

'Development projects will boost self-esteem of poor'

5

'EV FIRMS AGREE TO END SUBSIDY AFTER EXISTING SUBSIDY REGIME ENDS'

8

I never attach myself to film results: Meenakshi CHAUDHARY

P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

BRS MLC Kavitha, who chanted Bathukamma and Jagruthi earlier has now taken up the BC issue. Some people (Kavitha) remember things only after coming out from their 'power intoxication.' KCR expelled Eatala Rajender for claiming to be one of the founding fathers of the BRS. The BRS should give some posts to BCs



- Ponnambhakaram, Minister, TG P4

DON'T MISS...

'Don't trouble ryots with RoFR pattas'

Minister for Housing and I&PR Kolu Parthasarathi directed the revenue and forest officials not to trouble the farmers who are cultivating lands after being sanctioned Recognition of Forest Rights (RoFR) pattas and regularize the endowment lands. Minister Parthasarathi held a conference in the CCLA office at Mangalagiri with the officials of various departments. Speaking on the occasion, he said that he had received complaints that the forest officials were troubling the farmers who were cultivating the forest lands with RoFR...

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'It takes two to tango'

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has emphasised that normalising relations with India requires mutual willingness. Speaking with journalists at the Foreign Office here on Thursday, Dar highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic efforts since the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government took office last year. When asked about Pakistan's relations with India, he stressed on the importance of mutual effort, and said: "It takes two to tango." Dar also announced plans to visit...

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Rural poverty declines sharply

Rural poverty has declined significantly to 4.86 per cent in the fiscal ending March 2024 from 25.7 per cent in 2011-12 mainly driven by government support programmes, said a SBI research released on Friday. Urban poverty too is estimated at 4.09 per cent, down from 13.7 per cent in 2011-12. "The sharp decline in rural poverty ratio is on account of higher consumption growth in lowest 0-5 per cent decile with significant government support and such support is important as we also find that..."

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India all out for 185 on day one of 5th Test

Rohit Sharma "opted to rest" in the team's interest but the same old script unfolded on a new day for Indian batters as they surrendered meekly for a paltry 185 in the face of some hostile seam bowling from Australia on the opening day of the fifth and final Test here. Virat Kohli (17 off 69 balls), whose form and technical weaknesses are also under the scanner, was for the seventh time dismissed in the corridor of uncertainty in the tour, a problem that seems...

-SPORTS

7 new airports in AP

Vijayawada Airport to feature designs inspired by Kuchipudi dance and Amaravati stupas

CM Chandrababu Naidu announced significant plans to boost aviation infrastructure in Andhra Pradesh, including the development of Bhogapuram International Airport and the expansion of Gannavaram Airport



- The Gannavaram Airport expansion is expected to be completed by June
- The State government is also planning to establish an aviation university and training centre to meet growing aviation needs
- CM Naidu stressed the importance of strategic location planning for new airports, citing industrial growth in areas like Anakapalle and Nakkapalle

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh is set to receive a boost in aviation infrastructure as Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced plans to establish seven new airports across the State. The announcement was made during a review meeting held at his residence in Undavalli on Friday, attended by Union Civil Aviation

Minister Rammohan Naidu and senior officials from the Airports Authority of India (AAI).

The Chief Minister highlighted the existing aviation network in the state, which includes seven airports: Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, Kadapa, Rajahmundry, Gannavaram (managed by AAI), Kumool (state-managed), and Puttaparthi (a private airstrip). Additionally, the

Bhogapuram International Airport is currently under development.

CM Naidu emphasized that increasing demand for aviation services has necessitated the establishment of additional airports. He revealed plans for new airports at Kuppam, Dagadarthy, Srikakulam, Tadepalligudem, Nagarjuna Sagar, Tuni-Annavaram, and Ongole.

Continued on Page 2

AP govt to issue orders in Telugu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has made a significant decision to issue government orders in Telugu as well. Henceforth, all official orders will be issued in both English and Telugu.

The government has instructed various departments to first issue orders in English and upload them, and then, within two days, release the same orders in Telugu.

The General Administration Department (GAD) has advised departments to make use of the Director of Translation's services for the translation of these orders.

The Principal Secretary of GAD, Suresh Kumar, issued the directions regarding this change.

This decision follows the resolution passed at the World Telugu Writers' Mahasabalu held recently in Vijayawada, which urged the government to take concrete steps to issue all administrative matters and government orders in Telugu.

The move has been met with enthusiasm by poets and writers across the state.



Elaborate arrangements for PM's visit to Vizag: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand has stated that extensive preparations are underway for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Visakhapatnam on January 8. A video conference was held on Friday to review the arrangements, with officials from various departments. The Chief Secretary directed the officials to ensure that all necessary steps were taken to visit a success.

The CS instructed the General Administration Department to ensure that department heads closely monitor the progress and emphasized that both the Visakhapatnam District Collector and Police Commissioner, along with officials from other departments, should coordinate their efforts to ensure seamless arrangements.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to arrive in Visakhapatnam on the evening of January 8, where he will participate in a roadshow, travelling from the Sampath Vinayaka Temple to a venue near the Andhra University Engineering College. Given the anticipated large turnout

of public representatives and the general public, special parking arrangements are being made. The Chief Secretary also directed the Electricity and Municipal departments to ensure adequate lighting along the roadshow route and at the venue, as well as in parking areas. In addition, necessary amenities such as drinking water, temporary toilets, and other facilities will be set up at the venue and parking zones. Officials were tasked with ensuring transportation for people coming from Visakhapatnam and surrounding districts, including Anakapalle, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam. The Chief Secretary also stressed the importance of making arrangements for food, water, and shelter to ensure a smooth and hassle-free experience for the attendees.

Regarding traffic management, the Director General of Police (DGP) and the Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner were instructed to take all necessary steps to prevent disruptions or parking-related issues.

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Irrigation Minister Nimmala Rama Naidu and MA & UD Minister P. Narayana at a review meeting on Friday.

Budameru Diversion Canal capacity to be expanded

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ministers Nimmala Ramanaidu and P. Narayana held a review meeting at the Vijayawada Irrigation Camp Office on Friday to discuss measures for controlling the Budameru floods. The meeting, attended by senior officials from various departments, focused on planning the reconstruction of Budameru and implementing steps to prevent future floods.

During the meeting, it was emphasised that the negligence of the previous government had led to significant losses for the city's residents. Ministers Nimmala Ramanaidu and P. Narayana stated that while the previous government had failed to allocate any funds for Budameru's development, the current government is actively working on plans to strengthen flood control measures.

The review included discussions on enhancing the capacity of the Budameru diversion canal, which is set to increase from 17,500 cusecs to 37,500 cusecs, as per the Chief Minister's directions. Officials were also instructed to expand the old channel's capacity from the Velagaleru regulator to Kolleru and to ensure that water flows towards the sea from Kolleru without obstruction.

Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu pointed out that the damage caused by the Budameru floods was visible to all, with a sudden influx of 50,000 cusecs of water in one day, resulting in three breaches in the channel.

He praised the leadership of CM Chandrababu Naidu for effectively mitigating the impact of the floods and protecting the public.

Continued on Page 2

FREE BUS RIDE FOR WOMEN

AP ministers on study tour meet K'taka CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Home and Disaster Management Minister Vangalapati Anitha has announced that the government will soon fulfill its promise of free bus travel for women. Following instructions from Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, a team of ministers is currently on a study tour to Bengaluru, she stated.

During their visit, the team met with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Transport Minister Ramlal Lingareddy, and senior officials from the Transport



Department. Minister Anitha presented a bouquet and congratulated CM Siddaramaiah for successful

ly implementing the Free Bus Scheme for women in Karnataka.

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Israeli strikes kill 50 in Gaza

PNS ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli airstrikes killed at least 50 people, including several children, across the Gaza Strip, hitting Hamas security officers and an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone.

As the bombardment continued on Thursday and into Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he had authorised a delegation from the Mossad intelligence agency, the Shin Bet internal security agency and the military to continue negotiations in Qatar toward a ceasefire deal.

'I aim to see Telugus as global leaders'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Calling upon Telugus worldwide to become partners in the transformative development of Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu stated that his primary objective is for Telugu to be at the top position globally by 2047.

Addressing the Telugu Samakhya Mahasabalu in Hyderabad as the chief guest, CM Naidu expressed his vision of achieving a poverty-free society, inspired by the founder of TDP, the Late N.T. Rama Rao, who was instrumental in bringing glob-

al recognition to Telugu. Inaugurating the conference by lighting the lamp, the Chief Minister expressed his happiness at seeing Telugus from all over the world united on a common platform, and thanked the organisers for highlighting the respect Telugu enjoys worldwide.

Recalling the contributions of notable personalities like DVS Raju and Indira Dutt, CM Naidu affirmed that Telugus are united, whether residing in Anantapur, Adilabad, Srikakulam, Palamuru, or across other countries, including America.



He emphasized, "As Telugus, we must respect our mother tongue, just as we give the highest regard to our mothers." He noted that those

living abroad are showing more respect for Telugu than some in the homeland.

Continued on Page 2

DAM ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA AND NEW COUNTIES IN AKSAI CHIN

India slams China, lodges strong protest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday said it has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over creation of two new counties in Hotan prefecture, asserting that such moves will not lend legitimacy to Beijing's "illegal and forcible" occupation in the region.

In a strong reaction, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said parts of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh and that the Chinese action will have no bearing on New Delhi's consistent position regarding its sovereignty.

China's announcement on establishing the two counties came days after Special Representatives of the two nations resumed boundary talks that was stalled for almost five years.



"We have seen the announcement pertaining to the establishment of two new counties in Hotan Prefecture of China. Parts of jurisdiction of these so-called counties fall in India's Union Territory of Ladakh," Jaiswal said.

"We have never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation of Indian territory in this area," he said. "Creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India's longstanding and consistent position

'Will take necessary measures to protect interests'

Days after China announced its plan to build a mega dam on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet, India on Friday said it will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect its interests.

In its first reaction to the proposed dam, New Delhi urged Beijing to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by

activities in upstream areas. "We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

There have been apprehensions that the dam will have adversely impact the ecological balance of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

Continued on Page 2

regarding our sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China's illegal and forcible occupation of the same," Jaiswal added.

He further said: "We have lodged a solemn protest with the Chinese side

through diplomatic channels."

The latest irritant in ties came weeks after India and China ended an over four-and-a-half-year border standoff and announced steps to reduce mistrust.

'Medical seats can't remain vacant'

SC asks Centre to hold talks with stakeholders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Seats in medical courses cannot remain vacant, the Supreme Court on Friday said and asked the Centre to hold a meeting with the relevant stakeholders, including the states, and consider the recommendations of a committee appointed over the issue.

A bench of Justices B R Gawai and K V Viswanathan was hearing the matter when it observed, "Seats also cannot go vacant." In April, 2023, the apex court flagged the issue of super speciality seats in medical courses remaining unutilised.

The Centre had then proposed to appoint a committee, consisting of all the stakeholders including representatives of states and private medical colleges, under

the chairmanship of director general of health services to resolve the issue. On Friday, the Centre's counsel said the committee comprising the stakeholders was constituted and it had given its recommendations on the issue.

It would be appropriate if the Centre held a meeting with the stakeholders and came out with a concrete proposal, the counsel said. The bench therefore directed for the meeting to be held by the Centre. The apex court said the needful be done within three months and posted the matter in April. In April, 2023, the top court said the plea before it depicted a "very sorry picture" given 1,003 precious super speciality seats were going to waste as no admissions could take place for the seats.

A bench of Justices B R Gawai and K V Viswanathan was hearing the matter when it observed, 'Seats also cannot go vacant'.



CM reiterates commitment to Swarna Andhra by 2047

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu made a significant visit to the Avadhoota Datta Peetham at Patamata in Vijayawada on Friday. He reaffirmed the State's commitment to the Swarna Andhra 2047 vision, stating that there would be no deviation from this goal and that the state is determined to move forward, with no option for retreat. During the visit, he met the head of the institution, Ganapathy Sachidananda Swami, who warmly welcomed the Chief Minister and presented him with sacred offerings.

Following the meeting, CM Naidu participated in the inaugural ceremony of the Dattashestranath Yatra, which will take place at 42 locations across the state.

Addressing the gathering, CM Naidu expressed his gratitude, saying, "I consider it a



privilege to have had the darshan of Swamiji and received his blessings. Swami Sachidananda is deeply dedicated to the welfare of society. After praying for the removal of my hardships, I was presented with prasadam. We must foster a spiritual mindset and always speak the truth. It is

essential to have God's blessings with us. Everyone in the state should prosper economically, and we must work to eradicate poverty completely."

On the Swarna Andhra Vision 2047, Chandrababu Naidu affirmed, "Our goal is to achieve Swarna Andhra by 2047. When we announced

Vision 2020 for the united AP state, many criticized us, but today, the results of that vision are visible to all. Now, we are working on Vision 2047. We need to generate wealth and ensure the happiness of the people.

We are determined to move forward; retreat is not an option. I wish for the people to be happy, and we will work towards that goal. The people should place their trust in me, and I take on the responsibility of leading the state towards Swarna Andhra."

Ganapathy Sachidananda Swami also shared his thoughts on the Chief Minister, saying, "Chandrababu is a karma yogi, and the projects he undertakes progress without any hindrance. Under his leadership, not only is the state prosperous, but the dream of Swarna Andhra is also becoming a reality. I pray that Goddess Kanakadurga blesses him."

IT Minister Nara Lokesh inspects AP-Maker-Lab-On-Wheels prototype

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, Information Technology (IT), and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, on Friday inspected the prototype of the AP-Maker-Lab-On-Wheels at his residence in Undavalli. This innovative vehicle, introduced in collaboration with Infosys, is equipped with cutting-edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, and the Internet of Things (IoT). The initiative is being implemented on a pilot basis to raise awareness among students about global advancements in technology.

The AP-Maker-Lab-On-Wheels aims to familiarise students with transformative technological trends. As part of the pilot project, the vehicle will travel to schools in Mangalagiri, providing students with hands-on exposure to the latest technological innovations. Minister Lokesh commended Infosys for partnering with the state government to create transformative skill development



opportunities. He noted that once the pilot phase is successful, similar vehicles will be deployed to educational institutions across the state.

The initiative aligns with the objectives of Digital India and ESG Vision-2030 (Environmental, Social, and Governance) by promoting free digital and STEM learning opportunities, even in the state's remotest regions. The vehicle

features interactive 90-minute learning sessions, during which students can access courses through the Infosys Springboard platform at no cost. Upon course completion, students will receive world-class technology certificates.

The mobile lab is equipped with laptops, tablets, and other essential tools to facilitate digital learning. Infosys has committed an investment of ₹5

crore to set up the lab-on-wheels and will also cover an annual operational expenditure of ₹40 lakh. Additionally, Infosys will provide course content and trainer support, with an average investment of Rs 1,500 per student.

The programme aims to reach 4,800 students every three months. Infosys representatives explained that the lab-on-wheels will target four batches of 20 students daily, creating awareness and providing opportunities to develop their skills. Managing Director of the AP Skill Development Corporation, G Ganesh Kumar, Narasaraopet MP Lavu Krishnadevarayalu, and Infosys staff members were present during the inspection.

The AP-Maker-Lab-On-Wheels programme will soon be expanded to schools and colleges across the state, spearheaded by the AP Skill Development Corporation in close collaboration with Infosys.

AP launches food industry promotion one-stop helpline

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh's Minister for Industries, Commerce, and Food Processing, T.G. Bharath, announced the state's initiative to strengthen the food processing sector by launching the Food Industry Promotion One-Stop Helpline - 04045901100 at the APIIC office in Mangalagiri.

Speaking at the event, Minister Bharath highlighted that the primary objective of the helpline is to enhance transparency in government policies, encourage food processing entrepreneurs, and address their concerns. He explained that the helpline will assist investors and industries by offering essential information and clarifications on the Food Processing Policy 4.0 (FPP4.0). Furthermore, it will play a crucial role in supporting new industries through all necessary stages, from project report submission to obtaining government approvals.



Minister Bharath emphasized that the helpline will ensure that new investments receive swift approvals. "It will guide micro-entrepreneurs in identifying local food processing opportunities and connect them with District Resource Persons (DRPs) under the Prime Minister's Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME), helping them set up their own units," he said.

To improve the ease of doing business in the industrial sector, Minister Bharath noted that the helpline will address complaints

related to government permits, approvals, and administrative challenges. It will also serve as an intermediary to resolve issues with banks regarding PMFME loans, ensuring faster loan approvals.

Minister Bharath concluded by stating that the initiative reflects the Andhra Pradesh government's commitment to the growth of the food processing industry. He assured investors and industrialists that they could contact 04045901100 for immediate assistance and guidance.

Will PM lay stone for new rly zone during Vizag visit?

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Visakhapatnam on January 8 approaches, anticipation is building among rail enthusiasts and users regarding the potential announcement of the South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone headquarters. However, the absence of railway officials at a review meeting conducted by the District Collector on January 2 has cast a shadow of uncertainty over the issue.

"The absence of railway officials at such an important meeting raises concerns about the likelihood of any major announcements related to the South Coast Railway Zone," said a trade union representative who preferred to remain anonymous. This sentiment is echoed by many, who are skeptical about the possibility of a major announcement due to



Absence of railway officials at key meeting sparks concerns, while stakeholders hope for long-delayed progress on South Coast Railway Zone

the lack of official communication or representation at the meeting.

The region has faced repeated disappointments regarding SCoR, with the most recent being in November 2022, when Prime Minister Modi visited Visakhapatnam to inaugurate development projects, but failed to announce the SCoR headquarters. Furthermore, a revelation under the RTI Act

obtained by K. Eswar on November 19, 2024, confirmed that the Railway Board is still reviewing the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for SCoR—a report submitted over five years ago.

Chalasan Gandhi, former general secretary of the East Coast Railway Shramik Union (EcoRSU), expressed his frustration over the delay, stating, "The delay is causing opera-

tional setbacks. Vacant posts in the Waltair Division are being transferred to Khurda and Sambalpur Divisions in Odisha. This is a serious issue that requires immediate attention." Despite this, Mr. Gandhi remains optimistic about the Prime Minister's visit, saying, "I am confident the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone this time. Additionally, a date for operationalisation should be announced. Even temporary arrangements, like using the Gati Shakti building near the railway station for the General Manager's Office, can be made until the headquarters building is constructed."

As Visakhapatnam residents and railway stakeholders eagerly await January 8, hopes are high that the Prime Minister's visit will finally bring progress to the long-standing demand for the South Coast Railway Zone headquarters.

'Will take necessary...

Continued from Page 1

The Brahmaputra passes through these two states. "As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert-level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory," Jaiswal said. "These have been reiterated, along with need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries, following the latest report," he said.

"The Chinese side has been urged to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas," he added.

On December 25, China announced its plan to construct the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet, close to its border with India.

7 new airports in...

Continued from Page 1

He noted that many of these projects were initiated during the previous Telugu Desam Party government but had been stalled by the previous administration. The current coalition government is now focused on restarting these projects to meet future needs.

Kuppam Airport: A feasibility report has been prepared, with construction planned in two phases over 1,250 acres. The project requires NOCs due to its proximity to IAF, HAL, and Bangalore International Airport. Srikakulam Airport: Land acquisition has begun for this two-phase project spanning 1,383 acres. Dagadarthi Airport: The site, covering 1,379 acres, has all necessary permissions. Land acquisition for 635 acres is complete, and the airport will include industrial and cargo development. Ongole Airport: Identified for development on 657 acres, with a feasibility study still pending.

Nagarjuna Sagar Airport: Planned on 1,670 acres in Palnadu district, requiring forest clearance for 500 acres. Tadepalligudem Airport:

Proposed on 1,123 acres, with a feasibility study underway due to the proximity of nearby airports. Tuni-Annavaram Airport: Proposed on 757 acres, with good accessibility to railway lines, highways, and water bodies, enhancing its feasibility.

The Chief Minister stressed the importance of strategic location planning for new airports, highlighting industrial growth in Anakapalle and Nakkapalle as areas requiring aviation facilities. He also suggested exploring the possibility of an airport in Tadipatri.

Officials briefed the CM on the progress of the Bhogapuram International Airport and the expansion of Gannavaram Airport, which will feature designs inspired by Kuchipudi dance and Amaravati stupas. The expansion is expected to be completed by June. The state government is also planning to establish an aviation university and training centre, anticipating a rise in private flight parking needs. The Chief Minister's ambitious plans aim to transform Andhra Pradesh into a hub for aviation and industrial growth, enhancing connectivity and fostering economic development.

YSRCP opposes 'dilution' of Aarogyasri scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has strongly cautioned the coalition government against diluting the Aarogyasri scheme by privatizing it and handing it over to insurance companies.

Addressing the media, former MLA Gopireddy Srinivas Reddy described Aarogyasri as a welfare initiative that has become a lifeline for many people. He warned that any attempt to alter or privatize the scheme would face strong opposition. Introduced by the late Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy, the scheme has been lauded for its effectiveness and has even inspired similar programs in other states.

Reddy criticized TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu for attempting to hand over the scheme to private insurance companies, arguing that such a move would burden poor

patients. He explained that welfare schemes run by private insurers often operate on their terms, leaving the government with minimal control and disrupting the healthcare system meant for the underprivileged.

He further accused the coalition government of failing to deliver on its 'Super Six' promises and doubted its ability to consistently pay premiums to insurance companies. He warned that privatization would water down Aarogyasri, a scheme that enjoys immense popularity among the masses. Reddy also stressed the need to consult all stakeholders before implementing any drastic changes. Highlighting concerns, he pointed out that the current system—where insurance companies cover up to ₹2.5 lakh and the Aarogyasri Trust bears the rest up to ₹5 lakh—leads to confusion and imposes harsh conditions on patients.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a remarkable demonstration of excellence and efficiency, the Vijayawada Division of South Central Railway (SCR) has been awarded the prestigious 'Overall General Manager's Efficiency Shield' for its exceptional performance in 2024.

The Overall Efficiency Shield for 2024 was jointly awarded to the Vijayawada and Secunderabad Divisions of SCR Zone. The 69th Railway Week Awards - Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar-2024, recognising excellence across various fields, were presented at Rail Kalarang, Secunderabad on Friday.

Vijayawada Division received 12 Efficiency Shields out of the total 36, across various categories. Additionally, 7 Divisional Officers and 11 staff members were honoured with the



Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar 2024.

Narendra A. Patil, Divisional Railway Manager of Vijayawada, received the "GM's Efficiency Shield for Overall Best Performance" from Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager of South Central Railway.

Patil congratulated the branch officers for securing 11 shields in different categories and acknowledged the division's exceptional performance, which included the highest-ever revenue of Rs 5635.23 crore, along with

record-breaking freight revenue of Rs 4057.01 crore by transporting 36.63 million tonnes of cargo in the fiscal year 2023-24.

The DRM emphasized that passenger safety, elimination of manned level crossings, strengthening of existing infrastructure, enhancement of traffic facilities, and expansion of new lines will remain the top priorities for FY 2024-25. Patil urged the field staff to continue their coordinated efforts to ensure passenger safety and achieve the best possible results.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Panchami: Jan 03 11:39 PM to Jan 04 10:01 PM
Shashthi: Jan 04 10:01 PM to Jan 05 08:15 PM
Nakshatram: Shatabhisha: Jan 03 10:21 PM to Jan 04 09:23 PM
Purva Bhadrapada: Jan 04 09:23 PM to Jan 05 08:17 PM
Rahukalam: 9:36 AM to 10:58 AM
Yamagandam: 1:43 PM to 3:06 PM
Varjyam: 03:30 AM to 05:01 AM
Gulika: 6:51 AM to 8:13 AM
Amritakalam: 02:29 PM to 04:01 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:59 AM to 12:43 PM
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly Cloudy
Temp: 31°C
Humidity: 64%
Sunrise: 6:37 AM
Sunset: 5:48 PM
Updated: January 3, 2025 5:00 PM

AP ministers on study...

Continued from Page 1

She also mentioned that, along with AP's Transport Minister M. Ramprasad Reddy and Women and Child Welfare Minister Gummidi Sandhyarani, she visited the Shantinagar Bus Depot in Bengaluru. There, they inspected the new buses and interacted with passengers. During these interactions, the Home Minister directly inquired from the women passengers about the benefits of the free bus scheme.

Later, speaking to the media, Minister Anitha stated that despite the state's financial challenges, the government, under CM Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, is prioritizing women's empowerment. She added that the government is conducting a thorough study on the implementation of this key promise under the "Super Six" commitments to ensure there are no

shortcomings in the future.

The Home Minister also mentioned that they discussed the smart ticketing system with senior officials of Karnataka's Transport Department. She clarified that the government is closely observing how Karnataka is implementing the scheme from various angles. During a PowerPoint presentation by the Karnataka Transport Department, led by Minister Ramlal Lingareddy, Minister Anitha and her team raised questions to gain clarity on various aspects of the system, including the zero-fare and smart ticketing systems. Minister Anitha also addressed concerns about the challenges and difficulties faced by women during the initial days of the scheme's implementation. She stated that a detailed report on the Free Bus Travel Scheme would be submitted to CM Chandrababu Naidu shortly.

Budameru Diversion Canal...

Continued from Page 1

He also mentioned plans to prepare a comprehensive report on the situation for the CM's review. Minister P. Narayana explained that the floods had caused significant hardship in 34 wards of Vijayawada, particularly affecting 5,00,000 people who were stranded in water for four days. Despite the challenges, the government ensured the provision of 20-30 lakh drinking water bottles daily to meet the people's basic needs. However, some individuals politicised the water distribution efforts. Narayana stated that the previous government's cancellation of the Budameru tenders had contributed to this situation.

The ministers criticised the previous government for its negligent approach in addressing the Budameru flood issue. They also announced that another review meeting would take place on January 18 with officials from the Irrigation, Municipal, and Revenue departments. Future measures to prevent floods in Vijayawada, as well as coordination between disaster management and the government, were key points of discussion. Regarding financial constraints, the ministers noted that the previous government had mismanaged the state's finances, but under CM Chandrababu's leadership, the economic situation is gradually improving.

They also indicated that the central government's support would be sought for flood control initiatives in the Budameru and Krishna river basins.

Elaborate arrangements...

Continued from Page 1

GAD Principal Secretary S. Suresh Kumar presented a detailed plan for the visit, outlining the responsibilities of the concerned departments. The meeting also included updates from Visakhapatnam District Collector Harindra Prasad and Police Commissioner S. Bagchi, who provided details on logistical arrangements. Around 1,20,000 people from the city, 10,000 from rural areas, and 40,000 from Anakapalle are expected to attend.

During his visit, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stones for several major projects. He will inaugurate a new railway zone in Visakhapatnam and virtually launch the NTPC Integrated Green Hydrogen Hub in Pudimadaka village, Nakkapalli Mandal. This ₹65,370 crore investment project will be rolled out in three phases. Additionally, he will launch the Krishnapatnam Industrial Hub, a ₹1,518 crore project expected to employ 50,000 people. The foundation stone for the Bulk Drug Park in Nakkapalli, costing ₹1,876.66 crore and covering over 2,000 acres, will also be laid. This park is expected to generate 54,000 job opportunities. The arrangements for Prime Minister Modi's visit are being closely coordinated by various departments, to ensure a smooth and successful event.

'I aim to see...

Continued from Page 1

Speaking about his tenure as Chief Minister of the combined state in 1996, he recalled how Hyderabad was once filled with rocks, but he envisioned it transforming into an IT hub. He credited the TDP's significant role in the city's progress. "When I introduced Vision-2020, people mocked me. But through initiatives like Telugu Angeles, I laid the foundation for an outstanding start-up ecosystem, and I congratulate all of you for your efforts. Together, we can achieve anything," the CM said.

He also recalled the contributions of several prominent figures, including the Late PV Narasimha Rao, M. Venkaiah Naidu, Koka Subbarao, Justice Ramana, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, and the Late Balayogi, who held esteemed positions in the country. He noted that Tollywood has now reached global recognition, and the cultural richness of Telugus is reflected in Kuchipudi, Bharatanatyam, and Batukamma.

During the event, the Chief Minister honoured several celebrities, presented business awards to entrepreneurs, and unveiled a souvenir of the World Telugu Federation, as well as a logo for the start-up initiative, Telugu Angeles.

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Savitribai Phule remembered

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Savitribai Phule's birth anniversary was celebrated with great enthusiasm at the BJP state office on Friday. Speaking at the event, BJP State President and MP Daggubati Purandeswari emphasised the pivotal role played by Savitribai Phule in shaping India's education and social reforms.

Savitribai Phule, India's first female teacher, social reformer, poet, and freedom fighter, was born on January 3, 1831, in the village of Naigaon in Satara district, Maharashtra. Along with her husband, Jyotirao Phule, she made significant contributions to the rights of women in India. On January 1, 1848, Savitribai and her husband opened the first school for girls in Pune, laying the foundation for women's education in the country. Purandeswari encouraged women of the present generation to learn about the inspiring life and legacy of Savitribai Phule.

The event was attended by BJP State Media In-charge Paturi Nagabhushan, BJP leaders Lakshminarayana, PV Subbarao, and several other party members.

PM to virtually lay foundation for key projects in Vizag on Jan 8

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend a public meeting in Visakhapatnam on January 8, where he will virtually lay the foundation for several important development projects. This was announced by Anakapalli MP CM Ramesh, who encouraged the public to join in large numbers and give a warm welcome to the Prime Minister.

Speaking to the media on Friday, CM Ramesh highlighted the achievements of the coalition government, focusing on its efforts to create a positive environment for growth and attract significant investments to the district. He emphasized

that industrial development is crucial for providing job opportunities, especially for the youth. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, the "double engine government" is transforming the district. The growth of industries, establishment of educational institutions, railway projects, and road development are key factors in this transformation.

During the event, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation for various industrial projects in the district, with investments worth around two lakh crore rupees. Initial focus will be on industrial growth in the



MP CM Ramesh urges public participation, praises government's focus on industrial growth and infrastructure development.

Anakapalli, Yelamanchili, and Payakaraopeta constituencies, with plans for further expansion in Madugula, Chodavaram, and Narsipatnam. CM Ramesh stated,

"We believe that the Prime Minister's visit will take Visakhapatnam's development to new heights."

Some of the major projects include setting up additional central schools in Yelamanchili and Madugula, the creation of an engineering university in Madugula, and upgrading the Anakapalli to Rajahmundry road from four lanes to six. These projects are expected to create about 25,000 jobs and further boost local development. CM Ramesh also mentioned that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu would address the gathering, providing updates on the ongoing Godavari projects.



Sports symbolise unity: Octopus Addl DGP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The three-day Octopus Annual Police Sports and Games meet concluded with great enthusiasm at the APSP 6th Battalion ground in Mangalagiri on Friday. The event was attended by chief guest, Octopus Additional DGP, RK Meena.

Meena expressed his happiness, stating that sports symbolise unity, and the meet was conducted in a festive atmosphere with tremendous zeal. He praised the event's organisation, despite the lack of proper facilities, and highlighted the importance of fitness for police officers. He stressed how sports help relieve stress and promote teamwork. For a team to succeed, every member must work together harmoniously, which fosters a sense of unity among the participants.

He congratulated each participant and praised the successful conduct of 20 events, including the 100m, 200m, 400m, 5 km, and 10 km races, as well as shot put, javelin throw, and other track events. Games such as cricket,

volleyball, badminton, shuttle, and tug-of-war were also part of the event.

The primary goal of the Annual Sports Meet was to promote healthy competition among various teams, focus on physical fitness, and underscore the importance of mental well-being and stress relief. Participation in sports offers much-needed relief from the pressures of police work, allowing officers and staff to connect with colleagues in a relaxed and peaceful environment.

The athletes participated with great enthusiasm, showcasing their skills and talent. RK Meena also expressed his gratitude to the police officers, staff, coaches, attending police families, and media personnel.

In attendance at the event were RK Meena, Additional DGP, Octopus; S Senthil Kumar, DIG of Law & Order; Sumit Sunil Garud, Greyhounds Operations; and other officials, including IPS trainees, the 6th Battalion Commandant K Nagesh Babu, SP (Admin) M Nagendra Rao, and SP (Training) B Ravichandra.

New terminal at V'wada Airport by June



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The construction of the new terminal building at Vijayawada Airport is being expedited to meet the June deadline. On Friday, Union Civil Aviation Minister K. Ram Mohan Naidu, MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), and Guduvada MLA Venigandla Ramu visited the airport to inspect the ongoing construction work.

Airport officials briefed the dignitaries on the progress of the terminal building. The leaders toured the construction site

and reviewed the ongoing work. Union Minister Ram Mohan Naidu and MP Sivanath instructed the airport authorities to accelerate efforts to ensure timely completion by June. The new terminal is expected to enhance the airport's capacity and infrastructure, improving passenger convenience and operational efficiency.

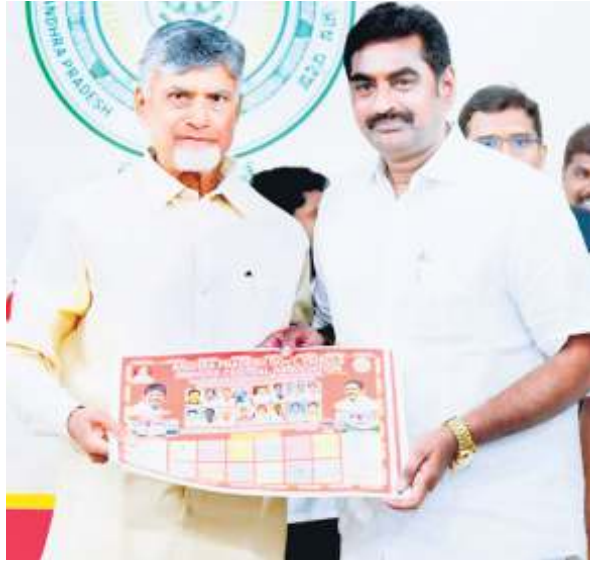
The inspection was attended by Airport Director Lakshminath Reddy, along with other officials and engineers involved in the project.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu unveiled the calendar for the state's Government Drivers' Association along with the New Year desk calendar on Friday. On this occasion, the president of the association, S Srinivasa Rao, and Secretary K Chiranjeevi extended their New Year greetings to the Chief Minister. They discussed various issues, and the Chief Minister assured them that their concerns would be addressed promptly.

The key issues raised included the purchase of new vehicles, allocation of funds for vehicle repairs, and the insufficient salaries of outsourced drivers. The drivers requested that outsourced drivers be regularized as government employees with appropriate pay. They also met with IAS officer Muddaada Ravichandra, Principal Secretary of the General Administration Department (GAD), to discuss these matters. Officials responded positively, assuring that justice

CM unveils calendar of drivers' body



would be done for outsourced drivers, including the restoration of commercial department drivers who had been

reassigned to attendant roles. Several members from various drivers' associations were present at the event.



Govt keen to promote industrial growth: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister TG Bharat reaffirmed the coalition government's commitment to fostering industrial growth in the state and extending support to budding entrepreneurs. He expressed delight over Vijayawada hosting the Rota Fair Expo 2025 and hoped for many more such initiatives in the future. The Minister formally inaugurated Friday's three-day event at the SS Convention Center in Vijayawada. The expo features 120 stalls showcasing various products from various companies.

During his visit, the Minister interacted with exhibitors and explored the diverse products

on display. Addressing the media, he remarked that the coalition government has been instrumental in restoring the capital region's past glory. He highlighted the promotion of business-related activities as a priority and criticized the previous YSRCP government for neglecting industrial development and disregarding the aspirations of young entrepreneurs. In contrast, he emphasized the current government's focus on industrial growth and its commitment to empowering young industrialists.

Rotary Club of Vijayawada Midtown President Gudipati Kishore Babu announced that the Rota Fair would run for three days, with arrangements

made to welcome around 10,000 visitors. He pointed out that the event offers a unique shopping experience ahead of the Sankranti festival and encouraged city residents to participate. He further mentioned that proceeds from the fair would contribute to polio eradication efforts.

The inauguration was graced by notable attendees, including Rota Fair Program Committee Chairpersons Chinnam Madhubabu and Amulya Srinivas, Quex Group of Companies CEO Anand Reddy, Rotary Club of Midtown Secretary Battula Pratap Reddy, and committee members Nani, Amit, Uday, and P. Srinivas, among others.

'Ukku Satyagraham' reflects people's sentiment

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Telugu film Ukku Satyagraham is a poignant tribute to the relentless struggles and sacrifices of steel workers and leaders who fought against the privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), disclosed Satya Reddy, the film's hero, producer, and director. These insights were shared following a special screening of the film at Chitralaya INOX, which took place on Friday and was attended by CPI(M) leaders, trade unionists, and members of the film's cast.

The film vividly captures the intense battle for the establishment of VSP, a movement that cost the lives of 32 individuals. It also features the iconic balladeer Gaddar, who made his final film appearance in Ukku Satyagraham. Released 37 days ago in 150 theatres across the region, the film continues to resonate with audiences, with screenings still running successfully in numerous venues. This enduring success is seen as a testament to the people's deep-seated opposition to the privatisation of VSP, underscored by the powerful slogan 'Visakha Ukku, Andhrala Hakku'—a rallying cry that has become synonymous with the fight for the steel plant's future.

Satya Reddy attributed the film's remarkable success to the widespread anti-privatisation sentiments not only in Andhra Pradesh but also in neighbouring states. "The ongoing agitations and protests have fueled the film's success. The people are united in their resolve, and the film's popularity reflects that spirit," Reddy remarked. He urged the public to remain steadfast and united until the central government annuls its decision on the privatisation of VSP, stressing the importance of collective action.

The film features notable performances by senior actor Prasanna Kumar, Nandi Award winner Vinay Prakash, and Dhanusri, who all play significant roles. Satya Reddy highlighted the film's climax, where the only way to prevent privatisation is revealed—a hopeful message for all those involved in the movement.

Vinay Prakash, who plays a key role in the film, lauded Satya Reddy's dedication, noting that despite having already produced 50 films, Ukku Satyagraham was made not for profit, but with a deep sense of social responsibility. "Satya Reddy has poured his heart into this project, driven by a genuine desire to make a difference," Prakash said.

Innovation hub to be set up in Parvathipuram: Collector

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

District Collector A Shyam Prasad announced a grant of Rs 3 crore for the creation of an innovation hub in Parvathipuram, following its recognition as an aspirational district by the NITI Aayog. The announcement was made during the district-level educational science exhibition held at DVVM School, organised by the Education Department.

"The creation of this innovation hub will serve as a game-changer for our district," said Collector Shyam Prasad. "With dedicated facilities for Physics, Mathematics, and even a planetarium, the hub will provide substantial benefits to students, particularly in these crucial subjects." The innovation hub aims to nurture the intellectual potential of students in the district, providing them with essential resources to excel in key subjects like Science, Mathematics, Physics, and Biology.

During the exhibition, Shyam Prasad inspected creative stalls designed by students, showcasing their innovative ideas and projects. He applauded the district's educational achievements, highlighting Parvathipuram's remarkable first-place ranking in the state for the tenth-grade pass rate over the past two years.



Government aims to foster student excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Physics with dedicated facilities, following the district's recognition by NITI Aayog.

The Collector, who has a deep passion for Physics, also reflected on his experience as a former physics teacher. He emphasised the critical role science plays in understanding the world around us and urged students to cultivate a habit of questioning. "Scientific exploration begins with asking questions. Always seek clarification from your teachers when in doubt," he advised, underscoring the importance of mastering key subjects like Science, Mathematics, Physics, and Biology for fostering creativity.

In his motivational address, Shyam Prasad invoked the legacy of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, the

former President and distinguished scientist. He highlighted the critical importance of nurturing future generations of scientists, emphasizing that the students of Parvathipuram possess the potential for groundbreaking scientific achievements through the cultivation of creative thinking.

As part of the ceremony, the Collector presented mementos and certificates to the winners of the educational science exhibition and the quiz competition. District Education Officer Dr N. Tirupathinayudu highlighted the scope of the exhibition, noting that 45 exhibitions from 15 mandals were selected for the district event.

Minister inaugurates adventure water sports at Tatipudi Reservoir

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Minister for MSME, SERP, and NRI Affairs Kondapalli Srinivas, inaugurated adventure water sports at Tatipudi Reservoir in Gantayada mandal on Friday, marking a significant step towards enhancing tourism in the region. The project, undertaken under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model with NRI organization Water Sports Simple India, aims to establish the reservoir as a premier tourist destination.

Speaking to the media after the inauguration, Minister Srinivas emphasized, "This initiative is not just about tourism, it's about creating opportunities for local youth and ensuring sus-

tainable development for the region. With an investment of Rs 5 crore, we are bringing global safety standards to ensure a world-class experience for visitors." He outlined the development plan, which encompasses water taxis and speed boats in Phase 1, water sports activities in Phase 2, and houseboats and floating cottages in Phase 3.

To enhance the visitor experience, the Minister announced the provision of additional facilities such as lighting and toilets to accommodate nighttime tourists. Highlighting the broader impact, he stated, "Boat rides here will become a major attraction for those traveling to Araku via Visakhapatnam, offering a unique blend of adventure and scenic beauty." Efforts to restore boat services for tribal communities in nearby villages are also underway under the guidance of the Forest Department.

The project was inaugurated in memory of the late Gorrupati Buchi Apparao, a visionary who played a pivotal role in the reservoir's development. "The late Buchi Apparao's contributions were instrumental in bringing the Tatipudi project to life. Today's launch is a tribute to his relentless efforts and dedication," the Minister remarked.

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Minister Kondapalli Srinivas, MLA Aditi Gajapati inaugurated the adventure water sports at Tatipudi Reservoir with a boat ride.

Local leaders lauded the initiative for its dual benefits of tourism promotion and employment generation. Vizianagaram MLA Aditi Gajapati stated, "This project will uplift the local economy by creating jobs and establishing Tatipudi as a must-visit destination." Palavalasa Yashaswini, Chairperson of the Turpu Kapu welfare and development Corporation, expressed her pride, saying, "It's an honour to witness the transformation of this reservoir into a prominent tourist spot."

Key highlights of the project include a fleet of boats, such as

two-seater, four-seater, and 16-seater water taxis, with boating services available daily from 9 AM to 6 PM. Ticket prices range from Rs 100 to Rs 200, depending on the boat type. G. Papa Rao, Executive Officer of Water Sports Simple India, assured, "Tourist safety is our top priority. All operators are certified, and we follow the highest standards of safety protocols."

Project Committee Chairman Kondapalli Kondalarao and Water Resources Department officials pledging their commitment to the project's success. This initiative is set to position Tatipudi Reservoir as a hub for adventure tourism, while fostering local development and community well-being.

KAKINA-SRIKAKULAM GAS PIPELINE

Tenders invited for project: MP

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar has announced that tenders have been invited for the Kakinada-Srikakulam Natural Gas Pipeline Project. In a statement issued on Friday, the MP said he had made significant efforts to ensure the execution of the pipeline project via Visakhapatnam to facilitate the supply of natural gas.

"I appealed to Natural Gas Regulation Board Chairman Anil Kumar Jain on October 21, 2024, and submitted a representation urging steps to expedite the Kakinada-Srikakulam pipeline project. In response, Natural Gas Regulation Board Secretary Anjan Kumar Mishra informed me that the process of inviting bids for the project has commenced," the MP stated.



MP Mahesh Kumar noted that recognising the importance of the pipeline project to Andhra Pradesh, the Natural Gas Regulation Board decided to entrust the responsibility for the pipeline to GAIL. The Andhra Pradesh Gas Distribution Corporation Limited (APGDC) has taken over the pipeline that has been laid so far in the state. The tendering process for the 290-km-long pipeline has begun, with

the pre-bid conference scheduled for January 17 and the last date for submitting bids set for April 16, the MP disclosed. The MP further announced that work on the gas pipeline would commence after the tender process is completed, asserting that the mega natural gas pipeline project is being realised due to his persistent efforts. He expressed gratitude to the officials concerned for their positive response.

13 held for organising obscene dances



PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

The police arrested 13 people for organising obscene dancing in Mandapeta as part of New Year celebrations on December 31 nights. The arrested people organized a programme similar to the rave party in Mandapeta in which some women, said to be transgenders, danced in the nude. The obscene and nude dancing went viral on social media.

around 11 o'clock, a programme was organized at the RR0M city layout located on the Gollaputha road. However nude and obscene dances with women or transgenders were organized in the New Year party and the same went viral on social media.

Based on the social media footage and reliable information, cases were registered against the organizers of the party and they were arrested. The police also arrested three transgenders in the connection. Two of the organizers of the programmes are absconding, the CI said.

7 students injured as auto overturns



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Seven school students sustained injuries when the auto-rickshaw they were travelling in overturned at Rustumbada village in Narasapuram mandal, West Godavari district, on Friday.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the driver was operating the auto-rickshaw at high speed in a reckless manner, leading to a loss of control over the vehicle.

Parents of the children have expressed their concerns, alleging that auto rickshaws often carry more passengers than permitted, posing a serious safety risk. They criticised the authorities for failing to take adequate measures to regulate such overloading.

The parents have urged the police to strictly monitor and prevent the overloading of auto rickshaws to ensure the safety of schoolchildren and avoid similar accidents in the future.

Govt failed to fulfil poll promises: Ex-minister

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Former minister and YSR Congress Party East Godavari district president, Ch. Srinivasa Venugopala Krishna, has accused TDP chief and Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu of being a "master manipulator" in politics. Addressing the media in Rajamahendravaram on Friday, he criticised the ruling coalition for failing to deliver on its election promises, particularly the much-publicised "Super Six" assurances.



"Despite six months in office and 12 cabinet meetings, not a single step has been taken towards implementing the promises made during elections," he said. He expressed disappointment over the lack of a concrete plan for the 'Super Six' promises, saying it has left the public disillusioned once again.

The former minister pointed out that schemes like "Talliki Vandanam" and "Annadata Sukhibhava," launched with much fanfare, have been shelved, causing significant losses to students and farmers. "This year alone, 87.42 lakh students have missed out on ben-

efits worth Rs 13,112 crore, while 54 lakh farmers were denied Rs 10,000 crore in support," he said.

Drawing a comparison with the previous YSRCP government, he remarked, "Under Jagan's leadership, welfare schemes such as Amma Vodi, Cheyutha, and YSR Rythu Bharosa were systematically implemented. In contrast, the current government's welfare promises remain hollow, with no action on the ground."

On women's welfare, he highlighted the failure of the "Adabidda Nidhi" scheme, leaving 1.80 crore women waiting in vain. He also criticised the reduction in free LPG cylinders

from three per year to just one, calling it a betrayal of public trust.

Speaking on governance, Venu Gopala Krishna accused the TDP-led coalition of resorting to "diversion politics" to avoid accountability. "Social media activists questioning the government's failures are being silenced with fabricated cases. This is an assault on democracy," he alleged.

He demanded that Chandrababu Naidu take immediate steps to fulfil the promises made during the elections. "Empty words and broken assurances will not suffice. If he truly cares for the people, he must act now," he said.

Govt committed to generating employment: Minister Savitha



PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for BC and EWS Welfare S. Savitha reiterated the government's commitment to generating large-scale employment, highlighting efforts to attract investors to Andhra Pradesh for industrial development.

Participating in the 'Yuva Keratalu' programme organised by the Kollu Foundation on Friday, the Minister emphasised the government's focus on job security for youth through the establishment of major industries.

"The government is taking steps to fill all vacant posts in government departments while also working tirelessly to attract significant investments to Andhra Pradesh to create employment opportunities," she said.

She noted that India's substantial youth population, if utilised effectively, could propel the country to global prominence. "The coalition government in the state is determined to create 20 lakh jobs over the next five years. Minister for IT Nara Lokesh is making relentless efforts to

bring large-scale investments to the state as part of this initiative," she observed.

The Minister mentioned that prestigious multinational companies, including BPCL and TCS, are set to invest in Andhra Pradesh. To align with industry needs, the government has implemented skill development programmes to prepare youth for job opportunities in upcoming industries.

"We are committed to providing technical training to unemployed youth, enhancing their technological proficiency, and ensuring they secure jobs in the industries being established in the state," she stated.

Savitha also pledged to create at least one entrepreneur in every household, announcing plans to extend loans to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through various corporations to promote entrepreneurship and achieve financial self-reliance.

She announced the reinstatement of the mid-day meal scheme for Intermediate students starting Saturday. "The TDP government implemented the scheme for

Intermediate students between 2014 and 2019, but it was revoked by the YSRCP regime. Now, we are bringing it back while ensuring quality education in government schools on par with corporate institutions," she remarked.

The Minister lauded the Kollu Foundation for its 12 years of service to society, urging people to draw inspiration from the organisation and contribute to community welfare.

Expressing concern over the growing drug menace in the state, she lamented that some youth have fallen prey to drug addiction, jeopardising their futures. "The Chandrababu Naidu-led government has taken stringent measures to curb the drug menace with an iron hand. There is an urgent need to create awareness among students and youth about the harmful effects of drugs," she emphasised.

Earlier, the Minister paid tributes to Savitribai Phule, APSRTC Chairman Kanakalla Narayana and several other leaders were present at the event.

LOSS OF LIVELIHOOD DUE TO ONGC PIPELINE

23,450 fishermen to get Rs 63,250 compensation each: Atchannaidu

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Minister for Agriculture and Marketing, K Atchannaidu, announced that a compensation of Rs 148 crore will be disbursed to 23,450 fishermen, with each receiving Rs 63,250, due to their loss of livelihood caused by the construction of the ONGC pipeline. He assured that the government would continue to support the fishermen.



Atchannaidu participated in a compensation distribution programme at Korangi village in Tallarevu mandal, near Kakinada, on Friday. Addressing the gathering, he emphasized that the state has a 950 km long coastal region, and at suitable locations, fishing harbours, jet-ties, and landing centres

would be developed as part of the fishermen's welfare initiatives.

He also announced that the compensation for fishermen during the fishing ban period would be increased from Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000. The new amount of Rs 20,000 will be directly credited to the accounts of eligible fishermen starting from April 1.

Minister for Excise and Mines, Kollu Ravindra, assured the fishermen that they would be provided with fishing nets, engines, and motorcycles, with a 70 per cent subsidy.

Regarding the compensation for fishermen affected by the ONGC pipeline, Atchannaidu stated that 20,878 fishermen from the Mummidiavaram constituency would receive Rs 132 crore, with the amount being directly credited to their accounts.

The event was attended by Government Whip and MLA Datla Subbaraju, Minister for Labour Vasamsetti Subhash, MLC Yanamala Ramakrishnu, MP Ganti Harish Madhur, and MLA Jyothula Naveen.



BC Welfare and Transport Minister Ponnambhakaram addressing the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Friday

Kavitha took up BCs' cause after realising their strength: Ponnambhakaram

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BC Welfare and Transport Minister Ponnambhakaram said that BRS MLC Kavitha, who had chanted Bathukamma and Jagruthi earlier, has now taken up the BC slogan. Some people (Kavitha) remember things after coming out from their 'power intoxication', Ponnambhakaram said.

Alleging that the BRS expelled former Minister Eatala Rajender from the party who was also one of its founding fathers, Ponnambhakaram asked the BRS to give some party posts to BCs.

Criticising Kavitha's comments on the Congress BC Declaration, he congratulated Kavitha for speaking about BCs. He said that although Kavitha conducted the BCs' meeting there was a gap in the leadership

of the BRS. Ponnambhakaram said that he was somewhat happy and somewhat unhappy at Kavitha organising a meeting of BCs at the Indira Park Dharna Chowk as she had never spoken about BCs when the BRS was in power.

He said that they would discuss if BCs were subjected to injustice in the Congress. Is that possible in the BRS, he asked. Kavitha took up the BC issue only after realising their strength, he said.

Ponnambhakaram said the Congress government will post the caste census report in the public domain and that the Congress government has decided to provide 42 per cent reservations to BCs in local body elections.

He warned Kavitha that they would not remain silent if BRS leaders used BCs for making political gains.

Officials directed not to trouble farmers with RoFR pattas

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Housing and I&PR Kolu Parthasarathi directed the revenue and forest officials not to trouble the farmers who are cultivating lands after being sanctioned Recognition of Forest Rights (RoFR) pattas and regularize the endowment lands.



Minister Parthasarathi held a conference in the CCLA office at Mangalagiri with the officials of various departments in which Minister for Health Satya Kumar attended.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that he had received complaints that the forest officials were troubling the farmers who were cultivating the forest lands with RoFR pattas despite relevant pattas being issued for their lands. He told the officials to focus on the matter and ensure that the RoFR patta land farmers are not troubled by the forest department or revenue department officials.

He instructed the officials to set up a 'Joint Committee' comprising the revenue and forest officials to resolve the problems of the RoFR patta land farmers. He also suggested to the officials that new numbers should be allocated to un-survey lands.

The problems being faced by the farmers who are cultivating the un-survey lands should be identified and steps should be taken to resolve them, he told the officials. He told the officials to issue RoFR pattas to the SC, ST and BC farmers who

have been cultivating the lands for several years.

"As part of development, lands are being allocated to industries and small and marginal farmers should also be given cultivation land titles. The main problem is that some mandal-level officials are changing even the details registered online, which is causing rising of problems" he expressed displeasure.

The Minister highlighted that hundreds of acres of land were donated to the temple by

donors but most of the lands are under encroachment and steps should be taken to resolve the issue.

Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly K Raghurama Krishna Raju, MLAs Bonda Umamaheshwara Rao, Kamini Srinivas, Gadde Ramamohan, Vasantha Krishna Prasad, Rajagopal Sriram, Varla Kumar Raja, K Srinivas and MLCs Ramaraju, Ashok Babu and Special Chief Secretary Sisodia were among those who were present.

Swift relief provided to 2 bonded labourers

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

Swift action by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in Nagarkurnool has brought relief to two Chenchu community members who were being exploited as bonded labourers in Gumpnapally village of Achampet mandal. The victims were allegedly forced to work under a landlord for a paltry debt amount of Rs 15,000.



Two members of the Chenchu community rescued from bonded labour were presented with cheques for Rs 30,000 each at Nagarkurnool on Friday. Chairman of Nagarkurnool DLSA D Rajesh Babu is also seen.

Acting on oral instructions from the Executive Chairman of the State Legal Services Authority (SLSA), Hyderabad, Chairman-cum-Principal District Judge of Nagarkurnool, D Rajesh Babu, immediately initiated action. In coordination with the Labour Officer of Nagarkurnool, and the RDO of Achampet, relief was ensured under the Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour, 2016.

The Chairman, along with the Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), worked closely with the Judicial Magistrate of First Class, Achampet, and the District Magistrate/District

Collector of Nagarkurnool to expedite the process. Rajesh Babu personally visited Achampet on Friday to oversee the relief measures and ensure justice for the victims.

Within just 12 hours of receiving the information, DLSA Nagarkurnool took proactive steps on a war footing. Demand Drafts amounting to Rs 30,000 each (a total of Rs 60,000) were issued to the two victims. These monetary

benefits were handed over in the presence of officials, ensuring immediate rehabilitation for the exploited individuals.

The coordinated efforts of the district authorities and legal services have drawn appreciation from various quarters. Speaking about the incident, G Sabitha, secretary of DLSA, Nagarkurnool, reiterated the commitment to safeguarding the rights of the marginalised and ensuring justice for victims of exploitation.

ACROSS THE STATES



Four dead as towing van hits SUV

Four persons were killed and three injured on Friday after a towing van rammed into their SUV on Mumbai-Goa highway in Maharashtra's Raigad district, a police official said. The incident took place in the early hours of the day and the towing van driver was arrested since he was found to be driving under the influence of alcohol, the official added. "A Scorpio on its way to Lonere with eight occupants halted at Mahad after the driver realised the fuel tank was empty. A speeding towing van rammed into the SUV, killing four persons on the spot, while three occupants sustained injuries and were admitted to the local rural hospital. One of the injured is in a critical condition, while the other two are out of danger," he said. "Prasad Natekar, Sameer Minde, Suryakant More, Sahil Shelar, all in the 25-30 age group, died on the spot. They are residents of Mahad. A case of causing death by negligence and other offences was registered against the towing van driver under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Motor Vehicles Act provisions," the official informed. The accused's blood samples have been collected for alcohol tests, he added.



Karnataka justifies bus fare hike

Karnataka Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Friday justified 15 per cent increase in government bus fares across the board and hit out at the BJP for its protest against the hike. Since there was a need to revise the salaries of transport staff, the bus fare revision was inevitable, he noted. Addressing reporters here, the minister said all the four corporations, namely Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation, KKRTC Kalyana Road Transport Corporation, North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation and Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, had been demanding an increase in bus fares. Finally, the government took a call in the cabinet meeting on Thursday, Reddy said. The minister said that way back in 2014, when he was holding the transport portfolio, bus fares were increased. When the diesel prices came down, the fares were slashed by two per cent, he added. On January 20, 2020, the then BJP government increased the bus fares by 12 per cent in KSRTC, KKRTC and NWKRTC.



NCC plans expedition to Mt Everest

National Cadet Corps has planned an expedition to the Mt Everest -- the world's highest peak -- later this year and a team is currently preparing for it at Siachen Battle School, the body's top official said on Friday. "We have got 16... eight boys and eight girls, and thereafter from among them the summiters are going to be selected," NCC Director General Lt Gen Gurbirpal Singh told PTI on the sidelines of a press briefing here. He interacted with reporters about the ongoing NCC Republic Day Camp at Delhi Cantonment and the future roadmap of the Corps. The NCC chief also shared some powerpoint slides detailing the journey of the Corps over the last one year. One of the slides were related to some of the mountaineering expeditions undertaken by the NCC cadets in the past, including to 'Mt Kang Yatse II (6,250m) -- team of 24 cadets' and 'Mt Abi Gamin (7,335m) -- team of 34 cadets.' The DG later told PTI the NCC had earlier undertaken an expedition to Mt Everest (8,848m). "We started preparing for last one year. As we speak, our team is in Siachen Battle School, preparing. We have got 16, eight boys and eight girls, and thereafter from among them the summiters are going to be selected," he said.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the Centre's development projects will boost the self-esteem of poor people and instil confidence in them, which is the real energy of Viksit Bharat.

At an event here, Modi handed over the keys to eligible beneficiaries of EWS (economically weaker section) flats at Swabhiman Apartments in the Ashok Vihar area, describing them as symbols of self-respect, dignity, and new aspirations and dreams.

The prime minister inaugurated several key development projects in Delhi, including 1,675 flats for residents of JJ (jhuggi-jhopri) clusters and the World Trade Centre, ahead of the assembly elections due in February.

Addressing a gathering, the prime minister said in the last

'Development projects will boost self-esteem of poor'

10 years, his government has fulfilled the dreams of owning a pucca house of over four crore people.

The development push from the BJP-led government at the Centre comes ahead of the assembly polls in Delhi, which is expected to be held in February.

The BJP has been locked in a bitter political confrontation with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which has been in power in the city since 2013, and is making all-out efforts to end its reign.

Recalling the dark days of the



Emergency in the past, Modi said he and many other party workers like him who were part of the underground movement against the Emergency stayed at Ashok Vihar.

He said the central government is handling major projects in Delhi, such as roads, metro systems, hospitals and college campuses. However, he added, the state government has failed to fulfil its responsibilities, especially in areas like the cleaning of the Yamuna River.

The PM said neglecting the Yamuna River has led to a cri-

sis where people are left with dirty water. He emphasised that his goal is to ensure that the benefits of good national schemes reach Delhi.

He said the central government's plans have provided the poor and middle classes with financial benefits and savings. He said the government is also making electricity bills zero and offering opportunities for families to produce electricity.

Modi said with the central government offering Rs 78,000 to help instal solar panels, families are becoming electricity producers through the Pradhanmantri Suryaghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

At the event, the prime minister announced the construction of nearly 3,000 new houses in Delhi. In the coming year, thousands of new houses would be made available for the city's residents, he said.

LINKING NEW DELHI TO ANTI-MUIZZU PLOT

India trashes Washington Post report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday strongly trashed two recent reports published by the Washington Post -- one linking New Delhi to a failed plot to impeach Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and another on Indian agents allegedly attempting to eliminate certain terror elements in Pakistan.

Dismissing the reports, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a "compulsive hostility" towards India.

In its report on the Maldives, the Post, citing a document titled "Democratic Renewal Initiative", claimed that opposition politicians proposed bribing 40 members of Parliament, including those from Muizzu's own party, to vote to impeach him. After months of secret talks, the plot-



ters failed to gather enough votes to impeach the president, it said.

"Both the newspaper and the reporter in question appear to nurse a compulsive hostility towards India. You can see a pattern in their activities. I leave you to judge their credibility. As far as we are concerned, they have none," Jaiswal said.

"As regards (the report on) Pakistan, I remind you of what Hillary Clinton said -- 'You

cannot keep snakes in your backyard and expect them only to bite your neighbours,'" he said.

Clinton had made the comments in a blunt message to Pakistan in 2011, when she was serving as the US secretary of state.

She had also said that Washington intended to "push the Pakistanis very hard" to remove militant safe havens and tackle groups like the Haqqani network that are responsible for cross-border strikes.

In its report on India's "shadow" operations in Pakistan, the Washington Post, quoting unnamed Pakistani and western officials, claimed that the Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), is carrying out a programme since 2021 to "kill at least a half a dozen people" inside Pakistan.

India always stood by Maldives: EAM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Maldives have finalised a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border trade with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserting that New Delhi has always stood by the island nation. Jaishankar made the remarks at a meeting with his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Khaleel in Delhi.

Khaleel arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit to explore ways to bolster bilateral ties in several key areas including maritime security, trade and investment.

"I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross border transaction has been signed," Jaishankar said.

"We have increased our engagement in various sectors and I do want to say that India



has always stood by the Maldives. You are a very concrete expression of our neighbourhood first policy," he added.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male.



Cong fields Alka Lamba against Delhi CM Atishi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday announced the candidature of Alka Lamba from the Kalkaji constituency where she will take on AAP leader and Chief Minister Atishi in the upcoming assembly polls.

The Congress on Friday released its third list of candidates -- which has just one name -- for the assembly polls due in February.

According to the All India Congress Committee, the Central Election Committee has approved Lamba's candidature from Kalkaji.

2013 MUZAFFARNAGAR RIOTS CASE

Charges framed against politicians, others

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

A special MP-MLA case here on Friday framed charges against several BJP leaders, including Uttar Pradesh Minister Kapil Dev Aggarwal, former Union minister Sanjeev Balyan and ex UP minister Suresh Rana, Samajwadi Party MP Harendra Malik and others in a 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots-related case, a lawyer said.

Special MP-MLA court judge Devender Singh Fauzdar framed charges against 19 accused. Those charged also include VHP leader Sadhvi Prachi, ex-BJP MP Bhartendu Singh, controversial priest Yati Narsinghanand, ex-BJP MLAs Ashok Kansal and Umesh Malik and former UP minister Ashok Katari. They are accused of violating prohibitory orders and inciting communal tension. All accused were present in court during the hearing.

The judge framed charges under sections 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 341 (wrongfully restraining someone), and 353 (assault or use of criminal force against public servant on duty) of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code, along with provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

'Will make all efforts to empower farmers'

PNS ■ NASHIK

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday said that the Central government will make all possible efforts to empower farmers.

Chouhan was addressing a 'Kisan Susamvad programme organised by Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) Krsihi Vijyan Kendra here.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, various schemes are being

implemented to empower farmers and make them capable," he said. He said panchanamas of crops will be done using a satellite system at the panchayat and village levels so that the process is accurate and farmers will receive compensation by direct benefit transfer immediately.

Chouhan assured that fertilisers are being made available to farmers at reasonable rates, and the government is positive about offering the right price and market for exportable produce.

Closely following developments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday said it is closely following the developments in the case of Indian nurse Nimisha Priya, facing a death sentence in Yemen.

Priya, who hails from Kollengode in Kerala's Palakkad district, has been found guilty of murdering a Yemeni citizen in July, 2017. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Friday, "We are closely following the developments around the sentencing of Nimisha Priya. The government is extending all possible help in the matter."

The 37-year-old nurse is presently lodged in a jail in

MEA on Nimisha Priya case

Sana'a, the Yemeni capital city that is under the control of Iran-backed Houthis.

On Thursday, an Iranian official said Iran will do whatever it can in the case.

The Yemeni national, Talal Abdo Mahdi, reportedly died from an overdose of sedatives allegedly injected by Priya to retrieve her passport from him.

According to reports, Priya was handed capital punishment by a trial court in 2020 while Yemen's Supreme Judicial Council upheld the verdict in November 2023.

Yemen's President Rashad al-

Alimi approved the death penalty to Priya a few days back.

Priya's mother, Prema Kumari, currently in Sana'a, has made an emotional appeal to the Indian government to save her daughter's life. In a video message from Yemen, Prema Kumari urged the Centre and other authorities to intervene urgently. "This is my final plea. She has only a few days left. Every member of the action council has worked tirelessly to raise funds. I beg the Centre and the council to do everything possible to save her life," she said.

'IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO'

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has emphasised that normalising relations with India requires mutual willingness.

Speaking with journalists at the Foreign Office here on Thursday, Dar highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic efforts since the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government took office last year.

When asked about Pakistan's relations with India, he stressed on the importance of mutual effort, and said: "It takes two to tango."

Dar also announced plans to visit Bangladesh next month and noted that Islamabad and Dhaka are rebuilding ties after the fall of the Hasina government in August last year.

"Bangladesh is like a lost

Says Pak on relations with India



brother. We aim to strengthen economic and trade cooperation," he said and mentioned that he received an invitation from Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus during a meeting in Cairo recently.

Yunus took charge as Chief Adviser after the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted from power on August 5 last year following a students-led protest.

Earlier, Dar rejected claims

of the country's isolation as he said, "When we assumed office, there was a perception of diplomatic isolation. However, by expanding our diplomatic reach and engaging with regional neighbours, this perception has changed."

Commenting on Afghanistan, Dar expressed Pakistan's desire to strengthen ties with Kabul but admitted that terrorism remained a major challenge.

He revealed that planned visits to Kabul were postponed due to terrorist attacks and also criticised former intelligence chief Gen Faiz Hameed for engaging in talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is a separate group but a close ally of the Afghan Taliban.



Development of Andaman, Lakshadweep priority of govt: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Development of infrastructure and increasing tourism facilities in Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep is the priority of the Narendra Modi government, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Friday.

Chairing a meeting of the Island Development Agency (IDA) here, Shah also said the central government is preserving the culture and heritage of these islands and accelerating the development works, according to an official release.

During the meeting, the home minister reviewed the progress of the ongoing development initiatives in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, the release said.

"Even though these islands are far from Delhi, they are close to our hearts, development of infrastructure and increasing tourism facilities

there is the priority of the government," he said.

Shah emphasised the need for a holistic approach to infrastructure projects in both island groups and called on all concerned central ministries to collaborate on initiatives related to tourism, trade and other key sectors.

He also issued clear directives to address pending issues and expedite the completion of ongoing projects.

The home minister underscored the importance of advancing solar and wind energy initiatives in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

He emphasised achieving the goal of 100 per cent renewable energy generation through solar panels and windmills in these regions.

Shah directed the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) to implement the 'PM Surya Ghar' scheme by installing solar panels in all households across both island groups.

Caste discrimination in colleges sensitive issue: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Terming it as a sensitive issue, the Supreme Court on Friday said it will devise an effective mechanism to combat caste-based discrimination in educational institutions in the country.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the University Grants Commission (UGC) to notify draft regulations to ensure no caste-based discrimination happened with students in the central, state, private and deemed universities.

It directed the UGC to furnish data on the number of institu-

tions which had established equal opportunity cells in compliance with the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions Regulations) 2012, popularly called "UGC equity regulations".

"We are equally conscious of this sensitive issue. We will do something. We will have to find out some effective mechanism and modalities to see that the 2012 regulations are translated into reality," the bench said.

It sought Centre's response on the issue and asked the UGC to furnish data within six weeks on the complaints over such discrimination among students in

Says will do something to stop it



all universities and higher education institutions besides the consequent action.

Senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for the mothers of students Rohit Vemula and Payal Tadv, who allegedly died by suicide after facing caste-based discrimination, said from 2004 till now over 50 students (mostly from SC/ST) had killed themselves in IITs and other institutions after facing such discrimination.

While Vemula, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad Central University died on January 17, 2016, Tadv, a student at TN Topiwala National Medical

College, died on May 22, 2019, after she was subjected to purported discrimination by three doctors in her college. The bench said a PIL was filed in 2019 but no substantial hearing had taken place on the issue so far.

"From now on we will list this petition periodically so that some effective solution could be found in the matter as since 2019 nothing much has happened," said Justice Surya Kant.

The UGC counsel submitted a committee constituted by it gave recommendation and the commission drafted new regulations to stop caste-based discrimination.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

America under attack

A series of seemingly unrelated attacks highlight a troubling pattern of violence that has become a daily occurrence in the US

It is not a good beginning of the new year for the United States. The United States witnessed a series of attacks that shook it to core: a truck-ramming incident in New Orleans, a shooting incident in New York and a shooting spree in Las Vegas. These events, happening in quick succession, underscore an alarming pattern of violence that warrants deep analysis into their causes and potential implications. In New Orleans, a truck driven by Shamsud Din Jabbar plowed into a crowd, killing 15 and injuring 30. The truck, bearing an ISIS flag, was found to contain weapons and potential improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Jabbar was killed in a shootout with law enforcement and the FBI is treating the incident as an act of terrorism. Several people were injured after a mass shooting incident at the Amazura nightclub in Queens, New York late on Wednesday. Meanwhile, one person was killed and seven were wounded when a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a hotel belonging to US President-elect



Donald Trump in Las Vegas. Motives remain unclear, but early investigations point to ideological influences. The attacks share a few commonalities. All incidents targeted densely populated, high-profile locations to maximise casualties and media coverage.

In New Orleans and potentially Las Vegas, ideological motives appear central, with Jabbar's ISIS affiliations highlighting international terrorism's persistent threat. The use of a vehicle, explosives, and firearms demonstrates the adaptability of attackers, making prevention increasingly complex. The motivations behind these attacks stem from several inter-

secting factors. Jabbar's case exemplifies how individuals, even the US citizens, can become radicalised through extremist propaganda, facilitated by online networks. The New York incident is case in point of hazards of allowing free gun culture and resistance to any law on gun control. Early reports from Las Vegas suggest mental health challenges combined with ideological leanings may have fueled the attack, a trend increasingly observed in lone-wolf attackers. The growing threat of extremism, combined with unchecked emotions and easy access to firearms, continues to claim innocent lives. The implications of these attacks call for enhanced surveillance, with increased monitoring of online platforms and extremist networks. The gun control is the need of the hour. Though the US is divided on the gun control, it is high times at least some initial steps were taken in this direction. The recent spate of attacks underscores a volatile and evolving threat perception in the US. While law enforcement's swift action has mitigated further tragedy, addressing the root causes of such violence requires a multifaceted approach. From tackling radicalisation to bolstering community resilience, the nation must remain vigilant and united against the forces that seek to sow fear and division.

PICTALK



A worker plucks chrysanthemum flowers at a farm, in Nadia

A legacy of leadership, humanity and service



SANTOSH MATHEW

Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States, leaves behind an extraordinary legacy as a leader, peacemaker and humanitarian



Jimmy Carter, was one of the oldest living American presidents. Along with being the individual who has lived the longest after serving as president in American history, he is also distinguished for spending the most extended post-presidential period alive. Jimmy Carter, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his efforts in promoting human rights and conflict resolution, passed away in 2023. He was the 39th President of the United States, and he outlived many of his contemporaries, including George H.W. Bush, who he defeated in the presidential race in 1980. Born James Earl Carter Jr. on October 1, 1924, he has made a significant mark on American history. From 1977 to 1981, Jimmy Carter served as the President of the United States. Before becoming president, Jimmy Carter served as the Governor of Georgia in 1971. Despite running for president again in 1982 (Democrat) and competing against Ronald Reagan, he faced defeat. After leaving the presidency, he, along with his wife Rosalynn Carter, established the Carter Centre in 1982 in pursuit of helping the disadvantaged. Rosalynn Carter became the first lady and the first woman to serve as a board member of the

Carter Centre. In 2002, Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards peace and his exemplary actions in promoting human welfare. Despite reaching the age of 90, he remained active in various fields. Carter continued his philanthropic work, including building houses for low-income families through Habitat for Humanity, reducing diseases and elevating the quality of life for the underprivileged. His advocacy for human rights, international conflict resolution, presidency, human rights, and socio-economic development reflects his dedication to humanitarian causes. Carter's dedication to peace and social justice, as well as his active involvement in public service, sets him apart among U.S. presidents. Carter played a key role in mediating international conflicts, notably contributing to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. His post-presidential activities, including receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and actively participating in various humanitarian initiatives, showcase his commitment to making a positive impact on the world. However, his attempt to rescue



IN 2002, JIMMY CARTER WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR HIS EFFORTS TOWARDS PEACE AND HIS EXEMPLARY ACTIONS IN PROMOTING HUMAN WELFARE. DESPITE REACHING THE AGE OF 90, HE REMAINED ACTIVE IN VARIOUS FIELDS

American hostages in Iran, known as Operation Eagle Claw, failed. In his personal life, Jimmy Carter married Rosalynn in 1946, and their marriage lasted more than seven decades. They have four children: Jack, James, Donnel, and Amy. Rosalynn "Rosalynn" Carter, actively participated in various activities, including writing, activism, and advocacy for different causes. She was born in 1927. Rosalynn was actively involved in various meetings and discussions as the First Lady. She faced controversies, engaged in foreign trips, and represented her husband in diplomatic roles. In 1978, the then-American President Jimmy Carter visited India. Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister at that time. He had a meeting with 500 media persons. Carter visited the village of Chumukedima. The purpose of his visit was to revitalize the village where his mother, Lillian Peace, had served in the Peace Corps. During his journey, Carter distributed a considerable amount of money and television to the villagers. The village was later renamed as Carterpuri. In 2015, Jimmy Carter was diagnosed with

cancer, and in 2019, he faced health challenges related to multiple falls. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Carter, at the age of 96, stayed at home due to the pandemic's circumstances. Despite facing challenges and controversies, Jimmy Carter remained an active and influential figure in national and international affairs throughout his life. His contributions to diplomacy, human rights, and conflict resolution earned him recognition and respect. Even though his time as the American President failed, he left the White House and continued his work as a global advocate for human rights. He established the Carter Presidential Foundation to protect human rights globally, helping those in need and experiencing hardship. The organization has grown globally, assisting those in distress in Africa, Latin America, and other societies. Carter's compassionate activities in these regions included health-care services and other humanitarian initiatives. Today, he remains one of the eminent figures among the great presidents of America. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ENSURE WORKERS' SAFETY

Madam—This refers to the editorial, 'Save Priya' (January 3). It is indeed the responsibility of the Indian government to ensure the safety and security of millions of Indian nationals who choose to avail the employment opportunities extended in other countries. When the government is not able to provide employment in India, it is but natural that helpless people venture going abroad seeking livelihood means. Had the government provided jobs they would not have thought of going abroad. Therefore, the government should negotiate with the countries employing Indians to ensure the safety and security of the employees. In case any of them are found guilty of any crime, they should be sent back to face legal proceedings in the home country. This is not new. In the case of Abu, the extradition is agreed to with the condition of not awarding him capital punishment. Above all, it is time to rethink awarding capital punishment. Let us imagine a scene of punishing all those involved in various crimes, those who instigated and promoted them in Manipur in the recent months. An individual killing another individual is a crime to be punished by awarding death sentences, but mass killing and raping go unpunished and even if punished, enjoy remission and paroles. Review is imminent.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

ISIS STRIKES AGAIN

Madam—Apropos of the headlines 'Terror Strikes United States' (January 3), the ghastly terror strikes before Donald Trump swears in his second term as president are ominous for his upcoming tenure and may influence and harden his policy on terrorism throughout the world. The army veteran Shamsud Din Jabbar, swayed by ISIS, can't be alone in executing the terrorist attacks killing 14 people and fatally injuring several citizens. In fact, he got the advanced arms training and technology from the US army itself. The police investigation may unearth the

Sports award winners announced



The list of sports award winners is finally made public now, and the names of those who received the government nod for the Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna Award include D Gukesh, Harmanpreet Singh, Manu Bhaker and Praveen Kumar. Also, there is a long list for the Arjuna Awards, Dronacharya Award and the others. Although every recipient is worthy of receiving the honours for doing exceptionally well in their respective sports field. But D Gukesh is worthy of receiving extra appreciation for clinching the

title at such an early age of 18. He excellently carved out his own space for the national sport honours by becoming the winner of the FIDE World Chess Championship, beating Ding Liren most recently last December 2024. His calmness, grit and sacrifices on personal grounds, as well as his patience for his sports category, made him the utmost deserving candidate for this very honour. He has taken chess to new heights for being a cynosure in the Indian sports history. Today chess has become a popular mind-game among the youth, especially Gen Z & Gen Alpha. All credit goes to the young aspirations & zeal of D Gukesh, R Vaishali and Praggnandhaa who have made this 6-century-based, Indian-origin game called Shatranj reach the epitome of sports craze among players of every generation. He is in true sense, India's Khel Ratna (Sports Gem).

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

SOLAR POWER FOR RESIDENTS

Madam—It is an excellent initiative by the UT Administration of Chandigarh to provide solar plants to the residents of the 'City Beautiful' under the RESCO (Renewable Energy Service Company) scheme at no cost, inviting the tapping of solar energy and savings for every household. The sun is available in plenty in northern India, which will make the scheme very successful. This scheme needs to be promulgated rapidly in other cities of the nation too, with the initiative of the Union government, to benefit the maximum number of people. It will help in saving natural energy, a privilege available in abundance to only a few select countries. The government should ensure that benefits are given only to those holding authorised infrastructure duly registered to discourage further unauthorised constructions and ensure correct utilisation of government funds.

R S Narula | Patiala

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Balancing dreams and parental aspirations: A dilemma for students

In a society deeply rooted in tradition and shaped by economic uncertainty, parents often tread cautiously when guiding their children's career paths

We tend to be over-cautious when we guide our children in their professional choices. I realised this only after I had cajoled my children into studying sciences till their class 12. My rationale was that they could always switch to any other course for graduation, but the reverse was not possible. They are now happily pursuing their non-science professions, often ribbing me about how much better they could have done in their Board examinations had I not insisted. Many parents from my social circle still struggle to resolve the conundrum.

A senior colleague faced such a dilemma for his daughter two decades back. My daughters were by now happily pursuing their dreams. I freely dispensed my wisdom to let the young lady pursue whatever she wanted. He was contemplative for some time before agreeing. He remembered his school friend, the son of a famous medical doctor. The friend was pushed into a medical college sometime in the late sixties. He quit after a couple of years, joined a



course in liberal arts, and was a contented leading artist. I was born a few years after independence. I believe our parents were excited about freedom but were equally apprehensive about the future for the next generation. They opted for the more secure government jobs for us through engineering or medical studies. Children from families who had already seen enough government jobs through second-generation elders started moving to other options in the nineties. The liberalisation of the Indian economy opened professional choices hitherto unknown to children and parents alike. But it was still not the same across the entire spectrum. A junior colleague sought my advice regarding his son's admission to an engineering course. The child had not performed well in the competi-

tive examinations. The fee charged by the available lower-rung colleges was exorbitant, necessitating the father to take a loan. It was tragic as he came to me after five years, a year after the young man had completed his graduation and had been unable to secure a job, requesting if I could arrange a job even at a measly monthly salary. I witnessed several similar cases and wondered about the strange phenomenon even half a century after independence when several better-paying career options were available. An improved economy has resulted in a continuous upward movement of people financially from the below-poverty line to the lower class to the lower-middle-class to the middle-middle-class, and so on. However, an increasing population also ensures a part of the population remains in the lower financial strata. These parents are insecure about the future leading them towards the perceived safer educational courses for children to pursue. We read about senior leaders exhorting young people to become job providers instead of job

seekers. Not many talk about the ways to achieve this or the alternate career options. Engineering and medical colleges keep mushrooming without the government and the leaders pausing to reflect upon the implications of unplanned growth. This will continue for a few more generations till the population stabilizes. I narrate experiences from my life when interacting with the young in college. I tell them to pursue their dreams. A few of them invariably ask me whether to follow the courses that their parents have chosen for them or if they should follow their dreams. It is a difficult question to answer. I draw upon my life when I respond, "Follow your parents today, they only want the best for you. But do not let your dreams die. Life gives enough opportunities for you to pursue your dreams - if not today, certainly sometime in the future."

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



SANJAY CHANDRA



FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOMING JEALOUSY AND POSSESSIVENESS

In a world driven by competition and material aspirations, they become the silent tormentors



RAVI VALLURI

The world has become exceedingly ruthless and is not populated by monks and sages. Renunciation today is seen as an act contemptibly performed by someone lacking in courage. Competition fuels the aspiration to launch territories and enlarge the area of dominance. Companies, countries and communities have all become wary of the material success of their 'competitors' and in the process compromise with their goals and objectives. Consequently, they resort to shortcuts to emerge triumphant and victorious. The attribute of jealousy arises in an individual when the mind is possessive of certain belongings.

They fail to appreciate it is primarily inadequacy and deficiency in the personality that triggers this kind of capricious and mercurial behaviour. Interestingly, envy in many also arises out of shortages. There can be a lack of aptitude, talent, resources, connections, opportunities or because of unfavourable outcomes. This engenders negative feelings towards perceived competitors, which culminates in jealousy and other negative feelings. Individuals subsumed by jealousy build walls of false security walls around their personalities.

Such minds feel cheery about their possessions. They attach importance to this property, clinging on to it. This could be a physical property, position, power and pelf, pleasure or sex. As per the Mahabharata, Karna was extremely jealous of Arjuna, which eventually proved to be his nemesis. Similarly, Dev Dutt remained extremely envious of his enlightened



cousin, Buddha, which only led to his downfall. The jealous and possessive mind is acquisitive by nature, taking both animate and inanimate objects for granted and getting attached to things, like an addiction to alcohol or marijuana.

Additionally, such a mind is perpetually petrified at the prospect of losing acquisitions. Fear in such minds harbours negative tendencies such as hatred, greed and ruthlessness. For instance, an artist aspiring to be a lead artiste in a drama plays foul with a more talented actress becoming fearful and gripped with hatred and greed. Her ruthless mind kept conjuring tricks, trying to outsmart the second lead and in the bargain lost the plot. Jealous and envious minds have become laboratories of antagonism that spew hatred. How do we overcome attributes such as jealousy, envy, and possessiveness? At one end of the spectrum are organisations and authorities which need to take up this responsibility. This includes proper parenting, where children are brought up on ideals of inherent goodness, an effective educational system that imparts values as part of their pedagogy, governments that take up the responsibility of providing equal opportunities to the citizens and try to carve out an egalitarian system and a society that addresses the core issues of humaneness amongst its citizenry. Vasudeva Kutumbakam (or what is termed one world family) is the net result. The spiritual touch is an important colour in the rainbow of goodness. One can practice any faith, but we need to be tolerant of other peoples' points of view. Spirituality succeeds where religions draw the fault lines and wave red flags. Globalisation has made the world flat, but has resulted in an exponential increase in crass commercialisation and human minds have fallen prey to antipathetic traits such as jealousy, envy, attachments, entanglements, greed and possessiveness. The vicious tendencies of jealousy and possessiveness can be tackled by following the two-fold approach highlighted so that the chasm between individuals diminishes. "Manifest plainness Embrace simplicity Reduce selfishness Have few desires." — Lao Tzu

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

How waterways shape global dominance



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Beyond the rhetoric of ideologies and resources, history reveals a stark reality: whoever commands the strategic arteries of global trade rules, the world



Have you ever wondered why the world's most significant conflicts haven't often been about land or wealth, but about water—specifically, the narrow, strategic passages that govern the flow of global commerce? What if the true history of power isn't written in the conquest of continents, but in the manipulation of these invisible arteries that sustain entire civilisations? We've been conditioned to believe wars are fought over ideologies, religions, or resources, but in reality, the greatest power struggles have always boiled down to one thing: who controls the waterways. In the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), Athens fought for dominance over the Aegean Sea, while the Punic Wars (264–146 BCE) saw Rome and Carthage clash over Mediterranean trade routes. The Viking Invasions (8th–11th Century) leveraged rivers and coastal routes to expand across Europe. The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) revolved around control of the English Channel, vital for military and trade access.

The Spanish Armada (1588) attempted to invade England via the Channel, only to fail, marking the rise of English naval power. The Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652–1674) pitted England against the Dutch for supremacy over global trade routes. The Opium Wars (1839–1860) saw Britain assert control over Chinese trade routes, while the Crimean War (1853–1856) focused on access to the Black Sea and key straits. History teaches us one undeniable truth: whoever controls the waters, controls the world. So, are today's tensions over waterways merely the latest chapter in an ongoing imperialist saga, where the West fights to preserve its dominance, regardless of the cost? Consider the Suez Canal, that artificial marvel that stitched together the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. To the naked eye, it may appear as nothing more than a lifeline for global trade, but dig deeper and you'll find it at the heart of Western exploitation. When the British seized control in 1882, under the convenient pretext of 'protecting their investments,' they didn't just shorten maritime routes; they solidified their chokehold on the world's shipping routes, ensuring that they would remain the dominant force in global com-



THE PANAMA CANAL EXISTS BECAUSE THE UNITED STATES ORCHESTRATED THE DISINTEGRATION OF COLOMBIAN SOVEREIGNTY IN 1903. THIS WASN'T A MOMENT OF ENGINEERING BRILLIANCE, BUT A CALCULATED EXERCISE IN IMPERIALISM

merce. When Egypt's Nasser attempted to break this grip in 1956, his actions sparked the Suez Crisis, where Britain, France, and Israel launched a military intervention to maintain their control. As US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles famously quipped, "The United States will not tolerate the use of force to interfere with the free flow of commerce." And yet, isn't it glaringly obvious that this was never about commerce at all—it was about the West's attempt to secure its monopoly, at any cost? In the same vein, the Panama Canal stands as a bold symbol of imperial manipulation. The US didn't merely 'build' the canal—it stole it.

The Panama Canal exists because the United States orchestrated the disintegration of Colombian sovereignty in 1903. This wasn't a moment of engineering brilliance, but a calculated exercise in imperialism. With the canal, the US secured its unchallenged control over the Atlantic and Pacific, guaranteeing military and economic supremacy for the century to come. Even when Panamanian discontent festered, and the CIA's once-trusted ally Manuel Noriega threatened the established order, the United States responded with military force under the guise of 'fighting drug cartels.'

To the naive, it was a noble cause. To the cynical, it was a ruthless move to preserve a stranglehold over one of the world's most critical arteries. The canal may have technically been handed back to Panama in 1999, but let's not fool ourselves—it remains an essential tool of Western control, albeit one with a new face.

Let's not forget the Strait of Hormuz, a sliver of water that handles a quarter of the world's oil. The British recognised its significance early on, securing their dominance over it through protectorate agreements in the 19th century. By the time of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s,

Hormuz had become the beating heart of the global oil trade, and any attempt to disrupt its flow was met with swift intervention.

Both sides sought to shut it down, understanding that control over Hormuz meant control over global energy. Yet, even today, with Iran flexing its military muscles, Western powers continue to police this waterway as though it were their birthright, ensuring that the oil flows uninterrupted, no matter the cost of human lives. Now, as the world shifts into a new era, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is emerging as the latest theatre of power.

Stretching along Russia's Arctic coastline, this passageway promises to bypass traditional chokepoints like the Suez and Panama Canal, opening up a new frontier for global shipping. With the ice caps melting, climate change has inadvertently opened a new battlefield for dominance. The West, for all its talk of climate change solutions, is deeply uneasy about the NSR. For centuries, the Western maritime powers have been used to dictating global trade, yet now they face the challenge of a new route that circumvents their long-held control. And then there are the Turkish Straits—where the promise of control has always been laced with deception.

In World War I, the Entente powers offered Russia control over the straits in exchange for military support, only to revoke that promise after the Bolshevik Revolution. Since the Montreux Convention of 1936, Turkey has held sway over the straits, but with conditions that serve the interests of the West. These waters remain a hotbed of tension, especially now, as the Russia-NATO conflict forces us to re-evaluate the importance of these narrow waterways.

Yet, in all of these conflicts, one fact is clear: Western powers have never relinquished their thirst for control. Look at the Malacca Strait, the life-

line for Asia's maritime trade, and the silent battlefield of geopolitical manoeuvring. In the 16th century, the Portuguese recognised its importance as the gateway between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, and later, the Dutch would follow. During World War II, Japan's occupation of Malaya underscored the strait's value, as it was the critical supply line for its imperial ambitions.

Today, China's dominance of the strait has triggered an uneasy response from the United States, which seeks to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Malacca Strait is as vital as it is contested, and its importance will only increase as the world edges closer to a new era of Cold War. Donald Trump's re-emergence as a political force serves as a blunt reminder that these conflicts are far from distant.

His comments on Greenland—a land abundant in resources and strategic significance—and on seizing Panama if needed, are not just idle musings. The United States' thirst for the Arctic has always been driven by the same imperial instincts that have defined its foreign policy for over a century. His fixation on the Panama Canal reveals the same ambitions, albeit with more brash rhetoric.

While many dismiss his comments as the reckless utterances of a man out of touch with the world's realities, those who know history understand that this is how empires operate: through calculated moves disguised as political theatrics.

The bottom line is this: the manipulation of waterways remains an open secret, and the struggle for control is as intense as ever—whether by the West or any power with imperialistic and hegemonic ambitions.

(The writer is a journalist and a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Dalal Street ends 2024 on a bearish note: Rs 9.65 trillion investor wealth eroded

A focus on earnings growth and moderation in valuations will be critical for sustaining long-term market performance in 2025

The absence of new year cheer was evident as Dalal Street continued crashing in the last week of December leading to 2025, in the process eroding investors' wealth to the tune of Rs 9.65 trillion as Sensex tanked by 2,915 points. The bear run at a time when the market was already grappling with thin year-end volumes was made worse by a weakening rupee as it slid towards the 86-pence mark. This further dampened the appeal of Indian equities for foreign institutional investors (FIIs) leading to robust FII outflows. The prevalence of this phenomenon was worldwide with Japan's Nikkei 225, China's Shanghai Composite, Australia's ASX 200, Germany's DAX, France's

CAC 40 and NASDAQ Composite showing similar bearish sentiments. The current stock market meltdown is influenced by several factors.

Not only in India, but global markets are witnessing this trend particularly due to profit-taking, and tax-loss harvesting focusing on year-end tax strategies, giving a miss to the traditional 'Santa Claus rally'. Institutional and retail investors alike booked profits and rebalanced their portfolios, particularly in large-cap stocks which posted strong growth in 2024, leading to selling pressure across the board and a broad-based correction. As economic interlinkages of India with the world have deepened, so has the integra-



HIMA BINDU KOTA

tion with global stock markets. The uncertain global economic conditions, particularly in countries like the United States, coupled with fears of a global recession fuelled by weak manufacturing data from China, have dampened investor sentiment both worldwide and in India. A decline in the demand for Indian exports, mainly in the IT and manufacturing sectors

further led to the market's downward spiral. Geopolitical tensions including regional wars, ambiguous crude oil prices and subsequent disruptions in supply chains have impacted the markets and sector-specific tragedies like the Jeju Air crash in South Korea contributed to the overall bearish sentiment.

Weaker than expected third quarterly results, particularly in the banking and consumer goods sector, dampened the confidence displayed by the markets due to the resilient first two quarters showed by the Indian economy. This reduced the conviction further as the banking and consumer goods sectors were considered growth engines since the beginning of the year.



Stock market valuations in India and around the globe were elevated in 2024.

In India, the higher valuations were fuelled by strong domestic economic growth and robust corporate earnings, leading to sustained investor confidence.

Several companies ranging across industries were trading at premium P/E ratios, like Infosys (28-30x); HUL (55x); Bajaj Finance (40x); and

Zomato (10-12x) to name a few. However, since the question of sustaining the overvalued stocks in the backdrop of weak quarterly earnings is difficult, it led to the year-end market corrections that we are experiencing at the end of December 2024.

Although the aggressive monetary policy by the Reserve Bank of India was able to combat inflation during the year, high interest rates negatively affected the borrowing costs of businesses and retail investors.

This led to increased interest in investments in fixed-income securities instead of finding equity markets attractive. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) who were attracted to the Indian growth story and wanted to be its

integral part also turned into net sellers in December 2024. A risk-averse stance and a strong USD value made emerging nations like India less attractive during the year-end, leading to capital outflows, which in turn led to a weakening rupee again. Overall, the bearish stock market sentiment in December 2024 was a combination of year-end profit-taking strategies, global economic outlook, high stock valuation concerns, weak sectoral performance and outlook and several international events. However, all is not bleak. These fluctuations are a part of the larger economic cycle and the markets will see an upward cycle with a long-term focus on the fundamentals and relevant steps at

the policy level. The resilient Indian economy and its economic growth will be the key driver for renewed opportunities for growth and investment in 2025.

This economic growth will be supported by increased investments in infrastructure, boosting the manufacturing environment to improve the industrial output, a burgeoning middle class and a revival of the rural economy may increase the demand for automobiles, FMCG and consumer durables in 2025. In addition, India's rapidly growing digital economy will continue to support new-age companies and sectors.

(The writer is Associate Professor at Amity University, Noida. The views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Gold prices almost flat at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams

Gold prices traded almost flat at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal closed at Rs 79,720 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver slipped Rs 230 to Rs 90,400 per kg on Friday. The white metal settled at Rs 90,630 per kg in the previous trading session. However, the price of gold with 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 130 to Rs 79,300 per 10 grams on Friday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery increased Rs 6 to trade at Rs 77,723 per 10 grams. "Gold traded with minor gains in the domestic market, while Comex gold maintained a sideways trend around USD 2,655 per ounce," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The market remains steady with limited movements as participants await further global cues to determine the next direction, Trivedi said. Silver climbed Rs 517 or 0.58 per cent to Rs 89,690 per kg in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Globally, Comex gold futures rose USD 2.10 per ounce or 0.08 per cent to USD 2,671.10 per ounce.

'EV firms agree to end subsidy after existing subsidy regime ends'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said the electric vehicle (EV) companies present in the meeting have unanimously agreed that they would no longer need subsidies once the existing subsidy regime ends. Stakeholders from the EV sector held deliberations with the minister here on issues pertaining to development of battery charging and swapping infrastructure.

The minister also said that companies are free to choose their own business models.

Whether they prefer to collaborate and share resources for battery swapping or sell vehicles with their own batteries, the decision is entirely up to them, he said.

"Everybody was unanimous in the room that once the existing subsidy regime comes to an end, none of them requires the subsidy to grow further...Each sector has one or the other model which makes it self-sustaining and does not call for further subsidies," Goyal told reporters when asked about the views of



companies on subsidies.

In a bid to woo global EV makers into the country, in March last year the government rolled out an electric vehicle policy, under which duty concessions were offered to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million.

The government has plans to install 10,763 public charging stations across the country under the FAME-II scheme.

Under FAME-India Scheme phase-II, incentives are provided to buyers of electric vehicles in the form of an upfront reduction in the

purchase price of electric vehicles.

There is another scheme - PM E-DRIVE - to support electric mobility through support for 14,028 e-buses, 2,05,392 electric three-wheelers (L5), 1,10,596 e-rickshaws and e-carts and 24,79,120 electric two-wheelers.

In addition, e-trucks, e-ambulances, EV public charging stations and upgrading of testing agencies are also supported under the scheme.

The government has also rolled out the production linked incentive (PLI) schemes for auto sector and manufacturing of Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC).

'Exports to cross USD 800 bn'

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said despite global economic uncertainties, India's exports of goods and services are expected to cross USD 800 billion this fiscal, which will be a record. Last fiscal year, the exports stood at USD 778 billion. He said though there will be stresses in the global system, but India's exports basket is large. "My estimate is that we will cross USD 800 billion in exports, another record given the world situation," he told reporters here. He added share in services exports is also growing at a rapid pace. On exports to developing and least developed countries (LDCs), he said those nations have been stressed because of the forex crisis they are facing after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Red Sea crisis too had impacted shipping lines.

EPFO rolls out centralised pension system

68 lakh pensioners to benefit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO has completed the Centralized Pension Payments System (CPPS) rollout in all its regional offices across the country that will benefit over 68 lakh pensioners, the labour ministry said on Friday.

The CPPS is a paradigm shift from the existing pension disbursement system that is decentralised, with each zonal/regional office of EPFO maintaining separate agreements with only 3-4 banks, the ministry explained in a statement.

Under CPPS, a beneficiary will be able to withdraw pension from any bank and there will be no need for to visit the bank for verification at the time of commencement of pension, and the amount will be immediately credited upon release, it stated.

The CPPS system January 2025 onwards will also ensure disbursement of pension throughout India without any need for transfer of pension payment orders (PPO) from one office to another even when the pensioner moves from one location to another or changes his bank or branch, it said.

This will be a great relief to pensioners who move to their hometown after retirement. The first pilot of CPPS was completed in October last year in Karnal, Jammu, and Srinagar regional offices with the pension disbursement of about Rs 11 crore to more than 49,000 EPFO pensioners, a ministry statement said.

The second pilot was taken up in November in 24 regional offices where about Rs 213 crore pension was disbursed to more than 9.3 lakh pensioners, it stated.



MOIL's manganese ore production rises 5 pc

The manganese ore production of state-owned MOIL rose by 4.5 per cent year-on-year to 13.3 lakh tonnes in the April-December period of the current fiscal, the government said on Friday. The sale of manganese ore also rose by 4 per cent to 11.39 lakh tonnes in the first nine months of the current fiscal, compared to the year-ago period. "Coming to the performance in the first nine months of the current financial year, MOIL has registered production of 13.3 lakh tonnes, which is 4.5 per cent higher and sale of 11.39 lakh tonnes which is 4 per cent higher than the corresponding period of the last year," the steel ministry said in a statement. The company's CMD Ajit Kumar Saxena exuded confidence that the company will maintain the growth momentum. "The PSU has also registered growth in its exploratory core drilling which stands at 72,340 metres, which is 19 per cent higher than the corresponding period of last year," the statement said.

UCO Bank's business grows 12pc

PNS ■ KOLKATA

UCO Bank on Friday reported robust year-on-year growth across key parameters for the quarter ending December 2024, with the lender's total business rising by 12.18 per cent to Rs 4.88 lakh crore.

According to a provisional disclosure submitted to the stock exchanges, total advances saw a sharper gain, registering a 16.20 per cent year-on-year rise to Rs 2.08 lakh crore, driven by a significant 18.83 per cent growth in domestic advances, which stood at Rs 1.83 lakh crore.

Deposits also experienced healthy growth, increasing by 9.37 per cent for the quarter to Rs 2.80 lakh crore, with domestic deposits rising by 7.29 per cent to Rs 2.65 lakh crore. The bank's CASA ratio — a critical measure of low-cost deposit base — remained steady at 37.96 per cent versus 37.61 per cent in December 2023.

The credit-deposit (CD) ratio improved to 74.55 per cent in the reporting quarter as against 69.93 per cent in the year-ago period, reflecting better asset utilisation.

Sensex, Nifty tank 1% on selloff in banking, IT stocks

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure to settle nearly 1 per cent lower on Friday as investors pared exposure to bank and IT stocks ahead of the earnings season starting next week.

A depreciating rupee against strengthening US dollar overseas further weighed on sentiment, traders said.

Despite a positive start, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 720.60 points or 0.90 per cent to close at 79,223.11. During the day, it slumped 833.98 points or 1.04 per cent to 79,109.73.

The NSE Nifty tanked 183.90 points or 0.76 per cent to 24,004.75.

On a weekly basis, the BSE



benchmark jumped 524.04 points or 0.66 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 191.35 points or 0.80 per cent.

"A sell-on-rally sentiment prevails in the market due to a strong US dollar, high valuation, and a shift towards a multi-asset investment strategy. Reducing US jobless claims and potential policy shifts in the US indicate that the Fed is not in a hurry to cut interest

rates in the near term. "Looking ahead, the market is likely to focus on Q3 earnings, with expectations of improvement in earnings on a QoQ basis," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the Sensex pack, Zomato, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, ICICI Bank, Sun Pharma, Larsen &

Toubrro, HCL Tech and ITC were the major laggards.

On the other hand, Tata Motors, Nestle, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the gainers.

"Despite the short recovery in the past two sessions, markets lost the momentum as there is still a lot of pessimism due to slowing growth, higher domestic valuations, foreign fund outflows, and uncertainty over US trade policies post Trump's resumption as the country's president.

Hence, markets may see bouts of correction, and investors will continue to maintain caution while keeping an eye on global developments," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Forex reserves drop to \$640.27 billion

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion during the week ended December 27, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped by USD 4.674 billion to USD 644.391 billion.

The reserves have been declining for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September.

For the week ended December 27, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 4.641 billion to USD 551.921 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased by USD 541 million to USD 66.268 billion during the week, the RBI said.



RBI lifts restrictions on Arohan Financial Services

The Reserve Bank on Friday lifted the restrictions placed on Kolkata-based Arohan Financial Services Limited with immediate effect. In October last year, the central bank had ordered Arohan Financial and three other NBFCs to cease and desist from sanction and disbursement of loans effective from the close of business of October 21, on material supervisory concerns, including usurious pricing. Subsequently, the Kolkata-based NBFC initiated remedial action on an ongoing basis, and submitted its various compliances to the Reserve Bank, the RBI said on Friday. "Now having satisfied itself based on company's submissions", and in view of their adoption of revamped processes, systems, and the company's commitment to ensure adherence to the regulatory guidelines on an ongoing basis, especially for ensuring fairness in the loan pricing, the Reserve Bank said it has decided to lift the restrictions placed on Arohan Financial Services with immediate effect.

ICAI calls for prudent tax reforms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI has sought tax benefits for promoting climate change mitigation strategies and a separate section for income from shares and securities in the income tax returns form.

Besides, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has sought a special tax regime for partnership firms and limited liability partnerships (LLPs) as well as simplification of income tax return forms.

The institute on Friday said it has advocated for prudent tax reforms aimed at fostering eco-



nomical growth and encouraging environmental sustainability in the pre-Budget Memorandum 2025.

"Provision of tax benefits for promoting climate change mitigation strategies, which will not only contribute to India's climate change goals but also

drive economic growth by promoting sustainable business practices is a suggestion in this direction," it said in a release.

Among other suggestions, ICAI has proposed a new head to show income from shares and securities that will have provisions relating to taxability of

income by way of dividend, interest or capital gains.

Rationalising conditions for treating a return of income as defective in the e-filing regime and provision of opportunity of being heard before treating a defective return as invalid is another suggestion by the institute. ICAI has also pitched for simplifying the capital gains provisions under sections 54 to 54F of the Act, extending 10 per cent tolerance band to cases where value is determined by the valuation officer under Section 50C(2), rationalising rate of tax under Section 115BBE in respect of cash credits and unexplained investments.

Premium devices demand to push smartphone mkt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rising demand for premium devices, led by Apple and Samsung, is expected to increase India's smartphone market size to over USD 50 billion (about Rs 4,28,900 crore) this year, market research firm Counterpoint Technology Market Research said on Friday.

The Indian smartphone market size was estimated at USD 37.9 billion (about Rs 3.25 lakh crore) in 2021, according to the research firm.

"India's smartphone market is on track to achieve its highest-ever value in 2025, crossing USD 50 billion. Brands like Apple and Samsung are leading this shift by offering competitive options in the premium and ultra-premium segments," the report said. Apple India has registered a total income of Rs 67,121.6 crore, while Samsung reported revenue of Rs 71,157.6 crore from the mobile phone vertical in the financial year 2024. According to the report, the retail average selling price of India's smartphone market is expected to cross the USD 300 mark (about Rs 25,700) for the first time in 2025. "Apple is expected to see strong demand for its Pro models, driven by

local manufacturing and recent price reductions across its iPhone lineup. Meanwhile, Samsung's value-focused strategy is gaining traction, particularly with its flagship S series," the report said.

Chinese brands like Vivo, Oppo, and OnePlus are attracting consumers by offering advanced camera systems etc. in the affordable premium category, ranging between Rs

30,000-45,000 apiece.

"Meanwhile, OnePlus is making a comeback by addressing Indian retailers' concerns related to display and motherboard, which had negatively impacted its performance earlier this year. Besides, the company's planned investment of Rs 6,000 crore (about USD 720 million) in local market expansion is expected to accelerate its recovery and growth," the report said. The premium segment (starting above Rs 30,000) is projected to exceed 20 per cent market share by 2025, the report said.

Rural poverty declines sharply, says SBI research

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rural poverty has declined significantly to 4.86 per cent in the fiscal ending March 2024 from 25.7 per cent in 2011-12 mainly driven by government support programmes, said a SBI research released on Friday.

Urban poverty too is estimated at 4.09 per cent, down from 13.7 per cent in 2011-12.

"The sharp decline in rural poverty ratio is on account of higher consumption growth in lowest 0-5 per cent decile with significant government support and such support is

important as we also find that change in food prices has a significant impact on not just food expenditures, but overall expenditure in general," said the SBI research on consumption expenditure survey.

The latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, released by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, showed that consumption inequality in rural as well as urban areas declined during the August 2023-July 2024 period as compared to a year ago.

The SBI research said that



the Consumption Expenditure Survey reveals a remarkable decline in rural poverty estimated at 4.86 per cent in 2023-24 (7.2 per cent in FY23 and 25.7 per cent in FY12) and

urban poverty estimated at 4.09 per cent (4.6 per cent in FY23 and 13.7 per cent in 2011-12).

It is possible that these numbers could undergo minor revisions

once the 2021 census is completed and the new rural-urban population share is published, the research report said.

"We believe urban poverty could decline even further. At an aggregate level, we believe poverty rates in India could now be in the range of 4-4.5 per cent with almost minimal existence of extreme poverty," it said.

Enhanced physical infrastructure is scripting a new story in rural mobility, it said and added that one of the reasons for the increasingly shrinking horizontal income gap

between rural and urban and the vertical income gap within rural income classes," SBI said.

"The difference between rural and urban monthly per capita consumption expenditure/ Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) to rural MPCE is now at 69.7 per cent, a rapid decline from 88.2 per cent in 2009-10...mostly due to the initiatives the government has taken in terms of DBT transfers, building rural infrastructures, augmenting farmer's income, (and) improving the rural livelihood significantly," it said

JAAVED JAAFERI, AVANTIKA & VIVAAN BRING THEIR NEW TALE OF LOVE WITH *INN GALIYON MEIN*

Directed by the renowned filmmaker Avinash Das, the romantic drama *Inn Galiyon Mein* is set to hit theatres on February 28, 2025. Known for his critically acclaimed projects like *SHE*, *Raat Baaki Hai* and *Anaarkali of Aarah*, Avinash Das brings his unique storytelling touch to this film, which delves into themes of love, society and the transformative influence of social media.

The film boasts an impressive cast, including veteran actor Jaaved Jaferi, rising star Vivaan Shah and Avantika Dassani, who makes her much-awaited theatrical debut. As the daughter of iconic actress Bhagyashree, Avantika's entry into the world of cinema adds to the anticipation surrounding the movie. This combination of experienced performers and fresh talent promises to deliver an engaging and relatable cinematic experience for audiences across generations.

Set in the digital age, *Inn Galiyon Mein* explores the complexities of relationships in a world where social media wields significant influence over personal lives. Speaking about the film, Jaaved Jaferi expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "In an era where social media plays a pivotal role in shaping our interactions and choices, this story examines its impact on love and relationships. It's a narrative that will resonate with anyone who has navigated the digital landscape in their personal life."

Avinash Das's nuanced direction and Amaal Mallik's evocative music promise to enhance the emotional depth of the film. The project is produced by Vinod Yadav and Neeru Yadav, with Alcor Productions as co-producers, ensuring a high-quality cinematic experience.

The first poster of *Inn Galiyon Mein* has already generated significant excitement among fans, offering a glimpse into the film's intriguing storyline. As the release date approaches, the buzz continues to grow, setting the stage for what promises to be an unforgettable journey into the challenges and beauty of love in the modern world.

Love and longing takes centre stage in *Fateh's Heer*

The much-anticipated romantic ballad *Heer* from the upcoming action-drama film *Fateh* has been released and it's already winning hearts. Sung by the exceptionally talented Vishal Mishra and Asees Kaur, the track explores the universal themes of love, longing and the unyielding hope that binds two souls despite physical distance.

Set against a poignant narrative, the song features heartfelt performances by Sonu Sood and Jacqueline Fernandez, bringing to life the bittersweet emotions of separation and connection. Their chemistry beautifully complements the tender lyrics and melodious composition, making *Heer* a must-add to every romantic playlist.

Singer Vishal Mishra, known for his soul-stirring love ballads, shared his thoughts on the track: "Heer is not just another love song. It's a reflection of longing and deep emotions. Asees' voice has brought a unique beauty to the composition, and we hope the song resonates with people across the globe."

Asees Kaur, celebrated for her versatility and expressive voice, echoed the sentiment: "Working on *Heer* with Vishal and Shabbir Ahmed was a truly special experience. The song captures the raw essence of love and yearning, and we're thrilled with how it has turned out. We hope listeners feel

the magic we felt while creating it." The music for *Heer* has been composed and produced by Shabbir Ahmed, with heartfelt lyrics penned by Shabbir Ahmed and Ajay Pal Sharma. The track is a seamless blend of poetic expression and enchanting melody, destined to resonate with audiences.

Produced by Sonali Sood of Shakti Sagar Productions and Umesh KR Bansal of Zee Studios, with co-producer Ajay Dhama, *Fateh* promises to be an action-packed cinematic experience. The film, slated for release on January 10, 2025, explores themes of courage, resilience and the battle against cybercrime, presenting a gripping narrative anchored by strong performances.



Phule in cinemas on Jyotiba Phule's 197th birth anniversary

In a tribute to one of India's greatest social reformers, the much-anticipated biopic *Phule* is set to hit theatres on April 11, 2025, marking the 197th birth anniversary of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule. The announcement was made on the occasion of Savitribai Phule's birth anniversary by the film's producers, Dancing Shiva Films, Kingsmen Productions and Zee Studios.

Directed by national award-winning filmmaker Ananth Mahadevan, *Phule* stars Pratik Gandhi as Jyotirao Phule and Patralekhaa as Savitribai Phule, capturing the revolutionary journey of this iconic couple who laid the foundation for equality and education in India. The film explores their pioneering efforts in combating caste discrimination, gender inequality and societal oppression during British colonial rule.

"This is our humble tribute to a great son and daughter of India," said director Ananth Mahadevan. "The film delves deeper than history books, offering an immersive journey



struggles, sacrifices and the undying resilience they exhibited to inspire change in rural Indian society.

Speaking about her role, Patralekhaa shared, "It's an immense honor to portray Savitribai Phule, who alongside Jyotirao Phule, redefined education and social equality in India. Announcing the release of this film on her birth anniversary feels deeply significant. I hope their story resonates with audiences and inspires them to carry forward their vision."

The film's poster, unveiled last year on Jyotirao Phule's birth anniversary, generated widespread praise and anticipation. Pratik Gandhi's portrayal of the visionary reformer and Patralekhaa's embodiment of the trailblazing educator are expected to bring authenticity and emotional depth to the story.

Ananth Mahadevan emphasized the historical accuracy of the film, saying, "While Phule adheres to historical facts, it is not just a narrative of the past. The film is a call to recognise the sacrifices and values of these reformers, which continue to shape our society today."

Paatal Lok Season 2 promises darker mysteries with deadlier threats

Kicking off 2025 on an electrifying note, Prime Video has unveiled the teaser for the highly anticipated second season of the critically acclaimed series *Paatal Lok*. Fans of the gritty crime thriller have been eagerly awaiting the return of the no-nonsense Inspector Hathi Ram Chaudhary, portrayed by Jaideep Ahlawat. The teaser provides a riveting sneak peek into a new and perilous case that pushes the protagonist to his absolute limits.

This season promises to up the ante, with darker mysteries, higher stakes, and deadlier threats awaiting Hathi Ram. The teaser hints at chaos lurking in every corner as the inspector dives deeper into the underbelly of society. The central question looms large: will Hathi Ram's relentless pursuit of truth come at the cost of his own sanity, or will his dogged determination prevail?



Produced by Clean Slate Filmz in association with Eunoia Films LLP, the eight-episode series is created and executive produced by Sudip Sharma. Helmed by director Avinash Arun Dhaware, the new season reunites fans with familiar faces while introducing exciting new additions to the cast. Alongside Jaideep Ahlawat, the show features stellar performances from Ishwak Singh, Gul Panag, Tillotama Shome, Nagesh Kukunoor and Jahnur Barua.

With *Paatal Lok Season 1* earning widespread acclaim for its gripping narrative and layered storytelling, expectations for the sequel are at an all-time high. This time, viewers can anticipate an even more immersive exploration of the show's signature dark, treacherous world.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



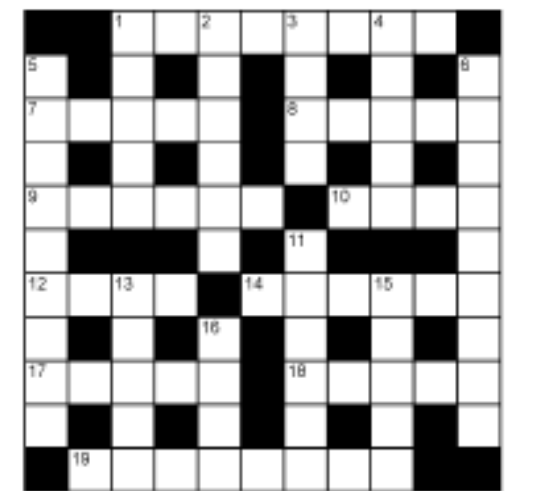
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



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Yesterday's solution

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- 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

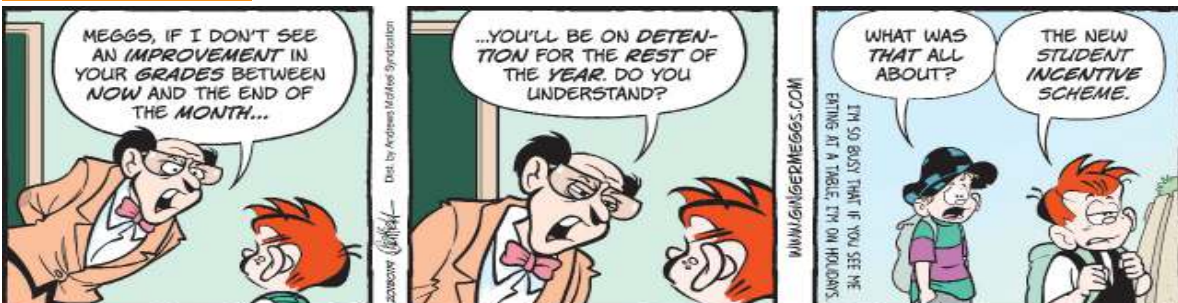
- Speaks very quietly
- A builder follows these when building a house
- The backbone
- Athens is the capital city of this country
- Fewer
- You see with these
- The large country just north of the USA
- Weary
- Near
- Young people

DOWN

- A huge sea mammal
- A six-legged creature
- Shove
- Lift up
- Food that looks like lots of worms
- A daily publication
- A small dish under a cup
- Garden soil
- A nut from an oak tree
- A worshipped statue



GINGER MEGGS



‘HYD’S SPORTS LANDSCAPE GROWS, WHILE KICKBOXING FIGHTS FOR ITS PLACE’

A PROUD HYDERABADI AT HEART, WHO HAILS FROM THE ‘CITY OF VICTORY’, VIJAYAWADA, K HARSHA RATNAKAR, AN INTERNATIONAL KICKBOXER SPEAKS PASSIONATELY ABOUT HOW THE CITY HAS SHAPED HIS LIFE, HIS ASPIRATIONS AND HIS DETERMINATION TO INSPIRE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF ATHLETES, IN THIS CHAT WITH THE PIONEER

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Hyderabad, celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and technological advancements, is steadily emerging as a hub for sports in India. The city has produced world-class athletes like badminton champions PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal and cricketing legend Mohammed Azharuddin, proving its capability to foster exceptional talent. With state-of-the-art facilities such as the Gachibowli Indoor Stadium and the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, Hyderabad provides a strong foundation for sports enthusiasts. However, while mainstream sports like cricket and badminton thrive, niche disciplines such as kickboxing continue to grapple with challenges in gaining recognition and support. Despite these obstacles, the city's diverse talent pool and growing passion for sports make it a promising contender in India's sporting landscape.

K Harsha Ratnakar, an international kickboxer and civil service aspirant, exemplifies the grit and determination needed to overcome these challenges. Born in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, Harsha moved to Hyderabad at the age of three and has since called the city his home. "Hyderabad has shaped me in every way possible. My education, my professional journey and even my dreams are deeply rooted in this city," says Harsha, who has cleared the Group-1 prelims in Telangana and is eagerly awaiting the results of the mains.

Beyond academics, he has made a name for himself in the world of kickboxing, representing India on the international stage. However, his journey has not been without struggles, particularly in fighting for the recognition of his beloved sport in Telangana.

Ratnakar's love for kickboxing began with a childhood fascination for action movies and WWE matches. "I was mesmerized by Jackie Chan, Bruce Lee and other action stars. Watching them made

me want to pursue something similar in real life," he recalls. Adding to his inspiration was his father, who was a karate player in his youth.

In 2012, he discovered kickboxing through a friend and joined a local academy under coach Suresh Patel. Initially, it was a casual hobby to stay fit and make productive use of his time. However, his dedication soon led him to participate in district-level tournaments. From there, he advanced to state and national levels, making his mark as a skilled athlete.

"My journey took a pause when I decided to focus on preparing for the civil services exams," he shares. For seven years, Harsha stayed away from the sport but returned with renewed passion in 2020. His comeback wasn't without challenges; he faced injuries, including a hamstring tear that placed him ninth in a national tournament. Undeterred, Harsha worked tirelessly to recover, eventually winning gold at the state level and earning a silver medal at an international championship.

Despite his achievements, Harsha's journey has been marked by the lack of recognition for kickboxing in Telangana. "While Hyderabad offers numerous opportunities, niche sports like kickboxing often face neglect," he observes.

The root of the problem, Harsha explains, lies in outdated policies. "Telangana still follows G.O. 74, a sports government order from 2012. This order, which hasn't been updated in over a decade, limits sponsorships, job opportunities and other benefits for athletes in unrecognized sports," he says.

Harsha shares several instances where this lack of recognition cost him dearly. In 2018-19, despite holding a national certificate, he was denied job consideration. Even after winning a silver medal at the international level in 2022, his achievement was not acknowledged by the state. "It's dis-



heartening to see my efforts go unnoticed, especially when smaller, recognized tournaments are given more weight," he says.

The lack of recognition also affects athletes' ability to participate in larger competitions like the Asian and World Championships. "In other countries, athletes who win medals are celebrated by their governments, with presidents and prime ministers congratulating them. Here, we struggle to even get basic support from the sports ministry," he points out.

However, he remains hopeful. "I'm not fighting just for myself but for the future generation of kickboxers in Telangana. More than 10,000 people actively practice the sport in the state, and around 500-1,000 regularly compete. Recognition would open up a world of opportunities for them."

For Harsha, Hyderabad is much more than just a city; it's his home and inspiration. "Hyderabad is a melting pot of cultures. From its rich history to its vibrant food scene, it offers something for everyone. It's a city where people from all walks of life come together," he shares.

Among the city's many highlights, Harsha particularly admires its food and the warmth of its people. "The food here is

unmatched and the sense of brotherhood among the residents is something I deeply value," he says. However, he also acknowledges the challenges, particularly the traffic, which can sometimes cause delays.

Despite these minor inconveniences, Harsha believes the city provides a strong foundation for anyone willing to work hard. "Hyderabad gives you opportunities—it's up to you to make the most of them," he says. As the senior-most active kickboxer in Telangana, Harsha feels a deep responsibility to uplift the sport. "I started kickboxing in 2012 and I've seen it grow over the years. Now, it's time for the government and society to recognize its potential," he says.

Harsha is actively working to bring attention to kickboxing, not just for himself but for the thousands of aspiring athletes in the state. "Recognition would mean better funding, more tournaments, and a brighter future for everyone involved," he emphasizes.

For him, Hyderabad will always be the city that shaped him. "This city has treated me well and given me a platform to represent it at state, national, and international levels. I will continue to work hard to make it proud," he concludes. Meanwhile, he zeal to advocate for the recognition of kickboxing in Telangana to support future generations of players, still continues.

I'M NOT FIGHTING JUST FOR MYSELF BUT FOR THE FUTURE GENERATION OF KICKBOXERS IN TELANGANA. MORE THAN 10,000 PEOPLE ACTIVELY PRACTICE THE SPORT IN THE STATE, AND AROUND 500-1,000 REGULARLY COMPETE. RECOGNITION WOULD OPEN UP A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEM



Is antibiotic overuse fueling UTI resistance?

Millions of people suffer from Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) annually, prompting many to demand antibiotics from their doctors. While antibiotics effectively treat such infections, overuse breeds antibiotic resistance - a looming global crisis.

THE ANTIBIOTICS DILEMMA

When patients experience the burning discomfort, frequent urination, or pelvic pain associated with a UTI, antibiotics might seem like a quick fix. However, not all UTIs require antibiotics. The frequent and sometimes unnecessary use of these medications has led to bacteria becoming resistant, making future infections harder to treat. According to recent studies, almost 30% of UTIs are caused by bacteria resistant to common antibiotics. This trend is alarming and calls for a reassessment of how we approach treatment.

NATURAL REMEDIES: A FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE

Before rushing to antibiotics, exploring natural remedies can be a safe and effective way to manage mild UTIs. Here are some tried-and-true approaches:

- Hydration is key:** Drinking plenty of water helps flush out bacteria from the urinary tract. Aim for at least 8-10 glasses of water daily to keep your system clean.
- Cranberry juice:** Studies suggest that cranberry juice may prevent bacteria from adhering to the walls of the urinary tract, reducing the risk of infection.
- Probiotics:** Maintaining a healthy balance of gut bacteria can enhance your body's ability to fight off infections. Yogurt and supplements with Lactobacillus strains are particularly helpful.
- Dietary adjustments:** Reducing sugar intake can limit bacterial growth, while foods rich in vitamin C help acidify the urine, making it less hospitable for bacteria.

Preventive measures: Better safe than sorry

Prevention is always better than cure.



Incorporating these habits into your daily routine can significantly lower your risk of developing a UTI:

- Good hygiene:** Wiping from front to back and avoiding harsh feminine hygiene products can reduce bacterial contamination.
- Emptying the bladder regularly:** Don't hold in your urine for extended periods, as this can encourage bacterial growth.
- Urinate after intercourse:** This simple act can wash away bacteria introduced during sexual activity.
- Wear breathable fabrics:** Cotton underwear and loose-fitting clothing can keep the area dry and less prone to bacterial growth.

When to Consider Antibiotics

Despite the effectiveness of natural remedies and preventive measures, there are situations where antibiotics are necessary:

- Severe symptoms:** High fever, back pain, or persistent vomiting may indicate a kidney infection, which requires immediate

- medical attention.
- Recurrent UTIs:** If infections occur frequently despite preventive measures, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to manage the condition effectively.
- Pregnancy-related UTIs:** Untreated infections during pregnancy can lead to complications for both the mother and the baby. Prompt treatment with antibiotics is critical.

Responsible antibiotic use

When antibiotics are necessary, it's crucial to use them responsibly:

- Complete the course:** Even if symptoms improve, finish the prescribed antibiotics to ensure all bacteria are eliminated.
- Follow the prescription:** Avoid using leftover antibiotics or sharing them with others, as this can contribute to resistance.
- Discuss options:** Talk to your doctor about narrow-spectrum antibiotics, which target specific bacteria and have less impact on overall resistance.

Role of medical guidance

Self-diagnosis and over-the-counter remedies can sometimes do more harm than good. Consulting a healthcare professional ensures that you receive the correct diagnosis and treatment plan. Additionally, periodic urine cultures can help identify resistant bacteria and guide more effective treatments.

The battle against antibiotic resistance requires collective effort. By adopting preventive measures, exploring natural remedies, and using antibiotics judiciously, we can safeguard their effectiveness for future generations.

As healthcare providers, we are committed to educating the public about responsible antibiotic use and providing personalised care tailored to each patient's needs. Together, we can ensure that antibiotics remain a life-saving resource—not a casualty of overuse.

(The author, Dr. P Vamsi Krishna, is a Sr. Consultant & Head of Department Urology, at CARE Hospitals, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad.)

Dating Sunday: The super bowl of love for singles everywhere

As 2025 begins, singles everywhere are kicking off the new year with bold intentions and a fresh perspective on dating. According to Tinder's Year in Swipe report, 2025 is all about embracing clarity, connection and spontaneity with trends like Loud Looking, Kiss-met and Nano-ships. Loud Looking empowers singles to confidently state their desires, Kiss-met celebrates those magical, spontaneous moments and Nano-ships highlight the significance of even the smallest romantic connections.

"Dating Sunday" refers to the first Sunday of the year, and it has emerged as the golden moment to kickstart these resolutions. In fact, the data reveals that the first Sunday of the year sees a surge in activity like no other day of the year:

- ◆ Swipe activity is nearly 20% higher than the rest of the year.
- ◆ The number of likes was 15% higher than the rest of the year.
- ◆ Singles are in conversation mode, being approximately 12% more likely to have a conversation with the number of messages sent on Tinder being nearly 20% higher than the rest of the year.
- ◆ The pursuit of connection pays off, as users on average experience over 10% more matches - with over 356 matches per second - than the rest of the year
- ◆ Responding faster than ever, users replied to messages 2 hours 16 minutes quicker than on last year's Dating Sunday (i.e. 2023).

Why the surge? It's simple: new year, new possibilities. Singles are manifesting their ideal connections and diving headfirst into their resolutions to meet new people, explore fresh experiences, and perhaps even find their perfect match.

For this year's Peak Dating Season (January 1 and February 14), here are



some tips for the singles to use on Dating Sunday:

- Set your profile resolutions:** Fresh starts call for fresh bios! Update your profile with your 2025 goals or share something intriguing about yourself to catch eyes and spark meaningful conversations. In order to simplify this process, the photo selector option helps singles choose their profile pictures, making it easier to present your most authentic self.
- Message with intent:** With over 2.1 million more messages sent daily during Peak Season than the rest of the year, starting conversations that show interest and originality will help you stand out. Maybe even include a fun resolution and ask about theirs!

3. Lean into peak season energy: January and February are bustling months for dating. Over 298 million more likes are exchanged during this time than the rest of the year. Astrology also plays a role in dating choices, with almost 40% surveyed singles saying 'astrology love predictions' are likely to influence how they date in 2025. Supporting this cosmic trend, the data reveals that Gemini is the most attractive star sign to men, while Virgo leads for women.

4. Make it a team effort: Dating doesn't have to be a solo sport! Nearly 50% of singles plan to lean on friends to navigate the dating world in 2025. Whether it's asking friends for advice or using Matchmaker to involve them in your dating journey, letting others in can bring fresh perspectives and that eye opener opinion we all need sometimes.

5. Manifest the love you want: Use this time to reflect on what you're looking for in 2025. Singles in 2025 are prioritising trustworthiness (40%), physical attraction (35%), shared values (31%), emotional availability (30%) and shared interests (28%) when dating. Meanwhile, deal-breakers like bad hygiene (50%), rudeness (44%) and too much talk about an ex (34%) remain major icks. With nearly 45% of singles seeking a "Golden Retriever type" partner—loyal, friendly and brimming with optimism—this is the perfect time to align your dating goals with what truly matters to you.

As we move further into 2025, singles are redefining dating with confidence and intentionality. By embracing trends like Loud Looking, Kiss-met and Nano-ships, they're not just seeking connections—they're creating meaningful moments that reflect their values and aspirations for the year ahead.

India all out for 185 on day one of fifth Test against Australia

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Rohit Sharma "opted to rest" in the team's interest but the same old script unfolded on a new day for Indian batters as they surrendered meekly for a paltry 185 in the face of some hostile seam bowling from Australia on the opening day of the fifth and final Test here.

Virat Kohli (17 off 69 balls), whose form and technical weaknesses are also under the scanner, was for the seventh time dismissed in the corridor of uncertainty in the tour, a problem that seems incurable at the moment.

At stumps, Australia were 9 for 1 with stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah sending the woefully out-of-form Usman Khawaja (2) back in the hut.

Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was unbeaten at 7 after hitting Bumrah for a first-ball four. The 19-year-old also had an animated exchange with the Indian star.

Bumrah opted to bat under overcast conditions and the ultra-defensive

approach by Indian batters only compounded their problems with Scott Boland's (20-8-31-4) immaculate length and tremendous discipline leaving them in a disarray.

Mitchell Starc (18-5-49-3) and Pat Cummins (15-2-4-37-2) were equally relentless giving the Indians no room for release shots.

Rishabh Pant top-scored for the visitors with a 98-ball 40, going against his grain to battle it out, taking painful blows to his body in the process.

If Rohit's decision to "rest" was a forward thinking move, the persistence with Kohli is proving to be detrimental and the celebrated batter might just have one more Test innings left to save his place in the traditional format.

"I wouldn't say it's a par score but still a competitive score," said Pant, admitting that the pitch is not easy to bat on.

If one takes away the second innings hundred at Perth out of his last 20 Test innings, Kohli has managed an average of 17.57.



He could have been out off Boland's first delivery but tried to battle hard. However, it has always been that one moment in which his hands and the willow magnetically follow a delivery in the corridor of uncertainty.

Pant curbs natural instincts for a session

Having copped criticism from all quarters for his bizarre shot selection in Melbourne, Pant, for a change, copped body blows, trying to curb his natural game.

The big-hitter in him came out only on a couple of occasions with one of them fetching him a straight six off Beau Webster.

Pant put his head down and endured nasty blows on his bicep, helmet and twice in the sensitive abdominal area. He and the dogged Ravindra Jadeja (26 off 95 balls) defended dourly as they added 48 off 151 deliveries for the fifth wicket.

Only 50 runs were scored in the second session and trying not to be adventurous proved counter-productive with most batters

retreating in a shell letting Boland and company dictate the terms of play. Finally, Pant's patience ran out and one pull shot too many became his undoing.

India realised they haven't scored enough runs and lost a lot of wickets. The defensive tactic in the second session when the ball got old ended up costing them dearly.

There wasn't much swing on offer despite cloudy conditions but a decent grass cover ensured that Boland's back-of-length deliveries proved enough.

As far as Pant was concerned, the "honest conversations" with head coach Gautam Gambhir seemed to have worked with the southpaw respecting the game situation for most part.

If Pant was disciplined, Shubman Gill's judgement on the last delivery before lunch did cause trouble for India.

Gill (20 off 64 balls) did all the hard work for close to couple of hours before stepping out to Nathan Lyon on the last ball of the session only to be caught at first slip.



Facing Jasprit Bumrah will be challenging on this track: Beau Webster

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Debutant all-rounder Beau Webster feels facing ace India pacer Jasprit Bumrah will be an enormous challenge on the SCG pitch which is helping seamers, and the Australian did not place his finger on an ideal first innings score.

India were all out for 185 and then Australia lost Usman Khawaja off the last ball of the day to Bumrah to end at 9 for one.

"Think there's definitely a method to go about batting on this wicket. But Jasprit is a world class bowler and no doubt he's going to challenge our whole batting group. He's phenomenal with his lengths and lines, it is going to be tough on a wicket that will offer a fair bit for him," Webster said in the post day one press conference.

He said getting India out for a total less than 200 on a seamer friendly track was a commendable effort.

"It was a pretty seamer-friendly track and most of the day the ball stayed pretty new with the grass coverage. It is not an abrasive square either. So, the plan was to bowl a little bit fuller and entice those front foot defences and front foot drives.

"Thought Scotty (Boland) was excellent, he's been unbelievable since he came back into the team and saw why he's a world class bowler. Thought all the bowlers were really good today to bowl

them out for 200."

Webster said the degree of seam movement for a few deliveries was way more pronounced and hence they beat the bat regularly.

"There were a couple of unplayable balls, when it seems that much it can be hard to get a wicket at times. We saw a nice-ish partnership (Jadeja-Pant), where we struggled to get a breakthrough through the sheer seam movement. We beat the bat a lot but couldn't find the edge."

The 31-year-old was all praise for Boland and said the pacer can find a way to get wickets on any surface and when there is help on offer, he is on par with the best in business.

"If there's anything in the wicket he finds it and if there's nothing in the wicket he still manages to find a way through," the lanky Tasmanian said.

"He's been fantastic this whole series when he's got his chance, he's relentless. I think it's his line and length and his natural angle that makes it really hard for right-handers, but when we see him go round the wicket to left-handers it's impressive stuff."

Webster caught the great Virat Kohli at third slip and he found Boland's bowling enjoyable.

"It's great to watch from the third slip today, the amount of movement he gets and how accurate he is and how challenging he is for both left and right handers.

We have probably seen Rohit Sharma for last time in Test cricket: Gavaskar, Shastri

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former India cricketers Sunil Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri feel that the Boxing Day Test might have been Rohit Sharma's final appearance in Test cricket, following his bold call to rest himself for the series finale that began here on Friday.

The 37-year-old chose to sit out with the series on the line, having scored only 31 runs in five innings across three Tests.

"I think it probably means that (if) India don't qualify for the WTC final, the Melbourne Test will be Rohit Sharma's last game," Gavaskar said during the lunch break on day one.

"The WTC cycle will start with the England series, and the selectors would likely want someone available for the 2027 final. Whether India gets there or not is another matter, but that's what the selection committee is likely to do.

"We have probably seen Rohit



Sharma for the last time in Test cricket," he added.

Shastri echoed the sentiment, predicting that Rohit would "pull the plug" on his Test career after the series.

"At the toss, Jasprit [Bumrah] mentioned it before I could ask," Shastri said during commentary.

"He said the captain opted to sit out and said the team would be stronger if Shubman

Gill plays.

"It can happen when you're out of sorts, you're mentally not there, you don't have the runs under your belt. It still is a brave call for a captain to own up and say, 'I'm prepared to take the bench in this game,'" he added.

Rohit has struggled in Test cricket recently, breaching the 20-run mark only twice in his last eight matches.

With India trailing 1-2 in the series, they must win the final Test to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, which they've held for a decade, and remain in contention for a spot in the World Test Championship (WTC) final against South Africa.

If India fail to qualify, their next Test series will be a tour of England starting mid-June.

"If there was a home season coming up he might've thought of carrying on, but I think he might just pull the plug at the end of this Test," Shastri said.

"He's not getting younger ... it's not that India don't have youngsters. There are very, very good players in the wings and it's time to build.

"Tough decisions, but there is a time for everything," Shastri added.

At the toss, stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah said "our captain has shown leadership by opting to rest in this game."



I wasn't in frame of mind to take charge because of nature of wicket: Pant

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant said he batted with restraint on the opening day of the fifth Test against Australia because character of the SCG pitch and the game situation did not allow him to be his customary aggressive self.

Pant, who copped severe criticism from all corners for his callous approach to batting during the previous Test at Melbourne, made a 98-ball 40 in India's 185 all out here on Friday.

"I think in this innings, I was not in a frame of mind where I wanted to take charge of the game because the wicket was doing too much and the kind of situation we were in," Pant said in the post-day press meet.

"I would say there might be a 50-50 chance which I could have taken early on in this innings but sometimes you have to play more secure cricket especially the way, wicket was behaving.

"We knew that if we lost one more wicket here, we might lose 2-3 in quick succession. So that was the idea behind the way I was playing," he added.

Pant's falling pull in Melbourne had prompted legendary Sunil Gavaskar to call the shot "stupid" and in the second innings, he slugged a half-tracker from Travis Head to find the only fielder in the deep when the Test match could have been saved.

"Yes, there is a time to attack, but when you have to feel that from inside. I can't just premeditate that I'm going to play this way. Whatever the game asked me to do on a given day, that's what I tried to do and that is the mindset."

For Pant, the equation is simple - everyone has learnt their own way to skin a cat but also need to learn the other way.

"It is a natural habit to back whatever the way you have played the game. But eventually you got to keep on evolving and, that is, I feel there is not one way to play cricket.

"But whatever comes more naturally is always better but you got to find that balance between playing aggressive cricket and having that balance when you play all those shots. That's what I'm trying to do," he explained his rationale.

"Just trying to make the most out of whatever the way I'm playing and just keep it simple, and not to overthink because you know when you're not having the best of the tours you might overthink."

He agreed that blows that he received, one on the left bicep and few in the abdominal area, were painful but that was the need of the hour.

"I mean definitely it's painful but you know sometimes you have to do the hard work for the team and that's okay. Not thinking about where I got hit but just playing the ball to the best of my abilities."

Biggest achievement of life but plenty more to come: Harmanpreet on Khel Ratna award

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Elated to become a Khel Ratna awardee after his career-defining Olympic performance, Indian men's hockey team captain Harmanpreet Singh said the honour is a recognition of his "fascinating" journey in which he still has plenty more to achieve.

Double Olympic-medallist shooter Manu Bhaker, chess world champion D Gukesh, Harmanpreet and Paralympic high jump gold-winner Praveen Kumar were honoured for the 2024 Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award by the sports ministry on Thursday.

"(It's the) biggest recognition of my life. It's a big achievement for me. I am really very happy. I think it's the best part of my life that I am getting such a huge award



and recognition," the 28-year-old Harmanpreet, who was India's top goal-scorer in the Paris Games with 10 strikes, told PTI in an interview.

The ace drag-flicker has won most of the prominent awards and accolades in his career, including back-to-back Olympic bronze medals, a junior World Cup gold in 2016, a

Commonwealth Games silver, an Asian Games gold and bronze besides two silver medals in the Champions Trophy.

Harmanpreet has also claimed the FIH Player of the Year award three times, including the year gone by. But he is far from satiated.

"Throughout my journey I have learnt a lot, I have seen a lot of ups and downs

including wins and losses. But I think you only learn from those experiences. From day one, my mindset has been how to improve myself," said the star player who was born into a family of farmers in Amritsar's Timmowal village and whose international career began in 2014.

A team-man to the core, Harmanpreet credited his fellow players for making it possible for him to shine individually.

"Whatever we are achieving we are achieving as a team. The journey has been very fascinating, I am getting individual recognitions and awards but only because of my teammates.

"I have enjoyed my journey a lot till date. I have put on a lot of hard work and I am happy with what I have achieved till date," he said.

I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out': Ponting says of Rohit's absence

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian batting great Ricky Ponting on Friday said he was "surprised" by the Indian camp's wording around Rohit Sharma's absence from the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy but admitted that the move was on expected lines.

The match started here on Friday with the visitors eyeing a win to level the series and retain the trophy.

However, Jasprit Bumrah, who walked out for the toss, said Rohit has "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test.

"I think the reaction has been that they all sort of expected that it might happen," Ponting told The ICC Review.

"The chat's been for the last couple of days that everyone expected that Rohit would not play this game, that Shubman Gill would come

back in and that (Jasprit) Bumrah would probably take over the captaincy again and that's the way it's turned out."

Given the circumstances, Ponting was totally in agreement with the woefully out-of-form Rohit skipping the decider at SCG but the former Australia captain was surprised by the wording of the news that came from the India camp.

"I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out' coming into such an important game," Ponting said.

"We know he's been a great stalwart for Indian cricket over a long period of time. So the way that they've actually worded it, you can only take it on face value.

"We've got to believe what we're hearing coming out of the Indian camp, but being such a big game, knowing that they have to win this one to retain the trophy, it was an

interesting time for one of their more experienced players to opt out."

The 37-year-old white-ball great looked like a pale shadow of himself in the ongoing series Down Under, struggling to execute even his bread and butter shots including the trademark front foot pull.

During the customary pre-match warm-up session, Rohit was seen playing football with Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant and Sarfaraz Khan, who along with Abhimanyu Easwaran will end the series without getting an international game.

Ponting did not say it in as many words but he very well understands that it could be the end of road for Rohit in the game's traditional format.

"You'd think it's probably a long way back for Rohit Sharma now in this format of the game," Ponting said.



"India don't play a Test match, I believe, until the middle or late June, which is a long way away when you're

sort of coming to the back end of your career.

"I think he's been a terrific player for India so with those

sort of guys, you wish them all the best and hope to see them back out there again, but as I said, I think it will be

a long - and probably difficult road - back for him."

Catch off Kohli's bat was clean. Ponting had no doubt that the attempt made by Steve Smith at second slip off Kohli's blade was a clean take.

Kohli edged a length delivery from Scott Boland to second slip, where Smith was positioned. Smith dived low to his right, seemingly catching the ball near the ground before flicking it upward toward gully, where Marnus Labuschagne completed the catch.

However, the decision was referred to the TV umpire, who ultimately ruled Kohli not out.

"I was in the back of the (commentary) box as it happened and from what I saw, and what I believe to be the interpretation of the rules, that seemed to be out to me," Ponting said.

"The ball may have touched

the ground. It may not have touched the ground, but the fact that his right index finger was still underneath the ball, I thought it was a clear catch."

The incident took place in the eighth over, off the first ball Kohli faced and Ponting admitted the limited angles available did not help.

"It might be one of those ones that depends which dressing room he's (Kohli) sitting in as well.

"Every Indian fan and Indian player will say that not out as it clearly touched the ground, but you could tell by the reaction of the Australians when it happened and even when they saw the replay on the big screen that they were all pretty confident that it was out."

"I'm sure over the course of this Test match we'll talk about it a whole lot more," Ponting said.

I never attach myself to film results: Meenakshi Chaudhary

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Last year was remarkable for Meenakshi Chaudhary, with five films released, including the much-appreciated *Lucky Bhaskar*. Interestingly, she started the year with *Guntur Kaaram* during the Sankranti festival and this year, she will be seen repeating the tradition with *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*.

"People believed in me and the director believed in me. I am very grateful to God," said Meenakshi, reflecting on her successful journey.

The actress revealed that the past year was incredibly busy with work. "Professionally, it was very good, but I didn't have much personal time. This year, I want to balance both professional and personal aspects and spend more time with my family," she added. Meenakshi is attempting something new with *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*. "For the first time, I did comedy and action sequences in this film. It's a completely new experience," she shared. She also opened up about her experience working with Venkatesh and Aishwarya Rajesh. "Venkatesh sir is in such a blissful space. He's a wonderful human being, very professional and incredibly fit and healthy at his age. It's inspiring, especially when I feel lazy at my age. He is truly motivational and a big inspiration," she said.

Sharing screen space with Aishwarya Rajesh was another highlight for Meenakshi. "She's such an established actor and I've watched many of her films. It was like a fan moment for me. She treated me like her own sister. Luckily, everyone was very positive and warm. I am the youngest in the group, and since this is my first comedy, they were very patient and helpful," she said, adding, "I learned so much from Aishwarya, who has already done nearly 40-50 films, while I'm just starting my career."

Meenakshi fulfilled her dream of playing a cop in *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*. "I always wanted to be a civil servant in real life, but I got to live that dream on-screen. I didn't do much homework for the role. My father is from the Army, so I already knew the officer's body language. I just watched a few videos on YouTube," she explained.

Actress Meenakshi Chaudhary, who had an eventful year, shares insights on her upcoming projects, her first comedy and action roles. She also discusses about her co-stars, Venkatesh and Aishwarya Rajesh

The action sequences were also a unique challenge for her. "I didn't struggle much with the action scenes because they came naturally to me. I've trained in MMA and sports. When action choreographer Venkat taught me some moves, he was surprised at how quickly I picked them up. Even I was surprised!" she said.

Meenakshi acknowledged the significance of Sankranti in Telugu states. "Sankranti and cinema are a big combination here. I know people even travel from abroad to spend time with their families during this festival. It's a sentimental occasion," she noted.

This year, she is promoting the film more actively. "I have time now to promote, and we even did some fun skits with Venkatesh's Venky Mama character. I had to act out popular dialogues from Bobbili Raja. It was a fun experience, even though I'm usually shy," she added.

Last year, Meenakshi had five film releases, with *Lucky Bhaskar* standing out as her breakthrough. "Those films were in production for two years, and they all released last year. I never attach myself to a film's result. While I tasted success with *Lucky Bhaskar*, the very next day I was on set for my next project. How I perform is in my control, but the result isn't. I give my 100% to every film and feel grateful for being able to work every day, earn for my needs, and live this life," she said.

Meenakshi shared her admiration for Balakrishna, whom she met for the second time on the reality show *Unstoppable*. "He has a child-like personality, and I respect him deeply. When we met the first time, I shared my story, and he remembered everything when we met again. He's very emotional, and I also met his daughters on set. He's the OG—there's nobody like Balayya garu," she said.

Talking about her upcoming projects, Meenakshi revealed, "I've signed a film with Naveen Polisetty. I've also signed two more films, but the makers will announce them. I'm looking forward to 2025, which promises to be colourful and exciting."



Bellamkonda's bold adventurous avatar from #BSS12 is here

After the setback of his Hindi debut film *Chatrapathi*, released in 2023, Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas has kept a low profile, with no film releases until now. However, the actor is busy shooting for multiple projects and on the occasion of his birthday on Friday, the makers of his upcoming film, tentatively titled *#BSS12*, unveiled a new poster featuring the actor.

Ludheer Byreddy is making his directorial debut with this film, while Mahesh Chandu is producing it. This movie marks a prestigious moment in Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas's career, being his highest-budgeted project to date. The makers also announced that 35% of the film has already been shot.

The poster, released on the actor's birthday, presents Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas in an adventurous avatar. Riding a bike, his look exudes a sense of audacity and fearlessness, with a powerful visual that amplifies the themes of danger, adventure and spiritual energy. The film is an occult thriller set around a 400-year-old Dashavatara temple, with Samyuktha playing the female lead. In another exciting update, actor Nani has unveiled a song from Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas's other upcoming film, *Bhairavam*. The song features the actor alongside Aditi Shankar, and the film is directed by Vijay Kanakamedala, known for his work on Naandhi.

Barbarik is a risky genre: Director Maruthi

Director Mohan Srivatsa is making his debut with the film *Barbarik*, produced by Vijayal Reddy Adidhala. The film stars Sathyaraj in one of the main roles, alongside Satyam Rajesh, Vasishtha N Simha and others. On Friday, director Maruthi launched the teaser for the film.

During the occasion, director

Maruthi mentioned that he didn't directly work on *Barbarik*, but provided a few suggestions and advice. "It's a very risky genre," he said. "I told Mohan and Rajesh the same. They started the film with confidence and Vijay garu has invested a lot in this film." Maruthi further added that Vijay is going to become a big producer soon. "I am

collaborating with Vijay garu on another project for ZEE Telugu," Maruthi revealed.

Maruthi praised director Mohan for the energy he put into the movie, emphasising that *Barbarik* has been made beautifully. "This film will be very unique, showing how a mythological character would appear to today's generation. This movie is going to be a big hit," Maruthi said. He also spoke about Sathyaraj's involvement in the film, mentioning that after working on *Baahubali*, Sathyaraj agreed to join *Barbarik* after liking the script. "I've worked with him in Prathi Roju Pandage and I hope this movie gets great support from everyone," he added.

Actor Sathyaraj shared his excitement about the project, saying, "From now onwards, it's going to be 'Prathi Roju Pandage' for the *Barbarik* team." He described the film as a pure commercial venture and mentioned that he loved the story shared by director Mohan. "The story is the hero of this movie. My character is quite different. I'm trying to become an aged action hero and this movie will help me earn that tag," said Sathyaraj. He also revealed that he dubbed in Hindi, Kannada and Tamil for the film and the makers asked him to dub his own lines even in Telugu.



Shankar unveils story of Game Changer, teases major surprise

Director Shankar has revealed the story of his upcoming film *Game Changer*, which stars top actor Ram Charan and is produced by Dil Raju. The trailer for the film was released on Thursday evening and during the event, Shankar shared insights about the film's narrative. He explained that the story revolves around a war between a government officer and a politician. "I like films like *Okkadu* and *Pokiri* and I wanted to make a film like them. *Game Changer* is a commercial film, similar to those, and it has all the ingredients you would expect from my films," said Shankar.

The director praised lead actor Ram Charan for his performance, saying that the actor effortlessly portrayed all characters. "His screen presence is impeccable," he added. Shankar also lauded the two leading ladies, Kiara Advani and Anjali, for their excellent performances. He mentioned that there is a big surprise in the film but did not want to reveal it just yet. He also took the opportunity to thank Dil Raju for introducing him to Telugu cinema.

"I should thank Dil Raju for giving me freedom and introducing me to Telugu cinema," Shankar said.

The director emphasised that the film is deeply rooted in Telugu tradition and culture. "Production designer Avinash Kolla has beautifully incorporated Telugu culture into the production design," he noted. Shankar revealed that Tamil director Karthik Subbaraj provided the story, while Sai Madhav Burra penned the powerful dialogues for the film. He also shared that Prabhu Deva choreographed the song



Jaragandi, without taking any remuneration, due to his love for Ram Charan and Dil Raju.

On this occasion, Shankar expressed his admiration for director Rajamouli, calling him "the pride of Indian cinema," and acknowledged how

Rajamouli's work has made Hollywood take notice of Indian cinema. "I thank him for attending this event," Shankar said.

Meanwhile, *Game Changer* is set for an IMAX release on January 10, 2025.

PRADEEP OF LOVE TODAY FAME IS NOW RETURN OF THE DRAGON

Pradeep Ranganathan became an overnight star with his film *Love Today* that became a huge blockbuster in Tamil and was also successful in Telugu. He is not only playing the lead character, but he directed the film. Now, he is coming up with another film in which he plays the lead actor. The title of this film is *Return of the Dragon*. AGS Entertainment and Pradeep joined forces once again for *Return of the Dragon*.

This film is written and directed by Ori Devuda fame Ashwath Marimuthu. Months after the announcement video of the *Return of the Dragon* received a positive response, the release of the song *Rise of Dragon* from the film has now left fans excited.

Leon James composed the music, while Ramajogayya Sastry penned the lyrics. The song is sung by Leon James himself and Nadisha Thomas. For the first time, famous director and actor Gautham Vasudev Menon have danced and vibed along with Pradeep Ranganathan for this energetic song. Anupama Parameshwaran is playing the female lead.



VN Aditya's tribute to Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry

Popular director VN Aditya directed the video titled *Swapnala Naava* which was shot in Dallas, USA. Parthasarathi Nemani composed music for this music video and the song lyrics penned by Yashwanth. The entire song was shot in Dallas and its post-production work is now complete. It is set to release soon.

Gopi Krishna Kotaru, a Telugu software engineer living in Dallas, USA, has launched a production company with this music video. In this song his daughter, Srija Kotaru performed. This song is a tribute to the late lyricist Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry.

At the video launch event, several celebrities attended and congratulated Gopi Krishna Kotaru and his daughter, Srija. Speaking at the event, Gopi Krishna shared that the idea for the song came from reflecting on the kind of messages Sirivennela Seetharama

Sastry would have conveyed to today's youth.

Director VN Aditya praises Srija and her talent, noting that she sings

like a professional despite being a debutant. He assured the audience that the song will soon be available for everyone to enjoy.

