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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Lagacharla women victims are saying that the police touched them in an indecent manner. The government should tender apologies for the police attack on the farmers. We are opposing the Government's and Ministers' efforts to politicize the Lagacharla incident against reality. That doesn't mean we are supporting the BRS. BRS is a more wretched party than the Congress. The BRS party pooled thousands of acres of land in the name of pharma city.

- **Thammineni Veerabhadram**, CPM State Secretary

P4

DON'T MISS...

MEIL sends mega vessels to Mongolia

Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited (MEIL), a global infrastructure leader, organised a flag-off ceremony on Thursday to mark the inaugural dispatch of a pressure vessel to the Mongol Refinery in Mongolia. The event took place at MEIL's state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Jeedimetla, Hyderabad. Dr Altantsetseg Dashdavaa, CEO of Mongol Refinery, attended the ceremony along with officials from the Mongol Refinery, Vikalp Paliwal, General Manager of MEIL, and other senior company officials...

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YSRCP to raise key issues in Parl

The Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) is preparing to raise several critical issues during the upcoming winter session of Parliament. These include concerns over the law and order situation in Andhra Pradesh, the Polavaram project, and the proposed amendments to the Waikf Board Act. Addressing the media after a meeting with party MPs on Thursday, MP Pili Subhashchandra Bose shared that former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had outlined the strategy for the party during the session and...

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Mamata to initiate 'total reshuffle' in CID

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday announced the initiation of a "total reshuffle" in the state CID, accusing a section of police personnel in the lower ranks of indulging in corrupt practices. She also directed DGP Rajeev Kumar to look into "complaints" received against some CID officers and take action in case those were found to be genuine. "I will initiate a total reshuffle in the CID. I am giving you (Kumar) the responsibility... Give me proposals and cross-check the complaints. At times, false complaints are..."

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Sebi abolishes 1% security deposit

Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday abolished the requirement of a mandatory security deposit with the exchanges before a public issue in a bid to facilitate ease of doing business for issuer companies. The move will be applicable with immediate effect, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular. Before this, any company that is looking to launch a public issue of equity shares has to deposit with the stock exchanges an amount equal to 1 per cent of the issue size. The deposit was returned...

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Rs 1,750 cr: Adani's bribe to Jagan for solar power deal ?

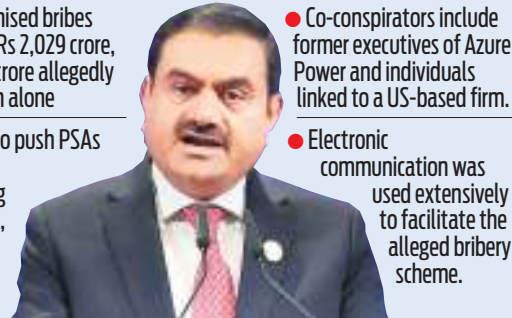
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant legal development, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (USSEC) has indicted billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani for allegedly paying ₹1,750 crore to former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. The payment was purportedly made to influence State electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs) to sign a deal to procure 7 GW of solar power from the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) under a manufacturing-linked project. Court documents filed in New York referred to "Foreign Official #1" as a high-ranking figure from Andhra Pradesh who held office between May 2019 and June 2024. Although the filing did not explicitly name Jagan Mohan Reddy, it alleged that Gautam Adani met the official multiple times in 2021 to finalise power sale agreements (PSAs) between SECI and the State's DISCOMs.

The court papers further revealed that Gautam Adani, along with his nephew Sagar Adani, Vineet Jain, and others, had promised bribes totalling ₹2,029 crore (approximately \$265 million) to Indian officials. Of this amount, Jagan Mohan Reddy allegedly

Payment made to influence DISCOMs to sign a 7 GW agreement with SECI

- Court documents referred to Jagan as "Foreign Official #1" without explicitly naming him.
- Adani allegedly met Jagan multiple times in 2021 to finalise the power sale agreements.
- The total promised bribes amounted to Rs 2,029 crore, with Rs 1,750 crore allegedly going to Jagan alone
- Bribes aimed to push PSAs under the Manufacturing Linked Project, benefiting Adani Green Energy.
- AP DISCOMs signed the largest solar power deal in India with SECI in December 2021.
- US prosecutors charged Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani, and six others for bribery and corruption.
- Co-conspirators include former executives of Azure Power and individuals linked to a US-based firm.
- Electronic communication was used extensively to facilitate the alleged bribery scheme.



received ₹1,750 crore. The bribes were reportedly intended to secure PSAs benefiting Adani Green Energy and other connected companies. The filings also identified co-conspirators, including a UK citizen based in Hong Kong and an Indian national, both associated with a US-based company.

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YSRCP defends deal with SECI

VIJAYAWADA: The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has issued a clarification regarding allegations against the Andhra Pradesh government over the involvement of industrialist Gautam Adani in bribing top officials in connection with a power procurement agreement. The party has strongly refuted the claims, emphasising that the agreement in question was with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI), a government-owned entity, and not any private companies, including those linked to Adani. In a detailed statement, the party explained that the Andhra Pradesh government supplies nearly 12,500 million units (MU) of free power annually to the agriculture sector, with the state compensating the distribution utilities for the cost of this power.

Continued on Page 2

High Court bench in Kurnool soon: CM



- The proposal, approved by the Cabinet, to be sent to the AP HC and Union govt.
- The Lokayukta and Human Rights Commission offices will stay in Kurnool.
- Naidu criticised the previous government's policies, especially the 3 capitals proposal.
- TDP's role in the State's growth and NT Rama Rao's legacy stressed.
- Ongoing river linking projects and Polavaram will boost Rayalaseema's agriculture and economy.
- Naidu says the Gollapalli reservoir helped attract Kia Motors to Anantapur.
- Plans to make Tirupati an education hub unveiled.
- CM flays previous government for neglecting Rayalaseema's industrial growth.
- Plans for a drone hub in Orvakallu revealed.
- Naidu says steps are being taken to develop Kurnool into a top city in the State.

Focus on development of north Andhra & Rayalaseema

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has confirmed that a High Court bench will be set up in Kurnool soon as promised during the elections.

Speaking to the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, Naidu said the Cabinet had already approved the proposal, and the resolution passed in the Assembly would be sent to the Andhra Pradesh High Court and the Union Government for further steps. He also assured that the offices of the Lokayukta and the Human Rights Commission would stay in Kurnool, putting to rest concerns about their possible relocation.

The Chief Minister emphasised the government's commitment to the overall development of the State, particularly focusing on the North Andhra and Rayalaseema regions. He mentioned plans for further growth in cities like Visakhapatnam, Kurnool, and

Tirupati. Naidu expressed disappointment that the state had not seen much progress in the past five years, blaming the "faulty policies" of the previous government, especially the proposal for three capitals. He reminded the Assembly that the TDP, even when in opposition, had always supported Amaravati as the capital. Naidu further stated that true development would only happen under the TDP, citing the party's past success in driving the state's growth. He recalled the legacy of TDP founder N.T. Rama Rao, initiated important projects like the Telugu Ganga, Handri-Neeva, and Nagari-Galeru to bring Krishna River water to Rayalaseema. The CM pointed out that ongoing river linking projects and the Polavaram project, which will help divert Godavari water to Rayalaseema, could be game-changers for agriculture and economic development.

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NPTC Green Energy ties up with NREDCAP for renewable energy projects

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NPTC Green Energy Limited (NGEL) has joined hands with the New and Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP) to set up renewable energy projects in the state.

This partnership, with an investment of Rs. 1,87,000 Crore, was announced in the presence of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu at the AP Secretariat in Velagapudi on Thursday. The joint



venture is expected to generate employment for about 1,06,250 people and bring financial benefits of around Rs. 20,620 Crore over the next 25 years.

The JV agreement was

signed and exchanged between NREDCAP and NTPC Green in a ceremony attended by CM Chandrababu Naidu, Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar, Gurdeep Singh (Chairman & Managing Director, NTPC/NGEL), R Saranganani (Executive Director, NGEL), K Vijayanand (Special Chief Secretary, Energy), KVN Chakradhar Babu (VC & MD, NREDCAP), MD of APGENCO, and other senior officials.

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UPROAR IN COUNCIL

Minister's remark triggers walkout by YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A controversial remark by Minister for Health, Medical and Family Welfare, Y Satya Kumar, during Question Hour in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council on Thursday sparked a heated exchange between the ruling NDA and the opposition YSRCP.

The minister, while responding to a question from YSRCP's PVVS Raju, quoted a proverb: "A hundred

rats eaten, the cat went on Haj pilgrimage." This statement triggered an uproar, with YSRCP members demanding an apology from the minister and protesting in the well of the house by raising slogans.

The issue arose when PVVS Raju questioned the minister on whether the government had written to the National Medical Council (NMC) rejecting the MBBS seats offered to the State.

Continued on Page 2

No move to privatise VSP: TG Bharath

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP-led NDA government in the State has clarified that there are no plans to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP). Minister for Industries and Commerce TG Bharath made this announcement during the Question Hour in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council, chaired by Council Chairman Koyye Moshen Raju, on Thursday. He reassured that the government remains committed to its election promises and ensuring that VSP stays in the public sector.

YSRCP members Varudu Kalyani, Duvvada Srinivas, and others raised concerns about the potential privatization of the Steel Plant.

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AP's Industries Minister Bharath acknowledged that VSP is currently facing a financial crisis, and the management has proposed selling around 24 acres of unused land to raise additional funds. At the request of CM Chandrababu Naidu, Union Minister for Heavy Industries & Steel, HD Kumar Swamy, assured that the Central government has no intention of privatising the steel plant.



International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants for Netanyahu, Hamas officials

PNS ■ THE HAGUE

The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants on Thursday for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defence minister and Hamas officials, accusing them of war crimes and crimes against humanity over the war in Gaza and the October 2023 attacks that triggered Israel's offensive in the Palestinian territory.

The decision turns Netanyahu and the others into internationally wanted suspects and is likely to further isolate them and complicate efforts to negotiate a cease-fire to end the 13-month conflict. But its practical implications could be limited since Israel and its major ally, the United States, are not members of the court and several of the Hamas officials have been subsequently killed in the conflict.

Netanyahu rejects arrest warrant

PNS ■ JERUSALEM



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has condemned the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant against him, saying Israel "rejects with disgust the absurd and false actions".

In a statement released by his office, he said: "There is nothing more just than the war that Israel has been waging in Gaza."

TCS to begin its Vizag operations in 3 months: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics Nara Lokesh announced that Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) will begin operations in Visakhapatnam within three months. Speaking in the state Legislative Assembly on Thursday, Lokesh revealed that the IT giant has agreed to set up a unit and campus in the city, providing a major boost to the region's IT sector.

Lokesh also confirmed that talks are ongoing with Infosys to establish a second campus in Visakhapatnam, with land acquisition currently underway. In response to questions about the state's IT policies, Lokesh blamed the previous government for hindering the growth of the IT sector by demanding shares from IT companies, which he said led to several investors pulling out of the

state. "Due to these policies, companies like NICS and STBI left Andhra Pradesh, resulting in the loss of thousands of employment opportunities," Lokesh stated. He highlighted the significant growth of the IT sector between 2014 and 2019, during which over 150 IT companies were established, creating jobs for more than 50,000 youth. Lokesh also praised the contributions of Telugus to the global IT industry,

noting that 20 per cent of IT sector employees worldwide are of Telugu origin. He emphasized that under CM Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, the state had prioritized IT development, with Visakhapatnam envisioned as a key IT hub.

Lokesh shared that discussions with multiple IT companies over the past few months had led to TCS's decision to set up operations in Visakhapatnam. He added that the state government aims to create 500,000 IT jobs over the next five years and is focused on building the necessary ecosystem to support these companies.

Addressing concerns about data centres, Lokesh acknowledged that the state had fallen behind neighboring states like Karnataka, Telangana, and Mumbai due to the previous government's lack of focus on setting up data centres. However, he assured that efforts are underway to attract investments in this sector, with a target to secure at least \$100 billion out of the \$300 billion global annual investment in data centres. "We are in talks with data centre owners to address issues like data security and taxation, and I am optimistic that these discussions will yield positive results," Lokesh said.

In addition to IT development, Lokesh mentioned the rapid progress of the Bhogapuram airport project. He also revealed plans to build the largest convention centre

in India in Visakhapatnam, which will further complement the city's growing IT ecosystem. He stressed the need for more hotels and infrastructure to support the growing business in the region. Lokesh expressed confidence that ongoing discussions with the top 100 IT companies in the country would attract more investment to Visakhapatnam. He also announced plans for a new policy aimed at attracting global delivery centres from Fortune 500 companies, which is expected to be introduced next month.

Regarding pending incentives for IT companies, Lokesh confirmed that Rs 500 crore had recently been released to clear outstanding payments. "Our focus is now on the 'Speed of Doing Business' to ensure faster approvals and smoother operations for IT companies in the state," he added.



Lokesh also praised the contributions of Telugus to the global IT industry, noting that 20 per cent of IT sector employees worldwide are of Telugu origin.



TTD Chairman meets TS CM Revanth

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Chairman BR Naidu paid a courtesy visit to Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy at his residence in Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad, on Thursday. During the meeting, the

TTD Board Chairman presented a 'Pattu Vastram' to the Telangana CM. In return, the TS CM felicitated BR Naidu with a shawl, presented him with a memento, and extended his best wishes on his appointment as the Chairman of the TTD Trust Board.

'SRIVANI' TICKET QUOTA INCREASED

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD has increased the quota of 'Srivani' tickets issued at Renigunta Airport from 100 to 200 by reducing the offline quota issued at Tirumala. This change will take effect from November 22.

Currently, TTD issues 900 Srivani tickets daily at

the counters behind Gokulam Rest House in Tirumala. From Friday onwards, 800 tickets will be issued at Tirumala, while 200 tickets will be made available at Renigunta Airport in Tirupati on a first-come, first-served basis. Devotees are requested to take note of these changes.

Speed up Narsipatnam tank bund project: Ayyanna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Assembly Speaker Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu once again appealed to the officials to expedite the completion of the Narsipatnam tank bund project which aims to develop the area into a major tourist attraction.

Reflecting on his eight-year journey, Ayyanna Patrudu, emphasised the need for swift action on the project. "We've worked hard over the past several years to bring this vision to life. It's not just about the tank bund but about creating a lasting destination that can boost tourism and benefit the local community. This project must be completed without further delay," he said during a review meeting with officials from the Roads and Buildings (R&B) and Tourism departments at the Assembly premises on Thursday.

The initiative to widen the road around the Narsipatnam pond began in 2018 under Ayyanna Patrudu's leadership. The R&B department allocated Rs 2.06 crore for the road widening, followed by Rs 79 lakh from the Tourism Department for statues and a track garden. Additionally, the R&B department sanctioned another Rs 5.70 crore, bringing the total allocated funds to approximately Rs 6.49 crore. However, only a portion of



these funds has been utilized, with the previous government's negligence leaving a significant amount untouched. "It's disheartening to see that so much money was left unused, despite the project's importance. But we are determined to complete what we started," Ayyanna Patrudu added. He even contributed Rs 1 lakh of his own funds for an elephant statue.

To expedite the process, Ayyanna Patrudu convened another review meeting with R&B Principal Secretary Kranti Lal Dande, Tourism Secretary Vinay Chand, and other officials. It was estimated that Rs 4.10 crore from R&B and Rs 6.40 crore from Tourism would be required to finish the project. A deadline of December 15 has been set for both departments to prepare the necessary documents for budget approval.

MEIL exports mega vessels for Mongol refinery

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited (MEIL), a global infrastructure leader, organised a flag-off ceremony on Thursday to mark the inaugural dispatch of a pressure vessel to the Mongol Refinery in Mongolia. The event took place at MEIL's state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Jeedimetla, Hyderabad.

Dr. Altantsetseg Dashdavaa, CEO of Mongol Refinery, attended the ceremony along with officials from the Mongol Refinery, Vikalp Paliwal, General Manager of MEIL, and other senior company officials. This inaugural dispatch marks the beginning of a significant phase in the Mongol Refinery project, symbolising the strong partnership between India and Mongolia. The project, supported by the Government of India, is a government-to-government initiative that highlights both nations' shared commitment to enhancing economic development and strengthening energy security in Mongolia.



Speaking at the event, Dr. Altantsetseg said, "The Governments of India and Mongolia are working together to strengthen our bilateral ties. I am very pleased with the tremendous work done by Megha Engineering. It is an honour to participate in the flag-off ceremony for the inaugural dispatch of a pressure vessel to the Mongol Refinery. This refinery is Mongolia's first-ever

oil refinery, and MEIL is executing three of the four key packages for this project, demonstrating their deep expertise, commitment, and the use of advanced technologies. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Government of India, Engineers India Limited (EIL), and MEIL for their efforts in making this landmark project a reality for Mongolia."

MEIL Director P Doraiah

remarked, "We are proud to begin the first dispatch of refinery equipment to Mongolia. Our dedicated workforce is executing this critical project with exceptional skill and commitment, overcoming various challenges in Mongolia. This is a milestone for MEIL, and we look forward to continuing our contribution to the success of the Mongol Refinery."

GVMC pioneers drone tech for urban governance and public health

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) is leveraging drone technology to tackle pressing urban challenges, from managing mosquito-borne diseases to curbing unauthorised constructions. This innovative approach, spearheaded by GVMC Commissioner P. Sampath Kumar, is setting a precedent for smart governance in Visakhapatnam.

"We are undertaking this as a pilot project. After successfully controlling mosquitoes using drones, we are now focusing on unauthorised constructions in the city. These drones, equipped with special software, will provide precise data on violations, enabling swift action," said Commissioner Kumar.

GVMC's urban planning division has observed that 30% of buildings in the city deviate from approved construction plans, particularly on plots larger than 250 square yards. Despite issuing over 12,500 building permits annually, enforcement gaps have resulted in significant revenue losses.



From combating mosquito-borne diseases to monitoring unauthorised constructions, GVMC's tech-driven approach sets a benchmark in smart governance

Drones will now digitally document unauthorised structures, capturing high-resolution images to determine the extent of violations. A senior GVMC official emphasized, "The additional tax due during property assessments has often been overlooked due to negligence by field staff. Using drones ensures transparency and accountability." This technology will also address encroachments on

Simhachalam Devasthanam lands, where unauthorised structures have proliferated. By mapping these areas, drones will aid officials in taking decisive enforcement actions.

In the fight against malaria and dengue, drones have already delivered impactful results. GVMC identified 188 high-risk sewage storage areas and deployed drones to spray mosquito-control chemicals in inaccessible locations.

Man, his son electrocuted

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

In a tragic incident, a man and his son were electrocuted when a high-tension wire got snapped and fell on their bike at Dantalapalli village in

Yellanur mandal on Thursday. Police said that the deceased Ramanyanyulu and his son Ravi were going on a bike to Dantalapalli village from Ankevaripalli village after attending a family function. A high-tension

electric wire snapped and fell on the bike in they died instantaneously. The deceased belonged to Madugupalli village in Putluru mandal. A pall of gloom descended on Madugupalli village with the death of the father and son duo. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.

Kannababu flays State govt for 'blatant lies'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Kurasala Kannababu has slammed the State government for what he called "blatant lies" regarding State finances, law and order, and other issues. Addressing the media, Kannababu questioned discrepancies in government statements, including claims about finances. He noted that while Opposition leaders like Chandrababu Naidu had raised concerns over State debt at Rs 14 lakh crore, the official budget showed it to be over Rs 6 lakh crore.

He also criticised Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's statement about 30,000 women being trafficked, which was contradicted by the government's official count of just 46 missing women. Kannababu further called out the government's claim of spending Rs 3,000 crore on building renovations, contrasting it with the actual Rs 101 crore figure. He also highlighted inconsistencies about the volunteer honorarium hike, which has since been denied.

Kannababu accused the government of mishandling finances, citing a recent Rs 50,000 crore loan taken under the leadership of Chandrababu. He also raised concerns over rising prices of essentials and power tariffs linked to smart meters, and criticised the government for prioritising toll collection over wealth creation.

IRREGULARITIES IN GARBAGE TAX COLLECTION

Probe will be ordered, says MA & UD Minister Narayana

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, P Narayana, announced an investigation into the collection practices of the garbage tax and any irregularities benefiting certain individuals.

Speaking in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Thursday, the Minister criticised the previous YS Jagan government for imposing unnecessary hardships on the people, stating that under the TDP administration, there were no increases in taxes within municipalities. The Minister moved the Andhra Pradesh Municipal Laws (Second Amendment) Bill, 2024, which was unanimously passed by the Assembly.

Minister Narayana remarked that the YS Jagan government had forcibly collected garbage taxes despite strong public opposition, accusing the previous administration of doing nothing but

creating problems for citizens in terms of waste management. He recalled that the then YSRCP government had amended the Municipal Laws Act to impose monthly charges for garbage collection, ranging from Rs 30 to Rs120 for residential properties, and Rs100 to Rs10,000 for commercial establishments, starting in November 2021. He pointed out that between November 2021 and July 2024,

approximately Rs 325 crore was billed for garbage collection, but only ₹249 crore was collected, highlighting the continuous objections from the public. The Minister expressed regret that some residential properties, with a nominal property tax of Rs50, were being charged up to Rs356 for garbage services.

Minister Narayana assured the Assembly that a thorough investigation would be conducted into the garbage tax collections and the outstanding debts incurred during the previous administration.



52 PB Siddhartha students get placements in TCS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As many as 52 students of P.B. Siddhartha College of Arts and Science, pursuing final year B.Com. and B.B.A., got selected by IT giant TCS in an off-campus recruitment drive hosted by the college.

Informing this to the media here on Thursday, Principal of the college Dr. M. Ramesh said that these students performed

well in TCS National Quarter Test and faced HR interview to secure job offers as Business Process Services Executives with salary package of Rs 2.4 Lakhs per annum.

College Director Mr. V Babu Rao appreciated the efforts of faculty members and the Placement Cell in moulding the students into potential manpower through meticulous training.

Govt to simplify pension disbursement

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has decided to simplify the distribution of pensions to beneficiaries, as announced by Minister for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, Kondapalli Srinivas. Under the new policy, pensioners will be able to receive their pensions even if they miss out on payments for up to two consecutive months.

The Minister explained that if a pensioner fails to collect their pension in the first month, the total amount for both the first and second months will be disbursed in the second month. If the pension remains uncollected for two consecutive months, the combined pension for both months will be provided in the third month. However, if a pensioner misses payments for three consecutive months, they

will be classified as a permanent 'migrant,' and their pension will be stopped. In such cases, if the pensioner returns to their original location, they can reapply for the pension, which will be reinstated.

The Minister also clarified that if the head of a family receiving an old-age pension passes away unexpectedly, the widow will be granted a widow's pension from the following month. Necessary instructions have been issued to the relevant officials to implement this process.

Furthermore, the Minister informed that the state government has directed district-level Rural Development Project Directors, MPDOs (Mandal Parishad Development Officers), and municipal commissioners to take the required action at the grassroots level to ensure smooth implementation of the policy.

Congress demands arrest of Adani

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji has demanded the arrest of industrialist and Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani, who is facing indictment by a US court in a solar power bribery scam.

In a statement issued on Thursday, Sivaji alleged that Gautam Adani was involved in insider trading and claimed that the Congress party had provided evidence of this to the investigating agencies.

The Congress leader ques-



tioned why the Modi-led Central Government was hesitating to initiate an investigation into SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch. Sivaji further alleged that Gautam Adani had previously been charged by the US Securities

and Exchange Commission for bribing officials and scamming American investors of ₹2,110 crore.

"We demand that the Centre order a probe by the CBI, ED, and a Joint Parliamentary Committee into the alleged frauds committed by Gautam Adani. An FIR should be registered against him, and summons should be issued," the APCC Vice-President stated.

He also called for a thorough inquiry into the agreements signed by Andhra Pradesh Discom officials with electricity companies linked to Gautam Adani.

Vizag Police reunite families by cracking multiple missing person cases



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Swift action and coordination across police stations lead to safe return of individuals, providing much-needed relief to their families

The City Police have demonstrated their efficiency and dedication by swiftly resolving three missing person cases across various police stations. The timely actions of the police force have reunited these individuals with their families, providing much-needed relief.

One of the cases, registered at the Steel Plant police station, involved a married woman who had left her home due to a family dispute. Within 48 hours, the police tracked her down and brought her back to

her family. A police official involved in the investigation stated, "We are pleased to have resolved this case promptly and brought the woman back to her family. Timely action and coordination with various teams were key to this successful resolution."

In another case at the One Town police station, a 15-year-

old boy who had gone missing was located by the city police within 24 hours. The boy was immediately returned to his family. A spokesperson for the One Town police station commented, "The swift recovery of the minor highlights the commitment of our police personnel to act promptly in such cases. We are pleased that the

child is back with his family." Meanwhile, a woman with mental health issues, who had left her home under the jurisdiction of the Arilova police station, was traced to Vijayawada and safely returned to her family. A senior officer said, "We are relieved to bring the woman home. Our officers worked tirelessly to ensure her safe return, and we appreciate the support from all units involved."

In a separate incident, a minor girl found wandering alone in the MahaRaniPeta police station area was identified by the police and

reunited with her parents. An officer handling the case stated, "This case underscores the importance of vigilance and a quick response from the police. We are pleased that the child is safe and back with her family."

City Police Commissioner Dr. Shankhabrata Bagchi praised the timely and efficient efforts of the police personnel involved in solving these missing person cases. He said, "The timely resolution of these cases reflects the dedication and hard work of our officers. I congratulate everyone for their outstanding efforts in bringing these individuals back home."



Couple ends life after killing five-month-old child

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

In a shocking incident, a couple, along with their five-month-old daughter, committed suicide by hanging themselves in their house, located at Santa Bazaar, in Narpala village on Thursday.

Shirisha hanging from the ceiling fan. Their five-month-old daughter and the police suspected that the couple before committing suicide, might have killed their child. The deceased Krishna Kishore used to run a medical shop and he was debt-ridden. The police understood that financial problems forced the couple to take the extreme step. The bodies were found in a decomposing state as they might have died four days ago. RI Jyothi and ASI Nagaraju registered the scene of the crime, registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.

1,800 litres of jaggery wash destroyed in raids

PNS ■ ELURU

Prohibition and Excise officials, along with the police, conducted raids at Sridhar veluru village in Kukkunur mandal and destroyed 1,800 litres of jaggery wash, which was being hoarded to brew illicit liquor. Prohibition and Excise Inspector K. Srinubabu informed the media that, acting on a tip-off about illegal liquor brewing, excise personnel, along with the police, raided a forest area in Kukkunur mandal. During the operation, they discovered an illicit liquor brewing unit. The team destroyed 1,800 litres of jaggery wash that was intended for distilling illegal alcohol. The Inspector warned traders that legal action would be taken against them if they supplied black jaggery — a key ingredient for brewing illicit liquor — to illegal distillers. He also urged the public to report illegal liquor activities by calling the helpline at 96185 21855.

EPACK Prefab plans to construct India's fastest-built factory in 150 hrs

The factory will cover 151,000 square feet and will be built using EPACK Prefab's advanced PEB technology. The company aims to complete the construction in record time without compromising on quality or durability



PNS ■ NELLORE

EPACK Prefab, a leading manufacturer of pre-engineered buildings (PEB), has announced a plan to construct India's fastest factory building in just 150 hours. The project will start on November 20th in Mambattu, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh. The factory will cover 151,000 square feet and will be built using EPACK Prefab's advanced PEB technology. The

company aims to complete the construction in record time without compromising on quality or durability. Sanjay Singhania, Managing Director of EPACK Prefab, said, "This project shows our

commitment to setting new standards in construction. We are confident that our team's planning and the speed of PEB technology will make this project a success. We want to demonstrate how quickly and

efficiently buildings can be made using prefab methods." The construction will happen in three phases. The first phase will involve building the main structure using prefabricated parts. In the second

phase, the roof will be added, and the building will be enclosed. The final phase will focus on finishing the interiors and other details, completing the entire structure within 150 hours.

Jagan supported campaign against mom, sister: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday accused YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy of supporting social media campaigns damaging his sister and mother. While speaking in the Assembly, the CM gave an example of such a post and said that he couldn't go further as those posts were highly disparaging. "A person who worked as a CM (Jagan) supported posts (on social media) on his mother and sister," alleged Naidu, citing the name of one Varra Ravindra Reddy who had allegedly indulged in such activities. Alluding to Jagan Mohan Reddy's recent press conference, Naidu asserted that the YSRCP supremo was feigning ignorance about the social media goings on.



8 red sander logs seized; 2 arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) personnel seized eight red sanders logs and arrested two smugglers at the SR Palem junction near Rajampet town in Annamayya district. DSP G. Balireddy informed the media on Thursday that a Task Force team, led by RI M. Chiranjeevulu and P. Naresh, conducted a search operation in the SR Palem area. During

the operation, the team spotted smugglers transporting red sander logs. Upon noticing the Task Force personnel, the smugglers abandoned the logs and fled into the nearby forest. The Task Force team chased after them, apprehended two smugglers, and arrested them. The arrested individuals are from Tamil Nadu. CI Suresh Kumar has registered a case and is currently investigating the matter.

Bhogapuram Airport to be named after Alluri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu announced in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly that the Bhogapuram International Airport will be named after the renowned freedom fighter Alluri Seetharama Raju. The resolution for this decision was proposed by Investment and Infrastructure Minister BC Janardhan Reddy, and it was unanimously approved by the Legislative Assembly. In his statement, CM Naidu praised Alluri Seetharama Raju for his valiant struggle for the rights of tribal people and his relentless fight against British rule. He highlighted how Alluri led attacks on British police stations at Chintagondi, Krishnadevi Peta, and Rajavomangi as part of his resistance. Naidu also recalled how Prime Minister Narendra Modi had unveiled a bronze statue of Alluri Seetharama Raju on the occasion of his 125th birth anniversary, recognising him as a hero and freedom fighter. Naidu stressed the impor-



tance of remembering and honouring such national heroes who fought for the country's independence. He also expressed frustration over the prolonged delay in the completion of the Bhogapuram Airport, which has been pending for the last five years. The CM further mentioned that the Legislative Assembly had resolved not only to name the airport after Alluri Seetharama Raju but also to establish a memorial museum in his honour. He expressed hope that a statue of the revolutionary hero would be erected in Parliament, and if required, a formal resolution would be sent to the Centre for approval.

YSRCP to raise key issues in Parl

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) is preparing to raise several critical issues during the upcoming winter session of Parliament. These include concerns over the law and order situation in Andhra Pradesh, the Polavaram project, and the proposed amendments to the Wakf Board Act. Addressing the media after a meeting with party MPs on Thursday, MP Pilli Subhashchandra Bose shared that former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had outlined the strategy for the party during the session and provided details of the key issues to be raised in Parliament. One of the primary concerns highlighted by Subhash Chandra Bose was the growing harassment and illegal detention of social media activists in the state. The YSRCP intends to raise these matters, alleging



that the state police are violating the rule of law by unlawfully detaining political opponents and activists, thereby infringing on their human rights. The party also reiterated its strong opposition to the proposed Wakf Board (Amendment) Bill, which it plans to challenge in Parliament. Bose emphasised that YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has made it clear that the party will not tolerate any actions seen as discriminatory against minorities. "We will

oppose the Wakf Board Amendment Bill and explore legal options to ensure the rights of minorities are protected," he stated. Another key issue the YSRCP intends to address is the Polavaram project, especially the Centre's decision to reduce the height of the Polavaram dam. The party will demand that the rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) package for displaced families be expedited, highlighting concerns about the welfare of those affected by the project. The privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) will also be a significant issue for the party. The YSRCP has been a vocal opponent of the privatisation move, with Bose reiterating the party's stance that VSP should remain in the public sector. "We will strongly protest the privatisation of VSP and advocate for its continued operation in the public sector," he added.

Wages of 'hamalis' hiked to Rs 28 per quintal

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The wages of 'Hamali' workers have been increased from Rs 25 to Rs 28 per quintal. Following the agreement reached with the Civil Supplies Department, the Hamali coolies have called off their strike. The agreement was finalised with the JAC leaders of the Hamali coolies on Thursday. A total of 5,791 hamali coolies will benefit from the wage hike, which will apply to 252 MLS points. Minister for Civil Supplies, Nadenla Manohar, assured that the coalition government will continue to work towards the welfare of civil supplies hamali workers in the future. The wage increase of Rs 3 per quintal will benefit 5,791 hamali workers. The Minister



held a meeting with the JAC leaders on Thursday at the Secretariat and agreed to implement the wage hike. The JAC leaders also raised other issues concerning the hamali workers, which the Minister assured to address.

Civil Supplies Commissioner Veerapandyan, Managing Director Veer Jilani, CITUC Honorary President Uma Maheshwara Rao and General Secretary Uday Bhaskar Rao were among those present at the meeting.

Police attack on Lagacharla villagers is despicable: CPM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana CPM State secretary Thammieni Veerabhadram said that "attack on the Collector by the villagers is wrong but the attack by the police on Lagacharla villagers is despicable. Veerabhadram said that the Left parties are condemning the police atrocities in Lagacharla severely. The leaders of Left parties visited Lagacharla village on Thursday. Later speaking to the media, Veerabhadram said, "The Lagacharla victims are saying that the police touched women in an indecent manner. The government should tender

apologies for the attack on the farmers of Lagacharla village and do justice to them. No question of taking a single inch of land in Lagacharla village by the government. The Communist parties would stand by the Lagacharla victims till the end." Veerabhadram said that the Collector has been stating that not to say that as an attack. However, government authorities and Ministers are describing the incident as an attack. "We are opposing the government and Ministers' efforts to politicise the Lagacharla incident against reality. That doesn't mean here we are not supporting the BRS.

SP stresses security at banks, steps for tackling cybercrime

PNS ■ ELURU

Superintendent of Police K Pratap Shiva Kishore highlighted the urgent need for enhanced security measures at banks and steps to combat cyber crimes. The SP convened a meeting with bank officials, police personnel, and security staff to review current security arrangements and discuss strategies to prevent crimes. He also briefed the bank officials on the types of crimes that commonly occur at banks and ways to mitigate them. Kishore pointed out that cybercriminals are often able to commit fraud by obtaining information directly from some banks, a fact that had come to light during investigations. He advised bank officials to take stringent measures to ensure that depositors' personal information does not fall into the wrong hands. The SP



also inquired if the banks had frozen the accounts of known cyber criminals. Further, the SP instructed bank officials to carefully monitor and verify any large transfers of money into accounts, particularly from other states, as these could indicate fraudulent activities. He assured the banks of full support in tackling cyber crimes and urged them to assist elderly customers when they are depositing or withdrawing money, as they are often targeted by

fraudsters. Kishore also emphasized the importance of securing ATM kiosks, suggesting that banks install CCTV cameras and appoint security guards to safeguard these areas. In the event of a cybercrime incident, he instructed victims to report fraud immediately by dialling 1930. Additional SP Purna chandra Rao, along with DSPs D Shrawan Kumar, M Venkateswara Rao, and KVVNB Prasad, also attended the meeting.

2 notorious thieves arrested, Rs 24L booty recovered

PNS ■ RAYACHOTI

The police have arrested two notorious thieves and recovered booty worth Rs 24 lakh. Addressing the media on Thursday, DSP Krishna Mohan said that a special team, led by Rayachoti CI Vara Prasad and SI Srinivasulu, was formed to apprehend the criminals. The arrested thieves, identified as Gummalla Venkata Subbaiah and Korla Kumar, were involved in multiple thefts and burglaries in the district. The police recovered gold jewellery and silver ornaments valued at Rs 24 lakh from their possession. The thieves are being produced before the court, the DSP added.

Make use of govt's welfare schemes, fisherfolk told

PNS ■ ONGOLE

District Collector A Thameem Ansariya and MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy urged the fishermen community to take full advantage of the welfare schemes provided by both the Centre and the State government. A programme was organised here on Thursday to mark World Fishermen's Day. Speaking at the event, MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy highlighted that both the Central and State governments are implementing various schemes aimed at improving the livelihood and financial conditions of fishermen. He reiterated that the State government is committed to safeguarding the interests of fishermen.

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Magunta further emphasised that the Prakasam district leads the state in fish production, contributing 29.1 per cent of the total production. He also mentioned that he had allocated Rs. 25 lakh from the MPLAD funds for the construction of the Fishermen Bhavan in Ongole, though work on the building had yet to commence. Collector Thameem Ansariya acknowledged the efforts of 75 fishermen from Prakasam district, who had taken 35 boats to Vijayawada to participate in the flood relief operations, and expressed her gratitude to them. She assured that the issue of the Sona boats had been brought to the attention of the Central government, and a

permanent solution would be provided soon. The Collector also spoke about the measures being taken to protect fishermen during cyclones and floods. She recognized the fisheries and aquaculture sector as a key driver for the state's development, particularly for the Swarnadhra@2047 initiative. She assured that steps were being taken to improve the financial conditions and living standards of fishermen. State Tourism Corporation Chairman Dr. Nukani Balaji and Mayor G. Sujata also addressed the gathering. District Fisheries Officer Chandrasekhar Reddy provided an overview of the welfare programmes being implemented for the benefit of fishermen.

ACROSS THE STATES

Bid to boost India-US ties

RAJNATH HOLDS TALKS WITH US DEFENCE SECRETARY

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday held talks with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin in Laos with a focus on implementing the new initiatives rolled out to bring peace in the Indo-Pacific under the framework of the Quad.



Both sides recognised the remarkable progress made under the US-India Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap, including ongoing collaboration to advance priority co-production arrangements for jet engines, munitions and ground mobility systems.

plan to procure 31 Predator high-altitude long-endurance drones from American defence major General Atomics under the foreign military sales route at a cost of nearly USD 4 billion figured in the talks. The deal was sealed last month.

sharing and industrial innovation," the defence ministry said on Singh-Austin talks. "Both sides recognised the remarkable progress made under the US-India Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap, including ongoing collaboration to advance priority co-production arrangements for jet engines, munitions and ground mobility systems," it said.

and the first-ever Quad-at-sea ship observer mission. The defence minister also referred to the launch of a Quad Indo-Pacific logistics network pilot project to support civilian response to natural disasters more rapidly.

DELHI POLLUTION CRISIS



Centre announces staggered work timings for employees

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday announced staggered working timings for its employees in view of the severe air pollution in Delhi, according to an order issued by the Union personnel ministry. Employees have also been asked to pool vehicles and use public transport to minimise vehicular pollution.

it said. The order said offices can be open from 9 am to 5.30 pm and 10 am to 6.30 pm. "The officers/staff using personal vehicles should be encouraged to pool vehicles and to use public transport to minimise the vehicular pollution," it added.



47 survivors of anti-Sikh riots handed out job letters

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Thursday distributed appointment letters to 47 survivors of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. According to a statement, six additional letters will be issued to successors of beneficiaries who have exceeded the age of service.



Malayalam actor Meghanadhan dies at 60

Renowned Malayalam film and television actor Meghanadhan, known for his iconic villainous roles, passed away in a hospital in the early hours of Thursday, industry sources confirmed. He was 60.



11-yr-old killed by mother, stepfather in Meerut

The mother and stepfather of an 11-year-old boy were arrested for allegedly killing him in Sardhana here, police said on Thursday. The accused, Nasreen (32) and Sameer (26), were sent to jail after police found their involvement in the murder following an interrogation on Wednesday, they added.

'Even Ajmal Kasab was given a fair trial'

SC remarks in Yasin Malik case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Even Ajmal Kasab was given a fair trial in our country, the Supreme Court on Thursday remarked and indicated it may set up a courtroom inside Tihar Jail for the trial of J&K separatist leader Yasin Malik in a kidnapping case.



hardly any connectivity in Jammu... In our country, a fair trial was given even to Ajmal Kasab and legal assistance was given to him in the high court." Kasab, the lone Pakistani gunman caught alive after the Mumbai terror attack, was hanged till death at the Yerawada Central Prison.

Army chiefs of India, Nepal discuss collaboration

PNS ■ KATHMANDU

Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Thursday held talks with his Nepalese counterpart General Ashok Sigdel here, focussing on collaboration between the two armies, officials said.

Delhi HC refuses to stay ED case against Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday refused to stay for now the proceedings against former CM and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to irregularities in the state Excise Policy 2021-22.



prosecution as he was a public servant when the alleged offence was committed. However, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, submitted a sanction was obtained to prosecute Kejriwal and he would be filing an affidavit. Kejriwal's counsel said the relevant document was not supplied to them along with the supplementary chargesheet and claimed there was no sanction

at the time of filing of the final report. The AAP convener's lawyer sought an early hearing after the court posted the hearing in January, 2025 and insisted an order on his plea for a stay on the proceedings be passed during the day owing to urgency.

'Rahul, Cong tried since 2002 to target Modi's image'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

PM's credibility remains high: BJP

The BJP on Thursday slammed Rahul Gandhi's attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the US prosecutors' indictment of Gautam Adani on alleged bribery and fraud charges as part of his long-running efforts to target its leader and noted that none of the four states named in American courts had a BJP government.



four states -- Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu -- where government functionaries were allegedly paid bribes of over USD 250 million to secure favourable deals, were ruled by non-BJP parties during the period mentioned in the indictment.

of crores of rupees by the Adani group, the ports-to-energy conglomerate, in states ruled by the Congress and its allies to question Rahul Gandhi over his party's dealings with the behemoth when he calls its boss Gautam Adani "corrupt".

India shaping global climate action: Environment Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is playing a pivotal role in shaping global climate mechanisms while ensuring its own developmental priorities are upheld, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav stated on Thursday, amidst the ongoing climate talks in Azerbaijan.

ensure that domestic priorities remain central to its approach. "Our initiatives to promote carbon and green credits align with global climate goals, while safeguarding India's developmental objectives," he noted.

Tampering with Ramakrishna Mission would cost heavily: HP Governor

PNS ■ SHIMLA



Tampering with organisations like Ramakrishna Mission will have a heavy cost, Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla said on Thursday, days after a clash in Shimla between the members of the sect and another group.

right," he said, adding, "We will not tolerate any disrespect to such a reputed organisation." Seven people, including three police personnel, were injured in a clash between members of Ramakrishna Mission Ashram and the Brahma Samaj late

Union minister stresses foster care for children

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development Savitri Thakur on Thursday emphasised that the foster care system offers an alternative to children aged six years and above who often face challenges in finding adoptive families.

Mamata to initiate 'total reshuffle' in CID

PNS ■ KOLKATA



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday announced the initiation of a "total reshuffle" in the state CID, accusing a section of police personnel in the lower ranks of indulging in corrupt practices.

and cross-check the coming. At times, false complaints are also lodged. If those are found to be genuine, take strong action. Do not spare me even if need be,"

Banerjee said during a meeting at state secretariat 'Nabanna'. Banerjee, who is also the state's home minister, also asked Kumar to take steps to

strengthen the Special Task Force (STF) and the anti-corruption bureau. "I will not tolerate that a section of the police and the CISF will accept bribes, be involved in the theft of coal, cement and sand, and then people will blame the Trinamool Congress.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Mending fences with China

Faced with a slowing economy and increasing geopolitical challenges, Beijing seems eager to seek a thaw with India

In a notable shift, the Chinese government has signalled its intent to recalibrate its ties with India following a series of disengagement measures along their disputed border. The thaw reflects both strategic considerations and economic imperatives as Beijing grapples with slowing economic growth and rising geopolitical challenges. After years of strained relations exacerbated by the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which resulted in casualties on both sides, the disengagement at friction points offers a moment to 'look into the future.' Chinese officials and business leaders have expressed optimism about a potential reset in ties, framing peace and stability as prerequisites for deeper bilateral engagement. China's economy has been under pressure from multiple fronts: sluggish growth, weakening consumer demand and the looming threat of escalating tariffs from the United States under Donald Trump's proposed policies. Beijing has already announced two rounds of monetary and fiscal stimulus packages, with a third expected soon, aiming to rejuvenate its domestic economy and strengthen trade ties with key partners like India.



India, with its vast middle-class market and growing manufacturing sector, represents an attractive prospect for Chinese businesses.

Despite a persistent trade imbalance—India's imports from China stood at \$99.59 billion in 2023, dwarfing its exports of \$16.23 billion—there is scope for collaboration. Chinese businesses see opportunities in India's pharmaceuticals, services and burgeoning electric vehicle market. China's business leaders and scholars have called for a pragmatic approach that separates border issues from economic and cultural ties.

Influential figures in China's economic hubs—Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen—have emphasised the benefits of collaboration. Companies like Shanghai Pharmaceuticals and carmaker BYD have expressed interest in leveraging the Indian market, highlighting areas like healthcare and electric vehicles as promising fields for cooperation. While Beijing appears eager to reset relations, New Delhi's emphasis on resolving border disputes as a precondition for normalisation remains a sticking point. India is likely to continue leveraging its trade policies to address the trade deficit and ensure balanced economic ties. Additionally, mutual trust needs rebuilding after years of diplomatic and military stand-offs. Indeed, the disengagement along the border is a significant step toward restoring confidence between the two nations. If both sides prioritise dialogue and economic cooperation, the thaw could lead to a more stable and mutually beneficial relationship. China's acknowledgment of India's potential as a key trade and investment partner, coupled with India's focus on reducing its trade deficit and securing fair access to Chinese markets, could lay the foundation for a new era in Sino-Indian relations. Whatever the reasons behind China's willingness to engage in dialogue, this is an opportunity that must be fully seized.

PICTALK



A worker spreads 'Finger Fryums,' for drying under the sun at a factory on the outskirts of Agartala

Congress party's political opportunism



SYED ZAFAR ISLAM

The glaring contradiction between Congress party's diatribes against Adani and its actions underscores a deeper issue of political expediency eroding its trust

The relationship between the Congress Party and the Adani Group is a masterclass in political hypocrisy. For all its vocal criticisms of the Adani-BJP nexus, Congress's historical and current actions tell a different story—one of close collaboration and mutual benefit. While Rahul Gandhi and his party present themselves as crusaders against crony capitalism, the truth is that Congress has been instrumental in the growth of the Adani empire. If anything, Congress's attacks on Adani only serve to highlight its duplicity.

Adani's early growth can be traced back to the 1990s when the Congress Party was in power. In 1993, under the Chimanbhai Patel-led Congress government in Gujarat, Adani was granted land at just 10 paise per square meter for his Mundra Port project. Further land allocations were made by Shanker Singh Vaghela, who was supported by the Congress Party. Interestingly, only about a third of Adani's total land acquisitions in Gujarat occurred during Modi's tenure as Chief Minister.

Despite Rahul Gandhi's relentless attacks on Adani, Congress-ruled states continue to roll out the red carpet for the conglomerate. In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's government has signed agreements with Adani for a massive 10,000 MW solar power project and handed over operational control of Jaipur International Airport.

In Chhattisgarh, Bhupesh Baghel's administration has approved Adani's role as a Mine Developer and Operator for coal blocks, while Himachal Pradesh's Congress Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu brokered a deal to reopen Adani-owned cement plants. These are not isolated incidents but part of a broader trend where Congress governments actively court the same group their leaders lambast at the national level.

This two-faced approach isn't just political theatre—it's deeply cynical. The group's ability to



deliver large-scale infrastructure projects, attract investments, and create jobs makes it indispensable to state governments, including those led by Congress. Yet, instead of owning this reality, Congress chooses to vilify Adani on the national stage, using him as a convenient punching bag to score political points against the BJP.

It's a strategy designed to mask its complicity while hoping voters don't notice the glaring contradictions. Rahul Gandhi, in particular, has made Adani the centerpiece of his attacks on Modi, framing the group as a beneficiary of crony capitalism. But his rhetoric collapses under scrutiny. Congress's historical and ongoing engagement with Adani exposes its attacks as hollow. If Congress truly believes Adani is emblematic of everything wrong with India's economic system, why does it continue to facilitate his projects in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh? Why does it refuse to acknowledge its role in Adani's rise, from land allocations in the 1990s to the financial wind-



THIS DUPLICITY ISN'T JUST BAD POLITICS; IT'S BAD FOR INDIA. CONGRESS'S SELECTIVE OUTRAGE OVER ADANI DISTRACTS FROM THE REAL ISSUES OF ECONOMIC CONCENTRATION AND REGULATORY CAPTURE

falls his group enjoyed during UPA rule?

The answer lies in political expediency. Adani Group's growth and expansion have not been limited to any single political party or government. The conglomerate has secured projects, investments, and approvals from governments led by Congress, regional parties, and other opposition parties across various states. But at the state level, where governance realities take precedence over rhetoric, the result is a schizophrenic approach that undermines whatever credibility Congress hopes to claim in its critique of crony capitalism.

This duplicity isn't just bad politics; it's bad for India. Congress's selective outrage over Adani distracts from the real issues of economic concentration and regulatory capture. While concerns about corporate influence on politics are valid and must be addressed, it is crucial to have a balanced and fact-based perspective on the issue. Worse, it perpetuates the very system it claims to oppose, enabling Adani's expansion while pre-

tending to stand against it. For Congress, the cost of this hypocrisy is more than just bad optics—it's a loss of trust. Voters are not blind to the contradictions between what Congress says and what it does. Rahul Gandhi's crusade against Adani might make for compelling headlines, but it rings hollow when Congress-ruled states continue to partner with the group. This gap between rhetoric and reality exposes Congress as a party more interested in political opportunism than principled opposition.

The people of India are wise enough to see through the opposition's double standards and political opportunism. They understand that the BJP government has always prioritised the nation's interests and has worked tirelessly to promote inclusive growth and development. We will continue to focus on our agenda of good governance, economic reforms, and social welfare, regardless of the opposition's baseless attacks and allegations.

(The writer is BJP national spokesperson; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GANGA UNSAFE FOR BATHING

Madam — The National Green Tribunal has ordered Varanasi DM to put up a board as the Ganga is not fit for bathing. It is unfortunate. Ganga is a lifeline to tens of millions of people who live in its basin and depend on it for their daily life. But in the recent years, the Ganga has become not suitable for drinking purposes and more pathetically for bathing too since it is severely polluted with human waste and industrial contaminants. Three quarters of sewage from the northern plains is discharged into the Ganga without treatment. The Central Pollution Control Board states that BOD levels should be less than 3 mg per litre for bathing, but in the Ganges, BOD levels can be up to 6.4 mg per litre.

Therefore, swimming in the river, which has high levels of harmful bacteria and toxic chemicals, can increase the chance of developing diseases like viral fever, nausea, typhoid, hepatitis, gastroenteritis and so on. The Ganga Action Plan was launched in 1985 with the aim of improving water quality through interception, diversion and treatment of domestic sewage and to prevent toxic and industrial chemical wastes from identified polluting units from entering the Ganga should be strictly implemented. The Namami Ganga project was launched in 2014 with the objective of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of the Ganga should be given life.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

BENGAL'S MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Madam — The article 'West Bengal's lost opportunity' (November 20), reshapes the genesis of Bengal's apathy for industry for decades and its doomed economy. The militancy of trade unionism under CPI(M) and TMC regimes has left Bengal de-industrialised for over five decades. CPI(M) and TMC are synonyms as the leftist cadre of CPI(M) has shifted en masse to TMC. Besides Tata Nano and Haringhata Dairy, the successive governments had opposed the Nuclear plant in

Winter smog chokes Delhi



The recurrent worsening of air quality in North India, particularly New Delhi, in the winter season is the cause for concern, which needs a comprehensive and long-lasting solution. This year the air quality index there reached 500 points, a severe plus range. Despite

the stubble burning being restricted, it has been frightening for one and all. The stubble burning in the fields of adjacent states has been considered a major contributing factor for the worsening of air quality there.

Apart from discouraging stubble burning, other measures like restricting the number of constructions, putting a cap on industrial emissions, and encouraging public transport should be implemented. Instead of passing the buck to the next, the centre and states should work in tandem to chalk out a comprehensive plan and implement it effectively. The authorities should involve the scientific community and include the people for better results. The public health, schools, transport, work and livelihood getting a halt with regularity every winter for decades in the capital region of India augurs no good at all.

DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

Haripur through violent agitations. In fact, the state governments and leadership of CPI(M) and TMC have been confrontational with Union Governments on setting up industries. The leftist agenda aims to weaken India and is subservient to the interests of China. The vote bank politics of CPI(M) and TMC have failed the state. Lakhs of youth have migrated to the other states for jobs.

The infrastructure of the state is in the worst condition and the political ecosystem thrives on violence. Therefore, alternative leadership outside CPI(M) and TMC has not emerged. Mamata Banerjee's leadership is more leftist than the Communist leadership of CPI(M) and CPI. Bengal is badly bruised on economy and GST and income tax collections are some of the poorest in the country with the size and population of the state. The successive governments of CPI and TMC have been oppressive, as evident from the recurrent violence in all Lok Sabha, Assembly, and Panchayat elections. A poor state with potential to be the most developed is very unfortunate for the

country. Bengali people deserve a better life and opportunity to grow.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

CASH CONTROVERSY

Madam — As Maharashtra hurtles toward a critical election, a political firestorm has engulfed the state, with BJP veteran Vinod Tawde and Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) leader Hitendra Thakur locked in a battle of accusations and counter-claims. Tawde, long embroiled in controversies and estranged from BJP heavyweight Devendra Fadnis, has found himself at the epicentre of fresh allegations of voter bribery. In Virar, BVA workers alleged that Tawde was caught red-handed with Rs 9.93 lakh in cash, sparking chaos. Thakur, claiming Tawde also possessed Rs 5 crore in cash and incriminating diaries listing names for monetary distribution, led the charge, insisting the BJP was attempting to buy its way to victory.

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Are taxpayers getting their money's worth?

From understaffed schools and ill-equipped hospitals to failing sanitation systems, taxpayers are left wondering: where is their money really going?

Each month, countless individuals contribute a significant portion of their earnings to the government, with the expectation that it will deliver essential services and build a nation worthy of our pride. Despite decades of commitments and the collection of hundreds of billions in taxes, numerous regions still suffer from shockingly inadequate basic infrastructure. Educational institutions lack adequate classrooms and dedicated teachers. Instead, middle-class families find themselves having to extend their budgets to enrol their children in private schools. Government hospitals, which are meant to provide free health care, are often overcrowded, dirty and severely lacking in staff. The middle class has ultimately turned away from these facilities, leading them to seek costly private care—where once more, their taxes and the expected refunds were meant to support them.



Each year, governments amass billions in tax revenue, yet a significant portion frequently gets redirected to non-essential projects, bureaucratic inefficiencies, or, even more troubling, corruption.

Extravagant government offices, regular overseas travel for officials and inadequately planned infrastructure initiatives consume resources that ought to be allocated to enhancing public services. Systemic leakages in public sector spending result in a significant portion of the allocated budget failing to reach those it was meant to benefit. It is not merely a matter of inefficiency; it represents a profound betrayal of public trust.

Taxpayers deserve clarity and results. Therefore, it is essential for governments to create detailed spending breakdowns that enable citizens to follow the flow of their funds. It is essential for governments to reassess their spending priorities. Rather than focussing on grand symbolic infrastructure projects, efforts will be directed towards grassroots enhancements—cleaning hospitals, recruiting skilled teachers, and ensuring proper sanitation in every school. Technology can play a crucial role in monitoring advancements on extensive spreadsheets and digital platforms, highlighting areas that

require urgent focus.

The key takeaway is the importance of civic engagement. People must insist on greater accountability from those they elect. Advocacy, community assessments, and exerting influence can indeed compel a government to establish fundamental infrastructure for the public. If the government disregards the opinions of the taxpayer, the collective voting strength and lobbying activities can convey a different kind of message. Public funds should serve as a means for advancing the nation, rather than being squandered on wasteful expenditures or corrupt practices. The true measure of a nation's greatness lies not in its towering skyscrapers or grand monuments, but in the care and support it provides to its people. Quality education, hygienic healthcare facilities, and essential sanitation are not privileges—they are basic entitlements. Now is the moment to hold the influential responsible for fulfilling their commitments.

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



RACHNA LAKHPATRI



FIRST COLUMN

THE FRAGILE MIND AND OVERCOMING FEAR

understanding the causes of mental fragility and embracing methods of healing can help us fight fear



RAVI VALLURI

The cell rang and dropped from her hands. There was an agonising silence across continents. Her only son in the US, a brilliant student, committed suicide. Bill Maher writes, "Suicide is man's way of telling God: You can't fire me, I quit." But do brave men commit suicide? It appears to be a permanent solution to a transitory problem. Marcus Trescothick and Chetan Sharma come to mind. The former suffered from xenophobia in the subcontinent and Chetan Sharma after being hit for that last ball six at Sharjah by Javed Miandad lost his mojo and rhythm.

Fear, anxiety, emotional upheavals, unpleasant feelings, panic attacks and phobias are all symptomatic of a fragile and delicate mind. A fragmented mind is invariably a victim of irrational fear. Such an individual is unable to distinguish between what is logical and what is not. People harbouring fear suffer from panic attacks, sweaty palms, disturbed sleep, palpitation, shortness of breath, inability to remain calm, dry mouth and numbness of the feet and hands. A contributor to the magnification of fear is our pent-up emotions. These emotions are not based on a rational or scientific thinking pattern. We end up violently or irrationally reacting rather than responding in a coherent and clear-sighted manner. Humans should be prudent to ponder, that if left untreated this situation can become mourning regalia. A person can suffer from psychosomatic illnesses, loss of appetite, self-deprecatory behaviour or even schizophrenia. An element of fear is perhaps required, because then we can patrol our fences. Perhaps the only fearless people are sages and mentally deranged personalities! They are insulated from fear! The



brain is an organ and the mind is our intellect. It makes us aware and enhances the quality of consciousness. The mind is a movie theatre where the soap opera of our life is enacted. We play, rewind, and rerun an enormous number of movies. Thoughts are impacted by the kind of food we partake in (Tamasik, Rajasik, Sattvik), the company we keep and the amount of rest we take. The quality (guna) of food has a bearing on our disposition and approach to life.

Tamasik food makes us sluggish, Rajasik food makes us feverish or anxious in disposition and Sattvik food makes us feel calm. The first two lead us to fearful situations. If we are closeted with individuals who have a negative thought process, we imbibe such attributes and evince such a behavioural pattern. "Man is known by the company he keeps" is a very old adage and so is "man is born free but always in chains". It is cardinal to have adequate physical and mental rest. If we are rested, then we are at peace and do not complain or quibble.

Then we are physically and mentally alert and high-yielding. In our minds, we need to keep space to just dump the garbage which disappears into the recycle bin, NEVER to APPEAR again. We need to pursue passions, and hobbies, indulge in sports, participate in extracurricular activities, avoid negative company, take up initiatives, practice meditation, keep the mind occupied, footslog on the treadmill, go for long walks, go for treks and read autobiographies of entrepreneurs and achievers. There are others who adopt the spiritual path by practising pranayama, learning yoga, undertaking the Art of Living course, or observing the breath through the Vipassana technique. To conquer fear, we need to log out of our comfort zone so that the virus of fear does not enter our operating system. And if nothing works out, the magic is to surrender to the Divine and feel grateful.

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

Dedicated bank for MSMEs to boost credit access



A S MITTAL

This new initiative seeks to bridge that gap and stimulate job creation and economic activity by providing MSMEs with the financial support they desperately need

The government plans to establish a dedicated bank to lend directly to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to enhance credit availability in this crucial sector. The industry has called for increased financial support, as current institutions like the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) primarily focus on refinancing loans rather than providing direct funding. In contrast, state financial and industrial development corporations do lend directly to MSMEs.

However, many, such as the Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation (PSIDC) and Punjab Finance Corporation (PFC), are experiencing funds crunch and have stopped credit flow. PSIDC gathered liabilities worth Rs 4700 crore, therefore, has not given any fresh loans to any company for the last 16 years. According to an Ernst&Young(EY) report, MSME credit penetration in India is only 14 per cent, significantly lower than in larger economies like the US and China, where the figures are 50 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively. Indian MSMEs face a critical credit shortage of? 25 trillion, indicating a substantial untapped credit market. Increasing lending to MSMEs can stimulate economic activity and create jobs. The proposed establishment of a separate bank dedicated to the MSME sector would help address these direct credit shortages. However, the government needs to finalise various details, such as the bank's ownership structure, which may adopt a hybrid public-private partnership model. Although large banks operate in the sector, they often struggle to meet the unique needs of MSMEs.

Countries in Europe provide valuable lessons by grouping MSMEs with home loan customers, both considered small borrowers. If the government does not establish a new bank, SIDBI could be transformed into a full-fledged bank focused on direct lending to MSMEs instead of merely refinancing. SIDBI plays a vital role in financing India's MSMEs and is owned by a consortium that includes the government and major financial institutions. In 2023-24, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) supported the agricultural sector with a loan portfolio of Rs 6.68 lakh crore, with the agriculture sector contributing 18 per cent to the country's GDP. On the other hand, SIDBI had a refinancing loan portfolio of? 84,000 crore in FY 2023-24, with the MSME sector contributing 30 per cent to the GDP. For micro and small enterprises to grow, obtaining capital remains one of their most significant challenges.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has designated MSMEs as a priority sector and directed banks to allocate 40 per cent of the Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to priority sectors, including MSMEs. However, a study by ICR has found that most banks do not exceed 25 per cent for MSME credit. SIDBI's future growth depends on how effectively commercial banks fulfil their priority sector lending targets. A report by ICR warns that if banks successfully meet their quotas, there could be a reduced need for SIDBI's refinancing services. Challenges: Despite the vital role MSMEs play in the country's economy, access to adequate, timely, and low-cost finance poses a significant hurdle to the sector's growth prospects. Limited credit history, insuffi-



INCREASING LENDING TO MSMEs CAN STIMULATE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND CREATE JOBS. THE PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEPARATE BANK DEDICATED TO THE MSME SECTOR WOULD HELP ADDRESS THESE DIRECT CREDIT SHORTAGE

cient collateral, lack of knowledge about government support, and high borrowing costs complicate access to funding for MSMEs. Unlike large corporations, MSMEs often lack an established track record, making it challenging to secure loans from banks and other financial institutions. There are 64 million MSMEs in India, with 99 per cent classified as micro-enterprises. Despite global adversities, the sector has helped cushion the economy from shocks. In a nation marked by significant disparities between urban and rural areas, MSMEs contribute to the upliftment of less developed regions, thereby reducing regional imbalances and inequality. The sector provides over 110 million jobs, accounting for 23 per cent of the country's labour force, making it the second-largest employer in India after agriculture.

The importance of MSMEs to the Indian economy cannot be overstated. They drive innovation, generate employment, and contribute significantly to exports and GDP. By fostering entrepreneurship and supporting large-scale industrialisation, MSMEs play a pivotal role in reducing regional imbalances, uplifting economically weaker sections, and stimulating socio-economic development. Their adaptability and resilience make them indispensable in the face of economic adversities, ensuring the continuous dynamism of the Indian economy. With a contribution of 27 per cent to India's GDP, 38.4 per cent of total manufacturing output, and 45 per cent of the country's total exports, the MSME sector serves as the backbone of the economy.

Global Models to Emulate: However, the government has launched several initiatives to promote financing for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE), Pradhan Mantri

Mudra Yojana (PMMY), and Stand-Up India. While these efforts are commendable, the government must ensure awareness of and effective disbursement for these schemes so that more enterprises can benefit. Additionally, the private sector needs to step up and promote MSME financing.

Without public-private partnerships, alliances, and collaborations, MSME financing will continue to face challenges. One pressing issue is the introduction of interest subvention to address high borrowing costs, which range from 10 to 12 per cent. This creates an uneven playing field when compared to countries like China, where the borrowing rate is 3.1 per cent, the US at 4.37 per cent, and the European Union, which averages 5.1 per cent for MSMEs.

In the US, MSMEs can access funding through various federal and state programmes. The Small Business Administration (SBA) plays a vital role by offering loan guarantees and encouraging banks and other financial institutions to lend to small businesses. The Microloan Programmes provide capital for various business needs, including working capital, equipment purchases, and real estate acquisitions. Furthermore, the US government supports MSMEs through grants, venture capital initiatives, and state-specific funding programs tailored to local business environments. This diverse range of financial products ensures that MSMEs can find suitable funding options for their specific requirements.

In European Union countries, MSMEs benefit from robust financial support frameworks facilitated by institutions such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). These entities provide funding through intermediaries like banks and microfinance institutions, offering loans, guarantees, and equity

financing. The EU also promotes MSME funding through programs focused on the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises, which emphasise innovation and competitiveness. In China, the government has implemented several measures to enhance MSMEs' access to finance through dedicated banks, such as the China Development Bank, which offers targeted lending. Local governments have established credit guarantee funds as well. Moreover, China's financial technology sector has significantly grown, with online lending platforms and digital financial services providing alternative funding sources for MSMEs.

Way Forward: The inherent challenges faced by MSMEs cannot be overlooked. It is essential to address the issues within the MSME sector that hinder financial accessibility. As recommended by the Parliamentary Committee on Finance, the comprehensive approaches in the US, EU, and China serve as valuable models for India to enhance its financing landscape for MSMEs, improve credit access, and make these enterprises globally competitive.

The government also proposed establishing a Merchant Credit Card (MCC) Scheme for traders and a Vyapar Credit Card (VCC) for micro-units, similar to the Kisan Credit Card (KCC). Under the Credit Guarantee Fund, a scheme to provide short-term loans with interest subvention is still awaited. There is still much work to be done to ensure that all MSMEs can access affordable and timely financing.

(The Author is vice-chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, vice-chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and president of Tractor and Mechanisation Association; Views expressed are personal)

India's gender gap in labour force participation: A missed opportunity

India must act swiftly to secure its digital future in an era where technological prowess is now essential for national security

A recent International Labour Organisation and Niti Aayog report shows that less than 50 per cent of women are in the labour force in India, compared to 80 per cent of men, and this proportion has not increased since 1990. India is presently realising a demographic dividend, with the largest number of the young working population in the age group of 15-34. The above trend in women's labour market participation has serious implications for the economy, indicating a need for transition.



KAJLEEN KAUR

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), presents a slightly optimistic

picture, where women's participation in the labour force has notably increased to 37 per cent from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18. Although growing, these figures are disgracefully low compared to 69 per cent in China and 57 per cent in Bangladesh. A similar comparison of female literacy rate in India with Sri Lanka, China, South Africa and Russia between 2011-2021

shows a remarkable growth from 59.28 per cent to 69 per cent for India, but it is way below all other countries where the figure is greater than 90 per cent, due to their dedicated efforts to female literacy. The female labour supply traces a U-shaped curve to economic growth in many developed countries implying an initial fall in the supply with an increase in the GDP of the country, but later showing a positive trend. However, in India, this upward trend is not realised implying that economic growth has not generated adequate jobs for women.

According to the OECD report (2019), women in India spend on average 352

minutes a day on unpaid work as against 52 minutes by men. The division emphasises that a woman's "appropriate" role may be dominated by patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and traditional bias, and are restricted to caregivers and homemakers. There is also a considerable gender-based wage gap of about INR 4,014. On average, men earn INR 12,048 per month while women earn INR 8,034, or about 33 per cent less than men. This illustrates the stereotypes and gender biases that affect employment decisions, promotions, and wage negotiations. Recently, Indian policymakers and government have undertaken several initiatives and schemes



to raise the status of women with better access, eliminating barriers, and gender parity in the educational system.

Programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao, and the National Programme for Education of Girls at

Elementary Level (NPEGEL) aim to combat gender bias, guarantee inclusive education, and improve access to education for all.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) also introduced the "Udaan Scheme" in 2022 to encourage and facilitate female students to pursue higher education in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

This is relevant as the Indian global compatibility centres (GCCs) show only 6.7 per cent of women in executive roles and 5.1 per cent in deep tech organisations. According to the World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report 2023, India ranks 127 out of 146

countries in terms of gender parity, an improvement of eight places from 2022. The underutilised talents and unrealised potential and skills of women are crucial for redeeming the benefits of demographic dividend. A comprehensive strategy including education beyond secondary schooling with a focus on skill development can design a long-term employment-oriented development strategy, acting as a catalyst in achieving goals set under United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

(Kajleen is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi University; Views are personal)

AAMIR KHAN'S WISDOM GUIDES SOHUM SHAH'S CAREER



Sohum Shah, an actor, entrepreneur and founder of Sohum Shah Films, has a clear and powerful philosophy when it comes to filmmaking. "Make one film, but do it with all your heart," he says, reflecting on a lesson he learned from none other than Aamir Khan. For Sohum, passion and dedication are far more important than focusing solely on commercial success. This belief has guided him in his journey both as an actor and a producer. As a producer, Sohum's work on *Tumbbad*, a fantasy folklore film, stands as a prime example of his commitment to heartfelt cinema. Released in 2018, *Tumbbad* quickly earned a cult following due to its unique narrative and haunting visuals. Sohum's approach to filmmaking is all about creating stories that resonate with audiences and stir emotions. "I don't have any special topics in mind that I want to focus on. Whoever brings me a good script, I will work

with that person," he shares, underlining that it's the story, not the trends, that matters most. By focusing on creating films with passion and purpose, Sohum Shah is proving that success is about more than just numbers—it's about making films that leave a lasting impact on the audience, much like the lessons he's learned from Aamir Khan. Sohum's next big projects are *Tumbbad 2*, which promises to continue the beloved saga, and *Crazy*, a film from Sohum Shah Films slated for release on March 7, 2025. The motion poster for *Crazy* has already created excitement and fans are eagerly anticipating the next chapter in Sohum's filmmaking journey.

Baby John: Diljit Dosanjh & Dhee collab's Nain Matakka out on November 25

The buzz surrounding Baby John has been electrifying ever since the first announcement and teaser, and now the excitement intensifies as the makers are all set to unveil the first song – *Nain Matakka* – releasing on November 25, 2024. Produced by Murad Khetani, Priya Atlee and Jyoti Deshpande, *Nain Matakka* promises to be the ultimate dance anthem. It's the first time these two global sensations Diljit



Dosanjh and Dheekshitha Venkadeshan, aka Dhee have collaborated for the song in the film which is penned by Irshad Kamil and the music is by S. Thaman. *Nain Matakka* track is a foot-tapping, peppy number that showcases the sizzling on-screen chemistry between Varun Dhawan and Keerthy Suresh. The magic of Diljit's voice combined with an electrifying beat, is sure to elevate this song to instant hit status! Dhee too adds her magic like no another. She is one of the most streamed Australian singer and composer. The film's teaser has already given us a glimpse of the gripping action and high-octane entertainment awaiting audiences and the music will only add to the excitement. Starring Varun Dhawan, Jackie Shroff, Wamiqa Gabbi and marking the highly anticipated Hindi debut of Keerthy Suresh, *Baby John* is a true blockbuster in the making. Presented by Jio Studios in association with Atlee and Cine1 Studios, *Baby John* is a production of A for Apple Studios and Cine1 Studios and releases on December 25, 2024.

MILEY CYRUS ANNOUNCES 'CAPTIVATING AND CHIC' VISUAL ALBUM

Fans of Miley Cyrus can look forward to both new music and accompanying visual art from her. Miley talked to Harper's Bazaar for their December 24/January 25 Art Issue spotlight and, in the main feature, she disclosed that she is creating a "visual album" to be released next year. She described her project to the magazine as "captivating and chic." The vocalist of Flowers also mentioned that the album is designed to convey some elements of twisted culture through music. The project is inspired by Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, a psychedelic film from 1982 that combines live-action and animation, adapted from the iconic album with the same title. Miley informed Bazaar that she wanted to create a version of *The Wall* with a more stylish wardrobe and increased glamour in order to fully represent the pop culture aspect. Panos Cosmatos, who directed one of her all-time favorite movies, 2018's *Mandy* featuring Nicolas Cage, is assisting Miley with the project. Cosmatos also took part in Bazaar's Cyrus edition, where he talked about her newest musical project being more experimental than any of her previous work as a Grammy winner. In her discussion with the media, Cyrus pointed out that the visual elements of her forthcoming album are influencing the music - whether the tracks are themed around ruin, heartache, or mortality. She assured her fans that the stunning and surreal visuals will be showcased in a lovely manner, as she thinks that even the darkest moments in one's life hold an element of beauty.



Rahul Dholakia's Agni celebrates firefighters' valour & sacrifice

The trailer of a never-before-told story about firefighters in Hindi cinema, *Agni* is now out, which offers cinematic salute to the fearless spirit, honour and sacrifices of firefighters. Directed and written by National Award-winning filmmaker Rahul Dholakia, the Excel Entertainment production features Pratik Gandhi and Divyendu in lead roles with Saiyami Kher, Sai Tamhankar, Jitendra Joshi, Udit Arora and Kabir Shah in pivotal roles. The much-anticipated film is set to premiere exclusively on Prime Video on December 6. With *Agni*, director Rahul Dholakia is thrilled to bring a story to life that not only celebrates the bravery of our firefighters



but also delves into their emotional journeys. He further said, "Firefighters are real-life heroes who go beyond battling fires—they rescue lives, respond to disasters and take on countless high-risk challenges with unwavering dedication. Their courage often puts them in challenging and dangerous situations, sometimes intensified by their own actions. This story is a tribute to their sacrifice, loyalty and resilience, and I hope it inspires audiences to recognise and appreciate these selfless protectors in our society." Meanwhile, *Agni* holds a special place in actor Pratik Gandhi's heart because he feels, "Agni is not just a film; it's a tribute to the courage of firefighters—the unsung heroes of our society. Delving into the emotional and physical challenges these brave souls face has been a transformative experience for me as an actor in a once-in-a-lifetime role. It's an honour to portray a character that reflects such resilience and dedication and I can't wait to share this gripping journey with audiences who are seeking impactful stories that celebrate human fortitude." After Divyendu's incredible journey, he has had with *Mirzapur*, *Agni*, releasing on the streaming platform feels like a homecoming. The project shows him portraying a cop, diving into the intense world of firefighters and the real-life heroes who protect us in this unique film. "This fictional film represents more than just an engaging story, but is something meaningful for me to be a part of. I consider this as a significant shift in my career as I take on a character to showcase a hero's personal sacrifices, beyond just their uniforms. It has enabled me to explore new depths of my craft that are raw and emotional, and I believe *Agni* will deeply resonate with audiences worldwide as it did with me."

Selena Gomez on her 'safest' relationship yet with Benny Blanco

Selena Gomez is hopeful about what lies ahead in her relationship with Benny Blanco. The actress featured on the upcoming *The Hollywood Reporter* cover discussed her relationship in her interview with the magazine. "This is the safest I've ever felt in one and I see a future with this person," she says about Blanco who was also featured in *PEOPLE's* 2024 Sexiest Man Alive issue. *The Only Murders in the Building* actress discussed how she's been coordinating with the paparazzi to provide privacy to her personal life. "When you put a little bit out there, people are not as hungry to hunt you down," she said. However, she clarified that most of her relationships don't have a peephole in them. The Fetish singer and the record producer officially acknowledged their relationship in December 2023. Gomez approved of various fan posts about Blanco and wrote, "He is everything to me in my heart," in a comment on one of them.



Nushratt Bharuccha teases emotional new project

Nushratt Bharuccha continues to win hearts with her acting prowess, charm and elegance. This year, the actress achieved a personal milestone by purchasing a car and seeking blessings at Siddhivinayak Temple. Not long ago, her visit to the T-Series office sparked curiosity among fans, leaving them speculating about an exciting new project. In a delightful surprise, Nushratt shared a series of intriguing photos on social media, hinting at a project she holds close to her heart. While the details remain tightly under wraps, her heartfelt caption suggests an emotional connection to this endeavor. The pictures offered fans a sneak peek into her world—a vanity van bearing her name, glimpses of a regal set and a candid shot from her makeup room, building anticipation for what's to come. Meanwhile, on the work front, Nushratt Bharuccha is gearing up to captivate audiences with her performance in the much-awaited *Chhori 2*.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



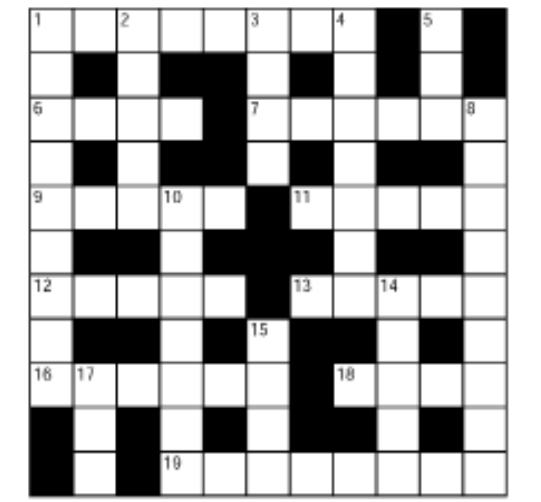
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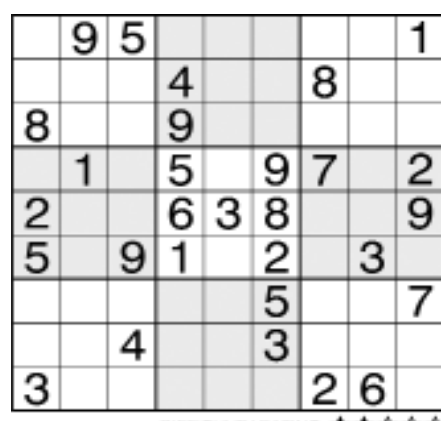
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Yesterday's solution

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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

- An extinct animal
 - Not different
 - Get away from
 - Beneath
 - Depart
 - Doing a job with something
 - Split into smaller parts
 - Something that helps you find the answer to a puzzle
 - Obstinate
 - Down
 - With your appearance changed so that people will not recognise you
 - Labelled
 - High playing cards
 - Soaring fireworks
 - Jump along on one foot
 - A tree that doesn't shed its leaves
 - Foes
 - A house made of hard snow
 - Restaurant's meal list
 - Liquid inside a pen
- SOLUTION**
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GINGER MEGGS



TRAVELOGUE

ANKITA CHHETRI'S CAPRI ADVENTURE IN A NUTSHELL!

AARTI SREENATH
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Picture this: You're on a sun-drenched island surrounded by cliffs that seem to kiss the sky and waters so turquoise they practically sparkle. This was Capri, a destination so enchanting it could make even the most seasoned traveler pause and take a deep, contented breath. Ankita Chhetri recalls, "Capri was pure magic! The cliffs, turquoise waters and the Blue Grotto were incredible, but what I loved most was soaking up the island's unique vibe. Every view was mesmerising."

But Capri isn't just about postcard-perfect landscapes. It's the heartbeat of its culture that captivates every visitor. She shares, "The Italian charm was absolutely captivating! From artisans handcrafting leather sandals to colourful ceramics on every corner and traditional music spilling out into the streets, there's a calm, beautiful rhythm of life here that makes you want to slow down and savour it all."

And speaking of savoring, let's talk food! Capri's culinary delights aren't just meals; they're experiences. "The food was divine! I fell in love with fresh seafood pasta and, of course, their famous Limoncello. Every meal felt like a celebration of flavours," she beams.

Of course, no trip to Capri is complete without connecting with the locals and Aditi was welcomed with open arms. "The locals were incredibly warm. Our boat tour

Sunkissed and smitten, Ankita Chhetri recounts her whirlwind romance with the enchanting island of Capri, where crystal-clear waters, picturesque landscapes and la dolce vita left her spellbound, in an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*.



guide was especially sweet. He went beyond just showing us around, constantly checking to ensure everyone was safe and having fun," she recalls, remembering the genuine hospitality that turned a simple boat ride into an unforgettable experience.

Speaking of boat rides, let's dive into the highlight of the trip: sailing around the island. She vividly recalls the moment: "Sailing around Capri was like a dream! Drifting through the crystal-clear waters with cliffs towering above—honestly, it's an absolute must-do!" Beyond Capri, though, lies her hometown, Hamiltonganj in West Bengal. "It's so underrated and unique. Nestled near the India-Bhutan border, it's got perfect weather, amazing food, mountains and pristine rivers. It's my personal slice of paradise."

When it comes to lodging, her stay in Praiano, just 15 minutes from Positano, was nothing short of magical. "We stayed in an Airbnb with stunning coastal views—a perfect base for exploring the Amalfi Coast," she describes, the charm of the place still fresh in their mind.

But when the pressures of work start to mount, she has a favorite retreat to recharge: "Lonavala! It's close to Mumbai and offers the perfect mix of windy weather, nature, and relaxation. It's my quick getaway to find peace."

However, not all travels are without their hiccups. She remembers a particularly nerve-wracking moment in Capri: "My sister and I almost missed the last boat from



Capri to Positano! We panicked, shouted, and waved at the departing boat. Miraculously, it came back for us. Those 15 minutes of panic were nerve-wracking, but oh-so-memorable!"

But Capri wasn't just about the sights and adventures—it was also about slowing down and embracing the present. "The beauty of Capri made me slow down and appreciate the small moments—the waves, the breeze. Watching the sunset from Anacapri felt like time stood still." Islands, it seems, have a special way of disconnecting you from the world and reconnecting you with yourself. Capri had that serene, timeless quality that left her feeling grounded and free.

As for capturing the experience, Ankita

keeps a detailed journal, taking photos and videos to relive the journey. "Capri and Amalfi felt like stepping into a painting. I'll treasure those memories forever," they reflect, a nostalgic smile crossing their face.

And when it comes to dream travel companions, she has the perfect pick. "I'd love to travel with Anam! Her energy is contagious and we've known each other for years. It would be a fun, crazy adventure!"

Whether it's sailing the crystal waters, tasting the freshest pasta, or simply watching a sunset from an idyllic island, Capri left an indelible mark on her. And who knows? Maybe they'll take Anam along next time, and Capri will get even more adventurous.



Building healthy boundaries by protecting your emotional space

Building healthy boundaries is essential for protecting your emotional space and ensuring that you maintain well-being in your relationships and daily life. Boundaries serve as the invisible lines that define where one person ends and another begins, allowing for personal space and autonomy. Establishing and maintaining these boundaries is crucial for emotional health, as they help prevent feelings of overwhelm, resentment and burnout. Here's a guide on how to effectively build healthy boundaries:

UNDERSTANDING BOUNDARIES

Boundaries can be physical, emotional, mental, or time-based. Physical boundaries pertain to personal space and physical touch. Emotional

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

• Gives you clarity:

When you set boundaries in your professional, personal and love life, it helps you give you clarity; you don't let other people disturb your mental peace for their sake or behaviour. It gives you clarity, keeps you focused and protects your mental health.

• Promotes self-growth:

When you set boundaries in your life, you don't allow others to cross the boundary; it helps you to make choices that support your goals and give you a sense of independence. It can also provide you with the freedom to grow on your terms; you don't let others interfere with your personal development.

• Maintains healthy relationships:

Everyone has a habit of oversharing and allowing other people to pass comments and judgments on their lives, but when we set healthy boundaries, it helps to strengthen our relationship. Long-lasting relationships are built on mutual respect; when you set boundaries, it presents misunderstandings, burnout and resentments. Boundaries help us connect with others without losing sight of our own needs, which leads to healthier relationships.

• Be clear and assertive:

Once you have identified your boundaries, communicate them clearly and assertively. Use "I" statements to express your feelings and needs without sounding accusatory. For example, saying "I feel overwhelmed when I

have to respond to messages immediately. I need some time to process before replying" conveys your needs while minimising defensiveness from others.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

After establishing your boundaries, it's essential to remain consistent. People may test your limits, especially if they are used to a more permissive dynamic. Stay firm in your decisions and gently remind others of your boundaries when necessary. Consistency reinforces the importance of your emotional space and shows that you value your well-being.

(The author, Archana Singhal, is a counsellor, family therapist and founder of Mindwell Counsel in Delhi.)

SPELLBINDING MELOMANIAC WITH HIS 'MADHUR-IC' MUSIC

With a voice that has captured the hearts of millions, **Madhur Sharma** has been making waves in the Indian music scene with his unique blend of classical and contemporary styles. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, rising music sensation Madhur Sharma opens up about his musical journey, his inspirations, his latest EP *Reversion* and more

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Madhur Sharma is a rising star in the Indian music scene, known for his soulful and melodious voice. This talented singer has captured the hearts of music lovers with his unique blend of classical and contemporary styles. With a strong foundation in Indian classical music, Madhur has released several popular singles and albums that showcase his vocal range and emotional depth. His notable releases include singles like *Kali Kali Zulfon Ke*, *Ek Dafa Tum Milo*, *Mere Baad Kisko Sataoge* (Lo-Fi), *Kehna Galat Galat* (Lo-Fi), *Tere Jeya Hor Disda* and *Woh Mulaqaat*, among many more.

Madhur's music often explores themes of love, longing and self-discovery, resonating with listeners across genres. His dedication to his craft and passion for music have

earned him a growing fan base and critical acclaim, marking him as an exciting emerging talent in the Indian music industry.

As we sat down to chat, Madhur shared with us the story of how his musical journey began. "My dad has been a huge influence on me. Since I was a kid, he would play all kinds of music for me and encouraged me to try new things." His time in a boarding school also played a significant role in shaping his passion for music. "We didn't have much to do in terms of entertainment, so I would spend most of my free time in the music room," he reminisced.

Sharma's latest EP, *Reversion*, is a proof of his innovative spirit. "I wanted to create something that would push the boundaries of traditional music," he explained. The EP is a beautiful blend of different genres, with each track offering something unique. Madhur's goal was to create music that would resonate with people across genres and he's thrilled with the response so far. When it comes to songwriting, he is humble about his abilities. "I'm actually very weak when it comes to writing songs," he laughed. However, he's fortunate to have collaborated with talented writers and composers who share his vision. Madhur's love for the Punjabi language is evident in his music and he's particularly fond of the song *Ranjhana Mera* from his latest EP.

As we wrapped up our conversation, he spoke about his experience performing live. "There's something special about connecting with your audience in person," he said. His Indian tour, which began in Hyderabad, has been a huge success, with audiences loving his unique blend of Bollywood and Sufi music. Madhur's love for Hyderabad is evident and he's grateful to have had the opportunity to perform there. "The city has a unique energy that's hard to find anywhere else," he said.

As Madhur Sharma looks to the future, he's excited to announce a new chapter in his musical journey. "After two back-to-back albums, I'm planning to release individual tracks," he shares. The first song, titled *Har Subah*, is a motivational track that's very close to his heart. "I've always wanted to create a song that motivates people to start their day on a positive note," he explains. Drawing from his own personal experiences, Madhur wrote *Har Subah* during a difficult time when he lost his parents. "Some songs really helped me get through that phase and now I want to pay it forward with my own music," he says. The title of his upcoming song encapsulates the song's message: to wake up each morning with a fresh perspective, leaving the past behind.



boundaries involve separating your feelings from those of others, while mental boundaries relate to thoughts and beliefs. Time boundaries help manage how much time you devote to others versus yourself. Understanding these categories is essential for recognising where you need to establish limits.

Self-awareness: The first step in building healthy boundaries is self-awareness. Reflect on your needs, feelings and limits. What situations or interactions drain you emotionally? Identifying these triggers can help you understand where to set boundaries. Journaling your thoughts or discussing them with a trusted friend or therapist can provide clarity on your emotional space and help articulate your needs.

It's going to get more attritional: Pat Cummins

PTI ■ PERTH

Australian captain Pat Cummins expects the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against arch-foes India to be more "attritional" as the two heavyweights of world cricket spar over five Test matches instead of the traditional four games. And given the enormity of the series, Cummins believes players would not have the time to be distracted by the IPL auction that would take place in Jeddah on Sunday, the third day of the match. The blockbuster series will be a survival of the fittest as Australia look to avenge successive losses on home soil when they go head-to-head from Friday.

"The Border-Gavaskar Trophy has always been very tight every series, five Test-match series gets really attritional, it's a big one really," Cummins said at the pre-match press conference here on Thursday. Australia will be without their assistant coach Daniel Vettori, who was granted permission to leave the Perth Test and be at the two-day auction with his IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad.



flown over there, but he has been here for the whole prep. Done all the meetings, done all the chats, watching it. We came to know that anyway," Cummins said. "So, for the players, I don't think so. Most of these guys have been there in the auctions before. They know

they can't really do anything. "You are a sitting duck and seeing whether you get selected or not. It doesn't... Doesn't make a difference to how we go about the first two days. It is not a distraction as far as I can see it," he added. The Australian captain admitted there will be

pressure on the home team, especially after it lost the last four Test series against India, including the two humiliating reverses on own soil. "There will always be pressure when you are playing at home. India are a very talented side and it will be a good challenge. But we are

not looking too far ahead," Cummins said. "It would be great to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. India are a great side but we are well prepared." The leading pacer also said that newcomer Nathan McSweeney should not try to imitate David Warner, the

legendary opener who retired from international cricket earlier this year. "He should play his natural game. He shouldn't try to imitate David Warner. That's not his game. As long as he makes the bowlers bowl again and again, that's his game," Cummins said of the man who is going to be handed his Test debut at Optus Stadium. Asked about India's talented all-rounder Nitish Reddy, Cummins said they shared the dressing room for IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad and praised the 21-year-old. "He is an impressive youngster. Didn't bowl much for SRH. He can swing the ball and is a really talented kid."

Interestingly, both Australia and India will be led by fast bowling captains, a rarity in international cricket. While Cummins will lead Australia, Jasprit Bumrah will be in charge of the Indian team as regular skipper Rohit Sharma is currently on a paternity leave. "It should happen more (pacers leading teams)," Cummins said. In the past four series between the two teams, India have won on all four occasions, including back-to-back away Test series wins in 2018-19 and 2020-21.



We are not carrying baggage from New Zealand series, says Jasprit Bumrah

PTI ■ PERTH

India's stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah on Thursday insisted that his team is not carrying any baggage from the unprecedented 0-3 defeat at home against New Zealand as it embarks on a challenging Test series against fierce rivals Australia. The five-match Test series starts here on Friday. "When you win you start from zero but when you lose, then also you also start from zero. We are not carrying any

baggage from India. Yes, we have our learnings from New Zealand series but those were different conditions and our results here have been different," said Bumrah, who is leading in the opening Test in the absence of Rohit Sharma, who is on paternity leave. Bumrah also said that the team has finalised its playing XI although he will reveal it only at the toss. "We have finalised our playing XI and you will get to know tomorrow morning before the start of the match," the skipper said.

Pujara backs KL Rahul at No. 3, believes Jaiswal can do a Warner



PTI ■ PERTH

Cheteshwar Pujara, who knows a thing or two about grinding the Australian attack in their den, on Thursday backed KL Rahul to bat at the vital number three slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, and said the swashbuckling Yashasvi Jaiswal is capable of doing what David Warner did in his prime. The five-match Test series begins here on Friday. "I don't know the batting order. I would prefer him (Rahul) at No. 3 because he has the experience to bat there," Pujara said in Star Sports press room. Rahul, however, is expected to open with youngster Yashasvi Jaiswal, while Karnataka's Devdutt Padikkal is being considered for No. 3 to maintain a left-right combination. "It seems the team is preferring Devdutt (Padikkal) at No. 3 for the left-right combination. He has batted at 5-6 and in the middle order. It will be easier to bat at No. 3 than opening. If he can bat at No. 3, it will be good." Pujara, currently sidelined from the Test set-up, praised Jaiswal and compared his batting with that of Australian great David Warner. "One of the most talented cricketers India has produced... I'm very confident that going forward, he has a lot to prove. I know he will play a key role in this series if we have to win.



"His role would be one of the most important ones. He can play a role similar to what David Warner used to do for the Australian team. "Being an opener, he holds the key. He's mentally tough. He loves batting, hits a number of balls. He has a long way to go across the formats." Pujara said the youngsters must play with self-confidence and without the fear of failure. "I will tell them the first battle is a mental battle. Self-confidence and belief are needed to make runs in these conditions. When there is pace and bounce, there is a chance of the ball hitting the body. You have to come out of that fear," Pujara said. On tackling short-pitch deliveries in Australian conditions, Pujara said the batters will have to identify the deliveries they should leave. "As a batter, you need to understand your strengths. We often end up playing hook shots we aren't quite capable of. On Indian pitches, most short-pitched deliveries are below shoulder level. But in Australia, they're often above shoulder height. "As a batter, you need to identify which balls to leave and which to play. Those below the shoulders are the ones you can pull, but you need to be in control of the shot. Sometimes you leave the ball, and sometimes you pull. You can't have a set rule -- you just need to look at the ball

and play according to the situation. Be in the present moment," he said. **Kohli needs a start** Virat Kohli may be going through a lean patch but Pujara believes his past success in Australia will help him to turn things around. "There is a lot of expectation of him. The number of matches he's playing and the athlete Virat is, he doesn't get enough breaks in between. That is why sometimes, when you're not getting enough breaks, your body and confidence go down a bit. That's normal. "He has got some break. He's at a place where he likes to compete. If someone is having a go at him, he would like to give it back to the bowlers -- that's how he started his journey. "He has set high standards for himself. He has that awareness. He's been a leader and is probably the best in the circuit. He's aware of what's expected of him and how many runs he has to make." Under Kohli's captaincy on the 2017-18 tour of Australia, Pujara aggregated over 500 runs and played a significant role in India's historic Test series triumph. "I'm confident that once he gets going, he needs to spend some time in the game. He's capable of doing all things. Always leading from the front, it's about getting a 50-60-70. If he gets a hundred, then he will have a great series ahead," Pujara said of Kohli. "In every match, he is motivated, whatever the format. Definitely, he has worked on it. It's about getting that start and spending time at the crease." **Pant 2.0 a lot smarter** Rishabh Pant has been the architect of their epic triumph in the 2020-21 series and the wicketkeeper-batter has returned after surviving a horrific car accident two years ago. Pujara feels the left-hander is a lot smarter now and will be one to watch out for. Australian bowlers struggle a bit to bowl to lefties. There's a different kind of enjoyment watching him. He's an attacking player who puts pressure on the bowlers. It becomes easy for me to play my natural game as they try to stop runs.

Spanish star Juan Mata joins ownership group of MLS expansion franchise San Diego FC

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Spanish star and World Cup Champion Juan Mata has joined the expansion San Diego FC's ownership group, making him the first active international soccer player to hold an ownership stake in Major League Soccer. Mata joins David Beckham as only the second international player to be involved in MLS ownership. "Joining San Diego FC as a partner is an exciting opportunity to help build something truly special in a city and league that are experiencing incredible growth," Mata said in a statement. He added that the commitment to the community by both the club and the Right to Dream



Academy "aligns perfectly with my own values. I look forward to contributing my experience and passion for the game and working alongside everyone here to build a club that inspires both on and off the pitch." He has been with the Western Sydney Wanderers of the Australian A-League since September.

career with Real Madrid Castilla before transferring to Valencia CF in 2007, where he won the Copa del Rey the following year. Mata signed with Chelsea FC in 2011, where he was pivotal in helping the London club capture the UEFA Champions League, FA Cup, and UEFA Europa League titles, earning Chelsea's Player of the Year honors twice in that span. He joined Manchester United in 2014, winning the FA Cup, Europa League and EFL Cup in nine seasons. He joined Turkish side Galatasaray in 2022, where he celebrated his first league title, before signing with Japan's Vissel Kobe in 2023, where he won the league again. Mata founded the Common Goal initiative, pledging 1 per cent of his salary to social causes.

Liga Deportiva Alajuelense threatens FIFA with legal action in bid for spot at Club World Cup

AP ■ SAN JOSE

The winningest team in Costa Rica is asking FIFA for a spot in next summer's Club World Cup and is willing to take legal action if denied. Liga Deportiva Alajuelense, which has won 30 league titles, wants FIFA to enforce the rule that forbids clubs from the same ownership to participate in the tournament. "The claim is based on the principles of eligibility set in the rules of the tournament," the club said in a press release. Team spokesman Marco Vazquez noted that Mexican clubs Leon and Pachuca belong to the same owner, Jesus Martinez, of Grupo Pachuca. "Those are the rules that FIFA established -- there cannot be multi-ownership,"



Vazquez said Wednesday. "There are two Mexican clubs from the same owner and the rulebook is clear. What we are asking is to review what FIFA itself established." The FIFA-run competition has been expanded from seven teams to 32 and will be staged in the United States from June to July next year. "We hired a law firm in Spain, and they have all the

details," Vazquez said of potential legal action. FIFA has not publicly reacted to the team's announcement and didn't immediately answer a request for comment. Alajuelense is the best-ranked team in Central America for the CONCACAF but 40th overall in the region. CONCACAF has four spots in the Club World Cup. The teams that qualified are the Seattle Sounders, Monterrey, Leon and Pachuca. Lionel Messi's Inter Miami will participate as a guest of the host. All five clubs were announced for the Dec. 5 draw in Miami. In Mexico, besides Leon and Pachuca, there are another two companies that own two or more clubs in the first division. Grupo Caliente owns Tijuana and Queretaro, while Grupo Orlegi controls Atlas and Santos.

Indian women's hockey team starts 2028 Los Angeles Olympics' qualification journey

PTI ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)

A new-look and much-fitter Indian women's hockey team started its 2028 Los Angeles Olympics' qualification journey in the most perfect manner, producing a scintillating, unbeaten performance during its title-defending Asian Champions Trophy campaign here. It marked a resurrection of sorts for the side that had been left deflated after failing to qualify for the Paris Olympics this year. It marks a fresh beginning for the team and its seasoned coach Harendra Singh. Since taking over in April, Harendra's vision has been crystal clear -- to qualify for the 2028 Games. He always believed and emphasised that a successful ACT campaign will be the right start for the team's journey towards the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. And Harendra couldn't have asked for more from his wards. "I truly believe this victory will inspire more young girls to take up

hockey and further elevate the sport in India. We are thrilled to be able to bring this win to our fans and our nation," said captain Salima Tete after the brilliant campaign. His primary focus since taking charge has been to improve the team's fitness, and fortitude and the Indian players performance in the just-concluded ACT was a testament to the fact that they have worked tremendously on these core areas and lived upto their coach's expectation. "While we celebrate this win, our focus remains on long-term goals. We are working hard every day, trusting the process, and staying dedicated to delivering our best in every tournament," Salima said. "Our ultimate aim is to bring more laurels to India and make the country proud," she added. The Indians were impressive in most departments of the game and remained unbeaten in seven matches, including the semifinal and final. What has been heartening for India was their ball transition from the backline to the opposition circle using both the



flanks. The resolute show by the defensive line was also one of the hallmarks of India's performance as they conceded just two goals in seven games, while scoring as many as 29

themselves. Out of these 29 goals, 15 came from field efforts -- a heartening statistic --, 12 from penalty corners and two from penalty strokes.

The ACT produced many stars for India, the prominent among them was 20-year-old young striker Deepika, who was the tournament's highest scorer with 11 goals to her name, including

four from field play, six from penalty corners and one penalty stroke. In fact, five Indians were there in the top-10 scorers' list. Besides Deepika, Sangita Kumari (4 goals), Preeti Dubey (3), Navneet Kaur (3) and Lalrmsiami (3) were also impressive. Harendra worked extensively on the fitness of the players in the run up to the tournament and it was clearly visible on the turf as the side played fast-paced, one-touch hockey throughout the tournament to trouble opponents, including reigning Olympic silver-medallists China whom they defeated 1-0 in the final to retain the title. If Deepika was a sensation upfront, vice-captain Navneet Kaur, Lalrmsiami and Neha were the fulcrum of India's midfield. Besides Deepika, young Sangita too was brilliant inside the circle, while Salima and 17-year-old Sunelita Toppo simply broke down the opposition defence with their dribbling skills and brilliant runs from the flanks. The defensive line was brilliantly

held together by Udit, Sushila Chanu, Jyoti and Ishika Chaudhary. So good was their performance that Indian goalkeepers Savita Punia and Bichu Devi Kharibam were hardly called into action in the tournament. But going forward, there is a vital area of concern for Harendra -- conversion rate from penalty corners. The statistics might show India scored 12 from penalty corners but the team's conversion rate was very poor. The Indians earned penalty corners aplenty in all the matches but lacked in execution and variation despite having as many as four options in the side in the form of Deepika, Udit, Navneet and Manisha Chauhan. But the future augurs well for the Indian team as the players look to gain much-needed exposure by rubbing shoulders with the best of the world in the first-ever four-team women's Hockey India League, starting in Ranchi on January 12 and finishing on January 26.

BOYAPATI'S INFLUENCE IN ASHOK GALLA'S FILM

Ashok Galla, nephew of superstar Mahesh Babu, second film, *Devaki Nandana Vasudeva*, has hit the cinemas today. In a candid conversation, he opens up about his film, his relationship with his uncle and his journey as an actor



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Mahesh Babu's nephew Ashok Galla takes the centre stage once again as the lead in his second film, *Devaki Nandana Vasudeva*. Directed by Arjun Jandhyala, the film carries the unique touch of acclaimed filmmaker Prashanth Varma, who provided the story. "It was around a year and a half ago that he narrated the story to me and I liked it instantly," shares Ashok. Prashanth Varma, known for his film *HanuMan*, pitched the story to Ashok even before its release. "The success of *HanuMan* is definitely a big advantage for us. It adds credibility and momentum to our film," Ashok notes, adding that director Arjun Jandhyala and his team made a few tweaks to the original story. Film maker Arjun Jandhyala, who has worked closely with Boyapati Srinu in the past, brings that influence to this project. When asked about the Boyapati connection, Ashok explains, "This film has the essence of a Boyapati-style movie, with a lot of action and emotional scenes. You can definitely see his mark in it." Much of the filming took place in Vizianagaram. Was the regional accent incorporated into the dialogue? Galla clarifies, "No, we didn't stick to the accent. Since this is a commercial film, we decided against it." He also feels that shooting in live loca-

tions enhanced his performance as an actor. Reflecting on the differences between his debut film *Hero* and this project, he says, "We wanted to showcase some variation in my look and character. For this film, both Prashanth Varma and Arjun Jandhyala envisioned a rugged appearance for me. They also asked me to gain weight, which I initially didn't understand. But during the action sequences, I realised why it was necessary—my co-actors playing villains are massive, like bouncers! It all made sense then." While the film promises commercial appeal, Ashok emphasises its emotional core. "The mother-son relationship is a major theme. My character does everything his mother says, which adds a strong sentimental layer to the story," he reveals. Ashok also shared a moment with his superstar uncle on social media, answering questions from fans. On Mahesh Babu's feedback, he says, "He's supposed to watch the film on Thursday, but I prefer not to sit with him during my films. It's nerve-wracking for me! I can watch any other movie with him, just not of my own." Addressing comparisons with his famous uncle, he admits he's eagerness to carve his own identity. "I know people still associate me with being Mahesh Babu's nephew and I want to move past that. To do so, I need a big hit. I'm working hard on every project to make that happen," he says. Did Mahesh Babu offer him advice after his debut? "He rarely comments on my acting, but he did say, 'If you want to succeed, you need to use your mind and stay focused.' That advice keeps me grounded and motivated," Ashok shares. Ashok's passion for acting dates back to childhood. "I first felt the urge to become an actor when I appeared in a cameo role in *Nani*. Later, during my boarding school years in Singapore, I attended advanced theatre classes. By the time I graduated from high school, I was certain about my career choice," he recalls. Though his father, Jayadev Galla, is a prominent politician and businessman, Ashok rules out any interest in politics. "That's definitely not for me. I want to focus solely on acting," he affirms. Speaking about his co-star Manasa Varanasi, who makes her debut with this film, Ashok praises her dedication. "She's a city girl but worked really hard to adapt to her role and prove herself," he says. When asked about future projects, Ashok reveals he's signed on with Sithara Entertainments for a "drama-comedy." As for exploring roles beyond the lead, he says, "I'm open to playing strong, meaningful characters if the opportunity arises."



Celebrating 50 glorious years of Mohan Babu in cinema

The Telugu film industry celebrates a monumental milestone as the legendary Mohan Babu marks 50 years in cinema. Renowned for his versatility and magnetic screen presence, he has shaped five decades of cinematic brilliance with iconic performances and transformative contributions to the industry. From redefining villain in *Swargam Narakam* to leading blockbusters like *Pedaryyudu*, Mohan Babu's journey is filled with groundbreaking achievements. His 1993 production *Major Chandrakanth* stands as a cinematic and political landmark, while his visionary efforts in education continue to empower thousands through Sree Vidyanketan and Mohan Babu University. To honour this remarkable legacy, yearlong celebrations will kick off in December 2024, leading to a grand tribute in November 2025. With Kannappa on the horizon, Mohan Babu's passion for cinema remains as vibrant as ever.



'We used a footage of KCR garu in this story'

Jabardasth fame Rocking Rakesh, who is debuting as a lead actor in the upcoming film *KCR: Keshava Chandra Ramavath*, opens up about the film and the reasoning behind its intriguing title.

Rocking Rakesh, widely recognised for his comedy on the *Jabardasth* show, is now stepping into a lead role with the film *KCR: Keshava Chandra Ramavath*, set to release this Friday. Known for his comedic timing, Rakesh is now venturing into a serious role in this film. "Comedians have the ability to experiment with any kind of role, unlike others. This has been proven by legends like Chalam, Rajababu, Brahmanandam and many others. So, I believe I can handle any role," Rakesh stated confidently. He revealed that the film's story was initially pitched to others, but they insisted he take up the lead role himself. "The original title I had in mind was *Mera Naam KCR*, but I couldn't proceed as I didn't get the required objection clearance from the party. Since my character's name is Keshava Chandra Ramavath, I decided to stick with *KCR*. A title like this adds buzz and curiosity around the film," he explained. Rakesh added that the protagonist in the film is a staunch admirer of KCR, the leader of the Telangana Movement. "There's a connection between KCR and the story. In fact, KCR sir himself appears in

the film. He doesn't know it, though—I used a footage to include him," Rakesh shared with a laugh. Addressing rumours that he initially approached another political party but was later backed by the BRS party, Rakesh clarified, "That's not true. If I had BRS support, I would've secured more theatres in Telangana. My intention was to honour KCR sir and the Telangana Movement. I've ensured his fans won't be disappointed." He also dismissed claims of political backing at the film's pre-release event, which was attended by Harish Rao. "I invited many people, including DIL Raju garu, but he didn't come. Most of the Jabardasth artists supported me, even those who campaign for Jana Sena. I've worked with Jana Sena too and I even invited the Communist party," Rakesh said. Rakesh noted an interesting observation during promotions in Andhra Pradesh. "Surprisingly, I got 26 theatres in Andhra, more than in Telangana," he explained. To make the film more accessible, Rakesh has also reduced ticket prices. "The maximum ticket price is set at Rs. 100 to ensure more people can watch the film," he concluded.



Vijay Deverakonda appreciates Priyadarshi

Priyadarshi is set to lead the upcoming film *Sarangapani Jathakam*, directed by Mohanakrishna Indraganti and produced by Sivalenka Krishna Prasad. On Thursday, actor Vijay Deverakonda released the film's teaser and expressed his admiration for Priyadarshi. Speaking on the occasion, Vijay praised Priyadarshi's growth as an actor. "Darshi has been doing great films, taking on lead roles in intriguing stories. I just

watched the teaser of *Sarangapani Jathakam*, where his character believes in horoscopes. Personally, I don't know much about true horoscopes, but seeing his journey makes me proud. When we worked on *Pelli Choppulu*, we never imagined reaching where we are today. Destiny has brought us here, and I'm thrilled for him," he said. Vijay also spoke fondly about director Indraganti Mohanakrishna. "I can't express how much I laughed

watching his film *Ashta Chamma*. At that time, it was such unique content, and I thoroughly enjoyed it," he shared, wishing success to the entire team, including producer Sivalenka Prasad. The film stars Roopa Koduvayur as the female lead opposite Priyadarshi, alongside actors like Vennela Kishore and Avasara Srinivas. The teaser hints at a hilarious entertainer, marking a potential comeback for Indraganti after a few setbacks.

MALAVIKA MOHANAN, PRABHAS SET TO SIZZLE IN THE RAJA SAAB

Malavika Mohanan who is carving her name in the pan-India cinema with her remarkable performances so far is set to mark her Telugu debut in the upcoming film, *The Raja Saab*. The actress will be seen romancing pan-India superstar and box office king, Prabhas. Fans are eagerly anticipating to witness the sizzling on-screen chemistry between Malavika and Prabhas and their pairing has already sparked immense curiosity and excitement among audiences. According to a source, the duo will soon be shooting for a romantic song. "Malavika and Prabhas will be shooting a hot romantic song for *The Raja Saab*. The song's shooting will take place in Europe around January and February," revealed the source close to the production house. *The Raja Saab* is touted to be a horror-comedy and is poised to be one of the most talked-about films of the year. The film is written and directed by acclaimed filmmaker, Maruthi. It will also star Nidhi Agerwal as another female lead. Malavika began her career with notable performances across different regional film industries— from her debut in *Pattam Pole* (2013) to her impactful roles in films like *Christy* (2023) and *Thangalaan* (2024). The actress recently debuted in Bollywood, playing the lead in *Yudhra* alongside Siddhant Chaturvedi. Apart from *The Raja Saab*, Malavika also stars alongside Karthi in the spy thriller, *Sardar 2*.



STANDALONE

Prime Video hosted the world premiere of its first-ever celebrity chat show, *The Rana Daggubati Show*, at the prestigious 55th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) on Thursday. The first episode of the unscripted Telugu Original series, featuring Nani, Teja Sajja and Priyanka Arulmohan, received a remarkable reception from the audience present in the packed auditorium at the special screening, just days before its worldwide launch on the service.

RAP022 kickstarts with a bang!

Ustaad Ram Pothineni had already announced *RAP022* on the auspicious occasion of Dasara and now we have another interesting development pertaining to the project. This film was formally launched with a pooja ceremony on Thursday in the presence of several guests. The launch ceremony was graced by directors Hanu Raghavapudi, Venky Kudumula and Gopichand

Malineni. The principle lead of the film, Ram Pothineni and Bhagyashri Borse also partook in the launch event. It was Hanu Raghavapudi who sounded the first clap, followed by Gopichand switching on the camera, and lastly, Venky Kudumula directing the first shot featuring Ram and Bhagyashri. The event was a starry affair and it had a super pleasant vibe. The script was handed over to

director Mahesh Babu P by Naveen Yerneni, Y Ravi Shankar, Mythri CEO Cherry, directors Hanu Raghavapudi, Gopichand Malineni, Venky Kudumula, Shiva Nirvana and Pavan Sadineni. Director Mahesh Babu has brought together the aesthetic looking pair of Ram and Bhagyashri for the film as he promises another fun and sensible film after *Miss Shetty Mr Polishetty*. He is evidently cooking up something super interesting with Ram, much to the delight of fans. The highly promising film is directed by Mahesh Babu P and produced by Mythri Movie Makers. Naveen Yerneni and Y Ravi Shankar are producing the film on a lavish scale. More details about the cast and crew will be out soon.

