

QUOTE OF THE DAY
 With local body polls approaching, the Congress Government has started a new drama in the name of Rythu Bharosa and ration cards. The government will not get more than Rs 2,000 crore from the 15th Financial Commission if it does not conduct local body elections before March. So the Congress has raised the curtains to a new drama in the name of Rythu Bharosa and ration cards. Don't believe the Congress's deceptive drama
 — Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home

Will turn Delhi into a city of the future, says PM Modi

FDI IN INDIA GROWING RAPIDLY: GOYAL

Poonam Kaur accuses Trivikram of impacting her life & HEALTH

DON'T MISS...

Rs 1200 cr Central aid for water: MP

Narasaraopet Lok Sabha member Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu announced that the Central Government has allocated Rs 1200 crore under the Jal Jeevan Mission to provide drinking water to rural areas in the constituency. The MP, accompanied by MLA Prattipati Pulla Rao, launched various development works at Boppudi village in Chilakaluripet constituency on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, the MP stated that the Central Government had sanctioned Rs 1200 crore to address the drinking water scarcity in several mandals...

-PAGE: 4

'We don't want Union Carbide waste'

"We don't want this toxic waste in our area," is the refrain of locals at Tarpura, a village adjacent to Pithampur's waste incineration unit where a huge quantity of waste from Bhopal's Union Carbide factory has been brought for disposal. An uneasy calm prevailed in the village with a population of around 20,000 on Saturday amid heavy police deployment. The plan to dispose of 337 tons of waste linked to the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, among the worst industrial disasters in the world, has sparked...

-PAGE: 5

Indian firms corner 1/5th of H1B visas

Indian-origin tech companies cornered a fifth of all H1B visas issued by the US with Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services leading the pack, an analysis of data from the US immigration department showed. According to data from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, in April-September 2024 period, out of the total 1.3 lakh H1B visas issued to different employers, about 24,766 visas were issued to Indian-origin companies. Out of these, Infosys took the lead with 8,140 beneficiaries, followed...

-PAGE: 8

Australia beat India to reach WTC final

A listless India was knocked out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final as Australia cruised to a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test here on Sunday to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years, leaving the visitors with much to deliberate in a difficult transition phase made worse by over-the-hill batting stars. Australia won the five-match series 3-1 and qualified for the WTC final against South Africa slated at the Lord's from June 11 to 15. While Australia would...

-SPORTS

'Liberate' temples from clutches of state: VHP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

National president of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Alok Kumar, has reiterated the demand for Hindu temples to be declared statutory and free from government interference. The VHP has launched a nationwide campaign to "liberate" temples from State and central control, with similar meetings planned across India. Addressing a large crowd at the Haindava Shankharavam public meeting in Kesarapalli on Sunday, Alok Kumar highlighted the historical significance of temples in Indian society, referring to reports from the British East India Company over 200 years ago that underscored the central role temples played in community life. He criticised the Andhra Pradesh Endowment Act, which mandates that 12% of temple income be paid to the government, with funds often diverted for non-Hindu purposes. Kumar called for the return of temple management to the Hindu community, including control over renovations and priest transfers. Govind Dev Giri Maharaj, Treasurer of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir Trust, praised the awakening of Hindus and stated that the movement would help protect Hinduism and the nation. He also noted that rituals at the Ayodhya Ram Mandir are now conducted free



- Kumar criticises the Andhra Pradesh Endowment Act, calling for the return of temple management to the Hindu community.
- Govind Dev Giri Maharaj praises the movement and highlights the success of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir, which is free from government interference.
- He announces the 'Pratishtha Dwadashi' festival to celebrate the consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya.
- Gokaraju Gangaraju demands temple income be used for Hindu purposes and that non-Hindus be restricted from temple management.
- Lyricist Ananta Sriram apologises for the misrepresentation of Hinduism in films, urging a boycott of offending productions.
- VHP calls for legal amendments to grant full autonomy to Hindu temples and criticises government-imposed restrictions on festivals and processions.

from government interference. Former MP and VHP national vice president Gokaraju Gangaraju criticised the government's control over temples, describing them as the "core pillars of Hindu Dharma."

Continued on Page 2



CM's 2-day Kuppam tour begins today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will visit his home constituency, Kuppam, on January 6 and 7. He will leave Begumpet Airport, Telangana, at 10.30 am on January 6 and reach HAL Airport, Bengaluru, Karnataka. From there, he will travel to Kuppam by helicopter, landing at Dravidian University Helipad by noon. During the visit, the CM will launch the 'Swarna Kuppam Vision 2029' document. He will also inaugurate a pilot project under the Net Zero Solarisation Programme in Kuppam mandal, integrated with beneficiary households. In the evening, Naidu will interact with farmers practising natural farming in Seegalapalle as part of the 'Organic Kuppam' initiative. He will stay overnight at the R&B Guest House. On January 7, the CM will visit the TDP office at 10 am and meet party leaders and workers. Later, he will unveil a statue of Shyamanna in Kangundi village.

Continued on Page 2

AP govt permits ticket hike for 'Game Changer'



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has approved a special hike in ticket prices for the highly anticipated film 'Game Changer', starring Ram Charan and directed by Shankar. The film is set for a release on January 10, coinciding with the Sankranti festival. Home Department Principal Secretary Kumar Viswajeeth issued a government order on Saturday permitting increased ticket rates due to the film's high demand. Benefit shows starting at 1 am on January 9 can now charge Rs.600 per ticket, inclusive of GST. On January 10, up to six shows will be permitted, including a special screening at 4 am. From January 11 to January 23, multiplexes can charge Rs.175 per ticket, while single-screen theatres can sell tickets for up to Rs.135.

2 die in mishap while returning home from Ram Charan event

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Two youths, Aravapalli Manikantha (23) and Thokada Charan (24), died in a road accident while returning from the 'Game Changer' pre-release event in Rajahmundry. Their bike was hit by a van near Sitanagaram in the early hours of Sunday. Manikantha died on the spot, while Charan succumbed to injuries at Kakinada Government General Hospital. Manikantha's mother had discouraged him from attending the event, recalling his father's death a few years ago. The tragedy has cast a pall of gloom on their colony, with families urging the government for ex gratia. District collectors, joint collectors, licensed cinema authorities, and police commissioners have been instructed to ensure proper implementation of these revised prices. 'Game Changer', produced by Sri Venkateswara Creations, has been generating nationwide buzz due to its massive budget and star-studded cast.



IT & HRD Minister Lokesh addressing a high-level meeting at Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

Lokesh calls for coordinated efforts to ensure success of PM's visit

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

HRD and IT Minister Nara Lokesh thanked the Central Government for its continuous support in the State's development. He called for teamwork among public representatives and officials to make the Prime Minister's visit on January 8 a grand success. During a high-level meeting on Sunday, Lokesh reviewed the prepara-

tions, including arrangements for the public meeting, roadshow, transport, food, drinking water, and parking. This visit will be the Prime Minister's first after the coalition government was formed. Lokesh stressed the need for cooperation among leaders of the three coalition parties and officials to make the event memorable.

Continued on Page 2



Centre allocates adequate fertilisers for Rabi in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Central government has allocated an abundant supply of fertilisers, including urea, to Andhra Pradesh for the Rabi season. Expressing gratitude for the Centre's support, Agriculture Minister K Atchannaidu thanked Union Minister for Civil Aviation K Rammoan Naidu for his proactive efforts in securing the required fertilisers for the State.

Continued on Page 2

Role of Telugus declining in national politics: Revanth



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy expressed concern over the diminishing influence of Telugu leaders in national politics and urged the community to revive its legacy. Speaking at the 12th World Telugu Conference held at the HICC in Hyderabad, Revanth highlighted the

Calls for concerted efforts for revival of legacy

significant contributions of stalwarts like Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, PV Narasimha Rao, NTR and Jaipal Reddy, who played pivotal roles in shaping the country's political landscape. "It is disheartening to see the reduced presence of Telugu leaders in national politics today. We must work together to restore our prominence," he said, addressing the gathering of Telugu-speaking individuals from across the globe. Revanth emphasized the importance of preserving Telugu culture and language. "Excelling in politics, cinema and commerce is important, but we must never forget the value of our mother tongue. While learning other languages is necessary, respecting and promoting Telugu is crucial," he stated. The Chief Minister stressed the government's efforts to honour the Telugu

language, including issuing official orders in Telugu. Revanth called upon the global Telugu diaspora to invest in Telangana and support its development initiatives. "Telugu people across the world have excelled in various fields. I urge them to contribute to Telangana's growth under the Telangana Rising initiative and Vision 2050," he said. The Chief Minister also outlined plans to transform Hyderabad into a world-class "Future City" and emphasized the need for both Telugu states - Telangana and Andhra Pradesh - to compete globally and progress together. "This is the moment to unite and ensure that Telugu culture and achievements shine on the world stage. Let us work together to make our states models of excellence," he concluded.



CM A Revanth Reddy, along with prominent Telugu people at the 12th World Telugu Conference held at the HICC in Hyderabad on Sunday

No HMPV cases in AP; no need to panic: Govt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

There are no reported cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Andhra Pradesh, a health official said on Sunday, assuring the public that there is no need to panic about the virus. Public Health and Family Welfare Director K Padmavathi stated that the virus spreads from person to person, similar to COVID-19, primarily affecting



children, the elderly, and individuals with weakened immunity. "There are no HMPV cases in Andhra Pradesh. The virus, detected in China, does not warrant any

panic," Padmavathi said in an official press release. According to the director, individuals in close contact with HMPV-infected persons are at risk of contracting the virus. She added that it can also spread through coughing, sneezing, touch, and handshakes with infected individuals. Similarly, Padmavathi noted that the disease can spread through utensils used by infected individuals.

Continued on Page 2

AP Cabinet meet on Jan 17

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP Cabinet meeting of the Council of Ministers, chaired by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, will be held on January 17, 2025, at 11:00 am in the AP Secretariat at Velagapudi, Amaravati. Chief Secretary to the government, K. Vijayanand, issued an urgent note regarding the Cabinet meeting. The Chief Secretary stated that all departments of the Secretariat have been informed about the upcoming meeting and that Special Chief Secretaries, Principal Secretaries, and Secretaries to the Government of all departments should submit their proposals (three signed copies of each) in the prescribed format as outlined in the Cabinet Handbook. Vijayanand further instructed that the proposals, in adherence to the guidelines, be submitted to the



General Administration (Cabinet.1) Department by 4:00 pm on January 16, 2025. Departments are also requested to provide a soft copy of the Cabinet Memorandum in Word or PDF formats, along with soft copies of PowerPoint presentations (PPTs). The PPTs should be limited to a maximum of four slides, focusing solely on the cabinet proposal. The concerned Secretary is required to submit the draft resolution to the office of the Chief Secretary.

India poised to turn world's health & wellness capital

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has immense potential to become the health and wellness capital of the world, and the day is not far when, along with 'Make in India', the world will also adopt 'Heal in India' as a mantra, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday. Modi made the remarks while virtually laying the foundation for a new Central Ayurveda Research Institute building in Rohini, terming it as "Ayurveda's next big leap". The ceremony was attended by Union Minister of State for Ayush (Independent Charge), Prataprao Jadhav, among other dignitaries. The new facility spanning 2.92 acres with an investment of Rs 187 crore will house a 100-bed hospital dedicated to

PM Modi lays foundation for Ayurveda institute



advancing ayurveda research and providing healthcare serv-

- The Rs 187 crore institute will have a 100-bed hospital for Ayurveda research and healthcare
- Modi emphasises making healthcare accessible, promoting AYUSH and Ayurveda
- AYUSH has expanded to over 100 countries in the past decade
- Modi mentions the inauguration of the second phase of the All India Institute of Ayurveda
- A special visa facility for foreign nationals to avail of AYUSH treatments in India
- Minister Jadhav lauds Modi, saying the facility will impact millions

Emphasising the Centre's focus on making healthcare accessible to the poorest of the poor, the prime minister said the government is promoting traditional Indian medicine systems like AYUSH and Ayurveda. Over the past decade, the AYUSH system has been expanded to more than 100 countries, he said. Modi also highlighted that the first World Health Organization (WHO) institution related to traditional medicine is being established in India. Stating that he inaugurated the second phase of the All India Institute of Ayurveda a few weeks ago, Modi said today the foundation for the Central Ayurveda Research Institute has been laid for which he con-

gratulated the people of Delhi. India has immense potential to become the health and wellness capital of the world, and the day is not far when the world would adopt 'Heal in India' as a mantra, just like the 'Make in India' initiative, he said. To facilitate foreign citizens in availing AYUSH treatments in India, a special AYUSH visa facility has been introduced and in a short span, hundreds of foreign nationals have benefited from this facility, Modi added. Speaking at the event, Jadhav expressed his gratitude to the prime minister for his leadership, saying, "This facility will drive forward research and quality healthcare, making a lasting impact on millions of lives across the country."

Monday Mirchi

TELANGANA CS SANTHI KUMAR'S APPOINTMENT SNUB SPARKS BUZZ

It seems Telangana's Chief Secretary Santhi Kumar is keeping a tight lid on her appointment calendar, and not everyone is making it past the gates. Whispers among the bureaucratic circles suggest that some officials, particularly those perceived as being close to the previous regime, are struggling to secure even a few minutes of her time. One bureaucrat reportedly gave up after being turned away three times—a rather telling anecdote that's now making the rounds. Is this an intentional snub aimed at a select few, or are all officials finding it equally hard to gain access? The speculation is rife, with some insiders pointing out that such exclusivity would be unusual in the functioning of a bureaucracy, where access typically trumps allegiance. Whether it's a deliberate move or a mere scheduling issue, the lack of clarity is fuelling plenty of chatter. For now, those seeking an audience with the CS might need a mix of patience and persistence—or perhaps a fourth try!

JAYESH RANJAN IN THE RACE FOR CS? MINISTER SPARKS SPECULATION

Whispers in the corridors of power suggest that Jayesh Ranjan might just be the next Chief Secretary, or so a minister cheekily hinted during a recent high-profile meeting. The minister, known for stirring up intrigue, dropped this nugget while also casually stating in the past that the current finance secretary, Ramakrishna Rao, could stick around for the next four years. Quite the statement, considering he's barely got a year left in service! The gossip mill is now churning out theories—was it a mere slip of the tongue or a calculated move to keep everyone guessing? While Jayesh's admirers are quietly cheering, insiders are wondering if this was a subtle nudge to the powers that be. Meanwhile, Ramakrishna's camp might just be polishing up their calendars, counting down days with a mix of hope and skepticism. One thing's for sure—this political tête-à-tête has left everyone buzzing. Watch this

space as the race to the top post is just getting interesting!

"GHMC CHIEF ILMBARITHI: SOCIAL MEDIA SNOOP OR SILENT STRATEGIST?"

Unlike his predecessors like Lokesh Kumar and Amrapali, who did not engage on social media, GHMC Commissioner Ilambarithi seems to be charting a different course. At first glance, one might assume he's staying off the social media radar. But insiders say that couldn't be further from the truth. Turns out, Ilambarithi is keeping a sharp eye on the corporation's digital image, possibly more than any of his predecessors. The twist? His style is all about passive engagement with plenty of behind-the-scenes supervision. From carefully crafted posts to ensuring the right narrative goes out, he's more of a quiet strategist than an outspoken crusader. So, while you may not find him sparring on Twitter or posting updates, don't mistake his silence for inaction. He's watching, and it seems he's playing the long game when it comes to GHMC's social media presence. A new style for a new era? Only time will tell!

WILL TELANGANA GET ITS FIRST WOMAN DGP?

The grapevine is abuzz with chatter about who will take over as Telangana's next DGP, with Jitender set to retire this year. Adding a dash of intrigue to the mix, it seems some women officers are already working overtime to make their presence felt in the race. Whether the government is seriously considering their bids or not, these officers are pulling every string to position themselves as strong contenders. The whispers have it that Telangana could very well see its first woman DGP if the stars align. With the state already bidding adieu to its first woman Chief Secretary soon, wouldn't it be fitting to break another glass ceiling? Of course, the actual decision-makers might have other plans, but for now, the ambitious efforts of these officers have everyone talking. Could this be a turning point for women in top positions or just another round of speculative frenzy?

--Yours truly

APJAC-Amaravati demands HR policy for contract staff

No HMPV...

Continued from Page 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Joint Action Committee - Amaravati (APJAC - Amaravati) Chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu has urged the state government to implement a comprehensive Human Resource (HR) policy for all contract and outsourcing employees working in various government departments.

He noted that outsourcing employees faced significant losses due to decisions taken under the 11th Pay Revision Commission (PRC).

The APJAC-Amaravati-affiliated Contract and Outsourcing Employees Association's state committee meeting was held at the AP



APJAC-Amaravati Chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu addressing the Andhra Pradesh Contract and Outsourcing Employees' Association meeting at the Revenue Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday.

Revenue Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday. The state executive council, along with all 26 district presidents and secretaries, attended the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Venkateswarlu highlighted that employees under organisations

across all departments.

He also emphasised the need for annual increments based on seniority to ensure fairness and career motivation for these employees.

Venkateswarlu called on the government to address these issues promptly to prevent further dissatisfaction among the workforce.

Andhra Pradesh Contract and Outsourcing Employees Association President K Suman, APJAC-Amaravati Women's Wing Chairperson P Lakshmi, Secretary General P Vijaya Lakshmi, Capital Unit General Secretary M Sankar, Gram/Ward Sachivalaya Employees Welfare Association President V Arlaiah and others were present.

The symptoms of the disease typically appear 3 to 10 days after infection and include flu-like signs such as cough, blocked nose, runny nose, sore throat, and breathing difficulties. In some cases, she noted, pneumonia and bronchitis may also develop. She added that the disease tends to be more severe in children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic illnesses.

Recommending preventive measures similar to those followed during COVID-19, the director advised washing hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and covering the nose and mouth with a handkerchief while coughing or sneezing, among other precautions.

She further noted that there is currently no specific antiviral treatment or vaccine for HMPV and added that affected children and elderly individuals will be treated at government hospitals.

YSRCP accuses coalition govt of betraying all sections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MLA Tatiparthi Chandrasekhar has alleged that the coalition government is deceiving all sections of society by failing to fulfil election promises and raising loans without proper accountability.

Addressing the media on Sunday, Chandrasekhar criticised HRD Minister Nara Lokesh, accusing him of poor handling of the education sector due to a lack of proper orientation. He questioned Lokesh's contribution to educational reforms, highlighting that salaries in the Education Department remain unpaid and digital classes are yet to be implemented.

He further alleged that false claims were being made regarding English medium education. While Lokesh himself pursued English medium education, he seems unwilling to extend the same benefit to poor students, Chandrasekhar remarked.

Criticising Lokesh's comments on Visakhapatnam's development, the MLA said it was the YSRCP that had fought for the railway zone, including land acquisition for the Waltair zone. He added that the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the Vizag Metro was prepared under the YSRCP government.



Chandrasekhar also accused the coalition of favouring GITAM University for personal interests while neglecting public welfare. He claimed the government has raised Rs 1.19 lakh crore in loans without implementing any welfare schemes, questioning its sincerity.

He further alleged that wealth creation under the current government benefits only Chandrababu Naidu while the poor and Dalits remain neglected. He criticised the government's treatment of officials, claiming they were being harassed.

The MLA also pointed out the rising hardships faced by people and accused Chandrababu Naidu of corruption during his previous term by constructing temporary buildings. He highlighted that petrol prices in Chittoor, Naidu's home district, are the highest in the country, reflecting poor governance.

Previous govt neglected Vizag & Uttarandhra: Lokesh

IT Minister promises to transform Visakhapatnam into an IT Hub, criticises Jagan government's policies and fiscal mismanagement

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

IT & HRD Minister Nara Lokesh launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, accusing the YSRCP government of neglecting Uttara Andhra and failing to establish Visakhapatnam as a thriving IT hub. Speaking to the media in Visakhapatnam after reviewing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit, Lokesh contrasted the current administration's performance with the achievements of the previous TDP regime led by Chandrababu Naidu.

"Chandrababu Naidu brought industries like Kia Motors to Andhra Pradesh, creating jobs and spurring economic growth. In contrast, the YSRCP government's poor governance and flawed policies have driven companies away from the state. Jagan Mohan Reddy made tall promises, including abolishing the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS), but has he delivered on them?" Lokesh questioned.

He further criticized the government for prioritizing pensions over sustainable development. "While Andhra Pradesh offers some of the



highest pensions in the country, this has come at the cost of fiscal stability and long-term progress," he added.

Highlighting Visakhapatnam's untapped potential as an IT hub, Lokesh expressed disappointment at the lack of significant investments in the region. "Our coalition government is determined to reverse this trend. We will ensure that global IT giants establish operations in Visakhapatnam, transforming it into a technological powerhouse," he asserted.

Lokesh also outlined the coalition government's strategy to

address the state's challenges, including financial liabilities inherited from the previous administration. He emphasized ongoing efforts with central ministers to secure critical projects for Andhra Pradesh and underscored the coalition's commitment to balanced regional development.

"Uttara Andhra has been overlooked for far too long. We will prioritize equitable development across all regions, ensuring adequate water supply and infrastructure for underserved areas. Under our governance, no region will be left behind," he declared.

Tribal youth script a success story by landing police jobs

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Two tribal brothers from Pulcherla Kunta Tanda Gram Panchayat under Farooqanagar mandal in Rangareddy district, have achieved remarkable success by securing police jobs through sheer determination and effort. Nenavat Bhaskar and Nenavat Venkatesh, who hail from a family that values education and discipline, completed their training at the Mancherial Police Academy and are set to join their duties on January 8. Their achievement has brought immense joy to their family and the community. "It is a moment of pride for our family and our village," said Veterinary Doctor Nenavat Bal Ram, a relative, adding that the brothers' hard work proved that dedication can lead to success.

The siblings credited their elder brother Nenavat Ravi and their parents for supporting them in their journey towards a government job. They encouraged students to adopt disciplined education and remain committed to their goals, emphasizing that success is achievable through perseverance.

'Land scam charges part of TDP's diversionary tactics'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP has strongly condemned the TDP and its allied media for making baseless allegations of a Rs 700 crore land scam involving the family of former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Addressing the media at the YSRCP Central Office, party spokesperson Puttha Siva Shankar Reddy termed the allegations as a deliberate attempt to divert public attention from the TDP's governance failures, corruption, and inability to fulfil its promises.

In recent days, TDP-backed media outlets and social media platforms have levelled accusations against YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, his brother YS Sunil, and his assistant K. Nageshwar Reddy, alleging their involvement in a fictitious land scam. These allegations, which mention individuals such as "Cheemakurthi Srikanth" and sub-registrar "Singh," are based on nothing more than hearsay, with no credible evidence or official complaints.

Reddy pointed out that the sub-registrar had already been investigated by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) during the YSRCP government's tenure, thus debunking any claims of bias or favouritism.

He further accused the TDP of using diversion tactics to deflect attention from its own mismanagement and the growing public dissatisfaction with its leadership. Reddy highlighted that

fabricating false stories has become a routine for the TDP, as evidenced by previous failed conspiracies like the "Madanapalle Files" and "Adani SECI Issue."

The spokesperson also criticised the TDP's social media wing, I-TDP, for manufacturing fake news, which is then amplified by yellow media to mislead the public.

Condemning the vulgar imagery and indecent thumbnails used in the TDP's social media campaigns, Reddy described them as acts of desperation. He confirmed that the YSRCP had lodged complaints with the Tadeppalli police and would pursue legal action against these defamatory campaigns.

Reddy stressed that the YSRCP government has always acted against corruption, even within its ranks. He challenged the TDP to produce any credible evidence to substantiate their claims, stating that the allegations are simply a smear campaign aimed at tarnishing the image of a government dedicated to public welfare.

The YSRCP urged the public to see through these lies and reaffirmed its commitment to good governance under the leadership of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Reddy warned of stringent legal action against those spreading defamatory content and assured the people that such baseless conspiracies would not deter the government from its mission to serve the people of Andhra Pradesh.

52 additional special trains during Sankranti festival

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To manage the expected surge in passenger traffic during the Sankranti festival season, South Central Railway will operate 52 additional special trains connecting various destinations via Vijayawada. A release from A. Sridhar, Chief Public Relations Officer of South Central Railway, confirmed the announcement on Sunday.

The special trains will include a range of services, with different stops and coach configurations to cater to the increasing demand.

Train No. 07077/07078 (Charlapalli - Tirupati - Charlapalli) will stop at Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Nadikude, Piduguralla, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Tenali, Bapatla, Chirala, Ongole, Nellore, Gudur, and Renigunta in both directions. These trains will feature 2AC, 3AC, Sleeper, and General Second Class coaches.

Train No. 02764/02763 (Charlapalli - Tirupati - Charlapalli) will stop at Jangaon,

Kazipet, Warangal, Mahbubabad, Khammam, Vijayawada, Tenali, Bapatla, Chirala, Ongole, Nellore, Gudur, and Renigunta in both directions. This train will also include 2AC, 3AC, Sleeper, and General Second Class coaches.

Train No. 07037/0038 (Vikarabad - Kakinada Town - Charlapalli) will halt at Lingampalli, Secunderabad, Charlapalli, Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Nadikude, Piduguralla, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Vijayawada, Gudivada, Kaikaluru, Akividu, Bhimavaram Town, Tanuku, Nidadavolu, Rajahmundry, and Samalkot.

Train No. 07655/07656 (Kacheguda - Tirupati - Kacheguda) will stop at Malkajgiri, Charlapalli, Jangaon, Kazipet, Warangal, Mahbubabad, Dornakal, Khammam, Madhira, Vijayawada, Tenali, Chirala, Ongole, Nellore, Gudur, and Renigunta stations in both directions.

Train No. 07035/07036 (Charlapalli - Narsapur - Charlapalli) will halt at Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Nadikude,

Piduguralla, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Vijayawada, Gudivada, Kaikaluru, Akividu, Bhimavaram Town, Viravaram, and Palakollu.

Train No. 07078/07079 (Secunderabad - Kakinada Town - Secunderabad) will stop at Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Nadikude, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Vijayawada, Eluru, Tadeppalligudem, Nidadavolu, Rajahmundry, and Samalkot stations.

Train No. 07031/07032 (Charlapalli - Kakinada Town - Charlapalli) will stop at Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Nadikude, Piduguralla, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Vijayawada, Gudivada, Kaikaluru, Akividu, Bhimavaram Town, Tanuku, Nidadavolu, Rajahmundry, and Samalkot stations.

Train No. 07487/07488 (Nanded - Kakinada Town - Nanded) will halt at Mukhdh, Dharmabadd, Basar, Nizamabad, Kamareddi, Medchal, Secunderabad, Kazipet, Warangal, Mahbubabad, Khammam, Rayanapadu, Eluru, Rajahmundry, and Samalkot.

Train No. 07025/07026 (Charlapalli - Srikakulam Rd - Charlapalli) will stop at Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Vijayawada, Eluru, Tadeppalligudem, Rajahmundry, Samalkot, Annavaram, Anakapalli, Duvvada, Pendurti, Kottavalasa, Vizianagaram, Chipurupalli, and Ponduru stations.

Train No. 07041/07042 (Kacheguda - Srikakulam Rd - Kacheguda) will stop at Malkajgiri, Charlapalli, Nalgonda, Miryalaguda, Sattenapalli, Guntur, Vijayawada, Eluru, Tadeppalligudem, Rajahmundry, Samalkot, Annavaram, Anakapalli, Duvvada, Pendurti, Kottavalasa, Vizianagaram, Chipurupalli, and Ponduru.

These special trains are equipped with 1AC, 2AC, 3AC, Sleeper, and General Second Class coaches to ensure a comfortable journey for the passengers. The additional trains will run during the festive period to alleviate overcrowding and facilitate smooth travel.

CM's 2-day...

Continued from Page 1

In the evening, he will lay the foundation stone for several development projects in the constituency. The CM will stay overnight at the R&B Guest House. On January 8, he will travel to Visakhapatnam to participate in development activities with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

TODAY ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	Saptami: Jan 05 08:15 PM to Jan 06 06:23 PM
Ashtami:	Jan 06 06:23 PM to Jan 07 04:27 PM
Nakshatram:	Uttara Bhadrpad: Jan 05 08:17 PM to Jan 06 07:06 PM
Revati:	Jan 06 07:06 PM to Jan 07 05:50 PM
Rahukalam:	8:14 AM to 9:36 AM
Yamagandam:	10:59 AM to 12:22 PM
Varjyam:	06:28 AM to 07:59 AM
Gulika:	1:44 PM to 3:07 PM
Amritakalam:	02:32 PM to 04:04 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:59 AM to 12:43 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 29°
Humidity: 58%
Sunrise: 6:38 AM
Sunset: 5:50 PM
Updated: January 5, 2024 5:00 PM

Lokesh calls for coordinated...

Continued from Page 1

He highlighted the Prime Minister's support for the state's growth with several projects and funds.

Key instructions were given for crowd management, including single barricades along the roadshow and separate sections for attendees from different constituencies. The public meeting, to be held at AU Engineering College grounds, is expected to attract about three lakh people from North Andhra and East Godavari districts.

Minister Lokesh visited the meeting venue, inspected the arrangements, and suggested improvements. District Collector M.N. Harendhira Prasad and CP Shankhabrata Bagchi assured that special officers have been appointed to manage all arrangements.

Lokesh emphasised flawless coordination, calling the visit a historic moment for Andhra Pradesh. Ministers, district officials, local MLAs, and other political leaders attended the meeting.

'Liberate' temples from clutches...

Continued from Page 1

He demanded restrictions on the employment of non-Hindus in temple management and the protection of temple properties. Gangaraju also advocated for temple income to be used exclusively for Hindu purposes.

Renowned lyricist Ananta Sriram spoke out against the disrespect shown towards Hinduism in films. He apologised on behalf of the film industry for misrepresenting Hindu epics and characters, calling for a boycott of films that insult the religion. Sriram urged filmmakers to follow the legacy of writers who por-

trayed Hinduism with dignity. At the Haindava Shankharavam meeting, the VHP called for a legal amendment to grant full autonomy to Hindu temples, free from government interference.

The organisation stressed that attacks on Hindu temple properties and institutions are unjust and illegal, urging the government to take strict action against those responsible for such assaults.

The VHP further criticised the government for imposing financial burdens and illegal restrictions on festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Dussehra. The group also opposed restrictions on the routes, dates, and meth-

ods of Hindu deity processions, asserting that such practices should remain free from government control.

The VHP demanded proper and quality management of rituals, prasad offerings, and services in temples with the utmost devotion. It also called for the immediate removal of non-Hindu employees from temple management and proposed that only devout Hindus be appointed to temple trust boards. The VHP emphasised that only non-political religious individuals should be allowed on temple boards, ensuring that temple management remains dedicated to Hindu Dharma.

Centre allocates adequate...

Continued from Page 1

The Centre had set a target of 21.31 lakh metric tonnes of fertilisers for the Rabi season but surpassed it by allocating 22.30 lakh metric tonnes, including urea. For January, the state's requirement was 2.29 lakh metric tonnes of urea, while the Centre allocated 2.32 lakh metric tonnes to meet the demand.

In a press statement issued on Sunday, Atchannaidu thanked the Centre for exceeding the initial target and ensuring sufficient supply. He particularly appreciated the allocation of 1 lakh metric tonnes of domestically produced urea, crucial for the state's crops. He acknowledged the active coordination and leadership of K Rammoohan Naidu in ensuring timely supply when farmers need it most. Director of Agriculture S Dilli Rao also expressed appreciation for the increased allocation of urea. He urged state authorities to ensure adequate distribution arrangements so that farmers receive the fertiliser on time. He emphasised that proper distribution would prevent black market activities and exorbitant pricing often seen during shortages.

The coordinated efforts between the state and central governments aim to ensure uninterrupted fertiliser availability to farmers, facilitating a successful Rabi season in Andhra Pradesh.

Left parties oppose AP govt's move to hike film ticket prices

CPI State secretary Ramakrishna demanded that the State government withdraw the decision on benefit shows and the cinema ticket price hike, citing Telangana's approach. He criticised Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan's remarks during the 'Game Changer' film pre-release event on the issue. Increasing film ticket prices and imposing an 18% GST without curbing black ticket sales and black marketing was unacceptable, he said.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Left Party leaders in Andhra Pradesh have strongly opposed the state government's decision to increase cinema ticket prices for two upcoming films during the Sankranti festival. They have demanded the immediate withdrawal of this decision, citing concerns about its impact on common people. CPI State Secretary K Ramakrishna and CPM State Secretary V Srinivasa Rao condemned the decision and the issuance of a Government Order in this regard in separate press releases on Sunday.

The leaders argued that such a move would burden the public, especially during challenging economic times, and accused the government of favouring certain segments of the film industry at the expense of ordinary citizens. They emphasised the need for cinema to remain an affordable form of entertainment and criticised the government for prioritising corporate interests over public welfare.

Public demonstrations and discussions with concerned authorities were suggested as part of their plan to pressure the government into reversing the decision.

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Further, he alleged the government was neglecting farmers' issues, such as Minimum Support Price (MSP) for food grains, while favouring the cine industry. Farmers have been protesting for years, even staging

protests in New Delhi, yet no response has been forthcoming, he commented.

CPM State Secretary Srinivasa Rao felt that the recent government order had changed the purpose of benefit shows. The income collected from benefit shows should be directed towards community and social activities. However, they have become profit-making tools for cinema producers, which goes against the original intent, he said.

He demanded the government implement a uniform policy for all cinema ticket prices. The practice of turning the film industry into a business venture by increasing ticket prices based on supply and demand was exploitative of fandom, he said. Such policies disproportionately hurt smaller films and producers, who lack the financial resources to compete with big-budget productions, leading to an industry where the rich get richer while diversity and creativity are stifled, he added.



City to host U-19 girls' SGFI natl volleyball tourney from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada is set to host the 68th School Games Federation of India (SGFI) National Volleyball Tournament for under-19 girls from January 6 to January 10 at PB Siddhartha Arts and Science College, Mogalrajapuram. The event is being jointly organised by the School Games Federation of Andhra Pradesh (SGFAP) and the School Games Krishna District Under-19 Unit.

A total of 600 participants from across the country will attend the event, including players, coaches, managers, and officials. Six volleyball courts have been prepared at the PB Siddhartha College grounds, including four equipped with floodlights. All 25 state teams have arrived in Vijayawada and have

begun their practice sessions.

After inspecting the arrangements, SGFAP Secretary G Bhanumurthy Raju conducted a press conference at the college's conference hall on Sunday. He revealed that except for Bihar, all other participating teams have reached Vijayawada and started practice. He stated that all arrangements for the smooth conduct of the tournament have been completed under the leadership of School Education Department Director V Vijaya Rama Raju and Samagra Shiksha State Project Director B Srinivasa Rao.

He further said that Samagra Shiksha sanctioned Rs 12 lakh to ensure the event's success, while Siddhartha Academy arranged six international standard courts, including four with floodlights.

"We are providing three-star hotel accommodation and travel support for all teams. Both North Indian and South Indian food options are being provided for the players. Women police personnel are deployed for security," he added.

The tournament will follow a league-cum-knockout format. The inaugural function is scheduled for 4 pm on Monday. Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni, Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rama Mohana Rao, and NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha are extending their support to the event.

Krishna District Under-19 Secretary V Ravikantha stated that matches will be held daily from 8 am to 12 noon and 4 pm to 10 pm. She added that MP Sivanath and Collector Lakshmisha are personally overseeing the arrangements.



Home Minister Anitha visits Central Jail, promises reforms

● Attributes the issues to administrative lapses under previous govt

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha visited the Visakhapatnam Central Jail on Sunday morning to assess its condition following allegations of illegal activities within the facility. During the visit, the Minister confirmed receiving reports of marijuana supply inside the jail, and announced that a comprehensive investigation is underway.

Speaking to the media, Minister Anitha attributed the issues to administrative lapses under the previous government. She emphasised the need for stronger oversight to ensure the safety and security of prisoners. The Minister inspected areas where cell phones were recently discovered and assured strict action against those found guilty of misuse.

In a startling revelation, the Minister disclosed that a cannabis plant had been found within the jail premises. Terming the situation as "alarming", she criticised the apparent negligence by jail staff and warned that such lapses would not be tolerated. While no suspensions have been made yet, Anitha stated that staff transfers might be implemented after the investigation concludes. She also reminded uniformed personnel to abstain from protests or strikes, emphasising their duty to maintain order.

The newly appointed Jail Superintendent highlighted ongoing efforts to improve the facility, including thorough cleaning operations and the installation of CCTV cameras, which are expected to be operational within 10 days. As part of enhanced security measures, some

inmates are being transferred to the Rajahmundry Jail. Addressing media queries, the Superintendent criticised the absence of proper records of jail visits over the past five years and assured that advancements in technology will now ensure greater transparency.

Anitha confirmed that the investigation into the discovery of cell phones will be completed within 10-15 days. She announced plans to increase staffing at the facility to prevent similar incidents in the future. Reiterating her commitment to restoring order and accountability, the Minister assured swift and decisive action against anyone found guilty of misconduct. The visit marks the government's first major step toward addressing the issues that have plagued it in recent years.



Centre allocated ₹1200 cr for drinking water project: MP



PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Narasaraopet Lok Sabha member Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu announced that the Central Government has allocated Rs 1200 crore under the Jal Jeevan Mission to provide drinking water to rural areas in the constituency.

The MP, accompanied by MLA Prattipati Pulla Rao, launched various development works at Boppudi village in Chilakaluripet constituency on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, the MP stated that the Central Government had sanctioned Rs 1200 crore to address the drinking water scarcity in several mandals. He assured that water taps would soon be provided to all households in rural areas. The MP also mentioned his efforts to bring Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Chilakaluripet for the inauguration of the bypass road. "We are completing development works on a priority basis due to financial constraints," he said.

MLA Prattipati Pulla Rao remarked that Prime Minister Modi, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan had witnessed the development of the drinking water project under the Jal Jeevan Mission, aimed at supplying drinking water to every household in rural areas.

Pulla Rao further promised the swift completion of the Venkateswara temple construction, adding that funds from the TTD would be sought if necessary.

3,000 people attend free medical camp at KBN College

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni inaugurated a free medical camp organised by the Kesineni Foundation at the KBN College at Kothapet under the Vijayawada West Assembly constituency on Sunday. NTR Trust, Go Hospital, Sankar I Hospital and KBN College supported the free medical camp. As many as 3,000 people attended the camp, of which 500 people took general medicine, 750 for eye tests, 1,250 for varicose pains, 250 for orthopaedic, and 350 for gynaecology tests. Later, the organisers distributed free medicines for all.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Sivanath said that he gives top priority to public health, and free medical camps are being conducted once every 20 days. Many poor and middle-class people neglect minor diseases and as a result, they are facing a lot of health troubles. The foundation has decided to organise medical camps in his constituency. Particularly, many people in the West Assembly constituency are facing severe concerns of varicose pains, the MP added.

Vijayawada West MLA Yalamanchili Satyanarayana

Chowdary alias Sujana Chowdary said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is giving special focus on Vijayawada Central and West Assembly constituencies. Officials are preparing special plans in this regard, he said. Particularly, the government is focusing on drinking water, stormwater and drainage issues in the hill areas, he explained.

AP Building and Other Construction Advisory Committee chairman G Raghurama Raju, TDP official spokesperson K Nagul Meera, leaders MS Baig, Md Fathullah, P Prasad, Sk Asha, and others were present.

Poster for international conference released

Meanwhile, MP Sivanath released the poster for the Functional and Smart Material International Conference to be conducted at the KBN College in Vijayawada from February 7-8. KBN College Principal Dr G Krishnaveni, SKPVV Group of Institutions AO Dr V Narayana Rao, KBN College Secretary and Correspondent Dr T Srinivas, and seminar convener Dr V Ravi Kumar were present.



Teachers honoured for their role in shaping society

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Rajkumar Chakravarthy, Director of Marketing Admissions at CMR University, Bengaluru, emphasised the crucial role teachers play in the development of society. He urged that teachers should not only be recognised for their hard work but also honoured for their significant contributions in shaping lives.

An esteemed Teacher Felicitation Programme was held in Vijayawada, organised by CMR University, Bengaluru. During the event, prominent teachers from Chaitanya, Narayana, Sharada, and Bhavisya Colleges were felicitated by university representatives.

Speaking at the event, Rajkumar Chakravarthy highlighted the essential role of teachers in bringing about positive changes in society. He mentioned that the purpose of the event was to encourage teachers in the education sector, and, in addition to felicitation, awards were presented to them.

GV Rao, Correspondent of Sharada Educational Institutions, shared his experience of over 33 years in the teaching profession. He noted that during this time, he had educated more than one lakh students, helping them achieve greater success.

Minister opens job mela, highlights skill development

● 25 companies offer 970 jobs

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

The Minister of Women and Child Welfare and Tribal Welfare, Gummidi Sandhya Rani, has emphasised the crucial role of skill development in securing employment during the inauguration of a job mela at Saluru Government Degree College on Sunday. "Where there is skill, there is a job," the Minister said, highlighting the importance of training in today's competitive job market. She added, "The government is committed to creating 25 lakh jobs across all sectors, ensuring opportunities for the youth of Andhra Pradesh."

The job mela, organised by the AP Skill Development Corporation in partnership with 25 companies, offered 970 positions with salaries ranging from Rs 10,000 to Rs 25,000 per month. Sandhya Rani

praised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's dedication to transforming the educational landscape, ensuring that students receive world-class educational standards.

The government has introduced several initiatives to support students, including the Dokka Seethamma Mid-Day Meal program, which aims to improve the health and enrolment of junior college students. Web-based classes, in collaboration with IIT Madras, have also been introduced to equip students with advanced skills, preparing them for global opportunities.

Sandhya Rani urged the youth to avoid the trap of drug addiction. "Drugs lead to personal and family ruin. Instead, focus on the abundant opportunities available and chart a pathway to a successful life," she said.

Visakhapatnam's Jyothi Yarraji set to receive Arjuna Award

● At 25, Yarraji made history as the first Indian woman to qualify for 100m hurdles at Paris Olympics

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam's pride, 25-year-old Jyothi Yarraji, is once again making headlines in the world of sports. Recently selected for the prestigious Arjuna Award, Yarraji has cemented her place in history as the first Indian woman to qualify for the 100m hurdles at the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics. Although she narrowly missed the automatic qualification mark by just 0.01 seconds, her impressive world ranking earned her a spot in this prestigious global event.

The Arjuna Award, which honours excellence, leadership, and discipline in sports, will be conferred upon Yarraji by the President of India at Rashtrapati Bhavan on January 17. Speaking to The Pioneer, an excited Jyothi shared, "I am extremely honoured to receive the Arjuna Award. It feels like a dream come true, and I'm deeply grateful for the support of my family, coaches, and everyone who believed in me."

Yarraji's journey to becoming one of India's top athletes is a testament to her grit and determination. Despite growing up in financial hardship, she has risen to the top of

her field, her remarkable speed on the track earning her comparisons to a cheetah. Facing hurdles such as injuries and the COVID-19 pandemic, Jyothi's perseverance has remained unwavering. "I never lost hope, no matter how tough the journey was," she shared. "Running is my passion, and I promised myself that I would never stop chasing my dreams."

Born on August 28, 1999, in a modest household, Yarraji's athletic career began at Port High School, where her potential was

spotted by her physical education teacher. While early financial constraints limited her training opportunities, Jyothi remained committed to her dreams, funding her athletic pursuits with the cash prizes she earned. The turning point came in 2021 when she secured sponsorship from the Reliance Foundation, further propelling her career forward.

In 2016, Yarraji joined the Sports Authority of India hostel and began training under Olympian N Ramesh. She later honed her

skills under British coach James Hillier at the Reliance Athletics High-Performance Centre. Her breakthrough moment came in 2022, when she shattered the national record for the 100m hurdles, completing the race in 13.23 seconds—a record she has broken multiple times since.

Yarraji's list of achievements is nothing short of extraordinary. She claimed a gold medal in 100m hurdles at the 2023 Asian Athletics Championships, a silver in 200m, a bronze at the World University Games, and another silver at the 2022 Asian Games. Reflecting on her success, Jyothi credited her parents' sacrifices. "It is not just my hard work, but also my parents' efforts and blessings that brought me here. Their support has been the foundation for everything I have achieved."

Currently pursuing a history degree at Acharya Nagarjuna University, Yarraji remains focused on her athletic goals. As India's fastest female hurdler, she holds a world ranking of 24th, securing her place in the upcoming Paris Olympics. "To win a gold at the Asian Athletics Championships and break records along the way is a proud moment for me and for our country," she said.



Spl Aadhaar registration drive for U-6 children in EG from Jan 6-10

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

A special Aadhaar registration drive will be conducted in East Godavari district from January 6 to 10 for children below six years of age.

District Collector P Prashanthi announced on Sunday that parents of children aged 0-6 should get Aadhaar cards for their children by submitting the required documents. She stated that approximately 17,000 children in the district fall under this category. Parents who have not yet obtained an Aadhaar card for their children are urged to take them to the special registration camps during this period.

The camps will be organised from 10 am to evening. The Collector instructed mandal-level officials to ensure the camps are held at village and ward secretariats. She clarified that the child's birth certificate with the name, the father's Aadhaar card, and a phone number would be required for the registration process.

She emphasised the need for



ward education and data processing secretaries, along with digital assistants, to carry out their responsibilities effectively during the drive. The Collector also directed that no other work or surveys should be assigned to officials involved in the Aadhaar camps and that no leave should be granted to the staff during this period.

The District Collector urged residents to utilise this opportunity, as welfare schemes are linked to the Aadhaar number. She encouraged people to voluntarily obtain Aadhaar cards for their children.

Meanwhile, the Collector announced that she would attend the Public Grievances Redressal System (PGRS) meeting at the MPDO office in Nallajerla on Monday. She instructed all district-level officials to be present at the Collectorate without fail, noting that people travel from distant places to have their grievances addressed. Petitions will be accepted from 10 am to 1 pm, and she encouraged the public to take advantage of the event.

POLAVARAM PROJECT

'No mediators in disbursement of compensation to evacuees'

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Management Nimmala Ramanaidu has emphasised that measures are being taken to ensure the disbursement of compensation to Polavaram project evacuees is carried out without the involvement of mediators.

The Minister laid the foundation stone for several development projects in Palakollu on Sunday. Speaking at the event, Ramanaidu revealed that Rs 1,000 crore is being allocated for compensation to the evacuees of the Polavaram project.

"All necessary steps have been taken to ensure that mediators or brokers are not involved in the compensation process. The compensation will be directly credited to the bank accounts of the evacuees, eliminating the possibility of interference," he said.

Reaffirming that the Polavaram project will play a crucial role in making Andhra Pradesh a drought-free state, the Minister reiterated the Government's commitment to sup-



porting those who have given up their land and homes for the project. Ramanaidu described the Rs 1,000 crore compensation as a Sankranthi festival gift for the evacuees and credited Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for the initiative.

The Minister recalled that during the TDP-led government from 2014 to 2019, Rs 800 crore was disbursed to the evacuees and colonies were constructed for them.

"The Polavaram project is 75% complete, and the diaphragm wall construction was also finished. However, the YSRCP regime's negligence caused significant damage to the diaphragm wall during the floods, along with the destruction of the guide bund and other parts of the project," he lamented. He criticised the YSRCP government for halting the project and neglecting it, which he claimed set the work back by 30 years. He also reminded that when in opposition, Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy had promised Rs 10 lakh to each evacuee, but once in power, he ignored them.

"If the Polavaram project is completed, it will pave the way for river interlinking in the state," he stated. Minister Ramanaidu pledged to complete the Polavaram project at the earliest, ensuring water supply to the northern and Rayalaseema regions of Andhra Pradesh.

Police arrest YSRCP leader Turaka Kishore

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The police have arrested YSRCP leader Turaka Kishore in Hyderabad and are bringing him to Macherla.

Turaka Kishore allegedly attacked TDP leaders, including the then MLC Budda Venkanna and Bonda Umamaheswar Rao, by smashing the windshield of their car with a log while they were travelling in Macherla town. Kishore is a close associate of former MLA and YSRCP leader Pinnella Ramakrishna Reddy.

A case was filed against Turaka Kishore in connection with the attack. The incident, which went viral on social media, led to Kishore gaining notoriety due to his involvement in several criminal cases. Although a case was reg-

istered against him, no action was taken during the YSRCP regime. After the TDP-led coalition government took office, Turaka Kishore went into hiding. Acting on a tip-off regarding his whereabouts, the police team traced him to Hyderabad and arrested him.

In response to Kishore's arrest, former MLC Budda Venkanna claimed that the then YSRCP MLA Pinnella Ramakrishna Reddy had incited Turaka Kishore to attack them. He also alleged that Reddy had promised to appoint Kishore as the municipal chairman if he carried out the attack.

"We narrowly escaped the attack. Such rowdies are a menace to society. It would not be wrong if he is killed in an encounter," Budda Venkanna remarked on social media platform 'X'.



Atheists call for promotion of scientific literacy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Youth Summit on the theme Role of Youth in Promoting Democratic Values and Scientific Temper was held at the Atheist Centre on the second day of the 12th World Atheist Conference. Dr. Devaraju Maharaju, Kendra Sahitya Academy Awardee, was the chief guest at the valedictory function.

He emphasised the need to further encourage rational literature and highlighted how the Atheist Centre, in its 85 years, has transformed the lives of countless individuals across the Telugu States, India, and globally.

Vikas Gora, co-convenor of the conference, presented the declaration, stressing the importance of using it as a catalyst for building a world rooted in reason, equality, tolerance, and human dignity. He stated, "We advocate for the widespread promotion of scientific literacy, critical thinking, and evidence-based reasoning in all aspects of life. We call for the establishment of secular governance, where decisions are grounded in reason, justice, and universal human rights, and advocate for the separation of religion from the state, politics, and education."

Vikas Gora further remarked, "We urge greater investment in education and mentorship to equip the next generation with the tools to confront extremism, irrationality, and social injustice. We will continue to challenge superstitions, extremism, and intolerance through activism, public dialogue, and educational outreach."

Dr. G. Saramam, Vikas Gora, Rashmi, Rajatha Gora, and others addressed the conference.



3 red sander logs seized, two smugglers arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Task Force police seized three red sander logs and arrested two smugglers at Mamanduru village in Renigunta mandal. DSP G Balireddy informed the media on Sunday that a Task Force team, led by RSI Suresh and Viswanath, conducted a combing operation in the forest area. The team spotted a group of red sander smugglers felling trees. Upon noticing the approaching Task Force personnel, the smugglers attempted to flee into the forest. However, the Task Force team managed to chase and apprehend two of them, who hail from Tamil Nadu. The seized red sander logs were recovered, and Task Force SI Rafi registered a case. The logs and the arrested smugglers were shifted to the Task Force police station in Tirupati.



Major carroms tourney kicks off

PNS ■ NELLORE

The 29th All India Carrom Federation Cup Tournament 2024-2025 officially began with grandeur at the Nellore Club in Nellore. Organised by the Andhra Carrom Association, with support from the Nellore Club and the All India Carrom Federation (AICF), this four-day event has attracted 350 participants, including top male and female players from 30 states and 9 institutions. The tournament features prominent players, including World Cup medalists such as K. Srinivas, the Men's World Cup winner from Telangana, and Kaziwa, the Women's Singles World Cup winner from Tamil Nadu.

The event was inaugurated by



Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy, MLA, in the presence of several distinguished dignitaries, including Rakibul Hussain, MP and President of AICF, Parvathareddy, Chandrashekar Reddy (MLC), Dr Neeraj Kumar Sampathy (Senior VP, AICF and President of the

Andhra Carrom Association), Bharati Narayan (Secretary General, AICF), Joseph Mayer (President, ICF), VD Narayan (Secretary General, AICF), SK Abdul Jaleel (General Secretary, Andhra State Carrom Association), Srimannarayana (President, Nellore

District Carrom Association), and Ponnavelu Sudhakar Reddy (Secretary, Nellore Club).

In his inaugural speech, Chief Guest Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy expressed his pleasure at hosting such a prestigious event in Nellore. He commended the efforts of the Andhra and Nellore Carrom Associations, along with the Nellore Club, for organising the championship and pledged his support for the continued promotion of carrom and future events in the state.

All players and officials are being provided with complimentary lodging and boarding during the tournament. The excellent arrangements and facilities have received widespread praise from both participants and All India officials.

Cong leader Chinta Mohan criticises apex court's verdict on SC classification

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Senior Congress leader and former Union minister Chinta Mohan has contradicted the Supreme Court's verdict on the Scheduled Caste (SC) classification, describing it as a "fraud." Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Chinta Mohan stated that seven Supreme Court judges had delivered the judgment on the SC classification, yet none of them had any understanding of untouchability.

He went on to claim that Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin had read the judgment, torn it, and



thrown it into the dustbin. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had also similarly discarded the judgment copy, he added.

"Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu wanted to divide the Scheduled Caste communities for political gain. The government has stopped issuing notifications for government jobs. There are barely 300 medical seats across 13 government medical colleges in Andhra Pradesh. How many of these will be allocated to SC candidates? Is the classification of SCs necessary in the state?" questioned the former Union Minister.

2 boys drown in Amaravati branch canal

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Two teenage boys drowned in the Amaravati branch canal at Sattenapalli on Sunday. Police said that five boys had entered the canal for a swim, and two of them drowned while three managed to reach the shore safely. The victims have been identified as Gopichand (13) and Charan (13). Both were students of Class 9. Fire brigade personnel, along with local expert swimmers, launched a massive search operation to recover the bodies.

State-level Poly Tech Fest to begin today in V'wada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Poly Tech Fest 2024-25 is set to begin on January 6 at the SS Convention Hall in Vijayawada. This two-day state-level event has been organised by the Department of Technical Education and Training under the guidance of School and College Education Department Principal Secretary Kona Sasidhar and Technical Education Department Director G. Ganesh Kumar.

A total of 249 projects have been selected from 107

Polytechnic Colleges across the state. These projects were shortlisted from 1,302 submissions made during 13 Regional Poly Tech Fests, with 15 to 20 projects from each region advancing to the state-level event.

The fest aims to provide a platform for diploma students to showcase their technical skills and innovations. It aligns with the 'Make in India' initiative and the state government's vision of 'One Family, One Entrepreneur,' empowering students with skills in science and technology.

'Cong wants to get vote bharosa'

● BJP leader Bandi on timing of Rythu Bharosa

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Congress Government is distributing Rythu Bharosa funds only because of local body elections, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said. He said the Congress Government is giving Rythu Bharosa by taking loans to make farmers vote for the Congress. The Congress Government will certainly scrap the Rythu Bharosa scheme immediately after local body elections, he added.

Sanjay appealed to the people of Telangana to understand the deceptive techniques used by the Congress Government.

Speaking to the media at the State BJP office here on Sunday, Sanjay said, "With local body elections approaching, the Congress Government has started a new drama in the name of Rythu Bharosa, new ration cards etc. The government will not get more than Rs 2,000 crore from 15th Financial Commission if it does not conduct local body elections before March. So the Congress has raised the curtains to a new drama named Rythu Bharosa and



ration cards. Don't believe the Congress's lies."

Sanjay said for this round of Rythu Bharosa payments, the government has raised ₹10,000 crore by mortgaging TGIC lands. What authority does the government have to mortgage public lands? Now borrowed money is being distributed, what will happen next time? If these loans are not repaid, the lands will be seized by banks. What is the government actually giving farmers?, he asked. Sanjay said that former Chief Minister KCR too deceived the people and unemployed youth in the same way by promising that he will give double bedroom houses, ration cards, jobs etc. Now the Congress is getting ready to deceive people like KCR as local body polls are approaching, Sanjay said.

Korba delegation lauds GVMC's urban development initiatives

● Mayor Raja Kishore Prasad and his team commend Visakhapatnam's cleanliness, beautification, and waste management practices

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A delegation from Korba city in Chhattisgarh, led by Mayor Raja Kishore Prasad and Chairperson Shyam Sundar Soni, visited the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) on Sunday as part of a study tour. The delegation, comprising 20 council members, was impressed by Visakhapatnam's innovative development initiatives and efficient management strategies.

"We are deeply admiring the initiatives taken by GVMC in terms of waste management, sanitation, and greenery," said Mayor Raja Kishore Prasad. "We intend to implement similar practices in our own city, and this visit has been a valuable learning experience for us."



Deputy Mayor Jiyani Sridhar emphasised the crucial role of urban development in national progress. "Urban development is key to a nation's growth,

and we are happy to share our best practices with other cities," said Sridhar. The Korba delegation was briefed on various GVMC projects, including

the waste-to-energy plant, sanitation and waste management programs, city greenery initiatives, and beautification efforts. They commended

Visakhapatnam's remarkable cleanliness and beautification achievements, highlighting the city's advanced road development, effective pollution control measures, and efficient underground sewage management.

"We are impressed by GVMC's collaboration with self-help groups, which is a model for urban development," said Chairperson Shyam Sundar Soni. "We look forward to implementing similar initiatives in Korba." The visit concluded with a tour of the GVMC Council meeting hall, discussions on mutual development strategies, and the presentation of a GVMC memento to the Mayor of Korba as a token of goodwill. This visit underscores the importance of knowledge sharing and best practices among urban local bodies in India.

ACROSS THE STATES



Elephant stuck while crossing rail fence rescued

An elephant, which was stuck while crossing a rail fence in the Veeranahosahalli range of Nagarhole Tiger Reserve near here, was rescued on Sunday, official sources said. Forest officials deployed earth-moving equipment to demolish one of the cement beam pillar barriers to which the rail fence was wedged. After the elephant was freed, it made its way into the forest, officials said. On learning that the elephant was caught in a predicament, the forest team rushed to the spot where the tusker was trapped between pillar barriers and was unable to lift its hind legs over the rail fence, they said. According to forest officials, the radio-collared tusker was aged around 30 years and its movement was being tracked. The rail fences are installed as a measure to prevent elephants from crossing into villages bordering forest areas.



Girl killed, 2 others injured as e-bike catches fire in MP

An 11-year-old girl was killed and two others sustained injuries when an electric motorcycle charging outside a house caught fire in Madhya Pradesh's Rattam on Sunday, police said. The blaze broke out around 2.30 am in a colony in the Industrial Area police station limits, an official said. The electric motorcycle was kept for charging outside the house of one Bhagwat Maurya when it caught fire, and the flames spread to another vehicle, said VD Joshi, the in-charge of the Industrial Area police station. He said the family went to sleep after plugging in the vehicle for charging, and they suddenly woke up to smoke billowing in the house. They called the fire brigade and managed to come out of the house, but Maurya's granddaughter Antra Choudhary was left behind, and she died of suffocation, the official said. He said Bhagwati Maurya and Lavanya (12) were injured and are undergoing treatment.



Drone falls close to Odisha CM during Jharsuguda visit

In a major security lapse, a drone deployed by the administration to take photographs of Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi accidentally crashed on the ground close to him during his visit to Jharsuguda, an official said on Sunday. The incident which occurred on January 2 came to light during the day after a video clip of the incident was circulated on social media platforms. "As per preliminary investigation, the drone was deployed by the district administration to take photographs and record video of the chief minister and other dignitaries during the visit. Due to some technical glitches, it accidentally fell near to the CM," said the police officer of Jharsuguda district. Majhi was heading towards Jhadeswar temple in the Purunabasti area of Jharsuguda when the drone fell near him. The alert personal security officer of Majhi and police officials immediately kicked the drone away.

Spanish woman returns to India to find biological mother

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Sneha, a Spanish citizen, has returned to India in search of her biological mother, who had abandoned her and her brother 20 years ago.



However, 21-year-old Sneha is running out of time as she has to return to Spain on Monday for her educational commitments. The researcher in children's education wanted to trace her roots and reached India with scanty information about her past. Her Spanish parents Gema Vidal and Juan Josh supported her in her quest and Gema accompanied Sneha to her home state. They had adopted Sneha and her brother Somu in 2010 from an orphanage in Bhubaneswar, where they were kept after their mother Banalata Das abandoned them in 2005.

Will turn Delhi into a city of the future, says PM Modi

ASSERTS NO WELFARE SCHEME TO BE SHUT IF BJP COMES TO POWER

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Delhi's AAP government of wasting a decade fighting with the Centre and urged its people to give the BJP an opportunity to turn the national capital into a city of the future. The prime minister also assured that no public welfare scheme would be discontinued if the BJP assumed power but the party's government would weed out the corruption in their implementation. Addressing a rally in the Rohini area, Modi dubbed the AAP government a "disaster" that had struck Delhi and asserted the BJP would usher in change.

"Only when this 'aapda' (disaster) is gotten rid of in Delhi, the double-engine of development will come in," Modi said. The prime minister said the Centre had been developing highways in Delhi, expanding the Metro network, starting the Namto Bharat Regional Rapid Transit System, and running big hospitals. "However, the moment you step out of a Metro station, you can see potholed roads, overflowing sewers. Some areas are such that even auto and cab drivers refuse to ply due to long traffic jams," he said.

"In the past 10 years, Delhi has witnessed a state government that is no less than an 'aapda' (disaster)! Delhiites

The prime minister said when the people of Delhi were grappling with COVID-19, struggling to find oxygen and medicines, the entire focus of the "aapda people" was on building their "Sheesh Mahal". "They made a huge budget for the 'Sheesh Mahal'. This is their truth... They do not care about the people of Delhi



have realised this. Only one voice is reverberating in Delhi -- 'Aapda nahi sahenge, badal kar rahenge (will not tolerate disaster, will bring change)," Modi said. The prime minister said when the people of Delhi were grappling with COVID-19, struggling to find oxygen and medicines, the entire focus of the "aapda people" was on building their "Sheesh Mahal". "They made a huge budget for the 'Sheesh Mahal'. This is their truth... They do not care about the people of Delhi. That is why every Delhiite today is saying... 'we will not tolerate aapda, we will change'," he said. Modi also accused the AAP government of spreading fear

and good governance will come." "We are in the 21st century and 25 years have passed. Two or three generations have entered their youth. The next 25 years are very important for Delhi. The next 25 years will see India emerging as a developed nation before their eyes. We all will be stakeholders in this journey," Modi said. The national capital should be a part of this glorious journey, he added. "In Delhi, people blessed the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections and now, in the assembly polls, are set to bless the BJP. This is a golden opportunity to win the heart of Delhi and free it of disaster ('aapda)," he said.

'K'taka govt finding excuses to halt guarantee schemes'

PNS ■ MYSURU (KARNATAKA)

Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Sunday accused the Congress government in Karnataka of finding ways to discontinue its flagship guarantee schemes, while "burdening" the common people with increased costs such as the recent 15 per cent hike in public transport bus fares. Speaking to reporters, Kumaraswamy said, "The Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah) is someone who has presented the most number of budgets in the state, as he has also held a finance portfolio, with his consent the five guarantee schemes were implemented and they (Congress) claim that they have walked the talk, but to walk the talk they are playing with the lives of the common man."

Expressing concern over the



government's insensitivity towards the struggles of the underprivileged. The revised bus fares, which took effect at midnight on Saturday, have drawn criticism from opposition parties and various sections of society.

The JDS leader charged the government with indulging in "daylight robbery," claiming that in the guise of implementing guarantee schemes, it was extracting several times more money from the same beneficiaries. "The Congress government claims it is fulfilling its promises, but at what cost? They are taking money from the people through fare hikes, increased stamp duties, and higher cess on petrol and diesel, and then giving it back in the form of schemes like Gruha Lakshmi. This is no achievement," he remarked.

fare hike, he said it impacted farmers, labourers, and the working class. "By increasing bus fares by 15 per cent, what has this government achieved? These hikes affect the lives of the common people, not the wealthy or ministers' families," he said, adding that the hike reflects the

ON DAY FOUR OF FAST UNTO DEATH

PK seeks support of Rahul, Tejashwi Yadav

PNS ■ PATNA

Jan Surraaj Party founder Prashant Kishor, who has been on a fast unto death to press the demand for cancellation of a BPS exam, on Sunday sought the support of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav.

Talking to reporters here on the fourth day of his 'Amran anshan', Kishor also said he was ready to "follow" these leaders and if they were averse to his presence, he was willing to "withdraw". "I want to inform the people that this agitation is non-political one and not being carried under the banner of my party. Last night, the youngsters formed a 51-member forum called 'Yuva Satyagraha Samiti' (YSS) which will steer this move-



ment of which Prashant Kishor is just a part. All are welcome to lend support to it Rahul Gandhi, who has 100 MPs and Tejashwi Yadav who has more than 70 MLAs," Kishor said. He added, "These leaders are much bigger than us. They can get five lakh people to gather at the Gandhi Maidan... this is the time to do so. The future of the youth is at stake. We are faced with a brutal regime which has ordered lathi charge 87 times in just three years."



Row over BJP leader's reference to roads citing Priyanka

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and party's candidate from Kalkaji, Ramesh Bidhuri, has yet again courted controversy by allegedly saying that after victory in the Delhi Assembly polls next month, he will develop smooth roads in the constituency like Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's "cheeks". No reaction of Bidhuri was available over his remarks and the attack on him by the Congress.

"I assure you that just as we made the roads in Okhla and Sangam Vihar, we will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," Bidhuri is heard saying in the purported video, which went viral on social media. Congress candidate from Kalkaji and Mahila Congress president Alka Lamba lashed out at Bidhuri and accused him of "insulting" women once again in his "usual indecent language". "Will the public in Kalkaji have such (a person) who cares neither for the dignity of the House (Parliament) nor respects the women," she said in a post on X.

3 killed as Coast Guard chopper crashes at runway

PNS ■ PORBANDAR (GUJARAT)



Two pilots and a crew member were killed on Sunday after an Indian Coast Guard helicopter on a routine sortie crashed at Porbandar airport runway in Gujarat and caught fire, officials said. The maritime security agency said the reasons for

the incident are being investigated through a Board of Inquiry. "ICG ALH MK-III helicopter CG 859 met with a mishap at Porbandar Airport Runway at about 1215 hrs on 05 Jan 25. The ICG helicopter had 02 Pilots and 01 Air Crew Diver at the time of the incident and was on a routine

training sortie," an ICG statement said. Immediately after the incident, the crew was rescued and shifted to a government hospital at Porbandar, where they were declared as brought dead. The deceased are Commandant (JG) Saurabh, Deputy Commandant SK Yadav and Navik Manoj Pradhan. They

will be cremated as per service traditions and honour, the ICG stated. Porbandar Superintendent of Police Bhagirathsinh Jadeja said the chopper crashed while landing near the Porbandar airport runway and caught fire. "The chopper was returning and trying to land when the incident occurred near a runway."

'We don't want Union Carbide waste here'

CHORUS OF DEMAND AT MP VILLAGE ADJACENT TO DISPOSAL SITE

PNS ■ PITHAMPUR (MP)

"We don't want this toxic waste in our area," is the refrain of locals at Tarpura, a village adjacent to Pithampur's waste incineration unit where a huge quantity of waste from Bhopal's Union Carbide factory has been brought for disposal. An uneasy calm prevailed in the village with a population of around 20,000 on Saturday amid heavy police deployment. The plan to dispose of 337 tons of waste linked to the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, among the worst industrial disasters in the world, has sparked off protests in the area. Some locals claimed that when ten tonnes of Union Carbide waste was disposed of at the Pithampur facility on a trial basis in 2015, it led to contamination of soil, underground water and water sources in nearby villages.

The incineration of a huge quantity of toxic waste will be hazardous for humans as well as the environment, the villagers fear, even though the Madhya Pradesh government has sought to assure them that there would be no harmful consequences. The administration has issued prohibitory orders in the 100-meter radius around the waste disposal unit in Pithampur and deployed a large police force. Many residents of Tarpura work in industrial units in Pithampur. "Our demand is that the toxic waste from Union Carbide factory should not be incinerated in Pithampur," Kailash Sharma, a resident of the village, told PTI. Sharma, who shifted to Pithampur from Bihar with his family of six some years ago in search of work, claimed that the attendance of labourers in local factories decreased after the government started transporting the

Union Carbide waste to Pithampur. Some other labourers living in the village endorsed his claim. Pithampur, home to around 1,250 factories, is the main industrial hub of Madhya Pradesh. Bhaya, a youth from Tarpura village, said, "We want this waste to be sent back to Bhopal." Protests rocked Pithampur, around 50 km from Dhar district headquarters, on Friday after the trucks carrying the toxic waste reached Ramky Enviro company where the incineration is to be carried out. Two people even attempted self-immolation and are now undergoing treatment. The administration on Saturday held meetings with local people and public representatives to assure them that their views will be heard. Dhar Superintendent of Police Manoj Kumar Singh said, "Life is normal in Pithampur at the moment."





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Vision for rural India

PM Modi hails rural resilience at Grameen Bharat Mahotsav; says rural prosperity is essential for national growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered an inspiring address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, held in New Delhi, highlighting the transformative strides made in rural development. The event celebrated the resilience and progress of rural India under the theme "Building a Resilient Rural India for Viksit Bharat 2047"—a vision to make India a developed nation by its centenary year of independence. PM Modi emphasised that the government's intentions, policies and decisions are invigorating rural India with newfound energy. He highlighted significant achievements in healthcare, agriculture and basic infrastructure that have elevated the quality of life in villages and driven economic growth. Reflecting on India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he proudly noted how Indian villages defied global doubts by ensuring vaccine access to the last mile. He attributed this success to inclusive economic policies that cater to every section of society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav



2025 highlighted significant achievements in rural development, painting an optimistic picture of progress. While these strides are commendable, a closer examination reveals underlying challenges that must be addressed to ensure holistic and sustainable rural transformation. PM Modi emphasised healthcare advancements, noting the establishment of over 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and the growing reach of telemedicine in rural areas. These initiatives reflect substantial progress; however, challenges such as a shortage of trained healthcare professionals, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent internet access in remote villages continue to hinder equitable healthcare delivery.

Agriculture has been a central focus of rural development efforts, with financial assistance under PM-KISAN and a significant increase in agricultural loans helping farmers enhance productivity. Yet, structural problems persist in the agrarian sector, including reliance on unpredictable monsoon, insufficient crop diversification and market volatility. The protests against contentious agricultural reforms also highlight the need for more inclusive policy-making and effective stakeholder engagement. The Prime Minister highlighted the sharp reduction in rural poverty, which has reportedly fallen below 5 per cent from 26 per cent in 2012. While this represents significant progress, the persistence of rural inequality and exclusion of marginalised communities from development initiatives cannot be ignored. Poverty metrics alone do not capture the broader challenges of deprivation, including limited access to quality education, healthcare and social mobility. Infrastructure gaps, such as unreliable road connectivity, inadequate digital networks, and inconsistent electricity supply, limit the potential of rural economies. Furthermore, rural India's heavy dependence on agriculture underscores the urgent need for economic diversification and the creation of jobs in manufacturing and services. Prime Minister's vision is indeed laudable but a lot needs to be done for upliftment of rural masses.

PICTALK



'Sadhus' of 'Shri Niranjani Akhara' take part in a procession towards Sangam, in Prayagraj

Harmony: A prerequisite for national unity



ATUL SEHGAL

The resurgence of communal discord calls for urgent reflection and action. It is time to expose the forces that exploit differences for personal gain

The global communal ecosphere is showing change for the worse. The word communal here connotes and covers ethnic, racial, religious and sectarian communities. The last seven decades since 1950 have not seen very many episodes of communal conflict or conflagration in the global society. After the terrible death and destruction wrought by the Second World War (1939-1945) and the horrible communal riots following the partition of India into two independent states, episodes of communal violence have been relatively less compared to that in earlier periods of world history. Of late, the world is riven by acrimony and wars at multiple locations and communally divisive sentiments across global societies appear to be rising again. It seems that during the above period, the sentiments of mutual hatred and antipathy among certain global communities remained suppressed, only to resurface now.

It is time to review and relook at the elements that go into building and strengthening communal harmony. With the world in the terrible throes of wars at several locations, it is perhaps time to strengthen communal harmony and amity globally, particularly in our society and not to allow it to be undermined. History has been written largely by the conquerors of countries and the governing elite. We often do not have true accounts of history do not read true history or otherwise are inclined to interpret facts wrongly, driven by our deep-seated prejudices.

If we look closely at the picture and analyse it dispassionately, we shall find that it is generally the politicians and rulers who incite communal violence for their own selfish needs or vile vested interests. Often, these acts of incitement are obscured through disinformation campaigns. There are cultural and ideological differences between communities. What to talk of mainstream religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, there are major and minor variants of these religions and sub-ideological sects whose number touch-



es almost three thousand. They all have major or minor ideological differences. Notwithstanding the many differing and dissonant injunctions of their scriptural texts, peace and harmony are basic to the progress and prosperity of citizens in every country, and every society and they are dear to all human individuals. That is why there are constitutions, laws and regulations in every country for proper governance that incorporates the functional upholding of universal peace promoting human values of justice and equality. Hence, we need to expose the machinations of the political elite to strengthen communal harmony in today's world. In the context of the current global scenario, the incidence of violence against Hindus in Pakistan or Bangladesh is more because of mischief and misdeeds of the ruling elite. During the colonial period in India, communal riots were frequently triggered by politicians or the governing elite. In our country with a population of 145 crore, nearly 21 crore are Muslims. They have been a part and parcel of our society for ages. We need to better integrate them, not appease them for petty political gains. The need of the hour is ideological realignment. And we should quickly brace ourselves for it. Let us not allow the demolition or destruction



DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD IN INDIA, COMMUNAL RIOTS WERE FREQUENTLY TRIGGERED BY POLITICIANS OR THE GOVERNING ELITE. THIS HAPPENS WHEN RELIGION AS A PRACTICE OF FAITH IS GIVEN A POLITICAL COLOURING

of religious buildings anywhere, but build monuments of universal, secular and humanistic culture to promote communal harmony. Let us build buildings and institutions that bind humans, not separate them. Let us educate global humans on the eternal metaphysical truths that apply to all, everywhere. Let us awaken humanity to the threads of universal knowledge about the Creator, creation and their relationship. Bharat has been the cradle of human civilisation because the divine knowledge emanating from the one Creator was revealed in this land to sages at the dawn of civilization. That core knowledge enshrined in the divine scriptures Vedas and ideology based on that needs resurrection today. Humans can live sensibly and peacefully for ages if they wish to. Only they need to be aligned with universal Dharma. Man-made sects separate; universal Dharma (righteousness) unites—because the latter comes from the omniscient Creator of all humans. When we talk of Sanatan as the religion of the inhabitants of Bharat, we refer to the above said broad-based, universal and eternal religion of humanity that transcends caste, creed, ethnicity and sect. Sanatan Dharma is the prescribed code of living handed down to the

earliest humans by the Creator. Let us strengthen adherence to that eternal code of living expected from humans by the one master of the Universe whose subjects we all are. Let us focus on the common, positive strands of ideology that exist in various mainstream religions and let us deliberate on the ideological strands that are dissonant with the universal Sanatan Dharma. Let us not mix religion with politics; rather let us give politics a more humanistic complexion. That is what is required today. We Indians are in the process of nation rebuilding after centuries of lying low due to depredation by foreign invaders. Now is the time for fast-track progress and we must beware of nefarious designs of foreign powers to create impediments to our progress. We should try to reform our political and legal institutions to make them truly secular and democratic. Let us make our national fabric strong, placing it above caste, creed, faith or religion. At the same time, we should strive to dissolve our ideological differences in the bright shining light of Sanatan Vedic Dharma which has been the beacon of guiding light of all humanity for eons since the dawn of civilisation. (The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ISRO EMBARKS DOCKING MISSION

Madam — On December 30, ISRO has embarked on another mission that has vast application in future exploratory missions. In fact, the space docking experiments or SpaDex mission are linked to the plan for setting up India's own space station named the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035 to carry out spacewalks and research in microgravity conditions. This mission also carries the PS4 orbital experiment module 4 or POEM 4, using the spent fourth stage of PSLV C 60 which otherwise would have ended as space debris carrying 24 payloads. Autonomous orbited docking is a sophisticated manoeuvre mastered by a few elite nations like the USA, China and Russia and India too is set to join this group. Docking is indispensable for missions that require heavy spacecraft and equipment that cannot be launched in one go, viz the International Space Station for instance.

A manned foray to the moon and the operation of the country's first space station is not possible without it. It could also open up opportunities for India's space research agency to collaborate with global missions that require docking facilities. The success of missions like Chandrayaan 3 and Aditya 1 in 2023 followed by the setting up of the first space observatory to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays in 2024, to the recent Cabinet approval in Sept 2024 of Venus Orbital Mission to study the different aspects of Venus, clearly showcases that it has enough expertise to contribute to the divergent facets of planetary research. This mission is the handiwork of collaboration between public and private enterprises and underscores not just its technical prowess but also lays a solid foundation for future endeavours that will shape the global space landscape.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

RELIEF FOR BHOPAL RESIDENTS

Madam—It is really sad that it took four decades to remove the toxic waste from

HMPV virus outbreaks spark panic



In China, the spread of viruses causing respiratory illnesses like Influenza A, HMPV, Mycoplasma Pneumonia, and COVID-19 has increased. This spread is affecting children's health significantly, leading to a rise in hospital admissions. These viruses exhibit symptoms similar to other respiratory infections, such as devastation caused by COVID-19, trusting the "Chinese Dragon" seems difficult. Five years ago, Wuhan's coronavirus outbreak wreaked

havoc worldwide, and now, the HMPV virus appears to have originated from the same location. Is this merely a coincidence, or is Wuhan a hub for developing biological colds and fevers in children. Now, the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is spreading in China, sparking fears that a similar outbreak could occur again. Wuhan, the epicentre of the initial coronavirus outbreak, is reportedly the origin of this new virus as well. China has stated that the situation is under control, and no travel restrictions have been imposed internationally. The Chinese Dragon seems to be spewing various deadly viruses. It is essential for the World Health Organization to take timely notice of these recurring dangerous viruses emerging from China.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

MELANISTIC LEOPARD SPOTTED AGAIN

Madam — After a "melanistic leopard" was spotted in the forests near Odisha's Nayagarh, wildlife lovers are understandably euphoric. Over the last five years, various forests of the country have reported the sighting of "melanistic leopards." Black feline of the big cat family, with small head, a robust jaw and strong hind legs—that's the compact description of "panther" or "melanistic leopard." In India, dense forests of the southern part harbour the black beauty. The black cats love to live in dense evergreen forests so that they can, as far as possible, avoid light. A genetic mutation, dominant or recessive, causes an overexpression of melanin pigments resulting in the so-called 'melanistic leopard.' However, the joy of sighting the big cat should be tempered with sobriety. Some 15 variants of the black cats are endangered.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Embracing your unique journey to success

This year, let's shift our focus inward, honour our unique paths and recognise the triumphs that shape who we are

How often have you beaten yourself up saying you don't measure up to others in terms of skillsets and success? How often have you undervalued your accomplishments with a desultory wave of hand accompanied by a "Oh, this is something everyone does" or "I haven't done anything great"? Chances are that we have done it a greater number of times than what is good for our self-esteem and confidence. A student of mine recently approached me for a review of her college admission essay wherein she had not highlighted many of her strengths that could catch the attention of the admission officer. "Oh, ma'am, these are things everyone in our school does. This isn't anything extraordinary," she said. I sat her down and explained: "We aren't worried about what others are doing. Our focus should be on what we have done so far and how it has been of consequence to us and others." The biggest reason for our disenchantment with our lives in this pacy world is we often undermine our capabilities by trying to match them with



others and trying to be one up over the rest. As long as we keep looking at others, we shall never be able to make the cut, which is completing a task to the best of our abilities, putting forth the best of our ideas as they emerge in our intellect and assessing their value not in terms of where you stand or what your ranking is in comparison, but giving ourselves due credit for the distance we have come given our specific challenges in life. No victory is small. To the little boy participating in a sack race at school, winning it or making it to the other end without stumbling should be an accomplishment. To a student who successfully makes a presentation in class, the comfort that she feels standing in front of a class and speaking about what she believes in is a success. To

a speaker on the stage, the mere fact that she is doing something that many people dread to do and evokes a standing ovation is a matter of great pride. Every little step that takes us forward is significant, not when we think if we are unique by contrast with another, but by how far we have come from where we began. True growth is not a race gauged by how others are performing but by the milestones, we cross on our journeys. Our fixation with comparison often blinds us to our progress. The yardstick of success is never universal—what feels ordinary to one could be an extraordinary triumph for another. Yet, we diminish our efforts simply because they don't mirror someone else's. We forget that personal achievements, however modest they seem, are stepping stones to greater accomplishments. The courage someone musters to speak in public for the first time, or the quiet resilience it takes to rise from personal setbacks—these are victories. They may not be headline-worthy, but they carry profound significance in shaping

our character and our path forward. The mistake we often make is believing that success has a standard template. It doesn't. As we step into a new year, let us make a conscious choice—to shift the gaze inward, to honour our unique journeys, and to celebrate the progress we've made, however small it may appear. Let us define success not by comparisons but by the courage to keep going, the strength to rise after a fall, and the grace to applaud ourselves for showing up. You are enough. Your story matters. And your victories, no matter how quiet, deserve recognition. Here's to a year where we measure success by our growth, not by how we compare to others. Let those who conquer mountains do so with pride and let those who climb smaller hills find joy in reaching their summits. And for those who can climb neither—whether by circumstance or choice—let their strength shine in being the cheerleaders who uplift others on their journeys. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist, and writing coach and has published six books. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR





FIRST COLUMN

GOD IS THE SOLE CONTROLLER

Logic, practicality and experience point to the necessity of a singular, omnipotent force governing all



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Imagine there being more than one controller of the Creation. They disagree on some matters and are not able to resolve them. What kind of chaos will result? Therefore, there being more than one controller is illogical, impractical and unimaginable. And this reality rules out all small controllers, as we imagine ourselves to be. Don't we all feel that we control something or another? Do we? These examples should provide the answer. There is a huge corporation, which employs thousands of people worldwide. Its owner has a say over who is used and at what level.

This is fine till something like a COVID-19 pandemic hits. There are lockdowns, quarantines and other social restrictions. This affects the working of the corporation. What about the so-called controller? He is under quarantine. Another example is of a president of a big country. He is puffed up by the power he enjoys. Unfortunately, he is assassinated. The assassin had control over his life, and this assassin was hanged. Who controlled what?

Let me take a common household. The man of the house making most decisions about the household may feel that he is a controller. What happens when the lady of the house opposes him on some issue? Where did the control go? We must understand that making decisions is not controlling anything because that would require controlling results. A team leader can make decisions on behalf of his team but he, himself, is controlled by circumstances. The only entity, who can ensure some result every time is God only, and no one else, now or ever. Having understood that God is the whole and sole controller, let us



understand how He manages it. The control is exercised through the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is just and according to the highest religious principles ('with - the Bhagavad Geeta 18.78), which is 'dharma'. Briefly, it is 'what you sow is what you reap.' Isn't that fair? No one can complain, and no one escapes punishment either, death notwithstanding.

Many engage in wrongful acts hoping to get away from punishment from man-made laws, but in God's control, no one does. Similarly, rewards are forever coming, as decided by the Divine Authority, which works under the superintendence of God. Similarly, God has empowered the material nature to give birth to the world along with moving and stationary objects. And on account of this, the world goes on. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Questions are raised about God's fairness and the System set by Him not being just. It is not true, which will be clear from the following examples. How was Hiroshima wiped out? Why were so many women and children killed or maimed? Surely, many must have been innocent.

The answer is very simple. All those born there were destined to be hurt in that fashion. Only those, who had bad karmaphalas coming to fruition were born there. Doesn't the divine authority have control over who would be born where? They have complete control and they also know the future.

Accordingly, they manage the Creation. Another instance could be of an infant dying soon after birth. Could we know that this soul had punishment coming for the heinous crime he had committed in his previous life; he had forced his wife to abort because the child was a girl? I am speculating, but that could be a reason. All souls are relocated after death. Where they will go will depend on many factors. Only God knows!

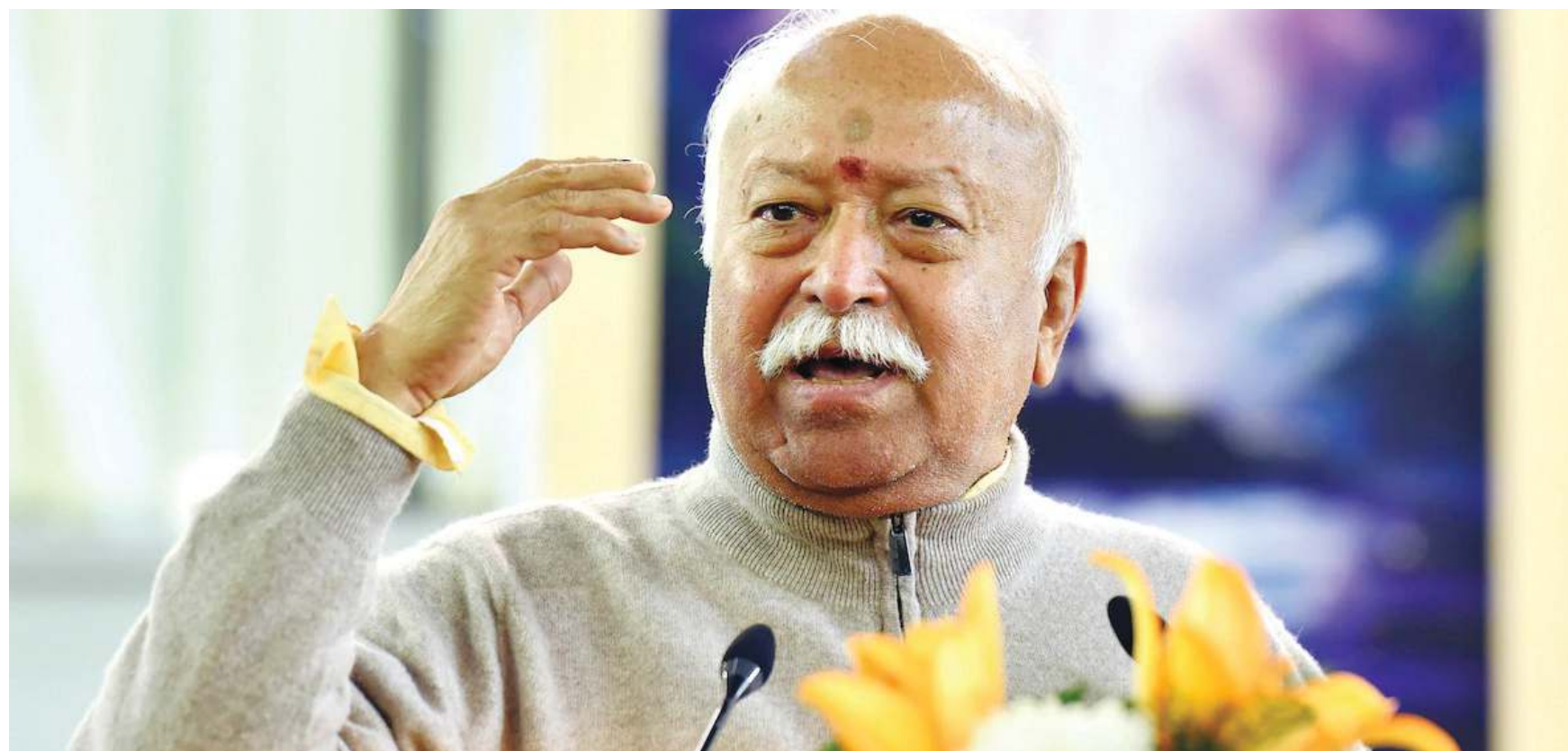
(The writer is a spiritual guide and teacher; views are personal)

Bhagwat champions unity as the path to India's Vishavguru vision



SUKHDEV SINGH

Highlighting the risks posed by divisive narratives such as 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes, Mohan Bhagwat stresses the importance of embracing India's pluralistic identity



Delivering a Sahjeevan Vyakhyannamala series lecture on the topic, India—the Vishavguru, the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat expressed his concern over the recent upsurge of 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and pointed out: "After Ram Mandir, some think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places". Rejecting the practice, he said, "This is not acceptable." Echoing his comment on Gyanvapi Masjid that "We look for a Shivaling beneath every mosque," implying that we should not, he cautioned: "The days of hegemony are gone," and that now "People choose their representatives, who run the government." Questioning the "language of dominance," he acknowledged the pluralistic nature of Indian society, where 'tradition' allows people to live in harmony while following their respective faiths. Drawing a comparison of India with the world, where similarity is the principle of unity, for India, he said, "Diversity is an ornament of unity, and we should respect and accept it." Rejecting hatred, malice, enmity, and suspicion daily under the burden of the past, he ruled out the 'majority-minority' binary and emphasised, "Everyone is equal here." To be a Vishavguru, India should be a nation of people who can rise above caste and religious differences. By what he has said, Bhagwat has targeted more than one point while acknowledging the reality of about 200 million Muslims besides the Christians, Sikhs, and others in India, on the one hand, and the geopolitical realities, on the other. If that is so, then the word 'Hindu' needs to be accepted as an Arabic-Persian cognate of the Sanskrit 'Sindu' and 'Hindustan' as a reference to the land of Hindus, i.e., the people living beyond the river Sindhu, but not a place of and for the people of a specific religion. The historical chronicles state that the river 'Sindu' was pronounced as 'Indus' by the Greeks



THE INDIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY WAS CODIFIED BY A SECTION OF PEOPLE AS A HINDU NATIONAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND AN ISLAMIC NATIONAL IDENTITY, DIVIDING THE PEOPLE ON RELIGIOUS LINES

and 'Al-Hind', which later became 'Hinds' or 'Hindus' by the Arabic Iranians.

The Greeks called 'the land of Indus' India, while the Arabic-speaking people called the region 'Hindustan.' It was a reference to the geographical region of old Punjab. The land of Hindus i.e. the people of river Sindhu, called Hindustan or India in the above sense, is a land of several religious faiths, such as Shaivism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, besides the principles of ancient Vedas and Puranas, and the word 'Hindu' has been a geographic and cultural identifier to distinguish between the indigenous people and others who came as traders or invaders, like Muslims, Christians, and Jews, etc., at the initial stages of their entry into the region; the distinction, however, did not mean religious opposition.

It only acted as an identifying communicative 'sign' for communication is organised on two axes: the axis of similarities and the axis of differences. The people from the 'other' lands gradually became the people of the land called Hindustan, or India, settling permanently and adding to the diversities on the land of the river Sindhu.

Since there is no definite founder and no single holy text to establish a religion called 'Hinduism,' it remains only a set of socio-cultural practices while the people practice a variety of their respective religious worship.

The words 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan' have remained signifiers for the geographic-cultural practices until projected as a religious and national identifier in

the early twentieth century in opposition to the colonial rule and in reaction to the Khilafat Movement by the Muslims in support of the Turkish Ottoman Sultan during the freedom movement of India.

The Indian national identity was codified by a section of people as a Hindu national religious identity and an Islamic national identity, dividing the people on religious lines. The division was perpetrated by the colonial British in more than one way, leading to the partition of India. Since 1947, free India has been a sovereign state nation, though it should have been a state of cultural nations politically united as a federal political state, settling the issue of religious nations forever. Yet India has stood the test of its unity in diversity with some collisions on the sidelines.

The internal dynamism of society and state is its continued collision and cohesion in their weaving: the more complex a society or a state is, the higher its level of collision-cohesion dynamics. For the well-being of the land and its population, the political drivers must turn the power to strengthen 'diversity' against the 'forced homogeneity' as a principle of organisation. But with the rising assertion of Hindu religious identity and a Hindu nation-state over Hindu geographic-cultural identity juxtaposing with the recent upsurge in 'Mandir-Masjid' controversies, rightly perceived by Mohan Bhagwat, the danger to the unity and cohesion is more imminent than not.

The sooner the ideologues of identities understand it, the better it is for the people living

together for centuries. Mohan Bhagwat seems to have realized it, and rightly so, he has underplayed the slogan—'one nation, one people'—stating, "Without Muslims, Hindutava is incomplete": Hindus and Muslims are different but complementary. Hindustan, or India, or Bharat, is a land of diversities, and only by choice of the ideology and practice of inclusion, it can become Vishavguru. To be the Vishavguru is to experience and accommodate more diversity. The Vishav, i.e., the universe, is organized into networks of similarities and differences, yet the precursor of life on earth is the 'difference' that engenders diversity.

Mohan Bhagwat's nuanced remarks underscore the importance of unity amidst diversity in India's journey toward becoming a Vishavguru. Acknowledging India's pluralistic fabric, he emphasised harmony over divisive narratives like 'Mandir-Masjid' disputes and rejected notions of religious hegemony. Bhagwat traced the historical and cultural origins of terms like 'Hindu' and 'Hindustan,' advocating for their geographic and cultural significance rather than a singular religious identity. He urged political and social leaders to strengthen diversity as a foundation for national cohesion. By embracing inclusion and mutual respect, India can truly embody the universal ideals required to be a global guide and leader.

(The writer is Professor (Retd), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Vice-Chairman, Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, New Delhi; views are personal)

The Bhagavad Gita: A blueprint for resilience, holistic health and leadership

From inspiring modern management practices to enriching prenatal care, the Gita's teachings resonate deeply in today's fast-paced world

The Bhagavad Gita is revered as a profound source of resilience, wisdom, and ethical guidance, often referred to as the essence of the Upanishads. Known as Brahmapitru or "Superior Knowledge," it offers timeless insights into life, existence, and cosmic truths. Despite being composed millennia ago, the Gita remains relevant today, providing practical teachings for navigating the complexities of modern life.

Its wisdom extends across diverse fields such as management, leadership, psychology, and medicine. For example, many prestigious

The Relevance of Beeja Sanskara and Garbha Sanskara
A lesser-known yet significant



KASHINATH SAMAGANDI

aspect of the Gita is its emphasis on Beeja Sanskara (pre-conception practices) and Garbha Sanskara (post-conception practices). Through the concept of Atmaja Bhava, it highlights a deep connection with the unborn child. These practices, rooted in Ayurveda and

Yoga, nurture wisdom, emotional stability, and virtuous qualities in the foetus, fostering holistic development. The scripture also underscores the importance of Satvika Ahara—a pure, balanced diet. During pregnancy, this diet not only supports the physical health of the mother and foetus but also nurtures emotional and spiritual harmony, laying the foundation for a well-rounded individual.

Resilience, Energy and Cosmic Balance
Rather than considering the Gita as the book of any person, caste, creed, country or religion, it is a guide to one's own personal, mental, social, and spiritual resilience and adaptability. Its teachings on perseverance, balance, and inner

strength resonate deeply with those facing modern challenges. The Gita's perspective on energy and cosmic balance aligns with contemporary scientific principles.

Ayurvedic Insights on Foetal Development

The Gita's teachings influence Ayurvedic principles, particularly in prenatal care. It identifies six essential Bhavas contributing to foetal development: Matruja Bhava (mother's qualities) Pitruja Bhava (father's qualities) Atmaja Bhava (soul connection) Satvya Bhava (compatibility) Rasaja Bhava (nutrition) Satvaja Bhava (mental stability) These emphasise the importance of parental health, nutrition, emotional well-being, and spiritual align-



ment in shaping the child's future. Such principles form the core of Garbha Sanskara practices, increasingly recognised in modern prenatal care for their holistic approach.

The Balanced Mind: Sthitaprajna
One of the Gita's most profound teachings is the concept of Sthitaprajna. This idea of remaining unaffected

by success or failure, challenges or triumphs, is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced world. Cultivating such equanimity fosters mental resilience and emotional stability, enabling individuals to navigate life's ups and downs with composure.

Holistic Health Through Integration

The Gita advocates an integrated approach to Ahar (diet), Vihar (lifestyle), Nidra (sleep), Achar (conduct), and Vichar (thoughts). These elements must work cohesively to promote comprehensive health and wellness. This holistic philosophy supports inter-science and intra-science integration in medicine. Intra-science integration ensures that all aspects of a medical system

work together to manage chronic conditions effectively, while inter-science integration leverages the strengths of multiple systems for optimal care. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing both acute and chronic conditions.

Holistic Development and Liberation: The Gita offers a roadmap for holistic self-development, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual growth.

Its teachings on Dharma (duty), Karma (action), and Bhakti (devotion) provide practical guidance for leading a purposeful and ethical life. Moreover, the Gita provides insights into personal development, emotional mastery, and the attainment of Moksha (liberation).

Its universal principles resonate across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and leadership, offering a framework for self-realisation and collective well-being. In conclusion, the enduring relevance of the Bhagavad Gita lies in its universal message of harmony, balance, and self-awareness. It inspires individuals and societies towards holistic growth and ethical living. Whether guiding inner conflicts or addressing societal complexities, the Gita remains an effective tool for achieving balance, resilience, and self-mastery in an ever-changing world.

(The author is Director of the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS



OfBusiness to ramp up steel biz

OfBusiness, a b2b commerce and fintech startup, is looking to invest about Rs 3,000 crore into doubling its steel business to more than 4MTPA in the next three years. The company has acquired three steel firms -- SMW Ispat, Shree Sidhbal Ispat and Noble Steel -- in the past and the expansion is lined up in all the three companies. "We are looking forward to investing close to USD 350 million, about Rs 3,000 crore, to scale up our steel business from the current 2 million tonne to more than 4 million tonne in the next 3 years. This is also expected to sharply increase the sector EBITDA to 2.5x from the current level. The funding will be a combination of internal accruals and debt & equity financing," Co-Founder and CEO Ashish Mohapatra said. The company supplies steel to companies such as L&T, Adani, J Kumar, Dilip Buildcon, Ashoka Buildcon. OfBusiness also plans to get into new categories such as pre-painted galvanised iron (PPGI) adding onto thermo-mechanically treated (TMT) bars and structures. The company is also planning a USD 1 billion IPO in FY26. "We have been continuously thriving for expansion of our business and be part of India's tremendous growth journey of USD 10 trillion economy. To support our expansion plans we are looking forward to our USD 1 billion IPO in FY2026," Mohapatra said.



Karur Vysya Bank adds two more branches in TN

Private sector Karur Vysya Bank has inaugurated two more branches, taking the overall branch network to 475 in Tamil Nadu, the bank said on Sunday. The Tamil Nadu-based bank inaugurated two branches, one each in Chennai and the other at Tiruchirappalli. According to a press release, during the current financial year, the company has added 28 new branches, taking the overall presence of the banking network to 866 across the country. The new branches would provide basic banking transactions and would also address the specific needs of customers. It would also provide banking and financial services covering retail, institutional and consumer lending. As on September 30, 2024, the bank's total business stood at Rs 1,76,138 crore with a deposit base of Rs 95,839 crore and advances at Rs 80,299 crore. In the last financial year, the bank recorded its highest net profit of Rs 1,605 crore, the release added.



ICAR urges Modi to appoint visionary chief

A member of the country's top agricultural research body ICAR on Sunday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to appoint a new director general with global expertise to revitalise the organisation ahead of the current chief's retirement next month. Venuogopal Badaravada, a member of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's (ICAR) Governing Body, said the leadership transition presents an opportunity to reform the organisation amid allegations of corruption, nepotism and recruitment irregularities. The current Director General Himanshu Pathak is set to retire in February. Badaravada urged bringing in leadership from outside ICAR to drive systemic reforms and enhance transparency. In a statement, Badaravada, who has served on advisory panels for national livestock and cattle breeding missions, requested to join the search committee for the new director general. He criticised ICAR's "leadership gaps and strategic oversight" since 2014, saying the body has focused heavily on rice cultivation while neglecting pulses, oilseeds and indigenous crop varieties crucial for food security and self-sufficiency.

FDI in India growing rapidly, says Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

FDI inflows into the country are surging, with investors from the Middle East, Japan, European Union, and the US recognising India's status as a top investment destination, driving rapid economic growth and generating millions of new jobs, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

He said that global investors are showing keen interest in India as the country offers several advantages such as strong domestic market, skilled and talented workforce and rule of law.

"I can clearly see FDI (foreign direct investment) in India once again growing rapidly and creating millions of jobs. Countries in the Middle East, EFTA region, Japan, and investors from the EU and the US are all realising that India continues to be the most preferred destination for FDI," Goyal said.

He added that India's stable and predictable regulatory framework, coupled with a favourable business environment and progressive policies aimed at enhancing ease of doing business, is attracting an increasing number of investors from around the world.

"Last month I met a CEO of one of the largest funds in the



"I can clearly see FDI (foreign direct investment) in India once again growing rapidly and creating millions of jobs. Countries in the Middle East, EFTA region, Japan, and investors from the EU and the US are all realising that India continues to be the most preferred destination for FDI," Goyal said.

US, who is also the largest investor in India, and he shared with me that his investments in India over the last 10 years have been some of the best investments his funds have ever done," he noted.

The US fund, Goyal said, informed him that they are investors in India for the last 20 years, but more than 80 per cent of their investments happened in the last few years.

"The CEO told me that he will be coming to India to celebrate 20 years of investing in India by announcing a further tranche of investments in India," he said.

The healthy performance of the Indian stock market will also attract more and more FIIs (foreign institutional investors), the minister said.

India is averaging over USD 4.5 billion in monthly foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows since January this year despite global uncertainties and challenges

Govt to launch another round of PLI scheme for steel sector

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will launch another round of production-linked incentive scheme for the steel sector on Monday.

The 'PLI scheme 1.1' will be launched by the steel minister H D Kumaraswamy.

"Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries...will launch 'PLI scheme 1.1' for the steel industry and call for applications...on January 6," the steel ministry said in a statement.

To encourage domestic production of specialty steel and lower imports by drawing in capital investments, the government had earlier introduced the PLI scheme for specialty steel.

The scheme has attracted investments worth Rs 27,106 crore, envisaging creation of 14,760 direct employment opportunities with an estimated production of 7.90 million tonnes of specialty steel.



As of November 2024, companies have already invested Rs 18,300 crore and generated over 8,660 in employment.

The government has been interacting regularly with the participating companies and based on feedback, it was felt that there was a scope to notify the scheme again to attract more participation, the statement said.

The concept of Production-Linked Incentives (PLI) was

conceived during the Covid-induced global lockdowns of 2020, emphasising the need to boost domestic manufacturing.

Initially launched for three sectors, the PLI scheme was later extended to include steel in November 2020.

The government had earlier said that it is working on another round of the PLI scheme for specialty steel as the response for the first round of the initiative did not meet expectations.

Global trends, earnings major drivers for markets: Analysts



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Equity markets this week will take cues from global trends, trading activity of foreign investors and quarterly earnings, with TCS kick-starting the results calendar on Thursday, analysts said.

Macroeconomic data announcements and the rupee-dollar trend would also dictate market trends, experts noted.

The Q3 FY25 earnings season will begin this week, with IT giants and leading financial institutions set to announce their results. TCS and Tata Elxsi will declare results on Thursday, January 9, 2025. Investors will closely monitor individual stock performances.

"Following the earnings season, markets focus is expected to shift towards the upcoming Union Budget and the policy decisions of the Trump 2.0 administration," Pravech Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been net sellers, while domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have been active buyers. This ongoing tug-of-war between FIIs and DIIs is likely to play a crucial role in determining the direction of the market this week, he added.

Indian-origin tech firms corner 1/5th of H1B visas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian-origin tech companies cornered a fifth of all H1B visas issued by the US with Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services leading the pack, an analysis of data from the US immigration department showed.

According to data from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, in April-September 2024 period, out of the total 1.3 lakh H1B visas issued to different employers, about 24,766 visas were issued to Indian-origin companies.

Out of these, Infosys took the lead with 8,140 beneficiaries, followed by TCS (5,274), and HCL America (2,953). Infosys came second to only Amazon Com Services LLC, which topped with 9,265 visas.

Cognizant, which was founded in Chennai but now has headquarters in New Jersey, ranked third in the list with 6,321 visas.

The H1B visa programme allows US companies to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty occupations. Indian companies have been significant beneficiaries of this programme, particularly in the technology sector.

Major Indian IT services firms such as Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, Wipro, and HCL Technologies have consistently ranked among the top employers for H1B visa holders. Wipro was lower down this time with 1,634 visa grants. Tech Mahindra stood close by, having been issued 1,199 visas.

While these companies continue to benefit from the programme, ongoing developments indicate a need for adaptation in response to regulatory changes and public sentiment. The future of the H1B visa will likely depend on balancing the needs of the US businesses for skilled labour with broader immigration policy reforms.

Post-Adani exit, Wilmar to emulate ITC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Wilmar Ltd (AWL), India's largest edible oil company, is adopting a strategy similar to ITC's by leveraging its core business and extensive distribution network to drive growth in its high-margin FMCG portfolio after the Adani group exit, according to sources.

Just as ITC used its strong cigarette business to expand into FMCG, AWL is set to use its dominant edible oil business as a foundation for FMCG growth.

Following the exit of the Adani Group, Wilmar may further capitalise on this approach by introducing more global FMCG brands into the Indian market, sources aware of the matter said.

In the December quarter, AWL's FMCG business achieved a 24 per cent year-on-year growth in volume, underscoring its efforts to expand both its food and FMCG product offerings.

FMCG makers expect inflation to hit volume growth, operating profit



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hit by inflation, higher input costs and pricing measures, fast-moving consumer goods companies are expected to see a contraction in their gross margin and a modest-to-flat operating profit in the October-December quarter.

Several FMCG makers are likely to log a low single-digit rise in their revenue, returning to the cycle of value-driven growth.

One of the reasons could be that a number of companies have opted for a price hike in the December quarter due to rising costs of input items such as copra, vegetable oil, and palm oil.

Home-grown firm Dabur expects a "low single-digit growth" in the December quarter along with a "flattish operating profit" as it faced inflationary headwinds in some of the segments.

FPIs withdraw Rs 4,285 cr amid global headwinds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors pulled out Rs 4,285 crore from Indian equities in the first three trading days of the month driven by apprehensions ahead of the third-quarter earnings season and high valuations of domestic stocks.

This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the entire December, data with the depositories showed.

The shift in sentiment comes amid global and domestic headwinds.

"FPIs are likely to continue selling as long as the dollar remains strong and US bond yields offer attractive returns. The dollar index at around 109 and the 10-year bond yield above 4.5 per cent are significant



deterrents to FPI flows," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 4,285 crore from Indian equities in the first three trading sessions of the month (January 1 to 3).

The uncertainty among foreign investors is reflected in the ongoing trend of outflows.

Comm min to discuss ways to boost exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials from the commerce ministry, and commercial wings of Indian Missions of 20 countries will hold a three-day meet, beginning here on Monday, to discuss ways to promote exports of goods and services, an official said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will also interact with these commercial representatives on January 6.

The issues, that would come up during the three-day celebration included opportunities and challenges and the way ahead in six focus sectors (of goods and services each) in 20 countries of significance; non-tariff barriers; logistics; WTO (World Trade Organisation) matters; and role and importance of MAI (market access initiative), the official said.



The commerce ministry is in the process of formulating a strategy to push exports of six key product categories, including engineering goods and electronics, to 20 focus countries, including the US, Australia, France, China, Russia, the UK, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia.

These countries, including the US and the European Union nations, account for a major chunk of India's total exports.

Besides Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal, Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and

Internal Trade (DPIIT) Amardeep Singh Bhatia would also address the officials.

After recording double-digit growth in October 2024, India's exports in November contracted 4.85 per cent year-on-year to USD 32.11 billion, while the trade deficit widened to an all-time high of USD 37.84 billion due to record surge in gold imports.

According to the commerce ministry data, imports rose 27 per cent year-on-year to a record USD 69.95 billion in November due to high inbound shipments of vegetable oil, fertiliser, and silver.

Cumulatively, during April-November this fiscal year, exports increased 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion and imports by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion.

CII suggests seven-point agenda for employment generation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming annual budget for FY26 could announce further measures to boost employment generation, CII said on Sunday, emphasising that job creation at a mass scale is important to engage the young population productively, and drive inclusive growth in the world's most populous nation.

The industry body has suggested a seven-point agenda to harness India's demographic dividend, including an integrated national employment policy, support to labour-intensive sectors, and setting up an international mobility authority, among other targeted measures.

With a median age of just 29 years, India is a young country, and is set to add 133 million people to its working-age population by 2050.

The government could consider launching an internship programme in government offices in rural areas for the col-



lege-educated youth, CII said.

It argued that this initiative would create short-term employment opportunities in government offices while bridging the gap between education and professional skills.

The programme would also help augment the available manpower resources for the effective implementation of various rural programmes and government initiatives.

CII has also proposed introducing a new provision under

income tax rule in lieu of Section 80J(AA) to encourage new employment. The new provision should continue as Chapter VIA deduction from gross total income, which is available even if a taxpayer opts for concessional tax regime.

It has proposed an integrated national employment policy which could subsume under its ambit the slew of employment generating schemes currently in works by various ministries/states.

Govt should lower GST on cement at 18 pc: JK Lakshmi

PNS ■ PATNA

The government should reduce GST on cement to 18 per cent from 28 per cent and take some policy measures in the upcoming Budget to boost consumption of this key building material, a senior official of JK Lakshmi Cement said.

In an interview with PTI, Arun Shukla, President and Director of JK Lakshmi

Cement, said there is a case to increase cement manufacturing capacity in India to meet the rising demand, which is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 7-8 per cent.

"One of the long-cherished dream, or the wish for us, has been reducing GST on cement," Shukla told PTI on the sidelines of Bihar Business Connect 2024 meet held here recently.



AKSHAY KUMAR TALKS SLUMPS, HARD WORK & PURSUING DIVERSE ROLES

Akshay Kumar on Sunday said that his 33-year career has been all about working hard and the Bollywood star aims to break his dry spell at the box office by continuing to do exactly that. Most of his last releases, including 2024's line-up *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, *Sarfra* and *Khel Khel Mein*, didn't do well at the ticket window. *Stree 2* and *Singham Again*, which featured the actor in a special appearance, were exceptions.

Akshay, who will next be seen playing an Indian Air Force officer in the upcoming film *Sky Force*, said that he has witnessed a slump many times in his career.

"It's not that it has happened for the first time. The best part is you keep on working hard. That is what I tell myself. If anyone talks to me about it, I say the same thing that you have to keep working hard," the actor told reporters at the trailer launch of *Sky Force*.

Akshay said many people advise him to do "one film or maximum two films" in a year.

"... But I say if I can work, then why not? I have based my entire career on that. Many people have told me not to do content-based films, but I don't want to leave that. I want to keep working on different kinds of films," he added.

Meanwhile, the *Airlift* actor also revealed that some have advised him to stop making content-driven films, but he remains firm in his resolve to continue pursuing such roles. "I don't want to stop. I want to do these kinds of films as well as others. I am very proud that I made the film *Sarfra*, even though it didn't work."

Lakshya to take on new challenges with Hansal Mehta's action film

Lakshya, who made a memorable Bollywood debut with Nikhil Nagesh Bhat's action thriller *Kill*, is reportedly gearing up for another thrilling role in a new action-packed film. After receiving praise for his impressive performance in *Kill*, which was backed by renowned producers Karan Johar and Guneet Monga, the young actor is set to take on yet another exciting project.

Sources suggest that Lakshya is in talks to star in the upcoming action film directed by filmmaker Hansal Mehta, known for his socially relevant stories and hard-hitting biopics. This marks an intriguing departure for Mehta, who is said to be exploring the action genre for the first time. According to an insider, the director is enthusiastic about venturing into new territory with this project, which is expected to be released in theatres.

The film is still in the casting phase, but the makers are reportedly eager to have Lakshya onboard as the lead actor. The source highlighted that Lakshya demonstrated both his acting range and action prowess in *Kill*, making him a natural fit for the role. Hansal Mehta, known for discovering and nurturing fresh talent, has a track record of bringing out stellar performances from new faces and it seems he has high hopes for Lakshya's involvement in this action-packed venture. While discussions with the actor are ongoing, no official confirmation has been made yet.

In addition to his potential collaboration with Hansal Mehta, Lakshya will also be seen in the highly anticipated web series *Stardom*, directed by Aryan Khan, the son of Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan. The series is expected to offer a glimpse into the glitzy world of Bollywood and Lakshya's role is expected to draw significant attention.



Rasha dazzles with her jaw-dropping dance in Uyi Amma

The *Uyi Amma* song from the much-anticipated Aazad has arrived, adding an electrifying vibe to the season with its upbeat and catchy rhythm. This special dance number, featuring debutants Rasha Thadani and Aaman Devgan, marks a stellar collaboration under the direction of Abhishek Kapoor, promising to be the ultimate party anthem for the weekend. The track immerses audiences in a world of vibrant energy, setting the stage on fire with Rasha Thadani's dynamic dance moves and undeniable chemistry with co-star Aaman Devgan. Their performances bring the song's electrifying essence to life, ensuring it becomes a highlight for any celebration.

Composed by the talented Amit Trivedi, *Uyi Amma* sees another collaboration between the music maestro and director Abhishek Kapoor. The track is sung by Madhubanti Bagchi, with the lyrics penned by the renowned Amitabh Bhattacharya. The choreography, which promises to be as memorable as the music itself, is handled by Bosco Leslie Martis, making it a true spectacle.

With its infectious energy and captivating performances, *Uyi Amma* is poised to take over the hearts of millions and dominate the dance floors.



Shahid Kapoor turns up the heat in Deva

The much-awaited teaser for *Deva*, starring Shahid Kapoor, has finally dropped, creating a buzz among fans and moviegoers alike. Produced by Zee Studios and Roy Kapur Films, this action-packed thriller promises to be an electrifying cinematic experience and the teaser has only intensified the excitement.

Following the release of two visually striking posters, which introduced viewers to the intense world of *Deva*, the teaser gives fans an even closer look at the film's electrifying action sequences.

Shahid Kapoor's fierce and commanding presence in the footage has already set the stage for an action-packed rollercoaster.

The teaser, coupled with a Grand Fan Event, has truly heightened the anticipation for the film. Fans flocked to the event in large numbers, where Shahid Kapoor personally interacted with them. The actor expressed his gratitude for their unwavering support and shared his excitement for the upcoming project. The event offered an emotional connection between Shahid and his fans, further amplifying the buzz around *Deva*.

Shahid Kapoor is no stranger to versatility in his acting and with *Deva*, he's set to push the boundaries even further. The

teaser showcases his intense avatar, where he seamlessly blends jaw-dropping action with graceful dance moves. Whether it's high-speed chases, explosive fight sequences, or fluid dance performances, Kapoor's dedication to the role is evident in every frame. The juxtaposition of raw, unfiltered action and his nimble footwork offers a refreshing take on the action genre.

The film also appears to pay homage to Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan's enduring legacy, with Shahid embodying that powerful aura in a contemporary and fresh new way.

Directed by the celebrated Malayalam filmmaker Rosshan Andrews, *Deva* is set to break new ground in the action-thriller genre. Andrews, known for his innovative storytelling, brings his unique style to the film, ensuring that *Deva* will be an unforgettable experience.

Produced by Zee Studios and Roy Kapur Films, *Deva* is an explosive and high-octane action thriller that will make its theatrical debut on January 31, 2025. With Shahid Kapoor at the helm, this film is poised to captivate audiences with its thrilling narrative, intense action, and stunning visuals.

Fans are eagerly awaiting the film's release, and based on the teaser, *Deva* is shaping up to be a must-watch blockbuster.



Himesh Reshammiya takes on bad guys with Animal-like fury



Himesh Reshammiya is back in action, and this time he's returning to his iconic role as Ravi Kumar in the trailer for *Badass Ravi Kumar*. This new film, a part of the same universe as his 2014 period thriller *The Xposed*, promises to take audiences on a thrilling ride filled with 1980s Bollywood nostalgia and intense action.

Much like his 2008 remake of Subhash Ghai's *Karz*, which itself was an homage to the reincarnation saga genre, *Badass Ravi Kumar* brings another engaging love triangle to the forefront. The film features an intriguing love triangle that sees Ravi Kumar caught between two very different women. On one side is Hansika Motwani, who previously starred alongside Himesh in his acting debut *Aap Ka Surroor* (2007). On the other side is Kirti Kulhari, known for her roles in *Pink*, *Mission Mangal* and *Four More Shots Please*. Kulhari's character takes on

a retro vamp persona reminiscent of Simi Garewal's iconic role in *Karz*, commanding Ravi Kumar to steal a fiercely guarded necklace for her. The trailer showcases Himesh's character diving into action with a brutal intensity, amping up the stakes in ways reminiscent of Sandeep Reddy Vanga's 2023 blockbuster *Animal*. In one standout scene, Ravi Kumar wields a chainsaw, literally disassembling his enemies in a fierce, no-holds-barred sequence. It's a level of action that seems to take the genre to new heights and fans can expect plenty of jaw-dropping moments.

The dialogues in *Badass Ravi Kumar* are delivered with a raw power that fans of 1980s Bollywood films will surely appreciate. Written by Bunty Rathore, the film is filled with punchlines that echo the larger-than-life dialogues of the era. These sharp, witty lines promise to make Ravi Kumar an unforgettable character, giving fans a nostalgic yet refreshing dose of the kind of bold, fearless dialogue writing that defined many action films of the 1980s.

Badass Ravi Kumar boasts an ensemble cast that includes Johnny Lever, Sanjay Mishra and Prabhu Deva, adding comedic and dramatic flair to the action-packed narrative. Produced by Himesh Reshammiya Melodies, the film promises to be an action-packed, fun-filled ride that will leave audiences at the edge of their seats. Set to blend nostalgia with new-age thrills, *Badass Ravi Kumar* is sure to appeal to both fans of 1980s cinema and contemporary action movie lovers.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



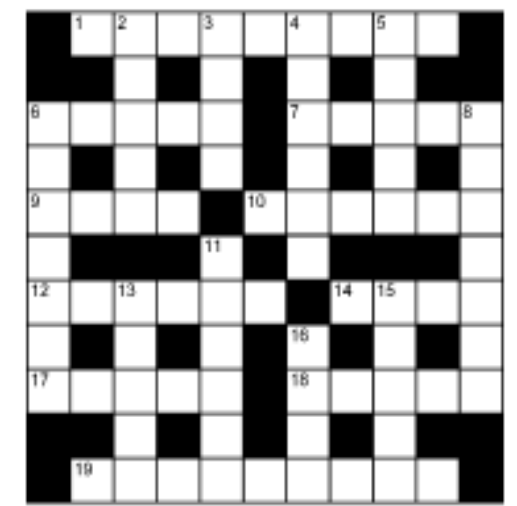
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- Carried on
- A person who decides who wins a competition
- A large stream
- A very small living thing that makes people ill
- Overtakes
- Reply
- Short skirt
- Rescued
- A smelly vegetable
- In poor health

DOWN

- Of greater age
- Things on your feet
- Norwegians live here
- Pixies
- Puzzles with many pieces that make up a picture
- From Russia
- Sew with this
- One third of twenty-one
- From Ireland
- A hard black fuel

SOLUTION

W	H	I	T	E	S	P	A	S
P	L	A	N	E	S	P	I	N
A	T	H	E	R	S	P	I	N
C	R	I	C	H	E	S	S	E
C	R	O	S	S	E	S	S	E
C	R	O	S	S	E	S	S	E
C	R	O	S	S	E	S	S	E
C	R	O	S	S	E	S	S	E
C	R	O	S	S	E	S	S	E

DIFFICULTY RATINGS: ★★☆☆☆

'I'VE BEEN CRAVING A FRESH CHALLENGE; GREATEST OF ALL TRIPS OFFERS JUST THAT'

TEJAL SINHA
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Life has taken a thrilling turn for Pema Leilani after her stint on *Splitsville*, a name synonymous with charm and determination is taking her vibrant personality to new heights with her latest project, *Greatest Of All Trips*. After winning hearts on *Splitsville*, Pema is now ready to dive into an adrenaline-filled adventure on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi. Reflecting on her journey since *Splitsville*, she shares, "The end of *Splitsville* wasn't really an end for me—it was the beginning of something bigger. It opened doors for me to do what I truly love—creating content for a wider audience, traveling to breathtaking places and collaborating with brands I've always admired."

The post-*Splitsville* phase of her life has been nothing short of transformative. Pema has successfully turned her passions into reality, building a fulfilling career that resonates deeply with her audience. "It's incredibly rewarding to share my adventures and connect with people who love what I do. That's what keeps me going," she says.

The excitement in her voice is palpable as she talks about Yas Island, the setting for *Greatest Of All Trips*. Known for its high-energy theme parks and thrilling activities, it's a perfect match for Pema's adventurous spirit. "As an adrenaline junkie, Yas Island is my dream destination. From heart-pumping

rides to exhilarating experiences, I can't wait to immerse myself in everything the island has to offer. It's going to be one wild ride, and I'm so here for it."

The show itself captivated Pema with its unique concept and the opportunity to explore something entirely new. "I've been craving a fresh challenge and *Greatest Of All Trips* offers just that. What really drew me in was the adventure factor—getting to explore Yas Island and its amazing attractions. It's the perfect combination of fun, competition and discovery."

But it wasn't just the setting that intrigued her. The chance to work with 30 talented creators from various fields added another layer of excitement. "Imagine being surrounded by individuals who are experts in fashion, fitness, dance and so much more," she says. "It's a chance to learn, collaborate and grow, even as we compete. That kind of creative energy is something I thrive on."

Pema's decision to join the show wasn't made lightly. After years in familiar formats like *Splitsville* and *Roadies*, she was eager to break out of the mold. "I felt like I needed a change, something that would challenge me in a completely new way. This show stood out to me because it's so different from anything I've done before. Plus, it's a solo journey—no need to strategise about alliances or connections. It's just me, giving it my all."

Speaking of her strategy, Pema believes in staying authentic. "I'm not here to play mind games or be someone I'm not. My plan is sim-

ple—be myself and give 100%. I did that on *Splitsville* and I'm proud of how I stayed true to who I am. That's the approach I'm bringing to this show too."

Transitioning from the love-centered dynamics of *Splitsville* to the action-packed competition of *Greatest Of All Trips* has been an exciting shift for Pema. "While *Splitsville* was about love and connections, it was also a game show at heart. But this is different. It's purely about personal performance and I'm thrilled to focus entirely on my strengths," she says.

Beyond the competition, Pema is eager to connect with her fellow contestants and build lasting memories. "I'm really looking forward to meeting creators from different backgrounds and learning from their experiences," she shares. "And of course, exploring Yas Island is going to be a highlight. Ferrari World, in particular, is something I've always wanted to experience. It's like a dream coming true."

As she gears up for this new chapter, her excitement is contagious. Whether it's navigating thrilling rides, forming new friendships, or taking on exciting challenges, she's ready to make the most of every moment. "This isn't just a show for me—it's an adventure, a learning experience, and an opportunity to push myself beyond my limits," she concludes with a smile.

With her infectious enthusiasm and unwavering authenticity, Pema Leilani is all set to turn *Greatest Of All Trips* into an unforgettable journey, not just for herself but for everyone who tunes in.



Pema Leilani, the charismatic star known for her stint on *Splitsville*, embarked on an exhilarating new journey with *Greatest Of All Trips*. Set against the vibrant backdrop of Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, this adventure-filled show promises to be a perfect fit for the adrenaline junkie and travel enthusiast in her. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Pema opens up about her transformative post-*Splitsville* journey, the thrill of competing with diverse creators

THE END OF SPLITSVILLE WASN'T REALLY AN END FOR ME—IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BIGGER. IT OPENED DOORS FOR ME TO DO WHAT I TRULY LOVE—CREATING CONTENT FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE, TRAVELING TO BREATHTAKING PLACES AND COLLABORATING WITH BRANDS I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRIED

ANSHUMAAN PUSHKAR ON MOONWALK

'I wasn't the first choice, but it turned out to be a blast'

VAISHNAVI TIKKA
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Anshumaan Pushkar is a talented Indian actor making waves in the world of web series. He has impressed audiences with his strong performances in shows like *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* and *Kathmandu Connection*. However, it was his role in the historical crime drama *Grahan* that truly showcased his acting prowess. Pushkar's ability to portray characters from different backgrounds and time periods is remarkable. He brings depth and emotion to his roles, making them believable and relatable. As he continues working on new projects, fans can look forward to seeing even more incredible performances from this rising star.

In this conversation with *The Pioneer*, the actor shared details about his journey and struggles to become an actor. He also spoke about his experience working on *Moonwalk*, how much fun he had during the shoot, and the nuances of portraying Tarik Pandey in the series.

Talking about his journey, he said it was always a dream to become an actor, but initially, he doubted his own abilities. "It was a dream to become an actor, but after giving a few auditions, I realised I wasn't very good at it. Then I started doing theatre in Mumbai for 6 to 7 years to improve myself," he revealed.

The *Grahan* star mentioned that finding opportunities wasn't easy despite having considerable talent. However, he maintained a hopeful outlook: "I did a few small roles in serials, but I didn't get any breakthrough roles. Still, I believe in destiny and never lose hope."

His first significant breakthrough came with *Jamtara*, an Indian crime drama television series.

He shared how his situation transformed during the lockdown when he received positive recognition for his acting in *Grahan*. "Once the lockdown began, I found myself doing nothing until I got the opportunity to work on *Grahan*, which is a series based on a novel. I received a lot of appreciation from the public and everyone involved."

Pushkar began gaining recognition along with better opportunities. "I started receiving great offers. I played a pivotal role in *12th Fail*, followed by *Kathmandu Connection*. I can't say it was a smooth ride, but the industry is appreciating my work and everything I've done," he added.

When discussing how roles are chosen in the industry, he said, "You don't really get to choose what you want to play; the makers pick the actors. As someone starting out, I didn't really have the choice to pick my roles. In this business, it's more about the industry choosing you rather than you picking what you want." *Moonwalk* is a



ANSHUMAAN PUSHKAR, THE RISING STAR OF THE INDIAN WEB SERIES, IN AN INTERACTION WITH *THE PIONEER*, OPENED UP ABOUT HIS INSPIRING JOURNEY IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, CHALLENGES, AND THE JOY OF STEPPING INTO DIVERSE ROLES, HIS LATEST PROJECT *MOONWALK* AND MORE

Hindi comedy series that premiered on December 20, 2024 on JioCinema. The series is set in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh and follows two rival thieves, Tarik Pandey (Anshumaan Pushkar) and Maddy Kapoor (Samir Kochhar), competing for the affection of Chandni Lakhani (Nidhi Singh). Chandni challenges them to steal the most valuable item for her, resulting in a series of comedic heists.

Additionally, a local gangster and his son plot to steal a fallen piece of the Moon, hoping to gain immense wealth. Pushkar explained that he wasn't the first choice for *Moonwalk* but ultimately landed the role after filming had already begun. "I wasn't the primary choice for the makers of *Moonwalk* at first. I was on a vacation when I suddenly received a call from the casting team saying they had a script and wanted me to come for a narration. They informed me that I was selected for the role. I was given only a day to decide whether or not I would take it. After reviewing the script, I said yes."

The *Country Mafia* fame credited director Ajay Bhuyan for making the process easier. "Working with a supportive director makes the work much easier. Director Ajay Bhuyan was very helpful in explaining the script and encouraging spontaneity on set," he emphasised. He also shared how unprepared he felt while working on the project, but his co-actors and the director provided invaluable support. "I was on set without any preparation or script in hand. I had many questions in my mind about whether I could pull it off or not. Fortunately, all my co-actors and the director were very supportive and understanding."

Pushkar further described his character, Tarik Pandey: "This character, Tarik Pandey, is a thief, but he doesn't see himself that way. His main priority is to master everything he does and ultimately become a master himself. He is also very emotional about his family and friends and exhibits innocent, childish behaviour. I connected with his innocence and felt that I share similar traits in my personal relationships. To embody this role, I had to bring out the child within me. I believe a character like this doesn't require much preparation. I had a blast on set playing this role."

In conclusion, Pushkar mentioned that he has been working on new projects recently and is enthusiastic about entertaining people.

Restoring habitats for migratory species

The Greater Flamingo traveling from Flamingo City, the Asian Koel from Singapore and the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater from Africa and Europe, to India's peninsular regions are just a few examples of migratory birds India welcomes annually. Unfortunately, alongside the global decline in migratory bird populations, India has seen a major decrease in the number of species visiting annually, primarily due to habitat loss.

For instance, the wetlands of Chilakapalem village in Andhra Pradesh, which once served as a crucial feeding and stopover site for passage migrants heading further south, have faced significant threats. Deforestation, wetland drainage and intensive agriculture have all contributed to this decline.

However, recent efforts at Chilakapalem have sparked a positive change, providing a model that can be adopted by other wetland regions in India. A large-scale afforestation initiative has rejuvenated the area and offered hope for these remarkable birds. Social enterprise Grow-Trees.com has initiated the Trees for Migratory Birds project, under which 15,000 saplings are set to be planted around the waterbody in Chilakapalem. Of this total target, nearly 7,000 saplings have already been planted.

"International agencies like the UN have enforced several treaties to conserve migratory birds. India plays a key role in these efforts through nationwide programmes under the government. As a social enterprise, our focus is to support regions facing severe habitat loss by planting saplings. At Chilakapalem,

the emphasis was on migratory bird populations and wetland preservation," says Pradip Shah, co-founder of Grow-Trees.com.

Accordingly, the tree species for the initiative were carefully selected to achieve local species such as Neem and Jamun, whose fruits are consumed by frugivorous birds, as well as Pongam (Karanj) and Indian Tulip.

The project also provides meaningful employment opportunities for local communities by engaging them in every stage of the plantation process.

"This project has been truly beneficial to our community. It has helped restore important habitats for various bird species and created job opportunities for local families to earn a living. Seeing our community, especially the women, actively involved in planting and caring for the trees is very inspiring. It's wonderful to know that this initiative will continue to benefit us for many years," says Donka Adilaxmi, Sarpanch of Chilakapalem Gram Panchayat.

Even after the plantation, the community remains actively involved in maintaining and nurturing the saplings, ensuring their growth and survival over time.

"Being part of this initiative has allowed me to support my family, and it feels good knowing I'm also helping to restore our environment. I'm hopeful that these efforts will continue to benefit our community. This project has been a truly wonderful opportunity for our village and I'm very grateful to be a part of it," says 45-year-old Chilaka Gannemma, an agricultural laborer in the village.



Australia beat India to reach WTC final; reclaim BGT after 10 years

PTI ■ SYDNEY

A listless India was knocked out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final as Australia cruised to a six-wicket victory in the fifth Test here on Sunday to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years, leaving the visitors with much to deliberate in a difficult transition phase made worse by over-the-hill batting stars.

Australia won the five-match series 3-1 and qualified for the WTC final against South Africa slated at the Lord's from June 11 to 15.

While Australia would be eyeing a second successive WTC mace, it would be the first time since the event's inception that India won't be in the finals. The team had finished runner-up in the previous two summit clashes.

On Sunday, the target of 162 could have been trickier for Australia had India's new Test captain Jasprit Bumrah been in a position to bowl despite painful back spasms. But once Virat Kohli led

the team out, it was as clear as the Sydney skyline that defending the total would be next to impossible. Bumrah deservedly walked away with the player of the series honour for his astonishing haul of 32 wickets in five matches. But it was hardly a consolation for the shambolic team performance that India managed, showing resilience only in brief phases.

"Little frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, you can't fight your body. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said of his inability to bowl in the second innings during the presentation ceremony.

Prasidh Krishna (3/65 in 12 overs) and Mohammed Siraj (1/69 in 12 overs) were not a patch on Bumrah and despite multiple breakthroughs, they bowled too many poor deliveries to make it easy for the hosts to canter home in just 27 overs.

Usman Khawaja (41), Travis Head (34 not out) and debutant Beau Webster (39 not out) completed



the formalities, putting an end to India's misery in a tour that has exposed all of the team's batting frailties and an unhealthy reliance on Bumrah.

Once Bumrah was ruled out after he tried some shadow bowling during the morning warm-up session and didn't feel comfortable, the writing was on the wall.

The magnificent Scott Boland (6/45) and the ever-reliable Pat Cummins (3/44) polished off the Indian tail for just 157 in 39.5 overs. If one takes out Rishabh Pant's fiery 61 and Yashasvi Jaiswal's 22, the other nine players collectively contributed a mere 74 runs.

The series would leave the men who matter in Indian cricket establishment with a lot on their minds when they deliberate on ways to get the house back in order.

With six of the completed innings yielding less than 200 runs, one doesn't need a soothsayer to tell what went wrong on the tour. Regular skipper Rohit Sharma and

batting talisman Virat Kohli flopped with technical issues troubling them throughout the season.

Jaiswal (391 runs) was the top-scorer despite three ducks followed by rookie Nitish Kumar Reddy (298 runs), KL Rahul (276 runs) and Pant (255 runs).

As much as one wants to take a nuanced view of Kohli and Kohli's poor form but it is undeniable that both veterans are finding it increasingly difficult to stem the rot that has set in their batting.

There are a few good youngsters in the fringes and the new World Test Championship cycle would demand that they be given a chance to develop over time.

While a tough call on Kohli and Rohit is awaited, the BCCI brass also needs to seriously look at whether coach Gautam Gambhir is the right man to be in-charge across formats.

Under Gambhir, India have lost six Tests out of 10 during the season going by apart from being defeated in an ODI series in Sri Lanka.



It's frustrating but you have to respect your body: Bumrah

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Laid low by a back spasm, Jasprit Bumrah was frustrated at missing out on bowling on the "spiciest wicket of the series," but the premier India pacer emphasized that sometimes it becomes imperative for a player to respect his body.

Bumrah could not bowl on day three when India needed to defend a small 162-run target on a tricky wicket.

Australia needed just 27 overs to overhaul the target and claim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years as they took advantage of Bumrah's absence.

"It was really frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, can't fight it. Disappointing, probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," Bumrah said, who was named Player of the Series for his 32 wickets in the series, during the post-match presentation.

"Felt a bit of discomfort during my second spell in the first innings and had to check it out."

Resuming day three at 141 for six, India lost their remaining four wickets for 16 runs to be all out for 157 in their second innings.

Asked about the discussion in the morning, Bumrah said: "The chat this morning was about the same thing, about

having belief and showing character. Lots of ifs and buts, the whole series was fought hard, we were in the game today as well, not like we were out of it, this is how Test cricket goes."

"Being in the game for longer, creating pressure, absorbing pressure and playing to the situation are all important. You have to adapt to the situations and these learnings will help us in the future."

Bumrah added that the experience of playing in Australia will help young players like Nitish Reddy and Harshit Rana in future.

"They've (youngsters) gained a lot of experience, they'll go from strength to strength. We've shown that we have a lot of talent in our group."

"Lot of the youngsters are keen, they're disappointed that we haven't won but they'll take learnings from this experience. It was a great series, congratulations to Australia, they fought really well."

Travis Head, who emerged as the highest run-scorer in the series with 446 runs, heaped praise on Bumrah.

"He's a great performer, he had an exceptional tour. It is the best individual performance I have seen in Test cricket," Head said.

Winning captain Pat Cummins described his team's 3-1 victory in the five-match series as

"unreal" and expressed immense pride in regaining the trophy.

"Unreal. A few of us didn't have this Trophy. Lived up to all the hype. Just been clear with our plans. We tried to be proactive, and ultimately, it worked out. Immensely proud," he said.

The star pacer also praised the camaraderie within the squad.

"We weren't at our best in Perth, but we had a lot of fun playing alongside each other. I love playing with these guys. Such a special group. I feel privileged to be part of such a team. Three debutants in this series fitted in well and contributed at different times."

Reflecting on his own performance, Cummins called the series "one of my most favourite Test series."

"Pretty happy with how I played. I had a fresh start coming into this series. These are the big series you prepare for. There were some keen moments when our mainstays really stood up. You need to do that to beat a side like India. Our guys put their hands up. It would go down as one of my most favourite Test series," he added.

Adjudged Player-of-the-Match for his impressive 10 for 76, Scott Boland expressed his satisfaction after playing a key role in Australia's 3-1 win.

He had replaced injured Josh Hazlewood in the squad.

Started setting new goals for 2025 after World Championship and Khel Ratna: Gukesh

PTI ■ BENGALURU

D Gukesh climbed dizzying heights in the past one month, a World Championship triumph getting garnished by the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award recently, but the chess prodigy now wants to reset his focus and goals to tackle a "challenging" 2025.

Gukesh will be seen in action in the Tata Steel tournament in Wijk aan Zee in Netherlands, beginning on January 17.

The event will see participation from frontline players such as Anish Giri, Arjun Erigaisi, Fabiano Caruana and R Praggnanandhaa among others.

"Yeah, 2025 will offer a very tough challenge. A lot of new and interesting tournaments are coming up. The world championship was in the past.



"I'm very happy about it and all the awards and receptions," Gukesh told a select media gathering during the felicitation ceremony organised by WestBridge Capital here on Sunday.

"But now, I have started thinking about new goals, new tournaments and new ways to prepare. The goal, the approach will be the same, to

give my best, to keep improving myself, and win as many tournaments as possible.

"So, I am looking forward to a fun year with a lot of learning, a lot of improvements and hopefully a lot of good results," he added.

However, Gukesh will have to carry with him the tag of world champion and along

with it loads of expectations and increased scrutiny. But the 19-year-old is prepared to stand in the limelight.

"Yeah, I have been used to being under the attention for a while. Obviously, after the world championship, it will be more. But the basic things I remember are to keep improving myself and accepting failures when they come."

"I think in general, I have high expectations of myself. So, I think my aim is to meet my own expectations rather than that of others," he said.

But has he been able to handle all the adulation that has deservedly come his way ("I had thought that it (winning the World Championship) would be somewhat similar to the Candidates, but obviously it's much more. I'm grateful for all the attention and recognition.



Varun Tomar shines in men's 10m air pistol

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reigning Asian champion Varun Tomar grabbed the spotlight by clinching both the senior and the junior men's 10m air pistol titles at the 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSCC) here on Sunday.

The 21-year-old Army marksman, who narrowly missed out on last year's Paris Olympics, overcame a sluggish start in the senior final to snatch his maiden national crown at the expense of teammate Pradhyumn Singh, who fell short by 0.8 points.

Rajasthan's Aakash Bhardwaj won the bronze.

Tomar then had a similar slow start in the junior final, but quickly made up ground, staying in touch with eventual silver winner Nikhil Saroha of Uttar Pradesh who was on a start-to-finish mission.

Tomar's patience finally paid off after the 21st shot as Nikhil blinked with an 8.5, handing the senior pro an easy double gold in the end at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting range.

Tomar's score in the senior final was 238, while he was clearly more confident in the junior final, resulting in greater accuracy with a tally of 246.2.

Pradhyumn also rounded off a fruitful day with a second medal, a bronze in the junior men's air pistol.

The youth final saw a UP 1-2 when Chirag Sharma overcame the 14-year-old Dev Pratap by margin of 1.3 after 24 shots.

Gavaskar upset after not being invited to present BGT with Border

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday expressed his displeasure after not being invited to present the trophy, named after him and Allan Border, to Australia following their win over India in the high-voltage five-match rubber.

Australia reclaimed the Border-Gavaskar trophy after 10 years with a six-wicket win over India in the fifth and final Test.

Border presented the trophy to the home team but Gavaskar, despite being at the venue at the same time, was inexplicably ignored.

"I certainly would have loved to have been there for the presentation. After all it is the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and it is about Australia and



India," Gavaskar was quoted as saying by Code Sports.

"I mean, I am here on the ground. To me it should not matter that Australia won when it comes to the presentation. They played better cricket so they won. That's fine.

"Just because I am an Indian.

I would have been happy to present the trophy with my good friend Allan Border," he added.

Had the Indian team won the trophy, Gavaskar would have been invited to present it to the victorious side.

Cricket Australia (CA) later confirmed that Gavaskar was

aware he would have presented the award to Indian captain Jasprit Bumrah if the tourists had won the Sydney Test and retained the trophy.

"We acknowledge it would have been preferable if both Allan Border and Sunil Gavaskar had been asked to go on stage," a CA spokesperson said in a statement.

Both India and Australia have been competing for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy since 1996-1997 and the rivalry has grown to become one of the biggest in Test cricket.

The five-match series that Australia won drew record crowds at multiple venues and broke an 87-year-old attendance record at the Melbourne Cricket Ground last week.

If you have commitment towards red ball, play domestic cricket, says Gambhir

PTI ■ SYDNEY

India head coach Gautam Gambhir said on Sunday that struggling stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli "still have the hunger to excel" but urged all senior players, including the duo, to play domestic games and show their "commitment" towards red-ball cricket.

Known for his plain speak, the two-time World Cup hero also didn't give any assurances on whether Rohit or Kohli will be a part of the Test set-up moving forward.

Both the stars were woefully out of form during the just-concluded Test series against Australia that the visitors lost 1-3 to surrender the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as well as a spot in the World Test Championship final.

"It's not the right moment right now for me to talk about where we are going to be after five months. A lot of things change in sport. Forms change, people change, attitude changes, everything changes in sport. And we all know that five months is a long time," Gambhir said at the post-series press conference.

"So let's see before the England series (in July) what's going to happen. But whatever will happen, will happen for the best interest of Indian cricket," asserted the former opener.

Rohit scored 31 runs in five innings before dropping himself from the playing eleven and Kohli managed 190 in nine knocks, including a second innings century after India had taken a lead of more than 300. A glaring failure for Kohli was his inability to avoid being dismissed on deliveries that were bowled outside the off stump.

Asked if he would like the seniors to play at least one round, if not two, of Ranji Trophy starting January 23, Gambhir sent across a clear message.

"I would always like everyone to play domestic cricket. That is how much importance domestic cricket needs to be given. Not only one game, if they are available and they have the commitment to play red-ball cricket, everyone should play domestic cricket," Gambhir said.

"As simple as it can get. If you don't give importance to domestic cricket, you will never get the desired players that you want in Test cricket," he explained.



Kohli last played a Ranji Trophy match in 2012 while Rohit's most recent domestic red-ball game was in the 2015-16 season.

The 'Ro-Ko' Dilemma

The tough-talking former player refused to be drawn into a

discussion on the much-speculated future of Kohli and Rohit, insisting that they are the best judge when it comes to analysing their role in Indian cricket.

"See, I can't talk about the future of any player, it's up to them as well.

But yes, what I can say is that they still have the hunger, they still have the passion, they're tough people and hopefully they can continue to take Indian cricket forward," he said.

"...Ultimately whatever they plan,

they will plan for the best interest of Indian cricket."

He wants the star duo to do some soul searching as to where they stand. "First of all, every individual knows where their game and hunger is. That is the most important thing for any sport and any profession."

"It is not just about the sport, how hungry you are, how passionate you are and whether the team is moving forward with your contributions or not," he pointed out.

I need to be fair to everyone

Gambhir, in his pre-match press conference, spoke about honesty in the dressing room. He reiterated the position on Sunday, saying that his responsibility is to be fair to everyone irrespective of their experience and stature.

"If I am fair with only two or three individuals and not with others, then I am being dishonest to my job," he said.

"So, whether it is a player who has not made a debut yet or a player who has played 100 Test matches, the simple aim of my job is that I have to be absolutely fair and equal to everyone," he added.

During his days in Kolkata Knight

Riders and Lucknow Super Giants, Gambhir often stressed about the need for a happy dressing room. He said that philosophy holds good for the India set-up too.

"If you're committed to what we are doing with honesty, I think that should be fine. And more importantly, to keep the dressing room happy, I have to be absolutely honest and equal and fair to everyone in that dressing room."

Rohit has shown accountability

Gambhir lauded Rohit for opting out of the fifth Test due to poor form.

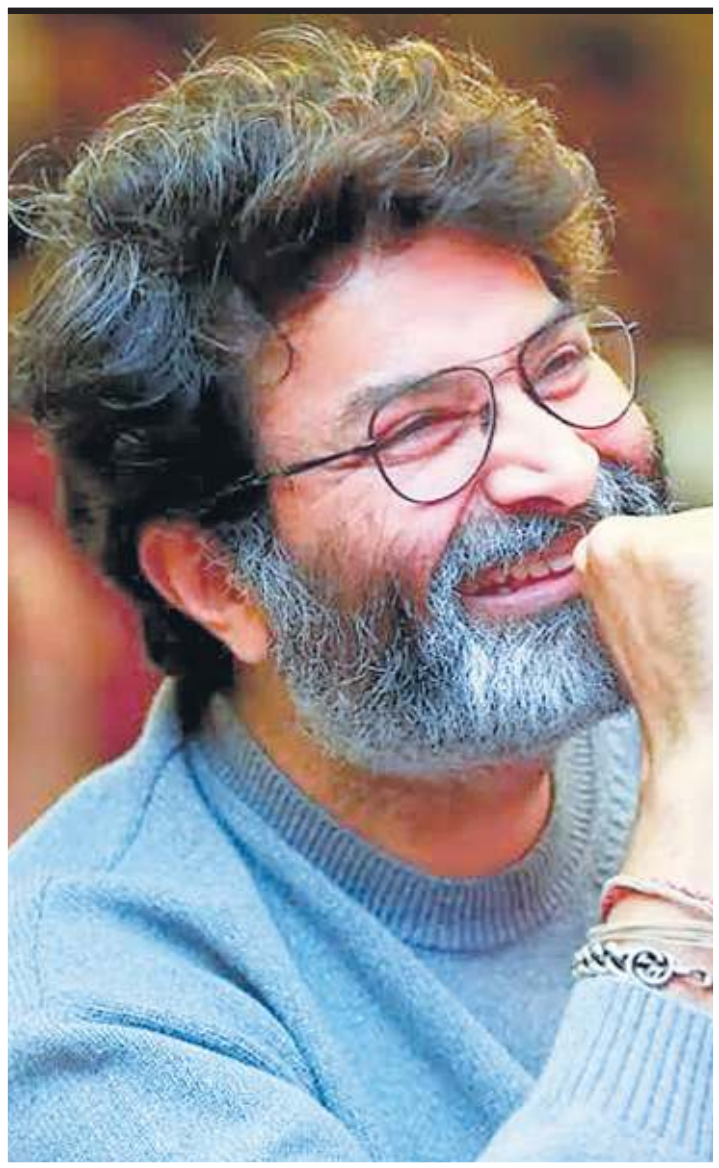
"If a leader has taken this decision, I don't think there is any problem. We talked about accountability and that starts from the top and Rohit Sharma started that in the last match," the 43-year-old said.

"I am the first one to accept mistakes"

When asked if there is an acceptance of everything that has gone wrong on the tour, Gambhir was quick to declare that he never runs from accountability.

"The first thing is that the person sitting here will accept the mistakes first. So, don't worry about the fact that the mistakes will not be accepted here," he replied.

Poonam Kaur accuses Trivikram of impacting her life & health



Actress Poonam Kaur has once again taken to social media to voice allegations against director Trivikram Srinivas, claiming his actions have affected her life and health

SURESH KAVIRAYANI

Actress Poonam Kaur has once again targeted director Trivikram Srinivas, this time too taking to her social media to voice her concerns. This isn't the first time the actress has publicly spoken about Trivikram Srinivas, as she has previously made similar allegations. However, Poonam Kaur has not filed a formal complaint or approached any trade body within the Telugu Film Industry regarding her allegations. Instead, she continues to share her grievances through social media posts. Previously, members of the industry had advised her to either take legal action or lodge a formal complaint with the Movie Artiste Association (MAA) or the Sexual Harassment Redressal Panel. During a past meeting

of the Redressal Panel, when the Jani Master issue was discussed, media persons inquired about Poonam Kaur's allegations against Trivikram Srinivas. At that time, panel members stated that she should approach them with a written complaint, which she has yet to do.

On Sunday, the actress once again took to social media to allege that her life and health have been damaged because of Trivikram Srinivas. She claimed that she had previously lodged a complaint with MAA, but no action had been taken.

In her post, Poonam Kaur wrote: "No questioning or even action taken on director #Trivikram-srinivas for complaint given in MAA association for very long. He rather is encouraged by the big wigs after

damaging my life, which has affected my health and happiness (sic)."

In response, MAA treasurer Siva Balaji clarified that they had not received any formal or written complaint from Poonam Kaur. "We didn't receive any formal or written complaint by her to us. I

even checked earlier records, but there was no complaint from her," said Siva Balaji. He added that instead of posting on social media, she should submit a written complaint. "If she goes legally or gives a complaint to any trade body in the Telugu Film Industry, they will take it up and investigate," he added.

Thammareddy Bharadwaj, a member of the Redressal Panel of the Telugu Film Industry, echoed similar sentiments. "She should approach us with a written complaint. If she explains in detail what the director has done to her and what exactly happened, we can at least take up the issue. But she is not providing details and is only posting on social media, which we cannot take as suo moto," said Thammareddy.

He further mentioned that he checked with the MAA office regarding Poonam Kaur's alleged complaint. "Someone told me that she gave a complaint to Srikanth and MAA. I called Srikanth and the MAA office staff, but they said they didn't receive any complaint," Thammareddy explained.

If Poonam Kaur is serious about her allegations against Trivikram Srinivas, members of the Telugu Film Industry have urged her to file a formal complaint with MAA or any relevant trade body. They have assured her that they are ready to take up the matter and investigate if she follows the proper process.

As of now, Poonam Kaur has not signed any Telugu or Tamil films.



Daaku Maharaja trailer brings another side of Balakrishna

Last year, Balakrishna took a step back from action as he was occupied with politics and the shooting of his film. However, this year he is kicking off the Sankranti festival with his upcoming movie *Daaku Maharaja*. The trailer for the film was unveiled at a grand event held in Dallas, USA. Directed by Bobby Kolli and produced by Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, the movie is already generating significant buzz.

The trailer reveals that director Bobby has explored a new dimension of Balakrishna, unleashing the wild side of the actor. It introduces the intense world of Daaku, played by Balakrishna, and delves into the protagonist's action-packed journey to protect his people. The narrative also sheds light on his past

and the numerous enemies he faces. Bobby has presented NBK in a never-before-seen avatar, showcasing his mass appeal, rage and swagger to the fullest. Balakrishna's portrayal is poised to be one of the film's standout features.

The trailer also highlights the menacing antagonist, played by Bobby Deol, along with key characters portrayed by Shraddha Srinath, Urvashi Rautela, Makrand Deshpande and others in pivotal roles.

Accompanied by Thaman's electrifying background score, the trailer has already built strong anticipation among fans. Scheduled for release on January 12, 2025, *Daaku Maharaja* promises to be a treat for NBK fans, as the trailer leaves no doubt that the film will be an action-packed spectacle.



We should not forget our roots: Pawan Kalyan

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan praised his nephew Ram Charan and explained the rationale behind the government permitting a hike in movie ticket prices. Opening his speech, Pawan Kalyan emphasised the importance of remembering the roots of the film industry and its pioneers. He mentioned iconic figures who initiated cinema in India and Telugu cinema, including Raghupathi Venkaiah Naidu, Dadasaheb Phalke, B.N. Reddy, Sippy, Goodavari Ramabrahmam, Satyajit Ray and others. "Every actor and everyone in the industry should remember their roots and where they come from," said Pawan Kalyan. He added that his and Ram Charan's success today is possible because of Mega Star Chiranjeevi. "We should not forget the roots," he reiterated.

The actor-turned-politician fondly recalled memories of his brother Chiranjeevi, highlighting his hard work and dedication. "When my brother came home at night, he didn't even have the stamina to remove his shoes because of his continuous work. I had the chance to remove his shoes and socks, and I saw his feet swollen. That was the extent of his hard work and because of him, we are standing here today," he said.

Pawan Kalyan also addressed misconceptions about his stance toward other actors. "We never discouraged people from watching other heroes' films. In fact, we watch their films too. Our brother taught us not to be against anyone in the industry," he said. He further stated that actors should not need to fold their hands or personally request assistance for industry-related issues. Referring to the time Chiranjeevi, Prabhas, and Mahesh Babu met with YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to request

a ticket price hike, he remarked, "Actors need not come for such matters; the producer can meet us instead." He clarified that the government earns 18% GST from every ticket sold, which justifies the price hike.

Pawan Kalyan also reminisced about buying black-market tickets to watch Shankar's *Gentleman* and praised the director's contribution to Indian cinema. "Shankar's films were dubbed into Telugu so seamlessly that we never felt they were dubbed—they felt like straight Telugu films. Now, he is making a straight Telugu film, and the world is watching Telugu cinema because of filmmakers like him," he said.

On Ram Charan, Pawan Kalyan commended his dedication and humility. "He never flaunts his dance abilities openly, but he is an exceptionally good dancer," he said. He also lauded producer Dil Raju for supporting him during a difficult time. "When I didn't have money and only had my name, Dil Raju produced *Vakeel Saab* with me. That money helped a lot for the Jana Sena Party and today, we are here," he shared.

Pawan Kalyan also took a dig at the previous government, recalling how they reduced ticket prices for his film Bheemla Nayak. "Our government didn't want to do that. Even some actors who didn't support our alliance received a ticket price hike. We don't mix politics with cinema," he clarified.

The actor's speech at the Rajahmundry *Game Changer* event was a highlight, as he spoke at length, while most others kept their addresses brief.



Vikraman's son to debut in Telugu cinema

Director Vikraman, renowned for his contributions to both Tamil and Telugu cinema, is set to introduce his son Vijay Kaniska as a lead actor in Telugu films. Vikraman, known for hits like the Tamil classic *Suryavamsam*, which was remade in Telugu with Venkatesh and in Hindi with Amitabh Bachchan, also directed memorable Telugu films such as *Vasantham* and *Cheppave Chirugali*, making a lasting impact in the industry.

Vijay Kaniska, who previously debuted in Tamil with the film *Hit List*, will now take center stage in the Telugu movie take *Kalavaram*. Directed by Hanuman Kalavaram, the film features Garima Vasamsetty, the film features Garima Chouhan as the female lead. *Kalavaram*, a unique blend of a love story and thriller elements, promises an engaging and fresh concept, with the story penned by Shashank.

The film also includes Raj Tiradasu of *Pushpa* fame in a pivotal role. Speaking about the project, Vijay Kaniska shared that his Tamil debut *Hit List* earned him accolades, and he is even more excited about *Kalavaram*. He credited the director and producer for their passion and expressed confidence that this film will be a milestone in his career. Producer Shobha Rani revealed that *Kalavaram* is the perfect title for this story, and the film boasts a cast of 70 artists. She hinted that more details about the movie and its ensemble cast will be revealed soon.



Vijay Sethupathi releases trailer of Kora

Tamil star Vijay Sethupathi has extended his support to the small-budget film *Kora* by releasing its trailer. This action-packed period drama, originally made in Kannada, will also be released in Telugu. Directed by Oratashree, the film features Tsunami Kitty in the lead role, alongside Charisma and P. Murthy in pivotal roles. The movie is produced by AB Nandini, AN Balaji and P. Murthy.

Vijay Sethupathi shared the trailer on social media, congratulating the team and expressing his support. The teaser, packed with high-intensity action sequences, promises to deliver a thrilling experience that will leave audiences on the edge of their seats.

Kora has been crafted as a gripping action spectacle and also stars M.K. Mata, Muniraju, and Ninasam Ashwath in significant roles. The film's blend of intense drama and action is sure to captivate audiences.

