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

**'Modi keeps his promises, right things will happen at right time'**

**'KALP' YOUR EMOTIONS**

**Director Nakkina's Cheap talk creates a FLUTTER**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**The Pioneer**

**Rising above politics the government should continue the BRS's decade-long journey of progress with focus on farmers' welfare. The BRS admin spent nearly Rs 4.5 lakh crore on agricultural development in the last 10 years**

**- K. Chandrasekhar Rao, BRS Chief**

**DON'T MISS...**

**148 arrested for selling Chinese manja**

Hyderabad City Police has booked 107 cases and apprehended 148 accused persons who were indulging in illegal business of prohibited Chinese manja. The Commissioner's Task Force of Hyderabad City Police has said that they seized 7,334 Chinese manja bobbins worth of around Rs 90 lakh. "The availability of Chinese manja is significantly reduced with the arrests we made. The local dealers who sell manja are overjoyed with the increase in sale of manja due to the non-availability of Chinese manja, said cops. In the South Zone, 15 cases were ...

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**From humble start to cutting-edge tech**

From a few rain gauges in 1875 to rivaling the world's best weather agencies, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has weathered its way to becoming a global leader in forecasting. Born out of calamities – a devastating cyclone in 1864 and monsoon failures in 1866 and 1871 – the IMD, turning 150 on January 15, has transformed from a humble setup into a cutting-edge hub of weather science. "HF Blandford, the first Meteorological Reporter to the government of India, prepared the first rainfall map of ...

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**Scope for Reserve Bank's rate cut**

Retail inflation declined to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December, mainly on account of easing of prices in the food basket, including vegetables – according to government data released on Monday – giving headroom to the Reserve Bank to reduce the key interest rate in upcoming monetary policy reviews. The inflation-based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) eased for the second month in a row after it breached the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) upper tolerance level of 6 per cent in October. The annual ...

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**'Can't compare two generations'**

It is needless to compare two generations of players and pass a judgement on who was better, legendary cricketer Kapil Dev said on Monday and refused to get into a debate if BCCI selectors were right in excluding Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant from the T20I squad for the five-match series against England. Kapil bowled nearly 300 overs during the 1991-92 Test series against Australia and in the same rubber he became the first Indian to take 400 wickets in the traditional format apart from contributing with ...

-SPORTS

**Hyd to be showcased as futuristic city: CM**

**Says happy with foreign investments in Telangana**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy emphasised Telangana's position as a prime destination for investments, attracting significant attention nationwide.

He said that the favourable business environment in the state has attracted substantial investments from global companies. The CM directed officials to showcase Hyderabad's potential as a futuristic city on global platforms.

Addressing a review meeting on the state's industrial policies at his Jubilee Hills residence, Revanth expressed confidence that the government's policies have made Telangana a robust economic powerhouse.

"In the first year alone, our government's initiatives have established Telangana as a strong economic entity," he said.

Ahead of his Davos visit to attend the World Economic Forum meeting from January 20 to 22, Revanth reviewed the progress of investments and agreements made over the past year.

He inquired about the operational



Chief Minister Revanth Reddy holding a review meeting on the state's industrial policy along with Minister Sridhar Babu in Hyderabad on Monday

**"In the first year alone, our government's initiatives have established Telangana as a strong economic entity," he said. Ahead of his Davos visit to attend the World Economic Forum meeting from January 20 to 22, Revanth reviewed the progress of investments and agreements made over the past year**

status of companies that had signed agreements with the state and expressed satisfaction with the

progressing at a rapid pace and seven in the initial stages.

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**Govt to roll out 4 welfare schemes**

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The Telangana Government is all set to roll out four major social welfare schemes – Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Athmeeya Bharosa, Indiramma Housing and the sanctioning of new ration cards – during Sankranti. These schemes are estimated to cost around Rs 45,000 crore.

The government plans to allocate Rs 22,500 crore for Indiramma Housing, Rs 19,000 crore for Rythu Bharosa and Rs 2,000 crore for Indiramma Athmeeya Bharosa. Farmers who are cultivating lands, including those with title deeds under RoFR, will receive Rs 12,000 per acre annually as per the Rythu Bharosa scheme. Landless agricultural labourers with job cards under the Employment Guarantee Scheme who worked for at least 20 days will

benefit from Indiramma Athmeeya Bharosa.

Indiramma Committees will oversee the implementation ensuring compliance with government orders. The committees will organise village tours to monitor progress. Each mandal will be divided into three parts for organising Grama Sabhas with proper arrangements like a dais, microphones and officials.

Flexis will display the names of beneficiaries and the details of cash disbursements in villages for public awareness sake.

This Sankranti is set to become the most memorable one since Telangana's formation, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti said during a review meeting held with officials and public representatives from Khammam and Bhadradi districts.

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**HAPPY SANKRANTI**

The Pioneer wishes its readers, advertisers, suppliers and agents a happy Sankranti. As our offices remain closed today (14-01-2025), there will be no issue of the newspaper on 15-01-2025

— RESIDENT EDITOR



**'Rise above politics, focus on farmers'**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao called upon the Congress Government to rise above politics and focus on farmers' welfare in his Sankranti greetings to the people of Telangana. Highlighting the festival's deep connection with agriculture, KCR called it a unique celebration of rural life.

The former CM said that around Rs 4.5 lakh crore has been invested in agriculture during the last decade, earning Telangana international



recognition as a model state for agricultural development.

"What was once a drought-stricken region is now a thriving hub of agriculture," he added.

"Sankranti is not just a festival. It is a reflection of the spirit of our farmers and their indispensable role. Only by brightening their lives can we truly enhance the joy of this festival," he said.

KCR emphasized that the BRS government has transformed Telangana's agricultural landscape through

Continued on Page 2

**Pongal gift for turmeric farmers**

**Centre to inaugurate National Turmeric Board today**  
**Palle Ganga Reddy to head the Board**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

There is good news for Telangana's turmeric farmers this Sankranti as the Centre has at last issued a notification on Monday setting up the National Turmeric Board based at Nizamabad.

The Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, will virtually inaugurate the National Turmeric Board office on Tuesday, that is, Sankranti Day. Officials of Central Commerce,

Industries, Agriculture departments and leaders from Telangana will attend the function.

The Centre is likely to announce strategies regarding the turmeric crop, new projects and Central policies.

Discussions may also be held regarding turmeric sales, problems in marketing and in securing loans. The Centre also issued a notification appointing Palle Ganga Reddy as the Chairman of the National Turmeric Board. Palle Ganga Reddy will hold the post for three years.

Continued on Page 2



**BRS MLA Kaushik Reddy arrested**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Kaushik Reddy was arrested by the Karimnagar Police after Congress MLA Dr Sanjay Kumar filed a complaint saying that he was verbally abused during

a review meeting held at the Karimnagar Collectorate.

Kaushik was arrested by the Karimnagar Police after an interview with the regional media. As he stepped out, he was asked to board a police vehicle which then drove

him to Karimnagar.

Jagitial MLA Sanjay Kumar accused Kaushik Reddy not only of verbally abusing him but also of attempting to physically assault him during the meeting.

After the incident, Sanjay filed a formal complaint with Speaker Gaddam Prasad, requesting action against Kaushik. He also recorded his statement with the police, urging

them to take the matter seriously.

So far, three cases have been registered against MLA Kaushik Reddy. The first case was filed based on a complaint from Sanjay's Personal Assistant. RDO Maheshwar lodged a complaint accusing Kaushik of creating chaos during the meeting, while Library Chairman Malleshwar reported inappropriate behaviour by the MLA.

**KTR condemns arrest, terms it illegal**



Terming the arrest of BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy as "illegal and undemocratic," BRS Working President KT Rama Rao strongly condemned the action.

"Arresting Huzurabad MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy under fabricated charges is a

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**Media's role crucial, stresses AP CM**

**Unveils Swatantra TV's 2025 calendar**

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu unveiled the 2025 New Year calendar of Swatantra TV during his visit to Naravariapalle on Monday. Known for championing the voice of the common people, Swatantra TV has earned recognition for its relentless focus on public issues and advocacy.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister emphasised the crucial role of media in creating awareness about the welfare and development schemes implemented by the State government. He highlighted the media's responsibility in



AP CM Chandrababu Naidu unveiling 2025 New Year calendar of Swatantra TV at Naravariapalle on Monday

Continued on Page 2

**Govt following fiscal discipline: Ponguleti**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress Government is implementing welfare schemes in the state by following the norms of financial discipline. Revenue and Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said. He said the Congress government is implementing all its assurances given to the poor.

Speaking to the media on Monday after inaugurating an Indiramma model house in

Kusumanchi in Palair on Monday, Ponguleti said that the dream of the poor to own a house is going to become a reality in Telangana soon.

He made it clear that the Congress Government would fulfil the own house dream of the poor even if the opposition hatches any number of conspiracies.

He said the allotment of Indiramma houses is taking place irrespective of political affiliation, caste and creed.

Continued on Page 2

**UGC-NET scheduled for tomorrow postponed**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The UGC-National Eligibility Test (NET) scheduled for January 15 has been postponed on account of festivals, including Makar Sankranti and Pongal, the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced on Monday.

The exam for admission to PhD programmes, awarding Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and appointment as assistant professors is being conducted from January 3 to January 16 for 85 subjects in the Computer Based Test (CBT) mode.

**Will OGH's new site create problems for commoners?**



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

Change is inevitable and every change has its pros and cons. The good news is that the government of TG is going to construct a new building for the Osmania General Hospital (OGH), which is now in a rundown condition.

However, the new building is not going to come up at the present site. The government has decided to

construct the new OGH building at the Goshamahal Police Grounds which is barely two km away from the existing OGH if one goes via the Malakunta Road. The distance will increase if one goes via other routes.

Hyderabad has three poor people's hospitals and they are the Osmania General Hospital, the Gandhi Hospital and the NIMS Hospital. The uniqueness of these three hospitals is that they are easily accessible to the poor. The poor from across the state can

Continued on Page 2

**MAHA KUMBH**  
**Devotion, tech and tradition fuse in Sangam**

**1.5 crore take dip as Maha Kumbh begins**

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The fog was thick, the cold intense and the waters freezing as the Maha Kumbh, the world's largest gathering, began on Monday with 1.5 crore people taking a dip in the Sangam in their quest for 'moksha' and the belief it will cleanse their sins.

Spirituality and astrology, culture and religion, tradition and modern-day technology... it all fused into one

**'Amrit Snan' today**

A record number of devotees are expected to take part in the first 'Amrit Snan' of the Maha Kumbh Mela on Tuesday on the occasion of Makar Sankranti.

The first Amrit Snan of Maha

Kumbh is special in many ways. It takes place a day after the first major 'snan' which took place on Monday in the Sangam area on the occasion of Paush Poonmima. The first Amrit Snan holds significance because the 'Akharas' will be participating in it.



in the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati in Prayagraj.

More than 40 crore people, including many from abroad, are expected over 45 days in the mela being held after 12 years. Besides, seers claim the celestial permutations and combinations for the event are taking place after 144 years, making the occasion even more auspicious for the faithful.

And so it was that a sea of people converged in Prayagraj for the fabled Maha Kumbh. Ash smeared sadhus from their abode in the Himalayas, the religious from across the country and abroad and those just curious to take in the sights and sounds of the biggest religious spectacle of all, the Maha Kumbh beckoned them all. Thirteen Akharas of seers from different sects are participating in the Maha Kumbh.



# CM will conduct surprise checks soon, says Venkat

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
Roads and Buildings (R&B) Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy stated that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy would conduct surprise checks soon. He asked officials to ensure there are no irregularities in implementing government schemes.

Participating in a review meeting in Khammam district on Monday, Venkat said that Collectors would be held responsible if Indiramma Houses are allotted to people already having houses.

He said Indiramma Houses will be allotted only to the eligible and that officials have a key role in implementing the scheme. He added they should not adopt a negligent attitude and asked officials to work as if the villages were their own.

# AAP opted for crowdfunding as Kavitha's South Group is inactive: Kiran

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, lashed out at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for launching crowdfunding by Delhi Chief Minister Atishi Marlena to meet the expenses of Delhi Assembly elections.

He said that AAP opted for crowdfunding as the South Group, which is facing allegations in the Delhi liquor scam, is inactive.

"The Aam Aadmi Party would not have had this problem if BRS MLC Kavitha had not been caught in the Delhi liquor scam. AAP is seeking donations as Kavitha's deal on behalf of the South Group got derailed. The BJP is in power because of South Group's deals," Kiran said here on Monday.

# BRS leaders lash out at Congress MLA Sanjay Kumar

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**  
Former MLA Rasamayi Balakishan and Chintam Sadanandam of the BRS condemned the unruly scenes witnessed in Karimnagar the previous day in the presence of three Congress ministers.

He said that AAP opted for crowdfunding as the South Group, which is facing allegations in the Delhi liquor scam, is inactive.

# BRS calls for steps to prevent oil refinery mishaps

**PNS ■ MUMBAI**

BRS Rajya Sabha MP Vaddiraju Ravichandra emphasised the need for proactive steps to prevent accidents in oil refineries and provide better service to consumers. He also explored the possibilities of introducing advanced facilities in the sector to meet evolving demands.

The BRS leaders were addressing a press conference at the Telangana Bhavan on Monday.

Referring to Jagitial MLA Sanjay Kumar's remarks on the six guarantees of the Congress government the BRS leaders criticised his statements.

# Will OGH's ...

Goshamah Police Grounds inside the Old City and it is not so easy to reach that place as the roads are not like the roads leading up to the existing OGH. Anyway, a new building is needed for OGH and people may get accustomed to it once it starts functioning, a city resident named Shankar said.

Defending Koushik Reddy's statements, Rasamayi Balakishan said, "What is wrong with what Koushik Reddy said? Why are the three ministers reacting so aggressively? If they cannot handle two MLAs questioning them, how will they face the people?"

The BRS leaders accused the Congress Government of oppressive tactics. "Id questioned, they file cases against us. This so-called Indiramma rule reminds us of Emergency. Four cases were filed against Koushik Reddy for merely questioning the government. But why hasn't any case been filed against Arekapudi Gandhi, who attacked Koushik Reddy's house, or against Congress goons who attacked the BRS office in Bhongir?" they asked.

# Media's ...

**Continued from page 1**  
bridging the gap between the government and the people, ensuring that benefits reach every corner of society.

**Continued from page 1**  
come to these hospitals without much trouble. The Osmania General Hospital is near the Mahatma Gandhi Bus Station (MGBS) and the Gandhi Hospital is near the Secunderabad Railway Station and the Jubilee Bus Station (JBS). The OGH and Gandhi Hospital are at a walkable distance from the MGBS and Secunderabad Railway Station respectively.

The NIMS Hospital is also located on the main road and the poor can reach NIMS Hospital easily from Secunderabad Railway Station and the MGBS on TGSRCT buses as it is located on a highway which goes via the NIMS Hospital.

# Govt to roll ...

**Continued from page 1**  
Bhatti emphasized that the selection and finalisation of beneficiaries would be conducted exclusively through Grama Sabhas to ensure transparency. Approval certificates will be handed over in the presence of officials and public representatives.

**Continued from page 1**  
The CM discussed the detailed progress of these projects with Industries Minister Sridhar Babu. The CM's six-day itinerary includes visits to Singapore from January 16-19 and Davos from January 20-22. Revanth will be accompanied by Industries Minister Sridhar Babu and senior officials of the Industries Department.

# Hyd to be ...

**Continued from page 1**  
Officials briefed the CM on the schedule for the six-day trip, including the planned sessions and meetings with industry representatives. The CM reiterated his commitment to accelerating Telangana's growth by attracting investments and fostering an industry-friendly ecosystem.

# Govt following...

**Continued from page 1**  
There is no need to give even a single rupee to anyone as bribe, he said and added that the eligibility for getting a house is poverty and not having a house.

# Pongal gift ...

**Continued from page 1**  
The setting up of the Turmeric Board will help farmers with new opportunities. Turmeric farmers will get more assistance from the Turmeric Board to sell their produce at good prices.

# Devotion, tech ...

**Continued from page 1**  
And as the famed mela formally began in the darkness of pre-dawn on the occasion of Paus Purnima to the sound of conch shells and bhajans, the excitement was palpable in the sprawling Sangam area as devotees -- mostly in groups -- walked towards the waters chanting "Jai Ganga Maiyya", "Har Har Mahadev" and "Jai Shri Ram".

# Media's ...

**Continued from page 1**  
questioning party-hopping legislators is an outright attack on democracy," KTR added.

# Media's ...

**Continued from page 1**  
BRS leader Harish Rao also lashed out at the Congress Government.

# Media's ...

**Continued from page 1**  
"What kind of rule is this where those questioning betrayal are arrested while defectors are shielded? Telangana, which flourished under KCR's leadership for 10 years, has now become a hub of political vendetta in just 13 months of Congress rule," he said.



PM Modi participates Kishan Reddy's Sankranti celebrations on Monday

# Modi attends Kishan's Sankranti celebrations

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Prime Minister Modi attended Sankranti and Pongal celebrations organised by Telangana BJP President Kishan Reddy in New Delhi on Monday.

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

People across India celebrate Sankranti and Pongal. It is a celebration of gratitude, abundance and renewal, deeply rooted in the agricultural traditions of our culture. My best wishes for Sankranti and Pongal. Wishing everyone happiness, good health and a prosperous harvest," the Prime Minister posted on X on Monday.



# LOS ANGELES WILDFIRE DEATH TOLL SURGES TO 24

# Firefighters brace for more fierce winds

**PNS ■ LOS ANGELES**

After a weekend spent blocking the explosive growth of fires that destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people in the Los Angeles area, firefighters got a slight break with calmer weather but cast a wary eye on a forecast for yet more wind.

**PNS ■ LOS ANGELES**

The National Weather Service issued red flag warnings for severe fire conditions through Wednesday, with sustained winds of 50 mph and gusts in the mountains reaching 70 mph. The most dangerous day will be Tuesday, warned fire behaviour analyst Dennis Burns at a community meeting Sunday night.

# Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa useless for 90% farmhands: Harish

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa scheme of the Congress Government has drawn fire from the BRS for its failure to address the needs of marginalised farmers and farm labourers.

cultural labourers in the state, the scheme is reaching only 10 lakh individuals, leaving 90% of them excluded. This is an injustice to those who toil in the fields," he said.

Harish lambasted Chief Minister Revanth for what he called "dummy checks and dummy promises."

Addressing a press conference in Sangareddy, BRS MLA Harish Rao criticised the government for leaving vast sections of the farming community in distress after giving them lofty promises.

He asked why the loan waiver cheques distributed months ago are not reflected in the bank accounts of farmers.

Harish threw a challenge to the Congress leadership for an open debate on the government's performance and policies. "You claim no projects were completed under the BRS admin. But six lakh acres in Nagar Kurnool and Mahbubnagar are irrigated today due to projects like Nettempadu and Bima," he said.

He said the Congress Government had failed to deliver on its assurance to provide financial aid to farmers and agricultural labourers. "Of the over one crore agri-

He pointed out the projects executed during BRS rule like the construction of community halls, provision of drinking water, improved road connectivity and electricity supply.

Harish also criticised the Congress Government for halting overseas scholarships for tribal students. "The BRS government provided scholarships to tribal students studying abroad. The Congress must resume the scholarships," he said.

# Congress failed to implement SC/ST Declaration: Harish

**PNS ■ ZAHEERABAD**

BRS MLA Harish Rao pointed out the unfulfilled promises in the Congress's SC/ST Declaration. "The Congress promised Girijana Bandhu with an assistance of Rs 12 lakh. It also promised to provide gold along with the Kalyana Lakshmi scheme for women but these remain unimplemented."

is heartening to see people not only from Sangareddy district but also from Maharashtra and Karnataka participating in the Mothi Matha Jathara," he said.

Harish concluded by praying for all devotees attending the Jathara and urged the Congress Government to act swiftly on its promises to tribal communities.

Harish along with MLAs Manik Rao, Chinta Prabhakar, DCMS Chairman Shivakumar and local leaders were attending the Mothi Matha Jathara celebrations at Mogudampalli and Upparapalli Thanda in Sangareddy district's Zaheerabad constituency on Monday.

"We have ensured proper arrangements for the thousands of devotees attending the Jathara. So they face no inconvenience. I prayed to the Goddess to bless everyone who comes here with happiness and prosperity," he said.

Harish concluded by praying for all devotees attending the Jathara and urged the Congress Government to act swiftly on its promises to tribal communities.

Speaking on the occasion, Harish expressed joy in being able to attend the festivities. "It

power giving many assurances

# Amigos head Ramana Reddy seeks Cong ticket for MLC polls

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The head of Amigos Educational Institutions, Musku Ramana Reddy, met TPCC President B. Mahesh Kumar Goud on Monday and sought an opportunity to contest from the Graduates MLC constituency Karimnagar-Adilabad-Nizamabad-Medak.

# My fight to save country: Kejriwal

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was trying to save his party while he was fighting to save the country. The former Delhi chief minister's comments came shortly after Gandhi launched an attack on the AAP leader at a poll rally here in Seelampur.

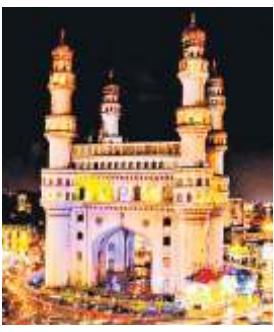


# City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | TUESDAY | JANUARY 14, 2025

03



## Sankranti Kite Festival

Venue  
People's Plaza,  
January 14, 10 am.  
Tuesday night

## Featuring DJ Salman

Venue  
36, downtown Brew  
Pub (Vapour)  
January 14, 8 pm.

## Tuesday Mic Comedy

Venue  
Trailing Ivy Café,  
January 14, 8 pm.

## CGA Kite Festival 2025

By Cyberabad  
Gujarati Association

Venue  
PJR Indoor Stadium  
January 14, 10 am.

## UN SPECIAL REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND CITIES

### ISB Prof Anjal Prakash selected as lead author

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Indian School of Business - ISB Hyderabad announced that Prof Anjal Prakash, Clinical Associate Professor and Research Director at the Bharti Institute of Public Policy, has been selected as a lead author for the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Cities. This report is part of IPCC's seventh assessment cycle, which began in July 2023 during its 43rd session in Nairobi, Kenya.

The IPCC is the UN body responsible for evaluating climate change science, impacts, risks and solutions. Prof Anjal is one of 150 global climate experts, including four Indians, working on this report as coordinating lead authors, lead authors, and review editors.



## Akkamahadevi-Domalpenta stay package for Amrabad Tiger Reserve begins

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Akkamahadevi-Domalpenta stay package was inaugurated at Srisailem backwaters in Amrabad Tiger Reserve (ATR) by MLA Dr Ch Vamshikrishna on Monday. It is situated amidst the scenic beauty of the Krishna River backwaters from the Srisailem dam. The package includes accommodation in four rooms of the Vanavahanga cottages or Guest House, offering a unique experience in a serene natural setting.

Visitors will be taken on safari rides to the Octopus View Point and Vajrala Madugu Watch Tower. These spots offer mesmerising views of the river meandering through lush green hills and complex topography. A safari will transport visitors to the Akkamahadevi trekking point. From there, they embark on a guided trek through natural forests, where they may witness wildlife and enjoy the serene Nallamala Hills and river views. The 45-minute trek leads to the sacred Akkamahadevi Caves, where visitors can offer prayers to Lord Shiva. After the visit, they trek back to the starting point and board safari vehicles.

## Drug racket busted in LB Nagar; Four arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The LB Nagar police busted a drug racket near Kamineni Junction and arrested four in its limits. They have registered a case under Sections 8(C) r/w 22(b), 27, 29 of the NDPS Act.

The main accused, Tenugu Ajay from Gautham Nagar, Jillelaguda, along with three accomplices - Ganduri Jafanya Raj alias Ricky from Vidyannagar Colony, Dasari Wilson alias Raju from Tekumatla village hailing from Suryapet

and Gadikana Mahender Kumar from Padmanagar Colony, Karmanghat - were arrested. The four individuals, reportedly friends, were addicted to drugs and procured MDMA from Bengaluru. They were transporting the narcotics via train and were intercepted by the police near Kamineni Junction. During the operation, the police seized 5 grams of MDMA, four mobile phones and a Maruti Omni car. Efforts are underway to track down the drug supplier linked to the racket.

## MANJA BOBBINS WORTH RS 90 LAKH SEIZED

# 148 arrested for selling prohibited Chinese manja

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad City Police has booked 107 cases and apprehended 148 accused persons who were indulging in illegal business of prohibited Chinese manja. The Commissioner's Task Force of Hyderabad City Police has said that they seized 7,334 Chinese manja bobbins worth of around Rs 90 lakh.

"The availability of Chinese manja is significantly reduced with the arrests we made. The local dealers who sell manja are overjoyed with the increase in sale of manja due to the non-availability of Chinese manja, said cops. In the South Zone, 15 cases were reported, leading to the arrest of 18 individuals and the seizure of 2,586 bobbins valued at Rs 31,03,200. The South East Zone recorded 17 cases with 26 persons involved, and 578 bobbins confiscated worth Rs 6,93,600.

The South West Zone topped the chart with the highest number of cases (32), involving 36 persons. Authorities seized 1,826 bobbins worth Rs 21,91,200 from this zone. In the East Zone, 19 cases were reported, with 30 persons involved and 1,008 bobbins were confiscated valued at Rs 12,09,600.

The North Zone registered 14 cases with 24 individuals involved. A total of 1,108 bobbins worth Rs 13,29,600 were seized.



## 'TELANGANA ZAROOR AANA'

# Minister Jupally asks people to participate in tourism campaign

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister Jupally Krishna Rao inaugurated the 7th International Kite & Sweet Festival 2025 at the Parade Grounds on Monday evening, urging people to take part in the 'Telangana Zaroor Aana' tourism campaign and visit Telangana's tourist spots at least once a month.

Wishing a Happy Bhogi and Sankranti to all Telugu people world-wide, Jupally emphasised the importance of kites in the festival. He expressed delight at having Hyderabad as the venue for the International Kite & Sweet Festival. The Minister also highlighted the participation of 47 international kite flyers from 19

countries, including Indonesia, Sweden, Australia, Sri Lanka, Canada, Cambodia, Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Italy, South Africa, Japan, Tunisia, Poland, Singapore, Ukraine and France. Additionally, 60 kite club members from 14 Indian states are part of the event. He added that such festivals encourage cultural exchange and celebrate our rich heritage. Jupally further emphasised that festivals symbolise our culture, traditions and heritage. While society evolves, the government is focused on reviving and preserving cultural practices. He added that the rise of social media and online gaming, the government promotes unity, cultural diversity and a return to traditional values.



Minister Jupally Krishna Rao inaugurates the 7th International Kite & Sweet Festival 2025 at the Parade Grounds on Monday



Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, Archaeologist and CEO, Pleach India Foundation, with the sculptures at Kankal in Vikarabad

## 10th century Jain sculptures in utter neglect at Kankal

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In all, 50 Jain sculptures are scattered in utter neglected state at Kankal village, Pudur mandal, Vikarabad district, says Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, Archaeologist and CEO, Pleach India Foundation.

As part of the awareness programme called Preserve Heritage for Posterity, he noticed sculptures including a colossal Ganesha, three Nandis, four Sivalingas, 15 idols of Naga devatas, Saptamatikas, Veerabhadra, 10 Hero stones engaged in fights, Chandis, Chamundi and a good number of Jain sculptures amidst bushes and under the trees.

Dr Reddy, said that the sculptures range in date between the 8th and 12th centuries CE representing the Badami Chalukya, Rastrakuta, Kalyani Chalukya and Kakatiya art styles among which the broken black granite sculptures of Jain Parswanath and Mahavira flanked by Yaksha and Yakshinis lying uncared for by the side of the masjid, roadside and under a tamarind tree in the village deserve immediate protection because of their artistic merit and antiquarian value, said Dr Sivanagi Reddy.

The Parshanatha image standing in Kayotsarga posture is mutilated at the head portion where the hoods of the serpent king, Dharnendra are broken. Based on a huge pedestal carved with the sculptures of lions, the symbol of Vardhamana Mahavira, Sivanagi Reddy suspects that there might be a colossal sculpture of Mahavira in the village yet to surface.

Dr Reddy documented all the 50 sculptures with the help of Chakali Sampath Kamar, a heritage lover, S Venkata Ramireddy, an agriculturist of the village and sensitised the villagers on the historical significance and need to preserve the priceless heritage sculptures for posterity. He appealed to the village and district administration to set up a village museum by shifting all the sculptures to the premises of the Siva temple.

## T-Hub partners with INSEAD to back early-stage startups

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

T-Hub, India's leading startup incubator, has partnered with the INSEAD National Alumni Association and INSEAD Angels India. This partnership aims to support early-stage startups in T-Hub's ecosystem with funding and mentorship, driving innovation and accelerating growth. INSEAD Angels will provide funding between \$50,000 and \$250,000, alongside expert mentorship and networking opportunities through events like Pitch Days and Demo Days.

At an event in the Pinnacle Hall on Monday, Interim CEO of T-Hub Sujit Jagirdar emphasised that this collaboration equips startups with essential resources to scale and succeed. He noted that by integrating INSEAD Angels, T-Hub connects startups with global investors, mentors and industry leaders, empowering entrepreneurs with funding, strategic guidance and access to international markets. Chief

Strategy Officer, Ministry of IT E&C, Government of Telangana, Sreekanth Lanka highlighted the shared focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. He said that the partnership strengthens Telangana's status as a startup hub, offering local startups global opportunities and expert support to grow rapidly.

Meanwhile, President of INSEAD National Alumni Association, Vivek Subramaniam expressed excitement about nurturing Telangana's entrepreneurial ecosystem. He believes the collaboration could create unicorns by leveraging the network of 2,500 INSEAD alumni across India.

Later, Akshat Birla, President of INSEAD Angels India, appreciated T-Hub's vibrant startup ecosystem and shared enthusiasm for supporting promising ventures. He described the partnership as an opportunity to give back and create growth in Telangana's dynamic startup landscape.



Telangana MLA Sabitha Indra Reddy, along with Sergio Loureiro, VP of Global Data Centre Operations, AWS, inaugurating the village development projects on Monday

## Amazon inaugurates village development projects

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Amazon Web Services (AWS) India announced the completion of community development projects in Meerkanpet, Kandukur mandal, Rangareddy district, Hyderabad. These include a public park, water purifier system, renovated buildings for a health sub-centre and a self-help group (SHG) resource centre. The projects were implemented with non-profit partner SEARCH, showing Amazon's commitment to community impact.

During the inauguration on Monday, Telangana MLA Sabitha Indra Reddy commended Amazon's initiatives, highlighting their focus on healthcare, education and infrastructure. She noted that the SHG resource centre now provides spaces for women to collaborate on entrepreneurial projects. She emphasised the effective use of these facilities and pledged to donate books to Amazon-developed

libraries that excite students and enrich villagers knowledge.

The park features a gym, children's play area and a walking track. The water purifier system, using automated dispensers, offers affordable drinking water. The upgraded health sub-centre includes a consultation room, short-stay inpatient room and expanded waiting area.

Amazon also installed solar streetlights and planted trees on village roads.

These initiatives demonstrate Amazon's dedication to improving local living standards and fostering sustainable development in rural communities.

Sergio Loureiro, VP of Global Data Centre Operations, AWS; Saji P.K., Director of Data Centre Operations - Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa, AWS; Aditya Chowdhry, Director of Data Centre Operations - India, AWS, local ward members and local leaders also participated in the programme.



Interim CEO of T-Hub Sujit Jagirdar, along with Chief Strategy Officer Sreekanth Lanka exchanging the partnership with President of INSEAD National Alumni Association Vivek Subramaniam at T-Hub on Monday

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BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AT THE HOSPITAL

## Axe falls on Nizamabad GGH Superintendent

● The state government has also ordered an inquiry into the functioning of Dr Pratima Raj when she was the General Hospital Superintendent

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

The axe of accountability has fallen on Dr Pratima Raj, the Superintendent of the Government General Hospital in Nizamabad.

An order, issued by the State government on Monday stated that "Dr Pratima Raj, Superintendent of General Hospital, Nizamabad, was relieved of her duties. Dr P Srinivas, professor and head of the department of Paediatrics, is kept in-charge of the post of Superintendent, Government General Hospital, Nizamabad." The order also said that an inquiry had been ordered against Dr Pratima Raj.

The action followed Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha expressing his anger at Dr Pratima Raj for using the hospital as a venue for personal activities.

Dr. Pratima Raj allegedly held birthday celebrations in her chamber without caring about the sufferings of the patients. She also received gifts from the hospital staff, prompting the government to take serious action and remove her from her position. Dr Srinivas, professor and head of the department of paediatrics has been appointed as the new Superintendent.

It is reported that on Friday night, the government hospital in Nizamabad transformed into a function hall. Dr Pratima Raj had turned her chamber into a grand venue with colourful decorations, balloons, and glittering lights to celebrate her birthday. There were large cakes, bouquets, gifts, photo shoots, and videos taken, making the chamber resemble a function hall, it is alleged. Staff members queued up to offer their best wishes and gifts to the 'Madam', and the entire area around her chamber resembled a celebration hall for hours.



Nizamabad Government General Hospital Superintendent Dr Pratima Raj being greeted on her birthday at the celebrations held at the hospital on Saturday

Meanwhile, on the same Friday night, Kethavat Vidya Nayak from Kalyapur village in Renjal mandal brought his wife, who had suffered a seizure, to the hospital. However, no medical staff was available. As a result, he had to carry his wife on his shoulders to enter the hospital. Inside, there were no doctors or staff to assist them. All the hospital personnel gathered at the Superintendent's chamber, and despite searching through all seven floors of the hospital, the patient and her family could not find anyone to help. Distressed by the absence of the doctors and staff, Nayak complained to MLA Dhanpal Suryanarayana.

With the MLA's intervention, the doctors finally attended to the patient in the early hours of the morning. Other patients in the hospital also suffered due to the staff's negligence. The incident of the patient being carried on the man's shoulders while searching for help was shared on social media and it went viral.

The episode caused quite a stir. The Health Minister reportedly decided to take action against Dr Pratima Raj.



On Monday, the morning of the Bhogi festival, the temple began its rituals with early morning prayers to the deity. Vinayaka Puja and other prayers were conducted. With the commencement of the Mallanna Jathara, devotees have started arriving at the temple. Devotees are coming from various districts of the state, leading to a heavy rush at the temple. The premises were packed with devotees, and the crowd grew throughout the night. By Monday, the temple grounds and surrounding areas were teeming with devotees.



## Inavolu Mallikarjuna Swamy Jatara gets underway

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Mallikarjuna Swamy Jatara celebrations have begun in Inavolu. The flag-hoisting ceremony was held with great grandeur on Sunday.

Initially, priests performed a ritual, followed by the archakas (priests) conducting morning prayers such as Vinayaka Puja, Rudrabhishekam, and others in accordance with Shaiva Agama procedures.

In the morning, Ganapati Puja and rituals were conducted. As a sign of the commencement of the festival, the deities were invited into the temple, and the saffron-coloured flag was hoisted with auspicious musical sounds and mantras.

After performing three rounds of circumambulation around the temple, the flag was raised atop the temple. Subsequently, after a grand Rudrabhishekam with Mahanyasam, offerings of water and fruits were made, and the festival was declared to have begun.

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With the commencement of

the Mallanna Jathara, devotees have started arriving at the temple. Devotees are coming from various districts of the state, leading to a heavy rush at the temple. The premises were packed with devotees, and the crowd grew throughout the night. By Monday, the temple grounds and surrounding areas were teeming with devotees.

All the main roads leading to Inavolu were crowded with pilgrim vehicles. TSRTC buses transported passengers to the temple. Devotees fulfilled their vows, offered prayers, and visited the deity. The temple grounds resonated with the sounds of drums and dhols.

On Tuesday, January 14th, during the Makar Sankranti and Bhogi festivals, millions of devotees are expected to visit the temple to offer their prayers and fulfil their vows. Executive Officer Addanki Nageswara Rao, along with East Zone DCP Ravinder, Parvathagiri Circle Inspector Raghajogopal, and other officials, visited the temple to review the security arrangements. Tahsildar Vikram Kumar, MPDO Venkateswarulu, ARDWS, Health Department, Excise, and GHMC officials, along with the police, were actively engaged in managing the Jatara duties.



## Cong govt fulfilling all promises: Megha Reddy

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

Congress MLA Megha Reddy participated as the chief guest in a rangoli competition organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Prajatantra Mahila Sangh, IDWA, here on Monday. During the event, he extended Sankranti greetings to the people of his constituency, wishing them happiness, health, and prosperity on the occasion of the Bhogi festival.

Under the leadership of IDWA district unit secretary Lakshmi, 40 women participated in the rangoli competition. The first prize was won by Shireesha, the second by Sravani, and the third by Manemma.

MLA Megha Reddy, along with Municipal Chairman P Mahesh and Municipal Vice Chairman P Krishnaiah, distributed prizes to the winners and 37 other women participants.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA Megha Reddy highlighted the welfare measures being implemented by the Telangana state government, which focuses on women's welfare under its six guarantees. These include free bus travel for women,

Aarogyasri scheme providing coverage of Rs 10 lakh, 200 units of free electricity, gas cylinders for Rs 500, and loan waiver for farmers. He further mentioned that on January 26, the government would be launching the Rythu Bharosa programme.

He stressed that under the leadership of Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the Congress party is fulfilling the promises made ahead of Assembly elections.

He criticised the previous BRS government for failing to deliver on their promises during their ten years in power and asserted that the Congress government is focused on people-centric governance.

The event was also attended by Congress Wanaparthy Town president Ch Vijay Chander, Wanaparthy constituency coordinator Lakkakula Satish, Municipal councillors Chandrakala, LIC Krishna, Sumitra, Yadgiri Vibhuti Narayana, Jayasudha, Madhu Goud, Vinod Goud, Tirupati Reddy, former Councillor Krishna Babu, and TPCC Wanaparthy Assembly Social Media Coordinator Dyrapogu Venkatesh.

## Vehicle owners struggle to find parking place in Kamareddy

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

Vehicle owners in Kamareddy are facing significant challenges due to a lack of parking facilities and coordination between the police and municipal administration. The police have been issuing fines to vehicle owners who park on roads near commercial establishments where no designated parking areas exist.

Additionally, "No Parking" signs have been installed in several locations, further complicating the situation for those looking for parking. This issue is particularly noticeable around the vegetable market areas, leaving vehicle owners confused about where to park.

In the past, 15 potential parking sites were identified within the district headquarters town, but the initiative stalled after the identification phase. Vegetable vendors from nearby villages typically sell their products along Tilak Road, where no parking spaces are available. Many people park their vehicles between Tilak Road and Subhash Road to shop, but the police have prohibited parking in the middle of the road to prevent traffic congestion.

Six years ago, the police department proposed parking locations and requested the municipality to take action, but there has been no response from the municipal authorities.

Chandrasekhara Reddy, the town circle inspector, explained that the police have been working to prevent parking in the middle of roads to reduce traffic jams. He also mentioned that vendors have been encouraged to set up shop in the Gunj area rather than on Tilak and Subhash Roads.



Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar offering prayers at Yadagirigutta temple on Monday

## Assembly Speaker Prasad Kumar visits temple, offers prayers

PNS ■ YADADRI BHUVANAGIRI

On Monday, Telangana Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar visited Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple and participated in special prayers. The temple's Executive Officer, Bhaskar Rao, extended

ed a warm welcome with a traditional Purna Kumbham ceremony. Arrangements were made for a special darshan and vedic scholars chanted hymns and offered blessings.

After the darshan, Bhaskar Rao presented the Speaker with a memento and temple

prasadam. Speaking on the occasion, Prasad Kumar stated, "Temples like this play a vital role in preserving our cultural and spiritual heritage. The sanctity of this place brings immense peace."

The temple premises were filled with a spiritual atmosphere as devotees, temple staff, and special guests joined together for the sacred events. The day concluded with the successful completion of the procession, which added grandeur to the celebrations. Devotees left the temple with blessings and a sense of fulfillment.

As a result, he had to carry his wife on his shoulders to enter the hospital. Inside, there were no doctors or staff to assist them. All the hospital personnel gathered at the Superintendent's chamber, and despite searching through all seven floors of the hospital, the patient and her family could not find anyone to help. Distressed by the absence of the doctors and staff, Nayak complained to MLA Dhanpal Suryanarayana.

## Increased security measures urged at reservoirs to prevent tourist deaths

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

The Ranganayaka Sagar and Konda Pochamma Sagar, part of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation project in the district, have become hazardous sites, with at least 50 fatalities reported in the past four years. The situation highlights the urgent need for enhanced security around these reservoirs.

Most deaths have occurred when tourists, unaware of swimming techniques, ventured into the water and drowned. These reservoirs have

also become locations for suicides, with individuals seeking to end their lives.

The reservoirs have grown in popularity as tourist destinations due to their proximity to the Rajiv Rahadari and their easy access from Hyderabad. Despite the installation of main gates designed to restrict entry to the water, tourists have continued to find ways to bypass these barriers, leading to tragic incidents.

On Sunday, five youths from Hyderabad tragically drowned in the waters of Konda



Pochamma Sagar, and rescue efforts were hampered as tourists found secret routes to enter the area. At Ranganayaka

Sagar, visitors have been gaining access to the water from hillocks behind the reservoir, creating a dangerous situa-

tion. Authorities are being urged to take stronger preventive measures, including the installation of CCTV cameras, the deployment of security personnel, and the presence of expert swimmers near the reservoirs to monitor tourist activities. Increased vigilance could help prevent further drowning accidents.

In recent months, the number of tourists visiting both reservoirs has steadily risen, contributing to the growing concerns.

Other tragic incidents

include the death of Raju, a private teacher from Siddipet, who drowned in Ranganayaka Sagar, and the discovery of the body of 22-year-old Irugadindra Aswini, whose body was found floating on the waters of the same reservoir. A 51-year-old man, Mariganti Satyanarayanacharyulu, also took his life by jumping into Ranganayaka Sagar.

Authorities are now being urged to take swift action to prevent any more tragedies and safeguard public safety at these popular sites.

## Gundu Srinivas appointed Atchampet BJP town chief

PNS ■ NAGAR KURNOOL

Gundu Srinivas Goud has been appointed Achampeta town BJP president. On the occasion, BJP state executive body member Mangya Naik, state council member Mandikari Balaji felicitated the new incumbent president Gundu Srinivas Goud. The district BJP elections returning officer and BJP state secretary M Srinivas Goud said that the appointment was made on Jan 12. Addressing the important leaders of the BJP, town presi-

dent of the BJP Srinivas Goud thanked the party leadership for reposing faith in his leadership. He thanked former

Minister and MP Sriramulu, BJP Nagarkurnool MP candidate Bharat Prasad. He vowed to strengthen the party and strive for the electoral success of the party. He also vowed to ensure that the party flag flutters in all regions of the town. BJP leaders Ramulu, Bhatti Jagadish Goud, Rangineni Ravinder, Tejaswini and others took part in the event.





ACROSS THE STATES



'No Helmet, No Fuel' from 26: Lucknow DM

Starting January 26, riders of two wheelers may not get fuel at filling stations in Lucknow if they are found without helmet or protective headgear...



Singapore prez to begin 5-day visit from today

President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam will be on a five-day visit to India beginning Tuesday with an aim to give new momentum to the ties between the two countries...



Union Min demands dedicated ministry for OBC welfare

Union Minister Anupriya Patel on Monday demanded the establishment of a dedicated ministry for the welfare of Other Backward Classes (OBCs)...

'Modi keeps his promises, right things will happen at right time'

PNS ■ SONAMARG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that he would keep promises he made to the people of Jammu and Kashmir...



Modi was addressing a public meeting after inaugurating a strategic 6.4-km tunnel here connecting Kashmir with Sonamarg...



way division. "With such projects, not only the distance of the heart but the distance from

Delhi is also reduced," Abdullah said, thanking the PM for staying true to his words.

The chief minister said that people often meet him and ask when Jammu and Kashmir's statehood would be restored.

"There is an atmosphere of peace in Jammu and Kashmir and we have seen its effect on tourism. Kashmir is writing a new saga of development today," he said.

Modi also paid tributes to the seven people who were killed in a terror attack near the tunnel here on October 20 last year.

After inaugurating the project, the prime minister went inside the tunnel and interacted with the project officials.



Infra development key to achieve Viksit Bharat goal: Gadkari

PNS ■ SONAMARG

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday said infrastructure development is imperative to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat, as the economy depends on good transport and communication facilities.

"The Prime Minister has given us a mission of developed and prosperous India. If we have to achieve a Viksit Bharat, we will have to improve the country's infrastructure.

"Until water, power, transport, and communication do not develop, industry, business, and tourism will not get a boost," Gadkari said, addressing a rally after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sonamarg tunnel here.

"Until water, power, transport, and communication do not develop, industry, business, and tourism will not get a boost," Gadkari said, addressing a rally after PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sonamarg tunnel here.

Good roads make a country developed and prosperous. We are working on a mission to make J-K developed and prosperous so that industries are established here, tourism increases, employment opportunities are created for the youth and poverty is eradicated.

'BJP pushing youngsters into quagmire of unemployment'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress slammed the BJP on Monday over protests being held by teachers, whose jobs are reportedly in danger, in Chhattisgarh and alleged that the Narendra Modi government is responsible for pushing youngsters into the "quagmire of unemployment".



microblogging platform.

On the other hand, BJP-ruled Haryana is becoming number one in paper leaks and the latest example of it is the MBBS paper-leak incident in Rohtak, he said.

"Double engine government is attacking the youth with double power. First attack -- the paper is leaked by the mafia in connivance with the government and there is no accountability of the government! Second attack -- in the BJP-ruled

states, jobs are not available, reserved seats are not filled and dreams of youth are shattered," the Congress chief said.

The biggest curse of the BJP on youngsters is that of unemployment, he added.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the teachers' protests in Chhattisgarh and alleged that the ruling party has pushed the future of youngsters into darkness.

Cong selling lies about UGC hiring norms: Pradhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Monday attacked the Congress, accusing it of "selling lies" about the draft recruitment norms rolled out by the UGC and said the practice of governors appointing university vice-chancellors has been going on even before Independence.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) released the draft regulations last week, proposing a major overhaul in the recruitment of assistant professors and vice-chancellors. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge had alleged that the UGC draft regulations, 2025, give state governors extensive control over vice-chancellor appointments and allow non-academics to hold these posts and termed it a "direct attack on federalism and state rights".

According to the draft regulations, industry experts, as well as senior professionals



from public administration, public policy and public sector undertakings, might soon be eligible for appointment as vice-chancellors. The draft norms have also given power to chancellors or visitors to constitute the three-member search-cum-selection committee to appoint vice-chancellors.

"Whether it is UGC Regulations 2010, 2018 or current UGC Regulations of

2025, it is clear in all that the chancellor or visitor appoints the vice-chancellor. As far as the discharge of the responsibilities of appointing vice-chancellors by the governors is concerned, this is a practice that has been going on even before Independence.

"The selection committee structure of UGC Regulations 2025 is actually the format of UGC Regulations 2010.

Pakistan epicentre of terrorism: Army chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan is the "epicentre" of terrorism and the cycle of violence in Jammu and Kashmir is being "orchestrated" from that country, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi said on Monday even as he described the overall situation in the Union Territory as "firmly" under control.



military is holding up along the Line of Control (LoC) but infiltration attempts from the Pakistani side are continuing.

In a significant move aimed at reducing tensions, the Indian and Pakistani armies on February 25, 2021 announced

that they would cease firing across the LoC while committing themselves to a 2003 ceasefire agreement. The violence level in Jammu and Kashmir is being "orchestrated" by the "epicentre of terrorism that is Pakistan", Gen

Dwivedi said. Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a series of terror attacks in the last few months. "Last year, 60 per cent of the terrorists eliminated were of Pakistan origin. As of today, whatever is a remnant in the (Kashmir) Valley and Jammu area, we feel that around 80 per cent or more are of Pakistani origin," the Army chief said.

Gen Dwivedi asserted that the situation in the Union Territory is "firmly under control". He said the terror infrastructure on the Pakistani side remains "intact".

"In recent months, increased terrorist activities were seen in North Kashmir and Doda-Kishtwar belt," he said, adding the "overall violence parameters" are under control.

India's development closely tied to North East: Khandu

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday said India's development is closely tied to the progress of the North East, and the region's growth will depend on the development of Arunachal Pradesh and its villages.



Inaugurating the SARAS Fair here, Khandu said state self-help groups (SHGs) and federations collectively manage a corpus pool of about Rs 300 crore, which, he said, is a testament to the scale and impact of the collective effort within the difficult terrains of Arunachal Pradesh. The fair, held annually by the state government, serves as a vital

link between talented rural artisans and national as well as international markets.

The fair showcases the cultural heritage, handicrafts, handlooms, and organic products from villages while promoting sustainable livelihoods. SHGs from across the state display and sell their goods at the fair, an official statement said here.

From humble start to cutting-edge tech

The IMD's key advancements include rapid severe weather assessments (2015), 6-minute cyclone scans (2018) and upgraded satellite systems. Its advanced numerical weather prediction models now deliver seamless forecasts from a few hours to an entire season

IMD LEADS WEATHER RACE AT 150

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

From a few rain gauges in 1875 to rivalling the world's best weather agencies, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has weathered its way to becoming a global leader in forecasting.

Born out of calamities -- a devastating cyclone in 1864 and monsoon failures in 1866 and 1871 -- the IMD, turning 150 on January 15, has transformed from a humble setup

into a cutting-edge hub of weather science. "HF Blandford, the first Meteorological Reporter to the government of India, prepared the first rainfall map of the country (undivided India) using data from 77 rain gauges..."

IMD Director General Mrutyunjaya Mohapatra told PTI. According to its 2023 report, the IMD operates 39 Doppler Weather Radars, INSAT 3D/3DR satellites pro-

viding 15-minute cloud updates, and a robust network of 806 Automatic Weather Stations, 200 Agro-AWS, 5,896 rain monitoring stations, 83 lightning sensors and 63 Pilot Balloon Stations.

The IMD's key advancements include rapid severe weather assessments (2015), 6-minute cyclone scans (2018) and upgraded satellite systems.

Its advanced numerical weather prediction models now deliver seamless forecasts from a few hours to an entire season, backed by high-resolution global models and seasonal forecast systems introduced

between 2016 and 2021.

Mohapatra said improvements in observations, communication, modelling and infrastructure have significantly enhanced weather and climate services. "Forecast accuracy for severe weather events improved by about 50 per cent in 2023 compared to 2014. This has significantly reduced the loss of lives and property during extreme weather events," he said. By 2023, the accuracy of five-day forecasts matched the one-day forecast accuracy of 2017. Cyclone landfall forecasts have become highly precise, with zero error in most cases (20 km for 24-hour forecasts).







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Confluence of faith

Truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience, the Maha Kumbh celebrates India's unity, diversity and enduring spiritual heritage

There are fairs and festivals but none like Maha Kumbh, a once-in-a-lifetime event that is as spiritual as it is eventful, showcasing tenacity, modernity, culture and human will to endure—all at the same time. The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, the world's largest religious congregation, began on January 13 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, drawing millions of devotees to the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers. This event is expected to host over 45 crore pilgrims, including 15 lakh from foreign nations, over its 45-day span. The Maha Kumbh is a deeply spiritual event, rooted in ancient Hindu traditions. The ritual of taking a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam is believed to cleanse one of sins and pave the way for salvation (moksha). This grand gathering is a testament to India's enduring spiritual heritage and celebrates the unity and diversity of its cultural fabric. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted, the Maha Kumbh is a "sacred confluence of faith, devotion, and culture."



The Uttar Pradesh government, in collaboration with central agencies, has made extensive preparations to accommodate the unprecedented number of pilgrims. The state has allocated a budget of Rs 7,000 crore for the event, focusing on sanitation, security, and technological integration.

Like any mega event Maha Kumbh is also not free from fear of mishaps especially stampedes which have happened in the past. To avoid that, there have to be elaborate security arrangements especially on the designated bathing days. The State government has deployed AI-enabled cameras, underwater drones for 24/7 monitoring, and teams from PAC, NDRF, and SDRF for crowd and water safety are on the watch. A first-of-its-kind initiative featuring digital monitoring systems to streamline crowd management and enhance safety has also been put in place. Besides, this time expansion of ghats, installation of remote life-saving buoys, and a fleet of 700 flagged boats have been made to ensure smooth movement and safety of devotees. Maha Kumbh's appeal lies in its fusion of ancient spirituality with modern infrastructure. This year's 'mela' exemplifies this synergy, blending cutting-edge technology with age-old rituals. The congregation serves as a melting pot for devotees, saints, and tourists, creating a vibrant tapestry of faith and culture. On *Paush Purnima*, the first 'Shahi Snan' witnessed more than 40 lakh devotees taking a holy dip at the Sangam. The ceremonial bath marks the beginning of the 'mela,' symbolising the purification of body and soul. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath welcomed devotees, emphasizing the event as a celebration of 'unity in diversity' and the blending of faith with modernity. With meticulous planning and unwavering commitment, Maha Kumbh 2025 stands as a shining example of India's ability to honour its spiritual roots while embracing technological advancements. As the Maha Kumbh unfolds, it offers a transformative experience to millions who seek spiritual solace and cultural enrichment.

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### PICTALK



Devotees take a holy dip at Sangam on the first day of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj

PTI

## How to give a golden touch to the silver years

Old age often conjures images of frailty, dependence and withdrawal. But it can be a second bloom—a chance to embrace life with renewed vigour

John and Hazel are a couple in their eighties. They were our neighbours at a mountain resort in Germany and were on a two-week holiday. They had come from the UK, driving nonstop for hours. They went hiking in the woods, drove to nearby places of interest even on snowy and rainy days without cursing the weather, made their own breakfast in their room instead of indulging in the buffet, and seemed to be having the best of their times. When I spoke to them, I saw how enthused they were about their retired lives, looking forward to travelling more, seeing more places on earth, and not once did they mention any discomfort that might be commonplace at their age: creaking knees, waning memory, shivering hands, feeble limbs. This is the kind of old age I wish for myself and my spouse. Though, truth be told, 'wish' feels more honest than 'envisage' because I am unsure if I will see the world that far ahead. Pushing my mid-fifties, I am already troubled by the thought of a frail old age where my body might fail me, denying me the



chance to drink life to the lees. Health issues have started giving me early warnings. And every time I travel to the West and see people older than me by a few decades living with independence, engagement, and joy, I am overcome not with envy but with wonder—and a quiet determination. Why do we, in India, not envision such a golden old age for ourselves? Why do we resign ourselves so early to physical decline, social withdrawal, and the weight of ailments? Somewhere along the way, we have been conditioned to expect aging as a slow retreat from life rather than an opportunity for a second bloom. Part of it lies in our cultural mindset, perhaps—where old age is often equated with quietude,

dependence, and spiritual pursuits. In contrast, many Western cultures emphasise personal fulfillment and activity well into the later years of life. Retirees continue to travel, explore hobbies, and stay physically active, seeing old age as a continuation of life rather than its decline. We Indians often embrace a more sedentary old age, citing health issues, familial obligations, or even spirituality as reasons to wind down. But does spirituality have to mean withdrawal? The narrative around aging needs to shift—from enduring to embracing, from retiring to thriving. Perhaps, if we break free from the cultural mould of passive aging and take cues from people like John and Hazel, we can look forward to a life where the sunset years are not just endured but truly, deeply lived. To achieve this, we must adopt a proactive approach. Regular physical activity tailored to our abilities can significantly enhance mobility and reduce age-related health issues. Prioritising balanced nutrition with a focus on protein intake and essential

vitamins is key to maintaining strength and mental clarity. Beyond physical wellness, fostering emotional well-being by staying connected with friends, family, and community can counter isolation and loneliness, which often accompany aging. Moreover, financial planning cannot be overlooked. A secure financial base can empower older adults to pursue passions, travel, and stay engaged in life. Ultimately, aging is a privilege—a phase of life that can be as vibrant and fulfilling as any other if approached with the right mindset. Let us not merely aspire for longer lives but richer ones, where we continue to explore, learn, and inspire generations that follow. The golden years can truly be golden if we choose to make them so. To John, Hazel and dozens others that I come across on my jaunts to the other side of the globe, thank you. For making me see life in a whole new perspective.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. View are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR

dependence, and spiritual pursuits. In contrast, many Western cultures emphasise personal fulfillment and activity well into the later years of life. Retirees continue to travel, explore hobbies, and stay physically active, seeing old age as a continuation of life rather than its decline. We Indians often embrace a more sedentary old age, citing health issues, familial obligations, or even spirituality as reasons to wind down. But does spirituality have to mean withdrawal? The narrative around aging needs to shift—from enduring to embracing, from retiring to thriving. Perhaps, if we break free from the cultural mould of passive aging and take cues from people like John and Hazel, we can look forward to a life where the sunset years are not just endured but truly, deeply lived. To achieve this, we must adopt a proactive approach. Regular physical activity tailored to our abilities can significantly enhance mobility and reduce age-related health issues. Prioritising balanced nutrition with a focus on protein intake and essential

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# The calculus behind global invitations

The guest list of Republic day, over the years has reflected India's growing global aspirations, balancing diplomacy with pragmatism



BHOPIINDER SINGH

Beyond the obvious suggestions of bilateral bonhomie and relationship, there is an invisible calculus of cold strategy in inviting foreign Heads of State to events like the Republic Day, in the Indian context. This year, the President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, graces the occasion. Last year it was the French President, Emmanuel Macron, who heads what the Hudson Institute has described as "India's new best friend". This is unsurprising, given that France was one of the rare countries to avoid condemning India's nuclear test (later emerged as amongst the foremost nuclear fuel and reactor suppliers), supports Delhi's bid to become a permanent member of the United Nations, besides offering strategic defence platforms like Rafale fighters, Scorpene submarines etc.

Before Macron it was the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (reviving memories of Nehru-Nasser era) whose visit signified India's increased leverage within Ummah (Islamic world), negating Pakistan's age-old rhetoric. Still earlier were stalwarts from BRICS comity i.e., Brazil and South Africa, which was reflective of India's expanded outreach and ambition to assert its strategic independence, beyond superpower-led 'Bloc'. But one region that has increasingly concerned India in terms of the duality of opportunities and threats, is from the East feeding its 'Act East' (evolved from prior 'Look East') policy.

Part of the opportunities is to stitch alliances and further the latent opportunities of the prosperous ASEAN region, and part of its security concern is the shared fear of China's expansionism which makes these Eastern countries, natural allies with India. Therefore the 2018 guest list for the Republic Day parade was a virtual who's who of Heads of State under the commemorative theme 'Shared Values, Common Destiny' from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. This year's guest is yet again the President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, who will be the third



Indonesian Head of State to come as the Chief Guest after Joko Widodo in 2018, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2011, and Sukarno in 1950 (who incidentally was the first foreign Head of State in a Republic Day parade).

Beyond the deep civilisation and cultural connection between the two Asian countries, Indonesia as the world's largest Muslim population country with institutionalised tenets of religious tolerance and diversities, has much in common with India. But perhaps the most significant commonality is the wounded history with China as the purge unleashed by Indonesian dictator and strongman, Suharto (killing between 0.5 to 1 million communists, also banning Chinese literature, culture and diplomatic relations) took decades for the Sino-Indonesian diplomatic relations to reopen in 1990.

But it is the brazen Chinese claims of territorial usurpation in the South China Seas that affect Indonesia the most, especially with its sovereignty over the Natuna Islands getting repeatedly punctured by Chinese transgressions. China's infamous nine-dash line formulation has consumed the waters of the Natuna Islands from a cartographical sense, even though the Permanent Court of Arbitration Ruling validated Indonesian claims. But it is an issue that remains testy with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto recently signing a memoran-



THEREFORE THE 2018 GUEST LIST FOR THE REPUBLIC DAY PARADE WAS A VIRTUAL WHO'S WHO OF HEADS OF STATE UNDER THE COMMEMORATIVE THEME 'SHARED VALUES, COMMON DESTINY'

dum of understanding with the Chinese for "joint maritime development" whilst acknowledging an "overlapping claim"—it was a move of acknowledgement that was slammed by many international commentators who believe it gave credence and support to Chinese claims.

That said, the usually unconcerned Indonesians who had warmed up to the Chinese with its Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) largesse and other investments are gradually becoming more Sino-wary and concerned. The visit of the Indonesian President to India will be carefully watched in Beijing for what is said or suggested during the visit. Besides the Chinese angularity, there are enough commercial and diplomatic stakes to be tapped bilaterally, which chooses the Indonesian Head of State, very apt and strategic.

However, across the oceans, it is the guest list of invitees for the swearing-in of the 47th President of the United States (20th Jan) that is raising eyebrows, about the unpredictability of the Trump 1.0.2 tenure, that it signifies. Reportedly the Trump-Vance Inaugural Committee has raised an unbelievable \$170 million (compared to \$107 in 2016) from the deep-pocketed donors and corporations who presumably seek to curry favour with him at the jamboree. But it is the personal invite list of Trump (doing away with the traditional avoidance of Head of State to

US Presidential swearing-in) that is extremely disconcerting, for it includes ideological hard right-wingers like Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Argentinian President Javier Milei, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, Hungarian President Viktor Orban, ousted Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and French far-right leader Eric Zemmour! But the strangest invite was to the Chinese President Xi Jinping, onto whom his Presidential campaign diatribe and threats were ostensibly directed. Xi tellingly declined and may instead send some other official.

The much-believed invite to the Indian Prime Minister never came, and it will be left to the External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, to represent the Indian government, as per the invite received. Another notable omission has been the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky who went public in expressing interest to attend the same but hasn't received the invite. Trump's unsaid 'frenemy' Vladimir Putin would be smiling at emerging signals from Washington DC. US Ambassador to India's reassurance given the "crowded swearing-in ceremony" doesn't seem too convincing or reassuring.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DECODING ANCIENT LANGUAGES

Madam —The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu MK Stalin has announced a prize of \$1 million for deciphering the script of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC), or Harappan Civilisation, aka Dravidian Civilisation, the Bronze Age culture that originated in the Indus River valley around 6000 BCE. For over a century, "the pictographic and logo-syllabic script, probably standing for one or two languages, has been the most vexing problem for epigraphists and archaeologists. However, "Indus script scholars John Marshall, Yuri Knorozov, Nikita Gurov, Kamil Zvelebil, Asko Parpola, Iravatham Mahadevan and Bryan Wells agree that the language underlying the Indus script is Dravidian." A science paper pointed out that the Indus Valley people spoke a Dravidian language, while the Vedic people spoke an Indo-European language, Sanskrit. The paper argues, "A possible scenario combining genetic data with archaeology and linguistics is that proto-Dravidian was spread by people of the Indus Valley Civilisation." At an event in Chennai to mark the centenary of the IVC, Stalin said that the discovery of Sir John Marshall, the then Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, completely changed the understanding of India's past. Stalin added that the discovery debunked the claim that Aryans and Sanskrit originated in India. Marshall's argument that the IVC predated Aryan (Vedic) civilisation and that the language in the Indus Valley could be Dravidian was a turning point in history. Ironically, his statue is being installed in Tamil Nadu, though he is credited with discovering IVC through excavations in Harappa and Mohenjodaro, now in Pakistan.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

### END POST-RETIREMENT POSTINGS

Madam —The suggestions of the Vice President to go on merit while deciding postings are welcome. His suggestion to

## India a developed nation by 2047



The ambition of transforming India into a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 demands bold and innovative economic strategies. The recent proposal to create an 'Amrit Kaal Fund' inspired by Singapore's GIC model, appears to be a highly promising approach to achieve the financial goals necessary for sustainable growth. India's public sector enterprises have demonstrated significant improvement in earnings and the market value of public sector stocks has nearly tripled

in recent years. By transferring PSU holdings in excess of 51 per cent into this fund, the government can effectively leverage these assets to raise resources, reduce fiscal deficits, retire public debt and improve India's sovereign credit ratings.

The strategic shift away from traditional privatisation toward shared public ownership addresses valid concerns about the concentration of wealth and political sensitivities. Furthermore, listing the fund as an exchange-traded vehicle would allow domestic and international investors to participate in India's growth story, thereby unlocking additional capital. It is imperative that the 2025 budget prioritises this visionary initiative to propel India towards 8+ GDP growth to achieve the goal of a developed nation by 2047.

Vishal Mayur | Tumakuru

do away with post-retirement rehabilitations is also a valid one to avoid decisions being incentivised and inductive to grab posts. But these are happening as policy of the ruling party. The top executives of public service commissions do not decide such political policies. Therefore, he should use his good office and prevail upon the ruling dispensation to do away with the system of taking their favourable judgements to decide their post-retirement rehabilitations.

A blanket ban avoiding posting after retirement for five years may be thought of. Postings lack logic. The governor is selected based on political lenience, and he is expected to appoint apolitical academicians as vice chancellors of universities. It cannot happen so. As such, postings are made on merit, but the merit here means normally the speed and commitment with which the line of the ruling party is toed up. In a system where caste, cash and commitment to policies are predominant, expecting activities meant for Puritans is like

searching for fuel sticks in a desert land.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

### EMPOWERING WOMEN INVESTORS

Madam —The participation of women in India's equity markets is steadily growing, marking a significant shift in financial dynamics. Factors like increased financial independence, digital accessibility through investment platforms, and rising financial literacy have empowered women to actively invest in stocks. Women are adopting a research-driven, long-term approach, contributing to a more balanced and stable market environment. Despite challenges like cultural biases and limited confidence in some cases, the trend is gaining momentum. This rise not only promotes gender inclusivity but also strengthens retail participation in India's equity landscape, heralding a more diverse financial future.

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





### FIRST COLUMN

## AN ODE TO MY MOTHER

A woman of immense strength and boundless compassion, she dedicated her life to healing



RAVI VALLURI

Always be associated with people who are good at heart, said Swami Vivekananda. My mother shared her birthday with Swami Vivekananda (12th January). She nurtured strong bonding with spiritually inclined stalwarts. I recall her association with Sathya Sai Baba, Ganapathi Sachchidanda Swamiji, Raghavendra Swami Mutt, Swami Chinmayananda, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Mahesh Yogi and Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. She wanted to pursue medicine but life did not take that trajectory. So, she upended the pyramid and became a qualified medical social worker and worked diligently at the Rajan Babu TB (RBTB) Hospital, in Delhi.

Gurudev says, "Open your hands and sky is in your hands." To combat and challenge the disease of tuberculosis she initiated several rehabilitation projects. This included a creche for the children of those afflicted with this malady, a Stitching Centre, candle and match-making units. She used to tell patients and their children that "Fear is only as deep as the mind allows." Thus, patients afflicted with TB, but not bedridden participated in the projects. This was what she called "Diversionsary Therapy". Climate changes, civilisations collapse, governments change, political affiliations alter and even the best possible model collapses.

This is inevitable. It was extremely traumatic for my mother and she became a patient of Paroxysmal Atrial Tachycardia (PAT). This is a type of arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). Paroxysmal means that the episode of arrhythmia originates and terminates abruptly. Atrial implies the arrhythmia starts with atria or in the upper chambers of the heart. The tachycardia results in a significant increase in the heartbeat per minute. It is accompanied by severe sweating, dizziness, palpitations, angina, and



acute breathlessness. Normally a patient suffers from such a condition owing to emotional upheavals, physical exhaustion, deep anxiety, and consumption of caffeine or alcohol. She was administered medication but it worked only to an extent. The real help came in the form of a pentagon-shaped talisman. That is through Siddha Healing, Pranik Healing, the 10-day Vipassana Course and the Part 1 and Part 2 Art of Living courses.

Indisputably it is the infinitesimal and scientific power of breath. Breathing techniques, meditation, medication and proper diet changed the trajectory of the life of the patient and brought back the mojo in her life. The year 2020 A virulent virus that is assumed to have originated in the dragon land of China assumed monstrous proportions and spread like a pandemic across the swathes of the globe. The robust lady, a woman of substance contracted the disease on the 23rd of December that year, a day after I was detected positive with the pestilence.

Six days before when she would have celebrated her eighty-fourth birthday, and despite testing negative for COVID, life was snuffed out and she entered the empyrean. She was on the ventilator, something my mother would have abhorred as the lethal virus had entered her lungs. Strangely at 7:30 a.m. that morning, though enfeebled by the pernicious disease, I was performing Sudarshan Kriya and had a premonition that my mother had entered Vaikuntha. A few minutes later my wife knocked on the door and with misty eyes and a choked voice conveyed the news. We are yet to recover from the body blow. My mother used to get up at twelve in the night and followed a strict regimen that included Vipassana meditation, Pranik Healing, Siddha Healing, Mudra Pranayama and then Sudarshan Kriya. This lasted for almost six hours. She was also religious in taking her short walks... how did she contract the disease and leave for her heavenly abode? Destiny or Karma?

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

# Deciphering the concerns in State of Forests Report 2023



V K BAHUGUNA

While the total forest and tree cover rose by 1,445.81 sq km since 2021, the findings reveal deeper concerns about the health and sustainability of India's natural forests



The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has a few weeks ago released its 2023 state of Forest report which shows an increasing trend in forest and tree cover in the country. The current assessment has shown a very meagre increase in forest cover by 156.41 sq km compared to the past assessment of 2021. However, the total forest and tree cover of the country has increased by 1445.81 sq km compared to the last assessment of 2021.

The results are good to show to the nation that its forest machinery is doing a good job in maintaining and also increasing the resources it is managing and controlling. This also is a good political tool in the hands of the Central government to show its success in conserving the forest resources and the overall environment. However, as the saying goes 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. The benchmark of any such professionally well-prepared report can be judged only if it shows the correct picture.

This year the team of the FSI brought out several key features like decadal changes in the various forest parameters and tree cover/ agro-forestry by preparing a change matrix, growing stock calculations both inside and outside the forest cover, information on canopy density of different classes of forests, carbon stock calculation, changes in western ghat eco-sensitive zone, fires and grazing status and status of natural regeneration, division wise forest cover for 16 states etc. The FSI officers have put up the data collected and analysed in the public domain and it is necessary that as professional administrators people like me bring some of the urgent issues that need the attention of the Prime Minister who is keen to see the success of conservation in the country, because the health of the forest of the country is not good rather the natural forests are in bad shape and



THE CONDITION OF FORESTS SHOULD NOT BE ASSESSED BY CARBON GROWTH OR TREE NUMBERS BUT BY THE CONDITION OF RESERVE AND PROTECTED FORESTS WHICH ARE THE SOURCE OF MORE THAN 450 RIVERS AND RIVULETS OF OUR COUNTRY AND SOURCE OF RECHARGING THE AQUIFERS, BINDING THE SOIL AND CONTROLLING THE HYDROLOGY

overall scenario demand a serious rethink on the way we manage our forest bio-diversity, even though India is ranked 3rd in top ten countries for an average net gain in the forest area. Let us discuss some of the points for action by the professionals/ administrators as well as the political leaders.

Before I flag the issues let us accept the fact that Trees outside the recorded forests are to the tune of 30.7 million ha which is 37.11 per cent of the total forest and tree cover of the country. All kinds of plantations like rubber, coconut, palm, areca nut etc are also included in it have saved the foresters from criticism with around 1289.40 sq km increase in tree cover between 2021 and 2023 and 20,286.57 sq km almost a 20 per cent increase since 2013.

On Paris's commitment to carbon stock India had compared to 2005 had already reached 2.29 billion tonnes of carbon capture. One of the issues of serious concern is the fact that the canopy density of over 40,709.28 sq km has shifted from high-density (70 per cent) and medium (40 per cent and above) density forests to open-category forests (10 per cent or less canopy density).

A major portion of this must be in recorded forests and catchments of major rivers and the habitat of Tigers. Apart from this 5573 sq km of good or open forest forests have become scrub and refractive wastelands. Thus almost 46707 sq km of forests have become non-forest inside the recorded forests as per page 73 of the report. Apart from this glaring forest /tree cover losses are in major forested states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra

Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Tripura, Telangana, Ladakh and Nagaland, North-eastern states and Himalayas.

However, some states reported an increase also and among them are Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh but the question today is how healthy is our forests. Now let us take the condition of regeneration. Only 48 per cent of the recorded forests have adequate natural regeneration 24 per cent have inadequate regeneration and another 9 per cent have no regeneration at all and for the last 10 years, there has been a severe loss of regeneration.

The condition of forests should not be assessed by carbon growth or tree numbers but by the condition of reserve and protected forests which are the source of more than 450 rivers and rivulets of our country and source of recharging the aquifers, binding the soil and controlling the hydrology so vital for sustaining the food, nutritional, climate, livelihoods and water security of millions of people of the country. So in a nutshell, we may feel happy to have a figure of 82 million ha of forest and tree cover (25.17 per cent of geographic area) which covers 71 million ha of forest cover (21.76 per cent) and 3.4 per cent Tree cover.

But the fact is we have only 9 million ha of very dense forests with 70 per cent canopy density and 24.35 million ha of forest with 40 per cent and above density. Another 18.5 million ha is with 10 per cent density or above and this includes the Green Wash area outside the recorded forests on private lands adjacent to recorded forests. Thus only 33 million ha of forest

cover is worth good density in the recorded forests compared to 30 million ha of trees outside the forests. Thus the real good forest is only around 10 to 11 per cent of the geographic area and it must give a wakeup call to foresters and political leaders. One of the reasons is the poor implementation of the Forest Right Act 2006 which has become an apolitical tool in the hands of competitive politics.

The Director General of Forests who is the Chief Technical Advisor of the government of India must tell the Prime Minister and Forest minister of the real situation in natural forest management as a professional like the then Army Chief Gen Vij told Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when he asked him to make adjustments in Siachin area and do not be hawkish. He told him firmly that being a professional he would never agree and after his presentation the Prime Minister supported him.

The IFS lobby should propose immediate remedial measures and one of the measures should be to change the format of the future State of Forest Report of FSI. The first part should only deal with the assessment of forests in recorded forests, the second part should deal with Trees outside forests and the third part should deal with fire management, carbon and change matrix etc. Hope the powers that be will notice the suggestion given here and stop the hotchpotch reporting.

*(The writer is former Director-General of ICFRE in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; views are personal)*

# India and Afghanistan: Navigating a complex diplomatic landscape

## The Taliban's return to power and Pakistan's enduring influence have created a multifaceted challenge for India

The evolving relationship between India and Afghanistan presents a multifaceted diplomatic challenge. India's engagement with Afghanistan, particularly after the Taliban's return to power, is closely linked to its broader strategic interests in the region, especially its rivalry with Pakistan.



K S TOMAR

The Taliban's close ties with Pakistan and its association with terrorism pose a serious security threat, making India's diplomatic engagement a complex but necessary endeavor. While seeking to safeguard its regional influence and counter Pakistan's dominance in Afghanistan, India must carefully navigate the Taliban's authoritarian rule, human rights concerns, and the risk of further destabilizing the

region. **India's Diplomatic and Developmental Footprint** India's involvement with Afghanistan extends beyond diplomatic posturing and is driven by long-term strategic and developmental goals. Through substantial investments in infrastructure, education, and humanitarian aid, India has positioned itself as an important partner to

Afghanistan. Projects such as the construction of the Afghan Parliament, the Salma Dam, and educational scholarships for Afghan students have significantly enhanced Afghanistan's infrastructure while fostering goodwill between the two nations. India's developmental efforts have had a direct positive impact on Afghanistan's stability and growth, providing a counterbalance to Pakistan's attempts to exert control over Afghan affairs. Strengthening ties with Afghanistan offers India significant strategic benefits, including access to Central Asia. By bypassing Pakistan, India secures a direct route to Central Asia's markets and resources, reducing Pakistan's monopoly over Afghanistan's

trade routes. This economic advantage is coupled with enhanced counterterrorism cooperation, as both nations share concerns about the proliferation of extremist groups. This collaboration not only bolsters India's position as a responsible regional power but also contributes to regional stability.

**Pakistan's Strategic Setback:** India's strengthened relationship with Afghanistan poses a significant challenge to Pakistan's strategic objectives. Historically, Pakistan has viewed Afghanistan as a strategic depth, crucial for its security and regional influence. Any shift in Afghanistan's alliances toward India directly undermines this narrative. The development of an India-Afghanistan trade corridor,



particularly through Iran's Chabahar Port, bypasses Pakistan entirely, diminishing its leverage over Afghanistan's trade routes. This economic shift erodes Pakistan's ability to influence Afghan policy, further isolating it in the region. Security concerns compound Pakistan's challenges. The increasing Indian presence in Afghanistan is perceived as a potential avenue for intelligence-gathering and support

for nationalist movements within Pakistan, particularly in its Pashtun and Baloch regions. **The Taliban's Role:** Despite Pakistan's close ties with the Taliban, India's diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan has the potential to empower elements within the country that resist Pakistan's control. This could shift power dynamics within the Taliban or exacerbate internal divisions. The Taliban's governance and its approach to extremism remain critical factors in shaping the future of India-Afghanistan relations. India's diplomatic strategy hinges on the Taliban's willingness to adopt inclusive governance and curb extremism, which could open avenues for constructive engagement.

**Regional Stability** Regional stability remains precarious as tensions between India and Pakistan persist, coupled with the Taliban's uncertain governance. Proxy conflicts could spill over into Afghanistan, exacerbating instability. **The Road Ahead:** India's long-standing commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction, particularly through investments in infrastructure and humanitarian aid, has been central to its regional strategy. India has invested over \$3 billion in Afghanistan, supporting projects such as the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, the Afghan Parliament building, and the Salma Dam. These initiatives have directly contributed to Afghanistan's economic and social develop-

ment. Other contributions include power transmission lines, healthcare programs, educational scholarships, and food aid, reflecting India's commitment to Afghanistan's well-being and stability. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 cast uncertainty over the future of these projects. Despite the political upheaval, India has maintained a humanitarian approach, continuing to provide support where possible. However, the Taliban's restrictive policies and authoritarian rule complicate these initiatives. India's cautious engagement seeks to balance its strategic interests with the need to uphold humanitarian values. *(Writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)*



MONEY MATTERS



Net direct tax kitty swells to Rs 16.90 lakh crore

The net direct tax collection grew 15.88 per cent to about Rs 16.90 lakh crore so far this fiscal, according to government data released on Monday. As per the data by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), mop-up from net non-corporate taxes, which include mainly personal income tax, stood at over Rs 8.74 lakh crore. The net corporate tax collection between April 1, 2024, and January 12, 2025, was around Rs 7.68 lakh crore. Net collections from securities transaction tax (STT) stood at Rs 44,538 crore so far this fiscal. Refunds worth over Rs 3.74 lakh crore were issued during the period, a 42.49 per cent increase over the year-ago period. Gross direct tax mop up between April 1 and January 12 grew 20 per cent to over Rs 20.64 lakh crore. The government has budgeted to collect Rs 22.07 lakh crore in the current fiscal from direct taxes. This includes Corporate tax collection of Rs 10.20 lakh crore, personal income tax and other taxes of Rs 11.87 lakh crore.



Centre extends soybean procurement deadline

The Centre has extended the soybean procurement deadline in Maharashtra to January 31, and in Rajasthan to February 4, following requests from state governments, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Monday. The previous deadlines were January 12 for Maharashtra and January 15 for Rajasthan. "Procurement is underway. We have extended the deadline for procurement in both Maharashtra and Rajasthan on state governments' requests," Chouhan told reporters. The government has also permitted additional procurement of 25,000 tonnes from Telangana, which has already reached its initial target of 59,508 tonnes. Total soybean procurement against the country has reached 13.68 lakh tonnes so far, Chouhan said. The procurement in Maharashtra and Rajasthan is being conducted under the Price Support Scheme (PSS), with the government purchasing soybean at a Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 4,892 per quintal. Chouhan said he would hold weekly Monday meetings at Krishi Bhavan to review crop conditions, procurement progress, price trends and weather conditions.



Gold maintains rising streak for 5th straight session

Gold prices rallied for a fifth straight session, rising Rs 110 to Rs 80,660 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 80,550 per 10 grams in the previous session on Friday. In the past five trading sessions, gold prices appreciated Rs 1,660, or 2.1 per cent, to Rs 80,660 per 10 grams. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 110 to Rs 80,260 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 80,150 per 10 grams on Friday. "Gold prices advanced as the rupee weakened by touching 86.61, driven by elevated crude oil prices. The rise in crude prices came on the back of fresh sanctions imposed on Russia by US President Joe Biden, escalating geopolitical tensions," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 58 paise down at its historic low of 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by a stronger American currency and surging crude oil prices.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The new regime in the US is unlikely to affect the business of Indian IT company HCLTech as it is very less dependent on H1B visas, a senior company executive said. "About 80 per cent of our people in the US are all locals, so our dependence on the H1B is one of the least in the industry. And it is not just now if I look back over the last 4 odd years, we have been pretty locally self-sufficient. "And that reflects in the number of H1Bs that we go through every year. It ranges

HCLTech not dependent on H1B: Co exec

between 500-1,000 in a year max...so it is minimal dependence," said Ramachandran Sundararajan, Chief People Officer, HCLTech. HCLTech on Monday reported a 5.54 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,591 crore for the December quarter. The H1B visa programme allows US companies to temporarily employ foreign workers in speciality occupations. Indian companies have been



'Optimistic about higher agri growth in on good monsoon'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's agriculture sector is poised for stronger growth in the 2024-25 fiscal year, driven by favourable monsoon conditions, according to Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister P K Mishra. "Monsoon has been good... I am very optimistic this year," Mishra told PTI in an interview. The agriculture and allied sector had seen a reduction in growth rate to 1.4 per cent in FY24. However, agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had recently indicated that the sector could see 3.5-4 per cent growth this fiscal year, riding on good monsoon. Mishra said between 2016-17 and 2022-23, agriculture and allied sectors saw an average annual growth rate of 5 per cent,

supported by strong performance in livestock and fisheries. The sector also proved resilient during the Covid-19 pandemic, contributing significantly to overall economic growth. However, challenges remain in pulses and oilseeds production. While pulses output has increased to 24-25 million tonnes from 14 million tonnes a decade ago, India is not yet self-sufficient, Mishra said. "A lot of research is going on and we should be making significant progress." Asked about high taxes on farm inputs and equipment, Mishra said agricultural issues cannot be viewed in isolation from broader tax policy considerations. "There are many tax issues and that need to be looked at more holistically," he said.

CBIC: GST officers must explain 'grounds of arrest' to offenders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

GST officers will now have to explain to offenders about the "grounds of arrest" and obtain a written acknowledgement from them, the CBIC said on Monday. Modifying the guidelines for arrest and bail in relation to offences punishable under the GST Act, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said: "The grounds of arrest must be explained to the arrested person and also furnished to him in writing as an Annexure to the Arrest Memo. Acknowledgement of the same should be taken from the arrested person at the time of service of the Arrest

Memo." As per the earlier guideline issued in August 2022, GST officers were required to explain to the arrested person the grounds of arrest, and note the same in the arrest memo. The instructions follow the Delhi High Court order in the case of Kshiti Ghildiyal versus DGGI (Delhi). The Delhi High Court has relied on the judgements of the Supreme Court which made a distinction between "reasons for arrest" and "grounds of arrest". The Supreme Court held that there is a "significant difference" in the phrases "reasons for arrest" and "grounds of arrest".

Market slump wipes out Rs 24.69L cr of investors' wealth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors lost Rs 24.69 lakh crore in market valuation in the last four days of severe drubbing in the equity market. Spike in global crude prices, unabated foreign fund outflows, a strong US jobs data diminishing early rate cut expectations, and the rupee logging its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years dampened investors' sentiment. The BSE Sensex tanked

1,869.1 points, or 2.39 per cent, in the past four trading sessions. Falling for the fourth straight session on Friday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 1,048.90 points, or 1.36 per cent, to finally settle at 76,330.01. During the day, it plunged 1,129.19 points, or 1.45 per cent, to 76,249.72. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 24,69,243.3 crore to Rs 4,17,05,906.74 crore (USD 4.82 trillion) in four days. With

RETAIL INFLATION EASES TO 5.2 PC

Scope for RBI's rate cut

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation declined to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December, mainly on account of easing of prices in the food basket, including vegetables -- according to government data released on Monday -- giving headroom to the Reserve Bank to reduce the key interest rate in upcoming monetary policy reviews.

The inflation-based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) eased for the second month in a row after it breached the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) upper tolerance level of 6 per cent in October. The annual rate of inflation was 5.48 per cent in November and 5.69 per cent in the year-ago period.

"During the month of December 2024, significant decline in inflation is observed in vegetables, 'pulses and products', sugar and confectionary, 'personal care and effects', and cereals and products," the National Statistics Office (NSO) said while releasing the CPI data. The top five items showing highest year-on-year inflation in December 2024 were peas (89.12 per cent), potato (68.23 per cent), garlic (58.17 per cent), coconut oil (45.41 per cent), and cauliflower (39.42 per cent).



The key items having lowest year-on-year inflation in December were jeera, ginger, dry chillies, and LPG (excluding conveyance). "The CPI (General) reached its lowest point during this period in July 2024. However, the CPI (General) and food inflation in December, 2024 is the lowest in the last four months," NSO said. Inflation in the food basket was at 8.39 per cent in December, down from 9.04 per

cent in the preceding month and 9.53 per cent in December 2023. The RBI, which has been tasked by the government to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent), has kept the key short-term lending rate (repo) at 6.5 per cent since February 2023.

The Reserve Bank's rate setting panel -- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) -- is scheduled to meet in February.

Commenting on the data, Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist and Head -- Research and Outreach at ICRA -- said while the CPI inflation declined in December 2024 from 5.5 per cent in November 2024, the pace of the correction was narrower than expected.

In sequential terms, the dip was driven by food and beverages, even as the year-on-year inflation for fuel and light, and pan, tobacco and intoxicants recorded mild upticks, she said.

Sensex, Nifty join global selloff on spike in crude oil prices, FII outflows

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex cracked over 1,000 points to dive below the 77,000 level on Monday, tracking heavy selling in global equities and a spike in international crude prices. A strong US jobs data erasing early rate cut expectations, the rupee logging its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and unabated foreign fund outflows also dampened investors' sentiment.

Falling for the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,048.90 points or 1.36 per cent to settle at 76,330.01. During the day, it plunged 1,129.19 points or 1.45 per cent to 76,249.72. As many as 3,562 stocks declined, while 555 advanced and 131 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Also, 508 stocks hit their 52-week lows while 120 stocks reached the one-year high level. Tata Motors, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma and UltraTech Cement were the other major laggards.



The NSE Nifty dropped 345.55 points or 1.47 per cent to close at 23,085.95. "The global markets witnessed a significant sell-off, prompting a similar response in domestic markets due to strong US payroll data suggesting fewer rate cuts in 2025. This has strengthened the dollar, driven up bond yields, and made emerging markets less attractive. Recent GDP downgrades and slowing earnings amidst higher valuations are weighing heavily on market sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Zomato cracked nearly 7 per cent. Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, and Sun Pharma were the other major laggards.

In contrast, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Consultancy Services and IndusInd Bank were the gainers.

The BSE midcap gauge dropped 4.17 per cent, and smallcap index tanked 4.14 per cent.

All BSE sectoral indices ended lower. Realty slumped 6.59 per cent, utilities (4.38 per cent), services (4.35 per cent), power (4.23 per cent), industrials (4.09 per cent), consumer discretionary (4.04 per cent), consumer durables (3.96 per cent) and commodities (3.69 per cent).

Meanwhile, retail inflation slowed to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December against 5.48 pc in November, mainly due to easing of prices in food basket, according to government data released on Monday. The rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 58 paise down at its historic low of 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by a stronger American currency and surging crude oil prices.



Rupee sinks to record low

Settles 58 paise down at 86.62 against US dollar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 58 paise down at its historic low of 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by a stronger American currency and surging crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.12, and moved 1 paise during intraday to 86.11 before closing the session with a loss of a staggering 58 paise at its lowest-ever level of 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback.

The fall of 58 paise, or 0.67 per cent, in one session was the steepest since February 6, 2023 when the unit had lost 68 paise.

The Indian currency has witnessed the deepest plunge of more than Re 1 in the past two weeks from the closing level of 85.52 on December 30.

Rupee had breached the 85-per-dollar mark for the first time on December 19, 2024.

On Friday, the local currency had declined 18 paise to settle at 86.04 against the US dollar, a day after registering a marginal gain of 5 paise. In the preceding back-to-back sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday, it had plunged 6 paise and 17 paise, respectively.



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Growing complexity in the cyber landscape is further exacerbating cyber inequity, deepening the divide between developed and emerging economies, and widening the gap between large and small organisations, the World Economic Forum said on Monday.

Growing complexity widening cyber inequity: WEF report

In its Global Cybersecurity Outlook 2025, the WEF said nearly 54 per cent of large organisations have identified supply chain interdependencies as the greatest barrier to achieving cyber resilience. About 45 per cent of cyber leaders were also found to be concerned about disruption of operations and business processes. It further found that geopolitical turmoil has affected the perception of risks, with one in three CEOs citing cyber espionage and loss of sensitive

information or intellectual property theft as their top concern. The WEF report said that the rising complexity in cyber space arises from the rapid growth of emerging technologies, prevailing geopolitical uncertainty, the evolution of threats, regulatory challenges, vulnerabilities in supply chain interdependencies and the growing cyber skills gap. "Cyberspace is more complex and challenging than ever due to rapid technological advancements, growing cyber-

criminal sophistication and deeply interconnected supply chains," WEF Managing Director Jeremy Jurgens said, calling for collaborations between public and private sector stakeholders to secure the benefits of digitalisation for all. The study found that 66 per cent of organisations expect AI to have a major impact on cybersecurity in 2025, but only 37 per cent reported having processes in place to assess the security of AI tools before deployment.



Indian realty sector attracts 6 pc more PE investment: Anarock

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private equity investment in Indian real estate rose 6 per cent to USD 2.82 billion during the April-December period of this fiscal, driven by a surge in fund inflow in industrial & logistics parks, according to Anarock. Real estate consultant Anarock data showed that the Private Equity (PE) investment in real estate rose 6 per cent to USD 2.82 billion during the April-December period of this fiscal from USD 2.66 billion in the year-ago period.

The number of PE deals dropped to 24 during the first nine months of the 2024-25 fiscal from 30 in the year-ago period. As per the data, foreign funds contributed 82 per cent to the total PE investments during April-December 2024,

while domestic only 18 per cent. Among assets class, the industrial and logistics sector accounted for 62 per cent of the total investments, housing 15 per cent, office 14 per cent and mixed-use projects 9 per cent. Shobhit Agarwal, MD and CEO, Anarock Capital, said, the top 10 deals comprised 93 per cent of total PE transactions in the first nine months of this fiscal year.

He noted that the total PE investment was led by the Reliance-ADIA/KKR warehousing deal which was worth USD 1.54 billion. "This deal, along with the USD 204 million Blackstone-LOGOS equity deal, significantly boosted the logistics and warehousing sector, which captured 62 per cent of total investment," Agarwal said.



## Preserving emotions, experimenting with elegance

Once seen as an old-fashioned décor choice, dried flowers have made a stunning comeback, capturing the attention of designers, homemakers and event planners as well. The Pioneer connects with a city expert, Dr Mahalaxmi Reddy, who discusses how these long-lasting blooms have become a popular alternative to fresh flowers, offering eco-friendly appeal, affordability and versatility



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**D**ried flowers are making a grand comeback, blending old-world charm with contemporary aesthetics. Their eco-friendly nature and long-lasting appeal have captured the hearts of many, offering a sustainable alternative to fresh flowers. Whether used for home décor, gifting or special events, dried flowers bring a unique touch of colour, texture and warmth to any space. Thanks to social media, their versatility and beauty are now celebrated worldwide, inspiring people to explore creative ways to incorporate them into their lives.

In an exclusive conversation with The Pioneer, Dr Mahalaxmi Reddy, an entrepreneur and retired faculty member in agricultural research, shared her insights on the rising trend of dried flowers and her accidental journey into entrepreneurship post-retirement. A former research scientist specializing in preserving eternal flowers, Dr Reddy provided fascinating details about the art and science of drying flowers, their growing popularity and the role of social media in reviving their appeal.

**Dried flowers through the ages**  
Describing the historical use of dried flowers, Dr Reddy said, "Dried flowers have been used for centuries. They are particularly popular in countries like Japan and Europe, where the market for them is thriving." She emphasised that fresh flowers, though beautiful, are expensive and require careful maintenance, making dried flowers a more practical choice.

She explained that dried flowers can be preserved through special treatment, extending their usability and appeal. "Flowers can be treated to ensure they last much longer. This makes them an excellent option for those looking to add timeless beauty to their spaces."

**Social media and the rising trend**  
Dr Reddy revealed that dried flowers have gained significant popularity in recent years, largely due to the influence of social media. "Social media has played a major role in making dried flowers trendy. People now see them as a stylish and aesthetic addition to interior spaces," she said.



Platforms like Instagram have showcased innovative ways to use dried flowers, making them accessible and appealing to a broader audience.

She added, "People are less aware of how to use these flowers in different ways."

The beauty and adaptability of dried flowers Dr Reddy explained why dried flowers are a preferred choice for décor. "Flowers are an eco-friendly resource that bloom and wither naturally. They add a soft touch of colour and texture to interiors, which is hard to achieve through other mediums."

She highlighted the visual appeal of dried flowers, saying, "Dried flowers enhance beauty through either natural dehydration or artificial methods. They are easy to handle with and retain their charm for a long time."

**The art of freeze drying**  
One of the most innovative techniques Dr Reddy discussed was freeze-drying, a process that preserves flowers in their original form. She elaborated, "Freeze drying retains the natural quality of flowers, making them eternal. This method is especially useful for preserving flowers gifted as gestures of love or significant emotions."

Explaining the process, she said, "Moisture is removed from the flowers to retain their cell structure and they are processed in a floral freeze-dryer. While the fragrance may be lost, the appearance remains almost identical to fresh flowers."

**A passion for experimentation**  
Dr Reddy also shared her personal passion for experimenting with dried flowers. "I try to dry every flower, especially exotic ones and preserve them in materials like aluminum. Each flower has its own unique beauty and I enjoy exploring different preservation techniques."

She emphasised that naturally dried flowers remain the most popular option among enthusiasts due to their simplicity and timeless appeal.

**A growing trend**  
Thanks to the creative presentations on the social media, dried flowers have reached a wider audience and become a trend. Dr Reddy concluded by expressing her optimism about their future, saying, "Dried flowers have endless possibilities and social media continues to inspire more people to appreciate and explore their beauty."

## 'KALP' YOUR EMOTIONS

**I**n the world of contemporary art, few exhibitions offer a more intimate and profound insight into an artist's personal evolution than Poonima Dayal's new exhibition, KALP, held in Delhi. This dynamic collection, which spans five distinct phases, takes viewers on a visual journey of self-discovery, emotional growth, and transformation, all explored through Dayal's unique use of colours, textures and abstract forms.

KALP, a word derived from the Sanskrit term for "imagination" or "creation," delves deep into the various stages of life and the emotional landscapes that accompany them. The five series within the exhibition—Out of the Box, Exploration, Resonance, Impressionist and Cityscapes—each represent a significant phase in her personal and artistic growth. Through these phases, she not only reflects on her internal journey but also invites viewers to join her on a path of introspection and discovery.

The journey begins with the Out of the Box Series, where she introduces the viewer to a vibrant world full of expressive strokes and rich symbolism. This series opens with a tribute to The Ramayana, honoring the divine, before evolving into powerful depictions of strength and warriors that celebrate life's exuberance. As the colours and forms unfold, deeper layers of the artist's personal transformation emerge, revealing the intricate processes behind her artistic and emotional development.

The Exploration Series represents a turning point in her work, as she begins to experiment with textures and symbolism to capture the essence of inner discovery. The cityscapes in this phase are abstract, metaphorical representations of her internal world—her evolving understanding of herself and her surroundings. This series

invites the viewer to reflect on their own journey of growth, humility, and exploration.

Moving into the Resonance Series, the tone shifts towards serenity. Through soothing blues and greens, she paints landscapes of emotion, evoking peace, clarity, and calm. The quiet introspection in these pieces mirrors the artist's own search for emotional tranquility, marking a peaceful departure from the intensity of earlier works.

Following the emotional depth of the Resonance series, she presents her Impressionist Series, where abstract forms and strokes capture the essence of life's progression. The work here speaks to the impermanence of moments—what has been learned, what remains uncertain, and the continual process of transformation. These pieces allow the viewer to feel the artist's ongoing evolution, creating an emotional connection to the universal journey of change.

Finally, the Cityscapes Series presents a conceptual reimagining of urban landscapes. Though the cities depicted in this series are



entirely fictional, they serve as potent symbols of emotional states and personal interpretations of the world around her. The works on canvas and paper, created during different phases of her artistic exploration, invite the audience to consider not just physical spaces but also the emotional landscapes we inhabit throughout our lives.

In an exclusive media statement, Poonima Dayal shared: "KALP is a deeply personal journey through my own life, expressed in the language of colors, textures and abstract forms. Each phase represents a different aspect of my inner evolution, from the vibrant beginnings of the Out of the Box series to the tranquil exploration of emotions in the Resonance series. Through this exhibition, I invite viewers to walk alongside me on this path of discovery, introspection, and growth."

Her artistic career spans over three decades. A graduate of the Delhi College of Art, she has evolved from using traditional oils to experimenting with acrylics, allowing her work to take on a new depth and vibrancy. Her art has been featured in prestigious galleries worldwide, including exhibitions in New York, Paris and London.

Speaking about the exhibition, curator Kishore Labar described KALP as "a compelling visual narrative that captures the essence of human transformation. Through her innovative use of color, texture, and abstraction, Poonima not only reflects her personal journey but also invites the audience to reflect on their own life phases. It's an immersive experience that transcends traditional art, becoming a personal and emotional dialogue between the artist and the viewer."

Poonima Dayal's work has earned her numerous accolades, including Talent Prize Awards and special mentions in international art exhibitions. With this exhibition, she continues to challenge boundaries, offering a transformative experience for both herself and her viewers.

For art enthusiasts and those interested in exploring the profound emotional journey that art can provide, KALP promises to be a thought-provoking exhibition.



**I**n 2024, young champions like Manu Bhaker and Gukesh Dommaraju rewrote history. 18-year-old Dommaraju became the youngest world chess champion ever while Bhaker became the first Indian woman shooter to win an Olympic medal and the first Indian to win two medals in a single Olympic Games. These two achievers had access to a sturdy support system as well as urban resources to reach their full potential but rural India too has vast reservoirs of

untapped sporting talent. Gumla in Jharkhand for instance, is not only known for its scenic beauty but also boasts a rich history of producing exceptional athletes in Hockey, Football, Athletics and Badminton. In fact, in 2022, five women hockey players, hailing from remote regions like Simdega, Khunti and Gumla travelled to the US after being chosen for an immersion programme.

Through the efforts of Transform Rural India's PPIA (Public Policy in Action) Fellows, the next generation of champions

is being nurtured in Jharkhand. Over 20 sports talent hunts have also been conducted at block and district levels in the past year while two indoor stadiums for badminton have also been established using Special Central Assistance (SCA) funding. The PPIA Fellowship is a key enabler in driving systemic change, empowering young athletes and nurturing tribal talent. The Jharkhand government has also launched sports schemes aimed at providing resources and opportunities to youth in insurgency-affected areas but it is not always possible

to disseminate them at the grassroots level. This is where Transform Rural India's PPIA Fellows step in to tackle the challenges of inter-departmental coordination. They strive to create seamless synergy between different stakeholders so that tribal and rural aspirants have access to requisite infrastructure and more. The far-reaching impact of the work done by the PPIA Fellows has hence not just facilitated individual success but also led to the economic and social upliftment of underserved communities in Jharkhand.

(The author, Prasanna Vasnadu, is a Parent Educator and Founder of Tikitoro.)

## How mental health impacts teen skin health

**A**s teens navigate the emotional ups and downs of adolescence, their skin often becomes an unwitting battlefield. But did you know the connection between mental and skin health is more than skin-deep?

The first signs of stress often appear on the skin. Understanding this intricate relationship is crucial in helping teens maintain both their mental and physical well-being.

At times like this, parents should create a supportive environment where teens can develop a positive self-image beyond appearances.

### Effect on Self-Esteem:

The influence of skin health on self-esteem significantly impacts adolescent mental health. Understanding this intricate relationship is crucial in helping teens maintain both their mental and physical well-being. Parents can support their teens by creating a safe space for them to discuss their feelings and encouraging them to look beyond their skin's surface. This approach helps motivate teens to feel comfortable and confident in their skin.

### Social Pressure and Anxiety:

Adolescents are highly influenced by peer pressure and beauty standards often promoted by the media. For teens, this pressure can be overwhelming, especially when it comes to appearance. To address this issue, it's important to educate early on the mindful use of social media and to understand that not everything online is real.

### Skin Picking Disorder:

Skin problems can have a greater negative influence on a teen's mental health than just social anxiety and low self-esteem. Skin-picking disorder, or dermatillomania, is a condition in which a person picks at their skin obsessively, frequently to the point of injury. Stress, anxiety, or a sense of being in the dark may lead to this behaviour. Teens who suffer from skin disorders such as acne may be at a higher risk of developing this disorder because they may pick at imperfections to make them look better.

### Role of Skincare Routines:

Encouraging healthy skincare routines can help teens feel more in control of their skin health, potentially reducing anxiety. A consistent rou-



tine tailored to their needs can also improve skin conditions, leading to a boost in confidence and self-esteem.

### Tips for Parents:

- Provide a secure environment where teenagers can discuss their emotional health and skin issues. Building confidence and self-esteem is vital so they can embrace their individuality, make informed choices about their well-being, and develop a positive self-image.
- Encourage teens to follow healthy skincare routines and avoid popping or squeezing pimples. It's also important to teach them that this is a part of life and that there are avenues they can explore to be more comfortable in their skin.
- Stress is another factor that contributes to both physical and mental health. Promote stress-relieving pursuits for the teen, such as physical activity, meditation, and interest-based hobbies.
- Encourage a healthy body image and self-esteem by highlighting their strengths and attributes. Boosting their self-esteem is the first step in ensuring that they can see that they are more than just the surface of their skin.

## Policymakers drive towards sports revolution



# what's brewing?



A performance by Gangireddulu, Haridasulu, Jangmadevarulu, Wings of wonder the ultimate Kites Flying was held to celebrate the Sankranti festival at Hyderabad

PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary

## Celebrate Lohri in Style

Lohri, the vibrant festival of harvest, brings with it the warmth of bonfires, the joy of family gatherings, and the tradition of exchanging gifts. It's a time to celebrate abundance, gratitude, and togetherness. What better way to share the festive spirit than with thoughtfully curated hampers that capture the essence of Lohri? Whether you're looking for a gift to impress or something to add charm to your celebrations, our hand-picked hampers have you covered.



### LOHRI GIFT HAMPER

Celebrate the vibrant festival of Lohri with FNP's exclusive Lohri Gift Hamper. This thoughtfully curated assortment includes traditional delights such as gur (jaggery), til (sesame seeds), and an array of premium dry fruits, all elegantly packaged to reflect the festive spirit. Perfect for sharing warmth and joy with loved ones, this hamper embodies the essence of Lohri celebrations.

Price: 2,799

### ASSORTED FLAVOURS GAJAK GIFT HAMPER

Celebrate the warmth and sweetness of Lohri with this delightful assortment of traditional treats. A perfect gift for family friends or colleagues this collection offers a blend of rich festive flavors that symbolize joy and prosperity. Thoughtfully curated it adds a special touch to the celebrations making every moment memorable. Share the love and sweetness of the season creating cherished memories that will last long after the festivities.

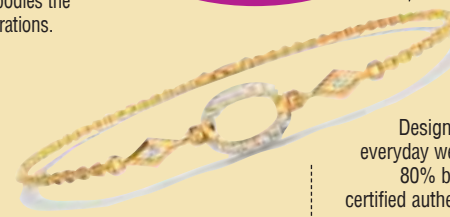
Price: 4,299



### REGAL CELEBRATION DIAMOND RING

The "Regal Celebration Diamond Ring" from Jewelbox is an elegant and minimalist ring available in 14Kt or 18Kt gold (Rose, White, or Yellow). Designed with lab-grown diamonds, this ring is suitable for everyday wear or as a thoughtful gift. It comes with features like 80% buyback, 100% exchange, a 15-day return policy, and certified authenticity. Free shipping and insurance are also offered.

Price: Rs 24,142



### NUTS OF NATURE

Celebrate the richness of Diwali with a treasure trove of wholesome delights that symbolise abundance and prosperity. This carefully curated assortment brings together a harmonious blend of dry fruits. As a whole, it embodies the essence of sharing and togetherness, making it the ideal gift to convey warmth and blessings during the festival of lights. Share the joy of health and abundance with your loved ones this Diwali.

Price: 2,899



### HANDCRAFTED SWEETS AND CLASSIC WINTER DELICACIES

Looking for the perfect gift? Nihira offers beautifully curated Punjabi hampers in their Lohri collection, filled with these festive delights and more. Whether you're celebrating with family or sending warm wishes to loved ones, these hampers make every moment extra special.

Price: Rs. 400 onwards



## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



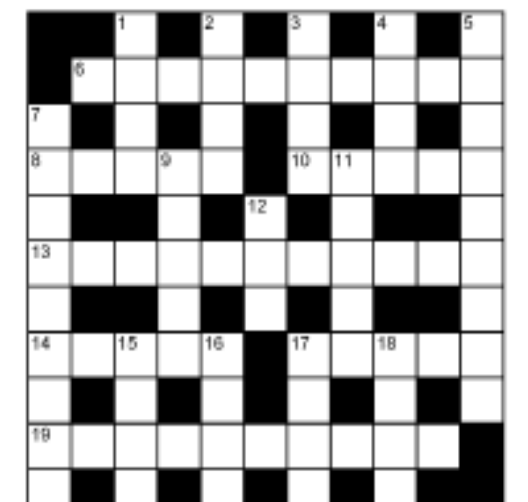
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### NANCY



### SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

DIFFICULTY RATINGS: ★★☆☆☆

### ACROSS

- Good-looking
- Feeling cheerful
- One third of twenty-four
- This many-legged creature is the young form of a butterfly
- Queues
- An animal to ride
- People on journeys
- Yummy brown stuff
- A part of something
- A house made of snow
- A gorilla is one
- Tidy and well arranged
- Observes
- Fifty percent
- Very uncommon

### DOWN

- Come to a halt
- Mix black and white to make this
- A throbbing pain
- Make music with the voice
- Periods of a hundred years



### GINGER MEGGS





# DIRECTOR NAKKINA'S CHEAP TALK CREATES A FLUTTER

Nakkina Trinadha Rao is a successful director with films like 'Cinema Chupista Mama', 'Nenu Local' and 'Dhamaka'. He is now coming up with another film titled 'Mazaka' that stars Rao Ramesh, Sundeeep Kishan, Anshu and Ritu Varma as the lead actors. The teaser of this film was released on Sunday and the director is successful in his career, but when it comes to speak about the film and actors, he acted very cheaply. His cheap comments on Anshu, the way he imitates Allu Arjun for forgetting the Chief Minister's name, is now going viral on the social media and the Internet. Netizens are now trolling him for his cheap behavior and talk.

Talking about Anshu and her film 'Manmadhudu', Nakkina said he watched the film many times. "When I was young I watched because of Anshu as she was looking like a 'laddu' in the film," said Nakkina, in a very cheap way. He didn't stop there and went on talking about her physical attributes. He added that she is in a range in this film and the next level. "So, that girl is now the heroine in my film and I can't believe myself. She is still like that. She is now

thin and I asked her to eat more and put on big sizes," said Nakkina, in a cheap way. He added that she improved (in the sense of weight) and next time she will improve more, said a laughing Nakkina about Anshu.

The director said that he was very happy to cast Anshu in his 'Mazaka' film. He said that she speaks only Queen's English. "I understand only 'Good Morning' and nothing more, when she talks," said Nakkina.

The director didn't stop there and wanted to talk about the other actress Ritu Varma. Here he imitated Allu Arjun where he forgot the name of the Chief Minister of Telangana Revanth Reddy at a press meet. Nakkina deliberately said that he forgot her name and asked for some water. He clearly wanted to imitate Allu Arjun here and then told Ritu Varma's name. This is another cheap talk and act by a director, who delivered some good hits with actors like Nani and Ravi Teja.

Now, the Telangana Women Commission Chairman has taken his comments very seriously and may ask him to appear in front of the Commission, according to a source.

The director, who delivered successful films with actors like Nani and Ravi Teja, talks very cheaply about actress Anshu and also imitates Allu Arjun, at the live event of his upcoming film promotion

## NAKKINA APOLOGIZES

Director Nakkina Trinadh Rao released a video apologising for his comments at the Mazaka teaser event. "At the 'Mazaka' teaser event for my comments, I came to know that many women were hurt. My sincere apologies to all of them. I wanted to make people laugh, so I did it and I didn't do it wantonly," said the director. He added that in his home also women are there, so he understands. "My personal apologies to Anshu and for the other heroines. I just wanted to tease her, so I imitated that scene. My aim was to provide some laughs at the event. I didn't know that these two became a big issue, many people's feelings hurt, so my sincere apologies to everyone," said Nakkina.



## Makers say there's a conspiracy against Game Changer



messaging platforms like WhatsApp. They demanded money from the producers and if they didn't pay them, they threatened to leak the pirated version of this film. Two days before the release, important plot twists were spitefully shared on the social media. After the release, an HD pirated print was leaked on various Internet platforms and Telegram.

The 'Game Changer' team now officially filed a complaint with Cybercrime police and provided evidence against the 45 individuals involved in these criminal activities. An investigation is going on to find out whether this group committed these crimes independently or as a group or had any external support.

Apart from the piracy, there was a campaign conducted on the Internet and also different social media platforms, to spread negativity about this 'Game Changer'. A few key clips and important sequences from the film were intentionally leaked to destroy audience enjoyment. The team lodged formal complaints against these pages and has been assured that necessary action will be taken soon.



Ram Charan and Shankar's combination 'Game Changer' was released with high expectations on January 10. This is one of the high budget films in Telugu Cinema and also Shankar's first Telugu film as a director. Dil Raju is the producer and he nearly spent Rs 450 crore on this film, according to a source. The makers expected huge openings, but to disappoint them, the openings are not good. Even the film got so much of negative talk after the release. Now, the makers are alleging that there is a conspiracy behind the negative talk and also the film unofficially leaked in some social media platforms deliberately.

Despite investing crores of rupees and over three years of relentless effort, the film became an unfortunate victim of piracy. On its release day during Sankranti, a pirated version of the film was leaked online by a group reportedly consisting of around 45 individuals, say the makers.

Not only the film was leaked, but the producers also got threatening calls. Before the release, the film's producers and a few team members were threatened through social media and



## We are planning a prequel to Daaku Maharaaj: Producer Naga Vamsi

Nandamuri Balakrishna starrer 'Daaku Maharaaj' film was released on Sunday and it is going with a positive note. Producer Suryadevara Naga Vamsi is very happy about the result and said the film is getting good revenue because of the festival. "Our pre-release event was supposed to be held at Anantapur, but

cancelled due to the stampede at Tirupati. Now, we are planning the success meet at Anantapur this week," said Naga Vamsi. The producer said that he is very sure that the film gets so much positive talk and especially Balakrishna fans are enjoying it. "When asked about the sequel to this film, he said, "We are planning a prequel to this one." Director Bobby Kolli is on cloud nine. "Last year Sankranti, my film

'Waltair Veerayya' became a super hit and now this Sankranti, 'Daaku Maharajaaj' is going to be another hit. Now, Sankranti is very special for me," said the director. He said that music director Thaman and Cinematographer Vijay Karthik stand out as the main pillars. "If we work sincerely and wholeheartedly, the audience definitely encourages the films," said the director.

## RAO RAMESH PRAISES SUNDEEP KISHAN

The teaser of 'Mazaka' was released on Sunday evening at a function in Hyderabad. The teaser is filled with a lot of fun and it shows that the film is going to be a hilarious one, especially by Rao Ramesh. Bezawada Prasanna Kumar is the writer and provided the story for this film, while Nakkina Trinadh Rao directed it. On this occasion, Rao Ramesh praised Sundeeep Kishan as he accepted the son's role in this film with a big heart.

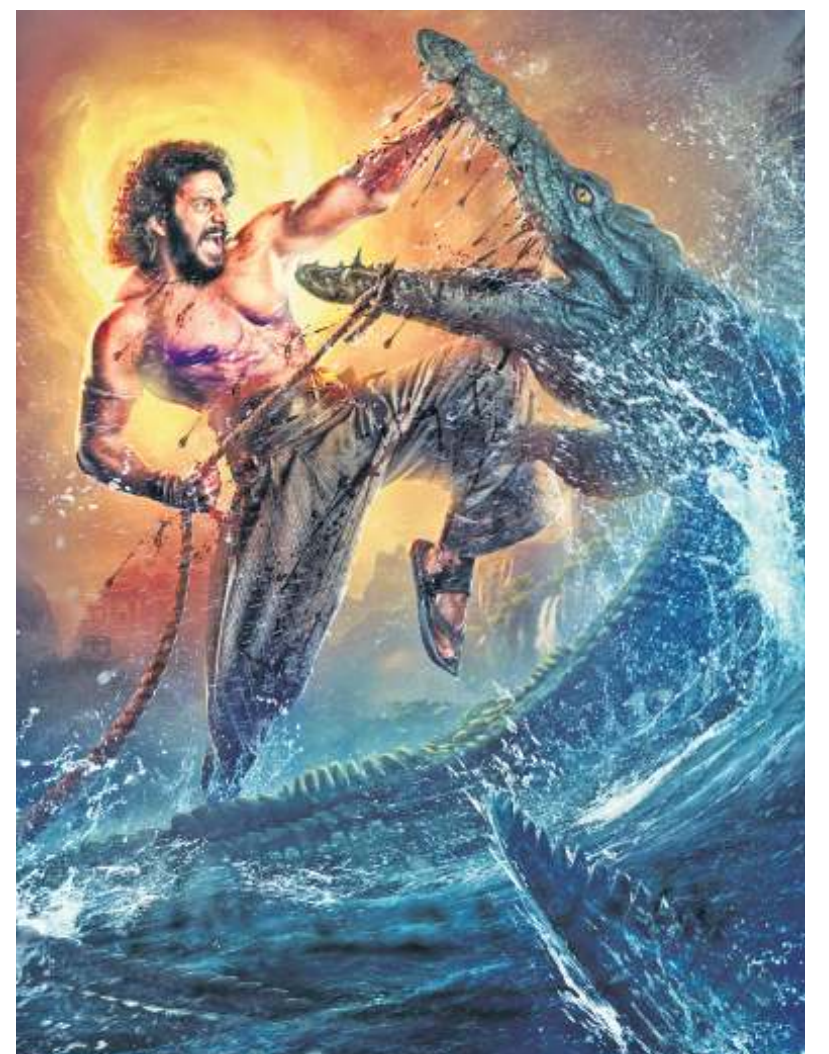
"The story revolves around a father and son. Prasanna Kumar wrote a very good story and I play the father's role and my character throughout the film. But for this story, someone accepted to play the son's role, and Sundeeep Kishan accepted it and he has a very big heart. If he wouldn't have accepted, the film may not have taken place. Once after he boarded, the project started. My sincere thanks to Sundeeep Kishan," said Rao Ramesh at the function. Ramesh said that the scenes between him and Sundeeep are very hilarious and come out very nicely. "Writer Prasanna Kumar wrote very humorous dialogues and his association with director Nakkina Trinadh Rao is a musical combination. The film shaped up well and I am confident, audience liked it very much," said Rao Ramesh. Anshu and Ritu Varma are playing the female leads opposite Rao Ramesh and Sundeeep Kishan respectively. Razesh Danda is the producer.



## Virat Karnna's Rudhra look from Nagabandham

Many supernatural and fantasy genres are successful in Telugu cinema; 'Nagabandham' is another film of the same genre. Virat Karnna is the lead actor in this film, while Abhishek Nama is the director. The first look of Virat's Rudhra was unveiled by Rana Daggubati on Monday. The first look poster presents Virat Karnna in a striking and rugged appearance. He is in an audacious avatar, fearlessly battling a menacing crocodile in the ocean. The first look poster is interesting and curious. 'Nagabandham' is shaping up to be an epic adventure, with its tagline 'The Secret Treasure hunting at the thrilling journey ahead. Abhishek Nama also brings his own vision and expertise to both the story and screenplay. Kishore Annapureddy is producing this film along with Abhishek Pictures.

The film is going to be released in all languages that combines spiritual mysticism with thrilling adventure. Nabha Natesh and Iswarya Menon are the female leads. The story is written with some true events that happened recently, where a treasure was discovered at temples like Padmanabhaswamy and Puri Jagannath. The story dives into the captivating mythology surrounding these divine locations and the enigmatic rituals designed to safeguard them.





# Barcelona thrashes Real Madrid 5-2 to win Spanish Super Cup final

PTI ■ MADRID

Real Madrid came out looking for some payback in the latest "clásico" against Barcelona but ended up being embarrassed again. Madrid lost 5-2 to Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday. That followed a 4-0 loss at home to Barcelona in the Spanish league in October. Kylian Mbappé put Madrid ahead early in his second clásico, but Barcelona then ran away with goals by Lamine Yamal, Robert Lewandowski, Raphinha — who scored twice — and Alejandro Balde. Rodrygo scored for Madrid on the hour mark after Barcelona goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny was sent off early in the second half. It was the third straight win for Barcelona in 2025 after it

lost two games in a row to end last year. "The Christmas break helped us reflect on what we had done wrong," Lewandowski said. "Now we can look forward to the run of games that we have until the end of the season." Madrid lost for the first time after a run of five consecutive victories. "It was a bad night," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "It's a disappointment, we won't hide it, but it's soccer... You have to try to learn from the losses. We have to look forward to what's ahead." Mbappé had been contained when the rivals met in October but scored a superb goal five minutes into the match at King Abdullah Sports City stadium after picking up the ball just inside Madrid's half, running at the defense and then finding the net with a clever finish. But Yamal evened the match with



a nice run in the 22nd and Lewandowski, who scored twice in the earlier clásico,

put the Catalans ahead in the 36th. Raphinha added goals in the

39th and 48th minutes, while Balde scored in first-half stoppage time.

Rodrygo scored from a free kick in the 60th after Szczesny was sent off for a

foul outside the area to stop a breakaway. Lewandowski has 26 goals in 27 appearances across all competitions for Barcelona, while Raphinha has scored 19 times and Yamal eight. Barcelona was able to count on Spain midfielder Dani Olmo after the Spanish government stepped in to provisionally allow the club to register him with the league. The final came after Mallorca fans said they were harassed by local men who support Madrid after Thursday's semifinal. Two wives of Mallorca players said they were groped. The Spanish Super Cup has become a moneymaker for the federation and competing clubs since the federation struck a deal in 2019 to hold it in Saudi Arabia. ATLETICO'S RECORD Atletico Madrid set a club

all-time record of 14 straight victories with a 1-0 win over Osasuna on Sunday and went top of the Spanish league at the halfway stage. Julián Alvarez scored in the 55th minute at the Metropolitan stadium to give Atletico the milestone victory and a one-point lead over second-place Madrid. Diego Simeone's team has a six-point gap to third-place Barcelona. Atletico has won all of its matches across all competitions since October. Its last setback was a 1-0 loss at Real Betis in the Spanish league on Oct. 27. Eight of the victories have come in the league. "It's an important streak to show the growth of this club," Simeone said. "We have been working really hard." It was the seventh consecutive league game without a win for Osasuna, which is in 11th place.



## Cummins, Hazlewood in Australia CT squad despite injury concerns

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Pat Cummins was on Monday named captain of Australia for next month's Champions Trophy while fellow pacer Josh Hazlewood too was included in the squad despite lingering injury concerns surrounding both players. Cummins was managing an ankle injury throughout the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India, which played a part in him missing the upcoming tour to Sri Lanka along with the pacer wanting to stay back at home to welcome his second baby. "I don't really have any more information than what I shared when we announced the Test squad (for Sri Lanka series) a few days ago," said Chair of Selectors George Bailey. "I believe he's had the scan, I have no idea what the scan said. But we want to give him a little bit of space at the back end of the Border-Gavaskar; obviously baby pending. "We'll work through that with Pat and obviously the selection panel and the medical team... But I know he's very keen," he added. Hazlewood, side lined from the Melbourne and Sydney Tests due to a calf niggle, was similarly not picked for the Sri Lanka series but has been named in the preliminary 15-player Champions Trophy squad.

Under ICC guidelines, Australia needed to name a squad by Monday, but can change it for injuries at any time before the tournament starts. The Aussies, a two-time winners in the event and the reigning ODI world champions, also picked all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, who was dropped for the fifth Test at SCG against India after mediocre outings in the first four matches. "This is a balanced and experienced squad with the core having been involved in the previous one-day World Cup, the West Indies series, last year's successful tour of the UK and the more recent Pakistan home series," Bailey said. "It offers a variety of options for touring management depending on opposition and the conditions that may present in Pakistan," he added. The squad will assemble, prepare and play a one-off ODI against Sri Lanka following the Test series before heading to Pakistan for the group stage matches of the ICC showpiece. Australia gave prominence to all-rounders in the squad selection as Matthew Short and Aaron Hardie were drafted in ahead of out-of-form Jake Fraser-McGurk. Adam Zampa is the lone specialist spinner in the squad. He will be supported by part-timers Short and Glenn Maxwell.

## You cannot compare one generation of cricketers with another, says Kapil Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It is needless to compare two generations of players and pass a judgement on who was better, legendary cricketer Kapil Dev said on Monday and refused to get into a debate if BCCI selectors were right in excluding Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant from the T20I squad for the five-match series against England. Kapil bowled nearly 300 overs during the 1991-92 Test series against Australia and in the same rubber he became the first Indian to take 400 wickets in the traditional format apart from contributing with the bat in the team's cause. India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah could not bowl in the second innings of the fifth Border-Gavaskar Test recently because of back spasms. India lost the five-match series 1-3. The 31-year-old Bumrah bowled



more than 150 overs and emerged the highest wicket-taker on both sides with 32 scalps. "Please don't compare. You cannot compare one generation with another. That is not required. Today, players are scoring 300 runs in a day. It didn't happen during our time. So don't compare the two (generations)," said Kapil during an event hosted by the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) of which he is

the president. The 1983 World Cup-winning skipper also added that one should not question the judgement of the selectors as they would have arrived at the decision to not play Jaiswal and Pant after giving it a thought. The two cricketers played all five Tests during the gruelling Australia series, with Jaiswal (391) emerging the second-highest run-getter, second only to Travis Head (448).

Asked if it was the right decision to drop two for the home series, Kapil said, "How can I comment on the judgement of others? I think the selectors would have thought about it." "So, if I say something it would be criticising them. I don't want to criticise them. They (selectors) are a group of people who must have planned and thought about that." With batting stalwarts Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli dishing out below-par performances in Australia, and talks of whether it's time for them to retire swirling, Kapil said the decision should be left to them. "They are very big players. Let's hope when they think it's the right time to play, when they think it's not, they will call it off," said Kapil, in response to a question whether they should be there for the Test series in England later this year.



## Gauff starts her Australian Open with a straight-sets win over Sofia Kenin

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Coco Gauff had a little difficulty adjusting to the sun at one end of Rod Laver Arena and dropped an early service game but quickly settled into a rhythm to start her Australian Open with a 6-3, 6-3 win Monday over 2020 champion Sofia Kenin. Third-seeded Gauff won the title at the WTA Finals last November and started this season by helping the U.S. to victory at the United Cup last week, a run that gives her a chance to move atop the rankings. The 2023 U.S. Open champion is wearing a Marvel-inspired bodysuit and skirt at Melbourne Park and she's radiating confidence and calm. "I knew going in it was going to be difficult, but you know I'm happy with how I played," she said of the 1-hour, 20-minute win over Kenin, who at No. 81 is a much tougher opponent than her ranking suggests. "I mean (I) could serve better, but like on that side I was struggling to see the ball," Gauff said, pointing to one baseline on the main show court that was bathed in sun. "So I'm just happy that I was able to manage through that." Another 20-year-old American, Alex Michelsen, produced the biggest win of his young career with a 7-5, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 first-round upset of 2023 Australian runner-up

Stefanos Tsitsipas. Michelsen's three booming service returns in the ninth game of the fourth set helped him earn a vital break against the 11th-seeded Tsitsipas and, after shaking off jitters on his own serve, he closed out for his first ever victory over a player ranked in the top 20. Gauff went into her opening round on a streak of winning 33 matches against players ranked outside the Top 50, dating to a loss to Kenin at Wimbledon 2023. It was tough going early, with Gauff converting an early break before Kenin got back on serve at 2-2, hitting deep ground strokes and getting good bounce off the hard court. But Gauff, who had five aces and four double-faults in her first two service games, lifted her tempo, started taking the ball earlier and won four of the next five games. She finished the match with 12 aces and nine double-faults, and saved seven of the eight breakpoints she faced. She also had 28 winners, including two rifling backhands on key points in the second set, and 13 unforced errors. The draw presented another tough trip to Australia for Kenin. It was the third straight year Kenin faced a Grand Slam champion in the first round in Australia, and her fourth consecutive first-round exit here.

## SA include Ngidi, Nortje in CT squad

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa on Monday included Lungi Ngidi and Anrich Nortje in the Temba Bavuma-led squad for next month's Champions Trophy after the pacers recovered sufficiently from their respective injuries. Nortje sustained an injury on his big toe last month which ruled him out of the series against Pakistan while a groin strain in November forced Ngidi to miss the series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan. South Africa, the semifinalists of the 2023 ODI World Cup, are placed in group B of the Champions Trophy. They will start their campaign against Afghanistan in Karachi on February 21 before meeting Australia in Rawalpindi on February 25 and their final group game is against England on March 1. However, frontline pacer Gerald Coetzee was not picked because of the groin injury that he suffered during the first Test against Sri Lanka in Durban last year. Subsequently, he missed the second Test at Gqeberha and the entire home



rubber against Pakistan. Pacer Nandre Burger, who suffered a lumbar stress reaction, ahead of the ODI series against Ireland in early October too was not considered for selection. However, the Proteas trusted the improving fitness of all-rounder Wiaan Mulder, who broke his middle finger in the series against Sri Lanka, but he played in the second Test against Pakistan after the physios gave the green signal.

Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi are the specialist spinners, who will be assisted by Aiden Markram's part-time off-spin. South Africa squad: Temba Bavuma (captain), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen.

## India Open: Spotlight on Satwik-Chirag as jumbo Indian contingent eyes end to two-year title drought

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The contingent is the biggest ever but focus would be on a handful of tried-and-tested names, especially the men's doubles team of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, when Indian shuttlers go up against a world-class field in the India Open Super 750 tournament beginning here on Tuesday. Despite the name, Indian success at the tournament hasn't been particularly regular with none from the host nation winning any title in the past two editions. The 21-strong group that will take the court this week would be desperate to change that statistic and make some amends after an ordinary Olympic campaign six months ago. The expectations would be especially high from Satwik and Chirag, who claimed the doubles title in 2022, the same year in which the currently erratic Lakshya Sen notched the men's singles top honour. The tournament will feature 18 of the world's top-20 men's singles players and 14 of the top-20 women's singles shuttlers.

Chirag and Satwik, who are former world number ones, have made a good start to the season by reaching the semifinals of the Malaysia Super 1000 last week. Despite the Paris Games disappointment, they have emerged as India's most reliable performers over the last two years by regularly making the deep end of the draws. They would be expected to do the same in the USD 950,000 event to be held at the KD Jadhav Indoor Stadium here. Satwik and Chirag, semifinalists at the 2024 China Masters, will face Malaysia's Wei Chong Man and Kai Wun Tee in their opening round. While the Indians have shown impressive form, they will be seeking improvement in quick rallies and service variations in a bid to better their runners-up position in the tournament last year. However, the Indian pair will face stiff competition from top names such as China's Olympic silver-medallists Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang. Also there in the field are Paris bronze-medallists Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik of Malaysia,



Denmark's Kim Astrup and Anders Rasmussen, and the Indonesian combination of Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto. Sindhur back in action Despite an underwhelming 2024,

one can never discount two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu, who would be back in action after missing the season-opener in Kuala Lumpur due to her wedding. The 29-year-old Hyderabadi

returned to winning ways, lifting the Syed Modi International title, although it was against a predominantly Indian field. Sindhur will begin her campaign against compatriot Anupama Upadhyaya and is drawn to face

Japan's rising star Tomoka Miyazaki in a potentially intriguing second round. MKiyazaki is a 2022 world junior champion and Sindhu's conqueror at last year's Swiss Open. Sindhu last won this event in 2017. The very exciting but equally inconsistent Lakshya Sen would be aiming to replicate his 2022 success at the event. He can draw confidence from his Syed Modi title win and a third-place finish at the Kings Cup a few days ago. He faces a tough opening test against Chinese left-hander Hong Yang Weng. HS Prannoy, returning after a five-month break following a pre-quarterfinal exit at the Paris Olympics, stumbled in the second round in Malaysia last week. However, the 32-year-old veteran showed signs of his vintage form during the short campaign. He will look to build on that when he faces Chinese Taipei's Li Yang Su in the first round. A victory could set up a showdown with second seed Jonatan Christie of Indonesia. With marquee players like Olympic champions Viktor

Axelsen (men) and An Se Young (women), and world No. 1 Shi Yuqi leading the competition, it would be no stroll in the park for the Indians in fray. But being on home turf could prove to be the morale-booster that helps them go over the line in difficult situations. Young names eye glory Some promising youngsters will also be eager to make a mark. Among them is Priyanshu Rajawat, who faces a tough challenge in his opening round against sixth-seeded Japanese Kodai Naraoka. Malvika Bansod will take on third seed Chinese Yue Han, and Aakarshi Kashyap will face eighth-seeded Thai Pornpawee Chochuwong. In women's doubles, India's hopes will rest on fifth-seeded team of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who will face Japan's Arisa Igarashi and Ayako Sakuramoto in the first round. Meanwhile, Guwahati Masters-winning pair of Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, will take on the British duo of Chloe Coney and Estelle Van Leeuwen. The Indians are seeded seventh here.