

Efforts to undermine that status won't succeed: Mamata

WHERE LOVE & CARE REWRITE THE LIVES OF HIV+VE ORPHANS

'I don't focus on screen time; I focus on giving MY BEST'

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer
KTR is a karyakarta of the BRS. Just like he stands by all our karyakartas, the party will stand by him when he is facing problems. The cases against KTR are part of the attempts to deflect public attention from the Congress Government's failures
- Harish Rao, BRS MLA

DON'T MISS...

hMPV: Hospitals to have beds, testing kits

On the ongoing reports about a surge in respiratory infections caused by Human Metapneumovirus (hMPV) from China, the Health Department of Telangana has advised the government hospitals to make arrangements to treat patients with influenza treatments in separate facilities and conduct every test; if then suspected the sample can be sent for hMPV testing. With this advise, Gandhi Hospital, Osmania General Hospital and Niloufer Hospital for now have arranged adequate oxygen beds and ventilators. However, the ...

Showdown between AAP and BJP in Delhi

A high drama unfolded Wednesday outside the 6, Flagstaff Road bungalow, once occupied by former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and dubbed a Sheesh Mahal' by the BJP, as AAP leaders attempted to enter it but were stopped by the police. The party workers later tried to reach the Prime Minister's official residence on Lok Kalyan Marg, but were stopped by police again, following which they staged a 'dharna'. In its turn, the BJP also took media to the AB 17 Mathura Road bungalow allotted to...

Industry status for food sector sought

National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) on Wednesday asked the government to grant industry status to the food services sector while seeking an equitable and fair e-commerce policy to provide a level-playing field to protect restaurants, delivery partners and consumers from potentially exploitative practices of platforms. In its pre-Budget recommendations, National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) said restaurants should be allowed to operate for longer hours, and also...

Bumrah continues to remain No. 1

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continued to reign supreme at the top of the bowlers' chart with a career-best rating of 908 in the latest ICC Test Rankings, released on Wednesday. Bumrah, who made history ahead of the fifth and final Test against Australia by recording the highest-ever ICC Rankings rating for an Indian bowler at 907 points, improved that tally by one point after taking two wickets in the first innings at the SCG. However, a back spasm ruled him out of bowling in the ...

6 killed in stampede at Tirupati

Heavy rush for tickets led to the tragedy at 'Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam'

PNS ■ TIRUPATI
The issuing of tokens for 'Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam' at Tirupati turned tragic with six people including five women getting killed in a stampede here on Wednesday. The stampede took place when the gate was opened and thousands of people who were waiting to get a 'Vaikunta Dwara Darshan' ticket to have darshan of Lord Venkateswara at the Tirumala hill shrine on the auspicious Ekadasi Day rushed in. The Ekadasi Day falls on Friday. Sources said that 20 injured people were admitted to the Ruia Hospital and nine were admitted to the SVIMS Hospital and are undergoing treatment. The stampede took place in the Bairagipattada area when thousands of people rushed to get Vaikunta Dwara Darshan tokens when the gate was opened. As the police and the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) officials did not make adequate arrangements to control crowds, the stampede lasted for around 20 minutes, devotees told the media.



Devotees did not make adequate arrangements to control crowds, the stampede lasted for around 20 minutes, devotees told the media.

'Came to seek blessings but my wife died'
PNS ■ HYDERABAD
The tragic stampede in Tirupati that claimed six lives and left many injured continues to draw emotional responses from victims' families and eyewitnesses, highlighting lapses in crowd management during the distribution of darshan tokens. Krishnan, the husband of stampede victim Mallika, shared his heart-wrenching experience. "My wife and I arrived at the foot of Tirupati hill around 3 pm. We were told tokens

Continued on Page 2

PM, Revanth condole Tirupati tragedy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and various other leaders condole the stampede in Tirupati which claimed several lives and injured many.

Prime Minister Modi stated, "Pained by the stampede at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. My thoughts are with those who have lost their near and dear ones. I pray that the injured recover soon. The AP Government is providing all possible

Collector Venkateswarulu, SP Subba Rayudu and TTD EO Shyamala Rao visited the place and brought the situation under control. They also visited the injured in hospitals. Three centres were opened to issue tokens at Srinivasam, Satyanarayanapuram and Bairagipattada areas. TTD officials had announced that 1.20 lakh tokens would be issued to devotees for having darshan of Lord Venkateswara on January 10, 11 and 12. Meanwhile, officials identified two of the deceased as Mallika of Selam in Tamil Nadu and Naidu Babu of Narsipatnam town. Sources said the police found a person suffering from breathlessness. In order to help him, the police opened the gate

TTD apologises to devotees, CBN to Visit Tirupati

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has apologised to devotees for the stampede at Tirupati, which claimed six lives and injured 40. TTD Chairman BR Naidu

termed the incident as unfortunate and said that, so far, only one victim has been identified while the identities of the others have not been confirmed. He said that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is taking the matter seriously

Poor crowd management led to stampede

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
The tragic stampede in Tirupati that claimed six lives appears to have been primarily caused by inadequate crowd management, which points to administrative lapses. However, other contributing factors must also be considered to gain a full understanding of the incident. The Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam is a highly anticipated event that draws large crowds annually. The failure to anticipate the sheer number of devotees and prepare accordingly indicates a lapse in planning. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) had set up approximately 90 ticket counters across various locations in Tirupati, with tickets made available from 5 am on January 9. This announcement drew tens of thousands of devotees eager to participate in the sacred event, but the sheer volume of people at centres such as Vishnu Nivasam, Bairagipattada, and Ramachandra



CM Revanth Reddy addressing PAC meeting held at Gandhi Bhavan on Wednesday

Local body polls very soon: Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Explaining to AICC General Secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal about the Congress government's programmes in Telangana, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said the government is going to hold local body elections soon and that there is a need for party activists to take the government's social welfare programmes to the people. Attending the Telangana Congress Political Affairs Committee (PAC) meeting on Wednesday at the Gandhi Bhavan, the Chief Minister said the government had condole former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh by holding a special Assembly session. The government also passed a unanimous resolution seeking Bharat Ratna for Manmohan Singh, he said. He said that the Telangana state was

ACB'S QUESTIONING OF KTR IN FORMULA E CASE HC allows lawyer's presence

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
The High Court on Wednesday allowed the presence of a lawyer of BRS Working President KT Rama Rao during his questioning by the ACB in the Formula-E Race case. The court said a lawyer can be present at a visible distance from the accused during the questioning. KTR was asked to submit the names of three lawyers. One of them would be allowed to be present during the interrogation.

KTR had filed a lunch motion petition in the High Court, seeking orders to the ACB to allow his lawyer during the questioning. During the hearing on the petition, KTR's counsel Prabhakar Rao cited the instances where lawyers were allowed during interrogation. Arguing on behalf of ACB,

Additional Advocate General T. Rajinikanth Reddy opposed KTR's request. KTR is scheduled to appear before the ACB on Thursday (January 9). The ACB, which is probing alleged financial irregularities in the conduct of the Formula-E race in 2023 when BRS was

in power, summoned KTR on January 6. He, however, returned from the ACB office after his lawyer was not allowed to be present during interrogation. KTR had submitted a letter to the ACB requesting it to defer his questioning till the High Court pronounced its order on his quash petition. The ACB issued another notice to him the same day, directing him to appear before it on January 9.

ACB grills IAS Arvind, ED questions BLN Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
IAS officer Arvind Kumar appeared before the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday in connection with the investigation into the Formula E Race funds misappropriation case. Listed as Accused No. 2 (A2), Arvind was reportedly questioned for nearly six hours by a three-member

ED extracts critical info from BLN Reddy about fund transfers

ED Car Race event. ACB officials recorded Arvind's statement, focusing on key questions like the decision-making process behind the cash transfers, the beneficiaries, and whether RBI approval was obtained for the transactions. Sources suggest that during his statement, Arvind indicated that the funds were released following orders from then Minister KT Rama Rao (KTR).

I will fight my case, cadres must focus on strengthening BRS: KTR
PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Speaking at the BRS party diary launch, KTR asked BRS workers to remain resilient despite political challenges, including the recent cases against the party's leaders. He described the allegations against him as baseless and emphasised the importance of focusing on the welfare and promises made to the people of Telangana. "The current situation is nothing compared to the struggles we faced during the Telangana Movement. Back then, our leaders sacrificed everything, and we overcame insurmountable odds.

United Breweries suspends beer supplies to TGBCL

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■ HYDERABAD

United Breweries Limited (UBL), the makers of beer brands like Kingfisher and Heineken, has suspended supplies to the Telangana State Beverages Corporation Limited (TGBCL). The decision stems from TGBCL's failure to clear outstanding dues and the absence of price revision for beer after 2019. This move by UBL is set to disrupt the availability of premium beer brands in Telangana, raising concerns among consumers and traders alike. The company stated that the absence of a price hike over the past four years and significant overdue payments have made operations in Telangana unsustainable. In a statement, UBL expressed disappointment, pointing out that despite multiple representations to



the government through the Brewers Association of India (BAI), no solution could be achieved. The company emphasized that it is responsible to its stakeholders and can no longer operate with escalating losses. The suspension also sparked debates about financial mismanagement in Telangana's excise sector. Industry insiders warn that without intervention from the government, the disruption could lead to shortages and impact the state's liquor revenue, which UBL says contributes around Rs 4,500 crore annually. "We have decided to immediately suspend supplies to the Telangana Beverages Corporation Ltd.

Govt rejects UBL's demand for beer price hike
PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao criticised the demands of UBL for a 33% hike in beer prices saying that would burden the public. He said that although the company wanted to increase prices to Rs 250 for beer from the current Rs 150, the government is firm on not succumbing to 'pressure' tactics. He said a retired judge-headed committee has been appointed to review prices in July. "The government will decide on price changes only after receiving the committee's report," he clarified. Accusing UBL of monopolistic practices, he said, "The company's demands have been rejected. We will not increase taxes or prices under pressure. After coming to power our government has not increased taxes by even a single Rupee." Jupally pointed out that UBL is claiming dues from the government. "As of December 7, 2023, Rs. 407.34 crore was pending, and the government cleared Rs 1,130.99 crore up to January 7, 2025. Currently, Rs 658.95 crore is pending," he said. The excise department inherited Rs 2,500 crore in dues from the BRS government, he said. (TGBCL) due to losses in Telangana. Despite our continuous efforts over the past two years, there has been no increase in the base prices offered for our products. This has resulted in massive losses,

Solar 'power' for TG women

Govt plans to enhance SHGs participation
PNS ■ HYDERABAD
The Telangana government has announced plans to enhance women's empowerment by setting up solar power plants through self-help groups, aiming to generate 1,000 MW of electricity. Each MW of solar power requires four acres, and approximately 4,000 acres needs to be identified. Collectors were asked to identify temple and irrigation lands for this. Forests were highlighted as potential locations for setting up solar plants, provided there are no disruptions to local communities or ecosystems. A video conference held with collectors discussed the progress of these initiatives, highlighting the government's commitment to creating opportunities for women through policy-driven efforts. Officials have been asked to identify land,



Allocation of Indiramma houses must be transparent: Ponnam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnab Prabhakar stressed the need for transparency in the allocation of houses under the Indiramma Housing Scheme.

He was speaking during a surprise inspection of the Shaikpet Tahsildar office on Wednesday.

During the inspection, Ponnab reviewed staff atten-

dance, inwards and outwards registers, and pending applications under the Kalyana Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak schemes.

He also examined the online dashboards and registers of public governance complaints and inquired about technical glitches in the online systems.

Emphasizing transparency in the survey and allocation of Indiramma houses, he said there were irregularities in the

maintenance of inward and outward registers. He directed officials to address pending records promptly and ensure government land is protected.

He also asked the Collector to use vacant buildings on the Tahsildar office premises to run Anganwadis or other uses.

The Minister was accompanied by Collector Anudeep Durishetty, Secunderabad RDO Sairam, Tahsildar Anita Reddy, and other staffers.

AICC filled with fake news peddlers, says Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said that the AICC is filled with fake news peddlers. Sanjay posted regarding this on Wednesday on X.

Criticising AICC leader Supriya Srinate for saying that the Congress government in Telangana is giving Rs 2500 per month to women, Sanjay said that Telangana women didn't get even Rs 1 from the TG Congress government.

Sanjay said that instead of empowering women, they are crushing them by demolishing homes, targeting vegetable vendors and forcing pregnant women on to the streets. This isn't governance, it's organized cruelty against women, he said.

"AICC is filled with fake news peddlers. Under Congress's disastrous rule in Telangana rape cases skyrocketed by 28.94%, killings of women rose by 13%, and kidnappings and abductions surged by 26%. Where is the safety they promised? Outraging women's modesty cases increased by 8%. Even basic dignity is under attack. Over 10,000 women faced harassment in public places under Congress rule. Is this their 'empowerment'? Congress has become a party of predators, destroyers, and liars. Telangana's women deserve respect, safety and support, not tears, fear, and betrayal. This is the ugly, rotten face of Congress. They deserve nothing but people's wrath," Sanjay added in his post.

Will stand by KTR, says Harish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Gathering support for BRS Working President KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA Harish Rao said that BRS stands united against the political targeting of its leaders.

"The cases against KTR are part of a conspiracy to deflect attention from the Congress Government's failures. KTR is a karyakarta of our party. Just like he stands by our karyarkatas, the entire party will stand by him, when he is facing problems," he asserted.

Reflecting on the state's progress under BRS rule and the shortcomings of the current administration, Harish emphasized the symbolic and practical value of the BRS diary.

"These diary launches were once instrumental during the Telangana Movement, serving as reminders of our struggle and success. Today, they should inspire us to reclaim



our position and inform people about the development achieved under BRS," Harish stated.

Criticizing the Congress government's performance, he said, "Revanth Reddy's one year in power has been about cuts, diversions and cases. The welfare schemes introduced by KCR have either been cut or discontinued. Even promises made in their manifesto have been ignored."

He labelled the Chief Minister as 'Eggethal Revanth Reddy', accusing him of rene-

g on key commitments, including farm loan waivers, Rythu Bandhu benefits and welfare schemes like Kalyana Lakshmi.

Harish also accused the government of prioritizing infrastructure projects benefiting private parties over social welfare programmes. "Funds are being spent on elevated corridors, metro expansions and six-lane roads near private lands, but there's no money for Aasara pensions or Rythu Bandhu," he charged.

Ministers must change working style, says Venugopal

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■ HYDERABAD

Expressing unhappiness over the attitude of ministers, AICC General Secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal said that ministers should change their working style.

He said that MLAs have no confidence in Ministers and party activists have no faith in MLAs and that it is time to change their attitude immediately.

He said that ministers should conduct Praja Darbars once a month in all districts and that the government should get close to the people,

it is learnt.

Attending the Telangana Congress Political Affairs Committee meeting held at the Gandhi Bhavan here on Wednesday, Venugopal said that party leaders are not countering the opposition criticism effectively resulting in opposition criticism reaching the people. There is a negativity among the people at the government and there is a need to take the works done by the government to the people, Venugopal said.

It is learnt that Venugopal asked the TPCC to take government programmes to the people effectively and observe 2025 year as the year of strengthening the party organ-

isationally.

He suggested that the party should move forward by appointing village, mandal and district-level committees and that the party should give posts to leaders who had worked for the party.

The party will fill all party posts and corporation posts soon and will give priority to party workers, it is learnt.

Venugopal asked the party leadership to get ready for local body elections, it is learnt.

The party is conducting a Samvidhan Bachao Rally in Telangana most probably on January 25 or 26 and AICC chief Mallikarjuna Kharge Or LOP in Lok Sabha will attend the rally.

Formula E Race case reveals succession politics in BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The way the BRS is handling the cases of KT Rama Rao's (KTR) alleged involvement in the Formula E Race funding controversy and Kavitha's role in the Delhi liquor scam reveals stark contrasts in approach both within the party and from the opposition. The contradiction is now glaringly drawing attention to how gender and succession politics play out in the BRS.

The BRS has once again rallied to reinforce KT Rama Rao's (KTR) position as the party's heir apparent, evident in the party's response to the Formula E Race funding controversy. Despite allegations and opposition scrutiny, the party's collective show of strength in defending KTR stresses his pre-eminence in the party.

The party has displayed overwhelming solidarity with KTR. BRS leaders, including key figures like Harish Rao, were seen rallying

behind him from day one. Press conferences were held back-to-back and BRS leaders spent nights at KTR's house

strategizing on how to counter the opposition. BRS leaders who remained silent during Kavitha's arrest in the Delhi liquor scam, were vocal in defending KTR, emphasizing his clean image on the very day of the High Court's decision.

In stark contrast, Kavitha, the daughter of K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR), faced an entirely different situation. During the liquor scam investigation, she bore the brunt of public and political attacks alone. Opposition parties staged protests and even attacked her residence. It was only later, that the party began extending support, albeit reluctantly. Kavitha was left to defend herself for days before other BRS leaders stepped in.

The difference in the BRS reaction also extends to the opposition's handling of these cases. While

KTR's case saw a relatively muted response, with the focus more on legal proceedings, Kavitha's ordeal turned into a spectacle.

The Delhi liquor scam was used as a rallying cry to discredit the BRS, with opposition leaders frequently targeting her at public events and in the media.

This disparity raises questions about ingrained prejudices within the BRS. Observers note that while KCR maintained a strategic silence in both cases, the party's body language indicates a clear distinction in how it views the son and the daughter. Political analysts observe that the support for KTR is proactive, calculated and unwavering, whereas Kavitha had to fend off attacks on her own until it became unavoidable to defend her.

As the BRS navigates these two controversies, the differing approaches may have long-term implications for the party's internal dynamics and its public image.

AP is a State of possibilities: PM

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone and inaugurated development works worth over Rs 2 lakh crore here on Wednesday. Paying his due respects to Lord Simhachalam Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy, Modi said it was after a gap of 60 years, with the blessings of the people, a Union Government was elected for the third time in a row in the country. Modi thanked the people for the grand welcome given to him during the roadshow prior to the event. He added that he respected the spirit of every word and feeling of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu during his speech and expressed confidence in achieving all the goals mentioned by the CM.

Poor crowd ...

Continued from page 1
Pushkarini led to chaos. The crowd management arrangements reportedly failed to cope with the overwhelming number of attendees.

Devotees who came for tokens were kept at the Padmavathi Park near Byragipattadu to avoid crowding on the roads. However, when one of the staff members at the token issuance counter fell ill, the queue line gate was opened to shift him to hospital. Devotees, thinking that the counter had been opened for token issuance, devotees rushed forward. Witnesses report that a stampede occurred at this moment. Some have also alleged that proper security arrangements were not made at the queue lines. It is also said that the local staff did not inform the higher authorities about the alternative arrangements.

The decision to distribute tokens for darshan, while well-intentioned, was poorly executed. The absence of sufficient counters, a systematic queuing mechanism and clear communication exacerbated the situation. The lack of trained personnel to control the crowds and direct them safely contributed to the chaos.

This festival holds immense spiritual importance, attracting devotees from across the country. The administration may have underestimated the turnout, especially after a period of pandemic-related restrictions. Devotees eager to attend after prior disruptions in temple activities likely contributed to the unusually high numbers.

Devotees reported confusion regarding the token distribution process which lacked clarity led to anxiety and crowding at specific counters. Inadequate use of technology, such as mobile apps or public announcements, to inform devotees about wait times or alternative options.

The token distribution centres were not equipped to handle large crowds, with narrow lanes and limited access points becoming choke points. The inability to regulate entry and exit flows likely contributed to crowd surges.

While administrative failures were a key factor, the combination of overwhelming turnout, logistical shortcomings, and human behavior created a tragic cascade of events.

For the first three days, January 10, 11, and 12, 1.20 lakh tokens were supposed to be issued on Thursday morning for Vaikunth Dvara darshan. For the remaining days, the tokens would be given at Vishnuviva, Srinivasa, and Bhudevi complexes in Tirupati, as per TTD. However, due to the crowd of devotees, tokens have been issued from tonight, as informed by EO Shyamal Rao.

United Breweries ...

Continued from page 1
making our operations in the state unviable. We have a responsibility to our stakeholders, and with each beer sold at a loss, it has become unsustainable for us to continue operations. The substantial overdue payments for supplies made to TGBCL complicate the situation. The Brewers Association of India (BAI) has made multiple representations to the Government regarding industry-wide challenges, requesting price increases to offset inflation, but unfortunately, there has been no resolution," UBL said.

The company urged the Telangana Government to address the issue promptly, ensuring financial sustainability for stakeholders and uninterrupted availability of beer brands. Meanwhile, consumers are left wondering whether this marks the end of the reign of Kingfisher and Heineken in Telangana's beer market.

Attack on BJP office is police failure: Vishweshwar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Condemning the attack on the State BJP office, Chevella MP Konda Vishweshwar Reddy said that the attack on the BJP office by Youth Congress activists was a failure of the police. Speaking to the media at the State BJP office here on Wednesday along with Malkajigiri MP Eatala Rajender and N. Ramchander Rao, Vishweshwar asked TPCC chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud, who condemned the attack on the BJP office by Youth Congress activists, to explain why Chief Minister Revanth

Reddy did not take any action against the attackers.

Vishweshwar said that the police arrested ST Morcha State President and some others although they were protesting peacefully. Why didn't the government arrest the attackers, he asked. "BJP leaders follow the Constitution. However, Congress leaders show the Constitution book for the sake of politics but engage in rowdiness. What sort of justice is this?" he said.

Eatala said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is the Home Minister and CV Anand the City Commissioner

of Police. Congress activists came to the BJP office from two sides and attacked the BJP office but the police did not stop them. He asked Revanth to explain whether it was an Intel failure or a planned attack. He said that Revanth Reddy has been resorting to attacks against people who protest against his admin.

"The Congress high command is also not happy with the Telangana government. I think the attacks are aimed at getting praise from Delhi leaders. The government should take total responsibility for the violence.

Local body ...

Continued from page 1

the government has paid Rs 4,000 crore for this till now, the CM added.

Earlier, the meeting paid tribute to Manmohan Singh by observing silence for two minutes.

AICC General Secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal, AICC in-charge General Secretary Deepa Das Munshi, TPCC chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, ministers Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, Damodara Raja Narsimha, Duddilla Sridhar Babu, senior leaders V. Hanumantha Rao, K. Jana Reddy, T. Jeevan Reddy, Dr J. Geetha Reddy, T. Jagga Reddy, Azharuddin, Anjan Kumar Yadav, Shabbir Ali and others attended the meeting.

Solar 'power' ...

Continued from page 1

including government ones, for setting up solar power plants. Coordination with banks for financial support has also been prioritised. The energy department, through TG REDCO, has invited tenders for the projects, and these will soon be finalized. The Collectors were directed to speed up land acquisition and finalize eligible groups for the initiative.

The conference emphasized the benefits of solar energy, particularly for tribal areas, enabling farmers to adopt things like drip irrigation. This could lead to better yields and increased income for marginalized communities. Collectors were tasked with ensuring effective implementation, especially in tribal belts where land availability is higher.

The government also plans to integrate the PM-KUSUM scheme, enabling farmers to

produce up to two MW of solar power. Farmers have been encouraged to apply for this scheme via the TG REDCO portal, ensuring access to affordable and sustainable electricity.

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka addressing Collectors emphasized that women's financial independence is key to their growth. The government has already finalised agreements between the energy and rural development departments to facilitate these solar power projects. Under the scheme, the government plans to provide interest-free loans and support self-help groups in using their resources effectively.

The Deputy Chief Minister also suggested using the rooftops of large buildings in urban areas like Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts for solar power generation. Protecting government land and promoting eco-friendly power generation were cited as added advantages of this initiative.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Dashami: Jan 08 02:26 PM to Jan 09 12:22 PM
Ekadashi: Jan 09 12:22 PM to Jan 10 10:19 AM

Nakshatram: Bharani: Jan 08 04:29 PM to Jan 09 03:07 PM
Kritika: Jan 09 03:07 PM to Jan 10 01:45 PM
Rahukalam: 1:46 PM to 3:08 PM
Yamagandam: 6:52 AM to 8:15 AM
Varjyam: 02:26 AM to 03:56 AM
Gulika: 9:37 AM to 11:00 AM
Amritakalam: 10:35 AM to 12:06 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:01 PM to 12:45 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Sunny
Temp: 28°
Humidity: 47%
Sunrise: 6:49 AM
Sunset: 5:58 PM
Updated: January 8, 2025 5:00 PM

I will fight ...

Today's cases are trivial in comparison," KTR said, calling Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's governance "shallow and opportunistic."

Drawing parallels with Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, KTR said, "When the Centre targeted Hemant Soren, the people stood by him as he fought for their interests. Similarly, we must stand united against any attempts to derail us."

Declaring that he would fight his case, KTR asked party workers to expose Congress's failures, particularly its unfulfilled promises to farmers. "The Congress owns every farmer Rs 17,000 per acre. We need to remind people of their unfulfilled assurances, like loan waivers and sup-

port tenant farmers," KTR said.

Looking ahead, KTR called for collective action. "This year must be a year of struggle against the Congress government's betrayals. Let every BRS worker become a KCR, fighting for justice for Telangana's people," he declared.

He also announced plans for membership drives, committee formations and the election of a new party president soon.

KTR dismissed fears over the case against him, stating, "When you've done nothing wrong, there's nothing to fear. We'll fight this case legally and emerge stronger. Our focus should remain on exposing Congress's financial mismanagement and false propaganda about irrigation projects and welfare schemes."

PM, Revanth condole...

Continued from page 1

assistance to those affected." Chief Minister Revanth Reddy expressed deep shock over the incident and extended his condolences to the bereaved families. He urged the Andhra Pradesh Government to ensure the injured receive the best medical care and also prayed for their speedy recovery. "I am deeply saddened by the stampede in Tirupati resulting in the loss of lives. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. I request the Andhra Pradesh Government to ensure that the injured receive the best medical care and I am praying for their speedy recovery," Union Minister of State for Home Bandi Sanjay Kumar said.

BRS leader KTR also conveyed his grief, saying, "Saddened by the loss of lives in the stampede at Tirupati. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families. My thoughts and prayers are with those families who have lost their loved ones."

6 killed in ...

Continued from page 1

but a large number of people rushed in leading to the stampede. They also said that adequate security arrangements were not made to regulate the crowd.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed deep shock at the deaths of six pilgrims in the stampede at Vishnu Nivasam in Tirupati earlier in the day. In a release here on Wednesday, the Chief Minister said that he is deeply saddened by the ghastly incident in which six pilgrims lost their lives. The CM inquired with officials about the treatment being given to those who had suffered serious injuries in the incident.

TTD apologises ...

Continued from page 1

and had expressed dissatisfaction with the officials' way of management during a teleconference. The Chief Minister warned that such incidents must not be repeated and is monitoring developments. He is scheduled to visit the families of the deceased on Friday at 11:45 am.

Chairman BR Naidu arrived at the Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Government General Hospital in Tirupati where the injured are undergoing treatment and spoke to doctors.

TTD Board Member Bhanu Prakash Reddy provided additional details, stat-

The Chief Minister is closely monitoring the treatment being given to the injured and other developments. The Chief Minister asked officials to visit the place and take all possible steps for providing relief to the devotees and ensure that effective medical treatment is provided to the injured.

The Chief Minister held a teleconference with the Tirupati Collector, SP and the TTD Chairman and inquired about the injured. He also expressed anger over officials not making proper arrangements to regulate the crowds.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan and Home Minister V. Anitha also expressed shock and grief over the stampede and the death of six devotees.

ACB grills IAS ...

Continued from page 1

The ACB is now examining the involvement of other officials and ministers to uncover the diversion of public funds.

Meanwhile, BLN Reddy's interrogation raised concerns about the involvement of top figures in the fund diversion case.

The ED interrogated BLN Reddy for over eight and a half hours and reportedly extracted critical information regarding the diversion of funds. Sources indicate that Reddy provided details about the roles played by Arvind Kumar and Minister KT Rama Rao (KTR) in the fund transfers connected to the Formula E race.

The investigation centres around the alleged diversion of Rs 55 crore to foreign accounts during the Formula E Car Race event. Both the ACB and the ED are probing the decision-making process behind the cash transfers, the intended beneficiaries, and whether RBI approval was obtained for these transactions.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | THURSDAY | JANUARY 9, 2025

03

Workshop to redesign engineering curriculum

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
A two-day event aimed at addressing the gaps between industry and academia while fostering innovation and skill development concluded successfully in Hyderabad. It was organised by IIT Madras, in collaboration with the Telangana State Council of Higher Education. It featured an Industry-Academia Conclave on January 7, followed by a workshop on January 8 to redesign the undergraduate engineering curriculum. Inaugurating the conclave, Prof V Balakista Reddy, Chairman of TSCHE and Vice-Chancellor of JNTU-Hyderabad, highlighted the need for integrating technology with education.

CITY EVENTS

Annual Day Celebrations

Academic Heights School

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
January 9,
(9 am to 5 pm)

Cultural Programmes

Aranya Natyam Dance
Institution

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
January 9,
(6 pm to 10 pm)

Milestone-8

The Student Fest

Venue

St Paul's Degree College
January 9 (11 am)

Grow Vasu

Biographical
Documentary

Venue

Lamakaan
January 9, (7 pm)

Weekend kids cooking camp

Master cooking and baking
in 09 fun weekends

Venue

Culinary Guru Institute,
Hyderabad.
Till January 11, 2025



GHMC Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi interacting with residents in Kukatpally zone

KUKATPALLY ZONE

Residents complain to Mayor: No streetlights and pucca roads

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi emphasised her commitment to addressing public grievances at the grassroots level and ensuring immediate solutions to residents' complaints. As part of her field visits, the Mayor visited several areas in Kukatpally Zone, including Balanagar and Allapur wards on Wednesday. She inspected the conditions in these localities and interacted with residents to understand their problems.

She promptly directed officials to resolve the issues. During her visit, the Mayor stated that the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is focusing on taking immediate action to resolve problems and prioritising urban infrastructure development. She visited areas in Balanagar, including Vinayak Nagar and Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, where she inspected stormwater drains and GHMC parks. She instructed regular desilting

of drains in Vinayak Nagar. The Mayor emphasised addressing issues in low-lying areas and instructed officials to ensure no hardships to residents. She also directed entomology teams to conduct fogging operations, maintain sanitation and carry out anti-larvae operations in all areas. Additionally, she urged officials to prepare GHMC parks for plantation drives.

In Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, residents highlighted severe traffic congestion and non-functional streetlights. The Mayor instructed engineering officials to prepare proposals for widening old bridges and replacing defunct streetlights. In Allapur division, the Mayor ordered officials to draft proposals for development works, including sewerage lines and road repairs in Saptadar Nagar E-Block and Rajiv Gandhi Nagar C-Block, as well as the construction of a multipurpose function hall and community hall.

In a virtual conference on Wednesday, Founder-President of Avtar Dr Saundarya Rajesh emphasised that cities should provide not only safety and accessibility but also competitive opportunities for women's economic success and leadership roles. She noted that Hyderabad, scoring 8.01 in infrastructure, leads in this area, surpassing other cities like Mumbai. Additionally, Hyderabad earned a rating of 6.95 in safety, ranking it among the leaders in this category. She mentioned that Hyderabad's standing reflects its role as a key city in supporting women's progress in India.

TOP CITIES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

Hyd ranks among top 5 cities for its infrastructure

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad ranks among the top 5 cities in 2024 and earns the highest score for its infrastructure with a well-connected public transport system and travel amenities, according to the Top Cities for Women in India (TCWI) Survey conducted by the Avtar Group.

In the third edition of the TCWI index, Hyderabad was highlighted for being one of the most inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities for working women. It scored the highest for infrastructure and was commended by women for its safety, employment opportunities and skilling initiatives.

The current reported expansion of Thurkayamjal lake is 495 acres, while its total extent is said to be 522 acres. HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath inspected the Thurkayamjal lake on Wednesday. Residents had reported issues of waterlogging in agricultural fields and homes due to blocked sluices and rising overflowing levels of the lake. Addressing these concerns, Commissioner Ranganath assured the public that all complaints regarding the Full Tank Level (FTL) of the Thurkayamjal lake would be investigated thoroughly. "We will consult irrigation engineers, revenue officials and technical experts from IIT, BITS Pilani and JNTU to scientifically determine the lake's FTL," he stated. He added that NRSC imagery and village maps would be utilised in the process, with findings expected within two to three months. The Commissioner acknowledged complaints about murky water entering the lake and stagnant drainage. Aditya Nagar residents living near the upper portion of the lake expressed concerns, stating that the area did not have water-logging issues when they purchased their plots. Ranganath assured the residents that there was no need for panic and promised impartial action. "We will scientifically determine the lake's FTL after reviewing NRSC imagery, maps and relevant revenue records, in consultation with all departments," he said.



HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath inspecting Thurkayamjal lake

Thurkayamjal lake shrinks: HYDRAA probes complaints

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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T-Hub launches programme to strengthen startups

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

T-Hub, India's leading startup incubator, launched the Business Incubation Management & Leadership (BIML) programme under the AIC T-Hub Foundation on Wednesday.

This programme aims to enhance India's incubation landscape by training managers to create and scale world-class incubation centres. It provides hands-on training, strategic insights and industry connections to support innovation and entrepreneurship nationwide.

The BIML programme focuses on startup-focused processes, stakeholder management and key frameworks like national policies, financial strategies and legal compliance. Participants earn certification upon completion, boosting their credibility as professional incubation managers. Collaborations with academic institutions and industry leaders further enrich learning through T-Hub's network of mentors and corporates.

CEO of AIC T-Hub Foundation Rajesh Adla emphasised the programme's role in empowering managers to advance India's startup ecosystem. Meanwhile, Interim CEO of T-Hub Sujith Jagirdar highlighted BIML's potential to unlock India's global startup leadership. The programme collaborates with 15 institutions across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Tamil Nadu, including CVR College of Engineering, Hyderabad, and NIPER, Guwahati. It focuses on incubators in edutech, sports and technology.

Workshops and community outreach programmes are designed to reach all sections of society across Telangana. Scammers claim the target is under investigation or has an arrest warrant, threatening immediate arrest unless a payment is made via RTGS or NEFT. They may use fake documents, video calls, or spoofed caller IDs to seem credible.

TGCSB reminds the public that no police officer or agency will demand money over the phone or video call. Legitimate officers will never request payment to cancel warrants or settle cases. In total, TGCSB's efforts have reached 35,700 participants, educating them about the dangers of sharing personal or financial information online. Citizens are advised to be cautious of calls or messages claiming to be from law enforcement requesting money or sensitive details. Never share personal info unless the caller's identity is verified. Avoid making payments via RTGS or NEFT. Report suspicious incidents to 1930 or cybercrime.gov.in. For more info, visit www.tgcsb.tspolice.gov.in.

Throughout January, the TGCSB will focus on addressing Digital Arrest Scams, where fraudsters impersonate law enforcement officials to extort money. Workshops and community outreach programmes are designed to reach all sections of society across Telangana. Scammers claim the target is under investigation or has an arrest warrant, threatening immediate arrest unless a payment is made via RTGS or NEFT. They may use fake documents, video calls, or spoofed caller IDs to seem credible.

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CYBER JAAGROOKTA DIWAS' 2025 TGCSB organises 394 meetings and 23 awareness rallies across State

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As part of 'Cyber Jaagrookta Diwas' 2025, the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) has organised 394 meetings and 23 awareness rallies across the State to educate citizens on emerging cyber threats.

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Telangana Cyber Security Bureau

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Krishna Ella honoured with INSA Fellowship

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr Krishna Ella, a scientist and co-founder Executive Chairman of Bharat Biotech International, has been awarded the India Fellowship of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) for 2025. This recognition highlights his contributions to vaccine technology, new discoveries and the development of innovative solutions.

Dr Ella joins an esteemed group of scientists and industry leaders, including Dr Anil Kakodkar, Dr VK Saraswat, Dr S Somanath, and others. This year, INSA awarded fellowships to 61 individuals, with industry leaders included for the first time. Fellows can attend meetings, vote and nominate others for fellowships or awards. Receiving the award on Wednesday, Dr Ella said "I'm honoured by this recognition and grateful for the support of my team at Bharat Biotech". He also pledged to continue supporting public health and vaccine innovation in India. Bharat Biotech, with nearly 30 years of experience, has delivered over 9 billion vaccine doses to 125 countries and now offers 18 vaccines. Founded in 1935, INSA promotes scientific knowledge and coordinates efforts to address national welfare issues in India.

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Dr Krishna Ella receiving the award from the India Fellowship of the Indian National Science Academy for 2025 on Wednesday



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PASSENGERS CAN SHOWCASE THEIR TALENT Hyd Metro introduces 'Me Time on My Metro'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The L&T Metro Rail (Hyderabad) Limited (L&TMRHL) launched the 'Me Time on My Metro' campaign, an innovative programme providing spaces at Metro stations for passengers to showcase their talent.

The 'Me Time on My Metro' campaign encourages passengers to explore hobbies during their commute, offering a stress-free, enriching travel experience. It will be celebrated in conjunction with the Sankranti Metro Fest from January 8 to 10, 2025, blending cultural festivities with daily travel.

At the Metro Fest in MG stand Metro Station on Wednesday, MD of HMRL NVS Reddy emphasised that the Hyderabad Metro was designed to reflect the city's soul, not just serve as a concrete transportation project. He highlighted its global recognition in 2013, when the Global Infrastructure Forum in New York named it the best engineering project world-

wide. Reddy also said that with 9 million vehicles on Hyderabad's roads and ongoing urbanisation, the Metro is crucial for reducing traffic congestion and enabling smoother commutes. Reddy stated that integrating cultural activities into Metro travel creates connectivity. He said that unique designated spaces will be available for passengers to recite poetry, perform music and display their talents. He mentioned that frequent

review meetings conducted by Chief Minister A Revath Reddy reflect the vision of making Hyderabad a global city. He concluded by stating that plenty of opportunities are coming this year. Meanwhile, MD & CEO of L&TMRHL KVB Reddy said the campaign aims to redefine urban mobility, turning each metro journey into a meaningful experience. He called the campaign a milestone in enhancing urban commuting and engaging with Hyderabad's vibrant spirit.

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HMRL MD NVS Reddy and L&TMRHL MD & CEO KVB Reddy unveiling 'Me Time on My Metro' campaign on Wednesday

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The preliminary keys for all three papers and the master question papers will be available on the TSPSC website (www.tspsc.gov.in) from January 8 to 12

through the candidate login from January 8 to 12 until 5:00 pm. Objections must be submitted in English, as the provided text box only supports this language. Candidates should upload evidence supporting their claims, with details like author name, edition/page number, publisher and website URL. Objections sent via email or personal representation will not be accepted.

REGISTRATION OF UNAUTHORISED LAYOUTS

Axe falls on Sub-Registrar in Yadagirigutta

PNS ■ NALGONDA

The Sub-Registrar of Yadagirigutta, P Gopi, has been suspended following an inquiry into irregularities in the registration of unauthorised layouts in December last year. Gopi was found accountable for discrepancies in the documentation concerning an unauthorised layout for a venture in Kolanupaka.

Deputy Inspector General of Registration and Stamps, Medchal-Malkajiri, has issued suspension orders against P Gopi, Senior Assistant at the Office of Assistant Chit Registrar, Nalgonda, and in Charge SubRegistrar at the SRO,

Yadagirigutta. The action comes following violations of Circular instructions set by the Controller and Inspector General (C&IG) related to document registration.

As per the proceedings issued on January 8 by G. Madhusudan Reddy, Deputy Inspector General, P Gopi is accused of registering 154 plots in an unauthorised layout in survey number 473/E3 and 472E3/1/2, located at Kolanupaka village under Alair mandal in Yadadri Bhongir district. The violation pertains to the failure to follow instructions outlined in C&IG Circular Memo No. G/257/2019, dated August 26, 2020, and December 29, 2020, which prohibited such actions.



The suspension comes after complaints were filed by Vantala Jangaiah on January 6, and Teenmar Mallanna, a member of the Legislative Council, on January

7, 2025. These complaints alleged irregularities in the registration process and pointed out the registration of plots in unauthorised layouts by P Gopi. The District

Registrar of Nalgonda and the District Registrar (MV & Audit), Nalgonda, conducted thorough investigations and submitted their reports. The findings revealed that Gopi had registered 125 plots in violation of the prescribed rules. In accordance with the powers vested under Sub Rule (1) Rule 8 of TSCS (CC&A) Rules 1991, the Deputy Inspector General has placed P Gopi under suspension with immediate effect.

The suspension aims to ensure the integrity of the registration process and uphold the legal guidelines established by the C&IG's office. Further investigations and actions are expected to follow.



HYDRA Commissioner AV Ranganath, accompanied by local Municipal Commissioner Amarendra Reddy and others inspecting encroachments at Masab and Jeelawar Khan ponds under Turkayamjal municipality on Wednesday

HYDRA Commissioner Intensifies efforts to protect Masab, Jeelawar Khan Ponds

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

HYDRA Commissioner AV Ranganath has taken decisive steps toward conserving the ponds, focusing on the Masab and Jeelawar Khan ponds under Turkayamjal municipality. Acting on numerous complaints, the Commissioner conducted a detailed inspection of the encroachments on Wednesday. He was accompanied by local municipal commissioner Amarendra Reddy and irrigation officials.

The inspection included a thorough examination of the Full Tank Level (FTL) and buffer zones of the ponds alongside engineers. Records related to ownership and encroachments were reviewed, revealing traces of gravel being dumped into the Masab pond to fill it. The Commissioner directed irrigation officials to submit detailed reports on the encroachments.

Ranganath stated that the inspection was carried out in response to allegations of encroachments. He said that strict action would be taken within two to three months against those

attempting to occupy and construct on the ponds. "No matter who is involved, there will be no negligence in protecting these water bodies," he emphasised.

In addition to addressing encroachments, the Commissioner highlighted plans to restore canals leading into the ponds, ensuring their preservation and functionality. He warned that stringent measures would be taken to prevent further encroachments and protect the region's water resources.

This is not the first time the HYDRA team has inspected the Masab pond. In earlier inspections, the team identified encroachments and recommended a more comprehensive study. With repeated complaints, the commissioner's personal involvement has heightened efforts to safeguard the ponds, sending a strong message to encroachers and instilling hope among locals concerned about the conservation of these vital water bodies.

The proactive measures by the HYDRA are seen as a significant step toward protecting ponds and ensuring their sustainability for future generations.

Govt Whip, Collector inspect laddu making unit

PNS ■ VEMULAWADA

Government Whip and Vemulawada MLA Aadi Srinivas, along with District Collector Sandeep Kumar Jha, inspected the Laddu manufacturing unit at Sri Rajarajeswara Swamy Temple on Wednesday.

After the Mahashivaratri Jatra coordination meeting, the Whip, Collector, and other officials including the District Superintendent of Police visited the temple and offered prayers. On this occasion, the temple's Executive Officer Vinod Reddy, honoured the MLA and the Collector with shawls and presented them with the prasadam, while the priests blessed them.

Subsequently, the Whip and Collector, along with others, inspected the Laddu manufacturing unit. They checked the store room, the ingredients used in making the laddus, the ghee, the manufacturing process, and the surrounding cleanliness. They inquired about the daily use of ghee, the number of laddus prepared daily, and the number of



Government Whip and Vemulawada MLA Aadi Srinivas and District Collector Sandeep Kumar Jha inspecting the making unit at Sri Rajarajeswara Swamy Temple in Vemulawada on Wednesday

staff involved. They suggested modernising the Laddu manufacturing unit fully and ensuring that prasadam is available in

proportion to the number of devotees. They also emphasised the need for special attention to quality and cleanliness.

Municipal officials told to chalk out plan for development of town

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

District Collector Adarsh Surabhi has directed municipal officials to chalk out plans for comprehensive development of Wanaparthy town. The officials, he said, should take the development of town into consideration while preparing budget.

On Wednesday, the Collector was holding a review meeting at the Collectorate Conference Hall. Additional Collector Sanchit Gangwar, along with all municipal officials and accounts officers in the district, were present. The Collector reviewed the taxes collected during the last financial year and future plans.

He instructed the municipal authorities to collect property tax, water tax, trade license tax and others efficiently for various development programmes, town development, infrastructure, and sanitation activities. He also directed municipal com-



Wanaparthy Collector Adarsh Surabhi holding a review meeting in Wanaparthy on Wednesday

missioners to assess newly constructed houses regularly and collect taxes accordingly. He ordered the issuance of notices to those with pending property taxes.

He recommended revising the assessments for houses that have undergone renovations or additional floors. In the new budget, he suggested purchasing vehicles for sanitation and paying electricity bills. He emphasised allocating 10 per cent of the total revenue to a Green Budget, planting trees, and ensuring their protection.

Concern over high fluoride levels in groundwater in Warangal dist

PNS ■ HANAMKONDA

Recent tests conducted by geologists from Kakatiya University have revealed that the presence of fluoride in drinking water in undivided Warangal district has surpassed the permissible levels, with concentrations reaching double the recommended limit. This issue has raised significant concern among officials and residents alike.

The study, led by Dr Bodge Satish and Dr Sai Krishna from the university's geology department, analysed water samples from 75 locations across the district. The findings indicate that the fluoride levels in the region exceed the World Health Organisation's (WHO) guidelines, which

stipulate that fluoride concentrations should be between 0.6 ppm and 1.5 ppm. Levels higher than 1.5 ppm increase the risk of fluorosis, a condition that can severely affect bone and dental health. The

research suggests that several factors contribute to the high fluoride content in the groundwater. These include the depletion of the groundwater table, the practice of sinking borewells deeper, and the excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers in agriculture. The study also found other harmful substances, such as nitrates and sulphates, in excess. Areas such as Mallampally Mandal and Gundedu in Kamalapur Mandal recorded fluoride levels as high as 3 ppm, double the permissible limit, which is a cause for concern.



Households in Bollaram, Ameenpur assured of piped, potable water

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy has announced that the new reservoirs constructed in Bollaram and Ameenpur municipal areas will start supplying drinking water by the January 20. On Wednesday, he held a review meeting with the Water Board officials and municipal chairpersons at the MLA camp office.

Speaking at the meeting, he mentioned that new reservoirs are being constructed and pipelines are being laid in the municipalities of the ORR area under Patancheru constituency to meet the increasing population. Specifically, two reservoirs with a capacity of two million litres each had been completed in Bollaram Municipal area, and pump house works were also completed. The drinking water supply would commence soon. He also noted that the construction of three reservoirs had been completed in Ameenpur Municipal area, serving Patel Guida, Lalabavi Colony, and Bandham



Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy holding a meeting with officials in Patancheru on Wednesday

Kommu, and the water supply will start by the 20th.

He mentioned that a permanent solution to the drinking water problem in Bollaram Industrial Area has been worked out. Plans are being made to provide drinking water to new homes and apartments

in the Bollaram Municipal area, which is situated on the other side of the ORR, he said.

Mahipal Reddy also mentioned that Rs 5.40 crore has been allocated to complete the works in Ameenpur, Tellapur, and Bollaram municipal areas. In Tellapur Municipal area,

15,000 beneficiaries are already residing in double-bedroom houses constructed in Kolluru and Osman Nagar, and officials were instructed to ensure the supply of drinking water without any issues. Municipal officials were also directed to select sites for the establishment of new reservoirs.

Aruna vows to develop govt hospital in Mbnr

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

BJP Lok Sabha member DK Aruna emphasised the need to further develop government hospitals. She was speaking at a key meeting held at the Mahabubnagar Government General Hospital Development Committee here. Local MLA Y Srinivas Reddy, Collector Vijayendra, and Health officials attended the meeting.

Aruna said that a new building with modern facilities is under construction. While the amenities in the hospital are good, there is a need for further development. She highlighted that the funds from MPs and MLAs alone are not sufficient for this, and she is taking special initiative to secure funds from both the Central and State governments. She promised to ensure that solar powered lights and an ambulance are provided for the hospital.

She expressed her hope that the hospital staff would work with the goal of providing a better healthcare for everyone. Aruna added



BJP Lok Sabha member DK Aruna interacting with staff of the government hospital in Mahabubnagar on Wednesday

that in the next four years, the hospital would be transformed into the best facility. She also said that Prime Minister Modi is allocating significant funds for hospital modernisation and other development projects to provide better healthcare to the people.

She further said that Prime Minister Modi is to provide better healthcare services to the public.

This is the largest hospital for the people of the undivided district. She called upon the staff to work with the goal of providing better healthcare to every individual. She said that her daughter was also born in the government hospital.

Mahatma's grandson to participate in Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi on Jan 11

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Tushar Gandhi will be visiting Achampet in the district on the January 11, according to Shivarchak Vijay Kumar, retired professor and convener of the Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi in Mahabubnagar district.

Tushar

Gandhi will participate in the conclusion of the 'Bapu Baato Mein Satyashodhan' walk, which is part of a 1,000-km foot journey

organised by the Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi and Gandhi-King Foundation. This walk will have completed 100 days by the time it reaches Achampet. Dr Shivarchak Vijay Kumar mentioned that Tushar Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi, would attend the event.

The "Bapu Satyashodhan Yatra" started from the Jogulamba Temple in Alampur on October 2 last year, and it was conducted for the welfare of future generations. Dr Vijay Kumar also emphasised that during this journey, various important issues were promoted, including supporting handloom products, fight against alcohol, drugs and narcotics use, encouraging traditional medicine, developing organic farming, promoting yoga, exercise, and proper nutrition for complete health, advocating for education with moral and spiritual values, protecting nature and biodiversity, enhancing work ethics, and building a society based on truth and non-violence.



Tushar Gandhi

People urged to be cautious about cybercrimes

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Cybercrime unit Assistant Commissioner of Police ChRV Phaninder advised people to be cautious about digital arrest scams. An awareness programme on cybercrimes was conducted by the Cyber Crime Police Station at Kasturba Gandhi Girls' School. During the programme, the police officer mentioned that cybercriminals often pressure victims to drive their victims to distress, and emphasised that law enforcement officials would never demand money or issue arrest warrants through phone calls or WhatsApp messages. He urged the people to



Cybercrime unit ACP ChRV Phaninder at an awareness programme on cybercrimes in Khammam on Wednesday

stay alert and be cautious about information received from unknown sources. He also advised people not to trust calls, messages, or emails asking for personal or financial information.

Cong leaders celebrate Rythu Bharosa announcement

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

In Sangareddy, a farmer celebration event was organised on Wednesday to mark the decision taken by the Congress Party under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge to provide Rs 12,000 investment support to farmers under the Rythu Bharosa scheme. The event was conducted under the leadership of TGIIC Chairman and Sangareddy Congress party district unit president Nirmala Jaggareddy, along with the farmers of the Sangareddy constituency. The farmers and leader anointed the portrait of CM Revanth Reddy with milk.

During the event, they stated that the Congress government is

a farmer-friendly government and the farmers in the Sangareddy constituency are very happy with the Rs 12,000 Rythu Bharosa benefit.

The event also saw the participation of TPCC Secretary Anjaneyulu, CDC Chairman Ramreddy, Sangareddy Marketing Chairman Ramachander Naik, Sadasivpet Market Committee Chairman Sadakula Kumar, Atma Committee Chairman and former Library Chairman Topaji Ananthakrishnan Prabhu, Sadasivpet Mandal President Siddanna Kandi, Party Mandal President Moti Lal Naik, Sadasivpet Town President Satyanarayana, Youth Congress State Secretary Koon Santos.



TGIIC Chairman and Sangareddy Congress party district unit president Nirmala Jaggareddy leading Rythu Bharosa celebrations in Sangareddy on Wednesday

ACROSS THE STATES



Kerala to be free from extreme poverty soon:CM

Kerala will be free from extreme poverty by November this year, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Wednesday. Speaking at the annual conference of district collectors and heads of departments, the chief minister stressed the need for effective implementation of all government programmes to achieve the goal. "Kerala will become a state with zero extreme poverty. We have been implementing comprehensive and scientific schemes to achieve this. These initiatives must be executed efficiently," he said. He instructed officials to ensure that each panchayat, block, and constituency could declare themselves as "extreme poverty-free" by November. He also told the officials to find adequate land for constructing houses for the poor. Various campaigns of the government including anti-drug drive and garbage-free Kerala should be completed in a time-bound manner, he said.

India, EU reaffirm commitment to democracy, rule of law

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the European Union (EU) on Wednesday reaffirmed their commitment to principles and values of democracy, rule of law and human rights and agreed on the need to safeguard freedom and diversity of civil society actors.

The issues were extensively discussed at the 11th India-EU Human Rights Dialogue held in Delhi.

The two sides discussed the issues related to civil and political rights, social, economic, and cultural rights, countering religious hatred, elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and opinion, both online and offline, a joint readout said.

While the EU reiterated its opposition to capital punishment, India reiterated its stand on recognition of the right to development as a "distinct, universal, inalienable and fundamental human right," it said. India is among few countries that



still have death penalty. "During the dialogue, India and the EU reiterated their commitment to the shared principles and values of democracy, freedom, rule of law, and to the promotion and protection of all human rights," it said.

The two sides emphasised the "universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness" of all human rights, it added.

"Reflecting their commitment

to upholding human rights, they both agreed on the need to safeguard the freedom, independence and diversity of civil society actors and organisations and other relevant stakeholders such as journalists, respecting freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly," the readout said.

The two sides also delved into issues of the 'LGBTQI+' community, women empowerment and issues

relating to technology and human rights.

The two sides also exchanged views on the rights of migrants and business and human rights, according to the readout.

India and the EU recognised the importance of strengthening national and international human rights mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights," it said.

Both sides underlined the importance of enhancing cooperation in the multilateral fora particularly at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, it said.

"In this regard, they committed to closer cooperation and more regular exchanges between the Permanent Missions of India and the EU in Geneva, in order to identify further opportunities for joint action," the readout added.

The two sides also discussed cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in accordance with international humanitarian law.



Tricolour hoisted on 73-foot mast near India-China border

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

A tricolour on a 73-foot-tall mast now stands at Gorsam Chorten in Jemithang, the first administrative centre near the India-China border in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district. The flag was hoisted on Wednesday in the presence of over 200 locals and Indian Army personnel. Organised jointly by the Army, the civil administration and local monks, the ceremony was led by Tawang Brigade Commander Brigadier Vipul Singh Rajput. Zila parishad member Lek Norbu, Jemithang Circle Officer Deewan Mara, local village elders and school children attended the event, a statement said.

The flag was hoisted with full military honours by Army personnel, followed by the singing of the national anthem.



Delhi's temperature settles at 21.5 degrees C

Delhi witnessed a sunny afternoon on Wednesday after several breezy cold days as the maximum temperature settled at 21.5 degrees Celsius, 2.5 notches warmer than the season's normal. Mainly clear skies were observed during the day even as the city was enveloped with dense fog in the morning with the visibility dropping to zero. The Humidity level at 5.30 am was recorded at 81 per cent. The maximum temperature on Wednesday rose significantly from the 16.2 degrees Celsius recorded the day before. However, it was a colder morning on Wednesday as the minimum temperature dropped sharply to 7.4 degrees Celsius, as compared to 10.5 degrees Celsius recorded on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the air quality was recorded in the "poor" category with a reading of 287 at 6 am, according to the Central Pollution Control Board data. The AQI stood at 334 in the "very poor" category at 9 am. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.



BENGAL LEADER IN ALL SPHERES

Efforts to undermine that status won't succeed: Mamata

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Asserting that West Bengal is a leader in every sphere - from education to culture and sports, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said the people of the state know how to counter any threat to undermine that preeminent position and heritage.

She also said that all members of Bengal's Santosh Trophy squad, which won the championship this year again, will be recruited into the state police force in the junior official rank under a special quota. Speaking at the 'Students Week' programme here, she named social reformer Rammoan Roy and polymath Iswarachandra Vidyasagar to buttress her point that Bengal has shown the path in eradicating social evils like practice of 'Sati' and exploitation of widows, while ushering female education.

Banerjee also underscored how Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam had spread the message of brotherhood, patriotism, amity and love for the motherland through their poems and songs to "unite people and not divide them."

"Now if someone threatens to undermine that spirit, that glorious heritage of the state, counter

that, combat that," she said without elaborating.

Banerjee said that sons and daughters of Bengal are working in every leading institute and organisation of the world and the country, reflecting the state's distinguished position in the field of education.

"Besides (Economist) Amartya Sen and (historian) Sugata Bose, both associated with Harvard University, so many Bengali academicians are spread worldwide, making the country India their home state proud with their achievements and contributions," she said.

Addressing the hundreds of students present at the venue, the chief minister asked them to study in the state's "top class higher educational institutions" offering a wide array of courses and realise their dreams.

Banerjee recalled during the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, she had facilitated the enrollment of the state's medical students who had to return midway through their courses at medical colleges in the state.

"If you (students) are enrolled at the institutes of your specialised discipline here, you won't have to

'India eyeing integrated satellite communication grid'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's defence forces are planning to build an integrated satellite communication grid comprising spacecraft in different orbits and data relay systems as space emerges as a new domain of warfare, a senior officer said. Addressing the DefSat Conference here, Defence Space Agency Director General Air Vice Marshal Pawan Kumar said the defence forces were also looking at collaborating with the industry to meet its requirements to get an edge over its rivals in the domain.

"When you talk of communication, I think the technology that we are focusing on is integrated satellite communication grid. We don't want any service to be over dependent on a particular satellite," Kumar said in the inaugural address at the DefSat conference organised by Satcom Industry Association-India here. Kumar said the defence forces were looking at a mix of constellations, either Medium Earth Orbit (MEO)-Geostationary Orbit (GEO)



or Low Earth Orbit (LEO)-MEO-GEO, and a lot of studies have happened on that. "We are also looking at tracking and data relay satellite systems primarily because it reduces demand to delivery time as far as OODA loop is concerned," he said. Kumar said the defence forces were also exploring quantum communications because of the obvious advantages of secrecy.

"We are looking for space and ground-based sensors which include telescopes and radars, along with the complete network so that the commanders can make appropriate decisions, whether it is military level, operational level, or tactical level," he said.



DU professor accused of sexual offence resigns

A professor at Delhi University's Ramjas College, who had been accused of sexual harassment, resigned on Wednesday following protests by students on campus over the alleged inaction by the administration on the issue. The alleged incident reportedly took place in December last year, when the professor, who also holds a prominent position in the university's student welfare cell, sexually harassed a minor female student. Students from various groups, including left-leaning organisations such as the All India Students Association (AISA) and the Students Federation of India (SFI), as well as the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), held demonstrations on Wednesday demanding the professor's suspension. The protest turned violent when some unidentified individuals wielding sticks attacked students on campus, as seen in videos circulating on social media. While AISA and SFI alleged that the attackers were ABVP members, ABVP denied the allegations, claiming they were peacefully protesting.

Showdown between AAP, BJP over 'Sheesh Mahal'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A high drama unfolded Wednesday outside the 6, Flagstaff Road bungalow, once occupied by former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and dubbed a Sheesh Mahal' by the BJP, as AAP leaders attempted to enter it but were stopped by the police.

The party workers later tried to reach the Prime Minister's official residence on Lok Kalyan Marg, but

were stopped by police again, following which they staged a "dharana". In its turn, the BJP also took media to the AB 17 Mathura Road bungalow allotted to Chief Minister Atishi to show that she already had a government residence and sought to know why she was asking for a separate bungalow.

AAP leaders Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bhardawaj staged a sit-in outside the Flagstaff bungalow after they were not allowed to enter it,



which they had invited the media to tour with them in a bid to counter the BJP's "Sheesh Mahal" jibes.

Transformer theft leaves UP village without power for 25 days

PNS ■ BUDAUN (UP)

Villagers in Soraha have been living without electricity for close to a month because of the theft of a 250 KVA power transformer.

Thieves dismantled the transformer in the village in Ughaiti area, stole its oil and other valuable components, and fled, according to locals and officials.

Though the power department has launched a probe into the matter, it is yet to install a new transformer even after 25 days. Neither have police been able to track the burglars. After dusk, the village with a population of 5,000 is plunged into darkness.

The most affected are students preparing for the Uttar Pradesh

Board exams, set to begin in February.

Village head Satpal Singh said, "The power cut has severely disrupted children's education and the daily lives of residents. Basic necessities like inverters and mobile charging are also unavailable. Villagers are increasingly becoming more and more agitated."

Vijay Sharma, a local class 12 student, said his online study has been severely impacted because of the power cut.

"The board exams are approaching, and it has been nearly a month since the transformer was stolen, yet it hasn't been replaced. This has made made online classes extremely difficult. My entire academic year is at stake," he said.



Clinical trials of medicines often done in poor countries: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Observing clinical trials of medicines and vaccines were often carried out in poor countries, the Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed a petitioner to file submissions and objections to the rules framed by the Centre on the issue. A bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti considered the submissions of Centre's additional solicitor general Archana Pathak Dave who said rules for new drugs and clinical trials were framed in 2019.

"We know that the clinical trials are conducted in poor countries," the bench said. Following the rules, Dave said New Drugs and Clinical Trials (Amendment) Rules were notified in 2024 to streamline the approval process for clinical trials and new drugs in India which aimed to improve patient safety protocols and ensure compliance with global standards.

Senior advocate Sanjay Parikh, appearing for NGO Swasthya Adhikar Manch, which filed a PIL in 2012 alleging large-scale clinical drug trials across the country by multinational pharmaceutical firms, said poor citizens were still being used as "guinea pigs" and not paid adequate compensation.

Despite law, Centre yet to rise from slumber

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a case over Mullaperiyar Dam, the Supreme Court on Wednesday expressed shock and said despite the Dam Safety Act by Parliament, the executive was yet to rise from its slumber. A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and Ujjal Bhuyan made the remarks after the Kerala government said the Centre enacted the Dam Safety Act in 2021 to stonewall proceedings, which were going on in court for the safety of the 130-year-old dam and since then nothing has been done.

When the bench was informed the Centre was yet to constitute a national committee for the dam's safety prescribed under the law, it said. "We are agast to know that despite enact-

ment of the Dam Safety Act by Parliament, the executive is yet to wake up from slumber." Senior advocate V Krishnamurthy, appearing for Tamil Nadu, said under the law, the Centre created a dam safety authority and an audit of the structure would be done. Petitioner Mathews J Nedumpara has sought review of apex court's orders over the safety of the dam on the ground that if water damages the dam, it would affect 50 to 60 lakh people living downstream.

The top court issued notice seeking the Centre's response and the assistance of the attorney general in the matter. The bench observed under Section 5(2) of the Dam Safety Act, a national committee comprising members prescribed under Section 5(1) was required to

● Supreme Court on Mullaperiyar dam row



be constituted within a period of 60 days from the date of the law's commencement, and it was required to be reconstituted every three years thereafter. "We are informed that no such national committee has been

constituted so far. Even the rules/regulations regarding the constitution, composition or functions of the said national committee have not been formulated," said the bench's order.

The court noted Tamil Nadu government's submission on the Centre creating a new supervisory committee led by the chairperson of the national dam safety authority by an office memorandum of November 21, 2024, in supersession of the supervisory committee constituted by the top court in 2014.

"It further appears there is no provision in the Dam Safety Act prescribing the constitution of a supervisory committee," the bench said, "and it further appears a supervisory committee was constituted by this court in an earlier round of litigation with respect to the Mullaperiyar Dam and the union of India has also conceptualised the constitution of the supervisory committee, maybe in terms of the judgment of this court."

The attorney general's assistance was sought by the court over the constitution of the national committee and giving effect to other provisions of the Dam Safety Act. It directed the AG to take instructions from the national dam safety authority on its responsibility under the law. The bench, during the hearing, considered passing an order for a safety audit of the dam by an expert panel to allay any fears surrounding the British-era dam, which is situated in Kerala but controlled by Tamil Nadu.

Krishnamurthy submitted Tamil Nadu had formed an expert panel to assess the structural stability of the dam but required approval by the national authority on dam safety in the upcoming meeting on January 10.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Brace up for battle royal

With polling scheduled for February 5, Delhi is poised for a fiercely contested three-way battle

As the Election Commission officially announced the schedule for Delhi's upcoming assembly elections, the stage is set for what promises to be a hard-fought, three-cornered contest. Polling for the 70 assembly seats in Delhi will take place on February 5, with the results to be declared on February 8. This election is poised to be a high-stakes battle between the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress, each bringing its own strategies, narratives and issues to the forefront. Under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal, AAP is looking to secure a third consecutive term in Delhi. The party, which has enjoyed overwhelming success in the last two elections, is fiercely campaigning for a 'hat-trick.' Kejriwal, whose party has transformed the political landscape of Delhi since its formation in 2012, is betting on his track record of governance and what he calls the 'politics of work.' AAP's focus remains on welfare programmes such as free electricity, water and healthcare, while the party claims its tenure has been marked by development and transparency. With the slogan "Phir layenge Kejriwal," AAP has launched a campaign centred around a positive vision for the future, contrasting its achievements with the BJP's focus on divisive politics. However, AAP's victory is far from assured. Despite its dominance in the previous two elections, the party now faces mounting challenges. AAP has been dogged by corruption allegations, a point of attack that the BJP has effectively capitalised on. For the BJP, this election is a do-or-die contest. The party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has mounted an aggressive campaign aimed at ousting Kejriwal and the AAP from power. The BJP's central theme revolves around anti-incumbency, accusing AAP of corruption and failing to address the capital's development needs. Prime Minister Modi, at the forefront of the BJP's attack, has called the AAP government an 'AAP-da' (disaster) and criticised its inability to offer a vision for Delhi's growth. Modi's rhetoric positions the BJP as the party of national progress, while framing Kejriwal's leadership as an obstacle to Delhi's future. The BJP's strategy is two-fold: discredit the AAP's governance while appealing to voters' desire for change. The Congress, once the dominant force in Delhi, is now a distant third. After losing power in the capital in 2013, the party has been trying to rebuild its political base, which has been severely eroded by both AAP and BJP. However, this time the party is determined to make its presence felt in the elections. Given the deepening polarisation, high stakes and aggressive strategies on all sides, the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections are shaping up to be a politically charged, hard-fought, and closely contested battle. Voters will have to choose between a legacy of governance under AAP, a vision for change from the BJP, and the prospect of stability from the Congress, making this election one of the most bitterly fought yet interesting to the core.



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PICTALK



A man and children perform for alms at Sagar Island on a foggy winter morning, in South 24 Parganas

Influencer marketing is making a big impact on India's small towns

Influencer marketing, once seen as an urban phenomenon, is now making waves in India's small towns and rural areas

Influencer marketing is no longer just a big-city thing in India. It has taken even the country's small towns and rural areas. The sole reason behind this shift is the recent surge in regional content creators, who connect deeply with local audiences by speaking their language, both literally and culturally.

The rise in regional content A regional revolution is on the cards for India's digital landscape. The share of regional language consumption on OTT platforms alone is estimated to go beyond 50-50 per cent by 2025, leaving Hindi content behind. This is to say, India's appetite for content in native languages is growing aggressively, laying down a strong foundation for regional influencers to thrive.

Brands tapping into 'Bharat' Brands seem to acknowledge this shift and have begun increasingly collaborating with regional influencers to penetrate non-metro markets. There's no argument over how crucial influencer marketing has become for



brands, with 75 per cent of brands considering it a part of their marketing strategy. Partnering with local creators gives an edge to brands in delivering messages that resonate with regional audiences and build engagement and trust.

Enter micro & nano influencers Brands are going big on micro and nano influencers, given their unmatched effectiveness in these markets. Their content is more relatable and trustworthy to local audiences. Notably, 47 per cent of brands prefer collaborating with micro and nano influencers for cost-effective campaigns and better engagement.

Economic opportunities for regional creators The creator economy is ris-

ing rapidly. The market size is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 22 per cent from 2023 to 2030.

This growth rate is proof of the plethora of opportunities that lie for regional creators, enabling them to monetise their content while contributing to the local economy. Despite the promising growth, challenges remain. Many creators in smaller towns may need more access to high-quality production resources or brand partnerships.

However, as the digital infrastructure improves and brands continue to recognise the value of regional influencers, these hurdles are likely to go away. The rise of regional content creators is reshaping India's influencer

marketing ecosystem.

By tapping into local languages and cultures, these influencers are not only taking brand messages to their target audience but also democratising content creation across the nation. The rise of regional content creators is transforming India's influencer marketing landscape. By connecting with local audiences in their native languages and cultures, these influencers are expanding the reach of brands to non-metro markets. As regional content consumption grows, brands are increasingly partnering with micro and nano influencers to achieve cost-effective, relatable, and trustworthy engagement.

The growing creator economy offers significant economic opportunities, despite challenges like limited access to production resources. As digital infrastructure improves, regional influencers will continue to thrive, reshaping content creation and broadening its reach across the nation.

(The writer is Founder and CEO iCubesWire; views expressed are personal)



SAHIL CHOPRA

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Donald Trump's H-1B dilemma

As President-elect Donald Trump prepares for his second term, the debate over H-1B visas for skilled foreign workers is heating up

As the US President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office on January 20, he faces a unique challenge. The issue of immigration and the H-1B visa has become a contentious point among the two key groups. He is trying to satisfy the conflicting interests of the billionaire tech community, who heavily fund his campaigns, and his 'America First' base.

Trump's recent favourable statements on H-1B visas for foreign skilled workers have sparked renewed discussions on the future of this critical programme. The New York Post quoted Trump, "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them." He added: "I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B visas. I have used it many times. It's a great program."

Trump admitted, Trump has backed Elon Musk and his other wealthy funders from Silicon Valley (South Africa-born Musk had an H-1B visa himself). While tech leaders want a liberal H-1B visa regime, 'America First' hardliners wish for stricter restrictions on immigration at all levels. In his first term, Trump prioritised protecting American citizens' interests, which had significant implications on the H-1B visas. 'America First' advocates argue that H-1B visas take jobs away from American workers. The looming question is, will the Trump's second term may prioritise American workers' jobs, or it could revert to the traditional Republican belief that immigration primarily benefits employers. Debates arose over H-1B visas following Trump's appointment of India-born Sriram Krishnan as his advisor on artificial intelligence. It caused divisions within Trump's team—opponents of the H-1B visa claim that the immigrants take away American jobs. The intriguing question is whether a second Trump term will prioritise jobs for American workers or revert to the traditional Republican stance that immigration is pri-



marily beneficial for employers. Influential supporters like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy argue that H-1B visas are crucial for addressing the US engineers shortage. Musk, who built his empire, and Vivek Ramaswamy have strongly supported the program. Musk expressed his readiness to go to war over it. They highlight a significant skills gap in the US labour market, particularly in STEM fields.

What is an H-1B visa, and why is there such controversy surrounding it? Would India suffer if H-1B visas were eliminated? The visa system for skilled workers from other countries was introduced in 1990 by President Bush to work legally in the US. The visa is for three years. Applicants must have a job lined up with a US-based sponsoring company or institution. Since 2004, the United States has limited the number of new H-1B visas to 85,000 yearly.

This cap includes 20,000 visas for international students with advanced degrees from US universities. In the fiscal year 2023, the US approved just over 386,000 H-1B applications. For the fiscal year 2024, there were 758,994 eligible registrations, an increase from 474,421 in 2023. Most approved applicants work in



MAJOR US COMPANIES, INCLUDING TECH GIANTS LIKE AMAZON AND GOOGLE, ARE SIGNIFICANTLY SCALING BACK THEIR SPONSORSHIP OF H-1B VISAS. INDIAN IT FIRMS, INCLUDING INFOSYS AND TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES (TCS), ALSO RECORDED SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTIONS

science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The issue is more than just an economic concern; new developments in artificial intelligence and advanced computing technology make it vital for US defence and national security. India receives approximately 72 per cent of H-1B visas, while Chinese citizens account for around 12 per cent.

Eliminating country-specific caps could increase job opportunities for Indians in the United States. It is a significant concern for many prospective applicants. Major employers in the tech industry, including Indian companies like Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Wipro, represent 35 per cent of the top 10 beneficiaries of H-1B visas. Beginning with FY 2025, USCIS changed from an employer-based to a beneficiary-centric registration system, following the agency's "serious concerns" noted after the FY 2024 registration period. Amazon, the largest H-1B sponsor, saw a steep decline in approvals, dropping from over 11,000 in 2023 to just above 9,000 in 2024. Major US companies, including tech giants like Amazon and Google, are significantly scaling back their sponsorship of H-1B visas. Indian IT firms, including Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS),

also recorded substantial reductions. Not everyone wants to get rid of the visa system.

According to the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, increasing the H-1B visa cap could generate 1.3 million new jobs. It would contribute approximately \$158 billion to the US GDP by 2045. H-1B visa holders often add to the workforce instead of taking jobs from US workers. Trump's recent statement about H-1B visas has given hope to many visa seekers, especially Indians. He stated that the US needs skilled and intelligent people and promised more job opportunities. It provides a positive outlook for H-1B visas. H-1B visa holders often complement, rather than compete with, US workers. Now many H-1B visa seekers are hopeful after Trump has sided with Musk. He claimed that there was a need for skilled and intelligent workers. His promise of unprecedented job opportunities offers a positive outlook for those seeking H-1B visas. The Indian government closely monitors any backlash against Indian H-1B visa holders in the US.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUPERSTAR CULTURE HURTS INDIA

Madam — No kudos is enough for Harbhajan Singh for boldly opposing the 'superstar culture' revolving around the 'holy cows' of Indian cricket. Irfan Pathan has also done the same and also questioned the place of Virat Kohli in the team. Not only has Kohli aggregated merely 190 runs in his nine innings in the just-concluded Indo-Australia Test series, but he has averaged less than 30 over the last five years! Yet Kohli gets not only allowed to dominate in the team; a deluge of silly excuses gets bizarrely served on the lines of 'Form Temporary Class Permanent', 'A century just an innings away', and "Stop criticising; runs will come!"

And to render a damn lie to 'ultimate truth' through constant repetition, some former stars have started shouting, "Kohli has still 4-5 years of glorious cricket in him!" But if one is not a 'superstar', we get Wridhiman Saha! So even after saving India from an imminent defeat in the Kanpur Test against New Zealand, that too by overcoming the unbearable pain of a stiff neck, Saha (then reigning as the world's best wicketkeeper) was clearly conveyed publicly, even when the Test was still on, that he is not in the team's 'scheme of things!' So in this biased, prejudiced setup, it is highly natural that this 'gallant show' of failures is sure to go on unless the 'superstar' culture is made to see its immediate end!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

JUSTIN TRUDEAU QUITS

Madam — The editorial 'Trudeau steps down' (Jan 8) highlights the domestic political reasons, economic failure and discontent in his own Liberal party for his resignation. In fact, Justin Trudeau scripted his own exit. His diplomatic blunders are also potential reasons for his resignation. He unnecessarily antagonised India for gaining Sikh support in elections without realising that the Khalistani movement is a secessionist and a hostile agitation that has the least support in India. He admittedly had no proof of the involvement of

Cashless treatment for road accident victims



As per the report titled "National Strategy for Prevention of Unintentional Injury," there were 430,504 deaths from unintentional injuries and 170,924 deaths due to intentional injuries in India. Despite efforts to improve road safety, India continues to grapple with a high number of fatalities due to road traffic injuries. It is unfortunate. The government of India, in line with its commitment to reduce fatalities, launched a pilot programme in Chandigarh in March 2024 to provide cashless treatment to the victims of road accidents caused by the use of motor vehi-

cles. The aim of this scheme was to establish an ecosystem for providing timely medical care to the victims of road accidents, including during the golden hour.

As per the scheme, the victims will be entitled to cashless treatment up to a maximum of 1.5 lakh rupees per accident per person for a maximum of 7 days from the date of the accident. It is applicable to all road accidents caused by the use of a motor vehicle on any category of road. Claims raised by hospitals for providing treatment to be remembered from the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund. The pilot programme was later expanded to six states. The scheme is going to be implemented nationwide from March 2025, as announced by Nitin Gadkari, Central Minister for Road Transport. It is really a welcome move. Certainly, lives of more accident victims will be saved.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

Indian agencies, yet he continued to blame India for the Nijjar murder case and promote and protect the extremist Pannu. His open support for Khalistani extremist elements eroded his credibility worldwide, as the Indian diaspora, including Sikh brethren, are peacefully living on all the continents, and only a few in Canada support Khalistan.

Trudeau gambled in vain. India observed utmost diplomatic restraint against Trudeau's anti-India statements on Khalistani extremists. It is true that no extremist or terrorist group dares to surge without government support, as it needs media, judiciary, police, and diplomatic support and funding for its secessionist, hatred, divisive, and violent activities. Canada provided all these facilities to the Khalistani extremists. Now the Trudeau tenure is over, the Khalistani extremists may not have a favourable time in Canada, and all false allegations against India in the Nizzar murder case will meet a logical end, and hardcore elements like Pannu will not be supported by the state. The Trudeau exit should be a lesson to

those foreign leaders who are inciting and supporting anti-national organisations in India.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

SALARY INCREMENTS DELAYED

Madam — Economic instability and the tendency of customers to reduce expenses have compelled major IT companies to postpone salary increments. This step by reputed firms like Infosys and LTI Mindtree is an effort to maintain financial balance, but its long-term impact could be severe.

A blow to employees' morale may lead to a decline in their creativity and efficiency. Additionally, measures like layoffs and reduction in workdays could create insecurity among the workforce. It is essential for companies to take balanced decisions that ensure financial stability while considering the human aspect, paving the way for holistic growth.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN STOP BLAMING, START AIMING

Blame is an easy escape when life doesn't go as planned, but it's also a barrier to personal growth



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Every man is the architect of his own life; hence one can easily say that we all try to make our lives just the way we want them to be, however, when something goes wrong, we immediately start looking out for someone or something to blame instead of changing ourselves to better the situation. It's a fact that we all spend too much of our time and energy in finding people to blame for all the problems in our life. But why do we need to blame someone? Because we want to redeem ourselves of the guilt of doing something wrong by justifying it, therefore internally we pass on the responsibility of our behaviour to a person, situation or an external factor. Doesn't that sound very normal? Well!!! It may be to the majority of us, but while playing this game of blaming, we forget that as per the Law of Karma, the one who changes himself first is the one who gets the gift of happiness. Hence if we are seekers of peace and happiness, then we have to change ourselves and not wait for others to do so. Blaming others happens due to a lack of vision to recognise and accept our faults and laziness in making amendments.



Gradually it becomes a habit of lethargy in a royal disguise. Usually, we blame others for our misery because we feel that things could have been better if the other person behaved properly with us, but we fail to understand the very fact that every action has an opposite and equal reaction, hence instead of looking at self, we always struggle to set the opposite person right.

When we are unable to find someone to blame, we end up blaming the situation. However, while doing so, we forget the fact that all the situations in our life are our creations, hence according to Karma Philosophy whatever we are experiencing currently is the result of an action, word or thought manifested sometime earlier. And now when it is time for us to repay, we should readily do it with courage & settle our karmic account to experience a burden-free state of mind. Right?

When the above two factors i.e. blaming someone or something don't work, the despaired human soul goes to the extent of blaming the Almighty because he feels that since everything in the world happens by the will of the Supreme, his plight is also an outcome of God's desire. Quite funny, isn't it? But we all indulge in such pastime activity daily. Remember! We all are actors who fall under the law of karma & perform actions to derive fruit out of it. Almighty never gets a share out of it.

As our teacher & guide, HE can teach, and make us understand, but HE cannot appear in the exam for us. Hence, we have to take all the tests of life by ourselves with full confidence. For a spiritual aspirant, unpleasant situations are examinations of life that are necessary to elevate one's spiritual stage & help in leaping forward in self-progress. Hence, we must not miss the opportunity to snap the web that we have all created with rationalization. Whether we fail or pass in these examinations doesn't matter much, what counts is the courage & vigour with which we face these examinations. For spiritual evolution, the habit of blaming is one of the major obstacles simply because the first rule of spirituality is observing one's self and not the others.

Hence it is very important to take responsibility for the experiences we undergo & make a conscious effort to do the right and be honest and accountable to ourselves because deceiving ourselves will only take us further away from spiritual liberation. So!! Stop blaming and start aiming because when you blame others, you give up your power to change. (Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

India's forests: Gains, gaps and the way forward



B K SINGH

The report underscores the need for robust monitoring, effective execution of plantation drives and third-party certification of carbon stock to meet India's climate commitments



Forest Survey of India has been releasing biannual reports on the status of Indian forests. The last report was released on December 31, 2021, and the current report which was due in December 2023, has been released after a year's delay. The highlight of the report is that total forest cover has been increased from 7,15,187 square km (2021 assessment) to 7,15,343 square km (current assessment), which is now 21.76 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. Also, the tree cover, which comprises trees along the linear infrastructures and also in agricultural fields up to one hectare is increased by 1289 square km, which is 3.41 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. The net increase of forest cover and tree cover is 1445 square km in two years period till 2023.

The increase in forest cover is a meager 156 square km. Among the states that have gained maximum increase in forest cover are Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. A maximum decrease in forest cover has been noticed in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Ladakh and Nagaland. Recorded Forest / Green Wash areas (RFA/GW) are the forests in control of the forest department. While Mizoram, Odisha, Karnataka, West Bengal and Jharkhand have added in RFA/GW areas and the forest cover has increased, Tripura, Telangana, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have lost. It indicates that states are losing their recorded forests. Villages on the fringes of the forests have been burning tree growth and occupying forest land with the support of local leaders and to claim it under the Forest Rights Act, of 2006. Improper implementation of the Forest Rights Act, of 2006 can be attributed to the reason for the loss of forests for agriculture. All the states have been taking up ambitious plantation programmes to increase forest cover and tree cover. The degraded forest areas are being planted regularly.

Taking a conservative estimate, a minimum of 18,000 square km area is being planted annually in the country; should



THE NET INCREASE OF FOREST COVER AND TREE COVER IS 1445 SQUARE KM IN TWO YEARS PERIOD TILL 2023. THE INCREASE IN FOREST COVER IS A MEAGER 156 SQUARE KM. AMONG THE STATES THAT HAVE GAINED MAXIMUM INCREASE IN FOREST COVER ARE UTTAR PRADESH, RAJASTHAN, CHHATTISGARH AND ODISHA

it not be reflected in this report? How can we justify a 7 square km increase in two years in RFA? It only indicates that deforestation and degradation are taking place at the same pace, we are planting the areas. Such an important report should contain an assessment of the success of plantations across the states. Forest cover outside RFA has increased in Gujarat, Bihar, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Assam, while it has been lost in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Loss of cover outside RFA is on account of the failure of the administration of the Revenue department of the state. States should put greater vigil on such forests.

These are the carbon sinks and in the era of a warming world, we cannot afford to plunder tree growth even outside RFA. The bright spot in the report is the success of the agroforestry programme. Most states have lost forest cover, but have gained in tree cover. This means that tree plantation programmes on private lands/community lands have been largely successful. Trees on government lands can be cut and destroyed, but the same cannot be done on private lands. In this period of two years, very dense forests increased by 3465.12 square km, while moderately dense forests and open forests have decreased by 1043.23 square km and 2480.11 square km respectively. Forest departments' efforts in taking up plantations in open and degraded areas appear to have shown some success. A large chunk of open and degraded areas has been re-stocked, which has pushed it into the very dense forest category.

But a simple arithmetic indicates that 58 square km of forests have been lost. Most probably, several small plots taken from forests on the fringes of the villages must

have been encroached on for agriculture and eventually community members had an intention to claim rights over it. Decadal changes in forest cover in Western Ghats eco-sensitive areas have also been brought out in the report. It is found that 58.22 square km of cover is lost in ten years. How can we forget the 30th July tragedy that struck Wayanad, Kerala? Nearly 500 humans were buried under landslide debris when they were asleep.

It also damaged roads, bridges, buildings and human houses. Landslides in portions of Karnataka and Maharashtra across the Western Ghats have disrupted lives and livelihoods. Losing 58 square km in ten years means losing nearly 6 square km annually. We need to mend our ways and cannot afford to lose any tree growth in such eco-sensitive areas. Mangroves in the country along the coastline protect against tsunamis, cyclones and Sea surges of any kind. The report indicates that out of 4991 square km of mangroves 7.5 square km is lost in two years. While Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra together have added 25 square km of mangroves, Gujarat has lost 36 square km. On the western coast Gujarat is the most vulnerable state against frequent and destructive cyclones, how can it afford to lose such a big chunk of mangrove forests?

Other coastal states are reportedly expanding their mangroves by taking up large-scale planting, but the report does not show any increase. There has to be an enquiry as to why mangrove plantation programs are failing. Another highlight of the report is that the growing stock of carbon in the forests is 7285 Mt, and comparing it with the 2021 report there is an increase of 81.5 Mt in two years. Thus our forests are adding 40.75 Mt of carbon annually,

which is like 149 Mt of CO2 equivalent annually. Comparing it with the report of 2005, the growth in forests has created a carbon sink of 2.29 billion tons of CO2 equivalent compared to the 2005 level. To contain the average global rise in temperature within 1.50 Celsius, we have committed in our nationally determined contribution to achieve a carbon sink of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tons of CO2 equivalent by 2030 in response to the Paris Climate Accord of 2015. We are on course to achieve the target well before 2030. I suppose we need a third-party assessment for carbon stock in our forests. Carbon credit has been quite a contentious issue and in several annual climate conferences, UNFCCC has failed to find a resolution. However, for the first time at Baku CoP 29, a resolution has been achieved. It has allowed countries to trade carbon credits - certified reductions of carbon emissions at prices determined as a consequence of emission caps imposed.

It has also been agreed that the operations of the carbon market would be supervised by the UN body. Strict UN control is needed, as a project proponent in the developed nation can pay for an afforestation project to absorb 1000 tons of CO2 in a developing nation where trees fail to put in desired growth and are unable to sequester the entire quantity of carbon credited. Therefore, the carbon sink created by us through our interventions in forest growth needs certification from the UN body. The report in future should take into account the plantation programs each state is implementing and measure the change in the cover concerning the success/ failure of plantations.

(The writer is retired Principal chief conservator of forests, head of Forest Force, Karnataka. Views expressed are personal)

Mahakumbh 2025: A spiritual confluence of faith, wisdom and Sahaj Smriti Yog The Mahakumbh invites millions to experience a celestial confluence of rivers, spirituality and wisdom

The Mahakumbh at Prayagraj, commencing on January 13, 2025, promises a celestial confluence of rivers, minds, and spirituality. This ancient gathering is a tribute to India's cultural and spiritual heritage, drawing millions of pilgrims and seekers worldwide. This year, the Mahakumbh assumes greater significance as it hosts a 'Samagam' (gathering) of seers and spiritual leaders to discuss Guru Nand Kishore's book, Sahaj Smriti Yog (An Impactful Form of Yoga and Meditation) and his teachings on Sanatan Dharma, spirituality and meditation.



B K JHA

self-realisation. It guides individuals to transition from clear thinking to transcending thought, unveiling inner peace and clarity. Gurujee emphasizes that rediscovering one's true self involves uncovering innate purity and harmony. In Sahaj Smriti Yog, Gurujee delves into the alignment of

this practice with the eternal principles of Sanatan Dharma, which sees truth as timeless and unchanging. The Mahakumbh's spiritual energy provides an ideal setting for this exploration. Guru Nand Kishore's interpretation of Sanatan Dharma underscores timeless wisdom, essential for spiritual pursuits. He highlights Guru Parampara (the lineage of spiritual masters) as vital for spiritual evolution, stating, "Sanatan Dharma offers solutions before problems arise—a clarity achievable through meditation or Samadhi." This wisdom, he explains, allowed ancient seers to provide fearless counsel to rulers. Central to Sahaj Smriti Yog is the Guru's role as a mirror reflecting the seeker's inner

self. Guru Nand Kishore asserts that true Gurus cannot self-proclaim; they are identified by seekers who trust their guidance. He warns against false spiritual leaders, emphasising that genuine Guru help dissolve ego, a prerequisite for enlightenment. Trust, he stresses, forms the foundation of the Guru-disciple relationship—a value modern society must urgently rediscover. The philosophy of Sahaj Smriti Yog is rooted in simplicity and universality, making it accessible to all. Unlike practices advocating detachment, it encourages embracing life's responsibilities fully. Transformation arises not by escaping reality but by engaging with it deeply and meaningfully. This approach fosters



spiritual growth while remaining grounded in daily life. The practice is built on three principles: understanding, experiencing, and feeling. Understanding cultivates self-awareness through intelligence and emotions. Experiencing transforms life's events into opportunities for growth. Feeling connects prac-

tioners with ultimate reality, transcending superficial existence to access profound essence. What sets Sahaj Smriti Yog apart is its non-coercive nature. It doesn't demand rigorous discipline or thought suppression but gently guides the mind to a state of deep peace and harmony. Practitioners effortlessly rediscover inner stillness and clarity. Guru Nand Kishore's vision extends to societal harmony. The Darpan Foundation and its ashram in Noorundumalai, Tamil Nadu, embody this philosophy. The ashram is a sanctuary for exploring Sahaj Smriti Yog principles, emphasising sustainability and holistic living. Gurujee advocates conscious choices, such as

supporting locally grown food, to nourish both individuals and the planet. The Mahakumbh provides an unparalleled platform for spiritual exchange. The 'Samagam' on Sahaj Smriti Yog will explore trust, humility, and spiritual growth. Guru Nand Kishore's teachings offer a roadmap for resolving global conflicts by fostering trust and reducing ego-driven blindness. He believes peace begins with personal transformation, replacing arrogance with clarity and humility. As humanity faces division and mistrust, Gurujee's Sahaj Smriti Yog serves as a beacon of hope, offering paths to personal enlightenment and collective harmony. The Mahakumbh amplifies this

message, inviting individuals from all walks of life on a transformative journey. Through the lens of Sahaj Smriti Yog, the Mahakumbh celebrates eternal spirituality, where ancient wisdom meets contemporary relevance. It calls humanity to embrace simplicity, sustainability, and spiritual clarity. As millions gather at Prayagraj to witness the confluence of rivers, Sahaj Smriti Yog reminds us that true peace begins within. Gurujee's words, "Clarity gives you power," encapsulate the transformative potential of this timeless practice. Let Mahakumbh 2025 be a milestone in redefining spirituality for a harmonious world. (The writer is a senior journalist. Views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



BHEL commissions PHEP-2 project in Bhutan

Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited has successfully commissioned two units of the 6x170 MW Punatsangchu-II Hydroelectric Project (PHEP-II) in Bhutan. Executed as part of a bilateral agreement between the Indian and Bhutanese governments, PHEP-II is a greenfield hydro project located in the Wangdue district of Western Bhutan, a BHEL press release said. Significantly, the Francis Turbine installed in the project is designed to operate at a rated head of 241 metres – the highest for any Francis Type Hydro Turbine in Bhutan. On commissioning of all six units, the expected annual power generation will be 4,357 gigawatt-hours, the release said. Unit 1 and 2 of the 6x170 MW PHEP-II were synchronised on December 16 and 17, 2024, respectively.



Mouri Tech, Amanta Healthcare scrap IPO plans

Solution provider Mouri Tech and Ahmedabad-based pharmaceutical company Amanta Healthcare have withdrawn their initial public offerings (IPOs). The companies had filed their Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) for the proposed IPO in September-October 2024 with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). However, the draft offer documents for the IPOs were withdrawn in December last year and the reasons for the withdrawal have not been disclosed, an update with Sebi showed on Wednesday. Going by the draft papers of Hyderabad-based Mouri Tech's proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 440 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of shares worth Rs 1,060 crore by promoters and an existing shareholder. Under the OFS, promoters Sujai Paturu and Anil Reddy Yerrareddy will sell shares worth Rs 615 crore and Rs 316 crore, respectively. Further, existing shareholder Srinivasu Rao Sandaka intends to offload equity shares valued at Rs 129 crore.



ONGC market valuation surges Rs 9,749.72 cr

Shares of ONGC climbed 3 per cent on Wednesday, on a day when UK's BP Plc won a bid for ONGC's giant Mumbai High oil and gas field, offering to raise crude oil production by 44 per cent and natural gas by a staggering 89 per cent over a 10-year period. The stock went up by 2.94 per cent to settle at Rs 271.25 on the BSE. During the day, it rallied 3.77 per cent to Rs 273.45. At the NSE, shares of the firm jumped 3 per cent to Rs 271.50. The company's market valuation surged Rs 9,749.72 crore to Rs 3,41,240.07 crore. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in a stock exchange filing said it has selected BP Exploration (Alpha) Ltd, a wholly-owned step-down subsidiary of BP Plc, as the Technical Service Provider (TSP) for raising production in the field. ONGC had in June last year floated a tender seeking foreign partners to reverse declining output at its flagship Mumbai High fields, offering a share of revenue from incremental production plus a fixed fee but not any equity stake.

India should build foundational models for AI: Nadella

Says investment is real entry barrier

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India must get into frontier work in artificial intelligence and build foundational models, but investment is a real entry barrier and just one mathematical breakthrough can change entire dynamics, Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said here on Wednesday.

are very fantastic math team and algorithms team.

"Let's not be bound, quite frankly, with what is considered frontier. So I would say India definitely should also do frontier work. Also use the frontier in order to, post training, to make it great for Indic languages, make it great for

During his second day of Microsoft India AI Tour, Nadella said that India can do great work in the area of Indic languages and transforming its industries using artificial intelligence.

"There's no reason why India can't do frontier work, but you can even define frontier pretty unique. So for example, I don't think the last known big breakthrough in AI frontier has happened. I always say we are one mathematical breakthrough away from that entire edifice being thrown out and being going after something else," Nadella said.

He said academics in India, the research institutions, including Microsoft Research,



Indian industry, and so on," Nadella said.

In response to a question by additional secretary in the IT ministry Abhishek Singh on whether India should build its own AI foundational model, Nadella said that India always has an option to do that but the real entry barrier in making foundational models is investment.

He said the other way to look at the investment barrier is to lower the cost with the help of research, which is always open for India.

GDP growth likely to be 6.3 %, tad below govt estimates: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The GDP growth is expected to be about 6.3 per cent in the current fiscal year, a tad lower than the government's estimates of 6.4 per cent, owing to several factors such as weak demand, SBI research report said on Wednesday.

According to the first advance estimates (FAE) of National Income for 2024-25 released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), released on Tuesday, India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25, because of poor showing by the manufacturing and subdued investments.

Historically, the difference between the estimates of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the NSO is always in the range of 20-30 bps and hence the 6.4 per cent estimate for the 2024-25 fiscal year is along expected and reasonable lines, the SBI's research report 'Ecowrap' said.

"We, however, believe that GDP (gross domestic product) growth for FY25 could be around 6.3 per cent, with downward bias," it said.

The report authored by Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Group Chief Economic Adviser, State Bank of India (SBI), also said as per capita nominal GDP is



expected to increase significantly in the current fiscal ending March 2025, by Rs 35,000 more than 2022-23, despite a slowdown in real GDP growth and nominal GDP growth remaining almost stagnant.

The FAE of the GDP in general shows a slowdown in aggregate demand in 2024-25, it said.

The heads that have positively contributed include government consumption with a growth of 8.5 per cent in nominal terms (4.1 per cent in real terms). Exports have also held the fort with positive growth of 8 per cent (5.9 per cent in real

terms). The worrying aspect of the demand is marked slowdown in gross capital formation, SBI's study said, adding that the capital formation nominal growth declined 270 bps to 7.2 per cent.

"...overall picture is that demand remains weak and sequential slowdown in FY25 at 6.4 per cent is an outer limit while the actual growth is definitely below the estimated figure," it said.

The report further said that the fiscal deficit at the end of November 2024 stood at Rs 8.5 lakh crore, or 52.5 per cent of the Budget Estimates (BE).

However, taking into account the revised GDP figures, if tax receipts grow by the BE, government expenditure lowered due to low CAPEX then fiscal deficit will be 4.9 per cent of the GDP in 2024-25, SBI's research said.

While, if government sticks to the fiscal deficit of Rs 16.1 lakh crore, then with the revised GDP numbers, the deficit as per cent of GDP would be at 5 per cent in 2024-25, the report said.

In the Union Budget, the government projected to bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.9 per cent of the GDP in the current financial year.

LIC's BSY records over 50,000 registrations within one month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bima Sakhi Yojana of LIC has seen over 50,000 registrations within a month of its launch by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an initiative towards Viksit Bharat through women empowerment.

After completion of one month since the inauguration, the total registration for Bima Sakhi is 52,511 of which 27,695 Bima Sakhis have been issued appointment letters to sell policies and 14,583 Bima Sakhis have started selling policies, LIC said in a statement on Wednesday.

Speaking about the development LIC Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Siddhartha Mohanty said, "It is our objective to cover each panchayat of the country with at least one Bima Sakhi within one year." LIC is strengthening the Bima Sakhi stream by grooming women with appropriate skills and empowering them with robust digital tools, he said.

Hybrid technology key to small farmers' growth: P K Mishra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hybrid crop technology can play a crucial role to address the unique challenges faced by the agricultural sector, particularly in supporting small-holding farmers who comprise 88 per cent of the agricultural workforce, helping India become a developed nation by 2047, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister P K Mishra said on Wednesday.

Despite agriculture's share in GDP declining from 42 per cent in 1977 to 18 per cent in

2023-24, the sector remains critical for inclusive growth with 46 per cent of India's workforce still dependent on it, compared to 70 per cent in 1977.

"For becoming a developed country, we need to have not only higher rate of economic growth but the growth should be inclusive and sustainable," Mishra said addressing a national symposium organised by Trust for Advancement of Agricultural

Sciences (TAAS) here.

"The agriculture sector plays an important role in making growth inclusive and equitable." India's agricultural growth has shown remarkable acceleration, reaching an unprecedented annual growth rate of 5 per cent during 2016-17 to 2022-23, with significant contributions from livestock (5.8 per cent) and fisheries (9 per cent). However, structural challenges persist. The



number of small farmers has increased to 146 million in 2015-16, with average holding size shrinking from 2.8 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.08 hectares. ICAR projects agriculture's GDP share will further decrease to 7 per cent by 2050, while still employing 27 per cent of the workforce.

"Hybrid technology can play a crucial role in addressing these structural challenges," the official said, emphasising its potential to boost productivity and profitability for small-holding farmers.

Expect RBI to cut interest rates next month: CII

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII expects the RBI to cut the benchmark interest rates next month to support sagging growth, its President Sanjiv Puri said on Wednesday and stressed the need to boost job creation through targeted interventions for labour-intensive sectors in the upcoming Budget.

Puri flagged "sticky" food inflation, highlighting the need to build agricultural resilience.

Gold reclaims Rs 80,000-mark; silver rallies Rs 500

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices reclaimed the Rs 80,000-level in the national capital on Wednesday driven by increased buying from jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity rose Rs 300 to touch nearly a one-month of Rs 80,000 per 10 grams. It settled at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams in the previous session on Tuesday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 300 to Rs 79,600 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The yellow metal finished at Rs 79,300 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Extending its winning run for the third

day, silver prices also jumped Rs 500 to hit almost a month high of Rs 92,500 per kg. The white metal had closed at Rs 92,000 per kg in the previous market session.

Traders attributed the rise in increased demand from jewellers and retailers in local markets. On the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery appreciated Rs 43 to Rs 77,574 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for March delivery increased Rs 224, or 0.25 per cent, to Rs 91,097 per kg in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Comex gold futures slipped 0.09 per cent to USD 2,663.10 per ounce in the international markets.

Markets settle marginally lower on muted GDP growth projection

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile session on Wednesday, as investors stayed on the sidelines ahead of the earnings season amid lower economic growth projections.

Besides, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows also dented sentiments.

However, buying in bellwether stocks TCS and Reliance Industries managed to restrict a steep decline in markets, traders said.

The 30-share BSE bench-

mark Sensex fell 50.62 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 78,148.49. During the day, it dropped 712.32 points or 0.91 per cent to 77,486.79.

The NSE Nifty skidded 18.95 points or 0.08 per cent to 23,688.95.

"Slowing economic growth projections and caution ahead of Q3 numbers added volatility in the market. However, the market witnessed a recovery from the day's low owing to the accumulation of beaten-down blue-chip stocks and in expect-

tation of government reforms in the upcoming budget to lift the tepid economy.

"The near-term sentiment is likely to be subdued due to the rise in US bond yield and fear of fewer rate cuts by the Fed," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharma, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, NTPC and State Bank of India were the

major laggards.

Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, ITC, Asian Paints, HCL Tech and Maruti were among the gainers. "IT stocks to be in focus as Tata Consultancy Services is set to kick-start the Q3 earning season with its results tomorrow. While revenue for the IT giant is expected to remain impacted by furloughs, client-specific challenges are likely to normalize in 3Q. Its EBIT margin may improve, driven by talent development, training, and operational efficiency. Rising crude prices led to buying interest in upstream oil & gas companies.

'Budget should focus on tax reforms, reduction in personal I-T'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Budget is expected to focus on boosting private capex, tax simplification and reduction in personal income tax, particularly for the lower-income groups, to stimulate demand, EY India said.

The Union Budget for 2025-26 is scheduled to be presented in Parliament on February 1.

EY India, in its Budget expectation note, said with over Rs 31 lakh crore stuck in income tax disputes as of 2023-24, there is an urgent need to clear Commissioner of Income

Tax (Appeals) backlog and bolster alternate dispute resolution mechanisms like advance pricing agreements and safe harbours.

"While a full comprehensive revision of the direct tax code may take time, we might see some initial steps towards its implementation in this Budget. I also hope for a reduction in personal income tax, particularly for the lower-income groups, to provide relief and stimulate demand," said Sameer Gupta, National Tax Leader, EY India.

EY said the expectations from Budget are focused on a



set of strategic reforms that can propel the economy forward. With an emphasis on fiscal consolidation, tax system simplification, and investment-driven growth, the Budget is

expected to lay a solid foundation for sustained economic development.

EY anticipates significant reforms to simplify the tax system and improve taxpayer ser-

vices, reduce litigation, and enhance tax compliance.

The government is already working on simplifying the Income Tax laws. It should follow a consultative approach and invite public comments on the draft proposals, EY said.

"Key areas of focus are likely to include enhancing public spending, reducing the fiscal deficit, incentivising private sector investment, and introducing targeted tax reforms that foster business innovation," EY said.

In the last Budget, government had rationalised the capital gains structure in terms of

holding period of assets and tax rates. The government may further address some of the unintended anomalies to make the rationalisation of capital gains more complete, EY said.

For instance, the holding period for capital assets, such as business undertakings in slump sales may be reduced from 36 months to 24 months and unlisted shares in IPO offer for sale (OFS) from 2 years to 1 year, aligning them with listed securities.

Gupta further said for businesses, particularly SMEs, reducing the complexity of tax compliance is critical.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
'E' PROCUREMENT NOTICE
 Short NIT No. 45/SE/MS/Sec-Bad Zone/GHMC/2024-25. Date: 07.01.2025
 No. of Works: 2 works, Estimated amount: Rs. 142.00 Lakhs. Bid Submission Start Date & Time: 08.01.2025 @ 01.00 PM. Bid Submission Closing Date & Time: 15.01.2025 @ 01.00 PM. Name & Address of Officer Cell No.: SE, Sec-Bad Zone, GHMC, Cell No. 9491642490 / 8009065855. Further details can be seen at <https://www.tender.telanganagov.in> Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Secunderabad Zone, GHMC
 B.O. No. 8548-PPCL/ADVT/112024-25, Dt. 05-01-2025

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER
 hmda
 East Wing, 7th Floor, Bawa Jagdish Commercial Complex, Amargat, HYDERABAD-500038.
e - Procurement Tender Notice
 NIT. No.HMDA/DEVICE/15 (2024-25) Date: 02.01.2025
 Tenders are invited on a procurement from valid Registered Contractors for the following works

S.No	Name of Work	Tender Inviting authority	Last date of submission
1	Calling of tenders for the work Annual Maintenance of LED street lighting at ROB Sakatpally Flyover, Hi-tech City Flyover and Begunthur Road for the period of 24-months.	Chief Engineer, HMDA	24.01.2025 @ 03:00 PM

 For Further details visit <https://tenders.telanganagov.in> Sd/- Chief Engineer, HMDA
 DPR R.O. No. : 867-PPCL-AGENCY/ADVT/112024-25

SOUTHERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF TELANGANA LIMITED
'E' PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
 New Specification numbers of 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for SC, 8024-25, 8024-25, 8024-25 (Reserved for ST), 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for SC, 8024-25, 8024-25, 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for ST, 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for SC & 8024-25 of CE/Op/Rural Zone are as follows:-
 Details are: New Specification numbers of 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for SC, 8024-25, 8024-25, 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for ST, 8024-25, 8024-25/Reserved for SC & 8024-25 of CE/Op/Rural Zone are as follows:-

1.	Bid download starts from	09.01.2025 from 14:00 Hrs.
2.	Bid download closing date & time online	28.01.2025 up to 14:30 Hrs.
3.	Bid submission Last date & time	28.01.2025 up to 14:30 Hrs.
4.	Last Date & Time for hard copies along with ODS/Bids	23.01.2025 at 14:00 Hrs.
5.	Technical Bid opening date & time	23.01.2025 at 15:00 Hrs.
6.	Price Bid Opening date & Time	28.01.2025 at 15:00 Hrs.

 Details are: First Extension of Specification number of 8024-25 (Reserved for SC) CE/Op/Rural Zone are as follows:-

1.	Bid download starts from	09.01.2025 from 14:00 Hrs.
2.	Bid download closing date & time online	28.01.2025 up to 14:30 Hrs.
3.	Bid submission Last date & time	28.01.2025 up to 14:30 Hrs.
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6.	Price Bid Opening date & Time	28.01.2025 at 15:00 Hrs.

 For further details please visit: www.tender.telanganagov.in or www.spdcstppower.com and contact O/s the CE/Op/Rural Zone, Gaganwari, Nampally, Hyderabad. Ph.No.649-2991311.
 Sd/- Chief Engineer, Operation, Rural Zone, B.O. No. 8832-PPCL/ADVT/112024-25, Dt. 08-01-2025
 TGSPDCL, Gagan Wari, Nampally, Hyderabad.

Where love & care rewrite the lives of HIV+ve orphans

VAISHNAVI TIKKA
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In a world that often dismisses the vulnerable, Palawi stands as a beacon of hope and a testament to the transformative power of compassion. Founded in 2001 by the dynamic mother-daughter duo Mangal Shah and Dimple Ghadge, this organisation has redefined the lives of HIV-positive children. What began as a modest effort in a small shed with just two abandoned girls has blossomed into a sanctuary for over 150 children. With its foundation rooted in love, they have touched the lives of more than 6,000 children, ensuring they receive shelter, education, healthcare and dignity.

Their journey is not just about providing care—it's about defying societal prejudices and rewriting the narrative for children who are often stigmatised. In an exclusive conversation, Dimple Ghadge, founder secretary of Palawi, shared the story behind this extraordinary endeavor. "In 2001, we found two abandoned girl children. When we took them to the hospital, they were diagnosed as HIV-positive. That moment changed everything for us. We started working with people in red-light areas, and that's how Palawi was born," she recounted.

Today, they operate from three buildings, providing a safe haven for children of all age groups. Its logo—a growing sapling—symbolises the organisations

Founded in 2001 by the determined mother-daughter duo Mangal Shah and Dimple Ghadge, Palawi has become a beacon of hope for HIV-positive children. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Dimple takes us through their noble cause



mission to nurture these children and help them thrive. However, the path to this success was fraught with challenges.

"People around us often asked, 'Why are you protecting such children who will die soon?'" Dimple revealed. Yet, these questions only strengthened their resolve. Education became a critical focus area. "Providing food and shelter was not enough. Schools refused to admit HIV-positive children and even when one agreed, there was blatant discrimination. That's when we decided to start our own school, Gyaan Mandir, affiliated with the Maharashtra Board in 2013. We even opened its doors to underprivileged non-

HIV students," she said.

Healthcare posed another significant challenge. To ensure the children received adequate medical attention, Palawi established its own medical unit. The organization also goes beyond traditional care by emphasising skill development. "Once a child turns 14, they are encouraged to pursue arts or crafts like candle-making and stitching. The money they earn is saved for their future education," she explained, adding that creativity knows no boundaries or prejudices. One of their most heartwarming initiatives is the Palak-Balak program, where an older child takes responsibility for a younger one. "For

instance, a 15-year-old might take care of a 2-year-old, ensuring they're safe and happy. This builds a bond of love and responsibility. Every night, the elder child writes a note to the younger one, fostering a unique connection," she shared.

Funding, too, has seen an evolution. "Initially, we relied solely on individual contributions. As awareness about our work grew, we began receiving international funding from organisations like CAF America and explored crowdfunding avenues," she highlighted.

The success stories from Palawi are a source of immense pride and inspiration. She shared one such story: "Two years ago, our students were barred from participating in a district-level sports competition. We pleaded for them to be allowed, even if they didn't win. Out of 15 sports events, our children emerged victorious in 13. It was a proud moment that silenced many critics."

Despite the obstacles, they have achieved a remarkable milestone: zero mortality under the Prabha Hira Pratishtan initiative. "Looking at the successful results of what you work hard for makes it feel worth it," she shared, her voice filled with pride.

Palawi's story is a powerful reminder that love, determination and a belief in the fundamental rights of every individual can overcome even the harshest challenges. It is not just an organisation; it is a family where children grow, thrive, and dream of a brighter future. As Dimple concluded, "We are here to give these children a life of dignity, and we will continue to fight for their right to live, grow, and succeed."

This is the heart of Palawi—a place where hope finds a home, and lives are transformed every single day.

48 HOURS OF NO SLEEP SHOOTING IN LUCKNOW!

It was 'exhausting yet rewarding' for Nidhi Singh

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Nidhi Singh's journey from Allahabad to becoming one of the most versatile talents in the entertainment industry is a captivating story of resilience and passion. With each role she takes on, Nidhi has not only proven her ability to adapt and grow but also her commitment to delivering authentic and powerful performances. In her latest project, *Moonwalk*, she steps into a character that challenges her like never before — one that is unpredictable, complex and thrilling. In this in-depth conversation with *The Pioneer*, the *Apharan* fame shares her experiences, the preparation behind her role and what it truly means to be a part of a project that pushes her to explore new dimensions as an actor.

Reflecting on her journey in the industry, Nidhi says, "I honestly feel it's just begun. Every single project feels as new and exciting as the first time I faced the camera." For her, the thrill of acting lies in the constant evolution and the opportunities to work with creative minds. "It's really lovely when the people you're collaborating with—be it the writers, directors, producers, co-actors, or crew—are aware of what you've done. But I still approach every project as a clean canvas."

Despite her success, she remains grounded about the ups and downs of her career. "The journey is never all smooth; there are days when it gets frustrating. But you hold on, look ahead and keep moving. Being a part of this industry, which once seemed like a far-fetched dream for someone from Allahabad like me, feels surreal."

Talking about her latest project *Moonwalk*, she shares how she was introduced to the script. "It was sheer luck. I had worked on a series, and through that, I was called in for a meeting. When they mentioned *Moonwalk*, I thought it might be something related to dance. I was thrilled initially, thinking I'd get to tap into my teenage love for dancing. But as I read the script, I realised it was a high-stakes comedy-drama, and I was hooked."

While Nidhi assumed she'd be auditioning for the character of Asma, she was pleasantly surprised when director Ajay Singh insisted she was perfect for the role of Chandni. "When he said Chandni, I couldn't believe it. I was sitting there in a casual T-shirt and pants, but he was convinced. It was thrilling and daunting because Chandni is unlike any character I've played before."

She describes the character as a complex and layered character. "She's manipulative, cryptic and thrillingly unpredictable. Playing such a character makes you question a lot about human nature. She's not an outright villain, but her moral fabric is questionable. She's defiant, doesn't tolerate nonsense and

From navigating the bustling streets of Lucknow during live shoots to embracing the complexities of her character Chandni in *Moonwalk*, Nidhi Singh offers a glimpse into the world behind her screen persona and her love for the art, in an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*

does what she wants without second-guessing. It's freeing and challenging to play someone so different from myself."

Preparing for her role required the *Mission Mars* star to step out of her comfort zone. "Chandni is super disciplined, into yoga and presents herself perfectly at all times—qualities I don't naturally embody. I had to physically and mentally align myself with her. Getting into the physicality of a character helps tap into their mindset. I trained rigorously, and somewhere along the way, I even started enjoying it!"

Since the character had no detailed backstory in the script, she crafted her own as an acting exercise. "While the audience won't get much insight into why Chandni is the way she is, I needed something to anchor myself. I created a backstory to help me bring conviction to her actions."

The shooting process for *Moonwalk* came with its own set of challenges. "We shot in live locations, often in the outskirts of Lucknow, with tight schedules. I remember shooting for 48 hours straight without sleep because of location constraints. It was exhausting but rewarding." The *Bahut Hua Samman* actress credits director Ajay Singh for his clarity and support. "He had such a clear vision for every character. He wouldn't handhold us, but whenever I struggled, he would step in with the perfect guidance. His brilliance as a storyteller was inspiring."

With her passion for storytelling, commitment to every role, and a relentless drive to evolve, Nidhi Singh continues to charm audiences and push her artistic boundaries.



Chronic acid reflux? Here's everything you need to know!

GERD or Gastroesophageal reflux disease is a chronic condition. It typically involves regurgitation of stomach acid and other contents into the esophagus, leading to symptoms such as heartburn, chest pain, difficulty swallowing and coughing. It occurs when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), a ring of muscle at the bottom of the esophagus, fails to close properly, leading to reverse flow of the stomach contents back up into the esophagus.

GERD can be caused by various factors including obesity, hiatal hernia, pregnancy, smoking and certain medications. Additionally, certain foods and beverages, such as citrus fruits, tomatoes, spicy foods, caffeine, alcohol and chocolate, can exacerbate symptoms.

Treatment for GERD aims to alleviate symptoms, heal esophageal damage and prevent complications. Here are some common approaches:

Lifestyle modifications: Making changes to diet and lifestyle can often help manage GERD symptoms. This includes avoiding trigger foods, eating smaller meals, avoiding lying down or bending over after eating, losing weight if overweight and quitting smoking.

Medications

- Antacids:** Over the counter antacids such as Gaviscon, Mucaine gel or Ulgel can help neutralize stomach acid and provide temporary relief from heartburn.
- H2-receptor antagonists (H2RAs):** These medications, including ranitidine and famotidine, provide longer-lasting relief than antacids by reducing the production of stomach acid.
- Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs):** Drugs like omeprazole, esomeprazole, rabeprazole and lansoprazole are more potent acid suppressors than H2RAs and are often prescribed for more severe cases of GERD or to heal esophageal damage.

- Prokinetic agents:** These medications help strengthen the lower esophageal sphincter and improve esophageal motility, reducing the frequency of reflux episodes. Examples include metoclopramide and baclofen.

- Surgery:** For patients who do not respond to lifestyle changes and medications, surgical intervention may be necessary. Fundoplication is a common surgical procedure for GERD, that involves wrapping up the upper part of the stomach around the LES to strengthen it and prevent reflux.

- Endoscopic treatments:** Less invasive procedures such as endoscopic suturing or radiofrequency energy delivery can be used to tighten the LES and improve its function, reducing reflux symptoms.

- Biologic therapies:** In recent years, biologic therapies targeting specific pathways involved in GERD pathophysiology have emerged as potential treatments. These therapies aim to modulate acid production, improve esophageal function, or reduce inflammation.

It's important for individuals with GERD to work closely with their healthcare providers to develop a customised comprehensive treatment plan catering to specific needs and preferences. Untreated GERD can lead to complications such as esophageal ulcers, strictures, a pre-cancerous condition called Barrett's esophagus, and esophageal cancer rarely. In summary, GERD is a chronic condition characterized by the regurgitation of stomach contents into the esophagus. The condition presents with symptoms such as heartburn and chest pain. Treatment options include lifestyle modifications, medications, surgery, endoscopic procedures and biologic therapies, with the goal of alleviating symptoms, healing esophageal damage, and preventing complications.

(The author, Dr. Lohith U, is a Consultant - Surgical Gastroenterology Bariatric and GI Oncology, at Manipal Hospital Sarjapur Road.)



Xiaomi India announced the global debut of the Redmi 14C 5G, redefining innovation in the budget smartphone segment



SLOKA, The School, celebrated its Annual Day with the theme "NAYANA 2025" at the Balapur School premises in Hyderabad. The event was inaugurated by Chief Guests Patlori Krishna Reddy, Chairman of SLOKA and Vedere Ashok Reddy, Director of SLOKA, who also felicitated the top-performing students during an inspiring ceremony. The celebrations saw enthusiastic participation from the management, staff, students, and parents, making the occasion a memorable and joyous one.

PARTY

A one-day symposium was organised by Hand in Hand India on Wednesday at Lemon Tree Premier, HITEC City, Hyderabad. The event brought together leaders from the corporate sector and voluntary organisations to discuss impactful social service programs and the importance of fostering a culture of volunteering.



STAR Hospitals has launched the STAR Comprehensive Stroke Centre, a cutting-edge facility designed to revolutionise stroke care in Hyderabad. The state-of-the-art centre was inaugurated on Wednesday at STAR Hospitals, Banjara Hills, marking a significant milestone in the city's healthcare landscape.

Photos by- SV Chary



Brigade Enterprises Limited has unveiled Brigade Gateway at Neopolis, Kokapet, Hyderabad. This integrated lifestyle project will feature a World Trade Center, Brigade Residences, a 300+ keys Intercontinental Hotel and Brigade's Orion Mall, a destination lifestyle mall, making it Hyderabad's most comprehensive mixed-use development.



St. Francis College for Women, in collaboration with American Corner Hyderabad, hosted a two-day "GEN AI Bootcamp." The workshop aimed to empower participants with cutting-edge knowledge and skills in generative artificial intelligence.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



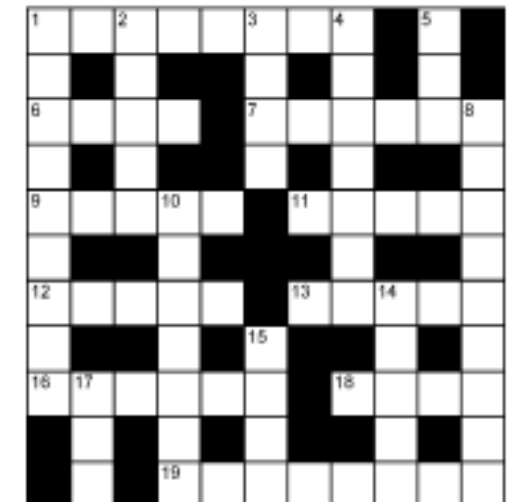
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



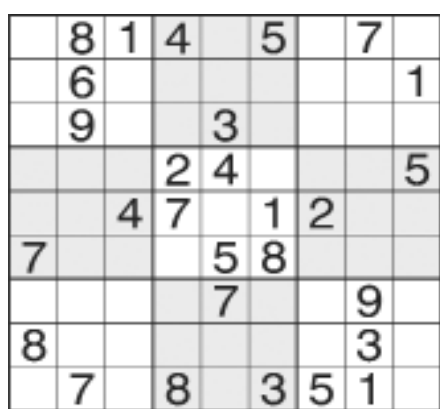
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution
 4 6 5 8 2 9 1 3 7
 2 7 1 6 4 3 5 9 8
 3 9 8 5 7 1 2 4 6
 5 2 9 4 6 8 7 1 3
 7 3 6 1 9 5 8 2 4
 1 8 4 2 3 7 6 5 9
 8 4 7 9 5 2 3 6 1
 6 1 2 3 8 4 9 7 5
 9 5 3 7 1 6 4 8 2

ACROSS

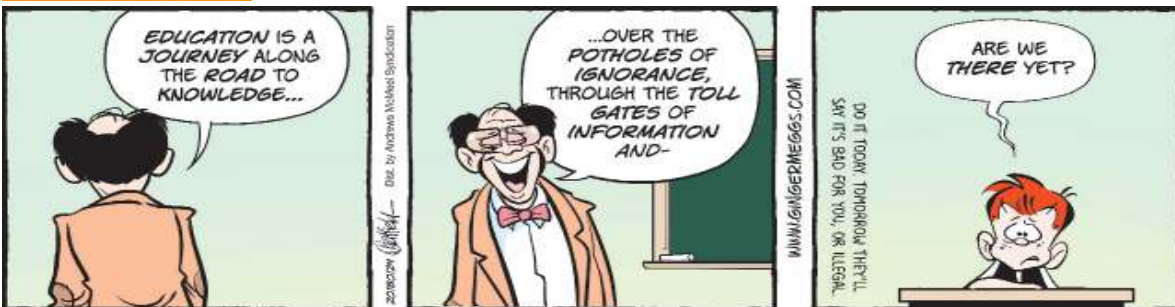
- 1 Blew up with a bang
- 6 Part of the foot
- 7 Baby cows
- 9 Beneath
- 11 Wool-covered animals
- 12 Melodies
- 13 A garden ornament like a small person
- 16 Leave
- 18 Wound someone with a pointed weapon
- 19 A person who controls the making of a film

DOWN

- 1 Completely tired out
- 2 Beg



GINGER MEGGS



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

'I don't focus on screen time; I focus on giving my best'

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Irrespective of a film's result, Shraddha Srinath continues to take on a variety of characters. In her last two films, *Saindhav* and *Mechanic Rocky*, she portrayed vastly different roles. Now, she is set to play another powerful character in her upcoming film *Daaku Maharaaj*.

In this movie, Shraddha stars opposite Balakrishna for the first time and revealed that her role in this film is unlike anything she has done before. She plays the character of Nandini, a pivotal role in the story. Directed by Bobby Kolli, the film is slated for release on January 12.

"The kind of films I've done often have a subtle or serious theme, or they are thrillers. But this film is an all-out package with a lot of emotion, comedy and action. Being part of a Balakrishna film means I'm watched by the whole world, and it's a do-or-die kind of opportunity for me. I have to make the best of my performance," said Shraddha Srinath.

The actress also opened up about working with Balakrishna and shared her admiration for him. "He is a big star, but he remains a down-to-earth person who never shows his stardom on set. That's one big quality of his. Another is his curiosity—despite being a superstar, he fully submits to the director and is always eager to try something new," said the actress about her co-star.

Discussing her character Nandini, Shraddha described her as a quiet, mature woman with emotional depth. "Nandini is soft yet strong. She knows when to say no, when to stop, and she can endure a lot. I have to thank director Bobby for giving me such a performance-oriented role. Generally, in big films, female characters don't get much to perform, but in this movie, we've been given substantial parts. Each character in the film is memorable, and everyone has given their best," she explained.

Shraddha revealed the effort that went into creating her character's look. "We did extensive research



ACTRESS SHRADDHA SRINATH OPENS UP ABOUT DAAKU MAHARAAJ, WORKING WITH BALAKRISHNA, HER ROLE AND MORE

on certain eras, fabrics, prints on sarees, nail polish, and hair makeup. The director wanted a special look, and it was a thorough process," she shared.

The film also features Pragya Jaiswal and Urvashi Rautela. When asked about comparisons between her role and the other female leads, Shraddha emphasised that she does not focus on comparisons. "I don't compare; it's futile and only leads to disappointment or insecurity. When the director narrated the story, I only focused on my character. Regardless of screen time, if you shine and give your best, people will remember you. I'm confident all of us will be appreciated for our performances. It's unwise to dwell on comparisons," said the actress.

She added that her role has significant emotional weight. "I dubbed my own voice for this role, which was one of the hardest parts. A co-director, who follows old-school methods, would sit with me and correct my Telugu lines. While I was delivering my lines, he literally had tears in his eyes because he got so emotional. The kind of performance this role required was very different. It reminded me of my theater days, as I had to delve deeply into my emotions. While I've played natural, next-door-girl characters before, this role was a unique challenge," she said.

Shraddha, who started her career in Kannada films, has also worked in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi cinema. When asked about juggling multiple industries and coping with language differences, she said, "It's natural for actresses to move from one industry to another. Whether big or small, actresses receive offers from various industries. I'm quite happy to work across all of them. Kannada and Telugu share some similarities, so learning Telugu was easy for me. Tamil, however, was a big struggle and remains challenging—I think a lot before speaking Tamil. Hindi isn't an issue since I was born in the North. Malayalam is very difficult, and I haven't tried it much."

Addressing a recent statement by Mega Star Chiranjeevi about the importance of good behavior in addition to talent, Shraddha agreed. "Talent is important, but being a decent human being and respectful is equally vital. I feel both are necessary," she said.

Finally, Shraddha shared a glimpse of her upcoming Tamil film *Aryan*, where she plays a journalist.

'People have now recognised me because of Godari Gattu from Sankranthiki Vasthunnam'

PNSJ HYDERABAD

Director Anil Ravipudi and veteran actor Venkatesh have teamed up for the third time in the much-awaited family entertainer *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*, set to release on January 14. The film stars Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary as the female leads, with Aishwarya taking on a comedic role for the first time in her career. She plays Bhagyam, the wife of Venkatesh's character.

Sharing her journey, Aishwarya revealed how she landed the role: "I was working on a web series when I got a call from director Anil Ravipudi for a look test. I was surprised because I had watched all his films and admired his work. My character has a unique accent, so I came to Hyderabad for the test. After I delivered just two lines of dialogue, he said it was enough and narrated the entire script to me. I've never laughed so much in my life; it was the most enjoyable narration I've ever experienced. After auditioning many others, they chose me for *Bhagyam* and I feel incredibly lucky to have played this role."

Aishwarya described *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* as a special milestone in her career. "The song *Godari Gattu* has become a sensation. At airports, people recognize me and take photos with me and I believe it's all because of that song. I haven't had many duet songs in Telugu and this one fills that gap beautifully. I'm even happier because I got to perform it alongside Venkatesh sir and it's become a huge hit," she said.

Reflecting on her role, Aishwarya admit-



ted to initial nerves about working with Venkatesh. "*Bhagyam* is not an easy character to portray. It's a role that requires the right balance to avoid overdoing it and I've never done anything like this in my career. It's a role that evokes sympathy, and you have to deliver a nuanced performance. Thankfully, Venkatesh sir encouraged me at every step. His support made all the difference, and that's why I was able to give my best performance."

Aishwarya recalled the challenges of filming, including a moment when she was overwhelmed: "On some days, I was so nervous that my hands would shake while delivering dialogues. Once, I even developed a fever from the pressure. But both Anil sir and Venkatesh sir were incredibly supportive, which helped me pull through." The actress added that *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* is a rare gem in the Telugu film industry. "It's been five years since a family entertainer like this came out. I'm proud to be part of a project that will resonate with families across generations."

Speaking about her co-star Meenakshi Chaudhary, Aishwarya said, "Meenakshi and I became great friends during the shoot. She's such a sweet and hardworking girl. She's also a doctor and her journey to this stage is truly inspiring. In the film, Meenakshi and Venkatesh sir's characters share a lot of screen time. Watching how Venkatesh's character navigates between us adds an interesting dynamic to the story."

Aishwarya concluded by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to be part of such a unique film. "Not everyone gets to act in a film like this and I consider myself very lucky. I always aim to take on diverse roles, and I see my work as a way to contribute something meaningful to society," she said.

My words about Pushpa misinterpreted on social media: Rajendra Prasad

Veteran actor Rajendra Prasad recently addressed reports surrounding his comments about the portrayal of characters in films, particularly referencing the blockbuster *Pushpa*. At an event, Rajendra Prasad remarked about certain contemporary roles played by actors. His comments, including a reference to a red sander smuggler becoming a hero, sparked speculation on social media.

On Wednesday, the senior actor clarified his stance, firmly denying the reports. "My words about *Pushpa* were completely misinterpreted. Not long ago, I met Allu Arjun and we both laughed about the social media rumours. Some characters we see on-screen are inspired by real people in society. My own films, such as *Appula Apparao* and *Ladies Tailor*, are prime examples of this concept," explained Rajendra Prasad.

Having spent nearly four decades in the film industry, Rajendra Prasad was asked about never receiving a Padma Award. Responding candidly, he said, "I have never thought about not receiving the Padma Award. It has never been a concern for me," he remarked. The actor is currently promoting his latest film, *Shashti poorthi*, which reunites him with his *Ladies Tailor* co-star Archana after many years. Speaking highly of the film,

Rajendra Prasad said, "*Shashti poorthi* is a beautiful, family-friendly movie. The ceremonies depicted in the film are integral to our culture and traditions. This is a film for those who respect Telugu culture and values."

He also drew a connection between the new film and his previous work, *Aa Nalaguru*. "A song from *Aa Nalaguru* is often played during the mourning ceremonies of celebrities. The lyrics for that song were written by Chaitanya Prasad and he has penned the songs in *Shashti poorthi* as well," said Rajendra Prasad.

Talking about Archana, he said, "Archana was a seasoned performer even when we worked together in *Ladies Tailor* in 1986. In *Shashti poorthi*, our characters are solidly written and carry great depth. I have always felt a sense of responsibility as an actor since my days at the training institute. Being part of this film is truly a blessing."

Directed by Pavan Prabhas and produced by Rupeysh, who also plays a lead role, *Shashti poorthi* promises to be a celebration of Telugu culture and traditions. Rajendra Prasad's involvement in the film underscores his dedication to meaningful and culturally resonant cinema.



YASH'S TOXIC TEASER OFFERS A GLIMPSE INTO BOLD, INTOXICATING CINEMATIC WORLD

On the occasion of his 39th birthday, Rocking Star Yash, the actor who revolutionized Indian cinema with the KGF franchise, has treated his fans to a bold and enigmatic teaser from his upcoming film, *Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups*. This special 'birthday peek' video offers a glimpse into a world unlike anything Yash's audience has seen before, reaffirming his penchant for pushing cinematic boundaries.

In the teaser, Yash appears in a striking white suit, paired with a fedora and a cigar, exuding charm and dominance as he steps into a lavishly styled club. The sultry atmosphere is alive with extravagance and mystery, setting the tone for this daring tale. The provocative visuals tease an intoxicating narrative that promises to be a bold departure from traditional storytelling, captivating viewers with its audacity and allure.

Acclaimed filmmaker Geetu Mohandas, who has helmed *Toxic*, spoke passionately about the project and working with Yash. "*Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups* is a story that defies convention and provokes the chaos within us. On Yash's birthday, as we release this first look, we celebrate not just a national icon but a visionary mind. His process is as mysterious as it is meticulous and collaborating with him has been a thrilling journey. This project represents the union of artistic vision and commercial storytelling, transcending borders, languages and cultures."

"To Yash, the journey of creation is sacred, and through this process, he has taught me that the thrill of the unknown is what keeps the craft alive. Together, we have created a world that is not just meant to be watched but to be deeply felt. Happy birthday to our Monster Mind!" she added.

Kangana Ranaut to launch teaser of GV Prakash's Kingston today

National Award-winning music composer, actor, and producer GV Prakash Kumar is gearing up for a major milestone in his career with the release of his pan-India sci-horror film, *Kingston*. Set to hit theaters on March 7, the film will be released in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, promising a cinematic experience that transcends language and regional boundaries. Adding to the excitement, Bollywood superstar Kangana Ranaut is set to launch the much-anticipated teaser of the film digitally on January 9, kickstarting the campaign titled "Road to Kingston."

The collaboration between GV Prakash and Kangana Ranaut is a testament to their mutual respect and creative camaraderie. Their partnership began with *Thalavi*, where

GV Prakash's soul-stirring compositions complemented Kangana's compelling portrayal of Jayalalitha. The duo's artistic connection deepened with *Emergency*, Kangana's ambitious political drama, for which GV Prakash is also composing the score. Speaking about the collaboration, industry insiders have lauded the synergy between the two, which promises to deliver yet another remarkable cinematic venture with *Kingston*.

The film stars Divya Bharathi as the female lead and is backed by the collaborative efforts of Parallel Universe Pictures and Zee Studios. The production houses are sparing no effort in ensuring that *Kingston* is a visual and narrative spectacle that appeals to audiences across India and beyond.



Racharikam promises intense political drama

The upcoming political thriller *Racharikam*, directed by Suresh Lankapalli and Eswar Vase, has garnered attention with its intriguing trailer. Featuring Vijay Shankar, Varun Sandesh and Apsara Rani in lead roles, the film explores the complexities of political power and its impact on society. The trailer, launched on Wednesday by renowned director Maruthi, offers a glimpse into the intense political narrative the film promises. Packed with powerful and thought-provoking dialogues, it builds anticipation for what seems to be

a gripping drama. Eswar Vase, who is also the producer, has assembled a strong team for the film. Arya Sai Krishna's cinematography and Vengli's music composition add to the film's appeal. The supporting cast includes Hyper Aadi, Rangasthalam Mahesh, Srikanth Iyengar and others, all set to deliver impactful performances. With its release date set for February 1, *Racharikam* aims to captivate audiences with its blend of drama, politics and emotions. It will be interesting to see how this political thriller unfolds and resonates with viewers upon its release.



Bumrah continues to remain No. 1 in Test rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continued to reign supreme at the top of the bowlers' chart with a career-best rating of 908 in the latest ICC Test Rankings, released on Wednesday. Bumrah, who made history ahead of the fifth and final Test against Australia by recording the highest-ever ICC Rankings rating for an Indian bowler at 907 points, improved that tally by one point after taking two wickets in the first innings at the SCG. However, a back spasm ruled him out of bowling in the second innings, restricting his role to just batting. Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja, who climbed a spot to be joint-ninth, is the other Indian giving Bumrah company in the top-10. He shares the ninth spot with Australian pacer Scott Boland, who has made a remarkable leap of 29 places to break into the top 10. Boland's stellar performance in the Sydney Test, where he



claimed a 10-wicket haul (4/31 and 6/45), proved too much for the Indian batters on a lively pitch. His efforts were instrumental in Australia's triumph, ending a decade-long wait to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Australia skipper Pat Cummins also made gains in the rankings, climbing to number two after picking up five wickets in the final match. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada rose a spot to occupy the third place while injured Josh Hazlewood moved down two places to be fourth. Rishabh Pant's blistering 33-ball 61 in the second innings earned him a three-spot rise in the batting rankings, moving him to number nine while India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal retained his fourth spot. South Africa captain Temba Bavuma extended his rich vein of form, scoring a vital century in the first innings to climb three spots to number six, also achieving a career-best rating of 769.



Sam Konstas regrets stand-off with Jasprit

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian teenage batting sensation Sam Konstas regrets his involvement in the stand-off with Jasprit Bumrah during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, admitting he was only trying to waste time but ultimately, the Indian pace spearhead had the "last laugh". Konstas made an impact in the final two Tests of the series with his audacious strokeplay, but also found himself at the center of a couple of fiery exchanges with Indian stars Bumrah and Virat Kohli. One such incident occurred on the opening day of the fifth Test, when Konstas had a heated run-in with Bumrah. "I love being in the contest and always try to put my best foot forward," Konstas told CODE Sports. Near the end of the day's play, Bumrah, looking to get in one more over, was met with resistance from the Australian players, who were trying to waste time. This led to a fiery exchange of words between Konstas and the Indian pacer. Two deliveries later, Bumrah, who was leading the side in the absence of an off-colour Rohit Sharma, took the wicket of Usman Khawaja off the last ball. After dismissing Khawaja, Bumrah walked in Konstas' direction and stared him down. Reflecting on the incident,

Konstas admitted, "I feel like it's probably a good learning for me. I was trying to waste a little bit of time there so they didn't get another over. But he (Bumrah) had the last laugh. "Obviously he is world class and he took, what, 32 wickets in the series." Konstas seems to have learned his lesson about not provoking the peerless pacer. "If that happened again, maybe I wouldn't have said anything," he said. The teenager was also involved in an on-field exchange with Kohli, who shoulder-charged Konstas, followed by a heated verbal exchange between the two. However, Konstas revealed that despite the incident, he later went to speak with his childhood hero Kohli. "I had a little chat after the game telling him that I idolise him, and it's obviously a huge honour playing against him," Konstas said. "When I did verse him, I was like, 'wow, Virat Kohli is batting.' He just had that presence about him, all the Indian crowd getting amongst it. Chanting his name. It was quite surreal." Konstas added that "He was very down to earth. A lovely person and just wishing me all the best saying hopefully I go well on the tour of Sri Lanka he said if I'm in. "My whole family loves Virat. I've idolised him from a young age and he's a legend of the game."



Prasidh Krishna, Devdutt, Washington available for Vijay Hazare knockouts

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka's Prasidh Krishna, Devdutt Padikkal and Tamil Nadu all-rounder Washington Sundar will be available for the Vijay Hazare Trophy knockout matches, starting in Vadodara from Thursday, after featuring in the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy series against Australia. However, KL Rahul, who played all the five Test matches against the Aussies, has requested for a break and will skip the Hazare knockouts. Rahul's availability for the second phase of the Ranji Trophy, beginning on January 23, will be decided at a later date. India head coach Gautam Gambhir had recently expressed his desire to see frontline Indian players making themselves available for the remainder of the premier domestic red-ball tournament. Washington, though, could link up with Tamil Nadu only if the team progresses to the semifinals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy. He played three matches and made 114 runs with a fifty but bowled just 37 overs across those Tests as pacers were preferred because of the conditions. The off-spinner took just three wickets. Prasidh will be high on confidence after making a good impression in the fifth

Test at Sydney, where the pacer grabbed six Australian wickets — 3/42 in the first innings and 3/65 in the second essay. Devdutt played just one Test match at Perth, primarily because skipper Rohit Sharma stayed back in India to welcome his second baby. The left-hander made a zero and 25 in India's 295-run win at Perth but was not selected for any of the other four Test matches. The 24-year-old was in terrific form prior to leaving for Australia for the India A tour, smashing four First-Class hundreds across Duleep Trophy and in the first leg of the Ranji Trophy. Both Prasidh and Devdutt are scheduled to join the Karnataka squad on January 10, a day ahead of their quarterfinal match against Baroda at Vadodara. Nitish to play Ranji Nitish Kumar Reddy too will fly out of Australia on Wednesday but he will not be seen in action immediately as Andhra has not progressed to the knockout stage. However, Nitish, who impressed everyone with his gutsy batting Down Under including a hundred at Melbourne, is likely to play in the second phase of the Ranji Trophy. He has played only one match this season before travelling to Australia.

Virat Kohli is always super motivated, he will know what to do: Faf du Plessis

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Virat Kohli will be "super motivated" to put a struggling phase behind him and the premier India batter is capable of returning to his run-making ways, said former South African captain Faf du Plessis here on Wednesday. Kohli had a torrid time in Australia during the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy, amassing a mere 190 runs at an average of 23.75 across five Tests despite starting off with an unbeaten hundred in the first Test at Perth. Du Plessis backed Kohli, his one-time teammate at Royal Challengers Bangalore, to come back stronger from the struggles, and said retirement is a "very personal" choice. "That is very, very personal. No one can speak to you about when that time is (up) as a player, you'll know," du Plessis told PTI on the sidelines of the SA20 Season 3's Captain's Day. "I know someone like him is super super motivated, he's gone through it all before, so he knows exactly what to do,"



said Du Plessis. The 40-year-old then went back to the day when he felt his time was up as a Test cricketer. "It is different for every player. Every player needs to answer that question. I remember when that time was for me," he said. "I just knew that certainly from the Test cricket perspective for me, I didn't have that same hunger and drive anymore and I felt that that stage certainly for me was a good time to let new guys come in and also step into the

T20 world. "I wanted to do that at the stage where I still felt like I was on top of my game," he added. Du Plessis was not pleased with ICC reportedly exploring the possibility of a two-tier Test system. "No, I think we need the game to be healthy," Du Plessis said. "We saw over the last few years the value that was put on Test cricket by Australia, England and India making sure that there were 4-5 Test series. "When you look at the other teams, there are two Test

matches here and there and playing six Test matches a season. I do not think that is healthy for the game," he offered. "As long as we can look at Test cricket as (being) important, you just look at all the Test matches that took place over the last few weeks, some incredible matches have been played," Du Plessis noted. "SA deserve to raise WTC trophy" South Africa spinner Keshav Maharaj rated the consistency of his side in Test cricket "phenomenal" and said they deserve to "raise a prestigious title." The Proteas will face Australia in the final of the World Test Championship in June at the Lord's. South Africa advanced to the title clash of the 2023-25 cycle with a 2-0 win over Pakistan at home, while India's string of losses against New Zealand at home and against Australia ended their hopes of a third consecutive WTC final appearance.

BGT: SCG track deemed 'satisfactory', other pitches rated 'very good' by ICC

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Four out of five pitches used in the recent Border-Gavaskar Test series between India and Australia have been rated 'very good' by the ICC, which found the track for the fifth and final game in Sydney to be 'satisfactory'. The marquee five-match series ended 3-1 in favour of the hosts, who regained the Border Gavaskar Trophy after a decade and also qualified for the World Test Championship final in June against South Africa. "The pitches at Perth Stadium, Adelaide Oval, Gabba and Melbourne Cricket Ground — the venues for the first four Tests — were rated as 'very good'; the ICC said in a statement.

"Meanwhile, the surface for the final Test in Sydney received a 'satisfactory', the second-highest rating on ICC's scale," it added. The traditionally batting-friendly pitch at the Sydney Cricket Ground favoured bowlers this time. Batters from both the teams struggled for the majority of the Test which ended in two and half days. "We encourage pitches that bring out the unique characteristics of that venue and this has long been a feature of Australian cricket," Cricket Australia's Head of Cricket Operations Peter Roach said in a media release while reacting to the ICC's ratings. "We don't look to prepare wickets that favour the home



side or suit our situation in a series. What we seek is a good contest between bat and ball and pitches that are likely to produce a result. "Weather obviously plays a

significant part in preparation and we know that even our most skilled curators are challenged at times by adverse weather," he added.

The Sydney track had a green top with variable bounce on offer and as many as 26 wickets fell on the first two days while four Indians and as many Australians were dismissed on day three as bowlers largely dominated the proceedings. "The SCG has been striving to bring out their unique characteristics of early pace and bounce before the pitch wears and spins," Roach said. "This year was a step in the right direction to achieving this which provided an exciting finish to the Border Gavaskar Trophy series and bodes well for the Ashes summer in 2025-26," he added. There was some debate around the SCG track after a few former players, including

Indian great Sunil Gavaskar, called it "not ideal". However, India head coach Gautam Gambhir had termed it as "spicy" but overall good for Test cricket. "The series also emphasised the benefits of playing first-class cricket at major venues," Roach said. "It allows our curators to become more familiar with the different challenges that go into preparing wickets in different weather conditions, and also allows players to enter the Test team familiar with the conditions they will confront," he added. In 2023, the ICC revamped its pitch rating system, reducing it from six categories to four — very good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory and unfit.

Shastri wants Rohit and Kohli to play domestic cricket; Ponting proposes time off for Kohli

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri wants the struggling Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to get back to playing Ranji Trophy and feels the Test future of the two superstars is dependent on the hunger to maintain their excellence in the game. The repeated failures of the star Indian duo in the Border-Gavaskar trophy contributed to the visitors' series loss. India head coach Gautam Gambhir underlined the importance of domestic cricket following the loss and Shastri too feels Rohit and Kohli should return to playing Ranji Trophy even though the next series is in June. "If there's a gap for them, they should go back and play some domestic cricket and see how it is. Because when you play Test match cricket for that

length of time, it's important to play domestic cricket for two reasons," Shastri said during a conversation alongside Australian great Ricky Ponting on ICC Review. "One you are abreast with the current generation (and) you can contribute to that younger generation with your experience. And more importantly, you get to play spin more than you will ever play. "If you see, India's record in India on turning tracks is not the greatest. If you have quality spinners in the opposition, they can trouble you. And they have troubled India," he added. Asked specifically on their Test future, Shastri added: "I would leave that on them and would be closely tracking how they fare in the upcoming games (ODIs against England, Champions Trophy).



"The hunger and desire as well is very important. One is 36 the other is 38 they would

know how hungry they are. They will walk away if they think they have had enough,"

added Shastri. Kohli will be better served by a break: Ponting

Former Australian captain Ponting has no shame in admitting that he carried on

playing at the highest level longer than he should have. Back in 2022, Kohli had taken a month off from the game and that worked well for him. Ponting feels time has come for Kohli to get away from the game following his constant troubles outside the off-stump over the course of the five Test series Down Under. "...The challenge is, and I can see it with Virat now, you can see how much he wants it. He's trying so hard that actually makes batting harder. The harder you try sometimes with batting, the less success you're going to have," said the multiple World Cup winner. "I started thinking more about not getting out rather than scoring runs and that might sound strange but that's what it was. I was trying to be so perfect set the right example play exactly the way my team needed me all the time but when I was playing

my best I didn't think about any of that. "I just walked out and thought about scoring runs. I can just see a little bit of that with Virat now. Even the way that he's getting out you can see he doesn't want to be playing at those balls he's trying not to do it but he's there's some mental block there that's making him feel for that one outside the off stump." A break can only help the Indian legend, said Ponting. "He had a mental break (in the past) where he stepped away for a while and then came back and find the love for the game again. So right now it just seems like that real love of the game for him is not there because he's making it too hard to enjoy. "So if he wants to continue playing Test match cricket, he might just need to have a little spell for a while, find the love for the game again."