

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
**The pioneer**  
 Bureaucratic delays had slowed some welfare schemes but Congress would not resort to falsehoods or surrender like BRS. Our social media team is a bit weak, but we will strengthen it. People don't want farmhouse rule. People would want governance coming to them. Manipulated surveys are being pushed

- Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC chief

**Jaishankar calls Trump 'American nationalist'**



**'SHARE OF SUGAR INDUSTRY IN GDP CAN GO UP TO 3 PC'**



**Historical blunders of Telugu CINEMA**



**DON'T MISS...**

**Aghori once again goes on rampage**

Aghori was at it again on Thursday. This time, in the Ramagundam industrial area, she got into a knock-down-drag-out fight with the people and the police. She swore at the police and also the people who gathered to see her when she arrived by car in the city. The Aghori said that she had arrived on Wednesday night at the invitation of a devotee in Malkapur, near NTPC. The Aghori, who arrived in her car, was spotted by the police and the people as soon as she stepped out after a feast at the devotee's house. It led to a confrontation...

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**SC to HCs: Appoint ad-hoc judges**

Considering a backlog of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court on Thursday allowed the High Courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding the 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength. A special bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant relaxed and kept in abeyance certain conditions the top court had imposed in its April 20, 2021 judgment on appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts. The verdict, which was authored...

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**India outlines global AI ambitions**

India on Thursday outlined global AI ambitions with plans to build its own 'foundational model' that could take on the might of ChatGPT, Deepseek R1 and others, as it lined up 'most affordable' common compute facility powered by 16,693 GPUs to be used by startups and researchers. India's bold move comes at a time when Chinese company Deepseek has turned heads after its AI model overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's appstore, challenging the AI dominance...

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**Gukesh beats Warmerdam**

World champion D Gukesh defeated Dutch Grandmaster Max Warmerdam to stay in sole lead on 7.5 points at the end of the 10th round of Tata Steel Chess tournament here. It was another eventful day for Gukesh who is now closing in on the 2800-rating barrier. The victory with black came easily when Warmerdam missed the line after being level for quite some time. It was a closed Sicilian where Gukesh knocked down a couple of pawns to force resignation in 34 moves. The youngest world...

-SPORTS

**A milestone in TG's healthcare evolution**

**CM Revanth to lay foundation for new Osmania General Hospital at Goshamahal**



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy will lay the foundation stone for a new, world-class, state-of-the-art Osmania General Hospital on Friday, giving a massive fillip to the public healthcare capacity of Hyderabad and Telangana on Friday.

After a decade of negligence, the Telangana state government will be making such a huge investment into public health and creating a new government hospital for people at such a scale, quality and capacity. The new hospital to be located at Goshamahal will be built with 32 lakh square feet built-up area, fulfilling NMC and IPHS norms, and shall have 2,000 beds. The scientifically designed facility, with state-of-the-art facilities, would comprise 29 major and 12 minor operation theaters, with facilities for robotic surgery and a dedicated transplant theater. The hospital shall also have modern laundry, STP, ETP, and biomedical waste management system.

The Medical Education and Training wing would be expanded majorly, with 30 departments,

including eight new emerging super-specialty disciplines. The building would house a new academic block with Nursing, Dental and Physiotherapy colleges.

The entire project would also reflect great coordination between departments and showcase a multi-departmental public problem-solving mindset that has been evolving under the Congress government wherein the entire land tract is being shared by the Hospital and Police department. This synergistic land sharing solution would help people with different requirements ranging from medical and educational to law and order and also ensure police welfare.

During a plethora of detailed reviews and planning sessions, the Chief Minister ensured enough provisions were made for current and future needs of electric supply, fire emergencies, and other utilities. The new hospital building design has separate provisions for a power substation, fire station, bio and non-bio waste management, and STP. During the planning, the relocation and rebuilding of a government school that existed on the parcel of land was also ensured.

**The scientifically designed facility, with state-of-the-art facilities, would comprise 29 major and 12 minor operation theaters, with facilities for robotic surgery and a dedicated transplant theater. The hospital shall also have modern laundry, STP, ETP, and biomedical waste management system**

**64 feared dead as US plane collides with army copter**

PNS ■ ARLINGTON

All 64 people aboard an American Airlines jet that collided with an Army helicopter were feared dead in what was likely to be the worst US aviation disaster in almost a quarter century, officials said on Thursday.

At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River after the midair collision Wednesday night when the helicopter apparently flew in the path of the jet as it was landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, officials said.



Rescuers were still searching for any sign of the 60 passengers and four crew members, but they did not believe there were any survivors, which would make it the deadliest US air crash in nearly 24 years. "We are now at the point where we are switching from a rescue operation to a recovery operation," said John Donnelly, the fire chief in the nation's capital. "We don't believe there are any survivors."

The body of the plane was found upside-down in three sections in waist-deep water. The wreckage of the helicopter was also found.

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**PROTECTION TO LOCAL QUOTA IN EDUCATION**

**TG must uphold Presidential Order**

NAVEENA GHANATE naveena.ghanate@gmail.com ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana's local quota in PG medical admissions remains safeguarded under Article 371(D) and the 1974 Presidential Order, despite the recent Supreme Court's judgment scrapping local reservation.

On the contrary, a case has been filed in Supreme Court for upholding GO Ms 148 where the Telangana government is arguing against Presidential order. The matter is set for hearing on Tuesday.

Top Sources said that Presidential order Article 371(D) is the ultimate protection and even the new judgement can be ignored. The Presidential Order of 1974, enacted



**Harish raises alarm over scrapping of local quota**

HYDERABAD: Former minister Harish Rao has expressed strong concerns over the Supreme Court's ruling that nullifies the 50% local reservation quota in PG medical seats, warning that the decision could have severe consequences for Telangana students and impact the availability of

postgraduate medical professionals in the state. Calling on the state government to take immediate action, Harish Rao urged the Congress-led administration to approach the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court to challenge the ruling.

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under Article 371(D), provides 85% reservation for local students in education. Similarly employment there is one more presidential order. Even after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, the AP Reorganization Act, 2014 (Section 95) upheld the continuity of these Presidential Orders,

treating Telangana as a distinct entity with local reservation rights.

Sources said that It is incorrect to assume that the Presidential Order ceased to apply after 2014, as its provisions remain legally binding.

Sources said, "Telangana government has challenged the high court

judgment scraping GO Ms. 148 on the ground it's contrary to Presidential order in the Supreme Court the Telangana govt is arguing the presidential order is ceased to have any application and filed a case in Court which ruled against it.

Continued on Page 2

**Budget session likely to be stormy**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament's Budget session is likely to get off to a stormy start on Friday with opposition parties demanding a discussion on the alleged mismanagement of the Maha Kumbh festival in Prayagraj where 30 pilgrims were killed in a stampede.

At the all party meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on the eve of the Parliament session, opposition parties also accused the



government of politicising the parliamentary committees and trying to push its agenda by using its majority.

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**Economic Survey today**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table Economic Survey 2024-25 on Friday, providing an official assessment of the performance of the economy in the ongoing financial year, and list out the challenges being faced by the nation.

Continued on Page 2

**Govt increases varsity teachers' retirement age from 60 to 65**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a major decision aimed at addressing faculty shortages and improving academic standards, the Telangana government has increased the retirement age of regular university teachers from 60 to 65 years. The order, issued by the Higher Education department, applies to teachers drawing University Grants Commission (UGC) scale pay in State universities.

The decision follows recommendations from the Telangana Council of Higher Education (TGCHE), which highlighted a severe faculty shortage since the last university recruitment in 2013.

The council noted that this shortage has impacted education quality, research and the ability to secure national and international accreditations like NAAC, NBA and NIRF rankings. Retaining experienced faculty is expected to help universities maintain academic excellence and a stable learning environment.

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**Govt just reshuffling same GHMC budget figures on paper: KTR**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS working president KTR has condemned the arrest of GHMC BRS corporators, calling it an outrageous act by the Congress government. He accused the ruling party of targeting public representatives for exposing the government's indifference towards Hyderabad's development.

KTR questioned whether raising concerns about the lack of funds for Hyderabad justified the police



action. "The Congress government has completely neglected Hyderabad since coming to power. When our corporators questioned this on behalf of the city's residents, they

were thrown out. Is this democracy?" he asked.

He alleged that the government failed to utilize the funds allocated in last year's budget, and instead of addressing the issues, it was trying to silence those who were exposing the deception. "They are simply reshuffling the same budget figures on paper and making tall claims.

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**Rs 8,440 crore for city's development works P:3**

**Congress will sweep GHMC polls, says Mahesh**

**Alleges Centre denying Telangana's due share**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud has asserted that Congress will hoist its flag in the upcoming GHMC elections, citing the party's governance and welfare schemes as key strengths. Speaking about the political landscape, he criticized the BJP-led Centre for failing to allocate a single rupee to Hyderabad while having two Union ministers from Telangana in its ranks.

Goud accused the Centre of withholding funds owed to the

state and reaffirmed the Congress government's commitment to caste census implementation. "The caste census has been completed, and a cabinet sub-committee meeting on its report will be held on February 5," he revealed.

Addressing Congress governance in the state, he said, "For the past year, our government's policies and programs have been benefiting the people. GHMC has a large intellectual voter base, and we are confident of victory."

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**67% netizens prefer farmhouse rule over Praja Palana**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress poll backfired as netizens preferred farmhouse rule over Praja Palana. The Twitter handle of Congress INC Telangana conducted a poll "What kind of governance do the people of Telangana want? And options were Farmhouse rule or People's rule"

There was a whopping 67% of votes for Farmhouse rule. TPCC Chief Mahesh Kumar Goud himself had to step in to control the damage. He said, "Our social media team is a bit weak, but we will strengthen it. People don't want farmhouse rule. Manipulated surveys are being pushed."

It may be mentioned here that in Telangana Farmhouse rule is dubbed at KCR's regime while People's rule is Congress. BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy said, "In a recent online poll, 70% of respondents favored KCR's governance over Congress. Nearly 90,000 people voted, and the results showed

a clear rejection of Revanth Reddy's administration. This is a direct slap in the face for Congress". TPCC social media convener Manne Satish who conducted the poll said that the poll was conducted to expose the true nature of BRS and to reveal how its social media machinery functions.

According to Satish, the poll has made it evident that BRS social media is engaged in misleading propaganda, which the people have now recognized. He further alleged that the party's social media operations are run from the United States. Referring to a specific campaign, he pointed out that BRS social media users had tagged posts calling for a "farmhouse governance," which, he asserted, was not in the public's best interest.

"Our poll was solely about governance," Satish clarified. "We simply asked the people whether they wanted governance in their hands or a farmhouse-style administration. This poll

**Congress poll backfires**



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**Farm house rule..... 67% Praja Palana..... 33% Total votes: 92,551**

had nothing to do with any particular leader. Anyone with a sense of social responsibility would not wish for a farmhouse governance model."

He claimed that even BRS MLAs had participated in the poll by tagging posts advocating for "farmhouse governance." Satish also alleged that a former Digital Media director Dileep Konatham had spent Rs. 13 crore of public funds on BRS social media operations.

Highlighting the difference between the two parties, he said, "Congress social media is run by dedicated, voluntary party workers, while BRS operates through paid individuals. Our social media team works in alignment with the party's ideology, unlike BRS, which uses deceptive tactics."

**Aleti seeks clarity on Indiramma houses**

PNS ■ NIRMAL

BJP Legislature Party leader and MLA Aleti Maheshwar Reddy has demanded clarity from the state government regarding the allocation of Indiramma houses, questioning how houses would be allotted to the landless poor. Addressing a press conference on Thursday, he criticized the Congress government for failing to fulfill its election promises and accused it of deceiving all sections of society.

He pointed out that while 1.9 lakh applications were received from homeless individuals across the district, around 70,000 applications came from his constituency alone. However, he noted that the government had sanctioned only 3,500 houses, calling it a betrayal of the poor. "The government must explain the criteria for identifying beneficiaries and disclose a clear implementation plan," he demanded.



Maheshwar Reddy also raised concerns over the suspension of the Rythu Bharosa scheme, warning that citing the election code as an excuse would not be tolerated. He insisted that all eligible beneficiaries should receive welfare schemes without discrimination and sought clarification on the issuance of ration cards.

# Will certainly implement SC categorisation, assures Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC secretary Sampath Kumar has reiterated that SC categorisation is a fundamental principle of the Congress party. Speaking at the PAC meeting, he stated that any comments made against this principle by Vivek or any other leader would be deemed as opposition to the Congress party itself, and is expected the party to take necessary action.

Assuring the Madiga community, Sampath Kumar declared that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and the Congress government would certainly implement SC categorisation. He urged Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) leader Manda Krishna Madiga not to stage protests, emphasizing that Revanth Reddy is the only Chief Minister who has personally argued in the Supreme Court for the Madiga community's cause.

He pointed out that the Telangana government has already initiated the process of SC categorisation based on the report of a one-



man commission. Taking a jibe at BRS leaders, he remarked, "It is laughable that Harish Rao and KTR are now talking about justice for the Madiga community. They should be ashamed." Sampath Kumar recalled that when he had suggested in the Assembly that the Usha Mehra Commission report be taken to Delhi, BRS leaders remained silent for a decade. He stressed that it was only Revanth Reddy who had raised his voice in the Assembly for the Madiga community.

## 'Congress implementing all promises'

TPCC Spokesperson Sudhakar Goud slams Laxman

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC spokesperson Bandi Sudhakar Goud has lashed out at BJP Rajya Sabha member K Laxman, stating that his claim that not even half of the six guarantees promised by Congress have

been implemented reflects his lack of awareness. He said that after assuming power, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has systematically fulfilled the promises made to the people during the last Assembly elections.

Taking a dig at the BJP, Sudhakar Goud questioned, "What happened to Modi's promise of depositing Rs. 15 lakh of black money into every citizen's account? He also assured one crore jobs every year—was ten years not enough for that?"

# Congress failed to honour poll promises, alleges Laxman

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP Rajya Sabha MP and OBC Morcha national president K Laxman has launched a scathing attack on the Congress government, calling its failure to fulfill electoral promises a testament to its inefficiency and deception. Addressing a press conference at the BJP state office, Laxman alleged that Congress leaders themselves have admitted their inability to implement the guarantees given to the people.

"Congress leaders openly admitting that they cannot implement their promises is proof of their incompetence. This government deceived the people with false guarantees to win power and is now trying to escape from its commitments," he said.

Laxman accused the Congress of betraying not just Telangana but also Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. He



pointed out that in Haryana and Maharashtra, the people rejected the Congress due to its history of broken promises, and he predicted a similar fate for the party in Delhi.

Slamming the Congress for making extravagant commitments before the elections, he said, "They gave six guarantees, made 66 promises, and 420 commitments before the elections, only to dump them after coming to power." He highlighted the plight of retired employees in Telangana, alleg-

ing that their benefits, including GPF, gratuity, and commutation bills, have been kept pending despite court notices.

On the issue of BC reservations, Laxman accused the Congress of backtracking on its Kamareddy Declaration promises and demanded that the government implement 42% reservations for BCs before conducting local body elections. He also criticized the previous BRS government's policies, claiming that BJP was the only party that fought against GO 317, which affected teachers.

Urging people to vote against the Congress in the upcoming MLC elections, Laxman said, "If this government is not held accountable, it will continue to trouble employees, the unemployed, and students. The BJP will stand as the voice of the people to ensure their rights."

# Guv, CM pay tributes to Mahatma Gandhi at Babu Ghat

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary, Governor Jishnu Dev Varma, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, and several dignitaries paid their respects at Babu Ghat.

Accompanied by ministers Tummala Nageshwar Rao and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, DGP Jitender, Chief Minister's advisor Vem Narendra Reddy, TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud and BC Commission chairman Niranjan, the leaders offered floral tributes to the Father of the Nation. Senior officials were also present at the solemn ceremony.

BRS chief K Chandrashekar Rao paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and stated that Gandhi's ideology had not only guided India's freedom movement but also served as an inspiration for democratic movements worldwide.

KCR emphasised that Telangana's statehood movement and the subsequent decade of progress under BRS rule were deeply influenced by Gandhi's ideals. He noted that only through patience and non-violent can true goals be achieved, adding that Gandhi's approach remains relevant for the world even today.

# Govt increases ...

Continued from page 1

The order aligns with UGC regulations and a previous directive from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), which encouraged states to adopt revised UGC pay scales and policies. Telangana had earlier implemented the UGC Revised Pay Scales, 2016, for teaching staff through GO 15 in 2019.

The government has directed all university registrars under the Higher Education department to implement the new retirement policy immediately.

# Budget session likely ...

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The Budget session starts on Friday with President Droupadi Murmu addressing both the Houses of Parliament assembled together in the Lok Sabha. After the President's address, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table the Economic Survey in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha separately.

Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on Saturday for the eighth consecutive time.

At the all party meeting, the opposition accused the BJP-led government of politicisation of the Kumbh congregation and prevalence of VIP culture at the cost of the common man.

The opposition parties also alleged that the government is steam-rolling its agenda in parliamentary panels and having disregard for parliamentary procedure of finalising House business at the meetings of the

Business Advisory Committee.

"We expressed our concerns over the biased manner in the conduct of Parliament proceedings," Gaurav Gogoi, Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, told reporters here. A section of the opposition leaders questioned the government over the publication of a parliamentary bulletin on the number of days allotted for discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, contending that this was the prerogative of the Business Advisory Committee.

"We have taken note of their concerns. The Business Advisory Committee (BAC) will decide which issues will be taken up for discussion. We hope for a smooth and productive Budget session. Cooperation from all parties is essential for a meaningful and constructive parliamentary session," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said.

# Congress will sweep GHMC ...

Continued from page 1

He highlighted major development projects, including Metro expansion, Fourth City, HYDRAA, and Musi river cleaning, which he said have boosted investments. "The real estate boom is intact, contrary to what is being claimed," he added. Goud announced that local body elections would be conducted only after reservation enhancements are finalized. He admitted that bureaucratic delays had slowed some welfare schemes but maintained that Congress would not resort to falsehoods or surrender like BRS.

On the upcoming Graduate MLC elections, Goud stated that three ministers, local MLAs, and MLCs had been consulted before shortlisting candidates. "We have sent a three-name shortlist to the AICC, and the final decision will be taken by them," he said, adding that a meeting on Teachers' MLC elections would be held on February

3. He also questioned the rationale behind demolishing the Secretariat, despite it being fully equipped with modern amenities. On the Naxalite issue, he reiterated that Congress had always advocated for Maoists to integrate into mainstream society. "Naxalism turned into a law and order problem, which is why we believe they should join the democratic process," he said. Goud announced that Rahul Gandhi would soon address a public meeting in Suryapet, and urged party leaders, including MLAs, ministers, and MLCs, to prominently display photos of Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy in campaign materials.

He also took a dig at BRS leader KCR, acknowledging his past contributions to the Telangana movement but asserting that the Congress government had delivered in one year what BRS couldn't in a decade.

# No clarity on housing schemes: BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy along with Manne Govardhan Reddy, and Thangabalu launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, accusing him of deceiving the people of Telangana with false promises. Addressing a press conference at Telangana Bhavan, the MLA alleged that the Congress government has failed to provide clarity on housing schemes and is only issuing empty assurances.

Kaushik Reddy pointed out that in Huzurabad alone, officials identified 40,000 eligible beneficiaries under the Indiramma Housing scheme. However, he claimed that the government was merely distributing papers without proper approvals. "Without signatures or official validation, how can people trust these documents? If they build houses based on these papers, they will be left stranded."

# TG to develop hydroelectric projects in Himachal Pradesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana has moved forward in strengthening its power sector by exploring opportunities in hydroelectric projects in Himachal Pradesh. State officials have initiated efforts in this regard.

The Himachal Pradesh government recently invited proposals under the BOOT (Build-Own-Operate-Transfer) model for 22 hydroelectric projects. A team of Telangana power department officials visited Himachal Pradesh to study the feasibility of these projects and expressed interest in projects with a capacity exceeding 100 MW.

During the visit, Telangana officials met with the Himachal Pradesh Power Secretary and examined key hydroelectric project sites, including the SELI Hydroelectric Project (400 MW) and the MIYAR Hydroelectric Project (120 MW). Following this assessment, they recommended focusing on projects with a capacity of over 100 MW.

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu has request-



ed Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu to send a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the earliest so that Telangana can take the necessary steps to move forward. On Thursday, Bhatti Vikramarka held a meeting with the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister in Delhi, where senior officials from both states participated.

Bhatti Vikramarka, along with Energy Department Principal Secretary Sandeep Kumar Sultanania, formally conveyed Telangana's interest in these projects to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. Telangana officials also submitted an official letter expressing their intent to explore investment opportunities in the SELI and MIYAR projects.

# TG must uphold Presidential...

Continued from page 1

The state's argument that students who complete four years of study in Telangana through All India Quota admissions do not qualify as local candidates had been dismissed by the High Court. The GO Ms. 148, which governs PG medical admissions, overrides and against the principle of presidential order does not override the Presidential Order, and any attempt to challenge it in court would be counterproductive for Telangana students. Now the case in in Supreme Court"

The 1983 Act further reinforces that local reservation in education and employment is derived directly from the Presidential Order of 1974 (Section 3 and Section 3A).

Telangana cannot enact domicile-based reservations independently, as it falls strictly under the Presidential Order's jurisdiction. Crucially, Article 371D(10) ensures the overriding effect of the Presidential Order, making it legally superior to any conflicting regulations.

The Telangana Adaptation of Laws Order, 2016, read alongside the 1983 Act, confirms that Telangana continues to function under the 1974 Presidential framework.

Sources said "If Telangana contests the Supreme Court's decision in a manner that undermines the Presidential Order, it could weaken the state's long-standing local reservation framework. Instead, the government should push for an amendment to increase the local quota from 85% to 95%,

ensuring greater protection for Telangana students. The past BRS government made an amendment to employment presidential order and increased reservation to from 85% to 95% in local employment. Likewise, the current government should focus on going for amendment than ignoring the order in toto. The latest judgement of supreme court won't be applicable if Presidential Order is intact".

With the case set for Tuesday's hearing, Telangana must focus on upholding the Presidential Order rather than challenging it even better if they withdraw the case. "A miscalculated legal stance could jeopardize local students' rights and open the door for further dilution of state-specific reservations in the future" Sources said.

# Economic Survey ...

Continued from page 1

The Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament ahead of the Union Budget, also provides the roadmap for reforms and growth.

The document is prepared by a team led by Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran. The survey outlines the developments in the economy and various sectors, in addition to providing an outlook for the next financial year.

The document is expected to provide an assessment of the key developments like slowing growth, declining value of the rupee against the US dollar, and subdued consumption demand.

Often surveys come up with new and out-of-the-box ideas to meet challenges relating to poverty alleviation, climate

change, education, infrastructure development, and financial sector.

On Saturday, Finance Minister Sitharaman will table the first full Budget of Modi 3.0 government amid expectations of tweaking income tax slabs, major boost for the infrastructure sector, larger allocations for rural development and the education sector.

The Budget Session will commence on Friday with President Droupadi Murmu addressing the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The first part of the session will conclude on February 13 and the second part will start on March 10. The session will conclude on April 4.

The session's legislative agenda has 16 bills, including the Waqf (Amendment) Bill and the Immigration and Foreigners Bill.

# Harish raises alarm over ...

Continued from page 1

He also demanded that Telangana's Union Ministers and BJP MPs put pressure on the Centre to safeguard the interests of local students.

Harish Rao highlighted that Telangana, a state that has seen significant advancements in medical education, now risks losing crucial opportunities for its students due to this decision. He recalled that after state formation, former chief minister KCR prioritized medical education by establishing a medical college in every district, increasing the number of government medical colleges from 5 to 34 by 2024. As a result, Telangana now ranks first in the country in MBBS seats per capita and second in PG medical seats.

As of 2025, Telangana has 2,924 PG medical seats, with

1,462 previously reserved for local students. However, the Supreme Court's ruling shifts all these seats to the All-India Quota, effectively eliminating opportunities for Telangana students to pursue postgraduate medical education within the state. The impact of this decision is not limited to Telangana, as students from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh are also likely to face similar challenges.

Harish Rao emphasized that southern states have been at the forefront of medical education for decades, ensuring a steady pipeline of healthcare professionals. He noted that Telangana's PG medical students currently serve an average of 12,799 individuals, compared to Karnataka (10,573), Andhra Pradesh (15,079), Tamil Nadu (15,123), and Kerala (18,662). The ruling could dis-

rupt these numbers and adversely affect medical services, particularly in rural areas, as it could impact reservations for SC, ST, and BC students.

Pointing to the central health minister's past statement that "health is a state subject," Harish Rao reminded that state governments fund medical colleges and stipends for PG students. Without local reservations, he argued, Telangana's investments in medical education would fail to benefit its students, leading to shortages in healthcare professionals. He urged the Telangana government to pass a resolution in the Assembly demanding the reinstatement of local quotas for PG medical seats and to pressure the Centre to intervene. Additionally, he called for a united effort from southern states to push for a constitutional amendment if necessary.

**TODAY**  
**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha  
Tithi: Dwitiya, Jan 30 04:10 PM to Jan 31 01:59 PM  
Tritiya: Jan 31 01:59 PM to Feb 01 11:38 AM  
Nakshatram: Shatabhisha, Jan 31 05:50 AM to Feb 01 04:14 AM  
Purva Bhadrpadada: Feb 01 04:14 AM to Feb 02 02:33 AM  
Rahukalam: 11:05 AM to 12:29 PM  
Yamagandam: 3:18 PM to 4:42 PM  
Varjyam: 10:11 AM to 11:40 AM  
Gulika: 8:16 AM to 9:40 AM  
Amritakalam: 09:31 PM to 11:00 PM  
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 PM to 12:52 PM  
**HYDERABAD WEATHER**  
Forecast: Mostly Sunny  
Temp: 32°C  
Humidity: 42%  
Sunrise: 6:48 AM  
Sunset: 6:11 PM  
Updated: January 30, 2025 5:00 PM

# 64 feared dead as US plane collides with ...

Continued from page 1

Donnelly said first responders on Thursday were searching an area of the Potomac River as far south as the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, roughly 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) south of the airport.

There was no immediate word on the cause of the collision, but officials said flight conditions were clear as the jet coming from Wichita, Kansas, with US and Russian figure skaters and others aboard, was making a routine landing when the helicopter flew into its path.

"On final approach into Reagan National it collided with a military aircraft on an otherwise normal approach," American Airlines CEO Robert Isom said. "At this time, we don't know why the military aircraft came into the path of the ... aircraft."

Three soldiers were aboard the helicopter during a training flight, an Army official said.

Images from the river showed boats around the partly submerged wing and the mangled wreckage of the plane's fuselage. Investigators will try to piece together the aircraft's final moments before the collision, including its contact with air traffic controllers as well as a loss of altitude by the passenger jet.

"I would just say that everyone who flies in American skies expects that we fly safely," Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said. "That when you depart an airport, you get to your destination. That didn't happen last night, and I know that President Trump, his administration, the FAA, the DOT, we will not rest until we have answers for the families and for the flying public. You

should be assured that when you fly, you're safe."

Reagan Airport was to reopen at 11 a.m. Thursday, the Federal Aviation Administration announced. The FAA previously said it would be closed until 5 a.m. Friday.

Duffy, just sworn in earlier this week, was asked if he could reassure Americans that the United States still has the safest airspace in the world.

"Can I guarantee the American flying public that the United States has the most safe and secure airspace in the world? And the answer to that is, absolutely yes, we do," he said.

Authorities have early indicators of what went wrong. The night was clear, the plane and helicopter were both in standard flight patterns and there was standard communi-

cation between the aircraft and the tower, Duffy said.

"We have early indicators of what happened here," Duffy said, though he declined to elaborate pending an investigation. It is not unusual to have a military aircraft flying the river and an aircraft landing at the airport, he said. Asked if the plane was aware that there was a helicopter in the area, Duffy said the helicopter was aware that there was a plane in the area.

Asked about President Donald Trump suggesting in an overnight social media post that the collision could have been prevented, Duffy said: "From what I've seen so far, do I think this was preventable? Absolutely."

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth did not appear at the Thursday morning press conference. He was expected to brief

reporters at the Pentagon later. Likely the deadliest plane crash since November 2001

If everyone aboard the plane was killed, it would be the deadliest US airline crash since November 12, 2001, when an American Airlines flight crashed into a residential area of Belle Harbour, New York, just after takeoff from Kennedy Airport, killing all 260 people aboard. The last major fatal crash involving a US commercial airline occurred in 2009 near Buffalo, New York. Everyone aboard the Bombardier DHC-8 propeller plane was killed, including 45 passengers, two pilots and two flight attendants. Another person on the ground also died, bringing the total death toll to 50. An investigation determined that the captain accidentally caused the plane to stall as it

approached the airport in Buffalo. Passengers on Wednesday's flight included a group of figure skaters, their coaches and family members who were returning from a development camp that followed the US Figure Skating Championships in Wichita. "We are devastated by this unspeakable tragedy and hold the victims' families closely in our hearts," US Figure Skating said in a statement.

Two of those coaches were identified by the Kremlin as Russian figure skaters Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, who won the pairs title at the 1994 world championships and competed twice in the Olympics. The Skating Club of Boston lists them as coaches and their son, Maxim Naumov, is a competitive figure skater for the US.

# Govt just ...

Continued from page 1

When our representatives pointed this out, their voices were stifled," KTR remarked.

Lashing out at GHMC's inefficiency under the Congress regime, KTR said the administration was failing to provide even basic civic amenities like sanitation, drinking water, and uninterrupted power supply. He demanded that all development projects initiated by the previous government be completed without delay.

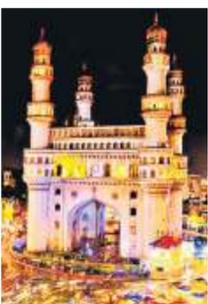
KTR warned that until then, the BRS would continue to question the Congress government and hold the Chief Minister accountable for Hyderabad's urban development. He demanded the immediate release of the arrested corporators and party leaders.

# City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | JANUARY 31, 2025

03



## CITY EVENTS

### Gender and politics mixer

Networking Event

Venue

Lamakaan,  
January 31, (5:30 pm)

### Live Musical Concert

Classical Music

Venue

Sri Thyagaraja  
Gana Sabha  
January 31, (5:30 pm)

### Tyagaraja Aradhana Music Festival

Naukacaritram:  
Kuchipudi Dance  
Performance

Venue

Shilparamam  
January 31, (5:30 pm)

### Book Release Function

By Kinera Art Venugopal  
Theatres

Venue

Conference Hall,  
Ravindra Bharathi  
January 31, (6 pm)

### USA Study Expo 2025

Education Fair

Venue

Hyatt Place  
January 31, (10:30 am)

## More funds, tax breaks urged for startups in Union Budget

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The upcoming Union Budget 2025 should increase funding for startup incubation programmes, research grants and tax breaks to help early-stage ventures, said Sujit Jagirdar, Interim CEO of T-Hub, India's leading startup incubator.

He emphasised that India's startup ecosystem drives economic growth, innovation and job creation.

To sustain this momentum, policies must empower entrepreneurs and simplify regulations, allowing startups to focus on scaling rather than compliance hurdles. Sujit highlighted the need for government-backed credit programmes and incentives for venture capital and angel investors to address funding challenges. He also stressed that government agencies, corporates and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) could boost startup growth through CSR initiatives and strategic partnerships, particularly in social innovation and sustainability.

## TG to introduce AI-driven digital initiatives in primary schools

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant move to revolutionise school education, the Telangana government is set to introduce AI-driven digital initiatives in primary schools. A high-level delegation from the state's Education department visited Bengaluru's EkStep Foundation on January 30 to explore collaborations that will enhance learning outcomes through artificial intelligence.

The delegation, led by Dr Yogita Rana, Secretary of Education, included Krishna Aditya, Commissioner of Intermediate Education; EV Narsimha Reddy, Director of School Education; Uma Harathi, Assistant Collector Under Training (ACUT), Vikarabad; Garima, Assistant Collector Under Training (ACUT), Narayanpet; and other senior officials.

Their visit was aimed at understanding how digital tools and AI-driven strategies can improve foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN), enable personalised learning and provide data-driven



A delegation led by Dr Yogita Rana, Secretary of Education, includes Krishna Aditya, Commissioner of Intermediate Education; EV Narsimha Reddy, Director of School Education, among others

insights for better decision-making in schools.

EkStep Foundation, co-founded by Infosys' Nandan Nilekani, has been instrumental in driving digital transformation across education, health and agriculture.

The organisation is already working with Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha, Punjab and Tamil Nadu to implement AI-powered learning models.

Telangana officials explored key areas of collaboration, including AI-powered digital

interventions, teacher training in digital pedagogy and leveraging analytics to bridge learning gaps.

This visit follows Telangana's recent study tour to Kerala in December 2024, where officials examined the successful integration of AI tools into the state's ICT curriculum. Inspired by these best practices, Telangana is now formulating a detailed action plan in collaboration with EkStep Foundation to implement AI-driven educational reforms tailored to the state's needs.

## ETO Motors ties up with FlixBus to start zero-emission e-bus operations

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad-based ETO Motors has partnered with FlixBus to launch zero-emission inter-city electric bus operations in India. The companies signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to deploy four luxury electric coaches by next month. This collaboration combines FlixBus's global expertise in inter-city transport with ETO Motors' innovative mobility solutions to promote sustainable travel.

In addition to launching these electric buses, the partnership will develop advanced charging infrastructure along FlixBus's operational routes. A scalable strategy for future electric mobility solutions is



also part of the agreement.

CEO of Thunder Plus and Group Chief Marketing Officer at ETO Motors, Rajeev YSR, said the company is committed to solving shared mobility challenges while reducing carbon footprints. Meanwhile, Surya Khurana, Managing Director of FlixBus India, highlighted that this collaboration aligns with India's green mobility vision.

## ReSRL & ACL announce Rs100 cr for transforming plastic recycling

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Re-Sustainability and Recycling Private Limited (ReSRL) and Aarti Circularity Limited (ACL) have announced a Rs100 crore initial investment to transform plastic recycling with the first facility in Hyderabad. This initiative aims to develop Plastic Materials Recycling Facilities (PMRFs) across the country.

The goal of the PMRFs is to segregate, extract, and recycle materials from various waste streams, including plastics, and produce Advanced Circular Materials (ACM). These materials will serve as raw materials, fuels, or recycled polymer



CEO of Re Sustainability Masood Mallick, along with Mirik Gogri, Director of Aarti Circularity Limited (ACL) exchanging partnership

feedstock. By 2030, the partnership aims to recover 500 tons of resources per day, exploring various feedstocks to maximize recycling and energy circularity.

Managing Director & CEO

of Re Sustainability, Masood Mallick said that Hyderabad's first facility will be operational within 15 to 18 months and will mark a major step in India's sustainable waste management efforts. He noted that this col-

laboration combines ReSRL's waste management expertise with Aarti Industries' experience in specialty chemicals, creating a strong foundation for cutting-edge recycling infrastructure. Together, they aim to minimize environmental impact and drive growth through resource efficiency.

Meanwhile, Mirik Gogri, Director of Aarti Circularity Limited (ACL), mentioned that this joint venture is a major step forward in addressing environmental challenges. He noted that the venture aims for a turnover of Rs 5,000 crore in five years, responding to the growing demand for recycled polymers.

## NO SHORTAGE OF FUNDS FOR WELFARE INITIATIVES: MAYOR

# Rs 8,440 crore for city's development works

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

## GHMC budget

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Council has approved an estimated budget of Rs 8,440 crore for the financial year 2025-26, along with a revised budget of Rs 8,118 crore for 2024-25.

Before the session began, council members observed two minutes silence in tribute to former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh, who recently passed away. They also paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary.

During the meeting, Mayor Vijayalakshmi assured that there would be no shortage of funds for infrastructure development and welfare initiatives in Hyderabad. She expressed gratitude to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for approving funds and supporting the GHMC's development efforts. She urged public representatives and officials to work in coordination to ensure essential infrastructure is provided to city residents.

Several corporators raised concerns about sanitation, street-lighting and the development of suburban areas. They emphasised the need to enhance GHMC's revenue sources and suggested conducting special drives to recover unpaid taxes from corporate schools.

GHMC Commissioner Ilambarthi highlighted that priority is being given to improving facilities in parks and sports grounds. He assured that street-lighting issues would be resolved soon, with contractors already appointed to complete the work.

MP and Ex-Officio Member Etela Rajender called for transparency in governance, urging that citizens should have complete trust in GHMC's leadership.



GHMC Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi at the budget meeting along with members on Friday

He stressed the need for better infrastructure, welfare measures for the poor and the revival of polluted water bodies in Hyderabad.

Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shobhan Reddy expressed satisfaction over the smooth conduct of the session and called for collective efforts to ensure better services for citizens. The meeting faced initial disruptions



from BRS members, who attempted to halt proceedings.

However, Mayor Vijayalakshmi invoked GHMC Section 89/1, leading to their suspension, after which marshals escorted them out.

Several key officials, including zonal commissioners, additional commissioners and corporators from various divisions, attended the session.

## Min Ponnam condemns bid to disrupt budget meet

Minister for Transport and BC Welfare Ponnam Prabhakar has strongly condemned attempts to disrupt the GHMC budget meeting, calling it an insult to the Constitution. He emphasised that the GHMC budget is directly linked to the development of Hyderabad and should not be obstructed for political reasons.

Speaking to the media, the Minister stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, the government is committed to protecting Hyderabad's brand image and ensuring good governance. He asserted that while every political party has the right to move a no-confidence motion, the Congress is fully prepared to face such challenges.

However, blocking the budget proceedings would ultimately hinder the city's progress. Prabhakar demanded that BRS leadership justify their actions, questioning whether their resistance stems from the unprecedented development currently taking place in Hyderabad after a decade of stagnation post-Telangana formation. He further asked whether the opposition's reluctance was due to envy over the city's rapid transformation under the current administration. "The kind of development that was missing in the past 10 years is now happening in Hyderabad. Is that why they want to stop it?" he asked.

## Protests, suspensions at GHMC meeting

The corporators of BRS, BJP have caused a stir and tried to obstruct Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Mayor Vijayalakshmi from functioning at the tenth special Budget meeting of the GHMC, followed by the 10th ordinary meeting of the council, scheduled at the GHMC head office on Thursday. Initially it began with the Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi addressing the members and in the whole meeting the House was adjourned for more than three times. The

corporators of BRS, BJP have targeted the Mayor with slogans of not receiving funds to their regions and the House was asked to be in control. "Respect your chair. House must be in order. A paper was thrown at me. I won't pause the House until the member apologises to me," said the Mayor. Later, the BJP corporators disguised themselves as beggars for not receiving funds to their regions. A few corporators of the BRS were arrested later for their continuous protests.

## Sports ground inaugurated at government school

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

WebPT Private Limited, Hyderabad, in partnership with NGO Nirmaan Organisation, inaugurated a new sports ground at Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), RC Puram, Sangareddy, on Thursday. This initiative aims to benefit 230 girl students by providing better sports opportunities, helping them compete at State and national levels.

Addressing the inauguration, Sangareddy District Collector Kranthi emphasised the importance of sports in students development and appreciated WebPT for its efforts in creating new opportunities. CEO of WebPT, a leading physical therapy software company, Andrea Facini reaffirmed WebPT's commitment to empowering underprivileged students. He expressed hope that the facility, facilitated by Nirmaan, would help students explore sports and unlock their athletic potential.



## Brahmotsavams of Jogulamba temple from Jan 30 to Feb 3

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Environment, Forest and Endowments Konda Surekha has been formally invited to attend the Brahmotsavams of Jogulamba Bala Brahmeshwari Swamy Devasthanam scheduled from January 30 to February 3, and the Mahashivaratri celebrations from February 25 to March 1.

The temple's Executive Officer Purenra Kumar, along with the priests, met the Minister at her Secretariat office and extended the invi-

tation. The temple priests offered Vedic blessings and presented her with temple prasadam and an invitation letter.

Briefing the Minister on the upcoming festivities, EO Purenra Kumar outlined the key events, including Dhvajarohanam, Maha Purnahuti, Sahasra Kalasabhishekam and the celestial wedding of Jogulamba Bala Brahmeshwari Swamy as part of Brahmotsavams. For Mahashivaratri, the temple will conduct the Kalyanotsavam, Rathotsavam,

AICC secretary and Alampur Congress in-charge Sampath Kumar was also present at the meeting.

Ashwa Vahana Seva and Avabhrudhotsavam.

In view of the back-to-back celebrations, Minister Surekha directed the EO to coordinate with officials from other departments to ensure smooth arrangements for devotees. She emphasised that no lapses should occur in the management of the festivities and instructed that the events be conducted in a grand and seamless manner.

The notification defines "persons with benchmark disability" as individuals with at least 40% of a specified disability as per the Act. The reservation is apportioned among different disability categories at a rate of 1% each for blindness and low vision, deaf and hard of hearing, locomotor disabilities, including cerebral palsy, dwarfism, leprosy-cured individuals, muscular dystrophy, and acid attack victims, Autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability, and mental illness and multiple disabilities, including deaf-blindness.

The government has directed that the reservation should be rotated among the categories in a cycle order to ensure equal opportunities.



Hyderabad Commissioner of Police CV Anand participating in the CPR training programme

## Cops get first-hand experience on CPR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad City Police began a four-day training programme on Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) on Thursday.

It was inaugurated by CV Anand, DG, Commissioner of Police, Hyderabad at ICC Building.

Speaking on the occasion, Anand said that the CPR training programme is being conducted under the auspices of Mythri Hospital, Mehdiapatnam and that he would like to thank them for providing the training 1,409 police personnel in the first phase.

A total of 1,248 Hyderabad City Police officers and personnel will participate in the second phase of the four-day training. They will be segregated into 15 batches and each batch will be trained for 90 minutes.

He said that it is an important programme that will be useful not only for police personnel but also for the general public. CPR restores the supply of blood and oxygen to the body that has stopped due to cardiac arrest. If the heart starts beating again, the person who has fainted will regain consciousness.

Other countries like America, Japan, Singapore and European countries have made CPR mandatory in their education system, said the doctors training the police.

Deaths are increasing due to lack of awareness about CPR. 1.15 lakh people die every day due to cardiac arrest worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, about 5.8 crore people die of heart attacks every year, added the doctors.

## Slovakian youth visit Telangana Bhavan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As part of their tour across major cities in India, Slovakian youth Michael and Viberavo visited the BRS central office, Telangana Bhavan, in Banjara Hills. During their visit, they explored the party headquarters and enquired with great interest about KCR and the significance of the Telangana Thalli statue.

The office staff provided detailed explanations about the historical photographs and the Telangana movement displayed on the walls of the Bhavan. The Slovakian visitors expressed their satisfaction with the visit, stating that the Telangana Bhavan tour gave them a deeper understanding of the region's political and cultural significance.

## BRS stages protest demanding fulfillment of promises

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Marking Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders and party workers staged a protest in Shadnagar, demanding that the Congress government fulfil the 420 promises it made before coming to power. The protest, led by Shadnagar BRS youth leader and former Keshampet MPP Y Ravinder Yadav, saw a large gathering of party workers at Gandhi's statue in Ganj, where they paid tribute to the Father of the Nation.

Speaking on the occasion, Ravinder Yadav criticised the Congress party, alleging that it had misled the people with false promises.

He pointed out that 420 days had passed since the Congress government was formed, yet most of its promises remained unfulfilled. He questioned the fate of key commitments, including the promised increased pensions for widows and the elderly, and financial support schemes for farmers. He accused the government of deceiving the public, particularly regarding the Rs 12,000

a year for farmworkers.

He further stated that people now regretted for voting the Congress to power, realising that their decision had led to hardships. He warned that Congress leaders would face people's anger if they visited villages for votes again.

During the protest, a booklet listing the Congress government's 420 promises was displayed as a symbolic reminder of the party's commitments. BRS leaders reiterated that they were demanding accountability, not for political gain, but to ensure the well-being of the people.

Several key leaders participated in the event, including former Shadnagar municipal chairman K Narender, vice chairman MS Natarajan, former Rythu Samiti president Tandra Venkat Reddy, Raikal Venkat Reddy, former town councilors Venkataram Reddy, Pratap Reddy, Mohammed Ejaz (Addu), former sarpanch Srinivas Reddy, Nandakishore, Jupally Shankar, former MPTC Bheeshwa Ramakrishna, youth leader Nandaram Ashok Yadav, Cheepiri Ravi Yadav, and many others.



BRS leaders and workers staging a protest at Mahatma Gandhi statue in Shadnagar on Thursday

## Wedding season to begin today in TG

Not less than 8000 couples in the undivided Mahabubnagar district are expected to tie knot



PNS ■ NARAYANPET

Wedding season in the state is set to kick off from January 31, as the auspicious Telugu month of Magha masam begins. An estimated 8,000 couples in the undivided Mahabubnagar district are expected to tie the knot between January 31 and March 6. There are 11 key muhurat (auspicious dates) spread across January, February, and March, with the first wedding muhurat starting on January 31.

Couples who have already gotten engaged are also making the most of this time by participating in pre-wedding photo shoots, often at scenic locations in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Hyderabad. These photo shoots are costing anywhere from Rs 10,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

Swami Santanand Purohit of Narayanapeta mentioned that there are two wedding muhurat on January 31. For February, auspicious dates include February 2, 7, 13, 14, 16, and 20.

Additionally, there will be two muhurat on February 22 and 23. Weddings and other significant events, like house-warmings, can be celebrated on these days.

Since December 27 of last year, celebrations for weddings and other events had been on hold. January 31 is considered ideal for house-warmings, with wedding muhurat beginning on February 2.

This upcoming season promises to be a busy one for a variety of businesses—flower decorators, wedding halls, caterers, tent houses, photographers, videographers, textile shops, gold merchants, cooks, printing houses, and priests—all of whom are gearing up for a high-demand period.

Vedic scholars also highlight that there will be additional important muhurat in April, May, and June following the Telugu Ugadi festival. However, the inauspicious Ashadham month will prevent any celebrations in the latter half of June. Wedding season will resume again in August and September.



An aghori having a confrontation with police in Ramagundam on Thursday.

## Aghori once again goes on rampage, abuses police

PNS ■ RAMAGUNDAM

Aghori was at it again on Thursday. This time, in the Ramagundam industrial area, she got into a knock-down-drag-out fight with the people and the police. She swore at the police and also the people who gathered to see her when she arrived by car in the city.

The Aghori said that she had arrived on Wednesday night at the invitation of a devotee in Malkapur, near NTPC. The Aghori, who arrived in her car, was spotted by the police and the people as soon as she stepped out after a feast at the devotee's house.

It led to a confrontation between the Aghori and the police.

Agitated over the police presence, the Aghori began using abusive language (unprintable) towards the police. It led to a tense situation in the village for a while, and the Aghori even attacked the police, media, and public, forcing them to

flee.

Afterwards, she drove directly to the NTPC police station, where she entered the station, removed the black cloth that covered her body and walked around inside. The police station was located near Rajiv Rahadari (road), and a large crowd gathered to see Aghori. The police had to calm her down and eventually sent her away from the area.

It may be recalled that Aghori created a scene at the Komuravelli Mallikarjuna Swamy temple in Siddipet on Wednesday. She whipped out a knife and went on the rampage, inflicting injuries on several people.

At first, after she arrived at the temple, she insisted on being allowed to enter through the main gate of the temple for darshan.

The naked Aghori insisted on being allowed to enter the temple from the main gate for darshan. However, temple authorities suggested that she would be allowed only if she wore clothes.

## Timber merchant files police case against forest officer

PNS ■ SURYAPET

In Kodada town of Suryapet district, a tribal person, named Srinivas from Jaggaiahpet in Andhra Pradesh, filed a complaint against a section officer in the Forest Department Khaadeer, alleging that the officer had abused him by using casteist slur. In his complaint, he also blamed the officer for using filthy language against him.

According to the complaint, Srinivas had been running a wood business by taking government permit. He accused the officer of demanding a bribe of Rs 60,000 a month.

Srinivas had stopped his business for six months due to the alleged harassment. When he visited the Kodada Forest office recently to request permission to resume his business, Khaadeer reportedly rejected plea and demanded



Srinivas

the bribe of Rs 60,000 every month. Khaadeer, Srinivas said, also threatened him with physical harm and insulted him using caste-based derogatory terms.

Following this, Srinivas approached the Kodada town police station and lodged a complaint.

## Who is the boss, Collector or the Police Commissioner?

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

In Karimnagar district, differences have reportedly arisen between the District Collector Pamela Satpathy and Police Commissioner Abhishek Mohanty. It is not clear about the origin of the difference between the two officers, who are known for their honesty and integrity.



Abhishek Mohanty



Pamela Satpathy

The reports about the differences between the two officers are widely discussed in the city. The alleged rivalry between them came into open during the police sports meet recently. The district police recently hosted Telangana's third Police Sports Meet, drawing around 2,500 athletes from across the state.

On January 21, the Sports Authority of Telangana requested the Karimnagar Police Department to make arrangements at the sports complex at Ambedkar Stadium for the event.

By January 27, the police had

arranged 150 beds at the stadium for athletes' accommodations. However, upon arrival, police officers found that the rooms were locked, with reports indicating that the District Collector had not authorised access to the stadium.

This fueled rumours suggesting that the locked rooms were a sign of growing friction between the Collector and the Police Commissioner.

Further speculation arose during a visit by Bandi Sanjay to the city. Despite Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar being a member of the Smart

City Board, the Police Commissioner was conspicuous by his absence. He was reportedly not invited to the event with his name and photo missing from the preparations. This exclusion sparked whispers of a deeper divide between the Collector and the Police Commissioner.

During the Central Minister's visit, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy expressed dissatisfaction with the district Collector's handling of security arrangements during the visit. He even asked where is Police Commissioner.

## CM assures funds for Peddagattu jatara

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Nalgonda MP Raghveer Reddy met Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy in Hyderabad on Thursday, urging him to allocate substantial funds for the Peddagattu (Gollagattu) Jatara, a major religious festival held in the erstwhile Nalgonda district.

Responding to the request, CM Revanth Reddy directed officials to prepare budgetary plans for the necessary arrangements, as the festival is set to commence on February 16. With

devotees expected to arrive in large numbers from across the country, the government is planning to ensure basic infrastructure, electricity, drinking water, and other essential facilities for the event.

The Chief Minister emphasised that previous governments had only made temporary arrangements, but this time, the focus should be on permanent development. He instructed officials to lay CC roads wherever necessary and ensure the smooth execution of the festival.

## MLA Shankar pays tributes to Mahatma

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

On the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary, Shadnagar MLA Veerlapalli Shankar paid floral tributes to the Father of the Nation, highlighting his unwavering commitment to truth and non-violence. The tribute event was held at the MLA

camp office in Shadnagar town, where party leaders and supporters gathered to honor Gandhi's legacy.

Speaking at the event, MLA Shankar described Mahatma Gandhi as a visionary leader who used non-violence as a powerful weapon to dismantle British rule and secure India's independence.

## Ensure nutritious food to children: Collector to Anganwadi workers

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

District Collector Badavath Santhosh conducted a surprise inspection on Tuesday at the Anganwadi centre and the Tribal Girls Residential School in Chenchugudem under Balmoro Mandal in the district.

During this inspection, he reviewed the nutritional food, milk, and eggs being provided to the children at the centre. He instructed the officials to ensure that meals are provided to students according to the government-approved menu at every Anganwadi centre.

The Collector directed the Anganwadi workers to provide eggs, vegetables, and nutritious food provided by the government to children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers promptly. He emphasised that Anganwadi centres should play a crucial role in establishing a healthy lifestyle in society and improving the health of children.

As Anganwadi centres are vital for the health and primary development of children,



Nagarkurnool Collector Badavath Santhosh interacting with officials at an Anganwadi centre at Chenchugudem in Nagarkurnool district on Thursday

there should be no shortcomings in their functioning, he cautioned.

While inspecting the children's educational skills at the Anganwadi centre, the Collector expressed happiness over the interest and talent demonstrated by the students. He appreciated their enthusiasm and learning abilities, noting that they reflected the core objectives of these centers. Later, the Collector made a

surprise visit to the Tribal Girls Residential School in Ramagiri (Chenchugudem) village. He inspected the store room, dining hall, and toilets of the school and advised that meals should be provided every day according to the government menu.

He also inspected the kitchen and recommended maintaining cleanliness in the kitchen equipment and surrounding areas. The Collector

instructed the school staff to work towards providing a clean and quality environment for the students.

Focusing on the school facilities, the Collector suggested that proper arrangements should be made for the students. He emphasised that immediate actions should be taken to improve the students' educational needs and basic facilities.

The Collector also urged strict measures to ensure a 100 per cent pass rate in the 10th-grade students. He highlighted that the government recently increased the diet mess charges and introduced a new menu to ensure that students receive nutritious food along with their skills.

He instructed officials to take the necessary precautions to provide daily meals as per this new menu.

The Collector was accompanied by DWO officer Rajeshwari, CDPO Damayanti, Tahsildar Srikanth, MPDO Raghavulu, Supervisor Nirmala, Anganwadi teacher Poshamma, and others.

## Leaders pay tributes to Mahatma on his death anniversary

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The 77th death anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was observed at the District Congress office, Sanjeevareddy Bhavan, on Thursday.

District Congress President Puvvalla Durgaprasad, City Congress Committee President Mohammed Javed, and District INTUC President Kotla Seetharamulu participated in the event.

The leaders paid floral tributes to Mahatma's portrait and offered their respects. Following this, District Congress President Puvvalla Durgaprasad and City Congress President Mohammed Javed remarked that Gandhi's principles

continue to be an inspiration even today. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence and is revered by the people as the Father of the Nation.

The event also saw the participation of TPCC members Puchakayala Veerabhadram, State OBC Cell vice president Vaddeboyna Narasimharau, former councillor Palakurthi Nageshwar Rao, State Minority Cell leaders BH Rabbani, District Women, Kisan, and Minority Presidents Dobbala Saujanya, Mokka Shekhar Goud, Syed Mujahid Hussain, Senior District Congress leaders Doda Ashok, Maddineni Ramesh, City Congress Corporators, and other leaders.



District Congress leaders paying floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi's portrait at the DCC office in Khammam on Thursday

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA				
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL DEPUTY COLLECTOR, LA, HAML, HYDERABAD				
FORM-F				
Notification by the Collector (LA), HAML (See rule 7 (c))				
Sl.No	NOTIFICATION NO. & DATE	GAZETTE NO. & DATE		
1.	NO C5/388/2024- RHS [201 to 225]	HAML No.25, dated 28-11-2024		
File No.:	C6/07/2025-RHS-4/1	Dated:	30-01-2025.	
Whereas the following Notifications were issued and published in the Gazettes for acquisition of the land under Extension of Metro Rail Project, Hyderabad Airport Metro Limited, Phase-II, from MGBS to Chandrayangutta, Corridor-VI, situated at Share-E Hyderabad Village, Bahadurapur Mandal of Hyderabad District for the Public purpose.				
In response to the said Notifications the following affected persons (Property owners and others) have come forward to settle their claims through Negotiations. The details of the willing affected persons/Land Owners are as follows.				
Sl.No./PW No.	Name and address	Sketch No.	Premises Sq.Yds	Extent in Sq.Yds
1/25	Smt Shameem Parveen w/o Late MD Zaheer uddin R/o 23-2-542, Hari Bowl, Moghulpura, Charminar Hyderabad-500055	RHS-225	23-2-542	199.82
It is hereby notified calling for claims and objections if any, to be filed before the District Collector, Hyderabad District/Special Deputy Collector, LA, HAML, Rasoolpura, Hyderabad within the Seven days of publication of this Notification i.e., by 7-02-2025. Sd/-				
Special Deputy Collector, LA, HAML, Rasoolpura, Hyderabad.				
Date: 30-01-2025				
DIPR No. 642/LA-PP/Adv/Agency/2024-25				

ACROSS THE STATES



Nine Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh

Nine Naxalites, mostly women -- carrying a cumulative reward of Rs 52 lakh on their heads -- surrendered before security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Thursday, an official said. The surrendered Naxalites included two couples, and all of them quit the armed movement citing their disillusionment with its 'inhuman and hollow ideology', he said. Kalnu Mangdu, his wife Madvi Budhri, Midiyam Sukka alias Sameer, his wife Rajni alias Rajee and women cadres Shanti Kawasi, Madkam Somdi, Nuppo Narsi, Madkam Hidme and Nuppo Hungi turned themselves in before authorities, said the official. Of these, Mangdu, involved in a major encounter in 2020, was active as a deputy commander of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) battalion No. 1 operating under the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist). His wife Budhri was a member of the South Bastar Division battalion No. 1. Sameer was the communication team commander of PLGA battalion No. 1 and his wife Rajee was a CNM member, he added.



Hearing in Rahul defamation case deferred to Feb 11

Proceedings in a defamation case involving Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, scheduled to take place Thursday, were deferred after the Congress leader's lawyer fell sick. Special Judge Shubham Verma scheduled the next hearing for February 11. The delay came after Rahul Gandhi's lawyer, Kashi Prasad Shukla, submitted a medical certificate stating that he was unwell and unable to attend the court proceedings. In response, Judge Verma set the new date for the hearing. Santosh Kumar Pandey, the advocate of Vijay Mishra, who has filed the case against Gandhi, said. Mishra, a BJP leader from Hanumanjani, filed his petition in 2018 accusing Gandhi of making 'derogatory' remarks during the Karnataka elections. Mishra claimed the remarks were offensive and caused him personal harm. After Gandhi failed to appear in court, a warrant was issued against him in December 2023.



Best marching contingents, tableaux get award

Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth Thursday presented awards to the best marching contingents and tableaux of 76th Republic Day celebrations. Uttar Pradesh's tableau showcasing the ongoing Mahakumbh won the first prize while the marching contingent of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles was adjudged the best among the three services. Tripura's tableau with the theme 'Eternal Reverence' has won the second prize among the tableaux from state and Union territories, according to the Defence Ministry. The tableau from Andhra Pradesh that showcased eco-friendly wooden toys was adjudged the third best. The awards were conferred at a ceremony held at Rashtriya Rangshala Camp in Delhi. Among the central ministries and departments, the tableau of the Tribal Affairs ministry was declared the best. The best marching contingent among the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and other auxiliary forces was the Delhi Police team. In addition, an online poll was conducted on the MyGov portal from January 26 to 28 for citizens to vote for their favourite tableau and marching contingents as 'popular choice category'.

BJP leader moves Delhi HC for defamation case against CM Atishi

A BJP leader on Thursday moved the Delhi High Court against an order dismissing his defamation case against Chief Minister Atishi.



In his plea, Praveen Shankar Kapoor said while rejecting the defamation complaint and quashing the summons issued by a magisterial court, the special judge went "beyond" the scope of his power in law. "The Special Judge has ventured into political adventurism akin to a political discourse by attempting to determine who is a bigger/smaller political entity, which was not at all and never be the scope of adjudication in revision proceedings. The Special Judge did not even permit the complainant to have a trial in order to make good his allegations," the plea alleged. Seeking the order to be quashed, the plea said there were various legal infirmities in the it.

Jaishankar calls Trump 'American nationalist'

EAM highlights strong India-US ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Emphasising strong India-US bilateral ties, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday described US President Donald Trump as an "American nationalist".

Speaking at an interactive session at Delhi University's Hansraj College, Jaishankar highlighted the evolving nature of global diplomacy and India's approach to it.

"I recently attended his (Trump's) oath-taking ceremony and we received good treatment. I believe he is an American nationalist," Jaishankar said in response to a question about whether Trump is India's friend or enemy. He acknowledged that Trump's policies could bring significant changes to global affairs but asserted that India's foreign policy would continue to be guided by national interest. "Yes, he (Trump) will change a lot of things, maybe some things will be out of syllabus, but we have to conduct foreign policies out of syllabus in the interest of the country," he said, adding, "There may be some issues where we differ, but



there will be many areas where things will be in our shed."

Jaishankar also stressed the strong personal ties between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Trump, saying, "Our relationship with the US is strong and Modi has a good personal relationship with Trump." During the session, Jaishankar spoke about India's growing global influence and changing perceptions about

the country. "Even non-Indians now say they are Indians, they think it will help them get a seat on a plane somewhere," he said.

Reflecting on his career, Jaishankar shared insights into his transition from academia and diplomacy to politics.

"I never thought I would become a bureaucrat. My entry into politics happened by accident, or call it fortune, or call

it Modi. He (PM Modi) pursued me in a manner that nobody could say no," he said.

He highlighted that Indians living abroad still rely on their homeland for support and said, "Jo bhi desh ke baahar jate hain, woh hamaare paas hee aate hain. Baahar hum hee rakhwale hain (Those who leave the country turn to us only. We are their caretakers outside)."

Cong overlooked interests of Dalits, backwards in 90s: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress did not protect the interests of the Dalits and backwards the way it should have in the 1990s, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said on Thursday.

Addressing a programme organised by Dalit influencers here, Gandhi said merely getting political representation for the Dalits and backwards would not help solve their problems unless they got "bhagidari" in institutions and wealth. He also said that once the "original base" of the Congress party is back, the BJP and the RSS would have to run away. It will happen soon, he added. Gandhi said during Indira Gandhi's tenure, the Congress had full confidence of Dalits, minorities, backwards, but in the 1990s "there were shortcomings," and the fact is not lost on the party.

"In the last 10-15 years, the



Congress party did not do what it should have done (for the Dalits, backwards). If I don't say this, I will be lying. If the Congress party supported and maintained the confidence of Dalits, backwards, the RSS could never have come to power. "During Indira Gandhi's time, there was full confidence of Dalits, minorities, backwards in the Congress. But after the 1990s, there were shortcomings," and the reality would have to be accepted by the Congress.

"This means that there has to be internal revolution within the Congress party by bringing in people like you," he said at the 'Vanchit Samaj: Dasha aur Disha' programme.

Gandhi said it was the disunity among the public which has obstructed their progress and allowed the BJP and RSS to flourish.

"The day we get together, they will run away. The day the original base of the Congress party will be united, the BJP, RSS will run away. We have to work on our unity."

Vote for BJP in Delhi irrespective of candidates: Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Launching an attack on AAP for "breaking" its promises like that of a Jan Lokpal, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday appealed to people in Delhi to vote for the BJP irrespective of the candidates.

"The BJP is the only party which has fulfilled all promises it had made in its manifesto... I would urge you to forget everything and vote for the BJP," Singh said, addressing a poll rally at Delhi Cantonment. "Vote for the BJP in Delhi and don't see who the candidate is. Your vote will be for Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Singh said.

He assured that all the schemes in Delhi will continue if the BJP comes to power. The residents will also be able to get the benefit of central schemes like Ayushman Bharat



Yojana which, he said, will be implemented within 10 days of the formation of government. Singh also said Atal Canteens will be established in all slums which will provide meals at Rs 5.

Targeting the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Singh used the term 'AAPDA', which translates to disaster in Hindi, for the party, and accused it of not

keeping its poll promises, especially to establish a Jan Lokpal.

"During the Anna Hazare movement, Arvind Kejriwal had said he would not form any political party. The trust that people bestowed on Anna Hazare's movement was used by him to form the government in Delhi... But did he fulfil his promises?" Singh said.

"He (Kejriwal) said they will establish a Jan Lokpal... but today, there are so many scams in Delhi," he said. Singh said it was the BJP that gave statehood to Delhi and also regularised several colonies.

"But the AAP government could not provide them with water or drainage facilities," he alleged. "AAP has fooled the people of Delhi to get their support."

SC allows HCs to appoint ad-hoc judges to tackle case backlog

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Considering a backlog of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court on Thursday allowed the High Courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding the 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

A special bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant relaxed and kept in abeyance certain conditions the top court had imposed in its April 20, 2021 judgment on appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts.

The verdict, which was



appointed if a high court worked with 80 per cent of its sanctioned strength, the other said ad-hoc judges could sit separately on benches to deal with cases.

Relaxing the conditions, CJI Khanna said, "Having regard to the situation, we are inclined to keep the observations from the conditions...of the order and judgement dated April 20, 2021 that recourse to the appointment of ad-hoc judges under Article 224A should not be made unless 80 per cent of the sanctioned strength is already either recommended or working," said the CJI.



AAP MP Maliwal detained for dumping garbage outside Kejriwal's residence

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal was detained by the police Thursday afternoon after she dumped three mini-truckloads of garbage outside the residence of former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in protest.

Earlier in the day, Maliwal visited Vikaspuri, where she claimed that the streets were choked with waste, posing severe health and hygiene issues for residents. Maliwal, along with a group of supporters, collected the garbage in three mini trucks and headed to Kejriwal's residence at 5, Ferozeshah Road.

Accompanied by hundreds of women holding placards that read, "Muskurayie, AAP

Delhi Mein Hain," Maliwal dumped the garbage outside Kejriwal's house, using a shovel to throw waste onto the ground. Soon after, she was confronted by female police personnel and removed from the site. She was subsequently detained and taken to the Parliament Street Police Station.

According to Maliwal, she was released after a few hours and an FIR was registered against her under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code for violating prohibitory orders.

After her release, Maliwal told reporters, "For the past ten years, Arvind Kejriwal has ensured that Delhi becomes a giant garbage dump. Roads are broken, drains are overflowing, and waste is piling up everywhere."

GANDHI-BABA JATRA

Maha village keeps up a 7-decade-old tradition

PNS ■ LATUR

Republic Day conjures up images of a grand parade and procession of tableaux in the nation's capital, but for a village in Maharashtra's Latur district, it is also about a "jatra" or fair centering around the Father of the Nation.

While most villages have fairs dedicated to local deities, residents of Ujed in Shirur Anantpal tehsil kept up its seven-decade-old tradition by organising the 'Gandhi-baba

Jatra' from January 25 to 27. Unbridled energy filled the village for three days, with streets adorned with vibrant flags and colourful 'rangolis' drawn in front of every house.

Nandini Jadhav, the sarpanch, led a procession to bring Gandhi's bust, which stands in the gram panchayat office on other days, to the village square.

The fair featured agricultural exhibitions, competitions for children, wrestling matches and cultural programmes.



Talking about the origins of this unique event, fair committee president Anant Jadhav

said earlier the village organised fairs dedicated to Lord Shiva, and Moiddinsab Khadri,

a spiritual figure. However, the fairs were discontinued after Independence.

In 1955, village elders decided to organise a fair which would not be on religious lines, and came up with the idea of celebrating the legacy of Gandhiji on Republic Day to promote the values of unity, peace and harmony that he stood for. The fair became an annual feature, barring the two years of COVID-19 pandemic, Jadhav said.

"Gandhibaba Jatra is proba-

bly the first fair in the country dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, and aligning the event with the Republic Day has added to its significance," he added.

The wrestling competition at the end of the three-day fair was a highlight that attracted several people from surrounding villages.

On Thursday, President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the nation in paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his 77th death anniversary.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Greenland gambit

Trump's attempt to acquire Greenland carries serious risks, threatening stability and undermining peace in the region

After assuming office, President Donald Trump has taken an aggressive approach, disrupting the global order—first economically and now through forceful tactics. His push to acquire the Danish island of Greenland by any means signals a potential standoff between the US and Denmark, and possibly even Europe. The push by the US President Donald Trump to acquire Greenland has led to tension between the United States and Denmark. While the idea was initially dismissed as implausible, Trump's administration has intensified efforts to assert influence over the resource-rich Arctic territory under Denmark though autonomous. Denmark has reacted with caution but with significant military reinforcements to protect its territory from any US misadventure. Greenland, the world's largest island, holds immense strategic value. With its rich reserves of rare earth minerals, vital for modern technology and defence systems, Greenland has become a focal point in the global competition. China dominates the rare-earth market, and the US sees Greenland as a potential alternative source to reduce its dependency on Chinese supplies.



Besides, Greenland's location provides a strategic foothold in the Arctic to dominate region. With climate change melting the Arctic ice and opening new shipping routes and exposing untapped resources, global powers, including the US, Russia, and China, have shown heightened interest in securing influence. The island is also home to the Thule Air Base, a key US military installation that plays a pivotal role in missile defence and early warning systems. Denmark has firmly rejected Trump's ambitions, reinforcing its commitment to Greenland's autonomy. In response to the escalating pressure, Denmark has announced a significant military expansion, allocating an additional 14.6 billion Danish crowns (\$2.05 billion) to enhance security in the region. The new military strategy includes the acquisition of three Arctic naval vessels, two long-range drones, and satellite surveillance systems. These enhancements aim to address the limited military presence in Greenland so far. While Greenland remains a semi-autonomous territory under Danish sovereignty, its growing geopolitical relevance has placed it at the center of international power struggles. The implications of US bid to take control over Greenland would be profound. Such a move would dramatically shift Arctic geopolitics, altering the balance of power and potentially heightening tensions between the US, Denmark, Russia, and China. The European Union has also expressed concerns over any potential shift in Greenland's status, as it would affect security dynamics in the region. It remains to be seen whether Trump's push to acquire Greenland will gain momentum or fade into history. Greenland has now become a pivotal battleground, and the Arctic, a once peaceful region, could soon become a new flashpoint the world can ill afford.

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# Seed innovation: Key to agricultural growth



AJAI RANA

Unlocking India's full agricultural potential demands strong policies, industry collaboration and a commitment to technological advancements, especially in seed innovation

India stands at the cusp of a transformative shift in its agricultural landscape, driven by its growing population, expanding economy, and the mounting challenges posed by climate change. With the Union Budget 2024 allocating Rs 1.52 lakh crore to agriculture, the government's recognition of the sector's importance in ensuring India's economic future is clear. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for agricultural growth focuses on innovation, sustainability, and resilience. For India to realise its agricultural potential by 2025, however, clear policy frameworks and effective industry collaboration are essential.



At the core of this transformation is the need for a robust, resilient, and technologically advanced seed sector. As India transitions from a traditional, production-centric agricultural model to one that prioritises farmer welfare and income generation, there is a fundamental opportunity to improve livelihoods and promote sustainable agricultural practices. A critical aspect of India's agricultural future lies in scientific advancements, particularly in the development of genetically modified (GM) crops. Globally, GM crops have proven successful in increasing yields, improving pest resistance, and reducing dependency on chemical inputs. Yet, India has been cautious in adopting GM technology, and a transparent, science-based approach to its regulation could help unlock its potential. A national consensus on the safe deployment of GM crops would support the goal of reducing reliance on imports, especially in essential crops like oilseeds and pulses.

The importance of collaboration between the private sector and public institutions such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) cannot be overstated. Such partnerships drive significant research and development efforts across key crops like oilseeds, cotton, and maize, while also protecting intellectual property rights (IPR) to incentivise further innovation. A strengthened IPR framework could position India as a global leader in agricultural research and technology. Youth involvement is emerging as a critical force for revitalising India's agriculture. The average age of farmers in India is over 50, which highlights the need to encourage younger generations to enter the field. As of 2022, about 30 per cent of India's youth are employed in agriculture, yet a large proportion still view it as a last resort. Programmes targeting youth education and entrepreneurship in agriculture are gaining traction, with initiatives like the National Agriculture Market (eNAM) and various skill development programmes helping young farmers access better technologies and market opportunities. Moreover, youth-led startups in agritech are making an impact in areas like precision farming, farm-to-table models, and sustainable agriculture practices, providing innovative solutions to long-standing problems.



FOR EXAMPLE, THE 'AGRI-STARTUPS' ECOSYSTEM IS SEEING RAPID GROWTH, WITH OVER 3,100 AGRITECH STARTUPS CURRENTLY OPERATING IN INDIA (AS OF 2023), AND AN INVESTMENT INFLOW THAT HAS GROWN BY 20 PER CENT ANNUALLY

For example, the 'Agri-Startups' ecosystem is seeing rapid growth, with over 3,100 agritech startups currently operating in India (as of 2023), and an investment influx that has grown by 20 per cent annually. This demonstrates the growing interest among youth to innovate and lead the agricultural transformation. Furthermore, sectoral integration across the agricultural value chain is becoming more pronounced. India's agricultural ecosystem is complex, with each sector, such as poultry, dairy, horticulture, and rural development, playing a distinct yet interconnected role in the overall growth. The government is focusing on strengthening these individual sectors as part of a holistic approach. The GST framework currently presents challenges for the agricultural sector, particularly about the costs and complexities of compliance for farmers and seed companies. Simplifying the GST system could reduce operational burdens and make agricultural practices more sustainable and profitable. Additionally, targeted tax relief or incentives for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in agriculture, particularly in seed production, agro-processing, and machinery manufacturing, could support growth and job creation, especially in rural areas. Restoring the 200 per cent income tax deduction for research and development (R&D) expenditure could significantly boost innovation in the seed industry. By reducing the financial pressures associated with R&D, such a policy would incentivise greater investment in developing drought-resistant and higher-yielding crop varieties. This would be particularly important in critical sectors such as oilseeds and pulses, where India faces challenges in achieving self-sufficiency. In addition, a unified national-level registration process for seeds, along with the "One Nation, One License" policy, would simplify operations for seed companies. The current multi-state registration process often leads to inefficiencies and delays, hindering the growth of the industry. A streamlined system would enable companies to operate more efficiently and ensure that high-quality seeds reach farmers promptly, fostering growth and innovation in the sector. Research Linked Incentive (RLI) schemes could further encourage innovation by offering financial incentives for successful R&D outcomes. This would accelerate the development of new seed varieties that are climate-resilient and high-yielding, reinforcing India's position as a leader in global agricultural research. Looking ahead, the future of seed research holds exciting possibilities, particularly in areas like biofortified crops, climate resilience, and hybrid development. Breeding drought-tolerant varieties of rice, oilseeds, and pulses will be essential to ensure food security in an era of unpredictable weather patterns.

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(The writer is the chairman of the Federation of Seed Industry of India and MD & CEO of Savannah Seeds; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CASH PROMISES TO WOO VOTERS

Madam — It is with reference to the news "AAP-BJP fight it out on social media over Guarantees" - January 30 While election freebies are not a new trend in Indian elections, the issue has become hotly debated in recent months. Recently, AAP, BJP and Congress have announced schemes and cash benefits to woo voters in poll-bound Delhi. They have made tens of promises to fulfil the needs of the poor, the middle class, women, youth, priests, and other sections of society if they form a government in Delhi. When AAP announces Rs 2100 per month to every unemployed woman of Delhi resident, BJP promises Rs 2500 to those below the poverty line and Rs 21,000 to pregnant women, and Congress promises Rs 2500 to every woman under the proposed Pyari Didiyojana. Also, AAP promises full financial assistance to children from dalit families for pursuing higher education. When BJP promises Rs 15000 for up to two attempts for students preparing for competitive examinations, Congress promises Rs 8500 under the Yuva Udan Yojana apprenticeship scheme for a year. While RBI has warned that rising expenditure on subsidies, including cash transfers to women, could limit productive investments. Activists are yet to arrive at a consensus on whether such schemes actually empower women or not. There are so many cases in the Supreme Court about freebies and cash transfers to residents. A few months ago, SC has issued notices to some state governments and the central government, also to the Election Commission of India, on the plea seeking comprehensive guidelines to bar political parties from distributing cash and other freebies at the expense of taxpayers. A total ban on freebies should be implemented by enacting laws at the centre.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

### DeepSeek disrupts AI market



The global AI race has taken a dramatic turn with the rise of DeepSeek, a Chinese startup that claims to rival US industry leaders at a fraction of the cost. Its latest model, DeepSeek-R1, has ignited debate over China's growing AI capabilities, sending shockwaves through tech markets. DeepSeek's AI Assistant, powered by DeepSeek-v3, has surpassed OpenAI's ChatGPT as the top-rated free app on Apple's App Store. The company claims to have trained the model for under \$6 million, a stark contrast to the billions spent by US firms. Even more striking,

DeepSeek-R1 is said to be 50 times cheaper to operate than GPT-4. The impact has been immediate and severe. Nvidia, the AI chip giant, suffered the biggest single-session stock loss in history, wiping out nearly \$600 billion in market value. Investors fear that low-cost Chinese AI models could disrupt the industry, forcing a rethink of AI development strategies.

US President Donald Trump called DeepSeek's rise a "wake-up call," urging American firms to stay competitive. However, concerns are growing over China's access to restricted Nvidia H100 chips, raising questions about how DeepSeek trained its models. The AI world now faces two possibilities: a new Cold War in AI, where the US and China develop separate ecosystems, or a global AI price war that democratises access to advanced AI. Either way, DeepSeek has proven that China is no longer playing catch-up—it's setting the pace.

Gopalaswamy J | Myslapore

### DRESSCODE FOR SIDDHIVINAYAK

Madam— The news that the Siddhivinayak temple trust, Mumbai, issued an advisory by barring devotees from adhering to dress sense and suggested avoiding torn jeans and prohibiting skirts and revealing clothes inside the premises. Having taken notice of the recent ghastly incidents at Govt RG Kar Hospital, Kolkata, and inside the Anna University campus, Chennai, there is an increase among perpetrators and wicked minds even when dressed properly. May be the reason that in order to bring good sense to prevail, the devotees, while praying before the lord, cross their arms and pull on their ears and also tap the temples gently not only to forgive and also to bless them with pious qualities. Dress to kill shouldn't end up otherwise in danger.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

### AT LEAST 30 DEAD IN STAMPEDE

Madam — A stampede broke out at the Sangam Nose area of Maha Kumbh, Prayagraj, at around 1 am on the inter-

vening night of Tuesday and Wednesday as lakhs of devotees rushed to take the holy dip on the auspicious occasion (bathing in the river will cleanse their sins and help attain salvation) of Mauni Amavasya. Due to the stampede at the world's largest religious gathering in India, at least 30 people were killed, with many more injured, a doctor at the Kumbh Mela festival told AFP. As a result, the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad has postponed the Amrit Snan. Political leaders expressed concerns, demanding immediate action and better future arrangements for pilgrim safety and wellbeing. People come from different places, bound by their faith, and they end up paying with their lives. Mahamandleshwar Premanand Puri has blamed the administration for the deadly stampede at Maha Kumbh Mela, stating they prioritised VIPs over safety preparations.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## PICTALK



Students witness the launch of ISRO's GSLV-F15, marking ISRO's 100th mission, in Sriharikota

PTI

## Challenging menstrual taboos in rural India



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

Cultural taboos and lack of awareness often confine girls and women to their homes, keeping them away from school, kitchens and religious spaces

In India, approximately 335 million women experience menstruation but the majority of them are uncomfortable about speaking about it or discussing their menstrual hygiene problems. Parents, especially in rural areas are often ignorant and unprepared to discuss this subject with their adolescent daughters. However, an ongoing campaign called 'Red Achcha Hai' (Red is Good) running in three states is breaking the silence around menstruation and debunking taboos and restrictions that confine girls and women to their homes and bar them from attending school, entering the kitchen and participating in cultural and religious events.



First started in 2018 as a programme to make women and adolescents in rural areas in Gujarat aware of body literacy, fertility and menstrual hygiene by CHETNA, a not-for-profit working on nutrition, health and women's empowerment, it acquired a new urgency in 2020 when newspapers headlined the shocking story of how girls in a college hostel, supported by a religious trust, were asked to

strip by the college authorities for breaking the hostel's rules for menstruating girls. This made CHETNA realise that they needed to accelerate and escalate their efforts. Thus, the Red Achcha Hai campaign. Started with a new vigour first in rural areas of Gujarat, and Rajasthan and later in Madhya Pradesh, the eye-catching Red Achcha Hai campaign tapped the power of drama and visual communication with the CHETNA team dressed in red explaining the menstrual process, the need for menstrual hygiene and breaking myths and taboos around menstruation. The positive impact of this awareness programme and distribution of 2199 menstrual hygiene management (MHM) kits containing three information booklets, a clothes brush, a nail cutter and a rope to dry the washed

cloth, led to its continuation in 47 schools of Sansad block of Ahmedabad since February 2024. Even while focusing on adolescents, the campaign continued to reach out to women too. In 2023, when the campaign was being conducted across 16 villages of Jhagadia block, Bharuch district of Gujarat, a woman sarpanch was invited as a chief guest for an event to celebrate nutrition week organised on the grounds of an adjoining temple. The sarpanch expressed her reservations as it was the fourth day of her period. However, after some discussions on the myths surrounding menstruation, the CHETNA team motivated her to come to the function. The sarpanch not only came for the function and sat on the temple steps but entered the temple. This act made her an icon for breaking the myths and taboos surrounding menstruation and helped to inspire other women shackled by societal barriers imposed by their families during their menstrual cycle. A mother of a malnourished child, who was also one of the partici-





## FIRST COLUMN

### TRUMPS INFLUENCE ON INDIAN ECONOMY

#### How India's digital economy could be shaped by his policies



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, has left an indelible mark on both American and global politics. While much of the discussion about his policies and influence has focused on traditional industries like trade, defence, and foreign relations, Trump's impact could extend beyond these sectors — especially to economies like India. As the world's largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing digital economies, India stands to experience both challenges and opportunities in the wake of Trump's post-presidency actions and his political stances. Here's a closer look at how Trump could shape India's digital economy.

**Trade Policies and Digital Tariffs** - Trump's "America First" policy introduced a more protectionist approach to trade, focusing on reducing imports and ensuring favourable terms for US companies. India has seen its digital space expand rapidly, particularly with global tech giants and startups. However, if Trump or his political allies push for new tariffs or restrictions on foreign tech investments — or increase scrutiny on digital platforms operating in India — it could complicate business relations. While this may benefit India's indigenous tech sector and could leverage such scenarios to strengthen local supply chains and reduce dependency on US companies, it will certainly be bad for US India's bilateral trade. **Geopolitical Tensions and Digital Sovereignty** Another area where Trump's impact could be felt is in the realm of digital sovereignty. Trump's earlier administration frequently took stances against Chinese technology companies. India, too, has followed suit with actions



against Chinese apps, and the digital sovereignty debate is likely to continue. Should Trump's influence result in stronger US-India alliances in the digital space, it could accelerate India's drive for data privacy regulations, local data storage mandates, and greater control over its digital infrastructure. The US and India will have the opportunity to collaborate on setting global standards for cybersecurity, data protection, and artificial intelligence.

If the relationship between the two countries remains strong, it could also lead to joint ventures that power India's emerging tech ecosystem. **US-India Strategic Digital Alliance** - Under Trump, the US-India relationship generally saw an uptick in strategic collaboration, especially in defence, technology, and trade. Post-Trump, this alignment could be further amplified. As a leader in traditional and digital technologies, Trump's legacy of prioritising high-tech industries in the US could create opportunities for Indian companies to collaborate with American firms in research and development. For India, this could mean access to cutting-edge technologies in fields like AI, 5G, quantum computing, and blockchain. Such collaboration could increase India's digital infrastructure capabilities, making it more competitive in the global market. **Promoting E-Commerce Growth** - Trump's policies favoured business growth, especially in the private sector. His approach to deregulation, tax cuts, and incentivising entrepreneurship could be leveraged by Indian businesses, particularly in the e-commerce space. While Donald Trump's influence on India's digital economy is not straightforward, his policies, legacy and post-presidency actions could create ripple effects across global digital markets, including India. Whether it's through tighter immigration restrictions, geopolitical positioning, or shifts in trade relationships, India's digital economy must remain agile, harnessing both challenges and opportunities. India's emerging tech scene is robust and well-positioned to adapt to global changes.

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

# Freebies could push Delhi to fiscal disaster



UTTAM GUPTA

#### Despite repeated warnings from the Supreme Court about the detrimental impact of freebies on free and fair elections, political parties continue to offer them



In the din of blistering campaign in Delhi with the central theme of major political parties being on "freebies" - an acronym for 'something given free of charge' - it may be worthwhile to remind them about two observations made by the Supreme Court (SC). In an order in *S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors* given in July 2013, the SC had observed that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people. "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree." A decade later, hearing a PIL on 'freebies', on January 25, 2022, it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue, budget for freebies is going above the regular Budget".

But, all this seems to have fallen on deaf ears. The state elections held since 2022 have witnessed political parties intensely competing with each other to mesmerise voters with a deadly combination of free goods and services and cash assistance. These have played a domineering role in winning elections. In Delhi, the offers have reached their 'NADIR'. The starting point was an announcement by the finance minister Atishi in the budget for 2024-25 reg. The Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women above the age of 18 in the national capital. Meanwhile, the ex-Chief Minister and convener of AAP Arvind Kejriwal promised an increase in income support under the MMSY to Rs 2,100 a month for every woman. AAP has also promised free medical services to all above 60 at all hospitals; financing foreign education for Dalit students; free bus travel for all students; 50 per cent concession on metro fares; life insurance cover of Rs 10 lakh, accident insurance of Rs 5 lakh for all auto-rickshaw drivers and e-rickshaw pullers; wedding aid of Rs 1 lakh for their daughters and free coaching for their children; Rs 18,000 per month for all pujaris and granthis etc.

Not to be left behind, the BJP has come up with a package that is far more lucrative. It has promised Rs 2,500 a



THE RECKLESS SPENDING OF THE TAXPAYER'S MONEY ON FREEBIES IS NEITHER A RECOGNISED POLICY NOR IS SANCTIONED IN A COURT OF LAW. IT IS BLATANT FINANCIAL IRREGULARITY THAT AMOUNTS TO BRIBING VOTERS USING PUBLIC MONEY SOLELY FOR GAINING ADVANTAGE IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

month to women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY); Rs 21,000 to pregnant women; LPG cylinders for Rs 500 and free cylinder on Holi and Diwali; a stipend of Rs 1000 a month to SC students pursuing technical and vocational courses; free education for needy students from KG to PG; free travel for students on Delhi Metro; Atal Canteens in Jhuggi Basti clusters providing nutritional meals for Rs 5 only; implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme and additional cover of Rs 5 lakh for senior citizens. BJP has vowed to continue all existing schemes.

The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognised policy or custom".

The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognised policy nor is sanctioned in a court of law. It is blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely for gaining advantage in electoral politics. Yet, the parties continue with it. What about the impact on the budget? Look at the BJP offer.

The number of women above the age of 18 years in Delhi is around 67 lakh. @Rs 2500 per month under MSY or Rs 30,000 annually to each woman, giving assistance to them all will require Rs 20,100 crore per annum. According to an estimate, there are about 15 lakh pregnant

women. @Rs 21,000 per woman, the total outgo comes to Rs 3150 crore annually. As for subsidy on LPG, take consumption of 4 cylinders per household (HH). The cost supply is around Rs 1000 per cylinder, for two cylinders (Holi and Diwali), the subsidy will be Rs 2000 whereas for the other two @ Rs 500 each, the outgo will be Rs 1000 or Rs 3000 per HH. Taking a total of over 82.5 lakh HHs (current Delhi population of 330 lakh divided by 4 being the average HH size), the annual impact would be Rs 2500 crore.

Look at free education for needy students from KG to PG. According to the latest data available, around 9.91 per cent of Delhi's population was considered below the poverty line in 2011-12. The current population is 330 lakh, and the poor are 33 lakh. Of this, takes one-third or 11 lakh to be persons in the studying age 4 - 25 years. Taking the average expense of educating a child in India at the bare minimum of Rs. 20,000 per annum, the total expense on "needy students" in the city would be about Rs 2200 crore annually. The additional burden of these four guarantees alone on the Delhi government's budget is Rs 27,950 crore (20,100+3150+2500+2200).

Other freebies would blot this figure by several thousand crore. Already, the finances of the Delhi government are in a precarious state. Against the total expenditure of Rs 76,000 crore during FY 2024-25, the total revenue is estimated at around Rs 58,000 crore.

This leads to a fiscal deficit (FD) of Rs 18,000 crore which is 80 per cent higher than the FD for FY 2023-24 at Rs 10,000 crore. The surge in FD is despite a steep reduction of over 30 per cent in capital expenditure from the bud-

get estimate (BE) of Rs 22,000 crore for FY 2023-24 to Rs 15,000 crore for FY 2024-25.

The government's current debt is about Rs 40,000 crore. But, this is not all. We also need to add the loans taken by its departments such as Delhi Jal Board (DJB): Rs 70,000 crore and Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC): Rs 10,000 crore as the liability for servicing those debts is vested entirely in the NCT government. This takes the total debt of Delhi to Rs 120,000 crore.

The situation has come to such a pass that CM Atishi has approached the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). The precariousness of the state's finances has a lot to do with the freebies which are estimated to cost about Rs 11,000 crore during 2024-25. Add to this at least Rs 30,000 crore being the impact of guarantees given during this election, freebies alone would dent the exchequer by Rs 41,000 crore annually.

Delhi government could be starting at an FD of close to Rs 50,000 crore. And, its debt would balloon to Rs 150,000 crore. The ball won't stop here. When used to doles, people will want more and more and parties can't say no. When, even a die-hard reformist and fiscal disciplinarian like Modi is forced to give way to freebies (courtesy, of Kejriwal's brand of politics), things will only worsen. What if people stop working (very likely when they get money sitting at home) and tax-payers stop paying taxes (likely when they see their earnings being frittered away in distributing doles to those who don't work)? The National Capital could be staring at fiscal disaster.

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

# Neravu Scheme: A catalyst for social change

#### It is a transformative movement dedicated to changing lives through direct action, offering relief and assistance to bring about social and economic change

Philanthropy has always been a driving force behind social progress, bridging gaps and providing succour to those in need. Often, it is the initiative of an individual or an organisation that reaches out to support the underserved. Marginalised sections of society, often ill-equipped to fend for themselves, view such assistance in dire circumstances as a matter of life and death. Across the country, there are numerous examples of individuals and organisations stepping up to aid the needy. In southern India, Mangalore, Karnataka, the MRG Group - a prominent business conglomerate with interests spanning hospitality, real estate and finance - has taken a remarkable step in this direction through its transfor-

mative initiative, the "Neravu". **The Neravu Initiative: A Lifeline for Thousands** Launched in 2019 with an initial allocation of Rs 1.25 crore, the Neravu has grown significantly in scope and impact. It has reached a remarkable milestone, disbursing Rs 6 crore in financial aid to support 3000 families and 60 organisations, benefiting approximately 15000 individuals. The assistance provided - ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 1 lakh for individuals and up to Rs 25 lakh for organisations - addresses diverse needs, including medical emergencies, education, sports, and social welfare. What sets the initiative apart is its scale and robust framework, ensuring that aid reaches thousands of households. The 'Neravu' program is



B K JHA

underpinned by a rigorous selection process to ensure the most deserving candidates receive support. An impartial committee meticulously reviews applications, prioritising critical medical cases, disabilities, and exceptional achievements in academics and sports. The programme extends beyond Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Shivamogga districts to

Kerala's Kasaragod district, showcasing its inclusive approach.

#### What is Neravu?

The word Neravu means 'support' in Kannada, and this initiative lives up to its name as one of the largest corporate-run financial assistance programs in India. Designed to address the immediate and long-term challenges faced by economically disadvantaged communities, the focus is on:

**1. Education:** Scholarships ensure access to quality education for underprivileged students.

**2. Healthcare:** Financial aid covers critical treatments and surgeries for those unable to afford medical expenses.

**3. Livelihood Enhancement:** Vocational training and resources empower individu-



als to achieve self-reliance. **Impact of the Neravu** Mangalore, a thriving port city known for its cultural diversity and economic activity, has witnessed a profound impact from the "Neravu". **Educational Opportunities:** Many students from low-income families have pursued higher education, thanks to scholarships. **Healthcare Access:** Critical

medical interventions have been made possible for individuals lacking access to quality healthcare.

**Empowerment:** Vocational training programmes have enabled women to contribute to their households. The MRG Group has expanded the reach of the "Neravu", demonstrating how corporate philanthropy can transcend geographical boundaries. **Empowering Communities Through Philanthropy**

The "Neravu" initiative's impact goes beyond immediate financial relief, fostering self-reliance and community upliftment. Beneficiaries have shared inspiring stories of transformation. For instance, Raj Lakshmi, a graduate from a nearby village and the eldest among her sib-

lings, completed her studies with the Neravu's support. Now employed as a computer instructor, she supports her family of five. "I could complete my course because of 'Neravu', and today, I am able to earn a living and help my family," she shares.

#### Making a Difference

The Neravu exemplifies how corporate initiatives can address pressing issues while fostering inclusive growth. Neravu's structured approach ensures that aid reaches the right people. In a world grappling with economic disparities, programs like "Neravu" serve as a beacon of hope. By addressing the root causes of poverty and empowering individuals, the initiative has brought tangible change to countless families.

Dr K Prakash Shetty, Founder & Chairman MRG Group, the visionary behind this movement, emphasises that philanthropy is not merely about monetary aid but about fostering a culture of self-reliance and social participation. Under his leadership, the MRG Group has blended business success with meaningful social impact, setting a benchmark in corporate social responsibility. The "Neravu" stands as a testament to the transformative power of structured philanthropy. By addressing fundamental challenges and empowering individuals, it inspires a collective commitment to building a more equitable society.

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

## IN BRIEF



### Rupee falls 9 paise to close at 86.64 against US dollar

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 86.64 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by a strong US dollar amid a hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve. Forex traders said the rupee continued to face pressure due to sustained foreign fund outflows and the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.58 and touched a high of 86.56 and a low of 86.65 against the American currency during the session. The local unit settled at 86.64 (provisional), registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee pared its initial losses to settle on a positive note, higher by 2 paise to close at 86.55 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent lower at 107.98. "US Dollar gained on the hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve."



### AI enters into codeshare partnership with KA

Air India has entered into a codeshare partnership with Kenya Airways as the Tata Group-owned airline seeks to expand as well as provide more travel choices for passengers. Both airlines will also continue to have their interline partnership. As part of the codeshare pact, Air India will place its 'AI' designator code on twice daily flights between Nairobi and Mumbai operated by Kenya Airways. This will allow passengers to take Air India flights via Mumbai to or from Bangkok (Thailand), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Malé (The Maldives), Melbourne (Australia), and Singapore, according to a release on Thursday. The codeshare partnership will also enable Kenya Airways to place its 'KQ' designator code on Air India-operated flights between Delhi and Nairobi.



### Sebi imposes Rs 7 lakh fine on MOFS

Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday imposed a penalty of Rs 7 lakh on Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd for flouting stock broker and depository participant rules. It has been directed to pay the fine within 45 days, according to an order passed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). This came after Sebi conducted inspection of the stock broker and depository participant, MotilalOswal Financial Services Ltd, jointly with stock exchanges and depositories for the inspection period from April 2021 to June 2022. In its probe, the regulator found that Motilal Oswal Financial Services did not resolve 26 complaints within a period of 30 days, transferred securities of credit balance clients to "client unpaid securities account", and incorrectly reported Margin Trading Funding (MTF) collateral to the exchange. Additionally, it had done wrong reporting and short collection of margin on one instance in CM (capital market) segment, on one instance in FO (futures & options) segment and on five instances in currency derivative segment.

## Budget may project 20 pc capex growth, tax concessions: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The FY26 Budget may project a 20 per cent increase in capex spending to drive economic activity, leave more disposable income in the hands of people and target a fiscal deficit of 4.4 per cent of GDP for the fiscal ending March 2026, a EY report said on Thursday.

EY India Chief Policy Advisor DK Srivastava said amid continuing global uncertainties, India may have to rely largely on domestic demand drivers to support the growth momentum.

"The FY26 budget should therefore restore the momentum of growth in Govt's capital expenditure. This may be supplemented by some rate rationalisation and income tax deductions aimed at increasing personal disposable incomes, particularly in the hands of lower income and lower middle-income groups," he said.

The upcoming budget must balance fiscal prudence with growth-oriented measures.

Increasing capital expenditure and putting more disposable income in the hands of consumers, particularly urban

consumers, will be pivotal to uplifting growth in domestic demand," Srivastava said.

The EY Economy Watch January 2025 report anticipates that the government may continue on its fiscal deficit glide path, reducing the fiscal deficit for FY26 to 4.4 per cent of GDP. The government had budgeted a 4.9 per



cent deficit for the current fiscal and EY expects this number to come in at 4.8 per cent in revised estimates in the 2025-26 Budget to be presented on February 1.

This can be enabled by accelerating domestic demand and private consumption, as well as by increasing the government's capital spending by at least 20 per cent.

This shall pave the way for sustained economic growth while ensuring fiscal discipline, EY said.

### L&T PAT rises to Rs 3,359 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Thursday reported 14 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) at Rs 3,359 crore for December quarter 2024-25 on the back of higher revenue from operations.

The company had posted a PAT of Rs 2,947 crore for the year-ago period, L&T said in a filing to BSE.

Revenue from operations increased 17 per cent to Rs 64,668 crore over Rs 55,128 crore in the year-ago period, the filing said.

The company said that the revenue growth was on the back of strong order book and ramp-up in execution momentum across its projects and manufacturing businesses.

L&T received its highest-ever quarterly orders of Rs 1,16,036 crore at the group level during the quarter, registering a Y-o-Y growth of 53 per cent.

During the quarter, orders were received across multiple geographies and diverse sectors like thermal power, renewable, power transmission, precision engineering, minerals and metals, water, commercial buildings and hydrocarbon onshore.

## Stock markets extend gains for 3<sup>rd</sup> day

Airtel, Reliance major movers

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Extending the winning run to the third day, benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher on Thursday on buying in heavyweight stocks Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and HDFC Bank.

The 30-share Sensex advanced 226.85 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 76,759.81 in a volatile trade amid the monthly expiry day. During the day, it surged 429.92 points or 0.56 per cent to 76,962.88.

The NSE Nifty went up by 86.40 points or 0.37 per cent

to 23,249.50. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, Nestle, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, Hindustan Unilever and HDFC Bank were the biggest gainers. Bajaj Finance climbed nearly 2 per cent after the company reported an 18 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 4,308 crore for the December quarter.

Tata Motors tanked over 7 per cent after the firm reported a 22 per cent fall in consolidated net profit to Rs 5,578

crore for the third quarter ended December 2024, impacted by a decline in revenue from its passenger and commercial vehicles divisions.

ITC Hotels, Bajaj Finserv, Adani Ports, Tech Mahindra, Zomato and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other laggards.

The Indian markets concluded on a positive note despite fluctuating between gains and losses.

The fall in oil prices due to a rise in US inventories and an ease in US 10-year yield after the US Fed's hawkish view may decelerate FII outflows.

## Gold prices scale yet another peak of Rs 83,800 per 10 grams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose for the second straight session to hit another fresh all-time high of Rs 83,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong global trends.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity edged up by Rs 50 to hit another fresh peak of Rs 83,800 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 83,750 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent puri-

ty also advanced Rs 50 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 83,400 per 10 grams. It had closed at Rs 83,350 per 10 grams in the previous trading session.

Additionally, silver rallied by Rs 1,150 to Rs 94,150 per kg from the previous market close of Rs 93,000 per kg.

Meanwhile, in futures trade, gold contracts for February delivery climbed Rs 575 or

0.72 per cent to hit a lifetime of Rs 80,855 per 10 grams. For April contracts, the yellow metal advanced by Rs 541 or 0.67 per cent to hit a fresh peak of Rs 81,415 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

"Gold traded positively in MCX as participants positioned themselves against potential import duty hikes,

following the 6 per cent cut in the previous Budget. "A significant divergence was observed between Comex and MCX, with domestic gold rallying 2.5 per cent in the past week, while Comex gained only 0.50 per cent," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

Silver futures for March delivery surged by Rs 1,050 or 1.14 per cent to Rs 92,916 per kg from the previous close of Rs 91,866 per kg on Wednesday.

## 'Share of sugar industry in GDP can go up to 3 pc'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The sugar industry has the potential to increase its share in the GDP to 3 per cent from the current 1-1.15 per cent, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Thursday, while emphasising on the need to raise per acre production of sugarcane.

The Indian agriculture sector provides livelihood to about 42.3 per cent of the population and has a share of 18.2 per cent in the country's GDP at current prices.

"The Indian sugar industry has the potential to contribute 3 per cent in the country's GDP," he said.



Noting that the government has done a lot to encourage production of alternative fuel in India, the minister also said the government is

now taking steps to encourage exports of ethanol.

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a 3 per cent increase in the procurement price for ethanol made from C-heavy molasses to Rs 57.97 per litre for the 2024-25 supply year, while keeping rates unchanged for other feedstocks.

The price increase, aimed at boosting ethanol production from sugar industry byproducts, comes as India pushes to meet its accelerated target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2025-26.

Observing that the government's policy of controlling exports of sugar is both ben-

eficial and harmful, the minister said there is need to re-look at the sugar industry with a new perspective.

"Because irrespective of party in power in the country, Indian policy makers have urban centric mindset. They are only concerned about inflation in four products -- sugar, oil, wheat and rice," Gadkari, who is known for his frank views, said.

"Our MSP rates of some crops are higher than market price, still we are not changing our crop patterns," he added. Gadkari said that diversification of Indian agriculture and sugar industry has shown good results.

## Challenges galore as FM sits down to frame Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, set to make history with her eighth consecutive Union Budget, has worked tirelessly with key officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, to prepare a budget of over Rs 50 lakh crore for FY26.

The Budget will have to address several challenges, including decelerating economic growth, falling value of Rupee against the US dollar and moderation in consumption demand.

The economic growth is estimated to slow to a 4-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY25. This is the lowest growth since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic which hit the world in 2019.

Sitharaman, who had steered the Indian economy through many difficult phases, including once-in-a-century pandemic, is again confronted with economic deceleration, moderation in consumption, stagnant private investment, and an uncertain geopolitical situation.

On account of various factors, the rupee plunged to an all-time low of 86.7 per US dollar earlier this month.

The team, assisting the Finance Minister to frame Budget proposals for 2025-26, includes Revenue Secretary

GPU hour) after 40 per cent cost borne by the government.

"Making modern technology accessible to everyone, that is the economic thinking of our PM... Ours is the most affordable compute facility, at this point of time," Vaishnav said.

The Minister said there are at least six major developers/startups who would be able to build foundational models in the next 8-10 months at the outer limit, and 4-6 months at a more optimistic estimate.

"Algorithmic efficiency matters a lot, it can deliver a model at much lower cost and less time than the world has seen today," the Minister said, expressing optimism that India will have a "world class foundational model" in the coming few months.

The government, under the IndiaAI Mission, had approved Rs 10,372 crore outlay to strengthen India's AI ecosystem - a key pillar for that was enabling 10,000 GPUs for AI Compute Infrastructure. The 18,693 GPUs would offer large compute power considering that Deepseek was trained on 2,000 GPUs and ChatGPT version 4 on 25,000 GPUs.

### GLOBAL AI RACE

## India outlines global AI ambitions

To build own foundational models

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday outlined global AI ambitions with plans to build its own 'foundational model' that could take on the might of ChatGPT, Deepseek R1 and others, as it lined up "most affordable" common compute facility powered by 18,693 GPUs to be used by startups and researchers.

India's bold move comes at a time when Chinese company DeepSeek has turned heads after its AI model overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's appstore, challenging the AI dominance concentrated so far with the US firms, particularly Silicon Valley frontrunner Open AI.

IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav exuded confidence that India will build a foundational model that is world-class, and that it will be able to compete with best models across the globe.

On Thursday, New Delhi announced the next steps in its AI blueprint, among them, 18,693 Graphics Processing Unit or GPUs on offer by the empanelled bidders (a list that includes Jio Platforms, CMS Computers, Tata



**India's bold move comes at a time when Chinese company DeepSeek has turned heads after its AI model overtook ChatGPT as the top-ranked free app on Apple's appstore, challenging the AI dominance concentrated so far with the US firms, particularly Silicon Valley frontrunner Open AI**

Communications, E2E Networks, Yotta Data Services, and others), and start of AI safety institution, with 8 projects approved under it.

The government is also calling for proposals to develop India's own foundational models that would be aligned to Indian context, Indian languages, culture, basically where datasets are "for our country, of our country and for our citizens" and "biases are removed".

Put simply, foundation models in generative AI are large, pre-trained models that form the base for a variety of AI applications.

The common compute facility (powered by 18,693 GPUs) would be made available at a

fraction of global cost benchmarks, Vaishnav assured. The compute facility will be "most affordable" coming significantly less than one dollar (per

### Five Coal India arms miss production target

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Five subsidiaries of Coal India, including SECL, CCL and ECL, have not met their production targets for April-December period of this fiscal year. Against the target of 133 million tonne (MT) set for April-December period, South Eastern Coalfields Ltd (SECL) produced 111.54 MT of coal.

The output by Central Coalfields Ltd (CCL) was 57.73 MT against the target of 66.48 MT. In the case of Bharat Coking Coal Ltd, the production was 29.07 MT against the target of 31.90 MT. Eastern Coalfields Ltd's (ECL) actual production was 33.82 MT while the target was 35.35 MT.

The output of Northern Coalfields was 104.90 MT while the target was 105.12 MT, according to Coal India data. On the other hand, Coal India arms Western Coalfields Ltd (WCL), Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) and North Eastern Coalfields (NEC)--a unit of Coal India Ltd--are ahead of their target.

WCL produced 45.10 MT of coal against the target of 44.66 MT. MCL's production was 161.02 MT against the target of 158.79 MT.

## Strong investor interest drives mutual fund inflows

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Value mutual funds have witnessed robust investor interest, garnering Rs 22,757 crore in inflows in 2024, nearly double the amount seen in 2023, fueled by impressive returns generated by the segment.

This surge reflects a shift in investor focus towards fundamentally strong yet undervalued stocks.

On average, value mutual funds delivered returns of over 21 per cent in 2024, with a nearly 20 per cent return over the past three years, the industry data showed.

Looking ahead to 2025, it is expected that value mutual funds will continue to capture attention, particularly amid global uncertainties, Trivish D, COO of stock trading platform Tradejini, said.

He highlighted that factors such as likely RBI rate cut and geopolitical shifts, including US policies, could shape investor sentiment.

In terms of inflows, the total amount into value mutual funds reached Rs 22,757 crore in 2024, a significant increase from Rs 11,927 crore in 2023, according to the Association of Mutual Funds



in India (AMFI).

This influx of capital contributed to a 39 per cent rise in assets under management (AUM), which surged to Rs 1.88 lakh crore by December

2024, up from Rs 1.33 lakh crore in 2023.

Several prominent value funds, such as UTI Value Fund, Axis Value Fund, Quantum Long Term Equity

Value Fund and ICICI Prudential Value Discovery Fund are available for investing. These funds have given good returns in the last year.

Moreover, Mahindra Manulife Value Fund, which is launching its new fund offering (NFO) on February 7, may attract investor interest. The fund is built on three core investment pillars -- quality companies, firms in recovery mode, and sectors poised for long-term growth. It aims to create a diversified portfolio across various sectors and market capitalisations.

Santosh Joseph, Co-founder

and CEO of Germinate Investor Services, noted that value mutual funds saw a notable surge in inflows, largely due to strong past performance and a resurgence in key sectors.

After a period of underperformance in 2022, value funds rebounded in 2023 and continued to deliver impressive returns in 2024.

This strong performance, coupled with markets reaching new highs, drew investors seeking undervalued sectors that were beginning to show substantial growth potential, he added.



## TRAVELOGUE

# Where are Indians travelling in 2025?

Whether you're looking for the best-value getaways, inspiration from pop culture, or tips to make stress-free bookings, **The Pioneer** is your go-to source for travel intelligence in 2025. We bring to you the latest insights into how Indian travellers are planning their 2025 holidays, from emerging trends and budget-friendly destinations to smart travel hacks that simplify decision-making with expert insights



from over 1,200 travel partners worldwide.

To ease the stress of decision-making, Joshi recommends prioritizing travel goals and using tools, such as:

- **'Whole Month' & 'Cheapest Month' Tool** – Helps travellers identify the most budget-friendly time to fly.
- **'Explore Everywhere' Feature** – Offers inspiration by suggesting destinations based on budget and availability.

### How Indians can overcome travel anxiety

Financial concerns play a crucial role in travel decisions, with 95% of Indians citing cost as a major factor. The Wanderlust Report also found that one in three (31%) travellers are inspired by affordable destinations, while 23% are motivated by knowing the cheapest places to visit.

For those worried about missing out on deals, Joshi highlights a widespread fear of imperfection among Indian travellers. "A staggering 96% of Indians hesitate to book due to fear of making a less-than-perfect choice, while 94% overthink their plans. However, despite the stress, nearly half (45%) of Indians still ended up travelling more than expected in 2024."

### Best value-for-money destinations for 2025

With budget-friendly travel in mind, they have curated a list of destinations offering the best value for money in 2025. Based on an analysis of millions of flights, some of the top budget-friendly destinations include:

**1. Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh** – Flights starting from Rs 8,390, driven by growing spiritual tourism and improved connectivity.

**2. Kochi, Kerala** – A cultural hotspot featuring historic sites, serene backwaters, and rich heritage.

**3. Jaisalmer, Rajasthan** – Known for its golden deserts, camel safaris, and vibrant folk culture.

**4. New Delhi** – A major travel hub with excellent connectivity to domestic and international locations.



**5. Phnom Penh, Cambodia** – A historically rich yet affordable destination with attractions like the Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda.

Other affordable destinations include Srinagar, Kuala Lumpur, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, and Davao in the Philippines.

Balancing budget and perfection in travel planning

Indian travellers often strive to balance affordability with quality, making travel planning an intricate process.

"We know that price-savvy Indians want both a great deal and a top-notch travel experience. That's why tools like Skyscanner's 'Saved' feature allow users to compare flights and hotels in one place, making decisions easier," Joshi explains.

He suggests reflecting on travel priorities and using planning tools to ensure a smooth experience.

### The influence of social media and pop culture on travel

Social media and influencers play a significant role in shaping travel choices. "Travellers are drawn

to destinations featured in celebrity posts, influencer itineraries, and even popular movies and TV shows," Joshi notes.

This trend, known as 'set-jetting', has gained momentum in India. The Travel Trends 2024 report found that:

- Manali became a top travel destination after being featured in Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani.
- Ladakh saw a 47% increase in interest due to 3 Idiots.

Another emerging trend is 'gig-tripping', where travelers plan trips around music concerts. "One-third (37%) of Indian travellers are willing to take short-haul flights to see their favorite artists live, while 79% would consider attending a concert overseas if it saves money," Joshi reveals.

Additionally, sports events are a major travel motivator, with 63% of Indians planning trips around major tournaments like Formula 1, cricket, and football.

As Indians gear up for their 2025 adventures, prioritization, flexibility, and smart travel hacks can make the planning process seamless. Whether leveraging tools like Price Alerts, exploring budget-friendly destinations, or drawing inspiration from pop culture and social media, Indian travelers are set for an exciting year.

## HOW TO TACKLE TRAVEL OVERWHELM AND CONSERVE MENTAL ENERGY

Travel planning is meant to be exciting, but for many, it can feel overwhelming. The sheer number of choices — destinations, flights, accommodations, activities — can lead to decision fatigue, making it harder to commit to plans. Dr Faye Begeti, a neurology doctor and neuroscientist, explains how travellers can ease this mental burden, conserve energy, and make planning stress-free.

Complex decision-making and thinking rely on the prefrontal cortex, the brain's command center for processing choices. However, the prefrontal cortex can become fatigued after handling too many decisions, leading to a sense of overwhelm. To prevent this, Dr Begeti suggests spreading out travel decisions over time rather than making them all at once. "Start planning early so decisions aren't rushed, and you can distribute them over several days or weeks," she advises.

Rest and sleep also play a crucial role in mental energy. A well-rested brain is more efficient at handling decisions, so it's best to tackle major travel choices — such as booking flights and accommodations — when mental energy is highest, such as in the morning. For less significant decisions, like picking restaurants or excursions, Dr Begeti recommends a "good enough" approach. "Pick an option that meets your basic criteria and move on. Overthinking minor details can drain both time and mental energy."

To simplify decision-making, narrowing down choices early can help. Instead of browsing multiple tabs and comparing endless options, using Skyscanner filters can streamline the process, making it easier to focus on the best-suited options. Choosing the right holiday for your mental state Not all holidays serve the same purpose. Some travellers seek relaxation, while others crave adventure and stimulation. Dr Begeti suggests using

the cognitive overload/underload framework to determine what type of holiday best suits your mental state.

**Cognitive Overload (Stress & Overwhelm):** If you're feeling mentally drained, a relaxing holiday in nature — such as a beach retreat or a mountain getaway — can help restore balance. "Nature has been shown to reduce cortisol, the stress hormone, making it an excellent choice for travelers experiencing burnout," says Dr Begeti.

**Cognitive Underload (Boredom & Disengagement):** If you're feeling uninspired or stuck in a routine, an experience-rich holiday, such as a cultural city break or an activity-based trip, can provide the stimulation your brain craves. "New experiences, like learning a skill or exploring a vibrant city, can boost cognitive engagement," she adds.

For those unsure of where to go, tools like Skyscanner's Savvy Search feature can help. Powered by AI, it allows travellers to describe their ideal getaway and generates a curated list of destinations with details and images, making it easier to find the perfect trip.

Dopamine, often called the "pleasure molecule," is actually more about anticipation than pleasure itself. "It motivates us by creating excitement when we look forward to something," explains Dr Begeti. This is why some people start planning their next trip as soon as their current one ends — having something to look forward to keeps motivation high.

To make travel planning more enjoyable, Dr Begeti recommends incorporating dopamine-boosting habits into the process. "If planning feels stressful, pair it with enjoyable activities — like having a hot drink, lighting a candle, or playing music. These small pleasures can trigger a dopamine release, making the process feel more rewarding," she suggests.

## Sachin-Jigar to make their kala ghoda debut with a power-packed performance on February 1<sup>st</sup>

Sachin-Jigar, who dominated 2024 with back-to-back hits and blockbuster albums, are all set to kick off 2025 on a high note. The celebrated composers will be performing for the first time at the iconic Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, Asia's largest multidisciplinary street arts festival. Taking place at the historic Asiatic Library Steps on February 1st, their performance is anticipated to be one of the festival's highlights this year.

From soul-stirring ballads to high-energy anthems, Sachin-Jigar's music has been an integral part of the Indian music scene. Their upcoming performance promises to bring the same energy and vibrancy to the heart of Mumbai, uniting fans in a night of unforgettable melodies and rhythms.

Speaking about their much-anticipated setlist and what this opportunity means to them, Sachin-Jigar shared, "Kala Ghoda is more than just a cultural festival; it's a celebration of creativity, artistry, and India's diverse cultural heritage. To be performing at such an esteemed event, especially after an incredible 2024, feels surreal. We are beyond excited to create an experience that will stay with the audience long after the night ends. Our setlist will be a mix of our biggest hits, fan favorites, including 'Aaj Ki Raat', 'Apna Bana Le', and 'Aayi Nai', ensuring a musical journey that resonates with everyone attending."

With its rich history of showcasing the best in music, art, and culture, Kala Ghoda is already buzzing with excitement for what Sachin-Jigar have in store. Their performance is guaranteed to be a standout moment, offering the audience a night of music, nostalgia, and electrifying energy.



## WINTER CALLS FOR SPECIAL BABY SKINCARE ROUTINES

As many parts of India continue to experience severe winter, newborn care especially their skincare is very critical. The skin of a newborn is 30% thinner as compared to an adult's skin, it loses moisture twice as fast and is prone to irritation and skin damage. Winter conditions with low temperature and harsh winds result in significant loss of moisture on a baby's skin, necessitating a comprehensive skincare regime to ensure a baby's skin remains soft, supple and healthy.

### Here are some important skincare guidelines to follow during winter months.

**Massage time: Choose massage oils with nourishing ingredients, avoid olive oil and mustard oils**

Oil acts as a source of warmth, enhances neurological and neuromotor development and blood circulation in babies during the massaging routine. Often parents adopt traditional practices by using oils to moisturize the baby as they feel it provides long lasting hydration. Contrary to popular cultural methods, IAP recommends that olive oil and mustard oil should not be used for massages. These oils should not be considered as substitutes for moisturisers for babies. These oils can disrupt the baby's skin barrier and may cause irritation.

Instead, parents should consider using oils enriched with pure Vitamin E for their baby's daily massage routine. Vitamin E helps deeply nourish the skin, supports its natural barrier function, and provides essential hydration during the dry winter months. A gentle massage with Vitamin E-enriched oils not only enhances skin health but also fosters a nurturing parent-child bond.



### Bathing routines: Shorter bath-time with mild cleansers

As per the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) guidelines, parents should limit bathing to once every couple of days or short baths daily. Always use lukewarm water to avoid excessive drying of the skin. While extended bath times may seem appealing, they can strip away the natural oils that protect a baby's skin barrier. After bathing, the baby should be dried from head to foot using a dry warm towel. Parents should choose mild, pH-balanced cleansers that are specifically formulated for babies. Mild cleansers are designed to be gentle on delicate babies' skin and help maintain its natural barrier.

### Moisturizing: Choose a moisturizer which provide long lasting hydration

During the winter, the role of moisturizers can-

not be emphasized enough. Choosing the right moisturizing products is an important aspect of winter skincare to protect the baby's skin from dryness.

Choose a moisturiser recommended by doctors which is gentle, light, non-greasy and quick absorbing. Parents can consider choosing a moisturiser equipped with hydrating ingredients like milk protein, Vitamin E, Vitamin B5, Aloe, Glycerine, coconut oil, chamomile extracts to keep the baby's skin supple, hydrated and nourished. Such ingredients hydrate the skin, act as a barrier against the cold weather as well as are anti-irritants that strengthen skin's protective barrier to prevent moisture loss. Choose a moisturizer which provides long lasting hydration, and is hypoallergenic, however re-apply moisturizer whenever it appears dry.

While baby lotions are often used on a baby's face and body, during winter months, it is advisable to use baby lotion for the body and baby cream for the face. The baby's face and cheeks are more exposed to harsh weather which needs extra protection to prevent dryness. Baby creams contain more oils and emollients which provide the intensive hydration forming a barrier on the skin to lock the moisturizer.

During winter months, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive skincare regime for your little ones. Skincare products for adults often contain harsh ingredients unsuitable for baby skin. Instead, parents should opt for products which are designed to protect a baby's skin, are effective, have no harmful chemicals but are gentle and clinically proven mild with nourishing ingredients and have undergone rigorous testing.

(The author, Dr. Dilip Tripathi, is the Regional Head, Baby & Women's Health Research & Development, at Kenvue.)

# what's brewing?



The 17th Grand Nursery Mela was inaugurated by Minister for Agriculture Thummala Nageshwar Rao at the All India Horticulture and Agriculture Exhibition. It showcases a spectacular variety of plants and gardening products, said Nursery Mela Incharge Khalid Ahmad at Necklace Road, People's Plaza



Royal Stag BoomBox kicks off its third edition in Hyderabad: Iconic performances by Amit Trivedi, Nikhita Gandhi, Raftaar and DJ Yogii. Embarking on a four-city tour, Seagram's Royal Stag BoomBox – The Original Sound of Generation Large – blends a fusion of Bollywood melodies and hip-hop beats with art, culture and gaming experiences.

**PARTY**

MBSI and QFleet announced partnership for deployment of 51 Maruti vehicles to enhance urban mobility in Hyderabad. QFleet, a fleet management company which provides ride hailing companies with high quality cars & drivers, and drivers/fleet operators with access to vehicle ownership and Moto Business Service India Pvt. Ltd. (MBSI), a prominent vehicle management and service provider in the shared mobility sector, on Thursday announced a major partnership for the deployment of Maruti Wagon R (CNG) vehicles in Hyderabad. The first batch of 51 vehicles were officially handed over during a ceremony at the QFleet Hyderabad head office, marking a significant step towards enhancing urban mobility in India.



**Photos by - SV Chary**



Freedom Healthy Cooking Oils, the leading brand of edible oils in the country, announced the winners of the Bumper Draw of 'Go for Freedom Gold Offer' for Telangana & Andhra Pradesh. One lucky winner from each State received a 50-gram gold coin, while 2 winners from each State received a 10-gram gold coin. Noted actor Tanikella Bharani, visited the Freedom Healthy Cooking Oils factory to witness the purity and quality standards maintained by the brand, and acted as the judge in the recent 'Freedom Courtroom Campaign.' He gave away the awards to the lucky winners.



Anantha Rehab, South India's largest and most advanced rehabilitation center, has successfully completed its first year of service, marking a milestone in patient recovery and care. Over the past year, the center has become a beacon of hope for patients recovering from strokes, surgeries, trauma, and chronic pain. To commemorate this achievement, Anantha Rehab organised a grand event at the Anantha MK Institute of Medical Sciences in Begumpet, Hyderabad.

**FUN**

**ARCHIE**



**GARFIELD**



**NANCY**



**GINGER MEGGS**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**



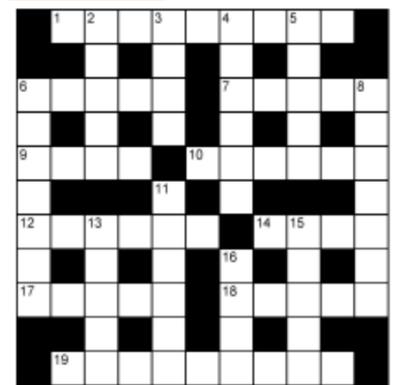
**REALITY CHECK**



**SPEED BUMP**



**CROSSWORD**



**SUDOKU**

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

**Yesterday's solution**

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

**Rules**

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

**ACROSS**

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

**DOWN**

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



RENTALA JAYADEV UNRAVELS MYTHS IN HIS BOOK

Historical blunders of Telugu Cinema



SURESH KAVIRAYANI

Kalidas which is now claimed and celebrated by Tamil Cinema as their first talkie film, is actually a Telugu cinema. It was a big blunder in the history books committed by the historians. Kalidas did not have any Tamil dialogue in it. Rentala Jayadeva, the writer, who came out with facts and evidence in his book Mana Cinema: First Reel, reveals more about South Indian cinema and the mistakes

Indian Cinema completed more than a hundred years and the Telugu Cinema is going to complete a hundred years in the year 2032, which is very near. The first Indian feature film 'Raja Harischandra' was released on May 3, 1913, produced and directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. This was the first silent movie and it was a big hit at that time. That's how Indian cinema started and Phalke is the person who began a new era of cinema on the big screen. Then the first Indian talkie cinema 'Alam Ara' was released on March 14, 1931.

HM Reddy, who worked for 'Alam Ara', and directed the first South Indian language talkie film 'Kalidas' which was released on October 31, 1931. Later, the first complete Telugu feature film 'Bhakta Prahlada' was released in 1932, February 6. HM Reddy, who directed 'Kalidas', made this Telugu film. After a few months of the Telugu talkie film, the first Tamil talkie film 'Raja Harischandra' was released on April 9, 1932. The first Kannada talkie film 'Sati Sulochana' was released on March 3, 1934. Interestingly, the director of this first Kannada film was a Telugu person YV Rao. The first Malayalam talkie film 'Balan' was released in 1938.

Though cinema in India completed more than hundred years and Telugu, Tamil cinema too completed 93 years, there is no proper book written on the history of Indian cinema, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada cinema till a few days back. Rentala Jayadeva, a film journalist, did enormous research in Indian and South Indian cinema for nearly 25 years and published a book titled 'Mana Cinema: First Reel'. In this book, he pointed out some historical blunders, especially in South Indian cinema, which was being projected with mistakes till now. In his book, he provides evidence and bare facts.

The important and sad part that the Telugu cinema ignored is the first South Indian language talkie was 'Kalidas'. The Tamil Cinema Industry is claiming 'Kalidas' to be their first Tamil cinema, but actually there are no Tamil dialogues in this film. The Telugu Film Industry rightfully can claim 'Kalidas' to be the first Telugu talkie film, because in this 9-reel film 'Kalidas' chapter contains four reels full of Telugu dialogues and songs. There are no Tamil dialogues in it.

"In my research about this film 'Kalidas', I gave proof that it is actually not just one film, it contains a three-film programme. The first three reels show Tamil patriotic songs, love songs, dance and



keerthanas. The next four reels are about Kalidas. Two important incidents, about his comedy and his love episode are shown. The entire episode runs with Telugu dialogues and songs. The remaining two reels show Rajyalakshmi's dance, which was popularly known as 'Kuratti' dance at that time. She also played the female lead in 'Kalidas', says Jayadeva. Though there are Tamil songs, there is no Tamil dialogue. The main part of the film 'Kalidas' is made completely in Telugu. So, the Telugu Film Industry should claim this 'Kalidas' as their first talkie film. Very sadly, we gave this film to the Tamil Film Industry, which they promoted as their first talkie film. The writer came out with complete proof. "When I went through many years of research, I found a review about film 'Kalidas'. Kalki, the writer of 'Ponniyin Selvan' (later this novel made into a film with the same name by Mani Ratnam), said in 'Anand Vikatan', about 'Kalidas' that the film didn't have any Tamil dialogues.

There is another big blunder in history books and Wikipedia of Tamil Cinema. They claim that the lead actor is PG Venkatesan, a Tamil actor, some saying the names of Narasimha Rao and P Srinivasa Rao. But it is completely wrong as the lead actor is VR Gangadhar, in the role of Kalidas and he is a



Telugu person. LV Prasad also played a small role in this 'Kalidas'. So, the first Telugu dialogues and songs appeared on the big screen in 'Kalidas', released on October 31, 1931. But our Telugu Film Industry is celebrating its birthday on February 6, which they said that the first Telugu talkie 'Bhakta Prahlada' was released on this date in 1932. Actually, the first full Tamil talkie film 'Rajah Harischandra' was released on April 9, 1932, which they should celebrate as their Tamil Cinema Day.

The writer also corrected a mistake earlier in 2011. Actually, the Telugu Cinema's birthday was celebrated on September 15, as some of the elders in the industry claimed that 'Bhakta Prahlada' was released on September 15, 1931. But in 2011, Rentala Jayadeva, corrected the mistake with evidence that the film was released not in September, but on February 6. From 2011, the Telugu cinema's birthday was changed to February 6, which was corrected by Jayadeva. He also got Nandi Award for

his research. When asked why couldn't correct the mistake about film 'Kalidas', he said, 'My research was not complete at that time. I found this after I went through more archives and research.'

For 'Kalidas' at that time they gave advertisements in the papers that it is a Tamil and Telugu cinema. "The makers wanted to woo both the Telugu and Tamil audience, who were equal at that time in Madras Presidency. So, they gave an advertisement like that," opines Jayadeva. He added that the title 'Kalidas' Chapter was made in only four reels, which is very short and audiences may not come to watch it. So, the director added some reels before and after this film. "So, that's why it is called a three-film programme. First they gave a song to TP Rajyalakshmi and asked her to sing. She did it. Then they asked her to sing and dance, which she did. They recorded her songs and dance. She became popular with Kuratti dance at that time. Also, she clearly told in an interview that HM Reddy gave her the Telugu dialogues, which she wrote in Tamil and rendered in Telugu for the film 'Kalidas'. So 'Kalidas' is the first Telugu talkie film, which was wrongly claimed by Tamil Cinema," said Jayadeva. The writer gave proof of TP Rajyalakshmi's interview and also what LV Prasad said about 'Kalidas' in an interview. He added that the complete Telugu talkie film is definitely 'Bhakta Prahlada' which was released on February 6, 1931.

There is another big blunder going in Kannada cinema regarding their first lead actress. The first Kannada Talkie film 'Sati Sulochana' had Tripuramba playing the female lead. But the Kannada Film Industry and even the historians, and Wikipedia are all showing the wrong picture of Tripuramba. "Whatever picture it is showing even till today is not Tripuramba. But it is that of Tamil actress KLV Vasantha, who played Sulochana in the Tamil film 'Sulochana' released in 1946. The writer shared the original Tripuramba picture and also the picture of KLV Vasantha from her Tamil film, which actually Kannada film industry people assumed it to be Tripuramba.

All these big historical blunders and many other interesting facts find a place in Jayadeva's book 'Mana Cinema: First Reel'. "I went to New Delhi, Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Kolkata, Vetapalem and so many other places for my research about cinema," he said. Though this book is published in Telugu, it should be translated into other languages, because it is not just a book to gain knowledge about Indian Cinema, but it provides deep insights and is a 'treasure trove'.

It is Jani Master versus Jhansi



Just a couple of days back, popular anchor and actress Jhansi posted on the social media that the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce (TFCC) won a case against choreographer Jani Basha. Actually, Jani was arrested under POCSO Act and later he was released on bail. The case is in the court. Jhansi claimed that TFCC wins case against Jani, who had challenged the Chamber's orders in the district court on the grounds of proven sexual harassment at workplace charges. She said that it is a significant judgement, proving that women's safety at the workplace is a priority.

The next day, Jani Master posted in the social media without naming Jhansi, relating to Jhansi's post. He said that some people are depicting the court orders in the wrong way and using them for their own gain. "The Union president elections were held without my prior knowledge. So, I filed a case about it and the verdict related to it. But you linked this verdict with another case and posted in your favour," said Jani Master in his post. He added that people will believe whatever you say, but the day the actual verdict is out, everyone will understand your true nature and



why you are spreading this misinformation. He said, "The truth will be known to all".

Now, these two posts are going viral on the social media and internet and netizens talking about Jhansi versus Jani Master.

Prithviraj Sukumar talks about Mahesh, Rajamouli film

There are many reports that Malayalam actor Prithviraj Sukumar is playing an important role in the upcoming Mahesh Babu and Rajamouli combination film. The film was officially launched recently and it is reported that the shooting is also going on. Prithviraj is busy promoting his upcoming film 'L2: Empuraan', a sequel to the earlier hit film 'Lucifer'. Mohan Lal acted as the lead in this film, while Pruthviraj directed the film. He also played an important role in it.

Now, he is roped in for many Pan-Indian films as he is one of the popular actors in Malayalam. He earlier did films like 'Salaar' with Prabhas and now there are reports he is roped in for SSMB29 too in a major role. When asked about it, the actor said that the media knows more than him. "There are a few things to be discussed and nothing yet finalized. Once everything is placed, I can speak about it," he said.

His 'L2: Empuraan' is all set to hit the screens on March 27. Recently, the teaser of this film was released at a function in Kochi. Malayalam superstar Mammooty was the chief



guest and released the trailer. Mohan Lal, Prithviraj, Manju Warrier, Tovino Thomas and many others who worked for this film attended

the event. This film is one of the most-awaited in the coming days. Like the first one, there are high expectations on this sequel too.

Siva Karthikeyan vs Vijay Antony on Parasakthi title controversy

The film title 'Parasakthi' is in controversy as it is claimed by two makers. Sudha Kongara and Sivakarthekeyan's film titled as 'Parasakthi' and the teaser was released on Wednesday. On the same day, popular actor Vijay Antony also released a look from his film and titled it 'Parasakthi'. With the same title for two films, this controversy is a big topical issue in Tamil Cinema.

Now, it seems, both the makers came to a conclusion and resolved the issue amicably. The producer of Sudha Kongara and Sivalarthekeyan met Vijay Antony and solved the issue. Before that Vijay Antony showed the certificate issued by the South Indian Film Chamber of Commerce and claimed that he registered the 'Parasakthi' title in Telugu. In reply to this, the producer of Sudha Kongara film also claimed that he registered the same title with both the Tamil and Telugu Film Producers Councils in both languages.

Now, the issue has been resolved and Vijay Antony's film is titled in Tamil as 'Shakthi Tirumagan' and 'Parasakthi' in other languages. The Sudha Kongara and Sivakarthekeyan film titled as 'Parasakthi' in Tamil as well as in Telugu. Telugu actress Sreeleela is making her debut with this Sudha Kongara film in Tamil.



The new cinematographer on the block

Cinematographer plays a very important role in every film. Actually, a director relies more on a cinematographer, not just to capture beautiful visuals, but on how to develop the story. Now, a new cinematographer Kushendar Ramesh Reddy is the talk of the industry. He already made his mark by consistently captivating viewers and leaving a lasting impression with every shot.

A native of Hyderabad, Ramesh Reddy's passion for photography started in his childhood, a time when he was already drawn to the art of capturing moments. Though it started as a hobby, he turned it into his professional pursuit, with deep passion. After completing his BFA in Photography, he took his skills to the next level by working alongside popular cinematographer KK Senthil Kumar. He worked with him for the films like 'Eega', 'Baahubali', 'Baahubali 2' and 'RRR'. "I gained a lot of experience working with him," said Ramesh Reddy. He became a second-camera operator on major productions.

"Then I started to do it independently and my first film came in 2022 with Bhag Saale," he said. Then he did 'Maa Oori Polimeru 2'. "People talk about the visuals and praise my cinematography skills in this film and I am very happy that

the film became a huge hit," said Kushendar.

Now, people are talking about the 'Razakar' film which is streaming on an OTT. The film was released in theaters last year and was critically acclaimed. "This is another film

in which my work gets good applause," said Reddy. This historical drama required a delicate balance of narrative and visuals, and Reddy's cinematography brought the story to life.

At present, Kushendar Reddy is

working on several high-profile projects. He is the cinematographer for 'Barbarik', directed by Mohan Srivatsa, which completed the shoot. He has also signed another film with director Anil Vishwanath and Allari Naresh combination film.



# Tata Steel Chess: Gukesh beats Warmerdam to stay in lead

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

World champion D Gukesh defeated Dutch Grandmaster Max Warmerdam to stay in sole lead on 7.5 points at the end of the 10th round of Tata Steel Chess tournament here. It was another eventful day for Gukesh who is now closing in on the 2800-rating barrier. The victory with black came easily when Warmerdam missed the line after being level for quite some time. The opening was a closed Sicilian where Gukesh knocked down a couple of pawns to force resignation in 34 moves. The youngest world champion is a half point ahead of nearest rival Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. Holding the sole third spot is R Praggnanandhaa on 6.5 points after a finely crafted victory over Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia. Arjun Erigaisi's hunt for an

elusive victory continued for the 10th day running as he drew with Vincent Keymer of Germany. P Harikrishna defended a slightly worse rook endgame to hold his fort against top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States, while Leon Luke Mendonca played out a draw with Anish Giri. Praggnanandhaa came up with a dominating performance against Fedoseev who chose the Tarrasch defense as black. The opening saw Praggnanandhaa getting a structural advantage and he nurtured it quite well in the middle game. The game was devoid of drama towards the end as Praggnanandhaa sacrificed all his pawns to make a new queen on board. The calculation was perfect and it was all over in 48 moves. Keymer showcased his opening preparation to hold Erigaisi easily. The closed Ruy Lopez did not put up



enough challenge and Keymer sacrificed a pawn early to maintain parity. Erigaisi had to give the pawn back in the middle game and the position just petered out to be level. Harikrishna had to face some stiff resistance against Caruana who played black. Down a pawn in the rook and pawns endgame, Harikrishna made use of his remaining resources and drew after 68 moves. In the Challengers' section, R Vaishali went down fighting against tournament leader Nguyen Thai Van Dai of the Czech Republic while Divya Deshmukh lost to Frederik Svane of Germany. Vaishali, on five points, shares the ninth spot and Divya, on two, is on 13th spot in the 14-players round-robin tournament. Just three rounds remain in the first major of the year. **Results: Round 10:** Masters: Leon Luke

Mendonca (Ind, 3) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 5); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 6.5) beat Vladimir Fedoseev (6); Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5) lost to D Gukesh (Ind, 7.5); P Harikrishna (4.5) drew with Fabiano Caruana (USA, 5.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 5.5) drew with Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 4); Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 3) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4); Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 7) beat Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5). **Challengers:** Nguyen Thai Van Dam (Cze, 7.5) beat R Vaishali (Ind, 5); Divya Deshmukh (2) lost to Frederik Svane (Ger, 6); Yakubboev Nodirbek (Uzb, 5) drew with Benjamin Bok (Ned, 6.5); Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 4.5) beat Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1); Suleymanli Aydin (Aze, 6.5) beat Nogerbek Kazybek (Kaz, 5); Miaoyi Lu (Chn, 5.5) drew with Ediz Gurel (Tur, 5.5); Erwin L'Ami (Ned, 7) beat Faustino Oro (Arg, 2.5).



## Narmada clinches gold in women's 10m air rifle

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Former World Cup winner Narmada Nithin Raju overcame a strong field, which included Asian Games medallist Ramita Jindal and Olympian Elavetil Valarivan, to not just create a national record but miss equalling the world mark by a fraction of a point on her way to clinching gold in the women's 10m air rifle event at the 38th National Games here on Thursday. Narmada, representing Tamil Nadu, clinched the top podium finish with a score of 254.4, beating back the challenge from Maharashtra's Arya Borse (252.5) and Ramita (230.4) in the eight-shooter final. In the process, she broke the national mark of 252.9 set by Olympian Apurvi Chandela at the 2019 World Cup in New Delhi. The world record in the event is 254.5 points, set by Huang Yuting of China at last year's ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi. This was 23-year-old Narmada's third-biggest career achievement in the event after she had won the 10m air rifle mixed team gold partnering Rudranksh Patil at the 2023 Cairo World Cup and bagging a bronze at the World Cup in Bhopal the same year. She is also in total control of her nerves, Narmada, who was third at the end of the qualification round on Wednesday, shot a string of superb scores to

stamp her authority over her more illustrious rivals in the final. She consistently shot high scores with three of her shots achieving maximum impact of 10.9, while another two shots in the 24-shot final fetched her 10.8. She didn't go below 10 in any of her 24 shots in the final. Maharashtra's Arya Borse, 22, too enjoyed a great outing and, on any other day would have clinched a top-podium finish with a score of 252.5 but the 2022 junior world cup gold medallist in team event wouldn't have known before the final that Narmada would come up with a record-breaking performance. Haryana's Asian Games bronze medallist shooter Ramita, 21, who had shot a superb qualification-round score of 634.9 to top the qualification, had to settle for a bronze medal despite coming up with another loaded performance, which saw her shoot consistently 10-plus scores on Thursday. Shooting is one discipline where many of the top players are taking part in the National Games. All the shooters, who competed in the Paris Olympics last year, with the exception of double-medallist Manu Bhaker and Esha Singh, will be seen in action in the National Games. In total, 364 shooters are representing 29 teams at the National Games, making shooting the star attraction of the Games.

## Several young players in probables list of Hockey India for FIH Pro League

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday included more than half-a-dozen young players in the long list of probables for the upcoming FIH Pro League, based on their performance in the Hockey India League and junior level competitions. Among those included in the list of 32 senior probables for the first time are goalkeeper Princedeep Singh, defender Yashdeep Siwach, midfielders Rabichandra Singh and Rajinder Singh, and forwards Angad Bir Singh, Uttam Singh and Arshdeep Singh. Veteran drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh will lead the side, while Hardik Singh will be his deputy for the Bhubaneswar leg of the Pro League, to be played at the Kalinga Stadium From February 15 to 25. India's campaign will feature matches against Spain, Germany, Ireland and



England, playing each team twice. "Impressive performances in the junior team and the ongoing HIL has won 22-year-old Angad Bir Singh and 20-year-old Arshdeep Singh their first senior team call-ups for the upcoming FIH Pro League matches," said Hockey India in a statement. Princedeep, a member of the gold-winning side at last year's Junior Asia Cup in Muscat, is a notable addition

to the senior side and will join first-choice goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak and Suraj Karkera. Yashdeep will be positioned in defence alongside veterans Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas and captain Harmanpreet, while in the midfield, Rabichandra Singh will have stalwarts Manpreet Singh, Hardik, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta Sharma for company. Head coach Craig Fulton expressed confidence that

the current set of players would play entertaining, top-notch hockey in the Pro League. "Extremely happy with the squad we have selected for the Bhubaneswar leg matches of the FIH Pro League. I believe this team can win us games, perform in harmony and most importantly play an impressive brand of hockey. "Looking forward to training with the players in the camp and starting our Pro League campaign on the right note." India had finished seventh among nine teams in the 2023-24 edition of the Pro League but the European leg did not go as per expectations. The team, however, came back from the setback to win a second successive gold at the Paris Olympics. "I have been scouting these players over the last few weeks and am excited to see what they do against some of the best international teams in the world," he added.

## Niko Kovac will take over as new coach: Borussia Dortmund

PTI ■ DORTMUND

Niko Kovac will be the new coach of Borussia Dortmund as last season's Champions League runner-up looks to rescue a troubled season. The former Bayern Munich and Monaco coach will start work Sunday, Dortmund's managing director for sport Lars Ricken told broadcaster DAZN following the team's 3-1 win over Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League on Wednesday. "We have reached an agreement in principle. He will take over the team on Sunday," Ricken told DAZN, and said Dortmund would discuss potential signings with Kovac before the transfer window closes Monday. Youth team coach Mike Tullberg oversaw Wednesday's game — Dortmund's first win of the new year in all competitions —



and will remain in his interim head coach role for Saturday's Bundesliga game at Heidenheim, Ricken said. Kovac takes over a team which is 11th in the Bundesliga and is heading for a playoff in the Champions League after finishing 10th in the 36-team league phase. Nuri Sahin was fired last week following a 2-1 loss at Bologna. It's the first job for Kovac since he was fired as coach of Wolfsburg in March. Born in Berlin, Kovac played international soccer for Croatia and coached the Croatian national team from 2013 to 2015.

## PCB, ICC to organise Champions Trophy opening ceremony on February 16 in Lahore

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in conjunction with the ICC will hold the opening ceremony of the upcoming Champions Trophy on February 16 in Lahore. A source in the PCB told PTI that chairman Mohsin Naqvi had approved a scheduled list of events prior to the first match of the tournament on February 19 at the National Stadium in Karachi between Pakistan and New Zealand. The PCB will officially open the renovated Gaddafi stadium on February 7 for which Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif has been invited as the chief guest. On February 11, the PCB will launch the renovated National Stadium in Karachi with a ceremony in which President Asif Ali Zardari has been invited as the chief guest.



The source said the PCB and ICC were also working out the schedule of the captains press conference and photoshoots. They are likely to be held in Lahore on February 16. The opening ceremony is scheduled at Huzoori Bagh at the historic Lahore fort in which officials of different boards, celebrities, legends of the game, and government officials will be invited.

The ICC and PCB are yet to confirm if Indian captain, Rohit Sharma, would be travelling to Lahore for the events. India will be playing their Champions Trophy matches in Dubai as part of a hybrid model deal between the ICC, PCB and BCCI and if they qualify for the final, then the title clash would also be held in the UAE city on March 9.

## MI Cape Town qualify for SA20 playoffs

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

MI Cape Town booked their maiden entry into the playoffs of the SA20 tournament here with a 10-wicket thrashing of defending champions Sunrisers Eastern Cape here. MI Cape Town will take on Paarl Royals in Qualifier 1 at Gqeberha on February 4 and the winner of the contest will make a direct entry into the final of the third edition of SA20. MI Cape Town were excellent from the beginning of the contest with Dewald Brevis, Corbin Bosch and Reeza Hendricks claiming fine catches to help dismiss the Sunrisers Eastern Cape for just 109. Corbin Bosch was the pick of the MI Cape Town bowlers, returning figures of 3.2-0-19-4, while only David Bedingham (45) and Andile



Simelane (21) clicked with the bat for the Sunrisers. South Africa pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada returned 3-0-14-2, while Trent Boult was again tight with his spell of 4-0-25-1. In reply, Rassie van der Dussen (48 not out off 30 balls) and Ryan Rickelton (59 not out off 36 balls) thrashed the Sunrisers Eastern Cape bowlers to produce a dominant show for their side. Brevis took a one-handed catch at the boundary to dismiss Sunrisers Eastern

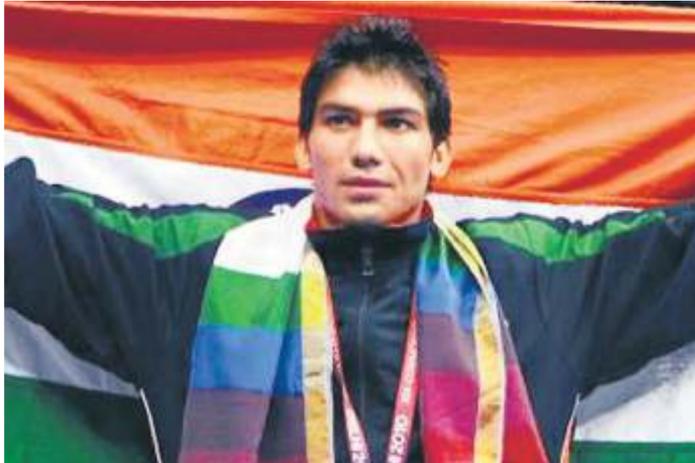
Cape batter Tom Abell (1), which was the highlight of their splendid efforts in the field. "Fielding put us ahead in the game. Ground fielding was amazing, and I think it plays a huge role. It was important to finish with the bonus point and in top two," said MI Cape Town captain Rashid Khan after the match. For Sunrisers Eastern Cape, their next match against Paarl Royals will be crucial as the outcome will determine their fate in the tournament.

# Former CWG gold-winning boxer Manoj Kumar retires to take up coaching

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Commonwealth Games gold-winning boxer Manoj Kumar, who dominated the light welterweight (64kg) division in India at his prime and did not hesitate to voice his disagreements with national federation's policies, announced his retirement on Thursday to begin a career in coaching. The 39-year-old, who won his first and only CWG gold in the 2012 Delhi Games, is also a two-time Asian Championships bronze-medallist. His second and last CWG medal, a bronze, came in Gold Coast in 2018. He is also a two-time Olympian, having competed in the 2012 London and 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, finishing as a pre-quarterfinalist in both editions after fighting performances that ultimately fell just short of pushing him

over the line. "It's a carefully thought out decision because once I turn 40, I can anyway not compete in amateur events as per international rules. I am retiring as a content man after representing my country to the best of my ability," Manoj, who hails from Kaithal in Haryana, told PTI. "I have just gratitude for the opportunities I got," he added. The outspoken pugilist, who began his boxing career at the junior level in 1997, completed his coaching diploma from the National Institute of Sports, Patiala in 2021. Injuries and a dispute with the national federation on selection issues hampered his India career after the Gold Coast CWG and he was not seen in any international event after that. He now intends to devote time to the academy that he



has set up with elder brother and long-time personal coach Rajesh Kumar Rajound in Kurukshetra. "For any athlete, saying

goodbye to the sport is an extremely emotional moment. If it weren't for Rajesh sir, I wouldn't have been recognised as an

Olympian boxer. He made me dream big and cleared every obstacle in my path to achieve them," he said reiterating his reverence for

the man who was, at times, his only support system. "This academy will serve as a medium to share our experiences and lessons with young athletes who will one day win medals for India in the Olympics," he added. Not among the most physically domineering boxers, Manoj created a niche for himself with his workman-like approach to the sport which meant wearing down his opponents in the ring with his deceptive defensive game. He could frustrate rivals with his shell guards and at the same time, surprise them with his very effective counter-attacks, which relied heavily on accurately placed straight punches. But despite a reasonably successful career, he could never find a steady sponsor who could stand by him when injuries chipped away at his fortunes. Manoj was elected as the

athletes' representative in the Boxing Federation of India's executive committee in 2016 but had to quit over disagreements with the body on its ever-changing selection policy, which included doing away with the traditional practice of trials for a while. "While in that commission, I raised my voice for fellow boxers. And when you do that too frequently, there are consequences. But I have never really cared. I still don't care," he said. Manoj's many other battles included a court case to get the Arjuna award in 2014 when the Kapil Dev-led selection panel ignored him despite the fact that he fulfilled the laid-down criteria as per the points system established for the honour. He won that fight in the Delhi High Court and was presented the award by the then sports minister

Sarbananda Sonowal a few months after the traditional ceremony. He also fought a long and futile battle to get promotion in the Railways, which had promised him the elevation after the 2010 CWG gold but failed to fulfil it eventually. He is the only Indian boxer aside from the iconic Vijender Singh to have won two CWG medals. Manoj belongs to the Ror community, which comprises descendants of the Maratha soldiers who fought Afghan invaders during the battle of Panipat in 1761. And throughout his career, he never missed a chance to remind people of his heritage. "For me, every bout is a now or never moment. I can't hold back for later, what if the later never comes," he had told PTI in an interview back in 2018. On Thursday, it was time to hit the relax mode for him.