

System must act to end the politics of vengeance

Whatever the reason all politicians will have to face the consequences of whatever they did when they had power. If anyone is spared his adversaries may get branded as impotent.



Opponents are now at the receiving end. Among all politically motivated cases, the case filed against the former Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the AP Legislative Assembly, N. Chandrababu Naidu, in connection with his alleged involvement in the skill development scam involving crores is the most important. This incident created ripples across the country and abroad. Irrespective of the merits and demerits of this particular case, there was widespread condemnation of it across the globe. Telugus, particularly techies, working in almost 20 countries staged demos in protest against the allegedly false implication of Chandrababu. He spent 53 days at the Rajahmundry Central Prison as he was remanded to custody by court. His arrest strengthened the bond between the NDA alliance partners.

Charging criminal cases against political opponents at an appropriate time appears to be 'justifiable' for these ruling parties. This is considered to be an appropriate reply to their opponents

The NDA led by the TDP in AP had the last laugh in the electoral battle as it won with a thumping majority in both the Assembly and the Lok Sabha. YSRCP cadres somehow felt that it may not be wise to file criminal charges against CBN just six months before the elections. A YSRCP spokesperson who quit immediately after the party's debacle in the Assembly elections openly criticised the leadership for arresting CBN just six months before polls. The party had to face criticism from its own ranks as well as others. An MP, K. Raghav Ramakrishnan Raju (RRR), who was elected on a YSRCP ticket and later became a critic had to suffer custodial

torture. It must be noted that he had undergone bypass surgery. But he approached the court complaining about the torture he had suffered and said that it was a gross violation of the law. The government had engaged two senior IPS officers who were holding charge of the departments handling the cases of CBN and RRR. Both the officers happened to be Dalits and the YSRCP government utilised their 'services' to avoid possible public criticism by using their Dalit background.

But instead of getting shielded from criticism they had to face strong action from the NDA government. Both officers had a good reputation ear-



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lier due to their competence, but had to face public criticism and also face disciplinary action. The two officers who came from the ranks of the underprivileged and had a promising future lost their credibility and career. The moral of the incident is that officials should not become tools in the hands of rulers who want to settle scores with

their political opponents. The invasion of CBN's house on the banks of the Krishna River in Amaravati by YSRCP Minister Jogi Ramesh and his accusation against CBN of insulting Ramesh's car driver citing his caste was shocking. A key figure in Jagan's cabinet, P. Ramachandra Reddy faced charges of misusing power for grabbing forest lands near his farmhouse. The 23 acres owned by Ramachandra Reddy suddenly increased to 75 acres.

Former Gannavaram MLA YSRCP leader V. Vamshi Mohan had to go to jail for allegedly kidnapping and intimidating a computer operator who was working at the local TDP office and for vandalising the TDP office using his men. Another former minister, Pemi Nani of Bandar, was charged with misusing rice supplied through the Public Distribution System.

The current AP Education & IT Minister, N. Lokesh, used to threaten his political

opponents when he was on his Yuva Galam Padayatra during the days when he was in the opposition saying that he was maintaining a 'red-book' listing the misdeeds of the ruling YSRCP leaders. Initially, YSRCP leaders ridiculed Lokesh and his red-book threats. But after assuming power, his opponents are now being charged one by one in different cases. Former minister V. Rajini was also charged as per provisions of the law.

The YSRCP government used Dalit police officers against opponents and the NDA admin is now slapping the Prevention of Atrocities against SC & STs Act which was passed after the infamous Karamchedu massacre in which five Dalits were brutally killed by upper caste landlords in the mid-1980s. There is now a general public impression that this Act which was intended to protect SCs & STs is being misused for political purpose.

Chandrababu was accused of abusing Jogi Ramesh's car driver citing his caste. How can the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) know the caste of a minister whom he never knew at all? Some legal provisions have become weapons in the hands of rulers to intimidate opponents. This is being continued and needs to be curbed by the intervention of higher authorities.

It has become common for the public to guess the names of opposition leaders who is likely to face the music soon. That's why the YSRCP leadership is warning the NDA that they will have to face the same music in case the YSRCP comes back to power.

Sadly, the politics of vengeance is now ruling the roost. Is it necessary for politicians to implicate opponents in criminal cases? If that is so then the system has to act properly to set things right in the larger interests of the nation.

Revanth will snatch your mangalsutra next: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao (KTR) launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and accused him of prioritizing real estate over governance.

Speaking at a Rythu Maha Dharna in Amangal, KTR

alleged that Revanth Reddy's family acquired nearly 1,000 acres in Kalwakurthy after elections, and the CM is now focused on increasing land prices instead of serving the people. KTR reiterated that Revanth is focused on increasing real estate prices rather than governing the state.

"After acquiring 1,000 acres in Kalwakurthy, Revanth is now planning a major road project just to inflate land values. He is more concerned about property rates and real estate than public welfare," KTR said.

"We told you not to trust Revanth, but you believed him. Yesterday he took away our

gates and doors for not paying back loans. Then they lifted the starters. Tomorrow if he is not given 10 gm gold or silver, he will snatch your Mangalsutra," Ravi said. KTR said that Telangana is currently under a disastrous administration where even women's security is at risk, warning that people must begin resisting Revanth Reddy's misuse from Kalwakurthy itself.

He said, "Revanth Reddy became CM by making 420 false promises and bluffing his way into power. He did nothing for his own constituency, Kodangal, where neither Rythu Bandhu nor loan waivers have been implemented. Even in Kalwakurthy, where his in-laws reside, he did not allocate a single rupee for development."



Revanth is the real hero, not KCR, says Mallu Ravi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress's Nagarkurnool MP, Mallu Ravi, criticised BRS leaders for describing KCR as the real hero and said that the real hero of Telangana is Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

Ravi said that Revanth has launched many development projects and social welfare works after becoming the CM, which KCR could not do during his 10-year rule.

He said that Revanth has the credit of honouring castes like no other state in the country. He sanctioned 56 integrated residential schools in the state and work has started on them.

The MP said SC, ST, BC and minority residential schools are being built on 25 acre campuses at a cost of Rs 200 crore each.

Efforts are being made to build Indiramma houses at a cost of Rs 5 lakh each, he said.

After the Congress came to power in the state, free bus travel facilities were given to women. 55,000 posts in government service were filled. The Arogya Sri scheme's limit was enhanced to Rs 10 lakh. People's problems are being solved from time to time, he said.

The Congress admin established the Skill University, Sports University and Fourth City, Ravi said.

Jupally's slip of the tongue

Mistakenly calls KTR as CM instead of Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Minister for Rural Development, Jupally Krishna Rao, launched a scathing attack on the BRS, questioning their claims that people want K. Chandrasekar Rao (KCR) to return as the Chief Minister.

Speaking at the CLP meeting, he demanded that BRS leaders should explain why KCR should be re-elected and justify his governance record. Jupally Krishna Rao forgot Revanth Reddy's name and called him Chief Minister KTR accidentally.

Responding to it KTR said, "Mark my words. Minister Jupally is going to be sacked from Cabinet soon for this mistake."

"Telangana was achieved through the sacrifices of several activists for a better administration, but KCR's rule

pushed the state into a massive debt trap. For 10 years, he ran the government in such a way that Rs 6,500 crore has to be paid every month as interest. While 18 CMs took Rs 65,000 crore loans in 65 years, KCR alone borrowed Rs 8 lakh crore in just 10 years," Jupally stated.

Accusing KCR of massive financial mismanagement, he said the former CM looted thousands of crores through irrigation project contracts, which were distributed among his family members and select contractors. "If tenders were transparent, the state could have saved Rs 50,000 crore," he said.

He criticized KCR for favouring Andhra contractors and said that Telangana's water share was neglected despite BRS aligning with the Centre for 10 years.

Jupally slammed KCR for not paying respects to Ambedkar's statue even once in 10 years and for running an autocratic administration where ministers and MLAs were not even allowed inside Pragathi Bhavan or his Erravalli farm.

He also accused KCR of making revolutionary singer Gaddar wait for three hours under the scorching sun outside Pragathi Bhavan.

He blamed KCR's rule for delays in implementing social welfare schemes and mocked KTR's recent claims of innocence, saying, "After committing countless mistakes, KTR now says he is innocent. Should we laugh or cry?"

He also questioned why BRS held public meetings where only KCR spoke never allowing any other leader to take the mic.

Govt failed to assert control over Nagarjuna Sagar: Kavitha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kavitha has slammed Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and has accused his government of ignoring farmers while crops are withering due to lack of irrigation water.

She said that instead of addressing the crisis, the Congress Government continues to mislead farmers with empty promises, warning that the party will face the consequences of farmers' fury.

Speaking to reporters at the BRS office in Suryapet, after offering bonam to Goddess Chowdamma at the Pedagattu Lingamantula Swamy Jataru, Kavitha criticized the state's water management.

"Revanth Reddy has no idea of water resources. The Medigadda Project is being neglected due to political

vendetta, depriving Telangana of much-needed irrigation," she said. She pointed out that Andhra Pradesh has launched a 199 TMC project at Banakacharla and that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is lobbying for approvals, while Revanth has failed to even assert control over Nagarjuna Sagar.

She credited KCR's leadership for bringing Godavari water to Suryapet and Krishna basin areas through Kaleshwaram, benefiting 1.22 lakh acres in Kodad constituency alone. She challenged Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy to explain why water is not being released now.

Kavitha accused the government of deliberately keeping the Medigadda Project unused, citing engineers who claim water could still be supplied for another 40 days to save standing crops.

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS Prosecution seeks death for Sajjan Kumar in murder case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The prosecution on Tuesday sought death penalty for former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar in a murder case related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, saying the crime was committed in a "brutal and diabolical manner".

The prosecution said the case was "graver than the Nirbhaya case" of 2012 in a written submission filed before special judge Kavari Bawaja. "The present case is graver than Nirbhaya case as in Nirbhaya case, a young woman was targeted but in the present case, people of a particular community were targeted," it said.

The minimum punishment under law for the offence of murder is life imprisonment.

The judge deferred the matter to February 21 after the counsel for Kumar sought time to argue on the matter, informing the court that the lawyer were abstaining from work on Tuesday in protest against Advocate Amendment Bill, 2025.

Senior advocate H S Phoolka, appearing for the complainant, supported the prosecution's demand of death penalty and sought time to argue the matter. Kumar is currently lodged in Tihar Jail.

The prosecution said there was something uncommon in the case, arguing the "aggravated circumstances outweighed the mitigating circumstances" and the case fell in the "rarest of rare case" category.

TODAY	
ALMANAC	
Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	Shashthi: Feb 18 04:53 AM to Feb 19 07:32 AM
Saptami:	Feb 19 07:32 AM to Feb 20 09:58 AM
Nakshatram:	Swati: Feb 18 07:35 AM to Feb 19 10:39 AM
Vishaka:	Feb 19 10:39 AM to Feb 20 01:30 PM
Rahukalam:	12:30 PM to 1:56 PM
Yamagandam:	8:10 AM to 9:37 AM
Varjyam:	04:55 PM to 06:42 PM
Gulika:	11:03 AM to 12:30 PM
Amritakalam:	03:39 AM to 05:27 AM
Ahijit Muhurtham:	NIL

HYDERABAD WEATHER	
Forecast:	Sunny
Temp:	34°
Humidity:	32%
Sunrise:	6:41 AM
Sunset:	6:19 PM
Updated:	February 18, 2025 5:00 PM

Govt committed ...

Continued from page 1

In a major push for international start-up collaboration, Telangana has entered into an agreement with Brazil's GOIAS Hub to promote start-ups and foster global partnerships.

The MoU was signed at the HICC in the presence of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and IT Minister Sridhar Babu, after discussions with Goias Hub representatives. T-Hub Foundation CEO Sujith and Goias State Science, Technology, and Innovation Secretary Jose Frederico Lyra Netto formalized the agreement.

As per the MoU, Telangana start-ups will get opportunities to operate in Brazil, while Brazilian start-ups will set up operations in Telangana. The agreement facilitates cooperation in Artificial Intelligence, IT, Agri-Tech, Healthcare, Biotech and Mining. Beyond market access, T-Hub and Goias will collaborate on incubation, capacity building, technology sharing, and investment enhancement, strengthening ties between India and Brazil and fostering a dynamic start-up ecosystem in Telangana.

States must ...

Continued from page 1

The judgement came in a suo motu case over the grant of bail. The top court said the government concerned had the power to incorporate suitable conditions in an order granting permanent remission and consideration of various factors was necessary before finalising the riders.

"The conditions must aim at ensuring that the criminal tendencies, if any, of the convict remain in check and that the convict rehabilitates himself in the society. The conditions should not be so oppressive or stringent that the convict is not able to take advantage of the order granting permanent remission. The conditions cannot be vague and should be capable of being performed," it said.

'Will allocate...

Continued from page 1

the end of the next financial year, construction of medical college buildings and hospitals across the state will be completed," the ministers said.

They also directed officials to maximize the utilization of Centrally-sponsored schemes. Plans are also underway to set up science and technology planetariums in district headquarters, the ministers revealed.

'Govt framing policies ...

Continued from page 1

before our eyes. All the loopholes and shortcomings in the Dharani Portal that the then rulers boasted about are there. Lakhs of farmers were thrown on the roads due to the 2020 ROR Act, which was implemented without formulating any regulations. Even three years after the enactment of the Act, the BRS government did not formulate rules, Ponguleti said.

Instead of sitting in the secretariat and framing rules, we are taking the advice of officials and experts, codifying everyone's opinions and preparing the Bhubharathi Act, he said.

"We will prepare rules connected to the Land India Act as soon as possible and bring the Act into force. We are formulating rules so that existing problems get resolved so that farmers benefit and the officials do not have any room for mistakes. The new revenue law in Telangana is going to bring major changes in the land administration of Bhubharathi. The main objective of this law is to protect land rights, bring transparency in land affairs, facilitate land transactions and make revenue services accessible to commoners," he said.

This law will provide a permanent solution to land problems, he said. In future, we will continue to administer land more efficiently through better policies and technology, he said. "This new law will not only provide land ownership rights but also bring financial independence to their lives," he said.

Cong govt discriminating ...

Continued from page 1

I challenge the Congress, which accuses the Centre of not providing funds. Are you ready for a debate on Central funding? I dare the Congress to treat this as a referendum and contest the MLC elections on this basis," he said.

Sanjay said the situation of the MLC candidate contesting on

behalf of the Congress has turned chaotic.

"He has no agents and no leaders campaigning for him. Even Congress MLAs have no intention of ensuring his victory. Now he is roaming with his own college staff. His staffers fear that if he wins, they might lose their jobs," Sanjay said.

Uttam asks Centre ...

Continued from page 1

ensure a sustainable drinking water supply for Hyderabad and for the Musi River's ecological restoration.

Uttam called for a speedy judgment on the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II (KWDT-II) to ensure justice for Telangana. He also pressed for swift completion of the water allocation process for major projects like the

Palamuru-Ranga Reddy Lift Irrigation Scheme, Samakka-Sarakka and the Sitarama Sagar Project.

Telangana demanded Central support for low-cost, long-tenure funding for irrigation projects, meeting the de-siltation and de-sedimentation costs of all major and minor irrigation projects and completion of the NDSA enquiry into the Medigadda Project.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 19, 2025

03



CITY EVENTS

Workshop On Crafting Terracotta Jewellery

Venue
FTCCI
February 17 to 19, (10:30 am)

Samatha Kumbh 2025 The Third Brahmothsavam Of The 108 Divya Countries

Venue
Statue Of Equality
February 9 to 19 (8 am)

Silk Expo Exhibition Cum Sale

Venue
Sri Satya Sai Nigamagaram
February 15 to 21, (10 am)

Headteacher suspended for allowing birthday fest on school premises

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The District Educational Office of Ranga Reddy has suspended the Headmistress in charge of an MPP School in Nandanavanam Colony in Saroor Nagar mandal for violating "Conduct Rules" by permitting political celebrations within the school premises.

The District Educational Officer order said that the school was used for the birthday celebrations of a political leader, which were organised under the supervision of a former corporator and involved the participation of students.

Authorities deemed it a violation of the Telangana Government Conduct Service (TGCS) Rules, 1964, and Education Department guidelines, which strictly prohibit the use of government schools for political activities.

Following an inquiry, Rajitha who was responsible for allowing the event, was placed under suspension as per Conduct and CCA Rules. During the suspension period, she has been instructed not to leave the headquarters without prior permission and will be entitled only to subsistence allowance.

The Education Department has reiterated that schools should remain neutral spaces, free from political influence, and has urged authorities to strictly enforce regulations to prevent such incidents in the future.

'AI will soon predict cyberattacks'

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■ HYDERABAD

With 85 per cent of cyberattacks coming from phishing and 8.9 lakh new malware threats daily, AI, which is now preventing attacks, will soon help predict them.

With 85 per cent of cyberattacks coming from phishing and 8.9 lakh new malware threats daily, Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is currently preventing attacks, will soon help predict them, said P Krishna Sastry, Partner - Cyber Security at Ernst & Young LLP.

During The SHIELD 2025, Telangana's premier cybersecurity conclave on Tuesday, Krishna Sastry, discussed the importance of cybersecurity and cyberattacks, noting that these are buzzwords in the industry. He explained that cybersecurity focuses on five areas: preventive control, protective control, detective control, responsive control, and predictive controls. He highlighted that AI is mostly used for preventive and protective controls, with limited use in detective controls. He emphasised that AI will not replace cybersecurity entirely and that human involvement is still crucial. He also mentioned that not all mod-



Panel members addressing the cybersecurity conclave SHIELD 2025 in Hyderabad on Tuesday

els work in cybersecurity.

Krishna Sastry also stated that AI is automating many processes in cybersecurity, leading to the evolution of next-generation security operation centers. He noted that AI-enabled firewalls are now better at detecting and combating malware. Krishna pointed out that only 2 per cent of the 8.9 lakh new malware threats are new and unknown strains, and AI is now being used to detect them. He also highlighted the development of a security orchestration platform for detecting threats and the potential of AI to predict cyberattacks soon.

Meanwhile, Krishna CV

Grandhi, senior advocate, discussed the need to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to AI and called for more adaptable solutions. He also mentioned SEBI's recent data security measures and emphasized the importance of explainability in AI regulations. He urged organisations to incorporate algorithm accountability and expand regulatory frameworks to include AI.

Sharat Kavu Raj, Inspector General of Police from Rajasthan Police, warned that AI-generated images and videos are becoming increasingly realistic, leading to new challenges in cybercrime.

New Security Policy on the Horizon: Sridhar Babu

Telangana Information Technology and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu announced that the state will soon introduce a new security policy aligned with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act. Speaking at the 'SHIELD 2025' conference organised by the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB), Cyberabad Police, and the Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC), he emphasized the need for a strong system to prevent cybercrimes. Sridhar Babu also revealed plans to set up a Giga Watt Data Center using advanced AI technologies. He stressed the importance of protecting data, as cybercriminals are increasingly targeting personal information rather than financial assets, which

could threaten both privacy and the economy. The Minister appreciated Telangana Police for their efforts in combating cybercrime, noting the recovery of Rs 185 crore from Rs 350 crore looted by cyber offenders. He also raised concerns over India's reliance on imported cybersecurity software, worth \$7 billion annually, and called for innovation from Indian software engineers. Sridhar Babu highlighted the dangers of the dark web, where personal data is sold, and the staggering global losses of \$10 trillion to cybercrime, with India accounting for Rs. 15,000 crore. He urged citizens to stay vigilant and report cybercrimes, emphasizing that cybersecurity is a shared responsibility.

He noted that AI can simulate voices and deceive individuals, stating that the future of AI attacks is just beginning to heat up.

Sunil Bajpai, Chief Trust Officer at Tania, stressed that AI-driven companies are thriving and highlighted the role of decep-

tion in cybersecurity. He pointed out that fakes have existed long before deepfakes, and AI can be useful in detecting fraud. He also emphasised the need for better collaboration between technology, regulators, and policymakers to ensure AI's future effectiveness.

TGBIE asks colleges to make nominal roll corrections free of cost

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Board of Intermediate Education has asked all government and private colleges to make nominal roll corrections free of charge and address student grievances promptly ahead of Intermediate Public Examinations 2025.

Krishna Aditya S, Secretary, Board of Intermediate Education, convened a Zoom meeting with officers of the Board of Intermediate Education and all the District Examination Committee members (DEC) to review the advance arrangements for the Intermediate Public Examinations 2025. During the meeting, the District Examination Committees were instructed to conduct a coordination meeting with District Collectors and ensure the provision of necessary infrastructure facilities at the examination centers. Officials were directed to take timely measures to prevent any inconvenience to students.

To ensure the smooth conduct of examinations, offi-



Officers of Board of Intermediate Education attending the zoom meeting in Hyderabad on Tuesday

cers were asked to provide details of additional staff requirements and updates regarding the secure storage and distribution of question papers.

It was emphasised that strict surveillance should be maintained at strong rooms, custodians and departmental officers should be appointed at the district level to oversee security arrangements. Stringent security measures were mandated to ensure the impartial and transparent administration of the examinations.

After the review of examination arrangements with the

District Examination Committees, the following key directives were issued to ensure fair and efficient conduct of the exams:

Experienced staff should be deployed for examination duties.

All examination centres must be under CCTV surveillance.

Accurate verification of examination staff details tails should be conducted to avoid errors. District-wise and centre-wise inspection of question paper security arrangements and staff details must be carried out.

Pi Ongoloy unveils cancer care initiative in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Pi Oncology Services unveils a cancer care initiative, offering round-the-clock, personalised chemotherapy across Hyderabad for the first time in the country. Patients in need of chemotherapy, breast cancer screening, or cancer-related vaccinations can now receive top-tier care at home, eliminating the stress of hospital visits.

Traditional hospital settings can be overwhelming for cancer patients, often triggering emotional distress. The Cancer Care at Home service provides a compassionate alternative, delivering medical excellence in a familiar, soothing environment surrounded by loved ones.

Dr. Bharat Patodiya, Founder and Director of Pi Cancer Care, emphasises that emotional well-being is crucial in fighting cancer. He added that home-based care not only promotes positivity but also eliminates the discomfort of commuting, reduces hospital wait times, and significantly lowers treatment costs, making quality care more accessible.

Govt plans solar fencing scheme to protect crops from wild animals

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government is considering introducing a solar fencing scheme to protect crops from wild animals and monkeys, Minister for Agriculture Tummala Nageswara Rao announced on Tuesday. He directed officials to study the implementation of solar fencing in states like Himachal Pradesh and formulate a policy to offer subsidies for farmers to adopt the scheme.

At a review meeting with Horticulture Department officials at the Secretariat, the Minister emphasised that this initiative would encourage more farmers to take up horticultural crops and vegetable farming.

Nageswara Rao also instructed officials to establish peri-urban clusters within a 100-km radius of Hyderabad to promote vegetable cultivation and reduce dependency on imports. He suggested providing farmers with subsidies for necessary machinery and expanding cultivation to eventually position Telangana as an exporter of vegetables in the

next few years.

To support oil palm and other crops, he directed the early processing of applications for drip and sprinkler irrigation equipment for the upcoming financial year. He also ordered a study on introducing macadamia cultivation in Telangana, analysing climate conditions, soil types, nursery requirements, and market potential.

The Minister announced that companies failing to meet oil palm cultivation targets will face action, citing the cancellation of Viswateja Oil Palm Company's license as an example. The land allotted to Viswateja has now been handed over to Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) for further oil palm cultivation.

He warned that companies failing to identify land for processing plants or meet plantation targets within 3-4 years would be removed. "Wherever companies have failed, responsibilities will be handed over to TS Oilfed to ensure better execution," he said.

He set a target of 2 lakh acres for oil palm cultivation

in the next financial year and directed officials to closely monitor private companies to ensure compliance. He also stressed that by the end of next year, at least one oil palm processing plant should be operational in each erstwhile district, with at least 6,000 acres of plantations in respective districts.

Nageswara Rao revealed that a new oil palm processing unit in Narmetta, Siddipet, under TS Oilfed, will be operational by May. Additionally, he instructed officials to finalise tenders for new processing plants in Beechupally (Kadhammam) and Kallur (Gadwal) immediately, ensuring their completion by December.

He also mandated that private companies that have cultivated over 6,000 acres must set up processing units without further delays.

The meeting was attended by Agriculture Principal Secretary Raghunandan Rao, Horticulture Director Yashmeen Basha, Oilfed officials, and other senior officials from the horticulture department.

Crime scene

Photographer among 7 arrested for stealing cameras

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a major breakthrough, the Masab Tank Police arrested seven individuals involved in a house theft case and recovered stolen high-end camera equipment worth over Rs 2.11 lakh.

The main accused, Dasi Vamsi, a photographer by profession, orchestrated the crime along with his associates after developing an acquaintance with the complainant through Instagram.

According to the police, Vamsi had been working at Redantz, Jubilee Hills, for the past six months. Facing financial difficulties, he hatched a plan with Md. Muzzamil Faraz and M Sathish to steal expensive cameras and lenses from the complainant's residence while he was away. The accused executed the plan on 31st January 2025, stealing high-end camera equipment, including:

After the theft, Vamsi and

his associates posted images of the stolen items on OLX and, with the help of Ranit Mallick and Parikhayit Das, sold the property to Jodigadla Raghunath Babu and Akash Singh for Rs. 2.11 lakh. The stolen amount was used for personal expenses and online gaming, according to police.

The investigation was conducted by Inspector of Police C Parasuram, under the supervision of ACP S Venkat Reddy, Banjara Hills Division in Hyderabad City.

Cargo aircraft makes emergency landing at RGI

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A cargo aircraft landed at the RGI airport here under emergency conditions following a technical snag, airport sources said on Tuesday.

The aircraft was coming from Chennai to Hyderabad. The pilots noticed a snag in the landing gear indicator and sought landing support late on Monday night following which the standard operating protocols for an emergency landing were activated, including putting take-offs and landings on hold. However, the aircraft landed safely, the sources said.

Senior advocate collapses in TG HC, dies

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A senior advocate collapsed and died while presenting arguments in the Telangana High Court here on Tuesday.

P Venugopal Rao, in his mid 60s, who was presenting the case in court number 21, suddenly fell down and an advocate performed a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) procedure on him, a member of Telangana High Court Advocates Association said.

A medical team at the High Court shifted him to a hospital where doctors declared him brought dead. The advocate allegedly suffered a heart attack, the Association member said.

Court proceedings were suspended in the afternoon following the incident.

SCR issues travel advisory in view of construction work at Secunderabad station

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The South Central Railway (SCR) has issued a travel advisory for passengers in view of the ongoing redevelopment of Secunderabad Railway Station. The upgradation project, being carried out at an estimated cost of Rs 720 crore, includes significant civil works such as the demolition of the existing north-side station building to make way for a new structure.

To ensure passenger safety and minimise inconvenience, SCR has implemented several measures to streamline crowd movement at the station. These include opening of a new entry

points at Gate No 2 (beside Ganesh Temple) for access to Platform No 1, featuring a general booking counter, an inquiry facility, and a waiting hall with a capacity for 750 passengers, along with 500 additional seating spaces.

An entry is also provided at Gate Nos 3 and 3B (opposite Swathi Hotel). Another new entry at Gate No 8 (Bhoiguda side) allows access to Platform No 10 with booking facilities.

Commercial Inspectors have been deputed for round-the-clock monitoring, while Commercial Officers are overseeing crowd flow during peak hours and the movement of



Commercial inspectors stationed at the entry point at Secunderabad Railway Station on Tuesday

Kumbh Mela special trains. Ticket-checking staff has also been increased for efficient boarding.

Adequate signage and

direction boards have been placed at station entry and exit points, platforms, foot overbridges, and circulation areas. Platforms are being assigned

well in advance to prevent congestion on Platforms 1 and 10.

Additional Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel have been deployed at entry and exit gates, platforms, concourses, and foot overbridges to regulate movement. Real-time monitoring through an enhanced CCTV network ensures prompt action in case of security concerns. RPF Shakti Teams are also patrolling the station for the safety of women passengers.

Regular inspections are being conducted to ensure adherence to fire safety protocols.



Soumya Mishra, Director General of Prisons and Corrections Services inaugurating the new filling station at Warangal Central Prison on Tuesday

New filling station opened at Warangal Central Prison

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

'My Nation Filling Station' was inaugurated at the Central Prison, Warangal, marks a significant step towards inmate rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Soumya Mishra, Director General of Prisons and Corrections Services, Satya Sharada, Collector and District Magistrate of Warangal, along with M Sampath, Deputy Inspector General of Prisons (Warangal Range) and B Ram Prakash, Commandant, Telangana Special Police, Mamnoon.

This 30th filling station, set up in collaboration with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and the Telangana government, aims to provide employment opportunities for inmates and released prisoners. Under this initiative, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) prisoners will earn

Rs 150 per day, while released prisoners will receive a monthly salary of Rs 16,500.

"Every inmate, regardless of their past, deserves a second chance.

Through projects like this, we are offering them not just custody, but an opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity," said

Soumya Mishra, Director General of Prisons and Corrections Services.

Chilli farmers in distress as prices plummet

Farmers demand Rs 25,000 support price per quintal
Khammam Lok Sabha MP Ramasahayam Raghuram Reddy demanded a remunerative price for chilli

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

A massive protest was staged on Tuesday at the Khammam Agricultural Market under the leadership of Left parties, All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), and Telangana Rythu Sangham as prices of all chilli varieties dropped. The farmers demanded that the government stabilise chilli prices and provide a support price of Rs 25,000 per quintal for chillies.

They demand the establishment of a Chilli Board for price stabilisation. Pothineni Sudarshan Rao, the state president of the Telangana Rythu Sangham, urged the government to recognise chillies as a food crop rather than a commercial crop. He demanded the establishment of a Chilli Board in Khammam to ensure price stabilisation. He also demanded that the government purchase chillies through MARKFED and NAFED at a support price of Rs 25,000 per quintal.

In 2023, chillies were sold at Rs 25,500 per quintal, but currently, they are being bought at the rate of Rs 11,000-13,000 per quintal, which is a matter of concern, said the farmers. It was mentioned that 447 farmers across the state committed suicide this year, with four deaths in the undivided Khammam district attributed to the instability in chilli prices.

The leaders and the farmers criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for ignoring the agricultural sector. Despite the presence of two Central Ministers in the state and three State Ministers in Khammam district, no assistance has been provided to farmers, he said.

The farmers also demanded the abolition of Goods and Service Tax (GST) on crops, fertilisers, and pesticides. They expressed anger over the imposition of GST.

CPM district secretary Nunna Nageshwara Rao warned that if the government failed to respond, the farmers would lay siege to the Ministers' camp offices.

Khammam MP Raghuram Reddy appealed to the Central government to establish a Chilli Board.

The protest was attended by Telangana Rythu Sangham leaders Yarra Srikant, Madineni Ramesh, Bhukya Veerabhadra, Y. Vikram, Yarra Srinivas Rao, Corporator Yallampalli Venkatar Rao, and others.



Chilli farmers, along with leaders of Left parties and farmers' organisations staging a protest in Khammam on Tuesday



Trader Nagaraj distributing small change to farmers and consumers at Rythu Bazaar in Adilabad

'Where there is will, there's a way'

PNS ■ ADILABAD

Nagaraj runs a clothing business at Gandhi Chowk in Adilabad town and earns his livelihood from it. He has a good understanding of the problems faced by local traders. He noticed that farmers and consumers at the local Rythu Bazaar were facing difficulties in obtaining small change. Several times, farmers had to abandon their business due to the unavailability of small change. He discovered that some middlemen were charging a commission for providing small change for every Rs 1000.

Realising that the brokers were

exploiting innocent farmers by taking commissions, Nagaraj decided to help the farmers. He contacted bank officials and began collecting Rs 10,000 worth of small change every day. He distributes this change without any commission to farmers and customers at the Rythu Bazaar every morning.

Even businesspersons he knows are supporting the cause he has espoused by providing small change, participating in this small service. Nagaraj mentioned that he started this initiative on his wedding anniversary after noticing difficulties being experienced by farmers who came from villages to sell their produce.

'Need to take measures to prevent drinking water shortage in summer'

PNS ■ NALGONDA

District Collector Ila Tripathi has stressed the need to take measures to ensure that there is no shortage of drinking water during the upcoming summer. She conducted a review meeting on Tuesday at the Nalgonda Municipal office.

She instructed ward officers to take proactive steps to prevent any inconvenience to the public regarding drinking water. She also suggested providing drinking water through water tankers if necessary, based on last year's demand for water. Additionally, she emphasised the importance of cleaning overhead tanks and water tanks regularly to avoid contamination, recommending the use of bleaching powder.

She said that measures should be in place to ensure that there is no disruption in water supply, especially in the suburbs of Nalgonda Municipality. Ila Tripathi also directed the officials of the Electricity Department to ensure that there are no power interruptions that may affect the water supply and stressed the importance of having contingency plans for electricity issues.



Nalgonda Collector Ila Tripathi holding a review meeting in Nalgonda on Tuesday

During the meeting, the Collector focused on the importance of maintaining sanitation, waste collection and ensuring a proper water and electricity supply. She also reviewed the progress of drinking water tank construction in the area.

The meeting was attended by Additional Collector J. Srinivas, Municipal Commissioner Syed Musab Ahmed, officials from RWSS, Mission Bhagiratha, Electricity, and Municipal ward officers.

17 sentenced to life for murder

PNS ■ YADADRI BHUVANAGIRI

In a case of murder driven by old rivalries in the Addaguduru Police Station limits, the Special Sessions Court in Nalgonda on Tuesday sentenced 17 individuals to life imprisonment. The incident occurred in 2017 in the village of Ajeempet.

According to prosecution, the deceased Battu Lingayya was previously involved in the death of an individual from the Yadav community. Lingayya's family, along with other community members, had nursed a grudge against him. During the Dasara celebrations, as the deceased's family participated in the festivities, an altercation led to a

violent clash, causing severe injuries and ultimately resulting in the death of Battu Lingayya. Once the incident was reported, the Addaguduru Police swiftly reached the crime scene and brought the situation under control. Based on the complaint filed by the family members, a case was registered under various sections of the IPC,

including 147, 302, 323, 504, 149, and 109, as well as the SC/ST Act. The investigation was carried out impartially and quickly under the supervision of higher authorities. After the presentation of evidence, the Nalgonda Special Sessions Court sentenced the 17 accused to life imprisonment, along with a fine of Rs 6000 each.

Gold trader arrested on charge of 'cheating'

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The Shadnagar police on Tuesday arrested Avusulu Naresh, the owner of Ankit Jewellers, for allegedly defrauding people under the guise of a gold savings scheme and chit business. The accused had reportedly deceived victims, including complainant Prabhakar, by showing them a gold shop and collecting nearly Rs 1 crore under false promises.



Shadnagar Circle Inspector Vijay Kumar announcing the arrest of gold trader on charge of cheating in Shadnagar on Tuesday

of crafting jewellery. Eventually, he fled without returning the money.

Based on technical evidence, Shadnagar police arrested the accused on February 17, 2025. They seized gold scheme records and a mobile phone linked to the case before sending him to judicial remand. The investigation was carried out under the guidance of Shamsabad Deputy Commissioner of Police Rajesh, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Ram

Kumar, and Shadnagar Assistant Commissioner of Police Ch Rangaswamy. Inspector P Vijay Kumar supervised the operation, with Investigating Officer S. Venkateswarlu DI, Crime DSI Shiva Reddy, and crime team personnel Mohan, Karnakar, Zakir, Raju, and Rafi playing a key role in solving the case.

In recognition of their efforts, the higher authorities have announced suitable rewards for the police team.

Circle Inspector, two constables in ACB trap

PNS ■ NARAYANPET

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in Telangana has intensified its operations with a series of raids. The ACB has been arresting government employees on graft charges. However, the behaviour of some government employees has not changed. The ACB is continuing its operations.

In the latest episode, the Circle Inspector of Maktal in Narayanpet district, along with two constables, was caught by the ACB while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000. The officials arrested are Maktal Circle Inspector Chandrashekar and constables Shivareddy and Narasimhulu.

According to ABC officials, a rape case was filed a few days ago against Sandhya Venkata Ramulu Gowd, who hailed from Mahabubnagar at the Maktal Police Station in Narayanpet district. The

accused, after going to the High Court, filed a petition and got bail. The High Court set certain conditions for bail, one of which was that the accused had to report to the Maktal Police Station every Monday and sign in.

Maktal Police Station constables Shivareddy and



Maktal Police Station Circle Inspector of Police and two constables

Narasimhulu allegedly demanded Rs 20,000 from the accused to modify the charge sheet in his favour. He then approached the ACB for help. This morning, while the accused was handing over Rs 20,000 to the police officer, the ACB officials caught them red-handed, the ACB Deputy Superintendent of Police Balakrishna said.

Migrant farmworkers come in handy in chilli crop harvesting

PNS ■ BHADRACHALAM KOTHAGUDEM

Migrant workers from Chhattisgarh and Odisha states have crossed state borders to work in Bhadrachalam Kothagudem district. Every year, thousands of workers are employed in the chilli harvesting work.

In the Chirala mandal of Bhadrachalam Kothagudem district, chilli has been cultivated across nearly 6,000 acres. Around 4,000 migrant workers from the Sukma and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh, and about 1,500 workers from Odisha, have been coming to this region for employment during the harvesting season. Temporary shelters have been set up in places like



Migrant workers

Talipeda and along the Godavari riverbanks. The workers earn around Rs 300 per day. This work provides them with employment for several months during the chilli harvesting season.

Local farmers said that but for these migrant workers from Chhattisgarh and Odisha, the chilli cultivation in this region would face a severe shortage of labour.

The arrival of these migrant workers has brought relief to the farmers.

With the influx of workers, the Godavari riverbank area has seen a lively atmosphere. Many migrant workers are living on sand dunes, which have become their makeshift homes.

They returned to the point of their origin soon after the harvesting is completed.

Electricity officials unveil Rs 14.14 cr plan

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

As part of the summer action plan, Electricity Department officials have proposed the establishment of five 33/11 KV substations in Mahabubnagar district to meet the anticipated peak demand, with a total estimated cost of Rs 14.14 crore.

Although summer is still a month away, the rapid depletion of groundwater due to intense heat has already led to a surge in power demand. To tackle these challenges and prevent issues like transformers fusing and tripping under the increased load, officials in Mahabubnagar and Narayanpet districts have developed a comprehensive plan. Key components of the plan include the development of a new 33 KV power line at a cost of Rs 4.94 crore, and an 11 KV line at Rs 1.84 crore.

Indian Bank KHAMMAM BRANCH, 2-2-3263, PER ROAD, BANCHOI CHOWK, KHAMMAM, TELANGANA-507003 Phone: (0874) 252305/89742/228347, Cell: 7983066547 Email: khammam@indianbank.co.in	
APPENDIX-IV (Rule-6(1)) POSSESSION NOTICE (FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTY) Where as the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the Indian Bank under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 (SARFAESI Act) in pursuance of the order of Section 13(1)(f) read with rule 6 and 9 of the Securitization (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 15/11/2024 and paper publication dated 20/11/2024 calling upon the Borrower/Equator:	
T. Borrower: Mr. Mohammed Farukuddin S/o Solavuddin Plot No. 6-2-362A, Sri Nagar Colony, Hyderabad Road, Nalgonda, Nalgonda Dist., Telangana-508001.	T. Co-Borrower: Mr. Mohammed Farukuddin S/o Solavuddin Plot No. 6-2-362A, Sri Nagar Colony, Hyderabad Road, Nalgonda, Nalgonda Dist., Telangana-508001.
with our Nalgonda Branch to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 14,14,14,14/- (Rupees Fourteen Lakhs Eighteen Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety Seven Only) with respect to Home Loan and Rs. 10,81,802/- (Rupees Ten Lakhs Sixty One Thousand Two Only) with respect to Home Loan Plus and the total amount as an accumulating loans in Rs. 24,78,469 (Rupees Twenty Four Lakhs Seventy Nine Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety Nine Only) as on 15/11/2024 with further interest and cost within 90 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.	
The borrower/quarter having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property on 14/02/2025 described herein before in schedule of contents collection form I filed under Section 13(1)(f) of the SARFAESI Act and the said date.	
The due attention to the provisions of Section 13(1)(f) of the SARFAESI Act and the Rules framed there under which deals with the rights of pledgee over the securities by the borrower.	
The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned that to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Indian Bank for an amount of Rs. 14,14,14,14/- (Rupees Fourteen Lakhs Eighteen Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety Seven Only) with respect to Home Loan and Rs. 10,81,802/- (Rupees Ten Lakhs Sixty One Thousand Two Only) with respect to Home Loan Plus and the total amount as an accumulating loans in Rs. 24,78,469 (Rupees Twenty Four Lakhs Seventy Nine Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety Nine Only) as on 15/11/2024 and further interest, costs and charges thereon.	
DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY All that part and parcel of land and residential house in Plot No. 24 of H No. 6-2-362A adjoining an extent of 236/30 Sq. Yards of Sri Nagar Colony, Hyderabad Road, Nalgonda within the limits of Nalgonda Municipal Corporation, Nalgonda Mandal and Dist., Nalgonda Sub-Registration Dist., Nalgonda/Registration Dist bounded by: North/Plot No. 18 South/30/4 road/wide road, East/Plot No. 25, West/Plot No. 23;	
(S: SRINATH KOLLU) Chief Manager/Autobond Officer, Indian Bank, Khammam Branch, H.No.2-2-32 & 33, P.S.R ROAD, Gandhi Chowk, Khammam, Pin-507003.	

TURNING GRIEF INTO LIFE

PNS ■ HANAMKONDA

Good people are like candles. They burn themselves up to give others light. Similarly, those who donate their organs, even after death, give the gift of life to many others. The best way to live after death is through organ donation. If the organs of the deceased can be provided to those in need, it brings new light to many families, this is how the enlightened people in Mucharla village in the district.

quarters, has a population of 500. The people of this village are socially conscious and have pledged to donate their eyes after death to bring light into someone else's life. With hearts of gold, they are making efforts to dispel darkness from the lives of as many people as possible.

Over the past few years, around 70 villagers donated their eyes, setting an example for others.

Ravinder, a local from the village, took the first step in this noble work. Ravinder, a Deputy Engineer in the Irrigation Department, lost his mother 12 years ago. He decided to donate her eyes to perpetuate her memory and bring light to those in need. Later, in 2019, he also donated



his father's eyes. Not stopping there, he started raising awareness about organ donation, especially eye donation, among the villagers. With his encouragement, many villagers decided to donate their

eyes. So far, 70 people from Mucharla village have donated their eyes. Inspired by Mucharla, around 20 people from nearby villages have also donated their eyes. Whenever

anyone passes away in the region, the local eye donation team from the Warangal Regional Eye Hospital is informed. They collect the eyes and send them to the Eye Bank. The corneas are collected within six to eight hours after death and are then transferred to the LV Prasad Eye Institute in Hyderabad, where they are transplanted into those in need.

Through eye donation, the villagers of Mucharla are giving sight to those who are blind, allowing them to see the world even after their loved ones have passed away. They take great satisfaction in restoring sight to those who have lost it, as millions of people across the country suffer from corneal blindness.

ACROSS THE STATES



No road connectivity in 8,300 villages in Odisha

In all, 8,300 villages in Odisha have no road connectivity, a minister told the Assembly on Tuesday. In a written reply to a question by BJP legislator Tankadhar Tripathy, the minister for panchayati raj and drinking water, Rabi Narayan Naik, said out of 59,971 villages in the state, road connectivity has been provided to 51,671 villages under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and other state-sponsored schemes in a phased manner. Naik said road connectivity has not been provided to 8,300 villages as those habitations are not eligible to be covered under the schemes. However, the cabinet has recently approved the PMGSY-IV scheme, and a survey to identify unconnected villages is going on in different states, he said. The minister said the exact data on the number of villages and hamlets which don't have all-weather roads can be provided after the survey. According to data provided by Naik, Koraput district topped the list of unconnected habitations with 1,374 followed by Rayagada (1099) and Nabarangpur (641).



UPSC extends last date to apply for prelims exam

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has extended the last date to apply for this year's civil services preliminary examination till February 21. This is the second extension in the deadline for applying to the examination, conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages - preliminary, mains and interview -- to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), among others. The last date for submission for Civil Services (Preliminary)-2025 and Indian Forest Service (Preliminary)-2025 has been further extended till 21.02.2025 (6 pm), said a notice put out by the Commission on its website. Further, a correction window will also be open for the applicants "from 22.02.2025 to 28.02.2025", read the notice, without mentioning any reasons behind the second extension. The Commission had recently also introduced certain changes in its online application system for the exam after aspirants complained of technical glitches while applying through it. Candidates are required to apply online by using the website <http://upsconline.gov.in>.



1 crore devotees visited Kashi temple from Feb 1-17

Amid the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, more than one crore devotees have visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple here during the first 17 days of this month, officials said on Tuesday. The number of pilgrims visiting the temple has broken all previous records, leading to overcrowded streets and transport hubs, they said. Due to the massive crowd, authorities have closed schools up to Class 8 since January 27 in Varanasi. The influx of devotees in Kashi is due to the Maha Kumbh, with lakhs of them arriving in the holy city after visiting Prayagraj. Heavy congestion has been reported at railway stations, bus depots, and key areas such as Maidaganj, Godowlia, and Dashashwamedh. The famous 'Ganga Aarti' is being symbolically conducted to manage the situation and will continue this way until February 26 when the 45-day Maha Kumbh Mela will conclude.

India-Qatar decide to elevate ties to 'strategic partnership'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday held wide-ranging talks with Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani as the two leaders decided to elevate India-Qatar relations to a "strategic partnership" with a focus on trade, investments, technology, energy and people-to-people ties, further cementing the "deep and traditional relationship" between the two countries. They also exchanged views on "regional and global issues" of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

The Amir of Qatar's two-day visit comes at the invitation of Modi. This is his second state visit to India. He earlier visited India in March 2015. His visit will provide "further momentum to our growing multifaceted partnership", the MEA had said ahead of the visit that began on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the Amir of Qatar was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as President Droupadi Murmu welcomed the visiting leader. Modi was also present on the occasion. Later, Modi and the Amir held talks at the Hyderabad

PM Modi, Amir of Qatar hold talks



House covering a range of bilateral issues.

India and Qatar on Tuesday also exchanged an agreement on establishment of strategic partnership between the two countries.

The documents were exchanged between Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin

Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in the presence of Prime Minister Modi and the Amir of Qatar here.

"India-Qatar, further cementing the deep & traditional relationship. PM @narendramodi & HH Sheikh @TamimbinHamad

Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar held wide-ranging talks at Hyderabad House today. Both leaders decided to elevate India-Qatar relations to a Strategic Partnership with focus on trade, energy, investments, innovation, technology, food security, culture & people-to-people ties. They also exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

India and Qatar have deep-rooted historical ties of friendship, trust and mutual respect. In recent years, the ties between the two countries, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people relations, have continued to strengthen, the MEA earlier said.

As the two leaders held talks at the Hyderabad House, the MEA in a post on X said, a "new milestone" was on the cards of this "special India-Qatar partnership".

A revised agreement for avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, between India and Qatar, was also exchanged, it was announced during the exchange of agreements ceremony held at the Hyderabad House.

'Focused on integrating Northeast into devpt journey'

PNS ■ KOHIMA

Union Minister of State Kriti Vardhan Singh on Tuesday said that the Centre has been focused on integrating Northeast into the development journey of the country.

Addressing reporters during his maiden visit to the Northeast starting with Nagaland, Singh, who is MoS for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, asserted that the region plays a vital role in India's overall development and reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering growth and improving connectivity.

"Since the current government came to power, efforts to uplift the Northeast have gained momentum, with a focus on improving infrastructure and ensuring the region's alignment with the growth of the national economy," he said.

The minister lauded the Union budget, noting its significant provisions for boosting various sectors such as agriculture, small-scale industries, defence production and employment.

"The budget reflects the aspirations of the Indian people and the



vision of a developed and self-reliant India by 2047," Singh said, while also pointing out the emphasis on agricultural reforms, quality education, and women's empowerment, as well as efforts to raise productivity through improved infrastructure, particularly in roadways, railways, and air connectivity.

Addressing questions about the Northeast, the Union MoS acknowledged the historical challenges regarding infrastructure and connectivity in the region.

However, he highlighted recent efforts under the UDAN scheme,

which has significantly improved air connectivity, as well as new railway stations and expanded road networks. He promised continued development to address the region's infrastructural needs.

On the issue of services at Dimapur railway station, where the number of trains has been reduced, the minister said that the expansion of regional stations and highways had led to some adjustments in train routes.

He also assured of looking into issues of removing trains originating from Dimapur.

Regarding the long-delayed second airport project in Nagaland, at state capital Kohima, the minister acknowledged the difficulties in progressing with the airport development but assured that 50 new airports, with a focus on Northeast India, were planned in the current budget.

He said he would take up the matter with the authorities concerned to push for timely resolution.

Touching upon concerns about the re-imposition of Protected Area Regime (PAR), particularly affecting foreign tourists visiting the state, the

Mamata denies links with B'deshi terrorists

Challenges BJP to prove charge

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday rejected allegations by BJP MLAs that she has links with terrorists and fundamentalists in Bangladesh, stating that she would resign if they could prove such claims.

Addressing the assembly, Banerjee criticised the saffron party legislators for making "baseless remarks" against her and said she would write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to complain about such claims. "The BJP leaders and MLAs are making baseless allegations that I have connections with terrorists in Kashmir and terrorists and fundamentalists of Bangladesh. If the BJP can prove I have connections with terrorists and fundamentalists, I would resign," the TMC supremo said.

Banerjee said she would write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, complaining that his party's MLAs were accusing her of having ties with Bangladeshi fundamentalists despite a lack of evidence. "It is better to die than to be falsely



accused of terrorism," she added. "Freedom of speech does not mean inciting hatred or dividing the House. Freedom of speech is not hate speech. You (BJP MLAs) exploit religion for political gains, but we do not," Banerjee said, emphasising her belief in secularism and the peaceful coexistence of all communities.

She also charged the BJP with using religion for political gains.

Referring to the ongoing tension in Bangladesh, the chief minister highlighted that it was her government's efforts that had ensured peace and harmony in West Bengal amid unrest in the neighbouring country.

Will work to bring Cong back to power in Maha: Sapkal

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Newly-appointed Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal on Tuesday took charge of his post and said he would work to strengthen the party's organization in the state and bring it back to power. Speaking at the party meeting after taking over from former state unit chief Nana Patole, Sapkal sought cooperation from party workers as well as leaders to revive Congress in Maharashtra. "If we don't try, we will not succeed," he said. He attacked the Bharatiya



Janata Party over its drive to enroll one crore members in Maharashtra and its claim to be the biggest party, adding that it was actually weak in the state.

"If it is the biggest political party, what was the need for it to break the Shiv Sena and NCP, and take Congress leaders in its fold," he said. He wanted honest and committed workers for rebuilding Congress in Maharashtra, Sapkal said. "I want to tell AICC in-charge Ramesh Chennithala that I will not vie for any other post, including chief minister. I don't want to become CM, MP or MLA. I will work to ensure that Congress returns to power and a Congress leader becomes chief minister," he said.

'Still in shock about what happened to us'

Deportee shares experience at US detention centre

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

No proper food, articles of Sikh faith into the dustbin being thrown in to the dustbin and thin blankets to cope with the cold due to air conditioners being run at low temperatures; is how 21-year-old Davinder Singh describes his traumatic experience at the US detention centre after he was apprehended while crossing the US border illegally.

Hailing from the village of Nangal Jalalpur in Punjab's Hoshiarpur district, Singh was among the second batch of 116 illegal Indian immigrants brought back in a US in a military aircraft on Saturday night.

"The air conditioning was run at an extremely low temperature round the clock in the detention center in the US, and we were given only wafer-thin blankets, which could not provide any sort of protection," claimed Singh, adding that he saw US officials throwing turbans -- an article of Sikh faith -- of many Sikh illegal immigrants into the dustbin.

"It was very painful watching turbans being thrown into a dustbin," Davinder told

PTI. Compelled to migrate to the US for a better life, Davinder set off on a perilous journey on June 28 last year. He was taken to several countries, including Amsterdam, Suriname, Guatemala and even traversed through the Panama forest.

Davinder said he crossed the US border on January 27, after which he and others were apprehended by the US Border Patrol.

He said they were taken to a detention centre where he spent 18 of the worst days of his life.

Davinder said they were kept in a hall with 60 to 70 illegal immigrants from various countries under the constant watch of US officials. He said the air conditioners were run non-stop at a very low temperature, and they were given thin blankets, which were even thinner than silver foil paper and one could see through them.

Their pleas for shutting off the AC or increasing the temperature fell on deaf ears. "When we would tell them we were feeling cold, they wouldn't bother at all," he said.

K'taka CM prefers silence over 'power-sharing pact' in govt

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Amid a tussle between Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar and Cooperative Minister K N Rajanna over the 'power-sharing agreement', Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said he would prefer not to speak.

It was rumoured that there was a secret power-sharing formula, according to which Siddaramaiah would be the chief minister for the first half of the Congress government's five-year term and then Shivakumar would replace him. A section of Congress MLAs and ministers has been backing Siddaramaiah and want him to complete the five-year term.

On the other hand, Shivakumar, who is also the Congress state president, has been trying to silence his opponents within the party, asking them to refrain from any such discussions as it causes damage to the party.

During an interaction with reporters on Tuesday, Siddaramaiah preferred not to speak on the issue. "I will not speak about the controversy now. Rajanna and Shivakumar have expressed their views," he said.

When asked whether the power-sharing agreement was for real, he said, "How many times should I tell you that the high command takes the final decision? Whatever they (high command) decide will be applicable to all". Rajanna on Monday hit out at Shivakumar, urging him not to "misuse" the name of the AICC and the party high command.

Researchers link gene to emergence of spoken language

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Why did humans start speaking? Scientists suggest genetics played a big role -- and they say the evolution of this singular ability was key to our survival.

A new study links a particular gene to the ancient origins of spoken language, proposing that a protein variant found only in humans may have helped us communicate in a novel way. Speech allowed us to share information, coordinate activities and pass down knowledge, giving us an edge over extinct cousins like Neanderthals and Denisovans.

The new study is "a good first step to start looking at the specific genes" that may affect speech and language development, said Liza Finestack at the University of Minnesota, who was not involved with the research.

What scientists learn may someday even help people with speech problems.

The genetic variant researchers were looking at was one of a variety of genes "that

contributed to the emergence of Homo sapiens as the dominant species, which we are today" said Dr Robert Darnell, an author of the study published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications.

Darnell has been studying the protein -- called NOVA1 and known to be crucial to brain development -- since the early 1990s. For the latest research, scientists in his lab at New York's Rockefeller University used CRISPR gene editing to replace the NOVA1 protein found in mice with the exclusively human type to test the real-life effects of the genetic variant. To their surprise, it changed the way the animals vocalised when they called out to each other.

Baby mice with the human variant squeaked differently than normal littermates when their mom came around. Adult male mice with the variant chirped differently than their normal counterparts when they saw a female in heat.

Both are settings where mice are moti-



vated to speak, Darnell said, "and they spoke differently" with the human variant, illustrating its role in speech.

This isn't the first time a gene has been

linked to speech. In 2001, British scientists said they had discovered the first gene tied to a language and speech disorder.

Called FOXP2, it was referred to as the

human language gene. But though FOXP2 is involved in human language, it turned out that the variant in modern humans wasn't unique to us. Later research found it was shared with Neanderthals. The NOVA1 variant in modern humans, on the other hand, is found exclusively in our species, Darnell said.

The presence of a gene variant isn't the only reason people can speak. The ability also depends on things like anatomical features in the human throat and areas of the brain that work together to allow people to speak and understand language.

Darnell hopes the recent work not only helps people better understand their origins but also eventually leads to new ways to treat speech-related problems.

University of Minnesota's Finestack said it's more likely the genetic findings might someday allow scientists to detect, very early in life, who might need speech and language interventions.

"That's certainly a possibility," she said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

New CEC takes over

Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner by the PM-led selection committee amid criticism

The senior Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The decision was made by the Prime Minister-led selection committee, which also named Haryana Chief Secretary Vivek Joshi as an Election Commissioner. However, the appointment has sparked controversy, with the Congress party questioning the process and alleging a lack of transparency. For decades, the Government held the power to appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. However, in 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that appointments should be made by a panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and the Leader of the Opposition (LoP). Despite this ruling, the new CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, replaced the CJI with a cabinet minister, a change that has been challenged in court. Gyanesh Kumar, is a seasoned bureaucrat and was appointed as an Election Commissioner in March 2023. He has a tenure extending until January 26, 2029, meaning he will oversee critical elections, including the 2029 general elections. His selection follows the convention of appointing the senior-most Election Commissioner to the role of CEC. Gyanesh Kumar replaces Rajiv Kumar, whose term concluded recently.



The Congress party, led by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, has strongly opposed the appointment process. Gandhi submitted a dissent note during the selection committee meeting, urging the Government to defer the decision until the Supreme Court rules on the validity of the selection panel's composition.

Congress leaders Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Ajay Maken have argued that proceeding with the appointment while the court is hearing a challenge to the new selection law undermines democratic principles. The government's decision to exclude the CJI from the selection panel and desperation to elect the CEC before the judgement indeed creates an impression that the Government wants to have its way in the election of Chief Election Commissioner. Ensuring transparency and balance in selecting election officials is crucial to maintaining a fair democratic process. Meanwhile, Vivek Joshi, a 1989 batch IAS officer, is set to serve as an Election Commissioner until February 2030. The Supreme Court has yet to issue a final verdict on the legality of the new selection process. The outcome of this legal battle could shape the future of India's electoral governance for years to come. To put things in perspective, the Election Commission plays a crucial role in the government machinery during elections and can significantly impact their outcomes. However, it is often influenced by the government through the appointment of favorable officials. It was, in fact, TN Seshan who, as Chief Election Commissioner, challenged government control and brought a sense of independence to the Commission.

PICTALK



A squirrel enjoys palash flowers, in Nadia

Bangladesh wipes out history, shuns India at its own peril

With opposition forces emboldened, Bangladesh appears to be at a turning point, grappling with a shifting political landscape and growing internal discord



ASHOK K MEHTA

As a Mukti Jodha (freedom fighter - that's what Bangladeshis call Indian Army personnel who fought the Liberation War), I'm appalled at the recent turn of events, the mayhem in Dhaka and many parts of Bangladesh following Sheikh Hasina's virtual address to her party supporters from somewhere near Delhi which provided the pretext for the students of the protest movement and parties opposed to Awami League to set ablaze 32 Dhanmondi residence of Mujibur Rehman and a museum in his name.

Perhaps nothing 'physical' remains of Mujib's legacy even as Hasina said: "History cannot be wiped out". Mahfuz Alam, one of the student advisors to Mohammad Yunus, noted that symbols of fascism were being dismantled. Surprisingly BNP Secretary General Faqurul Aslam Alamgir protested the disorder and violence at a meeting with Yunus where he sought early elections. Later, he asked India to hand over Hasina and her accomplices to the government in Dhaka for trial.

Army Chief, Gen Waqar uz Zaman also commented on the negative effect on internal stability by adverse law and order situation but significantly noting that India is a big country and important neighbour. It is important for good relations for the security interests of both countries, he added. India has called the violence as 'regrettable' attracting a summoning of its acting High Commissioner in Dhaka. India-Bangladesh relations will get a lot worse before they get any better despite Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Dhaka in November and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's meeting with Touheed Hasan, acting advisor to the interim government in Bangladesh last Sunday in Delhi. One thing is becoming clear: a new Bangladesh is evolving and this is the real one, unlike the new Nepal expected after the 10-year civil war. Last August in one week the face of Bangladesh changed and is changing by the day by design.

The Americans were being blamed for regime change. The US and India were never on the same page in the last many



decades here. In an interview with The Hindustan Times, Lisa Curtis, a Trump 1.0 White House NSC chief of South and Central Asia, has dismissed any US role in Hasina's ouster. Last week, PM Modi raised concerns about Bangladesh with President Trump who denied any role of US Deep State in it. But for India, there are lessons from events in Bangladesh that the establishment is silent about because there was non-partisan support for Hasina and Awami League with the country's liberation linked to Mujib and India.

After Mujib's assassination in 1975, Hasina and her sister Rehana were provided refuge in India; history repeated itself in 2024. I was invited in November 2023, two months before the elections, to speak at the Liberation War Museum on the role of Chancellor Willy Brandt of Germany. One of the trustees of the museum, Dr Mofidul Hoque, took me around the museum. There was a section completely devoted to the political movement against Rawalpindi led by Sheikh Mujib called Story of Liberation Under a Genocide. The accent of the display depicted the liberation war fought by Bengali Mukti Jodhas with India in a support role. But it did have a gallery



AFTER MUJIB'S ASSASSINATION IN 1975, HASINA AND HER SISTER REHANA WERE PROVIDED REFUGE IN INDIA; HISTORY REPEATED ITSELF IN 2024

Bahini by the Indian Army. During my five-day visit, the BNP was out of the streets every other day coupling with garment factory workers and their unions demanding higher wages. A virtual war was being fought on the streets with the dominant Awami League counter-protestors unleashed.

Most people I spoke to said if there was a free and fair election BNP would win. This was one view I received even from our High Commission. While people were angry with India for supporting Hasina, the media was scared of the government. Despite the negative vibes of the Hasina regime, Delhi was reluctant to abandon her. I wonder what inputs Indian intelligence agencies had provided. They likely failed to read the mood of the people which led to a students' revolt.

One other truth and for me, the most significant was that the goodwill dividend of India's support to the liberation war and attainment of nationhood has dissipated - to put it crudely, the use-by date was long over. The 1970 military vintage soldier had disappeared nearly two decades ago from all three armed forces - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In any case, very few units from East Pakistan Rifles and still fewer Bengalis

in the Pakistan Army were deployed in East Pakistan. The war effort was predominantly India with Mukti Bahini in support; that was the ground reality. As far as the Liberation War is concerned, Bangladesh had changed the narrative (history) as was evident from the Liberation War Museum. For India though, it was an iconic, once-in-a-thousand-year victory (over arch-enemy Pakistan) which became a landmark event for the Indian political and military leadership to celebrate and commemorate.

Yunus's Law Advisor, Arif Nazrul has said: "India was only an ally in the 1971 war victory, nothing more", a sentiment that was endorsed by the office of the interim government. Hasina's second spell of refuge in India is a matter of immense resentment in Bangladesh, but Delhi will not let down a friend and ally. India has opened its doors to several leaders fleeing from Nepal, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Maldives. But for housing Hasina, there will be costs for India.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KHELO INDIA WINTER GAMES POSTPONED

Madam — Climate change has finally made its presence felt by disrupting the 'Khelo India' to be held in Gulmarg. The second and final stage of the Khelo India Winter Games 2025, scheduled to be held in Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir from Saturday, has been postponed due to insufficient snowfall. The revised schedule will be announced when the weather conditions are favourable for the competitions. But now it does not seem that this will happen because now the spring season is going to enter the country. This is the second consecutive year that the event has been rescheduled due to insufficient snowfall. Last year, the Games had to be postponed till February after there was no rain in January.

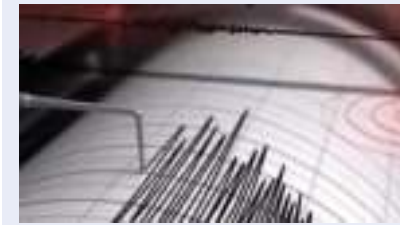
The lack of snowfall in many areas is mainly due to climate change, as rising temperatures lead to more precipitation in the form of rain rather than snow, leading to a decrease in snow piles and snow cover, especially in mountainous areas. This phenomenon is often called "snow drought." It is not just India that is being affected by climate; it is a global problem. The whole world is grappling with it. I think the way temperatures are rising and the problem of forest fires, not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, are making people feel helpless. It is quite possible that after the next few years, it will be difficult to even host the Winter Olympic Games. In the future, sports like ice hockey and ice skating will disappear into the pages of history.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

SC QUESTIONS GOVERNOR'S ACTIONS

Madam— The Supreme Court, while reserving its judgment on the writ petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Government, stated in unambiguous terms that Governor Ravindra Narayana Ravi's action of transferring the nine bills to the President of India after their re-enactment and re-submission was not in accordance with the provisions in the Constitution. The court noted that Governor Ravi had

Earthquake jolts Delhi



Residents of Delhi and its adjoining areas woke up to strong tremors caused by an earthquake of magnitude 4.0 on Monday morning. According to the National Centre of Seismology, the quake hit at a depth of about 5 km. Videos showed the ground and buildings shaking, forcing people to rush out of their homes. There have been no reports of casualties or damage to properties, but many residents claimed

that the tremors were so strong that it felt like a bridge was collapsing. However, the quake itself was not of a high-intensity magnitude. The gravity of the situation soon gave way to humour as social media users began sharing their reactions to the unexpected jolt. Memes and jokes flooded various platforms, with many poking fun at the situation while still conveying their fear and disbelief. While the suddenness of the earthquake understandably caused concern among residents, the quick wit and resilience of the people of Delhi-NCR were on full display as they found ways to cope with the unexpected turn of events. Like Mumbai rains, the Delhi tremor gave a tough time to people there, but it was business as usual once the tremor settled.

Aarohi Gupta | Ujjain

INDUSTRY STATUS FOR TOURISM

Madam — The Kerala government is planning to grant industry status to its tourism sector and cleared the way for the long-pending demand of the state tourism and hospitality sector of a specific area.

Granting industry status to that specific area will encourage investment and development in that sector. Although it has been estimated that the Kerala tourism sector is providing direct or indirect employment to 25 lakh people since 2018, rapid urbanisation, infra-structural development, and natural calamities and catastrophes could possibly lead to an all-time low. The step initiated by the government authority for turning Kerala tourism into an industry-specific area could benefit the mass audience and also help with better employment opportunities in the near future.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

"adopted his own procedure" when dealing with the bills. In its November 2023 order on the functioning of governors, the Apex Court had underscored the importance of upholding the spirit of Article 200. The court affirmed that governors cannot delay bills indefinitely.

The Supreme Court then observed that unfettered discretion to the governor would "virtually veto the functioning of the legislative domain by a duly elected legislature" and noted that "such a course of action would be contrary to fundamental principles of a constitutional democracy based on a parliamentary pattern of governance." It seems that the Governor of Tamil Nadu has little regard for the constitutional limitations and the rulings of the Supreme Court. In this context, the President of India's choices and her reticence were disheartening. Two of the bills referred to her have received assents, while the remaining are still under consideration. The impending verdict of the top court will be crucial in resolving this impasse.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Cracking CUET: A step-by-step guide to smart preparation

By understanding the exam format, setting clear goals, and following an organised study schedule, students can cover the syllabus while boosting confidence

Preparing for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) can feel overwhelming, especially when juggling schoolwork and other responsibilities. However, CUET has transformed the university admissions process and a well-structured preparation plan can help you cover the syllabus effectively while boosting your confidence. By following a strategic approach over a few months, you can significantly enhance your chances of success.

Step 1: Understand the CUET Exam Structure Before diving into preparation, familiarise yourself with the exam format. CUET typically consists of Language, Domain-Specific Subjects, and a General Test. It is essential to obtain the official syllabus for each section and review it thoroughly. Understanding the types of questions, including multiple-choice and short-answer formats, is crucial. Be mindful of the marking scheme, particularly any negative marking. **Step 2: Assess Your Readiness:** Start by evaluating your current knowledge and preparedness. Ask your-



self whether you have covered the syllabus for all sections, how confident you feel about scoring well on a scale of 1 to 5, and which section you find most challenging. **Step 3: Set Clear Goals** Define your objectives based on your preferred university and course. Research the CUET score requirements for institutions like Delhi University, Banaras Hindu University and JNU. Having a clear goal will keep you motivated and focused throughout your preparation journey.

Step 4: Allocate Study Time Using insights from your self-assessment, create a balanced study plan. If you are strong in certain subjects, spend less time on them but focus on regular revision. Dedicate more time to weaker subjects to better understand concepts and solve practice ques-

tions. For example, if the General Test is particularly challenging, allocate 1.5-2 hours daily to this section while spending an hour on Language or Domain-Specific Subjects.

Step 5: Weekly Study Schedule A well-structured timetable ensures consistency. A practical approach is to focus on one major subject per day from Monday to Friday. Saturday can be dedicated to taking mock tests and analysing performance, while Sunday should be reserved for reviewing the week's progress, revising difficult topics, and taking time to relax and recharge. Using time-blocking techniques by dividing the day into study, practice, and relaxation slots can be highly effective.

Step 6: Right Study Resources Relying on quality study materials is essential. NCERT textbooks provide conceptual clarity, while CUET-specific guides and reference books offer targeted preparation. Online platforms that provide mock tests and video lectures can be valuable resources. Practising with previous years' question papers helps in identifying

important topics and understanding question trends.

Step 7: Regular Mock Tests Mock tests play a crucial role in CUET preparation. Aim to take at least one full-length test per week and gradually increase the frequency as the exam approaches.

Step 8: Exam Logistics Since CUET is a computer-based test, familiarising yourself with the technical requirements is necessary. Marking significant dates on a calendar will help in avoiding last-minute surprises.

Step 9: Maintain a Balance Avoiding burnout is vital for effective preparation. Incorporate short breaks into your study routine and engage in activities like exercise or meditation to stay refreshed. Ensuring you get seven to eight hours of sleep daily will help in maintaining focus and energy levels.

Step 10: Stay Positive Consistency is the key to achieving success in CUET. Sticking to your study plan while remaining adaptable to changes will be beneficial.

(The writer is Managing Partner, FinTram Global LLP; views are personal)



PANKAJ DHINGRA



FIRST COLUMN

THE SELECTIVE NARRATIVES THAT SHAPE OUR LEGACY

History is often told from the perspective of the victors, shaping collective memory in ways that serve those in power



APS MALHOTRA

It is a well-established fact that History, often, is written from the perspective of the victor, making it a one-dimensional testimony of what transpired. Thus, while for the British Imperial power, the tumultuous events of 1857 were an unsuccessful mutiny by sepoys from across the subcontinent, for us, it is the celebrated 1st War of Independence. Before being put down with unprecedented vengeance and ferocity, it ignited a spark of 'freedom' which continued to inspire generations to come, although, in the process, they sowed venomous seeds of communal discord, deftly using their devious policy of divide and rule, which continue to rile us to this day.

Not surprisingly, the events instilled such fear in the minds of our forefathers that it was several decades before any credible stirrings for a fight to overthrow the yoke of imperialism were felt. To take this forward, while Bhagat Singh & his young comrades might have been treated as terrorists/ militants/ extremists by the British, their cohorts and courts, we extoll them as valiant freedom fighters and martyrs, so much so, that more than a century after Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life for the liberation of the motherland, we are witnessing a massive surge in his following, especially in the youth.

It is not difficult to gauge this- there is a proliferation of his photographs - on the rear of cabs and auto-rickshaws, trucks and buses, emblazoned on T-shirts, and so on. Given all this, what startled me, and raised my hackles was Rajmohan Gandhi's book, Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten. Otherwise, a well-researched and thoughtfully written book, his treat-



ment of the life and times of Bhagat Singh is rather disappointing- in a tome of more than 400 pages, there are just a few lines- a cursory mention of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Sadly, even in these lines, they are not feted as freedom fighters, but rather disparagingly, as delinquent and misguided youth, militant in their approach, hellbent on derailing the course of the freedom struggle. Well, while all of us have the liberty or freedom to form our opinion, in a broader sense, it needs to be noted that sensitivities of a significant mass of our population don't get hurt. Because, if the Butcher of Amritsar became a celebrated hero among a section of his countrymen, hailed as "the man who saved India" and a beneficiary of a fund of over ₹26,000, then, we need serious introspection as to how we portray our martyrs for the generations to come, because, as I repeatedly quote the words of George Santayana- "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The way history is written shapes how future generations perceive their past. The events of 1857 and Bhagat Singh's sacrifices remain crucial in our national consciousness, inspiring countless individuals. Yet, the selective representation of these figures in historical narratives raises concerns. When colonial figures like Dyer are glorified, while our martyrs are downplayed or misrepresented, it calls for reflection. As a society, we must ensure that our heroes are remembered with the respect they deserve. After all, history is not just about the past—it is a guide for the future, reminding us never to forget our hard-fought struggles.

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

Balancing growth with fiscal discipline



UTTAM GUPTA

Key measures, including tax reliefs and incentives for private sector, reflect a balanced approach to making India a developed economy by 2047



A theme that reverberates in the Union Budget for FY 2025-26 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2025, is 'sustaining the momentum of high economic growth alongside sticking to fiscal consolidation'. During FY 2024-25, the GDP growth (gross domestic product) is estimated at 6.4 per cent which is more or less close to the 6.5 per cent - 7 per cent projected in the Economic Survey (ES) for 2023-24 presented by Sitharaman in the Parliament on February 1, 2024. For FY 2025-26, according to the Economic Survey presented by her on February 1, 2025, the GDP is projected to expand between 6.3 per cent - 6.8 per cent. On top of a growth of 8 per cent plus for three consecutive years beginning FY 2021-22 and 6.4 per cent during FY 2024-25, this is a fairly impressive number in sync with the overarching goal of making India a 'developed economy' by 2047. As for fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts), in her interim budget presented on February 1, 2024, she had set a target of 5.1 per cent of the nominal GDP (NGDP). Subsequently, in the full budget for FY 2024-25 presented on July 23, 2024, she revised it downward to 4.9 per cent of the GDP taking into account the extra cushion of Rs 130,000 crore in the dividend transferred by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the Central Government from its operations during the FY 2023-24 (the actual dividend transfer was Rs 210,000 crore against a provision of Rs 80,000 crore made in the interim budget). Going by the revised estimate (RE) presented by the FM on February 1, 2025, the FD for FY 2024-25 has turned out to be even lower at 4.8 per cent of the NGDP. Even as the total revenue expenditure at Rs 3698,000 crore is only marginally lower than the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 3709,401 crore, the RE for capital expenditure is about Rs 1018,000 crore - a significant Rs 93,000 crore less than the BE of Rs 1111,111 crore. Indeed, this is a major reason behind a reduction of one percentage point in the FD over the BE. In the budget for FY 2025-26, the FM has provided for a total expendi-



THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS NEED TO BE COMPLEMENTED BY THE OWNERS OF BUSINESSES. THEY SHOULD GO FOR BETTER DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME THROUGH MEASURES SUCH AS KEEPING PRICES LOW, INCREASING SALARIES AT THE LOWER RUNGS, REINVESTING PROFITS FOR GROWTH ETC

ture of Rs 5065,000 crore which is a significant increase of 7.4 per cent over the RE for FY 2024-25 at Rs 4716,000 crore. This includes capital expenditure of Rs 1121,000 crore, the remaining Rs 3944,000 crore being the provision for revenue expenditure. Sitharaman has received flak for going slow on investment. This is unjustified and out of sync with the underlying facts. We need to compare the budget provision with RE for FY 2024-25. On this basis, the provision of Rs 1121,000 crore is 10.1 per cent higher than the actual capital expenditure during 2024-25. That apart, the position about the government's capital spending has to be viewed in totality. In her Budget for FY 2019-20, Sitharaman had laid a roadmap for catapulting the Indian economy to US \$5 trillion by 2024-25. In sync with this target, she had projected an investment requirement of over Rs 100,00,000 crore to build the infrastructure over five years. Of this, 39 per cent or Rs 39,000,000 crore was to come from the Centre and states each and the balance was Rs 22,00,000 crore from the private sector. The Centre's actual capital expenditure was for 2020-21: Rs 439,000 crore; 2021-22: Rs 554,000 crore; 2022-23: Rs 750,000 crore; 2023-24: Rs 1000,961 crore and Rs 1018,000 crore for 2024-25. Over five years, the total comes to Rs 3761,000 crore which is more or less close to the amount the Centre intended to contribute. Continuing with the above trend, a substantial allocation of Rs 1121,000 crore for 2025-26 shows the determination of the government to maintain the momentum of investment in building roads, highways, expressways, waterways, ports, airports, railways, irrigation projects, hospitals, schools, technical and research institutions and

so on in symphony with strengthening the foundations of the economy for a VIKSIT BHARAT by 2047. But, investment by the central government alone won't be enough to give the intended boost to the economy. The States and private sector also need to do their bit. The Centre has been helping the former to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans. During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For FY 2024-25, the transfers were kept at Rs 150,000 crore though the states didn't fully utilize the amount. For FY 2025-26 also, the budget allocation is kept at Rs 150,000 crore. To promote investment in the private sector, the Centre has given a host of incentives to industries and businesses. Amongst others, these included a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises. In 2024-25, the tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 percent to 35 percent. But, the private sector has complained of 'demand constraint'. Team Modi has addressed this as well. In the budget for FY 2024-25, Sitharaman altered tax slabs under the New Income Tax (IT) regime besides increasing the standard deduction by Rs 25,000. This resulted in a relief of around Rs 17,500 in personal income tax or PIT. In the budget for FY 2025-26, she has given a bonanza by announcing that a person earning Rs 1200,000 per annum need not pay any tax (taking into account the standard deduction of Rs 75,000/- now, the threshold comes to Rs 1275,000). Besides, she has altered the tax slabs to give relief even to persons earning more. Thus, a person earning Rs 2400,000 per annum will pay Rs

110,000 less. Consequent to these changes, the taxpayers will gain Rs 100,000 crore annually. These savings will be distributed amongst a total of 7 crore persons who won't have to pay any tax. This will give a big boost to demand. However, this by itself won't give the required fillip. The government's efforts need to be complemented by the owners of businesses. They should go for better distribution of income through measures such as keeping prices low, increasing salaries at the lower rungs, reinvesting profits for growth etc. Coming to FD, apart from lower capital expenditure (than BE), the contribution of buoyant tax collections in containing it at 4.8 per cent of the NGDP during FY 2024-25, can't be brushed aside. The RE of gross tax revenue (GTR) during the year at Rs 3850,000 crore is higher than the BE of Rs 3840,000 crore which itself was 14.6 per cent higher than GTR of Rs 3350,000 crore during 2023-24. For 2025-26, FM has kept the FD target at 4.4 per cent. To achieve it, she has set the GTR collections at still higher Rs 4270,000 crore. This despite lower tax rates shows that the government's efforts at broadening the tax base and ensuring tax compliance are working. In an interview, Sitharaman cited capital expenditure of 4.3 per cent as being more or less close to FD of 4.4 per cent. From a fiscal consolidation angle, this is a good sign as borrowings are used only for building assets. However, the government needs to go beyond by generating a 'revenue surplus' so that borrowings even for building capital assets can be cut. This is necessary as 'interest payments' alone account for over 25 per cent of total spending by the Centre. (The writer is a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

BJP sets its sights on West Bengal and Bihar after Delhi triumph

The Aam Aadmi Party's collapse in Delhi and the cracks within the INDIA bloc have emboldened the BJP to win Bengal and Bihar

Buoyed by its sweeping success in Delhi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has now turned its focus towards the crucial state elections in West Bengal in 2026, where it aims to dethrone Mamata Banerjee. What once seemed like an uphill battle is now a tangible possibility for the party. Emboldened by the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) debacle in Delhi, BJP leaders are proclaiming, "Delhi ki jeet hamari ho gayi, ab 2026 main Bengal ki baari hai" (We have won Delhi; now it's Bengal's turn in 2026). Bihar, too, is set to witness an intense electoral showdown. With recent victories boosting the party's confidence, BJP and its allies plan to enter the battle with renewed aggression to retain power. The frag-



KS TOMAR

mented INDIA alliance, which was evident in Haryana and Delhi, provides the BJP with an additional advantage. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has maintained a strong presence in West Bengal for decades, is expected to play a pivotal role in BJP's bid to oust Mamata in the upcoming assembly elections. **Modi's Appeal:** BJP's Trump

Card Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains the BJP's strongest electoral force. His leadership, credibility, and mass appeal, especially among the middle and lower-income groups, were decisive in Delhi's outcome. Welfare schemes like free ration under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana directly strengthened BJP's voter base. Modi's ability to project governance stability ensured that BJP's campaign resonated powerfully across the capital. Modi's credibility as a vote magnet and his guarantee to implement manifesto promises worked like magic for the BJP, which continues to heavily rely on him even for state elections. In his characteristic style, Modi remarked, "Congress has achieved a dou-

ble hat-trick of defeats with zero seats," predicting its further decline. Meanwhile, he celebrated BJP's string of victories in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Delhi, reinforcing his status as the party's ultimate campaigner. **Decoding BJP's Triumph in Delhi:** The Modi Factor Several key factors contributed to BJP's victory in Delhi, with Modi playing a central role. His strong stance on national security, Hindutva, and governance stability shaped the electoral landscape, particularly among urban and middle-class voters. **Modi's National Security & Hindutva Image** As the national capital, Delhi is heavily influenced by nationalistic narratives. Modi's firm policies on Pakistan, terrorism,



and Hindutva solidified BJP's core voter base. By framing the election as Modi vs. Kejriwal rather than a contest over local governance, BJP ensured that Modi's persona resonated strongly with voters. **PM's Welfare Schemes vs. AAP's Freebies** While AAP is known for its populist freebies, the Modi

government strategically countered this with large-scale welfare initiatives such as PM Awas Yojana (housing for the poor), Ujjwala Yojana (free LPG connections), and Ayushman Bharat (health insurance). By shifting the narrative from Kejriwal's localized welfare model to Modi's broader national schemes, the BJP successfully attracted lower-income and migrant voters. A masterstroke was Modi's assurance that AAP's welfare schemes would not be discontinued but rather enhanced, promising to elevate Delhi into a world-class city. This neutralized Kejriwal's traditional advantage and reassured voters. BJP also aggressively targeted AAP over corruption allegations, particu-

larly the liquor scam, altering voter perception. Modi's leadership was positioned as a guarantee of cleaner governance, contrasting sharply with AAP's tainted image. **Impact of BJP's Victories in Other States:** BJP's recent wins in Haryana, Maharashtra, and other key states created a momentum effect, reinforcing voter confidence in Delhi. Haryana's proximity made its results particularly influential, given the shared demographics. The party's national winning streak also boosted cadre morale, creating a perception of electoral invincibility, which further weakened AAP's positioning as an alternative force. **Why AAP Lost:** AAP's defeat was not solely due to BJP's strategic campaign

but also its political miscalculations. Kejriwal underestimated Congress's relevance, assuming it was a non-factor. This resulted in AAP's defeat in 14 assembly segments where the victory margin was lower than the votes secured by Congress candidates. AAP had previously employed a similar strategy in Haryana, splitting Congress's votes and aiding BJP's gains. However, this tactic backfired in Delhi, as the ignored Congress vote share ended up damaging AAP more than BJP. One of the biggest takeaways from AAP's crushing defeat is the blow to Arvind Kejriwal's national ambitions. (The writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Sebi cancels registration of 19 defunct firms

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Tuesday cancelled the registration of 19 defunct FVCI (Foreign Venture Capital Investors) after they failed to meet the eligibility criteria. The 19 entities include Axis Capital Mauritius, Axis India Infrastructure Holdings, Blackstone Capital Partners (Singapore) VI FVCI Pte Ltd, P6 Asia Holding Investments (Cyprus) Ltd, Pequot India Mauritius IV, Ltd and Omega FVCI Investments Pte Ltd. In its order, Sebi noted that these defunct FVCI companies are no longer in existence as incorporated entities in their respective jurisdictions and thereby no longer satisfy the condition of being an entity incorporated outside India as stipulated in the FVCI Regulations. The regulator observed from the website of the Business Registration Department of Mauritius, Cyprus and Singapore, that the status of 19 FVCIs in their parent jurisdictions was defunct. Additionally, the entities had not informed Sebi about the change in their regulatory status -- the entities becoming defunct in their home jurisdiction. Also, FVCIs had not submitted quarterly data on the Sebi Intermediaries(SI) portal for even 4 calendar quarters -- from the quarter ended March 31, 2023, to the quarter ended December 31, 2023.

'India, US complement each other; can give mutual concessions in trade'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With India and the US preparing to start negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday said the two countries can offer concessions and duty reductions, as their economies complement each other.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced their commitment to more than double the two-way commerce to USD 500 billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025.

"We complement each other, we can give mutual concessions to each other, tariff reductions and make it easier to export and import between the two countries," he said, adding, "We have started working on different ideas, engaging with different stakeholders within and outside the government and preparing ourselves for discussions, (which) we hope we will start soon."



He added that the agreement will open opportunities for the domestic industry to expand trade with the US to USD 500 billion by 2030.

"We look at this opportunity as a way to make India more competitive, come out with quality products, look at mutual concessions and attractive trading conditions which will support growth both in America and in India," Goyal said at the NDTV Profit Conclave 2025.

On reciprocal tariffs, the minister said India's tariffs are there to protect domestic

industry from imports from non-market economies.

"What we are working on is for mutual benefit resolving these issues for both our countries... Our situation with the US is different from the situation of many other countries," he said.

Further, he said that there should be no cause of concern to the domestic industry from the trade negotiations with the US, and India should enter these negotiations from a position of strength.

"I do not see any cause of concern...this is a golden

opportunity for business and will open floodgates of new business opportunities. My sense is that those who are panicking today will regret tomorrow," he said.

Earlier in the day at a CII event, Goyal said that India and the US are committed to increasing bilateral trade to USD 500 billion and negotiating a "strong" trade agreement within the next 6-8 months.

Goyal said once his US counterpart takes charge, both countries will discuss the contours of the pact.

Over 28 lakh companies registered, only 65 pc active: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 28 lakh companies are registered in the country and only 65 per cent of them or little over 18.1 lakh companies are active, according to official data.

Among those registered under the Companies Act, 2013, just 5,216 are foreign companies and out of those, 63 per cent or 3,281 entities were active at the end of January.

Latest data from the corporate affairs ministry also showed that a total of 16,781 companies were registered with a collective paid up capital of Rs 816.14 crore last month.

"A total number of 28,05,354 companies were registered in the country as on 31st January, 2025, of which 65 per cent (18,17,222) companies stand active. There is an increase of 0.14 per cent in the total proportion of active companies with respect to registered companies when compared to December 2024," the ministry

said in its latest monthly information bulletin.

As many as 9,49,934 companies have been shuttered.

In terms of sectors, the maximum number of active companies were in business services at 27 per cent, followed by manufacturing (20 per cent), trading and community, personal and social services (13 per cent).

The highest number of active companies were in Maharashtra, followed by Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

"An increase in the number of active companies is witnessed in the states of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi as compared to December 2024."

"Among the Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir showed a rise of 112 companies in contrast to December 2024," the ministry said.

As on January 31, there were 5,216 foreign companies registered in the country and out of them, 63 per cent or 3,281 entities were active.



Rupee falls 8 paise to close at 86.96 against US dollar

Rupee depreciated 8 paise to close at 86.96 (provisional) against US dollar weighed down by sustained foreign fund outflows and an uptick in the US Dollar index. Forex traders said there is a negative bias for the USD/INR pair as foreign investors continue to sell domestic equities and the RBI support is tapering off slowly. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.94 and touched the high of 86.91 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.98 before ending the session at 86.96 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 8 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 17 paise to close at 86.88 against the US dollar. Traders said disappointing trade deficit data from the domestic markets too pressurised the rupee. India's exports declined for the third month in a row in January, falling by 2.38 per cent year-on-year to USD 36.43 billion, while the trade deficit widened to USD 22.99 billion in the month.

Markets end slightly lower after a day's breather

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower on Tuesday as uninterrupted foreign fund outflows and lower-than-expected corporate earnings continued to hit investors' sentiment.

After a day's breather, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex ended 29.47 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 75,967.39. Intra-day, it dropped 465.85 points or 0.61 per cent to 75,531.01.

The NSE Nifty dipped 14.20 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 22,945.30.

"On Tuesday, the Indian blue-chip equity indices, Sensex and Nifty-50, closed with a slight decline, primarily due to a slowdown in earnings and concerns over ongoing foreign selling, which affected market sentiment," Ameya Ranadive, Chartered Market Technician, CFTe, Sr Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said.

From the Sensex pack, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC and Asian Paints were among the biggest laggards.

NTPC, Zomato, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HCL Tech were among the gainers. The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 1.71 per cent and midcap index declined 0.19 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, industrials dropped 1.51 per cent, consumer durables (1.19 per cent), telecommunication (1.06 per cent), capital goods (0.91 per



cent), auto (0.65 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.55 per cent).

BSE utilities climbed 1.03 per cent, BSE focused IT (0.86 per cent), Oil & Gas (0.70 per cent) and energy (0.38 per cent).

As many as 2,918 stocks declined while 1,032 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Rajasthan govt to present Budget today

PNS ■ JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government will present its Budget for the 2025-26 financial year on Wednesday.

Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Diya Kumari will present the state's income-expenditure estimates 2025-26 in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly at 11 am.

Kumari finalised the Budget on Tuesday, Sharing its photo with officials on social media platform X, she said, "Rajasthan Budget 2025-26 finalized."

Additional Chief Secretary (Finance) Akhil Arora, Principal Secretary (Budget) Debashish Prishti, Secretary (Expenditure) Naveen Jain, Secretary (Revenue) Kumarpal Gautam, Director (Budget) Brijesh Kishore Sharma were among those present.

According to an official statement, Diya Kumari, who is also the Deputy Chief Minister, will present the Budget for 2025-26 in the Assembly on February 19.

The Budget session of the Rajasthan Assembly began on January 31 with the address of Governor Haribhau Bagde.

Gold rises Rs 300 to Rs 88,500 per 10 gm, silver climbs Rs 800

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 300 to Rs 88,500 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had ended at Rs 88,200 per 10 grams on Monday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced Rs 300 to Rs 88,100 per 10 grams.

Silver prices also jumped Rs 800 to Rs 99,000 per kg from the previous close of Rs 98,200 per kg.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery jumped Rs 435 to Rs 85,490 per 10 grams.

"Gold continued its positive trend, driven by persistent global uncertainty over tariffs. With banks and funds maintaining high allocations to the safe-haven asset, gold remains well-supported," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst -- Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

Key events like Trump's speech on Wednesday, along with the Federal Reserve and RBI meeting minutes, will add to the market's volatility in the coming sessions, Trivedi said.

Silver futures for March delivery also appreciated Rs



439 to Rs 96,019 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

In the international markets, Comex gold futures for April delivery climbed USD 24.94 per ounce, or 0.86 per cent, to USD 2,925.64 per ounce in the global markets.

"Comex is trading above USD 2,925 as investors continue to monitor tensions between the US and European Union, as well as developments in Ukraine peace talks," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

Meanwhile, spot gold in the overseas markets rose nearly USD 16 to USD 2,912.50 per ounce.

"Gold gained modestly on Tuesday, maintaining its position as the primary safe-haven asset and an appealing infla-

tion hedge. "However, further gains were capped due to hawkish remarks from Fed member Patrick Harker, who advocated on Monday night for the central bank to keep interest rates unchanged," Samuil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Comex silver futures for March delivery in the Asian market hours quoted 0.47 per cent higher at USD 33 per ounce.

On Monday, the commerce ministry said its gold imports in January rose 40.79 per cent to USD 2.68 billion on account of increasing domestic demands.

Gold imports stood at USD 1.9 billion in January 2024, according to commerce ministry data.



NTPC pays interim dividend of Rs 2,424 cr

State-owned NTPC on Tuesday said it has paid an additional Rs 2,424 crore of interim dividend to its shareholders in the financial year ending March 2025. This is in addition to the first interim dividend of Rs 2,424 crore paid in November 2024, NTPC said in a statement. The Rs 2,424 crore dividend paid on February 18 is 25 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of the company. The total dividend paid by the company during the ongoing fiscal has reached Rs 8,000 crore, which includes the final dividend of Rs 3,152 crore for the financial year 2023-24 paid in September 2024. This is the 32nd consecutive year that NTPC has paid dividend. Under the Ministry of Power, NTPC is India's largest integrated power utility, contributing one-fourth of the country's power requirements. The company has an installed capacity of over 77 GW, with an additional capacity of 29.5 GW under construction, including 9.6 GW of renewable energy capacity. The company is committed to achieving 60 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2032.

Indian firms make presence felt as DIFC marks 20th year

PNS ■ DUBAI

As the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) continues to bolster Dubai's position in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region's financial services capital during its 20th year, a significant list of Indian names has been joining the bandwagon.

Significant Indian companies names added this year include ASK Asset & Wealth Management Group (Wealth Management), AI/tech unicorn, Nagarao.

According to a statement released here on Tuesday,

Middle East & Asian countries contributed the highest (51 per cent) for DIFC's growth in 2024.

Indian companies under financial services include Bharat Re Global Ltd, El Dorado Capital Ltd, Beacon Insurance Brokers, Fort Capital, Mahindra Insurance Brokers, and Nuvama Wealth and Investment Ltd.

DIFC houses 6,920 companies, up from 5,523 in 2023, registering a 25 per cent increase. DIFC attracted 1,823 new registrations, the highest-ever number recorded in a year, showcasing historic growth of 25 per cent.



Combined revenues for 2024 have shown the greatest leap since inception of the Centre, reaching AED 1.78

billion (USD 484 million), 37 per cent higher than 2023's record-breaking performance; and operating profit grew to AED 1.33 billion (USD 363 million), up 55 per cent.

DIFC Governor Essa Kazim said, "Over the last 20 years, DIFC has played a leading role in transforming Dubai and the UAE's economic landscape, in line with the Dubai Economic Agenda (D33). DIFC's Strategy 2030 continues to position us as the top global financial centre in the region and as one of the world's leading financial centres."

Unemployment rate dips to 6.4 pc in December quarter: Survey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas dipped to 6.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, according to the National Sample Survey Survey (NSSO).

Joblessness, or unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage of unemployed people in the labour force.

The unemployment rate in the December quarter of FY24 was 6.5 per cent. However, the rate stayed flat when compared sequentially. In the preceding July-

September quarter of FY25, the rate of unemployment for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas was at the same level of 6.4 per cent, the 25th Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) showed.

The unemployment rate among females (aged 15 years and above) in urban areas declined to 8.1 per cent in October-December 2024 from 8.6 per cent in the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 8.4 per cent in July-September, 2024.

Among males, the unemployment rate in urban areas remained flat at 5.8 per cent in



October-December 2024 as compared to the rate of the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 5.7 per cent in July-September, 2024.

Labour force participation

rate in Current Weekly Status (CWS) in urban areas for people aged 15 years and above increased to 50.4 per cent in October-December from 49.9 per cent in the

same quarter a year ago. The rate was 50.4 per cent in the July-September 2024.

Labour force refers to the part of the population, which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and, therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons.

The NSSO had launched PLFS in April 2017.

On the basis of PLFS, a quarterly bulletin is brought out giving estimates of labour force indicators namely unemployment rate, worker popu-

lation ratio (WPR), labour force participation rate (LFPR), distribution of workers by broad status in employment and industry of work in CWS.

The estimates of unemployed persons in CWS give an average picture of unemployment in a short span of seven days during the survey period. In the CWS approach, a person is considered unemployed if he/she did not work even for one hour on any day during the week but sought or was available for work at least for one hour on any day during the period.

IPO-bound NSE's valuation jumps 200 pc to Rs 4.7 lakh cr: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The IPO-bound NSE's valuation jumped 201 per cent in 2024 to Rs 4.7 lakh crore, a report said on Tuesday.

The largest India equity bourse, which is reported to have restarted its listing process by applying for a no-objection from markets regulator Sebi, is already the 10th-most valuable private company in the country, as per the 2024 Burgundy Private Hurun India 500 list of listed as well as unlisted companies.

The valuation was pegged at Rs 3.12 lakh crore, as per a September 2024 report. Another media report said the company, which also runs the world's largest derivatives exchange, aims to sell 10 per cent of holding in the IPO.

The overall revenues jumped 28 per cent to Rs 16,352 crore in FY24, and the post-tax profit surged 51 per cent to Rs 8,306 crore.

The stock bourse had moved on the listing plans after getting some clarity on allegations of not allowing equitable access to

its members. Hurun said it has travelled across the country and spoken with industry experts, journalists, bankers and accessed publicly available data sources while arriving at the valuation for private or unlisted companies.

The list of companies is led by Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries with a Rs 17.5 lakh crore valuation, while Tata Consultancy Services came second at Rs 16.1 lakh crore with a 30 per cent growth.

Billionaire Gautam Adani's flagship Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone was valued at Rs 2,73,530 crore as on December 13, which was used as the cut-off date for the list.

The Adani Group, which includes nine listed companies, was valued at Rs 13,40 lakh crore, while the Ambani-led Reliance Group's overall valuation was pegged at Rs 19.71 lakh crore.

The salt-to-software Tata Sons led among the industrial groups in valuation, with a 37 per cent jump in valuation to Rs 32.27 lakh crore.



Kirti Kulhari unleashing her 'new sides', What fans haven't seen is the next chapter: 'Action, horror, sinister — a lot to explore'

In an insightful conversation with *The Pioneer*, Kirti Kulhari opens up about her compelling performance in *Hisaab Barabar* on ZEE5, where she takes on the role of a layered police officer in a story that effortlessly combines humour with serious undertones. Known for her standout roles, she delves into her approach of bringing depth and nuance to every character, focusing on the smallest gestures to convey complex emotions

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With a filmography that spans bold, unconventional roles across genres, Kirti Kulhari has carved a niche for herself in the industry. Known for her nuanced performances in projects like *Pink*, *Four More Shots Please!* and *Criminal Justice*, the actress once again brings a layered character to life in *Hisaab Barabar*, now streaming on ZEE5. The Indo-Swedish co-production, directed by Ashwini Chaudhary, takes a lighthearted yet deeply insightful approach to a serious subject, using humour to lace its narrative. This unique tonality is what immediately intrigued Kirti. "They have used humour to sort of place such a serious subject and that really fascinated me. It's something I haven't done before and that's what drew me to the project," she shares.

In *Hisaab Barabar*, Kirti plays a police officer, a role that, on paper, could have been a straightforward one. However, she was determined to bring depth and complexity to her character. "It looks like a very simple character on paper and it could have been a one-dimensional thing. But with the way it was written and the way Ashwini sir and I explored it, I am so glad that it has come out so powerfully on screen," she says.

For the *Mission Mangal* actress, the challenge often lies in finding emotional subtleties that can be conveyed through the smallest of gestures. "That's what excites me—the idea of communicating emotions through just a look or a moment, rather than over-explaining them. When something looks easy on paper, I love

the challenge of making it deeply impactful."

Unlike some of her past roles, her research for *Hisaab Barabar* was not extensive. "I didn't feel the need to meet real-life police officers because my character is not just a cop—there's so much more to her as a person," she explains. Instead, she spent time with the director, dissecting every scene and understanding her character's motivations. "We developed a whole arc for her, sat down on individual scenes and really tried to find her emotional core. It was more about understanding her journey rather than focusing on the profession itself."

Her approach to playing this character also reflects a shift in the representation of women in cinema, particularly on streaming platforms. She believes OTT platforms have opened up avenues for more layered and complex female characters. "The writing is getting stronger, the rep-

resentation is getting wider and the complexities of characters are being portrayed beautifully. That's what it should be about," she says. While filming *Hisaab Barabar*, one particular aspect of her character stayed with Kirti—the way she chooses not to carry the baggage of her past. "There's a moment in the film where you finally realise she has lost her husband. But until that point, you don't see her as someone burdened by grief. She is celebrating life in her own small ways," she shares.

This aspect of the character resonated deeply with her. "It made me realise how we all go through hardships, but we don't have to carry them with us forever. We can choose to accept things for what they are and still live a full life in the present moment," she reflects.

Unlike some of the intense roles she has played in the past, *Hisaab Barabar* didn't give the Pink star any "real chills." The film, though dealing with a serious subject, maintains a lighthearted and engaging tone. "I understand the seriousness of the subject, but the fact that it's being told in such a fun way meant that I never really had those intense, dramatic moments. It's more about finding depth within that lightheartedness," she explains.

Reminiscing about her time on set, she recalls a particularly amusing incident involving director Ashwini Chaudhary. "One day, I reached the set, and we were about to shoot a cop scene. Ashwini sir was whispering, and I asked him what happened. He told me he had lost his voice. Now, if you know him, you know he's usually very loud! So, I joked, 'Finally, the unit will have some relief from your booming voice.'" She

laughs, adding that the entire crew, including her co-star Maddy (R. Madhavan), burst into laughter at her remark.

As for the road ahead, Kirti is excited to explore new genres and push her boundaries even further. "I'd love to do a love story, a sports film, action and even horror. There are so many sides of me that the audience hasn't seen yet—people haven't seen me do real action, horror, or even play a sinister character. There's a lot left to explore and I'm just getting started," she says. With her commitment to bringing depth to every role and her passion for storytelling, Kirti Kulhari continues to establish herself as one of the most versatile and fearless actors in the industry. And if *Hisaab Barabar* is any indication, she is only scratching the surface of her capabilities.

I didn't feel the need to meet real-life police officers because my character is not just a cop—there's so much more to her as a person. We developed a whole arc for her, sat down on individual scenes and really tried to find her emotional core. It was more about understanding her journey rather than focusing on the profession itself



PAWS, CLAWS AND LOVE!

Love is deep, messy, and beautifully unpredictable. It crosses generations, traditions and relationships, showing up in the warmest, quirkiest ways. And as Indian pet parents, we know love isn't just for family, friends, or partners—it's for the furry family members who turn our houses into homes.

Meet the Parents
Convincing Indian parents to accept a pet is almost always a journey. Most of us have heard them say, *Tum hi kaafi hoon sambhalne ke liye!* or *Ghar ko zoo mat banao!* But fast forward a few months and they're the ones sneaking treats, calling the vet before you even wake up, and saying things like, *Beta, tumhe uska khayal rakhna chahiye!*

Meet the Baby
Indian homes are full of endless family bonds and there's nothing more heartwarming than watching a baby and a pet grow up together. If you've ever introduced a pet to a little one, you know how special it is. That gentle curiosity, tiny hands reaching out for fur, and that first tail wag—it's magic.

Meet My Friends
Let's be honest—if you're a pet parent, you've probably forced your friends to FaceTime just to show off your dog's new trick or your cat's latest mischief. But the real test? How your friends react to your pet in person. Do they happily get covered in fur? Do they bribe your pet with treats? Do they join in when your dog zooms around the house at 2 AM?

Meet My Partner
This one's a biggie. In a world of arranged, love, and situationship relationships, nothing is more revealing than how someone treats your pet. Your partner making an effort to bond with your pet? Green flag. Remembering your dog's favourite toy or your cat's weird food habit? Shaadi material! And if they have a pet too? Well, that's a pawfect match waiting to happen!

STRUGGLING TO GET YOUR PET TO LIKE SOMEONE? TRY THIS!

If your pet is still unsure about a new person in their life, don't worry. Just like us, they take their time to warm up! Here are a few simple ways to help:

- Don't rush it:** Give your pet time to sniff around and get comfortable before expecting instant bonding.
- Bribe them with food:** Keep your pet's favorite treats handy—nothing says "you're cool!" like a tasty reward.
- Create shared experiences:** Whether it's playing fetch, a slow belly rub session, or just chilling together, these little moments matter.
- Respect their space:** Make sure your pet has a safe spot to retreat to when they feel overwhelmed.
- Be consistent & kind:** Training (and re-training) with patience goes a long way in helping your pet adjust to new people.

"There are many ways to celebrate the love you have for your pets. The best way is of course by being conscious of their nutritional needs and providing a well balanced diet through premium ingredients" says J.S. Ramakrishna, Business Head of Carnivel and a devoted pet parent for over 20 years.



Singapore's iconic firework display revamped!

In a stunning demonstration of ingenuity and imagination, Mount Faber Leisure Group (MFLG) presents the revival of Wings of Time, Singapore's most popular night performance, which has been magnificently renamed as Wings of Time Fireworks Symphony.



PNS/HYDERABAD

This legendary show at Sentosa's charming Siloso Beach has undergone a captivating transformation as the curtains open on its tenth anniversary celebration, taking the viewing experience to new heights. It promises to be a symphony of sensations, telling a captivating story that cuts across cultural divides and elicits a collective gasp of awe from viewers everywhere.

Prepare to be mesmerised, inspired and in wonder as this redefined entertainment marvel soars, redefining the craft of storytelling and solidifying its place as a must-see. To find out more about the experience, we spoke exclusively with Jennifer Wong, Deputy Director, Commercial, Mount

Faber Leisure Group (MFLG)! With a big smile on her face, Jennifer starts to tell us, "Oh, yes, we just finished celebrating our ten-year anniversary, and every time I look back at it, the only question that lingers in my mind is—how else can I bring innovation to it? Fireworks' is one method to make it more exciting! This time, it will feature extra special touches and be four times longer. We also have a new machine. To put it simply, it's like how we play with sparkles on Diwali, but this time, the machines are much larger. With the help of technology, viewers may experience an immersive fireworks spectacle that puts them up close and personal. And where was it all? For them, we have opened the waterways. It's not simply a spectacle; with the help of dance and lasers, a story will be conveyed! Our target audience is young adults and I have observed firsthand

their interest in what's going on, particularly with regard to the water fountains. At one point in the performance, we insert fireworks, which ends up being such an emotional high!"

Thus, the night sky comes to life with a breathtaking display that will wow you as the sun sets! Audiences of all ages will be enthralled by the spectacular extravaganza that is the recently improved performance.

Watch a kaleidoscope of almost 200 stunning fireworks displays that have been skillfully coordinated to create an engrossing and captivating experience. 3D projection mapping, lasers, water fountains and special effects all work together to create a memorable experience as the night sky turns into a brilliant canvas. Up to 2,500 guests are invited per show to indulge in the enchantment, so don't miss your chance to be a part of this amazing experience, which has two nightly performances at 7:40 PM and 8:40 PM. What's more is when she says, "With this show, we always attempt to keep a classic plot. You are sitting on the beach and gazing up at the water for this. Therefore, we are using the natural saltwater without any control over wind or tidal waves! The water fountain serves as our background! As a result, this background now travels in the direction of the wind. It looks extremely good artistically. Even though the children may not comprehend the story, they enjoy what they see; therefore, our job is done."

It is a visual spectacle with laser, fire and water effects and pyrotechnics, synchronised with symphonic music. "Everything is in English, including the commentary. The plot touches on issues



that are universally relatable. However, the food kiosk is what draws in our Indian tourists! It's usually your Coke and popcorn, right? It may surprise you to learn that our best-selling item is masala fries with an Indian flair! We also have momos and pav bhaji! Additionally, Indians are particularly interested in Mexican cuisine. There, the tacos are the star. We also provide an Indian buffet with thalis and masala chai after the show," Jennifer continues, referring to their efforts to accommodate Indian tourists.

Since Feb 1, the fireworks display has been four times longer than before, with nearly 200 shots lighting up the sky every show. What else? We also learn that many Indians are travelling to Singapore with tour groups since the outbreak! "Many of the regular visitors to our Sentosa, whom I know, would like to stay longer at Mount Faber. We also have multigenerational families coming to visit! Seeing that

travel trend is fantastic. We have Singapore Tourism on board and our hotel partners and well-followed digital creators really aid in establishing that foundation, which is how we receive feedback."

Wings of Time is now known as Wings of Time Fireworks Symphony with enhanced fireworks at Sentosa's Siloso Beach. It is the world's only multi-sensory night show blending advanced technology and stunning visual effects against the backdrop of the Sentosa waters! Additionally— "Use the beach as our natural backdrop and use seawater directly, while other fountain shows use a lot of electricity to pump out. Thus, there is actually reduced electrical use! It is not a closed chamber in which we operate. It has a track record of success! We are the only ones who have conquered the sky and the sea is our greatest draw. Even though it's difficult, the result is a sight that no one could have predicted."



The Swayamvar celebrated its 10th anniversary with a grand event at its Banjara Hills store in Hyderabad. Hosted by Komal Mundra and Vayshnavi Sirna, the event welcomed a host of celebrities, industrialists, and influencers to mark this significant milestone.



Renowned celebrity hairstylist and founder of Amjad Habib Salons, Amjad Habib, has officially launched the Amjad Habib Premium Salon at Kokapet, Hyderabad. The grand opening was graced by actress Hebah Patel, adding a touch of glamour to the event.



Kajaria has unveiled its largest Eternity and Kerovit Experience Centre in Hyderabad. Located at Vamsiram's Jyothi Ridge, 2nd Floor, Road No. 36, Jubilee Hills Extension, Kavuri Hills, Madhapur, this grand centre showcases Kajaria's premium range of tiles and bathware solutions. The inauguration was led by Rishi Kajaria, Joint Managing Director of Kajaria Ceramics Limited in Hyderabad.

PARTY



Ganges Valley School hosted a live edition of SAMVADH, an insightful platform aimed at empowering parents and educators with practical parenting strategies rooted in child development, neuroscience, and psychology. Held at Avasa Hotel, Hitech City, Hyderabad, the event marked the transition of SAMVADH from its origins as a YouTube discussion series to an engaging live experience. The session featured Vani Raju, Executive Director of Ganges Valley School, and Aarti C. Rajaratnam, a renowned psychologist and best-selling author, who delved into the thought-provoking theme, "Hyperconnected yet Disconnected."

Photos by- SV Chary



Amid the ongoing Maha Kumbh 2025, Himalaya BabyCare launched a unique initiative called "Prepare Your Baby Bag" to promote shared parenting and redefine caregiving roles in India. In collaboration with the Prayagraj Mela Authority (PMA) and key partner organizations, the campaign leveraged the platform of the Maha Kumbh Mela to raise awareness about the importance of shared responsibility in ensuring a child's health and well-being. The event was held in Hyderabad on Tuesday.



In a remarkable display of collective purpose, over 2,111 individuals gathered in Hyderabad today to create the world's largest human image of a dove, symbolizing peace. This incredible achievement, orchestrated by the Sudha Reddy Foundation, has officially been recognized as a Guinness World Record. The event, held at the Lords Institute of Engineering & Technology, saw participants dressed in white come together to form the breathtaking aerial tableau, celebrating unity and peace on an unprecedented scale.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



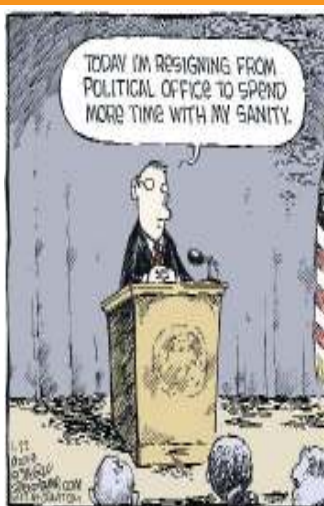
GARFIELD



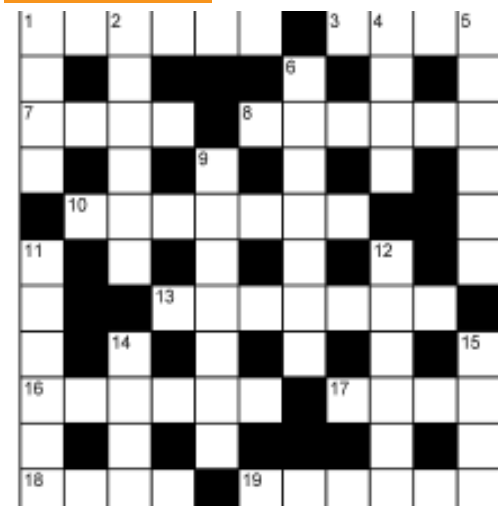
REALITY CHECK



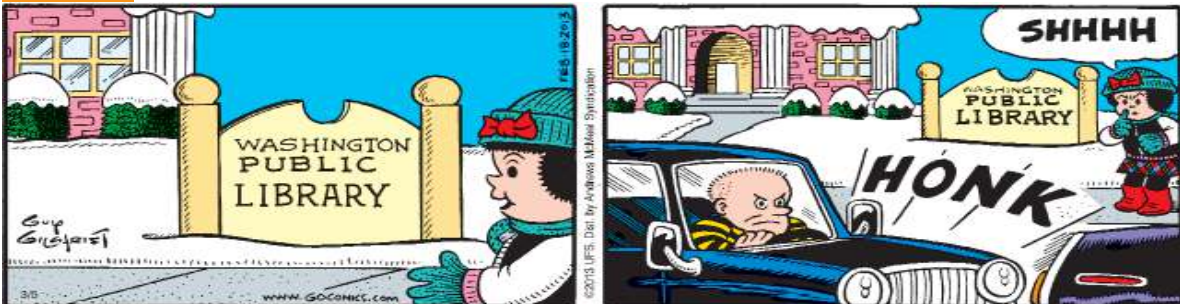
SPEED BUMP



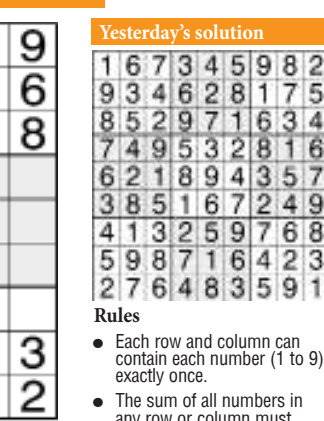
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



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 Use these on envelopes
- 3 Icy
- 7 A scented flower
- 8 Hot remains from a fire
- 10 Got away from
- 13 A month
- 16 A hole in a hill for a train
- 17 Birthday present
- 18 Scraps of material
- 19 A funny play or film
- 6 The leader of an empire
- 9 Looked at
- 11 Quicker
- 12 Make up your mind
- 14 Cosy
- 15 Don't go

DOWN

- 1 Certain
- 2 Help
- 4 Finished
- 5 Plates



GINGER MEGGS





Sundeep Kishan clears the air says, 'I'm not part of Rajinikanth's Coolie'

Ever since news broke that Superstar Rajinikanth is collaborating with director Lokesh Kanagaraj for his next film, *Coolie*, fans have been eagerly awaiting more details. Speculations were rife that Sundeep Kishan would also be part of the film alongside Varun. However, at the latest Dish TV Watcho Storytellers Conclave, Sundeep Kishan made a revelation that took everyone by surprise.

Revealing the details, Sundeep Kishan said, "Honestly, I'm not a part of *Coolie*. Lokesh is one of my best friends and anything big that happens to me, he's one of the first people to know. Likewise, he calls me first when something big happens to him. We don't talk about it much; we are just good friends."

He further added, "At one point, Rajni sir wanted to meet me, and I was asked to see him. When I finally did, it was amazing. We sat, talked about my work and I took his blessings. It was a memorable moment."

When asked if he has ever met his favourite stars, Sundeep shared an interesting perspective. He said, "I have this peculiar habit—I don't meet my favorite stars until they recognize me for who I am. For example, I didn't meet Aziz sir or Shafiq sir until they knew who I was. But meeting Rajni sir was something truly special!"

This confirms that Sundeep Kishan and Lokesh Kanagaraj are not collaborating on a project at the moment. Talking about his upcoming film, he shared, "My current film, *Mazaag*, is set to release on February 26. It's a crazy, fun entertainer. After doing three serious films—*Michael*, *Ryan* and *Captain Miller*—I felt I needed to do something lighter. I wanted to make the audience laugh and it's going to be a fun ride."

Sundeep was a guest speaker at the Watcho Storytellers Conclave, a step towards igniting impactful conversations within the film community while strengthening the Dish TV brand. He led a session titled 'A Young Star Who Seamlessly Gels into Any Role, Any Industry, and Platform'. After a successful launch in Kolkata, Watcho Storytellers Conclave arrived in Hyderabad, engaging creative community and empowering content creators nationwide.

With a focus on collaboration and innovation, the Hyderabad edition featured eminent filmmakers and creators, including Anil Ravipudi, Sundeep Kishan, Sunitha Tati, Baradwaj Rangan, Sai Rajesh and Nanda Kishore Emani, offering insightful sessions on the evolving content landscape.



SHWETA BASU PRASAD RECALLS FACING HEIGHT BULLYING ON SET OF TELUGU FILM

Actress Shweta Basu Prasad, known for her work across multiple languages including Hindi, Telugu and Tamil, has opened up on a negative experience she faced on a film set. The actress stated that the one and only time in her career when she was bullied for her physical appearance—specifically her height.

According to Shweta, the incident occurred while working on a Telugu film where she was repeatedly mocked for being shorter than her co-star. The actress shared that her male co-actor, who was much taller or close to 6 feet, was constantly the source of the bullying. "The entire crew would remind me of my height every single day. It became an uncomfortable situation for me on that set," Shweta admitted.

Shweta highlighted the irony of the situation, revealing how the male lead, despite his shortcomings in another area, was never called out. "He would mess up every scene, give retakes and struggle with the Telugu language. Ironically, despite him being Telugu, he couldn't speak the language properly. But I was managing with my limited understanding of the language, yet no one ever criticised him for that. Instead, I was constantly ridiculed for something that was entirely out of my control—my height," she said. The actress further emphasised the unfairness of the situation, pointing out that her co-actor's language issues were overlooked, while she was criticized for something she couldn't change. "It was something that was genetically inherited and yet, I was being judged for it. It was the only set where I truly felt bullied, and it was very bad," she confessed.

While Shweta did not name the film in question, she has had a successful career in the Telugu film industry, debuting in 2008 with *Kotha Bangaru Lokam*. She went on to act in a variety of Telugu films, including *Ride*, *Kasko*, *Kalavar King*, *Priyudu* and *Genius*. Her most recent Telugu film was *Vijeta* in 2016.

Shweta's career also spans across the Hindi and Tamil film industries, where she has garnered praise for her performances. Shweta's candid revelation sheds light on the difficulties that many actors face in the industry, particularly regarding issues of appearance and body image. Her story serves as a reminder of the impact such on-set bullying can have on mental and emotional well-being and it underscores the importance of fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone in the industry.

Mohanlal confirms Baiju Santhosh's role as Murukan in L2: Empuraan

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal on Tuesday introduced Murukan as the character played by actor Baiju Santhosh in director Prithviraj's eagerly awaited political action drama *L2: Empuraan* (*L2E*).

Taking to his X timeline, Mohanlal wrote, "Character No18 Baiju Santhosh as Murukan in #L2E #EMPURAAN." He also shared a link to a youtube video in which Baiju Santhosh spoke about his character in the film.

"I don't think anybody has forgotten the movie *Lucifer* and its characters, especially Stephachayan and Murukan. Murukan was a character I truly enjoyed portraying. And after a long gap of five years, we are reuniting once again through *Empuraan*. At this moment, I would like to thank Mohanlal, Antony Perumbavoor, Prithviraj, Murali Gopi, Sujith Vassudev and associate director Vava. As *Empuraan* arrives as Malayalam (cinema's) biggest film, Murukan is also making his return. And of course, with a touch of 'decency'," he said.

Mohanlal-starrer *L2: Empuraan* (*L2E*) is directed by actor Prithviraj and produced jointly by Antony Perumbavoor and

Subaskaran. The film's story has been penned by Murali Gopy and its music has been scored by Deepak Dev. The film has cinematography by Sujith Vaassudev and editing by Akhilesh Mohan.

It may be recalled that actor Prithviraj, during the initial stages of the film, had disclosed that the film would be a commercial entertainer starring Mohanlal. Murali Gopy, for his part, had said that this would be the second instalment in a three-film series.

Lucifer, the first part of the franchise which released in 2019 and which marked the directorial debut of actor Prithviraj Sukumaran, emerged a blockbuster in just eight days. It went on to make over Rs 200 crore, making it the highest grossing Malayalam film ever.

Needless to say expectations from the sequel, which is scheduled to hit screens on March 27 this year, have soared.



Urvashi Rautela's absence from Daaku Maharaaj poster sparks hilarious reaction online

For fans eagerly awaiting the OTT release of the Telugu film *Daaku Maharaaj*, there was one glaring omission that has sent the internet into a frenzy: Urvashi Rautela's absence from the film's promotional poster. Despite her significant role in the movie, which features Nandamuri Balakrishna and Bobby Deol, the Bollywood actress was notably left off the promotional material shared by Netflix India South. This has led to widespread speculation and plenty of humorous reactions from fans online. The poster, which was revealed last week to announce the film's OTT release date, caught the attention of many, but what truly stood out was the absence of Rautela, who had been one of the film's most talked-about stars. The song *Dabidi Dabidi*, featuring Urvashi and Nandamuri, became a viral sensation thanks to its catchy hook step, further elevating the film's profile among a wider audience. Despite this, her omission from the poster has baffled fans and sparked a hilarious series of online comments.

Rautela, who has consistently been at the center of the film's promotional activities, including making headlines for her comments on the film's box office success (reportedly earning Rs 105 crore), has played an instrumental role in generating buzz for *Daaku Maharaaj*. From discussing gifts she received from her parents to dismissing controversies surrounding other celebrities, Urvashi has kept herself in the public eye, helping the film secure a pop culture moment. This only adds to the puzzlement about why her image was not featured on the official poster. Social media users were quick to react, with many chiming in with tongue-in-cheek remarks. One comment best encapsulated the sentiment, stating: "First ever Firstest ever lady to be removed from the poster of her film first time ever happened to lady who's always first." Other fans added: "First Indian actress to get dropped from the poster" and "She is Asia's first woman who is dropped from her own film." While the reasons behind her exclusion from the poster remain unclear, one thing is certain: Urvashi Rautela has become an internet sensation in her own right, with *Daaku Maharaaj* becoming much more than just a movie. Fans are clearly feeling the absence of her presence in the marketing and it will be interesting to see if the issue is addressed as the film's release date approaches. In the meantime, the internet continues to have a field day with the unexpected and humorous situation.

PRODUCER SKN UNDER FIRE FOR CONTROVERSIAL COMMENTS ON TELUGU ACTRESSES—NOW CALLS IT 'FUN'

Producer SKN, known for his blockbuster *Baby*, sparked outrage with his comments on Telugu actresses. Speaking at the pre-release event of *Return of the Dragon*, he openly stated that he and his director friend Sai Rajesh do not want to encourage Telugu actresses. While welcoming Tamil actress Kayadu Lohar to the industry, SKN remarked that his previous experience with Telugu actresses had been disappointing, which led him to avoid working with them in the future. His remarks drew severe backlash from all corners of the film industry, with many questioning his stance. Following the outrage, SKN has now attempted to clarify his statement, claiming that his words were misunderstood. He insists that his comments were made in a "lighthearted" manner and were not meant to be taken seriously. However, this justification hasn't

convinced everyone. "What is there to joke about in such a statement?" questioned an anonymous producer, criticising SKN's attempt to downplay the controversy. The backlash intensified, with many industry professionals condemning the remarks as unnecessary and damaging to Telugu talent. Amidst growing criticism, SKN took to social media to defend himself, asserting that he has always been a strong supporter of Telugu actresses. "I am one of the few producers who have introduced many Telugu actresses to the industry. A lighthearted comment I made recently was misunderstood, leading to unnecessary headlines with incorrect meanings," he wrote. In an attempt to mend the situation, he further stated that he plans to introduce even more Telugu talent in various fields of cinema. "To clarify, I have introduced eight talented

individuals to the industry so far and am set to introduce 25 more talented Telugu girls across 4-5 different crafts in cinema through my upcoming films. Supporting and promoting Telugu talent has always been my priority," he added.

This incident follows a pattern of controversial remarks by industry figures, including actors Prudhvi and Chiranjeevi, which have often led to negative publicity rather than helping film promotions. Many believe such statements only serve to spotlight the individuals making them rather than contributing positively to the industry. Despite SKN's damage control efforts, the controversy has left a lasting impact, raising serious discussions about the treatment of Telugu actresses in the industry. Whether his promise to promote more Telugu talent will restore his credibility remains to be seen.



Nagarjuna to collaborate with Tamil director Ra Karthik for a story-driven film

Akkineni Nagarjuna is currently juggling multiple projects, keeping himself busy with exciting ventures. The veteran actor is actively working on *Kubera*, directed by Sekhar Kammula, where Tamil star Dhanush plays the lead alongside Rashmika Mandanna. Additionally, Nagarjuna has a significant role in *Coolie*, starring Rajinikanth and directed by Lokesh Kanagaraj.

While these two films are in production, sources reveal that Nagarjuna is also keen on doing a content-driven film. According to an insider, Tamil director Ra Karthik recently pitched a story to the actor, which he found intriguing. However, Nagarjuna has requested a few changes before giving it the final nod.

Ra Karthik made his directorial debut with the Tamil film *Nitham Oru Vaanam* in 2022.

Now, he is in discussions with Nagarjuna for his next project. "Although several filmmakers have approached Nagarjuna with commercial, entertainment-heavy scripts, he is more interested in a narrative-driven film with strong content. That's why he has asked Karthik for a few modifications," the source shared.

If everything falls into place, the film is expected to go on floors in the coming months. Furthermore, Nagarjuna is reportedly planning to produce the project under his own banner, Annapurna Studios. The team is also looking to cast predominantly Telugu actors for the film.

With Nagarjuna's commitment to meaningful cinema and Ra Karthik's fresh storytelling approach, this collaboration could bring something unique to the audience. Stay tuned for further updates!

India will feel Bumrah's absence very strongly: Dhawan

PTI ■ DUBAI

India will feel Jasprit Bumrah's absence "very strongly" in the Champions Trophy but they still have a great chance to win the tournament considering their recent form and a host of match-winners at their disposal, reckons former opener Shikhar Dhawan.

While the event starts in Pakistan on Wednesday, India start their campaign a day later with a match against neighbours Bangladesh at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

Pace spearhead Bumrah was ruled out of the tournament due to a lower back injury, having taken the maximum load during India's five-match Test series against Australia.

"My concern is they are going to miss Jasprit Bumrah, there is no doubt he will be a big absence and I think they will feel it very strongly," Dhawan wrote in an ICC column published on Tuesday.

"For me, he is the best bowler in the world, and his accuracy is hard to replicate. He is also a very calm character and that is crucial in a huge ICC event like this."

Dhawan is, however, backing Shubman Gill and Harshit Rana to sizzle in the tournament.

"At the same time, Harshit Rana has



come into the side and I think that is really exciting - keep an eye on him, I think he could have a breakout tournament.

"I like his attitude, he is a go-getter and he is not afraid of anything. He accepts challenges and we have seen in the England series that he is in

form. I am sure he will look to seize this opportunity and, if he does, he could provide a real X-factor for India."

Going by recent form and team strength, Dhawan found it hard to look beyond India when the discussion turned to title contenders.

"There are a lot of reasons to be optimistic for India. They have a very balanced side, especially with the bat - there is a nice blend of experience and youth. Shubman Gill, in particular, is so consistent and he has a big role to play. I think he will have a great tournament."

"Rohit Sharma has found form, Virat Kohli is there; they are a top side and will take some stopping."

Dhawan is also not ruling out teams such as South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and hosts Pakistan, to whom India lost in the title clash in the last edition in the UK.

"I really like South Africa in this tournament as well. They have played consistent cricket and have everything you need to win such a huge tournament - experience, strength-in-depth and X-factor players like Kagiso Rabada."

"I also like Pakistan, they will be hard to beat in home conditions, and also New Zealand - who are just always there or thereabouts."

"Australia have struggled in their series with Sri Lanka but they some great batters; Travis Head is in great form, and I'm really excited to see Steve Smith."

Dhawan is one of the most successful batters in the tournament's history having scored 701 runs in 10 innings at an average of 77.88. He hit three centuries in the tournament, with his best being 125 against Sri Lanka in 2017.

"The ICC Champions Trophy means a great deal to me. We won in 2013 and then reached the final in 2017, and both times I finished as leading run-scorer," he added.



WPL: Delhi Capitals, UP Warriorz eye improved batting effort

PTI ■ VADODARA

Delhi Capitals and UP Warriorz will be aiming for an improved batting effort on Wednesday after floundering in their previous Women's Premier League matches.

The Capitals are yet to match the pre-tournament favourite billing with performances. Their batting has failed to fire in two matches, even in their victory over the Mumbai Indians.

They made heavy weather of the chase of a 165-run target before winning by two wickets, and folded for 141 against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday during the eight-wicket defeat.

The trouble starts from the top as skipper Meg Lanning has not been able to produce a big knock yet. It has seemed that international retirement has taken a toll on the Australian.

There have been occasional fireworks by Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues or Sarah Bryce, but they have not been able to convert into a substantial innings.

Their bowling has been in much better shape with veteran Shikha Pandey leading from the front, but she needs some more support from others, particularly from fellow pacer Arundhati Reddy.

The UP outfit too is in a similar place. Grace Harris and Tahlia McGrath, their middle-order powerhouses, looked uneasy against spin

and the Capitals have a capable bunch in Minnu Mani, Jess Jonassen and Radha Yadav.

The Warriorz have invested heavily in skipper Deepti Sharma, young wicketkeeper batter Uma Chhetri and openers Vrinda Dinesh and Kiran Navgire.

It's not often that a WPL team fills their top four with Indian players, and the quartet will have to repay the faith of the management sooner than later.

The absence of an injured Alyssa Healy has reduced the firepower in their top order. They would also expect leg-spinner Alana King to make an impression against Delhi, as the Aussie spinner, who bowled that extraordinary Shane Warne-esque delivery in the Women's Ashes, was quite expensive against Gujarat.

Teams (from): UP Warriorz: Deepti Sharma (captain), Alana King, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Grace Harris, Shweta Sehrawat, Anjali Sarvani, Kiran Navgire, Sophie Ecclestone, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Tahlia McGrath, Chamari Athapaththu, Poonam Khemnar, Uma Chhetry, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Vrinda Dinesh.

Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (captain), Harleen Deol, Prakashika Naik, Beth Mooney, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Sayali Satghare, Danielle Gibson, Mannat Kashyap, Shabnam Shahik, Dayalan Hemalatha, Meghna Singh, Simran Shaikh, Deandra Dottin, Phoebe Litchfield, Tanuja Kanwar.



Best leaders that I know have always empowered colleagues: Cummins

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leadership is all about having faith in the strengths of colleagues, believes Australia's talismanic captain Pat Cummins, who is busy promoting his new book after being forced out of the Champions Trophy due to an ankle injury.

At the age of 28, Cummins became Australia's 47th Test captain and since then he has led his country to the 50-over World Cup and the World Test Championship triumph apart from retaining the Ashes and regaining the coveted Border-Gavaskar Trophy just last month.

The 31-year-old, who has 503 international wickets across formats with 294 in Tests alone, donned the hat of an interviewer to speak to 11 achievers-cum-leaders from around the world for his new book 'Tested: The remarkable power of resolve' published by Harper Collins.

Asked about his idea of leadership and to what extent should the captain assert his authority, Cummins told PTI: "The best leaders I've played under always made me feel empowered, brought the best out of myself and made me feel a sense of freedom."

"I think it's important to lean into the individual strengths of each team member rather than trying to make everyone

assimilate," the pacer further stated.

While he has a handsome USD two million-plus contract with IPL franchise Sunrisers Hyderabad, whom he captained last year in the cash-rich league, the traditional format remains his No.1 priority.

"I love Test cricket so much so its always been an easy decision to keep that as my number one priority. Especially in Australia, we are lucky to have Test cricket so well-supported."

Cummins also spoke about the respect he has for his fellow speed merchants Indian talisman Jasprit Bumrah and Kagiso Rabada of South Africa.

"Those two guys (Bumrah and Rabada) are bowlers I enjoy watching and admire. They have been taking wickets consistently for many years and we've had some wonderful contests."

Talking about the book, Cummins also revealed the process he followed while deciding the list of interviewees for his new book. "I started with a list of people I knew and admired and whose life stories exemplified resilience, leadership and the power of resolve," he said.

Delighted to see ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan, says Wasim

PTI ■ KARACHI

Former captain Wasim Bari is glad to see the return of a global cricketing event to Pakistan through the ICC Champions Trophy, and hopes that the nightmarish days after the militant attack on Sri Lankan team in 2009 are forgotten forever.

Pakistan could not host international cricket for 10 years after that gruesome day, and were forced to play their home matches in the UAE.

Bari was serving as the Director in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) under the Chairmanship of late Ejaz Butt when the attack took place on March 3 near the Liberty roundabout close to the Gaddafi stadium.

"It was the worst day in my life when news came through of what had happened. Everyone was numb and most of us in our offices realised



immediately this was going to put Pakistan cricket back by a few years," Bari said.

Bari said there was disbelief followed by sorrow the governments of both the nations and the ICC got involved, and later a chartered flight was arranged to send the Lankan team back home.

Six policemen and two others were killed in the attack and several were injured including Pakistani umpire Ahsan Raza, who later had to undergo a life-saving operation.

Bari recalled that when pictures of the bullet-ridden bus and vans carrying the match officials and umpires in blood stained shirts went viral, it became obvious that Pakistan's hopes of staging the Champions Trophy or even the 2011 World Cup matches had vanished.

Without putting blame on anyone, Bari said: "It should never have happened and the result was Pakistan cricket couldn't properly grow for the next 10 years, as all teams

refused to play in Pakistan for security reasons."

Bari said he is delighted to see the ICC Champions Trophy being held in Pakistan now and multiple teams landing in the country.

"To see England, Australian, South African, New Zealand and Afghanistan teams in Karachi and Lahore means so much to all Pakistani cricketers, board officials and the fans," he said.

The 75-year-old said it was a tribute to the singleminded effort of all the stakeholders involved in Pakistan cricket.

"I think it is also a time to pay tribute to the resilience of Pakistan cricket while hosting the Champions Trophy, after all that has happened in the last 10 years."

Bari said Pakistan have some very good players, who are capable of helping the team defend the Champions Trophy title.

India's bowling coach Morkel returns home

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's bowling coach Morne Morkel has left for his home in South Africa due to a family emergency.

Morkel, who was appointed for the job in September last year, had travelled to Dubai with the Indian team on Saturday, and also attended the side's first practice session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy beginning on Wednesday.

The 40-year-old former South African pacer was, however, not around for the Indian team's second practice session on Monday, it has been learned.

The development comes just as India geared up to began their campaign with a match

against Bangladesh at Dubai International Cricket Stadium here on Thursday.

The Indian bowling attack for the ICC tournament comprises specialist pacers and one fast-bowling all-rounder in Hardik Pandya. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was ruled out of the event due to lower back injury, leaving the task of shouldering the fast-bowling responsibility on Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana and Mohammed Shami, with Pandya being the fourth option.

Pakistan is the host nation of the tournament, but India will be playing all their matches in Dubai as per the hybrid model agreed by the concerned stakeholders.

Jaspal Rana will continue as my coach: Manu Bhaker

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eyeing glory in next World Championship, double Olympic medallist shooter Manu Bhaker said Jaspal Rana will continue to be her "coach" despite the Dronacharya awardee being roped in as the High Performance trainer for pistol discipline by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

Rana, a four-time Asian Games gold medallist, had a very bitter and public fallout with Manu before the Tokyo Olympics but they reconciled before last year's Paris Games, where the latter made history by bagging two bronze medals.

"Honestly, I only have to say one thing that he (Rana) is my coach all I know and he is very good at what he does. He is very, very talented and



he has been a great coach for me.

"All I know and all I can say is that he is my coach. Of course, he can be anyone else's coach as well but for me he is my coach," Manu said after winning the BBC Sportswomen of the Year 2024 award at a glittering function here on Monday night.

Under Rana's personal guidance, Manu, who was

struggling after the Tokyo Games, made a remarkable comeback and became the first Indian to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics since Independence.

She won bronze medals in 10m air pistol and 10m air pistol mixed team events in Paris to create history.

Talking about her future plans, Manu said: "We will be going for World Cups in

April, and then we have some domestic competitions in June."

"It will be followed by another World Cup in Munich. Then we will have the World Championships, probably in late October or November. My target is the World Championships. I want to peak at the right time for the World Championships," she added.

The season-ending World Championships will be held in Cairo, Egypt, from November 6-16. Her unprecedented success in Paris wouldn't have been possible without Rana's guidance and Manu agrees to it. Manu, who turned 23 on Tuesday, considers Rana as her father figure, while the coach gives her the courage and confidence to seek and achieve great things in her sport.

Champions Trophy set to start amid debate on relevance of 50-over cricket

PTI ■ DUBAI/KARACHI

Intrigue, uncertainty, backstage drama. The ICC Champions Trophy has seen it all even before the curtains go up on the tournament and it would only get more stirring over the next three weeks, starting with the opening clash between Pakistan and New Zealand in Karachi.

Eight teams will vie for a trophy, often talked up as tougher to win than the World Cup, and also to script a new chapter in their own cricketing story. While India will fight it out in Dubai, others will be primarily based in Pakistan, which would get to host its first ICC event since the 1996 World Cup.

Several barriers had to be hurdled over to cobble this tournament together after eight years. The tournament is also crucial amid the raging debate on the relevance of ODI cricket, which is struggling to find its place

amid the rage for T20 cricket and the devotion for Test format.

Perhaps, no other cricketing event in the recent past has been harried so much by long-standing geopolitical tensions, stubbornness by administrative boards of two important participants, and the nail-biting anxiety over the main hosting nation.

The chaos has been an endearing throwback to the 90s when cricket in the sub-continent resembled a hastily organised party.

But all these pre-tournament jitters will be forgotten once the teams enter the field, and the first of them will be Pakistan and New Zealand.

If anyone needs a reminder, then Pakistan had won the last edition of the Champions Trophy in 2017.

The opening match in itself is a curious clash -- a talented-yet-volatile Pakistan unsure of its own destiny against a team

for which order is everything. But the blue riband match of the tournament will be on February 23 when India take on Pakistan, ushering in customary waves of nostalgia, emotions, political grandstanding, and the social media battle.

That marquee showdown will be in Dubai as India remained steadfast in its refusal to set foot on Pakistani soil owing to security concerns.

Last dance of Kohli, Rohit? But beyond such team equations, certain individual players would want this tournament to be a memorable one.

On top of the list are India's batting talismans Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. They have been magnificent servants of the game over the last decade and half.

Few in modern era were able to match their achievements and aura. But now, these two titans have reached the last lap of a long race, and would



want to bow out in a blaze of glory. It's tough to imagine Kohli and Rohit being part of India's ODI set-up after the Champions Trophy irrespective of the outcome.

It might even impact their future in Test cricket, as a lukewarm outing here might force the selectors to mull over their role ahead of India's tour to England in June.

Similarly, a failure to win the Champions Trophy will bring the role of head coach

Gautam Gambhir under scrutiny. Gambhir might have received a temporary relief after India's domination over England in the recent home series, but not it wouldn't be enough to brush under the carpet, India's recent travails against New Zealand and Australia.

But a global trophy will certainly give him a much better ground to stand.

From a team perspective, India will be eager to wrest

their first ICC trophy in the 50-over format after their triumph in the 2013 Champions Trophy under the enigmatic Mahendra Singh Dhoni. It will be a perfect parting gift to Kohli and Rohit and a welcome carpet to some young names such as Shubman Gill who are set to take India into the future.

The challengers India are playing a brand of ODI cricket that makes them instant favourites to win the tournament. They have adopted an aggressive approach and have a varied line-up, brimming with talent.

But such calculations can go wrong because of a bad moment or session, as it happened in the 2023 World Cup final when India succumbed to Australia after a middling batting effort.

The Aussies themselves are without their premier pacers Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood. But the

two-time champions still pack a punch as they have a batting unit to meet the demands of ODI format.

Once a feared white-ball team, England have slipped a few rungs as age and form have caught up with some of their leading performers.

But do the likes of Jos Buttler, Joe Root and Liam Livingstone have one last roar left in them? Or will some of their new stars such as Harry Brook or Ben Duckett cut open a new path?

New Zealand are also travelling on fresh avenue following the retirement of Trent Boult and Tim Southee.

Kane Williamson is their trump card and the Kiwis would hope that he fires for them to earn their maiden white ball ICC trophy.

South Africa too will have a similar goal. They had won ICC Knockouts Trophy in 1998, but not bagged anything in recent times and the Temba Bavuma-led side

will be hoping for a reversal of fortune. But for that to happen, the Proteas should coat their minds with steel in crunch situations.

It's applicable to Pakistan as well. If they can stop obsessing over the match against India and not treat it as the 'final frontier', then the home side is a dangerous opposition.

Their pace attack is top-notch and they have some batters like Fakhar Zaman and Salman Ali Agha who can turn on the heat on the rivals.

Afghanistan, who have transformed into a formidable white-ball outfit, also can put other teams under immense pressure through a squad that has Rashid Khan and Rahmanullah Gurbaz.

Bangladesh now has receded to the periphery of cricketing consciousness, but can they pull of a stunner as they had done in the 2007 50-over World Cup?