

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy should take over the responsibility of making Rahul Gandhi the Prime Minister. Revanth is an all-rounder. After becoming the CM he executed development and welfare programmes on the one side and managed political affairs on the other. Politics is as important as development. Revanth Reddy is becoming a national leader

- Dr Mallu Ravi, Congress MP



'Delhi does not forgive sinners'

BEING THE HAIR-OES OF KINDNESS AND HOPE

Rao Ramesh dances with Sundeep in MAJAKA

DON'T MISS...

Power shutdown to affect water supply

The Telangana Transmission Corporation (TGTRANSCO) has announced a scheduled power shutdown on February 1, 2025, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, to facilitate the replacement of a non-functioning 132 KV Bulk Load Metering PT at Nasarapally sub-station. Due to this power outage, there will be a partial impact on water supply in several areas served under Krishna Phase-I, II, and III on the mentioned date. The affected regions include: I O&M Div. I: Miralamb, Kishanbagh, Al Jubail Colony, Shastripuram O&M Div. II: Santoshnagar ...

-PAGE: 3

Kejriwal against quota to Dalits

Stepping up his attack on AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday alleged that the former Delhi chief minister is opposed to reservations and is against Dalits, backwards, minorities and the poor. Addressing an election rally in Bawana here, Gandhi said he and his party do not fear Prime Minister Narendra Modi and on the contrary, "the PM is afraid of the Congress". He also attacked Kejriwal with the 'sheesh mahal' jibe for the second straight day and said that though...

-PAGE: 5

Gold strikes fresh all-time high

Gold prices rallied Rs 910 to hit a fresh all-time high of Rs 83,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday due to heavy buying from jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 82,840 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. The bright metal had jumped Rs 4,360 or 5.5 per cent to Rs 83,750 per 10 grams from Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on January 1. Snapping a two-day losing run, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also...

-PAGE: 8

Tilak rises to 2nd spot in ICC rankings

Talented India batter Tilak Varma climbed one spot to second, while mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy made a massive leap of 25 places to break into the top five in the latest ICC men's T20I rankings released on Wednesday. Varma now sits just behind Travis Head in the batters' list, with the Australian maintaining a 23-point lead at the top. The young Indian left-hander has been in sublime form, posting scores of 19 not out, 72 not out, and 18 in India's ongoing T20I series against England. With two ...

-SPORTS

30 dead in Maha Kumbh stampede



PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR (UP)
 At least 30 people were killed and 60 others injured in a stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela in the early hours of Wednesday, officials said. The pre-dawn stampede at the Sangam area occurred as millions of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, considered one of the most auspicious days during the mela. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Vaibhav Krishna told a press conference here in the evening the stampede has left 30 dead and 60 others injured. "The incident took place between 1-2 am due to the pressure of crowd. The crowds broke barricades and jumped to the other side, crushing those waiting there. Over 90 injured were rushed to the hospital, out of whom 30 died," he said. Barricades have been placed in the mela and akhara areas for lane management but they



Continued on Page 2
Yogi orders judicial probe 2

SC cancels domicile quota in PG medical seats

Terms it as unconstitutional

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
 In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Wednesday held domicile-based reservation in post graduate medical courses by a state was unconstitutional. A three-judge bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy, Sudhanshu Dhulia and S V N Bhatti said if such a reservation was permitted, it would be an invasion of the fundamental rights of several students. "We are all domiciled in the territory of India. We are all residents of India. Our common bond as citizens and residents of one country gives us the right not only to choose our residence anywhere in India but also gives us the right to carry on trade and business or a profession anywhere in India," the bench said. It went on, "It also gives us the right to seek admission in educational institutions across India. The benefit of 'reservation' in educational institutions including medical colleges to those who reside in a particular state can be given to a certain degree only in MBBS courses." The apex court held that considering the importance of specialist doctors in PG medical course reservation on the basis of "residence" would be violative of

Continued on Page 2

'Appoint prosecutors on merit, not political factors' 2

Family Survey draft report in 2 days, says CM Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 The Telangana Government's ambitious Comprehensive House-to-House Family Survey has been successfully completed, drawing nationwide attention. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy reviewed the progress of the caste census and congratulated officials for executing what he termed a historic exercise. During the review meeting held at the Integrated Command Control Centre, officials informed the Chief Minister that data from the survey has been recorded and a draft report will be submitted within the next two days. The final report will be presented to the Cabinet Subcommittee on February 2. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, Ministers Damodar Raja Narasimha, Uttam Kumar Reddy, Seethakka, Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Government Advisors K. Keshava Rao, former Minister Jana Reddy, Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari and senior officials attended the review meeting. The CM emphasised that data from the caste census will play a crucial role in shaping policies for social empowerment and the comprehensive development of Backward Classes (BC), Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), minorities and other weaker sections. He said the successful completion of the survey reaffirms the government's commitment to fulfilling its election promises. The data collected is already being used by the newly established BC Dedicated Commission to formulate targeted welfare measures. Continued on Page 2



'Finalise tourism policy by February 10'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has asked the Tourism Department to finalise the tourism policy by February 10. Officials were asked to study the tourism policies of other countries and formulate Telangana's new tourism policy by February 10. The new tourism policy aims to attract domestic as well as international tourists in large numbers. The decision was taken by the Chief Minister at a review meeting of the Tourism Department on Wednesday. The CM also gave some suggestions at the meeting to promote eco-tourism, temple

Continued on Page 2

Harish slams govt over food poisoning in Gurukul schools

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 Lashing out at the government over the rising incidents of food poisoning in Telangana's Gurukul schools, BRS MLA Harish Rao questioned the government's inaction regarding that despite repeated cases. On Tuesday, 84 students from Kandukur Gurukul were hospitalised due to food poisoning. A day later, 12 students from an ST hostel in Girinagar in Suryapet fell ill after consuming contaminated food and had to be rushed to hospital. Harish criticised the government for remaining indifferent despite the frequent food poisoning incidents in

Continued on Page 2

BRS undecided on MLC elections, KCR assesses risks

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 There is uncertainty over whether the BRS will contest the MLC elections as the leadership remains divided on strategy. BRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao held a key meeting with KT Rama Rao KTR and T. Harish Rao on Wednesday to discuss the party's approach, but a final decision was not taken. The hesitation comes in the context of a series of electoral setbacks for the BRS, starting from the 2023 Assembly elections, followed by defeats in the Lok Sabha elections and Graduates' MLC elections. With no recent electoral victories, some leaders fear another loss could weaken the party. Former MP B. Vinod Kumar acknowledged the party's losses but emphasised that the public mood against the Congress government is strong, especially in rural areas and among youth and government employees. "It's a fact that we have faced a series of losses. But it is also

Continued on Page 2

'Use AI to ensure transparency' Ponguleti holds review meeting on Indiramma houses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 The construction of Indiramma Houses should be undertaken with Artificial Intelligence (AI) immediately, Revenue and Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said. He said he had asked officials to make extensive use of tech to ensure that only bonafide beneficiaries benefit from the Indiramma Housing Scheme launched by the Telangana Government without any corruption. Ponguleti held a review meeting with officials on Indiramma Houses at the secretariat on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that it has been decided to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for selecting beneficiaries to completing the construction of houses. He said a special app has been created and a survey held to select beneficiaries transparently. He said that it has been decided to use AI to monitor the progress of house construction daily from anywhere in the state without any possibility of irregularities. He said that state-of-the-art tech methods are being implemented to identify the really poor. The officials were asked to identify ineligible and select the eligible ones by matching survey details conducted through the mobile app with cloud-based Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. The payments for the construction of houses will be made in four instalments, and it has been decided to use AI to ensure that payments are made on time without any delay.



Housing Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy in review meeting on Indiramma Houses with officials on Wednesday at Secretariat

Sanjay: Immediately sanction promised goodies to all eligible

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar appealed to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to sanction Rythu Bharosa, Atmiya Bharosa, Indiramma houses and ration cards to all eligible beneficiaries in the state immediately. Sanjay sent a letter to the CM regarding this on Wednesday. In his letter, Sanjay said that the government had announced that it is implementing Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Housing scheme, issuing new ration cards and the Indiramma Athmiya Bharosa



Continued on Page 2

ISRO scores a 100, PSLV takes the cake

PNS ■ SRIHARIKOTA
 The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Wednesday achieved a historic milestone with its 100th mission and revealed an ambitious future plan of crossing the next 100 launches in five years. Starting off with the SLV in 1979, the space agency crossed the 100-mission mark after 46 years, but what stands out is the PSLV's dominance through the years with 62 missions. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) has turned out to be ISRO's most trusted rocket, thanks to its unmatched reliability. While PSLV has been used for 62 missions, GSLV with indigenous cryogenic upper stage comes next with 17. LVM3 (Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle MkIII--the heaviest rocket) with 7 and SSLV (Small Satellite Launch Vehicle) 3, follow suit. The others are Reusable Launch Vehicle, TV (Test Vehicle) and PAT (Pad Abort Test). PSLV, often dubbed as the "trusted workhorse of ISRO" by scientists, has been used consistently to inject various satellites into precise Low Earth Orbits. The vehicle which is 44.4 metre tall is equipped to take payloads of up to 1,750 kg to Sun-Synchronous Polar Orbits of 600 km altitude. Continued on Page 2



CM for TTD-like Board for Yadagirigutta temple

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
 Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has directed officials to fast-track the establishment of a Yadagirigutta Devasthanam Board, modelled on the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) to oversee the administration of the temple. During a review meeting at his residence on Wednesday, the Chief Minister suggested modifications to the draft proposal for the constitution of the Dharmakartha Mandali (trust board). Revanth stressed that the temple should remain free from political influence, just like Tirumala, and called for measures to safeguard its spiritual and cultural purity. The proposed board will not only manage the temple administration but also oversee spiritual and service-oriented programmes.



Govt's failure to pay bills leaves contractors in distress

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HYDERABAD

Thousands of contractors across Telangana are staring at ruin as the government continues to delay clearing their pending bills. Payments for constructing school infrastructure under Mana Ooru Mana Badi to de-silt the city, election-related expenses and for even cultural events payments are not being cleared leaving workers and their families in despair.

Beyond numbers and policies, these are people whose lives are getting derailed due to the government's inaction. Delayed payments mean fathers unable to pay school

fees, workers unable to feed families and businesses on the brink of collapse. While the government sits on funds, people are losing everything they have worked for.

M. Surender Singh, the General Secretary of the GHMC Contractors' Association, is exhausted fighting for dues.

"We went on strike on January 10, and they promised to clear current year payments. But for 2023, they now say they need a vigilance audit. This is just a delay tactic. How can they verify if de-silt was done in 2023 now? By now, the drains are full again," he said, frustration evident in his voice.

"Never before has a government made us suffer like this.

YSR's government always ensured payments were made without excuses. This time, we have no choice. We will stop work from February 1 and go on strike," he added.

It's not just big contractors feeling the heat. Thousands of small and medium scale contractors who worked for the Mana Ooru Mana Badi scheme to improve government schools are drowning in debt.

Rakesh, a contractor, sent a heart-wrenching plea to the government. "My Rs 70 lakh Mana Ooru Mana Badi bills have been pending for 20 months. I have sold all my assets, but I still face harassment from moneylenders. I am struggling to feed my family. I request the government to pay my bills and save my

life," he said.

For Ramu, a small contractor, the delay is not just a financial setback, it's a personal crisis. "I need to pay my daughter's MBBS fees. My bill for the development of a park under the AMRUT scheme through TUFIDC is pending. I need the government to help," he pleaded his helplessness evident.

Another contractor on condition of anonymity said, "We have hosted various functions for various governments headed by YSR, KCR and now the Revanth Reddy Government. But this is the first time we are not being paid. Bills more than a year are due. The KCR government used to delay too but that was not as bad as now. No relief is being provided at all."

Narsi Reddy & Ashok Kumar to contest in Teachers MLC constituencies

PNS | HYDERABAD

The unions of teachers and lecturers have announced joint candidates for the elections in two Teachers MLC constituencies.

The unions announced former TPTF President Y. Ashok Kumar as the candidate in the Karimnagar-Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad Teachers MLC constituency. The unions announced sitting MLC Alugubelli Narsi Reddy as their candidate in the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Teachers MLC constituency.

The Telangana State United Teachers Federation (TSUTF) revealed this during a programme for introducing candidates.

'Oil palm factory in Narmetta must start ops by June 1'

PNS | HYDERABAD

Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao has instructed officials to keep Telangana at the top in the country in oil palm cultivation. The Minister asked officials to complete the oil palm processing unit at Narmetta in Siddipet district by June 1 and start the processing of oil palm bunches.

The Minister, who held a review meeting with oil palm officials at the Secretariat on Wednesday, said that oil palm cultivation should be undertaken in accordance with the target set by the government.

While oil palm cultivation was undertaken on 16,729 acres this year, steps should be taken to ensure that oil palm is cultivated on 19,271 acres by March, he said. Since the price of oil palm bunches has increased, awareness programs should be undertaken to encourage farmers to cultivate oil palm, he said. He said that the tender process should be initiated and work should start for constructing oil palm processing factories at in the Beachpally



Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao in a review meeting at Secretariat on Wednesday

and Kallur warehouses. This would benefit farmers in the new districts where oil palm is being cultivated and there would be an opportunity for new farmers to take up oil palm cultivation.

Similarly, he suggested that the title deeds of lands allotted by the government to organizations should be changed to the names of the organizations and fencing should be put up around it. He ordered that steps should be taken to appoint expert staffers in all departments.

Agriculture Secretary Raghunandan Rao, Horticulture Director Yasmin Basha, Cooperation Director Uday Kumar and other senior officials attended the review meeting.

TG govt eyes coconut-based revenue model for temples

PNS | HYDERABAD

The Telangana government is exploring innovative ways to generate revenue from temple offerings, with a focus on utilising coconut shells and oil, and related products for commercial use. The proposal, which includes the production of candles, oil and other temple-use items, has been discussed at the ministerial level, with a study being initiated on the feasibility of implementation.

Minister Konda Surekha has directed officials to study similar models in other temples and

examine how temple development can be integrated with self-sustaining economic activities. The plan aims to engage self-help groups (SHGs) in producing coconut-based items, thereby promoting local employment while enhancing temple revenues.

According to sources, discussions are underway to fast-track implementation in at least 2 or 3 major temples over the next couple of months. Officials have been asked to work on a war-footing to assess potential benefits and identify temples where the initiative can be successfully piloted.

Telangana Jagruthi plans meet on irrigation projects

PNS | HYDERABAD

Telangana Jagruthi has announced a round table meeting titled 'Neellu-Nijalu' at 11 am on January 31 at the Somajiguda Press Club.

The event aims to expose what the organisation calls the Congress government's failures in executing irrigation projects and to counter the alleged misinformation being spread about irrigation projects in the state.

Telangana Jagruthi President Kalvakuntla Kavitha will deliver the keynote address at the meeting. The event will also see the participation of intellectuals, Telangana

activists, irrigation experts and retired engineers who will engage in discussions on the state's irrigation policies.

Telangana Jagruthi said the Congress Government has not neglected irrigation projects but has also been running a misinformation campaign against projects developed under the leadership of former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao. The organisation emphasised the need to counter these claims and hold the government accountable for its inaction.

The meeting will focus on the alleged false propaganda surrounding the Kaleshwaram Project.

ECI announces biennial polls for AP, TG Legislative Councils

PNS | HYDERABAD

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced biennial elections for the Legislative Councils of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana from Graduates' and Teachers' Constituencies, as the terms of multiple sitting members are set to expire on March 29, 2025. The elections will be conducted for six constituencies - three in Andhra Pradesh and three in Telangana - following the retirement of the incumbent members.

In Andhra Pradesh, elections will be held for the East-West Godavari Graduates' Constituency represented by Ila Venkateswara Rao, the Krishna-Guntur Graduates' Constituency held by K S Lakshmana Rao and the

Srikakulam-Vizianagaram-Visakhapatnam Teachers' Constituency represented by Pakalapati Raghunatha Varma. Meanwhile, in Telangana, elections will be conducted for the Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Graduates' Constituency represented by T Jeevan Reddy, the Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Teachers' Constituency held by Kura Raghobham Reddy and the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Teachers' Constituency represented by Alugubelli Narsi Reddy.

The election schedule released by the ECI states that the notification for the elections will be issued on February 3, and the last date for filing nominations is February 10. Scrutiny of nom-

inations will take place on February 11, and the last date for withdrawal of candidature is February 13. Polling will be held on February 27 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, while the counting of votes is scheduled for March 3. The entire election process is expected to be completed by March 8.

With the Model Code of Conduct coming into effect immediately in the concerned constituencies, the Election Commission has urged all stakeholders to adhere to the guidelines. The elections hold significance as they will determine new representatives from the Graduates' and Teachers' Constituencies in both states, ensuring continued representation in the respective Legislative Councils.

52 arrested: Cyber Crime Police bust nation-wide fraud network

PNS | HYDERABAD

In a nation-wide crackdown on cyber fraud, the Hyderabad City Cyber Crime Police have arrested 52 individuals, including three key masterminds, in connection with major scams. Special teams conducted operations across multiple states, including Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Bihar and Hyderabad. The large-scale

operation resulted in the detection of 33 significant cybercrime cases, exposing the extent of online financial fraud plaguing the country. The arrested individuals were linked to 576 cases across India, including 74 cases registered in Telangana. These frauds ranged from trading scams and investment frauds to social media-related cybercrimes and cryptocurrency fraud. The total amount involved in these scams stood at a staggering Rs

88.32 crore. During the crackdown, police seized a significant amount of evidence, including 43 mobile phones, 39 ATM cards, 17 pass-books, 54 cheque books, 16 SIM cards, 3 laptops, 13 shell company stamps, and 9 Aadhaar and PAN cards. Additionally, Rs 47.9 lakh in cash and cryptocurrency worth Rs 40 lakh were confiscated. In a further blow to the fraudsters, Rs 2.87 crore has been frozen in their bank accounts.

Appoint prosecutors on merit, not political factors: SC

PNS | NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday chided the practice of state governments appointing public prosecutors in high courts on "political considerations" and said favouritism and nepotism compromised merit.

Observing judges were humans and at times they made mistakes, a bench of Justices J Bardiwala and R Mahadevan said the defence counsel and the public prosecutor owed a duty to correct the court if it was falling in some error. The bench said law officers were one of the "important wheels of the chariot", driven by judges to attain the cherished goal of human beings to secure justice against the wrong doers.

"Judges are human beings and at times they do commit mistakes. The sheer pressure of work at times may lead to such errors. At the same time, the defence counsel as well as the

public prosecutor owes a duty to correct the court if the court is falling in some error and for all this, we hold the state government responsible," it said. "This judgement is a message to all the state governments that the AGPs and APPs in respective high courts should be appointed solely on the merit of the person," it said.

The bench's verdict came on appeals against an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court in a criminal case lodged in Haryana.

For the bench, the "most disturbing feature" of the litigation was the high court order on the quantum of sentence which noted the state's counsel request for capital punishment for the accused.

"It is a different thing that the high court rejected the prayer of the public prosecutor. Such is the standard of the public prosecutors in the high courts of the country," the bench said.

Mallu Ravi: Revanth should take responsibility of making Rahul PM

PNS | HYDERABAD

Congress MP from Nagarkurnool Dr Mallu Ravi stated that Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy should shoulder the responsibility of making Rahul Gandhi the prime minister.

Ravi said everyone calls CM Revanth Reddy an all-rounder. After Revanth Reddy became CM, he did development and welfare programmes on one

side and political affairs on the other, he said. Saying that politics is as important as development, Ravi said that Revanth Reddy is becoming a national leader. The CM is performing yagna for the people. However, BRS and BJP leaders are spoiling the yagna.

Speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Wednesday, Ravi said that the BJP and the Modi government are working against Ambedkar's

Constitution. He alleged that Union Home Minister Amit Shah insulted Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha. Lok Sabha Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi asked Amit Shah to apologize, but he did not. He said the BJP follows Godse ideology while the Congress follows Mahatma Gandhi's ideology. Rahul Gandhi is fighting to protect the Constitution. He is implementing Mahatma Gandhi's ideology, he added.

Sanjay: Immediately ...

Continued from page 1

and supply them fine rice. The government had also announced that it would construct four lakh houses and that 3,500 houses would be allocated to every constituency and that Rythu Bharosa funds would be credited in farmers' accounts by January-end, he said.

However, none of these promises have been fully implemented, Sanjay pointed out. He said that there are 12,991 Gram Panchayats in the state, and only 561 villages, that is one village in each mandal, have been selected for implementing these schemes which is shocking.

Of the 70 lakh eligible farmers, only 4,41,911 have received Rs 6,000 per acre, which is disheartening. Similarly, as per the Indiramma Athmiya Bharosa, despite promising financial assistance to 10 lakh landless labourer families, funds have been credited to only 20,336 accounts so far, leaving 9.79 lakh families without any support, he said.

Sanjay said the government had announced ration cards for 40 lakh families, but only 42,267 people have been identified so far. This means that 99% of eligible beneficiaries have not received ration cards. Similarly, out of over 70 lakh applications received for housing, around 40 lakh people were found eligible, that is, 10 lakh families in Greater Hyderabad and 30 lakh in other areas.

'Finalise tourism ...

Continued from page 1

tourism and the tourism circuit in Hyderabad. Asking officials to focus on eco and temple tourism, the Chief Minister said that a joint action plan between the Revenue, Forest and Tourism Departments is required to attract devotees and tourists during the 'Sammakka-Saralamma' Jatra. A tourism circuit connecting nearby tourist areas and temples during the Jatra should be developed to attract more tourists, he said.

The CM asked officials to formulate plans to develop eco-tourism in areas like Adilabad, Warangal and Nagarjuna Sagar. Singapore-style eco-tourism policies will also be studied to improve tourism infrastructure in the state.

In view of the upcoming Godavari and Krishna Pushakarams, the CM asked officials to prepare plans to attract devotees and tourists from across the country.

The Chief Minister wants to identify and develop areas to promote eco-tourism in the state. Officials were also told to examine the issue of developing a tourism circuit by connecting Sanjeevaiah Park, NTR Park and Indira Park near the Hussain Sagar Lake in Hyderabad. The CM emphasised that the new tourism policy should bring more recognition to the state and generate revenues.

30 dead ...

Continued from page 1

gave way under the pressure of the jostling throng, he said. As the barricades broke, people fell on the holy dip during the 'brahm muhurt' (early morning time considered auspicious to perform certain activities), he said. Many, including women and children, fell down and were crushed.

Twenty-five of the deceased have been identified, Krishna said. Four of the deceased are from Karnataka and one each from Assam and Gujarat.

Among those injured, 36 are undergoing treatment at the hospital and the rest have been sent with their families, he said. He said the Mela administration has issued a helpline number -- 1920 -- for tracing missing persons.

The officer said the government has issued strict directives there will be no VIP protocol in the mela now onwards. "We will not be entertaining VIP protocol for the coming 'snans'."

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has contacted all the revered Mahamahadashwars, saints and akharas and has requested them to participate in this 'Amrit Snan'.

Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand said the administration's priority is to ensure that those who have come to take the bath return home safely. The officers did not answer any questions of the journalists.

Yogi orders judicial probe

PNS | LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday ordered a judicial inquiry to find the reasons that led to the stampede at the Maha Kumbh in which 30 people died and 60 were injured. Adityanath also announced an ex gratia of Rs 25 lakh each for the kin of the deceased.

The three-member inquiry panel would be headed by retired judge Harsh Kumar and also include former DGP VK Gupta and retired IAS officer DK Singh. The chief minister said a separate police inquiry would also be conducted into the whole issue.

"It is important to get to the bottom of the whole episode on how such a tragedy occurred," a visibly emotional Adityanath said, adding the chief secretary and DGP would visit the Maha Kumbh on Thursday for an in-depth probe into the tragic incident

ISRO scores ...

Continued from page 1

However, on account of its unmatched reliability, ISRO said PSLV was also used to launch various satellites into Geosynchronous and Geostationary orbits, like satellites from the IRNSS constellation.

The PSLV comes in four variants -- PSLV-CA, PSLV-DL, PSLV-QL,

PSLV-XL. The first launch of PSLV was PSLV-D1 launched on September 20, 1993. It was an unsuccessful attempt. However, the rocket made its first successful launch in October 1994 and later emerged as the most reliable and versatile launch vehicle of ISRO.

Some of the significant missions that were successfully launched by PSLV include the ambitious

Chandrayaan-1 in 2008 and Mars Orbiter Spacecraft in 2013. Scientists describe the Chandrayaan-1 and Mars Orbiter Mission as the 'feathers in the hat' of PSLV.

The Sriharikota spaceport situated about 135 km east of Chennai has two launch pads and incidentally the first launch pad came into service from September 1993 by launching a PSLV/IRS-P1 mission.

Family Survey ...

Continued from page 1

The Socio-Economic, Education, Employment and Political Caste Survey 2024 began on November 6 and was completed in the first week of December in all districts. Around one lakh government employees, including enumerators, supervisors, and data entry operators participated in the large-scale initiative, which was described as a 'Maha Yagna' by the Planning Department.

Officials reported that the survey identified nearly 1.16 crore families in Telangana, with teams successfully gathering data from over 96% of households. The remaining families could not participate due to reasons like locked houses, refusal to share details or unavailability at the time of enumeration.

The caste census was fast-tracked by the government, with the Cabinet approving the proposal within two months of assuming office. On February 16, the Telangana Assembly passed a resolution to undertake the survey. A six-member Cabinet Sub-Committee, led by Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy, was formed on September 12 to finalize procedures for the survey. The CM reviewed the sub-committee's recommendations on October 9, and the Planning Department was designated as the nodal agency to execute the survey. Government Order (GO) No: 18 was issued on October 10, laying out the detailed methodology for data collection.

Officials noted that the caste census was conducted at an unprecedented pace, setting an example for the rest of the country. The CM reiterated that Telangana is now a role model in conducting large-scale socio-economic surveys efficiently. The findings from the survey are expected to play a pivotal role in shaping policies that address the needs of marginalized communities and promote inclusive development.

Harish slams ...

Continued from page 1

residential schools. "It is disgraceful that the government has failed to take action even though parents are expressing extreme concern for their children's safety," he said.

He pointed out that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's statement about sending those responsible for serving adulterated food to jail has proven to be hollow. "The Chief Minister's words have turned out to be empty. How many more students need to be hospitalised? How many more lives must be endangered before the government wakes up?" Harish asked.

Demanding immediate intervention, he urged the Congress Government to ensure quality food for students and to take strong steps to prevent food poisoning in Gurukul schools.

SC cancels ...

Continued from page 1

Article 14 of the Constitution. "If such a reservation is permitted then it would be an invasion of the fundamental rights of several students, who are being treated unequally simply for the reasons that they belong to a different state in the Union. This would be a violation of the equality clause in Article 14 of the Constitution and would amount to a denial of equality before the law," the bench said.

The top court said the state quota seats, apart from a reasonable number of institution-based reservations, have to be filled strictly on the basis of merit in all India examination.

The judgement came on a reference made by a division bench which raised certain questions arising during the hearing of appeals against a Punjab and Haryana High Court decision in relation to admissions in Government Medical College and Hospital, Chandigarh.

City Pioneer

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HYDERABAD | THURSDAY | JANUARY 30, 2025

03

SPARKLING CYBERABAD

Automated litter pickup machines for high-traffic areas in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Inorbit Mall Hyderabad, in collaboration with Nirmaan Organization and the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), have launched Sparkling Cyberabad, a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative aimed at enhancing urban cleanliness in the city. As part of this project, six automated electric litter pickup machines will be deployed across high-traffic areas to maintain sanitation and improve public spaces.

The machines will operate six days a week in key locations, including Kondapur's Botanical Garden, Madhapur's Inorbit Mall and Durgam Cheruvu Park, Hitech City's Shilparamam Park and food streets, Hitex Arch, and Gachibowli's DLF Street food area and Raidurg

Metro Station. The initiative is expected to significantly enhance cleanliness in Hyderabad's commercial and residential hubs, benefiting both residents and visitors.

As part of its commitment for sustainable urban development, Inorbit Mall Hyderabad is spearheading this initiative under Inorbit Cares, its broader CSR programme. The launch event saw participation from representatives of Inorbit Malls, K Raheja Corp, GHMC, Nirmaan Organization, and other stakeholders.

GHMC Zonal Commissioner for Serilingampally Zone, Upender Reddy, lauded the initiative, stating, "It is the first time that litter cleaning machines have been introduced in GHMC. We express gratitude to Inorbit Malls and K Raheja Corp for bringing about this transfor-



mative change that the city has been eagerly awaiting." Shruvan Kumar Gone, Chief Operating Officer of K Raheja Corp (AP & Telangana), empha-

sized the project's importance in fostering a cleaner environment. "We are proud to support this initiative, which is a significant step towards making Hyderabad

a cleaner and more sustainable city," he said.

Expressing enthusiasm for the project, Sharat Belavadi, AVP Operations - Inorbit Malls, highlighted the company's commitment to community welfare.

"As the city continues to grow, so does its infrastructure. We wanted to give back to the community by creating a meaningful impact.

We are thrilled to partner with Nirmaan Organization and the GHMC to drive this initiative, ensuring that Hyderabad continues to grow as a cleaner and greener city," he said.

With Sparkling Cyberabad, Inorbit Mall Hyderabad is taking a proactive step in promoting sustainable urban development, setting a precedent for other corporate entities to contribute to the city's cleanliness and environmental well-being.



Superintendent of Osmania General Hospital Dr Rakesh Kumar Sahay and Prof CH Madhusudhan with the five liver transplant patients

5 patients undergo successful liver transplants at OGH

DEEPIKA PASHAM
deepikapasham2015@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

In a significant milestone for public health-care, Osmania General Hospital (OGH) successfully performed five liver transplants in just one month, saving the lives of two-year-old to forty-year-old patients suffering from rare genetic liver diseases.

The transplants include three cadaver liver transplants from Jeevandan and two live donor transplants for patients from extremely low-income backgrounds.

Prof Dr Madhusudhan, Head of Surgical Gastroenterology at OGH who led the team of specialists told The Pioneer, "These patients belong to lower income family groups, mostly daily wage labourers and they keep wandering around private hospitals to reduce the charges because private hospitals charge between Rs 30-40 lakh for such procedures."

The surgeries were conducted free of cost under the Aarogyasri scheme.

"We also received criticism on how the government hospitals follow the process, after surgeries. So, we planned that we will be helpful to our patients life-long. We have a WhatsApp group with our liver transplant patients and whenever they face mild symptoms of fever or cold they approach us and we recommend them to nearby hospitals because most private hospitals do not touch the liver transplant patient," he added.

"Every first Wednesday of a month we ask our patients to visit us for immunosuppression medication free of cost, which is mandatory for liver transplant patients."

The team behind the transplants included top specialists Prof CH Madhusudhan, Prof Abhimanyu, Prof Uma Devi, Prof Ramesh Kumar, Prof Vijay Kumar (HOD Paediatrics, Niloufer), Prof Madhavi, Prof Raghu, Prof Nadeem, Dr Vijaya Pavan, and many others.

CITY EVENTS

Classical Dance (BhamaKalapam)

By Madhumathi Kulkarni

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
January 30,
(6 pm to 10 pm)

Gaddar Jayanthi celebrations

By Department Of Language And Culture

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
January 30,
(9 am to 10 pm)

Live Performance

By Karwaan (Band)

Venue

Stone Waters - Kitchen & Lounge
January 30, (8 pm)

Thursday Night

With DJ HAK

Venue

Sounds & Spirits
January 30, (8 pm)

31-year-old constable dies of cardiac arrest

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A young police constable died, allegedly due to a cardiac arrest, at his house in Guntur on Wednesday.

T Karthik (31), a 2020 batch constable posted at the Market police station is survived by elderly parents and siblings.

P Raghavendar, SHO of Market police station told The Pioneer, "The passing away of our constable Karthik is right. He was on leave in Guntur. As per his daily routine, Karthik finished his morning walk and suddenly collapsed at home.

His family members rushed to his rescue and shifted him to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared him dead."

Karthik was working at Market police station for the last two years and the State administration will look into the compensation for his family, he added.

After DPS, Army Public School receives bomb threat

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Tension prevailed at the Army Public School (APS) in Bolaram and its surroundings when a bomb threat mail was received by the school authorities. Though the mail was received on Tuesday, the school authorities did not notice it and alerted Bolaram Police on Wednesday.

Following information from the management, the Army personnel, along with Bolaram Police and bomb squad, reached the school and took up checking for the presence of any explosive substances.

Srinivas, SHO of Bolaram said, "As per available information, the management received a threat email on its official ID from an unidentified person claiming explosives were planted on the school premises. It was after school hours that we checked the premises and found nothing. So it is declared as a hoax. No case has been registered yet."

Earlier on Tuesday, Delhi Public School in Nacharam received a bomb threat via mail and nothing was found in the school.

Power shutdown on Feb 1 to affect water supply

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Transmission Corporation (TGRANSCO) has announced a scheduled power shutdown on February 1, 2025, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, to facilitate the replacement of a non-functioning 132 KV Bulk Load Metering PT at Nasarlapally sub-station.

Due to this power outage, there will be a partial impact on water supply in several areas served under Krishna Phase-I, II, and III on the mentioned date. The affected regions include:

- O&M Div. I: Miralamb, Kishanbagh, Al Jubail Colony, Shastripuram
- O&M Div. II: Santoshnagar, Vinay Nagar, Saidabad, Chanchalguda, Asmangadh, Yakutpura, Madannapet, Mahaboo Mansion
- O&M Div. III:

Bhojagutta, Shaikpet

- O&M Div. IV: Boggulakunta, Afzalguni, Allabanda
- O&M Div. V: Narayanguda, Adikmet, Shivam, Chilkalguda
- O&M Div. VI: Jubilee Hills, Filmnagar, Prashasan Nagar, Thatthikhana
- O&M Div. VII: Tarnaka, Lalapet, Boudhanagar, Marredpally, Control Room, Railways, MES, Cantonment, Prakashnagar, Patigadda
- O&M Div. VIII: Riyasathnagar, Aliabad, Maisaram, Bandlaguda
- O&M Div. IX: Hasmathpet, Ferroguda, Gouthamnagar
- O&M Div. X: Saheb Nagar, Vaishalinagar, Alkapuri
- O&M Div. XI: BN Reddy Nagar, Vanasthalipuram, Auto Nagar
- O&M Div. XIII: Mahindra Hills
- O&M Div. XIV: Elugutta,

Ramanthapur, Uppal, Nacharam, Habsiguda, Chilkhanagar, Devenderanagar

- O&M Div. XV: Gachibowli, Madhapur, Ayyappa Society, Kavuri Hills
 - O&M Div. XVI: Madhuban, Durganagar, Budvel, Sulemanagar, Golden Heights
 - O&M Div. XVIII: Hardware Park, Dharamsai, Gandhamguda
 - O&M Div. XIX: Boduppal, Mallikarjunanagar, Manikchand, Chengicherla, Bharatnagar, Anand Nagar X Road, Peerzadiguda
 - O&M Div. XX: Meerpet, Kurmaguda, Lenin Nagar, Badangpet
- Residents in the affected areas are advised to store sufficient water in advance and use it judiciously. Normal water supply is expected to resume once power is restored.

FGG seeks action on Indiramma housing scam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Forum for Good Governance (FGG) has urged Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to take decisive action against politicians and officials involved in large-scale irregularities in the Indiramma Housing Scheme implemented between 2004 and 2014. In a letter addressed to the Chief Minister, FGG president M Padmanabha Reddy highlighted the misappropriation of thousands of crores under the weaker section housing programme and criticized the lack of progress in the CID inquiry ordered a decade ago.

The erstwhile Andhra Pradesh government launched the Indiramma Housing Scheme to provide homes for

the poor, sanctioning 33.4 lakh houses, of which 20.49 lakh were reportedly completed. However, on the ground, numerous houses remained incomplete, while in some cases, payments were made for houses that were never built. In several instances, existing houses were falsely shown as newly constructed Indiramma houses, allegedly with the involvement of local politicians and officials.

Following the formation of Telangana, the State government, through GO Ms. No. 9, dated July 26, 2014, ordered a CID inquiry into these irregularities, directing the agency to prosecute those responsible and recommend departmental action against erring officials. However, the inquiry has



remained in cold storage for the past 10 years.

FGG pointed out that when Telangana was bifurcated, there were lakhs of incomplete houses across the State. The new government at the time halted funding for the scheme and introduced the Double Bedroom Housing initiative instead. Concerned about the massive financial loss, FGG filed a Public Interest Litigation

(PIL No. 233 of 2015) in court, leading to an order for the release of funds to complete the unfinished houses.

Despite these developments, the CID has only surveyed 36 villages out of 12,000 in Telangana. During this limited inquiry, it was found that several existing houses were falsely recorded as newly built, and payments were fraudulently made. The CID requested government assistance in verifying the age of these houses, but FGG pointed out that simple checks using grama panchayat tax records or local inquiries could have easily revealed the truth. However, for reasons best known to CID officials, a thorough investigation was avoided, leaving the case unresolved.

Certificate course for nurses in mother and child health launched

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Ankura Hospital partners with Indian Institute of Public Health-Hyderabad (IIPH-H) to launch Excellence in Quality Care: A Certificate Course for Nurses in Mother and Child Health.

The programme aims to enhance nursing competencies by focusing on critical aspects of healthcare such as patient safety, infection control and compassionate care.

It is designed to equip nurses with advanced skills to provide specialized and superior care for mothers and children, addressing unique health scenarios like pre-



and broader participation.

Speaking about the programme, Dr Krishna Prasad Rao Vunnam, Founder and Managing Director of Ankura Hospital, said, "At Ankura, we are committed to providing the highest quality care for women and children.

By empowering nurses through advanced training, we reaffirm our commitment to innovation, excellence and delivering exceptional healthcare experiences. This programme is expected to benefit a large number of nursing professionals and the positive impact it will create is eagerly anticipated."

This initiative is open to nursing professionals from Ankura as well as the broader healthcare community, encouraging shared learning

Hyd turns a key growth hub in office leasing

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad is cementing its position as a major global business destination, as Global Capability Centres (GCCs) fuel an unprecedented surge in office leasing across India. According to JLL, India's top seven cities recorded an all-time high of 77.2 million sq. ft. of office leasing in 2024-22.6% year-on-year increase driven primarily by GCCs.

Bengaluru remains the dominant hub, capturing 47% of the total GCC leasing demand, but Hyderabad has emerged as a formidable contender. The city has positioned itself as a preferred destination for glob-

al companies seeking talent, innovation, and expansion opportunities. The demand for office space in Hyderabad has surged as GCCs continue to diversify beyond tech, expanding into sectors such as engineering, research and development (ER&D), banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI), and healthcare.

Speaking on the impact of this growth, Dr Samantak Das, Chief Economist and Head of Research and REIS at JLL India, said, "The record-breaking 77.2 million sq. ft. of office leasing in 2024 highlights India's growing stature as the 'office to the world.' GCCs



have been the backbone of this surge, accounting for 40% of the total office leasing activity from 2016 to 2024."

Hyderabad's strategic location, infrastructure development, and availability of skilled talent have made it a com-

peting alternative for global firms. The city has witnessed substantial leasing activity from multinational corporations in 2024, reinforcing its appeal as a thriving commercial hub.

Rahul Arora, Head of Office Leasing & Retail Services at JLL, noted that GCCs are reshaping India's office market. "Hyderabad's rapid growth in this sector underscores its importance in the larger ecosystem of global business operations," he said.

Traditionally, tech firms dominated GCC leasing, but the past three years have seen a significant shift. The ER&D (engineering, manufacturing, and industrial) segment has

doubled its share, while BFSI leasing activity has grown 1.5 times compared to the pre-pandemic period. Healthcare and biotech sectors have also expanded their presence, contributing to Hyderabad's growing stature as a business and innovation hub.

With its business-friendly policies and world-class infrastructure, Hyderabad is well-positioned to attract more global players. The city's commercial real estate footprint is expected to continue growing, reinforcing its status as a key destination for multinational corporations looking to establish and expand their operations in India.

Slaughterhouses, meat shops to remain closed today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has issued an official notice directing the closure of all cattle, sheep, and goat slaughterhouses, as well as retail meat and beef shops, within its limits on January 30 observance of Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary.

The GHMC issues this directive annually to mark the solemn occasion of Martyrs' Day, honouring Mahatma Gandhi's legacy and observing a day of non-violence.

The order, issued under

Section 533(b) of the GHMC Act, 1955, was addressed to the Commissioners of Police for Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Rachakonda. The municipal authorities have instructed officers concerned to ensure compliance with the directive and cooperate with the GHMC staff in implementing the closure.

A copy of the notice has also been sent to veterinary officers, GHMC zonal commissioners, the Additional Commissioner (Health) and the Managing Director of the Telangana State Sheep and Goat Development Cooperative Federation.

51 students take ill due to food poisoning in three separate incidents

PNS ■ NARAYANPET/SURYAPET/ YELLAREDDY

In all, 51 students took ill due to suspected food poisoning in Narayanpet, Suryapet and Kamareddy districts. At the Dharmwada Government High School in Narayanpet District, at least 25 female students fell ill on Wednesday due to suspected food poisoning.

The students experienced stomach pain, vomiting and dehydration after consuming food that was provided as part of a mid-day meal at the school.

Doctors from primary health centres in the village swiftly came to the school and administered medicine to the pupils affected by suspected food poisoning.

In the Kamareddy district, at the Government School at Yellareddy, food poisoning led to 14 students falling ill after



Affected students being treated at the Primary Health Centre at Yellareddy in Kamareddy district on Wednesday

consuming food served with pickles. The school staff rushed the affected students to the government hospital for treatment.

Affected students exhibited symptoms such as nausea, dizziness and restlessness, it is reported. Similarly, in the

Scheduled Tribes hostel near Girinagar in Suryapet district, food poisoning affected 12 students, and they were also rushed to the Primary Health Centre in Girinagar for treatment. Some of the affected students are receiving care in a private hospital. Parents of the affected students are deeply concerned and anxious about the situation.

A series of food poisoning incidents took place in Telangana. The State government took strong action against the authorities and also the principals of the schools.

District Collectors have been frequently visiting the Gurukul Schools inspecting the facilities and interacting with students to enquire about the quality of food being provided to them. The women IAS officers have also been visiting the schools as directed by the Chief Secretary.

'BJP will emerge as true representative of people in TG'

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Rajya Sabha MP K Laxman has expressed confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will emerge as the true representative of the people in Telangana, asserting that both the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) and the Congress have no place in the state in future. He made these remarks while participating as the chief guest in the BJP flag unveiling programme in Chevella town.

The event saw the participation of prominent BJP leaders, including Chevella MP Konda Vishveshwar Reddy, party district unit president Bokka Narasimha Reddy, and state executive members Nelli Srivardhan Reddy, Ane Babaiah, Deepalli Ashok Goud, Marri Shashidhar Reddy, and Chevella

Mahender, among others. Speaking at the event, Laxman criticised the Congress government, stating that it had failed to deliver on its promises even after a year in power. He accused the ruling party of deceiving people from all sections of society and claimed that the BJP is the only party that stands firmly in support of youth, women, farmers, and marginalized communities.

Expressing confidence in the party's growing influence, he said that people now recognised that BRS and Congress are two sides of the same coin and that both parties would be rejected in the upcoming local body elections. He assured BJP workers that the party would secure a decisive victory in these elections and would come to power in Telangana in 2029.

Nostalgia pervades as alumni return to govt school in Lokeshwaram

DEEPIKA PASHAM ■ HYDERABAD

A heartwarming moment reminiscent of the movie 96 unfolded in Lokeshwaram, Nirmal district, as 1998-1999 alumni from a local government school gathered to honour their teachers and contribute to the school's infrastructure. While the event stirred nostalgia, it also highlighted the collective commitment of these alumni to give back to their roots. This initiative is becoming a trend in villages across the district, with former students revisiting their schools to reconnect with childhood friends and pledge their support for positive change.

The contributions were entirely voluntary, with no pressure on unemployed members to participate financially. Notably, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) from the group generously donated Rs 10,000 each to support the cause. A standout aspect of the gathering was the group's promise to assist the families of their friends



A group photo of the 1998-1999 batch in their government school at Lokeshwaram

who lost their lives to Covid-19.

Venkatesh Telu, an alumnus working in Dubai, explained, "Reuniting with old friends and revisiting our government school after 25 years has become a meaningful tradition. We have been actively finding contacts and adding them to a WhatsApp group. Each batchmate is responsible for locating their peers and inviting them." He added, "We scheduled the reunion for January 12, when most of us would be home for the festi-

val season. The most rewarding part was reassuring the families of five of our friends who passed away during Covid-19 that we will always support them in any way we can."

The group also honoured their retired teachers and donated chairs and other infrastructure to the school. Reflecting on their visit, the alumni remarked, "Our government school has changed a lot, but the lessons we learned here have stayed with us and shaped us into who we are today."



Suryapet Superintendent of Police Sunpreet Singh announcing the arrest of the accused in the 'honour killing' case in Suryapet on Wednesday

Six arrested in 'honour killing' case in Suryapet

PNS ■ SURYAPET

The Suryapet Rural Police have arrested six individuals in connection with the brutal murder of Vadlakonda Krishna in a case of alleged honour killing on January 26. The accused have been charged with orchestrating the crime following a conflict over an inter-caste marriage. The police also recovered significant evidence which included a vehicle, a knife, five mobile phones, a plastic bag, and a rope, which were allegedly used in the murder.

Suryapet District Superintendent of Police Sunpreet Singh held a media conference on Wednesday and provided detailed information about the case. He was accompanied by Deputy Superintendent of Police Ravi, Circle Inspector Rajasekhhar, and Sub-Inspector Balu Nayak.

The police officer confirmed that the murder was premeditated and planned by the accused, including the victim's in-laws and their accomplices.

The arrested are Kotla Naveen (24), a farmer from Pillamarri village, Bairu Mahesh (39), a farmer from Talla Gadda; Kotla Saidulu (43), a farmer from Pillamarri village; Kotla Vamsi (22), a student from Pillamarri village; Kotla Buchamma (65), a homemaker from Pillamarri village; and Nuvvula Sai Charan (23), a private employee from Nalgonda.

The murder stemmed from the inter-caste marriage between

The main accused Naveen resorted to killing Vadlakonda Krishna because his grandmother felt that the marriage brought dishonour to the family

Krishna and Bhargavi, the sister of Naveen. Despite opposition from Bhargavi's family, Krishna and Bhargavi married secretly in August 2024, which heightened tensions. The accused felt that the marriage had brought dishonour to the family. On January 26, they lured Krishna to a secluded spot, where Mahesh strangled him with the help of Naveen, Vamsi, and others.

SP Sunpreet Singh urged people who enter into inter-caste marriages to approach the police if they face family pressure. He also warned that such criminal actions could lead to severe consequences, including imprisonment. The investigation is ongoing, and further arrests are expected.

According to reports, Naveen allegedly committed the crime by being provoked by his paternal grandmother. Around 9 am on Sunday, Naveen reportedly showed the body of Krishna to her at her relative's place in Suryapeta. The grandmother of Bhargavi felt that the girl had brought dishonour to the family.

CMRF cheques distributed in Khammam

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) cheques amounting to Rs 26 lakh were distributed to the beneficiaries in Khammam Rural mandal at the camp office of Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, T Dayakar Reddy, in-charge of the camp office distributed the cheques. A total of 70 beneficiaries received cheques valued at Rs 26 lakh.

The event was also attended by several prominent leaders, including Muddulapalli Agricultural Market

Committee Chairman Byaru Harinath Babu, Rural Mandal Congress Party President Kalleem Venkat Reddy, Youth Wing President Koti Ramana, PCC members Dharwad Rammurthy Naik, Nagandla Srinivasarao, Market Committee Directors Pantulu Naik, Chinna Krishnarao, Vanguri Ravi, and others. Speaking on the occasion, Dayakar Reddy stated that the government is committed to providing financial assistance to those in need through the Chief Minister's Relief Fund and urged the beneficiaries to make proper use of the assistance provided.

Second largest tribal Nagoba Jatara begins

PNS ■ ADILABAD

Nagoba Temple is located in Keslapur under Indravelli mandal in Adilabad district. The tribal people worship Nagoba, the serpent deity with devotion in this temple on the inaugural day of the eight-day Nagoba Jatara. As part of this, the Nagoba Jatara (Nagoba fair) is celebrated with special prayers and rituals starting at 10:30 pm on Tuesday night. The Mesram clan members perform special maha poojas for the deity using sacred Ganga water brought from the Godavari River.

On Tuesday members of the Mesram clan visited the Nagoba temple, along with their relatives wearing white clothes, and participated in the gathering. The women of the Mesram family assisted the new brides in performing special poojas at the Nagoba Temple.

Afterward, they sat in a row inside the temple and received



Devotees thronging Nagoba temple at Keslapur in Adilabad district to take part in Nagoba Jatara on Wednesday

blessings from the elders of the Mesram family. This ceremony marks their full integration into the Mesram family.

These prayers and other rituals continue for two days, and after the maha pooja and rituals, the celebrations of the Nagoba Jatara have offici-

ally begun. Starting from Wednesday, devotees are allowed to visit the deity. This Nagoba Jatara is known as the second-largest tribal fair in Telangana, and it attracts tribal people from all districts of Telangana and neighboring states. The fair is held in

Keslapur from Wednesday until February 4. The Telangana government has made extensive arrangements for the event, including the deployment of nearly 600 police personnel and installed 100 CCTV cameras for security and surveillance.

Man arrested on charge of matricide

PNS ■ KOTHAGUDEM

The Sujatha Nagar police here on Wednesday solved the mystery behind the murder of a 45-year-old woman B Sujatha, who was found dead at her residence in old Nimmalagudem under Sujathanagar mandal on January 25. Her son B Pavan was arrested on charge of matricide. Following a call from locals reporting the suspicious death, the police conducted an inquest and postmortem, which led them to register a case of suspicious death. Upon investigation, authorities discovered injuries on the woman's neck, which raised further suspicion. The police later identified her son, Pavan, as a key suspect. Pavan was arrested on Tuesday, and during questioning, the police said he had admitted to the crime.

BJP targeting Communists, says Chada Venkat Reddy

PNS ■ HANUMAKONDA

Communist Party of India (CPI) National Executive Member Chada Venkat Reddy stated that the BJP government at the Centre is conspiring to eliminate Communist parties, but Communists, who constantly fight for the people, can never be suppressed.

On Wednesday, the CPI organised a massive protest as part of its centenary celebrations, starting from Ekashila Park in Hanumakonda, under the leadership of the CPI district committee. Following the protest, a centenary celebration meeting was held at Kakatiya Hariitha Hotel. The meeting, presided over by CPI district secretary Karre Bikshapati, was attended by Chada Venkat Reddy, CPI State Assistant Secretary Takkallapalli Srinivas Rao, and



other prominent guests. Speaking on the occasion, Venkat Reddy criticised the BJP government for encouraging encounters on the pretext of eliminating the Maoists. But, the repressive measures were targeted against the Communists, he felt. He pointed out that as long as inequalities persist in the country, the BJP must understand that Communists cannot be elim-

inated. The CPI will continue its struggle for the people, he assured. CPI State Assistant Secretary Takkallapalli Srinivas Rao stated that welfare schemes must reach all eligible poor people in the district. He urged the continuation of the struggle until basic amenities like roads, electricity, and clean drinking water are provided in the colonies where poor people resided.

Chinna Reddy stresses importance of animal husbandry



Telangana State Planning Board Vice-Chairman G Chinna Reddy speaking at a farmers' meeting in Wanaparthy on Wednesday

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

During the Sri Choudeswari Jatara in Peberu Mandal of Wanaparthy district, an exhibition of Ongole breed cattle was held as part of the farmer's celebrations. The event was inaugurated by the Vice-Chairman of the Telangana State Planning Board G Chinna Reddy.

Speaking on the occasion, Chinna Reddy emphasised the importance of animal husbandry for the fertility of the land. He explained that using chemical fertilisers like urea on the soil for crops can make the land infertile after a few years. Therefore, raising cows, bulls, and other animals in every household would help utilise dung as manure. Using them for vermi compost can lead to better crop yields. He advised farmers to support and engage in animal husbandry.

In the village of Puramu, it was said that raising cattle was essential for both milk and crop production. He urged everyone to raise cows

in their homes because they are extremely beneficial for both dairy and agriculture. He also mentioned that having two bulls in front of the house brings joy and beauty. In addition to the common household pets like dogs, cats, or goats, raising cattle or calves would bring happiness and contentment, he noted. He urged everyone to work hard for the success of the three-day animal exhibition. He reassured farmers that the Krishna river water would reach the fields by March, and there is no need to worry about water scarcity for farming.

The event was attended by Agricultural Market Committee Chairperson Pramodini, Vice-Chairman Vijayavardhan Reddy, former public representatives Karn Sri Sainath, Meka Karray Swamy, Gouni Buchcharreddy, District Congress Party President Rajendra Prasad, Venkataramul, Farmer Union leaders Pabba Chandrashekhar Goud, Sai Reddy, Govardhan Reddy, Ball Reddy, Bull Sainath, Katikella Balaswamy, Erukali Balraju, and others.

Alleged terrorist from Warangal held at Chennai airport

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Warangal city has been rocked by reports of movements of terrorists. The news of Warangal citizen, named Zakariya, has been taken into custody at Chennai Airport on suspicion of having links with Pakistani terrorists has alerted the district administration and the police. Zakariya had been running a biryani centre near the Shivanagar under-bridge in Warangal for some time. He is suspected to have ties with terrorists. He has been taken into custody by the police on



A biryani hotel which was established by alleged terrorist Zakariya

January 25 while he was attempting to flee to Sri Lanka. Police suspect that Zakariya has had connections with Pakistani terrorists for several years. The local police have now launched an investigation into his 'criminal antecedents'. More details are yet to be known.

ACROSS THE STATES



B'luru palace land: K'taka issues ordinance to assert control

The Karnataka government has issued an ordinance to assert its rights over the expansive Bangalore Palace grounds, which spans 472 acres and 16 guntas near Mehkri Circle here. The move follows the state cabinet's decision on January 24 to reject the issuance of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the Mysuru royal family for acquiring nearly 16 acres of land within the palace grounds. According to the state government, granting TDR for the Bangalore Palace grounds would not be in the best interests of the state. The cabinet had expressed concerns that paying Rs 3,014 crore to acquire 16 acres of land for the development of just two kilometers of road would not be economically beneficial for the state. The ordinance aims to regulate and determine the utilisation of the land under the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996, which vests ownership of the land with Karnataka. The total value of the entire 472-acre property has been assessed at Rs 11 crore as per the provisions of the Act.



CBI books 7 ITBP officers for alleged corruption

The CBI has filed two separate FIRs against seven officers of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) for large scale alleged pilferage and fraudulent activities in government stores and corruption worth Rs 1.8 crore, officials said Wednesday. In the first FIR registered on a complaint from ITBP, the CBI has alleged that then Commandant Anupreet Borkar, who was posted in Pithoragarh in collusion with Deputy Commandants Deepak Gogoi, Puran Ram, Mukesh Chand Meena, Inspector Anil Kumar Pandey and contractor Madan Singh Rana, was involved in a series of illegal actions, primarily related to the tendering process for hauling government stores and material to Border Out posts (BOPs) in 2019-21. The complaint from ITBP has listed 12 instances of alleged corruption during the year 2020-21, the year India-China troops came face to face in Galwan Valley and a major push was given to boosting infrastructure at border outposts. In one such instance, the force alleged that during 2020-21 approval was given to purchase 105 pairs of Boot Combat Rubber (gum boots) at the rate of Rs 1,198 per pair but he purchased cheaper shoes of a different specification at Rs 499 per pair causing a loss of Rs 73,395 to exchequer.



GRAP 3 curbs invoked in Delhi amid rise in pollution

The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality on Wednesday invoked curbs under stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) amid a sharp rise in pollution due to unfavourable meteorological conditions, according to an official order. The air quality in Delhi deteriorated sharply amid calm winds, smoggy situation and low mixing height with the 24-average AQI rising to 365 at 4 pm, prompting the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to implement curbs under stage 3 of GRAP. GRAP Stage 3 entails a ban on non-essential construction work. Classes up to grade 5 are required to shift to hybrid mode under Stage 3. Parents and students have the option to choose online education wherever available. Under Stage 3, the use of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars (4-wheelers) is restricted in Delhi and nearby NCR districts.

'Delhi does not forgive sinners'

● Modi slams Kejriwal over 'poisoning Yamuna' remark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal over his remarks that "poison" is being mixed in the Yamuna, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that fearing their defeat in the Delhi polls, "AAP-da people" have turned desperate.

Addressing a public meeting in Kartar Nagar here in the run-up to the February 5 assembly polls, he also likened AAP leaders to serial killer Charles Sobhraj, who gained notoriety for duping people.

"Those who built 'sheesh mahal' and those who looted public money worth thousands of crores of rupees can never think of the welfare of the poor. That is why they are spreading lies in Delhi. These AAP-da people speak lies with such innocence that people get trapped," Modi said.

"You may have heard of Charles Sobhraj, he was a known thug. He was such an expert at duping people with innocence that every time people would get duped by him. That is why one has to remain



This is fraud and shamelessness. They want to make people struggle for water and want Purvanchalis to chhathi maiya's puja surrounded by garbage

cautious of such people," he said. Delhi has made it clear that now excuses, fake promises as well as "loot and lies" of the "AAP-da" government will not work, Modi said as he made a fervent appeal to voters to give him a chance to serve after 25 years of Congress and AAP governments.

Further hitting out at the AAP, Modi said that during the last two elections, the party asked for votes on the promise of cleaning the Yamuna and now it says that the issue does not yield votes. "This is fraud and shamelessness. They want to make people struggle for water and

want Purvanchalis to chhathi maiya's puja surrounded by garbage," he said.

The AAP has committed a "sin" that history, the people of Haryana and the country will not forget.

"A former CM has made malicious allegations against the people of Haryana. AAP-da people have become desperate due to the fear of defeat. Is Haryana different from Delhi? Don't they have children and relatives in Delhi? Will they mix poison for their own people?" Modi said, hitting out at Kejriwal.

He said the people of Delhi, PM Modi, diplomats in embassies and judges staying in the national capital drink the same water from Haryana.

"Can anyone think that to poison Modi, Haryana BJP has mixed poison in water? What are you saying? It is in Indians' character to forgive mistakes but neither Delhi nor India forgives sins committed with ill-intention," he said.

Kejriwal had alleged that the BJP is trying to keep the people of Delhi thirsty as it indulges in "dirty politics".



29 Naxalites surrender in C'garh's Narayanpur

PNS ■ NARAYANPUR

Twenty-nine Naxalites, including seven women, surrendered in Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh on Wednesday, a senior official said.

The cadres belonging to Kutul area committee of Maoists turned themselves in before the police, Border Security Force (BSF) and Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) officials here citing disappointment with the "hollow" Maoist ideology and growing internal differences within the banned outfit, Narayanpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Prabhat Kumar said.

They also said they are influenced by the development work being carried out in Maad area of Narayanpur, including rapid construction of roads, and said they wanted to lead a normal life henceforth, he said.

The surrendered cadres were active as members of Janatana Sarkar, militia, Chetna Natya Mandli (CNM - a cultural wing of Maoists) and lower rungs of Maoists, he said, terming the development as a major success for security forces.

With this, 71 senior and lower cadres have surrendered so far in the district since January 2024. During the same period, more than 60 Maoists were killed and 50 arrested, he said.

Parl panel adopts report on Waqf bill by majority

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel examining the Waqf Amendment Bill on Wednesday adopted by a majority vote its report that contained changes suggested by ruling BJP members, prompting the opposition to dub the exercise as an attempt to destroy the Waqf boards.

The Joint Committee of Parliament (JPC) on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, chaired by BJP member Jagdambika Pal, adopted the report on the draft legislation by a 15-11 majority vote. Opposition members were submitting dissent notes to the report. BJP members insisted that the bill, introduced in Lok Sabha in August last year, seeks to bring modernity, transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties, while the opposi-



● OPPOSITION SLAMS MOVE

tion termed it as an attack on the constitutional rights of the Muslim community and interference in the functioning of the Waqf boards.

Speaking to reporters after the 38th sitting of the committee, Pal

said the report will be presented to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday and tabled in both Houses of Parliament during the Budget Session beginning Friday. A key concern of the opposition was the

appointment of non-Muslims on the Waqf Board, which they claimed was violative of Article 26 of the Constitution that granted citizens freedom to manage their religious affairs, including establishment and

maintenance of institutions for religious and charitable purposes. "You have violated our rights granted under Article 26 of the Constitution. You talked about Uniform Civil Code, but there are Hindu Endowment Board, Sikh Boards, Christian boards which do not have non-Hindus, non-Sikhs, and non-Christians as members. But why does this not extend to Muslims? This is an attempt to destroy the Waqf Boards," Congress member Imran Masood told reporters here.

At its meeting on Monday, the committee had adopted 14 amendments to the bill, all proposed by BJP members and rejected every change suggested by the opposition members, including Congress, DMK, TMC, AAP, Shiv Sena-UBT and the AIMIM.

Kejriwal opposed to quota against Dalits, minorities

● Rahul Gandhi steps up attack at poll rally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up his attack on AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday alleged that the former Delhi chief minister is opposed to reservations and is against Dalits, backwards, minorities and the poor. Addressing an election rally in Bawana here, Gandhi said he and his party do not fear Prime Minister Narendra Modi and on the contrary, "the PM is afraid of the Congress". He also attacked Kejriwal with the 'sheesh mahal' jibe for the second straight day and said that though he talked about clean governance, the "biggest scam" in Delhi took place under his watch.

Gandhi said Kejriwal reneged on his promise of bathing in and drinking Yamuna water and challenged him to drink the water from the river. He said both Prime Minister Modi and Kejriwal are opposed to reservations and are against Dalits, minorities, backwards and the poor.

"Kejriwal should say clearly that he would get caste survey done and breach the wall of 50 per cent cap on reservation, but he will not do so as he is against Dalits, backwards and



minorities. When riots were taking place, where was he. Did he stand with you?" Gandhi said, slamming the former chief minister.

Training his guns specifically on Kejriwal, Gandhi said he used to move around in a small car wearing muffer and claim that he will do clean politics but the biggest scam in Delhi worth crores of rupees was done by his party and his people.

"He (Kejriwal) ran a corrupt government. Modi ji lies in his speeches and just like him, Kejriwal does the same. Five years ago, he (Kejriwal) had stated that he will take a bath in the Yamuna and drink its water. Five years have gone by and

he did not do so. You have to drink dirty water but Kejriwal lives in 'sheesh mahal' which is worth crores and lies to you," the former Congress chief said. Gandhi said he had told PM Modi in Parliament that the Congress will get a caste census done.

"When our government comes in Delhi, we will do a caste census. I had said that we will breach the wall of 50 per cent cap on reservations. We will break down this wall. I want to ask Kejriwal whether he wants to remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation. Kejriwal and Modi ji are against reservation and are against Dalits, minorities, backwards and the poor," Gandhi said.

Don't 'waste' your votes on Cong: Kejriwal to Delhiites

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the Congress, urging voters not to "waste" their votes on the grand old party.

Addressing a 'janasabha' in the Badli constituency here, Kejriwal accused the Congress of indirectly aiding the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"Why waste your votes on the Congress? The Congress will not win, it will just cut our votes. The Congress and the BJP are fighting this election together to defeat the AAP. Vote to make someone win, not to make someone lose," he said.

The AAP leader further emphasised his party's welfare schemes, claiming that 70 per cent of women, according to a survey, support the AAP.

He urged women to convince men in their families to vote for his party, alleging that men often get "distracted" by the BJP and the Congress.

The AAP has fielded its sitting MLA Ajesh Yadav from Badli against Congress' Delhi unit president Devender Yadav. While Ajesh Yadav has won the seat in the last two elections (2015 and 2020), Devender Yadav had previously held it in 2008 and 2013. The BJP



has nominated Deepak Chaudhary as its candidate in the constituency. Taking on the BJP over the rising ammonia levels in the Yamuna, Kejriwal once again accused the Haryana government of "poisoning" Delhi's water supply.

"The BJP has crossed all limits in politics. The BJP-led Haryana government has put poison named ammonia in the water. But we saved the people of Delhi by diverting the toxic water. We all are one — the people of Haryana are also us and the people of Delhi are also us," he said.

Kejriwal's fresh attack on the Congress comes amid growing rifts within the INDIA alliance.

The fissures deepened on Tuesday when he hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who had accused him of being "afraid" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and being involved in the "liquor scam".

BEATING RETREAT

Foot-tapping music, soulful renditions mark end of R-Day celebrations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foot-tapping melodies and the majestic backdrop of a setting sun over Raisina Hills mesmerised the audience at Vijay Chowk on Wednesday during the Beating Retreat ceremony, marking the culmination of the 76th Republic Day celebrations.

From "Kadam Kadam Badhaye Ja" and "Aye Watan Tere Liye" to "Ganga Jamuna" and "Bharat Ke Jawan" -- bands from the Indian Army, Navy, Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) played 30 foot-tapping tunes before a distinguished audience comprising President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, among others.

President Murmu arrived in the tradi-

tional buggy with the audience cheering as her open gold-plated carriage rolled down the Raisina hill.

The ceremony began with the massed band's "Kadam Kadam Badhaye Ja" tune, followed by several captivating numbers such as "Amar Bharati", "Indradhanush", "Jai Janam Bhumi", "Nati in Himalayan Valley", "Ganga Jamuna" and "Veer Siachen" by the Pipes and Drums band.

The CAPF bands played "Vijay Bharat", "Rajasthan Troops", "Aye Watan Tere Liye", and "Bharat Ke Jawan".

"Galaxy Rider", "Stride", "Rubaru" and "Millennium Flight Fantasy" were the tunes played by the IAF band, while the Navy band played "Rashtriya Pratham", "Nishak Nishpad", "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", "Spread the Light of Freedom", "Rhythm of the Reef" and "Jai Bharati".



It was followed by the Army band which played "Veer Sapoot", "Taqaat Watan", "Mera Yuva Bharat", "Dhruv" and "Faulad Ka Jigar".

The Massed Bands then played the tunes "Priyam Bharatam", "Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon" and "Drummers Call", drawing loud cheer and applause from the audience.

The event came to a close with the ever-popular tune "Sare Jahan Se Acha", played by the Buglers.

The principal conductor of the ceremony was Commander Manoj Sebastian.

The Army band conductor was Subedar Major (honourary captain) Bishan Bahadur, while M Antony, MCPO MUS II, and Warrant Officer Ashok Kumar were the conductors of the Navy and IAF bands, respectively.

The conductor of the CAPF band was Head Constable GD Mahajan Kailash

Madhava Rao. The Pipes and Drums band played under the instructions of Subedar Major Abhilash Singh, while the Buglers performed under the leadership of Naib Subedar Bhupal Singh.

The ceremony follows a centuries-old military tradition, wherein troops cease fighting, sheathe their arms, withdraw from the battlefield, and return to their camps at sunset upon the sounding of the retreat.

The first Beating Retreat ceremony in India was held in 1955, during the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip.

It was conceived by Major GA Roberts and commissioned by then-prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Since then, the ceremony has become an annual event, showcasing the musical and cultural heritage of India.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Indian economy in fast lane

India's economy is set to lead global growth, requiring right policies in the upcoming budget to maintain momentum

India's growth story is going strong despite interruptions in the global markets. Indian economy has maintained its momentum and will continue to do so in the next two years. According to the January 2025 edition of the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report, India is poised to retain its position as the fastest-growing major economy, with an impressive projected growth rate of 6.7 per cent for both FY26 and FY27. This remarkable trajectory not only surpasses global growth forecasts of 2.7 per cent but also cements India's status as a critical player in the global economic landscape. India's robust economic performance is underpinned by several key factors. The services industry continues to be a cornerstone of India's economy, contributing significantly to GDP and job creation. IT services, financial technology, and healthcare have been pivotal in driving growth. Government initiatives like 'Make in India' and the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes have helped manufacturing, fostering innovation and attracting both domestic and foreign investments. Investments in infrastructure, including roads, railways and digital connectivity, have bolstered economic activity and enhanced productivity.



India's economic ascent is noteworthy in a global context where growth remains tepid. With China's growth slowing to an estimated 4 per cent next year, India's consistent expansion underscores its growing prominence. The International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook aligns with the World Bank's projections, estimating India's growth at 6.5 per cent for 2025 and 2026, further reinforcing the nation's stable economic fundamentals. Despite its impressive performance, India faces a set of challenges that demand attention, especially as the Union Budget for FY26 approaches. While growth is robust, the need to create adequate job opportunities for India's burgeoning youth population remains pressing. Addressing structural unemployment will be crucial to ensuring inclusive growth. Rising global commodity prices and domestic supply chain constraints pose risks to price stability. Effective monetary and fiscal measures are required to contain inflation without stifling growth. With increased spending on infrastructure and social welfare, maintaining fiscal discipline will be a balancing act for policymakers. The agriculture sector, a backbone of the Indian economy, continues to face challenges such as erratic monsoons, low productivity, and market inefficiencies. Comprehensive reforms are needed to modernise and stabilise this sector. Geopolitical tensions, trade disruptions, looming tariff hike in the US and climate change are external risks that could impact India's growth trajectory. Strengthening economic resilience against these uncertainties is imperative. As Nirmala Sitharaman prepares to unveil the Budget, she must focus on addressing these challenges to keep India's growth momentum. Prioritising investments in education, healthcare, and skill development will ensure that the benefits of growth are widely shared.

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PICTALK



NCC cadets during the National Cadet Corps (NCC) rally at Cariappa Ground in New Delhi

The Gandhian ethos: A guide for a polarised world



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As societies grapple with discord and division, Gandhi's legacy inspires us to embrace dialogue, empathy and unity

On January 30, 1948, three gunshots ended Mahatma Gandhi's life but failed to extinguish the ideals he stood for. The physical silencing of Gandhi only immortalised his message of nonviolence, reconciliation and understanding. Seventy-seven years later, his teachings remain as vital as ever, resonating loudly in a world increasingly fraught with impatience, intolerance, and polarisation. In the face of these challenges, Gandhi's life work continues to urge humanity to rediscover the virtues of patience, empathy, and constructive dialogue. In our polarised global society, where divisions grow deeper and disagreements often turn hostile, Gandhi's philosophy offers a beacon of hope. The sound of silence left by those three bullets asks a poignant question: Can humanity heal its divisions without resorting to violence? Though Gandhi's message arose in a specific historical context, its relevance transcends time, providing an antidote to the impatience and discord threatening our shared humanity today.

Reviving Gandhian Ideals in Education
The urgency of restoring values like patience, dialogue and empathy is most pronounced in the education of younger generations. Early exposure to these principles can shape the leaders of tomorrow. Initiatives like Taking Gandhi to Schools integrate Gandhian philosophy into children's lives through storytelling, discussions, and experiential learning. These programmes go beyond preaching; they immerse students in the practice of nonviolence and coexistence. For example, lessons on managing classroom conflicts teach students to approach disagreements with empathy and active listening—skills they carry into the broader world. Educators and community leaders are also being empowered to foster these values. Workshops on nonviolent communication, mediation and conflict resolution turn abstract concepts into



actionable practices. These tools have been successfully applied in diverse settings, from resolving domestic disputes to rebuilding trust in conflict-ridden communities. The Gandhian ethos of reconciliation—rooted in forgiveness, nonviolence and dialogue—provides a framework for healing even the most entrenched divisions. **The Transformative Power of Reconciliation**

Gandhi's approach to reconciliation was not just about resolving conflicts but about restoring relationships. He believed in confronting injustice with courage, yet harboring no hatred for the wrongdoer. This philosophy promotes harmony over revenge, emphasising understanding and collective wellbeing. Archbishop Desmond Tutu echoed this belief, stating, "True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth." Similarly, Nelson Mandela, inspired by Gandhi, viewed forgiveness as a tool for lasting peace, asserting, "Courageous people do not fear forgiving, for the sake of peace."

By embedding these principles into education and social discourse, Gandhi's legacy becomes more than a commemoration; it becomes a lived reality. Seminars and dis-



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cussions on topics like forgiveness, interfaith harmony, and dialogue encourage participants to reflect deeply and adopt these values. Immersive experiences like these inspire young minds to embrace nonviolence as a powerful force for change.

Gandhi Smriti: A Living Tribute

At the heart of Gandhi's enduring legacy is Gandhi Smriti, the site where he spent his final days. Located at 5, Tees January Marg in Delhi, this historic place, once Birla House, holds profound significance. Gandhi arrived here on September 9, 1947, after finding his intended residence occupied by refugees from West Punjab following Partition.

Today, Gandhi Smriti is a national memorial, home to museums, Gandhi's preserved room, and the prayer ground where he held evening meetings. It attracts visitors from around the world, serving as a place of pilgrimage and a reminder of the tragedy that ended his life. Yet, Gandhi Smriti is more than a heritage site; it is an educational hub where people of all ages, especially children, learn about courage, compassion, and responsible citizenship. Every year, on Gandhi's birth and death anniversaries, chil-

dren perform musical tributes at the evening prayer meet. These events embody Gandhi's belief that peace must begin with the young: "If we are to teach real peace in this world... we shall have to begin with the children."

A Call to Action

The principles Gandhi championed—nonviolence, reconciliation, and understanding—are not relics of the past but vital tools for addressing modern challenges. His teachings remind us that change begins with small acts of kindness, empathy, and constructive dialogue. By nurturing these values in young hearts, we lay the foundation for a more harmonious future. As we commemorate Gandhi's life and philosophy, let us remember that the silence left by those three bullets was not an end but a beginning. It calls on us to transform divisions into unity, hostility into understanding, and despair into hope. The path to peace may be long and arduous, but it begins with the courage to believe in the power of nonviolence and the quiet persistence of nurturing hope in the hearts of the next generation.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UTTRAKHAND IMPLEMENTS UCC

Madam—The implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Uttarakhand is a landmark move with nationwide implications. Politically, it has reignited the debate on uniform laws, with the BJP advocating it as a step toward equality, while opposition parties and minority groups see it as a threat to India's pluralistic ethos. Legally, the UCC may face challenges from groups arguing it infringes on religious freedoms under Article 25 of the Constitution.

If successful, it could harmonise personal laws on marriage, divorce, and inheritance, simplifying legal processes and promoting gender equality. Socially, concerns about cultural and religious autonomy are significant, particularly among minority and tribal communities. While many welcome its focus on equality, critics argue the mandatory registration of marriages, live-in relationships, and notification of pregnancies could be intrusive and difficult to enforce.

Administratively, the UCC relies on digital infrastructure, such as Aadhaar-based verification and AI translations, but challenges may arise in rural areas with limited access to technology. Citizens must meet strict deadlines for registering relationships, highlighting the need for robust awareness campaigns. On a broader level, the UCC aims to foster national integration and secularism by reducing divisions created by diverse personal laws. Uttarakhand's success will determine whether this initiative becomes a model for other states or remains a divisive issue in India's socio-political landscape.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

US TARIFFS CONCERN INDIA

Madam—The editorial on Indo-US trade and relationships (January 29) presents valid points. India has been wasting time in giving mere slogans instead of finding solutions and strengthening the structures. Now even the GDP is not growing to the expected level, and the demands in rural and urban areas are declining, causing cau-

JPC approves 14 amendments in Waqf Bill



The Joint Parliamentary Committee set up to scrutinise the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, on Monday cleared the proposed legislation with 14 amendments in the original bill. The bill is likely to be taken up in Parliament for discussion and subsequent passage. One of the key amendments accepted by the JPC is to empower the state government to nominate to the authority to determine

whether a property is 'Waqf.' In the original bill, this power was entrusted to the district collector. As it was a foregone conclusion, the non-NDA members in the JPC opposed dilution of the existing Act. In fact, the Waqf Act 1995 had extended unlimited powers to the Waqf Tribunals. In the existing act, the decision of a tribunal is final and binding on the parties. No suit or legal proceedings shall lie under any civil court. In the absence of an appealing mechanism, decisions made by the Waqf Tribunals lack transparency. In addition, there were reports of widespread misuse of Section 40 of the Waqf Act to acquire and declare a property as Waqf property, which has led to disharmony among the communities. Thus, the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is the need of the hour.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

It is time India focuses its priorities on promoting meaningful education that parts with skills, talents and knowledge and infusing more vibrancy in the domestic markets by ensuring increased demands. The lifeline today is the IT sector, which is able to provide employment to the cream of talents among the graduates in the field. The migration policy of Trump is likely to disturb this lifeline.

Further, India cannot find fault with Trump calling for America First and Make in America, as the same is the slogan PM Modi was raising all along. In the background of a growing trade imbalance with the US, India cannot afford a penalty tariff nor take back such a huge number of migrants without pain. The actions of Trump are nothing but a declaration of the failure of globalisation, which was promoted against protectionist theory and insisted on free movements of capital, labour, goods, and services. However, it is time India focuses on empowering the vast majority to spend more, as the enriched rich cannot save this situation, and they are seeking safe places to deck their capital in

countries abroad. Change in the policy is inevitable.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

STAMPEDE IN MAHAKUMBH

Madam—The news of death at Mahakumbh is grotesque. More than seven people were killed and around 10 injured in a stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj, as tens of millions gathered to take a holy dip on the most auspicious day of the six-week Hindu festival. The drone footage showed millions of devotees, shoulder to shoulder, arriving in the pre-dawn dark at the temporary township in Prayagraj for the holy dip at the confluence of three rivers, the Ganga, Yamuna, and the Saraswati. Distraught families gathered outside temporary medical centres, searching for missing relatives, while emergency teams attended to the injured and police struggled to regain control over the crowds.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The lost art of balance: Lessons from a life of overwork



SANJAY CHANDRA

In the relentless pursuit of professional success, the lines between work and life often blur, leaving behind stories of missed moments, lost connections and unforeseen struggles

I remember a senior colleague reminiscing about his earlier years in the job. His daughters were small. He was a workaholic and the children would be long asleep when he returned. They would be gone to school by the time he surfaced the next morning. One of the children left a note on her pillow that there would come a time when she might not have time for him. I was talking to a young lady. Her father retired from the services. He felt lost with more than enough free time on hand. The organisation had taught him to work hard. There were no training manuals to lead a retired life. I met a relative at a wedding. He will superannuate from a senior position in a few months. He sounded uncertain about the future. He is a scientist and had no hesitation in accepting that he had considered science as a hobby his entire life. Now he was not so certain. In the same function, I caught snatches of conversation between a few gentlemen. An evening, that could have been spent talking about things other than business,



had turned into an extension of the workplace. They might not agree with me now. They derive joy from such conversations when still in active service. Will they feel the same after retirement in a few years? I flew with a young IT professional many years ago. He was on the verge of quitting a well-paying senior-level private sector job to join a government company at the mid-management level. I was confounded till he explained. He was working in a software company with the majority of clients from America. His Indian job required him to work Indian hours. His American clients wanted him to be available for calls when they woke up. He could at least sleep in the night in his new job. I do not

know if he found peace. It does not matter if one works in the private sector or with the government. The first lesson drilled into us when I joined the railway services was that a railway officer is always on duty, 24x7. It sounded glamorous in the heady euphoria of youth. I started believing that stress brought out the best in me. Till it was too late. I developed hypertension, and then diabetes. I also had meltdowns. I have transitioned from being a technocrat manager to exploring creativity. I write fiction novels, short articles, and stories, and guide others to pursue passions from a bucket list that they could not take up, lost in the quest to earn a living. Many are not so fortunate. They do

not even realise that they need to strike a balance or that they need help. Recent statements by a couple of respected business leaders raise issues beyond chuckles and memes. A professional typically spends almost four decades working. This is 2/3rds of his total life at the time of retirement. Unfortunately, this is the only life he has seen. He has not even been prepared to lead a different later life. It is tougher for women. They are expected to take care of the children also, and sooner rather than later, the birds fly out of the nest. As we grow older, we start equating productivity with longer working hours. We also start believing that health and mental wellbeing, whether working or after retirement, is not important. How wrong we are! Melissa Stegins, mindfulness teacher and productivity coach, reminds us, "Remember that work and life coexist. Wellness at work follows you home and vice versa."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN CULTIVATING PURE FEELINGS

By nurturing empathy, mindfulness and gratitude, we can create stronger relationships



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Since our childhood, we have been taught to be polite and to be nice to others. In a way, it's important because you get what you give, and if we want others to be nice to us, our behaviour towards them should be similar, shouldn't it? But! If our so-called nice behaviour is superficial, acting as a mask over not-so-nice feelings, it will not win us any goodwill in return, because the law of karma operates even at the most subtle level, which states: "As you sow, so shall you reap." Hence, it is very important to have genuinely good feelings towards others, because when our feelings are pure, good wishes and nice behaviour come naturally. We don't have to tell ourselves to be nice to someone or, at a more subtle level, suppress or dismiss negative thoughts that arise upon seeing someone. Because if the feelings are pure, such negativity would never arise from within us.

We tend to have pure feelings and love towards our near and dear ones. We wish them well from the core of our hearts and celebrate their successes. Even when they fail, we give them hope and encourage them to do better. Why? Because we love them. But what about those out-



side the circle of our family and friends? Our feelings towards them keep changing according to how we perceive them. It is not that anyone is inherently bad, but it's our perception that makes us react differently when the same mistake is made by a loved one or by someone else. To one, we show sympathy and understanding, and to the other, we may show irritation and anger. We are quick to affix negative labels to others viz: selfish, lazy, stupid, egoistic, etc.

Our thoughts, words, and behaviour towards that person are shaped by that label. Thus, we find ourselves unable to be nice to some people. However, it's important to understand that our perception can often be clouded by our own biases and prejudices. We may not always be aware of the reasons behind our judgments, and these judgments can lead us to act in ways that are not truly reflective of our values. By acknowledging this, we can start to challenge our assumptions and work towards a more empathetic approach. For instance, if we encounter someone who initially seems unapproachable or difficult, instead of allowing our initial impression to dictate our interactions, we should take a moment to consider the possibility of underlying factors that might be influencing their behaviour. Mindfulness encourages us to be present in the moment and to approach each interaction with an open mind and heart. When we are mindful, we are less likely to react impulsively or allow our judgments to cloud our interactions. It helps us to listen more deeply and to respond with greater empathy.

This appreciation naturally extends to others, helping us to see the good in them even when it might be obscured by their actions or behaviour. Furthermore, building strong, authentic relationships requires effort and intentionality. It involves not just being kind in moments of ease but also extending understanding and support during challenging times. It means being willing to engage in open and honest communication and being receptive to feedback. In essence, the habit of looking at every person with mercy and compassion can lead to profound transformations—not just in them, but in us as well. When we consistently choose to see the good in others and extend our support, we create an environment where healing and growth are possible. By cultivating these attitudes and practices, we contribute to a more compassionate and understanding world. Remember! Each of us has the power to influence our surroundings through our actions and attitudes, and by choosing to engage with others in a meaningful and supportive way, we help build a community characterized by genuine goodwill and harmony.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Beyond the 70-hour workweek: Redefining productivity



A S MITTAL

Fostering efficacy, accountability and a strong sense of ownership plays a big role in cultivating a productive and innovative workforce

Recent statements by prominent Indian business leaders advocating for extended work hours have sparked significant debate across the industries and political sphere. Infosys founder Narayana Murthy suggested a 70-hour workweek for the younger generation, while Larsen & Toubro chairperson S N Subrahmanyam pushed the idea further, proposing a 90-hour workweek, including Sundays. While their intent—to encourage competitiveness and efficiency—is commendable, the emphasis on extended work hours misses a crucial point: the number of hours worked is not the primary determinant of success. Efficacy, accountability, trust and a spirit of ownership are far more vital in creating a productive and competitive workforce.

The Fallacy of "More Hours Equals More Productivity" Globally, data and research have consistently shown that longer working hours do not directly correlate with increased productivity. According to a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), countries with shorter average work hours often rank higher in productivity. For instance, Germany—known for its robust industrial base—averages 34.6 hours of work per week and boasts one of the highest productivity levels in the world. In contrast, countries like Mexico, where workweeks stretch beyond 42 hours, report significantly lower productivity rates. The human brain has a finite capacity for sustained focus and creative thinking. Prolonged hours often lead to diminishing returns, increased burnout, and higher rates of errors. Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) have also highlighted the adverse health effects of excessive work hours, linking them to cardiovascular diseases and mental health disorders.

Moreover, the concept of presenteeism—being physically present but mentally disengaged—is an often-overlooked consequence of extended work hours. Overworked employees may appear productive but are less likely to deliver high-quality output. This underscores the importance of optimising work hours for maximum efficacy rather than simply extending them. What Truly Drives Productivity? Instead of focusing on quantity, business leaders should shift the discourse to quality. Productivity is not about the time spent at a desk or shop floor but what is achieved during that time. Three key factors contribute to this:

1. Efficacy: Efficacy emphasises doing things right rather than simply doing more. This involves leveraging technology, optimising workflows, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Organisations like Toyota have championed this principle through methodologies such as Lean and Kaizen, which focus on reducing waste and enhancing efficiency.

2. Accountability: Empowering employees to take ownership of their work fosters accountability. When individuals feel responsible for outcomes, they naturally align their efforts toward achieving goals. Google's OKR (Objectives and Key Results) framework exemplifies how clearly defined goals and transparent accountability can drive exceptional results. A sense of accountability ensures that time is used effectively and results are prioritised over mere activity.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS NOT A "LUXURY" BUT A NECESSITY FOR SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE. THE HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW NOTES THAT EMPLOYEES WITH BALANCED LIVES DEMONSTRATE 21 PER CENT GREATER PRODUCTIVITY AND ARE 57 PER CENT LESS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE BURNOUT

3. Ownership Spirit: A sense of ownership transforms employees from passive participants to proactive contributors. This requires building a culture where employees feel their work has a purpose and their contributions are valued. Startups often exemplify this culture, with employees going above and beyond not because of long hours but because they believe in the company's mission. When employees feel emotionally invested, their creativity and commitment naturally increase, making the organisation more competitive.

The Role of Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is not a "luxury" but a necessity for sustained performance. The Harvard Business Review notes that employees with balanced lives demonstrate 21 per cent greater productivity and are 57 per cent less likely to experience burnout. Moreover, a healthy work-life balance fosters creativity, problem-solving, and emotional resilience—all essential traits in today's dynamic business environment. Countries and companies that respect the need for work-life balance are reaping the rewards. For example, Scandinavian nations, with their strong emphasis on work-life balance, consistently outperform others on innovation and competitiveness indices. Similarly, companies like Microsoft Japan, which experimented with a four-day workweek, reported a 40 per cent increase in productivity while reducing electricity costs and boosting employee satisfaction.

Flexible working arrangements are becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide. The rise of hybrid work models in the post-pandemic world has shown that flexibility and accountability coexist and thrive. This shift highlights that the hours worked and the autonomy, trust, and resources provided to employees drive results. Leaders must

embrace these new paradigms rather than revert to outdated notions of success linked solely to time spent at work.

Lessons from History

Historical evidence further underlines the argument for excessively long work hours. During the Industrial Revolution, labour movements fought for the eight-hour workday, recognising that overworking led to physical exhaustion and declining efficiency. The founder of Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford's decision to implement a five-day, 40-hour workweek in the 1920s was driven not by altruism but by a realisation that well-rested employees were more productive and innovative. His approach improved productivity and set a precedent for modern labour practices. In the 21st century, technology has amplified this principle. Automation, artificial intelligence, and digital tools enable employees to accomplish in hours what once took days. Instead of relying on human endurance, organisations should not focus on integrating these tools to enhance productivity and free up employees for strategic, high-value tasks.

Reimagining Competitiveness

India's demographic dividend presents a unique opportunity to shape the future of work. With one of the world's youngest workforces, the focus should be on enhancing skills, fostering creativity, and nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset—not on extending work hours. By investing in upskilling programs, digital tools, and robust processes, Indian businesses can boost productivity without exhausting their workforce. Additionally, introducing flexible work arrangements can help tap into employees' diverse needs while improving engagement and output.

Addressing the Challenges

While advocating for shorter or

optimised work hours, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges. Industries with high operational demands, such as manufacturing and healthcare, may find it challenging to reduce work hours without compromising service delivery. In such cases, solutions like staggered shifts, better workforce planning, and investment in automation can help balance operational needs with employee well-being. Similarly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with limited resources may perceive shorter work hours as a risk to productivity. However, even these organisations can benefit from adopting efficiency-focused strategies like process optimisation and targeted skill development. The Way Forward As a moderate business leader, I firmly believe that success stems from striking the right balance between ambition and sustainability.

While hard work and dedication are indispensable, they must be guided by innovative strategies, supportive cultures, and a focus on outcomes. Asking employees to clock 70 or 90 hours a week may yield short-term results, but it risks long-term consequences in the form of burnout, disengagement, and declining health. Let's redirect the conversation from "hours worked" to "value created." By fostering efficacy, accountability, trust and an ownership spirit, Indian businesses can achieve competitiveness and efficiency while respecting the well-being of their greatest asset—their workforce. After all, it's not the hours you put in but what you put into the hours that truly counts.

The Author is vice-chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, vice-chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal

Budget 2025: Paving the way for a sustainable, inclusive and innovative agriculture

From increased investments in rural infrastructure to empowering farmers with technology, the policy decisions can redefine the future of Indian agriculture

As we come closer to the announcement of Budget 2025, the agriculture industry, considered the backbone of the Indian economy, at this point brings us to the crossroads. Agriculture is not just an economic sector, but a way of life for the millions who do it, accounting for nearly half of the country's workforce and a major chunk of the GDP. This has offered a unique pathway of change to tackle the pressing challenges as well as unlock the tremendous scope of Indian agriculture ecosystem in the budget.

A Call for Increased Investments in Agriculture The agricultural sector in India calls for a drastic increase in its budgetary allocation, with a heavy focus on rural infra-



AMIT BK KHARE

structure, irrigation systems, as well as agricultural research and development (R&D). Such investments will, therefore, not only improve productivity but also ensure that farmers particularly small holders have equitable access to modern farming techniques. Projects to complete irrigation systems

under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) and investment in micro-irrigation systems—such as drip and sprinkler technologies—should be the first priorities.

Empowering Farmers through Technology

Farmers are increasingly looking for smart and precision farming tools and technologies, ranging from drones to IoT, artificial intelligence, etc, promising competitive thinking towards Indian agriculture. Budget 2025 should encourage adoption of these technologies by providing subsidies, training and affordable digital tools. By equipping farmers with technological innovations, not only will resources be utilised efficiently, but it will also enable higher yields and prof-

its. **Improving Crop Insurance and Financial Security**

Agriculture is still highly vulnerable to climate risks and market volatility. To protect farmers, there is an urgent need to expand the coverage of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), make the premiums affordable and provide simple and instant delivery of claims. Besides, direct targeting of small and marginal farmers' access to credit for investment in agriculture as well as affordable risk coverage can remove uncertainties and promote investment in agriculture.

Promoting Sustainable Farming Practices

Climate change is an increasingly urgent threat to agricultural productivity. It should be



able to focus on better and climate-smart farming practices. It is essential to provide incentives for organic farming, crop diversification and development of drought- and flood-resistant crop varieties to make agriculture resilient to climate challenges.

Encouraging Value Addition and Agro-Processing

India has tremendous potential in agro-processing and value addition. Budgetary support for food processing units, supply chain modernisation, and cold storage facilities will help reduce post-harvest losses and increase farmers' incomes. Tax incentives for startups in this sector can attract private investment and create rural employment opportunities.

Focus on Women Farmers and Youth in Agriculture

Key to the future of Indian agriculture, therefore, are the women farmers and rural youth. Customised programmes for financial support, even during the plantation phase, skill development, and entrepreneurial support for women would instil them as agricultural leaders. Likewise,

youth participation can be restructured and enhanced through innovation grants, incubation centers and awareness campaigns to revitalise this sector.

Pursuance of Export Booster and Market Access

In this context, India is immensely capable and has the potential to set itself up as a global agri-exporter. The government should create dedicated export portals, cut regulation, and develop a policy that supports traders dealing in high-demand crops. Strengthening integration of rural connectivity & e-NAM (National Agricultural Market) platforms will provide the farmers with access to markets and fair pricing.

The Role of Allied Sectors Allied sectors such as dairy,

fisheries, poultry, etc., have enormous potential to help bolster rural incomes and employment. Feed, vaccines, and infrastructure budgetary allowances for these sectors will also promote diversification and give farmers added revenue streams.

Towards a Prosperous Agricultural Ecosystem

Budget 2025 can afford to be a gamechanger for India's agricultural ecosystem—when we bring sustainability, inclusivity and innovation in farming at the core of agriculture policy. Which, if met, will provide the farmers community to timely tackle the pitfalls and excel on the worldwide map.

(The writer is the Founder & Managing Partner at Snail Integral Pvt. Ltd. Views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Infosys, Siemens AG to drive digital learning

Services company Infosys on Wednesday announced the expansion of its collaboration with technology major Siemens AG to accelerate its digital learning initiatives with generative AI. The collaboration aims to provide over 250,000 Siemens' professionals globally with upskilling opportunities, and a personalised learning and growth experience, according to a release. "As part of the collaboration, Siemens' My Learning World, a digital learning platform that is accessible from anywhere anytime, will leverage Infosys Topaz, an AI-first offering using generative AI technologies, and Infosys Wingspan, an AI-powered next-gen enterprise learning experience platform," it said. A key feature of the improved platform include an AI-powered knowledge assistant, that acts as a learning companion and provides instant answers and personalised recommendations for the user. "The platform also has an AI-assisted content authoring feature that generates tailored content in multiple languages. An AI chatbot assists learners in real-time -- navigating courses, explaining complex concepts, and leads them to additional study resources if needed," the release further said.

Need policy changes to achieve 6.4 pc GDP growth: Moody's

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India needs to change its fiscal and monetary policy to achieve a 6.4 per cent GDP growth in 2025 amid a weak rupee, declining foreign investment and volatile inflation, Moody's Analytics said on Wednesday.

Moody's Analytics said it expects the 2025-26 Union Budget to support domestic demand, particularly investment while aiming for a fiscal deficit of less than 4.5 per cent of GDP for the next fiscal.

In 2023-24, the fiscal deficit was 5.6 per cent of GDP, which is estimated to come down to 4.9 per cent in the current fiscal.

"India is facing a bumpy road in 2025. A weakening rupee, declining foreign investment, and volatile inflation are the areas of greatest economic risk. Changes in fiscal and monetary policy, likely in the first half of the year, is needed if India is to achieve 6.4 per cent growth," Moody's Analytics Associate Economist Aditi Raman said.

Moody's said that while India had one of the fastest-



growing economies in Asia in 2024, GDP growth waned over the first three quarters.

GDP growth likely picked up in the December quarter, resulting in an overall expansion of 6.8 per cent in 2024. That compares with 7.8 per cent in 2023.

"The slowdown versus 2023 sets a cautious tone for 2025. With interest rates staying higher for long, domestic demand will moderate.

"Potential US tariffs on Indian imports will make for a challenging export environ-

ment that hampers growth. However, that won't be too influential, given India's relatively closed economy. Our baseline has GDP growth slowing to 6.4 per cent in 2025," Raman said.

Moody's Analytics said the rupee has weakened significantly since the start of the U.S. Federal Reserve's easing cycle in September.

Donald Trump's win in the US presidential race only put more pressure on the rupee as investors sold Indian assets, jumping on a greenback rally.

Despite interventions by the Reserve Bank of India, the rupee lost more ground in the opening weeks of 2025, hitting a record low of Rs 86.6 to the US dollar in mid-January.

"Although the rupee hasn't weakened as much as some other developing economies' currencies, we expect it to keep depreciating over the long term as a growing middle class increases the country's reliance on imports. The central bank will be hard-pressed to offset that pressure on the currency," Raman said.

Moody's Analytics expect inflation to cool to 4.7 per cent in 2025 from 4.8 per cent in 2024.

Food inflation should ease, but the tumbling rupee will likely add to input costs, driving up imported inflation.

Currency weakness may also delay rate cuts, Raman said.

"India faces a challenging 2025; growth is slowing, the rupee looks set to tumble against the greenback, and headline inflation is far from the midpoint of the central bank's target range," Raman said.

Steel makers expect protectionist measures in Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic steel makers said they are expecting protectionist measures in the upcoming Budget to safeguard the sector from dumping.

AMNS India CEO Dilip Oommen said he expects the government to continue its focus on infrastructure development while enhancing the ease of doing business.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget for the 2025-26 financial year in Parliament on February 1, 2025.

JSW Steel Joint MD & CEO Jayant Acharya said a level-playing field and measures against unfair trade will be essential for maintaining growth momentum of the Indian steel industry.

Synergy Steels Managing Director Anubhav Kathuria said the Budget may also consider fiscal incentives and logistical support to offset high input costs, which squeezed out margins in 2024.

JSL MD Abhyuday Jindal said, "We urge the government



to raise the basic customs duty on stainless steel products to 15 per cent for all non-free trade agreement countries."

These steps will further strengthen the domestic stainless steel sector and position it as a vital driver of India's Viksit Bharat@2047 vision, he said.

Ritabrata Ghosh, Vice President & Sector Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said,

"Current year 2024 was a challenging year for the domestic steel players, as the industry witnessed earnings pressure amidst steel exports from China and other FTA countries being diverted in large volumes to high-growth markets like India."



Union Bank of India plans to raise up to Rs 20,000 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Bank of India on Wednesday said it plans to raise long-term bonds worth up to Rs 20,000 crore to finance infrastructure and affordable housing. The public sector lender also plans to issue green/sustainable bonds of up to Rs 5,000 crore, it said, announcing the outcome of the meeting of its Board of Directors. On Monday, the bank reported a 28 per cent increase in net profit to Rs 4,604 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024, helped by improved core income. The Mumbai-based bank had earned a net profit of Rs 3,590 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Its total income rose to Rs 31,375 crore in the reporting quarter from Rs 29,137 crore a year ago, Union Bank of India said in a regulatory filing.

Gold strikes fresh all-time high of Rs 83,750

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rallied Rs 910 to hit a fresh all-time high of Rs 83,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday due to heavy buying from jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 82,840 per 10 grams in the previous trading session.

The bright metal had jumped Rs 4,360 or 5.5 per cent to Rs 83,750 per 10 grams from Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on January 1.

Snapping a two-day losing run, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also surged Rs 910 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 83,350 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The yellow metal finished at Rs 82,440 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Silver climbed Rs 1,000 to Rs 93,000 per kg from Rs 92,000 per kg in the previous trading close.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 228 to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 80,517 per 10 grams. Also, contracts for April delivery climbed Rs 199, or 0.2 per cent, to hit a fresh peak of Rs 81,098 per 10 grams for the

first time on Wednesday.

"MCX gold surged to a record high amid a pullback in the dollar index and weak consumer data print from the US lifted the sentiment of precious metals.

"Investors sought safe-haven assets after the stock market rout, particularly in the US tech stock," Deveya Gagliani,



Research Analyst of Commodities, Axis Securities, said.

Silver futures for March delivery advanced Rs 105, or 0.12 per cent, to Rs 91,156 per kg from the previous close of Rs 91,051 per kg on Tuesday.

Globally, Comex gold futures traded flat at USD 2,794.70 per ounce. "Gold rose on Wednesday as traders sought safety in the precious metal against President Donald's expected tariff plan," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Markets surge nearly 1 pc on buying in IT stocks, global cues

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, buoyed by a rally in IT, capital goods and industrial stocks amid a firm trend in global markets.

However, unabated selling by foreign investors ahead of the Union Budget kept market sentiment extremely cautious, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 631.55 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 76,532.96. During the day, it jumped 698.32 points or 0.92 per cent to 76,599.73.

As many as 2,978 stocks advanced while 1,011 declined and 93 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty soared 205.85 points or 0.90 per cent to 23,163.10.

"The Indian market has demonstrated resilience in anticipation of the upcoming Union Budget, with expectations of measures, aimed at stimulating consumption and job creation. Investors are now focusing on the upcoming FOMC meeting, with general expectations that the Fed will maintain its current hawkish stance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-



chip pack, Zomato jumped nearly 7 per cent. Tata Motors, Infosys, UltraTech Cement, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were the other major gainers.

In contrast, ITC Hotels, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Asian Paints and ITC were among the laggards.

The BSE smallcap gauge surged 3.28 per cent and the midcap index rallied 2.54 per cent.

"Most key sectors contributed to the recovery. However, the highlight of the session was the strong rebound in broader indices. Looking ahead, market participants will react to the US Fed meeting outcome in early Thursday trades, followed by the focus shifting to the January derivatives expiry," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Among BSE sectoral indices, realty jumped 3.10 per cent,

industrials (2.94 per cent), capital goods (2.70 per cent), IT (2.65 per cent), BSE Focused IT (2.63 per cent), commodities (2.30 per cent) and healthcare (2.20 per cent).

FMCG emerged as the only laggard.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the positive territory. Markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong were closed due to holidays.

European markets were trading mostly in the green. US markets ended higher on Tuesday.

"India VIX has seen a surge from 13 to 19 levels in the last five weeks and rising volatility created swings with negative bias in the market.

"FIIs Long Short Ratio is now at around 20 per cent, which is near the lower part of the range, but selling from FIIs in the cash market is the real cause of concern to get the market stability.

Digital payments rise 11.1 pc at Sept-end 2024: RBI data

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Digital payments across the country registered an 11.11 per cent year-on-year rise as on September 2024, according to RBI's index that measures the adoption of online transactions.

RBI's Digital Payments Index (RBI-DPI) for September 2024 stands at 465.33 as against 445.5 for March 2024, the Reserve Bank said in a statement on Wednesday. "The increase in RBI-DPI index was driven by growth in payment infrastructure and payment performance across the country over the period, it said.

The central bank had announced the construction of a composite RBI-DPI in March 2018 as a base to capture the extent of digitisation of payments across the country. The index comprises five broad parameters that enable the measurement of the deepening and penetration of digital payments in the country over different periods.

These parameters are Payment Enablers (weightage 25 per cent); Payment Infrastructure - Demand-side factors (10 per cent); Payment Infrastructure - Supply-side factors (15 per cent); Payment Performance (45 per cent); and Consumer Centricity (5 per cent).



Sebi mulls modifying investor charter for stock brokers

Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday proposed reviewing the investor charter for stock brokers in a bid to boost financial consumer protection alongside enhanced financial inclusion and financial literacy. The proposal is also in view of the recent developments in the securities market including introduction of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform and SCORES 2.0 - a web based centralized grievance redressal system of Sebi. In its consultation paper, Sebi has proposed to modify the investor charter for stock brokers and sought comments on the proposal till February 17. The proposed modified charter would include vision, mission, services provided to investors by brokers, various activities of brokers with timelines, DOs and DON'Ts for investors, grievance redressal mechanism and handling of investor's claims in case of default of a trading member along with the format for investor complaints data to be displayed by brokers on their respective websites and trend of annual disposal of complaints.

KRBL unveils new packaging for 'India Gate' basmati rice

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

KRBL Ltd on Wednesday unveiled new packaging for its flagship 'India Gate' basmati rice brand after 25 years, with an aim to capture 60 per cent market share over the next 3-5 years.

The company currently holds a 42 per cent market share in the branded basmati rice segment.

"We have 42 per cent market share at present and aim to reach 60 per cent in the next 3-5 years," KRBL Business Head Ayush Gupta told reporters here.

The new packaging features an updated logo, struc-

Targets 60 pc market share



tured information about basmati rice grain length, usage guidelines for different food preparations, and a QR code.

Gupta said the redesigned packaging will help consumers make informed decisions while purchasing branded

packaged products.

He noted that only two brands - India Gate and Daawat (LT Foods) - operate at the national level, with a combined market share of 60 per cent in India's branded basmati rice segment.

To achieve its market share target, the company plans to challenge regional brands and convert consumers from loose to packaged rice while expanding the category, Gupta added.

The company also offers health and brown rice under its health category. However, this remains a niche segment that requires time for market expansion

Aditya Birla Housing Finance raises Rs 830 crore fund

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited (ABHFL), a wholly owned subsidiary of Aditya Birla Capital, on Wednesday said it has raised Rs 830 crore in funding through Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs) from the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

The funds raised through IFC's investment will be utilised to address critical gaps by providing housing loans to low-income and middle-income groups, with a particular focus on encouraging homeownership among women, the company said in a statement.

A portion will also be allocated to supporting MSMEs (micro, small & medium enterprises), especially women-led enterprises, to drive growth and economic progress, it

added. This investment aims to enhance financial inclusion, and uplift underserved communities in the affordable housing and MSME sectors, the company said.

"This collaboration with IFC marks a key milestone in advancing financial inclusion and equitable growth," said Pankaj Gadgil, MD & CEO of Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited.

Wendy Werner, Country Head, India and Maldives, IFC, said, a dynamic housing sector and improved financial access for MSMEs, are essential for India's sustainable development.

"Through our partnership with Aditya Birla Housing Finance, we aim to expand affordable housing finance and enable more women to become business owners," Werner said.

Australian team to explore opportunities in wool sector

PNS ■ THANE

An Australian delegation of 40 farmers and entrepreneurs is currently visiting India to explore research developments and assess opportunities in the wool production sector.

The delegation visited the Wool Research Centre in Thane on Tuesday to gain insights into its research and operations, an official release by the centre said on Wednesday.

The Wool Research Centre, established in 1980 at Sandoz

Bagh, Thane, operates under the Union Ministry of Textiles. It is the only research facility in India dedicated to wool and its processing.

The centre conducts extensive research on wool and fabrics used by the Indian Army, athletes, and the medical field, ensuring they meet international standards.

Numerous researchers work at this institute, which has been a government-approved hub for wool research in India for over four decades. Wool Research Centre founder Ravikant



Kapoor said. During the visit, Harish Chatterjee, Director General

of the Wool Research Association, highlighted the significance of the delega-

tion's tour. "A team of 40 farmers and entrepreneurs from

Australia's wool production sector visited the Wool Research Centre to explore research developments and assess opportunities for industry growth in India," he said.

A meeting of the Australian delegation and representatives from the Australian and Indian governments is also scheduled in the national capital. The discussions will focus on strengthening trade ties and fostering growth in the wool industry between the two nations, Chatterjee added.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
PUBLIC HEALTH & MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE (NOTICE INVITING TENDER)
No.18/SE/PH/MUN/INT/2024-25 Dt: -01-2025
1) Construction of Pipe Drain for Diversion of Sullage in Vemulawada Municipality - Rs.380.00 Lakhs. 2) Widening & Development of Road Stretch, Central Dividers in Ballampally Municipality - Rs.200.00 Lakhs (4th Call). Bid Down Load Start Date: 31-01-2025 and End Date: 15-02-2025. Further details can be seen @ e-procurement market place i.e. www.tender.telangana.gov.in and for any further clarifications required, please contact office of the Superintending Engineer, P.H.Circle, Warangal. Sd/-Superintending Engineer, P.H.Circle, Warangal. R.D.No: 977-PP/CLADVT/10024-25. Date: 29-01-2025

HERO? NAH!

Being the hair-oes of kindness and hope



In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, hairstylist and philanthropist Shiva Kumar Yadav, founder of Hyderabad Hair Donation for Cancer Patients, shared his inspiring journey of turning discarded hair into a source of hope for cancer patients. Since 2020, his initiative has provided over a thousand wigs-free of cost-to economically challenged cancer patients across India

TEJAL SINHA
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In a small Hyderabad salon, hairstylist Shiva Kumar Yadav watched strands of hair being swept away after every haircut. But unlike most, he saw potential where others saw waste. Why let this hair go unused when it could bring hope to someone in need? he thought. This idea led to the creation of Hyderabad Hair Donation for Cancer Patients in 2020, a heartfelt initiative that has since provided over a thousand wigs - free of cost - to economically challenged cancer patients across India. As a hairstylist, Shiva had always admired the transformative power of a good haircut. But he also recognized that hair loss for cancer patients wasn't a choice - it was a painful side effect of their treatment. "Every day, I saw long strands



of hair being cut and discarded," Shiva recalls. "I wondered, Why not put it to good use? That's when I decided to start collecting hair and donating it for wig-making."

Initially, he sent the donated hair to an organization in Mumbai that specialized in making wigs for cancer patients. But soon, he had a new realization: Why not create a system in Hyderabad itself? Just as Shiva's initiative was gaining traction, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and the Mumbai-based organization he relied on shut down operations. He was left with a stockpile of donated hair but no way to turn it into wigs. Determined to keep going, Shiva began searching for a local wig-maker in Hyderabad. "I travelled across the city, meeting different people, but no one was willing to do it for free," he says. Finally, he met Pradeep Kumar, a wig-maker who offered to help - but with a condition. "He told me, 'Nothing comes for free. If you can cover the making charges, I'll help you make the wigs,'" Shiva remembers. With no other option, he started funding the wig-making process himself, ensuring that every wig reached a patient in need. Unlike many initiatives

that stop at hair collection, Hyderabad Hair Donation for Cancer Patients manages the entire process - from collecting hair to making wigs and personally delivering them to cancer patients.

Each wig costs about Rs 4,000 to make and requires seven ponytails of at least 12 inches in length. Even after processing, only 600 grams of usable hair remain from every kilogram collected. "We don't just gather hair and send it somewhere. We make sure it's transformed into wigs and given to the people who truly need them," Shiva emphasizes. "It's not just about cutting hair - it's about making a difference."

Since its inception, the initiative has donated over a thousand wigs to cancer patients across India. Shiva has received support from various donors, including his mother, wife, and anti-trafficking activist Sunitha Krishnan, who were among the first to contribute their hair.

As World Cancer Day (February 4) approaches, Shiva's work stands as a beacon of resilience and kindness. "When I started, I never imagined we'd reach this point," he says. "But seeing the smiles on cancer patients' faces when they receive a wig - it makes everything worth it."

One of the most remarkable aspects of this initiative is that there is no financial exchange involved. Shiva funds the entire wig-making process himself, ensuring that both donors and recipients participate purely out of goodwill. "My donors are my heroes - or should I say hair-oes," he smiles. "A small act of kindness, like donating hair, can bring confidence to someone who is battling for their life. That's what keeps me going."

With each wig, Shiva isn't just giving hair - he's giving hope, dignity, and the courage to face the world once again.

Recently, actress Madhavi Latha donated her hair to Hyderabad Hair Donation for Cancer Patients, supporting the cause of providing free wigs to economically challenged cancer patients. Founder Shiva Kumar Yadav emphasizes that his initiative operates independently and is not affiliated with any organization or hospital - wigs are given directly to patients in need. Additionally, Shiva recently had the opportunity to appear on a game show alongside popular actor Ravi Teja, helping to spread awareness about the importance of hair donation and its impact on cancer patients.

How you can contribute

Want to make a difference? Here's how you can support the initiative:

- Grow your hair to at least 12 inches before donating.
- Avoid cutting, dyeing, or layering your hair while growing it.
- Wash and dry your hair before donation.
- Spread awareness by allowing a short video reel to be made for social media.

Shiva personally collects hair donations and delivers wigs to patients. If you want to donate or request a wig, you can contact him at +91 96664 06586 or follow @hyderabadhairdonation99 on Instagram.

Expert insights into hair transplantation

PNSHYDERABAD

Imagine feeling confident again, looking younger and enjoying a newfound sense of self. This vision is being realised by someone! They have mastered the art of changing lives, one hair at a time and are a leading force in the field of hair restoration. Through the combination of futuristic technology and meticulous medical knowledge, the bespoke approach guarantees a hair transplant experience that is as distinct as it is correct. Whether thinning hair, receding hairlines, or the obvious symptoms of male or female pattern baldness have started to undermine your confidence, beyond your expectations, the talented team is dedicated to delivering outcomes that look natural. For what reason are you waiting? Let's dive into this exclusive interview and rediscover the delight of having a healthy, beautiful mane while also opening up a newfound freedom to live life to the fullest.

Do you know how our interviewee starts the conversation? "Hair plays a big role in one's self-esteem and confidence," recalls Dr. Gaurang Krishna, one of the founding members of MedLinks Hair Transplant. "Baldness and hair loss can have a major psychological impact on many people, particularly those who are not yet married. For most people, hair loss can impact not only their self-esteem but also other facets of their lives, such as their social interactions, career and education. However, some people are self-assured regardless of their hair condition. Having a positive appearance is crucial to feeling good about oneself."

The main cause of hair loss, particularly as we age, is genetics. Younger individuals who are losing their hair, however, can also be coping with underlying medical conditions. Another important factor is stress. It may cause telogen effluvium, a condition in which a lot of hair goes through the shedding phase. Stress can hasten hair loss, whether it comes from interpersonal disputes or other causes. Therefore, lifestyle factors like stress and heredity both have a big impact on hair health. He has revealed the profound causes of hair loss!

"It's a good



idea to consult a professional if hair loss persists for more than three months and doesn't seem to be improving," the spokesman goes on. "One easy test is the 'basin test,' which involves combing your hair while it's damp. It may indicate more serious hair loss and you should consult a specialist if you lose more than 80 to 90 hairs throughout the procedure or if the hairs that fall out are short and thin." Blood tests can also yield important information, but a comprehensive clinical evaluation is crucial. Tests may involve measuring thyroid, vitamin D, vitamin B12, hemoglobin, iron,

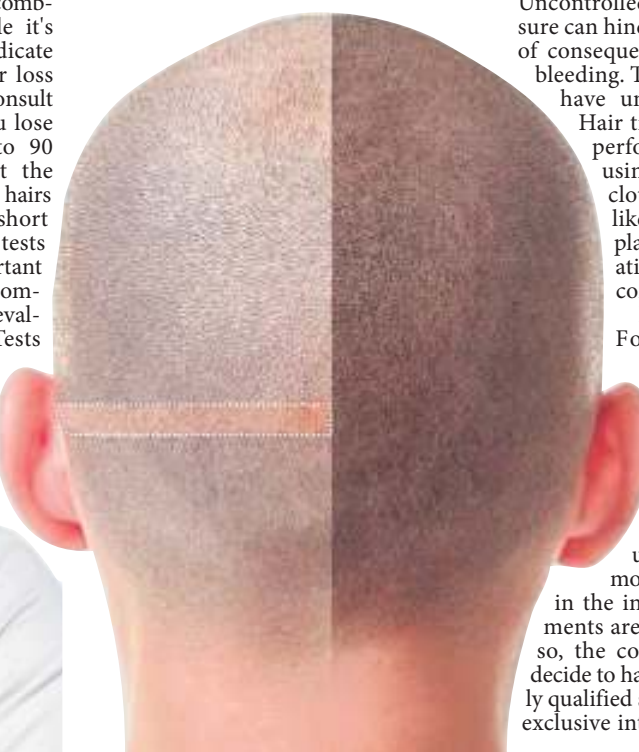
testosterone and dihydrotestosterone levels, which are associated with hair loss. Treating these imbalances early on can help stop additional hair loss because they can contribute to hair loss. Excellent observa-

tions! The big question now is: when is the best time to think about getting a hair transplant? The hair transplant surgeon continues, "When large bald patches have appeared, especially if little to no hair remains in the affected areas, a hair transplant is usually advised. Treatments such as medication or non-surgical techniques are preferred for modest hair thinning or the early stages of hair loss. When hair loss is obvious and has persisted over time, a transplant is typically more appropriate." Yet, "Indeed, there are a number of misconceptions about hair transplants. One widespread misunderstanding is that the process is extremely risky or that it may result in memory loss or brain damage, which is just untrue! Although there is some risk associated with any medical procedure, the likelihood of major problems, including death, is very low. A small number of deaths have been reported; however, they are anomalies given that millions of procedures are carried out safely. Making sure the transplant is carried out by a skilled surgeon who adheres to the right safety procedures is crucial."

Hair loss can also be caused by smoking, particularly in people who are already genetically prone. For most people, smoking exacerbates their condition, but for some people, such as celebrities with naturally thick hair, smoking may not have a substantial impact. Because smoking decreases blood flow to the scalp, it can harm hair follicles and hasten thinning. In the same way that smoking raises the danger of lung cancer, the likelihood of developing the disease is increased even if not all smokers will. Over to Gaurang, he says, "There are a few circumstances that can make getting a hair transplant unwise. Uncontrolled diabetes or high blood pressure can hinder recovery and raise the risk of consequences like infection or severe bleeding. The same is true for those who have untreated thyroid conditions.

Hair transplants should also not be performed on patients who are using blood thinners or who have clotting-related blood illnesses like thalassemia. Before contemplating the treatment, it is imperative that these conditions be controlled."

Permanent and Real-Time Follicular Extraction and Implantation, or Perfect-I, is a novel and cutting-edge technology that makes these clinics stand apart. It uses a more accurate and effective method, guaranteeing a smoother and more natural result than many clinics that use large implanters! "With more than five years of experience in the industry, hair transplant treatments are now far less expensive. Even so, the cost can still be higher if you decide to have surgery performed by highly qualified specialists." This concludes his exclusive interview.



The surge in women's health and wellness: A movement, not a trend

Women's health and wellness is changing in big ways, and it's about time. For years, women's specific health needs were either ignored or generalised. But today, that's shifting. There's more demand for products that actually fit women's real lives, and there's more understanding and support for their needs than ever before.

Take menstrual products, for example. A lot of women experience discomfort, rashes & irritation from traditional products—70%, in fact. This shows a serious flaw in how these products were made—without really thinking about how they affect women in the day-to-day. Now, women aren't willing to just accept discomfort as the norm. They want products that work better, fit into their busy lives, and actually feel good to use.

This demand for better products is happening alongside a bigger shift in how we talk about menstruation and women's health. Topics that used to be considered taboo are now slowly but openly being discussed. Women are sharing their experiences on social media, talking about the problems with existing products, and calling for safer, more thoughtful options. This has pushed the industry to take a hard look at what's being offered and step up with smarter, more user-friendly solutions.

Digital platforms have played a huge role in making this change happen. They give women a space to connect, share their stories, and take collective action. This has led to a wider variety of products that are better suited to different women's needs—products that understand that not all women are the same.

The rise of e-commerce and quick-commerce services has also made a big impact. It's easier than ever for women to get high-quality products across most pincodes. This is helping to level the playing field and bring better health products to more women, everywhere. Looking forward, women's health and wellness is built on three key things: quality, transparency, and community. Today, women want to know exactly what's in the products they use, where those products come from, and how they're made. Products need to work well, feel safe, and actually improve women's lives. Community matters, too. Women want to connect with each other, share advice, and support one another in making healthier choices. This isn't just a trend—it's a real shift in how women are thinking about health and wellness.

With more options available, women now have the power to choose products that work for them—whether it's rash-free period products, intimate care items like lubricants & condoms that are specifically made for them & actually feel good, or other hygiene products that suit their lifestyles. They don't have to settle anymore. They can pick what actually works for their bodies and their lives.

As the market keeps evolving, it's important for companies to really listen to women, respond to their needs, and create products that make a real difference. This change in women's health and wellness is about more than just business—it's about making women feel heard & understood.

(The author, Ketan Munoth, is the co-founder of Plush.)

what's brewing?



Shriti



Miss Universe Telangana 2024 Niharika Sood, along with founders of Habibs Salon Ahmed Habib and Aman Habib inaugurated Habibs Hair and Beauty Salon at Sri Rangapuram Colony, Bollaram Road, Miyapur, along with master franchisee for Telangana & Andhra Pradesh Gautam Manghnani, Vishal Verma, Salon owners Shriti Ladda and Prashant Ladda



Niharika Sood



Pooja



Palak



Rakshanda



Aparna

PARTY

Photos by - SV Chary



Suchitra Academy proudly hosted its highly anticipated Visual and Performing Arts presentation, "Biscope 2025," celebrating the exceptional creativity and talent of its students. The event showcased over 250 artistic works, ranging from stunning sculptures and pottery to intricate ceramic pieces, engaging installations, vibrant tie-dye creations, exquisite crafts, embroidery and captivating paintings. Each piece reflected the dedication, innovation and artistic potential of the young minds at Suchitra Academy



VT Markets celebrates accolades

VT Markets celebrated its excellence of over 30 global and regional accolades, and prestigious industry appearances, further solidifying its position as a trailblazer in the trading world. The firm also earned the coveted Approved Broker Member status from the Financial Commission, a prestigious recognition of its trustworthiness and transparency in the industry. The company expanded its global workforce to over 600 employees across 27 offices worldwide, scaling its operations to provide unparalleled support to traders. This rapid growth was mirrored in the firm's record-breaking trading volume, which saw a remarkable 150% year-on-year increase, reflecting the trust and momentum VT Markets has garnered within the trading community. Additionally, with a two-fold growth in gross deposits and first-time trades, the company's customer base and trading activity reached new heights, signaling its robust expansion and success on a global scale. Markets is primed for greater expansion in 2025, with bold plans to continue setting new standards in the brokerage industry including doubling down in key regions like Southeast Asia and Central Asia for rapid growth and further establishing its global leadership. These evolving market dynamics and ride the wave of success together with our valued clients and partners.

Pure AloeVera enriched with Hyaluronic Acid

India's leading Natural Health & Personal Care Company Dabur India Ltd has announced the launch of 100% Pure Aloe Vera Gel. Enriched with hyaluronic acid, the new Dabur Aloe Vera Gel combines natural care with scientific innovation to cater to the evolving skincare needs of consumers. Announcing the launch, Dabur India Limited Marketing Head-Skin Care Mr. Virat Khanna said: "Aloe vera has been a trusted natural remedy for centuries. At Dabur, we've enhanced its benefits by combining 100% pure aloe vera with the power of hyaluronic acid. The organic products market is rapidly growing in India because of increasing consumer awareness and aloe vera plays an important role in the beauty industry driven by its versatility, natural benefits, and growing consumer demand. Keeping this in mind, we have introduced Dabur Aloe Vera Gel which is made from

100% pure aloe vera. This carefully formulated gel retains the natural benefits of aloe vera, making it a versatile solution for both skin and hair care. Its non-sticky, fast-absorbing formula ensures deep moisturization without leaving a greasy residue, making it ideal for everyday use. With aloe vera becoming a key ingredient in skincare and haircare, we are confident that this new product will be loved by many consumers."



confident that this new product will be loved by many consumers."



Enabling Child and Human Rights with Seed Organizations (ECHO) marked a significant milestone as it convened stakeholders, experts, and industry leaders to reflect on five transformative years of championing decent work standards in the seed supply chain. Held at T-Hub, Knowledge City, Hyderabad, the event highlighted ECHO's achievements and mapped the way forward for sustainable and ethical practices in the seed industry. Over 100 representatives of various seed companies, NGOs, multilateral organizations and academic institutions actively participated in the event.

FUN

ARCHIE



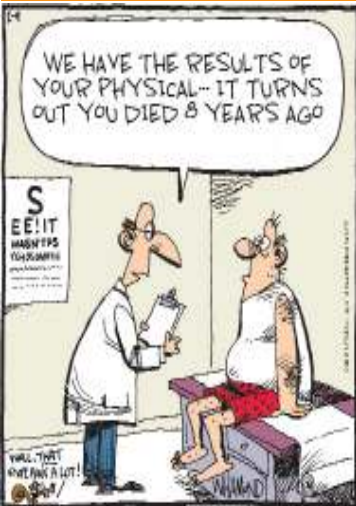
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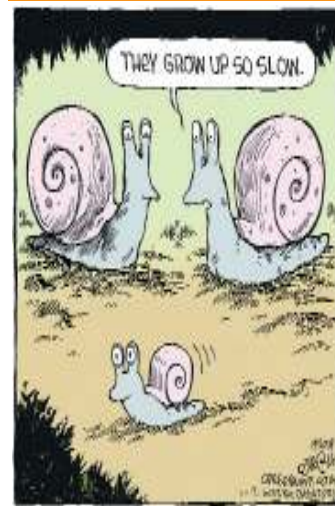
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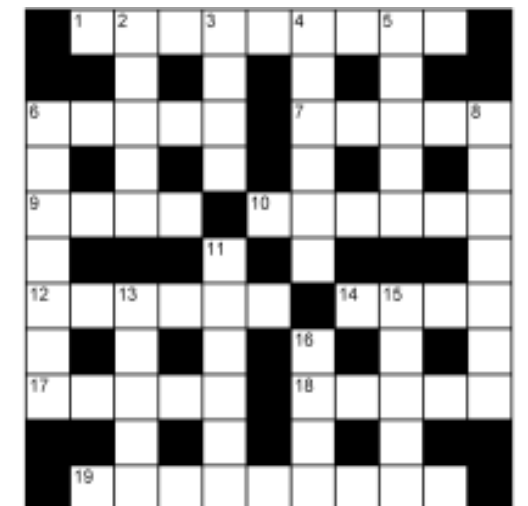
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- Large printed words on a newspaper's front page
- One of the five senses
- Brush hard to clean
- Catch fish with these
- Opposite of youngest
- A cricket referee
- Clean with water
- The sound a horse makes
- A smell
- These are carried in rain

DOWN

- The fourth even number
- A fruit on a palm tree
- A very rude remark
- Weird or uncanny

6 What you get if you stay out in the sun too long

- Someone who sells meat
- A shooter of arrows
- A piece of glass that can make a rainbow
- A greeting in Hawaii
- This covers a sheep



GINGER MEGGS



TOO SLOW NARRATION, BUT THE LAST FEW EPISODES ARE GOOD

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Hindi web series 'Panchayat' is a huge success on Amazon Prime Video. So, they came with season 2 and 3. The makers officially remade this web series in Telugu as 'Sivarapalli' and it was directed by Bhaskar Maurya. Shanukha Prashanth wrote the story for the Telugu version. This web series consists of eight episodes and Rag Mayur, Murali Dhar Goud, Rupa Lakshmi are playing the major roles in it.

Story:

Shyam (Rag Mayur) is an Engineering graduate who applies for a government job and is posted as Sivarapalli Gram Panchayat Raj secretary. After reaching the village, he is received by sarpanch Sudhakar (Muralidhar Goud) and deputy sarpanch Mallikarjun (Uday Gurrula). Sarpanch misplaces the key to the panchayat office and they break the lock. After seeing the panchayat office, Shyam wants to leave the job and go to the USA. To settle in that village, Shyam has to get accustomed to the local villagers, politics and to deal with them in a proper way. He is a government official, but the villagers do not take him seriously and make him do their personal work. As per a Government Order, a few slogans are written on the village walls that women should be edu-



cated. But some villagers object to those slogans. How Shyam explains to the villagers that women also need education and they should not be confined to homes, how he overcomes the hurdles he is facing and what happens to his CAT exam? Are part of the story. Who hoists the flag, actual arpanch Susheela (Rupa Lakshmi) or her husband Sudhakar? Big drama occurs on the Republic Day and how it ends is the crux of this web series.

Analysis:

The Hindi web series 'Panchayat' is a super success and now they remake it into Telugu as 'Sivaripalli'. This is supposed to be a comedy-drama with an internal message. Director Bhaskar Maurya roped in some good actors like

Rag Mayur, Muralidhar Goud and Rupa Lakshmi for the major roles, but the only problem with this web series is that the narrative is too slow.

The village, the people and every scene looks realistic and parts of the web series can really be enjoyed, but the director dragged a few scenes unnecessarily. When you watch the whole eight episodes, you feel that you are watching it for the entire day. Starting with the key which the sarpanch misplaces and the search is really tedious to watch in the first episode. There are a few like this in the first few episodes. The web series becomes interesting when the original sarpanch Sudha played by Rupa Lakshmi wants to show her real power.

There is also a message in this web



series when they insist that women should be educated in the villages and that they should send their girl child to schools. How it is conveyed to the villagers has come out nicely. The villagers threaten not to vote for the present sarpanch, if she insists that the girl child should be sent to school, but the sarpanch is reluctant, sticks to the rule and is even ready to lose the sarpanch post. The last few episodes are actually very interesting. The good thing about this web series is that the cinematography showed the village in a beautiful and realistic way. Actually, cinematography blends very well with the narration of the story. Shanmukh Prashanth's dialogues are good and the music is also carried well. Emotional quotient is also missing in the web series.

When it comes to the performance, every artist played his part well. Rag Mayur, who is already proven as an actor with his earlier work, did a fantastic job as the secretary. He is once again at his best and the highlight of the web series. In recent times, his work is being noticed from his films and this web series. Muralidhar Goud is perfect as sarpanch's husband and he steals the show. He is almost there in every Telugu film. He played a major role in 'Sivarapalli' web series and did his job with flying colours. Rupa Lakshmi became popular with the film 'Balagam' and got a major role in this web series. She is a natural actress and carried the role throughout, especially in the final episode, her performance is on the high. Uday Gurrula and Anji

Valguman also played their part well. In this web series, they got very good actors and everyone took their roles seriously and did it very well. Pavani Karanam of 'Pushpa 2' fame appears in the end. She leads to the second season.

Finally, 'Sivarapalli' is a good web series with a thought-provoking message in it. Though there are a few dragged scenes and episodes in the beginning, you need to have patience to watch the series. But the last few episodes, especially the flag hoisting scene come out well. This web series is supposed to be a comedy-drama with a message and when compared to the original Hindi web series, the Telugu director and writer focus more on their narration and writing.

Web series: Sivarapalli

Cast: Rag Mayur, Muralidhar Goud, Rupa Lakshmi, Uday Gurrula, Anji Valguman, Pavani Karanam and others

Writer: Shanmukha Prashanth

Producer: Arunabh Kumar

Director: Bhaskar Maurya

OTT platform: Amazon Prime Video

Rating: 2.5/5

Mohan Babu and his son meet Gujarat CM



Mohan Babu and Vishnu Manchu are promoting their film 'Kannappa' all over India. The other day, Vishnu was in Kerala and now, he, along with his father and senior actor Mohan Babu are in Gujarat and met Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel. As part of the promotional tour, the Kannappa team is visiting various locations across the country. Actors Sarath Kumar, Mukesh Rishi and executive producer Vinay Maheshwari also met the CM along with Vishnu and his father.

The team expressed their sincere gratitude for the warm hospitality extended by the Chief Minister and conveyed their best wishes for his good health and continued success. As a gesture of goodwill and prosperity, Vishnu Manchu presented a beautiful painting by renowned Telugu artist Ramesh Gorjala to the Chief Minister.

They are very confident about their film. So, they are promoting it like never before. Directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh, the film is at present in post-production and promotional activities. It is scheduled for release on April 25, marking one of the major summer attractions in Indian cinema.

'Shake the records of Thandel in Vizag, otherwise I will lose respect at home'

Naga Chaitanya Akkineni and Sai Pallavi are playing the lead in their upcoming film 'Thandel'. It is releasing on February 7 and it is directed by Chandoo Mondeti. The trailer of this film has been released at Visakhapatnam with a lot of fanfare. Top producer Allu Aravind is presenting it, while Bunny Vasu is the producer. On this occasion, Allu Aravind stated that he saw the film and he is speaking from his heart that the movie will be a big blockbuster.

Allu Aravind praises Naga Chaitanya and he says his performance is one of his best. He also remarked that Chaitanya has elevated the film with his acting skills and each scene came out very well. He also praised director Chandoo Mondeti. The producer gave an explanation about Sai Pallavi's absence, saying she couldn't come due to a health issue.

Naga Chaitanya said that he is indebted to Allu Aravind for life as for a year-and-a-half, Aravind guided them in making the film 'Thandel' (leader). He is thankful to Visakhapatnam, as he got inspiration to play 'Thandel' Raju character by visiting Jalaripeta. "I used to get the talk of any film first from Vizag. If it is hit here, it is going to be successful everywhere. So, Vizag people's verdict is very important to me," said Naga Chaitanya. "I love a Vizag girl and married her and now she is the ruling party at my home. I request all Vizag people, please shake the collections of 'Thandel' in Vizag. Otherwise, I will lose my respect at home," said Naga Chaitanya, in a lighter vein.



VIJAY ANTONY'S 25TH FILM TITLED PARASHAKTHI

Popular Tamil actor Vijay Antony is also a known actor in Telugu as his previous films like 'Bicchagadu' became a sensational hit here. From then onwards, all of his films were released in Telugu, simultaneously. His last two films are action based and now the actor is coming up with another one and they unveiled the title as 'Parashakthi'.

Vijay Antony is not just an actor, he is an all-rounder with so many hats like producer, editor, music director and so on. He provided music for the film 'Madha Gaja Raja' which was released recently during Sankranti, and was a surprise hit. The film delayed its release for nearly 12 years. Though it was released late, it was a success.

His upcoming film 'Parashakthi' is a landmark one in his career, because this is his 25th film. Directed and written by the acclaimed Arun Prabu, known for his notable works 'Aruvi' and 'Vaazhi', 'Parashakthi' promises to showcase Vijay



Antony's exceptional range and dedication as an actor. The film has all commercial ingredients like a mix of mass appeal, intense action, and heartfelt family drama.

Vijay Antony Films Corporation is producing it, while Vaagai Chandrasekar, Sunil Kriplani, and Trupthi Ravindra, are playing other important roles. The team is currently in post-production, working to ensure the film's summer 2025 release. It will be nothing short of a spectacular one.

Varun Tej is on location scouting in Vietnam

After a series of flops, actor Varun Tej is now gearing up for his upcoming film with director Merlapaka Gandhi. Tentatively titled as VT15, the film's pre-production is underway at present as Varun and the team are scouting for locations in Vietnam. The story backdrop is an Indo-Korean horror-comedy. So, the team is in Vietnam doing pre-production work. The film was announced on Varun Tej's birthday, but they didn't announce the other cast.

UV Creations and First Frame Entertainment is producing this film. Meanwhile, the pre-production formalities are underway for the movie in Vietnam, with Varun Tej, director Merlapaka Gandhi, and producers scouting some stunning locations in the country. They are also busy fine-tuning the script, as they are planning to begin the regular shoot from the first week of March.

Merlapaka Gandhi, who has crafted a unique storyline, is set to bring something fresh to the genre. Varun Tej will also undergo a major makeover for his role. SS Thaman will be composing the music. The full cast and crew details are expected to be announced soon.



Rao Ramesh dances with Sundeep in Majaka

Director Nakkina Trinadha Rao and writer Prasanna Kumar are now joining for 'Majaka' which is going to be another sure success, say the unit members. This director and writer combination earlier delivered many successful films, but now they put a high entertainment dose in 'Majaka', according to a source. Rao Ramesh and Sundeep Kishan are playing the lead actors, while Ritu Varma and Ashu of 'Manmadhudu' fame are the female leads. This is also Sundeep's 30th film.

Jointly produced by Razes Danda and Umesh KR Bansal, they released the bachelors' anthem from the film on Wednesday and started the musical journey. The interesting point about this anthem is that Rao Ramesh is shaking his legs along with Sundeep Kishan, which is entertaining. He is one of the

highly acclaimed actors in Telugu cinema, and is now playing a major role in this one along with Sundeep Kishan, added the source.

This track is a quirky, yet heartfelt tribute to the joys and struggles of bachelor life, making it an instant hit with single guys everywhere. Ramajogayya Sastry penned the lyrics, while Leon James provided the music.

Filed on the stunning Visakhapatnam beach, the song features Sundeep Kishan and Rao Ramesh as a father-son duo navigating the ups and downs of bachelorhood. Their on-screen chemistry is both endearing and entertaining. The film is set to hit the screens on February 21.



Tilak Varma rises to second spot in ICC T20I Rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Talented India batter Tilak Varma climbed one spot to second, while mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy made a massive leap of 25 places to break into the top five in the latest ICC men's T20I rankings released on Wednesday.

Varma now sits just behind Travis Head in the batters' list, with the Australian maintaining a 23-point lead at the top.

The young Indian left-hander has been in sublime form, posting scores of 19 not out, 72 not out, and 18 in India's ongoing T20I series against England.

With two matches remaining in the series, Varma has a chance to overtake Head and become the youngest-ever player to top the rankings -- a record currently held by Babar Azam, who reached No. 1 at the age of 23 years and 105 days. Varma's current rating of 832 points is the fourth-highest ever achieved by an Indian batter in T20I history, behind only Suryakumar Yadav, Virat Kohli, and KL Rahul. India's Abhishek Sharma also made



significant strides, jumping 59 places to 40th, while England's Liam Livingstone (up five spots to 32nd

and Ben Duckett (up 28 places to 68th) were the biggest gainers from the visiting team. Chakravarthy's rise Chakravarthy's magical 5/24 in India's 26-run loss in the third T20I

propelled him to top five in the T20I bowling rankings. Meanwhile, fellow spinner Axar Patel moved up five places to 11th, just outside the top 10.

England's Adil Rashid has reclaimed the No. 1 spot among T20I bowlers.

Rashid first claimed the top position at the end of 2023 and held it for much of last year until West Indies' Akeal Hosein briefly surpassed him before Christmas.

Bumrah continues to dominate Test rankings

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah remains the top-ranked Test bowler following his sensational performances in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia.

His dominance across formats also earned him the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024.

Among Test all-rounders, West Indies' Jomel Warrican has climbed to 24th, while Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan moved up two places to 15th in the Test batters' rankings, which continue to be led by England's Joe Root.



We will be ready: PCB on Champions Trophy readiness

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insists that the National Stadium here will be ready to host matches of the upcoming Champions Trophy despite mounting concerns around the venue's preparedness for the marquee event starting February 19. Pakistan's respected leading English daily 'Dawn' on Wednesday carried a story which stated that "it seems absolutely impossible to contemplate the renovation work being completed within the deadline, but the personnel handed the responsibility are beaming with confidence."

"The board would either be hero or zero for taking up such a mammoth task," the newspaper commented.

Although PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi inspected the Rawalpindi stadium on Tuesday and assured that the Champions Trophy would be held as planned, it seems unlikely that the Board would get control of the renovated venues in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi by the January 31 deadline.

The other upcoming major international matches at these venues include the four-match tri-series with New Zealand and South Africa from February 8 to 14 with the first two games in Lahore and then two matches, including the final, in Karachi.

"Look, the stadiums will be in a shape to host matches but the question is the PCB has promised everyone a world-class experience at these renovated venues for the Tri-series and Champions Trophy and whether they can deliver on that promise remains to be seen," a source, who is following the construction work, said.

Bilal Chohan, the man responsible for the renovation work, is reportedly complaining about not getting required equipment and clearances on time to complete the work in Karachi.

The panels to be installed on the new building were to be released from the Karachi Port only on Sunday night, with its installation scheduled for the next morning.

"These are the kind of things we are dealing with, but sometimes it's sad to see people bashing us," Chohan complained.

The PCB has spent around PKR 12 billion on renovation, constructions and installation of equipment at all three venues in Lahore and Karachi. Tickets have already gone on sale but until the PCB announces they have possession of the new-look stadiums, concerns will remain.

On Tuesday, ICC CEO Geoff Allardice resigned with a board member of the world body indicating that his failure to give a clear picture of Pakistan's preparedness was among the reasons for his departure.



Jerry Holness joins as Indian women's 400m relay coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Renowned Jamaican Athletics coach Jerry Lee Holness, who has mentored the likes of multiple Olympics and World Championships gold medalist sprinters Elaine Thompson and Nesta Carter, has taken charge of the Indian women's 400m team ahead of some high-profile events coming up this year.

Holness, a highly experienced and much travelled coach, joined the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) at the Lakshmbai National College of Physical Education in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on Monday.

"Holness has joined at NCoE Thiruvananthapuram. He is a highly experienced World Athletics Level 5 coach. He has coached some of the best in Jamaica including Olympic and World Championships medalists," Indian athletics chief coach Radhakrishnan Nair told PTI.

"He will take charge of the Indian women's 400m and 400m hurdles team which is currently based in Thiruvananthapuram," he added.

Holness' tenure will be up to 2026 initially and can be extended after an evaluation of his performance.

He will be coaching the likes of Hima Das, Subha Venkatesan Rupal, Kiran Pahal and Vithya Ramraj at

L N C P E Thiruvananthapuram. The 65-year-old Jamaican replaced Stashuk Valerii who was Indian women's 400m and 400m hurdles coach till the Paris Olympics.

"Since the Indian women's 400 team did not do well in the Paris Olympics, SAI did not want to renew his contract. Valerii has left after the Paris Olympics, so SAI wanted a new coach," Nair said from Thiruvananthapuram.

"We have important assignments this year like the Asian Championships, World Relays and World Championships, so Holness coming in will be a big boost," he added.

Holness joining the Indian athletics set-up came just days after the hiring of Russian legend Sergey Makarov Aleksandrovich as javelin coach. It is, however, learnt that double Olympic medalist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will primarily train with his own coach Jan Zelezny, a three-time Olympic gold medalist and world record holder in javelin throw.

Holness was part of the coaching staff of his country during the Paris Olympics. As track and field head coach at the famous Manchester High School at Mandeville in Jamaica, Holness has guided top athletes like Elaine Thompson, Nesta Carter, Sherone Simpson and Natoya Goule.

Presence of Shreyas Iyer will make it easier, says Suryansh Shedge

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Young Mumbai all-rounder Suryansh Shedge, who was picked by Punjab Kings in the IPL mega auction, is eager to carry forward his chemistry with skipper Shreyas Iyer as he gears up for his maiden IPL season.

The 22-year-old has already shown his finishing prowess in domestic cricket, playing a crucial role in Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy triumph under Iyer's captaincy.

In the final, he smashed an unbeaten 36 off just 15 balls and also contributed with the ball, taking 1/32, earning the Player of the Match award in their five-wicket win over Madhya Pradesh. Shedge, who made his senior Mumbai debut this season, believes Iyer's presence will help him settle in quickly at Punjab Kings. "If you track the record of Punjab Kings over the past



few years, they always invest in new talent, and they scout the domestic circuit closely," he stated in a release. "I am really excited to be a part of the franchise. Shreyas bhैया being the Captain makes it easier because he is a familiar face." He is particularly excited about working under legendary Australian cricketer Ricky Ponting. "Ricky Ponting is a legend. He

is beyond words. After retirement, he gave back to cricket and has been constantly involved with the community. "He has been a part of IPL for many years - so he knows ins and outs. Aussies are known for their fearless attitude and that's what he personifies. We are hopeful that under his guidance, we will lift the trophy this year," Shedge will also reunite with

his Mumbai teammate Musheer Khan at Punjab Kings as both were picked by their base price of Rs 30 lakh. On the second day of the IPL mega auction, the all-rounder was on a bus to the team hotel after a training session when he began streaming the auctions on his phone.

"I saw Musheer Khan's name and knew I would be coming up shortly. Punjab Kings bought him, so I was really excited," he said.

"I was just about to call him, but my name appeared, so I stopped. Punjab Kings raised the paddle, and we all celebrated on the bus. The first call I received was from Musheer, as we both will play for the same team." After a call with his parents, Shedge was congratulated by his Mumbai teammates, including Iyer, at the dining table, and he was dubbed 'Punjab da Munda' by his Mumbai teammates.

KL Rahul perfects cuts and drives in Karnataka nets

PTI ■ BENGALURU

KL Rahul's net session is all about meticulousness. Right from picking his gears out of a natty packed kitbag to facing bowlers, his every movement is measured.

There was no exception at the KSCA (B) grounds here on Wednesday as he readied himself for Karnataka's crucial Ranji Trophy match against Haryana. While Rahul is set to bat at No. 3 for Karnataka in his first competitive outing post the tour to Australia, the right-hander might occupy the No. 5 slot for India in the one-dayers.

It's the position that mandates batting in the middle passage to the business end of the innings. Overall, he has brilliant numbers at No. 5 - 1259 runs from 30 innings at an average of 57.2 with two

hundreds and nine fifties, his best figures across the batting positions.

Now, batting at that position in India and in Dubai will require him to negate spinners and Cricket 21 metrics show favourable stats. Rahul averages 47.6 at a strike-rate of 89 against leg-arm spinners (381 runs in 31 innings), while he makes



runs at 53.9 against off-spinners at an average of 47.6 - 377 runs from 35 innings.

In the Champions Trophy, Rahul will come up against a plethora of quality left-arm spinners from Bangladesh and New Zealand such as Mitchell Santner.

The 32-year-old has excellent figures against the orthodox variety - 342

from 29 innings at an average of 68.4 and made runs at a strike-rate of 95.

It also means that Rahul will have to play late, opposite to what he had done in Australia while standing a bit outside the crease to negate the swing. The Karnataka man will have to bring out his cuts and drives more often during those upcoming assignments.

Coming from the city of GR Viswanath and Rahul Dravid, it's not quite surprising then that Rahul has immense success with square cuts against spin - 12.1 per cent of his 2851 runs have come through that shot.

The drives - cover and off - have accounted for 10.7 per cent runs each while runs through the on-drive is a close fourth on the list with 10.2 per cent.

It was then of little wonder

that Rahul asked the Karnataka throw down specialist and spinner Hardik Raj to keep the line outside the off-stump, as he played a few withering cuts and flowing drives off them.

However, if the ongoing T20Is can be taken as a portent, the England bowlers will not shy away from using a few snorters against him. But pull is his most productive shot against pace as 15.9 per cent of his runs have come through it while getting out seven times, and he strikes at 164 while playing that particular shot. So, there was some focus on it too during the nets.

Now, the Ranji Trophy match here will give Rahul a chance to further perfect those shots against a relatively less intense opponent and atmosphere before travelling into a tough summer.

Virat Kohli boost for Ranji Trophy as Delhi aim to end on high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli's magnetic presence has not only lifted the profile of Ranji Trophy but also the Delhi team's sagging spirits as it eyes a winning end to an otherwise listless campaign in the final group D game against Railways starting here on Thursday.

Interestingly, Railways (17 points from six games) have more than a fair shot at making the knock-out stages if they beat Delhi with bonus points and take their tally to 24.

Delhi (14 from six games) only have mathematical impossibility to rely upon but the 10,000 odd crowd expected to watch isn't bothered about the results.

Tamil Nadu (25 points from six games), Chandigarh (19 from six games) and Saurashtra (18 from six games) are in a better position compared to these

two teams in terms of probability of qualification. If Delhi bowl first, the turnout is not going to exceed 3000 but in case Delhi is batting first, the crowd would prefer a Sanat Sangwan or Arpit Rana to get out quickly and make way for Kohli.

But what would happen if the 'King' gets out early? For starters, Ranji Trophy will go back to being 'Ranji Trophy' with four-five journalists and 200 odd spectators taking interest in the proceedings.

Such has been the interest level in Kohli's comeback that the Feroz Shah Kotla ground will have broadcasters joining the festivities gearing up for the live stream of the match, which is the star batter's first Ranji outing in 12 years and three months.

"I have played against Virat bhaiyya in the IPL. It is an honour that in back to back matches I have now led Rishabh and Virat bhaiyya."



Delhi skipper Ayush Badoni told reporters on the eve of the game. It is expected that Kohli will

come in place of left-hander Jonty Sidhu, whose form has tapered off in past few games as he didn't get enough

chances. The skipper would be vacating his own batting slot so that Kohli can bat at his

usual position. "He will bat at No. 4. He has told us to be positive and express ourselves

confidently," Badoni said. Kohli wouldn't mind getting a big one before the Champions Trophy which actually solves his purpose of playing this particular game.

While the BCCI has made it mandatory for all players to turn up in Ranji Trophy, the result of this particular game will have no bearing on whether Kohli will be picked in the Indian team after the Champions Trophy.

The Kotla track has a greenish tinge to it and Badoni indicated that they will play an extra pacer looking at the conditions.

Money Grewal looks set for a comeback in the playing XI as he provides extra pace. One of the two left-arm spinners among Sumit Mathur and Harsh Tyagi will be cooling his heels.

The Railways team has always been a banana peel for Delhi with their battle-hardened domestic pros always bringing their A game

to the fore. Karn Sharma had made his Test debut at Adelaide under Kohli 11 years back, incidentally the same game where the legend led India in red ball cricket for the first time.

There is keeper-batter Upendra Yadav, who till a year back was in India A scheme of things and is considered more than a decent batter. There is B Vivek Singh, an attacking left-handed opener and handy medium pace bowler.

In the pace department, Himanshu Sangwan is his strike bowler and if he can get that outside edge of Kohli's bat, it will be one for posterity.

Even the Railways team seemed to be smitten by Kohli as some of their players were seen taking selfies on the first day of training with the megastar of Indian cricket.