


# sunday pioneer

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**Slum dwellers will 'liberate' Delhi by uprooting 'Aapda' govt: Shah**

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**Indian economy likely to be 'A LITTLE weaker' in 2025: IMF**

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**Durgesh: A combination of PASSION and compassion**

Oilse

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
The pioneer

*The Congress Government will not arrest anyone without a probe. This is known to even Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay. Our government won't arrest without investigation in any case. The ED entered the scene after ACB's entry into the Formula E-Car Race scam. Why did the ED enter the scene if the government had colluded with the BRS? The ED entered the scene as corruption took place in Formula E-Car Racing*



**-Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Revenue Minister, Telangana** P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**Kolusu inaugurates cattle sheds**

The TDP-led NDA government has been working towards the welfare and development of dairy farmers since assuming power, said Kolusu Padhsarthy, Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations. On Saturday, he inaugurated a Gokulam cattle shed constructed under the Employment Guarantee Scheme at Nekkalamma village in Agiripalli Mandal, built with an investment of Rs 2.30 lakh. During the event, he highlighted the government's efforts to revive the mini Gokulam shed scheme...

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**'Tech key to solving India's challenges'**

ISRO Chairman Dr. Somanath on Saturday emphasized that technology is crucial in addressing India's challenges, such as poverty and security. Speaking virtually at the convocation of the Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) in Sri City, Dr. Somanath encouraged graduates to focus on six key traits for success: Passion, Commitment, Excellence, Determination, Focus, and Learnability, while also highlighting the importance of Humility, Honesty, and Integrity. In the evolving global landscape, he stated that technological...

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**AAP MLA dies in 'accidental firing'**

AAP leader and Ludhiana West MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi has died of a gunshot injury he sustained while cleaning his licensed pistol, his family said on Saturday. Gogi, who had a passion for vintage cars, was 58 and is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter. Joint Commissioner of Police Jaskaran Singh Teja said the bullet pierced Gogi's temple and he was rushed to the Dayanand Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), where doctors declared him dead. According to his family ...

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**Nation to become \$4 trillion economy soon**

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri on Saturday said India's energy security will fuel the country's bid to become a USD 4 trillion economy much earlier than the projected 2027. Puri was addressing a session at the 7th Mangaluru Literary Festival on Saturday. He said the International Monetary Fund has projected India to reach there by 2027. "But if the present trajectory continues, India will arrive there much before that," Puri said. The seventh edition of the festival was inaugurated by legendary Kannada writer S L Bhyrappa at the T M A Pai Auditorium. Following the inauguration, Puri delivered his key note address on India's energy security. According to Puri, there is no shortage of...

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**OBTUSE ANGLE**



**CM's SANKRANTI GIFT**

## Rs 6,700 cr pending bills cleared

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has approved the release of Rs 6,700 crore in pending bills for various sectors, providing much-needed relief to students, employees, farmers, contractors, and other stakeholders ahead of Sankranti, Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav announced on Saturday. The announcement followed a detailed review of the State's finances and pending dues, conducted by the Chief Minister in Undavalli. During the review meeting, which focused on the State's financial health and the release of long-pending payments, several crucial decisions were made. Minister Keshav explained that the release of these funds would provide immediate financial relief to many, particularly those in Amaravati who have been awaiting compensation for land acquisition. Keshav pointed out that the previous government's financial mismanagement had left the state in a precarious economic situation. However, CM Naidu is making concerted efforts to rectify the situation and steer the state towards progress, the Minister added.

The State is currently under pressure with more than Rs 10 lakh crore in pending dues, accruing daily interest, in addition to other liabilities amounting to Rs 1.30 lakh crore.



WHAT THE PACKAGE INCLUDES			
Rs 1300 crore for employee dues such as General Provident Fund (GPF), surrender leave, and Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS).	Rs 265 crore for Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) dues.	Rs 400 crore for NTR Medical Trust dues.	Rs 90 crore for 651 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), along with an additional Rs 241 crore in land compensation for farmers who provided land for Amaravati's development and Vijayawada airport at Gannavaram
Rs 519 crore for GPF dues.	Rs 788 crore for fee reimbursement and scholarships, including SC/ST scholarships, benefiting 6.5 lakh students.	Rs 100 crore for outstanding drug and medicine bills.	
Rs 214 crore for police personnel's surrender leave.	Rs 500 crore for power sector subsidy dues.	Rs 586 crore for small contractors, many of whom have been awaiting payments of Rs 5 to Rs 10 lakh due to issues with the previous government.	
Rs 300 crore for CPS dues.			

Keshav mentioned that the previous government's failure to meet its share of 94 central government schemes under the 60:40 funding model had hindered the implementation of

these schemes. Nonetheless, Rs 6,000 crore had been paid to the Centre, enabling the revival of 73 central government-sponsored schemes. Minister Keshav concluded by

expressing optimism about the state's financial recovery and extended his best wishes to the people of Andhra Pradesh for a prosperous Sankranti.



## Rs 14K cr to be invested in Kurnool's industrial park

### AP govt signs MoU with global leader in chip manufacturing

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Indichip Semiconductors Limited, a global leader in chip manufacturing, in partnership with M/s Yitoo Micro Technology Limited (YMTL) from Japan, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Andhra Pradesh to set up India's first private semiconductor manufacturing facility with an investment of over Rs 14,000 crore. The state-of-the-art facility will focus on manufacturing Silicon Carbide (SiC) chips, contributing to India's technological progress and sustainability objectives. Under its Semiconductor Policy announced in November 2024, the Government of Andhra Pradesh aims to position the state as a hub for electronics and semiconductor

manufacturing. The new SiC fabrication plant will begin with a production capacity of 10,000 wafers per month, with plans to ramp up to 50,000 wafers per month within 2-3 years. This strategic investment aligns with India's Atma Nirbhar Bharat vision and responds to the growing global demand for energy-efficient technologies, electric vehicles, and renewable energy solutions. Nara Lokesh, Minister for IT, remarked, "This investment reflects Andhra Pradesh's ability to attract cutting-edge industries through innovative policies and robust infrastructure. Our focus on nurturing talent and providing seamless support will ensure the success of this initiative and enhance India's global semiconductor footprint." *Continued on Page 2*

## Rising ganja abuse in AP turns a social issue

C PRADEEP KUMAR  
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■ VIJAYAWADA

The increasing use and trafficking of ganja (cannabis) in various parts of the State, particularly among youth and college students, has become a growing social issue. A recent incident involving seven students from Koneru Lakshmaiah University (KLU) in Tadepalli, apprehended by the police under the influence of ganja, has once again brought this alarming problem into the spotlight. What makes this case even more concerning is that the students were allegedly supplied the drug by their senior peers, highlighting the extent of ganja peddling and its pervasive grip on student communities. Despite being illegal, ganja has

**Recent arrest of 7 KLU students brings the problem into spotlight**



The incident at KLU underscores the severity of the issue. While the police took the unusual step of counselling the students and their families instead of registering cases, this well-intentioned response has sparked a debate. Supporters argue that the move prevents legal consequences from derailing the future of young people. However, critics contend that such leniency might fail to address the root cause of the problem and could leave the door open for further abuse among students.

emerged as one of the most commonly abused substances among young people. Its low cost, easy accessibility, and the temporary euphoria it provides make it especially appealing to college students who often find themselves vulnerable to peer pressure and other

influences. The fact that the illegal trade continues to thrive, despite law enforcement crackdowns, signals the growing scale of the problem. In this context, students have become both victims and perpetrators in the cycle of substance abuse and trafficking.

The incident at KLU underscores the severity of the issue. While the police took the unusual step of counselling the students and their families instead of registering cases, this well-intentioned response has sparked a debate. *Continued on Page 2*



## TTD to distribute ex gratia today

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

As per the decision made by the TTD Board, the distribution of ex gratia cheques to the families of the victims of the Tirupati stampede incident will commence on January 12. In this regard, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of TTD Trust Board Chairman BR Naidu at his camp office in Tirumala on Saturday afternoon, attended by board members. The TTD Chairman has formed two committees, consisting of several board members, to personally visit and distribute ex gratia cheques of Rs 25 lakh each to the six families of the stampede victims, in collaboration with the local legislators. The committee visiting Visakhapatnam and Narsipatnam includes board members Jotula Nehru, Janga Krishnamurthy, Panabaka Lakshmi, Janaki Devi, Mahender Reddy, MS Raju, and Bhanu Prakash Reddy. *Continued on Page 2*



**71.7% jump in Indian tourists' visit to Malaysia: P8**

## Central panel inspects Polavaram works

PNS ■ ELURU

The Jal Shakti Parliamentary Standing Committee, led by Chairman Rajiv Pratap Rudy, visited the Polavaram project on Saturday to inspect the ongoing construction work. The Committee members were accompanied by Water Resources Development

Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu, Special Chief Secretary G. Sai Prasad, and District Collector K. Vetri Selvi. The delegation's visit was aimed at reviewing the progress of the construction works. They first inspected the spillway and later examined the upper and lower cofferdam works. *Continued on Page 2*



## Traffic snarls galore on Hyd-V'wada highway

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■ VIJAYAWADA

The Hyderabad-Vijayawada highway witnessed severe traffic congestion on Saturday as commuters headed to their native places across the state to celebrate the Sankranti Festival. The surge in travel led to significant delays, particularly at the Keesara and Chillakallu toll plazas near Nandigama and Jaggaiahpetta, respectively, where long queues of vehicles formed despite efforts by authorities to manage the situation. Typically, these toll plazas handle around 40,000 vehicles daily. However, due to the Sankranti holiday rush, traffic volumes surged, with an estimated 75,000 to 1 lakh vehicles expected to pass through these toll gates over the weekend. The Nandigama flyover also became a major bottleneck, with vehicles moving at a crawl. Many families from Hyderabad and other parts of Telangana, taking advantage of the holiday



Heavy traffic was witnessed on the National Highway near Kanchikacharla in NTR district on Saturday. Pic: Ch Vijaya Bhaskar

declared for educational institutions from Friday, opted to travel in personal vehicles to their hometowns in Andhra Pradesh. The number of travellers is expected to rise further in the coming days as families prepare to celebrate the Harvest Festival on Monday. In response to the increased demand, special trains and buses

are being operated between Hyderabad and major cities like Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and Tirupati. The Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) is playing a vital role in managing the rush, with 7,200 special bus services running to accommodate the large number of travellers.

## School buses to ease Sankranti travel congestion

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ahead of the Sankranti festival, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has issued instructions to ease passenger congestion in Andhra Pradesh. With heavy travel expected, especially from Telangana and other states, the CM directed APSRTC Managing Director Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao and Transport Department officials to arrange for private school and college buses to transport passengers from urban areas to rural regions. Naidu emphasised that only buses in good condition should be used for safe travel. Major cities like Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, and Guntur are experiencing overcrowd-



ing at bus stations, with an increased demand for transport, particularly to native villages. To address this, a video conference involving officials from the Transport, Police, and RTC departments was held to discuss solutions. Immediate deployment of buses was ordered, and private school buses will be utilised where necessary. The Transport Department has been tasked with overseeing the management of these buses.

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

# CM Naidu assures justice and support to public

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu addressed public grievances on Saturday during his visit to the TDP central office in Mangalagiri. Among the complaints was one from Veeravalli Venkayamma, a widow, who sought justice for her tiffin hotel, allegedly taken over by followers of YSRCP leader Gopireddy Srinivasareddy. Venkayamma recounted that in 2014, during the tenure of Speaker Kodela Sivaprasad Rao, she was allotted a small piece of land near the Narasaraopet bus stand to set up her hotel, which she ran successfully. However, after the YSRCP came to power in 2019, Gopireddy Srinivasareddy and his associates allegedly seized her hotel. Tearfully, she informed the CM



that she faced repeated threats and attacks whenever she tried to reclaim her business. Venkayamma urged Chandrababu Naidu to take action against YSRCP leaders Subbareddy and Lakshnareddy and ensure the return of her hotel. During the grievance session, Chandrababu Naidu extended financial assistance from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to individuals struggling with medical expenses. He also interacted with differently-abled individuals, senior citizens, and other vulnerable sections, assuring them that their issues would be resolved. In addition, two donors, Makkapati Sheshagiri Rao and Radhakrishna, contributed Rs 1 lakh each towards the Anna Canteen initiative. The donors handed over their cheques to the Chief Minister, who lauded their generosity and support for the government's efforts to provide meals to the underprivileged.

# Megha Matters Missing in Action

BRS working president KTR once famously mocked the media, quipping that management conveniently avoided airing stories critical of Megha Krishna Reddy or MEIL. "You won't show when we speak against Megha," he had said. But when it came to walking the talk, irony seems to have paid a visit. During KTR's press briefing following the dismissal of his High Court petition, he spoke about Megha Krishna Reddy, even delving into the company's electoral donations to all political parties. However, when the official press note rolled out, it conveniently omitted MEIL detail. A coincidence, or just some strategic editing? Those who heard the briefing firsthand couldn't help but call out the glaring hypocrisy. His team was alerted about the glaring miss but they were more focused on a different headline for the day

moned as early as noon! Reporters exchanged confused glances, unsure whether to fly kites or pitch tents outside his office. Minister Ponguleti was also late for a chit-chat by 3 hours. Scribes were called around 1 pm only for the interaction to start at 4 pm. Even CM has been late to recent events, much to the frustration of attendees. Perhaps it's time someone gifts our leaders a reliable clock - or at least an efficient secretary.

rhetoric has certainly shifted. Once an ardent supporter of K Chandrasekhar Rao, Gutha has seamlessly transitioned to extolling Congress government schemes. Interestingly, this isn't a new habit for Gutha. Even during his time with the BRS, he conducted similar interactions in Nalgonda, sharing nuggets of political insight over lunch. However, the ethicality of a Legislative Council chairman making political comments continues to raise eyebrows, adding a layer of intrigue to these otherwise casual meet-ups.

## TG I&PR Minister's office: Public relations or selective relations?

## Rainbow Rumble: Bandi Sanjay's comments spark BJP infighting

Bandi Sanjay's fiery rhetoric took an unexpected turn when he criticised hospital extortion and pending Arogyasri dues, inadvertently mentioning Rainbow Hospitals. What seemed like another pointed jab soon turned into a political whirlwind, as Dharmapuri Arvind's followers, known for their loyalty, took issue with the comment. The twist? Arvind, a BJP MP, is reportedly linked to Rainbow Hospitals, a fact that Sanjay missed in his tirade. The mention ruffled feathers, with Arvind's supporters clashing internally with Bandi's loyalists. While Sanjay's camp insists it was an unintentional slip, Arvind's supporters aren't buying it. Looks like this Rainbow has brought more storm clouds than sunshine for the BJP.

Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, who holds the Revenue and Housing portfolios alongside Information and Public Relations (I&PR), seems to be facing a PR crisis of his own. Despite his reputation for dropping political bombshells during press interactions, his frequent chit-chats in the Secretariat have turned into a source of frustration for many scribes. The problem? Selective invitations. The latest instance on January 7 saw only a chosen few being invited by the minister's public relations officers

## Cockfights are back: Festival fun or faux pas?

As Sankranti approaches, it seems Vijayawada is throwing a really wild party. Forget the usual kite flying and sweet pongal—this year, the stars of the show are none other than the iconic cockfights and bullfights. Yes, those events that were once "banned" under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act have now made a bold return to the city's bustling neighbourhoods. Who knew animal cruelty could have such a revival? Organisers in Vijayawada, it seems, are eager to stir things up—quite literally—by bringing these controversial sports back to life. Locations like Patamata, Nidamanuru, and Prasadampadu are all getting a makeover,

## REPORTERS' DIARY

(PROs). This isn't a one-off; reporters have noted a recurring pattern of exclusion, with several being left in the dark. "This isn't just unfair—it's making us look bad in our offices," said a disgruntled journalist. Interestingly, while other ministers might not draw the same level of anticipation, Ponguleti's sessions are highly sought after, given his knack for making politically charged statements. However, the selective approach by his staff has reporters questioning whether the I&PR Minister's PROs are equipped for their roles. For someone leading the very department responsible for public relations, this mismanagement is ironic, to say the least.

with massive arenas popping up as if it were the hottest new concert venue in town. And who's footing the bill for this return of the bloody? Why, local politicians, of course! They've reportedly been seen shaking hands with organisers and turning a blind eye to laws like they're watching the latest reality TV show.

In years past, these blood sport events were relegated to the outskirts of towns, where authorities had a tough time spotting the action (or just pretending not to see it). Now? Well, these events are being held right under everyone's noses, smack dab in the urban centre. Why settle for being an underground event when you can go mainstream?

Local sources confirm that preparations are in full swing. Temporary structures are being set up faster than you can say "banned activities," and the anticipation is high for what promises to be one of the most controversial (and oddly festive) celebrations in recent history. So, will this be Vijayawada's new tradition—or is it just a flap in the face of animal rights? Only time - and maybe a few flying feathers - will tell.

(Naaveena Ghanate, Kolihetty Venkateswarlu and C Pradeep Kumar)

## Gutha's lunchtime loyalties: Chit-chats with a twist

Gutha Sukhender Reddy, the Telangana Legislative Council chairman, has kept his tradition of lunchtime chit-chats alive, but with a noticeable twist. Known for his camaraderie with scribes, Gutha, who once aligned with the BRS during its tenure, now showers praises on the Congress and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy after switching loyalties. The venue might be the same—the Legislative Council premises—but the

## Ministers' clocks go haywire

It seems time management is a tough nut to crack for our ministers. At a recent GIC inaugural event, Sridhar Babu kept everyone waiting for a whopping two-and-a-half hours. The crowd was restless, the staff uneasy, and the organisers left scratching their heads. A joke going around was if the minister running on a different time zone? Meanwhile, Minister Jupally Krishna Rao created his own scheduling circus over a press meet for the Kite Festival. First, the briefing was announced for 3 PM, then suddenly moved to 2 PM. But just to keep things spicy, some media houses were sum-

# Deputy CM Pawan enthralled by Vijayawada Book Fair

## Make use of LHMS for holiday security: SP

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Superintendent of Police (SP) Vakul Jindal has urged the people of Vizianagaram district to make use of the Locked House Monitoring System (LHMS) to ensure the safety of their homes while they travel to their native villages for the upcoming Pongal holidays. Speaking about the initiative, SP Jindal emphasized the importance of security during this busy season, saying, "We understand that many people will be heading to their native villages for the holidays, and it's crucial that we provide them with a solution to secure their homes while they're away."

The LHMS service, which is part of an initiative by the State Police, will be available in the Vizianagaram Municipal Corporation, Bobbili, and Nellimarla municipalities. The system offers property owners and residents the ability to monitor their homes through real-time CCTV surveillance.



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan visited the Vijayawada Book Fair on Saturday, spending over two and a half hours exploring a variety of book stalls and purchasing an extensive range of books. Known for his deep love for reading, the Deputy CM showed a keen interest in diverse subjects, including law, history,

politics, public policy, science and technology, agriculture, environmental topics, and Telugu literature. During his visit, Pawan Kalyan reviewed books in Telugu, Hindi, and English, selecting works from both renowned and emerging authors. His focus extended to ancient literature, critical analyses, translated literary works, dictionaries, and spiritual writings.

One of the memorable moments of his visit was his excitement upon discovering Man's Search for Meaning by Dr. Viktor E. Frankl. Expressing admiration for the book, he highlighted its potential to help people overcome despair and foster optimism. The Deputy CM shared his intention to buy additional copies to gift to others. The book recounts Frankl's harrowing experiences in Nazi concentration camps during World War II and his ability to find meaning in life even amidst adversity.

Apart from his literary interests, the Deputy CM also displayed a strong inclination toward books on Indian laws, governance, and environmental issues. He was accompanied by Vijayawada City Police Commissioner Rajasekhar Babu and Book Fair organisers Emesco Vijay Kumar, T Manoharanayudu, Lakshmaiah, Babji, and others, who appreciated his enthusiasm for the fair and its collection.



# Dy CM Pawan all praise for...

Continued from Page 1

He congratulated Greenko for setting up the world's largest green energy project and acknowledged its potential to serve as a model for renewable energy production in India. The project, spread across 2,800 acres, is the first of its kind in the country, combining solar, wind, and hydroelectric power generation in one location. Of these 2,800 acres, 1,700 acres were purchased by Greenko from the government and farmers, while 365 hectares of forest land were acquired with central government approval. However, there is an ongoing dispute regarding 45 hectares of land, which has been in litigation since 1962, involving both the revenue and forest departments. "We have requested the central government to resolve this dispute, and we are willing to cooperate in its resolution," Pawan Kalyan said. Anil Chalamalasetty, Group CEO & MD of Greenko, said that this ground-breaking initiative, combining solar, wind, and pumped storage power, would make a sub-

stantial contribution to global efforts to decarbonize hard-to-abate industries. Anil highlighted that upon completion, the project would catalyze economic growth in the region, aid the development of ancillary industries, and generate employment opportunities. He further emphasized that the project would prevent 3.3 million tonnes of CO2 emissions annually. This clean energy generation, storage, and on-demand supply project will play a vital role in enabling India to achieve energy security and accelerate its mission for global energy transition to greener sources. Anil also underlined Greenko's cutting-edge approach to integrating renewable energy sources with pumped storage projects. This integration is central to Greenko's strategy of creating a 100+ GWh/day Digital Cloud-Based Storage Platform, ensuring energy reliability and enhancing the clean energy transition. The Integrated Renewable Energy Project by Greenko is expected to play a pivotal role in the State's energy landscape, offering significant environmental and economic benefits.

## Rs 14K crore to be...

Continued from Page 1

TG Bharath, Minister for Industries, stated, "This partnership aligns with our vision of transforming Andhra Pradesh into a manufacturing powerhouse. The establishment of this SiC fab will not only generate thousands of jobs but will also drive innovation and foster ancillary industries in the region." Piyush Bichhoriya, Managing Director of Indichip Semiconductors, said, "This initiative reflects our com-

mitment to nation-building through technological innovation. By focusing on Silicon Carbide chips, we aim to strengthen India's manufacturing ecosystem and contribute to the global semiconductor industry."

Dr. Sandeep Garg, Director at Indichip, added, "This collaboration will not only introduce cutting-edge technology but also pave the way for a sustainable future by meeting the growing demand for energy-efficient solutions in electric vehicles

## TTD to distribute ex gratia....

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the committee assigned to Tamil Nadu and Kerala consists of board members Rama Murthy, Krishna Murthy, Vaideyanathan, Naresh

Kumar, Shanta Ram, and Suchitra Ella. The committees will also gather details regarding employment and education from the affected families, to offer one contract job per family, as well as free educa-

# Bhumana slams Anam's charges against Jagan

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Former TTD Chairman Bhumana Karunakar Reddy has strongly condemned the allegations made by State Endowments Minister Anam Ramnarayana Reddy against YSRCP President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy following the latter's visit to console the victims of the tragic Tirupati stampede.

In a video statement, Karunakar Reddy termed the minister's remarks as baseless and an insult to the bereaved families. "When six devotees lose their lives due to your administration's negligence, the moral responsibility



lies with you. Instead of making unfounded accusations against Jagan, you should have resigned. This only highlights your lack of accountability and sensitivity," he asserted. Karunakar Reddy blamed the tragedy on the government's mismanagement of the Vaikuntha Dwara Darshan tickets, the moral responsibility

negligence. He criticized the minister for politicizing the crisis, stating, "Rather than showing empathy or extending aid to the victims, Minister Anam resorted to false claims. This exposes who is truly playing politics during a time of tragedy?"

Refuting allegations that the YSRCP paid victims to criticize the minister, Karunakar Reddy challenged Anam to provide CCTV evidence to substantiate his claims. "If you cannot prove this, you must resign immediately. Your statements not only lack truth but also dishonour the victims and their grieving families," he said. He also accused the government of delib-

erately obstructing Jagan Mohan Reddy's hospital visit. "Your administration blocked his route with tractors and failed to provide adequate security. Even Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan's extended presence raises suspicions of a conspiracy to prevent Jagan from meeting the victims," he alleged. Karunakar Reddy concluded by accusing Minister Anam of attempting to divert attention from the government's failures. "These remarks reflect a desperate attempt to mask the administration's inefficiency and the minister's frustration over his lack of recognition within his own party," he stated.

# Rising ganja abuse...

Continued from Page 1

Supporters argue that the move prevents legal consequences from derailing the future of young people. However, critics contend that such leniency might fail to address the root cause of the problem and could leave the door open for further abuse among students.

The long-term effects of ganja use are devastating. Beyond the immediate euphoria, addiction, impaired cognitive function, and health complications loom large. Moreover, the normalization of drug consumption in certain social circles can also lead to the involvement of youth in more dangerous illegal activities, further harming their prospects.

The police, aware of the growing drug crisis, continue to fight the menace of ganja trafficking. However, the issue is deeply entrenched in many communities, and the increasing sophistication of traffick-

ing networks makes it difficult to stem the tide. The sheer volume of drug circulation often outpaces law enforcement efforts, creating a cycle that is hard to break.

In response to this growing crisis, the State government has established the EAGLE (Elimination of Abuse of Ganja, Liquor, and Drugs) task force. This specialised unit is tasked with coordinating anti-drug operations, targeting peddlers and suppliers, dismantling trafficking networks, and raising awareness about the dangers of substance abuse. While the formation of the EAGLE task force is seen as a positive step, its success will ultimately depend on its ability to collaborate effectively with local law enforcement, educational institutions, and the broader community.

The issue of drug abuse among youth calls for more than just enforcement; it requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society. Educational institutions, local

authorities, and families must work together to provide students with the support and guidance they need to resist the temptations of drugs. Public awareness campaigns must also be stepped up to inform young people of the long-term consequences of substance abuse and to challenge the normalization of drug culture.

While the police and the government have made some efforts to curb this issue, the continued involvement of educational institutions and communities is essential to tackling the root causes of drug abuse. As this issue continues to unfold, all stakeholders must work together to safeguard the futures of the youth and protect them from the devastating effects of substance abuse. When The Pioneer attempted to contact the top authorities at KL University, including the president and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, they were not available for comment on the issue.

## Central...

Continued from Page 1

The members also reviewed the hydroelectric project, diaphragm wall works, and interacted with officials from the Human Resources Department and project engineers. The Committee members assessed the photo exhibitions on the project's progress, set up by the contracting agency and project engineers. Special Chief Secretary Sai Prasad briefed the delegation on the details at each location.

Earlier, in the project meeting hall, Chairman Rajiv Pratap Rudy and the Committee members, along with contracting agency officials and engineers, discussed the progress of the project. Water Resources Department officials addressed the concerns raised by the Chairman regarding the construction works, and he expressed satisfaction with the updates. The Chairman also inquired about the construction of houses for displaced families under the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) package.

**TODAY**  
**ALMANAC**  
 Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha  
 Tithi: Chaturdash: Jan 12 06:34 AM to Jan 13 05:03 AM  
 Purnima: Jan 13 05:03 AM to Jan 14 03:56 AM  
 Nakshatram: Mrigashirsha: Jan 11 12:29 PM to Jan 12 11:24 AM  
 Ardra: Jan 12 11:24 AM to Jan 13 10:38 AM  
 Rahukalam: 4:33 PM to 5:56 PM  
 Yamaganadam: 12:24 PM to 1:47 PM  
 Varjyam: 07:32 PM to 09:05 PM  
 Gulika: 3:10 PM to 4:33 PM  
 Amritakalam: 12:57 AM to 02:30 AM  
 Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:02 PM to 12:46 PM  
**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
 Forecast: Partly Cloudy  
 Temp: 32°C  
 Humidity: 59%  
 Sunrise: 6:39 AM  
 Sunset: 5:53 PM  
 Updated: January 11, 2025 5:00 PM

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# Kolusu inaugurates cattle sheds to boost dairy industry



**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

The TDP-led NDA government has been working towards the welfare and development of dairy farmers since assuming power, said Kolusu Padhsarthy, Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations. On Saturday, he inaugurated a Gokulam cattle shed constructed under the Employment Guarantee Scheme at Nekkalamma village in Agiripalli Mandal, built

with an investment of Rs 2.30 lakh. During the event, he highlighted the government's efforts to revive the mini Gokulam shed scheme, which had been neglected during the previous YSRCP administration. Minister Padhsarthy emphasized that the TDP government is focused on improving facilities for livestock farming, including poultry, sheep, and goat farming, while also supporting farmers by providing better living conditions for

their animals. He mentioned that the government is promoting the construction of mini Gokulam sheds for those with limited land for livestock housing, offering 90% subsidies for dairy farmers and 70% subsidies for sheep, goat, and poultry farmers. He urged dairy farmers to take advantage of this opportunity and avail themselves of the benefits under the subsidy scheme. The government is also providing loans to enthu-

siastic farmers and those involved in livestock farming through the Department of Animal Husbandry and the National Livestock Mission to support the growth of their businesses.

The Minister further called on small and medium farmers to utilize the financial loans provided by both the state and central governments. He encouraged farmers to raise their awareness of the subsidized loans available for agricultural and business development, which could lead to improved economic growth.

Minister Kolusu Padhsarthy instructed officials from the Animal Husbandry department to hold monthly awareness meetings for farmers, offering guidance on loans, subsidies, and the benefits available to them. He also highlighted the role of modern technology in business to enhance financial outcomes. The government is offering loans of up to Rs 1 crore with a 50% subsidy for constructing farms for sheep, goats, and other livestock, and the Minister encouraged farmers to make the most of this opportunity.

The Minister emphasized that it is the responsibility of bankers and government officials to spread information about these loans and subsidies at the village level. He assured farmers that if anyone faced difficulties in securing loans, he would personally intervene to ensure the matter is resolved with the banks.

# Reorganised 'School Complex' system to enhance edn quality

The restructuring process involved an in-depth analysis of the existing system and incorporated feedback from various stakeholders to ensure that the new framework reflects ground realities. By grouping schools into clusters, the initiative aims to enhance the efficiency of teacher training programs and strengthen mechanisms for monitoring educational outcomes



**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

The reorganisation of the School Complex system under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in Andhra Pradesh

marks a significant step towards improving the quality of education and governance at the grassroots level. The state has established 4,034 clusters, comprising 2,809 "A" clusters and 1,225 "B" clusters, adopting a data-driven and consultative approach to bridge key gaps and optimize resource allocation. In this context, the Principal Secretary of the School Education Department,

Kona Sasidhar, issued G.O.Ms.No.1 on Saturday.

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and strengthen mechanisms for monitoring educational outcomes.

This innovative approach focuses on structured resource sharing and management, keeping pace with the evolving educational needs of students. The revamped school complex system is expected to streamline teacher training, enabling effective professional development across clusters.

Better coordination within these clusters will lead to the optimal utilization of infrastructure, teaching aids, and other educational resources. Special attention will be given to ensuring that schools in remote and underserved areas receive adequate support to meet standardized educational benchmarks. This initiative is a step forward in transforming the Indian education system, fostering inclusivity, and promoting the holistic development of students, in line with the NEP 2020 vision.

# National Youth Day celebrations in city today

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

The Youth Services Department is set to commemorate National Youth Day today, January 12, at Tummalapalli Kalak shetram in Vijayawada, celebrating the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. The event is expected to bring together around 600 youth representatives and youth asso-

ciations from across Andhra Pradesh. Minister for Transport, Youth Services, and Sports, M Ram Prasad Reddy, along with several MLAs and other dignitaries, will grace the occasion.

In a press release on Saturday, the Youth Services Department shared the day's itinerary, which includes a special session by representatives from the Ramakrishna

Math. They will delve into Swami Vivekananda's teachings, life, and philosophy, aiming to inspire the youth with his vision and ideals.

The celebrations will also feature a variety of engaging activities such as cultural programmes, essay writing, debates, and poster-making competitions. These events are designed to foster creativity, intellectual exchange, and a deeper understanding of Vivekananda's message.

The state government has instructed all districts to organize similar programmes to ensure Swami Vivekananda's ideals reach every corner of Andhra Pradesh. The National Youth Day celebrations aim to encourage the younger generation to embrace his teachings and actively contribute to nation-building, officials stated.

# Cricket betting crackdown exposes political nexus in Visakhapatnam

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

A major crackdown on illegal cricket betting in Visakhapatnam has exposed a disturbing network allegedly involving political figures and highlighting the devastating impact of gambling on local youth. The city is reeling from reports of individuals losing homes, sinking into debt, and even resorting to suicide due to pressure from ruthless bet collectors.

The scale of the problem has sparked widespread concern, with whispers of official complicity in protecting the perpetrators. "It's devastating to see how deep this runs," a local source commented. "Lives are being ruined, and no one seems to be held accountable."

On January 6, the city's task force police made a significant breakthrough, raiding an apartment in Pedda Waltair and arresting L. Ravikumara, a suspected kingpin of a major betting syndicate. Ravikumara allegedly managed illegal betting operations via laptops and mobile phones, using the 'SAUDA' app. Four others, B. Ravikumara, P. Trinath, Jilani, and Karthik (the latter three



currently at large), were also implicated.

The raid yielded a trove of evidence, including laptops and phones, which revealed links to 82 individuals involved in illicit financial transactions. Police also uncovered 103 unique transaction IDs tied to popular mobile payment services like PhonePe and GooglePe, totalling lakhs of rupees, underscoring the vast scale of the underground betting market. Disturbingly, investigators discovered evidence suggesting the bookies used intimidation tactics. Rowdies were allegedly employed to enforce payments from those who lost bets, escalating the situation beyond

simple illegal gambling into organized crime. "This isn't just about illegal gambling anymore," an investigator stated. "This is organized crime, with real-world consequences."

The most alarming aspect of the case is the alleged involvement of political figures. It has emerged that three of the five accused had long-standing affiliations with the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) before recently switching allegiances after the formation of the current coalition government. Sources indicate that a public representative attempted to intervene upon one of the gang members' arrest, seeking to influence the investigation.



# Sankranti celebrated at Siddhartha College

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

Parvathaneni Brahmaiah Siddhartha Arts and Science College, located in Mogalrajapuram, Vijayawada, celebrated Sankranti festivities with great enthusiasm on Saturday. The event was organised under the joint supervision of the Good Habits Club and Ethics Club, with active participation from faculty members and students.

The celebrations featured a variety of competitions, including Rangoli, kite flying, mehendi, and traditional costume contests titled "Telugu Ammayi, Telugu Abbayi." Other highlights included

Pongal cooking, Bommala Koluva (doll arranging), Gangireddu (decorated oxen) play, dances around the Bhogi bonfire by students, and melodious Haridasu singing.

PB Siddhartha College Director Vemuri Baburao and Principal Dr M. Ramesh expressed their delight, stating that these vibrant celebrations symbolically welcomed "Sankranti Lakshmi" to the Siddhartha campus.

Prizes were later distributed to the winners of various competitions. The festivities were coordinated by Good Habits Club Convener Rohini Kusuma and Ethics Club Convener M. Shivaparvathi.

# Tribals stage protest for road access

**PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI**

The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) residents of Chalisigam hilltop village, nestled within the Chimalapadu Panchayat of Ravikamatham Mandal, took to horseback on Saturday in a poignant protest for road access. This unique demonstration underscored the daily hardships faced by the community in their pursuit of basic amenities.

The heart of the matter lies in the crippling lack of a proper road connecting the 405 residents of Chalisigam to the outside world. While Rs 2 crore 66 lakh was sanctioned from Panchayat Raj Rural Development funds on October 30, 2023, under G.O. No. 726 for road construction, the project has hit a snag due to pending forest permissions. This bureaucratic hurdle has further compounded the community's woes.

For the tribals of Chalisigam, the absence of a motorable road has been a thorn in their side since India's independence 77 years ago. They are forced to navigate treacherous, makeshift paths, which have tragically claimed lives as villagers are carried on makeshift stretchers (dolis)



over perilous terrain. One tribal leader, speaking with a heavy heart during the protest, lamented, "Governments come and go, but our path remains blocked." He voiced the community's deep frustration, emphasizing their desperate need for basic rights and infrastructure. "We are not asking for the moon," he stated, "We simply plead for permission to build the road so that we, Adivasi tribals, are not left to beg for basic necessities."

The protest's striking imagery – villagers traversing the difficult terrain on horseback – caught the eye of several forest officials, including District Forest Officer M Shyamal, who happened to be traveling on a nearby high hilltop road. The sight of the horses struggling on the rough

paths served as a stark reminder of the villagers' daily ordeal and the dire need for infrastructure improvement. Many villagers were also en route to the Kothakota fair, further highlighting the arduous journeys they undertake without proper roads.

The protest drew support from prominent figures such as CPM District Executive Member K Govinda Rao, Seemalapadu Sarpanch Vanjari Gangaraju, and association leader Cheepuru Shankar Rao. Despite the uphill battle they face, the tribals remain hopeful that their voices will be heard. They are urging forest officials to expedite the process and grant the necessary clearances to pave the way for road construction, which would be a game-changer for their quality of life, providing crucial access to essential services and opportunities.

# KGH unveils Rs 35 crore state-of-the-art casualty block



**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

King George Hospital (KGH) has announced the construction of a state-of-the-art casualty block at an estimated cost of ₹35 crore. Funded by a public sector undertaking, this advanced facility is designed to provide comprehensive emergency care across multiple medical specialities.

Dr. P Sivananda, Superintendent of KGH, shared with The Pioneer, "The upcoming casualty block will be equipped with cutting-edge surgical facilities and diagnostic tools, including CT and MRI imaging systems. This will enable prompt interventions in critical situations, sig-

nificantly improving patient outcomes."

The new block will include emergency operation theatres strategically positioned near the hospital's entrance to ensure quick access for patients requiring urgent care. KGH, a vital lifeline for emergency services, serves not only Visakhapatnam but also North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.

In recent years, KGH has played a pivotal role in managing critical incidents, such as the food poisoning tragedy in Kotauratla and the deadly gas leak at Escientia Pharma. The hospital provided life-saving care and conducted post-mortem examinations for the

victims. Additionally, KGH has enhanced its radiotherapy capabilities with the introduction of a Rs 16 crore linear accelerator (LINAC) machine. This advanced equipment delivers precise cancer treatment, targeting malignant cells while minimizing harm to surrounding healthy tissue.

"We are dedicated to raising healthcare standards and ensuring better medical outcomes for the community," Dr. Sivananda emphasized. "The new casualty block and radiotherapy equipment represent significant strides in that direction." In another pioneering initiative, KGH has launched a pilot study in its pediatric department to treat haemophilia inhibitor patients with Emicizumab, an innovative drug that mimics the function of factor 8 in blood clotting. The state government is subsidizing the ₹52 lakh cost, providing free medication to two patients as part of the study.

To further enhance patient care, the hospital has introduced help desks and counselling rooms, offering support to families of ICU patients and ensuring they receive regular updates about their loved ones' conditions.

# Vizag celebrates Sankranti with vibrant return of 'Gangireddu' performers

**NOMADIC PERFORMERS AND THEIR DECORATED BULLS CAPTIVATE THE CITY, KEEPING CENTURIES-OLD CUSTOMS ALIVE**

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

As Visakhapatnam embraces the festive spirit of Sankranti, it is also witnessing the revival of a centuries-old tradition, as approximately 350 members of the Gangireddu community make their annual pilgrimage to the city. These nomadic performers, famed for their striking appearance—long moustaches and traditional attire—have arrived with their bulls from surrounding towns such as Sabbavaram, Anaka palli, Anakapalli, and Vepagunta, to continue a time-honored practice that dates back generations.

"The essence of Sankranti is all about preserving traditions," says Ammavaru, a member of the community, speaking to The Pioneer. "Every year, we select a different location. This year, we chose Visakhapatnam. We are visiting areas like Madhurwada, Thatiche tlapalem, Arilova, Gajuwaka, and Madilipalam, just as our ancestors did."



The Gangireddu community is easily recognizable with their bulls adorned in colorful saris and anklets, adding a vibrant touch to the streets of Visakhapatnam. Accompanied by the sounds of traditional nadaswaram and drums, the performers make the bulls dance to the rhythm, captivat-

ing the attention of residents as they move from house to house.

"The bulls are the heart of our tradition," says another community member, Suresh. "It's not just about the music or the performance. It's about bringing joy and blessings to the people. We do this to con-

tinue the legacy our forefathers left us, one that strengthens the bond between our community and the people we visit."

In line with tradition, residents offer rice, clothes, and money to the performers, who, in turn, bless the families with prosperity, health, and well-being. These exchanges create

a sense of community and continuity, with the performers playing a vital role in keeping the Sankranti spirit alive in the region.

After the Sankranti month, the Gangireddu community returns to their villages, but their connection to the tradition does not end. "For the other 11 months, some of us work as daily wage labourers, while others run small businesses," explains one of the elders. "The elderly, however, continue to travel to nearby villages, ensuring that our tradition remains alive throughout the year."

This vibrant and unique tradition not only adds to the festive celebrations of Sankranti in Visakhapatnam but also serves as a reminder of the deep-rooted customs that have withstood the test of time. Through music, dance, and blessings, the Gangireddu community continues to weave a tapestry of cultural heritage that binds them to their past and enriches the lives of the people they encounter.

# Tourism Minister Kandula Durgesh Inaugurates 'Mini-Gokulam' in EG

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Tourism and Cinematography Kandula Durgesh inaugurated a Mini-Gokulam at Vijeswaram village in Nidadavole mandal on Saturday. Constructed for Rs 1.8 lakh, the 'Mini-Gokulam' is part of a larger initiative to develop livestock infrastructure in East Godavari district.

Speaking at a public meeting near the Kanakadurga temple in Nidadavole, the Minister announced that 304 sheds for Mini-Gokulams, costing Rs 6.18 crore, have been completed in the district. A total of 680 Mini-Gokulams are being constructed in East Godavari at an overall expenditure of Rs 15.59 crore. The Minister highlighted that the Nidadavole constituency was sanctioned 128 Mini-Gokulams at a cost of ₹1.13 crore, with 54 already completed. Across the state, 12,500 Mini-Gokulams are being built as part of the government's efforts to enhance livestock resources.



"The Coalition Government is committed to strengthening the dairy sector. In contrast, during the YSRCP regime, only 268 Gokulams were constructed over five years. Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan inaugurated a Gokulam in the Pithapuram constituency on Friday," Kandula Durgesh stated.

The Minister emphasized that the construction of Gokulams would significantly boost dairy production across Andhra Pradesh. He also highlighted the government's efforts to support farmers, including the disbursement of Rs 1,600 crore in arrears for paddy procurement.

Addressing other developmental initiatives, the Minister stated that Rs 65.62 crore has been allocated for the construction and repair of 134 km of roads in the district, with 75 km completed for Rs 43.68 crore. Additionally, the social security pension has been increased from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000, and sufficient stocks of fertilisers have been made available in Nidadavole.

District Collector P Prashanthi extended Sankranti greetings to the people and participated in various activities alongside the Minister, including performing a pooja for a cow, planting saplings, and lighting a sacred bonfire. RDO Rani Sushmita and DWMA PD A Nageswara Rao were also present at the event.

## EASING TRAFFIC CONGESTION

# V'wada Western Bypass open for Sankranti travellers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Travellers heading home for Sankranti via Vijayawada can celebrate as the newly opened NHAI Western Bypass ensures smoother and faster travel. This timely initiative by the NTR District Police and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) aims to decongest traffic, providing a hassle-free experience for commuters during the festive season.



Vehicles from Hyderabad heading to Eluru, Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram, Visakhapatnam, and other destinations can now bypass traffic jams and save considerable travel time. Similarly, those returning to Hyderabad after Sankranti will also benefit from an uninterrupted journey on the bypass.

To alleviate traffic congestion in Vijayawada, vehicles have been diverted along the newly constructed bypass at Gollapudi (NTR District) and Chinna Avutapalli (Krishna District). This diversion, which commenced on January 10, will remain in effect throughout the festival period. NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu and Krishna District Superintendent of Police (SP) R Gangadhara Rao have coordinated efforts to ease the pressure on the Vijayawada-Gannavaram route and city roads.

Traffic police have been stationed at key points, including

Rayanapadu, where the bypass merges with the Hyderabad-Vijayawada National Highway, to ensure a smooth flow of vehicles. The successful diversion has significantly reduced traffic congestion in the city, drawing appreciation from residents for the proactive measures taken by the police and NHAI officials.

Before implementing the diversion, Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu, along with NHAI officials, inspected the bypass road from Chinna Avutapalli to Gollapudi. Following consultations with relevant authorities, vehicles from Hyderabad to Eluru, Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram, and Visakhapatnam were rerouted at Gollapudi. Traffic police were deployed to manage the diversion effectively and prevent vehicles from entering the city. The 30-km, six-lane bypass from Gollapudi to Chinna Avutapalli was initiated

in 2020, with Union Minister Nitin Gadkari laying the foundation stone. Despite construction still underway, with over 90% completed, authorities ensured that vehicles could travel smoothly, even in areas with high-tension wires. The bypass now enables commuters to travel between Gollapudi and Chinna Avutapalli in under an hour, significantly improving over the earlier 2-3 hour delays in Vijayawada city during peak times.

In light of the Sankranti rush, the bypass is temporarily open for two-way traffic, offering immediate relief to commuters. Efforts are underway to complete the remaining work and make the bypass fully operational, providing a long-term solution to traffic congestion in the region. This development is expected to benefit not just festival travellers but also address the area's long-term traffic management needs.

# Tirupati tragedy, a dark day for governance: Ex-MP

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Describing the Tirupati stampede as a clear failure of the government, former MP M. Bharat questioned the lack of basic facilities and proper crowd management. Speaking to the media on Saturday, he likened the chaotic arrangements to herding animals in a yard and criticised the administration for failing to provide even necessities like drinking water to the devotees.



Bharat alleged a lack of coordination between the TTD Executive Officer and the Chairman, stating that the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) seems to function more like a political party office rather than a revered religious institution. He demanded accountability for the tragic deaths, noting that such incidents have never occurred during the tenure of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Referring to the Pushkaram tragedy in Rajahmundry during Chandrababu Naidu's

regime, where 29 lives were lost, Bharat blamed Naidu's publicity-driven approach for the incident. He questioned why proper crowd management arrangements were not made in Tirupati, especially considering that over 1,20,000 tokens were to be issued.

Bharat criticised the TTD for not using online systems for token distribution and called for the resignation of the TTD Board for their negligence. He also demanded a judicial inquiry into the incident by a Supreme Court judge, asserting that merely taking action against junior officials would not suffice. Furthermore, he urged the government to dissolve the TTD Board if they failed to take responsibility.



# 3 red sanders logs seized, 3 held

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) seized three red sanders logs and arrested three smugglers in the Seshachalam forest.

DSP V Srinivasulu Reddy told the media that the RSASTF team led by RI K

Suresh Kumar Reddy and RSI Y Viswanath conducted combing in the forest. They saw three smugglers carrying logs on their heads.

On noticing the police, the smugglers tried to flee but the task force personnel apprehended them. They seized the red sanders logs and shifted to the task force police station.

# All set for cockfights despite ban

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Despite police warnings of stringent action, large arenas have been set up and lighting arrangements completed for grandly organizing traditional cockfights in West Godavari district, which has earned a dubious reputation for hosting such events.

Arches have been erected, flex banners put up, and floodlights installed at various venues across the district to hold the cockfights with great pomp and grandeur. The arenas have sprung up in multiple locations, including here in the district. It appears the organizers have ignored the police warnings and proceeded with the arrangements.

Sources suggest that political leaders in the district are providing support to the cockfight organizers, claiming that the blood sport is a traditional event associated with the Sankranti festival. Meanwhile, some organizers are exploiting loopholes in the law, arguing that they are



organizing cockfights legally by not attaching sharp-edged blades to the roosters' legs. Interestingly, the organizers are also making arrangements to broadcast the cockfights live and facilitate online betting. In response, West Godavari SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi warned of stringent action if the cockfights are conducted. In a statement issued on Saturday, he emphasized that organizing cockfights is an offence and a violation of the law.

"The police have taken all necessary measures to curb unlawful activities, including cockfights, 'gundata', casinos,

obscene dance performances, and poker gambling. Raids will be conducted on cockfight venues, and police teams are checking hotels and lodges to identify whether outsiders are staying to participate in cockfight gambling," the SP said. He also reiterated that the police are acting tough against cockfights under the orders of the High Court. Meanwhile, in the Eluru district, the police have demolished cockfight arenas set up in some villages in Jangareddy gudem. The arenas in Nuzvid, Jangareddy gudem, and Agiripalli mandals were destroyed by ploughing them with a tractor.

# Young couple among 3 killed as car rams lorry

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In a tragic road accident, three members of a family, including a young couple, were killed, and four others were injured when the car they were travelling in rammed into a stationary lorry at Shankavaram in Kattipudi mandal on the National Highway on Saturday.

According to the police, seven members of a family were travelling from Bhimavaram town in West Godavari district to the hill shrine of Annavaram on a pilgrimage. Their car collided with a stationary lorry, instantly killing Chavvakula Shyam Prasad (49), Karimshetti



Shivanarayana (38), and his wife Karimshetti Divya (33).

The injured were rushed to the Government General Hospital in Tuni, where the condition of two of them was reported to be critical. The accident caused a disruption in traffic on the busy Kolkata-Chennai route for a couple of

hours, but the police later managed to regulate the flow of traffic. A case has been registered by the police, and the bodies were shifted to the Government General Hospital for post-mortem.

Meanwhile, Minister for Transport Ramprasad Reddy expressed shock and sorrow over the horrific road accident in which three members of a family, including the couple, lost their lives. He conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families and instructed district officials to ensure the best medical treatment for the injured and provide all necessary assistance.

# 'Congress Govt will not arrest anyone sans probe'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress government will not arrest anyone without a probe, Revenue, Housing and Information and Public Relations Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said.

He made it clear that the Congress government will

not initiate any action against anyone vengefully.

Addressing the media on Saturday, Ponguleti said the law has been taking its own course in the Formula E-Car Racing case. People are watching every word uttered by BRS Working President KT Rama Rao who termed Ponguleti a 'Lottapeesu CM,

he said and added, 'Salute to KTR's language.'

"The Congress government will not arrest anyone without a probe. This is known to the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay. Our government won't arrest without investigation in any case. The Enforcement

Directorate (ED) entered the scene after ACB's entry into the Formula E-Car Race scam. Why did the Central agency ED enter if the State government had colluded with the BRS? ED entered into the scene because corruption took place in Formula E-Car Racing," he said.



# 'Embrace technology for progress'

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu emphasized the importance of embracing technology in rapidly evolving times as he inaugurated Super Bee Aeronautical, a student-founded drone company at Centurion University in Vizianagaram on Saturday.

The event marked a significant milestone in student innovation, as Super Bee Aeronautical aims to revolutionize the design and local manufacturing of drones and related technologies. Minister Rammohan Naidu praised the students for their ingenuity and the university for fostering an environment conducive to technological innovation.



"The work being done here is a clear indication of the enormous potential India's youth hold in shaping the future of technology and driving the nation forward," he said. The Minister encouraged the students to expand their efforts, particularly in applying drone

technology to sectors beyond agriculture.

Rammohan Naidu highlighted the transformative impact of drone technology in agriculture, reducing farmers' workload and improving their incomes. He urged the students to explore other sectors where

drones could make a substantial impact, contributing to economic growth and social development.

The inauguration was attended by State MSME Minister Kondapalli Srinivas, University Vice President Professor DN Rao, Chancellor Prof. GSN Raju, and other dignitaries from the academic community. The event showcased the growing trend of student-driven innovations in emerging technologies, poised to play a vital role in shaping the future of various industries. As India continues to evolve as a global leader in technological innovation, initiatives like Super Bee Aeronautical highlight the immense potential of the country's youth in driving positive change.

# Kollu inaugurates ultrasound, CRM arthroscopic unit

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for Mines and Excise Kollu Ravindra inaugurated the Ultrasound and a CRM Arthroscopic unit in the Government General Hospital here on Saturday. The medical equipment was installed at a cost of Rs 2 crore.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Kollu Ravindra highlighted the commitment of the coalition Government to provide better medical services to the people and as part of it advanced medical equipment had been installed in the Government hospital here on Saturday.

The doctors explained to the Minister about the medical



equipment. He recalled that the GGH here was upgraded as a 500-bed hospital during the TDP regime during 2014-19

and required facilities were provided. The efforts for a medical college affiliated to the GGH have become fruitful.

"By establishing a medical college, expert doctors in all departments will be available and from now on, there will be no need to go to other areas for better treatment. Vital medical services like urology, neurology, and urology surgery are available in the Government hospital here which has all the facilities. In the future, joint transplant and cardiology medical services will also be made available with the support of the State Government," the Minister highlighted. GGH Superintendent Dr. Ashalatha, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Srinivas and RMO Dr. Niranjan were among those who were present.

ACROSS THE STATES



**Kerala BJP leader George booked for 'hate speech'**

A case has been registered against BJP leader P C George for allegedly making remarks that could incite religious hatred, police said on Saturday. George, a former MLA, was accused of hate speech against a minority community during a TV discussion held earlier this week, they said. The Erattupetta Police registered a case against the senior BJP leader on Friday based on a complaint filed by Muhammad Shihab, reportedly a representative of the Muslim Youth League Municipal Committee. He was booked under Section 196(1)(a) and Section 299 of the BNS, and Section 120(o) of the Kerala Police Act, police said, adding that further proceedings would be initiated soon. Section 196 of the BNS penalizes actions or speech that promote enmity, hatred, or disharmony between different groups in society, while Section 299 deals with the deliberate and malicious act of insulting the religious beliefs of any class of people in the country.



**Committed to combat escalating drug crisis: Sukhu**

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The NDPS cases have risen by 340 per cent in the past decade from 500 cases in 2012 to 2200 cases in 2023 and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act was invoked for the first time in Himachal Pradesh, said Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. Virtually participating in the regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Saturday, he

emphasised on Himachal Pradesh's commitment to combat the escalating drug crisis, a statement issued here said. Asserting that the percentage of cases involving heroin has doubled, rising from 29 per cent in 2020 to 50 per cent in 2024, he said the state legislature has amended Section 37 of the NDPS Act, 1985, to close legal loopholes that allowed habitual offenders to secure bail. The PIT-NDPS Act was invoked for the first time, he said. This act enables the detention of repeat offenders involved in drug trafficking.

**Slum dwellers will 'liberate' Delhi by uprooting 'Aapda' govt: Shah**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Slum dwellers will become "liberators" of Delhi by uprooting the "Aapda" (AAP) government in the upcoming Assembly polls, BJP leader Amit Shah said on Saturday, assuring that no welfare schemes for the poor will be stopped if his party forms government in the city.



Addressing the 'Jhuggi Basti Pradhan Sammelan' at the JLN stadium here, Shah, who is also the Union home minister, promised that every slum dweller will be provided a house if the BJP wins the polls. The elections for 70-member Delhi Assembly polls will be held on February 5 and the votes will be counted on February 8. Shah greeted the gathering on the first anniversary of the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla's idol at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya with a loud chant of 'Jai Shri Ram'.

"When we talked of Ram Temple, Kejriwal said toilets need to be constructed, when Article 370 was scrapped, he said people need houses. Modi ji gave toilets as well as houses to the poor people, not Kejriwal," Shah said. Shah charged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has proved to be an "Aapda" (disaster) in its 10 years of rule in Delhi. He slammed AAP supremo and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for allegedly betraying the slum dwellers and forcing them to live in pathetic conditions in slums. "The slum dwellers will become the liberators of Delhi and do the work of uprooting the Aapda government," Shah said, citing the shortage of drinking water and sewers, and heaps of garbage in the slum clusters of the city.

**BJP attempting to deceive EC : AAP**

Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday accused the BJP of attempting to deceive the Election Commission by submitting fake voter registration applications in large numbers from the residential addresses of its leaders.

Addressing a press conference, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh claimed that dozens of voter registration applications had been filed from single small shops and basements. He also accused the BJP of submitting multiple new voter registration applications using the residential addresses of their leaders.

"This is the reality of the biggest political party in India. This is how Prime Minister Modi's party plans to win the elections," Singh said, listing the names of BJP leaders, including union ministers, for their alleged involvement in the issue.



**Modi to inaugurate Sonamarg tunnel tomorrow**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Sonamarg tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir on January 13. According to an official statement, the entire project, including the 12-km tunnel, has been constructed at a cost of over Rs 2,700 crore. It comprises the Sonamarg main tunnel, an egress tunnel and approach roads. Situated at an altitude of over 8,650 feet above sea level, it will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg en route to Leh, bypassing landslide and avalanche routes, the statement said. In a post on X, Modi echoed Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's statement after the latter visited the site to review preparedness for his visit and shared some pictures and videos. Abdullah said, "The inauguration of the Z-morh tunnel will open Sonmarg to tourism all year round, Sonmarg will now be developed as a great ski resort."



**Annamalai questions Naxals surrender policy in Karnataka**

PNS ■ UDUPI (KARNATAKA)

Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai has raised concerns over the Naxal surrender and rehabilitation policy in Karnataka, questioning its effectiveness and transparency. Annamalai, who had served as Superintendent of Police (SP) in Udupi between January 2015 and August 2016 and as SP Chikkamagaluru, considered a hotbed of Naxals in Karnataka, in 2018, had convened a press conference in Udupi on Saturday. According to him, while the policy aims to reintegrate former Naxals into mainstream society, doubts persist regarding its implementation. He pointed out that surrender and encounter cases have sparked widespread speculation, with many questioning the circumstances under which these events unfolded.

**Punjab: AAP MLA dies in 'accidental firing' from own pistol**

PNS ■ LUDHIANA

AAP leader and Ludhiana West MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi has died of a gunshot injury he sustained while cleaning his licensed pistol, his family said on Saturday. Gogi, who had a passion for vintage cars, was 58 and is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter. Joint Commissioner of Police Jaskaran Singh Teja said the bullet pierced Gogi's temple and he was rushed to the Dayanand Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), where doctors declared him dead. According to his family members and state party chief, Gogi was cleaning his pistol around 11.30 last night at his residence in Ghumar Mandi here fatally when the bullet got fired accidentally and hit him on his head. The police said the case is under investigation. Hours before his death, Gogi held a meeting with assembly Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan and AAP MP Balbir Singh Seechewal



over the issue of cleaning of Buddha Nullah (a drain of polluted effluents). Gogi was in the news last year when he demolished the foundation stone of Buddha Nullah rejuvenation project as he was upset over the delay in carrying out the work by the departments concerned. He visited the Prachin Sheelta Mata Mandir in BRS Nagar where a theft had taken place a few days ago and had assured justice in the matter. Gogi's cremation took place at the cremation ground near KVM school in Civil Lines this afternoon with his son Swaraj Singh Bassi lighting the funeral pyre. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Speaker Sandhwan, party MPs Raj Kumar Chhabwal, Seechewal and Sanjeev Arora, and cabinet ministers Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, Hardeep Singh Mundian, Lal Chand Kataruchak and Tarunpreet Singh Saund were among those who attended the cremation.



**'Computing, tech advancement core building block for India'**

PNS ■ PUNE

Computing and technological advancement is a core building block for India to become a developed nation by 2047, Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnav said here on Saturday. The minister also said C-DAC plays a major role in this regard. The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) is the premier organisation of the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for carrying out research, and development in the rapidly evolving

areas. Vaishnav launched one VEGA-based SoC ASIC and two DIR V VEGA processor based development boards designed and developed by C-DAC at the event held here. These are the ARIES ECO and ARIES NOVA development boards and THEJAS64 Indigenous 64-bit SoC, a release said. "ARIES ECO is useful for students, providing a hands-on platform for experimenting with applications like sensor fusion, smart meters, and wearable devices. It offers an easily accessible platform for education, research, and development in the rapidly evolving

field of embedded systems," it said. The THEJAS64 is the first fully indigenous 64-bit VEGA based System-on-Chip (SoC) designed for robust and secure embedded applications, the release added. "Computing and technological development is a core building block for India to become a developed country by 2047, and C-DAC plays a major role in it. A lot of research work in the field of semi-conductors and computing is happening in academic institutions like IIT Madras, IISc Bengaluru, IIT Gandhinagar, among others," Vaishnav said.



**4 Bangladeshis nabbed for illegally entering India**

Four Bangladeshis nationals have been arrested in Tripura's Khowai district for entering India without valid documents, police said on Saturday. An Indian person was also arrested for facilitating the entry of the Bangladeshis. Acting on a tip-off, police nabbed them near Teliamura railway station on Friday night. "During preliminary investigation, the Bangladeshis said they had come from Moulvibazar district and had plans to go to Dharmanagar in North Tripura district in search of work. As all the four persons entered Indian territory without valid documents, they were arrested," Sub-Inspector Kamalendu Dhar told PTI. The arrested Bangladeshis nationals were identified as Moinnuddin Miah, Rimon Miah, Rahim Ahmed and Suman Miah. One Indian, identified as Aamir Uddin of Dharmanagar was with the four Bangladesh citizens and was arrested for helping the infiltrators, he said.

**SpaDeX satellites positioned 230 m apart, health status 'normal': ISRO**

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The two Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) satellites that the ISRO aims to unite in orbit are currently separated by a distance of 230 m, with their health status deemed 'normal', the space agency said on Saturday. On Friday evening, the satellites were separated by 1.5 kms. ISRO has said that the distance would be reduced to 500 m by Saturday morning. In a post on X, ISRO said, "Arrested at Inter Satellite Distance (ISD) of 230 m, all sensors are being evaluated. Spacecraft's health is normal."

The space agency, however, has not committed to a date for conducting the docking experiments, which will bring the

ISRO successfully launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on December 30.

pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, and about 15 minutes after liftoff, the two small spacecraft weighing about 220 kg each were launched into a 475-km circular orbit as intended. According to ISRO, SpaDeX mission is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the demonstration of in-space docking using two small spacecraft that was launched by PSLV. This technology is essential for India's space ambitions such as Indian on Moon, sample return from the Moon, the building and operation of Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), etc.



**Time to pursue 'Indian dream': Rajnath**

PNS ■ MEERUT (UP)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday said that young people today no longer need to go abroad to pursue their dreams as the means and resources to fulfil their aspirations are now available within the country. Addressing a convocation ceremony at a private university here, he described youths as the nation's heroes and

emphasised that they have the potential to take the country to greater heights. "The country faced numerous challenges after Independence. An atmosphere of despondency prevailed due to various reasons, causing our youths to be afraid of dreaming... They only dreamt of the US, the UK... For decades our youths had to go abroad to fulfil their dreams..."

**'Ram Temple gives hope to suppressed civilisations'**

**UP CM on Ram Lalla idol consecration anniversary**

PNS ■ AYODHYA (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday said the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is a reminder to the "suppressed" civilisations and cultures of the world that they can assert their rights democratically and constitutionally. Addressing a programme held on the first anniversary of the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla's idol at the temple, Adityanath said not losing patience even after countless sacrifices and going through an 'agnipariksha' (trial by fire) was integral to the Ram Mandir



campaign. The chief minister bowed in front of Ram Lalla's idol, lit a lamp, offered flowers and performed an aarti. He also paid

tributes to the late Ashok Singhal, former working president of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and one of the key architects of the Ram Temple movement.

**Wife can get maintenance from husband even if she doesn't abide by cohabit decree: SC**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant judgement, the Supreme Court has ruled that a woman can be given the right to maintenance from her husband even after she has not complied with the decree to cohabit with her spouse if she has valid and sufficient reason to refuse to live with him. A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar settled the legal dispute over the question whether a husband, who secures a decree for restitution of conjugal rights, stands absolved of paying maintenance to his wife by virtue of law if his wife refuses to abide by the said decree and return to



**It said the question as to whether noncompliance with a decree for restitution of conjugal rights by a wife would be sufficient in itself to deny her maintenance, owing to Section 125(4) of CrPC has been addressed by several high courts but no consistent view is forthcoming, as their opinions were varied and conflicting**

the matrimonial home. The bench said there can be no hard and fast rule in this regard and it must invariably depend on the circumstances of the case. It said the question as to whether noncompliance with a decree for restitution of conjugal rights by a wife would be sufficient in itself to deny her maintenance, owing to Section 125(4) of CrPC has been addressed by several high courts but no consistent view is forthcoming, as their opinions were varied and conflicting.

After analysing various judgements of the high courts and the apex court, the bench said, "Thus, the preponderance of judicial thought weighs in favour of upholding the wife's right to maintenance under Section 125 CrPC and the mere passing of a decree for restitution of conjugal rights at the husband's behest and non-compliance therewith by the wife would not, by itself, be sufficient to attract the disqualification under Section 125(4) CrPC."



PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

# THE SPIRIT OF MAHA KUMBH

The *Maha Kumbh Mela 2025* in Prayagraj is a unique gathering where spirituality, culture and commerce come together, attracting millions from all walks of life to witness this incredible event, writes **BISWAJEET BANERJEE**



The countdown to the *Maha Kumbh 2025* has begun, with Prayagraj transforming into a bustling hub of spirituality, culture, and economic activity. From 13 January to 26 February, the city will host the largest human congregation on earth, drawing an estimated 40 to 45 crore pilgrims. This iconic event, steeped in Hindu tradition and faith, is more than a ritual, it is a celebration of India’s cultural and spiritual essence. The Sangam, where the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati converge, is at the heart of this grand spectacle. Pilgrims believe that a dip in these holy waters during the auspicious period cleanses them of sins and paves the way to salvation. “The Maha Kumbh Mela is not just a religious gathering but a transformative experience,” said Acharya Ramkishore Tiwari, a spiritual leader. “It is where faith meets divinity.” At the heart of this grand celebration lies the belief in spiritual purification. According to Hindu tradition, a dip in the holy confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati during this auspicious period is believed to absolve sins and pave the path to salvation. The origins of the *Kumbh* are steeped in the Puranic tale of the Samudra Manthan, where drops of divine nectar (amrita) spilled at four locations, Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain, sanctifying these sites forever.



**A CITY REBORN**  
The banks of the Ganga and Yamuna have transformed into a temporary city, sprawling across the Sangam area. Colourful tents of all sizes and hues have sprung up, creating an awe-inspiring sight. These tents house spiritual discourses, yoga sessions, cultural programmes, and temporary dwellings for millions of devotees. The air is filled with the aroma of traditional Indian delicacies, as numerous eateries and food stalls cater to the surging crowds. Stalls selling Rudraksha beads, saffron garments, holy books, and souvenirs stretch along the pathways, adding vibrancy to the bustling atmosphere. The iconic Naga Sadhus, covered in ash and wearing Rudraksha beads, take centre stage, drawing devotees and curious onlookers alike. Aghories, known for their intense spiritual practices, are seen meditating near the riverbanks, adding a mystical charm to the gathering. “We are not just preparing for an event; we are crafting an experience that celebrates India’s cultural heritage,” said Divya Prakash Singh, a senior official overseeing the arrangements. “From smart surveillance through 10,000 CCTV cameras to a dedicated mobile app for route and ritual updates, technology is playing a crucial role in ensuring safety and convenience.” “The energy here is contagious,” said Abhilash Narain, a resident of Prayagraj. “You do not have to be Hindu to feel the magic of this gathering.” Among the pilgrims is Rajni Devi, a 62-year-old widow from Rajasthan making her third trip to the Kumbh. “The Kumbh is my escape,” she said. “It’s where I find peace and the courage to face life’s challenges.” Similarly, Sunil Mishra, a young IT professional from Bengaluru, sees the



**ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS**  
Beyond its spiritual significance, the *Maha Kumbh Mela* is a colossal economic engine. The Uttar Pradesh government has allocated a staggering ₹5,600 crore to infrastructure and event management, with the total budget projected at ₹6,382 crore. The local economy thrives on this influx, benefiting small vendors, hoteliers, and service providers alike. “During the Kumbh, my daily earnings triple,” said Shyam Lal, a shopkeeper selling puja items near the ghats. Hotels across Prayagraj are reporting record bookings, with many fully reserved months in advance. “The demand is unprecedented,” said Priya Mehta, the manager of a mid-range hotel in the city. The ripple effect extends beyond Prayagraj. Nearby religious hubs like Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Mathura also see a surge in tourism, creating thousands of new jobs. “The Maha Kumbh 2025 could generate economic activity worth over ₹3 lakh crore,” estimated Awanish Awasthi, advisor to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.



**CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS**  
Hosting an event of this magnitude comes with its share of challenges. Ensuring the availability of clean drinking water, medical aid, and sanitation facilities for millions of pilgrims requires meticulous planning. “The key is vigilance,” said Ramesh Chandra, a senior police officer stationed at the Mela. “We’re deploying over 50,000 security personnel and using AI-enabled systems to manage crowds and prevent untoward incidents.” “The Maha Kumbh is a test of our organisational capabilities,” said Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. “We aim to set a global benchmark in event management while preserving the spiritual essence of the gathering.”

**A GLOBAL CELEBRATION**  
The *Maha Kumbh Mela* is not just a religious event; it is a global celebration of India’s living traditions. Documentary filmmaker Lisa Reynolds, covering the event for an international audience, described it as “a story of humanity in its purest form.” For first-time visitors, the scale of the event is overwhelming. “I’ve never seen anything like this,” said Hiroshi Tanaka, a journalist from Japan. “The blend of chaos and harmony is fascinating. It’s a reflection of India itself.” As the countdown begins, the anticipation surrounding *Maha Kumbh 2025* is palpable. For millions, it is a journey of faith and a reaffirmation of humanity’s enduring spirit. For Prayagraj, it is an opportunity to shine as a beacon of tradition, resilience, and progress. Acharya Ramkishore Tiwari sums it up: “Kumbh is about coming together as one family, transcending divisions and reaffirming our shared humanity.”





MAYFAIR SPRING VALLEY (GUWAHATI, ASSAM)

Located amidst the lush greenery of Guwahati, Mayfair Spring Valley offers a luxurious escape from the city's hustle and bustle. This premium resort is designed to provide guests with ultimate comfort and relaxation, featuring elegantly appointed rooms, a rejuvenating spa, a dedicated kids' play area and top-notch dining experiences. Surrounded by picturesque landscapes, the resort offers serene views of rolling hills and verdant gardens, making it an ideal retreat for nature enthusiasts and luxury seekers alike. Guests can also explore nearby attractions, such as the famous Kamakhya Temple and Brahmaputra Riverfront, ensuring a blend of tranquility and adventure during their stay.



VIVANTA MEGHALAYA (SHILLONG, MEGHALAYA)

Located in the vibrant city of Shillong, Vivanta Meghalaya is known for its proximity to exciting outdoor activities and cultural events. The resort offers 87 elegantly designed rooms and 14 spacious suites, providing comfort and luxury. It serves as a perfect base for exploring the region's natural beauty and music festivals. Known as the 'Abode of Clouds,' Meghalaya captivates one and all with its misty hills, living root bridges, and cascading waterfalls amidst lush greenery.

By TEAM AGENDA

Blessed with nature's bounty, Northeast India is a safe haven for many travellers who wish to escape the overcrowded and over-polluted city life from time to time. With the winter season worsening the pollution's threat to healthy living, Northeast India is the best place to take refuge in to revitalise your health and take a step back to centre within. Here are a few of the many scenic vacation spots that can do just that.

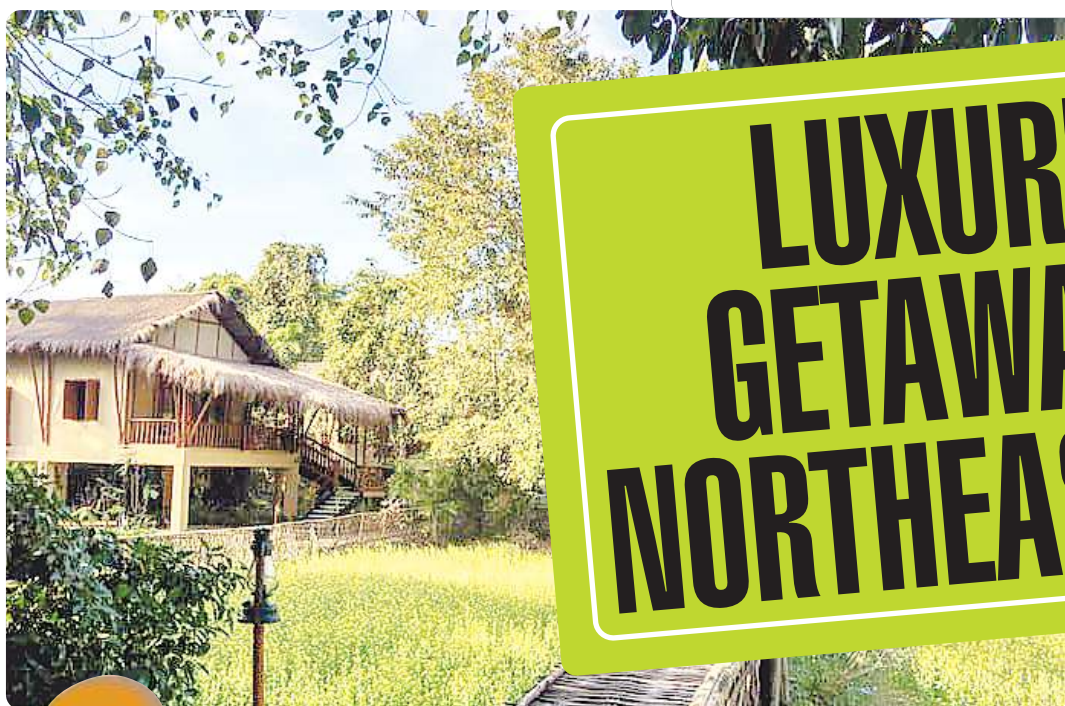


HOTEL CLASSIC GRANDE (IMPHAL, MANIPUR)

A part of the Radisson Individuals group, Hotel Classic Grande provides cosy accommodations in Imphal. With 171 rooms and suites featuring modern amenities, this hotel offers warm hospitality infused with local culture. Guests can enjoy exquisite dining options while taking in views of the Baruni Hill range. Manipur, known as the 'Jewel of India,' boasts of the world's only floating lake, 'Loktak Lake' and the serene Keibul Lamjao National Park, home to the endangered Sangai deer. It is also celebrated for its classical dance and handwoven textiles making it a true treasure of the Northeast.

TAKEAWAY

From the serene hills of Shillong and Gangtok to the wildlife-rich Kaziranga and Tawang, these destinations offer both luxury and tranquility. The aforementioned resorts offer that entire one can dream of in a staycation that rejuvenates the mind and soul. Whether you're seeking a luxurious resort or a more rustic retreat, Northeast India provides the perfect haven for anyone looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life and reconnect with nature.



DIPHLU RIVER LODGE (KAZIRANGA, ASSAM)

Situated on the outskirts of Kaziranga National Park, Diphlu River Lodge offers an authentic experience with its rustic ethnic design. The lodge features comfortable accommodations and a range of activities such as bird watching, vehicle safaris, and village treks, making it an excellent choice for nature lovers. A land of rolling tea gardens, the mighty Brahmaputra, and rich wildlife, Assam is brimming with its natural beauty and vibrant cultural heritage.



SUMMIT NORLING RESORT AND SPA (GANGTOK, SIKKIM)

This resort is set in a picturesque location with beautiful gardens and a serene atmosphere. Summit Norling Resort & Spa offers 27 well-appointed rooms, including luxurious chalets with stunning views of the Himalayas. Guests can enjoy various recreational activities and unwind by the pond or around a campfire. A serene paradise, Sikkim is adorned with snow-capped peaks, alpine meadows, and vibrant monasteries, offering breathtaking views and spiritual tranquility.

LUXURIOUS GETAWAYS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

The pressure of waiting for my admission results was becoming unbearable. My friend, Vishesh Shukla, suggested a short trip to Mathura and Vrindavan, known for their spiritual aura and rich heritage. Without much planning, we packed our bags and boarded the Lucknow-Agra Intercity Express in the evening. The train reached Agra late at night, and from there, we caught another train to Mathura. By the time we arrived in Mathura, it was around 1 a.m. A short auto ride costing ₹50 took us to Vrindavan, where we stayed at the Tourist Facilitation Centre. After a long journey, we finally got some rest, excited about the day ahead. In the morning, we checked into a modest hotel that charged ₹1,300 for 24 hours. After freshening up, our first stop was the famous Banke Bihari Temple. The temple's energy and devotion left us amazed. We continued our exploration with visits to the ISKCON Temple, Radha Raman Temple and Nidhivan, each offering a unique spiritual experience. Walking through the streets of Vrindavan, surrounded by the sound of bhajans and the sight of devotees, was truly calming. After a simple lunch at a local eatery, we returned to the hotel for a quick nap. The evening was reserved for the magnificent Prem Mandir, which looked breathtaking under the evening



SOULFUL TRAVEL DIARIES

Mathura's sacred temples, peaceful ghats and lively streets provided the perfect getaway from the stress of admission results, writes MANOJ SINGH NEGI



lights. The intricate architecture and devotional atmosphere made it a highlight of the trip. Dinner was at the newly opened Bikanerwala Restaurant on Chhatikara Road. The delicious food was the perfect end to the day. That night, I received the news I had been eagerly waiting for, I had been admitted to my dream institute, IIMC Dhenkanal! The happiness and relief were indescribable. I couldn't help but thank the positive energy of this spiritual trip for making this moment even more special. The next morning, we visited the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple, the birthplace of Lord Krishna. The early morning peace at the temple was soothing. We also stopped by the Dwarkadhish Temple, which is known for its vibrant morning rituals. The temples of Mathura left a deep impression on us with their history and devotion. After breakfast near Yamuna Ghat, we boarded a bus from Mathura Bus Stand to Tundla. We had a hearty lunch at Tundla before catching the Gombi Express, which took us back to Lucknow. This trip was much more than just a getaway. It gave me the clarity and positivity I needed, along with the joy of achieving my dream. The spiritual vibe of Mathura and Vrindavan, combined with their timeless charm, made it a journey I will never forget.

IN BRIEF



Just Dial Q3 profit up to Rs 131 cr

Just Dial Ltd, a local search engine, has reported 42.7 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 131.31 crore for December quarter FY25. It had a net profit of Rs 92.01 crore in the October-December period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing from Just Dial, now controlled by Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd. Revenue from operation was up 8.4 per cent at Rs 287.33 crore in the December quarter. The company "achieved its highest-ever quarterly revenue in Q3 FY25, further solidifying its position as a leader in the digital services," said Just Dial in its earnings statement. Total expenses were at Rs 215.57 crore, down 1.55 per cent from the year-ago period. Total income during the quarter under review stood at Rs 364.74 crore, up 7.3 per cent. Commenting on the results, Chief Growth Officer Shwetank Dixit said Just Dial's focus remains on driving top-line growth while maintaining operational efficiency.



School of Design Thinking signs MoU with ICT Academy

The School of Design Thinking promoted by noted industrialist Arun Jain, has signed a memorandum of understanding with ICT Academy of Tamil Nadu towards strengthening design thinking in educational institutions. Jain is the Chairman and Managing Director of city-headquartered Intellect Design Arena Ltd in the city. The partnership between the two entities aims to establish frameworks for cooperative institutional relations to encourage and promote collaboration in the area of design thinking. The MoU was signed in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister Udhaynidhi Stalin, Minister for Information Technology and Digital Services Palaniivel Thiaga Rajan at the UImagineTN 2025 event recently held in the city. "Design Thinking holds the transformative potential to reshape not only how we solve problems but also how we unearth new opportunities. Through this partnership, our goal is to nurture a community of students who prioritise human-centred approaches in their thinking," Jain said in a company statement here.



EMA Partners India SME IPO to raise Rs 76 crore

Mumbai-based EMA Partners India on Saturday said it is looking to raise Rs 76 crore on the NSE's Emerge platform through an initial public offering, which will open for public subscription on January 17. The issue with a price band of Rs 117-124 apiece will conclude on January 21. The bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on January 16, the company said in a statement. At the upper end of the price band, the company will raise about Rs 76.01 crore. The shares of the company are proposed to be listed on the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) platform of NSE Emerge. Investors can bid for a minimum of 1,000 shares and in multiples thereof, it added. The initial public offering (IPO) is a fresh issue of up to 53.34 lakh equity shares, aggregating up to Rs 66.14 crore and an offer for sale component of up to 7.96 lakh shares by promoters -- Krishnan Sudarshan and Subramanian Krishnaprakash, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP) filed on January 9.

Indian economy likely to be 'a little weaker' in 2025: IMF

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

The Indian economy is expected to be "a little weaker" in 2025 despite steady global growth, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has said.

Georgieva also said she expects quite a lot of uncertainty in the world this year mainly around the trade policy of the US.

In her annual media roundtable with a group of reporters on Friday, she said global growth is expected to be steady in 2025, but with regional divergence.

Georgieva said she expects the Indian economy to be a little weaker in 2025. However, she did not explain it any further. The World Economy Outlook update week will have more details about it.

"The US is doing quite a bit better than we expected before, the EU is somewhat stalling, (and) India a little weaker," she said.

Brazil was facing somewhat higher inflation, she said.

In China, the world's second-largest economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was seeing deflationary pressure and ongoing chal-



Georgieva said she expects the Indian economy to be a little weaker in 2025. However, she did not explain it any further. The World Economy Outlook update week will have more details about it

lenges with domestic demand, she said.

"Low-income countries, despite all the efforts they are making, are in a position when any new shock can affect them quite negatively," Georgieva said.

"What we expect in 2025 is to have quite a lot of uncertainty, especially in terms of economic policies. Not surprisingly, given the size and role of the US economy, there is keen interest globally in the policy directions of the incoming administration, in particular on tariffs, taxes, deregulation and government efficiency," Georgieva said.

"This uncertainty is particularly high around the path for trade policy going forward, adding to the headwinds facing the global economy, especially for countries and regions that are more integrated in global supply chains, medium-sized economies, (and) Asia as a region," she said.

That uncertainty is actually expressed globally through higher long-term interest rates, even though short-term interest rates have gone down, the IMF Managing Director said.

Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, replacing Joe Biden at the

White House.

Trump, 78, has announced plans to impose additional tariffs on countries like China, Canada and Mexico. He has publicly announced the use of tariffs as a key policy tool.

On inflation, the IMF expects global disinflation to continue, Georgieva said.

"As we all recognise, the higher interest rates that were necessary to fight inflation did not push the world economy into recession. They have delivered the desired results. Headline inflation is converging back to target sooner in advanced economies than in emerging markets," she said.

Nation to become \$4 trillion economy much earlier: Puri

PNS ■ MANGALURU

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri on Saturday said India's energy security will fuel the country's bid to become a USD 4 trillion economy much earlier than the projected 2027.

Puri was addressing a session at the 7th Mangaluru Literary Festival on Saturday. He said the International Monetary Fund has projected India to reach there by 2027. "But if the present trajectory continues, India will arrive there much before that," Puri said.

The seventh edition of the festival was inaugurated by legendary Kannada writer S L Bhyrappa at the T M A Pai Auditorium. Following the inauguration, Puri delivered his key note address on India's energy security. According to Puri, there is no shortage of fos-

sil fuel in the world. He said a few oil-producing and exporting countries project the fossil fuels as "short-lived resources" for their own "cartelising motives".

He also said India has ramped up its refinery capacity from 5 million barrels of crude to 5.4 million barrels per day with a scope for increasing the installed capacity to 6-7 million barrels per day shortly. "Our oil diplomacy is also on a high note. Along with traditional markets in the Middle East, India now imports from the US and Surinam apart from Russia. Despite the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) cutting down their production from 1.2 million barrels to 97 million, India's oil imports have remained steady, which is a great achievement in the geopolitical positioning of India," Puri added.

India adds record renewable energy capacity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India logged a record high renewable energy capacity addition of about 30 GW in 2024, more than 113 per cent higher than 13.75 GW recorded in 2023, according to the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy data. This assumes significance in view of India's ambitious plan to have 500 GW of renewable energy capacity in the country by 2030.

Besides, India needs to add an average of 50 GW of renewable energy capacity per annum over the next six years to achieve its target. "Exponential growth from 13.75 GW in 2023 to around 30 GW in 2024, resulting in achieving nearly 218 GW now underscores India's growing commitment to clean energy and its progress in building a greener future," New & Renewable Energy Minister Pralhad Joshi said in a post on X.

India joins UN committee on big data for official statistics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has joined the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD), which underscores the country's growing stature in the global statistical community and highlights its commitment to leveraging data and technology for informed decision-making.

The UN-CEBD was created to further investigate the benefits and challenges of Big Data, including the potential for monitoring and reporting on sustainable development goals.

As part of the committee, India will contribute to shaping global standards and practices in harnessing Big Data and data science for official statistical purposes, the statement by Ministry of Statistics



and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) said.

India's active engagement in the Committee of Experts will highlight its pioneering initiatives, including the establishment of the Data Innovation Lab and exploration of alternate data sources such as satellite imagery and machine learning for policy making.

This membership is a strategic opportunity for India to align its domestic advancements in Big Data and data sci-

ence with international goals, showcasing the country's capability to lead transformative initiatives in the data domain. Big Data and advanced data science techniques have the potential to revolutionize the production and dissemination of official statistics.

By integrating non-traditional data sources such as IoT, satellite imagery, and private sector data streams, India aims to modernize its statistical processes, enhance the accuracy of estimates, and enable the timely availability of critical data for policy formulation and governance.

This engagement will also complement India's ongoing efforts to streamline statistical production and drive innovation in data collection, processing, and analysis to reduce the time lag in data availability, the statement said.

GJEPC optimistic about diamond export revival Eyes Bengal's Singur as global jewellery hub

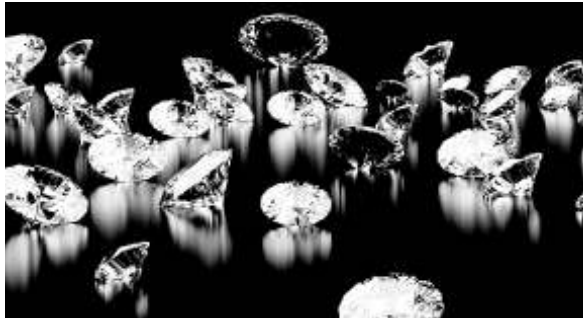
PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) on Saturday reported a 12 per cent jump in gold jewellery exports during the current fiscal, contrasting with a 10 per cent decline in diamond exports over the first nine months.

The apex trade body expressed optimism about a turnaround in diamond exports, particularly in the US, which accounts for nearly half of the total exports.

The exports of cut and polished diamonds between April and November of FY25 dropped by 18.8 per cent to USD 8,980.2 million compared to the same period the previous year. China's sluggish demand remains a concern for diamond exports, officials said on Saturday.

Nonetheless, a five per cent surge in US demand during



The apex trade body expressed optimism about a turnaround in diamond exports, particularly in the US, which accounts for nearly half of the total exports.

the Thanksgiving festival provided some relief for December month, they said.

"We believe the worst is behind us, with a 10 per cent decline in the first nine months of this fiscal. With the new government in the US under Donald Trump, we are optimistic about a revival in demand and expect 10-15 per cent growth in 2025-26," said GJEPC Chairman Vipul Shah at the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Eastern

Regional Office in Kolkata. Gold jewellery exports benefited from rising gold prices, noted state GJEPC official Pankaj Parekh.

Shah added that the industry, in its pre-budget proposals, has sought an alignment of duty drawbacks for platinum, an emerging precious metal with significant potential.

The GJEPC said it has invested Rs 150 crore in the global generic promotion of diamonds and is also promot-

ing lab-grown diamonds to cater to price-conscious consumers.

Shah also announced plans to establish Singur in West Bengal as a global export hub for fashion and costume jewellery, leveraging its skilled workforce and artisanal heritage.

He also highlighted shifting global trade dynamics, noting that the US is reducing procurement from China.

'No more actions on derivatives on anvil'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The capital markets regulator is not planning any more measures to curb or restrict activity in derivatives, Sebi's Wholtime Member Ananth Narayan said on Saturday.

An expert group under former RBI executive director G Padmanabhan continues to work on bettering the system, and some moves on ease of doing business and better risk management are being mulled, he added.

"At this point in time, there is no thought of Sebi taking any further steps in this particular regard," Narayan said, addressing an event organised by Sebi-promoted NISM here.

He also made it clear that the Sebi is not mulling any steps on "suitability and appropriability", which will determine who can trade in the derivatives market.

It can be noted that in November, Sebi imposed a set of restrictions to curb highly speculative trades in the futures and options market after data pointed out that retail investors lost money in 93 per cent of the trades over the last three years.

Making it clear that Sebi has nothing against derivatives and that they help in price discovery and deepening the market, Narayan assured that the tweaks will be introduced only after consultations.

Some of the measures being discussed within the market regulator include steps to better measure risk in the derivatives market.

"What you need ideally is that the volumes in the cash market should be nice and liquid, and there should be depth in the market. And likewise, the volumes in the derivative market should also have depth, should also have good volumes," he noted.

It is important to make sure that there is some kind of connectivity in the liquidity of the two markets, he said.

"What is very clear to us is the current way of measuring open interest as notional of futures and notional of options is simply not right. It gives a very, very wrong picture, and there is a need to debate how we move forward into a more meaningful metric," he said.



Narayan said the Sebi is also considering linking market-wide position limits to delivery volumes.

Linked to the same, it is considering a revision of index training limits imposed during the COVID pandemic to control volatility, the WTM said.

Sebi is also looking at the question of having indices with futures and options with very high concentrated weightages of some specific stocks from a perspective of ensuring trust in the system, Narayan added.

71.7 pc jump in Indian tourists visit to Malaysia

PNS ■ CHENNAI

A record 71.7 per cent increase in travellers from India to Malaysia was witnessed in 2024, attributed to the rise in flight connectivity between the two nations, Consul General of Malaysia in Chennai, Saravana Kumar Kumarasagam, said here.

With Malaysia extending the 30-day visa exemption for Indian nationals until December 2026, he described it as a "significant milestone" in enhancing connectivity between India and Malaysia.

"This is a golden opportunity for the people of Tamil Nadu and across India to

explore Malaysia's rich cultural heritage, pristine beaches, and vibrant cities without the hassle of applying for a visa," Kumar said in a press release on Saturday.

As Malaysia remains a key destination for Indian travellers, this extension of the 30-day visa exemption ensures seamless travel, he added. Tourism Malaysia's Chennai Director, Hishamuddin Mustafa, noted that the visa exemption not only simplifies travel but also reaffirms Malaysia's commitment to being a preferred destination for Indian tourists.

"With strategic partner-



With Malaysia extending the 30-day visa exemption for Indian nationals until December 2026, he described it as a "significant milestone" in enhancing connectivity between India and Malaysia

ships and robust promotional campaigns, we aim to showcase Malaysia's unparalleled hospitality, diverse attractions, and hidden gems," Mustafa added.

In 2025, Malaysia has rolled out unique offerings, including Community-Based Tourism, positioning Malaysia as a premier wedding destination, promoting

Malaysia as an education hub, and targeting high-potential customers under the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) segment.



# FATEH: SONU SOOD LEADS A GRIPPING CYBER-ACTION SAGA WITH IT'S MISSES HERE AND THERE

TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

**Plot:**

**F**ateh marks Sonu Sood's foray into the action-packed cyber-crime thriller genre, where he plays the titular character, Fateh, a relentless and determined hero who embarks on a mission to track down a notorious hacker. The plot follows Fateh's journey as he uncovers a web of cyber-crimes and exposes the murky underworld of hacking syndicates, all while keeping the audience at the edge of their seats with high-octane action sequences and twists. The story delves into the cyber world, focusing on issues like data theft, online fraud,

**DIRECTOR:** Sonu Sood  
**WRITER:** Sonu Sood and Ankur Pajni  
**PRODUCER:** Sonali Sood and Umesh KR Bansal  
**CAST:** Sonu Sood, Jacqueline Fernandez, Vijay Raaz, Naseeruddin Shah, Dibyendu Bhattacharya  
**RATING:** 3.5/5



striking, drawing comparisons to action franchises like *John Wick*. Sonu Sood's portrayal of a tough, no-nonsense hero is compelling and adds a layer of charisma to the film. The cyber-crime theme is a timely one, giving the film an edge and ensuring it resonates with a modern audience. The film's pacing is another positive; it keeps the energy high throughout, offering little time for the viewer to lose interest. *Fateh* impresses with its gripping storyline, packed with suspense, action and intricate plot developments. The film effectively taps into the current relevance of cyber-crime, making it timely and relatable to today's digital age. The screenplay moves at a brisk pace, maintaining a constant sense of urgency and mystery. While the narrative isn't entirely groundbreaking, it offers enough thrills and surprises to engage the audience, especially those with an interest in the cyber world.

and digital security, against a backdrop of personal vengeance and justice.

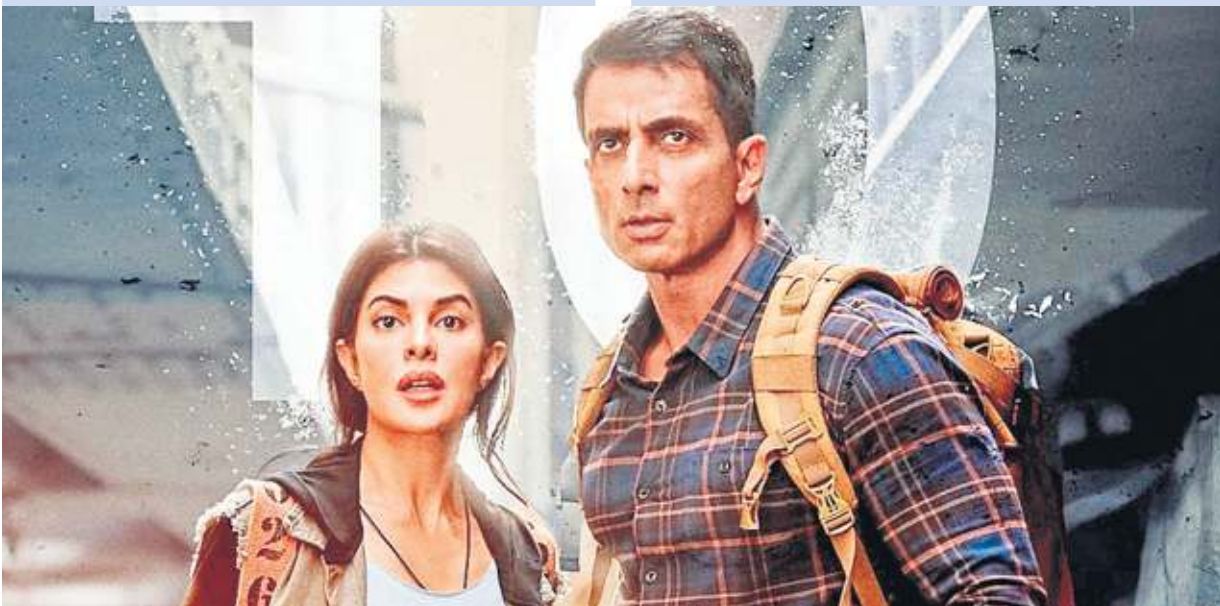
**Highlights:** One of the standout aspects of *Fateh* is its stylish action sequences. The choreography of fight scenes is sharp, dynamic and visually

**Drawbacks:** While *Fateh* certainly packs in the action, its character development could have been deeper. Fateh's backstory and motivations are only lightly touched upon and some secondary characters lack the depth necessary to make their arcs more compelling. The predictability of the plot also means that experienced thriller fans might find some of the twists and turns less surprising. Additionally, while the cyber-crime theme is intriguing, it doesn't always get the full attention it deserves, occasionally being overshadowed by the action sequences. At times, the story feels a bit predictable and may lean too heavily on familiar tropes of the genre. There is also a slight imbalance between action and story depth, with the former often overshadowing character development. Despite this, *Fateh* excels in creating an engaging viewing experience for fans of action thrillers.

**Performances:** Sonu Sood delivers a strong performance as Fateh, embodying the tough yet relatable hero with conviction. His screen presence is commanding, and his physicality adds to the film's intense atmosphere. While his portrayal may not break new ground, Sood's charisma shines through, making him an ideal fit for the role. Naseeruddin Shah plays the role of the kingpin, Reza, delivering a performance that feels disengaged and monotonal, even in the film's final moments when his character faces impending death. Vijay Raaz portrays Satyaprakash, whose digital password is ironically 'Satyameva Jayate,' offering a comedic touch, though the character's depth is lacking. Surprisingly, Dibyendu Bhattacharya, usually a reliable actor, appears shallow as a renegade cop. Sonu Sood, in a pivotal role, primarily communicates through grimaces, with only rare moments of a smile to break his otherwise stiff demeanor. Among the female cast, Jacqueline Fernandez stands out as Khushi, injecting some life into the film, while Shiv Jyoti Rajput's portrayal of Nimrit is rather forgettable. Krushna Patil's character, Dolly, is underutilized, and her performance is left mostly unexplored.

**Technical Aspects:** The technical aspects of *Fateh* elevate the film's overall experience. Cinematography is sleek and polished, capturing the fast-paced nature of the action sequences while also highlighting the darker, more sinister aspects of the cyber world. The film's editing is tight, ensuring that the narrative stays fast-paced and engaging. The background score complements the high-stakes drama, with intense music adding to the tension in critical moments. The sound design is equally effective, making the action scenes feel dynamic and impactful.

**Verdict:** *Fateh* offers a thrilling, action-packed ride that will appeal to fans of stylish action and cyber-crime thrillers. Sonu Sood's performance and the film's intense action sequences are its strongest assets, while the film's fast pace and intriguing premise keep the audience hooked. While it may not bring anything radically new to the genre, it's an engaging film that succeeds in entertaining its audience. If you enjoy high-energy thrillers with a contemporary setting, *Fateh* is worth watching. However, for those looking for deeper character exploration or a more complex plot, the film may fall short of expectations.



WHAT'S NEW

**DERMAFIQUE'S FACE CARE KIT**

The Dermafique Premium Face Care Kit Essentials Gift Pack for Men and Women, Pack of 3, is dermatologist tested on Indian Skin

Price: INR 1,499



**FLORACTIVE PROFESSIONAL ORGANIC NANO GEL SHAMPOO & CONDITIONER**

The Organic Nano Gel Shampoo is formulated to clean thoroughly while preserving hair's natural moisture balance, helping prolong smoothness. Meanwhile, the 3-in-1 Organic Nano Gel Conditioner hydrates, nourishes and seals cuticles for long-lasting shine and smoothness.

PRICE: INR 1,400 Each

**BIO-ESSENCE BIO-SNAIL SERUM**

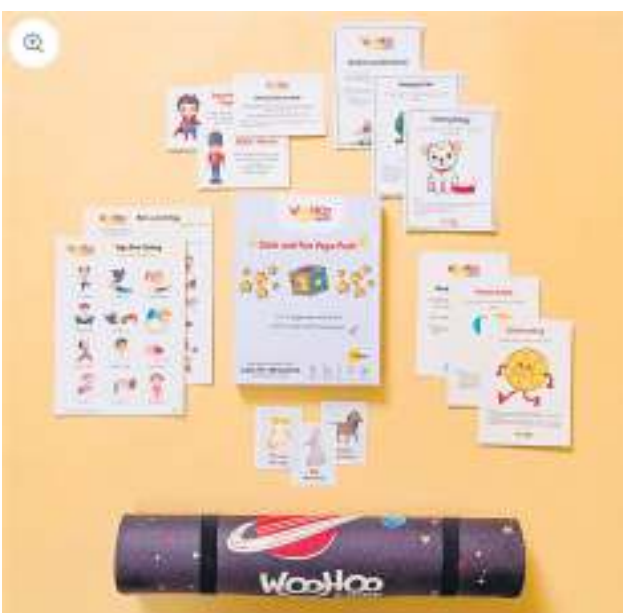
Celebrate the New Year with the gift of radiant skin! The Bio-Snail Serum, enriched with the transformative benefits of snail mucin, offers intense hydration and revitalisation for a luminous, glass-like glow. Perfect for winter, this serum keeps skin deeply hydrated and glowing even in the harshest conditions. Its lightweight, non-sticky texture absorbs quickly, making it an ideal addition to any skincare routine. ultimate skincare indulgence for a fresh and glowing start to the year!

Price: INR 899



**NOURISHING CARE FOR YOUR LIPS**

Infused with a blend of hydrating ingredients, this lightweight, non-sticky formula provides long-lasting moisture while delivering a glossy, irresistible shine. Whether you're looking to enhance your natural lip color or simply add a touch of hydration, this lip oil is your go-to for a soft, smooth, and supple pout, giving honey like hydration.



**WOOHOO SQUAD'S CALM AND FUN YOGA PACK**

This yoga bundle is perfect for kids aged 4+ to unwind after a busy day with guided relaxation exercises and playful yoga poses. It promotes focus, calmness, and better sleep while fostering emotional well-being.

Price: INR 749

**DIVINE RINGS**

Nothing elevates a party outfit like a statement ring and if you're wearing a Divine Solitaires ring, you know you've made a statement! Featuring expertly cut diamonds in chic, minimalist designs, this collection has something for everyone — from a classic round solitaire that catches the light perfectly to a contemporary cluster of diamonds.



HOROSCOPE



**ARIES**

Focus on self-improvement and confidence to overcome setbacks. Stay cautious yet open, balancing work, family and emotions. A new career opportunity offers stability and reward for your hard work.



**TAURUS**

Stay calm amidst challenges and adjust to changes. Overcome haunting memories and embrace optimism. A new job brings transformation. Responsibilities may distance you from past joys.



**GEMINI**

Avoid overestimating abilities and rash decisions. Communicate openly to resolve conflicts. Postpone changes, prioritize careful planning and embrace independence. Stay calm and thoughtful.



**CANCER**

Balance emotions and ambition while avoiding excessive openness or criticism. Patience and humour earn respect, while optimism and careful planning overcome challenges. Embrace joy and recognition.



**LEO**

Stay persistent in relationships and confident despite setbacks. Balance work and family, as fruitful ventures and favourable signs bring opportunities. Remain ethical and loyal to your loved ones.



**VRIGO**

Embrace unexpected connections and maintain optimism as life shifts. Balance work, family, and emotions. Brilliant insights spark success, while love, support, and small wins pave the way forward.



**LIBRA**

Stay resilient through setbacks and balance work, family, and emotions. Support from siblings and loyalty to others strengthen bonds. Cherish meaningful connections for a fulfilling life.



**SCORPIO**

Enjoy family support and time with children. Balance relationships and responsibilities with humility and flexibility. An unexpected love approach energises you, while reasoning skills aid progress.



**SAGITTARIUS**

Stay persistent despite delays and setbacks. Embrace love, affection, and support to boost confidence. Balance ego with humility, guide others wisely and continue efforts for success and harmony.



**CAPRICORN**

Embrace harmony and joy while overcoming frustrations. Stay focused. Success and recognition await, bringing encouragement. Socialize to uplift your mood and explore meaningful connections.



**AQUARIUS**

Stay cautious and calm, and avoid overestimating abilities. Postpone project changes and address important issues carefully. Embrace new opportunities with optimism, but adapt gradually to the changes.



**PISCES**

Stay open to others' ideas and communicate openly to resolve conflicts. Be cautious with innovations and changes. Take a refreshing break to recharge and embrace new experiences for confidence.

"He was the king amongst the industrialists of India"  
— NARAYANA MURTHY



*"What I would like to do is to leave behind a sustainable entity of a set of companies that operate in an exemplary manner in terms of ethics, values and continue what our ancestors left behind."*

— RATAN NAVAL TATA

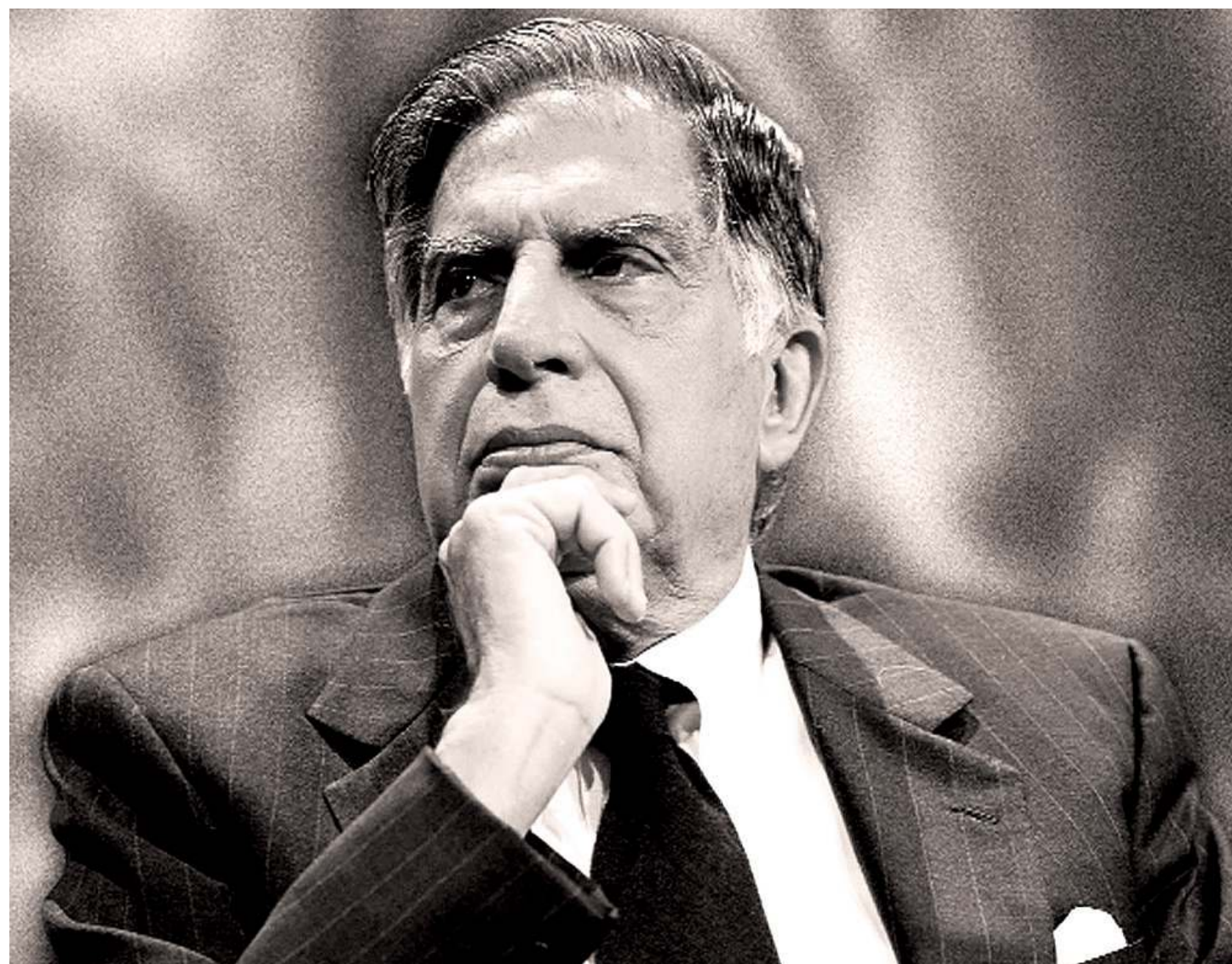
**P**ericles, the monumental Greek politician and statesman during the Golden Age of Athens in his historic Funeral Oration delivered in 431 BC (that is said to have influenced President Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address on 19th November, 1863!), said, "To famous men all the earth is a sepulchre: and their virtues shall be testified not only by inscription on stone at home but in all lands wheresoever in the unwritten record of the mind, which far beyond any monument will remain with all men everlastingly."

On 9th October, 2024, at exactly 11.30 pm IST, the towering 5 feet 10 inches tall Surat born Parsee industrialist-philanthropist Padma Vibhushan Ratan (meaning "precious jewel") Naval Tata, the Chairman Emeritus and the patriarch of the House of Tata, the largest business conglomerate in India (having a staggering annual revenue of over 165 billion US Dollars and encompassing a grand well knit family of over 1 million happy, well cared for and dedicated members worldwide!), breathed his last at the iconic Beach Candy Hospital nestled atop the Arabian Sea facing Cumballa Hill at the age of 86. He had been hospitalised on 7th October, 2024 owing to a critical combination of senescence and hypotension. Ratan held a meger 0.83 % cent stake in Tata Sons and had a net worth of Rs 7,900 crores, according to the Hurun India Rich List 2024. A large part of his wealth-nearly 75 per cent-was tied to his shares in Tata Sons. For Ratan, accolades poured in a torrential stream from across the country and from all corners of the world. In an impassioned eulogy that reflected the melancholy mood of a shattered nation, our Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi tweeted on X - "Shri Ratan Tata was a visionary business leader, a compassionate soul, and an extraordinary human being." On 13th October, 2024, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu in a post on X addressed to his friend Modi, condoled Ratan's death and highlighted his stellar contributions in fostering Israel-India ties, "I and many in Israel mourn the loss of Ratan Naval Tata, a proud son of India and a champion of the friendship between our two countries." In a post on LinkedIn on 14th October, 2024, Padma Bhushan Natarajan Chandrasekaran, (popularly known as "Chandra"), the most worthy successor of Ratan (he effortlessly stepped into Ratan's distinguished shoes and proudly donned his enviable mantle on 12th January, 2017!) and my personal friend for over 15 years since my heady days as a long term Advisor to Tata Consultancy Services Ltd. ("TCS"), the flagship of the prodigious Tata fleet, paid an effusive heartfelt homage to his former boss and mentor, "Anybody who met Mr. Tata came away with a story about his humanity, warmth, and dreams for India. There really was no one like him." Joseph Bitner Wirthlin, the renowned American businessman and religious leader rightly observed, "Some memories are unforgettable, remaining ever vivid and heartwarming!" In a moment of helpless nostalgia, my mind goes back irresistibly to the rather sultry summer day in the year 1986 when I fortuitously met Ratan (he was then the Chairman of Tata Industries and had in that capacity drafted the Tata Strategic Plan) for the very first time within the majestic confines of the Taj Palace Hotel, the only "palace" hotel in the national capital since 1983. Thereafter, I often used to stay at the Taj Mahal Hotel (the second hotel built by the Indian Hotel Company Ltd. ("IHCL") belonging to the Tata group after the iconic Taj Mahal Palace Hotel ("Taj Mahal Palace") in Colaba, Mumbai, in 1903 and popularly known as the Taj Mansingh Hotel because of its strategic location at 1, Mansingh Road), the 5 star-deluxe hotel of 1978 vintage, characterised as the "Epicentre of Delhi".

I used to meet Ratan sporadically in the hotel lobby mostly in the company of its various General Managers and close personal friends belonging to the golden days of the hotel viz. Ravi Dubey, Ronnie Lobo (both Ravi and Ronnie are sadly no more in this world!), and Patu Keshwani or even otherwise. Ratan used to be invariably accompanied by his old faithful, close confidante, trouble shooter and quintessential out and out Taj-Man Devendra Kumar Beri ("DK" to his friends!). Ratan used to mostly stay at a spartan guest house in the Tata Apartments at 23, Prithviraj Road, New Delhi. In those heady days, Uncle PV, who used to live at 9, Motilal Nehru Marg, often dropped by at the famed coffee shop Machan to drink endless cups of freshly brewed sugar free piping hot filter coffee over steamed idlis and vadas soaked in mild sambar. Ratan never missed the opportunity to wish him if he happened to be around in the hotel. He was an indefatigable admirer of Uncle PV! After Uncle PV became the Prime Minister on 21st June, 1991 consequent upon Rajiv Bhai's tragic assassination on 21st May, 1991, and before he moved into Prime Minister House at 7, Race Course Road (renamed Lok Kalyan Marg), a special Suite was booked in the hotel for his family members through the good offices of Ratan, which was guarded round the clock by the Special

# THE SHAH OF THE CORPORATE UNIVERSE

Ratan Naval Tata redefined corporate leadership with vision, ethics, innovation and unparalleled philanthropy, writes **ANOOP BOSE**



Protection Group ("SPG"). Ratan personally saw to it that members of Uncle PV's family were well cared for in the hotel. I had the glorious good fortune of staying with Uncle PV at his residence even prior to his becoming the President of the Indian National Congress and was, naturally, a regular visitor to Suite where I used to meet and interact with Uncle PV's two sons Rajeshwar and Prabhakar under the watchful eyes of the SPG personnel. One of my close friends Prashant Tewari, who used to work very closely with Uncle PV and Hansraj Bhardwaj, (the versatile lawyer and later rose to become India's most famous law minister), both were closely known to Uncle PV's family, used to co-ordinate crucial governance and political issues during the period of most dramatic transformation of the country.

Again, I used to have the opportunity to meet Ratan in the hotel! Ratan used to take a very special interest in the JRD Tata Memorial Lectures. On 19th September, 2008, Somnath Chatterjee, eminent Barrister and the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha and a close personal friend, delivered the 11th JRD Memorial Lecture on "Economic Development and Political Consensus Building" at the Mansingh Hall in the Mansingh. I was a special invitee to the event. After Somnath's lecture, I met Ratan and Somnath at the adjacent Aftab Mahtab, the regal wood and marble panelled venue, over dinner. My old friend Dr. Jamshed Jiji Irani (popularly known as "Doc I"), the honorific Managing Director of Tata Steel, was also there at Ratan's table. The tall and handsome Sanjay "Pole" Singh, Principal Resident Executive and Adviser, Tata Sons, came over to the table unobtrusively and recounted how I had saved Doc I's life by forewarning the Tata Management that some evil people had plotted to attack Doc I with crude bombs in the heart of Jamshedpur with a sinister motive. My last Taj Mansingh encounter with Ratan was just before the outbreak of the Covid epidemic in 2020. I was standing outside one of the hotel lifts when suddenly as if by magic Ratan emerged from the lift along with his old Harvard educated friend Prince Shah Karim al-Husseini, Aga Khan IV (known by his religious

“TO FAMOUS MEN ALL THE EARTH IS A SEPULCHRE: AND THEIR VIRTUES SHALL BE TESTIFIED NOT ONLY BY INSCRIPTION ON STONE AT HOME BUT IN ALL LANDS WHERESOEVER IN THE UNWRITTEN RECORD OF THE MIND, WHICH FAR BEYOND ANY MONUMENT WILL REMAIN WITH ALL MEN EVERLASTINGLY”

title "Maulana Hazar Imam"), the founder and chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, and DK of course. I wished him and walked with him to his waiting car. He bid me goodbye with a wave of his hand before getting into his car! As a special advisor to the Marathon group of companies, I used to travel every year to Bengaluru to participate in Aero India, the biennial air show and aviation exhibition held by the Ministry of Defence at the Yelahanka Air Force Station, Bengaluru, along with my illustrious Israeli friend Hezi Bezalet, the Chairman of the group, and other top Israeli officials. The 2007 Aero India was a very special event for me as Ratan, who was 69 years old at that time, valiantly reached out for the skies in a

spellbinding saga of high adventure on 8th February, 2007. Clad in a G-Suit, he co-piloted a Lockheed Martin F-16 Falcon multi-role fighter jet in a historic 35 minute sortie. Ratan held licences to fly both jets and helicopters! Upon landing after what Ratan described as an "exhilarating" flight, I heartily congratulated Ratan shortly after he was greeted by my old friend William "Bill" Sebastian Cohen, former US Defense Secretary, Royce Keplinger and other senior Lockheed Martin officials. On 9th February, 2007, a G-Suited Ratan once again took to the skies co-piloting a Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet. I met Ratan shortly after his second flight in the Boeing Pavilion to felicitate him with a small bouquet of pink roses in the august presence of my close friends Thomas "Tom" Reeve Pickering, the former US Ambassador to India and the former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs in the Clinton Administration, Dinesh Keskar, the senior Vice President, Sales in Asia-Pacific and India, Anil Srikanth, India President, and other top officials of Boeing Company. During that visit, I also had the golden opportunity of watching a scintillating aerobatic display by the Hindustan Aeronautical Industries Ltd. manufactured fly-by-wire Light Combat Multi-Role Tejas Aircraft in the distinguished company of Ratan, Arackaparambil Kurien Antony, Union Defence Minister, Indru and Bookanekere Siddalingappa Yediyurappa, Chief Minister, Karnataka, amongst other important dignitaries. Ratan noticed to his enormous delight that I was smartly attired in a royal blue English blazer, grey English flannel trousers, a hand crafted boater hat from the reputed hatters K.R.Snoxell & Sons, Luton, and dazzling gold rimmed Zeiss sun glasses! On 26th November, 2008, "a date which will live in infamy", Mumbai, the financial capital of India, witnessed a brutal, dastardly terrorist attack orchestrated by the Pakistani sponsored group Lashkar-e-Taiba, when the Indian Home Secretary Madukar Gupta, by an ominous coincidence, was enjoying Pakistan's hospitality in Murree, a mountain resort city close to Islamabad. Ten highly trained and heavily armed

terrorists infiltrated the city, having stealthily landed in inflatable speed boats at Macchimar Nagar, in Mumbai's Cuffe Parade neighbourhood, and heinously targeted several meticulously planned locations, including the Taj Mahal Palace. The Indian Government's response to the attack was "pusillanimous", as aptly observed by the Hindustan Times on 26th November, 2023! The attack claimed 166 lives, including 33 at the Taj Mahal Palace, and did not spare even the General Manager of the hotel Karambir Singh Kang's wife Niti and his two young teenage sons Uday and Samar. Gautam Shantilal Adani, the Indian billionaire businessman (who has recently been in the eye of a storm!), by a superb stroke of luck managed to save himself by hiding in the kitchen of the hotel! Defying all odds, it was Ratan who in a truly Churchillian manner valiantly rose to the occasion and provided the much needed leadership to an embattled nation facing an "ordeal of the most grievous kind"! In the face of the attack watched by a shell-shocked nation, Ratan, who was then 70, displayed superhuman courage, resolve and determination. He strode like a colossus and stood like a Rock of Gibraltar at the Colaba end of the Taj Mahal Palace for 3 days, as security forces fiercely battled the terrorists in the Taj Mahal Palace. Everyone became just those inches taller, every back just that much broader, as Ratan's own was. This was undoubtedly Ratan's finest hour when he embodied the will, spirit and grit of our people...indomitable, undaunted, relentless! Ratan was imbued with the extraordinary, nay God given, ability and gift to pick out and support the ideal leader both for the House of Tata as well as the nation...he was the Kingmaker extraordinaire! Ratan backed Modi to the hilt before the General Elections in 2014 and on 19th May, 2014 tweeted on X, "Mr. Modi's landslide victory echoes the people's mandate for strong leadership and clear policies for growth and prosperity for India." On 19th December, 2020 at the ASSOCHAM Foundation Week, Ratan ecstatically heaped praise on Modi for his leadership during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, "I think if we all stand together and follow what you have said, what you have done and what you have shown, we will have a situation where the world will look at us and say this Prime Minister said it could happen and he made it happen."

In January, 2017, Chandra's "mentor, guide and friend" Ratan cherry-picked Chandra to lead Tata Sons as its Chairman, the first non-Tata family member to hold the coveted post! On his appointment as the Chairman of Tata Sons, Chandra said, "I am humbled and honoured to be chosen to lead a truly great institution that occupies a unique position in hearts of the people in India and the world. I am proud to have been part of the Tata family for over 30 years and assuming this position is a great privilege. I want to thank the Tata Sons board and Mr Ratan N Tata for their confidence in me to lead this trusted institution that has a rich heritage." Addressing the annual gala annual event at the National Centre of Performing Arts on the birth anniversary of JRD Tata on 30th July, 2018, Ratan expressed gratification with regard to the direction in which group companies were headed under the leadership of Chandra and said that he was confident that "Tata Group is in safe hands." Yes, only a true leader can identify other true leaders! Both Modi and Chandra have proved to be phenomenal leaders of the 21st Century and have earned international acclaim, respect, adoration and admiration.

I have a myriad of friends who knew Ratan intimately and worked with him closely. I am highly emboldened to single out only 5 names viz. Pole, Tanmoy, Raian, Suprakash and Zubin Mehta, the Managing Director of Uniforms Unlimited, Mumbai, who holds a Masters Certification from the internationally reputed Savile Row Academy, London. All of them are unquestionably ad idem about Ratan: "He was a genuinely good, dedicated and large hearted soul filled with the milk of human kindness and our age is hardly fit to understand him." We should remember the stellar quality of Ratan's character as well as the remarkable range of his achievements. In his love of adventure and his imaginative powers, he was far removed from the modern industrialist-philanthropist. Yet everyone who came in contact with him paid tribute to the unimaginable power of his mind. He had an aptitude for business which raised him far above the ordinary levels of our generation.

He had a firmness of spirit which was not often elated by success, seldom downcast by failure and never swayed by panic. He loved life and was perfectly at peace with himself and the world around him. He could be helplessly uproarious. He wanted everyone to be happy. He wanted to taste and try everything that life could offer. Power never corrupted him, nor did success make him conceited, arrogant or pompous. Beyond his reputation as a business magnate and animal lover, Ratan's tenure as Chairman of the Tata Trusts has left an ineradicable mark on India's cultural kaleidoscope. The trusts have spearheaded numerous initiatives across healthcare, education, environment and disaster relief and their manifold contributions to art and culture stand out as particularly noteworthy. With no thought of the length of time he might be permitted on Planet Earth, Ratan was concerned solely with the quality of the service he could render to his nation and to humanity.

— The author is an internationally reputed senior lawyer practising in the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts and Tribunals in India

# I LIKE TO TAKE MY TIME CHOOSING PROJECTS

TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Harleen Sethi has always stood out for her impeccable talent and the meaningful projects she chooses to be a part of. With her refreshing humility and dedication, she has carved a unique space in the industry, delivering performances that resonate with audiences on a deeper level. Sethi has for long been celebrated not just for her talent but also for the thoughtful choices she makes as an artist. Speaking with her feels like stepping into a world of passion and humility. She has once again enraptured hearts with her latest release *Doctors*, a groundbreaking show

exploring the lives of doctors—the *Kohrra* fame sits down to share her thoughts on the journey, the challenges of embodying such a layered role and the gratitude she feels for the opportunities that come her way.

"Thank you for the compliment! You've truly made my day," Harleen begins this chat with warmth. "I feel so blessed and grateful to be doing what I love. It feels amazing to talk about a project that I'm so proud of. As an actor, I strive to make good choices and hearing such appreciation makes everything worthwhile."

Harleen's ability to immerse herself in diverse roles has earned her a special place in

the hearts of audiences. Her latest project, a show centered on the lives of doctors, stands as a testament to her dedication to meaningful storytelling.

Her pride for her latest endeavor is palpable. "This show is so close to my heart. We shot it over a year and a half ago and I recently revisited

over time, she transforms into a true healer and hero. It's an inspiring arc and I feel incredibly honored to bring her to life."

Portraying a doctor required extensive preparation. "From the scripting stage, we had real doctors—Dr. Agni and Dr. Janavi—on set. They helped us understand medical terminology, mannerisms and real-life cases sourced from AIIMS and around the world. We learned everything from how to take a pulse to administering CPR, checking and even the correct way to wash hands. Every detail mattered."

The *Broken But Beautiful* fame also dived deep into the psyche of a doctor. "I attended workshops, read books like *Complications* by Atul Gawande and observed real doctors to understand their mindset. It's not just about physical skills; it's about the emotional toll their work takes. The show offers a unique perspective on the personal and professional challenges they face."

"Every role comes with its own challenges, but professional roles like this are particularly demanding," she explains. "From the outside, it may seem glamorous, but the closer you look, the more you realise how challenging it is. Doctors, for instance, work under immense pressure, with 24/7 responsibilities and constant life-and-death situations. Separating personal life from professional life becomes crucial and mastering that balance is an art."

She recalls a pivotal scene in the series where Nitya experiences her first patient death. "It's a moment of reckoning for her and for me as an actor. Sharath (Ishan) says, 'What you do in this moment will define what kind of doctor you become.' It was incredibly challenging to portray that depth of emotion and responsibility."

Through this project, she developed a profound respect for the medical community. "I've come to understand just how hard doctors work and the immense responsibility they carry. They form their own communities because only they can truly understand the challenges they face. Shooting in real hospitals gave me a glimpse into their world, and it was deeply humbling. Doctors often create a second family among their peers because they spend so much time together. This sense of community and shared purpose is incredibly inspiring."

As she reflects on her journey, the *Gulmohar Grand* fame shares her excitement for the future. "I like to take my time choosing projects. It's important to me that each role challenges me and allows me to break away from my last image. I'm currently reading scripts for next year and I'm excited for what's to come."

Among her upcoming projects, Harleen reveals, "I've worked on a film with Remo D'Souza and Abhishek Bachchan for Amazon Original, which will release next year. I also have a dance sequence in *Woh Ladki Hai Kahaan* with Taapsee Pannu. Additionally, a couple of short films I've done will be doing the international rounds. I've entered the new year with so much hope and gratitude."

Harleen signs off with a message of gratitude: "Every project I do is a labor of love, and it feels wonderful when people connect with it. I hope *Doctors* resonates with audiences and inspires them as much as it inspired me. Here's to a new year filled with stories that move, motivate and make a difference."

Indeed, Harleen Sethi's journey is a testament to the power of passion, resilience, and making meaningful choices—both on and off the screen.



Harleen Sethi, in a heartfelt chat with *The Pioneer*, discusses her upcoming series that dive deep into the world of doctors. She shares her admiration for their dedication, the intense preparation for her role and the transformative journey of her character, Dr Nitya.

the show. Watching it brought back all the emotions, the anxiety, and the hope we felt while making it. It's not just a project; it's a tribute to doctors—especially after what they endured during the COVID-19 pandemic."

She continues, "The show captures the selflessness of doctors. They're there for us 24/7, often putting their own lives at risk. In most movies, we see glimpses of doctors' lives, but this series dives deep into their world, showing that they're human too—prone to mistakes, pressures and challenges. It's something India hasn't seen before. I hope it inspires young minds, much like an army film motivates the youth. It's a celebration of their dedication and resilience."

She plays Dr. Nitya, a character she describes as a heroine in every sense. "Vidya is a superhero, but she's also deeply human. The show unfolds through her eyes, showcasing her journey from revenge to love and redemption. Initially, she carries this heavy baggage of revenge, which drives her to the hospital. But



TRENDING

PERSON

PRITISH NANDY

Veteran journalist, poet and filmmaker Pritish Nandy passed away in Mumbai, leaving behind a rich legacy in Indian media and cinema. The news of his death was confirmed by his son.

PERSON

VIDEO

A viral video showing a visibly unsteady Yuzvendra Chahal being assisted to his car by a friend has resurfaced online, amidst divorce rumours. The video is reportedly from 2023.

MOVIE

GAME CHANGER

The much-anticipated Ram Charan and Kiara Advani-starrer *Game Changer* has finally hit the screens and one cannot stop adoring the lead stars.

SONG

UYI AMMA

Rasha Thadani's electrifying dance moves in the song *Uyi Amma* from her debut film have set social media ablaze. Her effortless grace and dynamic energy have left fans mesmerized, cementing her as a rising star to watch.

PICTURE

HYDERABAD'S 2ND LARGEST FLYOVER

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy inaugurated the Aramghar-Nehru Zoological Park flyover, Hyderabad's second-longest on Monday. As a tribute to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the newly inaugurated flyover has been named in his honour, aiming to improve connectivity and traffic flow in the city.

## Winter woes: How HMPV affects vulnerable populations

PNS| HYDERABAD

Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), though lesser-known compared to influenza or respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), is a common respiratory pathogen that affects people worldwide, particularly during late winter and early spring. Its symptoms—runny nose, cough, sore throat, fever and in severe cases, wheezing and difficulty breathing—often mimic other respiratory viruses, making it harder to diagnose without specific tests.

As cases of HMPV increase during colder months, experts emphasize the importance of awareness, preventive measures, and supportive care to minimize its impact, especially on vulnerable populations.

Dr. K.P. Balaraj, Consultant, Internal Medicine at SPARSH Hospital, RR Nagar, explains, "HMPV is not a mysterious virus—it's a respiratory pathogen we encounter every year. Most healthy people recover within a week or two, but the virus poses a higher risk for young children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems, leading to complications like pneumonia or bronchitis."

**Why HMPV often goes undiagnosed**

HMPV frequently overlaps with flu and RSV infections, which can result in its impact being underestimated. Dr. Balaraj adds, "The reason HMPV seems unfamiliar to many is its overlap with the flu and RSV. Without specific tests, we often attribute its effects to other respiratory illnesses. The absence of a dedicated vaccine or

antiviral treatment for HMPV makes prevention crucial."

Simple preventive measures, such as frequent handwashing, wearing masks in crowded areas, and avoiding close contact with infected individuals, can significantly reduce its spread. Supporting the immune system through a nutrient-rich diet, including foods high in vitamin C, zinc and probiotics, can also aid recovery and boost respiratory health.

**HMPV's impact during winter**

Winter months see a spike in respiratory illnesses, creating an environment where viruses

like HMPV thrive. Cold weather exacerbates pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and chronic bronchitis, making individuals with these conditions more vulnerable.

Dr. Sandeep Katiyar, Senior Consultant, Pulmonology at Apollo Spectra Hospital, Kanpur, warns, "HMPV thrives during colder months when respiratory viruses are at their peak. Confined indoor environments and poor ventilation during winter create ideal conditions for HMPV to spread through respiratory droplets."

He advises those at higher risk, particularly

the elderly and individuals with chronic respiratory conditions, to take proactive measures, including maintaining indoor air quality, wearing masks in crowded spaces, and avoiding close contact with sick individuals. "Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent severe complications, especially in high-risk groups," Dr. Katiyar emphasises.

**Unique risk to children**

Children, especially infants and toddlers, are among the most vulnerable to HMPV due to their developing immune systems and smaller airways, which can make it harder to

cope with the inflammation caused by the virus.

"HMPV is a significant cause of respiratory infections in children," says Dr. Rahul Khanna, Senior Consultant, Internal Medicine at Apollo Spectra Hospital, Karol Bagh, Delhi. "This virus often manifests as cold-like symptoms but can progress to more severe conditions like croup, bronchiolitis, or pneumonia, leading to hospitalization. Parents should be cautious if their child develops wheezing, difficulty breathing, or persistent high fever."

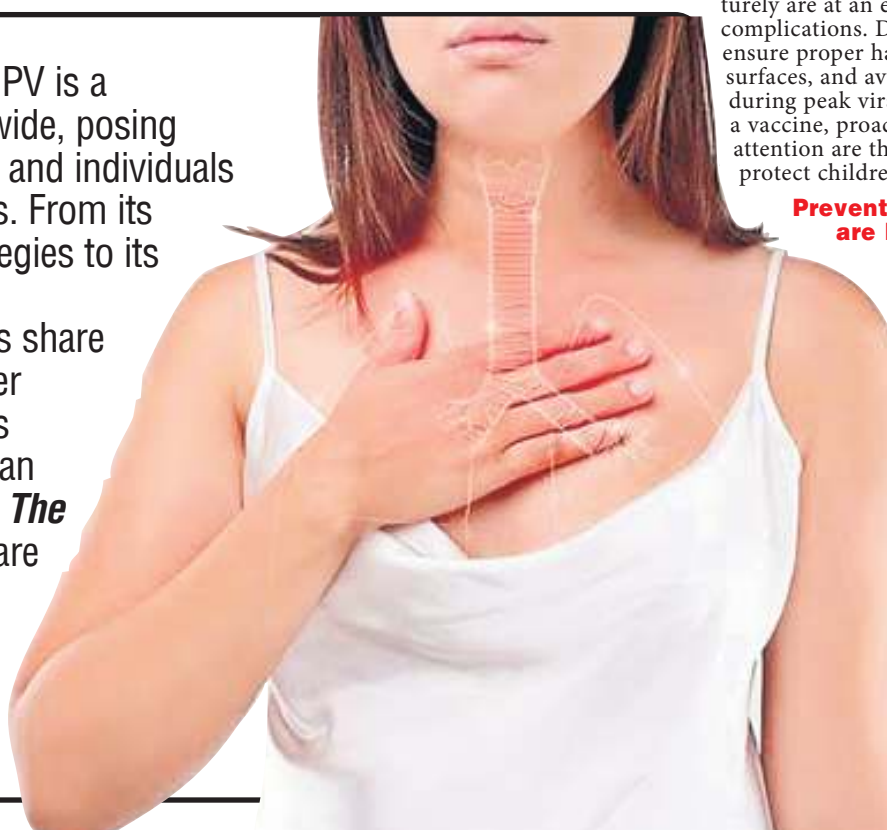
Children with pre-existing respiratory conditions, such as asthma, or those born prematurely are at an even greater risk of severe complications. Dr. Khanna advises parents to ensure proper hand hygiene, sanitise toys and surfaces, and avoid crowded public places during peak viral seasons. "In the absence of a vaccine, proactive care and timely medical attention are the most effective strategies to protect children from HMPV," he adds.

**Prevention and awareness are key**

While HMPV may not be as widely discussed as influenza or RSV, its prevalence and impact, particularly on vulnerable populations, highlight the need for greater awareness. Preventive measures, supportive care and early medical intervention can help reduce the risk of severe complications and ensure better outcomes for those affected.

As Dr. Balaraj concludes, "Though HMPV may not be as widely discussed, it is a virus we encounter regularly. Awareness and timely action—through preventive measures and supportive care—are essential in mitigating its effects."

Often overshadowed by influenza and RSV, HMPV is a common cause of respiratory infections worldwide, posing heightened risks for young children, the elderly and individuals with underlying health conditions. From its symptoms and prevention strategies to its seasonal surge and impact on vulnerable groups, the experts share insights to help readers better understand and combat this often-overlooked virus. In an exclusive interaction with *The Pioneer*, leading healthcare experts shed light on Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), a lesser-known yet significant respiratory virus that surfaces during late winter and early spring.





# DURGESH: A COMBINATION OF PASSION AND COMPASSION

**N**oted politician and dynamic leader Kandula Lakshmi Durgesh Prasad, popularly known as Kandula Durgesh, who commands respect across the political fraternity of both Telugu states, is currently serving as Minister for Tourism, Culture and Cinematography. His inspiring journey is a testament to hard work, determination and a deep-rooted passion for public service. Despite his down-to-earth demeanor, Durgesh always harboured a hidden leadership quality, driven by a desire to uplift the underprivileged and address the needs of society. As a Minister, Durgesh is steadfast in his mission to transform Andhra Pradesh into a cultural and tourism hub. In a candid conversation with **The Pioneer's C Pradeep Kumar, Kandula Durgesh** reflected on his inspiring journey from Rajahmundry, overcoming numerous hardships to reach his current role. His story is not just about political success but also about a lifelong commitment to serving people and building a better future for all.

## RAISED WITH DISCIPLINE & VALUES



I was born in Rajahmundry to Meda Venkata Bhojaratnam, a landlord and Padmavathi, a homemaker. Later, I was adopted by my maternal grandmother's sister, Kandula Someswara Rao and Ranganayakamma. I have a brother and three sisters. My brother, Gurudatt, runs an NGO, while my sisters--Meena Kumari is a retired teacher, Subbayamma is a homemaker and Annapurna is an advocate. They have all been very affectionate and supportive of me. My adopted mother was very disciplined and systematic in raising me, instilling values that have shaped my life. I pursued my graduation from VT College in Rajahmundry and later completed my post-graduation at BNR College in Bhimavaram.

## TRADITION OF VISITING JANGAREDDYGUDEM

Every summer during the holidays, all our cousins would visit Jangareddygudem, where my maternal grandfather served as a government doctor. These summer holidays remain some of my fondest memories. We would often visit the fields, play in the borewell water and take baths in the cool, refreshing streams. The visits to the mango, coconut and sweet orange farms were always special. Even after marriage, I continue to visit Jangareddygudem with my children, cherishing the village backdrop and passing on these precious memories.

## HOW PAWAN KALYAN LED ME TO JOIN JANA SENA

I entered politics while pursuing my post-graduation and became actively involved with the Youth Congress. I remained with Congress until 2016. During the tenure of former chief minister Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy, I served as a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) from 2007 to 2013. I briefly joined YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) from 2016 to 2018. In 2018, I was inspired by the vision and dedication of Jana Sena Party chief K Pawan Kalyan to serve the people and address the needs of the underprivileged, which led me to join Jana Sena Party.



## CAUGHT SMOKING, BUT GUIDED WITH WISDOM

An incident from my college days was when I decided to try smoking a cigarette and was caught by my uncle. He reported it to my mother, who, instead of scolding me, guided me with wisdom and understanding. Her approach led to a transformation and since then, I have never touched a cigarette or developed a habit of drinking.



## FROM MONO-ACTING TO POLITICS

From a young age, I always aspired to be a leader, regardless of the field. I excelled in academics, mono-acting, debates, stage dramas and other extra-curricular activities. My parents were incredibly supportive, playing a pivotal role in shaping me into the person I am today. My maternal grandfather, Pothula Veerabhadra Rao, was a former MLA and Municipal Chairman from the Congress party. I strongly believe his influence has played a significant role in shaping my path toward leadership in politics. During my college years, I served as the general secretary of the NSUI Rajahmundry Town Wing and later as the president of the District NSUI in East Godavari. I was also elected unanimously as the Students' Union chairman of VT College, Rajahmundry, a position that remains particularly special to me as a student.

## BUILDING A LIFE TOGETHER

I got married in 1988 to K Usha Rani, in an arranged marriage and she is my aunt's daughter. Our wedding was a grand celebration, marked by joy and attended by family, friends and well-wishers who shared in our happiness. We are blessed with a son and a daughter. My son, Dr K Krishna Teja, is a Neuro Physician and his wife, Dr Susmitha, is a Gynecologist. They have a beautiful daughter, my granddaughter, Aadvika. My daughter, Srirangapriya, is an Engineer and she is married to Eli Satyendra, an Engineer at HCL. My family continues to be my greatest source of strength and pride.



## WIFE HELPED BALANCE MY CAREER AND FAMILY LIFE

For every politician, dedicating time to family is a challenging task and for me, balancing the roles of a politician and businessman has been particularly demanding. While I hold family as my utmost priority, the responsibilities of politics and business often made it difficult to spend as much time with them as I would have liked.

My wife was my pillar of support, managing everything at home, from getting our children ready for school to raising them with care and devotion, all while supporting my career wholeheartedly. Sadly, she did not live to see me take on the role of minister, a position she always encouraged me to aspire to.



## POLITICS—MY PASSION

Politics is not just a career for me; it is my passion. My tagline, 'Politics with Purity', reflects my commitment to serving people with integrity. I firmly believe that a politician should be service-oriented, and this principle drives my work. Through my NGO, Sravanthi, I have undertaken several service-oriented initiatives, including environmental protection, capacity building for the fishing community, and promoting coastal ecology, with a particular focus on mangroves. My dedication to understanding and addressing these issues has taken me to countries in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, where I studied coastal and marine ecology.



## TOURISM AND CULTURE AT THE FOREFRONT

I see immense potential for development in the tourism sector, as Andhra Pradesh is blessed with scenic beauty that promises visitor satisfaction. Culture has always been a subject of great interest to me and I am thrilled to lead the Tourism, Culture and Cinematography departments under the guidance of our visionary leader, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.



## HAPPIEST MOMENT

Not just me, but my entire family was overjoyed when our party's Chief and Deputy Chief Minister, K Pawan Kalyan, recognised my efforts and entrusted me with the responsibility of leading the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Cinematography. It was a proud and unforgettable moment in my life.



## MESSAGE TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Politics can be a meaningful career for those with a genuine intention to serve the people and make a positive impact. It should not be viewed negatively, as it offers a platform to bring about meaningful change through constructive and thoughtful action. With dedication and hard work, one can achieve success in politics while contributing to the betterment of society.

## THE DYNAMIC TRIO

Over the past five years, the state faced challenges due to a lack of proper vision and direction. However, it is now in capable hands under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, with Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan dedicated to supporting the poor and needy and Prime Minister Narendra Modi providing comprehensive support. The people hold a strong belief that, under this dynamic trio's leadership, the State will overcome its financial challenges and embark on a path of prosperity and development in the days ahead.

**RAPID FIRE**

**YOUR NICKNAME :** Durgesh  
**Favourite colour:** Navy Blue  
**Favourite Food:** Sambar, Potato Fry  
**Favourite movie:** Rudraveena  
**Favourite holiday:** Mareduhilli  
**Are you religious/spiritual:** I am god fearing and spiritual  
**Favourite actor:** Chiranjeevi  
**Inspiration:** Atal Bihari Vajpayee (literary style of presentation)  
**Driving force:** DCM K Pawan Kalyan

## YOUR PLANS FOR NEXT FIVE YEARS

As the Tourism Minister, my vision is to elevate Andhra Pradesh to the forefront of tourism, leveraging its vast potential to attract visitors from across the globe. Over the past five years, the Tourism Department has been neglected and I am committed to revitalising it. Additionally, I aim to focus on the Culture Department, preserving and promoting our art, culture and language, showcasing their splendor and elevating them to new heights. My goal is to transform Andhra Pradesh into a tourism hub while driving comprehensive development in the Nidadavolu constituency. One of the pressing issues in Nidadavolu is the scarcity of drinking water, which I pledge to address promptly. Another critical challenge is the hardship faced by farmers due to the flooding of Erra Kaluva. I will ensure that the bunds are strengthened to prevent flooding and safeguard the livelihoods of our farmers. Furthermore, I plan to develop Nidadavolu in alignment with the developmental activities of Rajahmundry. Improving temple tourism will also be a priority, with a particular focus on enhancing facilities at the Kotasattemma Talli temple to attract more tourists and pilgrims. This initiative will be supported under the Akhanda Godavari Central Government Scheme, ensuring sustainable growth and prosperity for the region.



## CHAMPIONING COASTAL PROTECTION

I have also worked to empower fisherfolk by improving their lifestyles and helping them access government schemes. To further contribute to environmental awareness, I authored a Telugu book titled *Kostathira Paryavarana Parirakshana lo Mara-Adavula Patra* (The Role of Mangroves in Coastal Environmental Protection). This work reflects my deep commitment to preserving our environment and fostering sustainable development.

## LOWEST MOMENT

The lowest moments of my life were marked by profound personal loss. Losing my biological father was a deeply painful experience. More recently, I faced immense grief when I lost my wife on January 14, 2024. Just a few months later, in April 2024, on the very day of my nomination for the 2024 general elections, I endured another heartbreaking loss with the passing of my mother.

## PASSIONATE PUBLIC SERVANT

I consider myself a go-getter, someone who connects easily with people and maintains a good rapport with them. My ability to articulate ideas clearly and explain concepts in a way that is easily understood sets me apart. Above all, I value honesty and integrity in everything I do.

