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## ANDHRA PRADESH WARMLY WELCOMES THE PIONEER OF PROGRESS & TRANSFORMATION

We warmly welcome the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, **Sri Narendra Modi Ji,**

as he arrives in Visakhapatnam to launch transformative **projects worth over ₹ 2 lakh crore.**

Today marks a great milestone for the state, as these initiatives in energy, railways, roads and pharmaceutical sectors propel Andhra Pradesh towards a brighter future.

This momentous occasion will forever be etched in the state's history, symbolizing progress and growth.

### PROJECTS - TOTAL ESTIMATED COST



**NTPC Green Hydrogen Hub near Pudimadaka**  
₹ 1,85,000 Cr



**Construction of Visakhapatnam Railway Zone Headquarters** - ₹ 149 Cr



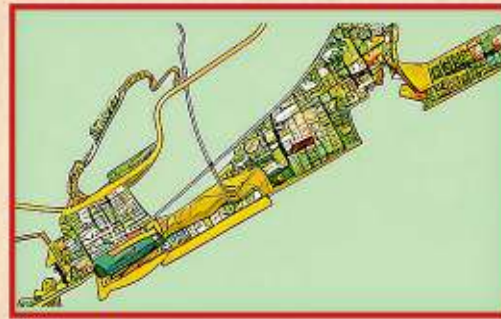
**Road Construction/Expansion (10 Projects)** - ₹ 4,593 Cr



**Krishnapatnam Industrial Park (KRIS City)** - ₹ 2,139 Cr



**6 Railway Projects**  
₹ 6,028 Cr



**Bulk Drug Park near Nakkapalli** - ₹ 1,877 Cr



**234.28 km of Roads (7 Projects)** - ₹ 3,044 Cr



**323 km of 3 Railway Lines (2 Rayalaseema Projects)**  
₹ 5,718 Cr

### INAUGURATIONS/ DEDICATION TO THE NATION

**Evening 4:45 PM**

**ROAD SHOW** from Venkatadri Vantillu Restaurant to AU Engineering College, Visakhapatnam

**Evening 5:30 PM**

**MEGA PUBLIC MEETING** at AU Engineering College Grounds



**LET US MARCH FORWARD TOGETHER TO REALIZE THE DREAM OF SWARNA ANDHRA 2047 AND CREATE A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL**



# Chandrababu has to go along with his NDA partners

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is facing a peculiar situation regarding the path he has to take to ensure his survival. He may have to go along with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as he is facing a strong opposition although it is a bit weak at present.

Naidu is naturally capable of assessing the political situation from time to time, particularly when it turns against his party's interests. But now he is facing a peculiar situation as he has to simultaneously make his son who is a Cabinet colleague capable with leadership qualities and also take along the administration smoothly.

It may not be easy to achieve this considering the condition of the ruling alliance. Any

further development can take place in AP only as per the directions of the NDA's national leadership irrespective of the personal capabilities of Naidu.

The Chief Minister is facing challenges in implementing his Super Six welfare schemes that gave the NDA a grand victory. The partners of the TDP like the Jana Sena Party (JSP) and the BJP also felt happy over the outcome of the 2024 elections and have confidence in their combined strength for ruling the State. Although the TDP won enough seats to form a government on its own, it deliberately endorsed the alliance for securing a landslide. Initially, the TDP leadership thought that its cadres were moved by the grand victory of the

**The Chief Minister is facing challenges in implementing his Super Six welfare schemes that gave the NDA a grand victory. The partners of the TDP like the Jana Sena Party (JSP) and the BJP also felt happy over the outcome of the 2024 elections and have confidence in their combined strength for ruling the State**

alliance which they considered as purely their party's triumph despite the presence of other partners in the alliance. This situation can be compared with that of the post-poll scenario in 2014.

Local body polls were held a year before the general elections in 2013. The TDP swept the polls much before the alliance materialised to fight the general elections. There

was almost the same poll combination then. The TDP and the BJP had an alliance and the unconditional support of JSP president Pawan Kalyan. He decided not to contest to prevent a split in the vote bank of the alliance. Although the TDP and the BJP won with the support of the JSP, TDP cadres started saying that the success was due to their strength as there was no alliance with the



BJP and the JSP at the time of local body polls the previous year. This means that the people of Andhra Pradesh voted for the TDP much before the general elections.

The financial condition of the State is such that it has to take loans even to run the

administration. The government is in such an embarrassing situation that it couldn't pay the salaries of its employees in time. The TDP leadership used to blame the admin headed by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for its inability to pay salaries to government employees on the first day of every month. But the government headed by Naidu is also facing the same situation.

After the implementation of the Super Six schemes, it may become an uphill task for the government to effectively deal with the situation.

Chief Minister Naidu appears to be a changed man compared to his 2014-19 stint. He thought that his ideas regarding the construction of the new capital Amaravati for residual Andhra Pradesh could be executed during his next term. He had drawn up plans

by holding meetings with consultants regarding the construction of Amaravati. Naidu is now focused on finishing at least 60% of the construction of the capital city in the next three years.

If Amaravati is 60 per cent complete, then the next government has to continue with it. It can't go for three capitals despite its strong aversion towards the TDP. Naidu knows that it is not easy to retain power even if he rules effectively. The political history of United AP proves the fact that mainline political parties don't have a chance to continue ruling. The Congress suffered a lot at the hands of the TDP with two consecutive defeats in 1994 and 1999. NTR headed the TDP in 1994 and CBN steered the organisation. The TDP suffered the same humiliating defeat in

2004 and 2009 at the hands of Congress's Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy. No party has won the people's mandate a second time in the residual State of AP as the TDP lost in 2019 and the YSRC lost in 2024.

Meanwhile, the TDP couldn't focus on political matters. Although it is playing the role of big brother in the alliance, it has to survive politically. If the situation turns favourable for the YSRC, then that would be a loss for the TDP. Although it is not recognised as the opposition in the Assembly, the YSRC has a strong base across the State.

The TDP thinks that there is a need to keep itself politically active to ensure survival in politics. Considering all these limitations, Naidu will have to go with the NDA partners to ensure his party's future.



The model of NTPC Green Energy Limited Green Hydrogen Hub Project at Pudimadaka.

## PM to lay stone for India's first Green Hydrogen Hub in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone for the state-of-the-art NTPC Green Energy Limited (NGEL) Green Hydrogen Hub Project at Pudimadaka, near Visakhapatnam on January 8. This pioneering project will be the first Green Hydrogen Hub under the National Green Hydrogen Mission, marking a significant step towards India's green energy revolution.

The ambitious NGEL Green Hydrogen Hub project involves an investment of approximately Rs 1,85,000 Crore, one of the largest

**The NTPC Green Energy Limited (NGEL) Green Hydrogen Hub Project, with a Rs 1.85 lakh crore investment, aims to revolutionize India's green energy sector, creating over 57,000 jobs and bolstering global export potential.**

investments in India's green energy sector. This includes the development of 20 GW of renewable energy capacities, positioning it as one of the country's largest integrated green hydrogen production facilities.

## PM, CM to attend stone-laying event of Green Hydrogen Hub

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In line with India's ambitious target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu will attend the groundbreaking ceremony of the Green Hydrogen Hub at Pudimadaka in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. The project is a joint green energy initiative between NTPC Green Energy Limited and the New & Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP).

The Green Hydrogen Hub at Pudimadaka is set to be a significant milestone in India's green energy sector. Spanning approximately 1,200 acres near the Gangavaram Seaport, the hub will focus on producing Green Chemicals, including 1.5 MTPA of Green Ammonia, 0.5 MTPA of Green Methanol, and 0.5 MTPA of SAF/Urea. The development plan also includes 25 industrial manufacturing units within a 300-acre area, alongside utilities, amenities, and logistics infrastructure spread across another 300 acres.

With an investment of around Rs 1.85 lakh crore, the Green Hydrogen Hub is expected to create approximately 57,000 jobs



between 2024 and 2032, providing a boost to both local and national economies. The infrastructure development, slated for completion in phases between 2024 and 2032, will include roads, industrial hubs, power and water facilities, desalination plants, port infrastructure, and chemical storage. NTPC Green Energy Limited has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state to establish renewable energy projects with a total capacity of 20 GW in Kurnool (3 GW), Anantapur (12 GW), and Chittoor (5 GW).

During a review meeting on the Green Hydrogen Hub in Visakhapatnam, Chief Secretary to the Government and Special Chief Secretary for Energy, K.

Vijayanand, reiterated the Andhra Pradesh Government's full commitment to combating climate change and advancing green energy solutions. "Renewable energy, including solar, wind, and pumped storage, will be the cornerstone of future power generation. These initiatives will not only meet growing energy demands but also reduce pollution and mitigate temperature rise," said K. Vijayanand.

He further highlighted that Andhra Pradesh, blessed with abundant renewable energy resources, is well-positioned to lead India's green energy revolution. The state has set ambitious targets for the next five years, including 78.5 GW of solar energy capacity, 35 GW of wind energy, 22 GW of pumped

storage, and 1.5 MMT of Green Hydrogen. The Green Hydrogen Hub in Visakhapatnam is set to serve as a model for other states, addressing both local and national energy needs sustainably.

KVN Chakradhar Babu, Managing Director of APGENCO and VC & Managing Director of NREDCAP, stated that the collaboration between NTPC Green Energy Limited and NREDCAP reflects the vision shared by the Hon'ble Prime Minister and Hon'ble Chief Minister for transforming the state's energy sector. "This pioneering project will be the first of its kind in the public sector and will lay the foundation for a port-based green economy," said KVN Chakradhar Babu.

"NREDCAP remains committed to promoting renewable energy projects through innovative technologies. Its focus includes generating clean energy from wind and solar sources, conserving energy in rural areas, and facilitating research, development, and training to ensure the state's leadership in renewable energy. This groundbreaking ceremony marks a significant step forward in India's journey towards a sustainable, green energy future," added the VC & MD of NREDCAP.



## TTD Dharmaratham to start for Maha Kumbh Mela today

### Replica Temple of Srivaru at Maha Kumbh Mela - EO

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

As part of its efforts to propagate Hindu Sanatana Dharma, TTD is constructing a replica temple of Sri Venkateswara Swamy at the prestigious Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. A Dharma Ratham, carrying deputed staff and devotees, will depart from Tirumala on January 8 at 7 am with the divine blessings of Srivaru, announced TTD EO J. Syamala Rao.

Addressing the media at Annamaiah Bhavan in Tirumala on Tuesday, the EO stated that this grand religious event is scheduled to take place from January 13 to February 26. The model temple is being built on a 2.89-acre

plot at Sector 6, Bajrang Das Road, Prayagraj, near the renowned Naga Vasuki Temple.

The EO further mentioned that Kankaryams and Utsavs will be conducted in the style of Tirumala, allowing Northern devotees to experience the grandeur of Sri Venkateswara Swamy. Daily sevas, from Suprabhatam to Ekanta Seva, will also be performed. TTD will organise Srivari Kalyanams on January 18, 26, February 3, and 12, he added.

To manage the temple activities and provide facilities for the thousands of visiting devotees, TTD is deputing a team of priests, Vedic scholars, and staff from various departments.

## Delhi to vote on February 5...

Continued from Page 1

According to the electoral roll, Delhi has 1.55 crore voters -- 83.49 lakh men, 71.74 lakh women and 1,261 transgender persons. There are 25.89 lakh young voters, 2.08 lakh first-time voters, and 830 above the age of 100, Kumar said.

More than 13,000 polling stations will be set up in Delhi, he said.

In the 2020 polls, AAP won 62 seats and the BJP eight while the Congress drew a blank.

Kumar also said bypolls were due in two assembly

seats in Jammu and Kashmir -- Budgam and Nagrota.

"...because of snow conditions, we will do it later. We have time till April and we will complete those elections before that," he said.

"There are two more parliamentary constituencies -- Basirhat in West Bengal and Visavadar in Gujarat. In both the cases, there are election petitions pending and, according to rules, we cannot do byelections till then," he added. Election petitions can be filed against the winning candidate in the respective state high courts within 45 days of declaration of results.

## Deadly quake jolts Tibet...

Continued from Page 1

It is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, a key figure of Tibetan Buddhism whose spiritual authority is second only to the Dalai Lama.

The epicentre was located in Tsogo Township of Dingri County, which has a population of approximately 6,900 people within a 20-km radius. There are 27 villages within this area.

Official data show Dingri County has a population of over 61,000 people.

The epicentre is located 90 km North-East of Lobutse in the Khumbu Himalayan range of North-East Nepal. The quake

struck at a depth of 10 km, according to a report issued by the China Earthquake Networks Centre, state-run Xinhua reported.

In his message, President Xi said it is essential to strengthen earthquake monitoring and early warning, promptly allocate emergency rescue supplies, expedite the repair of damaged infrastructure, ensure that the basic needs of residents are met, and guarantee a safe and warm winter for all.

China refers to Tibet as Xizang, part of the Himalayan region.

The Tibetan plateau is known to be prone to heavy earth-

quakes as it sits right over the place where the tectonic Eurasian and Indian plates meet, often colliding with huge force. Shigatse also suffered significant damage in the massive 8.1-magnitude quake that devastated Nepal in 2015.

Eighteen people were killed and 55 injured in the Shigatse region when a massive 8.1-magnitude quake hit Nepal and the wider Himalayan in 2015.

Meanwhile, in Nepal, the strong earthquake forced people to run out of their houses. It was felt in Kavrepalanchok, Sindhupalanchok Dhadang and Solukhumbu districts as well.

## Modi to lay...

Continued from Page 1

Former East Coast Railway Shramik Union leader Chalasani Gandhi highlighted that vacant posts from the Waltair Division were transferred to Odisha's Khurda and Sambalpur divisions. He suggested using existing buildings, like the Gati Shakti building, as a temporary headquarters to avoid further delays. Gandhi also stressed the need to retain the Waltair Division's headquarters in Visakhapatnam for better coordination with industries. The Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the zone's operationalisation is still pending with the Railway Board.

## 'Hindu Dharma' promoted during Jagan rule: Kottu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Kottu Satyanarayana has criticised BJP State president Daggubati Purandeswari for her remarks during the 'Hindu Shankharavam' meeting near Vijayawada.

Addressing the media at the YSRC office on Tuesday, Satyanarayana alleged that Purandeswari's statements were politically motivated to benefit her brother-in-law and

TTD leader N Chandrababu Naidu.

"It is unfortunate that Purandeswari used a platform meant to promote 'Hindu Dharma' for baseless political accusations. Her main agenda is to safeguard Chandrababu Naidu's interests, not uphold Hindu values," he stated.

Satyanarayana highlighted the contributions of the former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's government towards 'Hindu Dharma'.

## Textbook burden to be ...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister suggested considering the "Smart Platform" for curriculum restructuring and recommended implementing web-based menus and suggestion boxes to improve hostel management in universities. Discussions also focused on establishing AI University and Innovation University in the state, with an emphasis on increasing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in universities from 36% to 50%. He proposed selecting students from government degree colleges for scholarships.

Lokesh reviewed the academic roadmap for Intermediate education, including the revised syllabus, textbooks, academic calendar, new subject combinations, and the marking pattern. Talks included combining subjects like Mathematics and merging Botany and Zoology into a single paper. He also reviewed the implementation of an internal marking system similar to the CBSE's and recommended designing a calendar that ensures pre-final exams are completed by January. The Minister advocated for adopting digital assessment methods in place of OMR sheets.

**TODAY**  
**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha  
Navami: Jan 07 04:27 PM to Jan 08 02:26 PM  
Dashami: Jan 08 02:26 PM to Jan 09 12:22 PM  
Nakshatram: Ashwini: Jan 07 05:50 PM to Jan 08 04:29 PM  
Bharani: Jan 08 04:29 PM to Jan 09 03:07 PM  
Rahukalam: 12:22 PM to 1:45 PM  
Yamagandam: 8:14 AM to 9:37 AM  
Varjyam: 01:32 AM to 03:03 AM  
Gulika: 11:00 AM to 12:22 PM  
Amritakalam: 09:41 AM to 11:12 AM  
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL  
**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
Forecast: Sunny  
Temp: 30°  
Humidity: 54%  
Sunrise: 6:39 AM  
Sunset: 5:48 PM  
Updated: January 7, 2025 5:00 PM

## APSRTC to run 7,200 ...

Continued from Page 1

For the return journey, 3,300 special services will run between January 16 and 20.

Advanced reservations for all regular services have already been completed. To manage the festive rush, APSRTC has opened advance booking for the special services as well. Passengers can book tickets through the APSRTC website (www.apstrconline.in), booking agents, or the APSRTC mobile app. A 10 per cent discount on the base fare will be offered for passengers booking round-trip tickets.

Nodal officers, including depot managers, senior officers, and traffic managers, will be stationed at

## CM vows organic AP in...

Continued from Page 1

Naidu further revealed that the National Dairy Development Board plans to establish two units in Kuppam -- one for dairy and the other for vegetables and fruits -- which will create employment opportunities for the local youth. He asserted that with initiatives like green energy production, waste management, and organic farming, the need for hospital visits could be significantly reduced.

Describing Kuppam as an ideal location for commercial crops, Naidu expressed optimism that the promotion of organic farming would ensure a prosperous future for the area with excellent marketing facilities.

## CS: Tight security for PM's ...

Continued from Page 1

The Prime Minister's visit will span approximately three hours and will include various programmes. His roadshow will cover around one kilometre, stretching from the Venkatadri Vantillu Restaurant area to the Andhra University Engineering College Ground. At the venue, the PM will lay the foundation stones for key projects, including the Visakhapatnam Railway Zone headquarters, the Green Hydrogen Hub at Pudimadaka, the Bulk Drug Park at Nakkapalli, the Krishna Patnam Industrial Node, and the doubling of railway lines for the Guntur-Bibinagar and Gooty-Pendekallu sections. Additionally, PM Modi will virtually inaugurate the 6-lane bypass at Chilakaluripet on National Highway 16, along with several national highways

## CS: Tight security for PM's ...

Continued from Page 1

and railway lines. Anticipating a large crowd for the roadshow, the CS instructed the Visakhapatnam District Collector, Police Commissioner, Municipal Commissioner, and other officials to ensure sufficient parking facilities. The CS also directed the electricity department to guarantee an uninterrupted power supply for lights at the event, parking areas, and roadshow locations. The Municipal Department has been tasked with providing drinking water, temporary toilets, and other essential facilities at the event site and parking areas. As people from surrounding districts such as Anakapalli, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam are expected to travel to Visakhapatnam by buses and other modes of transport, the CS has requested the respective district collectors and SPs to ensure their safe arrival and departure.

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH**  
**PANCHAYATI RAJ ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT**  
**E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**  
No. 06-15/2024-25 Dt. 03.01.2025  
Online tenders are invited for Eight Works with an Est. Cost. Rs. 1923.39 Lakhs, sanctioned under PMJANMAM & PMGSY- XI Grants in PR Circle, Vizianagaram. Availability of Bid Documents: 07.01.2025, 11.00 AM to Dt. 21.01.2025 upto 5.00PM. Further details can be seen at <https://pmsys.tendersap.gov.in>, Mobile: 9493519456, 5d- Superintending Engineer, PR Circle, Vizianagaram





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QUOTE OF THE DAY  
The pioneer

Seoul bombs are starting to explode. The Electricity Commission report has arrived, the government is taking legal opinion and the Kaleswaram Commission's inquiry is going on. The phone tapping case is not over yet. Former Minister T Harish Rao would be there in all cases of former Chief Minister KCR. The Congress Government and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy have no intention to target the KCR family



- Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, TG Minister P4

Bankers urged to prioritise loans for youth

FIGHT BEYOND KICKBOXING RING

Are Allu Arjun & Jr NTR being sidelined by their FAMILIES?

DON'T MISS...

## PM, CM to attend Hydrogen Hub event

In line with India's ambitious target of achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu will attend the groundbreaking ceremony of the Green Hydrogen Hub at Pudimadaka in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. The project is a joint green energy initiative between NTPC Green Energy Limited and the New & Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP). The Green Hydrogen Hub at Pudimadaka is set to be a significant milestone ...

-PAGE: 2

## Minister pulls up officials for delay

Minister for Water Resources Management Nimmala Ramanaidu expressed his displeasure with the concerned officials and the contracting agency over the delay in completing works to establish a dialysis centre at the 100-bed new government hospital in Palakollu. On Tuesday, the Minister, accompanied by officers and doctors, inspected the ongoing construction at the hospital, which is being developed by the AP Medical Services Infrastructure Development Corporation. After reviewing the ...

-PAGE: 4

## e-Shram portal now in 22 languages

Union Minister Mansukh Mandavaya on Tuesday launched multilingual functionality on the e-Shram portal to provide seamless access to various government schemes for unorganised workers. In line with the vision of making eShram a 'One-Stop-Solution', this portal will now be available in all 22 Scheduled Languages, a labour ministry statement said. The event to launch multilingual functionality was attended by the Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment and several senior officials. It also marked the ...

-PAGE: 8

## We know how to beat Aus: Rabada

Fierce South African pacer Kagiso Rabada, no stranger to beating Australia, believes the prospect of facing them in the World Test Championship final at Lord's in June has already sparked anticipation and motivation in his side. Reigning champions Australia secured their spot in the WTC final with a six-wicket victory over India in the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Sydney, clinching the series 3-1. South Africa were the first team to qualify after defeating Pakistan by 10 wickets in the ...

-SPORTS

## Deadly quake jolts Tibet, kills 126 people

PNS ■ BEIJING

A 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck near one of Tibet's holiest cities on Tuesday, killing at least 126 people and injuring 188 others with tremors also shaking buildings and forcing people to run to the streets in neighbouring Nepal. According to regional disaster relief headquarters, the quake jolted Dingri County in Xigaze in Tibet Autonomous Region in China at 9:05 am Tuesday (Beijing Time). The US Geological Service, however, put the quake's magnitude at 7.1. At least 126 people have

## Tremors felt in Nepal

been confirmed dead and 188 others injured, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered all-out rescue efforts to carry out relief and rescue operations in the affected areas. Xi ordered utmost efforts to treat the injured and urged efforts to prevent secondary disasters, properly resettle affected residents, and handle the aftermath work effectively. Following the quake, China Earthquake Administration launched a level-II emergency service response and sent a

work team to the site to assist with disaster relief efforts. Xizang Autonomous Region also issued a level-II emergency response to the quake. Some 22,000 disaster relief items, including cotton tents, cotton coats, quilts and folding beds, together with special relief materials for high-altitude and frigid areas, have been dispatched by central authorities to the quake-hit area. Over 1,500 local firefighters and rescue workers have also been dispatched to the ground. Xigaze also known as Shigatse is close to the border with India. Shigatse is considered one of the holiest cities of Tibet. Continued on Page 2



## AMBITIOUS TARGET IN FARM SECTOR

# CM vows organic AP in 5 yrs

PNS ■ KUPPAM

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday announced plans to transform the Kuppam Assembly segment into a model for organic farming in the country. He assured that efforts would be made to achieve 100 per cent organic farming across the State in the next five years.

The Chief Minister remarked that just as medicines are now customised for individual needs, the day is not far when food too will be tailored to personal preferences, starting with Kuppam. Releasing the Kuppam Organic Farming Vision-2029, Naidu stressed the need to develop a farming system that safeguards public health.

He expressed confidence that the entire nation would eventually consume only organic food. Interacting with farmers at Srigalapalli, Naidu inquired about their farming practices and highlighted that agriculture would soon transform into a form of pharmacy where food itself serves as medicine. Naidu noted that those consuming

## Says Kuppam will show the way to the entire country



- The initiatives aim to generate employment and promote green energy.
- Kuppam's environment is ideal for organic and commercial crops with good marketing potential.

- Naidu emphasised tailoring food production to individual preferences starting from Kuppam.
- The Kuppam Organic Farming Vision-2029 was released to promote healthy farming practices
- Naidu believes organic food can reduce hospital visits and promote better health.
- He highlights traditional farming practices and the need to revive them.
- National Dairy Development Board will set up dairy and vegetable units in Kuppam.

organically grown food rarely need medical visits, pointing out that previous generations stayed healthier by eating natural produce. He mentioned organising a 10-day conference with renowned natural farmer Palekar and

several organisations to promote awareness of natural farming. He also mentioned the gradual revival of traditional farming practices and noted that some individuals find greater satisfaction in organic farming

than regular employment. The Chief Minister assured that an ecosystem would be developed to prevent misleading claims about the organic nature of food products. Continued on Page 2

## Textbook burden to be reduced on AP students

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, has directed officials to design a new curriculum aimed at reducing the burden of textbooks on students while enhancing the quality of education.

In a review meeting held at Undavalli on Tuesday, Lokesh, alongside officials from the School Education, Intermediate, and Higher Education departments, discussed a comprehensive curriculum for the 2025-26 academic year, covering everything from Kindergarten to Post-Graduate levels.

The Minister emphasised the need for reforms to achieve the goal of "AP Model Education" and

stressed that universities should aim for higher rankings in the QS World Rankings. He highlighted the importance of a credit framework, internships, and the inclusion of academic achievements, curriculum development, financial planning, and international collaboration strategies in the recruitment process for university faculty. Lokesh proposed that the newly formed Advisory Council, under the leadership of the Chief Minister, should consist of educationists, industrialists, stakeholders, policy experts, and research specialists. He also urged that the selection process for the council and university bodies, including Vice Chancellors, be completed swiftly. Continued on Page 2

## MP Avinash's PA Raghava Reddy arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Raghav Reddy, Personal Assistant to Kadapa MP Avinash Reddy, was arrested by the police at his residence in Pulivendula. The arrest followed the rejection of his anticipatory

bail plea by the High Court. The police arrived at his house, took him into custody, and shifted him to the police station. Raghav Reddy is accused of instructing YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) social media activist Varra Ravinder Reddy to post offensive content online. He is the 20th accused in a case registered under the SC/ST Act on November 8. The investigation is being led by Pulivendula DSP Murali Nayak. In anticipation of his arrest, a large number of YSRCP activists gathered at the Pulivendula police station.

## APSRTC to run 7,200 Sankranti specials

Normal fares to be charged in the interest of common passengers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) will operate 7,200 special bus services from various depots across the State to manage the Sankranti festival rush from January 8 to 20.

Managing Director Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao stated that these buses would ferry passengers to destinations across Andhra Pradesh and neigh-



bouring states Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

In a press release on Tuesday,

Tirumala Rao clarified that normal fares would be charged for the special services in the interest of common passengers. Out of the total special services, 3,900 buses will be operated before the festival, including 2,153 services to Hyderabad, 375 to Bengaluru, 42 to Chennai, 300 to Vijayawada, 250 to Visakhapatnam, 50 to Tirupati, 23 to Rajamahendravaram, and 500 to other locations. Continued on Page 2

## Jethwani case: HC relief to 3 Sr IPS officers

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Three senior IPS officers got relief on Tuesday in connection with the Mumbai actress Jethwani case as the Andhra Pradesh High Court granted them anticipatory bail. The High Court granted anticipatory bail to senior IPS officers, including PSR Anjaneyulu, Kanthi Rana Tata, and Vishal Gunni, who are facing allegations related to the actress Kadambari Jethwani case.

Additionally, Punjab was granted to the then Ibrahimpatnam CI Hanumanth Rao and advocate Venkateswarlu. The High Court had earlier directed the prosecution to file country affidavits, granting interim pro-



tection from arrest to the petitioners. Speaking to the media, advocate Narra Srinivas stated that cases had been registered against the four police officers on charges of harassing and implicating the actress in false cases. He also clarified that the granting of bail by the High Court would be challenged in the Supreme Court.

# Delhi to vote on February 5, APSSDC signs MoU with Suzlon Energy on green skilling

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Polling for all 70 assembly seats in Delhi will be held on February 5 and the votes counted on February 8, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar announced on Tuesday.

Bypolls to two assembly constituencies -- Milkpur in Uttar Pradesh and Erode in Tamil Nadu -- will also be held according to the same schedule while that in two constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir -- Budgam and Nagrota -- will be held later due to the current snowy conditions.

The last date to file nominations is January 17 and the scrutiny of nominations will be done by January 18. Candidates will be able to withdraw their nominations till January 20. "It is a single-phase election... We have deliberately kept polling on a Wednesday so more people come out to vote... like we did in Maharashtra. The entire election process will be completed by February 10," Kumar said at a press conference. Of the 70 seats in Delhi, 58 are general and 12 reserved. Continued on Page 2



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has launched India's largest green skilling initiative to create employment opportunities for the youth in the rapidly growing renewable energy sector.

As part of this initiative, the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) signed an MoU with Suzlon Energy to train 12,000 youth in renewable energy project areas such as mechanical, electrical, blade technology, civil, and licensing. Suzlon Energy will also establish five skill labs in select ITIs and polytechnic colleges. Both short-term (3-12 months) and long-term (over 12 months) vocational courses will be designed to offer training in the renewable energy sector.

Suzlon Energy, India's largest wind turbine manufacturer with over 21,000 MW of installed capacity, will provide

## IT Minister Lokesh says AP govt targets 7.5 lakh jobs in the sector



expertise to skill the youth of Andhra Pradesh and create job opportunities. Representing Suzlon Energy, Group CEO JP Chalasani was present along with senior officials VB Rao (Advisor), Rajendra Mehra (Chief HRO), and Kamalini Sanyal (Lead Talent Management).

Additionally, APSSDC signed a key MoU with Swanti Initiative to further enhance green skilling in the State. Swanti Initiative will offer support in skill development by identifying key sectors and industries to promote job growth. Trustee Uma Bhattacharya, State Consultant Siva Prasad, Secretary of School Education and Skill Development Kona Sasidhar, Managing Director Ganesh Kumar, and Executive Director of Skill

Development Corporation Dinesh Kumar attended the event.

As per the agreement signed on Tuesday, Swanti Initiative will map job requirements in the renewable energy sector in Chittoor, Nellore, Kadapa, Anantapur, and Kurnool over the next two years. A draft strategy for skill development and implementation will be prepared within four months and a skill landscape assessment for the sector.

Education, it, and Electronics Minister Nara Lokesh signed the MoUs. He stated, "Green energy is a key focus area for the Andhra Pradesh Government, and we aim to create 7.5 lakh jobs in this sector. With the global renewable energy push, we want AP to become a hub for green talent. These collaborations with Suzlon Energy and Swanti Initiative will help generate widespread job opportunities for our youth."





# Collector calls for joint efforts to end child marriage

● The social evil deprives girls of the opportunity to pursue their dreams

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha has emphasised the need for collective efforts to achieve a child marriage-free India. As part of the 'Balya Vivah Mukta Bharat' campaign, a district-level coordination meeting was held for Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) at the Pingali Venkaiah Meeting Hall in Vijayawada on Tuesday. On the occasion, Dr Lakshminsha administered a pledge

to the officials. In his remarks, Collector Lakshminsha pointed out that child marriage is a social evil that not only hinders the education, health, and development of girls, but also deprives them of the opportunity to pursue their dreams. He urged everyone in society to take action against child marriage. He highlighted the importance of widespread awareness regarding the health risks and other negative consequences that child marriage can entail. Later, he said it is crucial to

inform parents and encourage the involvement of NGOs in this fight. Furthermore, he directed the officials from various departments, including Women's Development, Education, Medical & Health, and Police, to work collaboratively to ensure the strict implementation of laws, programmes, and policies designed to prevent child marriage. He stressed the importance of focusing on the education and economic empowerment of girls, noting that education is key to prevent-

ing child marriage. He said that by empowering girls through education, poverty can be alleviated, helping to eliminate social issues like child marriage. The meeting was attended by Nodal Officer Ch Sangeetha, Vasavya Mahila Mandali President Dr Kirti Bollineni, Vijayawada Rural CDPO G Mangamma, Child Protection Officer M Rajarajeswar Rao, CMPOs, Tahsildars, MPDOs, MEOs, CDPOs, ASIs, Supervisors, and other officials.

# Durgesh discusses tourism investors' meet, beach development

● Stress on need for Centre-State Government collaboration for tourism development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Tourism, Culture and Cinematography, Kandula Durgesh, has directed Tourism Department officials to make arrangements for a Tourism Investors' Conference in Visakhapatnam and Tirupati soon. A meeting took place at the State Secretariat on Tuesday, where the Minister reviewed the progress of various tourism-related works. The Minister also held an in-depth discussion with officials regarding the proposals received during the Investors' Summit conducted in Vijayawada in December 2024.

Minister Durgesh stressed the collaboration between the Central and State governments in developing the tourism sector, highlighting the special attention given by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu to the growth of tourism. He urged officials to expedite the completion of ongoing projects and prove the efficiency of the department. Mentioning that he will personally monitor the progress of tourism development works in the coming days, the Minister stressed that offi-

cial should focus on the timely completion of these tasks.

The Minister also discussed the investment proposals from prominent hotel chains such as Oberoi, Mayfair, Taj Group, Hyatt, Mahindra and Sterling. He reviewed proposals from aspiring industrialists and deliberated on the concessions to be offered to them under the new tourism policy. Durgesh expressed interest in meeting these investors again soon to push forward the execution of these projects.

During the meeting, officials presented plans for the development of eight beaches in the State, with proposals for beautification, cleanliness, drinking water supply, and the construction of bathrooms. The Minister emphasised the importance of incorporating Swachh Bharat initiatives for cleaning beach areas and suggested partnering with local industrial companies to support this process.

Durgesh also instructed officials to ensure that newly modernised tourism hotels will be made available to the public by the end of this month. He further

directed that the tourism development proposals brought by MLAs should be seriously considered by the authorities.

The Minister also highlighted the importance of involving celebrities from the film industry in promoting tourism in the State. He discussed the implementation of projects like the Akhanda Godavari and Gandikota, which will be funded by the Central government's SASKI scheme, and provided guidance to officials on the execution of these projects.

Later, Minister Durgesh met with Kumar Vishwajeet, the Principal Secretary of the Home Department, and discussed matters related to the Cinematography Department and the new film policy. The Minister also congratulated Vishwajeet, who was recently promoted from Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) to Director General of Police (DGP).

Tourism Secretary Vinay Chand, Tourism MD Amrapali, Tourism Executive Directors Padmavati and Sheshgiri, Chief Engineer Narsimha Rao, Superintendent Engineer Eshwarayya, and Consultant Satyaprabh were present.



# Lokesh attends 'Dhanurmasa Mahotsav'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

'Dhanurmasam' is regarded as the favourite month of Lord Venkateswara, and it is believed that worshipping and having darshan of the Lord during this auspicious time brings prosperity to all, said Minister Nara Lokesh. He made these remarks at the 'Dhanurmasa Mahotsav', organised under the direct supervision of Sri Sri Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swami at Bajupji Vidyalyam in Mangalagiri's Srisaia Nagar.



Minister Lokesh highlighted the significance of observing Dhanurmasam during this sacred month, noting that such practices bring goodness into people's lives. He said that performing spiritual rituals during this time brings divine blessings. Expressing his gratitude for being part of the grand event, he stated, "It is a blessing for me to be part of this divine occasion, and I have also received

the Lord's blessings in this form." He further emphasised that such events increase awareness among the youth about the rituals to observe in various months, helping them lead lives filled with peace and happiness. The Minister also encouraged people to visit temples such as the Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple in Mangalagiri, the Panakala Narasimha Swamy

Temple atop the hill, and the Vijayakeeladri Temple during Dhanurmasam. Minister Lokesh extended his heartfelt thanks to Sri Sri Tridandi Chinna Jeeyar Swami for organising such a magnificent event and conveyed his wishes that the blessings of Lord Venkateswara, the deity of Kali Yuga, reach the people of the state.

# Wage, pension delays: Vizag Steel executives seek Govt support

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The general secretary of the Vizag Steel Executives Association (SEA), KVD Prasad, met with the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh, K. Vijayanand, to discuss the pressing challenges faced by Vizag Steel Plant (RINL) employees and widow pensioners. Prasad highlighted the severe hardships caused by pending wages and pensions for over four months.

During the meeting, Prasad submitted a formal representation requesting the AP government to extend financial support of Rs 2,000 crore as an advance, earmarked as Rs 500 crore per month for four months. In return, the State government would receive quality steel products for projects like Amaravati construction and housing for the underprivileged.

# CPI, CPM protest against steel plant's sale

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Leaders and activists of the CPI and the CPI(M) staged a strong protest in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, opposing the proposed strategic sale of the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL)-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. The protest was planned in the wake of the scheduled visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Visakhapatnam on Wednesday, where he is set to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for various Central government projects.

The protesters gathered at the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Dwarakanagar Junction, raising slogans against the government's decision to privatise the steel plant. They demanded that the government take immediate steps to save RINL from privatisation, allocate a special financial package for the plant, and ensure the provision of captive mines to secure its future.

"We urge Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make a clear public announcement on withdrawing the government's decisions that are threatening the stability of the steel plant. The Prime Minister must also announce a special package for the plant and ensure the allocation of captive mines during his visit to Visakhapatnam on Wednesday," the leaders declared. The protest programme was presided over by Aja Sarma, general secretary of the Uttarandhra Development Forum, who expressed strong disapproval of the government's stance on the plant. The ongoing debate over the strategic sale of RINL has become a significant political issue, with various factions voicing concerns over the future of one of the region's most vital industrial assets. The protesters urged the government to reconsider its privatisation agenda and provide a sustainable roadmap for the plant's growth.



Left party leaders and activists staging a protest against strategic sale of RINL-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, on Tuesday

# Medasani delights audience with 'Ashtavadhanam'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr Medasani Mohan, a distinguished scholar, captivated the audience with his remarkable 'Ashtavadhanam' performance at PB Siddhartha Arts and Science College on Tuesday. The event was organised by the Telugu Department, under the leadership of department head Dr N. Siva Kumar.

Dr Mohan's poetic brilliance was widely praised, with many describing his performance as enchanting and mesmerizing. The 'Nishiddhakshari' segment was managed by Dr Palaparthi Shyamalanandaprasad, who also commended Dr Mohan for completing his golden jubilee year of Avadhanam. The 'Nyastakshari' portion was conducted by Dr Gumma Sambasiva Rao, a retired Telugu professor. Dr Pingali Venkata Krishnarao, a retired lecturer, set a challenging poetic task for Dr Mohan, who responded with remarkable skill and finesse. Several professors and students actively participated in the event, prompting Dr Mohan to compose spontaneous poems on various topics, further showcasing his immense talent. After the event, Dr Mohan and the participants were honoured by Dean Dr Rajesh Jampa and AO Sridhar. The event also saw significant participation from the college's principal, Dr Meka Ramesh, and other esteemed faculty members.

# Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam performed



PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The age-old temple cleansing ritual, Koil Alwar Tirumanjanam, was performed in Tirumala temple on Tuesday in connection with Vaikuntha Ekadasi on January 10.



The entire temple premises including sub temples, puja utensils inside the temple, roofs, pillars and walls of Sanctum Sanctorum were smeared with an aromatic mixture called Parimalam, and cleansed on the occasion.

After the completion of the religious fete, TTD Chairman BR Naidu and Executive Officer J Syamala Rao told the media that this traditional ceremony is being observed before Ugadi, Anivara Asthanam, annual Brahmotsavam and Vaikuntha Ekadasi festivities. After the cleansing activity, the devotees will be allowed for darshan, they maintained.

TTD Board members including Bhanuprakash Reddy, Sambasiva Rao, Rajasekhara Goud, and Suchitra Yella Panabaka Lakshmi were also present during temple cleansing fete. Among other officers Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, CVSO Sridhar, DyEO Lokanatham and others took part in the programme. District SP Subbarayudu was also present.

# Applications for RIMC entrance exam invited

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) has announced the commencement of applications for the Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC) entrance examination for the January 2026 term. The entrance exam, which aims to admit boys and girls into Class VIII at RIMC, Dehradun, will be held on June 1, 2026, at designated centres across various states. In this regard, APPSC in-charge Secretary I. Narasimha Murthy issued a press release on Tuesday.

The RIMC, renowned for its rigorous academic and military training, invites applications from candidates aged between 11½ and 13 years as of January 1, 2026. Applicants must either be currently enrolled in Class VII or have completed the Seventh grade from a recognised school by the admission date. The examination will include subjects such as Mathematics, General Knowledge, and English, followed

by a viva voce for successful candidates. Candidates who clear the written test will be eligible for a viva voce interview, which will assess their intelligence, personality, and communication skills. A medical examination at designated Military Hospitals will then determine the final selection based on medical fitness. Application forms, along with necessary documents such as birth certificates, domicile proof, and Aadhar cards, must be submitted in duplicate to the Assistant Secretary (Exams), AP Public Service Commission, Vijayawada, by March 31, 2025. The application fee is Rs.600 for General candidates and Rs.555 for SC/ST candidates, payable through online transaction or demand draft. Interested applicants are advised to visit the RIMC website (www.rimc.gov.in) for detailed instructions and updates regarding the examination process. Further information on the exam centres and application procedures can be obtained from the Commission's office in Vijayawada.

# Volleyball: AP enter pre-quarterfinals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Hosts Andhra Pradesh have reached the pre-quarterfinals of the School Games Federation of India (SGFI) Volleyball National Tournament for Under-19 Girls, which is taking place at the PB Siddhartha Arts and Science Junior College premises in Mogalrajapuram. Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and CISCE have also entered the pre-quarters.

The quarterfinal matches are scheduled for Wednesday morning. Andhra Pradesh displayed an impressive performance in the league matches, achieving solid victories in both of their games to secure their spot in the pre-quarterfinals. However, another Telugu State, Telangana won only one match and lost two matches. The tournament is being organised by the School Games



Federation of Andhra Pradesh (SGFAP) and the Krishna District Under-19 Section under the auspices of SGFI. A total of 26 teams from across the country are participating in the competition, which follows a league-cum-knockout format.

**Day 2 - Results:** Andhra Pradesh defeat Chandigarh (25-12, 25-11, 25-13), Himachal Pradesh defeat Punjab (18-25, 25-16, 23-25, 25-17, 17-15), Uttarakhand defeat Chandigarh (25-15, 25-27, 18-25), Punjab defeat Telangana (25-18, 25-15, 25-18), Karnataka defeat Odisha (25-12, 25-13, 25-14), Tamil Nadu defeat Vidya Bharati (25-12, 25-3, 25-3), Maharashtra defeat Rajasthan (23-25, 19-25, 25-20, 26-24, 15-12), Kerala defeat Jammu and Kashmir (25-19, 25-13, 25-14), Gujarat defeat Haryana (23-25, 25-19, 25-18, 25-17), and West Bengal defeat Delhi (25-7, 25-11, 25-14)





SETTING UP OF DIALYSIS CENTRE

# Minister pulls up officials for delay

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Management Nimmala Ramanaidu expressed his displeasure with the concerned officials and the contracting agency over the delay in completing works to establish a dialysis centre at the 100-bed new government hospital in Palakollu.

On Tuesday, the Minister, accompanied by officers and doctors, inspected the ongoing construction at the hospital, which is being developed by the AP Medical Services Infrastructure Development Corporation. After reviewing the progress of the dialysis centre, he voiced his dissatisfaction with the slow pace of work. "The works can be completed in five days, but they have not been finished even after a

month," he remarked. The Minister warned of action if the works failed to meet quality standards. He stressed that the coalition government would not tolerate the indifference of officials and contractors, while also emphasising that no compromise would be made on the quality of the work.

He directed the officials to ensure that the dialysis centre at the new government hospital be set up to the same standards as corporate hospitals, to provide the best medical care for the poor. The Minister also expressed anger upon noticing mould on the roof of the hospital and questioned the officials about their negligence in maintaining cleanliness.

"The patients who require dialysis have to travel to Eluru,

Bhimavaram, Tadepalligudem, Rajahmundry, and Amalapuram. When we raised this issue with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, he sanctioned a dialysis centre at the new GGH with an allocation of Rs 12.60 crore. However, the contracting agency and officials have been indifferent in completing the construction on time," he said.

Minister Ramanaidu warned the contracting agency that action would be taken if they did not address the faults and ensure adherence to quality standards in the construction. APMSIDC DEE M Srinivasa Reddy, hospital superintendent Dr. O Ravi Kumar, and doctors Dr Varma and Dr. Santosh Kumar were among those who accompanied the Minister.

# Bankers urged to prioritise loans for youth



PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi has urged bankers to prioritise the extension of loans to youths under the BC and SC Corporation Action Plan as part of the self-employment scheme.

The meeting, chaired by the Collector, was held here on Tuesday. Addressing the gathering, Collector Vetri Selvi instructed the bankers to meet the set targets for loan disbursement. "The State Government has sanctioned Rs 36.49 crore for the establishment of 1,901 self-employment units this financial year under the OBMMMS Self-Employment Scheme for the youth from Backward Classes in the district, as part of the BC Corporation 2024-25 Action Plan,"

the Collector stated.

Similarly, Rs 4.30 crore has been sanctioned for 215 youths under the OBMMMS Self-Employment Scheme for Economically Weaker Sections in the district, she added.

The Collector also informed that 38 generic medical shops worth Rs 3.04 crore have been approved for unemployed youth from BC communities, with bankers covering 50 per cent of the unit cost as a loan and the State Government providing the remaining 50 per cent as a subsidy.

"Under the SC Corporation 2024-25 Action Plan, 750 self-employment units have been sanctioned for the district this financial year for Rs 25.91 crore for Scheduled Caste youth," the Collector explained. She also clarified that beneficiaries will be required to contribute 10 per cent of the cost, with 50 per cent of the loan provided by banks and the remaining 40 per cent covered as a subsidy by the government.

Collector Vetri Selvi added that candidates would need to apply online, with the applications being reviewed by the MPDOs at the mandal level. Eligible applications will be forwarded to the relevant departments. She urged bankers to ensure that loans are sanctioned online under the targets set, enabling unemployed youth to establish self-employment units.

Among those present at the meeting were DRDA PD R Vijaya Raju, ZP CEO K Subba Rao, BC Corporation ED Pushpamani, Social Welfare JD Jayaprakash, and officials from various banks.



# Shallow fog likely in coastal AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Meteorological Centre has issued a forecast for shallow fog at isolated locations in coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next three days. The report also predicts similar conditions in Rayalaseema for the next 48 hours. Dry weather is expected to persist across both Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema for the coming week.

The lowest minimum temperature of 16.1 degrees Celsius was recorded at Nandigama, and Anantapur in Rayalaseema during the past 24 hours.

# RSASTF SP visits forest areas, reviews combing operations

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The SP of the Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF), P Srinivas, inspected vulnerable forest areas and reviewed the vigilance and combing operations of the task force personnel to curb the illegal transport of red sanders.

On Tuesday, SP Srinivas visited the Penchalakona, Somashila, and Lankamala forest areas. He later convened a meeting with the task force and forest department officials at Penchalakona, Badvel, Siddavatam, and Railway Kodur, where he reviewed the operations of the task force teams. Speaking on the occasion, Srinivas instructed the task force and forest department officials to intensify vigilance and checks at entry and loading points within the forest to prevent red sander smuggling. "All vehicles must be thoroughly checked at the entry points," he directed.

He also emphasized the need to



ensure that there is no staff shortage at forest department checkpoints and that basic amenities are provided for the personnel. Steps are being taken to conduct mass combing operations with the task force and forest department personnel in the forests to curb the smuggling of red sanders.

"We will not hesitate to invoke the 'Preventive Detention Act (PD Act)' against repeated offenders involved in red sander smuggling, particularly those who have earned notoriety. A strict vigil must be maintained on known smugglers. Advanced technology should be

employed to monitor smugglers, inspect vehicles, and support combing operations in the forest areas," the task force SP said.

DSPs G Balireddy, V Srinivasulu Reddy, ACF J Srinivas, and other officials from the task force and forest department were also present.



# ₹5 lakh ex gratia handed over to kin of electrocution victim

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy handed over Rs 5 lakh ex gratia to the family of Etta Venkata Rao, who died of electrocution. The Minister handed over the ex gratia cheque to the bereaved family in his office at Toorpu Naidu Palem on Tuesday. Etta Venkata Rao was electrocuted on October 1, 2024. Minister Dola Veeranjanya Swamy brought the

incident to the notice of Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and recommended Rs 5 lakh ex gratia to the bereaved family. The Government sanctioned Rs 5 lakh ex gratia to the bereaved family which the Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy handed over to family members of the deceased. The family members thanked Minister Veeranjanya Swamy for handing over the ex gratia cheque.

# Collector, SP welcome Pondicherry Lieutenant Guv

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari district Collector P. Prashanthi and SP D. Narasimha warmly welcomed Pondicherry Lieutenant Governor K. Kailash Nathan on Tuesday.

The Lieutenant Governor arrived at Rajahmundry Airport from Hyderabad on Tuesday evening. He then proceeded to Kovvur, where he will stay overnight, according to authorities. On his arrival, he was greeted by District Collector P. Prashanthi, SP D. Narasimha Kishore, Airport Director Gyaneshwar, and RDO R. Krishna Nayak. Kailash Nathan will travel to Yanam on Wednesday after his overnight stay in Kovvur. He is scheduled to attend the 21st Yanam People Culture Festival 2025 and the 23rd Yanam Flower



Show 2025 exhibition. He will stay overnight in Yanam before departing for Madhurapudi Airport at 9:45 am on Thursday, and then leave for Hyderabad at 10:15 am.

# GMC to host 'Sankranti Sambaralu' for four days

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) will celebrate the spirit of Sankranti with a grand 'Sankranti Sambaralu' at NTR Stadium from January 12 to 15. The event, aimed at showcasing Telugu culture and traditions, was announced by GMC Commissioner Puli Srinivasulu at a press conference, attended by Guntur West MLA Galla Madhavi and Deputy Mayor Sheikh Sajila.

Srinivasulu highlighted that the celebration will feature various traditional activities, including Tambola, Musical Chairs, Tug of War, and Lemon & Spoon races. Registration for these events will begin on Tuesday evening at NTR Stadium.

MLA Galla Madhavi underscored the festival's significance, explaining that the GMC intends to



make this celebration a memorable one for the next five years. A committee comprising officials and local leaders has been formed to ensure smooth organisation of the event. The festivities will include traditional art and henna competitions, cultural performances, Gangireddula and cow shows, agricultural exhibitions, Kolatam, musi-

cal nights, and more. The event will conclude on January 15 with kite flying, dance performances, a magic show, and special competitions for professionals, such as cricket and shuttle matches.

The announcement event was also attended by Deputy Mayor Sheikh Sajila and other senior officials.

# Man kills wife, daughter

PNS ■ KADAPA

A tragic incident unfolded in T Tummalapalle village in Thonduru mandal of Pulivendula constituency on Tuesday, where a man brutally murdered his wife and teenage daughter.

Police reports indicate that Tummalaga Gangadhar Reddy, the accused, had been experiencing marital discord with his wife, Tummalaga Srilakshmi (37). A heated argument erupted between the couple on Tuesday, culminating in a violent outburst. In a fit of rage, Reddy fatally attacked both Srilakshmi and his daughter, Gangotri (14).

Both victims succumbed to their injuries at the scene. Following the horrific act, Reddy fled the scene of the crime. Local police have registered a case and transported the bodies to the Government General Hospital for post-mortem examination.

# 120 kg of ganja seized in car

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

The police seized 120 kg of cannabis from a car that was abandoned in an agricultural field on the outskirts of Nandigama on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team conducted vehicle checks at a toll plaza. Upon spotting the police, the drug peddlers turned their car around on the national highway. The police, noticing their suspicious behaviour, gave chase. However, the peddlers abandoned the vehicle at an agricultural field in Gowravaram village and fled the scene. Upon inspection, the police discovered 120 kgs of cannabis in the car.



The police suspect that the peddlers were en route to Maharashtra with the cannabis but abandoned

the car to avoid detection. CI YVL Naidu has registered a case and initiated a manhunt for the suspects.

# 'Seoul bombs starting to explode'

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU  
venkat.k.warlu@gmail.com  
■ HYDERABAD

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said the then ruling BRS party should explain why electoral bonds were given to the Congress. Apart from electoral bonds, there are many other things that should come out. It should be clear how much money went to foreign companies and to whose account, he said.

"Seoul bombs are starting to explode. The Electricity Commission report has arrived. The government is taking legal advice. The Kaleshwaram Commission's inquiry is going on. The case of phone tapping is not over yet. After I became a minister, I did not see the former minister of our district. Things are going on whether he is there or not," he said.

He said the BRS is the richest party among regional parties and wondered how that much money had come to the BRS.

He said that former BRS Minister T. Harish Rao would be present in whatever case KCR is present and made it clear that the Congress government and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy have no intention of targeting the KCR family intentionally. However, the

KCR family has a hand in whatever case that comes out, he said.

"The government appointed commissions and filed cases only as per the request of BRS leaders. It was they who appealed for probes into Kaleshwaram, power purchase deals and the Formula E-Car Race. Nothing has been done intentionally. BRS leaders committed misdeeds and they are now coming out. Kavitha will become the CM before KTR who thinks that he will become the CM if he goes to jail," Ponguleti said.

He said that everything will come out if IAS officer Arvind Kumar tells the truth. "How come a regional party managed to collect more funds than national parties? KCR spoke about the nation but never spoke about Telangana when he was the CM," Ponguleti pointed out. "Misdeeds will come out one day. Courts will decide what is wrong and what is right. Those who are guilty can never escape. It is not right to flex muscles in front of courts. We are not targeting BRS leaders. We are not targeting anyone. Why did KTR go to court if he did not do anything wrong? KTR has not changed. It seems his writer may have changed. KTR's aggression seems to have increased," he said.

# Flamingo Festival 2025 to be organised on Jan 18 & 19

PNS ■ NELLORE

The Flamingo Festival 2025 will be held from January 18 to 19 at Sullurpet, Atikanithappa, and Nelapattu. Collector S. Venkateswar and MLA Nelavala Vijayasri visited the Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary and the Environmental Science Centre in Doravaristram Mandal of Sullurpet constituency on Tuesday to review the arrangements for the Flamingo Festival.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector stated that the Flamingo Festival 2025 will be organised from January 18 to 20 with the coordi-



ination of all officials and public representatives.

The Collector recalled that the Flamingo Festival had been held

until 2020 but was not organised in the last four years. He mentioned that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, during his visit to the district,

had suggested that the Flamingo Festival 2025 should be organised on a grand scale as a State festival.

The Collector instructed the officials to ensure that the Flamingo Festival is celebrated in five locations—Nelapattu, BV Palem, Atakanithappa, Sri City, and Sullurpet—on January 18, 19, and 20. He emphasised the need for flawless arrangements for the event.

"Due to the unique ecological diversity of the Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, rare birds such as Grey Pelicans, Cormorant-billed birds (Water Crows), Spoon-billed Storks, Open-billed Storks, and others

flock to the sanctuary," he revealed.

Collector Venkateswar further highlighted that these migratory birds travel from distant foreign lands to raise their offspring. They bring food for their young from the nearby Pulicat Lake and sea waters, nurture them, teach them to swim and fly, and then return to their native regions in March and April.

MLA Nelavala Vijayasri mentioned that the Flamingo Festival will be celebrated over three days, from January 18, and urged the officials to work closely with public representatives to ensure the success of the event.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Trudeau steps down

### Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau resigns ahead of the upcoming elections

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's announcement of his resignation on January 6, 2025, marks a significant turning point in Canadian politics. Trudeau, who has served as Prime Minister since October 2015, made the decision amidst mounting pressure from his own party and growing challenges to his leadership. Trudeau's decision to step down comes against a backdrop of increasing discontent within the ruling Liberal Party. During his announcement outside Rideau Cottage in Ottawa, Trudeau acknowledged the internal discord that had hindered his leadership. In a strategic move, Trudeau met with Governor General Mary Simon to secure the prorogation of Parliament until March 24, effectively delaying the possibility of a no-confidence vote that was anticipated in the session scheduled to begin on January 27. This decision provides the Liberal Party with a window to elect a new leader and stabilise its position ahead of potential political upheaval. Trudeau's resignation reflects a culmination of political and personal challenges. The Liberal Party's diminishing unity became a significant obstacle for Trudeau's leadership. Discontent among MPs and party members had been growing, fueled by concerns over policy decisions, governance style, and declining public support.

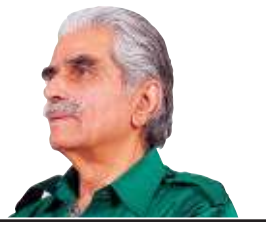


After nearly a decade in office, Trudeau's administration faced criticism over issues such as economic management, healthcare and Canada's climate policy. These challenges eroded his public approval, making him a less viable candidate for the next election. By stepping down before the next election, Trudeau's resignation allows the Liberal Party to rejuvenate its leadership and present a fresh face to voters, potentially mitigating electoral risks. Trudeau's departure will have significant political and national implications. The resignation sets the stage for a competitive leadership race within the Liberal Party. The choice of the next leader will be critical in determining the party's future direction and its ability to retain power. Trudeau's resignation reshapes Canada's political dynamics. The opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, is likely to leverage this transition period to challenge the Liberals' governance record and push for early elections. Trudeau's tenure, marked by landmark achievements such as legalising cannabis, advancing gender equality, and climate initiatives, will now be evaluated in the context of his departure. His legacy will hinge on whether the Liberal Party can sustain these accomplishments under new leadership. Justin Trudeau's resignation underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly evolving landscape. While his decision to step down reflects personal and political pragmatism, it also signals a pivotal moment for Canadian democracy. The coming months will determine how effectively the Liberal Party navigates this transition and whether Canada's political institutions can maintain stability amid change. Trudeau's departure opens the door to new opportunities and challenges for Canada's political future.

trouderisks. Trudeau's departure will have significant political and national implications. The resignation sets the stage for a competitive leadership race within the Liberal Party. The choice of the next leader will be critical in determining the party's future direction and its ability to retain power. Trudeau's resignation reshapes Canada's political dynamics. The opposition, particularly the Conservative Party, is likely to leverage this transition period to challenge the Liberals' governance record and push for early elections. Trudeau's tenure, marked by landmark achievements such as legalising cannabis, advancing gender equality, and climate initiatives, will now be evaluated in the context of his departure. His legacy will hinge on whether the Liberal Party can sustain these accomplishments under new leadership. Justin Trudeau's resignation underscores the complexities of long-term political leadership in a rapidly evolving landscape. While his decision to step down reflects personal and political pragmatism, it also signals a pivotal moment for Canadian democracy. The coming months will determine how effectively the Liberal Party navigates this transition and whether Canada's political institutions can maintain stability amid change. Trudeau's departure opens the door to new opportunities and challenges for Canada's political future.

## India's Gorkha Brigade: A legacy at crossroads

### The iconic Gorkha Brigade faces an uncertain future with the freeze on Nepal domiciled Gorkha recruitment under the Agnipath scheme



ASHOK K MEHTA

The press and media are flooded with stories about Nepal Domiciled Gorkha soldiers and their imperiled future in the Indian Army under the Agnipath scheme. With the last NDG in India's Gorkha Brigade likely to retire around 2045-50, it is possible two Gorkha soldiers could confront each other in Doklam, or elsewhere along the LAC should NDGs start joining the PLA. Traditionally, they have joined the British Army since the early 19th century, later the Singapore Police and Brunei Army and still later, the French Foreign Legion and the Russian Army (around 15,000 according to Al Jazeera news). Soldiering is in their blood with the first choice always and every time, the British Army has pampered as well as exploited them. On 10 November 2024, Kathmandu Post carried a front-page picture of impeccably smart Gorkhas at an attestation parade in the UK.

Three brothers in a Nepali family could still be in British, Indian and Nepalese armies in that order of preference. But Britain does not recruit Indian Domiciled Gorkhas. NDGs ceased joining the Indian Army for 5 years rendering hopelessly bleak the future of the Gorkha Brigade and a strategic glue that binds India and Nepal. Last year, in November and December, Indian and Nepalese Army Chiefs who became honorary Generals in each other's army spent a week in the other's country and were made much of. Last week, 1/11 Gorkha Rifles commanded by Col JP Singh went for joint training with the Sri Sri Jung battalion of the Nepal Army at Saljhandi near the border town of Butawal. (With PLA Nepal Army does only platoon-level joint training restricted to Kathmandu Valley).

No weapons are carried by either contingent as the host country provides them. No two sovereign armies and their Chiefs have such unique rapport. Despite the shared history, geography and historic links between the two countries and their armies, recruitment of NDGs has been frozen since India took the unilateral decision in June 2022 to change



the terms of engagement that Kathmandu says violated Treaty arrangements. Curiously both countries have remained silent at the political and military levels. India's senior-most officer, Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Anil Chauhan from 11 Gorkha Rifles has been approached by several Gorkha veterans to try to break the stalemate but he is loath to approach PM/RM/NSA saying that the government 'has taken a political decision'. QED

It is his responsibility to raise the decision-making process to the next level as other Army Chiefs in the past have done in the national interest. During the economic blockade in 2015, Gen Dalbir Singh was able to persuade PM Narendra Modi and FM Sushma Swaraj that prolonging the blockade would adversely affect the livelihood of Indian Army Gorkha ex-servicemen and families of serving soldiers in Nepal which in turn would impact bilateral relations. The blockade was ended but bilateral ties were seriously disturbed. After King Gyanendra conducted the Palace coup in 2004, India decided to stop the supply of lethal armaments to the Nepal Army which was fighting the Maoists. Then Army Chief, Gen JJ Singh, recommended against it. In a slanging match between MoD and EAM, Prime

DESPITE THE SHARED HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORIC LINKS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THEIR ARMIES, RECRUITMENT OF NDGS HAS BEEN FROZEN SINCE INDIA TOOK THE UNILATERAL DECISION IN JUNE 2022 TO CHANGE THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT THAT KATHMANDU SAYS VIOLATED TREATY ARRANGEMENTS

Minister Manmohan Singh upheld the embargo. On the other hand, Siachen, Army Chiefs had prevailed in convincing Singh not to budge over any withdrawal from or concessions on Siachen.

In 1986, during the Gorkhaland movement in North Bengal, as a senior Gorkha officer who had been deployed there, I was invited to a meeting by Principal Secretary to PM, Sarla Grewal along with Deputy Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Rawat for discussion on the violence and our response. In the higher direction of war in 1971, PM Indira Gandhi consulted Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw at every stage for planning and conduct of battle. In 1975, then Army Chief, Gen Gopal Bewoor, 11 Gorkha Rifles convinced Mrs Gandhi of the negative impact of stopping the recruitment of NDGs. So this is not the first time that the absurd idea of ending NDG recruitment has come up. But this time government decided on NDGs that CDS accepted. Lt Gen Sanjeev Chauhan is the senior officer and President Gorkha Brigade which meets annually in February in a unique assembly of seven Gorkha regiments to discuss professional matters. On recruitment of NDGs, they too are stuck at the Army Chief/CDS level. Two years ago, I wrote a letter

on strategic loss accruing from altered rules of NDG recruitment to the PM, PK Mishra. No acknowledgement nor reply was received. Service Chiefs in the past have been willing and able to advise political authority on military matters. The consultative process has stopped with this government. On December 15, 2024, while inaugurating India's World magazine, Foreign Minister Jaishankar conspicuously omitted to mention national security or the military component of international relations as part of India's foreign policy vision. Answering a question last year on why no NDG recruitment he said foreign policy is determined by India's national interest and not that of any other country, implying Nepal. India's national interests in terms of defence and security are entwined with those of Nepal with whom New Delhi claims a special relationship which Kathmandu mildly reaffirms. It was Modi who said in Nepal's Parliament in 2014 that India has fought no war where Nepalese blood was not shed. India-Nepal relations are written in blood.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

### PICTALK



Farmers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Nadia

PTI

## Digital shield: Safeguarding children from the digital trap

### The Indian government has proposed the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 to fortify children's online safety through robust data protection measures

The digital revolution has profoundly transformed how we live, learn, and connect. While this transformation offers immense opportunities for growth and development, it also poses significant risks, especially for vulnerable populations such as children. The digital world is fraught with challenges, from exposure to inappropriate content to exploitation through targeted advertising. Recognising the urgent need for robust protections, the Indian government has introduced the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.



These rules, still in draft form, have the potential to safeguard children from falling into digital traps by establishing a comprehensive framework for responsible data handling. A cornerstone of the draft rules is the requirement for verifiable parental consent before processing children's data. This mandate ensures that entities cannot collect or use data about minors without explicit authorisation from their parents or legal guardians. For example, creating an account on a social media platform or an online gaming service requires parents to verify their identity and approve the data processing activities. This provision is vital in reducing the risks posed by predatory targeting, identity theft, and unauthorised data collection. By putting parents in control, the rules prevent businesses from exploiting children's data for financial gain. This safeguard is particularly important in protecting children from behavioural profiling, which can have long-term implications on their psychological development and privacy. Educational institutions play a critical role in a child's growth, but they, too, rely heavily on data collection. The draft rules explicitly

address this by restricting data processing in schools and allied institutions to activities that are essential for educational purposes or the safety of students. For instance, tracking attendance, monitoring behaviour, and ensuring the security of transportation services are permissible, but excessive or irrelevant data collection is prohibited. These safeguards ensure that children's data is not misused or repurposed without clear justification. The digital world can be a double-edged sword. While it offers educational resources and entertainment, it also exposes children to inappropriate or harmful content. The draft rules mandate that data fiduciaries implement measures to ensure that children cannot access content that negatively affects their well-being. This includes filtering out materials related to violence, explicit content, and other age-inappropriate material. Such provisions are critical in protecting the mental and emotional health of children, who are particularly susceptible to the influence of harmful digital stimuli. Moreover,

they underscore the importance of collaboration between regulators and technology companies to create a safer online environment. Consent managers play a pivotal role in the new framework. As intermediaries, they enable data principals—in this case, parents or guardians—to give, manage, review, and withdraw consent for data processing activities. These managers must ensure that the process is transparent and user-friendly, empowering parents to monitor how their children's data is being utilised. The draft rules also require consent managers to maintain detailed records of consent given, denied, or withdrawn, enhancing accountability across the board. While the draft rules represent a significant leap forward, their successful implementation hinges on overcoming several challenges. This calls for innovative solutions, such as integrating verified digital IDs like Aadhaar with consent management systems. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### AUSTRALIA WINS B-G TROPHY

Madam —Australia deserves to be the winner of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy by their immaculate performance under the brilliance of Pat Cummins. While India was beaten thoroughly 3-1, the little hope in the Sydney test was vanquished when the ace Jasprit Bumrah got injured at the inappropriate time. All the credit goes to Bumrah and the world-class bowler claimed the man of the series despite India losing heavily, indicating that he's the supreme bowler from both sides. World stalwarts rated him high with huge respect for him and he has been shortlisted for the ICC men's cricketer of the year award for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, which has seen him walking tall among geniuses among world cricketers.

It's unfortunate that Captain Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were the great disappointment and the ultimate reasons for Team India losing the rhythm for the Titanic sink at the end. Though the young Jaiswal has been spectacular and K L Rahul did some good work, Pant played a cameo in a few innings that wasn't good enough for the team to pull back when the rest of the batters failed miserably at the end. Aussies Scott Boland's splendid variation and bounce would make Kohli remember Scott Boland more than Anushka in his dreams in this series by dismissing Virat 4 times out of Boland's 5 innings by having faced 68 balls for a mere 28 runs. Boland came into the side during the middle of the series and was the only breather for the Indian team. Anyhow, the series has not only the test for players but also for the head coach too. Gambhir needs to study a few management lessons. Hope the team India would make a comeback in the upcoming fixtures of T20 against England and in the following months to prove their worth to serve a few Badusa to ICC Chief Jay Shah to bring back sweeter moments for the fans too in the future.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

#### Create safe online environment for kids



The digital age has revolutionised childhood, with social media becoming an integral part of how young people connect and communicate. Yet, this evolution brings significant risks that demand urgent action. In this backdrop, India's draft rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act mandating consent of parents/guardians for minors to open social media accounts are a commendable step in safeguard-

ing children. The proposed rules make social media companies accountable for verifying parental consent through robust measures, empowering the guardians to guide their wards' online interactions.

To refine these rules, additional measures like AI-driven age verification, digital literacy workshops and transparent complaint mechanisms are essential. Regular audits, stakeholder feedback and alignment with global standards will further enhance the framework. By adopting these rules, India contributes to a global effort to create a safer online environment for children. In a world where digital engagement is unavoidable, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the youngest users is not merely a responsibility but also an ethical imperative. Building collaboration among parents, educators and social media platforms is crucial for lasting change.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

#### EDUCATION SYSTEM NEEDS REFORM

Madam—This refers to the article on turning Canada's crisis into India's opportunity. This looks to be an incongruent aspiration. Because Indian industries are already expressing their difficulties in getting recruitable skilled workers. This crisis is further confirmed by the latest programme to train 10 lakh youth as apprentices. 500 industries are listed out to engage in this programme in which both the trainees and the engaged industries are incentivised. The fact is the participants are already educated diploma or degree holders. The education system is yet to be tuned in such a manner as to make those completing education employable with appropriate skills and enough knowledge. It would be more appropriate to correct our systems before aiming at utilising others' crises into our opportunities. Having put education in the hands of the private players, the quality of education suffers the most. Except producing degree holders, simply by utilising the talent of byhearing and reproducing no

scope for creativity is offered. In the name of introducing new educational system subjects like astrology is being introduced. The education system urgently needs a total revamping to make it meaningful.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

#### BIDHURI SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam —BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri's statement, "We will make all the roads in Kalkaji like Priyanka Gandhi's cheeks," is not just an insult but also a reflection of his mentality. If such remarks can be made by a prominent senior party candidate, what can we expect from an ordinary citizen? The BJP should take strict action against Ramesh Bidhuri, as such a derogatory statement by a party member not only tarnishes his reputation but also damages the party's image. He should issue a public apology for this remark.

Priya Thakur | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN TEN MEANINGFUL RESOLUTIONS FOR 2025

It is time to focus on resolutions that align with our aspirations



SHAINY SHARMA

The dawn of a new year provides a blank canvas to rewrite your story, redefine your priorities, and reimagine the future. In 2025, seize this opportunity by setting resolutions that not only align with your aspirations but also enhance your quality of life. This year calls for more than just ambitious declarations – it demands realistic, sustainable changes that can truly transform our lives. Here are ten meaningful resolutions worth keeping making 2025 your best year yet.

1. Digital Wellness Revolution: The first and foremost is to break free from screen addiction by implementing a "sunset hour" for devices. Keeping aside one hour before bedtime for offline activities like reading or meditation will definitely help in improving both sleep quality as well as mental health.

2. Financial Intelligence Upgrade: Financial stability is a key component of a stress-free life. Start by evaluating your spending habits and creating a realistic budget by dedicating at least 30 minutes weekly to learning about investments and financial planning. By aiming to save consistently and work towards reducing debt, setting financial goals can provide clarity and motivation.



3. Sustainable Living Practices: As global awareness of environmental challenges grows, adopting sustainable habits is more important than ever. By transforming your environmental impact through practical steps such as switching to reusable products, adopting a plant-based meal day, and calculating your monthly carbon footprint to identify areas for improvement.

4. De-clutter your space: A cluttered environment often mirrors a cluttered mind. Take time in 2025 to organize and declutter your living and working spaces. Try working towards donating or recycling items that are no longer in need and creating systems to maintain the same.

5. Relationship Enrichment: Human connections are the bedrock of happiness and fulfilment. This year, try making a conscious effort to nurture your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues.

6. Physical Health Revolution: Developing regular physical activity is the cornerstone of good health. In 2025, move a daily habit. Whether it's strength training, yoga, swimming, or brisk walking, find an activity you enjoy and stick to it. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week to improve cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles, and boost mental well-being.

7. Mental Fitness Focus: A positive mindset can transform your experiences. In 2025, focus on the good in every situation, practice self-compassion, and surround yourself with uplifting individuals. Integrate daily mental health practices such as five minutes of mindfulness, gratitude journaling, or therapeutic creativity. Positivity fuels resilience and empowers you to overcome challenges with grace.

8. Knowledge Expansion: Read one book monthly on subjects outside your comfort zone. This broadens perspectives and keeps your mind agile in our rapidly changing world.

9. Community Engagement: Helping others fosters a sense of purpose and connection. Find a cause you care about and dedicate time or resources to it. Community service not only helps others but also provides networking opportunities and personal fulfilment. Volunteering not only benefits those in need but also enriches your own life with meaning and fulfilment.

10. Creative Expression: Dedicate time weekly to any form of creativity – writing, painting, music, or crafts. Creative outlets reduce stress and enhance problem-solving skills. As we embrace 2025, let's move beyond traditional resolution-setting and focus on creating meaningful, lasting changes that enhance both our personal growth and our impact on the world around us.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

# Farmers shunning use of nano-urea despite promotion



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite a strong push from the government and ambitious targets for production and adoption, the fiscal year 2023-24 witnessed a sharp 43 per cent drop in nano-urea sales

Last year, around this time, the Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers Mansukh Mandaviya had said "Consumption of urea this fiscal (read: FY 2023-24) is likely to be 8 percent less than in FY 2022-23 due to the use of its liquid nano variant. Because of this and higher domestic production, import of urea, the soil nutrient that accounts for 70 percent of the fertilizer subsidy bill, declined more than a fifth on year in 2023. Further spread of nano urea consumption and the start of a new large urea plant (Talcher in Odisha) by September 2023 would lead to elimination of imports in two-three years". Nano-urea is urea in the form of a nanoparticle containing nitrogen particles of 20-50 nanometres (nm) in size. It provides nitrogen or 'N' to plants in liquid form as an alternative to conventional urea which is mostly supplied as prill (it is a small diameter, spherical white solid). The minister's statement pointed towards the commitment of the government to promote the use of nano-urea so that imports of conventional urea are brought down to eliminating it.

However, according to data from the Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) – an umbrella body of the fertilizer industry – the sales of Nano urea plummeted by nearly 43 per cent during FY 2023-24 (this happened after growing by a significant 62 per cent during FY 2022-23). Meanwhile, the total production of Nano urea during FY 2023-24 was 81 per cent less than in the previous FY.

The manufacturers knew that there wouldn't be much demand for it; so they reduced the output even as its production capacity rose by 59 per cent. Why did the sales of Nano-urea decrease? But, before that, we need to understand why the government is so keen to promote its use.

The beauty of nano-urea lies in its ultra-small size and high surface area (10,000 times over 1 mm urea prill), which enables easy absorption by plant leaves. These particles enter the plant through cuticular pores, or stomata, and then penetrate the cell membranes through endocytosis. Once inside the cell, these release nutrients slowly and ensure full absorption by eliminating waste that normally happens with conventional means. The innovator namely Nano Biotechnology Research Centre (NBRC) of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) claims its efficiency (a measure of how much of the 'N' supplied from it is absorbed by the plant) is over 80 per cent against around 40 per cent for the conventional stuff.

The use of nano-urea also results in higher crop yield by 3-16 per cent when compared to traditional urea. Moreover, unlike the latter which raises environmental concerns including nitrate leaching, global warming, ozone layer depletion, and groundwater pollution, the former causes less soil, water and air pollution. According to a study, two foliar sprays of nano-urea curtailed nitrogen load by 25 per cent, besides reducing the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission from 164.2 to 416.5 kg CO<sub>2</sub>-eq ha<sup>-1</sup> under different crops.



FOR A COUNTRY THAT DEPENDS HEAVILY ON IMPORTS AND EVEN INCURS HUGE SUBSIDIES, WHY WOULD THE GOVERNMENT ALLOW EXPORTS? THE INDUSTRY, HOWEVER, CONCEDES THAT THERE WAS UNSOLD INVENTORY WITH DEALERS AND THAT MIGHT HAVE IMPACTED SALES DURING 2023-24

A more startling claim made by IFFCO/NBRC is that a 500-ml bottle of nano-urea is equivalent to a 45-kg bag of conventional urea.

The latter contains 46 percent N nutrient, or 20 kg (45x0.46). In contrast, the former contains 4 per cent N, or 20 grams (500x.04). The equivalence between the two means that urea in nano-form with a mere 20 grams can achieve what conventional urea does with 20 kg - a gap of 1000 times in efficiency. It is this monumental difference in efficiency that also enables the manufacturer to deliver a 500-ml bottle of nano-urea to farmers for Rs 240 without any subsidy support.

In contrast, the cost of supplying equivalent conventional urea in a 45 kg bag, is over eleven times at around Rs 2650 (while, this figure is for imported urea, even for urea produced domestically, the cost is substantially higher and varies from unit to unit), the Government has to give a subsidy of Rs 2410 to make available to the farmer at the same price of Rs 240. There being 22.22 bags in a ton of urea (1000/45), the subsidy on the import of a ton of conventional urea comes to Rs 53,550 (2410x22.22).

If we were to replace one million tons of imported urea with nano-urea which doesn't require any subsidy support, the government would save Rs 53,550 million or Rs 5355 crore. Mandaviya had kept a target of producing about 55 million bottles of nano-urea during FY 2023-24 which replaces 2.5 million tons of conventional urea. This would yield savings of around Rs 13,400 crore

in subsidy.

Around 600 cubic metres of natural gas (NG) is needed to produce a ton of conventional urea. For generating the same effect through the nano-urea - given the efficiency difference of 1000 times, the requirement of NG would be a mere 0.6 cubic metres (600/1000). This would lead to huge savings in the import of gas (currently, India imports one-third of its requirement for domestic urea production). Drastic reduction in load on infrastructure will be a bonus. Imagine the impact of handling, moving, storing and delivering a 500 - ml bottle of nano-urea vis-à-vis a bag of conventional urea containing 45,000 grams of the material.

The use of nano-urea thus offers unprecedented possibilities in terms of not just a substantial reduction in fertilizer subsidy but also trimming excess consumption of urea thereby reducing the imbalance in fertilizer use improving soil health, and helping achieve the environment-related goals. Additional benefits will accrue by way of savings in foreign exchange outgo, and a reduction in the current account deficit.

What explains the setback during FY 2023-24? Reportedly, the industry's argument that the fall in production and sales was due to 'the launch of new products such as Nano urea plus, with a higher concentration of nitrogen and reduction in sales of earlier variants of Nano urea that had lower nitrogen concentration' is untenable. This is because whatever the level of 'N' concentration, fundamentally the product

remains 'Nano-urea'. Another explanation is that 'the drop in sales could be because fact that farmers had bought large quantities of Nano urea in the previous years' doesn't cut ice. Farmers generally are not prone to stocking fertilizer material as the majority of them just don't have the wherewithal to hold stocks.

A third possibility that lower domestic sales could be due to the export of nano-urea doesn't make sense. For a country that depends heavily on imports and even incurs huge subsidies, why would the government allow exports? The industry, however, concedes that there was unsold inventory with dealers and that might have impacted sales during 2023-24. This shows that even during 2022-23, farmers didn't lift nano-urea to the extent revealed by the sales figures of that year. One can't escape inferring that nano-urea could be losing charm amongst farmers.

If it is due to factors like their being unable to cope with the rigours of the new technology (spraying it on leaves is more challenging than prill urea) or shortage of skilled labour etc, those can be overcome. But, if it is due to tall claims regarding efficiency or yield going haywire, it is a matter of concern. For instance, a study released by Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) in January 2024 says that the 'use of nano-urea led to decrease in the yield of wheat and rice by 21.6 per cent 13 per cent respectively'.

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

## Prashant Kishor's Jansuraj: A new political force or BJP's strategic move in Bihar?

As the 2025 assembly elections approach, the big question remains: Can Kishor truly reshape Bihar's political future, or is his role simply to disrupt opposition unity?

Prashant Kishor, a name synonymous with political strategy, has made his debut in Bihar politics with the launch of his party, Jansuraj. Drawing an analogy to a potter, Kishor likens his work to shaping the best clay into something meaningful, declaring, "We are bringing forward the best people of society. My role is to make this party win. I am in the role of a sutradhar (narrator); I have announced after the formation of the party that I will not run it. The party people will run the party." This declaration, however, has done little to quell speculations about his aspirations. Rumors abound that Kishor is vying for the post of Chief Minister, a claim he repeatedly denies. "I am not contest-



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

ing the elections," he insists. "I do not feel like contesting, but if the party decides that only I can secure a seat, then it will be a collective decision. I am not bigger than the party." Despite his assertions, Kishor's entry into Bihar politics has stirred discussions about the impact of Jansuraj on the state's political landscape, particularly in the context of the 2025 assembly elections. Questions loom: will his party

weaken the NDA or the INDIA alliance? Political analysts suggest that Kishor, with his background as a strategist for both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, could be a disruptive force. Some even speculate that he might be a BJP-backed "pawn," designed to fragment opposition votes, a claim fueled by his apparent inability to align with the Congress or RJD leadership.

Kishor's criticisms of Nitish Kumar's governance have been particularly sharp. He has lambasted Kumar's leadership style, though his past affiliations with the BJP have also fueled skepticism. Adding to the intrigue, JDU leaders have dismissed Kishor's efforts as insignifi-

cant. JDU, meanwhile, continues to champion causes like the nationwide caste census and the "One Nation, One Election" policy. It also plans to hold a workers' meeting in Nalanda on January 20, 2025, to gauge its position before the elections. JDU's reliance on caste-based politics, particularly its focus on Mahadalits, underscores its strategy for retaining relevance.

Recognizing the centrality of caste and community dynamics in Bihar politics, Kishor has crafted his approach accordingly. His first major move was targeting the Muslim and backward caste vote banks, which collectively account for 53.8 per cent of the electorate. To solidify his position, he announced plans



to field more candidates from Muslim and extremely backward communities in the upcoming elections. The appointment of a Dalit as Jansuraj's first working president further underscored this strategy. This decision, however, drew criticism, with some perceiving it as an overt counter to JDU's Mahadalit card. Kishor's

emphasis on Dalit representation, though a significant gesture, was met with resistance from sections of the political spectrum. Before launching Jansuraj, Kishor spent two years traveling across Bihar, conducting a padayatra and engaging in public dialogues in villages and towns. His campaign drew heavily from the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, echoing a narrative of grassroots empowerment. However, his advocacy for ending Bihar's liquor prohibition—a policy closely associated with Nitish Kumar's governance—has sparked controversy. Critics argue that this stance contradicts Gandhian principles and exposes Kishor to allegations of opportunism.

Despite the criticisms, Kishor's efforts signal a genuine attempt to address Bihar's long-standing issues. Bihar has long grappled with challenges like unemployment, poor infrastructure, and rising crime. Kishor positions Jansuraj as a platform to tackle these problems, but whether he can deliver remains to be seen.

Kishor's focus on marginalised communities, grassroots dialogue, and inclusive leadership sets a distinct tone. However, his political credibility and ability to translate ideas into action will be closely scrutinized. As the assembly elections approach, the political battlefield in Bihar is becoming increasingly dynamic. JDU's focus on its traditional voter

base and initiatives like the caste census may clash directly with Jansuraj's appeal to similar demographics. Meanwhile, speculation about Kishor's BJP connections and his critique of Nitish Kumar suggest that his presence will influence alliances and electoral strategies across the board. Prashant Kishor's entry into Bihar politics marks a significant shift. By forming Jansuraj, he has sought to disrupt the status quo and present a new alternative. However, whether he can truly emerge as a transformative leader or will merely fragment votes remains the critical question.

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



IN BRIEF



Tata Digital forays into retail investment

Tata Digital on Tuesday announced its foray into the retail investment space with the launch of its fixed deposits marketplace on the superapp Tata Neu. Customers can invest in fixed deposits through the marketplace with leading financial institutions at interest rates of up to 9.1 per cent without the need for a savings bank account, the company said in a statement. "With our fixed deposit marketplace, we aim to democratise access to high-yield, fixed-return instruments from multiple trusted providers. This simple and secure platform is designed to offer competitive interest rates, empowering both seasoned investors and newcomers to grow their wealth confidently and effortlessly," Tata Digital Chief Business Officer, Financial Services, Gaurav Hazrati said. The company said customers invest as little as Rs 1,000. With bank investments insured up to Rs 5 lakh by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), they get safety and complete peace of mind. Customers can choose from both banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) like Suryoday Small Finance Bank, Shriram Finance, Bajaj Finance, for a wide range of investment options, it added.

GDP growth likely to slip to 4-yr low of 6.4%: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25, mainly on account of poor showing by the manufacturing and services sector, according to government data released on Tuesday.

The gross domestic product (GDP) rate of 6.4 per cent will be the lowest since the Covid year (2020-21) when the country witnessed a negative growth of 5.8 per cent. It was 9.7 per cent in 2021-22; 7 per cent in 2022-23; and 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal ended March 2024.

The first advance estimates of National Income for 2024-25 released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) is lower than the 6.6 per cent projected by the Reserve Bank in December 2024. It is also a tad lower than the finance ministry's initial projection of 6.5-7 per cent.

The advance estimates will be used in preparation for the Union Budget to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the



Lok Sabha on February 1.

The economic growth slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent during the July-September period. It was 6.7 per cent in the first quarter (April-June).

The manufacturing sector output is expected to decelerate to 5.3 per cent from a high of 9.9 per cent recorded in the previous fiscal, NSO said.

The services sector, comprising trade, hotels, transport and communications, is estimated to expand at 5.8 per cent against 6.4 per cent in 2023-24.

lakh crore in 2024-25 compared to Rs 295.36 lakh crore in 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 9.7 per cent.

The size of the economy, as per the current estimates, is USD 3.8 trillion (@Rs 85.7/USD) during 2024-25.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Iera opined that while the NSO's implicit H2 FY2025 projections seem reasonable, some of the sectoral numbers could report higher growth prints.

"In our view, the GDP growth in FY2026 will be crucially influenced by global uncertainties as well as domestic uncertainties, amidst considerable base effects. Benefitting from an anticipated capex push in the upcoming Budget, we project the GDP growth at 6.5 per cent in FY2026," she said.

Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist, Crisil, said the decline in government capital expenditure, a key driver of post-pandemic recovery, during the second quarter is unlikely to be compensated for in the rest of the fiscal.

On the other hand, the farm sector is estimated to record a growth of 3.8 per cent in the current fiscal, up from 1.4 per cent in 2023-24.

"Real GDP has been estimated to grow by 6.4 per cent in FY 2024-25 as compared to the growth rate of 8.2 per cent in Provisional Estimate (PE) of GDP for FY 2023-24," NSO said.

Nominal GDP is likely to grow at 9.7 per cent in 2024-25 against 9.6 per cent in 2023-24. According to the data, nominal GDP (GDP at current prices) is estimated to attain a level of Rs 324.11

Finmin to hold talks with MFI players amid rising bad loans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Ministry will hold a meeting with microfinance institutions (MFIs) on Wednesday amid rising bad loans and delinquencies across all types of lenders in the sector.

According to sources, the Department of Financial Services Secretary is likely to chair the meeting with senior officials of MFIs here.

The meeting assumes significance as it comes with the sector showing signs of stress and rising delinquencies.

Credit to the microfinance sector by banks (including SFBs), NBFC-MFIs and other NBFCs has decelerated during the current financial year so far after witnessing rapid growth during the last three years, according to a latest report of the Reserve Bank.

"The microfinance sector is showing signs of stress, with rising delinquencies across all types of lenders and ticket

sizes. During H1:2024-25, share of stressed assets increased, with 31-180 days past due (dpd) rising from 2.15 per cent in March 2024 to 4.30 per cent in September 2024," said the RBI's Financial Stability Report, December 2024.

Importantly, among borrowers who had availed loans from multiple lenders and those with



higher credit exposure, impairment remained high.

RBI report said that alongside rising delinquencies, borrower indebtedness has risen notably: the share of borrowers availing loans from four or more lenders has increased from 3.6 per cent to 5.8 per cent during the last three years (September 2024 over September 2021).

Exim Bank India raises \$1 billion from overseas

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Exim Bank of India has raised USD 1 billion (about Rs 8,570 crore) from overseas at lowest ever spread to fund business growth, the Department of Financial Services said on Tuesday.

"Fantastic start to the year by Indian issuers in global capital markets, with state-owned @IndiaEximBank raising \$1 bn 10-year USD-denominated bonds at lowest ever spread (100bps) for USD-denominated public bond by a BBB-rated issuer in Asia," the Department of Financial Services (DFS) said in a post on X

This demonstrates the confidence of overseas investors in the India story, it said, adding, this landmark transaction marks a strong start to the year for Indian issuers in the international debt markets, supporting Exim Bank's mandate and contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Exim Bank provides financial assistance to exporters and importers, and functions as the principal financial institution for coordinating the working of institutions engaged in financing export and import of goods and services with a view to promoting the country's international trade.

Banks' profits set to moderate as bad assets inch up: Ind-Ra

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Increase in bad assets will impact banks' profitability in FY26, a domestic rating agency said on Tuesday.

Indian banks' profitability is at an "inflection point" in FY25 and is likely to moderate further in the fiscal afterwards, India Ratings and Research said, adding that FY24 was the peak for profits.

"Profitability (is)... expected to moderate further in FY26 with an expectation of rising slippages and higher credit costs over the FY24 levels which was at decadal lows," the agency's head and director financial institutions Karan Gupta told reporters here.

A bulk of the asset quality stress will emanate from the unsecured retail exposure, Gupta said, stressing that the same is "manageable" and will not have any systemic ramifications.

The under Rs 50,000 retail unsecured portion accounts for around 0.4 per cent of the banking credit, while only 3.6

per cent of the advances are the ones having a lending rate of over 11 per cent, the agency said.

The agency further said that credit growth has "lost steam", and sharply revised down its FY25 system credit growth estimate to 13-13.5 per cent as against 15 per cent ear-



lier, and also added that the core interest income is likely to be hit in the next fiscal.

Banks' net interest margin (NIM) will narrow by 0.10 per cent in the new fiscal due to a transmission of past hikes, higher slippages and a change in accounting policies, the agency said.

The gap between credit and deposit growth, which has moderated lately, is likely to narrow in FY26, the agency believes.

'Reduce GST to 1% in Budget'

Gems, jewellery sector urges govt

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The gems and jewellery sector has urged the government for a reduction in goods and services tax (GST) to 1 per cent on revenue equivalence ratio to ease the cost burden on the industry in the upcoming Budget.

"We seek rationalisation of taxes and availability of finance to support business," the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) Chairman Rajesh Rokde said in a statement on Tuesday. With the continuously increasing gold rates, the current rate of GST is increasingly becoming a burden for the industry and end customers, he said.

Therefore, GJC is urging for a reduction in GST from the current 3 per cent to 1 per cent in the upcoming Budget, which will encourage compliance, Rokde said. The tax reduction will enhance affordability for consumers, especially in rural areas, and most importantly, improve revenue collection by increasing the size of the formal economy, he added.

Gold climbs Rs 700 to Rs 79,700 per 10 gm

Silver jumps Rs 1,300

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices climbed Rs 700 to Rs 79,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday due to fresh buying by jewellers and retailers and depreciation in rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Monday, the precious metal ended at Rs 79,000 per 10 grams.

Silver rose sharply by Rs 1,300 to hit a three-week high of Rs 92,000 per kg on Tuesday. The white metal had closed at Rs 90,700 per kg in the previous session.

The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rallied Rs 700 to Rs 79,300 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 78,600 per 10 grams on Monday.

Traders said gold prices increased due to strong trends in the overseas markets and rise in domestic demand that aided in bullion prices.

On Tuesday, the rupee fell 5 paise to settle at 85.73 (provisional) against the US dollar, as higher crude oil prices and outflow of foreign funds continued to weigh on the local



unit.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery appreciated Rs 122, or 0.16 per cent, to Rs 77,280 per 10 grams.

Silver contracts for March delivery also rallied Rs 551, or 0.61 per cent, to Rs 91,105 per kg in the futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Comex gold futures rose 0.28 per cent to USD 2,654.90 per ounce in the international markets.

"Gold is hovering around the USD 2,635-level amid mixed cues. Uncertainty around upcoming US

President Trump's policy attracts some haven flows and provides support for precious metals," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Comex silver futures in the Asian trading hours traded 0.73 per cent higher at USD 30.81 per ounce.

"Market participants are closely watching the US ISM Services PMI and JOLTS job openings data to be released later on Tuesday, alongside non-farm employment change and unemployment claims reports," Abans Holdings' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said.

Investors will also focus on upcoming Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) member speeches scheduled for later this week, which will gauge the Federal Reserve's next policy move, Mehta added.

According to Renisha Chainani, Head of Research at August, this week is critical for gold traders, as they will closely monitor key economic data.

Indices rebound after two-day decline

Intense buying in blue-chip stocks like Reliance, ICICI Bank

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday after sliding for the past two sessions, driven by intense buying in blue-chip stocks like Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and L&T amid a firm trend in global markets.

However, a decline in IT stocks ahead of the earnings season and depreciating rupee against the greenback restricted the market rally, traders said.

In a range-bound trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 234.12 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 78,199.11. During the day, it jumped 487.75 points or 0.62

per cent to 78,452.74.

The NSE Nifty gained 91.85 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,707.90.

"Amid positive global cues indicating no major concerns regarding HMPV, the domestic market partially recovered from yesterday's sharp sell-off but traded within a range ahead of the critical first advance estimates for India's FY25 GDP. This comes in the context of moderated growth expectations, as the RBI recently revised its growth projection

downwards.

"In the near term, the market is expected to remain cautious, awaiting signs of earnings recovery during the upcoming result season, while also

dealing with ongoing FII selling, which is driven by the strengthening dollar, rising US bond yields, and reduced expectations of further rate cuts," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors,

Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Asian Paints, Nestle India, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro and Adani Ports were among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, Zomato, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Infosys were among the losers.

"Despite the respite, markets continue to face significant selling pressure during recovery attempts, indicating that bears remain in control," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.74 per cent, and the midcap index climbed 0.77 per cent.



Indo Farm shares climb over 27 pc in market debut

Shares of Indo Farm Equipment Ltd on Tuesday ended with a premium of over 27 per cent against the issue price of Rs 215. The stock started the trade at Rs 258.40, reflecting a premium of 20.18 per cent on the BSE. During the day, it jumped 33.44 per cent to Rs 286.90. Shares of the firm ended at Rs 272.70, up 26.83 per cent. At the NSE, it listed at Rs 256, up 19 per cent. The stock ended at Rs 273.69, a gain of 27.29 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 1,310.37 crore. In traded volume terms, 24.07 lakh shares of the firm were traded at the BSE and 242.73 lakh shares at the NSE during the day. The initial public offering (IPO) of Indo Farm Equipment garnered a whopping 227.57 times subscription on the closing day of bidding on Thursday. The Rs 260-crore initial share sale had a price band of Rs 204-215 per share. The IPO had a fresh issue of 86 lakh equity shares and an offer for sale (OFS) of 35 lakh shares by promoter Ranbir Singh Khadwalia.



ments related to the sector, including battery show and tyre show, besides the electronics show will be held at Bharat Mandapam, he added. "There are more than 40

plus launches which are going to happen during the auto show," Anand said, these will be across vehicle segments ranging from two-wheelers to passenger vehicles to buses. The auto show will be a B2B as well as a B2C show and a "huge footfall" is expected, he added.

When asked about the visa issues of Chinese participants, Anand said, "China is still a work in progress.

You know the concerns of the various Indian ministries, who are involved in screening of the visitors. We are still working on it. I can't tell you with certainty."

For large scale participation of Chinese companies in the expo, he said, "Visa may be a problem because it is not in one person's hand.

In India so many systems are in place about checking the visitors from China."

However, Anand said, "At least some are participating. BYD is going to be there."

Anand said, while the components show will be held at Yashobhooni, at Greater Noida there will be the construction equipment which will showcase urban mobility infrastructure, comprising not only land mobility and surface transport mobility but also air transport such as drone show, as well as water transport infrastructure.

e-Shram portal now available in all 22 scheduled languages

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday launched multilingual functionality on the e-Shram portal to provide seamless access to various government schemes for unorganised workers.

In line with the vision of making eShram a 'One-Stop-Solution', this portal will now be available in all 22 Scheduled Languages, a labour ministry statement said.

The event to launch multilingual functionality was attended by the Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment and several senior officials. It also marked the achievement of another milestone in the government's efforts to provide comprehensive social protection to unorganised workers in the country.

Meiti's Bhashini project has been leveraged to upgrade the eShram portal with 22 languages. The previous version was available only in English, Hindi, Kannada and Marathi.

In his address, Minister of Labour & Employment Mandaviya highlighted the growing trust in the e-Shram platform, saying the portal records an

average of over 30,000 registrations per day by unorganised workers.

The minister urged all unorganised workers to register on the e-Shram portal to avail the benefit of various government schemes designed to support their welfare, livelihood and

well-being. He also emphasised that registration on the portal would facilitate access to a broad spectrum of social security schemes and initiatives.

As of date, access to twelve government schemes has been facilitated through the e-Shram portal. For greater outreach and to ensure a seamless and user-centric experience, Mandaviya said that engagement of mediators like Common Service Centres, Bank Correspondents, Post Offices, and MY Bharat volunteers, among others, will be explored.



Over 40 new product launches expected at Auto Expo

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 40 new product launches are expected at the upcoming Auto Expo which will be held under the umbrella of Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 from January 17-22, a government official said on Tuesday.

With visas continuing to be an issue, large scale participation of Chinese companies are unlikely although some of them are participating at the expo, Joint Secretary at Ministry of Commerce and Industry Vimal Anand said here at the sidelines of cur-

tain raiser of 'Bharat Battery Show' which will also be a part of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025.

"Last year the mobility show was only held at Bharat Mandapam, but this year, we have multiplied it by three times and we are going to organise it at not only Bharat Mandapam, but also at Yashobhooni (India International Convention Centre, Dwarka) and India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida," he said.

The auto show will be the main attraction, and along with automobiles other seg-





DIANA PENTY ON STEPPING INTO A TRADITIONAL AVATAR FOR AZAAD

The trailer for Azaad offered a glimpse into a poignant story set in pre-independence India. Diana Penty takes center stage, portraying a traditional woman from a small village with raw authenticity...

TAAPSEE PANNU RESUMES GANDHARI, SECOND LEG UNDERWAY

Taapsee Pannu, celebrated for her versatility and powerful performances, is all set to dazzle audiences once again with her upcoming action-thriller, Gandhari. Known for redefining female-led cinema in films like Pink (2016), Naam Shabana (2017) and Thappad (2020), the actress has carved a niche for herself as a performer who takes on challenging roles across genres.



Zendaya and Tom Holland engaged?

Zendaya and Tom Holland, one of Hollywood's most beloved couples, are officially engaged, according to sources close to the pair. The engagement reportedly took place during the holiday season in an intimate and heartfelt setting at one of Zendaya's family homes in the United States.



Florence Pugh feels she 'abused' herself while working on folk-horror Midsommar

Hollywood star Florence Pugh, who received praise for her work in the Ari Aster directorial Midsommar, has shared that she is not likely to do a role like Midsommar. Furnishing the reason behind the same, the actor said that she feels like she abused herself while playing the film's protagonist Dani, a grief-stricken American woman who has a psychological breakdown when she joins her toxic boyfriend on a trip to a Swedish mid-summer festival.



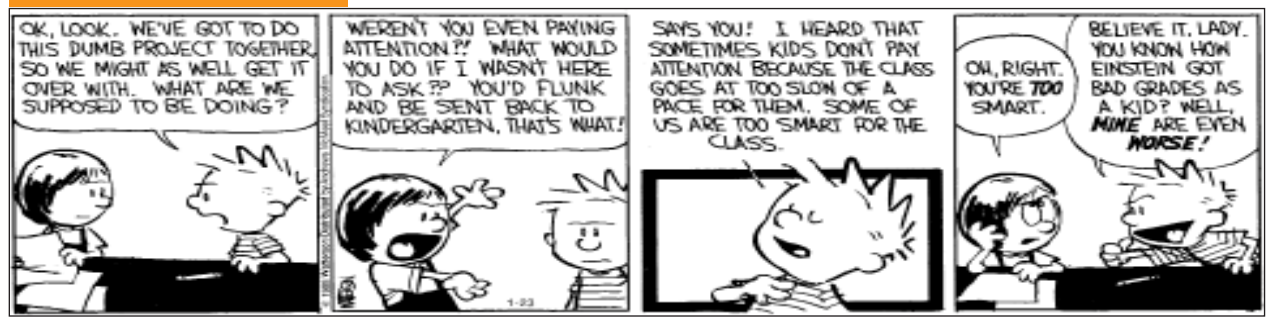
I've been broken for a long while afterwards, the actor said. Like when I did Midsommar, I definitely felt like I abused myself in the places that I got myself to go. The nature of figuring these things out is you need to go, 'Alright, well, I can't do that again because that was too much', she continued.

FUN

ARCHIE



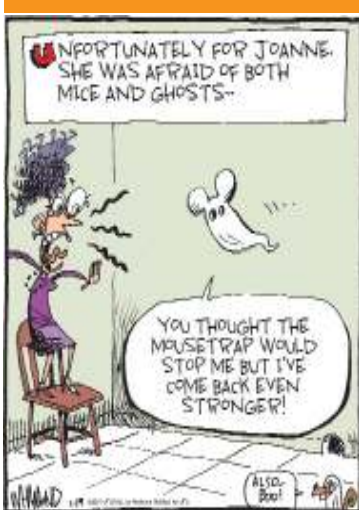
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



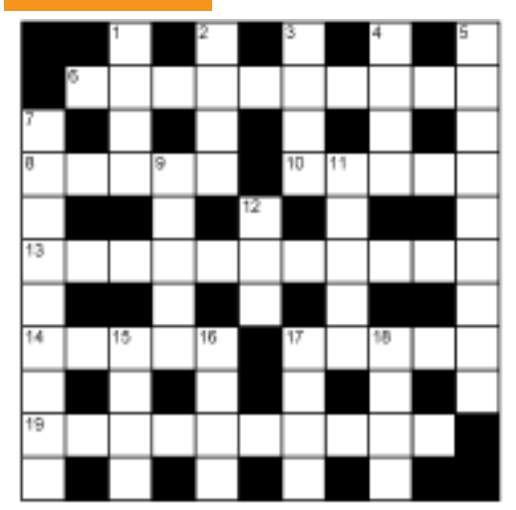
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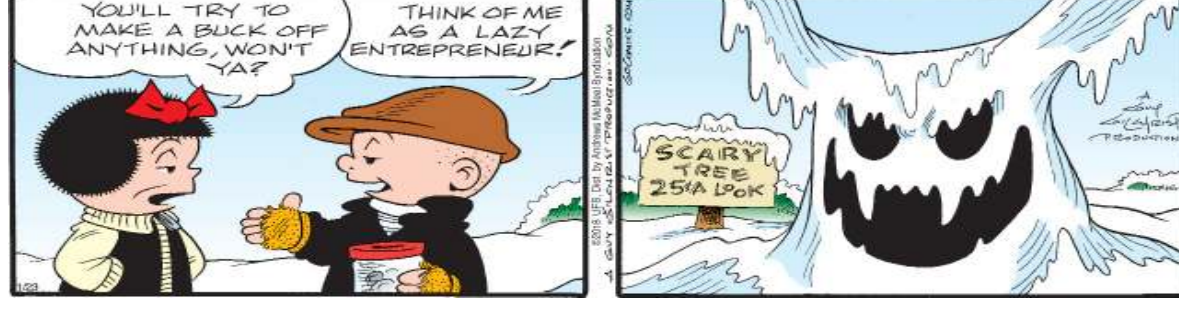
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



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

GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS
8 San Francisco is in this American state
8 Precise
10 A kind of play where all the words are sung
13 At once
14 Articles
17 Push roughly
19 Having no paid work
7 Very tasty to eat
9 Make butter with this
11 A piece of material to cover a hole
12 Baby goal
15 The organs of sight
16 Drinks little by little
17 Black stuff in chimneys
18 Unlock
DOWN
1 Molten rock flowing from a volcano
2 Birthday present
3 A spinning toy on a string
4 A joint in your leg
5 Unable to move some or all of your body
SOLUTION
S A F E S T G R O W
O T T A U A
N I L E S P A C E S
C H U N G O R I E S
A W G A R E D
A B C A R I E T
S O K S B A A
T A R G E T D R A W
C U D O G A
R O M E V E A R L Y



# Fight beyond kickboxing ring

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**N**aisha Bajaj's journey in martial arts is a story of passion, perseverance and purpose. What started as an after-school activity in 2014 has grown into an illustrious career, earning her gold medals on national and international stages. A trailblazer in kickboxing, Naisha has not only defied the odds but also paved the way for women in this male-dominated sport. Her dedication, resilience and vision to elevate the sport of kickboxing in Telangana and India make her an inspiring figure for aspiring athletes.

"Kickboxing started as a way to stay active, but today, it defines who I am," says Naisha. From winning championships to advocating for government recognition and better support for athletes, her journey is a testament to the power of hard work and unrelenting determination.

"I started kickboxing when my mother enrolled me in Taekwondo at the age of four. By seven, I switched to kickboxing, and it has since become a big part of my life."

Naisha comes from a supportive family. Her father is a software engineer, and her mother, from a business background, has been her biggest cheerleader. "My parents have always valued physical fitness," she explains. "My mother, in particular, has been especially supportive. She paid for my training and accompanied me to classes, waiting patiently during every session. Her support has been crucial to my journey."

Naisha has competed in numerous international and national championships, earning gold medals at every level. Her first significant victory came at the Telangana State Kickboxing Championship in Mahbubnagar in 2022. She went on to dominate other state-level championships in Jachchela, Wanaparthy and Warangal.

Her achievements extend to the global stage as well. She clinched gold medals at the Indian International Kickboxing Championships in New Delhi (2022 and 2024), the Khelo India Women's Kickboxing League in Hyderabad (2023) and the National Kickboxing Championship in Goa (2024).

Currently in her second year of intermediate studies, Naisha competes in the senior Full-Contact Kickboxing category. "Balancing school and training is challenging, but kickboxing has taught me discipline and resilience," she says. Training under the guidance of coach Suresh Patil at Iskimos Academy, Naisha continues to refine her skills.

What began as an after-school activity has evolved into a way of life. "Martial arts started as something to keep me active after school but now, it's more than a hobby—it's a way of life. Kickboxing has made me resilient and disciplined."

She attributes her mental and physical strength to the rigorous training and challenges she has faced over the years. Even an injury didn't deter her spirit. "The injury wasn't because of kickboxing; it was an accident. The recovery was painful in the first month, but I kept going to training. Kickboxing made the process easier, as it helped me stay focused and in the flow."

Naisha's ambitions go beyond personal accolades. She dreams of representing Telangana and India on larger platforms, but she also recognises the systemic challenges athletes like her face. One significant hurdle is the lack of government recognition for kickboxing in Telangana.

Naisha Bajaj, a decorated kickboxer from Telangana, is not just a champion in the ring but also a passionate advocate for the recognition and growth of kickboxing in her state. With multiple gold medals in national and international competitions, her ambition stretches beyond personal accolades—she wants to inspire young athletes and bring systemic change to the sport.

"I would like to represent Telangana and India," Naisha declares with determination. Her advice

**In an exclusive conversation with The Pioneer, Naisha Bajaj, Telangana's rising kickboxing star, opens up about her journey from a curious four-year-old in martial arts to a decorated champion on international and national stages.**



to aspiring athletes reflects her resilient mindset: "Be mentally prepared for setbacks, challenges, and financial constraints. Never give up."

For Naisha, the journey to the top has not been without its struggles. She openly acknowledges the financial hurdles that many athletes like her face. "Not everyone comes from a wealthy background," she says. "For me, it has always been a challenge, but I managed to cope with that."

Despite these constraints, she has continued to excel, proving that passion and perseverance can overcome even the toughest obstacles.

One of the most significant challenges for kickboxers in Telangana is the lack of government recognition for the sport. This, she explains, has far-reaching consequences.

"The Telangana government does not recognize kickboxing as a sport," she laments. "Because of this, all the kickboxers in Telangana are denied government jobs under sports quotas."

The lack of official acknowledgment not only deprives athletes of career opportunities but also limits the growth of kickboxing as a sport in the state.

Despite these setbacks, kickboxing enjoys a strong following in Telangana. "The state has 10,000 kickboxers. Out of these, 700 to 1,000 are actively competing," she reveals.

This vibrant community demonstrates the potential for the sport to flourish if given the right support. Naisha strongly believes that increased recognition and resources could unlock this potential.

Going ahead, she points to the latest developments in Andhra Pradesh as an example of what Telangana could achieve with better policies. "The Andhra Pradesh government recently increased their sports budget and revised their sports policy to include more disciplines," she notes. "Telangana should follow similar steps. We need better policies, training facilities, and financial support to attract more talent and encourage participation."

Naisha sees a brighter future for kickboxing if systemic changes are implemented. "More funds for kickboxing will drive more people toward the sport," she asserts.

Her journey, marked by resilience and an unyielding spirit, serves as an inspiration to aspiring athletes. At the same time, her advocacy highlights the need for greater government support for non-mainstream sports like kickboxing.

Through her achievements and efforts, Naisha Bajaj is not only making her mark as a champion but also paving the way for a better future for kickboxing in Telangana and India.

# Shaping the future of learning

**A**t a time when global citizenship is becoming normative, the approach to education also demands a fresh perspective. Unlike traditional models where the focus remains fixated on rote learning, modern pedagogies underscore whole-person education to develop transdisciplinary skills and a comprehensive worldview in a dynamic learning environment. As educators enter a new academic year, Abhishek Mohan Gupta, Founder and President of the Board of Management at Shrewsbury International School India, explores the key trends likely to shape education in 2025.

## SOFT SKILLS TO GET PROMINENCE

Much has been discussed about the role of technology in redefining education, particularly in data analytics, teaching techniques and classroom dynamics. This shift toward technology however cannot diminish the importance of soft skills like critical thinking, communication and emotional intelligence. Stronger emphasis on multiculturalism and multilingualism affords students a chance to cultivate respect for diversity, empathy as well as humanism essential for global citizenship. Modern pedagogies will also continue to be defined by experiential learning that teaches pupils to be independent as well as collaborative.

## FOCUS ON 'WHOLE-PERSON' EDUCATION

The future belongs to a holistic approach, not fragmented learning. This is where 'whole-person' education plays a crucial role. It promotes an approach that addresses the regional, cultural, social, spiritual and ethical development of students. Whole-person education nurtures character, ethics and values, essential for personal fulfilment and service to others. This focus will also enable educational institutions to cultivate ethical professionals and responsible citizens. In the coming years, emphasis will shift towards new value-based education models that also prioritise students' mental health.

## SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION

Green initiatives will be integrated into curricular, extending beyond operational and research aspects. Sustainability-focused efforts will become a core part of academia, with an emphasis on providing environmental literacy across subjects. Eco-friendly practices will be instilled in students, guiding them toward sustainability projects and preparing them to address climate challenges in the future. As more schools in India embrace these values, they will also shape the next generation of citizens who will strive to create a harmonious balance between the planet's well-being and the prosperity of all communities.

## AI-RELATED TECHNOLOGIES

Introducing students to the vast potential of tools like generative AI is crucial, but it is equally important to teach them how to harness it effectively. Excessive reliance on technology can hinder brain development and stifle creativity. Therefore, modern education must strike a balance between fostering creative thinking and embracing technological advancements. Students should be guided on how to use AI safely while also being empowered with the discretion to determine when to trust human intelligence over artificial intelligence.

## INCLUSIVITY IN EDUCATION

Inclusive education ensures that every child is provided with the opportunity for quality education and learning. The shift toward inclusive education is shaping school environments that celebrate diversity, by embracing gender equality and cross-cultural interactions. By promoting a broader vision and open-mindedness, educators empower students to view the world through a wider lens. This approach enriches learning and equips young minds to navigate and appreciate a diverse global society.



# Teen robotics whiz combines tech and vision to combat parking woes

PNS| HYDERABAD

**A**t just 13 years old, Keerthan Bhaskaran, a class 9 student from Chirec International School, has turned his passion for robotics into a practical solution for a common yet pressing issue—unauthorised parking. His invention, 'ParkPatrol,' combines cutting-edge technology with a cost-effective approach to address parking conflicts in communities and cities. With a clear vision, remarkable technical skills and the guidance of a supportive mentor, Keerthan has not only developed a functional prototype but also taken significant steps toward commercialising his idea.

Driven by a desire to create meaningful change, his interest in robotics started when he was just 10 years old during the pandemic. "I started robotics in late 2020. During COVID, I had nothing to do, so my mom sent me to a robotics class. I started with basic coding and gradually developed a flair for robotics," he said.

Unauthorised parking has long been a nuisance affecting residential communities, businesses, and urban areas. Keerthan's 'ParkPatrol' is a

**KEERTHAN BHASKARAN, A CLASS 9 STUDENT FROM CHIREC INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, HAS DEVELOPED 'PARKPATROL,' AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO TACKLE UNAUTHORIZED PARKING. IN AN EXCLUSIVE CHAT WITH THE PIONEER, HE DISCUSSES MORE IN DETAIL**



cost-effective system that uses sensors and cameras to detect unauthorised cars parked in reserved spots. "I was inspired to create this after noticing frequent parking issues in our community," he explained. He highlighted how 'ParkPatrol' stands out from other similar solutions. "All other

products in the market are very expensive and complex. This is different because it's a simpler and more cost-effective version," he stated.

Creating a functional invention at the age of 13 came with its own set of challenges, particularly regarding resources. However, Keerthan was fortunate to receive guidance from his mentor, Ajay Singh.

"There are not many resources available online for projects like this, but my mentor, Ajay Singh, helped me resolve a lot of technical issues. He also connected us with the ex-president of Sensen AI, an Australian computer-based company, who gave us valuable advice on improving and scaling the product for the market."

Talking about the technologies behind, he elaborated: "There are two major technologies in this project. One is motion detection. When motion is detected, it wakes up the camera, which takes 4-5 pictures of the car in front and detects the number plate. To extract the number plate, we use algorithms under a library called OpenCV. Techniques like masking and edge detection eliminate distractions, allowing us to focus on the digits of the number plate."

He revealed that his experience with similar projects and familiarity

with Python programming helped him complete the invention in just four months. "We conducted a test 2-3 months ago in our community using two cars parked over 4-5 days. The results were accurate. We successfully detected the number plates and notified the car owners. During these tests, we identified several areas for improvement."

The success of 'ParkPatrol' has encouraged Keerthan and his mentor to commercialise the product. "We are planning to release this commercially. I've been invited to various events to represent my project and I've taken a lot of feedback from judges, which will help us make further improvements," he said.

Unauthorised parking often disrupts peace and harmony in communities and he believes his invention can address this issue effectively. "A community's peace and harmony are really important. Unauthorised parking is a common problem in every community. This invention can help reduce conflicts and create a positive impact on society," he added.

In conclusion, this young inventor shared that he is currently working on new robotics projects and plans to present 'ParkPatrol' at an upcoming business carnival in February.



# Rohit and Kohli's Test future depends on selectors: Gavaskar

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's Test future is now in the hands of selectors, said former India captain Sunil Gavaskar while advocating an honest deep-dive into the team's downward spiral in the last six months.

In an interview to PTI, Gavaskar spoke about India's recent debacles, including the home whitewash by New Zealand, the way forward and the responsibility on the Ajit Agarkar-led national selection committee to give a fair chance to those waiting in the wings.

Asked about the raging debate surrounding the future of struggling stars Rohit and Kohli, Gavaskar said, "How long they continue, is really up to the selectors."

"Now that India has failed to qualify for the WTC (World Test Championship) final, it would be pertinent to reflect on the reasons that (why it) happened," he added.

This is the first time since the WTC's inception that India could not make the finals following a 1-3 loss to Australia in the Border-Gavaskar series that concluded on Sunday.

That defeat also meant that the coveted BGT was surrendered to Australia for the first time in a decade. The primary reason for the debacle was the batting unit's failure to fire with Rohit and Kohli proving to be the weakest link. Kohli scored 190 runs in nine innings including an unbeaten century, while Rohit's tally was a dismal 31 from five completed knocks.

Gavaskar didn't mince words while pointing out the repeated failures of the team's batters, who failed to cross the 200 mark six out of nine times during the series. "It is clear that in the last six months, the batting failed and that was the main reason that we lost matches that we should have won," the former captain stated.

"So, if changes are required for the new cycle of the WTC which



starts in mid-June in England, then hopefully the selectors will take into account who would still be there for the final in 2027 and choose accordingly," Gavaskar put things perspective.

Time for next crop to step up

The 75-year-old former India captain did not take names but said there are some good performers coming up in the domestic circuit and the onus is now on the selectors to give them a fair chance.

"Unless they are given a chance how will we know if those doing well in Ranji Trophy will do well at the international level? Here's where good selections come in," he said.

Gavaskar also complimented the selection committee for unearthing a talent like Nitish Kumar Reddy, who was one of India's three centurions in the just-concluded tour, others being Yashasvi Jaiswal and Kohli.

"Compliments to Ajit Agarkar and his team for seeing the potential in Nitish Kumar Reddy and picking

him for the Test squad too," he said of the player, who also enjoys strong backing of head coach Gautam Gambhir.

On the bowling front, Gavaskar said India has enough talent that needs to be given the requisite opportunities to ensure that a generational star like Jasprit Bumrah is not overburdened.

Once again, he refrained from taking names of the potential candidates, who would shape the bowling attack going forward.

"India has got loads of promising pacers who are waiting for an opportunity. Yes, Bumrah should not be overburdened and if others step up then we can have an attack that can win matches in any conditions," he said.

'Be honest'

The culture of putting stars at a pedestal has been an oft-stated problem in Indian cricket. But Gavaskar said it is not very difficult to stay grounded even with that if one is capable of taking an honest look at performances.



## Whitewash at home bigger failure than BGT loss: Yuvraj

PTI ■ DUBAI

World Cup-winning former all-rounder Yuvraj Singh has said that being whitewashed at home by New Zealand was a bigger low for Team India than the loss of Border-Gavaskar Trophy but refused to join the chorus of criticism against embattled veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

India have endured a difficult last few months in the five-day format, going down 0-3 to an under-strength New Zealand at home, which was a first in the team's Test history. This was followed by a 1-3 drubbing by Australia in the away edition of the Border-Gavaskar series.

Both the debacles have been largely attributed to the team's batting frailties, especially those of Rohit and Kohli.

"According to me, losing (to) New Zealand is more hurting (sic). Because they are losing 3-0 at home. You know, that is not acceptable. This (losing BGT) is still acceptable because you have won two times in Australia. And this time you lost," Yuvraj told 'PTI Videos' in an interview here.

"Australia has been a dominant side for the last so many years, that is my thought," the 43-year-old hero of India's 2011 World Cup triumph said.

While Kohli managed at least a hundred during the series despite continuing to be dismissed whenever he was

baited outside the off stump, Rohit was worse with a tally of just 31 runs and had to drop himself from the final Test.

But Yuvraj said it is unfair to lambast the duo given their past achievements.

"We are talking about our greats, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, we are saying very bad things about them," he said.

"...People forget what they have achieved in the past. They are one of the greatest cricketers of this time. Okay, they lost, they did not play good cricket. They are getting hurt more than us," he added.

Hopeful that India would bounce back strongly, Yuvraj said he has full faith in not just Rohit and Kohli but also new head coach Gautam Gambhir, who was his former teammate as well.

"I feel that Gautam Gambhir as a coach, Ajit Agarkar as a selector, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, they are the best minds in cricket right now," he asserted.

"And they have to decide what's the way for Indian cricket in future," he said.

The big-hitting former batter also lauded Rohit for dropping himself from the Sydney Test, saying it was a selfless act.

"I think it is a big thing. I have never seen in the past that the captain's form is not going well and he himself has gone out. And this is Rohit Sharma's greatness that he has kept the team ahead of himself," Yuvraj said.

## We know how to beat Aussies: Rabada

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Fiercy South African pacer Kagiso Rabada, no stranger to beating Australia, believes the prospect of facing them in the World Test Championship final at Lord's in June has already sparked anticipation and motivation in his side.

Reigning champions Australia secured their spot in the WTC final with a six-wicket victory over India in the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Sydney, clinching the series 3-1.

South Africa were the first team to qualify after defeating Pakistan by 10 wickets in the Boxing Day Test.

"It's actually quite some distance away, but a big occasion like the World Test Championship final gets you up for it," Rabada said on SuperSport after taking a six-wicket haul in his side's 10-wicket, second-Test demolition of Pakistan that completed a 2-0 sweep.

Up against defending champions Australia, the Proteas will start as underdogs but Rabada,



who twice played a big part in winning series against Australia in 2016-17 and 2017-18, is confident of pulling off an upset.

"South Africa versus Australia has always been an intense rivalry, because we play cricket quite similar. We play hard -- and they're going to come hard at us, and we know that. But we also know how to beat them," he said.

About the significance of Test cricket, Rabada said: "One hundred per cent, Test cricket is still alive. It's our best format that we've been playing right now.

"When you look at South African cricket and all our legends, they've all been great Test cricketers. The world's best players are Test cricketers, and this series against Pakistan has been a wonderful advertisement for Test cricket, especially in South Africa."

The Proteas don't have any Test assignment in the build-up to the WTC Final at Lord's from June 11-16 and coach Shukri Conrad has said they're looking at the possibility of a one-off match against either Ireland or Afghanistan.

"We're going to try and get a

Test match, possibly in the UK, against Ireland or Afghanistan, whoever is free. And if unsuccessful, we'll obviously go out a couple of days earlier, and make sure we camp there really well, probably in Canterbury," said Conrad. The coach was also all praise for his skipper Temba Bavuma for playing a key role in South Africa's resurgence.

"He's played unbelievably well this summer, and full marks to him," Conrad said.

"I think any captain who wants to lead from the front, they want to lead through performance as well, and that's what Temba's done exceptionally well.

"He's not lost a game as captain of South Africa (winning eight out of nine Tests). Leading from the front, turning out the performances he's had, he's probably in the form of his life.

"I haven't seen him play any better, and that obviously gives you a lot of confidence when you're captaining as well. I wouldn't want anyone else to be captaining us."



## England urged to boycott Champions Trophy game against Afghanistan by UK politicians

AP ■ LONDON

England should refuse to play the Champions Trophy cricket match against Afghanistan next month according to a letter signed by more than 160 U.K. Politicians.

The politicians want the England and Wales Cricket Board to take a stand against the Taliban regime's assault on women's rights and boycott the men's one-day international against Afghanistan in Lahore, Pakistan, on Feb. 26.

Female participation in sport has effectively been outlawed since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, a move that puts the Afghanistan Cricket Board in contravention of International Cricket Council rules.

Because Afghanistan's men are still allowed to compete by the ICC, a strongly worded letter has emerged from the U.K. Parliament pleading for the ECB to make its own moral objection.

Penned by Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi and signed by a cross-party group from the House of Commons and House of Lords including Nigel Farage and Jeremy Corbyn, it raises the "insidious dystopia" unfolding in Afghanistan.

The statement, addressed to ECB chief executive Richard Gould, concludes: "We strongly urge the England men's team players and officials to speak out against the horrific treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the

Taliban.

"We also urge the ECB to consider a boycott of the upcoming match against Afghanistan... To send a clear signal that such grotesque abuses will not be tolerated.

"We must stand against sex apartheid and we implore the ECB to deliver a firm message of solidarity and hope to Afghan women and girls that their suffering has not been overlooked."

Gould issued a swift response, reaffirming ECB principles while suggesting it favoured a uniform approach from all member nations rather than acting alone.

"The ECB strongly condemns the treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime," he said.

"The ICC constitution mandates that all member nations are committed to the growth and development of women's cricket. In line with this commitment, the ECB has maintained its position of not scheduling any bilateral cricket matches against Afghanistan.

"A coordinated, ICC-wide approach would be significantly more impactful than unilateral actions by individual members.

"We understand the concerns raised by those who believe that a boycott of men's cricket could inadvertently support the Taliban's efforts to suppress freedoms and isolate Afghan society. It's crucial to recognise the importance of cricket as a source of hope and positivity for many Afghans, including those displaced from the country."

## Don't feel I was in race for opener's slot in Border-Gavaskar Tests: Renshaw

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian Test batter Matt Renshaw said on Tuesday that he had no idea if he was in the race to replace retired opener David Warner in the recently-concluded Border-Gavaskar series against India, which the hosts won 3-1.

Several names, including Cameron Bancroft, Marcus Harris, Nathan McSweeney, Sam Konstas and Renshaw, were discussed by Cricket Australia as potential options for opening the innings.

McSweeney and Konstas made it to the playing XI, with the former playing the first three Tests and the latter getting included in the last two.

Renshaw felt he figured way down in the Australian selection pecking order for the opener's slot.

"I probably wouldn't say that



I got caught up in the opener race. I don't think I was in it at all," Renshaw told SEN Radio.

"I'm probably further away than a few of the boys (to be selected) but most of my Tests have been in Asia so I've got a fair bit of experience there if called upon," added Renshaw, who

would be fancying his chances as Australia select the squad for the Test series against Sri Lanka later this month.

Renshaw said he just wants to enjoy his cricket without bothering too much about selection issues.

"It's been me trying to play my cricket the way I want to

and I've really enjoyed it. (I'm) feeling really good about my cricket and how my batting is going and obviously there's aspirations there but I'm really enjoying my cricket right now."

Renshaw, 28, who has played 14 Tests, said opening the batting was a specialist's job and not everyone is cut out for the role.

"Opening is a specialist position, it's one of the toughest jobs in world sport," said Renshaw who last played a Test in February 2023 in the tour of India.

"If Steve Smith goes up the top and doesn't have the experience he would like, you can tell it's pretty difficult. I feel like I could bat anywhere if that opportunity came but I'll keep opening for Queensland because it brings me the most satisfaction when you succeed."

# Shastri, Ponting question Shami's injury management, say his inclusion could have boosted India

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Questioning Mohammed Shami's injury management, former greats Ravi Shastri and Ricky Ponting said the veteran pacer could have tilted the series in India's favour had he been added to the squad in the second half of the five-match Border-Gavaskar series. India's decade-long stranglehold on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy ended after they went down by six wickets in Sydney to lose the series 1-3.

The pacer, after recovering from an ankle injury, returned to action for his home state Bengal and impressed in all the three formats -- Ranji Trophy, Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 and Vijay Hazare one-dayers --, raising hopes of a late inclusion. But he was officially ruled out before the fourth Test in

Melbourne with the BCCI medical team citing a knee swelling, though both Ponting and Shastri believe a trip to Australia and a return late in the series could have been pushed.

"To be honest, I was very surprised with the communication going on in the media as to what exactly happened to Mohammed Shami," the former Indian head coach stated in The ICC Review.

"Where is he when it comes to recovery? He's been sitting in the NCA for I don't know how long. Why can't proper communication come out on where he stands? A player of his ability, I would have brought him to Australia.

"Absolutely, there's no question about that (Shami could have tilted the series in Melbourne or Sydney)," Shastri added.

The 62-year-old further said

it would have been beneficial if Shami had, at least, travelled with the group in Australia.

"I would have kept him part of the team and made sure that his rehabilitation was done with the team," said Shastri.

"And then if we thought by the third Test match that no, this guy can't play the rest of the series, I would let him go. But I would have brought him with the team, kept him, monitored him with the best of the physios and best of the advice even from international physios who are in Australia and seeing how he went. But I would have kept him in the mix."

Shastri believes the fast bowler could have provided adequate help to Jasprit Bumrah, who too struggled with fitness at the end of the series and could not bowl in the second innings of the

Sydney Test.

"It got so tight at 1-1 going into Melbourne," he said.

"You just needed that experience and support. For all you know, he might have raised the bar as well. And it would have been the two guys there (Bumrah and Shami).

"Pat Cummins couldn't have done it on his own, Scotty Boland had to step in. So you needed a bowler of his experience. You know, as hard as Mohammed Siraj tried, you needed Shami's experience there."

Echoing Shastri's views, Australian World Cup-winning captain Ponting said: "I was really surprised when he wasn't flown out even halfway through the series, two Test matches in."

"India's make-up obviously had Nitish Reddy there. So you had another seam bowling all-rounder anyway.

"So, if Shami, even if he wasn't fully fit, if he had to bowl fewer overs in a day, you had a backup seam bowling option to help him out and I think he could have been the difference. "When you asked me (in an earlier The ICC Review) at the start about what I thought the result would be, I said 3-1 Australia because Shami wasn't there. That was the first thing I said. That's how important I felt he was to India.

"If Shami, Bumrah and Siraj were in their starting team, I think things could have been completely different here in Australia."

Shami is currently playing in the domestic one-dayers for the Vijay Hazare Trophy and it remains to be seen if he's included for the England home series ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy in February.





# Are Allu Arjun & Jr NTR being sidelined by their families?



The Telugu Film Industry is abuzz with discussions about two top actors, Allu Arjun and Jr NTR and their strained relationships with their families.

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The Telugu film industry is currently witnessing intense chatter about two of its biggest stars, Allu Arjun and Jr NTR, who appear to be sidelined by their respective families. Both actors hail from prestigious film dynasties—Allu Arjun from the Mega Family and Jr NTR from the Nandamuri Clan. Despite their towering successes, their recent treatment within their circles has sparked debate and controversy.

## ALLU ARJUN'S STRAINED RELATIONS WITH THE MEGA FAMILY

Mega Star Chiranjeevi had a few days back attended the American Progressive Telugu Association's (APTA) Global Business Conference Catalyst in Hyderabad, where he shared anecdotes about his early struggles and career. While he praised Pawan Kalyan and Ram Charan, he made no mention of Allu

Arjun, despite the latter delivering massive hits like *Pushpa: The Rise and Pushpa: The Rule* (in Hindi).

Speculation suggests that the Mega Family's distance from Allu Arjun began after his visit to Nandyal. Even when Allu Arjun returned from jail recently, no Mega Family members visited him and the actor himself has refrained from mentioning Chiranjeevi or Pawan Kalyan in public events for months.

Chiranjeevi's comment at the event—"Behaviour is a very important trait for every person. If you are a talented actor, it comes secondary, but your behavior comes first. If you feel that you are on the top, your fall down starts"—is widely believed to be an indirect remark aimed at Allu Arjun, allegedly referring to the actor's demeanor following the success of *Pushpa*.

## JR NTR'S FALLOUT WITH THE NANDAMURI CLAN

Jr NTR, too, finds himself in a similar predicament within the Nandamuri family. In a recent episode of Nandamuri Balakrishna's talk show

*Unstoppable*, director Bobby Kolli—who directed *Jai Lava Kusa*—spoke about all his films except the Jr NTR-starrer. According to sources, the omission was intentional, as the Nandamuri family has ongoing differences with Jr NTR.

*Jai Lava Kusa* was a major hit for Bobby Kolli, marking a successful comeback for the director after the failure of *Sardar Gabbar Singh*. Fans have criticised the omission, speculating that it reflects the growing rift between Jr NTR and Balakrishna. The backlash escalated, with Jr NTR fans even calling for a boycott of Balakrishna's upcoming film *Daaku Maharaja*.



Producer Naga Vamsi urged fans to stay calm, stating on social media, "This is our film, and I need everyone's support. Let's make it a blockbuster success." Director Bobby clarified that the omission of *Jai Lava Kusa* was due to the event organisers not including the film in the presentation slides.

The apparent sidelining of Allu Arjun and Jr NTR has ignited heated debates on social media. Fans have taken sides, with many calling out the alleged unfair treatment of the two actors who have contributed significantly to Telugu cinema.

Both incidents have brought internal family dynamics to the forefront, with questions being raised about professional jealousy, egos and strained relationships in Tollywood's biggest dynasties.

While Allu Arjun and Jr NTR remain silent on the controversies, their fans continue to passionately defend them online, making this one of the biggest talking points.



## Wamiqa Gabbi in Adivi Sesh's G2

Adivi Sesh has firmly established himself as a talented actor, earning recognition as a Pan-Indian star with films like *Major*. However, the actor has been taking his time to complete his projects, leading to no releases in the past two years. Sesh has been fully immersed in shooting his upcoming films, with the most anticipated being *G2*, the sequel to his earlier hit *Goodachari*.

Much like its predecessor, *G2* is an action-packed spy drama. While *Goodachari* was directed by Sashi Kiran Tikka, with Adivi Sesh contributing the story, *G2* is helmed by Vinay Kumar Sirigineedi, with Sesh providing the screenplay. Not only is *G2* Sesh's most ambitious and high-budget film to date, but it is also poised to be a landmark project in the Indian spy thriller genre.

The makers of *G2* announced that Wamiqa Gabbi will play the female lead, starring opposite Adivi Sesh. Wamiqa, who is already a familiar face in Telugu

cinema thanks to her debut film *Bhale Manchi Roju* opposite Sudheer Babu, has also been making waves in Bollywood. However, her recent Hindi film *Baby John* didn't perform well at the box office.

Wamiqa has wrapped up a European shooting schedule with Adivi Sesh and expressed her enthusiasm about being part of the project. "I'm beyond excited to be part of the incredible journey of *G2*. Working with such a talented cast and crew inspires me to push boundaries and bring fresh energy to my character," she shared.

The film also stars Emraan Hashmi, with several key scenes already shot featuring the actor. With its gripping narrative and powerful performances, *G2* promises to elevate the *Goodachari* franchise to new heights.

Produced by T.G. Vishwa Prasad and Abhishek Agarwal, *G2* is shaping up to be a cinematic spectacle that fans of Adivi Sesh and action thrillers won't want to miss.

## Abhishek Nama's magnum opus Nagabandham introduces 'Rudhra'

Lakshmi Ira and Devansh, in collaboration with Abhishek Nama and Thunder Studios, are gearing up to introduce the pivotal character 'Rudhra' from the much-anticipated *Nagabandham*. The special reveal is set to take place in an exciting video slated for release on January 13, 2025.

Billed as one of the grandest cinematic spectacles of 2025, *Nagabandham* is poised to take audiences on a mesmerising journey that seamlessly blends mystery, mythology and adventure. The film's latest poster offers a tantalising glimpse into its narrative. It depicts a lone figure standing before an enormous, intricately designed doorway illuminated by a golden glow. This striking visual hints at ancient secrets and treasures hidden within, setting the tone for what promises to be an enthralling tale.

Marking the beginning of an epic saga, the upcoming video will introduce audiences to 'Rudhra', a character described as being central to the story. Speaking about the introduction, the creators shared that the unveiling of Rudhra will not only be a defining moment for the film but will also leave an indelible mark on the cinematic landscape.

Abhishek Nama, who has taken on the roles of writer, director and screenplay creator for the project, has crafted a narrative steeped in ancient lore and rich mythological elements. Produced by Kishore Annappureddy, *Nagabandham* is co-produced by Tarak Cinemas, ensuring a high-quality production that will resonate with audiences across the nation.

To reach a wider audience, *Nagabandham* will be released in multiple languages, including Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. This multilingual approach reflects the creators' ambition to present the story as a pan-Indian cinematic experience.



## Ajith Kumar escapes unscathed after car crash in Dubai

Tamil superstar Ajith Kumar, known for his acting prowess, is also a skilled racing driver. Apart from his successful film career, Ajith has been actively participating in international racing events. He has competed in the MRF Racing series in Mumbai, Chennai, and Delhi, as well as in Formula championships. As one of the few racers in India, Ajith

continues to pursue his passion for motorsports alongside his film career.

On Tuesday, the actor was practicing in Dubai for the upcoming 24H Dubai 2025 endurance race, scheduled to take place from January 11 to 12. However, on Tuesday around 12:45 pm, Ajith's car crashed into the fence during a practice session. The car spun around three

to four times before coming to a stop.

Fortunately, Ajith was unharmed in the incident as he was wearing all necessary safety gear. After the crash, he received immediate assistance and was quickly moved to another car. The actor walked away from the scene without any visible injuries, and it appears he is perfectly fine.



## Renu Desai talks high about 1000 Words

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's ex-wife, Renu Desai, attended the promotion of the film *1000 Words* as a special guest. The film stars Arvind Krishna, *Bigg Boss* fame Divi Vadthya, Meghana Srinivas and Vinay in lead roles, with Ramana Villart serving as both producer and director. The story, dialogues and screenplay were crafted by Dr. Sankalp.

The film had a special screening for select viewers, including Renu Desai. After watching the movie, Renu shared her heartfelt impressions, saying, "I knew Ramana as a photographer. He once told me a story, and while I thought it was good, I wondered how it would turn out on screen. It's a film everyone should watch and learn from. To take such a beautiful story from just one photo is extra-

ordinary," Renu further added, "Watching the movie brought tears to my eyes. This is just the beginning for Ramana. I hope to see more such wonderful films from him in the future."

Director and producer Ramana Villart revealed that the movie was entirely shot in the scenic locales of Araku. He explained, "We wanted to convey and show the pain a mother goes through while giving birth to a child." Praising the entire cast, he particularly lauded the performance of child artist Noori.

Speaking about Renu Desai's involvement, Ramana said, "Renu is like a sister to me. She became emotional when I narrated the story and offered her full support."

*1000 Words* promises to be a heartfelt cinematic experience, with a unique storyline that captures raw human emotions.

## 'Don't reveal anything about your past to your wives,' jokes Venky

Venkatesh stars as the lead actor in the upcoming film *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*, which is set to release on January 14, coinciding with the Sankranti festival. The film features Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary as the female leads. The pre-release event for the film took place in Nizamabad, the native town of producer Dil Raju.

Speaking at the event, Venkatesh expressed his joy about the film's function being held in Nizamabad. "You (the audience) have given me many hits throughout my career and I am truly thankful for that. Now, I'm coming with *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* for this Sankranti, and I appeal to everyone to come and watch this film. The film is packed with entertainment, good songs, and plenty of hilarious scenes. All the right ingredients are there in

this film, and director Anil has crafted a wholesome entertainer."

Aishwarya Rajesh plays his wife, while Meenakshi Chaudhary portrays a cop and his ex-girlfriend. In a light-hearted moment, Venkatesh jokingly advised, "Don't reveal anything about your flashback to your wives."

The actor showered praise on the two leading ladies and thanked director Anil for bringing such a project to life. "I've worked with producer Dil Raju on four films, and I look forward to doing many more with him in the future," Venkatesh concluded.

Meanwhile, producer Dil Raju speaking at the event humorously said, "People of Andhra give a vibe with movie but people of Telangana give a vibe with *Thella Kallu* (Palm Wine) and Mutton."

