

QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The party gave a B-form to Theenmar Mallanna, organised a huge rally and ensured his victory by convincing all sections. Will anybody hope for the loss of a party contestant? It is not proper to organise a meeting and scold other castes. I would welcome Mallanna if he scolds me but it is not right for him to scold the community

- Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, Minister

GST Council to soon take decision on rates, number of slabs: FM

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REDEFINING GLOBAL DANCE CULTURE WITH THE RHYTHM OF CHANGE

9

I am open to do any role: Sai RAM SHANKAR

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DON'T MISS...
TG's GST revenue sees 17% growth in January

Telangana's commercial tax revenue has shown a steady increase, with GST collections registering a 17% growth in January compared to the same month last year. However, while VAT revenue from petrol sales rose by 9%, VAT collections from liquor sales saw a 7% decline, raising concerns within the Commercial Taxes department. For the first ten months of the 2024-25 financial year (April to January), the State recorded Rs 62,858.55 crore in total commercial tax revenue, including GST, VAT and ...

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Modi takes 'urban naxal' jibe at Rahul

In a scathing attack on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said some people are openly speaking the language of urban naxals and asserted that those who "declare a war" against the Indian State can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country's unity. He also took a dig at Arvind Kejriwal and AAP a day before the Delhi assembly polls, saying "some parties are like 'AAP-da' for the future of the youth". Modi asserted that while his ...

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Gold continues record-breaking rally

Gold prices extended the rally for the fifth straight session and rose Rs 500 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 85,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid robust demand from jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 85,300 per 10 grams in the previous session. In this year, gold has surged Rs 6,410 or 8.07 per cent to Rs 85,800 per 10 grams from Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on January 1. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also ...

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Varun added to Indian ODI squad

In-form mystery spinner Varun Chakravarty has been included in the Indian ODI squad after his heroics in the just-concluded T20I series against England as the team management wants the KKR mystery spinner to "keep up the momentum". There is a fair chance that Chakravarty might just replace one of the four specialist spinners in the Champions Trophy (CT) squad. It could be one among Kuldeep Yadav or Washington Sundar, who could be axed to accommodate Chakravarty before the final ...

-SPORTS

Conduct nation-wide caste survey: TG

Telangana Assembly urges Centre, adopts resolution

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Legislative Assembly has formally approved the Social, Economic, Educational, Employment, Political and Caste Survey-2024 (Comprehensive Household Survey), marking a significant step towards data-driven governance. The resolution was passed on February 16, 2024, following the Cabinet's decision on February 4, 2024.

The survey was intended to collect authentic data on social, economic, educational, employment and political aspects to formulate targeted welfare policies for Backward Classes (BCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other weaker sections. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, while presenting the report, stated that the survey would serve as the foundation for policy-making and resource allocation, ensuring social

justice and fair representation. He emphasized that the initiative was inspired by Rahul Gandhi's vision of proportional resource distribution based on population demographics. "Today will be remembered as a red-letter day in the fight for social justice. The caste survey in Telangana will pave the way for similar exercises across India," he declared. The government issued GO MS No: 18 on October 10, 2024, and con-

stituted a committee under the leadership of Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy on October 19, 2024, to oversee the execution of the survey. The Planning Department was designated as the nodal agency, and the methodology was developed after studying similar surveys conducted in Karnataka and Bihar. The survey schedules were finalized after consultations with civil society organizations, social scientists, intellectuals, and other stakeholders.

BCs' population share increased in caste: CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress government has convened a special session of the Assembly on Wednesday and presented the socio-economic Caste Survey report. The day witnessed a war of words between the treasury benches and the opposition. Countering BJP MLA Payal Shankar's criticism of the caste census in the Assembly, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that Shankar is trying to create myths. The CM said that BJP leaders are speaking based on KCR's comprehensive family survey. There are discrepancies in population details. As per KCR's comprehensive family survey, BCs are 51 per cent. However, BCs are 56 per cent of the general population as per the caste census survey conducted by the Congress government, the CM said. He said that the population percentage of BCs increased in the caste survey which was conducted

scientifically. The CM asked BRS MLAs to reveal details of the comprehensive family survey. The CM said that KCR, T. Harish Rao, KTR and BJP MP DK Aruna and many others didn't participate in the survey. KCR and the others didn't participate in the caste survey due to the column that sought details about land ownership, he added. **WILL GIVE 42% SEATS IN LB POLLS** Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said the Congress

Congress betrayed BCs: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao slammed the Congress government for failing to introduce a Bill providing 42% reservations for Backward Classes (BCs), and accused it of deceiving the community with mere statements instead of taking legislative action. He criticised the Congress for announcing without enacting legal provisions, stating, "A mere statement cannot be called historic." KTR expressed disappointment that despite expectations from BC communities across the state, the Congress Government did not bring a Bill in the special legislative session. He said the government had only issued a statement without taking any concrete steps to implement the promised reservations in local body elections. Recalling past events, KTR pointed out that during the BRS government's Comprehensive Household Survey, Revanth had

publicly urged people not to provide details. "How can the Congress Government now refuse to recognize the data collected in an open and transparent survey?" he asked. He said that the Samagra Kutumba Survey, conducted by the BRS administration, had identified BCs as 51% of the population and that it rose to 61% when BC Muslims were included. KTR accused the Congress Government of



US deports illegal Indian immigrants

Sending military transport aircraft carrying them to India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A military transport aircraft of the US is bringing a group of Indian migrants, in the first such deportation to India as part of the big crackdown on illegal immigrants by President Donald Trump in his second term at the White House. Without directly commenting on the deportation flight carrying the Indians, a spokesperson at the US embassy in New Delhi said Washington is tightening immigration laws and removing illegal migrants. The US action comes in the midst of India and the US finalising various elements of a likely visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington from February 12 to 13. It is learnt a C-17 Globemaster aircraft of the US Air Force is bringing the Indians. However, there is no clarity on the number of people on board the plane and its specific destination. A C-17 aircraft can carry up to 140 people. There is no official word from India yet on the US action. The US embassy spokesperson

declined to provide details of the deportation flight but said: "The United States is vigorously enforcing its border, tightening immigration laws, and removing illegal migrants." "These actions send a clear message: Illegal migration is not worth the risk," the official added. The Trump administration has so far used military aircraft to deport illegal migrants to Guatemala, Peru and Honduras. India has emerged as the farthest of the destinations to send military aircraft to deport people by the Trump administration. Following his phone conversation with Prime Minister Modi on January 27, Trump said India "will do what is right" on the deportation of illegal migrants from the US. According to estimates, around 18,000 illegal immigrants from India have been identified by American authorities. Days after Trump came to power for a second term, India indicated its willingness to work with Washington to address issues relating to illegal immigration.

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BJP removed Sanjay, not Congress: Sridhar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu launched a sharp rebuttal against BJP MLA Payal Shankar in the Assembly, dismissing allegations that the Congress was against Backward Classes (BCs). He reminded the BJP that it was not the Congress but their own party that had removed Bandi Sanjay Kumar from the state BJP President post and sacked Bandaru Dattatreya from the Union Cabinet despite him belonging to a weaker section. During Tuesday's Assembly session, Payal Shankar had attacked the Congress government over the caste census, calling it politically driven. Sridhar countered these claims, asserting that the Congress had always championed the cause of BCs and weaker sections. He said that history is 'proof' that the Congress gave top priority to marginalised communities and challenged

Continued on Page 2

Why haven't BJP-ruled states conducted caste census: Uttam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy asserted that the percentage of BC population in Telangana has increased and accused the BRS of spreading lies by 'misquoting' statistics. He condemned the opposition for misleading the public with fabricated figures and reaffirmed that the Congress Government had conducted the caste-based socio-economic survey with total transparency. The survey, completed within a year under the guidance of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, is aimed at ensuring the empowerment of Backward and marginalised communities. Responding to CPI MLA K. Sambasiva Rao, he said the Congress Government undertook the massive survey to assess the socio-economic conditions of various communities scientifically.

He dismissed the Intensive Household Survey (IHS) conducted by the BRS Government in 2014, stating that its findings were never officially published. He pointed out that some opposition MLAs were quoting figures from the 2014 survey, but as an MLA at that time, he confirmed that the IHS was never recognised as an official document.

59 SC groups categorised into 3 groups, get 15% quota

Govt rejects creamy layer recommendation • CM terms it special day

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has taken a significant step towards categorising Scheduled Castes (SCs) following the recommendations of the one-member judicial commission headed by Dr Justice Shameem Akhtar. The report was placed in the Assembly by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Tuesday. The report, submitted on February 3, provides a detailed analysis of the socio-economic and educational status of SC sub-groups and recommends their classification into three categories to provide reservations. The government approved the recommendations to classify 59 SC communities into three groups: Group-I (Most Backward SCs), Group-II (Moderately Benefited SCs), and Group-III (Better Benefited SCs).

The report suggests a preferential model for filling job vacancies and implementing reservations based on the identified levels of backwardness within SC groups. However, the government has rejected the recommendation to introduce a creamy layer exclusion within SC reservations.

Continued on Page 2

Assembly Secy issues notice to 10 BRS MLAs who joined Congress

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a major development, notices have been issued to the 10 MLAs who had defected from the BRS to the Congress, as per the Supreme Court's orders. The Assembly Secretary formally served the notices, asking the legislators to submit a written explanation regarding their party switch. The BRS had approached the Supreme Court, seeking the disqualification of these MLAs as per the anti-defection law after the Telangana High Court had earlier ordered action within four

Stage is set for Delhi battle

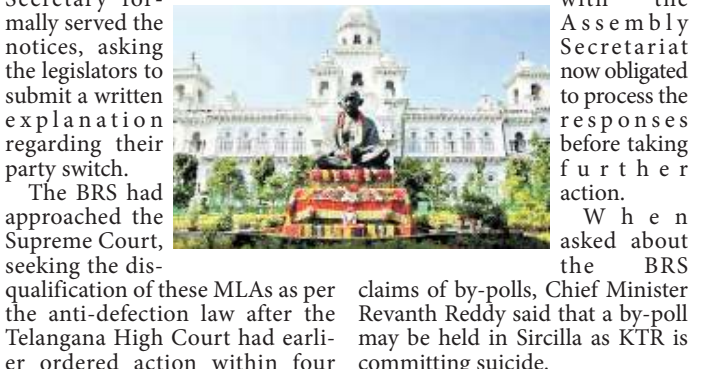
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The stage is set for the high-stakes Assembly elections in Delhi, with over 1.56 crore voters eligible to cast their ballots from 7 am onwards on Wednesday. Voting will take place across 13,766 polling stations in all the 70 Assembly constituencies to decide the fates of 699 candidates in a contest that could reshape the political landscape of the capital. Led by Arvind Kejriwal, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is seeking a third straight term, banking on its governance record and welfare schemes. On the other hand, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is making a determined push to reclaim the capital after more than 25 years. The Congress, which ruled Delhi for 15 years till 2013, is striving to stage a comeback after failing to win a single seat in the previous two elections. Polling will begin at 7 am on Wednesday and continue until 6 pm under tight security arrangements. The Election Commission has deployed 220 companies of paramilitary forces, 35,626 Delhi Police personnel, and 19,000 home guards to ensure peaceful voting. Nearly 3,000 polling booths have been identified as sensitive, and special security arrangements, including drone surveillance, have been made at some of these locations. According to Delhi Police, additional police forces will be deployed for the sensitive booths where Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) will also be

stationed to maintain law and order. Special provisions have been made for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, with 733 polling stations designated for their accessibility. In an effort to streamline the process, the Election Commission has introduced a Queue Management System (QMS) app, which will enable the voters to check crowd levels in real time. Additionally, 6,980 out of 7,553 eligible voters under the home voting facility have already cast their ballots. The campaigning, which officially ended at 6 pm on Monday, saw a high-voltage battle between the three main contenders. The AAP focused on its governance model, with Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi leading rallies across the city.

AAP eyes third term; BJP, Cong look at resurgence

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FIRST COLUMN

A DARK CLOUD BEFORE THE GOLDEN DAWN

Are we past the point of no return, or is there still hope for a new dawn?



RAJYOGI BRAHM KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

None of us would deny the fact that the whole world is in chaos today. The human race is in more pain and suffering than ever before. The root cause of this is, because three key powers i.e., religion, politics and science that run the world have miserably failed to function by their essential characteristics to look after the wellbeing of people at large. These powers have deviated from their normal course, lost their essential traits and degraded to the lowest level, which is quite visible from the sorry state of affairs across the world.

The power of religion which was meant to show human beings the righteous path which is necessary to maintain social harmony has today become a perpetrator of conflict. It's evident from the facts that religion has failed to uphold moral values in society which can be seen in the form of ever-increasing molestation and sexual assault cases at homes, workplaces, public places and even at schools and colleges that are considered temples of learning.

The historic Nirbhaya case is still very fresh in the minds of people who were shattered to see the height of barbarism to which a human can



go. Today the power of politics is also in a state of crisis. No government anywhere in the world can claim that they are free from corruption. Laws that are made for the benefit of the common public are turning out to be mere eyewash. People in power go scot-free despite breaking several laws, whereas a common man keeps paying penalties on various occasions for not abiding by the law.

On one side governments talk of clean fuels & make pollution checks mandatory, and on the other side, they continue to add a greater number of vehicles to roads each year to please the automotive sector. So, instead of reducing vehicular traffic by introducing greater modes of public transport, the government is making more and more cars accessible to the public at cheap rates. Is this right? Science, the third key power that runs the world, emerged as a result of man's search for a better life. It harnessed natural resources to channel them into means useful for human consumption. However, today the scenario is such that the energy tapped from nature has gone out of human control.

The use of science in violating the laws of nature has become the root cause of environmental imbalance leading to a rise in natural calamities which is evident by the recent report by the UN Panel on Climate Change making it crystal clear that large-scale global warming has triggered the melting of polar ice caps which is the biggest danger facing humankind. Modern scientific advancement that was meant to help humans live a better life has led to a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, endangering global peace and harmony. So, in short, we can say that three powers governing the world have gone haywire & they are steering us to mass destruction. But, what's more surprising is that despite ample knowledge of this phenomenon, nobody seems inclined to save the situation. Hence it won't be exaggerating to say that we have surely come to the point of no return, because with scarcity of non-renewable natural resources, spread of diseases, population explosion, social chaos and nuclear threat accompanied by natural disasters, the world scenario looks utterly scary. Under such darkness, the common man is bound to look UP to seek Almighty Supreme's help as the last resort to safety. Just imagine, when the world reaches its highest peak of unrest, it will be a sight that only a few of us would be able to bear because the kind of destruction that the world has prepared for is bound to shake the conscience of the most stone-hearted and guilty. Perhaps this impending destruction and clearing of human conscience is like a silver lining in the dark cloud which is perhaps the only way to the golden morning that we human souls have been endlessly waiting for. Remember !! Many hidden truths are often unobserved, not invisible.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

A fierce three-way battle for the capital's throne

With a closely contested fight and shifting voter sentiments, the Delhi election results could send ripples across the national political landscape



RAMAKANT CHAUDHARY

Chilly Delhi, though, the blitzkrieg of a high-octane election campaign, not bordering on the sort of "AAP-da" while going at hammer and tongs of Tu-Tu-Mai-Mai storm during a prime-time TV news show, for claiming Delhi Ki Kursi, has heated the political cauldron. A strong 1.55 crore voters of Delhi are basking in the sunshine of campaign songs for the Delhi Assembly Elections 2025: "Bahane Nahi Badlav Chahiye..." rendered by BJP against the AAP's Bhojpuri-laced tagline "Babua Phir Se CM Hoyihe... Delhi Ke Badal Dihe Surat, Suhawan, Khubsurat Ho, A Rajaji..." From all perspectives, who will win the ballot battle?

Will AAP score a hat-trick? Or will the resurgent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), relying on Prime Minister Narendra Modi as its face, hit Mauka (anti-incumbency) Pe Chauka? Or will the Grand Old Party deliver the googly of "Har Jarurat Hogi Puri, Dilli Mein Congress Hai Jaruri," an effort to regain its lost electoral ground in the triangular contest? The fate of Delhi will be sealed on February 5 when people exercise their franchise. And the D-day, February 8, when the results will be announced, will blow the conch of the new beginning of the 70-member eighth Vidhan Sabha.

The Phalodi Satta Bazar, which earlier showed AAP crossing the majority mark of 36, has revised its estimates. The Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP—whose mainstay of incorruptibility is being challenged by the Congress and BJP, which have levelled allegations against its top brass leaders—could clock a significantly reduced tally this time around.

According to the latest revised estimates, the BJP—which looks bullish after its recent victories in Maharashtra and Haryana—may bag around 31 seats, a good 5 seats short of the majority mark. A projection of a wafer-thin margin of victory between the AAP-BJP fierce slugfest has made party workers and strategists somewhat to pump up their tally amidst the Delhi election campaign hitting its last leg.

To woo voters, manifestos, guarantees, and welfare schemes appear to be tearing apart the atmosphere of the city-state. The Delhi Assembly Elections 2025 appear to be a big freebie face-off. Mahila Samman Yojana, Sanjeevani Yojana, Sankal Patra, Ayushman Bharat Scheme, Yuva Udaan Yojana, Pyari Didi Yojana, et al—innocent voters find themselves in an Alice-in-Wonderland.

BJP Resurgence
Winning the Delhi assembly poll has become an Achilles' heel for the PM Modi-led BJP while the saffron juggernaut swept Delhi's seven seats in the Lok Sabha Elections in 2014, 2019 and 2024. Having last won the Delhi election in 1993, the BJP wants to turn the tide this time by dismantling the proverbial equation of Modi for PM and Kejriwal for CM. Riding on the cusp of being the only party among the three in 2020 to have recorded an increased vote share, the BJP is leaving no stone unturned to repeat this achievement in 2025 as well. For the BJP, the road to victory runs through North and Northwest Delhi. In the



HAVING LAST WON THE DELHI ELECTION IN 1993, THE BJP WANTS TO TURN THE TIDE THIS TIME BY DISMANTLING THE PROVERBIAL EQUATION OF MODI FOR PM AND KEJRIWAL FOR CM

Wazirpur constituency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over keys to more than 1,650 flats to slum residents, creating a significant connection with local voters. Key areas like Chandni Chowk, Northwest Delhi, and Northeast Delhi have become pivotal grounds for the BJP's potential resurgence.

The BJP should prioritize the 38 constituencies where it secured over 40% of the vote share in 2020. Out of these, the party narrowly lost 17 seats to AAP by less than five percentage points but managed to win eight. These represent easier opportunities to gain ground. For the remaining 21 seats, the BJP will aim to capitalize on anti-incumbency sentiments against AAP to sway voters in its favour.

AAP Strategy
AAP of 2025, which might dominate the elections as the C-Voter survey suggests, looks different from its 2020 avatar. The Lok Sabha Elections 2024 speaks volumes that APP, despite an alliance with Congress, drew nought in all seven parliamentary seats of Delhi. Kejriwal's AAP looks lacking in sympathy as experts opine. Besieged with corruption charges and stern anti-incumbency, AAP has meticulously evolved strategies to launch popular welfare schemes to outweigh the allegations.

The party leaders are burning the midnight oil to retain floating voters who keep changing allegiance during the Lok Sabha polls and assembly elections. Kejriwal's poll manoeuvre is trying hard to win the hearts of Dalit and Muslim voters. AAP has

viscerally attracted voters from the Purvanchal community—a key demographic in Delhi hailing from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand that account for around 40 per cent of the electorate and holds a significant sway on 27 seats—by connecting the community on the ground level as the party, according to media grapevine, has held around 600 meetings in this context.

Congress Revival
With nothing to lose, Congress, which went from dominating Delhi's electoral landscape from 1998 to 2013 to not having a single MLA since, has entered the poll fray late yet remains determined to lock horns with AAP and dislodge the Kejriwal-led establishment from power, avenging the campaign that cost the UPA government heavily over a decade ago. The results of the 2022 Delhi Municipal polls, in which Congress won five wards in the Northeast district areas that were hit by the riots, buttress the perception that the minority community is disillusioned with AAP.

This electoral scenario could reinforce the poll fortune of the BJP, especially the vote bank of Muslims—21.6 lakh in the national capital—who have Congress in their heart and AAP in mind. The Muslim voters could play a key role in six assembly seats: Babarpur (35 per cent), Okhla (43 per cent), Seelampur (50 per cent), Matia Mahal (48 per cent), Mustafabad (36 per cent), and Ballimaran (38 per cent). In that sense, if Muslims—accounting for 12.86 per cent of Delhi's pop-

ulation—are divided between Congress and AAP, BJP will have the upper hand. The Delhi Elections 2025 is deemed the cynosure of all states' eyes.

The domino effect of its results, which will be declared on February 8, could rattle the poll pitch in Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Kerala, where assembly polls are slated to take place in 2025-26. If BJP wins, it will boost the image of the National Democratic Alliance, positioning BJP on top to record a hat-trick after winning Maharashtra and Haryana. On the other side, the victory of AAP will zoom out the political credibility of Arvind Kejriwal as a principal challenger to PM Modi. Also, if it loses the poll battle, the ramifications of which will give a jolt to Punjab, where AAP is in power. Trying to make the high-decibel contest triangular, Congress has put a concentrated campaign in the boroughs dominated by Dalits and minorities. If the grand old party succeeds in regaining the space it had in 2013—after being relegated to the third position behind BJP and AAP, bagging only eight seats—Congress will muster the courage to reach the position it held in 2008 when it secured 43 seats with around 40 per cent of the votes. So far in the campaign, there is no Kejriwal wave, nor is BJP having tailwinds. In the BJP vs AAP battle, only February 8 will decide who will get the reins of the Delhi Sultanate.

(The writer is a senior journalist and currently working with PRP Group as Content Head; views are personal)

Budget 2025: Bold reforms and innovations to put startups on growth trajectory

Key measures, including an expanded Credit Guarantee Scheme, higher Mudra loan limits, position India as a powerhouse for entrepreneurship and self-reliance

The Union Budget 2025 has laid a strong foundation for a transformative leap in India's startup and MSME ecosystem. At a time when entrepreneurship is fueling economic growth and job creation, the government has introduced a series of strategic measures aimed at fostering financial inclusion, innovation, and global competitiveness.



POORNA SINGH

A key highlight of this budget is the enhanced access to capital. The expansion of the Credit Guarantee Scheme will enable MSMEs and startups to secure funding without collateral, addressing a significant challenge for emerging businesses. Additionally, the substantial increase in the Mudra loan limit will allow early-stage entrepreneurs to scale their

ventures without financial constraints. Simplified tax structures, reduced corporate tax rates, and streamlined GST compliance will further ease cash flow issues, enabling businesses to reinvest in growth. Beyond financial incentives, the budget embraces a futuristic vision by

integrating infrastructure development with digital transformation. The allocation for plug-and-play industrial parks and logistics hubs will provide businesses with ready-to-use infrastructure, significantly reducing setup costs and expediting time-to-market.

The establishment of e-commerce export hubs will open new global opportunities, particularly benefiting sectors such as manufacturing, agritech, and handicrafts. Furthermore, a renewed focus on AI-driven automation and deep-tech innovation ensures that Indian startups remain competitive on a global scale. A crucial aspect of this budget is its emphasis on regulatory simplification and skill development. By easing compliance

norms, streamlining FDI regulations, and encouraging private sector collaboration in skilling initiatives, the government is fostering an environment where startups can concentrate on scaling rather than navigating bureaucratic complexities. These measures position India as a dynamic startup hub, reinforcing the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Ankit Kumar, CEO of Skye Air, lauded the government's initiatives, stating, "The Union Budget 2025 strengthens India's startup and MSME ecosystem with a Rs 10,000 crore fund, ensuring better access to capital and innovation support. Simplified tax structures and compliance reforms will further ease operations, fostering growth and scalability. By integrating dig-



ital infrastructure with financial incentives, the budget paves the way for startups and MSMEs to expand, innovate, and compete globally." The budget also provides a significant boost to innovation and research. The extension of the period of incorporation for startups by five years is expected to

encourage entrepreneurship. Additionally, the allocation of Rs 20,000 crore to support private-sector-driven research and infrastructure expansion at IITs will create a fertile ground for technological advancements. The introduction of the Credit Guarantee Startup Scheme (CGSS) and the Customised Credit Card for Micro Enterprises (ME-Card) will improve access to credit for startups and MSMEs, fueling growth and development. Ashish Gupta, CEO of Fretbox, remarked, "The Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (MCGS-MSME) will facilitate collateral-free loans, giving a major boost to the manufacturing sector. These initiatives will empower the next generation

of entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovators, and we look forward to seeing the tangible results of these efforts." By enhancing geospatial data capabilities, this initiative will equip businesses with better insights for logistics, infrastructure, and resource management. Saurabh Rai, CEO of Aarah Technologies, highlighted its impact: "Leveraging AI and advanced computing, startups can drive innovation in sectors like agritech, smart mobility, and climate tech. The mission's open data-sharing framework will reduce dependency on foreign sources, fostering self-reliance and accelerating growth." The budget also prioritizes boosting exports and manufacturing. Dr. Mahesh Gupta, CMD of Kent RO, praised the

initiatives, saying, "By facilitating easy access to export credit, cross-border factoring support, and tackling non-tariff measures, the government is addressing critical pain points for exporters. The customized credit cards for MSMEs, fund of funds for startups, and expanded fund-of-funds will undoubtedly improve capital access and stimulate growth. Enhancing investment and turnover limits for MSMEs will also provide a much-needed boost to their operational efficiency." Overall, the Union Budget 2025 signals a bold commitment to making India a global leader in entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation. (The author is senior technical writer at Ksolves, views are personal)



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Delhi decides

A 'do-or-die' for AAP, a prestige battle for the BJP and a fight for survival for Congress—Delhi heads to the polls today

In a battle of promises, power and prestige, Delhi votes today. The stage is set for the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, with voters heading to the polls today and results expected on February 8. With 1.56 crore voters across 70 constituencies, the political atmosphere in the national capital is charged, reflective of the high stakes involved. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), led by Arvind Kejriwal, aims for a third consecutive term while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress vie to reclaim relevance and power in the capital. The month-long campaign was intense, marked by fiery rhetoric and personal jabs. The BJP leaders accused AAP of corruption, branding their governance as 'AAP-da' (disaster). In return, Kejriwal took aim at the BJP, accusing them of law and order failures and even alleging that the BJP-led Haryana government "mixed poison" in the Yamuna, framing it as a 'genocide' attempt. The Congress, meanwhile, targeted both AAP and BJP with accusations of corruption and inefficiency. This election, like many others, saw a flurry of promises aimed at wooing voters with tangible benefits. AAP pledged monthly payments to temple priests, free bus rides, and extensive schemes for youth and students. Both BJP and Congress promised subsidised cooking gas cylinders and financial support for women and unemployed youth. The BJP additionally promised Rs 21,000 for expecting mothers, while Congress offered Rs 8,500 per month to unemployed youth. Security for the elections is tight, with over 30,000 police personnel and 220 paramilitary companies deployed across the city. Nearly 3,000 polling booths have been marked as sensitive. While assembly elections are a state matter, the fact that this election is taking place in Delhi, the nation's capital with a cosmopolitan character, gives it national significance. A win for AAP could solidify Kejriwal's model of governance and offer a template for other states and bolster its claim in other states, while a victory for BJP might signal a resurgence of the party in urban governance, reinforcing Modi's narrative of efficient governance. For Congress, a good showing could be the much-needed revival signal after a series of setbacks. As the voters cast their ballots, the outcome of these elections will not just shape Delhi's immediate future but could also influence the national political discourse. The Delhi elections, while significant, are not an ideal model for other states to replicate. The city's unique status as the national capital, with a mix of local and national issues influencing voter behaviour, creates an electoral landscape unlike any other. Additionally, the campaign narratives in Delhi tend to be dominated by high-pitched rhetoric and personality-driven politics rather than substantive policy debates. This makes the Delhi election an exception rather than a benchmark, highlighting the need for states to focus on governance models that prioritise long-term development over short-term electoral gains.



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PICTALK



Labourers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Nadia

Imbuing warrior ethos through strength

In Narendra Modi's cabinet, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh enjoys the optics of seniority, but not necessarily the authority that should come with it



ASHOK K MEHTA

In Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is de jure numero uno. He sits next to him at meetings and in Parliament and like most another minister, regularly invokes Modi's greatness and vision. The optics of seniority are excellent. So is his pedigree. He is a Thakur, dyed-in-the-wool Sanghi and twice President of BJP. His political graph starts as Education Minister to UP, CM Kalyan Singh. As Education Minister in 1992, his signal achievement was ending a regional malaise - copying in exams, sometimes with a knife dug into the desk. Like infiltrators across LoC, invigilators feared to cross the red line. He had an ordinance passed making copying a non-bailable offence - the onus of proving oneself innocent was on the accused. Fourteen and 15-year-olds were sent to jail on charges of copying. The pass percentage in the UP high school board examination for Class X in 1991 was 58.03. In 1992, after the anti-copying law was put in place, it slipped to 14.7. He lost the 1993 assembly elections.

A great believer in astrology Singh was ambitious and usually took his cue from RSS leadership. He rose to become chief minister of UP, the second Thakur to do so. As president of BJP, he was asked to inform seven times MP, former Finance, Defence and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh that he was no longer a member of the BJP (expelled). Jaswant had written the offending book - Jinnah - India Partition and Independence. Following a stint as Home Minister, he became defence minister after Modi had shuffled around Arun Jaitley, Nirmala Sitharaman and Manohar Parrikar as defence minister. Last month at the Republic Day NCC rally he revealed he was in NCC and a physics teacher. His fondness for Dabang - strength and power - is well known but his association with the redoubtable Raja Bhaiyya of Kunda, famous for rearing crocodiles in his pond - is less known. In the Westminster Parliamentary system cabinet ministers are selected by the PM and have to



be elected either directly or indirectly. But they are not grilled for confirmation as ministers by select committees as in the US presidential system. Otherwise, few would clear the viva, especially for the Defence Minister. Last week former Fox News commentator, Pete Hegseth former Army National Guard who was President Trump's most endangered cabinet choice went through hell before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation. Poor Pete! he was facing multiple allegations of abuse including sex and alcohol. He pledged to never drink alcohol if confirmed. Professionally he was well prepared, answering accurate questions on military equipment like the size of a 9mm bullet and the number of rounds in a carbine magazine. He told his examiners he would restore 'warrior ethos' in the armed services. Americans have much to worry about as the Chinese are catching up in technology, military and economic prowess. Singh has no similar worries. India has abandoned any catch-up with China, its main enemy. It hopes to make up the deterrent and capability gap through diplomacy as was evident from the meagre defence allocations (1.9 per cent of GDP) in last week's budget. After inflation and foreign exchange fluctuations, mod-

ernisation funds have decreased. In a tweet, Singh described the budget as 'wonderful' and congratulated Sitharaman for fulfilling the resolve of PM Modi for Viksit Bharat. No defence minister, service chief or CDS has ever put his job on the line, asking for additional funds. Recently a French CDS did so. He had to resign when the Euro 1bn extra that he demanded was not provided. Later, President Macron reinstated him along with Euro 1bn. For the last few years, Sitharaman has ceased mentioning defence allocation in budget presentations. The armed forces are expected to employ force multipliers like invoking Chanakya, imbuing ancient military craft and becoming contemporary through the fusion of past, present and future, as reflected by the new painting on this theme that replaced the once-in-1000-year surrender ceremony painting in the Army Chief's annex. For all his virtues - injecting Hindutva in a hitherto secular armed force, venerating weapons with religious symbols and motivating triservice warriors by pledging mookh tod jawab, Singh has ceded his area of responsibility to PMO and NSA. Former Defence Minister AK Antony in contrast was the Rock of Gibraltar, never letting the NSA or even the PM bypass him. So little reform got done. Singh is an affable team play-



THE ARMED FORCES ARE EXPECTED TO EMPLOY FORCE MULTIPLIERS LIKE INVOKING CHANAKYA, IMBIBING ANCIENT MILITARY CRAFT AND BECOMING CONTEMPORARY THROUGH THE FUSION OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CANCER CASES RISING RAPIDLY

Madam - Cancer is a major health issue in Southeast Asia with high rates of incidence and mortality. WHO has reported that more than 2.3 million people are diagnosed with cancer each year. It is estimated that by 2050 there will be an 85 per cent increase in the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the WHO's South East Asia region. It is unfortunate. Among the new cases, breast, cervix, and lung cancer were the most frequently reported. Economic transitions, lifestyle changes, and rising obesity prevalence are increasing cancer risk in this region with existing risk factors such as tobacco and indoor-outdoor pollution. Although cancer is a life-threatening disease, it can be prevented and treated if detected early. Screening programmes such as breast self-examination and mammography substantially increase breast cancer survival. Options such as breast-conserving surgery and breast reconstruction surgery should be more available in the SEA region. Cervical cancer is the second most frequent cancer in the SEA region, caused by high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV), and can be prevented by vaccination. Tobacco is another major cause of cancer and preventable deaths worldwide. More actions are to be taken as tobacco and smoking are still the cause of many deaths in the region. Equal attention should be paid to less prevalent types of cancer. Governments need to include cancer treatment in national insurance as done in countries like Indonesia, not restricted to surgeries but allowing lifelong treatment. There is an urgent need for continued efforts from clinicians, researchers, and policymakers to collaborate and find the most effective strategies to serve cancer patients in the best way possible. P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY

Madam - India's need and its policy related to power are yet to come close to each other. The allocation of Rs 20,000 crore is

Retired judges to boost efficiency



The reappointment of retired judges offers several advantages. Their vast experience and familiarity with legal procedures can enhance efficiency, especially in handling complex matters. Time-bound assignments ensure focus on specific case clusters, improving disposal rates without overburdening the regular bench. Additionally, this reduces the dependency on fresh judicial appoint-

ments, which often face administrative delays. However, concerns remain regarding the potential impact on judicial independence, as government approval could raise questions about executive interference. Transparency in the selection process, clear tenure guidelines and defined performance metrics are essential to mitigate these risks. Moreover, the absence of a concrete framework for lower courts highlights a critical gap. Given that the bulk of pending cases lie at the subordinate level, swift policy formulation for these courts is imperative. This initiative reflects the judiciary's proactive stance in judicial reforms, recognising that traditional measures are inadequate for the scale of India's legal backlog. Gopalswamy J | Chennai

EGGS ESSENTIAL FOR NUTRITION

Madam - According to the data, around 35-40 per cent of children in rural areas in Maharashtra are underweight, and the highest rate of malnutrition is found in North Maharashtra. Lack of access to nutritious food is one of the major factors behind malnutrition. With this backdrop, it is surprising to learn why the state government dropped eggs from the mid-day meals. Egg is a major source of protein and its substitute, pulses, are costlier than eggs, so eggs should remain a core part of mid-day meals, and if any student does not want to eat it, he can skip it. Earlier states like Madhya Pradesh and Goa also made such decisions, while it should be noted that a few states in Southern India have added the number of eggs given to children to ensure protein requirements are met. Such drastic decisions could prove detrimental to the families living below the poverty line. Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The digital age and the decline of meaningful connections

In a time when relationships are often reduced to fleeting digital interactions, staying connected through phone calls filled with warmth and laughter shows genuine care

There is a remarkable trait I have observed in my 92-year-old mother-in-law, a habit that sets her apart in an age where relationships are often reduced to fleeting digital exchanges. She remembers former colleagues, distant relatives, neighbours who once lived next door. And more than just remembering them, she stays in touch. At an age when many resign themselves to solitude, she picks up the phone and calls people from decades ago. Not just text messages, voice notes, or hurried "Hope you're well" followed by silence. She calls, she converses, she cares. It is a simple act, yet in today's world, it feels almost extraordinary. Her phone conversations are not perfunctory check-ins; they are rich tapestries of shared history, laughter, and updates on each other's lives. And the warmth with which she is received at the other end of the line is a testament to the bonds she has nurtured over the years. She is remembered because she remembers. She is loved because she has loved. It makes me wonder: What



are we losing in this hyper-connected yet increasingly impersonal world? Relationships today are often sustained by a string of forwarded messages, impersonal likes on social media, and hastily typed responses to keep up appearances. In the race for efficiency, we have sacrificed depth. Consider this: How many times have we opted to send a WhatsApp message instead of calling, simply because it's quicker? How often do we reply with an emoji rather than words that could convey something deeper? I suspect relationships have become more superficial, and perhaps we are to blame. It is easier to type a quick "Happy birthday!" than to call and hear the person's voice. It is more convenient to react to a post than to ask, "How have you really been?"

And yet, watching my mother-in-law, I realise that relationships, like wealth, require investment. The bonds we forge and sustain over time are the greatest savings we make in life. They are the human equivalent of a well-kept treasure-present when we need warmth, support, and belonging. One of the reasons we don't stay in touch is because we assume people are busy. They probably don't have time to talk. Or worse, we convince ourselves that if they really cared, they would call us too. And so, we let months slip into years, waiting for the other person to make the first move. But my mother-in-law doesn't wait. She doesn't hesitate to pick up the phone, regardless of how long it has been. And what's more, people respond to her with the same warmth and eagerness. It reminds me that relationships are not about keeping score; they are about keeping the connection alive. A strong social network isn't just about having company for celebrations; it is also about having shoulders to lean on in times of need. It is

about knowing that when life throws its uncertainties at us, there will be familiar voices to comfort us, guide us, and remind us that we are not alone. And yet, many people find themselves growing lonelier with age, not because they lack family or friends, but because they did not nurture those bonds. What would it take for us to revive the lost art of staying in touch? It doesn't take grand gestures. It doesn't require hours of free time. Sometimes, all it takes is a simple phone call. A heartfelt message. A conversation that goes beyond the surface. So here's a small invitation: Think of someone you haven't spoken to in a while-perhaps an old schoolmate, a former colleague, or a distant cousin. Instead of sending a message, call them. Ask about their life. Listen to their stories. Share something about yours. It may feel unfamiliar at first, but you may be surprised at how quickly the warmth returns. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR

Redefining global dance culture with the rhythm of change

TEJAL SINHA
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Dance is more than just a movement - it's a language of the soul, a bridge between cultures, and a testament to dedication and artistry. Renowned Kathak dancer Ritika Arora embodies all these qualities, her journey weaving together tradition and innovation, discipline and creativity. From the vibrant city of Amritsar to the global stage, she has captivated audiences and inspired students through her mastery of Kathak and other dance forms. Her love for dance began at a young age, influenced by the colourful Bollywood and Punjabi performances she grew up watching. Her passion soon transformed into a rigorous academic pursuit, as she earned both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Kathak from Guru Nanak Dev University. This formal education laid the foundation for her professional career, allowing her to excel not only as a performer but also as a teacher and choreographer. Her professional journey started in 2014 when she began working as a Dance and Yoga Teacher at KIDZ Camp Public School. Later, she took on the role of Studio Manager and Choreographer at Pankaj & Preeti Dance Academy, where her talent and leadership skills truly flourished. One of her most remarkable achievements came in 2015 when she choreographed a Guinness World Record performance featuring 8,726 children in Amritsar. This wasn't just a dance event; it was an anti-drug awareness campaign, using the power of movement to spread a vital social message. Reflecting on this experience, Ritika says, "The then Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Ravi Bhagat, highlighted that the record attempt was designed to raise awareness about drug abuse, which had devastated many lives in Punjab. The performance was a testament to how dance can be a force for social change." Beyond Kathak, Arora has explored a wide spectrum of dance styles, including Bollywood, Zumba, Bhangra, Bharatanatyam, Hip Hop, Ballroom and Western dance. She attributes her ability to balance these diverse forms to a strategic approach focusing on technical precision, cultural understanding and creative exploration. In 2022, she took a bold step in her career by relocating to the United Kingdom, a move that expanded her artistic horizons and introduced her to new audiences. This transition, she explains, has had a profound impact on her creative vision. "International exposure has given me opportunities to collaborate with artists from different backgrounds. I now have an expanded audience and the chance to engage with the community on a deeper level. Teaching diverse age groups, including the differently abled and elderly, has reinforced my belief that dance is for everyone." Embracing her role as a mentor and entrepreneur, she founded Nrityaritika Dance Studio Ltd in October 2024, based in Ilford, Essex. With over eight years of teaching experience, she designed her studio to be a hub of artistic excellence, offering classes in multiple dance forms for students of all ages and skill levels. The studio also provides specialized services such as wedding choreography and Zumba sessions. More than just a training center, Nrityaritika is a platform for cultural preservation and community engagement. "We conduct special free sessions for senior citizens and actively promote traditional Indian dance forms like Kathak and Bharatanatyam, ensuring that these art forms continue to thrive in a globalized world." Her efforts to bridge cultures don't stop there. Ritika's collaboration with KSPARK Entertainment, founded by renowned dancer Karan Pangali, has further solidified her position in the international dance community. Additionally, her partnership with Madhu's Ltd Company has opened up exciting performance opportunities. Through corporate tie-ups, entertainment projects, and educational initiatives, she is

constantly exploring new ways to bring Indian dance to the global stage. Organizing large-scale performances has been another defining aspect of her career. In addition to her Guinness World Record achievement, she successfully choreographed a Zumba and freestyle performance featuring 3,000 children. She recalls, "It was a monumental task that required meticulous planning, securing a venue, coordinating logistics, and ensuring safety measures. Collaborating with schools, community organizations, and volunteers was crucial. The event celebrated the energy and creativity of children while promoting health, unity, and the joy of movement." Setting ambitious goals is a hallmark of Ritika's career. Whether it's choreographing record-breaking performances or expanding her dance studio, she approaches each milestone with careful planning and perseverance. "Ambitious goals are best achieved by breaking them down into smaller, actionable steps. Engaging with the dance community for motivation and support is also essential. Self-reflection helps me assess my progress and refine my approach to challenges." As a classical Kathak dancer, she is deeply invested in the role of Indian dance in today's modern, globalized world. She believes that while Kathak preserves tradition, it also serves as a catalyst for innovation. "Kathak has shown remarkable adaptability. Collaborations with Western dance forms like ballet and contemporary dance have led to innovative performances that highlight the universality of artistic expression." She also emphasizes the importance of digital platforms in ensuring the preservation and accessibility of Indian dance for future generations. Promoting Indian

culture internationally comes with its challenges, including economic constraints, cultural preservation concerns, and audience engagement issues. However, Ritika has tackled these obstacles through digital outreach, collaborations with international institutions, and innovative marketing strategies. "We have adapted to changing audience preferences by making performances more accessible and engaging, often incorporating digital media and cross-cultural collaborations." One of her most fascinating artistic endeavors is her approach to integrating Kathak with contemporary dance forms while staying true to its roots. "Fusion must be approached as a research process. The key lies in preserving the intricate footwork, rhythmic patterns, and storytelling aspects of Kathak while experimenting with modern themes, technology, and cross-cultural elements." Looking ahead, she has ambitious plans for her dance studio and artistic career. She is currently working on projects involving corporate partnerships, entertainment collaborations, and new dance classes. She is particularly excited about her initiatives focusing on community engagement, ensuring that dance remains accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. Despite her global aspirations, Ritika remains deeply connected to her Indian roots. Having worked extensively in both India and the UK, she hopes to bridge these cultures through dance. "By offering a wide array of dance styles, I create an environment where students can explore and appreciate both Indian and Western forms. This exchange fosters understanding and appreciation between different communities."

For Ritika, dance is more than a profession - it is a lifelong mission. "My ultimate goal is to promote inclusivity, creativity and cultural diversity through dance. I want to leave a legacy by contributing to the evolution of teaching methodologies and choreographic techniques."

She credits her biggest inspirations - Birju Maharaj and Madhuri Dixit - for shaping her artistic vision. Staying motivated in her craft involves a continuous process of learning, self-reflection and collaboration. "I attend workshops, engage with diverse dance communities and blend classical techniques with modern innovations. Most importantly, I never lose sight of why I fell in love with dance in the first place."

To aspiring dancers, she offers invaluable advice: "Your greatest asset in dance is not technical perfection but your emotional authenticity and passionate commitment to the art. Embrace continuous learning, view challenges as opportunities for growth and never lose sight of your love for dance."

Through her artistry, mentorship, and dedication to cultural preservation, Ritika Arora continues to make a profound impact in the world of dance. Her journey is a testament to the transformative power of movement - an art that transcends borders, generations and traditions.

Passionate about preserving Indian classical dance while embracing modern fusion, Ritika Arora, in an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, shares her vision for bridging cultures through movement, her challenges in promoting Indian heritage internationally, and the power of dance as a tool for social change



HOW NETWORKING CAN ACCELERATE SUCCESS!



Many leaders and entrepreneurs underestimate networking and view mentoring as a nice-to-have, but in reality, both are essential tools for long-term success. Archana's journey—from being a first-generation lawyer to co-founding and scaling VERTICES PARTNERS—was built on the strength of relationships, trust and shared knowledge with like-minded people. True networking goes beyond business card exchanges, and true mentoring is more than feel-good advice. Both are about strategic value creation. Networking must be seen as a sustainable investment where confidence and integrity are built over time. Identifying key stakeholders in your industry and beyond and nurturing relationships proactively—even before you need them—can be game-changing. In her early days, she made it a point to engage deeply with clients, founders and senior leaders—not just for work-related discussions but to understand their long-term vision. These genuine relationships proved invaluable when launching the company, as many of my early clients and referrals came from this trusted network. To build meaningful connections, it is also valuable to attend industry-specific and cross-industry events with a clear objective. Follow up consistently with value-driven interactions, such as sharing insights, offering help, or making introductions. Keep a personal tracker wherein you share greetings, engage in a timely manner, and share potential synergy to nurture a lasting relationship. Once you choose the right mentor, more than motivating you, they help you navigate your cognitive limitations, enhance your reach to a like-minded fraternity, and protect you from costly hurdles. Rather than looking for basic business coaching, look for mentors who help you wade through similar experiences from the past you are currently facing. She was able to pave her path from an organized legal environment to entrepreneurship through invaluable insights from mentors who had built businesses from scratch. When the time came to pay it forward, she embraced the role of a mentor, guiding the young, rising entrepreneurs—mostly women—through strategic business growth advice, passing on valuable lessons, connecting networks, building platforms and preparing them with the skills that they required, navigating high-pressure moments and transitioning them to new horizons in their business undertakings confidently. More than merely seeking mentorship on broader lines, request guidance on a particular challenge. Leverage structured mentorship platforms like industry councils, accelerators, or invite-only business networks. As you grow, become a mentor yourself—teaching is a powerful way to refine your knowledge. The best ideas often come from outside your immediate industry. Expanding your network beyond your sector gives you a competitive advantage. She didn't limit her network to legal professionals; rather, she connected with entrepreneurs, investors, and thought leaders from various industries. This cross-sectoral approach gave her fresh insights on brand-building and audience engagement, which she applied back to her business. To benefit from cross-industry networking, join diverse industry forums, startup incubators, or global business organisations. For her, joining Asia's one of the largest Chambers of Commerce for

Women and eventually becoming its chairperson proved invaluable, offering her opportunities to learn, give back and build meaningful connections. Have regular conversations with people in fields unrelated to yours—creativity often sparks in unexpected places. Study how other industries solve problems and see if similar solutions can apply to your field. The most successful relationships are built on mutual value exchange rather than one-sided requests. You will be remembered when you help someone with their success-related hurdle by being a source to add value to help them overcome their hurdle. Throughout her career, she has ensured that she provide value first, be it for ice-breaking introductions, sharing legal insights, or simply being a sounding board. This approach has helped her bolster her relationships and organically brought many opportunities my way. Disengaging from transactional and taking up a relational networking mindset is the key. Making it a habit to help the fraternity grow collectively by helping know peers is certainly helpful to us in the long run too. Follow up and nurture relationships—people appreciate when you check in with genuine interest.



A successful mentorship program should be structured, with clear goals, accountability and feedback loops. Organisations should create internal mentorship frameworks to cultivate leadership from within. At the company, they ensure young lawyers don't just work on transactions but understand client strategy, business implications, and negotiation psychology. This hands-on mentorship approach accelerates their growth far beyond traditional training methods. Even in her role as a leader with certain Chambers of Commerce, she applied the same philosophy for the members and mentees. If you're a senior leader, implement mentorship programs within your company, ensuring mentees have clear milestones. As a mentee, set defined objectives with your mentor to track progress effectively. Use digital tools (like Notion, Trello, or Google Docs) to document key mentorship insights for reference. The real power of networking and mentoring is in its compounding effect—every relationship nurtured today builds a foundation for future success. Leaders who consistently invest in relationships and mentorship create an ecosystem where opportunities flow effortlessly. Many of her firm's breakthroughs came from long-standing relationships—clients, partners and referrals that grew organically over time. To maximise the compound effect, track your key relationships and periodically revisit them to stay connected. Take the long view—business success is rarely about one big break but about the cumulative effect of many well-nurtured relationships. Pay it forward—mentorship and networking thrive when leaders continue the cycle of support and knowledge-sharing. To sum it up, to be successful, one needs to be fortified with the shared strength of the networks and mentors that they build with time. Irrespective of whether one is a seasoned leader or a novice entrepreneur, establishing honest relationships and organized mentorship will govern your long-term success. As she reflects on her journey—from building a legal practice to engaging with entrepreneurs and thought leaders and leading a chapter of an established chamber of commerce for women—she sees one constant: the right relationships open the right doors.

(The author, Archana Khosla Burman, is an entrepreneur, Founding Partner - VERTICES PARTNERS, FICCI FLO National Head - Collaborations, Partnerships and Associations.)

DECODING GUILLAIN-BARRÉ SYNDROME

How CSF analysis aids in early diagnosis

PNS | HYDERABAD

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) is a rare autoimmune disorder where the body's immune system attacks the peripheral nerves, leading to weakness, numbness, or even paralysis. This condition can progress rapidly, and early diagnosis is critical for timely treatment. One of the most reliable diagnostic tools for GBS is cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) analysis. This simple yet essential test helps confirm the diagnosis, rule out other conditions, and guide treatment plans.

UNDERSTANDING GUILLAIN-BARRÉ SYNDROME

GBS often starts with symptoms such as tingling or weakness in the hands and feet, which may spread to other parts of the body. In severe cases, it can cause breathing difficulties or complete paralysis. While the exact cause of GBS isn't fully understood, it is commonly triggered by infections, such as the flu or gastrointestinal illnesses, and, in rare cases, by surgery or vaccinations. Since the symptoms of GBS mimic other neurological disorders, accurate and early diagnosis is essential.

WHAT IS CSF ANALYSIS?

Dr. Sameer Bhati, Director of Star Imaging and Path Lab Pvt. Ltd, explains to us, "Cerebrospinal fluid is a clear liquid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord, protecting and nourishing the central nervous system. CSF analysis involves extracting a small sample of this fluid, typically through a lumbar puncture (spinal tap), and examining it in a laboratory. This test is often used to detect infections, inflammation, or other abnormalities in the nervous system." For GBS, CSF analysis is particularly useful because it helps detect unique markers associated with the condition, allowing doctors to distinguish it from other diseases.

WHY IS CSF ANALYSIS CRUCIAL FOR DIAGNOSING GBS?

CSF analysis provides key information that is essential for confirming a GBS diagnosis:

- 1. Increased Protein Levels**

A hallmark feature of GBS in CSF analysis is elevated protein levels without a significant increase in white blood cells, a condition known as albuminocytologic dissociation. The increase in protein reflects nerve damage caused by the immune attack, and this pattern is a strong indicator of GBS.
- 2. Ruling Out Other Conditions**

GBS symptoms can overlap with those of other neurological disorders, such as infections, multiple sclerosis, or spinal cord diseases. By examining the CSF, doctors can rule out these conditions. For example, if an infection were present, the CSF might show an elevated white blood cell count or the presence of pathogens, which is not typical in GBS.
- 3. Understanding Disease Severity**

The degree of protein elevation in the CSF can also provide insight into how much nerve damage has occurred. Higher protein levels may indicate more severe nerve involvement, helping doctors determine the appropriate level of care and treatment.
- 4. Monitoring Progression**

CSF analysis can also be used to monitor the disease's progression over time. By repeating the test during treatment, doctors can observe changes in protein levels and evaluate whether the patient is responding to therapy.

"CSF analysis begins with a lumbar puncture, a procedure in which a thin needle is inserted into the lower back to collect a sample of cerebrospinal fluid. While the idea of a spinal tap may seem intimidating, it is generally safe and minimally uncomfortable. Local anesthesia is used to numb the area, so the patient typically feels only slight pressure during the procedure," adds Dr. Sameer. Once the fluid is collected, it is sent to a laboratory, where it is examined for abnormalities, including protein levels, white blood cell counts, and any signs of infection or inflammation.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER CSF ANALYSIS?

The results of the CSF analysis are combined with the patient's symptoms, medical history, and results from other tests to confirm the diagnosis of GBS. If GBS is confirmed, treatment can begin immediately.

Common treatments for GBS include:

- Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIg): This

therapy involves administering antibodies to neutralize the harmful immune response.

- **Plasmapheresis:** This procedure filters harmful antibodies from the blood, reducing the immune attack on the nerves. In severe cases, patients may require supportive care, such as mechanical ventilation, if their breathing is affected.

Why Early Diagnosis Matters

GBS can progress rapidly, and without timely treatment, it may lead to long-term complications, such as chronic nerve damage or permanent disability. Early diagnosis through CSF analysis allows doctors to start treatments that can reduce the severity of symptoms and improve recovery outcomes.

Conclusion

CSF analysis is an essential tool for diagnosing Guillain-Barré Syndrome. By detecting elevated protein levels and ruling out other conditions, this test provides critical information that guides treatment decisions. If you or someone you know experiences symptoms like sudden muscle weakness or tingling, it's important to seek medical attention immediately. CSF analysis can help doctors confirm the diagnosis and ensure that the right treatment is provided at the right time, improving the chances of a full recovery.





PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary

A BERRILICIOUS JOURNEY AWAITS YOUR ARRIVAL AT NATURALS ICE CREAM

Berry lovers are in for a treat, as Naturals Ice Cream is back with their super-anticipated Berry Festival. In fact, every February marks the start of this Berrilicious Journey across all Naturals Outlets in India. An ode to the best berries from around the world, this limited-period annual festivity celebrates the unique characteristics of Raspberries from Serbia, Mulberries from Maharashtra, Gooseberries from Uttar Pradesh, Blueberries from the USA and Blackcurrants from Poland. Moreover, this year the legacy brand has more to offer than ever before. It's beyond the flavours of the exotic fruits alone. It's going to be big and juicy, not just in taste but also in experience. The source of the berries alone is enough to tell you that it's hands down the finest in business, and the store decor is sure to delight both your palate and heart.



Besides, the flavours themselves are enough to make you fall in love. How could they not, when every berry is handpicked and made in small batches with the utmost care and attention to detail? Starting with selecting the source, churning the berries with their signature blend, to making sure each batch goes through multiple levels of scrutiny before hitting the shelves – every step is crafted to perfection. And the range of notes in the flavours offered is another win: from sweet, tart, citrusy, to sour, it's no less than a party for your taste buds. With so much to look forward to and so little time, it's best to keep your calendar updated. We suggest you block the month of love for the love of berries. Enjoy the choicest berry flavours only at Naturals Ice Cream. It's worth every rupee. Get on board with us for this berrilicious journey.

WHAT: Berry Festival –
A Berrilicious Journey!

WHEN: 1st February onwards

WHERE: Pan-India Naturals Outlets



Kamineni Hospitals hosted a grand drone show with 200 drones at GD Goenka School, Rock Town Residents Colony, LB Nagar. The event was organized to raise awareness about cancer on the occasion of World Cancer Day. The drones showcased cutting-edge technology, emphasizing the importance of early detection and timely treatment of cancer.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



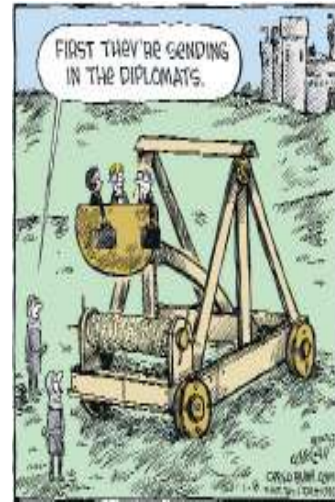
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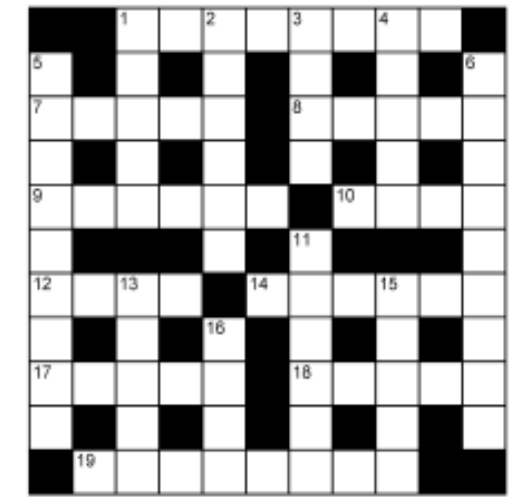
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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

ACROSS

- 1 A surgeon's knives
- 7 Egg centres
- 8 Water vapour
- 9 Required
- 10 Burn black by being too close to heat
- 12 Rescue
- 14 Paddle these boats
- 17 Below
- 18 Living
- 19 A very large hill

DOWN

- 1 Find the solution to
- 2 Reply
- 3 Shove
- 4 A flat kind of worm that sucks blood



GINGER MEGGS



I AM OPEN TO DO ANY ROLE: SAI RAM SHANKAR

SAI RAM SHANKAR, THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF TOP DIRECTOR PURI JAGANNATH, TALKS ABOUT WHY HE CAN'T WORK WITH HIS BROTHER, WHY HE HAS TAKEN BREAKS AND HIS FUTURE PROJECTS...



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Top director Puri Jagannath's brother Sai Ram Shankar is playing the lead in the film 'Oka Pathakam Prakarum', a crime genre. The film is releasing on February 7 and Sai Ram Shankar is pinning his hopes on this one. "I am confident that the story of this film is definitely a good one and after watching this one, people will appreciate it."

The actor said that he has been approached for many films, but not worked out.

"Some films because of budget and some of them I didn't like.

But I am getting a lot of offers these days," said Sai Ram. He added that after this film he is going to act continuously. "I am open to any roles," he said. If the role is good and he likes it, then he is ready to do it. "I am not sticking to play only lead characters. I am open to any other role, but it should be prominent," he said.

Director Vinod Vijayan is a Malayali and did he know Telugu? "Yes, he knows Telugu and he speaks also," said Sai Ram. He added that the director has won a few awards for his film and definitely helps for this film. "In

Malayalam, he directed two films with Fahadh Faasil and at a young age he became a director. He is also a friend of mine since the last 15 years," said Sai Ram.

Talking about the role, he said he is playing a criminal lawyer in it. "After the shooting started, for the first two days, I felt something wrong. So, I stopped and then did a workshop for nearly a month learning more about the body language and behavior of lawyers to get realistic." He added that they announced the cash prize of Rs 10,000 to any person if they identified the villain at the interval. "Actually, this announcement helps our film to get popular," he said.

Apart from the director, there are many Malayalam people who worked for this film and do they plan to release it there? "Not now, but once released in Telugu, we will definitely release it in Malayalam and Tamil," said the actor. He added that there are a few actors like Samuthirakani in the film.

The climax fight which they shot nearly with 25 dogs is going to be the highlight. "Yes, there was a big fight and we shot for nearly seven days. The dogs are not friendly ones, but regular breeds. While shooting for this fight, one dog came into my grill which scared me a lot. I called the action choreographer, but he was watching the scene on camera. To escape from it, I climbed the grill and in the meantime, the dog master came to my rescue."

His elder brother Puri Jagannath is one of the top directors and when asked whether there was any chance of acting in his film? "No," said Sai Ram without giving any reason. This film is releasing along with Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi starrer 'Thandel'. "No, I am not competing with 'Thandel', but my film is releasing next to that film," said Sai Ram.

The actor said that he was also approached for a web series. "I am working for a mythological web series in which I am playing a 60-year-old man in it," he said. He added that another film 'Resound' is almost over and a few more projects are in the pipeline.



Hari Hara Veera Mallu is definitely up to expectations, says AM Rathnam

Producer AM Rathnam made 'Kushi' with Pawan Kalyan in 2001 and it was a huge blockbuster at that time and took Pawan Kalyan into the top league. After that he produced several films and marked his name as one of the top producers in South India. After a long gap, Rathnam is now making a film with Pawan Kalyan titled 'Hari Hara Veeramallu', a period drama.

Directed by his son Jothi Krishna, the film is all set to release on March 28. The film's shooting is almost complete, after Pawan Kalyan allotted his

dates to complete it. The film started a few years back with director Krish, but Pawan Kalyan was busy with politics and is now the Deputy CM of Andhra Pradesh. Krish is moving to another film and Rathnam's son Jothi Krishna has taken over the directorial job and completed it.

Niddhi Agerwal plays the female lead, while MM Keeravani provided the music for this film. There are high expectations on this film, because this is the first one releasing after Pawan Kalyan became the Deputy CM.

"Definitely, this film raises the standards and makes everyone proud. I am confident that this one is going to reach the expectations of everyone and Pawan Kalyan is going to create a new benchmark with this film," said producer Rathnam.

Pawan Kalyan sang a song in this film and it was released recently and it went viral everywhere. With the shoot nearing completion, the post production work is going on to reach the release date. This film is set to surpass Pawan Kalyan's biggest blockbusters across all languages.

Prashanth Karthi is happy with the response to his film



Many films are now directly released on OTT platforms, and 'Pothugadda' is one of them released in ETV Win recently. Directed by Raksha Veeram, the film is getting good response. Prashanth Karthi, who plays a character with different shades, expressed his happiness over the appreciation his role is receiving.

"Initially, the director asked me to grow my beard and also sport long hair. But for some reason, I had to remove the hair. So, I thought I lost this role. But after a few days I got a call from director Raksha, who had seen my original look and decided to go with it. So, my appearance in this film is very natural," said Prashanth Karthi about his role.

The actor said that he is getting positive response from everywhere for his role in it. "I got appreciation for my performance which has different shades in it," said the actor. Though he is getting a lot of messages, when people like Chandra Siddharth and Chandrashekar Yeleti appreciate his acting, it is something special for him. He also revealed that most of the film was shot in the nights and that too in winter. "But, we never felt uncomfortable as we had taken care of everything," said Prashanth. Talking about his upcoming projects he said, "I am working on a film with a Rayalaseema backdrop. It is an action drama and I will reveal more details soon," said Prashanth.



Mahesh, Rajamouli film being made in three parts?

Top director Rajamouli is now shooting with Mahesh Babu and Priyanka Chopra for his upcoming film and it is tentatively titled as SSMB29. Rajamouli is taking all the precautions not to leak anything about the film, even after the shooting started at the Aluminium factory in Hyderabad. But still, people are talking more about the film.

Another news is doing rounds about the film is that Rajamouli is planning to make three parts. Generally, Rajamouli is taking his own time to come up with a film. So, for this film he already told Mahesh Babu that it is going to be in three parts and he has to spend nearly five years for this project, says a source.

Rajamouli in his career made only 'Baahubali' in two parts. But now, he is extending it to three parts with Mahesh Babu for this film as the story has good potential to do it, added the source. He mentioned many times that the film is an adventure one like Indiana Jones, the Hollywood film. So, he wanted to come up with sequels to this film too. The shooting is now taking a break with Priyanka Chopra leaving Hyderabad to attend her brother's marriage. Once after the marriage, she will be back for the shoot. The next schedule is going to be in South Africa, says the source.

MAZAKA POSTPONED TO SIVARATRI?

Rao Ramesh and Sundeeep Kishan are the lead actors in the film 'Mazaka' which is supposed to be released on February 21. Directed by Rakshina Trinadha Rao and produced by Rakesh Danda, the film story was given by Bezawada Prasanna Kumar. The shooting of this film is almost complete except for a song and a few patch-works. Though the makers are confident about the film's release on February 21, they don't want to release it in a hurry. So, they want to postpone it to February 26 to mark Maha Sivaratri.

On the other hand, the distributors are also putting pressure on the makers to release it

on Sivaratri, so that it will get good openings. Ritu Varma and Anshu of 'Manmadhudu' fame are playing the female leads. The film has come out really well and the makers are very happy for the response where they have shown the film to their close people and they said that it is going to be a sure hit.

Zee Studios is also involved in the production of this film and they already paid some advance to the producer. So, they want to release the film on February 21. Under these circumstances, the makers are going to take a decision in a few days. "Most probably, the film may be postponed to February 26," said the source.



Small films making a big impact: Raj Kandukuri

Director GD Narasimha is coming up with a small film titled 'Bhavani Ward 1997'. According to him, the film has horror, suspense and thriller elements and it is releasing on February 7. Gayathri Gupta, Pooja Kendre, Sai Satish and many others are playing important roles in it. The film's pre-release event was held in the city and producer, distributor Raj Kandukuri was a special guest for it. "I believe this movie has strong content and these days content-based movies are doing good," said Raj Kandukuri. He added that he actually launched the title post of this film sometime back and now attended the pre-release event.

"I am a big fan of horror films and I wish this film is going to be a good success," said Raj. He added that as the release date approaches, there is some tension within the team, because they are eagerly waiting for the audience response. "But these days small films are making a significant impact, and everyone should support this small film," he said.

Director GD Narasimha said that all the actors gave good performances in the film and hope this film enthralls the audience. "I am sure, the music will send shivers down your spine, and the visuals are fresh," said the director. He added that the fans of horror films can enjoy this 'Bhavani Ward 1997'.



