

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

With local body polls approaching, the Congress Government has started a new drama in the name of Rythu Bharosa and ration cards. The government will not get more than Rs 2,000 crore from the 15th Financial Commission if it does not conduct local body elections before March. So the Congress has raised the curtains to a new drama in the name of Rythu Bharosa and ration cards. Don't believe the Congress's deceptive drama

- Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home

Will turn Delhi into a city of the future, says **PM Modi**

FDI IN INDIA
GROWING RAPIDLY: GOYAL

Poonam Kaur accuses Trivikram of impacting her life & **HEALTH**

DON'T MISS...

Allu Arjun cancels visiting child at KIMS

Tollywood Actor Allu Arjun wishes to visit the child who fell unconscious in the Pushpa premiere incident and later cancels it due to Ramgopalpet Police asking him to reconsider the visit. T Narsing Rao, SHO, Ramgopalpet told The Pioneer, "We have received information through KIMS hospital and asked Allu Arjun to plan his visit because of the recent incident. Police need to be ready and not ...

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'We don't want Union Carbide waste'

"We don't want this toxic waste in our area," is the refrain of locals at Tarpura, a village adjacent to Pithampur's waste incineration unit where a huge quantity of waste from Bhopal's Union Carbide factory has been brought for disposal. An uneasy calm prevailed in the village with a population of around 20,000 on Saturday amid heavy police deployment. The plan to dispose of 337 tons of waste linked to the 1984 Bhopal ...

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Indian firms corner 1/5th of H1B visas

Indian-origin tech companies cornered a fifth of all H1B visas issued by the US with Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services leading the pack, an analysis of data from the US immigration department showed. According to data from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, in April-September 2024 period, out of the total 1.3 lakh H1B visas issued to different employers, about 24,766 visas were issued to Indian-origin companies. Out of ...

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Australia beat India to reach WTC final

A listless India was knocked out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final as Australia cruised to a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test here on Sunday to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years, leaving the visitors with much to deliberate in a difficult transition phase made worse by over-the-hill batting stars. Australia won the five-match series 3-1 and qualified for the WTC final against South Africa slated at the Lord's from June 11 to 15. While Australia would ...

-SPORTS

Role of Telugus declining in national politics: Revanth



CM A Revanth Reddy, along with prominent Telugu people at the 12th World Telugu Conference held at the HICC in Hyderabad on Sunday

Calls for concerted efforts for revival of legacy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy expressed concern over the diminishing influence of Telugu leaders in national politics and urged the community to revive its legacy. Speaking at the 12th World Telugu Conference held at the HICC in Hyderabad, Revanth highlighted the significant contributions of stalwarts like Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, PV Narasimha Rao, NTR and Jaipal

Reddy, who played pivotal roles in shaping the country's political landscape. "It is disheartening to see the reduced presence of Telugu leaders in national politics today. We must work together to restore our prominence," he said, addressing the gathering of Telugu-speaking individuals from across the globe. Revanth emphasized the importance of preserving Telugu culture and language. "Excelling in politics,

cinema and commerce is important, but we must never forget the value of our mother tongue. While learning other languages is necessary, respecting and promoting Telugu is crucial," he stated. The Chief Minister stressed the government's efforts to honour the Telugu language, including issuing official orders in Telugu. Revanth called upon the global Telugu diaspora to invest in Telangana and

Continued on Page 2



'Will complete Group 1 recruitment by March'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy announced that recruitment to 563 Group 1 posts would be completed by March 31, marking a significant milestone in Telangana's efforts to provide employment opportunities. Speaking at an event where he distributed cheques under the Rajiv Gandhi Civils Abhayastam scheme, the Chief Minister emphasized his government's commitment to supporting civil services hopefuls and addressing unemployment in the state. Revanth highlighted the challenges

faced by the state's unemployed youth over the past decade, stating, "We achieved statehood for Telangana to fulfil the aspirations of our youth, particularly job opportunities. However, the last 10 years saw immense struggles due to lack of employment."

"We achieved statehood for Telangana to fulfil the aspirations of our youth, particularly job opportunities. However, the last 10 years saw immense struggles due to lack of employment"

The Chief Minister distributed cheques of Rs 1 lakh each to 20 civil services aspirants from Telangana who qualified for the Mains examination. The financial assistance, he said, is part of the Rajiv Gandhi Civils Abhayastam scheme aimed at encouraging more candidates from Telangana to excel in the civil services exam. Continued on Page 2

'Congress's betrayal of farmers'

KTR calls protests over 'Rythu Bharosa'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao (KTR) has come down heavily on the Congress government for what he described a "blatant betrayal" of farmers. Addressing the media at the Telangana Bhavan on Saturday, KTR accused the Congress of breaking its election promise to provide ₹15,000 per acre under the Rythu Bharosa scheme and instead delivering only ₹12,000 with restrictive conditions. "This is nothing but daylight

robbery. The Congress promised ₹15,000 during the elections, but now farmers are being short changed. This is an unforgivable betrayal, and Telangana's farmers will not tolerate it," KTR said. KTR announced that protests will be held across Telangana on Monday in district, mandal and constituency headquarters to demand justice for farmers. "We will continue to fight until the Congress delivers on its promise. Farmers must question Congress leaders wherever they go," he said.



Continued on Page 2

Krishnaiah demands revival of full mess charges scheme

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

National BC Welfare Association President R. Krishnaiah has demanded the revival of the full mess charges scheme for BC, SC and ST students pursuing post-graduate and other courses in universities. Speaking at a public meeting held at the Osmania University Arts College attended by thousands of students, Krishnaiah urged the government to clear fee reimbursement arrears and construct dedicated buildings for BC hostels in the state. Continued on Page 2



Congress to hold PAC meeting on Wednesday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress is conducting a meeting of its Political Affairs Committee (PAC) on Wednesday (January 8) at the Gandhi Bhavan after a year. The last PAC meeting, which was the only one held after the party came to power before the Lok Sabha elections, passed a resolution requesting Sonia Gandhi to contest from Telangana during the Lok Sabha elections as the people of Telangana want to thank her for granting statehood. However, Sonia Gandhi became a Rajya Sabha Member.

AICC General Secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal is attending the meeting as chief guest. This meeting will be held under the chairmanship of AICC in-charge general secretary Deepa Das Munshi. 23 PAC members will attend the PAC meeting along with Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, TPCC President B. Mahesh Kumar Goud and Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka. Sources said the PAC meeting will discuss the one-year rule of the Congress Government, local body elections, party issues, MLC elections, the political scenario in the state, caste census, the future course of action and other issues. In fact, leaders like TPCC Working

Continued on Page 2

'Cong wants to get vote bharosa'

BJP leader Bandi on timing of Rythu Bharosa

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Congress Government is distributing Rythu Bharosa funds only because of local body elections, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said. He said the Congress Government is giving Rythu Bharosa by taking loans to make farmers vote for the Congress. The Congress Government will certainly

scrap the Rythu Bharosa scheme immediately after local body elections, he added. Sanjay appealed to the people of Telangana to understand the deceptive techniques used by the Congress Government. Speaking to the media at the State BJP office here on Sunday, Sanjay said, "With local body elections approaching, the Congress Government has started a new drama in the name of Rythu

Bharosa, new ration cards etc. The government will not get more than Rs 2,000 crore from 15th Financial Commission if it does not conduct local body elections before March. So the Congress has raised the curtains to a new drama named Rythu Bharosa and ration cards. Don't believe the Congress's lies." Sanjay said for this round of Rythu Bharosa payments, the government has raised ₹10,000 crore by mortgaging



Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar addressing the media at State BJP office on Sunday

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Clean Green Energy Policy to create over 1 lakh jobs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana's new 'Clean and Green Energy Policy' promises to be a significant driver of employment, with over 1.14 lakh jobs projected to be created within the next decade. The policy, which aims to add 20,000 MW of renewable energy and storage capacity by 2030, is set to generate opportunities across multiple sectors like manufacturing, project development and ancillary industries.

The policy focuses on promoting solar, wind, and hybrid energy projects, energy storage systems and green hydrogen. Women's self-help groups (SHGs) have been prioritized, with incentives to set up decentralized solar power plants ranging from 500 kW to 2 MW. These initiatives aim to empower



The policy incentivizes renewable energy manufacturing industries, offering subsidies and tax benefits for solar, wind, and battery manufacturing units. The establishment of green hydrogen production facilities and electric vehicle charging infrastructure is expected to create jobs in manufacturing, logistics and research and development

local communities and create grassroots-level employment. Rooftop solar installations on government schools, public buildings and housing schemes will also require a workforce for installation, maintenance and operations, creating more jobs. The policy incentivizes renewable energy manufacturing industries, offering subsidies and tax benefits for solar, wind, and battery manu-

facturing units. The establishment of green hydrogen production facilities and electric vehicle charging infrastructure is expected to create jobs in manufacturing, logistics and research and development. Capital subsidies for equipment manufacturing, water charge reimbursements, and power tariff reductions aim to attract investments in

manufacturing boosting job creation. The renewable energy push will require skilled engineers, technicians and professionals for project design, implementation, and operations. At the same time, semi-skilled and unskilled labour will be needed for construction and maintenance.

World will soon adopt 'Heal in India'

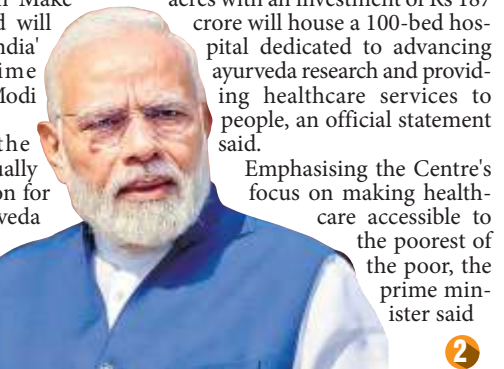
Says PM Modi, lays foundation for Ayurveda institute

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has immense potential to become the health and wellness capital of the world, and the day is not far when, along with 'Make in India', the world will also adopt 'Heal in India' as a mantra, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday. Modi made the remarks while virtually laying the foundation for a new Central Ayurveda Research Institute building in Rohini, terming it as "Ayurveda's next big leap".

The ceremony was attended by Union Minister of State for Ayush (Independent Charge), Prataprao Jadhav, among other dignitaries. The new facility spanning 2.92 acres with an investment of Rs 187 crore will house a 100-bed hospital dedicated to advancing ayurveda research and providing healthcare services to people, an official statement said.

Emphasising the Centre's focus on making healthcare accessible to the poorest of the poor, the prime minister said



Continued on Page 2

Monday Mirchi

TELANGANA CS SANTHI KUMAR'S APPOINTMENT SNUB SPARKS BUZZ

It seems Telangana's Chief Secretary Santhi Kumar is keeping a tight lid on her appointment calendar, and not everyone is making it past the gates. Whispers among the bureaucratic circles suggest that some officials, particularly those perceived as being close to the previous regime, are struggling to secure even a few minutes of her time. One bureaucrat reportedly gave up after being turned away three times—a rather telling anecdote that's now making the rounds. Is this an intentional snub aimed at a select few, or are all officials finding it equally hard to gain access? The speculation is rife, with some insiders pointing out that such exclusivity would be unusual in the functioning of a bureaucracy, where access typically trumps allegiance. Whether it's a deliberate move or a mere scheduling issue, the lack of clarity is fuelling plenty of chatter. For now, those seeking an audience with the CS might need a mix of patience and persistence—or perhaps a fourth try!

JAYESH RANJAN IN THE RACE FOR CS? MINISTER SPARKS SPECULATION

Whispers in the corridors of power suggest that Jayesh Ranjan might just be the next Chief Secretary, or so a minister cheekily hinted during a recent high-profile meeting. The minister, known for stirring up intrigue, dropped this nugget while also casually stating in the past that the current finance secretary, Ramakrishna Rao, could stick around for the next few years. Quite the statement, considering he's barely got a year left in service! The gossip mill is now churning out theories—was it a mere slip of the tongue or a calculated move to keep everyone guessing? While Jayesh's admirers are quietly cheering, insiders are wondering if this was a subtle nudge to the powers that be. Meanwhile, Ramakrishna's camp might just be polishing up their calendars, counting down days with a mix of hope and skepticism. One thing's for sure—this political tête-à-tête has left everyone buzzing. Watch this

space as the race to the top post is just getting interesting!

"GHMC CHIEF ILLAMBARITHI: SOCIAL MEDIA SNOOP OR SILENT STRATEGIST?"

Unlike his predecessors like Lokesh Kumar and Amrapali, who did not engage on social media, GHMC Commissioner Ilambarithi seems to be charting a different course. At first glance, one might assume he's staying off the social media radar. But insiders say that couldn't be further from the truth. Turns out, Ilambarithi is keeping a sharp eye on the corporation's digital image, possibly more than any of his predecessors. The twist? His style is all about passive engagement with plenty of behind-the-scenes supervision. From carefully crafted posts to ensuring the right narrative goes out, he's more of a quiet strategist than an outspoken crusader. So, while you may not find him sparring on Twitter or posting updates, don't mistake his silence for inaction. He's watching, and it seems he's playing the long game when it comes to GHMC's social media presence. A new style for a new era? Only time will tell!

WILL TELANGANA GET ITS FIRST WOMAN DGP?

The grapevine is abuzz with chatter about who will take over as Telangana's next DGP, with Jitender set to retire this year. Adding a dash of intrigue to the mix, it seems some women officers are already working overtime to make their presence felt in the race. Whether the government is seriously considering their bids or not, these officers are pulling every string to position themselves as strong contenders. The whispers have it that Telangana could very well see its first woman DGP if the stars align. With the state already bidding adieu to its first woman Chief Secretary soon, wouldn't it be fitting to break another glass ceiling? Of course, the actual decision-makers might have other plans, but for now, the ambitious efforts of these officers have everyone talking. Could this be a turning point for women in top positions or just another round of speculative frenzy?

--Yours truly

BRS leaders swallowed Rs 22,000 cr using Rythu Bandhu scheme: Kiran

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Targeting BRS Working President KT Rama Rao for criticising the Rythu Bharosa scheme, the Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, said that BRS leaders swallowed Rs 22,000 crore by disbursing Rythu Bandhu funds to the owners of lands filled with stones and rocks.

Posting on his X account regarding this on Sunday Kiran said, "You (KTR) appointed someone who knows Telugu as an admin, but it would have been better if you had also appointed someone who knows about Telangana. Are you familiar with farmers? Where were you when we created the highest grain harvest record in the state's history? Where are you who lied for five years by saying you would waive farm loans up to Rs 1 lakh? Where are we who waived loans up to

Rs 2 lakh of farmers? Last year we waived loans amounting to Rs 22,000 crore. Where are you who swallowed Rs 22,000 crore by allocating funds for lands filled with stones and rocks in the name of investment aid? Where are we providing Rs 12,000 as farmer insurance, Rs 500 bonus, crop insurance, crop damage compensation and subsidized seeds for cultivated land? Where are you saying that if there is no land farm labour has to go on to the road? Where are we who are giving Rs 12,000 even if there is no single gunta land? Where are you who grabbed lakhs of acres of farmers' land using Dharani? Where are we in solving the problems of farmers with the Bhu Bharati Act? People know about your 10 years of misrule. That's why people kicked you out during the Assembly polls and Parliament elections.

'Rs 15,000 Rythu Bharosa before Assembly polls'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's announcement that the Rythu Bharosa scheme will provide Rs 12,000 per acre annually, instead of the promised Rs 15,000, has triggered an internal debate in the Congress.

Top party sources disclosed that the government had explored all possibilities of increasing the amount to Rs 15,000 per acre. A top source said, "We will give before the 2028 elections."

"The goal is to honour the Rs 15,000 commitment. Whether it will be a phased increase or a direct hike will depend on the financial situation," a top Congress source revealed.



It may be mentioned here that on Saturday when asked by reporters if the Rythu Bharosa amount would be increased, the Chief Minister reiterated that Rs 12,000 per acre is being offered due to financial constraints, leaving no room for immediate clarity on a potential raise. The Rythu Bharosa scheme,

a cornerstone of the Congress manifesto, was designed to support farmers. However, the reduction of the promised amount has drawn sharp criticism from the opposition.

With elections far off, the Congress leadership is not facing pressure to deliver on its promises as it would be during election time.

Renowned Kannada writer Na D'Souza passes away

PNS ■ MANGALURU (KARNATAKA)

Noted Kannada novelist and writer Na D'Souza died at a hospital here on Sunday, sources close to his family said. He was 87.

He is survived by wife, Philomena, and three children, they said.

D'Souza has written more than 40 novels, many short stories, plays and literature for children.

His works include 'Kadina Benki', 'Dweepa', 'Mulugadeya Oorige Bandavaru', among others. He received Central Sahitya Academy's Bala Sahitya Puraskar for his children novel 'Mulugadeya Oorige Bandavaru'.

'Dweepa' was adapted into a film directed by Girish Kasaravalli. D'Souza has received several awards, and he presided over the 80th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana in Madikeri in 2014.

Decision to disburse Rythu Bharosa funds shows govt's commitment: Mahesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The decision to disburse Rythu Bharosa funds shows the commitment of the Congress Government, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud said.

He said the fact that the state government is standing by farmers in spite of financial constraints and serious financial problems is proof of the commitment of the Congress.

Expressing happiness over the decision to disburse Rythu Bharosa funds, Mahesh said that the BRS government had destroyed the state's economy by taking loans indiscriminately. The state's economy collapsed due to ill-advised decisions, lack of financial discipline and greed for kickbacks, he said.

Mahesh said the Congress came to power when the state had debts of Rs 7 lakh crore. But still, the Congress Government is doing good things for the people by implementing the assurances it had given to the people. He said the government had waived farm loans amounting to Rs 22,000

crore of farmers.

He said the government disbursed Rythu Bharosa funds to farmers last year and this year the government is giving it by enhancing the amount to Rs 12,000 per acre. He said the government is giving Rs 12,000

to the landless poor and tenant farmers under the Indramma Athmeeya Bharosa scheme. The Congress government is getting a good response from the public due to this, he said.

Mahesh said the BJP and the BRS are unable to stomach the

Cong govt strategically bypassing BRS misdeeds: Maheshwar

The Congress Government is strategically bypassing the BRS admin's corruption, Bharatiya Janata Legislature Party (BJLP) leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy said.

He described the fight between the BRS and the Congress as a deceptive drama and that both the BRS and the Congress are one.

"The Congress Government is trying to keep aside the big scams of the BRS admin and is taking up minor cases like the Formula E-Car Racing event, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had said that even 1,000 years of jail is inadequate for the misdeeds of KCR. However, the CM did not make it clear how many cases he had filed against

BRS leaders. It is nothing but a match-fixing drama if no inquiry is conducted using a sitting judge or the CBI on any issue," Maheshwar said.

He said that in the last one year he has raised many issues and corrupt deals that have taken place under the Congress Government. However, realising that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is not responding the BJP concluded that the Chief Minister has admitted his corruption, Maheshwar said.

Addressing the media at the State BJP office here on Sunday, Maheshwar said that crores changed hands in the Hetero Drugs scam. He asked the Chief Minister to explain why the government did not

take action against the Civil Supplies Department even after its irregularities were exposed. He asked whether the Chief Minister is accepting that a scam took place in the Civil Supplies Department.

Maheshwar demanded that the Chief Minister should open his eyes at least now regarding Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy's company issue.

"Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy's company bagged a Rs 1,350 crore contract. Isn't that abuse of power?" Maheshwar asked.

He asked the CM what about the scam that took place in the Kodangal Lift Project tenders. The BJP will

Seethakka stresses accountability at panchayati raj meet

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Minister Dr Danasari Anasuya aka Seethakka asserted her commitment to enforce strict accountability in official duties, emphasizing the need to transform villages into exemplary models.

Speaking at a review meeting with District Panchayati Officers (DPOs) held at the Rural Drinking Water Supply Centre in Erramanzil, Seethakka outlined her vision for the department's progress.

She noted that while she is empathetic towards employees' issues, there would be no tolerance for negligence. Joined by department Secretary Lokesh Kumar and Director Srijana, the minister reviewed development projects, sanitation, drinking water supply and utilization of funds across districts.

During the three-and-a-half-hour session, Seethakka urged officials to ensure clean and green villages and to provide essential amenities to rural communities.

She highlighted the importance of safe drinking water for anganwadi centres, gov-

ernment schools and SC/ST colonies and instructed regular testing of water quality. She also emphasized coordinating with headmasters and Panchayati secretaries to resolve water issues promptly.

"Rural development is at the core of our government's agenda. DPOs must take pride in serving villages, treating their work as a responsibility rather than just a job," she



said. Seethakka instructed DPOs to conduct fortnightly reviews with their teams and submit reports, stressing timely action plans to address local challenges. She urged them to identify unique ways to leave a positive mark on the department, adding that her leadership views the Panchayati Raj system as a family dedicated to improving rural lives.

Seethakka highlighted Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's appreciation of the department's efforts in ensuring sanitation and greenery in villages, reminding officials of the need to sustain momentum before summer.

She called for an action plan to prevent water scarcity and reiterated the importance of timely salary disbursements to sanitation workers and multi-purpose workers, now being processed directly through the Panchayati Raj Commissioner's office.

Department Secretary Lokesh Kumar issued directives to address sanitation issues, warning that Panchayati secretaries would be held accountable for drainage problems.

Commissioner Srijana urged officials to improve time management and maintain daily interaction with rural residents to address their needs efficiently.

Seethakka concluded by expressing happiness in heading a department closely tied to people's lives. She stressed the need for field visits and innovative approaches to ensure that the Panchayati Raj Department continues to make a significant impact.

Krishnaiah demands...

Continued from page 1

Krishnaiah, who is also a Rajya Sabha Member, highlighted the struggles of BC students after the discontinuation of full mess charges scheme in 1994.

"Students are unable to pay mess bills, which can go up to Rs 30,000, while scholarships cover only Rs 15,000. The balance becomes a burden, leading to delays in obtaining certificates after completing courses," he said.

Krishnaiah also criticised the government for not addressing the issue of fee reimbursement arrears which currently amount to Rs 4,000 crore.

He warned that unless these dues are cleared immediately, large-scale protests would be organized across the state. "Students are unable to pursue higher education or secure jobs due to the withholding of certificates.

This is an injustice that must be addressed," he added.

The MP expressed dismay over the lack of infrastructure in BC hostels. "There are 300 BC college hostels in the state, and not one has its own building. The government has constructed offices for collectors, revenue officials, and police stations, but has completely ignored hostels and gurukul schools for marginalized students," he said.

Krishnaiah pointed out that the government spends lavishly on infrastructure in areas like Kondapur and Madhapur, including flyovers and walking tracks, but fails to invest in basic facilities for hostel students. "Is the government not interested in ensuring these students get quality education and secure good jobs?" he asked. Krishnaiah raised the following demands:

Construction of well-equipped hostel buildings with dining halls, libraries, and study rooms.

Full reimbursement of fees for professional and postgraduate courses. Immediate clearance of Rs 4,000 crore fee reimbursement arrears.

Monthly pocket money of Rs 1,000 for female students and Rs 800 for male students.

Increase in day scholar scholarships from Rs 5,500 to Rs 20,000 per year.

Introduction of a BC Bill in Parliament to provide 50% reservations for BCs in legislative bodies.

Creation of a dedicated BC Ministry at the Central level to oversee education and welfare schemes.

Krishnaiah vowed to intensify protests if these demands were not met, asserting that only a collective struggle would bring justice to BCs.

Role of Telugus...

Continued from page 1

support its development initiatives. "Telugu people across the world have excelled in various fields. I urge them to contribute to Telangana's growth under the Telangana Rising initiative and Vision 2050," he said.

The Chief Minister also outlined plans to transform Hyderabad into a world-class "Future City" and emphasized the need for both Telugu states - Telangana and Andhra Pradesh - to compete globally and progress together.

"This is the moment to unite and ensure that Telugu culture and achievements shine on the world stage. Let us work together to make our states models of excellence," he concluded.

Congress to ...

Continued from page 1

President T. Jagga Reddy slammed AICC in-charge secretaries and general secretaries nearly a month ago for not doing anything that is expected to be done by them like conducting PAC meetings.

Jagga Reddy said that party programmes are not up to the mark and has said, "Will the AICC in-charges kill the party in Telangana?"

At last, the party is conducting a PAC meeting and it would be held in hot conditions, one senior leader said.

'Cong wants ...

Continued from page 1

TGIC lands. What authority does the government have to mortgage public lands? Now borrowed money is being distributed, what will happen next time? If these loans are not repaid, the lands will be seized by banks. What is the government actually giving farmers?, he asked.

Sanjay said that former Chief Minister KCR too deceived the people and unemployed youth in the same way by promising that he will give double bedroom houses, ration cards, jobs etc. Now the Congress is getting ready to deceive people like KCR as local body polls are approaching, Sanjay said.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Saptami: Jan 05 08:15 PM to Jan 06 06:23 PM
Ashtami: Jan 06 06:23 PM to Jan 07 04:27 PM

Nakshatram: Uttara Bhadrpada: Jan 05 08:17 PM to Jan 06 07:06 PM
Revati: Jan 06 07:06 PM to Jan 07 05:50 PM

Rahukalam: 8:14 AM to 9:36 AM

Yamagandam: 10:59 AM to 12:22 PM

Variyam: 06:28 AM to 07:59 AM

Gulika: 1:44 PM to 3:07 PM

Amritakalam: 02:32 PM to 04:04 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:59 AM to 12:43 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 28°
Humidity: 47%
Sunrise: 6:50 AM
Sunset: 5:56 PM
Updated: January 5, 2024 5:00 PM

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | MONDAY | JANUARY 6, 2025

03

SCR changes terminal to Charlapalli for express trains

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The South Central Railway (SCR) has changed the terminal operations of express trains to reduce congestion at Secunderabad and Hyderabad stations and improve passenger convenience.

The key changes include: The terminal change to Charlapalli for Train No. 12603/12604 (Chennai Central-Hyderabad-Chennai Central Express).

The revised terminal from Hyderabad to Charlapalli: Train No. 12603 Chennai Central-Charlapalli: From 07.03.2025 (Departs 16:45, Arrives 05:10). Train No. 12604 Charlapalli-Chennai Central: From 08.03.2025 (Departs 05:40, Arrives 17:25). For Train No. 12589/12590 (Gorakhpur-Secunderabad-Gorakhpur Express).

The revised terminal from Secunderabad to Charlapalli: Train No. 12589 Gorakhpur-Charlapalli: From 12.03.2025 (Departs 06:35, Arrives 13:30). Train No. 12590 Charlapalli-Gorakhpur: From 13.03.2025 (Departs 21:45, Arrives 06:40).

Additional stops at Charlapalli include: Train No. 12757/12758 (Secunderabad-Sirpur Kaghaznagar Express): Arrives at 08:32 and Departs at 08:33 (from 07.01.2025).

Train No. 17201/17202 (Guntur-Secunderabad Express): Arrives at 12:41 and departs at 12:42 (from 07.01.2025).

Train No. 17233/17234 (Secunderabad-Sirpur Kaghaznagar Express): Arrives at 15:47 and departs at 15:48 (from 07.01.2025).

HYDRAA razes illegal 5-storey building in Madhapur region

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Protection Agency (HYDRAA) razed a five-storey building due to its irregularities and obstruction towards traffic to 100 feet main road at the Ayyappa Society in Madhapur on Sunday.

The illegal building built on 684 square yards was brought down due to norms violation. It lacked parking facility and instead had a kitchen on the ground floor and no fire safety measures, HYDRAA said. The operation was conducted under the supervision of local police and DRF personnel for security.

HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath said that complaints were received from residents about the unauthorised construction, which included a cellar, ground floor and five additional floors (making it a seven-storey building). Despite prior GHMC notices and a High Court order, the builder continued construction without adhering to regulations.

"I inspected the building early in the morning and found that there was fecal matter or sewage



flows on the road which was in compliance of the residents. Our demolitions will be strictly as per the already stated demolition policy. We will take up with the GHMC Commissioner regarding the upcoming or under construction illegal buildings in Ayyappa Society and take a decision in consultation with them, he added.

The GHMC had issued a show cause notice on February 14, 2024. Additionally, the High

Court declared the construction illegal and ordered its demolition on April 19, 2024.

Portions of the building were previously demolished on June 13, 2024, but construction resumed illegally, prompting fur-

ther action, said officials of the HYDRAA.

Following a detailed review of notices and High Court orders, Commissioner Ranganath directed the immediate demolition of the structure.

ter action, said officials of the HYDRAA.

Following a detailed review of notices and High Court orders, Commissioner Ranganath directed the immediate demolition of the structure.

Two held for peeping into girls washrooms in pvt college

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Two persons were arrested for alleged voyeurism after some female students at a private engineering college in Medchal, near Hyderabad, accused the cooking staff of recording them in the hostel washrooms, police said on Sunday.

B Srinivas Reddy, ACP Medchal, speaking to The Pioneer said, "We arrested five individuals and during interrogation the two accused have accepted that they peeped into the female washrooms twice but recorded nothing. We also found no photos, videos of the accused mobiles. The other staff, including hostel warden and principal were issued notice to appear before during the investigation," he added.

After protests were held at the college over the voyeurism issue on January 1 and 2, a case was registered against seven people, including the two arrested individuals, the principal, director, and chairman of the college.

Based on the complaint of the students, the case was registered at Medchal police station on charges of voyeurism, abetment to commit a crime and other relevant sections of the IPC, besides the POCSSO Act.

During the investigation, the police apprehended two persons, both aged 20, who were accused



of peeping into the washrooms of the students.

One of them works as a cook's helper, a police official said, adding that they were sent to judicial custody on Saturday.

It has been established that the two accused targeted the hostel girls when they used the washrooms, according to a release from the Cyberabad Police Commissionerate.

The two arrested individuals were provided accommodation near the girls' hostel washrooms, giving them easy access and posing a serious threat to the privacy and safety of the minor vic-

tics, police said.

The girls' hostel wardens displayed negligence when the victims disclosed the incident, intentionally avoiding escalating the matter to the police or the parents of the victims, police added. The principal, director, and chairman pressured the hostel wardens to contain the exposure of the incident in order to protect the college's reputation but showed no interest in reporting the matter to the relevant authorities, which emboldened and abetted the two arrested individuals to carry out the voyeurism, police said.

Telangana to experience temperature drop to 11° C

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana is expected to experience a temperature drop to 11 degrees Celsius until January 8, according to IMD Hyderabad. The city's temperature could go as low as 5 degrees Celsius, especially in areas like Adilabad, Komaram Bheem and Nirmal.

The IMD forecasts misty or hazy conditions during morning hours in isolated areas over the next five days. Minimum temperatures to be 2 degrees Celsius to 4 degrees Celsius below normal for the next three days. A Yellow Alert has been issued for cold wave conditions in Adilabad, Komaram Bheem Asifabad, Mancheril, and Medak districts.

On Saturday, the lowest temperature recorded in Hyderabad was 10.6 degrees Celsius at the University of Hyderabad. Areas like Bahadurpura, Shaikpet, Musheerabad, Maredpally, Golkonda, Asifnagar and Bandlaguda reported temperatures below 15 degrees Celsius. The IMD also predicts partly cloudy skies in the city until January 8, alongside the temperature drop.

Skills varsity to prepare professionals: Minister



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Young India Skills University started by the State government aims to prepare skilled professionals, said IT Minister D Sridhar Babu, after inaugurating Data Economy's new workstation at HYTEC City on Sunday. He emphasised Hyderabad's rapid evolution as a global hub for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies.

This new workstation aims to provide innovative tech solutions. On this occasion, Sridhar Babu highlighted Hyderabad's

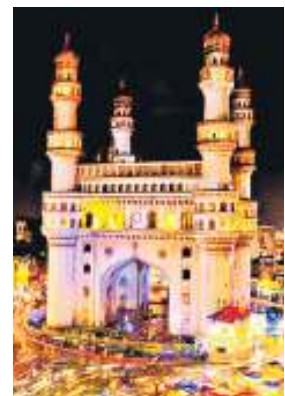
appeal to global enterprises, crediting its skilled workforce and excellent infrastructure. He appreciated Data Economy for its advancements in quantum computing, digital twins, and data transfer technologies and assured full government support for its growth and expansion.

Sridhar Babu also mentioned the state's commitment to talent development through the newly launched Young India Skills University, which aims to prepare skilled professionals for the industry. He encouraged software companies to expand

into tier-2 and tier-3 cities for balanced regional development.

The Minister expressed optimism about Hyderabad's growing startup ecosystem, AI centres, quantum computing hubs and data centres, which he believes will create substantial job opportunities. He also urged Data Economy to actively contribute to the proposed AI City, appreciating its plans to hire 500 more employees in Hyderabad by next year.

The company representatives Ravi Kopuri, Jawahar and Roshan Kumar also participated in the event.



Traditional Dance

Performance by Singidi

Venue: Ravindra Bharathi, January 6 (9 am to 10 pm)

Live Musical Orchestra

By

Chandra Tejalaya Music Academy

Venue

Sri Thyagaraja Gana Sabha, January 6, (4 pm)

Book Release Function

By Vemuri Satyanarayana

Venue

Conference Hall - Ravindra Bharathi, January 6, (6 pm to 10 pm)

Live Performance

By Capricio (Band)

Venue

Grease Monkey, January 6, (8 pm)

Weekend kids cooking camp

Master cooking and baking in 09 fun weekends

Venue

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

Allu Arjun cancels visiting child at KIMS as cops ask to reconsider



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Tollywood Actor Allu Arjun wishes to visit the child who fell unconscious in the Pushpa premiere incident and later cancels it due to Ramgopalpet Police asking him to reconsider the visit.

T Narsing Rao, SHO, Ramgopalpet told The Pioneer, "We have received information through KIMS hospital and asked Allu Arjun to plan his visit because of the recent incident. Police need to be ready and not disturb the hospital premises."

He was also asked to remain confidential about the visit.

The sources said that actor Allu Arjun's legal team advised him to take permission from the High Court and then visit the child.

In the formal letter the Ramgopalpet Police said, "We have received oral information from your management that you are planning to visit KIMS Hospital at Secunderabad on 5.1.2025 around 10:30 am for the purpose of visiting the minor victim of the recent stampede at Sandhya theatre who is currently under treatment at the hospital. In view of the heightened public interest in this matter, and to ensure minimal disruption to the hospital's operations and other patients, we recommend you to reconsider this public visit."

"However, if you are still intending to visit the hospital, we request that your management coordinate with hospital authorities and Ramgopalpet police station to get in touch with us so as to plan your entry and exit in such a way that minimises inconvenience to the hospital inmates and the general public," added the letter.

Farmer ends life over loan waiver in Medchal

PNS ■ MEDCHAL

A tragic incident unfolded in Medchal town as a farmer from Siddipet district, Surrender Reddy, ended his life, reportedly due to the non-implementation of crop loan waiver. The farmer, aged 52 and a resident of Chittapur village, was found hanging on the premises of the Medchal Agriculture office on Friday morning. According to Medchal ACP Srinivas Reddy, Surrender Reddy left behind a suicide note citing the crop loan issue and a local bank in Chittapur as reasons for his extreme step. He also mentioned his mother as a contributing factor in his note. The farmer had been living with his son in the Housing Board Colony of Medchal town.

Surrender reportedly took this drastic step after his repeated attempts to secure a waiver for his crop loan went unanswered. He had visited the Medchal Agriculture office, located near the Praja Parishad office, where he took the extreme step after leaving a detailed note.

The police have registered a case and are investigating the matter. Surrender's body was sent to Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad for post-mortem. Former ministers Harish Rao, Sabitha Indra Reddy, Mallareddy and Talasani Srinivas Yadav visited Gandhi Hospital to pay their respects to Surrender and offer condolences to his grieving family. They expressed sorrow over the tragic loss and assured the family of necessary support.

CM to open Aramghar-Zoo Park Flyover today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The six-lane flyover connecting Aramghar to Zoo Park, constructed under the Strategic Road Development Plan (SRDP), is set to be inaugurated by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on January 6. With a length of over four kilometers and built at an estimated cost of Rs 736 crore, the flyover stands as one of the largest in Hyderabad. It is expected to ease traffic congestion significantly, providing a signal-free commute for thousands of vehicles daily.

This flyover marks the 23rd such project completed under the SRDP and is the largest flyover in Hyderabad after the PV Narasimha Rao Expressway. The infrastructure aims to enhance connectivity between Shamshabad Airport and regions like Secunderabad, Warangal, Medchal and Malkajgiri, ensuring seamless travel while reducing fuel consumption



and air pollution.

The SRDP initiative has seen the completion of 36 out of 42 projects, which include 22 flyovers, five underpasses, six rail-over-bridges (ROBs), and other critical works. To further enhance Hyderabad's transport network, the government has allocated Rs 7,032 crore for 38 additional projects under the Hyderabad City Infrastructure Transparency and Innovation (H-CITI) initiative. These new projects will include underpasses and flyovers around KBR Park,

designed to alleviate traffic congestion at major junctions like Jubilee Hills Check Post, Film Nagar, and Road No. 45.

The Aramghar Flyover will cater to approximately 2,000 buses and private vehicles that use the stretch daily between Imlibun Bus Station and other parts of the city. It will also facilitate smoother connectivity to areas like Uppal, Nagole, LB Nagar, Bairamalguda and Chandrayangutta, enabling faster commutes and reducing travel time.

OLD CITY METRO RAIL

Cheques to be distributed to affected owners today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The path is fast clearing for the commencement of Phase 2 Metro works in Old City. The government has finalised the schedule to compensate affected property owners.

HAML MD NVS Reddy stated that there are 1,100 affected properties along the MGBS to Chandrayangutta route in Corridor-6. A significant number of these property owners are voluntarily coming forward to provide their land for road-widening and Metro Rail construction.

So far, 169 owners have submitted their consent letters and ownership verification has been satisfactorily completed for over 40 of these properties, Reddy stated. He announced that the distribution of cheques to these property owners will take place on Monday at 2 pm. The compensation cheques will be given by State Transport and BC Welfare

Minister and Hyderabad in-charge Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar, along with Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi.

District Collector Anudeep Durishetty has already determined a negotiated rate of Rs 81,000 per square yard as consent award for affected properties. In addition, as per the Relief and Rehabilitation Act, eligible property owners will also be provided rehabilitation compensation and reimbursement for dismantled structures, Reddy clarified. He emphasised that the compensation is being disbursed as per the Land Acquisition Act and based on the district collector's decisions.

The cheque distribution programme will take place at the Hyderabad District Collector's office near Lakdikapul. The event will be attended by Metro MD NVS Reddy and District Collector Anudeep Durishetty.

Minister inaugurates free eye check-up centres for drivers

PNS ■ NALGONDA

In a groundbreaking initiative to prevent road accidents, for the first time in the state, the Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy launched a free eye check-up and spectacles distribution programme at a dhaba (road-side restaurant) on the national highway in Nalgonda district on Sunday. The programme aims to safeguard drivers from potential accidents by ensuring they have proper vision.

Minister Venkat Reddy inaugurated the free eye test centre set up for drivers as part of the Road Safety Month, at a Dhaba at Vattimarti area under Chitaly mandal in Nalgonda. The programme was implemented under the supervision of district administration, police, and transport departments.

India has the highest number of road accidents in the world, and the Telugu states also report a significant share of these accidents. The Hyderabad-Vijayawada national highway has been wit-



Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy presenting spectacles to a driver in Nalgonda on Sunday

nessing an average of 70,000 to 80,000 vehicles daily. In response, the Telangana government has

taken the novel step of organising eye exams for drivers directly at the dhabas along the highway,

ensuring that anyone with impaired vision is immediately provided with corrective glasses.

Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy urged drivers to take advantage of the initiative, stressing that neglecting eye health, especially for long-distance drivers, increases the risk of accidents. He mentioned that the responsibility for reducing road accidents lies with the drivers themselves. Moreover, he shared plans to convert the Vijayawada-Hyderabad national highway into a six-lane road, with tenders expected to be completed by May of this year.

District Collector Ila Tripathi, emphasised that long-distance drivers often do not have access to regular eye check-ups due to time constraints or financial limitations.

Nalgonda district Superintendent of Police Sharat Chandra Pawar highlighted that the district has managed to reduce accident hotspots significantly.

MLA Vemula Veeresham also spoke. The Deputy Commissioner of the District Transport Department, Vani, also addressed the gathering.



Police warn youth against flying kites using Chinese manja

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Warangal Police Commissioner has warned that strict legal actions will be taken against anyone involved in the sale or use of government-banned Chinese manja (kite string) in the Warangal Police Commissionerate limits. With the Sankranti festival approaching, when people, especially the youth, prepare to fly kites, there has been an increase in the sale of Chinese manja by kite vendors. These Chinese manjas, made from nylon and synthetic threads, are dangerous not only to humans but also to flying birds, posing a threat to the environment. In light of this, the National Green Tribunal has issued orders, and as per those directives,

Warangal Police Commissioner has focused on curbing the sale and use of Chinese manja.

As part of this effort, the police have seized Chinese manja worth around Rs 2.62 lakh in recent raids conducted by the Task Force and local police. The Police Commissioner further emphasised that strict measures would be taken to prevent the sale of Chinese manja across all areas under the Commissionerate. He also urged the public to refrain from using Chinese manja and to fly kites in a manner that does not cause harm to others. He advised citizens to inform authorities by calling the Dial 100 number if they come across anyone selling or using Chinese manja.

Tension erupts in Adilabad district after forest officials raid village

PNS ■ ADILABAD

Tension flared in Keshavpatnam village under Ichoda mandal in the district on Sunday when villagers reportedly attacked Forest officials and vandalised a vehicle following the seizure of timber logs. The incident occurred after forest personnel conducted a cordon-and-search operation in response to reports of illegal timber stockpile in the area. During the operation, teakwood logs were confiscated from several homes.

As the officials began seizing the logs, some villagers became angry, assaulting the forest staff and damaging their vehicle. Forest officer Jadav Naishilal suffered minor



Villagers protesting at Forest officials searching for timber stockpiles at Keshavpatnam village in Adilabad district

injuries in the altercation. Police from Ichoda and nearby areas quickly arrived to control the situation and calm the agitated villagers. The area was subsequently placed under heavy security.

Keshavpatnam, located in the Adilabad district, has long been associated with timber smuggling, a major source of income for many residents. Forest inspection teams had been alerted to the large

quantities of timber being stockpiled in the village, prompting the search operation.

During the search, villagers accused the officers of unlawfully entering their homes and behaving rudely, which they claimed led to the violent confrontation. The villagers also expressed their displeasure with the authorities' actions and their ongoing efforts to prevent timber smuggling.

The officers are in the process of transporting the confiscated timber to the forest office, but the reaction of the villagers remains uncertain. The situation remains tense, with police picketing continuing in the area to prevent further escalation.

Rowdy-sheeter involved in 30 cases arrested

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The rowdy-sheet offender Perelli Praveen, who has allegedly been involved in illegal activities and causing distress among people, was arrested by the Two Town Police under the leadership of Inspector Balakrishna. He has been remanded in judicial custody.

The police officer said that On December 14 last year, in the Indiranagar area of the city, municipal staff demolished an illegally constructed shed using a earth-mover as part of their duties. Rowdy-sheeter Praveen and his brother Ravi Kumar obstructed the operation at NTR Circle. They violently attacked the municipal work-

ers and damaged the earthmover's windows with an iron rod.

A case was registered, and investigation was initiated. Since then, the accused had been on the run, continuing illegal activities such as land grabbing, issuing threats, and extorting money.

The accused has been involved in multiple crimes, including land grabbing, threats, and extortion. Based on this, a case was registered under Section 111 BNS of the law, and Praveen was arrested on Saturday, Balakrishna said.

Praveen, who had been convicted for life imprisonment in a murder case, has a criminal history including robbery, assault, and attempted murder. After being



Inspector of Police Balakrishna

released from prison for good behavior, he continued criminal activities.

He is a suspect in a total of 30 cases across Khammam and Nalgonda districts, of which he has been arrested in 21 cases and is currently out on bail, the police said.

Praveen has been involved in creating false documents related to land disputes, threatening victims, and issuing warnings of life-threatening harm.

"Action will be taken against individuals who disturb public peace and safety under the Organized Crime Act, and we will take legal action against them," said Inspector Balakrishna.

Harish unveils Swatantra channel calendar



Former minister T Harish Rao unveiling the Swatantra channel calendar in Siddipet on Sunday

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Former minister T Harish Rao unveiled the Swatantra channel 2025 New Year calendar here on Sunday in the presence of BRS leaders and journalists. He extended New Year and Sankranti greetings to the management, staff, viewers, and people.

Speaking on the occasion, Harish Rao stated that the channel has remained neutral and impartial. It has

been giving impartial news. The channel has been bringing the problems being faced by people to the attention of the government. He expressed his hope that the channel would scale new heights.

The event was attended by Siddipet district representative of Swatantra News Mallareddy, cameraman Mahesh, journalists Sanjeev Reddy, Rangadampalli Srinivas Goud, Jaipal Reddy, Lakshman, Naveen, and BRS party leaders.

Cold wave in Kumaram Bheem Asifabad District

PNS ■ KUMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD

The Meteorological Department has reported a significant drop in temperatures across Komaram Bheem Asifabad district, with minimum temperatures now 2 to 4 degrees lower than usual. The chill has been exacerbated by strong northeast winds, particularly affecting Asifabad district.

The severe cold, coupled with dense fog, has led to motorists facing a hard time navigating through highway.

As a result of the plummeting temperatures, local residents are taking extra precautions to cope with the cold. On Sunday, temperatures recorded at 6 am were 6.5°C in Sirpur (U), 6.6°C in Tiryan, and 9.3°C in Kerameri mandal. The minimum temperature in Asifabad has dropped from 9.8°C to 6.5°C. In response to the ongoing cold wave, the district has issued a Yellow Alert for the next two days, as announced by an official from the District Public Relations Department.

Tribal youth script a success story by landing police jobs

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Two tribal brothers from Pulcherla Kunta Tanda Gram Panchayat under Farooqnagar mandal in Rangareddy district, have achieved remarkable success by securing police jobs through sheer determination and effort. Nenavat Bhaskar and Nenavat Venkatesh, who hail from a family that values education and discipline, completed their training at the Mancherla Police Academy and are set to join their duties on January 8.

Their achievement has brought immense joy to their family and the community. "It is a moment of pride for our family and our village," said Veterinary Doctor Nenavat Bal Ram, a relative, adding that the brothers' hard work proved that dedication can lead to success.

The siblings credited their elder brother Nenavat Ravi and their parents for supporting them in their journey towards a government job. They encouraged students to adopt disciplined education and remain committed to their goals, emphasizing that success is achievable through perseverance. The achievement of Nenavat Bhaskar and Nenavat Venkatesh has become a source of inspiration for tribal youth, highlighting the potential of hard work and belief in oneself.

Pigeon betting racket busted in Vikarabad district

SRINIVAS GUDUPALLI ■ RANGAREDDY

A shocking pigeon betting racket was uncovered in Parigi in Vikarabad district after vigilant locals reported suspicious activity involving the release of pigeons from a trolley auto-rickshaw. The incident unfolded when residents noticed a group attempting to release pigeons into the sky and questioned their intentions. The individuals claimed they were training the birds for long distance flights, but their behavior raised suspicion when they tried to negotiate with the locals to prevent them from contacting the police. Concerned about possible illegal activities, the residents informed law enforcement.

Upon investigation, police found around 300 pigeons packed in 20 boxes inside the trolley auto-rickshaw. Each pigeon had a code number marked on its leg, suggesting organised betting activities. The authorities learned that bets were being placed on the performance of the pigeons during their flights.

Two key individuals, Munavar and Bubu Jani, who had transported the pigeons, were detained for interrogation. According to Munavar, the pigeons were trained to cover distances of up to 300 kilometers. However, their alleged use in betting has exposed a widespread illegal operation. The police are continuing their investigation to uncover the full extent of the racket and identify other individuals involved in the betting network.

menu. He also advised regular health check-ups for the students and asked the staff to look after them like their parents, as many had left their families to study far away.

The Minister suggested upgrading the school from an intermediate level to a degree level for minority girls. Several issues faced by the students were brought to his attention. Immediately, the Special Secretary of the Minority Welfare Department, Tafseer Iqbal, and the Chief Minister's Secretary interacted with the students. The Minister also praised the girls who had recently excelled in the Chief Minister Cup, recognising their talents in sports and science



Minister for Backward Classes and Transport Ponnambhakhar interacting with students at the Gurukul School in Husnabad on Sunday

innovation. He announced that NCC, NSS, Red Cross, and similar organizations would be introduced in all Gurukula schools.

He shared success stories from the lives of people who had achieved their goals and explained how students could utilise their intelligence to succeed. The minister emphasised that the government prioritises education. Upon forming the government, the government had already initiated teacher appointments, promotions, and transfers, and provided basic facilities in all schools. He mentioned that after a decade, the government had increased diet charges to provide quality food to students.

As many students' parents come from agricultural backgrounds, the Minister also informed them that the government had raised the Rythu Bharosa (investment support scheme) from Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000, and announced an annual Rs 12,000 for landless agricultural labourers. Additionally, new ration cards would be issued. The students expressed their happiness about the government support provided to their parents.

Siddipet Library Organisation Chairman Lingamurthi, Single Window Chairman Shivayya, Revenue Divisional Officer, Mandal Revenue Officer, and other officials accompanied the Minister.

ACROSS THE STATES



Elephant stuck while crossing rail fence rescued

An elephant, which was stuck while crossing a rail fence in the Veeranahosahalli range of Nagarhole Tiger Reserve near here, was rescued on Sunday, official sources said. Forest officials deployed earth-moving equipment to demolish one of the cement beam pillar barriers to which the rail fence was wedged. After the elephant was freed, it made its way into the forest, officials said. On learning that the elephant was caught in a predicament, the forest team rushed to the spot where the tusker was trapped between pillar barriers and was unable to lift its hind legs over the rail fence, they said. According to forest officials, the radio-collared tusker was aged around 30 years and its movement was being tracked. The rail fences are installed as a measure to prevent elephants from crossing into villages bordering forest areas.



Girl killed, 2 others injured as e-bike catches fire in MP

An 11-year-old girl was killed and two others sustained injuries when an electric motorcycle charging outside a house caught fire in Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam on Sunday, police said. The blaze broke out around 2.30 am in a colony in the Industrial Area police station limits, an official said. The electric motorcycle was kept for charging outside the house of one Bhagwat Maurya when it caught fire, and the flames spread to another vehicle, said VD Joshi, the in-charge of the Industrial Area police station. He said the family went to sleep after plugging in the vehicle for charging, and they suddenly woke up to smoke billowing in the house. They called the fire brigade and managed to come out of the house, but Maurya's granddaughter Antra Choudhary was left behind, and she died of suffocation, the official said. He said Bhagwati Maurya and Lavanya (12) were injured and are undergoing treatment.



Drone falls close to Odisha CM during Jharsuguda visit

In a major security lapse, a drone deployed by the administration to take photographs of Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi accidentally crashed on the ground close to him during his visit to Jharsuguda, an official said on Sunday. The incident which occurred on January 2 came to light during the day after a video clip of the incident was circulated on social media platforms. "As per preliminary investigation, the drone was deployed by the district administration to take photographs and record video of the chief minister and other dignitaries during the visit. Due to some technical glitches, it accidentally fell near to the CM," said the police officer of Jharsuguda district. Majhi was heading towards Jhadaeswar temple in the Purunabasti area of Jharsuguda when the drone fell near him. The alert personal security officer of Majhi and police officials immediately kicked the drone away.

Spanish woman returns to India to find biological mother

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Sneha, a Spanish citizen, has returned to India in search of her biological mother, who had abandoned her and her brother 20 years ago. However, 21-year-old Sneha is running out of time as she has to return to Spain on Monday for her educational commitments. The researcher in children's education wanted to trace her roots and reached India with scanty information about her past. Her Spanish parents Gema Vidal and Juan Josh supported her in her quest and Gema



accompanied Sneha to her home state. They had adopted Sneha and her brother Somu in 2010 from an orphanage in Bhubaneswar, where they were kept after their mother Banalata Das abandoned them in 2005.

Will turn Delhi into a city of the future, says PM Modi

ASSERTS NO WELFARE SCHEME TO BE SHUT IF BJP COMES TO POWER

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Delhi's AAP government of wasting a decade fighting with the Centre and urged its people to give the BJP an opportunity to turn the national capital into a city of the future. The prime minister also assured that no public welfare scheme would be discontinued if the BJP assumed power but the party's government would weed out the corruption in their implementation. Addressing a rally in the Rohini area, Modi dubbed the AAP government a "disaster" that had struck Delhi and asserted the BJP would usher in change.

"Only when this 'aapda (disaster)' is gotten rid of in Delhi, the double-engine of development will come in," Modi said. The prime minister said the Centre had been developing highways in Delhi, expanding the Metro network, starting the Namu Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System, and running big hospitals. "However, the moment you step out of a Metro station, you can see potholed roads, overflowing sewers. Some areas are such that even auto and cab drivers refuse to ply due to long traffic jams," he said.

"In the past 10 years, Delhi has witnessed a state government that is no less than an 'aapda (disaster)!' Delhiites

The prime minister said when the people of Delhi were grappling with COVID-19, struggling to find oxygen and medicines, the entire focus of the "aapda people" was on building their "Sheesh Mahal". "They made a huge budget for the 'Sheesh Mahal'. This is their truth... They do not care about the people of Delhi



have realised this. Only one voice is reverberating in Delhi -- 'Aapda nahi sahenge, badal kar rahenge (will not tolerate disaster, will bring change),' Modi said. The prime minister said when the people of Delhi were grappling with COVID-19, struggling to find oxygen and medicines, the entire focus of the "aapda people" was on building their "Sheesh Mahal". "They made a huge budget for the 'Sheesh Mahal'. This is their truth... They do not care about the people of Delhi. That is why every Delhiite today is saying... 'we will not tolerate aapda, we will change'," he said.

Modi also accused the AAP government of spreading fear

and good governance will come. "We are in the 21st century and 25 years have passed. Two or three generations have entered their youth. The next 25 years are very important for Delhi. The next 25 years will see India emerging as a developed nation before their eyes. We all will be stakeholders in this journey," Modi said.

The national capital should be a part of this glorious journey, he added. "In Delhi, people blessed the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections and now, in the assembly polls, are set to bless the BJP. This is a golden opportunity to win the heart of Delhi and free it of disaster ('aapda')," he said.

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'K'taka govt finding excuses to halt guarantee schemes'

PNS ■ MYSURU (KARNATAKA)

Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Sunday accused the Congress government in Karnataka of finding ways to discontinue its flagship guarantee schemes, while "burdening" the common people with increased costs such as the recent 15 per cent hike in public transport bus fares.

Speaking to reporters, Kumaraswamy said, "The Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah) is someone who has presented the most number of budgets in the state, as he has also held a finance portfolio, with his consent the five guarantee schemes were implemented and they (Congress) claim that they have walked the talk, but to walk the talk they are playing with the lives of the common man."

Expressing concern over the



government's insensitivity towards the struggles of the underprivileged.

The revised bus fares, which took effect at midnight on Saturday, have drawn criticism from opposition parties and various sections of society. The JDS leader charged the government with indulging in "daylight robbery," claiming that in the guise of implementing guarantee schemes, it was extracting several times more money from the same beneficiaries.

"The Congress government claims it is fulfilling its promises, but at what cost? They are taking money from the people through fare hikes, increased stamp duties, and higher cess on petrol and diesel, and then giving it back in the form of schemes like Gruha Lakshmi. This is no achievement," he remarked.

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ON DAY FOUR OF FAST UNTO DEATH

PK seeks support of Rahul, Tejashwi Yadav

PNS ■ PATNA

Jan Surraaj Party founder Prashant Kishor, who has been on a fast unto death to press the demand for cancellation of a BPS exam, on Sunday sought the support of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav.

Talking to reporters here on the fourth day of his 'Amran anshan', Kishor also said he was ready to "follow" these leaders and if they were averse to his presence, he was willing to "withdraw". "I want to inform the people that this agitation is non-political one and not being carried under the banner of my party. Last night, the youngsters formed a 51-member forum called 'Yuva Satyagraha Samiti' (YSS) which will steer this move-



ment of which Prashant Kishor is just a part. All are welcome to lend support to it Rahul Gandhi, who has 100 MPs and Tejashwi Yadav who has more than 70 MLAs," Kishor said.

He added, "These leaders are much bigger than us. They can get five lakh people to gather at the Gandhi Maidan... this is the time to do so. The future of the youth is at stake. We are faced with a brutal regime which has ordered lathi charge 87 times in just three years."



Row over BJP leader's reference to roads citing Priyanka

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji, Ramesh Bidhuri, has yet again courted controversy by allegedly saying that after victory in the Delhi Assembly polls next month, he will develop smooth roads in the constituency like Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's "cheeks". No reaction of Bidhuri was available over his remarks and the attack on him by the Congress.

"I assure you that just as we made the roads in Okhla and Sangam Vihar, we will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," Bidhuri is heard saying in the purported video, which went viral on social media. Congress candidate from Kalkaji and Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba lashed out at Bidhuri and accused him of "insulting" women once again in his "usual indecent language". "Will the public in Kalkaji have such (a person) who cares neither for the dignity of the House (Parliament) nor respects the women," she said in a post on X.

3 killed as Coast Guard chopper crashes at runway

PNS ■ PORBANDAR (GUJARAT)

Two pilots and a crew member were killed on Sunday after an Indian Coast Guard helicopter on a routine sortie crashed at Porbandar airport runway in Gujarat and caught fire, officials said. The maritime security agency said the reasons for

the incident are being investigated through a Board of Inquiry.

ICG ALH MK-III helicopter CG 859 met with a mishap at Porbandar Airport Runway at about 1215 hrs on 05 Jan 25. The ICG helicopter had 02 Pilots and 01 Air Crew Diver at the time of the incident and was on a routine

training sortie," an ICG statement said. Immediately after the incident, the crew was rescued and shifted to a government hospital at Porbandar, where they were declared as brought dead.

The deceased are Commandant (JG) Saurabh, Deputy Commandant SK Yadav and Navik Manoj Pradhan. They

will be cremated as per service traditions and honour, the ICG stated. Porbandar Superintendent of Police Bhagirathsinh Jadeja said the chopper crashed while landing near the Porbandar airport runway and caught fire.

"The chopper was returning and trying to land when the incident occurred near a runway.

'We don't want Union Carbide waste here'

CHORUS OF DEMAND AT MP VILLAGE ADJACENT TO DISPOSAL SITE

PNS ■ PITHAMPUR (MP)

"We don't want this toxic waste in our area," is the refrain of locals at Tarpura, a village adjacent to Pithampur's waste incineration unit where a huge quantity of waste from Bhopal's Union Carbide factory has been brought for disposal.

An uneasy calm prevailed in the village with a population of around 20,000 on Saturday amid heavy police deployment. The plan to dispose of 337 tons of waste linked to the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, among the worst industrial disasters in the world, has sparked off protests in the area.

Some locals claimed that when ten tonnes of Union Carbide waste was disposed of at the Pithampur facility on a trial basis in 2015, it led to contamination of soil, underground water and water sources in nearby villages.

The incineration of a huge quantity of toxic waste will be hazardous for humans as well as the environment, the villagers fear, even though the Madhya Pradesh government has sought to assure them that there would be no harmful consequences.

The administration has issued prohibitory orders in the 100-meter radius around the waste disposal unit in Pithampur and deployed a large police force. Many residents of Tarpura work in industrial units in Pithampur. "Our demand is that the toxic waste from Union Carbide factory should not be incinerated in Pithampur," Kailash Sharma, a resident of the village, told PTI. Sharma, who shifted to Pithampur from Bihar with his family of six some years ago in search of work, claimed that the attendance of labourers in local factories decreased after the government started transporting the

Union Carbide waste to Pithampur. Some other labourers living in the village endorsed his claim. Pithampur, home to around 1,250 factories, is the main industrial hub of Madhya Pradesh. Bhaya, a youth from Tarpura village, said, "We want this waste to be sent back to Bhopal."

Protests rocked Pithampur, around 50 km from Dhar district headquarters, on Friday after the trucks carrying the toxic waste reached Ramky Enviro company where the incineration is to be carried out. Two people even attempted self-immolation and are now undergoing treatment.

The administration on Saturday held meetings with local people and public representatives to assure them that their views will be heard. Dhar Superintendent of Police Manoj Kumar Singh said, "Life is normal in Pithampur at the moment.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Vision for rural India

PM Modi hails rural resilience at Grameen Bharat Mahotsav; says rural prosperity is essential for national growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered an inspiring address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, held in New Delhi, highlighting the transformative strides made in rural development. The event celebrated the resilience and progress of rural India under the theme "Building a Resilient Rural India for Viksit Bharat 2047"—a vision to make India a developed nation by its centenary year of independence. PM Modi emphasised that the government's intentions, policies and decisions are invigorating rural India with newfound energy. He highlighted significant achievements in healthcare, agriculture and basic infrastructure that have elevated the quality of life in villages and driven economic growth. Reflecting on India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he proudly noted how Indian villages defied global doubts by ensuring vaccine access to the last mile. He attributed this success to inclusive economic policies that cater to every section of society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav



2025 highlighted significant achievements in rural development, painting an optimistic picture of progress. While these strides are commendable, a closer examination reveals underlying challenges that must be addressed to ensure holistic and sustainable rural transformation. PM Modi emphasised healthcare advancements, noting the establishment of over 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and the growing reach of telemedicine in rural areas. These initiatives reflect substantial progress; however, challenges such as a shortage of trained healthcare professionals, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent internet access in remote villages continue to hinder equitable healthcare delivery.

Agriculture has been a central focus of rural development efforts, with financial assistance under PM-KISAN and a significant increase in agricultural loans helping farmers enhance productivity. Yet, structural problems persist in the agrarian sector, including reliance on unpredictable monsoon, insufficient crop diversification and market volatility. The protests against contentious agricultural reforms also highlight the need for more inclusive policy-making and effective stakeholder engagement. The Prime Minister highlighted the sharp reduction in rural poverty, which has reportedly fallen below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. While this represents significant progress, the persistence of rural inequality and exclusion of marginalised communities from development initiatives cannot be ignored. Poverty metrics alone do not capture the broader challenges of deprivation, including limited access to quality education, healthcare and social mobility. Infrastructure gaps, such as unreliable road connectivity, inadequate digital networks, and inconsistent electricity supply, limit the potential of rural economies. Furthermore, rural India's heavy dependence on agriculture underscores the urgent need for economic diversification and the creation of jobs in manufacturing and services. Prime Minister's vision is indeed laudable but a lot needs to be done for upliftment of rural masses.

PICTALK



'Sadhus' of 'Shri Niranjani Akhara' take part in a procession towards Sangam, in Prayagraj

Harmony: A prerequisite for national unity



ATUL SEHGAL

The resurgence of communal discord calls for urgent reflection and action. It is time to expose the forces that exploit differences for personal gain

The global communal ecosphere is showing change for the worse. The word communal here connotes and covers ethnic, racial, religious and sectarian communities. The last seven decades since 1950 have not seen very many episodes of communal conflict or conflagration in the global society. After the terrible death and destruction wrought by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the horrible communal riots following the partition of India into two independent states, episodes of communal violence have been relatively less compared to that in earlier periods of world history. Of late, the world is riven by acrimony and wars at multiple locations and communally divisive sentiments across global societies appear to be rising again. It seems that during the above period, the sentiments of mutual hatred and antipathy among certain global communities remained suppressed, only to resurface now.

It is time to review and relook at the elements that go into building and strengthening communal harmony. With the world in the terrible throes of wars at several locations, it is perhaps time to strengthen communal harmony and amity globally, particularly in our society and not to allow it to be undermined. History has been written largely by the conquerors of countries and the governing elite. We often do not have true accounts of history do not read true history or otherwise are inclined to interpret facts wrongly, driven by our deep-seated prejudices.

If we look closely at the picture and analyse it dispassionately, we shall find that it is generally the politicians and rulers who incite communal violence for their own selfish needs or vile vested interests. Often, these acts of incitement are obscured through disinformation campaigns. There are cultural and ideological differences between communities. What to talk of mainstream religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, there are major and minor variants of these religions and sub-ideological sects whose number touch-



es almost three thousand. They all have major or minor ideological differences. Notwithstanding the many differing and dissonant injunctions of their scriptural texts, peace and harmony are basic to the progress and prosperity of citizens in every country, and every society and they are dear to all human individuals. That is why there are constitutions, laws and regulations in every country for proper governance that incorporates the functional upholding of universal peace promoting human values of justice and equality. Hence, we need to expose the machinations of the political elite to strengthen communal harmony in today's world. In the context of the current global scenario, the incidence of violence against Hindus in Pakistan or Bangladesh is more because of mischief and misdeeds of the ruling elite. During the colonial period in India, communal riots were frequently triggered by politicians or the governing elite. In our country with a population of 145 crore, nearly 21 crore are Muslims. They have been a part and parcel of our society for ages. We need to better integrate them, not appease them for petty political gains. The need of the hour is ideological realignment. And we should quickly brace ourselves for it. Let us not allow the demolition or destruction



DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD IN INDIA, COMMUNAL RIOTS WERE FREQUENTLY TRIGGERED BY POLITICIANS OR THE GOVERNING ELITE. THIS HAPPENS WHEN RELIGION AS A PRACTICE OF FAITH IS GIVEN A POLITICAL COLOURING

of religious buildings anywhere, but build monuments of universal, secular and humanistic culture to promote communal harmony. Let us build buildings and institutions that bind humans, not separate them. Let us educate global humans on the eternal metaphysical truths that apply to all, everywhere. Let us awaken humanity to the threads of universal knowledge about the Creator, creation and their relationship. Bharat has been the cradle of human civilisation because the divine knowledge emanating from the one Creator was revealed in this land to sages at the dawn of civilization. That core knowledge enshrined in the divine scriptures Vedas and ideology based on that needs resurrection today. Humans can live sensibly and peacefully for ages if they wish to. Only they need to be aligned with universal Dharma. Man-made sects separate; universal Dharma (righteousness) unites—because the latter comes from the omniscient Creator of all humans. When we talk of Sanatan as the religion of the inhabitants of Bharat, we refer to the above said broad-based, universal and eternal religion of humanity that transcends caste, creed, ethnicity and sect. Sanatan Dharma is the prescribed code of living handed down to the

earliest humans by the Creator. Let us strengthen adherence to that eternal code of living expected from humans by the one master of the Universe whose subjects we all are. Let us focus on the common, positive strands of ideology that exist in various mainstream religions and let us deliberate on the ideological strands that are dissonant with the universal Sanatan Dharma. Let us not mix religion with politics; rather let us give politics a more humanistic complexion. That is what is required today. We Indians are in the process of nation rebuilding after centuries of lying low due to deprecation by foreign invaders. Now is the time for fast-track progress and we must beware of nefarious designs of foreign powers to create impediments to our progress. We should try to reform our political and legal institutions to make them truly secular and democratic. Let us make our national fabric strong, placing it above caste, creed, faith or religion. At the same time, we should strive to dissolve our ideological differences in the bright shining light of Sanatan Vedic Dharma which has been the beacon of guiding light of all humanity for eons since the dawn of civilisation. (The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISRO EMBARKS DOCKING MISSION

Madam — On December 30, ISRO has embarked on another mission that has vast application in future exploratory missions. In fact, the space docking experiments or SpaDex mission are linked to the plan for setting up India's own space station named the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035 to carry out spacewalks and research in microgravity conditions. This mission also carries the PS4 orbital experiment module 4 or POEM 4, using the spent fourth stage of PSLV C 60 which otherwise would have ended as space debris carrying 24 payloads. Autonomous orbited docking is a sophisticated manoeuvre mastered by a few elite nations like the USA, China and Russia and India too is set to join this group. Docking is indispensable for missions that require heavy spacecraft and equipment that cannot be launched in one go, viz the International Space Station for instance.

A manned foray to the moon and the operation of the country's first space station is not possible without it. It could also open up opportunities for India's space research agency to collaborate with global missions that require docking facilities. The success of missions like Chandrayaan 3 and Aditya 1 in 2023 followed by the setting up of the first space observatory to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays in 2024, to the recent Cabinet approval in Sept 2024 of Venus Orbital Mission to study the different aspects of Venus, clearly showcases that it has enough expertise to contribute to the divergent facets of planetary research. This mission is the handiwork of collaboration between public and private enterprises and underscores not just its technical prowess but also lays a solid foundation for future endeavours that will shape the global space landscape.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

RELIEF FOR BHOPAL RESIDENTS

Madam—It is really sad that it took four decades to remove the toxic waste from

HMPV virus outbreaks spark panic



In China, the spread of viruses causing respiratory illnesses like Influenza A, HMPV, Mycoplasma Pneumonia, and COVID-19 has increased. This spread is affecting children's health significantly, leading to a rise in hospital admissions. These viruses exhibit symptoms similar to other respiratory infections, such as devastation caused by COVID-19, trusting the "Chinese Dragon" seems difficult. Five years ago, Wuhan's coronavirus outbreak wreaked

havoc worldwide, and now, the HMPV virus appears to have originated from the same location. Is this merely a coincidence, or is Wuhan a hub for developing biological colds and fevers in children. Now, the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is spreading in China, sparking fears that a similar outbreak could occur again. Wuhan, the epicentre of the initial coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly the origin of this new virus as well. China has stated that the situation is under control, and no travel restrictions have been imposed internationally. The Chinese Dragon seems to be spewing various deadly viruses. It is essential for the World Health Organization to take timely notice of these recurring dangerous viruses emerging from China.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

MELANISTIC LEOPARD SPOTTED AGAIN

Madam — After a "melanistic leopard" was spotted in the forests near Odisha's Nayagarh, wildlife lovers are understandably euphoric. Over the last five years, various forests of the country have reported the sighting of "melanistic leopards." Black feline of the big cat family, with small head, a robust jaw and strong hind legs—that's the compact description of "panther" or "melanistic leopard." In India, dense forests of the southern part harbour the black beauty. The black cats love to live in dense evergreen forests so that they can, as far as possible, avoid light. A genetic mutation, dominant or recessive, causes an overexpression of melanin pigments resulting in the so-called 'melanistic leopard.' However, the joy of sighting the big cat should be tempered with sobriety. Some 15 variants of the black cats are endangered.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Embracing your unique journey to success

This year, let's shift our focus inward, honour our unique paths and recognise the triumphs that shape who we are

How often have you beaten yourself up saying you don't measure up to others in terms of skillsets and success? How often have you undervalued your accomplishments with a desultory wave of hand accompanied by a "Oh, this is something everyone does" or "I haven't done anything great"? Chances are that we have done it a greater number of times than what is good for our self-esteem and confidence. A student of mine recently approached me for a review of her college admission essay wherein she had not highlighted many of her strengths that could catch the attention of the admission officer. "Oh, ma'am, these are things everyone in our school does. This isn't anything extraordinary," she said. I sat her down and explained: "We aren't worried about what others are doing. Our focus should be on what we have done so far and how it has been of consequence to us and others." The biggest reason for our disenchantment with our lives in this pacy world is we often undermine our capabilities by trying to match them with



others and trying to be one up over the rest. As long as we keep looking at others, we shall never be able to make the cut, which is completing a task to the best of our abilities, putting forth the best of our ideas as they emerge in our intellect and assessing their value not in terms of where you stand or what your ranking is in comparison, but giving ourselves due credit for the distance we have come given our specific challenges in life. No victory is small. To the little boy participating in a sack race at school, winning it or making it to the other end without stumbling should be an accomplishment. To a student who successfully makes a presentation in class, the comfort that she feels standing in front of a class and speaking about what she believes in is a success. To

a speaker on the stage, the mere fact that she is doing something that many people dread to do and evokes a standing ovation is a matter of great pride. Every little step that takes us forward is significant, not when we think if we are unique by contrast with another, but by how far we have come from where we began. True growth is not a race gauged by how others are performing but by the milestones, we cross on our journeys. Our fixation with comparison often blinds us to our progress. The yardstick of success is never universal—what feels ordinary to one could be an extraordinary triumph for another. Yet, we diminish our efforts simply because they don't mirror someone else's. We forget that personal achievements, however modest they seem, are stepping stones to greater accomplishments. The courage someone musters to speak in public for the first time, or the quiet resilience it takes to rise from personal setbacks—these are victories. They may not be headline-worthy, but they carry profound significance in shaping

our character and our path forward. The mistake we often make is believing that success has a standard template. It doesn't. As we step into a new year, let us make a conscious choice—to shift the gaze inward, to honour our unique journeys, and to celebrate the progress we've made, however small it may appear. Let us define success not by comparisons but by the courage to keep going, the strength to rise after a fall, and the grace to applaud ourselves for showing up. You are enough. Your story matters. And your victories, no matter how quiet, deserve recognition. Here's to a year where we measure success by our growth, not by how we compare to others. Let those who conquer mountains do so with pride and let those who climb smaller hills find joy in reaching their summits. And for those who can climb neither—whether by circumstance or choice—let their strength shine in being the cheerleaders who uplift others on their journeys. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist, and writing coach and has published six books. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS THE SOLE CONTROLLER

Logic, practicality and experience point to the necessity of a singular, omnipotent force governing all



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Imagine there being more than one controller of the Creation. They disagree on some matters and are not able to resolve them. What kind of chaos will result? Therefore, there being more than one controller is illogical, impractical and unimaginable. And this reality rules out all small controllers, as we imagine ourselves to be. Don't we all feel that we control something or another? Do we? These examples should provide the answer. There is a huge corporation, which employs thousands of people worldwide. Its owner has a say over who is used and at what level.

This is fine till something like a COVID-19 pandemic hits. There are lockdowns, quarantines and other social restrictions. This affects the working of the corporation. What about the so-called controller? He is under quarantine. Another example is of a president of a big country. He is puffed up by the power he enjoys. Unfortunately, he is assassinated. The assassin had control over his life, and this assassin was hanged. Who controlled what?

Let me take a common household. The man of the house making most decisions about the household may feel that he is a controller. What happens when the lady of the house opposes him on some issue? Where did the control go? We must understand that making decisions is not controlling anything because that would require controlling results. A team leader can make decisions on behalf of his team but he, himself, is controlled by circumstances. The only entity, who can ensure some result every time is God only, and no one else, now or ever. Having understood that God is the whole and sole controller, let us



understand how He manages it. The control is exercised through the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is just and according to the highest religious principles ('with - the Bhagavad Geeta 18.78), which is 'dharma'. Briefly, it is 'what you sow is what you reap.' Isn't that fair? No one can complain, and no one escapes punishment either, death notwithstanding.

Many engage in wrongful acts hoping to get away from punishment from man-made laws, but in God's control, no one does. Similarly, rewards are forever coming, as decided by the Divine Authority, which works under the superintendence of God. Similarly, God has empowered the material nature to give birth to the world along with moving and stationary objects. And on account of this, the world goes on. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Questions are raised about God's fairness and the System set by Him not being just. It is not true, which will be clear from the following examples. How was Hiroshima wiped out? Why were so many women and children killed or maimed? Surely, many must have been innocent.

The answer is very simple. All those born there were destined to be hurt in that fashion. Only those, who had bad karmaphalas coming to fruition were born there. Doesn't the divine authority have control over who would be born where? They have complete control and they also know the future.

Accordingly, they manage the Creation. Another instance could be of an infant dying soon after birth. Could we know that this soul had punishment coming for the heinous crime he had committed in his previous life; he had forced his wife to abort because the child was a girl? I am speculating, but that could be a reason. All souls are relocated after death. Where they will go will depend on many factors. Only God knows!

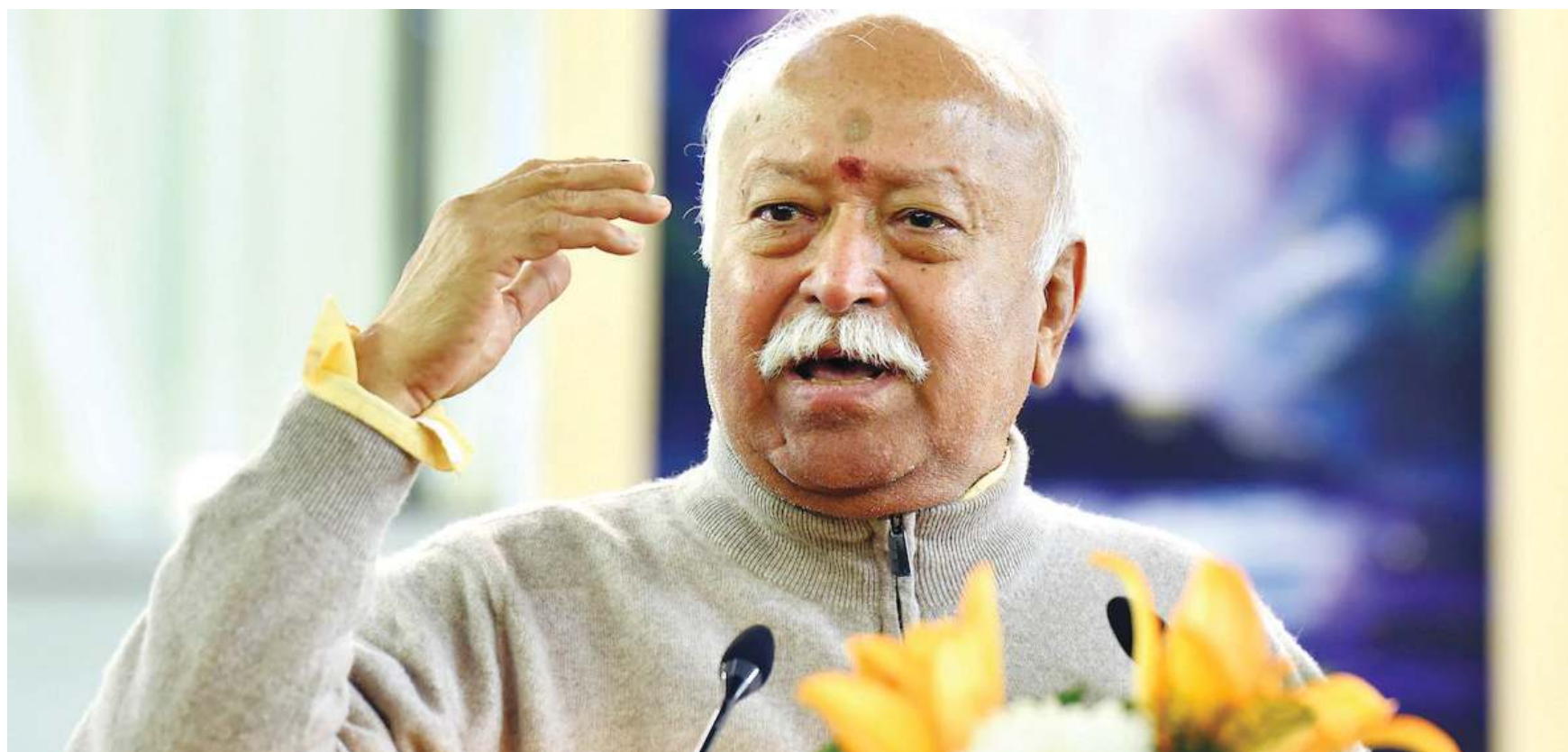
(The writer is a spiritual guide and teacher; views are personal)

Bhagwat champions unity as the path to India's Vishavguru vision



SUKHDEV SINGH

Highlighting the risks posed by divisive narratives such as 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes, Mohan Bhagwat stresses the importance of embracing India's pluralistic identity



Delivering a Sahjeevan Vyakhyannamala series lecture on the topic, India—the Vishavguru, the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat expressed his concern over the recent upsurge of 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and pointed out: "After Ram Mandir, some think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places". Rejecting the practice, he said, "This is not acceptable." Echoing his comment on Gyanvapi Masjid that "We look for a Shivaling beneath every mosque," implying that we should not, he cautioned: "The days of hegemony are gone," and that now "People choose their representatives, who run the government." Questioning the "language of dominance," he acknowledged the pluralistic nature of Indian society, where 'tradition' allows people to live in harmony while following their respective faiths. Drawing a comparison of India with the world, where similarity is the principle of unity, for India, he said, "Diversity is an ornament of unity, and we should respect and accept it." Rejecting hatred, malice, enmity, and suspicion daily under the burden of the past, he ruled out the 'majority-minority' binary and emphasised, "Everyone is equal here." To be a Vishavguru, India should be a nation of people who can rise above caste and religious differences. By what he has said, Bhagwat has targeted more than one point while acknowledging the reality of about 200 million Muslims besides the Christians, Sikhs, and others in India, on the one hand, and the geopolitical realities, on the other. If that is so, then the word 'Hindu' needs to be accepted as an Arabic-Persian cognate of the Sanskrit 'Sindu' and 'Hindustan' as a reference to the land of Hindus, i.e., the people living beyond the river Sindhu, but not a place of and for the people of a specific religion. The historical chronicles state that the river 'Sindu' was pronounced as 'Indus' by the Greeks



THE INDIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY WAS CODIFIED BY A SECTION OF PEOPLE AS A HINDU NATIONAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND AN ISLAMIC NATIONAL IDENTITY, DIVIDING THE PEOPLE ON RELIGIOUS LINES

and 'Al-Hind', which later became 'Hinds' or 'Hindus' by the Arabic Iranians.

The Greeks called 'the land of Indus' India, while the Arabic-speaking people called the region 'Hindustan.' It was a reference to the geographical region of old Punjab. The land of Hindus i.e. the people of river Sindhu, called Hindustan or India in the above sense, is a land of several religious faiths, such as Shaivism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, besides the principles of ancient Vedas and Puranas, and the word 'Hindu' has been a geographic and a cultural identifier to distinguish between the indigenous people and others who came as traders or invaders, like Muslims, Christians, and Jews, etc., at the initial stages of their entry into the region; the distinction, however, did not mean religious opposition.

It only acted as an identifying communicative 'sign' for communication is organised on two axes: the axis of similarities and the axis of differences. The people from the 'other' lands gradually became the people of the land called Hindustan, or India, settling permanently and adding to the diversities on the land of the river Sindhu.

Since there is no definite founder and no single holy text to establish a religion called 'Hinduism,' it remains only a set of socio-cultural practices while the people practice a variety of their respective religious worship.

The words 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan' have remained signifiers for the geographic-cultural practices until projected as a religious and national identifier in

the early twentieth century in opposition to the colonial rule and in reaction to the Khilafat Movement by the Muslims in support of the Turkish Ottoman Sultan during the freedom movement of India.

The Indian national identity was codified by a section of people as a Hindu national religious identity and an Islamic national identity, dividing the people on religious lines. The division was perpetrated by the colonial British in more than one way, leading to the partition of India. Since 1947, free India has been a sovereign state nation, though it should have been a state of cultural nations politically united as a federal political state, settling the issue of religious nations forever. Yet India has stood the test of its unity in diversity with some collisions on the sidelines.

The internal dynamism of society and state is its continued collision and cohesion in their weaving: the more complex a society or a state is, the higher its level of collision-cohesion dynamics. For the well-being of the land and its population, the political drivers must turn the power to strengthen 'diversity' against the 'forced homogeneity' as a principle of organisation. But with the rising assertion of Hindu religious identity and a Hindu nation-state over Hindu geographic-cultural identity juxtaposing with the recent upsurge in 'Mandir-Masjid' controversies, rightly perceived by Mohan Bhagwat, the danger to the unity and cohesion is more imminent than not.

The sooner the ideologues of identities understand it, the better it is for the people living

together for centuries. Mohan Bhagwat seems to have realized it, and rightly so, he has underplayed the slogan—'one nation, one people'—stating, "Without Muslims, Hindutava is incomplete": Hindus and Muslims are different but complementary. Hindustan, or India, or Bharat, is a land of diversities, and only by choice of the ideology and practice of inclusion, it can become Vishavguru. To be the Vishavguru is to experience and accommodate more diversity. The Vishav, i.e., the universe, is organized into networks of similarities and differences, yet the precursor of life on earth is the 'difference' that engenders diversity.

Mohan Bhagwat's nuanced remarks underscore the importance of unity amidst diversity in India's journey toward becoming a Vishavguru. Acknowledging India's pluralistic fabric, he emphasised harmony over divisive narratives like 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and rejected notions of religious hegemony. Bhagwat traced the historical and cultural origins of terms like 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan,' advocating for their geographic and cultural significance rather than a singular religious identity. He urged political and social leaders to strengthen diversity as a foundation for national cohesion. By embracing inclusion and mutual respect, India can truly embody the universal ideals required to be a global guide and leader.

(The writer is Professor (Retd), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Vice-Chairman, Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

The Bhagavad Gita: A blueprint for resilience, holistic health and leadership

From inspiring modern management practices to enriching prenatal care, the Gita's teachings resonate deeply in today's fast-paced world

The Bhagavad Gita is revered as a profound source of resilience, wisdom, and ethical guidance, often referred to as the essence of the Upanishads. Known as Brahmagvidya or "Superior Knowledge," it offers timeless insights into life, existence, and cosmic truths. Despite being composed millennia ago, the Gita remains relevant today, providing practical teachings for navigating the complexities of modern life.

Its wisdom extends across diverse fields such as management, leadership, psychology, and medicine. For example, many prestigious The Relevance of Beeja Sanskara and Garbha Sanskara A lesser-known yet significant



KASHINATH SAMAGANDI

cant aspect of the Gita is its emphasis on Beeja Sanskara (pre-conception practices) and Garbha Sanskara (post-conception practices). Through the concept of Atmaja Bhava, it highlights a deep connection with the unborn child. These practices, rooted in Ayurveda and

Yoga, nurture wisdom, emotional stability, and virtuous qualities in the foetus, fostering holistic development. The scripture also underscores the importance of Satvika Ahara—a pure, balanced diet. During pregnancy, this diet not only supports the physical health of the mother and foetus but also nurtures emotional and spiritual harmony, laying the foundation for a well-rounded individual.

Resilience, Energy and Cosmic Balance Rather than considering the Gita as the book of any person, caste, creed, country or religion, it is a guide to one's own personal, mental, social, and spiritual resilience and adaptability. Its teachings on perseverance, balance, and inner

strength resonate deeply with those facing modern challenges. The Gita's perspective on energy and cosmic balance aligns with contemporary scientific principles.

Ayurvedic Insights on Foetal Development

The Gita's teachings influence Ayurvedic principles, particularly in prenatal care. It identifies six essential Bhavas contributing to foetal development: Matruja Bhava (mother's qualities) Pitruja Bhava (father's qualities) Atmaja Bhava (soul connection) Satmyaja Bhava (compatibility) Rasaja Bhava (nutrition) Satvaja Bhava (mental stability) These emphasise the importance of parental health, nutrition, emotional well-being, and spiritual align-



ment in shaping the child's future. Such principles form the core of Garbha Sanskara practices, increasingly recognised in modern prenatal care for their holistic approach.

The Balanced Mind: Sthitaprajna

One of the Gita's most profound teachings is the concept of Sthitaprajna. This idea of remaining unaffected

by success or failure, challenges or triumphs, is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced world. Cultivating such equanimity fosters mental resilience and emotional stability, enabling individuals to navigate life's ups and downs with composure.

Holistic Health Through Integration

The Gita advocates an integrated approach to Ahar (diet), Vihar (lifestyle), Nidra (sleep), Achar (conduct), and Vichar (thoughts). These elements must work cohesively to promote comprehensive health and wellness. This holistic philosophy supports inter-science and intra-science integration in medicine. Intra-science integration ensures that all aspects of a medical system

work together to manage chronic conditions effectively, while inter-science integration leverages the strengths of multiple systems for optimal care. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing both acute and chronic conditions.

Holistic Development and Liberation

The Gita offers a roadmap for holistic self-development, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual growth. Its teachings on Dharma (duty), Karma (action), and Bhakti (devotion) provide practical guidance for leading a purposeful and ethical life. Moreover, the Gita provides insights into personality development, emotional mastery, and the attainment of Moksha (liberation).

Its universal principles resonate across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and leadership, offering a framework for self-realisation and collective well-being. In conclusion, the enduring relevance of the Bhagavad Gita lies in its universal message of harmony, balance, and self-awareness. It inspires individuals and societies towards holistic growth and ethical living.

Whether guiding inner conflicts or addressing societal complexities, the Gita remains an effective tool for achieving balance, resilience, and self-mastery in an ever-changing world.

(The author is Director of the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

FDI in India growing rapidly, says Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

FDI inflows into the country are surging, with investors from the Middle East, Japan, European Union, and the US recognising India's status as a top investment destination, driving rapid economic growth and generating millions of new jobs, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

He said that global investors are showing keen interest in India as the country offers several advantages such as strong domestic market, skilled and talented workforce and rule of law.

"I can clearly see FDI (foreign direct investment) in India once again growing rapidly and creating millions of jobs. Countries in the Middle East, EFTA region, Japan, and investors from the EU and the US are all realising that India continues to be the most preferred destination for FDI," Goyal said.

He added that India's stable and predictable regulatory framework, coupled with a favourable business environment and progressive policies aimed at enhancing ease of doing business, is attracting an increasing number of investors from around the world.

"Last month I met a CEO of one of the largest funds in the



"I can clearly see FDI (foreign direct investment) in India once again growing rapidly and creating millions of jobs. Countries in the Middle East, EFTA region, Japan, and investors from the EU and the US are all realising that India continues to be the most preferred destination for FDI," Goyal said.

US, who is also the largest investor in India, and he shared with me that his investments in India over the last 10 years have been some of the best investments his funds have ever done," he noted.

The US fund, Goyal said, informed him that they are investors in India for the last 20 years, but more than 80 per cent of their investments happened in the last few years.

"The CEO told me that he will be coming to India to cel-

brate 20 years of investing in India by announcing a further tranche of investments in India," he said.

The healthy performance of the Indian stock market will also attract more and more FIIs (foreign institutional investors), the minister said.

India is averaging over USD 4.5 billion in monthly foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows since January this year despite global uncertainties and challenges

Govt to launch another round of PLI scheme for steel sector

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will launch another round of production-linked incentive scheme for the steel sector on Monday.

The 'PLI scheme 1.1' will be launched by the steel minister H D Kumaraswamy.

"Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries...will launch 'PLI scheme 1.1' for the steel industry and call for applications...on January 6," the steel ministry said in a statement.

To encourage domestic production of specialty steel and lower imports by drawing in capital investments, the government had earlier introduced the PLI scheme for specialty steel.

The scheme has attracted investments worth Rs 27,106 crore, envisaging creation of 14,760 direct employment opportunities with an estimated production of 7.90 mil-



lion tonnes of specialty steel. As of November 2024, companies have already invested Rs 18,300 crore and generated over 8,660 in employment.

The government has been interacting regularly with the participating companies and based on feedback, it was felt that there was a scope to notify the scheme again to attract more participation, the statement said.

The concept of Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) was

conceived during the Covid-induced global lockdowns of 2020, emphasising the need to boost domestic manufacturing.

Initially launched for three sectors, the PLI scheme was later extended to include steel in November 2020.

The government had earlier said that it is working on another round of the PLI scheme for specialty steel as the response for the first round of the initiative did not meet expectations.



OfBusiness to ramp up steel biz

OfBusiness, a b2b commerce and fintech startup, is looking to invest about Rs 3,000 crore into doubling its steel business to more than 4MTPA in the next three years. The company has acquired three steel firms -- SMM Ispat, Shree Sidhbal Ispat and Noble Steel -- in the past and the expansion is lined up in all the three companies. "We are looking forward to investing close to USD 350 million, about Rs 3,000 crore, to scale up our steel business from the current 2 million tonne to more than 4 million tonne in the next 3 years. This is also expected to sharply increase the sector EBITDA to 2.5x from the current level. The funding will be a combination of internal accruals and debt & equity financing," Co-Founder and CEO Ashish Mohapatra said. The company supplies steel to companies such as L&T, Adani, J Kumar, Dilip Buildcon, Ashoka Buildcon. OfBusiness also plans to get into new categories such as pre-painted galvanised iron (PPGI) adding onto thermo-mechanically treated (TMT) bars and structures. The company is also planning a USD 1 billion IPO in FY26. "We have been continuously thriving for expansion of our business and be part of India's tremendous growth journey of USD 10 trillion economy. To support our expansion plans we are looking forward to our USD 1 billion IPO in FY2026," Mohapatra said.



Karur Vysya Bank adds two more branches in TN

Private sector Karur Vysya Bank has inaugurated two more branches, taking the overall branch network to 475 in Tamil Nadu, the bank said on Sunday. The Tamil Nadu-based bank inaugurated two branches, one each in Chennai and the other at Tiruchirappalli. According to a press release, during the current financial year, the company has added 28 new branches, taking the overall presence of the banking network to 866 across the country. The new branches would provide basic banking transactions and would also address the specific needs of customers. It would also provide banking and financial services covering retail, institutional and consumer lending. As on September 30, 2024, the bank's total business stood at Rs 1,76,138 crore with a deposit base of Rs 95,839 crore and advances at Rs 80,299 crore. In the last financial year, the bank recorded its highest net profit of Rs 1,605 crore, the release added.



ICAR urges Modi to appoint visionary chief

A member of the country's top agricultural research body ICAR on Sunday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to appoint a new director general with global expertise to revitalise the organisation ahead of the current chief's retirement next month. Venugopal Badaravada, a member of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's (ICAR) Governing Body, said the leadership transition presents an opportunity to reform the organisation amid allegations of corruption, nepotism and recruitment irregularities. The current Director General Himanshu Pathak is set to retire in February. Badaravada urged bringing in leadership from outside ICAR to drive systemic reforms and enhance transparency. In a statement, Badaravada, who has served on advisory panels for national livestock and cattle breeding missions, requested to join the search committee for the new director general. He criticised ICAR's "leadership gaps and strategic oversight" since 2014, saying the body has focused heavily on rice cultivation while neglecting pulses, oilseeds and indigenous crop varieties crucial for food security and self-sufficiency.

Post-Adani exit, Wilmar to emulate ITC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Wilmar Ltd (AWL), India's largest edible oil company, is adopting a strategy similar to ITC's by leveraging its core business and extensive distribution network to drive growth in its high-margin FMCG portfolio after the Adani group exit, according to sources.

Just as ITC used its strong cigarette business to expand into FMCG, AWL is set to use its dominant edible oil business as a foundation for FMCG growth.

Following the exit of the Adani Group, Wilmar may further capitalise on this approach by introducing more global FMCG brands into the Indian market, sources aware of the matter said.

In the December quarter, AWL's FMCG business achieved a 24 per cent year-on-year growth in volume, underscoring its efforts to expand both its food and FMCG product offerings.

FMCG makers expect inflation to hit volume growth, operating profit



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hit by inflation, higher input costs and pricing measures, fast-moving consumer goods companies are expected to see a contraction in their gross margin and a modest-to-flat operating profit in the October-December quarter.

Several FMCG makers are likely to log a low single-digit rise in their revenue, returning to the cycle of value-driven growth.

One of the reasons could be that a number of companies have opted for a price hike in the December quarter due to rising costs of input items such as copra, vegetable oil, and palm oil.

The price hikes came at a time when the urban market was dragged down by lowered consumption due to high food inflation. However, the rural market, which is slightly above one-third of the total FMCG market, stayed ahead of it.

Some of the listed FMCG companies, such as Dabur and Marico, shared their updates for the third quarter of FY25, and analysts expect either flat or low single-digit volume growth.

Home-grown firm Dabur expects a "low single-digit growth" in the December quarter along with a "flatish operating profit" as it faced inflationary headwinds in some of the segments.

FPIs withdraw Rs 4,285 cr amid global headwinds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors pulled out Rs 4,285 crore from Indian equities in the first three trading days of the month driven by apprehensions ahead of the third-quarter earnings season and high valuations of domestic stocks.

This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the entire December, data with the depositories showed.

The shift in sentiment comes amid global and domestic headwinds.

"FPIs are likely to continue selling as long as the dollar remains strong and US bond yields offer attractive returns. The dollar index at around 109 and the 10-year bond yield above 4.5 per cent are significant



deterrents to FPI flows," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 4,285 crore from Indian equities in the first three trading sessions of the month (January 1 to 3).

The uncertainty among foreign investors is reflected in the ongoing trend of outflows.

Comm min to discuss ways to boost exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials from the commerce ministry, and commercial wings of Indian Missions of 20 countries will hold a three-day meet, beginning here on Monday, to discuss ways to promote exports of goods and services, an official said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will also interact with these commercial representatives on January 6.

The issues, that would come up during the three-day celebration included opportunities and challenges and the way ahead in six focus sectors (of goods and services each) in 20 countries of significance; non-tariff barriers; logistics; WTO (World Trade Organisation) matters; and role and importance of MAI (market access initiative), the official said.



Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia.

These countries, including the US and the European Union nations, account for a major chunk of India's total exports.

Besides Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal, Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and

Internal Trade (DPIIT) Amardeep Singh Bhatia would also address the officials.

After recording double-digit growth in October 2024, India's exports in November contracted 4.85 per cent year-on-year to USD 32.11 billion, while the trade deficit widened to an all-time high of USD 37.84 billion due to record surge in gold imports.

According to the commerce ministry data, imports rose 27 per cent year-on-year to a record USD 69.95 billion in November due to high inbound shipments of vegetable oil, fertiliser, and silver.

Cumulatively, during April-November this fiscal year, exports increased 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion and imports by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion.

CII suggests seven-point agenda for employment generation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming annual budget for FY26 could announce further measures to boost employment generation, CII said on Sunday, emphasising that job creation at a mass scale is important to engage the young population productively, and drive inclusive growth in the world's most populous nation.

The industry body has suggested a seven-point agenda to harness India's demographic div-

idend, including an integrated national employment policy, support to labour-intensive sectors, and setting up an international mobility authority, among other targeted measures.

With a median age of just 29 years, India is a young country, and is set to add 133 million people to its working-age population by 2050.

The government could consider launching an internship programme in government offices in rural areas for the col-



lege-educated youth, CII said. It argued that this initiative would create short-term employment opportunities in government offices while bridging the gap between education and professional skills.

The programme would also help augment the available manpower resources for the effective implementation of various rural programmes and government initiatives.

CII has also proposed introducing a new provision under

income tax rule in lieu of Section 80J(AA) to encourage new employment. The new provision should continue as Chapter VIA deduction from gross total income, which is available even if a taxpayer opts for concessional tax regime.

It has proposed an integrated national employment policy which could subsume under its ambit the slew of employment generating schemes currently in works by various ministries/states.

Govt should lower GST on cement at 18 pc: JK Lakshmi

PNS ■ PATNA

The government should reduce GST on cement to 18 per cent from 28 per cent and take some policy measures in the upcoming Budget to boost consumption of this key building material, a senior official of JK Lakshmi Cement said.

In an interview with PTI, Arun Shukla, President and Director of JK Lakshmi

Cement, said there is a case to increase cement manufacturing capacity in India to meet the rising demand, which is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 7-8 per cent.

"One of the long-cherished dream, or the wish for us, has been reducing GST on cement," Shukla told PTI on the sidelines of Bihar Business Connect 2024 meet held here recently.

'I'VE BEEN CRAVING A FRESH CHALLENGE; GREATEST OF ALL TRIPS OFFERS JUST THAT'

TEJAL SINHA
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Life has taken a thrilling turn for Pema Leilani after her stint on *Splitsvilla*, a name synonymous with charm and determination is taking her vibrant personality to new heights with her latest project, *Greatest Of All Trips*. After winning hearts on *Splitsvilla*, Pema is now ready to dive into an adrenaline-filled adventure on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi. Reflecting on her journey since *Splitsvilla*, she shares, "The end of *Splitsvilla* wasn't really an end for me—it was the beginning of something bigger. It opened doors for me to do what I truly love—creating content for a wider audience, traveling to breathtaking places and collaborating with brands I've always admired."

The post-*Splitsvilla* phase of her life has been nothing short of transformative. Pema has successfully turned her passions into reality, building a fulfilling career that resonates deeply with her audience. "It's incredibly rewarding to share my adventures and connect with people who love what I do. That's what keeps me going," she says.

The excitement in her voice is palpable as she talks about Yas Island, the setting for *Greatest Of All Trips*. Known for its high-energy theme parks and thrilling activities, it's a perfect match for Pema's adventurous spirit. "As an adrenaline junkie, Yas Island is my dream destination. From heart-pumping

rides to exhilarating experiences, I can't wait to immerse myself in everything the island has to offer. It's going to be one wild ride, and I'm so here for it."

The show itself captivated Pema with its unique concept and the opportunity to explore something entirely new. "I've been craving a fresh challenge and *Greatest Of All Trips* offers just that. What really drew me in was the adventure factor—getting to explore Yas Island and its amazing attractions. It's the perfect combination of fun, competition and discovery."

But it wasn't just the setting that intrigued her. The chance to work with 30 talented creators from various fields added another layer of excitement. "Imagine being surrounded by individuals who are experts in fashion, fitness, dance and so much more," she says. "It's a chance to learn, collaborate and grow, even as we compete. That kind of creative energy is something I thrive on."

Pema's decision to join the show wasn't made lightly. After years in familiar formats like *Splitsvilla* and *Roadies*, she was eager to break out of the mold. "I felt like I needed a change, something that would challenge me in a completely new way. This show stood out to me because it's so different from anything I've done before. Plus, it's a solo journey—no need to strategise about alliances or connections. It's just me, giving it my all."

Speaking of her strategy, Pema believes in staying authentic. "I'm not here to play mind games or be someone I'm not. My plan is sim-

ple—be myself and give 100%. I did that on *Splitsvilla* and I'm proud of how I stayed true to who I am. That's the approach I'm bringing to this show too."

Transitioning from the love-centered dynamics of *Splitsvilla* to the action-packed competition of *Greatest Of All Trips* has been an exciting shift for Pema. "While *Splitsvilla* was about love and connections, it was also a game show at heart. But this is different. It's purely about personal performance and I'm thrilled to focus entirely on my strengths," she says.

Beyond the competition, Pema is eager to connect with her fellow contestants and build lasting memories. "I'm really looking forward to meeting creators from different backgrounds and learning from their experiences," she shares. "And of course, exploring Yas Island is going to be a highlight. Ferrari World, in particular, is something I've always wanted to experience. It's like a dream coming true."

As she gears up for this new chapter, her excitement is contagious. Whether it's navigating thrilling rides, forming new friendships, or taking on exciting challenges, she's ready to make the most of every moment. "This isn't just a show for me—it's an adventure, a learning experience, and an opportunity to push myself beyond my limits," she concludes with a smile.

With her infectious enthusiasm and unwavering authenticity, Pema Leilani is all set to turn *Greatest Of All Trips* into an unforgettable journey, not just for herself but for everyone who tunes in.



Pema Leilani, the charismatic star known for her stint on *Splitsvilla*, embarked on an exhilarating new journey with *Greatest Of All Trips*. Set against the vibrant backdrop of Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, this adventure-filled show promises to be a perfect fit for the adrenaline junkie and travel enthusiast in her. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Pema opens up about her transformative post-*Splitsvilla* journey, the thrill of competing with diverse creators

THE END OF SPLITSVILLE WASN'T REALLY AN END FOR ME—IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BIGGER. IT OPENED DOORS FOR ME TO DO WHAT I TRULY LOVE—CREATING CONTENT FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE, TRAVELING TO BREATHTAKING PLACES AND COLLABORATING WITH BRANDS I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRIED

ANSHUMAAN PUSHKAR ON MOONWALK

'I wasn't the first choice, but it turned out to be a blast'

VAISHNAVI TIKKA
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Anshumaan Pushkar is a talented Indian actor making waves in the world of web series. He has impressed audiences with his strong performances in shows like *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* and *Kathmandu Connection*. However, it was his role in the historical crime drama *Grahan* that truly showcased his acting prowess. Pushkar's ability to portray characters from different backgrounds and time periods is remarkable. He brings depth and emotion to his roles, making them believable and relatable. As he continues working on new projects, fans can look forward to seeing even more incredible performances from this rising star.

In this conversation with *The Pioneer*, the actor shared details about his journey and struggles to become an actor. He also spoke about his experience working on *Moonwalk*, how much fun he had during the shoot, and the nuances of portraying Tarik Pandey in the series.

Talking about his journey, he said it was always a dream to become an actor, but initially, he doubted his own abilities. "It was a dream to become an actor, but after giving a few auditions, I realised I wasn't very good at it. Then I started doing theatre in Mumbai for 6 to 7 years to improve myself," he revealed.

The *Grahan* star mentioned that finding opportunities wasn't easy despite having considerable talent. However, he maintained a hopeful outlook: "I did a few small roles in serials, but I didn't get any breakthrough roles. Still, I believe in destiny and never lose hope."

His first significant breakthrough came with *Jamtara*, an Indian crime drama television series.

He shared how his situation transformed during the lockdown when he received positive recognition for his acting in *Grahan*. "Once the lockdown began, I found myself doing nothing until I got the opportunity to work on *Grahan*, which is a series based on a novel. I received a lot of appreciation from the public and everyone involved."

Pushkar began gaining recognition along with better opportunities. "I started receiving great offers. I played a pivotal role in *12th Fail*, followed by *Kathmandu Connection*. I can't say it was a smooth ride, but the industry is appreciating my work and everything I've done," he added.

When discussing how roles are chosen in the industry, he said, "You don't really get to choose what you want to play; the makers pick the actors. As someone starting out, I didn't really have the choice to pick my roles. In this business, it's more about the industry choosing you rather than you picking what you want." *Moonwalk* is a



ANSHUMAAN PUSHKAR, THE RISING STAR OF THE INDIAN WEB SERIES, IN AN INTERACTION WITH *THE PIONEER*, OPENED UP ABOUT HIS INSPIRING JOURNEY IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, CHALLENGES, AND THE JOY OF STEPPING INTO DIVERSE ROLES, HIS LATEST PROJECT *MOONWALK* AND MORE

Hindi comedy series that premiered on December 20, 2024 on JioCinema. The series is set in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh and follows two rival thieves, Tarik Pandey (Anshumaan Pushkar) and Maddy Kapoor (Samir Kochhar), competing for the affection of Chandni Lakhani (Nidhi Singh). Chandni challenges them to steal the most valuable item for her, resulting in a series of comedic heists.

Additionally, a local gangster and his son plot to steal a fallen piece of the Moon, hoping to gain immense wealth. Pushkar explained that he wasn't the first choice for *Moonwalk* but ultimately landed the role after filming had already begun. "I wasn't the primary choice for the makers of *Moonwalk* at first. I was on a vacation when I suddenly received a call from the casting team saying they had a script and wanted me to come for a narration. They informed me that I was selected for the role. I was given only a day to decide whether or not I would take it. After reviewing the script, I said yes."

The *Country Mafia* fame credited director Ajay Bhuyan for making the process easier. "Working with a supportive director makes the work much easier. Director Ajay Bhuyan was very helpful in explaining the script and encouraging spontaneity on set," he emphasised. He also shared how unprepared he felt while working on the project, but his co-actors and the director provided invaluable support. "I was on set without any preparation or script in hand. I had many questions in my mind about whether I could pull it off or not. Fortunately, all my co-actors and the director were very supportive and understanding."

Pushkar further described his character, Tarik Pandey: "This character, Tarik Pandey, is a thief, but he doesn't see himself that way. His main priority is to master everything he does and ultimately become a master himself. He is also very emotional about his family and friends and exhibits innocent, childish behaviour. I connected with his innocence and felt that I share similar traits in my personal relationships. To embody this role, I had to bring out the child within me. I believe a character like this doesn't require much preparation. I had a blast on set playing this role."

In conclusion, Pushkar mentioned that he has been working on new projects recently and is enthusiastic about entertaining people.

Restoring habitats for migratory species

The Greater Flamingo traveling from Flamingo City, the Asian Koel from Singapore and the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater from Africa and Europe, to India's peninsular regions are just a few examples of migratory birds India welcomes annually. Unfortunately, alongside the global decline in migratory bird populations, India has seen a major decrease in the number of species visiting annually, primarily due to habitat loss.

For instance, the wetlands of Chilakapalem village in Andhra Pradesh, which once served as a crucial feeding and stopover site for passage migrants heading further south, have faced significant threats. Deforestation, wetland drainage and intensive agriculture have all contributed to this decline.

However, recent efforts at Chilakapalem have sparked a positive change, providing a model that can be adopted by other wetland regions in India. A large-scale afforestation initiative has rejuvenated the area and offered hope for these remarkable birds. Social enterprise Grow-Trees.com has initiated the Trees for Migratory Birds project, under which 15,000 saplings are set to be planted around the waterbody in Chilakapalem. Of this total target, nearly 7,000 saplings have already been planted.

"International agencies like the UN have enforced several treaties to conserve migratory birds. India plays a key role in these efforts through nationwide programmes under the government. As a social enterprise, our focus is to support regions facing severe habitat loss by planting saplings. At Chilakapalem,

the emphasis was on migratory bird populations and wetland preservation," says Pradip Shah, co-founder of Grow-Trees.com.

Accordingly, the tree species for the initiative were carefully selected to achieve local species such as Neem and Jamun, whose fruits are consumed by frugivorous birds, as well as Pongam (Karanj) and Indian Tulip.

The project also provides meaningful employment opportunities for local communities by engaging them in every stage of the plantation process.

"This project has been truly beneficial to our community. It has helped restore important habitats for various bird species and created job opportunities for local families to earn a living. Seeing our community, especially the women, actively involved in planting and caring for the trees is very inspiring. It's wonderful to know that this initiative will continue to benefit us for many years," says Donka Adilaxmi, Sarpanch of Chilakapalem Gram Panchayat.

Even after the plantation, the community remains actively involved in maintaining and nurturing the saplings, ensuring their growth and survival over time.

"Being part of this initiative has allowed me to support my family, and it feels good knowing I'm also helping to restore our environment. I'm hopeful that these efforts will continue to benefit our community. This project has been a truly wonderful opportunity for our village and I'm very grateful to be a part of it," says 45-year-old Chilaka Gannemma, an agricultural laborer in the village.



what's brewing?



Pavan and Padmaja



Haasini Bhattiprolu, a 15-year-old from a Telugu family in San Diego, made her debut Carnatic music performance in Hyderabad. The event was attended by Telangana IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu, as well as Haasini's family members, including her grandfather and former chairman of Cigniti Technologies, C.V. Subrahmanyam, among the rest.



Haasini Bhattiprolu



Swathi



SEESAW, Hyderabad's premier destination for children's holistic development announced its collaboration with tennis icon Sania Mirza. This partnership aims to enhance SEESAW's focus on fitness and child development, providing a nurturing environment for young minds and bodies to thrive. The event marked the presence of several socialities including Swathi and Sreeja Konidela.



Sania Mirza



Urmila



Subrahmanyam and Rajeswari



Sirisha



Madhavi



Mohana



Sruji



Tanusha



Sreeja Konidela



Aanam Mirza

Photos by- SV Chary

TechnoSport has successfully launched its latest exclusive store in Tolichowki, Hyderabad, marking its entry into the vibrant Telangana market. To celebrate the launch, they are offering exciting promotions, including a complimentary T-shirt for the first 100 shoppers, as well as exclusive giveaways such as gym bags, power banks and AirDopes.



The Amarvani Foundation presented the Bhayanagar Bharatiya Samskrti Sammelanam 2024-2025, a vibrant cultural celebration of Indian heritage and tradition. The event was held at the Samskrti Community Hall in Raj Bhavan premises, Somjiguda. The festivities commenced with a captivating Shobha Yatra, featuring cultural troupes from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, followed by a Deep Prajwalan ceremony.



The Telangana Energy Accounts Service Association diary was inaugurated by Energy Minister and Deputy CM Batti Vikramarka Mallu at Praja Bhavan. The event was attended by prominent figures, including President Dr. M. Tulasi Nagarani, Secretary General P. Srinivas, and Chief Advisor Dr. CH. Chandrudu.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



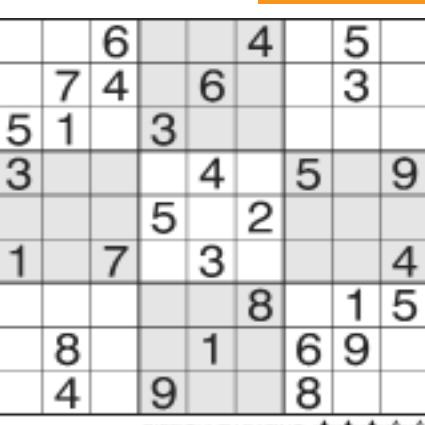
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- 1 Carried on
- 2 A person who decides who wins a competition
- 3 A large stream
- 4 A very small living thing that makes people ill
- 5 Overtakes
- 6 Reply
- 7 Short skirt
- 8 Rescued
- 9 A smelly vegetable
- 10 In poor health

DOWN

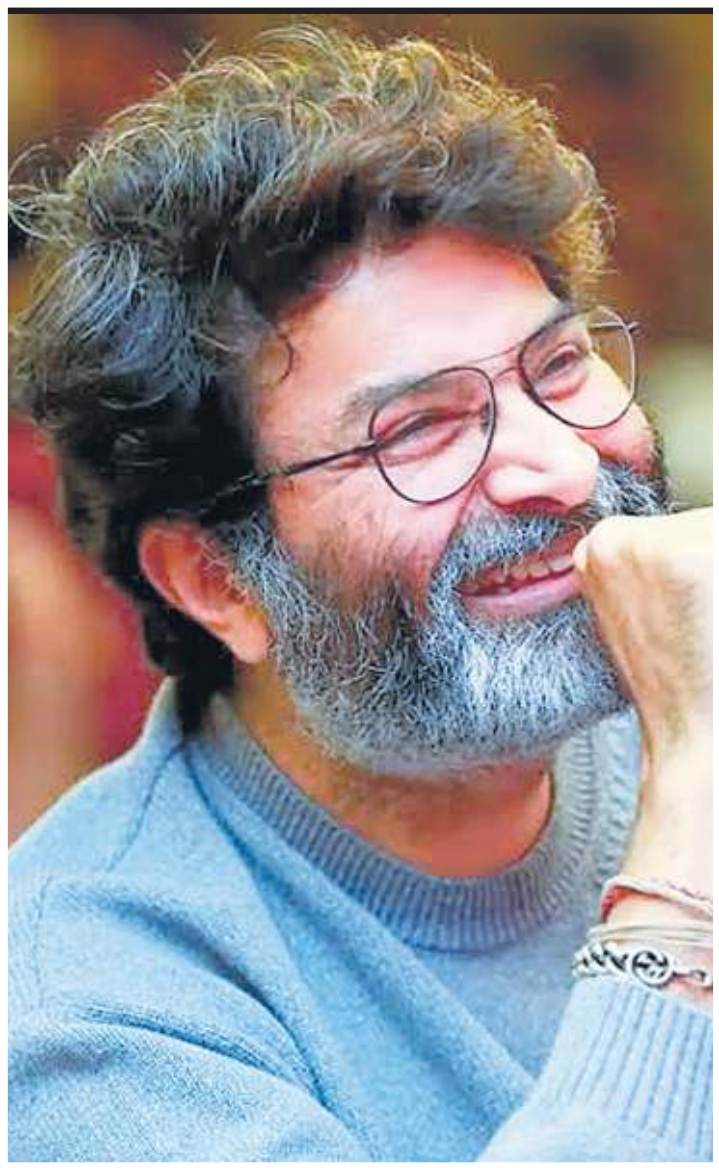
- 1 Of greater age
- 2 Things on your feet
- 3 Norwegians live here
- 4 Pixies
- 5 Puzzles with many pieces that make up a picture
- 6 From Russia
- 7 Sew with this
- 8 One third of twenty-one
- 9 From Ireland
- 10 A hard black fuel



GINGER MEGGS



Poonam Kaur accuses Trivikram of impacting her life & health



Actress Poonam Kaur has once again taken to social media to voice allegations against director Trivikram Srinivas, claiming his actions have affected her life and health

SURESH KAVIRAYANI

Actress Poonam Kaur has once again targeted director Trivikram Srinivas, this time too taking to her social media to voice her concerns. This isn't the first time the actress has publicly spoken about Trivikram Srinivas, as she has previously made similar allegations. However, Poonam Kaur has not filed a formal complaint or approached any trade body within the Telugu Film Industry regarding her allegations. Instead, she continues to share her grievances through social media posts. Previously, members of the industry had advised her to either take legal action or lodge a formal complaint with the Movie Artiste Association (MAA) or the Sexual Harassment Redressal Panel. During a past meeting

of the Redressal Panel, when the Jani Master issue was discussed, media persons inquired about Poonam Kaur's allegations against Trivikram Srinivas. At that time, panel members stated that she should approach them with a written complaint, which she has yet to do.

On Sunday, the actress once again took to social media to allege that her life and health have been damaged because of Trivikram Srinivas. She claimed that she had previously lodged a complaint with MAA, but no action had been taken.

In her post, Poonam Kaur wrote: "No questioning or even action taken on director #Trivikram-srinivas for complaint given in MAA association for very long. He rather is encouraged by the big wigs after

damaging my life, which has affected my health and happiness (sic)."

In response, MAA treasurer Siva Balaji clarified that they had not received any formal or written complaint from Poonam Kaur. "We didn't receive any formal or written complaint by her to us. I

even checked earlier records, but there was no complaint from her," said Siva Balaji. He added that instead of posting on social media, she should submit a written complaint. "If she goes legally or gives a complaint to any trade body in the Telugu Film Industry, they will take it up and investigate," he added.

Thammareddy Bharadwaj, a member of the Redressal Panel of the Telugu Film Industry, echoed similar sentiments. "She should approach us with a written complaint. If she explains in detail what the director has done to her and what exactly happened, we can at least take up the issue. But she is not providing details and is only posting on social media, which we cannot take as suo moto," said Thammareddy.

He further mentioned that he checked with the MAA office regarding Poonam Kaur's alleged complaint. "Someone told me that she gave a complaint to Srikanth and MAA. I called Srikanth and the MAA office staff, but they said they didn't receive any complaint," Thammareddy explained.

If Poonam Kaur is serious about her allegations against Trivikram Srinivas, members of the Telugu Film Industry have urged her to file a formal complaint with MAA or any relevant trade body. They have assured her that they are ready to take up the matter and investigate if she follows the proper process.

As of now, Poonam Kaur has not signed any Telugu or Tamil films.



Daaku Maharaja trailer brings another side of Balakrishna

Last year, Balakrishna took a step back from action as he was occupied with politics and the shooting of his film. However, this year he is kicking off his Sankranti festival with his upcoming movie *Daaku Maharaja*. The trailer for the film was unveiled at a grand event held in Dallas, USA. Directed by Bobby Kolli and produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, the movie is already generating significant buzz.

The trailer reveals that director Bobby has explored a new dimension of Balakrishna, unleashing the wild side of the actor. It introduces the intense world of Daaku, played by Balakrishna, and delves into the protagonist's action-packed journey to protect his people. The narrative also sheds light on his past

and the numerous enemies he faces. Bobby has presented NBK in a never-before-seen avatar, showcasing his mass appeal, rage and swagger to the fullest. Balakrishna's portrayal is poised to be one of the film's standout features.

The trailer also highlights the menacing antagonist, played by Bobby Deol, along with key characters portrayed by Shraddha Srinath, Urvashi Rautela, Makrand Deshpande and others in pivotal roles.

Accompanied by Thaman's electrifying background score, the trailer has already built strong anticipation among fans. Scheduled for release on January 12, 2025, *Daaku Maharaja* promises to be a treat for NBK fans, as the trailer leaves no doubt that the film will be an action-packed spectacle.



We should not forget our roots: Pawan Kalyan

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan praised his nephew Ram Charan and explained the rationale behind the government permitting a hike in movie ticket prices. Opening his speech, Pawan Kalyan emphasised the importance of remembering the roots of the film industry and its pioneers. He mentioned iconic figures who initiated cinema in India and Telugu cinema, including Raghupathi Venkaiah Naidu, Dadasaheb Phalke, B.N. Reddy, Sippy, Goodavari Ramabrahmam, Satyajit Ray and others. "Every actor and everyone in the industry should remember their roots and where they come from," said Pawan Kalyan. He added that his and Ram Charan's success today is possible because of Mega Star Chiranjeevi. "We should not forget the roots," he reiterated.

The actor-turned-politician fondly recalled memories of his brother Chiranjeevi, highlighting his hard work and dedication. "When my brother came home at night, he didn't even have the stamina to remove his shoes because of his continuous work. I had the chance to remove his shoes and socks, and I saw his feet swollen. That was the extent of his hard work and because of him, we are standing here today," he said.

Pawan Kalyan also addressed misconceptions about his stance toward other actors. "We never discouraged people from watching other heroes' films. In fact, we watch their films too. Our brother taught us not to be against anyone in the industry," he said. He further stated that actors should not need to fold their hands or personally request assistance for industry-related issues. Referring to the time Chiranjeevi, Prabhas, and Mahesh Babu met with YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to request

a ticket price hike, he remarked, "Actors need not come for such matters; the producer can meet us instead." He clarified that the government earns 18% GST from every ticket sold, which justifies the price hike.

Pawan Kalyan also reminisced about buying black-market tickets to watch Shankar's *Gentleman* and praised the director's contribution to Indian cinema. "Shankar's films were dubbed into Telugu so seamlessly that we never felt they were dubbed—they felt like straight Telugu films. Now, he is making a straight Telugu film, and the world is watching Telugu cinema because of filmmakers like him," he said.

On Ram Charan, Pawan Kalyan commended his dedication and humility. "He never flaunts his dance abilities openly, but he is an exceptionally good dancer," he said. He also lauded producer Dil Raju for supporting him during a difficult time. "When I didn't have money and only had my name, Dil Raju produced *Vakeel Saab* with me. That money helped a lot for the Jana Sena Party and today, we are here," he shared.

Pawan Kalyan also took a dig at the previous government, recalling how they reduced ticket prices for his film *Bheemla Nayak*. "Our government didn't want to do that. Even some actors who didn't support our alliance received a ticket price hike. We don't mix politics with cinema," he clarified.

The actor's speech at the Rajahmundry *Game Changer* event was a highlight, as he spoke at length, while most others kept their addresses brief.



Vikraman's son to debut in Telugu cinema

Director Vikraman, renowned for his contributions to both Tamil and Telugu cinema, is set to introduce his son Vijay Kaniska as a lead actor in Telugu films. Vikraman, known for hits like the Tamil classic *Suryavamsam*, which was remade in Telugu with Venkatesh and in Hindi with Amitabh Bachchan, also directed memorable Telugu films such as *Vasantham* and *Cheppave Chirugali*, making a lasting impact in the industry.

Vijay Kaniska, who previously debuted in Tamil with the film *Hit List*, will now take center stage in the Telugu movie *Kalavaram*. Directed by Hanuman Kalavaram, the film features Garima Vasamsetty, the film features Garima Chouhan as the female lead. *Kalavaram*, a unique blend of a love story and thriller elements, promises an engaging and fresh concept, with the story penned by Shashank.

The film also includes Raj Tiradasu of *Pushpa* fame in a pivotal role. Speaking about the project, Vijay Kaniska shared that his Tamil debut *Hit List* earned him accolades, and he is even more excited about *Kalavaram*. He credited the director and producer for their passion and expressed confidence that this film will be a milestone in his career. Producer Shobha Rani revealed that *Kalavaram* is the perfect title for this story, and the film boasts a cast of 70 artists. She hinted that more details about the movie and its ensemble cast will be revealed soon.



Vijay Sethupathi releases trailer of Kora

Tamil star Vijay Sethupathi has extended his support to the small-budget film *Kora* by releasing its trailer. This action-packed period drama, originally made in Kannada, will also be released in Telugu. Directed by Oratashree, the film features Tsunami Kitty in the lead role, alongside Charisma and P. Murthy in pivotal roles. The movie is produced by AB Nandini, AN Balaji and P. Murthy.

Vijay Sethupathi shared the trailer on social media, congratulating the team and expressing his support. The teaser, packed with high-intensity action sequences, promises to deliver a thrilling experience that will leave audiences on the edge of their seats.

Kora has been crafted as a gripping action spectacle and also stars M.K. Mata, Muniraju, and Ninasam Ashwath in significant roles. The film's blend of intense drama and action is sure to captivate audiences.



Australia beat India to reach WTC final; reclaim BGT after 10 years

PTI ■ SYDNEY

A listless India was knocked out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final as Australia cruised to a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test here on Sunday to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years, leaving the visitors with much to deliberate in a difficult transition phase made worse by over-the-hill batting stars.

Australia won the five-match series 3-1 and qualified for the WTC final against South Africa slated at the Lord's from June 11 to 15.

While Australia would be eyeing a second successive WTC mace, it would be the first time since the event's inception that India won't be in the finals. The team had finished runner-up in the previous two summit clashes.

On Sunday, the target of 162 could have been trickier for Australia had India's new Test captain Jasprit Bumrah been in a position to bowl despite painful back spasms. But once Virat Kohli led

the team out, it was as clear as the Sydney skyline that defending the total would be next to impossible. Bumrah deservedly walked away with the player of the series honour for his astonishing haul of 32 wickets in five matches. But it was hardly a consolation for the shambolic team performance that India managed, showing resilience only in brief phases.

"Little frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, you can't fight your body. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said of his inability to bowl in the second innings during the presentation ceremony.

Prasidh Krishna (3/65 in 12 overs) and Mohammed Siraj (1/69 in 12 overs) were not a patch on Bumrah and despite multiple breakthroughs, they bowled too many poor deliveries to make it easy for the hosts to canter home in just 27 overs.

Usman Khawaja (41), Travis Head (34 not out) and debutant Beau Webster (39 not out) completed



the formalities, putting an end to India's misery in a tour that has exposed all of the team's batting frailties and an unhealthy reliance on Bumrah.

Once Bumrah was ruled out after he tried some shadow bowling during the morning warm-up session and didn't feel comfortable, the writing was on the wall.

The magnificent Scott Boland (6/45) and the ever-reliable Pat Cummins (3/44) polished off the Indian tail for just 157 in 39.5 overs. If one takes out Rishabh Pant's fiery 61 and Yashasvi Jaiswal's 22, the other nine players collectively contributed a mere 74 runs.

The series would leave the men who matter in Indian cricket establishment with a lot on their minds when they deliberate on ways to get the house back in order.

With six of the completed innings yielding less than 200 runs, one doesn't need a soothsayer to tell what went wrong on the tour. Regular skipper Rohit Sharma and

batting talisman Virat Kohli flopped with technical issues troubling them throughout the season.

Jaiswal (391 runs) was the top-scorer despite three ducks followed by rookie Nitish Kumar Reddy (298 runs), KL Rahul (276 runs) and Pant (255 runs).

As much as one wants to take a nuanced view of Rohit and Kohli's poor form but it is undeniable that both veterans are finding it increasingly difficult to stem the rot that has set in their batting.

There are a few good youngsters in the fringes and the new World Test Championship cycle would demand that they be given a chance to develop over time.

While a tough call on Kohli and Rohit is awaited, the BCCI brass also needs to seriously look at whether coach Gautam Gambhir is the right man to be in-charge across formats.

Under Gambhir, India have lost six Tests out of 10 during the season going by apart from being defeated in an ODI series in Sri Lanka.



It's frustrating but you have to respect your body: Bumrah

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Laid low by a back spasm, Jasprit Bumrah was frustrated at missing out on bowling on the "spiciest wicket of the series," but the premier India pacer emphasized that sometimes it becomes imperative for a player to respect his body.

Bumrah could not bowl on day three when India needed to defend a small 162-run target on a tricky wicket.

Australia needed just 27 overs to overhaul the target and claim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years as they took advantage of Bumrah's absence.

"It was really frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, can't fight it. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said, who was named Player of the Series for his 32 wickets in the series, during the post-match presentation.

"Felt a bit of discomfort during my second spell in the first innings and had to check it out."

Resuming day three at 141 for six, India lost their remaining four wickets for 16 runs to be all out for 157 in their second innings.

Asked about the discussion in the morning, Bumrah said: "The chat this morning was about the same thing, about

having belief and showing character. Lots of ifs and buts, the whole series was fought hard, we were in the game today as well, not like we were out of it, this is how Test cricket goes."

"Being in the game for longer, creating pressure, absorbing pressure and playing to the situation are all important. You have to adapt to the situations and these learnings will help us in the future."

Bumrah added that the experience of playing in Australia will help young players like Nitish Reddy and Harshit Rana in future.

"They've (youngsters) gained a lot of experience, they'll go from strength to strength. We've shown that we have a lot of talent in our group."

"Lot of the youngsters are keen, they're disappointed that we haven't won but they'll take learnings from this experience. It was a great series, congratulations to Australia, they fought really well."

Travis Head, who emerged as the highest run-scorer in the series with 446 runs, heaped praise on Bumrah.

"He's a great performer, he had an exceptional tour. It is the best individual performance I have seen in Test cricket," Head said.

Winning captain Pat Cummins described his team's 3-1 victory in the five-match series as

"unreal" and expressed immense pride in regaining the trophy.

"Unreal. A few of us didn't have this Trophy. Lived up to all the hype. Just been clear with our plans. We tried to be proactive, and ultimately, it worked out. Immensely proud," he said.

The star pacer also praised the camaraderie within the squad.

"We weren't at our best in Perth, but we had a lot of fun playing alongside each other. I love playing with these guys. Such a special group. I feel privileged to be part of such a team. Three debutants in this series fitted in well and contributed at different times."

Reflecting on his own performance, Cummins called the series "one of my most favourite Test series."

"Pretty happy with how I played. I had a fresh start coming into this series. These are the big series you prepare for. There were some keen moments when our mainstays really stood up. You need to do that to beat a side like India. Our guys put their hands up. It would go down as one of my most favourite Test series," he added.

Adjudged Player-of-the-Match for his impressive 10 for 76, Scott Boland expressed his satisfaction after playing a key role in Australia's 3-1 win.

He had replaced injured Josh Hazlewood in the squad.

Started setting new goals for 2025 after World Championship and Khel Ratna: Gukesh

PTI ■ BENGALURU

DGukesh climbed dizzying heights in the past one month, a World Championship triumph getting garnished by the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award recently, but the chess prodigy now wants to reset his focus and goals to tackle a "challenging" 2025.

Gukesh will be seen in action in the Tata Steel tournament in Wijk aan Zee in Netherlands, beginning on January 17.

The event will see participation from frontline players such as Anish Giri, Arjun Erigaisi, Fabiano Caruana and R Praggnanandhaa among others.

"Yeah, 2025 will offer a very tough challenge. A lot of new and interesting tournaments are coming up. The world championship was in the past.



"I'm very happy about it and all the awards and receptions," Gukesh told a select media gathering during the felicitation ceremony organised by WestBridge Capital here on Sunday.

"But now, I have started thinking about new goals, new tournaments and new ways to prepare. The goal, the approach will be the same, to

give my best, to keep improving myself, and win as many tournaments as possible.

"So, I am looking forward to a fun year with a lot of learning, a lot of improvements and hopefully a lot of good results," he added.

However, Gukesh will have to carry with him the tag of world champion and along

with it loads of expectations and increased scrutiny. But the 19-year-old is prepared to stand in the limelight.

"Yeah, I have been used to being under the attention for a while. Obviously, after the world championship, it will be more. But the basic things I remember are to keep improving myself and accepting failures when they come."

"I think in general, I have high expectations of myself. So, I think my aim is to meet my own expectations rather than that of others," he said.

But has he been able to handle all the adulation that has deservedly come his way ("I had thought that it (winning the World Championship) would be somewhat similar to the Candidates, but obviously it's much more. I'm grateful for all the attention and recognition.



Varun Tomar shines in men's 10m air pistol

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reigning Asian champion Varun Tomar grabbed the spotlight by clinching both the senior and the junior men's 10m air pistol titles at the 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSCC) here on Sunday.

The 21-year-old Army marksman, who narrowly missed out on last year's Paris Olympics, overcame a sluggish start in the senior final to snatch his maiden national crown at the expense of teammate Pradhyumn Singh, who fell short by 0.8 points.

Rajasthan's Aakash Bhardwaj won the bronze.

Tomar then had a similar slow start in the junior final, but quickly made up ground, staying in touch with eventual silver winner Nikhil Saroha of Uttar Pradesh who was on a start-to-finish mission.

Tomar's patience finally paid off after the 21st shot as Nikhil blinked with an 8.5, handing the senior pro an easy double gold in the end at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting range.

Tomar's score in the senior final was 238, while he was clearly more confident in the junior final, resulting in greater accuracy with a tally of 246.2.

Pradhyumn also rounded off a fruitful day with a second medal, a bronze in the junior men's air pistol.

The youth final saw a UP 1-2 when Chirag Sharma overcame the 14-year-old Dev Pratap by margin of 1.3 after 24 shots.

Gavaskar upset after not being invited to present BGT with Border

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday expressed his displeasure after not being invited to present the trophy, named after him and Allan Border, to Australia following their win over India in the high-voltage five-match rubber.

Australia reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar trophy after 10 years with a six-wicket win over India in the fifth and final Test.

Border presented the trophy to the home team but Gavaskar, despite being at the venue at the same time, was inexplicably ignored.

"I certainly would have loved to have been there for the presentation. After all it is the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and it is about Australia and



India," Gavaskar was quoted as saying by Code Sports.

"I mean, I am here on the ground. To me it should not matter that Australia won when it comes to the presentation. They played better cricket so they won. That's fine.

"Just because I am an Indian.

I would have been happy to present the trophy with my good friend Allan Border," he added.

Had the Indian team won the trophy, Gavaskar would have been invited to present it to the victorious side.

Cricket Australia (CA) later confirmed that Gavaskar was

aware he would have presented the award to Indian captain Jasprit Bumrah if the tourists had won the Sydney Test and retained the trophy.

"We acknowledge it would have been preferable if both Allan Border and Sunil Gavaskar had been asked to go on stage," a CA spokesperson said in a statement.

Both India and Australia have been competing for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy since 1996-1997 and the rivalry has grown to become one of the biggest in Test cricket.

The five-match series that Australia won drew record crowds at multiple venues and broke an 87-year-old attendance record at the Melbourne Cricket Ground last week.

If you have commitment towards red ball, play domestic cricket, says Gambhir

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India head coach Gautam Gambhir said on Sunday that struggling stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli "still have the hunger to excel" but urged all senior players, including the duo, to play domestic games and show their "commitment" towards red-ball cricket.

Known for his plain speak, the two-time World Cup hero also didn't give any assurances on whether Rohit or Kohli will be a part of the Test set-up moving forward.

Both the stars were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia that the visitors lost 1-3 to surrender the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as well as a spot in the World Test Championship final.

"It's not the right moment right now for me to talk about where we are going to be after five months. A lot of things change in sport. Forms change, people change, attitude changes, everything changes in sport. And we all know that five months is a long time," Gambhir said at the post-series press conference.

"So let's see before the England series (in July) what's going to happen. But whatever will happen, will happen for the best interest of Indian cricket," asserted the former opener.

Rohit scored 31 runs in five innings before dropping himself from the playing eleven and Kohli managed 190 in nine knocks, including a second innings century after India had taken a lead of more than 300. A glaring failure for Kohli was his inability to avoid being dismissed on deliveries that were bowled outside the off stump.

Asked if he would like the seniors to play at least one round, if not two, of Ranji Trophy starting January 23, Gambhir sent across a clear message.

"I would always like everyone to play domestic cricket. That is how much importance domestic cricket needs to be given. Not only one game, if they are available and they have the commitment to play red-ball cricket, everyone should play domestic cricket," Gambhir said.

"As simple as it can get. If you don't give importance to domestic cricket, you will never get the desired players that you want in Test cricket," he explained.



Kohli last played a Ranji Trophy match in 2012 while Rohit's most recent domestic red-ball game was in the 2015-16 season.

The 'Ro-Ko' Dilemma

The tough-talking former player refused to be drawn into a

discussion on the much-speculated future of Kohli and Rohit, insisting that they are the best judge when it comes to analysing their role in Indian cricket.

"See, I can't talk about the future of any player, it's up to them as well.

But yes, what I can say is that they still have the hunger, they still have the passion, they're tough people and hopefully they can continue to take Indian cricket forward," he said.

"...Ultimately whatever they plan,

they will plan for the best interest of Indian cricket."

He wants the star duo to do some soul searching as to where they stand. "First of all, every individual knows where their game and hunger is. That is the most important thing for any sport and any profession.

"It is not just about the sport, how hungry you are, how passionate you are and whether the team is moving forward with your contributions or not," he pointed out.

I need to be fair to everyone

Gambhir, in his pre-match press conference, spoke about honesty in the dressing room. He reiterated the position on Sunday, saying that his responsibility is to be fair to everyone irrespective of their experience and stature.

"If I am fair with only two or three individuals and not with others, then I am being dishonest to my job," he said.

"So, whether it is a player who has not made a debut yet or a player who has played 100 Test matches, the simple aim of my job is that I have to be absolutely fair and equal to everyone," he added.

During his days in Kolkata Knight

Riders and Lucknow Super Giants, Gambhir often stressed about the need for a happy dressing room. He said that philosophy holds good for the India set-up too.

"If you're committed to what we are doing with honesty, I think that should be fine. And more importantly, to keep the dressing room happy, I have to be absolutely honest and equal and fair to everyone in that dressing room."

Rohit has shown accountability

Gambhir lauded Rohit for opting out of the fifth Test due to poor form.

"If a leader has taken this decision, I don't think there is any problem. We talked about accountability and that starts from the top and Rohit Sharma started that in the last match," the 43-year-old said.

"I am the first one to accept mistakes"

When asked if there is an acceptance of everything that has gone wrong on the tour, Gambhir was quick to declare that he never runs from accountability.

"The first thing is that the person sitting here will accept the mistakes first. So, don't worry about the fact that the mistakes will not be accepted here," he replied.