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**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

If BJP leaders speak wrongly about Gaddar again, the area in which the TG BJP office is located will be named after Gaddar. If you have to write your party office address, you have to mention "Gaddar Anna Gully." The BJP leaders would face double the fate the BRS leaders gave for making Gaddar sit in front of the Pragathi Bhavan for hours

- Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister

Strong pillars of India's governance model:

**Murmu**

**CAs NEED TO INNOVATE TO STAY AHEAD OF CURVE: RAJNATH**

This witty and adult comedy is for **MASSES**

**DON'T MISS...**

### Guillain-Barre case reported in Hyd

A 25-year-old woman from Siddipet, Telangana, is currently admitted and is put on ventilator support treatment at KIMS Hospital after being diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). According to Consultant Neurologist Dr Praveen Kumar Yada, "Despite the high prevalence of this disease in Pune, Maharashtra, the patient has no history of travel to Pune, nor does anyone in her family have a history of this condition. The GBS occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own nervous system after fever ..."

-PAGE: 3

## Who will have the last laugh

FM gives final touches to Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A cut or tweak in income tax rates/slabs to ease the burden of middle class struggling with high prices and stagnant wage growth is widely expected in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's record setting eighth consecutive Budget.

The Budget for the fiscal year starting April 1 is expected to contain measures to shore up weakening economic growth while being fiscally prudent. It is likely to focus on steps to boost

consumption while sticking to the roadmap of narrowing the fiscal deficit.

Expectations of relief on income tax, particularly for lower middle class, is high after Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked goddess of wealth for elevating poor and middle class.

"I pray to Goddess Lakshmi that the poor and the middle-class sections in the country are blessed by her," Modi said on Friday while speaking to reporters outside Parliament before the start of the Budget session.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with core team of officials on Friday

His government's first full-year budget in the third term will be presented against the backdrop of geopolitical uncertainties and an economic growth

rate slowing to four year low, with new US President Donald Trump threatening tariffs against countries like India.

Continued on Page 2

### Eco Survey calls for more reforms

Forecasts 6.3-6.8% growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's economy is likely to expand by 6.3-6.8 per cent in the coming fiscal, much lower than what is needed to become a developed country, and requires deregulation and reforms in areas like land and labour to stimulate growth, according to the government's pre-Budget Economic Survey.

The state of the economy document, tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday, indicated that India's world-beating growth

is moderating and more needs to be done to achieve the near 8 per cent annual rate needed to achieve the Viksit Bharat target by 2047.

The 6.3 per cent to 6.8 per cent growth rate in 2025-26 (April 2025 to March 2026 fiscal year) compares to an estimated 6.4 per cent growth in the current year ending March 31 - the weakest since the pandemic - and 8.2 per cent in the past 2023-24 financial year.

"Rural demand backed by a rebound in agricultural production,

Continued on Page 2

### AAP using Delhi as its 'political ATM'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party, accusing it of stalling Delhi's development while treating the national capital as its "political ATM" to fund its ambitions in other states.

Addressing a public rally in Dwarka here, Modi urged voters to elect a "double-engine government" to accelerate the city's progress. The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state. He highlighted the recently inaugurated...

-PAGE: 5

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

### TG tops in own tax revenue: Economic Survey

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana has emerged as the leading state in India in terms of own tax revenue, with 88 percent of its total tax receipts coming from its sources, surpassing Karnataka and Haryana, which recorded 86 percent each. The state's strong fiscal position, as highlighted in the Economic Survey 2024-25, reflects its robust financial management and revenue generation strategies.

Apart from its strong tax performance, Telangana has also been recognized as a top performer in the services sector.

Along with Karnataka and Kerala, the state has a high per capita Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in services, primarily driven by its thriving IT and fintech industries. Hyderabad, in particular, has been noted for its concentration of financial, real estate, and professional services, contributing significantly to the state's economic growth.

The Economic Survey categorizes Telangana as a state with strong

service sector performance, though it ranks moderately in terms of industrial growth. This reflects the state's reliance on urbanized, service-driven economic activities, particularly in Hyderabad, which continues to be a major hub for technology and financial services.

Telangana has also made significant strides in infrastructure development, with various investments in sustainable urban planning. The state is actively using ISRO's Bhuvan Platform for electrical infrastructure management, enhancing the efficiency of urban planning through geospatial mapping.

Additionally, Telangana is among the states benefiting from the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), which tracks over 9,766 infrastructure projects across India. The survey highlights that Telangana has maintained a strong capital outlay despite fiscal constraints, demonstrating its commitment to long-term development.



### Gold continues record breaking rally

Gold prices hit a fresh record high of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, driven by robust domestic demand and strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity continued its ascent for the third straight session, jumping by Rs 1,100 to hit a new peak of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams. The yellow metal has rallied by Rs 5,510 or 7 per cent since January 1 when the metal traded at Rs 79,390 per 10 grams in the local market...

-PAGE: 8

### Provide support prices to quality produce

Minister Tummala directs officials

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageshwar Rao directed officials to provide support prices for quality crops. He said that officials should provide the highest price for crops brought by farmers to markets. Officials should ensure that farmers' produce is sold without affecting farmers in any way, the Minister added.

Tummala conducted a review meeting with officials on Friday on support prices. He said that marketing officials should

ensure that crops are purchased at support prices and appealed to farmers to make use of the 14 green gram, 21 tur and 42 soya bean purchasing centres.

He also asked the farmers to use MARKFED godowns for storing their crops.

The Minister said the government will provide Rythu Bharosa to all eligible farmers. Hoping that the state would become number one in oil farm cultivation, Tummala suggested that farmers should use modern farming techniques and mechanize operations.



### Govt may stop Rythu Bharosa using election code as an excuse: Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, has accused the Congress Government of conspiring to halt the Rythu Bharosa scheme by making use of the election code as an excuse.

He asserted that Rythu Bharosa is a continuing scheme and should not face any objections from the Election Commission.

He also pointed out that the upcoming elections are for graduates and teachers which have no bearing on the Rythu Bharosa scheme. If needed, the BJP's state President Kishan Reddy will formally approach the Election Commission

Continued on Page 2

### CM lays stone for new OGH

Rs 2,700 crore hospital will be ready in two years, says Damodar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy laid the foundation stone for the new building of the Osmania General Hospital in Goshamahal on Friday.

The function was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha, and Ministers Ponnamp Prabhakar and Komatireddy Venkat Reddy.

The new Osmania General Hospital has been the dream of many. Due to various reasons the BRS government was unable to take a decision on rebuilding the hospital.

"We have taken the 26-acre Goshamahal Police Ground and the new Osmania General Hospital



CM Revanth Reddy, Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha and Ministers at the foundation stone laying function of the New Osmania General Hospital at Goshamahal on Friday

will have a 12-storey building with 2,000 bed capacity. It will cost Rs 2700 crore from construction of the building to putting place the infrastructure and medical equipment

and will be ready in two years," said Health Minister C. Damodar Raja Narasimha while addressing the media after the foundation stone laying ceremony.

### MLAS DEFECTION CASE SC: How much time does speaker need?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Supreme Court has taken up the case regarding the disqualification of Telangana MLAs who switched parties, questioning the delay in the decision. A Bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and George Michael is in pole position, half a point ahead of Nodirbek Abdussattorov...

the Assembly Speaker had failed to make a decision within a reasonable time.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing the Assembly Secretary, informed the court that notices had already been issued to the concerned MLAs. He also recalled the Supreme Court's previous orders that the Speaker must provide sufficient time for the MLAs to present their case before arriving at a decision.

Justice BR Gavai directed Mukul Rohatgi to communicate with the Speaker and determine how much time would be required to conclude the matter. The Supreme Court then adjourned the hearing for a week.



### Ichampalli didn't benefit TG, so KCR built Medigadda: Prakash

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Senior irrigation experts and leaders at the 'Neellu-Nijalu' roundtable meeting organised by Telangana Jagruti strongly defended the irrigation policies of the BRS Government and accused the Congress Government of spreading lies about major irrigation projects, particularly Kaleshwaram.

Former Irrigation officials and BRS leaders, including V. Prakash and Sridhar Rao Deshpande, argued that Telangana's irrigation development under K. Chandrasekharao was unparalleled and essential for the state's long-term water security.

Continued on Page 2

### 'Survey exposes Congress' lies'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS leaders hit back at the Congress Government, stating that the Economic Survey 2024-25 released by the Centre has debunked the false propaganda being spread about Telangana's development under BRS rule.

BRS MLA Harish Rao and BRS Working President KT Rama Rao asserted that the report serves as a slap on the face of the Congress, which had been hurling baseless charges against the BRS's decade-long governance.

Harish said that Telangana ranked first among 15 major states in tax revenue generation, with 88% of its income coming from state-generated resources. This, he said, demonstrates Telangana's financial strength and contradicts Congress' allegations of economic mismanagement.

The survey also countered Congress' misinformation about Mission Bhagiratha, confirming that Telangana is among the few states to have achieved 100% rural drinking water supply. The Economic Survey reiterated Telangana's dominance in the IT sector, ranking it alongside Karnataka as one of India's fastest-growing tech hubs.

The report dismissed Congress' allegations about Kaleshwaram and irrigation projects, stating that Telangana ranks fourth in the country in irrigated area, proving that the BRS's irrigation schemes have set an example for the nation.

KTR said the Economic Survey stands as proof of the success of the Telangana Model, showcasing economic self-reliance, agricultural growth, women empowerment, and

the execution of irrigation projects under BRS governance. He criticised the Congress Government, accusing it of failing in governance and resorting to misinformation about the BRS administration.

He pointed out that Telangana's tax revenue independence, as highlighted in the survey, proves the efficiency of BRS's financial management.

"Unlike other states, Telangana did not rely heavily on Centre for funds. Under BRS, the state successfully increased its revenue, making it one of the most self-sufficient economies in the country," KTR said.

Refuting Congress' allegations against irrigation projects, KTR said that Telangana has over 90% of its cultivable land under irrigation, a fact confirmed by the Economic Survey.

### Cong gives Graduates MLC ticket to Narendra Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress high command has announced the name of Graduates MLC constituency --- Karimnagar-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Medak candidate's name on Friday. The party high command announced the name of V Narendra Reddy, who is owner of Alphores Educational Institutions.

In fact, the graduate's constituency had 42 Assembly constituencies and 3.41 lakh voters. The election will be held on February 27.

As expected, the Congress party did not give ticket to sitting MLC T Jeevan Reddy, who is expecting MLC ticket from MLA's quota.

# Trust driven reforms-the final frontier

This year's Economic Survey, presented yesterday, vividly depicts a changing world that forces India to fundamentally rethink its economic policy framework to maintain its steady growth momentum. The Survey highlights momentous global shifts and the need for further economic reforms to navigate those shifts.

Globalisation, which celebrates efficiencies, productivity, and low costs, has dominated global economic thinking over the past few decades. It powered an unprecedented boom in international capital and technology flows, and trade. Countries like the Asian Tigers and China, which jumped onto the globalisation bandwagon early on, saw their economies leapfrog into middle-income and high-income orbits. Today, globalisation is rapidly losing favour in the developed West, putting a big question mark on

the export-driven growth model that powered the rise of the Asian Tigers and China.

The second shift is the increasing dominance of geopolitics over economics. Though the world may find solutions to the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Iran confrontations, the narrowing economic, technical, and strategic gap between the West and China, especially the USA and China, will shape the West's economic policies on global trade and investments in more significant ways and for much longer. China's trillion-dollar trade surplus over the past year hasn't gone unnoticed.

The third shift relates to a potential change in global investment flows. Today, the world FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) conjures up visions of large multinational companies from developed countries investing in emerging markets

**The Economic Survey refreshingly says: "But 'get out of the way' and trust people, we must, for we have no other choice. 'Business as usual' carries a high risk of economic growth stagnation if not economic stagnation."**

like India. But, soon, that might change. Under Donald Trump, the USA has announced an aggressive push to attract global and local investments to shore up manufacturing in America. The rest of the West might have no option but to follow the USA, raising competition for attracting international investments.

The fourth shift concerns security frameworks, especially NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Since the end of the Second World War, the US

has underwritten the security of the West and countries like Japan, bearing most of the costs. Now, with the US pushing its partners to bear a fair share of the burden, the budgets and priorities of partner countries, especially those from Europe, will have to be reworked, further increasing uncertainties in the global economy.

Another shift is a rethinking of the pace and kind of energy transition. Germany, which moved too aggressively on green energy, saw its energy



KISHORE POREDDY

costs rise, resulting in a rapid and profound slide in its industrial production. At the same time, this transition heavily depends on China's manufacturing prowess, thus creating geopolitical vulnerabilities for the rest of the world.

Since India was late to the globalisation and liberalisation

bandwagon, foreign investment and export-driven economic formula that worked so well for the Asian Tigers and China will no longer be sufficient for us. Any adverse impacts of these shifts will have an exaggerated effect on India since we are a young nation, and the demographic dividend we enjoy can quickly become a demographic burden unless it is productively engaged.

The Economic Survey strongly advocates "lowering the cost of business through deregulation" to accelerate economic growth in the face of these unprecedented global challenges. More significantly, it also talks about "trust" - the government trusting its citizens - and warns of dire consequences if the government does not do so.

The Economic Survey refreshingly says: "But 'get out of the way' and trust people, we must, for we have no other

choice. 'Business as usual' carries a high risk of economic growth stagnation if not economic stagnation." The only complaint one can raise is that the Economic Survey, in its own words, says this because "we have no other choice". A democratic government trusting its people should have been the norm all along, not something the government does because it has no other choice.

Yet, given our heavy socialist background and the Nehruvian model of development that guided our economic policy for decades, the dominant thinking that pervaded our policy was that the government knows best and that private Indians should be distrusted by default unless proven otherwise. The License-Permit Raj resulted from our government distrusting Indians, just like the British. India embarked on liberalising its economy more than thirty

years ago. The Modi government consistently pushed the boundaries of those reforms. It opened up reserved sectors like Space, simplified regulations, decriminalised compliances, improved government processes to reduce human interface, and digitised the economy to improve ease of doing business. Yet, the final frontier remained—until now.

That final frontier is an attitude change. It is one where the rulers trust their electors, and this trust, rather than suspicion, drives government policies. This change is not just economic but social and psychological. Taking this change to its logical conclusion would mean that the government reinvents itself from primarily being a "controller" to an "enabler" and "facilitator," helping Indians build our country's future.

*(The author is BJP TS spokesperson)*

## Ponguleti challenges KCR to come to Assembly

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy countered the comments made by BRS chief KCR against the Congress Government and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. He said that he had been observing KCR's roar.

Ponguleti asked whether KCR would continue to speak from the farmhouse or come to the Assembly and challenged KCR to come to the Assembly. "We will see where he goes instead of coming to the Assembly. We will speak only when he comes to the Assembly," he said.

Asking how KCR has been silent for 13 months confining himself to the farmhouse he

said that an opposition leader should go to the people and raise public issues in the Assembly.

He asked why KCR did not at least visit people who were hit by the rains and floods and added that KCR did not even come to the secretariat when he was in power. He asked why KCR had not come to the Assembly for a year as the opposition leader.

The Minister was angry with KCR's comment that people voted for the Congress out of greed and added that KCR is insulting the four crore people of Telangana.

He said that KCR never respected the people and that even after losing he has not thanked the public till now.

## KTR blasts Congress for stalling urban development

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao lashed out at the Congress Government for stalling urban development in Telangana, stating that the progress achieved during the last decade under BRS was now being undone.

Speaking at an event held to honour outgoing municipal chairpersons at the Telangana Bhavan, KTR criticized the Congress for its lack of vision and governance failures.

Recalling the condition of municipalities in United

Andhra Pradesh, KTR said that urban areas were once infamous for their filth and mismanagement.

"Municipalities used to be cesspools, and there was a saying that municipal offices functioned only for eating and sleeping. But after the formation of Telangana, KCR laid out a clear vision for urban development, ensuring that towns became economic engines," he said.

Highlighting the extensive planning and reforms undertaken during BRS rule, KTR said urbanization cannot be halted, but governments have

the responsibility to ensure balanced and comprehensive development.

"For 10 years, we had a proper strategy, implemented reforms, ensured continuous monitoring and allocated funds systematically. That is how Telangana's towns emerged as model urban centres," he stated. He also pointed out that Telangana municipalities had received numerous national awards for their exemplary growth.

Acknowledging the contributions of municipal chairpersons and councillors, KTR

praised them for working tirelessly to improve urban infrastructure.

"They launched and completed several development projects, and their efforts transformed the state's urban landscape. Even after their term ends, they should stay connected with the people, as the public will elect them again based on their track record," he remarked.

KTR stressed how BRS introduced decentralized governance by creating new districts, municipalities and corporations, thereby bringing administration closer to the people.

## Edu budget will be increased to 15%, assures CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress Government will increase the budget for education from seven per cent to 15 per cent in a phased manner, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said.

Speaking at a function at the Mogiligadda Government School in Farooq Nagar Mandal in Rangareddy district he highlighted the government's commitment to strengthening the education sector and developing rural areas.

Academician Professor Haragol who attended the function emphasised the historical importance of the 150-year-old institution, which counts Hyderabad's first Chief

Minister, Burgula Ramakrishna Rao, among its alumni.

Addressing the gathering, Revanth assured that the government had already sanctioned funds for the school's development. "Mogiligadda village and its school have historical significance. It is our responsibility to preserve them as a legacy for future generations," he said.

The CM stressed the need for technical education along with traditional learning and announced the sanction of an Advanced Technology Centre for the village. He highlighted recent government decisions in education, including the recruitment of 11,000 teachers and the promotion of 31,000 teachers.

## First you ...

Continued from page 1

Revanth also announced that the Assembly would hold discussions on the BC caste census and categorization of Madigas in the first week of February. "Stop your empty threats. If you have the guts, come to the Assembly and talk," he said.

concluded by stating that KCR, now confined to his farmhouse, had lost touch with the people. "KCR is like an expired Rs 1,000 note - outdated and worthless. If you can't bring yourself to acknowledge our government's achievements, stay in your farmhouse," he said.

Revanth dared KCR to participate in a discussion in the Assembly if he had bonafide intentions. "Unlike you, I don't have a history of duping people with false promises," he said.

Taking a dig at KCR's demeanour, he said, "He claims to be watching us keenly. Who exactly is he looking at? Instead of posturing, control your son and nephew who are wreaking havoc in public."

Mocking KCR's social media presence, he said, "He brags about getting more on X. Imagine a former Chief Minister of 10 years celebrating social media likes! That tells you everything about his mental state. When an online poll was conducted between Rakhi Sawant and Salman Khan, Rakhi got more likes, does that mean she is a better actor than Salman?"

He asked KCR to focus on setting his son and nephew on the right path before questioning others.

He also accused KCR of deceiving devotees by failing to release the promised funds for Jahangir Peer Dargah and Vemulawada Rajanna Temple. "You abandoned Palamuru, leaving it dry, and now dare to question us," he added.

Reaffirming his government's commitment to farmers, he announced that Rs 10,000 crore would be disbursed under Rythu Bharosa by March 31.

He also highlighted the Indiramma Aatmeeya Bharosa scheme, which provides Rs 12,000 per year to landless agricultural labourer families.

## I strike hard ...

Continued from page 1

steer Telangana towards development in every sector. Highlighting the stark contrast between the two regimes, KCR said that under the BRS, Telangana was in the forefront of development and welfare, whereas the Congress government, within just 14 months had left the people in distress. Questioning the Congress' credibility, he said, "We provided 24-hour power supply within the first few months of statehood, something the Congress failed to do in decades. We ensured irrigation water through massive projects, piped drinking water for every household via Mission Bhagiratha, waived water tax, restored tanks and built reservoirs like Mallanna Sagar. We introduced Rythu Bima to support farmer families in times of loss, distributed sheep to shepherds, and even during the pandemic, continued Rythu Bandhu without fail. We implemented welfare schemes for everyone, treating Telangana's people as our own. But now, everything is in shambles under Congress rule."

Lamenting TG's financial decline, KCR pointed out that under BRS, Telangana's revenue grew by Rs 15,000 crore annually, whereas under Congress, it had fallen by Rs 13,000 crore, as per the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report.

"If this continues, Telangana will face severe financial distress. Retired government employees are not even getting their benefits," he noted.

Criticizing the Congress government's

handling of education, he accused them of mismanaging the state's gurukul schools and suppressing dissent by filing cases against those who questioned them.

"They secured Muslim votes but failed to address their concerns. They haven't even considered paying salaries to imams and muezzins. The Congress is back to its old ways - power cuts have returned, drinking water supply is irregular, and governance is collapsing," KCR remarked.

Referring to irrigation issues in Zaheerabad, he questioned why the Congress government halted the Sangameshwara and Basaveshwara lift irrigation projects, which were sanctioned by BRS. "Farmers are suffering, and what is the district minister doing?" he asked, directing former minister Harish Rao to mobilize farmers for a massive protest against these injustices.

"Telangana was achieved under the pink flag, and no state has seen the kind of development that BRS ensured in just 10 years. If the Congress government continues to neglect public welfare, they will face severe consequences. Their internal surveys show that 75% of people still prefer BRS rule. We will hold a massive public meeting in February to review the Congress's one-year governance and expose its failures. Even the minorities are saying that they miss KCR," he claimed.

Taking a dig at the Congress' impact on real estate, KCR said, "Land prices are crashing under Congress rule. Under BRS, even remote areas saw land values soar to Rs 40-50 lakh per acre. If this continues, the situation will deteriorate further. We must fight back."

## 'BJP office address will have Gaddar's name'

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU  
venkat.k.warlu@gmail.com  
■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy warned BJP leaders that they will take a step that the BJP office address will have Gaddar's name by naming the area where BJP office is located after Gaddar if BJP leaders speak mistakenly about Gaddar again. He warned that they will not keep quiet if anyone speaks dishonouring Gaddar again. Congress government won't hesitate to name the area where BJP office is located after Gaddar, CM said.

The CM said that the BJP leaders would face double fate the BRS leaders meted out for making Gaddar sit in front of the Pragathi Bhavan for hours. He said that the Centre did not give Padma award to Gaddar though the State government recommended his name and hence the State government named Nandi film awards after Gaddar.

CM Revanth Reddy said, "Naming awards in the name of Gaddar is nothing but remembering him every year. We have med-

icine for everything. Those who insulted Gaddar in the past were punished appropriately. We will not keep quiet if spoken in an inappropriate manner".

The CM said that he used to take advice while going to balladeer Gaddar whenever he was of the feeling that he was politically alone.

While participating in Gaddar's birth anniversary celebrations at Ravindra Bharati on Friday, CM Revanth Reddy said that the Congress government recommended the names of Gaddar, Gorette Venkanna, Chukka Ramaiah, Adv Sri and Jayadeer Thirumala Rao to the Centre for Padma awards.

However, the Centre gave five Padma awards to the neighbouring State.

The CM said, "I addressed a letter to the Centre thinking that it will correct its mistake. Instead of correcting their mistake, they are saying that they will not give the award to Gaddar. BJP leaders are saying that they are giving Padma awards".

He said that Gaddar did a lot for the society. He said that the previous BRS government tried to avoid Gaddar when he died and did not allow Gaddar's body in LB Stadium.

"We will take decision to establish Gaddar's memorial on Necklace Road", CM said.



CM Revanth Reddy addressing the Gaddar's birth anniversary meeting at Ravindra Bharathi on Friday

## TODAY

| ALMANAC                   |                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Month & Paksham:          | Sukla Paksha                       |
| Tithi:                    | Jan 31 01:59 PM to Feb 01 11:38 AM |
| Chaturthi:                | Feb 01 11:38 AM to Feb 02 09:14 AM |
| <b>Nakshatram:</b>        |                                    |
| Purva Bhadrapada:         | Feb 01 04:14 AM to Feb 02 02:33 AM |
| Uttara Bhadrapada:        | Feb 02 02:33 AM to Feb 03 12:52 AM |
| <b>Rahukalam:</b>         | 9:40 AM to 11:05 AM                |
| <b>Yamagandam:</b>        | 1:54 PM to 3:18 PM                 |
| <b>Varijyam:</b>          | 11:28 AM to 12:58 PM               |
| <b>Gulika:</b>            | 6:51 AM to 8:16 AM                 |
| <b>Amritakalam:</b>       | 07:06 PM to 08:36 PM               |
| <b>Abhijit Muhurtham:</b> | 12:07 PM to 12:52 PM               |

**HYDERABAD WEATHER**

**Forecast:** Mostly Sunny  
Temp: 31°C  
Humidity: 63%  
Sunrise: 6:48 AM  
Sunset: 6:11 PM

Updated: January 31, 2025 5:00 PM

## Eco Survey calls ...

Continued from page 1

an anticipated easing of food inflation and a stable macro-economic environment provide an upside to near-term growth," said Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, who along with his team in the finance ministry, authored the report. The risks to India's economic prospects next year are balanced, he added.

Geopolitical and trade uncertainties, along with possible commodity price shocks, pose headwinds to the economy, said Nageswaran, who had last year predicted a 6.5-7 per cent GDP growth in the 2024-25 fiscal.

The survey said India needs to grow at nearly 8 per cent over the next decade or two, and the investment rate must rise to 35 per cent of GDP from the current 31 per cent to meet the longer-term economic goal of a developed nation by 2047.

The IMF projects India to be a US\$ 5 trillion economy by FY28 and US\$ 6.3 trillion by FY30, with an annual nominal growth rate of 10.2 per cent in US\$ terms.

Calling for reinvigorating the internal engines of growth by enhancing economic freedom through deregulation, the report called for states to reduce the cost of compliance by liberalising standards and controls on businesses as well as cutting tariffs and fees.

"Systematic deregulation is as critical, if not more, as investments in infrastructure and incentives to encourage innovation and create a viable Mittelstand i.e. India's SME sector," it added.

## FM gives final ...

Continued from page 1

Analysts and experts expect some tax rationalisation, export push, better implementation of capital spending plans and clear roadmap on structural reforms. They also see some expansion in the production-linked incentives, and increased allocation to some welfare schemes while continuing focus on infrastructure creation/upgrade.

Also, tariff cuts to encourage local manufacturing are expected.

Increased allocations to boost job creation and skills, lower customs duties on intermediaries and increase in agriculture investments are also high on the list of expectations. Measures for accelerating domestic demand and private consumption are also expected.

They all agree on one thing - the government will continue on the path of fiscal consolidation, with a projected fiscal deficit of 4.5 per cent of GDP for FY26 (April 2025 to March 2026) against 4.8 per cent in the current fiscal ending March 31.

## Ichampalli didn't ...

Continued from page 1

Prakash said that the Ichampalli Project, once proposed for Telangana, would have benefited Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh more than Telangana itself.

"That is precisely why KCR abandoned Ichampalli and instead built the Medigadda Barrage at a more strategic location, ensuring that Telangana got maximum benefit from Godavari waters," he said.

He pointed out that AP rulers 'systematically' deprived Telangana of irrigation projects and cited how they did not build a single project between Sriram Sagar and Dowleswarum. "Until KCR launched Pranahita and Penganga projects, they were completely ignored," he said.

Had the Eleshwaram Project been built during the United Andhra Pradesh era, 10 lakh acres in Warangal, Khammam and Nalgonda would have got water, he added.

## Govt may ...

Continued from page 1

regarding this, he said. He demanded an immediate all-party meeting to ensure that Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Aathmeeya Bharosa, ration cards, and housing allocations continued without interruption. He warned that if the schemes were halted using the election code as an excuse they would not remain silent.

If the Election Commission objects, he said that all parties should approach the Election Commission to seek approval for depositing Rythu Bharosa funds into farmers' accounts.

He said that farmers have already suffered losses for a year due to the delay in allotting funds. With no fair price for crops and rising input costs, farmers are now facing extreme distress. If the funds are stopped now, it would be like snatching food from their mouths, he said.

He pointed out that 40 lakh people across the state are awaiting ration cards, but the government has issued them to only 40,000 beneficiaries ignoring 99% of the poor.

## Kavitha accuses govt of playing politics over water issues

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kavitha came down heavily on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's Government, accusing it of engaging in political gimmicks over water issues. She demanded that the government stop misleading people and instead reveal the truth about irrigation projects in Telangana.

Speaking at a roundtable meeting on 'Neellu - Nijalu' organized by Telangana Jagruti at the Somajiguda Press Club on Friday, Kavitha, who heads the organization, was joined by intellectuals, retired engineers and public representatives.

During the discussion, resolutions were passed, and an open letter was addressed to the Chief Minister, highlighting concerns about the state's irrigation policies.

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# City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | SATURDAY | FEBRUARY 1, 2025

03

OPERATION SMILE-XI

## TG Police rescues 4,357 kids in anti-trafficking drive

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Police, successfully carried out Operation Smile-XI, a month-long initiative aimed at tracing and rescuing missing and trafficked children. It was conducted between January 1 and January 31, 2025. The operation saw a total of 4,357 children rescued across the State.

The drive was executed by 126 sub-divisional police teams, comprising 706 police personnel, in coordination with multiple government departments and NGOs.

The operation focused on identifying vulnerable pockets where children were at risk, including industrial units, brick kilns, railway stations, bus terminals, traffic junctions and other areas known for child



labour and trafficking. The Rachakonda police teams played a significant role, rescuing 912 children, while a substantial number of 1,793 children belonging to other states and even neighbouring countries like Nepal were also identified and secured.

Among the rescued were 68 streetchildren, 30 victims of forced begging and 3,940 chil-

dren engaged in child labour, including those working in hazardous conditions in brick kilns and other industries.

To strengthen their efforts, Telangana Police utilised the DARPAN facial recognition application, which helped trace 422 missing children by matching their photographs with police databases.

During the operation,

36,691 children's details were compared with missing persons' records, leading to a remarkable tracing success rate of 89 per cent for missing persons and 91 per cent for children.

These figures are significantly higher than the national average of 53 per cent for adults and 63.3 per cent for children.

A total of 1,038 FIRs were registered leading to the arrest of 1,040 accused persons with 1,602 children rescued in these cases.

Rehabilitation of rescued children was a priority, with 3,905 children reunited with their families while 452 were admitted to rescue homes for further care and protection. Additionally, 367 children were reintegrated into schools.

## NIN to assist in enhancing food safety in govt hostels

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant step toward improving food quality and safety in government hostels and residential schools, the Telangana government has partnered with the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad. This initiative aims to enhance nutritional standards and ensure food safety for students in residential educational institutions.

Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society (TGSWREIS) currently oversees 268 residential schools across the State, catering to around 1.7 lakh students from Class 5 to Intermediate. To provide balanced and nutritious meals, the government recently launched a Common Diet Programme, ensuring that students receive regular meals and snacks.

Following recent incidents of food poisoning and complaints regarding food quality, the State government has decided to implement stricter monitoring and quality control measures. As part of this effort, the NIN's expertise will be utilized to develop improved food safety protocols and maintain high nutritional standards.



IT Minister D Sridhar Babu, Chairperson & Convenor, ISF, JA Chowdary, along with Sadhguru Madhusudan Sai at the GCC & CEO Summit on Friday evening

## ISF's GCC & CEO Summit New Global Capability Centres policy will come up soon: IT Min

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Emphasising that the new Global Capability Centres (GCC) policy will be introduced soon, said IT Minister D Sridhar Babu, while addressing the GCC & CEO Summit, organised by the International Start-up Foundation (ISF), at ITC Kohinoor on Friday evening.

Addressing the leaders, Sridhar Babu highlighted the Telangana government's commitment to establishing a world-class hub for GCCs, backed by progressive policies, cutting-edge infrastructure, a thriving innovation ecosystem and trained manpower.

He said that special concessions for start-up products and services would be given and that the government plans to provide the best support for GCC adaptability.

He emphasised the focus on creating an environment that drives innovation, accelerates digital transformation and contributes to the state's economic growth with a favourable policy framework.

The Minister also mentioned efforts with the Central government to bring the Patent Office, currently in Chennai, to Hyderabad. He highlighted plans for a six-month student internship programme in the future.

Meanwhile, Chairperson & Convenor, ISF, JA Chowdary emphasised ISF's commitment to driving collaborations. A fireside chat with Sadhguru Madhusudan Sai and Sirisha Voruganti provided leadership and social impact insights.

The ISF GCC & CEO Summit gathered 50-60 global leaders, government representatives and industry pioneers to discuss corporate innovation, entrepreneurship and international collaboration.

Discussions covered policy frameworks, startup mentorship, market access and funding. Roundtable sessions focused on reducing entry barriers, engaging with startups and universities and using technology for risk mitigation.

## 9,307 applications received at Prajavani

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A total of 9,307 grievance applications were submitted during Prajavani on Friday at the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Praja Bhavan.

Officials reported the overall highest number of applications for the Indiramma Housing Scheme, with 7,100 submissions. Other applications included 1,736 applications (ration cards) related to Civil Supplies department, 211 for the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development department, 160 for the Electricity department, 43 for revenue-related issues, one for Pravasi and 56 for various other departments.

## First case of Guillain-Barre Syndrome reported in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 25-year-old woman from Siddipet, Telangana, is currently admitted and is put on ventilator support treatment at KIMS Hospital after being diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS).

According to Consultant Neurologist Dr Praveen Kumar Yada, "Despite the high prevalence of this disease in Pune, Maharashtra, the patient has no history of travel to Pune, nor does anyone in her family have a history of this condition."

The GBS occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks its own nervous system after fever or loose motions."

The woman initially received treatment at another hospital for a week, but as her condition worsened, she was shifted to

KIMS Hospital for advanced medical care. Due to the severity of her condition, she is currently being treated entirely on ventilator support.

The doctors advise not to panic and there are cases reported earlier.

Dr Madap Karuna, Pediatrician in Kompally explains, "There are one or two cases in the tertiary sector and we, while noticing symptoms in children, take the help of a Neurologist."

The doctors after the spread in Pune had begun sharing with us and we as a community are creating awareness to people."

The doctors advise general measures for safety are ensure that the water you drink is safe. Filter water before drinking, boil it for at least 20 minutes, and let it cool before consumption.

Wash vegetables and fruits carefully. Consume freshly cooked, clean home-made food. Avoid eating street food or exposed, unhygienic food items whenever possible.

Ensure poultry and meat are completely cooked before consumption. Avoid eating undercooked or raw food, especially eggs and chicken (non-vegetarian food).

Maintain personal hygiene. Avoid sharing utensils or food during an outbreak.

Keep raw and cooked food separate. Disinfect kitchen surfaces and utensils after handling raw meat.

Wash your hands with soap and water before eating and after using the toilet.

In regard to the symptoms, health experts said that along with diarrhoea, vomiting, cold, or cough, kindly visit the nearest healthcare centre immediately.

## TRAFFIC PULSE OF CYBERABAD POLICE Real time updates on traffic issues to commuters

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cyberabad Traffic Pulse was launched on Friday by Cyberabad Police Commissioner Avinash Mohanty, and Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) D Joel Davis in collaboration with the Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC) and Tanla.

The initiative aims to reduce traffic congestion and provide real-time updates to commuters via WhatsApp, Google RCS, SMS, or Flash Messages. The commuters can visit Traffic Pulse website and register via phone number to search and get results on road closures, VIP movements, accidents etc.

Cyberabad Police Commissioner Avinash Mohanty, and Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) D Joel Davis in collaboration with the Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC) and Tanla. The initiative aims to reduce traffic congestion and provide real-time updates to commuters via WhatsApp, Google RCS, SMS, or Flash Messages. The commuters can visit Traffic Pulse website and register via phone number to search and get results on road closures, VIP movements, accidents etc.

Commissioner Mohanty highlighted the platform's role in enhancing road traffic management, while Joint Commissioner Davis explained its features, such as real-time traffic updates, road diversions, and accident alerts. He also noted that the platform allows citizens to interact with the Traffic Police, share feedback, and receive personalized alerts.

SCSC Joint Secretary Rajesh emphasised the initiative's alignment with their mission to improve traffic management, and Tanla's Shriram expressed pride in supporting the project. The event concluded with a memento presented to Tanla's team for their contributions.

SCSC Joint Secretary Rajesh emphasised the initiative's alignment with their mission to improve traffic management, and Tanla's Shriram expressed pride in supporting the project. The event concluded with a memento presented to Tanla's team for their contributions.

## Hyd Police honours 706 officers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad City Police organised a Mega Reward Programme recognising 706 officers and staff for their outstanding contributions in crime detection, apprehensions and case disposals throughout 2024. The event celebrated the dedication and hard work of police personnel across various ranks, including six Additional DCPs, 13 ACPs, 73 Inspectors, 83 Sub-Inspectors, 12 Assistant Sub-Inspectors, 86 Head Constables, 334 Police Constables, 29 Home Guards, 64 ministerial staff, and six Public Prosecutors and Assistant PPs.

Taking into account the

**The Hyderabad Police Commissioner praised the relentless efforts of the force in maintaining law and order in a city with a population exceeding 80 lakh**

evolving challenges faced by the Central Crime Station (CCS) and Cyber Crime departments, the Hyderabad Police Commissioner introduced the Commissioner's Trophy to recognise exceptional work by special wings. For 2024, the Best Investigation

Team Award was presented to EOW Team - I of CCS, led by ACP Y Harish Kumar, Inspector D Ram Babu, and SIs S Ravi Kumar and B Jayanth. The Cyber Crimes Best Investigation Team Award was given to the team led by Inspector K Madhusudan Rao, along with SIs K Venkatesh and Ch Mahipal.

Addressing the gathering, the Hyderabad Police Commissioner praised the relentless efforts of the force in maintaining law and order in a city with a population exceeding 80 lakh. "Managing security in a dynamic urban environment with a wide range of criminal activities is an enormous task. Despite our daily commitments to ban-

dobast and security arrangements, our personnel respond swiftly to crimes, ensuring prompt investigation and justice. Hyderabad City Police continues to earn nationwide recognition because of our officers' commitment and teamwork," he remarked.

Highlighting the increasing number of people moving around at night and the rise in 24/7 businesses, the Commissioner acknowledged the challenges of ensuring security with a force of just 16,000 personnel. He commended the officers for their unwavering dedication and congratulated the awardees for their exceptional service in crime detection and law enforcement.

## All biz shut down, protests held in Goshamahal against new OGH

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

All business establishments in and around Goshamahal were shut-down on Friday protesting against the construction of New Osmania General Hospital (OGH) at Goshamahal.

The protests began in the morning with placards saying no to the construction of New Osmania General Hospital (OGH). As Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy was laying the foundation stone, the local police have detained a gang and left them after the programme completion.

However the members have protested again after CM Revanth Reddy left the Goshamahal police grounds. Ram Prakash Shukla, speaking to The Pioneer said,



The protestors in front of Goshamahal police grounds on Friday

"Our business will be impacted and look at the roads, they are very crooked already and where will the Sky Walk come or any expansion can come. There are hundreds of residents and colonies living for hundreds of years and Goshamahal Grounds is our exercise place and youngsters

practice for their sports championships."

There is a big problem of Nala-cum-Road caving in but no official responds to it. Our MLA is also fighting for it, to let the government resolve our colony issues before constructing a hospital, said locals.

## MIMS HPV PILOT STUDY

## All 58 women test negative in Arkalguda village

DEEPIKA PASHAM  
deepikapasham2015@gmail.com  
■ HYDERABAD

As January is recognised as Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, the Medciti Institute of Medical Sciences (MIMS), under the Share Medical Care Foundation, launched a pilot programme to screen women for cervical cancer in Arkalguda village, Medchal district. The initiative aims to promote early detection and prevention of the disease.

The project was initiated due to alarming statistics from the Global Cancer Observatory (2022), which reported an estimated 14,13,316 new cases and 9,16,827 deaths due to cervical cancer. India's high burden of the disease is linked to a lack of awareness, limited screening access, and inadequate

treatment services. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has proposed a global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem.

According to Dr Kalpana Basani of the Medciti Institute of Medical Sciences, "A pilot study was conducted in Arkalguda village in Medchal district. Based on the database, 93 women were to be contacted. Of these, 2 women refused participation, 16 were ineligible due to prior hysterectomy, one had passed away, and 15 houses were vacant. HPV DNA self-collected swabs were taken from 58 women, with all test results returning negative. Most of the participants were between 36 to 45 years old. Additionally, 72 per cent of the women were housewives, but only 5.17 per cent had a previ-



Field staff assisting women in Arkalguda village of Medchal for HPV Pilot Project study

ous history of cervical screening."

Eligible women, aged 25 to

65, who were non-pregnant, not menstruating and mentally competent, were recruited

through house-to-house visits. A printed consent form was read aloud, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before providing informed consent. Following this, women responded to an interviewer-administered questionnaire assessing demographic, reproductive, and contraceptive history.

A video in the local language guided participants on self-sampling procedures, with field staff assisting in self-vaginal swab collection. The collected samples were transported to MedCiti Hospital in Universal Transport Medium for point-of-care testing. The test detects HPV genotypes 16, 18, 31, and 45. Women testing positive would be contacted at home and provided with hospital transport for further examination but none required it.

## Private degree colleges to hold rally over pending fee reimbursement

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Private Degree and PG Colleges Management Association (TPDMA) has announced a state-wide protest rally on February 1, citing the government's failure to clear pending fee reimbursement dues. The managements of private degree colleges will march from Indira Park to demand the immediate release of long-overdue funds.

Despite multiple appeals to government authorities, including direct representations to ministers and officials, the association claims that no concrete action has been taken. Earlier, when the colleges called for a

shutdown, the government had intervened and Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka personally assured the management that all pending reimbursements would be cleared by December 20, 2024. However, TPDMA alleges that the government has failed to honour this promise, leaving educational institutions in dire financial distress.

The fee arrears have been accumulating for the past three years, pushing several colleges to the brink of closure. While a meager 5% of the dues was reportedly disbursed to just 25% of institutions, the remaining 75% of colleges have received no payments, the asso-

ciation stated. TPDMA leaders argue that this uncertainty has put both college managements and students' futures in jeopardy, questioning the very survival of higher education in Telangana. Association leaders, including president Dr Suryanarayana Reddy, secretary Yada Ramakrishna, executive presidents Sridhar Rao and Parameshwar, have appealed to journalists, political leaders and representatives of various organisations to support their cause. They urged the government to take immediate action and prevent further disruptions in the state's higher education system.



Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy speaking to the media in Nalgonda on Friday

## Pocharam considers passing torch to son?

Speculation is rife that MLA Srinivas Reddy may resign from his membership of the Legislative Assembly to facilitate his son to contest

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

Speculation is rife that Pocharam Srinivas Reddy is considering resigning from his membership of the Legislative Assembly to facilitate his son, Bhaskar Reddy, to contest.

It is reported that Srinivas Reddy, the Assembly Speaker during the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) regime, has decided to continue only as a government advisor. His resignation, local sources said, would help promote his image by projecting it because he can project it as a "principled stand" after switching his loyalty to Congress. He is expected to take a decision after discussing the issue with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy.

The reported stand taken by Srinivas Reddy, sources said, indicated that he might be doing so out of love for his son. In his long political career, has



Pocharam Srinivas Reddy



Pocharam Bhaskar Reddy

held significant positions such as minister and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, gaining recognition and respect. He started his political journey with the Congress and later joined TDP and afterwards BRS.

He returned to the Congress after the last general elections. Now serving as an advisor to

the government on agriculture, there has been criticism regarding his party-switching.

Srinivas Reddy has been known for maintaining certain values in politics. He served as the Panchayat Raj minister during the TDP government and as the Agriculture Minister and Speaker of the Assembly during the BRS

regimes. Throughout his career, he has not faced any allegations. Now, it seems he is keen on exiting the political stage without any stains on his reputation, and sources suggest he has already fixed a date to resign as MLA.

There has long been speculation about Bhaskar Reddy, Srinivas Reddy's son being the political successor. Many expected Bhaskar to contest from Banswada in the last election.

However, after discussions, the then Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao suggested that Srinivas Reddy remain in the arena.

Sources suggest he is now planning to resign as MLA in order to make Bhaskar Reddy his political successor.

He may soon take the step of passing the torch to his son. February or March is considered an ideal time for the transition.

## 5 students of residential school take ill due to food poisoning

PNS ■ JAGTIAL

Five students from the Minority Residential School (Girls) in Dharmapuri fell ill due to suspected food poisoning on Friday evening. The affected students complained of stomach pain and nausea, prompting school staff to take them to the Dharmapuri government hospital, where they are currently receiving treatment. Their condition is stated to be stable.

Parents have raised concerns, accusing the school authorities of failing to implement proper measures to ensure food quality, especially given the recurring incidents of food poisoning. Earlier this week, 27 students fell ill due to food poisoning in two different hostels across the state.

It may be recalled that several students in Suryapet, Kamareddy and Narayanpet fell ill a few days due to suspected food poisoning. The principal of Yellareddy Government School was placed under suspension after some students taking ill due to suspected food poisoning.



## Jagtial struggling with civic woes for five years

PNS ■ JAGTIAL

The Jagtial municipality has been experiencing a period of significant turmoil over the past five years, with numerous political shifts and administrative changes that have impacted development and governance. During this time, the municipality saw 12 different municipal commissioners, averaging two per year, making it difficult to maintain consistent leadership. The term also witnessed two chairpersons and one in-charge chairperson, along with several high-profile legal and corruption-related issues.

The municipality's five-year tenure was marked by frequent leadership changes. Lachchi Reddy initially served as the commissioner, followed by Jayant in 2020, who quickly went on a long leave. Korutla's municipal commissioner took over briefly, and then Additional Collector Arunasri held the position until Maruti Prasad was appointed as the full-time commissioner. However, Prasad left the post after a year due to ACB raid, which led to a succession of temporary appointments.

In 2021, Lakshminarayana from the SC Corporation was given additional charge, fol-



lowed by Swarupa Rani, who later left. Gopu Gangadhar succeeded her but was transferred due to political pressure. Rajeshwar, a divisional engineer, and Bhongir Naresh, the district disabled welfare officer, were among the other officials who took on additional responsibilities until 2024. At one point, Anil Babu, a commissioner, was placed under suspension on corruption charges, followed by a series of political maneuvers that kept the leadership in flux.

Corruption was a significant issue during this period, with ACB raids targeting several officials. In 2020, Assistant city planning officer Balananda Swamy and an outsourced employee were caught accepting bribes for building permissions. ACB cases in 2021 also led to the suspension of municipal revenue officer Anoop and bill collector Anil. A vigilance inquiry

was launched to probe irregularities in the town planning, revenue, and sanitation departments.

Despite receiving Rs 75 crore in funds under the TUFIDC programme, only half of the money was spent on development projects. Several initiatives, such as the development of cement concrete roads and drainage systems, community halls, and electric crematoria, either stalled or failed to progress. Some of these works, including roads worth Rs 2.20 crore, remained incomplete, while others, like the Rs 25 crore dumping yard development, were postponed indefinitely.

Politically, the municipal body saw a dramatic shift in leadership. In 2019, Boga Sravani from the TRS party took office as the chairperson, only to resign in January 2023 due to political differences.

She later ran for an MLA seat on a BJP ticket. Goli Srinivas, the vice-chairman, briefly took over the chairperson's duties before Aduvala Jyoti, a BRS councillor, assumed the position in February 2024. However, Jyoti's political allegiance shifted when she crossed over to the Congress party, adding another layer of complexity to the tumultuous period for the municipality.

## Teachers told to strive for better SSC exam results

PNS ■ MAHABUBABAD

On Friday, District Collector Advait Kumar Singh has inspected Shanigapuram, Kankara Board ZPHS Schools and Girls' Ashram Patashalas in Mahabubabad. He interacted with the student and enquired about the quality of teaching in the school.

The Collector enquired about the details of the food being served to the students in the midday meal and ordered the officials to follow the menu.

He inspected quality of food materials supplied by the agency. The dining hall and kitchen were inspected and suggested that the surroundings

be kept clean. The toilets should be checked and kept clean.

The Zilla Parishad School in Kankarabodu area of the town was inspected and the staff were directed to provide nutritious meals as per the midday meal menu. It is advised to conduct medical examinations as per the schedule and suggested by assessing the abilities of each student subject-wise academic instructions can be given.

He said that teachers should always work hard to achieve hundred per cent results. Principals and teachers of the respective schools were included in this inspection.



Mahabubabad Collector Advait Kumar Singh inspecting a school in Mahabubabad on Friday

## One dead, several injured as tractor turns turtle

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

In an incident near the Sagar Canal, close to Bonakal village in Khammam district, a tractor carrying labourers overturned, resulting in the death of one woman and severe injuries to several others.

According to police, farmworkers from Lingala village in the Vatsavayi mandal of Andhra Pradesh were traveling on the tractor to harvest chili.

While traveling near the Sagar Canal, the tractor lost control and overturned. Out of 23 farmworkers on the tractor, Yarlagadda Varamma (60) from Bonakal village died on the spot. Another woman labourer suffered a broken leg, and several others sustained serious injuries.

Since all the laborers are from Bonakal village, a pall gloom descended on the village. Upon receiving information, the family members of the labourers reached the accident site and rushed the injured to the Bonakal Government Hospital. After administering first aid,



Ill-fated tractor

they were transferred to Khammam Government Hospital for better medical care. The Bonakal police have registered a case and initiated an investigation into the incident.

Chairman of the State Warehousing Corporation Rayala Nageswara Rao and DCC president Puvvalla Durgaprasad visited the Khammam Government Hospital to inquire about the condition of the injured. They consulted the doctors about the health status of the accident victims and advised the medical authorities to provide better treatment to the injured.

## Food poisoning incident: Govt high school principal suspended

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

The District Education Officer has placed the Yellareddy Government School principal under suspension after 14 students taking ill due to suspected food poisoning on January 29. It may be recalled that Yellareddy Government School in Kamareddy district, as many as 14 out of 90 students who had midday meals on the

day fell ill. A total of 14 students experienced stomach pain and vomiting. The teachers immediately rushed the affected students to Yellareddy Government Hospital. After receiving treatment, the students recovered and went back their homes. Following an inquiry into the incident, the District Education Officer suspended the principal for negligence.

## Thieves decamp with Rs 16 lakh in Peddapalli district

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

In a major theft in Peddapalli district, thieves targeted locked houses. The details are as follows: In the Gautaminagar area of Godavarikhani town, unidentified individuals broke open a locked house and stole Rs 16 lakh in cash. The house belongs to Ram Mohan Rao, a retired Singareni worker, whose wife is undergoing cancer treatment in a hospital in Hyderabad.

When Ram Mohan Rao returned home early in the morning from the hospital, he found that the door was broken open. The Rs 16 lakh, which were kept in a locker, were missing.

Rao immediately filed a complaint with the NTPC police. The police deployed a fingerprint team to investigate the matter. A case has been registered, and an investigation is ongoing.

## RTC bus crashes into fields, passengers injured

PNS ■ RAJANNA SIRCILLA

A major accident was narrowly avoided involving an RTC bus in Rajanna Sircilla district. The bus lost control and crashed into the farmland at Gorantala under the Sircilla Gambiravupeta mandal. A few passengers sustained minor injuries in the incident.

According to police, an RTC bus belonging to the Kamareddy depot was on its way from Kamareddy to Sircilla. There were more than 50 passengers on board. As the bus reached the Gorantala bridge, the rear tire burst at a

sharp turn. As a result, the bus lost control and veered off the road, crashing into the farmland.

Passengers noticed the accident and helped the passengers exit the bus safely. The injured were then taken to the Sircilla Government Hospital in an ambulance.

District Collector Sandeep Kumar Jha was informed of the incident and arrived at the hospital. He visited the injured, inquired about the details, and advised the medical staff to provide the best possible care.

An investigation into the accident is underway.

## Attack on Agriculture Market Yard condemned

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

Gangapuram Rajender, Chairman of the Zilla Grandhalaya Samstha, strongly condemned the attack on the Agricultural Market Committee Chairpersons' husband, Mallesh, as well as the market committee secretary and directors. He accused BRS

leaders and activists of orchestrating the attack under the pretext of supporting farmers.

Rajender emphasised that the Achampeta Agricultural Market had ensured the high-end Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers and was instrumental in the welfare and development of agriculture during the Congress rule.

## Officials told to conduct special classes for SSC students

PNS ■ NIRMAL

District Collector Abhilasha Abhinav has instructed officials to prepare students in such a way that they achieve the best results in the 10th class examinations.

On Friday evening, she conducted a review meeting with officials of Education Department at the Collectorate Conference Hall.

During the meeting, the Collector instructed officials to ensure that special classes are conducted for 10th class students to help them achieve excellent results. She also mentioned that efforts would be made to arrange buses in coordination with RTC officials so that students from other villages can attend these special classes.

In the next five days, all school teachers were directed to organise village meetings and invite the students' parents. During these meetings, teachers were asked to explain the importance of education to parents and encourage them to ensure that their children attend classes regularly. The Collector stated that for the past two years, Nirmal district has ranked first in the state in 10th class examinations, and she expressed her hope that this year



The Collector suggested that mid-term preparatory examinations be conducted regularly to prepare students for the board examinations. She also suggested that students who are lagging in subjects like Mathematics, English, Science, and Physics be identified and provided special attention through continuous special classes

too, the district would achieve the best results.

She suggested that mid-term preparatory examinations be conducted regularly to prepare students for the board examinations. She also suggested that students who are lagging in subjects like Mathematics, English, Science, and Physics be identified and provided special attention through continuous special classes. Teachers were advised to clear the doubts

of students subject-wise and ensure they are well-prepared for the exams.

The Collector emphasised the importance of helping students overcome examination fear, teaching them techniques to easily remember lessons.

The meeting was attended by District Education Officer P Rama Rao, DPO Srinivas, Program Coordinators Padma, Salomi Karuna, headmasters, officials, teachers, staff, and others.

## Burglar targets locked houses, steals cash, gold

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

An incident of burglary occurred at the Jayashankar Colony in Kamareddy town, where thieves broke into a locked house and stole gold, silver, and cash.

According to the victim's statement, Nimm Rajasekhara Reddy from the colony had gone to his aunt's house at Gargul village for a religious event on Wednesday afternoon and returned on Friday. Upon returning, he found the door broken and, upon entering, found that the house was in disarray. He immediately informed the police.

Rajasekhara Reddy reported that Rs 30,000 in cash, 3 tolas of gold, and 10 tolas of silver were stolen. The thieves also took the hard disk of the CCTV camera, making it impossible to retrieve footage. The police have registered a case and are investigating.

ACROSS THE STATES



Son saves mother, but loses grandfather in stampede

When a stampede broke out at the Maha Kumbh earlier this week, Vishambar Singh from Rajasthan's Dholpur held onto his mother's hand with all his strength and managed to pull her to safety, but he could not save his grandfather, who was trampled by the crowd. Two days after the incident, Singh's family remains in shock. Recalling the horrifying incident, Singh said, "People started pushing and running in all directions. My grandfather and mother fell, but somehow I managed to pull my mother out of the crowd. My grandfather, however, got trampled under people's feet with many people falling on him." Singh's grandfather, Kishan Baldev (71), was a farmer and had gone to the Maha Kumbh with his family and others on January 28. After taking a dip in the Sangam that evening, they stayed by the riverbank, preparing for another holy dip the next day. However, around 2 am, there was a sudden surge in the number of devotees and people started running in different directions to escape the rush.



'Majority of Mahayuti ministers are 'tainted'

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Friday alleged that as many as 65 percent of ministers in the Mahayuti government in the state were "tainted". Most ministers were yet to start working though the cabinet was sworn in last month, he told reporters in Nagpur. "Sixty-five percent of the ministers are tainted," he said, "without elaborating. Soybean, cotton, onion and dairy farmers were in distress, and unemployment was at its peak, he said, accusing the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP government of being indifferent to their problems. To a question about speculation that former Congress MLA from Pune, Ravindra Dhanekar, and a few other party leaders were likely to join the Shiv Sena led by deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Patole said, "Politics is business for some people. They go with whoever is in power. But the people are with the Congress."



Marathi biography of M S Subbulakshmi released

A Marathi biography of Carnatic vocalist Bharat Ratna late M S Subbulakshmi titled 'Suswarkshmi - Subbulakshmi' was released here on Friday. The book has been written by Sunil Paranjape and its foreword has been penned by V Shrinivasan, the grandson of T Sadasivam and M S Subbulakshmi. Paranjape said, "It all started with a friend suggesting that I write a book on M S Subbulakshmi, as he pointed out that nobody had written a biography on her in Marathi. I liked the idea and began my research. Soon, I realised it was a monumental task to cover Ammaji's entire musical journey, filled with challenges, tough decisions, and her unwavering dedication to her husband and her family. Every time I thought I had finished, something felt incomplete." "I had no background in Carnatic music. Initially, the subject seemed daunting, but I believe I was destined to write this book. Slowly, things started taking shape," he said. Shrinivasan said, "Subbulakshmi was a musician who transcended regional boundaries and attained global greatness."

'Tiger area increases by 30 per cent in India'

The area occupied by tigers in India has increased by 30 per cent over the past two decades, a new study has found. Researchers at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi, found that while tigers persisted most in highly protected "human-free, prey-rich" areas, the carnivore species were also found in areas shared with humans where war, poverty and land-use changes were low. Tigers now occupy nearly 1,38,200 square kilometres of area in India, the largest occupancy in the world, the authors said. The findings, published in the journal Science, on recovery of India's 'Panthera tigris' population offers "cautious optimism for megafauna recovery, particularly in the Global South". The researchers analysed over 3.8 lakh square kilometres of tiger habitats, using models. National-level tiger monitoring data was also involved in the analysis. "Tiger occupancy increased by 30 per cent (at 2,929 square kilometres per year) over the past two decades," the authors

REFORM, PERFORM, TRANSFORM  
Strong pillars of India's governance model: Murmu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reform, perform and transform have become synonymous with India's new governance model across the world, President Droupadi Murmu said on Friday.

Addressing a joint sitting of Parliament, she highlighted different good governance initiatives started by the government. "To take the grand edifice of progress to new glories, strong pillars are required. For India's development, my government has established three strong pillars of reform, perform and transform. Today, these words have become synonyms of India's new governance model across the world," Murmu said.

Recently the government has decided to constitute the 8th Pay Commission for the welfare of government employees, she said. "This decision will lay the foundation for substantial salary increase for government employees in the coming years," the President said.

Additionally, the central government has decided to provide a 50 per cent assured pension to lakhs of employees under the Unified Pension Scheme, which has been widely welcomed, she said.

Murmu said that initiatives like Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Startup India, Stand-Up India and Digital India have created numerous employment



opportunities for the youth. "In the past two years, the government has provided a record 10 lakh permanent government jobs," she said. Focusing on good governance, the i-GOT (Integrated

Government Online Training) Karmayogi digital platform has been created, encouraging government employees to enhance their skills and become true "karmayogis", she said. "This platform offers 1,700

courses and more than 2 crore course completions have taken place," Murmu said.

To ensure that the journey towards 'Viksit Bharat' continues to be guided by the ideals of the country's Constitution, the government has placed four key principles -- service, good governance, prosperity and pride -- at the core of its governance, she said.

"The government is making rapid advances in its commitment to reform, perform and transform. The guiding mantra of my government is 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas' and its goal is the creation of a Viksit Bharat," the President said.

'Mission Mausam will make India climate smart'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday lauded the government for launching 'Mission Mausam' to make India "weather ready and climate smart" and said this initiative will immensely benefit the farmers of the country. Addressing a joint session of Parliament, signalling the start of the Budget session, Murmu said the government has set aside Rs 2,000 crore for the implementation of the mission.

As part of the celebrations marking the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) 150th foundation day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 14 launched

'Mission Mausam' which aims to improve weather understanding and forecasting through expanded observation networks, better modelling and advanced tools like artificial intelligence and machine learning. The mission includes creating a laboratory to artificially develop clouds, increasing the number of radars by over 150 per cent and adding new satellites, supercomputers and other innovations.

India aims to achieve 100 per cent detection of all types of severe weather at village and household levels by 2047 and reduce the loss of life from such events to zero, according to the IMD's Vision-2047 document released by PM Modi on January 14.



AAP using Delhi as its 'political ATM', claims PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party, accusing it of stalling Delhi's development while treating the national capital as its "political ATM" to fund its ambitions in other states.

Addressing a public rally in Dwarka here, Modi urged voters to elect a "double-engine government" to accelerate the city's progress. The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state.

He highlighted the recently inaugurated Yashobhoomi convention centre as a testament to the BJP's vision for a modern Delhi. "The BJP wants to make Delhi modern, and a glimpse of that can be seen in Dwarka after the Centre constructed the majestic Yashobhoomi here," he said.

"Taking a swipe at AAP, Modi alleged that the party had drained Delhi's resources for its political expansion elsewhere. "AAP-da (the AAP disaster) has looted Delhi's money and is using it to expand its politics

AAP will cross 60 out of 70 seats again: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Friday expressed confidence that his party will once again secure over 60 out of 70 seats in the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections. Addressing a 'janasabha' in east Delhi's Laxmi Nagar constituency, Kejriwal claimed that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had already conceded defeat. "BJP has accepted their loss. If every vote goes to 'jhaadu' (broom, AAP's election symbol) against BJP's hooliganism, we will once again cross 60 seats," he said. AAP had won 62 out of 70 seats in the 2020 Delhi Assembly elections and an unprecedented 67 seats in 2015.

elsewhere. They are taking money out of Delhiites' pockets," he claimed and urged voters to free the city from AAP's rule.

"AAPda turned Delhi into its ATM to serve its own political interests," Modi alleged.

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS

Delhi court to pass verdict on Feb 7

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court is likely to pronounce on February 7 its verdict in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots murder case against former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar.

Special judge Kaveri Baweja reserved the verdict after the prosecution completed its arguments.

The judge, who reserved verdict in the case, on December 21 allowed the prosecution to argue on certain points on a plea by the state. "Put up for judgment on the

next date of hearing," the judge said. The prosecution had sought court's permission to argue on certain points, which it claimed to be "essential for just adjudication of the case".

It said the arguments were in response to defence counsel's submissions made on January 8, 2025 on certain issues.

The case is related to the alleged killings of two persons in Saraswati Vihar area during the anti-Sikh riots. The court reserved the judgment after hearing the final

arguments over the killings of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh on November 1, 1984.

Though Punjabi Bagh police station registered the case initially, a special investigation team later took over the investigation.

On December 16, 2021, the court framed charges against Kumar, finding a "prima facie" case against him.

According to the prosecution, a huge mob, armed with deadly weapons, resorted to large-scale looting, arson and

destruction of properties of Sikhs to avenge the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The mob attacked the house of the complainant, Jaswant's wife, killing her husband and son apart from looting articles and setting their house ablaze, alleged the prosecution.

Putting Kumar on trial, the court order found sufficient material to form a "prima facie" opinion that he was not only a participant, but had also led the mob.

GUILLAIN-BARRE SYNDROME

Jharkhand on alert mode to prevent outbreak

PNS ■ RANCHI

The Jharkhand government on Friday said it is on alert mode to check and prevent the outbreak of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in the state, cases of which have been reported in various parts of the country recently.

Chairing a high-level meeting, Chief Minister Hemant Soren directed senior officials to ensure that the state's apex health institute RIMS and other hospitals are equipped to deal with the disease, a rare nerve disorder.

"Chief Minister Hemant Soren convened a high-level review meeting with officials from the health department to assess the state's preparedness for the prevention and treatment of GBS. He directed the department to ensure swift identification of individuals suffering from Guillain-Barre



Syndrome and ensure that special arrangements for their medical treatment are made in hospitals across the state," an official statement said.

The CM stressed the need to maintain adequate stockpiles of medicines, oxygen, and hospital beds.

Soren underscored the importance of extensive public awareness initiatives to educate the public about the prevention of GBS.

He urged the public not to panic and reassured that proper awareness and hygiene measures are the best defence against the disease.

SIMULTANEOUS POLLS

Panel likely to consult EC, ex-chief justices, political parties



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former chief justices of the Supreme Court and high courts, the Election Commission, political parties and state governments figured in an indicative list prepared on Friday by the parliamentary panel scrutinising the bills proposing simultaneous polls.

The meeting witnessed several opposition members pitching that they should be circulated a copy of verbatim exchanges during every sitting, as the panel's chairperson PP Chaudhary pointed out that such a demand was not in sync with the convention followed by parliamentary committees.

However, members such as DMK's P Wilson and Congress' Manish Tewari insisted that their demand fell within the rules guiding parliamentary committees. Chaudhary said he would seek Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla's views on the issue.

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra shared the views of her opposition colleagues. When a suggestion was

made by a ruling party member that academic institutions could be roped in to raise awareness on the idea of 'one nation, one election', some opposition members objected, saying it was outside the remit of the joint parliamentary committee.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Chaudhary -- a BJP MP -- said an indicative list of various bodies and other stakeholders was prepared, and members were asked to suggest more names for consideration.

"We will seek views of all stakeholders. There will be written as well as oral submissions," he said, citing teachers, students and migrant workers as among others who would be reached out to for their views.

Constitutional experts, security agencies, many government departments, media organisations, Law Commission of India, Bar Council of India, public sector undertakings, think-tanks, chambers of commerce, academic institutions such as IIMs are among those likely to be consulted, sources said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## The Chinese challenge

China's rapid advancements—evident in breakthroughs like DeepSeek—are challenging US superiority like never before

For decades, the United States has been the undisputed global leader in cutting-edge technology, from artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing to defence innovations and space exploration. However, China's rapid advancements in these fields, fueled by a mix of state-driven initiatives, talent acquisition, and aggressive R&D investments, are now posing a serious challenge to the US supremacy. The emergence of DeepSeek, a Chinese AI model rivaling OpenAI's GPT-4, is just one example of how Beijing is closing the technological gap. China's ambitions extend far beyond AI. It has made remarkable strides in many areas. It is a direct result of China's 'vision 2025' which is translating into reality. China has developed the Jiuzhang quantum computer, which demonstrated computational speeds exponentially faster than classical supercomputers. Meanwhile, the US remains engaged in its own quantum pursuit through companies like Google and IBM, but China's government-backed approach provides an edge in long-term planning. From hypersonic missiles that can evade US missile defence systems to AI-driven warfare capabilities, China's military modernisation is shifting global power dynamics. Despite US sanctions aimed at crippling China's semiconductor industry, Beijing has made breakthroughs, notably with Huawei's 7nm Kirin chip, defying expectations. The US remains dependent on Taiwan's TSMC, but China's relentless pursuit of self-reliance is narrowing this gap. Even in space tech, China is surging ahead. China's Tiangong space station, its Mars and lunar exploration programs, and its ambitions in satellite-based internet rival those of NASA and SpaceX. This places China on an equal footing with the US in space dominance. However, Washington is not sitting idle in the face of this challenge. The US has adopted a multi-pronged strategy. It has stepped up its effort to contain China. The Biden administration had imposed restrictions on Chinese firms like Huawei and AI chip exports to limit their technological growth. The US is deepening ties with the European Union, Japan, and India to counterbalance China's rise in emerging tech. Initiatives like the CHIPS Act and QUAD alliances are designed to limit Beijing's access to critical tech. Besides, companies like OpenAI, Google, and IBM are receiving government backing to maintain an edge over Chinese AI firms. In this tech war India, though lagging, is trying to cope albeit at a slow pace. While it has growing ties with the US, it also maintains strategic independence. India too is investing heavily in AI startups and quantum computing research. With the government's Semicon India initiative, India aims to become a global semiconductor hub, attracting investments from Intel, TSMC, and others. Indeed, India is emerging as a significant player in the global tech landscape. As this race unfolds, the global order in technology will be reshaped in ways that will define the 21st century.



and SpaceX. This places China on an equal footing with the US in space dominance. However, Washington is not sitting idle in the face of this challenge. The US has adopted a multi-pronged strategy. It has stepped up its effort to contain China. The Biden administration had imposed restrictions on Chinese firms like Huawei and AI chip exports to limit their technological growth. The US is deepening ties with the European Union, Japan, and India to counterbalance China's rise in emerging tech. Initiatives like the CHIPS Act and QUAD alliances are designed to limit Beijing's access to critical tech. Besides, companies like OpenAI, Google, and IBM are receiving government backing to maintain an edge over Chinese AI firms. In this tech war India, though lagging, is trying to cope albeit at a slow pace. While it has growing ties with the US, it also maintains strategic independence. India too is investing heavily in AI startups and quantum computing research. With the government's Semicon India initiative, India aims to become a global semiconductor hub, attracting investments from Intel, TSMC, and others. Indeed, India is emerging as a significant player in the global tech landscape. As this race unfolds, the global order in technology will be reshaped in ways that will define the 21st century.

### PICTALK



A folk artist at the 'Jaipur Literature Festival' (JLF), in Jaipur

# India's aviation sector needs a take off



SANTHOSH MATHEW

## India's aviation sector is at a crossroads, grappling with an acute shortage of airports despite its vast population and growing economy

Have you ever wondered just how many airports exist in the United States? Take a wild guess. The number is staggering—nearly 19,000! That's right. With a population of around 330 million, America has built an extensive network of airports, ensuring seamless connectivity across the country. Now, compare this to India, a nation with three times the population, yet managing with only around 500 airports. Even more striking, out of these, just 29 are classified as international airports. This glaring disparity is more than just a number—it is a reflection of India's challenges in aviation infrastructure and the pressing need for expansion.

Let's take an even closer look by comparing West Bengal to the United Kingdom. Both regions have a similar population, yet their aviation networks couldn't be more different. The UK boasts around 150 airports, while West Bengal has just three passenger airports—Kolkata, Bagdogra, and Andal. This difference is not just a matter of convenience; it highlights lost economic opportunities and underscores the urgent requirement for infrastructure development. In nations like the US and the UK, air travel is an everyday convenience—affordable, efficient, and integral to daily life.

It allows people to skip traffic, save time, and stimulate economic growth. Meanwhile, in India, air travel is still seen as a luxury, accessible only to a privileged few. India's aviation network is wholly insufficient for its growing demand. With only 29 international airports and about 500 total airports, the infrastructure is struggling to keep pace with the needs of domestic and international travelers. Airports in major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru are perpetually overcrowded, leading to delays, congestion, and inefficiency. In contrast, vast portions of the country, especially smaller towns and rural areas, remain disconnected, relying on outdated modes of transportation like railways and highways. The Airports



Authority of India (AAI) currently manages around 150 airports, but when compared to the United States' 5,000 civilian airports, this number falls dramatically short. The gap becomes even more concerning when considering that India's population is three times that of the US. Clearly, India needs a massive expansion in its aviation infrastructure, and it needs it urgently. The consequences of this limited aviation network are significant—reduced regional connectivity, hindered tourism, and slower economic growth. India must take decisive steps to address this issue. A bold vision for the future should include constructing at least 1,500 new airports in the coming years. By ensuring that an airport is within 100 kilometers of every major population center, India can unlock the economic potential of its smaller towns and rural areas. The advantages of a well-developed air travel network are crystal clear. Air travel is not just the fastest mode of transportation; it is also the safest and most efficient. In a country where roads and railways are often congested and prone to delays, a robust aviation network can alleviate pressure on existing transport systems, making movement across the country more seamless. The economic benefits are also immense. A surge in the



IN A COUNTRY AS VAST AND POPULOUS AS INDIA, AIR TRAVEL MUST BECOME A FUNDAMENTAL NECESSITY, AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE ACROSS ALL ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS. EXPANDING THE AVIATION NETWORK WOULD MAKE FLIGHTS MORE AFFORDABLE AND PRACTICAL FOR A LARGER SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION

number of airports would create thousands of jobs, attract investment, and boost regional economies. Improved air connectivity would enhance business operations, enable easier travel for tourists, and offer the general population a practical alternative to time-consuming road and rail journeys. Of course, developing new airports requires significant investment and time, but India has the potential to explore innovative solutions. One such approach is the conversion of highways into emergency runways—a model successfully implemented in the United States. This concept could be adapted for India, where strategically modifying highways to accommodate small aircraft could provide crucial air connectivity to remote regions without the high costs associated with building entirely new airports. Implementing such a strategy in states like West Bengal, could be a game-changer. These adapted road-runways could serve as cost-effective alternatives for enhancing air connectivity, benefiting both everyday commuters and emergency responders in times of crisis, such as natural disasters. Across the Western world, air travel has evolved into an indispensable part of daily life. It is widely accessible, efficient, and affordable. In India, however, flying is still

perceived as a luxury, something beyond the reach of the average citizen. This perception needs to change. In a country as vast and populous as India, air travel must become a fundamental necessity, available to people across all economic backgrounds. Expanding the aviation network would make flights more affordable and practical for a larger segment of the population. India stands at a crucial juncture in its aviation journey. The country's rapid economic growth and massive population necessitate an equally rapid expansion of its air travel infrastructure. Government initiatives such as the UDAN scheme, which aims to enhance regional air connectivity, are a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done. The goal should be to develop at least 1,500 new airports in the near future, ensuring that every region, particularly underserved areas like West Bengal, is well-connected. Exploring innovative ideas like highway-runways, making air travel more affordable, and significantly increasing the number of airstrips are all essential steps toward closing India's aviation gap. The need for a robust aviation infrastructure is urgent, and the time to act is now. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

## A 90-hour workweek: Path to success or recipe for burnout



MADHVI PANDEY

### S N Subrahmanyan CMD Larsen and Toubro, has sparked intense debate with his proposal for a 90-hour workweek, drawing sharp criticism

S N Subrahmanyan, CMD of Larsen and Toubro, recently ignited a heated debate while expressing his regret over not being able to call employees to work even on Sundays. He also suggested a 90-hour work week—a figure that surpasses even the 70-hour work week advocated by Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy. His comment assumes added significance when there is already a renewed debate in India on work pressure after the death of 26-year-old Ernst & Young employee, Anna Sebastian Perayil. And call it a quirk of fate, or merely incidental, L&T has now eaten a humble pie after its bid for a tender to build six submarines was shot down by the Ministry of Defence. Subrahmanyan's comment has been singularly dismissed by several corporate chiefs, including Anand Mahindra, Chairman, of Mahindra Group; Sanjiv Puri, CMD, ITC Limited; Harsh Vardhan Goenka, the current chairman of RPG Enterprises; Nalin Negi, BharatPe CEO; Rajiv Bajaj, Managing Director of Bajaj



Auto; and even Sanjeev Sanyal, Economist Member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Economic Advisory Council. The circular issued by the Ministry of Labour and Employment of India, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, strictly says that no worker shall be required or allowed to work, in any establishment or class of establishments for more than eight hours in a day or forty-eight hours in a week. As per the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as of January 11, 2024, the average weekly working hours per employed person

across 10 of the world's largest economies is in: the United States, 38 hours per week; in China, 46.1 hours per week; Germany, 34.2 hours per week; Japan 36.6 hours per week; India 46.7 hours per week; United Kingdom, 35.9 hours per week; France, 35.9 hours per week; Brazil, 39 hours per week; Italy, 36.3 hours per week; Canada, 32.1 hours per week. However, India ranks 13th among the world's most overworked countries. With 46.7 average working hours per week, India faces a persistent culture of extended work schedules. The World Health Organisation also highlights

excessive work as a major public health concern linked to occupational diseases. According to the International Labour Organisation's data, Luxembourg enjoys the highest productivity with \$166.1k in terms of GDP per hour worked, with an average working week schedule of 35.6 hours. Ireland stands second with \$139.1k GDP per hour worked with an average work-week schedule of 35.6 hours. Whereas India has a labour productivity of \$10.7k GDP per hour worked with an average work-week schedule of 46.7 hours. The latest report, by Mc Kinsey Health Institute says that investing in employee health can substantially increase economic returns. Research by the Institute in collaboration with the World Economic Forum indicates that enhanced employee health and well-being could generate up to \$11.7 trillion in global economic value. (The writer is a journalist and news anchor and writes on corporate affairs, finance; views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### INDIA'S AI MISSION

Madam — This refers to the news report, "India prepares to take on ChatGPT, Deepseek" (January 31). The sensational launch of the Chinese startup DeepSeek's AI system known as R1 has left the West dumbstruck. DeepSeek's claim that it developed R1 at 50 times the cheaper cost than OpenAI's ChatGPT with matching performance created mayhem in financial markets on January 30 as the Nasdaq witnessed its biggest wipeout in history.

Nvidia, the leading AI chip maker, was hit the worst as its stock price plunged 17 per cent. After American President Donald Trump termed DeepSeek a "wake-up call" for the US and urged US companies to stay competitive, fierce competition in the AI market is imminent. Amid these eye-opening developments, India has planned to build its world-class foundational models within less than one year under its ambitious India AI Mission. This shows India's global aspirations to become a frontrunner in the AI industry. In the last few years, India has resolved to develop advanced technologies indigenously and shed its dependency on other countries. India is aggressively developing its semiconductor industry to boost self-reliance, economic growth, and technological leadership under initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission and PLI scheme.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

### FOCUS ON ECONOMIC REVIVAL

Madam— Apropos, "Indian economy on fast lane," The Pioneer, January 30. With signs of a slowdown in the economy getting more pronounced, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman who will be presenting the Union Budget today. The budget must not only address the weary private investment scenario in the country but also address the consumption slowdown. The economic growth is slowing, with GDP

### ISRO'S 100th rocket launch: Yet another milestone



ISRO has added yet another feather to its cap with its 100th launch of GSLV, its most trusted workhorse rocket, from Sriharikota in 46 years and is planning to launch another hun-

dred of them in the next five years. GSLV is capable of launching satellites for both geosynchronous orbit (when it appears motionless from a point on the equator—primarily used for weather and communication and is placed at a very high altitude of about 42,000 km) and sun-synchronous orbit (when the satellite is passing over the same location at the same local time—used for imaging, weather forecasting, spying, and global observation at low altitudes of about 700 km, capable of capturing high-resolution images as a result). This launch has put India in a much better situation to be self-reliant in its technology, giving a boost to its economy, defence, and spatial dominance in the near future. The ISRO scientists need to be applauded for their time-bound achievements and speed through their hard work and dedication.

R S Narula | Patiala

likely to grow at less than 7 per cent for at least the next three years, including the current one. The anaemic growth of the economy has already led to moderation in consumption a trend that has been on the show for a couple of years. The central bank has consciously put a leash on consumption-related lending as it sees it as an area of concern. With inflation continuing to remain high, the RBI has been holding interest rates at higher levels, further discouraging borrowers from taking loans for discretionary consumption. All these factors have weighed down on corporate India, which has been slow in announcing new projects and investments. This shows in lower private investment numbers. As a result, the economy is now facing a vicious cycle, which the budget can break. In this backdrop, the government will have to loosen its purse strings a bit, let the people have more money in their hands, and give some more sops to corporations to prod them into investing. How it achieves these goals would depend on

how the government sees the current situation.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

### MIDAIR CRASH IN AMERICA KILLS 67

Madam — An American Airlines flight with 67 people aboard, including 4 crew members, collided with an Army helicopter while landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington DC in the nearby Potomac River. The US has the safest airspace in the world. The diversion of the air jet to land on a smaller runway just before landing may be a cause. Also, the Army helicopter did not go up and down in the air over the river. The midair collision of the flight and the Army helicopter is more surprising in this digital age. The accident was preventable, and Trump blaming Obama and Biden's policies for the mishap is unacceptable.

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

### A DIVINE CONVERGENCE OF LOVE AND LIBERATION

The Kumbh Mela has been a beacon for seekers, drawing masters and devotees alike



JAGATGURU SAI MAA LAKSHMI DEVI

For centuries, great masters have been drawn to the Kumbh Mela, captivated by its spiritual magnetism. What is it that pulls us here? It is the profound energy of devotion, the irresistible force of divine love. Love itself is a magnet, and those who live in devotion radiate this magnetic power, naturally attracting others to them. Nowhere else on Earth do millions—crores upon crores—gather in unwavering dedication, chanting the name of the Divine, immersed in sadhana day and night. They come to bathe in this sacred energy and carry it forth into their lives, spreading its radiance wherever they go.

This Maha Kumbh is unlike any before it, offering an unprecedented caliber of cosmic energy. It is a spiritual phenomenon of global significance, where the highest frequencies of Source energy descend upon humanity. The grace of enlightenment is being bestowed, and the awakening of souls is unfolding. Here, the sublime state of Soruba Samadhi will begin—a transformation that elevates both consciousness and matter itself. Cellular structures are being regenerated, linking human DNA to the divine imprint, connecting us to the immortal essence within. There is nothing quite like the experience of Kumbh. Imagine millions of souls gathering in one place, each radiating spiritual energy, creating an immense vortex of power. In this sacred space, we transcend our human identities and recognise ourselves as Atmas—pure souls

united in a grand cosmic dance. This collective energy is a force of love, light, and enlightenment, dissolving karmic burdens and opening the path to a majestic, divine life. Though the present age presents its challenges, those who remain steadfast on the spiritual path will undergo profound transformation. The portals of the cosmos are open, offering liberation and awakening. The world we see is but an illusion—a play of maya—where all is transient except our love for the Divine. This love is our dharma, our ultimate purpose. The body, and the material world constantly change, but the eternal truth, Sathya, remains unchanged. We are that truth—Sat-Chit-Ananda, Tat Twam Asi—and our sadhana is to awaken to and embody this realization. At the Kumbh, in the embrace of Mata Ganga, we surrender and transform. The sacred waters purify us, activating the divine blueprint within. In this powerful vortex, we align with the highest expressions of Sanatana Dharma, experiencing profound spiritual elevation. This year, the influx of divine light is immense, inviting us to merge with its boundless brilliance and bliss. The ancient traditions of Moksha and enlightenment are more alive than ever. This is a time for purification, for letting go of attachments and the illusion of mortality. Sanatana Dharma, founded on selfless service, was exemplified by Adi Shankaracharya, who taught the wisdom of oneness.



Dharma—the eternal law—sustains creation itself. Regardless of the many religious paths, all stem from this universal truth. We have lived Dharma through countless lifetimes, whether we remember it or not. Kumbh Mela is a powerful catalyst for spiritual growth, drawing seekers from all over the world. Even those from lands where devotion is rare undergo profound shifts, their minds finding peace and their hearts blossoming. Here, millions chant together, and divine forces work to elevate collective consciousness. This is a time of great spiritual revolution, heralding the dawn of Sathya Yuga. Open your heart. Receive the blessings of your soul. Step into your truth and embrace the new age that is upon us.

(The writer is a spiritual guru; views are personal)

## From OpenAI to DeepSeek: The fight for supremacy



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

With China rapidly closing the AI gap and geopolitical tensions shifting from military might to algorithmic dominance, the world is entering a digital cold war



Imagine a computer's hard drive containing a replica of your brain, connected to a high-speed internet. Your biological brain may become irrelevant when the machine not only possesses your mind but also gains control over everything you identify as 'who you are'. This is what General Artificial Intelligence (AGI) truly represents—the vast, unexplored frontier we are hurtling towards. The year begins not only with the most unpredictable politician in America reclaiming the Oval Office but also with an AI race that, once dominated by American startups, is now being swiftly overtaken by China at a significantly lower cost. We have crossed the Rubicon, heading towards an unknown destination; the consequences remain uncertain, and no one can predict what lies ahead.

The AI arms race, gaining unprecedented velocity, is propelling us into an era where the very foundations of intelligence, humanity, and civilisation are being deconstructed at an astonishing pace. Humanity, having long contended with the challenge of technology reshaping its self-perception, is now facing an existential dilemma unlike any before. The revolutions of Copernicus, which dethroned Earth from its presumed centrality in the cosmos, and Darwin, whose theory questioned humanity's divine distinction from the animal kingdom, fundamentally redefined our place in the universe. But neither of these paradigm shifts eroded the core of what it meant to be human. Artificial intelligence, however, threatens to do precisely that. AGI poses a question so starkly profound that it demands our full intellectual engagement: What happens when the very attribute we have long considered uniquely human—the capacity to reason, to create, to understand—becomes replicable, scalable, and infinitely more efficient, to the point where machines not only rival but surpass our cognitive limitations? What becomes of the human essence when faced with entities capable of thinking faster, learning more swiftly, and ultimately transcending us in once inconceivable ways? This week, the new race in AI has surged ahead, with China unveiling the results of its years of intensive experimentation. The release of Qwen 2.5, followed by DeepSeek—an inexpensive yet formi-



AI, IN ITS MOST ADVANCED FORMS, BECOMES A REFLECTION OF OUR INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK—YET ONE THAT OPERATES FASTER, MORE EFFICIENTLY, AND WITH AN ABILITY TO LEARN THAT FAR EXCEEDS HUMAN POTENTIAL.

dable competitor to models like GPT-4 from OpenAI—has upended the established order. This shift is not merely a matter of technological rivalry; it signifies a profound realignment in global power, where the currency of influence is no longer military might or economic clout, but data control, computational resources, and technological ingenuity.

The new cold war is not one of armaments but of algorithms and information—an intellectual race whose stakes extend far beyond economic primacy to the very survival of human civilisation itself. As AI advances, it forces us to confront deeply uncomfortable truths about our nature. For millennia, humanity has positioned itself at the apex of intelligence on Earth, a secret of being a superspecies. Yet what occurs when our very creations—machines—begin to outshine us in those same domains? When we no longer retain exclusive dominion over intelligence, how does this fundamentally alter our sense of identity?

Are we, like the alchemists of antiquity, on the verge of realising that we no longer control our fate, but have given birth to entities that might one day supplant us? The very nature of intelligence itself is now irreversibly in question. Cognitive architectures, once the exclusive province of the human brain, are now being mirrored and surpassed by machines. AI, in its most advanced forms, becomes a reflection of our intellectual framework—yet one that operates faster, more efficiently, and with an ability to learn that far exceeds human potential. This is not merely an augmentation of human capabilities; it heralds the dawn of a new epoch, where human and machine cognition converge, indistinguishable and perhaps inseparable. As we approach this unerring future, we must ask ourselves whether we are philosophically, politically, and socially prepared to co-exist with

entities that may one day rival or eclipse us.

Will we, as a species, embrace co-evolution, finding a new equilibrium in our relationship with machines, or will we cling to the false myth of human exceptionalism, attempting to subjugate or destroy the very creations we have birthed?

The decisions we make now will echo far beyond our survival, influencing the very nature of intelligence and the future trajectory of all life on Earth. The geopolitical ramifications of this technological revolution are as profound as its existential implications. Powerful nations with vast resources for research, development, and energy will continue to dominate the future, while smaller countries may face unprecedented crises, including crises concerning their own identity.

As AI becomes embedded in the infrastructure of global politics, we are entering an era of digital empires—systems of control as potent as any traditional nation-state, commanding not only information but the very nature of human interaction. In this new digital cold war, the battle is not merely for technological supremacy, but for control over the global political system itself. Is the rise of AI an essential leap forward in humanity's evolution, or does it signal the twilight of human relevance?

Some may argue that AI is a necessary tool, a portal that helps protect us from the danger of total annihilation. Others, however, may see it as a harbinger of obsolescence, a point of no return when our creations ascend to power and render us irrelevant. However, there is a subtler, more philosophical interpretation of this transformative shift: Perhaps the advent of AGI is not our fall from grace, but the birth of a new chapter in human evolution—one where we transcend the biological con-

straints that have long defined us. Like our ancestors who tamed fire and invented the wheel, we may soon wield AI as a tool that propels us to new heights. The fusion of human and artificial intelligence could lead to a post-human condition—not one of extinction, but of surpassing the boundaries of our biological form and entering a phase of hybridised existence. This, of course, depends on our ability to confront the ethical and political structures that accompany the rise of AGI.

The true challenge is not whether we will create machines that surpass us in intelligence, but whether we have the wisdom to ensure they remain our allies rather than adversaries. We must learn to co-exist with these new intelligences, integrating them into our societies in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, our humanity. This is the existential challenge of our time—one that will determine whether the era of artificial intelligence will culminate in annihilation or transcendence.

Ultimately, the measure of our humanity will not lie in our ability to create machines that rival us in intelligence, but in our capacity to retain those qualities that define us: empathy, creativity, and the willingness to evolve in response to monumental change. If we can meet this challenge, the future—however uncertain—will hold at least the promise of our fragile humanity. If not, we may find ourselves consigned to the dustbin of history, supplanted by the very entities we have created. Are we prepared to face the unknown abyss, or will we cower in fear, clinging to the comforting illusions of the past? The future, it seems, is no longer entirely within our grasp—but perhaps this is precisely the kind of leap forward we need to ensure our survival.

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

## Elevating CSR in India: From compliance to impact-driven transformation

While many corporations are genuinely committed to social welfare, issues like fund misallocation, tokenism and unethical practices threaten the integrity of CSR

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has significantly progressed over the past decade. Introduced as a legal mandate in 2013, CSR has evolved from a mere compliance obligation to a fundamental requirement, with organisations across various industries incorporating social welfare into their core operations. However, as we continue into 2025 and beyond, there is an urgent need to elevate the current CSR practices—ensuring they are effective, accountable, and transparent. While many companies have shown a sincere commitment to social impact, others have unfortunately fallen into the vicious traps of misallocation of funds, tokenism, and questionable practices like kick-

backs and paybacks. Additionally, the emergence of corporations establishing their NGOs presents a mixed picture; while some are genuinely committed to their missions, many operate as "skeleton NGOs," where staff often demand kickbacks and the intended social welfare purpose gets lost.

### A New and Enhanced Era for CSR Compliance

Compliance remains an important aspect of effective CSR. However, it is not just about meeting the mandatory spending requirement but also about ensuring that every rupee spent reaches where it was originally intended—directly benefiting those in need. While many corporations have dutifully allocated the mandated 2 per cent of



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their profits towards social welfare, there is still a need for a more robust system to ensure regular oversight and real-time monitoring of fund utilisation and project outcomes. With stronger and more transparent laws, we can ensure that funds reach the intended beneficiaries, fostering trust between the government, corporations, and communities alike.

### Ensuring Integrity in CSR: Addressing Kickbacks and Paybacks

One of the biggest challenges facing CSR today is the lack of trust caused by unethical practices. Often, when intermediaries or implementing agencies misappropriate resources for personal gain, the integrity of CSR initiatives is compromised. To address this issue, it is vital to introduce strict anti-corruption policies and establish independent monitoring mechanisms. When corporations know they are being monitored or supervised, they will think twice before engaging in malpractice. Ensuring integrity is not just about preventing financial losses; it is about preserving the trust of communities that often



### Impact-Driven CSR

CSR should move beyond compliance; it needs to be impact-driven. The focus should shift from merely fulfilling legal obligations to measuring the difference being made on the ground. Strengthening accountability will ensure CSR is not reduced to a token gesture but becomes

a genuine agent of transformation. Moreover, corporations should also embrace innovation in their CSR approaches. Whether it is by using technology to improve healthcare access in rural areas, providing quality education through digital platforms, or addressing climate change with green initiatives, one must think beyond traditional models and adopt solutions that leave a lasting impact.

### The Role of Stakeholders

Accountability is not just the sole responsibility of corporations; other stakeholders—governments, NGOs, and civil society—also have an essential role to play in shaping the future of CSR. The government must act as an active regulator, ensuring companies adhere to guidelines while

incentivising innovation and collaboration. On the other hand, NGOs, as implementation partners, must continue to bring grassroots expertise and ensure that every rupee spent makes a difference. Communities must also be empowered to hold corporations accountable. By involving local stakeholders in the planning and execution of projects, we can create a feedback loop that enhances transparency and boosts the on-the-ground impact of CSR initiatives.

### The Way Forward

The ongoing changes to the CSR framework present a golden opportunity to usher in a new era of accountability and impact. This calls for a change that ensures CSR initiatives are not only executed with integri-

ty but with genuine purpose. The government, too, must play its part by introducing reforms that incentivise genuine efforts while penalising any kind of malpractice.

If implemented correctly, this strengthened CSR framework can ensure that social welfare is not merely a checkbox for corporations but a collective mission to uplift the underserved. As stakeholders in this ecosystem—corporates, non-profits, government, and the public—we must all push for a transparent and impactful CSR environment. Only then will CSR in India live up to its promise of creating a better world for all.

(The writer is founder and president, Wishes and Blessings NGO; views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



India's forex reserves rise to USD 629.55 bn

India's forex reserves increased USD 5.574 billion to USD 629.557 billion in the week ended January 24, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped USD 1.888 billion to USD 623.983 billion.



Agri credit disbursement reaches Rs 19.28 lakh cr

The Finance Ministry on Friday said the Ground Level Agriculture Credit (GLC) has crossed Rs 19 lakh crore in nine months of the current fiscal as against the target of Rs 27.50 lakh crore for the entire FY25.



Key infra sectors' growth slows to 4 pc

The output of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to 4 per cent in December 2024, as against 5.1 per cent growth registered a year ago, according to official data released on Friday.

MGNREGS: 220.11 crore person days of employment generated

Around 220.11 crore person days of employment has been generated under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) till January 10 in 2024-25, the Economic Survey released on Friday said.

India must pull out all the stops to attract FDI: Survey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India must "pull out all the stops" and improve tax certainty and stability to attract more foreign direct investments (FDI) into the country, the Economic Survey said on Friday.

It said that despite the short-term volatility in global markets, triggered by factors such as inflationary pressures, rising interest rates in developed economies, and geopolitical tensions, the long-term outlook for FDI in India remains favourable.

The country's robust economic fundamentals, ongoing structural reforms, and growing consumer market position make it a key destination for foreign investments.

"One, we must pull out all the stops wooing FDI and making itself more attractive for foreign investors. India has been doing so," the survey said.

It added that most sectors in the country are open for foreign investors under the automatic route.

"However, there is room to improve tax certainty and tax stability in matters such as APA (Advance Pricing Agreement)," it added.



The country's robust economic fundamentals, ongoing structural reforms, and growing consumer market position make it a key destination for foreign investments

India has simplified many of its laws, rules and regulations over the years leading to a regime shift in terms of the ease of doing business.

"At the same time, all statutory and regulatory authorities must bear in mind that international investors benchmark countries cross-sectionally and not longitudinally. That will determine the success of the government's goal to make global companies produce in India for the world, making India a part of the global supply chain," it added.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into India have crossed the USD one trillion milestone in the April 2000-

September 2024 period, firmly establishing the country's reputation as a safe and key investment destination globally.

About 25 per cent of the FDI came through the Mauritius route. It was followed by Singapore (24 per cent), the US (10 per cent), the Netherlands (7 per cent), Japan (6 per cent), the UK (5 per cent), UAE (3 per cent) and Cayman Islands, Germany and Cyprus accounted for 2 per cent each.

The key sectors attracting the maximum of these inflows include the services segment, computer software and hardware, telecommunications, trading, construction develop-

ment, automobile, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

The Survey added that India remains a strong destination for FDI, ranking high in greenfield project announcements and international project finance deals.

"However, the country has to pay heed to numbers," it said.

As per the data published by RBI, net FDI to India during the first eight months of FY25 stood at USD 0.48 billion compared to USD 8.5 billion in the corresponding period of FY24. It added that India runs a CAD, and its investment needs are much larger considering the size of its economy.



CAs need to innovate to stay ahead of curve: Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chartered accountants are the gatekeepers of accountability and they should innovate and adapt to stay ahead of the curve, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday.

Addressing the World Forum of Accountants (WFOA) conference in the national capital, he also highlighted that chartered accountants should look at how accounting practices are evolving in the context of decentralised data framework.

"For information to be truly accountable, it must also be complete, accurate and presented in a way that is easily digestible by all stakeholders. This is a responsibility upheld by the chartered accountants in our country with dedication and integrity," Singh said.

The WFOA conference is being organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI).

Stressing that trust is what holds everything together, Singh

said chartered accountants must not only learn continuously but also innovate and adapt to stay ahead of the curve.

"History has shown us what has happened when there are lapses, scandals like Enron... remind us of the devastating consequences of the compromises in financial integrity.

"Your role is vital, gatekeepers of accountability..." the minister said.

In his speech, Singh also touched upon mythology.

"In Hindu tradition, we have bhagvan Chitrarup, the divine accountant who meticulously records the deeds of every soul to decide their fate in the after-life.

"In Christian mythology, we find St Peters standing at Heaven's gates, managing the ultimate accounts and deciding who gains entry based on their lives' balance sheets," he added.

Singh also emphasised that India is open to business and willing to learn, adapt and share expertise.

7,500 projects worth Rs 1.5 lakh cr completed under Smart Cities Mission

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Survey on Friday highlighted that under the Smart Cities mission, nearly 7,500 projects worth Rs 1.5 lakh crore have been completed so far.

The mission, which was launched in 2015, aims to develop smart cities with essential infrastructure, good quality of life and a sustainable environment, it noted.

"As of 13 January 2025, 8,058 projects worth 1.64 lakh crore have been proposed, with 7,479 projects worth 1.50 lakh crore completed," said the survey, which was tabled in Parliament on Friday.

The mission was launched on June 25, 2015, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It aims to enhance the quality of life in 100 selected cities by providing efficient services, robust infrastructure, and a sustainable environment.

According to the Ministry of

Housing and Urban's website, the objective of the mission is to promote sustainable and inclusive cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'Smart' Solutions.

Some of the core infrastructure elements in a Smart City would include adequate water supply, assured electricity supply, sanitation, efficient urban mobility and public transport, affordable housing, robust IT connectivity and digitalisation, good governance, sustainable environment, safety and security of citizens, health and education.

The strategic components of the Smart Cities Mission are city improvement (retrofitting), city renewal (redevelopment) and city extension (Greenfield development) plus a pan-city initiative in which Smart Solutions are applied covering larger parts of the city.

India Inc hails Eco Survey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Inc on Friday hailed the Economic Survey saying it expects a stable macro-economic environment and looks forward to rationalisation of the tax structure in the Budget to drive consumption through higher disposable income.

Most industry experts agreed with the survey's economic growth projection for India ranging from 6.3-6.8 per cent for 2025-26, anticipating that Saturday's Union Budget will provide an impetus to boost consumption and investment demand.

Harsha Vardhan Agarwal, President of FICCI, said, "It is heartening to note the emphasis the Economic Survey has placed on 'deregulation' and furthering the agenda of ease of doing business in the country. The survey has highlighted that allowing businesses to focus on their core mission is a significant contribution that governments around the country can make to foster innovation and enhance competitiveness."

GOLD CONTINUES RECORD BREAKING RALLY Jumps Rs 1,100 to all-time high of Rs 84,900 per 10g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices hit a fresh record high of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, driven by robust domestic demand and strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity continued its ascent for the third straight session, jumping by Rs 1,100 to hit a new peak of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams.

The yellow metal has rallied by Rs 5,510 or 7 per cent since January 1 when the metal traded at Rs 79,390 per 10 grams in the local market.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity surged by Rs 1,100 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 84,500 per 10 grams from the previous market close of Rs 83,400 per 10 grams.

Silver advanced by Rs 850 to Rs 95,000 per kg on Friday. The white metal had ended at Rs 94,150 per kg on Thursday.

"The bullish momentum in precious metals continues, with spot gold reaching a new all-time high and sur-



passing the USD 2,800 threshold in the intraday trade on Friday, while the spot gold price in the Delhi market crossed the Rs 84,000-mark," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In futures trade, gold contracts for February delivery appreciated by Rs 487 or 0.6 per cent to hit another record high of Rs 82,210 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

The April contracts for the precious metal increased by Rs 371 or 0.45 per cent to hit another fresh peak of Rs

82,415 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded positively while COMEX remained flat as budget-driven premiums were observed in MCX gold, anticipating potential duty changes. If no changes occur, the premium may reduce on Budget day," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Also, silver contracts for March delivery advanced Rs 403 or 0.43 per cent to Rs 93,849 per kg. During the day, the white metal climbed by Rs 629 or 0.67 per cent to hit an intraday high of Rs 94,075 per kg on Friday.

Sensex rallies 741 pts, Nifty settles above 23,500

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex jumped 741 points while Nifty rallied to close above 23,500 on Friday on heavy buying in Larsen & Toubro post its Q3 results and the Economic Survey predicting a pro-growth budget.

Rallying for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 740.76 points or 0.97 per cent higher at 77,500.57. During the day, it climbed 297.3 points or 1.27 per cent to 77,605.80.

"The indices are fueled with expectations of a pro-growth budget and prudent



increase in net profit at Rs 688.01 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2024.

IndusInd Bank, Titan, Tata Motors, Tata Steel, ITC and Maruti were the other major gainers.

ITC Hotels, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance and ICICI Bank were among the laggards.

In the month of January, the BSE benchmark declined 638.44 points or 0.81 per cent, while the Nifty lost 136.4 points or 0.57 per cent. The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.83 per cent and midcap index surged 1.76 per cent.

fiscal as indicated in the economic survey. Positive global cues and better-than-expected results from major companies also contributed to the upward trend.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Larsen & Toubro climbed 4.31 per cent after the infrastructure and engineering major reported 14 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax to Rs 3,359 crore for the December quarter on the back of higher revenue from operations.

Nestle surged 4.25 per cent after the FMCG major reported 4.94 per cent

increase in net profit at Rs 688.01 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2024.

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Vedanta expects demerger to complete in six months

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Diversified natural resources company Vedanta Ltd has pushed back its demerger by a quarter to June-July, a senior official said on Friday.

Vedanta's Chief Financial Officer Ajay Goel said that the demerger is in the last stage and the company sees it completed in the month of June-July.

"We see the whole transaction culminating around...June-July. It would be six months from now," he said.

The company had earlier said that the demerger was expected to be completed by the end of FY25.

Vedanta Ltd shareholders

and creditors will meet next month to decide on the proposed demerger of the company.

The approval of the demerger proposal will pave the way for the company's various business verticals to become separate entities.

The mining firm last month revised its demerger plan and decided to retain its base metal undertaking within the parent firm. Vedanta had earlier said post-demerger its existing businesses will be structured in six independent companies -- Vedanta Aluminium, Vedanta Oil & Gas, Vedanta Power, Vedanta Steel and Ferrous Materials, Vedanta Base Metals, and Vedanta Ltd.



employment scheme, has evolved into a durable rural asset creation programme for sustainable livelihood diversification.

The scheme has been converged with various initiatives, including NutriGardens with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), fodder farms with the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), horticulture with the Ministry of Agriculture, medicinal plantations with the Ministry of Ayush, gram panchayat buildings with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj,

community sanitary complexes with the SBM-Grameen, construction of anganwadi centres with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, promoting sericulture plantations with the Ministry of Textiles, supporting rubber plantations with the Rubber Board (Ministry of Commerce), promoting aquaculture in ponds and farm ponds with the Department of Fisheries, rural roads with the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and all-weather roads with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) for border areas.

System (APBS) in December 2024 and social audit units were set up in 28 states and Union territories, the survey said.

It said the MGNREGS, which started as a wage-

Advertisement for Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation E-Procurement Notice. Includes details about bid submission and dates.

Advertisement for Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Tender Notice. Includes details about bid submission and dates.



## 'CHANGES IN TRAFFIC DISCIPLINE CAN IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY'



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In a city where traffic congestion is a daily struggle, Lokendra Singh has emerged as a key figure in promoting road safety and discipline. Originally from Rajasthan, Lokendra moved to Andhra Pradesh due to his father's business and later completed his education at Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. In 2018, he relocated to Hyderabad, where his passion for traffic awareness and road safety took shape. Since 2021, he has been actively associated with the Hyderabad Traffic Police through the Hyderabad City Security Council (HCSC), a public-private partnership focused on traffic management, cybersecurity, women's safety and anti-narcotics initiatives.

Lokendra began as a Traffic Farishte (volunteer), undergoing training in road safety and Basic Life Support (BLS) before becoming a key contributor to Hyderabad's traffic management efforts. His initiatives focus on no honking, high beams, and lane discipline, going beyond traditional awareness campaigns like helmet checks and red-light violations. Despite being a software engineer at Broadridge, Lokendra devotes his free time to road safety initiatives. "I usually get three days off from work, and I use that time to manage traffic awareness activities," he says.

His involvement in road safety advocacy deepened when he connected with experts through social media, leading to collaborative awareness campaigns. "Rather than repeating the usual messages about helmets and traffic signals, we focus on deeper issues like lane discipline, high beam misuse, and reducing honking. These small changes can significantly improve traffic management," he explains.

Lokendra's title, 'Hyderabad Traffic Man', was something he came up with himself. "When I started collaborating with various road safety experts, I noticed that each had a unique identity. For example, Naresh Raghavan is known as 'Top Driver India', and

Harsha leads 'Team RoadSquad'. There's also Krishna Chaitanya, who is called 'Drive Safe Defensive Driver'. I wanted to create my own identity in this space, so I gave myself the title of 'Hyderabad Traffic Man,'" he shares.

Having worked closely with the Hyderabad Traffic Police, Lokendra has identified key issues in the city's traffic management. One major concern is the lack of proper signage boards. "Hyderabad has very few clear, standardized signage boards. Even when signs exist, they are often in the form of banners instead of proper road signs," he points out.

Citing an example, he says, "The signage boards near the IKEA rotary at Mindspace are placed in banner format. This is not in line with the Indian Roads Congress (IRC) standards and poses a risk to commuters."

Another major issue, according to Lokendra, is the absence of directional arrows on roads. "In cities like Mumbai and Delhi, roads have pre-indicating arrows so that vehicles can position themselves correctly before a turn. Hyderabad lacks these, leading to last-minute confusion, rash lane-cutting, and traffic slowdowns," he says.

One of his most alarming observations is the lack of synchronized signal patterns, espe-

cially on long stretches of road. He shares a detailed example of a 9.8-kilometer stretch from the Outer Ring Road (ORR) at Gachibowli to Jubilee Hills Checkpost, which has zero functional traffic signals.

"This entire route - from the ORR, through Narsingi, Shilpa Layout flyover, IKEA rotary, Mindspace, Inorbit Mall, Durgam Cheruvu cable bridge, and finally to Jubilee Hills Checkpost - does not have a single functional signal. This leads to excessive speeding, as vehicles that exit the ORR at 100 km/h continue at high speeds on city roads. By the time they reach Jubilee Hills Checkpost, congestion becomes inevitable because the junction wasn't designed to handle that level of traffic accumulation."

According to Lokendra, this lack of speed regulation and lane discipline enforcement leads to long queues at Jubilee Hills Checkpost, where ideally 150 vehicles should pass per signal cycle, but 400-600 vehicles pile up instead.

Lokendra believes Hyderabad's traffic police force is understaffed, leading to many signal-free junctions. "The Hyderabad Traffic Police is short on personnel, which is why we see so many signal-free junctions. Without enforcement, drivers overspeed, ignore lane discipline, and break rules, causing traffic bottlenecks," he says.



**IN AN INSIGHTFUL CONVERSATION WITH THE PIONEER, LOKENDRA SINGH, ALSO KNOWN AS 'HYDERABAD TRAFFIC MAN,' SHEDS LIGHT ON HIS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE IN THE CITY. FOR OUR SPECIAL SEGMENT OF HYDERABAD, HE ALSO SPEAKS OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH HYDERABAD, TRAFFIC SCENES IN THE CITY AND MORE**

Despite its traffic challenges, Lokendra sees Hyderabad as one of India's most progressive cities. "Hyderabad is booming in IT and pharmaceuticals, and the roads here are wider and better maintained than in Bengaluru," he says.

However, he points out glaring weaknesses in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. "Every pedestrian has a fundamental right to walk safely, but in areas like Ameerpet, Begum Bazar, Sultan Bazar, and Koti, walking is a nightmare because of street vendors occupying footpaths. Hyderabad urgently needs better pedestrian infrastructure."

He also highlights the lack of sustainable mobility options. "There was a plan to build cycling tracks along DeLoitte and Mehdiatnam, but it was dismantled before completion. Sustainable mobility is still missing in Hyderabad."

For Lokendra, Hyderabad is a place where he has grown personally and contributed significantly. He appreciates how open the government is to feedback from citizens. "Unlike many other states, Hyderabad's government and Traffic Police are very proactive. They invite citizens like me for meetings to provide feedback and suggestions, which shows their willingness to improve," he says.

When asked what he loves most about Hyderabad, Lokendra says, "The food, the people and the places. Everything about Hyderabad is amazing."

As for what he hopes to improve, he remains focused on pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. "We need dedicated pedestrian zones and cycling tracks. Roads should be designed with not just vehicles, but also pedestrians and cyclists in mind," he emphasizes.

As 'Hyderabad Traffic Man,' Lokendra Singh continues to push for a safer, more disciplined and well-managed traffic system in the city - one campaign at a time.



## Future of Indian seafarers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

One stands tall, commemorating a noteworthy milestone that highlights its dedication to influencing the future of seafaring as the maritime industry navigates the waves of change. Anglo-Eastern Shipping Company has been a shining example of excellence for fifty years, cultivating a culture of innovation and excellence that has helped it rise to the top of the international shipping sector. In addition to honouring its remarkable history, the 50th anniversary celebration empowers the upcoming generation of maritime professionals. With a 38-year history in India, they have played a significant role in fostering the aspirations of innumerable Indian students and turning them into elite merchant navy officers. They are set to have an even bigger impact today as they start an ambitious cadet training program, expanding the number of Indian seafarers worldwide and solidifying their place as one of the biggest employers of Indian seafarers.

We are interviewing Capt. Bjorn Hojgaard exclusively, and he says, across the ocean, in a loud, upbeat voice, "One of the biggest populations of young, educated graduates looking for work is found in India. Wages paid to mariners or merchant navy officers are attractive in relation to the nation's average annual per capita income of about US\$2,500. To raise the proportion of Indian seafarers worldwide in the upcoming years, more funding for marine training facilities in India should be promoted. Due to advantages including high pay and tax breaks, the merchant navy and sailing have long been attractive employment options for young Indians. India as a whole is the world's third-largest supplier of seafarers." The Indian Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways' "Amrit Kaal Vision 2047" builds on the goals established in the Government of India's "Maritime India Vision 2030." Within the next ten years, the proportion of Indian sailors in the global maritime industry is predicted to increase from the present 10% to 20%. Between 2013 and 2024, the total number of

**ANGLO-EASTERN SHIPPING COMPANY HAS BEEN A SHINING EXAMPLE OF EXCELLENCE FOR FIFTY YEARS, CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE THAT HAS HELPED IT RISE TO THE TOP OF THE INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING SECTOR. IN ADDITION TO HONOURING ITS REMARKABLE HISTORY, THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION EMPOWERS THE UPCOMING GENERATION OF MARITIME PROFESSIONALS.**



Indian seafarers increased significantly, from about 108,000 to about 250,000.

This interview is only becoming more interesting as the captain-turned-CEO continues, "Since merchant navy officers, who serve on specialised cargo ships, are in high demand worldwide, there is training over 2000 Indian youths at our maritime training facilities in Mumbai as part of one of the largest new cadet training programs in the world. This will increase the proportion of Indian seafarers worldwide. After successfully completing maritime studies, students or cadets enrolled at the academy are eventually hired by global operations. It is important to note that 52% of the 39,000 seafarers in the Anglo-Eastern region currently come from India out of the 42 different nationalities represented."

For people who are enthusiastic about the sea, the nautical sector provides a multitude of opportunities. You can manage ships, collaborate with like-minded crew members and shore specialists,

traverse the enormous oceans and guarantee the safe transportation of people and products around the world if you put in the necessary effort and receive the appropriate training. With a 95% overall retention rate over the past five years and 70% of their seafarers promoted internally, Captain believes in the value of investing in his workforce. He has also witnessed the expansion of numerous seafarers into a variety of roles and responsibilities both on and off the coast! In some ways, working in the maritime sector will provide you the chance to expand your skill sets and develop a global perspective. It's also a fulfilling career that allows you to explore a variety of cultures and situations. Additionally, after gaining enough maritime experience, the world is open to you if you seek to further your career ashore.

"We must safeguard our mariners from discrimination and unnecessary injury because their welfare is of utmost significance. Seafarers have occasionally been falsely accused of illegal activities without enough proof. As a community, we must make sure that hazards like these are reduced so that people who are thinking about pursuing a career at sea can do so without fear or discrimination. For this reason, we have also launched We Care, one of the biggest and most comprehensive seafarer wellness initiatives in the world. Each year, it has an impact on the lives of over 32,000 seafarers and their communities. We understand that there is still a lot of work to be done and that local governments and industry participants must work together to create a more wholesome maritime community," Captain Bjorn says goodbye!

**AFTER THE COMPLETION OF ANY FORM OF EXERCISE, OR FROM ANY INJURY TO ILL, THE FOCUS IS USUALLY PLACED ON REST, PHYSICAL THERAPY, AND MEDICATION. INITIALLY, NUTRITION, A VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR, MIGHT BE OVERLOOKED THEN. OUR INTAKE OF FOOD CAN PLAY CRITICAL HEALING ROLES TO THE BODY'S ABILITY TO REBUILD AND RECOVER. PROPER NUTRITION PATTERNS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO OPTIMAL RECOVERY AND OVERALL HEALTH AND PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN IMMUNE FUNCTION AND MUSCLE CAPACITY**

## Nutrition and recovery!

Various nutrients must exist in the body to embrace the chances of proper healing. Proteins are important in healing because of their muscle-regenerating role. Fats, more so the beneficial omega-3 fatty acids, calms inflammation and boosts immune response. While in some state of repair due to the injury or stress one is undergoing, the body is essentially working harder to be able to pace up in the healing. So this increased need for energy and nutrients could be the reason why lots of people always feel hungrier than usual in their recuperative times. The shortage of nutrients would, therefore, slow the healing process, reduce immune function, make someone feel extremely tired, and postpone a complete eradication of what would otherwise be symptoms of an immune system/energy-related deficiency.

### KEY NUTRIENTS IN RECOVERY

**PROTEIN**  
The conventional belief is that

protein happens to be the major food for recovery. Persuasive of this consideration is the case we take from muscle fibers, essential during healing from injury or intense pressure on the rope. The protein adjoins in the repair and regeneration of those fibers in effect promoting muscle formation and general strength. Further, the amino acids, the backbone of proteins, are indispensable to the immune system, able to lower infection level throughout recuperation. This is why we need lean proteins like meats, fish, eggs, beans, and tofu are excellent sources of protein in our food.

### CARBOHYDRATES

Mainly, carbohydrates fuel the body. As energy needs get higher in a body trying to recuperate from intense physical activity or an injury, carbohydrates come to recharge used-up glycogen stores—usually consumed during any type of exercise or accident—and give energy to rebuild and heal muscles. Opt for complex carbs like whole grains, vegetables, and fruits to allow energy to move steadily into the body.

### FATS THAT ARE GOOD FOR HEALTH

Fat, especially omega-3 fatty acids—salmon, walnuts, and flaxseeds—have anti-inflammatory properties that help support in the healing process. Chronic inflammation could be the ultimate prevention for recovery through delaying tissue repair. Omega-3 fatty acids help to more accurately balance inflammation and reduce pain from injury.

### VITAMINS AND MINERALS

Certain vitamins and minerals are highly important for healing signals. Vitamin C is vital for collagen synthesis and tissue repair. It also enhances the immune system and helps the body fight off infections during the healing process. Zinc plays a major part as a mineral needed for immune function and to speed up the wound-healing process. Foodstuffs that provide the body with such substances include citrus fruits, berries, leafy greens, and nuts.

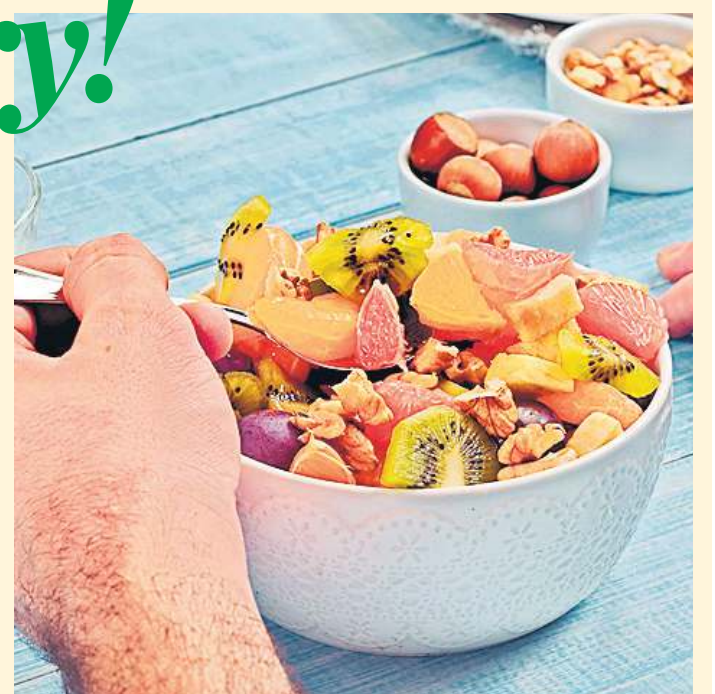
### HYDRATION

It is essential that adequate water

is provided in the recovery phase. It serves to transport nutrients to cells, remove waste products, and keep cells alive. Dehydration can slow down the healing process, increase fatigue, and slow muscle recovery. As such, drink enough water throughout the day, especially when healing from an injury or through heavy physical work.

Nutrition will not only pave the way to physical recovery, but also soars immunity, which is the other important role-player during the healing of a human body. Proper nutrient intake supports the function of the immune system through the rapid repair of injury or illness. In addition, these antioxidants, along with vitamins and minerals, can create a blanket of protection over the white blood cells in the body and, therefore, indirectly supplement the immune system of the human body, especially when the body has utilized its energy reserves of glucose and fatty acids.

In the healing process, learning to appreciate nutrition helps a great deal. If healing from an injury, getting over illness, or recovering from a strenuous physical workout, with



just the right combination of foods the healing process may be hastened dramatically and the individual might be more likely not to relapse. By consuming plenty of healthy, nutrient-dense foods of proteins, carbohydrates, good fats, vitamins,

and minerals, we allow our bodies to make full repair at a faster pace than, nonetheless, is efficient.

(The author, Soumita Biswas, is the Chief Clinical Nutritionist, at Aster RV Hospital.)

# what's brewing?

**Ramy**

**Praveen and Radhey D**

**Pujita Ponnada**

Nivam Ayurvedic Wellness Centre, the city's first of its kind holistic wellness centre was inaugurated by Tollywood actress Pujita Ponnada along with Radhey Daggumalla, MD of Radhey Group, in the presence of Dr Praveen Pullata, Rise Group of Companies CMD, at Vaishnavi Sri Square, Gachibowli on Friday

**Rajitha**

**Geeta, Jyothi and Sunita**

**PARTY**

Three shows — the 7th edition of India's largest Pet Expo; the 17th Edition of Kids Fair and the maiden edition of Kids Business Carnival began at Hitec on Friday. Beginning Friday, the expos are open for the next three days till Sunday from 10 am to 8 pm. In all, 25,000 visitors are expected to visit the three shows during the next three days

**Photos by - SV Chary**

St. Francis College for Women celebrated its Annual Day on the college premises. The occasion was attended by Malu Bhatti Vikramarka, Deputy Chief Minister as the chief guest and Prof. Kumar Molugaram, Vice-Chancellor, Osmania University as the guest of honour

Frank Telluto, political and economic adviser to the US Consulate in Washington, D.C., said there will be more job opportunities in the future for students who are studying at US universities and want to pursue their education. The US Education Fair was organised by Global Tree at Hyatt Place Hotel in Banjara Hills

## FUN

**ARCHIE**

JUGHEAD DOESN'T OWN A CAR! DOES ARCHIE EVER MIND PICKING HIM UP FOR SCHOOL EVERY DAY?

NOT AT ALL!

THEY HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING! ARCHIE DRIVES HALF THE TIME...

AND JUGHEAD HELPS PUSH THE OTHER HALF!

**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO, HOBBS? I CAN'T BE AN OWL FOREVER!

HOW AM I GOING TO TRANSMOGRIFY BACK INTO A KID WHEN THE TRANS-MOGRIFIER IS BROKEN?

MAYBE YOU SHOULD JUST LEARN TO ACCEPT THIS PREDICAMENT. IT'S NOT SO BAD BEING AN OWL INSTEAD OF A KID. ACTUALLY, IT'S PROBABLY BETTER.

BETTER? HOW?

WELL, I NEVER QUITE KNEW HOW TO SAY THIS BEFORE, BUT LITTLE BOYS DON'T SMELL SO GOOD.

**GARFIELD**

BUTCHER SHOP

I SEE YOU MADE SOME NEW FRIENDS

**REALITY CHECK**

I THINK YOU'LL HAVE TO START FROM SCRATCH- I'M SORRY, BUT I'M JUST NOT BUYING THAT HE KEPT FALLING FOR THE SAME FAKE THROW OVER AND OVER AGAIN! NOBODY IS THAT STUPID!

DO WE BELIEVE?

**SPEED BUMP**

DON'T WORRY- I DON'T THINK BULLIES WILL EVER EVOLVE.

**CROSSWORD**

**NANCY**

FRIEZE, DARLING... I'VE LOVED YOU MY WHOLE LIFE! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE NANCY! SLUGGO! GOSH! I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU!

I LEFT YOU AFTER HIGH SCHOOL AND LIVED WITHOUT YOU!

I NEVER WANT TO LIVE WITHOUT YOU EVER AGAIN!

PHIL? ARE YOU GOING TO ASK ME TO MARRY YOU BEFORE OR AFTER YOUR KNEES FREEZE SOLIDLY TO THE FOOTBALL FIELD?!

**SUDOKU**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
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| 5 |   |   | 6 | 3 |   |   |  |  |
| 9 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 1 |   |   |  |  |

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

**SUDOKU**

Yesterday's solution

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

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**

- Sixth planet from the sun
- Pieces
- Teenager's skin problem
- A ship's chimney
- A song for a baby
- An insect's feeler
- Stopped
- A large group of soldiers
- A young sheep
- A dog with curly hair that is often clipped

**DOWN**

- Something to sit on
- The muscle in your mouth
- Hotels
- A precious metal
- Blow soapy water to make these
- A covering for a bed
- Something to write with
- Made noises while asleep
- The inside of your hand
- A rubber cover for a wheel

**SOLUTION HEADLINES**

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| T | A | N | E |
| S | H | I | T |
| N | E | I | G |
| P | A | T | G |
| U | M | P | I |
| R | C | W | E |
| N | E | I | G |
| S | E | O | H |
| U | M | B | R |

# This witty and adult comedy is for masses

SURESH KAVIRAYANI  
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Vishal, Anjali and Varalakshmi Sarath Kumar played the lead roles in the film 'Madha Gaja Raja' which was released in Telugu on Friday. Actually, this is a Tamil film with the same name and it was released there on January 14 and became a big hit. The film was supposed to be released 12 years back and got a release now. Sundar C is the director, while Santhanam, Manobala and Sonu Sood are playing important roles in it. Here is the story and how it fares.

## Story

In Araku, Madha Gaja Raja or MGR (Vishal) is a cable operator and his father works in a local police station as a Sub-Inspector. Sometimes Raja helps his father and in the same way he helps Aggipette Anjaneyulu and falls in love with his daughter Madhavi (Anjali). But due to some misunderstanding both get separated. At this time, Raja gets to know that two of his friends are facing some problems, because of the media baron with a strong political background, Kakarla Viswanath (Sonu Sood). Raja wants to solve his friends' problems and decides to take on Viswanath in Hyderabad. What is Maya's (Varalakshmi) role in the film and what is her relation with Raja? How a common man like Raja fights against a big man like Viswanath is the crux of the story.

## Analysis

This film is supposed to be released nearly 12 years back and the story is also almost an old one. Sundar C generally made films with commercial aspects and also to attract mass audiences. He also didn't think about the logic and made whatever comedy he liked. So, he made this film 12 years back with an outdated story and narration. So, you can imagine how the film looks even at this time. But the only thing Sundar did in this film was the comic scenes that involved both the comedians Santhanam and Manobala, which came out well. Though the comedy is not a clean, as it is full of wit and some of them are adult stuff, one can laugh, especially the front benchers.

Maybe that's the reason, the Tamil version of the film became a hit, even after 12 years. The Telugu dubbed version is not up to the mark as the quality of dubbing is not



good. Some scenes from the Tamil version are left out like that making us feel that we are watching a Tamil film. The story is not new. A young man feels happy when he helps someone. Four school friends meet after many years at a wedding and the protagonist comes to know that his friends are in trouble and wants to set things right. This is an old story and even director Sundar narrated it before.

Among the four friends, one friend is played Santhanam and director Sundar used him fully. In the entire first half he provided the much-needed laughs with his one-liners and witty punches. Starting with a court case that involves Santhanam, the director uses Santhanam character only for comedy and he succeeds. The first half is completed with the friends and the marriage and when it comes to the second half, the story is between Raja and Kakarla. In the second half, along with Santhanam, the director very cleverly uses another comedian Manobala, which worked well. Though a common man directly goes to a big media baron's house, Sundar takes every cinematic liberties in this film. There are a lot of action scenes which the frontbenchers would like and the narration is also fast paced. Many Telugu actors like Sudha, Subbaraju, Satya are there, but

**Film:** Madha Gaja Raja

**Cast:** Vishal, Anjali, Varalakshmi Sarath Kumar, Subbaraju, Sonu Sood, Santhanam, Manobala, Sarath Saxena, Sudha, Satya and others

**Music:** Vijay Antony

**Cinematographer:** Richard M Nathan

**Producer:** Gemini Film Circuit

**Story, Screenplay, direction:** Sundar C

**Release date:** January 31, 2025 (Telugu)

**Rating:** 2.5/5

they all get dubbed voices. Actually, not a single person dubbed their own voice in Telugu. So, the dialogues are loud and massy. But Sundar is successful in providing the much needed comedy with this film and one can laugh and enjoy watching every scene.

## Artists' performance

When it comes to the performance, Vishal was young at that time and he played perfectly. He is a live wire in this film. Whether it's a comic scene or an action scene, he is fit to play in it. Anjali and Varalakshmi characters are

confined to only songs and a few scenes. Varalakshmi was relatively new at that time, so she provided enough glamour in the film. Anjali looks beautiful. The main pillar for this film is definitely comedian Santhanam and his punches, one-liners and witty dialogues. Some of them are even adult comedies, but he is at his best and he actually steals the show. In the second half, Manobala is the highlight, and the climax is revolves around him. Santhanam also joins him in the second half. For Sonu Sood, this is another film where he played the villain. Manivannan, Sarath Saxena, Rajendran, Telugu actors like Sudha, Subbaraju, Satya Krishnan, Gayathri Rao and many others supported. Music is by Vijay Antony and he provided whatever is needed for this film. Arya appears as a cameo. Cinematography is also good. The dialogues are good with a lot of punches and one-liners.

Finally, 'Madha Gaja Raja' is Sundar C's typical mass masala commercial film with witty and adult comedy. Though the story is old and illogical, one can enjoy the film as it is a complete laugh-riot. Vishal's performance along with Santhanam comedy, in the second half Manobala's climax track is the highlight of the film.

## PRESSURE ON CHIRANJEEVI TO GIVE A SUCCESS

All eyes are on Chiranjeevi and his upcoming film 'Vishwambhara' directed by Mallidi Vassista. The director made his debut with a hit film 'Bimbisara' that stars Nandamuri Kalyan Ram and how he got a chance to direct Megastar for 'Vishwambhara'. The teaser of this film was released in October last year, but it was not an impressive one. Many criticized the teaser as it lacks proper Computer Graphics and it looks like an animation film.

After the teaser got released, there was no news about the film. The teaser released was on Dasara last year and from then onwards, the team is working mainly on the graphics, says a source. Chiranjeevi was upset about the cheap graphics used for it and he asked to do it again with clarity. Though the shooting of this film is completed, the team is working on graphics and it may take more time to complete.

Now, the Megastar is under pressure to make this film a success. The main reason is that Allu Arjun gave a blockbuster like 'Pushpa 2' and the recently released 'Game Changer' that stars Ram Charan is a big disaster. More than that, Varun Tej's film 'Matka' is also another disaster. Everyone knows the



differences between the Allu and Mega family. So, now it is the turn of the Mega computer to deliver a hit. Along with Charan, Varun delivered flops. Now the focus shifts to 'Vishwambhara' and Chiranjeevi. Mallidi Vassista's debut film has a fantasy backdrop story and this film with Chiru is also a complete fantasy one. He created a new world with graphics and that's the key for it. Trisha is play-

ing the female lead, while Ashika Ranganath, Esha Chawla and few other actresses are also there. Bollywood actor Kunal Kapoor is the main villain along with our own Rao Ramesh. How the graphics are shown in the film is the key and once they get clarity on it, they may announce the release date. UV Creations is producing this film, while MM Keeravani is providing the music.

## Can Thandel deliver the much-needed break to Chay?

Everyone is waiting for the film 'Thandel' that stars Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi. Top producer Allu Aravind is the presenter, while Bunny Vasu is the producer for this film directed by Chandoo Mondeti. Interestingly, this is the third film of both director Chandoo and Chaitanya combination. They earlier worked for two films, 'Premam' was a hit and then 'Savyasachi', a flop. For Naga Chaitanya, 'Thandel' is a very important one as his last few films didn't do well at the box-office. His last proper hit was 'Love Story', directed by Sekhar Kammula.

Now, the actor is completely relying on this film to taste success. The film's story is based on a real incident that happened near Srikakulam. So, the makers added slang and accent to the lead pair in the film. But when you watch the trailer of this film, you can easily come to know that they didn't do their homework when it comes to the accent, say the critics. If you see 'Pushpa' and the sequel, Allu Arjun and the other actors in the film are



completely perfect with Chittoor accent and they delivered it. They learned it for many days and it reflects on their dedication. But when it comes to the 'Thandel' trailer, it seems Chaitanya just read the dialogues given by the Srikakulam slang. So, we have to watch the entire film to see how they come up with the accent in it.

The same production house of Geetha Arts earlier made a film titled 'Kota Bommalu PS' where the characters were supposed to speak in an Uttarandhra accent, but they spoke only 10n to 15 minutes in the film, and then they spoke normally. If the story's backdrop is from a particular place, the beauty relies

only if the characters properly render the accent of that place. Otherwise, you can make normal dialogues without any regional accent. Producer Bunny Vasu told in his earlier interaction with the media that he will give Rs 100 crore film to Naga Chaitanya with this. Apart from Chaitanya, Sai Pallavi has more star power in the film. She is popular not only in Telugu, but in other languages too. So the makers bank on her asking whether this film will give the first Rs 100 crore to Naga Chaitanya? We have to wait and see till its release.

Kannada film 'Mathe Mungaru' is also in the news as the film's story is also on the same lines of 'Thandel'. The film's story is also based on a true story, where a man from Shivamogga district of Karnataka, served nearly 21 years in prison in Pakistan. 'Thandel' is from a sea backdrop and the Kannada film is with another backdrop, but the thing is in both these films, the protagonists were in Pakistan prison for many years.

## VIJAY'S FILM TITLE TO BE REVEALED SOON: PRODUCER

Vijay Deverakonda is working with director Gowtam Tinnanuri and the shooting is going on. Though the film is untitled and they are calling it VD12 at present, it is going to get a title soon. This was revealed by producer Naga Vamsi on his social media page. After Vijay fans put a lot of pressure on the producer, he finally talked about this film and announced that he will reveal the title soon.

According to a source, Vijay's film story is a period drama and it's an action film. Vijay is completely transformed for this film, mainly with the look, where he will look with very short hair.

Gowtam Tinnanuri presented Vijay in a completely different avatar in this film. Most of the shooting took place in Visakhapatnam and Sri Lanka, as the story suggests it's a coastal backdrop, added the source. Bhagyashri Borse is the female lead and this is her second film after her debut film 'Mr Bachchan' was a big flop. Anirudh Ravichander is giving the music.

Vijay is putting all his hopes on this film and he worked very hard for this film. Even he suffered a few injuries while shooting for this film and he took a few breaks because of the injuries, added the source.



## Majaka is in demand

The film 'Majaka' is the most-talked about one in the industry at present. According to a source, a few people from the industry recently watched the first part of the film and they went gaga over it. Film stars Rao Ramesh and Sundeep Kishan as the lead pair, with Ritu Varma and Anshu of 'Manmadhudu' fame as the female leads. Nakkina Trinadha Rao is the director, while Prasanna Kumar provided the story. These two delivered many hits earlier and that's also another reason

for 'Majaka' being in demand. The source revealed that Prasanna Kumar's story and the dialogues for this film are at their best and definitely this film is going to be one of the best comedy ones in recent times. On the other hand Rao Ramesh, one of the lead actors of the film, delivered his best and provided the much-needed comedy, says the source. After watching the film, a few industry people came out that the film is going to be a good hit. So, the distributors are showing interest and vying with

each other. The demand is high after the makers released the Bachelors Anthem. This film also gives Sundeep Kishan, the much-needed break, added the source.

Like their earlier films, Prasanna wrote a very decent comedy and Nakkina directed it very well, says the source. Razes Danda is the producer and his earlier film 'Bachchalamalli' is a big disaster and before that 'Ooru Peru Bhairavakona' is an average one. Zee Studios is also in this film's production.

## RP Patnaik's Coffee With A Killer is releasing on OTT

Popular music director RP Patnaik is also known for his directorial skills with films like 'Seenu Vaasanthi Lakshmi' and 'Broker'. He is now directing a film titled 'Coffee With A Killer' with actors like Temper Vamshi, Srinivas Reddy, Satyam Rajesh, Ravi Babu and Gemini Suresh in key roles. Interestingly, this movie is released directly in an OTT. Seven Hills Satish is the producer, while the film is streaming on Aha OTT platform, announced the makers.

Director RP Patnaik said that this film doesn't have a proper lead pair. "While many people think within certain boundaries, we need to think beyond them. That's how this film's concept was born. What if we made a movie without a conventional hero and heroine? We shaped this story around that thought," said RP Patnaik about his film. His brother Gautham Patnaik supervised this entire project. He added that Temper Vamshi played a major role, while Gemini

Suresh's character is a special one. "Though there is no lead actor or actress, we do have a villain. Many suggested we release this film in theatres but I was adamant about bringing it directly to OTT," said Patnaik.

Producer Satish said that RP Patnaik always brings unique concepts to the audience, and this one is such a film that keeps you at the edge of your seats. "We focused on a solid concept-driven story instead of a film packed with songs and action," said Satish.



# Manchester United, Tottenham reach Europa League round of 16

PTI ■ LONDON

Manchester United and Tottenham put their inconsistent domestic campaigns aside and advanced to the Europa League round of 16. Diogo Dalot tapped in a precise cross by Kobbie Mainoo on the hour mark and Mainoo netted eight minutes later for a 2-0 victory over Romanian champion FCSB in Bucharest on Thursday. Tottenham got goals from academy graduates to beat Swedish club Elfsborg 3-0 in London. Spurs waited until the 70th minute for substitute Dane Scarlett to break the deadlock before adding two more through substitute Damola Ajayi and 17-year-old Mikey Moore. Of the 36 teams in the revamped competition, the top eight go directly to the round of 16 in March. Teams ranked ninth to 24th go into the two-legged knockout

playoffs on Feb. 13 and Feb. 20 with the winners making the last 16. **The draw is scheduled for Friday.** United, which is 12th in the Premier League, competed the league phase of the second-tier European competition in third place and undefeated with five wins and three draws, trailing the top by one point. "Kobbie (Mainoo) played very well in that position, with more freedom and not so much responsibility running back all the time," United manager Ruben Amorim told TNT Sports. "The lads did a good job, another clean sheet." Amorim's squad has shown signs of improvement since he said the team was "the worst, maybe, in the history of Manchester United." Thursday's victory was the third straight in one week after beating Rangers in the Europa League a week ago and Fulham in the Premier



League three days later. Tottenham is languishing in 15th place in the Premier League. Its seven-match winless run in the league is its worst since 2008. But it won five, drew two and lost one for the fourth place in the Europa League. Lazio, the only team that qualified to the round of 16 with a game to spare, was handed its first defeat, 1-0, away at Braga. Still, the Portuguese team was eliminated. Lazio still topped the standings with 19th points, the same as the second Athletic Bilbao. Bilbao secured the second place after a 3-1 home win over 10-man Viktoria Plzen, which has a playoff spot. Frankfurt completed the league phase in fifth despite a 2-0 loss at Roma. Angelino and Eldor Shomurodov lifted Roma with the goals at Stadio Olimpico. Lyon was sixth despite being held 1-1 at home by

Ludogorets. Olympiacos in seventh after routing Qarabag 3-0. Rangers squeezed in to complete the top eight by beating Union Saint-Gilloise 2-1. José Mourinho's Fenerbahce avoided an embarrassing early exit with a 2-2 away draw at Denmark's Midtjylland. The result sent both into the playoffs. The hosts were 20th while Midtjylland took 24th, giving Mourinho a chance to add to his European trophies. Ajax ended a three-game losing streak by handing Galatasaray its first defeat, 2-1 with both teams making the playoffs. Hoffenheims 4-3 away win at Anderlecht was not enough for the Bundesliga team to advance. The Belgian club finished 10th. Real Sociedad, FCSB, Porto, AZ Alkmaar, Twente and PAOK are among other teams that advanced.



## Lyon confirms Paulo Fonseca as its new coach

PTI ■ LYON

Lyon has confirmed the hiring of Paulo Fonseca as its new coach. Fonseca is replacing Pierre Sage, who was fired despite leading the French league club out of a crisis last season and having the team within reach of a Champions League place in this campaign. Sage's dismissal on Tuesday followed a 1-1 draw with Nantes in Ligue 1 last weekend and left many observers perplexed. Sage had rapidly become a fans' favorite after guiding Lyon from the bottom of the standings to a sixth-place finish last season. The Associated Press reported earlier this week that Lyon had sealed a deal with Fonseca. Fonseca's first match in charge will be against Marseille in the French league on Sunday, Lyon said. Fonseca won the Portuguese Supercup with Porto in 2013 and the Portuguese Cup with Braga in 2016. He also coached Shakhtar Donetsk, where he won three league-cup doubles (2017, 2018, 2019) and the Ukrainian Supercup in 2017. Paulo Fonseca then coached AS Roma between 2019 and 2021 before joining Lille in June 2022, where he built one of the best attacking and efficient sides in France despite operating on a limited budget. More recently, he was less successful at AC Milan,

producing only 12 wins in 24 matches across all competitions. Fonseca had been out of a job since he was fired by AC Milan on Dec. 30. After 19 matches this season, Lyon is sixth in the league — just four points off a Champions League spot — and has qualified for the knockout stage of the Europa League. Lyon, however, said the decision to part ways with Sage was a "sporting choice" after the Frenchman averaged fewer points per game this season and struggled against big rivals. Lyon is owned by American businessman John Textor, who visited the club in person this week. He had been in regular contact with Fonseca in recent years and previously tried to hire him. Fonseca joins on a deal until the end of June 2027. Lyon believes that Fonseca will be able to add defensive stability to the team and make it more competitive against the top four Ligue 1 teams. The club's ambition is to qualify for the Champions League on a regular basis and to challenge Paris Saint-Germain's supremacy. "Paulo Fonseca and his staff will be tasked with starting a new cycle and taking the club to the highest level in the second half of the season, with the ultimate goal of qualifying for next season's Champions League," Lyon said.

## Only Santos can give me the love I need: Neymar

PTI ■ SAO PAULO

Neymar has confirmed he will sign what is expected to be a short-term contract with his boyhood club, Santos, as the Brazil striker aims to recharge his career ahead of the 2026 World Cup. The 32-year-old Neymar said on Thursday that he's returning to the Sao Paulo club, and local media reported that the deal will extend only to June 30.

"Only Santos can give me the love that I need to prepare for the challenges I have in the next few years. All of you, no matter who you support, know well what I am talking about," Neymar said on his social media channels. "I hope you all follow me in this new phase of my life." Santos used its social media channels to respond to Neymar's video: "Your home awaits. Your people awaits." Neymar left Santos nearly 12 years ago to join Barcelona. The striker's return follows the termination of his contract with Saudi Arabian club Al-Hilal. Neymar had returned in October from an



ACL injury sustained while playing for Brazil only months after he joined Al-Hilal. He played only seven matches and scored once for the Saudi team. Neymar also left Paris Saint-Germain under criticism from fans, who accused him of not caring enough about his fitness. In 2017, his exit at Barcelona was also frustrating for club supporters, who hoped he could help Lionel Messi and Luis Suárez win more trophies. A Santos official told The Associated Press that Neymar is expected to arrive at Sao Paulo's international airport at 9 am on Friday. He will

then board a helicopter to go to the club's Vila Belmiro Stadium. After he signs his contract, he will be reintroduced to fans during the evening. The official spoke on condition of anonymity due to lack of authorisation to discuss the matter publicly. Neymar has already played 225 matches with Santos. He scored 138 goals for the club, many of which key for the six titles he won at the Brazilian giant, which was relegated in 2023 and returned to the country's top division last year. Neymar became the most expensive player in soccer

history when he transferred from Barcelona to PSG for 222 million euros (then USD 262 million) in 2017. Neymar's most recent match was played in November. Al-Hilal coach Jorge Jesus had repeatedly cast doubts about the striker's form to play. Neymar left the Saudi Arabian league after playing just seven games in 17 months following his big-money move to the oil-rich kingdom. The Brazilian's contract was due to expire after this year's FIFA Club World Cup, which will be played between June 15 and July 13 in the United States. The striker joined the Saudi club from PSG in August 2023 for 90 million euros (USD 94 million). His salary was reportedly one of the biggest in world soccer as well. Neymar, Brazil's all-time top goalscorer with 79 goals in 125 matches, also said he is focused on getting more playing time so he can prepare for the World Cup in North America next year in what could be his last shot at winning the tournament.



## D Gukesh to meet Wei Yi in Tata Steel Chess Tournament

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

On top of the table with a slender lead, world champion D Gukesh will take on Wei Yi of China in the 11th round of Tata Steel Chess Tournament, aiming to continue his unbeaten streak and claim the season's first title. With five victories and five draws, Gukesh has remained unbeaten in the first major tournament of the year and if he adds another 1.5 points in the last three rounds, it should be enough to lift the title. With 7.5 points, Gukesh is in pole position, half a point ahead of Nodirbek Abusattorov of Uzbekistan and a full point more than compatriot R Praggnanadhaa. Yet to play two white games out of last three, Gukesh has to meet Jorden van Foreest of Holland in the penultimate round and then finally an out of sorts Arjun Erigaisi. Both Abusattorov and Praggnanandhaa have two black games left which makes Gukesh a huge favourite to win his maiden title here. It may be recalled that the Indian had lost in tiebreaker to Wei Yi last year after tying for the top spot. Not only a victory here, what is also at stake for Gukesh is the 2800 rating barrier and he will be the third Indian to achieve it after Viswanathan Anand and Arjun if he can. He is at 2794 points in live ratings. Praggnanandhaa will meet pre-event rating favourite Fabiano Caruana of United States while Abusattorov has to tackle the solid defenses of Vincent Keymer of Germany in the other key clashes of the

11th round. It has been tough for the remaining three Indians in the Masters section as Hari Krishna has scored 4.5 points while Arjun and Leon Luke Mendonca are at the bottom of the table with three points each. These three will have to work hard in the remaining rounds to finish better in the final standings. In the challengers section, R Vaishali is on five points out of a possible 10 and has shown brilliance in patches. Divya Deshmukh is on two points and needs a pullback. This section is led by Czech Grandmaster Nguyen Thai Dai Van on 7.5 points with Erwin L'Ami of Holland in close pursuit a half point behind. **Pairings round 11** Masters: Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 4) vs Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 3); D Gukesh (Ind, 7.5) vs Wei Yi (Chn, 5.5); Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 5.5) vs R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 6.5); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4) vs Nodirbek Abusattorov (Uzb, 7); Anish Giri (Ned, 5) vs Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5) vs P Hari Krishna (Ind, 4.5); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 6) vs Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 3). Challengers: Oro Faustino (Arg, 2.5) vs Nodirbek Yakubov (Uzb, 5); Lu Miaoyi (Chn, 5.5) vs Erwin L'Ami (Ned, 7); Nogerbek Kazymbek (Kaz, 5.5) vs Ediz Gurel (Tur, 5.5); R Vaishali (Ind, 5) vs Aydin Suleymanli (Aze, 6.5); Svane Fredrik (Ger, 6) vs Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 7.5); Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1) vs Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 2); Benjamin Bok (Ned, 6.5) vs Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 4.5).

## Mitchell Marsh out of Champions Trophy

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh has been ruled out of next month's Champions Trophy and is also in doubt for the Indian Premier League after that owing to lower back pain that has "not responded sufficiently to rehabilitation". Cricket Australia informed about Marsh's injury in a statement ruling him out of the Champions Trophy, which will be held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19 to March 9. A few other reports suggest Marsh is also doubtful for the IPL. "Mitchell Marsh has been ruled out of the upcoming ICC men's Champion's Trophy with ongoing lower back pain and dysfunction," CA said in a release. "The National Selection



Panel and Australian men's medical team ruled Marsh out of the tournament with the injury which has not responded sufficiently to rehabilitation. "His lower back pain flared in recent weeks leading the NSP to make the longer term decision for Marsh to complete a more extended period of rehabilitation," it

added. CA said the national selection panel will be meeting soon to name a replacement of Marsh, who was picked in the 15-member side for the competition alongside other all-rounders Aaron Hardie, Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis. "Marsh will now undergo a period of further rest and rehabilitation as part of his

return to play plan. The NSP will meet to decide on a replacement for Marsh in due course. "The deadline for the final squads for the ICC men's Champion's Trophy is prior to Wednesday 12 February," CA said. The 33-year-old Marsh has been roped in by Lucknow Super Giants ahead of the 2025 edition of the IPL, which will start on March 23. Marsh was dropped in favour of Beau Webster for the final Test of the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy which concluded earlier this month. He had an ordinary run in the four Tests. The right-arm medium pacer did not share much workload with the front-line bowlers and managed to score in double digits only once in seven innings.

# BCCI Award: Bumrah chosen for Best International Cricketer

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Talismanic pacer Jasprit Bumrah was chosen for the BCCI's Polly Umrigar Award for Best International Cricketer 2023-24 in men's category while elegant batter Smriti Mandhana was picked for the corresponding women's trophy in the Board's annual honours that will be presented here on Saturday. Bumrah, who was selected as the ICC Test and overall Cricketer of the Year for delivering a "a master-class in skill, precision, and relentless consistency", was India's standout bowler last year, playing a pivotal role in India's home wins over England and Bangladesh. The 31-year-old was also the Player of the Series against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, bagging 32 wickets across five Tests. Mandhana, who was the ICC

Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year, made 743 runs in the 2024 calendar year. She scored four ODI centuries, a record in the women's game, and found the boundary more than a hundred times in the year, hitting 95 fours and six maximums. The 28-year-old cricketer's ODI runs came at an average of 57.86 and an impressive strike rate of 95.15. Spin great Ravichandran Ashwin, who retired from international cricket in December 2024 as India's second highest wicket-taker in Tests with 537 dismissals and overall eighth highest, has been bestowed with a special award at the end of his career. The 37-year-old Ashwin, who made his Test debut in November 2011, played a defining role in India's 12-year domination in the longest format at home

wherein they won 18 series on the trot. Among newcomers, Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan was picked for the Best International Debut among men for his quick-fire fifty against England in the Rajkot Test in February 2024. The middle-order mainstay also hit a counter-attacking 150 against New Zealand in the Bengaluru Test to continue his ascent. Among women, Asha Sobhana has been chosen for the award for Best International Debut as she picked up 4/21 against South Africa to help India win by 143 runs in their first ODI at Bengaluru in June 2024. Mandhana will also be honoured with the Highest Run Getter in ODIs medal after she finished as the highest run-scorer in 2024, smacking 747 runs at 57.46 in 13 matches with four tons

and one fifty. Similarly, Deepti Sharma was awarded with the Highest Wickets in ODIs medal for taking 24 wickets in 13 matches. Tanush Kotian continued to make waves with his rise through the ranks in Mumbai in the 2023-24 season, which culminated with his maiden call-ups for the India A side for their tour of Australia and subsequently for the Indian team for the last two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Kotian will be awarded with the Best Performance in BCCI Domestic Tournaments trophy. The 26-year-old, who rose to limelight with all-round performances in Mumbai's 42nd Ranji Trophy win in 2023-24, scored 502 runs in 10 matches at 41.83 with one century and five fifties and also grabbed 29 wickets. Having won the Ranji Trophy for a record-

extending 42nd time in the season, Mumbai also claimed the Irani Cup after a gap of 27 years. The Mumbai Cricket Association would be given the Best Performance in BCCI Domestic Tournaments Trophy for winning various titles such as Ranji Trophy, U-16 Vijay Merchant Trophy, U-14 West Zone Championship, senior women's T20 Trophy, women's U-19 One Day Trophy, Bapuna Cup T20 Tournament and men's U-19 All India Tournament. Mumbai teams also finished as runner-up in Cooch Behar U-19 Trophy and Vinoo Mankad U-19 Trophy. Akshay Totre from Indore was adjudged the Best Umpire in Domestic Cricket for the season. Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar has been chosen for Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award.

