

Stay united for 'viksit Bharat'

'INCLUSIVE GROWTH KEY PILLAR OF INDIA'S ECONOMIC BLUEPRINT'

I take only in full white: VENKATESH

QUOTE OF THE DAY The pioneer What's wrong if former chief minister K Chandrasekhara Reddy's photo is in my camp office? BRS chief KCR developed the state and what's wrong if I place his photo? Are we doing burglary? This is my house and I have the right to stay with my family. It is an official house. If I like it, I'll place Revanth Reddy's photo, if not, I won't. I was in touch with six to seven chief ministers in my political career - Gudem Mahipal Reddy, Congress Patancheruvu MLA

DON'T MISS... Anti-drug rally to promote awareness

Nizam College on Thursday hosted an Anti-Drug Rally organised by the National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC) students to create awareness about the dangers of drug abuse.

R-Day to showcase military prowess

Some of the cutting-edge defence platforms including BrahMos, Pinaka and Akash will be part of the 76th Republic Day celebrations on Kartavya Path with Army's Battle Surveillance System 'Sanjay' and DRDO's surface-to-surface tactical missile 'Pralay' set to be showcased in the ceremonial parade for the first time.

Industry wants steps to propel growth

With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman preparing to present the first full Budget of the Modi 3.0 government, industry players from various fields have put forth their demands for raising income tax limits, taking measures for more job creation, and further improving doing business to propel growth.

India batting stars disappoint

The high-profile return of India's stars in Ranji Trophy ended up as a damp squib with the likes of Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill falling cheaply on Thursday.

Ram Gopal Varma gets 3 months jail in cheque bounce case; arrest warrant issued

A court here has sentenced filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma to three months imprisonment in a cheque bounce case and issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against him.

Rising TG shines at Davos

CM Revanth team strikes ground-breaking deals Nets Rs 1,78,950 crore investments, Rs 49,500 jobs Secures biggest Rs 60,000 crore investments from Amazon

The Telangana Rising delegation, led by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, concluded its highly successful trip to Davos with a ground-breaking investment haul of Rs 1,78,950 crore, which is projected to create 49,500 jobs across multiple sectors in Telangana.



A highlight of the trip was Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's presentation of his Telangana Rising 2050 vision, which found strong endorsement among global investors, entrepreneurs, and policymakers. "Building on core strengths in software and pharma, Telangana will grow aggressively in Data Centres, Green Energy, Food Processing, Electric Vehicles, and Semiconductors," he stated.

Telangana to expedite inter-state Lendi Project

Focuses on early completion

The Telangana government has intensified its efforts to expedite the completion of the Lendi Project, an inter-state irrigation initiative that promises significant benefits for both Telangana and Maharashtra.



However, Reddy acknowledged that the project faced hurdles due to land acquisition issues, leading to its suspension in 2011. Efforts are now underway to resolve these challenges and resume construction.

'INHUMANE AND UNJUST'

Harish slams pension deduction for property tax

Former minister Harish Rao expressed strong resentment over the deduction of old-age pensions to cover pending property taxes in Mancherla district, terming it inhumane and unjust.



SC to take up Krishna Water dispute in Feb

The Supreme Court has announced that it will take up the petition filed by the Andhra Pradesh government regarding the Krishna water allocation dispute between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in February.

Slot system mooted in stamps, registration to tackle graft

In an effort to eliminate corruption and streamline operations, the Telangana government is set to introduce a slot booking system in the Stamps and Registration department.



Additionally, extra staff will be deployed in offices with high registration volumes.

sub-registrar offices handling non-agricultural property registrations and mandal revenue offices managing agricultural land registrations.

'What's wrong in placing KCR's photo in office'

BRS MLA from Patancheru, who joined the Congress party, Gudem Mahipal Reddy, asked what was wrong in placing former chief minister K Chandrasekhara Reddy's photo in his office.



Their thoughts are foolish. This is my house and I have the right to stay with my family. It is an official house.

KTR hits back at Revanth's 'IT mindset' remark

Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) leader K.T. Rama Rao (KTR) strongly responded to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's recent remark that "IT employees have employee mindset."

remarked, alluding to past controversies surrounding Revanth Reddy. KTR lauded the contributions of IT professionals, stating that their ingenuity and hard work are the backbone of the modern tech world.



'Anuja' gets nomination for Oscar

"Anuja", a New Delhi-set short film, on Thursday bagged a nomination in the Live Action Short category at the 97th Academy Awards.

More funds to boost rural development

The Telangana government has announced a fresh allocation of Rs 2,773 crore to boost rural development across the state, following the earlier sanction of Rs 2,682.95 crore.

Govt allocates additional Rs 2,773 cr Out of the newly sanctioned funds, Rs 1,419 crore is earmarked for CRR roads, Rs 1,288 crore for MRR funds, and Rs 66 crore under the PM Jan Man scheme

remote villages. Minister Seetakka, who has been instrumental in securing these funds, expressed gratitude to Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for prioritizing rural development.

ing officials, including executive engineers (EEs), deputy EEs, and superintending engineers (SEs), with vehicles for efficient project monitoring.



# City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | JANUARY 24, 2025

03



## CITY EVENTS

### Cultural Programmes

By Lasya Kalpa

#### Venue

Ravindra Bharathi  
January 24,  
(9 am to 10 pm)

### Live Telugu & Hindi Musical Orchestra

By Sujaramana Cultural Academy

#### Venue

Sri Thyagaraja Gana Sabha  
January 24, (4:30 pm)

### Alliance Francaise

Games Sessions

#### Venue

Alliance Francaise  
January 24, (6 pm)

### Live performance

By Dhruvam (Band)

#### Venue

36 Downtown Brew Pub (Vapour)  
January 24, (8 pm)

## Skills varsity announces admissions for 4 courses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Young India Skills University (YISU) has announced admissions for four short-term courses of Endoscopy Technician - 6 months, offered by AIG Hospitals; EQUIP Banking, Financial Services & Insurance - 4 months, offered by BFSI Consortium; Supply Chain Essentials Professional Certification Programme - 2.5 months, offered by o9 Solutions; Medical Coding Specialist - 2 months, offered by KIMS Hospitals.

Students are advised to enroll by visiting <https://yisu.in>. Detailed course information is available under respective schools. These programmes offer excellent employment and skill-building opportunities with competitive salaries. On-the-job training with industry experts is also included.

YISU informed that admissions close on January 31, 2025, and training begins in the first week of February.



## Anti-drug rally at Nizam College promotes awareness among youth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Nizam College on Thursday hosted an Anti-Drug Rally organised by the National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC) students to create awareness about the dangers of drug abuse. The rally was inaugurated by Nizam College Principal Professor AV Rajasekhara, who emphasized the importance of eradicating social evils and unhealthy habits, particularly among the youth.

Addressing the gathering, Professor Rajasekhara called for collective responsibility among faculty, staff and students to ensure that substances like drugs, marijuana and cocaine do not infiltrate educational institutions. "It is crucial to create awareness among the younger generation about the severe consequences of



drug abuse. NSS and NCC students have a pivotal role to play in this mission," he said. Highlighting the broader vision,

he stated, "A healthy society is the foundation for India's bright future."

The rally witnessed NSS and

NCC students marching through the campus and nearby areas, raising slogans against drug usage and promoting a drug-free envi-

ronment. Their spirited participation drew attention to the pressing need for action against the rising menace of substance abuse.

The event saw active involvement from Vice-Principal Professor G Upender Reddy, Academic Coordinator Dr S Renuka, Dr Chand Pasha, Philosophy Head Sudhakar, Cluster College Coordinator Dr Radhika, Dr Arathi Jadhav, PRO Dr Kavitha Shinde, NSS Programme Officers Dr Manjula, Dr CH Venkateswarlu, Swathi, Sravanthi and Dr. Markandeya, among others.

The rally underscored the importance of student-led initiatives in fostering a drug-free society and echoed the college's commitment to promoting awareness and social responsibility among students.

## Battle to save Urdu: Key meet tomorrow to shape its future

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Representatives of various organisations will meet on January 25 to discuss the challenges and future of the Urdu language in Telangana as concerns over its neglect and marginalisation grow.

Mohibban-e-Urdu (Urdu Lovers) will organise the meeting on January 25 at 2:00 pm at Media Plus, Gun Foundry, Abids, Hyderabad. Presided over by Tahreek Muslim Shabban president Mohammed Mushtaq Mallik, the session aims to address critical issues threatening the survival of Urdu and its institutions in the State.

The acute shortage of Urdu teachers has left many Urdu-medium schools on the verge of closure. Despite a seven-year wait since the last teacher recruitment notification in 2017, the latest DSC-2024 process filled only 517 of the 1,183 posts reserved for Urdu medium, leaving 666 posi-

tions vacant due to reserved category constraints. The government's inability to fill these posts has dealt a severe blow to the Urdu-medium education system, endangering its very existence and betraying the hopes of aspiring teachers and students.

Equally troubling is the government's failure to implement Urdu as the second official language, despite the Telangana Official Languages (Amendment) Bill, 2017. The bill, passed in recognition of the state's 12.69% Urdu-speaking population, has been reduced to little more than lip service. Official signboards are missing Urdu signage, press releases and communication are rarely issued in the language and the recruitment of only 66 Urdu translators since the bill's passage underscores the lack of commitment to this cause.

The neglect of Urdu institutions and their assets has compounded the crisis. Once-proud

organisations like Idara-e-Adabiyat-e-Urdu are being exploited.

A prime land belonging to the society has been sold away to private parties at a throwaway price in a questionable compromise. Institutions such as the Urdu Arts College in Himayatnagar and Urdu Ghar in Moghalpura face similar threats, with inadequate funding and official indifference undermining their ability to serve as custodians of Urdu's cultural and educational heritage. Prominent personalities, including leaders of religious and social organisations, writers, poets and journalists, will address the meeting to deliberate on these pressing issues. With the stakes higher than ever, the session is expected to ignite a collective effort to preserve the Urdu language, its institutions, and its legacy, which has been an integral part of Telangana's identity for centuries.

## MCR HRD Institute rolls out training programme for examiners

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resource Development Institute of Telangana (Dr MCR HRD) launched a 16-week Induction Training Programme for 122 examiners of patents and designs - 2025, under the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (CGPDTM), DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

The programme aims to train officers in examining patent applications from a techno-legal perspective and provide insights into administration.

DG of the Institute and Special Chief Secretary to the Government of Telangana, Dr



Shashank Goel emphasized the critical role of examiners in driving innovation and creativity by granting deserving patents and designs. He highlighted the need for examiners to understand the global Intellectual Property (IP) framework to align India's IP system with international standards.

Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trademarks, Dr Unnat P Pandit noted the recruitment of

550 examiners, reflecting the government's commitment to strengthening India's IP ecosystem. He highlighted India's rising IP filings and disposals, showcasing its growing global presence.

Meanwhile, Director of Administration, Hemant S Borale appreciated the achievement of granting over one lakh patents in 2023-24 and encouraged officers to utilise training resources for growth.

## Instagram and Snapchat Three nabbed for circulating child sex abuse material

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad City Cyber Crime Unit has arrested three individuals for their involvement in cases related to the creation and circulation of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) on social media platforms, including Instagram and Snapchat. These cases were registered following alerts from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which monitors crimes against children globally. The arrests highlight the growing threat of online exploitation and the Hyderabad police's commitment to addressing such crimes.

Investigations into the cases were conducted using leads such as IP addresses, mobile numbers and email IDs, which helped trace the accused to locations under the Hyderabad Police Commissionerate. In the first case, a 25-year-old private employee

was found to have downloaded child pornography from various websites, viewed it, and shared it via a fake Snapchat ID. Inspector S Nareish is leading the investigation.

In the second case, a 26-year-old self-employed individual also shared similar content on Snapchat after downloading it from various websites. Inspector K Satish Reddy is handling this case.

The third case involved a 32-year-old private employee who downloaded and posted CSAM content using a fake Instagram ID. Inspector K Prasad Rao is investigating this matter. The Cyber Crime Unit emphasized that evidence and leads provided by the Cyber Tipline Report are being corroborated to identify individuals involved in creating, sharing, or circulating such content. Officials assured that strict action would be taken against those exploiting children online.

## 85% Gram Sabhas completed across TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government announced that 13,861 gram sabhas and ward meetings, accounting for 85.96% of the planned sessions, have been successfully completed across the State as on January 23. On Thursday alone, 3,986 gram sabhas were conducted, witnessing active participation from citizens submitting applications for four government schemes set to be launched. On the day, 1,310 gram sabhas and 856 ward meetings were held, with several State ministers, public representatives and officials attending these gatherings.

The government lauded the large-scale public engagement and reiterated its commitment to ensuring the smooth rollout of the schemes through inclusive participation.

## Hyd-based Encore-Alcom sets up auto-robotic unit in Surat

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad-based Encore-Alcom has launched India's first auto-robotic aluminum manufacturing facility in Surat, Gujarat. This advanced plant, spread over 1,84,000 square feet, is the largest facility for aluminum doors and windows in the country and employs 500 people. The company has invested Rs 60 crore in the plant, using German

technology to produce 35,000 square feet of products daily.

Encore-Alcom has completed 3,500 projects globally, including in the US, UK, Dubai and Europe. The new plant provides direct and indirect jobs and complements an existing Surat facility of 60,000 square feet.

According to Founder and CMD Avuthu Shiva Koti Reddy, the company's products rival global standards

due to its in-house R&D and collaborations with Italian designers. He noted that the company set a record by manufacturing India's largest sliding door, measuring 20 feet and introduced designs that are easy to operate, even for children. Shiva also mentioned products like aluminum doors, windows, railings, and facades, with components imported from Slovakia.

## 400 AGED PARTICIPATE IN WALKATHON

## Care-giving systems for senior citizens stressed

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The International Day of Older Persons 2025 was celebrated at Hari Hara Kala Bhavan, Secunderabad, under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in collaboration with the Heritage Foundation RRTC, Hyderabad. On Thursday, over 400 senior citizens attended the event, which focused on the theme: 'Ageing with Dignity: The Importance of Strengthening Care and Support Systems for Older Persons.'

Founder of the Heritage Group KR Gangadharan emphasized self-respect as the foundation of dignity for senior citizens. He highlighted the National Policy on Senior Citizens (1999), recognizing the elderly as invaluable societal resources and reflected the United Nations' stance on their equal contributions to progress.



Over 400 senior citizens participate in the International Day of Older Persons walkathon on Thursday

Meanwhile, former MLA V Mohan Reddy spoke about the joy of connection in gatherings, where shared experiences bring comfort and a sense of belonging. Vice-President of AASARA Dr G Nageswara Rao highlighted programmes empowering seniors and noted initiatives like RTC fare discounts, a proposal to reinstate train fare concessions and plans for 10 multi-

disciplinary centres in Hyderabad for senior citizens approved at Rs 6 crore.

The event began with a spirited walkathon featuring 400 seniors, including 120 aged 70+, cheered by schoolchildren. As India's senior population is set to exceed 160 million by 2030, the event stressed the urgent need for strong care-giving systems.

## GHMC Standing Committee approves CRMP Phase 2

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Standing Committee, chaired by Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi, held its seventh meeting on Thursday at the Command Control Room in the GHMC headquarters. The committee approved 13 items, including 10 agenda points and three table items, aimed at improving infrastructure and civic amenities in Hyderabad.

The meeting also gave administrative approval for a comprehensive five-year road maintenance project under CRMP Phase-2, with an estimated cost of Rs 2,491 crore, and an alternate proposal for new road development worth



Rs 3,825 crore. The Lalapet-Moula Ali Flyover road extension received an additional Rs 1.30 crore, revising the total project cost to Rs 4.30 crore.

During the meeting, the Mayor emphasized the need for coordination between cor-

porators and officials to ensure holistic development and better facilities for citizens. The approved proposals focus on road widening, infrastructure development, and sustainable urban planning.

One of the major approvals includes the recommendation

to the State government for acquiring 227 properties for the 30-meter and 36-meter wide road expansion from Gulmohar Park Junction to Lingampally Railway Crossing. Another significant decision is the renaming of the National Highway 44 six-lane grade separator as Dr Manmohan Singh Expressway, subject to government approval.

Additionally, the committee approved the creation and maintenance of greenery near KBR Park through a CSR initiative for three years.

Other projects include desilting works in Charminar, Khairatabad, Kukatpally and Serilingampally zones at an estimated cost of Rs 2,231.75 lakh and three additional

desilting works worth Rs 697.85 lakh in Charminar, Khairatabad, and Secunderabad zones.

Notable approvals under the Hyderabad Innovative Transformative Infrastructure (H-City) project include steel flyovers and underpasses at Jubilee Hills Check Post, Road No. 45, and other critical junctions at an estimated cost of Rs 7,032 crore.

The committee also approved Rs 620 crore for the comprehensive development of the Nalgonda X Road to Owaisi Junction via IS Sadan.

The meeting was attended by GHMC Commissioner Ilambarathi, standing committee members, and senior officials from various zones and departments.



Workers staging a protest against rising vehicle thefts at a mall in Shadnagar on Thursday

## Mahipal condemns attack on camp office

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy has advised Congress party constituency in-charge Katta Srinivas Goud to stop indulging in personal attacks and engage in negative politics, which could have serious consequences if he continued to do. He made these remarks during a media conference on Thursday, where the incident of an attack by Katta Srinivas Goud's group on his camp office in Patancheru town was being condemned.

Mahipal Reddy stated that inciting party workers to attack the camp office, where the MLA resides, is a serious threat to democracy. He pointed out that he had won the MLA seat three times consecutively with the blessings of the people of Patancheru. He criticised Katta Srinivas Goud, who had previously failed to win as an MLA after two attempts and had faced legal issues, for making such comments.

He mentioned that he had never witnessed such petty politics in his 30 years of political career. He clarified that invitations for government events were extended according to protocol, not based on political party affiliations, and questioned whether such actions were happening in the right spirit. He also questioned how the situation would have unfolded if his workers had protested.



Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy addressing a media conference in Patancheru on Thursday



Ministers Thummala Nageshwar Rao and N Uttam Kumar Reddy at the swearing-in ceremony of Kodad Market committee in Kodad on Thursday

## 70% of TG population will be covered under PDS: Uttam

PNS ■ NALGONDA

The Congress government is committed to ensuring food security for 70 per cent of the population through the Public Distribution System (PDS), said Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy. He made the announcement while addressing a gathering in the Kodad constituency on Thursday.

The event was chaired by Kodad MLA Uttam Padmavathi and attended by Agriculture Minister Thummala Nageshwar Rao, among others.

Speaking at the swearing-in ceremony of the Kodad Market Committee's new governing body, the Minister stated that the initiative would involve issuing white ration cards to all

eligible poor individuals. He emphasised that this would benefit approximately 40 lakh people across the state.

Applications for ration cards submitted through platforms like Praja Palana, Prajavani, Mee-Seva, and Gram Sabhas are being processed. The minister assured that the ration card approval process is continuous and transparent. He urged people not to worry.

"We aim to provide white ration cards to every eligible individual," Uttam Kumar Reddy said. He clarified that no misinformation or delays would hinder the process.

Similarly, under Indiramma Indlu scheme, beneficiaries with land would receive Rs 5 lakh, while Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes bene-

ficiaries would get Rs 6 lakh. Furthermore, under the Indiramma Atmeeya Bharosa scheme, landless agricultural workers would receive Rs 12,000 annually. The Rythu Bharosa amount has been increased by 20% to Rs 12,000 per acre per annum and it would be applicable for cultivable land across Telangana state.

Uttam Kumar Reddy also announced plans to transfer Godavari waters to Paleru through link canals, extending the benefits to Mothe mandal.

Regarding infrastructure, Rs 18 crore has been allocated for the renovation of the Kodad Bus Depot. The Hyderabad-Vijayawada National Highway would also be expanded to six lanes, a project the minister had

pursued during his tenure as an MP.

Uttam Kumar Reddy revealed that a proposal for a railway line to Kodad had been submitted to the central government, along with a detailed route map.

Agriculture Minister Thummala Nageshwar Rao stated that the state government's primary focus is on farmers' welfare, emphasising that the prosperity of farmers leads to the development of villages.

Earlier speaking at the swearing-in ceremony of the Agricultural Market Committee held at Devi Sri Garden, Valigonda Mandal, on Thursday, the minister highlighted various initiatives taken by the government to support farmers and the agricultural sector.

## Welfare schemes will reach every eligible individual: Ponguleti

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy appealed to people on Thursday not to be apprehensive about the transparency in the selection of beneficiaries under various welfare schemes. Strong measures have been taken to ensure that the benefits of welfare schemes will reach all eligible people.

The Minister was touring the Tirumalayapalem mandal and laid the foundation stones for several developmental works.

The distribution of Indiramma houses, Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa, Rythu Bharosa, and the issuance of ration cards will begin on January 26. "The inclusion of beneficiaries in the welfare schemes is a continuous process," he assured the people.

The Minister also mentioned that Tipparedigudem will see the construction of cement roads, power line extensions and removal of lines over homes have been



Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy laying the foundation stone for developmental work in Tirumalayapalem mandal in Khammam on Thursday

approved. Proposals have been sent to the government for the repair of roads damaged by floods.

He assured that by the upcoming monsoon, cement concrete roads would be constructed. Approximately Rs 9 crore has been allocated to resolve the problem being posed by overhead electrical wire.

Despite the precarious financial conditions and the legacy of a huge debt burden, the Congress government is sincerely working for the welfare of the people and imple-

menting various schemes. From January 26, Rs 12,000 per acre will be provided for all cultivable agricultural lands, and Rs 12,000 annual assistance will be provided to families of landless labourers.

The event was attended by Irrigation Development Corporation Chairman M. Vijay Babu, Paleru Constituency Special Officer Ramesh, RDO Narasimha Rao, Tirumalayapalem Tahsildar Ramakrishna, MPDO. Silar Sahib, public representatives, officials, and others.

## Woman kills two daughters, ends life

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

In a shocking incident, a woman allegedly killed her daughter and hanged herself to death. The incident took place at Nidhanapuram under Madhira mandal in the district on Thursday.

Sheikh Bhaji and Preja of Nidhanapuram village had a love marriage five years ago. The couple has two children. Bhaji used to work as a bike mechanic in Khammam. At the same time, several cases of bike and chain

snatching were registered against Baji in several police stations in the past. In the early hours of Thursday, the police took Shaikh Bhaji away from his residence.

Soon after the police left the place, Preja resorted to the extreme step. It was learnt that she was also asked to come to the police station. Meanwhile, the local police were unaware of the arrest of Bhaji. They denied any knowledge of the case that led to his arrest. Preja had married Bhaji in an interfaith marriage a few years ago.

## Man kills himself over harassment from finance company

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

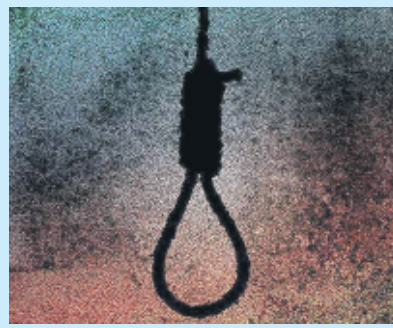
Unable to bear the harassment by a private finance company, a young man hanged himself to death.

The incident took place in Bibipet village in the district on Thursday.

The deceased was identified as 32-year-old Sunkari Praveen Goud.

Police have registered a case and are investigating it.

Praveen Goud, a resident of Tujalpur village, had borrowed Rs 3 lakh from a



five-star private finance company in Kamareddy for the construction of a house three years ago. Praveen Goud had been paying equated monthly instalments (EMIs) regularly since the beginning.

Praveen was, however, allegedly harassed by the private finance staff for the last three days as there was a delay in paying the last EMI of Rs 8,000.

Praveen Goud committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree on the outskirts of the village. He is survived by his wife and two children.

## Noisy protest mark Gram Sabhas on third day

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

In the undivided Nizamabad district, the Gram Sabha have turned chaotic. Police personnel were deployed to maintain peace at the meeting. The meetings were disrupted by protests and objections, with many people expressing anger over their names not being included in the welfare schemes announced by the authorities. The lists of eligible beneficiaries for schemes, such as ration cards, Indiramma houses, and Atmiya Bharosa are being blocked, with people protesting and even confronting officials.

The people directed their anger at the officials over the "omission of names" from lists,

particularly for ration cards and Indiramma houses, with many questioning why their names were left out. The authorities are facing significant protests, as many eligible individuals are excluded from the announced lists, while names of ineligible individuals, including political figures, appear on them.

In several places like Nizamabad rural, Balkonda, Armoor, Bodhan, Banswada, Ellareddy, and Jukkal constituencies, people are raising objections and questioning the authorities. Some villages have seen intense protests. In particular, there is strong opposition to the inclusion of names of people who do not qualify for the welfare



People protesting at a Gram Sabha in Nizamabad district on Thursday

schemes, with many villagers claiming that political leaders and influential individuals have been included unjustly.

The meetings are continuing under heavy police protection, as the authorities antic-

ipate further unrest and protests over the next few days.

Jangaon District: Similar protests are occurring in the Jangaon constituency, where people are objecting to the lists

of eligible beneficiaries for various welfare schemes, including Rythu Bharosa, ration cards, Indiramma houses, and Atmiya Bharosa. People are questioning why some ineligible individuals' names are missing from the list.

Mahabubabad: In the Torur mandal of Mahabubabad district, at a village meeting held in Venkata Puram, there was a heated argument between the villagers and the officials when eligible individuals did not receive Indiramma houses.

The situation escalated as the villagers expressed their frustration by submitting a memorandum in protest and the officials were forced to leave. This caused further tension in the village.

## Man attempts suicide at Gram Sabha

PNS ■ MULUGU

A tragic incident took place in Buttaigudem, Kannaigudem mandals in Mulugu district. During a Gram Sabha meeting held on Thursday to identify eligible beneficiaries for Indiramma houses and ration cards, chaos erupted. A man, named Nageshwara Rao, whose name was missing from the list of beneficiaries for Indiramma housing scheme, consumed pesticide at the meeting.

Officials and the police rushed Nageshwara Rao to a

local hospital. His condition is stated to be critical. He was transferred to the Mulugu Area Hospital for better treatment.



Nageshwara Rao, who attempted suicide at Gram Sabha, is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Mulugu on Thursday

Nageshwarara's wife Lakshmi said that her husband consumed insecticide because his name was included in the list of beneficiaries. She broke down and cried.

## Bandi consoles bereaved family members of BJP leader

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar consoled BJP senior leader Devishetty Naveen Kumar and his family members at Ganeshnagar in Karimnagar town on Thursday.

It may be recalled Naveen Kumar's mother Devishetty Rajamani (75) passed away on January 17 due to age-related ailments. The Union Minister expressed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members.

Earlier, the Union Minister paid floral tributes to the portrait of Devishetty Rajamani. Devishetty Rajamouli, Information and Public Relations Joint Director Devishetty Srinivas, Anjaneyulu, Hanumandlu, Jayanth Kumar and other family members were also present.



ACROSS THE STATES



Old Pension Scheme will remain in Himachal : CM

Chief Minister Sukhvir Singh Sukhu on Thursday said the Old Pension Scheme will continue as long as Congress is in power in Himachal Pradesh. Addressing a public gathering at Dari Mela Ground in Kangra's Dharamshala assembly constituency, Sukhu announced the construction of the country's largest international convention center near Tapovan at a cost of Rs 150 crore. He said the convention center would host seminars by major companies, boost tourism and create employment opportunities for local youth, a statement issued here said. The Congress government fulfilled its election promise by reinstating the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) to 1.36 lakh government employees, Sukhu said and asserted that OPS will continue as long as Congress is in power in the state. The central government has reduced the state's loan limit by Rs 1,600 crore and imposed additional restrictions for reinstating the OPS, he added.



'What are we without our land,' says Omar

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday asserted the importance of a land and its people in forging their identity and exhorted them to never let it go. The land of Jammu and Kashmir, a region restive for decades, must be protected by its people at all costs, he said. "When we talk about these matters - about the Constitution, special status, and the prosperity of Jammu and Kashmir - we are also talking about our identity. And our identity is tied to our land," Abdullah said while addressing a function in the Bari Brahmana area of Samba district. "We want this land to remain ours. The land that Sheikh Abdullah, with a single signature, transferred to you without any compensation... Without it, what do we truly possess?" he said. "It must not be taken away from us, and this should remain our collective effort," he added.



SAD crisis: Akal Takht calls meeting of 'Singh Sahibans'

Amid resentment over the alleged non-compliance of the Akal Takht's December 2 edict related to reorganizing the embattled SAD, Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh Thursday called a meeting of the five Sikh high priests on January 28. Though Akal Takht secretariat officials in Amritsar did not disclose the agenda of the meeting of five 'Singh Sahibans' (Sikh high priests), they said it will discuss some important "Panthic" issues at the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of Sikhs. Meanwhile, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) announced that it has decided to depute rebel leader Gurpartap Singh Wadala as an observer for its new membership drive, which commenced on January 20. While pronouncing on December 2 religious punishment for Sukhbir Singh Badal and other leaders for the 'mistakes' committed by the SAD government in Punjab from 2007 to 2017, the Akal Takht had also formed a seven-member committee for starting the membership drive and holding the elections for the post of SAD president and other office bearers within six months.

'80% people could have avoided blindness with timely treatment'

PNS ■ MATHURA (UP)

Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi said Thursday there are 7 crore people blind people in the country and 80 per cent of them could have avoided losing their sight if they had received timely treatment.



He stated that India needs advanced and modern ophthalmic facilities, and it is heartening to see that many social organisations are working in this direction, ahead of the government. Many Indians are also working in this field, providing medical aid to poor countries, the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize winner said while addressing the inauguration ceremony of 'Kalyanam Karoti Netra Sansthan' located on the Mathura-Goverdhan road. The institution has been started with a capacity of 200 beds, which will soon be increased to 400 beds. Shekhar Bajaj, the Chairman of Bajaj Foundation, was also present at the event as a special guest.

Stay united for 'viksit Bharat'

PM MODI ON BOSE'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called upon people to stay united in pursuit of 'viksit Bharat' and warned them against the forces seeking to weaken the country and break its unity.

Addressing a 'Parakram Diwas' event held in Cuttack to commemorate Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary in the city of his birth, Modi said the iconic freedom fighter's life is a source of continuous inspiration for people.

In the remarks delivered virtually, he said Netaji, as Bose was fondly called, chose to shun comfort zone and preferred to struggle for the country's independence.

Modi said, "He never got trapped in a comfort zone. Similarly, we all have to step out of our comfort zone to build a viksit Bharat. We have to make ourselves globally. We have to choose excellence and focus on efficiency." Bose was single-mindedly focussed on the country's independence and people from diverse background united for the cause, he said.

"Now we have to stay united for a developed India," he said and added, "Today when we are engaged in realising the resolve of developed India, the legacy Netaji Subhas will constantly inspire us." He said people



In the remarks delivered virtually, he said Netaji, as Bose was fondly called, chose to shun comfort zone and preferred to struggle for the country's independence

should seek inspiration from Bose's life for India's unity, urging them to keep working for Viksit Bharat and saying that this will be a true tribute to Bose. "We have to stay alert to those who wanted to weaken the country and break its unity," he said.

The prime minister cited a host of decisions, including the naming of islands in the Andamans after Bose, installation of his statue at India Gate and celebration of his birth

anniversary as 'Parakram Diwas', taken by his government to emphasise on its work to promote his legacy. Bose took pride in India's heritage and often spoke about India's rich democratic history, encouraging people to draw inspiration from it, he noted.

Fast pace of development, he added, goes hand in hand with people's progress, strengthening of the armed forces and overall development.

While over 25 crore people have been lifted out of poverty, modern infrastructure in also being built and the strength of armed forces has risen in an unprecedented manner in the last one decade, he said. India has emerged as a strong voice globally, he added. He stressed that a favourable environment exists globally for India's progress and that the world is watching how the country makes the 21st century its own.

The prime minister also paid tribute to Bose at an commemorative event in Parliament along with leaders from different parties, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.



Ayushman Bharat best of all schemes, says Amit Shah

PNS ■ SURAT

Union Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) was the best among the public welfare schemes launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating a trust-run cancer hospital and a sanatorium on Dumas road here, the Union Home minister also said the PM "has done several historical works in just one lifetime".

"But if you ask me to point out the best one among all these schemes, I will say Ayushman Bharat Yojna. Under this scheme, nearly 60 crore citizens are now eligible to get free treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh," Shah opined.

The cancer hospital, built by a trust at a cost of Rs 250 crore, that was inaugurated here will accept patients having

Ayushman Bharat card, he added.

"The Modi government took several steps to improve the healthcare scenario in the country. India's healthcare budget rose from Rs 37,000 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 98,000 crore under the Modi government, which indicates a three-fold increase in allocation. The PM adopted a holistic approach for improving health services in the country," he said.

In 2014, there were 387 medical colleges which used to produce 51,000 MBBS doctors, while the number of medical colleges went up to 766, producing 1.15 lakh MBBS doctors, Shah pointed out.

Other initiatives include promoting the AYUSH sector, providing clean drinking water and promoting sports to increase immunity and resistance power among citizens, the Union minister said.



Was Saif really attacked, wonders minister Nitesh Rane

PNS ■ PUNE

Maharashtra minister and BJP leader Nitesh Rane sparked a controversy on Thursday after he raised questions over the knife attack on Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan wondering if the Bollywood star was "really attacked or if he was acting".

The statement from Rane comes a day after former Rajya Sabha MP and Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Nirupam raised questions about the actor's swift return to normal life

following a six-hour surgery for deep stab wounds.

Rane further spoke on perceived biases, claiming that while many speak out when a 'Khan' is attacked, similar attention is not given to Hindu actors. He was referring to late actor Sushant Singh Rajput, who died by suicide in June 2020, and said that opposition leaders like Jitendra Awhad and Supriya Sule had remained silent on Rajput's case but were now vocal about Khan's situation. "Opposition leaders

Jitendra Awhad and Supriya Sule did not speak about (late actor) Sushant Singh Rajput. She is concerned only about Saif Ali Khan," Rane alleged.

The statement of Rane drew sharp criticism from Congress, which accused the government of mixing religion and politics. In response, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole condemned Rane's remarks, labelling them as an attempt to create a "religious divide" and distract from pressing issues. "Mixing religion and politics is BJP's agenda to divert the attention from issues being faced by people," he said. He urged police to focus on capturing the actual perpetrator rather than politicising the situation and alleged that there are discrepancies in the probe as some reports suggest that the individual caught on CCTV may not be the same as the one arrested. "Instead of raising Hindu-Muslim angle in law and order situations, police must catch the real culprit."

Unemployment, inflation rising due to wrong policies: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday said the "ever-increasing" unemployment and inflation due to "wrong policies" of the Modi government have made life extremely difficult for lower and middle class families, and asserted that the country now needs a budget that provides relief from rising prices.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh shared a media report on X which claimed that "back-breaking inflation in the last 10 years has emptied the pockets of the common people". "The Modi government has only taken care of its rich friends in the last ten years. Ever-increasing unemployment and inflation due to wrong policies of the government have made life extremely difficult for lower and middle class families," Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on X. The prices of milk, flour,



pulses, petrol, diesel and vegetables are "skyrocketing", he said. "The burden of EMIs and daily needs is increasing on every household. The country now needs a budget that provides relief from inflation!" he said. Will the government take any concrete steps after listening to the problems of the people, Ramesh asked.

The Congress on Wednesday claimed that it is becoming clear that the "disappointing" Quarter 2 GDP

growth numbers are not a blip but a clear slowdown in the economy and the post-pandemic bump is not broad-based enough to power long-term growth.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday also hit out at the Modi government over its economic policies and asserted that real development is when everyone progresses, there is a fair environment for business, a fair tax system and the income of workers increases.

Lawyers' names runs into 10 pages, order is few pages

SAYS SC ON MARKING APPEARANCES

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday raised concern over a large number of lawyers marking their appearance in cases, and their names running into several pages, whereas an order was only a few pages.

A bench comprising Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma said if a lawyer was assisting the court "effectively" it had no problem in adding the appearance.

"Names of lawyers go into 10 pages and the order will go into only a few pages. We are not passing any orders on how the names of advocates should be included in the order. Since you are representing the Bar, we are hearing out," it said.

The top court said though many lawyers appeared with the arguing counsel, nobody



argued when asked to.

"Or we would have clearly said you have no locus. Whoever is attached with the lawyer, their names are there. It cannot be done like that. When we see they are assisting you effectively, their names are there. We will pass the orders," the bench told senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the Supreme Court Bar

Association (SCBA). Sibal submitted the SCBA and the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association would submit a proposal to regulate the issue.

"You are right; 30-40 names cannot be given. But some reasonable, fair procedure to ensure that genuine people who are here and their names should be added," he said.

Republic Day to showcase military prowess

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Some of the cutting-edge defence platforms including BrahMos, Pinaka and Akash will be part of the 76th Republic Day celebrations on Kartavya Path with Army's Battle Surveillance System 'Sanjay' and DRDO's surface-to-surface tactical missile 'Pralay' set to be showcased in the ceremonial parade for the first time, officials said on Thursday.

India will display its military prowess and vibrant culture heritage on the majestic boulevard here on January 26, and the flypast will feature 40 IAF aircraft and three Dornier aircraft of the Indian Coast Guard. Lt Gen Bhavnish Kumar, General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area will be the Parade Commander while Parade Second-in-



Command would be Chief of Staff (COS), Delhi Area, Maj Gen Sumit Mehta.

Interacting with mediapersons here soon after the completion of the full dress rehearsal of the parade, Maj

Gen Mehta said the solemn event will showcase India's military prowess with a number of cutting-edge platforms, a range of vibrant tableaux as well as the country's rich heritage. T-90 'Bhishma' tanks,

BrahMos and Pinaka missile systems, Akash weapon system, Sarath (Infantry Carrying Vehicle BMP-II), Short Span Bridging System 10m, Nag Missile System, multi-barrel rocket launcher system

'Agnibaan', and 'Bajrang' (Light Specialist Vehicle) will take part in the parade.

Asked what factors were kept in mind while lending names to such platforms such as 'Agnibaan' and 'Bajrang', the COS, Delhi Area said, "Specialised vehicles made under 'Atmanirbhat Bharat' vision earlier reflected their capabilities, such as all-terrain vehicles, specialised mobility vehicle. We have given them names, they were not christened earlier. When they were being named, our cultural heritage was also acknowledged through the names."

Asked which platforms are taking part in the Republic Day celebrations for the first time, Maj Gen Mehta said, Battle Surveillance System 'Sanjay' and DRDO's 'Pralay' weapon system will be seen in the parade for the first time.

The Indian Army will be represented by a mounted column, eight mechanised contingents, and six marching contingents, officials said. The mounted column will be represented by the 61 Cavalry.

The marching columns will consist of contingents from Brigade of the Guards contingent, Jat Regiment, Garhwal Rifles Regiment, J&K Light Infantry (JAKLI) regiment and a contingent of the Corps of Engineers. While 75 years of enactment of the Constitution is the focus of Republic Day celebrations this year, the theme for the tableaux is 'Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas'. Sixteen tableaux from various states and Union Territories and 15 from central government ministries, departments and organisations will be part of the ceremonial parade.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Trump's ultimatum

Trump's plain talk on the Ukraine war—'end it or face sanctions'—could mark a turning point in the conflict

In a dramatic intervention, US President Donald Trump has asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to bring an immediate end to the ongoing Ukraine war. Labeling the conflict 'ridiculous,' Trump warned of severe economic sanctions and tariffs against Russia if Putin failed to negotiate peace. The threat marks a sharp escalation in Trump's rhetoric on a war that has already claimed the lives of over a million soldiers on both sides. Speaking on Truth Social platform, Trump reaffirmed his affinity for the Russian people and his respect for Putin but did not shy away from criticising the Russian leader for prolonging the bloody conflict. "We must never forget that Russia helped us win the Second World War, losing almost 60 million lives in the process," Trump said, highlighting historical ties while urging an end to the ongoing devastation. Trump's approach combines a mix of hardline economic threats and diplomatic overtures. In his straightforward message he suggested that the economic repercussions of prolonged conflict would be catastrophic for Russia. He emphasised that his preference was for a peaceful resolution.



The Ukraine war, which began with Russia's invasion in February 2022, has dragged on for nearly three years. The conflict has claimed the lives of nearly a million Russian soldiers and 700,000 Ukrainian troops. These staggering figures underscore the war's devastating impact, making it one of the deadliest conflicts of the 21st century. Economic consequences have also been severe, particularly for Russia. International sanctions, coupled with the strain of prolonged military operations, have left the Russian economy struggling with inflation and stagnation. Trump pointed to these economic pressures as a potential leverage point, suggesting that a peace deal is in Russia's best interest. Trump's ultimatum reflects a marked departure from his earlier, more ambiguous stance on the conflict. Trump administration is in direct talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Trump himself plans to engage with Putin directly. He appears intent on delivering on that promise with a mix of economic coercion and diplomatic engagement. Despite the grim reality of the war, Trump's comments offers a glimmer of hope for an early resolution. He has emphasised that both Zelensky and Putin should pursue a deal, suggesting that the leaders' willingness would be pivotal in ending the conflict. Trump's ultimatum to Putin could signal a turning point in the Ukraine war, but the path forward remains fraught with uncertainty. While the economic pressure could incentivise Russia to negotiate, the deep-seated political and territorial disputes fueling the conflict may prove challenging to resolve. As the world watches, Trump's next moves—whether imposing sanctions, brokering a deal, or recalibrating military aid—will shape not only the future of the Ukraine war but also the broader geopolitical landscape. For now, one thing is clear: Trump is determined to make his mark on history by ending a war that has caused untold suffering and reshaped global politics.

economic pressures as a potential leverage point, suggesting that a peace deal is in Russia's best interest. Trump's ultimatum reflects a marked departure from his earlier, more ambiguous stance on the conflict. Trump administration is in direct talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Trump himself plans to engage with Putin directly. He appears intent on delivering on that promise with a mix of economic coercion and diplomatic engagement. Despite the grim reality of the war, Trump's comments offers a glimmer of hope for an early resolution. He has emphasised that both Zelensky and Putin should pursue a deal, suggesting that the leaders' willingness would be pivotal in ending the conflict. Trump's ultimatum to Putin could signal a turning point in the Ukraine war, but the path forward remains fraught with uncertainty. While the economic pressure could incentivise Russia to negotiate, the deep-seated political and territorial disputes fueling the conflict may prove challenging to resolve. As the world watches, Trump's next moves—whether imposing sanctions, brokering a deal, or recalibrating military aid—will shape not only the future of the Ukraine war but also the broader geopolitical landscape. For now, one thing is clear: Trump is determined to make his mark on history by ending a war that has caused untold suffering and reshaped global politics.

### PICTALK



Tourists pose for pictures at the Taj Mahal, in Agra

## Can suspending commodity derivatives rein in food price



SANJAY RAWAL

The debate over whether speculative trading in futures commodity markets drives food price inflation remains unresolved in India and across Asia

While there are several concerns in India and across Asia, certain policy and key opinion circles that food price inflation is catalysed or influenced somehow by speculative trading in the futures commodity markets. Even while opinions are divided in policy circles and among economists who have studied and examined the nature of the relationship between food inflation and commodity and derivative futures trading contracts, and no empirical evidence hitherto seems to have been found despite numerous studies undertaken in India.

It would be worth mentioning that a detailed empirical research study conducted by leading researchers from the Indian Institute of Management Udaipur specifically studied three suspension events in India of futures traded commodities, which led the researchers to firmly state that the counterfactual for each of the examined episodes confirms that even in the absence of trading suspensions, food prices or inflationary trends would have followed their dynamic path.

Any upward price volatility could ostensibly be the effects or countereffects of various extraneous domestic or global (especially geopolitical) factors. It is also equally understandable and natural for any governing policy institution to be both fully cognisant and mindful of food price inflationary trends, and the fact that rising food prices can have a cataclysmic effect on food security and thus, by extension could have substantive socio-economic impact.

Successive policy establishments and ecosystems have always been overly cautious, ever since futures trading commodity derivatives exchanges were established in the early 2000s. Despite the mandate of such commodity exchanges that futures trading contracts encourage effective and fair price discovery and risk hedging, which consequently safeguards the commodity value chain from price risk which is a result of a fundamental play between demand and supply the apprehensions



concerning these market-driven tools continued to remain, manifesting itself the way of multiple instances of suspensions on certain commodity derivative contracts.

While trading suspensions have been a constant feature since 2007-2008, under the advisement of the price monitoring mechanisms and agencies within the government policy ecosystem, there never has been an occasion when suspensions of commodity trading exceeded more than a year in a single stretch, barring the odd 'sensitive' food commodity. So as a commodity markets expert, with a domestic and world view of ongoing trading in global commodity markets, one begs to specifically ask - Do derivatives trading suspensions really rein in food price inflation? Researchers have constantly alluded to synthetic control methodologies to apply to their studies for studying specific suspensions, their findings fairly and comprehensively conclude and determine that there is no empirical evidence that derivatives suspension had any impact whatsoever on food prices.

On the contrary, from specific instances studied, such as those of Bengal Gram (Chana)



SUCCESSIVE POLICY ESTABLISHMENTS AND ECOSYSTEMS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OVERLY CAUTIOUS, EVER SINCE FUTURES TRADING COMMODITY DERIVATIVES EXCHANGES WERE ESTABLISHED IN THE EARLY 2000S

in August 2021 and Mustard Seed Derivatives in October 2021, analysis from the said report from IIM Udaipur shows that prices of both commodities, Chana and mustard oil, would have continued on the same price trend path even without the suspension. To specifically quote a potent segment of the said study - it clearly articulates that the conducted research does not find any role of futures market trading on price changes, nor does it find any empirical evidence of the impact of suspension of trade on price behaviour in the period after suspension. Rather, the analysis shows that prices of commodities such as mustard oil would have had a similar trend even without the suspension. Furthermore, the study finds that before the suspension futures market had a dominant share of 64 per cent in discovering the true and fair price of the mustard seed commodity derivative.

The study goes on further to articulate that commodity derivative suspensions hurt genuine participants discourage the growth of domestic agri-derivatives markets and resultantly impact the growth of price hedging prospects of the commodity value chain

including CBBOs (Cluster Business Organisations) and FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations), while consequently hurting the value realisation and income levels of farmers.

It also adversely impacts India's position in providing a global price benchmark, despite the country being a major producer and consumer of several agricultural commodities. Needless to say, as an active observer of the Indian agri-based commodity trading ecosystem, it behove advocacy and argument that summary commodity suspensions as a method to arrest or contain food price inflation should not be adopted and further the suspension of futures trading contracts of agricultural commodity derivatives must be revoked. In closure, one must say emphatically that the development of the agri-derivatives market is supported in India, which in turn will lead to fair price discovery and transparent hedging of price risks, eventually creating a positive socio-economic impact for farmers and the agri-ecosystem in India.

(The writer is national president of Commodity Participants Association of India; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### PANIC KILLS PASSENGERS

Madam — Twelve passengers on the Pushpak Express were killed and 55 injured after jumping from the tight-packed unreserved coaches onto the track in panic, fearing a fire (they don't even notice or hear approaching trains), only to be run over by the Karnataka Express near Pachora railway station in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra. Unable to understand when the public will get some sense. Why do they need to wander on tracks even if they had jumped out of a train that they thought was on fire?

Though for this sad mishap we definitely cannot blame the railways from any angle. Even though people may have agreed with me that Indians have lost trust and faith in the railway administration to such an extent that without verifying the rumour, they believe it (smoke that perhaps sparked rumours of a fire) and act accordingly. This shows total distrust of the railways. This is not the first instance; the Jalgaon tragedy revives the painful memory of a similar accident in which 21 women and a boy lost their lives in Mumbai's Goregaon.

On October 13, 1993, passengers on Western Railway's 'ladies special' local between Borivali and Kandivali jumped off a first-class compartment onto the tracks after seeing smoke rise from the undercarriage of their stationary train. Whatever, we all know how our system works. It's the responsibility of people who travel to take care of themselves, not the railway. Yes, it is really tragic for people to lose their lives. It is a big loss to their families. A moment of profound grief and sorrow. May God give strength to all the deceased family members at this difficult time. May their souls rest in peace. Om Shanti.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

#### FREEBIES HURT ECONOMY

Madam—The growing trend of offering freebies during elections, such as in the Delhi Assembly polls, poses significant challenges to both the economy and democracy. Economically, these promis-

## US withdraws from WHO



In a tearing hurry to make America great again, Trump bombarded his country and the rest of the world with a slew of executive orders. He withdrew the US from the World Health Organisation, alleging that the global agency had mishandled the COVID-19 pandemic. His own handling of the coronavirus catastrophe was dreadful—over 3,50,000 deaths were reported in the US in 2020, the final year of his first term—but those glaring lapses are of no con-

sequence to him now. He has washed his hands of international collaboration to combat any future pandemic. Trump also signed America's withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, whose main goal is to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Last year ended as the planet's hottest on record, and the target looks even more improbable now with the US jumping ship. In an irrational way, the President pardoned 1,500-odd protesters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in a bid to prevent lawmakers from certifying his election defeat. The incident was a big blow to American democracy. In stark contrast, there is bad news for those desperate to sneak into the US, as Trump has declared illegal immigration at the US-Mexico border a "national emergency." It's America First for him—and the world must brace itself for the worst.

N Sathasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

strain public finances, divert resources from critical sectors, and create an unsustainable dependency culture.

Over time, this undermines fiscal discipline and hampers long-term development. In the democratic sphere, freebies erode accountability, manipulate voter choices, and shift focus away from systemic reforms. They often favour immediate political gains over addressing structural inequalities, weakening institutions, and fostering inequity. While welfare measures are essential for uplifting marginalised groups, they must be carefully balanced with sustainable policies. Policymakers should prioritise structural reforms, economic growth, and targeted welfare instead of indulging in competitive populism. Ultimately, a balanced approach is key to safeguarding both fiscal health and the integrity of democratic processes.

Gopalswamy J | Chennai

#### RUPEE'S FURTHER DECLINE EXPECTED

Madam — India's Weakening Rupee and its expected Impact on the Indian Stock

Market and on Companies with Large USD Borrowings and other relevant issues. Rupee's further decline cannot be avoided. RBI's own calculations indicate a large overvaluation of the rupee, so a lot more decline of the rupee against the dollar must happen, especially if the US imposes tariffs.

In case of a large and rapid rupee decline, the economy and stock markets could be disrupted. Therefore, economic turmoil is unavoidable. If the rupee becomes significantly weaker against the dollar, the debt and interest repayment burden of these Indian companies will go up. If the rupee is strong, then dollar debt becomes cheaper. So, nobody gained from this RBI pivot of 2022. Short-term strategies can sometimes have long-term consequences. India got into this mess by betting on high GDP growth, which can be the only saviour in this situation. But now the GDP growth itself has slowed.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## AI and defence dynamics: Global trends and India's adaptation



TARUN VIG

India is harnessing AI to enhance national security, counter threats and establish itself at the forefront of the defence innovation landscape

Cross-border terrorism and geopolitical tensions, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Iran hostilities, have driven unprecedented defence spending since World War II. To counter these threats, nations are leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to build resilient defence systems. AI enhances national security by enabling robust decision-making to detect, analyse, and address complex threats across multiple fronts.

#### The Shift Towards AI in Defence

AI is transforming defence strategies, reducing reliance on human personnel. The US military's active-duty personnel are at their lowest levels in eight decades, while the UK has seen a 30 per cent reduction since 2000, largely due to AI-driven tools replacing soldiers in high-risk operations. With advancements in IoT and data analytics, experts predict a significant increase in AI-based defence systems globally. India's AI-Driven Defence Evolution



India, a leading G20 nation, is actively integrating AI into its defence framework to counter internal and external threats. Initiatives like the 2022 launch of 75 AI-enabled defence products highlight India's focus on cybersecurity, automation, and autonomous systems. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) allocates \$12.6 million annually for AI projects, including the establishment of an AI center at the Military College of Telecommunication

Engineering (MCTE). Additionally, the 2024 launch of India's first AI Data Bank aims to enhance national security through real-time analytics and predictive capabilities.

#### AI in Security and Surveillance

AI aids investigation agencies in video surveillance and threat detection, analysing behaviour, communications and psychological patterns to identify risks. Using both Strong AI (mimicking human cognition) and Weak AI

(focused tasks), intelligence agencies enhance security, mitigate breaches and safeguard civilians and public institutions.

#### Challenges and Future Prospects

Despite promising advancements, AI adoption in India's defence faces challenges, including data privacy, cybersecurity and ethical concerns surrounding autonomous systems. To remain competitive, India must increase investments in research, collaborate internationally and address accountability issues tied to AI-driven military operations.

#### Conclusion

By adopting a risk-based regulatory framework, India can ensure the ethical and effective deployment of AI in defence. While challenges persist, the ongoing innovations and strategic initiatives signal a future where India's defence capabilities transcend traditional methods, embracing AI as a cornerstone of national security.

(The writer is Co-founder & CEO, Innfex Labs; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

### INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: CHAMPIONING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

India's approach balances national priorities with global responsibilities



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended the US presidential inauguration earlier this week. President Trump's inauguration by itself is an epochal moment for global international relations. India outlined its foreign policy approach a few days ago, during EAM's address at Nani Palkivala's memorial lecture. He mentioned that India's foreign policy in 2025 reflects a deepening commitment to multilateralism, but also recognises the competitive realities of a shifting global order. The nation has embraced issue-based partnerships with major groupings like the Quad, BRICS, and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). India's ability to balance multiple memberships and partnerships underscores its evolving diplomatic strategy, driven by a pragmatic approach to international relations.

At the heart of India's foreign policy is a strong solidarity with the Global South, rooted in post-colonial values of independence, sovereignty and resistance to external pressures. This unique perspective sets India apart from traditional alliance structures, as it champions the rights of developing nations while pursuing its strategic interests. While India continues to engage in global dialogues, it maintains its core principle of non-alignment and the freedom to choose partners based on national priorities. Recent shifts in India's domestic policies—across politics, economics and security—have influenced its foreign relations.



Notably, India's relationship with the United States has transformed, moving past historical hesitations to embrace a deeper strategic partnership. This cooperation spans security, technology, trade, and science, benefiting both nations. India's diaspora also plays a crucial role, acting as a living bridge to enhance bilateral ties. Despite occasional policy shifts in the US, the foundation for a robust relationship is now firmly established. However, India's engagement with China remains a complex challenge. As the two largest Asian nations with over a billion people each, their dynamic is shaped by historical disputes and differing political systems. The boundary issue, exacerbated by tensions since 2020, continues to complicate bilateral relations. The guiding principles for India's approach to China are mutual respect, sensitivity, and shared interests, with an emphasis on long-term stability and a multi-polar Asia. In the Indo-Pacific, India has extended its Act East policy, fostering deeper relationships with Japan, Australia and ASEAN countries, and strengthening the Quad alliance.

This partnership has progressed in areas such as climate action, maritime security, and digital connectivity. Similarly, India's collaboration with Russia remains a pillar of its foreign policy, with growing economic ties and shared strategic interests. India advocates for diplomacy in addressing global challenges, such as the Ukraine conflict, and seeks to provide solutions to global problems, including food security and climate change.

It has assisted smaller neighbours during crises, including the 2023 financial support to Sri Lanka, reinforcing its role as a regional leader. However, India's relationship with Pakistan remains strained due to ongoing cross-border terrorism. India is also engaged in strengthening ties with Myanmar and Afghanistan, maintaining its people-to-people connections despite political complexities. India's global ambitions are reflected in its increasing role in international organisations. As a proponent of multilateral reform, India has pushed for changes in the United Nations, advocating for greater representation of the Global South. It also leads initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. These efforts highlight India's growing responsibility as a global power, dedicated to addressing pressing issues like climate change, digital governance, and humanitarian crises.

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

## Budget 2025: A roadmap to empower farmers and reignite rural India



A S MITTAL

The Budget must go beyond promises—it must deliver feasible solutions to secure livelihoods, strengthen rural demand and bridge the rural-urban divide

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gears up to present the Union Budget 2025-26 on February 1, the nation stands at a pivotal crossroads. With GDP growth projected to dip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY 2024-25, the spotlight turns to revitalising the rural economy, a cornerstone of the country's consumption-driven growth.

The urgent call for agricultural reforms has grown louder, fueled by ongoing farmer protests, including the fast-unto-death by 70-year-old farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal at Punjab's Khanauri border, which has captured national attention, demanding a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP). Agriculture, which employs nearly 45 per cent of the country's workforce and sustains over 60 per cent of its rural population, is at a breaking point. Stagnant productivity, declining incomes, and policy neglect have left farmers in crisis. This Budget cannot be limited to lofty promises—it must deliver practical solutions to secure livelihoods, strengthen rural demand, and narrow the rural-urban divide. Revitalising agriculture is not just an economic necessity but a moral obligation to foster inclusive growth. Here's how Budget 2025 can introduce transformative measures to bolster the agricultural sector and ensure rural spending—currently contributing 60 per cent of total consumption—fuels India's economic resurgence.

### 1. Boost Agriculture Budget and Research

The allocation for agriculture and allied sectors constitutes only 3 per cent of the Union Budget, which needs to be raised to at least 7.5%. Unspent funds in this category should be carried forward to address critical gaps in research, education, and infrastructure for crop storage and processing. Investing in agricultural research institutions to develop climate-resilient crop varieties and sustainable farming techniques can enhance productivity. Encouraging public-private partnerships in agrarian innovation can further drive the sector's growth.

### 2. Provide Legal Backing to MSP

The persistent demand for Minimum Support Price (MSP) with legal guarantees highlights the sector's vulnerabilities. Implementing the MS Swaminathan Commission's recommendation of setting MSP at C2 (comprehensive cost of production) +50 per cent and granting it legal status can ensure private buyers do not exploit farmers. This reform would not put a significant financial strain on the government but could protect farmers from distress sales. Furthermore, creating a robust monitoring mechanism to enforce MSP and extending its coverage to more crops can improve farmers' incomes. Enhancing the transparency of procurement processes through digital platforms and integrating MSP enforcement with local market committees can also make the system more reliable.

### 3. Enhance PM-KISAN Support

The Rs 6,000 annual support to around 10 crore small and marginal farmers under PM-KISAN to help meet their working capital needs, unchanged since its launch in 2018, has not kept pace with inflation. However, with inflation averaging 6 per cent over the past six years. The government should consider doubling this support to Rs 12,000 annually to address farmers' growing financial needs. This increase could significantly impact



INDIA'S FARMERS LACK A ROBUST SOCIAL SECURITY NET. A NON-CONTRIBUTORY PENSION OF RS3,000 PER MONTH FOR SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS AGED 60 AND ABOVE, OWNING UP TO 2 HECTARES OF LAND, COULD PROVIDE MUCH-NEEDED FINANCIAL SECURITY

small-marginal farmers, who struggle to meet their expenses amid rising input costs for seeds, fertilisers, and irrigation.

### 4. Transform the Kisan Credit Card (KCC)

The KCC scheme provides short-term loans with an interest subsidy for up to Rs 3 lakh. However, the rigid repayment schedule often forces farmers to rely on private moneylenders to meet short-term cash requirements.

A more farmer-friendly approach would be to convert KCCs into running overdraft accounts, increase the credit limit to Rs 10 lakh, and cap interest rates at 4 per cent. Removing usage restrictions on loans would further empower farmers to make long-term agricultural investments. Additionally, simplifying the KCC application process and enhancing awareness through rural outreach programs can improve access to credit.

### 5. Introduce a Pension Scheme for Small Farmers

India's farmers lack a robust social security net. A non-contributory pension of Rs3,000 per month for small and marginal farmers aged 60 and above, owning up to 2 hectares of land, could provide much-needed financial security. Contributions from state governments could further augment this scheme. Implementing such a pension system can alleviate poverty among elderly farmers and reduce their dependence on family support.

### 6. Strengthen Animal Husbandry and Dairy Sectors:

Livestock contributes over 25 per cent to agricultural GDP but suffers from fluctuating milk prices and restrictive cattle rearing and trade policies. A simple yet impactful step would

be legally mandating private dairies to match or exceed the milk procurement prices set by cooperatives like Amul. Additionally, incorporating milk and eggs into the mid-day meal scheme can improve farm incomes while tackling malnutrition among children.

Promoting cattle insurance schemes and increasing budgetary allocation for veterinary services can enhance livestock productivity. Encouraging the adoption of modern technologies like artificial insemination and genetic improvement can further boost the sector's contribution to rural livelihoods.

### 7. Reform Fertiliser Subsidy Policies

The current system treats fertiliser subsidies as farmer benefits but deducts the subsidised amount while calculating MSP. This practice lowers farmers' actual remuneration. MSP calculations should instead consider the market price of inputs, ensuring fairer returns for farmers. The government could also promote balanced fertiliser use by incentivising organic farming practices and providing subsidies for bio-fertilisers. A shift towards a direct benefit transfer system for fertiliser subsidies can reduce leakages and ensure benefits reach the intended beneficiaries.

### 8. Simplify Crop Insurance

The PM Fasal Bima Yojana requires farmers to navigate complex procedures to claim compensation. The government should shoulder the entire premium initially, including the state's share, and simplify the claim process. This would reduce the administrative burden on farmers while ensuring timely compensation for crop losses.

Leveraging technology like satellite imagery and AI-driven risk assessment models can streamline the verification process and minimise disputes. Expanding insurance coverage to include post-har-

vest losses and natural calamities can make the scheme more comprehensive and farmer-friendly.

### 9. Reassess Inflation Control Policies

Policies like export bans, stock limits on agricultural produce, and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) dumping grains at below-market prices undermine farmers' profitability. These interventions should be re-evaluated to balance inflation control with fair returns for farmers. Encouraging exports of surplus produce and ensuring better storage infrastructure can reduce post-harvest losses. Developing a decentralised agricultural pricing system driven by real-time market data can align domestic policies with global demand trends. A Vision for Fairness and Growth India's agricultural sector has long been the backbone of its economy, yet farmers have faced systemic neglect and economic disparity.

Over the last decade, the government has written off Rs12.30 lakh crore in big corporate loans, while farmers continue to struggle under mounting debt (Rs 18 lakh crore) and policies that fail to guarantee fair prices for their produce. The 2025 Budget presents an opportunity to correct these imbalances. By addressing these critical issues, the government can improve farmers' lives, spur rural demand, catalyse GDP growth and lay the foundation for a more equitable and sustainable agricultural future. It's time to honour the farmers who feed the nation by delivering the support they deserve.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

## Pioneering community-led groundwater management for a sustainable future

The Atal Bhujal Yojana, designed to address India's growing groundwater crisis, shifts the focus to a community-driven approach

The Atal Bhujal Yojana, or Atal Jal, is a pioneering government initiative spearheaded by the Ministry of Jal Shakti, in collaboration with the World Bank. This innovative program marks a significant departure from traditional top-down approaches to water management, instead empowering communities to take the lead in sustainable groundwater management.

A Bottom-Up Approach to Water Security Atal Jal has been implemented across 8,203 Gram Panchayats, 229 blocks, and 80 districts in seven states: Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.

By directly engaging with marginalised farmers, the poor, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, and other vulnerable groups, the scheme promotes inclusive development and social equity. The core objective of Atal Jal is to increase groundwater availability and ensure its long-term sustainability. By bolstering groundwater resources, the programme aims to enhance agricultural productivity and build resilience against the growing threats of climate change. Atal Jal is more than just a water management program; it is a catalyst for social and economic transformation. By empowering communities and prioritising gender equity, the



SHANTANU GARG

scheme is paving the way for a more prosperous and sustainable rural India. As this groundbreaking initiative continues to unfold, it offers a beacon of hope, illuminating a future where water security and equitable development go hand-in-hand. With its transformative impact reverberating through every layer of soci-

ety, this groundbreaking initiative is a harbinger of hope, fortifying the future through equitable resource management and fostering prosperity among those it touches.

The Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal) is a comprehensive initiative that goes beyond technical solutions to address the pressing issue of groundwater depletion. It is a multifaceted programme that combines technical interventions with social and behavioural change strategies.

**Empowering Communities** A key aspect of Atal Jal is its focus on gender equality and community empowerment. By involving women in decision-making processes and capacity-building



programmes, the scheme empowers them to play a crucial role in sustainable water use.

Women are encouraged to participate in meetings, training and leadership roles, ensuring that their perspectives and needs are

considered. Atal Jal employs innovative approaches to engage with communities. Through a variety of activities, including rallies, community meetings, competitions, and social media campaigns, the scheme raises awareness about groundwa-

ter issues and promotes sustainable practices. The programme also recognises the importance of educating the next generation and conducts essay and drawing competitions in schools.

To further enhance its impact, Atal Jal utilises technology to monitor groundwater levels and disseminate information. The Atal Jal mobile app provides stakeholders and the general public with access to information about groundwater resources and management practices.

**A Sustainable Future** Atal Jal's well-defined sustainable strategy involves training community resource persons and preparing water budgets in

collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. This systematic approach ensures the long-term sustainability of the program and empowers communities to make informed decisions about water use.

The success of Atal Jal is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the team behind the initiative. By combining technical expertise with a strong focus on social and behavioural change, Atal Jal is poised to become a model for future groundwater management programmes.

(The writer is Programme Coordinator, the Green Evolution, India, Nepal, Bangladesh & Coalition for Food Systems Transformation in India; views are personal)

**IN BRIEF**



**Retail inflation for farm, rural workers eases**

Retail inflation for farm and rural workers eased to 5.01 per cent and 5.05 per cent in December from 5.35 per cent and 5.47 per cent, respectively, in November 2024. The All-India Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers (CPI-AL) and Rural Labourers (CPI-RL) remained unchanged for December 2024 at 1,320 and 1,331 points, respectively, a labour ministry statement said.

According to the statement, the CPI-AL and CPI-RL were 1320 points and 1331 points, respectively, in November 2024. The year-on-year inflation rates based on CPI-AL and CPI-RL for December 2024 were recorded at 5.01 per cent and 5.05 per cent, respectively, compared to 7.71 per cent and 7.46 per cent in December 2023, it added. The corresponding figures for November 2024 were 5.35 per cent for CPI-AL and 5.47 per cent for CPI-RL.

**Significant progress in talks on India-EU free trade pact: Official**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

There is a significant progress in the negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and European Union (EU), an official said on Thursday.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was in Brussels last week to meet European Commissioner for Trade Maros Sefcovic to take stock of the progress of the negotiations.

"Good progress is there on India-EU FTA. There is a significant progress in talks," the official said, without divulging more details.

During the meeting between Goyal and Sefcovic, the two sides agreed to build a commercially meaningful trade agenda and work towards a mutually beneficial trade pact.

The two leaders have also outlined political directions for both the teams to develop a mutually beneficial agenda for trade and investment and a robust FTA in an expedited manner to meet global challenges.

The meeting came ahead of the 10th round of talks between India and the EU, which is scheduled from March 10-14 in Brussels.

In the ninth round, both sides discussed trade issues covering goods, services, investment and government procurement along with necessary rules such as rules of origin, SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary), and technical barriers to trade.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years. It was stalled in 2013 due to differences over several issues.

The total trade stood at USD 180 billion in 2023-24. India exported USD 75.18 billion in goods and USD 31.13 billion in services to the EU, while the EU exported USD 63.44 billion in goods and USD 31.35 billion in services to India.



**'Inclusive growth key pillar of India's economic blueprint'**

**PNS ■ DAVOS**

India will comfortably maintain a 6-8 per cent economic growth rate while keeping inflation under check in the years to come, senior Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday.

Speaking at a session during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting here, the minister said inclusive growth remains a key pillar of the country's economic blueprint, alongside continued focus on manufacturing, services and simplification of laws.

Inclusive growth has been a key reason for Prime Minister Narendra Modi coming back for a third term as he ensured that the benefits of the economic growth reached every section of society, the minister said.

Vaishnaw said the talent available in India is unmatched across sectors and the world today trusts India because of its policies.

Companies are shifting their factories and value chains to India, he added.

Speaking at the same session, industrialist Sanjiv Bajaj said India has a government



that delivers on promises it makes to the industry.

India has become a world leader in many sectors, including in new-age areas like drones, he added.

But, a growth rate of 6-6.5 per cent is not good enough for a country as big as India, and it needs growth of at least 7-7.5 per cent, he said.

At the same time, there are some sectors and areas like land procurement where more needs to be done, Vaishnaw said.

The government has done a great job, but we need to grow faster and make sure the private capital comes in, he noted.

Vaishnaw said the simplification of tariffs and customs laws are among the key focus areas of the government, and export-led growth can be a key differentiator.

**Gold hits fresh all-time high of Rs 82,900 per 10 gm**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Gold prices rose Rs 170 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 82,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a positive global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 82,730 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

In about one year, the precious metal surged Rs 20,180 or 32.17 per cent to Rs 82,900 per 10 grams from Rs 62,720 per 10 grams on February 23, 2024. Extending the gains for the seventh straight session, gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 170 to hit an all-time high level of Rs 82,500 per 10 grams. The metal

had finished at Rs 82,330 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Gold of 99.9 and 99.5 per cent purity grew Rs 2,320 each in the last seven trading sessions. However, silver prices declined Rs 500 to Rs 93,500 per kg from the previous close of Rs 94,000 per kg on Wednesday.

Bullion traders attributed the rise in precious metal prices to heightened demand by jewellers and retailers, along with a strong trend in the international markets. In futures trade on Thursday, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 19 or 0.02 per cent to trade at Rs 79,583 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).



**Rupee falls 12 paise to settle at 86.47 against US dollar**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The rupee declined 12 paise to settle at 86.47 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid the strengthening American currency and continuous outflow of foreign funds. However, positive domestic equity markets and lower crude oil prices supported the Indian currency at lower level, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.46 and moved between high of 86.38 and low of 86.52 against the greenback during the session. The local unit settled at 86.47 (provisional) against the US dollar, registering a loss of 12 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee appreciated 23 paise to close at 86.35 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee declined on a strong US dollar and recovery in the US treasury yields. Oil outflows too weighed down the local unit. However, weak crude oil prices and positive domestic markets cushioned the downside.

**Rupee weakest performing currency in SA**

Moody's Ratings on Thursday said the Indian rupee has depreciated by around 5 per cent in the last two years and has fallen by 20 per cent in the last five years making it one of the weakest performing currencies in South and South East Asia.

Of the 23 rated Indian companies, Moody's assessed only six to be exposed to the effects of dollar strength, but these companies have sufficient mitigating factors.

These companies are the three oil refining and marketing companies (OMCs), Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) and Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL), building materials producer UltraTech Cement, Bharti Airtel and ride sharing company ANI Technologies Pvt Ltd. "While the rupee has depreciated by only around 5 per cent in the last two years, it has fallen over 20 per cent since January 2020, making it one of the weakest-performing currencies in South and Southeast Asia," Moody's said.

**Sensex rises on gains in IT, consumer durable stocks**

**PNS ■ MUMBAI**

Stock markets extended gains for the second day on Thursday helped by buying in IT, consumer durables and commodity stocks amid a largely positive trend in global markets.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share index rose by 115.39 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 76,520.38. The barometer started on a negative note dropping by 202 points to a low of 76,202.12. The index pared losses later and climbed 338.55 points or 0.44 per cent to hit a high of 76,743.54.

The broader NSE Nifty rose by 50 points or 0.22 per cent to end at 23,205.35.

From the Sensex pack, UltraTech Cement, Mahindra & Mahindra, Sun Pharmaceutical, Zomato, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Titan, ITC and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

In contrast, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HCL Technologies, PowerGrid,

Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, IndusInd Bank, Nestle India and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

"Uncertainty lingers whether the trade tariff measures will affect global trade, instigate higher inflation, and currencies volatility. The trend holds a declining momentum



YTD with a pause today contemplating the upcoming 2025 budget, which has a muted expectation," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Meanwhile in-line Q3 results showcasing QoQ growth to the indices suggesting that Q4 will be much better, Nair said.

In broader markets, the BSE smallcap index rose 0.67 per cent and midcap gauge jumped 1.78 per cent.

**FIRST BUDGET OF MODI 3.0**

**Industry expects host of measures to propel growth**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman preparing to present the first full Budget of the Modi 3.0 government, industry players from various fields have put forth their demands for raising income tax limits, taking measures for more job creation, and further improving doing business to propel growth.

The industry is hopeful that the government will announce a slew of measures to boost consumption by ensuring more money in the hands of people, boosting capital expenditure, giving relief to the housing sector and technological innovations.

Moin Ladha, Partner at Khaitan & Co, opined that with the Union Budget 2025 fast approaching, the industry as a whole is confident of some interesting changes to the regulatory landscape, particularly changes to foreign investment policy, stream-



lined compliance, and key policy changes in certain sectors.

One such key change that the Budget 2025 may bring is the introduction of 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector, raising it from the current 74 per cent, Ladha said.

Raoul Kapoor, Co-CEO of Andromeda Sales and Distribution, said the upcoming budget carries high expectations, particularly for the middle-income group, which has been grappling with rising household expenses and inflation. Over the years, there

have been limited tax benefits for this segment, despite the increasing financial burden.

"One area in dire need of attention is the tax deduction limit on home loan interest payments, which has remained unchanged since 2014.

The limit was last increased from Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 2 lakh, but in the decade since, real estate prices have escalated significantly due to rising demand, land costs, and construction expenses," Kapoor said.

Sitharaman will present the Budget on February 1 in the Lok Sabha.



**HPCL net profit more than triples**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday reported more than tripling of its December quarter net profit as marketing margins soared. Consolidated net profit stood at Rs 2,543.65 crore in October-December 2024 - the third quarter of April 2024 to March 2025 fiscal year (FY25) - compared with Rs 712.84 crore earning in the same period a year back, according to a stock exchange filing of the company. Profit was also up quarter-on-quarter when compared with Rs 142.67 crore earning in July-September 2024. Pre-tax earnings from downstream fuel retailing business jumped to Rs 4,566.07 crore in the third quarter from Rs 981.02 crore a year back and Rs 1,285.96 crore in the preceding quarter. This is because HPCL and other state-owned fuel retailers - Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) - continued to keep retail selling prices of petrol and diesel on freeze despite a fall in benchmark international oil prices during the reference period.

**'AI may be doing a lot, but 'head, heart and hand' still needed'**

**PNS ■ DAVOS**

Artificial Intelligence may be doing a lot of work already but the world would still need 'head, heart and hands' of a human, Union Minister Jayant Chaudhary said on Thursday.

Speaking during a session on 'Reskilling for the intelligent age' during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting here, the Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Minister also said dynamism is the currency that all businesses are asking for today.

On a lighter note, the minister said he would call

Artificial Intelligence amorphous or shapeless because artificial in the Indian context means 'naqli' or not real.

Chaudhary said India is already working on training its young talent for future requirements.

My task is to break the silos and our mandate is to skill our future generation from the school level with skills that could be needed in the future anywhere in the world, he added. I don't want a situation when a trained worker from India comes to Europe and he or she is told that he or she knows nothing, Chaudhary said.



He also said personally every day is a day of reskilling for him.

"I was in opposition and now I'm in government. My political constituency was farmers and now my job is skill development and school education," he said.

With businesses now invest-

ing over USD 240 billion annually in AI and digital infrastructure, the lack of skills remains the top barrier to unlocking the full potential of digital transformation.

The session, also comprising of CEOs from various industries, deliberated on what collaborative effort is needed to bridge the skills gaps and unlock the benefits for competitiveness, growth and productivity.

Honeywell CEO Vimal Kapur said people are retiring and new skills that are required are not readily available and everyone needs to work to solve this issue.

**FSSAI asks Patanjali Foods to recall specified batch of red chilli powder**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Patanjali Foods Ltd on Thursday said food regulator FSSAI has directed the company to recall a specified batch of packed red chilli powder due to non-conformity with food safety norms. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) issued an order in this regard on January 13, the company said in a regulatory filing.

The food safety regulator "has directed Patanjali Foods to initiate recall of the entire batch

of implicated food (i.e. Red Chilli Powder (packed) of Batch No. - A/JD2400012 due to non-conformance of Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011", it said.

Incorporated in 1986, Baba Ramdev-led Patanjali Ayurved group firm, Patanjali Foods (erstwhile Ruchi Soya) is one of India's top FMCG players.

The company is present in edible oils, food and FMCG and wind power generation sectors.

**'India, US, Middle East to add 100 GW solar capacity'**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

India, the US and Middle East are together expected to add 100 GW of solar capacity in 2025, while China will remain a dominant player in the sector, Wood Mackenzie said.

According to its latest research, the module prices will also increase this year, after two years of low solar panel prices due to global overcapacity.

This will compensate for the significant losses in profits that manufacturers experienced, it said.

"Emerging hubs in India, the US and the Middle East are expected to add at least 100 GW to the global solar manufacturing capacity," Wood Mackenzie said.

China will remain the dominant manufacturing hub. China will continue to be the world's solar manufacturing centre with 75 per cent (1.2 TW (terawatts) of the global operational capacity for major module components, the report said.

Wood Mackenzie said that coordination by Chinese manufacturers, supported by the Chinese government, will



be the key to bringing about rationalisation of the industry.

In 2025, advanced solar technologies TOPCon and Heterojunction (HJT) will be the predominant cell technologies for utility-scale applications, displacing p-type PERC (Passivated Emitter and Rear Contact) technology.

This shift will result in better module efficiencies and higher power densities.

The global solar industry will also need to adapt to a new and more uncertain policy paradigm this year as many countries held elections in 2024, and some of the new administrations coming into power bring a more conservative climate agenda to the table.

Uncertainty around renewable energy policy and the future of incentives creates ambiguity that will deter or halt solar project development in many regions.

Protectionist policies and local content mandates introduce additional costs and

challenges, particularly in markets without a mature solar manufacturing base.

"For example, developers and manufacturers in India struggle with higher costs of domestic modules and upstream components, and the policies affect project timelines and economic feasibility, hindering the growth seen in 2024," the Wood Mackenzie said.

As per the the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, India's total non-fossil fuel-based capacity has touched the level of 217.62 gigawatt (GW) as of January 20.

**SOUTHERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF TELANGANA LIMITED**  
E-PROCUREMENT / OPEN TENDER PAPER NOTIFICATION  
RRZ - 13 / 2024-25

Tenders are invited from eligible contractors for tenders with Specification No. 22A / 2024-25 for Bifurcation of 11KV Rajnagar feeder of Cybercity Circle of CE/OP/RR Zone. For further details regarding detailed notification, specification and digital certificate please visit [www.tender.telangana.gov.in](http://www.tender.telangana.gov.in).

Sd/- Chief Engineer, Operation, Ranga Reddy Zone,  
KPHB Colony, Hyderabad.

R.O.No: SPDL/PPCL/ADVT/10204-25, Date: 23-01-2025

**GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA ROADS AND BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT**  
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

On line tenders are invited under 'e'-procurement platform for 6 Nos of Road works and 2 Nos of Building works in Khammam District vide Executive Engineer (R&B) Division Sathupally NIT No 20/TS/TO/EE/R&B/SPL/2024-25/ Date: 21.01.2025.

Tender schedules can download from e-market place is: [www.tender.telangana.gov.in](http://www.tender.telangana.gov.in) in the last date of receipt of tenders before 03.02.2025 up to 2.30 PM. Further details can be seen at 'e'-procurement market place [www.tender.telangana.gov.in](http://www.tender.telangana.gov.in)

Sd/- Executive Engineer (R&B) Division :- Sathupally

R.O.No: 9547-PPCL/ADVT/110204-25, Date: 23-01-2025



## When number uncovers corruption and justice prevails, Madhavan gets the Hisaab Barabar

TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

### PLOT

**H**isaab Barabar revolves around Radhe (R Madhavan), a senior ticket collector in the railways who has an obsession with numbers, balance and accounting. A failure in achieving his dream of becoming an accountant, Radhe applies his meticulous sense of balance not just to his work, but also to his personal life, often to a fault. As a charming yet somewhat reserved single dad, Radhe's life takes a dramatic turn when he discovers discrepancies in his bank account that lead him to uncover a massive corruption scheme within the banking system. Now, what really happens and how the story unfolds, you need to give it a watch.

### ANALYSIS

At its core, Hisaab Barabar is a simple story executed with charm and finesse. Writer-director Ashwani Dhir crafts a tale that avoids the usual pitfalls of preachy social dramas. The narrative is straightforward but layered, focusing on themes of honesty, morality and resilience while keeping the tone light and family-friendly. The story doesn't rely on convoluted twists or melodrama; instead, it draws the audience in with relatable characters, crisp dialogues and a sense of earnestness.

### HIGHLIGHTS

Hisaab Barabar distinguishes itself with its unconventional protagonist, Radhe, who is far from the larger-than-life heroes typically seen in similar narratives. Radhe's relatable quirks, including his obsession with balance sheets and accountability, make him an intriguing and authentic character. His grounded personality and personal struggles as a single father bring a refreshing depth to the film's storytelling, setting it apart from formulaic narratives. The film's approach to addressing social

justice is another stand-out feature. While it delves into themes of corruption and wealth disparity, Hisaab Barabar avoids being overly didactic. Rather than delivering moralistic monologues or heavy-handed messages, the film opts for a subtler, more engaging narrative. The simplicity of its storytelling ensures the themes resonate with the audience without feeling overbearing, making it both thought-provoking and accessible.

One of the most notable aspects of the film is its ability to maintain a lighthearted tone while addressing serious issues. The blend of humour, warmth and moments of tension creates a balanced narrative that appeals to a broad audience. This tonal harmony ensures the story remains entertaining and family-friendly, avoiding the pitfalls of becoming overly intense or melodramatic.

The film's heartwarming and relatable themes also contribute to its appeal. Beyond the central plot of exposing corruption, the movie explores relationships, resilience, and the pursuit of justice in everyday life. Radhe's journey to balance his personal and professional challenges resonates deeply, making the film emotionally enriching. The execution of Hisaab Barabar stands out for its refreshing simplicity. The movie avoids convoluted twists and unnecessary dramatics, opting instead for a self-aware and earnest approach. This straightforward execution respects the intelligence of its audience, offering a narrative that feels authentic and honest while still being engaging.

### DRAWBACKS

One of the noticeable drawbacks of Hisaab Barabar lies in its tonal inconsistencies. While the film admirably attempts to blend comedy, drama and suspense, the frequent shifts between these genres can sometimes feel disjointed. Moments of light-hearted humour or romance are occasionally interrupted by sudden transitions to serious, high-stakes drama,



### REVIEW

**Director:** Ashwani Dhir  
**Producer:** Jyoti Deshpande, Sharad Patel and Shreyanshi Patel  
**Cast:** R Madhavan, Kirti Kulhari and Neil Nitin Mukesh  
**Streaming on:** Zee5  
**Rating:** 4/5



### TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Ashwani Dhir impresses with his restrained and focused approach to storytelling in Hisaab Barabar. His direction ensures the narrative remains engaging without feeling bloated, with a pacing that avoids any dull moments. The film strikes a careful balance between its various tones - comedy, drama and suspense - while maintaining a sense of authenticity. Dhir's storytelling is straightforward yet impactful, allowing the emotional core of the film to resonate without resorting to melodrama. The writing is one of the film's strongest aspects, with a sharp and self-aware script that avoids common clichés. The crisp dialogues are both entertaining and meaningful, adding depth to the characters and their interactions. Dhir's ability to blend humour and serious themes seamlessly ensures that the story feels relatable and grounded. The writing also respects the audience's intelligence, delivering a narrative that is engaging without being overly complicated or predictable. The cinematography in Hisaab Barabar effectively captures the charm of its small-town setting. The visuals are clean and grounded, complementing the film's tone and enhancing its authenticity. The camera work subtly underscores the emotions and conflicts within the story, without ever feeling intrusive or overbearing. The background score, while not particularly stand-out, does a commendable job of supporting the narrative. It complements the film's mood and transitions effectively, enhancing key moments without overshadowing the performances or storytelling. Though the music isn't a central highlight, it blends seamlessly into the fabric of the film, ensuring an immersive viewing experience.

### VERDICT

Hisaab Barabar is a delightful watch that thrives on its simplicity and strong performances. It tells a heartwarming story of resilience and justice, anchored by Madhavan's exceptional portrayal of a principled yet relatable hero. While it isn't without flaws, the film's earnest approach, engaging narrative and family-friendly tone make it an enjoyable experience for viewers of all ages.

which can disrupt the narrative flow. This lack of tonal balance detracts from the film's overall coherence and makes it challenging for the audience to stay fully immersed.

Another area where the film falls short is in its underutilisation of certain characters. While the story revolves around Radhe's journey, pivotal supporting characters - especially Kirti Kulhari's role - is not given enough depth or screen time. Her character, which could have added an additional emotional layer to the story, feels underdeveloped, leaving viewers wanting more from her storyline. The film's tendency to indulge in over-the-top moments also detracts from its otherwise grounded approach. While the antagonist's exaggerated portrayal offers moments of entertainment, some of the scenes involving the villain feel out of sync with the movie's subtle and earnest tone. These overly dramatic sequences risk pulling the audience out of the story, as they clash with the film's

more realistic and heartfelt moments.

The narrative sometimes leans on predictable tropes and clichéd plot points, which might feel overly familiar to seasoned viewers. Despite these drawbacks, Hisaab Barabar remains a largely enjoyable film. However, addressing these shortcomings could have made it an even more compelling and polished experience.

### PERFORMANCE

R Madhavan's performance is undoubtedly the heart and soul of Hisaab Barabar. He brings a disarming charm and authenticity to the character of Radhe, a humble ticket collector with a strong moral compass. Madhavan masterfully balances Radhe's quirks and vulnerabilities with his quiet determination, creating a character that is both relatable and inspiring. His ability to seamlessly navigate the film's tonal shifts - whether it's a comedic moment or a high-stakes confrontation - anchors the narrative and keeps the audi-

ence invested in his journey.

Neil Nitin Mukesh delivers a flamboyant and energetic performance as the film's antagonist. Playing the role of a corrupt banker, Mukesh leans into his character's over-the-top personality with gusto. While some scenes verge on caricature, his unhinged energy adds a layer of entertainment and creates a stark contrast with Madhavan's restrained approach. His exaggerated portrayal might not resonate with all viewers, but it undeniably adds drama and a sense of unpredictability to the film.

Kirti Kulhari, despite limited screen time, leaves a lasting impression with her nuanced performance. As Radhe's love interest and a pivotal character in the story, Kulhari brings subtlety and depth to her role. Her naturalistic acting style enhances her scenes, and her chemistry with Madhavan adds an emotional layer to the film. While her character could have been explored further, Kulhari makes the most of her role, elevating every moment she's on screen.

### REVIEW

## BUREAUCRACY THROUGH THE LENS OF CREATIVITY

**O**nce you delve into the history of Indian cartooning and search for the location of the International Cartoon Festival in India, the answer is Hyderabad.

From 2000 to 2002, Hyderabad hosted international cartoon competitions focusing on themes like gender discrimination, water issues, and cyber humor. Former President K.R. Narayanan launched the Indian Ink cartoon anthology on globalization in Hyderabad as well.

### How did this all happen?

Senior cartoonists like Mohan, Subhani, Sekhar, and Venkat envisioned making Hyderabad a hub for cartoons. They were encouraged by a senior bureaucrat at the time, B.P. Acharya, who assured them, "All your dreams will come true; go ahead!" Thanks to Acharya, who invited the nation's leading cartoonists, Hyderabad hosted two grand cartoon festivals in Telangana.

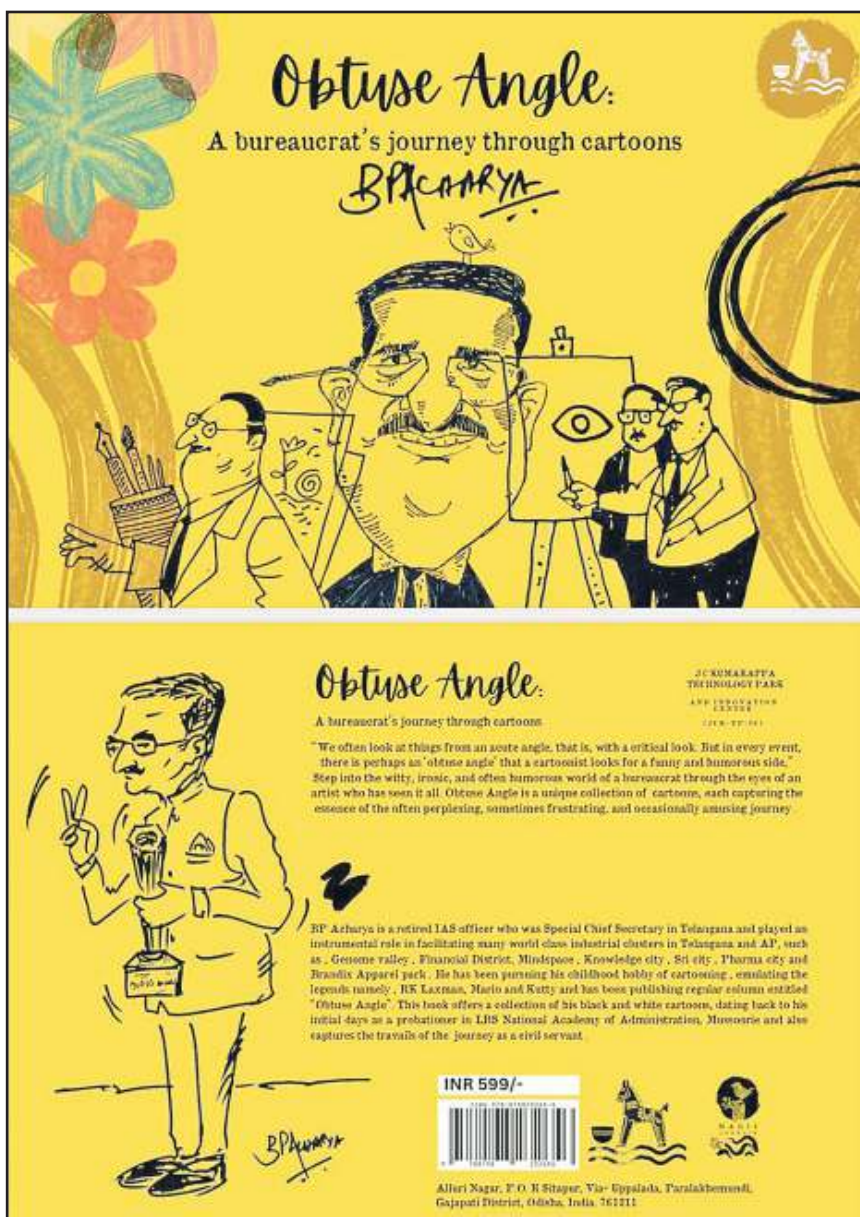
B.P. Acharya is a remarkable talent within India's bureaucratic system. He has a deep love for rural artists and is a gifted writer and political cartoonist. Recognized as a TED Speaker, Acharya has collaborated with renowned authors like Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in editing the Moutbatten Papers. Apart from contributing cartoons, he also writes articles for English newspapers.

As a former IAS officer and Special Chief Secretary of the Telangana government, Acharya played a pivotal role in developing industrial hubs such as Genome Valley, Financial District, Mindspace in Telangana, Sri City in Rayalaseema, and Brandix in North Andhra. These initiatives have directly and indirectly created employment for over 4 lakh people.

### How did he become a cartoonist?

Acharya attributes his passion for drawing cartoons to the inspiring satirical lines of legendary cartoonists R.K. Laxman and Mario Miranda. Fascinated by humor and art from a young age, Acharya translated his four decades of experience in civil services—from his student days to retirement—into a cartoon anthology titled Obtuse Angle.

Through his satirical lines, Acharya illustrated the challenges, hardships, and lighter moments encountered in his journey as a civil servant. He captured the inefficiencies of India's governance system through sharp, insightful cartoons, showcasing his extraordinary talent not only as a bureaucrat but also as a creative cartoonist.



His cartoons serve as a medium to highlight the struggles faced by common people, the inefficiencies of politicians, and the challenges within the civil service. The collection not only reflects his artistic prowess but also sheds light on the flaws in governance, administrative systems, and global developments.

Acharya's unique satirical style humanizes societal issues while offering constructive criticism of the system. His cartoons are not only

humorous but also thought-provoking, serving as a tool for understanding administrative challenges. With a blend of fine lines and subtle yet profound wisdom, Acharya's cartoons inspire budding artists to foster positive change through creativity. (To be available on Amazon soon)

(This book review, is written by Shyam Mohan, Cartoonist and Journalist.)

## Workplace mental health focus shifts to anxiety and panic disorders

**S**oaring rates of workplace stress and anxiety are evident, with approximately 40% of the workforce reporting stress levels that significantly impacted their ability to work in the last year.1 As we approach 'Blue Monday', known as one of the most challenging days for mental health, International SOS, the world's leading health and security risk services company, calls on organisations to take proactive steps in addressing the mental health challenges of employees.

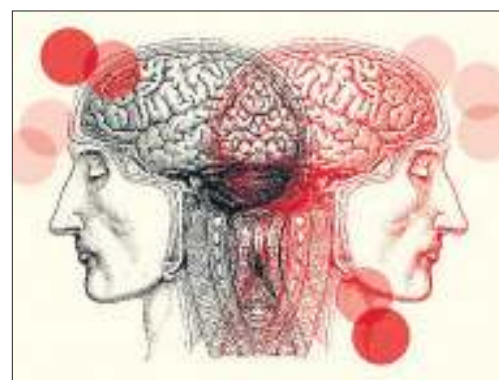
International SOS has identified the three most frequent mental health-related requests it has received from global workforces across various sectors over the past three years.2 These include support and assistance for:

- 1. Anxiety disorder:** intense and excessive fear and distress, often accompanied by physical tensions.
- 2. Depressive disorder:** mental health condition characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, emptiness, or loss of interest. It can significantly impact an employee's emotions, behaviour, and physical health.
- 3. Panic disorder:** a condition when an employee has repeated, unexpected panic attacks and worries constantly about when the next one might happen.

For individuals living with mental health conditions, meaningful employment can significantly contribute to their recovery and social inclusion, fostering increased confidence and improved social functioning. Research findings indicate that employment can have a more profound positive impact on mental health outcomes than traditional psychiatric care alone.3 However, when an employee experiences ongoing workplace stress, it causes an elevated level of anxiety-causing hormones. This sustained pressure can leave employees feeling fatigued and exhausted and, ultimately, may contribute to burnout. Without robust support, mental health conditions can severely impact an individual's self-confidence, job satisfaction, and ability to thrive in the workplace.

Dr Rodrigo Rodriguez-Fernandez, Global Health Advisor, Wellness and Mental Health, at International SOS, comments, "January and the start of a new year can be a particularly challenging time for many. The post-holiday blues, the return-to-work routines, and the harsh winter weather in the northern hemisphere can really take a toll on mental health and wellbeing. Blue Monday presents a crucial opportunity for organisations to proactively address mental health challenges for the year ahead and cultivate a culture of wellbeing that extends far beyond this single day."

"For organisations, recognising the inextricable link between good mental health, employee wellbeing, and organisational effectiveness is paramount. Alarming, workplace stress and anxiety rates remain high, with around 15% of the global working-age population suffering from mental illness.4



The detrimental effects of stress are multifaceted and can include circulatory and gastrointestinal issues, as well as significant physical and emotional repercussions.5 Protecting and promoting mental health in the workplace is about strengthening capacities, increasing awareness, and offering early intervention opportunities for those in need."

International SOS offers five points for organisations to implement proactive strategies to address stress and anxiety in the workforce:

### 1. SUPPORT

Foster a supportive culture and work environment: create a workplace culture that values open communication and support. Encourage employees to speak up about their stress levels and provide a safe space for them to share their concerns without fear of judgment or repercussions.

### 2. BALANCE

Promote work-life balance and implement flexible work arrangements: consider changing time-off policies to accommodate employees' mental health needs. Encourage employees to take breaks and set boundaries between work and personal life.

### 3. ASSESS

Conduct regular stress assessments: regularly assess the stress levels within the organisation through surveys, feedback sessions, and health screenings. Use the data collected to identify stressors and implement targeted interventions to address them.

### 4. ASSIST

Offer Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs): ensure easily accessible resources for mental health support, including workshops for stress management techniques, counselling services and mental health hotlines.

### 5. TRAIN

Equip managers with mental health first-aid training: upskill managers to identify signs of distress and offer initial support to employees who may be struggling.

# what's brewing?



● Naga Bhargavi

Hyundai Motor India Limited unveiled the Hyundai Creta Electric at JSP Hyundai, Jubilee Hills, in Hyderabad. Actress and Bigg Boss 8 fame Soniya Akula unveiled the exciting new model in the presence of Gokul managing director, Prudhvi Reddy Director of JSP Hyundai and Syed Anwar, Hyundai TSM on Thursday.

● Soniya Akula

PARTY

On Raj Kapoor's centenary celebration, actress Karisma Kapoor showcased the timeless beauty of Raw Mango's exquisite creations. For the event, she wore the Gombi kurta in sheer organza, paired with a silk slip featuring intricate zardozi embroidery with naqshi in both silver and gold. Completing her look, Karisma draped the Purabrath silk organza odhani, adorned with all-over floral butas, and styled it with the Kalabha translucent organza pant, making a stunning statement of refined tradition and modern elegance.



Care Health Insurance, one of the leading Health Insurers of India, has announced the launch of Ultimate Care, a ground-breaking health insurance designed to set new benchmarks in health coverage. Ultimate Care combines extensive benefits tailored to address unforeseen medical emergencies and rewards you for staying healthy. Commenting on the launch, Ajay Shah, Head - Distribution, Care Health Insurance, said, "In the healthcare landscape of today, it is essential to provide customers with a comprehensive and robust financial security that addresses unforeseen medical exigencies while also encouraging a proactive approach to health and wellness. With Ultimate Care, we aim to establish a new standard in delivering unmatched financial health protection by enabling customers to prioritize their health and well-being first, thereby providing them the peace of mind they deserve."



Step into the world of extraordinary cocktails and rooftop charm as Mazzo Rooftop Bar hosts its highly anticipated The Mazzo Bar Takeover Season 1, featuring the exceptional mixology artistry of Akshay Kumar. Set against the backdrop of Hyderabad's mesmerizing skyline, this exclusive event promises a week of indulgence, innovation, and unforgettable moments.

Photos by - SV Chary



Gokaraju Rangaraju College of Pharmacy in Hyderabad has launched a free "Upskilling and Certification Programme on Pharmacovigilance and Case Processing" for registered pharmacists in Telangana. This four-day initiative, created in collaboration with organizations like the Life Sciences Sector Skill Development Council and supported by various governmental bodies, aims to bridge the skill gap in the evolving life sciences sector.



Republic Day Sale, a week-long shopping extravaganza running until January 26, 2025. Shoppers can enjoy discounts on leading brands and explore exclusive deals designed for families and shopping enthusiasts alike at Ashoka One Mall

## FUN

### ARCHIE



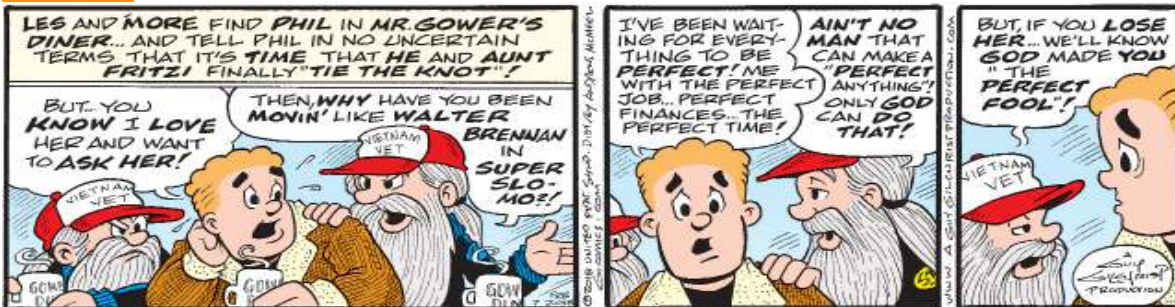
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



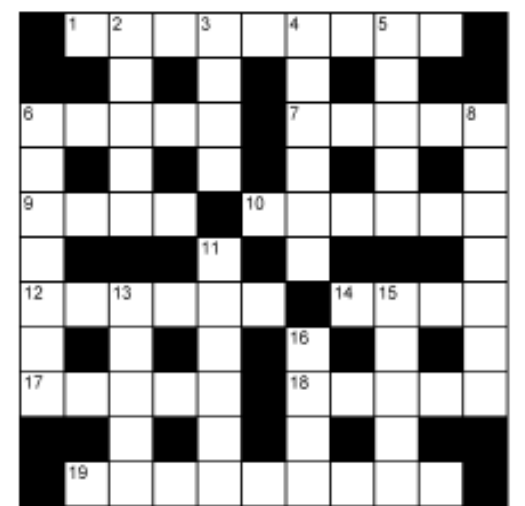
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU

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

#### Yesterday's solution

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

#### Rules

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

#### ACROSS

- The largest land animals
- A small rock
- Move slowly and quietly
- A flower with thorns on its stem
- An extinct animal or plant that has turned to rock
- Film stars
- A sound bouncing back to you
- A cloth for drying yourself
- People who make meals
- The leader of the USA
- Large plants in a forest
- A housemaid or butler
- Headrests on beds
- Tools for making holes
- A tall, narrow building
- A circus funny person
- This liquid chemical will burn your skin

#### DOWN

- Large wild cats
- A writer of verse
- A ship's heavy metal hook

#### SOLUTION

E	C	A	R	M				
N	O	R	T	H				
U	N	D	E	R				
E	N	D	I	N	G	A	B	
L	G	L	E	U				
O	I	N	D	O	C	T		
P	E	S	A	A	G			
E	A	R	T	H	V	O	I	C
S	V	U	E	L	R			
O	E	N	T	I	S	T		

**REVIEW**

## Gandhi Tatha Chettu is a thought-provoking film

**SURESH KAVIRAYANI**  
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

**P**opular director Sukumar's daughter Sukriti Veni played the protagonist in the film 'Gandhi Tatha Chettu'. Padmavathi Malladi, who was the writer for films like 'Mahanati' and 'Manamatha' is making her debut as director with this film. Because of Sukumar's daughter, big production house Mythri Movie Makers came forward to release it and took over the project. Sessa Sidhu Rao, who earlier directed a Telugu film titled 'Chooosi Choodangane', has turned a producer with this film. It has already won many awards at international and national film festivals.

**Story:**

Rama Chandraya (Anand Chakrapani) lives in a village, near Nizamabad, in his 15 acre agriculture land. Apart from this, he loves a big tree in his land and spends time under the tree. He names his granddaughter as Gandhi (Sukriti Veni), tells stories about Mahatma Gandhi, especially about non-violence, the ideologies which she follows in her real life. If someone scolds her, she never gets angry, never lies or never encourages bad things. Because of the local sarpanch, the sugarcane factory is closed. The village people are unable to sell their sugarcane and become penniless. At the same time, a businessman (Rag Mayur) steps into the village and asks everyone to sell their land, so that he can build a chemical factory. He says that it will help the villagers to earn money and also get jobs. Many villagers sell their land, but Rama Chandraya decline to do so, fearing they would kill the tree too. His son wants to sell the land and argues with him to sell it. Rama Chandraya takes a promise from his granddaughter to save the tree and dies. How Gandhi saved the tree and also recovered the lands from the businessman is the crux of the story.

**Analysis:**

As the title suggests, the story revolves around a girl named Gandhi, grandfather and a tree. A 13-year-old girl, who follows the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, saves the village, the tree and also the villagers from the clutches of a businessman. This is the story in a nutshell and the director Padmavathi narrated it in a very interesting way. Whatever she thought, she put it on the paper and everything was perfect. Without taking much time, she stepped into the story introducing all these characters.

The film has many thoughtful dialogues. The entire film itself is

a thought-provoking one. Non-violence and trees are very important for the present society and with love you can do anything, though the result is late. There are a few scenes where the girl's father realizes and touches the feet of his daughter. The last scene when the girl saves the cruel businessman from the villagers is also touching. The highlight of the movie is when the girl's father fixes her marriage with someone at a very young age, the girl immediately goes and shaves her head. There are many emotional and touching scenes in the film, but the only problem is that the film runs at a very slow pace. There are a few scenes that seem to be stretched, but in the end, Padmavathi's attempt is

laudable. Definitely, she made a good film with many realistic scenes. Many of the villagers were also part of the film and everyone acted in a realistic way. The music and the cinematography are good and the songs also come out well. The dialogues are very thoughtful and written well. Making of jaggery is more cinematic and the director could narrate in a very interesting way.

When it comes to the performance, Sukriti steals the show. She is very authentic about the language and she acted very naturally. It's really a daring decision to shave her head to get into her character. She is perfect for the role and emotes well with her stunning performance. Anand Chakrapani as grandfather did a commendable job and he is very natural in that role. He is one of the few good character artists we have and one wonders why our filmmakers are not using him in a proper way. Rag Mayur, the young upcoming actor, already proved to be a good actor with a few of his films earlier. In this film, he played a negative role to the hilt. The girl's parents and all other actors did their job well in other roles.

Finally, 'Gandhi Tatha Chettu' is a thought-provoking film made with an interesting idea which definitely is a timely reminder to the society. Director Padmavathi

Malladi is successful as a debut director and should be appreciated for her efforts. Don't know whether this kind of film will be a commercial success or not, but it is certainly a critically acclaimed one.

**Film:** Gandhi Tatha Chettu

**Cast:** Sukriti Veni, Bandreddi, Ananda Chakrapani, Rag Mayur, Raghuram, Bhanuprakash, Nehal Anand and others

**Cinematography:** Srijitha Chervupally and Vishwa Devabattula

**Music:** Ree

**Producers:** Naveen Yerneni, Yelamanchili Ravi Shankar, Sessa Sindhu Rao

**Writer and director:** Padmavathi Malladi

**Release date:** January 24, 2025

**Rating:** 3.5



## I TAKE ONLY IN FULL WHITE: VENKATESH

**IN THE WAKE OF IT RAIDS ON SOME OF THE PRODUCERS AND DIRECTORS, VENKATESH AND ANIL RAVIPUDI COMMENTS ABOUT IT ARE INTERESTING**

PNS|HYDERABAD

**T**he Income Tax (IT) raids on some of the bigwigs of Telugu Film Industry has shaken everyone. The raids are continuing even on the third day and the officials are after some of the top producers and directors' houses, offices and their search is intense, says a source. Producer Dil Raju's office and house are under the control of the IT officials, but promotions for his film 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' that stars Venkatesh and directed by Anil Ravipudi are continuing as usual.

On Thursday, lead actor Venky, director Anil Ravipudi and music director Bheems attended a media conference to promote the film and answered many questions. The IT raids on film people also came up in those discussions. Both Venky and Anil were candid in their replies. When asked

about many leading actors taking some of their remuneration in black, when the producers couldn't manage it, Venkatesh said, "I don't know about other actors. But I take my remuneration in full white. I will take only a small amount and I will be full white."

To another question, the actor said that he never seeks anything from God. "Whatever he gives I will take and I never ask him anything," said Venkatesh. The film collected huge amounts at the box-office. If this film was also released in a pan-India way like many films, the amount could have been more. "When it comes I will do, otherwise whatever comes to me, I will take. For this film there is a lot of bonus and we are all happy about it," said Venkatesh.

The makers announced that the film collected Rs 230 crore gross and when asked if this kind of figures might attract the attention of IT officials, director Anil Ravipudi said, "It's genuine collections and every ticket on

this film is accountable. There is nothing wrong in the collections of this film."

Director Sukumar's house was also raided. When asked about it, Anil said in a lighter vein, "I don't stay next to Sukumar. But in a few days I am shifting next to his house. You are all asking the question. So, they (IT people) may come to me also."

"The IT people also came to the festival for the film titled 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam,'" he said. "I think these raids are all common and it happens once in every two years. Generally, IT raids on film and business people are common," said the director.

When asked that while his producer Dil Raju was facing the music, here you are enjoying the success," he said, "Dil Raju is happy. When we contacted him somehow through some person, he asked us to continue the promotions of the film and take it to the public," said Anil.

## Are Pushpa 2 collections fake or real?

**T**he IT raids on top production house Mythri Movie Makers, Dil Raju, director Sukumar and a few others sent shockwaves to Tollywood bigwigs. There is no clear news about why the IT raids were conducted and what they got through these raids, but there is some news doing the rounds about the box-office collection of recent films 'Pushpa 2' and 'Game Changer'.

The IT officials asked the 'Pushpa 2' makers of Mythri Movie Makers about the collections which they showed on their official social media account. They mentioned that the film crossed the Rs 1800 crore mark in just four weeks and the IT officials checked the GST which they paid. According to some reports, the producers told the officials that the collections are just like

advertisements and the film didn't actually collect that much. The reports said that they deliberately added nearly Rs 400 crore to Rs 500 crore to the original collection, to show the film is the highest grosser in India. So, the IT officials grilled them and asked them to show all the accounts related to 'Pushpa 2', says the source.

On the other hand, the officials also asked producer Dil Raju about the film 'Game Changer' made on a high budget of Rs 450 crore. The film was a big disaster, but the officials asked for a poster which says the film collected Rs 400 crore. Dil

Raju told them that it was not released from his production

house, but it is from the actor's team, according to reports.

Now, the records of 'Pushpa 2' are fake doing rounds on the social media and internet. It is up to the producers to clear all these rumours. Whether they gave original collections or were fake? We have to wait till the IT officials complete their work.



## THREE FILMS LINED UP FOR CHIRANJEEVI

**W**hile the young actors are struggling to confirm their next film, senior actor Chiranjeevi is on a signing spree of films. His upcoming film 'Vishwambhara' is ready to hit the screens this year and the actor has already announced a film with director Srikanth Odela, produced by actor Nani. These are not just the two films that Chiranjeevi is busy with. He signed another film with director Anil Ravipudi, for which the shooting is going to start soon this year. The film is almost confirmed and Anil Ravipudi is working on the genre of the story and how he can project a towering personality like Chiranjeevi in his film.

Now, according to a source, Chiranjeevi is going to join hands once again with director Bobby Kolli. Both worked earlier for the film 'Waltair Veerayya', which was a big hit and Chiranjeevi is very much impressed by the work of Bobby. "So, he wants to do another film with him," added the source. Megastar is going to be busy with these films in the coming days. First he will concentrate on his fantasy 'Vishwambhara' directed by Mallidi Vassishtha of 'Bimbisara' fame. Before the release of this film, he may start shooting two of his other films, added the source.

## Laila is in my wish list: Vishwak Sen

**V**ishwak Sen's upcoming film 'Laila' is releasing on February 14, a Valentine's Day special. The team started promotions of this film a few days ago and on Thursday, they released a song. On this occasion, Vishwak Sen shares some of his experiences about the film in which he plays a female role. "It takes two-and-a-half-hours to do the make-up for me to change into a female. I really want to say hats-off to all the women," said the actor.

He said that the film is on his wish list. "When producer Sahu told director Ram Narayan to narrate the story to me, the director assumed that I may not do this one, but when he told me the story, I immediately accepted it," said Vishwak Sen. He added that the film is releasing on the Valentine's Day and whoever is single on that day will be reminded of Laila and Sony.

"This is the first time I did an out-and-out comedy film with an action backdrop. It's a new age film and I hope everyone likes it," said Vishwak. He added that they are releasing another song which is based on Rayalaseema milieu on February 1. Akanksha Sharma is the female lead. The director revealed that he told the story to three actors, but they refused to do it because of the lady character.



# Gukesh becomes highest-ranked Indian in FIDE rankings, displaces Erigaisi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing his rapid rise, world champion D Gukesh dethroned compatriot Arjun Erigaisi to become the highest-ranked Indian chess player, at fourth, in the latest FIDE rankings on Thursday. Gukesh, 18, achieved the feat when he logged his second victory in the Tata Steel Tournament in Wijk Aan Zee (Netherlands) defeating Vincent Keymer of Germany. Gukesh, who was awarded the Dhyani Chand Khel Ratna recently, has amassed 2784 rating points, while Erigaisi, who was the highest-ranked Indian for a long time, has slipped to fifth with 2779.5 rating points.



Norway's Magnus Carlsen continues to be the undisputed world No.1 with 2832.5 points, followed by United States' Grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura (2802) and country-mate Fabiano Caruana (2798). Gukesh has been in sublime form ever since he beat China's Ding Liren to clinch

the world title in Singapore in December last year. He took a break from the game to attend to functions and festivities back home and

skipped the World Rapid and Blitz Championship in New York. On his return to the board, Gukesh has not lost a single

game in Wijk Aan Zee. He has two victories and three draws so far in the tournament with eight rounds still to go. Erigaisi had become India's top-rated player in September last year and in December achieved his peak rating of 2801, which had made him the 15th-highest rated player in history and only the second Indian after five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand to breach the 2800 threshold. Erigaisi, who was a part of India's triumphant journey in the Chess Olympiad in Budapest last year, had gone to the World Rapid and Blitz Championship in New York hoping to secure a Candidates berth but returned home disappointed. The 21 year old is struggling in the ongoing Tata Steel Tournament, having garnered just one point so far, while Gukesh has 3.5.

# U19 T20 Women's World Cup: India outclass Sri Lanka, enter Super Six

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Opener G Trisha's excellent new ball spell composed 49 and pacers fashioned India's lopsided 60-run win over Sri Lanka and their entry into the Super Six of the ICC U19 T20 Women's World Cup as Group A toppers here on Thursday. On a spiteful pitch, Trisha's 44-ball knock (5x4, 1x6) was worth its weight in gold as it guided India to a competitive 118 for nine. Pacers VJ Joshitha and Shabnam then tore through the Lankan top-order to reduce them to nine for four in 3.2 overs, and run out of skipper Manudi Nanayakkara an over later had them reeling at 12 for five. Sri Lanka were eventually restricted to 58 for nine in 20 overs as India finished the group engagements with all-win record in three matches. There was not much life left



in Sri Lanka's chase once the spinners were introduced, and India's assortment of left-arm orthodox tweakers did the mopping up job to perfection. Rashmika Sewwandi (15, 12b, 2x4) looked in good touch for the while she lasted, but mounting asking rate forced her to take chances against Parunika Sisodia, and got caught in the deep. It was also the only double digit score in the Lankan

innings. Sisodia (2/7) was the pick among spinners as she and her colleagues Ayushi Shukla and Vaishnavi Sharma, who picked up stunning figures of 5/5 against Malaysia in the previous match, dismantled the lower order without much ado. Earlier, India's batting too went through stormy seas but Player of the Match Trisha held together the defending champions with exemplary maturity.

# Irfan Pathan backs Shami's delayed return, says team will make right call



PTI ■ KOLKATA

Former pace bowling all-rounder Irfan Pathan believes India made the right decision by delaying Mohammed Shami's international return following a prolonged injury lay-off by not fielding him in the first T20I against England here. Shami was not included in

India's playing XI for the first T20I against England here on Wednesday, despite proving his fitness in practice sessions and domestic cricket for Bengal. All eyes were on Shami's return after a 14-month injury lay-off, but India opted for a three-pronged spin attack instead, a decision that paid off as they bowled out England for a

meagre 132 before cruising to the target in 12.5 overs with seven wickets in hand. Irfan said Shami is experienced enough to take an honest assessment of his body. "When you've been such a seasoned campaigner and are among India's top 10 bowlers, you understand your body's limits well," said Irfan at a promotional event here. "Shami always provides honest feedback to the team management, and decisions are made through mutual communication. Recovery at the highest level takes time, especially after playing consistently. I believe he and the team management will make the right call at the right time." Having undergone surgery and rehab following an ankle injury sustained during the 2023 ODI World Cup, where he finished as India's top wicket-taker, Shami had made an impressive

return in domestic cricket, representing Bengal across all three formats. Shami has been chosen in India's white-ball rubber squad against England consisting five T20Is and three ODIs which will act as a build up to the Champions Trophy next month, where the team's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's inclusion is subject to fitness. Bumrah suffered a back niggle in the gruelling five-match Test series in Australia and could not bowl in the second innings of the fifth Test in Sydney, and in this context Shami's availability for the Champions Trophy is crucial to India's prospects. Irfan also expressed concerns over the lack of a pace-bowling backup in the Champions Trophy-bound squad, suggesting that Mohammed Siraj could have been included given Bumrah's uncertain fitness.

# Young guns prove PSG can deliver in Champions League without Mbappé

PTI ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain finally showed it can shine in the Champions League without star Kylian Mbappé, rallying from 2-0 down in the second half to beat Manchester City 4-2 for a crucial victory Wednesday. The win moved PSG out of the elimination zone in the competition's new-look format and dumped City in it with one game to play. PSG needs only a draw at Stuttgart next week to advance. "I feel pride this evening, against such a team, against such good players," PSG coach Luis Enrique said. "It was a complete performance today." PSG's re-designed attack finally clicked with four different scorers rather than relying too heavily on one to make the difference. Bradley Barcola, a 22-year-old winger, scored one goal and set up another for France

teammate Ousmane Dembélé, and 20-year-old midfielder Joao Neves headed in the third before striker Gonçalo Ramos rammed in the fourth in stoppage time. "The more competition we have, the happier I am," Enrique said. "That means that no player can think of their position as untouchable." A far cry from the Galacticos era when PSG was top-heavy with stars like Neymar, Lionel Messi and Mbappé but still fell short on the big stage. Still, the French team has struggled for goals in the competition since Mbappé's offseason departure for Real Madrid, netting just six in six games before City's visit and being blanked in defeats to Arsenal and Bayern Munich. Enrique said before facing City that the solution up front would come from more teamwork rather than hoping another player can emulate Mbappé, who scored 44 goals last season and helped PSG

reach the Champions League semifinals. City manager Pep Guardiola acknowledged his team was outplayed. "We have to accept it. In transitions we could not cope with them, they were faster," he said. "I give credit to PSG. When one team is better I have no problem to accept it. All of them they played really good. It's not a specific (player)." Mbappé's move to Madrid forced Enrique to improvise with his lineups all season. This time, 19-year-old winger Désiré Doué played as a makeshift striker even though center forward Ramos was available for this game where both wealthy state-backed teams - the United Arab Emirates (City) and Qatar (PSG) - were at risk of failing to advance to the knockout stage. City led 2-0 after 53 minutes but PSG were level by the hour mark after some inspirational play down the left from Barcola.

# Champions League: Ban on Feyenoord fans in France

PTI ■ PARIS

Feyenoord supporters have been banned by French authorities from traveling to Lille for next week's final Champions League group game between the two clubs. In an order published Wednesday, France's interior ministry said there was a "real and serious risk of confrontation" between fans of the two teams. Lille hosts Feyenoord on January 29 at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. The French authorities said Feyenoord's travels are often marred by "public order disturbances due to the violent behavior of certain supporters or individuals claiming to be supporters of this team," and they cited several examples of fan violence. Justifying its decision, the ministry added that 3,600 fans - 500 of whom were identified as being dangerous - had planned to travel to Lille, although only 2,600 seats had been allocated to the Dutch club. "Of the 1,000 supporters who have nevertheless planned to travel without a stadium admission ticket, it is feared that some will try to force their way into the stadium," it said. Later Wednesday, Feyenoord's match against Bayern Munich was stopped for seven minutes after kickoff because of poor visibility from clouds of smoke after fans lit flares and fireworks behind one of the goals. In May 2022, there were violent clashes in France between Marseille and Feyenoord fans outside the Stade Velodrome stadium before the return leg of their Europa Conference League semifinal. One video showed a Marseille supporter apparently unconscious on the ground as he was helped by fellow fans, while another showed two groups charging at each other shortly before kickoff just outside the stadium.

# India's batting stars disappoint on Ranji return, Jadeja shines

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The high-profile return of India's stars in Ranji Trophy ended up as a damp squib with the likes of Rohit Sharma, Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill falling cheaply at the BKC ground here. Going for his trademark pull off Umar Nazir, Rohit (3) got a leading edge which was caught by J&K skipper Paras Dogra at mid-off. Veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja was the only one who stood out among the battery of Indian stars as he took a five-wicket haul for Saurashtra to dismiss Pant's Delhi for 188 on a Rajkot turner. However, it was a forgettable outing for the rest as they made the slow walk back to the hut following early dismissals. Following a dismal run in Australia, Rohit returned to Ranji Trophy for defending champions Mumbai after a

decade, hoping to get some runs under his belt ahead of next month's Champions Trophy. But it was not to be at least in Mumbai's first innings against Jammu and Kashmir at the BKC ground here. Going for his trademark pull off Umar Nazir, Rohit (3) got a leading edge which was caught by J&K skipper Paras Dogra at mid-off. Veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja was the only one who stood out among the battery of Indian stars as he took a five-wicket haul for Saurashtra to dismiss Pant's Delhi for 188 on a Rajkot turner. However, it was a forgettable outing for the rest as they made the slow walk back to the hut following early dismissals. Following a dismal run in Australia, Rohit returned to Ranji Trophy for defending champions Mumbai after a



were watching the action from their office floors, returned to work soon after the 37-year-old Rohit was dismissed. Anticipating fan interest, the Mumbai Cricket Association had made temporary seating

arrangements for about 500 people at the BKC. The turnout, however, was not too high and some empty chairs could be seen. Mumbai were eventually bowled out for a paltry 120 in 33.2 overs. The team left

out their in-form teenage opener Ayush Mhatre to accommodate the stars. The 17-year-old Mhatre has struck two hundreds and a half century this season, including a 93-ball 148 in their previous game against

Saurashtra which Mumbai won by five wickets earlier this month. This is the only Ranji game that Rohit, Jaiswal and Iyer are expected to play given the game against Karnataka. England is due to start early next month and they would be joining the Indian ranks for it. Pant fizzles; Jadeja shines In Rajkot, Pant showed up for Delhi in a first-class game for the first time since the 2017-2018 season and his stay in the middle did not last long. The flamboyant left-hander was dismissed for 1 off 10 balls by veteran Saurashtra left-arm spinner Dharmendrasingh Jadeja. He attempted a sweep only to be caught at deep square leg. India all-rounder Jadeja took no time to be in thick of things as he accounted for five of Delhi's batters in his

first Ranji game since 2023. No fireworks from Gill either In Bengaluru, Punjab captain Shubman Gill (4) was caught behind in the game against Karnataka. The team was skittled out for a mere 55 with the pace duo of Abhilash Shetty and Vasuki Koushik sharing seven wickets between them to destroy the visitors. Gill fell to Shetty in the fourth over of the innings. The India stars made themselves available for Ranji Trophy after the BCCI made the contracted players' participation in domestic cricket mandatory, following the 1-3 series loss in Australia that opened a debate on the players' conduct and commitment to red-ball cricket. The Board had to issue a 10-point disciplinary diktat, urging all cricketers to spare time for domestic cricket.

# Man City takes spending this week to \$150 Million by signing Egypt's Omar Marmoush

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Reeling from a damaging loss in the Champions League, Manchester City took its spending this week to around \$150 million by signing Egypt forward Omar Marmoush from Eintracht Frankfurt on Thursday in a move that provides some belated backup to star striker Erling Haaland. The 25-year-old Marmoush joined City for a reported 70 million euros (\$73 million), following the arrivals of young defenders Abdou Diallo from Lens and Vitor Reis from Palmeiras for a combined \$77 million. City will hope the new signings can ignite its season, which was thrown back into turmoil when the team collapsed to a 4-2 loss at Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League on Wednesday to plunge to the brink of elimination with one game left in the

revamped first stage. Marmoush is second to Bayern Munich's Harry Kane in the list of top scorers in the German league this season, with 15 goals from 17 games for Frankfurt. He was not in the squad for the 2-0 win over Borussia Dortmund amid negotiations with City, and went on the field after the game for an apparent farewell in front of Frankfurt's fans. The move to City caps a rapid rise to stardom for Marmoush, who signed from Frankfurt on a free transfer in 2023 from Wolfsburg, where he'd only scored five goals the season before. It's not yet clear how Marmoush would fit into Pep Guardiola's tactics. His best performances this season have come as part of a two-striker formation alongside former Paris Saint-Germain forward Hugo Ekitiké, but Guardiola



prefers a lone striker in Haaland. Marmoush can play in wide roles and has generally done so for Egypt's national team, but less successfully than in a central role. He has six goals and three assists in 35 games for his country. In that sense, Marmoush seems a like-for-like replacement for Julian Alvarez, the versatile Argentina forward who left City for Atletico Madrid in August in a deal reportedly worth more than 103 million dollar after largely being in the shadow of Haaland over the last two years. Marmoush is the latest in a string of Frankfurt strikers to make lucrative moves to top European clubs, but they haven't always settled. Frankfurt sold Luka Jovic to Real Madrid in 2019 but he was back on loan just 18 months later and is now at Milan. Randal Kolo Muani left Frankfurt in 2023 for

PSG, where he is mostly a bench player and might miss this month. Guardiola has said the club is looking to bring forward future signings to this current transfer window because of injury problems this season that have rocked his team's campaign. The biggest of those is Rodri, the Spain midfielder and Ballon d'Or winner who is out for the season with an ACL injury. City also has been hit with injury issues at centre back, with Ruben Dias, John Stones and Nathan Ake all having time out of action. That explains the moves for Khusanov and Reis, who Guardiola says are ready to come into the team immediately if required. Not only is City struggling in the Champions League, the team is in fifth place in its Premier League title defense - 12 points behind leader Liverpool having played one game more.