

QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The pioneer
 If you want a corruption-free admin in Telangana you need a double-engine government. The BRS and the Congress are responsible for corruption and illegalities and they are looting the state. The BJP, which has been in power for the last 10 years in the country, has not faced even a single corruption charge
 - G. Kishan Reddy, Telangana BJP chief & Union Minister

PoK crown jewel of India says
Rajnath

'WANT TO BE A LEADER IN EVERY SEGMENT'

I tried my best to get Padma Award to my mother:
NARESH

DON'T MISS...

Aarogyasri services remain suspended

For the last two weeks, the current government and opposition political party BRS are blaming each other for suspended services of Aarogyasri to patients in corporate hospitals in Telangana. Opposition BRS MLA T Harish Rao says that the negligence of the Congress government has become a curse for the underprivileged. Due to the failure to clear pending dues, Aarogyasri services across the State have come to a halt, leaving many in distress. Despite the struggles faced by the people, the State government's lack of concern is deeply...

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Cops cite intl conspiracy angle

A Mumbai court on Sunday remanded a man arrested in the Saif Ali Khan attack case in 5-day police custody after observing that the prosecution's contention of an international conspiracy cannot be ruled out. Police produced the accused Mohammad Shariful Islam Shehzad (30) before a metropolitan magistrate court in Bandra at 1:30pm. Police told court that the alleged attacker was a Bangladeshi national residing illegally in India and there was need to find the motive behind his act. Police also told...

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India emerging as a 'bright spot'

India's current economic environment is conducive for private investments with the country emerging as a 'bright spot' amid the challenging global environment, according to a CII survey. The pan-India survey is an ongoing initiative, which would be completed for 500 firms by the first week of February. The interim results are based on a sample of 300 firms spread across all industry sizes (Large, Medium and Small). Notably, early results reveal that about 97 per cent of the sample firms are likely...

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SKY will be missed in CT: Suresh Raina

Former India all-rounder Suresh Raina feels middle-order batter Suryakumar Yadav will be sorely missed in the upcoming Champions Trophy as he could have provided the 'X-factor' in Dubai, where Rohit Sharma's side will play all its games. Suryakumar and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj were the two big names missing from the Champions Trophy squad announced on Saturday. They are among a total of six players who featured in the 2023 ODI World Cup squad. The others to miss out are Prasidh Krishna...

-SPORTS

Hostels on high alert with new deadlines

DEEPIKA PASHAM
 HYDERABAD

The recent rape of a first-year engineering student in her hostel has sparked concerns about the safety of hostels in Ibrahimpatnam and its surrounding areas.

A constant problem has been the supply of drinking water. The timings have changed, the students are asked to be in hostels by 8:30 pm, usually gates would be closed by 9 pm.

A visit to the locality reveals that hostels lack visible emergency contact numbers for police, despite the presence of patrolling vehicles and awareness programmes on cyber-crime and women's safety. There is a sense of question for working professionals and girl students.

Mangalpalle and Ibrahimpatnam have become hubs for girls' and boys' hostels, catering to students from



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The 'Telangana Rising' delegation headed by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy completed its Singapore visit successfully. From there, the Chief Minister, IT and Industries Minister D. Shridhar Babu and officials will leave for Davos on Sunday night and will reach Davos on Monday.

They will attend the four-day annual conference of the World Economic Forum held in Davos.

The TG delegation is leaving for Davos to market Telangana's advantages on the world stage and to introduce Hyderabad as a world-class investment destination. After the success of the Singapore trip, the team has high expectations about the

Set to showcase TG

Team Revanth ready for deals at Davos, ends Singapore tour successfully

Davos conference.

On the last day of his visit to Singapore, the delegation led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had face-to-face discussions with the heads



Meinhardt. The TG team explained the investment opportunities in Hyderabad and government policies to them.

The TG delegation had a busy three days in Singapore. The Telangana team had discussions with the representatives of leading business organisations and industrialists.

The Telangana Young India Skill University's MoU with the Singapore Institute of Technical Education (ITE) is a key development of the tour.

Continued on Page 2

CapitaLand Group to construct Rs 450 crore IT park in Hyd



CM A Revanth Reddy and Industries Minister D. Shridhar Babu with Capital Land Group representatives at Singapore on Sunday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The CapitaLand Group, a leading global real estate investment and development company headquartered and listed in Singapore, has announced a Rs 450 crore project to construct a state-of-the-art one million square feet IT park in Hyderabad.

Continued on Page 2

India a global leader, says Amit Shah

Inaugurates NIDM southern campus in AP



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday highlighted India's global leadership in disaster management, attributing the country's success to its resilient infrastructure and the adoption of a 'zero casualty' approach during disasters.

Addressing a gathering on the 20th Foundation Day celebrations of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) at Kondapavuluru in Krishna district, Shah also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led

government's support for Andhra Pradesh. He announced that the Centre had approved projects worth over Rs 3 lakh crore for the state in just six months.

The event marked the inauguration of the National Institute of Disaster Management's (NIDM) southern campus and the NDRF's 10th Battalion campus near Vijayawada. Shah also inaugurated and laid foundation stones for various development projects worth approximately Rs 220 crore.

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'BRS has no right to criticise Cong'

KCR regime did not issue even 40,000 ration cards: Uttam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Civil Supplies and Irrigation Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy strongly criticised the BRS government for spreading lies regarding ration cards.

He said the BRS, which did not issue even 40,000 new ration cards during its 10-year rule, has no moral authority to question the Congress government, which aims to help an additional 40 lakh people.

He said that the Congress government led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Deputy Chief Minister



Bhatti Vikramarka is committed to ensuring food security for all those eligible through a fair and transparent process.

He said that during the BRS rule, 12,07,558 applications for ration

cards were left pending with Mee Seva, while 18,00,515 requests for adding new members to existing cards remained unaddressed. Additionally, another 10 lakh applications were received during the Congress-led Praja Palana programme.

The state government would consider the information/applications received through the caste census, Praja Palana, Praja Vaani or Mee-Seva centres for new ration cards. If any person is left out, he/she can apply for a new ration card in Gram Sabhas being held from January 21 to 24.

TG needs double-engine govt: Kishan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

"A double engine government should come to power in TG," Telangana BJP President G. Kishan Reddy said. He said the BJP should come to power if people want a corruption-free admin in Telangana.

Addressing the media at the State BJP office here on Sunday after inducting leaders from various political parties into the BJP, Kishan said that anti-people rule is continuing in the state. He said that the BRS and the Congress are the main reasons for corruption and illegalities.

"If you want a corruption-free admin in Telangana there is a need for a double-engine government.



The BRS and the Congress are responsible for corruption, illegalities and looting in the state. The BJP, which has been in power for the last 10 years in the country, has not faced even a single charge of corruption," he said.

Cylinder blast triggers fire at Maha Kumbh



PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR (UP)

A big fire broke out at the Maha Kumbh Mela here on Sunday due to a cylinder blast, engulfing 18 tents in Sector 19, officials said. No casualty was reported in the incident.

Thick clouds of smoke enveloped the mela area as panic gripped the nearby akhadas. The officials said 15 fire tenders managed to bring the blaze, which started at around 4 pm, under control within an hour.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who was in Prayagraj to review the preparations ahead of Mauni Amawasya, also reached the spot and directed authorities to take steps to avoid any such incident in future, they said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Adityanath over phone to enquire about the incident.

"The chief minister told PM Modi that the blaze was quickly brought under control by teams of SDRF, NDRF and fire department," a senior official said.

'Cong govt a curse on farmers'

Will fight for implementation of promises: Harish Demands Rs 10 lakh as ex-gratia to dead farmers' families

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress administration has become a curse on farmers, BRS MLA Harish Rao said. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy does not mind if farmers' death march continues, he added.

He said that the suicide rate of Adilabad farmers is disturbing and that the government is responsible for the deaths of 402 farmers.

Declaring that suicides are not a solution for farmers he assured that the BRS will always stand by farmers.

"Let's fight till the promises given by the Congress are implemented," Harish said.

He said the BRS will pressure the government till it implements the farm loan waiver scheme in full, provides Rythu Bharosa and gives a bonus of Rs 500 for all crops.

Continued on Page 2

'Will bring light into lives of poor'

Govt to give Indiramma houses to all eligible: Ponguleti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Indiramma houses will be given to all poor people, Revenue Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said.

He said the Congress Government will construct houses for all the eligible poor in the next four years in a phased manner as per the party's assurance given during elections.

Addressing the gathering after releasing the Telangana State Housing Construction Employees' diary and calendar at the Ministers' quarters here on Sunday, Ponguleti



said the government will work in tune with the hopes of the people and that employees should also

work in tune with the government. "The BRS government had weakened the Housing Department which constructs houses for the poor. Moreover, the BRS government merged the Housing Department with other departments and closed it down. The Congress Government is moving step by step to restore the Housing Department," he said.

He said the government has provided a system for the construction of houses and the selection of beneficiaries.

Continued on Page 2

HISTORIC TRIUMPH

Indian women clinch first-ever Kho Kho World Cup

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian women's team emerged champion in the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup with a dominant 78-40 victory in the summit clash against Nepal here on Sunday.

On a memorable night at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium here, India produced a masterclass of speed, strategy and skill, dishing out a clinical show.

A brisk start marked Turn 1 as the Indian attackers took charge of the proceedings. Three batches in the Nepal women were out by simple touches on 7 occasions, putting 14 points to India's kitty.

Skipper Priyanka Ingle was in the best form with multiple touch points to her name, as the hosts started off



in an excellent manner. This was enough to take the Women in Blue to 34 points and preventing a single Dream Run for the Nepal team.

Manmati Dhama got Vaishnavi Pawar, and B Samjhana eliminated Priyanka Ingle but B Chaitra took India's first batch of Turn 2 into the Dream Run.

It wasn't for long, though, as

Dipa completed the ALL OUT just moments later. This got the side back into the game but they only managed to score 24 points at the end of Turn 2, with an 11-point deficit at half time.

India were once again the dominant force in Turn 3, never allowing the Nepal defenders to settle in their stride. BK Dipa was a regular for Nepal but it went in vain throughout, ensuring that the Indians edged closer to the trophy.

Chaitra was the orchestrator of the Dream Run for India, taking the score to a massive 78 points in Turn 4. Their batch went on for a massive 5 minutes and 14 seconds, closing out the game for India and confirming them as the first-ever champions of the Kho Kho World Cup.

Monday Mirchi

COLLECTOR TURNS TRIGONOMETRY GURU, LEAVES STUDENTS AWESTRUCK

Medak collector Rahul Raj decided to ditch the usual formalities on Saturday and stepped into a classroom at Vadiyaram Zilla Parishad High School in Chegunta Mandal. But this wasn't your run-of-the-mill pep talk—he dived straight into teaching trigonometry, all without cracking open a book! Students, who were likely expecting a quick handshake and a motivational speech, found themselves grappling with sine, cosine, and tangents, as the Collector tested their math skills. The buzz? His impromptu lecture impressed not just the students but even the teachers, who couldn't help but marvel at his ease with numbers. You don't see this every day—a Collector casually solving and quizzing kids on formulas.

RACHAKONDA CP'S PRESS MEETS: FASTER THAN COOKING MAGGI!

Rachakonda Commissioner Sudheer Babu has set a new benchmark for lightning-fast press meets, wrapping them up in just ten minutes—quicker than cooking Maggi noodles! The usual script? "We've made the arrest; the investigation is ongoing." And that's it. Journalists trying to dig deeper or get an exclusive scoop are finding themselves hitting a solid wall. The Commissioner's tight control over media leaks has become the talk of press circles, leaving scribes scratching their heads and scrambling for alternative sources. "Breaking Sudheer Babu is harder than breaking news," quipped one frustrated journalist. For now, it seems the CP is winning this cat-and-mouse game with the media, keeping his cards close to his chest!

SUBBARAYUDU'S EMOTIONAL OUTBURST AFTER STAMPEDE SPARKS DEBATE

Ex Tirupati SP and IPS officer Subbarayudu's sudden transfer following the tragic stampede has become a talking point across Andhra Pradesh, with emotional moments and political allegations fueling the controversy. Subbarayudu, who was hand-picked by Chandrababu Naidu from Telangana for a three-year deputation, reportedly broke down after the incident. In a tearful moment, the SP is learned to have told the now suspended DSP Ramana Kumar, "You should have killed me instead of this," expressing his anguish over the situation. Subbarayudu reportedly felt that the officer, who was just months away from retirement, had ruined everything with his actions during the stampede. Witnesses say the SP's emotions underscored the weight of the tragedy and its aftermath. However, the transfer has stirred political murmurs. Some Jana Sena followers alleged that Subbarayudu's transfer was rooted in caste politics, claiming it happened because he doesn't belong to the Kamma community. TDP loyalists, on the other hand, strongly refuted the claims, reminding critics that Subbarayudu was personally chosen by Chandrababu Naidu. Subbarayudu departs his post under a cloud of grief and controversy.

PV PULIKUMAR: RSP'S TAKE ON LION CAGED BY BIAS

The name PV Pulikumar is echoing across Andhra Pradesh, thanks to Retd IPS officer RS Praveen Kumar's fiery call for IPS officer PV Sunil Kumar to shed his silence and fight back against the system. "Enough of these quiet tears, brother. It's time to roar like PV Pulikumar!" Praveen declared, as he lashed out against what he calls systemic bias and injustice. Sunil, who finds himself embroiled in an inquiry and stripped of a posting, is being championed as a victim of caste discrimination by his supporters. "Is being born into the SC Mala community his only crime?" Praveen asked pointedly, adding that the absence of surnames like Reddy, Naidu, or Sharma on his name tag seems to have sealed his fate. The emotional spotlight turned to Sunil's decades-long service, contrasted sharply with what Praveen referred to as the "hypocrisy" of scam-tainted leaders walking free. "Hundreds of crores looted, and yet they hold public office. Meanwhile, a decorated officer like Sunil is left without a post and burdened by an unjust inquiry." For newbies Sunil Kumar is facing charges of misconduct when he was Additional Director General of Police (CID) and being responsible for the alleged custodial torture of then Member of Parliament and present Deputy Speaker of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly K. Raghuram Raju. As calls for "Pulikumar" to rise grow louder, one thing is certain—Sunil Kumar's fight isn't just against an inquiry but against a system that, as Praveen puts it, "knows how to crush and silence the underprivileged." Will the lion roar back or remain caged? The whispers have only begun!

AIS OFFICER'S FAMILY FACES HUMILIATION

An All India Service officer of the state Forest Department family has to face humiliation from his house owner. The senior officer Ramesh Kumar Suman (59), passed away from a heart attack on January 16 while on training session in Kochi, Kerala. Suman, an Indian Forest Service officer from Jharkhand, was serving as the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests in Andhra Pradesh.

After his death, authorities arranged to bring his body from Kochi to his rented residence in Mangalagiri. However, the landlord refused to allow the mortal remains into the rented premises. As a result, the body was moved to a Forest Department guest house in Guntur. A tent was set up for the last rites, attended by family members, relatives and department staff. Suman's wife and two daughters, deeply grief-stricken, were seen standing motionless near his body.

The final procession took place, with the last rites conducted near the Krishna River. Interestingly Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu expressed his condolences on social media, honoring Suman's contribution to forest conservation. The officer is known for his tireless efforts in environmental conservation, particularly in forest preservation. Suman had dedicated much of his career to restoring degraded forests.

--Yours truly

People worried about BJP's growth fabricating lies: Eatala

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Responding to a question on whether he would cooperate with the Kaleshwaram Commission's probe, the BJP's Malkajgiri MP, Eatala Rajender, said that persons who have no understanding of the Kaleshwaram Commission are speaking as they liked.

"Mediocre individuals who don't know anything about protocol are speaking as they liked about Kaleshwaram notices. It is those who don't know about how the government functions who speak like this. The Finance Department releases all bills sent by all government departments," he said.

He said that persons who are worried by the BJP's growth are fabricating lies that he does not care about their opinions. Responding to another question, Eatala said that he would not comment on the Telangana BJP President matter.

Speaking to the media on Sunday at the State BJP office, Eatala said that bills of retired officials are not being released if they do not give a 7 to 10 per cent cut of the money due to them. He said that some peo-



"Mediocre individuals who don't know anything about protocol are speaking as they liked about Kaleshwaram notices. It is those who don't know about how the government functions who speak like this. The Finance Department releases all bills sent by all government departments," he said.

ple have opened 'bribe shops.' Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's rule is extremely inefficient, corrupt and uncoordinated. They are looting as they do not know whether they will come to power again or not," he said.

Eatala said the Congress Government has been demolishing the houses of the poor

in the name of HYDRAA. The government demolished the houses of the poor on the Musi's banks and now the HYDRAA is demolishing houses in slums.

Eatala said that Balaji Nagar and Jawahar Nagar are old, big slums. "People from across the nation have been living in these areas from 1985. Most of

them are from Telangana, UP, West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. These people have purchased houses here. The land belongs to the defence department. The poor purchased the land from the Army people. The excesses of Revenue officials and real estate brokers have increased. The Revanth Reddy government is trying to demolish houses built after 1994," he said.

The then AP government gave house sites to 1,705 people who had undergone family planning surgery in Arundathi Nagar in 1998. However, the Congress Government is now saying that it will demolish them, Eatala said.

"Does Chief Minister Revanth Reddy have any control over governance or not? Officials have become brokers and are harassing the public. Officials are demanding bribes of Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh. The court pulled up the government when ex-army men approached it. But the government did not change its policy," he said.

He warned that the BJP will not remain silent if the government tries to demolish the houses of the poor.

Promote tribal products, stresses Venkaiah Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Vice President of India, M Venkaiah Naidu, has stressed the need to promote tribal products to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities. He urged both the state and central governments to prioritise tribal products and provide adequate marketing facilities to enhance income sources for tribal artisans. He also encouraged tribal communities to cultivate leadership qualities through unity.

The Girijana Praja Samakha (GPS) and Girijana Vidyarthi Samakha (GVS) national committees organised the 'Tribal-Aboriginal Sammelanam' at the Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Sunday. The event witnessed active participation from tribal representatives and dignitaries, with traditional cultural performances by tribal participants adding vibrancy to the occasion. Speaking as the chief guest, Venkaiah Naidu highlighted the exceptional potential of tribal artisans who craft unique and eco-friendly products using natural raw materials. He noted the increasing global demand for tribal crafts and encouraged artisans to seize these opportunities.

Turmeric Board welcome, but it is not final solution, says Kavitha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kavitha welcomed the establishment of the Turmeric Board but stressed that it is not the final solution to ensure the welfare of turmeric farmers.

She called for a three-pronged approach which includes the immediate implementation of a Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹15,000, stricter import restrictions and robust support for turmeric-based industries.

Addressing a press conference at the BRS office in Nizamabad on Sunday, Kavitha stressed the long-standing demand for an MSP of ₹15,000 and urged the Centre to prioritise it.

She also called on the Congress to focus on bringing turmeric-based industries to Nizamabad to create jobs. Highlighting the 800-acre



land allotted for an airport in Jakrapalli during KCR's rule, she demanded its swift development and urged the Centre to ensure it does not remain an empty election promise.

Kavitha highlighted the critical importance of supporting farmers during off-season periods when market prices are unfavourable. "During the turmeric sea-

son, prices naturally take care of farmers. It's yellow gold. But it's during the off-season time that they need us the most, and that's when an MSP becomes essential," she said. She urged both the government and the opposition to join hands to ensure farmers' welfare, emphasizing that collective efforts are necessary to help them.

It's inauguration eve, Trump ready to revel in his return to power

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump is spending the eve of his inauguration in a series of Washington events that celebrate his return to power and his "Make America Great Again" movement as he prepares to move back into the White House at a time of deep national political divisions.

Washington has prepared in unprecedented ways to keep the unfolding events safe and secure. But unlike when Trump helped spark a mob of his supporters to attack the Capitol and tried to retain power in 2021 after his loss to Democrat Joe Biden, officials are not expecting massive protests, unrest and violence this time.

Instead, the city is braced for crowds celebrating Trump's second term and MAGA's total control of the Republican Party.

It is a remarkable turnaround after Trump left the nation's capital four years in disgrace and skipped the inauguration of his successor. Trump blasted his

way through the 2024 GOP presidential primary and won November's election by an Electoral College margin unseen since Democrat Barack Obama was reelected in 2012.

Yet even with that comfortable victory and his party in full, albeit narrow, control of Congress, the incoming president remains one of the most polarising figures in US history, with nearly as many fierce detractors as ardent supporters. That means it could be difficult to fulfil postelection pledges about promoting bipartisanship while healing political differences. He told NBC News on Saturday that unity would be a theme of his inauguration speech Monday at the Capitol, along with strength and fairness.

"January 20th cannot come fast enough," he posted on his social media site. "Everybody, even those that initially opposed a Victory by President Donald J. Trump and the Trump Administration, just want it to happen."

'Cong govt a curse on...

Continued from page 1

He demanded that the government should pay an ex-gratia of Rs 10 lakh to the families of farmers who had died.

Speaking here on Sunday Harish said that one more farmer named Rathod Gokul had committed suicide in Adilabad after a farmer committed suicide inside a bank.

He asked the CM who is claiming that his government had waived farm loans to explain whether the CM is not seeing farmers ending their lives due to harassment by banks. He asked why the Revanth Government is troubling farmers who feed the nation.

Harish said that suicides by farmers were nothing but murders and that the CM should take responsibility for their deaths.

He said the Congress Government had failed to infuse confidence among farmers and the series of suicides prove that. Farmers are the backbone of the nation but the Congress government is playing games with their lives, he added.

He said that 402 farmers have ended their lives after the Congress took over the administration. He said that it is shocking that the government is in deep sleep even after all these suicides and that KCR had made agriculture profitable.

'Will bring light into ...

Continued from page 1

He said the government had reappointed 326 employees and strengthened the Housing Corporation.

He said the Congress government will strive hard to bring light into the lives of the poor in Indiramma Raj.

He appealed to the employees to extend their cooperation to the government to construct houses for the poor under the Rs 5 lakh scheme. Employees Union State President Gavva Ravinder Reddy, General Secretary Boggula Venkata Ram Reddy, senior leader Kandi Ravinder Reddy and others attended the function.

TODAY ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	Shashthi: Jan 19 07:31 AM to Jan 20 09:58 AM
Saptami:	Jan 20 09:58 AM to Jan 21 12:40 PM
Nakshatram:	Hasta: Jan 19 05:30 PM to Jan 20 08:30 PM
Chitra:	Jan 20 08:30 PM to Jan 21 11:36 PM
Rahukalam:	8:16 AM to 9:40 AM
Yamagandam:	11:03 AM to 12:27 PM
Variyam:	05:32 AM to 07:20 AM
Gulika:	1:50 PM to 3:14 PM
Amritakalam:	01:45 PM to 03:33 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:04 PM to 12:49 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 30°
Humidity: 42%
Sunrise: 6:50 AM
Sunset: 6:05 PM
Updated: January 19, 2025 5:00 PM

Set to showcase...

Continued from page 1

The ST TeleMedia Global Data Centre has come forward to set up a state-of-the-art AI-based data centre in Future City and has signed a Rs 3,500 crore deal for that.

CapitalLand has decided to set up a huge IT park in Hyderabad. This park will be developed at a cost of around Rs 450 crore. The discussions held with the Singapore Semiconductor Industry Association on semiconductor manufacturing and investment opportunities in the state have been fruitful.

CapitalLand Group to construct ...

Continued from page 1

The announcement was made after a meeting in Singapore attended by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, IT Minister Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu, Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, Dr E Vishnu Vardhan Reddy, IFS, the Special Secretary for Investment Promotion, B. Ajith Reddy, IDES, the Special Secretary in the CMO, and senior CapitalLand executives including Gauri Shankar Nagabhushanam, the CEO & ED of CapitalLand India Trust Management Pte. Ltd and Manohar Khatiani, the Senior Executive Director of CapitalLand Investment.

Strengthening Hyderabad's growth as a business hub the upcoming project is part of CapitalLand's broader development pipeline in Hyderabad.

This new project will cater to the increasing demand from Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and blue-chip companies seeking premium facilities.

Speaking about the project, Gauri Shankar Nagabhushanam said, "Hyderabad has demonstrated strong potential for business growth supported by the Telangana Government's progressive policies and the dynamic leadership of Revanth Reddy. We are happy to expand our footprint in Hyderabad, leveraging its vibrant ecosystem to deliver sustainable and world-class infrastructure."

Welcoming the investment Chief Minister Revanth Reddy described it as a milestone in reinforcing Hyderabad's position as a leading business and technology hub.

CapitalLand Group is a leading global real estate investment and development company headquartered in Singapore. Its portfolio spans retail, office, lodging, logistics, data centres etc.

In India, CapitalLand operates three prominent business parks in Hyderabad. They are the International Tech Park Hyderabad (ITPH), aVance Hyderabad and CyberPearl.

CapitalLand's earlier announced 25 MW IT load data centre in Hyderabad is on track to become operational by mid-2025, establishing Hyderabad's emergence as a critical node for digital infrastructure in India. The second phase of development of the International Tech Park Hyderabad (ITPH) is set to commence this year and is expected to be on stream by 2028.

Kovind headed a high-level panel that recommended holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies as a first step, followed by synchronised local body polls within 100 days.

Two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha last month. The bills have since been referred to a joint committee of Parliament.

Kovind emphasised that implementing simultaneous

India a global leader, says...

Continued from page 1

"I can confidently say that NDRF's implementation of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) policies has been instrumental in positioning India as a global leader in disaster management," Shah remarked. He also highlighted India's leadership in disaster-resilient infrastructure through the establishment of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which has now become a platform for 48 countries. Shah outlined the shift in disaster management strategy, noting that under the Modi government, the approach has moved from being relief-centric to rescue-centric, aimed at saving lives. He emphasised that the "zero casualty" goal is now a key objective, with NDRF, NDMA, and NIDM working in

close coordination to achieve it. The Minister recalled the devastating cyclone in Odisha, where 10,000 lives were lost, and noted that in the last two years, two cyclones had struck India but the "zero casualty" goal was successfully achieved. Shah praised the NDRF's efforts, which have been recognised internationally in countries such as Nepal, Indonesia, Turkey, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

The Modi government has allocated Rs 61,000 crore for disaster management under the 14th Finance Commission, compared to just Rs 12,500 crore under the 12th Finance Commission, Shah said. He also pointed out that the Centre has provided Rs 27,000 crore for the development of Amaravati through HUDCO and the World Bank. Shah assured the people of Andhra Pradesh that

polls would not only save time and money but also accelerate progress in education and development. Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, who was present at the event, added that frequent elections stalled development projects for months due to enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct.

"Simultaneous elections would strengthen the country's political and economic framework," he said.

Retired Supreme Court Justice Vineet Saran echoed a similar sentiment and said simultaneous elections would significantly reduce electoral expenses and contribute to building a developed India.

The event was attended by several dignitaries, including Divya Prem Seva Mission founder Dr Ashish Gautam, convener Sanjay Chaturvedi, Additional Advocate General Mahesh Chaturvedi, and other mission officials.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | MONDAY | JANUARY 20, 2025

03



Cultural Programmes

By Abhilasha Helping Hands

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
January 20, (9 am)

Suseela Narayana Reddy Award Function

By Rasamai

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
January 20, (1:30 pm to 10 pm)

Workshop Intellectual Property

Venue

T-Hub Foundation
January 20, (2 pm)



First cartoon book *Obtuse Angle* to be released at HLF on Jan 24

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The first cartoon book, *Obtuse Angle* by BP Acharya, showcasing a bureaucrat's journey, will be released at the Hyderabad Literary Festival 2025 (HLF) on January 24 at Sattva Knowledge City. The book release will be moderated by Dinesh C Sharma. Additionally, an exhibition of the cartoons will be held at HLF's Octave Colonnade to coincide with the launch.

Obtuse Angle highlights how a cartoonist finds humour in everyday life. It provides a witty, ironic and humorous perspective on a bureaucrat's world through the eyes of an experienced artist, capturing moments that are puzzling, frustrating and amusing.

The book is authored by BP Acharya, a retired IAS officer who served as Special Chief Secretary in Telangana. He helped develop major industrial hubs like Genome Valley, Financial District and Mindspace. A TED speaker, Acharya also worked with renowned authors Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre on editing Moutbatten papers. He also contributes weekly cartoon columns to English newspaper publications.

Talking to *The Pioneer*, Acharya shared that he was inspired by legendary cartoonists like RK Laxman and Mario Miranda and developed a passion for humour and art in childhood. As a bureaucrat, he used cartoons to showcase the lighter side of civil service. His four-decade journey, from student days to retirement, ends in *Obtuse Angle*, a unique cartoon collection.

The author mentioned that the book features black-and-white cartoons sketched on paper from his early days as a probationer at the LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, and captures the challenges of his journey as a civil servant.

TG civil supplies website down

● PREVENTING PEOPLE FROM FILING COMPLAINTS

SAMUEL JOSHUA
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana civil supplies website has been down for over three months, preventing people from filing complaints about consumer issues.

When asked, advocate and social activist Vijay Gopal expressed concern about the inactivity of the Consumer Affairs, Food and civil supplies department in Telangana. He pointed out the lack of updates regarding the department's oper-

ations and the roles of Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy and Commissioner DS Chauhan.

Vijay stated that he was unable to file complaints with the department or the Legal Metrology office, as the controller, who is also the commissioner, is inactive and inaccessible. He highlighted the absence of online or offline complaint mechanisms, citing a lack of accountability and trans-



parency. He also said that while other departments such as the police are providing active online responses, the civil supplies department remains unresponsive.

Vijay pointed out the rising consumer issues, such as retailers charging more than the maximum retail price (MRP). He mentioned a recent incident where a restaurant included a 5% service

charge in his bill, which should be a voluntary tip. He also noted that some traders charge an extra Rs 3-5 for beverages as cooling charges. He emphasized that while the Legal Metrology department has been inactive in recent years, many consumers remain unaware that such charges can be reported.

Vijay called on the Telangana Chief Secretary to explain why the Civil Supplies website and the department, along with the Legal Metrology team, remain inactive and unresponsive.

IMD PREDICTS RELIEF FROM COLD WAVE:

Day temperatures in Hyd to rise

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Hyderabad, predicted that day temperatures in Hyderabad will rise soon. Residents will continue to experience relief from the cold wave, with night temperatures expected to remain above 15 degrees Celsius.

According to Telangana weatherman, day temperatures have been cooler over the past 10 days. Starting January 20, the day temperatures are expected to grad-

ually increase to 31-33 degrees Celsius. However, nights and mornings will remain cool. Night temperatures are also expected to rise by the last week of January.

The weather department has lifted alerts for most of the districts in Telangana. The IMD forecasts that foggy or misty conditions are likely to occur during the morning hours in isolated areas across Telangana over the next three days. Minimum temperatures are expected to remain normal during this period.

573 AR police constables attached to 71 law and order police stations

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

To improve law and order and support various departments under the Hyderabad Police Commissionerate, CV Anand, Commissioner of Police, issued orders to attach 573 AR police constables (223 women and 350 men) from CAR Headquarters to 71 law and order police stations across Hyderabad. This includes 284 for law and order, 225 for traffic, 25 for the special branch, 25 for the task force, eight for H New, and six for cybercrime.

On Sunday, an interaction session was held with the constables at the ICCC building, Banjara Hills. The police constables



Commissioner CV Anand interacts with the police constables at ICCC Building, Banjara Hills on Sunday

received three weeks training in policing and civil interaction. After the training, 450 civil constables and 873 CAR constables reported for duty. Additionally, 10 platoons and 100 constables as drivers were assigned to support this effort.

Addressed the constables, Anand emphasized their role in maintaining peace and security in Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana. He stressed the importance of working with the public, being patient and tolerant, and performing duties with vigilance to prevent

crimes and improve patrolling. The Commissioner highlighted that this attachment was to fill vacancies and strengthen police efforts. Other officers Vikram Singh Mann, Parimala Hana Nutan and Rakshita Krishna Murthy participated in the programme.



Inter-state ganja transporter arrested with 62 kgs of ganja

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The South-East Zone Task Force and Chaderghat Police apprehended an inter-state ganja transporter, Raju Jat Raju, with 62 kgs of dry ganja. The contraband, valued at Rs 15.5 lakh, was seized at Post Office Lane near Nalgonda Crossroads in Chaderghat on Sunday. According to the

Police, Raju Jat Raju, 35, an ice cream vendor and ganja supplier, hails from Ramagundam, previously residing in Maharashtra. He had been in the ganja trade for five years, purchasing ganja from Subhash in Odisha and supplying it to his customer, Purushotham in Maharashtra. Recently, he purchased 62 kgs from Subhash and brought it

to Hyderabad for further distribution. Raju was previously involved in two similar cases and had served jail term. Subhash and Purushotham are yet to be apprehended.

The operation was supervised by senior officers, including Addl. DCP of Commissioners Task Force Ande Srinivasa Rao team and others.

DCM runs into parked vehicles; Four injured

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

An asleep driver ran a DCM vehicle into parked vehicles near Ghatkesar while returning from Yadagirigutta on Sunday. Nearly 30 residents, including elderly and children of Hyderabad were returning from Yadagirigutta. The vehicle veered off the road and crashed into parked vehicles near the Ghat Maisamma festival area before overturning. Around 20 two-wheelers were damaged in the accident. Four passengers in the DCM sustained serious injuries while two among them were admitted to Gandhi Hospital, said Traffic DCP. Upon receiving information, local police rushed to the spot and transported the injured to a nearby area hospital. A case has been registered on the driver.



HAML MD NVS Reddy inspecting the roads for the Medchal and Shamirpet Metro Rail corridors on Sunday

HAML MD inspects Medchal & Shamirpet Metro Rail corridors

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

To resolve some of the technical issues in alignment of the Metro Rail corridors to Medchal and Shamirpet, Hyderabad Airport Metro Ltd (HAML) MD NVS Reddy inspected them along with senior engineers and the technical consultants on Sunday.

Due to steep curvature of the road from Paradise to Bowenpally along the airport boundary and the insistence of airport authorities, HMDA is taking it's elevated corridor's alignment below the runway of Begumpet airport (Tadbund/Bowenpally side) for about 600 mtrs through a tunnel. However, dropping the Metro corridor which will be

at a good height at double elevation level over the planned HMDA elevated corridor down into a tunnel and again raising it to double elevated level after the end of the tunnel would pose several engineering complications for Metro Rail construction.

To resolve this complication and also to develop a world class integrated Metro rail hub at JBS, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy asked HAML MD to examine the feasibility of combining both Paradise-Medchal and JBS-Shamirpet Metro corridors initially and split it into two corridors of Medchal and Shamirpet thereafter. Keeping the suggestion of the CM in mind, the MD and his team walked on different

roads of Cantonment area to find the best possible Metro rail alignment.

These roads included JBS-Secunderabad club road, Staff road (Picket KV school road), Mudford road, Tivoli jn road, Diamond point jn-Centre point jn-Hasmathpet jn-Bowenpally (Sarojini Pulla Reddy bungalow) road; Tadbund-Anjaneya Swamy temple road, Tadbund jn-Airport office jn-Bowenpally check-post road etc.

During the inspection NVS Reddy gave the following directives to his team: The pros and cons of all the alternative roads shall be evaluated to avoid steep curves, need to take the alignment underground below the airport

and to minimize acquisition of private properties. The alignment shall cater to as many residential colonies as possible. Tentative station locations and availability of vacant State government/defence lands in their vicinity to be identified for better parking and other passenger facilities.

During the inspection, it was found advantageous to combine both the Metro corridors in the beginning at JBS. This way, the need to take the Metro alignment through a tunnel below the airport and it's consequent engineering complications can be avoided; and the alignment can be joined at NH jn at the end of Bowenpally (adjacent to Sarojini Pulla Reddy bungalow) road.

HCA honorary secretary appointed as manager of Team India

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) has announced that its Honorary Secretary R Devraj has been appointed as the manager of Team India for the upcoming

ICC Champions Trophy, which will start on February 19, 2025.

This prestigious role is a significant achievement for the HCA, as such recognition has come to the association after many years.

Devraj expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) office-bearers for entrusting him with this responsibility. He also acknowledged the unwavering support of the HCA fra-

ternity, which played a key role in achieving this honour.

The HCA congratulates Devraj on this appointment and extends its best wishes to Team India for a successful campaign in the ICC Champions Trophy.

Aarogyasri services remain suspended in corporate hospitals

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

For the last two weeks, the current government and opposition political party BRS are blaming each other for suspended services of Aarogyasri to patients in corporate hospitals in Telangana.

Opposition BRS MLA T Harish Rao says that the negligence of the Congress government has become a curse for the underprivileged. Due to the failure to clear pending dues, Aarogyasri services across the State have come to a halt, leaving many in

distress. Despite the struggles faced by the people, the State government's lack of concern is deeply unfortunate. "We demand the government address the issues raised by network hospitals, clear pending dues and ensure the continuation of Aarogyasri services for the benefit of the needy," said Harish Rao.

Responding to it, Health Minister Damodar Raja Narasimha said that the previous government neglected the Aarogyasri health scheme for a decade and the BRS leaders are now boasting about it. He pointed out that during



the previous regime, hospitals were left unpaid, package rates were not revised and arrears amounting to Rs 730 crore accumulated. "We inherited a broken system and have been resolving one issue at a time," the Minister said.

However, Telangana Aarogyasri Network Hospitals Association has said that a few mid and small segment corporate hospitals in districts and in the city have suspended the Aarogyasri services from January 10. "We want a road map for the scheme. Is the government interested

in continuing it? It is not about the government because the dues are pending for years now. Whenever we sat for protest from 2015 the due amount was Rs 1,000 to 1,200 crore. At least the government must take action on who is the beneficiary as approximately 3.2 crore have Aarogyasri cards and do we know how many of them are below poverty line families. They must draft a policy for the corporate hospitals to run the services," said Dr V Rakesh, President Telangana Aarogyasri Network Hospitals Association.

Telangana emerges as a model for communal harmony: Uttam

PNS ■ SURYAPET

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy asserted that Telangana under the Congress government emerged as a model state for communal harmony.

Speaking after reviewing arrangements for the annual Urs celebrations of Hazrath Sayyad Mohiuddin Shaheed and Hazrath Sayyad Jan Paak Shaheed, popularly known as Jan Pahad Saidulu Dargah, on Sunday, the Minister highlighted the state's legacy of peace and inclusivity.

Telangana State Wakf Board Chairman Syed Azmatullah Hussaini, Miryalguda MLA B Lakshma Reddy, and other senior leaders accompanied him during the review.

Uttam Kumar Reddy contrasted Telangana's ethos with the growing intolerance in BJP-ruled states. He criticised the RSS's attempts to stoke controversies around religious places, such as Ajmer Dargah, and praised Telangana's commitment to celebrating the syncretic traditions of Sufi saints.

He invoked the "Jai Bapu, Jai



Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy at Jan Pahad Saidulu Dargah in Suryapet district on Sunday

Bheem, and Jai Samvidhan" movement initiated by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, stressing how the principles of Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar continue to guide Telangana's governance. "Mahatma Gandhi's secular vision and Ambedkar's Constitution have ensured the

protection of rights for every individual, regardless of religion, caste, or region," he remarked.

Highlighting his personal connection to Jan Pahad Saidulu Dargah, Uttam Kumar Reddy noted that the shrine is revered by people of all faiths.

The Minister also spoke about

(incense center), CC flooring, masjid sheds, and other facilities.

After the formation of Telangana, as a state minister, Uttam Kumar Reddy sanctioned an additional Rs 1.11 crore for further development, including drainage systems, bore motors, CC roads around the Dargah, and the enhancement of pilgrimage amenities.

As a seasoned legislator, Uttam Kumar Reddy has consistently prioritised the development of Jan Pahad Saidulu Dargah.

The annual Urs celebrations at Jan Pahad Saidulu Dargah attract thousands of devotees from across the state. This year, the event is scheduled for January 23-25, with meticulous preparations underway to accommodate the influx of pilgrims.

Wakf Board Chairman Syed Azmatullah Hussaini revealed that the state government has sanctioned Rs 30 lakh for this year's Urs, a significant increase from the Rs 12 lakh allocated by the previous BRS government. He explained that the Dargah's funds remain frozen due to an ongoing court case, making government support essential for the celebrations.



Machinery for soil mining in Parigi constituency

Illegal soil mining continues unabated in Parigi constituency

SRINIVAS GUDUPALLI ■ HYDERABAD

Illegal soil excavation continues unabated in Parigi constituency, with hills, ponds, and government lands bearing the brunt of uncontrolled mining operations. The excavation, allegedly supported by local officials and ruling party leaders, has become a business worth crores, leading to severe environmental and financial consequences for the region.

Under the guise of limited permits, traders are reportedly excavating soil far beyond the approved boundaries, turning mounds and hills into barren lands and tunnels. These activities occur both on government and private lands, often under the cover of darkness. Villages in Parigi mandal, including Rangapur, Nazirabad, Gadsingapur, and Ibrahimpur, along with neighboring areas in Doma and Pudur Mandals, have been witnessing large scale illegal mining operations.

Illegal traders, charging between Rs 3,000 and Rs 5,000 per load, are transporting soil by tractors and lorries, depriving the government of substantial revenue. While this activity violates mining and transport regulations, officials from the revenue, police, and mining departments allegedly turn a blind

eye to it, raising allegations of collusion.

Locals have repeatedly raised alarm about the ongoing excavations, but to no avail. There are reports of officials visiting the sites momentarily, confiscating minimal equipment, and then leaving without taking concrete action. In some cases, whistleblowers have faced intimidation and interrogation for reporting the illegal activities.

The large-scale excavation has led to the destruction of hills, ponds, and natural landscapes, causing environmental degradation and disrupting local ecosystems. The unchecked mining also raises concerns about land erosion and long-term ecological harm.

Residents and activists are demanding immediate intervention from higher authorities to curb the illegal mining activities and hold the culprits accountable. Critics have called for stricter enforcement of regulations and punitive measures against officials and political leaders allegedly involved in the illegal trade.

As the soil trade in Parigi constituency continues to grow unchecked, the situation has become a topic of heated discussion, with many urging the government to take decisive action to protect public lands and natural resources.

BJP demands revival of market yard in Armarbad mandal

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

In the unified Amrabad mandal center in Nagar Kurnool district, there is only one agricultural market yard. In the past, farmers from Maddimadugu and Domasapenta used to bring and sell their grains at this market.

BJP leader Nagaraju stated that currently that the market yard has become a shelter for anti-social activities. In the Amrabad mandal, there are many small farmers in the Nallamalla region, most of whom grow only five to ten bags of crops and cannot produce more. Due to the absence of a market in Amrabad for selling their produce, farmers are forced to transport their grains to Achannampet, and even after renting tractors, they are left with very little profit.

Nagaraju emphasised that local market officials and MLA Vamsi Krishna, who is familiar with the problems of farmers, should immediately take action and revive the market yard.



Devotees arriving to witness Komuravelli Mallikarjuna Swamy Jatara on Sunday

Grandeur marks Komuravelli Mallikarjuna Swamy Jatara

PNS ■ KOMURAVELLI

The famous Shaiva temple in Siddipet district, Komuravelli Mallikarjuna Swamy Jatara (Komuravelli Mallanna), has begun on a grand scale. Since it is the first Sunday after Sankranti, a large number of

devotees arrived here to have a darshan of the Mallanna. The festival will continue for two and a half months. Special programmes will be conducted every Sunday in the temple.

The authorities have elaborated arrangements to offer

special, quick, and dharm darshan to the devotees. On Sundays, a large number of devotees from Hyderabad visit to have the darshan of Swamy. Additional police personnel were deployed and 88 CCTV cameras were installed to monitor the situation.

Welfare schemes should reach all eligible people: Collector

PNS ■ WARANGAL

District Collector Satya Sharada has instructed officials to conduct a thorough survey to ensure that the government's prestigious welfare schemes reach the eligible beneficiaries in a systematic manner.

On Sunday, in the villages of Vanchanagiri and Ookal Haveli in Geesukonda mandal, and Timmampet village in Duggondi mandal, the District Collector personally monitored the field-level survey.

She emphasised the need for a transparent and accurate survey to identify eligible beneficiaries for schemes like the Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Housing, ration cards, and Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa. The details of every beneficiary must be carefully reviewed, and the required data should be accurately recorded, she instructed the officials. The Collector, along with the survey teams, examined factors like the beneficiary's financial status, land ownership, family details, and eligibility for the schemes.

She urged survey team to



Warangal Collector Satya Sharada interacting with officials at a village under Geesukonda mandal in Warangal district on Sunday

interact with the public to collect necessary information. The main duty is to ensure that government schemes reach the people. The survey must be completed promptly and without any delays.

The government is working to provide financial assistance to small and poor farmers through various welfare

schemes. The Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa scheme is also aimed at providing welfare benefits to poor families.

The collector also mentioned that the government is committed to providing ration cards, Indiramma houses, Rythu Bharosa, and Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa to all eligible individuals. Applications pre-

viously submitted Prajavani programme for white ration cards and those pending at MeeSeva centers would also be considered, she said.

The event was attended by ZP CEO Ram Reddy, District Civil Supplies Officer Kishthayya, Mandal Special Officers, MROs, MPDOs, and others.

MLA inaugurates cricket competition

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

Wanaparthi MLA T Megha Reddy inaugurated cricket and volleyball competitions in Pebbair mandal in Wanaparthi district. The Chelimita Premier League cricket competition, held in the Pebbair mandal headquarters, saw the winners being presented with awards by Wanaparthi MLA T Megha Reddy. The event was conducted as part of the Sri Sri Sri Choudeshwari Devi celebrations.

MLA Megha Reddy, who also played with the cricketers, motivated and encouraged the players. During the event, he remarked that everyone should approach sports with a spirit of sportsmanship. He mentioned that both victory and defeat are natural in sport, and those who face defeat should play with more determination and prove their skills.

A newly constructed volleyball ground at the Pebbair market yard area was inaugurated by the MLA.

He emphasised that sports could bring national recogni-



Wanaparthi MLA T Megha Reddy playing cricket in Wanaparthi on Sunday

tion, and urged the youth to focus on both higher education and sports. The event was attended by Congress party Block President Srinivas Goud, Vice Chairman of Pebbair Market Yard Vijayvardhan Reddy, councilors Ell Swamy, Ashwini

Sathanarayana, Akkamma, leaders Ranjith Kumar, Dayakar Reddy, Yugender Reddy, former Sarpanch Surender Goud, Yapperla Ramreddy, Ramula Yadav, Chelimita Ramulu, Congress party leaders and activists, among others.

Many duped of Rs 15 crore in fake app scam

PNS ■ JANGAON

In Jangaon district, a fraudulent scheme launched by alleged scammers has led to many people losing around Rs 15 crores. The scammers used a seemingly innocent app promoting fruits, juices, and ice creams, claiming that investments made through the platform would double their returns. Victims, realising the fraud, have now turned to the police for help.

The scammers promoted an app called 'Costa Well Grown', assuring high returns on investments. Local agents were appointed to encourage people to invest in the app. They claimed that investing Rs 570 would yield Rs 1,480 and that larger investments would result in higher returns.

The scammers initially paid some profits, which

encouraged further investments by people in Jangaon town and surrounding villages, including daily wage workers, students, and employees. In total, around Rs 15 crore was invested in the scheme.

Before Sankranti, the app operators shocked victims by disabling the withdrawal option while keeping the app active for further investments. Victims were told by local agents that the withdrawal option would be restored after the festival. However, as days passed and the withdrawal option remained unavailable, agents became unreachable. It became clear to the victims that they had been scammed, prompting them to file complaints with the police, who have since launched an investigation.

The police have urged the public to be vigilant against such scams.

20 devotees injured as van overturns

PNS ■ ADILABAD

At least 20 people suffered injuries, 15 of them seriously, when a van in which they were travelling overturned at Malepur Ghat under Narnoor mandal in Adilabad district on Sunday.

The injured were given first aid at the Utnoor Hospital and then transferred to RIMS for better treatment.

All of them were on a pilgrimage from the Suryaguda village under the Gudihatnur mandal to the Jungu Bai temple in the Kerimeri mandal in Asifabad district. There were 65 people, including children, in the van when the accident happened.

The Director of RIMS stated that all necessary arrangements have been made to provide the injured with bet-

ter medical services.

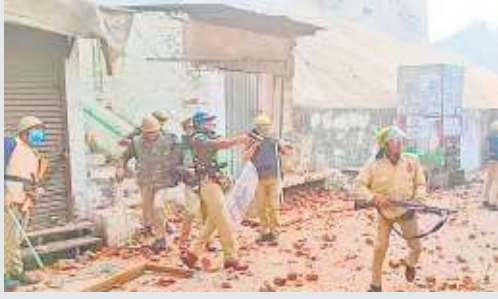
The injured devotees were ferried to Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS)-Adilabad by 10 ambulances. The doctors attended to the injured patients in the ambulance.

The van turned turtle and fell into a ditch. The rescuers had to struggle to extricate people from the van.



Devotees, who were injured in an accident, being administered first aid in an ambulance in Adilabad on Sunday

ACROSS THE STATES



Sambhal violence: Police arrest 10 more

Police on Sunday arrested 10 more people in connection with the November 24 violence near the Shahi Jama Masjid in this Uttar Pradesh district, officials said. With this, 70 people have so far been arrested in connection with the incident, Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Srish Chandra said. Those arrested were Tahzeeb, Azhar Ali, Asad, Danish, Suhaib, Alam, Mohammad Danish, Shane Alam, Bakir and Mulla Afroz, the officer said, adding that they were nabbed after police scanned CCTV footage and photographs that had gone viral on the social media. The ASP said Afroz, son of Afzar, is a active member of the Sarik Sata gang that is involved in vehicle and arms trafficking. He was reportedly present at the scene during the commotion and had allegedly fired at the police party during the chaos. The bullets struck several individuals, including Bilal and Ayan, who succumbed to their injuries. Police have seized a .32-bore pistol, three live cartridges and 15 blank cartridges from Afroz's possession.



Militant held by Assam Police under 'Operation Praghat'

A person, suspected to be a member of a fundamentalist terror group, was arrested in Assam's Dhubri district, a police spokesperson said on Sunday. The arrest was made by the state police's Special Task Force (STF) as part of 'Operation Praghat', an ongoing multi-state exercise against terrorists, fundamentalists and terror networks. The spokesperson said, "One Jaheer Ali, a 'jahadi', was apprehended from Khudigaon village under the Bilasipara police station limits." Twelve suspected terrorists, including Bangladesh nationals, have been arrested in the 'Operation Praghat' so far, he said. Under the ongoing operation, the Assam Police, had in December last year, arrested eight fundamentalists, including one Bangladeshi, and busted an attempt to set up 'sleeper cells' to carry subversive activities across the country.



Actor Sathyaraj's daughter Divya joins DMK

Nutritionist and daughter of noted actor Sathyaraj, Divya, formally got inducted into the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) on Sunday, in the presence of Chief Minister M K Stalin at Anna Arivalayam, the party headquarters here. DMK MP T R Baalu, Ministers P K Sekar Babu and K N Nehru were present on the occasion, the party said in a statement. "Today marks the beginning of an important chapter in my life. I am truly honoured to announce that I have officially joined the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. I sincerely thank our Chief Minister M K Stalin sir, and our Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin sir for their trust and support," Divya said after joining the party. "Inspired by the visionary path laid down by Muthamil Arignar Dr Kalaignar (the late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi), I embark on this new journey as a proud daughter of Tamil Nadu to work selflessly for the progress of our people," she wrote in a social media post. "My father and comrade Puratchi Tharmizhan Sathyaraj has always taught me that the real luxuries of life are in the rooted principles of equality and social justice - values that our Periyar (Dravidar Kazhagam founder E V Ramasamy Periyar) passionately commissioned.

Centre to hold talks with farmer leaders on Feb 14

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH



"It is not a big victory for us, but we were successful in getting a shut door open," said Punjab farmer leaders on an invitation extended by the Centre for holding a meeting to discuss their demands on February 14 at Chandigarh. They further said fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal had refused to take medical aid till the end, but when farmer leaders kept requesting him, he told them with a feeling of sadness, "Do whatever you feel is right." Considering the whole situ-

ation, the farmer leaders said they decided that medical aid for Dallewal should be started. "We cannot say it is a big victory, but we can say that we made one step forward. We were successful in getting a meeting (from the Centre), and we were successful in getting a shut door open (for talks)," farmer leader Kaka Singh Kotra said.

'PoK crown jewel of India'

J-K INCOMPLETE WITHOUT IT, SAYS RAJNATH

PNS ■ JAUNPUR (UP)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday described Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as the "crown jewel of India" and asserted that Jammu and Kashmir was incomplete without it. The senior BJP leader also accused Pakistan of continuing its conspiracy to foster terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

Singh was speaking to reporters in the Nizamuddin village of Jaunpur district, where he attended a ceremonial event at the home of senior BJP leader Jagat Narayan Dubey. "It (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) is the crown jewel of India and Jammu and Kashmir is incomplete without it," he said. "For Pakistan, the Kashmir occupied by it is nothing more than a foreign



territory being used to promote terrorism and anti-India propaganda. Terror camps and launch pads there (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) should be dismantled or it will face an

appropriate response," Singh added. The defence minister also hit out at Pakistani leader Anwar-ul-Haq over his alleged anti-India rhetoric. "Pakistan is trying to pro-

voke people against India on religious grounds while oppressing citizens there," he said. He also claimed that India had emerged as the world's largest digital economy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

India, which now has the highest number of 5G users, is on track to becoming a developed nation by 2047, Singh asserted. "Today, when India speaks, the world listens attentively. Our scientists are manufacturing defence equipment on Indian soil and exporting those to other nations. Moreover, 1.30 lakh start-ups are operational in the country," the defence minister said.

Singh urged youngsters to delve deep into India's history and said it reflected the country's accomplishments across domains.

SAIF ATTACK CASE

Cops cite intl conspiracy angle

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A Mumbai court on Sunday remanded a man arrested in the Saif Ali Khan attack case in 5-day police custody after observing that the prosecution's contention of an international conspiracy cannot be ruled out.

Police produced the accused Mohammad Shariful Islam Shehzad (30) before a metropolitan magistrate court in Bandra at 1:30pm. Police told court that the alleged attacker was a Bangladeshi national residing illegally in India and there was need to find the motive behind his act. Police also told court they needed to find out if there was an international conspiracy linked to the case.

However, defence lawyer Sandeep D Sherkhane contended his client was residing in the country for several years and has vital documents (for staying in the country) and that his family is also residing in

ACCUSED IN 5-DAY POLICE CUSTODY



India. The case has been hyped because of the presence of actor Saif Ali Khan, the defence lawyer further submitted. The police, however, sought 14-day custody stating the case was not just about a celebrity but that it involved a brutal attack. The police also told court the investigation is at a primary stage. Khan sustained grievous injuries in the attack, including a part of the knife blade

getting embedded in his body, the investigating officer told court.

The knife broke into three parts, two of which have been found, while the third needs to be recovered from the accused, police told court. The clothes the accused had worn at the time of the incident will have blood stains and it needs to be seized as part of the probe, police submitted.

The police, however, sought 14-day custody stating the case was not just about a celebrity but that it involved a brutal attack. The police also told court the investigation is at a primary stage

A probe was required to find out how he entered the actor's house and the motive behind the attack, the IO said. However, the defence lawyer said Shehzad should be remanded in judicial custody.

Accepting the police's contention after perusing documents on record, the court said the prosecution's submission of international conspiracy "cannot be said to be impossible".



EC used power of technology to strengthen people's power: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the Election Commission on Sunday, saying it has used the power of technology to strengthen people's power and also shown commitment to a fair polling process.

Modi's praise for the poll body in his monthly Mann ki Baat broadcast came ahead of its foundation day on January 25, observed as the National Voters' Day, and amid frequent criticism from the opposition for its alleged pro-BJP bias.

The EC has modernised and strengthened the election process from time to time, Modi asserted. "It has used power of technology to strengthen people's power," he said, asking people to participate in the polling process in large numbers to be part of democratic process and empowering it.

Opposition parties have increasingly raised questions on the integrity of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and Modi's remarks can be seen as an endorsement of the EVMs.

The prime minister said doubts were cast on India's viability as a democracy after it became independent, but the country proved them wrong. After all, India is mother of democracy, he said.

The programme was held on the third Sunday this month as against the last, which is usually the case, as next Sunday is Republic Day, Modi noted.

Opposition parties have increasingly raised questions on the integrity of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and Modi's remarks can be seen as an endorsement of the EVMs.

The prime minister played short audio clips of some of the members of India's constituent assembly, including its chairman Rajendra Prasad, Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Syama Prasad Mookerjee, to highlight the values they promoted.

Ambedkar called for everyone to work together in everyone's interest, while Prasad highlighted India's commitment to humanistic values, he noted. "We should take inspiration from them to build an India of which our Constitution makers would have been proud," Modi said.

The Republic Day will mark the 75th anniversary of the implementation of Constitution, he said. Speaking of the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, the prime minister said people of various castes and regions have come together. There is no discrimination of any kind, he added.

Modi said extensive participation of the youth is visible in the gigantic get-together of devouts, saying it will strengthen civilisational roots and assure a gold future.

Rahul launches 'White T-shirt movement' for justice, equality

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Sunday announced the launch of a 'White T-shirt Movement,' championing the rights of the masses, even as he accused the Narendra Modi government of turning its back on the poor. Gandhi announced the launch in a post on X and urged people to be a part of it.

"If you believe in economic justice, oppose rising wealth inequalities, fight for social equality, reject all forms of discrimination, and strive for peace and stability in our country, wear your white T-shirts and join the movement," said a video voiceover posted by Gandhi on X. "Today the Modi government has turned its back on the poor and the working class and has left them to their own devices. The government's entire focus is on enrich-



ing a select few capitalists." He said that because of this, inequality is constantly increasing and the condition of the workers "who nourish the country with their blood and sweat" is getting worse and they are forced to endure various kinds of injustice and atrocities. "In such a situation, it is the responsibility of all of us to raise our voice strongly to get them justice and rights. With this thought, we are starting the #WhiteTshirt Movement," he said on X. "I appeal to my youth

and working class colleagues to participate in this movement in large numbers. To join this campaign and get detailed information about it, visit this link - https://whitetshirt.in/home/hin or give a missed call on this number 99998 12024," the post further read.

The website of the 'White T-shirt Movement' states that a 'white T-shirt' is not just a piece of cloth but is a symbol of the party's five guiding principles -- compassion, unity, non-violence, equality, and progress for all.

'Need for collective action to address issues of women, children'

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

Union Minister Savitri Thakur on Sunday called for collective action and continued collaboration among stakeholders to address the challenges faced by women and children, and to ensure holistic development for all sections of society.

The Union Minister of State for Women and Child Development, who is in Arunachal Pradesh on a three-day visit, also inspected several ongoing projects at Daporijo in Upper Subansiri district.

Interacting with officials and community leaders, she commended the efforts to implement various government schemes effectively in the district. The minister's visit to the remote district highlights the Centre's commitment to fostering inclusive growth, empowering women and promoting



the welfare of children, particularly in far-flung areas, an official release said.

During the day, Thakur also inspected the One Stop Centre (OSC) at Daporijo, a critical support system for women in distress. She highlighted the importance of such facilities in ensuring the safety and empowerment of women, especial-

ly in remote areas. Thakur also assessed the implementation of housing projects under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), and steps taken under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Sikarjio village, the release said.

'Action plan ready to host 2036 Olympics'



PNS ■ BHOPAL

Union minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Sunday that a robust plan has been drafted to boost the sports environment to prepare India to host the Olympics in 2036. Mandaviya addressed a programme in the MP capital to launch the state's maiden Fit India Club. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav was also present.

"PM Modi ji said we will organise the Olympics in 2036. He said India would

have to achieve the 1 to 10 ranking in international sports in the next ten years.

"When the country celebrates the centenary year of Independence, we have to improve the sports ranking on a 1 to 5 scale in the sports sector," the Union minister for Sports and Youth Affairs said. He said this is not just a slogan, but a robust action plan has been prepared to achieve this target.

The Union minister said talented players are being identified and nurtured by

organising Khelo India school games for boys aged 9 to 15.

He said sports infrastructure is being expanded to propel India to the top ten in the world in 2036 by involving youths. "We are moving ahead with a comprehensive planning. India is changing and moving ahead under the leadership of PM Modi," he said. Yadav and Mandaviya unveiled the kit of players from MP participating in the upcoming National Games in Uttarakhand. They launched 'Khelo Badho Abhiyan' in MP, and inaugurated and performed the groundbreaking ceremony of various sports infrastructure.

Yadav said the Madhya Pradesh government is committed to the welfare of the youth. He said the Fit India Club follows the Fit India theme of physical, mental and spiritual development of players of every class and age.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trump in the Oval Office

As Trump begins his second term, he is likely to reshape domestic policies and redefining America's role in the world

Donald Trump will begin his second term as President of the United States today, marking a significant moment in US political history. The swearing-in ceremony has dignitaries from around the world in attendance. Notably, Chinese Vice President Han Zheng will represent China, highlighting the importance of US-China relations in the coming years. President Trump's second term is anticipated to commence with a series of decisive actions. Reports suggest that he plans to issue approximately 100 executive orders on his first day in office, targeting areas such as immigration, trade and energy. These orders aim to deport illegal immigrants, end birthright citizenship and reinstate the 'Muslim ban.' Economically, he plans to raise tariffs, cut taxes and eliminate regulations. Trump seeks to boost fossil fuel production by reducing green energy initiatives. His cultural policies include banning transgender women from female sports and restricting hormone treatments for minors.



In the international arena, President Trump's approach to China is poised to be assertive. He has proposed imposing tariffs ranging from 10 per cent to 20 per cent on imports, with the possibility of escalating to 100 per cent for BRICS countries like China and Russia if they move away from using the US dollar. Additionally, Trump has indicated a focus on addressing issues such as fentanyl trafficking and the operations of Chinese companies like TikTok in the US. A recent phone call between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping covered topics including trade, fentanyl and TikTok, suggesting a complex and potentially contentious relationship moving forward. Another area which is more relevant to us here is his attitude towards Indian companies and tech professionals working in the US with H1-B visas. The relationship between the United States and India is expected to experience both opportunities and challenges during President Trump's second term. The personal rapport between President Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi may facilitate continued cooperation. However, Trump's 'America First' policies could lead to heightened trade barriers, especially in sectors like information technology and pharmaceuticals, where India has significant interests. Despite these potential hurdles, India's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific region and its role in diversifying global supply chains away from China may provide avenues for strengthened collaboration between the two nations. As President Trump embarks on his second term, the global community will be closely monitoring how his administration's policies unfold, particularly in relation to major economies like China and India. The decisions made in the coming months will have profound implications for international trade, security and diplomatic relations.

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PICTALK



A farmer prepares an agricultural land for paddy cultivation, in Nadia

When elephants roamed beyond: A remarkable journey through China

A historic event captivated the world as a herd of 15 wild elephants embarked on a 500-km journey from Xishuangbanna to the bustling city of Kunming

Some time back an extraordinary event unfolded in China: for the first time in recorded history, a herd of 15 wild elephants embarked on an unprecedented journey. Leaving their natural habitat in Xishuangbanna (commonly referred to as Banna), the elephants traveled over 500 kilometers to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province. Xishuangbanna, an autonomous prefecture for the ethnic Dai people, lies in the southernmost part of Yunnan, bordering Myanmar and Laos.



into deserted homes, with one even slipping under a bed. Yet, they remained peaceful throughout their expedition. During their long journey, the elephants maintained their routines, munching on leaves, bathing in mud, and sleeping.

In a touching moment, a calf was born mid-journey. Eventually, after weeks of gentle coaxing and careful management, the herd returned to their home in Xishuangbanna. The reasons behind this unusual migration remain unclear. Experts speculate that an inexperienced leader might have led the herd astray, or that they were seeking a new habitat due to environmental changes. While conservation efforts in China have resulted in a gradual increase in the elephant population, these efforts are complicated by

human activity. Large-scale commercial rubber cultivation, introduced to Banna, has significantly disrupted the region's rainforest ecosystem.

These plantations, consisting of monocultures of Brazilian rubber trees, replace diverse habitats, further encroaching on the elephants' range. Asian elephants, an endangered species, number only about 300 in the wild in China, primarily in Banna. Protecting these animals is a national priority. Emergency workers and volunteers were mobilised during the migration, providing tonnes of corn, pineapples and other food to ensure both the safety of the elephants and the local population. Trucks and drones were deployed to guide the animals along safe paths, offering them a feast akin to a celebratory banquet. Xishuangbanna is a biodiversity hotspot, home to a wide variety of flora and fauna.

The region's tropical climate and historical isolation have preserved its rich ecosystems. In addition to Asian elephants, the area supports other endangered species

such as green peacocks, wild oxen, and monkeys. The Wild Elephant Valley Forest Park, located 47 kilometers north of Jinghong city, serves as a key conservation site. Spanning 369 hectares, this park provides a haven for wildlife and a unique opportunity for visitors to observe elephants.

The reserve features observation towers, allowing visitors to watch wild elephants bathing, playing, and strolling. A cableway provides breathtaking views of the valley, while the park's elephant-domestication school entertains visitors with performances by trained elephants, including dancing, headstands, and football tricks. Looking ahead, the Chinese government plans to establish an Asian Elephant Breeding Centre in Banna to further conservation efforts. These initiatives aim to protect not only the elephants but also the rich biodiversity of this unique region, ensuring a harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)



C K NAYAK

In the face of escalating transnational terrorism, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive global anti-terror strategy. Such a plan should involve a shared strategic vision and a unified, multilayered approach to ensure safety and security across borders. To counter the evolving threats, nations must develop a fresh perspective that emphasises mature international cooperation and robust retaliation strategies to deter destabilising activities.

Strengthening International Cooperation

Collaboration among nations is essential to design and implement an integrated strategic framework. This includes pooling development funds, fostering mutual trust and crafting plans to address shared security challenges. India, with its growing prominence on the global stage, is well-positioned to lead such efforts.

Its successful handling of key responsibilities—such as the G20 Presidency, leadership in the Quad Group, and chairing organizations like Interpol and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—demonstrates its capability to drive global strategic initiatives.

India's role in enhancing multi-layered security cooperation can serve as a model for addressing issues like the financing of terrorism, enhancing policing collaboration, countering cyber threats, and leveraging technological advancements. Tightened border and maritime security measures, coupled with efficient intelligence-sharing, are critical components of this strategy.

Adapting to Evolving Challenges

The nature of global threats has become more severe, with adversaries employing increasingly sophisticated tactics. This calls for an adaptable and proactive approach to strategic policy-making.

Nations, particularly in Asia, must diversify their strategies and implement forward-looking recommendations to effectively counter emerging challenges. A modernised approach to safety and security is imperative to outpace organised threats and propaganda-driven terror networks.

Bridging Policy Gaps

A significant gap exists between theoretical strategies



IN A GLOBALISED WORLD, THE IMBALANCE OF POWER AND INEQUALITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY OFTEN FUEL TERRORISM

and their practical application in countering terrorism. Regional political actors must engage in rigorous policy analysis and embrace innovative approaches to address these shortcomings. More integrated programs that support both military and law enforcement agencies are necessary to strengthen their efficiency in combatting propaganda and terror. Community development within regional alliances like the Quad can also foster resilience against destabilising forces.

Addressing Underlying Socio-economic Factors

In a globalised world, the imbalance of power and inequality in the international economy often fuel terrorism. Socio-economic disparities create fertile ground for non-state actors to exploit psychological vulnerabilities and propagate extremist ideologies. To counter this, nations must dismantle the mechanisms that enable the spread of false narratives and ill-intentioned ideologies.

Specialised Counter-Terrorism Frameworks

A robust counter-terrorism strategy must include spe-

cialised think tanks and talent development programmes. These institutions can provide tactical expertise, real-time feedback, and innovative solutions to address evolving threats.

Interactive communication between intelligence, law enforcement and military branches can further enhance operational efficiency. A modern, vigilant, and assertive network of military, police, and paramilitary forces must replace outdated systems to address the complexities of modern terrorism.

The Path Forward

To combat terrorism effectively, nations must overcome entrenched mindsets and outdated practices. Strategic planning should evolve to address the realities of state-sponsored terrorism and propaganda. Establishing a new consensus on international security and fostering a collaborative global environment are vital for achieving long-term stability.

(The author is a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor and expert in international relations; views are personal)



SUDHIR HINDWAN

Need for a unified global strategy against terrorism

Nations must come together to share a common vision and adopt a multilayered approach that prioritises security, innovation and collaboration



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SELECTORS RETAIN ROHIT SHARMA

Madam — The news that the selectors have retained the Indian skipper Rohit Sharma for the upcoming series against England for ODIs and for the Championship Trophy. While Rohit was averaging 6 runs in his last six innings, on the other side, the Karun Nair is waiting for his chance by having proved his immense worth with 752 runs in 7 innings with an average of 75.2 with 5 recent unbeaten centuries to his credit at the much-acclaimed Vijay Hazare Trophy, still waiting for his place patiently. It is also disproving the Board's statement that the players must play the local games to prove themselves to claim their place at the international level was not considered in Karun Nair's case.

One can expect that during the crisis in the upcoming series, when the team struggles, in the name of injury, Nair may get a call back from Rohit to join the team, as we have seen such inclusions in the past. One thing is evident that the selection criteria lack complete transparency and without the godfather, finding a place is becoming increasingly difficult in the team. Ironically, Sanju Samson was dropped for the series by assigning reasons that the board was not happy because he didn't play the local games. Stranger than fiction of selection won't do good for the sport and currently for the Indian cricket.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

JOBS OVER FREEBIES

Madam—The Delhi assembly elections have transformed into a marathon race for freebies without realising the negative impact on the state's economy and the diversion of massive funds for turning the potential workforce passive. Delhi loses its charm if the development, infrastructure, education, health, job creation and entrepreneurship are sacrificed. Delhi people should not ask for jobs as the parties are promising enough for their sustenance. Alas! After all, votes appear to decide their lives. The taxpayers pay taxes for the development, security and growth of the nation but virtually provide funds for freebies.

Centre announces 8th Pay Commission



In a major decision, the Union government has announced the 8th Pay Commission to revise salaries and pensions of over 1 crore central government employees and pensioners. With more money in the hands of the employees and pensioners after the implementation of recommendations of the next pay commission, the gov-

ernment is expecting a boost for overall consumption and demand in the economy. Though every employee deserves more, the appointment of a pay commission is an exercise against fiscal prudence.

At a time when 60 per cent of revenue expenditure is spent only on salary, pension, interest and subsidies, leaving only 40 per cent for development activities, the implementation of the 8th pay commission will further shrink the share of development activities in revenue expenditure. Every pay commission brings inflation to the economy, which affects the poor most. In addition, the financial condition of the states is not ready to bear the burden of another pay commission.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

Delhi is one of the biggest sources of revenue collection in income tax and GST. At least the taxpayers should have the option in their ITRs to invest or spend their taxes towards national security, education, industrial and civil infrastructure, health and welfare schemes.

All the welfare schemes and freebies are funded at the cost of higher electricity, water and municipal taxes paid by the non-eligible class besides taxes paid by them. In the long run, the taxpayers may be demotivated to pay taxes honestly as the political parties are squandering their hard-earned money on freebies, which are the antithesis of growth and development. At least the BJP was expected to promise jobs to the youth and empower them instead of turning them into dead wood like other parties. We should not lose the demographic dividend by parasitising the youth.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

EXPECTATIONS BURDEN WOMEN

Madam — Refer to The Silent Struggles of a Daughter-in-Law. A call to change

(January 18). The natural shift in family roles—where elders move from decision-makers to mentors (less responsibility, less freedom) and younger generations take on more responsibilities and more freedom in decision-making—can become complicated when societal pressures interfere. High expectations with society's rigid rules on newer generations often result in rigid roles, particularly for daughters-in-law, who are expected to navigate complex expectations. This situation may hinder the balance within the family.

To achieve the ultimate goal of love, care, and empathy, families must embrace internal management and communication rather than following society's rigid rules that allow shared responsibilities and individuality. This fosters understanding and reduces the generational gap, creating harmony and mutual respect among family members. The ultimate goal is a stable and loving society.

Riti Dwivedi | Indore

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FIRST COLUMN

A REUNION OF HEARTS, MINDS AND THE DIVINE

Today, we are connected not just by the bonds of friendship but by the threads of technology



RAVI VALLURI

Three decades ago, we were perhaps merely a group of motley friends and acquaintances. We were a bunch of strapping youngsters and petite women who had flowered from their teens, all tutees in an estimable institution. Three decades back we professed and cherished a heterogeneity of political ideologies spanning the left, right and center spectrums, in an era of a controlled economy and what also was the pre-globalisation era. This was a generation ago. Meanwhile, the Soviet economy crumbled and disintegrated, the Berlin Wall collapsed and diverse countries swiftly embraced consumerism and capitalism. A talismanic Zuckerberg bought a contrivance called WhatsApp from Jan Koum. All the technology and gadgets have provided seamless connectivity and people across the globe have been moored, and so it was with us. In a trice, we were all trussed up through WhatsApp.

A few months of endless chatting on WhatsApp resulted in a clarion call for a reunion. This was followed by frenetic preparations and a homecoming took place at the opulent Rajputana Sheraton, Jaipur. The assembly and the bonding were indeed amazing. For three days and four nights we were to shed our past baggage and live another life. The friends of yesteryears conducted themselves as a group of children rediscovering their roots. This is purely a physical pining. The geometry and architecture of the human mind are unmindful, unsuspecting and unaware of the exalted, elevated and lofty state it is capable of. This is the pining and longing for the Divine. The same longing that Radha Arjuna or Sudama possessed for Lord Krishna. This is true of all religions, faiths and spiritual masters. Like Yusuf, Dawud, Sulayman, and Ibrahim beckoned Allah. Akin to what the apostles, and more recently, Saint Teresa felt for Jesus or Ananda for Buddha. This is divine love without any attach-



ments and entanglements. This is not an emotion of craving but that of five Es. What are these five Es? The devotee, seeker and devout are subsumed with exhilaration, ecstasy, euphoria, elation, exultation and ebullience. This is the authentic and genuine pining for the Divine. It is a meditative state in which the seeker or the disciple basks in the glory of the Master and utters his name with the doctrine of the three Cs: credence, confidence, and conviction.

Yes, the enlightened Buddha does say nothing is permanent in life, and impermanence is the only constant factor. However, the heart and mind aching for the Divine is voracious. It transcends all boundaries and frontiers. Feelings and emotions encompass the human mind with constructive and efficacious thoughts, where it becomes intrepid to scale and surmount any misadventure. To elaborate further, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar poses a teaser, "Do we give quality time to the Divine?" He goes on to add, that we do that only after partying hard, watching some tantalizing movies and entertaining guests. The remainder or balance of our time is set aside by the mind to pine for the Divine.

The universe thus showers upon us only that quantum of benediction and bounty, depending upon our tapas or the tractive effort of the mind. However, through methodical and punctilious practice of techniques like yoga, pranayama, meditation and the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya, the mind can achieve the state of continuous communion with the Divine by remaining in the present moment. So, what happened to the group that met after thirty years? They are in abiding and sustained touch. Perhaps a dash of spiritual sparkle is required to cement the bonding from within and without.

(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)

LPG subsidies: Give it to the poor and needy



UTTAM GUPTA

As state-owned oil companies grapple with massive losses from selling LPG below cost, the Govt is set to allocate Rs 35,000 crore in subsidies to mitigate the financial burden



During the current financial year (FY) 2024-25, the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) are expected to incur an under-recovery of Rs 19,550 crore, Rs 10,400 crore and Rs 10,570 crore respectively on sales of LPG to household consumers. To make up for this loss totalling Rs 40,500 crore, the Union Government is likely to provide a subsidy of Rs 35,000 crore. In the Budget for 2025-26, to be presented on February 1, 2025, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will make a provision of Rs 10,000 crore in the revised estimate (RE) for the current FY and the remaining Rs 25,000 crore in the budget estimate (BE) for 2025-26.

The under-recovery arose because these corporations sold LPG for Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder against the cost of supplying at the retail point being higher. The cost is calculated as the refinery-gate price or RGP (taken as import parity price or IPP and export parity price or EPP in the ratio of 80:20) plus freight, marketing costs, marketing margin, dealers' commission, and taxes and duties. During the current FY, the cost is Rs 1043 per cylinder, and the loss is Rs 240 per cylinder which on total sales of 169 crore cylinders would be Rs 40,500 crore. Modi - government had stopped giving subsidies on LPG during FY 2021-22. Then, how come, it continues to make huge payments from the budget? LPG is an environment and human-friendly fuel that meets the needs of millions of households (HHS).

Subsidy on LPG ought to be given only to those HHS who are poor. The government also needs to track the income status of the beneficiaries and withdraw support from those who become better off and can pay cost-based prices. Ignoring these cardinal principles, the subsidy was given to anyone who had an LPG connection. It went to all and sundry including the rich. The poor who alone should have got it sat at the bottom. According to the Economic Survey (2015-16), only 0.07 per cent of LPG subsidies in rural areas went to a fifth of the



LPG IS AN ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN-FRIENDLY FUEL THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF MILLIONS OF HOUSEHOLDS (HHS). SUBSIDY ON LPG OUGHT TO BE GIVEN ONLY TO THOSE HHS WHO ARE POOR. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO NEEDS TO TRACK THE INCOME STATUS OF THE BENEFICIARIES AND WITHDRAW SUPPORT FROM THOSE WHO BECOME BETTER OFF AND CAN PAY

poorest households. In urban areas, the poorest fifth got only 8.2 per cent.

A lot of subsidies went to fake beneficiaries or the diversion of stocks (albeit subsidised) of LPG cylinders to hotels, restaurants, and other commercial users. Despite lacking sound justification, sheer populism drove politicians to give subsidies to all and sundry. They found ways to give it without taking the burden on the Centre's balance sheet. Initially, the subsidy on LPG (besides petrol and diesel) was cross-funded/subsidised by charging more on the sale of other products such as fuel oil, naphtha, ATF, etc. hence, no burden on the budget. In 2002-03, the Vajpayee-led NDA government ended the above system and decided to give subsidies on these products directly from the budget with the intent to eventually disband them. But, that was not to be.

The UPA government which took charge in 2004, even while continuing with subsidised sales, used disingenuous methods such as the issue of oil bonds to IOCL/BPCL/HPCL (instead of losses incurred by them due to selling these products at below-cost prices), and sale of domestic crude oil by stated owned upstream oil and gas companies viz. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Limited (OIL), etc. at a discounted price to these fuel refiners-cum-retailers.

In June 2010, petrol was decontrolled followed by diesel in November 2014. As for LPG, the Kelkar Committee recommended the removal of 25 per cent of the subsidy in 2012-13 and 75 per cent in the following two years. Modi Government which took charge in May 2014, started acting on it but in a calibrated manner. On January 1, 2015, it launched a direct benefit transfer (DBT) of subsidy.

Under DBT, oil PSUs deliver the cylinder to the beneficiaries at a full cost-based price and follow it up by depositing a subsidy in the beneficiary's account.

In turn, they claim reimbursement of the subsidy amount from the Centre. This helped in eliminating fake beneficiaries and curbing misuse that was inherent in the erstwhile system wherein subsidy was embedded in the price. But, the government couldn't muster the courage to trim the number of beneficiary HHS sans Modi requesting the rich to give up on their own.

The FY 2020-21 was a boon, viewed from a subsidy angle. In that year, there was a steep decline in international prices (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) leading to a fall in the cost of supplying an LPG cylinder to a low of Rs 600; hence, it could be given to all HHS at Rs 600 requiring no subsidy support. The BE of Rs 36,000 crore for that year was used largely to clear past dues of oil PSUs and provide free gas connections under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). During 2021-22 when the international price rose due to waning COVID and demand revival, the cost of LPG zoomed to over Rs 900 per cylinder.

This prompted the government to give subsidies but only to the PMUY beneficiaries. They were 9.6 crore out of a total of 33 crore HHS. It spent Rs 14,000 crore during that year. During 2022-23, it spent Rs 9,170 crore. But, this doesn't tell the full story. From June 2020 to June 2022, the government had asked the three fuel retailers namely IOCL/BPCL/HPCL to sell LPG at a price below cost and gave them a one-time grant of Rs 22,000 crore to compensate for the losses incurred in 2021-22 and 2022-23 (against under-recovery of Rs 28,250 crore).

This was nothing but subsidy (albeit 'hidden') given to all and sundry, and not just PMUY beneficiaries. In the Budget for 2023-24, it kept the BE for LPG subsidy at Rs 2,257 crore. As in the previous two years, that allocation was meant to cover subsidy to PMUY beneficiary HHS @ Rs 200 per cylinder for up to 12 refills per year. However, to benefit all the 33 crore HHS, on August 29, 2023, the Union Cabinet approved a reduction in the price by Rs 200 per cylinder effective from August 30, 2023, thereby enabling the PSU retailers to sell it at Rs 903 per cylinder (Delhi). Taking 4 fills per HH, @Rs 200 per cylinder, the annual burden comes to Rs 26,400 crore (200x4x33).

Since the decision was effective from August 30, 2023, for the remaining seven months of FY 2023-24, the outgo would be around Rs 15,300 crore. On March 9, 2024, the fuel retailers namely IOCL/BPCL/HPCL were asked to cut the price by another Rs 100 per cylinder (courtesy, of general elections) to Rs 803.

During the current FY 2024-25, the price has remained unchanged despite the cost remaining at an elevated level. The under-recovery for 2023-24 and 2024-25 thus comes to over Rs 40,000 crore of which the Centre now wants to reimburse Rs 35,000 crore. This and the earlier payment of Rs 22,000 crore for loss incurred by IOCL/BPCL/HPCL during 2021-22 and 2022-23 could have been avoided if only it had stuck to its earlier stance of restricting LPG subsidy only to the poor HHS and keeping it transparent. But, this is unthinkable in the current political climate wherein all decisions based on sound economic logic are hamstrung by populism.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

The silent epidemic: The untold story of gender inequality against men in India

Indian society, long entrenched in patriarchy and gender inequality against women, is now grappling with an overlooked dimension of the issue—gender inequality against men

Indian society has always been dominated by patriarchy and gender inequality against women. However, the two recent suicides of a techie and a head constable, both alleging extortion and harassment by their estranged wives and families, point to a highly skewed, female-oriented and obsolete legal framework. Gender inequality largely remains a half-told story, deprived of the male counterpart.



KAJLEEN KAUR

The legal system in India favours women with the dowry laws in India being specifically highly discriminatory. As per section 113B of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (now Bhartiya Saksham Adhiyog, 2023) if a married woman commits

suicide within 7 years of marriage, it is assumed that the husband or his family abetted suicide, while the same does not apply to women. Marriage litigation experts claim that when women file complaints against their husbands and families, the dynamics of abuse and unclear documentation frequently make

these cases highly complex and a woman's statement is usually considered at face value, creating a significant imbalance in the legal process.

Additionally, females also get a preference in the custody of children especially in younger ages below 5 years, in most divorce cases, as per the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022 data, men accounted for 1,22,724 suicides out of a total of 1,70,896. This is 71.81 per cent of all suicides. The data also highlights that a man commits suicide every 4.45 minutes while a woman every 9 minutes. Moreover, the rate of

suicide among married men is three times that of married women. In 2021 as many as 81,063 married men committed suicide while the women's figure stood at 28,660.

Family problems and marriage-related issues were the leading causes of suicide in metropolitan cities, accounting for 32.5 per cent of the cases. Gender inequality towards men finds limited discussions both culturally and in academic research, not just in India but globally. However, a closer look at the facts reveals a biased feminist societal structure predominantly. According to the founder of a Delhi-based organisation, Purush Ayog, society stereotypes assume that 'males



cannot be victims', which leads to ignorance and neglect of the issues facing them. A study by Stoet and Geary, 2019 for 134 countries claimed that men were more disadvantaged in 91

(68 per cent) countries than women. They argued that the Global Gender Gap was flawed, due to lopsided measuring techniques, which did not include situations where men are disadvan-

taged, due to the absence of literature.

Another study in France found that discrimination against men in female-dominated workplaces is more prevalent than discrimination against women in male-dominated workplaces. Similar examples of reverse sexism, with anti-male prejudice are vastly prevalent, but ironically barely quoted. The mental health research is also focussed on women, and scholars warn of the problems faced by men as a 'silent epidemic'. In the legal framework, the female culprits are less likely to have longer and more stringent imprisonment for similar crimes. Women's liberalisation and empowerment are necessary

for a progressive social structure and developed economy. Still, a gender-equal status should not be thrived at the cost of male exploitation.

In modern-day society, with evolving gender roles and relationships; better education and awareness; and a feminism gaining force, balanced matrimonial laws are more pertinent than ever. The government must consider amending marriage laws to include prenuptial agreements to address financial complexities, disputes, and legal rights.

(The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

India emerging as a 'bright spot': CII survey

Says current economic environment conducive for private investments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's current economic environment is conducive for private investments with the country emerging as a "bright spot" amid the challenging global environment, according to a CII survey.

The pan-India survey is an ongoing initiative, which would be completed for 500 firms by the first week of February. The interim results are based on a sample of 300 firms spread across all industry sizes (Large, Medium and Small).

Notably, early results reveal that about 97 per cent of the sample firms are likely to increase employment in both 2024-25 and 2025-26.

In fact, 79 per cent of the respondents' firms said that they added more people over the past three years.

The CII survey, which was conducted over the past 30 days, suggests that 75 per cent of the respondents believe that the current economic environment is conducive to private investments.

"Given that 70 per cent of



"Given that 70 per cent of the firms surveyed said that they would invest in FY'26, an uptick in private investments might be on the cards over the next few quarters."

the firms surveyed said that they would invest in FY'26, an uptick in private investments might be on the cards over the next few quarters", said Chandrajit Banerjee, Director General, CII.

"Even though geopolitical fault lines have disrupted global supply chains and have posed serious challenges to global growth, India has emerged as a bright spot amid this challenging global backdrop. The sound economic policies initiated by the Government helped revive the economy with emphasis on public capex-led growth," stated CII. The industry survey was

conducted to assess the pick-up in private-sector investments, employment in the private sector and growth in wages in the private sector.

The average increase in direct employment due to planned investments in the next year is expected to be in the range of 15 to 22 per cent between the manufacturing and services sectors respectively.

Similar expectations were seen in the interim results on indirect employment with manufacturing and services firms expecting about 14 per cent increase in indirect employment respectively over and above the existing levels of employment.

Majority of the firms surveyed indicated that it takes anywhere between 1 to 6 months to fill in vacancies of Senior management, Management/ Supervisory level, while regular and contractual workers take less time to fill in a vacant position indicating the need to fill the availability of skilled staff at the higher level in sample firms.

"With the two critical drivers of growth - private investments and employment - looking positive, we feel confident that the overall growth is likely to remain around a stable 6.4-6.7 per cent this year and is likely to be 7 per cent in FY'26", said Banerjee.



Tripura surpasses rubber plantation target

Tripura has surpassed its five-year rubber cultivation target of 30,000 hectare under an initiative of the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA), and is now aiming to increase the plantation to 69,000 hectare, an official said on Sunday. Indian Natural Rubber Operations for Assisted Development (INROAD), backed by ATMA, was launched in 2021 to develop 2 lakh hectare of natural rubber plantation in Northeast and West Bengal over five years. Under this initiative, the Rubber Board had set a target of 30,000 hectare for Tripura. "Tripura has already raised rubber plantations on 47,747 hectare against its five-year target of 30,000 hectare. We are expecting to increase the plantation areas up to 69,000 hectare," Rubber Board's Development Officer Arunabha Majumder said. He said rubber plantations under INROAD suffered setbacks in Assam, Manipur and West Bengal due to various reasons, prompting the Rubber Board to focus on Tripura. "Naturally, Tripura will be a major player in fulfilling the target of raising rubber plantations on 2 lakh hectare by the end of this year."



ODOP products' exhibition at Mahakumbh

Items such as carpets, glass toys from Firozabad, and wooden toys from Varanasi are being showcased under the Centre's 'One District One Product' (ODOP) initiative at the Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, an official statement said on Sunday. It also said that e-commerce firm Flipkart has set up a stall at the Mahakumbh, providing entrepreneurs with an opportunity to sell their products on their platform for free. Sharad Tandon, Joint Commissioner of Industries for the Prayagraj Division, stated that in 2019, the Kumbh Mela generated a business worth Rs 4.30 crore, and this time the business is expected to reach up to Rs 35 crore. The initiative is aimed promoting the handicrafts and cottage industries of the country. "Items such as carpets, zari-zardosi, glass toys from Firozabad, wooden toys from Varanasi, and other handicraft products are becoming major attractions for devotees," it said. Products having Geographical Indications (GI) have also been displayed at the Mahakumbh.



Delhi-NCR sees 30 pc increase in housing prices

Housing prices in Delhi-NCR appreciated the most among seven major cities with rates rising by an average 30 per cent during the last year on rise in input cost, according to Anarock. Real estate consultant Anarock noted that Delhi-NCR recorded the "highest yearly jump of 30 per cent in average residential price -- from Rs 5,800 per sq ft in 2023 to nearly Rs 7,550 per sq ft in 2024." The sharp increase in housing prices in Delhi-NCR was despite higher supply and a marginal fall in sales during the 2024 calendar year. There has been a significant increase in prices of land and labour as well as construction costs. As per the Anarock data, the housing sales dropped 6 per cent to 61,900 units in the last year from 65,625 units in the preceding year. The fresh supply of housing properties in Delhi-NCR rose 44 per cent to 53,000 units in 2024 from 36,735 units in the preceding year. Overall, Anarock data showed housing prices rose between 13-30 per cent across the top 7 cities, primarily due to increased input costs and strong homebuyer demand. The top seven cities together saw a 21 per cent yearly jump in average residential price to Rs 8,590 per sq ft from Rs 7,080 per square feet.



India not seeking duty concessions in FTA with Oman: Sources

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is not seeking customs duty concessions on over 100 product categories such as liquor, and cigarette in the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), which is under negotiations between the two countries, sources said.

They also said that though the FTA negotiations were concluded, Oman has sought revision of its market access offers on some products. The two sides have discussed three to four issues flagged by Oman, and any potential changes would be minimal, they said.

India is expected to gain greater market access for about 98 per cent of its goods in Oman, along with significant access to the services sector.

"There could be about 125-130 tariff lines (or product categories), where we have not asked for duty concessions and that included goods like liquor, and cigarettes," they added.

On January 14, India and Oman held the fifth round of talks for the agreement, which is aimed at boosting bilateral economic ties. The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in November 2023.

Oman's import duty ranges from 0 to 100 per cent along with the existence of specific duties. On specific meats, wines and tobacco products 100 per cent duty is applicable.

'Composite materials industry to touch US\$ 2.8 bn-mark'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic composite materials industry is expected to grow at a 7.8 per cent annual growth rate to reach USD 2.8 billion by 2030, a report said.

Composite materials or fibre-reinforced plastics (FRP) help in the circular economy as these are manufactured by combining multiple materials with different properties. The Indian composite materials market is estimated at USD 1.8 billion in 2024, FRP Institute said in its report. "The Indian composite materials market is likely to grow at a healthy CAGR of 7.8 per cent over the next six years to reach USD 2.8 billion by 2030," the Chennai-based body said. The major growth drivers for the industry will be increasing demand from sectors like electrical vehicles (EVs), renewable energy, transportation and construction industries, consumer and white goods, construction and defence.

Government projects like smart cities, hydrocarbon, freshwater transportation, sewage treatment system, and rehabilitation of water and sewage pipelines will also aid the growth.

'Want to be a leader in every segment'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ITC is sharpening its competitiveness and strengthening innovative capacity under its 'Next Strategy' as the multi-conglomerate aims to be a leader in the segments in which it operates, said its Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri.

The cigarettes-to-consumer goods conglomerate has articulated a strategy of the organisation, the ITC Next Strategy aiming to shape a future-ready enterprise and define the next phase of growth and profitability, Puri said.

As part of the ITC Next Strategy, it identified levers of competitiveness, which include digitalisation, sustainability, innovation and supply chain efficiency, among others for its future growth.

"These have been identified as areas where specific interventions have been made to become competitive and contemporary. The objective is to keep innovating while leveraging enterprise strengths," said Puri. The idea is to be a leader and to be a very large-scale business, in which ITC has made "appreciable progress" in its ongoing journey over a period of time. "For us, ITC's Next strategy is a journey in action. While we have made appreciable progress in many areas, I would not say that this journey is anywhere near completion. Our vision is to be a very large player in every segment that we operate in," said Puri. He further added: "In some

Stresses ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri



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segments, we are already leaders. It is our goal to be a leader in every segment we operate in." According to Puri, the world is now much more volatile and uncertain given the geo-political and geo-economic situation and the existential climate crisis.

"Given this context, we believe that a large and growing organisation like ours must remain nimble and consumer-centric, sharpening our competitiveness and strengthening our innovative capacity.

Improving connectivity to boost India-New Zealand trade: GTRI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and New Zealand should address market access issues for goods, promote collaborations in key sectors, and work on improving connectivity with an aim to boost bilateral trade, which is just USD 1.5 billion, think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

Both countries should set a target to double two-way trade within five years by identifying products for early tariff relief and organizing business delegations and roadshows in India, it said.

It also said that India's proposed free trade agreement with New Zealand would have limited benefit to domestic companies as they are already enjoying duty free access to a significant number of goods in that market. New Zealand's average import tariff is just 2.3 per cent, com-



pared to India's 17.8 per cent.

Besides, 58.3 per cent of New Zealand's tariff lines (or product categories) are duty-free, meaning Indian products already enjoy significant access without a trade pact in the New Zealand market, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said that while the India-New Zealand CECA (comprehensive economic cooperation agreement) negotiations

remain stalled, both countries can take steps to enhance their trade and economic ties.

"By addressing market access issues, promoting collaboration in key sectors (like agriculture, pharmaceuticals, IT, education, and tourism), and improving connectivity, India and New Zealand can unlock their trade potential and create a more robust economic partnership," he said.

Amid weak earnings outlook, rising dollar

FPIs take out Rs 44,396 cr from equities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 44,396 crore from Indian equities this month, driven by strength of the dollar, rising bond yields in the US, and expectations of a weak earnings season.

This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the month of December, data with the depositories showed. The shift in sentiment comes amid global and domestic headwinds.

"The continued depreciation in Indian rupee is exerting significant pressure on foreign investors leading them to pull the money out of the Indian equity markets."

Rupee expected to appreciate a bit to hover around 85-86/US\$



"I was quite confident to say that the rupee might be holding at 83-84 six months back, but given the uncertainty we have it should now stabilise at 85-86 against a dollar."

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rupee is expected to appreciate a bit and stabilise around 85-86 a dollar in the coming weeks with RBI's continued focus on stability of the domestic currency, Deloitte economist Rumki Majumdar said.

She said that the rupee may not now see the level of 83 despite RBI's intervention and the Indian currency being more stable than others.

The rupee tanked last week to hit its all-time low of 86.70 against the US dollar as massive foreign fund outflows and falling domestic equity markets dented investor sentiment. The rupee on January 13 logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 66 paise down at its historic low of 86.70 against the US dollar. The currency's previous record one-day fall of 68 paise was witnessed on February 6, 2023.

The domestic currency has depreciated by over 1 per cent in 2025 so far following a nearly 3 per cent decline in 2024 due to a strong dollar and FII outflows. The rupee closed at 86.60 a dollar on Friday.

"I was quite confident to say that the rupee might be holding at 83-84 six months back, but given the uncertainty we have it should now stabilise at 85-86 against a dollar," she said.

The dollar has been gaining strength in the run-up to the US president-elect Donald Trump's oath-taking ceremony on January 20. To manage steep volatility in the forex market, the RBI has routinely stepped in by selling US dollars in the forex market to arrest rupee depreciation. As a result, India forex reserves came down from a high of USD 704.88 billion at the end of September to USD 625.871 billion in the week ended January 10.

Auto enthusiasts swarm Bharat Mandapam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile enthusiasts of all ages and genders made their way to the country's flagship motor show at Bharat Mandapam on Sunday to check out their favourite cars and bikes on display.

With the marquee event opening for the general public after two days of press and business days, scores of visitors were seen entering the Bharat Mandapam premises from the

morning hours. As the day progressed, visitors' count swelled.

Traffic snarls, long queues at security checkpoints and crowded entry points did not deter the crowds who were keen on checking out the latest technologies and models lined up across multiple halls by OEMs.

Newly unveiled electric vehicles, concepts and new automotive technologies on display witnessed huge interest from visitors from across the NCR as

AUTO EXPO OPENS FOR PUBLIC



Newly unveiled electric vehicles, concepts and new automotive technologies on display witnessed huge interest from visitors from across the NCR as well as neighbouring cities and towns.

well as neighbouring cities and towns. Naveen, hailing from Meerut, said he started in the

early morning to reach Delhi to see his favourite cars and bikes. Several of his friends, who

could not make it today, are looking forward to visiting the Expo in the remaining days, he said. Expecting large crowds, companies also seemed prepared with more manpower at hand and barricading done around the display areas.

The staff has been sensitised to follow safety protocols and ensure a pleasant experience for visitors, a company executive said. Eating outlets around the premises also saw long queues throughout the day

'Watna Ve is not just a song; It's a call to honour our Motherland'



universal feeling of patriotism that runs deep in every Indian's heart. It's not just about my personal journey; it's about the shared pride and emotion we feel when we come together for our country. This song is a celebration of that bond."

For him, Watna Ve is more than just a piece of music—it's a heartfelt expression of his devotion to the nation. The title itself holds deep significance for him. "The phrase Watna Ve feels like a direct conversation with my country," he explained. "It's a declaration of love, loyalty, and gratitude. It's about saying, 'I owe everything to this land, and I'm ready to sacrifice everything for it.'"

The recording process for Watna Ve was an electrifying experience, according to Sudhir.

Collaborating with composer Arjit Srivastava, the team aimed to infuse the song with raw energy and deep emotion. "From the very beginning, we knew this song had to be special," Sudhir recounted. "The energy in the studio was contagious. One of the most memorable moments was when we nailed the final chorus. It was as if the song's spirit came alive in that instant. It felt like we were channeling the collective heartbeat of India."

His preparation for the song was just as intense. "Emotionally, I dug deep into my love for India," he said. "Vocally, I approached it with the same intensity as if I were preparing for a major Bollywood action sequence. Every note had to carry the weight of the song's message, and I wanted to ensure it resonated with listeners on a profound level."

One of the most powerful aspects of Watna Ve is its ability to evoke a sense of unity and pride. For the Shambhu singer, the song is deeply personal. "Every time I sing Watna Ve, I feel a surge of emotion. It's a reminder of how much my country has given me," he reflected. "There was a moment during the



recording when I felt overwhelmed by the lyrics and the melody. It was as if I could feel the heartbeat of every Indian in that room. That moment will stay with me forever."

The lyrics, penned by Arjun Sarkar, beautifully capture the bond between an individual and their homeland. "The words are a reflection of the sacrifices we're willing to make for our country," Sudhir explained. "They speak of devotion, pride, and the eternal connection we share with the land that nurtures us."

Yadhuwanshi hopes Watna Ve serves as an inspiration, particularly for the younger generation. "Patriotism isn't just about grand gestures or special occasions," he said. "It's a daily feeling—a way of life. It's about uniting beyond differences and putting the nation first. Through this song, I want to remind the youth that our strength lies in our unity and our commitment to building a brighter future for Bharat."

The song's bold, energetic spirit aligns with Sudhir's vision of patriotism as an active and unifying force. "When the country calls, we stand as one, ready to sacrifice. That's the message I hope resonates with every listener of Watna Ve," he added.

As Watna Ve garners attention and praise, he is already looking ahead to an exciting year. "I recorded a lot of songs last year, and I'm hoping to share them with my audience in 2025," he revealed. "There are Bollywood tracks, indie songs, and pop projects waiting in the wings. I'm praying to the universe—and to Mahakal—that everything I've worked on sees the light of day this year. I can't wait for my fans to experience what I've been creating."

Grateful for the unwavering support of his fans and the blessings of his faith, the Bam Bhole Bam singer is optimistic about the future. "This year is going to be epic," he said with a smile. "Thanks to everyone who has stood by me, I'm ready to take on whatever comes next."

Sudhir Yadhuwanshi's Watna Ve is a powerful reminder of the strength and unity that patriotism can inspire. With its stirring lyrics, soulful composition, and Sudhir's passionate voice, the song is destined to leave a lasting impact on listeners.

As Sudhir puts it, "Watna Ve isn't just a song—it's my heart poured out for my nation. It's a call to celebrate the bond we share as Indians and to honor the land that unites us all."

Be sure to listen to Watna Ve, now available on all major platforms, and join Sudhir in celebrating the spirit of India.



Pregnancy brings 4.9 per cent grey matter volume loss, partially recovered postpartum

A new research shows that 94 per cent of the grey matter in the brains of mothers undergoes changes during pregnancy.

The team from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) found that there is a reduction and partial recovery of almost 5 per cent of the total grey matter volume of the brain, especially in regions linked to social cognition. The study analysed the brains of women during pregnancy for the first time using neuro-imaging techniques.

The study, published in the journal Nature Communications, included non-pregnant mothers, whose partners were pregnant, to distinguish biological effects from those caused by the experience of being a mother. Researchers from UAB, the Gregorio Marañón Health Research Institute and the Hospital del Mar Research Institute together, with other prestigious international institutions, were part of the study. The findings reveal a

dynamic trajectory in the brain during pregnancy and postpartum, significantly linked to the steroid hormone fluctuations inherent to pregnancy, and to the psychological well-being of the mothers.

The findings revealed that, during the first pregnancy, grey matter volume in the brain is reduced by up to 4.9 per cent, with a partial recovery during the postpartum period. "These changes are observed in 94 per cent of the brain, being particularly prominent in regions linked to social cognition," said the study.

The study also demonstrated, for the first time, that the evolution of these morphological changes in the brain is associated with fluctuations in two estrogens hormones that increase exponentially during pregnancy and return to basal levels after delivery. The researchers observed that a greater increase and subsequent decrease in estrogen levels is associated with a greater decrease and subsequent recovery of brain grey matter volume.

Known for his passionate voice and deep-rooted connection to his heritage, Sudhir Yadhuwanshi is back again with Watna Ve, a powerful tribute to the indomitable spirit of India. As he reflects on the emotions that fueled the creation of this stirring track, he delves into his unwavering love for his country and how Watna Ve serves as a heartfelt call for unity and pride among all Indians.

TEJAL SINHA
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When passion meets purpose, magic is born—and in the world of music, few artists embody this truth like Sudhir Yadhuwanshi. A singer with an undeniable connection to his roots and an unyielding love for his craft, Sudhir has carved a niche for himself as a voice that speaks not just to the ears but to the hearts of millions. His latest release, Watna Ve, is a stirring anthem of patriotism that encapsulates the spirit of India and its people.

With soulful lyrics by Arjun Sarkar, a powerful composition by Arjit Srivastava, and the vision of producers Mayur and Deepa Agarwal, Watna Ve is more than a song—it's a call to unity, strength, and the timeless love for one's motherland. Released under the Be Together Music label, this track is a reflection of Sudhir's journey, his devotion, and his unwavering commitment to using music as a force for connection and inspiration.

In a world where music often transcends boundaries, Sudhir Yadhuwanshi stands out as an artist whose melodies are deeply rooted in his heritage while resonating with universal emotions. Watna Ve is not just a testament to his artistry but also a celebration of the indomitable spirit of Bharat.

Speaking about the inspiration behind the song in an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, the Kaawaa Kaawaa fame shared, "Watna Ve was born from the



Emotionally, I dug deep into my love for India. Vocally, I approached it with the same intensity as if I were preparing for a major Bollywood action sequence. Every note had to carry the weight of the song's message, and I wanted to ensure it resonated with listeners on a profound level

Eyes are one of the most active organs of the body and work endlessly throughout the day and even continue to move and work in our sleep. They have a variety of muscles that are responsible for eye movement and focus and need toning for best functioning. Here are five exercises we all must do to enhance our eye function as per ophthalmologists.

7 EYE EXERCISES TO TRY!

Dr. Digvijay Singh, Director, Noble Eye Care, suggests:

Pencil pushups: This is a form of convergence exercise where the eyes are made to focus on the tip of a pencil, which is moved from an extended arm length distance towards the nose. As the pencil tip approaches the nose, it may appear double or blurry and the eyes will need to make an effort to keep a clear image. Hold the pencil close to the nose for about 30 seconds while focusing on the tip and then take it further away to a full arm's length. Remember to blink your eyes during this exercise. Repeat this five to ten times.

Eye rotation and gazes: Move your eyes in all extreme gazes: up, down, left, right, left up, left down, right up and right down, each time starting from a straight-ahead gaze and returning to the straight-ahead gaze. Eye rotations in a clockwise and counterclockwise manner should be done to ensure full excursion of the extraocular muscles.

Tratak/gaze holding: Focus on a distant object of interest, such



as a candle flame, and hold your gaze on it for a period of thirty seconds or as long as you comfortably can. This is done while holding your blinking and

then one can blink rapidly a few times and repeat the exercise.

Dr. Neeraj Sanduja, MBBS, MS, Ophthalmologist, and Eye

Surgeon, Viaan Eye and Retina Centre, said, "With the advent of smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc., and increased screen time at work and home, digital eye

strain has become a very common cause of eye discomfort. This leads to symptoms like blurred vision, tired eyes, headache, and itchy and watery eyes. The below-mentioned eye exercises can help in relief from the above-mentioned symptoms. It is important to keep the head and spine straight and relaxed while performing the exercises.

Palming: Palming is an eye exercise that helps relax the muscles around the eyes, reducing eye fatigue. To palm, start by rubbing your hands together to warm them up. Close your eyes and place the palm of each hand over the corresponding cheekbone. Cup your hand over each eye and breathe deeply for five minutes.

Blinking: When we spend time on digital devices, our blink rate slows down. This can cause the eyes to dry out, making them feel sandy, gritty, and tired. Taking the time to consciously blink can restore the tear film. It also helps to spread the tears over the eyes. A blinking exercise involves closing the eyes, pausing for two seconds, then opening them again.

Near and far focus: Alternating between near and far focus helps to train your focusing system to engage and relax appropriately. Hold your thumb 10 inches from your face and focus on it for 15 seconds. Alternatively, you can hold a near object with a letter on it to better engage your focusing system. After fifteen seconds, shift your gaze to a target 20 feet (6 meters) away and again, hold your focus for 15 seconds. Return to your thumb. Repeat several times.

When we use our eyes for near work, our focusing system can become fatigued. Our eyes can also dry out. Scheduling regular breaks can help to alleviate some of this strain. The 20-20-20 rule is easy to remember. For every 20 minutes of near work, look at a target 20 feet away for 20 seconds. You can now return to your near activity. Regularly performing these eye exercises ensures good eye function and optimum vision. It is recommended to take a healthy diet rich in vitamins A, C, and E and other micronutrients and plenty of fluids along with these exercises for the best results.

I TRIED MY BEST TO GET PADMA AWARD TO MY MOTHER: NARESH



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Senior actor VK Naresh spoke about the Padma Awards and he expressed his anguish that his mother didn't get the award. "My mother created history with 46 films as director, which is a rare one in the world cinema. She is an actor, director and producer and I tried my best to get a Padma Award for her. I took up the issue to Delhi also, but of no use," said Naresh.

The actor added that he will try even in the coming days. "When KCR was the chief minister, he recommended my mother's name for Padma Award, but she didn't get it at that time," said Naresh and added that he still felt anguish that she didn't get the award.

"There are many people who deserved Padma awards, but they too didn't get it. Now, the BJP government is giving awards for deserving people," he said. He added that he will try in the future not only as her son, but also as a film personality. "I appeal to the government that people who worked relentlessly

for the development of the film industry should be honoured with awards," said Naresh. The actor said he is busy with a number of films this New Year.

"In the last 40 days I heard 22 stories and I selected a few of them which I liked. I am playing lead in two stories," he said. He added that both films and OTTs are doing well at present. "My film 'Veeranjaneyula Vihara Yatra' became sensational in OTT and now the film 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' is also a huge hit in theatres. So people are watching in theatres and at the same time they are also watching

films in OTT," said Naresh. He expressed happiness that he is getting offers to play roles in OTT films too.

The actor said that he is writing stories and he wants to direct in the near future. "I am very busy as an actor in my second innings. I would like to make sequels to 'Chitram Bhalare Vichitram' and 'Srivariki Premalekha' which I have started writing for these two. Definitely, I would like to direct in the near future," he said.



The actor said that a biopic on his mother Vijayanirmala is also on the cards. "My mother wanted me to write her story. So, I started writing and completed three pages and stopped. She asked me to write only the truth about her and not to write any lies. If a correct director and producers approach me, definitely I will give my mother's story to do a biopic," said Naresh.

The actor said that 2025 is going to be the busiest year for him. "I am acting in nine films and all of them are different from each other. Also, last year my successful film 'Veeranjaneyulu Vihara Yatra' created a new market for me in OTT," said Naresh. He added that he is working with young directors in these films. "I completed 52 years as an actor in the industry and I should thank all the directors, producers, writers and technicians for taking in their films," said Naresh.

The actor said that he earned so much from society, so he wanted to give back something to it. "So, I am planning two big projects this year: one is Cinema Museum and a Library, the other one is Creative Space for Young People. Pavitra and I already started on these two projects and the details of these two projects will be announced later," said the actor.

He added that director Jandhyala, Krishna and Vijayanirmala are his gurus. "Jandhyala taught me the basics of acting and he gave life to me as an actor. He is like a father to me. I started a dubbing and post production theatre on Jandhyala's name and soon I am coming up with a book on him," said the actor.

He added that he will launch the book on Jandhyala on February 20 on the occasion of his mother Vijayanirmala's birthday. The actor also announced that from this year he is going to start a 'Vijaya Krishna' award. Talking about his life after Pavitra entered, he comments, "The Titanic Ship reached the shore." He added that he is in a good phase of his life and everything is positive. The actor is celebrating his 65th birthday on Monday.



I am naming Thaman as NBK Thaman: Balayya

Nandamuri Balakrishna is on a high after the success of 'Daaku Maharaaj' which was released on January 12, on the occasion of Sankranthi festival. Directed by Bobby Kolli, the film did well and gave Balakrishna his fourth consecutive hit. Speaking about the success, the actor said, the film has a good message. "The story's backdrop is about water and in this film we created awareness about water preservation," said Balakrishna. He added that a Telugu engineer went to Rajasthan and became a Daaku Maharaaj to protect the people there. "I should thank the Telugu audience for making this film a great success," said Balakrishna.

The actor praises director Bobby for getting good performances from every actor. At the same time, Balakrishna praises music director Thaman and said that fans changed his name as Nandamuri Thaman. "From now onwards I want to name him as NBK Thaman," said Balakrishna at the success meet of this film.

Balakrishna talks highly about Telugu cinema and it is now watched by all over the world and appreciated. "The Telugu Film Industry is now growing up to match the world cinema," said the actor. Talking about his records, he said, "my records, collections, awards and rewards are all unstoppable," he said about himself.

He finally said that the Telugu audience always encourages when you show something new in the film. "It is proved with my 'Daaku Maharaaj'," he said. Because of the

Tirumala stampede incident, they cancelled the pre-release event in Anantapur, but now, they want to hold a success meet on January 22 at the same place, the actor declared. The actor praised the female leads Pragya Jaiswal and Shraddha Srinath for their performances.



Senior actor Naresh says that his mother deserves a Padma Award and he will try even now. He talks about his upcoming films, his personal life, his guru Jandhyala and his future plans

Finally, Nithiin locks his film release date at IPL time



Last year, actor Nithiin's films were not released and he is looking forward to this New Year. His film 'Robinhood' was supposed to be released last year, but due to some reasons, it got postponed. Directed by Venky Kudumula, the film is produced by big production house Mythri Movie Makers. Their film 'Pushpa 2' released on December 5, and they initially planned to release 'Robinhood' on December 25. But the makers thought that the film may not get a number of screens, because of their other film 'Pushpa 2'. So they postponed.

Many expected that they may compete at the Sankranthi festival with other films, but they didn't release at that time either. Now, the makers announced the release date as March 28. The actor needs a good break as his

last two films tanked at the box-office. His last successful film was 'Rang De' which was released in 2021. Now, he is banking on 'Robinhood' which is a heist comedy. Director Venky Kudumula earlier worked with Nithiin for 'Bheeshma' and it was a successful project. Now, he is joining hands for 'Robinhood' and Sreeleela is playing the female lead.

The film was completed long back and now the makers want to cash in on it during summer vacation. So, they announced the release date as March 28, but at the same time, the IPL cricket matches start and it is definitely a testing time for Nithiin. They already started the promotions by releasing a song. Now they are planning to release the second song featuring Ketika Sharma. The film's music is composed by GV Prakash Kumar.

Interesting Telugu title for Dhanush film

After the successful 'Raayan', actor Dhanush is focusing more on his directorial skills. Dhanush is the actor and director for 'Raayan', but in his next film 'Nilavuku En Mel Ennadi Kobam', he didn't act, but he completely focused on direction and also produced. The Tamil film is now dubbed into Telugu and releasing, but it gets an interesting title 'Jaabilamma Neeku Antha Kopama'.

A song with the same title is very popular in the film 'Pelli' that stars Vadde Naveen and Maheswari. Now, Dhanush's film gets this song lyric as his title and releases on February 21 along with the Tamil film. The film is releasing in Telugu by Asian Suresh distributors.



Dhanush has left a significant mark on the entertainment industry with his acting and also now as director. He is now all set to bring his third directorial, with this 'Jaabilamma Neeku Antha Kopama', after 'Pa Paandi' and the recent blockbuster 'Raayan'. This film also marks the actor's return to producing a movie after his 2018 film 'Maari 2'. The movie, which is touted as a romantic comedy, is also penned by the actor. The film has an ensemble cast of actors, including Pavish, Anikha Surendran, Priya Prakash Varrier, Mathew Thomas, Venkatesh Menon, Rabiya Khatoun and Ramya Ranganathan, in the lead roles. GV Prakash Kumar scored the music.

Varun Tej to join hands with Merlapaka Gandhi

Actor Varun Tej is looking for a good break as his earlier films didn't do well at the box-office. On the occasion of his birthday on Sunday, the actor announced his new film with director Merlapaka Gandhi. UV Creations and First Frame Entertainment are jointly producing this film. This time, Varun Tej is coming up with a new genre with this film, says a source. The title is also considered as 'Korean Kanakaraju', added the source.

The story's backdrop is based on Indo-Korean and it's a horror comedy. Merlapaka Gandhi is a successful director with films

like 'Venkatadri Express', 'Express Raja', 'Ek Mini Katha' and 'Maestro'. On the other hand Varun Tej is giving continuous flops with films like 'Gandeevadhari Arjun', 'Operation Valentine' and 'Matka'. He pinned hopes on his recent 'Matka', but the film turned out to be a huge flop. The actor worked very hard in this period drama, with Visakhapatnam backdrop story, but the audience didn't like it.

Now, he is completely banking on Merlapaka Gandhi and also trying a new genre of horror comedy. This is Varun Tej's 15th film and S Thaman is giving music for this one.



Tovino Thomas to widen the Telugu market

Malayalam actor Tovino Thomas is eyeing the Telugu market as his films are releasing in Telugu too. Last year, the actor promoted his film 'ARM' here in Telugu, but the film got an average talk. Now, the actor delivered the first Malayalam hit in the New Year with the film 'Identity'. Trisha played as the female lead and the film was released on January 2 in Malayalam.

Directed by Akhil Paul and Anas Khan, the film is an action thriller and for Trisha, this is her second Malayalam film. 'Identity' is a gripping action thriller that captivated Malayalam audiences, and is now set to enthrall Telugu viewers. The movie's Telugu distribution rights are brought by Movie Max Srinivas Mamidala in collaboration with Sri Vedakshara Movies Chintapalli Rama Rao.

With edge-of-the-seat suspense and numerous twists, this film promises to keep viewers glued to the screen. The film's action-packed storyline and thrilling narrative have already got positive reviews. With this film, Tovino Thomas wanted to widen his market into Telugu.



SKY will be missed in CT, he could have been the 'X-factor': Raina

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India all-rounder Suresh Raina feels middle-order batter Suryakumar Yadav will be sorely missed in the upcoming Champions Trophy as he could have provided the 'X-factor' in Dubai, where Rohit Sharma's side will play all its games. Suryakumar and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj were the two big names missing from the Champions Trophy squad announced on Saturday. They are among a total of six players who featured in the 2023 ODI World Cup squad. The others to miss out are Prasidh Krishna, Shardul Thakur and Ishan Kishan, while Ravichandran Ashwin has recently retired from the game. "Surya was an integral part of the World Cup squad, he is a 360 player who can score at 9 runs per over at any stage of the game. He can dominate the opposition and bats in a

different way," Raina said on Star Sports Press Room. "If Surya was there there would have been an X-factor, he will be missed. The responsibility will be now on top 3 who are not in form. Surya is someone who can bat in any position." Raina also said with uncertainty looming large over Jasprit Bumrah's fitness and Mohammed Shami returning from an injury, Siraj would have been a better option although he still feels, the Hyderabad pacer can still make it to the squad. "Siraj was in a different form in Australia but you can change the squad till 12 February. So I feel Siraj can be back in the side if Bumrah is not fully fit," he said. "Harshit Rana has done well. He has good pace, good bumper, variation, yorker and pace. He and both Arshdeep Singh can bowl at the death but I still feel, Siraj is a better option if Bumrah is not there." While Bumrah is racing



against time to be fit from back spasms that he suffered during the recent Sydney Test against Australia, Shami is returning to the ODI set up for the first time since the 2023 World Cup after recovering from a heel injury. While Rohit will lead the side, young talented batter Shubman Gill has been named as the vice-captain for the Champions Trophy, and Raina termed the decision as a forward-thinking move. "Gill got the vice-captaincy at the right time. He is the next superstar of India cricket, and has done remarkably well in ODIs. Rohit knows how to mentor a youngster and what value Shubman will bring in," said Raina, a member of India's 2013 Champions Trophy-winning side. With Dubai pitches tend to play slow and offer turn, Raina said left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav and all-rounder Hardik Pandya will play vital role in the bowling department. "Shami lacks of match

practice, Bumrah is still uncertain and Kuldeep is returning back from an operation. What will be important is to see who will partner Kuldeep in the spin department." India had won the Champions Trophy twice - in 2002 jointly with Sri Lanka and in 2013 in England, and Raina has no doubts that Rohit and his men can go all the way. "Rohit has the capacity, he has team but what will be important is out 11 player combination out of 15. The wickets will be a bit slow, but we have the capacity." Raina too backed Rishabh Pant to be first choice wicket-keeper in the Indian team, which also has KL Rahul. "Definitely Pant, his wicket-keeping has improved. But he has to play with more responsibility in a 50-over game. If he stays there for 40-50 balls he can take the game away from the opposition but he needs to spend more time at the crease."



ITF W50 singles event: Tatiana Prozorova saves six match points to emerge champion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tatiana Prozorova saved six match points to bag the singles title at the ITF W50 tournament, edging past second seed Panna Udvardy in a marathon final here on Sunday. Seventh seed Prozorova saved three match points in the 12th game of the second set and then three more in the tiebreaker to force a decider and finally prevailed 4-6 7-6(6) 6-4 in the three-hour-long final that was littered with breaks and unforced errors from the two players. "I am really happy that I could win this match and save so much points and also didn't miss my chance. I am really happy to win my first title in this year, in January and I will look forward to playing next tournament here in New Delhi," said Prozorova. It was Prozorova's first singles title in four months, her last trophy coming in September 2024 when she triumphed at the ITF W100 event in Incheon. Udvardy, who hails from Hungary and featured in top-100 in 2022, was playing her first final since June 2024 when she ended a runner-up in the WTA 125 event on clay in Italy and yet again missed out on a title. The two players traded early breaks to be at 3-3. From there, Prozorova had the chance to keep it a close affair but unforced errors let her down. She was down 0-40 in game

seven but managed to save all three break chances. She netted a backhand at deuce and then hit a forehand marginally long to drop her serve again. Udvardy too struggled to keep the ball within the lines and also her first serve troubled her. She saved four break points in the game eighth but eventually lost her serve, making it 4-4. Prozorova, by dropping her serve again, allowed Udvardy to be in a position from where she could have served out the opening set and the Hungarian did not miss the opportunity this time. Udvardy bagged the set when Prozorova hit a forehand long. Prozorova did not help her cause by not holding her serve at the start of the second set, handing that one-break cushion to her rival. Udvardy, though, could not consolidate the advantage, hitting a forehand error on a breakpoint in game six to allow her rival make it even-Stevens again. At 5-5, 30-all, Prozorova hit a backhand wide but Udvardy could not convert the chance. However, the Hungarian got the break when her rival again made a backhand error. Udvardy came to serve out the match, and had three match-points but lost all and was facing a breakpoint when she netted a forehand at deuce point. Prozorova grabbed the opportunity with a crushing backhand down-the-line winner, stretching the set to tie-break

India begin women's U-19 WC title defence with nine-wicket win over West Indies

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Indian bowlers shot a clueless West Indies batters out for a measly 44 to set up a commanding nine-wicket win to begin their title defence on a resounding note in the women's U-19 World Cup here on Sunday. Left-arm spinners Parunika Sisodia (3/7) and Aayushi Shukla (2/6) as well as pacer VJ Joshitha (2/6) toyed with the West Indies batters to bowl the Caribbeans out in just 13.2 overs in the Group A match at Bayuemas Oval. Kenika Cassar top-scored for the West Indies with a 29-ball 15 while opener Asabi Callender contributed 12. All the other West Indies batters could score in single digit figures with five of them getting out without opening account.



India chased down the target of 45 in just 4.2 overs, reaching 47 for 1 with opener Trisha G getting out for 4 on the second ball off Jahzara Claxton. Wicketkeeper-batter G Kamalini (16 not out off 13 balls) and Sanika Chalke (18 not out off 11 balls) took India home for an easy win. India play hosts Malaysia in their next group match here on Tuesday. Sri Lanka is the other team in Group A. The top three teams from each of the four groups will progress to the Super Six stage, with the three teams from Group A and Group D combining to form one Super Six group and similarly with the top three teams of Group B and Group C in the other

group. The teams will also carry forward their points and net run rates and will play the two sides who were not in their group in the first stage and who finished at a different position from them. As an example, if India finish second in Group A, then they will play the winner and the third-place team of Group D. The top two teams from each Super Six group will progress to the semi-finals. The final will be played here on February 2. Brief Scores: West Indies U-19 Women: 44 in 13.2 overs (Kenika Cassar 15; Parunika Sisodia 3/7, Aayushi Shukla 2/6, VJ Joshitha 2/6). India U-19 Women: 47 for 1 in 4.2 overs (Sanika Chalke 18 not out, G Kamalini 16 not out; Jahzara Claxton 1/18).

India defender Pritam Kotal joins Chennaiyin FC

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India defender Pritam Kotal on Sunday joined Indian Super League (ISL) side Chennaiyin FC, leaving Kerala Blasters FC on a two-and-a-half-year deal. The 31-year-old Kotal, who has more than 50 caps for India has been a regular feature in the ISL for the last decade. Kotal began his youth career with Chirag United before moving to the I-League and eventually to ISL. The West Bengal player has captained Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the past, leading them to eight consecutive wins in Kolkata derby. He has also been a member of the ISL winning sides in 2016 and 2019-20. The move will strengthen the defence line of the Marina Machans. With the Indian



team, Kotal won the 2016 South Asian Football Championship and was also a member of the sides that won the 2018 Intercontinental Cup and the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. He received the AIFF Player of the Year award in 2015. "The coach explained he really wanted me in his team, so when I got the offer, I had no doubts about joining. This is a very good team that plays well. My goal from hereon would be to try and win every match and go to the playoffs," Kotal said.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka moves into Australian Open quarterfinals

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Aryna Sabalenka has advanced to the quarterfinals at the Australian Open, where she's three wins from achieving something no woman has done since the 1990s. The two-time defending champion extended her winning streak at Melbourne Park to 18 matches with a 6-1 6-2 win over 14th-seeded Mirra Andreeva to open play Sunday on Rod Laver Arena. Martina Hingis, from 1997 to 1999, was the last woman to win three straight Australian Open singles titles. Sabalenka hugged Andreeva after the match, waved to the crowd, took a photo with her Polaroid camera and gave a thumbs up to mark the occasion. She's won 24 consecutive sets in Melbourne. "I'm super happy to get through this difficult match in straight sets," she said. It



was over in just over an hour. Apart from the fifth game of the second set, when Sabalenka has triple breakpoint but Andreeva rallied by winning five straight points to hold, just about everything went the way of the No. 1-ranked player. Sabalenka didn't face a break point until midway through the second set, when she saved three in one game. It seemed like she was testing

Viktor Axelsen, An Se-Young claim India Open titles

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic champions Viktor Axelsen and An Se-Young secured the men's and women's singles crowns respectively with dominating wins in lop-sided finals at the India Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Sunday. Axelsen, a 2017 and 2019 winner, prevailed 21-16 21-8 over last year's finalist Lee Chuek Yiu of Hong Kong in the men's singles summit clash at the KD Jadhav indoor hall which was almost full despite the fact that no Indian was competing in the two finals. Axelsen, a two time world champion, thus erased the disappointment of falling in the opening round of Malaysian Open super 1000 last week to the same opponent. In the women's singles, it was another graceful performance from An Se-



Young as she effortlessly packed off P Chochuwong 21-12 21-9. Malaysian combination of Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzududin, who had ended India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's run at the semifinals, produced another superlative show to outwit Korean pair of Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae 21-15, 13-21, 21-16 in the men's doubles final. In the women's doubles final, Japan's Arisa Igarashi and Ayako Sakuramoto beat Kim Hye Jang and Kong Hee Young of South Korea 21-15 21-13

In the mixed doubles final, China's Jiang Zhen Bang and Wei Ya Xin prevailed 21-18 21-17 over Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue. Axelsen vs Lee Lee, 2019 Hong Kong open winner, had finished as runner-up in the last edition and his dream of winning the title remained unfulfilled after he went down in the final for the second time in two years. Lee made a good start, opening up a 6-3 lead. But Axelsen slowly build up the momentum to gather a 11-8 advantage at the break. Lee kept fighting but couldn't pose a real threat as Axelsen took five game points and converted after Lee went long. The script didn't change despite the change of sides as Axelsen moved from 10-6 to 19-6 with a series of booming smashes to dismantle Lee's defence and complete the win in no time.

Barcelona again held to draw at Getafe, Griezmann misses penalty as Atletico's win streak ends

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona was bested by Getafe's defence again in a 1-1 draw in La Liga, while Atletico Madrid's club record winning streak ended after a late penalty miss by Antoine Griezmann. Barcelona got its first goal in five visits to Getafe thanks to Jules Kounde in the 10th minute on Saturday, but Getafe equalized and clamped down to get a fourth consecutive draw at its stadium against the powerhouse. The last time Barcelona won at Coliseum Stadium was in 2019, making the fixture an annual quagmire for the Catalan club. Real Madrid will aim to take advantage of the slips by its title rivals when it hosts Las Palmas on Sunday. Atletico's 15-win streak ended in a 1-0 loss to Leganes, its first loss since October 27. Atletico remained one point ahead of Madrid.

Barcelona was five points behind the front-runner. This round marks the beginning of the second half of the league. Barcelona frustrated again Barcelona was coming off huge wins: A 5-2 thrashing of Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final and a 5-1 win over Real Betis in the Copa del Rey. Barcelona visits Benfica in the Champions League on Tuesday. But José Bordalás's Getafe, with its physical, defensive style, once again frustrated Barcelona in Hansi Flick's first visit as its coach. "This was another exercise in survival," Bordalás said. "Taking a point today is like getting a win." Kounde put Barcelona ahead when Pedri threaded a pass to meet the right back's move into the area. Goalkeeper David Soria blocked his first effort but Kounde scrambled the rebound out of Soria's grasp and over the line. Moments after Raphinha headed a cross by Kounde



into the side netting, Getafe leveled in the 34th during a defensive letdown by the visitors. Mauro Arambarri put in a loose ball after Iñaki Peña did well to make a one-handed save of a volley by Cobo de Costa. "We controlled the game but they scored on the one chance they had, it is too bad," Kounde said. "We didn't have our finishing touch." Griezmann misses spot kick

Griezmann had a chance to at least snatch a point for the league leader after a video review awarded Atletico a 90th-minute penalty for a handball by defender Sergio González. But the French forward stroked his spot kick wide. Griezmann and Julián Alvarez hit the woodwork in the first half, but the leaders couldn't respond after Leganes defender Matija Nastasic scored with a 49th-minute header. Last week, Atletico broke its own record of 13 consecutive victories from 2012-13. Leganes returned to the first division this season and has become a giant-slayer in the top-flight. The modest club from Madrid stunned Barcelona when it was leader in December. Its win over Atletico lifted it into 15th place. "We don't have anything special, this is just the result of the hard work we put in each week," Leganes goalkeeper

Marko Dmitrovic said. "We have beaten two of the three big teams in the league, so we have no excuse not to perform like this each time out." Atletico, which was the biggest spender for Spanish clubs in the summer, is trying to win its third league under Simeone after titles in 2014 and 2021. Simeone said that during those championship runs, his side lost to smaller clubs Almeria (in 2014) and Levante (in 2021), and that didn't stop them from still beating Barcelona and Madrid to the title. "We had 15 wonderful games, a record in the history of this club. It was a great run that benefitted us in the league, Copa del Rey and Champions League," Simeone said. Atletico defenders Javi Galán and Clement Lenglet received their fifth yellow cards of the season and will miss the next round against Villarreal. But first, Atletico hosts Bayer Leverkusen in the Champions

League on Tuesday. Kike García blasts Betis Alaves striker Kike García scored a hat trick to lead a 3-1 win at 10-man Real Betis. The 35-year-old García, known more as a workhorse than a big scorer, earned a penalty after being fouled by Marc Bartra and opened the scoring in the 11th. After Betis lost Romain Perraud to a red card for a dangerous foul in the 55th, García spun before firing home in the 80th and thumped in a header for his treble. Lukébakio produces Sevilla late winner Dodi Lukébakio starred again for Sevilla after scoring a solo effort in the 89th minute to complete a 2-1 comeback at Girona. The Belgium forward tallied his team-leading ninth goal of the season after he nutmegged Ladislav Krejci before slotting the late winner past goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga.