

QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The pioneer

Union Minister of State Bandi Sanjay Kumar openly refusing to fund housing projects is a blatant violation of federal principles. This is not just a breach of the federal spirit but an outright denial of states' rights. No ruling party at the Centre has the authority to encroach on the rights of states

- Kavitha, BRS MLC

India, Indonesia call for code of conduct in South China Sea

INDIA-OMAN TO REVIEW PROGRESS OF FTA TALKS

Mahesh Sriram's debut in Telugu cinema after Hollywood TRIUMPH

DON'T MISS...

CMD Musharraf Faruqi honoured

Musharraf Faruqi, IAS, Chairman and Managing Director of Telangana Southern Power Distribution Company, was honoured by the Governor of Telangana, Jishnu Dev Varma, during the Republic Day celebrations held at Secunderabad Parade Ground. The ceremony was attended by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Chief Secretary Shanti Kumari, along with other dignitaries. The recognition was ...

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Rules for mandatory adoption of IST

In a move to standardize timekeeping, the government has drafted comprehensive rules mandating the exclusive use of Indian Standard Time (IST) across all official and commercial platforms, with the Consumer Affairs Ministry seeking public feedback by February 14. The Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2024, aims to establish a legal framework for standardising timekeeping practices, mandating IST ...

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Hospitality sector seeks infra status

Lack of infrastructure status, rationalisation of tax rates, easier visa processes and more incentives by state governments to promote investments are some of the key issues that need to be addressed for India's hospitality sector to realise its full potential, Hotel Association of India President K B Kachru said ahead of the Budget. In an interview, Kachru, emphasised upon the need for India to be marketed in a better fashion, and noted ...

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U19 WC: India crush Bangladesh

Reigning champions India continued their dominant run in the ICC Women's U19 World Cup with a resounding eight-wicket win over Bangladesh in their Super Six encounter here on Sunday. With this comprehensive win, India have now registered their fourth consecutive victory in the tournament, maintaining their unbeaten streak and further establishing themselves as strong title contenders. A disciplined Indian bowling attack, spearheaded by left-arm ...

-SPORTS

'We will not loot like KCR'

CM Revanth launches four welfare schemes from Kodangal

Rythu Bharosa funds to be disbursed immediately

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU
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 ■ HYDERABAD

Launching four new 'Praja Palana' schemes in the Chandravancha village of Kosgi mandal in Kodangal Assembly constituency on Sunday, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that KCR's family is criticising his (CM's) family although they are working selflessly.

"We will not loot like the KCR family. Our leadership wants us to stand by the people during hard times. You looted the state. My family does not loot the state. My family is serving the public although they do not hold any posts. The opposition is annoyed as my family supports me. Did I give any post to anyone in my family? KCR and his men are blocking Kodangal's development," the CM said.

The CM said that KCR had claimed that he had read 80,000 books. KTR had boasted that he had studied in the US. But the two leaders don't know how to issue ration cards to the poor, he said.

"My government decided to issue ration cards to 40 lakh new families in the state. Fine rice will be distributed to all ration card holders. A ration card is the identity of the poor.



CM A Revanth Reddy addressing the public meeting at Chandravancha village in Kosgi mandal in Kodangal constituency after launching four welfare schemes on Sunday. Beneficiaries are also seen in the picture



◆ MY GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO ISSUE RATION CARDS TO 40 LAKH NEW FAMILIES

◆ EVEN THOUGH KALESHWARAM PROJECT COLLAPSED, TG RECORDED A BUMPER HARVEST

◆ OPPOSITION LEADER KCR HAS NOT ATTENDED ASSEMBLY EVEN FOR A SINGLE DAY

New ration cards have not been issued for the last 10 years. We held

Grama Sabhas and accepted applications from those eligible. Have you ever seen officials in villages in the last 10 years? The 'people's government' sent officials to villages as they are accountable to the people. Today the Chief Minister (myself) came to the people. The people are our rulers," the CM said.

The CM said that they had brought about a change in government. "The Chief Minister and ministers should go to the people. It is not possible to rule the state by staying in a farmhouse. The oppo-

sition is creating chaos in Grama Sabhas by inciting people," he said. The CM said that even though the Kaleshwaram Project collapsed, the state had recorded a bumper harvest producing 1.56 crore tonnes of paddy. "The government gave a bonus of Rs 500 per quintal for super fine paddy. Continued on Page 2

TG celebrates R-Day with patriotic fervour

Changes in UGC norms an attack on states' rights: CM Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy slammed the Centre for changing University Grants Commission (UGC) norms and said that the Centre is trying to undermine the powers of states.

The CM criticised the Centre for attempting to centralise control over universities. "The move to change UGC rules and strip states of their authority over universities is a cultural and constitutional assault. This will reduce states to mere tax collection bodies." He urged Prime Minister Modi to

reconsider the decision, warning that Telangana will not hesitate to protest if the changes are implemented.

Stating that there is a big conspiracy behind the idea of having centralised control over universities, he termed the changes in UGC norms as an 'attack' on the Constitution.

The Chief Minister warned that if the Centre takes control of universities, they will become platforms to carry out 'malicious propaganda.'

Declaring that Telangana will strongly oppose this move and will not surrender its authority, the Chief Minister said he would discuss the issue Continued on Page 2



'You are not giving money from your savings'

Ponnam lashes out at Bandi ● Hints at locking horns with Centre over Indiramma

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Lashing out at the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, for stating that the Centre will not give funds if the houses given to the poor are named after Indiramma, the Transport and BC Welfare Minister, Ponnam Prabhakar, warned Sanjay that he is not providing funds from his savings. He also warned that they will see why the Centre won't give funds if the housing scheme is named after Indiramma. Addressing the media at the Gandhi



Minister Ponnam Prabhakar addressing the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Sunday along with other leaders

Bhavan on Sunday, Ponnam said that they will not remain silent if anyone ridicules Indiramma. Ponnam recalled that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had once described

Indira Gandhi as 'Kalimatha.' "The Centre collected Rs 37,000 crore in the last 10 months as GST from Telangana but what did the Centre give to Telangana? Why are schemes named

'Deen Dayal Antyodaya' and 'Deen Dayal Griha Jyoti'... Did they sacrifice their lives for the country? Did the two Union Ministers from Telangana bring even an extra Rupee from the Centre? Indians will not tolerate the BJP if they criticise Indira Gandhi," he said. Countering BRS Working President KT Rama Rao's statement about why applications are needed for welfare schemes when they have been taken from the people already, Ponnam asked KTR to select any village and ask if any beneficiary had suffered injustice.

Ex-armyman case to be altered to murder

DEEPIKA PASHAM
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 ■ HYDERABAD

As police continue to gather evidence, the case involving ex-Army man Gurumurthy, who reportedly killed his wife, Venkata Madhavi, and boiled her body parts, is set to be reclassified from a missing person case to murder.

Initially, the Meerpeta Police registered a missing person case after complaints were lodged by both Gurumurthy and Madhavi's parents. However, critical evidence recovered from the crime scene has shifted the investigation. Samples collected at Continued on Page 2

KTR, Bhatti in wordy duel over welfare schemes, governance

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A heated war of words erupted on X between BRS Working President KT Rama Rao (KTR) and Congress leader Bhatti Vikramarka, as they both fought over the implementation of social welfare schemes and governance in Telangana.

In a sharp critique of the Congress, KTR accused the party of restricting its promises to selective villages and misleading peo-

ple. "Did your manifesto, guarantee cards and campaigns reach only one village in a mandal? Is this what you call inclusive governance? Your transition from 'Andariki Anni' (everything for everyone) to 'Kondariki Konni' (a few for some) is nothing but a betrayal of Telangana's four crore people," KTR said criticising Bhatti. He also criticised the Congress approach to governance, claiming that the party's

"one village per mandal" approach was nothing but backstabbing public trust.

"After witnessing your one-year deceptive governance, the people are unwilling to wait. From tomorrow, villages that haven't received your welfare schemes will become battlegrounds for protests," KTR warned the public.

Responding sharply, Bhatti Vikramarka defended the Congress government, asserting that the welfare schemes Continued on Page 2

India parades military prowess, cultural grandeur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's new tactical missile Pralay, T-90 tanks, a skit depicting tri-services synergy on the battlefield, scores of dances and a parade of tableaux marched down Kartavya Path on Sunday in a magnificent display of military power, culture and development to celebrate the 76th Republic Day.

Like every year, defence hardware took centre stage of the 90-minute



76th REPUBLIC DAY



On the VVIP dais, Murmu was joined by Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, the chief guest for this year's parade. A contingent of his country's military band was given the honour of leading the parade

multifaceted colourful parade that began at 10.30 am, marching, dancing and rolling down the ceremonial boulevard, past the podium of the Supreme Commander, President Droupadi Murmu.

On the VVIP dais, Murmu was joined by Indonesian President

Prabowo Subianto, the chief guest for this year's parade.

A contingent of his country's military band was given the honour of leading the parade.

The two presidents arrived in the traditional horse-drawn buggy, a practice which made a comeback in

2024 after a gap of 40 years. They were escorted by the President's Bodyguard, the most senior regiment of the Indian Army.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, various Union ministers, the country's top military brass, foreign

diplomats, senior officials and thousands of spectators from across the country gathered on a sunny winter morning to witness the impressive show that also included a fly-past by helicopters and fighter and transport aircraft.

C-130J Super Hercules, C-295, C-17 Globemaster, Dornier, AN-32, Rafale, Jaguar and Su-30, among other aircraft, took part in the fly-past.



Six people dead as lorry rams into two auto-rickshaws

PNS ■ WARANGAL

At least six people, including a child, were killed in a major road accident on the Warangal-Khammam highway near Mamunur on Sunday. The incident happened when a lorry, laden with iron bars, lost control and rams into two auto-rickshaws carrying passengers from behind. The impact caused the iron bars to fall onto the vehicles.

The deceased are identified as Santosh, Pooja, Kiran, and Mukesh, all migrant farm labourers from Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. Continued on Page 2



An ill-fated auto-rickshaw

Fire breaks out on boat during Mata Maha Harathi event at Hussian Sagar

2

Monday Mirchi

SOCIAL JUSTICE KEY FOR CHIEF SECRETARY PICK

The buzz around the new Chief Secretary's appointment is going about with twists and turns. It seems Chief Minister Revanth Reddy might just be eyeing an SC or BC officer for the coveted post, making social justice the hallmark of his selection. Insiders hint that with hardly any Reddys in the running among the top bureaucrats, the CM could be setting a precedent in promoting diversity over traditional hierarchies. For the uninitiated, Revanth has already woven social justice into his decision-making by ensuring inclusivity in the Chief Minister's Office itself. While the civil services grapevine remains abuzz, one thing's for sure—this pick will be closely watched for its symbolic value and its nod to the broader narrative of empowerment.

JAYESH RANJAN: MASTERING THE ART OF LOVING THE JOB, NOT THE BOSS

When it comes to showcasing bureaucratic finesse, Jayesh Ranjan seems to have mastered the rule: love your job, not your boss. Whether under BRS or Congress, he continues to deliver with unmatched skill, pulling off a staggering Rs. 1.7 lakh crore in investments - a testament to what a committed bureaucrat can achieve. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, too, seems to have taken note, giving Jayesh the freedom to shine. At a recent CII meeting, Revanth even allowed him to answer industry queries, a move that left many impressed. The scene stood in stark contrast to the BRS era, where KTR's dominant presence often meant Jayesh had little space to step in. Even on the global stage at Davos, Jayesh stood out. Visuals from the event show him passionately marketing Telangana, with everyone else keenly listening. Whether it's navigating political transitions or pitching the state on international platforms, Jayesh Ranjan proves that loving the work you do makes all the difference.

KARIMNAGAR CP ABHISHEK MOHANTY SPARKS BUZZ WITH REPEATED NO-SHOWS

Karimnagar Commissioner of Police Abhishek Mohanty has been raising eyebrows with his consistent absences from key meetings. The buzz grew louder when he skipped a meeting attended by Union Ministers and local state ministers. Adding fuel to the fire, Mohanty even gave the Disha meeting a miss, leaving many wondering about his priorities. When Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar landed at the airport, Mohanty was nowhere to be seen, leaving Karimnagar Collector to face the heat from

Ponguleti. A little bird told us that Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy wasn't pleased, openly questioning Collector Pamela Satpathy about Mohanty's absence and even suggesting his transfer to local leaders. Whispers in political circles hint that Mohanty, who fought tooth and nail to stay in Telangana, is now being branded as a "Nepo kid" by critics for not stepping up to the role. Bureaucrats state that it might turn into an IAS versus IPS war if DGP doesn't take Mohanty to task. IAS circles are buzzing that Mohanty hasn't even deputed ACP to Union Minister's event and a IAS officer had to face ire because this IPS thinks he is much senior. Whether this is a temporary blip or a sign of deeper issues, one thing's for sure - Karimnagar's top cop is under scrutiny.

AJITH REDDY'S ZURICH GREETING FOR NAIDU SPARKS GOSSIP

B Ajith Reddy, Special Secretary to Telangana Chief Minister, has become the talk of the town after being caught on camera enthusiastically greeting Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu in Zurich. In a video shared by Naidu's team, the AP CM was seen walking out to a crowd of followers, among whom was Telangana CM's secretary. This unexpected gesture has stirred murmurs back home, especially among bureaucrats who have long been critical of having IDEs officers in the Telangana CMO. Whispers suggest that such actions only add weight to their narrative, with some saying it doesn't quite match the stature expected of the CM's secretary.

THE NEW FAD: COLLECTORS TAKE TO THE FLOOR

A new trend seems to be taking root among district collectors, with many choosing to sit on the floor during interactions to showcase their humility and connect with the people. Khammam Collector Muzzamil Khan was recently seen sitting cross-legged on the floor, engaging with students in a school, while Narayanpet Collector Sikta Patnaik opted to sit with villagers during a Praja Palana Grama Sabha. While these gestures are earning applause on social media, whispers among senior bureaucrats suggest there's more to it than just a display of humility. We've done far more impactful things in our time but didn't have social media to project. Whether it's genuine or strategic, the floor seems to be the new stage for collectors striving to strike a chord with the masses - and with their followers online.

--Yours truly

TG celebrates R-Day with patriotic fervour

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Departments across Telangana marked the 76th Republic Day on Sunday with flag hoisting ceremonies and patriotic celebrations, showcasing unity and pride.

At the Director General of Police (DGP) office, Additional DGP Swati Lakra unfurled the National Flag and saluted it with pride. The event was attended by AIG Ramana Kumar, CSO Yogeshwara Rao, and other officials and staff, who actively participated in the celebration. Patriotic songs filled the air, and the staff highlighted the importance of Republic Day, fostering a sense of nationalism and unity.

At the Telangana State Council of Higher Education office, Chairman Professor V Balakista Reddy hoisted the flag, joined by Vice-Chairmen Professor Etikala Purushotham and Professor S K Mohammed, along with Secretary Professor Sriram Venkatesh.

In his address, Professor Reddy highlighted Telangana's progress in education, citing the establishment of institutions like the Skill University and Sports University as transformative steps. He urged



Parimala Hana Nutan, Joint Commissioner of Police (Administration) Hyderabad participates in unfurling the national flag at ICCG Building

everyone to honour the sacrifices of freedom-fighters and continue working towards the academic and developmental progress of the State and nation.

The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) celebrated Republic Day with grandeur at its central office, Bus Bhavan. Executive Director (Operations) Munishkhar hoisted the National Flag, and senior officials, including RTC Chief Operating Officer Dr Ravinder, paid tributes to the portraits of great leaders.

The 76th Republic Day was celebrated with great enthusi-

asm at Young India Skills University, where Vice-Chancellor Subba Rao hoisted the National Flag. The ceremony included a rendition of the National Anthem and an inspiring address by the Vice-Chancellor. Registrar in charge Shri Chaman Mehta, Dr Sudhakar, visiting faculty, staff, and students actively participated in the event, showcasing their love and respect for the nation.

All Tri Commissionerates Hyderabad City Police, Cyberabad and Rachakonda Commissioners hoisted flags and appreciated the police force work.

CEA predicts TG power demand surge to 24215MW by 2029-30

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has projected a steep rise in Telangana's peak power demand, expecting it to soar from 15,623 MW in FY2023-24 to 24,215 MW by FY2029-30. Addressing the Republic Day celebrations at Vidyt Soudha, Principal Secretary, Energy, and CMD of TGGENCO, Sandeep Kumar Sultania, emphasised the power sector's critical role in facilitating the state's ambitious development plans.

To meet the surging demand and achieve sustainable energy goals, the State is venturing into Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). TGGENCO has already floated a tender for a 500 MWh BESS at Shankarpalli, Ranga Reddy district, signaling Telangana's commitment to integrating advanced technologies for a reliable power supply. This marks a significant step toward balancing the state's energy mix, which includes thermal, hydro, solar, and wind power.

Sultania also highlighted key milestones achieved in the

past year, including the launch of the Telangana Clean and Green Energy Policy, which aims to make the State a renewable energy hub with a target of 20,000 MW capacity by 2030. The dedication of an 800 MW unit at the Yadadri Thermal Power Station and initiatives such as solar villages further underline Telangana's commitment to clean energy.

He noted that Telangana's proactive policies and MoUs signed with global investors at the World Economic Summit in Davos will drive new projects across IT, pharmacy, aerospace, electric vehicles and industrial clusters. The power sector will play a pivotal role in supporting these initiatives, including Metro Rail expansion, the Regional Ring Road, and riverfront development.

The Principal Secretary also urged power utility employees to focus on innovation and efficiency, ensuring the sector continues to support the state's rapid growth. Prizes were distributed to winners of sports and games during the event,

Sanjay's statement undermines federal spirit: Kavitha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kavitha strongly criticised Union Minister of State Bandi Sanjay Kumar's recent remarks in which he reportedly said that no funds would be allocated for housing projects in Telangana.

Speaking at a seminar on constitutional protection organised by the Telangana Jagruti Student Wing on Republic Day, Kavitha condemned the statement as a blatant violation of federal principles and an infringement on the rights of states.

Sanjay had said that if the project is named Indiramma Indu then the Centre won't give funds.

In her keynote address, Kavitha emphasized the need to safeguard the Constitution and ensure transparency in governance.

The seminar approved 19 resolutions, focusing on constitutional values, state's rights and effective implementation of directive principles.

Kavitha announced that



Fire breaks out on boat during Mata Maha Harathi event at Hussian Sagar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A major fire broke out on a boat in Hussian Sagar during the Bharat Mata Maha Harathi event organised by the Bharat Mata Foundation late on Sunday evening. The incident occurred when fireworks set off as part of the programme exploded unexpectedly on the boat.

The fireworks, reportedly placed on two boats, ignited and caused a massive blaze. Witnesses reported that one person sustained severe burns on his hand, while another escaped with minor injuries.

Union Minister Kishan Reddy, who was attending

the event with the Governor, immediately ordered the injured to be rushed to a nearby hospital.

The mishap took place when fireworks were being set off from two boats belonging to the Telangana Tourism department as part of the event at People's Plaza on Necklace Road.

Flames from the fireworks fell on to the boats, igniting stored firecrackers and causing the blaze. Seven people were aboard the boats at the time. Firefighters quickly arrived and launched rescue operations.

The videos of the event went viral where only the flames into the air were witnessed and no human beings.



these resolutions, along with a letter she authored, would soon be submitted to the Governor by the students.

Lashing out at Sanjay, Kavitha questioned the propriety of a Union Minister openly refusing to fund housing projects.

"This is not just a breach of the federal spirit but an outright denial of states' rights," she said. She criticized the Centre, asserting that no ruling party at the Centre has the authority to encroach on the rights of states.

Union Minister of State Bandi Sanjay Kumar openly refusing to fund housing projects is a blatant violation of federal principles. This is not just a breach of the federal spirit - it but an outright denial of states' rights. No ruling party at the Centre has the authority to encroach on the rights of states. Taking a job at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who has been advocating constitutional protection across the country, Kavitha questioned his silence on constitutional violations in Telangana.

Special Officers appointed for 128 urban local bodies in TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Government of Telangana has announced the appointment of Special Officers for 128 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) across the State as the term of elected municipal bodies expired on January 26 and January 28, 2025. A significant portion of these appointments consists of Additional Commissioners of Local Bodies (ACLB), ensuring experienced officials are at the helm during this transitional period.

The ULBs include 120 municipalities and 9 municipal corporations, whose terms concluded on January 26, 2025, and Karimnagar Corporation, which saw its term end on January 28, 2025. With the elections for these councils pending, the appointed Special

Officers, majorly ACLB officers, will oversee the administration and handle the responsibilities of municipal councils and chairpersons until new bodies are elected.

This decision was based on a recommendation by the Commissioner and Director of Municipal Administration, Hyderabad, citing the need for interim administrative arrangements to avoid disruption in municipal services. The ACLB officials, alongside other senior officers, are tasked with ensuring the continuity of essential services, development projects, and transparent governance across urban areas.

The government emphasized its commitment to maintaining effective urban administration during this interim period and ensuring minimal disruption to public services.

powers by the Centre as an attack on us. We are not ready to surrender our rights," he said.

Stating that the Centre will have to withdraw changes in the UGC, the Chief Minister made it clear that if it fails to do so the state would not hesitate to protest.

Revanth also said that if the Centre continues to take away states' powers one after the other states will become just tax collecting institutions. He said it was unfortunate that the country is again witnessing a debate on the protection of the Constitution. The Chief Minister also said that the Centre did injustice to Telangana while deciding Padma awards. He said it was shocking to ignore personalities like Gaddar, Chukka Ramaiah, Ande Sri, Gorati Venkanna and Jayadheer Tirumala Rao. He said he would soon write a letter to the Prime Minister regarding this.

Six people dead ...

Continued from page 1

The lorry veered off the road and overturned. The lorry also fell on the auto-rickshaws.

Police suspect that the lorry driver may have been under the influence of alcohol. The officials said that the heavy vehicle coming from Khammam towards Warangal, loaded with iron, lost control and fell onto two autos travelling in the opposite direction.

As a result, four people died on the spot, while one person died at MGM Hospital. Two others who were injured were rushed to MGM Hospital for treatment. Warangal District Collector Sathya Sharada visited the scene of the accident.

She supervised the rescue efforts.

The Collector also visited MGM Hospital and enquired about the condition of the injured people in the accident. Police Commissioner Ambar Kishor Jha visited the site of the accident. The Collector directed the officials concerned to ensure that the bodies were sent to their hometowns.

Minister for Endowments Konda Surekha visited the site of the accident and consoled the families of the deceased. She assured them that the government would support them in all ways till they fully recover.

They were given some financial assistance for their immediate needs. Later the minister had enquired about the health condition of those undergoing treatment.

Ex-armyman ...

Continued from page 1

the scene were sent to two private forensic labs-one in Telangana and another out of state-for analysis.

A senior officer confirmed to The Pioneer that the case will officially be altered to murder on Monday, pending the receipt of forensic reports delayed due to the weekend. Police have now identified Gurumurthy as the prime suspect. Investigators worked with the city's CLUES team and forensic experts from Gujarat to analyze the evidence. Scientific methods, including DNA testing, are being employed due to the absence of the

victim's body.

Forensic experts detected traces of human tissue in a bucket and on an immesible water heater, findings that align with Gurumurthy's confession. Investigators also utilized Blue Star technology to detect blood stains, even on surfaces that had been washed or scrubbed. During interrogation, Gurumurthy admitted to murdering Madhavi, dismembering her body, boiling the parts, and disposing of them.

"We need the body to gather more clues and strengthen the case. Without it, the investigation heavily relies on scientific analysis and DNA reports, which takes time," an official said.

Changes in UGC ...

Continued from page 1

with his counterparts in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and other states for a joint strategy.

He was addressing a function organised at the Ambedkar Open University in connection with the unveiling of the statue of Dr BR Ambedkar. The Chief Minister appealed to Prime Minister Modi to scrap the changes made in UGC norms saying the regressive decision threatens the very foundation of cooperative federalism and goes against Ambedkar's ideals. He also termed the move as a cultural attack on states by the Centre.

"Such a move by the Centre is not proper. This will open the doors for unnecessary controversies. We consider this usurpation of states'

Top priority ...

Continued from page 1

travelling free in TGSRTC buses. The government is providing the Gruha Jyothi scheme to 50 lakh poor families in the state. The government is setting up the Young India Skill University to empower the youth," the Governor said.

The Governor said that due to the consistent efforts of Prajaa Prabhutva, the government was successful in putting forth its arguments strongly before the Krishna Water Tribunal-II recently and in safeguarding Telangana's rights on Krishna water.

"Telangana's cultural heritage has been at the forefront of our identity. This year, the adoption of the 'Telangana Tali', the Telangana Song has rejuvenated our cultural ethos. It has been decided to honour eminent personalities for their contributions to art, culture, literature and journalism," the Governor said.

He said that to provide socioeconomic, educational, employment and political opportunities to

Backward Classes, SC, ST, minorities and other weaker sections, the government launched the 'Socio, Educational, Economic, Employment, Political and Caste Survey' across the state.

"This survey provides a database to formulate evidence-based policies. This reflects our commitment to equitable growth and addressing the diverse needs of Telangana's populace. It marks a new era of governance driven by data, inclusivity, and transparency," he said.

He said that around Rs 9,200 crore is being spent on the welfare of BCs this year. "The Katamaiah Rakshana Kavacham Scheme has been launched to ensure the safety of toddy tappers. The government is implementing the Telangana Chenetha Abhyasa Hastham Scheme for the comprehensive development of handloom and powerloom workers. The scheme is being implemented with a budget of Rs 168 crore this financial year. Konda Lakshman Babuji Indian Institute of Handloom Technology offers a three-year diploma course in handlooms and textiles technology," the Governor said.

'We will not ...

Continued from page 1

Even after 10 years the Palamuru-Rangareddy Project has not been completed. The Kodangal, Narayanpet Lift Irrigation scheme has not been started. The opposition is trying to block bringing Krishna water to Kodangal. The BRS rulers did not care about people and were interested only in constructing farmhouses and looting public funds," he said.

The CM said the opposition is trying to prevent the completion of pending projects as they think that if the projects are completed they cannot survive. "Opposition leader KCR has not attended Assembly even for a single day in the last 13 months. Does he not have a responsibility to his voters? If he does not have that why does he hold on to his post," the CM asked. The CM said that he spent crores from his funds for developing Kodangal. "The

government is launching four big schemes from Kodangal on Sunday. All the schemes will be implemented by March 31 and all needy people will get their benefits," he said.

The CM said that as part of the six guarantees announced during Assembly elections, the Congress Government is launching Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa, Indiramma housing scheme and issuing new ration cards in Chandravancha village on Sunday. The CM said like soil and seed the bond between the Congress and farmers is inseparable. Former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy gave free electricity to farmers and waived their power dues. During UPA rule, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi waived farm loans amounting to Rs 72,000 crore and proved that agriculture is profitable. The Congress promised to waive farm loans amounting up to Rs 2 lakh and implemented it.

"My government waived farm loans amounting to Rs 21,000 crore of 22.50 lakh farmers. As part of the first phase of Rythu Bharosa, the government deposited nearly Rs 7,000 crore in the accounts of farmers," the CM said.

He said the BRS Government paid Rs 10,000 per acre. This government is providing Rs 12,000 under Rythu Bharosa. The government will pay Rs 20,000 crore to 70 lakh farmers as per the Rythu Bharosa scheme every year. Every farmer will get Rs 6,000 per acre from Rythu Bharosa after Sunday midnight, the CM said.

Launching the Rythu Bharosa scheme from Chandravancha village to help farmers, the CM said that during his padayatra, many landless poor had sought help. The government will pay Rs 12,000 to the landless poor every year under the Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa.

KTR, Bhatti...

Continued from page 1

launched on Republic Day like Indiramma Illu, issue of ration cards, Rythu Bharosa and Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa were just the beginning and not the end. "On this day we launched these schemes in one village per mandal as a ceremonial start ensuring 100% coverage. This approach ensures no one is left behind," he clarified.

Bhatti questioned the BRS's decade-long rule asking, "Why were these welfare measures not implemented during your 10 years in power despite adequate resources?"

He accused KTR of creating unnecessary hurdles to social welfare programmes by adding, "Our government is committed to delivering every scheme in saturation mode ensuring that no deserving beneficiary is excluded."

Defending the Congress's inclusive approach, Bhatti emphasised the government's efforts to engage with people directly through village assemblies to finalise beneficiary lists. "Unlike the past, when decisions were confined to four walls, we conducted three days of Gram Sabhas and invited applications for those left out. This government belongs to the people and is dedicated to their welfare," Bhatti said.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | MONDAY | JANUARY 27, 2025

03

Annual Day Celebrations
By Learning Umbrella School
Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
January 27, (9 am to 1 pm)

Varadhi Cultural Play
By Federation Of Telugu Asscn
Of Maharashtra
Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
January 27, (6 pm to 10 pm)

Live Telugu & Hindi Musical Orchestra
By Pushpanjali Rhythms
Venue
Sri Thyagaraja Gana Sabha
January 27, (4:30 pm)

Sathya Spoorthy
A Tribute To Sri Sathya Sai Baba
Venue
Sri Satya Sai Nigamagaram
January 27, (12 pm)

Vastrabhushana
Indian Weavers Lifestyle Exhibition
Venue
Kalinga Cultural Hall
January 22 to 27 (11 am)

D Sons Patola Art Exhibition
Venue
Labels The pop up space
January 18- to 27, (10 am)

GPL 2025
Badminton Championship
Venue
GITAM University
January 27 to 28, (12 noon)

Shutter-lifting cases solved, three arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The North Zone Police have successfully cracked a series of shutter-lifting cases reported within the jurisdictions of Trimulgherry and Karkhana police stations. Following an extensive investigation, three offenders, including two habitual criminals and one juvenile, were apprehended and sent on remand. The accused are identified as Junior Rajender Singh (38), a private employee from Pamula Basthi, Nizamabad, has a criminal history of 23 cases across multiple districts, including Cyberabad, Karimnagar, East Godavari, and Hyderabad. Banda Singh (46), a tawa kadai worker from Banswada, has been involved in four previous cases. A 17-year-old juvenile was also involved in the crimes. The police seized a sharp-edged weapon, shutter-lifting rods, and a mobile phone. Efforts are underway to trace the stolen property, with the offenders being uncooperative. A special team has been assigned to delve deeper into the investigation. The two habitual offenders, along with the juvenile, employed a systematic method to commit the crimes. They identified locked shutters on busy main roads or shops in cellars. They used specialised rods and tools to break open shutter locks, concealed their identities with masks, and wore gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints.

FLYOVERS, UNDERPASSES UNDER CONSTRUCTION TO EASE TRAFFIC CONGESTION

GHMC: Eight lakh applications surveyed for Indiramma houses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Commissioner Ilambarathi said that in regard to Indiramma houses, eight lakh applications have been surveyed out of 10.75 lakh. The distribution process will begin in February following gram sabhas to ensure transparency. During the Republic Day celebrations on Sunday, Commissioner Ilambarathi has detailed that the GHMC is committed to ensuring that eligible beneficiaries receive all government welfare benefits transparently. He stated that ward-wise gram sabhas will be conducted in the first week of February to distribute ration cards and Indiramma houses to rightful recipients. Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi, Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Sobhan Reddy and Commissioner Ilambarathi hoisted the national flag. Addressing the gathering, the Commissioner highlighted the vision of Dr BR



GHMC Commissioner Ilambarathi, along with Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi at the Republic Day celebrations

Ambedkar and the Constitution, emphasizing equality, freedom and fraternity. A comprehensive survey of eligible beneficiaries for ration cards and Indiramma houses

was conducted. Out of 83,276 applicants for ration cards, the survey has been completed. GHMC allocated Rs 7032 crore under the Telangana government's H-City initiative.

Flyovers and underpasses are being constructed to ease traffic congestion. Rs 100 crore has been allotted for 50 water-holding structures to tackle water-logging, with 13

already completed. In all, 3,035 internal roads worth Rs 810.30 crore are under construction, with 1,137 completed so far and 746 projects worth Rs 436.43 crore are being implemented, out of which 246 have been completed. Rs 149 crores has been sanctioned for beautification projects, including parks, medians and landscaping. Development of 24 landscape parks, three tree parks and greenery under flyovers is underway. Under the Indira Mahila Shakti scheme, Rs 63.37 crore in loans have been provided to 3,510 individual units and Rs 29.69 crore to 252 groups. E-Vehicle Charging Stations: 43 public EV charging stations are operational, with 40 more in progress. Rs 12.73 crore has been allocated for the construction of swimming pools and sports complexes. A GIS-based application is being implemented for efficient tax collection and property management.

Excellence awards given 'At home' in Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Republic Day tea party hosted by Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma at Raj Bhavan on January 26, 2025, was a grand affair, bringing together distinguished personalities from across the State. The event was attended by Chief Minister Anumula Revanth Reddy, Acting Chief Justice of Telangana High Court Sujoy Paul, Union Minister for Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy, Kamlesh D Patel, founder of Kanha Shanti Vanam, State Cabinet Ministers, MPs, MLAs, senior officials, and other notable figures. One of the key highlights of the event was the presentation of the Governor's Excellence Awards-2024, recognising individuals and institutions for their outstanding contributions in various fields. Governor Jishnu Dev Varma personally presented the awards, celebrating the achievements of the recipients.



In the Lifetime Achievement category, Dr G Chandrasekhar Reddy, IFS, was honoured for his contributions to environmental conservation. The Individual Category awards went to Dusharla Satyanarayana (Environmental Conservation), Arikapudi Raghu (Welfare of the Disabled), Jeevanji Deepti (Sports and Games), PB Krishna Bharathi (Culture) and Prof. M Pandu Ranga Rao (Culture). In the Institutional Category, Dhruvamsh Organisation was recognised for Environmental Conservation, LV Prasad Eye Institute for Welfare of the

Disabled, Aditya Mehta Foundation for Sports and Games and Samskruti Foundation for Culture. These awards underscored the Governor's commitment to honouring excellence across diverse domains. The tea party provided a platform for political leaders, policymakers and influencers to come together, fostering camaraderie while celebrating the spirit of Republic Day. Governor Jishnu Dev Varma extended his heartfelt appreciation to the awardees and attendees, emphasising the crucial role they play in building a progressive and inclusive Telangana.

India's first multicultural community unites 7,000 residents in R-Day fete

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

PBEL City, Hyderabad, home to over 7,000 residents from all 30 states and union territories, marked the 76th Republic Day with a grand celebration showcasing the diversity and unity of India. This unique residential community, often referred to as a 'Mini India,' hosted a vibrant parade and cultural events, reflecting the rich heritage of the nation. The highlight of the event was a mini-parade where residents proudly represented their states, donning traditional attire and presenting iconic art forms, landmarks, and cultural elements. Children, adults, and senior citizens alike participated enthusiastically, celebrating their heritage while embracing the diversity of their neighbors. Beyond cultural displays, the day featured sports activities such as cricket, volleyball, badminton, and running, encouraging active participation from residents. A group of over 100 senior citizens lent their wisdom and grace to the occasion,



embodying the spirit of inclusion and togetherness. Sustainability was a key focus of the celebration, with PBEL City emphasizing eco-friendly practices. The event utilized only environmentally sustainable materials, avoiding plastic and promoting waste segregation, reinforcing the community's dedication to green initiatives. Adding to its distinctiveness, PBEL City is equipped with a fully functional Volunteer Response Unit. This resident-

driven team, trained by government agencies, handles emergencies such as medical issues, accidents, fires, domestic violence, and missing persons, embodying the proactive and compassionate spirit of the community. "This celebration is a testament to the beauty of India's diversity," said Priyanka Raghuraman, an organizing member of the Mini India Parade Team. "Seeing people from different backgrounds come together to honour their

heritage and foster harmony is truly heartwarming. The Mini India Parade is a vibrant reminder of what makes our nation so special." The event was seamlessly organised by the Mini India Parade Team, a group of dedicated volunteers, with strong support from the PBEL City Association. PBEL City has set a benchmark for inclusivity, sustainability, and community spirit, showcasing how a shared purpose can create a harmonious and thriving neighborhood.

Ameenpur residents rally for road repairs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Residents of Ameenpur took out a rally on Sunday, demanding that officials repair the damaged roads in their locality. The construction of the roads reportedly began two years ago, was paused, resumed briefly and then stopped again. Speaking with The Pioneer, RK Yadav explained, "Since it was Sunday, around 20 to 25 people initially gathered with placards. As we walked towards the GHMC office, the crowd grew to nearly 500 people." He added, "The government

and elected representatives are focusing on economic activities, but internal services, such as road maintenance, must also be prioritised. Residents have been sharing concerns in WhatsApp groups, saying that accidents due to potholes are increasing." A working woman said, "The working class arrives nearly 30 minutes late to work, and students are delayed for school. Who will take responsibility for elderly and pregnant women who need to reach hospitals on time? Do we really have to protest for proper roads now?" she questioned.



Ameenpur residents take out a rally with placards demanding road repairs

Special blood donation camp with support of NPA members

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

To commemorate the 76th Republic Day, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy, in partnership with the Thalassemia & Sickle Cell Society, organised a special successful blood donation camp at the National Police Academy. The camp aimed to provide vital support to individuals suffering from thalassemia, a hereditary blood disorder. All the blood units collected were donated to the Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Society. SVPNPA Director, Amit Garg and Dr Chandrashekar, along with Dr Chandrakant Agarwal, President of the Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Society and Aleem Baig, Joint Secretary, TSCS, attended the event and expressed

their gratitude to the organizers, volunteers and blood donors. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Chandrakant Agarwal TSCS said, "We are truly grateful to the donors and others who have come forward and donated blood to meet the blood requirements of thalassemia patients. We are extremely honoured that the National Police Academy members have participated in the blood donation camp." Aleem Baig spoke about the blood donation camp, saying, "TSCS has been at the forefront of conducting mega blood donation camps in Hyderabad. We thank all the guests and donors who have extended their support to us and also promise to continue promoting awareness of thalassemia and its eradication."



DPRs for Medchal and Shamirpet Metro corridors in progress

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for new Metro corridors connecting Medchal and Shamirpet are being prepared as part of the Hyderabad Metro Rail's Phase-2 expansion. Announcing this during the 76th Republic Day celebrations at Hyderabad Metro Rail Bhavan, HMRL and HAML Managing Director NVS Reddy

stated that these corridors align with the Chief Minister's vision to enhance Metro connectivity across the city. In addition, Reddy informed that DPRs for five other Metro corridors, including airport connectivity from multiple parts of Hyderabad, have already been submitted to the Government of India. The Chief Minister has also urged the Union Housing

and Urban Development Minister to expedite approvals for the pending DPRs to pave the way for construction. During his address, Reddy highlighted the swift progress in demolishing affected properties in the old city to facilitate Metro expansion and emphasized the transformative impact these corridors will have on Hyderabad's development as a global city. "This

phase of Metro expansion requires a renewed commitment from all engineers and employees to ensure Hyderabad's growth remains on track," he said. The Republic Day celebrations were marked by the unfurling of the National Flag and patriotic tributes to freedom fighters. Metro officials and staff participated in the event with great enthusiasm, reaffirming their dedication to the city's progress.



Governor of Telangana, Jishnu Dev Varma honouring Musharraf Faruqi, Chairman and Managing Director of Telangana Southern Power Distribution Company, during the Republic Day celebrations held at Secunderabad Parade Ground

CMD Musharraf Faruqi honoured for excellence in welfare scheme implementation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Musharraf Faruqi, IAS, Chairman and Managing Director of Telangana Southern Power Distribution Company, was honoured by the Governor of Telangana, Jishnu Dev Varma, during the Republic Day celebrations held at Secunderabad Parade Ground. The ceremony was attended by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Chief Secretary Shanti Kumari, along with other dignitaries. The recognition was conferred on officials who have demonstrated outstanding commitment and results in implementing government welfare and development schemes. Musharraf Faruqi was acknowledged for his pivotal role in the success of the Telangana government's 'Gruha Jyothi' scheme, which provides free electricity to families consuming up to 200 units. The scheme has benefited 25.63 lakh families, significantly improving the quality of life for many households. Speaking on the occasion, Musharraf Faruqi expressed gratitude for the honour and dedicated it to the collective efforts of the organisation's employees and workers. "This recognition belongs to everyone who works tirelessly to implement welfare schemes and ensure uninterrupted quality power to all categories of consumers," he remarked. The award highlights the government's focus on ensuring effective delivery of welfare initiatives within the first year of its tenure, reflecting its commitment to inclusive development.



Every promise made to people will be fulfilled: Komatireddy

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy on Sunday asserted that every promise made to the people would be fulfilled. The people's government would continue to work towards a more inclusive development.

Venkat Reddy, who is the district in-charge Minister, was participating in launching new schemes at a function held in Khanapur village under Mudigonda mandal, along with the Additional Collector P Sreeja.

During the event, the Minister interacted with the beneficiaries of various schemes in the village and explained the benefits they would receive.

Minister Venkat Reddy stated, "The people's government has initiated action towards fulfilling every promise made to the people." He further mentioned that the government had introduced the Employment Guarantee Scheme to provide work to the poor by ensuring legal provisions. Additionally, the new scheme under "Indiramma Aathmiya Bharosa" is being launched, offering annual assistance of Rs 12,000 to poor beneficiaries without land. He also mentioned that since the people's government came to power, various programmes have been implemented, including the Rs 21,000 crore loan waiver



Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy launching new schemes at Khanapur village in Khammam on Sunday

for farmers, free bus travel, 200 units of free electricity, 500 gas cylinders, filling vacancies for youth, and the establishment of a Skill University to provide training.

In a small village like Khanapur, 107 new Indiramma houses, 32 new ration cards, Farmer's Assurance for 144 farmers, and Indiramma Aathmiya Bharosa for 35 individuals are being implemented. It was also announced that from Ugadi onwards, a free supply of 6 kg of fine rice per person will be given to ration card beneficiaries.

The Indiramma housing scheme will help alleviate the difficulties of the poor living in rented houses. Assistance of Rs 5 lakh will be provided in four phases, and this money should be used wisely to construct good houses. Government officials and engineers will provide advice and guidance for the construction of homes, as per the minister. In the past, under YS Rajasekhara Reddy's rule, houses were fully constructed for the poor, and today, similar house constructions have been taken up in vil-

lages. Funds are being provided under the Farmer's Assurance Scheme, and the funds will be deposited in banks starting tomorrow. In the future, when the state's financial condition improves, an investment support of Rs 15,000 per acre under Rythu Bharosa will be provided, as promised. Pending loan waiver issues will also be completed soon.

The minister mentioned that Sonia Gandhi, under her leadership, passed a law in Parliament for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGS) to ensure that the poor do not go hungry. He added that today, the people's government is distributing Rs 6,000 as part of the first instalment, with an annual payment of 12,000 for labourers.

The government is implementing welfare schemes transparently, and four new schemes are being launched today. He assured that actions would be taken in the future to fulfil every promise made to the people.

Chairman of the Warehouses Corporation, Royal Nageswara Rao, District Panchayat Officer Ashalatha, Mandal Special Officer and Tribal Welfare Department Deputy Director Vijayalakshmi, Mudigonda Mandal Tahsildar Sunita Elizabeth, MPDO Sridhar Swamy, officials, and others participated.

Bank officials humiliate woman over loan payment

PNS ■ JANGAON

Officials of a bank at a village in the district have gone to the extent of setting up a wood-burning stove in front of a house to draw the attention of villagers to a woman's failure to repay a loan. The bank officials called it a "cook and eat" agitation.

This incident came to light on Sunday in Pedda Thanda village under Devarupula mandal in the district.

Guguloth Lakshmi, a member of the Women's Self-Help Group from Pedda Thanda, took a loan from Telangana Grameena Bank. She has already repaid part of the loan. The remaining outstanding loan amount is Rs 61,000.

Bank manager Srinivas, Indira Kranti Patham (IKP) Assistant Project Manager Venkat Reddy, official Somana Rayan and VOAs went to Lakshmi's house and set up a wood-burning stove in front of her house as a form of protest to recover the loan. The beneficiary promised to pay Rs 10,000 by January 28 and the remaining Rs 51,000 by the deadline. However, the bank and Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) officials warned that if the loan amount is not paid by the due date, they would come back to



A wood-burning stove set up by bank officials to force a woman to repay a loan at Pedda Thanda village in Jangaon district

her house and protest in the same way. They claimed to have received instructions from higher authorities to recover the loans.

The bank officials' highhandedness came under severe criticism. Many tribal people criticised the bank officials.

All set for Nagoba fair at Keslapur from Jan 28

PNS ■ ADILABAD

The four-day second biggest tribal festival of Telangana the Nagoba fair to be held at Keslapur in Indraveli mandal of the district will commence from the night of January 28. The Mesram family members will perform Maha Puja at the Nagoba temple in Keslapur at 10.30 pm on Jan 28, kicking off the festival.

The government officials have been making arrangements as devotees are expected to throng the Nagoba temple in Keslapur from the neighbouring

Maharashtra, Andhra and Chhattisgarh states. Collector RajarshiSha, ITDA project officer Khusboo Gupta, Superintendent of Police GhouseAlam have reviewed the arrangements for the festival and issued directions to the government personnel to make the necessary arrangements.

Meanwhile, Mesram family members collected Godavari water from Hastina Madugu and reached Keslapur on Saturday. They camped on the outskirts of Keslapur taking shelter under the banyan tree.

Indiramma govt committed to welfare of people: Ponguleti

PNS ■ HANAMKONDA

On Republic Day, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy launched four important government schemes in Pembarti village in Hanamkonda district, aimed at benefiting various sections of people.



Srinivas Reddy criticised the previous BRS regime, accusing them of irresponsible borrowing and making false promises, especially during the elections. He praised the Indiramma government under Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, stating that it has been focused on fulfilling welfare and development

goals despite financial setbacks. Regarding the new schemes, he explained that Rythu Bharosa will provide an investment support of Rs 12,000 per acre to farmers with cultivable land. Additionally, the Atmeeya Bharosa programme will extend Rs 12,000 annually to agricultural workers. Ration cards are now being issued to the poor.

Speaking at the event, the Minister emphasised the state's ongoing efforts to ensure that everyone eligible receives assistance from government schemes.

The schemes introduced included the distribution of ration cards to the poor, the Rythu Bharosa, the Indiramma Atmeeya Bharosa financial assistance for landless agricultural workers, and the Indiramma Housing scheme for the homeless. These initiatives were part of the celebration of India's 76th Republic Day.

The Minister pointed out that the Indiramma government, now in its second year, has successfully implemented all the promises made during the election campaign. Despite facing financial challenges, the government has worked hard to extend the benefits of these programmes to the people. Referring to the Warangal declaration introduced by Rahul Gandhi before the elections, the Minister reiterated that the government remained committed to the welfare of farmers.

The government also plans to offer 3,500 Indiramma houses per Assembly constituency, with additional homes being allocated to tribal and Dalit constituencies as requested by local representatives. Across the state, the four schemes are being launched in 600 villages across 600 mandals. Reddy emphasised that the government is dedicated to reaching everyone in need, even if it takes time to process applications. In contrast to the previous regime, Srinivas Reddy said that the BRS did not conduct gram sabhas when launching schemes, while the Indiramma government has been engaging directly with the people.

Cong govt will ensure food security to poor: Uttam

PNS ■ YADADRI BHUVANGIRI

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy claimed that the Congress government was committed to ensuring food security and implementing welfare initiatives for all.

He was speaking after launching four flagship schemes - Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Atmeeya Bharosa, Indiramma Indlu and the issuance of new ration cards in the Praja Palana programme at Nathallagudem village in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, on the occasion of Republic Day on Sunday.

Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy hailed the initiative as the largest and most comprehensive food safety and welfare programme ever undertaken

by any state government in independent India. He emphasised that the Congress government has prioritised the upliftment of marginalised communities, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, minorities, economically weaker sections, farmers, students and youth.

Lok Sabha member Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Bhuvanagiri MLA Kumbham Anil Reddy, District Collector M Hanumantha Rao, senior leaders and officials participated in the programme.

Republic Day, marking the adoption of India's Constitution was chosen for this historic launch to signify the Congress government's commitment to the principles of justice, equality, and fraternity. Quoting



Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy handing over welfare benefits to a senior citizen at Nathallagudem village on Sunday

Mahatma Gandhi, the minister said, "There are people in the world so hungry that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread," underlining the

moral responsibility of governance to address hunger. He also invoked Dr BR Ambedkar, stating, "A just society is that society in which ascending

sense of reverence and descending sense of contempt is dissolved into the creation of a compassionate society," to highlight the transformative vision of the welfare schemes.

He explained that the Congress government is not only issuing ration cards but also transforming the Public Distribution System (PDS). Currently, ration cardholders receive coarse rice, much of which is inedible and often diverted for non-consumption purposes. Once the new ration card issuance process is completed, all cardholders will receive 6 kg of high-quality fine rice per person, free of cost. The initiative, costing the state an additional Rs 11,000 crore annually, is a key component of the government's commitment

to food security. "This is not just about rice; it is about restoring dignity and ensuring nutrition for every household," said Uttam Kumar Reddy.

The minister criticised the previous BRS government for neglecting food security, pointing out that fewer than 40,000 ration cards were issued during its decade-long rule. It was done during by-elections to cheat the voters. In contrast, the Congress government has already initiated issuing new ration cards to benefit an additional 40 lakh individuals. Beneficiaries were identified through socio-economic surveys, caste data, and applications received via Praja Palana, Praja Vani, and Mee Seva centres. If anyone is still excluded, they could apply, ensuring that no one is excluded.

ICFAI law school organises street play

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

In commemoration of the 76th Republic Day, the Legal Aid Society of ICFAI Law School, IFHE, Hyderabad, collaborated with Zilla Parishad High School, Proddatur Village, to organise a street play focused on educating citizens about their fundamental duties under the Indian Constitution. The event, which took place on Sunday, aimed to raise awareness among villagers and students regarding the importance of their duties as outlined in Article 51A of the Constitution. Prof Y Pratap Reddy, Dean of ICFAI Law

School, inaugurated the event by welcoming the guests and highlighting the significance of the Constitution. He stressed the importance of understanding both rights and duties, emphasising that an informed citizenry is essential for the nation's progress and democratic health. The Legal Aid Society members presented informative posters that illustrated the eleven fundamental duties, using pictorial representations to make the concepts more accessible.

These posters were designed to inspire citizens to incorporate these duties into their daily lives.

Welfare schemes launched in RR district

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

On the occasion of Republic Day, several welfare schemes were launched in Appareddy Guda village, Nandigama mandal, Rangareddy district. Shadnagar MLA Veerlapalli Shankar inaugurated key government programs including Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa, Ration Cards, and the Indiramma Indlu scheme. During the event, appointment documents were handed over to the beneficiaries.

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Mahesh Kumar Goud presented the certificates to the recipients, while MP Anil Yadav, SAT Chairman Shivsen Reddy, MARO Chairman Challa Narasimha Reddy, former



Shadnagar MLA Veerlapalli Shankar and TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud launching welfare programmes in Ranga Reddy district on Sunday

working president Kusuma Kumar, former Shadnagar MLA Chaulapalli Pratap Reddy, and former ZPTC Shyam Sundar Reddy also participated in the programme.

Speaking at the event, the leaders expressed their happiness in launching the welfare schemes, emphasising that these initiatives reflect the commitment of a "public government"

focused on the welfare of the people. They noted that Appareddy Guda was chosen as a pilot village for these programmes, highlighting the government's determination to ensure that every household receives a proper home.

The leaders also drew a parallel between the housing schemes initiated by former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy and the efforts under the leadership of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, expressing their gratitude for the progress made in providing homes to the poor. "This is a government that works for the people, and our goal is to see happiness in the eyes of the poor," they said. The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that no one is left without a home in the region.

REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS

Freedom-fighter honoured in Rangareddy district

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The 76th Republic Day of India was celebrated with great enthusiasm and pride at the Integrated District Offices Complex in Ranga Reddy District. District Collector C Narayana Reddy hoisted the national flag to mark the occasion, accompanied by a salute from the police.

In his speech, the Collector highlighted the various welfare and developmental programmes being implemented across the district, emphasising the progress achieved in key sectors. He also acknowledged the contributions of the district's citizens and outlined future initiatives for community development. A special moment of the ceremony was the felicitation of freedom fighter M Ramreddy, honouring his contributions to the nation's independence.

The event also featured a display of stalls showcasing achievements and ongoing ini-



Rangareddy Collector C Narayana Reddy honouring freedom-fighter M Ramreddy during Republic Day celebrations at the Collectorate on Sunday

tiatives in rural development, education, transport, and healthcare. These stalls served as a platform for visitors to learn about the district's efforts to improve public services and infrastructure.

Cultural performances by students from various schools added a festive spirit to the celebration. Children from institutions such as Social Welfare Residential School (Maheshwaram), Tribal Welfare Residential School (Ibrahimpatnam), KGVV, Mahatma Gandhi Jyotiba Pule School, Delhi Public School, Nadargol, Zilla Parishad High School (Thukkuguda), and Telangana Minority High School delivered mesmerizing performances that filled the atmosphere with patriotic fervor.

The event was attended by Additional Collector Pratima Singh, District Revenue Officer Sangeetha, Maheshwaram DCP Sunitha Reddy, along with other district officers, staff, students, and local residents.

Tension erupts as Cong, BRS workers nearly come to blows

PNS ■ JANGAON

Tension erupted at Erra Kunta Thanda in the district with the Congress and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) activists nearly came blows on Sunday.

The BR's activists, led by its lead Palla Rajeswar Reddy, staged a protest at a meeting venue, alleging that the police had arrested their party men ahead of the visit of Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy. Pushing and shoving ensued between the Congress and BRS activists. The Congress leaders raised slogans like "Go Back" against Palla Rajeswar Reddy.

The Congress activists even threw eggs at BRS leaders. A verbal duel ensued between



Police trying to separate the Congress and BRS activists who nearly came to blows at Erra Kunta Thanda in Jangaon district on Sunday

the rival party cadres. BRS workers also raised slogans against Congress leaders.

A tense atmosphere prevailed in the area as Congress and BRS workers raised slogans against each other. The police intervened and separated the warring groups. The police action averted a clash.

ACROSS THE STATES



Manipur gov't forms special cell to tackle extortion

The Manipur government has formed a dedicated anti-extortion cell under the home department, chief secretary Prashant Kumar Singh said in a statement here on Sunday. The initiative is designed to create an efficient and robust response mechanism to tackle extortion-related activities and ensure the safety and security of the public, the statement added. The cell will include representatives from the state police, central armed police forces, the Assam Rifles and the Army. The statement added "reports have indicated that various individuals including government officials have been threatened with severe consequences via calls, messages or letters by unlawful organisations if extortion demands are not met. These activities pose a significant threat to the law and order situation in the state." The government has urged citizens to cooperate in combating these unlawful activities and to report any incidents of threats or extortion to the new cell via toll-free number 1800 202 3326.



Shah Jahan's 370th 'urs' begins at Taj Mahal

Commemoration of the 370th death anniversary of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, who commissioned the Taj Mahal, began on Sunday. A three-day 'urs' (death anniversary) began with the offering of 'chadar' on the graves of Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz Mahal, an official said. Prince Vajpayee, the archaeology department's senior conservation assistant for the Taj Mahal, said the Taj Urs Committee and the department employees opened the UNESCO heritage site's basement tomb at 2 pm and placed 'chadar' on the graves of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. During this, Fatiha was read and prayers were offered. Qawwals performed Sufi 'kalam' outside the main dome, he said. Shah Jahan commissioned the Taj Mahal in 1631 to house the tomb of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The tomb is the centrepiece of the complex that also includes a mosque and a guest house.



CM Stalin boycotts 'At Home' reception

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday did not take part in the traditional 'At Home' reception hosted by Governor R N Ravi on the occasion of Republic Day and he visited Madurai to participate in events to felicitate him for getting the Centre's tungsten mining initiative cancelled. In the function held at Raj Bhavan, leaders of opposition parties -- the AIADMK, BJP, DMDK and Puthiya Tamizhagam -- took part. Chief Minister Stalin and his cabinet colleagues had attended the 'At Home' reception on the occasion of Independence Day in 2024. Governor Ravi, who has been critical of the DMK regime over several issues and policy matters, had in his address on the Republic Day eve had targeted the Stalin-led government. Ravi had alleged that many state-run universities in Tamil Nadu were in a dire financial crisis. In Madurai, CM Stalin, recalling his assurance that tungsten mining would not be allowed till such time he remained in office, said the village elders visited him in Chennai and invited him for the felicitation function.

'Kejriwal came coughing, left Delhi gasping for breath'

BJP MP Anurag Thakur on Sunday attacked former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal over the recurring deterioration in the city's air quality, witnessed in the past many years. Taking a dig at him, Thakur said Kejriwal came to Delhi "coughing" from Haryana 11 years ago and has since left the city "gasping for breath." The former Union minister also claimed that once the "AAP-DA" government is removed from Delhi, the BJP will ensure clean roads, clean water, a clean Yamuna, and clean air for the people of the city. "Aap-da," meaning disaster, is a derivative term Prime Minister Narendra Modi devised for the party in one of his rallies in the city.

India, Indonesia call for code of conduct in South China Sea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

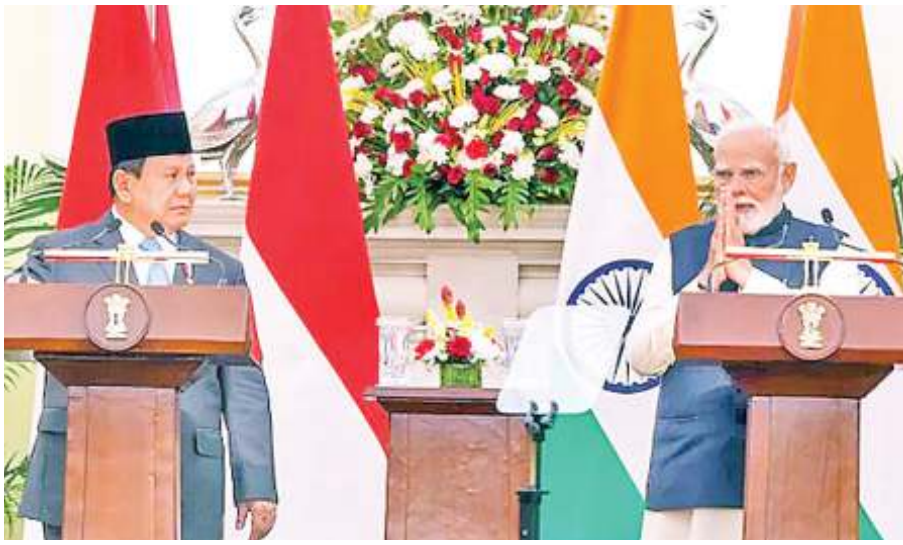
India and Indonesia have pitched for a "full and effective" code of conduct in the South China Sea in accordance with the relevant international laws amid China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the region.

The situation in the South China Sea figured in wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto on Saturday, according to a joint statement.

In their meeting, the two sides agreed to position a liaison officer from Indonesia at India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR). The Indian Navy established the IFC-IOR in Gurugram in 2018 to keep track of shipping traffic as well as other critical developments in the region under a collaborative framework with like-minded countries.

Modi and Subianto, while condemning terrorism in all forms, vowed to India-Indonesia anti-terror and called for concerted efforts to combat the menace without any "double standards". Both the leaders called upon all countries to take concerted action against UN-proscribed terrorist organisations and their affiliates, the statement released on Sunday said.

The Indonesian president arrived here on Thursday on a four-day visit. Subianto was the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations at the majestic Kartavya Path on Sunday.



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In their talks, the prime minister and the visiting leader also explored ways to boost India-Indonesia economic ties and emphasised the importance of expeditious implementation of a MoU inked by the two sides last year for the use of local currencies for bilateral transactions, according to the statement.

Modi and Subianto were of the view that the use of local currencies for bilateral transactions would further promote trade and deepen financial integration between the two economies. The joint statement, referring to the situation in the maritime domain, said the two leaders reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region.

They also called for unimpeded lawful maritime commerce and promoting peaceful

resolution of disputes in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea).

"In this regard, they supported the full and effective implementation of the declaration on the conduct of the parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety and look forward to the early conclusion of an effective and substantive code of conduct in the South China Sea (COC) that is in accordance with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS," the statement noted.

The ASEAN countries too have been insisting on a binding code of conduct (COC) on the South China Sea largely in view of China's consistent attempts to assert its expansive claims over the region.

Lankan Navy arrests 34 Indian fishermen, seizes trawlers

PNS ■ COLOMBO

The Sri Lankan Navy arrested at least 34 Indian fishermen and seized three trawlers for illegal fishing in two separate incidents, the authorities said on Sunday.

The fishermen have been arrested for illegal fishing in two separate incidents on January 25 and 26, the Navy said. Both arrests came off the coast of the northeastern Mannar district in the Navy's continued regular patrols in the Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing, the Navy said.

The arrested fishermen have been handed over to the relevant officials for further action. The Indian High Commission here earlier this week said some 41 Indian



fishermen who had been similarly arrested previously for poaching in Sri Lankan waters were repatriated. On January 12, eight Indian fishermen were arrested and two fishing trawlers were seized. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel

even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

Disapproving marriage does not amount to abetment of suicide: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said expressing disapproval for marriage does not amount to abetment of suicide under section 306 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma made the observation while quashing a chargesheet against a woman who was accused of abetting the suicide of another woman



who was allegedly in love with her son. The allegations were based on disputes between

the deceased and the appellant's son, who had refused to marry her. The appellant was accused of opposing the marriage and making disparaging remarks against the deceased.

The court said even if all evidence on record, including the chargesheet and witness statements, are taken to be correct, there is not an iota of evidence against the appellant.

"We find that the acts of the appellant are too remote and indirect to constitute the

offence under section 306, IPC. There is no allegation against the appellant of a nature that the deceased was left with no alternative but to commit the unfortunate act of suicide," the bench said.

The court said it is discerned from the record that the appellant, along with her family, did not attempt to put any pressure on the deceased to end the relationship between her and the appellant's son.

AI reshaping astrology landscape!

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an exciting convergence of technology and tradition, AI is reshaping the astrology landscape in India, enabling quick access to personalised insights, and appealing to a tech-savvy generation keen to explore their destinies through innovative digital platforms.

Industry experts foresee a future in which AI complements rather than replaces human knowledge and expertise. This intriguing fusion is not just a passing trend, it's reshaping how millions of people in India engage with the stars and their destinies.

"In India, AI is transforming traditional practices by digitising horoscopes, offering instant personalised readings, and enabling users to access astrology guidance anytime, anywhere, which has made astrology more approachable and popular. "Our AI astrologers are enabled to respond within



seconds -- the responses are not only quick but more accurate too which resonates deeply with the users," AstroSage AI founder Punit Pandey said.

AI-powered astrology apps offer a user-friendly interface, making it easy for users to interact and gain helpful

insights and have various additional features like daily predictions, compatibility reports, and personalised advice, he added.

Astrosage's AI feature has answered over 25 million queries since its 2024 launch, reflecting a positive user

response, Pandey said.

Users appreciate the accuracy and speed of the insights, often noting that the readings feel tailored to their needs and help them focus on solutions instead of problems, he said.

At the heart of this transformation lies sophisticated tech-



ONE NATION, ONE TIME

Govt drafts rules for mandatory adoption of IST

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to standardize time-keeping, the government has drafted comprehensive rules mandating the exclusive use of Indian Standard Time (IST) across all official and commercial platforms, with the Consumer Affairs Ministry seeking public feedback by February 14.

The Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2024, aims to establish a legal framework for standardising timekeeping practices, mandating IST as the sole time reference for legal, administrative, commercial, and official documents.

"IST shall be the mandatory time reference across all sectors, including commerce, transport, public administration, legal contracts, and financial operations," as per the draft rule. Key provisions include, prohibition of time references other than IST for official and commercial purposes, mandatory display of IST in government offices and public institutions and requirement for time-synchronization systems to ensure reliability,

availability, and cybersecurity.

The proposal comes as part of efforts to ensure precise timekeeping in critical national infrastructure, including telecommunications, banking, defence, and emerging technologies like 5G and artificial intelligence.

"Precise time with nanosecond accuracy is essential for strategic and non-strategic sectors," a senior government official told PTL.

Exceptions will be allowed for specialised fields such as astronomy, navigation, and scientific research, subject to prior government approval.

The Department of Consumer Affairs is collaborating with the National Physical Laboratory and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to develop a robust time generation and dissemination mechanism. Violations of the proposed rules will attract penalties, with periodic audits planned to ensure compliance across sectors.

Public stakeholders have been invited to submit comments and suggestions on the draft rules by February 14.

Himachal farmer, selected for Padma Shri revolutionised apple cultivation

PNS ■ SHIMLA

A progressive Himachal farmer, Hariman Sharma revolutionised apple cultivation by developing a variety that can be cultivated under warmer conditions in the lower hills.

It was earlier believed that apples could only be grown in the mid and the higher hills under cold conditions. Sharma's innovation, however, busted that myth.

He developed the 'HRMN 99' variety that can blossom at altitudes as low as 1,800 feet and is resistant to scab, a familiar disease that plagues the fruit. It is a unique innovation that has become popular not only in India but in



countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Zambia and Germany, the farmer from Ghumarwin in Bilaspur district said.

So far, more than a lakh horticulturists have planted

14 lakh saplings, he added.

The National Innovation Foundation has adopted the variety for studies and further development, and planted 33,000 saplings in 29 states. Sharma has himself distributed more than 1.9 lakh saplings to 6,000 farmers. Sharma's name was announced on Saturday for the Padma Shri award. He will be conferred with the award in the "Others (Agriculture)" category, acknowledging his dedication and innovation in transforming the lives of countless farmers while strengthening the agriculture economy.

He is the lone name from the state in this year's Padma awards list.

CRPF seeks security cover transfer from CISF

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CRPF has sought the Union home ministry's permission to transfer the VIP security cover of its incoming chief G P Singh to it from the CISF, official sources said on Sunday.

The Union government had on January 19 appointed Singh as the new Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) director general and he is expected to

take charge this week.

A 1991-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, Singh is currently working as the Assam director general of police. The sources said the CRPF has sought permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs for the transfer of the security cover of its new DG from the CISF to its protection wing for VIPs and high-risk dignitaries.

Industry sees future where AI enhances traditional practices

nology. Large Language Models (LLMs) and machine learning algorithms are aiding the processing of astrological data.

"We use a mix of advanced technologies to bring astrology into the digital age. Machine learning plays a huge role in spotting patterns and improving predictions. Natural language processing helps us create intuitive chatbots that understand and respond to offline user queries," InstaAstro CEO Nitin Verma said.

Verma further noted that "Big Data analytics enables us to process years of astrological insights, while recommendation algorithms help match users with the right astrologers based on their unique needs."

Younger generations are incredibly open to this integration. They see it as a natural progression -- combining the convenience of technology with the depth of tradition. For them, astrology delivered through apps and platforms

feels relevant and modern, yet still rooted in something timeless, Verma said.

"In cities with high social media usage, Gen Z makes up more than 60 per cent of our astrology enthusiasts. What's particularly interesting is that approximately 55 per cent of these young users specifically seek relationship guidance through our AI-powered platform," Astroyogi co-founder and COO Aditya Kapoor said. He noted that these digital natives appreciate the convenience of accessing astrological insights anytime, anywhere -- whether through an app or a chatbot. Feedback from users paints a picture of delight and curiosity. Many users said the insights they receive are remarkably tailored to their lives, enhancing their overall experience with astrology.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

75 glorious years

Seventy-five years on, the Indian Republic stands resilient, ready to tread the path toward a brighter tomorrow

India stands at a monumental crossroads as it celebrated 75 glorious years of being a Republic on Sunday. Resident Droupadi Murmu and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's presence symbolise India's robust diplomatic ties. With 10,000 special guests attending, this year's celebrations highlight the spirit of Jan Bhagidari, emphasising the people as architects of India's progress. The 76th Republic Day, marked by the theme of 'Shashakt aur Surakshit Bharat' (Empowered and Secure India), reflects the nation's aspirations. On this historic occasion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged countrymen to rededicate themselves to preserving the ideals of the Constitution. As the country marks this milestone, it becomes imperative to reflect on the achievements, challenges, and aspirations that define modern India. The adoption of the Constitution on January 26, 1950, was a bold assertion of India's identity as a sovereign, secular, and democratic republic. Over seven decades, the nation has weathered numerous challenges, from



political upheavals to external threats, while safeguarding its democratic fabric. India's ability to hold free and fair elections consistently remains a testament to the vision of its founding leaders. From the license-raj era to the liberalization reforms of 1991, India has evolved into the world's fifth-largest economy. Significant strides in technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship have positioned India as a global powerhouse in sectors such as information technology, pharmaceutical, and space exploration.

India's rich cultural diversity has continued to thrive amidst rapid modernisation. The promotion of regional arts, languages, and traditions, along with advances

in education and healthcare, has strengthened the social fabric. India's influence on the global stage has grown significantly, with active participation in forums like the United Nations, G20, and BRICS. Its leadership in championing climate action, digital inclusion, and south-south cooperation underscores its emergence as a responsible global leader. However, there are numerous challenges that are yet to be addressed. Despite impressive economic growth, India continues to grapple with stark inequalities. Issues like rural poverty, unemployment, and an uneven distribution of resources hinder holistic progress. Social harmony has often been tested, with caste, religious, and regional divides occasionally flaring into discord. Bridging these divides remains critical to ensuring the unity celebrated on Republic Day. While strides have been made in governance, corruption and inefficiencies in public administration still impede progress. The effective implementation of policies is often undermined by bureaucratic hurdles. As India celebrates its achievements, the path ahead demands renewed focus and commitment. Upholding the values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined in the Constitution must remain a collective priority. Ensuring the inclusion of marginalised communities in the democratic process is essential for a more equitable society.

PICTALK



A pair of parakeets are seen near their nest, in Jaipur

PTI

A chance encounter in Delhi: A story of hope amidst the chaos

Delhi, a city full of surprises, often unveils its charm in the most unexpected ways. While much has changed over the years, its enduring spirit continues to soar

Surprises never cease to crop up in my beloved Delhi, although, when I reminisce, I find this Delhi to be so very different from the place where I was born and grew up—in a few years from now, I will be touching the magical mark of sixty years—Insha-Allah!!! These are surprises that keep the passion to continue living here alive, despite the megapolis tottering on the edge of a bottomless abyss. I encountered one such surprise more than two decades ago, when I chanced upon an opportunity to care, to love-dispassionately. Then, I worked in the vicinity of Delhi's sprawling International Airport. At some distance from my office were robust pockets of greenery. As I strolled on the edge of a stagnant water body, immersed in thoughts, the shrill chirping of two birds circling overhead broke my reverie.



chirping pointed to a high level of desperation, of an impending crisis. Not the one to be blessed with Dr Do Little's prowess, instinctively, I shrugged off the noise to a behaviour anomaly that might be inherent in avians of this species. But the next moment I was proved wrong.

The magnitude of the disaster struck me like a sledgehammer—on the muck-infested, rotting, stagnant surface of the pond, I saw a tiny tremor, so minute that one could easily have missed it. It aroused my curiosity, and I leaned over to have a better view. Lo and behold,

trying to break free from the strangulating grip of the muck were three tiny birds, barely the size of an index finger—in all probability offspring of the panic-stricken pair hovering above. Perhaps they had fallen into the pond, carried by a dust-storm that had lashed the capital a few hours earlier. As they waged a fast-losing battle to stay afloat in the poisonous pool (symptomatic of most water bodies in the capital), the strings of my heart (already weakened by a blood pressure problem) felt a strong tug. Somehow, I managed to shrug off my indecisiveness

and moved to the edge of the pond. Tenderly, so as not to cause any harm, I scooped the first bird into my palm; the paranoid birds overhead mistook me for a predator and made some aggressive moves. But, as I delicately placed it on hard ground, they realised that I was not a foe—immediately, the chirping subsided; I finished the balance task in peace. After I had rescued the last bundle of joy and placed it on the welcoming lap of Mother Earth, I felt reassured that the worst was over.

Contended, I commenced my trudge into civilised environs. Barely had I taken a few steps, when I looked behind and saw the protective parents cuddling their young ones—exemplifying all that is human but is sadly getting diluted.

The unexpected encounter lifted my spirits sky-high, as even in the fast-decaying Delhi, my beloved Delhi, hope continues to flow eternally. And where there is hope, a better future can never be far away.

(The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)



A P S MALHOTRA

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Mobile phones in jails: A growing security nightmare

The continued use of mobile phones by criminals incarcerated in jails remains a critical issue that the government has yet to address effectively



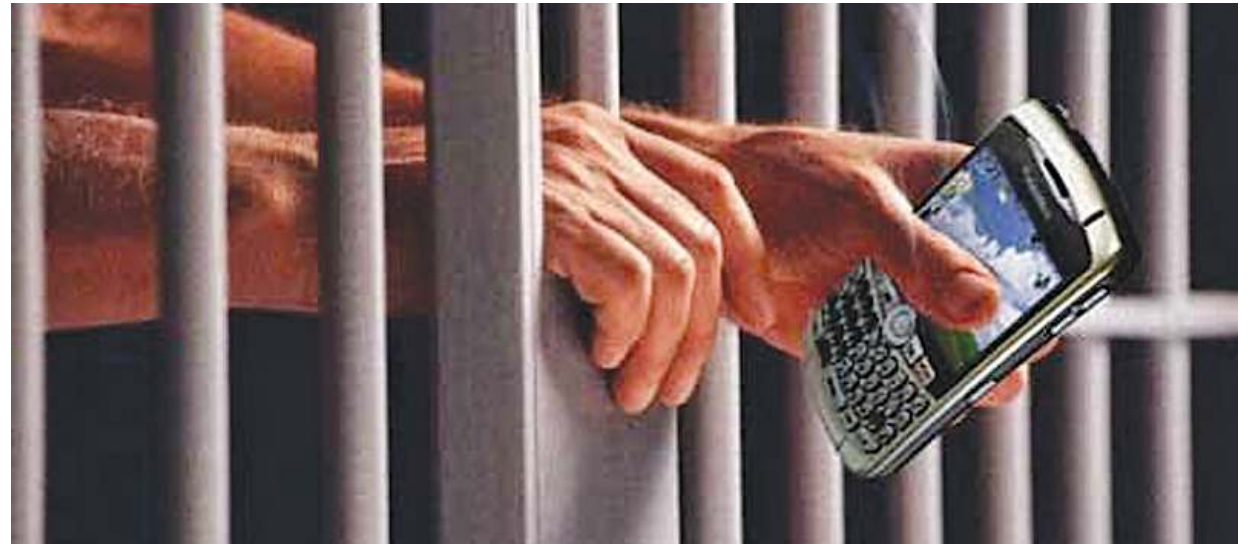
SANDEEP JOSHI

One pressing issue that the government has yet to effectively address is the continued use of mobile phones by criminals incarcerated in jails—an issue that persists even in high-security prisons. The seizure of mobile phones from inmates has become an all-too-common occurrence, posing a significant challenge to law enforcement agencies attempting to dismantle the nexus of organised crime operating from behind bars.

A primary reason for the rampant use of mobile phones inside jails lies in the unholy alliance between gang leaders within the prisons and certain jail authorities. This collaboration, coupled with the ineffective use of modern technology to prevent unauthorised mobile phone usage, has allowed the problem to spiral out of control. The issue has reached such alarming proportions due to the lack of strategic deployment of advanced solutions that are readily available today.

The consequences of mobile phone usage within jails extend far beyond facilitating criminal activities. It poses a direct threat to national security, compromises the safety of prison staff, and jeopardises public safety. While maintaining a robust telecommunication network within prisons is critical in today's mobile-driven world, the problem arises when authorities fail to leverage the latest technologies to either restrict or control mobile phone usage in designated areas. One technology that has been available for years is the mobile jammer, which disrupts mobile networks within a limited radius. However, this solution has proven ineffective, as it does not guarantee 100 per cent disruption of mobile services and, in some cases, hampers the network's functionality outside the prison-affecting areas like residential neighbourhoods. Despite its widespread use in jails across India, the jammer's limitations have become apparent.

In 2017, the "Tower-Harmonious Call Blocking System" (T-HCBS) was introduced, but it has yielded minimal results. Even after the installation of T-HCBS towers, the use of mobile



phones in prisons continued unabated. Telecom companies have failed to provide a mechanism for real-time monitoring of the system's effectiveness, leaving authorities without the tools needed to measure its success or identify shortcomings.

A recent investigation by the Delhi police in connection with a shootout at a Tilak Nagar car showroom uncovered a shocking revelation. The two main suspects, who are currently incarcerated in Tihar Jail, were using 5G-enabled phones to bypass mobile jammers. Although Tihar Jail, which houses around 20,000 inmates, is equipped with over 15 mobile jammers, these devices are outdated, designed for 4G networks, while the current technology in use is 5G. This discrepancy highlights the urgent need for the installation of updated jammers and infrastructure in Delhi's jails—a process that could take several months.

The scale of the problem is underscored by the discovery of over 500 phones and internet dongles during surprise raids conducted across three Delhi prisons in the past two years. Despite the Delhi government and the Ministry of Home Affairs acknowledging the issue and establishing a high-powered committee two years ago to address the problem, progress has been hin-

dered by red tape and slow-moving bureaucracy. The primary obstacle remains the reluctance of government officials to prioritise and implement the appropriate technologies needed to tackle the crisis.

In addition to aiding organised crime syndicates, the presence of mobile phones in jails has had unforeseen consequences for residents living near prison complexes. This interference with the mobile network has caused a decline in property values in the vicinity of the jail, a stark contrast to the property booms seen in other parts of Delhi.

The lack of a reliable mobile network has created serious problems for residents, particularly in emergencies, and has significant economic consequences as businesses and daily services reliant on mobile communication are disrupted. This problem is not unique to Tihar Jail or Delhi; similar issues have been reported from prisons in other metro cities.

While mobile communication technologies continue to advance rapidly, there are modern solutions that can effectively address the issue of blocking mobile networks within high-security prisons. These advanced systems do not merely block mobile calls but also enable real-time detection and location tracking of illicit mobile phone usage within the facility.

TELECOM COMPANIES HAVE FAILED TO PROVIDE A MECHANISM FOR REAL-TIME MONITORING OF THE SYSTEM'S EFFECTIVENESS, LEAVING AUTHORITIES WITHOUT THE TOOLS NEEDED TO MEASURE ITS SUCCESS OR IDENTIFY SHORTCOMINGS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EIGHT WORKERS KILLED IN BLAST

Madam — A massive explosion at the Ordnance factory at Bhandra in Maharashtra, a key defence establishment, killed at least eight workers. The blast was so severe that it completely turned the unit into a huge pile of rubble, burying workers under the debris. Injured persons have been admitted to hospitals. The accident in a key defence factory is quite unfortunate. The Maharashtra government has announced a solatium of 5 lakh rupees each for the families of those killed in the blast. The cause of the explosion is not yet determined.

The accident has occurred at the RDX manufacturing section of the factory. The ordinance factory at Bhandra is an important defence unit engaged in high-energy explosives like RDX and HMX, which go into the filling of a wide range of ammunition—from artillery shells to rockets in the form of propellants. The present accident is not the first one in the ordinance factory. In the past two blasts at the Central Ammunition Depot at Wardha, one in 2016 and another in 2018, at least 25 workers, including two army officers, had been killed. The Indian Ordnance Factories have not only supported India through the wars but also played an important role in building India with the achievement of technology and have ushered in the Industrial Revolution in India. Lack of safety measures in the factory should have been the reason for the huge blast.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

DOUBTS ON SAIF ALI KHAN'S ATTACK

Madam — Leaders like Nitish Rane, Sanjay Nirupam, and Jitendra Awhad doubt whether actor Saif Ali Khan was really attacked, reflecting their poor mindset. One of the leaders compares Saif's stabbing as "garbage." Another leader finds the Hindu-Muslim angle and says when a Hindu actor like Shushanth Singh Rajput dies, no one comes forward to say anything. It is a matter of shame that the BJP leaders find a religious angle in every

Chinar trees to be geo-tagged



It is heartening to note that the Jammu and Kashmir government has come up with a unique initiative of a 'Digital Tree Aadhaar' programme, targeting the conservation of the iconic Chinar trees, which are vital

to the region's cultural and ecological heritage. The initiative of the J and K government is laudable, especially at a time when rapid urbanisation poses threats to these trees, necessitating advanced technological interventions for their survival.

Under this drive, Chinar trees are being geo-tagged and embedded with QR codes that capture detailed information, including geographical location, health stats, and growth patterns. This approach allows conservationists to address potential risks effectively while creating a comprehensive Chinar tree database. Approximately 28,000 trees have reportedly been surveyed, with data continuously updated, aiming to preserve these trees.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

issue. One thing is sure: Saif quickly recovered because our doctors have given an effective treatment. On the other side, it is still being questioned whether the person who is arrested and the CCTV footage person are not the same. The police were swift enough to confirm that the attacker was Bangladeshi. It is still suspect that the police have caught the real assailant or an innocent person. The BJP leaders are alleging that Bangladeshis are entering our country and creating trouble. If it is so, then it is the total failure of the central government in controlling them. One thing is clear: frequent unusual incidents are happening in Mumbai and it is proved that Mumbai is not a safe place.

Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

MISUSE OF PUBLIC FUNDS

Madam — Distribution of public funds in cash (via DBT) is becoming rampant by the governments (both Union and State) under various names and schemes to various sections of society in the name of social justice. Whereas the very concept of such an award of money is unethical and

unwarranted because people believing in the workaholic system find it difficult to earn enough while those who happen to be in the list of category, class, caste, or section under the beneficiaries of handsome amounts of money from the state get the money without any work.

Be it the cash to SC ST OBC students, to religious and linguistic minorities students, to women, to farmers, to Maulanas of Masjid, or now to Pujari of Mandir, to unemployed youth, or to any other section of society, it is being promised and more or less delivered. Isn't it the corruption of the worst kind? Why should anyone get money in cash, which is not easy to earn? Sadly, some sections of the society getting such benefit turn nonperforming and have a negative contribution to the national growth. This must stop forthwith along with other freebies if we really want our progress and prosperity as a developing nation.

Jai Prakash Gupta | Ambala Cantt

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOMING AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Meditation and deep breathing can help reduce stress, anxiety and self-doubt



SAKSHI SETHI

Today at least one out of ten is being the victim of catastrophising (expecting the worst outcome), overgeneralising (believing that a single failure defines overall ability) and filtering (focusing solely on negatives while ignoring positives). Recent studies have proven that over 70,000 thoughts that come into an individual's mind every day consist of negative ones wherein some of them are the fuel for depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. Automatic Negative Thoughts often abbreviated as ANTs are like unwelcome guests in an individual's mind. They are a psychological phenomenon that can significantly impact mental wellbeing and performance in various aspects of life. These thoughts are spontaneous and fleeting, that arise without conscious effort. Triggered by specific situations, they even involve pessimistic thoughts that arise in response to everyday situations, often leading to increased stress, anxiety and self-doubt. It is very important for an individual to understand and address them for fostering a positive mindset and improving emotional resilience. ANTs are characterised by their automatic nature, as they occur spontaneously without conscious effort. These thoughts are often distorted and irrational, stemming from deep-seated fears or past experiences.

For instance, a student who performs poorly on one test might think, "I'm a complete failure," despite having performed well in other areas or in professional settings, after a presentation that received constructive criticism, an individual might think, "Everyone hated it," even though the feedback was largely positive and aimed at improvement. Similarly, in social situations, a person who notices someone yawning might assume, "I'm boring," disregarding the possibility that the person might simply be tired. These examples highlight how ANTs can distort per-

ceptions and negatively affect confidence and behaviour. The impact of ANTs can be profound. They contribute to a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. By distorting reality and reinforcing negative beliefs, ANTs can hinder decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal relationships. In academic and professional settings, these thoughts can undermine confidence, reduce motivation, and impair performance. Fortunately, there are effective strategies to combat ANTs and develop a more positive thought pattern. One of the most widely used approaches is cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), which focuses on identifying, challenging, and replacing negative thoughts with constructive ones.



For instance, when faced with a thought like, "I'll never succeed," individuals can challenge its validity by reflecting on past successes and recognising their capabilities. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and deep breathing, can also help in managing ANTs. These techniques encourage individuals to observe their thoughts without judgment and creating space to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively. Another useful tool is journaling, which involves writing down thoughts and analysing accuracy can help uncover patterns and triggers. Also, the act of writing helps to crystallise it and get it out of head. Building a strong support system is equally important. Sharing feelings and concerns with trusted friends, family members, or therapists can provide valuable perspectives and emotional relief. Positive affirmations and self-compassion can further counteract the negative effects of ANTs by fostering a sense of worth and capability. Remember, by recognizing its presence and implementing strategies such as CBT, mindfulness, and support-seeking, individuals can break free from the cycle of negativity and cultivate a healthier and more optimistic outlook. Addressing ANTs not only enhances mental wellbeing but also empowers individuals to navigate life's challenges with confidence and resilience.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Japan's struggle for relevance amid China's rise



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

As China rises as a dominant force in a multipolar world, Japan must navigate the challenge of balancing its historical baggage with maintaining its relevance



In December 2024, Japan's Ministry of Defence, through its influential think tank, issued a report that presents an unflinching look at China's meteoric rise and its implications for the global balance of power. Titled The Rising Global South and China, the report offers a sobering analysis of how China's strategic outreach to the Global South—its diplomacy, economic investments, and military presence—poses not only a challenge to the existing international order but also to Japan's place in the world. While the report forms a key element in Japan's evolving worldview regarding its neighbour, it is but one piece of a much larger, more complex puzzle.

The evolving dynamics between China and Japan demand a deeper exploration, not just of economic rivalry, but of historical tensions, ideological shifts, and global transformations that are redefining power structures across Asia and beyond. Why, one might ask, is it crucial to understand Japan's view on China in 2025? The answer lies in the seismic shifts currently reshaping the international order, where China is positioning itself as the hegemon of a new, multipolar world, and Japan must navigate an increasingly treacherous geopolitical terrain. This is not simply about Beijing's growing economic influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or its dominance in trade and investment in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

The contest runs deeper, revealing an ideological, military and moral confrontation where Japan's historical burdens, particularly its unresolved wartime past, complicate its ability to assert leadership in the face of China's rapid expansion. "Based on field research in Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Angola, and elsewhere, the report points out that the expansion of Chinese aid under the principle of non-interference in internal affairs may reduce the effectiveness of Western 'democratisation pressure' that uses aid as leverage."

Consider, for a moment, China's overwhelming presence in the Global South. While Western powers remain preoccupied with their domestic crises, Beijing has formed vast strategic partnerships, economic dependencies, and infrastructural investments across continents.



THE STRATEGIC INTERESTS OF JAPAN AND THE US ARE NOT ALWAYS ALIGNED, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO CHINA. WHILE THE US FOCUSES ON CONTAINING CHINA'S RISE, JAPAN IS CAUGHT IN A PRECARIOUS POSITION, BALANCING ITS NEED FOR SECURITY AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH CHINA AGAINST THE DEMANDS OF ITS AMERICAN ALLY

From Africa's mineral-rich lands to West Asia's energy corridors, China has inserted itself as both a benefactor and an enforcer, using its vast financial resources to extend its influence.

It has become the world's largest creditor, with loans amounting to over \$1.3 trillion since 2000, a sum that far outstrips Japan's modest foreign assistance initiatives. In the face of this, Japan's model of development aid—praised for its transparency and sustainability—has paled in comparison. Japan's approach, while effective in certain regions, lacks the scale and sheer audacity of China's outreach. Moreover, Japan's preoccupation with economic stability and its often subdued geopolitical ambition has left it on the back foot as China has aggressively pursued its vision for a new international order.

There is a deepening ideological divide. The language China uses to frame its influence in the Global South is couched in the rhetoric of anti-imperialism, South-South cooperation, and solidarity with the developing world.

This resonates profoundly with nations that have long been subject to the whims of Western powers. Beijing, adept at using its soft power, positions itself as the champion of the Global South, contrasting its rise with the history of exploitation by colonial and imperial forces. By leveraging its economic might, China is building a coalition of nations willing to challenge the existing global system, one dominated by the US and its allies.

This ideological appeal has found a strong foothold in parts of Africa and Asia, where many developing nations view China's rise as an opportunity to break free from the shackles of Western dominance. For Japan, the legacy of its imperial past complicates its post-war identity, which is grounded in pacifism,

democratic values, and economic growth. While China's rise is perceived as a return to national glory, Japan remains burdened by its wartime actions, which continue to fuel tensions, particularly with Beijing. This unresolved history hampers Japan's diplomacy, overshadowing its economic and diplomatic efforts, as issues of reparations, historical memory, and political reconciliation persist. And yet, Japan cannot simply be reduced to a passive recipient of China's strategic moves.

The reality is that Japan, with its robust economy and advanced technological sector, still holds significant sway in certain parts of the Global South, particularly in Southeast Asia. Japan has long been a key player in the economic development of this region, offering not just financial assistance but a model of governance and sustainable growth. But the rise of China has shifted the balance, and Japan is now forced to reckon with the reality that its traditional model—built on the principles of mutual benefit and technical expertise—may not suffice in the face of China's far-reaching ambitions.

There are many reasons why China is winning over many countries that were once bullied by the West in different ways. China's approach is a wake-up call for those countries still under colonial hangovers. Furthermore, as the report made an interesting observation, Japan's relationship with the United States, while essential for regional stability, is becoming increasingly complicated.

The strategic interests of Japan and the US are not always aligned, especially when it comes to China. While the US focuses on containing China's rise, Japan is caught in a precarious position, balancing its need for security and economic cooperation with China against the

demands of its American ally. Japan's position in this dynamic is fraught with tension—caught between the pressure to align with the US and the reality of an increasingly powerful China on its doorstep.

The question that now looms over Japan's future is not just one of economic survival but of moral and ideological relevance. As the Global South looks increasingly to China for leadership, Japan must reimagine its role in this shifting world order. Japan's model of development, founded on transparency, democracy, and sustainability, is being overshadowed by China's strategic depth and bold vision.

Japan must not only bolster its own economic and diplomatic presence but must also confront the difficult task of reconciling its historical baggage with its aspirations for a secure and prosperous future. To do this, it may be unwise for Japan to stand as a mouthpiece or paper tiger for NATO, learning from the havoc this double-speak military alliance creates. With Trump's return, the competition for the soul of the international system intensifies—a system where shared values and principles, rather than hegemonic power, increasingly define the rules of engagement.

In these circumstances, Japan's ability to adapt, offer a compelling vision for the future of the Global South, and balance its security needs with its diplomatic and economic outreach will determine whether it remains a relevant player or becomes a relic of a past world order, or merely a puppet of a warmongering alliance intent on destabilising the Asia-Pacific.

The coming years will reveal whether Japan can rise to this challenge, or whether China's inexorable march towards global dominance will leave it in the dust.

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

ISRO's PSLV-C60 Mission and POEM-4: A game-changer for India's space exploration

This mission positions India among a select group of nations capable of space docking and sets the stage for revolutionising space experimentation

India's space exploration has reached a significant milestone with the recent launch of the PSLV-C60 mission by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). This mission featured the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) alongside the PSLV-Orbital Experiment Module (POEM-4), propelling India into an elite group of nations capable of space docking. Additionally, ISRO's collaboration with startups, researchers, and academic institutions showcases its commitment to fostering deep-tech advancements while reducing the high costs of space experimentation. **Enhanced Resources** Traditionally, the upper stage of a launch vehicle becomes dormant after payload deployment. However, ISRO has cre-



ANKITH ANAND

actively repurposed the PSLV's fourth stage into POEM, an orbital platform equipped with telemetry, command support, and a power supply. This transformation enables technical and scientific research in space while optimising resource use and lowering financial barriers for researchers, academic institutions, and businesses. POEM-4 reflects ISRO's abil-

ity to turn constraints into opportunities, providing an affordable avenue for space experimentation. This democratisation of space access marks a turning point for India's space sector, opening the doors to innovations previously hindered by high costs and limited resources. **Empowering Startups** ISRO's POEM-4 has significantly benefited startups and academic institutions by enabling cost-effective in-orbit technology testing. Mumbai-based Manastu Space Technologies, for instance, is developing the Vyom 2U Green Propulsion System, which replaces toxic satellite fuels with an environmentally friendly hydrogen peroxide-based alternative. This innovation addresses two key chal-

lenges in space exploration—safety and sustainability—and incorporates advanced features like a high-temperature catalyst, optimised thruster design, and proprietary green propellant MS-289. With ISRO's support, Manastu is preparing for an upcoming PSLV mission to validate its technology, potentially positioning India as a global leader in sustainable satellite operations. GalaxEye, another innovative startup, has developed affordable synthetic aperture radar (SAR) modules. Unlike optical imaging, SAR technology penetrates clouds, providing precise and uninterrupted satellite imagery crucial for disaster management, environmental monitoring, and more. Validating its SAR modules in



space through POEM-4 positions GalaxEye to deliver cost-effective global imaging solutions. Additionally, TakeMe2Space, a startup working on space-based data centers and processing power modules, utilised POEM-4 for initial technology validation. This achievement, despite the startup's limited funding, highlights ISRO's commitment to nurturing deep-tech innova-

tors and breaking down entry barriers for emerging players. **Driving Economic Growth and Innovation** ISRO's approach with POEM-4 aligns with its broader vision of fostering public-private collaboration to stimulate economic growth. By offering advanced testing infrastructure at reduced costs, ISRO accelerates the commercialisation of innovative solutions. Manastu Space's collaboration with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) exemplifies the power of such synergies. With funding from DRDO's Technology Development Fund, Manastu developed the iBooster system through years of intensive research. Its successful delivery underscores the potential of

partnerships between government institutions and startups to advance national defense and space capabilities. **Push for innovations** The PSLV-C60 mission and the POEM-4 initiative position ISRO as a leader in frugal yet impactful innovation. By repurposing resources and promoting collaboration, ISRO demonstrates that groundbreaking advancements do not require massive budgets but thrive on ingenuity and inclusivity. Dr. Pawan Goenka, Chairman of IN-SPACE, aptly summarized the initiative's significance: "POEM is a practical solution deployed by ISRO that allows Indian startups, academic institutions, and research organizations to test their space technologies with-

out the need to launch entire satellites. By making this platform accessible, we are reducing entry barriers and enabling a wider range of entities to contribute to the space sector." **Toward a Multi-Trillion-Dollar Space Economy** India's ambitions of becoming a multi-trillion-dollar economy find a strong ally in ISRO's innovations. The space sector, driven by public-private partnerships, support for deep-tech startups, and inclusive access to space, is poised to play a key role in this vision. Initiatives like POEM-4 lay the groundwork for a thriving space ecosystem that fosters innovation, economic growth, and global leadership.

(The writer is a founding partner at Riceberg Ventures; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

India-Oman to review progress of FTA talks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Oman will review the progress of talks for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries during the visit of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to Muscat this week, an official statement said on Sunday.

Though the negotiations for the proposed agreement were concluded, Oman has sought revision of its market access offers on some products.

On January 14, India and Oman held the fifth round of talks for the agreement, which is aimed at boosting bilateral economic ties.

The negotiations for the agreement, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in

November 2023.

In such agreements, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on a maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and attract investments.

"The talks on India-Oman CEPA which are at an advanced stage are likely to get further impetus during the visit. Both sides are negotiating and exploring a commercially significant, balanced, equitable, ambitious and mutually beneficial CEPA," the commerce ministry said.

Goyal will also attend the joint commission meeting with Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al-Yousef during January 27-28. A business delegation is



According to the think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Institute), Indian goods worth USD 3.7 billion like gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery may get a significant boost in Oman, once both sides reach a comprehensive free trade agreement. These goods at present face a 5 per cent import duty in Oman.

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

Reduction in import duties under the CEPA will allow Indian products to enter the Omani market at competitive prices.

With a population of 1.4 billion compared to Oman's 5 million, India represents a vast consumer market for Oman.

accompanying the Minister for the Joint Business Council meeting.

On the sidelines, Goyal is also expected to meet Sultan bin Salim Al Habshi, Minister of Finance and Chairperson of the Ministerial Committee for CEPA; and Sheikh Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidy, President, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free

Zones (OPAZ).

Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries for India. India already has a similar agreement with another GCC member UAE which came into effect in May 2022.

The bilateral trade has declined to USD 8.94 billion (exports USD 4.42 billion and imports USD 4.5 billion) in 2023-24 from USD 12.39 billion (exports USD 4.47 billion and imports USD 7.91 billion) in 2022-23.

India's key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, and iron and steel.



Goa minister launches OYO Accelerator Program

Goa tourism minister Rohan Khaunte on Sunday launched OYO's Accelerator program which seeks to mentor and help small first-generation hoteliers to expand their business operations in the coastal state. Khaunte and OYO's Chief Operating Officer Varun Jain were present on the occasion. The minister also distributed Rs 25 lakh to the five beneficiaries of OYO's Accelerator Program. A spokesperson of Goa Tourism said that OYO is planning to add over 500 hotels and generate more than 5,000 new jobs in the state over the next one year through this joint initiative with the department. These properties will be located across all key regions - north, central and south Goa, he said. As part of the Accelerator programme, OYO is encouraging first-generation hoteliers to innovate and enter new markets, expand their customer base, and increase earnings by offering them mentorship, access to technology, dedicated relationship managers, and financial support. "These hoteliers will also be able to take advantage of OYO's network of over 15,000 corporate accounts and more than 10,000 travel agents across India to boost business prospects," he said.



Shreeji Shipping Global to raise funds via IPO

Shreeji Shipping Global Ltd, which provides shipping and logistic solution for dry bulk cargo, has filed draft papers with markets regulator Sebi seeking its approval to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The IPO is entirely a fresh issue of 2 crore equity shares, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company is planning to use Rs 289.4 crore out of the IPO proceeds for acquisition of dry bulk carriers in the supramax category in the secondary market, and further use Rs 19.5 crore for repaying debt. As of September 2024, the company had a total borrowings of Rs 264.54 crore, the draft papers filed on Friday showed. The flagship company of Jamnagar-based Shreeji Group primarily focuses on non-major ports and jetties, particularly along the west coast of India. Until September 2024, it has provided services at more than 20 ports and jetties including major Indian ports at Kandla, non-major ports at Navlakhi, Magdalla, Bhavnagar, Bedi and Dharmatar and overseas port at Puttalam Port (Sri Lanka). According to a D&B Report, cargo handled at ports in India is expected to grow at an annual rate of 10.80 per cent to 2,849 MMTs by Fiscal 2030 from 1,540 million metric tons (MMTs) in Fiscal 2024.



Hindustan Zinc likely to turn net debt-free : Report

Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL) is likely to turn net debt-free by the next financial year despite significant investment in capacity expansion, according to a report. According to brokerage firm Ventura Securities global demand for base metals -- zinc and lead, is expected to grow at a CAGR of 6/7 per cent... Domestically, India is a net exporter of zinc while having a deficit in lead supplies. Both these circumstances are favourable to HZL. "HZL is expected to turn net debt-free by FY26," it said. The country's largest producer of zinc, lead and silver had earlier said that it expects to reduce its debt to about Rs 2,000 crore by March-end from about Rs 6,000 crore at the end of the September quarter. Silver is fast gaining traction for investment demand and its use cases in industrial applications is only rising. The timely expansion in silver production capacities augurs well given the exploding demand, the report said. HZL has planned capacity expansion of Rs 16,000 crore, including sustaining capex, for the period FY 24-27 for funding the roaster plant in Rajasthan's Debari, fumer and fertilizer plant at Chanderiya (sulphuric acid forward integration), in the desert state and 450 mw renewable energy addition.

MARKETS THIS WEEK

US Fed rate decisions, Budget, earnings major driving factors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an eventful week ahead, stock market investors will take cues from major events like the US Federal Reserve's interest rate decision, the upcoming Union Budget and Q3 earnings, analysts said.

Besides, global factors, trading activity of foreign investors, rupee-dollar trend and movement of international oil benchmark Brent crude would also influence trading in the equity market, according to experts.

"All eyes are now on the upcoming Union Budget, scheduled for February 1, as the market looks for a meaningful trigger to shift sentiment positively. The ongoing Q3 earnings season has been lacklustre so far, especially in the consumption and financial sectors. "On the global front, the

Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) policy meeting will be critical," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Additionally, movements in the US bond yields and the Dollar Index will remain important to track. Signs of reversals in these two areas could drive positivity in global markets, Meena said.

For the Indian equity market, FII flows will continue to play a crucial role, he added.

Stock markets will remain open for trading on February 1, Saturday, for the Union Budget presentation, BSE and NSE had announced last month.

This week is important, not just for the equity markets but for the economy as well, with the Union Budget scheduled for February 1 (Saturday)," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.



Hospitality sector seeks infra status

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lack of infrastructure status, rationalisation of tax rates, easier visa processes and more incentives by state governments to promote investments are some of the key issues that need to be addressed for India's hospitality sector to realise its full potential, Hotel Association of India President K B Kachru said ahead of the Budget.

In an interview, Kachru, emphasised upon the need for India to be marketed in a better fashion, and noted that countries like Japan, South Korea and Thailand have been able to grow their GDP by giving importance to the tourism sector.

He emphasised upon the need for India to identify and promote MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) destinations with high potential, and work towards building the required infrastructure to draw tourists globally.

"We need investment. Investment can't be done by the government alone. Private



sector has to come in and invest. What would motivate them to invest in the country is they must have a respectable (return on investment) ROI then only they will invest," the Hotel Association of India President said.

Highlighting that "taxation is a big issue" in India, Kachru pointed out the differential rates of taxation and stressed upon the need to rationalise the tax rates and follow best practices of countries such as Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Moreover, he said, at the

state level, governments have to be forthcoming in inviting people and giving them some incentives to invest their money.

"... There was a time when we used to have close to 100 licenses to start a hotel. It has been substantially reduced. But still, I think we need to, we need to make it easier for people to operate hotels... Principally, everybody accepts that there should be a single window, but till that stage comes, I feel we should reduce approval processes to the minimum," Kachru said.



JK Cement to acquire majority stake in Saifco Cements

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

JK Cement, one of the leading cement producers, has said it will acquire a 60 per cent stake of Saifco Cements in a deal through which it will enter into the Jammu & Kashmir market.

The JK Group firm will acquire a 60 per cent stake in Saifco Cements, which has an integrated manufacturing unit at Khunmoh in Srinagar, at a valuation of Rs 174 crore, according to a joint statement.

Saifco's integrated manufacturing unit in Srinagar is spread across 54 acres of land and has a clinker capacity of 0.26 MTPA and grinding capacity of 0.42 MTPA.

Besides, it has captive limestone reserves spread over 144.25 hectares with a total minable reserve of 129 million tonnes.

"The acquisition will help the company expand its footprint into the state of Jammu and Kashmir Region," it said.

JK Cement has a manufacturing capacity of 24.2 MTPA (million tonnes per annum) having a strong presence in markets such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Its turnover for FY24 was at Rs 86.30 crore.

JK Cement Managing Director Raghavpat Singhania said this acquisition is a significant step forward in accelerating JK Cement's growth journey.

Aequs to set up MRO facility, plans to hire more people

PNS ■ BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA)

Bullish on growth opportunities, contract manufacturer Aequs is set to strengthen its aerospace manufacturing capabilities, expand consumer segment footprint as well as set up an MRO this year.

The company will also ramp up manpower by around 1,000 people in the financial year ending March 2026, according to its Chairman and CEO Aravind Melligeri.

Aequs -- which provides vertically integrated product solu-

tions for the aerospace and consumer goods industries, including high precision electronics components -- currently has around USD 120 million annual revenues.

Airbus, Boeing, Collins and Safran are among the aerospace customers of Aequs, which also has facilities in France and the US.

Elaborating on the future plans, Melligeri mentioned about expanding into the precision consumer electronics space and setting up the Maintenance, Repair and



Overhaul (MRO) jointly with Canada's Magellan Aerospace Corporation in 2025. Initially, the facility will start with works for turbo-prop engines.

"Consumer electronics is also a field where we feel we can

expand... consumer durables side, we initially focused on domestic market and now we will focus on the exports side," he said during an interaction here this week.

Aequs operates a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Belagavi, Karnataka that offers an end-to-end manufacturing value stream, including forging, machining, surface treatment and aero assemblies.

It is also the country's first notified precision engineering SEZ. At present, the company's aerospace vertical has around

1,800 staff and the plan is to add 300 to 400 more people this fiscal, Melligeri said.

Overall, Aequs expects to increase its overall manpower, which is currently around 4,000, by another 1,000 more people.

Melligeri said precision manufacturing is its core strength and added that on the consumer segment, "we are talking to some smart ring makers... it is a growing market."

According to him, 60-70 per cent of the value addition to the products is happening in the SEZ.

'PLI benefits to handicrafts, leather help create more jobs'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government in its coming Budget must extend fiscal benefits under the PLI (production linked incentive) scheme to sectors such as handicrafts and leather that can create more jobs, Deloitte said on Sunday.

It also suggested that the existing PLI schemes must continue in sectors that have seen success, such as electronics, auto and semiconductors. The government in 2021 announced PLI schemes for 14 sectors, including telecommunications, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chem-



istry cell battery, drones, and pharma, with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.

Deloitte further suggested that to improve global liquidity (once the Western central banks start easing their monetary policies), the government can raise the ceiling for investment size and remove location restrictions to attract more foreign investment.

"Multi-brand retail and e-

commerce are some sectors that may benefit from this," Runkil Majumdar, Economist, Deloitte India, said.

Further, she said that one of the biggest challenges will be to revive merchandise exports that have contracted by 3 per cent in FY24. To achieve the USD 1-trillion target by 2030, the government will have to create a roadmap. "We expect the government to soon complete the FTA (free trade agreement) talks with Oman, Peru, the UK, the European Union, Chile, the South African Customs Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council," Majumdar said, adding that this could boost India's exports in these regions amid global uncertainty.

BUDGET 2025

Tech industry bats for deep tech fund to bolster startup ecosystem

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's apex IT industry body Nasscom has batted for tweaks in safe harbour rules and widening the scope for utilisation of SEZ reinvestment reserves in its Budget wishlist, while advocating for creation of a central deep tech fund to bolster startup ecosystem in India.

Creation of a grant framework for the deeptech ecosystem, and making the deferment of the time of payment of tax on Employee Stock Option Plan available to employees of all DPIIT-recognized startups also tops the Budget expectations of the industry.

The Union Budget for financial year 2025-26 is scheduled to be presented in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2025.

For the USD 250 billion export-led Indian IT industry, the Budget comes amid continued global macro headwinds, geopolitical risks, and growing unease about possibility of sudden policy and tariff moves by the US, where President Donald Trump has promised to script a new, glorious chapter for America with his headline-grabbing second-term.

Issues under transfer-pricing regime, expanding the scope for



utilisation of SEZ reinvestment reserve for tech companies, as well as measures to promote startup in India figure high on Nasscom's budget expectations.

Among the key asks is also making deferment of the time of payment of tax on Employee Stock Option Plan (ESOP) available to the employees of more startups.

"The deferment - even if you look at only DPIIT-registered startups - is actually available only to about 2.5 per cent of these startups.

"While the DPIIT has roughly around 1.43 lakh startups registered on its portal, of which 3,600 odd are certified by the inter-ministerial board, and only these startups can get this benefit," Ashish Aggarwal, Vice

President and Head of Public Policy at Nasscom told PTI.

Given that the employee is required to pay full tax and there is only a deferment of the time of payment, the benefit should be available to all DPIIT recognised start-ups, not limited to 3,605 start-ups who have obtained IMB certificate under IT Act, according to Aggarwal.

"In fact, there is a merit in going beyond," he said.

Along with making the deferment available for all DPIIT recognised startups, safeguards can be added to say that eligible ESOPs will be available only to employees of DPIIT registered start-ups, and that ESOPs will be offered only to Indian resident taxpayers.

Demand revival aids automobile exports growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile exports from India rose 19 per cent year-on-year in 2024 led by a robust dispatch of two-wheelers, passenger vehicles and commercial vehicles, according to SIAM data.

Overall shipments rose to 50,98,810 units last year, up 19 per cent from 42,85,809 units exported in 2023.

"Last year saw revival in demand for the Indian automobiles from emerging markets

like Latin America and Africa," Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) Director General Rajesh Menon told PTI when asked about reasons for exports growth last year.

In 2024, passenger vehicle exports grew 10 per cent to 7,43,976 units as compared to 6,77,956 units in January-December period of 2023.

Utility vehicle shipments rose 33 per cent year-on-year to 3,23,621 units while van ship-



ments also jumped 14 per cent annually to 8,207 units.

Passenger car dispatches, however, declined 4 per cent last year to 4,12,148 units as compared to 4,27,876 units in 2023. Two-wheeler exports rose 23 per cent to 39,77,162 units as compared to 32,43,673 units shipped in 2023, led by motorcycles which grew by 24 per cent to 33,97,586 units.

Scooter shipments rose to 5,73,230 units last year from 4,91,329 units in 2023.

Hidayat Khan on the rendition of *Jana Gana Mana*

'IT DIDN'T FEEL LIKE A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY, BUT A HARMONIOUS EXPERIENCE'

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Republic Day holds a profound place in the heart of every Indian. It marks the birth of the Indian Republic, a day that honours the spirit of freedom and the adoption of the Indian Constitution. More than just a national holiday, it is a vibrant celebration of the unity that binds a nation so rich in diversity, where traditions, cultures, and languages converge to create a unique tapestry of shared identity. This year, the celebrations are set to be marked by a unique and poignant musical tribute. Renowned sitar virtuoso Hidayat Khan, son of the legendary Vilayat Khan, has released his deeply moving rendition of the Indian National Anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, on this very day. Infused with a soulful sitar alaap, resonant tabla rhythms and a powerful vocal solo, his interpretation is not only a tribute to India's cultural heritage but also a deeply personal expression of nostalgia and reflection. Recalling his emotional response to revisiting *Jana Gana Mana*, Khan shared how the project transported him back to his childhood. "The last time I sang *Jana Gana Mana* was in eighth grade in Dehradun. Revisiting it now brought back a flood of childhood memories. It's amazing how music has the power to transport you—just playing it on the sitar instantly took me back to that warm, nostalgic, and carefree time. It was a deeply moving experience, filled with warmth and a sense of connection to my roots. I can vividly recall those icy mornings, rushing to school, and standing in the assembly to sing *Jana Gana Mana*, Khan reminisced. "It's a charming and heartwarming memory, a snapshot of life in a beautiful small town in India that shaped so much of my identity," recalls the maestro in an exclusive chat with The Pioneer. For him, this project was not just an artistic endeavor but also a reflection of the values he grew up with. He noted that despite living in New York for

many years and traveling across the globe, the anthem symbolized the enduring principles that have shaped his life. "It didn't feel like a heavy responsibility, but rather a peaceful and harmonious experience. Revisiting this deeply symbolic piece allowed me to reconnect with my roots and reflect on the values that continue to guide me even today." When asked about how he envisioned the anthem evolving through the sitar, an instrument so closely tied to his family's legacy, he emphasized the personal nature of his approach. "The sitar is deeply connected to my emotions and my family's heritage, so it felt like the most natural way to express how I see India. Everything I've learned from my father, my forefathers, and the many gurus who have guided me—shapes how I communicate through my music. This piece is a reflection of all those influences coming together. I hope when people hear the anthem and watch the video, they can experience my journey and vision of India." Interestingly, Khan chose to keep the rendition deeply rooted in traditional Indian aesthetics rather than incorporating global influences. "I intentionally presented this rendition in the most organic and traditionally Indian way. The piece begins with an alaap, which unfolds the melody in a subtle and abstract manner. This is followed by the rhythmic section, which builds the mood, leading to the final vocal rendition of *Jana Gana Mana*. The predominant instruments and sounds are purely Indian, acoustic, and organic. The goal was to let the natural essence of our traditions take center stage." As the conversation shifts to the evolving landscape of music in today's fast-paced world, he provides an insightful perspective on classical music's role in preserving profound traditions like the anthem. In a time when music is often consumed in short snippets, he underscores the power of depth over length. "In today's fast-paced world, where music is often consumed in snippets, it's worth remembering that some of the greatest maestros of

In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, sitar virtuoso Hidayat Khan opened up about the profound personal journey behind his rendition of the national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*. As he revisited the anthem, Khan was transported back to his childhood in Dehradun, where memories of singing it in school flooded his mind. For him, this project is more than just a musical expression; it's a heartfelt tribute to his heritage, a reflection of the values passed down by his family



Indian classical music recorded on 78 rpm records, which were just three minutes long. Despite the brevity, those recordings had an unimaginable and profound impact, proving that it's not the length of the piece but the depth of its expression that matters." Hidayat emphasizes the timeless power of classical music, stating, "Classical music, even within a short span, can encapsulate the essence of something as profound as the national anthem. It preserves the

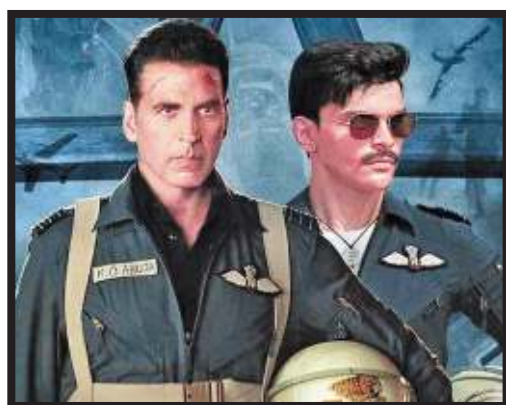
soul of the music, offering a moment of stillness and reflection amidst the noise of modern life. That's the timeless power of classical music—it doesn't just fill time; it transforms it." Turning to the cultural significance of his project, he hopes his rendition of *Jana Gana Mana* will spark a deeper conversation about India's rich heritage. "My goal with this rendition is to showcase the beauty and emotional depth of acoustic Indian classical music and instruments. I hope listeners can connect with the sensibility and aesthetics we've woven into this piece. If it inspires people to reflect on India's rich cultural and musical heritage, then I believe we've achieved something meaningful." One of the most daunting aspects of reimagining the anthem, according to Hidayat, was striking the delicate balance between honoring the anthem's original essence and adding his own artistic touch. He explains, "The most challenging part was finding the right balance between honoring the anthem's original essence and adding my own artistic interpretation. *Jana Gana Mana* is so deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness and carries immense cultural significance. As an artist, it was important to me that my rendition didn't distort its meaning but rather presented it in a way that allowed for personal expression while still respecting its solemnity. It was a delicate task, ensuring that the music felt both authentic to the anthem and true to my own artistic voice." When asked how he ensured that his version would resonate with modern audiences while staying true to its origins, Hidayat expressed a refreshing view of musical appreciation. "I don't see audiences as strictly modern or traditional, or defined by age. For me, there's a certain aesthetic and sensibility that guides my music, and that's the audience I aim to reach." He further emphasizes that music transcends labels, offering something universal. "Whether someone is from a different tradition or age group, I believe that if they can connect to the vision and the emotion behind the music, the piece

will resonate with them. It's not about labels, but about creating something that speaks to the heart." Despite the weight of the project, Hidayat reveals that he didn't experience moments of self-doubt or hesitation during the creative process. Once the vision for the rendition was clear, the work unfolded naturally. His deep connection with his father's teachings also played a significant role in shaping this project. Reflecting on how his father's influence continues to guide him, he notes, "Every time I hold my sitar, a part of my father's spirit and teachings comes through. His contributions to the world of music are immeasurable, and there's no way to engage with the sitar without being deeply inspired by him. His influence is embedded in everything I create, and that inspiration is always present, especially in a project as meaningful as this." As an artiste, Hidayat is keenly aware of the anthem's significance as a unifying force in India's culturally diverse landscape. "The beauty of India lies in its diversity," he says thoughtfully adding, "It's an extraordinary melting pot of cultures, where every 50 miles, the language, food, and traditions may change, yet we all live under the same umbrella. Despite these differences, when we come together and sing the national anthem, there's a moment where all that diversity fades, and we are united—Indian at heart, soul, and body. The anthem becomes a powerful reminder of our shared identity and collective spirit." Reflecting on the deeper meaning behind his rendition, Hidayat shares that his team and he have poured their hearts and souls into this re-imagining of *Jana Gana Mana*. "Through it, we hope to convey the vast heritage and culture from which we come," he says. "We want to reflect how we've evolved—absorbing influences from around the world while still preserving our roots." The soul of the rendition, he believes, lies in its message of unity. "The soul we wish to bring to the anthem is one of unity: one soul, one message, one voice. It's a celebration of diversity, embracing the world, and honoring humanity as a whole."

BEHIND THE HAIR

Darshan talks about Akshay Kumar and Veer Pahariya's *Sky Force* looks

When it comes to crafting memorable hair designs in cinema, Darshan Yewalekar is a name that stands out. Renowned for his ability to blend creativity with authenticity, Yewalekar once again showcases his mastery as the hair designer for the highly anticipated film *Sky Force*. Tasked with recreating the look of an era while celebrating India's aviation heroes, his work on the film has received widespread acclaim.



"The brief was clear—stay true to the time period while ensuring each character had a distinctive identity," Yewalekar explained. For a story set in a bygone era, his process began with thorough research. "Photographs from that time were scarce, so I had to rely heavily on references and my creative instincts to design hairstyles that felt authentic and relevant to the narrative," he added.

A highlight of the project for Yewalekar was working closely with Akshay Kumar, who leads the film's stellar cast. "Akshay sir is incredible to collaborate with," Yewalekar shared. "He places immense trust in your vision, but his insights always add depth to the character. For *Sky Force*, we worked on subtle hair transitions to reflect his character's journey over time."

The film also marks the debut of Veer Pahariya, who plays a pivotal role.

Designing his look presented a unique opportunity. "Veer was a blank canvas," said Yewalekar. "He was open to experimentation, especially with his moustache. We explored several styles before finalizing the perfect look for his character."

Designing hairstyles for a military film comes with its own set of challenges. "We

had to adhere to the strict grooming standards of Air Force officers, which meant avoiding anything overly dramatic or stylized," Yewalekar explained. Despite these constraints, he managed to create distinctive looks for each character, ensuring their personalities shone through.

The entire cast, including Sara Ali Khan, Nimrat Kaur, and the ensemble, benefited from Yewalekar's meticulous attention to detail. His designs seamlessly blended historical authenticity with cinematic flair, bringing each character to life in a way that resonated with the audience.

As *Sky Force* continues to earn rave reviews, Yewalekar's work stands as a testament to his expertise in combining storytelling with visual artistry. His ability to create hair designs that are both meaningful and memorable ensures that the film's characters remain etched in the hearts of viewers long after the credits roll.

Ayurveda's secret to healthy skin

Cold winters can lead to dryness, roughness, and sensitivity of skin. The following ingredients are chosen for their ability to restore moisture, nourish the deeper layers of skin, and thus counter the ill effects of harsh winters on skin. They align with the principle of "snehana" (oleation) as per Ayurveda, and work synergistically to combat winter skin issues.

1. Sesame Oil

- **Properties:** Rich in ceramides, antioxidants, and essential fatty acids.
- **Benefits:** Deeply moisturizes and nourishes the skin, protects the lipid barrier, and prevents dryness. Its warming quality makes it ideal for combating Vata dosha imbalance during winter.

2. Almond Oil

- **Properties:** Packed with Vitamin E and fatty acids.
- **Benefits:** Helps hydrate and repair dry, flaky skin, promotes elasticity, and gives a natural glow. Balances Vata and Pitta doshas. Being rich in Vitamin E, almond oil locks hydration in the cells, making your skin soft and bouncy even in winter.

3. Saffron (Kumkum)

- **Properties:** Rich in antioxidants and carotenoids.
- **Benefits:** Enhances complexion, fights free radicals, and promotes skin regeneration. It is beneficial in countering the skin dullness commonly observed in winters.

4. Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera)

- **Properties:** Contains bioactive compounds like withanolides.
- **Benefits:** Promotes collagen production,



reduces stress-induced dryness, and enhances skin resilience. Supports Vata balancing during winter.

5. Ghee (Clarified Butter)

- **Properties:** Rich in essential fatty acids and vitamins A, D, and E.
- **Benefits:** Provides intense hydration, reduces flakiness, and heals chapped skin. Balances Vata and Pitta doshas.

6. Turmeric (Haridra)

- **Properties:** Contains curcumin, a potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant.
- **Benefits:** Prevents dullness, soothes redness, and keeps skin glowing in harsh weather. Balances Kapha and Pitta doshas.

7. Sandalwood (Chandana)

- **Properties:** Cooling, soothing, and moisturizing with natural emollients.
- **Benefits:** Locks in moisture, soothes irritation, and reduces inflammation. It is particularly useful for balancing Pitta dosha.

8. Honey (Madhu)

- **Properties:** Humectant with natural antibacterial properties.
- **Benefits:** Retains skin moisture, exfoliates gently, and heals winter-related cracks. Balances Kapha and Vata doshas.

(The author, Dr. Swathi, is the Head of Research & Product Development, at Purely Yours.)

From drama to action: February releases has it all!

Bollywood is ready to light up the silver screen in February 2025 with a lineup of films that promise to capture hearts and keep audiences on the edge of their seats. From love stories to historical dramas and comedies, here's a list of the 5 must-watch Bollywood movies releasing this February—

Loveyapa - 7th February 2025

A fresh romantic tale featuring a youthful and charming pair, *Loveyapa* promises to be the perfect start to Valentine's month. With Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor in the lead, this film celebrates young love and its

emotional journey.

Inn Galiyon Mein - 28th February 2025

Bringing the complexities of modern relationships to the forefront, this romantic movie examines how love and social media intertwine in today's world. This thought-provoking film marks the big-screen debut of Avantika Dassani alongside Vivaan Shah. Javed Jafferi plays a pivotal role in this gripping story, which is produced by Vinod Yadav and Neeru Yadav and co-produced by Alcor Productions. *Inn Galiyon Mein* is set to release on 28th February 2025.

Chhaava - 14th February 2025

A grand historical saga featuring powerhouse performers including Vicky Kaushal, Rashmika Mandanna, Akshaye Khanna, Ashutosh Rana, and Divya Dutta, *Chhaava* is a must-watch for fans of gripping narratives and epic visuals. This epic drama explores the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the courageous son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Set against a dramatic backdrop, the film is expected to make a big impact at the box office.

Bad Ass Ravi Kumar - 7th February 2025

This action-packed entertainer combines over-the-top stunts, witty humor, and chart-topping music. With Himesh Reshammiya's signature flair and Prabhudeva's exceptional choreography, this film is sure to leave audiences thrilled.

Mere Husband Ki Biwi - 21st February 2025

A hilarious take on love triangles and relationship chaos, *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* promises to be a laugh riot. Featuring Arjun Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Shakti Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh, Anita Raj, Dino Morea, and Aditya Seal, this movie is perfect for a fun outing with friends and family.

what's brewing?



Dr. Madhavi Chowdhary



Third edition of 'Save the Weave' a one-day exhibition was organized by the Room 9 Pop-up Store, at Road 41, Jubilee hills, The Exposition was inaugurated by Tollywood Actress Dimple Hayathi and Dr. Madhavi Chowdhary Founder of Celebrity Secrets.

Dimple Hayathi

PARTY



Experium Eco Friendly Park, a first-of-its-kind eco-recreational wonderland, officially opens its doors to nature enthusiasts and thrill-seekers alike! Located at Proddutur village, near Pragati Resorts, Chilukuru Balaji Temple Road, Hyderabad, this groundbreaking attraction is set to redefine how we connect with nature by blending immersive environmental education, botanical wonders, and adrenaline-pumping experiences. On 28th January Experium is going to be inaugurated by Chief Minister of Telangana Revanth Reddy, Minister for Tourism and Culture of Telangana Jupally Krishna Rao and Mega Star Chiranjeevi.



"Celebrate this Republic Day with Jahanpanah! Discover unbeatable offers with up to 75% off on stunning ethnic wear for men and women. Embrace tradition and modernity as we unveil our bold new logo, symbolizing our rich legacy and evolution. That's not all-step into a new era of fashion with Jaan-e-Jahan, our first-ever women's ethnic wear collection that redefines elegance. Join actress Rashi Singh as we celebrate style, tradition, and innovation in this festive season. Don't miss out on these exciting surprises-shop now and be a part of Jahanpanah's incredible journey!"



Photos by - SV Chary



Renowned chess trainee Venkatchalam Saravanan, who acted as a chess trainer to former world chess champion Viswanathan Anand congratulated the children of Ekgra Chess Academy, Super Twins Amaya Agarwal and Anay Agarwal, who became champions of the chess tournament held in Europe. Viswanathan Anand, said that today the popularity of chess has increased, there are opportunities, conditions and technology. It is a matter of pride that India is the world champion today. He said that chess is not a game but it is useful as a mental power. Academy CEO Sandeep Naidu, Chief Coach Chaitanya, Coaches Sheetal and Bharat Kumar Reddy participated in the programme.



PappDarzi Lifestyle Exhibition This expo formally inauguration by Uppala Srinivas Gupta Tpc Prachara Committee co convener along with organizers Ramya Reddy, Sneha Reddy and Akanksha Reddy, at PMR Convention, Bandlaguda Road, Nagole



The Blue Cross of Hyderabad, in partnership with Mars Petcare, today hosted the third edition of the highly anticipated LoveMyIndie Dog Show at Chaitanya Vidyalaya, Domalguda. This annual event marks the 32nd anniversary of Blue Cross of Hyderabad and celebrates the unparalleled beauty of Indie dogs. Dedicated to championing the resilience and unique spirit of Indie dogs, Amala Akkeneni, Salil Murthy, Dr. Anil Murari, Dr. B.J. Vanaja Kumari, Dr. Nasreen Anjum, Neeraja Valisetty and Ashmitha Marva evaluated the participants on criteria such as behavior and friendliness.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



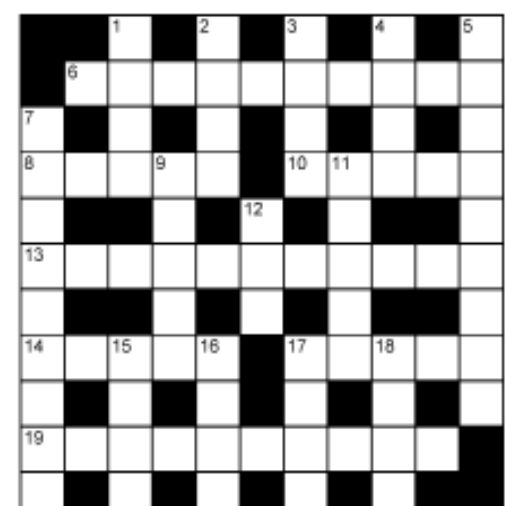
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



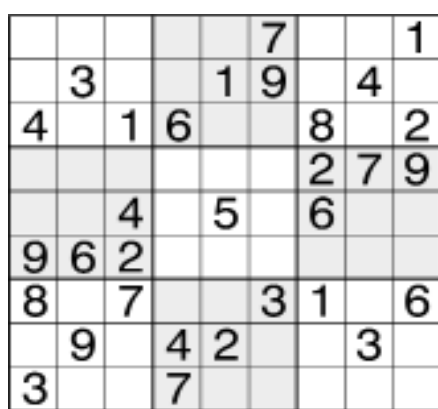
CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



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

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

- 6 Not finished
- 8 Chewed up and swallowed
- 10 Tongans live in this country
- 13 Someone who works with wires, lights, switches
- 14 A name for a doll
- 17 Have a quarrel
- 19 These are published daily

DOWN

- 9 To do something very well
- 11 Happen
- 12 Snoop
- 15 Important rules
- 16 The barks of a small dog
- 17 Mountains
- 18 A young woman



GINGER MEGGS



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

FROM PAINTING TO ACTING

MAHESH SRIRAM'S DEBUT IN TELUGU CINEMA AFTER HOLLYWOOD TRIUMPH

Born and raised in Hyderabad, Mahesh Sriram initially ventured into animation and modeling before making his mark in Hollywood, where he worked with top brands and featured in films like Barbie and Haunted Mansion. Now, with his Telugu debut in Phani, directed by VN Aditya, Mahesh blends his global experiences with his roots, offering a fresh perspective to the Telugu film industry



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

There is a Telugu saying, "inta gelichi racha gelavali" (win at home before you conquer the world), but when it comes to Mahesh Sriram, it's the complete reverse. This Telugu actor, who initially appeared in a few Hollywood films, is now making his debut in Telugu cinema with the film Phani, directed by VN Aditya. It's an intriguing journey for Mahesh Sriram, from Hyderabad to Hollywood.

"I was born and brought up here in Hyderabad and studied at Nizam College," said Mahesh Sriram. When asked about his name, he explained that his surname is Sriramula, but after moving to the USA, it was shortened to Mahesh Sriram. From a young age, Mahesh was interested in creativity. "I used to paint from my school days and also participated in competitions. They gave topics like nature, environment, life, and many others, so I painted according to those themes," he shared about his early artistic interests. His passion gradually evolved into animation. "I wanted to pursue the creative side, so I chose animation," he added.

While representing Andhra Pradesh in NCC, Mahesh's photo was published in the newspaper, leading to a new path in fashion and modeling. "Some people saw my photo and approached me for fashion and modeling," he recalls. This happened more than twenty years ago. "I still remember modeling for a motorbike advertisement and then for a festival," he said. At that time, his face appeared on many hoardings and print advertisements. "Many of my commercial advertisements were printed in newspapers," he noted.

However, Mahesh's true interest was in the creative side, so he focused on animation and joined Pentamedia Graphics in Chennai. "It was one of the leading animation studios in India, working on various projects, including Hollywood films on the technical side. When I left that company, I was familiar with 3D animation, motion capture technology, and filmmaking behind the scenes," he explained.

explained.

Afterward, he moved to the UK, where he worked for three years in London. "Working in India, the UK, and other European countries helped me merge with different cultures and gain a wealth of knowledge," he said. He was also invited to the Cannes Film Festival, and all these experiences eventually opened doors for him in the USA.

"Working in the USA was a completely different experience. I worked with top brands, participated in fashion shows, judged beauty pageants, and performed as a showstopper. I gained immense knowledge, especially regarding discipline, while working with directors and teams for commercials," Mahesh shared. His modeling career, which spanned nearly six years, ultimately led to his acting debut in Hollywood films.

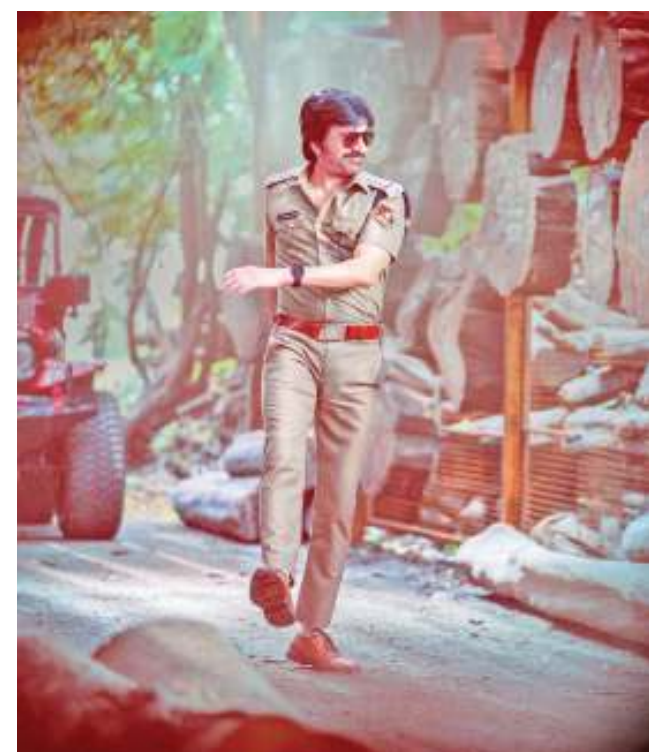
Mahesh explained the process of breaking into Hollywood: "To get into a Hollywood film, you first need an agent, whether you're a model or an actor. They guide and train you. After that comes the audition process, where casting directors approach agencies, who then contact agents to shortlist actors. Once you're selected, it's a completely different experience," he said. Mahesh appeared in a brief role in the high-budget Hollywood film Barbie, and later landed a significant role in Haunted Mansion. "I got to work with Jamie Lee Curtis and Danny DeVito, which boosted my confidence. I play a Maharaja in the film," he added.

Currently, Mahesh is busy with two Hollywood projects, one of which features him in the lead role. "The shooting is almost complete, with just ten days left. Now, I am in Hyderabad, and once I'm done here, I will join the Hollywood shoots," he said.

Meanwhile, Mahesh is also acting in a Telugu film titled Phani, directed by VN Aditya. The filmmakers were looking for an actor based in the USA, and a friend of Mahesh suggested his name. "VN Aditya reached out to me over Zoom a few times, and after meeting him in the USA, I signed the film. The shoot is completed, and the story revolves around a couple and a snake," Mahesh explained. The title Phani refers to a snake. "The couple living in the USA have big dreams, but an incident changes everything. It's a thriller, and I believe the film has turned out really well," he said.

Reflecting on his experiences in Hollywood, Mahesh mentioned the discipline he learned working there. "Time management and discipline are extremely important," he said. He also runs his own animation company, which handles corporate projects, commercials, and animations. "That's how I can balance my work in movies," he explained.

Mahesh expressed his happiness about acting in a Telugu film. "Telugu is my root, and it's where I come from. I'm thrilled to be a part of this film," he said. When asked about juggling work in both Telugu and Hollywood, he responded, "I am willing to work in both industries." He believes Telugu cinema has gained global recognition, and Indian actors are now respected in Hollywood. "The big difference in Hollywood is that you have to compete with international actors in a highly competitive market, which is a significant challenge," he shared. He added that with his growing experience, it's now much easier to get into Hollywood films than it was before.



MASS JATHARA GLIMPSE

Ravi Teja brings back his iconic swag in full force

On the occasion of Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja's birthday, the Mass Jathara glimpse was unveiled, sending fans into a frenzy. The glimpse brings back the vintage Ravi Teja magic that audiences have cherished over the years. From his unmatched energy to his iconic swag and electrifying vibe, this is a complete package of MASS ENTERTAINMENT.

Adding to the nostalgia, the glimpse features the iconic dialogue, "MANADHE IDHANTHA," which doubles the impact by taking fans back in time while delivering a fresh punch for today's audience.

Director Bhanu Bogavarapu perfectly captures the mass pulse with an engaging, power-packed glimpse, while Bheems Cecireolo's high-voltage background score amplifies the energy through-

out. With Ravi Teja at the helm, the glimpse reminds us why he continues to rule the mass entertainment space. The team behind the magic includes a powerhouse of talented technicians. With Vidhu Ayyanna's cinematography, Navin Nooli's editing, and Nandu Savirigana's dialogues, everything is perfectly aligned for a massive entertainer.

And of course, the dynamic producers Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, under Sithara Entertainments, Fortune Four Cinemas, and in collaboration with Srikara Studios, continue to deliver premium cinema experiences. With Mass Jathara, they add another blockbuster to their crown.

The Mass Jathara glimpse has already raised expectations, and more updates will be shared in the coming days.

Anupama Parameshwaran calls Parada her favourite film so far

Anupama Parameshwaran is currently busy with films in Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam. She made her debut in Malayalam with the film Premam ten years ago, and soon after, she ventured into Telugu cinema with A.. Aa., eventually establishing herself with several Telugu films. Now, she is set to appear in the upcoming film Parada, directed by Praveen Kandregula, with Sangeetha and Darsana Rajendran also playing key roles.

"Over these ten years, I have done nearly 25 films, and my most favorite character is Subbu from Parada, and my favorite film is also Parada,"

said Anupama. Reflecting on her decade-long journey, she shared, "I feel happy that I have completed ten years in the industry, and at the same time, I feel a sense of responsibility."

The actress expressed pride in the effort put into Parada. "Everyone worked really hard for this film. Not only did we all put in our best effort, but we also truly loved this film and worked with that passion," she said. Anupama confidently stated, "I don't usually guarantee anything for a film, but I assure you-come and watch Parada with your family, and I guarantee you'll enjoy it."



Nandamuri Balakrishna dedicates Padma Bhushan to fans and father, NTR

Veteran actor, politician, and prominent figure in Telugu cinema, Nandamuri Balakrishna, has been conferred with the prestigious Padma Bhushan Award, India's third-highest civilian honor. This recognition celebrates his remarkable contributions to the world of cinema, public service, and his enduring legacy as a member of the illustrious Nandamuri family.

On receiving this esteemed accolade, Balakrishna expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Government of India for recognizing his work and honoring him with such a distinction. Reflecting on this momentous occasion, he shared a note of appreciation that underscored his gratitude and acknowledgment of those who have been instrumental in his journey.

In his message, Balakrishna extended his sincere thanks to all those who have supported him throughout his illustrious career. "I am deeply thankful to everyone who has conveyed their wishes and blessings on this occasion," he stated. He went on to acknowledge the contributions of his colleagues and collaborators in the film industry. "I express my gratitude to my fellow actors, technicians, producers, distributors, exhibitors, family members, and the entire film fraternity who have been a part of this long and eventful journey," he said.

Balakrishna's heartfelt note paid a special tribute to his fans, whose unwavering love and support have been a cornerstone of his success. "I am forever indebted to my fans, who have stood by me as the proud successor of my father, the late

Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao garu, and to the countless audiences who continue to shower their unwavering love and support upon me," he said, highlighting the enduring legacy of his legendary father, a towering figure in Indian cinema and politics.

Balakrishna also took a moment to congratulate his fellow Padma awardees, recognizing their achievements and contributions to their respective fields.

Nandamuri Balakrishna has enjoyed a prolific career spanning several decades, with an extensive filmography that has cemented his position as one of Telugu cinema's most iconic stars. Beyond his cinematic accomplishments, his foray

into public service and his commitment to philanthropy have further distinguished him as a respected figure in Indian society.

This Padma Bhushan honor is a testament to his relentless dedication and the impact he has made in both the arts and public service.

Balakrishna concluded his message with a heartfelt declaration of his connection to his fans and admirers: "Then... Now... Forever... Always yours, Nandamuri Balakrishna."

The Padma Bhushan is a well-deserved recognition for Nandamuri Balakrishna, whose contributions continue to inspire generations, not just in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana but across India.



South stars shine as Padma Awards honour iconic talent

This year, the South film industries are celebrating the prestigious Padma Awards. The central government has conferred the Padma Bhushan on Telugu actor Nandamuri Balakrishna, recognizing his significant contributions. Not only is he a renowned actor, but he is also a politician, having been elected three times consecutively as an MLA from the Hindupur constituency. Beyond his professional career, Balakrishna is

deeply involved in social service through the Nandamuri Basavtarakam Cancer Institute, which has earned a reputation as one of the best in providing quality cancer treatment. His dedication to the institute reflects his commitment to improving the lives of others. The Telugu film industry is thrilled to see him honored with the Padma Bhushan.

Similarly, Tamil actor Ajith Kumar has been honored with the Padma Bhushan. Not only is he a celebrated actor, but he also gained recognition for securing third place in the recent Dubai Car Race, bringing pride to India. Another Padma Bhushan recipient is Malayalam actress Sobhana, who has made a mark in Telugu and Tamil cinema as well. A

classical dancer, Sobhana has received several accolades, including a National Award, and is well-deserving of this recognition.

From Kannada cinema, veteran actor Ananth Nag was awarded the Padma Bhushan. With over five decades in the industry, Nag has acted in nearly 300 films across Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi. His remarkable career has earned him numerous State Awards, cementing his place as one of the finest actors in Kannada cinema.

With these prestigious awards, the four major South Indian film industries-Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada-are celebrating the recognition of their stars at the national level.

Rajamouli and Mahesh Babu set to leave for South Africa for film shoot

Many are eagerly awaiting updates on the film collaboration between Rajamouli and Mahesh Babu. Typically, Rajamouli announces details about his projects before they begin, but this time, he has remained tight-lipped about the upcoming film with Mahesh. Although the film was officially launched a few days ago, many assumed that the shooting had already begun. However, Rajamouli recently took to social media to share a humorous video where he captures a lion and takes its passport. This video quickly sparked a flood of memes. Since Mahesh Babu is known for his frequent family trips throughout the year, the video humorously suggests that Rajamouli has taken Mahesh's passport to put an end to his holiday plans, signaling that the shooting of the film is

about to begin. Both Mahesh Babu and Priyanka Chopra responded to the video with witty comments. Mahesh Babu shared a dialogue from Pokiri, saying, "Okkasari commit aithe naa maata nene vinanu" (Once I commit, my word is final). Priyanka Chopra responded with "Finally," further fueling excitement. In her earlier posts, she had also hinted at the film, referring to it as a "new chapter." There is another interpretation of Rajamouli's video. The lion being caged and the passport being shown could symbolize the team preparing to leave for South Africa, known for its safaris, with everyone ready with their passports for the upcoming travel. With all these signs pointing toward it, Rajamouli is all set to begin shooting soon.



Thalapathy Vijay's final cinematic journey begins with Jana Nayagan

KVN Productions proudly unveils the first look of Jana Nayagan, marking the beginning of an extraordinary journey that will celebrate the illustrious career of Thalapathy Vijay. Directed by H. Vinoh, this film stands as a landmark project, bringing the curtains down on Vijay's cinematic journey. The first-look poster captures the essence of Jana Nayagan, showcasing Vijay standing confidently on an elevated platform, taking a selfie with an electrified crowd of supporters, symbolizing his unparalleled connection with his fans. The backdrop of an energetic, jubilant audience highlights Vijay as The People's Leader-the perfect tribute to his legacy. The title Jana Nayagan, translating to The People's Leader, reflects

Vijay's journey as a superstar and his impactful public service. This title perfectly embodies his persona and the mark he has left across generations. Accompanied by the musical genius of Anirudh Ravichander, the film promises to be a cinematic extravaganza, blending high-octane entertainment with deep emotional resonance. Produced by Venkat K. Narayana under the banner of KVN Productions, Jana Nayagan is set to be a celebration of Vijay's enduring charisma and his unmatched impact on Indian cinema. KVN Productions is on a roll with an exciting lineup of blockbusters, and this one already looks like a sure-shot hit!



Australian Open: Townsend, Siniakova win the women's doubles

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Taylor Townsend of the United States returned to the court on which her career first took flight, teaming with Katerina Siniakova to beat Hsieh Su-Wei and Jelena Ostapenko 6-2, 6-7 (4), 6-3 in the women's doubles final Sunday at the Australian Open.

"This is super-special to me," Townsend said. "The last time I played on this court I was 15 and in 2012 I won the juniors here and that was the kick-start."

"Honestly, being here is so special to me because this tournament was the beginning of me being able to live out my dream."

Top-seeded Townsend and Siniakova of the Czech Republic led 6-2, 5-3 and served for the match for the first time at 5-4 in the second set. But third-seeded Hsieh

and Ostapenko rallied to take the second set in a tie-break and to hold an early break in the third.

Taylor and Siniakova were able to fall back on proven teamwork on crucial points. This was their third Grand Slam together: they won Wimbledon last year and reached the semifinals of the US Open.

They were also able to exploit a hint of weakness on Hsieh's serve with Ostapenko at the net, breaking her four times in the match including in the ninth game of the final set. Siniakova then served out the match, with Townsend providing the finishing touch at the net.

The match was played in warm conditions on the Australia Day national holiday. The temperature was around 22C (71.6F) mid-afternoon and the court was warm, causing the ball to



skip through quicker, particularly from the left-handed Townsend.

Siniakova and Townsend raced to a 5-1 lead inside 30 minutes and while Hsieh managed to hold at 5-2 in the best game of the set, Siniakova held to love to close out the first set in 37 minutes.

Win or lose Siniakova was going to extend her stay atop the WTA doubles rankings to 136 weeks, the fifth-best run of all-time. She has reached the semifinals or better at the last five grand slams.

The second set, much the same as the first, began with Ostapenko and Townsend holding serve, then Hsieh was broken at 2-1.

Ostapenko held at 2-3 and there was noticeable lift in intensity from the third seeds, a recognition of the importance of the moment and they managed to break

Townsend to level at 3-3. But another Hsieh service break gave Townsend the opportunity to serve for the match at 5-4 but again, Ostapenko and Hsieh rallied to level at 5-5. Hsieh then managed a crucial hold with Ostapenko occasionally starting at the back of the court, rather than at the net.

Siniakova's hold sent the set into a tie-break in which Ostapenko and Hsieh picked up two points off Townsend at 5-4 and 6-4 to level the match.

The complexion of the game had changed and the third seeds were able to break Siniakova for the first time in the opening game of the third set, though Siniakova and Townsend immediately broke Ostapenko to level at 1-1.

Hsieh was broken again in the ninth game and this time Siniakova didn't miss.



Ian Chappell calls ICC an event management company

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Describing the ICC as an "event management company", former Australia captain Ian Chappell has observed that the financially stronger boards are getting their way in producing self-serving schedule while harming the interest of Test cricket.

Chappell also felt that a viable two-tier system for Test cricket should have been in place by now but added that there are other pressing matters that need urgent attention to keep the game's traditional format relevant.

"On the subject of a two-tier Test system, former West Indies pace-bowling champion Michael Holding noted: 'For all its faults, at least FIFA actually runs soccer. The ICC must run cricket'," Chappell wrote in his column for 'ESPNcricinfo'.

"Therein lies a perplexing problem. The ICC doesn't run cricket, and unless there's a major change of heart, the financially desirable nations will continue to have a huge say in producing a self-serving schedule."

Chappell though agreed that the game's financial engine India's influence is proportional to their contribution.

"Then there's the major issue of the financial split. The big three - India, Australia and England - despite being the wealthiest cricket nations claim a large slice of the money divided among cricket bodies, and yet they agitate for an even larger share.

"India's powerful presence in the ICC is in direct proportion

to their contribution of around 70 per cent of cricket's income. It's a complex issue to which cricket hasn't found a workable solution."

A proposal to split Test cricket into two divisions, which will ensure more high-stakes matches featuring bigger teams such as India, Australia and England, is under discussion.

Such a system could, however, also harm smaller teams, resulting in fewer Tests for them and also threatening inclusivity in the sport.

Chappell, one of Australia's finest captains, believed a system of promotion and relegation should be there with certain criteria.

"There should have been a two-tier Test system in place years ago."

"In reality only a limited number of teams are capable of competing long-term in the five-day game. West Indies earned the right to financial assistance with their capacity to draw crowds, and it's criminal they've been allowed to languish," he said.

Chappell further stated Afghanistan and Ireland should not be laying Test cricket as they don't fulfil all requirements.

"A system that includes promotion and relegation is feasible but there need to be certain criteria attached before a team attains Test status. Those should include: Do they have a viable first-class competition? Do they have legitimate grounds for holding five-day games? Do the grounds have adequate facilities? Are they financially stable?"

U19 WC: India crush Bangladesh

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Reigning champions India continued their dominant run in the ICC Women's U19 World Cup with a resounding eight-wicket win over Bangladesh in their Super Six encounter here on Sunday.

With this comprehensive win, India have now registered their fourth consecutive victory in the tournament, maintaining their unbeaten streak and further establishing themselves as strong title contenders.

A disciplined Indian bowling attack, spearheaded by left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma's impressive spell of 3/15, restricted Bangladesh to a paltry 64 runs in their 20 overs -- their lowest total of the tournament.

Despite their struggles, Bangladesh's total was the highest conceded by India in the tournament so far, having previously bowled out West Indies (44) and Malaysia (31) for under 50.

In response, India's chase was off to a blazing start, led by the in-form Trisha Gongadi, who once again proved her class with a fluent 40 off just



31 balls. She peppered the boundary ropes with eight fours, showcasing an aggressive intent and putting Bangladesh's bowling attack under immense pressure.

By the time she was dismissed after the powerplay, India needed just five more runs to seal the win.

Sanika Chalke (11 not out) and skipper Niki Prasad (5 not out) ensured there were no further hiccups, guiding India to victory in just 7.1 overs.

Their bowlers have been the cornerstone of their campaign, consistently delivering under pressure and keeping the opposition under

100 in all matches played so far.

Put in to bat, Bangladesh started with aggression but their approach backfired as they lost three quick wickets within the first four overs, reeling at 9/3 before limping to 16/3 at the end of the powerplay.

Indian seamers VJ Joshitha (3-1-6-1) and Shabnam Shakil (2-0-7-1) made full use of the conditions, extracting movement and bounce to stifle Bangladesh's batters.

With the early breakthroughs, the Indian spinners took charge and tightened their grip on the game.

Vaishnavi was instrumental in dismantling the middle order,

breaking a crucial 31-run partnership between skipper Sumaiya Akter and Jannatul Maoua for the sixth wicket, which saw Bangladesh crumble from 53/4 to 64/9.

Gongadi (2-0-6-1) also chipped in with her leg-spin, ensuring no respite for the Bangladeshi batters.

Bangladesh skipper Sumaiya fought a lone battle with 21 from 29 balls, providing some stability to the innings alongside Jannatul Maoua, who scored 14 off 20 deliveries.

They were the only two batters to reach double figures as India's bowlers maintained relentless pressure.

Bangladesh's innings was marred by poor running between the wickets and frequent dismissals, making it difficult for them to accelerate at any stage.

Despite their struggles, they managed to play out the full 20 overs, which will be a small takeaway for them going forward. PTI

India will look to carry this momentum forward when they face Scotland in their concluding Super Six fixture here on Tuesday.

Jyothi Yarraji clinches gold in 60m hurdles

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reigning Asian champion Jyothi Yarraji clinched gold in her first race of the season, that too with a national record, winning the 60m hurdles event by clocking 8.04 seconds at the Elite Indoor Meeting in Nantes, France.

The 25-year-old Yarraji, in fact, broke her own earlier national record of 8.12 seconds twice in a matter of few hours on Saturday.

She first clocked 8.07 seconds in the heats and then bettered her time in the final at the Stadium Pierre-Quinon in the World Athletics Indoor Tour bronze level meet.

Her timing is, however, still short of the qualifying mark of 7.94 seconds for the World Indoor Championships to be held in Nanjing, China in March.

Yarraji, who was recently conferred with the Arjuna Award, had won 60m gold in the Asian Indoor Championships in 2024 with a time of 8.12 seconds in Tehran, Iran.

She also holds the national



outdoor 100m hurdles record of 12.78 seconds. She is the reigning 100m hurdles Asian champion and won a silver medal in the Hangzhou Asian Games in 2023 with a time of 12.91 seconds.

Meanwhile, in the men's 60m hurdles event, Tejas Shirshe won a bronze with a time of 7.68 seconds.

This was Shirshe's second race of the season. On January 19, he had set a national record time of 7.65 seconds at the CMCM Indoor Meeting in Luxembourg. The previous national record in the event was 7.70 seconds, which was set by Siddhant Thingalaya in 2017.

The 22-year-old Shirshe is also the national record holder in 110m hurdles with a time of 13.41 seconds.

Mohun Bagan eye another home win

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Reigning Shield champions Mohun Bagan Super will look to extend their remarkable home form when they take on Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League here on Monday.

The Mariners currently lead the ISL table with 37 points from 17 matches, boasting an impressive record of 11 wins and four draws.

They have been in scintillating form, winning each of their last seven home games and remaining unbeaten in their previous five fixtures with three wins and two draws.

In contrast, Bengaluru FC are experiencing a rough patch,

winless in their last four outings (draw-1, loss-3). Sitting third in the table with 28 points from 17 games, the Blues will be desperate to break their poor run and narrow the nine-point deficit to Mohun Bagan.

If they manage to do so the Sunil Chhetri side will complete a historic league double over the Mariners after its commanding 3-0 win earlier this season.

Mohun Bagan have scored in each of their last 16 home matches, underlining their attacking prowess.

Bengaluru FC have conceded in each of their last 12 matches, marking their longest streak without a clean sheet in ISL history.

Mbappé scores first hat trick for Real Madrid

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Kylian Mbappé tucked the ball under his shirt as he raised both hands to return the applause to the Real Madrid fans who savored his first hat trick for his new club.

The France star had just led a 3-0 victory at struggling Valladolid that extended Madrid's lead of La Liga on Saturday, keeping it in position to retain the title just after the midway point of the campaign.

Gone was the inconsistent play and missed penalties from Mbappé during his first months with Madrid following his move from Paris Saint-Germain. The France captain has started pouring in goals with back-to-back multi-goal games and has Madrid in pole position with Atletico Madrid and Barcelona stalled.

"I'm very happy for the hat trick but even happier for the win," Mbappé said in fluent Spanish. "It was very important to win after Atletico's result because that



gave us a bit more pressure to take advantage of it."

Madrid's fourth straight triumph in the league combined with Atletico Madrid's 1-1 draw with Villarreal let Carlo

Anelotti's side open a four-point gap over its city rival. Barcelona was in third place at 10 points back before hosting Valencia on Sunday. Madrid trailed then-leader Barcelona at one point, but since getting blown away in a 4-0 clasico debacle, it has found its stride and is in championship mode.

"My adaptation to the team is over. I feel comfortable on the field and you can see that from the way I am playing with my teammates," Mbappé said. "This gives us confidence, but you know that until the 38th round this is not over. We have to keep winning because there is a long way to go."

No contest in Valladolid

The game between the front-runner and the bottom side fit its billing as a mismatch.

Valladolid could draw only one save from Thibaut Courtois in the opening moments. It was all Madrid the rest of the way even though Vinicius Júnior didn't play as he completed a two-game suspension.

Sinner beats Zverev, wins second Australian Open title

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

There's all sorts of ways beyond merely the score to measure just how dominant Jannik Sinner was while outplaying and frustrating Alexander Zverev during the 6-3, 7-6 (4), 6-3 victory Sunday that earned the 23-year-old Italian a second consecutive Australian Open championship.

The zero break points Sinner faced. Or the 10 he accumulated. The 27-13 advantage in points that lasted at least nine strokes. Or the way Sinner accumulated more winners, 32 to 25, and fewer unforced errors, 27 to 45. The way Sinner won 10 of 13 points that ended with him at the net. Or the way he only let Zverev go 14 of 27 in that category, frequently zipping passing shots out of reach.

And here is one more bit of evidence: Listen to what Zverev told Sinner during the on-court trophy ceremony: "You're the best player in the world, by far. I was hoping that I could be more of a competitor today, but you're just too good. It's as

simple as that."

That's coming from the guy who is ranked No. 2 behind Sinner, who has held the No. 1 spot since last June and is not showing any signs of relinquishing it. This was the first Australian Open final between the men at No. 1 and No. 2 since 2019, when No. 1 Novak Djokovic defeated No. 2 Rafael Nadal — also in straight sets.

"It's amazing," Sinner said, "to achieve these things."

That includes being the youngest man to leave Melbourne Park with the trophy two years in a row since Jim Courier in 1992-93 and the first man since Nadal at the French Open in 2005 and 2006 that ended with him at the net.

Or the way he only let Zverev go 14 of 27 in that category, frequently zipping passing shots out of reach.

Since the start of 2024, Sinner has won three of the five major tournaments, including the U.S. Open in September, and his record in that span is 80-6 with a total of nine tournament titles. His current unbeaten run covers 21 matches. The only thing that's clouded

the past 12 months for Sinner, it seems, is a doping case in which he was cleared by a ruling that was appealed by the World Anti-Doping Agency. He tested positive for a trace amount of an anabolic steroid twice last March but blamed it on an accidental exposure involving two members of his team who have since been fired. Sinner initially was exonerated in August; a hearing in the WADA appeal is scheduled for April.

While Sinner became the eighth man in the Open era (which began in 1968) to start his career 3-0 in Grand Slam finals, Zverev is the seventh to be 0-3, adding this loss to those at the 2020 U.S. Open and the 2024 French Open.

Those earlier setbacks both came in five sets. This contest was not that close. Not at all.

"We're trying to do all the right work," Zverev said. "I'm just not good enough."

Just before Zverev began speaking into a microphone during the trophy ceremony, a voice cried out from the stands, making reference to two of the player's ex-girlfriends who



accused him of physical abuse. During the match, there truly was only one moment that felt as if it contained a hint of tension. It came when Zverev was two points from owning the second set, leading it 5-4 and at love-30 on Sinner's serve. But a break point — and a set point — never arrived.

Zverev dropped the next four points, making it 5-all, and Sinner emerged with the ensuing tiebreaker. No surprise there: He went 4-0 in those set-deciders over the past two weeks and has grabbed 16 of his past 18.

A year ago, Sinner went through a lot more trouble to earn his first Slam, needing to get past Novak Djokovic — who quit one set into his semifinal against Zverev on Friday because of a torn hamstring — first, before erasing a two-set deficit in the final against 2021 U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev.

This time, the 6-foot-3 (1.91-meter) Sinner applied pressure with an all-around style that does not really appear to have any holes as his sneakers squeak from a sprint to a slide

that often nearly ends in the splits and he uses his long limbs to deliver deep groundstrokes. On this night, he proved superior in just about every meaningful way, other than aces. Returning serves from Zverev that reached 138 mph (223 kph), Sinner got the lone break of the opening set with a passing shot for a 5-4 lead. Zverev walked back behind the baseline, shaking his head while talking to his father and brother, who were seated in the front row of their court-side coaches' box.

There was more negative body language after Sinner served out that set at love to continue his crescendo, the final note an ace at 120 mph (194 kph). Zverev trudged to his bench, shoulders sagging, and dropped his racket on an equipment bag, a gesture that conveyed annoyance more than anger. Later, it became the latter: Zverev cracked one racket on the court and used a racket to hit another on the sideline.

Understandable, given what Sinner was doing on the other side of the net.