

the pioneer

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Strong pillars of India's governance model: *Murmu*



CAs NEED TO INNOVATE TO STAY AHEAD OF CURVE: RAJNATH



This witty and adult comedy is for *MASSSES*

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

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

- Revanth Reddy, CM, Telangana

DON'T MISS...

All set for NTR pensions in EG

All arrangements have been made for the disbursement of NTR Bharosa social security pensions in East Godavari district. District Collector P. Prashanthi stated that pensions amounting to Rs 102.14 crore would be disbursed to 2,36,331 beneficiaries on February 1. A total of 5,158 Pension Disbursing Officers (PDOs) have been assigned to distribute pensions across 9,041 cluster areas in the district. The Collector, in a statement on Friday, noted that the election code of conduct had come into effect following the issuance of the...

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AAP using Delhi as its 'political ATM'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party, accusing it of stalling Delhi's development while treating the national capital as its "political ATM" to fund its ambitions in other states. Addressing a public rally in Dwarka here, Modi urged voters to elect a "double-engine government" to accelerate the city's progress. The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state. He highlighted the recently inaugurated...

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Gold continues record breaking rally

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

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Gukesh to meet Wei Yi in TSC Tournament

On top of the table with a slender lead, world champion D Gukesh will take on Wei Yi of China in the 11th round of Tata Steel Chess Tournament, aiming to continue his unbeaten streak and claim the season's first title. With five victories and five draws, Gukesh has remained unbeaten in the first major tournament of the year and if he adds another 1.5 points in the last three rounds, it should be enough to lift the title. With 7.5 points, Gukesh is in pole position, half a point ahead of Nodirbek Abdusattorov of...

-SPORTS

Who will have the last laugh

FM gives final touches to Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday gave final touches to the first full Budget of Modi government's third term that is expected to balance the aspiration of the middle class for tax cut and needs of the economy to boost growth.

Sitharaman will on February 1 present a record eighth consecutive Budget that is expected to contain measures to shore up weakening economic growth and ease the burden on the mid-

dle class struggling with high prices and stagnant wage growth while being fiscally prudent.

"Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt. @nsitharaman interacts with the Secretaries and the senior officials involved in the Budget making process @FinMinIndia while giving final touches to the Union Budget 2025-26 at her office in North Block, in New Delhi, today," the finance ministry said in a post on X.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with core team of officials on Friday

Finance Pankaj Chaudhary also participated in the meeting, it said. The Budget will come in the backdrop of the GDP growth rate projected to fall to 4-year low of 6.4 per cent in the current financial year, close to its decadal average.

Continued on Page 2

Eco Survey calls for more reforms

Forecasts 6.3-6.8% growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

The state of the economy document, tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday, indi-

cated that India's world-beating growth is moderating and more needs to be done to achieve the near 8 per cent annual rate needed to achieve the Viksit Bharat target by 2047.

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

Continued on Page 2



New DGP Harish outlines his vision for AP police

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Harish Kumar Gupta, IPS (1992), has assumed the position of Director General of Police (DGP) of Andhra Pradesh. Expressing his gratitude towards Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for placing his trust in him, Gupta outlined his vision for the police force. Addressing the media on Friday after assuming charge, the DGP affirmed his commitment to following the path set by the Chief Minister and working towards achieving the SwarnAndhra Vision 2047 goals, with a particular focus on strengthening the police department.

Highlighting the rising threat of cybercrimes, DGP Gupta detailed plans to bolster cyber security. He announced that special attention would be given to reducing cyber-crime, with the establishment of a dedicated Cyber Security Police

Station in every district. Additionally, 600 Cyber Commandos would be recruited and trained at IITs to effectively tackle cybercrimes. Strict action would be taken against social media-related offences and cyber-crimes, he added.

Gupta emphasised the need for increased CCTV surveillance in crime-prone areas. He stated that efforts would be made to identify criminals swiftly and ensure they face legal consequences. Furthermore, AI technology would be harnessed to address traffic issues and enhance traffic management systems. DGP Gupta also stressed the importance of strengthening the Narcotics Division to combat drug-related crimes more effectively.

The new DGP assured that police welfare would be prioritised, with a focus on ensuring swift promotions within the department.

Continued on Page 2

GRADUATE MLC POLLS

Naidu gives roadmap for NDA win

SAYS VICTORY IN ALL ELECTIONS KEY TO STABLE GOVERNANCE

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has underlined the importance of electoral victories for stable governance during a teleconference with NDA coalition ministers, MPs, and MLAs concerning the upcoming MLC elections. He stated that elections would be held in the combined Godavari and Krishna-Guntur graduates' constituencies, as well as in the Srikakulam-Vizianagaram-Visakhapatnam teachers' constituency. The CM urged the NDA parties to organize coordination meetings to enhance their candidates' chances of success in the elections.

The coalition has nominated P Rajasekhara and A Rajendra Prasad as its candidates. The election notification will be issued on February 3, and the elections will take place on February 27, with counting set for March 3.

Continued on Page 2



- Naidu encourages the NDA parties to organise coordination meetings to boost their candidates' success

- The coalition has nominated P Rajasekhara and A Rajendra Prasad as its candidates, with the election notification on February 3 and elections on February 27

- CM urges leaders to engage with every graduate voter to secure a large majority but cautions against complacency

'TDP leaders' performance far from satisfactory'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister and TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu expressed strong dissatisfaction with the performance of party leaders, high-

lighting their failure to effectively implement and publicise government schemes. Addressing a party politburo meeting, Naidu criticised leaders for not taking action after assuming their positions, stating,

"The performance of party leaders is far from satisfactory. If we do not take the schemes we are implementing to the people, how can we expect success?"

Continued on Page 2

2 AP students die in car crash in Ireland

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Two students from Andhra Pradesh lost their lives in a car crash in County Carlow, Ireland. The victims have been identified as Chitturi Bhargava from Gandrai village in Jaggayyapeta mandal of NTR district, and Cherukuri Suresh from Guntur. Both in their 20s, they had moved to Ireland for higher studies.

Continued on Page 2

DSC notification after MLC polls: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, RTGS, IT, and Electronics Nara Lokesh has announced that the District Selection Committee (DSC) notification for teacher recruitment will be issued immediately after the conclusion of the MLC election code of conduct. Speaking at the TDP headquarters in Mangalagiri, Lokesh emphasised the government's commitment to initiating the recruitment process as the academic year begins.

The Minister explained that the recruitment process would begin in March, to complete teacher appointments before the start of the new academic year. He highlighted that the TDP has a strong record in

teacher recruitment, having filled over 80% of vacancies in both united Andhra Pradesh and post-bifurcation Andhra Pradesh. He assured that the government is actively engaging with teacher associations to ensure a democratic approach to decision-making and that all education-related policies will reflect teachers' feedback.

Lokesh also announced that every Friday, the Commissioner would be available to address teachers' concerns. He revealed plans to introduce a Transfer Act aimed at bringing more transparency to teacher transfers and reaffirmed that the TDP government bases its educational policies on extensive consultations with all stakeholders.

Continued on Page 2

SC upholds HC order on TDP office attack case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the case concerning the attack on the TDP office in Gannavaram, 33 accused individuals sought relief from the Apex Court. The petition was heard by Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, who refused to intervene in the Andhra Pradesh High Court's order.

The accused had earlier sought bail and anticipatory bail from the High Court, but their petition was rejected. The High Court directed them to approach the lower courts, stating that there was no immediate need for its intervention. Subsequently, the accused filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the High Court's decision.

However, the Supreme Court made it clear that it would not intervene in the matter. Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta upheld the High Court's order, instructing the accused to approach the trial court for anticipatory bail, as advised by the High Court.

Continued on Page 2

C-LAP to root out poverty in urban areas of AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Director of the Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA), N Tej Bharat, has stated that in line with the guidelines of the Deendayal National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), efforts are underway to formulate a City Livelihood Action Plan (C-LAP) across all urban areas of Andhra Pradesh. The initiative aims to provide livelihood opportunities to the urban poor based on their skills and abilities, thereby enhancing the per capita income of families in coordination with municipal authorities.

As part of this initiative, from 28th January to 5th February 2025, a City Livelihood Task Force (CLTF)

City Livelihood Task Force (CLTF) Committees have been formed in municipalities such as Srikakulam, Rajahmundry, Guntur, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and others.

Committee has been constituted under the leadership of the Municipal Commissioner in various municipalities, including Srikakulam, Rajahmundry, Prakasam, Guntur, Kakinada, Kadapa, Vizianagaram, Vijayawada, Anantapur, Visakhapatnam, Machilipatnam, Tirupati, Nellore, Chittoor, and Mangalagiri.

Continued on Page 2

CM offers silk robes to deity at Penugonda temple

PNS ■ PENUGONDA (WG DIST)

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu sought the blessings of Goddess Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari for the all-round development of the state during his visit to the temple in Penugonda, West Godavari district, on Friday. He termed it auspicious to offer silk robes to the goddess and noted that the temple has a 2,600-year history. Devotees believe that prayers at the shrine bring auspicious results.

The Chief Minister was accorded a ceremonial welcome by temple authorities and priests, while Vedic scholars blessed him during the visit.

Speaking on the occasion, Naidu said the goddess symbolises non-violence, self-sacrifice, peace, and righteousness. Devotees from

across the country, including Arya Vaisyas and other communities, worship her. He reiterated the government's commitment to the welfare of the Arya Vaisya com-

munity. Naidu pointed out that the temple houses a 90-foot statue of the goddess and a seven-storey tower. He lauded donors for supporting

various charitable initiatives through the temple trust. Highlighting the contributions of the Arya Vaisya community, the CM said they are known for

their business ethics and integrity. He noted that while they were traditionally engaged in small-scale businesses, they are now making significant strides in large-scale enterprises and public service.

He expressed confidence that with the blessings of the goddess, good fortune would prevail for all. The state government, he said, has introduced innovations like "WhatsApp Governance," making 161 government services accessible to the public. He stressed that his vision is to ensure happiness and prosperity for all.

Naidu also invited the Arya Vaisya community to actively participate in achieving the Swarnandhra Vision 2047 and reiterated his commitment to their welfare and the state's holistic development.



CM expressed confidence that with the blessings of the Goddess, good fortune would prevail for all. The State government, he said, has introduced innovations like "WhatsApp Governance," making 161 government services accessible to the public. He stressed that his vision is to ensure happiness and prosperity for all.

Trust driven reforms-the final frontier

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



KISHORE POREDDY

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

Since India was late to the globalisation and liberalisation

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

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

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

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

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

India embarked on liberalising its economy more than thirty

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

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

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson)

Complaints on land encroachments flood TDP Central Office

Minister Subhash promises to resolve issues raised by complainants

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

People from various parts of Andhra Pradesh gathered in large numbers at the TDP central office in Mangalagiri on Friday to raise grievances concerning land encroachments, unlawful activities, and other issues. Minister Vasanth Reddy Subhash, along with MLC Ashok Babu and MLA Badeti Chanti, heard the complaints and assured efforts to address the concerns raised.

One of the key complaints came from D. Chittitalli of Thoodem village, Bhogapuram Mandal, Vizianagaram district. She stated that her family has been cultivating land in the Annavaram Panchayat for over 40 years. However, during the previous government, members associated with the YSR Congress Party attempted to illegally claim the land using forged documents. She urged authorities to take action against the perpetrators and restore justice.

In Guntur district, Shaik Maulali of Raavela village raised a serious concern over



the death of his granddaughter, Amirun, who was married to Syed Rafi, the son of Syed Subhani from Sattenapalle. Shaik Maulali claimed that his granddaughter was killed within six months of her marriage due to additional dowry demands and requested action against the accused.

Eranna from Santhekudlur village, Adoni Mandal, Kurnool district, shared that his family has been cultivating land for over 50 years but has been unable to get the land registered online despite repeated attempts. He appealed to

authorities to take necessary steps for the online registration of the land.

K. Tejanath from Shaikshanipalli village, Uravakonda Mandal, Anantapur district, complained about his land, which is under a court dispute. He alleged that despite legal proceedings, an encroacher was illegally occupying the land and asked for immediate action to prevent further encroachment.

Chandrasekar A., convenor of the Scheduled Tribes Cell, urged the government to take steps to include the Pusa

community in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list. He requested that the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly pass a resolution to this effect and send it to the central government.

A complaint was raised by A. Srinivasulu of Marrikuntapalli village, Kalikiri Mandal, Annamayya district, concerning land disputes. Srinivasulu stated that his family, belonging to the Scheduled Caste community, had been farming their ancestral land for generations. However, he alleged that members of an upper-caste community were attempting to take over the land through violent means and threats. He requested intervention to protect his family's rights.

N. Madhu from Darsi, Prakasam district, demanded action against two Circle Inspectors (CIs), Bima Nayak and Ramakoti, who, according to him, had harassed TDP workers by filing false cases during the previous government. He called for an inquiry and appropriate action to be taken against them.

Roja slams Naidu govt over unpaid education dues

PNS ■ NAGARI

Former minister R K Roja criticised the Chandrababu Naidu-led government, accusing it of jeopardising students' futures by failing to clear Rs 3,900 crore in pending dues under various educational schemes.

She pointed out that Rs 2,800 crore under the 'Vidya Devena' scheme and Rs 1,100 crore under the 'Vasathi Devena' scheme remain unpaid, making education inaccessible for poor students. Roja reminded the public that when Chandrababu Naidu stepped down, Rs 2,800 crore in dues were pending, which the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government gradually cleared. Accusing Naidu of indifference towards the underprivileged, she alleged that the fee reimbursement scheme introduced by Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was now being systematically disman-

ttled. Slamming the government's policies over the past seven months, she claimed that key welfare schemes like 'Cheyutha', 'Ammu Vodi', 'Nadu-Nedu', 'Arogyasi', and the volunteer system have been scrapped. Instead of focusing on development, the government was preoccupied with criticising Jagan Mohan Reddy, she said.

Roja also took a jibe at TDP leader Nara Lokesh, who had earlier declared that people should "hold the government accountable" if promises were not fulfilled. "Whose collar should we grab now?" she questioned, alleging that Naidu had failed to implement his promises. She recalled how Naidu had once dismissed the act of pressing a button



to release funds as insignificant while she was now struggling to fulfil even basic commitments.

Taking a dig at Pawan Kalyan, Roja questioned his silence on Naidu's unfulfilled promises, despite guaranteeing them before the elections. "It seems their only goal was to seize power for themselves and their families," she remarked.

She further criticised the government for failing to deliver on its electoral assurances, including the promise of Rs 15,000 per student. "They lured people with fake promises and even distributed bonds that are now worthless," she said, accusing the ruling alliance of misleading voters with false claims of direct cash benefits.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Tritiya, Jan 31 01:59 PM to Feb 01 11:38 AM
Chaturthi: Feb 01 11:38 AM to Feb 02 09:14 AM
Nakshatram: Purva Bhadrapada: Feb 01 04:14 AM to Feb 02 02:33 AM
Uttara Bhadrapada: Feb 02 02:33 AM to Feb 03 12:52 AM
Rahukalam: 9:40 AM to 11:05 AM
Yamagandam: 1:54 PM to 3:18 PM
Varjyam: 11:28 AM to 12:58 PM
Gulika: 6:51 AM to 8:16 AM
Amritakalam: 07:06 PM to 08:36 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 PM to 12:52 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly Sunny
Temp: 32°
Humidity: 77%
Sunrise: 6:38 AM
Sunset: 6:04 PM
Updated: January 31, 2025 5:00 PM

DSC notification...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister strongly criticised the YSRCP's protests over pending fee reimbursement dues, accusing former Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's administration of leaving behind unpaid dues amounting to ₹3,000 crore, while the current government has already cleared ₹800 crore. He questioned the logic behind YSRCP leaders protesting over issues they had created.

Lokesh further stated that the current government is working to settle all pending dues from the previous YSRCP regime, including payments to farmers, employees, and other sectors. He accused the previous government of confusing with student and teacher data. In response, the Minister announced the introduction of an Aadhaar-linked "Apar Card" system to accurately track student numbers. He also revealed plans to implement a special mechanism aimed at reducing school dropout rates in government schools. Additionally, Lokesh announced a new proposal aimed at promoting leadership development within the TDP. He suggested that no leader should hold the same position for more than three terms, ensuring greater mobility within party ranks. This, he explained, would allow leaders to progress from village-level positions to mandal, constituency, and district-level roles.

ZAP students...

Continued from Page 1

Local media reports indicate that the accident occurred early on Friday morning at approximately 1:15 am on the N80 road in Graignemanangh, Leagh, Rathoe, Carlow. The car, which was heading towards Carlow town, skidded off the road and collided with a tree. The impact was severe, resulting in the immediate deaths of Bhargav, the driver, and Suresh, a passenger. Two other passengers, a man and a woman, also in their 20s, sustained serious injuries and were rushed to St Luke's General Hospital in Kilkenny. Fortunately, their condition is now reported to be stable.

Reports suggest that the car had been travelling from the Mount Leinster area, passing through Fenagh before heading onto the Wexford road when the crash occurred.

Naidu gives roadmap for...

Continued from Page 1

The CM emphasized the need for efforts to secure a large majority by engaging with every graduate voter, noting that the educated community largely supports the coalition. However, he cautioned leaders not to become complacent with this support. He urged that coordination meetings with NDA allies be held, and that work be done closely with cluster, unit, and booth in-charges, as well as with leaders from the Janasena and BJP committees.

"These elections are crucial for establishing a stable government," the CM remarked. He

added that only through electoral success can the administration gain further popularity and win the support of the people. First-time elected MLAs and new political entrants were urged to work with sincerity. He stressed the importance of effectively communicating the coalition government's development and welfare programmes to the public. Over the past seven months since the government's formation, the coalition has overcome challenges and is progressing towards effective governance, providing stable administration without burdening the people.

CM Naidu clarified that the government is not promising overnight changes but is working diligently to fix derailed systems. He highlighted the support from the central government for the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, the capital city of Amaravati, Polavaram funding, railway zones, and other development and welfare initiatives. The "Job First" policy has led to the introduction of new industrial policies, and the coalition government has attracted investments worth nearly Rs 7 lakh crore, which will create 4,10,125 job opportunities for the youth.

The CM further announced that the notification for 16,347 teacher posts (DSSC) will be issued soon. He emphasized that it is the responsibility of leaders to inform the public about these initiatives. Similar to the general elections, the three-party leaders must continue to collaborate in a coordinated manner for all upcoming elections. CM Naidu reiterated the need for a well-structured plan to ensure victory in every election. The candidates also reported that, with the exception of UTF, the teaching community is supporting the coalition.

New DGP...

Continued from Page 1

He also highlighted the need for improved health services for police personnel, recognising their well-being as crucial for the force's overall performance.

Gupta promised that work on the Police Academy and Greyhounds facility would be expedited, as the government has allocated the necessary land for these projects. He also shared plans to further strengthen the Greyhounds force, which specialises in counter-insurgency and anti-Naxal operations.

While the Dial 100 service is functioning well, the DGP assured that efforts would be made to enhance its efficiency. He also acknowledged the good performance of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems, with plans to further improve it to speed up criminal investigations and make the system more efficient.

'TDP leaders' performance far...

Continued from Page 1

Naidu recalled the party's successful run between 2014-2019 but pointed out that the failure to communicate these successes to the public led to their defeat. He emphasised, "This time, we cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes. We must work in the 1995-1999 mode to achieve good results." His frustration was evident as he stressed that party leaders must become proactive in promoting the party's achievements.

The Chief Minister also expressed concerns about the State's financial situation, stating that it was worse than anticipated. He noted the lack of opportunities for new loans and mentioned that while the central government's cooperation had helped bring in some pending projects and funds, there was still a lack of effort in publicising these developments. Despite securing a Rs 11,400 crore package for the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, Naidu lamented that ministers,

MLAs, and party leaders had failed to effectively communicate this achievement to the public.

"Only due to my pressure did the Central government announce the package for Visakhapatnam Steel," Naidu said, adding, "Thousands of employees benefited from this, but very few leaders spoke about it. How can we expect people to know about our achievements if we don't share them?"

Naidu also voiced anger over the failure of ministers and MLAs to counter negative media reports, warning that not addressing such stories could lead the public to believe them, causing harm to the party. He instructed leaders to actively respond to media reports in the future.

Further, he commented on the ongoing issue of cases filed against party workers by the YSRCP government, suggesting that coordination with the DGP and SP could help resolve the matter quickly. Responding to this, Minister Lokesh

assured that the party was taking the issue seriously and was closely monitoring the cases.

In response to comments made by former minister Yanamala Ramakrishnu regarding the party's handling of its Davos visit, Naidu explained that Lokesh's office had been actively involved in managing the matter. He also announced that the party would hold its Mahanadu on May 27-28 in Kadapa, a location chosen for its proximity to several districts and its good accommodation facilities.

Naidu concluded by outlining plans to launch the "Annadatha" and "Sukhibhava" schemes starting in May-June, stressing that the party would launch each scheme in a phased manner, considering the financial situation. He assured party leaders that promises made to the people would be fulfilled, and after the national president election, both State and national committees would be formed.

Who will...

Continued from Page 1

The Economic Survey 2024-25 tabled by the Finance Minister in both Houses has estimated India's GDP growth in the range of 6.3-6.8 per cent in FY26, much lower than what is needed to become a developed country, and requires deregulation and reforms in areas like land and labour to stimulate growth. It indicated that India's world-beating growth is moderating and more needs to be done to achieve the near 8 per cent annual rate required to achieve the Viksit Bharat target by 2047.

Continued from Page 1

The committee, in collaboration with the National Institute for MSME (NI-MSME), will work on designing a five-year City Livelihood Action Plan. Tej Bharat announced that a special programme has been launched in partnership with NI-MSME under MEPMA to develop C-LAP in all municipalities. The primary objective is to enhance

Eco Survey calls for...

Continued from Page 1

"Rural demand backed by a rebound in agricultural production, an anticipated easing of food inflation and a stable macro-economic environment provide an upside to near-term growth," said Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran, who along with his team in the finance ministry, authored the report. The risks to India's economic prospects next year are balanced, he added. Geopolitical and trade uncertainties, along with possible commodity price shocks, pose headwinds to the economy, said Nageswaran, who had last year predicted a 6.5-7 per cent GDP growth in the 2024-25 fiscal. The survey said

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

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

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

SC upholds...

Continued from Page 1

The court granted a two-week deadline for the accused to approach the trial court.

The Supreme Court also directed the state government not to take any hasty action before this deadline. It further advised the lower courts to make their decisions independently, without being influenced by the higher court's observations. The Supreme Court clarified that it was not addressing the merits of the case.

C-LAP to root out poverty...

Committee comprises representatives from various departments, industries, voluntary organisations, and self-help groups involved in urban livelihoods. He added that the committee will coordinate efforts to provide employment opportunities, necessary training, and sustainable livelihood programmes

for the urban poor. Special training sessions for line department staff and committee members will be organised in collaboration with NI-MSME, focusing on expanding job opportunities and self-employment prospects. Tej Bharat urged municipal authorities, voluntary organisations, youth, and women's groups to extend their support for the successful implementation of the programme.

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Ensure daily wage of Rs 300 for NREGS workers: NTR Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha has stated that NREGS workers must receive a daily wage of ₹300 as part of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. He instructed field-level officials and staff to execute work with a proper plan and to ensure that workers are paid the correct amount. The Collector held a teleconference on Friday with the Additional Rural Development Officers (ARDOs), Municipal Commissioners and MPDOs to discuss the NREGS scheme, Solid Waste Management (SWM) Centres, pension distribution and other matters. During the meeting, Dr Lakshmisha highlighted the need for a clear understanding of work marking and muster roll procedures. He urged officials to provide proper training to field assistants, technical assistants and other staff to ensure that the workers receive ₹300 per day. He emphasised that strong supervision is crucial to achieving goals. The Collector warned that negli-

'Field level staff should work with proper planning'



Dr Lakshmisha highlighted the need for a clear understanding of work marking and muster roll procedures. He urged officials to provide proper training to field assistants, technical assistants and other staff to ensure that the workers receive Rs 300 per day. He emphasised that strong supervision is crucial to achieving goals. The Collector warned that negligence in duty will not be tolerated and that disciplinary action will be taken if necessary.

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He also stressed the importance of ensuring the smooth functioning of the 264 solid waste processing centres (SWM centres) in 286 village panchayats. For the 22 pan-

chayats without such a facility, steps should be taken to establish them. He instructed that any necessary repairs be completed promptly and these centres should be brought into operation. All centres should be connected by roads, fenced and equipped for

vermi-seeding, she added.

Dr Lakshmisha stressed the need for every village panchayat to have at least one CLAP Mitra for every 1,000 people. He also stressed the importance of implementing the 'Swarnandhra-Swachhandhra' programme

in all panchayats and ensuring 100 per cent wet and dry waste collection. Efforts must be made for awareness camps, segregation of waste, and making bins available for public use. Besides, the Collector directed the completion of household geotagging and data integration as part of the household database survey.

The Collector instructed that pension distribution for the state government's 'NTR Bharosa' scheme should begin promptly at 6 AM, in accordance with State guidelines and election conduct rules. Efforts should be made to complete the distribution on the first day itself. Dr Lakshmisha also announced that ₹98.20 crore has been released for 2,29,913 pensions in the district.

The teleconference was attended by Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner Dhyana-chandra HM, DRDA PD K Srinivasa Rao, DWAMA PD A Ramu, ARDOs K Chaitanya, K Madhuri, K Balakrishna, Municipal Commissioners, MPDOs and others.

Novena prayers begin on a grand note at Gunadala

Bishop Raja Rao highlights special role of Mother Mary in God's salvation plan



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The grand Novena prayers for the Gundala Lourdes Mother Feast, one of the largest Catholic pilgrimage sites in South India, began on Friday evening with immense fervour. The event was inaugurated by Bishop Thalgatoti Joseph Raja Rao of the Vijayawada Diocese, along with Monsignor Fr Muvvala Prasad, Vicar General Fr M Gabriel, Rector Fr Yellati William Jayaraju, Director Fr K Marianna, Director Fr T Sunil Raju, and other dignitaries, who unveiled the banner of Mother Mary at the main church of the shrine.

In his message, Bishop Rajarao spoke about Pope Francis declaring 2025 as a Jubilee Year. He emphasised that Mother Mary was chosen as the Mother of God in His divine plan of salvation. He expressed that Mary is blessed among all women and honoured as the Mother of Christ. The Bishop added that honouring Mother Mary leads to receiving God's grace, and through her intercession, one can draw closer to God.

He also noted that the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Gundala Lourdes Mother Shrine were held successfully last year, and called upon devotees to celebrate the

101st anniversary of the feast this year with deep faith and devotion.

Monsignor Fr Muvvala Prasad stated that those fortunate enough to experience the divine vision of Mother Mary would be blessed. He mentioned that the Novena prayers, which will continue for nine days, will spiritually prepare devotees for the upcoming feast.

The event saw the participation of several prominent priests, including Fr B Anand, Fr M Chinnappa, Fr K Marianna, Fr P Thomas, and community leaders, along with a large gathering of devotees.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SC sub-classification: Commission visits Vijayawada

Assesses living conditions and welfare schemes for SC communities

The one-man Commission led by retired IAS officer Rajeev Ranjan Mishra to recommend measures for the fair distribution of benefits under the SC sub-classification reservation system visited Vijayawada on Friday. As part of his State-wide review, Mishra visited the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation to assess the living conditions and welfare schemes for Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. Accompanied by Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM

Dhyana-chandra, the Commission Chairman visited Relis Colony, where he interacted with residents to understand their livelihood conditions. He examined their housing and occupations to gather insights into their socio-economic status. Mishra also inspected an Anganwadi centre, reviewing the nutritional food provided to children, their height and weight

records, and the overall facilities available at the centre.

Later, he interacted with members of the Sainath Self-Help Group, analysing their financial growth through self-employment, government loan assistance, and the impact of their business ventures on economic empowerment. The Commission also visited Patamata

Zilla Parishad High School, where he discussed the educational progress of SC students with the headmistress. He reviewed the number of SC students, their academic performance, and the quality of mid-day meal services. To assess students' learning capabilities, he interacted with Class IX students, asking them to explain their syllabus topics.

Elaborate steps for Rathasapthami

2.5 to 3 lakh pilgrims expected to turn up for the festival

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The TTD Trust Board, chaired by BR Naidu, held an extensive discussion on the arrangements for Radhasapthami, scheduled to take place in Tirumala on February 4.

Speaking to the media at Annamaiah Bhavan on Friday, alongside TTD Executive Officer J Syamala Rao and other board members, the Chairman outlined the extensive preparations for the grand occasion. Key highlights include:

Radhasapthami, observed every year on Surya Jayanti during the Shukla Paksha Saptami Tithi, will see elaborate arrangements in Tirumala. Malayappa Swami will bless the devotees in a procession on seven vehicles from morning to evening.

An estimated 2.5 to 3 lakh devotees are expected, and TTD has made extensive arrangements to accommodate them.

On this day, the following services will be suspended: Ashtadala Pada Padmaradhana, Kalyanotsavam, Unjal Seva, Arjita Brahmotsavam, Sahasra Deepalankara services, and dar-



shan for NRIs, parents with infants, senior citizens, and disabled persons.

Slotted Sarvadarshan tokens will not be issued in Tirupati from February 3 to 5.

VIP break darshan will be cancelled, except for protocol dignitaries on February 4. No recommendation letters will be accepted for VIP break darshan on February 3.

Devotees with Special Entry Darshan (SED) tickets are requested to report at the Vaikuntham queue complex at the specified time on their tickets to avoid long waiting times.

Security will be heightened, with 1,000 TTD Vigilance personnel, 1,250 policemen, and additional support from Octopus, APSP, and fire brigade teams.

Special entry and exit points will be arranged for devotees to access the galleries.

NDRF personnel and expert swimmers will be stationed at Pushkarini for the chakra snanam.

Senior officers will supervise the facilities provided to devotees along the four Mada streets.

Continuous distribution of Annaprashadam, including but-

termilk, sambar rice, curd rice, pulihora, and pongali, will be available for devotees waiting in the galleries.

Temporary sheds will be set up along Mada streets to protect devotees from adverse weather conditions.

A total of 8 lakh laddus will be prepared, including a buffer stock of 4 lakh.

Electrical and floral decorations will be arranged to enhance the festive atmosphere.

LED screens will be installed so that devotees can view the vahanams.

Public announcements will provide live updates to devotees.

SVBC will broadcast the celebrations in HD quality, allowing devotees worldwide to witness the Rathasapthami festivities.

Medical personnel, medicines, and ambulances will be on standby to provide emergency services to devotees.

A team of 2,500 Srivari Sevaks will be deployed to assist with the distribution of Annaprashadam and water to devotees in the galleries.

Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, JEO Veerabrahmam, and CVSO I/c Manikantha were also present.

AP students shine at 'Hack to Future' with innovative solutions



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Students from Andhra Pradesh made a significant impact at the 'Hack to the Future' hackathon, a five-day event hosted by Quest Alliance in Bengaluru. The event, held from January 27 to 31, brought together more than 57 young innovators from five states to create scalable solutions for real-world challenges using AI, IoT, and sustainable technologies.

Among the standout projects, students from AP Model School, Mattam Sariyapalli,

developed an IoT-based livestock monitoring device, designed to track the movement and health of cattle, addressing challenges faced by rural farmers. Another team from KGBV Ponnada, Srikakulam, created a chatbot to assist hostel residents struggling with loneliness and mental health issues, with features to alert counsellors in critical situations.

These innovations are part of a broader initiative in Andhra Pradesh, where Quest Alliance has reached over 60,000 learners and trained more than 500

educators in STEM and 21st-century skills since 2019. The event was part of a larger effort under an MoU with Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Andhra Pradesh, to expand the AI curriculum in the state.

The hackathon emphasised inclusivity, with a focus on empowering girls and marginalised students. It also featured talks by women leaders in STEM and hands-on experiences with emerging technologies such as AI, drones, and Virtual Reality, preparing students for future careers in technology.

Youth murders mother after dispute over online games

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A teenager has allegedly killed his mother by stabbing her for not letting him play online games at their residence in Malkapuram. The deceased was identified as Alka Singh (48), wife of an employee with the Indian Coast Guard. Singh's husband, an Indian Coast Guard Commander Balbir Singh, was apparently stationed in Odisha at the time of the incident.

Upon receiving information about the incident from locals, the Malkapuram police rushed to the spot and found Alka Singh lying in a pool of blood.

According to police, the preliminary investigation revealed that Alka Singh's elder son Anmol Singh was suspected of killing his mother as he was addicted to online games for the past few months.

Alka Singh warned her son multiple times not to become addicted to internet games and forbade him from playing them on his laptop.

Malladi slams govt for failing to deliver 'Super 6' promises



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP Central Constituency Coordinator and former MLA Malladi Vishnu criticised the alliance government for failing to fulfil its 'Super 6' promises. Addressing the media on Friday, he stated that the ruling party was responsible for implementing its election manifesto but had failed to do so.

Vishnu highlighted that the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government had implemented 99.4% of its election promises,

a significant achievement. He recalled that issues raised during the Praja Sankalpa Yatra were addressed through the welfare calendar, ensuring transparency. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government continued welfare programmes without disruption.

Lashing out at Chandrababu Naidu, Vishnu accused him of misleading the public with false assurances. He recalled Naidu's 2014 promise to waive Rs 87,612 crore in farm loans, which was later reduced to Rs

15,000 crore. He also criticised the government for privatising medical colleges, making education inaccessible to the poor.

Vishnu alleged that the government had deceived farmers, women, and youth by failing to deliver on promises. He noted that Rs 3,900 crore under education schemes remained unpaid, exposing the government's failure.

Several YSRCP leaders, including Corporator Sharvani Murthy, were present.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) is promoting financial literacy among school students across India. The initiative was highlighted by S. Ranganathan, Vice-President of NSE, at the GITAM Excellence Meet (GEM-25) held at GITAM Deemed to be University on Friday.

Ranganathan, the chief guest at the event, emphasised the collaborative efforts between the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and NSE Academy in implementing a certification programme in Financial Market Management (FMM) for students in Classes IX and X. This programme, introduced under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) at Levels 1 and 2, provides a blend of theoretical and practical learning to equip young students with crucial financial literacy skills.

"Financial literacy is a vital life skill," stated Ranganathan, highlighting NSE Academy's extensive collaborations with Indian universities, private institutions, and government bodies. He announced that over 4.8 million students nationwide have received NSE certifications through various

NSE Academy empowering students with financial market skills

CBSE, NSE Academy implementing certification programme for Classes IX, X students



programmes, establishing these certifications as industry benchmarks for financial market expertise.

Prof. Raja P Pappu, Dean of GITAM School of Business, discussed the university's ongo-

ing partnership with NSE Academy in offering specialised financial programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He also revealed plans to incorporate additional financial education

subjects into the curriculum with NSE's support, stressing GITAM's commitment to preparing students for successful careers in the financial sector.

The GEM-25 event provid-

ed a valuable platform for students and faculty to gain insights into the importance of financial literacy and NSE Academy's contribution to developing financial market expertise among young people.

Arrangements made for NTR Bharosa pensions in EG

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

All arrangements have been finalised for the disbursement of NTR Bharosa social security pensions in East Godavari district.

District Collector P. Prashanthi stated that Rs 102.14 crore would be distributed to 2,36,331 pensioners on February 1. She mentioned that 5,158 Pension Disbursing Officers (PDOs) have been entrusted with the responsibility of disbursing pensions across 9,041 cluster areas in the district.

In a statement on Friday, the Collector informed that the election code of conduct has come into effect following the notification for the MLC graduates' constituency election. She added that necessary instructions have been issued to ensure pension disbursement



adheres to the guidelines of the Election Commission.

The Collector further revealed that the disbursement

of NTR Bharosa social security pensions would commence at 6 am on Saturday, with pensions being delivered directly to beneficiaries' homes.

"Arrangements have been made for the distribution of NTR Bharosa social security pensions at the doorsteps through 5,158 PDOs across 9,041 cluster areas in the district on Saturday. Each PDO will distribute an average of 46 pensions. The disbursement will begin at 6 am," Collector Prashanthi confirmed, adding that Rs 102.14 crore will be disbursed to a total of 2,36,331 beneficiaries in 17 categories through the relevant bank branches.

DRDA Project Director NVVS Murthy also stated on Friday that the cash withdrawal process had been completed from 71 branches of 11 banks across the district.

TTD Chairman lauds services of deputed employees

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Chairman BR Naidu, on behalf of the entire Trust Board, complimented the services of deputed employees of TTD at Kumbh Mela. TTD has constructed a Srivari temple in Maha Kumbh Mela at Prayag Raj of Uttar Pradesh in Sector 06. Speaking to the media after the TTD board meeting on Friday at Annamaiah Bhavan in Tirumala he said that more than 250 TTD employees are providing services in the Maha Kumbh Mela.

On an average, more than 10,000 devotees visit Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple every day at Prayagraj. He said that Srivari Kankaryams and prasads were being distributed in the style of Tirumala and praises were being received from the devotees in Prayag Raj.

Arasavalli gears up for grand Rathasaptami celebrations

Cultural programmes, grand processions, and spiritual events planned

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

The district administration is making elaborate arrangements for the upcoming Rathasaptami celebrations at Lord Suryanarayana Swamy Temple in Arasavalli, scheduled from February 2 to 4. District Collector Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar, during a review meeting with senior officials, spoke about the diverse cultural programmes, grand processions, and spiritual events planned for the festival. He emphasised the need for seamless coordination between all departments to ensure the smooth execution of the festivities.

The Rathasaptami festivities will commence with mass Surya Namaskars, followed by a vibrant array of rural sports, including volleyball, karrasamu, sangidi, bullock cart races, and weightlifting, all set to take place at the Municipal High School grounds. A dazzling fireworks display at the Dutch Building is also planned to add a touch of excitement to the celebrations.

For the first time, helicopter rides are being offered. The designated helicopter site has been inspected, and rigorous safety measures have been implemented. Emphasis has been placed on strict adherence to aviation regulations, with ticket bookings available through an official website. Logistical arrangements, including effi-



cient transportation to the helipad and well-equipped waiting areas for passengers, have been prioritised.

Anticipating a large turnout of over 3.5 lakh devotees at the Arasavalli Sri Suryanarayana Swamy Temple, the State Tourism Department has introduced a new tourism package to promote other significant temples in the region. This package, priced at Rs 750 per person, will cover prominent sites like the Srikrishna Swamy Temple of Srikurman, Endala Mallikarjuna Temple of Ravivalasa, Salihundam Buddhist site, and Mogadhalapadu beach.

The district police have implemented a comprehensive security and traffic management plan. Speaking to the media, SP Maheshwara Reddy stressed the importance of maintaining peace and order, ensuring a smooth and safe experience

for all devotees. He outlined key guidelines, including information on queue lines, designated parking areas, and routes for arrival and departure. Traffic diversion measures, crowd control, and the locations for various cultural events have been clearly communicated to the public through informative posters.

For the Ratha Saptami darshan, devotees can avail tickets at ₹300 for one person and ₹500 for two people. Devotees with special donor and 'Ksheera Abhishekam' tickets are advised to adhere to their allotted time slots for darshan. Authorities have urged all devotees to cooperate fully with the police and follow traffic diversion plans. Utilising designated parking spaces and adhering to the rules is crucial for the successful and peaceful organisation of the Rathasaptami celebrations.

Minister hands over land rights pattas to 374 tribal people



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar handed over land rights patta documents to 374 tribal people at Medarametla village in Addanki constituency on Friday.

These 374 tribal individuals had been living on the land for the past 20 years without any legal rights. The Minister officially granted them land rights during a programme held at the village.

Following this, the Minister inaugurated the newly constructed CC road for the villagers and laid the foundation stone for another CC road in the area. He also laid the foundation for the construction of a community hall at Medarametla SC colony, to be built with funds provided by

Synthide factory under its CSR programme.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Ravi Kumar reiterated that, in line with the promises made during the election campaign, the reconstruction of roads and drainage systems was underway, and efforts were being made to resolve the village's drinking water shortage.

Ravi Kumar emphasised that many development initiatives had been completed in the past seven months since the formation of the coalition government under Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

The Minister also mentioned that 180 new electrical poles had been installed in Medarametla SC colony and assured that electricity would be provided to all households in the colony.

SCR GM inspects stations in Guntakal Division

PNS ■ GUNTAKAL

South Central Railway (SCR) General Manager Arun Kumar Jain conducted a detailed inspection of Tirupati station and other stations in the Guntakal Division on Friday.

He was accompanied by Chandrashekar Gupta, Divisional Railway Manager of the Guntakal Division, along with senior officials. During his visit to Tirupati station, which is being redeveloped at a cost of Rs 311 crore, Jain reviewed the ongoing infrastructure work, including the construction of a new station building, installation of lifts and escalators, and other upgrades.

He emphasised the importance of adhering to

safety guidelines and instructed officials to expedite the completion of the project within the targeted timeline.

Jain also inspected the newly constructed Tiruchanur station, developed at a cost of Rs 32 crore, and reviewed its facilities, including high-level platforms and passenger amenities. Following this, he visited Rajampet station, where he evaluated the passenger amenities, station records, and ongoing redevelopment works being carried out at a cost of Rs 6 crore.

The General Manager also conducted a rear-window inspection from Rajampet to Kadapa, focusing on track maintenance, safety, and the condition of electrical and signalling equipment.

MLA Gummanuri worships Goddess Vasavi

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Guntakal MLA Gummanuri Jayaram and Vasavi Chowtries President Devaki Venkateswarlu worshipped Goddess Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari at the Vasavi Temple in Guntakal on Friday.

A devotional programme was organised at the temple to mark Sri Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari Atmarpanam Day. Both leaders presented silk clothes to the goddess and participated in various spiritual activities.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA Gummanuri Jayaram highlighted that as per the assurances given by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to the Arya Vysya community, the Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari



Atmarpanam programme is being officially organised across the state.

He noted that the organisation of this devotional day had brought happiness to all members of the Vysya community.

He also recalled that Chief Minister Naidu had presented silk robes to Goddess Vasavi in a temple at

Penukonda in West Godavari district on the same day.

Vasavi Chowtries President Devaki Venkateswarlu expressed her gratitude to the Chief Minister for officially organising the Vasavi Atmarpanam Day.

Temple Chairman Gopu Jagadish and other leaders were also present.

Manohar worships Goddess Vasavi, presents silk robes



PNS ■ TENALI

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar offered prayers to Goddess Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari at the Vasavi temple located on Bose Road here on Friday. The Atmarpanam day, a

devotional occasion, was observed with spiritual fervour at the Sri Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari temple, attracting a large number of devotees who gathered to seek the blessings of the Goddess. Minister Manohar partic-

ipated in various devotional activities, including special pooja and homam. On the occasion, he presented silk robes to the Goddess. The temple priests welcomed the Minister with Poorna Kumbham, following which they offered their blessings.

BJP office address will have Gaddar's name: TG CM

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

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

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



Gaddar.

CM Revanth Reddy said, "Naming awards in the name of Gaddar is nothing but remembering him every year. We have medicine for everything. Those who insulted Gaddar in the past were punished appropriately. We will not keep quiet if spoken in an inappropriate manner".

The CM said that he used to take advice while going to baladeer Gaddar whenever he was of the feeling that he was politically alone. However, Gaddar used to say that 'you perform your responsibilities and people would definitely identify you and Gaddar's word has become a reality'. CM said

that Gaddar had lived for the ideals he believed till his last breath.

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

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

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

Hiked registration charges a burden on people: Kannababu

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Terming Chandrababu Naidu a failure Chief Minister, YSRCP has said that people are being burdened by hiking the registration charges and cheating the people by not implementing any of the election promises.

Speaking to media here on Friday, former minister K Kannababu said registration charges are being hiked selectively and it does not apply to the Amaravati region which shows the intent of the government which favours a select few at the cost of the people of the State.

The hike is also done on the terms of realtors which shows the discrimination of the government and it plans to collect Rs 10,000 crore annually through registration charges.

This is nothing short of economic terrorism on the fiscal front as the Rs 3 lakh crore



aid announced by Home Minister Amit Shah and the Rs 1.19 crore loan aggregating to Rs 4.19 crore were not accounted for and there are no details. Not a single election promise was implemented and where did the money go was not revealed. On the contrary, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had disbursed the amount under DBT and strictly followed the welfare calendar.

Education, health, and agriculture were prioritized by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and the coalition never reveals what its

priorities are as wealth creation is not for people but for their coterie, he said adding that publicity and self-promotion is the only promotion of Chandrababu Naidu.

The WhatsApp governance is an imitation of the volunteer system that has taken governance to the doorstep. The Davos fiasco has adversely affected the brand image of Andhra Pradesh by the uncharitable remarks, he said adding that the Polavaram and all other issues were left in the lurch.

While education reforms had bettered the system under Nandu Nedu and other schemes, the coalition government has done nothing but only undertake mudslinging and blatant lies about YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's governance. We are undertaking Fees Poru demanding the immediate clearance of dues, he said.

Sub-inspector allegedly ends life by shooting himself

PNS ■ ELURU

A sub-inspector of police allegedly died by suicide by shooting himself with a service revolver at Tanuku Rural Police Station on Friday.

According to the police, the deceased, Sub-inspector AGS Murthy, had been suspended over corruption allegations and later placed under Vacancy Reserve. However, he was assigned convoy duty during the Chief Minister's visit. He reportedly took a service revolver and shot himself.

Police personnel said they heard gunfire inside the station and found AGS Murthy lying in a pool of blood near the washroom. A case has



been registered, and the body was sent to the Government General Hospital for post-mortem.

Meanwhile, the sub-inspector's family alleged that harassment by senior officials forced him to take the extreme step. They demanded an inquiry into his death to ensure justice.

Farmers protest Vizag Dairy's procurement reductions

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam Dairy's recent decisions to reduce milk procurement from farmers have triggered strong opposition from the farming community. The management's actions come on the heels of a price reduction for cow milk that was implemented four months ago.

Further compounding farmer grievances, the dairy has introduced a policy to return 100 millilitres of milk per liter brought by farmers to collection centres. Reports also suggest that a 'milk procurement holiday' — a one-day suspension of milk collection per week — is being considered, with similar reductions anticipated for buffalo milk procurement.

Farmers have expressed deep dissatisfaction with these changes, citing the increasing financial strain caused by the dairy's policies. Historically, milk producers supplying to Visakhapatnam Dairy benefited from various incentives and subsidies. However, these supports have been significantly

scaled back. Reductions in bonuses and cuts to financial assistance for bereaved families are among the changes that have exacerbated the situation for farmers.

In light of rising costs for animal feed and fodder, which have made livestock maintenance increasingly burdensome, many farmers have continued to supply milk, driven by the need to support their families. However, in the past two months, the price of cow milk has been reduced by ₹4 per liter due to what the dairy attributes to low demand. Concerns are mounting among farmers that this price reduction, combined with the return of milk at collection centres, may be indica-

tion of further cuts, particularly for buffalo milk procurement. Additionally, the potential for a weekly halt in milk collection has intensified these concerns.

Tipper driver electrocuted

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

In a freak incident, a tipper driver was electrocuted when the tipper trailer came into contact with a high-tension wire at Somalapuram village in D Hirehal mandal on Friday.

Police said that the tipper was transporting iron ore to the Somalapuram railway station. The tipper driver, the deceased Saipullah (30) lifted the hydraulic trailer of the vehicle to unload the iron ore. The hydraulic trailer came into contact with a high-tension wire killing the driver instantaneously. Meanwhile, after the electrocution, flames



erupted in which the tipper lorry was destroyed. The driver was taken to the GGH in Rayadurgam where the doctors pronounced him dead. The police registered a case.

ACROSS THE STATES



Son saves mother, but loses grandfather in stampede

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



'Majority of Mahayuti ministers are 'tainted'

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



Marathi biography of M S Subbulakshmi released

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

REFORM, PERFORM, TRANSFORM

Strong pillars of India's governance model: Murmu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Recently the government has decided to constitute the 8th Pay Commission for the welfare of government employees, she said.

"This decision will lay the foundation for substantial salary increase for government employees in the coming years," the President said.

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

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



opportunities for the youth.

"In the past two years, the government has provided a record 10 lakh permanent government jobs," she said.

Focusing on good governance, the i-GOT (Integrated

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

"This platform offers 1,700

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

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

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

'Mission Mausam will make India climate smart'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

AAP will cross 60 out of 70 seats again: Kejriwal

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

elsewhere. They are taking money out of Delhiites' pockets," he claimed and urged voters to free the city from AAP's rule. "AAPda turned Delhi into its ATM to serve its own political interests," Modi alleged.

Clear-cut political speech: Kharge

Says no acknowledgment of citizens' issues



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday described President Droupadi Murmu's address to both Houses of Parliament as a "clear-cut political speech" and claimed that it had no acknowledgment of what an ordinary citizen of the country is experiencing day after day.

In her address, Murmu said the government has worked with a strong determination to lift the economy out of a state of "policy paralysis", despite global concerns, such as the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and war-related uncertainties.

Addressing a joint sitting of Parliament, signalling the start of the Budget session, Murmu said the BJP-led government's third term is seeing work being done at thrice the speed of previous administrations, citing decisions on issues such as Waqf boards and "One Nation, One Election".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said it is very sad that the Narendra Modi government is behaving like the president read the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) pamphlet.

"In this 10-year laundry list, the Modi government has exaggerated even the smallest schemes as if they have achieved a big feat. This has been recurring seen in the President's address in past years also," Kharge said.

Asked about Murmu's speech, Congress general secretary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal said the government has made the president deliver a "clear-cut political speech".

Reacting to the president's address, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said it was a very predictable speech with no real surprises.

"It is her job to praise her own government, she did that. But what we are concerned about is what was omitted from her speech, the things her government has failed to accomplish, the matters where her government is not doing very well, the situation of the economy, the fact that the aam aadmi and the middle class are hurting today, the fact that unemployment is so high, the youth are not only facing record unemployment but even educated youth do not have jobs," Tharoor told PTI Videos.

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS

Delhi court to pass verdict on Feb 7

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

The case is related to the alleged killings of two persons in Saraswati Vihar area during the anti-Sikh riots.

The court reserved the judgment after hearing the final

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GUILLAIN-BARRE SYNDROME

Jharkhand on alert mode to prevent outbreak

PNS ■ RANCHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

SIMULTANEOUS POLLS

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Tiger area increases by 30 per cent in India'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The area occupied by tigers in India has increased by 30 per cent over the past two decades, a new study has found.

Researchers at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi, found that while tigers persisted most in highly protected "human-free, prey-rich" areas, the carnivore species were also found in areas shared with humans where war, poverty and land-use changes were low.

Tigers now occupy nearly 1,38,200 square kilometres of

area in India, the largest occupancy in the world, the authors said.

The findings, published in the journal Science, on recovery of India's 'Panthera tigris' population offers "cautious optimism for megafauna recovery, particularly in the Global South".

The researchers analysed over 3.8 lakh square kilometres of tiger habitats, using models. National-level tiger monitoring data was also involved in the analysis.

"Tiger occupancy increased by 30 per cent (at 2,929 square kilometres per year) over the past two decades," the authors



wrote. A large fraction of the tigers' current territory (45 per cent) is shared with nearly 60 million people in India.

However, "tigers persistently occupied human-free, prey-rich protected areas (35,255 square kilometers)," the authors wrote.

In September 2024, thousands of tribals residing in core areas of tiger reserves protested in response to a government order that directed forest officials to fast-track their relocation. The order was issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority in June.

Core areas of tiger reserves

are to remain unoccupied by humans for tiger conservation, according to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. However, tribes and indigenous communities have the right to live in these forests and access resources, under the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

In the study authors also explained that 'land sparing' and 'land sharing' are looked on as opposing views for recovering carnivore population.

Separating people from predators, or 'land sparing', is often resorted to for recovering large carnivores amid crowded and poverty-ridden regions of the Global South.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The Chinese challenge

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

For decades, the United States has been the undisputed global leader in cutting-edge technology, from artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing to defence innovations and space exploration. However, China's rapid advancements in these fields, fueled by a mix of state-driven initiatives, talent acquisition, and aggressive R&D investments, are now posing a serious challenge to the US supremacy. The emergence of DeepSeek, a Chinese AI model rivaling OpenAI's GPT-4, is just one example of how Beijing is closing the technological gap. China's ambitions extend far beyond AI. It has made remarkable strides in many areas. It is a direct result of China's 'vision 2025' which is translating into reality. China has developed the Jiuzhang quantum computer, which demonstrated computational speeds exponentially faster than classical supercomputers. Meanwhile, the US remains engaged in its own quantum pursuit through companies like Google and IBM, but China's government-backed approach provides an edge in long-term planning. From hypersonic missiles that can evade US missile defence systems to AI-driven warfare capabilities, China's military modernisation is shifting global power dynamics.



Despite US sanctions aimed at crippling China's semiconductor industry, Beijing has made breakthroughs, notably with Huawei's 7nm Kirin chip, defying expectations. The US remains dependent on Taiwan's TSMC, but China's relentless pursuit of self-reliance is narrowing this gap. Even in space tech, China is surging ahead. China's Tiangong space station, its Mars and lunar exploration programs, and its ambitions in satellite-based internet rival those of NASA

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

PICTALK



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

India's aviation sector needs a take off



SANTHOSH MATHEW

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

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

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

It allows people to skip traffic, save time, and stimulate economic growth. Meanwhile, in India, air travel is still seen as a luxury, accessible only to a privileged few. India's aviation network is wholly insufficient for its growing demand. With only 29 international airports and about 500 total airports, the infrastructure is struggling to keep pace with the needs of domestic and international travelers. Airports in major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru are perpetually overcrowded, leading to delays, congestion, and inefficiency.

In contrast, vast portions of the country, especially smaller towns and rural areas, remain disconnected, relying on outdated modes of transportation like railways and highways. The Airports



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



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

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

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

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



MADHVI PANDEY

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

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



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA'S AI MISSION

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

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

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

FOCUS ON ECONOMIC REVIVAL

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

ISRO'S 100th rocket launch: Yet another milestone



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

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

R S Narula | Patiala

likely to grow at less than 7 per cent for at least the next three years, including the current one. The anaemic growth of the economy has already led to moderation in consumption a trend that has been on the show for a couple of years. The central bank has consciously put a leash on consumption-related lending as it sees it as an area of concern. With inflation continuing to remain high, the RBI has been holding interest rates at higher levels, further discouraging borrowers from taking loans for discretionary consumption.

All these factors have weighed down on corporate India, which has been slow in announcing new projects and investments. This shows in lower private investment numbers. As a result, the economy is now facing a vicious cycle, which the budget can break. In this backdrop, the government will have to loosen its purse strings a bit, let the people have more money in their hands, and give some more sops to corporations to prod them into investing. How it achieves these goals would depend on

how the government sees the current situation.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

MIDAIR CRASH IN AMERICA KILLS 67

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

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

A DIVINE CONVERGENCE OF LOVE AND LIBERATION

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



JAGATGURU SAI MAA LAKSHMI DEVI

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

This Maha Kumbh is unlike any before it, offering an unprecedented caliber of cosmic energy. It is a spiritual phenomenon of global significance, where the highest frequencies of Source energy descend upon humanity. The grace of enlightenment is being bestowed, and the awakening of souls is unfolding.

Here, the sublime state of Soruba Samadhi will begin—a transformation that elevates both consciousness and matter itself. Cellular structures are being regenerated, linking human DNA to the divine imprint, connecting us to the immortal essence within. There is nothing quite like the experience of Kumbh. Imagine millions of souls gathering in one place, each radiating spiritual energy, creating an immense vortex of power. In this sacred space, we transcend our human identities and recognise ourselves as Atmas—pure souls



united in a grand cosmic dance. This collective energy is a force of love, light, and enlightenment, dissolving karmic burdens and opening the path to a majestic, divine life.

Though the present age presents its challenges, those who remain steadfast on the spiritual path will undergo profound transformation. The portals of the cosmos are open, offering liberation and awakening. The world we see is but an illusion—a play of maya—where all is transient except our love for the Divine. This love is our dharma, our ultimate purpose. The body, and the material world constantly change, but the eternal truth, Sathya, remains unchanged. We are that truth—Sat-Chit-Ananda, Tat Twam Asi—and our sadhana is to awaken to and embody this realization.

At the Kumbh, in the embrace of Mata Ganga, we surrender and transform. The sacred waters purify us, activating the divine blueprint within. In this powerful vortex, we align with the highest expressions of Sanatana Dharma, experiencing profound spiritual elevation. This year, the influx of divine light is immense, inviting us to merge with its boundless brilliance and bliss. The ancient traditions of Moksha and enlightenment are more alive than ever. This is a time for purification, for letting go of attachments and the illusion of mortality. Sanatana Dharma, founded on selfless service, was exemplified by Adi Shankaracharya, who taught the wisdom of oneness.

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

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

From OpenAI to DeepSeek: The fight for supremacy



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

entities that may one day rival or eclipse us.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A New and Enhanced Era for CSR Compliance

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



GEETANJALI CHOPRA

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

Ensuring Integrity in CSR:

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



rely on CSR for a better future.

Impact-Driven CSR

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

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

The Role of Stakeholders

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

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

The Way Forward

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

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

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

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

IN BRIEF



India's forex reserves rise to USD 629.55 bn

India's forex reserves increased USD 5.574 billion to USD 629.557 billion in the week ended January 24, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped USD 1.888 billion to USD 623.983 billion. The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. For the week ended January 24, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased USD 4.758 billion to USD 537.891 billion, as per the RBI data. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased USD 704 million to USD 69.651 billion during the week, the RBI said.



Agri credit disbursement reaches Rs 19.28 lakh cr

The Finance Ministry on Friday said the Ground Level Agriculture Credit (GLC) has crossed Rs 19 lakh crore in nine months of the current fiscal as against the target of Rs 27.50 lakh crore for the entire FY25. Against the target of Rs 27.50 lakh crore, agriculture credit to the tune of Rs 19.28 lakh crore has been disbursed as of December 31, 2024, registering 70 per cent achievement, the finance ministry said in a statement. In order to boost the credit to the rural sector with the help of effective and hassle-free agriculture credit, the government has been fixing annual targets for GLC. Over the past decade (2014-15 to 2023-24), agricultural credit disbursement has witnessed an average annual growth rate of more than 13 per cent, reflecting the increasing financial support extended to the sector. In the financial year 2023-24, agricultural credit disbursement reached Rs 25.48 lakh crore.



Key infra sectors' growth slows to 4 pc

The output of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to 4 per cent in December 2024, as against 5.1 per cent growth registered a year ago, according to official data released on Friday. On a monthly basis, the growth rate in the production of these sectors was lower than the 4.4 per cent expansion recorded in November 2024. In December, production of natural gas output recorded a negative growth. The production growth of coal, refinery products, fertiliser, and steel moderated to 5.3 per cent, 2.8 per cent, 1.7 per cent, and 5.1 per cent, respectively, against 10.8 per cent, 4.1 per cent, 5.9 per cent and 8.3 per cent in December last year. However, cement and electricity output rose to 4 per cent and 5.1 per cent in the month under review. The growth of core sectors -- coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity -- was 4.2 per cent during April-December this fiscal. It was 8.3 per cent in the same period last fiscal.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ment, automobile, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals.

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

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

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



CAs need to innovate to stay ahead of curve: Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Stressing that trust is what holds everything together, Singh

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

"History has shown us what has happened when there are lapses, scandals like Enron... remind us of the devastating consequences of the compromises in financial integrity. 'Your role is vital, gatekeepers of accountability...', the minister said.

In his speech, Singh also touched upon mythology.

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

According to the Ministry of

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

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

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

India Inc hails Eco Survey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

GOLD CONTINUES RECORD BREAKING RALLY

Jumps Rs 1,100 to all-time high of Rs 84,900 per 10g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

82,415 per 10 grams.

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

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

Sensex rallies 741 pts, Nifty settles above 23,500

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

Rallying for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 740.76 points or 0.97 per cent higher at 77,500.57. During the day, it jumped 846.15 points or 1.10 per cent to 77,605.96.

The NSE Nifty rallied 258.90 points or 1.11 per cent to 23,508.40. During the



day, it climbed 297.3 points or 1.27 per cent to 23,546.80. "The indices are fueled with expectations of a pro-growth budget and prudent

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vedanta expects demerger to complete in six months

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

The mining firm last month revised its demerger plan and decided to retain its base metal undertaking within the parent firm.

Vedanta had earlier said post-demerger its existing businesses will be structured in six independent companies -- Vedanta Aluminium, Vedanta Oil & Gas, Vedanta Power, Vedanta Steel and Ferrous

Materials, Vedanta Base Metals, and Vedanta Ltd.

However, later it revised the plan.

Vedanta had also said that the decision was taken following deliberations with stakeholders, including lenders, regarding the scheme and approval by the board of directors.

It also stressed the ongoing search for alternative avenues for restarting the copper business in Thoothukudi, Tamil



MGNREGS: 220.11 crore person days of employment generated

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

The survey report, which was tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, said 308.9 crore person days of employment was generated in 2023-24, 293.8 crore person days were generated in 2022-23, while

363.3 crore person days were generated in 2021-22. In the COVID-19 pandemic year of 2020-21, 389.1 crore person days of employment was generated.

The report added that multiple efficiency reforms have been introduced to fully utilise the scheme, which includes geotagging before, during and after the work is done.

It said 99.98 per cent payments were made through the National Electronic Fund Management System, wages were transferred under DBT and Aadhaar-based payment has been enabled for 96.3 per



cent of the total active workers.

Around 99.23 per cent of total successful transactions for wage beneficiaries was processed through the Aadhaar Payment Bridge

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

It said the MGNREGS, which started as a wage-

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

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

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



Somy Ali wants to make a film on her own life

Former actress Somy Ali has recently expressed her desire to make a film based on her own life. The actress, who had a brief yet memorable presence in Bollywood, is eager to share her personal journey through a cinematic lens.

In an interview with IANS, Somy shared, "Finally my goal is to do an episodic feature on my own life story. But at the moment I am just dipping my toes in the pool." Ali, who was once in a relationship with Salman Khan, also spoke about her short film "Gray," which has entered the South Asian International Film Festival in Florida.

Speaking about the film, the social activist mentioned, "Gray is my second film after finishing my masters in psychology, broadcast journalism and filmmaking. My first film was shockingly aired at a Hillary Clinton benefit show where an award was presented to a gang-rape victim from Pakistan."

She was the Senator Clinton and after seeing my film 'I Can

Survive' she told Huma Abeddin that she wants it aired at the benefit with Glenn Close in attendance and many other dignitaries.

"Gray is a very different film. It's about being frustrated and the fact that people are actually leaving my country due to the atrocities of Trump in the past and now being re-elected. The film depicts footage of several atrocities and has a psychological component to it. Why do we continue allowing them is the crux of the film? In this case the re-election of Trump," Somy added.

Talking about her upcoming projects, Somy Ali revealed, "Next is four short films. I am very excited because once Luis Da Silva joined No More Tears Board it was a big win for my NGO due to his contacts and contributions.

However, since he's been an actor in many big Hollywood productions, including The Fast and the Furious sequels, I wrote two of my new short films with him in the lead opposite me."

Neha Dhupia faints on the sets of Roadies, continues shooting moments after to wrap up the shoot on time

Actress Neha Dhupia, known for her fierce spirit and dedication, recently gave her fans a scare when she fainted on the sets of the new season of Roadies. The actress had been juggling a packed schedule, travelling across cities and small towns for the Roadies auditions while being away from her home and kids for over a month.

The incident, which was featured in a promo, saw Neha feeling dizzy and fainting on the sets. However, the ever-determined actress has

reassured everyone that she is fit, fine and ready to continue her journey as a leader on Roadies. Speaking about the incident, Neha shared, "It was a minor health scare, but I'm back on my feet, motivated and enthusiastic as ever. Roadies have always been about pushing limits and this journey inspires me to overcome every hurdle. Nothing is going to stop me." A source from the production added, "Neha's dedication is truly remarkable. Despite her hectic schedule and health

challenges, she actively fulfilled her duties as a leader and gave her all to the auditions. From bustling cities to remote small towns, she was completely invested in finding the best talent for the show." Fans of Roadies and Neha can breathe easy, knowing that their favorite leader is back, stronger than ever, and ready to lead the charge. The new season promises to be packed with action, drama and Neha's signature style of leadership that inspires both contestants and viewers alike.



Rapper Raftaar ties the knot with fashion stylist Manraj Jawanda in an intimate ceremony

Renowned rapper Raftaar, whose real name is Dilin Nair, has officially embarked on a new journey as he tied the knot with fashion stylist Manraj Jawanda in a private wedding ceremony on January 31. While the rapper has yet to share any official glimpses from the event, several pictures and videos from the wedding have surfaced on social media, capturing special moments from their celebrations.

The couple reportedly had a South Indian-style wedding, followed by a traditional Sikh ceremony, as seen in images shared by Instant Bollywood. The wedding

was an intimate affair, attended by close family and friends. Speculation about Raftaar's wedding began when a photo from the celebrations emerged online, featuring the words, "Dilin and Manraj's wedding." The buzz quickly spread, with fans and followers sharing clips from the haldi and sanget ceremonies, which showcased the couple enjoying their pre-wedding festivities.

As Raftaar remains tight-lipped about his wedding on social media, fans eagerly await an official confirmation or a personal glimpse from the newlyweds.

AR Rahman & Arijit Singh reunite for an eternal love anthem 'Jaane Tu' from 'Chhaava'

The Academy Award-winning legend AR Rahman and India's most sought-after singer Arijit Singh have reunited for the song 'Jaane Tu' from the, most-awaited film Chhaava. This enchanting song, chronicles the eternal bond of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Maharani Yesubai, portrayed by Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna respectively. "Chhaava," produced by the visionary Dinesh Vijan and Maddock Films, and directed by the talented Laxman Utekar, brings to life an iconic figure from India's history in a way never seen before. The film is set to roar in theatres on February 14 worldwide.



The song was launched in Hyderabad by the starcast amidst their fans and media. The teaser of the song has already garnered an incredible response and the full track is sure to live up to the hype, delivering an unforgettable experience. 'Jaane Tu' is a song that echoes the sentiments of a bond that has won over odds. AR Rahman's composition carries his trademark brilliance - intricate, otherworldly, yet universal. With poetic lyrics by Irshad Kamil, the song captures the beauty of love with Arijit Singh's heart touching vocals all set to create waves of love amongst the audience.

AR Rahman says, "For Jaane Tu, I wanted the music to echo the timeless devotion-like love between Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Maharani Yesubai, while also speaking to the modern soul. The endeavour was to craft something that feels like a bridge between two worlds - historical and contemporary. Arijit

Singh's textured and emotionally laden voice wraps around the composition, carrying the listener into a world of yearning and hope. His classical expertise and heartfelt delivery elevates the song to a realm very few singers can unlock."

Arijit Singh says, "Jaane Tu is divine and sincere. The melody hits right in the centre. I feel blessed that Rahman sir has given me the opportunity. I am grateful. I feel his music transcends time and I feel lucky to experience his music. Singing this song, I felt pure and passionate."

Director Laxman Utekar shares, "AR Rahman and Arijit Singh's collaborations have always been more than chartbusters - they're emotional touchstone for listeners. Jaane Tu promises to be one of those classics - an anthem of love that has been

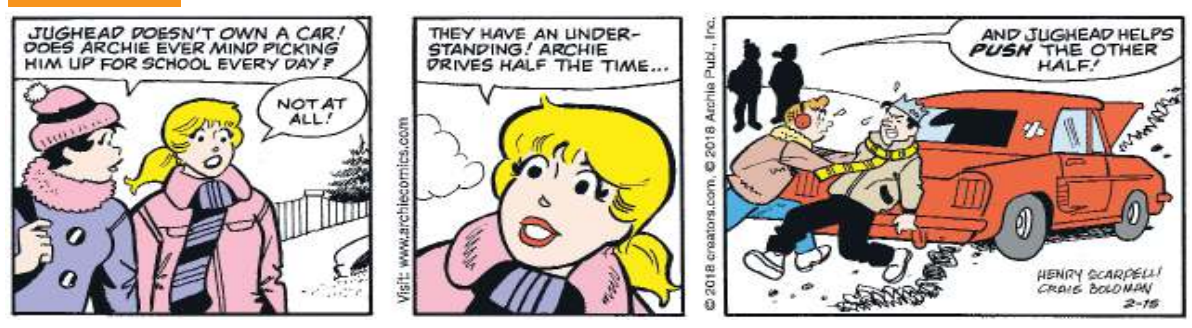
through unimaginable odds. This song is a tribute to the kind of love that moves mountains and stands the test of time. Rahman sir's music has the rare ability to take you to another plane and Arijit's voice grounds that journey in human emotion. Both Rahman Sir and Arijit Singh, along with Irshad Kamil's lyrics elevated the narrative, conveying the pulse of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Maharani Yesubai's love and sacrifices to be together."

Lyricist Irshad Kamil says "With Jaane Tu, we wanted to capture a feeling that transcends time - a love so pure, so effortless, that it feels eternal. Collaborating with AR Rahman is always special as he weaves in emotional depth with his music that turned the lyrics into something more than just words - into a timeless memory, one that would connect with listeners long after they hear it."

With the brilliant AR Rahman composing the music, the film is a celebration of storytelling brilliance. The charismatic Vicky Kaushal stars as Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the son of the lion, portraying the legendary leader's unmatched courage and resolve. Opposite him, the intense Akshaye Khanna takes on the role of the formidable Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, setting the stage for an epic clash of rulers. Adding grace and strength to the story is the versatile Rashmika Mandanna, who brings to life Maharani Yesubai Bhonsale, the Queen of Swarajya and Chhatrapati's queen, embodying elegance and resilience. Music of the film is presented by Sony Music.

FUN

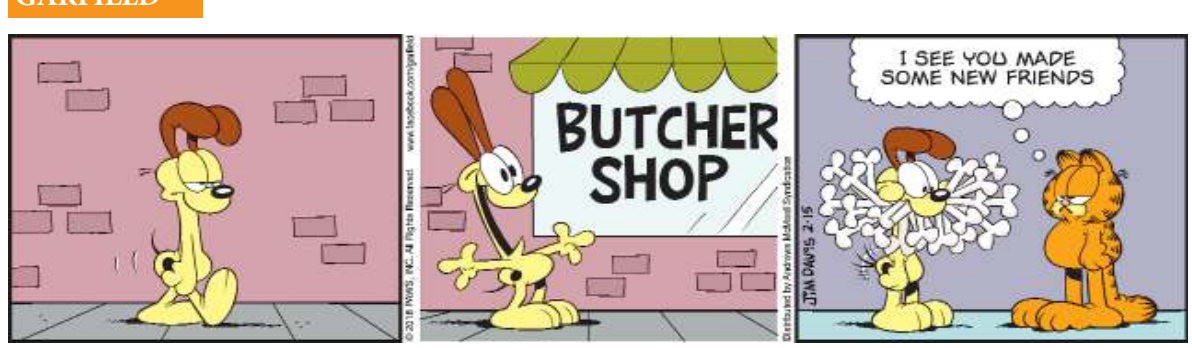
ARCHIE



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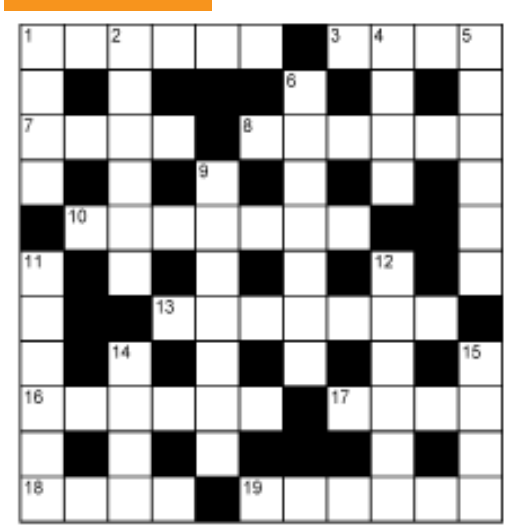
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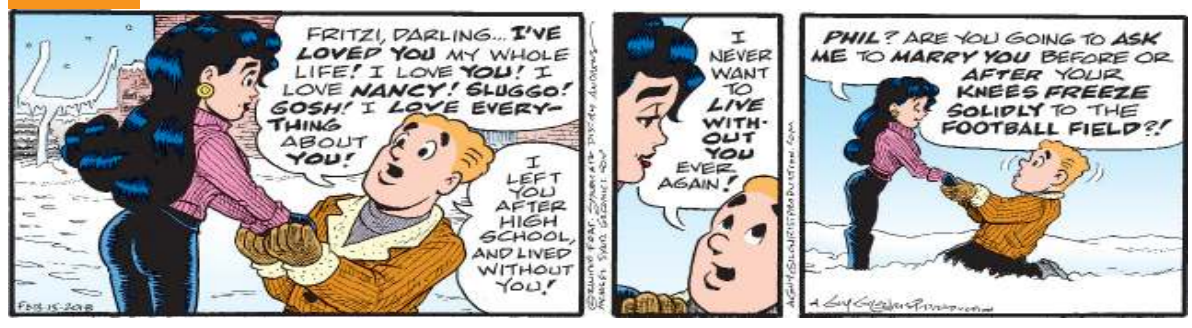
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

ACROSS

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

DOWN

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



GINGER MEGGS



'CHANGES IN TRAFFIC DISCIPLINE CAN IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY'



TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Future of Indian seafarers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Nutrition and recovery!

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

KEY NUTRIENTS IN RECOVERY

PROTEIN
The conventional belief is that

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

CARBOHYDRATES

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

FATS THAT ARE GOOD FOR HEALTH

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

VITAMINS AND MINERALS

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

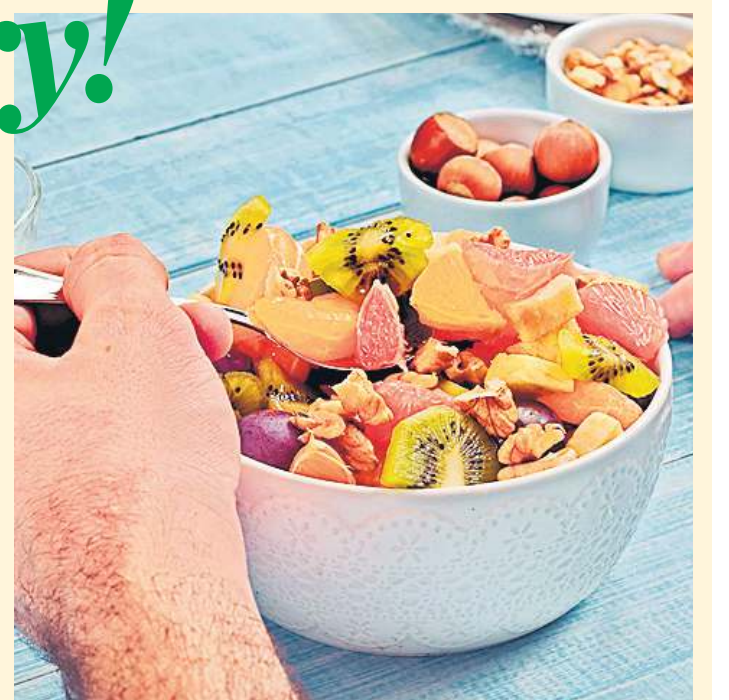
HYDRATION

It is essential that adequate water

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

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

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



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

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

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

Manchester United, Tottenham reach Europa League round of 16

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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



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

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



Lyon confirms Paulo Fonseca as its new coach

PTI ■ LYON

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

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

Only Santos can give me the love I need: Neymar

PTI ■ SAO PAULO

Neymar has confirmed he will sign what is expected to be a short-term contract with his boyhood club, Santos, as the Brazil striker aims to recharge his career ahead of the 2026 World Cup. The 32-year-old Neymar said on Thursday that he's returning to the Sao Paulo club, and local media reported that the deal will extend only to June 30. "Only Santos can give me the love that I need to prepare for the challenges I have in the next few years. All of you, no matter who you support, know well what I am talking about," Neymar said on his social media channels. "I hope you all follow me in this new phase of my life." Santos used its social media channels to respond to Neymar's video: "Your home awaits. Your people awaits." Neymar left Santos nearly 12 years ago to join Barcelona. The striker's return follows the termination of his contract with Saudi Arabian club Al-Hilal. Neymar had returned in October from an



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

then board a helicopter to go to the club's Vila Belmiro Stadium. After he signs his contract, he will be reintroduced to fans during the evening. The official spoke on condition of anonymity due to lack of authorisation to discuss the matter publicly. Neymar has already played 225 matches with Santos. He scored 138 goals for the club, many of which key for the six titles he won at the Brazilian giant, which was relegated in 2023 and returned to the country's top division last year. Neymar became the most expensive player in soccer history when he transferred from Barcelona to PSG for 222 million euros (then USD 262 million) in 2017. Neymar's most recent match was played in November. Al-Hilal coach Jorge Jesus had repeatedly cast doubts about the striker's form to play. Neymar left the Saudi Arabian league after playing just seven games in 17 months following his big-money move to the oil-rich kingdom. The Brazilian's contract was due to expire after this year's FIFA Club World Cup, which will be played between June 15 and July 13 in the United States. The striker joined the Saudi club from PSG in August 2023 for 90 million euros (USD 94 million). His salary was reportedly one of the biggest in world soccer as well. Neymar, Brazil's all-time top goalscorer with 79 goals in 125 matches, also said he is focused on getting more playing time so he can prepare for the World Cup in North America next year in what could be his last shot at winning the tournament.



D Gukesh to meet Wei Yi in Tata Steel Chess Tournament

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

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

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

Mitchell Marsh out of Champions Trophy

PTI ■ SYDNEY

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



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

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

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

BCCI Award: Bumrah chosen for Best International Cricketer

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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



This witty and adult comedy is for masses

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

Story

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

Analysis

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

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



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

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

Film: Madha Gaja Raja

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

Music: Vijay Antony

Cinematographer: Richard M Nathan

Producer: Gemini Film Circuit

Story, Screenplay, direction: Sundar C

Release date: January 31, 2025 (Telugu)

Rating: 2.5/5

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

Artists' performance

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

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

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

PRESSURE ON CHIRANJEEVI TO GIVE A SUCCESS

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

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

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



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

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

Can Thandel deliver the much-needed break to Chay?

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

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



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

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

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

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

VIJAY'S FILM TITLE TO BE REVEALED SOON: PRODUCER

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

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

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

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



Majaka is in demand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

