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'Stay vigilant against enemies'



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'DOCTORS AREN'T JUST LIFESAVERS; THEY'RE HUMAN TOO'



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Controversies that overshadowed Telugu Cinema's SUCCESS



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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Thanks to the Narendra Modi Government for inviting tenders for the construction of Triple-R roads. This is a Sankranti gift to the people of Telangana from the Centre. It is estimated that the construction of the Triple-R roads will cost around Rs 18,000 crore, and the Centre is ready to bear this expense



— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs P4

DON'T MISS...

PDS rice unloaded from Stella

The Stella L Panama ship, which had been detained at Kakinada Port after Public Distribution System (PDS) rice was discovered onboard, is now set to leave the port after the unloading of the rice. Official sources reported that Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan inspected Kakinada Port on November 11. During the inspection, he found 1,320 tonnes of PDS rice aboard the ship and immediately instructed officials to seize the vessel. Following this, a large-scale operation was launched to determine how much PDS rice had been loaded...

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India to host first WAVES Summit

India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke extensively about the WAVES Summit in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' Radio address on Sunday. Comparing the WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Modi said the...

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India to boost power generation, infra

India will set up more coal-fired and hydro-power plants and ramp up transmission infrastructure to achieve round-the-clock 'Power for All' in 2025, besides meeting rising demand fueled by economic expansion. To meet the growing energy demand, the government has devised a major plan for power generation capacity addition and the expansion of transmission infrastructure. According to Minister of State for Power Shripad Yesso Naik, India can definitely achieve '24x7' power for all with all the efforts...

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Ashi clinches maiden women's 3P natl title

Local shooter Ashi Chouksey overcame a strong field, that had the likes of Olympians Anjum Moudgil and Shriyanka Sadangi, to clinch her maiden national title in the 50m rifle 3-positions event here on Sunday. Ashi shot a superb 466.7, a full 3.1 points clear of two-time Olympian Anjum at her home range, the MP State Academy, during the 67th National Shooting Championship. Upcoming shooter Sakshi Sunil Padekar of Maharashtra won the bronze with an effort of 451.3. She then went on to win...

-SPORTS



The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometres south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 am. A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said.

PLANE BURSTS INTO FLAMES

179 people perish in South Korea



PNS ■ SEOUL

A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters. The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 kilometres south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800

jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 am.

A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals. Thailand's Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Seoul



received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

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AP to be made drought-free

CM unveils plan to divert 280 TMC of floodwater from the Godavari River to Krishna Delta, Rayalaseema, and Prakasam/Nellore districts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is spearheading massive plans to make Andhra Pradesh 100% drought-free by ensuring water supply to every acre of land. A significant aspect of the initiative is the completion of the Polavaram project, which is expected to benefit eight districts, including three in North Andhra and the Godavari districts, along with Krishna, Guntur, and Prakasam.

However, flood seasons in the state see the Godavari River releasing around 2,000 to 3,000 TMC of water into the sea each year. The Chief Minister's vision is to divert 280 TMC of this floodwater to irrigate the Krishna Delta, Rayalaseema, and Prakasam and Nellore districts, particularly in drought-prone areas. This, he believes, will significantly reduce water wastage and provide much-



■ **Polavaram Project:** Will benefit eight districts, including North AP, Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam.

■ **Project Cost:** Estimated at Rs 70,000 to 80,000 crore.

■ **Benefits:** Drinking water for 80 million people, irrigation for 7.5 lakh acres.

■ **Infrastructure upgrades:** NSP Right Canal capacity to increase, Tadipudi Lift Scheme to be upgraded.

■ **Key features:** 200 TMC Bollapally Reservoir, 31 km tunnel to Banakacharla, ensuring water even during floods.

needed water to these regions. Preliminary estimates suggest the project will cost Rs 70,000 to 80,000

crore and will require the acquisition of 54,000 acres of land.

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CM to attend NTR Bharosa Pension disbursement tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu will participate in the distribution of the NTR Bharosa pension scheme in Yellamanda village, Narasaraopet constituency, Palnadu district, on December 31. The CM will leave his Undavalli residence at 10:30 AM and reach Yellamanda village, Narasaraopet mandal, by 10:50 AM. Leaders and officials will welcome him at the helipad, and the distribution of NTR Bharosa pensions will take place from 11:00 AM to 11:30 AM. The CM will interact with pensioners and villagers from 11:35 AM to 12:35 PM.

From 12:40 PM to 1:00 PM, the CM will meet district officials and people's representatives. Following this, he will proceed to Kotappakonda, where he is expected to arrive between 1:45 PM and participate in the Trikotswara Swamy darshan and puja programmes.

Vijayanand made AP's new Chief Secretary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant administrative move, the Andhra Pradesh government has appointed K Vijayanand, IAS (1992), as the new Chief Secretary of the State. Vijayanand, who currently serves as the Special Chief Secretary in the Energy Department, will take over from Neerabh Kumar Prasad, IAS (1987), who is set to retire on December 31, 2024, upon reaching the age of superannuation. Orders to this effect were issued by S Suresh Kumar, Secretary to the Government, late on Sunday night.

Upon his appointment, Vijayanand met Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to serve as the Chief Secretary. He also thanked Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, Minister for IT & Electronics Nara Lokesh, Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar, and other Cabinet ministers for their support and guidance.



Vijayanand assured that he would strive to implement the Chief Minister's vision of inclusive growth and development, with a focus on the backward regions and weaker sections of society. He also acknowledged his predecessor Neerabh Kumar Prasad's dedication to the State's developmental efforts.

Vijayanand has held several key positions in the State, including Chairman and Managing Director of APTRANSCO and Chairman of APGENCO.

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100 street food hubs across India; Andhra gets four

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Union Minister of State for Health, AYUSH, and Family Welfare, Pratap Rao Jadhav, announced that the Central Government has approved the establishment of 100 Street Food Hubs across the country. Among these, four hubs will be set up in Andhra Pradesh, specifically in Kadapa, Vijayawada, Tirupati, and Visakhapatnam.

The announcement was made during a one-day training programme for street food vendors and petty traders, jointly organised by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Andhra Pradesh Food Safety and Standards

Department at the Collectorate in Tirupati on Sunday. The training sessions aim to ensure that street food vendors maintain high safety and hygiene standards in the food served to the public.

Addressing the gathering, the Union Minister stressed the responsibility of street food vendors to provide hygienic and unadulterated food. He highlighted the Government of India's initiatives to support street vendors under the Clean Street Food Initiative.

Minister Jadhav stated that India is progressing in the Amrit Kaal under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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Lokesh: Skill Census to empower AP youth


1st phase completed in M'giri & Thullur; Statewide expansion in 6 months

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a pioneering move, Andhra Pradesh has launched the Skill Census programme, the first of its kind in India, aimed at creating self-employment opportunities for the state's youth.

Minister for Education, Electronics, IT, and RTGS, Nara Lokesh, highlighted that the initiative focuses on equipping young people with skills for both local and international job markets.

Lokesh announced that the state has partnered with Centurion University to develop self-employment-based skill programmes for rural youth. The initiative will also



- Partnership with Centurion University to offer rural youth skill training in sectors like garment manufacturing, agriculture and drone technology.
- Agreement with ZCOMS for international skill training.
- Plans include APAAR ID distribution, training 20,000 candidates in skill hubs, and 26,000 through DDUGKY.
- Focus on recruiting for sectors like nursing, construction, and automobile industries.
- Call for job fairs and modernisation of polytechnic labs.

focus on establishing enterprise clusters in sectors such as garment manufacturing, auto parts, dragon fruit cultivation, smart agriculture,

and drone technology. Vocational training will be provided to youth in these sectors.

Continued on Page 2

Retired army officer kills son in Narsipatnam

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

In a shocking incident, a retired army officer, Kotaru Ramana, allegedly murdered his son, Bhaskar (32), in Lakshmi Nagar, Narsipatnam municipality on Sunday.

According to Circle Inspector Govinda Rao, the father and son had been consuming alcohol together on Saturday night when a heated argument erupted over a family matter. The verbal altercation quickly turned violent, with Ramana allegedly striking Bhaskar's lifeless body and alerted the police. Ramana allegedly informed the maid about the argument that had taken place the previous night.

The residents immediately informed the police at around 11:00 am on Sunday. Town CI Govinda Rao confirmed that a clues team has been dispatched to the scene to collect evidence. A case has been registered, and a thorough investigation is underway to ascertain the full details of the incident.

WOMEN'S WORLD RAPID CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP-24

Koneru Humpy creates history

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Grandmaster Koneru Humpy created history on Sunday by clinching her second title at the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess Championship 2024 in New York. Despite a challenging start with a loss on the opening day, Humpy staged a remarkable comeback on Day 2 and surged to the top of the standings on the final day, triumphing over a strong field.

Governor of Andhra Pradesh, S Abdul Nazeer, lauded Humpy's historic achievement, stating, "The nation is proud of Humpy's remarkable feat. I wish her continued success and hope she brings many more laurels to the country." Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu described Humpy's victory as "incredible." Congratulating her on social media, he said, "Her phenomenal triumph caps



off a remarkable year for Indian chess. This is a proud moment for India."

Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh also heaped praise on Humpy, tweeting, "Your exceptional feat showcases grit, determination, and skill. You are a true legend of Indian chess, inspiring generations to come."

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Countdown begins for ISRO's space docking experiment

PNS ■ SRIHARIKOTA (AP)

The countdown for ISRO's Space Docking Experiment onboard a PSLV rocket on Monday that would be a key milestone in India's space programme, commenced on Sunday evening, the space agency said.

A cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for in-space docking, it would make India join an elite list featuring China, Russia and the US.

ISRO has scheduled the lift-off of the PSLV-C60 rocket, at 9:58 pm from the first launch pad at this spaceport here on December 30 and it would carry SpaDeX with two spacecraft as the primary payloads along with 24 secondary payloads. "PSLV-C60/SpaDeX Mission Launch countdown commenced at 9 pm" on Sunday, an ISRO official told PTI.

The in-space docking technology would be essential for taking up India's ambitions in space including sending human to the Moon, bringing samples

TO LAUNCH SPACECRAFT TODAY



from there, and also building and operating India's own space station-Bharatiya Antariksh Station.

The docking technology would also be utilised when multiple rocket launches are planned to achieve common mission objectives.

ISRO said the two spacecraft in

the PSLV rocket-- Spacecraft A (SDX01) and Spacecraft B (SDX02) would be placed in an orbit that would keep them 5 km apart from each other. Later, scientists at ISRO headquarters would try to bring them closer up to 3 metre which would subsequently lead them for

merging together at an altitude of about 470km above Earth.

The process is expected to take place about 10-14 days after the scheduled lift-off on Monday, ISRO officials said. In the SpaDeX mission, Spacecraft A carries a High Resolution Camera, while Spacecraft B has Miniature Multispectral Payload and a Radiation Monitor Payload. These payloads would provide high resolution images, natural resource monitoring, vegetation studies among others.

Apart from this significant mission, scientists would also conduct the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-4 (POEM-4) in which 24 payloads--14 from ISRO and 10 from industry and academia, would be placed in the desired orbits one after the other over a 90 minute period after the lift-off.

The life of the payloads in the fourth stage would be about three to four months. The vehicle for the PSLV-C60 mission used here would be the 18th Core-Alone variant.

Monday Mirchi

POLITICAL GOSSIP BREWS AT WEDDING OF TOP COP'S SON

Politics makes strange bedfellows. And, it is not a coincidence that the laidback atmosphere at marriage functions provides the perfect setting for broaching political alliances (or signalling break-ups). The wedding of a top cop's son, apart from being a family affair in the company of near and dear, became an unintended networking hub for Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress leaders. A little birdie tells us that amidst the celebrations; a Union Minister and a prominent Telangana Minister were found engaged deeply in a conversation. While the details of their predictably juicy exchange remain a matter of conjecture, onlookers within their earshot could not help speculate the probabilities. A little bird told us that it looked intense-like they weren't just talking about the wedding menu. Could this be a rare moment of camaraderie, or was it political chess being played under the canopy of festivity? Only time will tell!

KTR'S FORMULA E CASE TWIST SENDS BABUS SCRAMBLING FOR COVER

The latest twist to the Formula E case has sent shockwaves through bureaucratic corridors, with Arvind Kumar's ordeal leaving a lasting impact. Bureaucrats, normally habituated to follow verbal directives, are now insistent on obtaining written orders from their political bosses, wary as they are now of being caught in the political crossfire at any time in the future if not now. Former minister KT Rama Rao, who had once declared 'Ask me' on matters relating to the probe, thus endorsing his camaraderie with officials, took an unexpected stance while filing his counter affidavit. He pinned the blame squarely on departments for procedural lapses. He contended that any procedural irregularities in the execution of the agreement were the responsibility of the officers concerned. Despite his political finesse, even KTR admitted in court that ministers don't handle procedures—a statement that has further unsettled the bureaucracy. What had started with MAUD Secretary Arvind Kumar and the Chief Engineer being under scrutiny has now spread to include other officers, notably from finance. "When blame starts flying, it doesn't stop at one department," an insider quipped. The political drama may dominate headlines, but within government offices, the atmosphere these days is one of extreme caution and deep-seated distrust.

AVINASH MOHANTY BREAKS MOULD AND LETS ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

At a time when publicity-hungry cops never miss an opportunity to pose with recoveries of booties after busting gangs of property offenders or bull-dozing modified bike silencers as if they went beyond their call of duty; Avinash Mohanty, the youngest Police Commissioner, is rewriting the rule-book, and it is not going unnoticed. Steering clear of the spotlight, Mohanty gets his team's Deputy Commissioners to hold press conferences - in stark contrast to the ways of his predecessors who basked in media glare. "At the Commissioner level, my job is to empower my team," Mohanty told this correspondent, after the Annual Press Meet. "It has been nearly two years, but how many press meetings have you actually seen me in?" While deigning to attend the annual pressers, Mohanty has extended his minimalist style to the annual reports. Last year, he ditched the hefty booklets for a single sheet encapsulating vital statistics. This year, he pared it down further: pure data, no frills. What if other Commissioners proudly display officer headshots? "Why waste space with photos when journalists need the facts?" a senior officer under his command quipped. Clearly, Mohanty is on a mission to let the numbers do the talking. His quiet revolution has started making waves.

RANGANATH KEEPS THE IPS TRADITION ALIVE AT HYDRABAD

When it comes to year-end stock-taking of achievements, it is the in thing for IPS fraternity. IAS officers do not have much leeway in this grand tradition as their verticals differ, apart from dissimilar lines of authority. So, when A V Ranganath, HYDRABAD's dynamic chief, rose to the occasion, the media already knew what to expect—and he didn't disappoint. Amid a subdued buzz in media circles, with some placing bets on whether Ranganath would stick to the IPS script, he did deliver and how! With his signature style and precision, he turned HYDRABAD's annual review into a memorable event. "Let's be honest, HYDRABAD wouldn't have had this flair if it was led by anyone else," a reporter conceded. True enough, Ranganath didn't just live up to expectations; he reminded everyone why IPS officers cultivate a knack for making even a simple report look grand.

—Yours truly

Court proceedings should be accessible to all: Retd HC judge

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Retired High Court judge Justice Akula Venkata Sesa Sai emphasised that studying in Telugu does not hinder career opportunities, citing examples of many individuals who have excelled after studying in their mother tongue. Speaking at the 6th World Telugu Writers' Mahasabha in Vijayawada on Sunday, Justice Sesa Sai shared his own journey of studying in Telugu and later learning English for professional purposes.

During a session on "Judicial Administration in Telugu," Justice Sesa Sai remarked, "It is inspiring to see some judges delivering judgments in Telugu. Courts are meant to serve the people, and their proceedings should be in a language that the majority can understand. In Andhra Pradesh, where 99.99% of the people know Telugu, it is crucial to make court arguments and judgments accessible in the



local language." He reiterated the need for transparency, urging for legal proceedings to be understandable to litigants and the general public.

High Court judge Justice K Manmadharao highlighted the importance of promoting Telugu in judicial administration. "I have delivered judgments in Telugu to ensure they are more comprehensible to the public. Translating English judgments into Telugu reduces

appeals and promotes transparency," he said, advocating for pride in one's mother tongue.

Justice B Nagesh stressed the significance of overcoming inferiority about using Telugu. He credited former Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and Justice NV Ramana for inspiring him to deliver judgments in Telugu. "Our language is rich and beautiful, and it is our responsibility to pass it on to future generations," he noted.

Lokesh: Skill....

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, an agreement with 2COMS will offer internationally recognised skill training, preparing youth for overseas employment opportunities.

The first phase of the Skill Census has been completed, covering 1.12 lakh households and 2.77 lakh residents in the Mangalagiri Assembly constituency and Thullur mandals. Lokesh announced that the programme will soon expand across the state, with a target for completion within six months. The minister also outlined plans for the next six months, including the distribution of APAAAR IDs to all polytechnic and ITI students. He emphasised the importance of training 20,000 candidates in 200 skill hubs, 2,000 in skill colleges, and 2,500 in NAC centres under the AP Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board. Additionally, 26,000 candidates will be trained through the DDU-GKY skill development initiative.

Under the Skill International Programme, the state will focus on recruiting candidates for sectors such as nursing, construction, and the automobile industry, with support from CEDAP and Indo-Euro Synchronisation.

Mangalagiri sets record in TDP membership drive

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Mangalagiri constituency, represented by TDP national general secretary and Minister for IT and Education, Nara Lokesh, has achieved a significant milestone by surpassing the one lakh mark in membership registrations. This sets a new record in Guntur district and places Mangalagiri at the top in the state for permanent memberships.

As part of this record-breaking achievement, 80 leaders enrolled as permanent members, each contributing Rs 1,00,000. The TDP's statewide membership drive, launched

on October 26, offers a membership fee of Rs 100, which includes Rs 5 lakh accident insurance.

TDP leaders had anticipated this milestone, and the constituency has now fulfilled their expectations. Residents of Mangalagiri, inspired by Minister Nara Lokesh's vision to transform the area into one of the finest in the country, have enthusiastically joined the party. A notable increase in youth participation has also been observed in this year's registrations.

Previously, the constituency recorded 51,951 memberships. This year, it has surpassed one lakh, breaking its own

record. According to party sources, out of 2,83,575 eligible voters in the constituency, 1,00,422 memberships had been registered by Sunday evening.

TDP activists are jubilant over this achievement. Party leaders have lauded the voluntary enthusiasm of the people, noting that the record was set without direct instructions or formal meetings from Nara Lokesh. Local leaders across mandals and towns have congratulated the newly registered and reinstated members, calling this a testament to the growing support for the TDP in Mangalagiri.



DGP offers prayers at Tirumala

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Director General of Police of AP Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao offered prayers to Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala on Sunday morning during break darshan. On his arrival in front of Sri Vari Temple, the priests and officials welcomed the DGP.

After the Lord's darshan,

Addl EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary presented Vari Prasadam, Theertha Prasadams, and a laminated photo of the Lord. The temple's Veda pundits blessed him with Vedic Hymns at Ranganayakula Mandapam.

Dist SP L Subbarayudu, CVSO Sreedhar, Temple DyEO Lokanadh and others were present.

APERC forms advisory panel

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) has constituted a State Advisory Committee (SAC) with 18 members from diverse sectors, as per a gazette notification issued on Saturday. The tenure of the SAC will be three years from the date of the notification.

The SAC's primary responsibilities include advising APERC on policy matters, monitoring the quality and continuity of services provided by licensees, ensuring compliance with licence conditions, protecting consumer

interests, and evaluating the performance standards of utilities in the state.

Thakur Rama Singh, the in-charge chairman of APERC, will serve as the ex-officio chairman of the SAC, while PVR Reddy and the secretary for consumer affairs will act as ex-officio members.

The SAC comprises 18 nominated professionals from various sectors. Among them, R Siva Kumar, Injeti Gopinath, Surapaneni Sri Murali, Tipirneni Partha Sarathi, Burra Phani Chandra, and Bandi Ramesh Kumar have been nominated from the industry sector.

The AP Chambers of

Commerce and Industry Federation (APCHAMBERS) has nominated Tipirneni Partha Sarathi and Burra Phani Chandra to the committee. APCHAMBERS President Potluri Bhaskar Rao and Secretary Bahudodda Rajasekhar congratulated the nominees and underscored the significance of this partnership.

They expressed confidence that the collaboration between APCHAMBERS and APERC would effectively address challenges faced by industries, associations, and communities, thereby contributing to the state's economic and industrial growth.

AP to be made...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, around 4,000 megawatts of electricity will be necessary, and significant forest land will need to be cleared. During a recent visit to Delhi, CM Naidu discussed the project with central officials, including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and urged the central government to expedite approvals and the tender process.

The project aims to deliver a range of benefits upon completion. It will provide drinking water to 80 million people, irrigate 7.5 lakh acres of land, and stabilize 22.5 lakh acres of already irrigated land. Industries will also be able to use up to 20 TMC of water, helping to support the state's economic growth.

To ensure the success of the project, the state government is focusing on diverting Godavari floodwaters to the Krishna River. This water will be carried through the Nagarjuna Sagar Right Canal to the Bollapally Reservoir, which will have a capacity of 200 TMC. From there, a 31 km tunnel will divert the water to Banakacharla.

Additionally, the capacity of the Nagarjuna Sagar Right Canal will be increased from 17,000 cusecs to 28,000-30,000 cusecs, while the Tadipudi Lift Scheme will be upgraded to handle up to 10,000 cusecs.

CM Naidu's initiative is poised to provide long-term benefits, ensuring reliable water availability even during adverse conditions. The Nagarjuna Sagar Right Canal and the Veligonda project in Prakasam district, which has been historically drought-prone, will be key to improving irrigation in these areas. The project will also ensure water supply to Rayalaseema during flood seasons, further solidifying its importance for the state's agricultural and industrial sectors.

Special Chief Secretary of the Irrigation Department, Sai Prasad, Chief Secretary of the Finance Department, Piyush Kumar, and senior officials from the Irrigation Department and the Chief Minister's Office attended the review meeting held by the Chief Minister at his residence in Undavalli on Sunday.

AP on brink of financial crisis, says Buggana



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy has sharply criticised the TDP-led coalition government, accusing it of pushing Andhra Pradesh into a financial crisis through reckless borrowing and unfulfilled promises.

Addressing the media in Hyderabad on Sunday, Buggana stated that the state had borrowed an unprecedented Rs 1,12,750 crore in just six months, marking a historic high in debt accumulation.

Buggana cautioned that such borrowing jeopardises the state's financial stability, placing an unsustainable burden on future generations. He contrasted this with the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government's tenure, claiming it adhered to fiscal discipline while prioritising welfare. He highlighted that during the YSRCP's rule (2019-2024), the state's debt grew at an average rate of 15.61%, significantly lower

than the 19.54% during the TDP's previous term (2014-2019).

The former minister criticised TDP chief and Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's vision documents, including the recently launched Vision-2047, dismissing them as hollow promises. Referring to past initiatives like Vision-2020 and Sunrise Andhra Pradesh, he alleged these had failed to yield tangible results.

Buggana also pointed to the TDP's failure to deliver on its "Super Six" promises, such as unemployment allowances and free gas cylinders. He raised concerns over rising off-budget borrowings, including Rs 31,000 crore for Amaravati's development, warning that such hidden debts would worsen the financial strain.

Accusing certain media outlets of bias, he urged them to hold the coalition accountable. He lauded the YSRCP for treating its manifesto as sacred, citing schemes like Amma Vodi, Rythu Bharosa, and Aasara, which transferred over Rs 4.2 lakh crore directly to the people.

Buggana called on the public to scrutinise the TDP-led government's governance and extravagant borrowing practices. He assured that the YSRCP remains committed to welfare and sustainable governance, urging citizens to focus on facts rather than political rhetoric.

100 street food hubs...

Continued from Page 1

As part of this initiative, capacity-building programmes and training sessions are being conducted for street food vendors and petty traders to ensure the delivery of safe, hygienic, and quality food.

The Minister urged street, food vendors, to maintain hygiene and taste while appealing to them to register their food kiosks online. South Regional Director Pancham, Joint Food Controller of Andhra Pradesh N Purnachandra Rao, DRO Narasimulu, and other officials were also present at the event.

Koneru Humpy...

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YSRCP President and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy celebrated Humpy's accomplishment, calling it a source of immense pride for Gudivada, Andhra Pradesh, and the nation. He said, "Her determination and excellence are inspiring, and we wish her continued success."

AP Sports Minister Ramprasad Reddy commended Humpy's outstanding performance in the 11-round competition, where she triumphed over Indonesia's Irine Kharisma Sukandar to secure the top position. He highlighted her perseverance and skill, encouraging the youth to draw inspiration from her success.

Koneru Humpy's extraordinary victory has brought pride to Andhra Pradesh and the entire nation, cementing her legacy as one of India's finest chess players.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said: "Heartiest congratulations to Koneru Humpy for winning the 2024 Women's World Rapid Chess Championship, her second world title! Your brilliance and perseverance inspire not just Andhra Pradesh but the entire nation. A true queen of chess!"

Vijayanand made...

Continued from Page 1

His leadership in the energy sector has been marked by swift resolutions to power-related issues, both within Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring southern states. As Special Chief Secretary, he was instrumental in formulating the Andhra Pradesh Integrated Clean Energy Policy, 2024, aimed at transforming the state into a global clean energy hub by adding over 160 GW of renewable energy capacity.

Vijayanand's expertise in the power sector spans over 14 years, during which he played a pivotal role in enhancing Andhra Pradesh's energy infrastructure. Notable projects under his leadership include the commissioning of several thermal and hydroelectric plants, such as the 2X250 MW units at Kothagudem, the 500 MW unit at Bhupalpalli, and the 800 MW solar plants at Thalari Cheruvu and Anantapur. He also oversaw the establishment of robust infrastructure for APTRANSCO and APGENCO at Vidut Soudha in Vijayawada, a first in the post-bifurcation period.

In addition to his energy sector contributions, Vijayanand served as Principal Secretary for IT & Electronics from 2016 to 2019, playing a key role in attracting IT and electronics industries to the state. His tenure saw companies like HCL and TCL set up operations in Vizag, Vijayawada, and Tirupati.

Vijayanand's experience also extends to electoral administration, having served as the Chief Electoral Officer & Ex-Officio Principal Secretary from 2019 to 2021, overseeing crucial electoral processes in the state.

Beginning his administrative career in 1993 as Assistant Collector of Adilabad, Vijayanand has served in various roles, including District Collector for Srikakulam and Nalgonda, and as State Project Director for Planning and Program Implementation. His diverse experience makes him a key figure in the continued governance and development of Andhra Pradesh.

Plane bursts into....

Continued from Page 1

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry. Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility, triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, told a televised briefing that the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage. Lee said that workers were looking into various possibilities about what caused the crash, including whether the aircraft was struck by birds, Lee said. Transport Ministry officials later said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Amavasya: Dec 30 04:01 AM to Dec 31 03:56 AM

Sukla Paksha Pratipada: Dec 31 03:56 AM to Jan 01 03:22 AM

Nakshatram: Moola: Dec 29 11:22 PM to Dec 30 11:57 PM

Purva Ashadha: Dec 30 11:57 PM to Jan 01 12:03 AM

Rahukalam: 8:11 AM to 9:34 AM

Yamagandam: 10:56 AM to 12:18 PM

Variyam: 06:38 PM to 08:27 PM

Gulika: 1:41 PM to 3:03 PM

Amritakalam: 05:29 PM to 07:07 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:56 AM to 12:40 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

Temp: 32°

Humidity: 63%

Sunrise: 6:35 AM

Sunset: 5:45 PM

Updated: December 29, 2024 5:00 PM

Master plan being prepared for city expansion: MP

Stress on importance of well-planned urban development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MP Kesineni Sivanath has announced plans for the future expansion of Vijayawada city, stating that a master plan is currently being developed. He indicated that the city will undergo significant expansion in the near future. The announcement was made during Sunday's meeting with the Subba Rao Colony Welfare Association in the Vijayawada East Assembly constituency.



During the meeting, MP Chinni emphasised the importance of well-planned urban development to accommodate the city's growth and meet the needs of its residents. He acknowledged that the stormwater drainage system could potentially damage the roads in the city. Therefore, he stated that the government will focus on improving roads and sewage treatment plants (STPs) first.

In addition, he promised that within six months, residents will see pothole-free roads in the city. Chinni also expressed his commitment to resolving the issues related to drainage and stormwater management. He mentioned that any developmental work initiated by the residents of the colony will be financially beneficial for them.

MP promises support for Gunadala Church development
Earlier, MP Chinni visited

the Mary Matha Church in Gunadala, where he assured support from his government for the successful organisation of the Mary Matha Tirunallu, a key religious festival scheduled for February, next year. During the visit to the church, the MP offered special prayers and took blessings from Fr Wiliam Jayaraj.

After meeting with the Church Committee, MP Chinni stated that the Gunadala Tirunallu festival is celebrated grandly each year. He noted that numerous pilgrims visit the church from both the State and across the country during the three-day event.

The government is providing support to ensure adequate facilities for the pilgrims, he added.

Regarding the development of the church, he plans to bring this issue to the attention of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. Also, he emphasised that the Gunadala Mary Matha Church holds top priority in religious tourism. Both regional and religious tourism are playing crucial roles in promoting capital tourism, he added.

Gunadala Church president Nuvvula Vijaya Babu, vice-president Cherukuri Joseph, treasurer Goli Vijay, member G. Ravi Kumar, and others participated in the meeting.

'No flowers, bouquets, garlands and shawls'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Cooperation, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, and Marketing K Atchannaidu has requested citizens, followers, party leaders, and activists who come to meet him and extend their New Year's wishes to refrain from bringing flowers, bouquets, garlands, and shawls.

In a press statement released on Sunday, the Minister emphasised that genuine affection and warm greetings are more than enough. He urged well-wishers to redirect the expense of such gifts towards a meaningful cause by donating books and pens to underprivileged students.

All-India Federation Cup Carrom Tourney in Nellore from Jan 5

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 29th All-India Federation Cup Carrom Tournament-2025 is set to take place from January 5 to 8, 2025, at the Nellore Club, Nellore. The event will be jointly hosted by the Andhra State Carrom Association and the SPSR Nellore District Carrom Association, with the All-India Carrom Federation organising the tournament.

Neeraj Kumar Sampathy, senior vice-president, All-India Carrom Federation, announced in a release on Sunday that the tournament will feature participants from 25 States and 10 institutions. Each team will consist of four men and four women players, along with their man-

agers and coaches.

The tournament will showcase a star-studded lineup of players, including top seeds K. Srinivas from Telangana and Rashmi Kumari from New Delhi, both representing PSPB. K Srinivas, the reigning world champion, will compete alongside M Khazima from Tamil Nadu, the women's singles title holder at the sixth Carrom World Cup held in the USA. Other accomplished members of the Indian team from the World Cup will also compete in the tournament. Notable players from Andhra Pradesh include top seeds Ch. Janardhan Reddy (Men) and MSK Harika (Women).

SK Abdul Jaleel, general secretary, Andhra State

Carrom Association, revealed that the tournament will feature four events: Men's Singles, Men's Doubles, Women's Singles, and Women's Doubles. All events will follow a knockout format. As a ranking tournament of the All-India Carrom Federation (AICF), the points earned will be crucial for selecting the Indian national team, adding significant value alongside other ranking events.

The tournament will also be graced by Josef Meyer, president of the International Carrom Federation, during the inauguration ceremony. Key matches will be streamed live by SYNCO, the official equipment manufacturer for the event.

DIG initiates inquiry into jail staff protest

Protesters alleged harassment by Jail Superintendent

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Ravikiran has launched an inquiry into a sit-in protest staged by Class IV employees and warders (security personnel) at Visakhapatnam Central Jail on Saturday evening. The protesters alleged harassment by Jail Superintendent Mahendrababu, particularly in connection with recent prison inspections.

DIG Ravikiran is currently investigating the events that led to the staff's agitation and is also looking into the allegations of mistreatment. In a show of solidarity, family members of the protesting staff joined the demonstration, expressing their dissatisfaction that only the Superintendent is being questioned. The protesters also announced their intention to meet with Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha to present their concerns directly to the authorities.

The incident that triggered the protest occurred on Saturday when Superintendent Mahendrababu and Deputy Superintendent conducted a routine inspection of the prison premises after noticing suspicious behaviour from two warders. During the inspection, one of the warders, Vasudeva Rao, reportedly misbehaved and used offensive language towards the officers. As a result, disciplinary action was taken against him.

This action led to a collective boycott of duties by the other staff members, who gathered in protest at the gate of the administration building. The protesters expressed their discontent with the Superintendent's actions, particularly regarding what they termed the misuse of authority under the pretext of marijuana inspections. The protesting staff members alleged that the Superintendent had been over-

stepping his authority. They claimed, "The Superintendent is misusing his power under the guise of conducting marijuana inspections. He is preventing staff from accessing the carriages and stopping them near the administration building, even subjecting them to underwear checks." In response to the allegations, Superintendent Mahendrababu clarified the situation. "Warder Vasudeva Rao made inappropriate comments about the officers, which were reported to higher authorities. We are acting on their instructions and have taken the necessary steps against him. Vasudeva Rao has a history of misconduct, having been suspended twice on corruption charges. We are implementing strict measures to prevent the entry of marijuana into the prison, which includes routine checks of the staff. Claims of harassment are completely unfounded," he said.

Cong prioritised Telugu language: Sivaji

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Congress senior leader and APCC vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji has said that the Congress party in the united Andhra Pradesh had always prioritised the usage of Telugu and pledged to continue safeguarding the language.



Addressing the World Telugu Writers Conference here on Sunday on the topic "Telugu Basha Parirakshana - The Role of Political Parties," the Congress leader emphasised that Telugu was extensively used by the gov-

ernment during the Congress party's rule. He recalled that GOs were issued in Telugu during the

tenures of Chief Ministers YS Rajasekhara Reddy, K. Rosaiah, and N. Kiran Kumar Reddy.

Shivaji further claimed that Congress leaders are proficient in Telugu and always express their views in the language. He reiterated the party's commitment to protecting Telugu and ensuring that all leaders use it.

The Congress leader also criticised YSRCP leaders for using abusive language to attack opposition leaders during their time in power, urging all political parties to prevent such conduct.



Plea to abolish third-party contract system in RTC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP Public Transport Department Outsourcing Employees Association, affiliated with the JAC Amaravati, is urging the State government to abolish the third-party contract system within the Road Transport Corporation (RTC), and to safeguard the rights of nearly 8,000 outsourcing employees, who have been subjected to exploitation for years.

At the first annual meeting of the APPTD Outsourcing Employees Association held here on Sunday, leaders including State chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu and secretary general Palishetti Damodar Rao made a series of pressing demands. It was emphasised

that the RTC management should directly disburse salaries to the outsourcing employees rather than relying on contractors.

"The time has come for the government to take decisive action to include RTC outsourcing employees under the government's APCOS, ensuring they receive salaries comparable to other outsourcing roles in various departments," said Bopparaju. He highlighted that the current salary structure is inequitable, seeking equal pay for equal work for the already underpaid RTC outsourcing employees.

He deplored that despite the inclusion of around 1,00,000 outsourcing employees in the APCOS system during previous

administrations, about 1,50,000 continue to remain outside its purview, suffering from irregular payments and lack of benefits such as EPF and ESI.

K. Suman, chairman of the APPTD Contract & Outsourcing Employees Association, advocated for proportional salary increments based on seniority and emphasised the need for consistent raises each year.

The meeting also saw active participation from various representatives of the association, including APJAC Amaravati State Women Committee secretary general Ponnuru Vijayalakshmi, along with leaders from different districts, highlighting the widespread support for the cause.

Sribharat extends support to local self-help groups

Five-day Self-Help Groups Mela drawing visitors

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



MP M Sribharat visited the Self-Help Groups (SHG) Mela at ASR Grounds on Sunday, where he expressed his appreciation for the immense talent and hard work demonstrated by local SHGs. The five-day fair, which commenced on December 25, has become a major attraction, drawing hundreds of visitors daily with its diverse offerings of unique handicrafts and delectable food items crafted by the city's SHGs.

During his visit, Sribharat lauded the Central and State government's policies aimed at empowering self-help groups, acknowledging the significant role these initiatives play in uplifting women and fostering local entrepreneurship. "The SHG Mela is a wonderful testa-

ment to the talent and perseverance of women in our society. It is heartening to see their hard work and creativity being recognised on such a platform. I am confident that such programmes will continue to elevate these groups and help them reach new heights," the MP said.

Sribharat also interacted with several SHG members, offering words of encouragement and praising their entrepreneurial spirit. He urged them to seize new opportunities and explore avenues for further growth. "We must all support these efforts, as they are pivotal in building a stronger, self-reliant society. I assure you of my full support in any initiatives that promote the development of Visakhapatnam and its people," he added.

The fair will conclude on Monday.

CPM seeks clarity on VSP's future during PM Modi's visit

PM should spell out whether VSP will remain under public sector or face privatisation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

CPM State secretary V. Srinivasa Rao has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make a firm commitment regarding the future of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) during his forthcoming visit to the city on January 8. Speaking at a media conference on Sunday, Rao emphasised that the Prime Minister should provide a definitive stance on whether VSP will remain under public sector control or face privatisation.

Rao recalled that in his previous visits to Visakhapatnam, Prime Minister Modi had avoided making any clear statements on the matter, despite claims that his visits were intended to strengthen the steel plant. "While the BJP leadership insists that VSP's privatisation will not happen, there has been no concrete action to ensure its survival in the public sector," he said, suggesting that Modi's earlier visits were part of covert efforts to pave the way for privatisation.

Further criticising the State government, Rao accused



CPM State secretary V Srinivasa Rao addressing the media on Sunday

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu of failing to raise the VSP issue during his recent meetings with the Prime Minister in Delhi. Rao claimed that the CM focused solely on facilitating the establishment of the ArcelorMittal steel plant at Nakkapalli, neglecting the future of VSP. He alleged that the discussions between Modi and Chandrababu were aimed at reducing the Centre's stake in the VSP and transferring its assets to private players. "This is nothing but a betrayal of the people of North Andhra and the entire State," Rao asserted.

Rao also raised other pressing concerns, including the conversion of a guest house construct-

ed by the YSRCP government at Rushikonda into a science museum. He argued that the museum could boost tourism in the region and enhance the city's cultural landscape. Besides, he called for a resolution to the pancha gramalu issue related to the Simhachalam lands, which would allow rightful owners to repair their homes and access loans.

Addressing environmental issues, Rao voiced concerns about the encroachment on water bodies by private and corporate entities. He linked the growing environmental degradation to the increasing frequency of floods in certain parts of the region.

Three-member committees to be appointed for PACSs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government is planning to nominate three-member committees for the Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies (PACS) across Andhra Pradesh to ensure that their operations are conducted efficiently. As part of the process, local MLAs are collecting three names from each PACS. Once the names are gathered through the Cooperation Department, the State government will issue a Government Order.

Besides, management committees will be established for the District Cooperative Central Banks (DCCBs), District Cooperative Marketing Societies (DCMS), Andhra Pradesh State

Management committees will be formed for DCCBs, DCMSs, APCOB and APMARKFED too

Cooperative Bank (APCOB), and the Andhra Pradesh Cooperative Marketing Federation Limited (APMARKFED). When the three-member committees are in place, the government will proceed with forming management committees for the DCCBs, DCMS, APCOB, and APMARKFED to ensure robust governance and streamline operations in these institutions.

The government is expected to issue a Government Order before the Sankranti festival. The term of the governing bodies of the PACS ended

in January 2018, but the previous TDP government extended their tenure for another six months on two occasions. Later, the YSRCP government appointed three-member committees in around 2,500 PACS, and seven-member committees for 13 DCCBs and DCMS. Subsequently, nominated committees were established for APCOB and APMARKFED, which continued until the formation of the TDP-led NDA government.

Currently, the PACSs, DCCBs, DCMSs, APCOB, and APMARKFED are being managed by official Persons-In-

Charge (PICs). According to the original schedule, elections should have been conducted in 2018; however, five additional years have passed without elections for the PACS. The TDP-led NDA government is contemplating holding elections for the PACSs, but some technical issues are hindering this process. So, the government is considering appointing committees for these three-tier organisations in the cooperative sector.

Farmers struggling to get loans
Farmers are struggling to secure loans because of the

absence of governing bodies for the PACSs, DCCBs, DCMSs, APCOB, and APMARKFED. Farmers have alleged that the current PICs are not facilitating their access to loans and are imposing several restrictions, even for crop loans.

Besides, they are encountering significant obstacles in purchasing paddy through PACSs. Farmers have also reported that PACS staff are not providing adequate information regarding loans, paddy procurement etc.

At this juncture, many TDP leaders are approaching their MLAs, MPs, and other TDP-NDA leaders to address these issues. The government remains uncertain about conducting cooperative elections,

and is considering nominating party leaders to the PACSs, similar to the previous administration. Many representatives have raised this issue with party leadership, including Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on several occasions.

After consulting with legal experts, CM Chandrababu decided to appoint nominated committees in these organisations. And he has directed all MLAs to gather names of active leaders who are enthusiastic about the cooperative sector to be appointed to the three-man committees. Thus far, TDP village unit leaders have sent three names for each PACS to their respective MLAs or constituency in-

SAAP chief congratulates Humpy on world title

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Animimi Ravi Naidu, Chairman of the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP), has congratulated Women's World Rapid Chess Championship. The championship, held at Wall Street in New York, witnessed Humpy clinch the title by defeating Indonesia's Irene Sukandar in the 11th round and securing an impressive score of 8.5 points.

Ravi Naidu expressed pride in Humpy's achievement, highlighting it as a moment of immense honour for the Telugu community. He praised her unwavering dedication, commitment, and determination, describing her as a role model for aspiring athletes.

The Chairman extended his best wishes for her future endeavours and hoped for more such victories in the days to come. He said that Humpy's triumph has added another milestone to her illustrious career, further elevating India's standing in the global chess arena.



In a press release on Sunday,

PDS rice unloaded from Stella, ship set to leave Kakinada Port

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The Stella L Panama ship, which had been detained at Kakinada Port after Public Distribution System (PDS) rice was discovered onboard, is now set to leave the port after the unloading of the rice.

Official sources reported that Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan inspected Kakinada Port on November 11. During the inspection, he found 1,320 tonnes of PDS rice aboard the ship and immediately instructed officials to seize the vessel.

Following this, a large-scale operation was launched to determine how much PDS rice had been loaded onto the

The Stella L Panama ship had been stranded at Kakinada Port for 48 days, as officials had not allowed it to depart due to the presence of the large quantity of PDS rice. However, it has now been announced that the ship will set sail for West Africa on January 4, 2025. The ship is transporting over 19,785 tonnes of ordinary rice to Port Banin in West Africa



ship for export. After a thorough investigation, it was confirmed that 1,320 tonnes of PDS rice were on board.

The Civil Supplies department took the rice to the anchorage port godown for storage. On December 17,

the District Collector confirmed the presence of the 1,320 tonnes of PDS rice aboard the ship.

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The Stella Panama is currently anchored about 9 nautical miles from Kakinada Port. Sources revealed that 28 companies had engaged the ship to transport rice to a West African nation. However, the discovery of the 1,320 tonnes of PDS rice led to the vessel's detention at the port.

3,172 petitions received during 'Revenue Sadassulu': WG DC

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

A total of 3,172 petitions have been received during the revenue sadassulu organised across West Godavari district, according to District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani.

Speaking to the media on Sunday, the Collector informed that the revenue sadassulu have been conducted in 237 villages across 20 mandals since their commencement on December 13. The initiative, directed by the State Government, aims to address land-related grievances.

"During this 237 revenue sadassulu, officials received 3,172 petitions related to various issues, including land disputes, out of which 319 cases have already been



resolved," the Collector stated.

She added that 12,691 people have participated in these meetings to seek resolutions for their grievances. Steps are being taken to resolve all land-related issues within 45 days of receiving petitions. The revenue sadassulu will

continue until January 8, 2025, and the Collector urged the public to utilise this opportunity to address their concerns.

Meanwhile, Collector Nagarani highlighted that a social audit is underway in the district to gather information on Scheduled Caste (SC) population, including details such as Aadhaar numbers, dates of birth, sub-castes, access to drinking water, toilet facilities, educational qualifications, and occupations.

The social audit details will be displayed at village secretariats, allowing SC residents to verify their data. Objections or corrections can be submitted online until January 2025. The final social audit list will be displayed at the secretariats on January 10, 2025.

Facilities being upgraded in SW hostels with Rs 143 cr outlay

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The State government is providing all necessary facilities to Social Welfare hostels and residential schools at a cost of Rs 143 crore, Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy announced on Sunday.

The Minister inspected the SC boys' hostel, BC boys' hostel, and girls' hostels in Singarayakonda. During his visit, he checked hostel rooms, kitchens, and premises, while interacting with students to understand their needs.

Speaking on the occasion, he stated that the renovation of social welfare hostels is being carried out on an unprecedented scale with an allocation of Rs 143 crore. "This is the first time such a significant amount is being spent on improving hostel facilities in the state," he asserted. The Minister further informed that 62 new hostel buildings are under construction at an estimated cost of Rs 296



crore. He highlighted that the best medical care is being provided to students of residential schools under the Bhima project, with a dedicated doctor appointed in each district for medical check-ups.

Additionally, health kits containing 15 essential medical tools have been distributed to residential schools. The Minister noted that corporate medical treatment had been provided to 10 students, saving their lives.

The initiative aims to enhance the living conditions and health facilities for students in Social Welfare hostels and residential schools across the state.

Min inaugurates free medical camp

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathy inaugurated a free medical camp organized jointly by the Manipal hospital and GVR trust at Chinnampet village in Chatrai mandal in Nuzvid constituency on Sunday.

The Minister saw the general medical check-ups, cancer tests, eye tests, heart tests, lung tests, and testing centres set up in the medical camp. He asked the doctors about the medical tests they conducted. He greeted the patients who came to the medical camp by name and inquired about their health conditions.

Speaking on the occasion Minister Parthasarathy said that the aim of his government is that no poor person, regardless of their wealth, should be deprived of better medical care.

"The government aims to provide health security to the poor people. Even though



"The government aims to provide health security to the poor people. Even though poor people are under NTR medical service for some diseases, they are suffering financially due to receiving treatment in hospitals by spending huge money. Financial assistance will be provided from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to everyone who is suffering financially and the Government will support them in every way," the Minister asserted

poor people are under NTR medical service for some diseases, they are suffering financially due to receiving treatment in hospitals by spending huge money. Financial assistance will be provided from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to everyone who is suffering financially and the Government will support them in every way," the

Minister asserted. The Minister urged everyone to take advantage of this mega-free medical camp provided by private institutions and voluntary organizations. Minister Parthasarathy expressed special gratitude to Manipal Hospital and GVR Trust for organizing this medical camp. He called upon voluntary organizations to set up such free medical

Grievance redressal programme in EG as usual today: DC

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

The Public Grievance Redressal System (PGRS) will be held as usual on Monday, district Collector P Prashanthi said in a statement here on Sunday.

She said that the PGRS would be held at district, division and mandal levels as usual on Monday, and directed all the officials concerned to attend the meeting without fail to receive petitions from the public.

The District Collector said that she and the Joint Collector would attend the revenue conference, to be held in Vijayawada by the Revenue Minister on Monday. In their absence, the DRO would receive petitions from the people on Monday in the PGRS

programme. Collector Prashanthi revealed that the officials would take petitions from 10 am to 1 pm on Monday in the Collectorate and appealed to the people to give their petitions to the officials on their grievances.



Commissioner issues guidelines for New Year's Eve

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Police Commissioner (CP) SV Rajasekhara Babu has announced a series of strict measures to ensure public safety during New Year's Eve celebrations on December 31. The Commissioner urged youths and organisations to celebrate responsibly, maintaining order and decorum to create a healthy and pleasant atmosphere.

In a press release on Sunday, CP Rajasekhara Babu stated that no permissions will be

Celebrations will not be allowed on public roads at midnight

granted for celebrations on public roads at midnight. These restrictions are intended to prevent disturbances and ensure a safe and enjoyable environment for all. The Commissioner called upon the public to cooperate with authorities and adhere to the issued guidelines.

Further, he said that the police will impose traffic restrictions on key roads, including Mahatma Gandhi Road (Bandar Road), Eluru



Road, and BRTS Road. He said vehicles will not be allowed on major flyovers such as Benz Circle Flyovers, Kanaka Durga Flyover, and the

NHAI West Bypass Road from China Avutapalli to Gollapudi during the celebrations.

Meanwhile, he spoke about triple riding on two-wheelers, and strict action will be taken against violators. The Commissioner specifically warned against driving under the influence of alcohol. Also, he said that vehicles with altered silencers creating excessive noise will be penalised. Celebratory activities such as cake cutting or dancing in the

middle of roads are strictly prohibited, he added.

Further, he said that the use of firecrackers on roads is not allowed. Rajasekhara Babu advised the public, particularly the youth, to cooperate with the police and avoid activities that could lead to road accidents or public inconvenience. He emphasised that adhering to these measures will contribute to a peaceful and enjoyable start to the New Year in NTR district.

Coalition govt a curse for farmers: Kakani

PNS ■ NELLORE

YSRCP district president and former minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy has lambasted the coalition government, accusing it of neglecting the farming community and plunging the agricultural sector into a severe crisis.

Addressing a press conference in Nellore, Kakani expressed concern over the alarming rise in farmer suicides. While unofficial figures indicate over 150 deaths, the government has acknowledged only 95. He criticised the administration for failing to ensure remunerative prices for crops and timely support during natural calamities, leaving farmers in dire straits. Referring to the tragic suicide of a farming couple in the YSR district, Kakani attributed it to the government's indifference and lack of commitment to addressing farmer grievances. Kakani specifically targeted



Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, accusing him of repeatedly betraying farmers. He highlighted Naidu's unfulfilled promises, including complete loan waivers and annual financial assistance of Rs 20,000. Instead, he alleged, Naidu mocked the plight of farmers by downplaying their suicides and providing inadequate compensation. In contrast, Kakani praised

the previous YSRCP government led by Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for its pro-farmer initiatives. He noted that compensation for farmer suicides was increased to Rs 7 lakh and 53.58 lakh farming families were supported with Rs 13,500 annually under the "Rythu Bharosa" scheme.

Kakani also pointed out that the government owes farmers Rs 12,563 crore in pending dues, including drought relief, crop insurance, and financial assistance. He demanded the immediate implementation of promises such as Rs 20,000 annual support, restoration of Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs), and free crop insurance.

Warning of intensified protests, Kakani said, "The coalition government has become a curse for farmers. It must act immediately to resolve these issues or face the collective wrath of the farming community."

Aquatic Championship: K'taka overall champions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Karnataka State won the overall championship in the 35th South Zone Aquatic Championship, which concluded at the Sir Vizzy Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Swimming Pool in Vijayawada on Sunday. Tamil Nadu stood in second place. Andhra Pradesh's Theerdhu Samdev and Yagna Sai won individual championships. NTR and Krishna District Swimming Associations jointly conducted the South Zone Aquatic Championship for three days. Vijayawada Central MLA and Government Whip Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. He presented the overall championship and runners-up trophies. Also, he presented individual championships and prizes to the winners. Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) 26th Division Corporator Vallabhaneni Rajeswari, Andhra Pradesh Aquatic Association general secretary Mohan Venkat Ram, NTR District Association chairman Yalamanchili Venkata Suresh, president Dr Obul Reddy, Krishna district president DVDV Bhaskar, tournament organisers Bhaskar, Bala Murali Krishna, I Ramesh, Vinod, and

RRR is Modi govt's gift to TG: Bandi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar demanded that the state government should pay students' fee reimbursement arrears before Sankranti.

He issued an ultimatum stating that if this is not done, massive protests will be launched after Sankranti under the leadership of Kishan Reddy. He also demanded the immediate fulfilment of the promise to fill two lakh posts in government service.

He said that the Congress failed to fulfil any of the promises it made in its 'Youth Declaration'. They didn't even honour their commitment to pay an unemployment allowance of Rs 4,000. The government owes each unemployed individual Rs 48,000 in arrears. This must be paid immediately, and the two



Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar addressing the media at Karimnagar on Sunday

lakh vacancies filled. Otherwise, the BJP will launch intense protests, Sanjay warned.

Sanjay felicitated candidates who had secured government jobs after undergoing training at the 'Deen Dayal Coaching Centre', on Sunday at his MP's camp office in Karimnagar. The coaching centre was established by Sanjay.

Later, addressing the media, he slammed the Congress

Government saying that the lack of fee reimbursement is causing severe hardship to lakhs of students. "College managements are incurring losses and are on the verge of closure. They are pressuring students to pay fees. Students are caught between the government and managements. Hence, we are issuing an ultimatum to the government that fee reimbursement arrears must be cleared before Sankranti. Otherwise, under the leadership of Kishan Reddy, we will organise protests," he said.

"It is shameful that the Congress is politicising Manmohan Singh's funeral. During Manmohan Singh's tenure as Prime Minister, Sonia Gandhi acted as super prime minister and reduced him to a rubber stamp. When the Manmohan Singh government introduced an ordinance

amending the Representation of the People Act, Rahul Gandhi tore it up and insulted him. However, recognizing Manmohan Singh's contributions, the Modi Government held an official funeral for him and will build a memorial for him in New Delhi," Sanjay said. The Congress which insulted former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao by denying him a proper funeral in New Delhi, has no moral right to criticise the Modi Government, he said. Responding to the RRR issue, Sanjay said, "Thanks to the Modi government for inviting tenders for the construction of the Triple-R roads. This is a Sankranti gift from the Centre to the people of Telangana. It is estimated that the construction of the Triple-R roads will cost around ₹18,000 crore, and the centre is ready to bear the expense."

4 arrested in minor girl gang rape case

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

The police have arrested four persons in connection with the gang rape of a 13-year-old girl. Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, DSP Abdul Subhan said that two of the accused forcibly took the minor girl, who was at Pavuralagutta centre, on a motorcycle to the Pampula Cheruvu area where they sexually assaulted her on the evening of December 29.

The DSP identified the accused as Mohammad Saleem, Bala Shankar Sai, Ashok, and Venkat Pawan. He mentioned that Ashok has a previous criminal record. The police presented the accused to the media. Cases under various sections, including Section 376 (rape) and the POCSO Act, have been registered against the accused. They will be produced before the court, the DSP said

Fake letter circulated over cops' recruitment



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Fraudsters have circulated a fake letter in the name of the Director-General of Police (DGP) regarding the recruitment of Home Guards and Civil Police. This letter falsely claims that provisionally selected candidates for these posts, including CT (Band/Bugler) in the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRBN), must join the training centre on January 10, 2025, for

basic training. The DGP office has categorically stated that this letter is entirely fabricated and was not issued by them. They have urged the public not to believe the contents of this letter as it is completely false and misleading. The DGP office has also warned of strict action against those responsible for creating and circulating this fraudulent letter.

ACROSS THE STATES



Two burnt alive in road accident in Uttar Pradesh

Two people were burnt alive following a collision between two trucks in Hamirpur district of Uttar Pradesh, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred around 8:30 pm on Saturday, on National Highway 34 in the Sumerpur area, Circle Officer Rajesh Kamal said. "Two trucks were involved in the accident. One truck caught fire following the collision, leading to the deaths of the driver and his assistant. Their identities are yet to be established," the officer told PTI. The occupants of the other truck fled the scene and search is underway to locate them. We have not received any complaint in the matter yet. We are trying to contact the owners of both trucks," he added. The police said a fire brigade was called to the site and rescue and relief measures were initiated. Some locals at the scene were reportedly seen capturing pictures and videos of the incident, they said. One of the video clips of the incident which surfaced on social media allegedly shows the assistant attempting to open the truck door to escape, while his body was almost entirely engulfed in flames.



'Hanuman ji was born in Rajbhar caste'

U.P's Panchayati Raj Minister Om Prakash Rajbhar on Saturday said that Lord Hanuman was born in the Rajbhar caste. Rajbhar, who heads the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP), a BJP ally, also hit back at Congress and Samajwadi Party for their newfound "love for BR Ambedkar". Addressing a public meeting, Rajbhar said, "Hanuman ji was born in Rajbhar caste. When (demon) Ahiravan took Ram ji and Laxman ji to Patal Puri, no one had the courage to bring them back. Only Hanuman ji, who was born in the Rajbhar caste, was the only one to have the courage to do it. Hanuman ji brought Ram and Laxman ji out of Patal Puri." He made the remarks after the 'bhoomi puja' for the construction of the statue of Maharaja Suheldev at the main gate of Vasudeva village in the Chitbaragaon area of Ballia. Targeting opposition parties in the state, the SBSP chief said.



Delhi records low of 13 deg C, dense fog likely

Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 18 degrees Celsius, two degrees below normal, according to the India Meteorological Department. The minimum temperature stood at 13 degrees Celsius on Sunday, six notches above the season's average for this time of the month. The weather department has predicted very dense fog on Monday, with the maximum and minimum temperatures expected to settle around 18 and 6 degrees Celsius, respectively. The 24-hour Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 225 in the 'poor' category at 4 pm on Sunday. On Saturday, the city's AQI was in the 'moderate' category. Out of 28 monitoring stations, Anand Vihar, Sirifort, and Vivek Vihar reported AQI levels in the 'very poor' category, with readings exceeding 300. The remaining stations recorded AQI levels in the 'moderate' and 'poor' categories, as per the Sameer App. An AQI between 0 and 50 is classified as 'good,' 51 to 100 as 'satisfactory,' 101 to 200 as 'moderate,' 201 to 300 as 'poor,' 301 to 400 as 'very poor,' and 401 to 500 as 'severe.'

Illegal immigrants from Bangladesh deported

At least seven illegal immigrants were deported from south Delhi, police said on Sunday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Ankit Chauhan said on Saturday a team apprehended seven nationals of Bangladesh, including five women, near the Arjanagarh Metro Station in Fatehpur Beri area. He said raids were conducted in slums, labour camps, and unauthorised colonies, leading to the capture of the illegal immigrants. The detained individuals were identified as Mohammad Umor Faruk (33), Riyav Miyan (20) and five women, all hailing from Bangladesh, he added. During interrogation they revealed that they had illegally crossed the border and were residing in Rajeev Nagar in Gurgaon. Verification of their mobile phones and documents confirmed their Bangladeshi citizenship, said the DCP. They were handed over to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) following completion of necessary documentation, he said.

'Stay vigilant against enemies'

RAJNATH SAYS INDIA NOT 'LUCKY' ON SECURITY FRONT

PNS ■ MHOW (MP)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday termed India a "not very lucky" nation on the security front and urged soldiers to keep a sharp eye on internal and external foes who he said are always active. He was addressing Army personnel at the more-than-two-century-old Mhow cantonment in the Indore district of Madhya Pradesh.

"Taking the security scenario into account, Bharat is not a very lucky country because our northern border and western border continuously face challenges," said Singh, who is on a two-day tour of the state. Mhow cantonment, 25 km from Indore, is home to three premier training institutes - Army War College, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering and Infantry School - other than the Infantry Museum and Army Marksmanship Unit.

"We also face challenges on the internal front. In the backdrop of this, we can't sit quiet, unconcerned. Our enemies, whether internal or external, remain active always. In these circumstances, we must keep a close eye on their activities and take appropriate and timely effective steps against them," he told the Armymen.

To make Bharat a developed and self-reliant country by 2017, the role of the Army is very crucial, said the defence minister. "as the country's defence minister, I would like



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to tell you that we should be alert always. This patch of time, though often referred to as peacetime, struck me deeply when I arrived and witnessed the discipline and dedication with which you are undergoing training. Your regimen is no less than that of a war," he told the gathering.

"To maintain such a level of discipline, dedication and firm conviction are needed," he added. Singh said he was impressed by the cleanliness at the Army establishments and cantonments across the country. "Your dedication to work inspires me. I can say that the most appealing thing is your devotion towards work and sense of responsibility. It is

inspiring to all of us," Singh said. Earlier, Singh along with the Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi paid floral tributes at the memorial of Dr B R Ambedkar at Mhow. The memorial of Ambedkar, the chief architect of India's Constitution, has been built at his birthplace in the Kali Paltan area of Mhow cantonment.

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Kejriwal accuses BJP of manipulating electoral roll

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday accused the BJP of trying to manipulate voter list in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections.

Speaking at a press conference alongside Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Kejriwal claimed the BJP was trying to win elections through "unfair means" after failing to present strong candidates or issues. "BJP has already lost the elections. They don't have a chief ministerial face or even proper candidates. They only aim to win through manipulation, but we won't let them succeed," he said.

The former Delhi chief minister alleged that the BJP had filed 11,000 voter deletion applications in one constituency alone, but the move was halted at the Chief Election Commissioner's intervention. "We exposed this and thankfully it was stopped," he said.

Kejriwal said that a large-scale operation began on December 15, with 5,000 voter deletion applications and 7,500 addition requests filed so far in his New Delhi Assembly constituency.

He claimed that this could alter 12 per cent of the constituency's votes. The total number of voters in the constituency, he said, is 1,06,873, as per the voter list published on October 29 after the summary revision, which was conducted between August 20 and October 20. "Operation Lotus has now reached my constituency. They are attempting to manipulate the electoral rolls to change the election outcome," Kejriwal alleged.

"This kind of manipulation undermines democracy. We appeal to the Election Commission to continue its strict monitoring to prevent such malpractice," he said.

India to host first WAVES Summit in February: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke extensively about the WAVES Summit in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' Radio address on Sunday.

Comparing the WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Modi said the leaders from the media and entertainment industry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather in Delhi for the Summit being held from February 5-9.

"This Summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation," he said. The prime minister emphasized the pivotal role of young creators in the preparations for WAVES,



reflecting the dynamic spirit of India's creative community.

He expressed pride in the enthusiasm of the country's youth and their contribution to the burgeoning creator economy, a key driver as India advances toward becoming a five trillion dollar economy.

"Whether you are a young creator or an established artist, associated with Bollywood or regional cinema, a professional from the TV industry, an expert in animation, gaming, or an innovator in entertainment technology, I encourage you to be a part of the WAVES

Summit," Modi said. He urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES. "The WAVES Summit is poised to serve as a global platform for India's creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation," Modi said.

The Summit will also highlight India's advancements in animation, gaming, entertainment technology, and regional and mainstream cinema, he added.

MANMOHAN MEMORIAL

Congress accuses Centre of having "hidden agenda"

PNS ■ ALAPPUZHA (KERALA)

The Congress on Sunday alleged that union government could not identify a designated space for performing the last rites of former PM Manmohan Singh, where a memorial could be built later, as it intervened in the matter with a "hidden agenda."

It has long been the practice to set up a memorial at the same place where the last rites are performed. However, the BJP-led Union government mishandled the issue and worsened the situation, the party alleged. Speaking to reporters here, AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal said that not only the Congress party but also the Shiromani Akali Dal had harshly criticised the Union government on the matter.

"A designated space was not found for Manmohan Singh's last rites and memorial because the central government intervened in the matter with a specific hidden agenda," he alleged. The Congress leader also wanted a discussion on the "brutal approach



and lapses on the part of the Centre. "It should be explained why the government is showing such disrespect to a great leader who rose to the post of Prime Minister from the Sikh community," Venugopal said.

He also accused the Centre of "failing to consult" the Congress party or Manmohan Singh's family members regarding the arrangements. "Seats were not even arranged for the closest relatives," Venugopal claimed, adding that the central government had "tarnished the late Prime Minister's reputation by not making the necessary arrangements for his last rites".

Akhilesh pitches for ballot voting

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav has called for elections to be conducted using ballot papers, citing a lack of trust in electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said this at a press conference at the SP headquarters here on Sunday, alongside Rahul Kumar Kamboj, an Indian-origin member of Parliament in Germany. "Even a country like Germany conducts elections using ballot papers. But in India, elections are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests," Yadav said. Emphasising the need for elec-



tions that inspire confidence, he said, "No one trusts EVMs. Even the faces of those who win elections seem dejected as they too do not have faith in the system." At the press conference, Kamboj highlighted the benefits of Germany's ballot-paper voting system. "In Germany, voting is still conducted using

SAYS EVMS NOT TRUSTWORTHY

ballot papers. It is an important system because any discrepancies can be addressed with a recount," he explained.

Reflecting on his visit to Lucknow and his longstanding relationship with Yadav, Kamboj said, "My efforts are focused on fostering a collaboration between Indian-origin individuals and Germany, so that the qualities of both countries can come together. We aim to facilitate cultural exchanges and I invite everyone to participate in the upcoming cultural festivals in Germany. Visa issues will no longer be a hurdle," he said.

Kamboj also spoke of building a bridge between opportunities in Europe and their implementation in India, specifically in Uttar Pradesh. "If we can identify the opportunities available in Germany and Europe, and bring them to places like Lucknow, it will open new avenues. That is my mission," he added.

Welcoming Kamboj, Yadav expressed enthusiasm for strengthening ties. "Your visit has created an opportunity to deepen the relationship between our regions, which will benefit the people of this state and country," he said.



Sabarimala temple to reopen today

PNS ■ SABARIMALA

The Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple will reopen on Monday for this year's makaravilakku festival, the temple authorities said.

The temple will be opened at 4 pm by Melshanthi S Arun Kumar Namboothiri, in the presence of the head priest,

Tantri Kandararu Rajeevaru.

Pilgrims can ascend the sacred 18 steps for darshan after the Melshanthi performs the ceremonial lighting of the fire at the fireplace (aazhi) in the sanctum. The temple was earlier closed on December 26 at 10 pm following the mandala puja, accompanied by the recitation of Harivarasanam.

PM INTERNSHIP SCHEME

6.21 lakh applications for 1.27 lakh opportunities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

About 6.21 lakh applications have been received for 1.27 lakh opportunities under the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme and the selection process is continuing, the government said on Sunday.

The scheme, announced in the 2024 Union Budget, aims to provide internship opportunities to 1 crore youth in top-500 companies over five years. A pilot project of the scheme, started on October 3, aims to provide 1.25 lakh internship opportunities during 2024-25.

In a release on Sunday, the

corporate affairs ministry said approximately 6.21 lakh applications have been received against 1.27 lakh internship opportunities. "The selection process for internship is ongoing." Partner companies have posted about 1.27 lakh internship opportunities on the internship scheme portal.

About 4.87 lakh individuals have completed their KYC and registered themselves on the portal, the release said. Under the scheme, interns will be provided a monthly financial assistance of Rs 5,000 for 12 months and a one-time grant of Rs 6,000.

While mentioning about

various initiatives taken this year, the ministry said the framework governing cost record and audit will be amended after considering stakeholders' comments and recommendations of the ministry-appointed committee.

From financial year 2023-24, the ministry has issued regular advisories to companies on adhering to the prescribed timelines for filing cost audit reports.

"This initiative has led to a 14 per cent increase in the timely submission of cost audit reports during 2023-24 compared to the previous year," the release added.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shifting stance

Trump's support for H-1B visas marks a major shift, offering relief to US companies and Indian tech workers alike

Politicians seldom walk their talk and do not mind taking u-turns even if it means reversing their own previous positions. Donald Trump the US President elect is the latest example. Trump has expressed his support for the H-1B visa program, which facilitates the entry of skilled foreign workers into the United States. This development comes as a marked departure from his earlier stance during his first presidential term, where he labeled the program 'very bad' and 'unfair' to American workers. Trump's latest remarks not only align him with tech magnate Elon Musk but also have significant implications for Indian professionals and US companies. The controversy surrounding the H-1B program reignited when Musk took to social media to vociferously defend the program against criticisms from immigration hardliners. Musk's electric vehicle company, Tesla, alone secured 724 H-1B visas this year, underscoring his vested interest in maintaining the program. Trump echoed Musk's sentiments in an interview, stating, "I've always liked the visas. I have used it many times. It's a great program."



This admission not only signals a softening of his earlier rhetoric but also a pragmatic acknowledgment of the program's benefits to the US economy. Indian IT professionals stand to benefit immensely from Trump's change in stance. Historically, Indians have been the largest beneficiaries of the H-1B visa program, occupying a lion's share of the annual quota. Trump's endorsement could reassure prospective applicants and existing visa holders about the continuity of the program, which has often been a lifeline for skilled workers seeking opportunities in the United States. The move

also counters recent fears of stringent immigration policies that could hinder their aspirations. The US technology sector, which has long relied on the H-1B visa program to address skill shortages, is likely to welcome Trump's shift. Companies like Google, Microsoft, and Tesla have consistently advocated for the continuation of the program, citing a lack of homegrown talent to meet the industry's demands. Musk's pointed critique of American culture's celebration of mediocrity over excellence highlights the role of foreign talent in driving innovation and maintaining the US's competitive edge globally. Trump's stance, however, has drawn ire from far-right activists and prominent figures within his own party. Critics, including Steve Bannon and Nikki Haley, argue that prioritising foreign workers undermines American labour and exacerbates domestic unemployment. Trump's endorsement of the H-1B visa program reflects a pragmatic shift rather than an ideological reversal. Recognising the indispensable role of skilled immigrants in the US economy, his administration's move signals a commitment to fostering economic growth and maintaining technological leadership. For Indian professionals, it offers renewed hope, and for US tech companies, it ensures access to the global talent pool they rely on to innovate and thrive.

PICTALK



An elderly woman makes kites for the upcoming Makar Sankranti kite festival, in Hyderabad

The paradox of happiness: Why we fear what we seek

As much as we strive for everlasting joy, we often find ourselves wary of its fleeting nature, hesitating to fully embrace it

If there is one thing that we relentlessly pursue in life—the only thing we put all our pennies on in this big worldly gamble—it is happiness. The ultimate goal that we all crave is everlasting bliss. What charades and circuses we play to attain the state of eternal joy! While this rigmarole governs our everyday thoughts and actions, another element sneaks in as soon as we reach our dream: Fear—the fear of losing the happiness that we know is ephemeral. Come to think of it, much as we covet it, happiness frightens us. It also makes us wary of revealing our joys, and we often hide good things to avoid getting jinxed. Why do we fear happiness? Why do we think every moment of joy comes at a price? The fear of happiness is a paradox embedded in the human psyche. It's almost as if we've been conditioned to believe that joy is too fragile to last, that it carries an expiry date we cannot predict. This belief turns happiness into a double-edged sword: on one side, it is the elation we strive for; on the other, it is the dread of its inevitable end.



Where does this fear originate? Perhaps it stems from a deep-seated awareness of life's impermanence. We've all seen moments of bliss snatched away by unexpected turns of fate. A child's innocent laughter may be followed by tears, a promotion at work may bring unforeseen stress, and a long-anticipated celebration may be marred by tragedy. These experiences condition us to approach happiness with caution, to brace ourselves for the fall even as we revel in the peak. This trepidation finds cultural expressions, too. Superstitions like "knock on wood" or "touch iron" are more than quaint habits; they are safeguards against the perceived fragility of joy. Similarly, the kaala teeka or talisman traditions reflect a universal belief that happiness attracts envy and, by extension,

misfortune. We place such conditions maybe because happiness, unlike sorrow, feels fleeting and illusory. Pain lingers and forces us to adapt, but happiness feels transient, like a butterfly—beautiful, delicate, and always ready to flit away. Is it fair to treat happiness as a precarious treasure? By fearing it, do we not dilute its essence and sabotage our ability to experience it fully? Modern life has made this paradox even more pronounced. With social media encouraging us to share our highs, celebrating joy has become a public event. On one hand, we feel validated by likes and comments; on the other, the exposure amplifies our unease. Will the digital applause somehow disrupt the balance of our good fortune? These questions linger, even as we hit the "share" button with a smile. But perhaps the greater fear is not external—it's internal. Happiness asks us to be present, to be vulnerable, and to believe that we deserve good things. For many, this is a daunting proposition. When shaped by struggles or conditioned to expect the worst, joy feels for-

eign, even undesired. The fear of losing it becomes a defence mechanism, a way of preparing ourselves for the inevitable end of happy times. It is important to recognise that happiness, like all emotions, is inherently fleeting. Accepting its impermanence allows us to savour it without clinging or dreading its end. Happiness deserves the same grace. Vulnerability is the price of true happiness, and the courage to embrace it, however briefly, is what makes life rich. Sharing our joy—whether with loved ones or the world—is not an invitation to misfortune but an act of trust in the abundance of good things. Let's challenge the belief that happiness comes at a cost. Life's highs and lows are inevitable, but they are not always sequential. A moment of joy does not necessitate a subsequent sorrow. Joy, in its purest form, deserves to be embraced—without caution, without apology, and most importantly, without fear. It's all easier said than done, I admit. (The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR

The statesman and a gentleman

Dr Singh's journey from a humble student to a distinguished statesman is a testament to perseverance, intellect and humility



V K BAHUGUNA

As the country mourns the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who breathed his last on 26th December 2024 at the age of 92. The world leaders condone the death of a man who was a common man's Prime Minister and a golden boy of destiny. He ruled the nation for 10 years after having successfully dealt with the economic crisis of 1991 when the then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao appointed him Finance Minister and the rest is history of dismantling the license raj and ushering in economic liberalization of the economy and the nation is grateful to him and the Narsimha Rao for opening up the economy of caged lion that is India the benefits of which the nation is reaping today. I write this article when the country's politics is witnessing high conflicts and drama and the entire gamut of politicians coming from a background which is miles away from Dr Manmohan Singh's academic background as most of the time the politicians are jostling with each other in the quest for power, position and money. The fractured polity of India is the creation of politics of power and money which also seamlessly spreads across sectors of society and administration. Dr Manmohan Singh was born in Pakistan and came to India as a poor student but due to the sheer talent, perseverance and hard work obtained a scholarship and attained high educational qualifications as an economist from the University of Cambridge and Oxford. As an academician and economist, he served the nation with dignity and aplomb as an officer and bureaucrat in the Planning Commission, Chief Economic Advisor and Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Chairman of the University Grant Commission and finally as politician member of Rajya Sabha for more than 30 years and Prime Minister for 10 years. The luck favours the brave as the saying goes and he had plenty of it. No Prime Minister in the past nor the near distant future is going to have such a background



and rich profile as Dr Manmohan Singh has and with this, he has etched his name in the history of India. As such no academician or economist in India could hope to achieve the post of Prime Minister of India considering our varied polity and its nature. Most of the professionals end up on bureaucratic posts and some may occupy the constitutional position of President or Vice-President of India or Governors. Sonia Gandhi will also be remembered for choosing him as Prime Minister of India after she was elected as leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party in the year 2004 and refused to hold the post considering opposition to her foreign origin. The Indian masses specially educated elite and young brains aspiring to be great leaders in many fields including politics must take several lessons from the life of Dr Manmohan Singh. The first, he was talented and humble but more than that he had a very high emotional intelligence. These days lot of people in diverse fields end up failing even though they have high calibre, capability, knowledge and intelligence but lack emotional intelligence. It is the emotional intelligence that frames the mental makeup of individuals reflected in their demeanour while dealing with

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people of diverse background and situations. Second, he had an uncanny talent for perceiving things with poise and confidence coming his way and organizing his capability most efficiently for the benefit of his organizations and ultimately for the country as Prime Minister of India and for his party. Many of our leaders in politics as also in bureaucracy lack poise and confidence and that results in making mistakes at crucial times. Third is how to handle provocative situations and when to be outspoken. This quality is essential while handling diversified issues with conflicting claims and counterclaims in both politics and administration. The fourth is to be silent like when Rahul Gandhi tore a proposed bill of his government publicly, and act firm like a solid rock and take a decision to its logical end without any compromise. The iron will he had shown when while signing the nuclear deal with America had shown his strong commitment and capability to carry his decision to its logical end even though the CPM withdrew support for his government. His government was, however, bailed out by the Samajwadi party but it has shown his strong personality as a national leader while dealing with international diplomacy. This attitude is the

hallmark of excellent leaders who can balance things considering what is best for the governance and the country. The fifth lesson which is most important for today's leaders is; that he was above favouritism, caste or religion and thus deftly handled his government with loyalty to his party leader and the country. However, sometimes the hangers-on in power especially in the bureaucracy do play mischief as observed by this writer nevertheless, such things always happen with all powerful posts and people. Though he was criticised by the opposition he maintained his poise and firmly remained loyal to his way of doing things and because of his scholarly eloquence and demeanours he was respected by all world leaders who mattered in international diplomacy. Dr Manmohan Singh, the academician par excellence, achieved dazzling heights. Such personas are born in politics once in a century or not born at all. I hope the current politicians of his party and the budding politicians/social and administrative aspirants imbibe these virtues to become effective leaders of tomorrow, which India needs today. (The writer is the former Director-General in the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE LEGACY OF MANMOHANOMICS

Madam — In the article Dr. Manmohan Singh's legacy as a pivotal figure in Indian politics and economics is thoughtfully and comprehensively evaluated. Through his tenure as prime minister for two consecutive terms and as finance minister in the 1990s, it recognizes his crucial contribution to the development of contemporary India. His strategic diplomatic engagements and economic liberalisation initiatives, such as the historic civil nuclear agreement between the United States and India, are rightfully hailed as turning points that have improved India's resilience and status in the world. Singh's lasting impact on India's socio-economic structure is also highlighted in the article, from social welfare reforms to Aadhaar-based delivery systems. Nonetheless, it is not afraid to criticize his administration, pointing out his difficulties with coalition politics, the impression of policy paralysis, and corruption scandals that damaged his administration's reputation. His personal integrity and his special status as a technocrat negotiating the turbulent waters of Indian politics are acknowledged in order to counterbalance these criticisms. What is noteworthy is the article's claim that, despite changes in administration, Singh's vision and policies continue to support India's advancement. It is convincing and evidence of Singh's enduring influence that "Manmohanomics" is being promoted as a "Make in India" paradigm for emerging countries. Overall, this article is a contemplative homage to a leader whose accomplishments merit a more lenient assessment from the past. Janvi Rajwani | Ujjain

THE FALLING RUPEE

Madam— Apropos, "Rupee falls further 23 paise to hit fresh record low of 85.5 against US dollars," The Pioneer, Dec 28. Its a cause of concern that rupee has crossed the psychological barrier of 85

Memorial for Dr Singh



In a bid demand to allocate space for a memorial for the former Prime minister of India, Dr. Manmohan

Singh. The people of our country are simply unable to understand why govt of India could not find a location for his cremation and memorial that is befitting of his global stature, record of outstanding achievements, and exemplary service to the nation for decades. Kharge also demanded that Singh's last rites be conducted at a place where a memorial can be built. When Kharge explained the demand and his communication with Modi to CWC, sources said a member of the Gandhi family even suggested that the cremation could be done at Shakti Sthal or Veer Bhumi - the resting places of former PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

against the dollar. It is an all-time low after a steady drop for some weeks, and the rupee is unlikely to rise soon. There are situations when a weaker currency does good to the economy and sometimes, conscious policy initiatives are taken towards that. But that is not the case with India now. Both global and domestic factors have contributed to the weakening of the rupee. India's economic growth has fallen to its lowest level in three quarters and merchandise trade deficits widened. The weaker rupee offers some opportunities. It provides an export advantage and could boost export-oriented industries like textiles. Incentives may be offered to such industries and suitable trade strategies can be formulated in their favour. Meanwhile, domestic manufacturing and productivity should be improved and reliance on imports should be reduced as they will become costlier. But, a weaker rupee fuels inflation as imported goods and services become dearer. RBI interventions and other

measures will provide only temporary relief. The lasting solution to rupee depreciation and other global challenges is to strengthen the domestic economy by improving production and increasing exports. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

PROVIDE MEDICAL HELP TO DALLEWAL

Madam — Apropos to providing medical help to Dallelwal. The Supreme Court has clarified in clear terms to provide medical help to the agitating farm leader to save his life and deal with the resisting crowd with iron hand if required. However the state government representatives have expressed their reservations of taking the risk of physical jostling with the resistance. The point to ponder is who is then going to do the needful if not the state authorities putting the credibility of the Supreme Court order in question. R S Narula | Patiala

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE CHALLENGES OF A NOBLE PROFESSION

Despite their vital role, educators remain undervalued and overstressed, leading to burnout



SAKSHI SETHI

The teaching profession, often referred to as one of the noblest vocations, faces significant challenges in today's world. As society evolves, so do the expectations placed upon educators. Despite their pivotal role in shaping future generations, teachers grapple with numerous issues ranging from inadequate compensation to increased workloads and shifting societal dynamics. Addressing these challenges is crucial towards ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of education systems worldwide.

Today, one of the most pressing issues for teachers is the sheer volume of work they manage. Beyond classroom teaching, educators are tasked with lesson planning, grading, administrative duties, and even participating in extracurricular activities. This workload which quite often extends beyond school hours, leaves little time for their family life or personal development. Even the pressure to meet standardized testing benchmarks and adaptiveness to diverse student needs adds to their stress levels, contributing to burnout and high attrition rates within the profession. Despite the critical importance of their role, many teachers feel undervalued and underpaid. In numerous countries, teacher salaries lag behind those of other professions requiring similar levels of education and expertise.

This financial disparity not only affects their quality of life but also discourages talented individuals from entering the profession. There is no denying that recognition for the hard work and dedication put up by a teacher is very limited which nowadays is diminishing their morale and job satisfaction. The integration of technology into education has trans-



formed teaching methodologies, requiring teachers to continually update their skills. While digital tools have enhanced learning experiences, they also demand significant effort from educators to adapt and implement effectively. The shift to online and hybrid learning models during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored this challenge, highlighting gaps in training and access to resources. Not only adaptations towards new learning models but another complexity that a teacher faces is classroom management.

With the advent of Gen Alpha, the role of a teacher has become increasingly complex as they now have to deal with a wide range of student behaviours and needs. Issues such as bullying, mental health challenges, and lack of discipline have increased enormously, and the abolishment of corporal punishments requires educators to act as counsellors and mediators in addition to their teaching roles. At the same time, rising parental expectations and involvement have also created added pressure, with some parents demanding individualized attention for their children. Despite so many challenges, there are multiple opportunities to improve the teaching profession and support educators. Increased investment in education systems, including better salaries and benefits, can help attract and retain talented teachers. It is extremely important to know that teaching is the only profession that creates other professions.

Promoting a culture of respect and appreciation for teachers, by recognizing their contributions through awards, public acknowledgement, and meaningful feedback can boost morale and reaffirm their value to society. The challenges faced by teachers today are multifaceted and require comprehensive solutions. By addressing issues such as workload, compensation, and training, society can ensure that educators are equipped and motivated to excel in their roles. Supporting teachers is not just an investment in their well-being but in the future of the students they inspire and educate. It is imperative to honour their dedication and create conditions that allow them to thrive, for the benefit of all.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Reaching for the stars, ruining the earth



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

In 2024, a year of rising conflicts and environmental crises, the race for space supremacy highlights a paradox: we look to the stars while neglecting our planet

That was a harrowing near-miss. Trump endured an assassination attempt, and the ensuing spectacle was nothing short of fantastical. As he emerged, emboldened and defiant, a self-proclaimed martyr rallying Americans to "fight...fight...fight," the undercurrent of turmoil in the U.S. political sphere became irrefutable. Following the attack, responsibility was squarely placed on the Secret Service, prompting the resignation of its chief, Kimberly Cheatle. However, the pivotal question is not about security oversights but rather the significance of his survival.

The fact that Trump has now emerged from such an ordeal only solidifies his centrality in American political discourse. His rhetoric will escalate to unprecedented levels of provocation, further inflaming a deeply divided nation. As January 20 nears and he ascends to the presidency as the 47th leader, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: America is on the precipice of a more ominous epoch. This is not merely about one man's political endurance—it is about the disintegration of American society itself, driven to the brink by long-standing forces in motion. On the broader geopolitical stage, 2024 has been a year of unsettling reconfigurations.

In Asia, China's dominance over Taiwan is undeniable, with global consensus growing that Beijing's ambitions will not yield to Western opposition. For years, the U.S. has provoked China through military deployments and arms to Taiwan. Yet, China's psychological and economic warfare has shifted the global balance of power, eroding America's influence in the Pacific. Despite this, the U.S. persists, its foreign policy increasingly marked by desperation and entrenched arrogance. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine, now in its third year, serves as a painful reminder of the West's misguided strategy of intervention. NATO's resolve is deteriorating, and support for Kyiv is dwindling in many Western capitals as the economic cost of the war becomes more pronounced. Public disillusionment with the conflict is palpable, yet the U.S. continues to allocate resources to a war with no clear resolution in sight.

The arms industry flourishes, and NATO's failure to pursue a diplomatic resolution leaves a bitter aftertaste, as Russia, empowered by internal European divisions, presses its advantage. In 2024 alone, the global arms trade reached a staggering \$632 billion, with much of that revenue enriching manufacturers who profit from relentless destruction. The grim reality is that war has evolved into a lucrative enterprise, sustaining the military-industrial complex while civilians bear the cost.

A similar dynamic is unfolding in West Asia, where Israel's military actions against Palestine and Lebanon have extended into Syria by year's end, driven by a voracious expansionist agenda, all under the protective mantle of U.S. support. The missile exchanges between Iran and Israel risk escalating into full-scale warfare, with no resolution in sight. Yet, the West remains obsessively focused on preserving its hegemonic power, blatantly disregarding the mounting humanitarian catastrophes. In parallel, the Arab world exposes its deep-seated fragmen-



INDIA IS POISED TO BECOME THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST ECONOMY WITHIN FIVE YEARS, YET RISING TENSIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES PRESENT AN OPPORTUNITY TO REASSESS THE TRUE NATURE OF AMERICA'S 'ASIA PIVOT'

tation, driven by centuries-old dogmas and self-serving political agendas, all of which continue to wreak havoc on the lives of millions of Muslims.

The situation in South Asia mirrors this instability. With the reelection of Narendra Modi and the BJP, India is significantly expanding its global influence, even as internal crises—such as communal violence in the Northeast and Kashmir—continue to intensify, with the government blaming its negligence. India is poised to become the world's third-largest economy within five years, yet rising tensions with the United States present an opportunity to reassess the true nature of America's 'Asia Pivot.' As tensions escalate in Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan, the region teeters on the brink of broader conflict. Political instability in Bangladesh, exacerbated by alleged U.S.-sponsored people's protests that ousted Sheikh Hasina, and fragile politics in Nepal, which increasingly aligns with China, further fuel the growing unease.

Sri Lanka and the Maldives, after years of political turmoil, have found a degree of stability by year's end. Sri Lanka, in particular, has experienced a remarkable political shift, with a single party securing a supermajority in parliament, now populated by a wave of inexperienced young politicians.

While the Maldives continues to navigate its political challenges, South Asia—often dismissed as a 'dead regional idea'—remains a crucial player in global geopolitics. Meanwhile, in 2024, Africa boldly rejects colonial influence, with nations like Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Chad expelling French forces and reclaiming sovereignty. Yet, the continent's vast resources fuel a neocolonial

scramble, exposing deep-rooted corruption and divisive leadership. Despite efforts to break free, Africa remains trapped by external exploitation and the greed of its elites, hindering true autonomy and progress. At the same time, the relentless march of artificial intelligence in 2024 highlights a more subtle threat: the obliteration of labour.

Entire industries, from retail to finance, have been disrupted by automation, leaving millions of workers displaced. In the U.S., unemployment rates hovered around 4.5% in 2024, but these statistics scarcely reflect the many individuals who have been relegated to underemployment or excluded from the labour market entirely. Meanwhile, global projections suggest that job displacement due to automation will increase by up to 30% over the next decade. While the technocrats celebrate AI's progress, millions are left behind. Simultaneously, the integration of AI into military systems raises the frightening possibility of autonomous warfare, where human lives are subject to the whims of algorithms.

In 2024, climate change worsened, but leaders offered only empty words. The COP29 collapse highlighted the wealthiest nations' evasion of responsibility, leaving the vulnerable to suffer while the crisis, fueled by inequality and unchecked industrialisation, deepened. By 2024, over 700 million people worldwide were living in extreme poverty, with hunger rates climbing sharply due to both the economic pressures of conflict and climate-related calamities. For many, securing enough food to survive has become an increasingly insurmountable struggle. In space, the race for hegemony reached new heights, as the U.S.,

China, and private corporations competed for supremacy in the cosmos.

Yet, one must question: why are such vast resources being allocated to space exploration when the world's most pressing issues remain unaddressed? The billions being invested in Mars colonisation could be better used to address the problems on Earth, yet the Western obsession with space reflects a deeper sense of hubris.

Humanity looks to the stars but fails to confront the crises that are unfolding on its soil. The year 2024 will be remembered as one that exposed the profound contradictions of our age. The Western world is at war with itself, consumed by political divisions, economic inequality, and an incapacity to respond to the genuine challenges of our time. The rise of populism, authoritarianism, and unchecked technological advancement portends a future in which the divide between the rich and the poor widens, and the planet teeters on the brink of environmental collapse. In this environment, the struggle for survival will no longer be merely political—it will be existential.

We are increasingly forfeiting our collective responsibility, continuing to vie for better accommodations in a sinking vessel, fully aware that we are all doomed to submerge. As we enter 2025, may we dare to confront the tumult of our times with the audacity to question everything, forging a future that challenges the very forces seeking to dominate us. Wishing you a year of purpose and unity.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Veganism: A resolution for health, planet, and compassion

Beyond being a dietary choice, veganism offers transformative benefits for personal health, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare.

As the year winds down, it is natural to reflect on the resolutions that were made in January. While there would be some of us who could hold on to their resolutions and some others who could not. However, there is no reason to feel lost. Making a New Year's resolution itself is a combination of awareness about oneself and a conscious decision to do better. Even setting a goal is a step in the right direction; this is more than most people manage.

Being vegan once seen as a fringe lifestyle choice, appears to be occupying an increasingly bigger place not only in the West but also in India. Reports indicate that vegan diets create 75% fewer



PRASHANTH VISHWANATH

greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming, as well as much less water pollution and wildlife damage. Fruits and vegetables, legumes, and grains require less energy, land, and water to produce than animal-derived diets. While diet seems to be the biggest concern for those wanting to

make the switch fact is that veganism is not just about diet, it is a lifestyle that refrains people from any form of animal exploitation. **Veganuary- the global behaviour**

change organisation encouraging people to try vegan in January and beyond- understands the importance of building a supportive community. Prashanth Vishwanath, who heads the organisation in India says "We know it takes a whole ecosystem to form positive habits. That's why we work with brands, restaurants and retailers to make plant-based products more accessible. Our 11 celebrity ambassadors from India show how they're on top of their game while eating

vegan. And anyone trying vegan with us receives more than 10 free resources including daily support emails. The idea is to make the transition to eating more plant-based as fun and rewarding as possible." **Building the 'try vegan' ecosystem**

Collaborating with brands in January 2024, 140 Indian firms participated in the Veganuary movement, launching new goods, special deals, and menu items. More than 40 new goods were launched in India, ranging from vegan eggs to curry meal sets. Nature's Basket, Amazon Fresh, Hilton Hotels, Big Basket, and Hard Rock Cafe were among the firms that participated, and the cam-



paign anticipates that many more will join this year. **Celebrity support** Veganuary's Indian Ambassadors include film stars, professional athletes, and mountaineers, with Mallika Sherawat being the most recent addition. They are passionate about it and

they have literally helped show millions of people how enriching plant-based eating can be. They send a loud and obvious message: a plant-based diet is a huge advantage for looking good on screen, channeling inner creativity, and fueling world record

feats. Free resources Annual Veganuary campaigns that encourage people to try vegan for a month as the new year rolls in come with an impressive list of free goodies to make the transition enjoyable and hassle-free.

Participants gain access to a digital celebrity cookbook, with vegan recipes from Indian and global celebrities, a complete vegan starter kit, with comprehensive answers to any questions about adopting a plant-based diet and a lot more.

In India, embracing veganism is especially practical, thanks to the wide range of naturally vegan foods that are culturally familiar, and easy to prepare taking out the need for expensive or

exotic ingredients. It just needs a little bit of planning to ensure it meets all the necessary nutrients.

The list of vegan food varieties is expanding every day, offering plenty of options to not only nourish your body but also delight your taste buds.

So, whether it's for your health, the planet, or compassion for animals, embracing a plant-based lifestyle is more accessible than ever. With the right support and an abundance of options, choosing to eat better could be the most rewarding resolution you take on this year.

(The writer is Country Director for India, Veganuary; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS



EEPC India bats for 'faceless' GST audit system

The Engineering Export Promotion Council (EEPC), India on Sunday proposed the introduction of a "faceless" GST audit system to boost ease of doing business in the country. The apex engineering exports promotion body's proposal comes following the successful implementation of "faceless assessment" by the Income Tax department. "The faceless GST audit system, by using technology and ensuring anonymity, will reduce compliance costs. A faceless system will streamline procedures allowing MSMEs to focus on growth and innovation," said Pankaj Chadha, chairman of EEPC India. The proposal is a part of EEPC India's Budget 2025 recommendation. By introducing a "faceless" GST audit system, India can further improve its ranking in the Ease of Doing Business index, making it a more attractive destination for foreign investors, it said. It also proposed that Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM) related liabilities should be eligible for the 'Amnesty Scheme' to address challenges faced by exporters, who may be unaware of foreign bank charges and foreign business services.



India's exports to Australia up 64.4 pc

India's exports to its trade agreement partner Australia rose 64.4 per cent year-on-year to USD 643.7 million in November on account of healthy growth in sectors such as textiles, chemicals and agricultural products, according to the commerce ministry data. However, the country's merchandise exports recorded a decline of 5.21 per cent year-on-year to USD 5.56 billion during April-November 2024-25, the preliminary data showed. India and Australia implemented an interim trade pact -- Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) -- on December 29, 2022 and are now in negotiations to widen the scope of the pact and make it a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). On the completion of two years of ECTA, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the agreement has brought with it increased market access for Indian exporters, expanded opportunities for MSMEs and farmers, and generated several employment avenues. It has also enabled growth in exports by 14 per cent in 2023-24; notable boost in IT/ITeS, business and travel services; and port-study work and work holiday visas, he said in a post on social media platform.



Reliance's Jamnagar 'super' refinery completes 25 yrs

Twenty-five years ago, on December 28, 1999, Reliance launched its first refinery at Jamnagar, Gujarat. The refinery overnight turned India from a fuel deficit nation to a self-sufficient one and later into a surplus, exporting gasoline and gasoil to Europe and the US. Today, Jamnagar has become the world's refining hub - an engineering marvel that is India's pride. When Reliance Industries Ltd, India's most valuable company, first spoke of building an oil refinery to process and convert crude oil pumped out of ground and from below seabed, into fuels like petrol (gasoline) and diesel (gasoil), majority of the experts had said that it would be impossible for an Indian company to set up the world's largest grassroots refinery in three years. But Reliance achieved that in a world-record time of just 33 months, notwithstanding lack of infrastructure and a severe cyclone that had hit Jamnagar then, sources aware of the matter said. More importantly, the 27 million tonnes a year (560,000 barrels per day) capacity unit was built at nearly 40 per cent lesser cost (per tonne) in comparison to contemporary refineries in Asia.

Govt cancels auction of 11 critical mineral blocks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has cancelled the auction of 11 critical mineral blocks in the fourth round due to poor response.

While no bids were received for four blocks, the remaining seven mines got less than three technically qualified bidders, according to the annulment notice.

The four blocks which include tungsten and glauconite, are located in the states of Chhattisgarh and Arunachal Pradesh.

"Since there were nil bids received...the auction process for four mineral blocks stands annulled," the notice said.

Critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play crucial roles in the production of clean energy technologies, ranging from wind turbines to electric vehicles.

"Since there were less than three technically qualified bidders...the auction process of these seven mineral blocks stands annulled," the notice said.

The government had earlier cancelled the auction of three critical mineral blocks in



Critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play crucial roles in the production of clean energy technologies, ranging from wind turbines to electric vehicles

the third round, 14 blocks in the second round, and 14 in the first tranche of critical minerals as the response was lukewarm. The government had earlier said that 24 critical and strategic mineral blocks have been sold in four rounds of auction.

"Out of 48 blocks put to e-auction, 24 have been successfully auctioned, including four mining lease (ML) and 20 composite licenses (CL) blocks," the mines ministry had said.

India is all set to launch a Critical Mineral Mission in the upcoming year to secure vital resources for green energy and

technology. The initiative involves government, industry, and research collaboration, focusing on acquiring overseas assets like lithium and cobalt, particularly in Australia, and boosting domestic mining through auctions and roadshows.

With a series of high-profile roadshows abroad along with plans to acquire critical mineral assets in Australia, India is set to woo international investors and make its mark on the global mining map.

The countries are now racing in a bid to secure these vital resources, which include lithi-

um and cobalt, through a complex web of policies and alliances, realising that critical minerals are the new lifeblood of the 21st-century economy.

According to an estimate by the World Bank, by 2050, the production of minerals, including lithium and cobalt, will need to increase by nearly 500 per cent in a bid to meet the growing demand for clean energy technologies.

At the same time, the International Energy Agency foresees that the rise in electric vehicles and battery storage will speed up the demand for these minerals at least 30 times by 2040.

'High employee attrition in private banks pose operational risk'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Employee attrition in private sector banks has witnessed an increase to about 25 per cent and this high turnover rate poses significant operational risk, according to the latest Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24.

Employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks and small finance banks (SFBs), the report, which was released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said.

The total number of employees of private banks surpassed that of public sector banks (PSBs) during 2023-24, but their attrition has increased sharply over the last three years, with average attrition rate of around 25 per cent, it said.

"High attrition and employee turnover rate pose significant operational risks, including disruption in customer services, besides leading to loss of institutional knowledge and increased recruitment costs. In various interactions with banks, the Reserve Bank has stressed that reducing attrition is not just a human resource function but a strategic imper-



ative," it said.

Banks need to implement strategies like improved onboarding processes, providing extensive training and career development opportunities, mentorship programmes, competitive benefits, and a supportive workplace culture to build long-term employee engagement, it said.

In view of several irregularities observed in grant of loans against gold ornaments and jewellery, including top-up loans, the Reserve Bank advised supervised entities to comprehensively review their policies, processes and practices on gold loans to identify gaps and initiate appropriate remedial measures in a time-bound manner. Supervised entities were advised to closely monitor their gold loan portfolios and ensure adequate controls over outsourced activities and third-party service providers, it said.

BUDGET 2025-26 CII calls for cut in excise duty on fuel to stir demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII in its budget suggestions for 2025-26 has recommended lowering the excise duty on fuel to boost consumption, especially at the lower income level, arguing that fuel prices significantly drive inflation. The budget could also consider reducing marginal tax rates for personal income up to Rs 20 lakh per annum. This would help trigger the virtuous cycle of consumption, higher growth and higher tax revenue, said CII. Asserting that the gap between the highest marginal rate for individuals at 42.74 per cent and the normal Corporate Tax Rate at 25.17 per cent, is high, it said, inflation has reduced the buying power of lower and middle-income earners.

"The central excise duty alone accounts for approximately 21 per cent of the retail price for petrol and 18 per cent for diesel. Since May 2022, these duties have not been adjusted in line



with the approximately 40 per cent decrease in global crude prices. Lowering excise duty on fuel would help reduce overall inflation and increase disposable incomes," the industry body said. Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII, said domestic consumption has been critical to India's growth story, but inflationary pressures have somewhat eroded the purchasing power of consumers.

"Government interventions could focus on enhancing disposable incomes and stimulating spending to sustain economic momentum. Persistent food inflationary pressures particularly impinge upon low-income rural households who allocate larger share to food in their consumption basket," he added.

Markets to end 2024 with positive returns despite roller coaster ride

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dalal Street had a roller coaster ride in 2024 from shattering record after record to facing heavy correction off-late but equity markets still rewarded investors with positive returns, driven by a surge in domestic fund flows and a resilient macro landscape.

The first half of the year saw robust corporate earnings, a surge in domestic flows, and a resilient macro landscape, driving the Nifty to an all-time high of 26,277.35 in September 2024, according to Motilal Oswal Wealth Management.

"In the last two months, the market has corrected from its all-time high. This correction marked the third major decline since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with unprecedented selling by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) due to a combination of domestic and global factors," it said in a note.

As of December 27, the BSE



benchmark Sensex has gained 6,458.81 points or 8.94 per cent while the NSE Nifty climbed 2,082 points or 9.58 per cent. The year was marked by significant events, with the Indian general elections and the US Presidential polls taking centre stage.

Equity markets also grappled with two major geopolitical turmoil -- the Israel-Iran conflict and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.

"2024, was a year of tug of war between the bulls & bears

marked by volatility majorly driven by global microeconomic data points followed by geopolitical tensions impacting markets. Despite all the uncertainties around the world, Indian markets sustained the pressure and delivered very decent returns.

"It was also a year of surge in valuation to the peak making Indian markets the most expensive in the world. While the excess liquidity in the market pushed valuations as high as possible surpassing funda-

mentals theories which eventually invited corrections in the markets from the top," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP Research, Research Analyst, Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 on September 27 this year, and the NSE Nifty also reached the lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day.

"2024 marked the ninth consecutive year of gains for the Indian equity market. Despite a challenging final quarter, the market delivered strong returns for the year, with midcap and smallcap stocks outperforming and rewarding investors handsomely.

"However, benchmark indices like the Nifty and Sensex lagged behind their global counterparts, particularly the US markets. This underperformance was largely driven by persistent and aggressive selling by FIIs," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Foodgrain output set to scale new peak as farm sector eyes 4 pc growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by favourable monsoon, though significant challenges persist in pulses and oilseeds production as the country's agricultural sector shows signs of robust recovery.

The Agriculture Ministry's initial projections paint an optimistic picture, with kharif (summer) foodgrain production estimated at a record 164.7 million tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year ending June 2025.

Winter crop planting has maintained steady progress, with wheat sown across 29.31 million hectares as of mid-December 2024, while total rabi (winter) crops cover 55.88 million hectares.

"We had a good kharif crop because of normal rainfall," Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi told PTI.

"Overall, the crop prospect for the whole year looks promising," he added, though cautioning against potential heat



waves in February-March that could affect the winter wheat harvest.

The agricultural sector is projected to bounce back strongly, with growth projections of 3.5-4 per cent in 2024-25, up from 1.4 per cent in the previous fiscal year.

Agri-economist S Mahendra Dev attributes this improvement to "good monsoon and rise in rural demand".

This growth comes despite localised floods and droughts affecting crops in parts of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Climate change-induced weather anomalies have particularly impacted

onion and tomato yields in certain regions.

However, the path ahead isn't without hurdles.

To address the persistent challenge of self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, the government will roll out the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) in 2025, backed by a substantial budget of Rs 10,103 crore. The initiative aims to reduce import dependency through targeted interventions and increased support prices.

The horticulture sector has shown remarkable progress, with record production of fruits and vegetables. The success is attributed to improved farming practices and technology adoption under various government schemes.

The sector is witnessing increased technological adoption, with drones and AI-driven tools gaining traction. "These innovations offer immense potential to enhance productivity," said Ashish Dobhal, CEO of UPL Sustainable AgriSolutions.

Markets to track FII trading, macroeco data, global trends: Analysts



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Macroeconomic data announcements, trading activity of foreign investors and global trends will guide equity market movement this week, which would also mark the beginning of the new calendar year and month, analysts said.

Movement of rupee, which registered the steepest fall in almost two years to hit its lifetime intra-day low on Friday, will also be tracked by investors.

"Persistent FIIs (Foreign Institutional Investors) selling has been a source of pressure on Indian markets, and their stance in the new year could shape near-term trends. Meanwhile, monthly auto sales data will also be closely watched. As the Q3 earnings season approaches, corporate quarterly updates will begin trickling in, setting the stage for market expectations," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

On the international front, key economic indicators like

manufacturing PMI data from China and the US, along with US jobless claims, will play a crucial role, Meena said.

However, the dollar index and US bond yields remain the most critical factors influencing the direction of global markets, he added.

Auto stocks will also remain in the limelight this week amid monthly sales data announcement.

"As we step into the new calendar year and month, auto sales data will be closely monitored for initial market cues. In the absence of any significant events, attention is likely to shift toward FII flows and currency movement, especially as the rupee continues to weaken against the US dollar. These factors could play a crucial role in shaping market direction in the near term," Ajit Mishra -- SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 657.48 points, or 0.84 per cent, and the Nifty went up 225.9 points, or 0.95 per cent.

India to boost power generation, transmission infra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will set up more coal-fired and hydro-power plants and ramp up transmission infrastructure to achieve round-the-clock 'Power for All' in 2025, besides meeting rising demand fueled by economic expansion.

To meet the growing energy demand, the government has devised a major plan for power generation capacity addition and the expansion of transmission infrastructure.

According to Minister of State for Power Shripad Yesso Naik, India can definitely achieve '24x7' power for all with all the efforts

in the ministry under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "We can do it. In 2025, we will be almost there to have 24x7 power for all in the country," Naik said.

He also said that the government is ready to support the expansion plan of the power sector in view of rising demand.

According to government estimates, peak power demand is expected to touch 270 GW in the summer season in 2025, up from the record high of 250 GW in May 2024 and 243 GW in September 2023. The peak power demand is estimated to reach a level of 446 GW by 2035.



The Ministry of Power along with states, has planned about 80 GW by 2031-32. Besides about 14 GW of hydro projects and 6,050 MW Pumped Storage Projects (PSP) are under construction. About 24.22 GW of

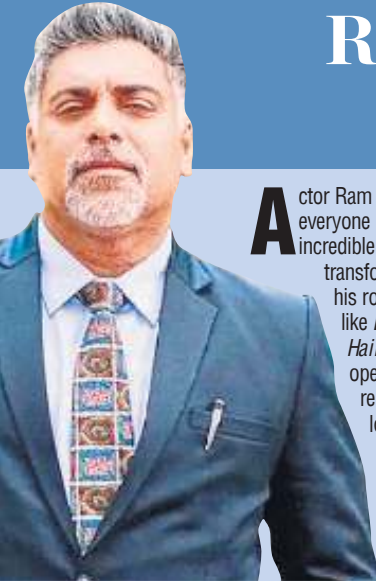
hydroelectric projects and 50,76GW MW of PSP are under various stages of planning and are targeted to be completed by 2031-32.

About 7,300 MW of Nuclear Capacity is under construction and 7,000 MW is under various stages of planning and approval. Besides, the government will also add about 300 GW of renewable energy capacity to have 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based power generation by 2030.

To evacuate electricity from the additional power generation capacity, the government has planned an investment of Rs 9.16 lakh crore to ramp up transmission infrastructure by 2032 to meet the rising demand for electricity.

Chairman, CII National Power Committee, and Managing Director, Adani Energy Solutions Anil Sardana said, "With significant strides in renewable energy integration, grid modernisation, and an unwavering commitment to carbon reduction, the sector has taken a giant leap towards meeting both domestic and global energy demands."

Ram Kapoor reflects on his weight-loss journey: 'It's not about scale but feeling strong'



Actor Ram Kapoor has left everyone in awe with his incredible physical transformation. Known for his roles in popular shows like *Bade Achhe Lagte Hain*, Kapoor has now opened up about his remarkable journey of losing 55 kilograms over the course of 18 months. His transformation has become an inspiration for

many, proving that with determination and a mindset shift, it is possible to take charge of one's health and life. Kapoor shared the challenges he faced while being overweight and the turning point that pushed him to embark on his weight loss journey. At his heaviest, Kapoor weighed in at 140 kilograms, a time when he was working on projects like *Akshay* and *Jubilee*. He admits that his weight impacted his health significantly. "I was diabetic, had a foot injury and felt breathless after walking just 20

steps," Kapoor revealed. "I struggled with basic movement and it became clear that I couldn't go on forever like this." It was during this period that Kapoor realised the importance of prioritising his health. "I have two children and I felt the need to set a positive example for them by taking care of myself," he shared. This realisation became the catalyst for his journey to lose weight in a natural, sustainable way. The actor emphasised that his transformation was deeply personal. "Over the last six months, I pushed

myself to shed 55 kgs, bringing me down to 85 kgs. The transformation is deeply personal," said Kapoor, reflecting on his progress. He proudly shared that his weight loss journey was achieved the "old-fashioned way"—without surgery or external aids. "For me, it was about a complete mental and physical reset. I didn't go for quick fixes or shortcuts. It was a complete change in lifestyle, habits and mindset. It wasn't just about willpower, it was about realising that this had to be a lifelong change." Discussing the additional challenges

of losing weight in his 50s, Kapoor said, "It's definitely harder. As you age, your body responds differently. It's not about following a diet for a few months; it's about changing who you are as a person. It was about changing my eating habits, sleep routine, exercise regimen, and incorporating fasting intervals," he explained. For Kapoor, fitness is not defined by a number on the scale. "It's not about the number on the scale; it's about how you feel—strong, energetic and healthy," he emphasised.

BLAKE LIVELY'S LAWSUIT AGAINST JUSTIN BALDONI TAKES NEW TURN

Blake Lively has found herself at the center of a legal storm after filing a lawsuit against actor-director Justin Baldoni, accusing him of sexual harassment and launching a smear campaign aimed at damaging her reputation. As new details surrounding the case continue to emerge, Lively has received backing from her co-stars, celebrity friends and the producers of the film *It Ends With Us*, the movie that sparked the controversy. There have been reports that Justin Baldoni plans to file a counter-lawsuit, alleging that Lively's team orchestrated a smear campaign by planting damaging stories about him during the film's promotional tour. However, Lively's publicist has vehemently denied these claims. In a statement issued to People, Lively's publicist explained the situation. "I was contacted on 8/11 by Sara Nathan (Melissa Nathan's sister) forwarding an anonymous tip that Page Six received, regarding allegations of HR complaints on the set of *It Ends With Us*," the publicist said. "After that, I was contacted by various press outlets asking about allegations of HR complaints. When contacted, I responded to press questions by referring them to Wayfarer or Sony for information regarding HR complaints."

The statement further clarified Lively's position, addressing Baldoni's accusations directly. "It's clear that Baldoni and his Wayfarer Associates are suggesting that I originated press stories about HR complaints on set, which is false, which provides the details of the campaign against my client," the statement continued. "I am not going to speak to when or how many lawsuits we are filing but when we file our first lawsuit, it is going to shock everyone who has been manipulated into believing a demonstrably false narrative. It will be supported by real evidence and tell the true story. In over 30 years of practicing, I have never seen this level of unethical behaviour intentionally fueled through media manipulation." According to Lively's legal team, the actor has been the victim of a calculated "social manipulation" campaign aimed at sabotaging her reputation. The campaign, the statement alleges, has caused significant harm to Lively's business and resulted in "severe emotional distress" for her family. The controversy surrounding *It Ends With Us* had already been making headlines earlier this year due to a rumored rift between Lively and Baldoni. The tension seemed to escalate when both actors were seen separately at the film's premiere, and none of the cast followed Baldoni back on Instagram after he followed them. As the legal battle continues to unfold, it remains to be seen how the case will progress and what further details will emerge. Lively and her team are poised to take legal action, promising a shock to those who have bought into what they deem a false narrative.

James Gunn on delay in release of *The Batman 2*

DC Studios co-chairman James Gunn defended the delay of *The Batman 2* and called it a common practice in the making of sequels. The director has defended the choice by recounting the gap between the sequels of hit films like *Alien*, *Incredibles*, *Terminator*, *Avatar*, *Top Gun* and others. Warner Bros announced the new release date of *The Batman 2*, a few days ago. Marking a postponement of one year from its original release date, the film is now slated to release in theatres worldwide on October 1, 2027, reported Deadline. James justified the delay and wrote, "To be fair, a 5-year gap or more is fairly common in sequels. 7 years between *Alien* and *Aliens*. 14 years between *Incredibles*. 7 years between the first two *Terminators*. 13 years between *Avatars*. 36 years between *Top Guns*. And, of course, 6 years between *Guardians Vol 2* and *Vol 3*." According to the report of Deadline, James confirmed the move was writing-related after the announcement. He wrote, "Sure. Yes, it is true. The only reason for the delay is there isn't a full script (those of you who follow me here probably know that already). Matt is committed to making the best film he possibly can, and no one can accurately guess exactly how long a script will take to write. Once there is a finished script, there is around two years for pre-production, shooting and post-production on big films." The vacant release date by *The Batman 2* has been taken over by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's untitled project with Tom Cruise.

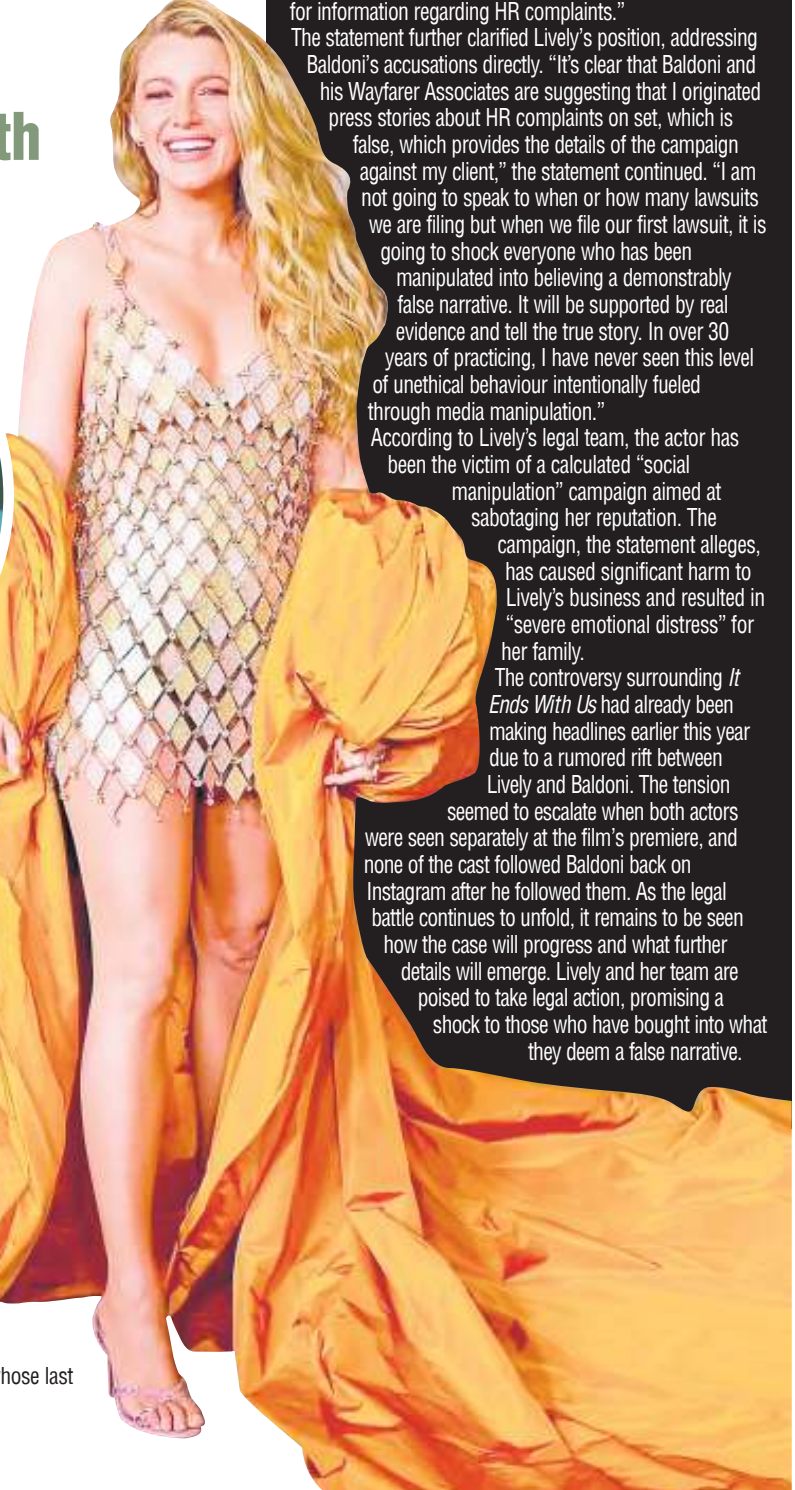
Sharvari 'harnesses' her last working day with *Alpha* actions

Bollywood actress Sharvari, who rose to prominence with *Munija*, punched her last working day of 2024 on the sets of her upcoming movie *Alpha*. On Sunday, the actress took to the stories section of her Instagram and shared a picture of her harness from the sets of the movie. She wrote on the picture, "Harness-ing my last working day of 2024 energy #Alpha. Grateful for each working day of 24. A year that has particularly been a testing one. Going to work has been my biggest blessing, has kept me motivated & going." *Alpha* is produced by Aditya Chopra and is a part of the YRF spy-universe. It is directed by Shiv Rawail, who is known for the streaming series *The Railway Men* which was also produced by YRF. It is the first female-led film from the spy-universe, and also stars Alia Bhatt and Anil Kapoor. The film's title was unveiled in a special video by the makers. In the title reveal video, Alia Bhatt is heard saying, "The 1st letter of Greek alphabet and the motive of our program. The first, the fastest of all and the bravest of all. Look carefully, you will find a jungle in each city. And the Alpha will always rule the jungle." The video dismisses the notion that only men can be alphas. In the film, both Alia and Sharvari play super-agents and it looks like Aditya Chopra is presenting them as the Alpha girls of the pack in spy-universe. Created by producer Aditya Chopra, the YRF spy includes blockbusters like *Ek Tha Tiger*, *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *War*, *Pathaan* and *Tiger 3*. The films lined up for the spy-universe include *War 2* with Hrithik Roshan and NTR Jr in the lead, *Pathaan 2* and *Tiger vs Pathaan*.



Salman Khan, Sajid Nadiadwala end 2024 with bhai's swag & style

Bollywood megastar Salman Khan returns to the big screen in style with *Sikandar*, a cinematic spectacle produced by his long-time collaborator and close friend Sajid Nadiadwala. The much-anticipated teaser, which has set the internet ablaze, showcases Salman in a never-seen-before avatar brimming with charisma, power, and his trademark swag. With jaw-dropping visuals and high-octane action, *Sikandar* promises to redefine cinematic grandeur. Adding to the excitement is the involvement of celebrated director A.R. Murugadoss, who brings his mastery of storytelling and action-packed narratives to the project. The teaser is further elevated by an electrifying background score composed by the acclaimed Santosh Narayanan, whose music perfectly complements the intensity and grandeur of the visuals. The pounding beats and soulful melodies add another layer of brilliance, making *Sikandar* a full-blown cinematic spectacle. In a bold and unprecedented move, the makers have chosen a YouTube-only approach for unveiling the teaser, ensuring that audiences around the globe get the richest possible viewing experience for this larger-than-life extravaganza. The decision highlights the filmmakers' immense confidence in the film's visual brilliance and impact, allowing viewers to experience the full majesty of *Sikandar* in high-definition from the comfort of their screens. With its compelling storyline, larger-than-life action and Salman Khan's undeniable charisma, *Sikandar* is set to be one of the biggest films of the year. This film also marks another milestone in the celebrated partnership between Sajid Nadiadwala and Salman Khan, whose last venture, *Kick*, became a Rs 300 crore blockbuster.



FUN

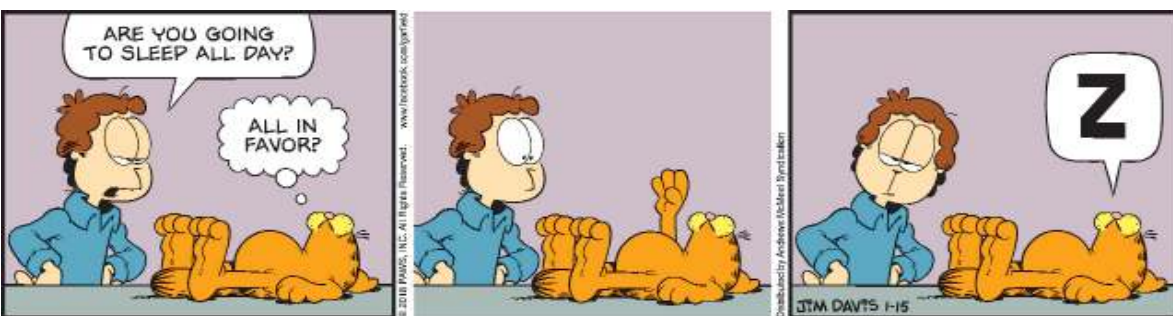
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



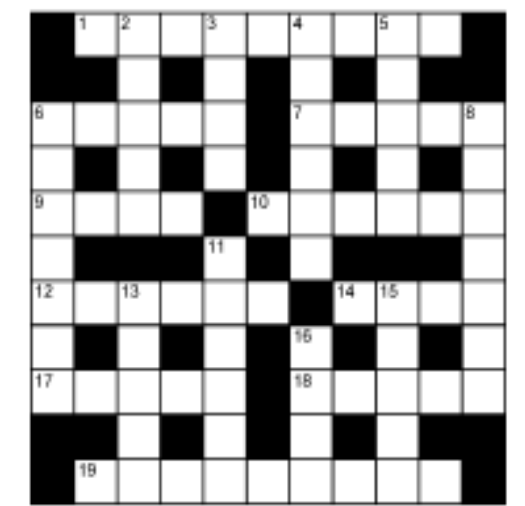
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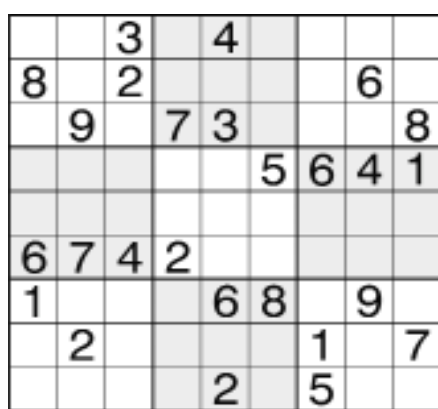
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- 1 A pain in your mouth
- 6 Under
- 7 Smash
- 8 A weekday
- 9 A huge person
- 11 Film theatre
- 10 Boil water in this
- 13 Rest from work and take it easy
- 12 Scared
- 15 Big
- 14 Lost blood
- 16 Tame animals kept at home
- 17 Cut into two equal parts
- 18 Sooner than expected
- 19 Completely tired out

DOWN

- 2 Sea
- 3 Carry away
- 4 Quarrelled
- 5 This beats rhythmically inside your chest



Vijayawada

'Doctors aren't just lifesavers; they're human too'

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Amir Ali is a name that resonates with versatility and passion in the entertainment industry. With a career spanning from television to different other mediums, Amir has proven time and again that he is more than just an actor—he is a storyteller who brings his characters to life with unmatched depth and authenticity. Known for his compelling performances in both drama and comedy, his work has captivated audiences across a variety of genres.

His latest project, the medical drama *Doctors*, marks a new chapter in his career, where he plays Dr. Dhaval, a complex character navigating the highs and lows of the medical world. The show takes a unique approach to the lives of

doctors, offering a glimpse into their personal struggles and the toll their demanding profession takes on them. With his dedication, emotional depth and eye for meaningful roles, he continues to solidify his place as one of the most exciting and respected actors in the industry. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, the *FLR* actor opens up about his experience working on this project, his thoughts on the character of Dr. Dhaval and the challenges of portraying such a complex role.

When asked about his initial feelings before embarking on a new project, Ali admits that a sense of jitteriness is always part of the process. "Whenever I start a project, I'm always jittery. That's the only thing I'm jittery about—the project itself," he shared. "I'm very particular, very concerned about the little things. There's always this self-doubt, wondering whether I should do it or not.

But once I'm sure about the project, I surrender completely to it, and then I stop questioning things."

His methodical approach was evident when he first met the team behind *Doctors*. "When I met producer Sidharth Malhotra the producer and director Sahil, I was gauging everyone. I needed to understand the script," he said. "It was pretty visible on my face, the uncertainty, but I could feel that there was something special about this project. The way they were planning it, it was unlike any other series I had seen before. This wasn't just about an incident happening in a doctor's life; it was about their lives, what they go through on a personal and professional level."

Amir explained how *Doctors* sets itself apart from other medical dramas. "There are shows made about doctors, but most of them are incident-based. This one is different. Yes, there are medical aspects, but it's much more about the emotions and experiences of the doctors. We take doctors for granted, considering them lifesavers, but their job is often thankless. They're expected to be available 24/7. If they don't pick up the phone at 3 in the morning, we blame them," the *Faraaz* fame pointed out. "But the show also acknowledges that they can make mistakes and get tired. It shows them as real people who deal with complex emotions, which is something I found very beautiful about the script."

Regarding the show's overall tone, he praised the subtle approach taken by the makers. "What I loved about the show is that it's not preachy. It presents the right kind of information, but it doesn't hit you over the head with it. It feels authentic and true to the lives of doctors, without trying to lecture the audience."

As the conversation shifted to the release of the trailer and the audience's response, *The Trial* actor expressed his excitement. "The trailer gives you a glimpse of the show, but trust me, the show is so much better. I was blown away when I saw parts of it. I had high expectations, but it turned out even better than I imagined. The look, the feel, everything about it is top-notch. People have even compared it

to international shows, which is a huge compliment. It's thrilling and gives that kind of vibe."

Amir plays Dr. Dhaval, a doctor with a complex past. While he couldn't reveal too much about his character, he shared a little about what makes him unique. "Dr. Dhaval is a man who's been through a lot in life—anger, betrayal, but also peace. He's a very layered character and that's what drew me to him. He's complicated, and that's what makes him interesting. When you watch the show, you'll understand why he's such a complex guy."

Discussing the challenges of portraying such a character, he shared that it was not an easy role. "This show was difficult for a number of reasons," he admitted. "We had workshops on what to do and what not to do and that really helped us get into character. The director's style was very particular; we did many takes from different angles, which was exhausting. But once you see the final product, you'll understand why it was necessary to get the mood just right."

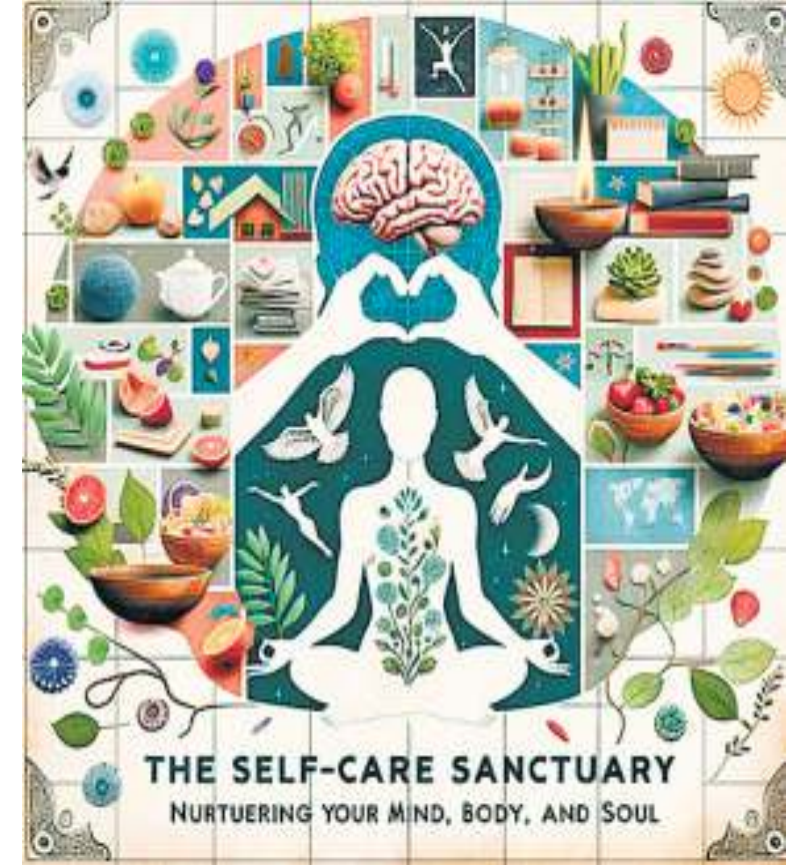
Another challenge was mastering the technical language and the medical procedures. "We had to learn a lot of technical terms and some of them were quite complex. We also had to be trained on how to wear surgical gloves, handle medical instruments, and wear the gear a surgeon wears. It was all very precise, and we had two doctors—Dr. Agni and Dr. Jeev—on set to guide us. They made sure we did everything correctly, from how to move to how to pronounce the medical terms properly."

When asked about memorable moments from the shoot, Amir reflected on the intensity of the surgical scenes. "There were some surreal moments. We used silicone models for surgeries, and they were so realistic. When you're doing a neurosurgery scene, it feels so real that it honestly makes you nervous. You're trying to get everything right and it's a lot to take in."

The conversation then turned to his admiration for OTT projects, which he had expressed in a previous interview. "I've always loved the freedom and boldness that OTT platforms offer. There's a lot of great content out there and *Doctors* is one of those projects that stands out. It's thrilling, emotional, and realistic. It's exciting to be part of such a great show. I'm happy to be working with amazing makers and I think the audience will really appreciate this one."

Looking ahead, Amir teased some exciting future projects but was unable to share details. "I'm working on something interesting, but I can't talk about it right now," he said with a smile. "I'm bound by confidentiality, but it's something I'm really looking forward to."

As Amir continues to take on new roles and challenges, one thing is clear: *Doctors* is a project he is incredibly proud of. With its unique perspective on the medical profession and a cast committed to authenticity, *Doctors* promises to be a must-watch series as it is currently streaming on Jio Cinema.



Nurturing minds, bodies & souls

The concept of holistic education—a philosophy focused on educating the whole person, beyond core academics—is gaining momentum in schools. With the advent of technology and the prevalence of instant gratification, children increasingly struggle to maintain a happy lifestyle. Schools, where children spend the majority of their time, are beginning to recognise that students need more than just a solid foundation in core subjects; they also need the support of a community and the opportunity to develop a compassionate understanding of the world around them.

The holistic approach is a comprehensive tool that educators use to address the emotional, social, ethical and academic needs of students within an integrated learning framework. Soul Science is one such framework, emphasizing the comprehensive development of the mind, body and soul. Students are taught to reflect on their actions and how they impact both the global and local communities, as well as how to learn from the community around them. Teachers often engage students in real-life, application-based projects that hone critical-thinking skills and promote social-emotional learning.

The primary goal of Soul Science is to cultivate a child's physical, emotional, moral, psychological and spiritual attributes. Educating the whole child means providing a suite of opportunities tailored to a child's unique skills and emotions. Soul Science is not just another subject; it is a real-life discipline where lessons are conducted in a safe, supportive environment, enabling stu-

dents to leverage their innate talents. The educator's role is crucial, serving as a guide to nurture students with varying educational levels and learning capabilities. While holistic education offers a comprehensive approach, educators may employ a variety of methods and strategies to create a holistic learning culture, tailored to the specific context of the school and community.

Soul Science, a homegrown initiative of Birla Open Minds, is one of the strongest unique selling points (USPs) of our network of schools. It has proven effective in fostering happiness, developing skills and shaping the subconscious minds of children, acting as a North Star for their life's journey.

Soul Science is the cornerstone of holistic teaching and learning. By harmonizing the soul, mind and body, students can transcend the confines of ego, competition and materialism. This approach fosters a deeper appreciation for compassion and nurtures a healthy sense of integration within the community. A wide spectrum of educational stakeholders—such as policymakers, researchers, curriculum designers, teacher educators and pre-service and in-service teachers—can learn and grow from Soul Science. It stands as one of the most effective remedies for addressing the crises and chaos of the modern world, reforming Indian education and replacing it with a curriculum grounded in happiness and holistic principles.

(The author, Yatharth Gautam, is the Director and COO of Birla Open Minds Education Pvt Ltd.)

Known for his ability to effortlessly switch between a wide range of characters, with his signature charm and candid insights, in an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, the versatile and pioneering actor Amir Ali, opens up about the challenges and joys of portraying complex roles, the meticulous preparation required for his latest project and what it takes to truly bring a story to life. We also explore the depths of his craft, his journey in the entertainment industry, and his compelling new role in the medical drama *Doctors*



From baby bumps to baby bliss

The year 2024 has been a year of joy and new beginnings for several Bollywood stars, as many embraced the beautiful journey of parenthood. This year has truly been a heartwarming chapter for these beloved stars and their growing families.



DEEPIKA PADUKONE-RANVEER SINGH

In 2024, Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh embraced parenthood with the birth of their daughter, Dua Padukone Singh. The couple shared the joyful news on Instagram, explaining the significance of her name, "Dua," which means "prayer," as she was the answer to their heartfelt wishes. Since becoming a mother, Deepika has offered glimpses into her journey, candidly sharing moments like adjusting to Dua's playful sleep patterns.



RICHA CHADHA-ALI FAZAL

Bollywood actors Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal welcomed their first child, a daughter named Zuneyra Ida Fazal. The couple shared their joy on social media, expressing gratitude for their healthy baby girl. Since then, Richa has offered glimpses into her life as a new mother, sharing moments of joy and reflection with her followers. The family was also spotted embarking on their first vacation together.



marking a new chapter in their lives.

ANUSHKA SHARMA-VIRAT KOHLI

Bollywood actress Anushka Sharma and cricketer Virat Kohli welcomed their second child, a son named Akaay. The unique name "Akaay" garnered significant public interest, becoming the second most searched term in Google's Year in Search 2024 sub-category "Meaning."

In November 2024, Anushka shared the first picture of Akaay with his sister Vamika, delighting fans and offering a glimpse into their growing family.



RADHIKA APTE-BENEDICT TAYLOR

Actress Radhika Apte and her husband, Benedict Taylor, welcomed their first child, a baby girl. Radhika shared the joyous news on Instagram, posting a heartfelt photo of herself breastfeeding.



her newborn during a work meeting, highlighting her seamless transition back to professional life. The couple, who married in 2012, had kept the pregnancy private until Radhika's appearance at the BFI London Film Festival in October 2024, where she debuted her baby bump.

SONNALLI SEYGALL-ASHESH L SAJNANI

Actress Sonnalli Seygall and her husband, Ashesh L Sajnani, welcomed their first child, a daughter named Shukar. The couple, who married in 2023, shared their joy on social media, with Ashesh posting a heartfelt video of himself dancing in the hospital room after their daughter's birth.

Sonnalli expressed her gratitude, explaining that the name "Shukar" embodies the thankfulness they feel in their lives. Embracing motherhood, Sonnalli has been open about her experiences, choosing to care for her newborn without a nanny and sharing insights into her journey as a new mother.

NATASHA DALAL-VARUN DHAWAN

Fashion designer Natasha Dalal and her husband, actor Varun Dhawan, welcomed their first child, a daughter named Lara. The couple shared the



joyous news on social media, with Varun posting a heartfelt message: "Our baby girl is here. Thank you for all the good wishes for the mama and the baby." Since Lara's birth, Natasha and Varun have been adjusting to their new roles as parents, cherishing this special time in their lives.



MASABA GUPTA-SATYADEEP MISRA

Fashion designer and actress Masaba Gupta and her husband, actor Satyadeep Misra, welcomed their first child, a daughter born on the auspicious occasion of Durga Ashtami. The couple shared the joyous news on Instagram, posting a heartfelt announcement along with a glimpse of their newborn's tiny feet. Masaba's mother, veteran actress Neena Gupta, expressed her happiness by sharing a photo holding her granddaughter,



captioned "Meri beti ki beti - Rab rakha," reflecting the family's joy and gratitude.

YAMI GAUTAM-ADITYA DHAR

Actress Yami Gautam and her husband, filmmaker Aditya Dhar, welcomed their first child, a son named Vedavid. The couple shared the joyous news on social media, expressing their excitement about embarking on the journey of parenthood. Yami took a brief hiatus from her



professional commitments to embrace motherhood, sharing glimpses of her new life, including her appreciation for traditional postnatal foods like panjeeri laddo.

AMALA PAUL-JAGAT DESAI

Actress Amala Paul and her husband, Jagat Desai, welcomed their first child, a son named Ilai. The couple shared the joyous news on Instagram, posting a heartfelt video that offered glimpses of their newborn and the celebrations at home. In September, during the



Onam festival, Amala delighted fans by revealing Ilai's face in a series of festive photographs, expressing her happiness in cherishing family traditions with her son.

PRANITHA SUBHASH-NITIN RAJU

Pranitha Subhash and her husband, Nitin Raju, are overjoyed to be expecting their second child. The actress, who has made a mark in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam cinema, shared the exciting news on Instagram on July 25, 2024, with a series of beautiful photos showcasing her baby bump. In her typical playful style, she captioned the post, "Round 2... The pants don't fit anymore," adding a humorous touch to the announcement.



Wanted to prove critics wrong for doubting my Test credentials: Reddy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Nitish Reddy wanted to confute his critics and the naysayers who doubted his ability to excel in Test format, and the gritty century at the iconic MCG was his way of conveying that he belongs to highest level of cricket. A few former players, including a former chairman of selectors, were sceptical about Reddy's elevation as a Test player but with 293 runs in six innings and a batting average of 58-plus, he has answered them back in a befitting manner. Reddy's 114 formed the cornerstone of India's first innings score of 369 and attracted a lot of attention on the young batter. Did you ever feel that you will be highest scorer in this

team? "Some people doubted me, like a youngster who played IPL, can't perform in such a big series. I know a lot of people did talk like that," Reddy said, sharing his frustration after the end of fourth day's play. "I just want to make them feel wrong about what they have said about me and that's what I am doing, I want people to know that I am here to give my 100 percent for Indian team," the 21-year-old said and his plain speaking was as aggressive as his purposeful batting. Asked how he looks at the past one month during which his life changed, he was quick to reply: "I guess for you guys, it is like one or two months. For me, it's like, I can see my past two to three years. How hard I've been



working on my batting and bowling." A lot of people don't know that Reddy had hired side-arm throwdown experts before the start of 2024 IPL and practised against them with speed of deliveries cranking up to 145 clicks from around 18 yards. "After the first IPL season, I realised what I have to improve my batting and I came up with a plan. When I got the off-season, I worked a lot on my batting and that's what is giving results now. It's not about the one month and two months, I have done the work from last two-three years to be here." The sacrifices made by his family is well documented and the Australian media was also keen to know about the man behind the player and

the role of his father Mutyalu. "To be honest, my father had 25 years of service in central government and when I was a nobody, and hadn't played a state-level game, the first person who believed in me was my father," he was a touch emotional. "He believed in me and he resigned from his job for me. He would take me to the ground, gym, always he wanted to be with me. He made a lot of sacrifices. If I have to tell about him, time won't be sufficient but I am so grateful to have a father like him." "I helped my team in a difficult situation where we can fight back strongly. So that was a special century for me and for my father as well." Talk about Virat Kohli, the man he looked up to when he decided to pursue the game,

and he said it was a surreal moment to see his idol give him a standing ovation. "I have been watching Virat from my childhood. He is my idol and now finally I have played with him. When he scored a hundred in Perth, I was at the non-striker's end. I felt so happy. "Now, I scored a century, he appreciated me. He came to me and said that 'you really played well, you got the team back in the game'. I always dreamt about that moment and finally when he talked with me, that's the best moment for me," he said as his face beamed. Asked about the chase on the final day, Reddy said: "First we have to take their last wicket. We will come back strongly and rectify our mistakes from the first innings."

Naomi Osaka says she won't 'hang around' in tennis if the results don't come

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka says she won't "hang around" in tennis if her results fail to match her high expectations. The 27-year-old Japanese player will play her first match since she suffered a back injury in the China Open in October at the ASB tennis classic in Auckland on Monday. Osaka told a pre-tournament news conference in Auckland on Sunday she was "humbled" by her form in 2024 in which she picked up her professional career after an almost 15 month break for the birth of her first child. She ended the season ranked 58. "I don't think I'm the type of player that would hang around," Osaka told reporters. "I have a lot of respect for all the players on tour, but the point of my life that I'm at right now, if I'm not above a certain ranking, I don't see myself playing for a while. "I'd rather spend time with my daughter if I'm not where I think I should be and where I feel like I can be." Osaka had a 22-17 win-loss singles record in 2024, reaching the quarterfinals at Doha and at s-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands. "I think 2024 humbled me, but



I also feel like I grew a lot," she said. "I worked way harder than I've ever worked before. So in that, I guess it was very painful to not get the results I wanted, but I feel like I'm growing and learning and I am really excited for this year (2025). "I played really good matches. People still talk to me about my Iga (Swiatek) match at the French Open (lost 7-6 1-6 7-5). So I'm glad that I was able to give people memories as well. "Even though I got injured in Beijing, which was my last tournament, I feel pretty optimistic about how that match would have turned out (against Coco Gauff) and I am excited to play on hardcourt again." Osaka won the Australian

Open in 2019 and 2021 and the US Open in 2018 and 2020. She says she still has a deep love for tennis, despite recent injury setbacks. "I've been playing tennis since I was three, and a huge part of that I owe to my parents, but I never really saw my life doing anything else," she said. "Then, when I sat there and had the opportunity to do other things, I realized that I'd rather be playing tennis. "So it was kind of one of those realization moments where you feel like you thought you were forced to do something, but in actuality you very much truly loved it. Osaka will play Lina Glushko of Israel in the first round of the ASB Classic.

Djokovic says players have 'been kept in the dark' on Sinner, Swiatek doping breaches

AP ■ BRISBANE

On the eve of his return to the court, Novak Djokovic has weighed in on tennis' high-profile doping cases and criticised what he perceives as double standards in the sport. The former world No. 1, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam title at next month's Australian Open, expressed his frustration Sunday at being "kept in the dark" regarding top-ranked Jannik Sinner's doping case. Djokovic is the top seed in the Brisbane International this week, making his first appearance at the event since 2009. He will also team up with Australia's Nick Kyrgios in doubles, with the duo headlining Monday's action. Off the court, Djokovic lent his voice Sunday to Kyrgios's strong criticisms made a day earlier, speaking out at length about the ongoing doping case involving current world No.1 Jannik Sinner. "I'm not questioning whether (Sinner) took the banned substance intentionally or not," Djokovic said at a press conference Sunday in Brisbane. "We've had plenty of players in the past and currently under suspension for not even testing positive to banned substances. "Some players with lower rankings waiting for their case to be



resolved for over a year. I've been really frustrated ... To see we've been kept in the dark for at least five months (on the Sinner case)." The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) charged both Sinner and former women's world No.1 Iga Swiatek with anti-doping breaches earlier in the year. Sinner tested positive twice for an anabolic steroid in March but avoided a ban after the ITIA ruled he was not at fault. The World Anti-Doping Agency has appealed the decision. Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for the banned substance trimetazidine. The Serbian further criticised the lack of transparency from tennis authorities regarding doping breaches. "The ATP hasn't really talked in depth about it. Why have they kept that case away from the

public? We see Simona Halep's case on the WTA Tour, now Iga Swiatek's case," Djokovic said. "It's not a good image for our sport. I'm just questioning the way the system works and why certain players aren't treated the same as others. Maybe some ranking reasons are behind it, or some players have more financial backing and stronger legal teams to tackle these cases." Despite his frustrations, Djokovic remains focused on the season ahead. After undergoing knee surgery earlier this year, he returned to the Wimbledon final but skipped the end-of-year ATP Finals, where Sinner capped a dominant season with his eighth title. Djokovic is looking to extend his legacy at Melbourne Park, where he has claimed 10 Australian Open titles, and has brought on former rival Andy Murray as his coach for the tournament. "It's strange for me to share all these kinds of insights about how I feel on the court, some of the secrets of what I'm going through, what I'm thinking about, how I see my game, with somebody who has been one of my top rivals," Djokovic said. "But I'm so glad and very thankful that he has accepted to work with me, and in Australia ... he's very meticulous, dedicated, and professional."

Ashi clinches maiden women's 3P national title

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Local shooter Ashi Chouksey overcame a strong field, that had the likes of Olympians Anjum Moudgil and Shriyanka Sadangi, to clinch her maiden national title in the 50m rifle 3-position event here on Sunday. Ashi shot a superb 466.7, a full 3.1 points clear of two-time Olympian Anjum at her home range, the MP State Academy, during the 67th National Shooting Championship. Upcoming shooter Sakshi Sunil Padekar of Maharashtra won the bronze with an effort of 451.3. She then went on to win a silver medal in the junior women's 3P as well to round-off a successful day. Ashi, who has been in great form over the past two years and was also a part of the Paris Olympic Games trials, extended her run of good form with a solid 590 in qualifications, to get into the eight-woman match-up in third place. Bhakti Bhaskar Khamkar of Maharashtra topped the qualification field with a blazing 592, while Anjum qualified second, her effort of 590 containing more hits to the inner-10 ring than Ashi. Sakshi took the sixth spot,



while another Olympian Shriyanka Sadangi qualified seventh. In the final, however, Ashi was in a different league altogether opening up a 2.3 points gap over Anjum at the end of the first 'Kneeling' position round. She maintained the lead after the 15 shots in the second 'Prone' position also. The lead increased to 2.9 after 10-shots of the last 'Standing' position and despite a few high 9s after that, the result was never in doubt. In junior women's 3P, Karnataka's Anoushka H Thokur shot 460.5 in the final to upstage Sakshi, who settled for silver on 456.3. Haryana's Nishchal, an ISSF World Cup silver medalist last year, shot 443.9 to settle for bronze.

South Africa collapses to 116-8 against Pakistan

AP ■ CENTURION (SOUTH AFRICA)

South Africa collapsed to 116-8 against Pakistan as fast bowler Mohammad Abbas ran riot on Day 4 of the first Test with the tourists closing in on their first Test win in South Africa in 18 years on Sunday. Abbas grabbed 6-43 on his return to Test cricket after more than three years and South Africa still needed 32 runs at lunch to seal a place in next year's World Test Championship final. Tailenders Kagiso Rabada, unbeaten on 10, and Marco Jansen with 5 not out were fighting a grim battle for the home team against the relentless Abbas.



Captain Temba Bavuma's controversial dismissal punctuated a South Africa collapse as it lost four wickets for just three runs with Abbas grabbing three

off his six balls. Bavuma, who made 40, surprisingly didn't request a television review when replays suggested that Abbas' ball had brushed the

batter's pocket and didn't make contact with the inside edge of the bat but the South African skipper walked back to the dressing room. Abbas bowled an unchanged marathon spell of 13 overs, but had to wait until Aiden Markram (37) and Bavuma saw off the testing first hour. Resuming at a wobbly 27-3, with still 121 runs needed for victory, Bavuma and Markram showed plenty of patience against Abbas' probing line and length before the fast bowler finally got the breakthrough after the first drinks break. Abbas was rewarded for his brilliant seam bowling when he beat the outside edge of Markram's bat and knocked

back the off stump. Bavuma survived a couple of close chances when he successfully overturned an on-field lbw decision against him early in the day and Naseem Shah couldn't hold onto a sharp catch at fine leg as he overstepped the boundary cushion while grabbing the ball over his head. South Africa had controlled the game at 96-4 before Bavuma's dismissal saw Abbas finding the outside edges of David Bedingham (14) and Corbin Bosch's (0) bat off successive deliveries and in between Kyle Verreyne dragged Naseem Shah's delivery back onto his stumps to give Pakistan a chance for victory.

Women's coach Alexandersson announces 23-member squad for Maldives friendlies

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian women's football team coach Joakim Alexandersson said on Sunday selected a mix of senior and U20 players in the 23-member squad for the two international friendlies against Maldives here on December 30 and January 2. The matches will be played at the Padukone-Draavid Centre for Sports Excellence. "We have some senior women's players joining us in the Bengaluru camp so we'll have a mix of U20 and senior players for this match. We're going to try and implement



some things in tomorrow's game. "It's nice to see and train the best in the country," said the Swede, who was named chief

coach of India's women's U20 and U17 national teams earlier this month. The squad: Goalkeepers: Hempriya Seram, Maibam Linthoingambi Devi, Nandini. Defenders: Aruna Bag, Juhi Singh, Juli Kishan, Sangita Basfore, Sanju, Shivani Toppo, Sorokhaibam Ranjana Chanu, Toijam Thoibisana Chanu, Vikshit Bara. Midfielders: Grace Dangmei, Kajol Dsouza, Neha, Nongmeikapam Sibani Devi, Nitu Linda, Rimpa Haldar. Forwards: Lhingdeikim, Lynda Kom Serto, Pooja, Pyari Xaxa, Simran Gurung.

Roar by MCG crowd after Reddy's hundred is something I never heard: CA CEO Hockley

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The collective roar of Indian fans after Nitish Kumar Reddy's maiden hundred is something that he has never heard at the MCG, and Cricket Australia's outgoing CEO Nick Hockley said on Sunday that it validated the decision to add a Test to the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The CA's decision to increase the number of Tests for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy from four to five has proved to be a masterstroke as crowd attendance and viewership records are set to surpass the hallowed Ashes. "I want to say thank you to everyone who turned up, the atmosphere last night when Nitish Kumar Reddy scored his hundred, the roar of the crowd was nothing that I have ever heard," Hockley told PTI in an exclusive interaction. The record total attendance (over five days) for a Boxing Day Test till date is 271,865 against England back in 2013 and the fourth Test involving

India has already witnessed a footfall of 255,462 spectators. With two more days left, CA is expecting the attendance to go well past 300,000. Hockley couldn't be more thrilled. "Absolutely thrilled with the number of fans that have come round from all over India. It's been an absolutely incredible atmosphere as we got over a quarter million people over the gates and that's too on days one, two and three," Hockley said. "This Border-Gavaskar Trophy has had the biggest Boxing Day crowd ever passing the Ashes and the series is so delicately poised now, it is living up to every hype." Hockley, who has had a good working relationship with the BCCI, said it was a no-brainer that the four-Test series between India and Australia transformed into a five-match rubber, considering its massive following. "I think it speaks about the relations between India and Australia and fans are always excited to see these two teams.



The five-Test series is what the fans deserve, players deserve. This series is likely to be alive going into Sydney. "We haven't had a full fifth day as we have had some unfinished business. I thank and am very grateful to the BCCI to have agreed to play a five-Test series. Hope it continues for the rest of the time." Days 1, 2 and 3 in Sydney all but sold out. There is forecast of rain during the New Year's Test in Sydney but even then the Indian diaspora will throng to the grounds with very limited tickets still left for the first three days. "Sydney will be very, very full. I think there are only very few tickets left for days one, two and three. We encourage people to quickly get their tickets if they want to come on Day 4. "There is a wonderful community from India in Sydney and we expect a similar atmosphere like MCG," he noted. Excited about prospects of

cricket's inclusion in Brisbane 2032. Los Angeles Olympics 2028 will witness the re-introduction of cricket at the quadrennial extravaganza and Hockley along with current ICC chairman Jay Shah are also in talks with Local Organising Committee (LOC) of Brisbane 2032 for keeping the sport in the Games' roster. "I am super excited for cricket being in Los Angeles, 2028. It is going to be amazing. It will be an opportunity to showcase cricket to a global audience and we are very excited to host the Olympics in Brisbane in 2032. We are hopeful and excited about the prospects of cricket being part of Brisbane 2032." "It is exciting times for cricket and the Olympics. We want more people who get to see our great game, T20 cricket for men and women is incredible entertainment and it has been the starting point of our discussion as to how we can help to grow the game globally," Hockley concluded.

CONTROVERSIES THAT OVERSHADOWED TELUGU CINEMA'S SUCCESS

The year 2024 has been a tumultuous one for the Telugu film industry, with several high-profile controversies making headlines. Despite the industry witnessing some huge hits, the controversies ultimately overshadowed the successes. The year started with a controversy between Mahesh Babu's *Guntur Kaaram* and Prashanth Varma's *Hanuman*. The year has seen many big controversies that shook not only the Telugu Cinema, but the entire Nation. Here are some of the controversies that dogged the industry.

T'wood's newcomers spark into sensations

Like every year, 2024 also saw many imported actresses make their debut in Tollywood. Some prominent names include Bhagyashree Borse, Jahnvi Kapoor, Rukmini Vasanth and Nayan Sarika. While some of them achieved blockbuster success, others faced flops. Despite the setbacks, some of these actresses continue to sign new projects.

GUNTUR KAARAM VS HANUMAN

Mahesh Babu and director Trivikram joined forces for their third film, *Guntur Kaaram*, released on January 12, 2024. On the same day, Prashanth Varma's *Hanuman* also released, but a controversy surrounding theatre allocations marred

the occasion. The *Hanuman* makers had made an agreement with some exhibitors, but those exhibitors failed to honor the agreement and instead screened Mahesh Babu's film. The *Hanuman* team officially complained to the Telugu Film Producers Council about the exhibitors' failure to honor their agreements. Interestingly, Mahesh Babu's film received negative reviews, while *Hanuman* premiered to positive reviews and eventually became a huge blockbuster in Telugu and other languages. Teja Sajja, an upcoming actor, became a star with this film and director Prashanth Varma became the most sought-after director following the film's massive success.

KONDA SUREKHA VS AKKINENI FAMILY

Telangana Minister Konda Surekha made shocking comments about Akkineni Nagarjuna and Samantha, Naga Chaitanya's divorce. The minister alleged that Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) president K.T. Rama Rao was responsible for Naga Chaitanya and Samantha's divorce. She made a shocking allegation that KTR had asked Nagarjuna to send Samantha to him to leave N-Convention. The minister added that this had caused significant disturbance to the Akkineni family, leading to the couple's divorce. The entire film industry came out in support of Nagarjuna, condemning Minister Surekha's comments on social media. Nagarjuna also condemned the minister's comments and filed a defamation case against her. Nagarjuna sent a strong message, stating that it was inappropriate to involve oneself in the personal lives of film stars who stay away from politics to attack political opponents. Samantha also strongly condemned the minister's comments, and later, the minister apologized to Samantha. This incident shook the entire nation and made headlines nationwide.

JANHVI KAPOOR'S DOUBLE HIT

Sridevi and Boney Kapoor's daughter Jahnvi Kapoor is a popular Bollywood actress who made her Telugu debut opposite Jr NTR in 'Devara', directed by Koratala Siva. Although her screen presence was limited, her songs became extremely popular on the internet and YouTube channels. Despite mixed reviews, the film was declared a blockbuster, marking a successful Telugu debut for Jahnvi Kapoor. The film's sequel is awaited, and the makers claim that Jahnvi's role will be stronger in the second part.

BHAGYASHREE SHINES BRIGHT IN AN OTHERWISE DULL FILM

Another Hindi actress Bhagyashree Borse made her debut with *Mr Bachchan* opposite Ravi Teja. She actually did a Hindi film *Yaariyaan 2* and director Harish Shankar impressed her and roped in her for his Telugu film. The film was a big disaster at the box-office, but Bhagyashree is an instant hit. Big production house Peoples Media Factory produced this 'Mr Bachchan' and the producer later admitted that the film was a mistake. Though the film is not commercially viable, Bhagyashree is getting big projects in Telugu. She paired opposite Vijay Deverakonda in an upcoming film and also Dulquer Salman in another film.

RUKMINI VASANTH DOUBLE HIT

This Kannada actress became an insKannada actress Rukmini Vasanth became an instant hit in Kannada cinema with films like *Sapta Saagaradaache Elio - Side A and Side B*. Before her Telugu debut, she was supposed to debut in *Appudo Ippudo Eppudo* opposite Nikhil Siddhartha, directed by Sudhir Varma. However, the film was released this year after a delay. Unfortunately, her debut Telugu film was a box-office disaster. Nevertheless, Rukmini Vasanth remains a hit in Kannada cinema.

NAYAN SARIKA MAKES IT BIG

Hyderabad girl Nayan Sarika made her debut with *Gam Gam Ganesha* opposite Anand Deverakonda. Although the film underperformed at the box-office, she secured two more projects, both of which were commercial hits. She played a village girl in *Aay*, produced by Niharika Konidela, which became an instant hit. Nayan then acted opposite Kiran Abbavaram in *KA*, which was a super hit. Despite her debut film's failure, Nayan's career is thriving in Telugu, with multiple projects in the pipeline.



RAJ TARUN VS LAVANYA

Actor Raj Tarun was embroiled in a personal controversy that made headlines for several weeks. Lavanya, his alleged wife, accused Raj Tarun of cheating on her. She claimed that the two had been in a live-in relationship for nearly 11 years and that their families were aware of their marriage.

Lavanya also accused Raj Tarun's co-star, Malvi Malhotra, of being the reason for their separation.

Lavanya alleged that Raj Tarun had forced her to undergo an abortion. Later, police filed a case against Raj Tarun, who obtained anticipatory bail. He accused Lavanya of being a drug addict, and both parties made headlines during this time. Malvi Malhotra had acted opposite Raj Tarun in the film *Tiragabada Saami*. Interestingly, Raj Tarun's films, including *Purushottamudu*, *Tiragabada Saami* and *Bhale Unnade*, released during this controversy, failed to achieve success.



JANI MASTER ARRESTED, OUT ON BAIL

Popular choreographer Shaik Jani Basha, known as Jani Master, was arrested in Goa by the Telangana police. A sexual assault case was registered against him by a woman choreographer who had worked with Jani Master on several films. The Narsingi police booked him under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The victim alleged that Jani Master had harassed and sexually assaulted her over the past six years. Jani Master was later granted bail and the case is currently in court. This episode shook not only the Telugu film industry but the entire nation. A few choreographers came out in support of Jani Master.



NAYANTHARA VS DHANUSH

Nayanthara and Dhanush, popular actors in Telugu and Tamil films, are embroiled in a feud over the documentary film *Nayanthara: Beyond the Fairytale*. A documentary about Nayanthara was streamed on a private OTT channel, and she requested actor Dhanush for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to use some visuals from the film *Aanum Rowdy Dhaan*. Nayanthara acted in the film, which was directed by her husband Vignesh, and they met for the first time during the film's production. Dhanush, the film's producer, rejected her request. The documentary was released with a few seconds of visuals from the film, prompting Dhanush to send a legal notice to Nayanthara for using the visuals without his permission. Nayanthara responded by calling Dhanush a tyrant and criticizing him, stating that his actions reflected poorly on his character. She wrote a three-page letter and posted it on her Instagram, criticizing Dhanush for not giving permission as she and her team worked two years on this documentary and to obtain NOC. Both these actors were on loggerheads and they made headlines for a few days.



RGV IN ANOTHER CONTROVERSY

Director Ram Gopal Varma is in the news for allegedly hiding to avoid arrest by the Andhra Pradesh police. The police issued notices for some of his posts about AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and his son Nara Lokesh, as well as Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan. A police case was registered against RGV in various places in Andhra Pradesh, citing that his posts were defamatory and indecent.

The AP police visited RGV's Hyderabad office to question him, but he was not present. He filed for anticipatory bail and reportedly went underground. However, after two days, RGV emerged, stating that he had not hidden anywhere and was available at his office.



MANCHU FAMILY WEB SERIES

In 2023, Manchu Manoj posted a video accusing his elder brother, Vishnu, of assaulting his associate. However, Vishnu later posted the video, hinting that it was part of a reality show like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. The Manchu family remained silent for a while but later openly accused each other. This year, Manoj filed a case against his father, senior actor Manchu Mohan Babu, claiming that his life was in danger. In another case, Mohan Babu filed a complaint that his younger son and daughter-in-law were forcefully taking his house. While the Manchu family drama unfolded, veteran actor Mohan Babu assaulted a journalist who came to his house to cover the news. Mohan Babu later apologized, but the journalist's ear was damaged, and he filed a complaint against Mohan Babu, which is still pending. Mohan Babu released audio files explaining his version of events, but Manoj filed another case, alleging that his brother Vishnu removed power and put sugar in generators. Until then, the men in the Manchu family were in the news, but suddenly, Mohan Babu's wife and Manoj's mother, Nirmala Devi, complained to the police that Vishnu was a good person who had celebrated her birthday and did not harm anyone. There are media reports that Mohan Babu has gone into hiding, and his whereabouts are unknown. The case is still pending.



SANDHYA THEATRE STAMPEDE

The Sandhya theatre stampede incident rocked not only the Telugu film industry but also made national headlines. Allu Arjun and director Sukumar's combination film *Pushpa 2: The Rule* was released on December 5 and the makers started premieres on December 4 night. Allu Arjun, along with his family members, went to Sandhya Theatre to watch his film, but a large crowd gathered to see him, resulting in a stampede-like situation. A 35-year-old woman lost her life and her son was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit. The police filed a case against the theatre owners, actors, and producers of the film. The police responded to the incident two days later. This issue rocked the entire Telugu film industry and made national headlines. The police arrested Allu Arjun in connection with the case, and the Nampally court remanded him to custody for two weeks. Later, the Telangana High Court granted him bail, but due to delays in receiving the bail papers, Allu Arjun had to spend a night in jail before being released the next morning. The entire film industry rallied around Allu Arjun, offering support. Many actors, producers and directors consoled him, stating that they stood by him. Some actors responded to his arrest on social media. Later, Allu Arjun held a media conference, stating that some individuals were attempting to tarnish his reputation. He emphasized that the incident was unfortunate and not his fault. However, the police released a video of the entire Sandhya Theatre episode the next day, showing Allu Arjun entering and leaving the theatre.

