

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From: VIJAYAWADA HYDERABAD DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN


QUOTE OF THE DAY



Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has become a pan India Chief Minister after arresting pan India film star Allu Arjun. Some CMs became known through corruption, however, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy grabbed attention through his daring decisions. It is wrong on the part of KT Rama Rao to say that there is a scam involving Rs 12,000 crore in the RRR project as its total value is just Rs 7,000 cr

— Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Bhongir MP

P4



'Don't depend on freebies, produce own solar power'

5



'INDIA-EFTA TRADE PACT LIKELY TO COME INTO FORCE BY YEAR END'

8



Mahesh Babu-Rajamouli film begins, with all SHUSH!

P12

DON'T MISS...

Survey for crop loans to tenant ryots

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji has directed bankers to conduct village-wise surveys to ensure the full sanctioning of crop loans for tenant farmers. He pointed out that while the Revenue Department has issued over 77,000 Crop Cultivated Right Cards (CCRC) to tenant farmers, the crop loans sanctioned by banks remain significantly low. To address this, he has asked bankers to survey to understand why tenant farmers are not applying for crop loans. As part of the annual credit plan implementation, Collector Balaji held a meeting with...

-PAGE: 3

PM's resolutions mere 'jumlas'

The Congress on Thursday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new year resolutions are nothing short of 'jumlas' (rhetoric) destroying the lives of every citizen. In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the government has given no solution for the economic turmoil created by it as he cited seven indicators to substantiate his point. "The Modi government has no solution for the economic turmoil it has created! Seven..."

-PAGE: 5

White-collar hiring up 9% in Dec: Report

White-collar hiring activity in December witnessed a 9 per cent increase compared to the same period of the previous year, driven by high-skill and strategic roles, a report said on Thursday. According to Naukri JobSpeak, the index reached an impressive 2,651 points in December 2024, reflecting a robust 9 per cent year-on-year growth, a promising sign for the year ahead. Key sectors that were primary growth drivers in December 2024, included AI/ML (36 per cent), Oil and Gas (13 per cent), FMCG...

-PAGE: 8

Dressing room debates should stay there

Asserting that "debates" in the dressing room should not come out in public domain, India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Thursday said he has had some "honest" conversations with his players and that the ongoing transition in the team will be all-encompassing. Gambhir also side-stepped queries on whether out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma will get a place in the final XI for the fifth and final Test against Australia starting on Friday. Amid reports of unrest in the dressing room, the head coach sought...

-SPORTS

INTEGRATED CLEAN ENERGY POLICY



Rs 10L cr-investments set to flow into State

7.5 lakh jobs to be generated for youth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravikumar announced that the Andhra Pradesh Integrated Clean Energy Policy, 2024, is set to attract investments worth Rs 10 lakh crore and create nearly 7.5 lakh employment opportunities. The implementation of the policy is underway, focusing on clean energy, job creation, and economic growth.

On Wednesday, AP Transco and AP Genco, in collaboration with the state government, launched the 2025 dairy and calendars at the State Secretariat in Amaravati. The event was attended by Chief Secretary K Vijayanand, AP Genco MD KVN Chakradhar Babu, and the Energy Minister. During the occasion, the Minister extended New Year greetings to the AP Transco and AP Genco teams, appreciating their dedicated efforts in ensuring a steady supply of quality power to consumers, in line with the vision of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

Minister Ravikumar highlighted that the government is taking substantial steps to reform the power sector, with a focus on transitioning from crisis management to welfare. He emphasized that the newly introduced AP Integrated Clean Energy Policy is expected to generate Rs 10 lakh crore in investments, resulting in job opportunities for approximately 7.5 lakh people. Additionally, AP Transco is set to implement projects worth Rs 15,729 crore, which will include the establishment of 71 substations, an increase in transmission capacity by 16,507 MVA, and the construction of 4,696 km of transmission lines.

The Minister also congratulated the AP Genco team for their entry into the pump storage project (PSP) sector under the leadership of CM Chandrababu Naidu.

Continued on Page 2

Rs 2,723 cr for Amaravati works

Cabinet nod for projects with loans from WB, HUDCO and German financial institutions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Cabinet on Thursday approved Rs 2,723.02 crore for two engineering projects in Amaravati, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh. The meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, also decided to undertake these developmental works with financial support from the World Bank, HUDCO, and German financial institutions. Fresh tenders will be invited for the works, adhering to the guidelines of these bodies.

Briefing the media, Information and Public Relations Minister Kolu Parthasarathi announced the Cabinet's approval for a draft ordinance to amend the Andhra Pradesh Metropolitan Region and Urban Development Authorities (AP MRUDA) Act of 2016. This amendment will allow changes to the capital master plan, infrastructure plans, and zonal areas in the capital region.

The Cabinet also sanctioned 19 additional posts in the newly established Pithapuram Area Development Authority to ensure efficient administration. Furthermore, approval was given for the establishment of the AM Green Ammonia (India) Pvt Ltd unit in Kakinada, exempting the company from stamp duty under the Green Energy Policy.

Continued on Page 2

- The Cabinet approves Rs 1.82 lakh crore investments and Tirupati ESI hospital upgrade with 191 new medical staff.
- 6.35 acres of land for an ESI hospital in Prattipadu, Guntur, sanctioned.
- The Cabinet approves space allotment for TCS to set up a development centre at Millennium Towers, Visakhapatnam.
- 2 GW Electrolyser unit by John Kakirel Green Hydrogen Solutions in Kakinada cleared.



Approval for amendments to the AP MRUDA Act, allowing changes to the capital master plan and infrastructure.



- The Cabinet discusses implementing six key schemes, including Talliki Vandanam and releasing the state's share under Rythu Bharosa.
- The Prime Minister will lay the foundation for the NTPC Integrated Green Hydrogen Hub in Pudi Madaka, with Rs 65,370 cr investment.

- PM Modi will inaugurate the Krishnapatnam Industrial Hub, a Rs 1,518 crore project, creating 50,000 jobs.
- A bulk drug park worth Rs 1,876.66 cr is being set up in Nakkapalli, with an expected Rs 11,542 cr investment and 54,000 jobs.
- PM will lay the foundation for a railway zone in Visakhapatnam.

CM unhappy with Revenue dept's performance

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed dissatisfaction with the Revenue Department's handling of public grievances during an AP Cabinet meeting at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Thursday. He directed officials to avoid negligence, pointing out that ongoing issues were not being addressed in revenue conferences. Wishing all ministers a Happy New Year, Chandrababu also congratulated K. Vijayanand on his appointment as Chief Secretary. The CM noted that this was the first time a BC officer had been appointed to the position, recalling that the

Telugu Desam Party government had previously appointed SC officer Kaki Madhav Rao to the same post. Chandrababu questioned officials about delays in resolving key issues, particularly regarding 22A lands and house site problems. He expressed concern over the public's growing impatience and asked how much longer people would have to wait. Special Chief Secretary R.P. Sisodia assured that the issues would be resolved soon, but the CM highlighted the gap between administrative patience and public expectations.

1 dead, 5 hurt in boiler blast

PNS ■ PELLAKURU (TIRUPATI DIST)

One person died and five others are injured in a boiler blast here in Tirupati district, said a police official on Thursday.

Tirupati Superintendent of Police L. Subba Rayudu said the blast occurred late on Wednesday night at MS Agarwal company that melts sponge iron to make iron balls. "One person died, another is seriously injured and four more suffered simple injuries."

Subba Rayudu said, adding that the industrial safety committee will determine the exact reasons for the blast. All the injured persons are undergoing treatment and a case is being registered.

Funding plans for Vizag, V'wada metro projects come under review

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu reviewed the progress of the Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada Metro Rail projects during a meeting held at the Secretariat. Metro Managing Director Ramakrishna Reddy provided an update on the status of the projects, highlighting that Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for the Vijayawada Metro (66 km) and the Visakhapatnam Metro (76.90 km) have already been approved.

During the review, the Chief Minister explored funding options based on the 2017 Metro Rail Policy. This policy allows for 100% equity funding by the central government, a provision unavailable under earlier frameworks. Chandrababu cited the



example of a 16-km metro project in Kolkata, implemented under this model at an investment of Rs 565 crore by the Ministry of Urban Development and Railways. He emphasised the need for similar support for Andhra Pradesh's metro projects and directed officials to engage with the central government on this matter.

Referring to the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, the Chief Minister stressed that it includes provisions for metro rail projects in the state.

TDP membership crosses 1 cr-mark

Minister Lokesh signs MoU with insurance companies for cadre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Amid the TDP's membership crossing one crore in just a few days, the party's National General Secretary and Minister for Education, Nara Lokesh, on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with insurance companies to provide coverage for all one crore party activists.

Lokesh, along with representatives from United India Insurance and Pragmatic Insurance Broking Services, marked a historic milestone. The TDP thus became the first political party in the country to offer insurance security to one crore activists.

Under the agreement, the party has paid Rs 42 crore as the first premium



to provide insurance coverage to its activists for the full year, from January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025. The party plans to make similar payments next year. As per the MoU, every party activist is eligible for Rs 5 lakh acci-

dental insurance.

Since assuming the role of leader of the party workers' welfare, Lokesh has been introducing several pioneering initiatives. So far, the party has spent an impressive Rs 138 crore for the welfare of its cadre. Additionally, a dedicated legal wing has been established to handle court cases filed against TDP activists during the previous YSRCP regime.

A special cell has also been set up at the TDP central office to offer immediate assistance to party workers in case of accidents. On behalf of the NTR Trust, residential schools have been established in Hyderabad and Challapalli in Krishna district to provide free education to the children of deceased party activists.

2024 verdict a turning point in State: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Wednesday, criticised the Jagan Mohan Reddy government for its "blunders," stating that these have become a curse for the people of Andhra Pradesh. He said the historic verdict delivered by the people in 2024 in favour of the TDP-led NDA government marked a significant turning point for the State.

Speaking to media persons at the TDP central office in Mangalagiri, Chandrababu Naidu, who is also the party's national president, remarked that

the five-year rule of the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) caused immense suffering. He claimed that the people now feel safer and more comfortable under the NDA's leadership. He accused the previous government, led by Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, of adopting anarchic policies that destroyed systems and left projects like Amaravati and Polavaram in disarray.

"Since the coalition government was formed, I have visited New Delhi four

times to address technical issues and secure central funds," Chandrababu said. He assured that the government is slowly but steadily steering the State back on track. He also mentioned that objectionable comments on social media are being strictly monitored and controlled.

Chandrababu expressed regret over the damage caused during the YSRCP regime, calling it a period marked by crime and lawlessness. He claimed that the NDA government has

been working diligently over the past six months to rectify these issues and restore order.

"Our government is working with a clear set of priorities to rebuild confidence among the people. The NDA received a historic mandate in 2024, and we are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities," he said. He announced that the Polavaram Project Technical Committee had submitted its feasibility report and assured that the project would be completed on time with central assistance.

Mid-day meal for inter students from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Human Resources and IT, Nara Lokesh, is set to inaugurate the Mid-Day Meal Scheme for Intermediate students at the Government Junior College in Payakapuram, Vijayawada, on January 4. This initiative marks a significant step as the state government has already been implementing the Mid-Day Meal Scheme for Primary, Upper Primary, and High School students. Since January 1 this year, the scheme has been extended to Intermediate students, supported by

the necessary government orders.

Ahead of the launch, Director of Intermediate Education Kritika Shukla, Samagra Shiksha State Project Director B Srinivasa Rao, and NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha inspected the arrangements at the Government Junior College in Payakapuram. The event was initially planned for Machilipatnam on January 3 but has now been rescheduled for Vijayawada on January 4.

During the inspection, Kritika Shukla outlined plans to set up a main dais on the college premises.

RECORD 17 PARA-ATHLETES TO RECEIVE ARJUNA

Manu, Gukesh among 4 Khel Ratnas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Double Olympic-medallist Manu Bhaker and chess world champion D Gukesh were among four winners of the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award announced by the Sports Ministry, which also named an unprecedented 17 para-athletes in the list of 32 Arjuna awardees to honour their resounding success at the Paris Paralympics.

The other two Khel Ratna winners unveiled by the ministry on Thursday for the year 2024 were men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and para-athlete Praveen Kumar.

The awards will be conferred on the athletes by President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 17. The 22-year-old Bhaker became



independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events in August.



The announcement comes a few days after reports that Bhaker had been ignored for the Khel Ratna as the award selection committee did not recommend her due to the absence of an application from her.

The shooter later admitted that there may have been a lapse on her part

while filing the nomination. Once the procedural issues were sorted, there was never any doubt that Bhaker would be among the awardees.

In the same Paris Games, Hamranpreet led the Indian hockey team to its second consecutive bronze medal. The 18-year-old Gukesh, on the other hand, became the youngest-ever World champion while also helping the Indian team win a historic gold in the Chess Olympiad last year.

The fourth recipient, para-high-jumper Praveen, was crowned the T64 champion in the Paris Paralympics. The T64 classification is for athletes who have one or both legs missing below the knee and rely on a prosthetic leg for running. The Khel ratna awardees receive a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh along with a citation and a

medallion. The Arjuna awardees are given Rs 15 lakh as cash reward, a statuette of Arjuna and a citation.

ARJUNA FOR PARIS OLYMPICS MEDALLISTS

The athletes selected for this year's Arjuna award include Paris Olympics bronze medal-winning lot of wrestler Aman Sehrawat, shooters Swapnil Kusale and Sarabjot Singh and the men's hockey team players Jarnanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Sanjay and Abhishek.

The para-athletes outnumber the able-bodied ones in the list of Arjuna winners this time due to the magnificent Paris showing in which they returned with 29 medals, including seven gold and nine silver.

Continued on Page 2



Books have given me courage: Dy CM

Inaugurates 35th Vijayawada Book Festival

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan has said that books have given him the courage to stand firm in life. He made these remarks while inaugurating the 35th Vijayawada Book Festival, organized by the Vijayawada Book Festival Society (VBF), at the Indira Gandhi Sports Stadium on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Pawan Kalyan shared his experiences with

books and education. He highlighted that his reading habit was influenced by his parents. "I would not hesitate to give away any book, even if it cost a crore. But I would never part with the books I own. Without books, I feel I would not have amounted to anything in life. Having books made me feel like I didn't need teachers. Even though I stopped my formal education after Intermediate, my love for reading never stopped.

Continued on Page 2

'Power deals with SECI can't be scrapped without solid proof'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said the state government cannot scrap power purchase agreements with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) without obtaining solid proof of bribery allegations. The Chief Minister's comments assume significance in the backdrop of Adani being indicted by the US Department of Justice over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribes to Indian officials in exchange for favourable solar power contracts, including from Andhra Pradesh. This allegation has been refuted by the Indian conglomerate as well as the opposition YSRCP.



The previous YSRCP regime in Andhra Pradesh is embroiled in this alleged scam with claims that government officials received bribes from the Adani Group, which reportedly amounted to Rs 1,750 crore. "We are getting proper documentation and once we get that then we will take action (if there was any corruption involved). If we cancel the MoUs right away then it may lead to legal issues and unnecessary complications," Naidu said during an informal interaction with reporters on Wednesday at TDP headquarters in Mangalagiri.

The CM's comments came after Andhra Pradesh Power Distribution Companies' decision earlier last month to procure over 4,000 million units of power from SECI, out of the total agreed 17,000 MU from the next fiscal. Refuting the bribery allegations, the YSR Congress Party has said the agreement was between the state government, Discoms and SECI which is a central government organisation and there is no third-party involvement. Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila recently alleged that the previous YSRCP regime had forged a 25-year deal with the Adani conglomerate to buy power at Rs 2.49 per unit while the Gujarat-based corporate house was supplying it only at Rs 1.99 per unit in Gujarat, burdening Andhra Pradesh people by Rs 1 lakh crore.

power of the Adani Group was an 'advantage' to Andhra Pradesh and action against bribery allegations will be only after thoroughly establishing the evidence. Refuting the bribery allegations, the YSR Congress Party has said the agreement was between the state government, Discoms and SECI which is a central government organisation and there is no third-party involvement. Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila recently alleged that the previous YSRCP regime had forged a 25-year deal with the Adani conglomerate to buy power at Rs 2.49 per unit while the Gujarat-based corporate house was supplying it only at Rs 1.99 per unit in Gujarat, burdening Andhra Pradesh people by Rs 1 lakh crore.

CM clears first file on New Year's Day

Rs 24 cr released from CMRF to aid 1,600 beneficiaries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the first day of the New Year, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu marked the occasion by clearing a significant file under the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF), aimed at supporting the underprivileged. The Chief Minister approved the release of Rs 24 crore, which will directly benefit 1,600 individuals in need. Since the TDP-led NDA government assumed office, a little over Rs 100 crore had been disbursed under the CMRF until December 31, benefiting 7,523 people. With the latest clearance, the total funds released under the CMRF have now reached Rs 124.16 crore, extending assistance to 9,123 beneficiaries across the state.

Govt focus on crime control, says CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu emphasized that the state government's top priority is controlling crime, with a particular focus on restoring law and order, which he claimed had been severely impacted over the past five years. He made these remarks while addressing probationary ASPs and DSPs who had completed their training and were preparing to take up their duties. During a meeting held at the Secretariat on Thursday, CM Naidu issued several directives. He pointed out that criminals, who once infiltrated political parties, now disguise themselves in political attire. He also mentioned how, until recently, opponents and their families were being defamed on social media with derogatory remarks, stressing the need for strict action against such individuals. The CM criticized some police officers from the previous government for tarnishing the reputation of the police force through inappropriate actions. He highlighted the misuse of the police for political vendettas during the previous administration and noted that the state had become a hub for ganja and drug distribution, contributing to a rise in crime rates. He instructed the police to intensify efforts to combat the smuggling and transportation of these illegal substances, as well as illegal activities like sand mining and belt shops. Chandrababu also pointed to the emerging threat of cyber-crime and urged the police to stay ahead by enhancing their strategies. He emphasized that maintaining law and order would attract investments and create jobs in the state. He reminded the officers to adopt a friendly policing approach and noted that the previous administration had failed to fully utilize technologies such as body cameras and CCTV systems, which help reduce crime by identifying offenders.

He instructed the police to intensify efforts to combat the smuggling and transportation of these illegal substances, as well as illegal activities like sand mining and belt shops. Chandrababu also pointed to the emerging threat of cyber-crime and urged the police to stay ahead by enhancing their strategies. He emphasized that maintaining law and order would attract investments and create jobs in the state. He reminded the officers to adopt a friendly policing approach and noted that the previous administration had failed to fully utilize technologies such as body cameras and CCTV systems, which help reduce crime by identifying offenders.

CM Naidu receives Srivari Prasadam on New Year's Day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N. Chandrababu Naidu, received the blessings of Sri Venkateswara Swamy along with Prasadam on the occasion of New Year's Day, Wednesday. TTD Executive Officer J. Syamala Rao, accompanied by a team of Vedic pundits from the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), formally met the Chief Minister at his residence in Undavalli. They extended New Year greetings to the State's leader. During the visit, the Vedic pundits performed Vedaseervachanam (Vedic blessings) for the Chief Minister. They also presented him with Sesa Vastram, 2025 calendar and diary of Sri Venkateswara Swamy.



Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, accompanied by a team of Vedic pundits from the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), formally met the Chief Minister at his residence in Undavalli. They extended New Year greetings to the State's leader. During the visit, the Vedic pundits performed Vedaseervachanam (Vedic blessings) for the Chief Minister. They also presented him with Sesa Vastram, 2025 calendar and diary of Sri Venkateswara Swamy.

Experts praise Nagarjunakonda sculptures

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A team of experts specialising in Buddhist digital experiences recently visited the Nagarjunakonda Island Museum and its surrounding structures as part of their study on the Buddhavanam project at Nagarjunasagar. The group, led by Professor Sarah Kenderdine from New Zealand, was briefed on the historical and cultural significance of the Buddhist sculptures and inscriptions displayed at the museum. They also examined the reconstructed brick structures of stupas, chaityas, and viharas, which date back to the Ikshvaku period (3rd century CE). Dr E. Sivangireddy, a noted Buddhist scholar and CEO of Pleach India Foundation, provided the team with detailed insights into the museum's collection. The artifacts, salvaged from Sriparvata-Vijayapuri, the ancient capital city of the Telugu people, were unearthed during archaeological excavations conducted between 1954 and 1960. The team also learned about the discovery of sacred relics of Lord Buddha from the Maha Stupa during these excavations.



A team of experts specialising in Buddhist digital experiences recently visited the Nagarjunakonda Island Museum and its surrounding structures as part of their study on the Buddhavanam project at Nagarjunasagar. The group, led by Professor Sarah Kenderdine from New Zealand, was briefed on the historical and cultural significance of the Buddhist sculptures and inscriptions displayed at the museum. They also examined the reconstructed brick structures of stupas, chaityas, and viharas, which date back to the Ikshvaku period (3rd century CE). Dr E. Sivangireddy, a noted Buddhist scholar and CEO of Pleach India Foundation, provided the team with detailed insights into the museum's collection. The artifacts, salvaged from Sriparvata-Vijayapuri, the ancient capital city of the Telugu people, were unearthed during archaeological excavations conducted between 1954 and 1960. The team also learned about the discovery of sacred relics of Lord Buddha from the Maha Stupa during these excavations.

Vizag port signs Rs 300 cr deal for flyover

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Port Authority (VPA) signed a Rs 300 crore agreement with Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL) on Thursday to construct a flyover aimed at reducing congestion and enabling seamless cargo movement via road and rail traffic towards the port. Designed to improve traffic management and cargo evacuation, the project will cover the areas surrounding the port and critical parts of the city leading to it. "The agreement pertains to the construction of a flyover bridge connecting Seahorse Junction to the dock area at Vizag Port. The estimated cost of the project is approximately Rs 300 crore.

Rs 2,723 cr for Amaravati...

Continued from Page 1

In other decisions, the Cabinet approved solar and wind battery storage projects in Nandyal, YSR Districts, Kakinada, and Hosur (Pattikonda Mandal in Kurnool), with an investment of Rs 2,000 crore expected to generate 1,380 jobs. These projects will proceed without land allocation from the State Government. Additionally, 40 acres were approved for the India Reserve (IR) Battalion in Yadamarri Mandal, Chittoor, and 6.3 acres in Guntur District for the construction of an ESI Hospital and staff quarters. The Cabinet also okayed the upgrade of the ESI Hospital in Tirupati from 50 to 100 beds, with an estimated cost of Rs 7.44 crore, along with the hiring of 191 medical and paramedical staff. The Cabinet decided to release the State's share of the Rythu Bharosa scheme upon the Centre's release of funds. Furthermore, it was announced that fishermen will receive an additional Rs 10,000, taking their total payment to Rs 20,000 in April. Teacher posts under the Mega DSC will be filled by the upcoming academic year. In preparation for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Visakhapatnam on January 8, a political committee will be formed to ensure the event's success and make necessary arrangements.

Rs 10L crore...

Continued from Page 1

AP Genco plans to set up its own 1350 MW PSP in the Upper Seeler region as part of this initiative. Furthermore, the Minister shared plans for the construction of five joint-venture pumped storage projects (PSPs) with a total capacity of 5000 MW to meet peak load demands. An MoU has been signed with the central public sector company NHPC for the project, marking a significant milestone for the state's power sector.

Manu, Gukesh among 4 Khel...

Continued from Page 1

The official list also includes sprinter Jyothi Yarraji, javelin thrower Annu Rani, women's hockey team captain Salima Tete, world champion boxers Nitu Ghangas and Saeety, veteran swimmer Sajjan Prakash, Olympiad gold-winning chess player Vantika Agrawal and squash star Abhay Singh. Among the para athletes, Paris Paralympics gold-medallist Dharambir (club throw), Navdeep Singh (javelin throw) and Nitesh Kumar (para badminton) are the prominent names in the record number of Arjuna winners. Paris Olympics bronze-winning para-archer Rakesh Kumar, para-shooters Mona Agarwal and Rubina Francis also feature in the list among others. The ministry also cleared three coaches for Dronacharya award in the regular category, including Olympic bronze-medallist Swapnil Kusale's coach Deepali Deshpande. The Dronacharya award in the lifetime category will be conferred on former India football manager Armando Colaco and badminton coach S Muralidharan. The award is given to coaches to honour their outstanding work and for enabling athletes to achieve excellence in their chosen sport in top international competitions. **Murlikant Petkar gets Lifetime Arjuna** India's first Paralympic gold-medallist Murlikant Petkar, who won the top honours in the 50m freestyle swimming event of the 1972 Heidelberg Paralympics, was named for the Arjuna Awards (Lifetime). An Army man, Petkar's inspiring tale of resurrecting himself as a para-athlete after being disabled due to bullet wounds sustained during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, was recently turned into a biopic, 'Chandu Champion', starring Kartik Aaryan.

CM hailed for holding WUA elections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao, president of the Andhra Pradesh Water Users Associations' Federation and vice chairman of the Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal Project Committee, expressed his gratitude to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for conducting the elections for Water Users Associations. He urged the Chief Minister to allow the Project Committee Chairman to be invited to ZP and DRC meetings, and for the Mandal Parishad meetings to include Distributary Committee Chairmen and WUA Presidents for Gram Panchayat meetings, as was done previously. In celebration of the New Year, Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal Project Committee Chairman Gopala Krishna Rao, along with Distributary Committee Chairmen Komreddy Rajesh, Pamarthi Srinivasa Rao, Devineni Satyanarayana, and Kosaraju Rambabu, met with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu at the TDP Central Office in Mangalagiri to extend their greetings. They also submitted a detailed report on the Water Users Associations to the Chief Minister. Speaking to the media at the TDP Central Office in Mangalagiri, Gopala Krishna Rao expressed confidence that the irrigation department would achieve positive results with active farmer participation. He highlighted that the TDP government had reinstated the Water Users Associations for the second time in the state. He also noted that during the previous tenure of the TDP, an additional 90 TMC of groundwater had been stored. Under the leadership of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Water Resources Minister Dr. Nimmala Ramanaidu, the three-tier Water Users Associations elections were conducted peacefully, he added.



Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal Project Chairman Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao, along with DC Presidents Satyanarayana, Srinivasa Rao, and others, addressing the media at the TDP Central Office after they met with CM Chandrababu Naidu.

that the TDP government had reinstated the Water Users Associations for the second time in the state. He also noted that during the previous tenure of the TDP, an additional 90 TMC of groundwater had been stored. Under the leadership of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Water Resources Minister Dr. Nimmala Ramanaidu, the three-tier Water Users Associations elections were conducted peacefully, he added.

Preparations in full swing for Modi's visit to Anakapalli

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Preparations are underway for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Anakapalli on January 8, where he will lay the foundation stones for various projects, including a bulk drug park at Nakkapalli and NTPC's green energy project at Atchutapuram. District Collector Vijaya Krishnan has instructed officials to complete all necessary preparations, outlining the key aspects of the visit during a meeting with district authorities on Thursday. "We are working diligently to ensure that the Prime Minister's visit is conducted seamlessly, marking a significant milestone in the region's development," Krishnan said. To ensure a smooth execution of the event, specific responsibilities have been assigned to relevant officials. Sheikh Aisha, Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) of Atchutapuram, and V.V. Ramana, RDO of Narasipatnam, will oversee the virtual arrangements for the events at Atchutapuram and Nakkapalli, respectively. Meanwhile, the District Transport Officer, Civil Supply Officer, and District Panchayat Officer will manage the logistics for buses and food arrangements. A control room will be set up at the Collector's office to ensure smooth coordination and monitoring of the entire program.

Books have given me...

Continued from Page 1

The reason I stopped at Intermediate was not because I couldn't study or perform well; I was an excellent student. The education I sought could not be found in textbooks or classrooms. I learned at home, following the example of Rabinranath Tagore, who learned without attending school," said Pawan Kalyan. During the event, Pawan Kalyan also unveiled a book on the life of former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, authored by Krishna Rao. The Vijayawada Book Festival will be open to book lovers until January 12, from 2 PM to 9 PM. VBF Secretary Manohar Naidu announced that 270 stalls had been set up this year. The festival grounds will feature various named sections, including the Pidikiti Ramakoteswara Rao Pavilion, the Ramoji Literary Stage by the Ramoji Group, and the Pratibha Stage, named after Ratan Tata, for student activities.

YSRCP MLC slams Naidu-led govt for unfulfilled promises

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSRCP Women's Wing State president and MLC Varudu Kalyani launched a scathing attack on the Chandrababu Naidu-led government for failing to deliver on electoral promises, particularly those meant for women. Speaking to the media on Thursday, Varudu Kalyani said that "we demand that the government fulfill its promises, especially those related to welfare schemes and women's safety," Kalyani said, speaking to the media on Thursday. "It is unacceptable that the government has failed to implement schemes like the free bus service, Maha Shakti Scheme, and Thalli Ki Vandanam Scheme, which were promised to benefit women and students." Kalyani criticized the government for not providing unemployment benefits, despite earlier promises. "The government pledged jobs or a monthly stipend for unemployed youth, but none of these schemes have been implemented," she said. In contrast, Kalyani highlighted the achievements of the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government, which created 1.25 lakh jobs in village secretariats and provided Rs. 5,000 monthly allowances to 2.5 lakh volunteers. Kalyani expressed concern over the increasing alcohol and ganja consumption in the state, which she linked to a rise in domestic violence and vulnerability of women. "The government's failure to address this issue is alarming, and we demand immediate action," she said. The YSRCP Women's Wing State President also criticized the government for removing the DISHA app and the lack of substantial policies for women's protection. "The rising crime rates, including horrific incidents like the rape of two women in Hindupur, are evidence that the government is not prioritizing women's safety," she said. Kalyani concluded her statement by reaffirming the YSRCP's commitment to accountability and the welfare of the people. "We will continue to advocate for the needs of the state's citizens, especially women, in the face of such neglect," she said.



despite earlier promises. "The government pledged jobs or a monthly stipend for unemployed youth, but none of these schemes have been implemented," she said. In contrast, Kalyani highlighted the achievements of the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government, which created 1.25 lakh jobs in village secretariats and provided Rs. 5,000 monthly allowances to 2.5 lakh volunteers. Kalyani expressed concern over the increasing alcohol and ganja consumption in the state, which she linked to a rise in domestic violence and vulnerability of women. "The government's failure to address this issue is alarming, and we demand immediate action," she said. The YSRCP Women's Wing State President also criticized the government for removing the DISHA app and the lack of substantial policies for women's protection. "The rising crime rates, including horrific incidents like the rape of two women in Hindupur, are evidence that the government is not prioritizing women's safety," she said. Kalyani concluded her statement by reaffirming the YSRCP's commitment to accountability and the welfare of the people. "We will continue to advocate for the needs of the state's citizens, especially women, in the face of such neglect," she said.

'CM's illegal residence as official one sets dangerous precedent'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP spokesperson Putha Siva Sankar Reddy has strongly criticised the State government's decision to declare Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's residence, built on the Krishna River embankment in violation of regulations, as his official residence. Speaking at the YSRCP headquarters, Reddy called such a move a dangerous precedent that undermines the rule of law. Reddy highlighted the inconsistency in the TDP's stance, recalling that in 2014, Naidu and his party labeled these constructions as illegal and vowed their demolition. "In 2015, Naidu told the media of tearing down such structures. Yet today, he resides in one of them, now declared his official residence," Reddy said. The spokesperson outlined multiple violations, including National Green Tribunal (NGT) norms, which prohibit construction within 100 meters of riverbanks. "Naidu's residence is just 19.3 meters from the Krishna River. It defies environmental guidelines, and Lokayukta directives, and contributes to river pollution. Yet no action has been taken," he pointed out. He also cited conflicting ownership claims, with Lingamaneni Ramesh stating the property was handed over to the government, while Naidu claims to live there on rent. "These contradictory statements expose the duplicity surrounding the issue," Reddy said. Reddy criticized Panchayati Raj, Environment Minister Pawan Kalyan for his inaction, contrasting it with Telangana CM Revanth Reddy's efforts to demolish illegal constructions. "Why hasn't Deputy Chief Minister Kalyan addressed the illegal constructions on the Krishna riverbank, starting with the Chief Minister's residence?" he questioned. Demanding accountability, Reddy urged immediate corrective measures and transparency from the government. "The demolition of illegal constructions should begin with Naidu's residence. The people of this state deserve better," he said.

with Telangana CM Revanth Reddy's efforts to demolish illegal constructions. "Why hasn't Deputy Chief Minister Kalyan addressed the illegal constructions on the Krishna riverbank, starting with the Chief Minister's residence?" he questioned. Demanding accountability, Reddy urged immediate corrective measures and transparency from the government. "The demolition of illegal constructions should begin with Naidu's residence. The people of this state deserve better," he said.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Chaturthi: Jan 03 01:08 AM to Jan 03 11:39 PM
Panchami: Jan 03 11:39 PM to Jan 04 10:01 PM
Nakshatram: Dhanishta: Jan 02 11:10 PM to Jan 03 10:21 PM
Shatabhisha: Jan 03 10:21 PM to Jan 04 09:23 PM
Rahukalam: 10:58 AM to 12:20 PM
Vamagandam: 3:05 PM to 4:28 PM
Yamajalam: 05:16 AM to 06:48 AM
Gulika: 8:13 AM to 9:35 AM
Amritakalam: 12:19 PM to 01:51 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:58 AM to 12:42 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 31°C
Humidity: 64%
Sunrise: 6:37 AM
Sunset: 5:47 PM
Updated: January 2, 2025 5:00 PM

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.



Cockfight arenas getting ready in Krishna, NTR district, Eluru

Organisers allegedly receive support from local TDP leaders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The villages of the combined Krishna district are gearing up to organise cockfights for the traditional Sankranti festival, whether the State government and the Police Department give permission or not. Cockfights are deeply rooted in the local customs of Krishna, West Godavari, and East Godavari districts, and during the three-day Sankranti festival, they draw punters and spectators from far and wide.

Major arenas, or 'rings' are reportedly being prepared in villages such as Ampapuram (Bapulapadu mandal), Kankipadu, Edupugallu, and Punadipadu (Kankipadu mandal) besides Tenneru, Manthana, Velpuru and other villages in Krishna district. Also, Gannavaram, Surampalli, Mustabad, China Avutapalli and other villages of Gannavaram mandal are likely to host the bloodsport.

Besides, the ruling TDP and its alliance partner Jana Sena Party leaders are keen to conduct cockfights for the upcoming Sankranti festival. Apart from Ampapuram, rings are getting ready at Nuzvid, Agiripalli, Shobhanapuram, Edara, AdaviNekkalam, Nekkalam-Gollugudem, Musunuru, Chatrai, Vissannapet, Tiruvuru, Putrela, Gampalagudem, A Konduru,



Mylavaram, and G Konduru.

Organisers are allegedly receiving backing from local leaders, including some people's representatives and members of the ruling TDP party, to ensure that the events proceed smoothly. Cockfight lovers, not just from other States, but foreign countries, visit Krishna and Godavari districts during this period to participate in the bloodsport.

During the three days of the Sankranti festival, hundreds of crores of rupees are exchanged among punters, particularly in the Ampapuram, Kankipadu, and Punadipadu rings. So far, the police have not taken any steps to prevent cockfights as they had done earlier in NTR and Krishna districts.

Previously, they had ravaged cock-fighting rings set up in mango gardens.

Elaborate arrangements for spectators

Meanwhile, the organisers are making arrangements to conduct cockfights at Ampapuram, Edupugallu, Kankipadu, Punadipadu, Kotturu Tadepalli, Vissannapet, Nuzvid, Agiripalli, Kondapalli, Tiruvuru, and other areas in the combined Krishna district. The second cadres of the ruling TDP and JSP leaders have been approaching their respective MLAs, MPs and ministers including the party constituency in charge to provide police permission for conduct-

ing cockfights. Also, they are urging leaders that the police should not create any trouble.

Entry tickets are available at Rs.5,000 and Rs.10,000. Ampapuram village in Krishna district, which is situated adjacent to the national highway, was well known for conducting cockfights. The organisers have released invitation cards, and videos on social media to invite punters to participate in the cockfights.

Every year, the police give warnings to cockfight organisers and those who tie knives to cocks. According to the information available from the Police and the Revenue departments, no action has been started for stopping cockfights. In this situation, TDP and JSP leaders are getting ready to conduct the bloodsport at various places.

This year, TDP leaders from Vijayawada are also showing interest in organising cockfights at the real estate ventures in and around Vijayawada city. They are in search of suitable spots for parking, seating and setting up food courts. One of the followers of an MLA from Vijayawada is more interested in conducting cockfights near Nunna. Meanwhile, the party leaders in Nunna village are also searching for mango gardens to conduct cockfights.

Coordinated efforts urged for completion of rly-related projects

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr. G. Lakshmisha, emphasizing the urgency of public welfare projects in the district, called for greater coordination among various departmental officials.

During a meeting held at the Collectorate on Thursday, Dr. Lakshmisha reviewed ongoing and upcoming projects with officials from the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, Revenue Department, South Central Railway, NHAI, Water Resources, Drainage, Panchayat Raj Engineering, and Rural Water Supply. The meeting aimed to evaluate approved works, their progress, and identify actions required to ensure smooth execution of future projects.

Dr. Lakshmisha urged officials to expedite the preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) and promptly complete joint inspection processes. He stressed the importance of inter-departmental coordination to ensure timely completion of railway-related projects. The



Collector also provided guidance on fund allocation under the Amrit Bharat Scheme and discussed the Sattenapalli-Kompalli railway line, among other initiatives.

Discussions also covered significant projects such as the Gunadala Railway Over Bridge, Singh Nagar Railway Over Bridge, the double-line railway under-bridge near Vambay Colony, and the double-line railway over-bridge near Madhura Nagar Pappula Mill. Detailed deliberations were held on maintaining internal roads in Thiruvuru town and addressing technical issues. The Collector directed officials to prioritize drinking water supply and maintenance

of various schemes for the towns of Jaggayyapeta and Nandigama.

Rural Water Supply officials were instructed to prepare proposals and DPRs for effective project execution. Irrigation officials were also directed to replace head regulating gates at Velagaluru and provide motors for the G. Konduru Tarakarama lifting scheme.

The meeting was attended by DRO M. Lakshmi Narasimha, Vijayawada RDO K. Chaitanya, CPO Y. Srilatha, and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Additional Commissioner D. Chandrasekar, along with officials from Railways, R&B, National Highways, and other departments.



Pawan launches mobile cancer screening clinic

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan inaugurated a mobile cancer screening van on Thursday at his camp office in Mangalagiri. The initiative aims to provide free cancer screening services to the public in Krishna district. The van has been set up through the initiative of Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashouri, with CSR funds of Rs 2 crore from Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

The mobile van will serve people across seven constituencies in Krishna district, offering cancer screening tests as a preventive measure, particularly for women. Equipped with seven types of medical instruments, including ultrasound, mammogram, blood tests, X-rays, chemical analysis, and colonoscopy, the van will visit villages in each mandal three days a week, providing these tests free of

charge. Medical experts say that early detection of cancer through these screenings can help prevent up to 40,000 deaths annually. DCM Pawan Kalyan expressed his appreciation for BEL and MP Vallabhaneni Balashouri for their commitment to social responsibility in setting up the van. He emphasized that the van would play a crucial role in providing accessible screening tests to the public.

The event was attended by State Minister Kollu Ravindra, Government Whip Pidugu Hariprasad, MLAs Mandali Buddhadasa, Varla Kumar Raja, Kagitha Krishna Prasad, Venigandla Ramu, Bode Prasad, and Yarlagadda Venkatarao, Krishna District Collector D K Balaji, Chairman of the State Medical Development Services Corporation Ch Srinivasarao, district medical officials, and Jana Sena leaders from Krishna district.

Decades-old land disputes resolved at 'Revenue Sadassulu'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 'Revenue Sadassulu' programme has successfully resolved over 13,000 land-related issues across the state, benefiting around six lakh people. A total of 1.8 lakh petitions were submitted, with nearly 45% of the issues being resolved within 45 days. Many of these petitions were related to errors in land records and boundary disputes.

Revenue, Registration, and Stamps Minister, Anagani Satya Prasad, criticized the previous government's handling of land disputes, pointing out that the lack of efforts in resolving such issues had resulted in increased problems like land encroachments and legal conflicts. He emphasized that the Revenue Sadassulu was introduced to restore citizens' faith in their land rights and eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic delays.

In a notable development, two farmers from Talupul village in Annamayya district, who had been without access to a road leading to their farmland for over 20 years, had their issue resolved at the Revenue Sadassulu. Farmers Srihari and Sudheer had been struggling due to the road being blocked by illegal mango tree plantations. Revenue officials identified the road's boundary from the village's revenue map and cleared the path, providing much-needed relief to the farmers. In another case, Sunitha from Chityala village in East Godavari district had been unable to obtain a position certificate for her land despite multiple visits to the MRO office. At the revenue conference, officials conducted a survey and promptly issued the certificate, enabling her to secure a bank loan.

Form special teams to curb cockfights: Krishna DC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji held a coordination meeting with officials from the Police, Animal Husbandry, Revenue, Panchayat Raj, and Municipal Departments on Thursday and instructed them to form special teams at the Village, Mandal, Division, and District levels to prevent the conduct of cockfights ahead of the Sankranti festival.

Balaji urged the officials to act swiftly upon receiving information about cockfights being organised in the district during the festival and take immediate action. He issued these directions to the concerned authorities during a meeting at the collectorate conference hall in Machilipatnam.

In the meeting, the Collector ordered the imposition of Section



Krishna District Collector DK Balaji chairs a meeting with officials from various departments at the conference hall in Machilipatnam on Thursday.

144 in areas where cockfights had been previously conducted. He further instructed that criminal action be taken under Section 10 of the AP Gaming Act, 1974, against those involved in such activities. Additionally, he directed the police and revenue officials to file bind-

over cases against individuals who participated in cockfights or were found to have tied knives to the birds in the previous year.

Revenue Divisional Officers K Swathi (Machilipatnam), G Bala Subrahmanyam (Gudivada), BS Helda Sharon (Vuyyuru), Animal

Husbandry Officer Dr. Chinna Narasimhulu, Krishna ZP CEO Kannama Naidu, Machilipatnam Municipal Corporation Commissioner Bapi Raju, Marketing AD Satyanand, and several police officials were present at the meeting.

'Government not paying attention to concerns of employees'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Secretariat Employees Association president Venkatarani Reddy expressed disappointment over the government's lack of attention to employees' concerns, even after seven months of the coalition administration. The association pointed out that no issues related to employees have been addressed, including pending DA, IR, GPF dues, and the appointment of a new PRC commissioner.

The employees had hoped that the government would announce the IR as a New Year's gift or at least by Sankranti, but were disheartened when no such announcement was made. They also condemned the mistreatment of senior officers,

some of whom have not received postings or promotions despite fulfilling all qualifications.

The association further highlighted that, despite expectations for housing plots for employees in the Amaravati capital development project, the government has not responded. They also criticized the government for failing to engage with employees' unions and resolve pending issues, unlike the previous administration, which held regular meetings and provided updates on pending payments. The association has urged the government to immediately address the issues of postings, promotions, pending payments, and the appointment of the PRC commissioner, as well as allocate housing plots for Secretariat employees.



AP Governor offered Srivari blessings

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer was offered Vedaseervachanam by the Vedic pundits of TTD at Raj Bhavan on Wednesday, on the occasion of New Year.

TTD Executive Officer J Shyamala Rao extended New Year greetings to the Governor by presenting Sesha Vastram, Theertha Prasadam, TTD calendar and diary.

Bankers told to conduct village-wise surveys

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji has directed bankers to conduct village-wise surveys to ensure the full sanctioning of crop loans for tenant farmers. He pointed out that while the Revenue Department has issued over 77,000 Crop Cultivated Right Cards (CCRC) to tenant farmers, the crop loans sanctioned by banks remain significantly low. To address this, he has asked bankers to carry out a survey to understand why tenant farmers are not applying for crop loans.

As part of the annual credit plan implementation, Collector Balaji held a meeting with officials from agriculture and allied departments at the collectorate in Machilipatnam on Thursday. During the meeting, he emphasized that officials must identify the reasons behind tenant farmers not receiving crop loans and



thoroughly analyze the situation. He also instructed bankers to implement the crop insurance scheme for all farmers who have received crop loans from banks. Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashouri urged bankers to sanction loans to tenant farmers, including small and mar-

ginal farmers, fishermen, and cattle farmers. He also called for loans to be sanctioned to sheep and goat breeders. He further emphasized that by June and July of this year, 25% of crop loans should be sanctioned to tenant farmers.

The meeting was attended by

LDM C Ravindra Reddy, RBI LDO Naveen Kumar, NABARD District Development Manager Milind Chosalkar, Indian Bank Zonal Manager M Rajesh, Union Bank of India Deputy Regional Manager Tataji, ZP CEO Kannama Naidu, and other officials.

Parcel containing mobile phones found at Central Jail

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A routine inspection at Visakhapatnam Central Jail revealed a significant security breach as a parcel containing mobile phones, a battery, a power bank, and a charging cable was discovered near the Penna Barracks. The parcel was buried under flower pots and secured with stones, raising alarm over potential lapses in security protocols within the facility. "We are taking this matter very serious-

ly, and a detailed investigation is underway to ensure that such incidents do not recur," said Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi, who personally oversaw the inquiry. The parcel's contents raised concerns, particularly since mobile phones are often used for illegal activities within jails. "Initially, we suspected the parcel contained illegal substances like marijuana, but after a thorough inspection, it became clear that it was filled with electronic items," said a senior jail official.



Further investigation revealed that the mobile phones were without SIM cards, suggesting they were either meant for future use or part of a larger smuggling operation. "The lack of SIM cards is a key clue in our investigation," said an officer. "It implies that these devices could have been intended for use in illegal activities." The parcel was found near the barracks housing Kola Hemant Kumar, a notorious rowdy-sheeter and prime suspect in the kidnapping case involving the family of former MP MVV Satyanarayana. Hemant

Kumar, who is currently serving a murder sentence, has been under surveillance due to his extensive criminal record. "Given the location of the parcel, we are closely monitoring all possible connections to Hemant Kumar," said an investigator. "We need to re-evaluate and strengthen our security measures," said Mahendrababu, Jail superintendent. "This discovery highlights a significant gap that must be addressed immediately to maintain the integrity of the institution and ensure the safety of everyone involved."



Minister Durgesh assures support for handlooms sector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In line with the ongoing efforts to boost tourism development, Tourism Minister Kandukuru Durgesh reviewed the state's initiatives to establish tourism circuits across the state. During a meeting with the Minister for BC Welfare, Handlooms, and Textiles, S. Savitha, Minister Savitha requested that the Tourism Department collaborate with the Handlooms and Textiles

Department to develop handloom clusters and promote handicrafts. The meeting took place at the State Secretariat on Thursday, where Minister Savitha met Minister Durgesh at the chamber on the first floor of the second block. After exchanging New Year greetings, Minister Savitha briefed Minister Durgesh about several proposals related to the Handlooms and Textiles Department. With the announcement of the

new Tourism Policy for 2024-29 by the State Government, Minister Savitha emphasized the development of tourism circuits in the state and urged the Tourism Minister to work together to bring back the glory of handlooms and handicrafts. She particularly highlighted the need to develop handloom clusters as part of the tourism circuits and promote local handicrafts to provide support to artisans. Minister Durgesh responded

positively to the request, stating that promoting handicrafts and handlooms is an essential endeavour. He assured that his department would work towards increasing the sales of Lepakshi, Apco, and other handloom products in the state. Minister Durgesh, along with Principal Secretary of Handlooms and Textiles, K. Sunita IAS, Commissioner of Handlooms and Textiles, Rekha Rani IAS, and other officials, attended the meeting.



Physical tests for cop aspirants begin

PNS ■ ELURU

The Physical Efficiency Tests (PET) for male police constable aspirants commenced on Thursday, at the police parade ground in Eluru, under the supervision of Eluru District Superintendent of Police, K. Prathap Siva Kishore IPS. A total of 600 hall tickets were issued by the Andhra Pradesh State Level Police Recruitment Board (APSLRB), with 346 candidates appearing for the tests. Out of these, 211 candidates qualified. The tests are being conducted transparently and impartially,

with the use of technology, CCTV surveillance, and drones. The District SP ensured the smooth conduct of the event, adhering to the rules and regulations of the recruitment board. The tests for female police constable aspirants will be held separately on January 3 and 4, 2025. Candidates must bring original certificates and submit them during the verification process. Pregnant women are exempt from tests and must submit relevant documents for exemption. All facilities have been provided to assist candidates in completing the events.

Youth urged to embrace critical thinking

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

E. Ravi Kiran, Additional Director General of the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes and Narcotics (NACIN), has emphasised the importance of questioning as a cornerstone for progress at the 'Inter-District Youth Conference' organised by Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) in Visakhapatnam. Addressing the

participants, Ravi Kiran encouraged them to adopt critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration - the "Four Cs" that can transform their lives. "The safety of our planet is in our hands, and it's essential we live in harmony with nature for sustainable development," Ravi Kiran stressed, highlighting the need for environmental conservation.

The conference brought together 27 youth from Kadapa district, fostering a vibrant cultural exchange. Gorli Maheshwara Rao, Deputy Director of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, noted the nationwide initiative of organising youth conferences to promote mutual learning. "These exchanges are crucial for cultural integration and understanding," Rao said.

2 red sanders smugglers held

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Two red sanders smugglers were arrested near Srivarimettu in Tirupati district, and three logs of red sandalwood were seized by the Task Force police. Acting on special instructions from Task Force In-charge and Tirupati District SP, L. Subbarayudu, and under the leadership of Task Force SP, P. Srinivas, the team led by DSPs G. Balireddy, V. Srinivasa Reddy, and Md. Sharif carried out a combing operation in the Nagapatla Beat area of the Bakrapet range in Chandragiri mandal on Wednesday. As they reached the western side of Srivarimettu, the team spotted three individuals carrying red sandalwood logs. Upon being warned and surrounded, one individual abandoned the logs and fled, while the other two were arrested. The seized logs were collected, and the arrested individuals were taken to the Tirupati Task Force Police Station. A case was registered at the Task Force Police Station, and SI Rafi is conducting the investigation. During interrogation, it was revealed that more smugglers were hiding in prohibited forest areas, prompting the Task Force personnel to intensify their search efforts.



VIMS first govt hospital in AP to get nod for liver transplantation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakha Institute of Medical Sciences (VIMS) has made history by becoming the first government hospital in Andhra Pradesh to receive approval for liver transplantation. This achievement showcases the hospital's dedication to providing top-quality healthcare and improving medical infrastructure in the state. "We are extremely proud to announce that VIMS is now authorised to perform liver transplants, marking a groundbreaking

moment for any government hospital in the state," said Dr. K. Rambabu, Director of VIMS. "This approval reflects our growth and our commitment to offering advanced healthcare services to the people of Andhra Pradesh." VIMS has also made remarkable progress in performing rare and complex surgeries, all at no cost to the patients. "In 2024, we successfully performed surgeries like bilateral cochlear implants, complex neuro-spinal procedures, and the removal of intricate abdominal tumours," Dr. Rambabu added.



VIMS is also expanding its facilities, with plans to build a secondary-level Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Medical Management Centre, approved by the Union Government. "The construction of a three-storey building for this new facility will begin soon," said Director Dr. Rambabu. "This will improve our hospital's ability to handle emergencies involving chemical and biological threats."

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru District Collector K. Vetrivelu has directed relevant authorities to prepare a detailed micro-plan and roadmap for the verification of 'Sadaram' certificates. This follows a video conference held on Thursday, where state-level officials, including K. Kannababu, Principal Secretary of the Health and Medical

Department, and Veerapandiyam, CEO of SERP, discussed the distribution and verification of Sadaram certificates across the state with all district collectors. The district collector, along with senior officials, attended the meeting at the local collectorate. The state officials emphasized the importance of thoroughly inspecting the certification documents issued for those receiving

pensions under the NTR Bharosa scheme. They noted that the government is taking strict measures to eliminate fraudulent beneficiaries using fake documents. To support the verification process, medical teams will be appointed, and a special app has been developed to log details. Village-level health assistants will also help by conducting door-to-door investigations.

Unqualified candidates will have their details immediately entered into the app, and their benefits will be revoked based on medical verification. The district has 1,496 individuals receiving the pension for long-term illness. The collector instructed officials to ensure the process is carried out efficiently, following the prescribed guidelines, and to submit daily reports.

Development of Kaikalur Assembly segment reviewed

PNS ■ ELURU

A review meeting was held on Thursday at the local Tahsildar office in the Kaikalur constituency of Eluru district to discuss key issues such as drinking water, roads, housing, progress in various departments, and the resolution of multiple problems in the constituency. The meeting was attended by Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Deputy Speaker K. Raghuramakrishnam Raju, District Collector K. Vetrivelu, and MLA Dr. Kamineni Srinivas, along with officials from various departments. During the meeting, Deputy Speaker K. Raghuramakrishnam Raju emphasized the need for action

to protect the Kolleru region from flood risks. He suggested that authorities take immediate steps to remove encroachments on the Upputeru area and widen the drainage system. Notices should be issued to encroachers, and the removal of encroachments should commence from February 1, he instructed. He explained that the Upputeru drain was designed to release 12,000 cusecs of water, but due to encroachments, its capacity has been reduced to only 6,000 cusecs. As a result, the Kolleru region faced severe flooding last year, causing significant hardships to people and farmers. Removing the encroachments from the Upputeru drain, he stated, is the permanent solution to this issue, and

authorities must take prompt action in this regard. District Collector K. Vetrivelu focused on the primary issues of road construction, drinking water, and housing for the poor in the Kaikalur constituency. She instructed officials to pay special attention to these areas and take appropriate steps to resolve them. She mentioned that 51 works related to R&B roads, covering a distance of 165 km with an investment of Rs 27 crore, have been completed, and the remaining works should be finished as per the scheduled timelines. Additionally, she directed officials to allocate Rs 50 lakh for improvements to the main road in Kalidindi.



CM committed to uplift of Rajaka community: Savitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Minister for BC, EWS, Handlooms, and Textiles, S. Savitha, stated that the primary goal of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is to uplift the Rajaka community. Savitha, the Chairperson of the Rajakula Corporation, met with the Minister at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Thursday. During the meeting, Savitha submitted a memorandum requesting the resolution of several issues impacting the community.



Minister Savitha emphasized that only under the TDP government has the Rajaka community received significant benefits. She highlighted that CM Chandrababu Naidu has introduced numerous schemes aimed at the community's welfare. Between 1994-2004 and 2014-2019, various initiatives were launched to promote the welfare of the Rajaka community, including the provision of essential tools and equipment through the Self-Employment Assistance Scheme. Societies were set up, and subsidised loans were

provided. Moreover, the construction of dhoobi ghats (traditional wash areas) and the provision of free electricity up to 150 units were among the many benefits offered during these periods. Minister Savitha also criticised the previous government led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, claiming that it neglected the Rajaka community, as it did with other castes. She accused the Jagan government of discontinuing the welfare schemes initiated by the TDP and replacing them with the "Jagananna Chedodu" scheme, which provides only Rs

10,000 per year, offering minimal support to the community. Minister Savitha affirmed that under CM Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, the Rajaka community is now set to experience better days. She instructed Savitha, the Corporation Chairperson, to effectively communicate the government's schemes to the people. In response, Savitha expressed her gratitude to CM Chandrababu Naidu for the opportunity to serve as Chairperson and thanked Minister Savitha for her continued support.

US scholar calls for preservation of Indian art forms

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Dr. Roxanne Kamayani Gupta, a distinguished American scholar, dancer, and writer, has emphasised the significance of preserving India's rich cultural heritage and classical art forms in the face of growing modernity. Speaking at a guest lecture on "Ancient Indian Arts in a Post-Modern World" organised by the GITAM Department of Fine and Performing Arts, Dr. Gupta stated, "Modern Indian art serves as an ambassador, taking India's philosophy and heritage to a global audience."

yogic concentration, while the aesthetics, symmetry, and dynamism of dance enhance the practice of yoga." Expressing concern over the growing materialistic tendencies among the younger generation, Dr. Gupta emphasised the need for them to engage deeply with Indian art and culture. "Understanding and preserving Indian art forms will help build a society enriched with values," she stated. Dr. Gupta believes that the younger generation can play a vital role in keeping the nation's cultural traditions alive. "The younger generation needs to engage with Indian art and culture, not just as a form of entertainment, but as a way of life," she emphasized.



The event, presided over by Dr. K. Malyanada, Associate Professor at the Department of Fine and Performing Arts, GITAM, saw enthusiastic participation from both students and faculty.

Revanth became 'Pan India' CM after arresting Pan India Film Star Allu Arjun: Kiran

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has become a 'Pan India' Chief Minister after arresting 'Pan India' film star Allu Arjun. "Some CMs became known to the people through corruption. However, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy gained attention by taking daring decisions," he said. During a chat with journalists on Thursday, Kiran said the BRS government had planned to deceive farmers by changing the Regional Ring Road (RRR) alignment. He said the Congress has no habit of hiding money after looting it from the people. He criticised BRS Working President KT

Rama Rao for saying that there is a scam involving Rs 12,000 crore in the RRR project as its value is just Rs 7,000 crore. He said that one can understand the fear haunting KTR through his meaningless statements and added that the Congress will not file false cases against anyone like the BRS. He said that KTR, Harish Rao and Kavitha are wilfully engaging in an evil campaign against the Congress government. "KTR is speaking differently every day about the Formula E-Car Race case. He will certainly go to jail if he has committed illegal acts. However, I hope that KTR comes out innocent in the E-Car Racing case. But unfortunately, it has been proved that KTR has committed an offence in this case," Kiran said.

ACROSS THE STATES



Odisha doubles pension of freedom fighters

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday announced that the pension of freedom fighters would be doubled. The CM also announced that those who were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the emergency period will now be eligible for a monthly pension of Rs 20,000. Majhi made the announcements while addressing a function held on the occasion of the All India Freedom Fighters Day. "Acknowledging freedom fighters role in India's struggle for independence, the state government will enhance their pension amount. The freedom fighters who were imprisoned will get an increased pension of Rs 20,000 from earlier Rs 10,000 a month," he said. Freedom fighters who actively participated in the Independence struggle, but were not imprisoned, would now get Rs 15,000 instead of Rs 9,000 a month. Majhi said those who were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the 21-month Emergency period will now be eligible for a monthly pension of Rs 20,000.



Assam elephant population increases to 5,828

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said elephant population in the state increased to 5,828 from 5,719 in the last seven years. The forest department's Elephant Population Estimation in 2024 revealed a growth in elephant population, with 36 per cent of them being adult females. "A safe haven for our Gentle Giants. Assam means animal safety & their thriving numbers tell the tale. The Elephant Estimation Exercise carried out by @assamforest has captured 5,828 jumbos in the State with 36% adult females, bringing joy to every animal and nature lover", the Chief Minister posted on X. The elephant population comprised 3,044 adults, both male and female, 1,042 sub-adults, 717 juvenile and 1,025 calves. The estimation was conducted in 1,536 survey blocks, across 43 forest divisions with a total manpower of 5,743 involved in the exercise. Drones were also used extensively during the survey.



K'taka decides to hike bus fare by 15%

The Karnataka cabinet on Thursday decided to increase the bus fares in the state-owned transport corporations by 15 per cent. The decision was taken in view of the substantial hike in operational costs such as increase in spending on fuel prices and staff, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil said. "The cabinet has decided to revise the bus fare of the four state transport corporations of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC), Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (KKRTC) and Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCC) by 15 per cent," Patil said while briefing reporters here. The Minister said the decision will come into effect from January 5. According to him, the BMTCC bus fares were increased on January 10, 2015 when the diesel prices were Rs 60.90 per litre. "The daily diesel consumption was Rs 9.16 crore 10 years ago by the four corporations, which has now increased to Rs 13.21 crore. The expenditure on staff in these four corporations was Rs 12.95 crore daily, which has increased to Rs 18.36 crore daily.

'Don't depend on freebies, produce own solar power'

PNS ■ MANGALURU (KARNATAKA)

Union Minister for Renewable Energy Prahlad Joshi urged people on Thursday not to be dependent on the governments for freebies, but to produce their own solar power.

Joshi attended a consultative meeting with the consumers, electricity supply company (ESCOM) officials, and people's representatives to discuss Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana here on Thursday.

"I will not comment on what the motives were behind the distribution of free power generated using environmentally harmful core sector material. But sustainability in the power sector is going to be the key to a safer future for the country," said Joshi, who is also the Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

According to Joshi, Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 15, 2024 aims to provide free electricity to households in India by providing a subsidy to install solar panels on their roofs. The subsidy will cover



"I will not comment on what the motives were behind the distribution of free power generated using environmentally harmful core sector material. But sustainability in the power sector is going to be the key to a safer future for the country. I remember the statistics: 2.5 lakh tonnes of coal were being mined at enormous cost and environmental degradation, transported to the thermal power producers, and the process of producing thermal power involved a very high cost."

up to 40 percent of the cost of the solar panels.

He said with the free schemes involving non-renewable sources, somebody still has to pay a price.

"In this bargain, so many short cuts will have to be taken by the implementation bodies in the form of cutting production costs, thereby becoming unproductive and ending up sick," said Joshi.

Recalling the time he was a coal minister, Joshi said the cost being paid is enormous for what is being distributed as "free". "I remember the statistics: 2.5 lakh tonnes of coal were being mined at enormous cost and environmental degradation, transported to the thermal power producers, and the process of producing thermal power involved a very high cost," he added.

Joshi also said the other renewable energy sources the government was looking at for development in the future, tidal, wind, and geothermal power are on the anvil.

"Research and product development are underway in these forms of energy. The solar power management is also undergoing ground breaking research and product development, which will extend the life of solar power units from 25 years to 40 years. Their installed capacity will also increase, and the cost is going to be rationalised

depending on the demand," added Joshi.

He said there is scientific data available that by 2050, the heat on earth is going to reach 'critical' levels.

"If we do not buckle up and use fewer heat-generating power modules, we may reach there even by 2030," Joshi pointed out. He also pointed to Rajasthan and Gujarat, which experienced temperatures rising up to 50 degrees Celsius in 2024, as examples.

"If the temperature retains its upward tendencies, it is projected that the GDP will come down by 19 percent as a result of manpower loss due to fatigue and health issues of the human resource," said Joshi.

BSF allowing infiltrators to enter India to destabilise Bengal: Mamata



PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused the Border Security Force of letting infiltrators from Bangladesh enter India and charged the BSF with trying to destabilise the state.

Stating that she could sense a "blueprint of the central government behind this attitude of the BSF", Banerjee also accused a section of district magistrates and SPs of helping the border guards in their illegal act.

"We have got information that the BSF is letting infiltrators enter India through Islampur, Sitai, Chopra and several other bordering areas. The BSF is also torturing women and trying to destabilise the state," she said at an administrative review meeting at the state secretariat 'Nabanna'. Visa is not our matter but that of the central government. We used to get the

'Ultimate level of delusion'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Sukanta Majumdar flayed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday over her accusations against the BSF and said she has reached the "ultimate level of delusion".

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader's remarks against the BSF and said she has reached the "ultimate level of delusion". The Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo also said she could sense a "blueprint of the central government" behind this attitude of the BSF.

list of who were taking flights to come here, but now it has been stopped. So, we do not know who all are coming," she said. The Trinamool Congress supremo claimed that it was a conspiracy to blame the TMC for the infiltration issue.

CENTRE-DELHI FACE-OFF



Union Minister accuses Atishi govt of blocking farm schemes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday accused the Delhi government of depriving farmers of benefits under central schemes and urged Chief Minister Atishi to keep political differences aside in matters of farmer welfare.

In a letter to Atishi, Chouhan said the AAP government has failed to implement major central initiatives including the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, and the Beej Gram programme.

"I am writing this letter in sadness. You have never taken proper decisions in the interest of farmers. Your government has stopped implementation of farmers-friendly central schemes. Your government is not sympathetic towards farmers. Today, farmers in Delhi are upset and worried," Chouhan said in the letter dated January 1.

Due to the non-implementation of multiple central schemes, Delhi's farmers are being denied crucial benefits ranging from seed distribution to infrastructure development, he said.

The Union minister said the absence of the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission has prevented farm-

"I am writing this letter in sadness. You have never taken proper decisions in the interest of farmers. Your government has stopped implementation of farmers-friendly central schemes. Your government is not sympathetic towards farmers. Today, farmers in Delhi are upset and worried," Chouhan said.

ers from accessing benefits for nursery establishment, tissue culture facilities, planting material procurement, and post-harvest infrastructure.

The non-implementation of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana has further impacted farmers' access to agricultural mechanization, precision irrigation, soil health initiatives, crop insurance, and the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, he added.

Chouhan expressed concern over Delhi's failure to implement the Beej Gram programme, which offers benefits including seed distribution, testing facilities, laboratory infrastructure improvement, and assistance for seed certification agencies.

Record tourist inflow in Kaziranga

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Kaziranga National Park (KNP) recorded the highest tourist inflow in the last two decades with 1,64,636 people visiting its four ranges since its opening this season in October 2024, an official said on Thursday.

The park earned a revenue of Rs 43,226,225 from entry fee which is a testament to its growing appeal and success of recent initiatives, the official added. The park generally remains open from October to May, following which it takes a monsoon break.

In October 2024, 30,058 tourists visited the park, up from 17,271 in the same month the previous year. In November, there were 53,367 visitors, compared to 35,006 the year before, and in December, the number rose to 81,211, from 65,139 in 2023, the official added.

PM's new year resolutions nothing short of 'jumlas'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new year resolutions are nothing short of 'jumlas' (rhetoric) destroying the lives of every citizen.

In a post on X, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the government has given no solution for the economic turmoil created by it as he cited seven indicators to substantiate his point.

"The Modi government has no solution for the economic turmoil it has created! Seven indicators that illustrate the extent of mess in the lives of ordinary Indians. "50 per cent increase in Gold Loans and 30 per cent jump in gold loan NPAs. Private consumption - the total value of goods and services purchased by households has slowed down in the last 8 quarters and has not



"The Modi government has no solution for the economic turmoil it has created! Seven indicators that illustrate the extent of mess in the lives of ordinary Indians."

recovered to pre-COVID levels," he said in his post.

Kharge said car sales growth has plunged to a four-year low and wages have grown at a compound annual rate of just 0.8 per cent in the engineering, manufacturing, process, and infrastructure (EMPI) sectors

in the past 5 years (2019-2023). Food inflation, he said, has averaged 7.1 per cent over the last eight quarters. Indirect taxation in the form of GST on essential items are depleting household savings which are at a 50-year low, the Congress chief claimed.

"Household financial liabilities are now 6.4 per cent of GDP - the highest in decades. Rupee has hit all-time low, forcing foreign fund outflows and loss to small investors worth lakhs of crores.

"Narendra Modi ji, Your annual 'New Year resolutions' have been nothing short of 'jumlas' destroying the lives of every citizen," Kharge alleged.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also said according to the RBI, the income of Indian families is continuously decreasing and the number of borrowers is increasing.

Romance leads Aligarh man to Pakistan jail

PNS ■ ALIGARH (UP)

A 21-year-old man in Aligarh district has found himself behind bars in Pakistan due to a romantic relationship with a girl from across the border, officials here said.

The young man, identified as Badal Babu, was arrested on December 28 by Pakistani authorities in the Punjab province for illegally crossing into the neighbouring country without any legal documents, the officials said.

The shockwave from this unexpected incident reached Babu's village through the media. His parents, who had believed their son was working in a factory in Delhi, were shocked to learn of his arrest through a report sourced from a Pakistani news portal. Babu's father, Kirpal Singh, who lives in Khitkari



village under Barla police station area, told media that the family learned of their son's arrest via social media.

"We couldn't believe it. For us, till this moment we knew that he was working in Delhi, but the next moment we are shocked to discover that he's in a Pakistani jail. It's like something out of a movie," he said, in disbelief.

The family has now appealed to the Indian govern-

ment, particularly to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to intervene and negotiate with Pakistan for Babu's release.

"We want our son back and we don't know how to bring him home. We are calling on the prime minister to help us," Babu's mother said, speaking to reporters. "He was a simple boy. He never did anything like this before," she added.

Aligarh Superintendent of Police (Rural) Amrit Jain confirmed that they had received a memorandum from the family and would be taking the matter up with the Ministry of External Affairs.

"We will approach the proper channels to provide whatever assistance is necessary and work towards establishing contact with Babu. Our primary goal is to secure his release from custody in Pakistan," Jain said.

No pressure from BJP-led NDA on us: J-K CM

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Dismissing suggestions that his National Conference was under pressure to join the BJP-led NDA, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday expressed optimism that the promises made by the Centre to restore statehood of Jammu and Kashmir will be fulfilled at the earliest.

During his first media meet here since assuming office in October, Abdullah emphasised that the region's current status as a Union Territory should be viewed as a temporary arrangement, with the restoration of statehood being the "biggest challenge" his government faces.

Abdullah dismissed rumours suggesting pressure from the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to alter the National Conference's ideology and join the alliance.

Centre trying to 'bring back' revoked farm laws: Punjab CM

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday claimed that the Centre was trying to 'bring back' the now-repealed farm laws, referring to the newly announced draft of the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing.

The AAP-led Punjab government has termed the newly announced draft policy as an attempt to reintroduce the three central agricultural laws passed in 2020 "through backdoor." After a yearlong protest by farmers, the Centre had repealed the laws.



Speaking to reporters here, Mann also stated that the demands of the protesting farmers pertain to the central government, which should hold a dialogue with the farmers.

"All the demands of the farmers pertain to the Centre, whether

they come from the two forums leading the ongoing agitation at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders or from other farmers' unions. The demands are the same, even though the farm unions may differ," Mann said. "Why does the Centre not invite farmers for a dialogue?" he asked.

Farmers, under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13, after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

After 40 yrs, toxic waste shifted from Bhopal's Union Carbide

PNS ■ DHAR (MP)

Forty years after the Bhopal gas tragedy, 377 tons of hazardous waste has been shifted from the defunct Union Carbide factory for its disposal at a unit in Dhar district, officials said on Thursday.

The toxic waste was transported at around 9 pm on Wednesday in 12 sealed container trucks via a 'green corridor' from Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal to Pithampur industrial area in Dhar district, located 250 km away.

Amid tight security, the vehicles reached around 4.30 am on Thursday at a factory in Pithampur where the waste will be disposed of, Dhar

Superintendent of Police Manoj Singh said over phone. The trucks were currently parked on the factory campus in Pithampur, he added.

"A green corridor was creat-

ed for the nearly seven-hour journey of the vehicles to the Pithampur industrial area in Dhar district," Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department

Director Swatantra Kumar Singh said on Wednesday.

Nearly 100 persons worked in 30-minute shifts since Sunday to pack and load the waste in trucks, he said.

"They underwent health check-ups and were given rest every 30 minutes," Singh added. The highly toxic methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked from the Union Carbide pesticide factory on the intervening night of December 2-3, 1984, killing at least 5,479 persons and leaving thousands with serious and long-lasting health issues.

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on December 3 rebuked authorities for not clearing the Union Carbide site in Bhopal





www.dailypioneer.com

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

PAPER WITH PASSION

Save Priya

Priya's story reveals a harrowing struggle. Efforts must intensify to stop her execution and ensure repatriation

The story of Nimisha Priya, a nurse from Kerala, currently on death row in Yemen, has sparked widespread debate and concern. With her death sentence sanctioned by Yemen's President Rashad al-Alimi, the clock is ticking on securing her release. Her story is not an isolated case but an ordeal that many workers face in the Gulf and many other countries. This case is not only about the fate of one individual but also raises critical questions about justice, diplomacy and human rights. Nimisha Priya, a trained nurse, moved to Yemen to work in private hospitals and make a career. In 2015, she partnered with Yemeni national Talal Abdo Mahdi to set up a clinic in Sana'a. Yemen's laws necessitate local sponsorship for businesses and Mahdi played that role for Priya. However, this professional relationship spiraled into a nightmare. Mahdi manipulated ownership documents of the clinic, claimed he was her husband using forged and morphed photographs and seized control of her finances. She was harassed mentally



and subjected to physical torture and imprisonment in her own home. In 2017, desperate to reclaim her passport and escape his clutches, Priya attempted to sedate Mahdi. Unfortunately, the sedatives proved fatal due to an overdose, leading to his death. The Yemeni judicial system found her guilty of murder, sentencing her a death sentence.

Efforts to appeal her conviction have been exhausted, with the Yemeni Supreme Court and President rejecting her pleas. While Mahdi's death is undeniably tragic, Priya only wanted to regain her life and runaway from coercion and cruelty. If she is executed

than it would be travesty of justice and would mean penalising a victim. Priya's actions, though legally punishable, occurred in a context of desperation and fear for her safety and freedom. The Government of India must assist Nimisha Priya and her family in securing her release and repatriation. Her release hinges on a complex process involving Yemen's tribal justice system and the payment of blood money to Mahdi's family must be paid by the accused to get a pardon. High-level diplomatic discussions with Yemeni authorities and tribal leaders are essential to secure a waiver of the death penalty. Besides, mobilising public support to raise blood money can be a way out. Employing a dedicated legal team with expertise in Yemeni law and tribal negotiations is crucial to ensuring fairness and efficiency in the process. Highlighting Priya's case on global platforms as a human rights issue may garner international support and pressure Yemen to reconsider her sentence. Priya's case underscores the plight of expatriates caught in abusive circumstances. Her actions, while grave, were not premeditated but driven by self-preservation against a backdrop of systemic exploitation. Repatriating Priya to India would allow her a better trial. The Indian government and civil society must step up efforts to secure her release and ensure she receives a fair chance to rebuild her life.

PICTALK



Local folk singers (Baul Fakir) perform to entertain visitors and wishing them Happy New Year, in Birbhum

PTI

Crowdfunding can transform science research funding

By connecting directly with the public, crowdfunding offers researchers an opportunity to explore bold ideas fueled by passion

The conventional research funding model, which is primarily dependent on government grants and institutional allocations, is currently under increasing scrutiny. Scientists and innovators frequently find themselves facing competition for a diminishing pool of resources as budgets tighten and priorities shift in numerous regions of the globe.

A novel paradigm is emerging, one that is influenced by the digital economy: crowdfunding for research. Is it possible that this community-driven, decentralised approach could revolutionise the way we finance science? Government funding has been a cornerstone of scientific research across the globe, particularly in the domain of basic research. This funding plays a vital role in driving innovation, supporting the exploration of fundamental scientific principles, and fostering advancements that often serve as the foundation for applied research and technological development. Despite its critical importance, accessing government research grants presents sig-



nificant challenges for scientists and institutions, making it a complex and often time-consuming endeavour. The exhaustive application process is one of the foremost difficulties in securing government funding. Researchers must navigate hectic administrative paperwork, including filling out detailed forms, providing extensive documentation, and adhering to strict procedural guidelines. This bureaucratic overhead often becomes a distraction, diverting researchers' time and energy away from their primary focus—scientific discovery.

Writing and refining grant proposals, ensuring compliance with submission requirements, and coordinating with institutional administrators

consume weeks or even months. This process can be overwhelming for many scientists, particularly those involved with teaching responsibilities or other professional commitments. Another challenge is the influence of governmental policy on funding priorities. The allocation of research funds is often tied to the strategic objectives of the ruling government. This means that researchers must tailor their proposals to align with themes or areas of focus deemed significant by policymakers.

As a result, projects that do not align with government priorities may struggle to find financial support, even if they hold substantial scientific or societal value. Moreover, the eligibility criteria for government funding further restrict access. Typically, government grants are available only to individuals holding doctoral degrees and those affiliated with recognised academic or research institutions, and some agencies restrict people from private institutions.

Crowdfunding is emerging as a revolutionary alternative to

overcome these hurdles. Crowdfunding involves gathering financial support for a project or venture by soliciting small contributions from a large group of people, typically through online platforms. It offers a direct, democratic, and flexible solution, empowering researchers to pursue their ideas with fewer constraints while promoting passion-driven inquiry. Crowdfunding allows researchers to connect directly with the public, garnering financial support for projects that resonate with a broader audience. Platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, FundRazr, Hoope, GoFundMe, etc. have already successfully funded creative projects and their application in scientific research is growing. Crowdfunding science projects require researchers to dedicate considerable time and effort to campaign management, diverting resources away from their core research work.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

overcome these hurdles. Crowdfunding involves gathering financial support for a project or venture by soliciting small contributions from a large group of people, typically through online platforms. It offers a direct, democratic, and flexible solution, empowering researchers to pursue their ideas with fewer constraints while promoting passion-driven inquiry. Crowdfunding allows researchers to connect directly with the public, garnering financial support for projects that resonate with a broader audience. Platforms like Kickstarter, Indiegogo, FundRazr, Hoope, GoFundMe, etc. have already successfully funded creative projects and their application in scientific research is growing. Crowdfunding science projects require researchers to dedicate considerable time and effort to campaign management, diverting resources away from their core research work.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)

Winter session stalemate: Urgent need for reform

There is a pressing need for parliamentary reforms to ensure discipline, decorum and efficiency as a lot of parliamentary time is simply wasted



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Parliament's productivity in the recent Winter Session was a record low, with only 52 per cent of scheduled work completed. Various factors, including disruptions and lack of quorum, contributed to the reduced output. The confrontation between the treasury benches and a belligerent Opposition continued throughout. The current performance highlights the challenges in maintaining productivity. The Opposition, in particular, wanted to discuss the Adani issue. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi has been raising the issue in public. It is a matter of significant public interest due to its implications. Also, the Opposition asked Union Home Minister Amit Shah to apologize for his comments about Dr BR Ambedkar, a highly respected figure in Indian history. The government was not willing to be flexible. With a productivity of merely 40.03 per cent during the Winter session.

Lok Sabha passed four of the five bills it received. Rajya Sabha approved 3 bills. During this session, the Lok Sabha lost 65 hours and 15 minutes, the highest in 2024. Many requests for adjournment motions made in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were not accepted. The 18th Lok Sabha is different in many respects. For the first time in a decade, we have a strong opposition with an official leader of Opposition (LOP). The bitterness between parties within and outside Parliament is increasing. Neither side is willing to accommodate. Discipline, decorum and dignity of Parliament are of paramount importance. The pressing need for parliamentary reforms is more evident than ever, and action is needed now. Over Rs 97,87,50,000 of taxpayers' money was spent during the Winter Session. The cost of running a Parliament session is over Rs 2.5 lakh per minute, a considerable burden on the exchequer, which should prompt reevaluating our parlia-



mentary practices. The Parliament's high cost and low productivity must be addressed sooner or later. House is often adjourned many times a day. In the last five decades, it has increased by over 100 times. This underlines the need to address the issue. For instance, Parliament saw protests from the ruling BJP-led NDA and the aggressive Opposition INDIA Bloc. BJP MPs accused the Congress party of "insulting" Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and INDIA Bloc MPs demanded the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his comments about Ambedkar. The escalating conflict over this issue resulted in two injuries and police involvement. Political parties should focus on honouring Ambedkar's legacy instead of blaming each other. Other bills include the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill, the Bharatiya Vayuyan Vidheyak, the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, the Bills of Lading Bill, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, the Railways (Amendment) Bill, the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, and the



DURING THIS SESSION, THE LOK SABHA LOST 65 HOURS AND 15 MINUTES, THE HIGHEST IN 2024. MANY REQUESTS FOR ADJOURNMENT MOTIONS MADE IN LOK SABHA AND RAJYA SABHA WERE NOT ACCEPTED

Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill. The government also introduced a controversial bill, 'One Nation, One Poll'. While the MPs are called lawmakers, Bills have been passed amidst the din and noise without proper discussion. The decreasing time available for parliamentary debates is detrimental to democracy. Protests, adjournments, and shortened sessions have lost nearly half of the sessions. Parliamentarians question the government, elicit information, and check it mainly through the Question Hour. Short Notice questions, calling attention, and adjournment motions all check the executive. But all these are relevant only when the House runs. More efforts need to be made to establish the success of a parliamentary system: Discipline, character, and a strong sense of public morality. The need for comprehensive and immediate parliamentary reforms is more evident than ever, and the time for action is now. All stakeholders, including political analysts and citizens, must understand the urgency of the system. All stakeholders, from

oilfield parties to citizens interested in governance and parliamentary affairs, should feel this urgency. Economic reforms are imperative to ensure sustainable economic growth. The role of Parliament is linked with the new economic policy, which should lead to a drastic reduction in the role of the State. Professionalising floor management techniques is crucial to ensuring Parliament's efficient functioning. While we can legitimately be proud of the reasonably successful work of Parliament during the last five decades, Parliament must function in step with the needs of the changing times. We must proceed carefully and cautiously and evolve a national consensus on desirable changes. After all, Parliament is the communication link between the people and the government. The solution lies in adopting healthy parliamentary practices and maintaining decorum and discipline, which are crucial for dignified conduct in the Parliament. For this, both the government and the Opposition must cooperate.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AN EXCELLENT ARTICLE ON DR SINGH

Madam — I am writing to express my heartfelt appreciation for the excellent article titled 'The Statesman and a Gentleman' published in your esteemed newspaper. The article captures the life, legacy and unparalleled contribution of Dr Manmohan Singh to India's economic and political landscape. The article is very informative and educative. I have found Dr V K Bahuguna extremely well-informed. His writings are excellent and deep.

R K Sharma | New Delhi

SIMPLIFY H-1B VISA PROCESS

Madam — The H-1B visa system, a vital link between international talent and US companies, has become a contentious issue in the global workplace. It offers opportunities for skilled professionals in fields like technology, medicine, and engineering but faces significant challenges such as intense competition, complex procedures, and unclear minimum wage thresholds. According to a 2024 report by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, only 85,000 of 387,000 applications were approved, with the lottery-based system often excluding highly qualified professionals. Companies like Infosys, TCS, and Google face talent shortages due to limited approvals, while startups struggle with high costs, ranging from \$35,000 to \$50,000 per application.

The lack of a minimum wage threshold further fosters unfair competition for U.S. workers. Tesla CEO Elon Musk has called for reforms, including a minimum wage of \$150,000 to ensure only highly skilled professionals qualify. He advocates simplifying and automating processes to enhance efficiency. Musk also suggests reducing fees to support startups and small businesses, aligning the system with its goal of advancing America's technological and industrial leadership. Reforming the H-1B visa system could boost U.S. innovation, productivity, and tax revenues while balancing competition

Farmers' protests disrupt daily lives



Hindu sentiment of the fundamentalist Khalistani forces added up force in the agitation under the grab of farmers.

Though obviously the so-called farmers who are agitated are from Punjab and have been the recipient of the biggest cake from the state in the name of MSP, subsidies, loan waivers, free electricity etc., what they are demanding now is untenable. The Supreme Court which called for suspension of the farm laws without exercising its authority against the roadblocks is still deaf towards the tragedy of commuters on the highway blocked by these anarchists supported by AAP, Congress and SAD politically just to vent their hatred towards the BJP and Modi. Only forcible evacuation of the highway is the very first thing that needs to be done, the SC and the CJI must order the use of force in public and national interest at the earliest.

Jai Prakash Gupta | Ambala

People at large are angrily fed up with the farmers agitation that started with the 3 farm laws enacted by the parliament, which were touted to be the game changer to improve the economic health of farmers across the country. As usual, about every decision of the Union Govt. led by Narendra Modi since 2014, the political opposition with tacit anti-India international forces successfully built the narrative after their anti-CAA agitation faded out and the anti-

between local and foreign workers. With transparent and efficient procedures, the system could become a cornerstone of global collaboration and long-term growth, positioning the U.S. as a leading hub for global talent.

R K Jain | Barwani

ROHIT SHARMA NEEDS A BREAK

Madam — Australia is the champion in the 'Boxing Day' test at Melbourne when they have everything in their command. The will to win made all the difference and the Aussies did it professionally at MCG in the fourth test to take the lead 2-1 in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. While India lost by a margin of 184 runs by bowled out for a meagre 155 in their chase, the selectors must take a serious call at this juncture. It's once again the pathetic failure of Rohit Sharma, which has been highly disappointing and Kohli partnered him soon in the pavilion by recklessly fishing one well outside the off-stump. K L Rahul and N K Reddy can't always be among runs and get out by the beauty of deliveries. Yashasvi Jaiswal was

the lone fighter in the middle and his fluent 84 couldn't help the team when wickets were falling like ninepins at the other end.

When Pat Cummins sets an example by his responsible all-round display for the Aussies, Rohit Sharma can't have any excuses for his dismal batting. Selectors would continue with Rohit for the final test at Sydney and if the stewardship doesn't go to change in the near future it will be construed as gross injustice for Jasprit Bumrah by denying him the captaincy at the right time. Time has ripened for Bumrah to take over and it's high time for Rohit to gently take a break from the test cricket format to make room for deserving young guns who are in the waiting for long to take pride by wearing the Indian hat. Maybe the Head Coach Gautam Gambhir might have felt that his fitness and form are much better than relying on Rohit and Kohli at this stage.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S NEW TRADE PARADIGM WITH THE US

India faces new challenges from the Trump's tough stance, spurring urgent talks on tariffs and trade



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

The year gone by saw some crucial path-altering elections in nearly 70 of the most powerful democracies in the world. Some of the most populous countries led by India and including the US, Bangladesh, Indonesia etc. voted for a leadership of their choice in 2024. While the Indian electorate chose to renew another 5-year term for Prime Minister Modi (albeit with a less-than-expected mandate), Bangladesh too renewed its faith in Sheikh Hasina (who was accused of rigging the electoral process to retain power), which ultimately led to her being thrown out in a coup. In a highly polarised election ground, in the US, the incumbent President a front runner for the top job at the white house, pulled out near the finish line, leaving his second in command the Vice President to throw her hat in the ring against a mighty opponent Donald Trump. The US electorate gave a clear mandate for Donald Trump to lead the new global order for the US. Donald Trump's clear victory in the US elections, now potentially could lead to several multilateral, bilateral rejigs, around the globe. President-elect has already nominated several friends and allies from the past, in some of the top jobs.

He has threatened high tariffs for Canada and Mexico while joking that the former is another state of the US. He has strong views on India's trade surplus with the US which is already an issue of concern for Indian officials. Several Indian ministries were in a huddle in the last week of the year 2024, trying to assess the amount of exports from their respective sectors, while looking at the tariffs imposed on US imports. New Delhi-based policy research institute Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) spent the last day of the year discussing 'Trade Tariff and Trump'. Several recommendations were made by the panel of experts regarding the future of India-US bilateral trade relations.



A press release from the event highlighted in the first paragraph that "India should have comprehensive engagement with the US, as new administration led by President-elect Trump takes over. India should explore a comprehensive new institutional framework to address the multiple issues that arise from trade, investment, technology and finance linkages. India should urgently consider appointing a Task Force or create other institutional mechanisms that bring in domestic policy coherence on these lines." In an unrelated development, India's External Affairs Minister Jaishankar spent the last week of the year in the US, meeting key presidential nominees for the incoming Trump administration and also attending the last foreign affairs ministers meeting under President Biden, even though QUAD as the framework was empowered by Trump Presidency 1.0.

The policy research institute RIS has cautioned to not respond with any knee-jerk reactions, to possible volatile statements emerging from Washington, immediately after President Trump's swearing-in, instead, it suggests "India may need to plan first, plan hard, and yet plan fast." An agile, business approach may be the best way forward to dealing with the incoming administration.

It may also be worthwhile to note that the Indian government should reconsider some of the non-tariff barriers it imposes on imports in the form of regulatory compliances and compulsory testing etc. To avert losses, tie up with our US importers need to be strengthened so that they lobby for their own needs. However, low technology products have high US tariffs. We may be left with an avenue there to improve our participation in the value chains being built up in the US manufacturing sector. "A diversification of markets for Indian products may be needed, which could also have a sectoral focus. India can focus on exporting a certain bunch of products to say the Gulf Nations or the ASEAN group of countries depending on the price advantage. Some hedges need to be built to prevent any major hit of Trump tariffs.

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

AI: Revolutionising Punjab's governance



A S MITTAL

Punjab has the potential to harness artificial intelligence as a cornerstone for global competitiveness and unprecedented growth and bring about substantial gains



Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic concept confined to science fiction; it is a transformative force redefining governance globally. For a state like Punjab, rich in culture and potential but grappling with multifaceted challenges, embracing AI could be a game-changer. With a technocrat policymaker like Arvind Kejriwal, Punjab is uniquely positioned to leapfrog other states by recognising AI as a critical element for global competitiveness to unlock unprecedented growth. One of the first steps toward AI-driven transformation is the creation of a dedicated Ministry of Artificial Intelligence (MAI). Such a ministry, backed with an Artificial Intelligence policy equipped with adequate budget provisions, could centralise its AI initiatives, ensuring that day-to-day work across multiple departments is well-coordinated and strategically aligned.

The ministry could also promote AI literacy among citizens, emphasising the benefits of AI and addressing any potential concerns or ethical challenges. A robust policy framework led by MAI could position Punjab among innovative states. States like Telangana have already set an example by launching an AI mission to drive AI adoption across governance, healthcare, and agriculture. Punjab can adapt these learnings to build a robust AI ecosystem that attracts accountability and efficiency. Fostering Accountability and Efficiency AI is not a replacement for human effort but a tool to support it. AI can free up human resources for more strategic work by automating routine tasks and providing real-time insights. For example, Finland has successfully used AI to improve public services, ensuring accountability and efficiency in governance without overburdening employees.

Punjab's administration can similarly use AI to track project progress, measure outcomes, and enhance transparency. AI can also play a vital role in curbing corruption, a long-standing issue in governance. By using AI algorithms to analyse pat-



AI CAN ALSO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN CURBING CORRUPTION, A LONG-STANDING ISSUE IN GOVERNANCE. BY USING AI ALGORITHMS TO ANALYSE PATTERNS IN FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS AND DETECT ANOMALIES, THE GOVERNMENT CAN IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS INSTANCES OF MISMANAGEMENT OR FRAUD

terns in financial transactions and detect anomalies, the government can identify and address instances of mismanagement or fraud. Such measures save resources and build public trust in the governance. Empowering Citizens Through AI Successful implementation of AI empowers citizens. AI-driven e-governance platforms can simplify administrative processes, making it easier for people to access government services. For example, AI chatbots can assist citizens in filing complaints, applying for permits, or seeking information, significantly reducing bureaucratic delays.

AI can enhance public safety by enabling predictive policing and improving disaster management systems. By analysing data on crime patterns and natural disasters, AI can help authorities take preventive measures, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Punjab's residents.

Revolutionising Key Sectors - AI can be the cornerstone for transformation in Punjab's key sectors: **1. Health:** AI-powered diagnostic tools can revolutionise healthcare delivery in Punjab, especially in rural areas with limited access to quality healthcare. Tamil Nadu's use of AI to predict disease outbreaks and improve maternal healthcare outcomes offers a model worth emulating. Punjab's healthcare system could leverage AI for telemedicine, enabling remote consultations and reducing the burden on overworked medical professionals. Moreover, AI can assist in making cutting-edge treatments more accessible to patients.

2. Education: AI-driven platforms can personalise student learning experiences, addressing individual strengths and weaknesses. For instance, a country

like Estonia has integrated AI into its education system to offer tailored teaching, ensuring no student is left behind. Punjab can adopt similar systems to improve education levels and employable skill development. AI can also predict dropout rates and identify at-risk students, enabling timely interventions to keep them in education. Additionally, AI tools can train teachers, equipping them with modern methodologies to enhance classroom engagement.

3. Agriculture: Agriculture is Punjab's backbone, but the sector faces multifaceted challenges. AI can optimise irrigation, predict weather patterns, and offer crop-specific advice to farmers. Karnataka's use of AI to predict crop yields and help farmers secure better prices exemplifies how technology can empower agricultural communities. Punjab could take this further by implementing AI-powered precision farming techniques, which use data from drones and sensors to monitor soil health and pest activity, ensuring higher productivity with lower resource consumption.

4. Industry and Infrastructure: For enterprises, AI could bring regulatory clarity or, conversely, added scrutiny in areas such as data sharing, intellectual property and the ethical use of AI. It can streamline manufacturing processes, enhance supply chain efficiency, and improve project monitoring in infrastructure development. Gujarat's use of AI to attract investments and facilitate industrial growth shows how a state can harness technology to boost its economy. Punjab's industrial sector could use AI to identify global market trends and adapt its manufacturing capabilities accordingly. In infrastructure,

AI can ensure better planning and execution of projects, reducing delays and cost overruns.

5. Resource Mobilisation: AI tools can help Punjab's government enhance efficiency in tax collection, reduce revenue leakages, and improve financial planning. Andhra Pradesh's Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS) uses AI to monitor and optimise resource allocation, providing a blueprint for Punjab to follow. AI can also assist in identifying untapped revenue streams, enabling the government to fund developmental projects without increasing the financial burden on its citizens.

The Way Forward By embracing AI with a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach, Punjab can address its existing challenges and set itself on a path toward sustainable and inclusive growth. The magic of AI lies in its ability to amplify human potential and solve complex problems. Under the visionary leadership of Bhagwant Mann and with the proper policy framework, Punjab can harness this magic to transform its socio-economic landscape. Establishing a dedicated AI ministry, investing in infrastructure, and adopting AI across key sectors will make Punjab a leader in good governance and improve its people's quality of life. The time to act is now, and Punjab must rise to the challenge to set a precedent for other states to follow.

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

From vision to reality: How good governance is transforming education in India

Vajpayee's vision of a 'New India,' anchored in democratic principles and citizen-centric governance is giving a new look to the education

Ten years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set forth his vision of sushasan (good governance), calling it "the key to a nation's progress." He declared December 25, former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth anniversary, as Good Governance Day. Vajpayee had envisioned a "New India" where the government would embody the principles of democracy and development, emphasising citizen-centric decision-making, transparency, and public participation.



TUHIN A SINHA

Put simply, good governance means that the day-to-day functioning of the government is effective, transparent, and accountable, which, in the modern age naturally includes e-governance and digital empowerment. In fact, in the context of a welfare government functioning in a vastly unequal society, good governance is fundamental for ensuring sustainable development, social justice, and the protection of human rights.

In 2019, India also adopted a metric called the Good Governance Index (GGI) to track and compare governance among the states and

union territories across ten key sectors. The 11th Good Governance Day presents an apt moment to pause and reflect on the state of governance in one of the most critical sectors—education. Even though Human Resource Development, composed of indicators like "quality of education" and "elementary school retention rate," is one of the ten key sectors covered by the GGI, a close look at India's education governance reveals substantial room for improvement, particularly at the school level.

Vajpayee's commitment to education was evident during his tenure as Prime Minister—he pioneered the landmark Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2002,

which emphasised universal school enrollment and went on to form the cornerstone of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Building decisively on this foundation, Prime Minister Modi's leadership has elevated education to new heights through bold reforms.

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, along with the NIPUN Bharat Mission, has revolutionised the approach to foundational learning. This shift is being carefully monitored through multiple assessment initiatives - states have implemented third-party evaluations, while programs like CBSE's SAFAL, the National Achievement Survey, and Gujarat's groundbreaking Vidya



Samiksha Kendra (VSK) use cutting-edge technology to track progress systematically. These assessment systems have revealed both progress and persistent challenges in our education system. The data highlights critical areas that need attention, particularly in learning outcomes. Various learning sur-

veys show that over 5 crore elementary-grade students lack foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Learning gaps for these children only keep widening as they progress through grades with a weak foundation. It is then unsurprising that almost 33 per cent of Grade VIII students are unable to read simple sentences or do basic arithmetic.

Recognising these challenges, PM Modi's administration has taken a step through the State School Standards Authority (SSSA), recommended in the NEP 2020, which emerges as a pivotal reform to enhance India's school governance standards. The proposed SSSA would be an indepen-

dent quality regulator for all schools, both public and private. One of the key functions of the SA is to ensure public disclosure of school performance data for all schools through a digital portal.

With all schools being held to clear and uniform quality standards and policymakers being informed by data-driven insights, educational resources will be used more efficiently. The SA can create a culture of transparency where parents are active participants in their children's education.

With its emphasis on streamlining bureaucracy, focusing on outcomes rather than inputs, and integrating technology to reduce administrative burdens, not only

does it embody Prime Minister Modi's ideal of "minimum government, maximum governance". A pertinent example is the set of eight principles of good governance recommended by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)—participation, rule of law, transparency, accountability, equity, effectiveness, consensus, and responsiveness. As the nation observes Good Governance Day, the call to action is clear: states must embrace the SA to realise the shared vision of a "New India," where quality education is a right, not a privilege.

(The writer is National Spokesperson, BJP; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Rupee falls 9 paise to close at 85.73 against US dollar

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as strong dollar demand from importers and foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the dollar gained against most currencies during 2024 and continued to remain on a strong footing this year. Moreover, persistent foreign fund outflows further dented investors' sentiments. Additionally, global markets are expected to see low volumes as the holiday season is underway in major economies like those in Europe. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and witnessed an intra-day low of 85.79 and a high of 85.68 against the American currency. The local unit settled for the day at 85.73 (provisional), registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close amid a sharp recovery in domestic equities. On Wednesday, the rupee settled flat at 85.64 against the US dollar. On December 27, the local currency touched its lifetime intra-day low of 85.80 against the greenback. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strength in the US Dollar and dollar demand from importers."

Govt to revise WPI base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23

Sets up 18-member working group

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday said it has constituted an 18-member working group, under the chairmanship of NITI Aayog Member Ramesh Chand, to revise the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23. The revision of the base year helps in presenting a more realistic picture of the price situation in the country.

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the group, it will suggest the commodity basket of WPI and Producer Price Index (PPI) with the base year 2022-23 in the light of structural changes in the economy; review the existing system of price collection and suggest changes for improvement; and decide on the computational methodology to be adopted for WPI / PPI.

The group will also examine the methodology for the compilation of PPI, suggest further improvement in compilation and presentation and recommend a roadmap for

switch over from WPI to PPI.

The members of the group include representatives from the RBI, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Statistics, Department of Agriculture, Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas; Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Chief



Economist, SBI Group.

The non-official members include Economist Surjit Bhalla; Shamika Ravi, Member, Economic Advisory Council to PM; Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist, Crisis; Nilesh Shah, MD, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management; and Indranil Sengupta, Co-Head and Economist, Bank of America Merrill Lynch. Earlier, there was a plan to revise the base year from 2011-12 to 2017-18.

'India-EFTA trade pact likely to come into force by year end'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The implementation process of free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA is progressing fast and is expected to come into force before the end of this year, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

The two sides signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) on March 10, 2024. Under the pact, India has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products such as Swiss watches, chocolates and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

"Yes, EFTA is progressing very fast," Goyal told PTI when asked if the agreement would come into effect this year.

The minister said the Swiss Council of States has approved the agreement and now will go to their National Council for



approval.

"So this overwhelming support in political circles in Switzerland for the TEPA with EFTA is truly a sign of the times to come... and in their statement also, it shows that it has cleared an important hurdle and they are hoping to bring in entry to force by autumn of 2025, before the end of calendar year 2025," Goyal said. The bloc committed an investment of USD 100 billion -- USD 50 billion within 10 years after the implementation of the agreement and another USD 50 billion in the next five years -- which would facilitate

the creation of 1 million direct jobs in India. This is a first-of-its-kind pledge agreed upon in any of the trade deals signed by India so far.

The commitment is the key substance of the TEPA (Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement), which took almost 16 years to conclude, for India in return for opening its markets for several products coming from the EFTA nations.

There is a provision in the agreement that if the proposed investments would not come because of some reasons, India can suspend duty concessions

to the four countries.

Domestic customers will get access to high-quality Swiss products such as watches, chocolates, biscuits, and clocks at lower prices as India will phase out customs duties under the trade pact on these goods over 10 years.

It is taking time to implement the agreement due to an elaborate ratification process of these pacts in different countries. In India, such agreements are approved by the union Cabinet, in EFTA countries, they need approval from their parliament.

On the progress of FTA negotiations with other countries, Goyal said he has held meetings with the new UK trade minister on the proposed pact.

India and the UK are expected to hold the next round of talks for a proposed FTA later this month to resolve the pending issues and close the negotiations.

The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.



India sugar production declines to 95.40 lakh tn

Sugar production fell by 16 per cent to 95.40 lakh tonnes in the first quarter of the ongoing current marketing year that started in October, mainly due to a decline in output in Maharashtra, according to industry body ISMA data released on Thursday. Mills had manufactured 113.01 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period. The production data excludes the diversion of sugar for ethanol making. According to the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA), crushing rate in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka was better than last year. However, the crushing rate suffered in Uttar Pradesh during the last week of December 2024 due to a temporary disruption in cane supply owing to rains. During the first quarter, 493 mills were operational as against 512 factories a year ago.



DMart's revenue up 17.5 pc to Rs 15,565 cr

Avenue Supermarts Ltd, which owns and operates retail chain DMart, has reported 17.5 per cent increase in standalone revenue from operations at Rs 15,565.23 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024. The company had posted a revenue of Rs 13,247.33 crore in December quarter a year ago. Avenue Supermarts informed BSE on Thursday. The total number of stores as of December 2024 stood at 387. Revenue for the quarter is subject to limited review by the statutory auditors of the company, it said. In October-December 2022-23, standalone revenue was Rs 11,304.58 crore. Promoted by Radhakrishnan Damani and his family, DMart retails basic home and personal products across Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, NCR, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Oil, gas demand to remain strong in FY26: India Ratings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's oil and gas demand is likely to remain strong in the next financial year even as weak global demand will drive down refining margins, India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said on Thursday.

The agency expects the credit profile of downstream companies to remain stable during the year, driven by healthy demand for petroleum products and healthy marketing margins that would offset compressed Gross Refining Margins (GRMs), yielding healthy overall EBITDA.

Credit profile may see an addition of debt on account of under-construction refinery expansion projects for all the major oil marketing companies (OMCs). The credit profile of upstream oil companies shall remain dependent on crude oil prices, Ind-Ra said in the FY26 Oil and Gas Outlook.

EBITDA generation for upstream companies may fall with a moderation in oil prices and a reduction in production from legacy fields. However, the impact of low crude oil prices is expected to be offset by the removal of special excise on the production of crude and an increase in production expected from new discover-



ies. "Indian oil and gas demand is expected to remain strong in FY26, leading to an expansion in the refinery and petrochemical capacities. India's refinery capacity is expected to increase by 22 per cent in the next two-three years.

Ind-Ra expects the strong demand to be driving oil and gas investment decisions in India," said Bhanu Patni, Associate Director, Corporates, Ind-Ra.

Ind-Ra expects the City Gas Distribution (CGD) sector's credit profile to remain stable in FY26 post-reduction of low-cost domestic gas allocation. Return on invested capital could moderate, however it would remain healthy.

New geographical areas could see some pressure on capex execution as internal

accruals for funding capex may come down. The performance of standalone petrochemical players may improve during FY26 as they benefit from an improvement in the crack spreads and easing of the oversupply situation created due to the rampant capacity addition during FY19-FY24, especially in China.

The agency expects GRMs to remain subdued during FY26 like in IHFY25, on account of a slowness in global consumer and industrial demand, especially in China, and additional supply flowing from refinery capacity additions seen globally.

However, demand for petroleum products in India is expected to remain strong during FY26, with bulk demand coming from diesel, petrol and LPG.

'Employment increases 36 pc to 64.33 cr in last ten years'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union labour minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said employment in the country has increased by 36 per cent to 64.33 crore in 2023-24 from 47.15 crore in 2014-15, which shows improvement in job creation during NDA period.

Talking to media persons, the minister also stated that employment under UPA grew by just about 7 per cent between 2004 to 2014.

He noted that under the UPA government between 2004 to 2014 just 2.9 crore additional jobs were created whereas under the Modi government between 2014-24, 17.19 crore jobs were added.

In the last one year (2023-24) alone, the Modi government has created around 4.6 crore jobs in the country, the minister stated.

The data assumes significance in the backdrop of pressure on the government for job creation in the country.

About the agriculture sector, the minister stated that employment declined by 16 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under UPA tenure whereas it has grown by 19

per cent between 2014 -2023 under Modi tenure.

Similarly, employment in the manufacturing sector grew by just 6 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under UPA tenure while it increased by 15 per cent between 2014-2023 under Modi tenure.

He further informed that employment in the services sector grew by 25 per cent between 2004 to 2014 under UPA tenure while it increased by 36 per cent between 2014 -2023 under Modi tenure.

He also stated that the unemployment Rate (UR) dropped from 6 per cent in 2017-18 to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24 while the employment rate (WPR) grew from 46.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 58.2 per cent in 2023-24.

Similarly, he informed that the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) grew from 49.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 60.1 per cent in 2023-24. About the growth in youth joining the formal job market, the minister also informed that in the last seven years (between Sept 2017- Sept 2024) over 4.7 crore youth (Age 18-28 years) have joined Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) fold.

Sebi to continue proceedings against ZEEL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets watchdog Sebi on Thursday said it will slap a fresh show cause notice on ZEEL founder chairman Subhash Chandra, and his son Punit Goenka as it vowed to continue the investigation into alleged violation of listing norms against the media baron and his company.

The order passed by Sebi's adjudicating officer said the contents of the earlier Show Cause Notice (SCN) issued to them will also be incorporated "in the SCN to be issued in the instant matter".

The ZEEL and its top management are under Sebi scrutiny for alleged violations of disclosure norms and initially a show cause notice was issued to them in July 2022.

Following the July 2022 show cause notice, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) and Punit Goenka filed settlement applications with the Sebi.

However, the application to settle the adjudication proceedings was rejected by a panel of whole-time members of Sebi and the matter was referred to the markets watchdog for further investigation.

Govt clears PLI incentive of Rs 246 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of Heavy Industries has approved incentive claims of Rs 246 crore submitted by Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors under the Rs 25,938 crore PLI scheme for the automobile and auto components industry, officials said.

Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H D Kumaraswamy has expressed satisfaction with the progress made by auto original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) toward achieving localized manufacturing through initiatives like PLI scheme.

He also congratulated Tata Motors and M&M for devel-

oping this capability and exuded confidence that more applicants would take advantage of the PLI scheme.

According to sources, Tata Motors submitted an incentive claim of approximately Rs 142.13 crore based on determined sales in FY 2023-24.

The eligible sales of Advanced Automotive Technology (AAT) products from Tata Motors include the Tiago EV (electric four-wheeler), Starbus EV (electric bus), and Ace EV (electric cargo vehicle), totalling Rs 1,380.24 crore.

Mahindra & Mahindra submitted an incentive claim of Rs 104.08 crore based on deter-



mined incremental sales of AAT products totalling Rs 800.59 crore for FY 2023-24, with a cumulative investment of Rs 978.30 crore, officials said.

The eligible sales from their e3W models, including Treo, Treo Zor, and Zor Grand amount to Rs 836.02 crore,

supported by a certificate of domestic value addition (DVA) issued by the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI).

"The total claims from these two applicants amount to approximately Rs 246 crore, which have been examined and recommended by the Project Management Agency (PMA) and subsequently approved by Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI)," an official said.

The scheme aims to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities in AAT products, address cost disabilities, and establish a robust supply chain.

Investors richer by Rs 8.52 L cr in two days of market rally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth surged Rs 8.52 lakh crore in two days of market rally, with the benchmark Sensex climbing nearly 2 per cent on Thursday alone.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,436.30 points or 1.83 per cent -- its best single-day gain in more than a month -- to settle at 79,943.71 on Thursday. During the day, it soared 1,525.46 points, or 1.94 per cent, to 80,032.87.

On Wednesday, the benchmark gauge had climbed 368.40 points, or 0.47 per cent, to settle at 78,507.41. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surged Rs 8,52,239.27 crore to Rs 4,50,47,345.71 crore (USD 5.25 trillion) in two days.

"While markets failed to deliver a Christmas rally over the past few weeks, the New Year has provided strong optimism in the first two days with Sensex touching the psychological 80,000-mark on the back of broad-based short-covering."

"Gains in banking, IT, auto and metal triggered a major rally despite concerns in the currency market which saw the rupee scaling fresh lows

amid rising crude oil prices and subdued growth," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

From the 30 Sensex blue-chip firms, Bajaj Finserv jumped nearly 8 per cent while Bajaj Finance soared 6.50 per cent. Maruti, Titan, Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech, Zomato, UltraTech Cement and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other major



gainers.

Sun Pharma emerged as the only laggard.

The BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.89 per cent and small-cap index climbed 0.68 per cent. All sectoral indices ended in positive territory. Auto surged the most by 3.66 per cent, followed by IT (2.34 per cent), IT (2.31 per cent), consumer discretionary (2.24 per cent), teck (2.19 per cent), consumer durables (2.02 per cent) and commodities (1.41 per cent).

White-collar hiring up 9 pc in December: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

White-collar hiring activity in December witnessed a 9 per cent increase compared to the same period of the previous year, driven by high-skill and strategic roles, a report said on Thursday.

According to Naukri JobSpeak, the index reached an impressive 2,651 points in December 2024, reflecting a robust 9 per cent year-on-year growth, a promising sign for the year ahead.

Key sectors that were primary growth drivers in December

2024, included AI/ML (36 per cent), Oil and Gas (13 per cent), FMCG (12 per cent) and Healthcare (12 per cent), said the report.

Top metro cities collectively posted a 10 per cent growth as the year came to an end, it added.

The Naukri JobSpeak is a monthly Index representing the Indian job market and hiring activity based on new job listings and job-related searches by recruiters on the resume database of Naukri.com.

Meanwhile, according to the



report, fresher hiring, which had majorly been muted through 2024, saw an impressive 6 per cent growth in December 2024, driven by creative, lifestyle and retail sectors

like Design (39 per cent), Beauty and Wellness (26 per cent) and Consumer Durables (19 per cent), respectively.

The FMCG sector achieved an 18 per cent growth in fresher hiring during December 2024, marking the highest monthly increase for the sector in fresher recruitment throughout the year, it added.

The creative industry showed an interesting technical tilt in December as video editors and interior designers were among the top roles hired, reflecting a balanced demand for visual storytelling and spa-

atial innovation, it stated.

The Architecture and Interior Design industry stood out with a 39 per cent growth in fresher hiring, contributing to the design sector's impressive 51 per cent growth overall, it added.

The report also revealed that following the strong hiring trends highlighted in October, South India continued its robust performance into December 2024, reinforcing its position as a key driver of white-collar employment.

While Chennai (35 per cent) and Bangalore (21 per cent)

sustained their impressive growth, Coimbatore emerged as a standout, with fresher hiring growing by 14 per cent, fueled by a 52 per cent surge in foreign MNC hiring.

Hyderabad also posted 15 per cent growth, reflecting the region's sustained appeal for high-skill and fresher roles across sectors like IT, Consumer Durables, and Real Estate.

"India's job market is entering 2025 with vigour, driven by AI/ML (Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning) growth and creative sectors."



Kate Beckinsale fires back at weight critics

Kate Beckinsale, known for her fierce and unapologetic attitude, has hit back at online trolls who made unsolicited comments about her weight. The actress, who has long been a subject of scrutiny due to her public persona, was not in the mood to let negative comments slide as the year came to a close. Beckinsale responded to a troll who commented, "It's not a criticism, but I think you've lost too much weight lately." Beckinsale swiftly shut down the comment, saying, "If it's not criticism, it's a passive-aggressive, completely unnecessary opinion from someone I don't know who knows nothing about my circumstances. So next time you feel like commenting on someone's body, I suggest you keep it to your f---ing self." The actress didn't stop there, continuing to fire back at others who made remarks about her appearance. When another user advised her to gain some weight, she responded with a blunt retort: "Not all of us want t**ies like yours." She also reacted to another comment that asked, "What happened to K. Beckinsale?" by humorously saying, "She's dead. So please end donations and flowers." In a response to a comment in Spanish, asking if everything was alright at home, Beckinsale answered: "Everything is absolutely great, f--- off." Beckinsale's no-nonsense attitude towards trolls is well-known, but her response this time came with a deeper context. Earlier in the year, in July 2024, she had similarly shut down body-shamers, explaining how her personal struggles had led to significant weight loss. "I watched my stepfather [director Roy Battersby] die quite shockingly; my mother has stage 4 cancer and I lost a lot of weight from stress and grief quite quickly," Beckinsale shared in a candid post. She revealed that the emotional toll had burned a hole in her esophagus, causing her to vomit large amounts of blood and requiring critical care for weeks.

ARMAAN MALIK & AASHNA SHROFF'S LOVE STORY UNFOLDS IN A DREAMY WEDDING

Playback singer Armaan Malik has officially tied the knot with his longtime girlfriend, influencer Aashna Shroff. The couple, who had announced their engagement in August 2023, shared the delightful news with their followers on Instagram, posting breathtaking pictures from their wedding day. The images, radiating pure joy and love, featured the couple dressed in stunning traditional attire, including shades of orange, which added to the romantic atmosphere of the intimate ceremony.

The wedding announcement was made on Thursday and the couple shared their happiness through a heartfelt caption in Hindi, reading, "Tu hi mera ghar" (You are my home). The pictures revealed an intimate outdoor ceremony, attended by close family and friends, reflecting the deep bond they share.

The journey to this beautiful moment began a few months earlier when Armaan Malik proposed to Aashna in August 2023. To mark the special occasion, Armaan released a music video titled *Kasam Se - The Proposal*, dedicated to Aashna. Just two months later, they made their engagement official in a formal ceremony.

Armaan Malik, a highly regarded Indian playback singer, songwriter, record producer, voice-over artist, performer and actor, has earned widespread recognition for his melodious voice across various languages. Aashna Shroff, on the other hand, is a well-known fashion and beauty blogger and YouTuber, with a growing influence in the online community.

Together, Armaan and Aashna's union has captured the hearts of many and the couple continues to inspire their fans with their love and shared journey.



Shahid Kapoor's smoldering Deva poster evokes Kabir Singh energy



Zee Studios and Roy Kapur Films' upcoming action-packed thriller, *Deva*, has become one of the most highly anticipated films in recent times. The makers have kept audiences at the edge of their seats with constant updates, each one intensifying the excitement around the project. The latest reveal, a stunning new poster featuring Shahid Kapoor's fierce look, has only added to the growing anticipation.

In the poster, Shahid Kapoor exudes raw power and charisma, his rugged look complemented by a cigarette, giving him an air of attitude and intensity. The visual impact is heightened by the background image of the legendary Amitabh Bachchan from his iconic 90s era, creating a nostalgic connection that adds a unique depth to the poster. This powerful blend of Shahid's fierce energy with Bachchan's iconic presence sets the tone for what promises to be a thrilling cinematic experience. Many of the netizens even stated how the look reminds them of Shahid's *Kabir Singh*. Fans are eagerly waiting to witness Shahid's powerhouse performance in the film.

Deva is directed by the acclaimed Malayalam filmmaker Rosshan Andrews, and produced by Zee Studios and Roy Kapur Films. Set to release on January 31, 2025, the film is expected to be one of the first major blockbusters of the year. With its gripping storyline, high-octane action sequences, and stellar performances, *Deva* is sure to be an unforgettable ride for moviegoers.

STANDALONE

Mere Husband Ki Biwi brings a twisted love story on Feb 21, 2025

The highly anticipated comedy film *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* is set to hit cinemas on February 21, 2025, starring Arjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh and Bhumi Pednekar in the lead roles. Directed by Pooja Entertainments, the film is already creating waves with its intriguing storyline and stellar cast. Known for its quirky and humorous approach, *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* promises a fresh take on relationships, love and the unexpected twists that life throws at us.

On Thursday, the makers dropped a quirky and fun-filled video on social media to tease the audience ahead of the film's release. The video, which features a remixed version of the classic track *Apna Banale Mujhe Balma*, adds a dash of nostalgia to the modern storyline. The remix brings an energetic and upbeat vibe, perfectly aligning with the film's lighthearted and humorous theme. The caption accompanying the video reads, "Yahan Pyaar Ki Geometry thodi twisted hai—kyunki yeh love triangle nahi puri circle hai," hinting at the unusual

and complex love dynamics the film explores. The film revolves around an unusual love story, where the dynamics of relationships are anything but conventional. The characters, played by Kapoor, Singh and Pednekar, are caught in an intriguing web of emotions, misunderstandings and quirky situations. While it seems like a typical love triangle at first glance, the tagline cleverly suggests that the story will unfold in a much more surprising and unconventional manner. Instead of the traditional love triangle, this film explores a much more complex circle of relationships, making it a must-watch for fans of quirky romantic comedies. Directed by Pooja Entertainments, known for their knack for producing fun and engaging films, *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* is shaping up to be one of the most anticipated films of 2025. The film's playful approach to love, relationships and the unexpected turns they take is bound to leave audiences entertained and amused.



Following his remarkable milestone with the Dil-Luminati Tour, Diljit Dosanjh had the honour of meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The meeting was a significant moment, with PM Modi expressing immense pride in Diljit's success and the global recognition he has garnered. The Prime Minister acknowledged the cultural impact of Dosanjh's music and the pride he brings to India through his international achievements.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



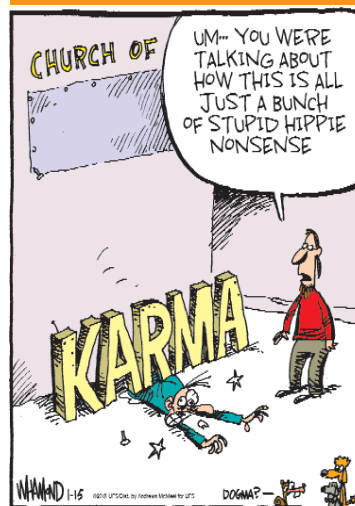
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



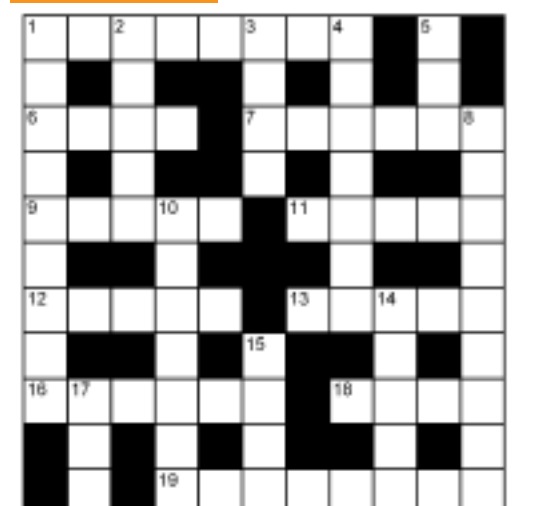
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



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

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

- 1 A tank for live fish
 - 2 A list of restaurant meals
 - 3 A feeling that makes you want to scratch
 - 4 Check the length of green
 - 5 A female sheep
 - 6 Stopped doing something
 - 7 A pale purple colour
 - 8 Large extinct animals
 - 9 A crown-wearing woman
 - 10 Very old
 - 11 A female relation
 - 12 The largest continent
 - 13 Workers sit at these in offices
 - 14 A person from Sweden
 - 15 Adult males
 - 16 Hot coals left after a fire
 - 17 Adult males
- DOWN**
- 1 An emergency vehicle
 - 2 Normal



'Every dish I create carries the memory of the place'

TRAVELOGUE

Travel and food share an inseparable bond, enriching the other in ways that create unforgettable experiences. For celebrated chef Ranveer Brar, this connection goes beyond mere exploration—it's a philosophy, a way of life that shapes his culinary creations and storytelling. Here's diving in deep into his travel diaries and exploration



TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Whether wandering through the bustling streets of a foreign city, soaking in the serene beauty of a remote mountain range, or tasting the local flavours of a quaint village, travel offers a unique lens through which we can experience the world. It's a chance to break free from routine, embrace spontaneity and create memories that last a lifetime. Each trip, whether near or far, carries the promise of discovery—of new places, new people and perhaps, a new sense of purpose.

For celebrated chef Ranveer Brar, food is not just a craft—it is a lifelong institution of learning. His journey into the world of cooking began in the bustling communal kitchen of a langar in his hometown, where the act of feeding hundreds selflessly planted the first seeds of his culinary passion. "The sheer volume of food being cooked by 50 to 60 people, without tasting it and yet producing dishes of such delicious perfection—it was fascinating," Brar reflects. "It taught me the importance of emotion in cooking, hygiene, and above all, selflessness in the kitchen." Brar's love for cooking truly blossomed when he

explored the streets of Lucknow as a young man. The city, rich in culinary heritage, folklore and gastronomic tales, unfolded before him as an endless source of inspiration. It was here that he apprenticed under Munir Ustad, a skilled kebab vendor, who provided Brar with his first formal tutelage in cooking. Lucknow's vibrant food culture, with its rich history and iconic dishes, cemented Brar's connection to cuisine and fueled his desire to pursue it as a career.

After completing his education at IHM Lucknow, Brar began his professional journey with the Taj Group of Hotels.

Over the years, he expanded his culinary horizons, opening restaurants across India and abroad, but he never forgot the foundational lessons learned in the langar or the streets of Lucknow. Brar firmly believes that travel is essential to becoming a better chef. "To innovate or reinvent any dish, you need to experience it in its original form, at its place of origin," he says. His travels have taken him across India and to distant lands like Turkey, Scandinavia and Kerala, all of which have left an indelible mark on his culinary style. "Kerala's spices, Turkey's vibrant street food and the minimalist elegance of Scandinavian cuisine have all been deeply inspiring."

His trip to Georgetown left a lasting impression. "It's a melting pot of cultures, and you see that reflected in its food," Brar shares. "At Line Clear, I had an unforgettable plate of nasi kandar. Exploring the street food—from Chinatown to Little India—was a culinary adventure in itself. For me, street food is always the best way to understand the true essence of a place."

Brar takes great pleasure in observing how people today are connecting more deeply with food. "It's wonderful to see people not just eating but also engaging with food, exploring its stories and history," he says. He encourages food enthusiasts to dive into local culinary scenes when traveling. "Talk to the locals. Visit older establishments that have stood the test of time. You'll uncover stories of culinary evolution that no book can teach you." When Brar travels, he brings back more than recipes. His trips are a source of stories, inspiration and cultural understanding. "Every dish I create carries the memory of a place, a flavor, or a conversation," he shares. His travels also fuel his passion for poetry, which he often pens during his journeys.

In Melbourne, Brar found inspiration in an unexpected way. "I got lost in Hosier Lane, mesmerised by the graffiti. Those vibrant colours and the creativity of the artists stayed with me long after I found my way out." When asked to name the best food city, Brar hesitates. "Best would be limiting it. Maybe I'm yet to find one," he says thoughtfully. However, he admits to having a soft spot for Istanbul's rich and diverse food culture, as well as for Lucknow and Kolkata back home.

For Ranveer Brar, every journey is an opportunity to explore, learn and connect—both with people and their food. It's this ethos that makes him one of the most beloved chefs, as he continues to transform his experiences into dishes that tell stories of tradition, innovation and shared humanity.

AI-powered cardiac devices pave way for heart disease management

Adaptive cardiac devices are revolutionising heart disease treatment for real-time monitoring and dynamic therapy adjustments, according to a report.

The report by GlobalData, a data and analytics company, showed that these devices offer continuous, precise interventions enabling better patient outcomes. These also present a shift toward more effective and responsive management of heart disease.

In contrast to traditional devices like pacemakers that deliver consistent outputs, the novel adaptive cardiac technologies leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse heart activity. The adaptive technology also adjusts treatment based on fluctuations in cardiac rhythms, leading to a personalised approach. This ensures that therapy aligns precisely with a patient's evolving condition, providing 24/7 care and better health outcomes.

According to GlobalData forecast, the cardiovascular devices market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.20 per cent from \$84.8 billion in 2023 to \$140 billion in 2033. This growth highlights the increasing demand for advanced diagnostic and therapeutic tools tailored to cardiac care.

"The cardiovascular devices market is undergoing rapid expansion and diversification. AI-enhanced solutions exemplify the industry's shift toward precision medicine, aligning with regulatory bodies like the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prioritising innovative approaches to improve outcomes in cardiovascular disease management," said Cynthia Stinchcombe, Medical Devices Analyst at GlobalData.

The report projects that advancements in cardiac care, combined with novel therapies, will transform the field, providing new solutions for millions affected by heart disease globally.

"The adoption of cutting-edge technologies in cardiovascular care emphasises the critical role innovation plays in modern healthcare. With these advanced systems, we are moving towards more tailored and effective treatment strategies for heart conditions, improving both quality of life and clinical outcomes," Stinchcombe said.

The report also highlights the synergy between wearable cardiac monitors—such as ECG-enabled smartwatches—and AI-driven devices.

Wearables provide continuous monitoring outside clinical environments, while adaptive implants offer precise therapeutic interventions, creating a comprehensive framework for cardiac health management.

"As cardiovascular diseases remain a leading global health concern, the advancements we're seeing offer renewed hope. Emerging technologies are crucial in expanding diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities. With the FDA's support for AI-driven medical devices, these innovations are set to reshape cardiac care, delivering transformative benefits to patients worldwide," Stinchcombe said.



Turning trauma into triumph

PNS|HYDERABAD

Autism support goes beyond providing care—it's about fostering understanding, inclusion and empowerment for individuals on the spectrum and their families. It encompasses early diagnosis, therapeutic interventions, educational programs and emotional assistance tailored to meet unique needs. Effective support focuses on fostering communication, social skills and independence through methods such as speech therapy, behavioural interventions, and sensory integration. Equally crucial is empowering families by providing resources, counseling and tools to navigate challenges and celebrate progress. Now this is where Leeza app comes to the rescue.

Mohammad Ibrahim Raza, a pioneer in the development of the Leeza App, is driven by a strong sense of personal connection to families living with autism and great desire to transform their existing conditions. With a vision of compassion and innovation, Raza, seeks to create a life-altering experience for families dealing with autism. He explains that the app is a comprehensive autism support service that begins with free preliminary assessments for early signs of autism and continues with appropriate interventions.

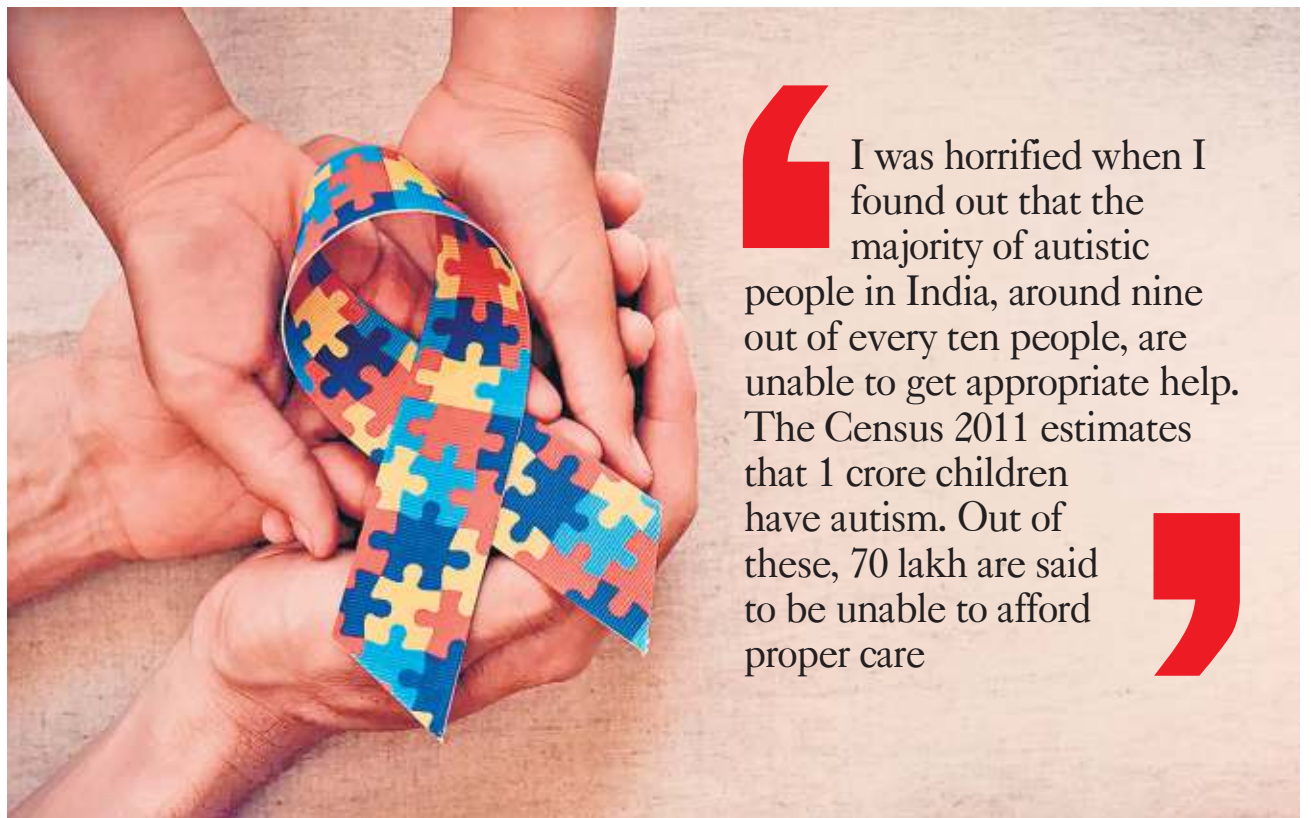
Raza had another story to tell. He shared the story behind Leeza App and expressed how he envisions society to be more inclusive and supportive in an inspiring conversation with us.

The beginning of this engagement was very personal. "I had a cousin who was diagnosed with autism. The struggle that we went through in terms of getting a proper diagnosis and therapy centers was traumatic. We were duped and the void of being understood and supported was so painful." After this experience, Raza felt responsible and decided to do something about autism which led him to conduct research on the condition.

The app was officially launched on January 30, 2024, after a soft launch in October 2023 and an official one in August 2024 where its full features were visible and functional. The development of the app was in progress for some time before people witnessed its official version. "The idea was conceived in October 2023 when we started working on the idea. We hosted an unofficial launch on December 30, 2023, and an official launch on August 2024 when all operations were initiated."

Through the intelligent application of AI, novel techniques in prediction assessments, free counseling's and formal assessments are offered. The app also gives parents the needed tools so that they can work together with the child as partners in therapy. Raza underlines the point by saying: "Our focus is to simplify treatment and decrease the level of dependence on the therapist's profession. As far as we hope, parents can do a lot and they must have the means to do that."

In addition, Raza appreciates the value of



I was horrified when I found out that the majority of autistic people in India, around nine out of every ten people, are unable to get appropriate help. The Census 2011 estimates that 1 crore children have autism. Out of these, 70 lakh are said to be unable to afford proper care

collaborations and partnerships. For instance, Leeza App does not have any formal partnership with the Parents Association for Welfare of Mentally Handicapped Persons (PAWMH), but the two organisations operate within the same ecosystem. Raza states, "During the visa's international phase, I've gone to the USA, Poulsen, and has seen by myself what neurodevelopmental conditions do to families. It made me even more determined to develop the platform for the community that the app strives to build."

As its expands and manages to make an impact, Raza stays focused on the course. "I want the Leeza App to be a light for families who have autism. We are not only an app—we are a network of solidarity which transcends borders." Raza has taken it upon herself and through Leeza App, initiates a new revolution of how families impacted by autism get detection, support and integration.

The diagnosis of his cousin made him more cautious and encouraged him to search for ways that would help people with autism and their families. Raza recalls, "I was horrified when I found out that the majority of autistic people in India, around nine

out of every ten people, are unable to get appropriate help. The Census 2011 estimates that 1 crore children have autism. Out of these, 70 lakh are said to be unable to afford proper care."

The research by Raza brought him to the conclusion, "The parents are kept in the dark and therefore, always remain in denial and confusion in a bid to help their child." He points out, "Parents are the people who are with the child, the child is with them the longest and empowering the parents is critical." This insight triggered the idea of Leeza App where the idea is to enable the services for autism to be available at lower costs.

Raza reflects when he started he was doing something wrong, "I was worried I'd cause more harm than good, because I'm not autistic." He tells a story about thinking about charging the app a nominal fee to use its services. But his mentor, Mirash Rahim, cautioned him against doing so because of the fear and uncertainty parents feel when seeking out assessments for their children. Raza says of an autistic child: "It's a lifelong condition, and their life is going to change completely. We cannot afford to increase their stress."

His approach reflects Raza's commitment to empathy and to understanding. He understands how sensitive the matters in question are and how plainly it needs to be said. "I have to be so careful because this topic is really sensitive and I can't do them more harm than good." With Leeza App, Raza aspires to create a supportive ecosystem for families with autism impacting parents to be co-therapists for their children.

He also envisioned partnering with existing therapy centers to offer affordable options, but the reality turned out less than perfect. "The therapy prices were soaring high, with certain centres pricing as high as Rs 40,000 a month," Raza explains. People living below extremely low debt lines hardly manage to spend Rs 9,000 a month on nutrition. How could they pay Rs 40,000?"

This made him re-evaluate and look for different solutions. In his search, he found Bharati Vidyalaya, a teacher training institute and therapy centre. Raza met the founder Ayesha Rubina, and discovered a common vision. "The thing is we picked each other up, and since then we've been impacting families. Therapy is now accessible even to people from low-income backgrounds, like auto drivers."

He is working on enabling the parents to treat their own children as a co-therapist such that financial reasons should not cap their children's development. He says, "Our agenda is whenever a parent comes to us, the last thing that they should be worried about is 'oh but the price or money' - but their biggest headache should be on how to make their child independent."

The parents are kept in the dark and therefore, always remain in denial and confusion in a bid to help their child. Parents are the people who are with the child, the child is with them the longest and empowering the parents is critical

Debates in dressing room should stay there: Gautam Gambhir

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Asserting that “debates” in the dressing room should not come out in public domain, India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Thursday said he has had some “honest” conversations with his players and that the ongoing transition in the team will be all-encompassing. Gambhir also side-stepped queries on whether out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma will get a place in the final XI for the fifth and final Test against Australia starting on Friday. Amid reports of unrest in the dressing room, the head coach sought to douse the fire by declaring that they were “just reports, not truth.” “There were some honest words is all I can say. Honesty is extremely important if you want to go on and achieve some great things,” Gambhir told mediapersons on the eve of the Test match that India need to win to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and stay alive in

the World Test Championship. The straight-talking former opener refrained from taking names but acknowledged that a transition is in progress and performance will be the sole criteria to stay in the side. “Indian cricket will always be in safe hands as long as there are honest people in that dressing room. Honesty is the most important thing for any transition. And it’s not phasing out senior players and bringing in new players. Ultimately what will keep you in the dressing room is performance,” Gambhir couldn’t be more precise. If one read between the lines, it seemed that even Mohammed Shami’s days as an international cricketer are numbered. Shami could not regain fitness for the current series despite being a rehab for a while. “Earlier when transitions happened it seemed, one department is taking the team forward but (in this case) transition will happen in both



batting as well as bowling,” he said. The question of natural game versus situational awareness cropped up and the coach reiterated his stand that the team’s needs come first. “Only one ideology matters and that’s team first. It’s a team sport and you have got to play how team needs you to play. You can play the natural game but in team sport, individuals only contribute.” When Rishabh Pant’s shot-selection in the Melbourne Test was specifically mentioned, he brushed it aside, saying, “I don’t want to talk about individuals, they know where they stand.” The feisty Gambhir was on full view when an Australian reporter threw a query on why Rohit had not showed up for the interaction as is the “tradition.” “Can you confirm the playing eleven?” he asked. The response was vague when it came to addressing the question on his final XI. “Everything is fine with Rohit and

I don’t think there is anything traditional here. The head coach is here and that should be good enough,” he said. “We will decide on the playing XI after looking at the pitch,” he added. When the same question was repeated, he was more terse. “The answer remains the same.” So, what are the conversations that he has had with Rohit and Virat Kohli, whose dismissals outside the off-stump continue to hurt the team. “There’s only one conversation and that’s how to win matches for India. We all know how important that is,” he said. However, Gambhir said that he doesn’t appreciate dressing room debates get space in public discourse. “Debates between coaches and players should be confined between them. This sport is known for results but conversations between individuals should stay inside dressing room,” he asserted.



Sri Lanka beats New Zealand by 7 runs in the 3rd T20

AP ■ NELSON

Kusal Perera scored Sri Lanka’s fastest Twenty20 International century — from 44 balls — on Thursday to spur his team to a consolation win over New Zealand by seven runs in the final match of the three-match series. Perera’s career-best score in a century partnership with captain Charith Asalanka lifted Sri Lanka to 218-5 — its second-highest T20 score, as it batted first for the first time in the series. New Zealand held a winning 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first match by eight runs and the second by 45 runs. New Zealand needed to achieve its highest run chase in T20s to complete a clean sweep of the series and was given a good start by Rachin Ravindra who made 69 from 39 balls. But it fell just short, held to 211-7. The Black Caps began at a pace to match Sri Lanka, reaching 60-0 in the six-over power play. But Asalanka slammed the brakes on the New Zealand innings when he dismissed Ravindra, Mark Chapman (9) and Glenn Phillips (6) in quick succession. Asalanka had figures of 3-25 after those dismissals but Daryl Mitchell hit four consecutive sixes from his final over to wreck his analysis and bat New Zealand back into the game. Wanindu Hasaranga then dismissed Mitchell Hay (8)

and Michael Bracewell (1) in the 16th over to tip the match back in the visitors’ favor. Asalanka took a superb diving catch to remove Bracewell and managed his bowlers well in a superb all-round performance. “I think it’s a good win for us,” Asalanka said. “I think throughout the series we’ve played good cricket but couldn’t manage to get a win. Finally we got it. I hope this is a momentum shift for us. Adapting to these conditions has been a key for us.” New Zealand came to the last over, bowled by Binura Fernando, needing 22 to win. After taking six runs from the first three balls, one of which was a wide, Zak Foulkes hit the fourth ball for six, leaving New Zealand needing 10 from the last two balls. It was too much and the New Zealand batters managed only three more runs. The start of the match was delayed by 30 minutes by a wet outfield and when it began Sri Lanka lost the toss but had the chance to bat first on a good pitch at Saxton Oval. The tourists lost both openers, Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis, inside the power play. But Perera powered up the Sri Lanka innings in an outstanding batting performance, hitting 13 fours and four sixes in his 101 from 46 balls. One of the keys to victory was the 75 runs Perera and Asalanka hit between the 14th and 18th overs which proved vital in making the run chase just too much for New Zealand.

Australia captain Pat Cummins likely to miss tour of Sri Lanka

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia captain Pat Cummins hinted that he may skip the tour of Sri Lanka later this month to be present for the birth of his second child. Australia are scheduled to play two Tests in Sri Lanka on January 29 and February 6, around the same time his wife — Becky — is due to give birth. “It’s pretty hard to plan exactly the day, but definitely (I might miss the Sri Lanka tour),” Cummins told ‘The Daily Telegraph’ at the launch of the Pink Test, starting here on Friday. In Cummins absence, Steve Smith or Travis Head will lead Australia. Cummins revealed that his mother’s death last year had a profound impact on reshaping his priorities in life. The pacer had returned



midway through the tour of India to be with his mother when she passed away. “In some ways, it really makes you focus in on what I think is important. It’s family, it’s enjoyment, it’s trying to find joy in life and I think that’s been a slight shift in the way I’ve approached playing and

touring and it’s just given me that real decluttering mindset. “When you go out, you just want to play well, and of course, there’s going to be pressure, but you don’t want to forget what mum and dad used to say to us every time we went out to play as kids: ‘Go and enjoy it. Try your

best, but make sure you enjoy it.’ I try to remind myself of that every time I go on a tour or play.” “Whatever you choose to do, there’s always an opportunity cost,” Cummins reflected. “In the last few years, that’s really rung true. When you go away on tour, you’re missing out on family time or moments. That’s a deliberate choice, so you have to make sure you’re making the most of that tour or that game, if that makes sense.” Cummins has previously admitted that he regretted missing the early weeks of his son Albie’s life due to his commitment to the World Cup. “I missed a big chunk (of Albie’s early days) last time and I want to work out how we can spend a bit more time at home for that initial period this time,” he had said.



Marsh dropped, Starc declared fit for BGT finale

PTI ■ SYDNEY

All-rounder Beau Webster will replace an out-of-form Mitchell Marsh in Australia’s squad for the fifth and final Test against India, home skipper Pat Cummins said here on Thursday. The 33-year-old Marsh scored only 73 runs in seven innings across four Tests and Cummins cited this as the reason for his axing. He has bowled merely 33 overs in the series so far, claiming just three wickets. “We have one change in our side. Beau Webster comes in place of Mitch Marsh. Mitch knows that he hasn’t scored enough runs,” Cummins said at the pre-match press conference. “Mitchie obviously hasn’t quite got the runs or perhaps wickets said he would have liked this series. So, it felt like it was time for a fresher up and Beau’s been with the squad. He’s been great. But I feel like now is a good week for Beau to get a chance.” The 31-year-old Webster, who played against India A in November, has scored 5247 runs and taken 148 wickets in first-class cricket. Webster has been in good form in the Sheffield Shield as well and averaged over 55 last season. “He’s just been one of those star performers for Tasmania with the bat or ball, or in the field. He always seems to have a big impact, quite aggressive. (He) can change the game, like we’ve seen Mitch Marsh or Travis Head or Alex Carey do in that middle order.” Cummins admitted that

Webster’s crafty bowling played a role in the decision. “That was definitely a factor. It’s always nice to have a fifth bowler that bowls quite a lot for Tasmania. So if we need to call on that, we can.” “Firstly, if you’re going to bat six, you picked for your batting, which he’s shown in Shield over the last couple years when he takes the game on, and he’s really changed some games for Tasmania. That pace bowling of Beau’s going to be handy,” said Cummins. However, Cummins asserted that the Boxing Day match will not be Marsh’s last Test for Australia. “Particularly here in Australia, when a batter misses out or gets dropped, it’s always seen as a big thing, but it’s not the case. We love pulling a squad of players together who we can call on at different times, and we thought the time was right for Mitchy to have a fresher-up and miss this one. “But doesn’t mean that he won’t be back in the team at some point,” the skipper said. Starc fit Cummins also put to rest the speculation surrounding Mitchell Starc’s fitness, saying the left-arm pacer will play the game. “He went for scans yesterday. But he got the all clear to play this match. He is good to go,” Cummins said. The 34-year-old’s fitness was the main concern for the hosts after he battled through sore ribs in the Boxing Day Test but still managed to bowl effectively with help from the team’s physios.

Arsenal moves up to 2nd place in Premier League with 3-1 win over Brentford

AP ■ LONDON

Arsenal is back into a second place in the Premier League and in no rush to add players in the transfer window. Mikel Arteta’s team beat Brentford 3-1 on Wednesday to leapfrog Nottingham Forest and close the gap on league leader Liverpool to six points. “If there’s an opportunity, we’ll look at it,” Arteta said of the January window. “I really like my players. I really value what we have, because it’s a lot of quality and a lot of commitment from all of them.” That includes 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri, who got his first Premier League start in place of the injured Bukayo Saka. The teenager was involved in second-half goals by Mikel Merino and Gabriel



Martinelli. Bryan Mbeumo put the home team ahead in the 13th minute at Gtech Community Stadium, but Gabriel Jesus made it 1-1 just before the half-hour mark — his sixth goal in the past four games. Merino scored in the 50th minute and Martinelli added

a third three minutes later. It was Arsenal’s second straight win without Saka, who is likely to be sidelined until at least March. The England winger tore his right hamstring in a 5-1 win over Crystal Palace on Dec. 21. Arsenal extended its unbeaten streak to 12 games

in all competitions. Liverpool has a game in hand on the Gunners, who play at Brighton on Saturday. Liverpool hosts Manchester United on Sunday. Brentford remained in 12th place and has lost three of its past four Premier League matches. **HAVERTZ SENT HOME WITH ILLNESS** Several Arsenal players were dealing with a virus before and during the game, Arteta said. Kai Havertz was sent home, and Declan Rice only entered the game as a substitute in the 78th minute. “These things happen. There are always things thrown at you, infections, viruses, so I try to delay the lineup as late as possible because you can get up in the morning and unfortunately have a surprise like this,” the manager said.

Unfortunate that India aren’t travelling to Pakistan for Champions Trophy: Shane Watson

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson termed India’s inability to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy as “unfortunate” but said the ICC showpiece will offer star batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma a chance to liberate themselves from a prolonged form slump. The global governing body has adopted the “Hybrid” model for this edition of the CT with India scheduled to play its matches at a neutral venue in Dubai. “It’s unfortunate that things have worked out that way for sure. But there’s no doubt that what everyone loves seeing — the India-Pakistan games. Whenever they come together, whether it’s an ICC event, it is a really special time because we’ve got a sense of what’s on the line,” Watson told the media here during the Champions Trophy Tour. “It’s unfortunate that India aren’t travelling to Pakistan for this Champions Trophy. But, unfortunately, that’s just the way it is right now,” he added. Watson said the CT offers cricket a

fresh context, breaking the long lull of four years between two ODI World Cups. “The CT is a critically important tournament in world cricket because the One Day World Cup is only once in every four years. It is great because it breaks up those four years,” he noted. The 43-year-old also said the CT keeps the ODI format alive amidst the rightful prominence Test cricket receives and the upsurge of T20s. “You keep giving one-day cricket the energy that it needs because it is a great game. It’s a great format. It provides that balance between Test cricket and T20 cricket. “We never want to lose the format of one-day cricket, but there needs to be context as often as possible. And the CT certainly provides that.” “When you play a CT where there’s only eight teams, there is something riding on every ball. And as a team, you have to hit the ground sprinting. Otherwise, you’ll be out like it was for the Australian team in 2013.” Then defending champions Australia had finished at the



bottom of Group A with a solitary win and crashed out of the tournament, which India won eventually under MS Dhoni. Current form no worry for Rohit, Kohli

Both Rohit and Kohli were part of that victory in England 12 years back, but now these two superstars are finding it tough to make big runs as they did in the past. But Watson was not worried over

the Indians’ patchy form for talks surrounding their retirement. “I don’t think it (current poor form) will really play a part at all with Rohit Sharma and Virat’s impact in one-day cricket. It’s

going to be different conditions where they’re playing in Dubai. One-day cricket does really free them both as well,” said Watson. He placed his faith in Kohli’s extraordinary ODI numbers — 295 ODIs, 13906 runs, Average: 58.18 with 50 hundreds and 72 fifties. “Kohli is an absolute master of one-day cricket.” “Yes, he’s a master of all formats, but especially ODIs. You see his extraordinary numbers over a long period of time, averaging around 57 and a strike rate of 93 over a long period of time. It’s crazy to think the control that he has over his innings.” Watson said Rohit could be back to his best in ODIs. “We’ll see that again in the Champions Trophy. Rohit, like we saw in the one-day World Cup (2023), when he was at his very best, he was taking on the game. “It’s more difficult to be able to do that in Test cricket. He hasn’t been able to find that balance here in Australia. But when he goes out for the batting in one-days, he lets loose. That’s when we see the very best of Rohit Sharma.”

“So I’d be very surprised if he doesn’t perform really well in the Champions Trophy, knowing that he probably doesn’t have a lot of time left, whatever that is, but a lot of time left in international cricket. So I’m sure he’ll let the handbrake off,” he added. Pat for Nitish Kumar Reddy Watson said Nitish Kumar Reddy who made a hundred in the Boxing Day Test, will have to improve as a bowler to realise his full potential as an all-rounder. “It’s exciting to see a young all-rounder coming through, be able to do what he did in the IPL just from a batting perspective. (because of) The impact player, which is sort of one of the rules that I don’t particularly like...Someone like Reddy didn’t get an opportunity to be able to really bowl much. “But now we’re seeing it in Test cricket and he will fit beautifully into one-day cricket and T20 cricket because of the versatility he provides. He’s got all the gears from a batting perspective and his bowling is only going to get better the more exposure he gets,” he concluded.

MAHESH BABU-RAJAMOULI FILM BEGINS, WITH ALL SHUSH!



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Superstar Mahesh Babu is teaming up with acclaimed director SS Rajamouli for the first time. While the film was officially announced some time ago, the team held a formal pooja ceremony on Thursday at the Aluminium Factory, which houses Rajamouli's office. The event was attended by Mahesh Babu and his family, including his wife Namrata, along with Rajamouli, his wife Rama Rajamouli, music director MM Keeravani and Rajamouli's father, Vijayendra Prasad. Producer KL Narayana and his family members were also present at the ceremony.

Interestingly, Mahesh Babu, who traditionally avoids attending pooja ceremonies for his films due to his personal sentiments, surprised everyone by making an exception for this project. For many of his latest films, his family members would attend such events in his place. Breaking his own tradition, Mahesh's presence at this event added a unique significance.

The pooja was a private affair, attended by assistant directors and unit members. Unlike Rajamouli's usual practice of announcing a film with a formal media conference, this launch was kept entirely low-key. According to sources, Rajamouli may hold a press meet later to share more details about the film.

The shooting for the film is set to commence immediately, with initial plans for locations in India. While earlier reports suggested that filming might begin in South Africa or other international locations, it is not yet confirmed. Rajamouli scouted locations in Odisha, hinting that portions of the film might be shot there as well. Rajamouli has often mentioned

that the story of this film is inspired by an Indiana Jones-style adventure. According to unit sources, Priyanka Chopra has been confirmed as the female lead. Known for her prominence in both Hindi cinema and Hollywood, Priyanka's involvement elevates the project's international appeal.

"This film with Mahesh Babu is being made on a grand scale with international standards. It will be released not only in Indian languages but also in Hollywood," revealed a source. The decision to cast Priyanka Chopra aligns with the film's ambition to reach global audiences.

This collaboration between Mahesh Babu and SS Rajamouli promises to be a landmark project, with the industry eagerly awaiting more details about its grand scale and adventurous storyline.



This film with Mahesh Babu is being made on a grand scale with international standards. It will be released not only in Indian languages but also in Hollywood



Ilayaraja and Keeravani join hands for a film

Yes, you heard it right. Two musical legends, Ilayaraja and MM Keeravani, have come together for a film, but not as co-composers. Instead, their collaboration takes on a unique form in the upcoming movie *Sashtipurthi*. Directed by Pavan Prabha, the film features veteran actor Rajendra Prasad in a key role, with Roopesh playing the lead. National Award-winning actress Archana also stars alongside Rajendra Prasad, marking their reunion on screen after 38 years since their iconic film *Ladies Tailor*. Music maestro Ilayaraja is composing the soundtrack for

Sashtipurthi, while Oscar-winning composer MM Keeravani has contributed by penning the lyrics for a song titled *Edo Ye Jannalodo*, which is set to release soon. Director Pavan Prabha expressed his excitement, stating, "There are five songs in the film. Chaitanya Prasad has written lyrics for four of them, while Keeravani Garu graciously wrote the lyrics for the fifth. We were fortunate that Keeravani Garu had some spare time in Chennai and was kind enough to contribute. This song is especially significant as it represents the coming together of Ilayaraja Garu and Keeravani Garu." Producer Rupesh Chowdhary shared his elation, calling this collaboration the best thing to happen for his film.



Pawan Kalyan croons for Hari Hara Veera Mallu

Actor-turned-politician Pawan Kalyan has been busy serving as the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and it has been a while since we last heard a song from his upcoming film. Now, the makers of *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* have announced that they will be releasing a song from the film on January 6. The song, *Maata Vinali*, will be released not only in Telugu but also in other languages such as Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi.

What makes this song particularly interesting is that Pawan Kalyan himself has sung it. The track is a powerful and mesmerising song

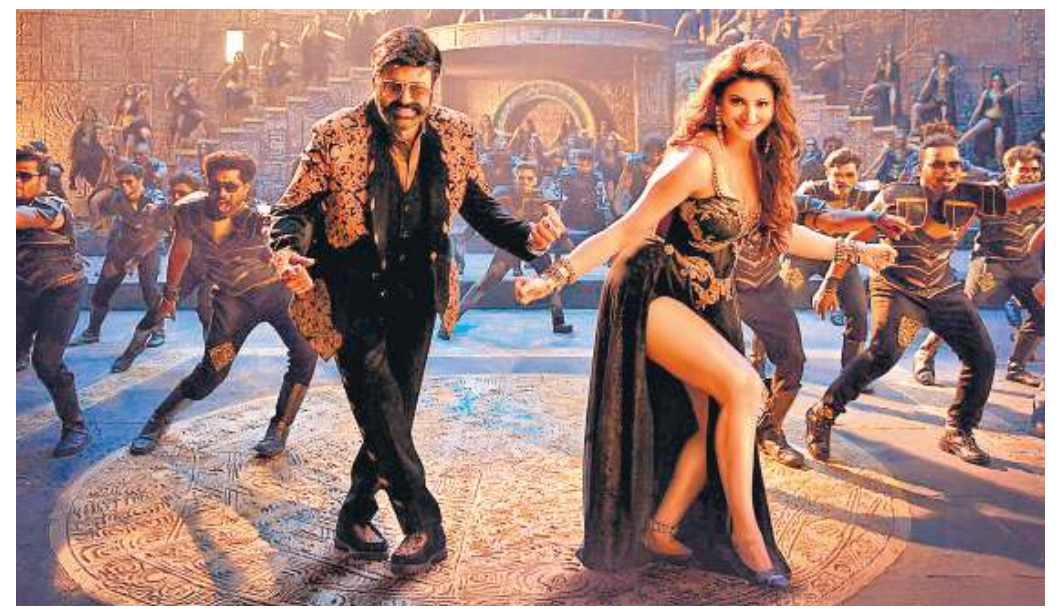
that showcases his impressive vocal prowess. The music has been composed by MM Keeravani, while the lyrics for the Telugu version have been penned by Penchal Das. What truly sets this song apart is Pawan Kalyan's vocals for the Telugu version. Over the years, he has lent his voice to several memorable tracks in films like *Thammudu*, *Kushi*, *Johnny*, *Attarintiki Daredi*, *Agnyaathavaasi* and a few other films. This song is set to make waves with its electrifying energy and soulful lyrics. The movie is currently in its final stages of shooting and post-production, with only 5 days of shooting left.

7G Brindavan Colony 2 nears completion



Director Selvaraghavan created a sensation with his 2004 film *7G Brindavan Colony*. Starring Ravi Krishna in the lead role alongside Sonia Agarwal, the movie, produced by Ravi Krishna's father AM Rathnam, became one of the most celebrated classics of its time. Now, nearly 20 years later, the much-anticipated sequel, *7G Brindavan Colony 2*, is set for release. Ravi Krishna reprises his role as the male lead, while Anaswara Rajan takes on the role of the female lead. Selvaraghavan, who helmed the first installment, returns to direct this sequel as well.

According to the makers, *7G Brindavan Colony 2* will retain the emotional depth and impact of the original, promising to tug at the audience's heartstrings once again. The sequel features a stellar supporting cast, including the versatile Jayaram, the comedic brilliance of Suman Shetty and the seasoned acting skills of Sudha. Adding to the excitement is the return of Yuvan Shankar Raja, whose music for the original film remains iconic. His compositions for the sequel are expected to recapture the magic while introducing fresh melodies for a new generation. "*7G Brindavan Colony* is a film that touched hearts and holds a special place in Tamil cinema history. With this sequel, we aim to recreate that magic while delivering a fresh and compelling narrative for today's audience," said producer AM Rathnam. Fans of the original and new audiences alike eagerly await the release of *7G Brindavan Colony 2*, which promises to be an emotional and cinematic treat.



Urvashi Rautela sizzles with NBK in Dabidi Dabidi

The words *Dabidi Dabidi* are instantly recognisable and synonymous with Nandamuri Balakrishna. Now, a lyrical song titled *Dabidi* has been released from Balakrishna's upcoming film *Daaku Maharaja*. The film is directed by Bobby Kolli and produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya. Urvashi Rautela, known for her glamour, is the actress featured in the song, grooving along-

side Balakrishna. She brings enough oomph to the song, making it a surefire attraction for the mass audience, especially Balakrishna fans.

This interesting song is penned by lyricist Kasarla Shyam, who skillfully blends Balakrishna's iconic monologues with Thaman's high-octane beats and dynamic musical arrangement. This song is undoubtedly going to be a favorite among fans.

Apart from Urvashi Rautela, the film also features other talented actresses, including Pragya Jaiswal, Shraddha Srinath and Chandini Chowdhary. Balakrishna is playing a unique role, one that he hasn't portrayed in many years. Director Bobby promises that this film will be the best in Balakrishna's illustrious career. Notably, Hindi actor Bobby Deol plays the villain in the film, which is set to hit the screens on January 12.

Kannada actor Ganesh eyes on Telugu



After a few Kannada actors like Upendra, Shivaraj Kumar, Rishabh Shetty, Yash, Rakshith Shetty, now another popular Kannada actor Ganesh is now widening his market into Telugu. Though the actor did many films in Kannada, the Telugu audience knew very little of him as his films didn't release much in Telugu. Now, the actor is coming up with a film titled *Pinaka* which is made with a black magic and fantasy backdrop. The film's teaser was released on Thursday. Interestingly, this film is produced by TG Vishwaprasad of People Media Factory. So, the film is releasing in Telugu also. B Dhanunjaya, a choreographer, is now turned as director with this *Pinaka* film. The teaser looks promising as Ganesh appeared in a different avatar in this one. The story deals with Kshudra shakti and Rudra Shakti. The visuals and the way they portrayed Ganesh in this teaser is interesting. It seems People Media Factory put a lot of money on this film as it needs a lot of graphics. Apart from Kannada, the makers are planning to release the film in Telugu and other languages too.

VENKY IN FULL PROMOTIONAL MOOD



Senior actor Venkatesh is everywhere, promoting his upcoming film *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*, which is set to release on January 14. He has been making appearances on various channel reality shows, giving video interviews, and even participated in the *Unstoppable* show. Additionally, he took part in a special chat with the film's leading ladies, Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary, along with producer Dil Raju and director Anil Ravipudi. During this chat, they all dressed up as characters from their earlier films, with Aishwarya as Chanti, Meenakshi Chaudhary as 'Bobbili Raja', director Anil Ravipudi as 'Jayam Manadera', and Dil Raju as 'Gharshana'. The film's songs are also going viral on the internet, indicating that Venkatesh is aggressively promoting his film this time around. Last year, his *Sankranthi* release did not fare well, but this time, he has an entertaining film and is leaving no stone unturned. As a result, he is ahead of the promotions compared to the other two films releasing during the Sankranthi festival. Director Anil Ravipudi is known for his expertise in writing comedy scenes. After *F2* with Venkatesh and Varun, he is now coming up with *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*, which promises to be even more entertaining than his previous film, according to the makers. This film has all the ingredients of a perfect Sankranthi release, making it a must-watch during the festival.