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Published From: HYDERABAD DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN VIJAYAWADA



'Development projects will boost self-esteem of poor'

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I never attach myself to film results: Meenakshi CHAUDHARY

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

BRS MLC Kavitha, who chanted Bathukamma and Jagruthi earlier has now taken up the BC issue. Some people (Kavitha) remember things only after coming out from their 'power intoxication.' KCR expelled Eatala Rajender for claiming to be one of the founding fathers of the BRS. The BRS should give some posts to BCs

- Ponnambhakhar, Minister

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DON'T MISS...

Swift relief provided to 2 bonded workers

Swift action by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in Nagarkurnool has brought relief to two Chenchu community members who were being exploited as bonded labourers in Gumpnapally village under Achampet mandal. The victims were allegedly forced to work under a landlord for a paltry debt amount of Rs 15,000. Acting on oral instructions from the Executive Chairman of the ...

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'It takes two to tango'

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has emphasized that normalising relations with India requires mutual willingness. Speaking with journalists at the Foreign Office here on Thursday, Dar highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic efforts since the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government took office last year. When asked about Pakistan's relations with ...

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Rural poverty declines sharply

Rural poverty has declined significantly to 4.86 per cent in the fiscal ending March 2024 from 25.7 per cent in 2011-12 mainly driven by government support programmes, said a SBI research released on Friday. Urban poverty too is estimated at 4.09 per cent, down from 13.7 per cent in 2011-12. The sharp decline in rural poverty ratio is on account of higher consumption growth in lowest 0-5 per cent decile with significant ...

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India all out for 185 on day one of 5th Test

"Rohit Sharma" opted to rest" in the team's interest but the same old script unfolded on a new day for Indian batters as they surrendered meekly for a paltry 185 in the face of some hostile seam bowling from Australia on the opening day of the fifth and final Test here. Virat Kohli (17 off 69 balls), whose form and technical weaknesses are also under the scanner, was for the seventh time dismissed in the corridor of uncertainty in the tour, a problem that seems ...

-SPORTS



No regularisation of outsourced employees: CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy extended New Year greetings to the people of Telangana, highlighting the challenges his government has faced during financially turbulent times. Addressing officials and employees, the Chief Minister acknowl-

edged the difficulties inherited from the previous decade and emphasized his government's commitment to restoring governance and ensuring welfare for all.

On the issue of regularising outsourced and contract employees, particularly under schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Revanth

said that legal and policy constraints make this unfeasible. "Pushing for regularization without legal backing will escalate problems, not solve them," he added.

He said that one of the first measures taken by his administration was ensuring timely payment of salaries to

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Revanth stresses swift land acquisition for RRR

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy emphasized the need for speeding up land acquisition for the northern section of the Regional Ring Road (RRR) and ensuring generous compensation for farmers.

During a review meeting at the Secretariat on Friday, the Chief Minister directed Collectors serving as arbitrators to secure the highest possible compensation for landowners.

The CM reviewed key aspects of the RRR, National Highways, land acquisition and

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Rs 1,000 cr to upgrade village roads

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy announced a scheme to upgrade rural roads in Telangana at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore.

The funds will be released in phases, with Rs 150 crore disbursed every month starting January and ensuring that the full amount is utilised by June-end.

The decision was made during a review of the Roads and Buildings (R&B) and Panchayat Raj Departments at the Secretariat on Friday.

The Chief Minister emphasised the importance of building roads that

Continued on Page 2

'Medical seats can't remain vacant'

SC asks Centre to hold talks with stakeholders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Seats in medical courses cannot remain vacant, the Supreme Court on Friday said and asked the Centre to hold a meeting with the relevant stakeholders, including the states, and consider the recommendations of a committee appointed over the issue.

A bench of Justices B R Gai and K V Viswanathan was hearing the matter when it observed, "Seats also cannot go vacant."

The Centre had then proposed to appoint a committee, consisting of all the stakeholders including representatives of states and private medical colleges, under the chairmanship of the director general of health services to resolve the issue.

On Friday, the

Centre's counsel said the committee comprising the stakeholders was constituted and it had given its recommendations on the issue.

It would be appropriate if the Centre held a meeting with the stakeholders and came out with a concrete proposal, the counsel said.

The bench therefore directed for the meeting to be held by the Centre. The apex court said the needful be done within three months and posted the matter in April.

In April, 2023, the top court said the plea before it depicted a "very sorry picture" given 1,003 precious super speciality seats were going to waste as no admissions could take place for the seats.

"On the one hand, we find that there is always a shortage of super speciality doctors and on the other hand these precious seats remain unfilled," it said.



A bench of Justices B R Gai and K V Viswanathan was hearing the matter when it observed, "Seats also cannot go vacant"

STAMPEDE CASE

Allu Arjun gets regular bail

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A Nampally court on Friday granted regular bail to Tollywood actor Allu Arjun in the Sandhya Theatre stampede case.

The Nampally Criminal Court, which had reserved its orders on January 30, granted regular bail to the actor, who was on interim bail for four weeks given by the High Court.

The Nampally Court directed Allu Arjun to deposit two sureties of

Rs 50,000 each. The court also directed him to cooperate with the investigation and appear at the Chikkadpally Police Station every Sunday.

Allu Arjun's counsel Ashok Reddy said the court also asked him not to try to influence witnesses.

The police had opposed the bail petition of the actor while his lawyers contended that he couldn't be blamed for the incident.

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Rythu Bharosa to turn crucial issue in local body elections

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

During the 2023 Assembly elections, the 'Dharani Portal' became an item on the election agendas of some parties. Similarly, 'Rythu Bharosa' is definitely going to become an election agenda item during the local body elections.

The Congress is thinking of going for local body elections after depositing the Rythu Bharosa funds in the bank accounts of farmers. However, the BRS and the BJP are getting ready

to use the Rythu Bharosa scheme as their weapon. The BRS and the BJP are waiting for Rythu Bharosa guidelines, which will be finalised at Saturday's Cabinet meeting.

The BRS has already launched a scathing attack on the Congress government alleging that it is placing conditions on farmers for getting Rythu Bharosa funds only to reduce the number of beneficiaries although the government had made it clear that all farmers will get Rythu Bharosa for their 'cultivated lands'.

The BRS has already announced that it is going to launch a poster war

against the Congress government from Saturday onwards demanding that the government give Rythu Bharosa like the BRS admin.

The BRS, which also took applications from farmers when it introduced the Rythu Bandhu scheme, criticised the Congress government for seeking applications from farmers. The BRS termed the seeking of applications from farmers as 'begging'.

It is learnt that the BRS is going to use the Rythu Bharosa scheme as well as the Rs 2 lakh loan waiver schemes as their local body election weapon.

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Cong, BJP ignoring BCs, alleges Kavitha

Demands 42% quota in local polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Criticising the Congress and the BJP for ignoring Backward Classes (BCs), BRS leader Kavitha called for urgent implementation of the caste census report and to provide 42% reservations for BCs in local body polls. She warned of a public backlash if promises made to BCs are not fulfilled.

Kavitha was speaking at the BC Maha Sabha organised by Telangana Jagruthi at the Indira Park here on Friday to mark the 194th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule.

Addressing a massive gathering, Kavitha declared, "If even one of my statements is proven false, I will quit politics."

She accused successive Central Governments of betraying BCs for over seven decades, contrasting their failures with the commitment of regional leaders like KCR and the late NTR.

Kavitha highlighted the importance of the caste census, the installation of a Jyothiba Phule statue in the Assembly, and the full implementation of the Kamareddy BC Declaration.

The BRS leader

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FORMULA E RACE CASE

ACB summons KTR on Jan 6th

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) summoned BRS MLA KT Rama Rao (KTR) asking him to appear before it on January 6 in connection with an ongoing investigation.

The summons pertains to allegations regarding the Formula E Race case, with the ACB seeking KTR's cooperation in providing necessary clarifications. The agency has asked him to cooperate with the inquiry.

The ACB, on December 19, named KTR as the prime accused in an FIR alleging corruption, fund mismanagement and violations of

the Prevention of Corruption Act. Special CS Arvind Kumar and ex-Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) Chief Engineer BLN Reddy were also named in the FIR.

The case is about alleged unauthorised payments of Rs 45 crore to the race organisers, resulting in a Rs 8 crore RBI penalty on the Telangana government. ACB issues notices to three people in Formula-E race case. The ACB has issued notices to KTR to appear on January 6, Special CS Arvind Kumar on January 8, and BLN Reddy on January 10.



Ideas more important than investments: CBN

Asks rich Telugus to make 10 poor families rich

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu gave a call to Telugus to learn Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deep Technology.

The Chief Minister said that 'ideas' are more important than 'investments' and that every household should have one industrialist in the Telugu states. He said that everyone's aim should be to make India a "Zero

Poverty' nation. Addressing the World Telugu Federation Conference (WTFCC) at HICC on Friday, Chandrababu said that Prime Minister Modi prepared Vision-2047 for Viksit Bharat to make India numero uno across the world by 2047.

"Society gave us this status. These infrastructures have come in the form of Public-Private Partnership (P3). However, some people earned

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DAM ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA AND NEW COUNTIES IN AKSAI CHIN

India slams China, lodges strong protest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday said it has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over creation of two new counties in Hotan prefecture, asserting that such moves will not lend legitimacy to Beijing's "illegal and forcible" occupation in the region.

In a strong reaction, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said parts of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh and that the Chinese action will have no bearing on New Delhi's consistent position regarding its sovereignty.

China's announcement on establishing the two counties came days after Special Representatives of the two nations resumed boundary talks that was stalled for almost five



years. "We have seen the announcement pertaining to the establishment of two new counties in Hotan Prefecture of China. Parts of jurisdiction of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of

Ladakh," Jaiswal said. "We have never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation of Indian territory in this area," he said. "Creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's long-standing and consistent posi-

tion regarding our sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's illegal and forcible occupation of the same," Jaiswal added.

He further said: "We have lodged a solemn protest with the Chinese

side through diplomatic channels." The latest irritant in ties came weeks after India and China ended an over four-and-a-half-year border standoff and announced steps to reduce mistrust.

'Will take necessary measures to protect interests'

Days after China announced its plan to build a mega dam on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet, India on Friday said it will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect its interests.

In its first reaction to the proposed dam, New Delhi urged Beijing to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by

activities in upstream areas. "We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. There have been apprehensions that the dam will have adversely impact the ecological balance of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The Brahmaputra passes through these two states.

CM REVANTH TO HMWSSB

Draft 25-year plan to supply water to Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy asked the Hyderabad Water Board (HMWSSB) to draft a comprehensive plan to supply safe drinking water to the city's residents during the next 25 years. The CM was attending the first HMWSSB Board meeting chaired by a CM after the state's formation.

Highlighting the rapid expansion of Greater Hyderabad, the Chief Minister stressed the importance of preparing to meet the city's



water needs till the year 2050. He emphasised the inclusion of

Reddy presented a financial overview, highlighting a significant revenue deficit of Rs 8,800 crore. This includes Rs 4,300 crore in unpaid dues from government departments, Rs 5,500 crore in pending electricity bills, and Rs 1,847 crore in loan repayments.

While the income of the Water Board currently covers salaries, allowances and maintenance, the financial outlook remains challenging. The Chief Minister asked the Finance Department to coordinate efforts to address these issues and urged the Water Board to explore ways to enhance revenue generation, such as collecting outstanding dues and securing low-interest loans for upcoming projects.

Officials also reported on the outdated pipelines installed in 1965 to supply water from the Manjeera River, which frequently disrupt supply due to repairs. The Chief Minister ordered the construction of a modern alternative pipeline and suggested using funds from the Centre's Jal Jeevan Mission to finance the project.

The meeting was attended by officials like the Chief Minister's Advisor, Vem Narender Reddy, Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Municipal Department Principal Secretary Dana Kishore, Special Principal Secretary Ramakrishna Rao, Irrigation Secretary Rahul Bojja, HMWSSB Board MD Ashok Reddy, GHMC Commissioner Ilambari, and the CM's Special Secretary, Ajith Reddy.



BC Welfare and Transport Minister Ponnambhakkar addressing the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Friday

'Kavitha took up BCs' cause after realising their strength'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BC Welfare and Transport Minister Ponnambhakkar said that BRS MLC Kavitha, who had chanted Bathukamma and Jagruthi earlier, has now taken up the BC slogan. Some people (Kavitha) remember things after coming out from their 'power intoxication', Ponnambhakkar said.

Alleging that the BRS expelled former Minister Eatala Rajender from the party who was also one of its founding fathers, Ponnambhakkar asked the BRS to give some party posts to BCs.

Criticising Kavitha's comments on the Congress BC Declaration, he congratulated Kavitha for speaking about BCs. He said that although Kavitha conducted the BCs' meeting there was a gap in the leadership of the BRS.

Ponnambhakkar said that he was somewhat happy and somewhat unhappy at Kavitha organising a meeting of BCs at the Indira Park Dharna Chowk as she had never spoken about BCs when the BRS was in power.

He said that they would discuss if BCs were subjected to injustice in the Congress. Is that possible in the BRS, he asked. Kavitha took up the BC issue only after realising their strength, he said.

Ponnambhakkar said the Congress government will post the caste census report in the public domain and that the Congress government has decided to provide 42 per cent reservations to BCs in local body elections.

He warned Kavitha that they would not remain silent if BRS leaders used BCs for making political gains.

Govt making Rythu Bharosa scheme conditional to deceive farmers: Kishan



Telangana BJP president G Kishan Reddy addressing the media at State BJP office on Friday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TG Congress government is trying to place various conditions on farmers who want Rythu Bharosa funds to deceive them and is also trying to dupe tenant farmers and farm labourers, Telangana BJP President G. Kishan Reddy said.

He was addressing the media at the State BJP office here on Friday. He said the Congress had made many promises before and after Assembly elections. But not even a single promise has been implemented, he pointed out.

"There was no change in the lives of the people who voted for the Congress. There is no change in Telangana. Only the figures in the government have changed. Earlier, BRS

leaders used to loot. KCR's family looted Telangana. Today Congress ministers are looting TG," Kishan said.

He said that before the Assembly elections, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Revanth Reddy toured Telangana and made many promises. But the government is now helpless and none of its guarantees can be implemented. It is also conducting victory celebrations and issuing press releases to fool people, he said.

"The government knows what crops are being cultivated in the state. How much land farmers are cultivating in each village. Although the government has details about how many farmers are there, it is trying to hide it in the name of applications," Kishan said.

'Congress committed to Kamareddy BC declaration'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Making it clear that the Congress Government is committed to the Kamareddy BC Declaration, the Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) chief, B. Mahesh Kumar Goud, said that the Congress Government is committed to the caste census. He said discussions are going on across the nation about the caste census done in Telangana.

Mahesh was speaking while attending as the chief guest at the 194th state-level birth anniversary celebrations of Savitri Bai Phule organised by the BC Women's Welfare Association at the Ravindra



TPCC Chief B Mahesh Kumar Goud addressing the gathering at Savitri Bai Phule's 194th Birth Anniversary celebrations at Ravindra Bharati on Friday

Bharati on Friday. He said that he had been fighting inside the Congress as the son of a BC individual and that it is unethical on the part of BRS leaders to speak about BCs.

a parallel sewage treatment plant to complement the water supply infrastructure.

During the meeting held at the Integrated Command Control Centre on Friday, the CM directed officials to consult expert agencies and conduct detailed studies for the proposed plans. Officials provided updates on the current water supply, which serves 13.79 lakh tap connections through a 9,800-km distribution network, sourcing water from the Manjeera, Singoor, Godavari and Krishna rivers.

The discussion included plans for Godavari Phase 2, aimed at supplying additional drinking water to Usman Sagar and Himayat Sagar. The meeting discussed pumping water from either the Mallanna Sagar or the Kondapochamma Sagar for the project. Based on consultancy reports and cost-efficiency analyses, the Chief Minister approved sourcing 20 TMCs of water from Mallanna Sagar, an increase from the initially proposed 15 TMCs, to meet the city's growing requirements.

Water Board MD Ashok

Ideas more ...

Continued from page 1

crores and became rich. However, the poor remained poor. Public-Private partnership is essential to make India a poverty-free nation. The people present here should make 10 families rich and it will be a real social service. People earning more should adopt 10 poor families," Chandrababu said.

He said the present discussion across the world is population management. It is a matter of concern that the population of South India is declining like that of South Korea, Japan, China, Germany and others. These nations are facing problems due to their declining populations. India will become strong only if it takes precautionary measures regarding population, he said.

Chandrababu said that all Telugus from Anantapur to Adilabad and Srikakulam to Palamuru are one wherever they may be. He said that he had said earlier that 'brain drain will become brain gain' and that has become a reality now.

"I assumed that this part of Hyderabad would become a great city and I moved forward with Vision-2020. Telugus should help each other wherever they may be. Hyderabad has been transformed into a city known across the world and that is because of the then TDP government's foresight. Revenue increased here due to the foundation laid by the then TDP government," he said.

Some castes approach BC Commission to change their name

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana BC Commission convened under the chairmanship of G. Niranjana to discuss issues connected to caste representation, reservations and austerity measures. Commission Members Rapolu Jayaprakash, Tirumalagiri Surender, Balakshmi Rangu, and Member Secretary Balamaya Devi attended the meeting.

The Commission reviewed requests from representatives of the Dommarra, Pichiguntla, Tammali Budabukkala, Kummara and Veeramushti

castes for changing their names citing the stigma associated with their current names. It also considered pleas for adding synonyms for Kummara, Rajaka and Mera castes.

A notification was issued inviting objections which can be submitted at the Commission's office in Khairatabad between January 4 and January 18.

The meeting also decided to examine whether BC reservations are being implemented in appointments and promotions in government departments and institutions. It will verify if roster point registers are being maintained as required.

In a move to address the problems of nomadic communities, the Commission announced field visits in the third week of January to study their socio-economic and living conditions.

The Commission discussed the State Government's letter on austerity measures and resolved to reduce expenses in the context of Telangana's financial problems. The Commission decided to limit recruitment to essential roles, drastically cut hospitality expenses and give up the official phones used by the Chairman, Members and officers.

Former IPS officer AR Srinivas appointed Vigilance Director

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has appointed retired IPS officer AR Srinivas as the Director of Vigilance and Enforcement (V&E) under the General Administration Department. The appointment is for a period of two years or until the post becomes redundant, whichever is earlier.

A government order (GO Rt. No. 16) issued on January 3 by Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari details the terms of the appointment. The order emphasised that the terms and conditions of his re-appointment would be communicated separately.

AR Srinivas, who has a distinguished service record, will assume charge immediately. The appointment aims to strengthen the state's vigilance and enforcement mechanisms.

BRS sure of Govt repeating farm loan waiver failures in Rythu Bharosa

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As the Congress government gears up to deliver its flagship Rythu Bharosa scheme by Sankranti, concerns are mounting about its potential effectiveness as the farm loan waiver scheme failed to leave a positive impact despite costing a staggering Rs 21,000 crore.

BRS bigwigs have already voiced their scepticism predicting that Rythu Bharosa would follow a similar trajectory.

The BRS said that while the Congress government strives to meet its Sankranti deadline, internal dissent, logistical challenges, and unresolved issues from schemes like the farm loan waiver scheme indicate that Rythu Bharosa could face hurdles in both implementation and acceptance.

The BRS brass is confident that any limitations imposed on the scheme - such as excluding certain crops or acreage - will trigger a public backlash. The government is stuck between fulfilling its

promise and its financial limitations.

"Chief Minister Revanth Reddy cannot back out now. He promised to deliver it by Sankranti," said a senior leader.

Adding to the criticism, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao (KTR) said that the government is once again burdening farmers with the requirement of submitting fresh applications.

Interestingly, even in 2018, the government took applications for Rythu Bandhu. Now, they are doing the same thing again, seeking fresh declarations for Rythu Bharosa. But the BRS is questioning the repeated paperwork. Even Congress sources acknowledged that farmers are accustomed to receiving benefits and cannot be easily moved out of their comfort zone.

'Congress treating farmers as beggars'

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao launched a scathing attack on the Telangana Congress government and accused it of failing farmers and undermining the Rythu Bharosa scheme.

Speaking at a press conference at the Telangana Bhavan, KTR said the government is plotting to strip farmers of their rightful benefits through misleading claims and bureaucratic red tape.

He criticised the Congress government for introducing mandatory affidavits for farmers to avail the scheme, branding it a tactic to hound the farming community.

"Farmers are being portrayed as thieves by this government. Instead of fulfilling promises, the government is propagating lies against farmers and subjecting them to unnecessary scrutiny," he said.

Shabbir blasts KTR for making IAS officers scapegoats

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Declaring that BRS Working President KT Rama Rao has been speaking illogically regarding the Formula E-Car Racing case, Government Advisor Shabbir Ali said that KTR had made IAS officers scapegoats and is trying to escape by saying that he has nothing to do with the matter and that IAS officers were supposed to look into the matter.

Pointing out that BRS Working President KT Rama Rao's election affidavit submitted in 2008 showed his net worth as Rs 4.32 crore, and that in 2009, KTR's election affidavit said his net worth was Rs 7.99

crore, Shabbir asked how KTR's assets increased so much in a year. How did KTR's net worth increase to around Rs 50 crore in 2023, he asked.

Shabbir Ali said that the assets of BRS leaders Harish Rao and Kavitha's had also increased massively. He asked KTR to reveal whether they didn't remember rules when they had arrested Chief Minister Revanth Reddy during the Parliament session when the BRS was in power.

Declaring that BRS leaders are shameless, Shabbir challenged KTR on corruption and said that KTR's assets increased during the Telangana Movement as well.

APTA KATALYST 2025 Telugu NRIs global business meet discusses biz ideas

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

APTA KATALYST 2025, the biggest ever Telugu NRIs Global Business Conference with a theme Connect, Collaborate, Create began at Hitex in the city. Botcha Satyanarayana, former Minister in Andhra Pradesh was the chief guest at the programme.

Speaking at the occasion Satyanarayana said, "I am very happy that though Indians have travelled to countries, but they are coming back to help their country grow."

Over 1000 Telugu-origin delegates from over 20 countries descended on Hyderabad for the conference.

APTA KATALYST 2025

The five key areas of the Global Business Conference, according to APTA are Knowledge Sharing and Mentoring, Networking, Partnerships and Collaborations, Startup Ecosystem and Enable and help Businesses grow. The business conference in the future is expected to generate business transactions worth over Rs five lakh crore.

The meeting will have five parallel sessions on different verticals of the business for another two days. The startups, business of Renewable Energy to see more opportunities as Telangana is planning to launch a Clean and Green Renewable Energy Policy.

Over 100 distinguished speakers and panelists are expected to address 42-plus sessions. Some of the keynote speakers and panelists include Anil Chalamalasetti, Sekhar Puli, Nalli Durga Rao, Dr Bonadda Raghavendra Rao, Srinu Bayireddy, Bhaskar Gangipamula, Umesh Kunapureddy and Murali Kottu.

The focus areas of the conference include: Technology, Green Energy, Education or Medical Education, Tourism and Hospitality, Health, Skill Development, Aqua Culture, Agriculture, Global Trading and Manufacturing with a focus on Make in India and Semiconductors, IPOs, Banking, Taxation and Finance.

Rythu Bharosa to ...

Continued from page 1

The BJP also sharpened its criticism of Rythu Bharosa on Saturday. Telangana BJP chief G. Kishan Reddy slammed the Congress government saying that it has been trying to place many conditions on Rythu Bharosa to deceive farmers and is also trying to deceive tenant farmers and farm labourers.

It is learnt that the BRS is going to intensify its criticism of Rythu Bharosa after the government announces guidelines. It is learnt that the BJP is also chalking out plans to launch a movement on behalf of farmers.

Besides the Rythu Bharosa and loan waiver schemes, BJP leaders Kishan Reddy, Sanjay and Alleti Maheshwar Reddy have been cornering the Congress government by exposing its corruption.

One political analyst said the Rythu Bharosa scheme is definitely going to become a local body election issue.

Allu Arjun gets ...

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A woman was killed and her son was critically injured in the stampede at Sandhya Theatre during the premiere of 'Pushpa 2: The Rule'.

The police booked the theatre management, Allu Arjun and his team for culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Allu Arjun was arrested on December 13 in the case. He was produced before the Nampally court, which remanded him to

14-day judicial custody. His lawyers approached the High Court, which granted him interim bail the same day.

The actor, who is named accused number 11 in the case, was released from Chanchalguda Jail the next day. As the 14-day judicial remand ended on December 27, the actor had to present himself before the court for further proceedings. After obtaining permission from the court, the actor appeared through video conference.

Cong, BJP ignoring ...

Continued from page 1

criticised the Congress Government in Telangana for its delayed recognition of Savitribai Phule's contributions, noting that official celebrations of her birth anniversary were announced only after the Maha Sabha was planned.

She also challenged the Congress to fulfil its promise to provide 42% reservations for BCs, stating, "The elections must reflect actual population proportions based on accurate data, or

the people will hold them accountable."

Kavitha condemned the Congress for suppressing the Kaka Kalelkar and Mandal Commission reports and criticised the BJP for refusing to conduct a caste census.

She blasted both parties for failing to release the 2011 caste census report. "The BJP 'destabilised' the VP Singh Government when it took significant steps for the welfare of BCs. This shows their commitment to BCs is only on paper," Kavitha said.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Panchami: Jan 03 11:39 PM to Jan 04 10:01 PM
Shashthi: Jan 04 10:01 PM to Jan 05 08:15 PM
Nakshatram: Shatabhisha: Jan 03 10:21 PM to Jan 04 09:23 PM
Purva Bhadrapada: Jan 04 09:23 PM to Jan 05 08:17 PM
Rahukalam: 9:36 AM to 10:58 AM
Yamagandam: 1:43 PM to 3:06 PM
Varjyam: 03:30 AM to 05:01 AM
Gulika: 6:51 AM to 8:13 AM
Amritakalam: 02:29 PM to 04:01 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:59 AM to 12:43 PM
HYDERABAD WEATHER
Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 29°
Humidity: 37%
Sunrise: 6:47 AM
Sunset: 5:55 PM
Updated: January 3, 2025 5:00 PM

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03



Boxing, cricket coaching centres to come up in TGSP: DGP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Director General of Police Dr Jitender has announced that boxing and cricket coaching centres will come up under the guidance of boxer Nikhat Zareen and cricketer Mohammed Siraj.

The announcement was made during Passing Out Parade conducted for constables who have completed their training in various Telangana Special Police (TGSP) battalions across the State.

Speaking at the programme as the chief guest at the 1st Battalion in Yousufguda, Dr Jitender highlighted the international achievements of Telangana athletes, such as boxer Nikhat Zareen and cricketer Mohammed Siraj, who have been appointed as DSPs in TGSP.

He revealed that specialised training centres would be established under their leadership to train athletes to excel on an international level.

Dr Jitender praised TGSP personnel for their contribution in maintaining law and order within the State and their commendable services in other states. He added that the trained personnel would also be deployed to curb drug trafficking and control cybercrime.

He announced that 4,077 TGSP constables across the State have successfully completed their training, including 548 from the Yousufguda battalion. This marks the largest-scale training conducted by the department to date. Addressing the new recruits, he encouraged them to work with dedication and bring pride to their families and the police department.

TGSP Additional DGP Sanjay Kumar Jain urged the recruits to uphold discipline and integrity in their service. Among the 4,077 trained constables, 2,746 are graduates, 596 postgraduates, and 62 ex-service-men.



CITY EVENTS

Triveni

Music & Dance Festival Season 2

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi January 4 (6 pm)

Aavedana

Telugu Movie

Venue

Lamakaan January 4, (11:30 am)

Workshop

Gen AI & Networking

Venue

Lamakaan January 4, (4 pm)

Women On The Move

Workshop on women's mobility In Hyderabad

Venue

Lamakaan January 4, (2 pm)

Migrant Memory

Art Exhibition By Raki Nikahetiya

Venue

Kalakriti Till January 5 (8 pm)

Weekend kids cooking camp

Master cooking and baking in 09 fun weekends

Venue

Culinary Guru Institute, Hyderabad. Till January 11, 2025.

Special drive targets banned Chinese manja

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A special drive was conducted by the Task Force teams of the Hyderabad Commission onerated focused on the banned Chinese manja on Friday. The operation resulted in 14 cases being filed and 987 bobbins of banned Chinese manja seized.

Chinese Manja, made of synthetic nylon coated with abrasive materials, poses significant risks to public safety, wildlife and the environment. Despite ban in several regions, its use persists, particularly during kite festivals.

According to Ande Srinivasa Rao, Addl. Commissioner of Police, Chinese manja is sharp and dangerous, causing severe injuries, especially to pedestrians, motorcyclists and kite enthusiasts. The string entangles birds, leading to injuries or fatalities and poses risks to street animals. Being made of non-biodegradable material, it clogs drainage systems and harms urban areas. Its sale and use are banned under environmental protection laws, showing a lack of concern for public safety.

Cold wave grips TG; minimum temperature drops below 10°C

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Cold wave has gripped Telangana with minimum temperature dropping to single digits in 15 out of state's 30 districts on Friday, officials said.

According to the Telangana Development Planning Society (TGDPs), the average minimum temperature in the State was 13.3 degrees Celsius, which is 2.7 per cent below the normal temperature. There was a significant drop in night temperatures in many places, including the state capital Hyderabad and its suburbs.

Kumaram Bheem Asifabad recorded the lowest temperature at 6.5 degrees Celsius. Sirupur (U) in the district was the coldest place in the State.

Sangareddy district was shivering at 6.9 degrees Celsius, followed by Adilabad at 7.1°C, Vikarabad at 7.3°C, and Rangareddy at 7.5°C.

The other districts which recorded minimum temperature of less than 10°C are Kamareddy (8°C), Nirmal (8.5°C), Mahabubnagar (9°C) and Rajanna Sircilla (9°C), Medak



(9.1°C), Medchal Malkajgiri (9.6°C), Siddipet (9.7°C), Jayashankar Bhupalpally (9.9°C), Narayanpet (10°C) and Jagtial (10°C).

There was a sharp drop in mercury levels in and around Hyderabad. Moinabad in Rangareddy district near Hyderabad experienced biting

cold with minimum temperature dropping to 7.5°C.

Moulaali in Medchal Malkajgiri district recorded a minimum temperature of 9.6°C.

Fifteen districts recorded minimum temperatures ranging between 10.3°C and 13.2°C.

Hyderabad district recorded an average minimum temperature of

17°C. Maredpally was the coldest at 12.1°C.

Meanwhile, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted cold wave conditions at isolated pockets in the Adilabad, Kumaram Bheem Asifabad and Nirmal districts on Saturday.

Mainly low-level North-Easterlies prevail over the State, said an IMD bulletin.

Dry weather is likely to prevail for the next seven days. Mist or hazy conditions are likely to prevail during morning hours at isolated pockets over Telangana during the next five days.

Minimum temperatures are likely to be below 2 to 4°C during the next three days.

For Hyderabad and its surroundings, the IMD has predicted a partly cloudy sky over the next 48 hours.

Mist/hazy conditions are likely to prevail during morning hours.

Maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be around 3°C and 14°C respectively. Surface winds are likely to be North-Easterlies with wind speeds around 4-8 km per hour.

Governor calls for youth role in nation's economic development

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Governor Jishnu Dev Varma attended the graduation ceremony of the School of Post-Graduate Studies at the Engineering Staff College of India on Friday. In his address, the Governor emphasised the vital role youth must play in the country's economic develop-

ment. He highlighted the need for skill development and urged young people to adapt to advancing technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Data Sciences and Machine Learning, as these fields are shaping global challenges.

Governor Dev Varma referred to slogans like 'Jai Jawan - Jai Kisan' by Lal

Bahadur Shastri, 'Jai Vignan' by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and 'Jai Anusandhan' by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, emphasising their relevance to the potential of Indian youth.

He encouraged students to embrace these skills, which would enable them to make significant contributions to

the nation.

The Governor urged youth to "Dream Big and Achieve Big" and draw inspiration from figures like Nelson Mandela, Swami Vivekananda and Narayana Murthy. He also acknowledged graduates from various batches who were honoured with medals and certificates.



PRAJAVANI

TG Praja Palana website stays dysfunctional

SAMUEL JOSHUA samueljoshuamjmc@gmail.com ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana's Praja Palana website remained dysfunctional, leading citizens to visit Prajavani to submit grievances regarding the online enrollment of pending applications for the promised six guaranteed welfare schemes.

On Friday, over seven people complained about enrollment delays at Praja Bhavan. When asked, Mohammed Yousaf shared his struggle, stating he had completed application forms for his parents but was unable to enroll them online due to the website being non-functional. He mentioned that despite visiting the Collectorate, GHMC ward, and circle offices several times since December, the officials informed him that the website had been closed, as the applications for one year had been received.

Yousaf stressed that without online enrollment, his family would not be eligible for welfare schemes. He also noted that his wife's application remained pending, leaving his entire family without support from the government. He said that even after raising the issue

VRAs and DSC candidates protest over pending grievances

A large number of Village Revenue Assistants (VRAs) and DSC candidates protested over pending grievances. A total of 359 grievance applications were submitted at Prajavani on Friday at the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Praja Bhavan. More than 150 eligible family members of VRAs protested regarding 3,797 pending inheritance job appointments as per GO 81 and 85. Ranga Rao from Nagar Kurmool mentioned that out of 20,555 members, only 16,758 received appointments, leaving many in financial distress. Despite raising grievances for seven months and meeting with ministers, the issue of pending appointments continues. He noted that 3,797 qualified members, many with postgraduate degrees, are being ignored. Over 250 people have died struggling with

debt, stating that their concerns remain unaddressed. Meanwhile, DSC candidates from the 2008 batch who completed certificate verification for 1,399 positions also protested at Praja Bhavan. The candidates demanded for issuance of posting orders for teacher positions. Over 50 members called on the Minister of Education and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to speed up the process. Despite completing certificate verification over 100 days ago, many are still waiting for their job postings. The members urged concerned departments to resolve the issue and issue posting orders. According to the officials, 103 applications were received from Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, 85 for Power, 62 for Revenue and 109 for other departments.

Hyd Ayyappa devotees hurt in Kerala bus mishap; Driver

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A bus carrying Ayyappa devotees from Hyderabad met with an accident on Thursday while travelling to Pamba. The mishap claimed the life of the bus driver and left several passengers injured.

The devotees, residents of Madannapet in Hyderabad, were rushed to a hospital in Kottayam for treatment. Following the incident, the devotees shared a video message expressing their gratitude to Union Minister of State and BJP leader Bandi Sanjay for ensuring prompt

medical aid and arranging for the free transportation of the deceased driver's body back to Hyderabad.

The post-mortem of the driver has been completed, and the body was sent to Hyderabad in an ambulance. Meanwhile, the devotees have confirmed their safety after receiving medical care and are reportedly recovering.

The incident has cast a shadow over the spiritual journey of the group, with authorities urging all pilgrims to ensure vehicle safety and road preparedness during the ongoing pilgrimage season.

Startups to be given opportunity to produce 20,000 MW clean energy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

"Startups owned by youngsters will be given an opportunity as we will dedicate budget soon for them to participate in a vision to produce 20,000 megawatts of clean energy by 2030," said a press release by the Telangana government on Friday.

A special meeting was held on Clean and Green Energy Policy with Stakeholders and would submit their opinions while presenting in the Cabinet meeting and get a final approval with the suggestions.

The State is setting ambitious goals, with a current renewable

energy capacity of 11,399 MW, and aims to expand it further by achieving 20,000 MW by 2030. Aiming to design green and sustainable urban environments to meet the growing demands of expanding urban populations.

Development of a modern city near Hyderabad integrating cutting-edge artificial intelligence and smart technologies is on the anvil. The government is working on projects like the Fourth City Regional Ring Road (RRR), Metro Rail expansion, new airports, and industrial corridors to enhance logistical capabilities. Telangana

currently boasts a renewable energy capacity of 11,399 MW, including 7,889 MW of solar power, 2,518 MW of hydro power, and 771 MW from distributed renewable sources. Additionally, floating solar projects and green hydrogen technologies are under consideration.

With a wind capacity of 54,717 MW, Telangana ranks among the top 8 states in India. The state has already established 872 EV charging stations, and estimates that electricity demand will grow from 15,623 MW in FY 2024 to 31,809 MW by FY 2035.

FGG asks govt to restrict Rythu Bharosa to 5 acres

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Forum for Good Governance (FGG) has submitted a detailed proposal to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, recommending changes in the implementation of the Rythu Bharosa scheme to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness. In a letter addressed to the Chief Minister, FGG President M Padmanabha Reddy highlighted key concerns regarding the scheme's financial burden on the State and suggested limiting benefits to targeted groups.

The FGG noted that the Government of India has introduced multiple measures to support farmers, including subsidies for fertilizers, the Fasal Bheema Yojana (crop insurance), and financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 per acre for farmers with up to 5 acres of land. Similarly, Telangana has implemented schemes like free electricity for agricultural pumpsets, Rythu Bheema insurance, loan waivers up to Rs 2 lakh, and bonuses for specific paddy varieties. However, the Forum point-



ed out flaws in the Rythu Bandhu scheme, which provided Rs 10,000 per acre irrespective of the land's cultivation status. They argued that this approach placed an unsustainable burden on the State economy, extended benefits to landlords and income taxpayers and excluded tenant farmers who need support. "Farmers should be assisted and protected, but the scheme must focus only on those with cultivated lands," Padmanabha Reddy emphasised in the letter.

The Forum recommended limiting Rythu Bharosa benefits to farmers with up to 5 acres of land under cultivation. It

also urged the government to exclude fallow lands, non-agricultural landholders, and high-income individuals from the scheme to ensure that funds reach the intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, tenant farmers should be included to address their vulnerability.

The Forum warned against over-promising welfare schemes under political pressure, which has led to financial instability in states like Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. They noted that excessive spending on welfare has left little room for developmental initiatives, as highlighted by the Reserve Bank of India in its reports.

Govt planning BlockChain City

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Highlighting that the Telangana government plans to set up a Blockchain City, IT Minister D Sridhar Babu inaugurated Phase 3 of Centillion Networks and HC Robotics Private Limited on Friday. Speaking at the event, Sridhar Babu appreciated Centillion's rapid growth, expanding from four employees

to 1,800 in just a few years. He highlighted their role in generating jobs, especially in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and remote districts of Telangana.

Sridhar Babu also mentioned the development of an AI City and Quantum Computing Hubs. He expressed hope that Centillion Networks would lead in these transformative initiatives.

TG to set up traffic awareness parks in schools

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana government aims to set up Traffic Awareness Parks in 500 to 1,000 schools, enabling children to understand and follow traffic rules.

In a significant step towards promoting road safety awareness, the Telangana government, in collaboration with UNICEF, plans to establish Traffic Awareness Parks in both government and private schools across the State. Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar announced this initiative during the inauguration of National Road Safety Month at the Khairatabad transport office on Friday.

The Minister emphasized the importance of teaching traffic rules from a young age to foster responsible road behavior. "This year, we aim to set up Traffic Awareness Parks in 500 to 1,000 schools, enabling children to understand and follow traffic rules effectively," he said.

Minister Prabhakar participated in a road safety awareness rally alongside school students, holding placards advocating road safety. He unveiled posters and pamphlets promoting the campaign's theme: "Follow Traffic Rules, Prevent Road Accidents."

The National Road Safety Month, which runs from January 3 to 31, aims to edu-



Transport Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar, along with Transport Chief Secretary Vikas Raj, Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Vishwaprasad, among others releasing the posters on traffic awareness

cate the public about road safety measures. The programme is being implemented in collaboration with the transport, police and education

departments to enhance road safety awareness and reduce accidents. The Minister highlighted the state's strict measures to curb traffic rule viola-

tions. "We have registered cases against 7,000 violators so far and will cancel the licenses of those who repeatedly break traffic rules. Stern action will be taken against offenders," he warned.

On January 7, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari will chair a national meeting on road transport, where further plans will be discussed.

Transport Chief Secretary Vikas Raj, Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Vishwaprasad, Joint Commissioners Ramesh and Mamilla Chandrasekhara Goud, and other transport department officials were present at the programme.

RCC wall along Munneru to come up in 7 months

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy says that the structure will offer a permanent solution to floods

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy has announced that a permanent solution to the longstanding flooding issue of the Munneru River, which has affected the people of Khammam and Paleru constituencies, would be worked out within the next seven months. He mentioned that a 17-kilometre reinforced cement concrete (RCC) retaining wall is being constructed along the Munneru River at a cost of Rs 690 crores to prevent flooding in residential colonies along the river. He directed the officials to complete the construction by July 15, ahead of the coming monsoon season, under any circumstances.

On Friday, the Minister, along with Khammam Lok Sabha member R Raghuram Reddy, District Collector Muzammil Khan, Khammam Municipal Commissioner Abhishek Augustya, and Additional Collectors P Sreeja and P Srinivas Reddy, reviewed the progress of the Munneru River retaining wall construction and land acquisition at the Integrated District Collectorate.

During the review, the Minister mentioned that 234 acres of land are required for the construction of the retaining wall, of which 64 acres are government land, and 170 acres are private land. He instructed the Revenue officials to hold land acquisition discussions with landowners and speed up the process on a war-footing. He noted that frequent flooding due to Munneru River overflow is troubling the people in Khammam and Paleru constituencies, and constructing the retaining wall is the only solution to work out a permanent solution to the problem.

The Minister also inquired about the design of the retaining wall, asking if the flow of water from check dams and the potential flood risks from the urban catchment areas were considered in the design.

He instructed that progress be monitored every two days, with a clear daily plan to ensure the construction proceeds on schedule.

He also directed the formation of additional field teams to ensure the timely completion of work and requested that daily progress updates be shared via WhatsApp.



Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, along with Khammam MP R Raghuram Reddy and District Collector Muzammil Khan, at a review meeting in Khammam on Friday

To expedite land acquisition, the Minister suggested forming a specialist committee to hold consultations with farmers and explain the benefits of the retaining wall construction to encourage landowners to offer their land for the project.

The Minister emphasized that any encroachments or irregularities, particularly at the lower levels of the revenue staff, would be dealt with strictly, and no corruption would be

tolerated in the process. District Collector Muzammil Khan stated that a plan has been prepared for land acquisition.

He explained that the previous year's flood levels did not exceed 170,000 cusecs, but in September 2024, the flow reached over 312,000 cusecs. Based on this, a design was made for a retaining wall with the capacity to withstand 350,000 cusecs of flow, with a height of 15 meters and a width of 6 meters, covering 8.5 kilometres in rural and urban areas, totalling 17 kilometres.

The review meeting was attended by Revenue Divisional Officer Narasimha Rao, Irrigation Superintending Engineer Venkateswara Rao, Roads and Buildings Superintending Engineer Hemalatha, Paleru constituency special officer Ramesh, urban and rural Tahsildars Ravi Kumar and Ramprasad, and other relevant officials.



Two members of the Chenchu community rescued from bonded labour were presented with cheques for Rs 30,000 each at Nagarkurnool on Friday. Chairman of Nagarkurnool DLSA D Rajesh Babu is also present.

Swift relief provided to two bonded labourers

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

Swift action by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in Nagarkurnool has brought relief to two Chenchu community members who were being exploited as bonded labourers in Gumpanapally village under Achampet mandal.

The victims were allegedly forced to work under a landlord for a paltry debt amount of Rs 15,000.

Acting on oral instructions from the Executive Chairman of the State Legal Services Authority (SLSA), Hyderabad, Chairman-cum-Principal District Judge of Nagarkurnool, D Rajesh Babu, immediately initiated action.

In coordination with the Labour Officer of Nagarkurnool, and the Revenue Divisional Officer of Achampet, relief was ensured under the Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour, 2016.

The Chairman, along with the Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), worked close-

ly with the Judicial Magistrate of First Class, Achampet, and the District Magistrate/District Collector of Nagarkurnool to expedite the process.

Rajesh Babu personally visited Achampet on Friday to oversee the relief measures and ensure justice for the victims.

Within just 12 hours of receiving the information, DLSA Nagarkurnool took proactive steps on a war footing.

Demand Drafts amounting to Rs 30,000 each (a total of Rs 60,000) were issued to the two victims. These monetary benefits were handed over in the presence of officials, ensuring immediate rehabilitation for the exploited individuals.

The coordinated efforts of the district authorities and legal services have drawn appreciation from various quarters.

Speaking about the incident, G Sabitha, secretary of DLSA, Nagarkurnool, reiterated the commitment to safeguarding the rights of the marginalised and ensuring justice for victims of exploitation.

Quacks ruling roost in Siddipet district

PNS ■ GAJWEL

Despite recent surprise raids by Telangana Medical Council authorities, which targeted 20 hospitals in Gajwel for operating without necessary permissions, many dispensaries run by quacks have resumed operations the very next day.

Following the raids, there was widespread optimism in Siddipet district that this would be the end to quackery. However, the hospitals, which were sealed, resumed their activities without facing any further action, raising concerns among the public. This lack of enforcement has led to growing doubts and suspicions about the authorities' commitment to

ending illegal medical practices. In the district, many hospitals, diagnostic centres, and pharmacies are being run by unqualified individuals without proper approvals. There are over 250 nursing homes, 500 diagnostic centres, and more than 1,000 medical shops operating in the area, with more than half of them lacking the necessary permits. Patients seeking even basic treatment are being exploited by these unlicensed practitioners, who charge them exorbitantly for diagnostic tests and procedures, including X-rays. There is also an apparent 'unholy alliance' between these doctors and the owners of hospitals and diagnostic centres.

All Set for Ijtima Gah programme in Shankarpalli

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The Ijtima Gah programme is scheduled to commence on Saturday at the guest ground at Shankarpalli town in Rangareddy district. Chevella MLA Kale Yadayah inspected the arrangements at the venue to ensure a smooth and successful event.

Following the inspection, MLA Kale Yadayah held a meeting with public representatives, officials from various departments, and minority leaders to review the final preparations. The meeting focused on coordination and readiness for the program, which holds significant impor-



District Collector C Narayana Reddy, along with Chevella MLA Kale Yadayah, at a media conference at Shankarpalli town in RR district on Friday

tance for the local community.

The event witnessed the participation of District Collector C Narayana Reddy,

District Library Chairman Eluganti Madhusudan Reddy, along with public representatives, officials, party leaders, and minority leaders.

Ponnam unveils Swatantra channel Calendar

PNS ■ SIDDIPEET

The 2025 New Year calendar, designed by the Swatantra channel, was unveiled by the Minister for Backward Classes Welfare and Transport, Ponnam Prabhakar, along with the Chairman of the District Library Association, Lingamurthy.

The calendar was launched on Friday in the presence of journalists and activists in Husnabad town.

During the event, Minister Ponnam extended New Year greetings to the management, staff, and viewers of the Swatantra channel.

Chairman of the Library Association, Kadem Lingamurthy, said that Swatantra channel should con-



Minister for Transport Ponnam Prabhakar unveiling Swatantra channel calendar

tinue to bring to the attention of the government the problem being faced by people. He also conveyed his best wishes to the channel.

Swatantra channel reporter Mallareddy, cameraman Mahesh, former ZPTC Girikondal Reddy, and Congress party leaders were present.

Municipal council meeting descends into chaos

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The general body meeting in the Nagarkurnool Municipality on Friday descended into chaos. Instead of discussing the beign faced by common people, the ruling and opposition party leaders fought over funds and allocations of funds for their respective wards.

Issues such as drinking water, garbage collection, roads, streetlights and other development works should have been included in the agenda for discussion. However, the meeting turned into a blame game among councillors of different parties, focusing solely on the funds allocated to their respective wards. This created chaos at the meeting.

It seems that the members were arguing over the distribution of remaining funds, with proposals for purchasing items like a Vaikuntha Rath, two



Councillors at the Nagarkurnool Municipal council meeting in Nagarkurnool on Friday

tractors, and ten auto-rickshaws, as well as sharing the allocated funds for these purposes. There have been constant allegations that the municipal councillors have failed to fulfil the promises they made to the people and have been involved in activities inimical to public good.

During the meeting, the ruling and opposition parties exchanged accusations regard-

ing these same issues, and this has become a hot topic of discussion. With only 13 days left in their term, the ongoing blame game has raised questions about the future of these councillors in the upcoming elections. There are allegation that at least Rs 1 crore meant for workers' wage was misappropriated. But there is no inquiry into the allegations so far.

Khammam police to act tough on cockfights

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

In view of the Sankranti festival, Khammam Police Commissioner Sunil Datt has warned that strict action will be taken if cockfights are organised. He stated that special measures have been taken in the Khammam Police Commissionerate limits to enforce ban on cockfights.

At a meeting held with police officials through teleconference on Friday, the Commissioner instructed the formation of special teams at the division, mandal, and vil-

lage levels to ensure that cockfights do not take place.

He advised the police officers to take action without delay if any information regarding cockfights or gambling is received. He suggested registering bind-over cases against those who have organised cockfights in the past. The Commissioner also directed that cases be filed against those who provide land or guest houses for cockfights.

He appealed to the public to cooperate for a peaceful Sankranti by creating awareness about the ban on cock-



Sunil Datt, District Collector

fighting in the villages. Sunil Datt emphasised that a strict ban would be enforced on the

sale, storage, and use of Chinese manja (kite string), which is harmful to birds, ani-

mals, and humans. He instructed Station House Officers to focus on this issue.

Cases would be filed against shops selling Chinese manja, he clarified. The Police Commissioner also suggested taking safety measures during kite flying to ensure no harm to humans or birds and to completely avoid the use of banned manja. Local police and Task Force personnel have been directed to enforce ban. The police appealed to the public to join hands in controlling cockfights and the use of Chinese manja.

Four killed in autos-car collision

PNS ■ MEDAK

Four women were killed, and several others were injured when a car collided with two auto-rickshaws near Narsapur on Friday. The victims, identified as Dudi Aishwarya, Papagari Manisha, and another woman, died on the spot. The accident occurred at Medalamma Temple on the Narsapur-Hyderabad road

when the speeding car hit the two autorickshaws traveling in opposite directions. The injured passengers were quickly taken to the government hospital in Narsapur for treatment.

The car was on its way from Narsapur to Hyderabad. The driver lost control of the car and collided with two autos coming from the opposite direction.



Twisted metal that all remains of the autos-rickshaw

Take sympathetic look at farmers: Gudur urges CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Bharatiya Janata Party state senior leader Gudur Narayana Reddy on Friday urged Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to look into the alignment of Regional Ring Road on the Southeast side and protect the farmers from losing their lands for the sixth time.

In a media statement, he said that farmers who have lands in the new alignment would be forced to lose their lands for the sixth time if the same alignment is finalized.

"Therefore there is every need for the government to take a relook at the present alignment. It must change the alignment to the old one so that the farmers need not lose their lands," he said.

Narayana Reddy said that when the RRR was planned it has been proposed to construct the road along Choutuppal, Motakondur, Alair, other side of the Yadadri and Gajwel. However, the BRS leaders have brought pressure on the government and have seen that the alignment is changed to



Gudur Narayana Reddy

Choutuppal, Valigonda, Bhuvanagiri, and Gajwel.

He said that the farmers of Bhongir mandal have given their lands to the government for five times for developmental activities. They have given lands for construction of High Tension power line, NH No 163, two bypass roads at Bhuvanagiri, and Yadadri Temple Development Authority activities. They were forced to cede their land for the sixth time.

The BJP leader said that the areas coming under new alignment have been well connected already for the

logistic and commuting purposes. Construction of RRR with that alignment would not serve any purpose.

He said that former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao with hard-headedness has approved the new alignment just to favour his party men. The new alignment has been proposed without any sense and practical knowledge.

He explained that the old alignment was meant to provide connectivity to the rural areas in the Southeast side. It was proposed to improve the economic prosperity of those areas.

He said that when the RRR was envisaged it has been felt that its alignment should be kept 35 to 40 kms away from the Outer Ring Road. This would benefit the areas falling between ORR and RRR. With the change of old alignment to new one this purpose would be defeated.

He has urged the Chief Minister to take a sympathetic look at the travails of the farmers and take steps to change the present alignment to the old one.

Fourth City development to be accelerated

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Congress leader and former MLA Kichennagari Lakshma Reddy (KLR) emphasised the commitment to transform Maheshwaram constituency into a thriving metropolis. During a meeting with Chief Minister Revanth Reddy at his residence on New Year's Day, KLR conveyed his greetings and discussed key developmental initiatives for the region.

In their discussions, Revanth Reddy and KLR reportedly addressed the acceleration of major projects, including Fourth City, Green Pharma, Skeel University, health and education hubs, industrial parks, and metro rail infrastructure. The Chief Minister urged KLR to ensure smooth land acquisition for critical projects such as the 330-foot road and connections between the ORR and RRR, emphasising minimal disruption to stakeholders.

Revanth Reddy highlighted that top global companies are eager to establish themselves in Fourth City. He commended KLR's efforts in persuading farmers from Jennaiguda and



Congress leader and former MLA Kichennagari Lakshma Reddy meeting Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy at his residence on New Year's Day.

Kandukuru mandals to agree to land acquisition by offering compensation, plots, and solar energy initiatives for women, ensuring no losses to farmers.

Discussions also covered plans to designate Maheshwaram and Kandukuru mandals as municipalities, aligning with the region's rapid development. Revanth Reddy lauded KLR for his relentless work in advancing Maheshwaram constituency and urged him to oversee the progress of Fourth City, including the establishment of Skeel University.

ACROSS THE STATES



Four dead as towing van hits SUV

Four persons were killed and three injured on Friday after a towing van rammed into their SUV on Mumbai-Goa highway in Maharashtra's Raigad district, a police official said. The incident took place in the early hours of the day and the towing van driver was arrested since he was found to be driving under the influence of alcohol, the official added. "A Scorpio on its way to Lonere with eight occupants halted at Mahad after the driver realised the fuel tank was empty. A speeding towing van rammed into the SUV, killing four persons on the spot, while three occupants sustained injuries and were admitted to the local rural hospital. One of the injured is in a critical condition, while the other two are out of danger," he said. "Prasad Natekar, Sameer Minde, Suryakant More, Sahil Shelar, all in the 25-30 age group, died on the spot. They are residents of Mahad. A case of causing death by negligence and other offences was registered against the towing van driver under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Motor Vehicles Act provisions," the official informed. The accused's blood samples have been collected for alcohol tests, he added.



Karnataka justifies bus fare hike

Karnataka Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Friday justified 15 per cent increase in government bus fares across the board and hit out at the BJP for its protest against the hike. Since there was a need to revise the salaries of transport staff, the bus fare revision was inevitable, he noted. Addressing reporters here, the minister said all the four corporations, namely Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation, KKRTC Kalyana Road Transport Corporation, North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation and Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, had been demanding an increase in bus fares. Finally, the government took a call in the cabinet meeting on Thursday, Reddy said. The minister said that way back in 2014, when he was holding the transport portfolio, bus fares were increased. When the diesel prices came down, the fares were slashed by two per cent, he added. On January 20, 2020, the then BJP government increased the bus fares by 12 per cent in KSRTC, KKRTC and NWKRTC.



NCC plans expedition to Mt Everest

National Cadet Corps has planned an expedition to the Mt Everest -- the world's highest peak -- later this year and a team is currently preparing for it at Siachen Battle School, the body's top official said on Friday. "We have got 16... eight boys and eight girls, and thereafter from among them the summiters are going to be selected," NCC Director General Lt Gen Gurbirpal Singh told PTI on the sidelines of a press briefing here. He interacted with reporters about the ongoing NCC Republic Day Camp at Delhi Cantonment and the future roadmap of the Corps. The NCC chief also shared some powerpoint slides detailing the journey of the Corps over the last one year. One of the slides were related to some of the mountaineering expeditions undertaken by the NCC cadets in the past, including to 'Mt Kang Yatse II (6,250m) -- team of 24 cadets' and 'Mt Abi Gamin (7,335m) -- team of 34 cadets.' The DG later told PTI the NCC had earlier undertaken an expedition to Mt Everest (8,848m). "We started preparing for last one year. As we speak, our team is in Siachen Battle School, preparing. We have got 16, eight boys and eight girls, and thereafter from among them the summiters are going to be selected," he said.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the Centre's development projects will boost the self-esteem of poor people and instil confidence in them, which is the real energy of Viksit Bharat.

At an event here, Modi handed over the keys to eligible beneficiaries of EWS (economically weaker section) flats at Swabhiman Apartments in the Ashok Vihar area, describing them as symbols of self-respect, dignity, and new aspirations and dreams.

The prime minister inaugurated several key development projects in Delhi, including 1,675 flats for residents of JJ (jhuggi-jhopri) clusters and the World Trade Centre, ahead of the assembly elections due in February.

Addressing a gathering, the prime minister said in the last

'Development projects will boost self-esteem of poor'

10 years, his government has fulfilled the dreams of owning a pucca house of over four crore people.

The development push from the BJP-led government at the Centre comes ahead of the assembly polls in Delhi, which is expected to be held in February.

The BJP has been locked in a bitter political confrontation with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which has been in power in the city since 2013, and is making all-out efforts to end its reign.

Recalling the dark days of the



Emergency in the past, Modi said he and many other party workers like him who were part of the underground movement against the Emergency stayed at Ashok Vihar.

He said the central government is handling major projects in Delhi, such as roads, metro systems, hospitals and college campuses. However, he added, the state government has failed to fulfil its responsibilities, especially in areas like the cleaning of the Yamuna River.

The PM said neglecting the Yamuna River has led to a cri-

sis where people are left with dirty water. He emphasised that his goal is to ensure that the benefits of good national schemes reach Delhi.

He said the central government's plans have provided the poor and middle classes with financial benefits and savings. He said the government is also making electricity bills zero and offering opportunities for families to produce electricity.

Modi said with the central government offering Rs 78,000 to help instal solar panels, families are becoming electricity producers through the Pradhanmantri Suryaghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

At the event, the prime minister announced the construction of nearly 3,000 new houses in Delhi. In the coming year, thousands of new houses would be made available for the city's residents, he said.

LINKING NEW DELHI TO ANTI-MUIZZU PLOT

India trashes Washington Post report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday strongly trashed two recent reports published by the Washington Post -- one linking New Delhi to a failed plot to impeach Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and another on Indian agents allegedly attempting to eliminate certain terror elements in Pakistan.

Dismissing the reports, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a "compulsive hostility" towards India.

In its report on the Maldives, the Post, citing a document titled "Democratic Renewal Initiative", claimed that opposition politicians proposed bribing 40 members of Parliament, including those from Muizzu's own party, to vote to impeach him. After months of secret talks, the plot-



ters failed to gather enough votes to impeach the president, it said.

"Both the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a compulsive hostility towards India. You can see a pattern in their activities. I leave you to judge their credibility. As far as we are concerned, they have none," Jaiswal said.

"As regards (the report on) Pakistan, I remind you of what Hillary Clinton said -- 'You

cannot keep snakes in your backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbours,'" he said.

Clinton had made the comments in a blunt message to Pakistan in 2011, when she was serving as the US secretary of state.

She had also said that Washington intended to "push the Pakistanis very hard" to remove militant safe havens and tackle groups like the Haqqani network that are responsible for cross-border strikes.

In its report on India's "shadow" operations in Pakistan, the Washington Post, quoting unnamed Pakistani and western officials, claimed that the Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), is carrying out a programme since 2021 to "kill at least a half a dozen people" inside Pakistan.

India always stood by Maldives: EAM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Maldives have finalised a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border trade with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserting that New Delhi has always stood by the island nation. Jaishankar made the remarks at a meeting with his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Khaleel in Delhi.

Khaleel arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit to explore ways to bolster bilateral ties in several key areas including maritime security, trade and investment.

"I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border transaction has been signed," Jaishankar said.

"We have increased our engagement in various sectors and I do want to say that India



has always stood by the Maldives. You are a very concrete expression of our neighbourhood first policy," he added.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male.



Cong fields Alka Lamba against Delhi CM Atishi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday announced the candidature of Alka Lamba from the Kalkaji constituency where she will take on AAP leader and Chief Minister Atishi in the upcoming assembly polls.

The Congress on Friday released its third list of candidates -- which has just one name -- for the assembly polls due in February.

According to the All India Congress Committee, the Central Election Committee has approved Lamba's candidature from Kalkaji.

2013 MUZAFFARNAGAR RIOTS CASE

Charges framed against politicians, others

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

A special MP-MLA case here on Friday framed charges against several BJP leaders, including Uttar Pradesh Minister Kapil Dev Aggarwal, former Union minister Sanjeev Balyan and ex UP minister Suresh Rana, Samajwadi Party MP Harendra Malik and others in a 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots-related case, a lawyer said.

Special MP-MLA court judge Devender Singh Fauzdar framed charges against 19 accused. Those charged also include VHP leader Sadhvi Prachi, ex-BJP MP Bhartendu Singh, controversial priest Yati Narsinghanand, ex-BJP MLAs Ashok Kansal and Umesh Malik and former UP minister Ashok Katari. They are accused of violating prohibitory orders and inciting communal tension. All accused were present in court during the hearing.

The judge framed charges under sections 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 341 (wrongfully restraining someone), and 353 (assault or use of criminal force against public servant on duty) of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code, along with provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

'Will make all efforts to empower farmers'

PNS ■ NASHIK

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday said that the Central government will make all possible efforts to empower farmers.

Chouhan was addressing a 'Kisan Susamvad programme organised by Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) Krsihi Vijyan Kendra here.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, various schemes are being

implemented to empower farmers and make them capable," he said. He said panchanamas of crops will be done using a satellite system at the panchayat and village levels so that the process is accurate and farmers will receive compensation by direct benefit transfer immediately.

Chouhan assured that fertilisers are being made available to farmers at reasonable rates, and the government is positive about offering the right price and market for exportable produce.

Closely following developments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday said it is closely following the developments in the case of Indian nurse Nimisha Priya, facing a death sentence in Yemen.

Priya, who hails from Kollengode in Kerala's Palakkad district, has been found guilty of murdering a Yemeni citizen in July, 2017. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Friday, "We are closely following the developments around the sentencing of Nimisha Priya. The government is extending all possible help in the matter."

The 37-year-old nurse is presently lodged in a jail in

MEA on Nimisha Priya case

Sana'a, the Yemeni capital city that is under the control of Iran-backed Houthis.

On Thursday, an Iranian official said Iran will do whatever it can in the case.

The Yemeni national, Talal Abdo Mahdi, reportedly died from an overdose of sedatives allegedly injected by Priya to retrieve her passport from him.

According to reports, Priya was handed capital punishment by a trial court in 2020 while Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council upheld the verdict in November 2023.

Yemen's President Rashad al-

Alimi approved the death penalty to Priya a few days back.

Priya's mother, Prema Kumari, currently in Sana'a, has made an emotional appeal to the Indian government to save her daughter's life. In a video message from Yemen, Prema Kumari urged the Centre and other authorities to intervene urgently. "This is my final plea. She has only a few days left. Every member of the action council has worked tirelessly to raise funds. I beg the Centre and the council to do everything possible to save her life," she said.

'IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO'

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has emphasised that normalising relations with India requires mutual willingness.

Speaking with journalists at the Foreign Office here on Thursday, Dar highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic efforts since the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government took office last year.

When asked about Pakistan's relations with India, he stressed on the importance of mutual effort, and said: "It takes two to tango."

Dar also announced plans to visit Bangladesh next month and noted that Islamabad and Dhaka are rebuilding ties after the fall of the Hasina government in August last year.

"Bangladesh is like a lost

Says Pak on relations with India



brother. We aim to strengthen economic and trade cooperation," he said and mentioned that he received an invitation from Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus during a meeting in Cairo recently.

Yunus took charge as Chief Adviser after the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted from power on August 5 last year following a students-led protest.

Earlier, Dar rejected claims

of the country's isolation as he said, "When we assumed office, there was a perception of diplomatic isolation. However, by expanding our diplomatic reach and engaging with regional neighbours, this perception has changed."

Commenting on Afghanistan, Dar expressed Pakistan's desire to strengthen ties with Kabul but admitted that terrorism remained a major challenge.

He revealed that planned visits to Kabul were postponed due to terrorist attacks and also criticised former intelligence chief Gen Faiz Hameed for engaging in talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is a separate group but a close ally of the Afghan Taliban.



Development of Andaman, Lakshadweep priority of govt: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Development of infrastructure and increasing tourism facilities in Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep is the priority of the Narendra Modi government, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Friday.

Chairing a meeting of the Island Development Agency (IDA) here, Shah also said the central government is preserving the culture and heritage of these islands and accelerating the development works, according to an official release.

During the meeting, the home minister reviewed the progress of the ongoing development initiatives in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, the release said.

"Even though these islands are far from Delhi, they are close to our hearts, development of infrastructure and increasing tourism facilities

there is the priority of the government," he said.

Shah emphasised the need for a holistic approach to infrastructure projects in both island groups and called on all concerned central ministries to collaborate on initiatives related to tourism, trade and other key sectors.

He also issued clear directives to address pending issues and expedite the completion of ongoing projects.

The home minister underscored the importance of advancing solar and wind energy initiatives in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

He emphasised achieving the goal of 100 per cent renewable energy generation through solar panels and windmills in these regions.

Shah directed the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) to implement the 'PM Surya Ghar' scheme by installing solar panels in all households across both island groups.

Caste discrimination in colleges sensitive issue: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Terming it as a sensitive issue, the Supreme Court on Friday said it will devise an effective mechanism to combat caste-based discrimination in educational institutions in the country.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the University Grants Commission (UGC) to notify draft regulations to ensure no caste-based discrimination happened with students in the central, state, private and deemed universities.

It directed the UGC to furnish data on the number of institu-

tions which had established equal opportunity cells in compliance with the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions Regulations) 2012, popularly called "UGC equity regulations".

"We are equally conscious of this sensitive issue. We will do something. We will have to find out some effective mechanism and modalities to see that the 2012 regulations are translated into reality," the bench said.

It sought Centre's response on the issue and asked the UGC to furnish data within six weeks on the complaints over such discrimination among students in

Says will do something to stop it



all universities and higher education institutions besides the consequent action.

Senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for the mothers of students Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadv, who allegedly died by suicide after facing caste-based discrimination, said from 2004 till now over 50 students (mostly from SC/ST) had killed themselves in IITs and other institutions after facing such discrimination.

While Vemula, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad Central University died on January 17, 2016, Tadv, a student at TN Topiwala National Medical

College, died on May 22, 2019, after she was subjected to purported discrimination by three doctors in her college. The bench said a PIL was filed in 2019 but no substantial hearing had taken place on the issue so far.

"From now on we will list this petition periodically so that some effective solution could be found in the matter as since 2019 nothing much has happened," said Justice Surya Kant.

The UGC counsel submitted a committee constituted by it gave recommendation and the commission drafted new regulations to stop caste-based discrimination.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

America under attack

A series of seemingly unrelated attacks highlight a troubling pattern of violence that has become a daily occurrence in the US

It is not a good beginning of the new year for the United States. The United States witnessed a series of attacks that shook it to core: a truck-ramming incident in New Orleans, a shooting incident in New York and a shooting spree in Las Vegas. These events, happening in quick succession, underscore an alarming pattern of violence that warrants deep analysis into their causes and potential implications. In New Orleans, a truck driven by Shamsud Din Jabbar plowed into a crowd, killing 15 and injuring 30. The truck, bearing an ISIS flag, was found to contain weapons and potential improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Jabbar was killed in a shootout with law enforcement and the FBI is treating the incident as an act of terrorism. Several people were injured after a mass shooting incident at the Amazura nightclub in Queens, New York late on Wednesday. Meanwhile, one person was killed and seven were wounded when a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a hotel belonging to US President-elect



Donald Trump in Las Vegas. Motives remain unclear, but early investigations point to ideological influences. The attacks share a few commonalities. All incidents targeted densely populated, high-profile locations to maximise casualties and media coverage.

In New Orleans and potentially Las Vegas, ideological motives appear central, with Jabbar's ISIS affiliations highlighting international terrorism's persistent threat. The use of a vehicle, explosives, and firearms demonstrates the adaptability of attackers, making prevention increasingly complex. The motivations behind these attacks stem from several inter-

secting factors. Jabbar's case exemplifies how individuals, even the US citizens, can become radicalised through extremist propaganda, facilitated by online networks. The New York incident is case in point of hazards of allowing free gun culture and resistance to any law on gun control. Early reports from Las Vegas suggest mental health challenges combined with ideological leanings may have fueled the attack, a trend increasingly observed in lone-wolf attackers. The growing threat of extremism, combined with unchecked emotions and easy access to firearms, continues to claim innocent lives. The implications of these attacks call for enhanced surveillance, with increased monitoring of online platforms and extremist networks. The gun control is the need of the hour. Though the US is divided on the gun control, it is high times at least some initial steps were taken in this direction. The recent spate of attacks underscores a volatile and evolving threat perception in the US. While law enforcement's swift action has mitigated further tragedy, addressing the root causes of such violence requires a multifaceted approach. From tackling radicalisation to bolstering community resilience, the nation must remain vigilant and united against the forces that seek to sow fear and division.

PICTALK



A worker plucks chrysanthemum flowers at a farm, in Nadia

A legacy of leadership, humanity and service



SANTOSH MATHEW

Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States, leaves behind an extraordinary legacy as a leader, peacemaker and humanitarian



Jimmy Carter, was one of the oldest living American presidents. Along with being the individual who has lived the longest after serving as president in American history, he is also distinguished for spending the most extended post-presidential period alive. Jimmy Carter, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his efforts in promoting human rights and conflict resolution, passed away in 2023. He was the 39th President of the United States, and he outlived many of his contemporaries, including George H.W. Bush, who he defeated in the presidential race in 1980. Born James Earl Carter Jr. on October 1, 1924, he has made a significant mark on American history. From 1977 to 1981, Jimmy Carter served as the President of the United States. Before becoming president, Jimmy Carter served as the Governor of Georgia in 1971. Despite running for president again in 1982 (Democrat) and competing against Ronald Reagan, he faced defeat. After leaving the presidency, he, along with his wife Rosalynn Carter, established the Carter Centre in 1982 in pursuit of helping the disadvantaged. Rosalynn Carter became the first lady and the first woman to serve as a board member of the

Carter Centre. In 2002, Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards peace and his exemplary actions in promoting human welfare. Despite reaching the age of 90, he remained active in various fields. Carter continued his philanthropic work, including building houses for low-income families through Habitat for Humanity, reducing diseases and elevating the quality of life for the underprivileged. His advocacy for human rights, international conflict resolution, presidency, human rights, and socio-economic development reflects his dedication to humanitarian causes. Carter's dedication to peace and social justice, as well as his active involvement in public service, sets him apart among U.S. presidents. Carter played a key role in mediating international conflicts, notably contributing to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. His post-presidential activities, including receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and actively participating in various humanitarian initiatives, showcase his commitment to making a positive impact on the world. However, his attempt to rescue



IN 2002, JIMMY CARTER WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR HIS EFFORTS TOWARDS PEACE AND HIS EXEMPLARY ACTIONS IN PROMOTING HUMAN WELFARE. DESPITE REACHING THE AGE OF 90, HE REMAINED ACTIVE IN VARIOUS FIELDS

American hostages in Iran, known as Operation Eagle Claw, failed. In his personal life, Jimmy Carter married Rosalynn in 1946, and their marriage lasted more than seven decades. They have four children: Jack, James, Donnel, and Amy. Rosalynn "Rosalynn" Carter, actively participated in various activities, including writing, activism, and advocacy for different causes. She was born in 1927. Rosalynn was actively involved in various meetings and discussions as the First Lady. She faced controversies, engaged in foreign trips, and represented her husband in diplomatic roles. In 1978, the then-American President Jimmy Carter visited India. Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister at that time. He had a meeting with 500 media persons. Carter visited the village of Chumukedima. The purpose of his visit was to revitalize the village where his mother, Lillian Peace, had served in the Peace Corps. During his journey, Carter distributed a considerable amount of money and television to the villagers. The village was later renamed as Carterpuri. In 2015, Jimmy Carter was diagnosed with

cancer, and in 2019, he faced health challenges related to multiple falls. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Carter, at the age of 96, stayed at home due to the pandemic's circumstances. Despite facing challenges and controversies, Jimmy Carter remained an active and influential figure in national and international affairs throughout his life. His contributions to diplomacy, human rights, and conflict resolution earned him recognition and respect. Even though his time as the American President failed, he left the White House and continued his work as a global advocate for human rights. He established the Carter Presidential Foundation to protect human rights globally, helping those in need and experiencing hardship. The organization has grown globally, assisting those in distress in Africa, Latin America, and other societies. Carter's compassionate activities in these regions included health-care services and other humanitarian initiatives. Today, he remains one of the eminent figures among the great presidents of America. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ENSURE WORKERS' SAFETY

Madam—This refers to the editorial, 'Save Priya' (January 3). It is indeed the responsibility of the Indian government to ensure the safety and security of millions of Indian nationals who choose to avail the employment opportunities extended in other countries. When the government is not able to provide employment in India, it is but natural that helpless people venture going abroad seeking livelihood means. Had the government provided jobs they would not have thought of going abroad. Therefore, the government should negotiate with the countries employing Indians to ensure the safety and security of the employees. In case any of them are found guilty of any crime, they should be sent back to face legal proceedings in the home country. This is not new. In the case of Abu, the extradition is agreed to with the condition of not awarding him capital punishment. Above all, it is time to rethink awarding capital punishment. Let us imagine a scene of punishing all those involved in various crimes, those who instigated and promoted them in Manipur in the recent months. An individual killing another individual is a crime to be punished by awarding death sentences, but mass killing and raping go unpunished and even if punished, enjoy remission and paroles. Review is imminent.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

ISIS STRIKES AGAIN

Madam—Apropos of the headlines 'Terror Strikes United States' (January 3), the ghastly terror strikes before Donald Trump swears in his second term as president are ominous for his upcoming tenure and may influence and harden his policy on terrorism throughout the world. The army veteran Shamsud Din Jabbar, swayed by ISIS, can't be alone in executing the terrorist attacks killing 14 people and fatally injuring several citizens. In fact, he got the advanced arms training and technology from the US army itself. The police investigation may unearth the

Sports award winners announced



The list of sports award winners is finally made public now, and the names of those who received the government nod for the Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna Award include D Gukesh, Harmanpreet Singh, Manu Bhaker and Praveen Kumar. Also, there is a long list for the Arjuna Awards, Dronacharya Award and the others. Although every recipient is worthy of receiving the honours for doing exceptionally well in their respective sports field. But D Gukesh is worthy of receiving extra appreciation for clinching the

title at such an early age of 18. He excellently carved out his own space for the national sport honours by becoming the winner of the FIDE World Chess Championship, beating Ding Liren most recently last December 2024. His calmness, grit and sacrifices on personal grounds, as well as his patience for his sports category, made him the utmost deserving candidate for this very honour. He has taken chess to new heights for being a cynosure in the Indian sports history. Today chess has become a popular mind-game among the youth, especially Gen Z & Gen Alpha. All credit goes to the young aspirations & zeal of D Gukesh, R Vaishali and Praggnandhaa who have made this 6-century-based, Indian-origin game called Shatranj reach the epitome of sports craze among players of every generation. He is in true sense, India's Khel Ratna (Sports Gem).

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

SOLAR POWER FOR RESIDENTS

Madam—It is an excellent initiative by the UT Administration of Chandigarh to provide solar plants to the residents of the 'City Beautiful' under the RESCO (Renewable Energy Service Company) scheme at no cost, inviting the tapping of solar energy and savings for every household. The sun is available in plenty in northern India, which will make the scheme very successful. This scheme needs to be promulgated rapidly in other cities of the nation too, with the initiative of the Union government, to benefit the maximum number of people. It will help in saving natural energy, a privilege available in abundance to only a few select countries. The government should ensure that benefits are given only to those holding authorised infrastructure duly registered to discourage further unauthorised constructions and ensure correct utilisation of government funds.

R S Narula | Patiala

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Balancing dreams and parental aspirations: A dilemma for students

In a society deeply rooted in tradition and shaped by economic uncertainty, parents often tread cautiously when guiding their children's career paths

We tend to be over-cautious when we guide our children in their professional choices. I realised this only after I had cajoled my children into studying sciences till their class 12. My rationale was that they could always switch to any other course for graduation, but the reverse was not possible. They are now happily pursuing their non-science professions, often ribbing me about how much better they could have done in their Board examinations had I not insisted. Many parents from my social circle still struggle to resolve the conundrum.

A senior colleague faced such a dilemma for his daughter two decades back. My daughters were by now happily pursuing their dreams. I freely dispensed my wisdom to let the young lady pursue whatever she wanted. He was contemplative for some time before agreeing. He remembered his school friend, the son of a famous medical doctor. The friend was pushed into a medical college sometime in the late sixties. He quit after a couple of years, joined a



course in liberal arts, and was a contented leading artist. I was born a few years after independence. I believe our parents were excited about freedom but were equally apprehensive about the future for the next generation. They opted for the more secure government jobs for us through engineering or medical studies. Children from families who had already seen enough government jobs through second-generation elders started moving to other options in the nineties. The liberalisation of the Indian economy opened professional choices hitherto unknown to children and parents alike. But it was still not the same across the entire spectrum. A junior colleague sought my advice regarding his son's admission to an engineering course. The child had not performed well in the competi-

tive examinations. The fee charged by the available lower-rung colleges was exorbitant, necessitating the father to take a loan. It was tragic as he came to me after five years, a year after the young man had completed his graduation and had been unable to secure a job, requesting if I could arrange a job even at a measly monthly salary. I witnessed several similar cases and wondered about the strange phenomenon even half a century after independence when several better-paying career options were available. An improved economy has resulted in a continuous upward movement of people financially from the below-poverty line to the lower class to the lower-middle-class to the middle-middle-class, and so on. However, an increasing population also ensures a part of the population remains in the lower financial strata. These parents are insecure about the future leading them towards the perceived safer educational courses for children to pursue. We read about senior leaders exhorting young people to become job providers instead of job

seekers. Not many talk about the ways to achieve this or the alternate career options. Engineering and medical colleges keep mushrooming without the government and the leaders pausing to reflect upon the implications of unplanned growth. This will continue for a few more generations till the population stabilizes. I narrate experiences from my life when interacting with the young in college. I tell them to pursue their dreams. A few of them invariably ask me whether to follow the courses that their parents have chosen for them or if they should follow their dreams. It is a difficult question to answer. I draw upon my life when I respond, "Follow your parents today, they only want the best for you. But do not let your dreams die. Life gives enough opportunities for you to pursue your dreams - if not today, certainly sometime in the future."

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



SANJAY CHANDRA





FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOMING JEALOUSY AND POSSESSIVENESS

In a world driven by competition and material aspirations, they become the silent tormentors



RAVI VALLURI

The world has become exceedingly ruthless and is not populated by monks and sages. Renunciation today is seen as an act contemptibly performed by someone lacking in courage. Competition fuels the aspiration to launch territories and enlarge the area of dominance. Companies, countries and communities have all become wary of the material success of their 'competitors' and in the process compromise with their goals and objectives. Consequently, they resort to shortcuts to emerge triumphant and victorious. The attribute of jealousy arises in an individual when the mind is possessive of certain belongings.

They fail to appreciate it is primarily inadequacy and deficiency in the personality that triggers this kind of capricious and mercurial behaviour. Interestingly, envy in many also arises out of shortages. There can be a lack of aptitude, talent, resources, connections, opportunities or because of unfavourable outcomes. This engenders negative feelings towards perceived competitors, which culminates in jealousy and other negative feelings. Individuals subsumed by jealousy build walls of false security walls around their personalities.

Such minds feel cheery about their possessions. They attach importance to this property, clinging on to it. This could be a physical property, position, power and pelf, pleasure or sex. As per the Mahabharata, Karna was extremely jealous of Arjuna, which eventually proved to be his nemesis. Similarly, Dev Dutt remained extremely envious of his enlightened



cousin, Buddha, which only led to his downfall. The jealous and possessive mind is acquisitive by nature, taking both animate and inanimate objects for granted and getting attached to things, like an addiction to alcohol or marijuana.

Additionally, such a mind is perpetually petrified at the prospect of losing acquisitions. Fear in such minds harbours negative tendencies such as hatred, greed and ruthlessness. For instance, an artiste aspiring to be a lead artiste in a drama plays foul with a more talented actress becoming fearful and gripped with hatred and greed. Her ruthless mind kept conjuring tricks, trying to outsmart the second lead and in the bargain lost the plot. Jealous and envious minds have become laboratories of antagonism that spew hatred. How do we overcome attributes such as jealousy, envy, and possessiveness? At one end of the spectrum are organisations and authorities which need to take up this responsibility. This includes proper parenting, where children are brought up on ideals of inherent goodness, an effective educational system that imparts values as part of their pedagogy, governments that take up the responsibility of providing equal opportunities to the citizens and try to carve out an egalitarian system and a society that addresses the core issues of humaneness amongst its citizenry. Vasudeva Kutumbakam (or what is termed one world family) is the net result. The spiritual touch is an important colour in the rainbow of goodness. One can practice any faith, but we need to be tolerant of other peoples' points of view. Spirituality succeeds where religions draw the fault lines and wave red flags. Globalisation has made the world flat, but has resulted in an exponential increase in crass commercialisation and human minds have fallen prey to antipathetic traits such as jealousy, envy, attachments, entanglements, greed and possessiveness. The vicious tendencies of jealousy and possessiveness can be tackled by following the two-fold approach highlighted so that the chasm between individuals diminishes. "Manifest plainness Embrace simplicity Reduce selfishness Have few desires." — Lao Tzu

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

How waterways shape global dominance



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Beyond the rhetoric of ideologies and resources, history reveals a stark reality: whoever commands the strategic arteries of global trade rules, the world



Have you ever wondered why the world's most significant conflicts haven't often been about land or wealth, but about water—specifically, the narrow, strategic passages that govern the flow of global commerce? What if the true history of power isn't written in the conquest of continents, but in the manipulation of these invisible arteries that sustain entire civilisations? We've been conditioned to believe wars are fought over ideologies, religions, or resources, but in reality, the greatest power struggles have always boiled down to one thing: who controls the waterways. In the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), Athens fought for dominance over the Aegean Sea, while the Punic Wars (264–146 BCE) saw Rome and Carthage clash over Mediterranean trade routes. The Viking Invasions (8th–11th Century) leveraged rivers and coastal routes to expand across Europe. The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) revolved around control of the English Channel, vital for military and trade access.

The Spanish Armada (1588) attempted to invade England via the Channel, only to fail, marking the rise of English naval power. The Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652–1674) pitted England against the Dutch for supremacy over global trade routes. The Opium Wars (1839–1860) saw Britain assert control over Chinese trade routes, while the Crimean War (1853–1856) focused on access to the Black Sea and key straits. History teaches us one undeniable truth: whoever controls the waters, controls the world. So, are today's tensions over waterways merely the latest chapter in an ongoing imperialist saga, where the West fights to preserve its dominance, regardless of the cost? Consider the Suez Canal, that artificial marvel that stitched together the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

To the naked eye, it may appear as nothing more than a lifeline for global trade, but dig deeper and you'll find it at the heart of Western exploitation. When the British seized control in 1882, under the convenient pretext of 'protecting their investments,' they didn't just shorten maritime routes; they solidified their chokehold on the world's shipping routes, ensuring that they would remain the dominant force in global com-



THE PANAMA CANAL EXISTS BECAUSE THE UNITED STATES ORCHESTRATED THE DISINTEGRATION OF COLOMBIAN SOVEREIGNTY IN 1903. THIS WASN'T A MOMENT OF ENGINEERING BRILLIANCE, BUT A CALCULATED EXERCISE IN IMPERIALISM

merce. When Egypt's Nasser attempted to break this grip in 1956, his actions sparked the Suez Crisis, where Britain, France, and Israel launched a military intervention to maintain their control. As US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles famously quipped, "The United States will not tolerate the use of force to interfere with the free flow of commerce." And yet, isn't it glaringly obvious that this was never about commerce at all—it was about the West's attempt to secure its monopoly, at any cost? In the same vein, the Panama Canal stands as a bold symbol of imperial manipulation. The US didn't merely 'build' the canal—it stole it.

The Panama Canal exists because the United States orchestrated the disintegration of Colombian sovereignty in 1903. This wasn't a moment of engineering brilliance, but a calculated exercise in imperialism. With the canal, the US secured its unchallenged control over the Atlantic and Pacific, guaranteeing military and economic supremacy for the century to come. Even when Panamanian discontent festered, and the CIA's once-trusted ally Manuel Noriega threatened the established order, the United States responded with military force under the guise of 'fighting drug cartels.'

To the naive, it was a noble cause. To the cynical, it was a ruthless move to preserve a stranglehold over one of the world's most critical arteries. The canal may have technically been handed back to Panama in 1999, but let's not fool ourselves—it remains an essential tool of Western control, albeit one with a new face.

Let's not forget the Strait of Hormuz, a sliver of water that handles a quarter of the world's oil. The British recognised its significance early on, securing their dominance over it through protectorate agreements in the 19th century. By the time of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s,

Hormuz had become the beating heart of the global oil trade, and any attempt to disrupt its flow was met with swift intervention.

Both sides sought to shut it down, understanding that control over Hormuz meant control over global energy. Yet, even today, with Iran flexing its military muscles, Western powers continue to police this waterway as though it were their birthright, ensuring that the oil flows uninterrupted, no matter the cost of human lives. Now, as the world shifts into a new era, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is emerging as the latest theatre of power.

Stretching along Russia's Arctic coastline, this passageway promises to bypass traditional chokepoints like the Suez and Panama Canal, opening up a new frontier for global shipping. With the ice caps melting, climate change has inadvertently opened a new battlefield for dominance. The West, for all its talk of climate change solutions, is deeply uneasy about the NSR. For centuries, the Western maritime powers have been used to dictating global trade, yet now they face the challenge of a new route that circumvents their long-held control. And then there are the Turkish Straits—where the promise of control has always been laced with deception.

In World War I, the Entente powers offered Russia control over the straits in exchange for military support, only to revoke that promise after the Bolshevik Revolution. Since the Montreux Convention of 1936, Turkey has held sway over the straits, but with conditions that serve the interests of the West. These waters remain a hotbed of tension, especially now, as the Russia-NATO conflict forces us to re-evaluate the importance of these narrow waterways.

Yet, in all of these conflicts, one fact is clear: Western powers have never relinquished their thirst for control. Look at the Malacca Strait, the life-

line for Asia's maritime trade, and the silent battlefield of geopolitical manoeuvring. In the 16th century, the Portuguese recognised its importance as the gateway between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and later, the Dutch would follow. During World War II, Japan's occupation of Malaya underscored the strait's value, as it was the critical supply line for its imperial ambitions.

Today, China's dominance of the strait has triggered an uneasy response from the United States, which seeks to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Malacca Strait is as vital as it is contested, and its importance will only increase as the world edges closer to a new era of Cold War. Donald Trump's re-emergence as a political force serves as a blunt reminder that these conflicts are far from distant.

His comments on Greenland—a land abundant in resources and strategic significance—and on seizing Panama if needed, are not just idle musings. The United States' thirst for the Arctic has always been driven by the same imperial instincts that have defined its foreign policy for over a century. His fixation on the Panama Canal reveals the same ambitions, albeit with more brash rhetoric.

While many dismiss his comments as the reckless utterances of a man out of touch with the world's realities, those who know history understand that this is how empires operate: through calculated moves disguised as political theatrics.

The bottom line is this: the manipulation of waterways remains an open secret, and the struggle for control is as intense as ever—whether by the West or any power with imperialistic and hegemonic ambitions.

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

Dalal Street ends 2024 on a bearish note: Rs 9.65 trillion investor wealth eroded

A focus on earnings growth and moderation in valuations will be critical for sustaining long-term market performance in 2025

The absence of new year cheer was evident as Dalal Street continued crashing in the last week of December leading to 2025, in the process eroding investors' wealth to the tune of Rs 9.65 trillion as Sensex tanked by 2,915 points. The bear run at a time when the market was already grappling with thin year-end volumes was made worse by a weakening rupee as it slid towards the 86-pence mark. This further dampened the appeal of Indian equities for foreign institutional investors (FIIs) leading to robust FII outflows. The prevalence of this phenomenon was worldwide with Japan's Nikkei 225, China's Shanghai Composite, Australia's ASX 200, Germany's DAX, France's

CAC 40 and NASDAQ Composite showing similar bearish sentiments. The current stock market meltdown is influenced by several factors.

Not only in India, but global markets are witnessing this trend particularly due to profit-taking, and tax-loss harvesting focussing on year-end tax strategies, giving a miss to the traditional 'Santa Claus rally'. Institutional and retail investors alike booked profits and rebalanced their portfolios, particularly in large-cap stocks which posted strong growth in 2024, leading to selling pressure across the board and a broad-based correction.

As economic interlinkages of India with the world have deepened, so has the integra-



HIMA BINDU KOTA

tion with global stock markets. The uncertain global economic conditions, particularly in countries like the United States, coupled with fears of a global recession fuelled by weak manufacturing data from China, have dampened investor sentiment both worldwide and in India. A decline in the demand for Indian exports, mainly in the IT and manufacturing sectors

further led to the market's downward spiral. Geopolitical tensions including regional wars, ambiguous crude oil prices and subsequent disruptions in supply chains have impacted the markets and sector-specific tragedies like the Jeju Air crash in South Korea contributed to the overall bearish sentiment.

Weaker than expected third quarterly results, particularly in the banking and consumer goods sector, dampened the confidence displayed by the markets due to the resilient first two quarters showed by the Indian economy. This reduced the conviction further as the banking and consumer goods sectors were considered growth engines since the beginning of the year.



Stock market valuations in India and around the globe were elevated in 2024. In India, the higher valuations were fuelled by strong domestic economic growth and robust corporate earnings, leading to sustained investor confidence.

Several companies ranging across industries were trading at premium P/E ratios, like Infosys (28-30x); HUL (55x); Bajaj Finance (40x); and

Zomato (10-12x) to name a few. However, since the question of sustaining the overvalued stocks in the backdrop of weak quarterly earnings is difficult, it led to the year-end market corrections that we are experiencing at the end of December 2024.

Although the aggressive monetary policy by the Reserve Bank of India was able to combat inflation during the year, high interest rates negatively affected the borrowing costs of businesses and retail investors.

This led to increased interest in investments in fixed-income securities instead of finding equity markets attractive. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) who were attracted to the Indian growth story and wanted to be its

integral part also turned into net sellers in December 2024. A risk-averse stance and a strong USD value made emerging nations like India less attractive during the year-end, leading to capital outflows, which in turn led to a weakening rupee again. Overall, the bearish stock market sentiment in December 2024 was a combination of year-end profit-taking strategies, global economic outlook, high stock valuation concerns, weak sectoral performance and outlook and several international events. However, all is not bleak. These fluctuations are a part of the larger economic cycle and the markets will see an upward cycle with a long-term focus on the fundamentals and relevant steps at

the policy level. The resilient Indian economy and its economic growth will be the key driver for renewed opportunities for growth and investment in 2025.

This economic growth will be supported by increased investments in infrastructure, boosting the manufacturing environment to improve the industrial output, a burgeoning middle class and a revival of the rural economy may increase the demand for automobiles, FMCG and consumer durables in 2025. In addition, India's rapidly growing digital economy will continue to support new-age companies and sectors.

(The writer is Associate Professor at Amity University, Noida. The views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Gold prices almost flat at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams

Gold prices traded almost flat at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal closed at Rs 79,720 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver slipped Rs 230 to Rs 90,400 per kg on Friday. The white metal settled at Rs 90,630 per kg in the previous trading session. However, the price of gold with 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 130 to Rs 79,300 per 10 grams on Friday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery increased Rs 6 to trade at Rs 77,723 per 10 grams. "Gold traded with minor gains in the domestic market, while Comex gold maintained a sideways trend around USD 2,655 per ounce," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The market remains steady with limited movements as participants await further global cues to determine the next direction, Trivedi said. Silver climbed Rs 517 or 0.58 per cent to Rs 89,690 per kg in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Globally, Comex gold futures rose USD 2.10 per ounce or 0.08 per cent to USD 2,671.10 per ounce.

'EV firms agree to end subsidy after existing subsidy regime ends'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said the electric vehicle (EV) companies present in the meeting have unanimously agreed that they would no longer need subsidies once the existing subsidy regime ends. Stakeholders from the EV sector held deliberations with the minister here on issues pertaining to development of battery charging and swapping infrastructure.

The minister also said that companies are free to choose their own business models.

Whether they prefer to collaborate and share resources for battery swapping or sell vehicles with their own batteries, the decision is entirely up to them, he said.

"Everybody was unanimous in the room that once the existing subsidy regime comes to an end, none of them requires the subsidy to grow further...Each sector has one or the other model which makes it self-sustaining and does not call for further subsidies," Goyal told reporters when asked about the views of



companies on subsidies.

In a bid to woo global EV makers into the country, in March last year the government rolled out an electric vehicle policy, under which duty concessions were offered to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million.

The government has plans to install 10,763 public charging stations across the country under the FAME-II scheme.

Under FAME-India Scheme phase-II, incentives are provided to buyers of electric vehicles in the form of an upfront reduction in the

purchase price of electric vehicles.

There is another scheme - PM E-DRIVE - to support electric mobility through support for 14,028 e-buses, 2,05,392 electric three-wheelers (L5), 1,10,596 e-rickshaws and e-carts and 24,79,120 electric two-wheelers.

In addition, e-trucks, e-ambulances, EV public charging stations and upgrading of testing agencies are also supported under the scheme.

The government has also rolled out the production linked incentive (PLI) schemes for auto sector and manufacturing of Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC).

'Exports to cross USD 800 bn'

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said despite global economic uncertainties, India's exports of goods and services are expected to cross USD 800 billion this fiscal, which will be a record. Last fiscal year, the exports stood at USD 778 billion. He said though there will be stresses in the global system, but India's exports basket is large. "My estimate is that we will cross USD 800 billion in exports, another record given the world situation," he told reporters here. He added share in services exports is also growing at a rapid pace. On exports to developing and least developed countries (LDCs), he said those nations have been stressed because of the forex crisis they are facing after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Red Sea crisis too had impacted shipping lines.

EPFO rolls out centralised pension system

68 lakh pensioners to benefit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO has completed the Centralized Pension Payments System (CPPS) rollout in all its regional offices across the country that will benefit over 68 lakh pensioners, the labour ministry said on Friday.

The CPPS is a paradigm shift from the existing pension disbursement system that is decentralised, with each zonal/regional office of EPFO maintaining separate agreements with only 3-4 banks, the ministry explained in a statement.

Under CPPS, a beneficiary will be able to withdraw pension from any bank and there will be no need for to visit the bank for verification at the time of commencement of pension, and the amount will be immediately credited upon release, it stated.

The CPPS system January 2025 onwards will also ensure disbursement of pension throughout India without any need for transfer of pension payment orders (PPO) from one office to another even when the pensioner moves from one location to another or changes his bank or branch, it said.

This will be a great relief to pensioners who move to their hometown after retirement. The first pilot of CPPS was completed in October last year in Karnal, Jammu, and Srinagar regional offices with the pension disbursement of about Rs 11 crore to more than 49,000 EPFO pensioners, a ministry statement said.

The second pilot was taken up in November in 24 regional offices where about Rs 213 crore pension was disbursed to more than 9.3 lakh pensioners, it stated.



MOIL's manganese ore production rises 5 pc

The manganese ore production of state-owned MOIL rose by 4.5 per cent year-on-year to 13.3 lakh tonnes in the April-December period of the current fiscal, the government said on Friday. The sale of manganese ore also rose by 4 per cent to 11.39 lakh tonnes in the first nine months of the current fiscal, compared to the year-ago period. "Coming to the performance in the first nine months of the current financial year, MOIL has registered production of 13.3 lakh tonnes which is 4.5 per cent higher and sale of 11.39 lakh tonnes which is 4 per cent higher than the corresponding period of the last year," the steel ministry said in a statement. The company's CMD Ajit Kumar Saxena exuded confidence that the company will maintain the growth momentum. "The PSU has also registered growth in its exploratory core drilling which stands at 72,340 metres, which is 19 per cent higher than the corresponding period of last year," the statement said.

UCO Bank's business grows 12pc

PNS ■ KOLKATA

UCO Bank on Friday reported robust year-on-year growth across key parameters for the quarter ending December 2024, with the lender's total business rising by 12.18 per cent to Rs 4.88 lakh crore.

According to a provisional disclosure submitted to the stock exchanges, total advances saw a sharper gain, registering a 16.20 per cent year-on-year rise to Rs 2.08 lakh crore, driven by a significant 18.83 per cent growth in domestic advances, which stood at Rs 1.83 lakh crore.

Deposits also experienced healthy growth, increasing by 9.37 per cent for the quarter to Rs 2.80 lakh crore, with domestic deposits rising by 7.29 per cent to Rs 2.65 lakh crore. The bank's CASA ratio — a critical measure of low-cost deposit base — remained steady at 37.96 per cent versus 37.61 per cent in December 2023.

The credit-deposit (CD) ratio improved to 74.55 per cent in the reporting quarter as against 69.93 per cent in the year-ago period, reflecting better asset utilisation.

Sensex, Nifty tank 1% on selloff in banking, IT stocks

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure to settle nearly 1 per cent lower on Friday as investors pared exposure to bank and IT stocks ahead of the earnings season starting next week.

A depreciating rupee against strengthening US dollar overseas further weighed on sentiment, traders said. Despite a positive start, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 720.60 points or 0.90 per cent to close at 79,223.11. During the day, it slumped 833.98 points or 1.04 per cent to 79,109.73.

The NSE Nifty tanked 183.90 points or 0.76 per cent to 24,004.75.

On a weekly basis, the BSE



benchmark jumped 524.04 points or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 191.35 points or 0.80 per cent.

"A sell-on-rally sentiment prevails in the market due to a strong US dollar, high valuation, and a shift towards a multi-asset investment strategy. Reducing US jobless claims and potential policy shifts in the US indicate that the Fed is not in a hurry to cut interest

rates in the near term.

"Looking ahead, the market is likely to focus on Q3 earnings, with expectations of improvement in earnings on a QoQ basis," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the Sensex pack, Zomato, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, ICICI Bank, Sun Pharma, Larsen &

Toubro, HCL Tech and ITC were the major laggards.

On the other hand, Tata Motors, Nestle, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the gainers.

"Despite the short recovery in the past two sessions, markets lost the momentum as there is still a lot of pessimism due to slowing growth, higher domestic valuations, foreign fund outflows, and uncertainty over US trade policies post Trump's resumption as the country's president.

Hence, markets may see bouts of correction, and investors will continue to maintain caution while keeping an eye on global developments," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Yes Bank clocks 12.6 pc loan growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Yes Bank on Friday said it has posted a credit growth of 12.6 per cent at Rs 2.45 lakh crore for the December quarter. Total advances were Rs 2.17 lakh crore at the end of December 31, 2023, Yes Bank said in a regulatory filing.

The lender reported a 14.6 per cent rise in total deposits to Rs 2.77 lakh crore as against Rs 2.41 lakh crore at



the end of the third quarter of the previous financial year. Liquidity Coverage Ratio rose to 133.2 per cent at the end of December 2024 as

compared to 118.4 per cent at the end of nine-month period of previous fiscal.

Meanwhile, another private sector lender IndusInd

Bank reported a 12 per cent growth in credit at Rs 3.67 lakh crore during October-December quarter as compared to Rs 3.27 lakh crore in the third quarter of the previous financial year.

At the same time, deposits grew by 11 per cent to Rs 4.09 lakh crore as compared to Rs 3.68 lakh crore in the same quarter a year ago, IndusInd Bank said in a separate regulatory filing.

Forex reserves drop to \$640.27 billion

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion during the week ended December 27, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped by USD 4.641 billion to USD 644.391 billion.

The reserves have been declining for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September.

For the week ended December 27, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 4.641 billion to USD 551.921 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 541 million to USD 66.268 billion during the week, the RBI said.



RBI lifts restrictions on Arohan Financial Services

The Reserve Bank on Friday lifted the restrictions placed on Kolkata-based Arohan Financial Services Limited with immediate effect. In October last year, the central bank had ordered Arohan Financial and three other NBFCs to cease and desist from sanction and disbursement of loans effective from the close of business of October 21, on material supervisory concerns, including usurious pricing. Subsequently, the Kolkata-based NBFC initiated remedial action and submitted its various compliances to the Reserve Bank, the RBI said on Friday. "Now having satisfied itself based on company's submissions", and in view of their adoption of revamped processes, systems, and the company's commitment to ensure adherence to the regulatory guidelines on an ongoing basis, especially for ensuring fairness in the loan pricing, the Reserve Bank said it has decided to lift the restrictions placed on Arohan Financial Services with immediate effect.

ICAI calls for prudent tax reforms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI has sought tax benefits for promoting climate change mitigation strategies and a separate section for income from shares and securities in the income tax returns form.

Besides, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has sought a special tax regime for partnership firms and limited liability partnerships (LLPs) as well as simplification of income tax return forms.

The institute on Friday said it has advocated for prudent tax reforms aimed at fostering eco-



nomical growth and encouraging environmental sustainability in the pre-Budget Memorandum 2025.

"Provision of tax benefits for promoting climate change mitigation strategies, which will not only contribute to India's climate change goals but also

drive economic growth by promoting sustainable business practices is a suggestion in this direction," it said in a release.

Among other suggestions, ICAI has proposed a new head to show income from shares and securities that will have provisions relating to taxability of

income by way of dividend, interest or capital gains.

Rationalising conditions for treating a return of income as defective in the e-filing regime and provision of opportunity of being heard before treating a defective return as invalid is another suggestion by the institute. ICAI has also pitched for simplifying the capital gains provisions under sections 54 to 54F of the Act, extending 10 per cent tolerance band to cases where value is determined by the valuation officer under Section 50C(2), rationalising rate of tax under Section 115BBE in respect of cash credits and unexplained investments.

Premium devices demand to push smartphone mkt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rising demand for premium devices, led by Apple and Samsung, is expected to increase India's smartphone market size to over USD 50 billion (about Rs 4,28,900 crore) this year, market research firm Counterpoint Technology Market Research said on Friday.

The Indian smartphone market size was estimated at USD 37.9 billion (about Rs 3.25 lakh crore) in 2021, according to the research firm.

"India's smartphone market is on track to achieve its highest-ever value in 2025, crossing USD 50 billion. Brands like Apple and Samsung are leading this shift by offering competitive options in the premium and ultra-premium segments," the report said. Apple India has registered a total income of Rs 67,121.6 crore, while Samsung reported revenue of Rs 71,157.6 crore from the mobile phone vertical in the financial year 2024. According to the report, the retail average selling price of India's

smartphone market is expected to cross the USD 300 mark (about Rs 25,700) for the first time in 2025. "Apple is expected to see strong demand for its Pro models, driven by local manufacturing and recent price reductions across its iPhone lineup. Meanwhile, Samsung's value-focused strategy is gaining traction, particularly with its flagship S series," the report said.

Chinese brands like Vivo, Oppo, and OnePlus are attracting consumers by offering advanced camera systems etc. in the affordable premium category, ranging between Rs 30,000-45,000 apiece.

"Meanwhile, OnePlus is making a comeback by addressing Indian retailers' concerns related to display and motherboard, which had negatively impacted its performance earlier this year. Besides, the company's planned investment of Rs 6,000 crore (about USD 720 million) in local market expansion is expected to accelerate its recovery and growth," the report said.

Rural poverty declines sharply, says SBI research

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rural poverty has declined significantly to 4.86 per cent in the fiscal ending March 2024 from 25.7 per cent in 2011-12 mainly driven by government support programmes, said a SBI research released on Friday.

Urban poverty too is estimated at 4.09 per cent, down from 13.7 per cent in 2011-12.

"The sharp decline in rural poverty ratio is on account of higher consumption growth in lowest 0-5 per cent decile with significant government support and such support is

important as we also find that change in food prices has a significant impact on not just food expenditures, but overall expenditure in general," said the SBI research on consumption expenditure survey.

The latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, released by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, showed that consumption inequality in rural as well as urban areas declined during the August 2023-July 2024 period as compared to a year ago.

The SBI research said that



the Consumption Expenditure Survey reveals a remarkable decline in rural poverty estimated at 4.86 per cent in 2023-24 (7.2 per cent in FY23 and 25.7 per cent in FY12) and

urban poverty estimated at 4.09 per cent (4.6 per cent in FY23 and 13.7 per cent in 2011-12).

It is possible that these numbers could undergo minor revisions

once the 2021 census is completed and the new rural-urban population share is published, the research report said.

"We believe urban poverty could decline even further. At an aggregate level, we believe poverty rates in India could now be in the range of 4-4.5 per cent with almost minimal existence of extreme poverty," it said.

Enhanced physical infrastructure is scripting a new story in rural mobility, it said and added that one of the reasons for the increasingly shrinking horizontal income gap

between rural and urban and the vertical income gap within rural income classes," SBI said.

"The difference between rural and urban monthly per capita consumption expenditure/ Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) to rural MPCE is now at 69.7 per cent, a rapid decline from 88.2 per cent in 2009-10...mostly due to the initiatives the government has taken in terms of DBT transfers, building rural infrastructures, augmenting farmer's income, (and) improving the rural livelihood significantly," it said

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Tender Specification No: 1-04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09/2024-25 of SE/OPMDK for various works in Medak and Toppran Divisions of Medak Circle. Sale of Bids starts from Dt: 06.01.2025 and ends on Dt: 10.01.2025 at 13:00 Hrs. Last date for submission of bids is Dt: 10.01.2025 at 15:00 Hrs. and opened on Dt: 10.01.2025 at 16:00 Hrs. Further information can be obtained from website www.spsouthernpower.com. Phone: 08452-221442 & 7901003668, 7901677789.
Sd/- Superintending Engineer
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‘HYD’S SPORTS LANDSCAPE GROWS, WHILE KICKBOXING FIGHTS FOR ITS PLACE’

A PROUD HYDERABADI AT HEART, WHO HAILS FROM THE ‘CITY OF VICTORY’, VIJAYAWADA, K HARSHA RATNAKAR, AN INTERNATIONAL KICKBOXER SPEAKS PASSIONATELY ABOUT HOW THE CITY HAS SHAPED HIS LIFE, HIS ASPIRATIONS AND HIS DETERMINATION TO INSPIRE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF ATHLETES, IN THIS CHAT WITH THE PIONEER

TEJAL SINHA
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Hyderabad, celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and technological advancements, is steadily emerging as a hub for sports in India. The city has produced world-class athletes like badminton champions PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal and cricketing legend Mohammed Azharuddin, proving its capability to foster exceptional talent. With state-of-the-art facilities such as the Gachibowli Indoor Stadium and the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, Hyderabad provides a strong foundation for sports enthusiasts. However, while mainstream sports like cricket and badminton thrive, niche disciplines such as kickboxing continue to grapple with challenges in gaining recognition and support. Despite these obstacles, the city's diverse talent pool and growing passion for sports make it a promising contender in India's sporting landscape.

K Harsha Ratnakar, an international kickboxer and civil service aspirant, exemplifies the grit and determination needed to overcome these challenges. Born in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, Harsha moved to Hyderabad at the age of three and has since called the city his home. "Hyderabad has shaped me in every way possible. My education, my professional journey and even my dreams are deeply rooted in this city," says Harsha, who has cleared the Group-1 prelims in Telangana and is eagerly awaiting the results of the mains.

Beyond academics, he has made a name for himself in the world of kickboxing, representing India on the international stage. However, his journey has not been without struggles, particularly in fighting for the recognition of his beloved sport in Telangana.

Ratnakar's love for kickboxing began with a childhood fascination for action movies and WWE matches. "I was mesmerized by Jackie Chan, Bruce Lee and other action stars. Watching them made

me want to pursue something similar in real life," he recalls. Adding to his inspiration was his father, who was a karate player in his youth.

In 2012, he discovered kickboxing through a friend and joined a local academy under coach Suresh Patel. Initially, it was a casual hobby to stay fit and make productive use of his time. However, his dedication soon led him to participate in district-level tournaments. From there, he advanced to state and national levels, making his mark as a skilled athlete.

"My journey took a pause when I decided to focus on preparing for the civil services exams," he shares. For seven years, Harsha stayed away from the sport but returned with renewed passion in 2020. His comeback wasn't without challenges; he faced injuries, including a hamstring tear that placed him ninth in a national tournament. Undeterred, Harsha worked tirelessly to recover, eventually winning gold at the state level and earning a silver medal at an international championship.

Despite his achievements, Harsha's journey has been marked by the lack of recognition for kickboxing in Telangana. "While Hyderabad offers numerous opportunities, niche sports like kickboxing often face neglect," he observes.

The root of the problem, Harsha explains, lies in outdated policies. "Telangana still follows G.O. 74, a sports government order from 2012. This order, which hasn't been updated in over a decade, limits sponsorships, job opportunities and other benefits for athletes in unrecognized sports," he says.

Harsha shares several instances where this lack of recognition cost him dearly. In 2018-19, despite holding a national certificate, he was denied job consideration. Even after winning a silver medal at the international level in 2022, his achievement was not acknowledged by the state. "It's dis-



heartening to see my efforts go unnoticed, especially when smaller, recognized tournaments are given more weight," he says.

The lack of recognition also affects athletes' ability to participate in larger competitions like the Asian and World Championships. "In other countries, athletes who win medals are celebrated by their governments, with presidents and prime ministers congratulating them. Here, we struggle to even get basic support from the sports ministry," he points out.

However, he remains hopeful. "I'm not fighting just for myself but for the future generation of kickboxers in Telangana. More than 10,000 people actively practice the sport in the state, and around 500-1,000 regularly compete. Recognition would open up a world of opportunities for them."

For Harsha, Hyderabad is much more than just a city; it's his home and inspiration. "Hyderabad is a melting pot of cultures. From its rich history to its vibrant food scene, it offers something for everyone. It's a city where people from all walks of life come together," he shares.

Among the city's many highlights, Harsha particularly admires its food and the warmth of its people. "The food here is

unmatched and the sense of brotherhood among the residents is something I deeply value," he says. However, he also acknowledges the challenges, particularly the traffic, which can sometimes cause delays.

Despite these minor inconveniences, Harsha believes the city provides a strong foundation for anyone willing to work hard. "Hyderabad gives you opportunities—it's up to you to make the most of them," he says. As the senior-most active kickboxer in Telangana, Harsha feels a deep responsibility to uplift the sport. "I started kickboxing in 2012 and I've seen it grow over the years. Now, it's time for the government and society to recognize its potential," he says.

Harsha is actively working to bring attention to kickboxing, not just for himself but for the thousands of aspiring athletes in the state. "Recognition would mean better funding, more tournaments, and a brighter future for everyone involved," he emphasises.

For him, Hyderabad will always be the city that shaped him. "This city has treated me well and given me a platform to represent it at state, national, and international levels. I will continue to work hard to make it proud," he concludes. Meanwhile, he zeal to advocate for the recognition of kickboxing in Telangana to support future generations of players, still continues.

I'M NOT FIGHTING JUST FOR MYSELF BUT FOR THE FUTURE GENERATION OF KICKBOXERS IN TELANGANA. MORE THAN 10,000 PEOPLE ACTIVELY PRACTICE THE SPORT IN THE STATE, AND AROUND 500-1,000 REGULARLY COMPETE. RECOGNITION WOULD OPEN UP A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEM



Is antibiotic overuse fueling UTI resistance?

Millions of people suffer from Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) annually, prompting many to demand antibiotics from their doctors. While antibiotics effectively treat such infections, overuse breeds antibiotic resistance - a looming global crisis.

THE ANTIBIOTICS DILEMMA

When patients experience the burning discomfort, frequent urination, or pelvic pain associated with a UTI, antibiotics might seem like a quick fix. However, not all UTIs require antibiotics. The frequent and sometimes unnecessary use of these medications has led to bacteria becoming resistant, making future infections harder to treat. According to recent studies, almost 30% of UTIs are caused by bacteria resistant to common antibiotics. This trend is alarming and calls for a reassessment of how we approach treatment.

NATURAL REMEDIES: A FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

Before rushing to antibiotics, exploring natural remedies can be a safe and effective way to manage mild UTIs. Here are some tried-and-true approaches:

- Hydration is key:** Drinking plenty of water helps flush out bacteria from the urinary tract. Aim for at least 8-10 glasses of water daily to keep your system clean.
- Cranberry juice:** Studies suggest that cranberry juice may prevent bacteria from adhering to the walls of the urinary tract, reducing the risk of infection.
- Probiotics:** Maintaining a healthy balance of gut bacteria can enhance your body's ability to fight off infections. Yogurt and supplements with Lactobacillus strains are particularly helpful.
- Dietary adjustments:** Reducing sugar intake can limit bacterial growth, while foods rich in vitamin C help acidify the urine, making it less hospitable for bacteria.

Preventive measures: Better safe than sorry

Prevention is always better than cure.



Incorporating these habits into your daily routine can significantly lower your risk of developing a UTI:

- Good hygiene:** Wiping from front to back and avoiding harsh feminine hygiene products can reduce bacterial contamination.
- Emptying the bladder regularly:** Don't hold in your urine for extended periods, as this can encourage bacterial growth.
- Urinate after intercourse:** This simple act can wash away bacteria introduced during sexual activity.
- Wear breathable fabrics:** Cotton underwear and loose-fitting clothing can keep the area dry and less prone to bacterial growth.

When to Consider Antibiotics

Despite the effectiveness of natural remedies and preventive measures, there are situations where antibiotics are necessary:

- Severe symptoms:** High fever, back pain, or persistent vomiting may indicate a kidney infection, which requires immediate

- medical attention.
- Recurrent UTIs:** If infections occur frequently despite preventive measures, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to manage the condition effectively.
- Pregnancy-related UTIs:** Untreated infections during pregnancy can lead to complications for both the mother and the baby. Prompt treatment with antibiotics is critical.

Responsible antibiotic use

When antibiotics are necessary, it's crucial to use them responsibly:

- Complete the course:** Even if symptoms improve, finish the prescribed antibiotics to ensure all bacteria are eliminated.
- Follow the prescription:** Avoid using leftover antibiotics or sharing them with others, as this can contribute to resistance.
- Discuss options:** Talk to your doctor about narrow-spectrum antibiotics, which target specific bacteria and have less impact on overall resistance.

Role of medical guidance

Self-diagnosis and over-the-counter remedies can sometimes do more harm than good. Consulting a healthcare professional ensures that you receive the correct diagnosis and treatment plan. Additionally, periodic urine cultures can help identify resistant bacteria and guide more effective treatments.

The battle against antibiotic resistance requires collective effort. By adopting preventive measures, exploring natural remedies, and using antibiotics judiciously, we can safeguard their effectiveness for future generations.

As healthcare providers, we are committed to educating the public about responsible antibiotic use and providing personalised care tailored to each patient's needs. Together, we can ensure that antibiotics remain a life-saving resource—not a casualty of overuse.

(The author, Dr. P Vamsi Krishna, is a Sr. Consultant & Head of Department Urology, at CARE Hospitals, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad.)

Dating Sunday: The super bowl of love for singles everywhere

As 2025 begins, singles everywhere are kicking off the new year with bold intentions and a fresh perspective on dating. According to Tinder's Year in Swipe report, 2025 is all about embracing clarity, connection and spontaneity with trends like Loud Looking, Kiss-met and Nano-ships. Loud Looking empowers singles to confidently state their desires, Kiss-met celebrates those magical, spontaneous moments and Nano-ships highlight the significance of even the smallest romantic connections.

"Dating Sunday" refers to the first Sunday of the year, and it has emerged as the golden moment to kickstart these resolutions. In fact, the data reveals that the first Sunday of the year sees a surge in activity like no other day of the year:

- ◆ Swipe activity is nearly 20% higher than the rest of the year.
- ◆ The number of likes was 15% higher than the rest of the year.
- ◆ Singles are in conversation mode, being approximately 12% more likely to have a conversation with the number of messages sent on Tinder being nearly 20% higher than the rest of the year.
- ◆ The pursuit of connection pays off, as users on average experience over 10% more matches - with over 356 matches per second - than the rest of the year
- ◆ Responding faster than ever, users replied to messages 2 hours 16 minutes quicker than on last year's Dating Sunday (i.e. 2023).

Why the surge? It's simple: new year, new possibilities. Singles are manifesting their ideal connections and diving headfirst into their resolutions to meet new people, explore fresh experiences, and perhaps even find their perfect match.

For this year's Peak Dating Season (January 1 and February 14), here are



some tips for the singles to use on Dating Sunday:

- Set your profile resolutions:** Fresh starts call for fresh bios! Update your profile with your 2025 goals or share something intriguing about yourself to catch eyes and spark meaningful conversations. In order to simplify this process, the photo selector option helps singles choose their profile pictures, making it easier to present your most authentic self.
- Message with intent:** With over 2.1 million more messages sent daily during Peak Season than the rest of the year, starting conversations that show interest and originality will help you stand out. Maybe even include a fun resolution and ask about theirs!

3. Lean into peak season energy: January and February are bustling months for dating. Over 298 million more likes are exchanged during this time than the rest of the year. Astrology also plays a role in dating choices, with almost 40% surveyed singles saying 'astrology love predictions' are likely to influence how they date in 2025. Supporting this cosmic trend, the data reveals that Gemini is the most attractive star sign to men, while Virgo leads for women.

4. Make it a team effort: Dating doesn't have to be a solo sport! Nearly 50% of singles plan to lean on friends to navigate the dating world in 2025. Whether it's asking friends for advice or using Matchmaker to involve them in your dating journey, letting others in can bring fresh perspectives and that eye opener opinion we all need sometimes.

5. Manifest the love you want: Use this time to reflect on what you're looking for in 2025. Singles in 2025 are prioritising trustworthiness (40%), physical attraction (35%), shared values (31%), emotional availability (30%) and shared interests (28%) when dating. Meanwhile, deal-breakers like bad hygiene (50%), rudeness (44%) and too much talk about an ex (34%) remain major icks. With nearly 45% of singles seeking a "Golden Retriever type" partner—loyal, friendly and brimming with optimism—this is the perfect time to align your dating goals with what truly matters to you.

As we move further into 2025, singles are redefining dating with confidence and intentionality. By embracing trends like Loud Looking, Kiss-met and Nano-ships, they're not just seeking connections—they're creating meaningful moments that reflect their values and aspirations for the year ahead.

what's brewing?

The Glam Squad, ladies club by Shazia Bakal hosted its New Year Party with black and golden dress code; the party got even special with fun prizes and thoughtful gifts.

Amrita, Shazia Bakal, Pallavi, Sushila Bokadia, Kajal Lakshani, Sadia

Farha, Rukshar, Fathima, Sushma, Bhanupriya

Lakhotia College of Design celebrated Women's Teacher's Day, pioneering efforts of Savitribai Phule, India's First female teacher and also paid tribute to its co-founder, the Late Ayesha Lakhotia.

Muzigal Edutech celebrated surpassing their 100+ academy registrations and 8,000+ students in 2024. With strong collaborations and a commitment to innovation, they aim to make education more accessible globally as it looks towards its vision 2025.

Haripriya and Sushmita

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

NANCY

Nancy debuted in the comic strip Fritzi Ritz by Ernie Bushmiller in 1933. Fritzi adopted her orphaned niece, who soon became the star. The strip's name changed to Nancy in 1938. We're ringing in the New Year with the history of Nancy!

GINGER MEGGS

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	
5				6
7		8		
9			10	
12	13	14	15	
17			18	
19				

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

ACROSS

- Speaks very quietly
- A builder follows these when building a house
- The backbone
- Athena is the capital city of this country
- Fewer
- You see with these
- The large country just north of the USA
- Wearry
- Near
- Young people

DOWN

- A huge sea mammal
- A six-legged creature
- Shove
- Lift up
- Food that looks like lots of worms
- A daily publication
- A small dish under a cup
- Garden soil
- A nut from an oak tree
- A worshipped statue

SOLUTION

A	C	A	T	I	O	N	E		
S	L	I	D	E	R				
U	A	H	S	E					
L	I	A	C						
A	M	N							
N	E	E	C	E					
C	I	A							
C	E	N	T						
A	N	I							
T	E	A	C	H					

I never attach myself to film results: Meenakshi Chaudhary

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Last year was remarkable for Meenakshi Chaudhary, with five films released, including the much-appreciated *Lucky Bhaskar*. Interestingly, she started the year with *Guntur Kaaram* during the Sankranti festival and this year, she will be seen repeating the tradition with *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*.

"People believed in me and the director believed in me. I am very grateful to God," said Meenakshi, reflecting on her successful journey.

The actress revealed that the past year was incredibly busy with work. "Professionally, it was very good, but I didn't have much personal time. This year, I want to balance both professional and personal aspects and spend more time with my family," she added. Meenakshi is attempting something new with *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*. "For the first time, I did comedy and action sequences in this film. It's a completely new experience," she shared. She also opened up about her experience working with Venkatesh and Aishwarya Rajesh. "Venkatesh sir is in such a blissful space. He's a wonderful human being, very professional and incredibly fit and healthy at his age. It's inspiring, especially when I feel lazy at my age. He is truly motivational and a big inspiration," she said.

Sharing screen space with Aishwarya Rajesh was another highlight for Meenakshi. "She's such an established actor and I've watched many of her films. It was like a fan moment for me. She treated me like her own sister. Luckily, everyone was very positive and warm. I am the youngest in the group, and since this is my first comedy, they were very patient and helpful," she said, adding, "I learned so much from Aishwarya, who has already done nearly 40-50 films, while I'm just starting my career."

Meenakshi fulfilled her dream of playing a cop in *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*. "I always wanted to be a civil servant in real life, but I got to live that dream on-screen. I didn't do much homework for the role. My father is from the Army, so I already knew the officer's body language. I just watched a few videos on YouTube," she explained.

Actress Meenakshi Chaudhary, who had an eventful year, shares insights on her upcoming projects, her first comedy and action roles. She also discusses about her co-stars, Venkatesh and Aishwarya Rajesh

The action sequences were also a unique challenge for her. "I didn't struggle much with the action scenes because they came naturally to me. I've trained in MMA and sports. When action choreographer Venkat taught me some moves, he was surprised at how quickly I picked them up. Even I was surprised!" she said.

Meenakshi acknowledged the significance of Sankranti in Telugu states. "Sankranti and cinema are a big combination here. I know people even travel from abroad to spend time with their families during this festival. It's a sentimental occasion," she noted.

This year, she is promoting the film more actively. "I have time now to promote, and we even did some fun skits with Venkatesh's Venky Mama character. I had to act out popular dialogues from Bobbili Raja. It was a fun experience, even though I'm usually shy," she added.

Last year, Meenakshi had five film releases, with *Lucky Bhaskar* standing out as her breakthrough. "Those films were in production for two years, and they all released last year. I never attach myself to a film's result. While I tasted success with *Lucky Bhaskar*, the very next day I was on set for my next project. How I perform is in my control, but the result isn't. I give my 100% to every film and feel grateful for being able to work every day, earn for my needs, and live this life," she said.

Meenakshi shared her admiration for Balakrishna, whom she met for the second time on the reality show *Unstoppable*. "He has a child-like personality, and I respect him deeply. When we met the first time, I shared my story, and he remembered everything when we met again. He's very emotional, and I also met his daughters on set. He's the OG—there's nobody like Balayya garu," she said.

Talking about her upcoming projects, Meenakshi revealed, "I've signed a film with Naveen Polisetty. I've also signed two more films, but the makers will announce them. I'm looking forward to 2025, which promises to be colourful and exciting."



Bellamkonda's bold adventurous avatar from #BSS12 is here

After the setback of his Hindi debut film *Chatrapathi*, released in 2023, Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas has kept a low profile, with no film releases until now. However, the actor is busy shooting for multiple projects and on the occasion of his birthday on Friday, the makers of his upcoming film, tentatively titled *#BSS12*, unveiled a new poster featuring the actor.

Ludheer Byreddy is making his directorial debut with this film, while Mahesh Chandu is producing it. This movie marks a prestigious moment in Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas's career, being his highest-budgeted project to date. The makers also announced that 35% of the film has already been shot.

The poster, released on the actor's birthday, presents Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas in an adventurous avatar. Riding a bike, his look exudes a sense of audacity and fearlessness, with a powerful visual that amplifies the themes of danger, adventure and spiritual energy. The film is an occult thriller set around a 400-year-old Dashavatara temple, with Samyuktha playing the female lead. In another exciting update, actor Nani has unveiled a song from Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas's other upcoming film, *Bhairavam*. The song features the actor alongside Aditi Shankar, and the film is directed by Vijay Kanakamedala, known for his work on Naandhi.

Barbarik is a risky genre: Director Maruthi

Director Mohan Srivatsa is making his debut with the film *Barbarik*, produced by Vijayal Reddy Adidhala. The film stars Sathyaraj in one of the main roles, alongside Satyam Rajesh, Vasishtha N Simha and others. On Friday, director Maruthi launched the teaser for the film.

During the occasion, director

Maruthi mentioned that he didn't directly work on *Barbarik*, but provided a few suggestions and advice. "It's a very risky genre," he said. "I told Mohan and Rajesh the same. They started the film with confidence and Vijay garu has invested a lot in this film." Maruthi further added that Vijay is going to become a big producer soon. "I am

collaborating with Vijay garu on another project for ZEE Telugu," Maruthi revealed.

Maruthi praised director Mohan for the energy he put into the movie, emphasising that *Barbarik* has been made beautifully. "This film will be very unique, showing how a mythological character would appear to today's generation. This movie is going to be a big hit," Maruthi said. He also spoke about Sathyaraj's involvement in the film, mentioning that after working on *Baahubali*, Sathyaraj agreed to join *Barbarik* after liking the script. "I've worked with him in Prathi Roju Pandage and I hope this movie gets great support from everyone," he added.

Actor Sathyaraj shared his excitement about the project, saying, "From now onwards, it's going to be 'Prathi Roju Pandage' for the *Barbarik* team." He described the film as a pure commercial venture and mentioned that he loved the story shared by director Mohan. "The story is the hero of this movie. My character is quite different. I'm trying to become an aged action hero and this movie will help me earn that tag," said Sathyaraj. He also revealed that he dubbed in Hindi, Kannada and Tamil for the film and the makers asked him to dub his own lines even in Telugu.



Shankar unveils story of Game Changer, teases major surprise

Director Shankar has revealed the story of his upcoming film *Game Changer*, which stars top actor Ram Charan and is produced by Dil Raju. The trailer for the film was released on Thursday evening and during the event, Shankar shared insights about the film's narrative. He explained that the story revolves around a war between a government officer and a politician. "I like films like *Okkadu* and *Pokiri* and I wanted to make a film like them. *Game Changer* is a commercial film, similar to those, and it has all the ingredients you would expect from my films," said Shankar.

The director praised lead actor Ram Charan for his performance, saying that the actor effortlessly portrayed all characters. "His screen presence is impeccable," he added. Shankar also lauded the two leading ladies, Kiara Advani and Anjali, for their excellent performances. He mentioned that there is a big surprise in the film but did not want to reveal it just yet. He also took the opportunity to thank Dil Raju for introducing him to Telugu cinema.

"I should thank Dil Raju for giving me freedom and introducing me to Telugu cinema," Shankar said.

The director emphasised that the film is deeply rooted in Telugu tradition and culture. "Production designer Avinash Kolla has beautifully incorporated Telugu culture into the production design," he noted. Shankar revealed that Tamil director Karthik Subbaraj provided the story, while Sai Madhav Burra penned the powerful dialogues for the film. He also shared that Prabhu Deva choreographed the song



Jaragandi, without taking any remuneration, due to his love for Ram Charan and Dil Raju.

On this occasion, Shankar expressed his admiration for director Rajamouli, calling him "the pride of Indian cinema," and acknowledged how

Rajamouli's work has made Hollywood take notice of Indian cinema. "I thank him for attending this event," Shankar said.

Meanwhile, *Game Changer* is set for an IMAX release on January 10, 2025.

PRADEEP OF LOVE TODAY FAME IS NOW RETURN OF THE DRAGON

Pradeep Ranganathan became an overnight star with his film *Love Today* that became a huge blockbuster in Tamil and was also successful in Telugu. He is not only playing the lead character, but he directed the film. Now, he is coming up with another film in which he plays the lead actor. The title of this film is *Return of the Dragon*. AGS Entertainment and Pradeep joined forces once again for *Return of the Dragon*.

This film is written and directed by Ori Devuda fame Ashwath Marimuthu. Months after the announcement video of the *Return of the Dragon* received a positive response, the release of the song *Rise of Dragon* from the film has now left fans excited.

Leon James composed the music, while Ramajogayya Sastry penned the lyrics. The song is sung by Leon James himself and Nadisha Thomas. For the first time, famous director and actor Gautham Vasudev Menon have danced and vibed along with Pradeep Ranganathan for this energetic song. Anupama Parameshwaran is playing the female lead.



VN Aditya's tribute to Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry

Popular director VN Aditya directed the video titled *Swapnala Naava* which was shot in Dallas, USA. Parthasarathi Nemani composed music for this music video and the song lyrics penned by Yashwanth. The entire song was shot in Dallas and its post-production work is now complete. It is set to release soon.

Gopi Krishna Kotaru, a Telugu software engineer living in Dallas, USA, has launched a production company with this music video. In this song his daughter, Srija Kotaru performed. This song is a tribute to the late lyricist Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry.

At the video launch event, several celebrities attended and congratulated Gopi Krishna Kotaru and his daughter, Srija. Speaking at the event, Gopi Krishna shared that the idea for the song came from reflecting on the kind of messages Sirivennela Seetharama

Sastry would have conveyed to today's youth.

Director VN Aditya praises Srija and her talent, noting that she sings

like a professional despite being a debutant. He assured the audience that the song will soon be available for everyone to enjoy.



India all out for 185 on day one of fifth Test against Australia

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Rohit Sharma "opted to rest" in the team's interest but the same old script unfolded on a new day for Indian batters as they surrendered meekly for a paltry 185 in the face of some hostile seam bowling from Australia on the opening day of the fifth and final Test here.

Virat Kohli (17 off 69 balls), whose form and technical weaknesses are also under the scanner, was for the seventh time dismissed in the corridor of uncertainty in the tour, a problem that seems incurable at the moment.

At stumps, Australia were 9 for 1 with stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah sending the woefully out-of-form Usman Khawaja (2) back in the hut.

Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was unbeaten at 7 after hitting Bumrah for a first-ball four. The 19-year-old also had an animated exchange with the Indian star.

Bumrah opted to bat under overcast conditions and the ultra-defensive

approach by Indian batters only compounded their problems with Scott Boland's (20-8-31-4) immaculate length and tremendous discipline leaving them in a disarray.

Mitchell Starc (18-5-49-3) and Pat Cummins (15-2-4-37-2) were equally relentless giving the Indians no room for release shots.

Rishabh Pant top-scored for the visitors with a 98-ball 40, going against his grain to battle it out, taking painful blows to his body in the process.

If Rohit's decision to "rest" was a forward thinking move, the persistence with Kohli is proving to be detrimental and the celebrated batter might just have one more Test innings left to save his place in the traditional format.

"I wouldn't say it's a par score but still a competitive score," said Pant, admitting that the pitch is not easy to bat on.

If one takes away the second innings hundred at Perth out of his last 20 Test innings, Kohli has managed an average of 17.57.



He could have been out off Boland's first delivery but tried to battle hard. However, it has always been that one moment in which his hands and the willow magnetically follow a delivery in the corridor of uncertainty.

Pant curbs natural instincts for a session

Having copped criticism from all quarters for his bizarre shot selection in Melbourne, Pant, for a change, copped body blows, trying to curb his natural game.

The big-hitter in him came out only on a couple of occasions with one of them fetching him a straight six off Beau Webster.

Pant put his head down and endured nasty blows on his bicep, helmet and twice in the sensitive abdominal area. He and the dogged Ravindra Jadeja (26 off 95 balls) defended dourly as they added 48 off 151 deliveries for the fifth wicket.

Only 50 runs were scored in the second session and trying not to be adventurous proved counter-productive with most batters

retreating in a shell letting Boland and company dictate the terms of play. Finally, Pant's patience ran out and one pull shot too many became his undoing.

India realised they haven't scored enough runs and lost a lot of wickets. The defensive tactic in the second session when the ball got old ended up costing them dearly.

There wasn't much swing on offer despite cloudy conditions but a decent grass cover ensured that Boland's back-of-length deliveries proved enough.

As far as Pant was concerned, the "honest conversations" with head coach Gautam Gambhir seemed to have worked with the southpaw respecting the game situation for most part.

If Pant was disciplined, Shubman Gill's judgement on the last delivery before lunch did cause trouble for India.

Gill (20 off 64 balls) did all the hard work for close to couple of hours before stepping out to Nathan Lyon on the last ball of the session only to be caught at first slip.



Facing Jasprit Bumrah will be challenging on this track: Beau Webster

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Debutant all-rounder Beau Webster feels facing ace India pacer Jasprit Bumrah will be an enormous challenge on the SCG pitch which is helping seamers, and the Australian did not place his finger on an ideal first innings score.

India were all out for 185 and then Australia lost Usman Khawaja off the last ball of the day to Bumrah to end at 9 for one.

"Think there's definitely a method to go about batting on this wicket. But Jasprit is a world class bowler and no doubt he's going to challenge our whole batting group. He's phenomenal with his lengths and lines, it is going to be tough on a wicket that will offer a fair bit for him," Webster said in the post day one press conference.

He said getting India out for a total less than 200 on a seamer friendly track was a commendable effort.

"It was a pretty seamer-friendly track and most of the day the ball stayed pretty new with the grass coverage. It is not an abrasive square either. So, the plan was to bowl a little bit fuller and entice those front foot defences and front foot drives.

"Thought Scotty (Boland) was excellent, he's been unbelievable since he came back into the team and saw why he's a world class bowler. Thought all the bowlers were really good today to bowl

them out for 200."

Webster said the degree of seam movement for a few deliveries was way more pronounced and hence they beat the bat regularly.

"There were a couple of unplayable balls, when it seems that much it can be hard to get a wicket at times. We saw a nice-ish partnership (Jadeja-Pant), where we struggled to get a breakthrough through the sheer seam movement. We beat the bat a lot but couldn't find the edge."

The 31-year-old was all praise for Boland and said the pacer can find a way to get wickets on any surface and when there is help on offer, he is on par with the best in business.

"If there's anything in the wicket he finds it and if there's nothing in the wicket he still manages to find a way through," the lanky Tasmanian said.

"He's been fantastic this whole series when he's got his chance, he's relentless. I think it's his line and length and his natural angle that makes it really hard for right-handers, but when we see him go round the wicket to left-handers it's impressive stuff."

Webster caught the great Virat Kohli at third slip and he found Boland's bowling enjoyable.

"It's great to watch from the third slip today, the amount of movement he gets and how accurate he is and how challenging he is for both left and right handers.

We have probably seen Rohit Sharma for last time in Test cricket: Gavaskar, Shastri

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former India cricketers Sunil Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri feel that the Boxing Day Test might have been Rohit Sharma's final appearance in Test cricket, following his bold call to rest himself for the series finale that began here on Friday.

The 37-year-old chose to sit out with the series on the line, having scored only 31 runs in five innings across three Tests.

"I think it probably means that (if) India don't qualify for the WTC final, the Melbourne Test will be Rohit Sharma's last game," Gavaskar said during the lunch break on day one.

"The WTC cycle will start with the England series, and the selectors would likely want someone available for the 2027 final. Whether India gets there or not is another matter, but that's what the selection committee is likely to do.

"We have probably seen Rohit



Sharma for the last time in Test cricket," he added.

Shastri echoed the sentiment, predicting that Rohit would "pull the plug" on his Test career after the series.

"At the toss, Jasprit [Bumrah] mentioned it before I could ask," Shastri said during commentary.

"He said the captain opted to sit out and said the team would be stronger if Shubman

Gill plays.

"It can happen when you're out of sorts, you're mentally not there, you don't have the runs under your belt. It still is a brave call for a captain to own up and say, 'I'm prepared to take the bench in this game,'" he added.

Rohit has struggled in Test cricket recently, breaching the 20-run mark only twice in his last eight matches.

With India trailing 1-2 in the series, they must win the final Test to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, which they've held for a decade, and remain in contention for a spot in the World Test Championship (WTC) final against South Africa.

If India fail to qualify, their next Test series will be a tour of England starting mid-June.

"If there was a home season coming up he might've thought of carrying on, but I think he might just pull the plug at the end of this Test," Shastri said.

"He's not getting younger ... it's not that India don't have youngsters. There are very, very good players in the wings and it's time to build.

"Tough decisions, but there is a time for everything," Shastri added.

At the toss, stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah said "our captain has shown leadership by opting to rest in this game."



I wasn't in frame of mind to take charge because of nature of wicket: Pant

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant said he batted with restraint on the opening day of the fifth Test against Australia because character of the SCG pitch and the game situation did not allow him to be his customary aggressive self.

Pant, who copped severe criticism from all corners for his callous approach to batting during the previous Test at Melbourne, made a 98-ball 40 in India's 185 all out here on Friday.

"I think in this innings, I was not in a frame of mind where I wanted to take charge of the game because the wicket was doing too much and the kind of situation we were in," Pant said in the post-day press meet.

"I would say there might be a 50-50 chance which I could have taken early on in this innings but sometimes you have to play more secure cricket especially the way, wicket was behaving.

"We knew that if we lost one more wicket here, we might lose 2-3 in quick succession. So that was the idea behind the way I was playing," he added.

Pant's falling pull in Melbourne had prompted legendary Sunil Gavaskar to call the shot "stupid" and in the second innings, he slugged a half-tracker from Travis Head to find the only fielder in the deep when the Test match could have been saved.

"Yes, there is a time to attack, but when you have to feel that from inside. I can't just premeditate that I'm going to play this way. Whatever the game asked me to do on a given day, that's what I tried to do and that is the mindset."

For Pant, the equation is simple - everyone has learnt their own way to skin a cat but also need to learn the other way.

"It is a natural habit to back whatever the way you have played the game. But eventually you got to keep on evolving and, that is, I feel there is not one way to play cricket.

"But whatever comes more naturally is always better but you got to find that balance between playing aggressive cricket and having that balance when you play all those shots. That's what I'm trying to do," he explained his rationale.

"Just trying to make the most out of whatever the way I'm playing and just keep it simple, and not to overthink because you know when you're not having the best of the tours you might overthink."

He agreed that blows that he received, one on the left bicep and few in the abdominal area, were painful but that was the need of the hour.

"I mean definitely it's painful but you know sometimes you have to do the hard work for the team and that's okay. Not thinking about where I got hit but just playing the ball to the best of my abilities."

Biggest achievement of life but plenty more to come: Harmanpreet on Khel Ratna award

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Elated to become a Khel Ratna awardee after his career-defining Olympic performance, Indian men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh said the honour is a recognition of his "fascinating" journey in which he still has plenty more to achieve.

Double Olympic-medallist shooter Manu Bhaker, chess world champion D Gukesh, Harmanpreet and Paralympic high jump gold-winner Praveen Kumar were honoured for the 2024 Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award by the sports ministry on Thursday.

"(It's the) biggest recognition of my life. It's a big achievement for me. I am really very happy. It think it's the best part of my life that I am getting such a huge award



and recognition," the 28-year-old Harmanpreet, who was India's top goal-scorer in the Paris Games with 10 strikes, told PTI in an interview.

The ace drag-flicker has won most of the prominent awards and accolades in his career, including back-to-back Olympic bronze medals, a junior World Cup gold in 2016, a

Commonwealth Games silver, an Asian Games gold and bronze besides two silver medals in the Champions Trophy.

Harmanpreet has also claimed the FIH Player of the Year award three times, including the year gone by. But he is far from satiated.

"Throughout my journey I have learnt a lot, I have seen a lot of ups and downs

including wins and losses. But I think you only learn from those experiences. From day one, my mindset has been how to improve myself," said the star player who was born into a family of farmers in Amritsar's Timmowal village and whose international career began in 2014.

A team-man to the core, Harmanpreet credited his fellow players for making it possible for him to shine individually.

"Whatever we are achieving we are achieving as a team. The journey has been very fascinating, I am getting individual recognitions and awards but only because of my teammates.

"I have enjoyed my journey a lot till date. I have put on a lot of hard work and I am happy with what I have achieved till date," he said.

I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out': Ponting says of Rohit's absence

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian batting great Ricky Ponting on Friday said he was "surprised" by the Indian camp's wording around Rohit Sharma's absence from the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy but admitted that the move was on expected lines.

The match started here on Friday with the visitors eyeing a win to level the series and retain the trophy.

However, Jasprit Bumrah, who walked out for the toss, said Rohit has "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test.

"I think the reaction has been that they all sort of expected that it might happen," Ponting told The ICC Review.

"The chat's been for the last couple of days that everyone expected that Rohit would not play this game, that Shubman Gill would come

back in and that (Jasprit) Bumrah would probably take over the captaincy again and that's the way it's turned out."

Given the circumstances, Ponting was totally in agreement with the woefully out-of-form Rohit skipping the decider at SCG but the former Australia captain was surprised by the wording of the news that came from the India camp.

"I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out' coming into such an important game," Ponting said.

"We know he's been a great stalwart for Indian cricket over a long period of time. So the way that they've actually worded it, you can only take it on face value.

"We've got to believe what we're hearing coming out of the Indian camp, but being such a big game, knowing that they have to win this one to retain the trophy, it was an

interesting time for one of their more experienced players to opt out."

The 37-year-old white-ball great looked like a pale shadow of himself in the ongoing series Down Under, struggling to execute even his bread and butter shots including the trademark front foot pull.

During the customary pre-match warm-up session, Rohit was seen playing football with Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant and Sarfaraz Khan, who along with Abhimanyu Easwaran will end the series without getting an international game.

Ponting did not say it in as many words but he very well understands that it could be the end of road for Rohit in the game's traditional format.

"You'd think it's probably a long way back for Rohit Sharma now in this format of the game," Ponting said.



"India don't play a Test match, I believe, until the middle or late June, which is a long way away when you're

sort of coming to the back end of your career.

"I think he's been a terrific player for India so with those

sort of guys, you wish them all the best and hope to see them back out there again, but as I said, I think it will be

a long - and probably difficult road - back for him."

Catch off Kohli's bat was clean. Ponting had no doubt that the attempt made by Steve Smith at second slip off Kohli's blade was a clean take.

Kohli edged a length delivery from Scott Boland to second slip, where Smith was positioned. Smith dived low to his right, seemingly catching the ball near the ground before flicking it upward toward gully, where Marnus Labuschagne completed the catch.

However, the decision was referred to the TV umpire, who ultimately ruled Kohli not out.

"I was in the back of the (commentary) box as it happened and from what I saw, and what I believe to be the interpretation of the rules, that seemed to be out to me," Ponting said.

"The ball may have touched

the ground. It may not have touched the ground, but the fact that his right index finger was still underneath the ball, I thought it was a clear catch."

The incident took place in the eighth over, off the first ball Kohli faced and Ponting admitted the limited angles available did not help.

"It might be one of those ones that depends which dressing room he's (Kohli) sitting in as well.

"Every Indian fan and Indian player will say that's not out as it clearly touched the ground, but you could tell by the reaction of the Australians when it happened and even when they saw the replay on the big screen that they were all pretty confident that it was out."

"I'm sure over the course of this Test match we'll talk about it a whole lot more," Ponting said.