



# the pioneer

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**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
The pioneer

The officials and the police are supporting real estate brokers and goons. Brokers are grabbing the lands of the poor around Hyderabad with the help of the police and revenue officials by creating fake documents. They are also attacking the poor. I went to Arundathi Nagar, Balaji Nagar and Jawahar Nagar. The Revenue Minister, Collector and the CP spoke to me. Six months have gone by since I became an MP. I am seeing the tears of the poor everyday

- Eatala Rajender, BJP MP P4

**Priyanka is 'Stree Shakti', Rahul 'Yuva Shakti': Kharge**

**SHILPA SHIRODKAR**  
TARGETED ME BECAUSE SHE NEEDED SOMETHING NEW TO LATCH ON TO: KASHISH

Unfazed by Game Changer disaster, Charan's focus shifts to his next film

**DON'T MISS...**

**Kollu hails Centre's VSP package**

Minister for Excise and Mines Kollu Ravindra on Tuesday strongly defended the Centre's special package for the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), rejecting opposition claims that the initiative was insufficient to prevent privatization. Addressing a media conference alongside TDP State President Palla Srinivasa Rao, Ravindra emphasized that the package was a vital step toward revitalizing the plant...

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**Neutral expert backs New Delhi's stand**

A World Bank-appointed neutral expert has backed New Delhi's position on the framework to resolve certain disputes between India and Pakistan on Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects. While India has been pressing for resolution of the issues by the neutral expert as mandated under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) between the two countries, Pakistan has been backing the Permanent ...

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**Sensex crashes 1,235 points**

Benchmark Sensex tanked 1,235 points to settle at more than seven-month low due to an across-the-board selloff triggered by global tariff war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows, making investors poorer by over Rs 7 lakh crore. The 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 1,235.08 points or 1.60 per cent to settle at 75,838.36 dragged by losses in IICI Bank and Reliance Industries. During the day, the BSE benchmark ...

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**India wins in U19 Women's T20 WC**

Debutant left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma recorded astonishing figures of 5/5, including a hat-trick, as India demolished Malaysia by 10 wickets in an utterly one-sided U19 Women's T20 World Cup match that was done and dusted in less than 18 overs here on Tuesday. Vaishnavi's figures are the best ever in the tournament's history as Malaysia were bundled out for a paltry 31 in 14.3 overs. Fellow left-arm spinner Ayushi Shukla (3/8) also chipped in as India bowlers ran ...

-SPORTS

## India's era begins in 2028: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday said India will enter a new era of global leadership starting in 2028. He was addressing a Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) session on green industrialisation held on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos in Switzerland. Speaking to top Indian industrialists, including Tata Group chairman N Chandrasekharan, the Chief Minister cited a Bloomberg analysis, which predicts that by 2027 India will emerge as the leading country contributing the most to the incremental GDP of the world. "From 2028 it is going to be the era of India. That is bound to happen. India will be the only country with a demographic dividend for another 20 to 25 years," said Naidu. Highlighting India's global

- Naidu cites a Bloomberg report projecting India as a top contributor to global GDP by 2027.
- India's demographic advantage lasting 20-25 years highlighted.
- Naidu praises PM Modi's Viksit Bharat - 2047 vision, predicting India's top two global status in 22 years.
- Plans for a Global Leadership Centre in Amaravati aim to train leaders for global challenges.
- State initiatives include promoting organic farming with traceability and certification.



- Naidu urges industrial collaboration for double-digit economic growth to avoid hindering middle-income status.
- PPP model advocated to combat poverty and promote equal opportunities.

### Naidu engages with CEOs of top firms in Davos

PNS ■ DAVOS

On the second day of his visit to Davos for the World Economic Forum summit, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has been actively engaging with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of various globally renowned companies to encourage them to set up their units in Andhra Pradesh.



During a meeting with Shin Hak Cheol, CEO of LG Chem Ltd, Chandrababu explored further investment opportunities in the state across various sectors. In a message posted on 'X', the Chief Minister highlighted that the meeting aimed to attract more investments from the company to Andhra Pradesh.

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standing, Naidu said Indians are regarded as one of the most acceptable communities worldwide and expressed confidence that they will perform exceptionally well in contributing to the global community. Calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a visionary with clarity on administration and future, the CM referred to the PM's Viksit Bharat - 2047 vision and asserted that India will emerge as the number one or two country in the next 22 years.

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## 16 Naxals, including top leader, killed in encounter

Shah terms it 'mighty blow to Naxalism'



PNS ■ RAIPUR/BHUBANESWAR

Sixteen Naxals, including a top leader of the CPI (Maoists) who was carrying a reward of Rs 1 crore, were killed in a joint operation by central and state police forces along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border. Union Home Minister Amit Shah Tuesday termed the encounter as "another mighty blow to Naxalism" and asserted the Narendra Modi government's resolve for a Naxal-free India and the joint efforts of the security forces to eliminate the menace from the country. Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district superintendent of police Nikhil

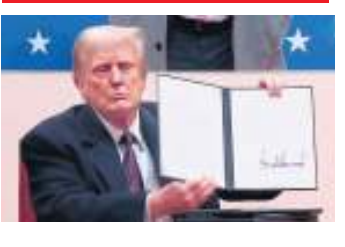
Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district superintendent of police Nikhil Rakhecha said of the deceased, one has been identified as Jairam alias Chalpati, a central committee member of the CPI (Maoist), who was carrying a bounty of Rs 1 crore.

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### Trump withdraws US from WHO

Signs executive order



PNS ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order beginning the process of withdrawing America from the World Health Organisation, the second time in less than five years that the US has made a move to withdraw from the world body. It was among dozens of executive

actions he signed after being sworn in on Monday for a second term, on issues ranging from immigration to foreign policy to climate change. The World Health Organisation (WHO) came under intense criticism from Trump in 2020 for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which grew into a worldwide health crisis during the final year of his first term. "That's a big one," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office of the White House when an aide presented to him an executive order on this to be signed by him. "We paid USD 500 million to World Health when I was here, and I terminated it. China, with 1.4 billion people, has 350 dependents... Nobody knows what we have because so many people came in illegally."

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### Nara Lokesh invites ZF Foxconn to AP

PNS ■ DAVOS

Minister for Information Technology (IT) and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, on Tuesday, invited ZF Foxconn to establish its unit in Andhra Pradesh, describing the State as a strategic location for the expansion of supply chain operations. Lokesh, who is attending the World Economic Forum summit in Davos, met Eike Dorff, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ZF Foxconn Chassis Modules, on the second day of his visit at the Belvedere Hotel. During the meeting, Lokesh highlighted that Andhra Pradesh is rapidly emerging as a key hub for the automobile sector. He informed Dorff that major car man-



IT Minister Lokesh specifically mentioned Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, and Anantapur as strategic locations for establishing automobile manufacturing and supply chain operations.

facturers, such as Kia and Isuzu, have already set up their units in the state. The IT Minister further noted that bus manufacturing companies like Ashok Leyland, Veera, and

Azad Mobility are also planning to expand their Original Equipment Manufacturing (OEM) units in Andhra Pradesh, as the State offers a conducive investment ecosystem.

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### Action to be taken against Sr IPS officer

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to initiate disciplinary proceedings against senior IPS officer N. Sanjay under Rule 8 of the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969. The decision was formalised through Government Order (GO) Rt No. 122, issued by Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand on Monday.

As per the order, Sanjay has been directed to submit a written statement of defence within 30 days of receiving the notice. He must also specify if he wishes to be heard in person. The inquiry will address only those Articles of Charge that are not admitted by Sanjay, and he is required to specifically admit or deny each charge. The officer has been warned that failure to submit a written defence or appear in person within the stipulated timeframe will result in disciplinary action based on the available evidence, assuming he has no explanation to provide. The order further states that any attempt by Sanjay to exert political or external influence, or if any representation is received on his behalf during the proceedings, will be presumed to have been made at his instance.

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## Expedite land acquisition for NH expansion: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand has directed district collectors, joint collectors, and officials from relevant departments to expedite the land acquisition process for the construction and expansion of national highways and bypass roads across Andhra Pradesh. During a video conference held on Tuesday with officials from the Revenue, Forest, Transport, Roads and Buildings (TR&B), National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Vijayanand emphasised

the importance of completing the process swiftly to avoid project delays. Highlighting the critical role of land acquisition in the timely execution of highway projects, the

The Chief Secretary conducted a district-wise review of pending land acquisition and forest clearance issues with the officials. He underscored the need to adhere to regulations by providing adequate compensation to farmers while ensuring the process is completed within the stipulated timeframe



Chief Secretary instructed district collectors and joint collectors to prioritise this task. He stressed that prompt action would ensure that the required land is handed over to construction agencies without unnecessary delays. The Chief Secretary also conducted a district-wise review of pending land acquisition and forest clearance issues with the officials. He underscored the need to adhere to regulations by providing adequate compensation to farmers while ensuring the process is completed within the stipulated timeframe.

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■ VIJAYAWADA

## Race for AP's new DGP hot up

Harish Gupta emerges frontrunner as present incumbent Dwaraka Tirumala Rao is set to retire on January 31

As the end of January approaches, the Andhra Pradesh Police Department is bracing for a leadership change. With less than a week remaining before the current Director General of Police (DGP), Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, a 1989 batch IPS officer, reaches superannuation on January 31, 2025, the State is eagerly awaiting the announcement of his successor. Tirumala Rao, who currently holds the dual posts of AP DGP and the Managing Director (MD) and Vice Chairman (VC) of the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC), will step down as the top cop. However, sources close to the State government suggest that Tirumala Rao may continue in his role at APSRTC for some time, ensuring continuity in the corporation's



leadership. The race for the DGP position is heating up, with several senior Indian Police Service (IPS) officers anticipating elevation. Among them are Harish Kumar Gupta (1992 batch), Kumar Vishwajeet (1994 batch), and Dr A Ravi Shankar Ayyanar (1994 batch). Of these, Gupta is said to be the most likely candidate, with sources indicating that he has earned the trust of the state government. Gupta's credentials have positioned him favourably for the role. His recent appointment by the Election Commission of India as

the DGP of Andhra Pradesh ahead of the 2024 general elections was widely praised. Under his leader-

ship, the State witnessed a smooth and peaceful election process, which earned him accolades from Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Those close to the government suggest that Gupta's strong relationship with the CM, coupled with his exemplary leadership during the elections, makes him a strong contender for the post. In another significant development, it is understood that while Tirumala Rao will step down as DGP, he will continue in his position as MD and VC of APSRTC. Sources within the corporation have confirmed that the state gov-



### AP to be transformed into a ganja-free state: DGP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

DGP Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao outlined the commitment to combat illegal ganja cultivation and trafficking. During his visit to the Satya Sai district, he stressed that the state government is working tirelessly to make Andhra Pradesh a "ganja-free" state. Addressing the media on Tuesday, DGP Tirumala Rao stated that ganja cultivation is currently limited to just 100 acres across the state, with most illegal trafficking originating from Odisha. He also clarified that the claim that

ganja is predominantly found in the agency areas of the state is a misconception. The DGP emphasized that the government has been actively curbing illegal trafficking and cultivation, focusing on eradicating ganja plantations during the current season. The DGP highlighted that the Police department has been focusing on curbing the illegal transport of ganja by establishing a special team under the Home Ministry, along with the involvement of the Excise, Health, Tribal Welfare, and HRD Ministries.

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# CBN was testing waters with demand to make Lokesh Deputy CM

What would a mature politician do to strengthen his position? It could be simply taking a step backwards and describing it as taken in the interests of alliance partners! This appears to be true if one takes a look at the blitzkrieg over the possible elevation of the AP Minister for Information Technology, Nara Lokesh, the son of AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, as the Deputy Chief Minister.

There was a sudden demand in the TDP to elevate Lokesh as the Deputy Chief Minister as TDP cadres gave Lokesh credit for the TDP having one crore plus membership, for setting up a helpline for party activists to seek help if they face problems and for providing insurance coverage to them.

The campaign for Lokesh seems well for TDP cadres who play the role of big brother in the ruling NDA alliance comprising the Jana Sena Party (JSP) and the BJP. But it could be a bitter pill for the other two partners, especially the JSP, as its leader Pawan Kalyan is now the Deputy Chief Minister and everybody considers him as the 'No. 2' in the AP Cabinet.

Everyone knows that the JSP, a crucial partner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), contributed much to bring the alliance to power by giving up several seats to prevent vote splitting. That helped the NDA a lot. Chief Minister Chandrababu himself acknowledged the JSP's magnanimity in making the alliance a grand success. The NDA combine bagged

**Meanwhile, the sudden demand for the elevation of Lokesh as Deputy Chief Minister hit the NDA partners like a bomb. This is particularly true of JSP cadres as their leader is now the No. 2 in the Cabinet. In other words, if Lokesh is made the DyCM, he will become equal to Pawan Kalyan**

around 90% of the seats (164 seats out of 175) in the AP Assembly. This massive victory left the YSRCP without even the principal opposition tag as that requires it to have 10% of the seats.

As the TDP is the big brother in the NDA in AP, it feels superior to other NDA partners. The cadres of the JSP and the BJP think that they are not being treated as 'respectable

friends.' The NDA leadership in AP has been trying to tackle this feeling among BJP and JSP cadres by giving them nominated posts based on their performance in the general elections.

Meanwhile, the sudden demand for the elevation of Lokesh as Deputy Chief Minister hit the NDA partners like a bomb. This is particularly true of JSP cadres as their



M D RATNA KUMAR  
Senior Journalist

schemes due to financial problems, it may not be desirable for the TDP to offend the JSP by elevating Lokesh as the Deputy Chief Minister. That can hurt JSP supremo Pawan Kalyan.

Lokesh may be the political successor of Chandrababu Naidu. But giving him a higher post would land the NDA in trouble even in the absence of a strong opposition. Strictly speaking, the YSRCP is not in a position to create problems for the NDA. Although it has no principal opposition tag, the YSRCP has cadres in almost all Assembly constituencies. However, it is still not able to get over the feeling of not having the principal opposition tag.

It is those who want to work under Lokesh in future who are behind the demand to make him DyCM. But Chief Minister Chandrababu has put a full stop to the demand

to elevate his son as the Deputy Chief Minister. Chandrababu knows that such a demand could irritate the JSP and its possible consequences could be serious.

JSP cadres hope that Pawan might get an elevation with the blessings of Prime Minister Modi in future and don't want anything that could hit the prospects of their leader. Pawan thinks that his DyCM post was earned through hard work and everyone in the JSP thinks that their leader should not be downgraded by giving the same post to others.

When Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy was the CM of United AP, he decided to remove senior Congress leader M Satyanarayanan Rao (MSR) from the Cabinet after some embarrassment. YSR offered him the RTC Chairman post. MSR reluctantly accepted it

after abolishing the posts of other RTC Directors making him 'synonymous' with RTC. Similarly, Pawan has been made comfortable by not allowing anybody to become equal to him in the Cabinet.

During YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's rule, there were five Deputy Chief Ministers as Jagan gave all prominent castes a Deputy CM post. Actually, the Deputy Chief Minister post has no constitutional recognition.

Generally, Chandrababu is known for floating ideas for public debate. He is believed to have conveyed his thoughts to TDP cadres to get it discussed by the public and may implement the idea if the feedback is encouraging. A senior politician like Chandrababu would experiment like this to gauge the public mood. The issue of elevating Lokesh was one such thing.

# PRC for electricity employees soon: Gottipati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar has announced that the process of formation of the Pay Revision Commission (PRC) for electricity employees is progressing well, with a positive decision expected soon under the leadership of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu. The minister made this statement while participating in the launch of the Diary-2025 and Calendar event organised by the Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board Employees (APSEB) in Vijayawada on Tuesday. During the event, Minister Ravi Kumar unveiled the Diary-2025, while K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu, Managing Director of APGENCO, launched the Calendar.

Diary-2025 and calendar of the department's staff launched

The Minister lauded the unwavering commitment of electricity engineers, highlighting their round-the-clock efforts to ensure the survival and success of the organisation. He noted that, unlike many other states, Andhra Pradesh's Electricity Board prioritises public service over commercial objectives. Addressing the challenges faced by the sector, he acknowledged the shortage of Assistant Engineers (AEs) and line staff in various districts and stressed the need for corrective measures. Despite these challenges, he commended the employees for their dedication, often risking their lives in the



Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar, Released APSEB Engineers Association Diary-2025 in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Photo: Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar

of duty. Minister Ravi Kumar stated that Andhra Pradesh's electricity board provides superior services compared to those in other states, attributing this to the

employees' enthusiasm and hard work. He shared his personal experiences, recalling their tireless efforts during the recent floods in Vijayawada to ensure an uninterrupted power supply. Highlighting the sector's annual growth rate of 6-7 per cent, he pointed to increasing opportunities in renewable energy and the state's ambitious plans to expand electricity production.

He revealed that under Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's vision, efforts are underway to bring 30 gigawatts of electricity production to the state, to contribute 7-8 gigawatts from the electricity board's initiatives. The Minister assured employees

that their concerns would be addressed and urged them to focus on not only providing quality electricity but also enhancing public services.

K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu, Managing Director of APGENCO, shared insights from his previous role as an engineer at Vizag Steel Plant, expressing his deep appreciation for the hard work and dedication of electricity engineers. He assured employees that discussions with the Chief Minister and the Energy Minister would soon lead to an increase in the number of engineers. He praised the exceptional performance of engineers in the post-reform era of the electricity sector, highlighting their critical role in maintaining operational excellence in every shift.

# Min lauds govt move to allot 340 liquor shops to toddy tappers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC, EWS, and Handlooms S Savitha has expressed her happiness over the government's decision to allocate 340 liquor shops to toddy tappers, calling it a historic move. The Minister also praised the government's initiative to provide a 50% subsidy on liquor shop license fees, thanking Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for his commitment to the welfare of toddy tappers.



In a press statement on Tuesday, Minister Savitha emphasized that this decision fulfilled one of the key election promises made by the Chief Minister. The government had promised to allocate 10% of liquor shops to toddy tappers, and with the issuance of the GO, 340 shops are now set aside for them. She expressed her delight over the significant financial benefit this allocation would bring to toddy tapper families, with the subsidy on license fees further enhancing their economic advantage.

Minister Savitha reiterated that the coalition government has once again proven itself to be a government for the BC (Backward Classes) community. She highlighted that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's focus has always been on the welfare and development of BCs, a goal reflected in the decisions and allocations made by the government.

# Nara Lokesh invites ZF ...

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Lokesh specifically mentioned Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, and Anantapur as strategic locations for establishing automobile manufacturing and supply chain operations.

Lokesh assured Dorff that the state's infrastructure, including wide roads, ports, and airports, would greatly facilitate supply chain operations. He also emphasized the state government's focus on providing employment opportunities to the youth and enhancing their skills. The Minister urged ZF Foxconn to collaborate with the government in setting up engineering and skilling centres in Andhra Pradesh.

In response, Dorff informed Lokesh that ZF Foxconn Chassis Modules, in partnership with Hero Motors, already operates a plant in Chennai and provides essential global customer services to BMW. The CEO shared that the company aims to increase its transactions in India to \$8.8 billion by 2029, up from the current \$4.4 billion. He assured Lokesh that a positive decision would be made soon, following discussions at the company's board meeting regarding the Andhra Pradesh government's proposal.

# 'Aarogya Yog Yatra' national campaign launched in Tirupati

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), the country's largest professional body representing over 46,000 obstetricians and gynaecologists, in collaboration with UNICEF, has launched 'Aarogya Yog Yatra', a pioneering campaign aimed at promoting the holistic wellness of mothers and babies in India.

Dr. Sunita Tandulwadkar, President of FOGSI, inaugurated this transformative initiative in the spiritual city of Tirupati. The year-long



national campaign, which will cover 13 of India's most spiritually significant locations, seeks to integrate spirituality into medicine and inspire a proactive health approach among women and doctors.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Sunita Tandulwadkar said: "This unique campaign holds great importance as our country is home to the oldest spiritual traditions in the world. In my 34 years as a doctor, it is spirituality that has enabled me to give my best every single day. It connects us with the universal energy, guiding us to heal holistically. This Yatra is our way of sharing this realization with FOGSI members and the wider community."

# YSRCP slams coalition govt for neglecting housing for the poor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Malladi Vishnu, YSR Congress Party's Central Constituency Coordinator and former MLA has accused the coalition government of neglecting housing amenities, including bus services, already in place.

He further alleged that the coalition government's mismanagement had turned the housing scheme into a burden for beneficiaries. In contrast, he praised the previous government led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for realizing the dreams of the poor by constructing mini-townships with essential facilities and providing homes to the underprivileged.

Water, street lighting, and proper infrastructure. He asserted that under the YSR Congress Party's rule, such issues would have been addressed, with all necessary amenities, including bus services, already in place.

He further alleged that the coalition government's mismanagement had turned the housing scheme into a burden for beneficiaries. In contrast, he praised the previous government led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for realizing the dreams of the poor by constructing mini-townships with essential facilities and providing homes to the underprivileged.



Vishnu pointed out the severe inconvenience caused to residents due to the lack of basic facilities like drinking

# India's era begins...

Continued from Page 1

Speaking about the proposed Global Leadership Centre (GLC) in Amravati, Naidu said he is aiming to nurture future leaders to tackle emerging global challenges.

He also outlined plans to transform the state into a hub for organic farming, focusing on eliminating the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides while ensuring traceability and certification for agricultural products.

Further, he urged industrialists to collaborate with the government in achieving the double-digit economic growth

goal set by the PM. He cautioned that failure to meet this target could hinder the country's progress towards becoming a middle-income nation.

In addition, he emphasised the importance of effective population management and appealed to well-off citizens to lend a helping hand to the underprivileged under the Public Private People Partnership (PPPP or P4) model he is propounding to eradicate poverty.

All of us will join hands to make India poverty-less, offer equal opportunities and provide better living standards, he added.

# AP to be transformed into...

Continued from Page 1

The state government has also set up a specialized 'Eagle Cell' to regulate ganja and other drug-related activities. DGP Tirumala Rao further noted the significant progress made in tackling cybercrimes and reducing road accidents.

He mentioned that with the help of advanced technology, cybercrimes have been significantly reduced across the state.

# 16 Naxals, including top ...

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The identity of the remaining cadres was yet to be ascertained.

"Another mighty blow to Naxalism. Our security forces achieved major success towards building a Naxal-free Bharat. The CRPF, SoG Odisha, and Chhattisgarh Police neutralised 16 Naxalites in a joint operation along the Odisha-Chhattisgarh border. With our resolve for a Naxal-free India and the joint efforts of our security forces, Naxalism is breathing its last today," Shah wrote on X.

Giving details of the incident, police said two women Naxalites were killed during a joint operation on Monday along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border. A large cache of firearms, ammunition and IEDs, including a self-loading rifle, were recovered from the encounter site.

A fresh exchange of firing took place late Monday night and it continued till early hours of Tuesday in a forest under the Mainpur police station areas (Chhattisgarh) along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha border, in which 12 more Naxalites were gunned down.

With this, the total number of Maoists killed in the operation went up to 14, police said.

Intermittent exchange of firing in the area was underway on Tuesday too and the number of Maoist casualties may increase, they said.

A joint team of security personnel from the District Reserve Guard (DRG) of the Chhattisgarh Police, CoBRA commandos of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Special Operation Group (SOG) personnel from the Odisha Police were involved in the operation.

# Expedite land acquisition for ..

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To address challenges related to the projects efficiently, Vijayanand called for better coordination among the Revenue, Forest, TR&B, NHAI, and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways departments. Key officials, including Chief Commissioner of Land Administration (CCLA) G. Jayalakshmi, TR&B Principal Secretary Kantilal Dande, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Rahul Pandey, NHAI Regional Officer R.K. Singh, and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways Regional Officer Rakesh Kumar, participated in the meeting. District Collectors and Joint Collectors also joined the video conference virtually.

# Action to be taken against Sr IPS ...

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Such actions will be treated as a violation of All India Services (AIS) Rule 18, leading to additional action against him.

The disciplinary process will be conducted in line with established procedures, ensuring due process and accountability throughout the investigation.

# Trump withdraws US...

Continued from Page 1

WHO member states, said the executive order.

"In addition, the WHO continues to demand unfair one-sided payments from the United States, far out of proportion with other countries' assessed payments. China, with a population of 1.4 billion, has 300 per cent of the population of the United States, yet contributes nearly 90 per cent less to the WHO," it said, adding that the US intends to withdraw from the WHO.

The global health body stands to lose hundreds of millions of dollars in funding following Trump's order.

Reacting to Trump's move, WHO in a statement on Tuesday said it "regrets the announcement".

"WHO plays a crucial role in protecting the health and security of the world's people, including Americans, by addressing the root causes of disease, building stronger health systems, and detecting, preventing and responding to health emergencies, including disease outbreaks, often in dangerous places where others cannot go," the statement said.

# Naidu engages...

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister also held a meeting with Vincent Clerc, CEO of Maersk, one of the world's largest integrated logistics companies. During their discussions, Chandrababu Naidu outlined in detail the investment opportunities available in the state. Clerc expressed enthusiasm about exploring Andhra Pradesh's maritime potential and indicated his readiness to study the possibilities before deciding on investing in the state. Earlier, Chandrababu Naidu met with Lakshmi N. Mittal, Executive Chairman of ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AMNS India), and CEO Aditya Mittal. The company has made a landmark investment of Rs 1.4 lakh crore for a 17.8 million-ton integrated steel project in Anakapalle.

This initiative is one of the largest greenfield projects in recent times. The Chief Minister, along with the Minister for IT and Electronics and other officials, held detailed discussions on advancing this significant project.

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## 6 Surya Ghar beneficiaries from NTR dist invited to R-Day celebrations

● Collector encourages people to take advantage of the scheme to receive free electricity

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Union Government has invited six beneficiaries of the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Scheme from NTR district to participate in the 76th Republic Day celebrations, which will be held in New Delhi on January 26. The Central government has sent invitations to a total of 10 beneficiaries from the State, allowing them to enjoy power consumption without any charges. Notably, six of these beneficiaries are from NTR district.

Beneficiaries Meda Krishna (Vijayawada), ARPR Prasad (Guntupalli), Koneru Ravi Kumar

(Poranki), V Buchaiah Chowdary (Ramavarappadu), M Venkateswara Rao (Prasadampadu), and K Sai Krishna (Kanchikacherla) will participate in the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. They met NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha at his chamber on the collectorate premises in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

Collector Lakshminsha expressed happiness over six beneficiaries from the district being invited to participate in the Republic Day celebrations. He noted that both the State and Central governments are implementing the scheme with dedication. He encouraged people to take advantage of this initiative to receive free electricity without having to pay any bills. He added that the district administration aims to provide two lakh PM Surya Ghar connections in the district.

Further, he stated that the district administration registered around 59,000 names, of which 600 connections have been ground so far. These people paid electricity bills earlier, however, now they are not paying any bills and obtaining power free of cost, he said. "The people of the district should come forward to register their names to get the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli connections by taking inspiration

from the six individual beneficiaries," he added. Meanwhile, he said that members of the OC and BC categories of SHGs can obtain solar connections with a capacity of three kW by registering their names for just Rs.2 lakh, and they will receive a subsidy of Rs.78,000. Beneficiaries should pay Rs.20,000 of their share and the remaining Rs.1,02,000 will be provided by banks as loan. SC/ST people are eligible for 100 per cent subsidy under this scheme, he said. PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Nodal Officer M Bhaskara Rao accompanied the beneficiaries who met the Collector.

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PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Nodal Officer M Bhaskara Rao accompanied the beneficiaries who met the Collector.

## 'Investment Bazaar' to boost industrial sustainability in AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM) organised the 'Investment Bazaar for Energy Efficiency' in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, marking a significant step toward accelerating energy efficiency initiatives in the state's industrial sector. The event was designed to foster collaboration between financial institutions (FIs) and industries, facilitating the financing and implementation of energy-efficient technologies and projects.

Speaking during the event, Prudhvi Tej Immadi, Chairman & Managing Director of APEPDCL, highlighted the importance of creating a platform for financial institutions to engage with industries and finance energy-efficient projects. He emphasized the vital role of the Energy Efficiency Financing Platform (EEFP) in enhancing energy efficiency financing across Andhra Pradesh. The EEFP enables

The event aims to foster collaboration between financial institutions and industries, unlocking investment potential and promoting energy-efficient technologies across Andhra Pradesh's industrial sector.

industries and financial institutions to collaborate on funding energy-efficient technologies, appliances, and projects.

The State Energy Efficiency Action Plan aims to unlock an investment potential of approximately Rs 8000 crores by 2031 in sectors such as industries, commercial transport, and more. D Chandram, Director of Finance at APEPDCL, encouraged stakehold-

ers to explore opportunities for fast-tracking energy efficiency projects, emphasizing the need for cost-effective solutions to meet growing energy demands.

APSECM has identified 34 energy efficiency projects with a total investment potential of Rs 408 crores in Andhra Pradesh. The event showcased cutting-edge energy efficiency technologies, including IE3 and IE4 Motors, Variable Frequency Drives (VFDs), and Micro Turbines. These technologies have the potential to transform industries by improving energy efficiency and reducing operational costs.

The 'Investment Bazaar for Energy Efficiency' is expected to pave the way for successful financing deals, accelerating the adoption of energy-efficient solutions. With initiatives like this, APSECM is driving Andhra Pradesh towards a more sustainable and energy-efficient future, unlocking investment potential and reducing energy consumption across industries.



CMD APEPDCL, Prudhvi Tej Immadi, releasing a booklet at the APSECM's Investment Bazaar Workshop in Visakhapatnam, alongside D Chandram, Director Finance, APSECM, BEE, and Bank officials.

## Halt to VSP privatisation a historic victory: I & PR Minister

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathy has hailed the halt to the privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) as a historic victory for the coalition government.

In a press conference on Tuesday, the Minister emphasised that VSP, with a production capacity of 7.3 million tonnes of steel and spread over 22,000 acres, holds immense significance for the people of Andhra Pradesh. He recalled that 30 people had sacrificed their lives to demand the establishment of the steel plant in Visakhapatnam, which was expected to generate large-scale employment. The VSP, which began production in 1992, has played a key role in the nation's economic progress, he added.

The Minister pointed out that the Economic Affairs Committee of



I & PR Minister Kolu Parthasarathy addressing a press conference in Eluru on Tuesday.

the Centre had proposed privatizing VSP, citing its losses. The plan was to withdraw 100% equity and hand over the plant to a private

company. However, the proposal faced strong opposition from the people of Uttarandhra, the Telugu Desam Party, Janasena, and VSP

employees, with the workers' 1500-day-long movement becoming a historic chapter. Parthasarathy criticized the previ-

ous YSRC government, stating that despite having 22 MPs, it failed to stop the privatisation attempts. He accused Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy of compromising the state's interests to the Centre. The Minister credited the Chandrababu Naidu-led government for successfully convincing the Centre to abandon the privatization plan. He also highlighted that the Centre allocated Rs 11,440 crore for VSP's rejuvenation.

Parthasarathy further noted that the state government secured over Rs 31,000 crore from the Centre for various development projects, including the construction of Amaravati. The Minister also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's confidence in Andhra Pradesh, as demonstrated by the recent foundation stone-laying ceremony for projects worth Rs 2.08 lakh crore in Visakhapatnam.

## 'Raksha Mantri' award for Vizag skater

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Dontera Greeshma, a renowned international artistic skater from Visakhapatnam was conferred with the esteemed "Raksha Mantri Commendation Card" by India's Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, on January 20, 2025. Greeshma is among the exclusive five awardees chosen from across the nation, and this honour celebrates her exceptional contributions and achievements in the field of sports.

Greeshma, a Class XI student of Visakha Valley School and an NCC cadet, was selected from a pool of over 17 lakh NCC cadets nationwide. Her commendation is a testament to her remarkable performances in artistic skating and her dedicated efforts in representing India on the international stage.

Greeshma's impressive sports journey began at the tender age of four. She has represented India at the prestigious 2022-23 Asian Games, securing a remarkable 6th

position, and has won a Gold Medal at the 2023 Asian Roller-Skating Championship, along with 2 Silver Medals. With an impressive total of 134 medals across international, national, state, and district competitions, Greeshma has become a symbol of excellence in the sports world.

Her parents expressed heartfelt gratitude to her mentors, P. Satyanarayana (Team India Coach) and T. Chitti Babu (Team A.P. Coach), as well as the Roller-Skating Federation of India (RSFI), Andhra Pradesh Roller Skating Association (APRSA), Visakhapatnam District Roller Skating Association (VDRSA), DSDO-Visakhapatnam, and Visakha Valley School.

This prestigious recognition not only honours Greeshma's exceptional talent but also underscores the growing importance of sports in India, particularly artistic skating. Her achievements continue to inspire young athletes across the nation.



## Kollu defends Centre's spl package for VSP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Excise and Mines Kollu Ravindra on Tuesday strongly defended the Centre's special package for the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), rejecting opposition claims that the initiative was insufficient to prevent privatization. Addressing a media conference alongside TDP State President Palla Srinivasa Rao, Ravindra emphasized that the package was a vital step toward revitalizing the plant.

He credited Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for securing the package, noting that Naidu had successfully lobbied Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to release funds for VSP's revival. Ravindra recalled that during Naidu's previous tenure as Chief Minister, his efforts had also been instrumental in securing crucial



funds from the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which kept VSP from being referred to the Board for Industrial Finance and Restructuring (BIFR), thus averting the threat of closure.

In a sharp critique of the opposition, Ravindra accused former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy of failing to protect the steel plant during his five-year tenure. He pointed to the significant role played by Palla Srinivasa Rao, who had launched a fast-unto-death protest in defense of the plant.

Ravindra also took the opportunity to highlight other government initiatives, including the laying of the foundation stone for the South Coast Railway (S Co R) Zone headquarters in Visakhapatnam, the near completion of the Bhogapuram International Airport, and the ongoing progress of the Polavaram project.

## Congress wants West Bypass Road to be named after VM Ranga

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji has urged the government to name the West Bypass Road in Vijayawada as 'VM Ranga Bypass Road' in honour of the late Congress leader and former legislator Vangaveeti Mohan Ranga.

Addressing the media on Tuesday, Shivaji recalled that the party had earlier requested the Kanakadurga Flyover Bridge be named as 'VM Ranga Flyover Bridge,' but it was instead named 'Kanakadurgamma Flyover.' He cited several instances of projects and schemes named after prominent leaders, including the Pulichintala Project named after K.L. Rao, the Ambedkar memorial and statue at the PWD Grounds, the Dokka Manikamma Mid-Day Meal Scheme, the Pula Subbaiah Veligonda Project, and the Tadipudi Lift Scheme, named after local leaders. The Congress party had welcomed these decisions, he said.



Shivaji also mentioned that a proposal to rename Gannavaram Airport as 'VM Ranga Airport' remains unfulfilled. He lamented that despite Ranga's significant contributions as a popular leader and former MLA of Vijayawada, recognition in his honour has been overlooked.

"Considering VM Ranga's stature and influence in the region, we demand the Government to name the West Bypass Road as 'VM Ranga Bypass Road' as a tribute to his legacy," Shivaji stated.

Later, Shivaji, along with

Congress leaders and admirers of VM Ranga, visited the site near Kanakadurga Varadhi in Krishna Lanka where the slain legislator was cremated. The group sought Government approval to construct a memorial at the site.

Sivaji recalled that during the YSRC regime, they had approached then-minister Ambati Rambabu regarding the construction of a VM Ranga memorial, and he had responded positively. He reiterated the demand for a fitting tribute to VM Ranga, who remains an icon for many in the region.

## GITAM transfers solar tech to Ladakh varsity

Innovative technology aims to reduce post-harvest losses and enhance drying processes for high-altitude crops, including apricots and sea buckthorn, benefiting Ladakhi farmers.



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

GITAM Deemed to be University's Technology Enabling Centre (GTEC) has successfully transferred its innovative "Hybrid Solar Dryer with Automatic Temperature Controller" technology to the University of Ladakh, marking a significant step towards sustainable agriculture in the Leh and Kargil regions. The technology aims to reduce post-harvest losses and enhance the drying process of high-altitude crops such as apricots and sea buckthorn.

The formal transfer took place in a ceremony attended by Prof. Raja

Phani Pappu, Dean of the GITAM School of Business and GTEC Coordinator, and Prof. SK Mehta, Vice-Chancellor of Ladakh University. Dr. Krishna Kanth Pulicherla, Scientist E from the DST Technology Translation and Innovation (TTI) Division, and Dr. Sanjay Kumar, Chief Scientist at ACSR, were also present, highlighting the importance of collaborative scientific efforts.

The Hybrid Solar Dryer, developed by GTEC's Dr. Karaka VVNR Chandra Mouli, Dr. Ravi Kumar Gurazada, and Sombhatt Shastri Ayyala, addresses critical challenges faced by Ladakhi farmers.

With the region's agricultural products, particularly apricots and sea buckthorn, suffering significant post-harvest losses due to inadequate drying facilities, this innovative dryer integrates solar and conventional energy sources to provide an efficient, temperature-controlled drying environment.

The technology promises to reduce spoilage, enhance product quality, and extend the shelf life of crops. It offers farmers an opportunity to tap into premium global markets, while simultaneously contributing to sustainable agricultural practices by minimizing waste. Ladakhi farmers currently face a

post-harvest loss rate of up to 60%, and this solution is poised to drastically cut that figure.

Prof. Mehta expressed optimism that the technology would revolutionize the agricultural sector, increasing harvest utilization and improving incomes. Prof. Pappu highlighted the potential for Ladakh to become a major player in the global market for organic high-value crops. Dr. Pulicherla emphasized the role of Technology Enabling Centres in addressing local challenges and fostering sustainable development, making this transfer a milestone for the region's agricultural growth.

# Farmers to benefit from ICAR-CTRI: Union Minister

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Union Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Steel, Bhopatiraju Srinivas Varma, has stated that farmers will continue to benefit from the ICAR-CTRI, praising the organisation for its efforts to improve the financial conditions of tobacco farmers. A programme was held here on Tuesday to mark the rechristening of the ICAR-CTRI building as the ICAR National Institute for Research on Commercial Agriculture (NIRCA). The Union Minister inaugurated the building complex.

Addressing the gathering, the Union Minister expressed hope that Indian farmers would benefit greatly in the future through ICAR-NIRCA. He highlighted that for the past 75 years, CTRI has made significant efforts to enhance the economic and living conditions of tobacco farmers. By expanding its focus to include additional crops such as turmeric, chili, castor oil, and ashwagandha, alongside tobacco, it will be of great benefit to farmers in the region, he noted.

The Union Minister also lauded the transformation of NIRCA in its efforts to increase farmers' incomes through commercial agriculture. He pointed out that for the past 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has



been working towards doubling farmers' incomes by increasing the production of value-added agricultural products, commercialising agriculture, and reducing imports.

He expressed the wish that ICAR-NIRCA would become a leading research institute in the country for

commercial agriculture and provide even greater support to farmers.

Dr. Maganti Seshu Madhav, Director of ICAR-NIRCA, delivered the welcome address and explained

the need for the transformation from ICAR-CTRI to ICAR-NIRCA, along with the future action plan through

a presentation. He highlighted that six research centres, the All India Network Project, and two Krishi Vigyan Kendras are functioning under ICAR-CTRI's management. Dr. T.R. Sharma, Deputy Director General (Crop Sciences), New Delhi, expressed his happiness at the progress made by the Central Tobacco Research Institute (CTRI) over seven decades, noting that it has now evolved into a national commercial agricultural research institute. He suggested that research should focus primarily on volatile substances in current commercial crops. He also urged a team of scientists to work on innovations in tobacco, turmeric, chili, ashwagandha, and castor oil crops for the benefit of farmers. Dr. Sharma later inaugurated the Genome Editing Laboratory at ICAR-NIRCA and examined the tobacco plants derived through genome editing in the greenhouse.

He also inspected various value-added products, including turmeric capsules, ashwagandha capsules, turmeric tea bags, immunity boosters, soaps, and more, all manufactured under the supervision of Chief Scientist Dr. K. Suman Kalyani at the sales point. Tobacco Board Chairman C. Yashwanth Kumar, BJP leader Somu Veerajulu, and ATARI Director Dr. Sheik N. Meera also spoke at the event.

# Advanced soil and leaf testing lab set up in Kakinada

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In a significant boost for farmers in the Godavari district, Coromandel International Limited has inaugurated a state-of-the-art Soil and Leaf Testing Laboratory at its plant in Kakinada. The new facility, equipped with the latest technology, will provide accurate soil and plant nutrient analysis, helping farmers across India gain a better understanding of the nutrient composition of their soil.

This advanced laboratory aims to empower farmers with the knowledge to make informed decisions about agricultural inputs, promote sustainable farming practices, and ensure the long-term health of the soil.

The laboratory was officially inaugurated by Arun Alagappan,

The advanced laboratory aims to empower farmers with the knowledge to make informed decisions about agricultural inputs, promote sustainable farming practices, and ensure the long-term health of the soil.

Director & CEO, along with the company's senior leadership team.

During the inauguration, S. Sankarasubramanian emphasized Coromandel's commitment to sustainable agriculture and farmer empowerment. "Our focus is to provide farmers with the tools they need to optimize both productivity and sustainability," he said. "By offering fertilizer recommendations based on soil and leaf test results, we are enabling farmers to make informed, tailored decisions for specific crops, regions, and seasons. This unique laboratory will greatly enhance outcomes by offering precise insights into nutrient requirements."

This initiative is expected to transform farming practices in the region, paving the way for better crop yields and more sustainable agricultural methods across India.

Executive Chairman of Coromandel International, and S. Sankarasubramanian, Managing

# Officials directed to register proposals for PM Awards on website

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector A Thameem Ansariya has instructed officials to register proposals for the Prime Minister's Awards on the official website.

During a meeting held on Tuesday, the Collector reviewed the process for submitting proposals for the PM Awards. She emphasized that officials must prepare detailed reports regarding the implementation of various Central Government schemes from April 2022 to December 2024.

"For the PM Awards, details of 14 items across three categories need to be entered on the relevant website. Comprehensive information on the implementation of schemes such as Har Ghar Jal Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Arogya Yojana, PM Vishwakarma, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, PM Swanidhi, Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, Mission Indradhanush, Kisan Credit Card Scheme for farmers, and schemes for fishermen and animal husbandry should be submitted to the Central Government through the designated websites," the Collector explained.

Additionally, the Collector stressed that development works carried out in the Yerragondapalem area under the Block Development Programme, as well as the Bangaru Balyam and Margadarshini initiatives, should also be reported in detail as part of the innovative programmes being implemented in the district. CPO Venkateshwarlu, DMHO T. Venkateshwarlu, DCHS Suribabu, NTR Medical Service District Coordinator Hemanth, District Fisheries Officer Chandrasekhar Reddy, District Animal Husbandry Officer Baby Rani, and District Education Officer Kiran Kumar were present at the meeting.



# Creativity key to reforms, says School Education Director

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

School Education Director Vijay Ramaraju emphasized the need to encourage creativity among students as part of ongoing reforms in the education sector.

A Zonal Level Workshop for Strengthening Schools was held here on Tuesday, with the participation of district collectors from East Godavari, Kakinada, Konaseema, and other officials. Speaking on the occasion, Vijay Ramaraju highlighted that, to strengthen government school education, awareness and training programs have been undertaken in partnership with the Human Resources Department and the intellectual community.

He noted that in cases where there are only 6, 7, or 8 students in an upper primary school, a higher school should be established based on the student population, adding that each village should have a model primary school. "The involvement of district administrations is crucial for the smooth implementation of this process. Hence, a workshop has been organized with the officials of the respective coordinating departments. The primary objective is to implement reforms that will foster creativity among students," Vijay

Ramaraju stated. He also announced that, under the new proposed policy, clusters would be formed in districts based on the number of students. These clusters would upgrade schools into satellite foundations, model primary, basic primary, high school, and higher secondary schools. Efforts will also be made to ensure that there are 15 to 25 schools in each cluster.

Ramaraju further affirmed that committees would be formed at the cluster, mandal, and district levels to assess and report on necessary changes and additions. A comprehensive study report will be compiled after gathering their opinions. "Cluster-level and mandal-level committees should identify a model primary school in each gram panchayat or municipal ward and prepare proposals for the reconstruction of schools," he noted.

East Godavari District Collector P. Prashanthi, Kakinada District Collector S. Shan Mohan, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema District Collector R. Mahesh Kumar, Municipal Commissioner Ketana Garg, Regional Joint Director of School Education G. Nagamani, RDED officials, Dy. DEOs, MEOs, and HMs also participated in this zonal-level workshop.

# Private colleges accused of exploiting students

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The incident in which a student from Sri Chaitanya was thrown out of the institution for not paying fees has sparked outrage. The student and her father also staged a protest outside the college.

Ravi Chandra, the State working president of the YSRCP Students' Wing, has expressed grave concerns over the rising exploitation of students by private educational institutions in Andhra Pradesh. He accused colleges like Sri Chaitanya and Narayana of charging exorbitant fees and resorting to unethical practices. He pointed out that these institutions are charging unreasonable amounts, such as Rs. 18,000 for books and Rs. 400 for ID cards worth only Rs. 50. Ravi Chandra criticized the Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP regime for enabling such practices and questioned Minister Lokesh's silence on the issue. He remarked that during YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's government, institutions engaging in such exploitation were blacklisted, ensuring students were not subjected to financial and mental harassment.

# Naidu, Lokesh misused public funds: Kakani

PNS ■ NELLORE

Former minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) Nellore district president, Kakani Govardhan Reddy, has criticized Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh for misusing public funds during their trip to Davos, describing it as an exercise in self-promotion and false propaganda.

Speaking to the media on Tuesday, Kakani alleged that the father-son duo had prioritised personal glorification and baseless criticism of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy over attracting genuine investments.

He pointed out that despite Chandrababu Naidu's four visits to Davos between 2014 and 2019, no tangible investments materialized, and their announcements were nothing more than publicity stunts.

Kakani also criticized Chandrababu for falsely claiming credit for Hyderabad's development, emphasizing that major projects such as the Outer Ring Road, Shamsabad Airport, and Microsoft's land allocation were executed during Dr YS Rajasekhara



Reddy's tenure.

Further, Kakani dismissed Lokesh's recent announcements at Davos, including an agreement for a golf course project by a real estate company, as empty claims with no real benefit to the state. He contrasted these with the achievements of YS Jagan, who secured Rs. 1.26 lakh crore worth of investments during the 2022 Davos summit without unnecessary fanfare. These investments have already been translated into real projects, such as Tech Mahindra's

Rs 200 crore ethanol plant, Adani Group's Rs 60,000 crore green energy projects, Greenko Energies' Rs 37,000 crore project, and Aurobindo Pharma's Rs 28,000 crore green energy plant. These projects have created thousands of jobs and boosted local employment, showcasing Jagan's commitment to the state's development.

Kakani also criticized Chandrababu for his governance failures, including the privatization of 54 public sector undertakings, rising unemployment, and neglect of farmers. He reminded the public of the transformative initiatives during YS Rajasekhara Reddy's tenure, such as free electricity, Aarogyasri, 108 ambulance services, fee reimbursement, and housing for the poor.

He urged the public to recognize the stark contrast between Chandrababu Naidu's empty promises and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's tangible achievements. Concluding his statement, Kakani called out the TDP's repeated attempts at propaganda, which have consistently been rejected by the people of Andhra Pradesh.

## SANKRANTI RUSH

# APSRTC nets record Rs 23.71 cr in one day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Public Transport Department (APPTD), popularly known as Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) earned a record of Rs.23.71 crore in income

on January 20. Besides, the corporation crossed the Rs.20-crore mark in earnings three times during the Sankranti festival this year.

In this connection, APPTD Commissioner and APSRTC Ex Officio Managing Director (MD) Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao issued

a press release here on Tuesday. He lauded the bus commuters for supporting the APSRTC buses during the festival season. The APSRTC operated special bus services during the Sankranti festivities charging normal fare, and people welcomed the move, he added.

Further, he said that this year, the RTC authorities had planned to run around 7,200 special bus services, however, the corporation ended up operating 9,097 special buses. "The APSRTC gained Rs.21.11 crore through the special bus services," he added.



# Eatala slaps real estate broker

● Alleges Police, Revenue officials backing brokers to encroach lands of poor

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP MP from Malkajigiri Eatala Rajender slapped a real estate broker on Tuesday. The real estate agent was accused of encroaching poor people's lands. Expressing anger over a real estate broker who was causing trouble to the poor in Ekashilaganagar under Pocharam Municipality in Malkajigiri district, Rajender and his followers attacked the real estate broker and his men.

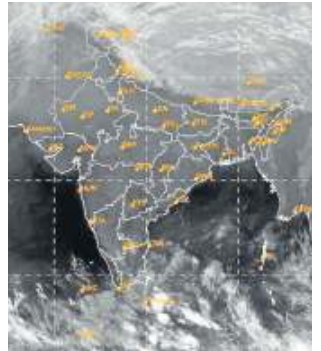
Eatala said, "The officials are supporting brokers. The real estate brokers are encroaching the lands of the poor with the support of police and revenue officials while creating fake documents around Hyderabad city. The officials are extending their support to the goons. It is like a fence eating a crop."

Knowing that the lands are being occupied and injustice is being done to the poor with the complaint of the poor, Rajender went to the spot on Tuesday to inspect the area. The real estate

brokers said that they will block the MP and even burn the tents. In this background, the brokers came in order to examine the lands there. Enraged while seeing the broker and his men, Eatala slapped the broker. Later, the BJP workers also attacked the real estate broker and his men.

Later speaking to the media, Rajender said that he has been seeing the tears of the poor for the last six months. He warned, "Khabardar, if anyone tries to trouble the poor, the brokers are troubling the poor owners of the houses."

Rajender said, "I came here after informing the local Minister and the police. However, the goons tried to threaten the poor even after I came here. The goons warned the poor to inform me. The police are losing their respect day-by-day. We will chase away goons while taking the responsibility to protect the poor if police fail to provide security to the poor."



# Conditions favourable for end of northeast monsoon rains

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Meteorological Centre announced on Tuesday that conditions are becoming favourable for the cessation of Northeast Monsoon rains over Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema, and South Interior Karnataka around January 24. In its daily weather report, the Centre indicated that dry weather is expected to prevail across Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next seven days. The lowest minimum temperature in the plains of Coastal Andhra Pradesh was recorded at 14.3 degrees Celsius at Kalingapatnam during the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday, the report noted.

# Huge quantity of cannabis seized, 4 peddlers arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A major drug haul took place at the Chillakallu toll plaza on Tuesday, where police seized 218 kilograms of cannabis being transported in two cars.

ACP Tilak informed the media that acting on a tip-off, a police team carried out vehicle checks. During the inspection, they discovered 218 kg of ganja hidden in the two cars.

The seized cannabis is valued at over Rs 30 lakh. The arrested individuals—B. Nageswara Rao, A. Prasad, T. Ramana, and B. Yellayya—had purchased the ganja from Odisha and were transporting it to Hyderabad.

The peddlers admitted to the police that they were selling ganja in Hyderabad due to the high demand and the easy money involved. The 218 kilograms of cannabis were neatly packed in 109 packets and concealed in the cars for the journey to Hyderabad.

A case has been registered by Jaggayyapet CI Venkateswarlu.



# Seminar held to create awareness on financial fraud, cybercrimes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an effort to educate railway staff about the growing risks of financial fraud and cybercrime, the Personnel Department of Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway, organised a seminar titled 'Samrudhi' at the Divisional Railway Auditorium on Monday.

PE Edwin, Additional Divisional Railway Manager (Infrastructure), Vijayawada Division, was the chief guest and Ch Srinivasulu, Deputy Regional Manager, Bank of Baroda, was the guest of honour. Around 150 railway employees attended the event, which aimed to raise awareness and provide actionable insights to safeguard against financial fraud and cybercrime.

During the seminar, experts from the Bank of Baroda, led by Ch Srinivasulu, elaborated on various types of digital financial fraud, including phishing attacks, fraudulent emails, business email compromise attacks, vishing and smishing (voice and SMS phishing scams) and other techniques used by fraudsters.

ACROSS THE STATES



**'BJP govt unable to stop custodial deaths in UP'**

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav Tuesday alleged that the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh has not been able to stop the custodial deaths in the state. His remarks came a day after family members of a man who died in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal held the police responsible for his "custodial death", claiming they did not allow him to take essential medicines on time. Police dismissed the allegations, saying Irfan (45) was allowed to take medicines and the entire incident was captured by CCTV installed at the police outpost. In a post in Hindi on X, Yadav said, "Under the BJP government, the series of 'deaths in custody' is not stopping in Uttar Pradesh. In a recent case, the death of a person, who was taken from his home in the name of interrogation in Sambhal, sparked public outrage. The BJP government which is committing injustice is now in its last phase." Superintendent of Police of Sambhal Krishna Kumar had said the police outpost in charge allowed Irfan to take his medicine and he was offered water.



**Over 20 IEDs, gelatine sticks recovered in Jharkhand**

Over 20 IEDs and more than 50 gelatine sticks were recovered by security personnel from a forest in West Singhbhum district on Tuesday during an anti-Naxal operation, a senior police officer said. A total of 21 IEDs were recovered from the forest near Serengda village and defused by a bomb disposal squad on the spot. Superintendent of Police Ashutosh Shekhar said. Besides, 55 pieces of gelatine sticks were seized from the area and destroyed, he said. The IEDs were planted by suspected CPI (Maoist) members to target security personnel engaged in the anti-Naxal operation, he said. The district police have been carrying out a massive combing operation for the last few months, following inputs about the presence of top Maoist leaders in core Kolhan area of West Singhbhum, the officer said. Earlier this month, a minor girl was killed and a woman suffered injuries in an IED explosion in Jarakela area of the district.



**'Ad-hoc judges can be appointed to deal with criminal cases in HCs'**

The Supreme Court on Tuesday suggested the appointment of ad-hoc judges in high courts to deal with the huge pendency of criminal appeals. A special bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant referred to the data on pendency of criminal cases in several high courts and said in Allahabad High Court alone there were 63,000 criminal appeals pending. The CJ said in the Jharkhand High court the figure stood at 13,000, and similarly 20,000, 21,000, 8,000 and 21,000 criminal cases were pending in high courts at Karnataka, Patna, Rajasthan and the Punjab and Haryana respectively. The bench said it could partly modify the 2021 judgement to ensure ad-hoc judges were appointed to decide criminal appeals by division benches presided over by sitting high court judges. The CJ said no ad-hoc judge should be appointed in a high court if it was functioning with 80 per cent sanctioned strength of judges. "We will have to deal only with the condition that the ad hoc judges will be sitting on the benches which are dealing with criminal cases with one sitting judge as the presiding judge... to that extent we require that modification," the bench said.

**Pregnant cow beheaded: Five taken into police custody**

PNS ■ UTTARAKHANDA

Five individuals were taken into custody on Tuesday in connection with a case involving the gruesome beheading of a pregnant cow, mutilation of its calf, and the removal of its legs, police said.



The perpetrators reportedly took away the cow's body, leaving behind its head, legs, and calf, according to police. The incident occurred in Kondakuli, Salkodu village, Honnavara Taluk, Uttara Kannada district. Superintendent of Police M Narayana told PTI, "We have identified 10 suspects and taken five of them into custody for questioning. Six special teams have been formed, and we have gathered clues to apprehend the main culprits who are currently absconding."

**'Political parties should have code of conduct for lawmakers'**

PNS ■ PATNA

Amid disruptions in Parliament and state legislatures, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday urged political parties to devise a code of conduct for their lawmakers to uphold the dignity of their respective Houses.

The two-day 85th All India Presiding Officers' Conference also adopted a five-point resolution that included a collective resolve to take steps to ensure "disruption-free" debate and discussion in their respective legislatures.

The presiding officers agreed to deploy technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to bring legislative bodies closer to the people by making available debates in the local and two additional languages, Birla said.

The presiding officers voiced concern over the decline in the number of sittings of state legislatures and agreed to implement the resolutions of previous meetings.

"In an earlier meeting of the presiding officers, we had resolved that the state legislatures would hold at least 60 sittings in a calendar year. We have agreed to make efforts to implement the resolution,"



"In an earlier meeting of the presiding officers, we had resolved that the state legislatures would hold at least 60 sittings in a calendar year. We have agreed to make efforts to implement the resolution,"

Birla told PTI in an interview.

Making a strong pitch for an internal code of conduct by political parties for their elected representatives, Birla said such an approach could lead to fewer disruptions in legislative bodies.

The Lok Sabha speaker said some parties had an unwritten code of conduct for Parliament and state legislatures and their

members refrained from entering the well of the House and disrupting proceedings.

Birla also urged the media not to glorify lawmakers for disrupting House proceedings and write more frequently against unruly conduct during sessions of Parliament and state legislatures. "Don't make heroes out of those who disrupt proceedings," the Lok

Sabha speaker said.

The two-day conference was attended by 41 presiding officers who expressed their views on "75th Anniversary of Constitution: Contribution of Parliament and State Legislative Bodies in Strengthening Constitutional Values". Speakers of various state assemblies, including Satish Mahana (Uttar Pradesh), Rahul Narvekar (Maharashtra), M Appavu (Tamil Nadu) and Abdul Rahim Rather (Jammu and Kashmir), participated in the deliberations. Ram Shinde and Neelam Gorhe, the chairperson and the deputy chairperson of the Maharashtra Legislative Council, respectively, also spoke on the deliberations.

Addressing the valedictory session, Birla said the presiding officers had resolved to make legislative bodies the focal point of debate and discussion. "All political parties should cooperate in upholding the dignity of the legislative bodies. This will be possible only when political parties have a code of conduct for their lawmakers," he said.

His remarks came in the backdrop of repeated disruptions witnessed in many legislative bodies.

**Priyanka is 'Stree Shakti', Rahul 'Yuva Shakti': Kharage**

PNS ■ BELAGAVI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage on Tuesday said that Lok Sabha MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra represented 'Stree Shakti' and likened her to icons who fought against the British -- Kittur Rani Chennamma and 'Jhansi Ki Rani' Lakshmi Bai-- and hailed Rahul Gandhi as a symbol of 'Yuva Shakti'.



Addressing the 'Gandhi Bharat' event here, Kharage said the Congress has organised the event to commemorate the centenary of lone Congress session held in Belagavi, which Mahatma Gandhi had chaired as the grand old party's president way back in 1924. "If there is Kittur Chennamma it's Priyanka Gandhi. If there is 'Jhansi Ki Rani', it's Priyanka Gandhi. She is very strong. She stabilised the family after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

"We have Stree Shakti (in Priyanka Gandhi) and Yuva Shakti, which is Rahul Gandhi," he said. Themed as 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan', the event targeted Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "insulting" the Indian Constitution and its architect B R Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha recently.

The Union Minister has dismissed the allegation as a "lie". Kharage also recalled Gandhi's famous statement

delivered in Belagavi, 'Main Jinda Rahna chahta hoon Bharat ke liye, Marna chahta hoon Bharat ke liye (I want to live for India and die for India)'. He claimed that Nathuram Godse, who assassinated Gandhi, was the disciple of Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah show respect for Gandhi, they actually worship Godse, he added.

The Congress veteran also accused the BJP of "playing a game" by alleging differences between Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Countering the BJP's claim that Congress insulted Ambedkar by ensuring his defeat, Kharage showed a letter to the public, which he claimed was written by Ambedkar to his friend Kamalakant where he mentioned that Savarkar and S A Dange were responsible for his defeat.

INDUS WATER TREATY

**Neutral expert backs New Delhi's stand**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A World Bank-appointed neutral expert has backed New Delhi's position on the framework to resolve certain disputes between India and Pakistan on Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects.

While India has been pressing for resolution of the issues by the neutral expert as man-

dated under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) between the two countries, Pakistan has been backing the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague to resolve them.

India and Pakistan signed IWT on September 19, 1960 after nine years of negotiations with a sole aim to manage issues relating to cross-border rivers. India welcomed the rul-

ing by the neutral expert, International Commission of Large Dams president Michel Lino. On Monday, Lino ruled that he is competent to render a decision on the "merits of the Points of Difference" between India and Pakistan on the two hydropower projects.

"India welcomes the decision given by the Neutral Expert under Paragraph 7 of Annexure

F to the Indus Waters Treaty, 1960," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"The decision upholds and vindicates India's stand that all seven questions that were referred to the neutral expert, in relation to the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects, are differences falling within his competence under the treaty," it said on Tuesday.

**Over 100 devotees saved after heart attacks at Maha Kumbh**

183 CRITICAL PATIENTS GOT ICU CARE

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Over 100 devotees who suffered heart attacks at Maha Kumbh have been saved while 183 critical patients have received ICU care and 580 minor surgeries have been successfully performed, officials said. Additionally, 1,70,727 blood tests have been conducted and 1,00,998 people have availed OPD services so far, they said.



Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, the Central Hospital at the Maha Kumbh is providing world-class medical care to ensure the safety and well-being of millions of devotees, they said. Dr. Gaurav Dubey, Nodal Officer of the Maha Kumbh Medical Establishment, said devotees from across India and abroad are receiving exceptional healthcare in Mahakumbh Nagar.

Highlighting recent cases, he said, "Two devotees from

Madhya Pradesh experienced chest pain and were successfully treated at Central Hospital. Both were admitted to the ICU, underwent examinations and received prompt treatment. Now they are fully healthy." Dr. Dubey said ECGs were conducted on both patients, leading to effective treatment and recovery.

Among other cases, 105-year-old Baba Ram Jane Das from Hanumanganj in Phulpur

sought treatment at Central Hospital for stomach pain, he said. Praising the advanced medical facilities, Dr. Dubey thanked the state government for ensuring such excellent healthcare at the Maha Kumbh.

A dedicated team of specialist doctors including experts in general medicine, dental surgery, orthopaedics, gynaecology, pediatrics and child care, is providing healthcare services at the Central Hospital.

**Five days after knife attack, Saif back home from hospital**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan returned home on Tuesday, a little wan but smiling broadly as he left a Mumbai hospital five days after an intruder stabbed him inside his apartment with a knife in the neck and spine.

The 54-year-old actor underwent a neurosurgery to treat a spinal injury and a plastic surgery to repair wounds on his neck and hands at Lilavati Hospital after he was stabbed by an intruder in the early hours of Thursday last week in his 12th floor flat in 'Satguru Sharan' building in upscale in Bandra.

As he exited the hospital, Khan, wearing a white shirt and a pair of blue jeans, waved to waiting cameras, his hand bandaged, and expressed heartfelt gratitude for the support he received throughout his recovery



process. Saif got into a waiting black vehicle, accompanied by security personnel. His wife, actor Kareena Kapoor Khan, was also seen at the hospital shortly before he was discharged.

The Mumbai police have arrested the intruder who allegedly stabbed the Bollywood actor. The accused, identified as Shariful Islam Shehzad Mohammad Rohilla Amin Fakir (30), a Bangladeshi

national, is at present in police custody.

The 30-year-old accused, arrested from adjoining Thane city on Sunday, has told the police he stabbed the actor in his back multiple times to free himself from his tight grip, an official said.

After the attack, the intruder escaped from Khan's flat, and hid in the garden of the building for around two hours, the official said.

BETI BACHAO BETI PADHAO

**Govt plans 10th anniv with nationwide events**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will organise weeks-long celebrations to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative, the Union women and child development ministry said on Tuesday.

Beginning on Wednesday, the celebrations will continue till March 8, observed as International Women's Day. The inaugural event in Delhi on Wednesday will feature Union ministers JP Nadda, Annapurna Devi and Savitri Thakur, alongside senior women officers from the armed forces, paramilitary forces and the Delhi Police.

Officials from central ministries, Anganwadi workers, student volunteers and representatives from international organisations such as UNICEF, UN Women and the World Bank will also participate.



The occasion marks the beginning of nationwide celebrations reflecting the scheme's transformative impact over the past decade, according to a ministry statement. The celebrations will include events at the state and the district levels.

Special programmes will be held on Wednesday, Sunday (January 26), and March 8, engaging communities through rallies, cultural performances, and felicitation ceremonies for women achievers. The ministry has also announced sustain-

ability initiatives, including a nationwide plantation drive, and will run awareness campaigns across print, digital and social media to further amplify the message of gender equality and empowerment.

Launched on January 22,

The inaugural event in Delhi on Wednesday will feature Union ministers JP Nadda, Annapurna Devi and Savitri Thakur, alongside senior women officers from the armed forces, paramilitary forces and the Delhi Police

2015, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Haryana's Panipat, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative was created to address the critical issues of gender imbalance and declining child sex ratio. Over the years, the initiative has driven significant progress.

The national sex ratio at birth improved from 918 in 2014-15 to 930 in 2023-24, and the gross enrolment ratio of

girls at the secondary level rose from 75.51 per cent to 78 per cent during the same period. Institutional deliveries rose from 61 per cent to 97.3 per cent, and first-trimester antenatal care registrations surged from 61 per cent to 80.5 per cent, reflecting the programme's far-reaching impact.

The scheme has gone beyond numbers to drive cultural and social change.

Initiatives such as the Kanya Shiksha Pravesh Utsav returned more than a lakh out-of-school girls to education while programmes like the Yashaswini Bike Expedition showcased the empowerment of women in action.

The scheme has also utilised creative campaigns, including collaborations with television shows, to address societal issues such as girl child abandonment and to spread awareness about the value of daughters.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Pak army calls the shots

Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan gets 14-year jail sentence but it won't fix Pakistan politics

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent conviction and 14-year prison sentence mark a critical juncture in the country's turbulent political history. Accused of corruption in a high-profile case involving illegal acquisition of land through a deal with property tycoon Malik Riaz, Khan's sentencing further diminishes his political standing. This development not only underscores the enduring influence of Pakistan's military establishment but also raises concerns about the country's democratic trajectory. The accountability court verdict found Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, guilty of illegally obtaining plots of land worth billions of rupees in exchange for facilitating Riaz's laundering of \$239 million. While Khan received a 14-year sentence and a fine of 1 million Pakistani rupees, his wife was handed a seven-year sentence. The Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has condemned the sentence, labeling it a politically motivated attack. Khan has consistently dismissed the charges



as a "witch hunt" orchestrated by his rivals, particularly Pakistan's powerful military, which he accuses of engineering his ouster and imprisonment. Khan remains one of Pakistan's most popular leaders, with a dedicated following that views him as a symbol of resistance against entrenched corruption and military dominance. His imprisonment, however, presents significant challenges for his party and supporters. PTI's ability to mobilise mass protests and maintain its political momentum is constrained by the increasing crackdown on its members and leaders. For Pakistan's political system, Khan's conviction deep crisis. It highlights the judiciary's perceived partiality and its use as a tool to settle political scores. Moreover, the case illustrates the broader struggle between civilian leaders and the military establishment that has long dominated Pakistan's political landscape. Despite Khan's claims of standing against dictatorship, his tenure as prime minister (2018-2022) was marked by a close alliance with the military, which eventually soured. His falling out with the military's top brass, particularly after accusing them of plotting his assassination, set the stage for his political downfall. The military's role in orchestrating Khan's ouster and subsequent legal troubles underscores its continued dominance. For decades, the military has acted as Pakistan's ultimate power broker, influencing elections, judicial proceedings, and policy decisions. This has impeded the growth of democratic institutions in the country. Khan's case reaffirms that no civilian leader can challenge the military's authority without facing severe consequences thus subverting the democracy. The implications of Khan's conviction extend beyond his personal political future. It sets a precedent for the use of legal mechanisms to neutralise opposition and raises concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions. Pakistan, indeed has a long way to go on the road to democracy!

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### PICTALK



Devotees celebrate 'Komuravelli Mallanra Jathara' festival, at Komuravelli in Siddipet

## ISRO's space docking: A new era for India's space exploration

This pioneering feat showcases India's growing expertise in advanced space technologies and paves the way for ambitious space odysseys

The Indian space research landscape has consistently been characterised by a combination of resilience, ingenuity, and ambition. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which has consistently advanced the frontiers of science and technology, recently accomplished another significant milestone with the successful completion of its docking experiment. This accomplishment represents a pivotal moment in India's space exploration endeavours, emphasising the nation's expanding capabilities in sophisticated space technologies.



synchronisation of spacecraft in space—a complex technological feat. India has joined the select group of spacefaring nations that possess docking skills because of the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) successful demonstration of this capability.

To establish permanent human settlements beyond Earth, space colonisation necessitates the development of sophisticated capabilities, including the ability to construct space habitats, transfer resources between spacecraft or from Earth, and manage maintenance and logistics in space. Docking technology is essential for these activities as it facilitates the construction of large modular structures, such as space stations or habitats. This capability guarantees that multiple components can be launched inde-

pendently and assembled in orbit, thereby reducing the complexity and cost of the mission. Additionally, docking enables the exchange of resources and the transfer of crew members, which are both critical for maintaining long-term missions and developing self-sufficient systems in space. ISRO is establishing the foundation for India's involvement in humanity's endeavours to become a multi-planetary species by mastering docking technology. ISRO's success in docking technology positions India as a significant player in global space exploration and enhances its strategic importance in the space sector.

By demonstrating its capability to execute complex space manoeuvres, India strengthens its ability to develop Indigenous space infrastructure, including modular space habitats and stations. The Gaganyaan mission, India's inaugural human spaceflight program, is one of the immediate beneficiaries of this accomplishment. Critical functionalities, including the assembly of modular space habitats and the execution of

in-orbit refuelling, will be facilitated by docking technology. These capabilities will guarantee mission flexibility and efficiency, which are essential for the long-term preservation of human existence in space. Furthermore, the success of docking technology will expedite the fulfilment of India's vision of having its space station, "Bharatiya Antriksh Station," by 2035. Docking proficiency augments ISRO's potential for intensified engagement with international space agencies. As the International Space Station (ISS) approaches the end of its operational lifespan, there is a worldwide initiative for next-generation orbital platforms. India's proven docking capabilities position it as a significant partner for collaborative missions, potentially enhancing its influence in global space governance and diplomacy. This scientific achievement enhances India's standing in the burgeoning space economy.

(The writer is the Dean-Academic Affairs, at Garden City University, Bangalore. Views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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## Why new generation may force change in Thai politics

The nation grapples with economic challenges, political turbulence and the enduring influence of its old guard monarchy-military alliance



ASHOK K MEHTA

The tourist-undiscovered jewel is Siracha in the Gulf of Thailand, 90 km southeast of Bangkok and 30 km north of Pattaya. Ascott Group's Oakwood Hotel is your strategic compass to assimilate Siracha as I am doing. Blissfully quiet alongside a park caressing the sea, it caters to all: Koreans who come in droves to play golf even while their president was being arrested; Japanese with corporate interests are also in plenty; soon Chinese will descend for the Year of Snake but hardly any Indians though 200 of them are building an oil refinery close by. Koh Sichang island 40 minutes in a steamer is worth getting lost in as King Rama V loved to do 200 years ago.

Ripened Sirachans belt their favourite melodies in the park as joggers and wanderers freeze to a halt when the national anthem plays in the mornings. Unlike in fading monarchies elsewhere, the Royals are ubiquitous: pictures of the present King Maha Vajiralongkorn, the Queen, the highly respected late king and the King's sister are familiar sights in the Kingdom of Thailand which escaped being colonised. But lately political parties like now in its third avatar, the People's Party led by the Harvard-educated Pita Limjaroenrat and the past nemesis of the old guard, Pheu Thai party led by old fox Thaksin Shinawatra, have tried to unseat the old guard consisting of the monarchy-military alliance. In the 2023 elections, these parties sought a review of the crime of lese majeste (Royal Defamation) which is a seditious law to repress dissent and reforms in the military but the coalition could not unite. The old guard maintains its authoritarian indirect rule through the unelected constitutional court and a 250-member Senate (Upper House) formed by the Army after the 2014 coup. Incidentally, Thailand holds the dubious record for the maximum number of attempted and successful coups (30). A military-backed government of former Army Chief Gen Prayut Chan O'Shea became Prime Minister- from khaki to Savile Row suit -from 2014 to 2023 when his Palang Pracharath Party (PPP) was overwhelmed by the



democratic tsunami. The old guard employed the constitutional court to ban Pita from politics for ten years which prevented the formation of a democratic coalition government despite 284 members in a House of 500 lawmakers; instead, Shinawatra's Pheu Thai formed a fractured coalition government of six parties which initially included another former Army Chief, Gen Prawit Wongsuwan-led PPP. In the present government Shinawatra's daughter, Paetongtarn is PM (it was Shinawatra's sister, Yingluck once earlier) and is backed by six parties. Shinawatra's return from exile in August 2023 and rehabilitation in politics was the result of a royal pardon as part of a deal to maintain the status quo with the old guard calling the shots. Unlike in Nepal where two adversarial political parties have formed a coalition government (after nearly two decades of musical chairs) for political stability, Thailand is subjected to a wobbly government led by an inexperienced Shinawatra scion remotely controlled by the patriarch. Peoples Party and Pheu Thai will not be allowed to form a coalition by vested interests. The big challenge for the government is the economy which has declined from a growth rate of 4.5 per cent in 2000 to 1.6 per cent between 2014 and



THE OLD GUARD MAINTAINS ITS AUTHORITARIAN INDIRECT RULE THROUGH THE UNELECTED CONSTITUTIONAL COURT AND A 250-MEMBER SENATE (UPPER HOUSE) FORMED BY THE ARMY AFTER THE 2014 COUP

2023. The government has not been able to fulfil its promise of giving Thaibaht 10,000 (around Rs 25,000) for all 45 mn Thais to boost consumption, though, in September 2024, it did provide some of the dole in Phase I. On January 27, 2025, four elderly will receive Thaibaht 10,000 to trigger the economy. Other steps proposed to revive the economy are negotiating additional Free Trade Agreements and implementing infrastructure projects. Thailand's most ambitious project is the land bridge connecting the Andaman Sea in the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea in the Pacific Ocean across the Isthmus of Kra costing USD 35 bn which will be a shorter alternative route through the Malacca Strait - China's historic dilemma for its sea trade. China will be the leading investor in the strategic project that will alter the economic dynamics for Thailand and the region, especially China. Thailand holds the magic wand for tourism. As targeted, foreign travellers in 2024 crossed 35 mn increasing the country's revenue by 34 per cent over the previous year. Integrated entertainment is the new slogan and includes gambling in casinos while visa-free long-term entry has been extended. Chinese are by far the largest number of vis-

itors followed by Malaysians and Indians. Saarc countries especially Nepal have much to learn about integrated tourism. India and Thailand have enjoyed fruitful relations, especially the religious connection with Hinduism and Buddhism. Thailand is part of Bimstec and as part of ASEAN closely involved with Track I and Track II meetings on locating a political resolution of Myanmar's civil war in which India as a neighbour is a key stakeholder. Myanmar's Generals envy the old guard's hold over power but they have no King to invoke divinity. Thailand relies heavily on China (14 per cent population is of Chinese origin) while having good relations with the West, especially the US. Thaksin Shinawatra is again under the scanner booked for an old case of lese majeste. The old guard has perfected all tricks of the trade to check the growing aspirations of the new generation represented by Pita's reincarnated People's Party (and other parties) whose slogan for the 2027 elections is "government of change". That should worry the old guard, not Siracha. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### UPROAR OVER JUDGEMENT

Madam — It is with reference to the news "Justice for murderers most foul"—January 21. The Sealdah Court in Kolkata has ordered Sanjay Roy, the convict in the rape and murder case of a trainee doctor at the state-run RG Kar medical college and hospital, to life imprisonment until death and noted that it was not in the rarest of rare categories. Also, the court has ordered Sanjay Roy to pay a 50,000-rupee fine and directed the West Bengal government to pay 17 lakh rupees as compensation to the victim's family. Though the Court convicted Sanjay Roy, the convict, on different sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, it refrained from imposing the death penalty for raping and murdering a young doctor on a hospital campus itself. It is unfortunate. As per the Indian legal system, the CBI, which investigated the case, has the right to challenge the sentencing order and seek enhancement of the sentence to death before the High Court. Many people, including the CM of West Bengal, are not satisfied with the sentence awarded to the convict Sanjay Roy. The incident led to nationwide outrage and prolonged protests by junior doctors in West Bengal demanding justice for and stronger security measures in government hospitals. At the same time, a court in Kerala has awarded a 24-year-old woman the death penalty for the sensational murder of her boyfriend in 2022 by administering him with a concoction laced with lethal herbicide, a planned murder.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

#### ISRO'S MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT

Madam— Apropos to "A Giant Leap in Space", published on January 21. Former President of India, late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, would have been the happiest person had he been alive today as ISRO scripted another history in space. India has entered into the niche club along with the US, China, and Russia. It is a huge

## Trump begins his second term



Donald Trump is all set to write the new world order with his second term as the 47th President of America. The inauguration ceremony of Mr. Donald Trump is jam-packed with the tech titan guest list from all around the world; interestingly, Indian industry tycoon Mukesh Ambani is also part of the delegation. The reign of Donald Trump is already a matter of

deep discussion, speculation and sensitivity for the whole world. After his 'America First' commitment, he is making a comeback with MAGA, i.e., Make America Great Again.

His inauguration speech will act as the ultimate trailer as for the whole world, he highlight his commitment and plans for the upcoming four years, and the way he want to shape the future world order. Now that Mr. Trump has officially begun his presidency 2.0, we all have to wait and watch what churning will come out for the rest of the countries of the world from the presidency of Donald Trump. India also has to closely test the new avatar of Mr. Trump, wishing for more strategic cooperation and proximities in the years to come.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

technological milestone that underscores our ambitions to expand our share, which is just 2 per cent now, in the 400 billion USD global space market. Space docking is a stepping stone in our desire to build a space station or other various complex missions like Chandrayaan-4 and Gaganyaan. Along with other payloads, eight cowpea seeds were sent to space, which germinated within four days of the mission launch, which demonstrates that food can be grown in long space missions. China-our hostile neighbour-whose ambitions of becoming a space power are not hidden from anyone-so India must continue to develop cutting-edge capabilities to safeguard its space assets. Further, the GoI has approved the setting up of a third launch pad at Sriharikota, which will further boost ISRO's space ambitions and future projects.

Bal Govind | Noida

#### HOSTAGES RELEASED IN GAZA

Madam — Apropos "Gaza ceasefire begins, handover of hostages started,"

published on January 20. The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas raises hopes for a possible end to a devastating 15-month conflict.

The ceasefire, agreed upon after a year of intensive mediation by the United States, Qatar and Egypt, is the first step in a long and fragile process aimed at winding down the war. Interestingly, Qatar, punching above its weight, has set itself up as the world's leading mediator, which is probably because the West Asian nation wants to establish its own security in an unstable region, analysts say. Global relationships are key, and Qatar is known for its wide and varied network of contacts. Meanwhile, the ceasefire does mark the start of a new chapter for Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza, and Israelis. While ceasefires are not legally binding, they can perhaps best be thought of as a type of contract between warring parties.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN THE MATERIALISM DILEMMA

How Gen Z can break free from consumer-driven values and have a life of their own



SHAINY SHARMA

In a world that is increasingly driven by consumerism, the rise of materialistic values among Generation Z, or Gen Z as it is often abbreviated has become a topic of growing concern. Gen Z as defined as the age group between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has grown up in an era that is undoubtedly dominated by social media, influencer culture, and hyper-connectivity.

While technological advancements have brought undeniable benefits, they have also fostered a culture that often equates self-worth with possessions and appearances. Gen Z must reassess these values and prioritise more meaningful aspects of life. The rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and many more have created an environment where materialism thrives. The relentless exposure to idealised lifestyles and extravagant displays of wealth has fostered feelings of inadequacy and pressure to conform or compete.

Today, social media influencers, often incentivised by brands showcase expensive products as symbols of success and happiness which has reinforced a cycle where material possessions are viewed



as essential for validation and social status. The pressure to abide by these standards is so overpowering, especially for young individuals who are still forming their identities resulting in profound psychological effects. Recent studies have examined the spending behaviours of Gen Z, highlighting a complex relationship with materialism. Various studies have also shown that individuals who prioritise material wealth and possessions often experience increased anxiety, reduced life contentment, and higher rates of depression.

Gen Z which is already grappling with a mental health crisis, the fixation on materialism exacerbates the problem as it shifts focus away from intrinsic values such as personal growth, relationships, and community involvement, which are far more fulfilling and enduring sources of happiness. There is no denying that materialism has significant environmental repercussions.

The fast fashion industry, a key driver of consumerism, is notorious for its unsustainable practices, contributing to pollution, waste, and the exploitation of labour. Gen Z, which is often touted as the most environmentally conscious generation, faces a paradox and their inclination toward materialistic consumption undermines their efforts to combat climate change.

While materialism has been ingrained in modern society, it is not an inevitable path for Gen Z. By recognising the pitfalls of this mindset and striving for a more balanced and intentional approach to life, they can pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable future. It is time for Gen Z to redefine success, not as the accumulation of material possessions but as the cultivation of meaningful relationships, personal growth, and contributions to the greater good. In conclusion, Gen Z has the opportunity to break free from the traps of materialism and redefine success by prioritising intrinsic values such as personal growth, meaningful relationships, and sustainability. By embracing a more intentional and balanced approach to life, they can shape a healthier, more fulfilling and environmentally conscious future.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

## Dangers of China's mega-dam plans on the Yarlung Tsangpo



B K SINGH

With the Tibetan region's seismic vulnerability due to tectonic plate activity, such mega-dam projects could exacerbate risks to life, biodiversity and regional stability

Earthquake of 7.1 magnitude on the Richter scale on January 7 in Tibet killed 126 people and injured 188 making rescue and relief difficult as the temperature dropped to -60 Celsius. Tremors were also felt in Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal. The epicentre of the quake was Tibet's Tingri County, 75 km north of Mount Everest, the World's highest mountain. The quake brings focus on China's latest plan to build the World's biggest dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Tibet, very close to the Indian territory of Arunachal Pradesh. Tibetan region and its fringe areas in China are seismically quite active.

This is the area where the Indian and Eurasia plates clash and the force generated can be strong enough to cause uplifts and increase the height of the Himalayan peaks. In Sichuan province alone earthquake of 7.9 magnitude was struck in May 2008 killing 90,000 people, another of 7.1 magnitude in April 2013 killing 196 people, and the third one of 6.8 magnitude in September 2022 killing 93 people has been recorded. Qinghai province has also seen two major earthquakes of 7.1 magnitude in April 2010 and 6.2 magnitude in December 2023 killing 2698 and 126 people respectively.

Two earthquakes have also struck Gansu province in July 2013 and December 2023. A report released after the 7th January earthquake in Tingri, Tibet, NASA has brought out that the speed of earth rotation has slowed down after the water was impounded in three gorges dam (607 meters in height and 2 km long) on the River Yangtze in China. The report further says that the earth takes .06 microseconds more to complete a rotation about its axis, post-construction of the dams. Earth rotation is linked to interplanetary activities, and can influence activities from Sun as well as the atmosphere.

The dams make the region seismic prone increasing the vulnerability of the population. More such dams in the region would increase the vulnerability further. Seismic activities have the potential to damage large dams too. If any such dam bursts in an earth quake, a large quantity of water would outflow through human areas washing away lives and properties.

This can be catastrophic in the region. The world's mightiest river Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, which becomes Brahmaputra as it flows in Arunachal Pradesh has several gigawatts of energy stored as it runs down the steep mountains. China has projected 60 gigawatts of power by damming this river in Tibet at the cost of \$137 billion. The power output of this project is two and half times the output of the Four Gorges Dam, along the river's upper and middle reaches. These are Dagu dam (640 megawatts), Zangmu Dam (510 megawatts), Jiacha Dam (320 megawatts) and Jiexu Dam (300 megawatts). The Zangmu dam project is the only one among these that has been operational so far. The other three projects are still in the construction stage and are marred by logistical and technical challenges posed by steep



WITH THE LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS THE COUNTRY POSSESSES, THE REMAINING DAM PROJECTS WILL ALSO BE A REALITY AND EVENTUALLY VERY LITTLE WATER WILL BE ALLOWED TO FLOW IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA IN THE LEAN PERIOD

mountains and deep gorges. China being an upper riparian state should not work on such projects in secrecy and put lower riparian states like India and Bangladesh to a disadvantage. It is irresponsible and aggressive posturing of China that it plans to change the flow of water in the Brahmaputra River during lean as well as peak seasons. Data suggest that the total annual outflow of Yarlung Tsangpo in China is significantly lower than the Brahmaputra in India. Brahmaputra, therefore enjoys a much bigger catchment in steep mountains than Yarlung. This is when the Zangmu dam project is operational. The challenges encountered by China in completing other projects in the middle reaches are not unsurmountable.

With the level of technological advancements, the country possesses, the remaining dam projects will also be a reality and eventually, very little water will be allowed to flow in the Brahmaputra in the lean period. This is likely to hurt biodiversity conservation and agricultural production in India and Bangladesh.

For more than a decade China has been dumping the maximum amount of greenhouse gases nearly 14 gigatons annually into the atmosphere. The US is the distant second with 8 gigatons annually.

With the warming Sea surface huge amount of moisture is dumped in the atmosphere having the potential to bring heavy downpours for one or two days.

In such circumstances, 400 mm of rain in 48 hours is not uncommon these days. It would result in unprecedented flooding and the authorities would be forced to release water from the dams, to save the lives and livelihood of the population.

The Brahmaputra in India during the rainy season always swells. It has more disadvantages than advantages. While the floodplains of Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam become fertile when the water recedes and leaves silt behind, the flooding brings misery to people and biodiversity. Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO hotspot, is world world-famous site for biodiversity conservation. It is one of the best conservation sites for endangered single-horn rhinoceros. Though Kaziranga is a tiger reserve, but state of Assam gives first preference to rhinoceros conservation. Poachers kill this huge animal for a single horn. Forest personnel sacrifice their life to protect it. During the flood, many species of even big mammals get washed away with the flow of water.

The Forest department of the Assam government has made several arrangements including the construction of high-rise embankments using earth, to ensure that wild animals take shelter on these embankments during peak flooding.

The release of any additional quantity of water from the Chinese dams will cross the threshold and wash away wild animals in even bigger numbers. Though there is no formal water

treaty between the two countries, the Chinese plan for the dam without consulting riparian states and UNESCO is morally inappropriate. Since China won't listen to anyone on earth, India must take certain actions in its interest.

We should enhance our monitoring system and record the volume of flow of water in different seasons in rivers flowing from China. Satellite imagery should also be used in mapping and forecasting flood risk. More storage facilities should also be created so that the flood water can be diverted into them, whenever the river crosses the high flood level mark. While selecting sites for flood storage structures, local and ecological factors must be taken into consideration. Further seismic activities must also receive proper consideration. State governments and the centre must boost navigation activities in the Brahmaputra basin. The central government has already prioritized investments in inland waterways. Brahmaputra Waterway 2 has direct access to Chittagong Port in Bangladesh and Haldia in West Bengal.

It can be a very good economic corridor for trade with south-east Asian countries. In the absence of a water treaty, we should flag the issues relating to climate change, wetland conservation, and biodiversity conservation on all forums where both India and China are signatories.

(The writer is retired principal chief conservator of forests, head of Forest Force, Karnataka. Views are personal)

## Maha Kumbh 2025: A timeless 'sangam' of faith, mythology and modernity

the event reaffirms its status as an intangible cultural heritage, blending ancient mythology and lived religious practices to embody the unity in diversity of Indian spirituality

Mark Tully, the well-known former BBC correspondent depicted the 1989 Maha Kumbh at Parayag as an enigmatic and enchanting interplay of time and timelessness. Navigating the kaleidoscopic unfolding of saints from Akhadās, pilgrims called Kaplvasis, stakeholder communities such as Prayagwals and Ghatiya priests, Kewats and Khatiks, and overall householders and renouncers, Tully reported on the mythology and history aimed at a greater common goal, the spiritual uplift of the participating humanity. The religion of the Hindus at Maha Kumbh wrote Tully, is a 'religion beyond the reality of history, a religion of the imagination which goes beyond reason'.



DEV NATH PATHAK

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur is engaged in reviewing the Prayag Maha Kumbh of 2025, enabling a fresh perspective on the interplay of time and timelessness surrounding the intangible heritage. At various levels, the intangible heritage seems to have found tangible manifesta-

tion. The enormity of Mahakumbh is not merely in the formidable statistics on the whopping number of participants or even the scale of the organisation. The numbers have increased over the decades and the organisation has entered an art of state level. In the past Mahakumbh was spotted by the Indian Space Research Organisation space satellite as one of the most jaw-dropping visuals. The 2025 version has ensured that more elaborate facilities for the pilgrims and sadhus, diverse categories of accommodations on three sides of Sangam, and the latest technology for the upkeep of hygiene are in place. The administrators of the Kumbh district have seemingly left no stone unturned to ensure highly

efficient, technologically supported services. Yet the most significant is the power of mythology, history and social embeddedness of the Hindu religion, the Sanatan dharma. No wonder UNESCO had to declare Kumbh as an intangible heritage of India in 2017. But the intangible and abstract have very tangible and concrete expressions in the Kumbh, the latest addition being an up-marketed Akshaya Vat, a mythical tree adjoining the precincts of the fort of emperor Akbar. Even though Maha Kumbh is conceived and communicated through abundant textual references, it is a manifestation of lived religious tradition and collective memory of India. The ancient texts of the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Atharva



Veda, Matsya Purana, Skanda Purana, Vishnu Purana, and the epics such as Valmiki's Ramayana and Ved Vyas's Mahabharata provide ample references to the religious congregation, premised on the origin myth of Hindu mythology. Gods in collaboration with demons conducted a churning of the ocean, the sagar-manthan. The boatmen tell us that the sagarmanthan shall contin-

ue in our minds. Of the four-treasure priceless outcomes of the churning one was a Kumbh of Amrit, a pitcher filled with immortality nectar. Many versions of the myth and tales inform that some drops of nectar fell in the confluence of rivers, Ganga, Jamuna and mythical Sarasvati. On certain celestial occasions, the nectar in the confluence becomes available for the pilgrims, who stay by the confluence and observe a daily life of austerity, piety, and spiritual practices, called Kalpwaas, aimed at transforming the body and mind. Unlike the modern historians' dispute about the origin of Mahakumbh, many travellers, chroniclers and intellectuals from ancient to modern times have found it mystical. The

Chinese Buddhist scholar Hsüan Tsang attended a Kumbh in the 7th century CE in which the emperor of Kannauj Harshavardhan participated and gave away his wealth. In the 9th century CE, the Hindu reformer saint and scholar Adi Shankar transformed the Mahakumbh into a more pan-Hindu event. Much later Mughal emperor Akbar constructed ghats and fortifications by the Sangam contributing to the infrastructure of the Kumbh Mela, as described by Abu Fazal in Akbarname. In modern India Mahatma Gandhi had more critical comprehension of the Mahakumbh. He mentioned in his biography that self-realisation was not a hostage to the pilgrimage in the Kumbh, yet in 1915 he

attended the Kumbh at Haridwar. Jawaharlal Nehru, however, fondly remembered in The Discovery of India, "What was the tremendous faith, I wondered, that had drawn our people for untold generations to this famous river of India"? A microcosm of India, Maha Kumbh represents unity in diversity and lived religion described in Dhananjay Chopra's book published in 2024 by the National Book Trust of India. Perhaps that ensures an interplay of time and timelessness and thus a long future of the Maha Kumbh. (The author is Associate Professor of Sociology at South Asian University and is a member of the Maha Kumbh review team of IIT Kanpur; views are personal)

## IN BRIEF



### Gold rises Rs 100 to Rs 82,100 per 10 gm

Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 82,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 82,000 per 10 grams on Monday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased by Rs 100 to Rs 81,700 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 81,600 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. However, silver prices traded flat at Rs 93,000 per kg on Tuesday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery appreciated Rs 426 or 0.54 per cent to trade at Rs 78,970 per 10 grams on Tuesday. "Gold traded with gain on MCX, reaching Rs 79,000. The rise was driven by heightened trade uncertainty following Trump's announcement of raising tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. Silver futures for March delivery also rose Rs 188 or 0.21 per cent to Rs 91,630 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). In global markets, Comex gold futures fell USD 18.20 per ounce or 0.66 per cent to USD 2,730.50 per ounce.



### Bridgestone India expects 7-8 pc growth

Bridgestone India is expecting around 7-8 per cent growth in the replacement demand this calendar year after seeing a disruption owing to multiple factors in 2024, a top company executive has said. The Indian arm of the Japanese tyre company Bridgestone Corporation also said that along with increasing its product offerings, it is also expanding its market footprint by ensuring its presence in tier 3 and 4 towns of the country. The company in November announced a USD 85-million investment plan for enhancing production capacity and capability across its two plants in the country to reinforce its premium-mass strategy. "We are focusing on providing premium products and services to Indian consumers as part of our mid-to-long term strategy with focus on sustainability at the core of our business. India is the fastest-growing market in our portfolio and our recently announced investments of USD 85 million is a reflection of our confidence in the Indian market," Hiroshi Yoshizane, Managing Director at Bridgestone India said.



### UCO Bank to raise Rs 2,000 cr via QIP

State-owned UCO Bank on Tuesday said the bank would mobilise Rs 2,000 crore through Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) during the ongoing quarter to comply with Sebi's minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms. The government has recently approved the QIP plan to raise up to Rs 2,000 crore, UCO Bank Managing Director and CEO Ashwani Kumar said during an interaction with media on quarterly numbers. The bank has already appointed merchant bankers and legal advisers for the proposed QIP and started meeting investors, including mutual funds, he said, adding that at an opportune time, the bank would launch QIP in this quarter. Post QIP, the Government of India's holding would reduce by 3 per cent. The Government of India holds 95.39 per cent stake in UCO Bank at the end of December 2024. The government has extended the deadline for meeting minimum public shareholding norms for central public sector enterprises and public sector financial institutions till August 2026.

## Sensex crashes 1,235 points

Investors lose over Rs 7 lakh cr in single day

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex tanked 1,235 points to settle at more than seven-month low due to an across-the-board selloff triggered by global tariff war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows, making investors poorer by over Rs 7 lakh crore.

The 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 1,235.08 points or 1.60 per cent to settle at 75,838.36 dragged by losses in ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries. During the day, the BSE benchmark plummeted 1,431.57 points or 1.85 per cent to hit an intraday low of 75,641.87.

The broader NSE Nifty plunged 320.10 points or 1.37 per cent to close at 23,024.65, a level not seen since June 6, 2024. In the intraday trade, the NSE Nifty plunged 367.9 points or 1.57 per cent to 22,976.85.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 7,52,520.34 crore to Rs 4,24,07,205.81 crore or USD 4.90 trillion.

"Domestic markets experienced a significant decline today, with heightened volatility, followed by Trump's announcement of trade tariffs



on neighbouring countries on his inauguration day, adding uncertainty into global markets. "The weak recovery in the ongoing Q3 earnings, coupled with a depreciating INR, are likely to prompt further outflows from FIIs," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Among Sensex shares, Zomato fell the most by 10.92 per cent due to weak Q3 earnings. NTPC, Adani Ports, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were among the major laggards.

UltraTech Cement and HCL Technologies were the

only gainers. The BSE midcap gauge declined 2 per cent and small-cap index slumped 1.94 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, Realty nosedived the most by 4.22 per cent, followed by Consumer Durables (3.99 per cent), Consumer Discretionary (by 2.90 per cent), Services (2.86 per cent), Power (2.63 per cent), Telecommunication (2.52 per cent) and Utilities (2.35 per cent) were among the laggards.

As many as 2,788 stocks declined while 1,187 advanced and 113 remained unchanged on the BSE. Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP

(Research), Mehta Equities Ltd said, "Markets were on a cautious mode in the past few sessions, but witnessed frenzied selling on Tuesday as investors now fear that Trump's inaugural speech to safeguard America's interest could hurt economic prospects of many countries, including India, going ahead. While foreign investors continue to offload domestic shares at will, any further rise in US bond yields could trigger massive selling." In Asian markets, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended higher, while Shanghai and Seoul settled on a flat note on Tuesday. European markets were trading higher on Tuesday. US markets were closed on Monday on the occasion of Martin Luther King Jr Day.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude slipped 0.76 per cent to USD 79.54 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,336.54 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. On Monday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 454.11 points to settle at 77,073.44 and NSE Nifty climbed 141.55 points to close at 23,344.75.

## India, France to expand partnership

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and France have agreed to expand their partnership in high-end technology sectors, ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's expected visit to Paris next month to attend a summit on artificial intelligence.

The two sides discussed various aspects of the bilateral ties during India - France Foreign Office Consultations held in Paris on Monday.

The meeting was co-chaired by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Secretary-General of French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs Anne-Marie Descotes.

In the talks, the two sides also deliberated on the evolving situation in the Middle East and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Misri also called on French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot and Emmanuel Bonne, the diplomatic advisor to the French president.

"Both sides undertook a comprehensive review of the progress made in various facets of bilateral cooperation, as out-

lined in the India-France Horizon 2047 Roadmap," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Tuesday.

The 'Horizon Roadmap' was unveiled following wide-ranging talks between Prime Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris in July 2023. Its aim was to shore up bilateral ties including in



trade and investment.

"The discussions encompassed key areas of bilateral cooperation including defence, civil nuclear energy, space, cyber and digital, AI, institutional dialogue mechanisms, and initiatives fostering people-to-people exchanges and cultural ties," the MEA said in a statement.

It said both sides agreed to expand bilateral partnership in the areas of high-end technology sectors.

## EU wants to upgrade strategic ties with India

PNS ■ DAVOS

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday said the first trip of her new Commission will be to India as she wants to upgrade the strategic partnership with "the largest country and democracy" of the world.

In a special address at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting here, she said the European Commission wants to see local industries flourish in its partner countries because that is also in its own interest.

"And, we have partners across the world, from Africa to Indo-Pacific," she said.

"The first trip of my new commission will be to India. Together with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we want to upgrade the strategic partnership with the largest country and democracy in the world," she declared.

While European Parliament re-elected her for a second term in July last year, the new

commission officially began work recently. Her present term will continue till 2029.

She further said, "I believe we also strive for mutual benefits with our conversations with China. All continents will have to deal with the growing burden of climate change and impact is impos-



sible to ignore."

The Paris Agreement continues to be humanity's best hope and Europe will stay the course, she assured.

The president said the world has entered a new era of harsh geostrategic competition. Breaking the bonds in the global economy is in no one's interest, she said.

"Europe will keep seeking cooperation, with our long-time friends, and any country we share interests with," she added.

## Will increase renewable energy production to 500 GW: Joshi

PNS ■ JAIPUR

The government is committed to increase the production of renewable energy in the country to 500 GW by 2030 and meet 50 per cent of the energy requirement from renewable sources, Union minister Pralhad Joshi said on Tuesday.

The central as well as state governments are working rapidly towards fulfilling this commitment, the renewable energy minister said at the regional review meeting on renewable energy here.

He said that the country's energy requirement is likely to double by 2032.

He said that ten years ago India was the 11th economy of the world. Progressing at the fastest pace, the country has become one among the five largest economies today and is moving towards becoming the third largest economy.

Work is being done rapidly towards energy self-reliance so that all sectors of the economy can move forward, he said.

The minister further said that as per the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 2026), in order to reduce



carbon emissions and promote environmentally friendly energy in the coming years, preparations are being made to impose green tax on the industrial use of fossil fuels in many countries of the world.

In such a situation, it is the duty of all of us to encourage renewable energy with the aim of keeping Indian products competitive in the international market and ensuring a better future for the coming generations while dealing with global warming.

At the review meeting, state chief minister Bhajanlal Sharma said that to achieve the goals of energy security and sustainable development, there is a need to use energy efficiently, adopt renewable sources and develop new energy policies.

## FRP industry has good future in India: Gadkari

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Noting that composite materials can be used as an alternative for various industries, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday urged stakeholders of the fibre-reinforced plastics (FRP) industry to undertake research & development (R&D) activities to bring down cost by at least 25 per cent. The FRP has a good future in the country and it can be used in multiple industries from renewable energy to infrastructure projects, the Minister for Road, Transport and Highways said, while addressing the International Conference and Exhibition on Reinforced Plastics (ICERP 2025) organised by the FRP Institute.

"FRP is very important not only for the road sector but for the aviation, space science, transport, shipping. Everywhere we need to reduce the cost. If you can reduce the (production) cost by 25-30 per cent by getting good technology and good raw materials available in the country... it is really the futuristic point of view," Gadkari said.

## Chemical industry seeks tweaking in customs duties to boost mfg

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The chemicals industry has sought tweaking in customs duties in the forthcoming Budget on certain products such as Polyethylene Terephthalate and Polyvinyl Chloride with a view to cut imports from China and boost domestic manufacturing.

China is currently the world's biggest exporter of key products like Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) resins, Purified Terephthalate Acid (PTA), Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) and polyester fibre.

Industry sources said that this global overcapacity, coupled with flat demand growth in many countries and a changing geopolitical land-

scape, poses a threat of cheap imports flooding into India.

Though India has significantly increased its domestic capacity for PET bottle-grade chips, there has been an increase in the low-cost imports, especially from China, which has eroded the competitiveness of India's domestic producers, they said.

Similarly, in the case of PVC, a critical material used in sectors like construction, needs a relook in terms of tariff treatment considering its crucial role in the economy.

"Restoring PVC duty back to pre-2022 levels of 10 per cent would provide desired impetus for creating domestic capacity," they added.

Further in the Man-made Fiber

(MMF) polyester segment where domestic capacity utilisation is being hindered by low-cost imports, especially from China warrants an upward revision of tariff to 10 per cent.

"A tariff increase on polyester would not only safeguard domestic manufacturers from unfair competition but also bolster local production capacities, aligning with the ambitious textile sector growth target of USD 350 billion by 2030," the source said.

The industry has shared these issues with the government for their consideration.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Budget on February 1.

## India Inc optimistic about India-US trade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry leaders expressed optimism about India-US trade and economic ties under President Donald Trump, outlining opportunities for advancing bilateral cooperation, in areas such as healthcare, pharma, and electronics.

Notably, Trump has again warned that he will impose 100 per cent tariff against countries of the BRICS bloc, of which India is a part, if they take any step to replace the US dollar.

Trump, who took oath as the 47th President of the US on Monday, said, "If the BRICS nations want to do that, that's okay, but we're going to put at least a 100 per cent tariff on the business they do with the United States."

They "have a 100 per cent tariff if they do so much as even think" about reducing the use of the dollar in global trade, he added.

Hours before Trump's inauguration ceremony in the US on Monday, RPG Enterprises Chairman Harsh Goenka, in a post on X, said, "What India can do for Trump: 1.Ease market access for U.S. products 2.Welcome Starlink & Tesla 3.Be flexible with Amazon 4.Strengthen defense

ties What Trump can do for India: 1.Support in aerospace & defense manufacturing 2.Back India's UN Security Council bid 3.Ease visa rules for Indian talent 4.Collaborate on bringing good relations with Bangladesh," Goenka said in the post.

Sharing his views on the prospects of India-US ties under the Trump-led US administration, S P Sharma, Deputy Secretary General of



PHDCCI, told PTI, "Donald Trump's previous tenure proved highly beneficial for India, with a robust bilateral trade trajectory and dynamic economic relations. Moving forward, we anticipate further strengthening of India-US bilateral economic and trade relations. As a leading driver of global growth, India's perspectives hold significant importance for shaping a better and more balanced world". Sudarshan Jain, Secretary General, Indian Pharma ceutical Alliance, said healthcare security and affordability are key priorities for the new Trump Administration.

## Sebi to banks: Stop bringing 'pump and dump' companies to IPO

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sebi Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Tuesday said the capital markets regulator has found "egregious misuse" of funds raised through initial public offerings (IPOs) by certain companies and urged investment bankers to desist from helping such entities access the capital markets.

Even before the term "agentic artificial intelligence" was coined, Sebi had been working on a tool based on that concept to process IPO documents faster, Buch said.

Speaking at an event organised by Association of Investment Bankers of India (AIBI), Buch said the i-bankers know exactly when they are bringing a "pump and dump" company to the market.

"You (i-bankers) should not bring a bad company to the market," she urged the audience comprising rainmakers.

There are markers like the high fees being paid to the banker, or the company having less or no staff at all or no visits by the bankers to the facilities of a company which speak loudly about the intent behind an issuance and it being a "pump and dump" issue, she



is typically followed by a share sale by the promoter to make a quick buck.

Apart from this, Buch said Sebi has also found "egregious misuse" of IPO funds by certain companies, which basic-

ly involves related party transactions to route the money to safe havens or entities related to the promoter.

Many a time, fund routing is done to overseas markets that would include showing up a front like an acquisition or purchase of intangibles like a software or app, she explained.

Comparing Sebi's role to a doctor in a hospital, Buch said the regulator has seen various wrongdoings by companies.

Buch said Indian markets have matured in a way that the law is being followed in "letter", but added that efforts will

have to be made to follow it in the "spirit".

There are plenty of companies with high corporate governance who can act as "role models" for the broader ecosystem, she said, adding that as the system transits to complying with legal requirements in spirit, it does not have to invent anything new and can learn from peers.

There are a variety of reasons why companies are opting to become increasingly compliant, she said, specifying inter-generational shift in ownership as one among them.



# Pintu Ki Pappi, rescheduled to release on March 21!



Get ready for the rom-com entertainer like never before! Mythri Movie Makers backed Vidhi Acharya's V2S Production's 'Pintu Ki Pappi' has taken the buzz high, ever since the trailer was released. The film introduces three promising newcomers: Shushant, Jaanya Joshi and Vidhii, who have grabbed the audience's attention for their performance in the trailer.

The makers have now made the biggest announcement as 'Pintu Ki Pappi', will now hit the silver screens on March 21. The film was initially slated for release on February 21. This shift in the release date comes as part of a strategic decision by the makers to ensure the film reaches the widest possible audience. With its quirky title and promise of wholesome entertainment, the movie has already created significant buzz among fans and cinephiles. Directed by Shiv Hare, the film promises to be a perfect blend of humour, drama and heartwarming moments, making it a must-watch for audiences across all age groups.

'Pintu Ki Pappi' also boasts a stellar cast, including Vijay Raaz, Murali Sharma, Sunil Pal, Ali Asgar, Puja Banerjee, Aditi Sanwal, Ria S Soni, Urvashi Chauhan, Pymori Mehta Das, Mukteshwar Ojha and Ganesh Acharya himself. The film, written and directed by Shiv Hare, promises to be a delightful addition to the cinematic landscape. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more updates on this exciting new film!



## Taha Shah Badussha and Tulsi Kumar set the tone for 2025 with 'Vekhan Nu'

Taha Shah, known for his dynamic performances across music videos and films, is set to team up with the melodious Tulsi Kumar for their first-ever collaboration. The duo revealed the announcement with an enchanting poster today, leaving fans eager for what's to come.

The poster exudes romance, giving a glimpse of what looks like a love story set to soulful music. Taha and Tulsi's on-screen chemistry shines through in the visuals, as they share an intense yet tender moment, hinting at a heartfelt narrative. The upcoming track, scheduled for release on January 24, is expected to be a romantic anthem. With Taha's magnetic presence and Tulsi's emotive voice, the song promises to take listeners on an emotional journey of love and longing.

Having already impressed audiences with his performances in several movies and popular shows, Taha is no stranger to the genre, and his pairing with Tulsi Kumar has fans buzzing with anticipation. Social media is already abuzz with predictions about their chemistry and the story behind the song.

## Akshay Kumar defends Salman Khan on reports of him leaving 'Bigg Boss 18' sets over Salman's late arrival

Bollywood superstars Akshay Kumar and Salman Khan are maintaining the 'Bhaichara' as the former came out in support of Salman after reports of Akshay leaving the 'Bigg Boss 18' sets without shooting after Salman allegedly didn't arrive to shoot on time. The actor was in the national capital on Monday and issued a clarification on the matter. Akshay cleared the air as he said that he had prior commitments that he needed to attend to, which is why he had to leave the sets.

Akshay, who is awaiting the release of his first film this year 'Skyforce', also shared that he had spoken to Salman before making his exit, ensuring that everything was okay between them.

He told the media in Delhi, "I was running late for something. I spoke to Salman and he was stuck with something personal. He told me that he would be late by around 40 minutes. But I had to leave because I had a prior commitment. Mujhe jana pada. However, we spoke about it."

Earlier, Akshay welcomed Tabu on the sets of their upcoming movie 'Bhooth Bangla'. The makers of the film took to their Instagram and shared a picture of Akshay extending a warm welcome to the actress and the two embraced each other.

The two icons of Bollywood have consistently won hearts with their performances, and their reunion after more than two decades is naturally antcipat-

ed. Akshay and Tabu previously shared screen space in the cult-classic 'Hera Pheri'.

Sharing the picture, the makers wrote in the caption, "Some things get better and iconic with time. @priyadarshan.official, @akshaykumar and @tabutiful are back in action after 25 years for #BhoothBangla in Jaipur." The excitement around 'Bhooth Bangla' has been at its peak ever since its announcement.

While the film is one of the most awaited horror comedies, it promises several elements to look forward to. Among these, its ensemble cast is the most crucial aspect that makes this film even more special.

Moreover, the film will also reunite the iconic team director Priyadarshan, Akshay Kumar and Tabu, who last worked together on 'Hera Pheri'. This has undoubtedly heightened the anticipation for the film, which is coming with such a stellar cast and intriguing promise.

The film is directed by Priyadarshan, and produced by Shobha Kapoor and Ektaa R Kapoor under the banner of Balaji Telefilms and Akshay Kumar's production house, Cape of Good Films. The film is co-produced by Faara Sheikh and Vedant Baali.

## DUA LIPA LEFT TERRIFIED AFTER FANS BREACH SECURITY AT HOTEL IN CHILE



Pop sensation Dua Lipa was left shaken after a disturbing security breach at her hotel in Santiago, Chile, where overzealous fans managed to sneak on to her floor and wait outside her bedroom door. The 29-year-old singer, known for her chart-topping hits like 'New Rules', had flown to the luxurious Ritz-Carlton to film a commercial. However, her trip took an unexpected and terrifying turn when her privacy was compromised. According to a source who spoke to The Sun, the situation escalated when a group of fans, desperate to catch a glimpse of the singer, managed to gain access to her hotel floor. "Things were manic as she touched down, with fans eager to see her. A group of them not only made it to her hotel floor but were also found waiting outside her room. Security had to conduct an extra sweep of the area, and more fans were found loitering near her lift," the source explained. The frightening incident has led to a review of Dua Lipa's security arrangements during her travels. The breach left the star visibly shaken, and as a result, she has reportedly made it clear she will no longer take pictures inside her hotel to protect her privacy.

This is not the first time the 29-year-old singer has experienced a breach of security. Last year, during her preparations for Glastonbury, Dua was forced to halt her rehearsals when a TikTok wannabe managed to break into her rehearsal space in Birmingham, further highlighting the ongoing challenges she faces in maintaining her personal safety.

As the safety concerns grow, it is likely that Dua's team will increase efforts to protect the star from future incidents. Despite the unsettling encounters, Dua continues to enjoy her career and remains dedicated to her fans, though it's clear the security of her privacy is now a top priority.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE

#### CALVIN AND HOBBS

#### GARFIELD

#### REALITY CHECK

#### SPEED BUMP

#### CROSSWORD

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7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
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15				
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17				
18				

#### NANCY

#### SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- A large extinct animal
- Do this in water
- Me
- A friendly word for a cat
- Feathered creatures
- The same in value
- This animal has no legs
- Turned over and over on the ground
- A group of players on one side in a game
- All the bones in your body
- Houses for horses
- Wide awake and watchful
- Doing nothing, lazy
- A bird that hunts at night

DOWN

- Vanish
- Hit these in with a hammer
- A large number of soldiers
- A person from Moscow
- Unwell
- Someone who catches fish
- Houses for horses
- Wide awake and watchful
- Doing nothing, lazy
- A bird that hunts at night

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

## Shilpa Shirodkar targeted me because she needed something new to latch on to: Kashish

TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

The 18th season of Bigg Boss was nothing short of a storm - a perfect blend of chaos, conflict and captivating personalities that kept viewers on the edge of their seats. At the heart of this fiery season was Kashish Kapoor, a contestant who redefined what it means to be savage. Fearless, outspoken and unapologetically real, Kashish was a force to be reckoned with from the moment she stepped into the house. Whether she was dismantling alliances, calling out hypocrisy, or proving her mettle in grueling tasks, Kashish's raw energy and fiery spirit made her a standout in a house filled with bold contenders. Season 18 was more than a game; it was a battleground - and Kashish was one of those, who ruled it with her unapologetic dominance.

Having created ripples in Splitsvilla, she returned to reality TV as a contestant in Bigg Boss, where her journey unfolded with raw emotions, unfiltered thoughts and fiery confrontations. In this candid conversation, Kashish reflects on her time in the Bigg Boss house, her relationships and the challenges that defined her tumultuous yet unforgettable experience.

"I think I would describe my journey in Bigg Boss as very real," Kashish begins. "Every moment, every emotion - I felt it deeply, in a way I hadn't in a very, very long time. I believe things happen for a reason and while the journey had its ups and downs, I can't complain because being part of Bigg Boss was something I had never expected. I'm forever grateful and thankful for that opportunity."

However, she believes that had she entered the Bigg Boss house from the very beginning, her experience would have been drastically different. "I do think that things would have been much better for me. I would have dominated heavily. There's no doubt about that," she asserts.

Kashish's public persona has undergone a remarkable transformation. Reflecting on the backlash she faced during Splitsvilla and how it compares to the love she received after Bigg Boss, she shares: "The hate I received after Splitsvilla has turned into nothing but love after Bigg Boss. People didn't see the real me during Splitsvilla. My decisions hurt them, and I was misinterpreted and misunderstood. But in Bigg Boss, they finally saw who I truly am, and that's why I believe the love came pouring in."

Despite the affection she now enjoys from fans, she admits that her time in the Bigg Boss house often felt lonely. "Most of the time, I felt alone, not just physically but emotionally. I don't believe in faking relationships or friendships. For me, connections need to be organic. Unfortunately, in the house, most friendships were superficial. I'd rather be alone in my own company than be surrounded by people who don't resonate with me."

Eventually, Kapoor found a few genuine bonds in the house, but she maintains that the early days were challenging. "After some time, I connected with a few people, and that made things better. But the journey to get there wasn't easy."

One of the recurring themes of her experience was feeling targeted by her fellow contestants. "Yes, I definitely felt targeted, especially by Shilpa," she shares. "At first, it seemed like there was no reason for it, but when I thought more about it, I realized there was. I mean, how long can you cling to a narrative that no longer works for you? (Karan,

As one of the most fearless and unfiltered contestants in the Bigg Boss house, Kashish Kapoor cemented her reputation as a savage yet authentic force in the house. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Kashish Kapoor opens up about her transformative journey in Bigg Boss Season 18, a season that set new benchmarks for drama, strategy and emotional intensity

Shilpa, Vivian and the 'Maa-bete' angle). I gave Shilpa something new to focus on, and she jumped at the opportunity." Kashish also highlights the biases within the house, which she believes worked against her. "There's a lot of bias in the house. Unfortunately, for most contestants, Raja ka beta hi raja hota hai. But I wasn't about to let that stop me. From the moment I entered, I made it clear that I was a threat. That's why they tried to corner me - to avoid giving me any attention or footage. They thought they could sideline me, but I don't depend on others for my moments. I take what I deserve."

She doesn't hold back when it comes to her opinions about her fellow housemates. Her relationship with Chahat, for example, was fraught with ups and downs. "I was angry with Chahat for something she did to me, and I retaliated. But deep down, there was no hatred. We had our differences, but when I needed her the most, she was there for me. We rekindle our bond, and I'm grateful for that."

Her feelings about Karan, however, are far more negative. "Karan is not someone I would ever expect anything good from. When I entered the house, I thought he was a nice guy, but I was wrong. He's absolutely a bad, bad person."

Kashish also addresses the dynamics between Avinash and Vivian, two contestants whose relationship stirred controversy. "I've said this so many times - Avinash and Eisha are not Vivian's friends. She was always trying to sideline him, and eventually, she did. Even his wife felt that way. Eisha and Avinash are both cut from the same cloth - they're snakes, and they'll do whatever it takes to get ahead. That's exactly what they did."

Despite the challenges, betrayals, and isolation, Kashish Kapoor has emerged stronger and more self-assured than ever. Her journey in Bigg Boss wasn't about winning friendships or alliances - it was about staying true to herself. "I'm proud of the person I was in the house. Whether people loved me or hated me, I was always real. That's what matters the most."

Through her honesty, resilience, and unapologetic attitude, Kashish has proven that she's entrenched in the world of reality TV. Whether you love her or hate her, there's no denying that Kashish Kapoor leaves a lasting impression - and she's not going anywhere anytime soon.



There's a lot of bias in the house. Unfortunately, for most contestants, Raja ka beta hi raja hota hai. But I wasn't about to let that stop me. From the moment I entered, I made it clear that I was a threat

**KASHISH, AT THE END OF THIS CHAT GETS ONBOARD FOR A RAPID FIRE ROUND FROM HER EXPERIENCE IN THE BIGG BOSS HOUSE:**

**Who should have left the house before:** Eisha and Shilpa

**Most irritating:** Shrutika

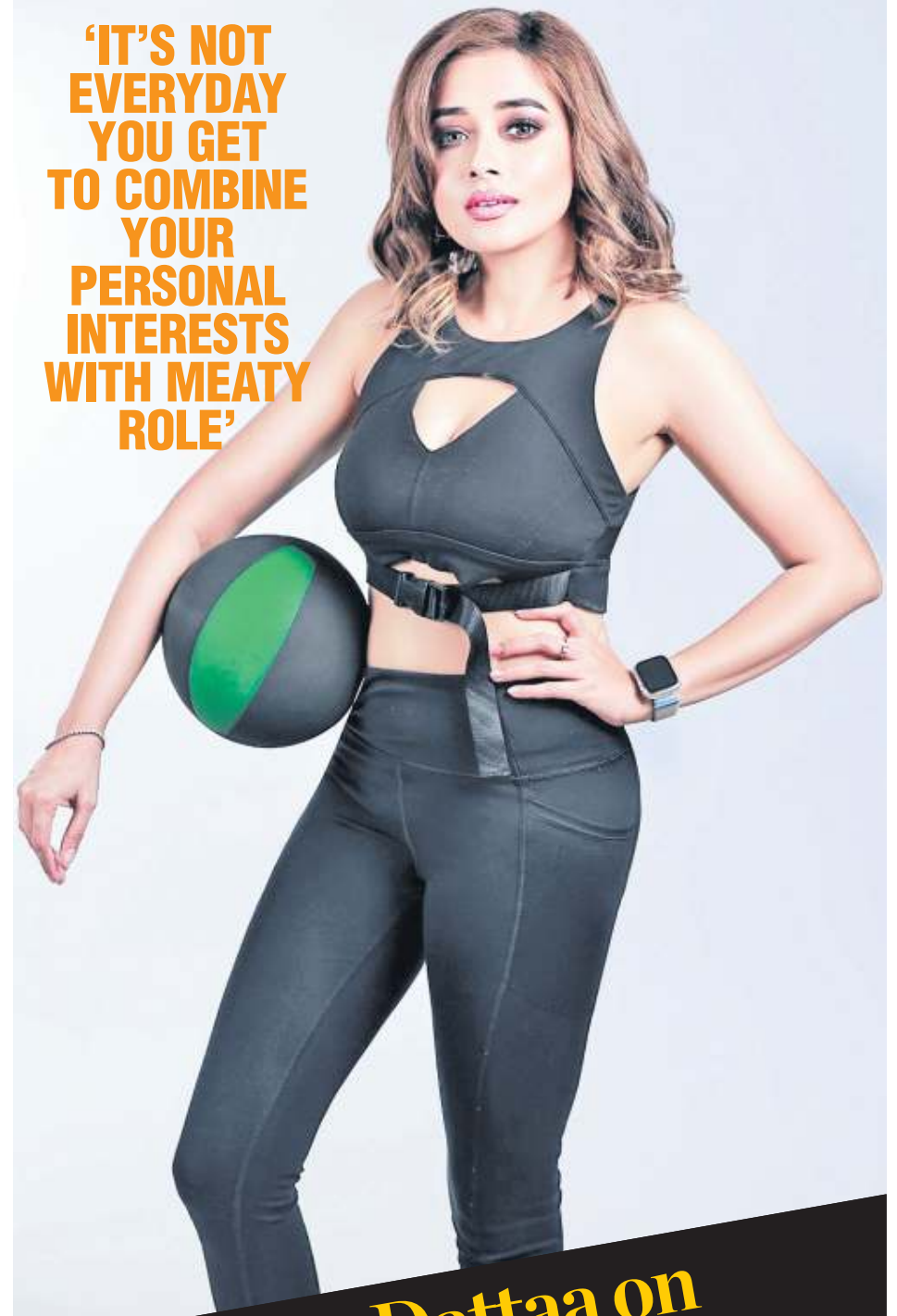
**Sweetest:** Chahat and Edin

**Backstabber:** Shilpa Shirodkar

**The one who fake to Top 10:** Shilpa Shirodkar

**Gamer:** Rajat, because he only focused on playing games and of course his 'Samikaran'

'IT'S NOT EVERYDAY YOU GET TO COMBINE YOUR PERSONAL INTERESTS WITH MEATY ROLE'



Tinaa Dattaa on playing a grey character in Personal Trainer

Crime thriller series, "Personal Trainer" is all set to release on 23rd January on Hungama OTT platform. The series is set against the backdrop of Mumbai's elite gym culture, this gripping tale explores ambition, love, and the dangerous pursuit of physical perfection. At the heart of the story is Neha Dharamrajan, a married woman, played by Tinaa Dattaa, whose illicit affair with her personal trainer, Anish, essayed by Gulshan Nain, sets off a chilling chain of events that culminates in Anish's mysterious murder. As secrets unravel and the gym community's hidden motives surface, the search for Anish's killer intensifies, leaving everyone under suspicion. Tinaa's commanding portrayal of Neha, who navigates betrayal and turmoil with resilience and strength, drives the show's emotional core.

Renowned for her dedication to fitness, Tinaa reveals how her disciplined lifestyle helped her deliver a compelling performance in the series. She shares, "There's a scene

where I perform a headstand, and I was proud to pull it off on my own. My passion for health and wellness allowed me to bring authenticity to Neha's character. It's not every day that you get to combine your personal interests with such a meaty role."

Talking about her experience working on the show and sharing insights about her character, she adds, "Neha is a grey character, and it was exciting to portray someone complex with both strengths and flaws. Besides bringing a promising character to life, it was fantastic to work with such a talented cast. Each one of them brought something unique to the table, motivating me to push my limits as an actor. We also formed a great bond on set, and the camaraderie was evident in every scene. I can't wait for viewers to witness this thrilling drama unfold on Hungama."

With stellar performances by Tinaa Dattaa, Gulshan Nain, and Sahib Tagra, among other actors, along with a pulse-pounding premise, Personal Trainer promises suspense, drama, and a whole lot of unexpected twists that will keep viewers guessing until the very end.

## The dual lessons of independence and interdependence in boarding schools

The Association of Boarding Schools recently found that 78 percent of borders are motivated by their peers in comparison to 49 per cent of public school students. "The surging popularity of boarding schools can be attributed to this synergistic learning environment along with a sharp focus on the holistic development of students. Today parents choose boarding schools not just because of the academic excellence they offer but to also ensure that their children grow into fulfilled, multifaceted individuals," says Dominic Tomalin, Founding Headmaster of Shrewsbury International School.

On International Education Day (January 24), he outlines some of the salient factors that make boarding schools the preferred choice for future-forward education:

A well-established boarding school usually offers not just exemplary academic performance data but also a list of inspiring alumni it has produced. It is likely to have a unique core philosophy that offers each child exactly what they need in order to reach their full potential. Boarding schools also offer well-resourced amenities conducive to holistic development including smart classrooms, thoughtfully designed boarding houses, excellent



academic infrastructure and facilities accommodating extracurricular and sporting activities.

International institutions that align with the larger goals of your child offer a curriculum that is tai-

lored to enable access to top global universities. Shrewsbury for instance offers English National Curriculum, empowering pupils to undertake Cambridge International IGCSE Examinations in Years 10 and 11.

These examinations then qualify the pupils for entry into A-Level courses. Parents and students today, prefer a world-class education and an interactive learning environment as opposed to modules that encourage



passive, rote learning.

To be a global citizen today, a young person must gain exposure to multiculturalism, as it expands their perspective, fosters respect for diverse viewpoints and ethnicities,

and cultivates mutual respect between individuals hailing from different backgrounds. An international institution is a perfect space to learn the value of inclusivity, collaboration and multilingualism. An

integrated learning culture encourages active listening and teamwork, and emphasizes the importance of both independence and interdependence to achieve shared goals. It goes a long way in preparing students for leadership roles in the future.

A boarding school is also the perfect place to learn the value of peer support. The warmth, trust and fellowship between older students and their younger peers create a safe, nurturing home away from home. Mentorship opportunities kindle leadership qualities and empathy. They also polish interpersonal and communication skills that last a lifetime. Guided sessions where students discuss their experiences and learn more about each other offer a safe space for clearing doubts and establishing lasting understanding.

Boarding schools do not just help students bridge classroom learning with practical learning experiences but also imbue them with value-based education that connects them to the world beyond the campus. A pedagogy rooted in ethics and social responsibility encourages students to address real-world problems, contribute to society in a positive way, and extend themselves to make a real difference to the world outside.

# Shami in focus as India eye fresh start against England

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Fit-again pacer Mohammed Shami's comeback would be keenly watched when the Suryakumar Yadav-led Indian T20 team takes on an evenly-matched England in a five-match series starting here on Wednesday, aiming to make up for the recent Test disasters that have caused considerable turmoil and heartbreak.

The white-ball rubber, comprising five T20s and three ODIs after that, presents an ideal platform for both the teams to experiment with combinations and assess form before next month's Champions Trophy.

Shami, despite missing four matches, emerged as India's leading wicket-taker in the ODI World Cup 2023 with 24 scalps, including a sensational 7/57 in the semifinal against New Zealand at the Wankhede.

Interestingly, the pacer has claimed the same number of wickets - 24 at an average of 29.62 - in his limited T20I career and will aim to improve on that while proving his fitness.

Shami was sidelined after the last final against Australia on November 19, 2023 due to an ankle injury that

required surgery. The recovery from that was followed by swelling on his left knee during the domestic comeback some weeks back.

Following his inclusion in India's Champions Trophy squad, Shami's return will garner national attention.

With pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah nursing a back injury and his Champions Trophy participation doubtful, Shami's comeback assumes greater significance.

The 34-year-old made his competitive return in the Ranji Trophy for Bengal, guiding them to their first win of the season with a seven-wicket haul.

He followed it up with impressive performances in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (11 wickets) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (five wickets). Shami's T20I career has been sporadic, with just 23 appearances since his debut in 2014. His last outing in the format was against England in the 2022 T20 World Cup semifinal.

With the Rohit Sharma-led Indian Test set-up still reeling from a horror tour of Australia, a good performance from the T20 side has become imperative especially after the Board had to step in to reinforce



dictats on team discipline.

**Axar's new beginning**  
All-rounder Axar Patel will debut as India's vice-captain in the T20I format. He has been rewarded for his stellar all-round contributions in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign in the Caribbean last

year. Axar played a crucial knock of 47 off 31 balls in the final against South Africa and took nine wickets at an average of 19.22 across eight matches.

The Gujarat player has already outlined his vision for India's middle order, emphasising a flexible

approach with players floating between No. 3 to 7 depending on match situations.

**Curious case of Sanju Samson**  
All eyes will also be on Kerala's Sanju Samson, who faces another critical juncture in his career after being omitted from India's Champions Trophy squad.

He was subsequently ignored by Kerala selectors for their Ranji Trophy match against Madhya Pradesh.

The wicketkeeper-batter has proven his mettle several times, becoming the first Indian to score successive T20I centuries in the recent series against South Africa being a case in point.

Promising all-rounder Nitish Reddy, who scored his maiden Test century against Australia in December at Melbourne, has also earned a spot in the squad, giving the team another option pace-bowling all-rounder along with the redoubtable Hardik Pandya.

**England's fresh start**  
For the Jos Buttler-led England, the series marks a new chapter under head coach Brendon McCullum, who signed a three-year contract following Matthew Mott's resignation following their T20 World Cup exit.

Known for revolutionising Test cricket with his aggressive 'Bazball' approach, McCullum will now seek to replicate that success in the limited-overs format.

It would not be a new territory for the New Zealand great, who was also at the helm of Kolkata Knight Riders after playing for the

franchise in the inaugural IPL. England will miss key players Reece Topley, Sam Curran, and Will Jacks, but promising 21-year-old Jacob Bethell, who impressed in the ODI series against the West Indies last year, will look to shine.

Bethell has averaged 57.66 and struck at 167.96 in his seven T20I appearances. Test opener Ben Duckett has been given the position in the shortest format for the first time in six years.

Like Shami, England's fiery pacer Jofra Archer will be under the spotlight as he returns from injury to lead their pace attack ahead of the Champions Trophy.

The playing XI finalised for Wednesday also includes pace bowler Mark Wood, who has recently recovered from a right elbow injury.

But conditions in India, with the possibility of heavy evening dew, could pose a challenge for bowlers. After Wednesday's game, the series would move to Chennai for the second T20I (January 25), followed by matches Rajkot (Jan 28), Pune (Jan 31) and Mumbai (February 2). The ODI leg will start in Nagpur on February 6, followed by Cuttack (February 9) and Ahmedabad (February 12).



## T20s won't affect England's CT preparation: Jos Buttler

PTI ■ KOLKATA

England skipper Jos Buttler is confident that the T20I series against India will not hamper their preparation for the upcoming Champions Trophy, and he also hopes to build a working relation with new head coach Brendon McCullum on this tour.

The ODI-format Champions Trophy will start from February 19, and England will play just three 50-over matches against India in the run-up to the marquee tournament.

"It's going to be a great series against a really top side in their own conditions. There's loads to look forward to. I'm not worried about schedules at the moment. I'm just looking forward to playing some games," Buttler said on the eve of the first T20I here at the Eden Gardens.

"I think it's going to be a really exciting T20 series. Obviously, there's some ODIs to follow, so yeah, I'm just looking forward to the games," he added.

McCullum, the red-ball coach, had succeeded Matthew Mott as England's limited over formats coach, and Buttler wanted to build the bond with the Kiwi.

"Obviously, it's not a new setup because Baz (McCullum) has been around for a while," Buttler said.

"There are a lot of players in this squad who have worked with him in the Test team over the years. So, yeah, I'm just looking forward to building that relationship in the white-ball setup."

England have arrived in India with a full-strength squad with Jofra Archer and Mark Wood leading the pace department.

"Sometimes there's so much cricket that certain players have to be rested or managed, but that's certainly not the case for us at all in this series. So we're a full complement of players, which is really exciting. Obviously, Baz is coming into the white-ball setup for the first time, and there's plenty to look forward to here and now."

He further mentioned that bowlers like Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carson, and Adil Rashid, who has multiple first-class centuries, provide depth to the line-up.

"I think we're really blessed, actually, in terms of the bowlers that we have here on this tour. They're all very, very capable batsmen. I think if you look at guys like Gus Atkinson with a Test hundred, Brydon Carson is an excellent hitter, and even Adil Rashid sometimes is down at 11 who's got multiple first-class 100s."

"I think we're very fortunate in that sense it gives a lot of confidence to the guys at the

top. There's plenty to come, so we can be really aggressive and not worry too much about our wicket, because we've got guys behind who can do exactly the same job," he added.

**Bethell special**  
Buttler also praised young talent Jacob Bethell, who has been making waves in English cricket.

"He's done brilliantly well coming into international cricket. He's got a good head on his shoulders and obviously he's got the game for it, as you've seen in the white-ball stuff."

"Moving into Test cricket, it was fantastic to watch him in New Zealand. This is again a new challenge for him, playing in India, and one I know he's excited for," Buttler said.

**Salt to keep wickets**  
As for England's playing XI, Buttler indicated that the team is almost settled, with some final decisions pending on the bowling front.

"Yeah, pretty much. Just waiting on a couple of the bowlers to see how they pull up through training. Phil Salt will keep wickets. He's obviously been playing brilliantly in T20 cricket for a while now."

"Ben Duckett will be with him at the top of the order. Jofra will play, Woody will play, and then we're just waiting on a couple of bowlers," he said.

## Australian Open: Bopanna-Zhang pair lose mixed doubles quarterfinal

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Rohan Bopanna and Shuai Zhang had a match point in the Super Tie-break but could not close out the mixed doubles quarterfinals in their favour as local wild cards John Peers and Olivia Gadecki emerged winners in an exciting contest at the Australian Open here on Tuesday.

Bopanna and Zhang lost 6-2 4-6 9-11 in one hour and eight minutes at Kia Arena, bringing curtains on India's campaign at the first Grand Slam of the season.

Bopanna had earlier made exit from the men's doubles. India's other contenders, including singles exponent Sumit Nagal, and doubles specialists Yuki Bhambhani and N Sriram Balaji, had also lost at various stages of the hard-court Major.

Bopanna and Zhang ran away with the opening set but the Australian wild-card pair



bounced back strongly. The Chinese player lost her serve in the third game of the second set and that gave Peers and Gadecki an opening to force a Super Tie-break. There was no surprise, and that break remained with the wild cards, who wrapped up the second set.

The windy conditions also occasionally made the returns a bit tough.

Serving to stay in the set, Bopanna came out with his booming serves even as Peers tried to put pressure on him with an aggressive approach from the baseline, targeting Zhang on the net.

Peers gifted a free point with his double fault while serving for the set but came back strong with Gadecki hitting a volley winner on the next point.

Solid serving handed the local favourites two set points. They converted when Zhang's service return sailed over the baseline.

Bopanna lost his serve on the first point of the Super Tie-break with Peers finding a volley winner following a quick duel with Zhang. The Chinese also lost a point on her serve with super-fast returns being fired from across the net. Bopanna's on-the-jump forehand winner made it 3-3 but Peers found a stunning service return winner on the Indian's serve to earn another mini break.

A Peers return on Zhang's second serve gave the Aussies a 7-5 lead. Gadecki lost both points on her serve and it was 7-11.

At 8-8, Gadecki's feeble return went wide giving Bopanna and Zhang their first match point. Peers saved the chance with a strong serve.

## Mandhana climbs to second position in ICC women's ODI rankings



PTI ■ DUBAI

India opener Smriti Mandhana inched closer to the top position, climbing to the second spot in the latest ICC women's ODI batting rankings following a stellar series against Ireland.

Mandhana, the only Indian in the top 10, had blasted 135 in the third ODI, besides scoring 41 and 73 in the opening and second game.

The 28-year-old currently has 738 points to her name, while South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt (773 points) is at the top, followed by Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu (733) in the third place.

Jemimah Rodrigues, who scored her maiden hundred in the second ODI against Ireland, jumped two places at the 17th spot, while skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who missed the series, is at the 15th spot.

Deepti Sharma, with 344 points, is placed at the sixth spot in the allrounders' list which is headed by Australia's Ashleigh Gardner, who claimed four wickets and scored 146 runs in the Ashes to claim the top spot from South Africa veteran Marizanne Kapp.

In the bowling rankings, headed by Sophie Ecclestone, Deepti also improved a spot to fourth with 680 rating points.

Gardner was productive with both bat and ball, as the Aussies claimed all three ODIs against England down under.

## India defeats Malaysia in U19 Women's T20 World Cup

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Debutant left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma recorded astonishing figures of 5/5, including a hat-trick, as India demolished Malaysia by 10 wickets in an utterly one-sided U19 Women's T20 World Cup match that was done and dusted in less than 18 overs here on Tuesday.

Vaishnavi's figures are the best ever in the tournament's history as Malaysia were bundled out for a paltry 31 in 14.3 overs. Fellow left-arm spinner Ayushi Shukla (3/8) also chipped in as India bowlers ran through Malaysia's batting line-up without much ado.

India barley batted an eyelid while chasing down the target in 2.5 overs, reaching 32 for no loss. G Trisha made an unbeaten 27 off 12 balls with five fours.



The lowest total in a women's T20I, however, is 6 -- shared by Maldives and Mali.

In the men's game, Ivory Coast has held the record since being bowled out for just seven runs in a 264-run defeat by Nigeria in Lagos last year.

Now, India are on top of their group with four points, same as Sri Lanka but the former

has better Net Run Rate -- +9.1 to Lanka's +5.5.

But that easy chase was the fruit borne out of Vaishnavi's impeccable spell.

There was appreciable turn and bounce on offer in the pitch here, and she used it to the hilt as the home side batters had no answers to her guile.

Nur Ain Binti Roslan, Nur

Isma Dania and Siti Nazwah were her hat-trick victims, and she achieved the feat in the 14th over, that saw Malaysia further stumbling from 24 for six to 30 for nine.

"This was a dream debut to get a hat-trick and five-wicket haul. My journey has had its ups and downs. I look up to Radha Yadav (India senior left-arm spinner) and Ravindra Jadeja. I had visualised how to get wickets here last night," said Vaishnavi after the match.

Earlier, she had the wickets of Malaysia skipper Nur Syuhada and Nuriman as none of the home side batters were able to reach double digits.

In fact, India had bowled 10 wides and Malaysia's scoreboard would have been even more anaemic if those runs were not there.

# Shubman Gill as vice-captain is a forward-thinking move: Ashwin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ravichandran Ashwin has backed the Indian team management's decision to appoint Shubman Gill as vice-captain for the Champions Trophy as a "forward-thinking move", saying the top-order batter's place in the side is more or less settled and he can be groomed as a future leader.

Off-spinner Ashwin, who retired during the recent Australia tour, seemed to suggest that there were no plenty of options available for the job.

"Think about who else in the current squad could be considered for the vice-captain role. I'm not saying whether the decision to make Shubman Gill vice-captain was right or wrong, but the point raised is valid, especially since he was the vice-captain in the last series as well," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel on Sunday.

"I could be mistaken, but I believe he's also had some vice-captaincy experience in Test cricket. This could be a forward-

thinking move, as the management might be considering who could take on the leadership role in the future."

While Gill is the ODI vice-captain, Axar Patel has been handed the role in T20Is.

"While both (Rishabh) Pant and (KL) Rahul could play together, they've handed the vice-captaincy to the player whose spot in the XI is already secure. If Shubman Gill is groomed to lead in the future, he can rely on the guidance of senior players like Virat Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah," he said.

The prestigious ICC event is scheduled to start from February 19 in Pakistan and the UAE, and Ashwin raised concerns about the paucity of left-handers in the top seven apart from the absence of a reliable No. 8 in India's batting order.

"This squad mirrors the 2023 ODI World Cup," Ashwin said.

"Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill open, both right-handed. Then there's Virat Kohli. Shreyas Iyer likely bats at 4, given his strong performance in the World Cup.



KL Rahul follows.

"At No. 6, it's a choice between Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel. Hardik occupies No. 7. We lack

left-handed batters in the top seven. Outside the XI, we have Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant."

Left-handed batter Yashasvi Jaiswal, who was one of the bright spots in the Australia Test series, was also included in the

squad.

Weighing the permutations and combinations in which Jaiswal may get his ODI debut, Ashwin said: "Jaiswal might only play if someone gets injured. He could have a chance against England. But what if he scores consecutive centuries?"

"One option is to open with Jaiswal and Rohit, pushing Shubman to 3, followed by Virat at 4. This would place either Rishabh Pant or KL Rahul at 5. If Jaiswal plays, Shreyas Iyer would likely be dropped. While unlikely, India must capitalise on Jaiswal's current form," he said.

All-rounder Washington Sundar is another player who could have an impact if he finds a place in the playing XI.

Reflecting on the scenario, Ashwin said: "Another scenario involves Washington Sundar. Gautam Gambhir highly values Washington due to his batting. He can also be used as a floater."

"If you follow the World Cup format, you play either Jaddu or Axar at No. 6, Hardik at 7, and Washington at 8. This allows for

three fast bowlers or Kuldeep and two pacers, maintaining balance with Hardik's all-round skills," he added.

India will play all their matches in Dubai, and Ashwin feels dew could be a factor there, affecting the team combination.

"Ideally, Washington should bat at 8. Does it make sense to have a player like Nitish Reddy in the scheme of things? If Kuldeep plays at 9, it's two pacers and three spinners."

"With Nitish, he could bat at 8, allowing Kuldeep at 9 and two fast bowlers. This would provide the luxury of four fast bowlers and two spinners. I don't know if he was considered."

"Washington Sundar at 8 might not be feasible if dew is a major factor. In that case, Kuldeep Yadav would bat at 8, and the team would likely go with all seamers -- Arshdeep, Bumrah, and Shami."

"In the 2023 World Cup, we lacked batting depth from No. 8 onwards. These are the crucial questions that need to be addressed."



## Sai Ram Shankar is back with a thriller this time

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Director Puri Jagannath's younger brother Sai Ram Shankar is back with a film after a gap. The actor made his debut with the film '143' in 2004. Though he acted in a few films till now, he has not been successful as an actor. He is taking long gaps between his films and now, he is coming up with a film titled 'Oka Pathakam Prakarum'. He is playing a lawyer in this film directed by national award-winning director Vinod Vijayan. Interestingly, the director made half a dozen Malayalam films till now and also won a national award for his film 'Ottal'. He directed the Telugu film 'Oka Pathakam Prakarum' with Sai Ram as the lead.

"I have known Vinod Vijayan since 2005 and we continue our friendship. When he narrated this film story to me, I felt that universe sent him to me," said Sai Ram. He

added that he liked the project and completed it. "I play Siddharth Neelakanta, public prosecutor and criminal lawyer in this film," said the actor. "My character revolves around the story. It is very intense and one can't predict whether I am a criminal, and the relation to me with the crime that happened in the story is unpredictable," said the actor.

The actor said that after three days of shooting, director Vijayan called his friend from the National School of Drama to train him for a month. "That tells how intense my role in the film is. Maybe I have been waiting for this film all these days and I am sure that this film will definitely fill the gap," said Sai Ram. He added that the technicians who worked for this film are winners of national awards. "I am blessed for working with them for this film," said the actor.

Sai Ram said his friend and director Vijayan won the national award for his film 'Ottal'. "It also won many international awards. Because of Vijayan, many top tech-

nicians worked for this Telugu film. 'Oka Pathakam Prakarum' is releasing on February 7.

"I don't think that in recent times a suspense thriller like this one came out. That's why we are also putting a contest for it. If anyone predicts the villain after the first half, we are going to give him/her a prize money of Rs 10,000," said the actor. He said that the team has confidence in the film, so they are putting on this contest. "In 50 theatres, they will give a coupon and once the first half is completed, the viewers should write the villain's name and once the movie is over, whoever writes the correct name will get the money," said Sai Ram about the contest. He praised the director for his screenplay and the story. "I am sure this film gives me the much needed break and I will be back with regular films without any gap," said Sai Ram.

## KIRAN ABBAVARAM EXPECTING HIS FIRST CHILD

Actor Kiran Abbavaram and his wife Rahasya Gorak are going to be proud parents soon. This news was announced by Kiran himself on his social media, sharing a picture of him and his wife and saying "our love is growing by 2 feet". Actor Kiran married his co-star and actress Rahasya on August 22, 2024. They met on the sets of their debut film 'Raja Vaaru Rani Gaaru', fell in love and dated for a few years. They got engaged last year in March and married in August. After her debut film, Rahasya said goodbye to acting. Now, the couple announced the pregnancy on their social media. On the professional front, Kiran delivered a much-needed hit film 'KA' which was released last year. He is now busy with multiple projects and one of the films ready to hit the screens is 'Dilruba'.



## Unfazed by Game Changer disaster, Charan's focus shifts to his next film

This year, one of the high-budget films 'Game Changer' was released on January 10 and it became a huge disaster. Ram Charan played the lead actor with Shankar Shanmugham as director. There were high expectations for this film, but it disappointed everyone, especially Mega fans. Ram Charan promoted this film in Uttar Pradesh capital Lucknow and then in the Telugu states. Kiara Advani is the female lead and there are a number of actors like SJ Suryah, Jayaram, Srikanth and Samuthirakani. Anjali plays the second female lead. Before the film, director Sukumar and Mega Star Chiranjeevi, predicted high about the film and even Sukumar went on and said that Ram Charan will definitely get an award for his performance. He announced that he watched the film along with Chiranjeevi. They also praised Anjali's performance in the film. Despite all this, the film didn't have any impact at the box-office and from day one it registered low numbers. The makers accused more on piracy and deliberate negative publicity on this film. Now, the film turned out to be a huge box-office failure, but Ram Charan has now moved to his next film. "Ram Charan is now focusing on his upcoming film directed by Buchi Babu Sana and they have already completed two schedules. Ram Charan is unfazed by the flop and he moves on to another project," said a source. Janhvi Kapoor is the female lead in this period drama, while AR Rahman is providing the music.



## VENKATESH STUNS WITH HIS FILM COLLECTIONS, BEATS CHIRU AND ALLU ARJUN

Venkatesh and Anil Ravipudi film 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' released on January 14, during the Sankranthi festival. There were no big expectations on this film, but because of the promotions and the comedy content, one expected that the film will do reasonably well. But to everyone's surprise, this Venkatesh film stunned the entire Telugu Film Industry by creating records all over the Telugu states, after its release.

This is the first time that Venkatesh's film collected more than Rs 100 crore and now after one week, the collections have surpassed Rajamouli's 'Baahubali'. Another interesting thing is that actors like Venkatesh, whose age is 60 plus, collecting such huge collections is definitely a landmark in TFI. Only Chiranjeevi's comeback and his 150th film 'Khaidi No.150' showed good numbers in the first weekend and also his other film 'Waltair Veerayya' also collected nearly Rs 130 crore shares in the overall collections.

But now, Venkatesh is going to easily surpass Chiranjeevi's collections in the coming days and set a new benchmark in the senior actor's category. Audiences are watching 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' like never before and it seems, this film is definitely creating history in the collections, say trade pundits. The film already surpassed first week collections of Allu Arjun's 'Ala Vaikuntapuramlo' and now stands in the 7th in the top ten Telugu film collections in Telugu states. If the trend continues like this, the 64-year-old Venkatesh is all set to create history in the coming days. This film is released only in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.



## Satyaraj's interesting portrayal in Barbarik

In recent times, the content-driven and small films are successful at the box-office. Many new directors are entering into the film industry and showing their talent with their first films. Another director Mohan Srivatsa is also making his debut with the film 'Barbarik'. Produced by Vijaypal Reddy Adidhala, the film is presented by popular director Maruthi. The movie's cast is interesting with senior actor Satyaraj playing the main protagonist with Satyam Rajesh, Vasishtha N Simha, Sanchi Rai, Udaya Bhanu and Kranthi Kiran in key roles.

Each character, particularly those played by Satyaraj, Satyam Rajesh and Vasishtha N Simha, is set to play a pivotal role in the storyline. Satyaraj's striking appearance and dynamic performance are sure to be one of the main attractions. The teaser promised stunning visuals, a powerful background score and exceptional production values that elevate the film to a whole new level.

The music is composed by the Infusion Band. The movie is now in its post-production and the makers will announce the release date in the coming days.

## Released after 12 years, Vishal's film a surprise hit

Actor Vishal was in the news when he attended the pre-release function of his film 'Madha Gaja Raja'. When he was holding the mike to speak, his hand shivered and there were tears in his eyes. Many showed concern about Vishal's health at that time. The actor said he attended the film's function because the film is releasing after 12 years of its completion. The film was supposed to be released in 2013, but due to some financial problems, it was released on January 12, this year. Sundar C is the director with Vishal as the lead actor, while Anjali and Varalakshmi Sarath Kumar played the female leads.

Though Vishal is not well and running high temperature, he came to this film's function to promote it. A few days later, Vishal attended another event and looked healthy and normal. The interesting thing is that though the film was released after 12 years, it became a hit. The Tamil audience liked the film and it collected a good amount at the box-office. The film soon reached the Rs 50 crore mark, say the trade analysts. The film already got the breakeven and is now into profits. Another interesting point about this 'Madha Gaja Raja' is, it is the first Tamil hit film in this New Year.