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'Cong's lies cannot hide its insults to Ambedkar' 5



'WE HAVE TO WAIT AND WATCH TO SEE HOW IT PANS OUT': OFFICIAL 8



'Accent is not just used as a comedy, but emotion in *Srikakulam Sherlock* HOLMES' P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY

the pioneer

Some MLAs are coming to the Assembly after consuming liquor in the morning. These Members don't know what they are saying in the House. A breath analyser test should be conducted on legislators before they enter the House



- Harish Rao, BRS MLA

P4

DON'T MISS...

Man killed over financial row

A 25-year-old man was brutally murdered over a financial dispute in Old Guntur. The deceased has been identified as Chappidi Deepak, a resident of Chenchupet in Tenali. It is alleged that Deepak was killed by his friend, Gaddala Kiran, along with four others. According to the police, Deepak had borrowed Rs 50,000 from Kiran a few months ago for personal needs. Although Deepak's father, Chandrasekhar, had assured Kiran that the amount would be repaid, no payment was made despite several months passing...

-PAGE: 3

India, China agree to maintain peace

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Wednesday held "substantive discussions" during the Special Representatives dialogue here and reached a six-point consensus, including continuing to take measures to maintain peace at borders and promote healthy and stable development of relations. During their meeting, the first after a gap of five years, both sides positively evaluated the solution reached between the two countries on border issues and reiterated that the implementation...

-PAGE: 5

Central govt amends aircraft security rules

Against the backdrop of the recent spate of hoax bomb calls targeting airlines, the government has amended the aircraft security rules whereby perpetrators can face penalties and could even be barred from flying. The civil aviation ministry has amended the Aircraft (Security) Rules, 2023. Two new rules -- 29A and 30A -- have been introduced. In October, airlines received 666 hoax bomb threats while the total number of such threats stood at 999 this year till November 14, as per official data. Under the amended...

-PAGE: 8

Melbourne with confidence: Rohit

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma hailed the resilience of the lower-order batters after his team managed to salvage a crucial draw in the rain-hit third Test against Australia here on Wednesday, saying the side it has given the side renewed confidence for the remaining series. With the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy now tied 1-1, Rohit believes the team's morale will be high during the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. "I mean, we will take that. Obviously to have interruptions like that wasn't great, but going to Melbourne...

-SPORTS



Dy CM: ₹70K cr push for potable water in State

Slams previous govt for neglecting Jal Jeevan Mission

- Pawan Kalyan highlights frequent complaints about water shortages despite laid pipelines.
- Detailed project report to be submitted by Jan 2025.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Wednesday said he frequently received complaints about the lack of water from people.

He made this remark while inaugurating a Jal Jeevan Mission workshop. The Jal Jeevan Mission is a Central government initiative aimed at providing safe and adequate drinking water through household tap connections to all rural households by 2024.

"Wherever I go, people complain that while pipelines have been laid, water isn't flowing. Even in my constituency, Pithapuram, water comes very slowly," Kalyan said, addressing the workshop attended by rural water supply officials from across the state.

Kalyan accused the previous YSRCP government of "neglecting" the scheme, claiming that while a smaller state like Kerala has sought Rs 46,000 crore for the mission, the previous government requested only Rs 26,000 crore.

He further claimed that the YSRCP government "failed" to contribute its share of funds, which hindered the scheme's implementation.

Referring to a conversation with Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil, Kalyan said the minister also pointed to the YSRCP government's "negligence" towards the Jal Jeevan Mission.

Kalyan, who also oversees the Panchayat Raj Ministry, accused the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led dispensation of wasting Rs 4,000 crore allocated for the scheme and acting against the central government's intentions.

Kalyan said he has requested Rs 70,000 crore for the state under the mission and was advised by Patil to submit a detailed project report (DPR).

The Deputy CM added that the DPR would be submitted in January 2025 and assured that drinking water would be provided to every household under the mission.



Govt rolls out 'Investment Tracker' for project monitoring

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has introduced a digital platform, Investment Tracker, to ensure timely monitoring and implementation of industrial projects. Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad highlighted this during a review meeting held on Wednesday at the State Secretariat. The session focussed on streamlining the State Investment Promotion Committee (SIPC) projects and expediting approvals for industrial units.

Continued on Page 2

Shah's remarks on Ambedkar trigger uproar



Opposition stalls Parlament, seeks HM's sacking

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A massive political row erupted on Wednesday as the Congress and other opposition parties launched an all-out attack on Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks on B R Ambedkar and demanded his sacking.

As opposition parties unitedly protested against Shah and stalled both houses of Parliament, alleging that his remarks had insulted Ambedkar and demanding his apology, Shah said that the Congress had distorted his comments under a malicious campaign after the discussion on the Constitution "established" that the opposition party was against Ambedkar and reservation.

Parties like the Congress, Trinamool Congress, AAP, RJD, SP, Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Left protested against Shah inside Parliament and outside.

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien submitted a notice to move a privilege motion against Shah in the Rajya Sabha, where the Home Minister made the remarks.

Continued on Page 2

PARITALA RAVI MURDER CASE

HC grants bail to 5 accused after 18 yrs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Wednesday granted bail to five persons accused in the high-profile murder case of former minister and TDP leader Paritala Ravindra (Paritala Ravi). The bail comes 18 years after the incident, which took place in January 2005.

While appearing for the petitioners Narayana Reddy (A-3), Rekhamayya (A-4), Ranganayakulu (A-5), Vadde Konda (A-6), and Obireddy (A-8), advocate Swarupa Reddy submitted that in the present case, the applicants are not the prime accused and they are languishing in jail for more than 18 years. She further argued that they have good chances of acquittal as the court below has truly gone on tenuous circumstantial evidence to connect them to the crime which will not stand the test of law. She maintained that the benefit of doubt should be given to them and sought a direction to the authorities concerned to release them on remission. The High Court's decision has drawn much attention, given the prolonged duration of the case, which has been under legal proceedings for nearly two decades.



Paritala Ravi, a prominent political figure and leader of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), was brutally murdered on January 24, 2005, in Penukonda, Anantapur district. His killing sent shockwaves through the political landscape of Andhra Pradesh at the time, with far-reaching political and social consequences. The case has been marked by protracted investigations and multiple legal proceedings. Over the years, several people were arrested in connection with the murder, making the trial one of the most high-profile in the State.

The granting of bail to the accused after such a long period has sparked mixed reactions. While some view the decision as a step towards justice, others have expressed concern over the prolonged delay in resolving the case. As the legal process continues, the next developments in the Paritala Ravi murder case will be closely watched, given its controversial and enduring significance in the State's political history.

Gajuwaka student dies in Canada

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A student from Gajuwaka, Phani Kumar, has died while pursuing his MS in Canada.

He was found dead in his room.

His roommates informed the family in India about the sad news.

The family has requested the help of Visakhapatnam MP Sribharat, Gajuwaka MLA Palla Srinivas, and the district collector to speed up the process of repatriating his body to India.

The family is waiting for assistance to bring Phani Kumar's body back for the final rites.

TDP's official YouTube channel hacked

Efforts underway to restore access

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The official YouTube channel of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has been hacked, resulting in its suspension since Wednesday morning. Users attempting to access the channel have reported encountering a "Page Not Available" error message, making the platform inaccessible.

In response, the TDP's technical team has initiated an investigation to identify the hackers and restore the channel's normal operation. The party has also filed a formal complaint with YouTube's management, seeking prompt assistance to resolve the issue and bring the channel back online.

The TDP's YouTube channel is a vital communication tool for the party, serving as the primary platform for broadcasting live press conferences from the party's central office, covering events, and sharing speeches by prominent leaders, including party chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. It has become an essential medium for disseminating news and updates on the party's activities to its wide base of followers, including party leaders, cadres, and supporters.

This breach marks a significant concern for the party, as it is the first such incident.

The channel has long been a crucial link between the party and its followers, enabling engagement with the public. The leadership has expressed concern over the possible disruption of communication and its impact on outreach efforts.

The TDP's leadership is focused on tracking the origin of the hack and bringing those responsible to justice. The technical team is working closely with YouTube to ensure the swift restoration of the channel, which is expected to play a key role in future communications about the party's activities and upcoming events. As investigations continue, the TDP has assured its supporters that it remains committed to resolving the situation and will take all necessary steps to prevent such incidents in the future.



CM to take part in 'Revenue Sadassu' tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is scheduled to attend the Revenue Conference at Ganguru in Penamaluru Mandal, Krishna district, on December 20. Ahead of his visit, District Collector DK Balaji, Superintendent of Police R Gangadhara Rao, and Penamaluru MLA Bode Prasad inspected the arrangements on Wednesday.

As part of his district tour, CM Naidu will also review the paddy procurement process at the Venkatadri Oils Private Limited Rice Mill near the Rythu Seva Kendra.

Continued on Page 2

Central Sahitya Akademi Award for Penugonda

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Renowned writer Penugonda Lakshminarayana has been conferred with the prestigious Central Sahitya Akademi Award for his work, Deepika Abhyudaya Vyasa Samputi.

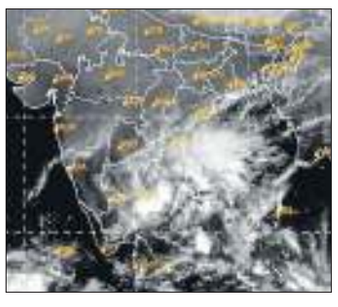
Lakshminarayana, a lawyer based in Guntur, has been an active member of the Progressive Writers' Association since 1972, holding various positions at district, state, and national levels. He made history as the first Telugu literary figure to be elected national president of the association in 2023. His literary journey began with the poem Samidha in 1972.

On Wednesday, the Sahitya Akademi announced the winners for 21 languages across the country. This year's awards include eight poetry collections, three novels, two short stories, three essay compilations, and three books on literary criticism. Additionally, one book on drama and research was also selected. Awards for the Bengali, Dogri, and Urdu languages will be announced in the next phase.

Continued on Page 2

Heavy rain likely in north coastal AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR



The low pressure area over the southwest Bay of Bengal, with the associated cyclonic circulation extending up to 5.8 km above sea level, has become more marked and continues to lie over the same region, according to the Meteorological Centre.

In its daily weather update on Wednesday, the Centre said the low pressure area is likely to move northwestwards towards the North Tamil Nadu and South Andhra Pradesh coasts within the next 24 hours. It is then expected to move northwards along the Andhra Pradesh coast in the following 24 hours.

Heavy rain is expected at isolated places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next 48 hours. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely in isolated areas of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh on December 19. Thunderstorms with lightning are also expected in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the same period.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers are expected at many places or isolated locations in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next seven days. Rainfall was recorded at a few places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and at one or two places in Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours, the report added.

'INDIA CHARGES LOT OF TARIFF'

Trump threatens to impose reciprocal tax

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump has reiterated his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for the high tariff imposed by India on import of certain American products.

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"Reciprocal. If they tax us, we tax them the same amount. They tax us. We tax them. And they tax us. Almost in all cases, they're taxing us, and we haven't been taxing them," Trump told reporters on Monday.

He made the remarks while responding to a question on a potential trade agreement with China. Trump said India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"The word reciprocal is important because if somebody charges us — India, we don't have to talk about our own — if India charges us 100 per cent, do we charge them nothing for the same? You know, they send in a bicycle and we send them a bicycle. They charge us 100 and 200. India charges a lot. Brazil charges a lot. If they want to charge us, that's fine, but we're going to charge them the same thing," Trump said at a news conference at Mar-a-Lago. Responding to a question, his Commerce Secretary pick Howard Lutnick said "reciprocity" is something that is going to be a key topic for the Trump administration. "How you treat us is how you should expect to be treated," he said.



During his election campaign in October, Trump has claimed that India imposes the highest tariffs on foreign products. But they do it with a smile.

"Perhaps the most important element of my plan to make America extraordinarily wealthy again is reciprocity. It's a word that's very important in my plan because we generally don't charge tariffs. I started that process, it was so great, with the vans and the small trucks, etc," Trump had said Thursday in October. In 2019, Trump has repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on American products.

He has criticised India's "big tariffs" on American paper products and the iconic Harley-Davidson bikes. The US is the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at USD 77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at USD 42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

During April-October this fiscal, the country's exports to America rose by 6.31 per cent to USD 47.24 billion, while imports grew by 2.46 per cent to USD 26 billion. Between FY 2020 and FY 2024, India's merchandise exports to America rose by 46 per cent from USD 53.1 billion to USD 77.5 billion. Imports from the US also grew to USD 42.2 billion last fiscal from USD 35.8 billion in 2019-20.

Continued on Page 2

Naidu's governance focus leaves TDP workers feeling abandoned

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP), once celebrated for its grassroots strength and disciplined cadre, is facing growing internal challenges. Despite Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's focus on governance and the rebuilding of Andhra Pradesh, party workers are increasingly disillusioned, citing a lack of political accountability and insufficient attention to their concerns.

The frustration among the cadre is rooted in their experiences during the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) regime led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Many endured harassment, false cases, and targeted attacks, hoping for swift justice once the TDP returned to power. However, the cautious approach of the TDP-led coalition government has left many workers disappointed. Investigations into alleged irregularities, including scams in liquor policy and power contracts during the YSRCP era, remain inconclusive. Adding to the discontent, bureaucrats seen as instrumental under the YSRCP continue to hold influential positions, while some former YSRCP leaders have found a place in the ruling coalition, eroding trust among the rank and file.

A disconnect between the leadership and grassroots workers is becoming increasingly evident. Loyalists who stood by the party during its years in opposition now feel sidelined. Decisions like appointing Sana Satish, a political outsider, to a key position have deepened the resentment, with many perceiving such moves as prioritising wealth over dedication. Instances like YSRCP leader Jogi Ramesh appearing alongside TDP leaders at a recent function have further alienated workers, who view such gestures as signs of leniency towards adversaries.

The gap between the TDP leadership and its grassroots workers is growing more apparent. Long-time loyalists who supported the party through its opposition years now feel neglected.



RAMESH KANDULA
Chief Editor Swatantra TV and author

Appointments such as that of Sana Satish, a political outsider, to a prominent role, have intensified their frustration, with many seeing it as a preference for wealth over commitment. Besides, events like YSRCP leader Jogi Ramesh sharing the stage with TDP leaders at a recent function have further estranged workers, who interpret such actions as a soft approach towards rivals.

Naidu's focus on governance, while aimed at bolstering public support, has drawn criticism for its lack of aggressive political messaging. Some argue that the TDP's perceived inertia in countering YSRCP's influence could enable Jagan's resurgence by 2029, a prospect that deeply concerns party workers.

The TDP must recalibrate its priorities to regain its momentum. Recognising the sacrifices of its cadre and addressing their grievances is crucial. Taking decisive and transparent action against YSRCP's alleged malpractices could restore both morale and public confidence. Rewarding loyalty and commitment over affluence in decision-making will be equally important. The party's revival hinges on bridging the gap between its leadership and workers, balancing governance with assertive political accountability to secure its place in Andhra Pradesh's dynamic political landscape.

Minister Sandhyarani highlights key welfare achievements in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Women, Child Welfare, and Tribal Welfare, Gummidi Sandhyarani, outlined significant achievements of the coalition government in her department's efforts over the first six months of the Chandrababu Naidu government. She chaired a review meeting with officials from the Women's Development and Child Welfare and Tribal Welfare Departments on Wednesday to discuss progress since June 2024.



Minister Sandhyarani highlighted several key initiatives, including the allocation of ?52.68 crores for the construction of toilets and provision of drinking water facilities in Anganwadi centers. She also mentioned the allocation of ₹40.54 crores to upgrade 8,853 Anganwadi centers with facilities such as nutrition gardens, rainwater harvesting, LED screens, and RO water purifiers. The Minister announced the procurement and distribution of 80,194 growth monitoring devices, worth ₹10.18 crores, to track children's nutritional status. She added that ₹4.76 crores had been released for 34.66 lakh Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) books aimed at enhancing literacy among children aged 3 to 6 years.

Sandhyarani noted the launch of 139 new Anganwadi centers under PMJANMAN to improve living conditions for vulnerable tribal groups. A total of 5.98 lakh community-based events, including health and nutrition programs, have been organized across all AWCs. The Minister also reported the successful prevention of 780 child marriages through monitoring committees.

Further developments included the filling of 301 posts at district-level AWCs, 126 at one-stop centres, and 94 vacancies at Mission Vatsalya. An amount of ₹6.14 crores has been allocated for the rehabilitation of 1,296 victims of violence.

The Minister also emphasized the successful rescue of 371 children from child labour and begging during special drives between July and November. A Surya Kumari, Secretary of the Women's Development and Child Welfare Department, and M. Vengopal Reddy, Director, along with other officials, were present at the meeting.

Rs 30 cr investment for Nuzivid Market Yard: Kolusu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/NUZVID

The renowned Nuzvid mangoes, celebrated both nationally and internationally, are set to receive a major boost with the development of the Nuzvid Market Yard, thanks to an investment of Rs 30 crore. This initiative was announced by Minister for Housing, Information & Public Relations, Kolusu Parthasarathi, during a review meeting at the local market yard on Wednesday. The meeting brought together farmers, traders, and officials to discuss plans for enhancing mango marketing facilities.



Minister Parthasarathi highlighted that while Nuzvid mangoes enjoy a distinct identity in the market, recent declines in quality have led to significant financial losses for farmers. He assured that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is fully committed to the development of the agricultural sector, with various subsidised schemes aimed at supporting farmers. The Minister also announced the reintroduction of a crop insurance scheme for mangoes, which had been neglected by the previous government.

To aid the economic growth of mango farmers, Parthasarathi revealed plans to improve transportation infrastructure and introduce air cargo services for exporting high-quality mangoes to international markets. He urged farmers to focus on enhancing the quality of mango production to preserve the esteemed reputation of Nuzvid mangoes.

The Minister also recalled how mango farmers had raised concerns during Nara Lokesh's Yuvagalam padayatra, with promises to address their issues. In response, Rs 30 crore will be invested in infrastructural upgrades at the market yard to support the production of premium mangoes.

Parthasarathi emphasised the need for collaboration between farmers, traders, and scientists to safeguard the brand of Nuzvid mangoes. A committee of horticulturists, marketing experts, and mango researchers will be formed to educate farmers on improving yields, production techniques, and soil health.

Furthermore, the Minister touched upon the environmental clearances required for the Chintalapudi Lift Irrigation Scheme, assuring that the project would be completed soon. Plans for establishing food processing units and a food park in Nuzvid were also announced, aiming to create job opportunities for two million youth and foster industrial entrepreneurship through a new policy targeting one entrepreneur per household.

Vijaya Sunitha, Director of the Agriculture Marketing Department, commended the high demand for Nuzvid mangoes, while stressing the importance of reducing chemical use and improving crop quality. Efforts to raise awareness on these matters will be undertaken to support farmers in achieving better production standards.

Other officials present at the meeting included Marketing Department Joint Director Srinivas, Deputy Director Lavanyaveni, Executive Engineer Srinivasarao, Nuzvid RDO M. Vani, and Horticulture Department Additional Director Haranadha Reddy.

Shah's remarks...

Continued from Page 1

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge warned that there will be a countrywide agitation if Shah does not resign. Congress president Kharge too addressed a press conference and demanded that Shah resign or else PM Modi should sack him. Kharge said a person becomes a minister by taking oath of the Constitution and if he insults it, he has no right to remain in the Cabinet. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said, "Baba Saheb is the architect of the Constitution, a great man who gave direction to the country. The country will not tolerate his insult or the insult to the Constitution framed by him. Home Minister should apologize!" Several MPs of the INDIA bloc also held a protest in Parliament premises demanding Shah's apology for his remarks on Ambedkar.

The uproar in Parliament also spilt onto the streets of the national capital and other states like Maharashtra, Bihar and Tamil Nadu where various parties held protests. In Delhi, AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal led a protest with hundreds of supporters outside the BJP chanting slogans of "Amit Shah maafi maango, Amit Shah sharm karo". "Abhi ek fashion ho gaya hai - Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Itna naam agar bhagwan ka lete to saat janmon tak swarg mil jata (It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar'. If they had taken God's name so many times, they would have got a place in heaven)," Shah had said in the Rajya Sabha during the debate on Constitution.

Notifications issued for major & medium irrigation project panel polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The final stage of the Water Users' Associations (WUA) elections has begun with the issuance of election notifications for the Major and Medium Irrigation Project Committees. The elections for the Project Committees (PCs) are scheduled for December 21. The election officers for the NSP Project Committee, A. Sri Rama Krishna (Pulichintala Project SE), and the Krishna Eastern Delta Project Committee, R. Mohana Rao (Irrigation Circle, Vijayawada), issued the general body meeting notifications on Wednesday.

The Nagarjuna Sagar Project Committee election will take place at the Farmers Training Centre within the Irrigation Compound premises in Vijayawada, while the Krishna Eastern Delta Project Committee election will be held at the Collectorate meeting hall in Machilipatnam.

Initially, the Project Committee elections were set for December 20; however, the state government rescheduled the date to December 21 due to technical reasons. In the erstwhile Krishna District, two Project Committees are active: the Nagarjuna Sagar Lal Bahadur Canal (Left) Project Committee within the Nagarjuna Sagar Project and the Krishna Eastern Delta Project Committee.

The general body meetings will begin at 9 am, followed by the receipt of nominations for the Project Committee Chairman position from 9 am to 9.15 am. The list of contesting candidates will be announced at 9.30 am. If there is more than one candidate, voting will take place from 9.30 am to 10 am. The election process for Vice Chairman posts will start at 11 am and conclude by 12.30 pm.

Under the Nagarjuna Sagar Project Committee, there are 17 Distributary Committees, while the Krishna Eastern Delta Project Committee has 32 DCs. The respective DC presidents will elect the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen for the Project Committees. These elections are crucial for ensuring effective water resource management and governance across the region's irrigation projects.

Cong demands apology from Amit Shah for remarks on Ambedkar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Congress party has strongly condemned the remarks made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah about Dr BR Ambedkar and has called for an apology.

Speaking to the media here on Wednesday, APCC vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji stated that Union Minister Amit Shah made derogatory remarks in Parliament regarding the architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar. "Amit Shah has no right to speak about Dr BR Ambedkar, and he should



apologise to the nation for his inappropriate comments," Shivaji demanded.

"People of India hold in high regard leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhagat Singh, Subhash Chandra Bose, and Dr BR Ambedkar. To degrade Ambedkar in Parliament is completely improper and objectionable. The Home Minister must offer an unconditional apology to the nation," he added. Shivaji also called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi to remove Amit Shah from the Union Cabinet.

The Congress leader further criticised both Modi and Shah, saying, "The Prime Minister and Home Minister have shown no faith in the Indian Constitution but frequently speak about Manusmriti. It is wrong for the Prime Minister to defend Amit Shah's com-

VIKSIT BHARAT 2047 & SWARNANDHRA 2047



Lanka asks Centre for budgetary support to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/NEW DELHI

Lanka Dinakar, Chairperson of the Twenty Points Programs Implementation (Viksit Bharat 2047 & Swarna Andhra 2047) in Andhra Pradesh, has submitted a proposal to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, seeking vital support for the state's development in the upcoming Union Budget 2025-26.

Dinakar acknowledged the Union Government's financial backing for key projects like Amaravati, the Polavaram Irrigation Project, and industrial nodes such as Orvakallu and Koparthi.

He called for continued assistance to further these initiatives, focusing on capital expenditure and long-term interest-free loans to boost infrastructure development.

The proposal includes several key recommendations, such as funding for a "Skill Census" to improve industrial skills, support for additional projects under the PM Gatishakti Yojana, and Rs. 2-2.5 Lakh Crores in interest-free loans for irrigation and drought-prone areas. It also proposes reforms to MGNREGA, linking job cards to Aadhaar for better tracking, and a review of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) for more efficient distribution.

Dinakar also requests a Rs. 50,000 Crore fund for the development of the Eastern region, including Andhra Pradesh, and highlights the need for special attention to Prakasam District and prioritization for Production Linked Incentives (PLI) in renewable energy and technological manufacturing.

AP govt rolls out....

Continued from Page 1

Addressing the challenges posed by the lack of district-level officials in some departments, the Chief Secretary directed that General Managers of District Industries Centres (DICs) should act as nodal officers. He urged that proposals for new industrial units be presented to the District Industrial Promotion and Export Committee (DIEPC), headed by district collectors, to facilitate timely permissions.

The Investment Tracker will be used to monitor projects from the Detailed Project Report (DPR) stage to final implementation. Neerabh Kumar Prasad described it as an efficient tool to identify and resolve obstacles, ensuring seamless project execution. Government departments will use the platform to track project status, update information, and address bottlenecks. Investors can also access the portal to check their project's progress, promoting transparency and accountability.

The Chief Secretary instructed officials to monitor projects under SIPC and SIPB (State Investment Promotion Board) for prompt approvals. He further directed line departments from 14 sectors, including Industry & Infrastructure, IT & Communications, and Food Processing, to submit weekly progress reports. District collectors were tasked with regularly reviewing the Investment Tracker dashboard.

Senior officials, including Special Chief Secretary (Energy Department) K Vijay Anand, MD NEDCAP KVN Chakradhar Babu, Director of Industries Abhisikth Kishore, and Joint Director of Industries Ramalingeswara Raju, participated in the meeting.

CM to take part in 'Revenue...

Continued from Page 1

Collector Balaji, SP Gangadhara Rao, and MLA Prasad, along with officials from various departments, visited the designated sites and held a coordination meeting with officials from Agriculture, Revenue, Panchayat Raj, R&B, and other departments to finalise arrangements for the CM's visit.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Balaji emphasised the importance of seamless coordination among departments to ensure the success of the event. He mentioned that the Chief Minister would interact directly with farmers to discuss paddy procurement and assess the facilities provided by the Rythu Seva Kendras. Following this, the CM will visit the rice mill and proceed to the Revenue Conference at Ganguru village, he added.

The Collector also instructed the R&B department to ensure pothole-free roads in areas included in the CM's itinerary.

Additionally, he directed officials to expedite the preparation of the helipad and ensure all other logistical arrangements were in place. Prominent officials, including Krishna District Joint Collector Geethanjali Sharma, Vuyyuru RDO Sharon, DSO Parvathi, and Agriculture Joint Director Padmavati, were present during the inspection.

Trump threatens to...

Continued from Page 1

On the other hand, trade in services between the two nations expanded 30.3 per cent from USD 54.1 billion in 2018 to an estimated USD 70.5 billion in 2024.

India is also a key destination for American businesses such as professional, scientific, and technical services, manufacturing, and IT. Washington is the third largest investor. India received USD 66.7 billion of FDI inflow between April 2000 and June 2024.

Central Sahitya Akademi...

Continued from Page 1

A distinguished panel of literary figures from various Indian languages served as jury members, recommending books for this prestigious honour. The Sahitya Akademi executive board, chaired by Madhav Kaushik, met on Wednesday to announce the winners. The awards ceremony will be held on March 8 next year in New Delhi. Each winner will receive a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh and a shawl, in recognition of their contributions to literature.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	
Chaturthi:	Dec 18 10:06 AM to Dec 19 10:03 AM
Panchami:	Dec 19 10:03 AM to Dec 20 10:49 AM
Nakshatram:	
Ashlesha:	Dec 19 12:58 AM to Dec 20 01:59 AM
Magha:	Dec 20 01:59 AM to Dec 21 03:47 AM
Rahukalam:	1:35 PM to 2:57 PM
Yamagandam:	6:44 AM to 8:06 AM
Varjyam:	02:53 PM to 04:36 PM
Gulika:	9:28 AM to 10:51 AM
Amritakalam:	12:19 AM to 01:59 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:51 AM to 12:35 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Scattered Showers
Temp: 29°c
Humidity: 76%
Sunrise: 6:30 AM
Sunset: 5:39 PM

Updated: December 18, 2024 5:00 PM

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
ROADS & BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
NIT No.07/MDR-SDMF/ENC(MDR)/2024. Dt.17.12.2024
Online tenders are invited under e-platform for 2 No of works for an amount of **Rs.7.80 Crores** in Alluri Seetharamaraju District & 3 No. of works for **Rs.6.97 Crores** in Eluru District under SDMF. Tenderers can download the tender schedules from e-market place i.e., **www.apeprocurement.gov.in** from **20.12.2024, 3.00 PM** onwards.
R.O.No: 1489/2/CL/ADMT/R1/2021-22, Dt. 16.12.2024 Sd/- Engineer-in-Chief (R&B) MDRs

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Six lakh devotees expected for Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment

NTR District Collector, Police Commissioner inspect arrangements at Durga Temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha, Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanachandra, Kanaka Durga Temple Executive Officer KS Rama Rao, and other officials, on Wednesday, inspected the preparations for the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment. The event will take place at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam located atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada from December 21-25.

The NTR district authorities anticipate over six lakh devotees to visit the temple during the five-day event. To accommodate the influx, temple authorities, in coordination with various departments, are ensuring all necessary arrangements are in place. During the inspection, both the District Collector and Police Commissioner expressed satisfaction with the preparations and commended the efforts to facilitate a smooth and secure experience for devotees.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Lakshmisha said that the Durga Temple is all set for the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment and that they are providing swift darshan facilities for the Bhavani devotees without any hurdles. An average of at least one lakh to 1.5 lakh devotees will visit the temple every day. The district administration is making comprehensive arrangements for the Deeksha relinquishment, he said.



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NTR District collector Dr G Lakshmisha, Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu, VMC Commissioner HM Dhyanachandra, Durga Temple EO Rajasekhar Babu and others inspecting the arrangements for Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment at the Durga Temple in Vijayawada on Wednesday

He added that all these arrangements are meant to ensure quick darshan, and three Homa Gundams are being provided to offer Irumudi. Bathing facilities are arranged in River Krishna.

The Police Commissioner said that for the purpose of the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment, a special app has been made available for the devotees. Through this app, the devotees can learn about the queue lines, waiting halls, parking areas, Laddu Prasadam counters, Anna Prasada and all other facilities at the Durga Temple, he said.

Durga Temple EO Rama Rao told Collector Lakshmisha and CP Rajasekhar Babu that around 800 bathing showers are being arranged at all bathing ghats in Krishna.

Vijayawada RDO K Chaitanya, Temple Executive Engineers KVS Koteswara Rao, Additional DCP G Ramakrishna, West Zone ACP Durga Rao and others accompanied the officials.

Minister opens Civil Services Study Circle for BC candidates

Permanent study centre will come up in Amaravati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC Welfare, EWS Welfare, Handloom & Textiles, S Savitha, has stated that the State government has established the Civil Services Study Circle for BC candidates, offering facilities comparable to corporate study circles. She encouraged aspiring civil servants to take full advantage of this initiative to achieve their career goals. The temporary Study Circle will be continued at the BC Bhavan and later, a permanent building will be constructed at Amaravati with the encouragement of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, she added.

On Wednesday, Minister Savitha inaugurated the BC Civil Services Study Circle at Gollapudi in Vijayawada Rural mandal. Firstly, he paid rich tributes to Mahatma Jyothiba Pule. She inaugurated digital classrooms, a digital library and group discussion rooms in the study circle.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Savitha emphasised that the study circle aims to provide equal opportunities and resources to BC candidates, enabling them to compete effectively in Civil Services examinations. For the Civil Services coaching, as many as 100 candidates were shortlisted out of 600 candidates who attended the eligibility test, she said. The State government is spending Rs.2 lakh per one candidate. So, they should prepare well and get good results, and bring a good name to the State, he added.

Further, she said soon after forming the government, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu put his first signature on the Mega DSC order.

Also, free DSC coaching centres have been started in all 26 districts, she said. She announced that the government will start an online DSC coaching facility soon.

Mylavaram MLA Vasantha Krishna Prasad, Tiruvuru MLA Kolikapudi Srinivasa Rao, BC Welfare Department Director Dr A Mallikharjuna, Secretary Pola Bhaskar and others attended the programme.



BC Welfare Minister S Savitha inaugurating the BC Civil Services Study Circle at Gollapudi near Vijayawada on Wednesday

Minister Savitha emphasised that the study circle aims to provide equal opportunities and resources to BC candidates, enabling them to compete effectively in Civil Services examinations. For the Civil Services coaching, as many as 100 candidates were shortlisted out of 600 candidates who attended the eligibility test, she said

Man killed over financial row

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A 25-year-old man was brutally murdered over a financial dispute in Old Guntur. The deceased has been identified as Chappidi Deepak, a resident of Chenchupet in Tenali. It is alleged that Deepak was killed by his friend, Gaddala Kiran, along with four others.

According to the police, Deepak had borrowed Rs 50,000 from Kiran a few months ago for personal needs. Although Deepak's father, Chandrasekhar, had assured Kiran that the amount would be repaid, no payment was made despite several months passing.

On Monday, Kiran invited Deepak to a party in Guntur, claiming that his friends would also be present. Deepak arrived, and the group, including Kiran, Sivasankar, Ashok, Gopi, and Akbar, consumed alcohol on the outskirts of Balajinagar in Old Guntur. An argument broke out over the unpaid debt. In a drunken rage, Kiran and his associates severely assaulted Deepak, leaving him critically injured.

Realising the seriousness of the situation, the accused admitted Deepak to a government hospital under the alias 'Venkat Reddy.' Despite efforts to save him, Deepak succumbed to his injuries in the early hours of Wednesday while undergoing treatment.

His father, Chandrasekhar, subsequently filed a complaint with the police. A case has been registered, and investigations are underway. A manhunt has been launched for Kiran and the other accused, who are currently absconding.

Speaker announces expansion of Narsipatnam hospital

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Speaker of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu, has announced plans to expand the Narsipatnam NTR Government Hospital from its current capacity of 150 to 200 beds. This expansion aims to address the growing healthcare needs of the community.

The announcement was made during a development committee meeting held at the hospital. "We are working diligently to secure the required permissions for expanding the hospital to meet the increasing demand for healthcare services in the region," said Ayyanna Patrudu. He also expressed strong support for fundraising initiatives, urging the committee to meet monthly to track progress. "We must come together to raise funds for improving this hospital and its services."

Several key decisions were made during the meeting to improve the hospital's infrastructure and patient care. A solar system will be installed in the newly constructed building to ensure sustainable operations. Besides, Rs 15 lakh has been allocated for the renovation of the hospital's ambulance and doctors' quarters. Addressing concerns raised by doctors about the lack of a CT scan machine, Ayyanna Patrudu assured them of his commitment to securing the necessary funds. "I will work towards obtaining the funds for the CT scan, with support from NRIs and government channels," he stated. To enhance patient experience, fresh coloured bed sheets will be provided daily, and the Anna Canteen will now serve two meals and morning tiffin to patients and their attendants.



Ayyanna Patrudu also acknowledged the support of Anakapalli District Collector Vijaya Krishnan and emphasised the importance of continued collaboration to develop both Narsipatnam and Anakapalle hospitals through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) grants.

Freedom Fighters Museum to honour tribal heroes in Lambasingi

Officials asked to expedite construction works

PNS ■ PADERU

Sada Bhargavi, Director of the Tribal Welfare Department, has called for speeding up the construction of the Freedom Fighters Museum in Lambasingi, aimed at showcasing the rich cultural heritage and traditions of tribal communities.

During her inspection of the museum site on Wednesday, Bhargavi described the project as a potential "jewel in the crown" and instructed officials to fast-track its completion. Expressing dissatisfaction with the delays in construction, she ordered the termination of the existing contract and the issuance of fresh tenders.

"The museum must be completed without further delays. The tender process should be finalised by January 8, and construction must begin on January 16," Bhargavi stated.

Vizag to get Real-Time Governance centre

State-of-the-art hub to use technology for crime prevention, traffic management

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam is poised to revolutionise its governance and boost administrative efficiency with the development of a dedicated District Real-Time Governance (DTRG) facility. This state-of-the-art technology hub, currently under construction on the Collector's office premises, will serve as a central command centre for monitoring and managing various district activities.

"The DTRG will serve as a nerve centre for monitoring and controlling various activities in the district," said an official from the district administration. "With cutting-edge facial recognition technology and live feed monitoring, we aim to ensure a safer and more efficient environment." The facility will integrate live feeds from CCTV cameras installed by government agencies and private organisations across Visakhapatnam. A dedicated team of at least 30 personnel will monitor these feeds in real-time, enabling rapid response to criminal activities, traffic violations, and public safety concerns.



The centre will monitor crowd behaviour, detect violations like illegal parking and signal jumping, and observe waste disposal practices. Police and other relevant agency personnel will be stationed at the DTRG for a coordinated response to critical situations. "The real-time system will provide us with immediate insights into any disturbances or violations, enabling swift action," said another official involved in the project. "Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are being developed to ensure seamless operations, and the facility will also receive inputs from state headquarters for comprehensive coordination."

This initiative comes as the city acknowledges the underutilisation of existing infrastructure. Visakhapatnam already has command and control centres within the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) and the Police Commissionerates, which receive feeds from smart poles and CCTV cameras installed under the Smart City initiative.

Comprehensive health screening for children to come up

Initiative under National Child Health Programme aims to detect and address health concerns early

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam district administration is preparing to roll out a comprehensive health screening programme under the National Child Health Programme. This initiative aims to identify and address health issues at an early stage, ensuring timely interventions and a healthier future for children throughout the district. "We have instructed the health department to ensure that no child is left untreated," a senior government official said. "The government will bear all expenses, including referrals and specialised care."

The programme targets children from Anganwadi centres to those studying up to class 10. Following a two-phase model, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and Mid-Level Health Providers (MLAHPs) will conduct initial screenings to identify potential health concerns. Children requiring further attention will be referred to the nearest primary health centre for comprehensive examination and treatment.



For more complex cases, the District Early Intervention Centre (DEIC) at King George Hospital (KGH) in Visakhapatnam will provide specialised care, including surgeries for conditions such as cleft palate, congenital hearing impairments, and speech difficulties. Dr. P Jagadeeshwar Rao, District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO), underscored the importance of early intervention. "Parents often fail to recognise issues like speech and hearing impairments at an early stage, leading to delays in treatment. This programme bridges that gap and ensures timely medical intervention," he said.

To ensure efficient tracking and follow-up, each child enrolled in the programme will receive a dedicated health information card. These cards will record critical health parameters such as height, weight, nutritional status, and seven other key health indicators. A Health Department official clarified the importance of these records, stating, "These cards are not just documents but tools that allow continuous monitoring and serve as a roadmap for ensuring the child's overall health and well-being." The screenings will focus on four critical health areas: diseases, developmental delays, deformities, and deficiencies—commonly referred to as the "4 Ds." By addressing these concerns, the programme seeks to reduce the burden of paediatric health issues in the district and significantly improve the quality of life for affected children. The administration's initiative represents a significant advancement in enhancing healthcare services for children.

GITAM transfers innovative solar dehydration technology to Mizoram farmers

Designed to revolutionise drying process for agricultural products, reducing post-harvest losses and extending shelf life

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The GITAM Technology Enabling Centre (GTEC) at GITAM Deemed to be University has transferred its innovative 'Hybrid Solar Dehydrator with Automatic Temperature Controller' technology to the State of Mizoram. This technology is designed to revolutionise the drying process for various agricultural products, including herbs, spices, grains, fruits, and vegetables, significantly reducing post-harvest losses and extending shelf life.

A formal transfer ceremony took place in Mizoram on Wednesday, with the letter of transfer signed by Mizoram's Minister of Horticulture Department, Prof. Lalnilawma, and Prof. Raja P Pappu, GTEC Coordinator and Dean of GITAM School of Business.

The Hybrid Solar Dehydrator utilises a combination of solar energy for daytime operation and grid or stored energy for nighttime use, ensuring 24/7 functionality. Equipped with advanced sensors and an automated temperature control system, the dehydrator offers a customisable design adaptable to various products and applications.

"The Hybrid Solar Dehydrator is designed to process a wide range of products, from turmeric, mint, and ginger to grains like rice and wheat, as well as fruits such as mangoes and apples, and even medicinal plants like neem and moringa," said Prof. Raja P. Pappu. "This low-cost, energy-efficient technology not only aligns with Mizoram's sustainable development goals, but also opens new export opportunities for farmers, reduces food wastage, and boosts economic growth by creating employment."

The technology was developed by Dr. Karaka VVNR Chandra Mouli, Dr. Ravi Kumar Gurazada, and Sombhatt Shastri, with key support from Dr. Lalhmingliana Renthlei of Mizoram University.



Testing in Visakhapatnam during the summer months demonstrated the dehydrator's effectiveness. "During testing in Visakhapatnam's summer, the dehydrator achieved temperatures up to 89°C, effectively reducing moisture without compromising product quality," explained Dr. Mouli. "This efficiency makes it ideal for high-humidity regions like Mizoram, ensuring farmers can meet both local and export demands."

This eco-friendly solution addresses the challenges posed by high humidity, preserving the flavour, colour, and nutritional value of dried products. By mitigating post-harvest losses, the technology empowers small-scale farmers and MSMEs to increase productivity and income.

Prof. Lalnilawma expressed enthusiasm for the potential impact of the technology on Mizoram's agricultural sector. "This partnership with GITAM is a significant step toward improving agricultural practices in Mizoram," he stated. "The Hybrid Solar Dehydrator will help our farmers reduce losses and enhance their market competitiveness." This technology transfer promises significant benefits for Mizoram's agricultural community and economy.

Make 'Good Governance Week' prog a success: DC

PNS ■ ELURU



"The main objective of the GGW programme is to provide effective governance to the common people and offer quality solutions to their problems in a timely manner. As part of these activities, rallies and workshops should be organised in collaboration with field-level staff," she stated.

District Collector K Vetri Selvi has directed officials to ensure the success of the 'Good Governance Week' programmes, which will be held from December 19 to 24 in the district.

The Collector convened a meeting with officials on Wednesday to review the preparations for the 'Good Governance Week' (GGW).

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Vetri Selvi emphasised the need for a wide campaign and public awareness regarding the GGW programmes in the district.

She noted that the campaign, being conducted under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India, should raise awareness about the steps being taken by the district administration to address public grievances and enhance public service delivery.

"The main objective of the GGW programme is to provide effective governance to the common people and offer quality solutions to their problems in a timely manner. As part of these activities, rallies and workshops should be organised in collaboration with field-level staff," she stated.

The Collector also instructed that quizzes, essay writing, and oratory competitions be held in educational institutions to create awareness about good governance. She directed the officials to upload videos and photos of success stories related to government development and welfare programmes on the relevant portal.

"The district authorities should highlight at least three success stories regarding the resolution of public problems through the relevant departments. Steps should also be taken to organise a workshop at the Godavari Conference Hall on December 23 as part of the Good Governance Week celebrations," Collector Vetri Selvi added.

DRO V. Venkateswara Rao, In-charge ZP CEO and DRDA PD Dr. R. Vijayaraju, social welfare officer JV Jayaprakash, and DEO Venkata Lakshmamma were among those who attended the meeting.

435 lost/stolen mobile phones recovered

PNS ■ TIRUPATI



The Tirupati district police have recovered 435 lost or stolen mobile phones, valued at approximately Rs 87 lakh, over the past month.

Speaking to the media on Wednesday, Superintendent of Police (SP) L Subba Rayudu said special measures had been implemented to curb mobile thefts, especially in busy localities.

Highlighting the department's achievements, the SP stated that the Tirupati district police have recovered 4,275 lost or stolen mobile phones, worth Rs 7.56 crore, in 12 phases. During these phases, the recovered phones were handed over to their rightful owners. These devices were traced within Andhra Pradesh and in Kerala, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.

The SP informed that a dedicated WhatsApp number (94906 17873) has been set up for lodging complaints about lost or stolen mobile phones. Alternatively, complaints can also be registered through the Central Equipment Identity Register.

As Tirupati is a prominent spiritual centre attracting numerous pilgrims, incidents of lost or stolen phones are frequent. The SP urged victims to promptly report such cases using the available platforms.

In a cautionary note, the SP advised the public to refrain from opening links sent by unknown sources or sharing OTPs. He also warned against purchasing phones from mobile repair shops or unauthorised sources.

The SP lauded Cybercrime CI R Vinod Kumar for his efforts in recovering a significant number of lost or stolen phones. Additional SP Venkata Rao and other officials were present during the media briefing.

Award for Chittoor SP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

VN Manikantha Chandolu, Superintendent of Police (SP) of Chittoor District, has been awarded the first prize in the Award for Best in Crime Detection (ABCD) for the quarter of July to September. The Chittoor Police successfully detected a case involving the loot of Rs. 26 lakh from an ATM at Gudipala, using technological support. In recognition of this achievement, the Director General of Police (DGP), Ch. Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, presented the ABCD Award first prize to SP Manikantha during a meeting at the DGP office in Mangalagiri on Wednesday.

In addition, Guntakal Railway SP Rahul Meena secured second place for solving a case involving the looting of gold, cash, laptops, and mobile phones, where the perpetrators drugged passengers with cool drinks at Hindupur Railway. Kurnool SP Bindu Madhav won the third prize for successfully solving a murder case investigated by the Aspari police. Dr. BR Ambedkar Konaseema district SP B. Krishna Rao received a consolation prize for solving a theft case and arresting 11 interstate criminals.

The first-place winner received a cash prize of Rs. 1 lakh, the second prize was awarded Rs. 60,000, and the third prize winner received Rs. 40,000. The consolation prize winner received Rs. 20,000.

Additional DGP Ravi Shankar Ayyannar and other officials participated in the programme.

Dy CM Pawan Kalyan pledges support to Sankurathri Foundation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



In a significant development, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan extended his support to the Sankurathri Foundation. The meeting took place on Wednesday evening at his camp office in Mangalagiri, where Pawan Kalyan met with Sankurathri Chandrasekhar, founder of Kiran Eye Hospital and Padma Shri awardee.

During the meeting, Chandrasekhar highlighted several important issues and informed the Deputy Chief Minister about the invaluable services provided by the Sankurathri Foundation. He emphasised that the foundation has been making a substantial contribution to public welfare, with Kiran Eye Hospital offering high-quality eye care to the underprivileged. In response, Pawan Kalyan assured his full support for these organisations.

The meeting was attended by several political leaders, including Legislative Council Whip Pidugu Hariprasad, Chairman of the Party's Program Committee Kalyanam Shivasrinivas, and Party Leader Dr. Jyothula Srinivas.



TTD committed to promoting Vedic education: EO

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is dedicated to promoting Vedic education and is making good efforts to ensure its progress for the benefit of future generations, stated TTD Executive Officer (EO) Sri J. Syamala Rao.

The TTD EO visited the Sri Venkateswara Vedic University (SVVU) in Tirupati on Wednesday and chaired a review meeting on the university's activities.

Speaking to the media, the EO explained that SVVU was established by TTD in 2006. Since its inception, significant research has been undertaken in Vedic education. As part of this initiative, efforts are being made to bring the knowledge contained in the Vedas to the broader public for societal benefit.

He further highlighted that subjects such as trigonometry, Vedic mathematics, and astronomy are embedded within the Vedas, emphasising that it is essential for the general public to be aware of these subjects.

"There is a need to impart the knowledge of ancient Indian sciences to today's youth, in collaboration with institutions like IIT. We will take necessary steps to collect, preserve, and digitise ancient manuscripts," the EO stated. He assured that the science of the Vedas would continue to be made accessible to the public, and efforts would be made to protect Hindu Sanatana Dharma.

Later, the EO inspected the university's classrooms, hostels, a recording studio, and palmistry books. He also released the Shukla Yajurveda Vajasaneeyapradi Sakhyamu and Vedic books like 'Sevadi'. SV Vedic University Vice-Chancellor Rani Sadasivamurthy, TTD Joint Executive Officer (JEO) Smt. Goutami, Registrar Acharya Dr. Radhagovinda Tripathi, and other officials participated in the programme.

Some MLAs coming drunk to Assembly, says Harish



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS leader T. Harish Rao made a sensational claim in the Telangana Assembly on Wednesday that some Members are coming drunk to the House and proposed a breath analyser test for all legislators.

He said in the House that like the breath analyser test to check drunk driving on roads, a test should be conducted on legislators before they enter the House.

Harish said that some Members are coming to the House after consuming liquor in the morning. These members don't know what they are speaking, he said.

Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy demanded that Harish should apologise to the House for his comments. He said Harish's remarks are disparaging not just for the House but the entire society.

He lamented that Harish is making personal attacks and added that no MLA either from the ruling party or the opposition should make personal remarks.

Harish made the above comment when Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy termed him a thief in connection with the Kaleshwaram Project.

Government Whip Beerla Ilaiah said that Harish may have spoken about his uncle, the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR).

Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar expressed his unhappiness over Harish's remarks and said they will be deleted from the records.

Earlier, he also deleted certain remarks by BRS MLA Vivekananda. He also criticised the remarks of BRS MLA Kaushik Reddy and warned him that if he continued to make such remarks he would be suspended. The Speaker said that this is not a good tradition for new members.

The Minister for Legislative Affairs, D. Sridhar Babu, took exception to the allegations made by Vivekananda against the government. He said the Member should inform the Speaker before levelling allegations.

The BRS MLA had made the allegations while speaking about the problems of auto-rick drivers. Sridhar said it was the BRS Government which had betrayed auto-rick drivers.

DGP compliments police officers for winning medals in tennis tourney

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



DGP Ch. Dwarka Tirumala Rao has congratulated the Andhra Pradesh Police officers for their exceptional performance at the 25th All India Police Lawn Tennis Championship, where they secured silver medals in various categories. The five-day event, organised by the CISF, was held in Bengaluru, Karnataka, and saw participation from police teams across the country.

A team of eight officers from the Andhra Pradesh Police took part in the competition and secured second place, winning silver medals in the Open Singles, Open Doubles, and Veteran Doubles categories.

The tournament featured 24 teams from various states, union territories, and central paramilitary forces from across the nation. The AP Police team was led by IG KV Mohan Rao, along with other officers.

Officials directed to take steps to prevent mishaps at Perupalem Beach

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM



West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has instructed the concerned officials to take necessary steps to prevent drowning incidents involving tourists at Perupalem Beach.

The Collector, along with SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi, convened a meeting with officials to review the safety measures being implemented for visitors who come to the beach to take a holy dip during auspicious occasions.

Speaking at the meeting, Collector Nagarani emphasized the need for strict safety measures to protect bathers at the beach. She proposed the deployment of lifeguards, the use of patrol boats, installation of danger warning boards, and other precautionary measures to prevent drowning incidents.

Nagarani also highlighted the importance of providing fishermen with a subsidy of 40-60 percent on equipment developed by ISRO under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

She explained that attaching transponder devices to fishing boats would help track their location during storms. She urged officials to raise awareness among fishermen regarding this initiative.

Antarvedi Marine PS Circle Inspector ANM Murthy presented proposals on the measures to be taken to prevent accidents, while Fisheries Department Assistant Director LLN Raju outlined schemes aimed at strengthening the fisheries sector.

The meeting was attended by SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi, Coastal Stretch Marine Additional SP GBR Madhusudana Rao, Antarvedi Marine PS Circle Inspector ANM Murthy, Fisheries Department AD LLN Raju, Kakinada Coast Guard SP Gupta, IB DCIO Sandeep Sudarshan, Marine SI Nagarjuna Rao, and others.

Malladi expresses concern over toll charges on city roads

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Malladi Vishnu, YSRCP Central Constituency Coordinator and former MLA has strongly opposed the government's decision to impose toll charges on vehicles travelling on city roads. He criticised the state government for finding new ways to burden the public, particularly as toll fees were previously restricted to national highways. Now, the government plans to extend toll collection to city roads, which Vishnu deemed an unfair move.

Vishnu argued that the decision is essentially a step towards privatising public assets. He pointed out that the revenue from advertisements and hoardings, which would normally benefit the corporation, would now be compromised. The government is planning to implement toll charges on 642.90 kilometres of roads across 16 cities in Andhra Pradesh. In Vijayawada, 23 kilometres of roads will be handed over to private agencies under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, he added.

If this proposal is implemented, toll charges will be levied on busy roads in the Central constituency, including BRTS Road, Sambamurthy Road, and GS Raju Road, covering 7.3 kilometres.

YSRCP expresses concern over anti-social activities in Tirupati

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Former MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy has raised serious concerns about the deterioration of the sanctity of Tirupati, citing the rise of anti-social activities, including the spread of liquor, drugs and pub culture in the temple town. Speaking to the media on Wednesday, he accused certain ruling party leaders of supporting these activities, which he believes are eroding the sacred atmosphere of the area.

Bhumana expressed distress over the fact that liquor and drugs are easily available in Tirupati, disrupting its spiritual sanctity. He specifically mentioned the growing influence of pub culture in nearby Tiruchanur, which is alarming to the residents and pilgrims who visit the region for its religious significance.

NABARD CGM inaugurates 'Stall in Malls'

Says NABARD is ready to provide skill development training if a group of 30 people comes forward

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



NABARD Chief General Manager MR Gopal purchasing a Kondapalli toy during an exhibition held as part of 'Stall in Malls' in Vijayawada on Wednesday

The Chief General Manager of NABARD, MR Gopal, announced that it is hosting "Stall in Malls" initiatives at private shopping malls to promote products created by Self-Help Group (SHG) women members and rural artisans. He emphasised that NABARD is committed to providing nationwide marketing support for these products, helping artisans and SHG members reach broader markets. On Wednesday, Gopal inaugurated the Nestham Voluntary Organisation's Stall Mall arranged at PVP Mall, which is financially supported by the NABARD in Vijayawada. In this connection, he visited the many stalls in the 'Stall in Mall' and spoke to the women members regarding the produce and their marketing.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that this initiative aims to empower rural artists and SHG members by showcasing their handcrafted products in urban centres, thereby boosting their income and market exposure. He said that NABARD had experimentally conducted an exhibition for jute bags, handlooms, Kalamkari cloths, Kondapalli toys, and other products last year. As a result, all products were sold and it evoked a good response from the public, he said.

ACROSS THE STATES



Two Monkeypox cases reported in Kerala

Two cases of monkeypox (Mpox) have been reported in Kerala, state Health Minister Veena George said on Wednesday. Two men, who recently returned to Kerala from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), tested positive for the disease, she said. One of the men from Wayanad district was initially found to be infected, and the second person, from Kannur, tested positive later, according to her statement. Following the reports of the disease, the Health Department has directed those who came in contact with the patients to monitor for any symptoms and report them accordingly. Kerala had reported a few cases of monkeypox in September this year, following the global outbreak of the disease.



17-year-old wins prestigious 'Diana Award'

A 17-year-old Gurugram private school student who helped identify gaps in mental health awareness and intergenerational perceptions has won the globally renowned Diana Award -- a prestigious accolade conferred on a young person for humanitarian efforts or social action. Anvi Kumar of The Shri Ram School, Aravalli, has been honoured for her significant contributions to transforming mental health education across India, according to a statement. The Diana Award, established in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, celebrates young changemakers who have gone above and beyond to create and sustain positive change worldwide. Founded in 1999, the award is the only charity that carries the late princess's name, with the support of her sons, the Prince of Wales and Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex. The recognition comes on the special 25th anniversary of the Diana Award. Adding a personal touch to the honour, the recipient also received a letter of congratulations from Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex, expressing pride in the awardees' resilience and dedication to changing the world for the better.



419 people died in sewer, septic tanks in last 5 yrs: Govt

As many as 419 people died in sewer and septic tanks in last five years, the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry said on Wednesday. Responding to a question in Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale, in a written reply, said no death has been reported due to manual scavenging. According to the data shared by him, 419 people died in sewer and septic tanks in last five years. Tamil Nadu (67), Maharashtra (63), Uttar Pradesh (49), Gujarat (49) and Delhi (34) were among states that reported the highest number of such deaths. A total of 419 such deaths were reported in the last five years

'Cong's lies cannot hide its insults to Ambedkar'

OUR REVERENCE FOR HIM ABSOLUTE: PM MODI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday stoutly defended Amit Shah from the Congress' charge that he insulted B R Ambedkar in his Rajya Sabha speech, asserting that the opposition party's "rotten ecosystem" and "malicious lies" cannot hide its misdeeds.

As the Congress and other parties latched onto Shah's comments last evening to attack the government, Modi said the home minister actually exposed the Congress party's "dark history of insulting" Amebdkar.

"They are clearly stung and stunned by the facts he presented, which is why they are now indulging in theatrics. Sadly, for them, people know the truth," Modi said in a series of posts on X.

When it comes to Ambedkar, his government's respect and reverence are absolute, the prime minister asserted.

Shah's Cabinet colleagues, including Rajnath Singh, Ashwini Vaishnaw and Kiren Rijiju, rallied to his defence and launched a fresh onslaught on the main opposition party for its alleged insults of the architect of the Constitution.

In a searing attack on the Congress, Modi said if the party and its "rotten ecosystem" think their "malicious lies" can hide their misdeeds of several years, especially their insults towards Ambedkar, they are gravely mistaken.

He said people of India have seen time and again how one party, led by one dynasty, a reference to the Nehru-Gandhi family, has indulged in every possible dirty trick to obliterate Ambedkar's legacy and humiliate the SC/ST communities.

The list of the Congress' sins towards Ambedkar includes getting him defeated in elections not once but twice, first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru campaigning against him and making his loss a prestige issue, denying him a Bharat Ratna, and not allowing his portrait a place of pride in Parliament's Central Hall, the prime minister said.

He said, "The Congress can try as they want but they can't deny that the worst massacres against SC/ST Communities have happened under their regimes. For years, they sat in power but did nothing substantive to empower the SC and ST communities."

Congress twisted facts, distorted my statement: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday accused the Congress of twisting facts and distorting his comments in the Rajya Sabha related to B R Ambedkar after BJP leaders "exposed" the opposition party's repeated "insults" to the architect of the Constitution. Addressing a press conference here, Shah alleged that the Congress in the past has also misrepresented his and even PM Narendra Modi's comments to spread confusion and mislead people. "I condemn the Congress for twisting facts. Why did it happen? It happened because BJP leaders spoke on how the NDA governments upheld the Constitution and established with facts that the Congress is anti-Ambedkar, anti-Constitution and anti-reservation," Shah told reporters here.

The senior BJP leader said the Congress also insulted V D Savarkar and blew to smithereens the values enshrined in the Constitution by imposing Emergency.

"When all these facts came out, the Congress used its old tricks and made an effort to mislead the society by presenting twisted facts," Shah said.

Shah said he comes from a party that can never insult Ambedkar.

Asked about Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's demand for his resignation, the home minister said in a lighter vein that he can quit if this will make the Congress president happy but it will never solve his problems.



Arunachal CM warns of stern action against corrupt govt employees

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday warned of stern action against government employees indulging in corrupt practices. Speaking at the Passing-Out Parade of the 49th batch of Arunachal Pradesh Police (APP) recruits at the Police Training Centre (PTC) in Banderdewa near here, Khandu said there are rumours of contractual ANM and GNM nurses being demanded huge sums of money for regularisation of their jobs. "I have been repeating my warning against corruption from every possible platform available. I have personally requested Director General of Police (DGP) Anand Mohan to thoroughly investigate the matter and if there is any truth to the rumour, those involved will not be spared," he said. The chief minister said that the state cabinet has already decided to regularise the jobs of contractual nurses across the state in batches and expressed surprise that despite knowing about it, some are ready to pay to get regularised.

'Govt will not remove temples built on Waqf properties'

KARNATAKA CM TELLS ASSEMBLY

PNS ■ BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA)



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday assured the Karnataka Assembly that the government will not remove those temples which are built on Waqf properties. In case notices have been served to them, then they will be withdrawn, he said. During a discussion on the issue of the Waqf Board issuing eviction notices to farmers, temples and many other individuals, the Chief Minister said, "If temples have been built on Waqf properties then we will not remove them. I am making it very clear. In case any notice has been issued, they (notices) will be withdrawn."

As the raging Waqf issue echoed in the Assembly with the BJP raising it, the Waqf and Minority Affairs Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan clarified that if notices were given to farmers and temples then they will be withdrawn. The Chief Minister too reiterated Khan's statement and said no farmer will be evicted from the land they have been tilling.

The BJP legislator Araga Jnanendra demanded that properties mentioned in government records as Waqf should also be removed as the mere withdrawal of notices will not serve the purpose.

The Leader of the Opposition BJP, R. Ashoka, justified the demand by saying that there were 110 Kuruba families in the Krishna Raja constituency, in Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's home district of Mysuru, who have been running from pillar to post to get the notices removed. They have submitted several memoranda to Siddaramaiah, but to no avail. He said there are hundreds of such instances where people face hardship by such notices.

Minister Khan reminded the BJP that it was in its manifesto in 2014 there was a promise to remove encroachment on Waqf properties.

The Chief Minister underlined the need to save the Waqf properties saying that there were 1.10 lakh acres of Waqf properties in the state which now reduced to just 20,000 acres due to various provisions of law such as the Inam Abolition Act as well as encroachment.

Jnanendra said, "We (BJP) too support saving the Waqf properties but our point is why notices were given now." Siddaramaiah said the situation was such that there was a need to save the properties and notices were given as there is a Central law for it.

India, China agree to maintain peace at borders, promote ties

PNS ■ BEIGING



National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Wednesday held "substantive discussions" during the Special Representatives dialogue here and reached a six-point consensus, including continuing to take measures to maintain peace at borders and promote healthy and stable development of relations.

During their meeting, the first after a gap of five years, both sides positively evaluated the solution reached between the two countries on border issues and reiterated that the implementation work should continue, according to a press release by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Both officials believed that the border issue should be properly handled from the overall situation of bilateral ties so as not to affect the development of relations, it said.

Both sides agreed to continue to take measures to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border area and promote the healthy and stable development of bilateral relations, it said.

The two sides reiterated their commitment to continue seeking a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable package solution to the boundary issue in accordance with the political guidelines agreed upon by the Special Representatives of the two countries on resolving the boundary issue in 2005, and to take positive measures to promote this process, it said.

Must balance growth, sustainability to tackle climate change: Om Birla

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday called for striking a balance between development and sustainability to tackle the challenge of climate change.

Addressing the inaugural session of an Appreciation Course in Parliamentary Processes and Procedures for a group of Officer Trainees (OTs) of the 2023-25 batch of the Indian Forest Service held at the Parliament House Complex, Birla said India is at the forefront of tackling the climate change challenge with Mission LiFE - Lifestyle for Environment.

"In Indian culture, nature is revered, where we worship trees, and regard the earth as our mother. This deep respect for nature has shaped our practices and policies towards environmental conservation. "This has not only resulted in more number of forest parks in the country and various other policy efforts to develop the forest areas but also gave a push to the tourism in these regions," Birla said.

The course is being organised by the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE), Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Birla mentioned that issues related to wildlife conservation and environmental imbalances are regularly discussed in Parliament, according to an official statement.

Supreme Court bats for preservation of India's 'sacred groves'

■ Asks Centre to create comprehensive policy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Wednesday recommended the Centre to create a comprehensive policy for governance and management of community-protected forests, known as sacred groves.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai, S V N Bhatti and Sandeep Mehta, said India was home to thousands of sacred groves, which were patches of forests or clusters of trees that held deep cultural or spiritual significance for the local communities that protected and sustained them.

"The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is recommended to create a comprehensive policy for the governance and management of sacred groves across the country," the bench said.

The judgment quoted a Bhagwat Gita verse, as saying, "Nature is the source of all material things: the maker, the means of making, and the things made. Spirit is the source of all consciousness which feels pleasure and feels pain".

Highlighting the ecological and cultural importance of the sacred groves, the top court recommended their protection under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, particularly through Section 36-C, which allows for declaration of "community reserves".

The top court delivered its verdict on a plea raising concerns over the sacred groves in Rajasthan.

The apex court directed the forest department of Rajasthan to carry out detailed on-ground and satellite mapping of each sacred grove in the respective area and classify them as "forests", as recommended in the central empowered committee's report of June 1, 2005.

It also directed the state to complete the survey and notification of sacred groves/Orans in all districts.

MINORITY WELFARE SCHEMES

Parliament panel calls for timely action

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



A parliamentary panel has urged the Ministry of Minority Affairs to expedite approvals and streamline processes to ensure effective implementation of welfare schemes for minority communities. The Committee also expressed concern over the surrender of Rs 2,064.95 crore in unspent funds during 2023-24. It recommended that states and Union Territories (UTs) adhere to timelines for completing procedural requirements and proposed penal provisions for delays.

The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment tabled its report in Lok Sabha on Wednesday, highlighting both achievements and challenges in executing initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK), scholarship programmes and skill development schemes. It underscored the need for immediate action to overcome procedural delays that have previously led to under-utilisation of funds.

The Committee noted that the pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means scholarship schemes have been pending approval since 2021-22. These programmes have historically benefited over 8.12 crore students, comprising 34.75 per cent of the minority population.

The Committee recommended swift approvals to prevent disruption in educational support for minority students. It also called for harmonisation of these schemes with similar initiatives under other ministries to ensure consistency and efficiency.

Observing that several schemes lacked physical targets, the panel recommended that annual goals be established to assess their success. This would help identify the percentage of the minority population benefitting and guide appropriate budget allocations.

PMJVK, which received Rs 910 crore for 2024-25, aims to improve infrastructure in minority-concentrated areas. The Committee stressed the need for better compliance with procedural guidelines and faster fund disbursement to avoid project delays. It suggested improved monitoring and data collection on project approvals and completion rates to ensure the scheme's effectiveness.

In addition to scholarships, the Committee urged the ministry to explore new initiatives such as residential education, free coaching and overseas study support tailored for minority communities. Chairperson P C Mohan, in the report, emphasised the importance of accountability and timely action. "The welfare of minority communities relies on sincere and effective implementation of these schemes. We must ensure that allocated resources reach those in need without unnecessary delays," he said.

Delhi's air quality nears 'severe plus', mercury settles at 23 deg C

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Pollution levels in Delhi remained hazardous on Wednesday as the air quality index rose to 448 at 6 pm, nearing the 'severe plus' category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Of the 36 monitoring stations in the city, 32 recorded AQI in the 'severe plus' category, while the readings surpassing 480 at several locations, creating an extremely hazardous environment for residents.

The remaining stations reported 'severe' air quality.

Areas like Anand Vihar, Bawana, Burari, Dwarka, ITO, Jahangirpuri, North Campus DU, among others recorded air quality in 'severe plus' category. An AQI of 400 or above warrants urgent attention, as per CPCB's color-coded warnings.

Delhi has been experiencing toxic air quality for the past few days due to drop in wind speeds, allowing local pollutants to concentrate in the atmosphere, according to experts.

On Tuesday city's 24 hour average AQI was 433 at 4 pm, against 379 on Monday.

VIJAYAWADA | THURSDAY | DECEMBER 19, 2024

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Not again!

Delhi air quality once again plummets to unbreathable 'severe' category despite GRAP IV

You may not be a smoker but you are still smoking 10 cigarettes a day if you happen to be in Delhi. This is what the doctors have to say about Delhi pollution. The capital witnessed a sharp decline in air quality on Wednesday, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) crossing the 400 mark and entering the 'severe' category once again. This alarming situation unfolded despite the implementation of Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which entails stringent anti-pollution measures. Monitoring Stations Report Severe-Plus AQI Out of the 37 monitoring stations listed on the Sameer app. These figures highlight the widespread and acute nature of air pollution across the city. GRAP, a tiered system of air quality management, categorises air quality into four stages based on AQI levels: Stage I (Poor, AQI 201-300) Stage II (Very Poor, AQI 301-400) Stage III (Severe, AQI 401-450) Stage IV (Severe Plus, AQI above 450) Under Stage IV, measures such as a complete ban on construction and demolition activities, including public infrastructure projects and the prohibition of diesel trucks carrying non-essential items entering Delhi are enforced. Offices—public, municipal and private—are advised to reduce staff attendance to 50 per cent, with the rest working from home. Additional measures like the closure of colleges, non-essential businesses and odd-even vehicular restrictions are considered during such extreme conditions. Despite these restrictions, Delhi's air quality has continued to deteriorate, raising questions about the efficacy and enforcement of these measures.



However, experts feel that it is more due to metrological conditions and not a failure of GRAP. They attribute the sudden spike in pollution levels to unfavourable meteorological conditions, particularly a significant drop in wind speeds. The stagnation allows local pollutants to accumulate, exacerbating the already critical air quality. During winters, Delhi's air pollution crisis is compounded by a combination of factors. Vehicle emissions is a primary contributor to the city's air pollution. Besides vehicular pollution, paddy straw burning adds to the pollution burden. Factories emit significant quantities of pollutants. But right now it is the dip in temperatures. During winters heavy air traps pollutants near the ground, creating a thick layer of smog. The hazardous air quality in Delhi poses severe health risks to its residents. Prolonged exposure can lead to respiratory ailments, cardiovascular issues and other chronic conditions. Vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions, are at the highest risk. This is not the first time Delhi's air quality has entered the severe-plus category this season. In November, similar conditions led to the imposition of GRAP Stage IV. The recurrence of severe pollution highlights the cyclical nature of Delhi's air quality crisis, driven by a mix of local and regional factors. Unfortunately, authorities lack a comprehensive plan to address the issue, relying instead on knee-jerk reactions and ineffective quick fixes.

PICTALK



Visitors click photographs of the frozen Drung waterfall, in Baramulla PTI

Year 2025: Prophecies, politics and progress



KALYANI **SHANKAR**

From hosting grand spiritual and political events to navigating economic growth and political turbulence, 2025 is poised to be a year of transformation and change



What does the crystal ball reveal about the upcoming year 2025? The predictions are a mixed bag. Nostradamus, the famous French astrologer and seer, has made significant predictions regarding global affairs and India's future for 2025. The 16th-century seer has predicted significant events that have shaped our world, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the moon landing, lending credibility and a sense of awe to his predictions. People today are trying to interpret the 16th-century seer's prophecy, impressed by his historical accuracy. Nostradamus has predicted that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war may end in 2025.

He warned that both nations could face climate change and floods. According to the New York Post, Turkey and France could significantly facilitate the peace process between Ukraine and Russia. Nostradamus also foretold an 'ancient plague' in England in 2025, indicating a resurgence of a historical disease and the resolution of Brazil's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and various natural disasters.

Additionally, Nostradamus has predicted that the earth may be hit by a asteroid. He said 'From the cosmos, a fireball will rise, a harbinger of fate,' could engage us in potential future events with profound and concerning implications.

As for India's future, the year begins with the 2025 Republic Day parade. The theme is 'Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas. It is yet to be finalised who will be the chief guest. On the religious side, the next Maha Kumbh Mela will be held in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, from January 13, 2025, to February 26, 2025. The Mela is a grand and holy spiritual gathering every 12 years at a rotating location. Millions of pilgrims rush to the venue to take the holy bath.

In 2025, India will likely see fast economic growth, social challenges and new technology. The government is making significant improvements in technology education and renewable energy. These efforts and chances for economic development give a positive outlook for India's future prosperity. India is becoming more critical globally by working closely with other major economies in trade, defence, and climate efforts. This shows India's growing political power. At the domestic level, a critical issue facing the Opposition coalition, INDIA, is its cohesion. Already, some tensions have emerged. The Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have distanced themselves from the alliance. The AAP plans to contest the Delhi Assembly elections independently.

The cracks within were visible in the latest Haryana, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand Assembly polls. While the Congress has done poorly in Haryana and Maharashtra, it is in coalition in Jharkhand with the JMM. The partners in the coalition are unhappy about the Congress's dismal performance. They are watching how Congress performs in the upcoming Delhi and Bihar polls scheduled for 2025.

The upcoming Assembly polls will indicate the future of political realignment. Delhi will hold Assembly elections in February, with the BJP looking to unseat Aam Admi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

> IN 2025, INDIA WILL LIKELY SEE FAST ECONOMIC GROWTH, SOCIAL CHALLENGES, AND NEW TECHNOLOGY. THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

The AAP has faced many challenges, including corruption allegations against several leaders in the recent past. As a tactic, the AAP has appointed Athishi as a temporary chief minister for the polls. The AAP and Congress were partners in the Lok Sabha elections. While AAP performed reasonably well, the Congress got no seats.

Bihar will also have elections this year. It is politically a critical state. The ruling NDA, led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, may face intense competition from the Mahagathbandhan, headed by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav. The BJP and the JD(U) are working to retain the state.

Two political organisations—the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the CPI—will celebrate their birth centenary. The RSS will complete 100 years in September, while the CPI will begin its centenary celebrations in December this year. With its ups and downs, the RSS has strongly influenced Indian politics and society now making it hard for future governments to weaken their power. At the same time, communist parties have less impact now, as right-wing parties are becoming more popular. On international affairs, India will hold the Quad Summit, originally scheduled to be held in New Delhi this September, which was relocated to New York due to a scheduling conflict among the attending leaders. Now, India will host the QUAD summit in 2025.

The US President Trump will likely visit New Delhi for the summit, further revealing India's position in international affairs. Another important visit is that of Russian President Putin, in the first half of next year. The Kremlin has said it will set a date early next year. It will be Putin's first visit since the Ukraine conflict began.

Overall 2025 will be a mixed year for India. The economy is progressing well, and foreign relations are stable, but the political situation remains unclear. By next year, Congress could recover, or the BJP and the regional satraps would have a further hold on the electorate.

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

Preparations underway in Prayagraj for Mahakumbh 2025



BINOD **TAKIAWALA**

Prime Minister Modi visits the Triveni Sangam, offers prayers and reviews the arrangements for the world's largest spiritual gathering

Year 2025 is going to witness the largest religious gathering of humanity at Prayagraj - Mahakumbh. The preparations are already in full swing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached the holy city of Prayagraj, the land of pilgrimage, to oversee preparations for the grand Mahakumbh. This becomes even more significant at the confluence of three holy rivers-Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. At this Triveni Sangam, the auspicious gathering of saints and sages during Mahakumbh elevates it into a grand event. The significance of Mahakumbh lies in its occurrence every 12 years, an event described in depth in our religious texts and Puranas.

According to the estimates of government of Uttar Pradesh, over 45 crore people will attend the Mahakumbh Mela 2025. This makes it the world's largest religious gathering. Though everybody would like to take a dip at Sangam, but there are other centre of attractions too.

Among the ancient temples of Prayagraj, the Nag Vasuki Temple holds a special place.



Worship of serpents or Nagas has been integral to Sanatan Dharma since ancient times. Among these, Vasuki, considered the king of serpents, is an essential figure. Vasuki Nag is also depicted as Lord Shiva's necklace.

According to the legend of Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), Vasuki Nag was used as the rope during the churning of the ocean by gods and demons, with Mount Mandarachal serving as the churning rod. Vasuki Nag's body was injured during this process, and on Lord Vishnu's advice, he rested at Prayag and bathed at the Triveni Sangam to heal.

It is believed that a visit to the Nag Vasuki Temple after a holy dip at Sangam completes the spiritual journey. This temple, located in the Daraganj area of Prayagraj along the Ganga River, has its roots in ancient mythology. A story mentions that King Divodas of Kashi performed penance to bring Lord Shiva to Varanasi, and Vasuki Nag was requested to stay in Prayagraj by the deities. Vasuki Nag agreed, stipulating that devotees must visit him after bathing at Sangam and worship him on Nag Panchami. The temple was subsequently established under divine guidance.

Preparations for Mahakumbh 2025: The grand Mahakumbh, to be held from January 13 (Pausha Purnima) to February 26 (Maha Shivratri) next year, is being meticulously planned. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth Rs 5,500 crores aimed at improving pilgrim amenities and strengthening the city's infrastructure.

Key projects include:

1. Doubling and electrification of the Varanasi-Madhosingh-Prayagraj rail section, including a new rail bridge over the Ganga.
2. Construction of underpasses and overpasses to ease traffic.
3. Development of nine new ghats, 3,000 additional trains, 300 parks, and the planting of 300,000 trees over 4,000 hectares.

While in Prayagraj PM Modi not only saw the preparation first hand but also performed rituals at the Sangam, prayed at the Akshay Vat tree, visited the reclining Hanuman Temple, and offered prayers at the Saraswati Koop. He also toured the Mahakumbh exhibition site. The Mahakumbh is expected to draw millions of pilgrims to the Sangam, where it is believed that a dip in the holy waters cleanses one of sins and leads to spiritual liberation (moksha). Apart from bathing rituals, devotees participate in prayers, discourses by saints, and spiritual enlightenment sessions.

(The writer is a freelance journalist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISTRACTING FORM ISSUES

Madam —The introduction of 'One Nation One election' bill is a conscious attempt to waste the precious time of the parliament, and it is definitely timed to divert the attention of all from crucial issues like Manipur, serious allegations over Adani Group's misconducts, inflation, declining growth rates, the stunningly widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, and the fast deteriorating relationship with many countries. The ruling dispensation, in spite of being aware of a lack of enough strength to get this amendment bill through, tabling it in the parliament displays the intention behind its introduction. Moreover, the reasons counted upon to place this bill do not sound either logical or rational.

Losing majority support and deciding to refer the bill to the Joint Parliament Committee is a preplanned act deliberately meant to divert the course. It has already been explained by many quarters that the very idea of this proposal runs against democratic norms, as the demands of the people vary from a state and central government and are altogether different from local bodies. The narratives of national parties are sure to sway over the elections of state assemblies and the local bodies. The claims about expenditure do not deserve to be considered. Claims of hurdles to development programmes are not correct, as the restrictions are only for the launching of new projects during the notified period. Above all, the inability of the Election Commission to hold such a huge project is visible from the time schedule it keeps up to hold elections. Therefore it is not good to waste huge resources and take away the time of parliament sessions.

A G Rajmohan | *Anantapur*

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIANS

Madam— Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi carrying a bag to Parliament that has "Palestine" emblazoned on it proves that she is most concerned about the war, where the innocent people in Palestine are dying because of the deadly war. She has rightly raised her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressed solidarity with Palestinians. She has rightly said that it is the moral responsibility of every right-thinking individual, including all those Israeli citizens who do not believe in hatred and violence and every government in the world, to condemn the Israeli government's genocide actions and force them to stop. On her first day speech in Parliament, she raised the issues of Bangladesh and Modi's government's failure to negotiate with Bangladesh.

In her 32-minute speech, she talked about key issues like the BJP's alleged attempt to change the constitution, the growing monopoly of the Adani Group, atrocities on women, incidents of violence in Sambhal and Manipur, and the demand for a nationwide caste census. She has also met the victims of the Unnao rape case, the father of the Hathras rape case, and the Sambhal violence victims. She has also raised the iconic frame of India's greatest military victory, a painting of the Pakistan army signing the instrument of surrender in Dhaka on December 16, 1971. We deserve more leaders like Priyanka Gandhi.

Zakir Hussain | *Kazipet*

DILJIT WANTS BETTER CONCERT INFRA

Madam — Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh recently announced during his performance in Chandigarh that he would not hold any concerts in India until the government improves the country's concert infrastructure. India boasts a large number of talented singers who represent the nation globally and deliver phenomenal performances in international concerts. However, within their own country, they face inadequate concert infrastructure and a lack of basic facilities. This is concerning, as well-organised concerts could serve as a significant source of revenue and provide livelihoods to thousands. It is high time that the government recognises the potential of the music industry and invests in developing world-class infrastructure to support artists and their audiences.

Jakir Hussain | *Kanpur*

Goa Liberation Day



Goa's Liberation Day is celebrated on December 19 and has its importance in the history of Goa. This is the day when Goa got her freedom from the dominant rule of the Portuguese with the help of the Indian armed forces and the navy.The Liberation of Goa was rather a historic event. The fight for Goa's freedom was dual-inside Goa and outside Goa-which was performed by the Indian government.

Towards the end of 1961, after various unsuccessful talks, the Indian government deployed armed forces.

On December 17, 1961, more than 30,000 Indian ground troops with the help of the Indian Air Force and the army conquered the 3,000-member ill-prepared Portuguese navy. There were a few more armed acts following that. The rest of the Portuguese colonies of Daman and Diu were also overpowered. The complete build-up of the Portuguese colonies shaped the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu. The total army operation-'Operation Vijay'-was' performed almost without any violence. Finally, the Portuguese Governor General Vassalo da Silva freed Goa on December 18. After three days of the operations, on December 19, 1961, Goa, at last, became a part of India. The day is observed with a lot of celebrations in Goa.

Jubel D'Cruz | *Mumbai*

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FIRST COLUMN

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

By embracing spiritual self-reflection and cultivating positivity, we can rise above turmoil



RAJYOGI BRAHM KUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

Nowadays there seems to be a crisis, disappointment and conflict of duality at every step of life. How do we deal with this? How do we prevent the self from becoming pessimistic or disheartened? Today the great modern disease of human consciousness is all about looking outward to find means to derive happiness without examining the inner self, values, attitudes and motives; relying and depending more on the external signals and hoping for the best. However, in practicality, life cannot be created with such hopes, as there are no shortcuts to achieving happiness. In today's world, no individual and nothing can create a permanent state of wellbeing within us, as it is our prerogative and responsibility. The external factors can contribute, guide and inspire us but ultimately our life is what we make out of it.

True happiness or a lack of it does not come from external things but from what is inside oneself. For example, money is not the means to happiness nor is it the cause of one's unhappiness. In reality, it is our attitudes and values that determine the use or misuse of external instruments, whether that is money, a person, an event or an object. A life that has value and is worthy of living is only possible when there is a reflective examination through which there can be illuminating change. So, to reorientate our consciousness, we would require a consciousness based on self-knowledge i.e the knowledge of the spiritual self which creates self-respect and positivity, enabling us to gain the right perspective on life which in turn would help us to deal with any kind of negativity in a balanced and less painful way. Accordingly, with positivity, we



experience inner strength to cope with external issues affecting the sense of balance in our lives. When we are more positive towards ourselves, obviously we express the same attitude towards others and in all situations. Inner strength also comes when we interact with others in such a way that love, peace and happiness are honestly expressed and experienced.

The pivotal point is "honesty" because there cannot be a sense of fulfilment through falsehood, imitation or duality expressed through attitude. Hence the need of the hour is to live a life based on "Eternal Spiritual Principles" that would allow us to keep a positive attitude towards the self and others, thereby making our life joyful rather than conflicting or a bundle of confusion. Spirituality is not a system or technique of worship or ritual, it is in essence, knowing how to lead a life and through this knowing there is happiness. A spiritual person has found that spark of eternal reference within, which gives him or her not only deep contentment but also a sense of purpose. The first prerequisite for spirituality is a life that functions appropriately and thinks and cares about one's self in the most decent way. Thinking and caring about one's self inappropriately creates too much dependence on others, too many needs, too many demands, too much possessiveness.

So the right way to proceed is to first examine oneself and then acknowledge the positive abd the negative traits within us. By doing so, we get the courage to change whatever needs to be transformed without any kind of fear and, without pretence. The basis of successful change for betterment is to understand the attitudes, feelings and motives that drive us for the change by accepting the original positivity of the self, the immortal goodness of the soul. It is this goodness of the self that forms the foundation of our dignity as human beings. The expression of this original goodness in our life is what is called 'divinity' which makes us truly human. So let us awaken the expression of the divine within us to live a fulfilling joyful life amidst all the chaos & crisis around.

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

Education: From Kothari Commission to NEP-2020



J S **RAJPUT**

The educators and policymakers are called upon to transcend ideological divides and lead India toward inclusive progress and innovation



The most comprehensive initiative in education in post-independence India was the report of the National Commission on Education, usually referred to as the Kothari Commission. It submitted its report entitled "Education for National Development' on June 29, 1968. The first two sentences say it all: "The destiny of India is now being shaped in its classrooms. This, we believe, is no rhetoric." It was this report that led to the first national education policy of 1968. For the first time, science and mathematics became compulsory for both boys and girls up to tenth standard!

Yes, it was generally believed that only boys could handle the tough subjects of science and mathematics, and girls could opt for lighter options of spinning weaving, home science; and the like! The compulsory study of science and math was resisted and opposed as being unjust and unfair to girls! This one change transformed the lives of millions of girls and has brought global accolades to the Indian advancements in the world of science, technology, ICT and space research. Policies once formulated and formalised deserve support in vigilant implementation, persistent monitoring, and scrutiny based on their relevance 'in the great enterprise of national reconstruction'. India today has great challenges ahead, both national as well as global.

It has the manpower and enough experience to confront these successfully. In the third decade of the 21st century, it's the quality of education and skill acquisition that would equip India shall remain its prime contributory tool against every challenge. The content and process of education shall have to specifically equip itself against nurtured negativity, increasing mutual distrust and ballooning bitterness in public life. Solutions shall certainly not emerge from those that thrive only on negativity and are ill-equipped to see light and positivity around them.

> THE CONTENT AND PROCESS OF EDUCATION SHALL HAVE TO SPECIFICALLY EQUIP ITSELF AGAINST NURTURED NEGATIVITY, INCREASING MUTUAL DISTRUST, AND BALLOONING BITTERNESS IN PUBLIC LIFE

Who must come forward and accept responsibility to normalise such an unacceptable socio-cultural environment? Why not ask the Gandhi ji? Once, before independence, one Dr Mote posed a query to Mahatma Gandhi: what he thought was the greatest problem facing his country! The expected answer could have been, in those days, related to slavery, poverty, illiteracy, ill health, or in the social context.

While narrating it in his Gandhi Katha, Narayan Desai tells the audience: that the answer was the 'callousness of the intellectuals'! Narayan Desai Goes ahead: "Give it a thought. If we stand by and watch the poor blaming their poverty on fate, Gandhi is relevant today. If we can see the callousness of the intellectuals, then Gandhi is relevant today. What are the problems according to intellectuals?

'Why X or Y has become Vice-Chancellor and not me'! They think only of this and are unaware of other social issues". Their concerns for critical social, cultural, social cohesion and religious amity are minimal.

One's obvious inference would be that solutions to major national concerns shall - and must – emerge from institutions and the educated and the learned responsible for attaining their stated objectives. It includes the dilapidated structures running Sarkari schools, much sought-after private schools, and the universities. It also includes the glittering campuses of national institutions that have brought international repute to our educational enterprise.

So, mainly it points out to teachers; from primary schools to professors of the universities, and researchers working in institutions of science, technology, psychology, social sciences and every other area.

One wishes each one of them recalls the assessment of Gandhi shuns away the dreaded callousness and strives to create centres of dialogue and discussions on improving the life and living standards of our people, particularly the 'last man in the line' who was so dear to the Mahatma! At first glance, the existing climate makes such a transformation rather impossible!

Despite all the odds, sincere attempts must be launched to create institutional think tanks with open boundaries that provide for healthy academic, scholarly and intellectual deliberations, not constrained but individual ideological affiliations. For an academic, who shapes the lives of numerous individuals, it is the well-being of others that must precede his own!

And this is no rhetoric or a cliché in the Indian context and culture. For a broad-minded person, this becomes a must, an integral part of his thought and action and hence, an achievable premise.

This is the main task of every teacher preparation institution, from where it shall percolate to schools via teachers trained there, and then to the establishment and the society. After the education policies of 1968, 1986 and 1992, and a gap of around three decades, another policy formulation comes before the nation in the shape of the National Education Policy; NEP-2020. It has been under implementation for the last four years. Having been associated with the implementation and also policy formulations, one could venture to infer that the NEP-2020 was prepared with unprecedented enthusiasm from teachers, scholars academics institutions, organisations and individuals.

As the process was long overdue and rightly very extensive, it inspired active participation from practically every section of society. Unfortunately, its implementation stands hampered in certain states on grounds that may not necessarily be academic.

India has a developed well-knit interactive system of the national and state-level bodies and institutions that have learnt over the years how to arrive at a national consensus in the sectors of education and teacher education. This institutional strength of consultation, collaboration and cohesion need not be diluted in cases where the union and state governments belong to different ideological affiliations.

Intellectuals in education and research must convincingly internalize that they are making the future of individuals and creating the future of India. No one else is destined and better placed than them to reconstruct India. The moment each one of them expands his horizons, thinks holistically, and takes a long-term view, the road ahead would emerge very clearly; how to proceed individually and also collectively to sed the intellectual callousness and lead the nation on the right path.

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. He is Atal fellow with the PMML, New Delhi; views expressed are personal)

Guarding digital India: The urgent need for cybersecurity in a rapidly evolving digital space

India has the potential to lead the world in cybersecurity innovation, but achieving this requires more than technological solutions



VINAY **PATHAK**

In the fast-evolving digital landscape of India, a silent battle is being fought—not with traditional weapons but through malicious code, complex algorithms, and increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks. As the country embraces its "Digital India" initiative, the rise of cyber threats demands immediate attention. Protecting the digital future requires strong cybersecurity frameworks, skilled professionals, and widespread public awareness. The call for "Digital Guards" or "Cyber Warriors" has never been more urgent.

The scale of the digital threat is staggering. The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) recorded 53,117 security incidents in 2017. By October 2023, this number soared to an alarming 1.32 million—a twentyfold increase that exposes critical national vulnerabilities. Globally, the situation is no less concerning. Operations like INTERPOL and AFRIPOL's 2024 Operation Serengeti, which arrested over 1,000 cybercriminals across 19 African nations, underscore the scale of the problem. These operations identified over 35,000 victims and uncovered financial losses nearing $193 million, demonstrating the global reach and devastating impact of cybercrime.

Phishing remains a primary weapon for cybercriminals, accounting for 22 per cent of all incidents. These attacks manipulate victims into revealing sensitive information or downloading malicious software. Credential theft, responsible for 16 per cent of incidents, further exposes individuals and organisations to system breaches, financial fraud, and corporate espionage. Emerging threats like mobile app malware are amplifying risks. For instance, 15 SpyLoan malware apps on Google Play, downloaded over 8 million times, went beyond data theft to harass and extort victims, underscoring cybercriminals' growing ingenuity.

The economic toll of these attacks is devastating. About 65 per cent of Indian enterprises have been forced to pay ransoms to recover critical data, with average demands reaching $4.8 million. Recovery costs add another $1.35 million per incident, straining even large corporations. Smaller businesses, lacking resources for robust cybersecurity measures, are particularly vulnerable. This systemic vulnerability has been termed the "cybersecurity poverty line," where approximately 60 per cent of Indian companies lack the infrastructure and expertise to defend themselves against cyber threats.

High-traffic online shopping periods, such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday, are prime



targets for cybercriminals. During these events, fraudsters employ phishing scams, fake e-commerce websites, and malware to exploit consumers and businesses alike. Recent high-profile incidents highlight these vulnerabilities. In November 2024, a ransomware attack on Blue Yonder disrupted Starbucks' operations, forcing a return to manual processes. Similarly, McLeod Russel's system compromise sent shockwaves through the corporate sector, emphasising the interconnectedness of digital systems and the widespread disruptions that a single attack can cause. India's cybersecurity preparedness is worryingly insufficient. Only 4 per cent of Indian enterprises have robust infrastructure capable of withstanding advanced attacks. This shortfall is a national security concern, as cyberattacks transcend corporate interests, threatening essential services and critical infrastructure.

Initiatives like the Cyber Challenge 2024, a joint effort by the Delhi Police and CyberPeace Foundation, offer hope. This programme engages developers, engineers, and cybersecurity experts to craft innovative solutions using cutting-edge technologies such as AI, blockchain, and quantum computing. Collaboration with institutions like DRDO, MeiTY, and the National Forensic Science University underscores the comprehensive approach needed to address these challenges. Experts emphasise that cybersecurity must move beyond being an IT department's responsibility to become a core component of every organization's strategy. This shift involves continuous employee training, regular security audits, investments in advanced technologies, and fostering a culture of vigilance. Drawing inspiration from global models like the European Union's GDPR, India could implement stringent cybersecurity standards, offering subsidies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to invest in security measures and penalising negligence in cyber protection.

As digital transformation accelerates across sectors such as finance, healthcare, education, and government services, robust cybersecurity is no longer optional—it is a fundamental necessity. The path forward demands a collaborative effort. Government agencies, private enterprises, educational institutions, and cybersecurity professionals must unite to build a resilient digital ecosystem.

(The writer is Assistant Professor Indian institute of information technology sonepat Haryana; views are personal)

the pioneer

Money 08

VIJAYAWADA | THURSDAY | DECEMBER 19, 2024

IN BRIEF



Gold falls Rs 200 to Rs 79,100 per 10 gm

Gold prices fell Rs 200 to Rs 79,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a firm trend in international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity settled at Rs 79,300 per 10 grams in the previous session. Snapping a three-day losing run, silver climbed Rs 500 to Rs 92,000 per kg on Wednesday. It closed at Rs 91,500 per kg on Tuesday.
In the last three sessions, the white metal plunged Rs 5,500 per kg. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 200 to Rs 78,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 78,900 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Gold remains on the defensive as the market braces for the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's (Fed) meeting, which can provide forward guidance for bullion prices, experts said. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery went up Rs 74, or 0.1 per cent, to trade at Rs 76,945 per 10 grams.



Net direct tax kitty grows to Rs 15.82 lakh crore

Net direct tax collection grew 16.45 per cent year-on-year to over Rs 15.82 lakh crore till December 17 this fiscal, buoyed by higher advance tax mop-up, government data showed. Advance tax collection during the period rose 21 per cent to Rs 7.56 lakh crore.
The collection includes corporate tax of over Rs 7.42 lakh crore and non-corporate tax mop-up of Rs 7.97 lakh crore. Securities Transaction Tax (STT) of Rs 40,114 crore was collected between April 1-December 17 of current fiscal year. Refunds worth Rs 3.39 lakh crore were issued during the period, registering a growth of 42.49 per cent year-on-year. Gross direct tax collection, which includes corporate, personal income tax and STT stood at over Rs 19.21 lakh crore, a 20.32 per cent growth over the collection in April 1-December 17, 2023



Gem, jewellery exports decline to USD 1,986 mn

Gems and jewellery exports saw a decline of 12.94 per cent to USD 1,986.21 million (Rs 16,763.13 crore) in November on prolonged geopolitical tension, Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said on Wednesday. Gems and jewellery exports in November 2023 stood at USD 2,281.4 million, the GJEPC data added.
Cut and polished diamonds export in November declined 39.81 per cent to USD 666.01 million compared to USD 1,106.53 million for the same period last year. Provisional exports of polished lab grown diamonds during November declined 42.37 per cent to USD 62.88 million over USD 109.10 million for the previous year. However, the plain gold jewellery exports grew 72.12 per cent to USD 652.81 in November as compared to USD 379.27 million in the same period of the previous year.
"Prolonged geopolitical tension continues to remain a matter of concern for the Indian gems and jewellery industry, which has led to a slowdown in exports after seeing an uptick in the previous month

TRUMP'S TARIFF THREAT

'We have to wait and watch to see how it pans out': Official

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



So one will have to wait and watch and see," Director General of Foreign Trade (DGF) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said here at CII's export competitiveness event

Imposing reciprocal duties violates global trade rules but one has to follow a "wait and watch" approach to US President-elect Donald Trump's remarks on imposing reciprocal tariffs, a senior official said on Wednesday.

US President-elect Donald Trump has said that India charges a lot of tariffs, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products.

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"It will be very difficult to decipher from one or two sentences which Mr Trump makes but if I understood from what he was saying. His main intent is that reciprocity will matter in future. So if you are putting a tax on Harley-Davidson (bikes) we will also put a tax on your motorbike exports. So from that point of view, this will be in clear violation of the WTO (World Trade Organization) norms but there are instances when Mr Trump has used measures like Section 232 of the Tariff Act which allows the US to take unilateral measures against countries on national security grounds. "So one will have to wait and watch and see," Director General of Foreign Trade (DGF) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said here at CII's export competitiveness event. He said that there are many areas where India has tariff peaks but the country does not necessarily export those to the US.

For example, India has high customs duties on a number of agri goods but they are not necessarily exported to America.

"So if the US uses reciprocity and imposes taxes on that, it will not harm us in a major way but there could be a few items where this reciprocal principle thing might impact us," he said. Further, he added, "So one has to wait and watch, how it is panning out and the fine print of this will be available only after they undergo a process like they have a process where the USTR (US Trade Representative) examines, investigates and recommends an action. Before guessing the impact, one will have to wait and watch as to which are the kind of products that they are looking at."

In 2019, Trump repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on American products. He has criticised India's "big tariffs" on American paper products and the iconic Harley-Davidson bikes.

Indian economy to grow 6.6 pc: Ind-Ra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) on Wednesday projected the Indian economy to grow at 6.6 per cent in 2025-26, up from 6.4 per cent in the current fiscal year.

Ind-Ra believes investments will be a key growth driver for the Indian economy in FY26, like in FY22 and FY24.



The Indian economy has experienced a cyclical growth slowdown in the past three quarters, which it expects to reverse from the December quarter.

The GDP growth till FY24 was impacted by the aftereffects of Covid-19, even the base effect impacted the quarterly GDP growth.

While the June quarter GDP growth of FY25 was impacted by the combination of a strong base effect and the general elections in May 2024, the growth in the July-September period witnessed the extended impact of weak private sector capex.

Ind-Ra believes that the Indian economy is facing monetary, fiscal, and external tightening. While it expects monetary conditions to ease now, the fiscal and external tightening is expected to continue in FY26 as well, the agency said.

"Nonetheless, the FY26 GDP growth is expected to be same as India's best decadal growth (FY11-FY20)," says Devendra Kumar Pant, Chief Economist and Head Public Finance, Ind-Ra.

Ind-Ra's said growth and inflation forecast could, however, be affected by any tariff war, and any capital outflow, if the dollar continues to strengthen.

Ind-Ra expects the retail inflation in FY26 to average at 4.4 per cent, lower than FY25 forecast of 4.9 per cent. "The timing of rate cut would depend on how the forthcoming data -- arithmetic of the FY26 Union Budget, inflation trajectory and evolving domestic and global landscape -- gels with the RBI's flexible inflation targeting approach," Ind-Ra said.

CAI expects 36.5 pc dip in cotton exports on lower output

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's cotton exports are likely to decline 36.53 per cent in the 2024-25 season, beginning from October 1, to 18 lakh bales due to lower production following shrinking acreage of the crop in the north and Gujarat, Cotton Association of India (CAI) said on Wednesday.

The total exports during the 2023-24 season stood at 28.36 lakh bales, according to CAI data.



"The decline in cotton exports is mainly due to a decline in production following lower acreage this year. The acreage for cotton crop has shrunk 35 per cent in the north cotton growing region (Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan) and by 15 per cent in Gujarat.

This is going to keep the cotton prices steady compared to the global markets," CAI President Atul Ganatra told PTI.

The total cotton pressing 2023-24 season is estimated at 302.25 lakh bales compared to 327.45 lakh bales in the previous season.

Meanwhile, the total cotton supply till end of November 2024 is estimated at 108.41 lakh bales, comprising the pressing figures of 69.22 lakh bales, imports of 9 lakh bales and the opening stock estimated at 30.19 lakh bales at the beginning of the season.

Further, the CAI has estimated cotton consumption till November-end at 54 lakh bales while the export shipments up to November 30, are estimated at 4 lakh bales of 170 kg.

Stock at the end of November is estimated at 50.41 lakh bales, CAI added.

Sensex, Nifty extend losses on foreign fund outflows

All eyes on US Fed's decision

PNS ■ MUMBAI



Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed on the back foot for the third straight session on Wednesday as investors offloaded utility, capital goods and metal stocks amid foreign fund outflows.

Besides, investor sentiment remained subdued ahead of the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 502.25 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 80,182.20, taking its downtrend to the third day. During the day, it tanked 634.38 points or 0.78 per cent to 80,050.07.

As many as 2,563 stocks declined while 1,442 advanced and 94 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty declined 137.15 points or 0.56 per cent to 24,198.85.

"The near-term market construct has turned weak, with FIIs turning sellers on rallies. Yesterday's massive FII sell figure of Rs 6,410 crore in the cash market indicates that more selling is in store on market bounces. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Power Grid, NTPC, Adani Ports, JSW Steel, ICICI Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finance were the main laggards.

In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra and HCL Technologies were the gainers.

"Nifty fell for the third consecutive session, losing 137 points amid selling pressure ahead of the US Fed's interest rate decision later on Wednesday. Over these three sessions, Nifty dropped by 2.3 per cent.

The BSE smallcap index declined 0.76 per cent, and the midcap gauge dipped 0.61 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, utilities tanked 2.06 per cent, power (1.78 per cent), capital goods (1.56 per cent), metal (1.44 per cent), industrials (1.30 per cent) and financial services (1.20 per cent).

BSE Focused IT, healthcare and IT were the gainers. "Investors shunned stocks led by banking ahead of the outcome of the US rate decision with a focus on the Fed chairman's commentary on inflation and growth outlook in the backdrop of the worsening global economic situation. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,409.86 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

National Cooperative Database is ready and operational: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has launched the National Cooperative Database (NCD), which will be a valuable tool for improving the cooperative landscape in India, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

The NCD portal is a comprehensive repository of information on cooperative societies across India. There are more than 800,000 primary cooperative societies with over 29 crore members, according to the portal.

The database was created in three phases and is now operational at coopera tives.gov.in, Cooperation Minister Amit Shah said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

The database will help in data-driven decision-making, effective monitoring and evaluation, policy formulation, transparency and accountability, research and analysis, and facilitating access to finance.

The NCD has been developed by Ministry of Cooperation with the support of state governments.

Data of all cooperative societies from various sectors has been entered in the database by nodal officers appointed by states for this purpose.

'High interest rates big deterrent for MSME exporters'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's high interest rates are a big deterrent for exporters community and the commerce ministry is working with its finance counterpart to help them at this front, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

Director General of Foreign Trade Santosh Kumar Sarangi said that the department of commerce has been "struggling" to convince the finance ministry regarding the relevance of the Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES) and the extent to which it is maintaining manufacturing competitiveness.

Sarangi said there are many studies which suggest that very high collateral demand by financial institutions is a big deterrent for MSMEs to access institutional finance and that deters them from getting into the export market.

"So how do we ensure collateral free or a subsidised collateral arrangement for MSMEs is something that the department of commerce is working with the department of expenditure," he said adding India has high interest rates vis-a-vis its peer nations.

The repo rate in India is 6.5 per cent, whereas in many Southeast Asian nations, it is between 2.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent.

"So this has been a big deterrent for our exporters, especially MSMEs, to become export competitive," he said.

He added that the IES has been able to partially neutralise the "very" high interest rates that "our exporters face.

As of now, the scheme is there till December 31.

"We hope our negotiations with the finance ministry is able to convince them that this actually a huge intervention for MSMEs and it allows them not only to stay afloat in the market but to ensure that their integration with the global marketplace is much better and stronger," he added.

Amazon exits Shoppers Stop; sells 4 pc stake for Rs 276 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global e-commerce giant Amazon on Wednesday exited retail chain Shoppers Stop by selling a 4 per cent stake in the company for Rs 276 crore through an open market transaction.

US-based Amazon, through its investment arm Amazon.com NV Investment Holdings, sold nearly 44 lakh shares or 4 per cent stake in Mumbai-headquartered Shoppers Stop, as per the block deal data on the National Stock Exchange (NSE).

'About 59 pc of entities surveyed faced financial frauds'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Many Indian organisations faced financial or economic fraud in the past 24 months where procurement fraud emerged as the top threat, a PwC survey said.

PwC's Global Economic Crime Survey 2024 analysed the responses of 2,446 heads of organisations across the world, of which 91 were from India, on the most disruptive economic crimes affecting their sector and ways of mitigating risks of fraud and non-compliance.

More than 50 per cent of the respondents held top positions and comprised board members, CEOs, managing directors and presidents, PwC said. It said, "59 per cent of the Indian organisations surveyed said that they had faced financial or economic fraud in the past 24 months. This is 18 per cent higher than the global average of 41 per cent and 7 per cent higher in India when compared to the results of the 2022 edition of the same survey."

It further said the 2024 edition of the survey indicates that procurement fraud is now a predominant issue for Indian businesses, with 50 per cent of respondents identifying it as a major problem, marking a significant 21 per cent increase compared to the global sentiment.

In contrast, in 2022, customer fraud was reported as the top concern by 47 per cent of businesses.

Globally, 44 per cent of leaders highlight cybercrime as their top concern, the survey said.

"Historically, one of the oldest economic crimes, procurement fraud involves illegal manipulation of procurement processes



for financial gain. This year, half of our respondents in India identified it as their major worry," Puneet Garkhel, Partner and Leader, Forensic Services at PwC India, said.

Being one of the most disruptive economic crimes, procurement fraud cuts across industries and processes, Garkhel added.

While Indian companies are using data analytics to combat procurement fraud with 52 per cent analysing transactions pre-deal and 46 per cent post-deal, only 37 per cent employ real-time payment monitoring with the capacity to block suspicious transactions.

HOAX BOMB THREATS TO AIRLINES

Central govt amends aircraft security rules

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of the recent spate of hoax bomb calls targeting airlines, the government has amended the aircraft security rules whereby perpetrators can face penalties and could even be barred from flying. The civil aviation ministry has amended the Aircraft (Security) Rules, 2023. Two new rules -- 29A and 30A -- have been introduced.

In October, airlines received 666 hoax bomb threats while the total number of such threats stood at 999 this year till November 14, as per official data. Under the amended rules, now, the Director General of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has powers to "refuse admission to any person or group of persons in the aircraft". Also, the DG can direct any person or group of persons to leave the aircraft," according to a notification. In case the DG is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient in the interest of security, then the directions can be issued in writing under Rule 29A, the notification said.

Rule 30A pertains to prohibiting communication of false information that can jeopardise the safety and security of an aircraft, aerodrome or civil aviation facility or both.

The prohibition is also for spreading false information that can "cause panic among



passengers, crew and ground personnel or the general public; or...disrupt the civil aviation operation," the notification dated December 9 said.

With the new rule, the perpetrators can face penalties of up to Rs 1 lakh.

Nitin Sarin, Managing Partner at Sarin & Co, said the latest amendments to the rules come against the backdrop of the spate of hoax bomb threats received by airlines in recent months. He also said the amended rules will act as a deterrent to those spreading false information that could adversely impact aircraft security and create panic among people.

"Now, individuals who are found to be spreading false information may be liable to face penalty of up to Rs 1 lakh.

"There is no specific mention of putting such people on a no-fly list in the amended rules. However, the new rule 29A that gives power to the BCAS DG to refuse boarding of an individual in an aircraft could be interpreted as being an enabler to permit the BCAS to create its own no-fly list," Sarin noted.













Sajid Nadiadwala's multi-starrer to release on December 5, 2025

2025 is set to be the year of Sajid Nadiadwala, with four major releases lined up. The head honcho of Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment is reuniting the dynamic duo of Shahid Kapoor and Vishal Bhardwaj for a big-screen entertainer under his banner, featuring Tripti Dimri, Nana Patekar and Randeep Hooda.

This big, action-packed commercial entertainer is scheduled to release on 5th December 2025, with the film's shooting commencing on 6th January.

The untitled film promises to deliver the perfect dose of entertainment for audiences. With *Sikandar, Housefull 5, Baaghi 4* and Vishal Bhardwaj's directorial next, Sajid Nadiadwala becomes the only producer to have multiple mega releases under his banner without any collaborations.

Presented by Sajid Nadiadwala, a Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment production, this untitled next is directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and slated for release on 5th December 2025.

INDIA'S OSCAR HOPE *LAAPATAA LADIES* FALLS SHORT BUT WINS HEARTS WITH CRITICAL ACCLAIM

India's *Laapataa Ladies*, helmed by Kiran Rao, is no longer in contention for the Oscars 2025. On Tuesday, December 17, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences revealed 15 films that have made the shortlist in 10 categories for the upcoming round. The films that made the shortlist will now be screened and voted on by Academy members, who will determine the final nominees for the 97th Academy Awards.

On Wednesday, the makers issued a statement making it official. The team behind the Indian film *Laapataa Ladies* (*Lost Ladies*) expressed gratitude and humility after the movie failed to make it to the Academy Awards shortlist this year.

"We are, of course, disappointed, but equally we are immensely grateful for the incredible support and belief we've received throughout this journey," said the producers of the film, Aamir Khan Productions, Jio Studios and Kindling Productions, in a joint statement.

The team thanked the Academy members and the Film Federation of India (FFI) jury for considering their film. "To be included in this prestigious process alongside some of the finest films from across the world is an honor in itself," they added.

The producers also expressed heartfelt thanks to audiences worldwide who have shown love and support for the film. "Our heartfelt thanks to all the audiences around the world who have expressed their love and support for our film," they said.

The team congratulated the teams of the top 15 shortlisted films and wished them the best in the next stages of the awards. "We congratulate the teams of all the top 15 shortlisted films and wish them the very best in the next stages of the awards," they said.



Despite missing the shortlist, the team remains committed to bringing more powerful stories to life and sharing them with the world. "For us, this is not the end but a step forward. We remain committed to bringing more powerful stories to life and sharing them with the world," they concluded.

Laapataa Ladies has received critical acclaim for its unique storytelling and powerful performances. Although it may not be representing India at the Oscars this year, it has undoubtedly left a mark on the hearts of audiences and critics alike.



TAAPSEE & KANIKA'S *GANDHARI* SHOOTING BEGINS

Taapsee Pannu kickstarts her shoot for the much-anticipated *Gandhari* by ace writer-producer Kanika Dhillon. The actor has dropped some interesting images from the first day of her shoot, creating anticipation amongst her audiences.

Gandhari marks Kanika Dhillon and Taapsee Pannu's sixth collaboration after back-to-back success with *Manmarziyaan, Haseen Dilruba, Phir Aayi Hasseen Dilruba* and many more. The images from the first day of the shoot portray Taapsee in a never-before-seen avatar.

Taapsee shared those images and wrote, "Dear God, grant my request so that I may never deviate from doing good deeds. That, I shall have no fear of the enemy when I go into battle and with determination I will be victorious. That, I may teach my mind to only sing your praises. And when the time comes, I should die fighting heroically on the field of battle. Let the war begin! *Gandhari*."

Gandhari is the second project under Kanika Dhillon's banner, Kathha Pictures, post the success of the mystery drama *Do Patti* and for this action drama, the ace producer has roped in highly acclaimed director Devashish Makhija, known for his movies like *Bhonsle, Joram* and others.







LOOKBOOK



A day before its highly anticipated premiere on Prime Video, Pushing Buttons Studios hosted a special screening of Indo-French coming-of-age drama *Girls Will Be Girls*. The award-winning film, which has garnered critical acclaim on the global festival circuit, marks the feature directorial debut of Shuchi Talati. It also introduces debutants Preeti Panigrahi and Kesav Binoy Kiron in lead roles, alongside acclaimed actress Kani Kusruti in a pivotal performance.











FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



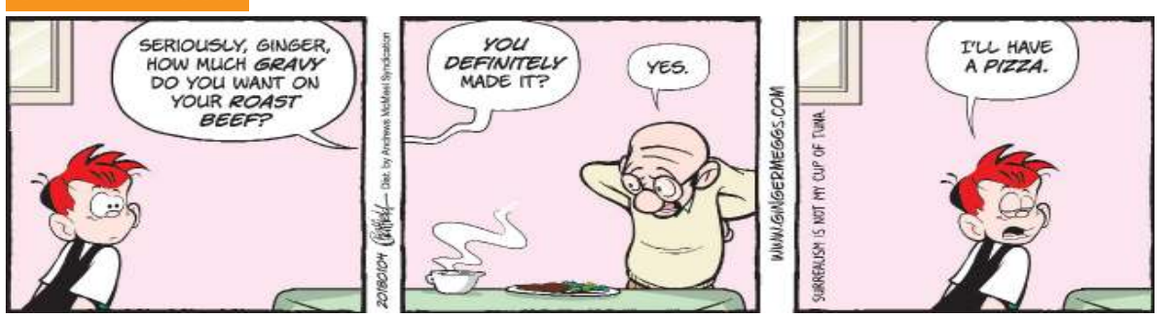
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NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

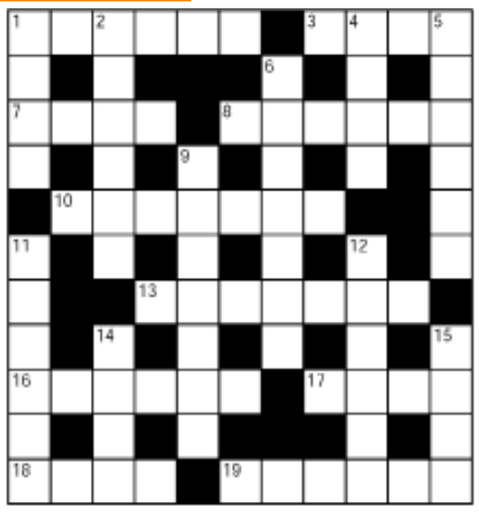
Yesterday's solution

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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.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Connected together
3 Mix black and white to make this colour
7 Shift
8 Ottawa is the capital city of this country
10 Very unusual
13 Baby cats
16 Funny circus performers
17 Munch on
18 Painful to touch
19 Almost

DOWN

1 Leap
2 Ask to come
4 Use a book
5 Every twelve months
6 Badly behaved
9 A sick person in hospital
11 Building blocks made from baked clay
12 A weight to stop a boat drifting
14 Bitter-tasting
15 Not at home

SOLUTION 771

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Thursday
December 19, 2024



FOSTERING CULTURE OF CHANGE & COMPASSION WITH 'SAMARPAN'

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer* for our special segment of Community Wise, Courtney Lalotra, the visionary founder of Samarpan Trust, delves into the transformative journey of her organisation, which has been at the forefront of empowering marginalised communities in India through a multi-faceted approach to education, healthcare and social welfare

TEJAL SINHA
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In the depths of adversity, a spark of compassion can ignite a movement. For Courtney Lalotra, founder of Samarpan Trust, that spark was fanned into a flame by a poignant encounter with an abandoned special-needs child during her volunteer work in India. She has devoted her life to uplifting marginalised communities through a multi-faceted approach to education, healthcare and social welfare. The child's death left a profound impact on Lalotra and ignited her desire to address the systemic issues affecting vulnerable populations.

"Caring for that child opened my eyes to the glaring gaps in the social welfare system," Lalotra shared in an exclusive chat with ***The Pioneer***, as she goes on to add, "Millions of children and women were suffering due to systemic neglect and I knew something had to be done."

This experience became the foundation of Samarpan Trust, which was built to uplift and empower women, children and families in vulnerable situations. She elaborated, "The struggles I witnessed within these communities—and the realisation of their immense potential—motivated me to create a platform that protects, educates and empowers. At its core, Samarpan is driven by the belief that every individual deserves dignity, opportunity and a chance to thrive, no matter their circumstances."

The trust stands out for its integrated approach, addressing healthcare, education and social welfare as interconnected pillars of development. She explained that the organisation combines healthcare initiatives with educational programs, ensuring that children are healthy enough to attend school and succeed academically. "Healthcare, education and social welfare are inseparable. For example, when we provide healthcare support to children, we're not just treating illnesses—we're enabling them to learn, grow and dream without limitations. Similarly, our skills training programs for women tackle systemic poverty and inequality, empowering families to become self-reliant and resilient," she remarked.



This approach reflects the trust's commitment to fostering sustainable development. She believes that by addressing these interconnected challenges, the trust creates a ripple effect of positive change within the community.

They employ a comprehensive system to assess its impact, using both quantitative and qualitative metrics. The trust places equal emphasis on qualitative outcomes. "For us, the impact is more than just numbers. It's about real stories of transformation—women becoming financially independent, children achieving educational milestones and families breaking free from cycles of poverty," she explained.

To refine and improve its programs, Samarpan conducts regular reviews, incorporates community feedback. "We see our role as dynamic. We're constantly learning and evolving to meet the needs of the communities we serve."

Healthcare forms a crucial component of their initiatives, as access to quality care remains a significant challenge for marginalised communities. They have partnered with local doctors to organise free medical camps, dental health checkups and health awareness programs. "We also focus on women's health," Lalotra said. "Through our sanitary pad distribution drives, we address menstrual hygiene—an often overlooked yet essential aspect of women's well-being." These efforts ensure that even the most economically disadvantaged individuals have access to essential healthcare services.

Then comes education, which remains a cornerstone of their work. Its Girls' Education Program (GEP) sponsors the education of underprivileged girls at risk of child labour, early marriage, or dropping out of school. "We go beyond sponsorship by offering career counselling, computer training, English courses, job training and internships. This comprehensive support system gives girls the tools they need to succeed."

They also operate free schools for the children of daily wage laborers, where students are taught up to a second-grade level before being enrolled in government schools. Special needs daycare centers provide safe spaces for children with disabilities, where individualised education plans are designed by experts.

The trust's Virtual Interaction Interchange program connects children with global volunteers via video calls, helping them improve their English and confidence. Adult literacy programs further extend the trust's mission, ensuring that even parents in marginalised communities have the opportunity to learn to read and write. Samarpan's vocational training programs in tailoring, handicrafts and other skills have been pivotal in empowering women to achieve economic independence. "We've partnered with international markets to ensure that these women earn fair wages for their handmade goods. It's not just about income—it's about dignity, leadership, and creating change-makers within their communities."

Leadership development programs equip women with the confidence and skills to advocate for their rights and inspire others. "When women become leaders in their communities, the ripple effect is extraordinary," she explains.

Let's not forget sustainability, which is a key priority for Samarpan. Lalotra explains how the trust builds community ownership and develops scalable models, such as tuition centres run by program graduates. "One of our graduates, Anita, started a study center on the roof of her slum home. It's these grassroots efforts that inspire us and prove the impact of our programs," she says.

Despite challenges such as resource constraints and cultural stigmas, the founder believes in the importance of community advocacy and flexibility. "Listening to the community and involving them in the solution design is critical. Every challenge is an opportunity to innovate and grow."

Looking ahead, Samarpan plans to expand its initiatives into mental health counselling, environmental sustainability and digital education. "We're exploring e-learning centers that focus on AI and coding to bridge the digital divide in rural areas. The future lies in equipping communities with the tools to thrive in a rapidly changing world."





Ayurveda's global renaissance

In a world gripped by chronic illnesses, mental health crisis and a burgeoning demand for holistic wellness, an ancient Indian healing tradition is quietly making its way into the heart of modern healthcare. Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old system of medicine, is experiencing a renaissance that stretches far beyond its Indian roots, finding resonance in Western societies and influencing global health landscapes.

Sitting at the intersection of science, sustainability and spirituality, Ayurveda offers a holistic paradigm that prioritizes balance—of body, mind, and spirit—over symptom management. For centuries, Ayurveda's principles of prevention, nature alignment and personalised care were embedded within India's cultural tapestry. Today, in an era of integrative healthcare, its appeal transcends borders.

"With chronic disease and lifestyle disorders on the rise, particularly in Western nations, Ayurvedic medicine offers a new and powerful context for illness," says Dr. Monica B Sood, the visionary CEO of Navjivan Group and Chairperson of the National Unity & Security Council in India. "It advocates addressing the primary causes of afflictions, not just treating symptoms. This perfectly aligns with today's global consciousness around prevention and sustainable living." Ayurveda's principles have been adopted piecemeal across global wellness trends—yoga, mindfulness and plant-based diets—but its broader philosophy has long struggled to gain mainstream credibility in the West. Skepticism around its scientific rigor and misconceptions about its efficacy have often relegated it to niche circles.

The landscape, however, is shifting. With initiatives such as scientific research collaborations, university courses abroad, and cross-border trade of certified Ayurvedic products, the system is inching closer to global acceptance. "Scientific research on Ayurveda has steadily increased," Dr. Sood explains, "paving the way for meticulous and standardised implementation in Western societies." The result is a new openness toward this ancient science, particularly in areas grappling with unsustainable healthcare models. "Ayurveda's compatibility with contemporary sciences like nutrigenomics, psychology and immunology allows it to adapt seamlessly to diverse cultural and geographical settings," she adds.

This integration was a focal point during Dr. Sood's recent address at the UK Parliament, where she advocated for closer India-UK collaborations in health and wellness. "I highlighted India's transformational economic trajectory and immense potential to forge partnerships with the UK in health, education, and green energy," she says. "Combining India's historic work in preventive medicine with the UK's innovations in medical research can lead to solutions for global challenges—from mental health and chronic conditions to pandemic readiness."

Specifically, Dr. Sood envisions joint research initiatives and innovation hubs bridging ancient and modern systems. "I hope this dialogue leads to tangible outcomes, such as collaborative medical research, Ayurvedic integration into mainstream care, and accessible healthcare solutions for underserved populations."

Despite its growing traction, Ayurveda still faces significant hurdles. Scientific validation through rigorous clinical trials remains limited, and a lack of standardised regulatory frameworks undermines trust. Misconceptions persist, particularly in urban centers where allopathic medicine dominates. "There's skepticism about Ayurveda being unscientific," Dr. Sood concedes. "We need scientific backing, frameworks for integration, and public education to overcome these barriers."

Globalisation adds another layer of complexity. "Many traditional practices were passed down orally and face extinction. Meanwhile, inconsistent quality control and overharvesting of medicinal plants threaten sustainability. We need policy reforms, global collaboration, and tailored responses to safeguard indigenous knowledge." These challenges are particularly pronounced in efforts to establish Ayurvedic hospitals abroad. Cultural barriers—dietary habits, language differences, and entrenched preferences for allopathy—can slow progress. Yet, Dr. Sood sees an opportunity. "These hospitals can act as ambassadors of Ayurveda," she explains. "They can retain authenticity while adapting to local customs, offering structured, scientifically validated care that bridges cultural gaps."

In remote and underserved regions, digital platforms could hold the key to Ayurveda's accessibility. Combining ancient principles with next-generation technology, these platforms promise to revolutionise Ayurvedic care. "Artificial intelligence can enable personalised health recommendations based on individual prakriti," Dr. Sood says, referring to Ayurvedic body types. "Blockchain can authenticate medicinal products, while telemedicine can connect patients with skilled practitioners globally."

Wearable technology could integrate Ayurvedic principles into real-time health tracking, while virtual platforms may foster global communities where patients, practitioners, and researchers collaborate. "Such platforms will drive large-scale studies and scientific validation," she emphasises. "If applied strategically, Ayurveda could evolve into a global wellness movement."

Amid growing mental health concerns worldwide, Ayurveda offers a refreshingly holistic approach. By addressing the mind-body connection, it emphasises prevention, resilience and daily practices to foster mental well-being. "Ayurveda's philosophy of balance sees mental health not as isolated brain chemistry but as a dynamic interplay of physical, emotional and spiritual factors," Dr. Sood explains.

Practical interventions, such as incorporating dinacharya (daily routines) and pranayama (breathing exercises) into school curriculums, could transform educational spaces. "Herbs like brahmi and ashwagandha, known for their cognitive and stress-relief properties, can complement synthetic therapies," she notes.

Ayurveda's role in addressing chronic and complex illnesses—such as Alzheimer's, diabetes, epilepsy and cancer—represents one of its most exciting frontiers. "Brahmi and ashwagandha show immense potential in slowing cognitive decline and supporting brain health," Dr. Sood says. "In diabetes care, herbs like methi and gurmar improve insulin sensitivity, targeting root metabolic imbalances." Perhaps most groundbreaking is Ayurveda's emerging role in oncology. Herbs like giloy and turmeric are being studied for their anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties. "They not only help control chemotherapy side effects but may also inhibit tumor growth," Dr. Sood explains. "It's a remarkable fusion of ancient wisdom and modern science."

As global healthcare systems reach breaking points, Ayurveda's potential as a sustainable, accessible, and holistic medical model has never been more profound. "It's time to view Ayurveda not as an alternative but as a complementary pillar of integrative medicine," Dr. Sood says.

By championing scientific validation, fostering global partnerships, and preserving its sustainability, Ayurveda may emerge not just as India's gift to the world, but as a necessary framework for the future of human health.

"The answers to modern healthcare crises may lie in ancient wisdom," Dr. Sood concludes. "We must ensure that Ayurveda's resurgence is global, inclusive, and forward-looking. Only then can its full potential be realised."





Dr. Monica B Sood, honoured at the Global Excellence in Leadership Summit & Awards (GELSA) 2024 at the UK Parliament, champions a visionary roadmap for India-UK collaboration—merging Ayurveda, healthcare and education to forge a robust partnership for 2030. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Dr. Sood shared insights on her groundbreaking efforts and the path forward

Your wedding wonderland with royal retreats

Today's new-age couples are increasingly seeking customised, immersive and stress-free wedding experiences at exotic locales. While most talk of weddings in Tuscan vineyards or islands of Maldives, Rajasthan in India is home to some splendid locations that add opulence, grandeur and royalty to a wedding celebration. With wedding destinations like Udaipur, Jaipur and Jodhpur, the region is just perfect for anyone seeking a celebration that is a cut above the rest.

Beyond ordinary: While the Pink City, is known for gorgeous havelis and palaces that can host grand weddings, the Lake City offers luxury beyond imagination and Jodhpur gives a peek into the vibrant Rajasthan culture on a grand scale. An expert wedding consultant has insider knowledge of hidden gems at these locations and offers clients an experience that is beyond ordinary. In sync with the values, personality and aesthetics of the couple, these cities reflect Indian culture and make the wedding a unique experience.

Cultural uniqueness: Rajasthan is known for folk songs and dances, henna artists and traditional art forms that can keep the guests enamoured and engaged for hours. When weaved expertly by the wedding consultants into the wedding at the destination, they can literally create the most enjoyable wedding. The groom entering in a vintage car or on elephants is an experience that can only be curated here. This cultural journey and celebration of deep-rooted customs adds authenticity to the experience of the couple along with the guests.

Gastronomic delight: Rajasthan is a storehouse of elaborate culinary experiences that consist of mouth-watering, authentic snacks, starters, and delectable dishes like kachori, dal bati choorma, bajre ki roti with chutney, ker sangri, etc. For non-vegetarians too, there is an array of choices, with lal maas beating all the dishes on the menu. Desserts such as ghewar and malpuas are also popular. Add to it the hospitality of Rajasthan that will feed the guests with love and in a traditional way.

Perfect guest experience: Although the couple is the main emphasis, destination wedding consultants understand that every guest's experience is equally important. They frequently plan carefully planned pre- and post-wedding activities to make everyone feel valued and pampered. Private tours, spa services and more can be included. This careful preparation guarantees that visitors depart with priceless memories and a sense of having been a part of something genuinely remarkable. And nothing can match the vast options that Rajasthani cities have to offer.

Technology infusion: The planning of opulent vacation weddings has changed due to technology. Virtual site tours, digital planning tools and personalised professional advice at every stage are now available. Couples can stay informed and involved even when they are separated by great distances thanks to the virtual consultations and real-time planning updates that many consultants provide. Additionally, guests can take advantage of interactive experiences such as personalised apps that provide event specifics and improve the experience for all participants.

Seamless experience: A destination wedding comes with its own set of complex logistics issues. Getting married can create more fuss about who gets the visa and who can travel such long distances. Rajasthan is closer to most Indian cities, making its important cities a popular choice for couples who want to get married at a gorgeous location.

While all the aforementioned factors make Rajasthan the most ideal wedding destination, always remember that a professional wedding consultant can be instrumental in making the event a spectacular one, with personalised touch and unforgettable memorabilia for the couple as well as the guests.



the pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | THURSDAY | DECEMBER 19, 2024

Third Test between India and Australia ends in a draw

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India escaped with a crucial draw in the weather-hit third Test against Australia after intermittent rain wiped out majority of play on day five, leaving the five-match series tantalisingly locked at 1-1.

Resuming the day at 252 for nine, India batted for 24 balls and were all out for 260 in their first innings.

With limited time left in the day to force a result after majority of the morning session was rained out, the Australian batters came out all guns blazing and stuttered to 89 for seven in 18 overs before making a brave declaration, giving India at least 54 overs to chase down 275.

Bad light and rain forced an early tea break soon after with India at 8 for no loss in 2.1 overs. The rain got heavier as the time passed and no play was possible thereafter.

The absorbing series is nicely poised going into the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

India would have fancied chasing 275 on day five but weather helped them immensely in the game controlled by Australia.

Jasprit Bumrah (3/18) was brilliant as usual in the second innings with Mohammed Siraj (2/36) and Akash Deep (2/28) offering good support.

Australia's approach in the second essay was brave and questionable at the same time.

Nathan McSweeney (4) and Marnus Labuschagne (1) went after balls outside the off-stump and perished while Usman Khawaja (8) and Mitchell Marsh (2) fell to good deliveries.

Wickets falling in a heap did not impact Australia's approach as they kept going for the big hits. Skipper Cummins chipped in with two sixes and as many fours before the declaration.

In the morning session, lightening and subsequent rain allowed only 24 balls to be bowled.

The warning of severe weather was flashed on the digital scoreboard at the Gabba shortly after India were bowled out for 260 in their first innings, handing Australia a lead of 185 runs.

Akash Deep (31) was the last man out, stumped off a Travis Head delivery, bringing an end to a 47-run stand with Jasprit Bumrah (10 not out).

The duo had done well to avoid the follow-on on day four.

Players were asked to remain in the dressing room and fans were requested to take shelter away from the fence after the visitors were all out.

The forecast was largely clear for Brisbane from Thursday onwards but the entire game has been adversely impacted by bad weather with rain forcing multiple stoppages for four out of five days.

Only day two of the game was not impacted by weather as Australia coasted to 405 for seven on the back of memorable hundreds from Head and Steve Smith.

Going into the fourth Test beginning December 26, India have major concerns in both batting and bowling department which they must address.

Barring K L Rahul, who has been India's standout batter on the tour, the star-studded line up has not found a way to negotiate the threats posed by the Australian pace attack.

Skipper Rohit Sharma has been woefully short of runs and after the hundred in Perth, superstar Virat Kohli has struggled with ball outside the off-stump.

Majority of the batters have been guilty of playing away from their bodies in challenging conditions. They will need to curb their white-ball instincts to make an impact at MCG.

On the bowling front too, it has been effectively a one man show with Jasprit Bumrah doing the heavy lifting in all the games.

Mohammed Siraj bowled in the Brisbane Test with a niggle, leaving a question mark over his fitness ahead of the Melbourne game.

Akash Deep, who played ahead of Harshit Rana, bowled well in the game but did not have a lot of luck, especially against Smith. He is expected to retain his place the eleven.

India have picked three different spinners in the first three Test. It remains to be seen what strategy they adopt for the Boxing Day Test.





Will go to Melbourne with confidence: Rohit

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma hailed the resilience of the lower-order batters after his team managed to salvage a crucial draw in the rain-hit third Test against Australia here on Wednesday, saying the side it has given the side renewed confidence for the remaining series.

With the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy now tied 1-1, Rohit believes the team's morale will be high during the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

"I mean, we will take that. Obviously to have interruptions like that wasn't great, but going to Melbourne at 1-1 pretty much gives us that confidence to go out there and pull things towards us," Rohit said at the post-match presentation.

"The situation we were in just after lunch (on Day 4), needed someone to stand up and take us through, we knew with the weather, we knew it wasn't going to be a full game."

Opener KL Rahul once again shone, top-scoring with 84 before Ravindra Jadeja (77) put up a lower-order resistance. Then the last duo of Akash Deep (31) and Jasprit Bumrah (10 not out) put on a gritty 47-run partnership to help India avoid follow-on before they were all out for 260 in reply to Australia's big first innings score of 445.

"Credit to (Ravindra) Jadeja, the way he played and (KL) Rahul, the way he played was magnificent at the top of the order, the fight that Akash Deep and Bumrah (gave) was great to watch, we have seen them work so hard at the nets (on their batting)."

Despite the challenges posed by intermittent rain and lightning on the final day, India's bowlers held their own in the second innings.

Bumrah was particularly brilliant, taking 3/18, while Akash Deep and Mohammed Siraj chipped in with two wickets each.

Australia's bold approach in the second innings saw them declare at 89/7, setting India a target of 275 in 54 overs, but bad light and rain ensured no further play was possible after the early stages of the chase.

"Coming to the bowling, Bumrah was outstanding, Akash Deep is a feisty cricketer, always wants to be involved in the game, very new to international cricket, he has worked hard at the nets, still new to international cricket, but he has put in the hard yards...

"There are people in the group to put their hand across and help him going forward. As he showed with the bat, these are the sort of characters we needed in the team," Rohit added.

Cummins rues not leading 2-1

Australia captain Pat Cummins lamented the impact of rain on the game's outcome.

"Would be better to be 2-1, lot of rain, nothing we can do about it. We set a huge total and felt like we were right ahead of the game throughout," said Cummins.

Australia also suffered a heartbreak with pacer Josh Hazlewood ruled out of the entire series with a calf strain.

"Poor Josh, one of those things, few rain breaks probably helped, Starc and I were able to push through.

"Day 5 here can be up and down, there wasn't much cricket played on it, felt challenging when the ball was new and hard."

Cummins also highlighted the positives that his team could take from the match.

"(Steve) Smith and Head's innings' were fantastic, Alex Carey too... (Nathan) Lyon looked really good, Starc got wickets, just about ticked off every box."

On the Boxing Day Test, Cummins said: "That will be amazing, one of those things here in Australia that you wake up and can't wait for."

Head confident he'll be 'fine' for Boxing Day Test in Melbourne

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia's man in form, Travis Head, played down concerns over his fitness after appearing to struggle with a potential groin issue during the rain-marred drawn third Test against India at the Gabba here on Wednesday.

Head said he expects to be "fine" for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

The five-match series is tied 1-1 going into the Boxing Day Test after the drawn affair.

"Very pleased with the way I am batting at the moment. Just a little sore, but I should be fine (before the next game)," Head, who was adjudged the player of the match, said after the game.

The 30-year-old, who has been in red-hot form with 409 runs at an average of 81.80 this series, noticeably struggled to run between the wickets during his brief innings of 17 on day five.



At times, he was seen clutching his groin, raising concerns among the commentators.

Former pacer Brett Lee called the visuals "worrying signs", noting Head's limited movement, while Indian great Ravi Shastri also expressed concern, describing the potential injury as a "body blow" for Australia, given Head's big role in the batting lineup.

Head did not take the field during India's second innings, fuelling further speculation.

"Travis, he'll be fine. It's a bit of a tight quad. He'll be fine for Melbourne," asserted his captain Pat Cummins.

The left-hander further reflected on his approach this series, attributing his success to adapting well to challenging conditions and staying composed at the crease.

"Challenging wicket. I had to work through the gears. I had different plans, pleased I could get through those. Good partnership with (Steve) Smith," he said on their centuries, contributing to their 241-run massive stand.

"I just try to sum up the conditions well. What I've done well this series is assess the conditions. Pleased with the tempo I've batted with. Pretty relaxed communication.

"Felt like he was back in his rhythm, and he gives me full freedom and confidence knowing he's going to be there for a long while. I feel like I am playing the situation in front of me," he added.

Mitchell Santner replaces Williamson as New Zealand white-ball skipper

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner was on Wednesday appointed the New Zealand white-ball captain, officially taking over the role from Kane Williamson who stepped down following the T20 World Cup in June.

Santner, who has represented New Zealand in 243 internationals, will take-on the permanent leadership mantle of both the ODI and T20 sides. Santner has previously led the team in 24 T20s and four ODIs.

The 32-year-old will begin his full-time captaincy tenure in the upcoming T20 and ODI series against Sri Lanka in late December and early January.

The Sri Lanka marks the beginning of a heavy run of white ball cricket for the side, including an ODI Tri Series in Pakistan in February, followed by the ICC Champions Trophy and a home T20 and ODI series against Pakistan to conclude the home summer.



"It's obviously a huge honour and a privilege to be asked," said Santner in a NZC statement.

"When you're a young kid the dream was always to play for New Zealand but to have the opportunity to officially lead my country in two formats is special.

"It's a new challenge and I'm excited to get stuck into the important period of white ball cricket that we have ahead of us."

Santner, who most recently led the side in last month's T20 and ODI series in Sri Lanka, is one of just four players to have represented New Zealand over 100 times in both ODI and T20I cricket and is widely regarded as one of the top white ball bowlers in world cricket.

He first led the side in a T20 against West Indies at Bay Oval in November 2020 and became New Zealand's 24th ODI captain when he led the side in the only ODI against Scotland in Edinburgh in 2022.

New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said Santner was a great fit for the role.

"Mitch is a fantastic team man and leads by example in all facets of the game," said Stead.

"He's an incredibly calm and collected personality and he has a huge amount of respect in the changing room, which will serve him well.

Pacer Ihsanullah returns to action after injury fiasco

PTI ■ KARACHI

Promising young Pakistan pacer Ihsanullah has returned to competitive cricket in the ongoing Champions Cup T20 tournament in Rawalpindi after being sidelined since late 2022 following a botched diagnosis of his injury.

The Pakistan Cricket Board had appointed an independent medical panel to oversee his rehabilitation, following prolonged issues with his treatment and recovery.

Ihsanullah emerged as a bright prospect during the 2022 Pakistan Super League to be fast-tracked into Pakistan's white-ball squads for T20 and ODI matches. However, his progress was halted by an elbow injury, which led to significant scrutiny of the PCB's medical management.

The independent medical panel discovered that the injury had been misdiagnosed, and appropriate treatment was not initially recommended.

Ihsanullah had also not adhered to his rehab properly.

This mismanagement eventually prompted the resignation of the PCB's head of medical panel, Dr Sohail Saleem.

During his treatment, Ihsanullah even underwent an elbow surgery but he was later sent to England to see a specialist by the independent medical panel who ruled out another surgery but recommended a new rehab programme for the player.

At one stage even the PCB officials appeared to lose patience with the young bowler for not taking his recovery seriously and then he even blamed the PCB for his prolonged forced absence from cricket.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's seasoned allrounder, Shadab Khan is also facing fitness issues while captaining a team, in the Champions Cup which forced him to miss a few games of the event and he has not even bowled frequently.

Australian capatain Cummins denies momentum in India's favour after draw

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australia captain Pat Cummins is not bothered if India walked away with momentum from the drawn third Test but is pleased that they did not let the visitors exploit better batting conditions in the first innings.

Australia, who largely controlled the third Test, declared their second innings at 89/7 to set India a 275-run target but rian prevented an exciting climax.

"(I) can't say I've ever been scared of momentum — don't really care about that. I think we can take a lot from this week," he told media after the end of the contest.

"A couple of great partnerships, to be sent in on a (fresh) wicket and score 450 (445) and then managing to bowl India out for 250 (260) when the wicket, the conditions were probably a little bit better. We can take a lot from that," he said.

Ashwin is one of the all time greats

While the contest expectedly ended in a draw with the series tied 1-1, India's spin great Ashwin announced his immediate retirement from international cricket.

Cummins said Ashwin's decision midway through the series was surprising.

"Yeah, (the timing was) a bit of a surprise. He's obviously been a fantastic player all around the world really. There aren't too many finger spinners that have that kind of longevity. He'll go down as one of the all-time greats."

"(He was) always a fantastic competitor, (we) had a lot of battles against him over the years here in Australia as well over in India. Just a massive respect from our change room to the career that he's had," he said.

The home skipper said the Brisbane Test was one of the most frustrating games due to the number of times players were forced off the field.

"It's right up there. I can't remember (in the past) even coming close (to) the amount of times we were on and off throughout the five days," he said.



"Especially here in Brisbane, I feel like it normally just pelts down for a couple hours and then you're back on and it's clear... yeah, frustrating. (It) felt like we were ahead of the game for pretty much all of it, but not to be," he added.

Hazlewood to miss remainder of series, Head will be fine

Cummins lamented that pacer Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the series due to injury but said Travis Head would be fine from a "tight quad" trouble.

"Joshy won't be part of the series, which is a real shame. Travis, he'll be fine. It's a bit of a tight quad. He'll be fine for Melbourne," Cummins said.

"It's really tough. It's kind of in the story of the last few summers. The extra layer to that is probably one of the most disciplined, professional sports people you'd ever meet," Cummins said while talking further on Hazlewood.

"The way he trains and prepares and goes about... when he's at home, he's in the gym every second day, every day doing whatever it needs to take to try and minimise injuries."

"That's an extra kind of blow knowing how much he has put into his body over the last few years to try and play as many Test matches as he can."

He continued, "We value him. Unfortunately, he'll miss this series. I don't know when exactly he'll be right to go again, Even in the little snippets you've seen this series, how much we rate him, how much of an impact he can have." Cummins said it has been a tough series for top-order batters while backing Australia rookie Nathan McSweeney ahead of the team's selection for the remaining two Tests.

"The trend in world cricket, pretty much all around the world, is (that) the top three is really hard place to bat at the moment. Particularly here in Australia, the wickets are tough," he said.

"I've been really impressed with the way he's (McSweeney) gone about it even today. Someone's starting out his career still being selfless enough to go out there and try and play shots rather than just trying to preserve and get a score."

"I'm really impressed with him. Again, (he) hasn't probably scored the runs that he would (have) liked, but he has played some important knocks that have set up a win in Adelaide and a really good result here," he added.

'Accent is not just used as a comedy, but emotion in *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes*'



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The recent trend of films featuring regional accents continues with the upcoming movie *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes*, which showcases the Srikakulam accent. Writer Mohan is making his directorial debut with this film, which stars Vennela Kishore in the title role, along with six other actors, including Ananya Nagalla, Muralidhar Goud and Ravi Teja Mahadasyam. "This is not just a comedy film, but also an emotional one," said director-writer Mohan about the film. He added that the story is set in the backdrop of 1991. "The accent is not used for just comedy in this film; it's an emotion," said the director.

Talking about the story, Mohan said that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Visakhapatnam before he left for Sriperumbudur, where he was assassinated. "When a big incident happens, people don't think about a small incident that happened at the same time. So, I took the true story of Rajiv Gandhi and wrote a fictional story of *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes* and linked both in my story. If you want to know how I linked them, you have to watch my film," he said. Interestingly, most of the work for this film is not related to Srikakulam. "Most of the artists are from Telangana, including Vennela Kishore. They took it as a challenge and learned the Srikakulam accent for this film," said Mohan. He added that he too started watching videos of Srikakulam-related content and the accent. "I am from Guntur, but I know about Srikakulam, so I asked everyone to watch the videos related to the accent and also spoke with that accent in the office until the film was completed," he said.

The director said that Vennela Kishore is playing the character of the detective, Sherlock Holmes. "In general, a female lead or some other people assist the detective, but in my film, his father and mother are his assistants. They wanted their son to become a police officer, but he didn't, so he ended up as a private detective," said Mohan.

Producer Ramana Reddy wanted to make a film and was listening to many stories. "At that time, I narrated this story to him, he liked it and immediately wanted to start," he said, explaining how this project came together.

When they put *Srikakulam Sherlock Homes* as the title, the distributor Vamsi Nandipati suggested adding a tag to it, otherwise, people may not register. "Many people, especially the rural ones, didn't know Sherlock Holmes. So, we added the tag *Chantabbai Taluka*, because Chiranjeevi did a detective film *Chantabbai* and this Taluka is popular with Pawan Kalyan's Pithapuram constituency, so that's how we put the tagline," explained the director.

The director said that all the characters in this film are important. "In the last 40 minutes of the film, it definitely takes everyone into a spellbound state, and producer Vamsi Nandipati bought this film after watching that only," said Writer Mohan.

Writer Mohan, known for his work as a writer, is now making his directorial debut with *Srikakulam Sherlock Holmes*. Ahead of the film's release, he shares his insights on the film and speaks about his journey

Mohan hails from Guntur and worked with popular director EVV Satyanarayana, Posani Krishna Murali and then Jeevitha Rajasekhar. "When I worked with Jeevitha and Rajasekhar, I toured most of the areas in Srikakulam district with them when they campaigned for a political party. Actually, Rajasekhar only started calling me Writer Mohan, thus my name has this prefix," said Mohan. When he worked with EVV, there were many people with Mohan's name, "so he put the prefix Writer to my name, because I am from the Writing Department," he said.

The film was mostly shot near Nellimarla of Vizianagaram district, near Bheemili and then Ramoji Film City. "It's a period film and I wanted to capture the 90s look for my film. So, I didn't get many places, so I shot most of the film," said the director.

He also shared that there are many writers at present and there were many stories with them. "Everyone wanted to become directly a director now, earlier they started with assistant, associate and then director. He used to learn the work, but now they don't want to work and want to become directors," said Writer Mohan. He added that many writers didn't get a proper name when they worked for a film. "That's another reason many writers are turning to direction," he said.

When asked about his strong point, he said comedy. "When I worked with EVV Satyanarayana, I learnt this from him," he said. He said he didn't feel that he got the chance of direction very late. "I don't feel it. I learnt all the basics all these years and also settled with my family. Now, I got the chance to direct a film, so I can do it without any pressure," he concluded.



SIDDU JONNALAGADDA'S *JACK* LOCKS THE RELEASE DATE



Many filmmakers are now locking in their release dates for next year. With tough competition for release dates, many are announcing their release dates well in advance. One such film is Siddhu Jonnalagadda's *Jack*, which is scheduled to release on April 10, 2025.

Recently, Siddhu delivered a huge blockbuster with *Tillu Square*, the sequel to his earlier film *DJ Tillu*. He is currently working on multiple projects, including *Jack*, directed by Bommarillu Bhaskar. The film's tagline is 'Konchem Crack'. Bhaskar, who gained fame with the hit film *Bommarillu*, is now directing Siddhu Jonnalagadda and the duo is expected to explore a new genre.

BVSN Prasad is producing the film, and 80% of the shooting has already been completed. The film is currently being shot in Hyderabad. The makers are confident that they will complete the film soon and have ample time to promote it, which is why they announced April 10, 2025, as the release date.

The film promises to be a fun ride, with Vaishnavi Chaitanya, known for her role in *Baby*, as the female lead. Prakash Raj, Naresh, and Brahmaji also play key roles. Achu Rajamani is composing the music.



Srilakshmi honoured with lifetime achievement award at Bullitera Awards

Every year, VB Entertainment's Boppana Vishnu presents the Bullitera Awards and this year, he presented the awards for 2023-2024 at Shilpakala Vedika in Hyderabad. Many film and TV personalities attended the event, including popular director SV Krishna Reddy, producer Atchi Reddy, Ambika Krishna, JD Lakshmi Narayana, actor Puri Akash and actress Archana.

On this occasion, senior actress Srilakshmi was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award. In addition to this, awards were also given to TV artists, social media influencers, and YouTubers. Boppana Vishnu also provided financial assistance to ten artists.

Srilakshmi, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award, expressed her gratitude saying, "I am thankful to the Bullitera Award for recognising my work in films over the years. They have recognised me for acting in films for so many years and presented me with this award. First and foremost, I would like to thank my guru Jandhyala garu. Then, I would like to thank all the directors with whom I have worked." She added that she is grateful to all the audiences who have always shown special affection for her. "I will continue to entertain you like this," she said.

Apart from Srilakshmi, other award recipients at the function included *Bigg Boss* fame Dane Manas, actress Archana, *Bigg Boss* fame Bebakka, Prithviraj, who has completed 30 years in the industry, Divya Vani, Ritu Chowdhury, Bullet Bhaskar, Ram Satyanarayana and Madala Ravi.

Nani shoots in Kashmir for *Hit 3*

Nani is moving quickly from one film to another. After completing his work on his earlier film *Saripodhaa Sanivaaram*, he swiftly shifted his focus to his next project. The actor is currently in Kashmir, shooting for the film *HIT: The 3rd Case*. Directed by Dr. Sailesh Kolanu and produced by Prashanti Tipirneni, the film is the third installment in the *HIT* franchise. The film promises to be a gripping crime thriller, presenting Nani as a HIT officer. The unit has begun filming a fresh schedule in Kashmir, where they are shooting an intense action sequence featuring Nani and a team of fighters, along with other crucial scenes. Production is progressing smoothly, with the makers having already announced the film's release date. Srinidhi Shetty, known for her role in *KGF*, is playing the female lead. Nani's transformation for this role is striking, with a complete makeover to fit his character's tough, dynamic persona. The makers have already announced that the film is set to hit the screens on May 1, 2025.



Kiccha Sudeep's *Max* releases on Dec 27



Kannada Superstar Kiccha Sudeep's new action thriller *Max* is all set for a grand theatrical release in Telugu on December 27th by Asian Suresh Entertainments.

Versatile Actor Varalaxmi Sarathkumar and Happening Tollywood Actor Sunil played key roles in this film directed by Vijay Kartikeya. Kollywood renowned producer Kalaipuli S. Thanu bankrolled this project under V Creations in association with Kiccha Sudeep's Kiccha Creations. The teaser is already hyping the expectations on the movie as Kiccha Sudeep is seen playing a powerful police officer Arjun Mahakshay. Featuring the intense action and thrilling story, this film is now the most awaited release from Kannada.



STANDALONE

Ace producer Dil Raju has taken charge as the chairperson of the Telangana Film Development Corporation (TFDC), marking a significant milestone in the Telugu film industry. As a renowned producer, Dil Raju brings his extensive experience and expertise to the role, which is expected to boost the growth of Telugu cinema.



Neha Shetty to sizzle in a special song for PK's *OG*

Actress Neha Shetty, known for her role in *DJ Tillu*, is set to sizzle in an item song in Pawan Kalyan's upcoming film *OG*. Directed by Sujith, the film's shooting is currently underway in Thailand. Although Pawan Kalyan is the main lead, he will not be featured in the item song, according to a source. The makers are now shooting a special song featuring Neha Shetty, as announced by the actress on her Instagram story.

Neha Shetty expressed her excitement, stating that she is ready to start shooting in Bangkok and saying "Let's Roll". This confirmation has sparked curiosity among audiences, especially given her popularity for her role as Radhika in *DJ Tillu*. With the *OG* shoot underway in Thailand, Neha Shetty has joined the sets, indicating that she has begun filming the special song.

Pawan Kalyan, who is currently serving as the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, is committed to completing the films he had signed before taking office. These films include *Hari Hara Veera Mallu*, *OG* and *Ustaad Bhagat Singh*. Having recently completed *Hari Hara Veera Mallu*, Pawan Kalyan is expected to wrap up *OG* soon, provided he allocates a few days for the shoot. With Neha Shetty on board for the special song, the makers are confident that they can secure Pawan Kalyan's dates and complete the film.