



PM HOPEFUL
OF ACHIEVING RS 9 LAKH-CR TEXTILE EXPORTS



Krishnaveni's century-long journey in cinema comes to AN END



QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

I saw the words spoken by Congress leaders on TV. Ironically, Congress leaders said that the father's caste applies to the son, and that since Rajiv Gandhi was a Hindu his son Rahul Gandhi is also a Hindu. How did Rajiv Gandhi become a Hindu? Rajiv Gandhi's father Feroz Jehangir Gandhi was a Parsi. Their ancestors from Persia came to India and became Parsis. Feroz Jehangir Gandhi's religion applies to Rajiv Gandhi. So Rajiv Gandhi is not a Hindu. Rajiv is a Parsi with Muslim roots

— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs

P4

DON'T MISS...

Dola allays fears over GBS spread

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy has assured the public that there is no need to worry about the outbreak of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), as all necessary preventive measures have been taken to contain it. Responding to the death of a woman from Prakasam district at the Government General Hospital (GGH), the Minister stated that GBS is not a fatal disease and urged people not to panic. "All required medicines have been made available in hospitals for the treatment of GBS patients..."

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To ban or not to ban?

At least 79 education systems globally have banned smartphones in schools as many countries debate their impact on learning and privacy of children. According to the UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) team, 60 education systems (or 30 per cent of the total registered education systems globally) had banned smartphone in schools by the end of 2023 through special laws or policies. By the end of 2024, 19 more joined the list, bringing the total to 79 (or 40 per cent). India is yet to come up with...

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Reliance, BP lose decade-old gas

In a setback for Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Ltd and its partner BP Plc, the Delhi High Court has overturned an international arbitration tribunal's ruling that held the duo not responsible for paying any compensation for the gas they produced and sold, which had allegedly migrated from adjoining fields. Here is an explainer on the entire dispute: **FIELDS IN QUESTION:** Block or area KG-DWN-98/3, known as KG-D6, was awarded to a consortium of Reliance Industries...

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Arshdeep poised to start ahead of Harshit

Harshit Rana has been the flavour of the season as far as India's emerging crop of fast bowlers is concerned but one of head coach Gautam Gambhir's finds is unlikely to start in India's playing eleven in the Champions Trophy with Arshdeep Singh still considered way ahead in terms of talent and quality. The Indian team management gave Harshit all three ODIs against England, and if one is absolutely fair to the burly 6-foot-2-inch tall Delhi speedster, he has not looked out of place. While Arshdeep enjoys a...

-SPORTS

'Ensure NDA win in MLC polls'

NAIDU SAYS EVERY ELECTION IS A TEST FOR THE ALLIANCE

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu issued clear directions to National Democratic Alliance (NDA) leaders on Sunday to work unitedly for the success of NDA candidates in the ongoing elections to the Legislative Council from Graduates' constituencies.

During a teleconference with Ministers, MPs, MLAs, and other NDA leaders from the combined Guntur, Krishna, and both Godavari districts, Chandrababu Naidu emphasised that every election is a test for the alliance and that NDA candidates must secure victory. He urged leaders of all three alliance partners to work in unison, coordinate closely with the cadre at the grassroots level, and raise awareness among voters.

The Chief Minister noted that people had reposed immense faith in the NDA, as reflected in the 2024 verdict with a 93 per cent strike rate. "We have been striving every day to meet their expectations, launching various developmental programmes and welfare schemes while bringing governance back on track. Significant transformation has been achieved in administration," he told the NDA leaders.

Highlighting efforts to create employment opportunities by attracting investments through 'Brand AP', Chandrababu Naidu

CM to attend ITCX 2025 in Tirupati today

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu will visit Tirupati on Monday, February 17, to participate in ITCX 2025, organised by the International Temples Convention & Expo (ITCX) at Asha Conventions, Mangalam, Tirupati. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister will share the dais with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and Kerala Governor Rajendra Arlekar during the event. As per the schedule released by the CMO, Chandrababu Naidu will depart from Vijayawada Airport in Gannavaram at 2.30 pm and reach Tirupati by 3.15 pm. After attending the programme at Asha Conventions, he will return from Tirupati Airport at 6.45 pm and reach Vijayawada by 7.30 pm.

- Naidu highlights NDA's 93% strike rate in the 2024 polls and ongoing development efforts.
- Rs 7 lakh crore investment deals expected to generate over four lakh jobs.
- Skill Development Centres to be set up; 64 lakh pensions are disbursed monthly.
- Naidu says govt issuing DSC notification for 16,347 teacher posts and clears Rs 780 cr dues.
- Work-from-home opportunities for women under exploration.
- Naidu says NDA's achievements in eight months must be communicated to the public.



said confidence among industrialists had been restored. He reiterated that agreements had been signed with investors worth Rs 7 lakh crore, which could generate over four lakh jobs.

He also mentioned that Skill Development Centres were being established across the State to create employment opportunities. Pensions are being paid to 64 lakh beneficiaries every month, and the DSC notification to fill 16,347 vacant teacher posts will be issued soon.

The Chief Minister added that Rs 780 crore in fee-reimbursement dues left pending by the previous government had been cleared.

He further stated that salaries for government employees and pensioners were being paid promptly on the first of every month. "We are also exploring revenue-generating opportunities for educated women through the work-from-home system," he said.

The NDA government has imple-

mented these measures within just eight months, he noted and stressed that it was the responsibility of NDA leaders to communicate these achievements to the people.

With only 10 days left for the elections, alliance leaders must work in close coordination to ensure NDA's victory, he said, while cautioning them against violating the poll code. Chandrababu Naidu also expressed confidence that the winning candidates' majority should exceed that of the general elections.



STAMPEDE AT NEW DELHI RAILWAY STATION

Death toll climbs to 18

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The death toll in the overnight stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station climbed to 18 on Sunday, with a senior railway official saying the incident occurred after some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a footover bridge.

More than a dozen people were also injured in the stampede at the railway station which witnessed a surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj -- where the Maha Kumbh is underway -- on platform number 14 and 15 of the station.

Hospital and police sources said the death toll has climbed to 18.

Northern Railway's Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Himanshu Upadhyay said that at the time of incident the Patna-

bound Magadh Express was standing at platform number 14 and the New Delhi-Jammu Uttar Sampark Kranti Express was stationed at platform number 15.

"Some people who were coming down from the footover bridge towards platform numbers 14 and 15 using stairs slipped and fell on others," he said, citing the cause of the stampede.

Sources said delays in train departures and the sale of 1,500 general tickets every hour may have created a chaotic situation at the New Delhi Railway station.

According to official sources, wrong announcement about change of platforms may also have created a confusion that led to the stampede.

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What led to Delhi stampede?

5

Pawan proves talk of TDP-JSP rift a myth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Putting to rest speculation about a 'gap' between the TDP leadership and Jana Sena, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan attended the 'Euphoria Musical Night' organised by the NTR Trust on its 28th anniversary here.

Recent developments, including Kalyan's absence from a meeting of ministers and secretaries chaired by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, had fuelled rumours of differences. His lower ranking in file clearance—placed tenth below Naidu and Minister Lokesh—had further added to the buzz. However, Kalyan's presence at the event on Saturday dispelled such speculation. He was warmly received by Naidu and Lokesh and enjoyed the musical night.

"Had a great time participating in the musical event organised for thalassaemia patients by NTR Memorial Trust, headed by Madam Nara Bhuvaneshwari garu. My wholehearted thanks to Hon. CM @ncbn garu and @naralokesh garu for making me part of this event. My best wishes to @MusicThaman and his team for their energetic performance," Kalyan posted on Saturday night.

TDP spokesperson and Swachha Andhra Corporation Chairman K Pattabhiram dismissed the rumours of differences, attributing them to YSRCP workers spreading speculation on social media. After the event, Lokesh announced that Pawan Kalyan had donated Rs 50 lakh to the NTR Trust for thalassaemia patients. The event aimed at raising awareness and funds for their treatment.



"Had a great time participating in the musical event organised for thalassaemia patients by NTR Memorial Trust, headed by Madam Nara Bhuvaneshwari garu. My wholehearted thanks to Hon. CM @ncbn garu and @naralokesh garu for making me part of this event. My best wishes to @MusicThaman and his team for their energetic performance."

GBS claims woman's life in Guntur

PNS ■ GUNTUR

A woman from Alasandlapalli in Prakasam district, identified as Kamalamma, succumbed to Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) while undergoing treatment at Guntur Government General Hospital (GGH) on Sunday. She had been suffering from high fever and severe leg weakness and was on ventilator support for several days before her demise. GGH superintendent Ramana Yashasvi confirmed her death.

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Devotees continue to throng Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR (UP)

Despite the conclusion of key bathing festivals, including Amrit Snan and Maghi Purnima, the surge of pilgrims at the Maha Kumbh shows no sign of abating and an estimated 1.36 crore devotees had taken a holy dip at the Sangam by 6 pm on Sunday.

According to figures released by the mela administration, the total number of pilgrims who have taken a dip at the Sangam since January 13, when the Maha Kumbh started, has gone past 52.83 crore.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath conducted an aerial survey of the Maha Kumbh on



Sunday and reviewed traffic-management and other facilities with officials. He requested all devotees arriving in Prayagraj to cooperate in maintaining a smooth traffic flow. The chief minister asked the pilgrims to avoid parking their vehicles on roads and instead, use

designated parking areas.

He also appealed to religious and social organisations to continue their charitable food-distribution services uninterrupted.

In view of the massive influx of devotees, the Prayagraj district magistrate has ordered online classes for the students of Classes 1 to 8 across all government, aided and recognised schools in rural and urban areas from February 17 to February 20.

Saturday also saw 1.36 crore devotees taking a holy dip, while on Friday, around one crore pilgrims participated in the ritual, pushing the total number of pilgrims past the 50-crore mark

BJP focusing on leadership reshuffle in AP?

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The political landscape of Andhra Pradesh is undergoing a significant transformation, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) reportedly looking to strengthen its foothold in the State ahead of the upcoming elections. It is learnt that the three-party alliance—comprising the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), BJP, and Jana Sena Party (JSP)—is working towards consolidating its position, even as the BJP reassesses its leadership strategy.

According to reliable sources, BJP's Andhra Pradesh president, Daggubati Purandeswari, has been summoned to Delhi for high-level

Fate of State party chief Purandeswari hangs in balance

Purandeswari is learnt to have been summoned to Delhi for high-level discussions, fuelling speculation about a possible reassignment to a crucial national role.



ence and reposition itself within the alliance.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent visit to Andhra Pradesh is seen as a strong indicator of BJP's renewed focus on the state. During interactions with party cadres, he reportedly stressed the importance of highlighting the Central government's contributions to Andhra Pradesh's development. Reliable sources indicate that BJP's top leadership wants to ensure that the party's role in various infrastructure and welfare initiatives is effectively communicated to voters.

Continued on Page 2

Bird flu scare sends chicken prices plummeting

Consumers shift to fish and mutton

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The recent bird flu outbreak in the Telugu states has rattled poultry markets, upending consumer choices and pushing families to reconsider their dietary staples. What was once the most affordable and preferred protein source for many is now facing an unexpected slump, as fear of infection keeps buyers away from chicken shops.

Hoping for lower prices, many consumers anticipated a chance to relish their favourite chicken dishes. Instead, the government's restrictions on sales in affected regions have led to a supply crunch. Although shops in unaffected areas have reopened, hesi-

tant consumers are choosing to stay away, despite prices dropping to as low as Rs 100 to Rs 150 per kilogram.

Sunday, typically the busiest day for chicken vendors, has now turned eerily quiet. Traders, who once saw long queues of cus-

tomers, now find their shops empty, while the demand for alternatives has surged. Mutton prices have soared to Rs 1,000 per kilogram, as fewer chickens enter the market. Even fish markets are experiencing a rush, with prices rising to Rs 400 per kilogram and

prawns reaching Rs 900.

For the middle class, the switch from chicken to mutton is financially burdensome. Many have chosen to forgo meat altogether, turning instead to vegetables and pulses. Eggs, once a staple in many households, are also seeing a decline in demand.

Beyond individual households, the bird flu outbreak has had institutional consequences. Welfare programmes have temporarily removed chicken from their menus, replacing it with vegetarian options.

The situation is especially dire in East Godavari, West Godavari, and NTR districts, where poultry farms have suffered massive losses. In Anumullanka village alone, over 11,000 chickens perished in just two days.

Government authorities have swiftly intervened, imposing strin-

gent containment measures, including temporary bans on chicken and egg sales in affected areas. In Narsingaraoepet, officials have declared a one-kilometre red zone around the outbreak, prohibiting all poultry trade within that radius.

Despite assurances from health experts that properly cooked chicken poses no health risk, public apprehension remains high. Medical professionals warn that if bird flu were to spread to humans, symptoms could include high fever, severe sore throat, fatigue, body aches, and respiratory distress. While officials maintain that the situation is under control, consumer behaviour tells a different story. Until fears subside, chicken might remain off the menu in many Telugu households, with fish and mutton taking its place at the dining table.



2ND US FLIGHT IN AMRITSAR

Deportees complain of being shackled

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A US military aircraft carrying 116 illegal Indian immigrants landed at Amritsar airport late on Saturday night, with the men among the deportees claiming they were in shackles during the journey and Sikh youths were allegedly without turbans.

The C-17 aircraft, which landed at the airport around 11.35 pm on Saturday, was the second batch of Indians to be deported by the Donald Trump administration as part of its crackdown on illegal immigrants.

Of these 115 deportees, 65 are from Punjab, 33 from Haryana,



eight from Gujarat, two each from Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. They were provided food upon reaching Amritsar, much to their relieve after the exhausting journey.

Continued on Page 2

Monday Mirchi

RAMAKRISHNA RAO SET TO BE NEXT CS — A PROMISE FINALLY FULFILLED

The guessing game is over—Special CS K Ramakrishna Rao is all set to take over as the next Chief Secretary. Not only the preferred choice of bureaucrats, he also has the Telangana Chief Minister's backing. Yours truly had already written in this column about how RKR was the frontrunner, and now it's happening. Interestingly, this isn't the first time his name was in contention. Back in the KCR era, RKR was promised the CS post, but political and caste equations derailed that plan. Now, the Revanth Reddy government is finally delivering on that old commitment. In bureaucratic circles, there wasn't much of a debate—when asked, a majority confidently picked RKR as the obvious choice, with some refusing to even consider alternatives. His tenure will be a short one, lasting a maximum of four months, but that hasn't stopped the excitement. Looks like the bureaucrats got their way this time!

SECOND-IN-COMMAND UNDER FIRE, BUT BUREAUCRATS STAY UNSCATHED

The government's second-in-command has been making headlines for all the wrong reasons, with the Opposition relentlessly targeting him over commissions and even dragging his wife into the controversy. But here's the interesting part—while he remains under scrutiny, the bureaucrats working with him are walking away spotless. A little bird tells us that there's a simple reason for this: they are never made part of these "discussions." Unlike some officers who were closely aligned with the previous regime and are now feeling the heat, these bureaucrats are relieved to be left out of the loop. If—big if—a probe ever happens, they'll have nothing to worry about.

Given how things are playing out for others, that's probably the safest place to be!

POLICE SHUFFLE: KEY POSTS STILL VACANT, TG DGP OFFICE HOARDING DSPS?

Looks like there's a game of musical chairs happening at the Telangana police headquarters! Despite all the big talk about efficiency, key positions are still lying vacant. Gandhi Nagar and Cyberabad Crimes ACs are also missing in action. No ACP for HYDRABAD yet—guess disaster management isn't a priority? Meanwhile, the DGP office seems to be hoarding DSPs like a collector's edition set. And what's the deal with Nizamabad? Still, no full-time Commissioner, as if the city is running on autopilot. Over at Rachakonda and Cyberabad, the Joint CP (L&O) post is empty, making one wonder if law and order is being handled via remote control. Maybe someone should remind Telangana's top leaders that these aren't just placeholders on a list.

COLLECTORS ON THE MOVE—A STARK CONTRAST FROM BRS ERA

From teaching classes to sitting on the floor with students, composing school songs, screening movies, and even sharing meals—collectors are making their presence felt in the field like never before. Their visits are not just frequent but also proudly documented on social media and sent out to the press. While the public sees this as a refreshing change, the real celebrations are happening among officers who aren't collectors. A bureaucrat vividly recalls the unspoken rule during the BRS era—stepping out of the office was a risk and those who dared faced consequences. Now, the very thing that was once frowned upon is being encouraged. It's not about just inspections anymore; it's about the sheer joy of finally having the freedom to move without fear.

--Yours truly

Work for win of Alapati: Min

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Labour Minister Vasamsetty Subhash called for unity among all members of the Telugu Desam Party to ensure victory of the party's MLC candidate Alapati Raja in the upcoming graduate MLC elections. Speaking at a meeting organized for the Krishna-Guntur district graduates on Sunday, he stressed the importance of collective efforts to support the coalition.

Minister Subhash remarked that although there is support from all graduates for the coalition, it is crucial for party cadres to work diligently towards Raja's victory and expressed confidence that coalition candidates would emerge victorious in the MLC elections across the state.

He noted that since the coalition government took power, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has been advancing with a clear vision aimed at comprehensive development.

Kollu calls for resounding victory in MLC elections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Mines, Geology and Excise Kollu Ravindra has called for a decisive victory in the upcoming Legislative Council elections in Krishna district. Addressing a preparatory meeting led by Machilipatnam in-charge Minister Vasantha Subhash, he urged party leaders to engage personally with every graduate voter to secure support for the alliance candidate.

Criticising the previous Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government, he alleged that the past five years were marked by suppression and humiliation, tarnishing the state's reputation. He pointed out that with the Centre's support, major projects like Polavaram and Amaravati were now back on track.



"We must inform the youth about the destruction of the past five years and the progress made in the last eight months. Victory is assured, but our goal should be to secure a massive majority that will leave YSRC leaders hesitant to face the public."

Minister Ravindra accused the previous administration of downgrading the Polavaram project to a lift irrigation scheme and attempting to derail Amaravati with caste-based politics. He also recalled the opposition to the Pattiseema project, emphasising that Krishna district would have suffered without it.

He highlighted that after the coalition government assumed power, the Centre promptly released funds for Polavaram and Amaravati. He also noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for projects worth Rs 2 lakh crore, which are expected to drive the state's development.

Several leaders, including RTC Chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao, MLAs Kagita Krishna Prasad, Yarlagadda Venkatarao, Venigandla Ramu, Mandali Raja, Konakalla Jagannatha Rao, Buragadda Vedavyas, Srinivas Reddy, Swachh Bharat Corporation Chairman Kommareddy Patabhram, Biodust Chairman Vijay Kumar, and BJP leader Sriram Kondalarao, attended the meeting.



Tirupati to host 'Mahakumbh of Temples' from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The International Temples Convention & Expo (ITCX) 2025 is set to be held at Asha Conventions in Tirupati from 17 to 19 February. Conceptualised by Gireesh Kulkarni, Founder of Temple Connect, in association with the Anthyodaya Pratishthan, ITCX 2025 aims to bring together Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain institutions on a global platform to modernise and strengthen temple ecosystems while celebrating their cultural heritage.

The event will see hybrid participation from around 1,581 devotional institutions across 58 countries, featuring over 111 speakers, 15 workshops and knowledge sessions, and more than 60 stalls at the expo.

Dubbed the 'Mahakumbh of Temples', ITCX is a flagship initiative of Temple Connect, an organisation engaged in documenting and digitising information about temples of Indian origin. The event is chaired by

Prasad Lad, who also serves as the Chief Whip of the Maharashtra Legislative Council. This edition focuses on enhancing the devotee experience and convenience, aligning with its theme of 'Engaging, Empowering, and Enhancing the Temple Economy'.

ITCX 2025 has received support from the Government of India through the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, and the Incredible India initiative. The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) is the presenting partner, while the Archaeological Survey of India and the Tourism and Endowments departments of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and other states have also extended their backing.

"In line with the Prime Minister's vision of preserving Bharat's cultural and spiritual heritage, ITCX seeks to bridge the gap between tradition and modern governance. Temples are not just places of worship but also cultural and economic powerhouses.

AP to host National Energy Efficiency Summit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh has been selected to host the BEE-Indo German Energy Program Partnership National Summit on February 2 in Vijayawada. Organised by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power, in collaboration with GLZ, the summit aims to strengthen State Designated Agencies (SDAs) to effectively implement national energy programmes and drive significant energy savings and CO2 reductions.

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand, who also serves as Chairman of AP State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM), will deliver the inaugural address. In a letter to Vijayanand, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Power, and Director General of BEE, Srikanth Nagulapally, underscored the importance of his participation for the summit's success.

Welcoming the event, Vijayanand reiterated the State government's commitment to enhancing the financial stability of power distribution companies (DISCOMs). He highlighted efforts to leverage Central government schemes like PM Surya Ghar and PM Kusum to expand renewable energy adoption and reduce operational costs.

During the summit, the Chief Secretary will release a report on



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the economic and energy savings achieved through BEE Star Rated Appliances. He has also directed APSECM CEO BAV Kumar Reddy to coordinate with BEE to ensure the event's smooth execution.

Additionally, Vijayanand has urged the Central Government to increase Andhra Pradesh's battery storage capacity from 1,000 MW to 2,000 MW to improve grid stability and enhance renewable energy utilisation. He commended BEE's role in implementing energy efficiency programmes that contribute to better power quality, reduced energy costs, and India's climate goals.

A special session will highlight best practices in energy efficiency

from Andhra Pradesh, Tripura, Kerala, Karnataka, Odisha, and Uttarakhand. Milind Deora, speaking on the investment potential in the sector, noted that India is expecting substantial investments in energy efficiency. He lauded the efforts of states such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and Telangana in advancing energy conservation initiatives.

Andhra Pradesh, through SECM, has taken the lead in organising Investment Bazaars and establishing a Financial Institutions Committee to explore local financing options for energy efficiency projects, Deora added.

met Rangarajan's father, Soundararajan, and inquired about his health. Soundararajan recalled his close association with the late YS Rajasekhara Reddy, and during the interaction, Bhaskar Reddy reminisced about their bond.

Chevireddy meets Chilkur temple chief priest

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP State general secretary Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy met Chilkur Balaji Temple's chief priest, CS Rangarajan, who was recently attacked. Following the instructions of former Chief Minister and

YSRCP President Shri YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Chevireddy visited Rangarajan on Sunday and inquired about the details of the incident. He also checked on his well-being and conveyed that Jagan Mohan Reddy stands firmly in his support.

Additionally, Chevireddy

Stampede is govt's failure, railway min must be sacked: APCC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Alleging that the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station was a result of government failure, the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) has demanded the dismissal of Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav.

Addressing the media in Vijayawada on Sunday, APCC vice-president Kolanukonda Shivaji called for a comprehensive inquiry into the incident. He also urged the Centre to enhance the ex gratia payment to Rs 25 lakh for the bereaved families and Rs 5 lakh for the



injured. "Unfortunately, 18 people lost their lives in the stampede in the national capital," he lamented. Shivaji urged the Supreme Court to take suo

motu cognisance of the incident, issue notices to the Railway Ministry and Railway Board, and conduct an inquiry.

He demanded that the issue be debated in Parliament, criticising the government for not allowing opposition leaders to raise public concerns. "The government failed to run adequate trains for Maha Kumbh Mela pilgrims travelling to Prayagraj, yet it continues to talk about the Bullet Train," he remarked.

Shivaji further alleged that the lack of proper arrangements for pilgrims had led to traffic jams stretching for hun-

dreds of kilometres. "There are no adequate facilities at Prayagraj for the pilgrims. The government seems more focused on profits than on providing facilities to railway passengers," he said.

Questioning why the platform number was suddenly changed when over 10,000 passengers were waiting, he said the decision triggered the stampede.

He also criticised the government for restricting media access to Jayaprakash Hospital, alleging that it feared exposure of the railway department's failures.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Panchami: Feb 17 02:16 AM to Feb 18 04:53 AM
Shashthi: Feb 18 04:53 AM to Feb 19 07:32 AM
Nakshatram: Chitra: Feb 17 04:31 AM to Feb 18 07:35 AM
Rahukalam: 8:11 AM to 9:37 AM
Yamagandam: 11:04 AM to 12:30 PM
Varjyam: 01:32 PM to 03:20 PM
Gulika: 1:56 PM to 3:22 PM
Amritakalam: 12:22 AM to 02:10 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 PM to 12:53 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 33°
Humidity: 73%
Sunrise: 6:32 AM
Sunset: 6:11 PM
Updated: February 16, 2025 5:00 PM

Deportees complain...

Continued from Page 1

According to sources, most of the deportees in the second batch were aged between 18 and 30. A third plane carrying 112 deportees, that include people from Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat, is expected to land at Amritsar airport late on Sunday night, official sources said. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Sunday strongly condemned the US authorities for allegedly not allowing Sikh deportees, who were part of the second batch of illegal Indian immigrants, to wear turbans. The statement came after some video clips on social media showed Sikh deportees without turbans completing their immigration formalities at the Amritsar airport.

SGPC officials, who were deputed for providing 'langar' and bus service for deportees at the Amritsar airport, gave 'dastar' (turban) to the Sikh deportees. Among the second batch of deportees, those hailing from Punjab were taken to their homes in police vehicles around 4.30 am on Sunday after immigration and background checks. However, two deportees belonging to Rajpura in Patiala district were arrested upon their landing in Amritsar in connection with a murder case. Sandeep Singh alias Sunny and Pradeep Singh were wanted in a murder case registered in Rajpura in 2023.

The second batch of deportees had tales of toil, jour-

BJP focusing on...

Continued from Page 1

Political observers note that BJP's ambitions in the state are aligned with its long-term goal of becoming a formidable force in Andhra Pradesh. "BJP's expansion here is not just an experiment; it is a well-calculated move. The party's national leadership is determined to carve out a larger space for itself," said political analyst Dr S. Ravi Kumar. He added that any potential leadership change in the state would be based on strategic necessity rather than political compulsions.

Amid these developments, discussions over Purandeswari's possible replacement are reportedly gaining traction within party circles. According to BJP insiders, the leadership is carefully evaluating its options, keeping in mind the complex socio-political dynamics of the state. A senior party leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, remarked, "Any decision on leadership will be based on BJP's long-term interests in Andhra Pradesh. The party needs a leader who can navigate alliance politics while also ensuring independent

growth." Despite its alliance with the TDP, BJP has reportedly been firm on continuing its membership drives and organizational strengthening. This has, however, led to unease within certain TDP circles. Some TDP leaders are said to have expressed concerns over BJP's aggressive expansion, fearing it could erode their traditional vote base.

In another significant development, several leaders from the ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), particularly from Visakhapatnam and the Godavari districts, have reportedly shown interest in joining BJP. However, it is learnt that their induction has been delayed due to objections raised by TDP leadership. Political observers believe BJP's rising influence in the state is inevitable, but caution that the party must carefully navigate these transitions to maintain alliance harmony.

With the elections approaching, BJP's moves in Andhra Pradesh are being closely watched. Whether the party emerges as a stronger force or faces resistance within the alliance remains to be seen.

GBS claims...

Continued from Page 1

The rising number of GBS cases in Andhra Pradesh has triggered concern, as the syndrome, which typically affects one in every 1,00,000 individuals, is seeing an unusual surge. On February 11 alone, seven cases were reported at GGH, with patients admitted from Eluru, Prakasam, and Palnadu districts. At present, 17 patients are receiving treatment for GBS in government hospitals across the state, with some requiring ventilator support.

While GBS is not contagious, its increasing incidence is worrying. The syndrome is often triggered by infections and can lead to muscle weakness or paralysis. Timely diagnosis and treatment are crucial to preventing severe complications, particularly as the condition can spread through contaminated water and food. Alarmingly, GBS, traditionally seen in adults, is now affecting children and infants.

Though GBS is not usually fatal, delayed diagnosis and treatment can result in serious consequences. Symptoms include weakness in the legs and arms, tingling sensations, and difficulty in walking or climbing stairs. Some patients may also experience facial weakness, slurred speech, and difficulty in swallowing. In severe cases, breathing difficulties may arise, necessitating ventilator support.

Death toll...

Continued from Page 1

Railways have announced a compensation of Rs 10 lakh each for the next of kin of those killed in the stampede.

Those seriously injured will get Rs 2.5 lakh and those with minor injuries 1 lakh, the railway said. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh condoled the loss of lives in the stampede.

"Deeply anguished to know about the loss of lives in a stampede at New Delhi railway station. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and pray for speedy recovery of those injured," Murmu said in a post on X.

The Prime Minister said, "Distressed by the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station.

My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured have a speedy recovery. The authorities are assisting all those who have been affected by this stampede."

Delhi Police have launched an investigation into the stampede.

"Our main target is to investigate the main cause which caused the stampede. We will collect all data of CCTV footage and announcements done during that time," a police source said.

Acting Delhi Chief Minister Atishi earlier told reporters that 15 people had been brought dead at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital of central Delhi

MP urges Panchayat Champions to work for rural development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) has said Panchayat Champions must work towards comprehensive village development, ensuring that central and state government schemes reach every household. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat can only be achieved through rural development. He also highlighted Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's goal of creating an entrepreneur in every household.

As part of the Viksit Panchayat initiative, MP Sivanath personally funded the training of 33 Panchayat Champions through the Kesineni Foundation in collaboration with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR). After completing their comprehensive village development training from February 10-16 at NIRD, Hyderabad, these 33 youth received certificates from MP Kesineni Sivanath and NIRDPR Director General G Narendra Kumar, during a meeting on Sunday.

During the session, the trained Panchayat Champions presented their development plans to NIRD officials and MP Kesineni Sivanath, outlining how they intend to transform their villages.



The MP stressed that ensuring self-employment opportunities for educated youth is crucial.

He urged the Panchayat Champions to create awareness among unemployed youth in villages about various Central government schemes. They should also encourage small-scale industries with minimal investment to help young entrepreneurs generate substantial profits. The champions have the responsibility of bridging the gap between gov-

ernment schemes and rural households, he added.

MP Kesineni Sivanath outlined key focus areas for village development that includes promoting education and employment opportunities for rural youth. Supporting initiatives that uplift women economically and socially. Strengthening healthcare services and ensuring better hygiene standards. Enhancing digital services for better panchayat administration.

Promoting eco-friendly agricultural practices and water conservation. Encouraging local industries and self-employment.

He stressed that all 295 villages under the Vijayawada parliamentary constituency should become a role model for the nation in terms of rural development. He also mentioned collaborations with NGOs to set up sanitary napkin manufacturing units in four constituencies, ensuring affordable distribution.

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Kesineni Sivanath emphasised that rural development should not depend solely on government funds. He is working to channel Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds for improving Primary Health Centers (PHCs) across the district.

Additionally, he has personally funded the modernisation of 194 government school playgrounds in NTR district, installing long jump pits and eight types of sports equipment for students.

Services on employee health cards remain inaccessible

Hospitals refuse cashless transaction for employees



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

KV Shiva Reddy, JAC chairman and State president the APNGO Association, said the employees, teachers and pensioners in Andhra Pradesh are facing difficulties in accessing cashless medical services under their designated health cards. Despite regular contributions from employees, referral hospitals are refusing treatment, citing non-payment from the government.

Speaking at the Andhra Pradesh Lab Technicians' State conference held at the NGO Home in Gandhinagar on Sunday, Shiva Reddy stated that employee issues remain unresolved, with most concerns pending since the previous government. He urged the ruling alliance to focus on addressing employees' grievances.

A Vidyasagar, State general secretary of the APNGO Association, said that lab technicians have not received a single promotion throughout their careers. He emphasised the need to establish a proper promotion channel to ensure at least one promotion during their service period. He also pointed out that, despite government orders for 100 per cent implementation of the revised pay structure, the execution remains stalled. He urged the State government to take immediate action.

Other pressing issues include the establishment of a Pay Revision Commission (PRC), the release of pending Dearness Allowance (DA), settlement of General Provident Fund (GPF) surrender leave payments, and clearing arrears related to the Andhra Pradesh Government Life Insurance (APGLI). Employees have been struggling due to delays in these payments, and Vidyasagar called upon the government to resolve these concerns. He also pointed out

that despite the PRC Committee's tenure nearing 18 months, the committee has yet to be appointed, and he demanded immediate action.

Lab Technicians Association leaders, including State president Venu and general secretary MS Murthy, presented various demands to the NGO JAC leadership, including regularisation of contract employees, ensuring they receive benefits similar to regular staff, including leave policies, creating a promotion channel by upgrading 159 posts to Grade 1 to allow career progression, and providing risk allowance, uniform allowance and laundry allowance, which lab technicians currently do not receive.

The JAC leaders assured that these issues, including those related to contract and outsourced employees, would be brought to the attention of the State government and the Health Minister.

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha has emphasised the need for a smooth and grand conduct of the Maha Sivaratri Brahmotsavams, ensuring that devotees face no difficulties. She said the Chief Minister's instructions were clear on facilitating a hassle-free experience for devotees attending various Brahmotsavams across the State.

Chairing a review meeting at the Sri Kalahasteswara Swamy temple, Minister Anitha, along with local MLA Bojjala Sudheer Reddy and officials, discussed the arrangements for Maha Sivaratri 2025. She stressed the need for meticulous planning and coordination among departments such as Revenue, Police, and Endowments to enhance the experience of devotees.

The Minister directed officials to ensure a smooth darshan experience, particularly by regulating VIP visits to

SIVARATRI BRAHMOTSAVAMS AT TIRUMALA

Ensure event is peaceful, grand: Anitha



avoid inconvenience to ordinary devotees. She instructed authorities to provide proper holding areas, parking,

toilets, stretchers, medical teams, and essential medication. Measures such as drone surveillance, CCTV cameras,

and a control room would be in place for effective crowd management.

MLA Sudheer Reddy and the temple's Executive Officer informed that during the 13-day festival, free laddus would be distributed to devotees in the queue, and water bottles would be provided. Over 400 CCTV cameras would be installed for security. Local residents will have the opportunity for free darshan on the 27th, while the Chief Minister is expected to visit on the 25th to offer ceremonial garlands to the deity.

Earlier, Minister Anita visited the temple and received blessings from the priests. The temple's Executive Officer, Bapireddy, honoured her with sacred garlands and prasada.

Tirumala Srivari Salakatta Theppotsavam from March 9-13

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The Srivari Salakatta Theppotsavam will be held in Tirumala from March 9-13.

The Utsava deities will bless devotees on the finely decked float in Swamy Pushkarini from 7 pm onwards every day.

On the first day of the festival, Sri Sita Lakshmana Anjaneya, along with Sri Ramachandra Murthy, will bless the devotees by taking three rounds. On the second day, on

March 10, Sri Krishna Swamy, along with Rukmini Devi, will take a pleasure trip on the float three times. On the third day, Sri Malayappa Swamy, along with Sri Devi and Bhudevi, will bless the devotees by taking three rounds in Pushkarini followed by five and seven rounds on the succeeding days, respectively.

Meanwhile, TTD has cancelled Sahasra Deepalankara Seva on March 9 and 10, Arjita Brahmotsavam and Sahasra Deepalankara Seva on March 11-13 owing to Teppotsavam.

Union Budget disappointment for AP: Baburao

Reject inducements and misinformation in the electoral process

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPM leader Ch Baburao has expressed strong disapproval of the Union Budget, labelling it a betrayal of the common people and a disappointment for Andhra Pradesh. During his visit to Aji Singh Nagar and other areas in Vijayawada, he engaged with local CPM leaders and the public, addressing various pressing issues.

Baburao listened to the concerns of local residents, particularly highlighting issues related to electricity tariffs and adjustment charges. He urged graduates to vote carefully in the upcoming Legislative Council elections and stressed the importance of ethical voting. Baburao outlined the budget's failures, stating it did not alleviate the financial burdens on common citizens, and was primarily designed to benefit corporate interests. He noted that it provided no tax relief for the 140 crore Indians and accused the government of ignoring Andhra Pradesh's specific needs, particularly regarding pending projects in Amaravati.

Baburao stressed the importance of rejecting inducements and misinformation in the electoral process. He advocated for the election of intellectual and meritorious leaders to the

Legislative Council, opposing the use of financial influence in politics. Baburao called upon voters, regardless of party affiliations, to reject candidates who rely on money power, insisting that the Council should represent teachers, graduates, unemployed youth, and workers. He criticised the practice of using the Legislative Council as a means for unemployed politicians to regain influence.

He pointed out that the budget failed to provide tax relief to common citizens and could have taxed top corporate firms instead. He criticised the ongoing high GST, fuel taxes, and increasing debt, which continue to burden ordinary citizens. Baburao lamented the lack of funds for Andhra Pradesh and unfulfilled promises made during the State's bifurcation. He noted that the budget seemed to prioritise politically significant states like Bihar, sidelining the needs of Andhra Pradesh.

Baburao called for a collective rejection of the economic policies of the BJP-led Central government. He emphasised the need to pressure the Centre for fair allocation of funds to Andhra Pradesh. Baburao encouraged citizens to be aware of the government's tactics and to vote wisely to protect their interests.

POCSO convictions send strong message

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A series of recent convictions under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has sent a strong message across the city: the exploitation and abuse of children will not be tolerated. Three prominent cases have resulted in significant prison sentences, marking a decisive shift towards stricter enforcement of the law and offering a glimmer of hope in the fight against these crimes.

Shankara Rao was sentenced to 20 years in prison and a Rs 10,000 fine for sexually assaulting a 12-year-old girl in the Anandapuram suburbs. In another case, Srinu, also known as Ghajni, received a 20-year sentence and a Rs 17,000 fine for raping a girl in Bheemili. The most publicised case involved YouTuber Chippada Bhargav, known online as Fun Bucket Bhargav. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison and a Rs 4 lakh fine for repeatedly raping a girl, resulting in her pregnancy.

These convictions reflect a nationwide trend of stricter enforcement of the POCSO Act. Special courts are expedit-

Special courts expediting investigations and delivering significantly harsher punishments



ing investigations and delivering significantly harsher punishments. Previously, a seven-year sentence was more common; now, accused individuals face substantially longer terms, including life imprisonment. Police officials report that this increased severity has instilled a sense of fear within the people.

According to police reports, victims are predominantly girls aged 12 to 18, often lacking

parental supervision, orphaned, or raised by a single parent. Many perpetrators exploit social media platforms to connect with these vulnerable girls, luring them under false pretences. Disturbingly, some perpetrators are known to the victims, including neighbours or even relatives.

Madhavi Ganapathi, a member of the District Vigilance and Monitoring Committee, confirmed the expedited pace

of trials. She emphasised the vulnerability of girls without parental support and noted that while some accused individuals display a lack of fear of the law and even resist arrest, the POCSO Act, with its expedited trials, is addressing these challenges. "Even attempted rape can result in life imprisonment," she stated, "and rape convictions carry mandatory life imprisonment."

"The courts are sending a clear message," Ganapathi continued. "These convictions demonstrate a commitment to protecting our children and ensuring that those who violate them face the full force of the law."

Experts emphasise the importance of awareness programmes and increased parental involvement to address the root causes of this disturbing trend. "We need to create a culture of zero tolerance for child sexual abuse," said a local child rights activist who wished to remain anonymous. "This requires a multi-pronged approach that includes stricter law enforcement, but also focuses on education, prevention, and support for survivors."

Creativity of students showcased at art exhibition



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Prominent Telugu writer Dr V Satyavati has praised the creativity of students and stressed the need to nurture this talent into excellence. The exhibition of paintings by Art Mate students, themed around the Telugu language, was held at the Art Mate office in Gurunanak Colony on Sunday, in celebration of International Mother Language Day and the centenary of Telugu artist Damerla Ramarao.

The exhibition was inaugurated by writer Satyavati, who congratulated the students for organising the first-ever art exhibition dedicated to the Telugu language. She expressed that such initiatives not only help preserve the Telugu language but

also instil a love for one's mother tongue among students.

A Sunil Kumar, Director of Art Mate, highlighted that the main purpose of the exhibition was to cultivate students' interest in art and to promote awareness of the culture. Special guest Pinnaeni Murali Krishna, from the Makineri Basavapunniah Science Center, commended the children's artwork displayed at the event. Senior artist Pavuluri Chidambaram showcased the exquisite illustrations inspired by Satyavati's poetry about the Telugu language. During the closing ceremony, R Kondal Rao, secretary of Amaravati Balotsavam, along with art enthusiasts M Madhusudana Rao, presented awards to the winners.

AP strengthens efforts to protect Olive Ridley turtles

State Govt, Coast Guard, and Marine authorities intensify measures amid alarming mortality rates

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In response to the alarming mortality rate of Olive Ridley sea turtles along the Andhra Pradesh coastline, the State government, in collaboration with the Coast Guard and the Marine and Forest departments, has launched intensified conservation measures. Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan has directed the Forest and Environment Department to investigate the causes of turtle deaths and formulate a comprehensive action plan for their protection.

According to Dr. Supraja

Dharini, chairperson of the TREE Foundation, a staggering 2,641 Olive Ridley turtles were found dead along the Andhra Pradesh coast between January 1 and January 30. This high mortality rate coincides with their peak nesting season, raising significant concerns about the survival of this vulnerable species.

The Olive Ridley turtles (Lepidochelys olivacea) are classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and depend on Andhra Pradesh's sandy shores for nesting between December

and April. Key nesting locations include beaches near Sullurpetta, Tirupati, Nellore, Prakasam, and Bapatla, as well as estuarine regions of the Krishna and Godavari rivers, Kakinada, Anakapalli, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam.

A primary factor contributing to the high mortality rate is entanglement in fishing nets. According to Raghu Prakash of the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), Olive Ridley turtles need to surface every 40-45 minutes to breathe. However, when trapped in fishing nets—partic-



ularly hazardous kona (gill nets), atuka, and teak nets—they often suffocate before they can be released.

The issue of turtle conservation gained global prominence with the introduction of Section 609 of Public Law 101-162 in the United States in

1996, which restricted shrimp imports from countries failing to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). India's initial attempts to implement TEDs using U.S.-imported technology in 1996 faced resistance due to reported catch losses of 15-30 per cent. However, a break-

through came in 1997 with the development of an indigenous TED by CIFT, which ensured full turtle protection while reducing shrimp catch losses to less than one per cent and fish losses to around three per cent.

With renewed governmental focus, increased awareness, and technological advancements, conservationists remain hopeful that the Olive Ridley turtle population can be safeguarded. Current efforts include the enforcement of stricter regulations on harmful fishing practices and the promotion of TED usage among local fishermen, ensuring a sustainable balance between marine biodiversity conservation and the fishing industry needs.

'Pursue Phule's ideals to root out social disparities'

PNS ■ NELLORE

Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya has urged people to follow the ideals of social reformer Jyotirao Phule and work towards eliminating social disparities.

On Sunday, the Governor unveiled the statues of Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule on the premises of Venkateswarulu Municipal High School. The statues were installed by the Bandaru Eswaramma Self-Help Group in coordination with the National BC Sangh.

Speaking on the occasion, Dattatreya emphasised the need to draw inspiration from Phule, who championed education as a means to eradicate poverty. He recalled Phule's efforts in promoting education for backward communities and lauded him for educating and empowering his wife, Savitribai Phule, as a social activist. "Unveiling their statues is a great honour for me," he remarked, adding that the nation's development depends



on women's progress across all sectors. He also highlighted the reforms introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the 'Viksit Bharat' initiative. Calling for unity among backward classes, he stressed

the need for reservations to be implemented in proportion to their population. He assured that the government would extend necessary support to women from backward communities.

Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana, former MP Mekapati Rajamohan Reddy, and State Wakf Board Chairman Abdul Aziz were among those present at the event.

Govt committed to completing Chintalapudi LI scheme: Min



PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K. Parthasarathi has reiterated the government's commitment to completing the Chintalapudi Lift Scheme to provide irrigation and drinking water to the region. The Minister, accompanied by MP Putta Mahesh Kumar, visited several villages in the Nuzvid constituency on Sunday.

The Minister and the MP inspected the NSP minor canal under the NSP Madicherla project at Katrenipadu village, which remains incomplete. Officials informed them that two farmers had raised objections to the digging work, leaving a 300-metre stretch of the canal undug.

As a result, hundreds of

acres in nine villages are deprived of NSP water, causing crops to wither. The Minister and the MP directed officials to submit a report on the reasons behind the stalled canal work and assured farmers that they would take up the matter with the government to resolve the issue.

Addressing a gathering, Minister Parthasarathi alleged that the maintenance of Sagar canals was neglected during the previous YSRC regime, leading to the growth of thorny bushes that obstructed water flow. He instructed officials to prepare estimates for the renovation of the Sagar canals and submit a report on their present condition.

"I will make every effort to renovate the minor irrigation canal in Katrenipadu mandal

and address the prevailing water crisis," he assured. Criticising the previous YSRC government for neglecting irrigation projects, he accused it of adopting faulty policies.

MP Putta Mahesh Kumar also blamed the previous YSRC regime for halting the Chintalapudi Lift Scheme works. "The Naidu-led government will ensure the project is completed at the earliest. Once finished, it will resolve the water crisis in the combined West Godavari and Krishna districts. All legal hurdles will be cleared, and the project will resume soon," he assured.

NSP Project Committee Chairman Kota Veerababu and other officials accompanied the Minister and the MP during the visit.

Waltair Division gears up for Maha Kumbh Mela rush

Special trains and extra coaches have been added

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The East Coast Railway's (ECOR) Waltair Division has unveiled a comprehensive plan to manage the expected surge of pilgrims travelling to the Maha Kumbh Mela. Special trains and extra coaches have been added to existing long-distance trains to increase capacity.

To ensure smooth travel, ticket checking has been intensified, and Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel have been deployed at key stations to manage crowds. Information is being disseminated through announcements, digital displays, and various media platforms. Extra ticket counters will also be open during peak hours.

Cleanliness, water availability, and other passenger amenities on special trains will be closely monitored. Security has been boosted with intensive ticket-checking drives and safety campaigns, including the deployment of special RPF and GRP squads. "Dedicated 24/7 war rooms have been established to monitor pilgrim movement, amenities, cleanliness, and passenger comfort," said Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Waltair, Manoj Kumar Sahoo.

5 killed in 2 separate road accidents

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Tragedy struck Andhra Pradesh this Sunday with two separate road accidents claiming the lives of five people, including a couple.

The first accident occurred near Nimalipuri village in Rajupalem mandal, Palnadu district. A car travelling from Hyderabad to Rajupalem village collided head-on with a lorry. The impact resulted in

The accidents occurred in the Palnadu and Tirupati districts, highlighting the dangers of road travel in the State

the instant death of all three occupants of the car: Sheik Najima, a woman, and her two sons, Nurullah and Habibullah. Rajupalem police have registered a case and the bodies have been

moved to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Narasaraopet for post-mortem examination.

In a separate incident, a couple lost their lives in a collision between their car

and a lorry near Dodlavaramitta village in Pellakuru mandal, Tirupati district. Gannu Madhav Krishna (48) and his wife, Sarita Sumangal (43), were en route to Tirupati from Hyderabad when the accident occurred. Pellakuru police cleared the road of the mangled vehicles to restore traffic flow. Further investigations are underway in both cases.

'Hare Krishna Movement' founder honoured with 'Vishwa Guru' title

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the Hare Krishna Movement (ISKCON), was bestowed with the title 'Vishwa Guru' (World Teacher) by the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad (ABAP) at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj the other day. This prestigious honour recognises Srila Prabhupada's remarkable contributions as an ambassador of Sanathana Dharma (Hinduism).

To celebrate this significant achievement, Madhu Pandit Dasa, Padma Shri awardee and chairman of the Hare Krishna Movement, presented two gold 'shatagopams' (sacred headgear) to the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swami Temple in Simhachalam on Sunday. The offerings were received by Assistant EO N. Ananda Rao in the presence of Chief Priest Srinivasachary. "Srila Prabhupada is the only Acharya in modern times who spread the glories of the Lord across the globe," said



Saty Gaura Chandra Dasa of the Hare Krishna Movement. "The title 'Vishwa Guru' is a fitting tribute to his unparalleled work." He emphasised Srila Prabhupada's role in introducing the worship of Lord Lakshmi Narasimha to a worldwide audience, noting that ISKCON devotees globally perform Arati and Sankirtan (devotional singing and dancing) to Lord Narasimha as part of their daily practice.

The event in Simhachalam saw the participation of numerous prominent Hare Krishna Movement leaders, including Satya Gaura Chandra Dasa, governing body commission (GBC) member and regional president for Andhra and Telangana; Vasudev Keshav Dasa, GBC member and vice-president of ISKCON Bengaluru; Yudhistira Krishna Dasa, vice-president of

Krindavan Chandrodaya Mandir; Jagan Mohan Krishna Dasa, president of HKM Ahmedabad; Amitasana Dasa, president of HKM Mumbai and GBC member; Vamshidhar Dasa, president of HKM Vijayawada; Jai Chaitanya Dasa, vice-president of ISKCON Bengaluru and GBC member; and Sri Niskinchana Bhaktha Dasa, president of HKM Visakhapatnam.

Minister Dola allays fears over GBS spread

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Swamy has assured the public that there is no need to worry about the outbreak of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), as all necessary preventive measures have been taken to contain it.

Responding to the death of a woman from Prakasam district at the Government General Hospital (GGH), the Minister stated that GBS is not a fatal disease and urged people not to panic. "All required medicines have been made available in hospitals for the treatment of GBS patients. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has reviewed the situation and instructed officials to take all necessary steps to prevent the spread



of GBS," he said. Reiterating the government's commitment to public health, the Minister emphasised that providing medical care to those in need remains a top priority for the coalition government. He advised people to remain cautious until the situation subsides, adding that GBS is not a new disease and can be effectively treated.

Min seeks support for handloom industry in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/DELHI

Minister Savitha met with Union Minister of Handlooms and Textiles Giriraj Singh in a courtesy visit on Sunday in Delhi. The meeting took place during the India Tex 2025 International Exhibition, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the audience at the Indian Pavilion on Sunday.

During their discussion, Minister Savitha urged the Central government to provide support for the development of the handloom industry in the State. She highlighted that due to the ineffectiveness of past administrations over the last five years, the handloom sector in Andhra Pradesh has faced significant challenges. The lack of market facilities for handloom products and the absence of encouragement from the previous government have left thousands of families in distress, she noted.

Expressing her concern, she mentioned that many weavers have resorted to extreme measures, unable to repay debts or

sell their products. She expressed optimism that after the 2024 elections, the new NDA government led by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu would bring better days for the handloom sector. Minister Savitha pointed out that a new textile policy was recently introduced and efforts are underway to reinstate the various schemes implemented by the Chandrababu government between 2014 and 2019. She stressed that the Chief Minister has decided to exempt handloom products from GST to support the weavers.

Savitha conveyed to Minister Giriraj Singh that if the Central government extends its support, it would offer greater financial security to the weavers. The Union Minister responded positively to Minister Savitha's requests for assistance in attracting investments in the handloom sector. Accompanying Minister Savitha were State Handloom and Textiles Department Commissioner Rekha Rani and other officials.

German delegation to visit natural farming fields in Guntur

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A German delegation is set to visit natural farming fields in Andhra Pradesh starting from February 17, as part of their study on the Andhra Pradesh Community-Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) initiative led by Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS), Government of Andhra Pradesh. The delegation will tour the State for five days covering Guntur, Krishna, Eluru and East Godavari districts.

During their visit, the team

will explore various natural farming models implemented under APCNF and engage with farmers to understand the benefits of natural farming. They will also interact with women's self-help groups (SHGs), who play a crucial role in promoting and implementing natural farming practices. Additionally, the delegation will hold discussions with farmer scientists and mentors and will assess home nutrition gardens that contribute to food security and sustainability.

15 held for gambling, Rs 2.2L seized



PNS ■ KADAPA

The police raided a poker gambling den and arrested 15 persons at Kottevandlapalli village in Peddamandyam mandal of Annamayya district on Sunday.

Sub-inspector PV Ramana said that acting on a tip-off, a police team led by him conducted the raid on the outskirts of the village. The police seized Rs 2.20 lakh in cash, 14 mobile phones, and 16 two-wheelers from the accused.

The arrested persons were taken to the Peddamandyam police station, and cases were registered against them under the AP Gaming Act.

Rajiv Gandhi was not Hindu as his father Feroz Jehangir Gandhi was Parsi: Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Only 32 per cent reservations for BCs if quota for Muslims is reduced: Sanjay

Rajiv Gandhi was not a Hindu as his father Feroz Jehangir Gandhi was a Parsi, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar said.

Sanjay was addressing the closing ceremony of the 'Swadeshi Mela' organised by the Ambedkar Stadium in Karimnagar on Sunday as the chief guest.

Sanjay said that Feroz's ancestors were of Muslim descent and

Rajiv Gandhi's wife Sonia is an Italian Catholic Christian. "How can Rahul Gandhi be a Hindu then," he asked.

Sanjay said that if 42 per cent reservations are given to BCs 10 per cent of that will go to Muslims. This shows that BCs have been dealt a serious injustice. He said the Congress is conspiring to reduce the quota for BCs and cheat them in the name of the caste census. "I heard the words spoken by

Congress leaders on TV. It is ironic that Congress leaders said that the father's caste applies to the son and that since Rajiv Gandhi was a Hindu his son Rahul Gandhi is also a Hindu. How did Rajiv Gandhi become a Hindu? Rajiv Gandhi's father Feroz Jehangir Gandhi was a Parsi. Their ancestors came to India from Persia and became Parsis. Feroz Jehangir Gandhi's religion applies to Rajiv Gandhi. So Rajiv Gandhi is not a Hindu.



Rajiv is a Parsi with Muslim roots. Rahul Gandhi's family in #10, Jan Path has no caste, religion, race, or country. But Modi is a pure Indian. Foreigners today bow down to Modi. Nowadays, every Indian abroad is proudly calling himself an Indian," he said.

Sanjay said that Hindus are being severely wronged in the name of the BC caste census. "Congress leaders are conspiring to reduce the population

percentage of BCs. They have included 10 per cent quota for Muslims in BCs. The Congress government said that they would give 42 per cent reservation to BCs. Out of this 10 per cent goes to Muslims. So BCs get only 32 per cent reservations. And how will reservations be given to 42 per cent BCs? The Congress government is doing more injustice than justice to BCs," he said.

Sanjay said the government

has decided to bring a law against religious conversions and love jihad like in Maharashtra. A similar law should be passed in Telangana too.

"If Muslims are included in the BCs list and if the Bill is sent to the Centre there is no question of the Centre approving that. There is no pretence in this. We will work for Hindu Dharma. If Muslims are removed from the BCs list and sent to the Centre we will definitely ensure that the list is approved," he said.

ACROSS THE STATES



Teacher jumps to death from Atal Setu

A 50-year-old school teacher, who was allegedly being troubled over a loan, jumped to his death from the Atal Setu, the country's longest sea bridge between south Mumbai and Navi Mumbai, an official said on Sunday. The man, a resident of Alibag in Maharashtra's Raigad district, died by suicide near Ulwe, close to the Nhava Sheva end of the sea bridge, on Friday morning, the official said. His family told the police that he had borrowed money through an instant loan app last month to clear some debt and was struggling to pay an outstanding of Rs 12,000. As he was unable to pay, recovery agents of the loan app company had been calling him over the past week and allegedly threatening to shame him, the official said. The recovery agents subsequently allegedly circulated the primary school teacher's morphed images among his contacts and in WhatsApp groups, his family told the police. According to the police, the man reached the Atal Setu in a car, alighted and plunged into the waters on Friday.



Union Minister Pradhan takes holy dip at Sangam

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam on Sunday during the ongoing Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, calling it "the grandest celebration of faith and devotion." After 144 years, this great confluence of the Maha Kumbh is happening, where an ocean of saints, sages, and devotees gather. It is the grandest celebration of faith and devotion," he said. "Maha Kumbh is not just a festival, but a living flame of India's thousands-of-years-old spiritual and cultural consciousness. It is a divine occasion when the entire world is witnessing the magnificence of Sanatan culture and the unique power of devotion," he added. On Saturday, Pradhan was in Varanasi for the inauguration of the third edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam, an education and cultural exchange organized by the Ministry of Education. aha Kumbh, the mega-religious event held every 12 years, is being celebrated in Prayagraj from January 13 and will continue for 45 days.



4 killed in road accident on Purvanchal Expressway

Four people, including a woman, were killed, and six others were injured after the tempo-traveller they were travelling in collided with a bus from behind on the Purvanchal Expressway in Barabanki district on Sunday, police said. The bus, coming from Chhattisgarh and the tempo-traveller, coming from Maharashtra, were both headed to Ayodhya. The deceased have been identified as Deepak, Sunil, Anusuiya and Jaishree, all aged between 35 and 55, and residents of Maharashtra, police said. Superintendent of Police (SP) Dinesh Kumar Singh said the police had to use a cutter to free those trapped in the tempo-traveller. Two of the injured individuals have been admitted to a trauma centre in Lucknow, while four others are undergoing treatment at the district hospital. The SP added that the bodies of the deceased have been sent for autopsy. The police suspect the accident occurred after the driver of the tempo-traveller dozed off, the officer said. The SP mentioned that an FIR has been registered in connection with the incident against the tempo-traveller driver, Viddhat Sihnede, who fled the scene after the accident.

HANDCUFFING DEPORTEES

PM Modi didn't tell his good friend about country's outrage: Congress

The Congress Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on a visit to the US recently, of not conveying to his "good friend" Donald Trump about the outrage over the shackling of Indians being deported from America. Two US military planes have landed in Amritsar this month so far, deporting Indians as part of the Trump administration's promised crackdown on illegal migration. Another deportation flight from the US is scheduled to arrive in Amritsar on Sunday night. Many deportees have claimed they were in shackles during the flight. Congress general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh referred to reports of shackling Indians deported from the United States and said, "It is abundantly clear that the PM did NOT convey to his good friend our country's outrage at the manner in which Indian citizens are being deported from the USA. Only



Ajit Pawar claims contractors submitting bills without work, warns of action

PNS ■ JALNA

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has alleged that many contractors are submitting bills and receiving money for development works without carrying them out, warning that such practices won't be tolerated. He was speaking on Saturday at a programme in Partur in Jalna district where ex-MLA and Congress leader Suresh Jethliya joined his Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The deputy CM rued that the quality of development work remains "substandard" despite substantial government expenditure, and vowed to not let contractors join his party. "Bills are being submitted and money is withdrawn without doing work. Don't come to my party (NCP)," said Pawar, who is also the state's finance minister. He also urged government officials to do their job sincerely.

What led to Delhi stampede?

Passengers got confused between 'Prayagraj Express, Prayagraj Special': Officials



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The deadly stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station last evening happened as passengers got confused between 'Prayagraj Express and Prayagraj Special', and rushed to change their platform after an announcement, officials said on Sunday. Sources in the police department said that according to their preliminary investigation, the confusion happened because of the announcement of the trains having same initial name 'Prayagraj'. The Railway Ministry said the announcement for the

arrival of the 'Prayagraj Special' at platform number 12 made passengers waiting for 'Prayagraj Express' at platform number 14 jittery and they rushed to platform number 12, leading to the stampede and the tragic death of 18 people. Railway officials said these two were different trains but had somewhat similar names, and people couldn't make out the difference. Worried that they might miss the train, a huge influx of people invaded the stairs causing the stampede. "There is an unprecedented rush due to the Maha Kumbh. Many special trains have been

operating for the past several days. Prayagraj Express was about to arrive at platform number 14 and passengers were waiting to board the train," Railway Board Executive Director (Information and Publicity) Dilip Kumar said. "There was some time left for the Prayagraj Express to come to the platform (14). Meanwhile, an announcement was made for another train -- Prayagraj Special -- to arrive at platform number 12. Before this one, one more special train had already left that platform," Kumar added. The passengers waiting on platform number 14 thinking

that their train would come at 12, started moving towards the escalators and stairs which led to the stampede. The ministry also released the list of disbursement of compensation amount according to which besides 18 dead, three were grievously injured and 27 received minor injuries. Out of the 27, 11 were given treatment and released from the hospital. "The officials of the Northern Railway are taking all efforts to manage this unprecedented crowd of passengers," Kumar said, expressing grief for those who lost their lives in the incident.

5 victims died due to traumatic asphyxia: Hospital

NEW DELHI: Five of the 18 victims of the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station died due to traumatic asphyxia, the RML Hospital said on Sunday. The LNJP handed over the bodies to the RML Hospital which conducted a post-mortem examination on them, it said. "No injured were brought to RML Hospital. We received five dead bodies from LNJP for postmortem. Four of them were females and one a male," a senior doctor said. At least 18 people were killed in the overnight stampede at the packed railway station. A senior railway official said on Sunday that the incident occurred after some passengers slipped and fell on others while coming down from a footover bridge. More than a dozen people were also injured in the stampede on Saturday night at the railway station which witnessed a surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj -- where the Maha Kumbh is underway -- on platform number 14 and 15.

Indian Ocean truly a global lifeline: MEA Jaishankar

Calls for efforts to fulfil development aspirations

PNS ■ MUSCAT

The Indian Ocean is veritably a global lifeline, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Sunday, as he asked the countries in the region to look out for each other, supplement their strengths and coordinate their policies to fulfil its development, connectivity, maritime and security aspirations. Jaishankar addressed the inaugural session of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference in Muscat on "Voyage to New Horizons of Maritime Partnership." "The Indian Ocean is veritably a global lifeline. Its production, consumption, contribution and connectivity are central to the manner in which the world runs today," he said. "Our voyage to new horizons is best done as a



coordinated flotilla of the Indian Ocean. We are understandably a diverse group in terms of history, geography, development, politics or culture. But what unites us is a common devotion to the well-being of the Indian Ocean region," he said. "In a volatile and uncertain era, we seek stability and security as the baseline. But beyond that, there are ambitions and aspirations that we strive to achieve. They will be

easier reached when we look out for each other, supplement our strengths and coordinate our policies," he added. Jaishankar said that currently there is considerable churn in world affairs. "At the two ends of the ocean, this churn is at its sharpest today. In the Middle East/West Asia, there is a serious conflict underway with the potential for further escalation and complication," Jaishankar said.

DSP killed in road accident in Odisha

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Two persons including a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) were killed when their car was hit by a speeding truck in Odisha's Jajpur district on Sunday, police said. The accident took place on National Highway 215 under Panikoili police limits on Sunday afternoon. The deceased police officer has been identified as Balam Nayak who was working as DSP in the Jajpur district police headquarters at Panikoili while the other deceased is his relative, identified as Purna Chandra Nayak. According to reports, the DSP along with his relative was returning to Panikoili from his native place at Ghatagan in Keonjhar district when a speeding truck hit their car near Kripalu Rice Mill.

'Rana visited North, South India before 26/11'

Extradition will help join the dots: Officials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Tahawwur Hussain Rana's possible extradition from the US in connection with the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks could provide important leads into his travels in parts of north and south India days before the carnage in 2008, officials have said. The 64-year-old Rana, a Pakistan-born Canadian national and a close associate of Pakistani-American terrorist and one of the main conspirators David Coleman Headley, is serving supervised detention at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles after completing a 14-year sentence in 2023. US President Donald Trump announced on Thursday that his administration has approved Rana's extradition to India, referring to him as "one of the plotters and very evil people of the world."

Once extradited, Rana would be the third person to be sent on trial in India in the case after Ajmal Kasab and Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal. In November 2012, Kasab, the lone surviving Pakistan terrorist, was hanged to death in Pune's Yerawada Jail. Arrested by the FBI on October 27, 2009, Rana was chargesheeted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2011 under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Section 6(2) of the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.

'Mizoram to introduce fresh Bill to protect jobseekers in India, abroad'

PNS ■ AIZAWL

To facilitate legal employment in the country and abroad, a fresh Bill will be introduced in the upcoming budget session of the Mizoram assembly commencing February 19, an official said on Sunday. The Mizoram Private Placement Agencies (Regulation) Bill, 2025, if passed, will empower private placement agencies to recruit and send youths, particularly domestic workers, outside the state and foreign countries legally, he said. Under this bill, the government will provide licenses to private agencies to execute such tasks, he said. The bill was conceived following legal issues faced by domestic workers from Mizoram in foreign countries last year, particularly in Syria,

UAE and other Gulf countries, the official said. Last year, the state government and generous individuals, in collaboration with the Centre rescued several Mizo women, engaged as housemaids, from Syria and other Arab countries after they faced legal problems. Although the Mizoram Private Placement Agencies (Regulation) Bill was previously enacted in 2015, the act empowered private placement agencies to provide jobs to any women as domestic workers beyond the state's boundaries within the country (India), the official said. The assembly secretariat, till Friday, received at least 740 starred questions and 88 unstarred questions to be answered by the ministers concerned during the upcoming budget session, the assembly official said.

Development initiatives benefited tribal communities: Murmu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu said on Sunday that the ongoing development initiatives have positively impacted tribal communities across the country. Speaking at the inauguration of Aadi Mahotsav 2025, she noted that multi-dimensional efforts are being made to ensure their progress. "The true development of our nation will be realized only when our tribal communities progress," Murmu said. President Murmu said the ongoing developmental initiatives have positively impacted tribal communities from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat and from Jammu and Kashmir to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Bhagwat emphasises unity of Hindu society, calls it responsible community

PNS ■ BARDHAMAN



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday emphasised the importance of uniting Hindu society, calling it the country's "responsible" community and stating that it views unity as an embodiment of diversity. Addressing an RSS programme at SAI Ground in Bardhaman, he said, "People often ask why we focus only on Hindu society, and my answer is that the country's responsible society is Hindu society." "Today is not a special event. Those unaware of the Sangh often wonder what it wants. If I had to answer, I would say the Sangh seeks to organise Hindu society because it is the responsible

society of the country," Bhagwat said. He also stressed the importance of accepting the world's diversity. "Bharatvarsha is not just a geographical entity; its size may expand or shrink over time. It is called Bharatvarsha when it embodies a unique nature. Bharat has its intrinsic character. Those who felt they could not live in harmony with this nature created

their own separate countries," he said. "Naturally, those who remained wanted Bharat's essence to endure. And what is this essence? It is much older than August 15, 1947. It is Hindu society, which flourishes by embracing the world's diversity. This nature accepts and moves forward with the world's diversities. There is one eternal truth that never changes," he added. He underscored that the foundation of Hindu society rests on its ability to embrace diversity, a principle encapsulated in the Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family). "We say 'unity in diversity,' but Hindu society understands that diversity itself is unity," the RSS chief added.

To ban or not to ban?

COUNTRIES DEBATE CURBS ON SMARTPHONE USAGE IN SCHOOLS



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At least 79 education systems globally have banned smartphones in schools as many countries debate their impact on learning and privacy of children. According to the UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) team, 60 education systems (or 30 per cent of the total registered education systems globally) had banned smartphone in schools by the end of 2023 through special laws or policies. By the end of 2024, 19 more joined the list, bringing the total to 79 (or 40 per cent). India is yet to come up with any specific law or policy on smartphone usage in educational institutions. Some bans have become

more stringent in the last year. For example, the Zhengzhou city of China further restricted the use of phones in primary and secondary schools, demanding that parents provide written consent that a phone was really needed for pedagogical reasons. In France, a "digital break" was suggested in lower secondary schools as an add-on to the already existing phone ban at other education levels. At the opposite end, Saudi Arabia reversed its ban due to the opposition by disability

groups for medical purposes. "This mapping (of educational systems) did not include

all sub-national jurisdictions in federal countries, although four were assessed in detail. For

example, in Australia, two of the nine territories (New South Wales and South Australia) have introduced bans, while in Spain, all but three of the 17 autonomous communities (Basque Country, La Rioja, Navarre) have introduced bans," a senior official of the GEM team told PTI. "In the United States, 20 out of its 50 states have regulations now in place, from the Phone-Free School Act in California to the phone ban for K-12 classrooms in Florida, the ban on students using portable

wireless device in Indiana and another ban in Ohio," the official added. In some of these new regulations in the United States, however, one approach is to issue guidelines, but leave it to schools to define the precise policies on usage in class. In Indiana, for example, school boards have to draft and publicly post specific policies for their schools saying whether students can access their phones during lunch and what consequences the students may face for using prohibited devices. In addition, sometimes there are exceptions, such as for learners who require learning accommodations in the Louisiana ban, and for anyone with a health condition that requires monitoring in Ohio.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Charting new course

Prime Minister Modi's recent US visit was an ice breaker and promising despite Trump's insistence on raising tariff walls

Since Donald Trump assumed the presidency of the United States, he has made a significant global impact. Through his "Make America Great Again" initiative, he has repositioned the US on the world stage, aiming to reshape the existing global order. By imposing tariff barriers and taking direct action when necessary, his policies have put several economies, including India's—which heavily depends on exports to the US—at risk. However, some relief appears to be on the horizon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the United States has been lauded as a significant milestone in strengthening Indo-US relations. Meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House, both leaders engaged in comprehensive discussions that culminated in agreements spanning trade, defence, energy and technology. Despite previous tensions over tariffs, with President Trump labeling India as a "tariff king," the summit showcased a collaborative spirit. Both nations committed to more than doubling bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. This ambitious goal is set to be achieved through a forthcoming bilateral trade agreement aimed at reducing duties and enhancing market access. Additionally, the US expressed interest in increasing investments in India's nuclear energy sector, signalling a deepening of economic ties.



A cornerstone of the discussions was defence cooperation. The US offered India the advanced F-35 stealth fighter jets, marking a significant step in military collaboration. This proposal aligns with the ten-year defence cooperation plan, emphasising the US's intent to bolster India's defence capabilities. Such initiatives

are indicative of a strategic partnership aimed at ensuring regional stability and countering emerging threats. Technological and Innovation Partnerships Prime Minister Modi's engagement extended beyond political leaders to influential figures in the technology sector. His meeting with SpaceX CEO Elon Musk underscored a mutual interest in space exploration and technological innovation. Discussions encompassed potential collaborations in space technology, mobility solutions and the introduction of services like Starlink satellite internet in India. These dialogues reflect a shared vision of leveraging technology for economic growth and societal benefit. The visit also highlighted India's nuanced position on global issues. While strengthening ties with the US, India maintains its strategic autonomy, especially concerning relations with Russia and its stance on conflicts like the Ukraine war. This balanced approach allows India to navigate complex international landscapes, ensuring its national interests are prioritised. Prime Minister Modi's visit to the United States has set a positive trajectory for Indo-US relations. The agreements and discussions held promise a future of enhanced cooperation across various sectors, reflecting a robust partnership poised to address both nations' strategic and economic objectives.

PICTALK



A pair of Asiatic lions inside their enclosure at Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal

The legacy of leadership: What truly endures



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Greatness in leadership is not merely about personal glory—it is about creating a legacy that endures across time, geographies and generations



Anyone who has attempted to perpetuate his memory in any institution or community has believed himself to be an institution builder. To be an institution builder, as the words themselves will show, one has to build a purpose, establish a process, gather resources, and pull them together in pursuit of an objective. This pursuit cannot be the pursuit of self-glorification. Usually, a successor tries to outdo his predecessor; this can be by upscaling, ignoring, or finding flaws in the predecessor's efforts. Sooner or later, this destroys everyone involved because everyone must necessarily end up with a successor. That successor, sooner or later, becomes a competitor to the predecessor. This may be an obvious truth, but not many people seem to have recognised it. Hence, if one is seeking glorification, perhaps the most important pursuit should be the search for a successive successor who is not only in sympathy with one's approach but will carry the mission forward. The great leaders of the world have recognised this instinctively, and the epithet 'Great' has come their way. Martin Luther was a good example, as was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Nelson Mandela could also be a good

illustration. The examples are many. In each case, the conclusion is the same. Each so-called great leader needed a succession of people generously following them who proclaimed their greatness from the treetops. This may be easy to propound but difficult to action. One reason for this is that it needs a succession of people after one's own life who would concur with the approach, and indeed have been beneficiaries of that person's influence. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has been widely celebrated for his theories of agitation against foreign rule. There is evidence of his having worked together in tandem, where the situation so demanded, with the rulers. This has since been noted and at times overlooked. There is a hypothesis which has done the rounds in certain quarters that the title of "Mahatma" was conferred upon him because of his request by the foreign rulers. Such observations are difficult to critically appraise decades or centuries later. However, one approach remains. Recognition of one's leadership and contributions is a complex process that has yet to be fully understood. One's greatness is therefore a matter of consen-

USUALLY, A SUCCESSOR TRIES TO OUTDO HIS PREDECESSOR; THIS CAN BE BY UPSCALING, IGNORING, OR FINDING FLAWS IN THE PREDECESSOR'S EFFORTS. SOONER OR LATER, THIS DESTROYS EVERYONE INVOLVED BECAUSE EVERYONE MUST NECESSARILY END UP WITH A SUCCESSOR

sus building which is always difficult in its fullness. The bottom line is there must be something enduring in the actions of an individual to receive kudos across communities generations and geographies. That something must include what is noble in human existence. The succeeding leaders may be helpful but they cannot determine the full range of perceptions. The long and short of it is that petty pursuits of petty objectives for limited periods rarely have given enduring recognition for one's greatness. Sooner or later, for most aspiring leaders, some process of a counterpoint emerges as other contenders for the spot of greatness arise. Very often, these people, as alternate leaders, are from a different vantage point of perception, and debate is generated. Few have claimed eminence for greatness without having survived the crucial test of times and acceptance across generations. History is a telltale testament as to how the pre-eminence of one's contribution or the significance of one's contribution can change with the changing cultures of the times. One may not be so well recognised in one's lifetime, but subse-

quent generations awoken to that greatness as per their vision and their own needs. The case of Birsa Munda is an interesting example. Not so long ago, he was one of the freedom fighters who was remembered in certain parts of India only by certain people. But times changed, and now he is being celebrated with the glory of a true visionary leader who fought for the independence. Times change, and so does the vision. However, if one thing remains constant, it is that few have attained leadership across generations and geographies without having a sound streak of spiritual vision. One may be celebrated for martial glories or administrative contributions, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, for loftiness beyond the constraints of time and space, some elevated spiritual insights valid across people and generations seem a common need. It is obvious that the subject matter of the greatness of leaders and what constitutes the same needs continuing depths of research, iteration and honest conviction. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

A reluctant pilgrim's awakening: Discovering faith at the Kumbh

What began as a journey of reluctant exploration turned into an experience that reshaped my understanding of faith, devotion and purpose

Triveni is where the three sacred rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, and the now-extinct mythical Sarasvati, merge. It is believed that bathing in the holy waters of Sangam, particularly during certain auspicious days, brings blessings. I am not too fond of visiting religious places. I am used to a certain level of comfort. I have, probably mistakenly, come to associate spirituality and religion with a minimalistic way of living. Standing in serpentine queues for a microsecond glimpse does not appeal to me.

I remember a visit to Tirupati during my railway probation with two other friends. A look at the painfully slow-moving long queue was enough for us to wait outside as the third friend went in to also pray on our behalf. I believe that my God resides within me. Thus, the idea of visiting the Kumbh was not even remotely in my thoughts. An article on the biggest religious and spiritual fair in the world made me realise that this was the Mahakumbh, an event that would repeat 144 years later. It was this novelty that I could not resist. My wife



decreed that we should also visit Varanasi. A premium tent was reserved in one of the luxury camps. We booked waitlisted train tickets without any hopes of confirmation. My younger brother working in the railways assured us to try to get us the seats. I was hoping he might not be able to help, till we boarded the train early in the morning, much apprehensive about the next three days. We had read and heard enough about the stampede and the long walks due to the barricades. The experience in Prayagraj was nothing like my apprehensions. The camp by the banks of the river Ganges, away from the crowded centre, was more of a luxury resort. The roads were crowded,

which resulted in traffic jams. But we managed to take a dip at the confluence and then visit the Akharas, the religious order of Sadhus, the monks. We did not have to walk long distances. The next day was slightly more chaotic. The cab for Varanasi arrived late and we had to take an e-rickshaw to reach the parking lot. The evening saw us jostling with the massive crowd, all walking towards the riverbank for the customary Ganga Aarti, a daily ritual performed at dusk to honour the sacred river. We even managed to brave the homogenous crowd the next day to pray at the Kashi Vishwanath temple. I realised that the two cities are more than a confluence of the rivers or a visit to the temple.

It is a Sangam of diverse people, united through a single objective. The majority are poor people, who are content in their devotion and belief in a supreme power. They have not seen Him, but have an unshakable belief that their God will not forsake them, come what may. It is this faith that sees them bear the drudgery of living and eking out a livelihood. Many from the upper strata of society do not have to struggle each day, but they also have this absolute faith. A few like me are curious and visit for the novelty. It was more than a different experience. There I was, moving in the vast sea of humanity, looking around me with awe. It dawned upon me that like the multitude, I too needed this visit. I learned that I must perform actions with the same single-minded devotion. This is the reason that I was born a human in the vast universe. I was transformed. I had found my goal.

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

EXTRADITION OF TAHAWWUR RANA

Madam — The agony of the horrific 26/11 terrorist attack still lingers in India's heart. Hundreds of innocent civilians lost their lives in this massacre. This dreadful chapter of terrorism saw the involvement of Tahawwur Rana, a Pakistani-origin US citizen and an aide of Lashkar-e-Taiba. Now, with the US administration approving Rana's extradition to India, a significant path toward justice has been paved. Rana's extradition is not just about punishing a criminal; it symbolises India's unwavering stance against terrorism and the growing global support for this cause.

This decision will not only expedite the judicial process but also bring a ray of hope to the victims' families, who have been waiting for justice for years. Although legal hurdles may arise in the extradition process, if it succeeds, it will send a strong message to terrorists that no matter where they hide, they cannot escape the clutches of justice. This diplomatic victory underscores India's firm resolve and international backing. Now is the time to bring Rana before the Indian judicial system and deliver justice to the innocent martyrs of 26/11.

R K Jain | Barwani

RANVEER SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The controversy around the "India's Got Latent" episode with YouTube content creator Ranveer Allahabadi making mockery of his parents too in the name of dark comedy depicts his actual senses and mindset on camera. Despite Ranveer being honoured with the National Digital Creators Award by the Prime Minister himself just last year, he didn't give a thought before speaking on camera, which will be telecasted on public platforms. It is sheerly surprising that his comedy flow can be so senseless that he could not even think about how he could be so vulgar while commenting on his parents. Now that he is deleting all the episodes already seen by the audience or presenting his public apology, it does-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

President's rule in Manipur



The Centre has imposed President's Rule in ethnic strife-torn Manipur after the ruling BJP's failure to have a consensus on the name of the successor to N Biren Singh. Primarily, the governance failure of the N Biren Singh government may be held responsible for the current situation of the state. But many geo-social factors have also played a big role in an increase in ethnic discord among various communities of the state. Demographic changes and shrinking of

their traditional areas due to the unchecked influx of Kukis from Myanmar over the decades have led to discontent in Meiteis.

Intelligence reports suggest that these illegal settlers are indulging in smuggling of drugs and weapons. N Biren Singh's government's tough action against the drug menace and illegal occupation of forest land in hilly districts, particularly Churachandpur, irked Kukis. On the other hand, his government's failure to implement the Manipur High Court's April 2023 direction to consider the request of Meiteis to include them in the ST list led to the loss of trust of his own Meitei community. Fierce opposition of tribal groups to the High Court's direction kept his govt on the back foot.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

n't make any sense. Every action taken by Mumbai police to probe him and the action by the National Commission of Women were the worthy punishments that Ranveer, aka Beer Biceps, must face. The action will message every such public figure to stop believing that not every one of their public comments is always right.

These public personalities hold a greater responsibility of representing the social values and aspirations in good sense. Millions of people follow them to learn something good and inspirational from them, not such a shit mentality. The dwindling following of Ranveer on social media platforms is welcoming. We all must not follow such a person who holds such shit senses about the people in his surroundings, especially the vulgarity about the parental relationship. Society shapes from the morals of a few leaders. If public figures fail to do their job in a manner they should, it is better to boycott such personalities holistically with adequate punishment to them. This will act as a lesson for other social media fig-

ures to be wary of well before speaking in public.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

BUMRAH'S ABSENCE HURTS INDIA

Madam — The absence of Jasprit Bumrah from the Champions Trophy matches is a shock and not in favour of the Indian team. He was a key bowler in Australia, and his absence will be felt very much. Bumrah is a crisis man, making fast bowling look effortless. He rises to the occasion and delivers exceptional spells across formats. He was overburdened in Australia and as a result found unfit now. The selectors, instead of using him in tandem with number one spinner Ashwin, neglect the latter and now pay a heavy price. Bumrah's importance to the team is undeniable, whenever in trouble. With both the star bowlers unavailable, the chances of reaching the Champions Trophy final appear rather bleak.

C K Subramaniam | Sanpada

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

RESTRAINT IS A DIVINE QUALITY

Many of us give in to fleeting desires, leading to personal degradation



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Swami Vivekananda was approached by a young Western woman wanting to marry him. He asked her reason. Then, he gave a very witty answer and excused himself. Similarly, a young and pretty woman approached a famous scientist. She wanted a child with his intelligence and her looks. He excused himself by stating that there is a possibility that the child may be born with his looks and her intelligence. We remember them because showing such restraint is very uncommon. Rather, it is common that people seek opportunities to cheat on their spouses; they make many efforts, never mind being offered on a platter. The result is punishment beginning with the degradation of the person. We have ten senses. There are five knowledge-gathering senses, which are eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue. Then, there are five working senses, which are speech, hands, legs, genital and anus. I will detail how and why restraint should be practiced. Beginning with the eyes, what do our eyes wish to see most? Something very beautiful. This is fine as long as it is something like a beautiful flower, lake or mountain. When it degrades like seeing nudity, it must be avoided. Unfortunately, the mind is very unhelpful in this regard; it pulls us down.

Tongue is another offending sense; it leans towards tastier foods, which may harm. How do you explain eating too much salt or sugar, which benefits little and harms plenty? What is the explanation for eating harmful meat preparations, except for their taste when plenty of choices are available in vegetarian dishes? Here again, the mind is the culprit. Additionally, material intelligence justifies. Restraint is considered foolish. What we do wish to listen to most is? Sorry, dirty jokes.



Then, people love to have friendships with those who will appreciate the moon for some pecuniary benefit. Even in songs, some people strangely prefer to hear sad songs, or which titillate. People do realise that habituated thus we condemn ourselves to the next life also.

Long Krishna warns, "The ear, the eye, the touch sense, the tongue and the nose go to the next body with the mind." (15.7) We are more restrained in the matter of the nose: foul smell repels. But some people eat stale foods; they are under the mode of darkness. (18.10) Skin is generally a friend of all; we like cool comforts in the summer and warm surroundings in the winter.

Turning to the working senses, speech is the worst offender of all. What do you think causes the maximum harm? It is very easy to guess; it is something spoken inappropriately or in anger.

What is the explanation for abusing when the reaction is bound to be severe? But people do not control themselves. Even the best of men have weak moments when they slip up. Lord Krishna has counselled, "One who is not agitated by others and who doesn't get agitated by others, he is dear to Me." (12.15) Genitals give the maximum trouble unless controlled from an early age.

It is so easy to abuse oneself, but it is so harmful. Restraint is required, which is why 'brahmacharya' (celibacy) is highly recommended. God has allowed sex enjoyment, which is not against 'dharma' (within moral principles). (7.11) Why not be restrained and enjoy a superior feeling!

(The writer is a spiritual leader; views expressed are personal)

Addressing the crisis in Sikh leadership and religious identity



IQBAL SINGH LALPURA

The revival of Sikhism requires a collective effort from the Sikh community and its leaders to adapt, evolve and work together towards this holy mission

It is humanly impossible to accept the threat of extinction to Sikhism. Without delving into the glorious history and angelic principles of the Sikh religion, the present position is that after leaving Nankana Sahib, Punjab Sahib, and most religious places, including the capital of Khalsa Raj Lahore, Sikh leaders decided to join India without a written agreement from the then Congress leadership. This decision was made despite being part of the Congress leadership, which suffered millions of deaths and loss of property. The Sikhs believed Congress leaders only to be betrayed even after the amalgamation of Shiromani Akali Dal twice in 1948 and 1956 respectively. The majority of Sikh leadership was power-hungry and remained with Congress.

The remaining Sikh leaders started political agitations, from language to statehood, seeking more power for states under the Anandpur Sahib resolution and even advocating for an independent state of Khalistan, using Gurdwara funds and premises under various leaders. To gain within the Sikh community, they did not hesitate to blame and marginalise others. These agitations resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people and the loss of property and kept Punjab in a state of turmoil.

The Sikh leadership, known as Akali, eventually gained political power in Punjab from 1967 onwards many times and also became partners in the central government on multiple occasions. However, the loser in these agitations was peace and prosperity in Punjab, coupled with the loss of the image of Sikhs as angels of Guru Nanak, who were perceived as extremists, anti-national, or atankwadi or terrorist or extremist not only in India but abroad also. Every Sikh living in India suffers from this stigma without any fault of their own. Sikh Guru Sahiban organized preaching and propagation through Manjis, Masands, Nirmale, and Udasis. This took Sikhism to every part of the country and abroad. However, after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Britishers took over the control of Gurdwaras.

What to talk of propagation, they started converting Sikhs to Christianity beginning with Maharaja Duleep Singh. The 1920 to 1925 Gurdwara Sudhar lehar after sacrificing several Sikhs and loss of property gave chance to Sikh to manage their religious places and use donations for community causes. The research, education, and propagation of Sikhism should have been the agenda, but leaders decided differently and joined Congress for politics and freedom struggle. The preaching of the Sikh tenets to even Sikhs was ignored. Gurdwaras, the concept of a community meeting, service, and preaching centres were converted into mere places of ritual (banned by Guru Sahib) or platforms for leadership within the community or politics.

Instead of being places of learning, equality, meditation, and service. In the absence of any guidance or unity, the Gurdwaras at the village level also failed to promote the values of making villagers one family as preached by the Guru. The Gurdwara Parbandhak committees lacked plans to take the Sikh religion to every part of their respective states, other parts of the country, and the universe. They even divided Sikhs on political lines instead of uniting them as being Sikh brotherhoods.

While comparing one religion to another is impossible, one can learn from others. It is possible to criticise other religions, but one should also acknowledge the dedication of



SIKH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT AMONG THE BEST AND ARE NOT WIDESPREAD IN PUNJAB AND OTHER PLACES. WITHOUT STANDARD EDUCATION, SIKHS ARE EXCLUDED FROM BUREAUCRACY AND THE JUDICIARY, THE TWO ESSENTIAL PILLARS OF DEMOCRACY, EVEN IN PUNJAB, BUT TO TALK OF OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY

their preachers, their lifestyle, knowledge, discipline, and humility. In Sikhism, every religious service, from Pathi to Akhand Path, kirtan, Ardas, Dhadi, Katha, and even marriage and cremation ceremonies, has become a means of earning money. Having lost the golden principles of the Nirmal Path, Sikhs are now respected only for their free kitchen and service to society, which is ingrained in their blood and DNA by Gurus.

Sikh educational institutions are not among the best and are not widespread in Punjab and other places. Without standard education, Sikhs are excluded from bureaucracy and the judiciary, the two essential pillars of democracy, even in Punjab, but to talk of other parts of the country. Due to mismanagement and loss of reputation, even the Sikh community has lost interest in these educational institutions. A review of voting patterns from 1951-52 to 1972, and even 1977, reveals that the Sikh Akali party was unable to form a government in Punjab state or establish itself as a recognized power in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. However, after Operation Blue Star, Wood Rose, Black Thunder, and the killing of thousands of Sikhs, as well as the insult and discrimination they faced, Sikhs joined hands to defeat the Congress in Punjab decisively and bring the Akalis to power. Nevertheless, after giving them a chance under different leaders, the majority of Sikhs have distanced themselves from the Akalis, as they failed to heal the wounds inflicted by being part of politically motivated agitations or simply being Sikh. Due to their failure to resolve community issues and allegedly joining anti-Sikh forces in 2017, the Akalis are no longer the leading opposition party in Punjab.

The latest Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak committee elections

have made it clear that in a state with over 15 lakh Sikhs, only about 3.50 lakh voters registered, and about 2.46 lakh voted. The leadership, who were in charge under various governments, were wiped out due to disenchantment. Cases of misuse of Gurdwara funds for personal gain have been reported in social media and papers. In Punjab, the situation is no better, with a state having a 1.60 crore Sikh population, but only less than 30 lakh voters registered. The leadership of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee must explain what happened to the remaining 1.30 crore plus Sikhs. Have they converted to other religions, or are they not interested in Gurdwaras?

They have been in control of Gurdwara funds for over 100 years and now owe an explanation to the new generation. The state of affairs in Delhi, with regards to the Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, is concerning. A significant majority of Sikhs show little interest in becoming voters, which is alarming. These committees, which oversee historical Gurdwaras numbering around 500 in India, don't represent the thousands of other Gurdwaras across the country. Interestingly, the proposal for an All India Gurdwara Act, which was first introduced in 1956, was put on hold in 1998-99 by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

The reason behind this decision was the potential influence of Sikhs from outside Punjab on Gurdwara management, which could have threatened the control of Punjab's Sikh leadership. Moreover, those who left Punjab between 1982 onwards for greener pastures abroad, using political asylum as a pretext, have not contributed to spreading the Sikh religion. Instead, their primary objective has been to blame the Indian government and promote hatred. No person would be attracted to this kind of projection of a reli-

gion of Angels. Their contribution to Punjab's development is also not visible. The failure of Sikh religious and political leadership after 1839 AD, when Shere Punjab breathed his last, is responsible for the present situation. The intelligentsia and capable Sikhs have lost interest and are not even contacted or consulted. The situation demands that Sikh achievers come forward to save the religion from further damage. In this situation, the first effort should be to save the Sikh religion. This can be achieved by promoting education, distancing oneself from avoidable agitations, and improving relations with the government of India and the majority community to seek their help in reviving the Sikh religion before it is too late.

Furthermore, to achieve this, it is essential to establish a unified platform for Sikh organisations and institutions to collaborate and work towards a common goal. This platform should have Sikh brotherhood much away from politics. It can facilitate dialogue, coordination, and collective action among Sikh groups, enabling them to pool their resources, expertise, and influence to promote the Sikh religion and address the challenges facing the community.

Additionally, there is a need to revitalize Sikh educational institutions, promote standard education, and encourage Sikhs to participate in bureaucracy and the judiciary. This can help restore the community's reputation and rebuild trust in its institutions. Ultimately, the revival of Sikhism requires a collective effort from the Sikh community, its leaders, and organisations. It demands a willingness to adapt, evolve and work together towards this holy mission.

(The writer is Chairman - National Commission for Minorities Government of India; views are personal)

Cooperative commodity zones: A farmer-led revolution for economic empowerment

These zones present a groundbreaking solution, empowering farmers through cooperative-led trade, storage infrastructure and digital platforms

Indian farmers have long struggled with price instability, distress sales and financial insecurity. While the Minimum Support Price (MSP) provides some relief, its limitations and inefficiencies leave many farmers vulnerable. A transformative approach, the Cooperative Commodity Zone (CCZ) model, offers a more sustainable solution by enhancing price security, market access, and financial resilience. As global agriculture shifts toward sustainability and resilient supply chains, India must adopt a farmer-centric model that ensures fair earnings and economic empowerment.



BINOD ANAND

Cooperation), promoting cooperative strength, local enterprise, and self-sufficiency. This model enables farmers to become key stakeholders in commodity trade rather than remaining dependent on middlemen and speculative traders. India's commodity market structure currently favours traders and speculators, lim-

iting farmer participation. Mandis (APMC markets) are often controlled by cartels that suppress prices, preventing farmers from receiving fair compensation.

While platforms like NCDEX and MCX exist for commodity trading, they remain inaccessible to small farmers due to a lack of financial literacy and a proper warehouse receipt system. This forces many into distress sales at low prices, exacerbating their vulnerability.

International institutions such as the World Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) have criticised India's MSP system as an economic distortion. Their market-driven recommendations benefit large

agribusiness corporations while ignoring India's agrarian realities, such as fragmented landholdings, inadequate storage, and climate uncertainties. The MSP debate, shaped by these institutions, serves multinational trading firms rather than Indian farmers. The CCZ model offers a paradigm shift toward farmer-led economic hubs.

These zones integrate cooperatives, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), storage units, processing centres, and digital platforms to ensure stable prices, fair trade, and better incomes. Instead of relying solely on MSP, CCZs provide an "MSP Plus" model where farmers receive either MSP or a higher market-driven price. CCZs establish



cooperative-led procurement and storage facilities, allowing farmers to sell at optimal prices. By participating in commodity trading through cooperatives, farmers can hedge risks and benefit from price appreciation. Digital platforms and cooperative aggregation enable direct trading on national and global markets, reducing

reliance on intermediaries. Storage infrastructure within CCZs stabilises prices and minimises post-harvest losses. Farmers can avoid immediate distress sales through cooperative warehouses and cold storage facilities. Integrating value addition and processing centres ensures that raw produce is transformed into higher-value products, increasing farmer profitability.

Through e-commerce and direct sales channels, CCZs create a transparent, farmer-centric market where farmers dictate prices. Technology plays a crucial role, with AI-based price forecasting, blockchain-enabled transparency and mobile trading platforms providing real-time pricing and secure transac-

tions. Financial literacy programs will equip farmers with knowledge of credit, crop insurance and hedging mechanisms. Successful global models highlight the potential of cooperative-driven commodity management.

The Netherlands, Canada, and India's Amul Dairy Model exemplify how cooperatives can drive agricultural prosperity. Extending this approach to grains, pulses and horticultural products can create a national network of farmer-owned enterprises. CCZs will enhance farmer earnings, reduce post-harvest losses and generate employment in storage, processing and marketing.

This system reduces reliance on government procurement,

empowering farmers to control their economic destinies. With the right policies and cooperative leadership, CCZs can make Indian agriculture self-sufficient, prosperous, and globally competitive. The time has come for farmers to transition from survival to prosperity. CCZs provide the roadmap for this transformation, countering misleading narratives from international financial institutions. The CCZ model is more than an idea—it is a movement poised to redefine India's agricultural landscape and place farmers at the center of economic progress.

(The writer is a member of the high-level MSP committee, Ministry of Agriculture; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS



BoM gets RBI nod to open GIFT City branch

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) on Sunday said it has received approval from the Reserve Bank of India to set up an International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) Banking Unit at GIFT City. The branch will function as Bank of Maharashtra's first international branch carrying out offshore banking operations from India. Speaking on the development, BoM MD & CEO Nidhu Saxena said, "This is a significant opportunity for our bank as we continue to expand our operations across geographies. The opening of IBU in GIFT City will be yet another milestone in the bank's growth story." This development will help expand international banking business and also enable the bank to provide specialised banking services to its customers, he added. Aligned with the government's vision of making India an international financial hub, the GIFT City, located in Gandhinagar, Gujarat is India's first IFSC, aimed at revolutionizing India's financial ecosystem by providing world-class banking services locally and reducing reliance on offshore financial hubs, BoM said in a statement.



Over 100 designer companies take part in ADW exhibition

More than 100 designer companies, Indian craft artists and students are displaying their creations at the Ahmedabad Design Week being held here, organisers said on Sunday. The three-day design exhibition that started on Friday provides a platform for collaboration, a display of multidisciplinary designs and technologies, and ideas for sustainable solutions, according to a statement. More than 50 industry leaders are participating in the event to share their ideas on evolving designs, creativity and sustainability, the statement said. Over 20 artisans from across India are also displaying traditional crafts such as Jamdani, Ajrakh, Bandhani and Brass Antique, bringing artistry and storytelling to life, it added. Around 5,000 people including students, industry professionals and academicians have attended the event so far. The event is being held at Karnavati University campus in Gandhinagar and the Hutheesing Visual Arts Centre in Ahmedabad, the statement said.



India-US TRUST to drive economic cooperation

India-US TRUST (Transforming Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology) will pave the way for economic and technological cooperation between the two countries, while focus on the IMEC framework will deepen collaboration in infrastructure and economic corridors, according to industry experts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump have agreed on the TRUST initiative, to emphasise on creating strong supply chains of critical minerals, advanced materials, and pharmaceuticals. As per a joint statement issued after the Trump-Modi meeting in Washington, both countries have decided to launch a recovery and processing initiative for strategic minerals such as lithium and rare earth. The two sides will also work together on economic corridors and connectivity infrastructure under the IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) and I2U2 frameworks. "TRUST initiative on critical minerals and advanced materials marks a significant step toward economic and technological cooperation. PM's focus on the IMEC and the I2U2 Group reflects a strategic push for global connectivity, fostering economic integration across regions," said Naveen Jindal, the President of apex body Indian of Indian Steel Association (ISA) and Chairman Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL).



India-US trade agreement has boosted biz confidence: Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The announcement to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement between India and the US has boosted business confidence in both countries, as it can help further strengthen economic ties by leveraging their competitive strengths, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced to more than double the two-way commerce to USD 500 billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025. "The Prime Minister has brought back with him an agreement or an understanding to enter into a trade deal by fall of this year. I think, it gives a lot of confidence and a lot of relief to every business person in the US and in India who

believe that together, we can truly transform world trade, together with our competitive strengths in different areas, we can truly work as two friends, as two partners for progress and prosperity," Goyal said. Normally in a free trade agreement, two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. Besides, they also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments. During the first term of US President Donald Trump, the two countries had discussed a mini-trade deal, but it was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of such pacts. The commerce minister also said that India is expanding and forging new partnerships across the world with new trade agreements with the developed world including with Australia, the UAE, and EFTA bloc.

PM hopeful of achieving Rs 9 lakh-cr textile exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said he is optimistic that the textile sector will achieve the Rs 9 lakh crore annual exports target ahead of the 2030 deadline. This assumes significance in view of the General Budget 2025 announcement of a five-year Cotton Mission to increase cotton productivity especially of extra-long staple varieties. It allocated Rs 500 crore for the National Cotton Technology Mission. Speaking at the Bharat Tex 2025, Modi said, "We are currently ranked as the 6th largest exporter of textiles and apparel in the world, with textile exports valued at approximately Rs 3 lakh crore. Our goal moving forward is to triple this figure and achieve exports worth Rs 9 lakh crore." "This success is attributed to the hard work and consistent policies implemented over the past decade, which have led to doubling of foreign investment in the textile sector during this period. He said, "The way work is being done, I think we will achieve this target ahead of the 2030 deadline."



This success is attributed to the hard work and consistent policies implemented over the past decade, which have led to doubling of foreign investment in the textile sector during this period, he said. The sector is a major employment generator and contributes 11 per cent to the manufacturing sector. The Union Budget provided for an outlay of Rs 5,272 crore (in Budget Estimates) for the Ministry of Textiles for 2025-26. This is an increase of 19 per cent

over Budget Estimates of Rs 4,417.03 crore for the 2024-25 fiscal year. Bharat Tex, being held in New Delhi from February 14-17, is the textile industry's largest event comprising a mega expo spread across two venues and showcasing the entire textile ecosystem. The Bharat Tex is becoming a big global event, with more than 120 nations participating in it, Modi said. India is moving ahead in the direction of manufacturing high-

grade carbon fibre, he said. The prime minister also urged the banking sector to provide assistance to textile sector as one unit needs investment of just Rs 75 crore, and gives employment to 2,000 people. He noted that India's textiles and apparel exports registered 7 per cent growth last year. The country is working on creating a skilled talent pool for the textile sector, he noted. "Our focus is on technical textile sector; India making its presence felt in this space," he said.

FPIs withdraw Rs 21,272 cr from equities

Total outflow nears Rs 1 lakh cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The exodus of FPIs from the Indian equity markets continues as they pulled out Rs 21,272 crore in the first two weeks of this month, driven by global tensions after the US imposed tariffs on imports. This came following a net outflow of Rs 78,027 crore in January. With these, the total outflow by FPIs has reached Rs 99,299 crore -- near Rs 1 lakh crore -- in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. Going forward, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, believes that reversal of FPI strategy will happen when the dollar index moves down.

Global trends, FIIs trading activity to drive mkt trends

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets are expected to be driven by global trends and FPI trading activity this week after the conclusion of the earnings season, analysts said. Unabated foreign fund outflows, lower-than-expected quarterly earnings and global trade war fears hit market sentiments last week, where the benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty extended their downward trend to the eighth day in a row on Friday. "With the conclusion of the Q3 earnings season, now focus will be on global developments amid a turbulent market environment on account of Donald Trump's trade policies," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management,



Further cues. Additionally, speculation regarding US tariffs and their impact on global trade will remain a key factor to watch," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. The US FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) meeting minutes will also be in focus this week. Osho Krishan, Senior Analyst - Technical & Derivatives, Angel One Ltd, said, "In the absence of key domestic triggers, global developments are more likely to provide impetus in setting up our market tone." In the last eight trading days, the BSE benchmark tanked 2,644.6 points or 3.36 per cent, and the NSE Nifty slumped 810 points or 3.41 per cent.

Reliance, BP lose decade-old gas migration dispute



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a setback for Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Ltd and its partner BP Plc, the Delhi High Court has overturned an international arbitration tribunal's ruling that held the duo not responsible for paying any compensation for the gas they produced and sold, which had allegedly migrated from adjoining fields. Here is an explainer on the entire dispute: **FIELDS IN QUESTION:** Block or area KG-DWN-98/3, known as KG-D6, was awarded to a consortium of Reliance Industries Ltd and Niko Resources of Canada in the first bid round under New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) in 2000 by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. (BP bought a 30 per cent stake in the block more than a decade later). In the same round, block KG-DWN-98/2 (KG-D5) was awarded to Cairn Energy India Ltd, which was subsequently acquired by state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in two phases. An adjacent Godavari block was awarded to ONGC on nomination basis in 1997. Reliance started output from KG-D6 in 2009 while ONGC started output in January 2024. **DISPUTE:** The dispute began in July 2013 when, suspecting reservoir connectivity of its KG-D5 and G-4 blocks with that of Reliance's KG-D6, ONGC on July 22, 2023 wrote to the DGH stating a detailed geological & geophysical (G&G) interpretation of the available data on the Godavari and KG-DWN-98/2 blocks shows "evidence of lateral continuity of gas pools" into KG-D6. Simply put, it meant that subsurface gas pools of the Reliance block and the ONGC blocks appeared to be connected with possible migration of gas between the two. And since Reliance started producing first, it might have drained out ONGC's resources as well. ONGC requested the Directorate General of

Hydrocarbons (DGH), an upstream regulatory arm of the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, to provide it with G&G data, along with the production and well data of the contiguous area of block KG-DWN-98/3. **MEDIA LEAK:** The issue got leaked to the media and a small news item appeared in one of the dailies. As was the practice of any material event, this was presented to the board of ONGC in April 2014. The board asked the management to review the matter and report back. **ELECTION DAY PETITION:** As directed by the board, the company management reverted with a detailed report. The board asked the management to take legal steps to protect its interest. The options before ONGC was to either file an FIR for "theft" of its gas by Reliance or file a civil suit claiming damages. While a criminal case (FIR) was ruled out, the board felt a civil case could drag on for decades. A way out was to file a writ petition, which are promptly taken note of by the high courts. But a writ can be filed only against the state. Since DGH as a custodian of resources and supposed to have known of the connectivity issue when it approved detailed development plans of Reliance, ONGC decided to file the writ against the DGH and the ministry. Reliance was the third respondent. The petition was filed before the Delhi High Court a day before counting of the general elections on May 15, 2014. On September 10, 2014, the Delhi High Court disposed of ONGC's petition and directed the government to take a decision, after it received a report from an independent panel set up by ONGC and RIL. **EYEBROWS RAISED:** ONGC's petition did raise a few eyebrows then. The petroleum ministry ordered an enquiry into whether ONGC had consulted the ministry before filing the writ petition against its largest stakeholder the Union of India and upstream regulator DGH.

Japanese firms eye India as part of 'China Plus One' strategy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Post the Covid-19 pandemic, Japanese companies are eyeing India as a base as they adopt the 'China Plus One' strategy to diversify their manufacturing and supply chains to reduce dependence on China, experts from Deloitte said. The strategy involves establishing production facilities in alternative countries, with India emerging as a

significant beneficiary. "Post-Covid, Japanese companies have been actively exploring China-plus supply chain strategies, with India emerging as a key destination. While some companies returned to Japan, others are looking at India not just as a manufacturing hub, but as a gateway to high-growth markets like the Middle East and Africa," Deloitte Japan CEO Kenichi Kimura said. While the sheer scale of India's domestic market is a major draw, what makes India even more compelling is its well-established business and talent networks across these regions. "While Japanese businesses have yet to fully tap into this potential, we see India as not just a market, but a critical supply chain hub that can drive regional and global success," Kimura said.

HFCL eyes growth from overseas sales

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic telecom gear maker HFCL is betting big on growth from overseas sales and uptake of defence supplies as the company looks to become a Rs 10,000-crore revenue enterprise, a top company official said. Mahendra Nahata Managing Director HFCL during the company's recent investor call said the firm had an order book of Rs 10,000 crore as on December 31, 2024. "We are increasing our presence by appointing our own employees, distributors, and dealers in key global markets. Our goal is to achieve a substantial rise in export revenue from our optic fibre segment,

Sets Rs 10,000-cr revenue target



with a significant portion of revenue coming from international markets in the coming years. Additionally, we aim for a considerable share of our telecom segment revenue to be export-driven," Nahata said. He said the company's board has granted approval for a strategic expansion into Europe by way of setting up an optical fibre cable manufacturing facility in Poland.

"The European Commission on December 16, 2024 announced the imposition of definitive anti-dumping duty on all other Indian OFC manufacturers, reaffirming HFCL's exemption," he said. The company has posted revenue of around Rs 1,012 crore in the December 2024 quarter. Nahata said HFCL is likely to add a revenue of Rs 350-400 crore in the current quarter but may not achieve the target of Rs 2,000 crore set for the fiscal year due to shortfall in supply of some equipment on account of delay in customer readiness, trials, etc.

MP's new logistics policy will attract investors: Yadav



PNS ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government's new logistics policy will strengthen the state's economy and attract investors in the upcoming global investors summit (GIS), Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Sunday. Invest Madhya Pradesh - Global Investors Summit, is scheduled in Bhopal on February 24 and 25. Yadav listed various features of the Logistics Policy such as RFID, Green Card Scheme, green industrialisation etc. According to Yadav, the logistics policy novelties that were unveiled recently will improve supply efficiency by reducing logistics costs. "The policy's objective is to develop efficient, reliable, and strategically sustainable world-class logistics infrastructure so that logistics cost can be reduced to global standards by 2030," he stated.

Over 29,500 registered drones in India: Official

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 29,500 drones are registered in India, with the national capital having the maximum number at 4,882, according to official data. After the national capital, the highest numbers of registered drones are in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra at 4,588 and 4,132, respectively. The data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) updated till January 29

showed that there were 29,501 registered drones. Other states that have a high number of registered drones include Haryana (3,689), Karnataka (2,516), Telangana (1,928), Gujarat (1,338) and Kerala (1,318), as per the data shared by the civil aviation ministry with the Rajya Sabha this week. So far, the regulator has issued 96 Type Certificates to different Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) models or drones, and out of them, 65 models are for agri-



culture purpose. Each registered drone is issued a Unique Identification Number (UIN) from the Digital Sky Platform, which is operated by the DGCA. DGCA-authorized Remote Pilot Training Organisations (RPTOs) have issued 22,466 Remote Pilot Certificates (RPCs). Sharing the data as part of a written reply, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol also said the central government has taken various steps to

increase the usage of drone technology across various sectors. Among other measures, the ministry amended norms in August last year whereby the requirement of passport for the registration and de-registration/transfer of a drone was scrapped. Since then, voter ID, ration card or driving licence can be used for registration and de-registration or transfer of drones. There is a drone airspace map, which is divided into three zones -- green, yellow and red.

what's brewing?

Kartik Aaryan and Sreeleela set to ignite the screen in Anurag Basu's upcoming musical love story

After the massive success of *Bhoolaiya 3*, Bollywood star Kartik Aaryan is set to headline a new untitled film, where he will share screen space with rising sensation Sreeleela. Helmed by acclaimed director Anurag Basu, the film is a musical love saga that delves into themes of passion, longing and destiny.

The first glimpse of the film, released on Saturday, has already piqued audience interest. Kartik Aaryan sports a rugged look, with thick stubble, unkempt hair and a guitar in hand as he performs at a concert while smoking a cigarette. The intense imagery hints at a deeply emotional narrative, setting the stage for what promises to be a gripping love story.

Kartik Aaryan's on-screen chemistry with Sreeleela is expected to be electrifying, as the actress has already impressed audiences with her stellar performances. Their collaboration in this heart-wrenching love saga is set to be a major highlight of the film, making it one of the most anticipated releases of the year. With the film slated for a Diwali release, fans can look forward to an emotionally charged



cinematic experience. Presented by Gulshan Kumar & T-Series, the film boasts music composed by Pritam, ensuring a soul-stirring soundtrack that complements the film's

intense storyline. Producers Bhusan Kumar and Krishan Kumar are backing the project, adding to its grandeur and appeal. Amid his professional commitments, Kartik

recently took a moment to revisit his past. The actor visited DY Patil University, where he pursued engineering, and shared a heartfelt video on Instagram reflecting on his journey.

"From sitting on the backbench to standing on the stage for my convocation—what a journey it's been! DY Patil University, you gave me memories, dreams, and now, finally, my degree (only took over a decade!). Thank you, Vijay Patil Sir, my incredible teachers, and the young dreamers here for all the love—this feels like coming home," Kartik wrote.

In addition to this musical romance, Kartik has also secured a project with Dharma Productions, marking a significant turn in his career after his previous fallout with filmmaker Karan Johar. With multiple exciting projects in his lineup, the actor is set to continue his successful run in Bollywood. With an intriguing storyline, a dynamic lead pair, and Anurag Basu's visionary direction, Kartik Aaryan's upcoming film promises to be a cinematic spectacle that will leave audiences captivated this Diwali.

Elnaaz Norouzi lands first Hollywood lead role in *Hotel Tehran*

After making her Hollywood debut in *Kandahar* (2023) alongside Gerard Butler, actor Elnaaz Norouzi is now set to take on her first leading role in the West. The film, titled *Hotel Tehran*, will see her starring opposite Zachary Levi, with veteran actor Liam Neeson also playing a key role.

Confirming the news, Elnaaz shared her excitement about this milestone in her career. "The film is about an ex-CIA agent who travels to Tehran to uncover secrets about the governments. It's a big deal for me to play the lead opposite Zachary Levi, and having my childhood favorite, Liam Neeson, in the film makes it even more special. It still hasn't fully sunk in," she said.

Reflecting on the filming experience, the 28-year-old expressed how much she enjoyed working on *Hotel Tehran*. "The director, producers and even Zachary have been amazing. It made me wonder— is Hollywood always like this, or was I just lucky? The experience was incredible, and the movie turned out even better than what we had envisioned," she shared.

The film is now in its final stages of production, with visual effects (VFX) work underway. Elnaaz revealed that *Hotel Tehran* is expected to release either later this year or in early 2026. Elnaaz also spoke about the bond she developed with her co-star Zachary Levi on set. "After shoot, we would get together and play poker. I had never played poker before, so I actually learned how to play from Zachary, who is a very skilled player," she revealed.

For Elnaaz, working with Liam Neeson is a surreal achievement. "As a child, I always dreamt of acting alongside Shah Rukh Khan, but when I watched Liam Neeson, I never imagined that one day I would play the female lead in a film that he is a part of. More than anything, that feels unreal to me," she said.

With *Hotel Tehran*, Elnaaz Norouzi is making significant strides in international cinema, proving that talent knows no boundaries. As she steps into her first Hollywood lead role, the excitement around her growing global career continues to build.



Mawra Hocane says 'no hard feelings' even if she's not part of *Sanam Teri Kasam* sequel

The re-release of *Sanam Teri Kasam* has been met with an outpouring of love, surpassing the admiration it received during its original run. The film's renewed success has left the cast and crew elated, reigniting conversations about a possible sequel.

In a recent interview, actress Mawra Hocane, who played the beloved character Saru, finally addressed the possibility of reprising her role in *Sanam Teri Kasam 2*. While she expressed her enthusiasm for being part of the sequel, she also maintained a gracious perspective. "If it's possible for me to be a part of it, I'd love to," Mawra shared in a candid conversation with Connect Cine. "But even if it isn't, there's no hard feelings."

Despite her desire to return, Mawra emphasized that she would support the project regardless of her involvement. She acknowledged the film's producers for their unwavering dedication and was particularly appreciative of producer Deepak Mukut, stating that he truly deserves the recognition the film is now receiving.

Meanwhile, in a separate interview with India Forums, filmmakers Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru revealed that *Sanam Teri Kasam* was always intended to have a second chapter. They shared that while writing the first film, they envisioned it as a two-part story, and the sequel has already been mapped out. With a clear narrative in place for Inder's (Harshvardhan Rane) journey ahead, the filmmakers are now gearing up to bring the next chapter to life. Fans of the original film are eagerly awaiting more details about the project, hoping to see their favorite characters return to the big screen.

The success of *Sanam Teri Kasam* upon re-release is a testament to its enduring impact. Whether Mawra Hocane reprises her role or not, the anticipation for the sequel is stronger than ever. With the filmmakers confirming a well-defined storyline for *Sanam Teri Kasam 2*, audiences can expect an emotionally charged continuation of the heart-wrenching love story that won hearts worldwide.

Ranveer Singh's *Dhurandhar* enters final schedule

Ranveer Singh is currently immersed in the final leg of shooting for his much-anticipated film, *Dhurandhar*, directed by Aditya Dhar. The espionage thriller, which delves into the history of the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), has been generating immense buzz among fans eager to see the actor-director duo collaborate for the first time. According to recent reports, the film's production, which began nearly a year ago, is now approaching its final stretch. The last leg of shooting is currently taking place in Mumbai, with the team setting up an elaborate action sequence in Andheri.

A source close to the production shared insights into the ongoing schedule, revealing that the final phase is heavily focused on adrenaline-pumping action. "The Mumbai schedule is primarily centered around high-octane action sequences. The production design team has meticulously recreated the backdrop for these intense scenes in a controlled environment in Andheri. Ranveer has been undergoing extensive preparation to execute these sequences with precision," the source stated. Ranveer Singh, known for his dedication to his roles, has been working tirelessly to perfect his action sequences for *Dhurandhar*. The film's Mumbai schedule is expected to wrap up by the end of February, marking the completion of principal photography.

Adding to the excitement, *Dhurandhar* will also feature seasoned actor Akshaye Khanna in pivotal scenes alongside Ranveer. Other members of the cast are expected to join in the coming days to complete their remaining portions. With *Dhurandhar*, Aditya Dhar, best

known for *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, is expected to bring his signature realism and intensity to the spy thriller genre. Given Ranveer Singh's history of delivering power-packed performances, expectations are high for his portrayal of a character entrenched in the world of espionage.

As the final touches are being put in place, fans are eagerly awaiting further updates on *Dhurandhar*, which promises to be a gripping cinematic experience.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



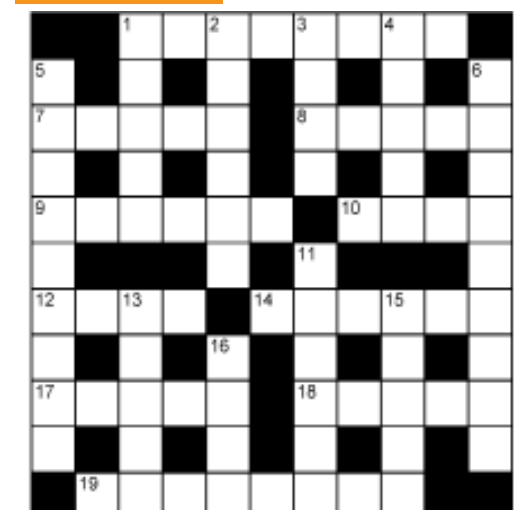
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

1	8	6	5	3	2			
			1					
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Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- 1 A water sport
- 2 After eighth
- 3 Worship
- 4 Rope loop
- 5 Not able to be seen
- 6 Read this daily
- 7 Hurt someone's feelings by being rude to them
- 8 Fewer
- 9 Command
- 10 This metal goes rusty
- 11 Cardboard box
- 12 A fruit
- 13 Change
- 14 A large serving spoon
- 15 Untidy shambles
- 16 Book name
- 17 Someone in jail

DOWN

- 1 Musical pieces for the voice
- 2 Breathe in
- 3 A ditch around a castle



How Thyagarajan sisters are spearheading saree revolution for all of India!



PNS|HYDERABAD

In a world where technology and tradition frequently appear to be at odds, Shobitam is bravely bridging the divide. This innovative approach, which was founded by the creative sister duo of Aparna and Ambika Thyagarajan, is transforming how Indian weaves are viewed, accessed and appreciated around the world. By using technology to democratise the handloom weave industry and make it more accessible, inexpensive and appealing to a new generation of lovers and connoisseurs, Indian textiles are preserving their rich cultural legacy. Their creative, digital-first strategy is not only empowering weavers and artisans but also changing the perception of Indian textiles, turning them from commodities into treasured works of art that cut beyond national lines!

The remarkable diversity of India is reflected in the symphony of colours, textures and patterns seen in Indian weaving. Every fabric, from the delicate sheen of silk to the earthy allure of cotton, conveys a story about the region, its inhabitants and their customs. Together, the elaborate patterns, the deft weaving and the meticulous attention to detail produce a genuinely one-of-a-kind and exquisite work of art. This may be seen from the exclusive interview! "As the founder, I saw early on that getting over the deeply rooted desire for touch-and-feel purchasing was the largest obstacle to selling sarees online. Shopping for sarees has been an engaging activity for years; patrons enjoy touching the cloth and chatting

with store owners. It took a calculated fusion of transparency, technology and trust to bring that experience online. Through our live trunk presentations, we've made investments in top-notch photography, thorough product descriptions and video demos that highlight each saree's texture, drape and exquisite weaves. Furthermore, we tell the weaver's story so that buyers can relate to the artistry of each work," says Aparna Thyagarajan, co-founder & CPO, Shobitam.

Their aim is to keep Indian traditional clothing firmly anchored in our culture while bringing it to the attention of the world. The sisters accomplish this by collaborating closely with weavers, making sure that each piece is real and coming up with creative designs that appeal to a wide range of cultural backgrounds. "People love our assortment of sarees. We export sarees throughout the world from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Indian textiles are becoming popular all around the world, but with distinctive regional variations that capture local fashion tastes," shares the founder.

They co-create sarees with their weavers rather than sourcing them. Each saree sets out on a journey that connects a worldwide audience with centuries-old workmanship. It all starts in India's weaving clusters, where 600+ artists work together to co-create designs and preserve and revive old skills. The sisters' eyes have been opened by working so closely with craftspeople; each weave carries generations of expertise, passion and talent.

Aparna goes on, "By incorporating sarees and

handwoven fabrics into regular clothing rather than only being worn on special occasions, we're redefining ethnic design. The saree is evolving; it is no longer only a celebratory garment but rather a deliberate decision that prioritises sustainability, quality and workmanship over rapid fashion. However, there are also practical difficulties—draping a saree can seem intimidating. With inventions like pre-stitched sarees and personalised blouse stitching, it is spearheading the saree revolution and making tradition simple. We are making sure that Indian weaves are not just remembered but also reinterpreted for the contemporary world as the global diaspora embraces conscious fashion!"

The sisters' goal is to make India's rich weaving legacy affordable and available around the world. They work together with craftspeople to revive traditional methods and introduce them to a worldwide audience, whether it's a Tanchoi, Patteda Anchu, Gomi Teni, or any other weave. They view the problem of striking a balance between preservation and business viability as an opportunity. Through education and storytelling, they generate demand for heritage textiles throughout the nation. By doing this, they not only help craftspeople but also spread India's heritage globally, one saree at a time!

For a long time, Vidya Balan has championed the saree as a symbol of strength and individuality. Let's have a little discussion about it! More than just a celebrity endorsement, Vidya Balan's connection to Shobitam celebrates the saree as a representation of self-expression, self-assurance and classic style. As someone who has continuously promoted handwoven sarees, Vidya personifies our ideals of sincerity and a profound respect for India's rich textile history. "If it's a Saree, it's a Shobitam," as Vidya states, reaffirms our dedication to democratising ethnic fashion on a worldwide scale. Her impact goes beyond fashion; she breaks prejudices, redefines traditional attire for contemporary women and starts discussions about adopting sarees in daily life. Through her voice, we can raise awareness of sustainable design, showcase the artistry of weavers and encourage more people worldwide to view sarees as a comfortable, empowering option rather than a piece of clothing for special occasions," notifies co-founder.

The co-founder, speaking with much greater fervour, firmly feels that the saree is a classic garment that adapts while maintaining its core qualities. The saree is more important than ever because of the growing awareness for sustainable, heritage-rich apparel, even if Gen Z and millennials tend toward minimalism and fast fashion. By providing pre-draped sarees, the sisters are preserving the future of sarees by making them more accessible to younger generations—basically, reducing the time required to drape a saree to only one minute! They have taken advantage of this opportunity by purchasing by Isadora.com, the market leader in

ready-to-wear sarees, which offers pre-stitched sarees in a variety of regional draperies, including Bengali, Coorgi, Mekhla Chador and Nauvari.

"The saree is more than just six yards of fabric; it is a weaving of history, grace and strength. As a representation of "Shakti," it symbolises heritage, identity and empowerment. The saree is seeing a comeback as a result of India's incredible growth in the past ten years. Women all throughout the world are taking it back as a sign of their cultural pride, self-assurance and grace. Just take a look at the thousands of people who proudly don sarees to greet Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he travels abroad—it's a revolution—a saree revolution! The saree is not only still in style today; it is unstoppable. Ultimately, power dressing is more than just wearing suits!"

They think they are spearheading the saree revolution for all of India because they are integrating innovation with tradition, making the saree not just relevant but unstoppable. Because tradition has no boundaries, only admirers, Shobitam is ultimately fiercely local at heart while having a global reach.



VIDYA'S IMPACT GOES BEYOND FASHION; SHE BREAKS PREJUDICES, REDEFINES TRADITIONAL ATTIRE FOR CONTEMPORARY WOMEN AND STARTS DISCUSSIONS ABOUT ADOPTING SAREES IN DAILY LIFE.

ASTRO TOURISM TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN SAUDI

The universe is magnanimous. It is an all-encompassing symphony of chaotic, incomprehensible forces—most of which remain unseen and unknown to humankind.

Starting January 25, four major planets—Venus, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars—were visible together in the evening sky, creating a spectacular for stargazers. As the celestial journey continues, the night sky will now showcase the increasingly rare phenomena, culminating in an exceptional event on February 28. On this night, six planets—Saturn, Mercury, Neptune, Venus, Uranus, Jupiter, and Mars—will align in a row, offering an unmissable opportunity for astronomy enthusiasts to witness this magnificent planetary line-up.

As fascinating as this thought is, for those living in the hustle and bustle of the city, the night sky often feels empty. Stars are few and far between and spotting a comet seems like a far-off dream. But if you're someone with a deep passion for the cosmos, yet find yourself staring up at a starless sky, do not be disheartened.

THERE IS A SIMPLE SOLUTION: ASTRO TOURISM

Simply put, astro tourism is the act of travelling to a destination solely to experience cosmic magic at its best; travellers can reconnect with nature and appreciate the beauty of the universe, all while cultivating a sense of calm and mindfulness. A destination that allows the chance for luxe stargazing experiences and more is Saudi. Here, you can choose from a selection of glamping experiences in the winter desert breeze, camp overnight in almond-shaped peaks, or even dine by the shore and under the stars this winter season.

Stargazing against the backdrop of Hegra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in AIUla!

Did you know that AIUla has recently been named the Middle East's first-ever International Dark Sky Park? DarkSky International, a global organization dedicated to combating light pollution in urban and rural regions, has granted Dark Sky Park accreditation to two locations in AIUla County—AIUla Manara and AIGHarameel Nature Reserve. AIUla's untouched and serene environment makes it one of the best places in the world to observe the night skies, with a multitude of stars visible to the naked eye and more viewable through telescopes.

The Hegra Night Tours offer an unparalleled opportunity to discover AIUla's UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hegra, under the night sky. Think scenic bicycle rides to explore AIUla's hidden gems, all while hearing stories of an erstwhile Nabataean civilization by Rawis (professional guides) under a starlit sky, miles away from any city.

To take a deeper dive into the AIUla night sky, you can also choose to stargaze at Gharameel, a tranquil and remote area in AIUla, where you will be guided by expert astronomers on a cosmic adventure. Enjoy Saudi hospital-

ity at its finest by the fireside with a traditional dinner under the sky. Part of the AIUla Skies Festival, this humbling stargazing adventure will surely shift your way of looking at the world. For those looking to unwind and indulge in luxury, the Celestial Villas at Habitas AIUla, one of the area's most luxe sustainable wellness resorts, are designed with telescopes and spacious areas for lounging, entertaining and enjoying the stunning views of vibrant sunsets against the backdrop of sandstone cliffs.

THE MILKY WAY IN SAUDI? ABSOLUTELY!

The historic Mount Majdah, located south of the Tabuk province in Saudi Arabia, offers pristine, clear views of the Milky Way Galaxy. Known for its unique rock formations adorned with ancient engravings, it is the perfect spot to take in the majestic galaxy that Earth calls home. To get there, you'll need a four-wheel-drive vehicle ideal for the adventurous ride.

To make the most out of your experience, you can choose

from a wide selection of other seasonal activities, including hiking, camping and sledding. While there is a list of multiple mountain experiences in the region, snow seekers should lace up their boots and venture to Jabal Al Lawz, which means "Almond Mountain" in Arabic. Measuring 2,549 meters, it's the tallest mountain in the Tabuk Province and the only place in Saudi where it snows almost every year—making it perfect for a winter hike. To get there, you can either drive down via one of the two routes from Tabuk or book a tour that will pick you up from your hotel in Tabuk and take you to the mountain. If hiking sounds like too much adventure for you, then you can enjoy the same views of the galaxy at AIUla's Gharameel.

ASTRONOMY TOURS AND MORE AT SAUDI'S RED SEA

The Saudi Red Sea is an unexplored luxury tourism destination on the west coast of Saudi. It houses the world's fourth-largest barrier reef system, pristine beaches, canyons, mountains and mangroves waiting to be explored. What's more is that the destination is one of the least light-polluted regions in the country, making it an ideal location for observing the night sky.

The Saudi Red Sea will soon become the largest Dark Skies Reservation in the world to protect the nocturnal environment. Luxury hospitality chains like The St. Regis and Nujma, a Ritz Carlton Reserve, are already implementing innovative lighting strategies and offering unique starlit experiences by the shore while also making conscious efforts to preserve the dark sky with minimal light pollution.

If you're looking to make the best of the Saudi Red Sea's dark sky, then book yourself a starlit full moon hike. During this tour, a local astronomer will guide you through the night sky while narrating stories of Bedouins and pilgrims who relied on the night sky to light their path through the desert. This soulful journey has a lot in store for history enthusiasts.

WINTER EXTRAVAGANZA UNDER RIYADH'S NIGHT SKY

Did you know that in the area around Riyadh, you can see the Little Bear constellation all year long? A lot is in store around this capital, especially if you are a Gemini, Pisces, or Sagittarian. Since the area falls under the Northern Hemisphere, the constellations appear slightly different, with the views also changing every season. In areas far from Riyadh, about 300 kilometers, where there is no light pollution, the stars can be seen even with the naked eye.

For those also looking for immersive cultural night experiences in the city, the winter season is the best time to visit!

So, if you're someone seeking something beyond the ordinary, Saudi opens the door to adventures that leave you wanting to discover every single secret that Saudi has to offer.



'Revitalising beauty: Traditional remedies meet contemporary innovation'

Ever felt like the skincare aisle is an overwhelming mix of science lab experiments and ancient beauty secrets? One side promises quick fixes with fancy ingredients you can't pronounce, while the other swears by age-old remedies that take forever to show results. But what if you didn't have to choose?

For centuries, Ayurveda has been a go-to for natural skincare—relying on herbs, oils, and plant extracts to heal and nourish the skin. And let's be honest, there's something comforting about using ingredients that have stood the test of time. But for the modern generation, waiting weeks (or months) for results isn't always practical. That's where modern skincare steps in, using active ingredients that speed up the process without stripping away nature's goodness.

Traditional skincare is like a well-balanced, home-cooked meal—nourishing, wholesome, and rich in benefits. Modern skincare, on the other hand, acts as the advanced technique that enhances

efficiency and delivers faster results. When combined, they create the ideal formula for achieving healthy, radiant skin.

More and more people are moving toward skincare that's effective yet safe—products that work with the skin, not against it. Harsh chemicals, unnecessary fillers and temporary fixes are losing their appeal. Instead, the focus is shifting toward natural ingredients, backed by research, that actually get the job done.

For instance, The Natural Wash, which values transparency, sustainability and authenticity, strives to bridge the gap between traditional skincare wisdom and modern-day convenience. The next time you select a skincare product, consider whether it offers the perfect balance of tradition and innovation. After all, in skincare—just like in life—harmony is key to lasting results.

(The author, Akshit Goel & Shivangi Goel, are the Co-Founders of The Natural Wash (TNW).)

Yashasvi Jaiswal set to miss Ranji semis

PTI ■ NAGPUR

It is unlikely that Mumbai will have an injured Yashasvi Jaiswal in their ranks, but the resilient defending champions are firm favourites against Vidarbha in the Ranji Trophy semifinal, beginning here on Monday.

It is understood that Jaiswal might travel to the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru for further assessment of his unspecified injury soon, as he has been named as a "non-travelling reserve" in India's Champions Trophy squad. But the possible absence of Jaiswal in no way reduces the firepower of Mumbai in a match that is the repeat of last year's final.

Mumbai have a host of stars in their line-up such as skipper Ajinkya Rahane, Suryakumar Yadav, Shivam Dube and Shardul Thakur who can alter the course of the game on their own. But more than the presence of some acclaimed and accomplished players, their determination makes the 42-time champions a team cut from different cloth.

On several occasions this season, Mumbai's top-order



malfunctioned but their lower-order batters like Thakur and Tanush Kotian have bailed them out with gritty efforts. Even in the quarterfinal against Haryana, they were tottering at 113 for seven before Shams Mulani and Kotian milked 183 runs for the eighth wicket to rescue Mumbai. Mumbai would hope that the big guns will return to run-making ways on the Nagpur pitch that often sides with

batters. While the stories of such late-order resistance are heart-warming, Mumbai would like a more polished effort from their top-order against Vidarbha, who are in red-hot form this season.

They don't have big names in their bowling line-up, but Harsh Dubey, Yash Thakur, Aditya Thakare and Nachiket Bhut have consistently struck for Vidarbha.

In fact, left-arm spinner Dubey is the highest wicket-taker this Ranji season with 59 victims in his bag.

Hence, Vidarbha will be eager to exploit that slightly wobbly nature of Mumbai top-order and put them under pressure early.

None of the Mumbai batters figure among the top 20 of the highest run-makers this season. Siddesh Lad (565 runs) is their top run-aggregator and he is

22nd on the run-maker's list. In contrast, Vidarbha's frontline has been in much better shape this season as Yash Rathod (728 runs) is the fourth-highest run-getter in the chart.

Karun Nair (591) and skipper Akshay Wadkar (588) too have chipped in with important runs. However, they would like some better outings from openers Atharva Taide and Dhruv Shorey.

Teams (from): Mumbai: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Ayush Mhatre, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Amogh Bhatkal, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal (injured), Siddesh Lad, Shivam Dube, Akash Anand (wk), Hardik Tamore (wk), Suryansh Shedde, Shardul Thakur, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Mohit Avasthi, Sylvester D'Souza, Royston Dias, Atharva Ankolekar, Harsh Tanna.

Vidarbha: Akshay Wadkar (c & wk), Atharva Taide, Aman Mokhadde, Yash Rathod, Harsh Dubey, Akshay Karnewar, Yash Kadam, Akshay Wakhare, Aditya Thakare, Darshan Nalkande, Nachiket Bhute, Siddesh Wath (wk), Yash Thakur, Danish Malewar, Parth Rekhade, Karun Nair, Dhruv Shorey.

10-man Real Madrid draws at Osasuna after red card

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Jude Bellingham's use of an English expletive to curse at the referee left Real Madrid a man down and unable to defend a lead as the La Liga leaders drew at Osasuna 1-1 on Saturday.

Kylian Mbappé put Madrid ahead in the 15th minute with his 11th goal in as many league games. But Madrid was outnumbered after Bellingham's red card for using an expletive while protesting the refereeing five minutes before halftime.

Osasuna pulled level after the referee awarded a penalty after a video review and booked Eduardo Camavinga for stomping the foot of Ante Budimir in the box. Budimir slotted the 58th-minute equalizer past Thibaut Courtois to unleash celebrations at El Sadar Stadium.

The draw in Pamplona put Madrid's league lead in jeopardy. While Atletico Madrid failed to take advantage of the slip and stayed one point behind the frontrunners, Barcelona can pull level with its top rival if it beats Rayo Vallecano on Monday.

Next up for Madrid is a home game against Manchester City on Wednesday when it will try to make good on its 3-2 win in their first meeting of the Champions League knockout rounds playoff.

'English translation error' In what seemed to be a stretch of linguistic analysis, coach Carlo Ancelotti tried to defend his player by claiming that referee José Luis Munuera made a translation error of Bellingham's use of an English expletive.

"Bellingham didn't do anything that deserved a sending off," Ancelotti said. "He said (expletive) off, not (expletive) you. I don't think that was meant to be offensive." Munuera wrote in his refereeing report that Bellingham told him "from just a few meters away, (expletive) you."

Bellingham said "I don't want to go into details of what was said" but insisted he was unfairly treated, saying the referee made a translation



error and that there was indeed a degree of difference between the expletive when combined with "off" or "you."

"It is clear that he made a mistake and there was a miscommunication," said the England midfielder, who got a two-game ban last season after receiving a red card for using an expletive in English protesting a ref's call.

More fuel for the fire Ancelotti was also shown a yellow card early after he complained excessively for what he thought was a handball by an Osasuna player in the host's area.

Following its loss at Espanyol, the powerhouse sent a scathing letter to Spain's soccer federation to decry what it considered "adulterated" refereeing that favored other teams. The league president responded by saying that the 36-time champion had "lost its mind."

The decisions by Munuera aggravated Madrid's sense of grievance regarding the refereeing in La Liga.

"Things have happened in the last three games that everyone has seen," Ancelotti said. "The VAR has reviewed plays in our area and not in the opponent's area. ... We just have to keep fighting. We played a good game today and we will try to do so again on Wednesday and in the next La Liga game."

Mbappé remains hot Mbappé had an up and down first few months while adapting to Madrid, but he has been

scoring at ease in recent weeks and has 17 league goals, second only to the 19 by Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski.

Mbappé had an opportunity to bag an injury-time winner but Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera blocked his shot from an angle.

Osasuna, which beat Barcelona 4-2 in September when the Catalan club was leading the league, moved into seventh place. Budimir's goal let the Croatia striker equal an Osasuna club record of 57 career goals in La Liga, a mark set by Sabino Anderson.

"It is always very special to enter the history of a club that is over 100 years old. I am very proud," Budimir said.

Atletico gladiators' fail to retake lead Atletico Madrid remained a point behind Madrid after it was also reduced to 10 men and needed a late goal from substitute Alexander Sorloth to draw at home with Celta Vigo 1-1.

Pablo Barrios hurt Atletico's chances when he saw a direct red card for a studs-first slide into the lower leg of Pablo Durán just seven minutes into the match. Borja Iglesias earned a penalty when fouled by Robin Le Normand in the area, sending substitute Laga Aspas to the spot to put Celta ahead in the 68th.

Sorloth salvaged a point for the hosts when the Norway striker won a long ball and rifled it home in the 81st.

LIV Tour commits to Adelaide tournament until 2031

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

LIV Golf has secured its foothold in Australia, with Adelaide retaining hosting rights for its tournament until 2031, despite increasing speculation of a reunification of the PGA and LIV tours and what that could mean for the sport's landscape.

Sunday's announcement signals LIV's ambitions to remain a prominent player in world golf despite increasing efforts to reunify the PGA and LIV Golf tours, which included PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan meeting with President Donald Trump last week.

"There's no place we'd rather be than right here in Adelaide," new LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil said ahead of Sunday's final round at The Grange Golf Club - the most successful stop in the fledgling golf league's short

history. Adelaide's hosting contract with LIV Golf had been due to end after its fourth event in 2026, but with around 100,000 fans attending in each of the past two years it prompted the South Australian state government to bid for an extension. Government officials also unveiled plans Sunday to shift the event from The Grange to a newly redeveloped city course designed by former LIV Golf chief Greg Norman.

Norman a central figure in establishing the breakthrough tour will oversee the redesign of the North Adelaide Golf Course, located in the city's central business district.

"As a golf course designer, you very seldom get the opportunity to be involved with a project downtown," he said. "North Adelaide Golf Club is basically a diamond in the rough and we're going to unpick it."

Jannik Sinner's three-month ban slammed by tennis pros

PTI ■ LONDON

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner accepting a three-month doping ban deal was slammed by his fellow tennis professionals on Saturday.

Sinner and the World Anti-Doping Agency settled on the suspension that means he can play again from May 5, will not lose his number one ranking, will not miss any Grand Slams, and will not lose titles or prize money he earned after testing positive for a banned anabolic steroid last March.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka wrote on X, "I don't believe in a clean sport anymore."

"Fairness in tennis does not exist," Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios said on X. "Obviously Sinner's team have done everything in their power to just go ahead and take a three

month ban, no titles lost, no prize money lost. Guilty or not? Sad day for tennis."

Medvedev, speaking after losing in the Open 13 semifinals in Marseille, said, "I hope everyone can discuss with WADA and defend themselves like Jannik Sinner from now on."

Former British number one Tim Henman told Sky Sport, "When I read the statement this morning it just seems a little bit too convenient."

"Obviously having just won the Australian Open, to miss three months of the tour and therefore to be eligible to play at Roland Garros, the timing couldn't have been any better for Sinner, but I still think it leaves a pretty sour taste for the sport."

The Professional Tennis Players Association, founded by Novak

Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil, also weighed in on X, posting a statement criticising the parties involved in the decision-making process: The ATP, WTA, Grand Slams, WADA and International Tennis Integrity Agency.

"The system is not a system. It's a club. Supposed case-by-case discretion is, in fact, merely cover for tailored deals, unfair treatment, and inconsistent rulings. It's not just the different results for different players. It's the lack of transparency. The lack of process. The lack of consistency. The lack of credibility in the alphabet soup of agencies charged with regulating our sports and athletes," the PTPA wrote.

It accused the agencies of unacceptable bias "for all athletes and shows a deep disrespect for every sport and its fans."

Champions Trophy: Arshdeep poised to start ahead of Harshit



PTI ■ DUBAI

Harshit Rana has been the flavour of the season as far as India's emerging crop of fast bowlers is concerned but one of head coach Gautam Gambhir's finds is unlikely to start in India's playing eleven in the Champions Trophy with Arshdeep Singh still considered way ahead in terms of talent and quality.

The Indian team management gave Harshit all three ODIs against England, and if one is absolutely fair to the burly 6-foot-2-inch tall Delhi speedster, he has not looked out of place. While Arshdeep enjoys a better economy rate of 5.17 compared to Harshit's 6.95 per over, it is the former's ability to bring the ball back into the right-handers during the Powerplay overs that will tilt the scales in his favour in the tournament starting February 19.

Arshdeep, who also has only nine ODIs since he made his debut in a short ODI series in New Zealand in 2022, will be ahead on most counts when one looks at the parameters that would be taken into account based on the conditions available at the Dubai International Stadium.

"Harshit has improved by leaps and bounds in terms of reducing his weight and has

become sharper in terms of speed. But if I had to choose one among the two as Mohammed Shami's partner, it has to be Arshdeep as he can swing the ball both ways and is a left-arm.

"I would be a trifle surprised if Harshit starts ahead of Arshdeep," former national selector Devang Gandhi, who has also seen Rana from close quarters as Delhi Ranji coach said.

India will start with a clash against Bangladesh on February 20 here. It is understood that Harshit started in all three games against England because the team management, currently helmed by Gautam Gambhir, wanted to check out if his protegee could be considered as Jasprit Bumrah's replacement, and also this was the only series where Shami's fitness could also have been tested in real terms.

Hence, Arshdeep was rested in the first two games and only got a chance when the think-tank decided to rest Shami, who had played back to back ODIs. Former India opener WV Raman, one of the most respected coaches in the country, feels experience will be a key factor which should go in favour of the Punjab pacer.

"Arshdeep, due to his relative experience and the left arm

being a different dimension, has an advantage. The Dubai track will be decent for the pacers," Raman observed.

He also raised a key point about playing multi-nation event compared to bilateral series.

"A bit more experience always helps in ICC events, which is a different ball game from bilaterals. In ICC event, you will play different opposition every day and accordingly an experienced bowler changes his plans," said Raman, who has also been India U-19 batting coach and head coach of the national women's team.

Gandhi, on his part, also pointed out the options Arshdeep brings to the table in various phases of the match. "Harshit hits deck and gets it to move a bit both ways after pitching along with those effective occasional heavy balls in the range of mid 140s. But when you have Arshdeep, he can swing the new ball and also use angles of the crease effectively when he comes round the wicket during death overs," he explained.

An NCA level two coach, who had watched the India U-19 team play in Dubai during the Asia Cup, had observed that there is at least five to six inches more bounce on offer at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

Aditi Ashok slips to tied 53 in Saudi Ladies International

PTI ■ RIYADH

Aditi Ashok played a disappointing round of three-over 75 and slipped to tied-53rd at the Saudi Ladies International here on Sunday. Aditi with rounds of 69-72-75 totalled even par 216 for three days. This was her first event of 2025 on the Ladies European Tour.

It was a tough day with two birdies, three bogeys and a double bogey in the 75 at the Par-72 Riyadh Golf Club.

The other three Indians, Pranavi Urs, Diksha Dagar and Tvesa Malik had missed the cut earlier on.

Thailand's Jeeno Thitikul secured her fifth Ladies European Tour (LET) title after storming to a four-stroke victory.

The Thai star, who is number four in the Women's World Golf Rankings, began the day with a three-shot lead.

A round of 69 (-3) on the final day to end the week with a score of 16-under-par was more than enough to ensure Thitikul began her 2025 season in the best way.



Korea's Somi Lee finished the week in second place in the Individual competition with a score of 12-under-par after she captained her Team to victory on Saturday.

England's Annabell Fuller recorded her best-ever finish on the LET with solo third place on 11-under-par. Four players finished in a share of fourth place with Japan's Chisato Iwai, Korea's

Ina Yoon, Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen, and Thailand's Ariya Jutanugarn all on 10-under-par.

One shot back, five players rounded out the top 10 with England's Charley Hull, Australia's Hira Naveed, China's Muni He, Austria's Emma Spitz, and Switzerland's Chiara Tamburlini on nine-under-par. In the LET Order of Merit,

England's Cara Gainer continued to lead the standings with 505.18 points to her name, Thailand's Thitikul is now in second place with 500 points.

The LET season has a two-week break before a trip to Australia with the first of three events - the Australian WPGA Championship - taking place from March 6-9 at Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club.

Batting depth gives Royal Challengers slight edge over Delhi Capitals

PTI ■ VADODARA

After starting from the blocks with contrasting wins, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Delhi Capitals (DC) will look to consolidate their position when they meet in WPL 2025 here on Monday.

Defending champions Royal Challengers brushed aside Gujarat Giants (GG) by six wickets in the opening game, while the Capitals had to go through a last-ball thriller before notching a win over Mumbai Indians (MI).

But the overall balance, especially in batting, and bowling gives RCB a slight edge over Delhi.

Their batting strength was on full display when the Smriti Mandhana-led side chased down a 200-plus target without much ado.

They have been bolstered by the addition of young talents like Raghavi Bist, Kanika Ahuja, who have seamlessly blended with seniors Mandhana, Ellyse Perry, Richa Ghosh and Danny Wyatt.

Both Kanika and Bist had played excellent roles too in the team's win over GG. However, they might just hope for a tidier effort from their bowlers, and Perry abstaining from bowling has reduced their efficiency a bit in that department.

The Aussie star is recovering from a hip injury that she sustained during the recent Women's Ashes, and will not be bowling at least in the initial stages of the WPL. So, RCB will need a heftier contribution from experienced Kim Garth and Georgia Wareham, as both

leaked plenty of runs against Gujarat.

They would also like to see youngsters VJ Joshiha and Prema Rawat too step up and support seasoned Renuka Singh.

It is imperative because Delhi has a fiery batting unit consisting of skipper Meg Lanning, Annabel Sutherland, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Nandini Kashyap, Sneha Deepthi, Jess Jonassen, Niki Prasad, Taniyaa Bhatia, Marchizanne Kapp, Radha Yadav, Titas Sadhu.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (Captain), Nuzhat Parveen, Joshiha Vj, Richa Ghosh, Danni Wyatt, Kanika Ahuja, Sabbineni Meghana, Ekta Bisht, Kim Garth, Shreyanka Patil, Ellyse Perry, Prema Rawat, Georgia Wareham, Raghvi Bist, Heather Graham, Jagravi Pawa, Renuka Singh, Charlie Dean.

However, the RCB batting line-up could offer them a vastly different challenge.

Squads Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (Captain), Alice Caspey, Sarah Bryce, Annabel Sutherland, Minnu Mani, Shafali Verma, Arundhati Reddy, N Charan, Shikha Pandey, Jemimah Rodrigues, Nandini Kashyap, Sneha Deepthi, Jess Jonassen, Niki Prasad, Taniyaa Bhatia, Marchizanne Kapp, Radha Yadav, Titas Sadhu.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (Captain), Nuzhat Parveen, Joshiha Vj, Richa Ghosh, Danni Wyatt, Kanika Ahuja, Sabbineni Meghana, Ekta Bisht, Kim Garth, Shreyanka Patil, Ellyse Perry, Prema Rawat, Georgia Wareham, Raghvi Bist, Heather Graham, Jagravi Pawa, Renuka Singh, Charlie Dean.



Rauf recovers from injury, set for CT opener

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf has recovered from his injury and will be available for his side's ICC Champions Trophy (CT) opening match against New Zealand on Wednesday, according to sources.

A source close to the Pakistan team confirmed on Sunday that Haris, who sustained a muscular strain in his lower chest wall during the recent tri-series tournament, has recovered and will play in the Champions Trophy opener in Karachi.

"Haris is okay now and the rest given to him after the first match of the Tri-Series has helped him recover well," the source said, adding that Pakistan has no fitness issues with any other player.

Haris, one of Pakistan's key bowlers with his express pace and ability to take wickets in the middle overs, has remained with the squad despite the selectors calling up uncapped Akif Javed as a backup for him.

Haris has a haul of 83 wickets in 46 one-day internationals and another 110 wickets in 79 T20 internationals as he has built a reputation as a specialist white-ball bowler.

Former Pakistan left-arm pacer Muhammad Amir had on Saturday expressed his concerns on a TV channel about Haris' fitness for the Champions Trophy. Amir claimed that if the pacer had suffered a side strain it would take five to six weeks to heal completely.

Krishnaveni's century-long journey in cinema comes to an end



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Chittajallu Krishnaveni, popularly known as Krishnaveni, passed away on Sunday morning at her residence in Film Nagar. She was 101 years old and is survived by her daughter, Anuradha Devi.

Born on December 24, 1924, in Pangidigudem village, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, Krishnaveni was the daughter of Dr. Yerramsetti Lakshmana Rao and Nagarajamma. She developed an early interest in acting, performing mythological roles like Prahlada and Dhruva in school plays. Her talent was recognized by renowned director C. Pullaiah, who cast her in *Sati Anasuya* (1936), a film made entirely with child artists. Notably, comedian Relangi, who was then a production manager, introduced her to Pullaiah. At just 10 years old, Krishnaveni began her cinematic journey.

Following *Sati Anasuya*, she returned to Rajahmundry and pursued theatre. She later acted in *Tukaram* (1937), but the film did not fare well. However, her role in *Kacha Devayani* (1938) brought her recognition. After appearing in *Mahananda*, she relocated to Madras, continuing her acting career. During this time, she married Mirzapuram Raja, who later produced Bhoja Kalidasu, in which she starred. Following her marriage, Krishnaveni was restricted to acting only in her home productions. She played lead roles in films such as *Jeevana Jyothi* (1940), which marked the debut of C. Narayana Rao, followed by *Daksha Yagnam* (1941) and *Bheeshma* (1944). Her performances in *Gollabhama* (1947) and *Lakshamma* (1950) earned her widespread acclaim.

Krishnaveni eventually took charge of Sobhanachala Studios, her husband's production house, while also raising her daughter. She bid farewell to acting and launched her own production house, MRA (Meka Rajyalakshmi Anuradha), named after her daughter. She's named as the first woman producer.

In a time when mythological and folklore films dominated, Krishnaveni took a bold step by producing *Manadesam*, the first Telugu film adapted from a Bengali novel (*Vipradas*). This film introduced legendary actor Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR) to the silver screen. Director L.V. Prasad, recommended by K.S. Prakash Rao, suggested NTR for the role of a police inspector. Krishnaveni offered NTR an advance of Rs 250, paving the way for his illustrious career as an actor and later as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

Manadesam also marked the debut of playback singer P. Leela and became a significant milestone in Telugu cinema. It provided a breakthrough for actors like S.V. Ranga Rao and playback singer Jikki,



establishing them in the industry.

Her next major production, *Lakshamma*, stirred controversy. Based on Tripuraneni Gopichand's story, the film starred Krishnaveni and C. Narayana Rao. Simultaneously, filmmaker Ghantasala Balaramayya produced *Sri Lakshamma Katha* with Akkineni Nageswara Rao and Anjali Devi. While Balaramayya's film flopped, Krishnaveni's version became a massive hit, leading to much debate within the industry. Her last film as an actress was *Sahasam* (1952), in which noted Congress politician and former Maharashtra Governor Kona Prabhakar Rao played the lead. She produced her final film, *Dampatyam* (1957), which introduced music director Ramesh Naidu.

Krishnaveni attempted several ambitious projects that were shelved mid-production, including *Kummari Molla* with Chittoor Nagaiah, *Lady Doctor* directed by B. Sridhar, and *Good Evening* directed by

Kamal Ghosh. She also initiated two Kannada films, *Rajasimha* and *Paleru*, which were discontinued after partial shooting. Despite her immense contributions as an actress, producer, and mentor to some of the greatest talents in Telugu cinema, Krishnaveni's contributions were largely unrecognised by the industry. For years, she was overlooked at major film industry events and was not honored by the government. Following widespread criticism of this oversight, she was finally awarded the Raghupathi Venkaiah Award in 2004.

Her daughter, Anuradha Devi, later followed in her footsteps, producing several successful films featuring Kannada legend Rajkumar, Akkineni Nageswara Rao, and other leading stars. Krishnaveni's passing marks the end of an era. Her impact on Telugu cinema, particularly her role in introducing NTR and nurturing countless artists, remains unparalleled.

CONDOLENCES POUR IN

AP CM

Chandrababu Naidu pays tribute to Krishnaveni

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed his condolences, stating that Krishnaveni played a crucial role in elevating Telugu cinema as an actress, producer, and studio owner. He also highlighted her recognition as a Raghupathi Venkaiah Award winner. "It is deeply saddening that she has passed away. May her soul rest in peace," said Naidu. He extended his sympathies to Krishnaveni's family members.

SHE INTRODUCED MANY TO THE INDUSTRY: PAWAN KALYAN

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister and actor Pawan Kalyan paid tribute to Krishnaveni, who passed away on Sunday. In his message, he recognized her as the first woman producer in the Telugu film industry and expressed his sorrow over her passing. "Krishnaveni was a versatile talent who showcased her abilities as an actress, playback singer, producer, and studio owner in the early days of Telugu cinema. She also made her mark by introducing NTR and playback singer Ghantasala to the industry," he said, extending his condolences to her family.

SHE MADE HER MARK IN TELUGU CINEMA: NARA LOKESH

AP IT and Education Minister Nara

Lokesh also paid tribute to Krishnaveni, acknowledging her contributions as a first-generation actress and producer in the Telugu film industry. In his message, he praised her for serving Telugu cinema as the owner of Sobhanachala Studios and for producing a variety of impactful films. He also highlighted her prestigious Raghupathi Venkaiah Award and other honors. He extended his condolences to her family members.

KRISHNAVENI WAS A VERSATILE TALENT: BALAKRISHNA

Actor and politician Nandamuri Balakrishna also mourned Krishnaveni's passing, calling her a versatile personality who left a lasting impact on Telugu cinema. "As an actress, producer and studio owner, she carved her own chapter in the industry. At a time when mythological and folklore films dominated, she produced *Manadesam*, a film that delivered a strong social message. She was honored with many awards, and we recently felicitated her at NTR's centenary celebrations," said Balakrishna. He also emphasized that she played a crucial role in introducing Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR) to Telugu cinema. Expressing his deep sorrow, he conveyed his heartfelt condolences to her family.

Amid dating rumours, Samantha shares Selena Gomez' lyrics—A hidden message?

The Pioneer had earlier reported that actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu is dating Raj Nidimoru, one-half of the renowned filmmaker duo Raj & DK. Over time, several reports have surfaced regarding their alleged relationship, keeping fans and media buzzing with speculation.

Samantha, an avid social media user, often shares glimpses of her personal and professional life. The *Citadel: Honey Bunny* actress dropped a series of breathtaking pictures from a photoshoot. Dressed in a white ensemble paired with a tasseled long skirt and a striking green belt, she looked effortlessly glamorous. However, it was her cryptic caption that truly stole the spotlight.

Amid the ongoing dating rumours, Samantha shared lyrics from Selena Gomez's latest song, *Scared of Loving You*, writing:

"If I lose my shit, promise not to laugh / If I throw a fit and get photographed / Would you take my side? Would you hold my hand? / If they sell a lie, don't let 'em send me back."

Accompanying the lyrics, she added hashtags #LyricsForLife and #SelenaGomez, hinting at a deep personal connection to the song's meaning.

While Samantha has not directly addressed the dating speculations, her post has left fans wondering if the lyrics reflect her current emotions. Neither she nor Raj Nidimoru have commented on the rumours, keeping the mystery alive.

For now, Samantha continues to focus on her professional commitments while engaging with fans through her candid and thought-provoking social media updates.



Chandoo Mondeti in talks for Suriya's next

Director Chandoo Mondeti is on cloud nine, with the success of his latest film *Thandel*, starring Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi. The director said that there were a few sensor problems when they sent the certificate. "They didn't accept some dialogues, so we had to mute it, they also asked for some visual cuts and because of the censor cuts, there's 30 percent of the emotion less in the film," said Chandoo.

The director announced one more film *Tenali Ramakrishna* with Naga Chaitanya. Basically, Chaitanya's grandfather ANR played Tenali Ramakrishna role in that old classic. "Naga Chaitanya put his efforts sincerely, so he can transform into the character of Tenali Ramakrishna. As a friend and director, I wanted him to do this kind of role," said Chandoo. Talking about his upcoming projects, he said that he is ready for *Karthikeya 3*. "I am also in talks with Suriya and I hope it is going to work out. In between there are talks for another film," said Chandoo.



Nag Ashwin to Direct Alia Bhatt Before Kalki 2898 AD Sequel

Director Nag Ashwin, who rose to prominence with just three films, is gearing up for the sequel to his 2024 sci-fi blockbuster *Kalki 2898 AD*. The film ended on a note that set up the next chapter, but production for the sequel has been delayed due to lead actor Prabhas' packed schedule.

Prabhas, who played the titular role in *Kalki 2898 AD*, is set to begin filming *Spirit* in May. Additionally, he will be occupied with Hanu Raghavapudi's *Fuaji* until mid-2026. As a result, the sequel's production has been pushed back. While waiting for Prabhas' availability, Nag Ashwin has reportedly pitched a new script to Bollywood star Alia Bhatt, who has given her nod to the project. Sources suggest that the filmmaker has nearly completed the final draft and may start production soon. If all goes as planned, this project will be completed before *Kalki 2898 AD*'s sequel goes on floors.



Vishwak Sen's market down

Actor Vishwak Sen, known as much for controversies as for his films, is currently facing a rough phase in his career. His latest film, *Laila*, has turned out to be a massive failure at the box office, further denting his market value. According to industry insiders, Vishwak's attitude has also been a topic of discussion, but this latest setback has reportedly come as a wake-up call for him.

Reports suggest that Vishwak has been charging around Rs 6 to Rs 8 crore per film. However, with *Laila* underperforming, his remuneration is expected to take a hit. Well, not just this, his previous two films, *Gangs of Godavari* and *Mechanic Rocky*, also failed to impress audiences. The actor himself admitted that he had high hopes for *Mechanic Rocky* but acknowledged certain mistakes, vowing not to repeat them. However, with *Laila*, it appears he has fallen into the same trap once again.

The director of *Laila*, in pre-release interviews, mentioned that several actors had rejected the script because they were unwilling to play a female character. "Vishwak should have thought twice before accepting this role and questioned why others rejected it. He jumped in without a second thought and now it has backfired," said an industry source.

With this string of failures, Vishwak Sen's market has significantly declined. Producers who invest in his films may now face challenges in marketing and selling them. "At this stage, Vishwak should focus more on choosing strong scripts and improving his performances rather than being caught up in controversies," added the source.

