

"I did not give clean chit to KTR. I am a fighter and I will not fear even if a by-poll comes. There is no change in my comments on HYDRAA. I am appealing to the government to rethink on HYDRAA".

- Danam Nagender, Khairathabad MLA, Telangana P3

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

'India's young will power its rise to becoming developed by 2047'

GAUTAM ADANI
 TO INVEST RS 65,000 CR IN ENERGY, CEMENT

Balayya's Daaku Maharaj is a typical paisa vasool FILM

'P-4' for poverty-free AP

State made rapid strides in last 6 months: Pawan

DON'T MISS...

'Amaravati will be built in 3 years'

Minister for Housing and I&PR, K Parthasarathy, has assured that the capital city of Amaravati will be constructed within the next three years. Accompanied by his wife Kamala Lakshmi, the Minister took part in Sankranti celebrations held at Kothagudem village in Chatri Mandal on Sunday. The couple received a warm welcome from the villagers, and the Minister lit the traditional Bhogi Mantalu. He extended his heartfelt Sankranti wishes to the people on the occasion. Speaking at the event, Parthasarathy emphasised that Amaravati will be...

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'AAP failed to fulfil promises: BJP'

Ahead of the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections the BJP on Sunday alleged that the AAP government in the capital failed to fulfil all of its key poll promises and destroyed the city. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here senior party leader and Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri listed 10 promises including cleaning the Yamuna and making Delhi pollution-free that AAP made ahead of the 2020 polls but did not fulfil. Targeting Arvind Kejriwal Puri said the AAP...

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Indichip inks deal with Andhra govt

Indichip Semiconductors Ltd along with its joint venture partner Yitua Micro Technology (YMTL) from Japan on Saturday inked an agreement with the Andhra Pradesh government to establish India's first private semiconductor manufacturing facility with an investment of Rs 14 000 crore. This cutting-edge facility will focus on manufacturing Silicon Carbide (SiC) chips contributing to India's technological advancement and sustainability goals. The southern state pledged to provide land at Orvakal mega industrial...

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India defeat Ireland by 116 runs

A collective batting performance headlined by Jemimah Rodrigues' maiden hundred formed the cornerstone of India's commanding 116-run win against Ireland in the second women's ODI here on Sunday as the hosts took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. India scored a massive 370 for five riding on three half-centuries and a ton before restricting Ireland to 254 for 7 in the stipulated 50 overs. It was the elegant skipper Smriti Mandhana, who was first off the blocks with an...

-SPORTS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Extending Sankranti greetings to Telugus across the globe, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday emphasised that true festive celebrations in every household are possible only when economic imbalances are eradicated and people's living standards are improved.

"We have been working tirelessly to brighten people's lives through welfare, development, and good governance. Under the Swarnandhra Vision-2047, we have laid out ten principles to make the Telugu society number one in the world. The foremost among these is achieving zero poverty," he said in a message on 'X' (formerly Twitter) on the occasion of Sankranti.

Highlighting the P-4 (Public-Private-People Partnership) system, the Chief Minister stated that it is designed to achieve the goal of zero poverty. Reflecting on the reforms introduced in the combined Andhra Pradesh since 1995, he noted that the earlier P-3 (Public-Private Partnership) system had generated significant employment and wealth.

"Many individuals from humble farming backgrounds rose to great heights by seizing the opportunities provided at that time. Numerous people have excelled nationally and internationally, with some even emerging as global leaders," Naidu said in his message.

Expressing concern over widespread poverty, the Chief Minister

CM bets big on 'Public-Private-People-Partnership' policy

- Naidu extends Sankranti greetings to Telugus globally
- Under the Swarnandhra Vision-2047, ten principles are outlined to make Telugu society number one, with zero poverty as the top goal
- Reflecting on previous P-3 reforms, Naidu highlights the growth of people from humble backgrounds who achieved success
- Despite progress, many families in AP still face poverty, lacking basic amenities
- The P-4 policy aims to

empower society and eradicate poverty by involving achievers in helping the underprivileged

- Naidu urges successful individuals to mentor and support those in need to uplift living standards
- The success of Janmabhoomi-inspired initiatives recalled, encouraging replication for further development
- Eradicating poverty is a key goal of the government, requiring people's active participation
- The CM calls for collective effort toward a poverty-free and prosperous AP

pointed out that, as per the Central census, many families in both rural and urban areas of Andhra Pradesh remain in destitution. Basic amenities such as drinking water, medical facilities, education, and nutrition are still inaccessible to them, he said. To address this, Naidu unveiled the P-4 policy document aimed at empowering society and eradicating

poverty. He urged the top 10% of achievers in society to support the bottom 20%, enabling them to pursue education, gain employment, and improve their skills. "Wherever one is in the world, they can lend a helping hand to a person, a family, a village, or a region in their motherland to uplift living standards. Continued on Page 2



Naidu inaugurates CNG, PNG projects

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu inaugurated AG&P Pratham - THINK Gas' CNG and PNG projects in Tirupati, marking a significant step towards enhancing natural gas infrastructure across the State. The projects aim to serve the districts of Tirupati, Chittoor, Nellore, Annamayya, Anantapur, Sri Satya Sai, and YSR Kadapa.

During the inauguration, Naidu highlighted Andhra Pradesh's role as the second-largest producer of natural gas in India, thanks to the Krishna-Godavari Basin.

Continued on Page 2

Since taking charge in Andhra Pradesh, the NDA coalition government has made significant strides in development. The Central government has already approved several key projects, including the construction of Amaravati, the Polavaram project, and industrial zones. With the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, the State is witnessing lakhs of crores of rupees in investments.

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation for projects worth Rs 2.08 lakh crores in Visakhapatnam. At the same time, tenders have been invited for various works related to the construction of Amaravati, and the Polavaram project is also gaining momentum. In stark contrast, development in Andhra Pradesh remained stagnant during the five years of YSRCP rule, with little progress in key sectors.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, however, pointed out that in just six months under CM Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, the state government has achieved several significant milestones. He claimed that the progress made in this short period has already surpassed the achievements of the YSRCP government during its five-year rule. Pawan Kalyan took to the social media platform X to share comparisons of the development under both regimes. Pawan Kalyan highlighted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Naidu, the NDA government has surpassed previous milestones. For example, during the five years of the YSRCP rule, only 1,800 km of cement concrete (CC) roads were constructed under the Panchayati Raj Department. In contrast, the NDA government has constructed 3,750 km of CC roads in just six months. While only 268 mini Gokulams were established under the YSRCP, the current government has built 22,500 mini Gokulams in the same timeframe. Moreover, while YSRCP allocated ₹91 crore for housing for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG), the NDA government has earmarked ₹750 crore for the same in just six months.

Ban no deterrence for cockfight organisers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a blatant disregard for the Andhra Pradesh High Court's explicit directions to prevent cockfighting during the Sankranti festival, organisers are moving ahead with their plans to hold these illegal events in the NTR and Krishna districts. Key areas of focus include Ramavarappadu, Enikepadu, Jakkampudi, Ampapuram, Edupugallu, Kankipadu, Surampalli, and Gannavaram, where large-scale cockfighting arenas are being set up, particularly in high-traffic zones like Vijayawada-Vissannapeta R&B Road, Inner Ring Road, and National Highway.

Despite being prohibited, these events continue to attract crowds,

POLICE FAIL TO FOIL PLANS FOR ILLEGAL EVENTS



with a variety of side activities, including gambling on 'Gundata' and playing cards, contributing to the overall chaos. Animal cruelty remains a central concern, with roosters being used in brutal fights that often end in bloodshed.

One notable arena in Jakkampudi, near the Abhayanjaneya Swamy Temple, has received backing from

a powerful figure—a Cabinet-ranked MLA. Prominent banners at the venue promise a bumper prize, such as an Enfield motorcycle, to the winner of the three-day event. Allegedly, this MLA has instructed local police and revenue officials to refrain from taking action, making the illegal event even harder to curb. Continued on Page 2

Congress promises Rs 8,500 to unemployed for Delhi polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday promised to give Rs 8,500 every month to educated unemployed youths in Delhi for one year if it comes to power in Delhi.

This is the third scheme launched by the Congress ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

The financial assistance will be provided under the 'Yuva Udaan Yojana' and it is not free, AICC general secretary Sachin Pilot said at a press conference.

"We will provide financial assistance to youths who can show their skills in a company, factory or organisation. They will get money through these companies. This is not a scheme under which one will get money while sitting at home," Pilot said. "This help will not be just financial. We will try that people are absorbed in those fields where they have received training... so that they can... improve their skill set," he said.

He alleged that the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party had totally ignored the youth in the past 11 years when they were busy building the "Raj Mahal" and "Sheesh Mahal", respectively.

During the press conference, AICC Delhi in-charge Qazi Nizamuddin, Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav and NSUI, Congress' student wing, president Varun Chaudhary were also present.

Private carriers fleece Sankranti travellers; airline ticket prices soar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Every year during the Sankranti festival, lakhs of people travel to their hometowns to celebrate the festival with family. While half of them travel by private vehicles, trains, or RTC buses, the rest opt for private travel buses. This surge in demand has led private travel agencies to exploit the situation by significantly raising ticket prices.

From January 11 to 18, private travel agencies began blocking tickets as early as January 1 and increased the prices by three to four times. On regular days, a non-AC bus ticket from Vijayawada to Visakhapatnam costs Rs 750, an AC



bus Rs 1,200, and a sleeper bus Rs 1,500. However, during the festival season, these charges have surged to Rs 2,000 for non-AC buses, Rs 3,000 for AC buses, and Rs 5,000 for AC sleeper buses. For routes like Vijayawada to Vizianagaram or Srikakulam, an additional Rs 500 is being charged to passengers. Continued on Page 2

AP to lead energy efficiency initiatives



To host global event expanding State's international reach

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand has reaffirmed the government's strong commitment to a phased rollout of Mission LiFE, emphasising the importance of global consultations to develop an effective action plan. He urged the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and the Ministry of Power to provide financial support to MSMEs for adopting energy-efficient technologies, including investment-grade energy audits, detailed project reports, and advanced monitoring mechanisms.

In a meeting with the BEE media advisor and the Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM) CEO, the Chief Secretary highlighted the need to spread the message of Mission LiFE across the state. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu echoed this vision, stressing the importance of adopting environmentally conscious lifestyles to address climate change. Continued on Page 2

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Govt delegates powers to local bodies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant move towards decentralisation, the state government has issued orders granting municipalities the authority to approve building structures and layouts. A Government Order (GO) Ms No 5, signed by FAC Secretary Kannababu, has transferred several powers under the Andhra Pradesh Metropolitan Region and Urban Development Authorities Act, 2016, to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and Gram Panchayats. This decision, which comes into effect on January 11, 2025, aims to improve administrative

efficiency and responsiveness at the grassroots level.

The powers being delegated include granting permissions for buildings and layouts, enforcing regulations against unauthorised developments, and other related functions. Municipal Corporations, Municipalities, Nagar Panchayats, and Gram Panchayats within the jurisdiction of Development Authorities will now take charge of these responsibilities.

The Director of Town and Country Planning, Andhra Pradesh, will serve as the overall monitoring authority.

IPL 2025 from March 23: BCCI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla on Sunday said that the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) will get underway from March 23. Shukla made the announcement after the BCCI Special General Meeting in Mumbai on Sunday.

During the meet, Devajit Saikia and Prabhjee Singh Bhatia were elected as the new BCCI secretary and treasurer respectively. They were both elected unopposed after being the only ones to file nomination for the posts vacated by Jay Shah and Ashish Shelar.

The IPL will follow the International Cricket Council's Code of Conduct regulation for participating players during the upcoming season which will start on March 21 while the Women's Premier League will be played across four cities, the governing council decided on Sunday. While



Rajeev Shukla had told mediapersons that the cash-rich league will commence from March 23, a senior GC member clarified that it will start either on March 20 or 21.

"From now on, ICC's sanctioned penalties will be imposed for Level 1, 2 or 3 offences. Till date, IPL had its own Code of Conduct but going forward, Playing Conditions will be followed as per ICC T20I regulations," an IPL GC member told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Meanwhile, the four centres where Women's Premier League matches will be held are: Lucknow, Mumbai, Baroda and Bengaluru.

PM Modi to inaugurate Z-Morh tunnel in Kashmir

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

The security forces on Sunday intensified sanitization efforts and area domination exercise in Kashmir, a day ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the valley for the inauguration of the strategically important Z-Morh tunnel in Ganderbal district, officials said.

The Prime Minister is likely to address a public rally after the inauguration of the tunnel at Gagangir, the officials said, adding the venue is now off-limits for the public.

Built at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway, the strategic 6.5-km Z-Morh tunnel will be a major step towards making the Ladakh region accessible by road throughout the year. The work on the project began in May 2015 and was completed last year. The soft opening of the tunnel was



done in February 2024. The tunnel is vital in terms of the defence needs of the country in the Ladakh region and also connecting the youngest Union Territory to the

rest of the country. Situated at an altitude of 8,650 feet, the Z-Morh tunnel is a two-lane road tunnel equipped with a parallel 7.5-metre-wide escape passage for emergencies. The tunnel ensures seamless connectivity between Gagangir and Sonamarg, and will ease summer travel to Ladakh. Along with the under-construction

Zojila tunnel, the Z-Morh tunnel will ensure uninterrupted connectivity to Baltal and Ladakh regions for civilian and military traffic.

The National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), which oversees the project, has said the "engineering marvel" is a game

changer for the region. Meanwhile, the deployment of security personnel has been increased in the vulnerable areas and dozens of checkpoints have been set up at important intersections in various districts to ensure that anti-national elements are not able to move around freely, they said. Continued on Page 2

With Zojila tunnel, MEIL has major role in the project

Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL) has played a major role in the reconstruction of Kashmir under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The prestigious Zojila Pass tunnel that will provide all-year connectivity between Jammu and Kashmir and

Ladakh Union Territories is being constructed by MEIL.

The single-tube Zojila tunnel, from Baltal in the Ganderbal district of central Kashmir to Minimarg in Drass town of Ladakh's Kargil district, has an approach road of 18 km.

The total length of the project

from Sonamarg to Minimarg is 31 km. From Sonamarg to Baltal it is 18 km. Then the main tunnel starts from Baltal and goes to Minimarg. It is 13-km long. The work is going on at a rapid pace on both the projects," Intiaz Ahmed, the construction manager of MMEIL said.

Monday Mirchi

SMITA SABHARWAL'S PINK OBSESSION CREATES WAVES

Telangana State Tourism Secretary, Smita Sabharwal, is making waves not just for her creative initiatives but also for her curious choice of colours. When she unveiled the "Telangana Zarur ana" logo, official Telangana tourism, the striking pink lettering instantly caught attention, with whispers floating around about the lingering charm of the pink party BRS. To be able to pull off such a thing in Congress government is a big deal. The logo gained even more traction when Congress leader Pawan Khera endorsed it on X, raising eyebrows further. But the twist came at an event with Tourism Minister Jupally, where the logo's pink took a backseat, replaced by a demure white. While the official word is yet to surface, tongues are wagging in bureaucratic circles about how the iconic pink—symbolic of Telangana's previous political era—continues to pop up, even after the power equations have shifted. It seems the allure of pink is hard to let go, leaving many wondering if it's more than just a design choice.

HYDRAA POLICE STATION: VISHWAJEET IPS' VISION BECOMES REALITY

The transformation of EV&DM into HYDRAA, with its newly granted police station status, marks a pivotal moment in Hyderabad's governance. While the spotlight often shines on HYDRAA Chief AV Ranganath, the roots of this evolution go back to the leadership of Vishwajeet, IPS, the former head of EV&DM. Vishwajeet's tenure as EV&DM chief laid the foundation for HYDRAA's current powers. Recognising the need for a robust enforcement mechanism to address land grabbing, encroachments, and public asset protection, he relentlessly pushed for the establishment of a dedicated police station. His vision has now come to life, empowering HYDRAA to handle complex cases with the autonomy and authority of law enforcement. Currently serving as SP CID, Vishwajeet's career has often been under the spotlight. For the uninitiated, he was once perceived as close to BRS, particularly after the controversial Nerella incident in Sircilla. Following this, he was moved to Hyderabad, where he served as the EV&DM chief and wanted it to be given police station status.

VIKARABAD COLLECTOR PRATIK JAIN FACES CRITICISM AMID SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ

Vikarabad Collector Pratik Jain is facing criticism for his frequent public appearances with Tirupathi Reddy, brother of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy. The backlash intensified after an event where students were made to wait barefoot under the scorching sun, drawing ire from both social media users and bureaucratic circles. In response, Pratik highlighted his initiatives for improving residential schools, including launching a "Movie Club" to inspire students through films. He shared that Hidden Figures was screened for Social Welfare Girls' Schools with help from the Trainee Collector, while The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind is planned for boys' schools.

The screenings are held at night to avoid disrupting academic schedules.

Reflecting on his broader efforts, Pratik tweeted, "After months of planning and executing, we've seen some results in schools and hostels, but it's a long way to go to match the hostels I stayed in at IIT Guwahati. As the saying goes—dreams are the ones which don't let us sleep." He added that all repairs were carried out using local labourers, a practice he adopted during his ITDA tenure.

While his efforts are commendable, criticism continues to loom over his public conduct, leaving many unconvinced of his intentions.

KTR'S ANGER AT DANA KISHORE SPARKS POLITICAL STORM

The ongoing fallout from the Formula E case has reportedly left KTR furious with Principal Secretary MAUD Dana Kishore, a senior bureaucrat whose role in the event has become a subject of intense whispers in administrative corridors. While the specifics of KTR's ire remain closely guarded, insiders suggest the controversy surrounding Dana Kishore may extend far beyond Formula E, hinting at deeper issues that have ruffled feathers within the BRS ranks. Adding to the intrigue is Dana Kishore's impending retirement in 2026, a timeline that some believe could shield him temporarily. However, whispers are growing louder that should the BRS return to power, KTR's displeasure could translate into a relentless pursuit of accountability, ensuring that Dana Kishore faces consequences. As political and bureaucratic tensions simmer, all eyes are on how this high-stakes drama will unfold.

DANAM NAGENDER HITS OUT AT DCP, CITES POLITICAL VENDETTA

Khairatabad MLA Danam Nagender has publicly expressed his frustration with the DCP, accusing the officer of creating unnecessary turbulence in the area. Nagender claimed that the DCP is acting as though he is "supreme" and unnecessarily magnifying incidents to project himself as a champion of justice. "Because of this DCP, the government, especially Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, is getting a bad name," Nagender said. The MLA further alleged that the DCP's actions go beyond his duties, filing cases indiscriminately, and even digging up decades-old matters. "When I contested for the parliament elections, this DCP filed 12 cases against me. If such officers are given unchecked freedom, it will harm the government more than anyone else," he remarked. Nagender dismissed any personal fear of the officer but urged the government to reconsider allowing such officials to operate unchecked. "Officers like him come and go, but the Chief Minister must think whether such officers are needed. This is not about me; it's about the government's reputation and stability," he added. The remarks have sent ripples through both political and administrative circles, leaving many to ponder the delicate balance between governance and the autonomy of law enforcement. —Yours Truly.

Another intl cricket stadium to come up in Amaravati: MP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) president and Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), has announced plans to establish another international cricket stadium in Amaravati. This will be in addition to the existing ACA International Stadium in Mangalagiri.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan are working towards transforming Andhra Pradesh into a sports hub, dubbed Kreedandhra Pradesh, with the support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, MP Chinni said.

To mark the birthday of Minister for Human Resources and IT, Nara Lokesh, the third season of the



Mangalagiri Premier League (MPL) cricket tournament, titled Pride of Mangalagiri, was inaugurated by ACA President Sivanath at the ACA International Stadium in Mangalagiri, Guntur district, on Sunday.

Speaking at the event, MP Chinni highlighted ACA's efforts to enhance cricket infrastructure in the state. He

announced that the Cricket Academy in Vizianagaram would be inaugurated by the end of January, alongside the Women's Cricket Academy, which is set to open this month. Plans are also underway to launch the Andhra Premier League (APL) cricket tournament soon, he added. Additionally, he shared updates on the renovation of

the Visakhapatnam Cricket Stadium, which is being undertaken at a cost of ₹50 crore. The renovation work is expected to be completed by the end of March, making the stadium ready to host Indian Premier League (IPL) matches, he explained.

As part of initiatives to promote sports, sports kits will be distributed to 147 government schools in the NTR district on the occasion of Lokesh's birthday on January 23.

Prominent attendees at the event included Andhra Pradesh Padmasali Welfare and Development Corporation Chairman Nandam Abaddhaiah, AP Medical Services and Infrastructure Development Corporation Chairman Chillipalli Srinivasa Rao, and other dignitaries.

Naidu inaugurates...

He emphasised that initiatives like AG&P Pratham - THINK Gas' projects are essential for using the state's natural gas resources to power homes, industries, and the transport sector, driving economic growth. He also expressed gratitude to Japan for its continued collaboration in energy development, contributing to Andhra Pradesh's push towards a net-zero economy.

Earlier, Naidu launched the Domestic PNG network by lighting a kitchen stove at a residence in Tiruchanur and flagged off a CNG vehicle rally to raise awareness about CNG in Tirupati. In a boost to natural gas infrastructure, he inaugurated a CNG Mother Station at Anupalli, Chittoor, and laid the foundation stone for a CNG station in Nellore.

The CM also handed over CNG-powered Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) for municipal waste collection in Tirupati, reinforcing the state's commitment to sustainable waste management.

'CM brought true Sankranti with release of pending bills'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Labour, Factory Boilers and Health Services, Vasamshetti Subhash, expressed his delight over Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's decision to release pending bills worth Rs 6,700 crore, describing it as the true Sankranti celebration for the people of the state. He commended the Chief Minister for his deep concern for the welfare of the public and various sections of society.

Subhash took a dig at the previous YSRCP government, stating that during its five-year tenure, over Rs 1 lakh crore worth of bills remained unpaid. He emphasised that while the state was burdened with loans and interest, it was only under the leadership of Chandrababu that these long-pending dues were being cleared. The minister noted that under the previous government, even during festive seasons, bills were left unsettled. In contrast, with the release of funds just two days before the festival, the present government has provided a real chance for the public to cele-



brate.

In a statement released on Sunday, Minister Subhash pointed out that the Chief Minister had approved Rs 788 crore to benefit 6.5 lakh students, addressing fees pending from the previous administration.

He also highlighted significant steps taken by CM Chandrababu to clear dues for small contractors and those with pending bills under Rs 10 lakh, benefiting 26,000 people.

The minister further noted the release of funds for various sectors, including Rs 265 crore for TDS dues, Rs 241 crore for

police surrender leave arrears, Rs 500 crore for the electricity department, Rs 400 crore for Aarogyasri (the healthcare scheme), and Rs 241 crore for farmers' rental dues. These fund releases are expected to accelerate development projects initiated by the current government.

Additionally, Subhash praised the resolution of pending Aarogyasri bills, which he said would ensure healthcare security for the poor, and appreciated the Chief Minister's efforts to resolve issues with network hospitals. He expressed gratitude to Chandrababu for his commitment to the welfare of the people, particularly the underprivileged.

The minister also criticised Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for leaving the state with a debt of over Rs 11.5 lakh crore, but acknowledged that only Chandrababu could balance welfare schemes while clearing such massive arrears. Subhash extended his Sankranti greetings to the people of the state, encouraging everyone to celebrate the festival with joy.



Recovered devotees have Srivari Darshan

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) facilitated Srivari darshan for 28 devotees on Sunday.

These devotees had sustained injuries during the stampede incident at the Vaikuntha Dwaradarshan SSD ticket counters on January 8 in Tirupati and had since recovered following treatment at SVIMS.

On January 11, TTD Chairman B.R. Naidu visited the injured at the hospital, provided compensation, and directed officials to arrange a special darshan for them once

they recovered. Acting on these instructions, the TTD organised protocol darshan for the recovered devotees.

Expressing their happiness, the devotees conveyed their heartfelt gratitude to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu, the TTD Chairman, and officials for their support.

They appreciated the swift compensation, exceptional care during their recovery, and arrangements for their Srivari Vaikuntha Dwara Darshan, enabling them to return to their homes with peace of mind.

Release of Rs 1,300 cr dues for staff inadequate: YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Nallamra Chandrasekhar Reddy, State President of the YSRCP Employees & Pensioners Wing, has strongly criticized the coalition government's announcement of releasing Rs 1,300 crore as a Sankranti gift to employees, calling the amount grossly inadequate.

Reddy pointed out that the total pending dues to state employees and pensioners stand at a massive Rs 25,000 crore, making the announced Rs 1,300 crore insufficient to address the outstanding payments. He also questioned the government's claim of releasing Rs 6,700 crore for pending dues, clarifying that only

Rs 1,300 crore is allocated for employees, with the remainder earmarked for other purposes. Reddy condemned the government's portrayal of this allocation as a significant benefit for employees during the festive season, calling it misleading.

Breaking down the Rs 1,300 crore allocation, Reddy noted that Rs 519 crore has been designated for General Provident Fund (GPF) payments, Rs 214 crore for a single installment of surrendered leave for the police department, and Rs 300 crore for Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) employee contributions. He questioned the adequacy of these amounts, particularly in light of the

substantial dues still outstanding.

Reddy also expressed concern over the government's failure to hold regular Joint Staff Council meetings, which were previously conducted to address employees' concerns. He urged the government to announce an Interim Relief (IR) of at least 30%, immediately release the two pending Dearness Allowances (DAs), set up a new Pay Revision Commission (PRC) without delay, and resume Joint Staff Council meetings. He also called for new job recruitments and the implementation of promised unemployment benefits.

Further, Reddy criticized the government for not fulfilling its pre-election promises, such as ensuring timely payment of salaries and pensions, implementing a new PRC, and regularizing contract employees. He also highlighted the plight of 3.8 lakh pensioners who have not received benefits such as DA arrears, PRC arrears, surrendered leave encashments, CPS contributions, retirement benefits, and medical reimbursements.

Reddy demanded that the government engage in meaningful discussions with employee associations to address these pressing issues and fulfill its commitments to the state's employees and pensioners.

He also outlined the government's objective to provide a 24/7 power supply with global standards, aiming to create a conducive environment for attracting investment and industrial development. To achieve this, the Chief Minister emphasised the need for timely completion of power projects, particularly renewable and energy-efficient ones, as stated by the Chief Secretary.

The Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (SECM), the designated state agency, has identified key sectors for priority action: transport, industry, buildings, agriculture, and fisheries. These sectors, particularly MSMEs, offer significant opportunities for energy savings, economic growth, and job creation.

The Chief Secretary, who released a report on Mission LiFE submitted by the BEE media adviser, also highlighted the critical role of MSMEs in driving economic growth and providing employment. He called for focused support to the fisheries sector in West Godavari and the glass and refractory industries in East and West Godavari districts to adopt advanced energy-efficient technologies.

To showcase Andhra Pradesh's initiatives, the state plans to host a global summit on energy efficiency in collaboration with BEE.

The summit will highlight the progress made under Mission LiFE, which aligns with the principle "Prakriti Rakshati Rakshita" (nature protects those who protect it).

AP to lead...

Continued from Page 1

PM Modi to...

Continued from Page 1

The officials said that random checking and frisking of people and vehicles, including two-wheelers, have been intensified while patrolling is also taking place.

"Security has been tightened near the Z-Morh tunnel. Multi-layered security arrangements have been put in place and the PM's security team, comprising the SPG personnel, has taken over the venue," they said. Jammu and Kashmir Police, paramilitary forces and the Army are part of the security apparatus for Monday's inauguration. Extensive area domination exercises, searches and patrols are being conducted for the smooth conduct of the event, the officials said. However, it is widely perceived that the arterial road link between Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh has been shut for the Prime Minister's visit.

'P-4' for poverty...

Continued from Page 1

Those who have achieved success in their respective fields should give back to society as mentors, by providing opportunities and supporting families in need," the Chief Minister appealed. Recalling the success of programmes inspired by the Janmabhoomi initiative, Naidu said they had transformed rural areas significantly, thanks to the contributions of NRIs and industrialists. He called upon everyone to replicate that spirit and create opportunities for the underprivileged sections of society.

"Poverty-free society is the goal and policy of this Government. Eradicating poverty, which is a major obstacle to progress, is our aim. However, this requires the active partnership of the people with the programmes implemented by the State Government," Naidu said.

The Chief Minister encouraged those visiting their native places for the festival to focus on this cause. He announced that a portal will soon be launched to gather suggestions, experiences, and advice from the public on the P-4 policy for 30 days. "Let us work together towards achieving zero poverty and making the Telugu society the best in the world. I earnestly appeal to everyone to join this mission for a healthy, happy, and developed Andhra Pradesh," Chandrababu Naidu concluded.

Private carriers fleece Sankranti...

Continued from Page 1

For the Vijayawada to Hyderabad route, where the regular fare for an AC bus was Rs 1,000, the price has now increased to Rs 2,500. Similarly, fares for AC buses from Vijayawada to Rayalaseema destinations such as Kadapa, Anantapur, and Tirupati have surged from Rs 1,200 to Rs 3,500-4,000. Other routes have also seen sharp hikes. For instance, the AC sleeper bus from Hyderabad to Nellore, which normally costs Rs 1,500, is now priced at Rs 3,000. Non-AC sleeper buses, which were previously priced at Rs 1,000, are now charging Rs 2,500, while non-AC buses have seen an increase from Rs 850 to Rs 2,000. From Bengaluru to Nellore, AC sleeper tickets have risen from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500, while non-AC sleeper fares have jumped from Rs 900 to Rs 2,000, and non-AC bus fares have gone up from Rs 800 to Rs 1,700.

On routes such as Guntur to Hyderabad, where ticket prices for non-AC buses typically cost Rs 450, for AC buses Rs 500, and for AC sleeper buses Rs 650-750, the prices have been increased by Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 during the festive season. With lakhs of people

expected to travel on private buses, the travel syndicate has found a way to take advantage of the situation. G Kaavyasri, a software employee from Bengaluru, spoke to The Pioneer and shared that she has to pay an additional Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 per ticket for her family of four to travel to Guduwada for the Sankranti festival. She expressed frustration with the "flexi-pricing" policy, which she felt imposed a huge burden on passengers during the festive season. She urged the authorities to take strict measures to prevent private carriers from hiking prices by two to three times.

Meanwhile, Sankranti has also seen a dramatic rise in airline ticket prices. In recent days, airfares for flights from Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Delhi to Vijayawada have increased by three to four times compared to regular days. With trains and buses fully booked, many passengers have turned to air travel, leading to soaring prices. A flight from Bengaluru to Vijayawada, which typically costs between Rs 3,500 and Rs 3,750, is now priced at Rs 13,000 to Rs 16,000 for these three days. Flights from Hyderabad to Vijayawada, usually under Rs 3,000, have surged to Rs 11,000 to Rs 16,000.

Ban no deterrence for...

Continued from Page 1

This is not an isolated incident. In Kothuru Tadepalli, residents raised concerns about the safety and law and order implications linked to cockfighting. The High Court had explicitly ordered strict enforcement of the ban in these areas, resulting in the police displaying warning banners. However, despite these warnings, arrangements for cockfights in nearby areas like Ampapuram and others continued unabated.

The influence of political figures in the NTR district has compounded the issue. Supporters of another Cabinet-rank MLA are reportedly building large cockfight arenas in Ramavarappadu and Enikepadu, replete with spectator galleries and tents. Despite direct warnings from law enforcement, including police chiefs from both NTR and Krishna districts, officials appear to have been unable or unwilling to intervene.

Krishna District, known for its strong connections to this illicit tradition, also faces similar challenges. Venues in areas like

Ampapuram, Surampalli, Gannavaram, Edupugallu, and Kankipadu are fully prepared for cockfighting events, despite repeated advisories from the Krishna District Superintendent of Police, R. Gangadhara Rao. His warnings, however, seem to have had little impact.

The lack of action from local police and revenue authorities has led to frustration among residents, many of whom believe that the authorities are complicit in the continuation of these illegal events. As public outcry grows, the failure of the police to dismantle cockfighting arenas or halt these events raises critical questions about the enforcement of court orders and the accountability of local officials.

This situation highlights the urgent need for stronger legal enforcement and stricter penalties for those violating the ban. As the Sankranti festivities continue, it remains to be seen if authorities will finally take meaningful action or if the illegal practice will persist, emboldened by political influence and the failure of law enforcement to act decisively.

'Next 30 years belong to the youth'

162nd birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda observed



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Grand celebrations were organised on the National Youth Day, marking Swami Vivekananda's 162nd birth anniversary, at the Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Sunday. The Youth Services Department organised the celebrations, attended by around 600 rep-

representatives from across the State. TDP MLC Paruchuri Ashok Babu, Youth Services Department Commissioner K Sarada Devi and others were guests.

Addressing the gathering, MLC Ashok Babu said that youths are the main pillars and assets of the country. "The next 30 years belong to the youth. Vast opportunities

await them and they have a bright future," he said.

Ashok Babu mentioned Swami Vivekananda's speech in Chicago, and added that those words are an inspiration to youngsters.

He added that the State government led by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has provided many opportunities to the youth

and they have the skill to create wonders. He asked youngsters to use these opportunities and grow in their careers, and make their dreams come true.

K Sarada Devi said that Swami Vivekananda, who was born in Calcutta, was the first Indian who showed India's strength to the world by participating in the interfaith

prayers in Chicago. As a student of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he constituted several Ramakrishna Maths across the country, she added.

Youth Services Department Deputy Director SVDS Ramakrishna, Krishna and NTR districts Chief Executive Officer U Srinivasa Rao, Eluru CEO Prabhakara Rao and others were present.

Customs seize foreign gold worth Rs 14.37 crore

Bust smuggling gangs at various places in AP in a three-day-long operation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major operation, the officers of the Customs Preventive Commissionerate, Vijayawada, have intercepted 16 persons carrying smuggled gold and seized 17.90 kilograms of foreign-origin smuggled gold worth ₹14.37 crore. The seizures were made at various locations viz., Tadipatri Railway Station, Nellore Railway Station and Bollapalli Toll Plaza, according to Sadhu Narsimha Reddy, Commissioner.

In a release on Sunday, he stated that acting on a specific intelligence, teams comprising officers from Customs Commissionerate (Preventive), Vijayawada, Central GST, Tirupati and Central GST, Guntur Commissionerate busted the smuggling gangs at various places in Andhra Pradesh in a three-day-long coordinated operation. These intercepted



persons were carrying the smuggled gold from Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It is noticed that, in some cases, they deliberately erased the foreign markings to camouflage the smuggled nature of the gold.

In this entire operation, 16 persons including a women carrier were arrested under the provisions of the Customs Act, 1962. The accused have been remanded in 14 days judicial custody by the Court of Special Judge for Economic offences, Visakhapatnam. The Customs Department remains vigilant and committed to tackling smuggling and safeguarding the

economic and national interests of the country. Citizens have been encouraged to report any suspicious activity related to smuggling or evasion of customs duty. He further said that in the year 2023-24, the Vijayawada Customs (Preventive) Commissionerate made seizures of smuggled gold to the tune of more than 32 kg, worth ₹19 crore. The Vijayawada Customs team, in the financial year 2024-25 so far, has seized 20.41 kilograms of contraband gold valued at Rs 16.15 crore, and 65 lakh smuggled cigarette sticks worth Rs 6.5 crore.

Tiruvuru TDP MLA in centre of controversy again

Kolikapudi accused of physically assaulting YSRCP woman ward member

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLA from Tiruvuru, Kolikapudi Srinivasa Rao, has once again found himself at the centre of controversy. The latest incident took place in Gopalapuram village, A Konduru Mandal, NTR district, over a newly constructed CC road under the Palle Panduga programme. The MLA is reportedly accused of physically assaulting Bhukya Chanti, a YSRCP woman ward member, during an attempt to mediate a dispute.

Chanti alleges that MLA Srinivasa Rao attacked her at her residence two days ago. Distressed by the altercation, she reportedly consumed pesticide. She was initially treated at Tiruvuru Hospital and later transferred to Help Hospital in Vijayawada, where she is currently under observation. Doctors have confirmed that her condition is stable and

not life-threatening. The controversy revolves around the newly constructed CC road in Gopalapuram. A family dispute between two brothers—one affiliated with the TDP and the other a supporter of the YSRCP—escalated when barricades were put up on the road by Chanti's husband, Krishna, and their sons. The family demanded that the road remain closed until the dispute was resolved.

Upon hearing about the obstruction, MLA Srinivasa Rao visited the site, accompanied by party leaders, while attending an event at TDP leader Rambabu's house. He intervened on behalf of Rambabu and instructed Chanti's family to remove the barricades. However, the argument reportedly escalated, with both sides unwilling to back down.

This incident adds to the growing list of controversies

surrounding MLA Srinivasa Rao, which include previous disputes with his own party leaders. TDP leadership, including Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, has previously cautioned him regarding his conduct. In this case, Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) has been tasked with addressing the ongoing issues in the Tiruvuru constituency.

The altercation has sparked public outrage and raised concerns about the MLA's behaviour. While TDP leaders have yet to issue an official statement, YSRCP supporters and local residents have condemned the MLA's alleged actions and are demanding accountability. The issue has now been brought to the attention of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who has instructed party leaders to seek an explanation from MLA Srinivasa Rao.

RINL introduces new VRS amidst criticism

Invites eligible employees to apply by January 31

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), has launched a new Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) aimed at streamlining its workforce. The scheme invites eligible employees to apply by January 31.

According to a circular issued by the HR Department of RINL, the primary goal of the scheme is to rationalise the current workforce, optimise human resource utilisation, reduce costs, and enhance productivity. "The scheme is designed to provide a smooth transition for our employees while also helping the company to optimise its workforce and improve oper-

ational efficiency," said a RINL spokesperson.

However, the announcement has drawn criticism from the Visakha Ukta Parirakshana Porata Committee, led by J. Ayodhya Ramu. Ramu expressed concerns about RINL's financial health, pointing out that the company currently struggles to pay pending salary arrears for both employees and contract staff.

"The RINL management should allocate at least Rs 250 crore to clear the pending salary arrears that have accumulated over time. This outstanding amount is due to employees and contract staff, many of whom are facing financial hardships because of



the delayed payments. The inability of the company to meet its basic obligations, like paying salaries on time, raises serious concerns about its financial stability. If the company is struggling to pay its workforce the salaries they

are rightfully owed, how can it possibly manage to set aside the necessary funds to provide compensation for employees opting for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS)," Ramu questioned.

Despite the opposition, RINL's management hopes the VRS will help in optimising its workforce and improving operational efficiency at the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. The scheme is expected to be an important step in RINL's ongoing efforts to reduce costs and enhance productivity in a challenging economic environment.

Eligible employees can register for the VRS through an online platform starting January 15. To be eligible, employees must have completed a minimum of 15 years of service and be at least 45 years old.

The compensation package includes 35 days' salary for every completed year of service and 25 days for any remaining service period until superannuation.

No clean chit for KTR in Formula-E: Danam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

I did not give a clean chit to BRS Working President KT Rama Rao in connection with the Formula E-Car Racing case, the Congress's Khairatabad MLA, Danam Nagender said on Sunday.

Condemning the social media campaign against him saying Danam Nagender spoke against the government, he clarified that conducting the Formula E-Car Racing event was good for attracting investments and for the development of Telangana.

"I had only said that Hyderabad's brand image got a boost after the Formula E-Car Racing event. I told KTR this then itself and he took my advice regarding the Formula E-Car Race event. However, some people have distorted my comments and are campaigning

that I spoke against the government," he said.

Danam said that a probe by the ACB and the ED is going on about the Formula E-Car Racing event. He said that he has doubts that a quid pro quo deal took place involving transfer of funds in connection with the Formula E-Car Racing event during elections.

Danam said that facts will come out after the probe. "I did not give a clean chit to KTR. I am a fighter and I do not fear even a by-poll. There is no change in my comments on HYDRABAD. I am appealing to the government to rethink about HYDRABAD," he said.

He said that BJP leaders did a one day 'Musi Nidra' in houses located on the Musi River bank. However, ACs were installed in the houses where the BJP leaders slept before they went there, he added.

MLC Yesu Ratnam releases 'Swatantra TV Calendar'



PNS ■ GUNTUR

MLC Yesu Ratnam released the 2025 calendar of the popular Telugu news channel

Swatantra TV here on Sunday.

On the occasion, the MLC congratulated the management of the Swatantra news channel for its success.



Sankranti rush: Waltair Division steps up crowd management

Additional ticket counters and ATMs have been installed

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the Sankranti season approaches, the surge in passenger traffic at railway stations and onboard trains has resulted in a significant rise in footfall. To ensure smooth and efficient travel during this busy period, the Waltair Division of East Coast Railway has implemented a range of special crowd management measures at all major railway stations.

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager K. Saandeep emphasised the importance of these initiatives. "As the Sankranti season brings a substantial rise in passenger numbers, we are committed to ensuring a hassle-free and safe travel experience for all passengers. With the surge in demand, we have intensified our efforts to provide efficient services and maintain safety standards."

In response to the higher traffic, additional ticket counters and Automatic Ticket Vending Machines (ATVMs) have been installed at stations to ease ticketing processes. Along with these, dedicated enquiry counters have been set up to provide real-time assistance to passengers.

AU gets Rs. 10 cr for research development

To focus on marine life and ecological research



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra University (AU), ranked 41st in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) this year, has been allocated Rs. 10 crore for research development. This funding comes as part of a new strategic initiative by the Union Ministry of Science and Technology, which has earmarked Rs. 100 crore for BITS Pilani, designated as the hub university.

BITS Pilani will subsequently distribute these funds among several 'spoke' universities, including AU, for their respective research endeavours. "AU's research focus will primarily center around marine life, organisms, and related ecological aspects," stated a university official. "The university aims to leverage this funding to conduct cutting-edge research and foster innovation in these critical areas."

Professor G. Shashibhushan Rao, Vice-Chancellor of AU, confirmed the project's five-year duration. The allocated funds will be utilised for acquiring state-of-the-art research equipment, hardware, and software. Additionally, scholarships will be provided to

researchers across various departments, including the College of Science and the engineering faculty.

Prof. Rao said that the Union Ministry of Science and Technology is boosting university research by allocating Rs. 100 crore to top-20 universities. These 'hubs' will distribute Rs. 10 crore each to 80 other universities ('spokes') for research projects, focusing on institutions ranked in the top 100 of the NIRF.

This funding model represents a departure from previous years when the Department of Science and Technology directly allocated research grants to individual universities. By channelling funds through hub universities, the government aims to encourage healthy competition and enhance the overall quality and impact of research across the nation.

"This initiative reflects the Union Ministry's vision to foster a more coordinated and collaborative research environment in India," said a senior academic. "Universities like AU will play a crucial role in contributing to the nation's scientific and technological advancement through this collaborative approach."

Set higher goals inspired by Swami Vivekananda: DC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha has said that the youth should set high goals inspired by Swami Vivekananda and work diligently to achieve them, regardless of the challenges they face.

On the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary and National Youth Day, a special programme was organised by the District Youth Welfare Department at Raghavaiah Park, Vijayawada. The Collector paid floral tributes to the statue of Swami Vivekananda, accompanied by officials and extended greetings on National Youth Day.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Lakshminsha urged the youth to draw inspiration from Swami Vivekananda's life, which was marked by simplicity and continuous learning. He encouraged them to mould themselves with determination and move forward with confidence. He highlighted that Swami Vivekananda's teachings serve as a guiding light for the success of young people.

IT'S IN THE FAMILY!



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a world where extraordinary accomplishments often stem from individual brilliance, the Konatala family stands out as a beacon of collective talent and dedication. Originally from Anakapalli and now residing in China, the family of four has etched their names into history by setting multiple Guinness World Records in yoga and sports.

"We are proud to be the only family in the world to hold a Guinness World Record in the Yoga and Sports category," shared Vijay Konatala, speaking to The Pioneer. Their inspiring jour-

ney began in 2021 when Vijay achieved a Guinness World Record by performing advanced yoga poses—Astavakrasana, Mayurasana, and Bakasana—for the longest duration. His achievements didn't stop there; he earned recognition from the Asian Book of Records, India Book of Records, and Nobel World Records.

However, Vijay is not the sole star in the family. His wife Jyoti pushed the boundaries of possibility when she set a Guinness World Record just five days before giving birth in 2021.

Holding poses such as Vrksasana, Samakonasana,

Sirshasana, and Mandalasana for the longest time, Jyoti made a powerful statement about the capabilities of women. "This achievement shatters common perceptions about physical exertion in late pregnancy. When practised under proper guidance, yoga is safe and beneficial for both mother and baby," Jyoti said, inspiring mothers worldwide to embrace yoga.

The next generation of Konatalas has continued to raise the bar. Fourteen-year-old Jasmita set a Guinness World Record in June 2024 for completing the fastest time to skip rope on one leg in one minute. Not to be outdone, her five-year-old broth-

er Shankar joined the record books in October 2024, performing 129 skipping rope skips on a trampoline in one minute. His feat not only made him the youngest record-holder in this category but also shattered a 30-year-old record held by Japanese professional athlete Yu Okamoto.

"We are incredibly happy that our son, a five-year-old Indian boy, has broken the Guinness record of a 30-year-old Japanese athlete," said Vijay, brimming with pride. Beyond the accolades, the Konatala family sees their journey as a mission to promote Indian yoga and sportsmanship globally.

Beautification works underway in Eluru city: DC

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi has said that beautification works are being carried out in Eluru city and called upon people to participate in the process and extend cooperation.

District Collector, accompanied by SP K Pratap Siva Kishore, Joint Collector P Dhatri Reddy and MLA Badeti Radhakrishnaiah, participated in the road divider beautification works here on Sunday. The road divider beautification works were carried out as part of the city's beautification. The road divider from the Fire Station centre to the ZP office was beautified today.

On the occasion, Collector K Vetri Selvi said that everyone should be a partner in the development and beautification of Eluru city with the social consciousness that it is their city. She said that the programmes to make Helapuri city clean and beautiful will continue. She appealed to the people not to spoil the beauty of the city with posters and other writings on walls, road dividers and other places. She revealed that special activities would be implemented for



the beautification and development of Eluru.

Eluru MLA Radha Krishnaiah called upon people to be a part of the programme to make the city a beautiful city. The onus of making Eluru city beautiful lies on all, he noted, adding that the businessmen and the residents of the city should work hard to keep the city clean and pleasant. The MLA warned of imposing a fine if wall posters are pasted on walls. The same is repeated in the second case.

SP KPS Kishore expressed happiness for participating in

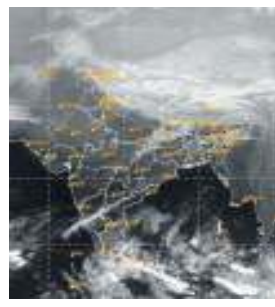
the city beautification works and emphasized the need to maintain hygiene and tidy conditions across the city. He called upon people to keep the surroundings clean and beautiful. The SP said that Eluru city should be number one in the country in the Swachh Bharat campaign organized by the Prime Minister and that the police would continue to provide full support and cooperation in such programmes.

Joint Collector Dhatri Reddy appealed to the people to work together to make Eluru City an example for the country in sanitation manage-

ment and garbage collection.

"The Government is spending lakhs of rupees on city beautification work and making it attractive. Unfortunately, many people are spoiling the beauty of the city with unauthorized hoardings, flexi and digital banners. The municipal corporation and police will take action against those who are involved in such actions as per the 1997 Act and those who obstruct the city beautification," the

Joint Collector made it clear. DSP D Shrawan Kumar was among those who took part in the programme.



Moderate rain likely in Rayalaseema in next 3 days: Met

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Light to moderate rain is expected at isolated places in Rayalaseema over the next three days, according to the Meteorological Centre's report on Sunday. The same weather conditions are likely to persist in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh for the next 48 hours. Dry weather is forecast to continue in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh for the next 7 days, in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh from January 14 to 18, and in Rayalaseema from January 15 to 18.

Over the last 24 hours, dry weather prevailed in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema. The lowest minimum temperature recorded was 15.5 degrees Celsius at Aroyavaram in the plains of Rayalaseema on the night between Saturday and Sunday, the report added.

Amaravati will be built in three years: Minister Parthasarathy



PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR, K Parthasarathy, has assured that the capital city of Amaravati will be constructed within the next three years.

Accompanied by his wife Kamala Lakshmi, the Minister took part in Sankranti celebrations held at Kothagudem village in Chatrai Mandal on Sunday. The couple received a warm welcome from the villagers, and the Minister lit the traditional Bhogi Mantalu. He extended his heartfelt Sankranti wishes to the people on the occasion.

Speaking at the event, Parthasarathy emphasised that Amaravati will be developed as a world-class capital with financial assistance from

the World Bank. He asserted that the Chandrababu Naidu-led government is committed to the state's development, with the Chief Minister determined to achieve rapid progress and deliver a top-tier capital city.

The Minister also pledged to complete the Chintalapudi lift irrigation scheme, ensuring the provision of drinking and irrigation water to the region. He highlighted that development works worth 20 crore had already been undertaken in the Nuzvid constituency.

Parthasarathy praised Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh for leveraging advanced technology to enhance governance and attract significant investments

to the state, thereby generating large-scale employment opportunities. "The government is ensuring that payments for farmers' paddy produce are disbursed within 48 hours of procurement. Promises made to the people are being fulfilled one after another," he remarked.

He further noted that the government has increased social security pensions from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 and allocated Rs 1,600 crore for road repair works across the state. Additionally, steps are being taken to introduce free bus travel for women shortly, he clarified.

Sub-Collector Smaran Raj, alongside leaders from the TDP and JSP, also participated in the event.

Huge response to 'Atom on Wheels' mobile exhibition

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

To raise awareness and educate the public about the benefits and applications of nuclear energy, a special campaign titled "Atom on Wheels" was launched by the Government Women's Junior College, Srikakulam, on November 13, 2024. The campaign featured a dedicated mobile exhibition bus, which was flagged off in the presence of dignitaries.

Over November and December, more than 39,000 people were informed about various applications of nuclear



energy through engaging mediums such as panels, LED TVs, audio-video projection systems, and pamphlets.

The mobile exhibition is set to continue for the next two months, covering additional mandals in Srikakulam and

Vizianagaram districts. It will reach thousands more across numerous villages in a phased manner.

During its initial phase, the exhibition visited around 80 villages across 11 mandals in Srikakulam district. The mobile bus reached schools, markets, community centres, panchayat offices, and hospitals, engaging diverse groups, including school students, women, youth, gram panchayat members, and employees of local organisations.

As part of the campaign, educational and animated

films highlighting the scientific aspects and safety of nuclear energy were showcased. Additionally, creative leaflets were distributed to address various topics related to nuclear energy.

Officials accompanying the bus played an active role in addressing public curiosities, resolving apprehensions, and clearing doubts about nuclear energy. The initiative received an enthusiastic response from participants, demonstrating a growing interest in understanding the societal benefits of this energy source.



Police dismantle cockfight arena, arrest organisers

PNS ■ BAPATLA

Sankranti festival celebrations.

The police raided and dismantled a cockfight arena at Jampani village on Sunday.

Vemuri Circle Inspector Anjaneyulu informed the media that, acting on a tip-off, a police team led by Sub-Inspector Ravi Krishna carried out the raid near a sugar factory in the village, where they discovered the cockfight arena.

The police demolished the shamiyana (tent) and destroyed the arena by tilling the land with a tractor. They also seized the roosters, which were prepared for the cockfight, along with flex banners and other related materials.

Following the instructions of Superintendent of Police Tushar Dudy, police teams, under the supervision of Deputy Superintendent of Police Srinivasa Rao, conducted checks across several villages. The SP issued a stern warning, emphasising strict action against cockfights and any gambling activities during the

Raids in Palnadu
In a recent operation, the Palnadu police raided Konakanchi Vari Palem village in Rompicherla mandal on Sunday and destroyed several cockfight arenas.

Palnadu SP Kanchi Srinivasa Rao informed the media that widespread raids were being carried out across the district to curb the practice of cockfights.

A police team, led by SI Ashok, conducted the raid and discovered an active arena set up for a cockfight. The authorities demolished the arena by ploughing the land. Drones were also deployed to detect cockfights being organised in remote areas.

The SP issued a stern warning against those involved in organising cockfights and other forms of gambling, emphasising that stringent action would be taken. He also urged the public to report any such activities by calling the police helpline at 112.



Coalition govt failed to spread festive cheer among people: Kannababu

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Former minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) Kakinada district president Kurasala Kannababu has criticised the State government for failing to spread festive cheer among the people during Sankranti.

Addressing the media on Sunday, he pointed out the sharp rise in essential commodity prices, increased electricity tariffs, and the lack of welfare initiatives, which he said have left the underprivileged struggling to celebrate the festival.

Kannababu lamented that rural families, once beneficiaries of YSRCP's welfare schemes, are now grappling with financial



hardships and despair. He accused the ruling coalition of celebrating Sankranti within its leadership circles while ignoring the struggles of the common people. Highlighting the neglect of flagship schemes such as "Ammavodi" and "Rythu Bharosa," Kannababu alleged delays in initiatives like "Talli ki

Vandanam." He recalled that during the YSRCP regime, welfare funds were released ahead of Sankranti, ensuring even the poorest families could partake in the festivities.

The former minister also raised concerns over the lack of transparency in the operations of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD). He questioned the involvement of unqualified individuals in reviews and alleged misuse of visitor data, demanding accountability from the government.

Responding to TDP leader Nara Lokesh's claims about industrial stagnation, Kannababu countered by highlighting the achievements of the YSRCP government. He cited projects like

the Greenko Renewable Energy initiative and the establishment of industrial clusters, which he said were implemented despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. He dismissed Lokesh's claims that industrialists were hesitant to invest in the state as baseless and lacking evidence.

Kannababu also commended the YSRCP's efforts in transforming education through initiatives like "Nadu-Nedu," "Ammavodi," and "Vidya Deevana," which have improved school infrastructure and empowered students. He urged the ruling coalition to prioritise governance and fulfilling promises rather than resorting to baseless criticism of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's leadership.

40 sharp-edged knives seized



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

As part of ongoing efforts to curb cockfights, the East Godavari police seized 240 sharp-edged knives and arrested two individuals at Krishnuniipalem village in Godavaram mandal on Sunday.

SI Pawan Kumar informed

the media that acting on a tip-off, the police raided a house in the village and discovered the 240 knives, which are typically tied to one of the legs of roosters during cockfights.

The police arrested two people for supplying the sharp-edged knives to the cockfight organisers.

Rs 4-cr jewellery in theft cases recovered



PNS ■ ELURU

The police have recovered 2.206 kg of gold jewellery linked to 23 burglary and theft cases and handed it over to the victims on Sunday.

Superintendent of Police (SP) K. Pratap Shiva Kishore informed the media that the recovered jewellery, valued at over Rs 4 crore, was returned to some victims in a formal event. The SP personally handed over the recovered valuables to a few of them.

Explaining the department's new approach, the SP highlighted that under recently revised laws, the police are now responsible for returning stolen valu-

ables to victims even before the court case concludes. However, he urged the victims to attend court hearings and cooperate during the trial to ensure that the accused are brought to justice.

In light of the rising number of thefts, the SP advised citizens to take preventive measures, including installing CCTV cameras around their homes and premises. The SP assured that all stolen property related to these cases would be fully recovered within the next two months and returned to the rightful owners. He also commended Additional SP Surya Chandra Rao for his efforts in solving the 23 burglary and theft cases and recovering the stolen items.

Cops' families celebrate Sankranti

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Under the leadership of NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu, the police department, along with its officials, staff, and their families, celebrated the Sankranti Sambaralu at the Armed Reserve Grounds near Mahatma Gandhi Road in Vijayawada on Saturday. The event featured traditional celebrations such as Bhogi Mantalu, Rangoli, Gangingedullata, Gobis, and various cultural programs organized by the police staff and their families.

Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Gowthami Shali, Tirumaleswara Reddy, Krishnamurthy Naidu, SVD Prasad, Trainee IPS Manisha, ADCPs AVL Prasanna Kumar, M Raja Rao, K Koteswara Rao, AR ACP D Prasada Rao, and other senior officials attended the celebrations and expressed their joy at the successful conduct of the event.

Addressing the attendees, CP Rajasekhara Babu shared that the police ground had transformed into a festive village, reflecting the spirit of Sankranti. He emphasized that



the festival should be celebrated by everyone, regardless of religion or caste. "I am delighted to celebrate Sankranti with the police family. I believe this festival will usher in a new era in people's lives," he said.

The Commissioner also highlighted the importance of wearing helmets to reduce road accidents among two-wheeler riders. He thanked the media for their efforts in raising awareness about helmet usage. He shared that in a personal verification of 1,193 two-wheelers at Benz Circle using a drone, 1,004 riders were found to be wearing helmets.

Rajasekhara Babu urged the public to adopt helmet usage

starting from the Sankranti festival and assured that the police would work to reduce road accidents. He also made it clear that strict action would be taken against those violating helmet rules.

Furthermore, the Commissioner warned against organizing cockfights and gambling during the Sankranti festival. He reminded the public that such activities are prohibited by law, and stringent action would be taken against anyone found involved. The police department has already dismantled several cockfight arenas and reiterated that strict measures would be taken if any such activities were found.



Minister flags off e-autos

PNS ■ RAYACHOTI

Minister for Transport M Ramprasada Reddy flagged five e-auto rickshaws which were donated by the ICICI bank for garbage collection here on Sunday.

ICICI Bank donated 5 e-auto rickshaws worth Rs 48 lakh to the Rayachoti municipality for garbage collection. The Minister drove the auto rickshaw for a distance on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister assured of developing Rayachoti town. He said that steps were taken to make Rayachoti town garbage-free by extending vehicles and other equipment to the town. The Minister thanked the ICICI Bank management for donating five e-auto rickshaws worth Rs 48 lakh for garbage collection.

ACROSS THE STATES



Arms and ammunition seized in Odisha's Malkangiri

A huge cache of arms and ammunition has been seized in a dense forest in Odisha's Malkangiri district, police said on Sunday. The arms dump, suspected to be of Maoists, was unearthed when District Voluntary Force (DVF) personnel were conducting a search operation in Jinelguda forest area under the jurisdiction of MV-79 police station on Saturday. Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Vivekanand Sharma said. The seized items, which were found buried in the ground, included one self-loading rifle, two magazines, four ammunition charger clips, 50 rounds of 7.62 mm SLR ball ammunition, two rounds of .303 ball ammunition, one magazine pouch, daily use items, a syringe, a mobile phone with SIM and some Maoist literature, the SP said. Sharma said they suspected that the red rebels, who had set up camps in the area, fled the spot leaving behind the items in the wake of the search operations. The seized arms and ammunition belong to Maoist cadres of AOBSSZC (Andhra-Odisha Border Special Zonal Committee) and were aimed to target civilians and security forces, he said.



'HMPV not new; stay calm, take basic precautions'

Amid growing concerns over the detection of human metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases in India, health experts have emphasised the virus is not new and advised people to stay calm and take basic precautions. HMPV, that causes upper respiratory infection, recently gained attention following an outbreak in China. While it can affect people of all age groups, experts said India has not witnessed any unusual surge in cases. The HMPV typically spreads through the air, especially during winter and early spring. HMPV is not a new virus; it was first identified in 2001. The virus is an emerging health concern, but there is no reason to panic. Understanding its symptoms, taking necessary precautions, and adhering to testing protocols are critical to managing its spread, effectively, said Dr Aabid Amin Bhat, the Medical Director at Ujala Cygnus Group of Hospitals. He said the common symptoms of an HMPV infection include cough, fever, fatigue, respiratory illness, sore throat, body aches, and gastrointestinal issues in some cases.



Maha Kumbh set for auspicious start on 'Paush Purnima'

Maha Kumbh 2025 -- a 45-day event billed as the biggest gathering of humans in one place -- is all set to begin Monday with the first major bathing ritual or Shahi Snan on the auspicious occasion of Paush Purnima at the Sangam, the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and the mystical Saraswati rivers here. The present edition of the Kumbh is being held after 12 years, though seers claim the celestial permutations and combinations for the event are taking place after 144 years, making the occasion even more auspicious. Perhaps that is why the Uttar Pradesh government is confident of 35 crore devotees visiting Prayagraj this time. Already the numbers are telling, with a record 25 lakh people taking the holy dip on Saturday, two days ahead of the formal start of the event.

UP gov't proposes 'no helmet, no fuel' policy to curb road accidents: Kishor Dwivedi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Transport Department has proposed a strict no helmet, no fuel policy across cities in the state in an effort to reduce road accidents and fatalities involving two-wheelers. Transport Commissioner Brajesh Narain Singh issued an official letter on January 8 directing the fuel station operators not to sell fuel to two-wheeler riders who are not wearing helmets including the pillion. The letter sent to the district magistrates of all 75 districts in the state and also marked to the divisional commissioners emphasizes the urgency of the measure, citing data that shows a significant number of two-wheeler accident victims do not wear helmets. It also highlights directions issued by Chief Minister Yogi



Adityanath earlier this month during a review of road safety measures in the state. The chief minister had noted that annually 25,000-26,000 lives are lost in the state due to road accidents. The majority of deaths in road accidents involving two-wheeler riders are due to the non-use of helmets.

'India's young will power its rise to becoming developed by 2047'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Sunday that the capabilities of India's young population will power the country's rise to becoming developed. Addressing the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue here, he said some people may find the goal of India becoming developed difficult but it is not impossible. No power can stop India from becoming a developed country if the spirit of Viksit Bharat guides its every step policy and decision, he said, highlighting the strength and numbers of the country's young population.

Big targets have to be set for a country to march forward... This is what today's India is doing, Modi said, adding that the country is accomplishing numerous goals in different sectors ahead of time.

India has set the target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2030 and will meet the goal before that, he said.

The prime minister added that the government alone cannot drive the country forward and told youngsters drawn from across the country that the ownership in Viksit Bharat is not Modi's alone but also of them. Their ideas will



be part of the country's policies and give it direction, he said. Achieving ambitious goals requires the active participation and collective effort of every citizen of the nation, he added. The prime minister cited the rise of the USA following its economic crisis in the 1930s and Singapore's rise from a backward region lacking basic facilities to a major economic power to stress the need for setting big goals and sincerely working towards them. He noted how India became an open defecation-free country, manufactured Covid vaccines and inoculated

its population against the virus. Asserting that the 25 years till 2047 are India's golden period (Amrit Kaal), Modi said he has full confidence that the young population will realise the dream of Viksit Bharat. This is the time for a quantum jump, he said. The country also hopes to host the Olympics in the next decade and is working towards it with full dedication, he added.

Swami Vivekananda had a lot of faith in the young generation and said the youth will find solutions to all problems, Modi said. He added that he has absolute faith, blind

faith in his words. The event was held on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary which is observed as the National Youth Festival.

Stressing the role of high growth in India's development, Modi recounted how the country's capacity and budget in different fields have risen with the growth of its economy. The budget for infrastructure has grown six times in 10 years, he said. Asserting that the Indian economy is on its way to becoming the third biggest in the world, the prime minister said it will cross USD 10 trillion by the next decade.



'5,000 youths have shunned Naxalism to join mainstream'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Sunday said Naxalism has declined significantly in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli as nearly 5,000 youths have quit the outlawed movement, joined the mainstream and many of them have got employment. In the next five years, Gadchiroli will become the highest revenue-generating district in Maharashtra, he said at the BJP's state-level convention in Shirdi in Ahilyanagar district. Gadkari appealed to the BJP workers to channel the party's electoral success into meaningful societal transformation. The victory in the last year's state assembly polls should lead to the establishment of surajya (good governance), he said.

Highlighting the progress made in Naxal-affected Gadchiroli, he said there was a time when visiting some areas in the district was diffi-

cult even for public representatives. Today, nearly 5,000 youths have shunned Naxalism and come back to the mainstream. Many have got jobs like drivers, fitters among others, the senior BJP leader said. Engineering and polytechnic colleges have been established and garment manufacturing for exports has begun in the district, he said. The area, once backward, has now generated employment for 10,000 tribal youths, Gadkari said. In the next five years, Gadchiroli will become the highest revenue-generating district, he added. Gadkari also emphasised the importance of addressing the issues of unemployment, malnutrition and lack of education.

The soul of our party is to create a powerful nation that can guide the world, he said. He highlighted the need for transformation in rural areas and the uplift of labourers and the poor.

ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION DEBATE

EC has termed poll code vital for ensuring level playing field

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

One of the key reasons cited by the government to push for simultaneous polls has been that frequent imposition of model code disrupts development work and normal public life, but the Election Commission has asserted it is a vital instrumentality aimed at providing level playing field in polls. According to the bills brought by the government to implement one nation, one election, there is an imperative need for holding simultaneous elections for various reasons including polls becoming expensive and time-consuming.

The Constitution amendment bill to implement one nation, one election said the imposition of a Model Code of Conduct in poll-bound parts of the country puts on hold the entire development programmes and causes disruption in normal public life.



It said that frequent poll code imposition also impacts the functioning of services and diverts the manpower from their core activities to election duties for prolonged periods. But the poll authority is of the view that it would not be correct to view the application of MCC in terms of disruption as it is a vital instrumentality aimed at providing level playing field to all stakeholders involved in campaign. Responding to a questionnaire

in March 2023 by the law commission on simultaneous polls, the EC had said the applicability of the model code depends on the cycle and frequency of elections and rationalisation of the same would to that extent, curtail the time of MCC. It has been evolved by the Election Commission in consultation with political parties as a voluntarily code of conduct to be followed by all stakeholders and is an integral to the design of conducting free and fair elections and for credible outcomes, it said.

'AAP failed to fulfil promises, 'destroyed' Delhi'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, the BJP on Sunday alleged that the AAP government in the capital failed to fulfil all of its key poll promises and destroyed the city.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, senior party leader and Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri listed 10 promises including cleaning the Yamuna and making Delhi pollution-free that AAP made ahead of the



2020 polls but did not fulfil. Targeting Arvind Kejriwal, Puri said the AAP national convener only spreads lies and did not make any effort to fulfil the promises his party made to vot-

ers. Kejriwal came into politics saying that he would not accept big government bungalows and only travel in his Wagon R but built a sheesh mahal for himself to live a luxurious life during his stint as Delhi chief minister, the BJP leader charged. AAP destroyed Delhi, he added.

Puri also targeted the AAP government in Punjab, saying the party had promised to end the menace of drugs in the border state but instead the drug lords there got more energy.

J-K: Ganderbal residents hope Z-Morh tunnel will boost tourism

PNS ■ SONAMARG (JK)

Residents of Ganderbal district living on either side of the 6.5 kilometre Z-Morh tunnel on Srinagar-Sonamarg highway are hopeful that the mega-infrastructure project will boost the local economy and help eradicate unemployment in the area.



It is a good thing that the Z-Morh tunnel will open soon, immensely benefiting the locals. Sonamarg is breathtaking in winter but the road closure prevented visitors. We are grateful to the government for this tunnel, a local shopkeeper, Mohammad Yousuf Shera, said.

Shera believes the year-

round connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg will elevate the destination's global appeal. Sonamarg will now be famous not only in the country but around the world. I think foreigners will like this place, he said.

Highlighting the strategic importance, Shera said the

tunnel will also benefit armed forces. There should be facilities for the soldiers who to defend the country at the borders. The tunnel would facilitate the soldiers in terms of better connectivity, he added.

The Z-Morh tunnel has reduced travel time between Srinagar and Sonamarg allowing vehicles to travel at speeds of up to 70 kilometre per hour compared to the earlier 30 kilometre per hour on the winding roads. The tunnel has a capacity of handling 1,000 vehicles per hour. The project will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, his first visit to the union territory after the assembly polls.

BJP will demolish all slums if it comes to power in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed that the BJP would demolish all slums in Delhi if voted to power in the upcoming assembly elections.



Addressing a press conference in the Shakur Basti area here, the former chief minister accused the BJP of prioritising land acquisition over the welfare of slum dwellers. They want your votes first and your land after the elections, Kejriwal said, referring to the BJP. There was no immediate response from the BJP.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief further challenged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to withdraw all cases

against people living in jhuggis and resettle those displaced within 24 hours, vowing not to contest the elections if the BJP complies.

I will not contest the elections if Amit Shah withdraws all the cases against the slum dwellers or displaced people. If

the BJP fails, I will contest and stand as a shield for the slum dwellers. Let's see who destroys them, Kejriwal claimed.

He also criticised the BJP's Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan scheme, calling it an eyewash. In the past 10 years, they have constructed only 4,700 flats for slum dwellers. Delhi has 4 lakh jhuggis. At this rate, it will take them 1,000 years to provide homes for all slum dwellers in the city, he said.

Kejriwal also alleged that the BJP has plans to take over the land currently occupied by slum dwellers without addressing their housing needs. They will demolish all the slums and acquire the land without any concern for the people living there, he added.

Bengal gov't notifies new speed limits for vehicles for school, market areas

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The West Bengal government has notified new speed limits for vehicles ranging from 10 km to 50 km per hour depending on school and market areas across the state to reduce road accidents, officials said on Sunday.

The speed limit on all urban and non-urban roads passing through market and residential areas with significant interactions between motor vehicles and people has been restricted to 30 km/hour to keep the risk of fatality within 10 per cent, only they said. In school zones, the same has been restricted to 25 km/hour.

The maximum speed limit in urban areas has been capped at 50 km/hour following the global best practices factoring the situation in the country and



the state, an official said. The speed limit for buses has been confined to 20 km/hour which can be reduced to 10 km/hour in certain pockets of the city. If road mishaps keep

happening in accident-prone pockets, the transport department and the police will examine and take a call on speed limits of buses, another official said. The state adopted a

scientific speed management policy which was prepared after getting the technical guidance of IIT Kharagpur, he said. The policy focused on defining safe speed limits under dif-

ferent scenarios and taking all necessary measures for effective implementation and enforcement of speed limits, the transport department official said.

In the new year, the state moved forward by notifying the safe speed limits which will be implemented and enforced across the state uniformly to reduce road accidents and fatalities, he said. IIT Kharagpur senior faculty member and traffic and road safety expert Prof. Bhargab Maitra told PTI. Notified safe speed limits are highly scientific and the notification will be instrumental in reducing road fatalities in the state.

IIT Kharagpur has been working closely with the West Bengal government and will continue to provide all neces-

The speed limit on all urban and non-urban roads passing through market and residential areas with significant interactions between motor vehicles and people has been restricted to 30 km/hour to keep the risk of fatality within 10 per cent, only they said.

sary technical support to the state for effective implementation and enforcement of the Speed Management Policy and Notified Speed Limits for the benefit of the people, he said.

IIT Kharagpur will also provide necessary support to other states for enhancing road safety and benefiting people. Fatalities due to road accidents are unacceptable and we shall do everything possible to improve the road safety scenario, he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Rising drug menace

Amit Shah's contention that seven per cent of Indians are into substance abuse is an eye-opener; the Govt must act now

India is grappling with an escalating threat that cuts across social and economic lines: the increasing prevalence of drug abuse. With seven per cent of the population reportedly engaged in narcotics use, the issue has become a pressing concern for policymakers, law enforcement agencies and society at large. Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently underscored the severity of the problem, describing it as a "cancer" that could destroy the nation's future generations. Speaking at the 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' conference, Shah highlighted the government's intensified efforts against the drug menace. In 2024 alone, narcotics worth Rs16,914 crore were seized, a record-breaking figure. Comparing the past two decades, Shah noted that from 2004 to 2014, 3.63 lakh kilograms of drugs were seized, whereas from 2014 to 2024, the figure had risen seven-fold to 24 lakh kilograms. Despite this, the drug menace has only increased with even school going children also becoming drug addicts. The discovery of at least

50 illegal labs across the country underscores this issue. With stringent actions against traditional narcotics, there is a worrying shift towards the production and consumption of synthetic drugs, a trend that demands immediate intervention.

India's geographical location plays a significant role in its vulnerability to drug trafficking. Positioned near the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) and the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand), the country serves as both a transit and a destination hub for narcotics. Social factors such as unemployment, poverty, and peer pressure further exacerbate the issue, especially among the youth, creating a vicious cycle of addiction and criminality. Since 2019, the Modi government has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to tackle the drug crisis. Enhanced enforcement efforts have led to record-breaking seizures, reflecting improved coordination and action against traffickers. However, the drug menace has only increased. India needs to focus on strengthening its law enforcement framework, ensuring that agencies have access to advanced training, technology and resources to dismantle drug networks. The regulation of precursor chemicals must be tightened to prevent their misuse in synthetic drug production. Rehabilitation facilities must be expanded to provide holistic support to those battling addiction, while nationwide public awareness campaigns should be intensified to foster a culture of prevention. The fight against drugs also requires regional and global cooperation. Neighbouring countries must work together to address cross-border trafficking, share intelligence and coordinate enforcement actions. At the domestic level, fostering collaboration between governments, non-profits and local communities is essential to sustain long-term efforts. The drug menace in India is not merely a law enforcement challenge but a societal crisis that demands collective action. The government must step up the efforts before it becomes a full-blown crisis.



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PICTALK



People buy kites ahead of 'Makar Sankranti' festival, in Amritsar

Pioneering meteorology and AQ management



RAJESH VERMA

IMD has evolved from focusing on weather forecasting to becoming a key player in climate research, disaster management and air quality monitoring

The completion of 150 years of establishment of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is a matter of great pride for every Indian. The India Meteorological Department (IMD), established in 1875, has played a pioneering role in meteorological and atmospheric studies in India. Initially focused on weather forecasting and seismology, the Department gradually expanded its scope to include climate research, disaster management, and environmental monitoring. IMD was perhaps the first institution in India to start systematic long-term measurement of solar radiation, precipitation chemistry, ozone, and aerosol optical and physical properties.

Recognising the importance of atmospheric composition, IMD became an active partner in global atmospheric environment monitoring and research programs and contributed significantly towards ozone hole, air quality, precipitation chemistry, climate change, solar dimming and brightening research. The Earth's climate system has demonstrably changed since the pre-industrial era. IMD has a key responsibility in understanding the science of climate change and variability as well as adaptation and mitigation strategies. It plays a prominent role in facilitating a broader use of climate information, products and services. IMD has been mandated to operate the national meteorological observing systems; develop and maintain data archives; undertake climate monitoring; and carry out climate diagnostics, climate analysis and climate assessment.

All this reliable and authentic data and information collected over 150 years has provided a proper assessment of climate change in India and has also helped in developing policy formulation for adaptation and mitigation measures. The air quality forecast and assessment system helps CAQM and other pollution control authorities in the country to make decisions for air quality management including the implementation of GRAP. The problem associated with air pollution is very complex as



many factors contribute to changes in concentrations of the main pollutants. The major factors are anthropogenic emissions, urbanisation, specific topography, emissions sources, environmental factors and meteorology. The advances in computational resources allowed the use of advanced deterministic chemical transport models, leading to more accurate air quality forecasts, replacing the previous empirical and statistical approach which has some limitations.

The scientists at India Meteorological Department and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, Ministry of Earth Science jointly developed the advanced Air Quality Early Warning System (AQEWS). The advanced modelling framework consists of a high-resolution fully coupled state-of-the-science Weather Research and Forecasting model coupled with chemistry (commonly known as WRF-Chem), and ingest data from satellites on aerosol optical depth, surface data from air quality monitoring stations across India and high-resolution emissions from various anthropogenic and natural sources including dust and stubble burning, to create more accurate initial conditions using state-of-the-art data assimilation techniques,



THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL METEOROLOGY HAS WITNESSED TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATIONS, WITH CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGIES ENABLING PRECISE, REAL-TIME INSIGHTS INTO ATMOSPHERIC DYNAMICS AND AIR QUALITY

to improve forecasts. The chemical data assimilation is further integrated with dynamical downscaling at a 400-meter resolution to provide a very high spatial resolution air quality forecast for the Delhi region. The prediction part of the system consists of two modelling frameworks, one is based on the NCAR atmospheric chemistry transport model (WRF-Chem) and the second one is based on the Finnish Meteorological Institute model SILAM (System for Integrated modeling of Atmospheric composition). The models take into account the latest land use land cover (LULC) change information over Delhi, background aerosols and pollutants, long-range transport of dust from dust storms and particulate matter from stubble burning. The predictions are now available up to 72 hours lead time at 400 meter resolution and 10 days in advance at 10 km resolution for the Delhi region. The advanced warning system provides (a) an air quality forecast at 400 meters for the Delhi/ NCR region, (b) an air quality forecast on primary and secondary stress of Delhi/NCR at 400 meters resolution, (c) an air quality forecast at 10 km resolution for entire South Asian region, (d) real-time observations of air quality over Delhi/NCR region, (e) details about natural

aerosols like dust (from dust storms) and particulate matter using different satellite datasets, (f) Near real-time fire information over India, (g) forecast of the contribution of non-local fire emissions. Consistent efforts are required to further improve the model performance.

The field of environmental meteorology has witnessed transformative innovations, with cutting-edge technologies enabling precise, real-time insights into atmospheric dynamics and air quality. The accuracy of air quality forecasts is essential for mitigating the health impacts and economic costs of air pollution. IMD and associated institutions are continuously striving for improvement in environment monitoring and air quality prediction.

IMD's historical contributions have not only improved the scientific understanding of India's unique atmospheric conditions but have also played a critical role in global efforts to combat air pollution and climate change.

Many compliments to the meteorological community for their hard work in making IMD a global leader in the field of weather and climate. (The author is Chairperson of the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas; Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONGRESS CHALLENGES AAP

Madam — The Election Commission of India has announced the date for polling for 70 assembly seats in Delhi. Though a tough fight between the incumbent AAP and the BJP is on the cards, the Congress has thrown down the gauntlet by fielding strong candidates against the AAP heavyweights like Arvind Kejriwal and Atishi Marlena. Unlike the two previous occasions when it didn't contest assembly elections on a serious note and drew a blank, this time the Congress is leaving no stone unturned to corner the AAP on various issues such as the liquor scam and the Sheeshmahal row.

But the Congress' revival plan in Delhi has rattled the already crumbling INDIA bloc. Almost all parties of this bloc have openly thrown their weight behind the AAP. But for the Congress, the biggest shock has come from its oldest and most trusted ally, Lalu Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal. After Lalu Yadav backed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's willingness to lead the Opposition alliance instead of Congress leaders, his son Tejasvi Yadav dropped the bomb on the Congress by saying that the INDI alliance was only for Lok Sabha elections.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

CEO CRITICISED FOR 90 HOUR PROPOSAL

Madam — L&T Chief has gone a few steps ahead of what Infosys's Narayana Murthy has prescribed and as expected, his suggestion of 90 hours a week and working even on Sundays has stirred up a debate. His remark to justify how long you can stare at your spouse is weird to say the least. Subrahmanyam should have looked at his former boss A N Naik's comment on regretting not spending enough time with his wife and children during his working life and after hanging up his boots, he was repenting it and said he is trying to wash his sins.

Ultimately, at the end of the day, it is all about productivity and creating a positive work environment in the organisation and not spending long hours at the office.

Devastating wildfire in LA



In the wildfire that has engulfed Los Angeles in America, at least 11 people have died as the fire destroyed thousands of homes and more than 10,000 buildings, including schools, hospitals and so on. It has forced 180,000 people to evacuate their homes. The true death toll is not known. The fire, coupled with strong winds, has severely degraded air quality by releasing hazardous

smoke posing immediate and long-term risks to public health. The fire has already consumed around 22,000 acres of land. It is also said that climate change had made the grasses and shrubs that are fuelling the Los Angeles fire more vulnerable to the burning. Firefighters have been trying their level best to contain the spread of fire, but only 11 per cent of the fire had been contained to date.

It is estimated that the total damage and economic loss from this wildfire disaster could reach nearly 4 per cent of the annual GDP of the state of California. Heavy rain and a shift of wind direction alone could diminish the present situation. The wildfire in Los Angeles is a warning to other countries across the globe to be more cautious about climate change.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

These types of talks always come from the top, but implementation happens at the bottom, so if he really means what he said, he should walk the talk and work 90 hours a week for a year or two to set an example, and if it helps in improving business performance, then he should expect others to follow suit. In a top-down approach, if these CEOs push their employees beyond a point, it will only result in more burnout, and productivity is bound to suffer, needless to mention that mental and physical health will take a huge toll.

Bal Govind | Noida

MINOR BEHIND SCHOOL BOMB THREATS

Madam — Sending fake bomb threats to more than 23 schools in Delhi by a minor student of class 12 is not only a grave crime but also poses a severe crisis for both society and the administration. Such baseless and deplorable acts create an atmosphere of tension in schools and spread chaos across the entire city. Security agencies are forced to waste their time and resources on non-existent threats, diverting their focus and strength from genuine emergen-

cies. This incident also highlights how excessive examination pressure can heavily impact students mentally. However, this does not justify the right of any student to spread terror in society.

If a student is experiencing mental stress due to exam pressure, they require guidance and proper mental support, not engagement in acts that cause fear and unrest in the community. In such cases, it is the responsibility of both the law and the education system to provide students with the right guidance. They must be taught that false threats are not only harmful to society but also leave an undesirable and severe impact on their personality and future. Despite being a minor, children must understand that their actions do not only affect their own future but also deeply impact the entire society. Education and guidance are the tools that can help in their development into responsible and sensitive citizens.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Showcasing rural India's resilience and vision for Viksit Bharat 2047

From showcasing GI-certified products to championing organic farming, Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025 underscored rural India's vital role in nation building

Rural India, often described as the soul of the nation, has been a cornerstone of India's economic and cultural identity. The Grameen Bharat Mahotsav 2025, organised by NABARD and inaugurated by the Prime Minister, illuminated the remarkable strides made by rural communities.



This event brought together policymakers, entrepreneurs, artisans, and thought leaders to celebrate and further the progress of rural India while envisioning a sustainable and inclusive future. Held under the theme 'Building a Resilient Rural India for a Viksit Bharat 2047', the Mahotsav provided a platform to showcase the diverse achievements of rural India. From GI-certified products and tribal crafts to organic agriculture and women-led entrepreneurship, the festival underscored the untapped economic and cultural potential of rural areas, particularly the North-Eastern region. In his inaugural address, the Prime Minister emphasised the pivotal role of rural India in achieving a Viksit Bharat

by 2047. He highlighted the government's focus on enhancing rural infrastructure, promoting financial inclusion, and empowering marginalised communities. The Prime Minister's speech set the tone for the event, reinforcing the idea that the path to India's growth lies in the empowerment of its villages. NABARD Chairman, Shaji KV, delivered a compelling address, reflecting on the transformative journey of rural India over the past decade. He pointed to significant advancements such as improved infrastructure through the Prime Minister Gram Sadak Yojna, wide-

spread electrification, digital connectivity, and the GI tagging of rural products. These initiatives, he stated, have bridged the gap between rural and urban areas, creating opportunities for inclusive economic growth. The Mahotsav also featured dynamic panel discussions that explored critical aspects of rural development. One panel delved into the potential of organic agriculture, discussing how climate-smart practices can address food security, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment. Highlights included the success of the "GOBAR-Dhan" Yojana, which has already established over 2,300 biogas units, and the expansion of the organic agriculture market, now valued at Rs16,800 crore. Another panel emphasised the importance of empowering cooperatives, with NABARD's initiatives in digitising over 67,000 cooperative societies playing a transformative role in making banking more accessible and affordable for rural populations. The event wasn't just about discussions and

economic progress—it was also a celebration of India's rich cultural heritage. Vibrant performances brought to life the diverse artistic traditions of rural India. It provided rural entrepreneurs and artisans with access to broader markets, strengthened partnerships between stakeholders, and emphasised sustainable practices. The festival also resulted in actionable policy recommendations, including the promotion of digital literacy, enhanced support for organic farming, and initiatives to boost rural infrastructure and healthcare. As the event concluded, it left a resounding message: the future of India lies in the empowerment of its villages. With the collective efforts of organisations like NABARD and the unwavering support of the government, rural India is poised to lead the nation into a brighter, more sustainable future, aligning perfectly with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. (The writer is a development writer; views are personal)



PRABHA GUPTA





FIRST COLUMN

THE CHAINS OF DEPRIVATION

The feeling of deprivation dominates most of us, leaving many of us caught in an endless cycle of unfulfilled desires



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Feeling of deprivation dominates life, one should not be surprised by this statement and this applies to all of us with some exceptions. You have guessed it. These fortunate souls are devotees of God. Let me substantiate what I have stated.

Do you agree that we have many unfulfilled desires; all of us have? Some of these are deep desires; those remain unfulfilled throughout our lives. The first one is to have plenty of money. What is plenty? Yes, it varies from person to person, but don't we change the quantum? I have done it throughout my life. What I had hoped for when I was a child has been exceeded many times over, but I still feel that more is what will really please me. By the way, I am one of those fortunate souls, whose needs have always been fulfilled, barring a few short spans. An extreme example is that of having a cycle and desiring a scooter. Once that is obtained, a car will be nice to have. This goes on till one gets to desire a private jet.

Then, come sexual feelings. From childhood, these feelings are never far away from our thoughts. And these are fanned by what we are exposed to by ads and what we choose to associate with like going on internet. Even children do so and giggle with friends. One may question why this feeling is so widespread. Because the creation can only be sustained by procreation. Even Lord Krishna has allowed this activity when He stated in the Bhagavad-Geeta, "I am passion in beings, according to religious principles," (7.11) But what human beings do not even animals do, i.e. make sex an overpowering urge. Even marriage does not satisfy it, though one feels in childhood that it would. Because sexual acts have a purpose, and cannot be made a burning desire.



The third enemy of us human beings are fearful thoughts. The underlying reason is our being small, very small in the overall context. We are also mostly ignorant, i.e., do not know what is good for us. Our intelligence is mostly flawed. There is spiritual intelligence, which is what the Bhagavad-Geeta is all about. Don't we avoid reading it? Because it will expose how little we know. This feeling of safety can only come from God, because only He can ensure it. Unfortunately, most of us avoid taking shelter of God, even though we know about Him.

Why don't we? Whatever we may say we really don't have much faith in God. Most of us feel that God is superior to us but not someone we must take shelter of, though God is everything. (7.19) Then, spiritual practices are considered utterly boring. Do we feel that they should be enjoyable like watching television? They are 'tapa' (austerities), as they should be. Our deeply embedded emotions like greed, lust and enviousness would not let us take shelter of God. The feeling that we can manage on our own also defeats us, even though we keep failing repeatedly in whatever we wish to achieve.

But everyone is not unintelligent. Many do take shelter of God and would never have second thoughts. Isn't this proof enough that they must be getting rewarded. Yes, God begins to guide and help them. One would know what is really desirable like peace, not unlimited sense enjoyment. God is so kind that He provides what we really need and He protects what is worth protecting. (9.22) God only can extricate us from our suffering caused by our past impious acts. (18.58) The list goes on, but one will only experience them if one gets started.

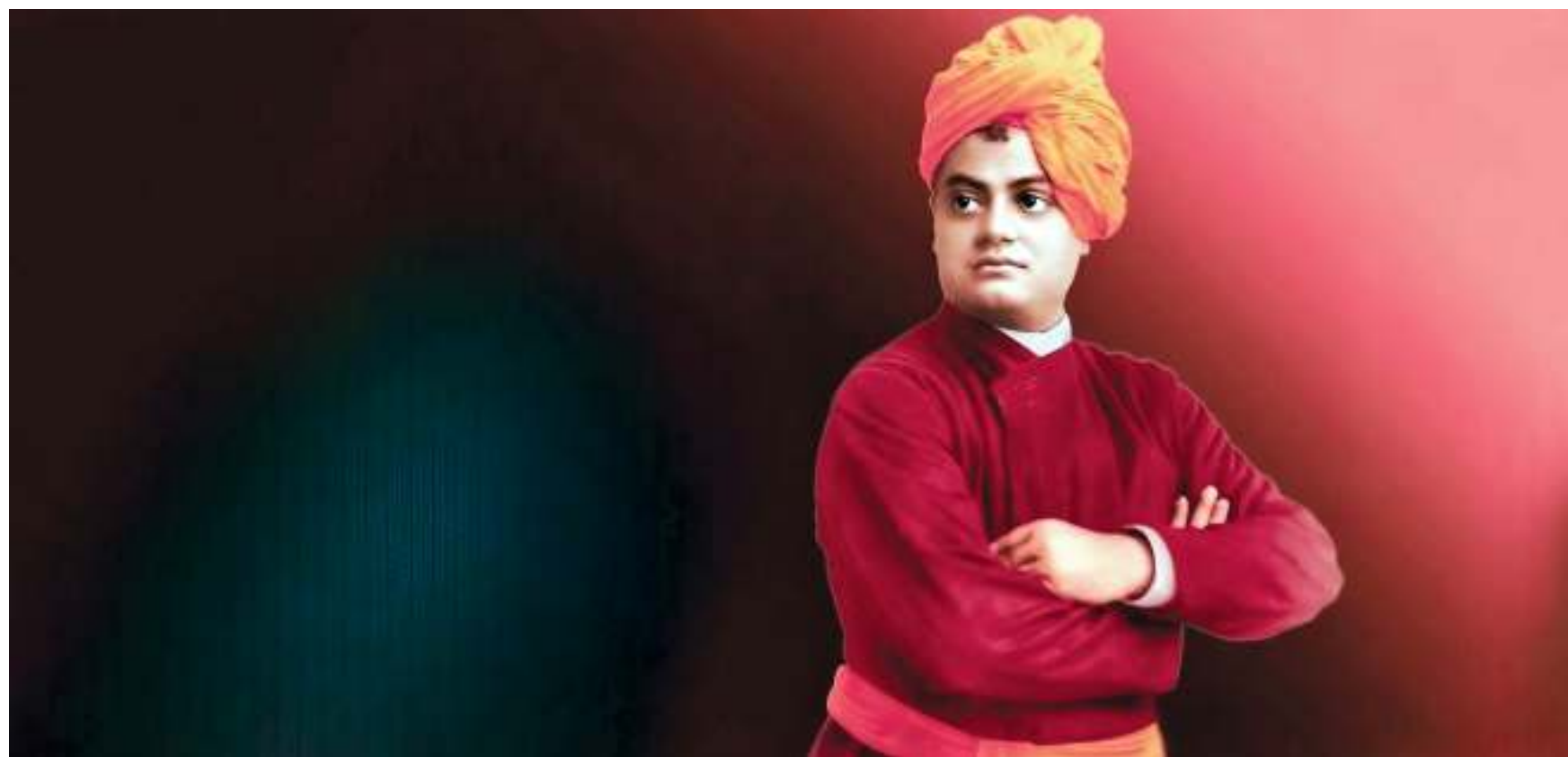
(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

Vivekananda: A vision for an inclusive world



AMAL CHANDRA

As we celebrate Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary, it is crucial to revisit his teachings, not just as historical artefacts but as living ideas relevant for today



Swami Vivekananda, born Narendranath Datta on January 12, 1863, is one of India's most remarkable spiritual leaders and thinkers. His birth anniversary is more than a mere occasion to honour his memory; it is an invitation to reflect on his profound legacy and the enduring relevance of his ideas. While his role in revitalising Hinduism and introducing Indian philosophy to the Western world is well-documented, some aspects of Vivekananda's thought remain less explored yet deeply significant. In a world grappling with numerous social, ethical, and philosophical challenges, his teachings serve as a quintessential guide.

Vivekananda was much more than a spiritual icon; he was a pragmatic philosopher who firmly believed in the application of spiritual principles to practical life. His famous assertion that 'service to humans is service to God' exemplifies his view that spirituality should be lived, not merely theorised. He encouraged people to engage in social service, emphasising that true religion manifests in the form of compassion, kindness and action.

This perspective feels especially resonant in our modern times, where there is often a disconnection between spiritual practices and real-world issues. Vivekananda's message is a call to integrate spirituality with daily life, urging individuals to act with empathy and responsibility toward others.

One of the most forward-thinking aspects of Vivekananda's philosophy was his vision of education. He was deeply critical of the colonial education system, which he believed produced clerks rather than thinkers and visionaries. For Vivekananda, education was not merely about accumulating knowledge but about developing the whole person—intellectually, morally and spiritually. He emphasized the need for self-reliance and character-building, which he saw as the true objectives of education. In today's educa-



HE WAS A PATRIOT WHO DEEPLY LOVED INDIA, YET HIS NATIONALISM WAS INCLUSIVE, ROOTED IN THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL WEALTH OF THE NATION RATHER THAN IN AGGRESSION OR EXCLUSION

tional discourse, which increasingly values holistic development and critical thinking, Vivekananda's ideas are strikingly prescient. His approach encourages educators and policymakers to think beyond conventional curricula, fostering environments that nurture creativity, ethics, and personal growth. At a time when women's rights were severely restricted, he advocated for their education and empowerment, highlighting the significant role women could play in shaping society.

He often drew from India's spiritual heritage, pointing to historical examples of women who had achieved great intellectual and spiritual heights. In a world that continues to struggle with gender disparities, Vivekananda's vision offers a timeless reminder of the importance of creating opportunities for all, irrespective of gender. His thoughts encourage us to work towards dismantling barriers and fostering a society where everyone can achieve their potential. Another fascinating aspect of Vivekananda's thought was his balanced approach to nationalism and internationalism.

He was a patriot who deeply loved India, yet his nationalism was inclusive, rooted in the cultural and spiritual wealth of the nation rather than in aggression or exclusion.

His famous speech at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893 exemplified his belief in the unity of humanity. In his view, true patriotism did not mean hostility toward others but an appreciation of one's culture while respecting and learning from others. This approach is particu-

larly relevant today, as we navigate the complexities of national pride in a globalised world. Vivekananda's inclusive nationalism provides a framework for fostering pride in one's heritage while promoting global solidarity. Less commonly discussed, yet equally significant, is Vivekananda's respect for science and rational inquiry. Unlike many of his contemporaries who saw religion and science as oppositional forces, Vivekananda believed they could complement each other. He encouraged the cultivation of a scientific temper, advocating for a worldview that embraced both rationality and spirituality.

His open-mindedness toward scientific discoveries and his belief in the power of reason present a balanced perspective that is incredibly relevant in today's age of rapid technological advancement. Vivekananda's stance reminds us that faith and reason need not be in conflict but can coalesce to enrich our understanding of the world. Vivekananda was also a pioneer of interfaith dialogue, advocating for the respect and understanding of all religious traditions. He saw the diversity of faiths not as a barrier but as a testament to the multifaceted nature of truth. His inclusive attitude towards different religions stands as a powerful counter to the sectarian violence and religious intolerance that plague many societies today. Vivekananda's vision of interfaith harmony reminds us of the need for empathy and respect in a world often divided along religious lines.

His approach encourages us to find common ground and to cel-

brate the richness that diverse spiritual traditions bring to humanity. The legacy of Swami Vivekananda is multifaceted.

He was a monk, a philosopher, a nationalist, and a reformer, whose ideas continue to inspire millions worldwide. His teachings invite us to reflect on our personal and collective responsibilities, urging us to work towards a world that is more just, compassionate, and inclusive. Vivekananda's emphasis on the practical application of spiritual principles, disagreement with the imposition of vegetarianism, advocacy for education that nurtures the whole person, progressive views on gender, inclusive nationalism, and respect for both science and interfaith dialogue, all remain remarkably relevant.

His vision offers solutions to many of the challenges we face today, from educational reforms to gender equality, from religious harmony to ethical living. As we celebrate his birth anniversary, it is crucial to revisit Swami Vivekananda's teachings, not just as historical artefacts but as living ideas that can guide us toward a better future. His message is clear: "Arise, awake" - true greatness lies in the ability to apply timeless principles to the needs of the present, to foster a world where humanity can thrive in all its diversity.

Swami Vivekananda's life and work remain a beacon, illuminating the path to a world that values compassion, justice, and the collective wellbeing of all its inhabitants.

(The writer is a policy analyst, political commentator, and columnist. Views expressed are personal)

The future of turmeric exports: India's path to securing global market dominance

By adapting to domestic production practices with the changing global demand and fostering a collaborative ecosystem, India can secure its future exports in the global market

For centuries, India has been known as the 'Land of Spices', producing and exporting a wide variety of products, renowned for their distinctive flavour, aroma and health benefits. One such spice is turmeric, known as the 'Golden Spice of India', which has spread through trade beyond South Asia to different parts of the world. Today, turmeric is cultivated in many South Asian countries, China, Africa and the Caribbean and has multiple end-uses spanning industries such as food, pigment, dye, nutraceuticals, cosmetics and medicine.

With global demand rising and growing demand for high-quality curcumin for preventive healthcare, sever-



ARPITA MUKHERJEE

al countries, such as Myanmar, Fiji, and Indonesia, are among the top five producers. India continues to be the largest exporter with close to 67 per cent of global exports in the year 2023. While the export value has increased from USD 182.53 million in 2017 to USD 212.65 million in 2023, the share in exports is showing a

slow decline, with new exporting countries like Fiji coming up. Global demand is also shifting towards turmeric, which has high curcumin content and organic varieties. Developed markets like the EU and the USA are emerging as key centres for the consumption of high-quality turmeric that meets stringent sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and quality standards. The share of the USA in the imports of turmeric increased from 13.80 per cent in 2017 to 18.98 per cent in 2023, making it the first largest importer followed by India. We continue to import significant amounts of turmeric (especially dry), mainly from Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Much of our

exports are in raw and powder format, where processing and further product developments are done in markets like the European Union (EU). Within the EU, countries like the Netherlands and Germany have become key exporters along with other countries like the USA. Some reasons for lower value addition in India include the inability to supply more than 10 per cent of the global requirement of turmeric with higher than 5 per cent curcumin, high use of pesticides and insecticides, lack of market knowledge and limited R&D and innovative products. The country must evolve from just a raw turmeric supplier by innovating, ensur-



ing quality, and adopting sustainable and good agricultural practices to maintain India's global dominance and move up the global value chain. Several companies have made strides in this direction by producing curcumin extracts for pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals. Products like Vicco Turmeric Cream combine turmeric with modern cosmetics, linking Ayurvedic

traditions with contemporary personal care. High-curcumin variants, such as Lakadong turmeric, are gaining international recognition for their medicinal benefits. The number of Geographical Indication (GI) turmeric has increased to six as of December 31, 2024. However, to achieve the Indian Government's objective of making India the global hub for turmeric production and to meet the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's projected target of turmeric exports of USD1 billion by 2030, further action is required.

Establishing a National Turmeric Board, announced by the Prime Minister, is one such step towards consolidating and implementing com-

prehensive regulations governing the entire turmeric value chain, imperative to enhance the sector's global competitiveness. Additionally, although the standards of domestically produced turmeric align with international regulations, such as the CODEX, global turmeric users require higher curcumin content, with sustainable farming practices and for that targeted R&D is needed to improve the curcumin content of the produce.

Export processes and compliance requirements need to be streamlined and simplified. Signing mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) for standards and organic may help. For example, the MRA for organic products signed

between India and Taiwan in 2024, is a step in the right direction. Similar MRAs need to be signed between India and its key turmeric export destinations like the EU and the USA, which will reduce the cost and time of certifications and testing. By aligning domestic production practices with the changing global demand and fostering a collaborative ecosystem, India can secure its future exports as a reliable and preferred supplier of high-quality turmeric in the global market.

(The writer is professor, at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations. With inputs from Eshana Mukherjee. Views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS



Trump 2.0, AI to influence global trade in 2025: Experts

Geopolitical tensions the potential for a renewed US-led trade war under President-elect Donald Trump rising sustainability-driven barriers China's overcapacity in key sectors and rapid advancements in AI will significantly impact global trade in 2025 according to experts. They said Indian exporters and importers should work hand in hand with the government to deal with these challenges. India they said need to prioritise their AI (artificial intelligence) strategy as it promises to transform trade logistics and supply chain management and reshape traditional trade patterns. AI is fast emerging as an important vehicle for future trade's journey. The AI-driven digital transformation is poised to boost not only services trade but it may also create whole new categories of tradable AI-powered goods -- from autonomous vehicles to robotics and beyond trade expert and Hi-Tech Gears Chairman Deep Kapuria said. He said while geopolitical tensions are beyond the competency of the private sector to influence businesses from the developing world need to invest resources to comply with growing needs to meet sustainability parameters both environmental and social.



FPIs withdraw Rs 22,194 cr in Jan amid weak earnings

Foreign investors have withdrawn Rs 22,194 crore from Indian equities this month driven by expectations of a weak earnings season a steady rise in the US dollar and concerns over tariff war during Donald Trump's presidency. This came following an investment of Rs 15,446 crore in the month of December data with the depositories showed. Foreign investors have scaled back their investments in Indian equities significantly amid global and domestic headwinds. This exodus of foreign money from the Indian markets could be attributed to multitude of factors such as expectation of yet another weak earnings season concerns over the tariff war under Trump's presidency slowdown in GDP growth still high inflation numbers and uncertainty over the commencement of the interest cut in India Himanshu Srivastava Associate Director Manager Research Morningstar Investment Research India said. Additionally record low level of Indian rupee surge in US bond yields coupled with rich valuation of Indian markets also makes Indian equities relatively unattractive for foreign investors.



Mcap of five of top-10 most-valued firms tumbles

The combined market valuation of five of the top-10 most-valued firms tumbled Rs 1,85,952.31 crore last week with HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit in-line with a weak trend in domestic equities. Last week the BSE benchmark slumped 1,844.2 points or 2.32 per cent and the Nifty dropped 573.25 points or 2.38 per cent. While Reliance Industries HDFC Bank ICICI Bank State Bank of India and ITC faced erosion from their market valuations Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) Bharti Airtel Infosys Hindustan Unilever and the latest entrant in the top-10 pack -- HCL Technologies were the gainers. The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank dropped by Rs 70,479.23 crore to Rs 12,67,440.61 crore. The Kolkata-based diversified entity ITC's valuation tumbled Rs 46,481 crore to Rs 5,56,583.44 crore. The mcap of State Bank of India slumped Rs 44,935.46 crore to Rs 6,63,233.14 crore and that of Reliance Industries eroded by Rs 12,179.13 crore to Rs 16,81,194.35 crore. ICICI Bank's valuation declined by Rs 11,877.49 crore to Rs 8,81,501.01 crore. However TCS added Rs 60,168.79 crore taking its mcap to Rs 15,43,313.32 crore.

Gautam Adani to invest Rs 65,000 cr in energy, cement

PNS ■ RAIPUR

Industrialist Gautam Adani on Sunday called on Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and announced an investment of Rs 65,000 crore in the Adani Group's energy and cement projects in the state officials said.

Adani met Sai at the latter's official residence in Chhattisgarh capital Raipur a statement issued by the state's public relations department said.

During the meeting Adani announced a planned investment of Rs 60,000 crore to expand the group's power



plants in Raipur Korba and Raigarh in the state. This expansion will enhance Chhattisgarh's total power generation capacity by an additional 6,120 MW the statement said. Additionally the Adani Group chairman also committed Rs 5,000 crore for the

development and expansion of the group's cement plants in the state it said.

On the advice of the CM Adani also assured the state government of a Rs 10,000 crore impetus over the next four years to support initiatives in education healthcare skill development and tourism under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and beyond from the Adani Group the statement said.

The meeting also explored potential collaborations in manufacturing defence-related equipment and establishing data centres as well as a Global Capability Centre in Chhattisgarh it said.

Government partially restores gas supply to IGL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has increased cheaper gas supply to city gas retailers IGL Adani-Total and Mahanagar Gas restoring a major part of the allocation that was cut in 2024 according to regulatory filings by the companies.

The government in October and November last year had cut supplies of the so-called APM Gas (low-priced natural gas coming from old fields such as Mumbai High and Bassein fields in the Bay of Bengal) to city gas retailers by as much as 40 per cent in view of limited output.

This led to city gas retailers hiking CNG prices by Rs 2-3 per kg and planning more increases as they replaced lost volumes with higher-priced input fuel.

The price hike made CNG less attractive when compared to alternate fuels like diesel. Following this the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in a December 31, 2024 order rejigged some allocations of gas produced from below ground and undersea.

The ministry ordered a cut in gas supplied to state-owned GAIL and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) for production of LPG and diverting those volumes to city gas entities.

Amnesty Scheme for customs may be announced in Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to reduce litigation Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the upcoming Budget may announce an Amnesty Scheme for customs to foster ease of doing business.

The main asks of the industry would certainly be aligned with the objectives of the government and one objective of the government has been litigation reduction. On that front having an amnesty scheme for customs especially covering pre-GST legacy taxes like additional duty special additional duty has been one of the asks of the industry Price Waterhouse Co LLP managing director Anurag Sehgal said.

The government had in the past announced amnesty schemes for excise and service tax and even for the income tax but not for customs.

There are estimates that over 40,000 cases were pending in various courts and tribunals pertaining to customs duty alone.

Another consultancy firm EY India said customs litigations are pending at various forums for a very long time and the same require time and effort to be spent by both the taxpayer and the government in resolving them.

EY India also suggested that a one-time dispute/litigation resolution/settlement scheme should be introduced under



the Customs Law to settle and resolve pending disputes.

According to Deloitte India partner Mahesh Jaising the government should end long-drawn litigation to resolve long-standing disputes alleviate the burdened judicial pipeline and upgrade the law to keep pace with technological advancements and international best practices.

An amnesty scheme along the lines of Sab ka Vishwas will be a welcome decision. The industry has been waiting for such a scheme for years to address pending litigation matters under customs. This will especially help small businesses avoid past disputes and move ahead with a clean slate Jaising said.

Another important wishlist of the industry on customs would be rate rationalization to support the Make in India ini-

tiative Sehgal said. You have PLI Phased Manufacturing Programme coming up in many sectors. So rate rationalization would help promote investment in India he said.

Besides he said the industry is expecting the review of exemptions. Review of exemptions is very important because there are certain exemptions which are very critical for sectors like sustainable green tech maybe MSMEs healthcare where industry wants that they should be reviewed and extended he added.

Asked about the increase in duty on gold in view of rising import Sehgal said it was reduced only in the July Budget so tinkering with rate on this high value and sensitive item may not come so quickly.

Chennai among top 3 Indian cities for women's Social and Industrial inclusion: Study

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Chennai has been recognised as one of the top three cities in India excelling in social and industrial inclusion for women according to a recent study.

As many as eight cities from Tamil Nadu have figured in the list with the capital city ranking second for being the most inclusive safe and resilient and sustainable city for working women.

As per the Top Cities for Women in India 2024 report by Avtar group South India emerged as the most gender-inclusive region with 16 cities in the south featuring in the top 25.

Bengaluru has surpassed Chennai to secure the top position as the best city in the country for working women in 2024 it said.

Avtar Group Founder-President Saundarya Rajesh said Chennai came second for being the most inclusive safe resilient sustainable city for working women and



Tamil Nadu dominated the survey results with Coimbatore Tiruchirappalli Vellore Madurai Salem Erode and Tiruppur also being on the top of the list.

Cities are the foundations of opportunity. They shape how women live work and thrive. A clear understanding of the core principles and cultural fabric of our cities is crucial for advancing women's progress and inclusion. Rajesh said on the findings.

To realise the dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047 we need women professionals to succeed on par with men. This is possible only if cities are truly gender inclusive and offer an atmosphere where women's strengths can be optimised she added.

Indian Gas plans to offer 3-6 month contracts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Gas Exchange (IGX) has sought regulatory approvals to launch 3-6 month gas contracts benchmarked to international gas prices its chief executive Rajesh Kumar Mediratta said.

IGX currently allows gas suppliers to sell the fuel on the exchange for durations ranging from daily weekly fortnightly and monthly. It also offers intraday trading at a fixed price. Mediratta said the exchange has applied to the regulator Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) for permission to launch three-month and six-month delivery contracts indexed to gas benchmarks such as FIXI and Platts JKM WIM and Dated Brent. We are awaiting a clearance from PNGRB he said. The new long-duration contracts will have a payment cycle of a fortnight compared to the current system of payments being made in 2-3 days after delivery.

CII suggests 10-point agenda on ease of biz reforms in Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi Jan 12 (PTI) Ahead of the upcoming Budget industry body CII on Sunday suggested a 10-point agenda to drive ease of doing business reforms aimed at reducing compliance burden simplifying regulatory frameworks and improving transparency. Among the urgent policy interventions the industry body has recommended that all regulatory approvals -- central state and local levels -- must mandatorily be provided only through the National Single Window System.

It has also pitched for expediting the process of dispute resolution by improving the capacity of courts and placing greater reliance on alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism.

For streamlining environmental compliances Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said a unified framework could be introduced which consolidates all requirements into a single



document.

Emphasising that easy access to land is important to facilitate new or expanding businesses it said that states may be incentivised to develop an online integrated land authority with an objective to streamline land banks digitise and integrate land records provide information on disputed land and guide necessary reforms.

To assist industry in land acquisition across nation the India Industrial Land Bank (IILB) which provides information on land across majority of states can be evolved into a national-level land bank with dedicated central budget support it said.

While India has over the last decade remained focused on improving ease of doing busi-

ness (EoDB) there is a need to maintain the momentum especially in certain specific areas the CII stated.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said Simplifying regulatory frameworks reducing compliance burdens and enhancing transparency should continue to remain our focus agenda for next several years. Compliances for industry related to various areas such as land labour dispute resolution paying taxes and environment offer a vast scope for reduction vital for boosting competitiveness driving economic growth and employment generation.

To ensure timely processing of industry applications and delivery of services from the central ministries an Act imposing statutory obligation on all public authorities for time-bound delivery of services and redressal of grievances could be passed with provision of deemed approval beyond the prescribed timeline CII suggested.

India's coal import rises 2 pc to 182 MT in Apr-Nov period

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's coal import rose by two per cent to 182.02 million tonnes (MT) in the April-November period of the current fiscal year.

The country's coal import was at 178.17 MT in the year-ago period according to data compiled by business-to-business e-commerce company junction services ltd.

However the country's coal import dropped to 19.57 MT in

the month of November over 22.30 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal.

There was a drop in volumes which was in line with market expectation. Ample availability in the domestic market reduced import demand from consuming sectors such as sponge iron and steel. Also the comfortable stock position at power plants resulted in muted demand for imports junction MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said.

Significant % of iPhone, Android users faced issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Significant percentage of iPhone Android users in the country said they have experienced call connection issues after the latest software upgrade online platform LocalCircles said in its latest report.

According to the survey 60 per cent of iPhone users and 40 per cent of Android users in the country have shared that they are experiencing problems in their services after the latest software

upgrade.

Call failure is the biggest problem that iPhone users are facing be it a normal call or app-based calls while freezing of apps is the biggest issue for Android users.

The report noted that 6 in 10 apple iPhone users surveyed who have upgraded to iOS 18 or higher are having difficulties. 28 per cent of the respondents stated that most/some of voice and OTT calls don't connect or drop. 12 per cent stated screen of the



phone goes dark 12 per cent stated apps are hanging.

The survey conducted between November 12 to December 26 claims to have received over 47,000 responses (31,000 from users of Apple iPhone devices and nearly 16,000 from users of Android devices) located in 322 districts of India.

The survey found that Nearly 9 in 10 apple iPhone users surveyed who have upgraded to iOS 18 and are having difficulties attribute it to the iOS and no one

attributed their problems to their WiFi or mobile network.

Apple has been issuing updates of its latest operating system iOS 18.

In October the company had issued an iOS 18.0.1 update to fix screen and camera freezing issues in select models of iPhone 16. The update mentioned fixing issues related to memory allocation on some iPhone models. The company's latest update 18.2.1 provides important bug fixes.

NITIN GADKARI CALLS 'EMERGENCY' AUTHENTIC AND EXCELLENT

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari attended a special screening of the much-talked-about 'Emergency' in Nagpur, hosted by actor-director Kangana Ranaut and Anupam Kher.

Directed by Kangana, Emergency plunges deep into one of India's most controversial and turbulent chapters, an era when democracy was suspended, and the nation stood at crossroads. With Kangana's commanding portrayal of Indira Gandhi and a stellar cast featuring Anupam Kher as

Jayaprakash Narayan among others, the outing takes viewers on an intense political journey, exploring the high-stakes battle between unchecked power and the soul of democracy itself.

Talking about his experience, Nitin Gadkari shared a post on his social media where he wrote, "Joined the special screening of the movie Emergency, featuring @KanganaTeam and @AnupamPKher, in Nagpur today. I wholeheartedly thank the filmmakers and actors for presenting the dark chapter of our nation's history with such authenticity and

excellence. I urge everyone to watch this film, which portrays a significant period in India's history."

Responding to his wish, Kangana wrote, "Thank you so much for your precious time sir."

Nitin Gadkari was visibly floored by the film's authentic narrative and the gripping performances. Emergency's attention to detail, its nuanced portrayal of pivotal moments in history, and its exploration of political maneuvering clearly struck a chord with the leader.

Written and directed by Kangana herself, Emergency delves into one of

the most controversial periods in Indian history. The film also boasts of a stellar cast, including Anupam Kher, Mahima Chaudhary, Milind Soman, Shreyas Talpade, Vishak Nair and the late Satish Kaushik in his final on-screen performance.

Produced by Zee Studios, Manikarnika Films and Renu Pitti, Emergency promises to be a cinematic spectacle. With music by Sanchit Balhara and GV Prakash Kumar, and dialogues penned by the acclaimed Ritesh Shah, the film is set to hit the theatres on January 17, 2025.



Is Helen Flanagan returning to 'Coronation Street'?

Reality star Helen Flanagan, who is known for portraying Rosie Webster on the television series 'Coronation Street' for more than two decades, initially stepped away from the show in 2018 for maternity leave. However, she has now hinted at her return on the show, report 'Mirror.co.uk'. Helen originally joined 'Coronation Street' in 2000, playing the role for 12 consecutive years before taking a hiatus. She later returned to the cobblestones in 2017 for a brief stint.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', Helen shared a nostalgic photo on Instagram from her childhood days on 'Coronation Street'. She captioned the post, "Ah, love this pic I found @coronationstreet with the iconic Barbara Knox. I was Matilda's age".

Fans and friends quickly filled the comment section, reminiscing about Helen's time on the cobblestones. One user commented, "Love this, Helen. I remember you at that age", while another speculated whether the post hinted at her return to the show, writing, "A hint, perhaps?" A third added, "we NEED Rosie & Sophie back especially with Kevin's upcoming storyline, you girls are such a delight to watch".

And a fourth wrote, "Awww. Love this picture. I miss you in Coronation Street. I am currently watching the Classic Episodes on ITV 3. Today, it was the one where Sally makes Rosie take the morning after pill, after she gets caught seeing Craig. Your acting was amazing. You are such a huge talent. You and Brooke Vincent were both fabulous. Sending lots of love".

The former 'Coronation Street' actress had been in a relationship with footballer Scott for over a decade and they welcomed three children together. Following their split, Helen spiralled into a 'very scary' psychotic episode while on her dream New Year's break in Bali with their children Matilda, Delilah, and Charlie.



Tabu joins the cast of Akshay Kumar starrer 'Bhooth Bangla', Shooting underway in Jaipur

Bollywood fans have reason to celebrate as acclaimed actress Tabu joins the cast of Akshay Kumar's much-anticipated horror-comedy, Bhooth Bangla. The announcement was made by Akshay Kumar himself, who shared a picture on social media featuring him alongside Paresh Rawal from Jaipur.

Sharing the news on the social media, Tabu posted a picture on social

media trying to hint on her upcoming project, "Hum yahan bandh hain." Tabu who was last seen in crew produced by Ektaa Kapoor also commented on the post saying, "Aaapka swaagat hai always an honour Tabu mam."

Bhooth Bangla promises to blend elements of humour and horror, a genre Akshay Kumar has mastered in previous hits like Bhool Bhulaiyaa and Laxmi. Tabu, known for her versatility and powerful performances in films like Andhadhun and Haider, is expected to bring a unique depth

to the film. The film's shooting commenced last week in the culturally rich city of Jaipur. The historic locales of Rajasthan are expected to add a hauntingly beautiful backdrop to the film's narrative. The crew has reportedly been filming in some of the city's iconic spots, adding an authentic touch to the eerie yet comedic storyline.

Tabu's entry into the project has raised expectations for the film, with fans eagerly anticipating how her dynamic with Akshay Kumar will play out on screen. Industry insiders

suggest that Bhooth Bangla could be one of the standout films of the year, combining stellar performances with an engaging script.

Directed by Priyadarshan, Bhooth Bangla is produced by Shobha Kapoor and Ektaa R Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms and Akshay Kumar's production house, Cape of Good Films. The film is co-produced by Faara Sheikh and Vedant Baali. The story is written by Akash A Kaushik and screenplay by Rohan Shankar, Abilash Nair and Priyadarshan. The dialogues are by Rohan Shankar. Bhooth Bangla is slated for its theatrical release on April 2, 2026.



MANISHA KOIRALA REFLECTS ON STARDOM, ARROGANCE, AND LIFE LESSONS

Manisha Koirala, one of Bollywood's most iconic actresses, has graced audiences with her stellar performances in films like 1942: A Love Story and Dil Se. In a recent interview with Pinkvilla, the actress opened up about the impact of early success on her personality, how stardom changed her, and the life lessons she has embraced over the years.

Speaking candidly about her early years in the industry, Koirala admitted that stardom did lead her to develop a sense of arrogance. She explained, "Yes, I think I had changed. I felt like I became a bit arrogant. When success comes quickly, without much hard work, changes are inevitable. And you are immature, you're young, so you don't understand much - neither about the world nor about yourself."

The actress shared that this phase made her feel like the center of the universe, adding, "At that time, I felt like I was the center of the universe.

But I'm not really. You realize that as you mature and go through life."

Koirala also reflected on the mistakes she made during her career. While she admitted to having some regrets, she clarified that her actions were never intentionally harmful. "There were some mistakes I made that I regret today, but I don't think I made any huge mistakes. If at all, I might have hurt someone else, yes. Because I am a sensitive person," she said.

Acknowledging the role her family played in her personal growth, the actress said, "A big factor in my life has been my mother and father, who no matter how much I soar, will bring me back down to earth and say, 'Stay grounded.'"

Manisha Koirala made her Bollywood debut in 1991 with Subhash Ghai's Saudagar, quickly cementing her place as one of the industry's most talented actresses. Over the years, she has delivered memorable performances in films like Khamoshi: The Musical, Bombay, and Dil Se. Most recently, she was seen in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's much-anticipated series Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar, where she continues to showcase her versatility as an actor.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



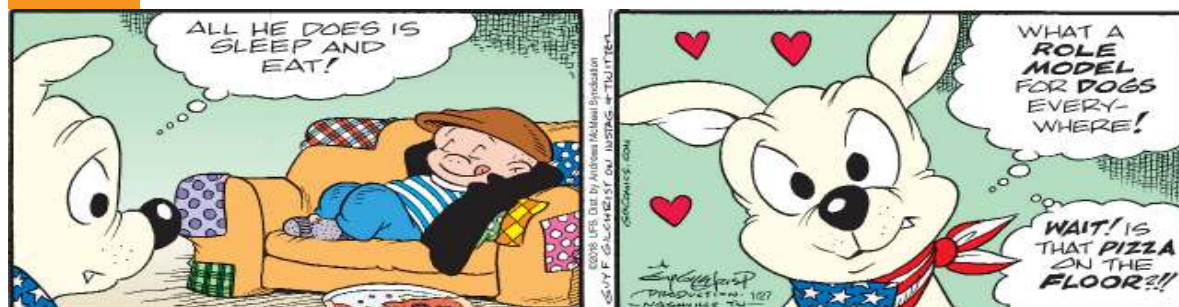
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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

GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS

- Noon
- Costing nothing
- Contact by telephone
- Purchasing
- Rich
- Very sore
- A floor covering
- Large boat
- A red gemstone
- Selected
- Going very quickly
- Less dirty
- Cup and
- Small trees
- A ripping sea creature
- Twirl around

DOWN

- One of the planets
- A meal
- Water from the sky
- Ninety less ten

SOLUTION

REPEATING								
DATED	LARGE							
ENTRANCE								
DRAGON	FOUR							
GREEN	HELP							
SCOW	ACTED							
ROSE								
ANSWERING								

FROM SCREEN TO STAGE

KUBRA ALI'S JOURNEY OF EMPOWERMENT

VAISHNAVI TIKKA
 vaishnavi.tikka@gmail.com

Kubra Ali is a fearless woman who challenges societal norms and redefines what women can achieve. As a passionate advocate for empowerment, she is driven by a bold vision to inspire others and prove that women can reach extraordinary heights when they dare to dream big, work tirelessly, and stay true to their authentic selves.

Reflecting on her journey in an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, Kubra said, "My journey to becoming Mrs England Globe and Mrs Canada Globe has been nothing short of life-altering. It is a testament to the adage that 'where there's a will, there's a way.'"

Ali started her career in media, working as a TV host, news presenter and anchor in Canada. She used her platform to give a voice to people who needed to be heard and to make a positive impact on her community.

Then, Ali unexpectedly entered the world of pageantry. She found the Mrs Globe competition inspiring because it celebrates women for their intelligence, accomplishments and the good things they do for the world. It wasn't easy competing in Mrs Canada Globe, but Ali stayed true to herself and worked hard. She was thrilled to win the People's Choice Award, showing how much people connected with her.

Ali faced many challenges that tested her strength, her ability to adapt and her determination. But she overcame these challenges and learned that if you're strong and keep trying, you can achieve anything. "The journey was filled with challenges that tested my ability to cope with, adaptability and determination. As the old saying goes, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. Every obstacle I faced

In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, Kubra Ali, a fearless trailblazer and advocate for women's empowerment, opens up about her inspiring journey of breaking societal barriers and redefining what women can achieve.

served as an opportunity for growth," she added. Ali's story isn't just about winning awards. It's about showing that true success comes from going beyond what others expect of you. She wants to inspire women to chase their dreams without fear and to change the way we think about success. "Winning Mrs England Globe in 2024

was more than just a title, it represented the power of stepping out of one's comfort zone and pursuing dreams fearlessly," she said.

As Ali prepares to represent England in the Mrs Globe 2025 competition in Beijing, she carries a message of hope and endless possibilities. She believes that real success

comes from doing better than anyone expects and staying true to yourself. Ali is more than just a pageant winner; she's a symbol of empowerment, showing women that they can reach their full potential and make a lasting difference in the world.

Ali believes that every woman has the power to break free from the limits society puts on them and create her own path to success. Her journey proves that with big dreams, hard work and staying true to yourself, anything is possible. "These titles have allowed me to amplify causes close to my heart, encourage women to embrace their potential, and redefine what it means to succeed in today's world," Kubra concluded.



From Cirrhosis to Cancer

Every glass raised in celebration could also be a step closer to an invisible battle within. Liver cancer, one of the deadliest forms of cancer, often arises from cirrhosis—a chronic liver condition that quietly scars the liver over time. Cirrhosis itself is frequently linked to alcohol consumption, turning the joy of one drink into a potential future of liver damage and cancer. But here's the good news! With awareness and action, the cycle from alcohol to cirrhosis to cancer can be broken before it's too late.

How Alcohol and Cirrhosis are related?

Liver Cirrhosis is a dangerous, irreversible condition where the liver becomes severely scarred and loses its ability to function properly. While there are various causes, such as hepatitis or fatty liver disease, alcohol abuse is one of the leading—and preventable—causes of cirrhosis.

Dr. K. Chaitanya Laxmi Reddy, Consultant Psychiatrist, Asha Hospital, Hyderabad, "When someone drinks heavily, the liver, which breaks down alcohol, can suffer serious damage. Chronic (long-term) and excessive drinking can lead to various liver issues, with cirrhosis being one of the most severe outcomes. Over time, the liver struggles to process large amounts of alcohol, leading to inflammation and damage. As the liver continues to be overwhelmed, it starts to develop scar tissue, which impairs its ability to function properly. Eventually, this excessive scarring results in cirrhosis, a condition where the liver is severely damaged and unable to perform its vital functions." And with cirrhosis comes an elevated risk of developing liver cancer many people are unaware of the damage until it's too late.

Alarming numbers

Chronic liver disease (CLD) is a growing global health concern, leading to approximately 2 million deaths each year. Among these, cirrhosis accounts for a staggering 1.16 million deaths. In India, the situation is equally alarming, with liver disease responsible for around 2.95% of total deaths and contributing nearly 18.3% of all cirrhosis deaths worldwide. In fact, in 2020, liver cancer was the tenth most common cancer in India, with 34,743 new cases and 33,793 deaths annually.

The critical link between cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) cannot be overlooked; nearly 70% of HCC cases arise in patients with cirrhosis. Alcohol misuse has emerged as a leading cause of cirrhosis, making it a significant contributor to the rising rates of liver cancer.

"Many individuals remain unaware of the long-term damage that excessive alcohol consumption can inflict on

their liver, paving the way for cirrhosis and, ultimately, HCC. This emphasizes the urgent need for increased awareness and proactive measures to prevent cirrhosis and its life-threatening consequences, highlighting the importance of making informed lifestyle choices to safeguard liver health," Dr K Chaitanya shares.

Prevention is the key

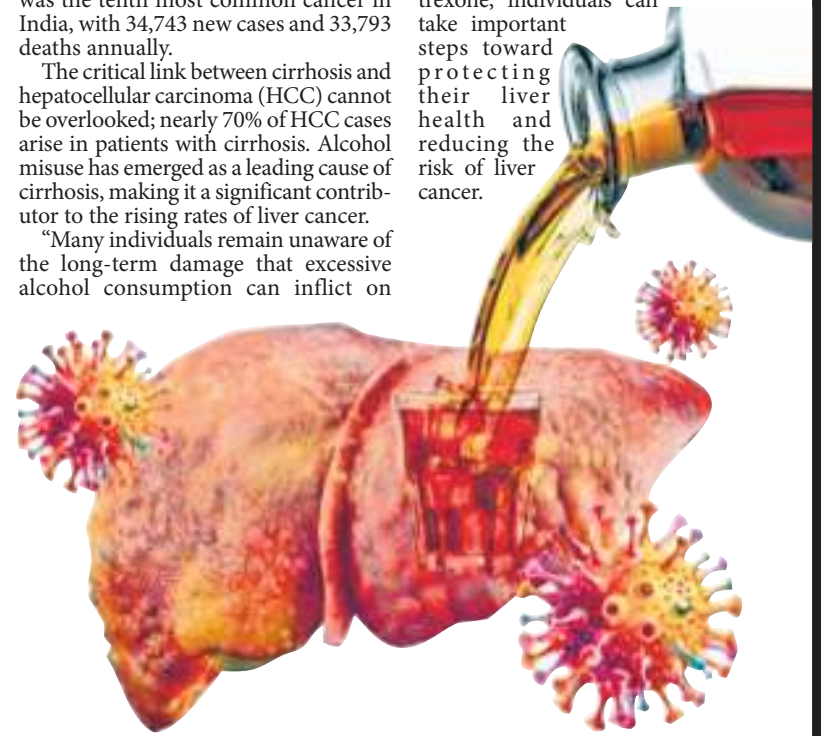
While limiting alcohol intake is the best way to prevent cirrhosis, those struggling with alcohol dependence can seek support through counseling, support groups, medical treatments such as naltrexone, and rehabilitation programs.

This medication has shown promise in helping individuals manage their cravings and maintain abstinence, particularly for those with compensated cirrhosis.

A recent study presented at the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), revealed promising results for treating alcohol use disorder in cirrhosis patients. The study found that naltrexone, a medication typically used to treat addiction, helped reduce cravings and supported abstinence in patients with compensated cirrhosis. After three months, 64% of participants receiving naltrexone remained alcohol-free, compared to 22% in the placebo group. This finding offers hope for those looking to manage their addiction and reduce the risks associated with alcohol-induced cirrhosis.

Additionally, regular liver function tests, especially for those at risk, are essential for early detection of liver disease. It goes without mentioning the importance of lifestyle changes, including a balanced diet, exercise, and limiting alcohol consumption, which can greatly reduce the chances of developing cirrhosis and, by extension, liver cancer.

Liver cancer often develops silently, but it can be prevented. By cutting back on alcohol and seeking assistance when needed, individuals can lower their risk of cirrhosis and the irreversible damage that can lead to cancer. This Liver Cancer Awareness Month serves as a reminder to reflect on our drinking habits and the significant impact they can have on our health. It's crucial to spread awareness about alcohol's role in liver disease. With support and treatment options like naltrexone, individuals can take important steps toward protecting their liver health and reducing the risk of liver cancer.



LUXURY MEETS STORYTELLING

A monumental merger between global conglomerate SRAM & MRAM Group and the renowned film production company Paradigm Pictures AD Ltd was unveiled at an exclusive event held at the prestigious Warren House. This partnership signifies a groundbreaking venture that combines luxury, technology, and storytelling, poised to revolutionize the entertainment landscape in India and beyond.

Dr. Sailesh L. Hiranandani, Chairman of SRAM & MRAM Group, and Arvind Dharmaraj, Chairman of Paradigm Pictures, attended the event. This merger signals SRAM & MRAM Group's strategic foray into the high-end entertainment sector in India, further cementing its legacy of innovation.

The group has earned its reputation through a diverse portfolio that spans technology, finance, agriculture, healthcare, energy, hospitality and infrastructure. The group's leadership in pioneering technological advancements and sustainable practices has made it a global powerhouse. With this merger, SRAM & MRAM bring

their expertise into the entertainment industry, aiming to blend technical excellence with Paradigm Pictures' creative brilliance.

"Our vision is to create a world-class film city, seamlessly blending cutting-edge technology with elite talent from Europe and the US, redefining the standards of storytelling and production excellence," stated Dr. Sailesh L. Hiranandani, outlining the group's aspirations.

A cornerstone of the merger is the proposed development of a 50-acre film city, set to commence construction soon.

Envisioned as a global benchmark for film production, this facility will offer comprehensive infrastructure, including customizable sets for schools, hospitals, and residential spaces. This all-encompassing ecosystem will simplify the filmmaking process for creators.

The film city will feature

- **World-class studios**— Equipped with advanced VFX capabilities and top-tier dubbing and editing suites.

- **Luxury preview theatres**— Five theatres with Dolby Atmos technology, including two with over 100 seats for press screenings and three

- with 25 ultra-premium seats for exclusive previews.

- **Opulent lodging and resorts**— Ten high-end resorts, each with private pools and four-bedroom accommodations for celebrities, alongside a 100-room facility for film crews.

- **Recreation and event spaces**— featuring a café, pub, conference

- halls, and a sophisticated venue for audio launches, effortlessly combining production and leisure.

- Paradigm Pictures AD Ltd showcased its cinematic prowess at the



Warren House event with its award-winning Cannes short film. Celebrated for its compelling storytelling, Paradigm Pictures has achieved streaming milestones with V1 Murder Case and Harkara, each surpassing 100 million minutes on Amazon Prime Video. With seven projects currently in development, the studio continues to shape impactful narratives that resonate across the globe.

Global and Pan-Indian productions in pipeline

The newly merged entity is poised to begin production of high-profile pan-Indian films once the state-of-the-art film city enters its construction phase. The first slate of five films will draw inspiration from novels and real-life stories and feature celebrated actors. Simultaneously, the collaboration will expand into European and American markets, combining Indian storytelling traditions with global filmmaking expertise to deliver internationally appealing projects.

Elevating the merger's allure, the alliance with RingDance Entertainment will bring the

Nordic Casefiles trilogy to life, inspired by the acclaimed novel Bird Whisperer by Ruud & Mild. This ambitious project includes:

- **RUUD & MILD**— Nordic Casefiles (Game) – A real-time interactive mystery-solving experience.

- **BIRD WHISPERER (TV Series)**— A deep dive into Scandinavian crime stories.

- **PARISTAN (Feature Film)**— A powerful tale of a father's search for his missing son in Stockholm, revealing hidden truths.

The event witnessed the presence of distinguished guests, including representatives from BBC, Netflix, and associates of renowned director Danny Boyle. Attendees celebrated the merger with awards recognizing contributions to technology, the arts, and sustainable development.

This historic evening at Warren House heralds a transformative chapter in global entertainment, setting the stage for groundbreaking projects destined to captivate audiences worldwide.

Manchester City wins 8-0 against Salford City in FA Cup

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City routed fourth-division Salford City 8-0 in the FA Cup as Premier League teams flexed their muscles against lower league opposition. Shocks were in short supply as Liverpool and Chelsea booked their place in the next round with heavy wins. Brighton, Bournemouth and Leicester also romped to victories. Those six clubs scored a combined 32 goals. The third round is traditionally one of the most anticipated weekends in English soccer as top flight clubs enter the competition with the prospect of upsets. But it was a day when the might of the Premier League was underlined, with high-flying Nottingham Forest and Wolverhampton also going through. The biggest shock was Brentford's 1-0 loss to the bottom team in division two, Plymouth. United greats humbled City showed no mercy against neighbor Salford, which is co-owned by Manchester United icons David Beckham, Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Gary and Phil Neville and Nicky Butt. Despite

resting a number of star players, Pep Guardiola's four-time defending Premier League champion was rampant at Etihad Stadium, with rising talent James McAtee hitting a second half hat trick. City prospects Divin Mubama and Nico O'Reilly also made the score sheet. "They were incredible — commitment, aggressive — there were so many things that I liked," Guardiola said. "With everyone (there) was respect. You cannot win by that margin if you don't respect the opponent." Jack Grealish was also on target for City, scoring his first goal for the club in 38 games. His last goal for City was in December 2023. Giggs, who is also Salford's director of football, was on the touchline to watch the action and had to endure taunts from the home fans. Scholes and Butt, meanwhile, looked glum when television cameras focused on them in the executive seats. Promotion-chasing Salford had won its last six games without conceding a goal. "You always know you're at the mercy of the quality of the competition. Man City and Pep have never disrespected anybody



and tonight they showed us why they are what they are and why he is who he is," manager Karl Robinson said. "I said to the players

I would have taken eight goals conceded in seven games, I just didn't expect them to all come in one."

Quad chasing Liverpool's bid to win an unprecedented quadruple is still on after a 4-0 victory over Accrington Stanley.

The Premier League and Champions League leader is also into the semifinals of the English League Cup. Fourth-division Accrington was never expected to prevent Arne Slot's team from advancing to the fourth round and Diogo Jota, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Jayden Danns and Federico Chiesa scored for Liverpool at Anfield. Rio Ngunuwa, aged 16, became Liverpool's second youngest debutant. Chiesa's goal was his first since joining Liverpool from Juventus in the offseason following an injury-disrupted start at Anfield. Big wins Chelsea won 5-0 against fourth-division Morecambe at Stamford Bridge. Tosin Adarabioyo and Joao Felix scored two goals each for the eight-time winner. Leicester was fighting relegation but thrashed second-tier Queens Park Rangers 6-2 for only its second win under manager Ruud van Nistelrooy. The Dutch coach hadn't won since his first game in charge at the start of December against West Ham. James Justin scored twice and Jamie Vardy converted a second-half penalty.

Georginio Rutter scored twice in Brighton's 4-0 win at Norwich. Norwich's American striker Josh Sargent went on as a 79th-minute substitute after recovering from groin surgery that had sidelined him since Oct. 27. Bournemouth's Dango Ouattara struck a double in a 5-1 victory against West Brom. Forest advances sitting third in the Premier League, Forest notched its seventh straight win by beating Luton 2-0. Ryan Yates and Ramon Sosa scored. Wolverhampton advanced 2-1 at second-division Bristol City. Plymouth shocks at the bottom of the second division, Plymouth is in danger of being relegated to the third tier and last month parted ways with manager Wayne Rooney. But it turned giant-killer with a late winner against Brentford. Morgan Whittaker's 82nd-minute strike ended Plymouth's 11-game winless run and secured a famous Cup upset. Former Manchester United prospect Demetri Mitchell scored twice to help third-division Exeter beat second-division Oxford 3-1 and reach the fourth round for the first time in 44 years.



Australian Open: Zheng Qinwen starts her bid for another final

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Zheng Qinwen's tennis resume is quite different from what it was when she showed up at the Australian Open a full year ago. No matter everything she accomplished in 2024 — a runner-up finish at Melbourne Park; an Olympic gold medal for China — she felt jitters before entering Rod Laver Arena on Sunday. After overcoming some hiccups late in the opening set of her first-round match on a stormy Day 1 at the season's first major tennis tournament, Zheng came through with a 7-6 (3), 6-1 victory against Anca Todoni, a 20-year-old qualifier from Romania who has won one Grand Slam match in her career. "Actually, I feel really nervous," said Zheng, who is seeded No. 5. "I started to feel nervous already since yesterday, 'cause I felt special emotion for the Australian Open. ... I really like it here." As well she should. It was 12 months ago on Melbourne's hard courts that Zheng made it all the way to the final before losing to Aryna Sabalenka. The two-time champion began her bid for a third consecutive title with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over 2017 U.S. Open title winner Sloane Stephens. Alexander Zverev, the men's No. 2 seed, faced Lucas Pouille in the last match at Rod Laver Arena. Two of the first three men's

contests to conclude both went five sets. Kei Nishikori, the 2014 U.S. Open runner-up, saved a pair of match points in the third set and came all the way back to beat qualifier Thiago Monteiro 4-6, 6-7 (4), 7-5, 6-2, 6-3, while No. 6 Casper Ruud, a three-time finalist at majors, defeated Jaume Munar 6-3, 1-6, 7-5, 2-6, 6-1. Nishikori, competing in Melbourne for the first time in four years after a series of hip, ankle and knee injuries, raised his arms and threw his head back, causing his black hat to fall off, after improving to 29-8 in five-sets, including 8-1 at the Australian Open. Before her run in Australia last January, Zheng had only played in eight major tournaments, making one quarterfinal. Her big-hitting breakthrough opened a season in which she wound up with a gold draped around her neck at the Paris Games in August. The 22-year-old Zheng's power-based game is best suited for hard courts, and playing indoors doesn't hurt, either, so she eventually was quite comfortable against Todoni under a closed retractable roof, while thunder and lightning and a serious downpour suspended action on the courts that can't be covered. Still, Zheng frittered away set points while serving for the opener at 5-4, then was forced to save set points for Todoni later. Afterward, Zheng said

that being nervous usually makes her focus better, but this time, it didn't make "me play my best tennis out there." Maybe that's because it was her first match of the season. Still, she was good enough on this day. The second set was more one-sided, and Todoni took a medical timeout for treatment on her lower back after three games. Zheng was among only a handful of players able to complete matches in the early going at what is now a 15-day tournament after a Sunday start was instituted last year. That extra time, which spreads out the first round across three days, could be particularly helpful this week, when Monday's packed program already included matches for Novak Djokovic, Jannik Sinner, Carlos Alcaraz, Coco Gauff and Iga Swiatek. No. 29 Linda Noskova was the first seeded player to exit the bracket, just a year after she stunned Iga Swiatek in Melbourne. Noskova lost 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 to Clara Tauson, while seeds who won Sunday included No. 11 Paula Badosa; No. 14 Mirra Andreeva, No. 18 Donna Vekic; and No. 30 Leylah Fernandez, the 2021 U.S. Open runner-up. "To be able to play a match and to finish a match with a roof, it's much more easy than ... To stop with the rain," said 20th-seeded man, Arthur Fils, who eliminated Otto Virtanen of Finland 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4, 6-4.

Bangladesh omit Shakib Al Hasan, Litton Das from Champions Trophy squad

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh on Sunday omitted former skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who has been suspended from bowling in international and domestic cricket because of an illegal action, from their Champions Trophy squad. Shakib, who failed a test of his bowling action at the Loughborough University in England last month, also could not procure a positive assessment in a second independent test conducted at the Sri Ramachandra Centre for Sports Science in Chennai recently. The omission from the 15-member Champions Trophy squad could also mark the end of the 37-year-old's ODI career. The tournament begins on February 19. Shakib, who was retired from Test and T20I formats, was reported for a suspect bowling



action during a one-off appearance for Surrey in the County Championship in September last. On-field umpires Steve O'Shaughnessy and David Millns made the report, which was termed "shocking" by Bangladesh Cricket Board officials. No place for Litton also Bangladesh, who will open their Champions Trophy

campaign against India in Dubai on February 20, have also left out seasoned wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das after his recent modest outings. Das could not make a fifty in his last 13 ODI innings. His last 50-plus score was against India at Pune in October 2023. In fact, the 30-year-old's last seven innings read: 6, 1, 0, 0, 2, 4, 0.

Other than these two big names, all-rounder Afif Hossain, and pacers Shoriful Islam and Hasan Mahmud too failed to get a place in the squad which will be led by Najmul Hossain Shanto. Najmul is returning to the side after missing the home ODIs last year against the West Indies due to a hamstring injury. Along with Najmul, experienced Mushfiqur Rahim and Mustafizur Rahman and promising top-order batter Towhid Hridoy too have made a comeback. Bangladesh squad: Najmul Hossain Shanto (capt), Mushfiqur Rahim (wk), Towhid Hridoy, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan, Mahmudullah, Jaker Ali, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan, Nahid Rana.



Sumit Nagal knocked in opening round

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

A profligate Sumit Nagal's Australian Open campaign ended in a straight-set defeat against world number 25 Tomas Machac in the men's singles event here on Sunday. The top Indian singles player failed to capitalise on his chances, losing 3-6 1-6 5-7 to his opponent from Czech Republic, who dominated with his superior consistency and precision. Nagal, ranked 91st, started the match confidently, dropping just two points in his first three service games. However, a double fault and a string of forced and unforced errors saw him lose his serve in the seventh and ninth games, handing Machac the opening set. In the second set, Nagal had an early chance to break Machac in the opening game, but the Czech player held firm, saving the breakpoint. From there, Machac seized control, wrapping up the set in just 36 minutes as Nagal struggled to keep up. Trailing by two sets, Nagal mounted a spirited fightback in the third set, securing an early break and racing to a 3-0 lead, which he extended to 5-3. However, a flurry of errors, including another double fault, allowed Machac to stage a comeback with a crucial break. The Czech player capitalised on the momentum, closing out the match and ending Nagal's campaign.

India defeat Ireland by 116 runs, take 2-0 lead in Women's ODI series

PTI ■ RAJKOT

A collective batting performance headlined by Jemimah Rodrigues' maiden hundred formed the cornerstone of India's commanding 116-run win against Ireland in the second women's ODI here on Sunday as the hosts took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. India scored a massive 370 for five riding on three half-centuries and a ton before restricting Ireland to 254 for 7 in the stipulated 50 overs. It was the elegant skipper Smriti Mandhana, who was first off the blocks with an attacking 73 off just 54 balls, while Rodrigues' first hundred (102 off 91 balls) ensured a smooth finish for the hosts. Newcomer Pratika Rawal (67 off 61 balls) and seasoned Harleen Deol (89 off 84 balls) also made merry on a sub-par bowling attack. Ireland batted steadily but never had the



firepower to surpass a gigantic Indian total. Save Christina Coulter Reilly's 80, there wasn't much fight from the other batters as off-spinner Deepti Sharma emerged as the pick of the Indian bowlers with figures of 3 for 37. Seamer Titas Sadhu got 1 for 48 in 10 overs. Earlier, India's total was based on two big stands -- 156 off 19 overs between Mandhana and Rawal and 183 off 28

overs between Rodrigues and Deol. In all, Indian batters smashed an astounding 44 boundaries and three sixes in 50 overs. As far as Rodrigues was concerned, her record has been one that flattered to deceive with just six half-centuries across 40 games. But once she got the boundary off medium pacer Arlene Kelly, the relief was palpable as she did a mock guitar-playing act with her willow. "It has been a long wait to get this hundred. Glad that the team gave me a role at No. 4 and I could deliver," Rodrigues told broadcasters Star Sports at the innings break. "Today, the important thing for me was to be till the 50th over. Getting runs is not a problem, I am good at that, but being till the end was important and glad I could do that." She said during their 183-run stand, it took some time for her and Deol to assess the nature of the track.

Gavaskar, Kamblī among stalwarts felicitated as Wankhede's 50th anniversary celebration begins

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Some of Mumbai's cricketing heroes, including legendary batter Sunil Gavaskar and former player Vinod Kamblī, were on Sunday felicitated by the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) at the opening event of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Wankhede Stadium. The main event will be held on January 19 at the Wankhede Stadium. A host of other cricketing stalwarts, including Sanjay Manjrekar, Wasim Jaffer, Raju Kulkarni, Chandrakant Pandit, Lalchand Rajput, Shobha Pandit and Arundhati Ghosh, who all had contributed to the rich legacy of Mumbai cricket, were also felicitated. Gavaskar was the first Mumbai captain to be felicitated on Sunday. He was presented a memento by MCA President Ajinkya Naik. "It is indeed a very big honour for me to be here at this iconic venue that has given Indian cricket so much, the 2011 Cricket World

Cup being the icing on the cake, and to be part of the start of the celebrations of 50 years of Wankhede Stadium," Gavaskar said. "As an opening batter, I couldn't miss the start so I am here. I want to wish the MCA all the best and also want to express my deepest sense of gratitude for giving me opportunities since school cricket. "I am what I am because MCA lifted me and helped me to take those steps and subsequently supported me even when I was playing for India...I want to thank you all for having me here," he said. Gavaskar was also a member of the Indian team that played the inaugural Test at the Wankhede Stadium against the West Indies in 1974. Kamblī, who was recently discharged from a local hospital after being admitted to the ICU on December 21 due to health complications, was also present on the occasion. He was seen being escorted around as he is still on the recovery path.



After his felicitation, Kamblī spoke about his playing days at the iconic venue.

"I remember I smashed my first double hundred here against England and then went on to score

many more hundreds in my career," he said. "If anyone wants to play for India

like me or Sachin (Tendulkar), then I would advise that you should keep working hard and never leave doing that because that's what Sachin and me did since our childhood days." Speaking on the occasion, MCA President Naik said, "Wankhede Stadium's 50th anniversary is a special occasion for us. Today was the start of the grand celebration. "Our main goal behind this week-long event is to inform the next generation about Mumbai's cricket history and contributions of men's and women's players who played for Mumbai and inspire the young generation to take forward this legacy." Former MCA President Vijay Patil was also felicitated. The Sports Journalists Association of Mumbai (SJAM) was also felicitated for the support and contribution to Mumbai cricket. As part of the week-long celebrations, two exciting cricket matches involving teams from MCA, SJAM, Consul Generals and IAS Officers were held. Legends like Sachin Tendulkar,

Rohit Sharma and Dilip Vengsarkar will also be part of the grand celebrations. The other stalwarts who are expected to join the celebrations are former India skippers Ravi Shastri, Ajinkya Rahane, current T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav and former national women's team captain Diana Edulji. The main event will also feature Mumbai's legendary men's and women's players from domestic and international cricket. The 50th anniversary celebrations will continue throughout the week. MCA will felicitate the groundsmen of clubs and grounds, and organise Polly Umrigar Health Camp and special lunch for them on January 15. This will be followed by felicitation of the members of the Mumbai team which played the first First-Class match at the Wankhede Stadium in 1974. The MCA will also release a coffee table book on January 19, while a commemorative postal stamp will also be issued.

BALAYYA'S **DAAKU MAHARAAJ** IS A TYPICAL PAISA VASOOL FILM

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Story

A tea estate owner Krishna Murthy (Sachin Khedekar), who is also running a school, in Madanapalle is facing troubles from local MLA Trimurthulu Naidu (Ravi Kishan). Krishna Murthy's granddaughter Vaishnavi is in danger. So, a servant (Makrand Deshpande) calls Maharaj (Balakrishna), who is in Bhopal, to safeguard her. Maharaj comes down to Madanapalle and joins the estate as driver Nanaji and saves the little kid from Trimurthulu Naidu and his goons. The story turns into another interesting plot when a goon called Balwanth Singh Thakur (Bobby Deol) tells him that Daaku Maharaja is hiding in Madanapalle. Who is Daaku Maharaja, what is his background story? What happened between Daaku Maharaja and Balwanth Singh Thakur, and what is their relation with the small girl Vaishnavi? What are the roles played by Nandini (Shraddha Srinath) and Kaveri (Pragya Jaiswal) in Daaku Maharaja's life? If you want answers for these questions, you have to see the film.

Analysis:

Bobby Kolli is a clever director and writer, because when he got a big star like Balakrishna, he didn't go for an experimental story or something else. He sticks to a regular formula, but narrating it in a new style. He used Balakrishna's mass appeal and his onscreen presence to perfectly fit his story. That's what he did with 'Daaku Maharaja'. The story is not new and sometimes one can predict also, but the director narrated it in a new manner with interesting action sequences.

If you remember Rajamouli's 'Simhadri' story where Jr NTR hails from Andhra, who goes to



After delivering a hit 'Waltair Veerayya', with Mega Star Chiranjeevi, director Bobby Kolli, joined hands with another star Nandamuri Balakrishna for 'Daaku Maharaja'. On the other hand, Balakrishna delivered three consecutive hits with 'Akhanda', 'Veera Simha Reddy' and 'Bhagavanth Kesari' and can he continue the success streak with this 'Daaku Maharaja'? The film released today to cash in on the Sankranti holidays. Here is the story and how it fares.

Kerala, helps people there and is named as Singamanalai. Back again to his family and when he was in hospital, someone revealed the flashback of Kerala story and how he helped people there. It seems director Bobby has taken something like this where a person hailing from Andhra went to Madhya Pradesh and helped people in some village and became a Daaku Maharaj. The same person returns to save a family in Andhra, when he gets

injured, someone reveals his flashback.

Bobby is telling the same kind of story, but the treatment is different. Here in this film, he used Balakrishna's mass appeal with the dialogues and action episodes. For Balakrishna, the character in this film is definitely projected in a new dimension. In most of his earlier films, his character was filled with loud dialogues and mass appeal action scenes. But in this film, though there are typical Balayya's

punch dialogues, they were shown in a subtle manner and the action scenes designed in a very stylish way.

The first half of the film is very interesting with a local MLA threatening a tea estate owner and then Balakrishna enters into their family as driver Nanaji. How he saves the girl child and the encounters between Balakrishna and goons are narrated in an interesting way with the interval scene is definitely the highlight. The second half is a bit slow where the director narrates the flashback episode and the story that happened in Madhya Pradesh. Another plus point is that the director didn't drag these action scenes, but choreographed very well. The director also captures some good emotional scenes between the little girl and Balakrishna. In the second half too there are few emotional scenes, but when compared to the first half, the second half is a bit lag. The Chambal episode definitely gives something new, but the climax is not up to the mark.

When it comes to the performance, Balakrishna steals the show with three different get-ups. He is at his best, especially in the emotional scenes with the small girl and his intense performance. He is good at action sequences and also delivered his typical punch dialogues. Definitely, it's Balakrishna's show completely from the beginning. Shraddha Srinath once again came up with flying colours and provided a strong impact, though her character is very less. On the other hand, Pragya Jaiswal, known for her glamour role, is shown in a serious character in this one. Bobby Deol, after the success of 'Animal' is a regular in South films as a villain. He acted in a negative role and looked good. Sachin Khedekar played the grandfather role several times and this is another one. Chandini Chowdary, Divi Vadithya are there in supportive roles. Urvasi Rautela added glamour quotient to the film. Ravi Kishan is seen in a regular one. There are plenty of actors like Makrand Deshpande, Shine Tom Chako, Aadukulam Naren, Satya, Jeevan Kumar and

VTV Ganesh who did their job well.

The cinematography is definitely one of the highlights with Vijay Kartik Kannan coming up with beautiful and rich visuals. He earlier worked for 'Jailer' and now he has shown Balakrishna, especially in action scenes, in a different way. S Thaman's background score is another pillar for this one. Though he failed for the other Sankranti film, he is at his best for this 'Daaku Maharaja'. His background score elevated many scenes, especially Balakrishna.

Finally, 'Daaku Maharaja' is a complete paisa vasool film with its commercial ingredients. Balakrishna is at his best and director Bobby Kolli narrated the old story in a new style. The punch dialogues of Balakrishna, his mass action, the emotional scenes definitely enthrall his fans, they can celebrate the festival with this one.

Film: Daaku Maharaja

Cast: Nandamuri Balakrishna, Pragya Jaiswal, Shraddha Srinath, Urvasi Rautela, Sachin Khedekar, Bobby Deol, Chandini Chowdary, Ravi Kishan and others

Music: S Thaman

Cinematography: Vijay Kartik Kannan

Producers: Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya

Director: Bobby Kolli

Release date: January 12, 2025

Rating: 3/5

Anil Ravipudi rejected Thalapathy Vijay's last film?



Director Anil Ravipudi gets a big chance to direct Tamil superstar Vijay's last film, but it seems, the director is in no mood to direct it. This was revealed by none other than the Tamil actor VTV Ganesh, who is also popular in Telugu with his trademark dialogue 'Evadra nuvvu intha talented ga vunnav'. On Saturday evening at the 'Sankranti Vasthunnam' music festival, the actor spoke about director Anil Ravipudi and revealed this news.

When VTV Ganesh got his chance of speaking, he requested director Anil Ravipudi also on to the dais and Anil agreed. In his speech, he revealed that Vijay wanted to remake Anil Ravipudi's hit film 'Bhagavanth Kesari', so he called Anil Ravipudi and asked him to direct it. "But Anil Ravipudi rejected Vijay sir's offer as he didn't want to do a remake," said VTV Ganesh. When Ganesh said that Anil rejected the offer, Anil was blank faced and asked Ganesh to stop revealing that news. Though Anil tried to do the damage control for Ganesh's comments, Ganesh went on and said that Vijay called Anil, but he rejected the offer as he is busy with the present film 'Sankranti Vasthunnam'.

But later, Anil clarified on Ganesh's news and said that he didn't reject it. "Vijay sir called me and we had some meaningful discussion in a good atmosphere. The details about Vijay69 will be announced by the makers officially and this is not the best stage to talk about that film," said Anil Ravipudi, to clarify about it. Anil agreed in his speech that Vijay and he discussed Vijay's last film. The music event went in a very good atmosphere, but because of Ganesh's news about Anil and Vijay film, spoiled the evening.

I DON'T THINK ABOUT THINGS WHICH ARE OUT OF OUR CONTROL: VENKATESH

Senior actor Venkatesh is coming up with 'Sankranti Vasthunnam' for this Sankranti festival. Anil Ravipudi is the director, while Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary are the female leads. Speaking about the film, Venkatesh is very confident about the success. "Earlier, many of my films were released at this festival and were successful. I am confident that this 'Sankranti Vasthunnam' is also going to be a hit," said Venkatesh. The actor said that the film is a perfect one for the festival with lots of entertainment. "When director Anil Ravipudi narrated the line of the story, a husband and ex-cop, dedicated wife and an ex-girlfriend, I felt it has elements of a successful story. There is a small crime also added to the story and I know that this film is definitely a minimum guarantee one," said Venky. He added that his combination with director Anil is very successful and also both worked in a friendly atmosphere.

"I tried a different comedy in this one and definitely it looks fresh to the audience. I want to do more films with Anil as we had a good rapport after working three films," said the actor. Talking about the song which he crooned, he said that it is his idea. "When I heard the song at two-o'clock at night, I danced without knowing. Some crazy energy is there in the song, so I said that I will sing the song. That day my voice was also clear and there are English words in the lyrics, which made my job easy," said Venky about the song.

When asked about the hits and flops affecting him and his career, he said 'no'. "I give my best for every film and work honestly and sincerely. Hits and flops are not in our hands and I don't think too much about things that are not in our control," said the actor. Venky praised the two female lead actresses and said they performed very well. The promotions are crazy for this film and those videos are viral on the Internet and social media. "Actually, the music has come out very nice. On the other hand, I like dancing very much. Anil and the two female leads with a lively team wanted to do something new to promote the film. Luckily, our promotions attract many people and I am happy that they enjoyed it," said Venkatesh.

About his web series 'Ran Naidu' season 2, he said it may come in March. "I completed my dubbing part," he said. About his upcoming films, there are story discussions happening at Suresh Productions, Sithara Entertainments, Mythri and Vyjayanthi Movie production houses. "Nothing has been finalised as it is still at the discussion stage," said Venkatesh.



Rashmika Mandanna injured, three films shoot delayed

Top actress Rashmika Mandanna injured her leg while doing her gym. The actress is busy with Down South and also a Hindi film with Salman Khan. The actress has taken to social media and put a picture of her with the injured leg and says that the injury may take time to heal.

The actress delivered a hit film with 'Pushpa 2 The Rule' and before that her Hindi film 'Animal' became a huge blockbuster. She is one of the highest paid actresses and also most demanded not only in South, but also in Hindi. "Injured myself in my sacred gym shrine," she said in her Instagram.

She mentioned and apologized to the filmmakers of 'Thama', 'Sikandar' and 'Kubera' for the delay in the shoots due to her injury.

"To my directors, sorry for the delay... I'll be back soon enough just making sure my legs are fit for action (or at least fit for hopping). In the meantime, if you need me...I'll be the one in the corner doing a highly advanced bunny hop workout," she said about her injury. Rashmika is also acting in another Hindi film 'Chhaava' and a Telugu film 'The Girlfriend'.

Big shock to Dil Raju

The Telangana and Andhra Pradesh governments gave ticket price hike and also extra shows to Dil Raju film 'Game Changer'. He also distributed Balakrishna's 'Daaku Maharaja' in Nizam and his other film 'Sankranti Vasthunnam' was released on January 14. But after the High Court comments, both the governments revoked their GOs and not allow the price hike and also cancel the benefit shows.

This news is a big shock to Dil Raju. Not only this, the film 'Game Changer' collections are also not encouraging and the critics also do not like the film much. Apart from this, the producer apologized for his comments at his film event in Nizamabad, a few days back. He said, "People of Telangana get vibes only for meat and palm wine." This comment became viral and many criticised him for his remarks, saying that the people of Telangana were hurt. So, he released a special video saying that his comments are unfortunate and apologized to the people of Telangana.



VAISHNAVI IS GOING PLACES

Telugu girl Vaishnavi Chaitanya became sensational with the blockbuster film 'Baby'. She became a household name and a star after the success of that film and now she is busy with multiple projects in Telugu. The film collected more than Rs 100 crore and the actress also won Best Actress Filmfare Award for her performance in the film.

Now, the actress is going places as she signed a Tamil film and two Kannada films, according to a source. The actress is always choosy about her roles and gives importance to the story. "She likes her role and okayed the Kannada film opposite a big star, but she is waiting to announce the details by the production house," added the source.

Even many Tamil filmmakers approached her with different scripts, but she agreed to do two Tamil films, said the source. "She wants her role to be strong and impact the film," added the source about the Tamil films. With two Telugu projects and now Kannada and Tamil films added to her kitty, Vaishnavi is now definitely one of the most demanded actresses in Down South in the coming days.

