



the pioneer

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

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

I would like to congratulate the Telangana Government on its progress towards fulfilling our guarantees. I appreciate the initiatives of the Transport Department and the Backward Classes Welfare Department. I hope that you will continue to work towards realising our vision of 'Nyaya'

- Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition



P4

'Governance reforms must begin at grassroots level'

WILL ACHIEVE 2 LAKH TARGET: SHAH

No comedy, no suspense; Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes misses THE SPARK

DON'T MISS...

TTD to issue 1.20 lakh tokens

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer Shyamala Rao on Wednesday informed that Tirupati and Tirumala Sarva Darshan time slot tokens will be issued for Vaikuntha Dwara darshanam at Tirumala Srivari Temple for 10 days from January 10. Rao said that for the first three days of January 10, 11 and 12, 1.20 lakh tokens will be issued from 5 am on January 9, and tokens will be issued the day before for the remaining days. The EO along with the Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary inspected Ramachandra Pushkarini...

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'The Satanic Verses' returns to India

British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie's controversial book 'The Satanic Verses' has quietly returned to India 36 years after it was banned by the Rajiv Gandhi government. A "limited stock" of the book, which caused a furore against its author and content that was deemed blasphemous by Muslim organisations the world over, has been selling at Baharisons Bookellers in the national capital for the past few days. "It has been a few days since we got the book and the response has been very good so far..."

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EPFO adds 13.41 lakh net members

Retirement fund body EPFO has registered 13.41 lakh net new members addition in October 2024, according to showed latest payroll data. This signifies increased employment opportunities and heightened awareness of employee benefits, bolstered by EPFO's effective outreach initiatives, a labour ministry statement said on Wednesday. According to the statement, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has released provisional payroll data for...

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Bumrah equals Ashwin's record

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah got a huge boost on the eve of the Boxing Day Test when he achieved the joint-highest rating ever by an Indian player, equalling the record held by spinner Ravichandran Ashwin in the ICC Ranking for Bowlers. The quick gained 14 rating points following his 9/94 in the drawn third Test at Brisbane to not only equal Ashwin's highest-ever 904 rating points but also consolidate his position at the top of the rankings. Bumrah has a chance to better Ashwin's rating points, which the...

-SPORTS

TG CM to hold talks with Tollywood honchos today



PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will hold a meeting with prominent members of the Telugu film industry on Thursday. The meeting will take place at 10 am at the Police Command Control Centre at Banjara Hills in Hyderabad.

Tollywood stalwarts Dil Raju, Chiranjeevi, Venkatesh, Allu Aravind and other producers and directors are expected to attend the meeting. The government will be represented by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka and Ministers Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, Uttam Kumar

Reddy and Damodar Raja Narasimha. The meeting will discuss the challenges and concerns of the Telugu film industry. The government and film industry leaders are expected to work together to find solutions to the industry's problems and frame policies for its growth.



Avoid controversy, engage in dialogue: Anurag

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Participating in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee birth centenary celebrations, BJP MP Anurag Thakur hailed the contributions of Telugu cinema and its actors in putting Indian films on the global map. Speaking at the event, Thakur emphasised that Telugu actors like Allu Arjun and Chiranjeevi have not only brought recognition to Indian cinema but have also received accolades from Prime Minister Modi's Government, including the National Award for Allu Arjun and the Lifetime Achievement Award for Chiranjeevi.

He credited films like RRR, Pushpa, KGF, and Baahubali for enhancing Indian cinema's reputation worldwide. Thakur also urged people to avoid controversies, steer clear of politics and instead engage in dialogue and maintain safety. Reflecting on Atal Bihari Vajpayee's unparalleled contributions, Thakur described him as a visionary whose journey began as an RSS worker and evolved into a celebrated poet, orator and statesman.

Vajpayee's ability to inspire people, whether as the Prime Minister or as a parliamentarian, earned him respect across party lines. He recalled how Vajpayee upheld democratic values even during challenging times, contrasting it with the Congress' actions during the 1975 Emergency. Highlighting Vajpayee's leadership during the 1999 Kargil War, Thakur noted how Vajpayee firmly resisted international pressure to retreat, asserting that not an inch of Indian territory would be compromised. This resolute stance inspired soldiers and instilled confidence in the nation.

Vajpayee's vision for India is exemplified by schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, which connected villages with roads and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, aimed at improving the education infrastructure.

Aravind visits boy at KIMS, donates Rs 2 crore

Allu Aravind visited the eight-year-old boy undergoing treatment at the KIMS Hospital on Wednesday. He also announced an ex-gratia donation of Rs 2 crore to the boy's family contributed by Allu Arjun, Mythri Movie and Sukumar.

Meanwhile, the top honchos of the cinema industry decided to meet Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Thursday. The Chief Minister's Office has allocated a slot at 10:30 am to actor Chiranjeevi, Venkatesh and Allu Aravind who will meet the CM at the Command Control Centre.

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka and Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy will attend the meeting. Addressing the media Allu Aravind said, "The boy is showing improvement. The ventilator has been removed. Our assistance is for the kid's future. Of the Rs 2 crore, Allu Arjun gave Rs 1 crore while 'Pushpa-2' filmmakers Mythri Movies and Director Sukumar gave Rs 50 lakh each."

The cheques for Rs 2 crore were given to Telangana Film Development Corporation Chairman Dil Raju who was also present at the hospital. Dil Raju said members of the Telugu film industry would meet Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Thursday at 10 am.

CM Naidu meets PM Modi, focuses on state issues



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has participated in various meetings and events during his Delhi visit. On Wednesday morning, he attended the birth centenary celebrations of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Later, Chandrababu took part in a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance at the residence of BJP national president JP Nadda.

Later, the CM met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence for a 45-minute discussion. They talked about various State government programmes, financial issues and key projects. Chandrababu briefed the Prime Minister about the restart of crucial projects like Polavaram and Amaravati, detailing the steps being taken to expedite the work. He thanked the PM for the financial assistance for two vital projects in the State. He also raised concerns about the diversion of funds from 94 Central government schemes under the previous administration, which had caused significant losses.

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Leaders pay tributes to Vajpayee

A leader the Indian nation can be proud of: Chandrababu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu paid floral tributes to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Wednesday, during Vajpayee's birth centenary observance. He described Vajpayee as "a leader the Indian nation can be proud of", expressing his deep admiration for the statesman's vision and leadership. In a grand celebration marking the birth centenary of the former Prime Minister, several high-profile political leaders gathered at the Sadaiv Atal Memorial Park in Delhi. Among them was the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Lok Sabha Speaker Om



Birla, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, BJP national president JP Nadda, and various union ministers. Amidst the tributes to Vajpayee, CM Chandrababu also took a moment to reflect on his relationship with the late leader through a heartfelt post on social media. He posted on X: "On the occasion of Vajpayee's centenary, I pay my homage. It is due to his foresight that India today competes with nations across the world and stands tall with pride. Working alongside a leader who always put 'Nation First' is a memory that will remain with me forever. His unique way of thinking about the country, his suggestions for modernity and technology, and his proposals for reforms are experiences I will never forget. I pay my respects to the beloved son of India, Atal Ji."

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VSP PRIVATISATION

TDP accused of betraying workers

Steel Plant's Karnataka counterpart secures a massive lifeline of Rs 15,000 cr from Centre

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), stands perilously close to collapse while its Karnataka counterpart, Visvesvaraya Iron and Steel Plant (VISL), a unit of Steel Authority of India Limited, secures a massive lifeline of Rs 15,000 crore from the Central government. This stark disparity, announced by Union



Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H.D. Kumaraswamy during the 87th All India Kannada Literary Conference in Mandya, has ignited a storm of anger and raised grave concerns about the leadership priorities in Andhra Pradesh.

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Christmas celebrated with pomp and gaiety

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Christmas was celebrated with great enthusiasm and festive spirit across Andhra Pradesh, as families came together for reunions and religious observances. Christmas services took place throughout the day at various churches, some starting as early as 4.30 a.m., marking the beginning of the celebrations.

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Minister announces steps to create jobs, empower youth

Focus on training youth in various industries to build a skilled workforce

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC Welfare S Savitha has announced a slew of new initiatives under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, aimed at creating employment opportunities and empowering youth, particularly women, in Andhra Pradesh. Speaking to media persons at the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) central office in Mangalagiri on Wednesday, Savitha revealed that the government plans to provide employment for 10,000 individuals through SEEDAP. This initiative will focus on training youth in various industries, including poultry and food processing, to build a skilled workforce.



Savitha stressed the TDP government's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and empowering women through free training programmes available across the State.

She stated that Chandrababu has consistently advocated for the welfare of the Backward Classes (BCs) in the State, continuing the legacy of Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR), who founded federations that significantly uplifted the BC community.

Criticising the policies of the previous YSRCP government led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Savitha accused him of manipulating electoral sentiment by promising job creation without taking tangible steps to improve the welfare of BC students. She specifically pointed out that under Jagan's administration, basic infrastructure facilities like hostel maintenance for BC students were neglected.

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Six years on, TIDCO housing project remains stalled

Neglect, delays, and lack of basic amenities dash hopes of affordable housing for urban poor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Six years after its launch, the much-anticipated TIDCO (Township and Infrastructure Development Corporation) housing project, aimed at providing affordable housing for the urban poor, remains largely unoccupied, plagued by delays and neglect. Initiated under the TDP government, the project has suffered significant setbacks under the subsequent YSRCP regime, leaving thousands of potential beneficiaries in limbo. Despite cosmetic efforts, such as



repainting houses in YSRCP party colours, little has been done to address critical infrastructural issues.

The TIDCO project, envisioned as a key component of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, has seen progress stall, with completed houses unallocated and contractors halting work due to unpaid bills. "The lack of basic infrastructure has left thousands of potential beneficiaries in limbo," said a beneficiary.

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38 feared dead as Azerbaijani airliner crashes

PNS ■ MOSCOW

Kazakhstan officials say 38 people have died after an Azerbaijani airliner crashed on Wednesday near the Kazakhstan city of Aktau.

Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbaev disclosed the death toll while meeting with Azerbaijani officials, the Russian news agency Interfax reported. Azerbaijan's prosecutor general's office said previously that 32 of the 67 people on board the plane had survived. The Embraer 190 was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus.

Preliminary information showed that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board, Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti quoted Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, as

saying. Kazakhstan's Emergency Ministry said in a Telegram statement that those onboard included five crew. A total of 29 survivors, including two children, have been hospitalized, the ministry told RIA

Novosti. Another Russian news agency, Interfax, quoted medical workers as saying that four bodies have been recovered and emergency workers at the scene as saying that both pilots died. The plane

crashed while attempting an emergency landing 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) from Aktau, Azerbaijan Airlines said.

The Prosecutor General's Office said that the number of 32 survivors

wasn't final, and according to Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry some of them were in critical condition. The number of survivors could mean that over 30 people may be dead. According to Kazakh officials, those aboard the plane included 42 Azerbaijani citizens, 16 Russian nationals, six Kazakhs and three Kyrgyzstan nationals.

Mobile phone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft, lying upside in the grass. The footage corresponded to the plane's colours and its registration number.

Some of the videos posted on social media showed survivors dragging fellow passengers away from the wreckage.



RIA Novosti quoted Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, as saying that preliminary information showed that the pilot had chosen to divert to Kazakhstan's Aktau after a bird strike on the aircraft led to "an emergency situation on board".

Govt committed to developing cooperative sector: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Cooperation, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, and Fisheries, K Atchannaidu, has emphasised the government's commitment to developing the cooperative sector in the State through well-structured planning. He highlighted focused efforts to strengthen dairy and fisheries sectors by utilising support from the new multipurpose Primary Agriculture Cooperative Societies (PACS) registered in 2023.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated 10,212 newly formed PACS, Dairy, and Fisheries Societies under the banner of 'Sahakar Se Samridhi' in New Delhi on Wednesday. Minister Atchannaidu participated in the programme from the Panchayat Raj & Rural Development Commissioner's Office in Tadepalli.

Atchannaidu said the initiative aims to improve productivity and economic sustainability within these vital sectors. It seeks to foster the growth of cooperative models for rural development and empower farmers. In the newly formed Multipurpose Cooperative System, there are 932 Women Cooperative Dairy Societies in the State, which currently procure 60,000 litres of milk every day and supply it to various agencies.

Union Home Minister inaugurates 10,212 newly formed PACS, Dairy, and Fisheries Societies



Minister K Atchannaidu presenting certificate to a Women's Milk Dairy member at the Panchayat Raj & Rural Development Commissionerate in Tadepalli on Wednesday

Furthermore, he mentioned that approximately 45,000 families benefit from these societies. The government aims to achieve the top position in milk procurement, as Andhra Pradesh is currently in fourth place. The Minister also announced that his government would support the dairy societies formed under the Andhra Pradesh Dairy Development and Cooperative System to ensure they receive affordable prices for milk. As a result, they will provide milk-testing machinery and milk-

chilling facilities.

He stated that the government will offer training to society members in capacity building and business development. Later, he revealed that the government will encourage Podder Plus Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to help dairy farmers earn additional income. Also, he noted that the government raised the withdrawal limit for cooperative societies from Rs.1 crore to Rs.3 crore.

Meanwhile, the Minister mentioned that reducing the current income tax rate from

30 per cent to 15 per cent, following discussions with the Central government, will be beneficial for cooperative societies aiming to turn a profit. Later, Atchannaidu presented performance certificates to the best PACS, milk societies and fisheries societies.

The event was also attended by Animal Husbandry Principal Secretary M.M. Naik, Director Damodar Naidu, Fisheries Commissioner Dola Sankar, APCOB Chief General Manager Venkata Ratnam, and others.

Roadmap for next six months to improve education system: Lokesh

Reforms in school education towards 'Andhra Model Education'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh, has been working tirelessly to transform the State's government schools into a model for the nation, spearheading the 'Andhra Model Education'. As part of this effort, the State government has taken several steps to overhaul the school education system.

A comprehensive roadmap has been laid out for the next six months to further improve standards in government schools and junior colleges. The State is preparing a "One School-One App" dashboard to track real-time data on school conditions. Plans are underway to host State-level science expos and national sports meets under the School Games Federation. Another Mega PTM will be held at the end of the academic year to review and plan further improvements in educational standards.

New uniforms, bags, and competitive exam materials will be distributed to students from Classes 1 to 12 by the start of the next academic year.

Plans are also in place to implement curricular reforms from the 2025-26 academic year, including partnerships with IIT Madras to effectively execute the Education Power programme.

One of the major initiatives under this model is filling the 16,437 vacant teacher positions. Following the signing of the Mega DSC file by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, the process is underway and a transparent Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) was conducted with 1,87,256 candidates qualified. Efforts have also been made to strengthen government schools, with the introduction of an academic calendar free from political affiliations. The State organised Mega Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTM) on December 7 across 44,000 government schools in a festive atmosphere.

Reforms in the curriculum have also been introduced to align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Nipun Bharat mission. In collaboration with organisations such as UNICEF, Pratham, J-PAL, Madi, and



Leadership Equity (LFE), new teaching methodologies are being implemented besides bringing back 84,640 out-of-school children into the mainstream.

The government is working towards better data integration across sectors through APAAR ID. The government has also filled vacancies in SCERT and has recruited 342 teaching and 991 non-teaching staff for KGBVs. Moreover, 255 career and mental health counsellors have been appointed to support students in areas like career planning, mental growth, and conflict resolution.

The State has introduced a "Star Rating" system based on

attendance, performance, and facilities like toilets, drinking water, and other amenities across 44,000 schools. As part of the mid-day meal programme from January, the diet charges for KGBVs have been increased from ₹1,400 to ₹1,600.

In a move to improve educational standards at junior colleges, the State government has extended working hours for government junior colleges, from 9 AM to 5 PM starting from the 2024-25 academic year, two lakh intermediate students in government and aided colleges will receive free textbooks, notebooks and school bags. Additionally, the State government has decided to provide mid-day meals to intermediate students in all 475 government junior colleges starting in January 2025.

Through these coordinated efforts, the Andhra Pradesh government is strengthening its education system, working towards a model that rivals private institutions, and yielding positive results over the past six months under Minister Nara Lokesh's leadership.

TDP accused of...

Continued from Page 1

Despite Karnataka contributing just two MPs to the BJP-led Central government, its JD(S) leadership displayed unshakable determination in saving VISL. In contrast, Andhra Pradesh, with a significant representation of 17 MPs spanning TDP, BJP, YSRCP, and Jana Sena, has failed to secure even a fraction of the Rs 18,000 crore desperately needed to revive VSP. "How can Karnataka's JD(S), with just two MPs, achieve this when Andhra Pradesh's representatives—with far greater numbers—can't even ensure salaries for VSP workers?" a union leader questioned bitterly.

The neglect has had devastating consequences for VSP's nearly 20,000 employees, who have gone without salaries for three months. Major festivals like Dussehra, Diwali, and Christmas, which are usually times of joy, have become periods of despair. The Central government's move to privatise VSP, evidenced by the recent Expression of Interest (EoI) to outsource fire-fighting and rescue services at RINL-VSP, has further fuelled fears of an impending sell-off.

The frustration among workers and activists reached a boiling point when leaders of the Visakha Utku Parirakshana Porata Committee bypassed local MP Sribharat to seek help from Rajya Sabha member K K Ragesh and V Sivadasan. "Our own MPs have failed us. We're forced to turn to leaders in other states," lamented a committee member.

The TDP, once vocally opposed to VSP's privatisation, now faces accusations of betrayal. Critics argue that the party is prioritising its alliance with Prime Minister Narendra Modi over its electoral promises.

Solve issues of Village and Ward Secretariat volunteers: CPM

Government urged to settle salary dues immediately

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has written to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, urging him to take immediate action regarding the issues faced by Village and Ward Secretariat volunteers. In the letter, V Srinivasa Rao, party State secretary, raised concerns about the welfare and financial security of approximately 2,50,000 volunteers who have been serving across the State for the past five years.

Srinivasa Rao stated that

the previous Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government had promised to increase the honorarium for these volunteers to ₹10,000 per month as part of its electoral manifesto. "Not only has the promised wage hike not been implemented, but many volunteers are also facing significant delays in receiving their current salaries," the CPM leader said.

The party has strongly urged the government to settle the outstanding salary dues immediately, fulfil the commitment of increasing the honorarium, and ensure

job security by retaining all volunteers in their positions. Rao pointed out that many volunteers hold degrees and postgraduate qualifications, emphasising the high level of education among individuals willing to work at such low wages, especially in the context of rising unemployment in the State.

CPM has demanded that the government prioritise the settlement of pending salary payments, enforce the promised ₹10,000 stipend, and reverse any forced resignations, ensuring the reinstatement of all affected volunteers.

Tumma provided undue benefits to Sakshi : ACB

Between 2019 and 2024, Sakshi received Rs 371.12 cr in advertisements

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Commissioner of Information & Public Relations (I&PR) Department and ex-officio Secretary under the previous government led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, Tumma Vijaykumar Reddy, allegedly provided undue benefits to Sakshi newspaper and TV channels through government advertisements and bill payments, according to a

preliminary investigation by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB).

ACB investigation revealed that between 2019 and 2024, Sakshi received a sum of Rs 371.12 crore (43 per cent of total government advertisements) in advertisements. In comparison, all TV channels combined received only Rs 26.71 crore in government advertisements.

Of this, Rs 16.17 crore was allocated to channels with a pro-YCP stance, including Sakshi. Notably, no advertisements were given to Andhra Jyothi, TV5 or Maha News chan-

nels during this period.

The ACB also discovered that Vijaykumar Reddy had appointed several Sakshi Media Group employees to positions in I&PR and Andhra Pradesh Digital Corporations through unconventional channels. Subsequently, the ACB filed a case against him on September 14, 2024, for corruption and abuse of power. The case has been registered under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 120B (criminal conspiracy) and sections 7, 13(2), and 13(1)(a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Minister announces...

Continued from Page 1

In contrast, Savitha praised Chandrababu Naidu's proactive approach, noting how the TDP government quickly allocated funds and responsibilities to corporations set up under the previous regime, but had been poorly managed. She also condemned the reduction of reservations for BCs in nominated positions under Jagan's government, calling it a deliberate attempt to stifle the political and economic growth of the BC community.

Highlighting the achievements of the TDP government, Savitha pointed to the allocation of ₹39,700 crore for the welfare of BCs under the NDA government and detailed plans to address the neglect of BC hostel students, including the allocation of funds for maintenance and educational improvements. She also praised the establishment of 107 schools dedicated to students from weaker sections during the TDP's tenure.

Christmas...

Continued from Page 1

Churches across the State were beautifully decorated with illuminating lights, and vibrant stars of various sizes adorned the buildings. Many churches recreated nativity scenes, further enhancing the festive atmosphere. Large crowds gathered at prominent churches, including the Gunadala Mary Matha Shrine, St. Paul's Cathedral, Infant Jesus Catholic Church, Philadelphia AG Church, CSI All Saints Church, Indian Pentecostal Church, Messiah Fellowship Church, and Zion Fellowship Church, among others.

In Peddakani near Guntur, the Bible Mission Church held its early morning Christmas service between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m., followed by a banquet for the attendees, adding to the festive celebrations.

Swachh Andhra Corp chief visits Surat to study waste management

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Surat Municipal Corporation converts sewage water to drinking water

Swachh Andhra Corporation Chairman Kommireddy Pattabhiram, during his visit to Surat, drank water treated from sewage and appreciated the efforts of Surat Municipal Corporation officials for converting sewage water to drinking water.

Pattabhiram, along with his team, recently visited Surat, Gujarat, where he observed the remarkable methods employed for waste management. The team was impressed by the city's transformation from a place with poor sanitation and plague outbreaks to one of the cleanest cities in the country. Pattabhiram lauded Ramachandra Rao, the Commissioner of Surat Municipal Corporation, for this transformation.

During his visit, Pattabhiram noted several key aspects of Surat's waste management, including both solid and liquid waste management

systems. The city has established a 2,285-km-long sewage pipeline network and uses 11 Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) to treat around 1,076 MLD (Million Liters per Day) of wastewater. This water undergoes tertiary treatment, transforming it into drinking water. Notably, approximately 30 per cent (around 370 MLD) of this treated water is supplied to textile parks and industries in the region.

He and his team had the opportunity to observe the entire process of sewage treatment through the STPs and tertiary plants, and they even drank the treated water. He stressed that turning sewage water, which is typically unpleasant, into drinkable water is a remarkable achievement. Besides, the Surat Municipal Corporation has earned over ₹600 crore from

this water treatment process, converting it into a valuable revenue source.

Pattabhiram also stressed the need to implement such advanced tertiary treatment plants in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in high-density urban areas like Tirupati, Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Nellore and Kurnool.

He highlighted that similar sewage treatment initiatives could be adopted in these cities under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. Drawing comparisons with Singapore's sewage-to-drinking-water projects, he expressed hope that the State government will soon take steps to modernise existing sewage treatment plants and implement this process for the benefit of both industries and public health.

Sajjala calls for massive protests against power tariff hike

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP State coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy has directed party district presidents to ensure the success of protests against the government's decision to impose an additional burden of Rs 15,000 crore on the public through increased electricity tariffs.

Speaking during a teleconference from the party's central office, he urged all leaders and cadres to organise large-scale rallies and submit memorandums at electricity offices across all constituency centres



on December 27.

Sajjala criticised the government's move, calling it a betrayal of its pre-election promise

not to increase electricity charges. He labelled the decision as unjust and said it has drawn widespread opposition from the public. He emphasised that the protests, conducted under the leadership of YSRCP, have already garnered strong support from various sections of society.

He asked constituency in-charges to take the initiative seriously, ensuring active participation from grassroots-level leaders, village-level representatives, and the public. He encouraged the involvement of civil organisations to amplify

the protests. "This movement should make the government realise the extent of public resentment and compel them to withdraw the tariff hike," he said.

Sajjala also highlighted the need to stand with farmers who have suffered due to recent heavy rains. He called upon party leaders to meet the affected farmers, assess their problems, and assure them of the party's support.

"This fight is not just for the party, but for the welfare of every citizen in the State," he added.

CM Naidu meets PM...

Continued from Page 1

However, he informed the Prime Minister that 74 of these schemes had been resumed.

The Chief Minister also spoke about the establishment of the ArcelorMittal Steel Plant and requested the Prime Minister to ensure the timely supply of raw materials for the project. He urged the PM Modi to expedite the necessary permits from various departments to help the project progress. The CM also stressed the need for cooperation to overcome technical challenges to ensure the project's success.

In his address, the CM pointed out that the previous government had destabilised the financial system, using up the revenue deficit grants meant for five years in just three years. He appealed to the Prime Minister for financial assistance through the special assistance programme. Following this, CM Chandrababu presented the Swarnandhra Vision 2047 document to the Prime Minister. The vision document outlines the State's goals and plans to contribute to the vision of a developed India by 2047. The CM requested all-around support from the Central government to achieve this vision. He also discussed with the Prime

Minister upcoming foundation stone ceremonies and project inaugurations planned for next month.

Earlier, soon after the NDA meeting, Chandrababu met Union Steel Minister HD Kumaraswamy, where they discussed strengthening of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. Afterward, he had a meeting with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to discuss the foundation laying of the Visakhapatnam Railway Zone and speeding up the railway projects in the State. He also expressed his gratitude to the Prime Minister for approving a new railway line to Amaravati.

Later, the CM met Union Ministers Amit Shah and Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss the State's financial situation and the steps being taken to stabilise it. They discussed the release of Central funds for various departments and other financial matters.

He again requested special assistance from the Central government, considering the State's financial challenges.

The meeting was attended by State Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav, Union Ministers K Ram Mohan Naidu, P Chandrasekhar, Srinivas Varma and Members of Parliament.

Leaders pay...

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Meanwhile, Minister for Education, Electronics, IT and RTGS, Nara Lokesh said, "I pay tribute to former Prime Minister, Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his centenary. Vajpayee was a man who constantly strived for the country's progress. With his leadership, he paved the way for the construction of a new India. He made special efforts to ensure that the country achieved great progress in the fields of IT, telecom and communication. He changed the face of the country through the Golden Quadrilateral project. With his vision, the country is taking a step towards a developed India.

He demonstrated India's power to the world by conducting the Pokhran nuclear tests.

Bhavani Deeksha Viramana concludes on a grand note

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The five-day Bhavani Deeksha Viramana Mahotsavam (the relinquishment of the vow) concluded on a grand note at the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, located atop Indrakeeladri, in Vijayawada on Wednesday. The temple priests performed 'Maha Pournahuti' at the Yagasala near the Sivalayam atop Indrakeeladri at around 10.30 AM marking the conclusion of the Bhavani Deeksha Viramana.

Amidst the chanting of Vedic hymns, the priests offered a silk sari, pieces of sandalwood, ghee, flowers, and fruits to the Homagundam. They showered the devotees with 'Aashirvachanam' (blessings). Kanaka Durga Temple Executive Officer (EO) KS Rama Rao, Sthanacharya Vishnubhotla Siva Prasad Sharma, and other priests supervised the ritual.

Despite expectations of over six lakh pilgrims, the event witnessed a turnout of approximately four lakh devotees during the five days. On the final day alone, around 72,000 devotees visited the temple by 6 PM, according to EO Rama Rao. Special arrangements were made by the NTR district administration, police, and temple

Over 4 lakh pilgrims thronged Durga Temple during five days of Deeksha Viramana Mahotsavam



Bhavani devotees relinquishing their Deeksha on the final day of the Mahotsavam at the Kanaka Durga Temple in Vijayawada on Wednesday
Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

authorities to manage the massive influx of devotees, ensuring the smooth conduct of the event.

According to the Temple EO, as many as 3,70,114 devotees visited the temple during this year's Bhavani Deeksha Viramana. "With the cooperation of NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminisha,

Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu, and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra, all arrangements had been made and no devotee faced any inconvenience," he said.

The authorities provided drinking water facilities, besides medical aid. Over

7.65 water bottles were supplied to the devotees. They had prepared around 20 lakh Laddu Prasadam, of which 17,48,837 laddus were sold. Also, 1.34 lakh devotees had Anna Prasadam. As many as 55,629 devotees purchased Kesakhandana tickets for head-tonsuring, the EO said.

Preparations underway for CM's visit

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Coordinator to Chief Minister's programmes, Pendurthi Venkatesh, conducted a thorough inspection on Wednesday to review the ongoing preparations for the scheduled visit of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to Visakhapatnam. The visit, slated for January 4, promises to be

a high-profile event, featuring an Operational Demonstration (Op. Demo) by the Eastern Naval Command (ENC) on Beach Road.

Venkatesh, accompanied by officials from the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC), Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA), and

ENC, scrutinised the arrangements in front of Viswapiya Function Hall, a key location for the event. The tentative schedule outlines a packed itinerary for the CM, including his arrival at Visakhapatnam Airport, followed by a flight to the Naval Coastal Battery (NCB), and then proceeding to the Beach Road venue for the operational demonstration.

Following the demo, Chandrababu is scheduled to address the public and will later attend a high-tea event organised by the Naval authorities. Venkatesh's inspection ensures that all logistical and infrastructural aspects are in place to host this high-profile event, guaranteeing a seamless and successful visit.

MLA opens reservoir

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada West MLA Yalamanchili Satyanarayana Chowdary, also known as Sujana Chowdary, inaugurated a reservoir with a storage capacity of 1,500 kilolitres near the Lorry Stand in the 40th Division of the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) on Wednesday. The reservoir was built using Rs. 3.30 crore from the 15th Finance Commission.

During the inauguration, MLA Sujana Chowdary expressed his commitment to providing adequate drinking water facilities to every household in the West Assembly constituency. He highlighted that this second reservoir was constructed to address drinking water scarcity in the area. These reservoirs will supply potable water to more than 20,000 residents in the VMC's



39th, 40th, and 42nd divisions.

Furthermore, he stated his intention to secure additional funding from both the State and Central governments to ensure a sufficient drinking water supply. He assured that no one in his constituency

would face drinking water issues in the future.

VMC Corporators Anjaneya Reddy, G. Narendra, Irfan, Marupilla Rajesh, Arshad, EE Venkateswara Reddy, DEE Karunakar Babu, AEE Ramakrishna, and others were also present at the event.

Better road connectivity for tribal communities

Efforts to eradicate doli mota practice lead to construction of 6.07 km of road



PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

In a significant effort to transform the lives of pregnant women, at-risk individuals, and entire communities, the district administration has made remarkable strides in connecting remote tribal habitations with proper roads. The focal point of this initiative is Valabu village in Devarapalli mandal, where the plight of people being carried on makeshift stretchers, locally known as doli, due to poor road infrastructure, sparked the District Collector Vijaya Krishnan into action.

"The distressing situation where individuals were being carried on makeshift stretchers due to lack of proper roads prompted me to direct the Panchayat Raj Engineering Department to conduct a comprehensive survey of unconnected tribal areas," said the District Collector. "Our goal is clear—to improve connectivity and eliminate practices like the 'doli mota,' which have caused immense hardship to these communities."

Within just two months, significant strides have been made. Six out of seven previously unconnected communities are now linked to the broader road network, thanks to the construction of 6.07 kilometers of road.

10 missing kids reunited with families

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

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NTR district administration introduced QR code-enabled wristbands for child safety



NTR District Collector Dr Lakshminisha scanning the wristband tied to a child who took Bhavani Deeksha during the Deeksha Viramana Mahotsavam at the Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam in Vijayawada (File photo)

the NTR district administration, police, and temple authorities to manage the massive influx of devotees, ensuring the smooth conduct of the event.

According to the Temple EO, as many as 3,70,114 devotees visited the temple during this year's Bhavani Deeksha Viramana. "With the cooperation of NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminisha, Police Commissioner SV



ICDS staff tying a wristband enabled with QR code to a child who took Bhavani Deeksha (File photo)

HM Dhyanchandra, all arrangements had been made and no devotee faced any inconvenience," he said.

The authorities provided drinking water facilities, besides medical aid. Over 7.65 water bottles were supplied to the devotees. They had prepared around 20 lakh Laddu Prasadam, of which 17,48,837 laddus were sold. Also, 1.34 lakh devotees had Anna Prasadam. As many as 55,629 devotees purchased Kesakhandana tickets for head-tonsuring, the EO said.

DC: Revenue Conferences completed in 567 villages

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Parvathipuram District Collector A Shyam Prasad has announced the successful completion of Revenue Conferences in 567 villages across the district, bringing much-needed relief to residents. During a teleconference with officials, he commended the progress and emphasised the need to replicate this success in the remaining villages.

"These conferences are not just about resolving revenue issues," said Collector Prasad. "They are about directly serving the people and making government services accessible to them free of cost." He urged Revenue officials to actively inform the public about the benefits of these conferences and provide efficient and timely assistance to citizens.



The conferences have already been held in 244 villages in the Parvathipuram division and 323 villages in the Palakonda division. The Collector stressed the importance of addressing public grievances effectively during gram sabhas. "Complaints must be acknowledged promptly, registered in

the online system, and thoroughly investigated, including on-site visits," he instructed.

To expedite the resolution of court cases, a special drive has been initiated. Prasad encouraged individuals involved in litigation to seek assistance from Tehsildars and Revenue Divisional Officers. He advised Tehsildars to collect affidavits from complainants and explore practical solutions for amicable settlements.

The district administration has also recommended the appointment of Mandal Surveyors to conduct land surveys and address boundary disputes effectively. The Collector emphasised the importance of completing all gram sabhas within a specified timeframe to ensure efficient and effective service delivery to the public.

Commissioner inspects West Bypass to ease traffic congestion

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu conducted inspection of the Western Bypass from Gollapudi to Chinna Avutupalli in Vijayawada on Wednesday, as part of measures to reduce traffic congestion in the city.

Following the Bhavani Deeksha conclusion, traffic in Vijayawada has seen a significant increase. To manage this, traffic was diverted from the Gollapudi centre through the Inner Ring Road. As the congestion grew around the Ramavarappadu Ring Centre area, the authorities took steps to ease traffic flow by redirecting vehicles away from the city and onto the Western Bypass. Due to ongoing repairs on the



Western Bypass, traffic boards were placed along the route to ensure that drivers faced no difficulties.

With the New Year and Sankranti festival fast approaching which are expected to bring even more traffic to

the city, the police are encouraging the use of the Western Bypass to help ease congestion. During his inspection, the Commissioner, along with Traffic ADCP AVL Prasanna Kumar, Trainee IPS officer V Manisha, Gannavaram Inspector Shiva Prasad and Megha Construction Liaison Officer Murali, reviewed the ongoing work on the Western Bypass.

The team discussed the pending construction work on the bypass and stressed the need for swift action to complete the road works. The Commissioner assured that the police will provide any necessary support to expedite the completion of the works ensuring smoother traffic flow for the upcoming busy periods.

Steps for self-employment to 10,000 women

To receive 45-day free skill training in the garment sector



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Society for Employment Generation and Enterprise Development Andhra Pradesh (SEEDAP) and BC Welfare Department is launching a new skill training programme in January to empower rural women economically and help them achieve self-sufficiency. The programme is designed to enable rural women to not only develop skills in the garment sector, but also to promote the establishment of small-scale industries. On Wednesday, BC Welfare Minister Savitha and SEEDAP

Chairman Deepak Reddy G discussed the implementation of this new programme at the Secretariat.

As part of the programme, 10,000 rural women across the State will be selected in January to receive free, 45-day training in garment making. Upon completing the training, each woman will be provided with high-quality Juki machines, in collaboration with SEEDAP and the BC Welfare Department.

After the training, Centurion University will work to connect the women with industries, helping them

achieve financial independence and provide employment opportunities to others. Once industry orders are received, the women will be employed based on piece work. With the support of industries, this programme will provide all the necessary resources for women to attain self-sufficiency in the garment sector.

BC Welfare Secretary P Bhaskar, BC Welfare Director Mallikarjun, SEEDAP Executive Director Dr Shyam Prasad, SEEDAP State Mission Manager Vijay Kumar and JM Rao from Centurion University were present.

Waltair Chief Commercial Inspector wins national award

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

N. Hari Priya, Chief Commercial Inspector of the Waltair Division of the East Coast Railway, has been honoured with the Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar by Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnav. The award was presented during the 69th Railway Week celebrations held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

Hari Priya's recognition stems from her innovative approach to ticket-checking operations. Her leadership in implementing key initiatives, including the use of body-worn cameras and Hand Held Terminals (HHTs), has significantly enhanced efficiency and transparency within the division. These efforts have resulted in record earnings of Rs 28.46 crore in the 2023-24 financial year.

Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Manoj Kumar Sahoo expressed immense pride in Hari Priya's achievement. "Her exemplary efforts inspire all of us to strive for greater efficiency, safety, and passenger satisfaction in Indian Railways," stated Sahoo.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The 2024 SHG Mela, themed Sanja Utsav - Apno Ka Utsav, was inaugurated on Wednesday by Rajya Sabha member Golla Babu Rao. This vibrant event celebrates the achievements of Self-Help Group (SHG) women and their growing contribution to the local economy and society. Featuring 100 stalls showcasing a diverse range of products crafted by SHG members, the mela aims to empower women economically.

Golla Babu Rao expressed immense pride in witnessing the accomplishments of SHG women. "Women are the backbone of a thriving economy. I will continue to advocate for their rights, including securing reservations for them in Parliament." He pledged to allocate Rs 10 crore from his MP funds to sup-

'Sanja Utsav' showcases women's entrepreneurial spirit

Features 100 stalls showcasing a diverse range of products crafted by SHG members



port initiatives that enable women's access to government

schemes and enhance their involvement in business and

manufacturing sectors.

GVMC Commissioner Dr P Sampath Kumar highlighted the significance of the mela, saying, "This event provides a platform for SHG members to showcase and sell their products, advancing their economic and social empowerment." He also emphasised the importance of technology in fostering growth for SHGs.

Palakollu-Marteru road widening works launched

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu formally launched the Palakollu-Marteru road widening works. The Minister performed bhoomi pooja for the road widening works at Ullamparu village in Palakollu mandal on Wednesday. The Palakollu-Marteru road widening works will be carried out at a cost of Rs 25 crore.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Ramanaidu asserted that highways are important for the development of a region. He highlighted the commitment of the Government to make the State as pothole-free roads. He reminded that during the previous tenure of Chandrababu Naidu as Chief Minister, cement roads were laid to every village, adding that roads were also constructed connecting mandal and district headquarters from every village.

"With the cooperation of the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, four lanes and six lanes of national highway were constructed in AP. The widening of the national highways as four and six lanes reduced the journey to Visakhapatnam to six hours and Hyderabad 7 hours," he claimed.

The Minister acknowledged that the road repairing works are going on a speedy manner and the works would be completed by the Sankranti festival.



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Along with all institutions, the road maintenance was also ruined during the erstwhile regime, he lashed out. The Minister recalled the death of seven people in a road accident in Palakollu mandal due to damaged roads. Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu demanded the

YSRCP leaders to tender an apology to the people for their inept governance and ruining of all systems. Referring to Jagan Mohan Reddy's announcement that he would go to the people in January month, Ramanaidu with what intention he would go to people now and what he would do to them as he had already ruined all sectors during his five years regime, he questioned.

"Now the Chandrababu Naidu headed Government is able to bring required funds from the Centre to carry out various development works," he observed and credited the achievement to the Chief Minister. Ex-MLC Angara Ramamohan, R&B DE BV Ramana, AD DSN Murthy, TDP,BJP and JSP leaders were present.



Minister inaugurates Gokulam, assures all help to cattle rearers

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathy inaugurated a Gokulam at Chattrai village on Wednesday. The Gokulam was set up at a cost of Rs 2.30 lakh.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister asserted that the coalition led Government in the State had taken many steps for the development of the dairy industry. He highlighted the Government's commitment for the development of the dairy industry, stating that the mini-gokulam sheds are being sanctioned as part of enhancing milk production. The TDP headed Government had taken all steps to bring the past glory to the Gokulams to encourage the rearing of cows.

"The Government has taken steps to promote rearing of sheep, goat, chicken and cattle in the rural areas. The Government encouraged the cattle rearers by sanctioning Gokulam sheds," he acknowledged and appealed to the cattle rearers to avail the opportunity.

The Government is extending 90 percent subsidy for the setting up of mini-gokulams and the dairy farmers should avail the opportunity, he stated and praised that the dairy farmers are helping for the growth of the country by raising cattle.

"The Government is extending loans to aspiring farmers and livestock breeders as an incentive under the Animal Husbandry Department and the National Livestock Mission. Every livestock breeder should take advantage of these. The small and marginal farmers should avail themselves of the financial loans provided by the State and Central Governments," Minister Parthasarathy told the farmers.

The Minister said that they should also be aware of the subsidized loans provided by the government. He ordered the officials to educate the dairy farmers about the State and Central governments' incentives and loans. The Minister called up on the small and marginal farmers to avail the loans and thereby develop

their businesses and grow financially.

Minister Parthasarathy directed the Animal Husbandry Department officials to organize meetings every month with bankers, agriculture and other government officials to educate farmers on the benefits of loans and the process of obtaining them, and to provide loans to farmers, especially livestock breeders.

He asked the dairy farmers to adopt modern technology and reap financial benefits, assuring them of providing loans up to Rs 1 crore with a 50 percent subsidy for the construction of sheep, goat and cattle farms and asked them to make use of the opportunity.

The onus of extending loans to the dairy farmers and cattle rearers extensively lies on the bankers; he said and asked the farmers to bring to his notice, if banks refused to sanction loans to them. Ex-MLA Ghanta Murali and animal husbandry officials were among those who were present.

14 feet python captured, freed in forest



PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Devotees going to famous hill shrine Tirumala through the stairs, horrified as they noticed a 14 feet python at Alipiri on Wednesday.

The devotees saw the huge python on the way to Alipiri on the metladari.

Snake catcher Bhaskar Naidu was informed about the python who rushed to the place and captured the huge python. Later the snake was freed in the forest.

Reliance donates Rs 1.11 crore to TTD Trust

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Reliance Industries CEO PMS Prasad donated one crore eleven lakh eleven thousand one hundred and eleven rupees to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) SV Annaprasadam Trust here on Wednesday.

The donation amount, through Demand Draft, was handed over to the TTD Additional EO Venkaiah Chowdary at Ranganayakula Mandapam in Srivari Temple.

PNS ■ MAHABUBABAD

BID TO WARD OFF WILD ANIMALS

Farmers switching to tobacco cultivation

In a bid to tackle the increasing damage caused by wild boars and monkeys to their crops, a group of farmers in the Kothaguda and Gangaram mandals have turned to tobacco cultivation. The farmers in villages in Gangaram mandal have collectively cultivated tobacco on 80 acres of land.

Previously, crops like maize, paddy, sorghum and red gram were frequently damaged by wild animals, but the farmers noticed that these animals do not touch the tobacco fields. This led to the expansion of tobacco cultivation. Last year, just six farmers grew tobacco, but this number has increased to 25 farmers in the current season.

The input cost of cultivating tobacco is about Rs 50,000 per acre, with yields ranging from 10 to 15 quintals per acre. The support price for tobacco this year is Rs 15,000 per quintal, making it a lucrative crop for the farmers. After harvesting, various organisations purchase the tobacco from the farmers, ensuring a good market for their produce.

Kothaguda Agriculture officials highlighted that the tobacco



crop has proved to be more profitable for farmers. The Agriculture Department has also conducted an awareness programme on crop rotation and methods to protect crops from wild animals. As a result, many farmers have been encouraged to grow tobacco.

A farmer explained that wild animals, including monkeys, would not enter tobacco fields because of the strong smell of the crop. This natural deterrent has significantly reduced crop damage, leading to higher yields and increased profits for the farmers.

Yetkuri Srinivas, another farmer added that tobacco cultivation is providing farmers with substantial profits due to higher yields.

The crop requires minimal maintenance—mainly removing weeds and watering the plants. If seedlings are planted in October, the crop is ready for harvest by February, further contributing to its appeal.

This shift to tobacco farming is a practical solution to the challenges posed by wild animal interference while offering farmers a more rewarding and sustainable income.

Rahul hails TG Govt's success

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi hailed the Telangana Congress Government's success in implementing the party's guarantees given to the public in a letter sent to Minister Ponnampalapati Prabhakar in response to the latter's note detailing the achievements of the Congress Government in TG.

Rahul acknowledged the efforts of the Telangana administration in implementing welfare and development programmes, particularly through the schemes of the Transport Department and the Backward Classes Welfare Department.

"I would like to congratulate the Telangana Government regarding its progress towards fulfilling our guarantees. I appreciate the schemes launched by the

Transport Department and the Backward Classes Welfare Department," he stated.

The Congress leader expressed optimism for the government's continued commitment to the party's vision of 'Nyaya' (justice). "I extend my best wishes to the Telangana Government and hope that you will continue to work towards realising our vision of 'Nyaya,'" he said in the letter.

Ponnampalapati, in his earlier communication, had detailed the Telangana Government's efforts to implement its promises and ensure the welfare of the people. He had emphasised the leadership's determination to push forward schemes that reflect the Congress's commitment to inclusive development.

The Telangana Congress Government recently completed a year in power.

VAIKUNTHA DWARA DARSHANAM JAN 10-12

TTD to issue 1.20 lakh tokens

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer Shyamala Rao on Wednesday informed that Tirupati and Tirumala Sarva Darshan time slot tokens will be issued for Vaikuntha Dwara darshanam at Tirumala Srivari Temple for 10 days from January 10.

Rao said that for the first three days of January 10, 11 and 12, 1.20 lakh tokens will be issued from 5 am on January 9, and tokens will be issued the day before for the remaining days.

The EO along with the Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary inspected Ramachandra Pushkarini, Bhudev Complex, Jeevakona High School, Indira Municipal Grounds, Srinivasam, Vishnunivasam, Ramanaidu School in Bairagipattada, M.R. Palli



schools where counters are being set up in Tirupati (while in the community hall at Balaji Nagar in Tirumala for the Tirumala locals.) About 87 counters are being set up in 8 centers in Tirupati and 4 counters in Tirumala

making a total of 91 counters, he said.

He said that the devotees should show their original Aadhaar card and get the tokens, and this time, slips with their photo identification will be issued to the devotees who got the tokens. Devotees without tokens will not be allowed for darshan of Srivaru during these 10 days, Rao maintained.

The EO explained that special queue lines and barricades are being set up in the areas where the counters are coming up, drinking water and toilet facilities are being provided to the waiting devotees. Devotees with Sarva Darshan Tokens are requested to come to Tirumala at their allotted time only to have speedy and hassle free Srivari Darshan. Later he conducted meetings with officials at the TTD Administration building.

Woman thief arrested, Rs 12.50 L. booty recovered



PNS ■ ONGOLE

The police arrested a woman thief at RTC depot in Kanigiri town on Wednesday and recovered Rs 12,50,000 worth gold jewellery from her.

Informing this to the media here on Wednesday, Superintendent of police AR Damodhar said that the police woman thief Vemula Akhila.

The accused Akhila and Bathula Venkata Ramana are relatives and she used to visit Venkata Ramana's house frequently. Then, Akhila noticed the place where Venkata Ramana kept valuables, cash and gold jewellery. She also observed the place where he used to place keys of the iron safe in the house.

She developed a passion for gold jewelry and decided to commit stealing them. On the

morning of November 4, 2023, when the complainant's family members were not at home, the accused went to the house and intruded into the house by opening the iron safe doors and decamping with the gold jewellery and other valuables.

The police arrested the woman thief and recovered gold jewellery including chains, rings, bracelet, necklace worth Rs 12,50,00. Special teams were formed led by additional SP K Nageswara Rao and DSP M Maheswara Rao and the team arrested the accused when she was going to sell the gold jewellery at the RTC depot in Kanigiri town. SP Damodhar appreciated CI Sk. Khajavali, SIs T Sriram, K Mdhava Rao and other police personnel for cracking the major heist and recovering the booty.

Notorious burglar arrested; Rs 13.80 L booty recovered

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

The police arrested a notorious burglar at Prakasam Chowk centre here on Wednesday and recovered gold jewellery and silver ornaments worth Rs 13,80,000.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Superintendent of police Adnan Nyeem Asmi said that the accused Gona Vamshi was involved in nine offences. The police recovered gold jewellery weighing 210 grams and silver ornaments weighing 1.2 KG. He used to observe the locked houses during the day time and commit burglaries during night times.

He was addicted to vices and to fund his vices, he started committing burglaries and other offences. In May 2024, in



the Housing board colony here near Aditya school, he committed a burglary in which he made away gold jewellery and silver ornaments worth Rs 13.80 lakh.

A special team was formed

led by DSP RG Jayasurya and Inspector M Nagaraju and sub-inspector BY Kiran which arrested the burglar. The SP appreciated the police team for arresting a notorious burglar and recovering the booty.

Couple commits suicide

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

A middle aged couple committed suicide by hanging themselves to a branch of a tree at Kuchuvuripalle village in Chandragiri mandal on Wednesday.

Police said that the deceased Surendra Naidu (50) and Latha (45) committed suicide by hanging to a tree on

the outskirts of the village. The deceased Surendra Naidu was working as a line inspector in the Electricity department.

The couple had two daughters and they settled down in the US. They couple had no financial problems. The reasons for the couple taking the extreme step were yet to be ascertained, police said.

Police conduct special drive to check anti socials

PNS ■ ELURU

The police in the district, under the directions of Superintendent of police K Pratap Shiva Kishore, conducted special drives and checking, at various places to ensure that there would not be any untoward incidents during the Christmas events and to regulate the anti-socials.

The police teams conducted special checks at railway stations, bus stations and at other vulnerable and busy places on the night of Tuesday and Thursday. The police teams also conducted a face wash programme to ensure that the drivers do not drive vehicles in a drowsy state. The police also conducted drunk and drive tests for motorists to do away



with accidents. Special bandobast was provided in Kaikaluru to take out a candle rally by Christmas as part of celebrating Christmas. Mandavalli SI Ramachandra Rao and Mudinepalli SI Veerabhadra Rao supervised the bandobast. The

police teams conducted checking of vehicles at highways to curb the transportation of ganja and illicit liquor. Special protection was provided to temples, churches and mosques to ensure the festival passed peacefully in the district.

Poker den raided; Rs 8 lakh seized

PNS ■ ELURU

The police conducted a raid on a poker den and seized Rs 8 lakh and arrested 32 poker gamblers at SMR Nagar here on Wednesday.

CI Satyanarayana told the media that on a tip off, a police team conducted a raid on a poker den and arrested 32 people who were playing poker. The police seized Rs 8,10,000, 25 mobile phones and one motorcycle.



ACROSS THE STATES



Man hacked to death for opposing drug abuse

A 60-year-old man was allegedly hacked to death by a gang of men for opposing drug abuse in the district, police said on Wednesday. The incident occurred at a village under the jurisdiction of Varkala police station at 8.30 pm on Tuesday. The victim, identified as Shajahan, was allegedly attacked by the gang for reporting their drug use to the authorities, police said. Shajahan sustained severe injuries and was rushed to Thiruvananthapuram Medical College Hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries. No arrests have been made so far, police said, adding that a search is ongoing for the suspects involved in the crime. The body of Shajahan has been handed over to his relatives following a post-mortem examination, they added.



UP Police bust cattle smuggling racket , 8 held

Bhadohi police intercepted two large containers labelled "postal vehicles" on NH-19 here during a routine check on Wednesday, and found that 85 cattle were allegedly being smuggled in it, officials said. Eight members of a suspected cattle smuggling gang were arrested during the operation, according to officials. The containers were stopped near Babu Sarai in the Aurai police station area early in the morning. Upon hearing unusual noises coming from the closed containers, we decided to open them. One container held 55 calves while the other contained 35, all tightly bound in a cruel manner," said Station House Officer (SHO) Ajit Kumar Srivastava. Srivastava said that during the unloading of calves, one container driver attempted to flee. The police teams chased the vehicle for about 10 km as the cattle smugglers attempted to flee and eventually intercepted it near Kothra village," he said. All eight suspects were apprehended during the chase. Upon interrogation, the suspects confessed that they were transporting the calves from Dehri-on-Sone in Bihar to sell them in Kanpur and Unnao districts of Uttar Pradesh.



Baby girl found in 'Ammathottill' on Christmas morning

A three-day-old baby girl was found in the "Ammathottill" (baby cradle) of the Kerala State Child Welfare Committee here in the early hours of Christmas Day. This is the 22nd baby received at the Thiruvananthapuram 'Ammathottill' this year, an official release said. Later, she was named as Snigdha. Over 2,400 people, including media personnel and members of various sections of society, suggested names via social media and in person after State Health and Women and Child Development Minister Veena George invited the public to suggest a name for the baby, making the event even more memorable. The name was chosen through a draw. "Out of the suggested names, it was Janu, a two-year-old girl from the Child Welfare Committee, who picked the paper with the name 'Snigdha'," she wrote in a Facebook post later in the evening. George participated in the ceremony online, and the Committee's General Secretary, G L Arun Gopi, was also present.

Man tries to immolate self near parliament

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A man in his early 30s tried to immolate himself near the new Parliament building on Wednesday afternoon, an official of the Delhi Fire Service said. A call regarding the incident near the Railway Bhawan opposite the Parliament building was received at around 3.35 pm and a fire tender was pressed into service, the official said. The security personnel deployed near Parliament rushed the man identified as Jitendra, a resident of Bagpat in Uttar Pradesh, to the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, he said. "He set himself on fire at the roundabout



near Rail Bhawan. The local police and railway police along with some people immediately extinguished the fire and the person was sent to the hospital," an official statement said.

According to initial investigations, he took the extreme step due to a dispute with some individuals back home in Bagpat, it said.

Modi slams Congress for ignoring Ambedkar's contributions

■ LAYS FOUNDATION STONE OF KEN-BETWA PROJECT



PNS ■ KHAJURAHO

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday accused Congress of ignoring Dr B R Ambedkar's contribution to the development of water resources in the country as he laid the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa river linking project in Madhya Pradesh.

Speaking at the programme at Khajuraho in Bundelkhand region, Modi said that in the 21st century, only the nations with adequate and well-managed water resources can advance.

The PM's comments about Ambedkar came amid the controversy over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent remarks about the iconic leader and the Congress's nationwide protests over the issue.

Ambedkar's vision and far-sightedness contributed significantly to the strengthening of the country's water resources, their management and dam construction, Modi said.

Ambedkar played a crucial role in the development of major river valley projects and formation of the Central Water Commission, he added.

"Ask anyone...after the country got independence, who thought about the visionary subject of Jal Shakti? Even my journalist friends will not be able to answer because the truth was suppressed to give credit to one person....water resources of India, construction of dams, the vision for all this -- it was of one great man -- Babasaheb Ambedkar," he said.

"But Congress never gave credit to Babasaheb for the efforts related to water conservation and big dams," Modi claimed.

"The major challenge of the 21st century is water security. In the 21st century only those countries which have adequate water resources with proper management will move forward," he said.

Talking about the development projects carried out by the government of late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Modi said for years Vajpayee was a teacher for several workers like him.

Scholars and analysts should select 100-200 parameters and assess the performance of various governments, those of Congress, the Left, "family-oriented people (dynastic parties)" and coalitions, he suggested.

Belagavi dons festive look to host centenary Cong session

PNS ■ BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA)

The border town of Karnataka will take a dive into history for the next two days, reminiscing about the lone Congress session that Mahatma Gandhi presided over a century ago.

The Congress session, held on December 26 and 27, 1924, stands as a pivotal moment in the Indian freedom struggle.

During the session, Gandhi appealed for spinning Khadi and called for non-cooperation, which became a major movement in pre-independence India.

The key organiser of the event was Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, who was referred to as the Khadi Bhageratha of Karnataka. He was a torchbearer of the freedom struggle in Belagavi, then known as Belgam.

'Governance reforms must begin at grassroots level'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said that the governance reforms must begin at the grassroots level to bring about long-lasting and meaningful change.

In a significant step towards strengthening grassroots governance, he launched the 'Viksit Panchayat Karmayogi' initiative on Good Governance Day, celebrated every year to mark birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The initiative, which is part of the broader 'Prashasan Gaon Ki Aur' campaign, aims to enhance the capacity and competence of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by equipping elected representatives and officials with the tools and knowledge required for effective governance and participatory planning, said



Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel.

He emphasised "that governance reforms must begin at the grassroots to bring about long-lasting and meaningful change as well as to fill up the capacity gaps".

Piloted in Odisha, Assam, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, the initiative leverages e-learning platforms, AI-powered chatbots, and mobile apps to bridge knowledge gaps and enhance service

delivery, Singh said. He said that this program aligns with the government's broader mission to decentralise governance and foster participatory decision-making at the grassroots level.

The initiative is expected to create scalable models of citizen-centric governance, enabling PRIs to drive equitable and sustainable development across rural India, according to a Personnel Ministry statement.



Military standoff with India ends in Ladakh, long freeze over

PNS ■ BEIJING

It was a breakthrough year in India-China ties after a near freeze in their ties for over four years - the longest since the 1962 war - with an agreement to end the eastern Ladakh military standoff.

After "amassing of a large number of troops by China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh" in April-May 2020, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in a recent statement in Lok Sabha, resulting in the Galwan valley clash in June 2020, there had been a breakdown in the relations between the two Asian giants.

The post-1962 war chill lasted till the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988.

This time, the two countries held periodic talks between the top commanders and through the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC), resulting in disengagement in stages from four points -- the Galwan Valley, the Pangong Lake, Hot Springs, and Gogra -- in eastern Ladakh by creating buffer zones.

Finally, on October 21, India and China firmed up an agreement on patrolling and disengagement of troops along the LAC in eastern Ladakh at the remaining friction points of Depsang and Demchok.

The agreement led to the first structured meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit at Kazan in Russia soon after, their first in five years. Subsequently, Jaishankar met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Brazil in November where they reached an understanding that the Special Representatives (SRs) and the Foreign Secretary-level mechanisms will be convened soon.

Constituted in 2003 to comprehensively address the vexed dispute of the India-China border spanning to 3,488 kms, the Special Representatives mechanism is headed by NSA Doval and Foreign Minister Wang.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh too met his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun at the ASEAN Defence Ministers' meeting in Vientiane in Laos in November.

Delhi CM may be arrested in a fake case: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal claimed on Wednesday that Delhi Chief Minister Atishi may be arrested in a "fake" case by the central investigative agencies at the behest of the BJP.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal, who was flanked by Atishi, said, "We got to know from our sources that a meeting was held and investigative agencies have been ordered by the BJP to arrest CM Atishi in a fake case."

The BJP is trying to distract AAP from campaigning for assembly polls, he alleged.

"We came to know that they are preparing a fake case on Atishi in the transport department, and they want to halt the scheme of free bus rides for women," the AAP chief said. "I will not let the scheme of free bus rides for women stop till I am alive,"



Kejriwal, who is out on bail in a case related to the excise policy 'scam', asserted.

He also claimed that central agencies have been instructed to conduct raids on all senior leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) before arresting Atishi in the coming days.

"Raids will be conducted on me, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh, Saurabh Bharadwaj, Satyendar Jain and Atishi. Their goal is to distract us from our election preparations and campaigning and to

entangle us in other matters," Kejriwal said.

Atishi said that AAP has always worked with honesty and would continue to do so without any fear of agencies.

"I am confident that if their agencies file false cases against me or even arrest me, the truth will eventually prevail. I have full faith in the justice system of this country. Just as all our senior party leaders who were falsely implicated were eventually granted bail after the truth came out," she said.

Defeat forces inimical to country's progress : Dhankhar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday stressed on the need for citizens to adopt a "nation first" mindset to counteract forces, both internal and external, that struggle to accept India's rapid progress.



Dhankhar, who was speaking at a convention of organic farmers in Medak district of Telangana, also underscored that dialogue is the only way to address problems in a democracy.

"Today, I see that farmers are worried about certain issues. If any section of society is worried, it is necessary to resolve it positively and without delay. In a democracy, the only way to resolve issues is through dialogue. I have said on numerous occasions that dialogue is the only way to find solutions to problems in a democracy," he said.

AFTER 36-YEAR BAN

'The Satanic Verses' returns to India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie's controversial book "The Satanic Verses" has quietly returned to India 36 years after it was banned by the Rajiv Gandhi government.

A "limited stock" of the book, which caused a furor against its author and content that was deemed blasphemous by Muslim organisations the world over, has been selling at Bahrison's Booksellers in the national capital for the past few days.

"It has been a few days since we got the book and the response has been very good so far. The sale has been good," Bahrison's Booksellers' owner Rajni Malhotra told PTI.

The book, priced at Rs 1,999, is only available at Bahrison's Booksellers stores across Delhi-NCR.

"@SalmanRushdie's The Satanic Verses is now in stock at Bahrison's Booksellers! This groundbreaking & provocative novel has captivated

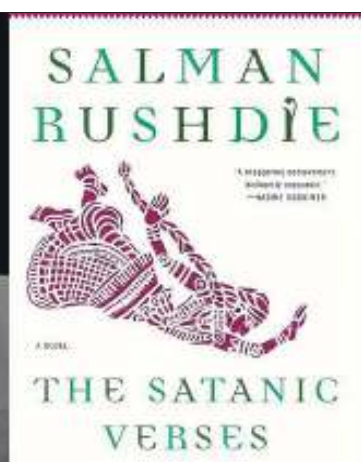
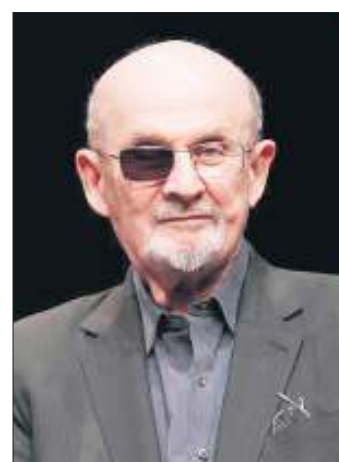
readers for decades with its imaginative storytelling and bold themes. It has also been at the centre of intense global controversy since its release, sparking debates on free expression, faith, & art," the bookseller said in a post on X.

Manasi Subramaniam, Editor-in-Chief, Penguin Random House India, also posted on the social media platform, quoting Rushdie.

"Language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so to make it true." At long last. @SalmanRushdie's The Satanic Verses is allowed to be sold in India after a 36-year ban. Here it is at Bahrison's Bookstore in New Delhi," she wrote.

Other bookstores, including Midland Book Shop and Om Book Shop, do not plan to import the book.

In November, the Delhi High Court closed the proceedings on a petition challenging the Rajiv Gandhi government's ban on the import of the novel, saying since



authorities have failed to produce the relevant notification, it has to be "presumed that it does not exist".

The order came after government authorities failed to submit the notification dated October 5, 1988, which banned the import of the book.

"In the light of the aforesaid circumstances, we have no other option except to presume that no such notification exists, and therefore, we cannot examine the validity thereof and dispose of the writ petition as infructuous," the court said.

The book ran into trouble short-

ly after its publication, eventually leading to Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini issuing a fatwa calling on Muslims to kill Rushdie and his publishers. Rushdie spent nearly 10 years in hiding in the UK and the US.

In July 1991, the novelist's Japanese translator Hitoshi Igarashi was killed in his office.

On August 12, 2022, Lebanese-American Hadi Matar stabbed Rushdie on stage at a lecture, leaving him blind in one eye.

Even though the book is available for purchase at Bahrison's, it evoked a mixed response from readers, especially due to its price.

Bala Sundaresan, a tech entrepreneur, who has always wanted a physical copy of the book was surprised to hear the price.

"I would rather wait some more time till an Indian print of the book is available. I was only interested in it because of the controversy that has surrounded it for decades, (I am) not really a Rushdie fan," the 33-year-old said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Extradition dilemma

Bangladesh's request to extradite Sheikh Hasina raises critical questions about India's role as a key player in South Asian politics

Bangladesh has formally requested India to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India following her ouster on August 5, 2024. The request, conveyed through a diplomatic "note verbale," places India in a delicate position, requiring a careful balancing of international law, bilateral relations, and regional stability. This article explores the background of the situation, the implications of such an extradition, and the options available to India. Sheikh Hasina, a towering figure in Bangladeshi politics and leader of the Awami League, was ousted from power after a student-led movement erupted into nationwide protests. Despite the government meeting the protesters' demands, unrest persisted, which Hasina claims was orchestrated by Muhammad Yunus, Chief Adviser to Bangladesh's interim government. The protests culminated in her removal from power, prompting her to flee to India. The diplomatic note issued by Bangladesh's interim government reflects its intention to bring Sheikh Hasina back to face accountability or to address the political turmoil she left behind.



India and Bangladesh share a complex relationship shaped by historical ties, mutual interests, and occasional tensions. Extraditing Sheikh Hasina could be seen as India's support for the interim government, potentially straining ties with the Awami League, one of Bangladesh's major political forces. The political crisis in Bangladesh has already created ripples in South Asia. Any decision by India regarding the extradition could influence the region's political dynamics, including relations with other South Asian nations. Sheikh Hasina's safety and the fairness of any trial

are also suspect as she might face attrition upon her return. India would need to weigh these concerns against its international obligations under extradition treaties and agreements. How India handles this case may affect India's stance as a regional power and its commitment to democratic principles. India could provide asylum to Sheikh Hasina, citing humanitarian grounds or concerns about the fairness of legal proceedings in Bangladesh. This would align with India's historical role as a refuge for political exiles but might antagonise the interim Bangladeshi government. India could agree to extradite Hasina with conditions ensuring her safety, fair trial, and adherence to international legal norms. Such a move might help India maintain its relations with both the interim government and Hasina's supporters. India can also delay the extradition while engaging diplomatically with Bangladesh to seek a mutually acceptable solution. This would allow India to assess the evolving political situation and minimize potential fallout. While India's decision will undoubtedly influence India-Bangladesh relations, its impact will also resonate across the region. India must weigh its options carefully, prioritising both the immediate political implications and its long-term vision for South Asian stability.

PICTALK



The Jakhu Temple and its premises covered with snow after fresh snowfall, in Shimla

ONOP: A bold reform or a political gamble?

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushes forward with his vision of 'One Nation, One Poll' the nation waits to see whether this proposal will unite or divide



KALYANI SHANKAR

The introduction of a controversial bill, 'One Nation One Poll,' has created more controversy than acceptance. The BJP has been talking about it but introduced it, which has been sent to the joint select committee of the Parliament. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in a hurry to fulfil the BJP's unfinished agenda. He had already opened the Ayodhya temple and got the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir. This long-awaited bill aims to streamline the electoral process for 28 states and eight union territories, with an electorate of nearly a billion voters. The bill has triggered widespread debate, significant interest, and Opposition from various parties.

Though momentum is building for simultaneous elections, some questions need answers. They include whether Modi has the required two-thirds majority to pass the bill in Parliament. Is there a political consensus? Will the Opposition come on board? Is the timing of the bill right? Most Opposition parties reject the idea of simultaneous polls. They include the Congress, the Left parties, the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. They reject it mainly to settle political scores and apprehension that they may benefit the BJP. Former President Ram Nath Kovind chaired a nine-member committee recommending simultaneous polls last year, labelling it a 'game changer.' Thirty-two parties supported the concept, and 15 rejected it. The panel also advised that the Centre form a panel to oversee the implementation of this proposal. Also, there should be a joint electoral roll for all elections so that voters will use the same list for national, state, and local polls.

Over the years, elections have become a standard feature, but the 'One Nation, One Poll' bill has the potential to reshape our election process. Proponents of the bill argue that it could



significantly reduce campaign costs, alleviate the strain on administrative resources, and streamline governance. This could ultimately benefit the public by reducing the frequency of elections, a prospect that should inspire optimism. Elections in India are held at different levels. The first is panchayat, followed by the district level, the state assembly level, and finally, the national level. They happen at different times, and the government wants to streamline the system. Interestingly, the idea of simultaneous polls is not new. Historically, it was a synchronised poll from 1952 to 1967. The premature dismissal of various governments and the consequential dissolution of Assemblies led to staggered polls. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi dismissed many Opposition-ruled state governments. The most important thing is that the BJP needs the support of the allies and friendly parties. In the recent 2024 polls, the BJP was 40 short of a majority in the house and could form the government only with the help of JD (U) and Telugu Desam. Most opposing parties reject simultaneous polls, including Congress, the Left parties,



HISTORICALLY, IT WAS A SYNCHRONISED POLL FROM 1952 TO 1967. THE PREMATURE DISMISSAL OF VARIOUS GOVERNMENTS AND THE CONSEQUENTIAL DISSOLUTION OF ASSEMBLIES LED TO STAGGARD POLLS

the Trinamool Congress, and regional and smaller parties. Even in the BJP, 20 MPs were absent while the bill was introduced. The Kovind panel also suggested having the votes in two parts. The first will be for Lok Sabha and Assembly votes, and the second for local groups. The bill faces significant constitutional, legal, and political challenges. The Kovind panel suggests amending Articles 83 and 172 to allow simultaneous elections.

However, the BJP lacks the two-thirds majority for this amendment, and the Constitution needs clarification on concurrent polls. The potential impact on the federal structure of the country and the logistical challenges of conducting simultaneous elections for a billion voters are crucial factors to consider. Prime Minister Modi's main challenge is to gather enough support in Parliament. At the same time, the government must build political consensus and persuade the Opposition to agree. The Opposition has rejected simultaneous polls, fearing it might benefit the BJP. The 15 opposing parties hold 205 MPs, while Modi needs 362 votes to proceed.

A legal framework for simultaneous elections is essential to address mid-term government collapses and central political manoeuvring. The one nation, one poll approach reduces waste and election frequency, so the Opposition should consider it carefully and present any alternative proposals for public discussion. The One Nation One poll has been one of the poll promises of the BJP. Some core issues have already been addressed, such as the revocation of Article 370 and the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

In his third term, Modi wants to finish the unfinished agenda. Modi presents this legislation with a clear strategy: Whether he succeeds or not, he benefits. If the bill gets passed, it will be an advantage for the BJP government. If it fails, he can claim that he tried to enact reform but faced Opposition obstruction. Despite potential delays, it's important to debate the bill, as election spending ultimately comes from taxpayers' money. Now that the bill has been sent to a joint select committee, we must wait for its report.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S ACQUISITION PLANS

Madam — Trump is on a shopping spree to buy Canada, the Panama Canal and Greenland, desiring to make Canada its 51st state with Trudeau as its governor. He wants the gifted Panama Canal back to his country. The Panama president has, however, expressed his disagreement with both his conditions, thereby creating another contentious issue ready to be dealt with in the near future. He is also eyeing Greenland to gain its strategic advantage for monitoring the missiles launched from Russia and China on the US and alternatively using it as a launching pad for the US missiles on them. Greenland being rich in minerals like uranium is another factor for its advantage to the US. More so, the greatest island on this planet is not green but mostly ice-filled, comprising glaciers that create many new waterways on its melting due to global warming each year, giving a wider area for its exploration.

He is also creating a powerful force by enriching it with the recruitment of capitalists like Elon Musk and AI experts in his cabinet to act as resources for implementing his future plans. Indian brain drain forms a substantial part of his team, like Sriram Ramakrishnan, the AI expert, and such other talents that India has lost to another country at its cost for its inability to identify and hold them at the appropriate time. If this happens, the demography will start taking a new shape, and interrelation equations of friends and foes will change. India needs to withhold its talent by stopping its brain drain at any cost by providing them better than what they get abroad to discourage their move to foreign lands. However, the unpredictable nature of Donald Trump will keep the world guessing with fingers crossed till it actually happens in reality after he takes over as president, as for all you know, he may suddenly say one day "I was just joking."

R S Narula | Patiala

Shyam Benegal passes away at 90



The sad demise of legendary filmmaker and stalwart of Indian cinema Shyam Benegal at the age of 90 is an irreparable loss for both the cinema and the society. His historic contribution to parallel cinema will be written in golden words in the history of Indian cinema. He was the vanguard of the movement

of realistic and issue-based filmmaking, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. His directorial debut movie, 'Ankur,' in 1974 itself was a landmark in Indian cinema. Along with his timeless movies, he launched the careers of many highly accomplished actors, including Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah and Shabana Azmi.

Besides his contribution to cinema, Shyam Benegal was a man of great values who never hesitated to speak his mind. Despite his ideological differences with the right wing and the Modi government, he opposed returning national awards as a mark of protest against the alleged increase in intolerance in India. He, himself a two-time chairman of FTII, did not support the strike of students of the institute against the appointment of TV actor Gajendra Chauhan as its chairman.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

PRITHVI SHAW'S FUTURE IN DOUBT

Madam — Ravi Shastri once saw Sachin Tendulkar, Brian Lara and Virender Sehwag in Prithvi Shaw. He was a player "born to play cricket," Shastri had said of Shaw. A ton on test debut against the West Indies in 2018 and a blistering 52-ball 70 in the next announced Shaw's arrival on the big stage. But Shaw played his last test for the country in 2020. He was part of the Indian ODI team for a little more than a year. Now at 25, he has not only been left out of the Indian team, but he does not find a place in the Mumbai side as well. His exclusion from the state team for the Vijay Hazare Trophy has effectively rendered all chances of Shaw making a comeback to the Indian team extremely slim because Indian cricket is bristling with talent and perseverance, hard to replace. Indiscipline, antics, and arrogance reportedly caused his downfall. Shaw was embroiled in frequent off-field controversies. While those could have been shrugged off, through his poor fitness and casual approach, he was apparently becoming a liability for teams. As rightly put by an

office bearer of the Mumbai Cricket Association, "Shaw is his own enemy."

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

CONCERN OVER SHAMI'S FITNESS

Madam — The team India has been endeavouring for over a period to gain the ground, where it's seen the bowlers and batters are totally at sea. Then, everyone wishing for Shami's comeback, which can drastically strengthen the tie of the team, especially the bowling attack, as he showcased his back-to-back top-notch performance in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, leading bowling length effectively. But once again, BCCI's update about his fitness, that he has been deemed not fit for selection in the remaining two tests due to concern over left knee swelling, has ruined countless hopes. Our wishes for his speedy recovery and the team's unparalleled persistence to heal up the millions' fresh wounded hearts.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Lessons from yesterday: Reflections that shape a lifetime



SANJAY CHANDRA

The past is a treasure trove of memories and lessons, each shaping who we are and guiding us into the future

The past shapes our present. The present is past the next moment, to make way for the future. We are left with fond memories. These memories also teach us invaluable lessons. I was prone to my share of mischief as a child for which I would get scolded by my parents. At such times, I was assured of a haven hiding behind my grandmother. She was impartial to both sides as she counselled my parents to be more indulgent and taught us to be well-behaved.

I remember another afternoon. I returned from school excited about my outstanding results in the examinations. Unmindful of my mother's much-needed siesta, I woke her up. Still groggy, she hugged and blessed me, before continuing with her interrupted sleep. That one spontaneous gesture was my reward which would continue to inspire me throughout my life. My father usually rested and slept on Sunday afternoons.

We tried not to disturb his sleep. One day, we might have been noisier than usual and ended up soundly thrashed by our father. I wit-



nessed a different facet of my father's personality later in the evening, as he gently expressed his regret for the outburst. I would remember in times to come that there was no shame in accepting if I was wrong. I remember the day I met the young girl who became my wife and life partner in the next few months. After the initial heady days, we buckled up to the serious business of making a life together.

We have been married for 40 years. These have not been easy decades faced with the harsh realities of life. We never give up, whatever the setbacks. We continue to strive towards the common goal of leading a happy and contented life together. It is easier to face challenges and find solutions as a team. Another nostalgic memory is

from a long-ago holiday to the beach town of Puri. Our guest house was a couple of hundred meters from the beach. Our daughters were much younger. I was, and continue to be, a protective father, worrying about their safety. That one day, I sat on the veranda, fondly looking at the two children playing with sand on the beach. Their innocent efforts, many of which were unsuccessful, to mould a work of art out of the slippery sand, taught me not to give up. My mother kept a copy of Ramcharitmanas in her prayer corner. I read somewhere that you could find a solution to any problem in the epic.

All you had to do was open any page, and the top line would help you find ways to tackle your most pressing

issue. I also tried it sometimes. I remember that a simple reading of the lines was not enough. What mattered was the action plan that I arrived at based on my interpretation, and the determination with which I pursued.

Fair play, guiding the team members, impartiality, giving undivided time to team members however busy one might be, empathy, working for the team, pride in the performance of the team members, and out-of-box thinking, were only a few of the invaluable lessons that my experiences taught me.

They have stood me in good stead through the rough and tumble of life. The words of psychiatrist, Abraham Twerski would resonate with many, "Ruminating about the past will get you nowhere. So go ahead and learn from the past whatever you can, and then put it behind you. Remember, there is nothing you can do to change it, but you can use its lessons to improve your future."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MANTRAS

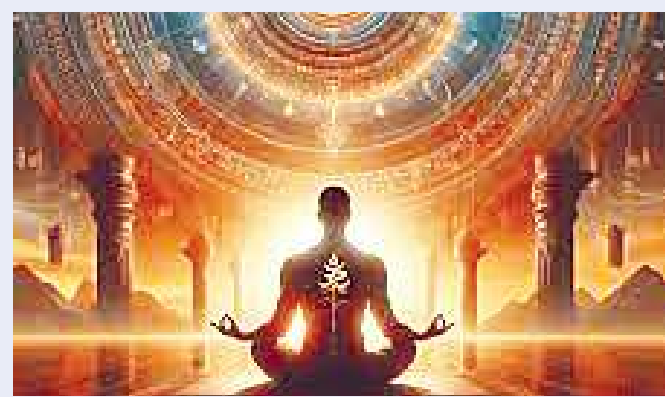
The Divya Chikitsa Mantras stand out as a remarkable system for channelising divine energy



ASHWANI GURU JI

You might have heard of Sanjeevani Vidya given by Guru Shukracharya, which could bring back the dead to life, or of a certain herb called Sanjeevani buti, which brought back Lakshman to life. You may have also heard of the Madhu Vidya or Brahmaidya as possessed by Sage Dadhichi which could enable one to attain immortality, or the Chyawanprasha prepared by the Ashvini Kumars to restore the youth of Sage Chyawan.

These are not tales or works of fiction, the Vedic rishis were masters of Creation, the human body being a microscopic part of that. The proof that these were not fiction lies in the fact that most of the modern scientific discoveries have come from the Vedic shastras. You may visit www.dhyandivya.com to know which scientific discovery has come from which shastra. While most of the ancient Vedic healing sciences are lost in the dust of kaliyuga and most herbs have become extinct, a fraction of them still can be accessed and even that fraction is enough



to achieve amazing results. Divya Chikitsa Mantras as detailed in Sanatan Kriya is one such gem from the treasure trove of Vedic gyan. Divya Chikitsa Mantras use sound and vibrations to bring about the desired effect and changes in your body.

When done right their healing and transformational effects are apparent for all to see. A combination of 7 mantras they work to unblock certain nadis (energy channels) and awaken specific centres, to channelise the force of divine energies for a practitioner. It is said that the body of a deva resides in the mantra. This has been practically experienced by each one who has attended a yagya at Dhyana Ashram where complete forms of the deities were invoked through specific chants manifested in the Yagya Agni. For the mantra to bear fruit, it has to be received from a Guru who is Siddha in the mantra, in line with the ancient Guru Shishya Parampara. Guru channelises the force of the respective deity in the mantra and also imparts the dihwani (correct pronunciation) of the mantra. The efficacy of a Vedic mantra depends on the correctness of its chant; faulty pronunciation of even a single syllable changes the entire meaning.

Taittiriya Samhita narrates the story of Tvashta in this regard. Tvashta performed a sacrifice to destroy Indra. He used the mantra, 'indrashatru' to manifest his thought. However, he placed a lofty note on the word 'Indra' instead of 'shatru' because of which the meaning of the word changed from 'slayer of indra' to 'the one who will be slain by indra' and thus the son, Vrutra, so born to him was defeated by Indra, just because of a pronunciation defect. To quote from Panini Shiksha, a mantra devoid of the correct vowels (svar) and consonants (varna) is faulty and does not convey its intended meaning. It is like a verbal thunderbolt that harms the one who is chanting, as had happened in the case of erroneous pronunciation of the word, Indrashatru. The Vedic seers had mastered this incredible science of sound in the form of mantras, they were well aware of the high degree of specificity and precision that is required to harness the power of sound.

Shiksha, one of the six vendangas, deals with the science of proper pronunciation of words and laws of euphony. Volumes have been written on Shiksha by Panini, Yagnyavalkya and Vasishtha. Shatpath Brahman states that every alphabet of a word possesses some kind of strength and explains the secret of every alphabet. Therefore it is important that one partakes the vidya of mantras from a Guru. Reading from books /internet or hearing on television/social media and starting self-practice may have detrimental effects if the chant is not proper.

(The writer is a spiritual Guru; views are personal)

State budgets on the brink: RBI sounds alarm



UTTAM GUPTA

With outstanding debts exceeding the prudential threshold, the RBI urges states to adopt "next-generation" fiscal rules to ensure sustainable financial management

According to a report on 'State Finances: A Study of Budgets of 2024-25' released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on December 19, 2024, the consolidated gross fiscal deficit (GFD) of all State governments was contained within 3 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) during the financial years (FY) 2022-23 and 2023-24. For 2024-25, their GFD has been budgeted at 3.2 per cent of GDP. They have complied with the stipulation under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 which requires them to keep it within the 3 per cent cap. But, the good news ends here. The report reveals that the total outstanding liabilities of States were 28.5 per cent of the GDP in March 2024. Though lower than the peak of 31 per cent reached as of March-end 2021, it remained significantly above the prudential debt-GDP ratio of 20 per cent mandated for the states under the Act.

Another measure of how a State government is managing its budget is its revenue expenditure (RE) about capital outlay (CO). While, the RE being on items such as salaries, wages, pension bills, subsidies etc essentially goes towards non-asset creating spending, CO results in the generation of capital assets thereby providing a foundation for income stream over some time. Greater emphasis on the latter is considered fiscally prudent whereas more of the former can lead to fiscal destabilisation. The record of many states on this crucial parameter is disconcerting. For all states, the total expenditure increased from around Rs 3428,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 5760,000 crore during 2024-25 (budget estimate). As regards RE, it increased from Rs 3018,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 4840,000 crore in 2024-25. The CO increased from Rs 410,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 920,000 crore during 2024-25. These numbers yield a ratio of RE to CO or RECO of 5.2 (4840,000/920,000).

In several states, the RECO is much higher than even this national average. For instance, in Punjab, at 17.1 it is more than three times followed by Puducherry (14.1), Kerala (10.6) and Delhi (10.3). There are some better-performing states too such as Manipur having the best ratio (2.4), followed by Gujarat (2.9) and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh (3.1). However, the abnormally high RECO of other states pushes up the national average. **How does it compare with the Centre?** The total expenditure of the Central Government increased from Rs 3042,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 4820,000 crore during 2024-25. Of this, the RE increased from Rs 2603,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 3709,000 crore during 2024-25. On the other hand, its CO increased from Rs 439,000 crore during 2020-21 to Rs 1111,000 crore during 2024-25. So, RECO for the Centre is 3.3 in 2024-25 (3709,000/1111000) against 5.2 for the States.

Barring a couple of good performers like Gujarat which is doing even better than the Centre, most of the states have been reckless in their revenue



BARRING A COUPLE OF GOOD PERFORMERS LIKE GUJARAT WHICH IS DOING EVEN BETTER THAN THE CENTRE, MOST OF THE STATES HAVE BEEN RECKLESS IN THEIR REVENUE SPENDING AND THAT INCLUDES A SHARP RISE IN EXPENDITURE ON SUBSIDIES

spending and that includes a sharp rise in expenditure on subsidies. Since 2018-19, subsidies given by the states have grown 2.5 times to over Rs 470,000 crore being the budget estimate for FY 2024-25). The RBI cites farm loan waivers, free or subsidised services like electricity, transport, gas cylinders, and cash transfers to farmers, youth and women as key areas of incipient stress. It suggests that states need to adopt "next-generation" fiscal rules, time-bound glide paths for fiscal consolidation, and rein in subsidies and freebies so that it doesn't crowd out more productive expenditures. Such exhortations have been made umpteen times in the past not just by the RBI but also by several committees set by the government on 'expenditure reforms' from time to time. Now, we have more jargon like "next-generation" fiscal rules to convey the same message with greater intensity.

The RBI posits these rules as "combining the medium-term fiscal sustainability objective with short-term flexibility allowing state governments more maneuverability in dealing with exogenous economic shocks". The banking regulator goes on "these will involve inter alia, the use of data analytics, including machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI); improved data transparency and disclosure practices; and strengthening the institution of State Finance Commissions to deliver public services more effectively and scale up social and physical infrastructure." Put simply, the RBI expects the State governments to not just bring about policy reforms and refinements to better target welfare schemes - focusing primarily on the poor

sections of the society but also to galvanise the administrative machinery and institutions to deliver benefits efficiently and prevent misuse/diversion by making the best use of technology interventions.

Do the States understand?

The answer is a categorical 'no'. Forget a finely crafted system desired by the RBI and government committees, most of the states have put in place crude and non-transparent subsidy regimes call them freebies - a jargon for "something given free of charge" - all aimed at alluring voters and winning elections. The political parties have sought to cover under 'something' literally everything that touches the life of a person. It includes free food, free health, free education, free LPG cylinder, free laptops, free transport, state support for marriage, and pilgrimage for the elderly; it's an unending list.

In the last couple of years, the freebies promised by them have become more brazen with parties coming out with 'cash transfers' to the account of voters. Such schemes mostly directed at women have won elections for the concerned parties in elections held during 2023 and 2024 in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Haryana. The parties compete with each other in offering more. A common refrain is 'Who will promise more?'

Look at this. In the budget for 2024-25, Delhi finance minister Atishi announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the AAP government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women

above the age of 18 in the national capital. Now, ex-Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has increased the amount to Rs 2100 per month. In response, the BJP has reportedly promised a still higher cash transfer of Rs 2500 per month. Let us be clear. Unlike 'normal' budget expenses which are planned and backed by well-orchestrated efforts to garner revenue, additional financial liabilities imposed by the freebies promised in the election manifesto affect the budgetary position of the State in a totally 'uncontrolled' and 'unplanned' manner. Moreover, these freebies don't have a sunset date meaning these will continue to be given 'eternally' - no matter which party rules. This is the surest invitation to fiscal catastrophe. Take the case of Delhi.

Already, without the MMSY, the financial position of the Delhi government has come to such a pass that CM Atishi has recently forwarded a request to the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). Now, if AAP were to come to power yet again, MMSY @Rs 2100 a month would cost the exchequer an additional Rs 17,000 crore per annum.

Since 2018-19, state subsidies have grown 2.5 times to over Rs 470,000 crore (2024-25), courtesy freebies cult. This will increase exponentially, destabilising State budgets, and making a mockery of the much-touted fiscal consolidation drive. The Supreme Court has on several occasions observed that 'freebies are bad'. Will it force parliamentarians to enact a law to curb them?

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

Festive cheer meets smart choices: Navigating the real estate boom of 2024

By evaluating long-term financial goals, buyers can turn festive opportunities into lasting investments

With the festive season ongoing in full swing, there is a surge in consumer spending. This time is often marked by a flurry of purchases fuelled by tradition and sentiment. While the allure of buying a home can be particularly enticing during this festive period, buyers must approach such decisions with careful consideration. They must look beyond the festive fervour and reflect on key aspects that can guide them to make informed decisions.

Decoding Festive Demand
As per a report 'Unravelling the Trends Shaping India's Real Estate Market in 2024' by CBRE, from January to September, the luxury housing category collectively constituted 16 per cent of the overall



RAHUL MEHROTRA

housing demand.

This growth has spurred developers to launch new projects, resulting in the category representing 19 per cent of the total new launches during the first nine months of 2024. This trend is only going to grow further spurred by the festive season as buyers are investing in end-products that

offer better amenities such as club-house, larger living spaces, and modern facilities. Metro cities, in particular, have seen a wave of new project launches by developers this year, catering to various buyer segments.

While luxury properties grab headlines, the affordable housing sector remains the backbone of India's real estate market as this is where buyers purchasing their first home find the most value.

Having said that, many first-time homebuyers are compelled to buy a property given the abundant promotional offers and incentives provided by realtors. It is so because the festive season spurs confidence as it often coincides with salary increments, bonuses, and a general uptick in economic activity. However, buyers much before they scout for a property, should evaluate the long-term aspects. Questions such as - "Can I support paying the EMI?" or "Is it the right approach?" may seem overwhelming at first, but assessing one's worth is very crucial at this stage.

Interest Rate Matters
The interest rate set by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is a crucial factor in deciding other crucial interest rates. The repo rate is unchanged for the 10th consecutive time, and this implies that the Equated Monthly Installments (EMIs) are likely to remain manageable. Further to this, I believe there would be a pickup in demand for housing loans as the festive season progresses. Recent data from the RBI

reveals a remarkable 40 per cent increase in home loan deployment, highlighting the diminishing gap between monthly rents and EMIs. Additionally, 80 per cent of aspiring homeowners preferred home loans as the top choice for property acquisition this year.



Typically, possessions and property deliveries are scheduled in the latter half of November, aligning perfectly with the festive momentum. In addition to stable interest rates and EMIs, the array of offers and discounts available during the festive season can be another key factor of consid-

eration. However, it's essential to look for transparent offers that can help avoid hidden fees and unexpected costs. One should seek out reduced processing fees, flexible repayment plans, cashback schemes, and opportunities for negotiation that can make the festive season an advantageous time to invest.

What Should Buyers and Investors Do?

Investors and buyers must focus on long-term value by evaluating their income and cash flows to ensure manageable EMIs. The festive season can be an opportunity to reduce upfront costs and select properties in developing areas with strong amenities and connectivity for better appreciation. The predictability in EMI

outflows coupled with festive discounts can make the dream of homeownership more achievable. First-time buyers, particularly in the affordable housing segment, must rely on loans to bridge the financial gap as well as look for special offers and discounts.

While festive discounts are great, buyers should align their decisions with pragmatic goals rather than being swayed by just sentiment. Buying a property during a festive season is certainly the start of a prosperous journey, but to truly benefit, one needs to have a stable financial plan - whether it's the first home or adding to one's portfolio.

(The writer is MD & CEO, RHD FCL; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Govt extends duty-free import of yellow peas

The government has extended the import of yellow peas without duty and MIP (minimum import price) till February next year. However, the imports are subjected to registration under online Import Monitoring System, with immediate effect, for all import consignments where Bill of Lading (Shipped on Board) is issued on or before February 28, 2025. "Import of yellow peas...is free without the MIP condition and without port restriction, subject to registration under online import monitoring system, with immediate effect, for all import consignments where the bill of lading (shipped on board) is issued on or before February 28, 2025," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) has said in a notification.



Swan ties up with AG&P for India FSRU

Business tycoon Nikhil Merchant-run Swan Energy has lined up a floating LNG receipt and regasification unit for its proposed liquefied natural gas import project at Jafrabad in Gujarat, the firm said in a regulatory filing. Swan signed a Heads of Agreement with Singapore's AG&P Terminals and Logistics to form joint venture companies to provide a floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and a floating storage unit to operate the Jafrabad terminal as well as for supplying LNG. A joint venture company (LNG supply company) will be incorporated "for the purpose of supplying LNG in India or any other jurisdiction", Swan said in the filing, adding it will hold 51 per cent equity stake and the balance 49 per cent equity stake shall be held by AG&P LNG. Another joint venture company (vessel company) will be incorporated "for the purpose of providing floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) and floating storage unit (FSU) to operate Swan LNG Pvt Ltd's LNG Terminal.



'Energy sector roadmap prepared for next 25 years'

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said his government has prepared a roadmap for the state's energy sector for the next 25 years. The state government plans to provide solar energy facility for houses provided to the poor people under various schemes, he said at a 'meet-the-press' programme here. In the next two-three years, efforts will also be made to reduce the electricity tariffs, said Fadnavis, who holds the energy portfolio. "The energy sector is very important, and we have prepared the roadmap for the next 25 years," the chief minister said. "We also plan to make sure houses provided to the poor under different government schemes do not get electricity bills. These homes will be covered under solar energy," he said. Fadnavis said he has also focused on expediting the completion of pending projects, especially in the irrigation sector.

Govt committed to improve quality spending, cut fiscal deficit: Finmin report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will continue its focus on improving quality spending, strengthening the social security net and bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of the GDP in FY26, a finance ministry document said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Budget for 2025-26 in Parliament on February 1.

The Union government is committed to pursuing the glide path of fiscal consolidation as announced in the Budget for FY 2021-22 and to attain a level of fiscal deficit lower than 4.5 per cent of GDP by FY 2025-26, according to finance ministry statements on the half yearly review of the trends in receipts and expenditure and deviation in meeting the obligations of the government under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, 2003.

The statements were tabled in the Lok Sabha last week.

"The thrust will be on improving the quality of public spending, while at the same

time, strengthening the social security net for the poor and needy. This approach would help further strengthen the nation's macro-economic fundamentals and ensure overall financial stability," it said.

According to the statements, the Budget 2024-25



was presented in the backdrop of global uncertainties caused by the wars in Europe and the Middle East.

India's sound macro-economic fundamentals have cushioned the country from the vagaries afflicting the global economy.

"It has also helped the nation pursue growth with fiscal consolidation. As a result, India retains its pride of place as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

However, risks to growth still remain," it said.

REC forms arm for renewable power evacuation in MP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned REC on Wednesday said it has formed a subsidiary for the evacuation of power from renewable energy projects in Madhya Pradesh. Rajgarh III Power Transmission Limited has been incorporated as a wholly-owned subsidiary of its wholly-owned arm REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL) on Wednesday, REC said in an exchange filing.

Rajgarh III Power Transmission Limited is a related party of REC Limited. The promoter, promoter group/ project companies do not have any interest in the new entity, except to the extent of its shareholding.

The company has been incorporated as a Transmission System for the Evacuation of Power from RE Projects in Rajgarh (1500 MW) SEZ in Madhya Pradesh-Phase III. "After selection of the successful bidder in accordance with the Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) guidelines, the company would be transferred to the successful bidder, along with all assets and liabilities," it said.

EPFO adds 13.41 lakh net members in Oct

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO has registered 13.41 lakh net new members addition in October 2024, according to showed latest payroll data.

This signifies increased employment opportunities and heightened awareness of employee benefits, bolstered by EPFO's effective outreach initiatives, a labour ministry statement said on Wednesday.

According to the statement, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has released provisional payroll data for October 2024, revealing a net addition of

13.41 lakh members.

As per the data, EPFO enrolled around 7.50 lakh new members in October 2024.

This addition in new memberships can be attributed to growing employment opportunities, increased awareness of employee benefits, and EPFO's successful outreach programmes, the ministry stated.

A noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, constituting

a significant 58.49 per cent of the total new members added in October 2024.

The net payroll data for the age group 18-25 for October 2024 is 5.43 lakhs.

This is in consonance with the earlier trend, which indicates that most individuals joining the organised workforce are youth, primarily first-time job seekers. The payroll data highlights that approximately 12.90 lakh members exited and subsequently rejoined EPFO.



Three entities settle AIF rule violation case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Three entities have settled with capital market regulator Sebi a case pertaining to the alleged violation of AIF norms and other regulatory rules after paying Rs 28.5 lakh towards the settlement charges.

The settlement fee was paid by the applicants (Utthishtha Virat Fund, Utthishtha Management Advisors LLP, and P Rama

Krishna) jointly and severally.

The order came after the applicants proposed to settle the enforcement proceedings that may be initiated against them for the violation of the provisions of the Alternate Investment Fund (AIF) regulations.

"In exercise of the powers...and in terms of the settlement regulations, in respect

of which the notice was issued, are hereby settled in respect of the applicants," Sebi's whole time members Amarjeet Singh and Kamlesh C Varshney said in the order on December 20. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) observed from the analysis of the Private



Placement Memorandum audit reports (PPM audit reports) of Utthishtha Virat Fund for FY 2022-23 that the continued interest of sponsor as of March 31, 2023, stood at 2.44 per cent of investible corpus. The regulator noted that the interest of the sponsor was lower than the limit of 2.5 per cent of the investible corpus as required to be maintained under AIF regulations, thereby Utthishtha Virat Fund flouted the rules.

FPI inflows into equities drop sharply in 2024

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a robust 2023, foreign investors significantly scaled back their investments in Indian equities in 2024, with net inflows amounting to over Rs 5,000 crore, as elevated domestic valuations, coupled with geopolitical uncertainties prompted investors to adopt a more cautious stance.

Looking ahead to 2025, FPI flows into Indian equities could see a recovery, supported by a cyclical upswing in corporate earnings, particularly in domestic-oriented sectors like capital goods, manufacturing, and infrastructure, Vinit Bolinjkar, Head of Research, Ventura Securities, said.

However, elevated valua-

Rebound anticipated in 2025



tions and cheaper alternatives in other emerging markets, such as ASEAN and Latin America, could constrain these inflows.

Additionally, lingering concerns over a prolonged global recession may weigh on investor sentiment and

inflows into Indian markets.

As of now, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have made a net investment of over Rs 5,052 crore in the Indian equity markets and Rs 1.12 lakh crore in the debt market (till December 24), as per data available with the depositories.

This followed the extraordinary Rs 1.71 lakh crore net investment in equities in 2023, driven by optimism surrounding India's resilient economic fundamentals.

In contrast, 2022 witnessed the worst net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore due to aggressive rate hikes by global central banks.

Prior to the outflow, FPIs invested money in the last three years (2019, 2020 and 2021).

Cement industry looks for growth improvement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian cement industry, witnessing a consolidation and heightened rivalry between two corporate houses snapping smaller players, pins its hope on 2025 for an improvement in sales realisation, higher margins and acceleration in demand, expecting around 8 per cent sales growth helped by an increased government spendings on big-ticket infra projects.

Over 50 MTPA (million tonnes per annum) capacity are being acquired for USD 4.5 billion by two leading players - Aditya Birla group firm

UltraTech Cement and billionaire Gautam Adani-led Ambuja Cements, besides organic expansion of the existing units as they have kept their war chest ready prowling for opportunities.

The industry faced challenges on numerous fronts in 2024, right from moderate capacity utilisation to lower sales realisation, which impacted the topline of several makers, contraction of margins and slower volume growth.

However, 2024 would also be known for big-ticket acquisitions by UltraTech and Adani Cement to consolidate their



positions and achieve their targeted growth ahead of time.

Adani Cements, a lateral entrant in the sector, completed the acquisition of Saurashtra-based Sanghi Industries, Panna Industries and recently

announced to acquire CK Birla group firm Orient Cement as part of its inorganic growth strategy. Besides, it has also snapped up small players facilities as My Home and its subsidiary ACC has also acquired

Asian Concretes and Cements. These acquisitions and expansions helped Adani Cement to cross a 100 MTPA capacity with a pan-India presence in 2024 within two years of entry in the sector, with 70 MTPA acquired capacity from Swiss firm Holcim.

The Adani group has plans in the works to raise this to 140 MTPA by FY28, just a shade below market leader UltraTech's current capacity of 156.66 MTPA grey cement.

Aditya Birla group is also firming on all cylinders to maintain its lead, and has plans for 200 MTPA capacity by FY27. In

2024 it announced acquisition of South-based India Cements Ltd and is in the process of acquiring Kesoram Industries' Cement Business.

According to Deloitte India Partner Rakesh Surana, 2024 was a year of consolidation for the cement industry, marked by significant mergers and acquisitions. "This trend has highlighted a structural shift in the sector, with the largest companies accounting for a substantial share of the overall capacity. Currently, the top five cement producers collectively command an estimated 60-65 per cent of the industry's capacity," he said.

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India Cements promoter Srinivasan resigns as UltraTech completes acquisition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading cement maker UltraTech has completed the acquisition of promoters a 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements Ltd, following which N Srinivasan and other promoters of the South-based cement maker have stepped down.

The Aditya Birla Group firm has completed the acquisition of 10.13 crore equity shares of India Cements Ltd (ICL), representing 32.72 per cent of the equity share capital of the company.

"This, together with the existing shareholding of 7.05 crore equity shares (22.77 per cent) of the equity share capital of ICL, has resulted in the Company's shareholding increasing to 17.19 crore equity shares representing 55.49 per cent of ICL's equity share capital," UltraTech had informed in a late-night regulatory filing on Tuesday.

Consequently, ICL "has become a subsidiary of the Company" with effect from December 24, 2024, it added. On Wednesday, ICL informed that pursuant to the completion of the transaction and due to the consequent cessation of control by the existing promoters over the company, N Srinivasan has stepped down as Vice Chairman and Managing Director.

Besides, his daughter Rupa Gurnath, wife Chitra Srinivasan and V M Mohan have also stepped down from the board of the company, according to a regulatory filing by ICL.

Moreover, "pursuant to the consummation of the Transaction on December 24 2024, UltraTech has acquired sole control of the company and has become the promoter of the company in accordance with the LODR Regulations",

informed ICL. Further, the board also recorded the resignation of certain independent directors - S Balasubramanian Adityan, Krishna Srivastava, Lakshmi Aparna Sreekumar and Sandhya Rajan with effect from the end of business hours on December 25, 2024, it added.

The board has also appointed four new directors - K C Jhanwar, Vivek Agrawal, E R Raj Narayanan and Ashok Ramachandran. Besides, three independent directors - Alka Bharucha, Vikas Balia and Sukanya Kripalu - have come on board of ICL.



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cooperation Minister Amit Shah launched 10,000 new multi-purpose Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) on Wednesday and asserted that the government will achieve its target of establishing 2 lakh such societies before the five-year timeline.

Addressing the launch event, Shah said prosperity through cooperation cannot be achieved unless cooperatives function effectively at the panchayat level.

"We have kept a target of setting up 2 lakh PACS in five years. I want to tell you that we will establish 2 lakh PACS before five years. In three months, we established 10,000 new PACS," the minister said.

The initiative will be rolled out in two phases, with NABARD establishing 32,750 new M-PACS in the first phase, while NDDB will set up 56,500 dairy cooperatives and NFDB 6,000 fishery cooperatives.

In the second phase, NABARD will create 45,000 M-PACS, NDDB will establish 46,000 dairy cooperatives and NFDB 5,500 fishery coopera-

tives. State governments will form about 25,000 new cooperatives, he added.

Shah also released standard operating procedures (SOP) for the liquidation of defunct PACS, which will enable the setting up of new societies in 15,000 villages.

Under current norms, a second PACS cannot be established in villages where one already exists unless declared defunct.

The minister distributed registration certificates, micro ATMs and RuPay Kisan Credit

Cards to the newly established cooperative societies.

Shah also highlighted the importance of digitalisation in the sector, noting that the government has already computerised existing PACS and integrated them with 32 different initiatives.

However, he stressed that technology alone is not enough.

"We have computerised, given software and started different schemes. However, cooperatives cannot operate, if there is no trained manpower,"

The initiative will be rolled out in two phases, with NABARD establishing 32,750 new M-PACS in the first phase, while NDDB will set up 56,500 dairy cooperatives and NFDB 6,000 fishery cooperatives

he said, urging societies to utilise the new training model.

So far, 11,695 PACS have registered under new model laws, he added.

The minister also recalled the contribution made to the cooperative sector on the 100th birth anniversary of late former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

He added that the 97th Amendment to the Constitution was brought during Vajpayee's regime to give a push to the cooperative sector.

Ola Electric expands network to 4,000 stores

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ola Electric on Wednesday said it has expanded its network to 4,000 stores nationwide, a four-fold increase from its existing network.

The company has opened over 3,200 new stores co-located with service facilities.

The expansion spans beyond metros and Tier I and II cities into smaller towns and tehsils, Ola Electric said in a statement.

"With our newly opened stores co-located with service centres, we have completely redefined EV purchase and ownership experience, setting new benchmarks with our #SavingsWalaScooter campaign," Ola Electric Chairman & Managing Director Bhavish Aggarwal said.



IMTIAZ ALI CONFIRMS *THE IDIOT OF ISTANBUL*

After weeks of speculation about a potential collaboration, director Imtiaz Ali has confirmed that he will be working with Fahadh Faasil on an upcoming film. In a recent directors' roundtable with The Hollywood Reporter India, Imtiaz not only confirmed the project but also revealed its title: *The Idiot of Istanbul*.

Imtiaz, when asked about the film, shared that while the announcement had been made, the project might not be his next one to hit the screens. He explained, "This announcement is out, but it's like a little ahead of its time. There is a movie, but I don't know, it might not be the next one up. But, yes, I've been trying to make this film for a long time."

When further probed about Fahadh Faasil's involvement in the film, Imtiaz responded



enthusiastically, saying, "I would love to do this. And now, since you've cornered me, I don't know why I'm not supposed to say this. But yes, my plan is to make this film with Fahadh."

If the project materialises as planned, *The Idiot of Istanbul* will mark Fahadh's Hindi film debut, a move that many fans of the talented actor are eagerly anticipating. Although Fahadh has consistently prioritized Malayalam cinema throughout his career, his recent ventures in Tamil and Telugu films suggest his willingness to branch out into other industries as well.

As of now, Imtiaz has not yet announced his next project or its cast.

Fans of both Imtiaz Ali and Fahadh Faasil are excited to see this new collaboration unfold, especially with the promise of Fahadh stepping into Hindi cinema in *The Idiot of Istanbul*.



MALAIKA ARORA ADDRESSES ARJUN KAPOOR'S SINGLE COMMENT, ADVOCATES FOR PRIVACY

Malaika Arora and Arjun Kapoor, once one of Bollywood's most admired couples, made headlines in 2024 after announcing their separation. Despite enduring societal judgment over their age gap throughout their relationship, the couple's decision to part ways took the industry by surprise. A few days back, Arjun Kapoor had confirmed that he is now single at a public event, which led to increased speculation and media attention. Malaika Arora, known for her grace and poise, has now responded to the situation, addressing the breakup in her own way.

In a latest chat, Malaika made it clear that she values her privacy and would never publicly discuss her personal life. She remarked, "I will never choose a public platform to talk about my personal life. So, whatever Arjun has said is entirely his prerogative." This statement reflects her desire to maintain boundaries when it comes to her private matters, emphasising that personal decisions should remain personal. Acknowledging the challenges of the past year, Malaika expressed that it was time for everyone to move on and embrace a fresh start in the new year. Her words signalled her readiness to look forward and focus on the future, leaving behind any negativity.

HOUSEFULL 5 COMPLETES FILMING, SET FOR JUNE 2025 RELEASE

Housefull 5, starring Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh and Abhishek Bachchan, has concluded filming, the makers have announced.

The fifth part of the popular comedy franchise is helmed by Tarun Mansukhani of *Dostana* fame and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala's production banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

In an Instagram post, the studio shared the news of shooting wrap along with a picture of the ensemble cast. "That's a wrap for *Housefull 5*! A rollercoaster of emotions, filled with laughter, hard work and unforgettable memories," Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment posted on Tuesday evening.

The film also features Fardeen Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Chitragada Singh, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma and Nikitin Dheer.

The franchise started with 2010's *Housefull*, followed by three sequels -- *Housefull 2* (2012), *Housefull 3* (2016) and *Housefull 4* (2019).

Housefull 5 is scheduled to be released on June 6, 2025.



Boney Kapoor breaks silence on *No Entry 2* cast changes

No Entry, one of the most beloved comedy films of the early 2000s, has long been a fan favourite and anticipation has only grown since the announcement of its sequel. However, news of the film's original cast, including Salman Khan, Anil Kapoor, Fardeen Khan and Esha Deol, being replaced by new actors has disappointed some fans. In a latest interview, producer Boney Kapoor explained the reasons behind this casting change, revealing that the original cast members had their own reasons for not returning. Despite this, Kapoor reassured fans that the sequel, *No Entry 2*, will live up to the legacy of the original film.

"I waited long enough, but everybody had their own reasons and I respect those reasons. So, it has been freshly packaged now." While some fans were hoping to see the same ensemble cast return, Kapoor emphasised that the new

version of the film brings fresh energy and excitement. Kapoor further expressed confidence in the sequel's potential, sharing that people who have already heard the subject believe it is even better than the original film. He highlighted that *No Entry 2* is filled with all the right elements that made the first film a hit, promising that the sequel will meet the high expectations of fans. In addition to details about the cast, Kapoor also revealed the film's production schedule. Shooting for *No Entry 2* is set to begin in June or July 2025, with a targeted release date of October 26, 2025, coinciding with the Diwali season. Kapoor acknowledged that the film would require significant post-production work and he expressed hope that the team would be able to meet the tight deadlines to ensure the movie's timely release.

As fans eagerly await the sequel, Boney Kapoor's updates offer a glimpse into the exciting future of *No Entry 2*, ensuring that the beloved comedy franchise will continue to entertain audiences for years to come.



WHEN SHRADDHA KAPOOR GOT VARUN BEATEN UP, HERE'S WHY!

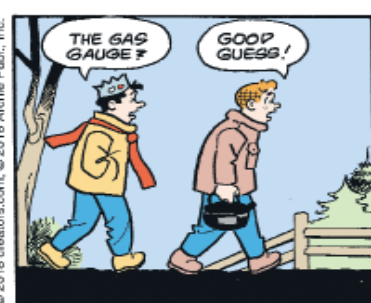
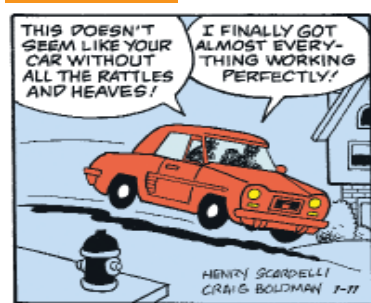
Varun Dhawan and Shraddha Kapoor's bond goes way back to their childhood, thanks to their families' deep roots in the film industry. Their fathers, Shakti Kapoor and David Dhawan, had worked together on several projects, which brought the young stars together on set. One memorable incident from their early years has since become a hilarious and heartfelt part of their friendship. Back then, Shraddha was just eight years old, and she had developed a fondness for Varun. In a playful yet dramatic turn of events, young Shraddha decided to take Varun on a trip to the mountains to confess her feelings. However, a young Varun, confused and unsure about such matters at that age, rejected her. As surprising as it sounds, the rejection didn't go over well with Shraddha, and what followed was straight out of a Bollywood film.

Varun Dhawan recently shared the story, recounting how Shraddha held on to that rejection for two more years. It all came to a head at Shraddha's tenth birthday party. "I was invited to her birthday party and she was wearing a frock. Around that time, there were four guys who had a crush on her. While we were all playing in the jumping bag, I was suddenly surrounded by these boys who demanded, 'Why don't you like Shraddha?'" Varun recalled. In the heat of the moment, the boys turned on him and a playful yet chaotic fight ensued. "They started fighting with me and Shraddha had them beat me up because I didn't accept her proposal," Varun admitted. But things didn't end there—Varun also fought back and the scene turned into a typical, filmy scenario. Despite the chaos, Varun went on to win the dance competition at the party, while Shraddha came third.

Fast forward a few years, and Varun found himself once again in Shraddha's orbit—this time, things were very different. As they grew older, Shraddha blossomed into an incredibly beautiful teenager. Varun, who had grown up and was attending a different school, ran into Shraddha at a dandiya competition. This time, Varun's reaction was entirely different. "I was in trouble at the event because I accidentally hit someone with a dandiya stick and I was running for my life. That's when I saw her walking in slow motion and I realised she looked incredibly beautiful," he recalled. That moment marked a significant change in their dynamic. Varun admitted that, at that moment, he regretted rejecting her all those years ago. Varun further humorously wrapped up the story by urging fans to hear the other side from Shraddha herself, adding a playful twist to their long-standing friendship.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



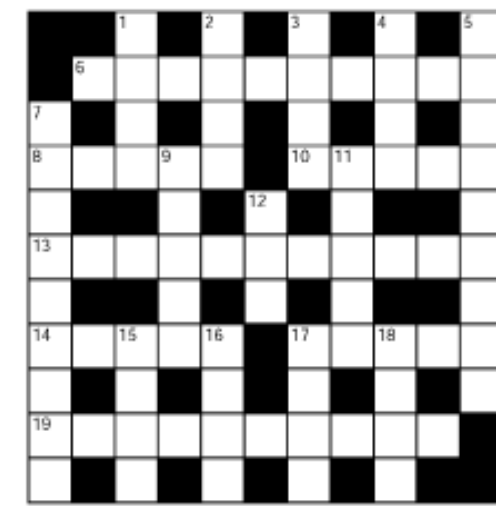
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

7	9	8	4	5	1	2	6	3
2	3	4	9	7	6	1	8	5
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6	5	3	2	9	4	8	7	1
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8	7	9	1	6	3	5	4	2
3	8	2	6	1	7	9	5	4
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- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- An aircraft sometimes used for rescuing people
- Lubricated
- A sorcerer's power
- A country in Europe
- This makes music in a church
- A liquid chemical that will burn your skin
- Very bad
- People in China and other countries eat with these

DOWN

- In good health
- Discover
- The sound of an explosion
- A male deer
- A large reptile that lives in rivers in hot countries

7 Jump along on one foot in this game

9 More than is needed

11 Permit

12 Write with this

15 Become taller

16 A bird builds this

17 A liquid chemical that will burn your skin

18 A counterfeit thing

SOLUTION

B	I	T	T	E	R	P	L	U	M
S	L	I	P	S	O	S	E	D	
L	I	V	S	O	R	D			
H	E	L	P	E	R	S			
A	L	E	N	T	E	R	E	D	
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SERVING HUMANITY BY BRIDGING IT WITH HOPE

TEJAL SINHA
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In a world where hunger and inequality remain persistent challenges, organisations like No Food Waste stand as beacons of hope and compassion. Led in Telangana by Rtn. Dr. K Venkata Murali, this remarkable NGO has spent nearly a decade ensuring that excess, untouched food from events, hotels and homes finds its way to those who need it most. But the work of No Food Waste doesn't stop there—it extends its helping hands to encompass education, healthcare and livelihood support, transforming countless lives along the way. Dr. Murali and his dedicated team of volunteers exemplify the power of community, proving that a collective effort can create meaningful change, one meal and one act of kindness at a time.

For the past seven to eight years, the organisation has been making a tangible difference in the lives of countless individuals. The organisation operates with the mission of redistributing untouched, excess food from events, hotels and residences to those in need.

Dr Murali elaborated to us on the ethos and evolution of No Food Waste. "The main concept is to collect untouched, excess food and deliver it to nearby hunger spots or to people in need. Over the years, we've identified additional needs like medical support, education and livelihood assistance, and extended our efforts to help in these areas as well," he said.

Reflecting on the journey of the NGO, he expressed immense satisfaction. "Our volunteers have been instrumental in identifying genuine needs and ensuring that the help reaches the right people. The dedication of our team is commendable, and we owe much of our success to them," he noted.

However, the path hasn't been without its challenges. "The primary challenge has always been finding committed volunteers and accurately identifying genuine beneficiaries. When something is offered for free, many claim to be in need. It requires thorough due diligence to ensure the resources reach the truly deserving," he explained.

Managing the redistribution of cooked food presents another set of difficulties. "Cooked food has a very short shelf life—just two to three hours. It's crucial to deliver it before it becomes unusable. Identifying nearby hunger spots was tough initially, but now we have mapped over 550 spots in Hyderabad and across Telangana, enabling us to respond quickly," he said.

The NGO has strategically divided Hyderabad into seven zones for



With nearly a decade of unwavering service, the No Food Waste NGO has become a beacon of hope for the underprivileged, fueled by the dedication of its volunteers and the generosity of its donors. In an exclusive interaction with The Pioneer, Rtn. Dr. K Venkata Murali, director-Telangana of the organisation, offers a closer look at the challenges, triumphs and the collective effort that keeps this noble cause thriving.



better food distribution. Hunger spots have been identified across areas like Bala Nagar, Moti Nagar, Abids, ECIL and many others.

"We've ensured that wherever donors are located, there is a nearby hunger spot to bridge the gap swiftly," he added.

He also addresses other pressing needs. Under medical support, the NGO provides items like oxygen concentrators, wheelchairs, hospital beds and medicines. "One notable case involved a student who, after a serious accident, required a specialised hospital bed to recover over four months. We provided the bed free of charge, which not only helped him but has since benefited other patients as well."

In education, the NGO assists

with examination fees, college fees, laptops, mobile devices for online learning and books. Regular food distribution efforts include providing cooked meals to 1,500-1,800 people daily from two community kitchens, as well as distributing dry rations and seasonal necessities like blankets and fruits.

The success of No Food Waste is made possible through partnerships and individual donors. "The Rotary Club of Hyderabad North and Rotary District 3150 have been among our most consistent supporters for the past five years. Whenever a necessity arises, they are always the first to respond," he acknowledged. He also praised individual donors who consistently step forward to

help bridge the gap between resources and needs.

With Christmas and New Year approaching, they have planned several initiatives. "We are conducting blanket drives, distributing cakes and planning a special food distribution on New Year's Day. For us, every day is a day of service, and celebrations mean ensuring others have what they need," said Dr. Murali.

He further emphasised that the efforts of No Food Waste would not be possible without the generosity of donors and the dedication of volunteers. "We see ourselves as a bridge between donors and the needy. Our volunteers and the people who trust us with their contributions are the true heroes of this journey," he concluded.

No Food Waste continues to shine as an exemplary model of community service, proving that a committed team can indeed create a world where fewer people go hungry.



Sustainable housing for all

In the face of rapid urbanisation and climate change, the need for sustainable and affordable housing in India has never been more pressing. As the nation looks to build a greener future, the concept of green buildings is emerging as a critical solution. The housing finance landscape is evolving to promote and support these sustainable initiatives and practices, aiming to transform the way we build homes across the country.

Green buildings and sustainability

Green buildings are designed to minimise the environmental impact of construction and operation by using energy, water and materials more efficiently. These structures prioritise resource conservation, environmental responsibility and the well-being of residents. In India, adopting green building principles is critical for reducing carbon emissions and improving the overall quality of life. By implementing energy-efficient designs, sustainable water management practices, and effective waste disposal strategies, these buildings contribute significantly to the nation's sustainability goals.

The benefits of green buildings extend beyond environmental impact. They offer economic advantages by reducing utility costs for homeowners and enhancing property values. This makes them a preferred option for developers and buyers alike, prompting a shift in the housing finance sector towards supporting sustainable housing projects. As awareness grows, there is increasing pressure on financial institutions to integrate green building practices into their lending criteria, offering preferential rates for loans to developers who meet sustainability standards. This shift not only supports government objectives but also reduces risks associated with climate change, such as increased flooding and resource shortages.

Government objectives for green buildings

The Indian government's commitment to sustainable development is reflected in initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), which aims to provide affordable housing for all. A key focus is promoting green buildings through funding schemes, policy incentives and partnerships with organisations such as the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) and the Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA), Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies (EDGE). These partnerships set standards for green buildings, enabling developers to access grants and incentives.

The government also encourages financial institutions to promote sustainable housing through green financing programs. This approach aligns with national and global sustainability goals, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. By advocating for energy-efficient designs and sustainable



practices, the government aims to reduce the carbon footprint of the built environment and support the transition to a greener economy.

Several targeted policies and schemes have been introduced to promote green building practices:

- Green housing funding:** Launched to provide low-cost/subsidised loans to affordable housing developers integrating green building practices into their projects. This funding helps bridge the financial gap between conventional and green construction by offering affordable credit at lower interest rates, encouraging builders to adopt energy-efficient techniques.

- EESL scheme for energy efficiency:** Through the Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), the government provides financial support for energy-efficient appliances and systems in green buildings, including LED lights, energy-efficient air conditioning systems, and solar water heating solutions. This helps reduce energy consumption in residential units.

- PM surya ghar:** Muft Bijli Yojana - Managed by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, this scheme offers subsidies to homeowners and RWAs for installing solar panels, promoting the use of renewable energy in residential buildings and reducing their carbon footprint.

- Multilateral agencies and development Financial Institution (DFIs):** Various agencies and DFIs started to provide loan facilities to Housing Finance institution for promoting green housing construction and sustainable practices. Here, focus is also on training, skill improvement, sustainable construction material and development of overall ecosystem for green affordable housing in India.

Role of housing finance in promoting green buildings

Housing finance institutions are increasingly recognising the value of incorporating green building practices into their lending criteria. By offering preferential loan rates to developers who meet sustainability standards, these institutions are helping drive the adoption of sustainable construction practices.

This shift not only supports government objectives but also mitigates risks associated with climate change, such as flooding and resource shortages.

For financial institutions, supporting green housing projects presents a significant opportunity to enhance their portfolios' resilience and contribute to a sustainable future. By focusing on energy-efficient buildings, these institutions can help mitigate environmental impact and provide better living conditions for homeowners. The integration of green building practices into housing finance is essential for fostering sustainable development and encouraging developers to adopt environmentally responsible construction methods.

Challenges and solutions

Despite the growing interest in green buildings, several barriers remain. High upfront costs, limited awareness among developers, and a shortage of skilled professionals are significant challenges. To overcome these hurdles, targeted education programs, financial subsidies and public-private partnerships are needed. These initiatives can help reduce costs and increase understanding of green building practices among all stakeholders. By providing financial support and technical guidance, the government and financial institutions can make sustainable housing projects more accessible, encouraging their adoption nationwide.

Redefining housing finance for a sustainable India requires collaboration across sectors—developers, financial institutions, government bodies, and the public. By prioritising green building practices and aligning with sustainability goals, the housing sector can lead the way in creating a resilient, sustainable housing ecosystem. As India continues its journey towards sustainable development, the principles outlined in this initiative will be key to building a future where housing is not only affordable but also environmentally responsible. By leveraging green financing, the housing sector can bridge the gap between economic development and sustainability, paving the way for a greener, more sustainable India.

(The author, Ajay Jaiswal, is the chief operating officer, at IIFL House Finance.)



Allu Arjun's arrest

In December 2024, Allu Arjun became embroiled in a controversy surrounding the tragic events at the premiere of his highly anticipated film *Pushpa 2* at Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad. A stampede broke out during the screening, resulting in the death of a woman and critical injuries to her young son. Allegations surfaced that the event lacked adequate crowd management and safety protocols, with claims that Arjun attended the screening despite police advising against it due to safety concerns. This led to the actor's arrest, though he was later granted interim bail by the Telangana High Court.

Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek's divorce rumours

In 2024, rumours about Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachchan's divorce made headlines. Speculation arose during Anant Ambani's wedding, where Aishwarya and her daughter Aaradhya attended separately from the rest of the Bachchan family,



CELEBRITY TURMOIL 2024

The year 2024 was marked by a series of controversies that dominated headlines across various sectors. Ultimately, 2024 underscored the complexities of navigating fame, power, and public opinion in an age dominated by instant communication and constant connectivity.

ily, who appeared together, including Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bachchan and Abhishek. The absence of public birthday wishes for Aishwarya from Abhishek and the Bachchan family further fueled the rumors of a possible rift. However, the family dispelled these speculations by appearing united at Aaradhya's school event later in the year.

Arshad Warsi's comments on Prabhas



Arshad Warsi found himself at the center of controversy after commenting on Prabhas' portrayal in *Kalki 2898 AD*. During an interview with Sandish Bhatia, Arshad candidly expressed his disappointment with the depiction of the character, saying, "Prabhas, I am really sad, why was he... he was like a joker. Why? I want to see a Mad Max. I want to see Mel Gibson over there. Tumme usko kya bana dia year. Kyu karte ho aisa mujhe nahi samajh mein aata (What have you made of it? Why do they do such things I never understand)." His remarks were perceived by many as a critique of Prabhas, sparking backlash from fans. However, Arshad later clarified that his comments were directed at the characterization and creative choices in the film, not at Prabhas as

an actor. Despite the clarification, the incident stirred significant debate among fans and industry insiders.

Poonam Pandey's death hoax

In February, social media was abuzz with news of Poonam Pandey's alleged death due to cervical cancer, leaving her fans shocked and grieving. Heartfelt messages poured in from admirers, mourning the loss of the actor. However, it was later revealed that the news was a publicity stunt aimed at raising awareness about cervical cancer. The revelation sparked widespread outrage, with many calling the move insensitive and unethical. While the intention may have been to shed light on a critical health issue, the stunt backfired, drawing sharp criticism and tarnishing Pandey's image among fans and the public.

Salman and Shah Rukh Khan receive threats

This year was marked by heightened security concerns in the entertainment industry, with prominent actors Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan receiving serious threats. Salman, reportedly on gangster Lawrence Bishnoi's "hit list," faced five threats, including a shooting incident outside his residence earlier in the year, prompting increased security measures. Bishnoi's list is said to include comedians, politicians, and rival gang members, further intensifying the gravity of the situation. In November, Shah Rukh Khan received a chilling threat from an anonymous caller

demanding Rs 50 lakh and warning of fatal consequences if the amount was not paid. Swift action led to the arrest of a suspect, but the incidents have raised alarms about the safety of high-profile celebrities.



AR Rahman's divorce

AR Rahman left fans stunned with the announcement of his separation from Saira Banu after 29 years of marriage. In a joint statement shared through their lawyer, the couple cited significant emotional strain and unresolved tensions as reasons for their decision, despite their deep love for each other. The statement emphasised their request for privacy during this challenging time. Adding to the intrigue, Rahman's bassist Mohini Dey also announced her divorce on the same day, sparking speculation about a connection between the two events. Mohini swiftly denied the rumours, referring to Rahman as a "father figure" and dismissing the conjecture as baseless. The coincidental timing of the announcements created a flurry of discussion but underscored the personal challenges faced by both individuals.



Visitors have exploited Australia's 'brittle' top order: Shastri

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former coach Ravi Shastri has backed India to win the Boxing Day Test, saying the visitors have exploited Australia's "brittle" top order to have their "nose ahead" in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Shastri added that Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is "almost single-handedly" responsible for the visitors keeping the series levelled at 1-1. "I think India would take this, the way the series is poised. Any overseas team being 1-1, especially with the games being in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, they would take this. "Going 1-1 into Boxing Day is the best case scenario. I would say India have their nose ahead," Shastri told news.Com.Au. Australia's top order comprising Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney and Marnus Labuschagne have been unable to

score against Bumrah. It has forced them to hand a debut to teenage sensation Sam Konstas while dropping rookie opener Nathan McSweeney. "It's been pretty brittle. When you look at this Australian line-up, it's been a long time since I've seen an Australian line-up where the top order is that brittle. India have exploited that and continue to exploit it," Shastri said. All-rounder Mitchell Marsh has also largely struggled for runs. In the last year, Labuschagne, Marsh, Khawaja and Steve Smith all had average less than 30 in Test cricket. "India is 1-1 in the series and that man (Bumrah) has almost single-handedly got India into that position," Shastri said. "As far as Konstas goes, I think he's very refreshing. He's got flair, he's got flamboyance. But Test cricket is Test cricket. His technique will tighten up and he will be the future for Australia." Shastri feels McSweeney was



unfortunate to have been axed after just three Tests. "McSweeney was very unfortunate. He did the hard yards but he's a middle order batsman. I see him travelling to Sri Lanka when the Australian team go there and rebuild his career from there. "But I think it's a good move getting Konstas in because you need someone who can take the attack to the Indian team, because the punches were coming from nowhere." India have won the last two series in Australia and now have the opportunity to become only the third touring side to win three consecutive series Down Under, joining the West Indies (1984/85, 1988/89, 1992/93) and South Africa (2008/09, 2012/13, 2016/17). "Massive. No team has done that in a long time. Australia hammers sides when they come here. For India to pull off three on the trot will be something special.

"But they'll have to play good cricket. I see Australia coming hard in this Test match, especially with the bowlers. It's the batting that'll be the challenge for Australia more than anything else." Shastri feels India has come to Australia with a strong intent to win. "India have come here to win, they haven't come here to fill in the numbers. Even when I was the coach, our mantra was to play extremely hard, fair and to win. "You have to think of a method to beat Australia and not just compete. You've got to plan properly, how to take your 20 wickets. India have done that and been very aggressive. "They've been in the face of Australia and give as good as they get. It's been entertaining and feisty stuff. The first day of the Boxing Day Test will determine which way the series will go," he added.



Cummins' message for Konstas: Have fun and don't overthink

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia skipper Pat Cummins understands what a teenager goes through on a high-profile Test debut and knows what he needs to tell a young Sam Konstas: "Have fun and don't overthink." Konstas, 19, is all set to make his debut against India in the Boxing Day Test, starting Thursday. Konstas has created a lot of buzz in Australian domestic cricket and his Test debut at the expense of Nathan McSweeney has become quite an event. When the skipper was asked about his feelings during his Test debut at 18, Cummins spoke about an element of naivety that can stop a kid from overthinking about how big a deal it is. "I spent a bit of the time wondering why or how I was there, how it happened so quick. I just remember being really excited and I think it's similar to Sammy (Konstas) this week. "There's a level of naivety that you just want to go out and play like you do when you're a kid in the backyard," Cummins said during the pre-match press interaction. "You just want to take the game on, have fun and not overthink. So that's the message to Sam. That's definitely how I felt as an 18-year-old, I was just really excited," Cummins fondly recollected. Cummins shared with

Konstas, how he, as a teenager, handled his debut back in 2011. "I was saying this to Sam the other day, I remember as an 18 year old I was thinking if I didn't have a great game it wasn't my fault, it was the selector's fault for picking me. "I was like, well they're the idiots that picked an 18 year old. You're so young starting out your career it's just its boxing day doesn't get any better than this so just enjoy the moment," he laughed. For Cummins, having 38-year-old opener Usman Khawaja, who is exactly double Konstas' age is a boon for the youngster as he will have calming influence at the other end even as youngsters with uncluttered mind always have an edge. "There's so much value in having experience and you've seen everything before. But there's almost just as many positives in having that freedom and naivety just to go out and see the ball and hit the ball." Indians can throw some challenges at some point. Even in a slump, Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant are players whom this Australian team really respects. There are two Test matches and there could be a pushback round the corner. "I really hope not but you know they're good players so no doubt they'll throw some challenges at us at some point." Asked if his opposite number Rohit Sharma's poor form is

an advantage, Cummins reminded Rahane's century at a stand-in skipper at Melbourne. "Look, hard to say. It was a good Test match here a few years ago. I think Rahane got 100 from memory. So yeah, it always seems like a boxing day every year is a cracking test match. Last year was a great Test match against Pakistan as well." The Indian team is in transition but Cummins wants to keep focus intact on his set of players. "Every team always has something they're kind of grappling with or trying to improve on. As I said previously, I'm really happy our team's travelling. "I thought after Perth we bounced back brilliantly in Adelaide and last week in Queensland. So for us it's about focusing on what we do well and getting excited for a great week." Head fit, Lyon is king at MCG, Boland is world class Head coach Andrew McDonald has already spoken about Travis Head being fit and the left-hander's extended net session was an indicator. Head had sustained a quadriceps niggle while batting in the second innings in Brisbane. "Trav is good to go. So he'll play. He just ticked off some final things today and yesterday. No stress, no kind of worries about injury with Trav. So he'll go into the game fully fit."

South Africa aims to seal its place in WTC final in test series against Pakistan

AP ■ CENTURION

South Africa will be eyeing a place in the World Test Championship final with an all-seam attack against Pakistan in the first test, starting Thursday. The Proteas need to win one of its remaining two test matches in this WTC cycle to guarantee a place at the Lord's final next year and captain Temba Bavuma believes expectations have risen in his team to do well in the two-test series. "There'll be pressure that comes with that," Bavuma said. "But to be honest with you, we're coming into the series to win the series 2-0. We understand that for us to do that, there's certain things that we need to do as a team: keep things simple, keep doing the small things right, and allow the results to take care of itself." South Africa has included four fast bowlers in the lineup with Corbin Bosch, who consistently bowls above 140 kph, set to play his first test at his hometown. Seasoned fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen will team up with Dane Paterson and Bosch to challenge Pakistan's batters on an expected pacey Centurion pitch where fast bowlers have a clear advantage over the last six years, picking up 227



wickets with spinners dismissing only 16 batters. Heading into the tests, South Africa's top-order batters did struggle against Pakistan in a rare 3-0 ODI whitewash with Tony de Zorzi, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs all failing to read the offspin bowling of Salman Ali Agha in the opening game of the series. Whether it's easy, whether it's hard, we've got to find a way to do it," Bavuma said. "Whatever, I don't know, trauma that was there... Guys will have to deal with it."

Pakistan has long been struggling in test matches in South Africa, losing 12 and winning just two of the 15 test matches since it first toured the country in 1995. Pakistan's below-par show in South Africa includes its lowest test score of 49 at the Wanderers in 2013. Pakistan is lying at No. 7 in the WTC points table and Aaqib Javed is its fourth head coach in this WTC cycle with Mickey Arthur and Mohammad Hafeez quitting after one series. Jason Gillespie resigned just two weeks before Thursday's test.

Gillespie, who was hired by the Pakistan Cricket Board in April, had a horror start to his two-year contract when Bangladesh swept Pakistan in Pakistan 2-0 in the test series before England won the first test at Multan. Gillespie was removed from the selection panel and Javed masterminded Pakistan's back-to-back wins against England on two engineered spinning pitches where Noman Ali and Sajid Khan bagged 39 wickets. But Pakistan has brought in only Noman Ali for the two-test series in South Africa and is still contemplating whether to follow South Africa and go with an all-out pace attack. Shaheen Shah Afridi, who played in the preceding white-ball series in South Africa, has been surprisingly left out for the test matches. Naseem Shah and Babar Azam return to the test fold after missing the last two home tests against England while selectors have recalled seamer Mohammad Abbas after three years with the left-arm seam option of Mir Hamza in the squad. Abbas took 90 wickets in 25 test matches from 2017 to 21 before he ran out of selectors' favor despite his consistent performances for Hampshire in England and in domestic first-class cricket.

Head best batter in world, his performances against Bumrah exemplify fearless approach: Chappell

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Travis Head is the "best batter in the world" whose performances against Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy exemplify his fearless approach and "Australian way of batting", feels legendary cricketer Greg Chappell. Head has dominated the batting chart with 409 runs in the first three Tests with two hundreds and a fifty, and former Australia captain Chappell believes his simplicity and aggression are behind his success as a Test batter. "Head's performances against Jasprit Bumrah in this series exemplify his fearless approach. While most batsmen struggle to survive Bumrah's unorthodox action, sharp pace, and relentless accuracy, Head has treated him like any other bowler," Chappell wrote in Sydney Morning Herald. "By playing with intent and looking to score off Bumrah, Head has not only nullified his threat but disrupted his rhythm.

His ability to dispatch short deliveries with authority and drive fuller ones with precision has been remarkable, underscoring the strides he has made," he added. Chappell said Head's flourish in the recent years across formats is due to an uncluttered mindset. "From a raw, unpredictable talent to one of the most dominant male batters in world cricket, Travis Head has soared into his prime with an almost ethereal elegance," Chappell wrote. "His story is not just about overcoming challenges but about embracing a simplicity of style that has become his hallmark — one that allows his mind to remain uncluttered and his game devastatingly effective," he added. Chappell termed Head's 152 against England in the 2021-22 series as the "turning point". "The turning point came during the 2021 Ashes. Head's counterattacking 152 in Brisbane was a revelation. Walking in at 5-195, he transformed the game with a whirlwind innings, taking the opposition bowlers apart and



shifting the momentum firmly in Australia's favour," he wrote. "That innings wasn't just about

runs, it was a statement of intent, a declaration that he would play his way."

Chappell believes Head is one of the most feared batters in the world who can dictate terms

Bumrah equals Ashwin's record for rating points in ICC Ranking for Bowlers

PTI ■ DUBAI

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah got a huge boost on the eve of the Boxing Day Test when he achieved the joint-highest rating ever by an Indian player, equalling the record held by spinner Ravichandran Ashwin in the ICC Ranking for Bowlers. The quick gained 14 rating points following his 9/94 in the drawn third Test at Brisbane to not only equal Ashwin's highest-ever 904 rating points but also consolidate his position at the top of the rankings. Bumrah has a chance to better Ashwin's rating points, which the now-retired off-spinner achieved in



December 2016, when the fourth match of the Border-Gavaskar Test begins at the MCG on Thursday. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada (856) and Australia's Josh Hazlewood (852) are trailing

the Indian pacer at the second and third place respectively. Charismatic Australian batter Travis Head's stellar run in the ongoing series against India helped him climb to fourth spot (825 rating

points) in the Test Ranking for Batters. He is still behind the England duo of Joe Root (895) and Harry Brook (876), and former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson (867). Head smashed a scintillating 152 at the Gabba to follow up his century in the second Test at Adelaide. Compatriot Steve Smith's century at the Gabba got him into the top-10 once again. Among all-rounders, India's Ravindra Jadeja continues to lead the chart with 424 rating points, while Australia skipper Pat Cummins earned his place back in the top-10, following his four wickets and 42 runs in the third Test at Gabba.

Cristiano Ronaldo takes family to Lapland for Christmas vacation

AP ■ HELSINKI

Soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo said it was "just a little cold" as he posed bare-chested in the snow before taking an icy dip in a pool during a Christmas vacation in Finland's Lapland region. The 39-year-old Portuguese international traveled with partner Georgina Rodriguez and their children, who met Santa Claus in a 10-minute video posted online by Ronaldo on Tuesday. The former Real Madrid and Manchester United great appeared to decline to ski with his family. He wished his followers — including 645 million on Instagram — a "Merry Christmas" in Spanish.



TFI is meeting Chief Minister today: Dil Raju

The Telugu Film Industry (TFI) is in doldrums after the Allu Arjun arrest episode, where the Telangana Chief Minister announced that there are no benefit shows or ticket price hike in Telangana state. Also, there is a big gap between the Telugu Film Industry and the Telangana Government, so the TFI members will be meeting the Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy today. This was confirmed by the Telangana Film Development Corporation chairman Dil Raju.

"Yes, we are going to meet Chief Minister Revanth Reddy today morning at 10 am," said Dil Raju. "I am sending messages to everyone and whoever available in the city is coming, including actors, directors and producers," said Raju at KIMS Hospital. On Wednesday, Raju, along with producer Allu Arjun, producer Mythri Movie Makers and director Sukumar, together donated Rs 2 crore for the family of Prabhakar (Revanth's husband).

"We are also taking care of the family and we will do whatever we can permanently," said Dil Raju. When asked that Allu Arvind is also attending tomorrow's meeting, Dil Raju said, "Everyone is coming." He said he is arranging this meeting through FDC. "I am related to the film industry, so Revanth Reddy garu appointed me as FDC Chairman and it's my responsibility to fill the gap between the two," said Dil Raju.

For another question, he said he didn't meet Allu Arjun, but said, "I will definitely meet him".

Megha Akash's another Telugu film is ready



After her marriage, Megha Akash is signing films, especially in Telugu. Though the actress made her debut with the film *Lie* in Telugu, but she didn't get much success here. After her debut few of her Telugu films released, but they didn't do well at the box-office. Now, another Telugu film of her, *Sahakutumbanam* is all set to hit the screens soon.

Uday Sharma is the director, while H Mahadeva Gowda and H Nagaratna are the producers. Ram Kiran is the lead actor in this film. The makers started the promotions and on that part, they released a lyrical video titled *Adi Dhaa Saaru* on Tuesday. According to the makers, the film is touted to be a clean family entertainer.

Interestingly, one of the best music directors, Mani Sharma is providing the music for this film. Anantha Sriram penned the lyrics and it has already struck a chord with audiences. Veteran actors Rajendra Prasad and Brahmanandam are playing important roles in it. Megha Akash's refreshing new look and her performance in the song have garnered praise, adding to the anticipation surrounding the movie.



No comedy, no suspense; *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes* misses the spark

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Comedian Vennela Kishore has acted as the lead in a few films earlier and now another one, *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes*, has been released on Christmas Day. Writer Mohan makes his debut as a director, while Ananya Nagalla plays one of the main leads. Distributor Vamsi Nandipati has taken over this small film, making it an interesting venture. The promotional videos are also interesting, and the film is a crime comedy. Here is the story and how it fares.

Story:

On May 21, 1991, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi left Visakhapatnam and landed at Sriperumbudur for a political campaign, where he was assassinated in a bomb blast. The same night, a girl named Pulidandi Mary was killed at Visakhapatnam beach. CI Bhaskar (Aneesh Kuruvilla) told journalists that he would catch the killer within a week, or else he would resign from his job. Since he had to work on the Rajiv Gandhi murder case simultaneously, he asked a private detective, Sherlock Holmes (Vennela Kishore), to solve the Mary case within a week.

Balu (Ravi Teja Dasyam) loves Bramarambha (Ananya Nagalla) and on her birthday, Balu arranged a cake-cutting ceremony at the beach, along with two of his friends. Balu, Brama, a suspended cop, three fishermen and others tell different stories about Mary's murder. Who killed Mary, and how did Sherlockholmes find the real killer? What was the motive behind Mary's murder? Did he complete the investigation within a week? This is the crux of the story.

Analysis:

Writer Mohan has worked as a writer for several movies and is an experienced writer. He has made his debut as a director with *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes* and one expects a normal story from him due to his experience. However, to everyone's surprise, he comes out with a complete dud.

Generally, when one expects a detective story, one looks forward to at least some puzzle-like scenes and an interesting story. Moreover, with Vennela Kishore playing the title role of the detective, one expects some humor as well. However, the director fails to provide any of these elements in the film.

The story begins with the news of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in Sriperumbudur and the local police are on the streets to check for any unwanted incidents. At the same time, a murder takes place at the beach and then Sherlock Holmes enters the scene. One expects that it is not a complete suspense thriller but a routine film with a few entertainment scenes, considering Vennela Kishore's involvement. However, the director fails to provide even a single comedy scene or an interesting scene.

Watching the first half is tedious and one feels uneasy. Furthermore, Vennela Kishore's attempt at the Uttarandhra accent is completely absurd, and he fails to pronounce it properly, as he seems to have just read the dialogues given by the writer. To portray any accent convincingly, one needs to feel it and pronounce it naturally; otherwise, it will not come out nicely.

The director spoils the beautiful Uttarandhra accent by forcefully incorporating it into some characters. Sometimes they speak with a normal accent, and sometimes with a local accent. Since the title is *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes*, the director intended to use the local accent. One wonders why the director chose Vennela Kishore for the role, as any actor could have done better.

It is boring to see Vennela Kishore playing the same kind of roles in many films. Only in the second half are there a few minutes of interest when the detective reveals the killer and the motive. Most scenes are repetitive, making the film boring to watch. Some dialogues are not up to the mark and a few are too vulgar.

Performances:

When it comes to the artists' performances, Ananya Nagalla stands out, playing an interesting role, especially in the second half. She plays a different role and this film helps her showcase

her performance from another angle. She is the only highlight of the film.

Vennela Kishore plays the title role, but he is a complete waste and his role is uninteresting. His accent, performance and character are all disappointing. He fails to contribute to the film with his presence.

Ravi Teja Dasyam plays a regular role and Siya Gautam is seen after a long time, but her role offers nothing. Prabhakar and Aneesh Kuruvilla justify their roles. There are many others in the film, but none of them are impressive.

Verdict:

Finally, *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes* is a complete dud, lacking even a single impressive scene. There is no comedy, emotion, or suspense in this film, which is supposed to be a crime comedy. Writer Mohan has made a disappointing debut with this film and despite being an experienced writer, he failed to showcase his strong writing skills. Vamsi Nandipati, who surprisingly liked this film, made exaggerated claims, such as *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes* being the highest grosser after *Pushpa 2*. This time, his judgment is completely wrong regarding this film.

Cast: Vennela Kishore, Ananya Nagalla, Ravi Teja Dasyam, Aneesh Kuruvilla, Baahubali Prabhakar, Bhadram, Nag Mahesh and others

Music director: Sunil Kashyap

Cinematographer: N Mallikarjun

Producer: Vennapusa Ramana Reddy

Writer and director: Writer Mohan

Rating: 1/5

STANDALONE



Actor Dharmam, who is set to appear in the upcoming film *Drinker Sai*, has always been a huge fan of Prabhas. At a recent event, the makers of *Drinker Sai* invited a special guest, Kiran Raj, who is known for being Prabhas' doppelganger. Interestingly, Prabhas himself had wished Dharmam success for the film, making the occasion even more special.

Suhas's next is a sparkling romantic comedy

Actor Suhas began his career as a character artiste but soon transitioned to lead roles. He has achieved success as a lead actor with a diverse range of scripts and is now set to appear in another film titled *Oh Bhama Ayyo Rama*. According to the makers, this film is a romantic comedy. Ram Godhala is making his directorial debut with this film, while Malavika Manoj, known for her role in "Joe", is making her debut as the female lead opposite Suhas. Described as a sparkling comedy that is witty and playful, the film explores the dynamics between a young man and his romantic interest in a lighthearted manner. *Oh Bhama Ayyo Rama* is a unique love story. The makers have released a glimpse video from the film, which opens with a romantic scene featuring the lead pair driving in a vintage car. However, the mood shifts when the car breaks down, forcing the male lead to get out and push.

Harish Nalla is producing the film, while Anita Hassanandani, known for her role in *Nuvvu Nenu*, is set to make a comeback with a prominent role in this film. Radhan is composing the music.



Pradeep Machiraju shakes his leg with Chandrika Ravi

Pradeep Machiraju is a known face after his shows on Television and also his characters in films. He is also played as lead actor in '30 Rojullo Preminchadam Ela' and the film is an instant hit because of its music.

Now, Pradeep is coming up with his second film as lead actor, titled 'Akkada Ammayi Ikkada Abbayi'. Directed by duo Nitin and Bharath,

it promises to be a unique blend of romance and family drama. Deepika Pilli is playing the female lead, while produced by the Monks & Monkeys banner.

The film has already generated a lot of buzz, with the release of its first look and first single receiving a positive response. On this Christmas day, the makers released the film's second single 'Touch Lo Undu' fea-

turing Pradeep Machiraju and Chandrika Ravi. After the romantic ballad 'Le Le', which featured the lead pair, the second song 'Touch Lo Undu' brings in a lively, high-energy beat perfect for mass appeal. Chandrika Ravi adds a touch of glamour as she dances alongside Pradeep Machiraju in a lively and colourful setting. Sandeep Bolla has penned the story and dialogues.

Vishwak Sen's dual role doubles the excitement

Christmas has turned out to be much merrier for the fans as Telugu filmmakers are sharing glimpses of their upcoming films. Vishwak Sen has also unveiled his look from his forthcoming film, *Laila*. In this movie, he plays an unconventional role, showcasing his versatility by portraying both a male and female character.

Directed by Ram Narayan and produced by Sahu Garapati, the makers had earlier released *Laila's* eye look and a release date poster. The first look poster

of the film features Vishwak Sen in a stylish and affluent avatar.

As Sonu Model, he is seen with a tattoo around his neck and additional tattoos on his hands that read 'Sonu Lover' and 'Sonu Killer'. Although Vishwak Sen's transformation into a female character is remarkable, the complete look of this character has yet to be revealed.

This film also marks the debut of Akanksha Sharma as the female lead. *Laila* is scheduled for a worldwide release on Valentine's Day, February 14.

