and relying on his uncle (Srikanth Iyengar) to bail him out of trouble. One day, Sai is hit by the bike of a medical student, Bhagi (Aishwarya Sharma), who leaves the scene without much ado. Seeking revenge, Sai confronts her the next day, only to fall in love with her. However, Bhagi, disapproving of Sai's drinking habits, pretends to reciprocate his love. When Sai discovers that Bhagi doesn't actually love him, he is devastated. The rest of the story explores Sai's attempts to win Bhagi's love, the challenges he faces, and the lessons he learns.

Performances:

Dharma Kakani, in his second film, delivers a decent performance and looks handsome on screen. He exudes confidence and ease in his acting, indicating potential for a bright future. However, without a compelling story, his efforts feel underutilized. Aishwarya Sharma, as the female lead, performs well for a debutante but has significant room for improvement.

Srikanth Iyengar and Posani Krishna Murali offer notable performances, but their roles don't leave a lasting impact. Bhadrans' comedy

extended version of the mandatory two-minute anti-smoking and anti-alcohol message that precedes every film. Unfortunately, the same message is stretched into a two-and-a-half-hour movie, with little innovation or depth. Rather than spending resources on this film, the makers could have opted for a social awareness campaign on the ill effects of smoking and drinking.

The first half of the film revolves around Sai's drinking habits and his growing infatuation with Bhagi. The plot is interspersed with songs and lackluster scenes, making it a tedious watch. The second half introduces the "Vanthena" episode, which is a spoof of Manthena Satyanarayana and his Nature Cure Hospital. These sequences are immature, uninspired and fail to generate any interest.

As anticipated, the film concludes with the predictable message: "Smoking and alcohol are injurious to health." While the intention is commendable, the execution is unimaginative, making the film an ordinary watch with a foregone conclusion.

Technical Aspects:

The film's music is subpar and fails to elevate the narrative. The cinematography is average, and the dialogues are unimpressive. Despite the efforts of the cast and crew, the overall technical execution lacks finesse.

The film aims to deliver a social message, it does so in an uninspired and predictable manner. The year 2024 ends on a dull note with this routine and forgettable film.

falls flat and adds nothing to the film, while the rest of the cast, including Rithu Chowdhary, have minimal roles.

Verdict:

Drinker Sai could easily have been a two-minute short film akin to "The Mukesh Story," but instead, it drags its message into a tedious two-and-a-half-hour runtime. The second half, particularly the "Vanthena" episode, is unnecessarily prolonged and monotonous. While the film aims to deliver a social message, it does so in an uninspired and predictable manner. The year 2024 ends on a dull note with this routine and forgettable film.

Cast: Kakani Dharma, Aishwarya Sharma, Posani Krishna Murali, SS Kanchi, Srikanth Iyengar, Bhadrans and others

Music director: Sri Vasanth
Cinematographer: Prashanth Anikreddy

Producers: Basavaraju Srinivas, Ismail shaik and Basavaraju laharidhar

Director: Kiran Tirumalasetti

Rating: 1.5/5

