

the pioneer

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The pioneer
There is a need for all Telanganites to join hands beyond politics for the state's progress. The BRS and Telangana activists should come forward to protest against the Centre's bias. The leaders of the BRS and the BJP repeatedly criticise Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's New Delhi visits. What will they say about budget allocations now?

- B. Mahesh Kumar Goud,
MLC and TPCC chief

India-Indonesia ties rooted in shared culture:
PM Modi

BUDGET IS
BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: SITHARAMAN

After two years, Ajith is arriving with
ACTION

DON'T MISS...

Rathasaptami in Tirumala tomorrow

The TTD has made extensive arrangements for the celebration of Rathasaptami on Tuesday, February 4, at Tirumala. On the seventh day of Magha every year, Sri Malayappa Swamy blesses devotees in a procession, travelling on seven different vahanas from morning till evening. To ensure the comfort of the devotees watching the vahana procession, German sheds have been set up along the galleries of the four Mada streets, protecting them from adverse weather conditions. Food counters have been strategically placed in the galleries to offer...

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Cong's 'EAGLE' to monitor elections

The Congress on Sunday set up an eight-member committee -- Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) -- to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission of India. The committee will first take up the Maharashtra voters' list manipulation issue, and submit a detailed report to the leadership at the earliest, the party said in a statement. The panel includes Congress treasurer Ajay Maken and senior leaders Digvijaya Singh, Abhishek Singhvi...

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'Expert panel soon to boost 'Make in India'

A committee will be set up under the national manufacturing mission to get into the details on issues like cutting cost of doing business; preparing future-ready workforce; and availability of technology to further promote Make in India initiative, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said. Representatives from the Centre, states, and private sector are expected to be there in the committee. It would identify key focus areas, which are futuristic and where there is demand both in the domestic...

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Two-tier Test format ahead of India's tour

When Australia face South Africa in the World Test Championship final, it will mark the end of the current format, which is set to be relaunched as a two-tier system ahead of India's tour of England later this summer. In a bid to create a "fairer competition", England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Richard Thompson, who is the head of the ICC's strategic growth committee, recently held talks with the apex body's chairman Jay Shah and the two will lead the plan. With just ...

-SPORTS

Naidu backs BJP's Delhi bid

Calls for a 'double-engine' govt, citing success of TDP-JSP-BJP alliance in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/NEW DELHI

In a high-energy election rally held in Shahdara, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu extended his full support to BJP candidate Sanjay Goyal for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. Addressing a large gathering of the Telugu community, Naidu emphasised the importance of a strong and progressive government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Speaking in Telugu, Naidu stated that he had come to Delhi to lend his support to the BJP and expressed confidence that the Telugu community would back the party. He highlighted the widespread presence of Telugus across the globe, recalling a recent gathering in Zurich where 600 Telugus had met him. He noted that this was a testament to the unity and strength of the Telugu people.

Naidu praised India's growing global stature under Modi's leadership, citing discussions on artificial intelligence and green energy at the World Economic Forum (WEF) 2025 in Davos as examples of India's increasing prominence on the world stage.

He urged the Telugu community in Delhi to actively campaign for BJP's victory, stressing that the party's success was crucial for the country's future. He pointed to India's demographic advantage and



- AP CM Naidu extends full support to BJP candidate Sanjay Goyal in Delhi Assembly elections during a rally in Shahdara
- Emphasises the need for a strong, progressive government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi
- Highlighted the unity and strength of the Telugu community worldwide, referencing a gathering of 600 Telugus in Zurich
- Naidu praises Modi's leadership, citing India's growing global presence and participation in the WEF 2025
- Urges the Telugu community in Delhi to campaign for BJP, projecting India as the world's number-one economy by 2047 under Modi
- Naidu criticises the AAP government for Delhi's deteriorating condition, highlighting issues like air pollution, lack of job opportunities, and inadequate clean water
- He compares BJP's promises, such as free education and potable tap water, with AAP's focus on foreign education
- Naidu condemns AAP's extravagant spending on palaces while neglecting public welfare
- Naidu predicted BJP's victory in Delhi, highlighting recent wins in Maharashtra and Haryana, and urged people to vote for progress and prosperity

projected that under Modi's leadership, India would emerge as the world's number-one economy by 2047. Naidu criticised the AAP government for the deteriorating

state of Delhi, claiming that had the BJP been in power, the city would have transformed into a metropolis on par with Washington, DC. He expressed concern over the

severe air pollution in the capital, remarking that both environmental and political pollution were plaguing the city.

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Mudragada's house attacked

PNS ■ KAKINADA

An unidentified miscreant attacked the residence of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader Mudragada Padmanabham in Kirlampudi on Sunday.

The assailant allegedly rammed a tractor into the main gate of the house, forcibly breaking it open. He then went on to damage a car parked within the premises before barging into the compound and raising slogans such as 'Jai Jana Sena'. Eyewitnesses reported that the miscreant even attempted to scale the compound wall in an effort to enter the house. However, he



failed to gain access as the doors remained locked.

Upon learning about the incident, a large number of Mudragada's supporters gathered at the scene. The police arrived at the spot and pacified the agitated supporters. It

is learnt that the police have detained one individual in connection with the attack.

Reacting to the incident, Kakinada Jana Sena Party (JSP) district president Tummala Babu categorically denied any involvement of his party. He clarified that the attack was not carried out by a JSP activist and dismissed the social media reports linking JSP to the incident as baseless.

Meanwhile, senior YSRCP leaders, including former Minister Kurasala Kannababu, Chelluboina Venugopal Krishna, and Dadishetti Raja, strongly condemned the attack on Mudragada's residence.

4 killed, 14 hurt in lorry-bus collision

PNS ■ NAGARI

In a ghastly road accident in Chittoor district on Sunday night, a lorry and a bus collided on the Tirupati-Chennai highway, resulting in the death of four people and injuries to 14 others.

The injured were rushed to local hospitals for treatment. Police reached the accident site and started rescue operations. A case has been registered, and efforts are underway to identify the deceased.

Polls for civic body posts today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Elections for the posts of chairpersons, vice-chairpersons, and deputy mayors in seven municipalities, nagar panchayats, and three municipal corporations in Andhra Pradesh are set to take place today. The elections will be held through a special meeting called by the authorized officers at 11:00 am on February 3.

The State Election Commission (SEC) has issued a notification for the elections to fill casual vacancies for chairpersons and vice-chairpersons in seven municipalities/nagar panchayats. In addition, detailed arrangements have been made for

POLL-BOUND CIVIC BODIES	
Nandigama	- Chairperson
Hindupur	- Chairperson
Palakonda	- Chairperson
Buchireddypalem	- (both posts)
Nuzvid	- Vice-chairperson
Tuni	- Vice-chairperson
Piduguralla	- Vice-chairperson

the election of the Standing Committee of Guntur Municipal Corporation, scheduled for Monday.

State Election Commissioner Nilam Sawhney has instructed the Collectors and District Election Authorities to ensure that the elections are conducted as per the established norms.

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Jana Sena, TDP gear up for annual plenaries

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As political tides in the State shift, the stage is set for the annual plenaries of two major parties - Jana Sena and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) - whose strategies for the upcoming elections reflect sharply divergent political trajectories.

The Jana Sena, led by Pawan Kalyan, is scheduled to hold its plenary in March, with a focus on Pithapuram, the leader's home constituency in East Godavari. On the other hand, TDP has announced its Mahanadu for May, choosing Kadapa - a district traditionally dominated by the YSR Congress - as its venue. This contrast in venue choices reflects not just the geography of their operations but also the political positioning each party seeks to project.

ALLIES WITH DIVERGENT STRATEGIES



JSP solidifying base in EG

Pithapuram, a stronghold for Jana Sena, holds significant political importance for the party. By focusing on this region, Pawan Kalyan aims to consolidate his base, particularly among the influential Kapu community, which has tradition-

ally been a key support group for the party. "Pithapuram is more than a symbolic gesture; it is a critical move to strengthen Janasena's foothold among its core supporters," says Dr. Ravi Reddy, a political analyst.

Jana Sena's approach appears primarily defensive. While the party has garnered some support in the state, it is now focusing on fortifying its position in East Godavari, ensuring loyalty from its existing supporters before attempting any significant expansion beyond its traditional strongholds. Analysts argue that the plenary in Pithapuram will provide Pawan Kalyan with the opportunity to solidify internal party structures and gauge the pulse of his committed followers.

Continued on Page 2



DGP Harish Kumar has Durga darshan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Director General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta, along with his family, visited the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Sunday and offered

special prayers to Goddess Durga Devi.

Deputy Executive Officer of the Durga Temple, M Ratna Raju, extended a warm welcome to DGP and his family and facilitated their darshan of the presiding deity, Kanaka Durga Devi.

Prayagraj gears up for 'zero-error' Amrit Snan

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Shaken by the deadly January 29 stampede, top Uttar Pradesh government officials on Sunday stressed the compliance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directive of "zero-error" during the ongoing Maha Kumbh's final 'Amrit Snan' on Basant Panchami.

The government said said expects five crore pilgrims to take the holy dip Monday, and several steps has been taken to ensure the event remains incident-free.

"Operation Eleven" has been implemented for crowd management, one-way traffic system has been put in place in the mela area for smooth movement for pilgrims and preventing congestion at Triveni Ghats, barricades have been raised, and additional police forces deployed, particularly on pontoon bridges, to avoid any mishap.

5 crore devotees expected to attend Maha Kumbh today



Other key measures include increased security at the New Yamuna and Shastri bridges, deployment of armed state and central police forces at major crowd points like Tikarmafi Turn and Phaphamau

Bridge, and strategic traffic diversions. Rail and bus operations have been streamlined, with additional trains and shuttle services for devotees. The Prayag Junction and key

city intersections are under heightened security, while extra forces including Rapid Action Force and Provincial Armed Constabulary personnel, have been stationed at sensitive locations.

The government aims a "zero-error" safety approach, ensuring an orderly and secure 'Amrit Snan' experience, according to an official statement. Two senior IAS officers Ashish Goyal and Bhanu Chandra Goswami, who were part of the team that successfully conducted the 2019 Ardh Kumbh, have been called in to oversee the smooth conduct of the Mela. They have joined Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand, forming a trio that was part of the mega fair six years ago.

The chief minister visited Prayagraj on Saturday, his first since the tragic crowd crush at Sangam Nose on Mauni Amavasya (January 29) which left 30 dead and 60 injured. Police said overcrowding caused the stampede as the devotees jostled for space, breaking a barrier and falling onto those sitting and waiting on the other side to take a holy dip.

Monday Mirchi

N. BALARAM'S RARE DEPUTATION EXTENSION SIGNALS STRONG BACKING

Securing a central deputation beyond the usual three to five years is no easy feat, but N. Balaram IRS (2010) has managed to get a rare sixth-year extension. What's raising eyebrows, however, is that his file was personally signed by the Chief Secretary herself - an uncommon move that hints at the strong backing he enjoys. Insiders say his extension isn't just a recognition of his work but also a reflection of the strong lobby that stands behind him. A proud son of Palamuru just like Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Balaram has risen from humble beginnings—once working as a laborer near City Chain to fund his education—to now leading Singareni.

PAMELA SATPATHY TO OUTSHINE SMITA SABHARWAL IN KARIMNAGAR

The buzz in Karimnagar is that Collector Pamela Satpathy might just achieve what even the celebrated Smita Sabharwal couldn't during her tenure - putting an end to the infamous Karimnagar dump yard saga. A little bird tells us that Pamela has a concrete plan in the works to tackle the long-standing issue, earning her whispers of praise in both bureaucratic and political circles. While Smita left her mark with innovative initiatives, insiders are betting that Pamela's knack for solving persistent problems will cement her legacy for years to come. Political chatter suggests she is already being talked about as the collector who could redefine governance in Karimnagar—possibly surpassing the legendary reputation of her predecessor.

HARISH RAO'S SELECTIVE OUTRAGE OVER IRRIGATION ADVISORS IN TG

Harish Rao has raised concerns over the appointment of Adityanath Das, former Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh, as an advisor to the Telangana government. He pointed out that Das had previously advocated for Andhra's water interests and was even sentenced to three months in prison for misleading the court on the illegal construction of the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme. However, what Harish conveniently overlooked is that Penta Reddy, an advisor during the KCR regime, has been retained even under the Congress government. Whispers are that if appointing advisors with past allegiances is an issue, then the criticism should apply to all, not selectively. Political circles are abuzz with whispers that Harish's attack is more about scoring points than genuine concern, if advisors are to be blamed, it should be across the board - or not at all.

THREE SENIOR IPS OFFICERS FROM TELANGANA FOR CENTRAL DEPUTATION?

In a significant bureaucratic shift, three key IPS officers from Telangana are likely to move on central deputation. Among them, one is a high-ranking state-level officer, while the other two are serving as Police Commissioners. The development has sparked discussions within the state administration, as these officers hold crucial posi-

tions in law enforcement. Whispers indicate that the process is in the final stages. With their departure, a reshuffle in the state's police leadership is inevitable, leading to speculation about who will fill these key positions. While central deputation is common for senior IPS officers seeking career growth and broader administrative exposure, the timing of these transfers has raised curiosity, especially in the backdrop of evolving law and order challenges in the state.

MINISTERS' MIXED SIGNALS LEAVE OFFICIALS AFFLED

A recent conference with collectors on ration card distribution turned into an unexpected display of confusion, exposing the lack of unity among the Chief Minister and his ministers. While officials tuned in expecting clear directives, they were instead treated to three ministers contradicting each other—right in front of district collectors. The bureaucratic circles had a field day dissecting the chaos, with one senior IAS officer quipping, "The government should first decide what it wants before asking us to implement it. But here, the ministers themselves can't agree, and that only hurts the government's credibility. With collectors left scratching their heads and whispers growing louder, insiders say this isn't just a one-off incident but a sign of deeper cracks within the leadership."

ABV ENJOYS DOUBLE BONANZA UNDER NAIDU GOVT

Retired IPS officer AB Venkateswara Rao is now living the dream, courtesy of the Chandrababu Naidu-led government. After enduring what can only be described as a turbulent rollercoaster ride under former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, where his career was less about promotions and more about suspensions, ABV is now enjoying the sweetest of returns.

Just days after Venkateswara Rao openly criticised Jagan, the Naidu government responded with the swiftness of a well-oiled political machine. Not only did they regularise his suspension periods—both from February 2020 to February 2022 and from June 2022 to May 2024—they decided to treat those "vacation" days as "on duty." And what's that? A full salary and allowances for the entire time he was on forced sabbatical? ABV must be laughing all the way to the bank. But wait, there's more! Before Venkateswara Rao could even get comfortable with his newly minted pay cheques, the Naidu government pulled a masterstroke: appointing him as the Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Police Housing Corporation Limited. So, while others struggle to get their hands on the last piece of office stationery, ABV is now set to continue his career for another two years with extra perks, professional prestige, and, let's face it, a significant career plot twist. From suspended officer to superstar, ABV is surely taking notes on how to stage the best career comeback in recent memory!

-Yours truly



TTD EO lauds NRI Sevak from UK

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer (EO) J. Syamala Rao and Additional EO Ch. Venkaiah Chowdary on Sunday extended their congratulations to Ritu Vakkalanka, an NRI who travelled from the UK to Tirumala to volunteer in Srivari Seva.

She met with the EO and Additional EO during a meeting with Srivari Sevaks at the Asthana Mandapam on Sunday.

Speaking at the event, Ritu shared her admiration for the world-class facilities provided by TTD to the devotees, calling them unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

She mentioned that she works as a financial consultant in London and had made the

journey to Tirumala to serve pilgrims as a Srivari Sevak. Expressing her joy, she called the opportunity a divine blessing.

Ritu also lauded the Anna Prasadam distribution by TTD, noting that the provision of food to thousands of devotees at the Anna Prasadam Complex is a remarkable feat. She commended the TTD administration for its well-planned efforts in ensuring that all facilities are meticulously arranged for the devotees. Both the EO and Additional EO appreciated her dedication, praising her selfless service to the devotees who travel from across the globe, including from the UK, to offer seva in Tirumala.

JEO Veerabrahmam and CPRO Dr. T. Ravi were also present at the event.



TDP MPs welcome CM Naidu in Delhi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of the NDA alliance, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu arrived in Delhi to campaign for BJP candidates and was warmly received by TDP Members of Parliament. MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) and other MPs welcomed the Chief Minister upon his arrival at the Delhi airport on Sunday evening.

Naidu arrived in Delhi on a special flight from Hyderabad's Begumpet Airport. At the Delhi airport, he was greeted by Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communications, P. Chandrashekar, along with MPs Ganti Harish, Madhur Balayogi, Bastipati Nagaraju, and Rajya Sabha MP Sana Satish. The Chief Minister's visit was at the invitation of the Delhi Telugu Association to participate in the BJP candidate's campaign.

Polls for civic...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the District Collectors and Joint Collectors of Tirupati, Nellore, and Eluru have made arrangements for a special meeting to conduct the election of deputy mayors at 11:00 am today. Eluru Municipal Corporation will hold elections for two deputy mayor posts.

Botsa slams Budget, alleges neglect of AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Leader of Opposition in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council, Botsa Satyanarayana, has strongly criticised the recently announced budget, alleging that it fails to address the state's pressing needs. Speaking to the media in Visakhapatnam, he accused the government of paying mere lip service by mentioning eminent Telugu poet Gurajada Appa Rao without allocating substantial funds for Andhra Pradesh, while extending significant financial support to Bihar.

"While invoking Gurajada Appa Rao is a matter of pride, symbolic gestures alone do not drive development," he remarked. He contended that the people of Andhra Pradesh had high expectations for developmental projects and financial assistance, but the budget had left them disillusioned. Botsa took particular exception to the proposed reduction in the height of the Polavaram project from 45.72 metres to 41.15 metres, warning of grave repercussions,

particularly for North Andhra. Terming it a significant setback for the state's water security and development, he announced plans to convene a meeting with experts and intellectuals to oppose the move.



He also launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), accusing Naidu of prioritising financial packages over securing special category status for Andhra Pradesh. He asserted that governance should be centred on public welfare rather than political expediency. Comparing the present administration with the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) regime, he claimed that under former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's leadership, the state witnessed a higher GDP growth rate than during the previous coalition government.

Raising concerns over the fate of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, Botsa questioned Naidu's silence on its proposed privatisation and criticised the budget for failing to safeguard its future. He also lambasted the government for not extending adequate assurances to farmers and neglecting promises made to women. Echoing Y.S. Jagan's stance, he dismissed Naidu's commitments as impractical and lacking feasibility, underscoring the importance of credibility in politics.

Highlighting industrial progress during the YSRCP regime, Botsa pointed to initiatives in the green energy sector and the establishment of bulk drug parks. He noted that multiple consultations had been held to facilitate projects such as the green hydrogen initiative and the bulk drug park during Y.S. Jagan's tenure.

3-hour ordeal for 14 in rly station lift

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Fourteen railway passengers returning from the sacred hill shrine of Tirumala had an unexpected and terrifying experience when they got trapped in a lift at Markapuram railway station for over three hours on Sunday.

What started as a routine attempt to switch platforms turned into an ordeal when the overloaded lift abruptly came to a halt mid-way, leaving the passengers stranded inside. With no technician available due to the holiday,



their distress grew as they desperately called for help.

Panic set in as the passengers, weighed down by luggage and exhaustion from their pilgrimage, screamed for assistance. Railway police

were alerted and immediately rushed to the spot, but without an elevator technician on hand, the situation seemed dire. Realizing that waiting any longer could worsen the passengers' condition, the rail-

way personnel took matters into their own hands. After multiple failed attempts to restore the lift, they resorted to breaking open the elevator door. Moments of tension finally gave way to relief as all 14 passengers were safely pulled out. The rescue operation brought immense relief to both the passengers and railway officials.

For those trapped, however, it was an experience they would never forget—a pilgrimage that ended not just in devotion but also in an unexpected test of patience and resilience.

Nagababu wants Peddiredy to quit

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

Jana Sena general secretary K Nagababu strongly criticised Punganur YSRCP MLA Peddiredy Ramachandra Reddy for his repeated absence from Assembly sessions and demanded his resignation.

Speaking at a public meeting held at the ZP school premises in Punganur on Sunday, Nagababu expressed his disappointment over the YSRCP's failure to represent the people's issues in the Assembly.

He accused the party of neglecting the concerns of the public by not attending sessions and not raising important issues. "The people of the state entrusted 11 seats to YSRCP, but they have deceived 20 lakh voters by not attending the Assembly and failing to speak up for the people," Nagababu said. "YSRCP MLAs must be present in the Assembly and raise the concerns of the people," he added.

Refuting the YSRCP's claims that they were denied micro-



phones in the Assembly, Nagababu asserted, "If they attended the sessions, it would have been clear whether the mike was given or not. The YSRCP is spreading falsehoods to evade public criticism for avoiding Assembly sessions."

Nagababu also promised that all corrupt activities carried out by YSRCP leaders during their tenure would be investigated and presented before the courts. "When they were in power, YSRCP leaders spoke freely. Now, they must face the consequences of their actions," he stated.

Praising the coalition govern-

ment for its efficient governance over the past seven months, Nagababu highlighted several development initiatives undertaken in the region. He also warned that individuals involved in illegal activities, such as plundering mines and forest lands, would be held accountable.

The meeting was attended by key leaders including AP TIDCO Chairman Vemulapati Ajay Kumar, MLA Aarani Srinivasulu, Chittoor district president Dr. Pasupuleti Hariprasad, and other prominent figures like N. Venugopal Reddy, Kiran Rayal, Ram Das Chowdary, and Challa Ramachandra Reddy.

BCCI announces cash award of Rs 5 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI on Sunday announced a cash award of Rs 5 crore for the Indian team and its support staff after the title triumph in the U-19 Women's T20 World Cup in Kuala Lumpur with the board's top office-bearers hailing the achievement.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) extends its heartfelt congratulations to the India Under-19 women's team for successfully defending their title at the ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup 2025 in Malaysia. To honour this remarkable achievement, the BCCI has announced a cash reward of INR 5 crore for the victorious squad and support staff, led by head coach Nooshin Al Khadeer," the Indian cricket board said in a statement.

India clinch...

Continued from Page 1

"I've dreamt of this moment for the past two years, and I can't believe I hit the winning runs - it's truly surreal. My teammates' support made all the difference, and this moment is one I'll cherish forever," said Sanika after the match.

Left-arm spinner Parunika (4-0-6-2) provided India with an immediate breakthrough, dismissing opener Simone Lourens for a duck as South Africa struggled from the outset.

Right-arm seamer Shabnam Shakil (2-0-7-1) then removed the dangerous Jemma Botha, reducing South Africa to 20/2 by the end of the fourth over. The pressure intensified when Ayushi bowled Diara Ramlakan, further denting South Africa's innings.

At the halfway mark, South Africa were struggling at 33/3, unable to gain any momentum.

YSRCP leaders meet SEC, demand fair elections



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leaders met State Election Commissioner (SEC) Neelam Sawhney to raise concerns over the upcoming elections for deputy mayors of corporations and municipal chairpersons in Andhra Pradesh. They alleged that the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and its allies were undermining democracy through illegal activities, including threats, violence, and coercion to influence the electoral process.

The YSRCP leaders condemned these actions and urged the EC to take measures to ensure free and fair elections without any external interference. They also highlighted instances of alleged illegal activities by TDP leaders, including the destruction of properties belonging to YSRCP candidates and attempts to forcibly displace opposition members.

Naidu backs BJP's Delhi...

Continued from Page 1

He also questioned the lack of employment opportunities in Delhi, pointing out that many young people were forced to seek work in Noida, Gurugram, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad instead. Naidu criticised the AAP government for its failure to provide clean drinking water, stating that workers from Bihar now preferred working in South India over Delhi due to the poor living conditions.

Comparing the election manifestos of the BJP and AAP, Naidu asserted that BJP's promises, such as free education from kindergarten to postgraduate levels, were far superior to AAP's emphasis on foreign education. He

praised the Modi government's initiative to provide potable tap water to every household and stressed the need to clean the Yamuna River. Naidu urged voters to choose BJP for a cleaner and healthier Delhi.

Naidu also criticised the extravagant spending by AAP leaders, condemning the construction of lavish palaces while the common people continued to suffer. He took aim at Arvind Kejriwal and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, denouncing their lavish expenditure on residences while public welfare remained neglected. He urged Delhiites to remove Kejriwal from power, just as Andhra Pradesh had ousted

Jagan, for the greater good of the people.

Highlighting the success of the TDP-JSP-BJP alliance in Andhra Pradesh, Naidu pointed to the economic progress made in just seven months, with Rs 7 lakh crore in investments attracted. He called for a "double-engine" government in Delhi, akin to the one in Andhra Pradesh, to drive rapid growth and prosperity.

Naidu urged the people of Delhi to vote for the BJP, stressing that Delhi, as the heart of India, should reflect the nation's strength and progress. He emphasised that under Modi's leadership, India had risen to global prominence, achieving significant economic growth and policy reforms.

Jana Sena, TDP gear up...

Continued from Page 1

TDP challenging YSRCP in Kadapa

In stark contrast, TDP's decision to hold its Mahanadu in Kadapa signals a more aggressive strategy. Kadapa, long considered a bastion of the YSR Congress, is a region where TDP has recently made notable inroads, securing seven out of ten assembly seats in the most recent elections. "TDP's choice of Kadapa is a clear statement that the party is ready to challenge the dominance of YSR Congress, even in its strongholds," observes Prof. Subba Rao, another political analyst.

TDP's strategy in Kadapa is a bold move to expand its reach and wrest influence from its primary rival. By focusing on

this crucial district, TDP aims to strengthen its foothold in a key area while projecting itself as a formidable alternative to YSR Congress. The Mahanadu in Kadapa is seen as more than just a political gathering; it will serve as a statement of intent, signalling TDP's readiness to reclaim lost ground and extend its presence in traditionally difficult territories.

Consolidation vs expansion

The stark contrast between Jana Sena's defensive posture and TDP's offensive approach is clear. While Jana Sena is focusing on reinforcing its base in East Godavari, TDP is looking to challenge the existing political power structure in Kadapa and neighbouring regions. "Jana Sena's approach

is to safeguard its existing support base and secure its strongholds, while TDP is trying to shift the political balance by making significant inroads into areas where YSR Congress has been dominant for years," says Dr. Reddy.

These strategies offer more than just insights into the parties' immediate plans. They provide a window into their long-term goals. Janasena, despite its leadership's appeal, faces the challenge of expanding beyond its established strongholds. TDP, on the other hand, is keen on regaining its former political influence, looking to disrupt the YSR Congress's grip on power.

A litmus test for both parties

The annual plenaries of Jana

Sena and TDP are likely to have far-reaching implications for the parties.

Both gatherings will provide a litmus test of each party's political health, offering insight into their future trajectories. While Janasena needs to make inroads into new territories to expand its base, TDP's challenge lies in asserting its presence and regaining relevance in the face of its rivals' growing influence.

As both parties prepare for their respective events, the political landscape of Andhra Pradesh appears to be at a crossroads. How these parties navigate their plenaries and the strategic messages they send will play a pivotal role in shaping the state's political future in the coming months.

Nandigama Nagara Panchayat Chairperson poll today

A petition has been filed in HC seeking stay on the election

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the current political landscape, the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) holds an absolute majority in the Nandigama nagar panchayat. However, they are facing a petition in the Andhra Pradesh High Court regarding the Chairperson position. The petition was filed before the election for the vacant Chairperson post, and the petitioner demanded that the elections for the two vacant municipal councillor positions in the town be completed first.

Nandendla Harika, a resident of Nandigama town, approached the court three days ago, seeking a stay on the election for the vacant Chairperson position. She claims an interest in contesting for the vacant 11th ward and later wishes to become the Chairperson. She has urged the court to stay the Chairperson election until the elections for the two vacant ward positions are held.

In light of the situation, the



government has appointed Advocate General Dammalapati Srinivas to secure the Chairperson position in Nandigama. Although the petition was temporarily suspended from being heard at the time of filing in the High Court, Dammalapati Srinivas is consulting with legal experts to ensure that it does not obstruct the scheduled election of the Chairperson on February 3.

According to the election notification, the NTR District Election Officer and Collector, Dr. G. Lakshmi, issued Form II notices to all ward members to attend a special meeting to elect the Chairperson. The nagar

panchayat will hold a special meeting to conduct the casual election for the Chairperson on February 3 at 11 AM.

Mandava Vara Lakshmi, the elected member of the 11th ward, and Madugula Naga Ratnam, elected from the seventh ward, served as Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, respectively, until their deaths due to health issues. Orsu Lakshmi, the second Vice-Chairperson, is currently acting as the Chairperson.

There are 20 wards in the Nandigama nagar panchayat. In the last local body elections held in 2021, the YSRCP secured 13 out of the 20 wards, while the

TDP won six and the Jana Sena Party won one seat. Shortly after the new council was formed, one TDP councillor joined the YSRCP, increasing their strength to 14. However, due to recent political changes, the YSRCP now has only four councillors.

Meanwhile, four women councillors are competing for the Chairperson position. The main contenders are Shakhamuri Swarna Latha from Ward 8, Yechuri Lakshmi Ratna Kumar from Ward 5, K Satyavathi from Ward 14, and Mandava Krishna Kumar from Ward 10. However, the party has not yet announced its candidate.

In this context, the TDP is facing a court petition regarding the Chairperson election. The government has fielded the Advocate General to address the situation and clear all legal hurdles to ensure a smooth election. He is making all efforts by conducting a series of meetings with all legal experts to avoid a High Court stay on the election.

100 yoga gurus set world record by performing Surya Namaskar 108 times

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To mark Vasantha Panchami and Ratha Saphthami, the Andhra Pradesh Yoga Sabha organized a mass event where 100 Yog Gurus performed Surya Namaskar 108 times. This event took place at the Zilla Parishad Kalyana Mandapam in Machilipatnam, Krishna district, on Sunday, with the aim of entering the International Book of World Records. District Collector DK Balaji participated in the programme.

The 100 Yoga Gurus successfully performed Surya Namaskar 108 times as well as 12 types of yoga asanas, leading to the event being recognised in the International Book of World Records.

On the occasion, Collector Balaji emphasised that complete health and spiritual well-being can be attained through Surya Namaskar. He noted that the celebrations for Arasavalli Sri Suryanarayana Swamy Ratha Saptami began with Surya Namaskar on this day. He explained that performing Surya Namaskar during Brahma Muhurta enhances overall health and spiritual feelings.



The 100 Yoga Gurus successfully performed Surya Namaskar 108 times as well as 12 types of yoga asanas, leading to the event being recognised in the International Book of World Records

Furthermore, he highlighted that the consistent practice of Surya Namaskar improves mental clarity and concentration. He described Surya Namaskar not merely as a physical exercise but also as a means to develop mind-body awareness. Balaji stated that yoga is a unique practice beneficial for physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Additionally, he mentioned that yoga encompasses various asanas, breathing techniques like pranayama, and Surya Namaskar, along with meditation mudras. He explained that Surya Namaskar combines all of these elements into a comprehensive practice. The Collector also noted that yoga gurus traditionally perform Surya Namaskar facing the

sun at sunrise. On the occasion, TTD Dharmacharini Jonnalagadda Madhavi recited the Bhagavad Gita. This significant event has now been included in the International Book of World Records. The District Collector presented certificates to all participants in the program.

Prominent yoga gurus including Ghantasala Gurunatha Babu, Maddala Chintayya, Mahalakshmi, Mudigonda Sastry, and RD Prasad took part in the event alongside employees, teachers, businessmen, and students.

Sworn in as ex-officio member



PNS ■ TIRUMALA

K Rama Chandra Mohan took oath as an ex-officio member of the TTD Board of Trustees at the Tirumala Srivari Temple on Sunday.

Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, Additional Executive Officer, TTD, administered the oath of office in front of Srivaru on

Sunday. After darshan along with his family members, the ex-officio member was rendered Vedaseervachanam by Vedic scholars in Ranganayakula Mandapam.

Temple Deputy EO Lokanatham, Board Cell Deputy EO Prashanthi, Peishkar Ramakrishna and others were present.



AI-based CT FFR test for advanced cardiac disease launched

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Aster Ramesh Hospitals has introduced India's first AI-based CT FFR (Fractional Flow Reserve) test, marking a significant advancement in preventive cardiology. This cutting-edge technology enhances early detection and

diagnosis of coronary artery disease (CAD), offering a non-invasive alternative to catheter angiography.

Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu, Chief Cardiologist at Aster Ramesh Hospitals, highlighted that AI is revolutionizing cardiology by improving diagnostic preci-

sion. Western countries now prefer Calcium Score and CT Angiogram tests over traditional ECG, Echo, and Treadmill tests for detecting heart disease. AI-driven techniques optimize cardiac imaging and treatment decisions. The CT Angio FFR test helps assess CAD severity,

with lifestyle changes and cholesterol control managing 70-80% of cases, while only 20-30% require stents or surgery. Dr Ramesh Babu advised against stress tests before CT or Catheter Angiograms, citing the American Heart Association's recommendations.

Jonty Rhodes stresses teamwork, successful business

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Legendary South African cricketer and motivational speaker Jonty Rhodes highlighted the pivotal role of teamwork in achieving success, during his keynote address at the Business Network India (BNI) Conclave 3.0, held at SS Convention in the city on Sunday.

Renowned for his exceptional fielding skills, Rhodes drew powerful parallels between cricket and business, stressing that just as teamwork leads to victory on the field, mutual cooperation is key to thriving in the corporate world. He emphasized the importance of making timely decisions and taking swift actions, advising attendees to stay ahead of market trends and adjust their strategies accordingly.

Rhodes praised the event organisers and encouraged par-



ticipants to continue fostering collaboration, strengthening the business sector, and contributing to the country's economic growth. The conclave attracted over 1,500 prominent business leaders. Roundtable discussions explored emerging business opportunities and strategies, offering valuable insights for attendees.

BNI Vijayawada Chapter Executive Directors Jai Desai and Vishal Desai also highlighted the organization's advanced technological system, designed to help entrepreneurs build meaningful connections.

Addiction to online gaming, alcohol: A growing concern in India

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A string of disturbing incidents has highlighted the increasing dangers of addiction to online gaming, alcohol, and gambling. Recent cases include a young boy attacking his mother for restricting his online gaming in Visakhapatnam, a 15-year-old in Haryana committing suicide after being banned from mobile games, and a man in Krishna district assaulting his father with an axe due to alcohol addiction and debt. These incidents underscore a troubling trend where addicted individuals perceive family members as adversaries, leading to violent confrontations.

Experts warn that the inability to control these addictive behaviours strains relationships and leads to tragic outcomes, affecting both the individual and their loved ones. Online gaming addiction, particularly among students, significantly impairs academic focus, while individuals addicted to alcohol or gambling often resort to borrowing money or accumulating debt to sustain their habits, jeopardising their personal as well as professional lives.

Medical experts note that addiction manifests in various

Addiction manifests in various ways - increased anxiety, erratic behaviour, excessive device use, and aggressive reactions to minor issues



ways, including increased anxiety, erratic behaviour, excessive device use, and aggressive reactions to minor issues. Common signs include excessive screen time, behavioural changes such

as aggression and withdrawal, unexplained financial problems, avoidance of social interactions, and difficulty concentrating. Studies indicate that phone addiction is most preva-

lent among those aged 9 to 25, alcohol and drug addiction commonly affects individuals between 20 and 50, and gambling addiction is widespread among those aged 20 to 40.

Dr. Ramireddy, Superintendent of the Government Mental Hospital, emphasised that addiction develops over time, typically within three to six months—a critical period for identification and intervention. Treatment involves medication, counselling, and behavioural therapy. However, many individuals resist treatment, underscoring the importance of early detection and professional assistance. Untreated addiction can lead to severe mental health disorders, further complicating recovery.

With addiction cases on the rise, experts urge families and communities to remain vigilant. Timely diagnosis and support can help individuals regain control, preventing further tragedies and violence. Recognising the signs of addiction and seeking professional help is essential in addressing this growing concern. By working together, we can mitigate the devastating effects of addiction and foster a healthier, more supportive society.



Oncologist calls for early detection to combat rising cancer cases

Up to 40 per cent of cancers can be prevented through lifestyle modifications such as avoiding risk factors and vaccination

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the world prepares to observe World Cancer Day on February 4, Dr. Murali Krishna Voonna, MD of Mahatma Gandhi Cancer Hospital and Research Institute (MGCHRI), has emphasised the importance of preventative action and awareness in curbing the rising cancer cases globally. According to Dr. Krishna, up to 40 per cent of cancers can be prevented through lifestyle modifications such as avoiding risk factors and vaccination, while early detection can potentially cure 50 per cent of cancer cases.

Dr. Krishna highlighted several modifiable risk factors that could significantly reduce cancer incidence, including quitting smoking, abstaining from alco-

hol, maintaining a healthy diet, avoiding junk food, and HPV vaccination for cervical cancer. He stressed that regular screening plays a crucial role in early detection, with early-stage cancers having a 95 per cent cure rate if detected in time.

The economic and health implications of tobacco use are also underscored by Dr. Krishna, who noted that the Government of India allocates approximately Rs1 lakh crore annually in cancer treatment subsidies, while tobacco revenue stands at just Rs 18,000 crore. He calls for stricter enforcement of existing laws, such as the Control of Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), to limit tobacco use.

Dr. Krishna also advocates for greater support from govern-

ment health schemes like Ayushman Bharat and AarogyaSri, ensuring they cover not only treatment but also diagnostic services. He points out that India's health budget is lower than those of smaller nations such as Nepal and Thailand, and calls for GST exemptions for medical imports to reduce costs for both hospitals and patients.

Ahead of World Cancer Day, MGCHRI organised a walkathon on the Beach Road on Sunday, February 2, to raise awareness about cancer and its prevention among the general public. Dr. Krishna concludes by urging individuals and governments to take action, stressing that, with the right steps, the fight against cancer can be won.

'Budget lacks commitment towards AP'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vallamreddy Lakshmana Reddy, president, Jana Chaitanya Vedika, has strongly criticised the 2025 Union Budget, accusing the Central government of failing to provide adequate support to the State. Reddy claimed that the budget reveals a lack of commitment towards Andhra Pradesh, particularly in addressing issues outlined in the State's bifurcation statute.

While expressing satisfaction over the provision in the budget that exempts salaried individuals earning up to ₹12 lakh from income tax, Reddy focused on several key concerns regarding the State's development. He highlighted the Central government's decision to reduce the height of the Polavaram irrigation project from 45.72 m to 41.15 m, calling it a step backward. This reduction, he argued, transformed the project into an ordinary venture rather than the national project that was initially promised, undermining its original intent and the full funding commitment made by the government.

He further criticised the government's lack of focus on irrigation projects under construction in the State.

Vijayawada hosts Pickleball Tournament for cancer champions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Observing World Cancer Day, HCG Curie City Cancer Centre, Vijayawada, organised a fun and inclusive Pickleball Tournament for cancer champions, clinicians and care givers. The event, aligned with the global theme of 'United by Unique,' aimed to highlight the individual triumphs, strength, resilience and unique journeys of cancer champions

while fostering a sense of unity through sport.

With over 30 participants, the event brought together a vibrant community united in the fight against cancer. The pickleball tournament featured doubles matches with cancer champions and their families participating alongside each other. Pickleball, known for its accessibility and focus on teamwork, serves as the perfect activity for promoting both



physical well-being and emotional healing. In addition to the tournament, there will be wellness workshops focused on the benefits of staying active post-treatment, as well as relaxation zones designed to support mental health and well-being.

Terli Yuva Kishore, Chief OO, HCG, Vijayawada, said: "On World Cancer Day, we at HCG Curie City Cancer Centre, Vijayawada, acknowl-

edge the fearless resilience displayed by champions navigating through complexities posed by cancer journeys. Our initiatives, including the pickleball tournament, reflect our commitment to building community bonds among cancer champions. Their experiences emphasise the importance of collaborative efforts in fostering nurturing environments that are essential for achieving holistic healing."

Notorious bike lifter arrested, 48 vehicles recovered

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The police arrested a notorious bike lifter and seized 48 two-wheelers in Pithapuram. SP Bindu Madhav told the media in Pithapuram on Sunday that the Pithapuram circle police arrested notorious bike lifter S Gangadhar and recovered 48 stolen motorcycles from his possession.

He had stolen the motorcycles in Pithapuram, Kakinada, Tuni and Anakapalli. The police also arrested the six receivers who purchased a stolen bike from him. The SP appreciated the Pithapuram circle police for arresting a notorious bike lifter.



Tirumala decked out for Rathasaptami tomorrow



PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The TTD has made extensive arrangements for the celebration of Ratha Saptami on Tuesday, February 4, at Tirumala.

On the seventh day of Magha every year, Sri Malayappa Swamy blesses devotees in a procession, travelling on seven different vahanas from morning till evening.

To ensure the comfort of the devotees watching the vahanam procession, German

sheds have been set up along the galleries of the four Mada streets, protecting them from adverse weather conditions.

Food counters have been strategically placed in the galleries to offer continuous servings of food and drinking water to the pilgrims.

Devotees will be served a variety of refreshments, including tea, coffee, milk, buttermilk, fresh water, sambar rice, curd rice, pulihora, and pongali.

LED screens are being installed at key locations in Tirumala, where large gather-

ings are expected, to broadcast the vahana sevas live.

The temple streets have already been adorned with vibrant Rangolis, while white coolant paint has been applied to enhance the aesthetics.

TTD vigilance and security personnel, along with police, SPF officers, and NCC cadets,

will ensure smooth and secure proceedings for the devotees. Senior officials have been assigned the task of overseeing the facilities in the galleries of the four Mada streets to ensure everything runs smoothly for

To ensure the comfort of the devotees watching the vahanam procession, German sheds have been set up along the galleries of the four Mada streets, protecting them from adverse weather conditions. Food counters have been strategically placed in the galleries to offer continuous servings of food and drinking water to the pilgrims.

the pilgrims. For global devotees, the Vahana Sevas will be broadcast live on SVBC.

Additionally, 2,500 sevaks have been deployed to assist the pilgrims and ensure a comfortable and seamless experience.



GMC standing panel polls today

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) Commissioner Puli Srinivasulu announced that the Standing Committee elections will be held on Monday, with all necessary arrangements in place to ensure their smooth and efficient conduct.

He emphasized that all designated officers and staff must strictly adhere to election regulations while carrying out their duties.

On Sunday morning, Commissioner Srinivasulu, along with Election Officer and Additional Municipal Commissioner Challa Obulesu and other officials, reviewed the arrangements for the elections.

He issued necessary instructions to officials to ensure a seamless electoral process.

The GMC Commissioner inspected various election-

related materials, including display boards, polling compartments, ballot boxes, and other equipment essential for conducting the elections. He confirmed that all preparations had been finalized, with polling set to begin at 10:30 am and conclude at 3:00 pm on Monday.

Srinivasulu stated that only corporators arriving to cast their votes would be permitted inside the office, and they must carry identification cards issued by the Guntur Municipal Corporation.

He clarified that mobile phones, electronic devices, and other materials would not be allowed inside the polling station. A special cloakroom has been established at the Citizens' Service Center in the municipal parking area for corporators to store their personal belongings.

To maintain order during

polling, he announced that no other vehicles would be allowed to park within the Municipal Corporation premises. Corporators arriving to vote have been instructed to use the parking facilities at Gandhi Park. Upon entry through the main gate of the Municipal Corporation, they will undergo a police check before proceeding to the polling station, with arrangements in place for their exit through the parking gate after voting.

The GMC Commissioner further stated that staff must perform their duties strictly within their designated departments, carrying their identification cards at all times. Those assigned election duties must report by 8:00 am with their ID cards. Additionally, only the Election Officer will be permitted to carry a mobile phone into the polling station.



SP praises AR forces' role in maintaining law & order

PNS ■ BAPATLA

Superintendent of Police Tushar Dudi has commended the Armed Reserve (AR) police personnel for their crucial role in maintaining law and order. He assured them of plans to establish a shopping complex to provide essential goods at subsidized prices for police personnel.

A demobilization programme was held on Sunday at the police parade grounds, where the SP participated as the chief guest.

Speaking on the occasion, the SP stated that the district has a full complement of armed forces and that an annual mobilization programme is conducted to enhance the skills of AR personnel. This year's mobilization took place from January 20 to February 2, with eight platoons consisting of 40 personnel each.

He highlighted various welfare measures being undertaken for AR personnel, including a mega medical camp organized in October, where free medical check-ups were conducted for about 400 police personnel and their family members. He also announced the establishment of a police welfare canteen and a shopping complex

to provide essential commodities at subsidized prices. From general security duties to handling law and order situations, AR personnel play a key role, he noted. He urged them to focus on physical fitness and professional skill development while maintaining discipline in both professional and personal life.

As part of the mobilization programme, medical examinations were conducted for around 300 AR staff. The SP also announced that the last Friday of every month would be observed as 'Grievance Day' to address and resolve staff issues.

The SP emphasized that AR police personnel received specialized training during the mobilization programme, including indoor and outdoor classes, service rules, handling advanced weaponry, drills, march fast, mob control, VIP escorts, PSO, BD team operations, prisoner escort, bandobast, and motor vehicle duties to enhance their professional skills. He reiterated that armed forces are swiftly deployed wherever law and order issues arise. AR DSP Vijay Sarathi, DSP Ramanjaneyulu, CCS DSP Jagadhi Naika, and other officials were present at the event.

Steps taken to check exodus of labourers from Prakasam



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Balaveeranjanya Swamy has confirmed that measures have been implemented to curb the exodus of labourers from Prakasam district who are seeking livelihood opportunities in other states.

A programme was organised here on Sunday to mark the 56th formation day of Prakasam district. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Balaveeranjanya Swamy stated that the government is focused on generating local job opportunities as part of efforts to stem the migration from the district to neighbouring states. He emphasised that a renewable energy industry is being set up in Kanigiri, along with a leather park in Giddalur.

"Kandukur constituency, where Ramayapatnam Port and Horticulture University are located, will soon be merged with Prakasam district. The Bharat Petroleum Refinery Unit will also commence operations soon. There is a possibility of tobacco-related industries being established in the district," he said, adding that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu had discussed these initiatives with industrialists during his visit to Davos. The Minister also reiterated

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his commitment to expediting the completion of the Veligonda project to provide water for irrigation and drinking purposes. He assured that check dams would be constructed where necessary to ensure efficient water utilisation, and highlighted that interlinking rivers in the state remains a priority.

Acknowledging the upcoming infrastructural developments, the Minister announced that work on the four-lane road from Beistavaripet to Ongole will begin this year. He further noted that the state government will actively encourage the tourism, aqua, and granite industries in the district.

"Chief Minister Naidu has also prioritised the development of Prakasam University and Ongole Dairy. Along with the establishment of an airport in Ongole, small and micro industries will be further promoted. Prakasam district will be comprehensively developed by leveraging its

geographical and human resources," the Minister affirmed.

Collector A. Thameem Ansariya stated that the district would be developed in line with the ten principles outlined by the state government in Vision-2047. She noted that Prakasam is the largest district in the state geographically, and efforts are underway to ensure it ranks high in development. "The district vision document has been prepared with this goal in mind," she confirmed.

MLAs Damacharla Janardhan Rao, BN Vijay Kumar, Maritime Board chairman Damacharla Satyanarayana, Tourism Corporation chairman Nukasani Balaji, Mala Finance Corporation chairman P. Vijay Kumar, and State Agriculture Corporation vice-chairman Mareddy Srinivas Reddy also addressed the gathering. Earlier, they garlanded the statue of freedom fighter Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu.

BRS & Telangana activists must protest against the Centre's bias: Mahesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Declaring a war on the BJP in protest against the Centre's stance against Telangana at the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue, TPCC Chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud said that the BRS and Telangana activists should come forward to protest against the Centre's biased attitude towards Telangana.

Addressing a protest held at the Tank Bund Ambedkar statue on Sunday, Mahesh appealed to all political parties to put politics aside and come together for the sake of Telangana's development. He said that they will stage a peaceful protest till the Centre gives adequate funds to Telangana.

Asking the Union Ministers from Telangana, G. Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay Kumar, to reveal whether they don't want the state to develop, Mahesh asked Sanjay and Kishan to quit the Union Ministry. He said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and other Ministers are fighting for Telangana.

He said that the budget introduced by the daughter-in-law of Telugus, Nirmala Sitaraman, puts politics before the nation's comprehensive development. He said the budget allocations proved the BJP's clear bias against Congress-ruled states like Telangana.

Mahesh said the BJP has eight MPs from Telangana, however, the Centre gave only



a donkey's egg to Telangana. He said that Nirmala Sitaraman showed an empty hand to Telugus singing Gurajada Apparao's 'Deshamante Matti Kadoy' song. The BJP-led Centre's budget allocations look like allocations for Delhi and Bihar elections, he pointed out.

Mahesh said the BJP has been using the Union Budget for political purposes, dividing states and endangering national unity. He said the Centre did not pay any attention to the country's 'inclusive' growth in the budget.

Budget allocations show BJP's step-motherly attitude against Telangana, he said. How can India develop when the budget allocates funds only to a few states, he asked.

He said that Telangana, which has a 5.1 per cent share in the country's GDP, is getting only 2.10 per cent of the Budget. It is sad that Telangana is not even getting Rs 40,000 crore from the Centre, although the Centre collected Rs 1,01,000 crore from Telangana, he said.

He recalled that the CM and Ministers went to New Delhi and begged the Prime Minister for funds for TG, but nothing happened.

He said the budget contains zero allocations for Bifurcation Act assurances, the second phase of the Metro and other things.

He said that it is strange that the BJP which goes around saying 'Sab ka Saath, Sab ka Vikas,' does not see the problems of the 140 crore people in the country. The people of Telangana will never forgive the BJP after seeing the 2025-26 budget allocations, he said.

"There is a need for every Telangana resident to come together beyond politics for TG's progress. The BRS and Telangana activists should come forward to protest against the biased attitude of the Centre. The leaders of the BRS and BJP repeatedly criticised Chief Minister Revanth's New Delhi visits. What will they say about budget allocations now?" he said.

He recalled that the CM and Ministers went to New Delhi and begged the Prime Minister for funds for TG, but nothing happened.

9 thieves arrested, liquor bottles recovered

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The police arrested nine thieves and recovered a large quantity of liquor bottles in Vinukonda on Sunday.

According to the police, a gang of nine individuals was involved in thefts at liquor

shops in and around the Vinukonda area. They stole liquor bottles and distributed them among their friends and relatives. Acting on a tip-off, the police apprehended the gang and seized over two hundred liquor bottles worth more than Rs 3 lakh.

The gang's modus operandi involved breaking open the shutters of liquor shops and stealing liquor bottles, which they later sold at lower prices in rural areas. The arrested individuals will be produced before the court, police officials stated.



Focus on crimes against women, kids: IG

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Guntur Range IGP Sarvashresth Tripathi has instructed Prakasam district officials to give special attention to tackling crimes against women and children.

During his annual inspection of the DSP office in Markapuram, the Guntur Range IGP reviewed all records in the sub-divisional office, including those related to SC/ST, POCSO cases, crime registers, GCR registers, monthly review files, OE, and other records. He provided several recommendations to the officials.

The IGP inquired about the cases registered in the past, their investigation status, and the progress of ongoing cases.



He emphasized that both grave and non-grave cases should be thoroughly investigated to ensure the accused are punished. He urged that pending cases be reduced through a specific action plan and that habit-

ual offenders be closely monitored. Special focus should be given to crimes against women and children, he added.

He directed the officers to implement visible policing to maintain law and order, control

crime, and enhance enforcement efforts. Strong measures should be taken to prevent anti-social and illegal activities, and proactive steps must be taken to address road accidents.

Earlier, IGP Sarvashresth Tripathi and SP AR Damodhar paid tribute to freedom fighter and former Chief Minister Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu on the occasion of the 56th formation day of Prakasam district. Markapuram DSP U Nagaraju and other officials were also present.

ACROSS THE STATES



Woman forces husband to sell kidney, elopes with lover

A woman allegedly coaxed her husband to sell his kidney for Rs 10 lakh to raise money for their daughter's education, only to flee with another man taking away the entire cash in West Bengal's Howrah district, a police officer said on Sunday. Police launched a probe based on a complaint lodged by the husband's family living in Sankrail. The woman had been pestering her husband for the past one year to sell his kidney and earn some money to run their household in a better way and admit their 12-year-old daughter to a good school, according to the complaint. Believing in his wife, the man agreed to go under the scalpel after she sealed a contract with a buyer for Rs 10 lakh to sell the organ. After the surgery held last month, the man brought home the money. His wife asked him to take rest and not step outside for a speedy recovery. "Then one day she left the house and did not return. I later found the entire amount of Rs 10 lakh in cash along with some more was missing from the almirah," the man said.



Navy gets replacement for MQ-9B drone

Months after an MQ-9B Sea Guardian drone crashed into the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Navy has received a replacement for the high-altitude long-endurance surveillance platform from its US-based manufacturer General Atomics, authoritative military sources said on Sunday. One of the two MQ-9B drones that the Indian Navy had taken on lease was lost in a "controlled ditching" at sea following a technical snag in mid-September last year. General Atomics has sent a replacement for the drone that crashed into the sea as per contract obligations, the sources told PTI. The MQ-9B drones are capable of remaining airborne for over 35 hours and can carry four Hellfire missiles and around 450 kgs of bombs. In 2020, the Indian Navy took the two MQ-9B drones on lease for a period of one year. However, the lease period was extended subsequently. In October, India sealed a mega deal with the US to procure 31 Predator drones from General Atomics at a cost of nearly USD 4 billion to crank up the military's combat prowess along the contested borders with China.



Kerala CM to inaugurate 30 new smart Anganwadis

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will inaugurate 30 new smart anganwadis equipped with state-of-the-art facilities for children here on Monday. The CM will inaugurate the facilities via video conference at an event to be held in an auditorium here. State Health Minister Veena George will preside over the function. An official statement said on Sunday. George stated that anganwadis in the state have been upgraded to smart anganwadis as part of efforts to make them child-friendly and support the physical and mental development of children. So far, approval has been granted for constructing 189 smart anganwadis, of which 89 have already been opened, she said. "The 30 new anganwadis are now becoming operational in addition to these. With this, a total of 117 smart anganwadis have been established in the state," George added. The smart anganwadis have been designed with facilities to ensure the comprehensive development of children, she said.

CJI, judges hold meeting to discuss appointment of ad-hoc judges in HCs

The conference was followed by a meeting of the chief justices of the high court and senior-most judges of the high court with the Chief Justice of India, Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Justice B R Gavai and Justice Surya Kant, judges of the Supreme Court of India, the top court administration said in a press release. "Issues relating to filling up of vacancies in high courts, appointment of ad-hoc judges in high courts and establishment of evening courts were discussed," it said.

India-Indonesia ties rooted in shared culture: PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the relations between India and Indonesia are not just geopolitical but are rooted in thousands of years of shared culture and history with both countries have a tradition of unity in diversity.

Modi made the remarks while addressing the Maha Kumbabishekam of Shri Sanathana Dharma Aalayam in Jakarta, Indonesia, via video conferencing.

"It is my pleasure that I have become a part of the Maha Kumbabishekam of the Murugan Temple in Jakarta. I am far from Jakarta but my mind is close to it just like India and Indonesia are close to each other...I extend my wishes to all the people there on the occasion of Maha Kumbabishekam," Modi said.

Just a few days ago, President Prabowo Subianto had taken the love of 140 crore Indians from India, Modi said and added that through their president, the people of Indonesia



"It is my pleasure that I have become a part of the Maha Kumbabishekam of the Murugan Temple in Jakarta. I am far from Jakarta but my mind is close to it just like India and Indonesia are close to each other...I extend my wishes to all the people there on the occasion of Maha Kumbabishekam," Modi said

must be experiencing the good wishes of every Indian. "I congratulate all of you and crores of devotees of Lord Murugan in India-Indonesia and across the world on the occasion of Maha Kumbabishekam of Jakarta Temple. I wish that the praise of Lord Murugan continues through the hymns of Tiruppugal. May the mantras

When India is developing, why should Delhi lag?

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP dispensation in Delhi refused central assistance out of fear that the credit would go to the Narendra Modi-led Union government, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh claimed on Sunday. Speaking at an election rally in Rajendra Nagar, the veter-

Today, it is the fifth largest, he added.

"When India is developing under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, why should Delhi be left behind? The city government does not take the Centre's help. We don't discriminate against any state but the (Delhi) chief minister is afraid that Modi ji will get



an leader said India's economy had grown under the BJP government but Delhi did not benefit from it. "The BJP has not got an opportunity to serve Delhi in a long time... Delhi did not get the development it deserves," Singh said.

India has been on a path of development under the Modi government. India was the 11th largest economy in 2014.

the credit," he said. Attacking former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the defence minister alleged that he did not resign even when he was sent to jail in the liquor policy case. Kejriwal -- who was part of the India Against Corruption movement -- went against the wishes of Anna Hazare to form a political party, he claimed.

Cong sets up 'EAGLE' to monitor conduct of fair polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday set up an eight-member committee -- Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) -- to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission of India.

The committee will first take up the Maharashtra voters' list manipulation issue, and submit a detailed report to the leadership at the earliest, the party said in a statement.

The panel includes Congress treasurer Ajay Maken and senior leaders Digvijaya Singh, Abhishek Singhvi, Praveen Chakravarty and Pawan Khera.

Besides, Gurdeep Singh Sappal, Nitin Raut and Challa Vamshi Chand Reddy are also part of the panel.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has constituted an Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) with immediate effect to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission of India, the statement said.

Besides Maharashtra, 'EAGLE' will also analyse past elections in other states, and proactively monitor upcoming elections and all other issues related to the conduct of free and fair elections in the country.

Significantly, the setting up

of the panel comes just days before the Delhi Assembly polls.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had last month alleged that there is a "serious problem" with the country's election system and that the Election Commission needs to ensure there is transparency in polls.

Maintaining that "something wrong" has taken place in Maharashtra assembly elections, he had said the Congress and the opposition have been asking for voter lists of Maharashtra and Haryana elections, which the EC is refusing to provide.

He had demanded that the EC come clean on the issue.



Committed to protecting, enriching nature, says Union Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Sunday said India is committed to conserving and enriching nature, as reflected in the steady increase in Ramsar sites -- wetlands of international importance -- across the country.

On the occasion of World Wetlands Day, Yadav credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on wetland conservation

for India's record 89 Ramsar sites, the highest in Asia and the third highest in the world.

"With a consistent rise in Ramsar sites, India is showing the commitment to both conserve and enrich nature. Towards that end, PM Shri Narendra Modi ji has laid an unprecedented emphasis on preserving wetlands. It is because of this approach that our tally of Ramsar sites has reached 89," Yadav posted on X.

112 killed in Mizoram road accidents in 2024

PNS ■ AIZAWL

At least 112 people died in road accidents in Mizoram in 2024, a senior official said on Sunday.

A total of 124 road accidents were reported in the state during the period, Transport Secretary Zosangliana said.

He said that in the past five years between 2019 and 2023, road mishaps occurred on 423 occasions, claiming 355 lives. The Mizoram government had on Saturday kicked off the 'Road Safety Month' campaign.

Altogether 3,99,290 vehicles were registered under the state transport department till January 24, Zosangliana added.

5 killed as bus falls into gorge in Gujarat

PNS ■ DANG (GUJARAT)

Five persons were killed and 35 others injured when a private bus carrying pilgrims hailing from Madhya Pradesh fell into a deep gorge in Gujarat's Dang district early Sunday morning, police said.

Among the injured persons, 17 were grievously hurt, they said, adding the victims were on a trip to religious places across various states in the country.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav announced assistance of Rs 4 lakh to the families of the



deceased and Rs 1 lakh to the critically injured victims.

The accident occurred around 4.15 am when the bus driver lost control over the

and plunged 35 feet into the gorge.

The passengers started at night for Dwarka in Gujarat from Trimbakeshwar in Maharashtra's Nashik district.

The official said they stopped for tea at Saputara before resuming their journey when the accident occurred 2.5 km from the hill station.

"Five persons died on the spot, and 17 others suffered serious injuries and have been rushed to a civil hospital at Ahwa. Some others have sustained minor injuries. The rescue operation is nearly over," the official said.

He said the bus, carrying 48 pilgrims, broke the crash barrier

India prioritised tech-driven progress in healthcare sector: Jitendra

PNS ■ JAMMU

India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership prioritises technology-driven progress in the healthcare sector, Union minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to completing 10 lakh genome sequencing in the coming years to enable more accurate disease prediction and personalised interventions.

Inaugurating the Centre for Advanced Genomics and Precision Medicine at AIIMS

- Jammu, the Union minister of state in the Prime Minister's Office said the country was well on its way to leading the world in genomic health care.

"Under Modi's leadership, India has prioritised technology-driven progress in the healthcare sector," Singh said, citing the government's efforts in promoting indigenous research and biotechnology.

He highlighted the exponential growth in India's bio-economy - from USD 10 billion in 2014 to nearly USD 130 billion at present, with a target of USD 300 billion

in the near future. With more than 9,000 biotech start-ups compared to 50 in 2014, India is rapidly emerging as a global leader in medical innovation, he asserted.

"Gene therapy promises individualised management of disease for each patient. Even if two individuals suffer from the same condition -- be it cancer, kidney disease, or any other ailment -- the treatment could be different in each case, guided by the individual's unique genetic makeup, pre-existing susceptibilities and inherited vulnerabilities," the doctor-turned politician said.



Union Min Suresh Gopi backtracks on 'upper castes' remarks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Suresh Gopi on Sunday courted a controversy by stating that the members of the "upper castes" should handle the tribal affairs portfolio, which he backtracked later.

Speaking at a BJP election campaign meeting in New Delhi, the actor-turned-politician said that real progress in tribal welfare would only be possible if leaders from "upper castes" oversaw the ministry. Facing backlash over his remarks, Gopi later backtracked, claiming that his statement was made with good intentions.

"If my comment is not well received or if this explanation is unsatisfactory, I withdraw my remarks," he said.

India experienced remarkable transformation: UNGA

PNS ■ UNITED NATIONS

India has experienced "remarkable transformation" in the last decade, UN General Assembly President Pilemon Yang has said, underlining that his upcoming visit to the country will give him an opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has "fuelled this change".

Yang will visit India from February 4 to 8, his first official visit to the country as President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly.

"As the world's largest democracy, the fifth-largest

economy and home to one-fifth of humanity, India is an important member of the United Nations," Yang told PTI in an exclusive interview ahead of his trip.

Responding to a question on the visit's focus, Yang said he looks forward to "understanding, more deeply, India's priorities and vision for the future of multilateralism."

During the visit, he will engage with Indian leadership, including President Droupadi Murmu and External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.

Recalling that he had visited India in 2013 as Prime



Minister of Cameroon, Yang said that since then, India has experienced a "remarkable transformation" and he expects the visit to give him the "oppor-

tunity to see how digital and technological innovation has fuelled this change, all the way to the grassroots level.

"The visit will also serve to highlight the importance of information sharing and capacity building in advancing sustainable development in the Global South. India has in many respects led the way through its South-South cooperation," Yang said in the written interview.

Yang said his message "to the people of India, and particularly to the young people of India, is one of confidence and ambition. Confidence in the extraordinary work achieved and ambition in that there is always more work to do, collectively, to make our world a better place."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Boost for middle class

Tax reliefs, agricultural boosts and support for gig workers define Union Budget 2025, but concerns about economic growth persist

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2025-26 on February 1, 2025, focusing on stimulating economic growth, supporting the middle class and enhancing agricultural productivity. The Union Budget 2025-26 with a total expenditure of Rs 50,65,345 crore, focuses on economic growth, middle-class relief and agricultural development. On the infrastructure front, capital expenditure there is a modest increase to drive development, though specific figures were not detailed. Meanwhile, the fiscal deficit is projected to be 4.4 per cent of GDP for 2025-26. While the budget lays out ambitious plans to stimulate various sectors, its effectiveness will depend on implementation and overall economic conditions. What must come as big relief for the middle class is raising of the income tax limit. The budget introduced significant tax relief for the middle class by raising the income tax exemption threshold to Rs 12.75 lakh per annum, effectively exempting individuals



with an average monthly income of up to Rs1 lakh from paying income tax. This move aims to boost household savings and consumption.

A six-year programme has been announced to increase the production of pulses and extra-long staple cotton and help farmers. The government plans to support farmers by purchasing pulses at guaranteed prices and investing in research and development to enhance cotton yields, thereby reducing dependence on imports. The budget has also proposed registration of one crore gig workers on the e-Shram portal. This initiative aims to formalise the gig economy workforce and improve their access

to healthcare and welfare schemes. An allocation of Rs 11.21 lakh crore was made for capital expenditure, reflecting a modest increase from the previous year. This investment is intended to stimulate infrastructure development and economic growth. Some analysts, including Moody's Ratings, have expressed concerns that the tax relief measures for the middle class may have a limited effect on overall economic growth. The effectiveness of these measures in significantly boosting consumption and investment remains uncertain. The budget's capital expenditure increase was modest, which may not be sufficient to drive the desired level of infrastructure development and economic expansion. While the budget outlines ambitious programmes, the success of these initiatives will depend on effective implementation at the ground level. Past challenges in executing government schemes could pose hurdles to achieving the desired outcomes. The Union Budget 2025-26 introduces notable measures to support the middle class and agriculture, but its potential impact on broader economic growth and the effectiveness of implementation remain areas to watch. While the budget's initiatives are promising, concerns linger about their impact on economic growth and the effectiveness of their implementation.

PICTALK



Visitors at the 'World Book Fair' at Pragati Maidan, in New Delhi

Rethinking the Places of Worship Act 1991

The Supreme Court's interim order barring civil courts from hearing suits related to places of worship has reignited debate over the Places of Worship Act, 1991



SMRITIKA KESRI

A special bench of the Supreme Court led by CJI Sanjiv Khanna, on December 12, 2024, had barred all the civil courts from entertaining any fresh or pending suits related to the places of worship, in effect, validating the Act for an interim period, even before hearing the constitutional challenge to it. The Places of Worship Act was enacted to serve as a legislative firewall against religious disputes over the places of worship. It seeks to bar conversion of places of worship and freezes their religious character as they existed on August 15, 1947, with an exception for the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

Judicial Review and the Rule of Law

The abatement of suits and other legal proceedings in relation to the places of worship, as sought to be done through Parliament by a legislative fiat in 1991, goes contrary to the basic feature of the rule of law and judicial review as held in *Indira Gandhi vs Raj Narain*, among others. In India, and other parliamentary democracies, the view of the Parliament, served through its members, often portrayed as an eternal "will of the people," free from all fetters, is misplaced: it is not only anathema to democratic and constitutional thoughts of our republic but also problematic in its philosophical underpinnings from where it stems out.

The Parliament's act of granting immunity to certain legal disputes is based on a fallacious hypothesis that Parliament is a symbol of the continuous 'will of the people' and, consequently, not answerable to the courts. However, the Indian constitution establishes the principle of constitutional supremacy, as opposed to unchecked parliamentary sovereignty, which ensures that even parliamentary legislation, though reflecting the will of the people, is subject to judicial review. This is traceable from Article 13(2), which reinforces that parliamentary laws cannot override the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution and remain subject



to constitutional constraints and judicial scrutiny. Hence, an act passed by the Parliament—the Places of Worship Act, in this case—cannot annihilate the fundamental right of freedom of worship enshrined under Articles 25 and 26, as well as the text of the Preamble.

Treating equals as unequal The Places of Worship Act, nevertheless, made its effect inapplicable to the hitherto Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid dispute, by way of Section 5, acknowledging its special significance emanating from being present at a particular site while excluding other similarly placed temples, viz. Kashi Vishwanath and Krishna Janma Bhumi, also derive their significance from being located at specific sites/places. In this manner, the Act has created an unreasonable and arbitrary classification against Article 14 of the Constitution by treating Ram Janma Bhumi as a separate class in itself. The Supreme Court in *Royappa* has held that "equality is antithetic to arbitrariness. In fact, equality and arbitrariness are sworn enemies; one belongs to the rule of law in a republic while the other, to the whim and caprice of an absolute monarch.



THE PARLIAMENT'S ACT OF GRANTING IMMUNITY TO CERTAIN LEGAL DISPUTES IS BASED ON A FALLACIOUS HYPOTHESIS THAT PARLIAMENT IS A SYMBOL OF THE CONTINUOUS 'WILL OF THE PEOPLE' AND CONSEQUENTLY, NOT ANSWERABLE TO THE COURTS

Where an act is arbitrary, it is implicit in it that it is unequal both according to political logic and constitutional law and therefore violative of Article 14." In addition, under the two-pronged Article 14 test, first settled by the Supreme Court in *Anwar Ali Sarkar*, any legislative classification that provides advantages and disadvantages on a differential ground will be declared as unconstitutional: (a) if there is no intelligible differential between the classification made, which distinguishes those that are grouped from those that have been excluded; (b) if that differential does not have a rational relation to the object sought to be achieved by the statute in question.

The classification made under the Act is unconstitutional for two primary reasons: First, the exemption accorded to Ram Janma Bhumi presumes the rights of the parties attached to the Ayodhya dispute to be more equal and holier than the rights of similarly placed parties about the other two religious sites (Kashi & Mathura); secondly, the classification is devoid of any factual basis and based on a premise that abatement of legal proceedings for reclamation of religious sites other

than Ram Janma Bhumi will ease communal tensions in the country. Even assuming so, a routine law and order situation cannot be the basis for the suspension of a constitutional right. The unreasonable classification carved out by the Act and placing a bar on parties attached to disputes concerning places of worship from knocking on the court's door warrant serious re-evaluation.

The door of the courts, in a functioning democracy, based on a written constitution, must always be ajar to the victims of wrongdoings. Having said that, invalidating the entire Act, at this stage, may not be the most pragmatic course of action. In that case, following the terms of "ut res magis valeat quam pereat" (it is better for a thing to have an effect than to be void), a more measured approach would entail reading down the Act to extend the benefit of Section 5 [exemption from the Act, as done with Ram Janma Bhumi] to two other similarly placed temples (Kashi & Mathura), rather than invalidating it entirely.

(The author is a practising advocate in Delhi, with inputs from Vaidushya Parth; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PEOPLE-CENTRIC BUDGET

Madam — The Union Budget 2025 may be hailed as the budget of the people, for the people. The FM has admirably identified the middle class's dedication towards nation building, so apart from targeting the indices, ratios and vital parameters to showcase the country's march towards the third largest economy, she has presented a grassroots budget swaying over every aspect of the middle class from largesse on tax benefits, MSMEs, farmers and entrepreneurs. The synergy of the middle class in service, industry and business will have a multiplier effect on the GDP in coming years. The new Income Tax Bill is expected next week and commensurate with the budget, comprehensive amendments and simplification are expected.

Our country has unlimited resources, but they need to be tapped through reasonable and promotional tax legislation and encouraged for wealth creation through ease and promotional legislation. The GDP has a fair ratio of revenue collection of more than sixty percent. So the revenue policymakers, particularly the GST administration, should tune their policy by lowering GST slabs and doing away with the irrelevant concepts of luxury goods. The media has missed the defence outlay increase of 9.53 per cent at Rs 681,210 crores, but looking at the huge investments in defence by neighbouring China, the resources have to be mobilised for the modernisation of infrastructure, sixth-generation missiles, aircraft, artillery, and Navy warships. It is now the turn of the state governments to present their budgets conforming with the union budget, targeting the rural industrialisation and infrastructure, modernising their existing industrial estates and promoting the industry.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

END EXPLOITATIVE WORKWEEKS

Madam—The articles 'Beyond the 70-hour workweek: Redefining productivity' (January 30) and 'A 90-hour workweek: Path to success or recipe for burnout' (February 1), both in *The Pioneer*, are

Govt schools show improvement



Undoubtedly, the general public has a negative image of government schools. As soon as the economy improves slightly, people are eager to send their children to pricey private schools. However, the findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2024) offer new optimism. The ASER report, which was conducted on pupils from

rural areas, demonstrates that the reading abilities and mathematical skills of youngsters aged six to fourteen in the country improved following the Corona crisis. Students' basic mathematical skills have improved in schools at both the government and private levels.

Children in class five can solve division problems. The good news is that learning standards have increased in schools across the country. This level remained steady until 2010, after which it began to decline. According to the ASER research, as enrolment rates have improved, so has digital literacy. It is encouraging that, following the Corona period, there has been a renewed emphasis on education in schools. Awareness has also been demonstrated among parents.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

timely and well argued. The suggestions regarding 70 to 90 working hours per week by some leading industrialists and capitalists of India are highly reactionary and exploitative.

The suggestion shows their greed for more profits in the name of increased productivity and efficiency. Both the authors have given pertinent arguments against this proposal. All work and no play makes young people dull, unhealthy and unproductive. Extended working hours will make the young population of the country hypertensive, heart patients and mentally deranged. It will cast the young population of India into fire. Despite labour laws, many companies in India are taking 60 hours of work per week from their employees without paying them extra money. Due to fear of unemployment, young people are compelled to work for long hours. All righteous persons, employers and labour union leaders should oppose this proposal tooth and nail. A 5-day, 35 to 36.5 hour workweek is considered ideal internationally.

Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt

INDIA T20 WIN: 17TH TIME IN A ROW

Madam — India clinched a record 17th consecutive T20 series on home soil with a thrilling 15-run win in the fourth match against England in Pune on Friday. This match will be remembered for a long time for the scintillating batting performance of Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dubey, whose half-centuries helped India bounce back from early jolts. But it was bowler Harshit Rana who stole the show. He made his debut in the match as a concussion substitute for Shivam Dubey and claimed three scalps. However, his impressive performance did not go down well with some foreign players who questioned the entry of Harshit Rana, a bowler, as a concussion substitute for an all-rounder player. But their misplaced criticism does not belittle his feat. These are the same players who seal their lips over bad umpiring against India in their countries.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Budget 2025-26: A leap toward 'Viksit Bharat' with fintech at the forefront

Finance Minister has unveiled a forward-looking Budget that reinforces India's commitment to financial inclusion, innovation and sustainable economic growth.

Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman has presented a forward-thinking and progressive Union Budget 2025-26 that reinforces India's steadfast journey toward Viksit Bharat. This year's budget is a reflection of the government's unwavering commitment to fostering financial inclusion, driving innovation and ensuring sustainable economic growth. By laying a robust foundation for a digital-first economy, it not only addresses the present needs of businesses and individuals but also sets a visionary course for the future of India's financial ecosystem.



fintech innovation. These strategic measures will help fintech companies drive greater financial inclusion and economic resilience across the country. Some of the most impactful highlights of this budget for the fintech ecosystem include: **Grameen Credit Score Framework** – A groundbreaking initiative aimed at transforming rural financial empowerment by enabling better credit access for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and underserved rural communities. This will facilitate greater participation of rural enterprises in the formal economy.

Revamped Central KYC Registry – A much-needed step toward simplifying compliance requirements for financial institutions, reduc-

ing redundancies, and enhancing the ease of doing business across banking and fintech sectors.

Expansion of Digital Public Infrastructure – Initiatives such as BharatTradeNet will play a pivotal role in streamlining trade financing and documentation processes, ensuring seamless digital transactions, and bolstering India's position as a global trade hub.

Higher Credit Availability for MSMEs and Startups – Enhanced credit card limits for micro-enterprises, alongside expanded guarantee cover programs, will provide vital financial support to budding entrepreneurs and small businesses, fueling economic growth and job creation. As we look ahead, the fiscal year 2025-26 presents enormous opportunities for fintech players like us at i-exceed to drive groundbreaking innovations in banking and financial services. With strong regulatory support and government-led initiatives, we are well-positioned to: Scale digital banking and embedded finance solutions to cater to unbanked and underbanked segments, fostering a

more inclusive financial landscape.

Leverage cutting-edge technologies such as AI, blockchain, and automation to enhance regulatory compliance, improve credit risk assessment, and strengthen fraud prevention mechanisms.

Accelerate the adoption of digital lending and payment solutions by seamlessly integrating with India's rapidly evolving financial ecosystem, thereby enhancing user experience and operational efficiencies. The budget's strong focus on inclusive growth, digital empowerment, and financial accessibility aligns perfectly with our vision of creating next-generation fintech solutions that bridge gaps, simplify processes, and unlock new growth opportunities for businesses and individuals alike. The year ahead promises to be a transformative one for India's fintech landscape. We must seize this momentum, foster collaboration, and continue to innovate relentlessly.

(The writer is co-founder and CEO of i-exceed technology solutions; views are personal)



S SUNDARARAJAN



FIRST COLUMN

THE SCIENCE OF MUDRAS

Rooted in the five elements, the five pranas and the three doshas, mudras have therapeutic properties



RAVI VALLURI

Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita says, "There is nothing as sacred as knowledge." Knowledge can be acquired by the human mind through the 5 Ds—dedication, determination, dynamism, devotion and discipline and one H—Humility. The science of mudras, is intrinsically related to the esoteric knowledge of yoga and which can be further segregated into the five elements, the five life forces (or subtle forces of energy called the pranas) and the three doshas. The five elements are namely—Akash (ether or space), Vayu (air), Agni (fire), Jal (water) and Prithvi (earth); the five life forces or pranas are Prana, Udana, Samana, Apana and Vyana and the three doshas are Vata, Kapha and Pitta. Humans unconsciously practice mudras. For instance, the Namaste Mudra or a young child begins learning to walk with his thumbs raised which is called the Meru Dand Mudra. An infant even in a deep slumber, his index finger would involuntarily touch the thumb and the other three fingers are on the base of the palm (Chinmaya Mudra). The universe in its auto-mode conjures these processes to take place and we are oblivious to the occurrence. Some other mudras which need to be practised are:

(a) Jnana mudra: This is performed to increase brain power, improve memory and for the removal of negative thoughts. Thereby one attains peace and bliss.

(b) Prithvi mudra: This helps in balancing the five sense organs, improves blood circulation and enhances our energy levels. Practice of this mudra assists in increasing our alertness.

(c) Apana mudra: This facilitates an improved elimination process, revitalising the digestive system, improving the gums and strengthening immunity.

(d) Prana mudra: This mudra addresses the problem of fatigue; it also



provides essential vitamins to the body besides increasing stamina and vigour to the human body. It also helps in maintenance of the health of our eyes.

(e) Dhyana mudra: Essentially, this mudra helps in making us mindful and wakeful and we are at peace with ourselves. Over a period, we attain peace of mind.

(f) Shunya Vayu mudra: Practice of this mudra helps in combating problems of flatulence and gastric ailments. The gut houses our solar plexus, which is also referred to as the second brain. We need to take adequate care of our abdomen as most human ailments arise from this part of the body. Therefore, there is enormous merit in the adage, "Health is in your hands".

Sudarshan Kriya: The unique breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya is the fulcrum of the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living. Su means proper, Darshan implies vision and Kriya is a purifying action. Through the actions of our breath, we appreciate a proper vision of who we are. It is momentous to understand that nature runs on a rhythm. For instance, the sun rises and sets at a particular time, similarly, seasons arrive and exit at predetermined times. Humans feel hungry or sleepy at certain times. Our emotions, feelings and thoughts are all cast in the symphony of rhythm. We are unable to distinguish between cacophony and symphony in this frenetic pace of life which is cannonaded by innumerable thoughts, continuous action and noise. When sounds are harmonised by the syllable of Soham, we can term it as magical music. Enlightenment is not accruing anything providential but harmonising our whole being rhythmically. During the breathing process participants feel varied sensations, emotions, tingling sensations, laughter, weeping among others. This wonderful knowledge and wisdom have triggered humaneness to blossom when every cell is energised.

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

Cornered in the wild: Trapped tigers spark conservation debate

As human encroachment, tourism and habitat fragmentation continue to blur the boundaries between nature and civilisation write **BKP Sinha and Arvind Kumar Jha**

A viral video capturing a distressing scene of a tigress and her cubs blocked by a throng of safari vehicles in Maharashtra's Umred Pauni Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary has recently stirred significant concern and legal action. The Bombay High Court has taken suo-motu cognizance of the incident. Soon after, the Supreme Court sought a uniform national policy for managing the country's tiger reserves. The harrowing sight of the tiger family, seemingly gripped by fear while navigating the available space, serves as a poignant metaphor for the troubling dynamics between humans and wildlife, whether inside a tiger reserve or not. Mankind's relentless drive to dominate and exploit nature has led to a disturbingly eroded sense of ecological sanity. Tigers, magnificent predators endowed with a formidable set of adaptations, have long been revered for their prowess. Their sharp teeth and claws, exceptional vision and hearing, flexible spines and explosive bursts of speed enable them to efficiently stalk and capture prey.

Their striped coats act as camouflage, making them elusive both as hunters and as well as prey. Tigers, being solitary creatures, are known to be fiercely territorial, marking their domains with scents, claw marks, and vocalisations. While frequent and close encounters with tigers may thrill tourists, these experiences come at a significant cost to the animals' well-being. Increased human presence not only exacerbates stress and vulnerability among these majestic creatures but also alters their natural behaviour. After several populist initiatives to regularise forest encroachments, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was legislated in 2006. It marked an era of mass-scale recognition of habitation, self-cultivation, and community forest resource rights. However, it has also resulted in new encroachments and a notable influx of human populations into forest areas increasing the proximity and chances of conflict between wildlife and humans.

The data from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs shows that by November 2024, an overwhelming 4.35 million (85.7 per cent) out of 5.07 million claims under the FRA had been disposed of. Titles on forest rights in 33 million acres of forest land having been given, illegal occupation continues in the rejected cases which are 36.5 per cent in left-wing affected states and 60 per cent in others.

The absence of a final deadline for claim submission, ease of securing recommendations from Gram Sabhas that many times are not held, the prevalent use of the FRA as a political tool, and the quality of scrutiny at the authorities' levels have created an environment encouraging encroachers confident of regularisation. In Gujarat, 434 cases have been disposed of, and Maharashtra accepted 4,322 new individual forest rights claims in November while distributing 498 titles. Triggered by legislation, such a trend of ingress into wildlife habitats is unprecedented. There has been a significant surge in recognition of community forest resource rights (CFRR) after the FRA Rules were amended in 2012. Management rights of forests have been granted to communities by violating the eligibility conditions stipulated in sections 3(1)(i) and 4(3) of the FRA. Not sparing even tiger reserves and National Parks and Sanctuaries, such rights are granted, for example, in huge areas in Chhattisgarh in Dhamtari (5,544 ha), Achankmar and Sitanadi Udanti tiger reserves (12,527 ha), 60 per cent of Billigiri Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, and the



IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE, THE ODISHA STATE GOVERNMENT ISSUED AN ORDER IN 2024 HOLDING FOREST OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE FOR TIGER DEATHS WHICH HAS STIRRED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY FORESTERS IN BALANCING CONSERVATION EFFORTS WITH THE RIGHTS AND SAFETY OF PEOPLE

Tansa Sanctuary in Maharashtra. Such actions do trigger a surge of human presence within wildlife habitats. As regards human casualties resulting from tiger attacks, they were recorded at 110 in 2022 and 82 in 2023. Data from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), however, sheds light on troubling trends in tiger mortality. In 2021 and 2022, tiger deaths within reserves exceeded those outside. However, this pattern reversed in 2023 and 2024, with more tiger fatalities occurring outside protected areas. As of January 2025, 17 tiger deaths have been reported, 12 of which occurred outside reserves. The conversion of spared areas into shared spaces impacts the behaviour of wildlife. Tigers are no exception.

They naturally respect territorial boundaries but get forced to venture into human habitations due to encroachment and habitat degradation. It does result in harm to locals, mostly accidental and out of hunger rather than retaliatory or revengeful. People, however, in contrast to their erstwhile prevalent spirit of tolerance and co-existence, mostly respond now through retaliation or out of vengeance resulting in the escalation of human-wildlife conflict.

In an unprecedented move, the Odisha state government issued an order in 2024 holding forest officials accountable for tiger deaths which has stirred conversations about the responsibilities and challenges faced by foresters in balancing conservation efforts with the rights and safety of people. The interaction between humans and wildlife species that are naturally active during the day (diurnal) or at dawn and dusk (crepuscular) face substantial behavioural changes when their activity patterns overlap with human activities. In the case of recreational activities in parks also, animals that typically forage or hunt during these times may alter their routines due to the presence of people, leading to stress and changes in feeding, mating, and territorial behaviours. Inside and near forests, light pollu-

tion, such as artificial lighting from streetlights, homes and recreational areas disrupts wildlife in numerous ways.

It can interfere with their natural movement patterns, making it difficult for animals to navigate their habitats, find food, or avoid predators. Light pollution can also impact predation, as predators might find it easier to spot prey, or conversely, prey might become disoriented and more vulnerable. Additionally, artificial lighting can affect reproductive behaviours, as many species rely on natural light cues for mating rituals and timing. The current approach of providing electricity etc. to interior forest habitations, seemingly beneficial for human populations, does pose a significant threat to long-term wildlife conservation. Along with this, large-scale proposals such as those recently announced in Telangana and Nagarhole (Coorg district) of Karnataka must consider their potential impact on human-wildlife conflict too.

Mitigating adverse impacts on wildlife necessitates more than merely avoiding times when human activities overlap with wildlife activities. Even if human disturbances occur outside of wildlife activity periods, the large-scale nature of such disturbances can still have a profound effect on wildlife. These disturbances often displace animals from their natural habitats, causing significant behavioural changes that can threaten even their survival. Instances from the area near Pench National Park in Maharashtra highlight the negative consequences of the changed behaviour of tigers. In one such case, a tiger in Parshiwni village attacked only tethered cattle, easy prey. During the necropsy of this tiger, excessive fat was found due to changes in its behaviour and diet. In the Ramtek area tigers have exhibited a concerning loss of territorial instincts indicating a breakdown in their natural order and social structure. Another tiger from the Kanhan region displayed unusual behaviour by regularly avoiding consuming its kill. Such avoidance

suggests, prima facie, a high level of stress and disturbance. Such instances are alarming as they simply indicate that the natural predator-prey dynamics and status of the health of the tiger population are compromised. Minimising disturbance to wildlife is paramount inside tiger reserves. However, with the current onslaught by humans and the pace of blurring of ecosystem boundaries, a more nuanced approach is necessary which requires a deeper understanding of the spatial and temporal dynamics of wildlife movement, recognition of the varying levels of sensitivity among different species, and consideration of a broader ecological context that includes fragmented landscapes, human settlements, and the impacts of climate change.

While the whole country is eagerly waiting for an early decision in the matter of Wildlife first and Ors Vs Union of India & Ors (109/2008) from the Supreme Court, the need for a national policy framework for not just tiger reserves but for all habitats cannot be overstated. It should be implemented by State Governments while duly considering the local contexts and the unique challenges faced by each region.

Eradicating illegal encroachments on forest and wildlife habitats and relocating the genuine right-holders onto non-forest areas with adequate infrastructure should be the first step towards restoration of the ecological integrity of our natural systems. The impacts of climate change and natural disasters are no longer theoretical threats but stark realities. Recognizing the broader public interest in wildlife conservation and ecosystem sustainability, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs must collaborate closely to develop and implement effective conservation strategies that address these challenges.

(The writer are former PCCFs, UP and Maharashtra; views expressed are personal)

Budget 2025 puts sustainability at the forefront, but execution holds the key

With substantial investments in renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture and afforestation, the budget lays a strong foundation for a greener future

The Union Budget 2025 signals a decisive shift towards environmental sustainability, reinforcing India's commitment to a cleaner, greener future. With a strong focus on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, afforestation, waste management and climate resilience, the government has intended to balance economic growth with ecological responsibility. Expanding solar, wind, and hydro energy, along with incentives for green hydrogen, is a welcome step toward reducing India's carbon footprint. The emphasis on electric vehicles (EVs) and battery storage solutions will further bolster the transition to clean energy, reducing



RAJ KUMAR SRIVASTAVA

dependence on fossil fuels. However, the challenge remains in efficient implementation and ensuring accessibility to these technologies, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Agriculture, often at the crossroads of economic and environmental policies, has received a much-needed sus-

tainability boost. The PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana and Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses are moving in the right direction, ensuring climate-resilient farming and reducing excessive reliance on chemical fertilisers. However, agroforestry, regenerative farming and watershed management need further integration into mainstream agricultural policy to create a truly sustainable food system.

The budget's allocation for afforestation and biodiversity conservation reflects an increased understanding of the role that forests and ecosystems play in mitigating climate change. With the Compensatory Afforestation Fund

Management Authority (CAMPA) receiving enhanced support, there is hope that India's forests will be managed with greater transparency and scientific precision. However, urban greening and nature-based solutions in city planning deserve stronger commitments, given the growing challenges of urban heat islands and pollution.

The circular economy model gets a notable push with incentives for waste-to-energy projects, stricter plastic waste management, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) regulations. These are positive steps, but enforcement remains a crucial hurdle. Ensuring that industries comply with waste management norms and



moving towards a zero-waste economy will require robust monitoring and public participation. The budget's recognition of climate resilience, particu-

larly through disaster management investments and early warning systems, is a commendable effort. Coastal and flood-prone regions will benefit from increased fund-

ing for disaster-resistant infrastructure, but a long-term climate adaptation roadmap needs further detailing.

One of the most promising aspects of Budget 2025 is the expansion of India's Green Finance ecosystem. With tax incentives for Green Bonds and carbon trading markets, the government is encouraging private sector participation in sustainability efforts. However, ensuring that green investments translate into real environmental benefits will require stringent regulatory oversight and transparency.

While Budget 2025 takes significant strides in promoting environmental sustainability, its true success will be measured by execu-

tion, enforcement, and long-term commitment.

India has demonstrated political will in tackling climate change, but the challenge remains in aligning policy promises with on-the-ground realities. Sustainability is not just a budgetary allocation; it is a mindset shift. To truly achieve a green future, India needs a whole-of-society approach, where the government, private sector, and citizens work together to ensure that economic growth does not come at the cost of ecological wellbeing. With this budget, India has set the direction—what remains is the resolve to act decisively.

(The writer is a retired IFS officer; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

Budget is by the people, for the people: Sitharaman



Tax cut to spur investment: DEA Secy

Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth on Sunday said the historic decision to give significant income tax relief will stimulate demand and propel growth in the next financial year for which the ministry has pegged the nominal GDP growth of 10.1 per cent. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced significant income tax cuts for the middle class. Individuals earning up to Rs 12.75 lakh in a year will not have to pay any taxes benefiting 1 crore taxpayers. However, the tax cuts will cost the exchequer about Rs 1 lakh crore. The Union Budget has tried to address domestic headwinds through measures which can mitigate them, Seth told PTI in an interview. "Very, very significant tax relief given to all taxpayers, and in particular to the middle class, is an attempt towards that direction, because some data is showing that consumption, as well as investment by the private sector is not to a level which requires or which is necessary for a higher growth path," he said.



India emerges as a global export hub: Nissan

India is emerging as one of the major global export hubs for Japanese auto major Nissan, with the company beginning to ship the left-hand drive version of its compact SUV Magnite to new countries, according to a senior company official. The company, which has commenced shipping 10,000 units of the left-hand drive (LHD) Magnite across various global markets, is considering the introduction of hybrid and CNG vehicles and more models in India, in addition to its already announced lineup for the country, Nissan India Operations President Frank Torres said in an interview. He also said the global development regarding Nissan and Honda exploring a possible merger would not affect the company's announced plans for new products, including two mid-size SUV models (one five-seater and one seven-seater) and one electric SUV, and the target of tripling its domestic and export volumes to 1 lakh each per annum by the end of FY26 in India. "India is moving as one of the global export hubs for Nissan... With the start of exports of the left-hand drive version of the Magnite, we will be exporting to a total of 65 countries now, thus becoming one of the highest hubs of export globally for Nissan," Torres said.



Allocation for export promotion schemes dips

The government has earmarked Rs 2,250 crore for export promotion schemes for 2025-26, down 17 per cent from Rs 2,718.73 crore allocated in the revised Budget estimates for 2024-25. According to the Budget document, allocation for Department of Commerce has dipped to Rs 5,300.99 crore for the next fiscal as against Rs 5,624 crore in the revised estimates (RE) for the ongoing fiscal year. Under export promotion schemes, no fund is allocated for market access initiative (MAI) and interest equalisation scheme. Though the scheme ended on December 31, 2024, the exporting community has been pitching hard for its extension. Now the government has announced plans to roll out an export promotion mission. "New scheme namely, Export Promotion Mission, has been formulated to act as a catalyst to facilitate India's export competitiveness," it said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech on Saturday said that through the mission, the government will facilitate exporters to get easy access to credit, cross-border factoring support, and support to MSMEs to tackle non-tariff measures in overseas markets. Funds for the Duty Drawback Scheme too have dipped to Rs 181.9 crore for 2025-26 as against Rs 258.2 crore in the RE for 2024-25.



"I think the prime minister put it succinctly, he said it's the people's Budget, it is the Budget which the people wanted." "As they say in democracy in Abraham Lincoln's words, it is Budget by the people, of the people for the people."

"We have heard the voice of the middle class" who had been complaining about their aspirations not being met despite being honest taxpayers. With the honest and proud taxpayers wanting the government to do more to limit the impact of factors like inflation.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday described the Union Budget as "by the people, for the people, of the people", and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was fully behind the idea to cut taxes for the middle class but it took time to convince the bureaucrats. "We have heard the voice of the middle class" who had been complaining about their aspirations not being met despite being honest taxpayers, she said in an interview. With the honest and proud taxpayers wanting the government to do more to limit the impact of factors like inflation, the prime minister was quick to task Sitharaman to look at ways to give relief. While Modi was quick to

agree to tax relief, it took a bit of convincing to get on board the officials in the finance ministry and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) - who are tasked to ensure revenue collection to meet welfare and other schemes, she said. Presenting her eighth straight budget, Sitharaman on Saturday announced an increase in the personal income tax threshold below which taxpayers owe no tax to Rs 12 lakh, up from Rs 7 lakh, as well as a rejig in tax brackets that would help those earning higher than that save up to Rs 1.1 lakh. The Rs 5 lakh hike in exemption limit is the biggest ever and equals all the reliefs that were given between 2005 and 2023. "I think the prime minister put it succinctly, he said it's the people's Budget, it is the

Budget which the people wanted." Asked to describe the ethos of the budget in her own words, she said, "As they say in democracy in Abraham Lincoln's words, it is Budget by the people, of the people for the people." Sitharaman said the new rates would "substantially reduce the taxes of the middle class and leave more money in their hands, boosting household consumption, savings and investment". Explaining the thought that went behind the big announcement, Sitharaman said the tax cuts were in the works for some time. "It wasn't talking about rate restructuring, although for several years now, we have been looking at ways in which the rates can be a lot more reasonably taxpayer friendly. And

therefore that work was also going on," she said. "Equally, after the July budget, there was this voice of the middle class, which felt that they were paying tax... but also felt they don't seem to have much in the way of redressing their problems." There was also this feeling that the government was very inclusive in taking care of the very poor and the vulnerable sections. "So the voice, which came wherever I travelled, was we are proud taxpayers. We are honest taxpayers. We want to continue to serve the country by being good taxpayers. But what do you think about what kind of things you can do for us?" she said. "And so I had this discussion also with the prime minister who put me on the specific assignment to see what is it that you can come up with."



FMCG makers hope for a revival in consumption growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fast-moving consumer goods companies hope for a revival in consumption growth, aided by higher household disposable funds due to significant tax reliefs and increased investments in rural development announced in the FY26 Budget. The measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget on Saturday will not only alleviate the burden of inflation and lay the strong fiscal foundation for the FMCG industry but also help stimulate demand for premium products, experts and makers said. Terming the budget as progressive, Emami Vice Chairman & MD Harsha Vardhan Agarwal said: "A major highlight of this budget is the significant announcement on personal income tax, which is a welcome move. "By putting more money in the hands of consumers,

this step is expected to boost consumption and drive an increase in discretionary spending, ultimately strengthening overall economic momentum," said Agarwal, who is also president of the industry body FICCI. PepsiCo India & South Asia Chief Executive Officer Jagrut Kotecha said the budget is focused on an income-led economic revival that will provide relief to the middle-income group. "The measures introduced should alleviate the burden of inflation and rising living costs, bringing much-needed relief to consumers and in turn help in stimulating overall consumption," said Kotecha. Godrej Consumer Products Ltd Chief Financial Officer Asaif Malbari said the latest annual budget takes a balanced approach by strengthening rural infrastructure, manufacturing, and consumer spending, which are three critical pillars for the FMCG sector.

Mcap of 7 of top-10 valued firms jumps Rs 1.83L crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of seven of the 10 most valued firms jumped Rs 1,83,322.54 crore last week, with Hindustan Unilever becoming the biggest gainer. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,315.5 points or 1.72 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 389.95 points or 1.68 per cent. Equity markets were open on Saturday due to the presentation of the Union Budget. While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, ITC and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) were the gainers from the top-10 pack.

RBI's interest rate decision, global trends key drivers for markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

RBI's interest rate decision, quarterly earnings and global cues would be the major driving factors for equity markets this week, analysts said adding that the impact of the Union Budget could linger on this week. Trading activity of foreign investors will also be a key driver for the markets, experts noted. "US and India's manufacturing PMI for January to be released on Monday, will be the key macro data to watch out for. Investors will closely study the fine prints of the Budget policies and market focus will shift back to the corporate earnings/outlook and



RBI's interest rate decision to be announced on Friday," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. From the earnings calendar, Asian Paints, PC Jeweller, Tata Power, Titan, Apollo Tyres, Bharti Airtel, ITC, MRF, SBI, LIC, M&M and NHPC will announce their earnings this week. Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP

(Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said, "Will the RBI soften its stance and announce any rate cut in this week's credit policy that would be interesting to watch out for? However, investors need to watch out for global developments, as any uptick in US bond yields and FII selling could dampen sentiment." PMI data for the manufacturing and services would also be tracked by investors. "As we look to this week, there are several important events on the horizon, including the MPC outcome, the Delhi state election, and developments regarding US tariffs."

Power consumption growth takes a dip

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's power consumption increased by just 2.7 per cent to 137.49 billion units (BU) in January as use of heating appliances like heater and geysers reduced owing to above normal temperatures. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) the country's mean temperature in January was 18.98 degrees Celsius, the third highest for the month since 1901, behind 1958 and 1990. According to official data, power consumption was 133.94 BU in January 2024. Similarly, the highest supply in a day (peak power demand met) also rose to 237.30 GW from 222.32 GW in January

Growth subdued at 3% to 137.49 billion units



during evening hours for May 2024 while 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW in the evening hours for June 2024. The ministry had also estimated that peak power demand may hit 260 GW in the summer of 2024. According to government estimates, peak power demand is expected to touch 270 GW in the summer of 2025. Experts opine that power demand as well as consumption remained subdued last month mainly due to decrease in use of heating appliances like heaters and geysers amid day and night temperatures remaining above normal levels.

The Finance Ministry, in consultation with Niti Aayog and DPIIT, will soon decide on the parameters for the 'Investment Friendliness Index of States', which will aim to create healthy competition among states to allure private investments, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil said on Sunday. The 2025-26 Budget announced the launching of an Investment Friendliness Index of States in 2025 to further the spirit of competitive cooperative federalism. In an interview, Govil said while many regulations and reforms have been done at the level of the Centre, some investors feel that similar reforms are needed at the state level. The index will nudge the states to look at the regulations to see what is holding back investments. "The main idea is not so much to rank the states and to say who is good or bad but more to prompt the states to take a look at their own rules, regulations and procedures and to find out from them which are the ones which investors deem or find unfriendly, unworkable or difficult and how does that affect the states in getting investments," Govil said.

Extreme weather events driving food inflation: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The food inflation rate in India has remained firm over the past two years defying the global trend, and frequent extreme weather events are one of the reasons, the government said in its latest Economic Survey. Tabled in Parliament on Friday, the report said that the decline in onion and tomato production over the past two

years can be partly attributed to frequent extreme weather events in major producing states compared to other regions. Extreme weather events in 2023-24 damaged crops in major horticulture-producing states, leading to inflationary pressure on horticultural commodities, it said. "Over the past two years, India's food inflation rate has remained firm, diverging from

global trends of stable or declining food inflation. This can be attributed to factors such as supply chain disruptions exacerbated by extreme weather events and reduced harvest of some food items," the report said. Citing data from the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the report said that the total crop area damaged in 2024 was higher than in the previous two years due to



extreme weather conditions. The government also referred to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, which shows a significant rise in the frequency

of extreme weather events, especially heatwaves. Between 2022 and 2024, heatwaves were recorded on 18 per cent of days, compared to 5 per cent in 2020 and 2021, the report said. The Economic Survey acknowledged that recent shocks like geopolitical conflicts and extreme weather have caused price fluctuations, but their impact has now subsided, leading to more variation in commodity prices.

of long-term price stability, the report suggested developing climate-resilient crops, strengthening data systems to monitor prices, reducing crop damage, and minimizing post-harvest losses. On Saturday, the government announced a six-year mission to increase pulse production, aiming to achieve self-sufficiency in three widely consumed varieties -- tur, urad, and masoor.

of extreme weather events, especially heatwaves. Between 2022 and 2024, heatwaves were recorded on 18 per cent of days, compared to 5 per cent in 2020 and 2021, the report said. The Economic Survey acknowledged that recent shocks like geopolitical conflicts and extreme weather have caused price fluctuations, but their impact has now subsided, leading to more variation in commodity prices.



KANWALJIT SINGH 'FEELS SURREAL' WORKING WITH RAJSHRI PRODUCTIONS

For veteran actor Kanwaljit Singh, dreams don't have any final date. After nearly five decades in the industry, his long-awaited wish has finally come true; working with the iconic Rajshri Productions. And the project that made it happen? Bada Naam Kareng, the latest offering from showrunner Sooraj R Barjatya. In the series, Kanwaljeet steps into the pivotal role of Anand Raathi, Rishabh's wise and loving uncle. Reflecting on this milestone, Kanwaljit shared, "I have been in the industry for over 40 years, and working with Rajshri Productions has always been a dream. I've admired their work, values, and commitment to storytelling. Being a part of this project now feels surreal. Anand Raathi is a complex character, full of love, wisdom and values. He's the glue that holds the family together, and I'm honoured to play this role. This is a story that will touch your heart, make you laugh and maybe even bring a tear to your eye. It's about love, family and values. I'm proud to be a part of it and hope the audience loves it as much as I do."

Directed by Palash Vaswani, Bada Naam Kareng is a celebration of love that challenges expectations and redefines what it means to be a family. It's a beautiful reminder that true love is found not just in the rituals, but in the deep connection between two hearts. Will Rishabh and Surbhi follow their hearts? Their journey will capture your heart and remind you of the power of love and family. Produced by Rajshri Productions, the series features a stellar ensemble cast, including Ritik Ghanshani, Ayesha Kaduskar, Kanwaljeet Singh, Alka Amin, Rajesh Jais, Chitrali Lokesh, Deepika Amin, Jameel Khan, Rajesh Tailang, Anjana Sukhani, Sadhika Sayal, Gyanendra Tripathi, Priyamvada Kant, Omm Dubey and Bhavesh Babani, among others.

MERE HUSBAND KI BIWI

Arjun Kapoor juggles b/w his ex-pyaar & current dildaar

If you're in the mood for a comedy film that promises to deliver laughter, witty punchlines and a touch of self-awareness, Mere Husband Ki Biwi should be on your must-watch list this February. Featuring a stellar cast including Arjun Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar and Rakul Preet Singh, this upcoming film is set to bring a refreshing dose of humour to the big screen.

Following the release of its quirky and vibrant posters, the makers have now unveiled the much-awaited trailer, which gives audiences a glimpse into this unique comedy of errors. Packed with hilarious moments and engaging performances, the film aims to be a complete entertainer that guarantees a paisa vasool experience.

Mere Husband Ki Biwi revolves around Arjun Kapoor's character, a man caught between his past and present in the most comical way possible. Bhumi Pednekar plays his wife, who suffers from retrograde amnesia and forgets several years of her life. While she is in the process of recovering, Arjun's character finds himself falling for Rakul Preet's character, leading to an unexpected love triangle.



As the story unfolds, Arjun Kapoor's character is left juggling between his ex-pyaar and current dildaar, making for a series of humorous and unpredictable twists. The film not only delivers a fun-filled romance but also

plays with the idea of self-deprecating humor, encouraging audiences to laugh along with the characters.

Beyond the central trio of Arjun Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, and Rakul Preet Singh, Mere

Husband Ki Biwi boasts an impressive supporting cast, including Dino Morea, Harsh Gujral and veteran actor Shakti Kapoor. The chemistry between the leads, coupled with the comedic timing of the ensemble cast, promises an uproarious cinematic experience.

The trailer suggests that the film brings a fresh perspective to comedy with well-crafted punchlines, cleverly woven confusion and energetic performances. At a time when action-packed films and romantic dramas dominate the theatres, Mere Husband Ki Biwi aims to provide a much-needed comic relief.

Directed by Mudassar Aziz, known for his expertise in the comedy genre, Mere Husband Ki Biwi marks his return to his Happy Bhag Jayegi roots. Aziz, who has previously helmed successful comedies like Pati Patni Aur Woh and Khel Khel Mein, brings his signature flair for humor and lighthearted storytelling to this project. Presented by Vasu Bhagnani and Puja Films, and produced by Vasu Bhagnani, Jackky Bhagnani and Deepshikha Deshmukh, the film aims to captivate audiences with its entertaining narrative and rib-tickling moments.

Karan Tacker takes on supernatural genre in Bhay

Karan Tacker, known for his intense portrayals in high-octane thrillers like Khaakee: The Bihar Chapter and Special Ops, is now stepping into an entirely different realm - one where the unexplained takes center stage. In his latest project, Bhay, Tacker takes on the lead role of Gaurav Tiwari, a real-life paranormal investigator whose life was dedicated to uncovering the mysteries of the supernatural.

Unlike his previous roles as law enforcers navigating crime and espionage, Bhay sees Tacker embarking on a chilling journey into the unknown. Gaurav Tiwari wasn't just a ghost hunter - he was a seeker of truth, a bridge between the tangible and the spectral. His story, filled with eerie encounters and haunting truths, is now being resurrected on screen, with Tacker bringing his legacy to life.

For Tacker, Bhay marks a dramatic shift from his previous work. Speaking about his role, Karan Tacker expressed his excitement for this transformative

experience. "I'm thrilled about stepping into the shoes of Gaurav Tiwari; it has been one of the most immersive and joyful experiences of my career. His life was a fascinating blend of science and spirituality, belief and skepticism, and his thought of 'knowledge cancels fear' is what drew me to do this show. Bhay is an exploration of the unknown and a tribute to a man who dedicated himself to unveiling the mysteries that lie beyond our understanding and helping out so many people from the beyond. Bringing this story to life has been both exciting and humbling, and I can't wait for audiences to embark on this chilling journey with us." Bhay is more than just a supernatural thriller - it is an ode to a man who spent his life chasing phantoms, only to become an enigma himself. The show boasts a talented ensemble cast, including Kalki Koichlin, Danish Sood, and Saloni Batra, all of whom will navigate a world where every creaking door has a story to tell and every shadow hides a deeper secret.



A DREAM FULFILLED

Boman Irani's directorial debut screens at his childhood theatre

In a moment filled with nostalgia and emotion, Boman Irani's directorial debut, The Mehta Boys, premiered at Mumbai's iconic Regal Cinema in Colaba as part of the Kala Ghoda Festival. For Irani, this was not just a film screening - it was a deeply personal homecoming. The very theatre where he once sat as a young cinephile, mesmerized by the magic of storytelling, had now become the stage for the unveiling of his own cinematic creation.

The film, which explores the delicate nuances of a father-son relationship, resonated deeply with the audience. The premiere concluded with a standing ovation, leaving Irani visibly moved as he stood in the theatre that had been a cornerstone of his childhood. Taking the stage after the screening, Boman Irani delivered an emotional address, expressing his gratitude to his family, cast, and crew for being part of this milestone in his life. In a particularly touching moment, he paid tribute to Aslam, a film projectionist who has worked at Regal Cinema for an astounding 53 years.

Reminiscing about his early years, Irani shared, "I remember watching The Sound of Music, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Von Ryan's Express, Oh God, Agony and Ecstasy, and Kramer vs. Kramer multiple times in this theatre. I've sat in every single seat that you all have occupied today. And now, to see The Mehta Boys on this very screen, surrounded by all of you, is an incredibly



emotional moment for me. It feels like my graduation day - like a childhood dream finally coming true."

Even before its Mumbai premiere, The Mehta Boys had been making waves. The film had its international debut at the Indian Film Festival (IFFI) in Berlin, Germany, where it was met with acclaim. Closer to home, the trailer received high praise from industry stalwarts like Anil Kapoor, Abhishek Bachchan, and Riteish Deshmukh, who lauded Irani's storytelling and directorial finesse. Starring Boman Irani, Avinash Tiwary, Shreya Chaudhry, and Puja Sarup, The Mehta Boys delves into the intricate dynamics of familial love and generational differences. With its heartfelt narrative and powerful performances, the film is expected to strike an emotional chord with audiences.

For those eager to watch The Mehta Boys, the wait won't be long. The film is set to premiere exclusively on Amazon Prime Video on February 7, 2025.

STANDALONE



The World Pickleball League brought not only high-octane competition but also a touch of Bollywood magic as Aamir Khan and Ali Fazal took centre stage for an electrifying exhibition match at the CCI, Brabourne Stadium. The not-so-friendly yet thoroughly entertaining showdown saw Ali donning blue and Aamir sporting black, partnering with Dilli Dillwale's Lauren Mercado and Chennai Super Champs' Thaddea Lock, respectively

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



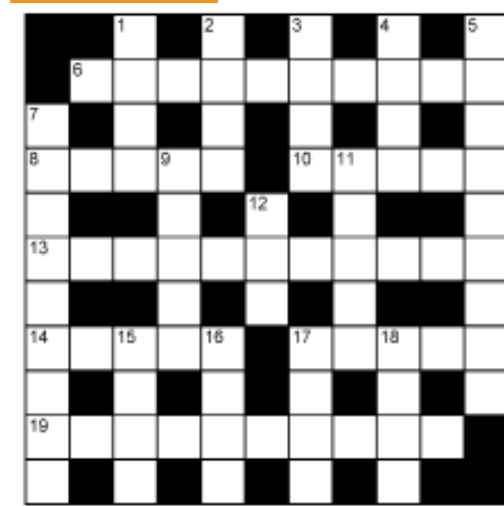
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

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.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

ACROSS

- A large naval ship
- Feeling very annoyed
- A South American dance
- A very wealthy person
- Gets closer to
- A soft type of hat
- A grower of fruit trees

DOWN

- Gun sound
- Don't go
- A strap for trousers
- Skinny
- The people you play against in a game
- A court game played with rackets and a shuttlecock
- A measuring stick



GINGER MEGGS



Vijayawada

'WE DIDN'T WANT SKY FORCE FEEL LIKE 'BEEN THERE, SEEN THAT' VIBE'

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

From a struggling artist juggling multiple roles to becoming one of the most sought-after screenwriters in the industry, Aamil Keeyan Khan's journey is a testament to perseverance, adaptability and an unrelenting passion for storytelling.

With films like Drishyam 2, Runway 34, Bholaa, Shaitaan, and Sky Force to his credit, he has mastered the art of keeping audiences at the edge of their seats. His work on Drishyam 2 even earned him the prestigious IIFA Award for Best Story (Adapted). In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, Aamil delves into his approach to screenwriting, the art of suspense and his unexpected journey into the world of cinema.

Khan's journey into screenwriting was anything but conventional. In fact, he describes it as a "happy accident." Reflecting on his early days in Kolkata, he recalls how financial constraints led him to writing. "Back in Kolkata, I co-founded a theatre group with my friend Anshuman. We acted, produced, and managed the plays, but we barely had enough money to pay for the auditorium - hiring a writer was out of the question," he says. "The older plays felt dated in terms of language, so I was forced into writing simply because we couldn't afford a proper writer. Necessity is a great teacher, and that's where it all started."

However, Khan never saw himself as confined to one particular role. "All the guys I admire - Kishore Kumar, Sylvester Stallone, Clint Eastwood - they've mastered multiple crafts," he says. But he also acknowledges the reality of surviving in the industry. "Let's be real: when the rent is due, you sell whatever sells. Desperation made me cook up ideas in the hopes that someone would buy them."

Determined to make a mark, Khan moved to Mumbai in 2016 and threw himself into the grind. "I was hustling from morning to midnight - auditioning as an actor during the day, building websites in the afternoon, doing stand-up comedy in the evening, and writing stories at night," he recalls.

Interestingly, his first break in the industry wasn't in screenwriting but in editing. "Ironically, I didn't even start as a screenwriter. My first paid gig was in editing - I assisted cinematographer Sanjay F Gupta on his documentary, editing parts of it."

But storytelling eventually took over. "I started developing ideas, and in 2020, with Runway 34, let's just say... things finally took off," he says with a smile.

Discussing his approach to screenwriting, he emphasises that every film demands a unique treatment, but at its core, storytelling is always about emotion. "Every story boils down to what it makes the audience feel. The first step is to identify the core emotion of the film - fear, tension, excitement, hope - and then build everything around that."

Once that emotional foundation is in place, choosing the right genre to convey the story becomes crucial. "A thriller like Drishyam 2 is all about suspense and deception - keeping the audience guessing while making sure every reveal is satisfying. Runway 34, on the other hand, had elements of mystery and survival, so the storytelling had to create a sense of urgency and pressure while staying grounded in reality."

Screenwriting, he says, is also about when and how to reveal information. "In high-stakes stories, tension comes from what the audience knows versus what the characters know. The goal is to keep the audience leaning forward, making them active participants in the story. Whether it's a mind game like Drishyam 2 or a high-intensity drama like Runway 34, the challenge is the same - keeping people invested, right up to the final frame."



For Khan, his latest project, Sky Force wasn't just another war film - it was a story that needed to be told. "Some stories aren't just told; they demand to be told. Sky Force was one of them. For me, this wasn't a war film - it was a film about brotherhood. It's not the machine, but the man behind the machine that matters."

At the heart of the film lies the relationship between the officers, a dynamic that drives the narrative forward. With a filmography spanning thrillers, action, and drama, he has proven his ability to adapt to different storytelling styles. He believes the key to mastering different genres lies in understanding their rhythm. "Storytelling is all about rhythm. A thriller demands tension and precision, an action film needs momentum, and a drama thrives on emotion. The trick is to listen to the story - some need a slow burn, some need a ticking clock."

Rather than imposing a personal style on every film, he lets the genre dictate the tone. He also turns to classic films for inspiration, studying what makes them work. "Besides that, I have my go-to bibles in every genre - films that I revisit to understand what makes them work. It's not about copying but about learning the craft from the best and then finding my own way to figure that rhythm."

Given Khan's previous work on Runway 34, one might assume that he was well-prepared to write another aviation-based film. But Sky Force presented an entirely new challenge. "Having worked on Runway 34, which was also an aviation-based film, we thought we had some idea of what we were walking into... but boy oh boy, we couldn't have been more wrong," he admits. One of the biggest challenges was ensuring that the aerial action sequences felt fresh and engaging. "It was crucial that the scenes didn't give off a been there, seen that vibe," he explains. "To achieve that, we had to take all the technical information and present it in the simplest layman terms possible - so that when the action unfolded, when the dogfights happened, the audience knew what was going on."

One of the defining aspects of Khan's work is his ability to craft morally ambiguous characters that resonate with audiences. He believes that the most compelling stories force audiences to confront their own moral boundaries. "There's a good wolf and a bad wolf within all of us, and the most gripping stories explore that battle," he says. "The key is making the audience understand a character's choices, even if they don't agree with them. In Drishyam 2, the tension comes from making people root for someone who is technically guilty. In Shaitaan, it's about power and control. These stories resonate because they force the audience to ask, What would I do in their place? - and that's when

KNOWN FOR HIS WORK ON DRISHYAM 2, RUNWAY 34, BHOLOAA AND SKY FORCE, AAMIL KEEYAN KHAN OPENS UP ABOUT HIS UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY, HIS UNIQUE APPROACH TO STORYTELLING, EMPHASIZING EMOTION, SUSPENSE AND MORE



storytelling becomes truly powerful."

Instead of chasing commercial success, Khan prioritizes storytelling that feels authentic to him. "I focus on whether the film works for me first. At least that way, I know there's one person who genuinely enjoys it. And if it feels right to me, I hope and pray it'll resonate with others too."

Writing for an established franchise like Drishyam 2 comes with immense pressure, but Khan's approach is refreshingly simple - he ignores the expectations. "By forgetting that it's part of an established franchise and focusing entirely on crafting a kick-ass narrative," he says. "The pressure of expectations can be distracting, so I try not to think about it."

Rather than being weighed down by the legacy of a previous film, he focuses on what makes the story compelling on its own.

When asked about the most difficult project he has worked on, Khan doesn't hesitate. "That's my next film," he says with a grin. "How did I overcome the creative hurdles? I haven't. Still figuring that one out."

While he remains tight-lipped about his upcoming projects, he hints at a diverse and exciting lineup. "All top secret!" he teases. "There are five feature films and two web series in the works, spanning thrillers, true stories, crime, action, drama, comedy, and, of course, horror." And as for what audiences can expect?

He keeps it simple. "The same thing as always - expect the unexpected."

Bhumi Pednekar brings 90s-style comedy back with Mere Husband Ki Biwi

Actor Bhumi Pednekar is excited to take on the comedy genre in her upcoming film Mere Husband Ki Biwi, a move she describes as a refreshing opportunity, especially considering comedy was a dominant genre in 1990s Hindi cinema. The film, directed by Mudassar Aziz, also stars Arjun Kapoor and Rakul Preet Singh, and delves into the quirks and complexities of romantic relationships.

At the trailer launch of the film, Pednekar shared her enthusiasm about stepping into a comedic role, a genre she feels is often overlooked for female actors. "I grew up watching films in this genre and was inspired by actresses like Karisma Kapoor and others who brought comedy to the forefront," Pednekar said. "I'm glad Mudassar sir gave me the opportunity to try my hand at comedy in two of his films, Pati Patni Aur Woh and Mere Husband Ki Biwi."

Pednekar expressed that it's rare for female actors to lead in comedy films, making this a significant chance for her to break new ground. "In this film, both female actors take on comedy in a way that was common in the 90s, where actresses would lead the comedic roles just like in the Number One series films," she added, referring to the iconic films of that era.

The film's focus on romantic relationships, paired with its comedic elements, sets the stage for an entertaining experience, with both Pednekar and Singh embracing their comedic roles.

During the conversation, Pednekar was asked about the common perception of rivalry between female actors. She firmly dismissed the idea of ego clashes and insecurities on set, especially between her and her co-star Rakul Preet Singh. "She is my sister. She's married to my best friend (Jacky Bhagnani), and now she has become one of my closest friends. This narrative that two heroines are insecure is not true—it must have been started by insecure men," Pednekar shared, emphasizing the strong bond she shares with Singh.

The film's producer, Vashu Bhagnani, along with Jacky Bhagnani and Deepshikha Deshmukh, brings Mere Husband Ki Biwi to the screen, promising a mix of humor and heart.

Set to release on February 21, the film will explore the humorous side of complex romantic dynamics, with Bhumi Pednekar, Arjun Kapoor, and Rakul Preet Singh taking center stage.

With the promise of a fun-filled, refreshing take on relationships, Mere Husband Ki Biwi is sure to be a treat for fans of comedy, offering both entertainment and the delightful chemistry between its lead actors.



Mahakumbh 2025 breaks tourism records!

The world gathers in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, for the magnificent Mahakumbh 2025, as the Ganges River's hallowed waters churn with excitement. India's rich cultural legacy is demonstrated by this age-old spiritual extravaganza, which takes place once every twelve years. The Mahakumbh, which unites devotees, tourists and explorers from all over the world like a celestial alignment, fosters a sense of wonder, spirituality and community. A parallel phenomenon is taking place as the celebrations rouse the banks of the Ganges: an extraordinary travel boom that is propelling India's tourism industry into the stratosphere. As India proudly presents its rich cultural tapestry to the globe, the stage is set for a monumental celebration that will not only revitalize the economy but also revive the soul!

Data from local companies, airlines and travel agencies indicates that the Mahakumbh is drawing record numbers of visitors, which is stimulating the economy and providing a big opportunity for the travel and tourist sector. With the government spending Rs 5,000 crore on tourism infrastructure, including enhancing roads, railways, airports and accommodation facilities to handle the surge of tourists, the event is anticipated to bring in Rs 40,000 crore in tourism revenue.

Demand for local services, like car rentals, is also rising; businesses like Savaari Car Rentals are observing an increase in reservations for private transportation due to its comfort and convenience. The government has increased infrastructure development to handle the influx, strengthening Prayagraj's roads, growing its airports and bolstering security measures! "The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is not just a spiritual event; it is a huge driver of travel and tourism in India," says Gaurav Aggarwal, founder and CEO of Savaari Car Rentals. "We have witnessed a 21.4% increase in spiritual tourism this year, with an anticipated 42 million pilgrims. Travel demand has been directly impacted by this surge, particularly



in tier-2 and tier-3 towns. Off-the-beaten-path routes to Prayagraj, like those from Varanasi, Ayodhya and Lucknow, have seen a 35% increase in reservations over prior years."

Aggarwal continued, "We are dedicated to ensuring that this significant transition goes well by growing our fleet, hiring certified drivers and improving on-ground assistance. To meet the increasing demand for hassle-free, dependable and safe travel, we have expanded operations and improved connectivity along important pilgrimage routes. We are crucial to making Maha Kumbh 2025 a huge success for pilgrims and India's tourism industry by guaranteeing last-mile connectivity, even on less-travelled routes."

With a clear and ambitious goal for the future, Savaari Car Rentals hopes to solidify its position as the industry leader in the Indian vehicle rental sector. This vision is supported by an unwavering focus on technology and innovation, a dedication to strategic initiatives and a thorough comprehension of the changing dynamics of the market. Its path has been characterised by noteworthy accomplishments and turning points thus far, laying the groundwork for future expansion and prosperity. Fundamentally, the travel and tourism industry is experiencing a notable economic boom as a result of the Mahakumbh, which is expected to be a historic occasion that will underscore India's position as a global center of culture.

Two-tier Test format likely before India's tour of England: Report

PTI ■ LONDON

When Australia face South Africa in the World Test Championship final, it will mark the end of the current format, which is set to be relaunched as a two-tier system ahead of India's tour of England later this summer. In a bid to create a "fairer competition", England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Richard Thompson, who is the head of the ICC's strategic growth committee, recently held talks with the apex body's chairman Jay Shah and the two will lead the plan. With just five months left for the next cycle to start with England hosting India at Headingley from June 20, Thompson acknowledged the urgency of the matter. "It is fully understood that the current structure does not work in the way it should and we need to find a fairer, better competition, but at

this stage no recommendations have been put forward," Thompson told Telegraph Sport. "We have five months to work on this, step back and look at what the structure should be going forward. The World Test Championship should be fairer and more competitive. It is going to change to ensure it always encourages the best teams to reach the final and encourages other nations that want to play Test cricket, to play Test cricket. "We will protect, grow and ensure the integrity of Test cricket because the format is crucial to the DNA of the game." The current model has drawn criticism for its inconsistencies. Teams do not play every other nation within the two-year cycle, and an excess of two-Test series has skewed standings. Political constraints mean India and Pakistan do not



face each other, impacting the integrity of the competition. Similarly, South Africa reached the final without playing Australia, though they will meet in the title clash at Lord's in June. Discussions will also explore the possibility of four-day Tests, as this could help boards schedule three-Test series around franchise leagues, the report has said. Notably, no three-Test series involving teams outside the "big three" of England, India, and Australia has taken place since 2019. However, the four-day Tests won't be there for marquee series such as the Ashes or matches between tier-one nations. The push for a two-tier system gained traction following Australia's blockbuster series against India, which set attendance records. The proposed model would see the top-tier nations play

each other more frequently, potentially sidelining other teams and series which has evoked negative responses from the legends of the game. West Indies great Clive Lloyd has been a strong critic of the system, saying it would be "disastrous for smaller teams". "All these countries have worked very hard to get there. We have been in ICC for nearly 100 years. We've a great history and now you're going to tell us, because of a monetary situation, this is how it's going to be," Lloyd had said. Sri Lanka's World Cup winning skipper Arjuna Ranatunga has also criticised the move, saying it would only benefit the three boards. "Sport isn't just about Pounds, Dollars and Rupees. Administrators must nurture and protect the game." Bangladesh batter Mominul Haque and England's former pacer Steven Finn have also criticised the move.

Hard to go past India, Australia in CT: Ponting

PTI ■ DUBAI

The legendary Ricky Ponting feels the quality of players and recent history make India and Australia the favourites to compete in the summit clash of the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy. The 50-over tournament will take place from February 19 to March 9 across three venues in Pakistan and one in Dubai. "It's hard to go past India and Australia again," Ponting told the ICC Review. "Just think about the quality of players in both countries right now, and you look back in recent history when these big finals and big ICC events have come around, and inevitably Australia and India are there somewhere," said the former Australia captain. India and Australia are the only teams to have won the Champions Trophy twice.



India secured the crown in 2013 and shared the trophy with Sri Lanka in 2002 after the final was washed out, while Australia clinched back-to-back titles in 2006 and 2009. Pakistan, the defending champions after winning the 2017 edition, will also pose a strong challenge, according to Ponting. "The other team that is playing some really good cricket at the moment is Pakistan," said Ponting, who won two ODI World Cups

and as many Champions Trophy titles as captain. "Their one-day cricket over the last little bit has been absolutely outstanding. We know they're not always the most predictable team in those big tournaments, but they seem like they've sorted things out a little bit." Pakistan won all the three ODI series they played last year, including a 2-1 comeback win in Australia and Zimbabwe, followed by a 3-0 whitewash of South Africa.

Pure cricketing miscalculation, says Ashwin on concussion substitution row

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India spinner R Ashwin has questioned the use of concussion substitution during the fourth T20I against England, in which medium-pace Harshit Rana replaced batting all-rounder Shivam Dube, calling it a case of "pure cricketing miscalculation." Dube, who had scored a half-century, was struck on the head by Jamie Overton off the penultimate delivery of India's innings. Head coach Gautam Gambhir then effectively used the concussion protocol to field Rana in place of Dube, who bowls at speeds in the early 120 km/h range. Rana, on debut, took 3 for 33, and India won the match by 15 runs, clinching the T20 series with a match to spare. "The game is done. India capture yet another series at home. T20I has been a real juggernaut of a win. But my first question is, did we forget it was an international game and played an IPL match?,"



Ashwin said on his hindi YouTube channel 'Ash ki baat'. "Because today all the discussion was on how Harshit Rana became Shivam Dube's concussion sub? I can understand it has happened in the past too. In Canberra, Yuzvendra Chahal replaced Ravindra Jadeja. "You can call poetic justice, or in fact poetic injustice. I don't understand it. At least earlier, Chahal replaced Jadeja. Here, Harshit Rana replaced Shivam Dube." The concussion protocol

allows a like-for-like replacement, and Rana, a tearaway quick, replaced medium pacer Dube, who is used as an 'impact player' for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL. England's captain Jos Buttler, unhappy with the decision, stated that his team was not consulted and would seek clarity from match referee Javagal Srinath on what exactly constituted a like-for-like replacement in concussion cases. Ashwin believes that

Ramandeep Singh would have been a more appropriate like-for-like replacement for Dube. "There is no role of the Indian or England team. If there is no one in the squad, then you can say that Harshit Rana can bat a bit and Shivam Dube can bowl a bit, that's why we brought him in. Like-for-like replacement Ramandeep Singh was sitting outside. I don't understand," said Ashwin. "This is a case of pure cricketing miscalculation, either on the part of the umpires or the part of the match referee or whoever be it. Ramandeep Singh was there, a batter who can ball a bit, like-for-like for Shivam Dube. Not for him. "Harshit Rana was chosen as the concussion substitute. I think people in charge should look into this. Today it happened against England and hurt, some day India might be hurt too." India will face England in the final ODI on Sunday.

Karnatak, Haryana play out a draw

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Ravichandran Smaran gave another reminder of his immense talent with an unbeaten hundred as Karnataka ended the Ranji Trophy season with a draw against Haryana in their Elite Group C match here on Sunday. However, Haryana have already qualified for the knockouts from the group, starting from February 8, along with Kerala. Haryana are also the group-toppers with 29 points from seven games and Kerala finished second with 28 points. Karnataka were fourth (20) behind Bengal (21) on the table. Starting from overnight 108 for 3 and 38 runs behind, Karnataka had some work to do to ensure that they would not end up with a defeat in their final league match. However, they lost Deydutt Padikkal (43), KL Shrijith (2) and Yashovardhan Parantap (12) in the space of 12 overs to slip to 164 for six. The home side was just 16 runs ahead at that time, but Smaran (133 not out, 217 balls, 14x4, 2x5) and Hardik Raj (40, 78 balls, 4x4) shared an alliance of 98 runs for the seventh wicket to shore their side up. More importantly, they consumed nearly 25 overs and a couple of hours during the stand that carried Karnataka to 262 before Hardik fell to Jayant Yadav. But by that time, Karnataka had a lead of 114 runs. Smaran extended that lead to 148 as Karnataka reached 294 for 8 in their second innings, and at that point Haryana agreed for a draw, knowing that there was not enough time to mount a chase. Smaran was also Karnataka's highest run-getter this Ranji Trophy season with 516 runs in seven matches at an average of 64.50 with two hundreds.

BCB independent committee to probe BPL corruption allegations

PTI ■ DHAKA

The Bangladesh Cricket Board has established an independent inquiry body to assist its Anti-Corruption Unit in probing a slew of corruption allegations over the last couple of weeks in the Bangladesh Premier League. This marks the first official corruption investigation in the BPL since 2013 as the league faces challenge with delayed player payments and ticketing controversies. "As part of its ongoing efforts, the BCB is in the process of establishing an Independent Inquiry Body to further support the ACU in its investigations," a BCB press release said. "The BCB remains dedicated to ensuring a fair and

transparent cricketing environment, and will continue to take all necessary actions to safeguard the integrity of the sport in Bangladesh." Recent media reports have alleged instances of corruption, naming specific players and matches, although these claims have not yet been substantiated by the BCB's ACU. "The BCB has also come across media coverage regarding potential anti-corruption concerns about the BPL. The Board reiterates its firm commitment to upholding the integrity and spirit of the game," added the release. "The BCB strictly adheres to the ICC Anti-Corruption Code for Participants and maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption in any form.

Balaji-Bollipalli pair wins, Karan impresses on debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

N Sriram Balaji and Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli were clinical in their effort before Karan Singh dished out an impressive show on debut as India thrashed Togo 4-0 in the play-off tie to keep their place in the Davis Cup World Group I, here Sunday. Starting the day with a 2-0 lead in pocket, India needed to win just one of the three matches of the day. The pair of Balaji and debutant Bollipalli did the job in the very first contest against M'lapa Tingou Akomolo and Hod'abalo Isak Padio. The Indians needed only 57 minutes to dispatch the Togo team 6-2 6-1 at DLTA Complex. Togo replaced their best player Thomas Setodji with M'lapa Tingou Akomolo due

to an arm injury. It hurt them as Akomolo could not hold serve even once in the contest. The tie already sealed, India expectedly handed debut to youngster Karan Singh in the first reverse singles. Watched by his coach Aditya Sachdeva, the 21-year-old raced to a 6-2 6-3 victory. Both teams decided not to play the dead fifth rubber. Surprisingly, it was Sasikumar Mukund who sat in the captain's chair instead of Rohit Rajpal when Karan played. Karan served extremely well, was aggressive in his returns and also wisely used the drop shots. Padio, who plays in the US Collegiate circuit, hit the ball well but Karan had better control and that made a huge difference in the outcome of the match. Karan, who also trained at the now-shut National Tennis



Centre (NTC) at DLTA, showed a lot of composure and did not let the occasion get to him. The only blemish for Karan was dropping his serve in the fifth game of the second set. Balaji was sensational with his serving. Playing percentage tennis, he lost just one point on his serve during the match. It was a pretty straightforward

show from Balaji and Bollipalli, who had won a Challenger together last year. Bollipalli was a bit under pressure when he could not pick up a half-volley, making it 30-all in his first ever service game on debut but managed to hold. After that it was one-way traffic throughout. The Indians got their first

break when Akomolo served in the third game. At 15-15, Bollipalli hit an upish forehand return that sailed over the two players but landed inside the lines. Balaji then hit a service return winner to earn two break points. A riveting volley rally ensued on first break points with all four players showing some great reflexes, but eventually one Akomolo return flew over the baseline. It gave India a 3-1 lead and Balaji made it 4-1 with another strong service game. His nerves settled, Bollipalli came out serving even better and soon Akomolo was serving to stay in the set. However, he did not help Togo's cause by serving consecutive two double faults from 15-15, giving the Indians two set points.

Praaggnandhaa and Gukesh in joint lead at Tata Steel Masters

PTI ■ WJUK AAN ZEE

World Champion D Gukesh played out a draw with Jorden van Foreest of Holland, while Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa beat Alexey Sarana of Serbia as the two Indians shared the lead after a thrilling day at the Tata Steel Masters here. Praggnanandhaa notched up his third consecutive win to take his tally to a commendable 8.5 points, same as his compatriot Gukesh after the 12th and penultimate round. The two Indians are now poised for an exciting finish in the prestigious tournament, with the remarkable prospect of one of them potentially clinching the title—a first in Tata Steel Masters history. Eying the top spot after the 11th round, Nodirbek Abdosattorov of Uzbekistan was outdone by Arjun Erigaisi and is all but out of

title contention on 7.5 points. Praggnanandhaa was involved in another Queen's gambit declined opening. Only this time he was playing with white pieces. It was quite a contrast from his previous round game against Caruana as Sarana went for an early advance of king side pawns and then castled on the queen side. It was time to launch an attack against the black king and Praggnanandhaa did not disappoint. In tactical complications, Praggnanandhaa was at his best as he sacrificed a piece to rip-apart the black's king position and what followed thereafter was a pleasure to watch. "At that point I realized it could be a long game, but then I saw this piece sacrifice," said Pragg after the game. The game ended through a queen sacrifice resulting in force checkmate. Gukesh played a game of



fluctuating fortunes against Foreest, who has the ability to play the spoiler on any given day. Foreest declared his peaceful

intentions early in the Queen pawn game as white when he appeared ready for a repetition. However, Gukesh declined the offer and the

game was still equal with many pieces on board. Foreest sacrificed a Rook for a knight but on the 39th move Gukesh returned the

favour with his clock ticking away. It was a won position for Gukesh but precise calculation was needed and it was right here that the Indian faltered allowing his opponent a huge comeback. Foreest had suddenly turned the tables down but did not quite realise it and decided to go for perpetual checks in the heavy piece endgame. Arjun Erigaisi finally proved his mettle against Nodirbek Abdosattorov, whose ambitions of claiming the top spot came to an end. The game featured a Nimzo-Indian Defense, wherein the Indian had white pieces and his choice of Capablanca variation gave little chances for Abdosattorov to disturb the balance. In the early middle game, Abdosattorov went for unwarranted complications and ended up blundering on the king side. Arjun won a pawn first and later won two bishops for a rook. With precise calculations he

wrapped up the issue. In other games, Leon Luke Mendonca shared the point with top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States, while P Harikrishna drew with Vincent Keymer of Germany. The finale could be exciting as Gukesh is up against a resurgent Arjun, while Praggnanandhaa has to tackle Keymer. In case of a drawn result on both boards, the play-off of shorter duration game will decide the winner. In the challengers' section, R Vasihali lost to Ediz Gurel of Turkey to remain on five points and Divya Deshmukh was on the receiving end against Benjamin Bok of Holland. It's a three-way lead in this section with Aydin Suleymanli of Azerbaijan and Nguyen Thai Dai Vam of Czech republic joining overnight leader Erwin Lami in pole position on 8.5 points. Results round 12 Masters:

Erigaisi Arjun (Ind, 4.5) beat Nodirbek Abdosattorov (Uzb, 7.5); Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 5) drew with D Gukesh (Ind, 8.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 6.5) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 6.5); Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 4.5) drew with Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 6); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 8.5) beat Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5.5); P Harikrishna (Ind, 6) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 5); Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5) lost to Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 7). Challengers: Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 7) beat Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 5); Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 3) lost to Benjamin Bok (Ned, 8); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 8.5) beat Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1); Aydin Suleymanli (Aze, 8.5) beat Svane Frederik (Ger, 7); Ediz Gurel (Tur, 7) beat R Vasihali (Ind, 5); Erwin Lami (Ned, 8.5) drew with Nogerbek Kazymbek (Kaz, 6.5); Oro Faustino (Arg, 3.5) beat Lu Mlaoyi (Chn, 5.5).

It is not combinations, it is content for success: Dil Raju

Top producer Dil Raju made sensational comments about big budget and combination films. He also says that the collections which are showing these days are completely wrong and the percentage of success is very low. He spoke about so many issues related to the film industry at the distributor's gratitude meet...



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Top producer Dil Raju made sensational comments at the success meet of his film 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam'. After a long time, the distributors attended meet to mark the success of a film and they are all very happy that they got profits because of 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam'. "With this film's success, we learnt a lot of lessons. It is not com-

binations, it is the content that will give success," said Dil Raju. These comments from a top producer like Dil Raju means, it is sensational. These days many top producers rely more on combinations than the content.

Even Dil Raju's other film 'Game Changer' is a big combination of Ram Charan and director Shankar, which is one of the high budget films. It seems, Dil Raju put a lot of money on 'Game Changer', but the film was a big disas-

ter at the box-office and all the distributors and producer lost a lot of money. After the two days of 'Game Changer' release, 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' was released and the first show onwards the film got positive response and became a huge hit. Directed by Anil Ravipudi, the film has now joined the Rs 300 crore club, which is a record. "A Telugu cinema reaching Rs 300 crore club is definitely a miracle," said Anil Ravipudi at the same event.

Dil Raju also said that many films which are showing highest collections are not the actual figures. "When a film gets a breakeven for a distributor, it becomes a hit. But these days many distributors are losing money, at the same time, the makers release posters that it is a big success. Now, the industry has seen only 90 per cent flops, only 10 per cent success. But from the last 20 years, though there are a few flops and success, distributors continue their journey with us which we should thank them," said Dil Raju.

The producer said that he entered into the industry and saw a lot of success and failures too. "We believe in story and content, but in between we too see ups and down, also believe in combinations for the last four to five years. But now, we learnt our lessons," said Dil Raju. He added that he introduced many new talents to the industry. "We made some classics with newcomers and we always believe in content and now with 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam', we are back to normal and definitely want to make films in the coming 10 years," said Dil Raju.

Senior actor Venkatesh is the lead actor in this film, while Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary are the female leads. "Major credit goes to Venkatesh," said Anil Ravipudi and added that he has seen two miracles with this film in his life. "A regional cinema collected Rs 100 crore in just six days and also a regional cinema reached Rs 300 crore which I saw for the first time," said Anil Ravipudi, the director.

Dil Raju's brother and another producer Shirish said that these days, people are not giving value to distributors. "We started our production with distribution and now there is no respect for distributors. But now, Anil Ravipudi gets that respect and value due to the distributors with this success," said Shirish.

One of the distributors LVR said that these days many distributors are at loss, despite the film collections showing high. "In the last few years, no film made any profits for distributors. After many years, the distributors are in a happy position with 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam'," said LVR.

After two years, Ajith is arriving with action

It's been more than two years, Ajith Kumar's film was released in Tamil and Telugu. Ajith is one of the popular stars in Tamil cinema and his films are also releasing in Telugu as he is known here. Recently, Ajith Kumar also participated in the car racing at Dubai and made India proud as he stands in the third position. Now, his film 'Vidaamayarchi' is releasing on February 6, and at the same time it is releasing in Telugu as 'Pattudala' on the same date.

Magizh Thirumeni is the director, while it is produced by Subaskaran under Lyca Productions. The film has also completed the censor formalities and

has been certified U/A. The recently released trailer has taken the internet by storm, featuring Ajith Kumar in an intense action-packed role. Trisha Krishnan is playing the female lead; after a long time both are together for this film. Regina Cassandra is also there in another key role along with action King Arjun. The movie has already sold for a whopping price for Satellite and OTT, with Sun TV acquiring the satellite rights and Netflix bagging the OTT streaming rights.



DULQUER SALMAN'S NEW TELUGU FILM LAUNCHED

Malayalam superstar Dulquer Salmaan is now concentrating more on Telugu cinema. The actor is on cloud nine with his latest 'Lucky Bhaskar' becoming a big success in Telugu. Now, the actor's new film 'Akasamlo Oka Tara' was launched on Sunday in Hyderabad. Pavan Sadineni is the director, while the film is produced by Sandeep

Gunnam, son of popular producer and director Gunnam Gangaraju. The interesting part about this film is, two big production houses, Swapna Cinema and Geetha Arts owned by Swapna Dutt and Allu Aravind respectively, backed this film.

On Sunday at a simple ceremony, the muhurat was held in Hyderabad. Dulquer Salmaan with the success of 'Lucky

Bhaskar' is widening his business in Telugu. He is also popular in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi. So the makers are planning to release it in all other languages too.

On the other hand, director Pavan Sadineni is a successful director with his debut film 'Prema Ishq Kadal' and then made two other films and few web series also. His last web series 'Daya' is also a big suc-

cess on the OTT. Now, he got a big chance to direct Dulquer Salmaan for 'Akasamlo Oka Tara'. The regular shooting may start soon and the other cast and crew details will also be announced in the coming days.



Anirudh roped in for Nani and Odela film

Anirudh Ravichander is one of the few young music directors in demand in both Tamil and Telugu. The music director is now roped in for Nani and Odela combination film 'The Paradise'. Nani and Anirudh shared this news on their social media and it is their third collaboration. Earlier, Anirudh worked for Nani's 'Jersey' and 'Gang Leader'. "This one is special. My dear Nani and Odela," shared Anirudh in his social media page. "We are on our hatricket. This is an epic," says Nani in his social media page welcoming the music director.

Nani is currently shooting for the film 'Hit 3' and once after he completes this one, he is going to join Srikanth Odela for 'The Paradise'. Srikanth and Nani earlier worked for 'Dasara' which is a period action drama. Nani's performance in that film was critically acclaimed. As the title suggests, this film also has an action backdrop with entertainment, says a source.

No buzz for Vishwaksen's Laila

Vishwaksen, the young actor, is looking for a break with his upcoming film 'Laila'. He is also appearing as a woman in this film and it is touted to be a comedy. The film is slated for a February 14 release, on the occasion of Valentine's Day. Though the makers put on a

few events recently, there is no buzz about the film.

Ram Narayan is the director, while Akanksha Sharma is the female lead. Produced by Sahu Garapati, the film's teaser and two songs released recently, but still the film didn't get the buzz that they expected. Recently, another song from the film was

also unveiled. Music is composed by Leon James.

Vishwaksen's last two films 'Mechanic Rocky' and 'Gangs of Godavari' didn't do well at the box-office. The actor is now pinning hopes on this 'Laila' which he did hard work especially to appear as a woman. He is one talented

actor, but it seems, the actor needs a good break and compete with others. The latest song is going to be a major crowd-puller, according to the makers.

The screenplay for 'Laila' is written by Vasudeva Murthy, with Richard Prasad handling the cinematography.



Music director Thaman turns into lead actor

Music director S Thaman is all set to play the lead actor in a Tamil film, according to a source. The actor is going to share screen space with another actor Aharva in this Tamil film. Interestingly, Thaman made his debut as an actor in 'Boys' directed by none other than Shankar Shanmugham. After that, he appeared as a cameo in a couple of films, but he never was a lead actor.

Now, the source reveals that a Tamil director is all set to rope in Thaman as the lead actor in his film. Though Thaman is one of the top music directors in Down South, he is busy with multiple projects both Telugu and Tamil as music director. But in the meantime, he wanted to pursue his acting too, thus he accepted this role. "It's an interesting story and Thaman's role is very important in it, that's why he agreed to do it," said a source.

Thaman's recent film 'Daaku Maharaja' is a successful one and he is also nicknamed as Nandamuri Thaman. He is also working for a musical night for NTR Trust to raise funds for medical camps. He also met AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu recently.

