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'Diaspora will play key role in achieving viksit Bharat vision' 5

'HYD HAS BECOME MEDICAL TOURISM HUB' 10



Ram Charan shines, but Game Changer falters with outdated STORYLINE P12



QUOTE OF THE DAY

the pioneer

While we aim for the Moon, it's time we learnt how to coexist responsibly on Earth. Future City is envisioned as a world-class hub on par with cities like New York, London, Seoul, Dubai and Tokyo. This exclusive service sector city will be designed to be pollution-free and climate-resilient, establishing Hyderabad as a global benchmark in urban planning



- M Revanth Reddy, CM, Telangana

P4

DON'T MISS...

Stringent action against cockfights

District Collector K Vetri Selvi and Superintendent of Police K Pratap Siva Kishore have instructed officials to implement strict measures to curb cockfights and gambling activities in the district. During a video conference held on Friday with police, mandal-level, and excise officials, the Collector and SP reviewed the steps being taken to prevent cockfights, gambling, and illicit liquor sales. Collector Vetri Selvi emphasised that cockfighting is illegal and directed sub-collectors, RDOs, and tahsildars to set up control rooms in coordination with...

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Rahul gets bail in defamation case

A special court in Pune on Friday granted bail to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case related to his alleged objectionable remarks on Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar. The MP/MLA court granted bail to the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha on a surety bond of Rs 25,000 after he appeared before it through video conferencing, his lawyer said. Senior Congress leader Mohan Joshi stood as surety for Gandhi (54) before the court presided over by Amol Shinde, judicial magistrate...

-PAGE: 5

Govt extends monthly GST return, payment

The government on Friday extended the deadline for filing monthly GST sales return form GSTR-1 and GST payment by 2 days after taxpayers reported technical glitches in the GSTN system. As per a notification by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), the last date for filing GSTR-1 for December is January 13, while that for taxpayers opting for quarterly payment under the QRMP scheme for the October-December period will be January 15. Normally, the last date for filing...

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India beat Ireland by six wickets

Pratika Rawal showcased maturity beyond her experience, while Tejal Hasabnis capped a memorable comeback, posting a fifty each, as India outplayed an inexperienced Ireland by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match women's ODI series here on Friday. Rawal anchored the modest run chase of 239 after stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana's brisk 41, smashing 10 fours and one six for a career-best 89 (96 balls). Hasabnis, who last played an ODI against New Zealand in October 2024, struck her first fifty after her ...

-SPORTS

TIRUPATI STAMPEDE

Pawan demands apology from TTD



PNS ■ KAKINADA

In a strong political statement, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj, K Pawan Kalyan, has called upon the Chairman, Executive Officer (EO), and Joint EO (JEO) of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) to publicly apologise to the devotees for the tragic stampede in Tirupati that claimed six lives.

Addressing a public gathering on Friday, as part of the 'Palle Panduga and Panchayat Week' celebrations, Pawan Kalyan demanded that TTD officials hold a press conference and express their regret over the incident. "I have apologised to the devotees for the stampede, even though I had no role in it."

Continued on Page 2

TTD chief heeds Dy CM's advice, apologises



PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In response to a call from Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, TTD Chairman BR Naidu has issued an apology to the devotees for the recent stampede, although he acknowledged that no apology could undo the tragic loss of six lives.

Speaking to the media after the TTD Board meeting on Friday, BR Naidu stated, "We are taking the suggestions of Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan into consideration." Pawan Kalyan had earlier demanded apologies from TTD Chairman BR Naidu, Executive Officer Syamala Rao, and Additional Executive Officer Venkayya Chowdary for their role in the incident.

Continued on Page 2

AP set for realty boom: CM

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday expressed confidence that Andhra Pradesh would experience a real estate boom, earning appreciation from players in the construction industry.

Speaking at a real estate conference in Guntur, the Chief Minister said he had directed Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana to formulate the country's best real estate policy.

"I have instructed Narayana that there should be a boom in the construction sector in Andhra Pradesh, with no hurdles for developers. If required, study policies across the country and bring the best practices here to ensure the real estate industry values our efforts," Naidu said.

The Chief Minister added that Andhra Pradesh should set the benchmark for real estate policies, making it the go-to state for the sector. He assured that if any state implemented a better policy, the TDP-led government would adopt those measures to stay ahead.

Reflecting on challenges faced by the construction sector under the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP regime from 2019 to 2024, Naidu said Narayana had held multiple consultations with industry players to simplify regulations.

The CM also stressed that the Municipal Administration Department and other related agencies would relax their rules to facilitate the sector's growth.

MA & UD Minister Narayana tasked with developing the best real estate policy in India



- AP aspires to become the benchmark for real estate policies nationwide
- Naidu criticises setbacks in the realty sector during the YSRCP regime
- Simplified rules promised for the construction industry
- Dashboard system to ensure timely permissions with deemed approvals for delays
- CM pledges full support to revive the struggling construction sector



- Naidu encourages embracing AI for innovation and growth
- Smaller towns like Kurnool and Nellore to be developed alongside Amaravati
- Industry players were urged to maintain discipline and avoid unauthorised constructions
- Naidu highlights Amaravati as a city unparalleled in the country

To streamline operations further, Naidu promised the launch of a dashboard within two months. This system would set clear timelines for permissions, with provisions for deemed approvals if deadlines were not met.

Recognising the current challenges faced by the construction industry, Naidu pledged full support to revive and boost the sector. He urged stakeholders to leave past setbacks behind and focus on progress.

Shifting focus from his traditional advocacy for IT, Naidu made a strong pitch for embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI) and tools like ChatGPT, emphasising their potential in daily life and decision-making.

Continued on Page 2

Special darshan for stampede-injured devotees

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The 'Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam' on the auspicious occasion of 'Mukkoti Ekadasi' was celebrated with religious fervour in Tirumala on Friday.

The darshan began in the early hours of the day following the Abhishekam. Devotees were granted access half an hour earlier than the scheduled time, much to their delight. The holy chants of "Govinda, Govinda" resonated throughout Tirumala, creating an atmosphere of devotion and spiritual ecstasy.

Under the directives of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) made special arrangements for devotees injured in the recent Tirupati stampede. Those who participated in the Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Minister, TTD Chairman, and officials for facilitating this much-anticipated Mukkoti Darshanam.

Speaking about the arrangements, an Additional EO of TTD stated, "As per the Chief Minister's instructions, priority has been given to common devotees. Sarva Darshan for common devotees is being conducted as per the scheduled time.

Continued on Page 2

RTGS key to govt's performance: CS



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand highlighted the need for the Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS) to provide technical support to government departments to boost their efficiency. He urged RTGS to align its activities with the vision of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for better governance outcomes. On Friday, the Chief Secretary visited the RTGS centre at the Secretariat, where RTGS Director Suresh Kumar and CEO K Dinesh Kumar welcomed him and provided an overview of their ongoing initiatives.

During his visit, Vijayanand acknowledged the potential of technology in improving governance and emphasized the need for RTGS to function as a state-of-the-art technological platform. He expressed his commitment to personally overseeing RTGS operations to ensure alignment with the government's objectives.

Continued on Page 2

YSRCP for HC probe into Tirupati stampede

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has held the State government responsible for the recent stampede in Tirupati, urging the High Court to step in and investigate the tragedy.

The incident, which has shaken the faith of devotees across the world, calls for urgent accountability, the party leaders said.

Speaking to reporters on Friday, YSRCP leader Botsa Satyanarayana slammed the government for its lack of preparation and poor response.

Continued on Page 2

'Our govt keen to create 20L jobs in 5 yrs'



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP-led government is committed to fulfilling its promise of creating 2 million jobs in both public and private sectors over the next five years, said Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh. He emphasised the need for collective effort and coordination to achieve this target.

The first meeting of the ministerial subcommittee on job creation was held at Undavalli on Friday, with senior officials from various government departments in attendance.

The meeting was chaired by Nara Lokesh, with guidance from Tourism Minister Kandu Durgesh and Chief Secretary K Vijay Anand.

Continued on Page 2



Judge sentences Trump in hush money case

But declines to impose punishment

PNS ■ NEW YORK

President-elect Donald Trump was sentenced on Friday in his hush-money case, but the judge declined to impose any punishment.

The outcome cements Trump's conviction before he returns to power while freeing him to return to the White House unencumbered by the threat of a jail term or a fine.

Trump's sentence of an unconditional discharge caps a norm-smashing case that saw the former and future president charged with 34 felonies, put on trial for almost two months, and convicted by a jury on every count. Yet, the legal detour — and sordid details aired in court of a plot to bury affair allegations — didn't hurt him with voters, who elected him to a second term.

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan could have sentenced the 78-year-old Republican to up to four years in prison. Instead, he chose a sentence that sidestepped thorny constitutional issues by effectively ending the case but assured that Trump would become the first person convicted of a felony to assume the presidency.

Merchan said that like when facing any other defendant, he must consider any aggravating factors before imposing a sentence, but the legal protection that Trump will have as president "is a factor that overrides all others".

Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan could have sentenced the 78-year-old Republican to up to four years in prison. Instead, he chose a sentence that sidestepped thorny constitutional issues by effectively ending the case but assured that Trump would become the first person convicted of a felony to assume the presidency.

ENHANCED JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

AP govt ties up with Infosys

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Leading software company, Infosys, has stepped forward to support the ambitious skill census programme initiated by the State government. The initiative aims to enhance employment opportunities by providing technical assistance to assess and develop skills among the youth.

As part of this collaboration, Infosys will provide a digital platform powered by generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the pre-certification of candidates' skills. The Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Infosys in the presence of Minister for Education, Information Technology (IT), and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, on Friday.

Commending Infosys for its proactive role under corporate social responsibility, Lokesh said the pre-validation of data would simplify the process of imparting skill development training to youth based on market demand. He expressed confidence that this collaboration would pave the way for more targeted and effective training initiatives. Lokesh also lauded Infosys for its commitment to generating 20 lakh jobs in the State over the next five years.

Continued on Page 2

Can shed old ideas for 'nation first' cause: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said he is willing to discard old ideas and embrace new ones as long as they fit into his essential ideology of "nation first".

Appearing for the first time in a podcast, which was hosted by Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath and released on Friday, Modi said he sees his success in how he prepares a team who can deftly handle things, as he asserted that there are many young politicians with potential. He declined to name any, saying it will be injustice to many others.

Modi said it has been his life's mantra that he may make mistakes but will not do anything wrong out of bad intentions.

He said, "When I became (Gujarat) chief minister I said I will not spare any effort to work hard. I will not do anything for myself. And, thirdly, I am human and I can make mistakes. But I will not do anything wrong out of bad intentions. I have made it a mantra of my life. Mistakes are inevitable. I must have made mistakes. I am a human too, not a god."

When Kamath asked him if he has planned for the time beyond him, training those he has faith in, not for today but after 20-30 years, Modi said, "I can see people with a lot of potential. When I was in Gujarat, I would say that I want to go after preparing (team) for the next 20 years. I am doing it. My success lies in how I prepare my team who will be able to deftly handle things. This is my benchmark for me."

He said politics needs continuous entry of good people who put mission over ambition, and summarised his ideology as "nation first".

Asked if he sees such potential in any young politician, Modi said they are many of them.



"They toil, they work with a mission. If I say a name it will be injustice to many others. There are a lot of names and faces in front of me. I know details of a lot of people but it is my responsibility to not do injustice to others."

"They toil, they work with a mission. If I say a name it will be injustice to many others. There are a lot of names and faces in front of me. I know details of a lot of people but it is my responsibility to not do injustice to others," he added. In the over two-hour podcast, he summarised his ideology as "nation first".

Modi said, "If I have to leave old ideas behind, I am ready to discard them. I am ready to accept new things. but the benchmark should be 'nation first'. I have only one scale and I don't change it."

Noting that one-third seats for MLAs and Lok Sabha members will be reserved for women in near future, he said women are already present in local bodies due to 50 per cent reservation for them in many states and asked them to work to become as capable as they can be to prepare themselves for assemblies and Parliament.

Gear up for Skill Census across State: Nara Lokesh to officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Education and IT Minister Lokesh emphasised that lessons learned from the Skill Census conducted in Mangalagiri should guide the statewide rollout, ensuring the survey is effective and easy to implement. He stressed the importance of collecting comprehensive data that benefits the youth throughout their careers

State Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, has announced the launch of the Skill Census program across Andhra Pradesh. He directed officials to expedite preparations for the initiative during a review meeting with the Skill Development Department at his Undavalli residence on Friday.

Lokesh emphasised that lessons learned from the Skill Census conducted in Mangalagiri should guide the statewide rollout, ensuring the survey is effective and easy to implement. He stressed the importance of collecting comprehensive data that benefits the youth throughout their careers, including information from both organised and unorganised skill sectors. The minister highlighted the ongoing efforts of the TDP at its central office, where skill training is provided using party funds to create employment opportunities. He proposed leveraging this model through the Overseas Manpower Corporation to train youth for international jobs. Lokesh noted that skilled workers are in demand not only in the Middle East but also in European and Southeast Asian countries. He suggested that localised training programs tailored to the needs of these regions could potentially create employment for up to 2,00,000 youth abroad.

To enhance employability, Lokesh recommended introducing foreign language courses, such as German and Japanese, in government colleges. He also emphasised equipping students with cutting-edge technologies and advanced skills to meet global industry demands.

Once the Skill Census is completed, Lokesh urged officials to create awareness among youth, encouraging them to pursue skill development training in sectors aligned with their interests. He underscored the program's primary goal of creating 2 million jobs in five years and economically empowering poor and middle-class families.

Lokesh also directed officials to avoid duplication of data with existing records from SEEDAP, APSSDC, and NAP while compiling the Skill Census.

The meeting was attended by Skill Development Secretary Kona Shashidhar, Skill Development MP Ganesh Kumar, and other officials.

'Naidu interested only in publicity'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leader and Radharanga Mitra Mandali State president Vangaveeti Narendra strongly criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for his ineffectiveness as a leader. Chandrababu is only interested in publicity and lacks genuine intent to serve the people, he said and accused the CM of making hollow promises during elections to gain power and failing to deliver them.

Narendra criticised the appointment of inexperienced leaders like B.R. Naidu as TTD Chairman, resulting in mismanagement. He highlighted the lack of basic facilities for devotees visiting Tirumala for Vaikunta Ekadashi darshan and expressed anguish over the stampede incident in Tirupati, which claimed six lives.

He held Chandrababu directly responsible for the tragedy and demanded his arrest.

Energy Minister brings electricity to Adivasi villages

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar has brought electricity to several Adivasi hamlets in the Yerragondapalem constituency of Prakasam district, ending decades of darkness in these remote areas.

Many tribal families living between Yerragondapalem and Srisailam have been without electricity since independence. After a survey with officials from the electricity department, the minister found that 1,750 Adivasi households were still unelectrified. He raised the issue with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who approved a plan for full solar electrification of these villages.

With an investment of around ?2.20 crores, electricity was provided to 956 tribal households in six villages. Additionally, 611 families in the Tiger Reserve Zone were identified for solar electrification. Minister Ravi Kumar assured them they would soon receive uninterrupted power through solar batteries.

The minister said that Adivasi families live in extreme poverty and that the government is committed to improving their living conditions. He highlighted that serving the poor is a priority for the government, and this initiative reflects its dedication to the welfare of Adivasi communities.

Ravi Kumar also announced plans to extend solar power to other families in the Tiger Reserve Zone and provide solar electricity for agricultural needs. He promised support under the employment guarantee scheme, ensuring workdays for the Adivasis. He stressed that the government is committed to protecting the rights of Adivasi communities and improving their quality of life.

AP set for realty...

Continued from Page 1

He also assured balanced urban development, promising to upgrade smaller towns like Kurnool and Nellore, ensuring Andhra Pradesh's cities rank among the best in the country.

Naidu urged industry players to maintain discipline, avoid unauthorised constructions, and report violations to the authorities.

Reaffirming his vision for Amaravati, Naidu said, "There will be no city like Amaravati in the entire country."

TTD chief heeds...

Continued from Page 1

In a subtle reference to Pawan Kalyan earlier in the day, the TTD Chairman remarked, "There is no need for us to respond to anyone's comments. Even if we apologise to the devotees, the deceased cannot be brought back to life."

However, BR Naidu admitted that apologising to the devotees was not wrong, acknowledging that a mistake had been made. He confirmed that an inquiry would be conducted to determine the exact cause of the stampede. Additionally, he assured that strict action would be taken against those responsible for the incident.

The TTD Chairman also announced that ex gratia cheques would be delivered to the families of the victims at their doorstep.

Special darshan...

Special arrangements were made to ensure that devotees injured in the Tirupati stampede could also partake in the Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam."

He further assured, "We are committed to providing hassle-free darshan for all devotees who have booked their slots today."

The day witnessed an overwhelming turnout, with Tirumala basking in the divine atmosphere of devotion and celebration.

Naidu staging a 'calculated drama' over stampede incident: Ambati

PNS ■ GUNTUR



Former minister Ambati Rambabu has strongly criticised Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's handling of the tragic stampede in Tirupati, accusing him of staging a "calculated drama" to shield his loyalists. Speaking to the media at the Guntur Camp Office, Rambabu alleged that Chandrababu lacked the courage to take action against those responsible, including the TTD Chairman, EO, JEO, and district SPs, whom he described as a "criminal gang" appointed to serve the CM's political interests.

Rambabu accused the Chief Minister of making lower-level officials scapegoats while protecting individuals more focused on political vendettas than their duties.

He pointed out the severity of the incident, where six devotees lost their lives due to poor planning at one of the world's most sacred temples. He criticized the government for failing to take serious steps to prevent such tragedies and accused Chandrababu of appointing officials in Tirupati based not on their competence but on their loyalty to the ruling party. According to Rambabu, this "criminal gang" has a history of suppressing dissent and engaging in malicious propaganda, including attempts to tarnish the temple's sanctity by spreading false allegations about prasadam distribution.

The former minister also accused the government of deliberately creating obstacles to prevent Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy from visiting the grieving families. Despite these hurdles, Jagan walked to meet the victims' families and assured them of support.

Rambabu condemned Chandrababu's actions, calling them an attempt to stop Jagan from exposing the government's failures. He criticized the Chief Minister for prioritizing political manoeuvring over justice for the victims.

Responding to recent allegations against him, Rambabu dismissed them as baseless and politically motivated. He expressed his willingness to fully cooperate with the police and reiterated his respect for the law, while accusing certain media outlets of spreading false narratives under political pressure.

Rambabu demanded immediate and strict action against those responsible for the Tirupati stampede. He warned that failing to hold the guilty accountable would anger devotees and damage the reputation of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam. He concluded by urging the government to focus on protecting the lives and sentiments of devotees, ensuring such preventable tragedies do not happen again.

APCC chief Sharmila slams NDA leaders for silence on key issues

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila expressed her concerns over the silence of NDA leaders regarding critical issues, particularly the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP). During a press conference here on Friday, Sharmila accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of failing to provide assurances during his recent visit to Visakhapatnam.

Sharmila pointed out that Modi's speech did not address important promises made during the bifurcation of the state, including the Special Category Status (SCS) for Andhra Pradesh, the status of the Kadapa Steel Factory, and the development package for Uttarandhra and Rayalaseema. She questioned the silence of TDP and JSP leaders, despite their alignment with the BJP.

Sharmila also criticized the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) for its alleged "secret alliance" with the BJP, particularly after Union Home Minister Amit Shah's controversial remarks against Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. She reminded that TDP, JSP, and YSRCP leaders had condemned Shah's comments, while also benefiting from Dalit votes.

The Congress leader criticized YSRCP President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for supporting the BJP, despite his father's opposition to the party's ideology. Sharmila concluded that if the BJP continues to hold power, it could pose a threat to India's Constitution and reservations, emphasizing the need for a Congress-led government to safeguard democratic values.

Later, Sharmila staged a silent protest near the Gandhi Statue, condemning Union Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The protest was supported by the AICC in charge of Andhra Pradesh, Manickam Tagore, and other senior party leaders.

Pawan demands...

Continued from Page 1

Why is it that those responsible cannot do the same? If I can apologise to the Hindu devotees for an incident I wasn't involved in, why should they feel ashamed to do the same? We cannot avoid responsibility for such mistakes. Should I appear before the people as an accused?" he questioned, expressing his frustration with the handling of the situation.

Pawan Kalyan drew a comparison, stating, "Even the Prime Minister of Japan apologised to the people for a mistake he didn't commit. If I make a mistake, I am ready to face the consequences."

The political leader also aimed at the VIP culture in Tirumala, demanding that it be reduced and that common devotees should have easier access to the temple. He noted, "The honeymoon period for leaders, including myself, is over. You, the people, trusted me and elected me, and I must live up to that trust."

He stressed that everyone should take responsibility in the event of a mishap. "While some officials may have made errors in Tirupati, the entire district police force is being blamed and is bearing the brunt of it," he remarked. Pawan Kalyan expressed his anger over the inefficiency of some officials involved.

In his address, Pawan Kalyan also inaugurated a 'mini-gokulam' at the Krishna temple in Kumarapuram village and launched 12,500 'gokulams' set up across the state. He promised to establish an additional 20,000 'gokulams' in the future.

AP govt ties...

Continued from Page 1

Representing Infosys at the event were Santosh and Tirumala, joined by the Secretary of Skill Development, Kona Sashidhar, and other senior officials.

Under this programme, Infosys will connect students to tailored learning pathways through digital platforms and create user-friendly interfaces to promote continuous learning. The company will also collaborate with APSDC to address the evolving needs of the industry by offering free learning opportunities and ensuring the efficient functioning of the digital platform.

Infosys plans to integrate its Springboard platform to offer curated learning pathways, conduct free online courses and workshops, and deploy technology solutions to enhance skill development. The company will assess and validate the existing skills of 3.59 crore individuals in the 15-59 age group across the State.

Probe into mobile phone scam in Vizag Central Jail

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



A disturbing discovery has surfaced from Visakhapatnam Central Jail, where two notorious prisoners have admitted to using mobile phones during their incarceration, triggering an investigation into potential security breaches and corruption within the facility.

Deputy Jail Superintendent Jawahar Babu confirmed that two individuals with known criminal backgrounds, identified as rowdy-sheeters linked to the YSR Congress Party (YCP), confessed to possessing and using cell phones while serving their sentences. However, the prisoners, Venkata Hemanth and U. Rajesh, have refused to divulge the identities of those they communicated with, leaving authorities scrambling for leads.

Hemanth, a notorious figure in the city, is currently serving a life sentence for a variety of criminal offenses, including his alleged involvement in the kidnapping of family members of former MP MVV Satyanarayana. Hemanth was jailed in June of last year, alongside Rajesh, who has been in custody since mid-June on remand for his role in a separate case.

The illicit mobile phone use came to light after jail officials, suspecting foul play amid growing concerns over unauthorized communication within the prison, interrogated the two inmates. During questioning, both Hemanth and Rajesh admitted to using mobile phones and even implicated jail staff in aiding their actions. Despite their confessions, authorities have yet to trace the recipients of the calls made from within the facility.

The incident was brought to the attention of the Arilova police, who have now joined the investigation, determined to uncover the full extent of the scandal. Security measures at the jail have since been tightened, with the two accused transferred to a separate barrack as of December 31, 2024. To address the apparent lapses in security, jail management has seen a reshuffling, with 37 warders being transferred. Thirteen new warders have been inducted, while another 14 are challenging their transfers in court.

This revelation has raised serious concerns over the integrity of the jail system, suggesting that key staff members may have been complicit in the illegal activities. The authorities are now under intense scrutiny to ensure that such incidents do not recur, with some calling for systemic reforms to strengthen security and transparency within the prison system.

YSRCP for...

Continued from Page 1

"Apologies or suspensions alone cannot undo the damage caused to the sanctity of the holy shrine," he said, demanding a comprehensive inquiry by the High Court.

Satyanarayana pointed to lapses in planning and coordination, noting that no proper review meetings involving key officials from revenue, police, and medical departments were held before the Vaikunta Dwaram darshan, a major event that draws large crowds. He criticized the token distribution system, which was spread across multiple locations in Tirupati and Tirumala, leaving devotees to suffer in long queues without basic amenities like food, water, or medical care.

He also dismissed conspiracy theories surrounding the extended ten-day darshan period, stating that no such incidents occurred during their administration. Satyanarayana further accused the current government of prioritising political appointments over merit in the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) board. "The officials appointed by Chandrababu Naidu have failed to safeguard the sanctity of the shrine. Their focus lies elsewhere," he remarked.

RTGS key to govt's...

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Secretary also discussed the progress of "WhatsApp Governance," a flagship initiative by CM Naidu to make government services more accessible. RTGS CEO Dinesh Kumar informed him that nearly all preparations for the platform were complete, showcasing its features to the Chief Secretary. The platform will offer over 150 public services and allow citizens to file complaints through WhatsApp. Vijayanand recommended that the platform should be available in both English and Telugu to ensure accessibility for all.

Vijayanand further advised RTGS to collaborate closely with all government departments. He stressed that innovative solutions developed by RTGS should be shared with respective departments after assessing their specific needs. He suggested that RTGS assign dedicated representatives to each department to engage with officials, identify challenges in service delivery, and develop technological solutions to address them. He emphasized that RTGS should not merely point out shortcomings in departments but work proactively to provide technological remedies to enhance their performance.

The meeting was attended by RTGS Deputy CEO M Madhuri and other senior officials, who pledged their commitment to implementing the Chief Secretary's recommendations effectively.

'Our govt keen to create 20L jobs...

Continued from Page 1

In his address, Minister Lokesh reminded the gathering that the TDP, Jana Sena, and BJP had come together during the recent elections to form a joint manifesto. The first promise in this manifesto was the creation of 2 million jobs within five years, across both government and private sectors. Lokesh noted that no political party in the country's history had ever made such a significant commitment.

Lokesh shared a personal experience from his "Yuva Galam" padyatra, where he met a woman in Gandhara Nellore. She had lost her husband, a drunkard, and struggled to educate her two children. She had requested jobs for her children, a story that inspired the manifesto's focus on addressing real-life challenges. A cabinet subcommittee was formed to focus specifically on job creation, and it will meet every 15 days to monitor progress. Additionally, once a month, the Chief Minister will hold a meeting to track investments and job creation efforts.

The minister underlined the urgency of special attention to job creation. He pointed out that despite efforts, the state had not seen the expected level of investments over the past five years. Andhra Pradesh is currently lagging behind states like Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka in attracting investments. Many industries were driven out of the state during the previous administration, and now, industrialists are seeking guarantees from the government. Lokesh stressed that compared to the period from 1995 to 2004, competition among states has intensified, and various departments must now focus on attracting investments and creating job opportunities. He also emphasized the need for faster permits and land allocations for industries, requiring cooperation from all stakeholders.

The minister also acknowledged the central government's support, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi backing the state's development. He called for collective effort to put Andhra Pradesh on a path of progress, noting that development and welfare should go hand-in-hand.

He further mentioned that the state is facing a monthly deficit of Rs 4,000 crore and appealed to everyone to unite for the creation of 2 million jobs.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Dwadashi:	Jan 10 10:19 AM to Jan 11 08:21 AM
Trayodashi:	Jan 11 08:21 AM to Jan 12 06:34 AM
Nakshatram:	
Rohini:	Jan 10 01:45 PM to Jan 11 12:29 PM
Mrigashirsha:	Jan 11 12:29 PM to Jan 12 11:24 AM
Rahukalam:	9:38 AM to 11:01 AM
Yamagandam:	1:47 PM to 3:09 PM
Varjyam:	05:50 PM to 07:21 PM
Gulika:	6:52 AM to 8:15 AM
Amritakalam:	09:27 AM to 10:58 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:01 PM to 12:46 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 31°C
Humidity: 57%
Sunrise: 6:39 AM
Sunset: 5:52 PM

Updated: January 10, 2025 5:00 PM

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'Real estate development key to State's progress'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Govt has made building construction, layout permits, issuance of building approvals easier

Real estate development is the key to the progress of States, with cities like Hyderabad and Bengaluru being prime examples of growth driven by the real estate sector. Over the past five years, the real estate sector in the State has been in a slump. Only with the growth of the construction and real estate industry can the State make progress. To revive the real estate sector, the government has made building construction, layout permits and issuance of building approvals easier, said Minister P Narayana in his address at the inaugural ceremony of the CREDAI Property Show.

The three-day property show was attended by Minister Kollu Ravindra and MLAs Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao, Bode Prasad, Gadde Ram Mohan, along with MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni). The dignitaries launched the PVR Group brochure together.

Speaking at the event, Minister Narayana thanked the government for simplifying the process of building approvals and layout permits, following a study of best practices in 10 States across the country. He also highlighted reforms such as reducing road width requirements for layouts from 12 metres to nine metres and transferring responsibility for buildings under 15 metres to licensed surveyors without the need for permission. He mentioned that a single-window system will be introduced to avoid bureaucratic delays for building permits. Narayana expressed confidence that in the coming days, the real estate sector will see rapid growth in Vijayawada, Amaravati, and across the State.

MP Sivanath praised CREDAI for organising the property show, making it accessible to the middle class. He attributed the growth of real estate in Hyderabad to the efforts of former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. He recalled how, before 1995, the real estate sector in Hyderabad was underdeveloped, and it was the growth of IT and pharma industries that led to the real estate boom in the city. He emphasised that it was the development of infrastructure that contributed to both business and construction sectors' growth.

He also pointed out that after the State bifurcation, it was Chandrababu Naidu who laid the foundation for the State's development. In contrast, the previous government had a damaging effect on the construction industry. As a result, real estate has stagnated in the State over the last five years. Due to the lack of construction activities, workers in the industry have faced severe hardships, he noted. He added that under Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, efforts are being made to revive the real estate sector.

Along with Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao, MP Keshineni Sivanath also proposed the establishment of the National Academy of Construction (NAC) for construction workers to the Chief Minister.

The event was also attended by CREDAI representatives G Ramireddy, Alla Shivareddy, YV Ramana Rao, Dasari Rambabu, Ramesh Ankineni and others.

Excise officials announce measures to ensure safe Sankranti

To ensure uninterrupted supply of IML and beer to licensed vendors

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Ahead of the Sankranti festival, Nishant Kumar, Director, Excise & Prohibition, and Rahul Dev Sharma, Director, Enforcement, Prohibition & Excise, led a Statewide video conference on Friday to discuss strategies for ensuring a safe, lawful and incident-free celebration. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, District Prohibition & Excise Officers and Station House Officers.

Key measures include ensuring an uninterrupted supply of Indian Made Liquor (IML) and beer to licensed vendors through APSBCL depots with strict monitoring to avoid shortages. Officials stressed the importance of stock management and quality assurance to prevent issues during the festival.

In addition, targeted raids on illicit liquor operations will be intensified, focusing on high-risk villages and public gatherings. Border surveillance will be enhanced, with Excise check-posts and border mobile patrolling parties activated to prevent the smuggling of non-duty-paid and spurious liquor from neighbouring States.

Efforts to monitor toddy sales for drug adulteration and ensure the safety of narcotic substances will also be prioritised, with Enforcement teams conducting regular inspections.

Officials also urged close coordination with other agencies to address any potential substance abuse.

The Excise Department has urged all stakeholders to cooperate in upholding public welfare during the celebrations.

AP sets sails to be global shipbuilding leader

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The Government of Andhra Pradesh has taken a big step towards its goal of becoming a global leader in shipbuilding. With a coastline of 1,053 km, a well-developed network of ports, and strategic locations, the state has great potential to become a top destination for shipbuilding in the world.

Following the vision of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, the State is focused on developing a world-class shipbuilding industry. To move forward with this goal, S Suresh Kumar, Principal Secretary of Infrastructure and Investment, chaired an important meeting at the Secretariat in Amaravati to discuss the future of shipbuilding in the State. This initiative is also in line with the Government of India's Maritime Vision 2047, which aims to make India one of the top five shipbuilding nations globally.

To promote the shipbuilding sector, the Andhra Pradesh Maritime Board (APMB) recently invited proposals through an Expression of Interest (EoI) to attract global shipbuilding investments. The EoI has already caught the attention of major global shipbuilders. Hyundai Heavy Industries and other leading Korean shipbuilders have shown interest in Andhra Pradesh as a potential location for developing shipyards. Site visits and ongoing discussions with these companies have strengthened the state's growing reputation in the global shipbuilding industry.

The focus of Friday's meeting was on exploring collaboration opportunities with Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), a leading Indian shipbuilding company. GRSE representatives had productive talks with APMB officials and visited possible sites for setting up shipbuilding facilities in Andhra Pradesh. GRSE praised the state's infrastructure, coastal resources, and strategic advantages, which could help build a strong shipbuilding industry.

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The key takeaways from the meeting were that GRSE was impressed with the state's infrastructure and coastline, which provide a solid base for shipbuilding. The discussions focused on how Andhra Pradesh could play a key role in achieving India's Maritime Vision 2047, including developing a maritime industry cluster to support shipbuilding activities. The Andhra Pradesh Maritime Board assured GRSE and other investors of full support, including incentives, fast approval processes, and further infrastructure development to encourage investment.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh is fully committed to making its vision of becoming a global shipbuilding hub a reality. The meeting with GRSE is an important milestone, adding to the progress made with Hyundai and other Korean shipbuilders. Moving forward, APMB will continue its efforts to engage with industry leaders, finalise investment plans, and build the necessary infrastructure for the shipbuilding sector.

No Bhogi bonfires on roads: GVMC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Burning bonfires on tar roads causes the tar to melt

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) Commissioner Dr. P Sampath Kumar has issued a strong appeal to citizens to refrain from lighting Bhogi bonfires on tar roads. In a press release on Friday, the Commissioner urged the public to celebrate the festival responsibly by choosing open grounds or vacant spaces for their bonfires, instead of constructing them on roads.

Dr. Sampath Kumar explained that burning bonfires on tar roads causes the tar to melt, which in turn leads to the formation of potholes and undermines the city's ongoing beautification efforts. The damage to the roads results in significant financial losses for GVMC, which uses public funds to construct and maintain these roads for the convenience of residents. He emphasised that such actions not only lead to infrastructure damage but also cause considerable inconvenience to commuters.



The Commissioner also warned of the risks associated with bonfires on roads, including the increased potential for accidents. He highlighted that such activities pose a serious threat to public safety and urged people to exercise caution during the festival.

In addition to his request to citizens, Dr. Sampath Kumar called upon public representatives, leaders of various associations, resident welfare societies, and NGOs to play an active role in educating people about the importance of preserving public infrastructure. He urged these groups to ensure that Bhogi bonfires are not lit on tar roads, in parks, or any other inappropriate locations.

Five GITAM MBA students among India's Top 100



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Five outstanding students from the MBA 2023-2025 batch of GITAM School of Business have achieved a remarkable milestone by securing spots among the Top 100 MBA Students (India Region) in the prestigious E4 MBA Intercollegiate Summer Trainee Awards 2024. Ali Ghali, Cherukuri Sitara, GV Vijaya Ratna Pravallika, P. Ankita, and Sukala Jyotsna are the students.

Organised by E4 Development & Coaching Ltd., this highly competitive platform assesses the practical skills of management students across India. The rigorous evaluation process involves project presentations, telephonic interviews, psychometric assessments, and mentorship from industry experts, focusing on summer projects.

This year's competition witnessed an overwhelming response, with over 13,000 aspirants from 250+ B-Schools across 60 cities vying for recognition.

"This recognition is a testament to the talent, dedication, and hard work of our students and the exceptional academic environment at GITAM School of Business," said Prof. Raja P. Pappu, Dean. "It reflects the quality of mentorship and industry exposure we provide to equip students with the skills required for a competitive corporate world."

The E4 MBA Awards provide significant career advantages, including prominent placement in the National Placement Brochure, which offers visibility to over 500 leading corporates in India. This achievement sets the stage for exceptional career opportunities for the awardees.



9th Boccia National Championship kicks off

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Over 100 athletes with severe disabilities from 21 States participating in the event

The ninth Boccia National Championship 2024-25 was inaugurated at the India Expo City in Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) by Lt. Gen. NS Raja Subramani, Vice Chief of Army Staff, on Friday. The international-level event brings together over 100 para-athletes with severe disabilities from 21 States, showcasing their exceptional talent and competitive spirit.

The inauguration ceremony also marked the launch of significant projects within AMTZ, including the ATTRIUM building, a cutting-edge research and innovation hub for assistive technology, and the TechTron facility, supporting radioisotope production for cancer therapy.

Lt. Gen. Subramani commended AMTZ and its Managing Director Dr. Jitendra Sharma for their contributions to medical technology and nation-building. He highlighted AMTZ's alignment with India's Make in India initiative and the vision for a Viksit Bharat 2047.

The championship provides a platform for para-athletes to demonstrate their skills and competitive spirit in Boccia, a Paralympic precision ball sport designed for athletes with severe physical disabilities. The event will conclude on January 15 with a closing ceremony and the announcement of winners who will represent India on global stages.

Will seize buses collecting excess fares: DTC

Special inspection team set up

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



In connection with the Sankranti festival, private buses are reportedly collecting excess fares from passengers, and strict action will be taken against them including filing cases and seizing the buses, said DTC A Mohan.

A meeting was held at the DTC office on Friday with private travel operators. During the meeting, Mohan made it clear that with the increased travel during the Sankranti festival, especially from distant places, there have been multiple reports through various sources that some private bus operators charge excess fares from passengers. Private buses from Vijayawada operate to distant locations like Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru and Visakhapatnam. The DTC has instructed bus operators not to charge more than the fixed fares. Any violation will lead to action under the Motor Vehicles Act, he warned.

He also mentioned that a special inspection team, consisting of 10 motor vehicle inspectors, has already been set up across the district. From January 8, the team has been conducting checks at various locations and this will continue until January 20. If buses are found charging more than the actual fares, cases will be filed and the buses will be seized, Mohan stated.

Passengers who experience inconvenience due to excess fares can file complaints by calling 9154294698, DTC Mohan added.

Bus ticket prices go up by 50-100 pc ahead of Sankranti

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Action warned against operators violating fare regulations

Private travel operators in Visakhapatnam are facing criticism for drastically inflating ticket prices by 50 to 100 per cent ahead of the Sankranti festival. This surge in fares has sparked widespread concern among passengers and raised questions about regulatory oversight.

"We are monitoring the situation, and private bus fares should not exceed those of State-run RTC buses," said Adinarayana, Deputy Commissioner of the Transport Department. "We will take action against operators violating fare regulations, impose fines, conduct surprise inspections, and seize buses operating without proper tax payments."

The price rise is evident across various routes. A private bus ticket from Hyderabad to Visakhapatnam, which cost between Rs. 1,500 and Rs. 2,000 just days ago, has now soared to Rs. 3,200 and is projected to reach a staggering Rs. 5,720 by January 14. Return trips from Visakhapatnam to Hyderabad have also seen similar increases, climbing to as high as Rs. 6,000. "This is unacceptable," said a passenger, who wished to remain anonymous. "We are already struggling to make ends meet, and now we have to pay exorbitant prices to travel home for the festival."

Local routes are not exempt. An AC sleeper ticket from Visakhapatnam to Vijayawada has more than doubled from Rs. 1,200 to Rs. 2,500 within a week. The Visakhapatnam-Hyderabad route has witnessed an even sharper rise, with AC sleeper fares jumping from Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 5,800 and non-AC sleeper fares increasing from Rs. 1,060 to Rs. 3,200.

With over 110 buses being operated daily by 54 travel companies connecting Visakhapatnam to major cities like Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Bengaluru, and Chennai, the demand during Sankranti puts significant strain on the private bus sector. These inflated fares disproportionately affect lower and middle-income families who are now struggling to afford travel home for the festival.

Meanwhile, the RTC Visakhapatnam region has stepped up efforts to accommodate the increased passenger demand during the Sankranti festival. On January 9, the RTC operated 130 special buses, including 65 buses to distant areas and 65 additional services within the region. Extra buses were deployed on popular routes such as Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Rajahmundry, and Kakinada.

Besides, special services were arranged for passengers travelling to districts like Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and others. Given the anticipated rise in passenger traffic on Saturday and Saturday, the RTC plans to continue deploying additional buses to meet the demand.

Collector, SP direct officials to take stringent steps against cockfights

PNS ■ ELURU



The Collector stressed that awareness campaigns must be conducted to inform people that organising or participating in cockfights is a punishable offence. Flex banners should be displayed in rural areas, and surveillance cameras and police pickets should be set up at vulnerable spots to monitor and deter such activities.

District Collector K Vetri Selvi and Superintendent of Police K Pratap Siva Kishore have instructed officials to implement strict measures to curb cockfights and gambling activities in the district.

During a video conference held on Friday with police, mandal-level, and excise officials, the Collector and SP reviewed the steps being taken to prevent cockfights, gambling, and illicit liquor sales.

Collector Vetri Selvi emphasised that cockfighting is illegal and directed sub-collectors, RDOs, and tahsildars to set up control rooms in coordination with DSPs and SGOs. She urged officials to destroy arenas set up for cockfights using JCBs and tractors, seize money from organizers under Section 163 of BNSS, and take legal action against offenders under the A.P. Gambling Act, 1974.

To promote alternatives, she advised encouraging youth to participate in traditional sports such as Kabaddi, Volleyball, and Cricket, and engaging women in Rangoli competitions. She also instructed tahsildars to form monitoring committees at the village level to maintain constant vigilance.

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She directed the police to conduct raids on hotels, guesthouses, and lodges to ensure no outsiders are facilitating or participating in these illegal events.

SP K Pratap Shiva Kishore warned of strict action against those involved in cockfights or poker gambling. He added that landowners who permit their lands to be used for these activities would also face legal consequences.

Officials, including DRO V Visweswar Rao and Nuzvid Sub-Collector Smaranraj, attended the meeting and pledged to implement the directives efficiently.

Collector asks public to make use of Surya Ghar Yojana

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM



"The Central Government, through the PM Surya Ghar Mufti Bijli Yojana, aims to provide solar power to one crore households across the country at a subsidised rate. Under this scheme, each household can install solar panels to generate up to 3 kW of power, with a subsidy of Rs 78,000," said Collector Nagarani, urging people to seize this opportunity

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has encouraged residents to install solar panels on their rooftops and generate solar power under the 'Prime Minister's Surya Ghar Mufti Bijli Yojana'.

In a statement issued on Friday, the Collector highlighted that solar power is an effective solution to rising electricity bills and urged citizens to take advantage of the scheme, which enables the generation of solar power at a subsidized cost.

"The Central Government, through the PM Surya Ghar Mufti Bijli Yojana, aims to provide solar power to one crore households across the country at a subsidised rate. Under this scheme, each household can install solar panels to generate up to 3 kW of power, with a subsidy of Rs 78,000," said Collector Nagarani, urging people to seize this opportunity.

She explained the subsidy details, stating, "The Central Government offers ?30,000 per kilowatt as a subsidy. For a 2 kW system, the subsidy is ?60,000, and for a 3 kW system, it is Rs 78,000. Installing a 3 kW solar panel system costs Rs 1.45 lakh, of which the Centre provides Rs 78,000 as a subsidy. The remaining amount can be financed through bank loans without requiring collateral."

The Collector also outlined the space requirements for installation. For households consuming 0-150 units of electricity per month, 1-2 kW panels can be installed in just 100 square feet. Similarly, for those consuming 150-300 units, 2-3 kW panels can be installed.

She clarified that the maximum subsidy available is ?78,000. Consumers can use the electricity generated to meet their needs and sell the surplus through net metering. "The DISCOM will pay ?2.83 for each unit of electricity sold," she added.

Residents are urged to make the most of this scheme to reduce their electricity costs and contribute to sustainable energy usage.

VMC Commissioner orders immediate desilting process

Officials have identified 72 locations where rainwater tends to accumulate on roads

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanachandra has directed officials to begin the desilting process with immediate effect. During his visit on Friday, he inspected various locations, including the Eat Street, Eluru Road, Machavaram, ESIC Hospital, Christ Rajapuram, AS Ramarao Road, Harijan Wada, Loyola College Road and Madhu Chowk areas.

Speaking on the occasion, the Commissioner mentioned that officials had identified 72 locations where rainwater tends to accumulate on the roads during heavy rainfall. He instructed engineering officials to carry out continuous desilting at these locations to prevent water stagnation on the roads, even during heavy rains. He also stressed the need for constant monitoring and desilting of the main outlet drains and related systems.

The Commissioner noted the issue of underground drainage overflow in the Eluru Road and Machavaram areas and instructed officials to take immediate action to resolve the problem. In Christ Rajapuram and Harijanwada, where old two-wheelers and four-wheelers had been abandoned, he directed the police to coordinate and remove the vehicles without causing traffic disruptions.

At the ESIC Hospital, the Commissioner observed that the culverts were in a dilapidated condition and ordered repairs to make them functional. He also urged the prompt completion of drain construction at the Madhu Chowk centre, near the caves. Further, the Commissioner instructed officials from Engineering and Town Planning departments to regularly clear construction debris from the roads.

Zonal Commissioner Prabhudas, Chief Engineer R Srinath, In-Charge Chief Medical Health Officer Dr Suresh Babu and Superintending Engineers P Satyanarayana and P Sathyakumari were present.

Jagan ignored ICU protocol in hospital: Anam

PNS ■ NELLORE

Endowments Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy has lashed out at former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for ignoring the ICU protocol during his visit of stampede injured in the hospital and alleged that the YSRCP was politicising the unfortunate stampede incident which took place in Tirupati.

Talking to the media here on Friday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Rs 2 lakh crore worth of development works in the State, the stampede incident took place in Tirupati and described it as unfortunate.

However, Opposition YSRCP leaders were politicizing the stampede issue by making irresponsible statements.

When Jagan Mohan Reddy visited the injured in the hospital, hundreds of YSRCP activists assembled there and created chaos outside of the hospital.



Manohar dedicates Lake Park to people

PNS ■ TENALI

Minister for Civil Supplies, Nadendla Manohar dedicated the newly constructed Sri Satyanarayana Lake Park to the public at China Ravoor, near here, on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, Manohar said that the promise of completing the park before Sankranti had been fulfilled. Built with modern facilities at the corporation level, the park has now become a popular spot, known for its greenery and peaceful environment, the Minister highlighted.

"The construction work was completed swiftly through the coordination of the authorities over the past few months. This area, which had been neglected during the YSRCP regime for the last five years, is now brimming with natural beauty," acknowledged the Civil Supplies Minister. A special walking track has been set up in the park for senior citizens, and the park features lush greenery and a pleasant atmosphere. It has been designed as a recreational spot for families to enjoy together.

Initially, free entry will be offered to everyone for the first two months, the Minister clarified.

AR SI killed as car hits bike

PNS ■ BAPATLA

An Armed Reserve Sub-inspector was killed when a car hit his motorcycle at Vedullapalli check-post on the highway on Friday.

Police said that the deceased ASI Medida Sampurna was going to Bapatla from the RSI office. A speeding car hit his bike killing him instantaneously. Interestingly, the car which hit the bike of the deceased was owned by a sub-inspector Arun.

The police registered a case and shifted the body to the GGH in Bapatla for post-mortem.



'Will create wonders in TG'

Future City will compete with NY, London, Seoul: CM Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



Revanth reaffirmed the government's decision to make Hyderabad a "Net-Zero City." As part of the effort, 3,200 electric buses are being introduced into the TGSRTC fleet, and electric vehicle registration and road taxes have been waived to boost adoption

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy presented a transformative vision for Telangana during his address at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) National Council meeting held in Hyderabad.

Emphasizing the state's commitment to sustainable growth, innovation and women's empowerment, he invited investors to partner with the government to "create wonders in Telangana."

Revanth reaffirmed the government's decision to make Hyderabad a "Net-Zero City." As part of the effort, 3,200 electric buses are being introduced into the TGSRTC fleet, and electric vehicle registration and road taxes have been waived to boost adoption.

He announced plans to relocate polluting vehicles beyond the Outer Ring Road (ORR) and set an example for urban sustainability.

"While we aim for the Moon, it's time we learn to coexist responsibly on Earth," he remarked, stressing the urgency of sustainable practices.

The CM unveiled plans for Hyderabad's "Future City," envisioned as a world-class hub on par with cities like New York, London, Seoul, Dubai and Tokyo.

This exclusive service sector city will be designed to be pollution-free and climate-resilient, establishing Hyderabad as a global benchmark in urban planning.

Highlighting the state's focus on women's empowerment, Revanth said that 67 lakh women are active members of self-help groups in Telangana. These groups are setting up canteens in government offices and have been encouraged to establish solar power plants generating 1,000 MW. A three-and-a-half-acre site near Hi-Tech City has been allotted for women entrepreneurs to sell their products.

"Our goal is to make one crore women millionaires while prioritizing rural women's empowerment," he said.

The CM outlined plans for Telangana's infrastructure development, including the construction of a 360-km Regional Ring Road (RRR) with radial roads connecting it to the ORR. Development of clusters modelled after China, focusing on pharma, life sciences, aerospace, EVs and solar industries. A dry port in Telangana will be connected to Andhra Pradesh's Machilipatnam Port via road and rail.

Revanth emphasised the government's focus on skill development, noting that 1.1 lakh engineering graduates pass out annually, many of whom lack essential skills. Collaborating with the Tata Group, the state is investing Rs 2,400 crore to transform ITIs into Advanced Training Centres.

He also announced the establishment of a Skill University, modelled after ISB, with Anand Mahindra as its Chairman. Additionally, a Sports University and Sports Hub are being developed to promote sports and allied industries.

Aadhaar-linked systems exclude vulnerable communities from Govt services'

Workshop held to empower young persons with the skills to navigate digital systems

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Digitisation, hailed as a path to progress and improved access to government services, is proving problematic for marginalised groups, particularly Adivasis and the economically disadvantaged. PV Ramesh, a retired IAS officer with extensive experience in tribal affairs, pointed out that digital systems, especially Aadhaar-linked platforms, have inadvertently created new barriers, excluding vulnerable communities from essential services.

Speaking at the workshop on "Understanding Digital Social Welfare Programmes" organised by LibTech India in Kondakarla village of Munagapaka mandal, Ramesh discussed the challenges these communities face in accessing welfare programmes like MGNREGA, PM-Kisan, and PDS due to complex digital interfaces. The workshop, attended by 25 Adivasi youth from youth from the Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) of Paderu, Seethammapeta, Parvathipura, and Srisailam, aimed to empower young leaders with the skills to navigate digital systems and advocate for their communities. One participant shared how the Chenchu tribe in Nallamala forest continues to face exclusion from government benefits due to digital hurdles, highlighting the broader issue of digital disenfranchisement.

The participants shared their struggles in accessing welfare schemes such as MGNREGA, PM-Kisan, and Public Distribution Systems (PDS) due to complex and exclusionary digital interfaces. One participant described how the Chenchu tribe in Nallamala forest continues to face exclusion from government benefits because of digital obstacles, highlighting the broader issue of digital disenfranchisement. For many communities, lack of stable internet, reliable identity documentation, or digital literacy makes accessing these services even more difficult.

Ramesh encouraged the participants to document their experiences and use them for public advocacy, stressing the importance of collective action. He urged them to share their stories to raise awareness about Aadhaar-linked exclusions and to apply pressure on local governments to address the challenges.

NICHE Handloom Expo 2024-25 showcases India's rich heritage



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Weavers' Service Centre in Vijayawada, under the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, is hosting the "NICHE Handloom Marketing Expo-2024-25" from January 8 to January 14, 2025, at the A Plus Convention Centre, Moghalrajpuram, Vijayawada. This seven-day exhibition aims to promote handloom products, including fabrics from local weavers, handloom agencies, handicrafts, and Khadi items from artisans across India.

Andhra Pradesh, renowned for its vibrant handloom industry, has more than 1.77 lakh handloom weavers. The event is being organised under the Handloom Marketing Assistance of the National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) to support the state's weavers and their traditional craft.

The expo will feature a wide range of handloom products, including some of Andhra Pradesh's most famous sarees such as Uppada Jamdani Silk Sarees, Mangalagiri Cotton & Silk Sarees, Chirala Kuppadam Silk Sarees, Pedana Kalamkari Cotton Sarees, and Srikalahasthi Pen Kalamkari Sarees. Visitors can also expect sarees from other states, including Paithani Silk Sarees from Maharashtra, Gadwal Sarees from Telangana, Banaras Brocade Sarees from Uttar Pradesh, and many more.

In addition to the exhibition, the event will include a series of cultural performances and showcases. On January 10, 2025, a fashion show will highlight the beauty of traditional handloom sarees draped in various styles from different states. The show will feature creations by students from the National Institute of Design, Guntur, celebrating the fusion of creativity with traditional handloom. Another cultural dance performance will take place on January 11, 2025.

The expo brings together 29 participants from Andhra Pradesh and 20 from other states, totaling 49 handloom weavers, handloom societies, and agencies. Renowned organisations like APCO, Lepakhsi, and Tamil Nadu Co-optex are also participating in this event.

"We invite the residents of Vijayawada and visitors from across the region to experience the diversity and richness of India's handloom heritage," said Anil Sahu, Deputy Director and Head of Office at Weavers' Service Centre, Vijayawada. "This is an excellent opportunity to support the hardworking weavers and artisans who continue to preserve our traditional textiles, while also offering a chance to own colourful, high-quality handloom fabrics and sarees from all over India," he added.

The exhibition will remain open to the public until January 14, 2025. It promises to be a vibrant celebration of India's rich handloom traditions and a platform for both local and national artisans to showcase their craftsmanship.

ACROSS THE STATES



AMU receives bomb threat mail, security intensified

Aligarh Muslim University has received an email with the sender threatening "to blow up the campus," police said on Friday. The sender claimed to detonate the bomb already planted on the campus and also threatened to mix "pork oil" in the food if he did not get Rs 2 lakh, his demand, through UPI. Superintendent of Police (City) Mrigank Shekhar Pathak said all sensitive areas on and around the campus have been going through checks since last evening, when top varsity officials, including the vice chancellor, received the email. Authorities are "not taking any chances" with the threat, Pathak said. Police and university authorities have been maintaining a strict vigil in all areas where students gather, including the Maulana Azad library, the officer said. AMU spokesperson Asim Siddiqui told PTI that the email mentioned "ransom money". "The university authorities reported the matter to the police, who have also activated the Cyber Crime Cell to trace the origins of the mail ID from which the threat was issued," he added.



Sarpanch assaulted for NOC to beer shop

The sarpanch of a village in Maharashtra's Palghar district was allegedly attacked with sticks by a group of persons on Friday for granting a no objection certificate (NOC) to a beer shop, police said. Local residents and shopkeepers observed a 'bandh' to protest against the attack on Chetan Patil, the sarpanch of Manor village. "The incident occurred in the morning at the gram panchayat office. A local resident, Alvi Altaf Rais, questioned the sarpanch about issuing a no-objection certificate (NOC) to set up a beer shop in the village. Their altercation soon turned into a fight, in which Rais and four to five others attacked Patil with sticks," a police official said. The incident created tension in the village. The supporters of the sarpanch gathered outside the local police station to seek action against the accused. A 'bandh' was called to show solidarity with him and all the establishments in the local market remained shut throughout the day.



Couple, son killed over property dispute

A couple and their 31-year-old son were killed by a group of persons over a property dispute in Chhattisgarh's Surajpur district on Friday, police said. The incident took place in Jagannathpur village under Khadgawa police chowki when the deceased, identified as Mange Ram Toppo (60), his wife Basanti (53) and their son Naresh were working in the field, an official said. There was a long-standing dispute between the victims and the accused over around 7.5 acres of land. Recently, a local court gave an order in favour of Toppo, he said. When the trio were working in their field, the rival group, comprising more than 20 persons, reached the spot and attacked them with sticks and axes, leaving the woman and his son dead on the spot, he said. The man succumbed to his injuries while being taken to a hospital, he said. The accused escaped from the spot after the incident. Seven to eight suspects have been identified and efforts are on to trace and nab them, he said. A case has been registered in this connection and further probe is on, he added.

'Diaspora will play key role in achieving Viksit Bharat vision'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR



Noting that the Indian diaspora represents the best of the country and an integral part of the nation, President Droupadi Murmu on Friday emphasised their crucial role in achieving the vision of a viksit Bharat by 2047.

Addressing the valedictory session of the three-day 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) 2025 here, President Murmu said, "Viksit Bharat is a national mission that requires the proactive and enthusiastic participation of every Indian, including those living abroad."

She asserted that the diaspora's global presence and their achievements place them in a position to significantly contribute to India's development.

"The Indian diaspora represents the best of our country and they have carried with them not just the knowledge and skills acquired in this sacred land, but also the values and ethos that have been the foundation of our civilization for millennia," she said.

"Whether in the fields of technology, medicine, arts, or entrepreneurship, the Indian diaspora has made a mark that the world acknowledges and respects," she pointed out.

Referring to the convention, the President described it as more than just an event, saying, "It is a platform where ideas converge, collaborations are forged, and the bonds between India and its diaspora are strengthened."

On India's timeless philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family), she said this vision is about creating an ecosystem that balances economic progress with social justice and environmental stewardship, while contributing to global well-being. "As India celebrates the achievements of our Pravasi Bharatiya family, we should also look forward to the future with hope and determination. Together, we can build a viksit Bharat, a nation that stands tall on the global stage and continues to be a beacon of light for the world," she added.

Addressing the gathering, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said the diaspora has made outstanding contributions to both India and the world in diverse domains based on their immense talent, creativity, dedication, commitment, and perseverance.

"They have left an indelible mark on global society. Their extraordinary achievements have made the country and Indians proud and have strengthened our relationships with other people and nations," he said.

Women-led development incorporated into foreign policy: Jaishankar

BHUBANESWAR: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said that women-led development is the priority of the Centre, and it has also been incorporated into India's foreign policy. Jaishankar said this while chairing a plenary session themed "Ideal Woman Diaspora: Women's Leadership and Influence - Nari Shakti", held on the last day of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention. He said that India cannot become a developed nation until "we are able to deal with traditional, historical and societal attitudes. If India is to become a modern, industrial, tech-centric society then we cannot neglect the role of 50 per cent of the talent". "Women-led development has been the priority of the central government. It has also been incorporated into our foreign policy," Jaishankar said without elaborating. Giving due respect to women's skills, the government is committed to ensuring their nutrition, health and education by reducing social disparities, he said. As significant steps towards women's empowerment by the Centre, maternity leave was extended to 26 weeks, loans were provided to three crore women entrepreneurs under the MUDRA scheme, and 32 lakh bank accounts were opened under the Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, the minister said, adding that women's participation in higher education increased 28 per cent.



HC seeks Delhi govt report on action against child labour

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Friday asked the city government to file a comprehensive report concerning the steps taken by the authorities against use of child labour as well as rescue and rehabilitation of such children.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela sought district-wise information on these issues in the report which has to be affirmed by the Delhi chief secretary.

"The respondent (Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi) will file a status report clearly indicating how many meetings of task force were held district-wise; action plan have been made for conducting rescue operation district-wise; steps taken for rehabilitation of rescued children.

"Let a comprehensive report be filed, affirmed by the personal affidavit of the chief secretary of Delhi," the bench ordered.

"There has to be some accountability district wise," remarked the court.

The court also asked the Delhi Police to file a status report concerning its probe into an FIR alleging assault and molestation of volunteers who had participated in a raid to rescue child labourers.

"Give a status report. What is the current stage. Don't take it casually. Do your duty and ensure steps are taken," the court said, as it also sought the presence of the SHO concerned on the next date of hearing in March.

The high court was hearing a plea by NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA) which had filed the petition in the aftermath of a tragedy in which over 40 people, including several minors, lost their lives in December 2019 when a fire broke out at a factory in Anaj Mandi here.

TN proposes stringent punishment for sexual offences

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Friday introduced a bill proposing to enhance the quantum of punishments for offences committed against women and children under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and certain provisions relating to bail in the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.

The Bill to amend the BNS and BNSS in its application to Tamil Nadu, known as the Criminal Laws (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 2025, will come into force on the date notified by the state government.

It proposes rigorous imprisonment (RI) of not less than fourteen years and twenty years in the case of sexual assault by a police officer or a public servant, but may extend to RI for the remainder of life and fine, RI for life, death or RI for life for repeat offenders, and imprisonment for not less than three years which may extend to five years and fine for disclosure of victim's identity.



Harsh penal provisions have been proposed for assault or use of criminal force on women with intent to outrage her modesty, sexual harassment, voyeurism, stalking, and voluntarily causing grievous hurt by throwing or attempting to throw acid. This Bill is among the three introduced in the Assembly today.

Moving the Bill, the CM said the state government was fully committed to the protection, welfare, and well-being of women and children and therefore they have been accorded the highest priority by the state government.

About 41 per cent of all women working in factories in India are employed in this state, which has a high female enrollment in schools and higher institutions.

The statement of objects and reason of the Bill stated that pursuant the state's unwavering commitment to ensure the safety of its citizens, particularly women and children, and to ensure that heinous acts of rape and sexual offences against women and children are met with the full force of the law, it has become necessary to provide deterrent punishment for the perpetrators of atrocities against the women and children.

SAVARKAR REMARKS

Rahul gets bail in defamation case



PNS ■ PUNE

A special court in Pune on Friday granted bail to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case related to his alleged objectionable remarks on Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar.

The MP/MLA court granted bail to the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha on a surety bond of Rs 25,000 after he appeared before it through video conferencing, his lawyer said.

Senior Congress leader Mohan Joshi stood as surety for Gandhi (54) before the court presided over by Amol Shinde, judicial magistrate (first class) and special judge for MP/MLA cases.

Advocate Milind Pawar, representing Gandhi, said soon after his client appeared before the court, they moved a bail application.

The judge allowed the plea and granted bail to the former Congress president on a surety bond of Rs 25000, he informed.

The advocate said the court also granted permanent exemption to the Lok Sabha MP from Rae Bareli from appearing before it.

Zoological Survey of India discovers new pangolin species



PNS ■ KOLKATA

Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) scientists identified a new pangolin species which diverged from the Chinese pangolin (Manis pentadactyla) around 3.4 million years ago, the organisation said in a statement on Friday.

The ZSI said the discovery of the Indo-Burmese pangolin (Manis indo-burmanica) sheds light on the evolutionary diversity of pangolins, likely influenced by dramatic geo-climatic changes in the region, one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.

The study, led by Mukesh Thakur of the ZSI, used cutting-edge genomic tools to analyse mitochondrial genomes. "This discovery is a testament to the power of modern genetic tools in uncovering hidden diversity. The Indo-Burmese pangolin not only enriches our understanding of Asian pangolins but also emphasises the need for region-specific conservation efforts," Thakur said.

Lenrik Konchok Wangmo, a PhD scholar at the University of Calcutta, also played a crucial role in this research, particularly in identifying the paratype specimens from Arunachal Pradesh.

ROW OVER WELL NEAR SAMBHAL MOSQUE

SC orders status quo, issues notice to Centre, ASI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the district magistrate to maintain status quo on reviving or allowing prayers at a "private" well located near the entrance of the Mughal-era Jama Masjid mosque in Sambhal.

Considering a plea of the Sambhal Shahi Jama Masjid management committee on the issue, a bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar issued notices to the Centre, the director general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Sambhal district magistrate and other private Hindu side litigants led by Hari Shankar Jain.

The mosque committee's plea said the Samhal district administration was conducting a "purported drive" to revive old temples and wells in the city with reports indicating the revival of at least 32 old unused temples besides the identification of 19 wells being made operational for public prayers.



In the list of wells, being sought to be revived by the district administration, there's also a well in the mosque precincts, it alleged.

Seeking a response from the authorities within two weeks, the bench directed the district magistrate not to give "effect to the notice" with regard to the well near the mosque.

The plea sought a direction to the Sambhal district magistrate to ensure a "status quo" was maintained with respect to the "private well situated near the stairs/entrance of the mosque and not take any steps/actions with regard to the same without due permission from this court".

While one half of the covered well was inside the mosque, the other half protruded outside on a curved platform, it said.

According to the plea, the well was situated at the trijunction of the three narrow lanes leading to the mosque's main entrance and was used for drawing water for the mosque, the plea said.

The bench directed no steps would be taken regarding the well without its permission and instructed the authorities to file a status report within two weeks.

Industries have important role in India's Space Vision: ISRO

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

ISRO Chairman S Somanath said on Friday that industries have a phenomenal role to play in achieving India's Space Vision 2047, rolled out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. ISRO chairman-designate V Narayanan also echoed the same view.

In his pre-recorded inaugural speech, at the biennial National Aerospace Manufacturing Seminar (NAMS) 2025, Somanath said that the industries will face significant challenges as their collaboration with the space programme is going to increase substantially.

One of the challenges would be the regular production of rockets, satellites and other systems required for the space programme and the other would be engineering, manufacturing and supplying items like new space crafts and systems, miniature electronics, large propulsion tanks and engines, he said.

"They have to be produced in numbers to meet the tight schedules," he added.

He said the task was a huge one as the strength of the space community in the public sector was not increasing substantially.

Somanath further said that while there was growth in the private sector, manufacturing, supplying and managing the supply chain were also going to be substantial challenges.

Narayanan was also not present in person and a pre-recorded speech by him was played at the seminar where he said that material and manufacturing teams have a crucial role to play in the space programme.

He said that without them, "satellites and rockets will only be in paper form".

Narayanan further said that in the last 44 years, India has successfully accomplished 99 launch vehicle missions and placed a number of satellites in orbit.



"The demand for launch vehicles and satellites has gone up. Presently we have around 54 satellites and next in 3-4 years, more than 100 satellites will have to be placed in orbit.

"To accomplish this, the role of industries in manufacturing is phenomenal. It is not just the design team, the materials and manufacturing teams also have to play a crucial role as without them, the satellites and rockets will only be in paper form," he said.

Earlier the demand for rocket launches was low, but now as the requirements increase, there is a need to improve the launch vehicles' payload capability, Narayanan said.

For this the country was developing the cryogenic and semi-cryogenic propulsion systems, he said.

"However, even though the semi-cryogenic project was approved almost 15 years back, our hands are tied only because of the challenges we are facing in manufacturing as the industry capability was less," he said.

Frequent polls obstruct progress: Chouhan

PNS ■ DURG

Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday urged the people of Chhattisgarh to support Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'one nation, one election', saying that frequent polls hinder the country's progress.

The Union agriculture minister was addressing a function of the state government, 'Mor Awas Mor Adhikar', in Nagpura village, to allocate houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.

"In our country, anything else may or may not happen, but preparations for elections take place for five years, 12 months and 365 days. A year ago, elections were held in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, followed by the Lok Sabha polls. Subsequently, elections took place in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, and Jharkhand. Now Delhi's 'dangal' has come, and after that, the Bihar elections will be held. These frequent elections are obstacles to the country's growth," he said.

VIJAYAWADA | SATURDAY | JANUARY 11, 2025

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Transforming defence

The 'Year of Transformation' can give necessary momentum for defence manufacturing and innovation

India's defence landscape is set to undergo a transformative shift in 2025, as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) embarks on an ambitious overhaul aimed at modernising procurement processes, expanding indigenous manufacturing capabilities and boosting research and development (R&D). The year has been declared as the 'Year of Transformation,' with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other top officials outlining a vision to address long-standing challenges while positioning the country for greater self-reliance and competitiveness in defence. One of the key focus areas for the government is to revamp the Defence Acquisition Procedures (DAP). These procedures, which have been criticised for their complexity and inefficiency, are set to be replaced with a more streamlined, lighter, and faster version. The aim is to cut down delays in procurement timelines and eliminate bureaucratic hurdles that have long impeded defence modernisation. The new framework will not only make the system more efficient but will also create a level playing field for both established players and newcomers in the defence sector. In addition to reforming procurement, the government has placed a strong emphasis on boosting indigenous manufacturing and R&D.



While India is the world's fifth-largest manufacturing economy, its defence manufacturing capacity remains relatively small in comparison to its overall economic standing. To address this gap, the government plans to allocate more resources to defence R&D, with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) targeting an increase in R&D spending from 5 per cent to 15 per cent of the defence budget in the coming years. One area that has garnered particular attention is the development of aero engines. India has faced challenges in developing these critical technologies domestically, and the government has signaled that joint ventures with foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) will be essential for progress. With significant investments required—potentially as high as Rs 50,000 crore—the government is determined to make the necessary commitments to build the infrastructure and expertise required for successful co-development of aero engines and related technologies. Another significant initiative is the creation of a more competitive defence industry ecosystem. Currently, India's defence sector is largely dominated by Public Sector Undertakings. The government aims to level the playing field by encouraging the participation of startups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises through policy changes. Despite these ambitious plans, India's defence ecosystem still faces several challenges. One of the most significant hurdles is the relatively small manufacturing base in sectors like aerospace, where India's ability to scale production and develop cutting-edge technologies has been limited. Besides,archaic policies, delays in preparing Requests for Proposals and overly complicated procedures have often led to extended timelines. This must change if defence sector is to become competitive and innovative.

PICTALK



Devotees carry 'kalash' during 'Hindu Rashtra Seva Mela' at Goregaon PTI

The trust factor in human interaction



VINAYSHIL **GAUTAM**

The temperament and conviction of individuals play a pivotal role in shaping trust, whether in personal relationships or organisational dynamics



There is a general feeling that if something is committed on paper, with other things being equal, it is reliable evidence that it will be carried out. If it is on a legal document, the credibility quotient is still higher, and if there are clauses that recognise the punitive element of violation, the feeling of reliability further goes on. This, like many truths, goes a certain distance.

This cannot be the place to explore the veracity of such belief, but there is an occasion to look at certain other aspects of reliability, especially the temperament of the people involved. Some people take their words seriously, and others casually. This attitude permeates their entire behaviour, and in certain matters, it becomes even more evident that they take their words seriously.

Other types of people are quite figuratively the opposite, and they take their own words so lightly that when they utter them, they are not sure what conviction they carry. Between these two extremes, the larger part of the population rests with varying degrees of reliability and different levels of conviction.

This simple truth makes the entire range of human conviction open to many shades of possibilities and makes dealing with each other either at a direct level or at a group level, an extremely dubious proposition wherein liability is concerned. This even affects official interaction as indeed it does personal interaction. It is therefore necessary in a group culture to inculcate the correct values of interpersonal dynamics.

People cannot be 'taught' to be reliable. This is because the fundamental principles of values, like eternal values, remain the same. Every domain of human life talks about what is right, what is beautiful, and what is essential to keep groups sustainable and harmoniously together. In such circumstances where it is recognised that observing pristine standards may be difficult, many people practice silence. They simply do not talk about values at all. This may or may not work because silence and lack of communication would allow each one to create his norm and use his interpretation. What matters most then is how the leader of the group behaves as an exemplar and what other members of the group see as the essence of acceptable behaviour.

Positive or negative recognition then follows. For this, the informal and formal leaders of the group must agree on certain examples and set an example collectively. It is difficult, especially when there is no clear reference point and no way of verifying what rules the roost.

If the group has a powerful man, his behaviour is noticed and others try to imitate him. If the powerful man acquires power by formal position, it is one story. If, however, he acquires power through organising cliques and factions and through manipulations, there are always dangers of somebody calling the bluff or indeed power slipping out of his hand.

> IF THE POWERFUL MAN ACQUIRES POWER BY FORMAL POSITION, IT IS ONE STORY. IF, HOWEVER, HE ACQUIRES POWER THROUGH ORGANIZING CLIQUES AND FACTIONS AND THROUGH MANIPULATIONS, THERE ARE ALWAYS DANGERS OF SOMEBODY CALLING THE BLUFF

All this is not conducive to organisational stability or, for that matter, even clarity. It makes the job of a new entrant particularly complex. The complexity would be enhanced if the new entrant could not navigate his way intelligently with perspicacity and shrewdness. If the group has a large number of turnovers, then the complexity is further compounded. Under the circumstances, it's perhaps best to recognise that, like all truths, simplicity is the best approach. Being truthful, simple, and straightforward is the foundation of sound behaviour, stable relationships, and the achievement of goals constructively and dependably. Like all foundations of a sound civil society, positive thinking, straightforward action, and dependable follow-up is the way to go forward.

It is the human mind that creates complications. Legality and other elements that try to substitute the basic character of dependability, without the right ambience, will remain halfway houses. It can lead to quibbling, litigation, and, at times, disappointment. However, stability will remain a matter of character, and that is where civil societies need to pitch. Whether this is in a formal organisation or an informal civil setup, it would hardly make a difference. Truth remains the truth and for the best way, it is important to follow it up relentlessly with simplicity and dignity. Like many tales, this too has a tailpiece.

There is a Sanskrit dictum, "Satyam bruyat, priyam bruyat naa bruyat satyam apriyam". A free translation of this shall be "Speak the truth, speak the pleasant; do not speak the truth which is unpleasant".

There can be many views on this, and each will have its assumptions and derivations. If assumptions vary, as do the derivations, conclusions would be also varied. That is the nature of truth: multi-faceted, each appearing right in its way. One has to navigate one's way.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

Breaking barriers: The rise of women investors in India's equity markets



ARUN **CHAUDHARY**

Among the most notable trends in the equity market is the surge in women investors, whose participation has grown 6.8 times since 2015

The Indian equity market has radically transformed over the past two decades. The advent of smartphones, digital trading platforms, and increased financial literacy has ushered in a new era of investors — young, financially aware, and open to taking calculated risks. Recent data from the National Stock Exchange (NSE) reveals that women now constitute over 22 per cent of equity market investors in India, a 6.8X growth since 2015.



This surge in female participation is particularly noteworthy given the tepid adoption of demat trading in its early days. It could be attributed to women enjoying greater financial independence, a growing interest in equities, and a disciplined approach to sustainable wealth creation. The rise in women's financial awareness has also been a critical driver of this growth. A study by CRISIL and DBS found that 47 per cent of women now make independent financial decisions.

This newfound autonomy is reflected in the increasing number of women investing in mutual funds. According to AMFI data, women's share in industry AUM rose to nearly 21 per cent by the end of December 2023, against 15.2 per cent in March 2017. Importantly, this trend is not limited to major cities; women in smaller towns show equal enthusiasm for capital market investments.

However, the same CRISIL and DBS study revealed that women still allocate 51 per cent of their investable assets to fixed deposits and savings bank accounts, 16 per cent to gold, 15 per cent to mutual funds, 10 per cent to real estate, and just 7 per cent of their investible corpus—being the least preferred option. Given the proven potential for substantial market returns, women's risk-averse attitude towards equities is particularly perplexing.

Over the past five years, benchmark indices have delivered over 100 per cent returns. For instance, based on a daily rolling return analysis, the Nifty 50 Total Returns Index has shown positive returns of approximately 93 per cent over three years.

These double-digit returns from long-term equity investments have far outpaced the single-digit interest rates offered by traditional savings accounts and fixed deposits. However, women tend to be cautious when it comes to equities. The potential impact of increased women's participation in equity markets is substantial. A BCG study found that women contribute $5 trillion annually to the global wealth pool. Encouraging more significant equity investment among women and prudent risk management practices is crucial for building a stronger financial future for individuals and the nation.

Regulators are already implementing measures to create a safe and transparent market environment for women investors. For instance, initiatives like the Women's Investor Awareness Programme actively educate and empower women by simplifying stock market concepts and encouraging them to take control of their financial futures. Simultaneously, the industry complements these efforts by developing accessible and informative content in regional languages and diverse formats, such as podcasts and video tutorials, to make complex financial concepts easier to understand. Women themselves must actively participate in the stock market by engaging in discussions, seeking knowledge, and taking the initiative to invest. Starting with a systematic investment plan is a smart approach to building wealth over time. Additionally, consulting financial experts can help women navigate the market with confidence. It is time for women to seize this opportunity, take control, invest wisely, and contribute to rebuilding a more equitable and financially robust India.

(The writer is Director & Chief Business Officer at m.Stock by Mirae Asset Capital Markets; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TWO TIER SYSYEM IN TEST CRICKET

Madam — There are talks between Australia, England, and India and the International Cricket Council's (ICC) new chair, Jay Shah to split Test (cricket) playing nations into two tier, with Australia, England and India in one tier and the rest in a different tier. The concept has gained impetus post the BGT series, where the attendance and TV viewership touched new records. If agreed upon by the ICC council, this will come into effect post-2027 after the present commitments are met by these nations. The objective is that these three nations will play against each other twice in three years as against the present four-year schedule. While the idea may have sprung up from the revenue point of view, ICC must focus on its unwritten objective of improving the quality and skill level of the weaker member nations and making all the members play competitive cricket.

The choice of three nations-India, Australia, and England-also in the upper tier, is arbitrary if it is on the basis of the quality of cricket displayed. If it is so, India has not displayed quality cricket, both in the home series against the Kiwis and down under in the BGT series recently. Also, the Windies have stunned the Aussies in Gabba in a pink ball test in 2024. The recent entrants to the test-playing nations, like Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Afganisthan have also displayed talents and enthusiasm. Hence such an idea of an arbitrary split must be shunned.If the ICC is serious about splitting, it must be based on the performance in a given time period, say between 2025-28, on the number of points scored by each nation on the number of test wins/losses and can consider having two or three divisions amongst the twelve member countries. Having done that on the basis of points scored, one can consider promotion or demotion of the first and last two, respectively, which will also instill a sense of competitiveness and thereby sustain interest in the test cricket.

Gopalaswamy J | *Chennai*

A policy shift for Afghanistan



In a major and surprising development, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai on Wednesday. Though its relations with Afghanistan had nosedived after the Taliban seized power in the mountainous, landlocked republic in 2021, New Delhi, in a smart move, kept providing humanitarian and economic assistance to Afghanistan. The Taliban also requested the Indian delegation to reopen its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan. Now, Misri's meeting marks a major shift in New Delhi's policy towards the Taliban. This meeting has taken place at a time when Afghanistan is witnessing heightened tensions with Pakistan concerning the Durand Line-the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan-as well as regarding the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

By condemning Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan, New Delhi has played a well-calculated diplomatic move. Besides the Pakistan factor, Iran's Chabahar Port is also going to play a major role in India-Taliban relations as Kabul is looking to leverage its ties with India by using the Chabahar Port. Thus, both the Taliban and New Delhi have realised that bilateral ties are mutually beneficial for both countries. By playing a vital role in restoring peace, stability, and development in Afghanistan, New Delhi can secure geopolitical leverage over Pakistan at the crossroads of South and Central Asia.

Manoj Parashar | *Ghaziabad*

HONOURING INDIAN DIASPORA

Madam—The city of Odisha turned out to be the venue for the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas this year. In order to honour the immense contribution of the Indian diaspora, it is particularly required to appreciate the exceptional contribution of Indians overseas. For many decades, millions of Indians have paid visits to foreign countries to grab vibrant opportunities in different spectrums of life.

Indians made exceptional contributions to the economic success of the different nations, assisting India to create its own niche soft power on the basis of its people settled overseas. Indians are globally renowned for contributing the world's highest remittance back to India with 129 billion USD in 2024. The spirit of the Indian diaspora is ever vibrant and zealous, and this celebration at Odisha's Bhubaneswar for appreciating Pravasi Bhartiya is a welcoming initiative. Let's take a moment to thank & appreciate the Indian diaspora, who are continuously extending the legacy of India all around the world.

Kirti Wadhawan | *Kanpur*

MAHAKUMBH MELA IN PRAYAGRAJ

Madam — The Great Mahakumbh Mela 2025, set to take place in Prayagraj, which is held only once in a period of 144 years, which is beginning from January 13 to February 26, is much more than a religious gathering-it is a profound celebration of spirituality, culture, and cosmic alignment. This ancient festival, rooted in the Sanatan tradition, is believed to influence not only human affairs but also cosmic and terrestrial energies.

The event is centred on the holy confluence of three rivers-the Ganga, Yamuna and the Saraswati. The Mahakumbh exemplifies India's rich cultural diversity, drawing millions of devotees, ascetics, and pilgrims from all walks of life. Through practices like ritual bathing, chanting, meditation, and spiritual discourses, it becomes a unifying force, blending traditions and beliefs into a harmonious whole.

Anushka Bohra | *Ujjain*

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

VIJAYAWADA | SATURDAY | JANUARY 11, 2025

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FIRST COLUMN

HOMESCHOOLING: AN OPTION WORTH EXPLORING

While it comes with challenges, its benefits make it an increasingly compelling choice



SAKSHI **SETHI**

Childhood is a short season, and homeschooling gives a child more time to truly enjoy it. In recent years, homeschooling has seen a significant rise in popularity as parents increasingly opt to educate their children at home rather than through traditional schooling systems. This shift reflects a combination of concerns about conventional education and the desire for more tailored learning experiences. One of the primary reasons parents choose homeschooling is the ability to customise education to suit their child's unique needs.

There is no denying that curriculum is a valuable tool but at the same time a terrible master. Traditional classrooms often struggle to accommodate different learning paces and styles, whereas homeschooling allows parents to tailor lessons, fostering deeper understanding and engagement. Many parents cite dissatisfaction with public or private school systems as a motivator for homeschooling. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms, underfunding, and lack of individual attention can negatively impact the quality of education. Additionally, concerns over bullying, peer pressure, and exposure to harmful influences prompt parents to seek alternatives.

Homeschooling allows families to integrate their cultural, ethical, or religious values into the curriculum. Parents can teach their children in alignment with their personal beliefs, creating an educational experience that reflects their family's principles. Unlike traditional schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility in schedules and teaching methods. Families incor-



porate travel, extracurricular activities, or non-traditional subjects into their routine, enhancing the learning experience. This adaptability appeals to families seeking a more balanced lifestyle.

Unlike traditional schooling, homeschooling offers flexibility in schedules and teaching methods. Families can incorporate travel, extracurricular activities, or non-traditional subjects into their routine, enhancing the learning experience. This adaptability appeals to families seeking a more balanced lifestyle. While homeschooling offers many benefits, it is not without its challenges. Parents often need to dedicate significant time and effort to planning and teaching. Additionally, concerns about socialisation can arise, as homeschooled children may have fewer opportunities for peer interaction. However, many families address this by participating in extracurricular activities, and community events. Homeschooling is not a new phenomenon.

In olden times, education often took place at home, with parents or private tutors guiding the learning of their child. The rise of formalised schooling in the 19th and 20th centuries shifted education to institutions, but homeschooling remained a choice for families who sought alternatives. Modern homeschooling driven by educational reformers and parents seeking greater control over their children's education began gaining traction in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it continues to evolve, integrating technology and innovative teaching practices. Technology undoubtedly has played a pivotal role in making homeschooling more accessible and effective. It has also enabled collaboration and connection among homeschooling communities. Online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and educational applications such as Scholastic Kids, Udemy, Duolingo, Funbrain and many more provide parents with resources to create comprehensive curricula. The shift to homeschooling reflects a broader desire among parents to take control of their children's education and provide a more personalised, values-driven learning environment. While homeschooling comes with its challenges, the benefits of flexibility, individualised attention and alignment with family priorities make homeschooling an increasingly appealing choice for families worldwide.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Junta faces collapse amid escalating defeats



HIRANMAY **KARLEKAR**

Losses across key regions, coupled with mass defections and severe military setbacks, suggest a crumbling grip of Military on power in Myanmar



By all indications, 2025 is going to be, militarily, a dismal year for Myanmar's ruling junta. It is clearly losing its war against the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and its armed wing, the People's Defence Force (PDF), ethnic armed organisations (EROs), and the Three Brotherhood Alliance (Henceforth the Alliance). Comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), active in the Kokang Special Region of northern Shan State, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in the Shan State and the Arakan Army (AA), based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part, the alliance has been acting in close cooperation with the PDF and other ethnic armies.

Crystal-gazing is a hazardous business. Nevertheless, a fling at it is warranted by the unfolding events in that star-crossed country. A report under the headline, 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG,' (datelined January 6, 2025), in the news website The Irrawaddy, cited the NUG as stating that the military regime controlled only 107 of the country's 330 townships. The PDF and EROs fully or partly controlled 144 townships or 44 per cent of the country. The website, which enjoys a high-measure of credibility, carried an article by Maung Kavi (datelined January 8, 2025) under the headline, 'Myanmar Junta Boss warns resistance as Regime Loses Ground Nationwide,' saying that the NUG had further claimed that nearly 1,500 of the junta's soldiers and police personnel had defected to the civil disobedience movement and 480 of them had taken up 'revolutionary duties.'

The report titled 'Junta's Writ Only Runs in One-third of Myanmar: NUG,' further states that 315 officers were killed and 127 injured in course of the last year. In the same period, 53 senior officers ranging in rank from colonel to major general, were either killed, injured, or taken prisoner. Among the rank and file, 14,093 soldiers and border guard policemen were killed and 7,363 injured.

Anti-regime groups seized 741 junta positions. They were mostly captured by ethnic armies, but 162 were taken by PDF and People's Defence Teams in Sagaing, Magwe, Mandalay, Bago and Tanintharyi regions.

> THE ODDS ARE NOW RAPIDLY STACKING UP AGAINST THE JUNTA. NO DOUBT, THE LATTER HAS TANKS AND OTHER ARMOURED VEHICLES, ARTILLERY AND AIR FORCE. TANKS AND ARMOURED VEHICLES ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO DEPLOY IN THE AREAS DOMINATED BY THE ETHNIC FORCES

The military lost in 2024 some 140 battalions and two regional commands - Northeastern Command in northern Shan State and Western Command in Rakhine-plus one regional operations command, five military operations commands, six operational bases, two airbases, 17 border guard police bases, as well as many infantry and light infantry battalions, and artillery, logistics, signal, and military engineering units.

While one should not take the NUG's claims at face value reports from the ground indicate that the Sit-Tat (as the junta's army is called) has suffered severe body blows during the last year. The Three Brotherhood Alliance has gained significant ground since launching its offensive, code-named Operation 1027, on October 27, 2023. The AA had established control over almost the entire Rakhine State by April, 2024. In a major development, the MNDAA claimed on July 31, 2024, that it had captured Sit-Tat's military base in Lashio, a city in Shan State close to the border with China, and its airport. This was a major loss for the junta.

As Vivek Shankar has pointed out in a piece in The New York Times datelined August 5, 2024, the 'city of Lashio and its airport lie on a crucial trade corridor to Yunnan Province in China, which is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a high-speed rail link and other infrastructure projects on both sides of the border.'

Besides gains in the north, the anti-junta forces had captured four towns in northern Mandalay. According to a report by Andrew Nachemson published in Al Jazeera dated September 23, 2024, their capture had placed them within striking distance of the city of Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest urban centre, with a population of nearly two million.

On October 8, 2024, the Sit-Tat suffered a serious reverse with the fall of the township of Pinlebu to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an important part of the coalition of forces fighting the junta, and its allies. Located on the border of the Sagaing Region and Kachin State, its capture opened up to the opposition forces the routes leading to the Kawlin township and the surrounding areas.

Besides its geo-strategic significance, the township's fall is important for what it revealed of the Sit-Tat's state. A report by Saw Lin, published in the news website, The Irrawaddy, on October 14, 2024, cites the NUG as claiming that the junta's troops, numbering 800, were defeated despite 670 airstrikes and the dropping of over 5,000 bombs, that around 70 junta soldiers were killed, 275 were missing, 225 were wounded, 48 surrendered and 102 captured during the fighting. Around 400 firearms and other military equipment were seized.

In keeping with the trend, the Junta had ceded three townships and the Western Command headquarters in Rakhine State in December, 2024, as the ethnic Arakan Army gained control over 14 of the 17 townships in the westernmost state. On January 1, 2025, the Sit-Tat retreated from a heavily-fortified police station in Sagaing Region's Budalin Township after a yearlong siege by regional resistance forces, making it easier for the latter to operate in the region.

According to Maung Kavi's report cited earlier, the junta, which has been losing towns and bases to EROs in Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Karen states, has not been able to launch any military operation to retake the northern Shan State, almost the whole of which it had lost in 2024. The Sit-Tat is in a bad way.

Its morale is low. There is internal discord. Several three-stars generals have been removed. Many younger officers are unhappy as they recognise that almost the entire country is against them. According to a piece by Ye Myo Hein (datelined May 4, 2023) featured by the United States Institute of Peace, it was found the Sit-Tat, whose "headcount," showed a "strength of a total 300,000-400,000 before the coup," showed that it currently "had a strength of about 150,000 personnel.

Roughly 70,000 are combat soldiers. At least 21,000 service members have been lost through casualties, desertion and defection since the coup. At this troop level, the Sit-Tat is barely able to sustain itself as a fighting force, much less a government."

The odds are now rapidly stacking up against the Junta. No doubt, the latter has tanks and other armoured vehicles, artillery and air force. Tanks and armoured vehicles are very difficult to deploy in the areas dominated by the ethnic forces. With densely forested mountainous terrains, deep gorges and steep climbs, these are ideal for staging ambushes. Moreover, air-strikes and artillery do not win wars, even when backed by heavily armed and trained infantry. Otherwise, the United States would have swept to a victory in Vietnam.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

Real-time travel assistance: Transforming the Indian travel experience

From the integration of cutting-edge technology to the emergence of unique destinations, the way we explore has been redefined



HARISH **KHATRI**

The travel industry in India has undergone a significant transformation in the past decade. The advent of technology, the emergence of unique destinations, and travellers' shifting preferences have reshaped the way we experience travel. While convenience and connectivity have expanded exponentially, so have the challenges that come with travelling through this vast and diverse country.

In such a scenario, the idea of real-time travel assistance is much more than a luxury, gradually becoming a necessity. India is a land of incredible diversity, which often presents challenges for travellers, both domestic and international. With 28 states and countless languages, customs, and traditions, exploring India can be as overwhelming as it is enriching.

A misplaced document, a language barrier, or a medical emergency in an unfamiliar city can turn a dream vacation or a crucial business trip into an overwhelming ordeal. This is where the concept of real-time assistance steps in, bridging the gap between exploration and ease.

The Need for Immediate Support: Travelers today demand solutions that are immediate, efficient, and humanised. The expectations from travel experiences are no longer confined to curated itineraries and luxury stays. Safety, comfort, and resolution to unexpected issues are just as critical to creating memorable journeys. Whether it's assistance in locating a nearby pharmacy late at night, navigating bureaucratic hurdles in a foreign environment, or finding reliable medical aid during emergencies, travellers increasingly rely on services that ensure a smooth journey. Real-time assistance goes beyond static travel guides or pre-recorded helplines.

It operates as a different system where timely, empathetic, and accurate support becomes a part of the travel experience. It is this proactive approach that helps mitigate common traveller challenges and allows for a seamless journey, irrespective of the destination.

Empathy in Travel Assistance: A game-changer at its core, real-time travel assistance is about offering humanised solutions. Travellers often find themselves in vulnerable situations where a touch of empathy can go a long way. Imagine being stuck at a remote train station with no one to guide you to your next stop or dealing with a sudden health scare in a busy urban centre where you don't know the language.

These are moments when an empathetic, knowledgeable professional on the other end



of a call or chat can provide not just solutions, but also reassurance. It is this empathy paired with technology that is revolutionising travel assistance in India. Real-time support services aim to address the emotional and logistical needs of travellers in equal measure.

Utilising Technology to Enable Seamless Experiences: The amalgamation of technology and travel assistance has unlocked possibilities previously deemed unattainable. Advanced algorithms, live tracking, and geo-location services now enable assistance providers like India Assist to respond with precision and speed. Right from helping a traveller recover a lost wallet, guiding them to the best transport options, or facilitating emergency care, technology serves as the backbone of real-time assistance.

Moreover, AI-powered systems can predict and preempt potential challenges, ensuring that travellers are equipped with solutions even before they face a problem. Combined with human expertise, such systems provide an unprecedented level of service that adapts to the ever-changing needs of travellers.

A Vision for the Future of Indian Travel

As India continues to grow as a preferred travel destination for global tourists and a thriving market for domestic explorers, the need for reliable, real-time support systems will only increase. From first-time solo travellers to seasoned professionals on the move, everyone stands to benefit from a travel arena where assistance is no longer a reactive measure but an integral part of the journey.

The impact of such assistance goes beyond individual convenience. It enhances the overall travel ecosystem, fostering trust and confidence among travellers. When individuals feel supported, they are more likely to venture into less-explored destinations, bolstering local economies and creating new tourism opportunities.Real-time assistance also aligns with India's vision of creating a more inclusive and welcoming travel environment. Addressing the unique needs of every traveller, be it accessibility, safety, or cultural understanding — opens the doors to a more diverse and enriching travel experience.

As we move forward, the travel industry must imbibe the ethos of real-time assistance, not as an add-on service but as a core pillar of the travel experience. After all, the most unforgettable journeys are not just about the destinations we visit — they are about the challenges we overcome and the moments of human connection that transform challenges into memories.

(The writer is founder and MD of India Assist; views are personal)

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IN BRIEF



India's forex kitty drops to $634.58 bln

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion in the week ended January 3, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had declined by USD 4.112 billion to USD 640.279 billion. The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatility in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. For the week ended January 3, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 6.441 billion to USD 545.48 billion, the data released on Friday showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.



Rupee hits 86 against US dollar, settles 14 paise lower

The rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86.00-mark (provisional) for the first time against the US dollar on Friday as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds. Surging crude oil prices overseas and negative sentiment in domestic equity markets also weighed down the Indian currency, forex traders said. Also, dollar strengthened on increased demand amid the anticipation of restrictive trade measures by the new US administration after Donald Trump takes over as president on January 20. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.88, hit the intra-day peak of 85.85 before settling at the lowest-ever level of 86.00 (provisional) against the greenback, 14 paise lower from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee gained 5 paise to settle at 85.86 against the US dollar, recovering from the steep decline of 17 paise in the preceding session.



SpiceJet to fly 10 grounded aircraft by mid-April

Domestic carrier SpiceJet on Friday announced plans to bring back into operations 10 of its grounded aircraft, including four Boeing B737 Max, by mid-April. The airline said it has added 10 planes to its fleet since October 2024 -- three grounded aircraft that were brought back into service and seven inducted on lease. The move comes close on the heels of SpiceJet signing a pact with US-based engine MRO StandardAero Inc last month for the restoration of its grounded MAX fleet. SpiceJet has 28 aircraft, of the total 62 in the fleet, in operations, comprising 20 B737, six De Havilland Canada DHC-8 Dash 8 and two Airbus A320, as on January 10 as per flight tracking website planespotter.com. The remaining 34 aircraft -- 16 B737s and 18 De Havilland Canada DHC-8 Dash 8 -- are on the ground due to various reasons, as per the website. The return of 10 grounded aircraft back into operations will help the airline significantly increase its current fleet of 28 aircraft, even as some of these planes are redelivered to lessors during the same period, SpiceJet said.

SNAG IN SYSTEM

Govt extends monthly GST return, payment deadline

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The government on Friday extended the deadline for filing monthly GST sales return form GSTR-1 and GST payment by 2 days after taxpayers reported technical glitches in the GSTN system.

As per a notification by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), the last date for filing GSTR-1 for December is January 13, while that for taxpayers opting for quarterly payment under the QRMP scheme for the October-December period will be January 15.

Normally, the last date for filing GSTR-1 for monthly return filers is January 11, while for quarterly taxpayers it is January 13.

The deadline for GST payment by filing GSTR-3B for December has been extended to January 22, from the existing date of January 20.

For taxpayers who pay GST quarterly, the due date has been extended to January 24 and January 26, depending on the state-wise registration of the business.

Earlier in the day, GST Network said in a post on X that it has sent an "incident report" to the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on the technical glitches in the system and requested an extension of the filing date of GST sales return or GSTR-1.

"GST portal is currently experiencing technical issues and is under maintenance. We expect the portal to be operational by 12:00 noon. CBIC is being sent an incident report to consider extension in filing date," GST Tech, the official handle of GSTN, said in a post on X.

The GST Network has been facing technical glitches since Thursday as taxpayers were unable to generate summary of GSTR-1 and file the return.

UN report forcasts robust growth in Indian economy

Projects 6.6% growth in 2025

PNS ■ UNITED NATIONS



The Indian economy is projected to expand by 6.6 per cent in 2025, primarily supported by robust private consumption and investment, according to a United Nations report.

The report titled 'the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025' was released here on Wednesday.

It also said that the near-term outlook for South Asia is expected to remain robust, with growth projected at 5.7 per cent in 2025 and 6.0 per cent in 2026, "driven by strong performance in India as well as economic recovery in a few other economies", including Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The Indian economy grew by 6.8 per cent in 2024 and is forecast to expand by 6.6 per cent in 2025. The Indian economy is projected to return to the 6.8 per cent growth in 2026.

"The economy of India, the largest in the (South Asia) region, is forecast to expand by 6.6 per cent in 2025, primarily supported by robust private consumption and investment. Additionally, capital expenditure on infrastructure development is expected to have strong multiplier effects on growth in the coming years," the report said.

It added that strong export growth in services and certain goods categories, particularly pharmaceuticals and electronics, will bolster economic activity for India. On the supply side, expansion in the manufacturing and services sectors will keep driving the economy throughout the forecast period.

Meanwhile, favourable monsoon rains in 2024 have improved the summer-sowing areas for all major crops, boosting agricultural output expectations for 2025.

Investment growth has remained particularly strong in East Asia and South Asia, partly driven by domestic and foreign investments in new supply chains, particularly in India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, the report said.

In India, the public sector continues to play a pivotal role in funding large-scale infrastructure projects, physical and digital connectivity, and social infrastructure, including improvements in sanitation and water supply.

Strong investment growth is expected to continue through 2025.

Consumer price inflation in India is forecast to decelerate from an estimated 4.8 per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent in 2025, staying within the 2–6 per cent medium-term target range set by the central bank. While decreasing energy prices have contributed to the ongoing decline, adverse weather conditions have kept prices of vegetables, cereals, and other staples elevated in 2024, resulting in spikes in the country's headline inflation in June and September.

It said that several developing economies, including China, India, and Mexico, have maintained robust investment growth, while African nations have faced limited public investment due to high debt servicing burdens, and Western Asia has experienced low investment growth amid subdued oil revenues.

Global economic growth is forecast at 2.8 per cent in 2025 and 2.9 per cent in 2026, largely unchanged from the rate of 2.8 per cent recorded in 2023 and estimated for 2024.

Sensex, Nifty extend losses on surging crude prices, FII outflows

PNS ■ MUMBAI



Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty nursed losses for the third consecutive session on Friday, in lockstep with a weak trend in global equities as concerns over economic growth and quarterly earnings sapped risk appetite.

Surging crude oil prices and a strengthening dollar index also hit investor sentiment.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 241.30 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 77,378.91. During the day, the benchmark gyrated 820.15 points between the intraday high of 77,919.70 and a low of 77,099.55.

As many as 3,167 stocks declined, 827 advanced and 84 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty dropped 95 points or 0.40 per cent to 23,431.50.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark slumped 1,844.2 points or 2.32 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 573.25 points or 2.38 per cent.

"Domestic market sentiment remained subdued due to rising crude oil prices, driven by supply concerns, and a strengthening dollar index. Despite the IT sector's resilience following positive early Q3 results, broader indices bled due to uncertainties surrounding Trump policies and high valuations.

"Consolidation may persist in the near term, yet investors are closely watching the US non-farm payroll data today for further guidance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share bluechip pack, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, UltraTech Cement, Sun Pharma, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Tata Steel, Power Grid, Adani Ports and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the major laggards.

Tata Consultancy Services jumped nearly 6 per cent after the IT services company reported an 11.95 per cent jump in the December quarter net profit to Rs 12,380 crore.

Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Infosys and Bajaj Finserv were the other big gainers.

"Markets continued its downward trajectory as rupee scaling new lows due to strengthening dollar has further dampened investors' sentiment. Amid concerns of subdued economic growth and expectations of a slowdown in the quarterly earnings, investors cut their bet on banking and mid and small-cap stocks.

Gold rises Rs 250 to Rs 80,550 per 10 gm; silver trades flat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Gold prices rose Rs 250 to Rs 80,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday as rupee hit record low amid consistent buying from retailers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal ended the previous session at Rs 80,300 per 10 grams.

However, silver traded flat at Rs 93,000 per kg on Friday.

The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity continuing to shine bright for the fourth straight session by appreciating Rs 250 to Rs 80,150 per 10 grams. It had finished at Rs 79,900 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Traders said the rise in gold prices at local market is also propelled by robust overseas demand.

Meanwhile, the rupee declined 14 paise and touched the crucial 86-mark for the first time against the US dollar on Friday as it failed to resist pressure from a stronger American currency and huge outflow of foreign funds.

On a weekly basis, gold prices surged Rs 1,550, or 2 per cent, to Rs 80,550 per 10 grams, while silver shot up 2.5 per cent to Rs 93,000 per kg.

On the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery climbed Rs 388, or 0.5 per cent, to Rs 78,492 per 10 grams in the futures trade on Friday.

Silver contracts for March delivery bounced Rs 506, or 0.55 per cent, to Rs 92,217 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Comex gold futures increased USD 16.10 per ounce, or 0.6 per cent, to USD 2,706.90 per ounce in the overseas market.

"Gold extended rally on Friday on the back of safe-haven demand due to uncertainty around future US monetary policy under President-elect Donald Trump," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

'India needs to be a global champion in sunrise sectors'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant on Friday said the country needs to become a global champion in sunrise sectors to achieve the target of becoming a developed nation and USD 32 trillion economy by 2047. Addressing the 'Bharat Climate Forum 2025', Kant further said the US, Europe and India have lost the art of manufacturing, and this will have huge implications for the global economy.

"My belief is that without India becoming a global champion in sunrise sectors, we would not be able to achieve the target of becoming a developed nation by 2047, we will never be able to become a USD 32 trillion economy," he said.

Kant pointed out that in solar panel manufacturing, Indian industries are 5-7 years behind the curve.

Noting that India's industry is persistently focusing on fossil fuel vehicles, he said, "If you do not become a manufacturer of electric vehicles (EVs), then you will lose the EV market globally".

NTPC Renewable Energy begins 110 MW commercial supply

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned power giant NTPC on Friday said its step-down arm NTPC Renewable Energy has started commercial supply of 110 MW electricity from two different solar projects.

With this, the total installed and commercial capacity of the NTPC group has now become 76,708.18 MW, a BSE filing stated.

According to the filing based on the certificate issued on January 9, 2025, by Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI), the second part capacity of 60 MW out of 320 MW Bhainsara Solar PV Project in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan of NTPC Renewable Energy Ltd (NTPC REL), a step-down subsidiary of NTPC Ltd through its subsidiary NTPC Green Energy Ltd, is declared on Commercial Operation with effect from January 7, 2025.

National waterways to get Rs 50,000-cr investment in next 5 yrs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An investment of Rs 50,000 crore will be made to boost infrastructure along national waterways in the next five years, according to an official statement on Friday.

According to the statement, the investment proposals were announced in Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) meeting at Kohora in Kaziranga.

"IWDC bats for major infra upgrade on National Waterways, to invest Rs 50,000 crore in five years," the statement said.

IWDC was organised by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency for development of waterways under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW).

According to the statement, a major policy initiative in the form of Riverine Community Development Scheme was mooted at the IWDC meet to improve the socio-economic well-being of coastal communities by developing infrastructure.

Speaking at the event, Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said 1,000 green vessels will be launched in the next five years to boost green shipping inland waterways.

After the success of Kochi's Water Metro project, it will be expanded to 15 cities of the country, including Guwahati, Sonowal added.

He also said ship repair facilities will be established at more national waterways soon.

According to Sonowal, more than Rs 23,000 crore has been earmarked for New National Waterways Development and Green Shipping initiatives.

Encouraging big corporates to collaborate with startups: DPIIT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is encouraging large corporates to collaborate with startups to address business challenges and problems as it would promote the growth of budding entrepreneurs, a top official said on Friday.

Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Amardeep Singh Bhatia also said measures like the abolition of angel tax are helping startups to come back and register their firms in India.

"Large companies may have sufficient work on their hands, and if they face any problems, instead of pulling more resources, they may like to collaborate with somebody outside the company to resolve the problem. So in that, we are pushing that you work with startups," Bhatia told reporters here. A number of big companies have come forward for this and have signed MoUs, he added.

The firms have shared problems with startups like developing new manners in which a glass can be sealed and new technologies for PCB manufacturing.

"We are hopeful that in the 10th year (of the Startup India initiative), we will be able to push private enterprises and companies to start collaborating more with startups, in the form of outsourcing some of the works to startups, collaborating with them to bring in new products, giving them assistance by way of mentorship, access to labs and testing facilities," he added.

The secretary said the department is also looking at greater integration between Indian startups and international markets. "What we want is for our startups to tie up with international companies where they can outsource their problems to our startups. We want that linkage," Bhatia said.

When asked about the kind of collaborations that can happen with foreign countries, he said some of these nations have large sovereign and investible funds, and for some of these funds they would like to look for investment opportunities in Indian startups. Speaking at the media briefing, DPIIT Joint Secretary Sanjiv said that Saudi Arabia has shown interest in participating in Startup Mahakumbh, which is scheduled in April. The department has urged corporate houses to give orders and increase procurements from startups, he noted.



"This year, we plan to have 75 challenges in which companies will pose questions, and share problem statements.

Factory output growth hits 6-month high of 5.2 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



India's industrial production (IIP) growth accelerated to a six-month high of 5.2 per cent year-on-year in November 2024, riding on the increased festive demand and pick up in manufacturing sector, according to the official data released on Friday.

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) recorded a growth of 2.5 per cent in November 2023, according to a statement by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation.

The previous high growth rate at 6.3 per cent was recorded in May 2024. It grew by 4.9 per cent in June and 5 per cent in July 2024.

The IIP growth was flat in August before picking up at 3.1 per cent in September and 3.7 per cent in October 2024.

The growth in the factory output, measured in terms of the IIP, in April-November 2024 grew by 4.1 per cent against 6.5 per cent in the year-ago period, the data showed.

As per the data, the mining output growth decelerated to 1.9 per cent in November from 7 per cent expansion in the year-ago month.

The manufacturing sector's growth accelerated to 5.8 per cent in November from 1.3 per cent a year ago.

Power generation growth slowed to 4.4 per cent from 5.8 per cent a year ago.

As per use-based classification, the capital goods segment growth accelerated to 9 per cent in November 2024 against a contraction of 1.1 per cent in the year-ago period.

Showing festive demand, consumer durable (or white) goods production grew by 13.1 per cent during the reporting month against a contraction of 4.8 per cent in November 2023.

In November 2024, consumer non-durables output growth remained almost flat at 0.6 per cent compared to a contraction of 3.4 per cent in November 2023.

According to the data, infrastructure/construction goods reported a growth of 10 per cent in November 2024, up from a 1.5 per cent expansion in the year-ago period.

The data also showed that the output of primary goods logged a 2.7 per cent growth in November 2024 against 8.4 per cent a year earlier.

The expansion in the intermediate goods segment was 5 per cent in the month under review, higher than 3.4 per cent a year ago.

the pioneer
Vijayawada | Saturday January 11, 2025

what's brewing?



PAMELA ANDERSON ON EX-HUSBAND TOMMY LEE

Hollywood star Pamela Anderson has said that she has lost touch with her former husband Tommy Lee and wishes they had a better rapport. The *Baywatch* star had a rocky marriage with Lee from 1995 to 1998 before they divorced after the leak of the couple's sex tape, reports female-first.co.uk.

Anderson has now revealed she has "not recently" been keeping in touch with Lee, telling Andy Cohen while appearing on the host's Sirius XM show *Radio Andy*: "I mean we used to talk a lot more, not recently unfortunately." She added she hoped things would improve between her and Lee – as their son Dylan, 26, is soon set to get married. She said: "I wish we did have a better rapport right now. My youngest son is engaged and we're going to have grandkids together."

The actress added she was sure her and Lee's relationship would be "okay eventually", and put their current state down to "just kind of a moment right now". The actress and musician also have a 27-year-old son named Brandon.

She previously spoke about her divorce from Lee in her 2023 memoir *Love, Pamela*, saying in the book the end of their three-year marriage marked the "hardest, lowest, most difficult point" of her life.

She said that her marriage to Lee was the "only time" she was "ever truly in love" and also admitted their divorce left her "crushed" and "devastated" after the 1995 leak of their tape.

Anderson has recently left her blonde bombshell look and gone make-up free and told peopl.com in 2023: "I'm makeup-free at home, so why not for Paris Fashion Week? I really didn't know anyone would notice it, but I'm glad it became a positive message."

She also told Better Homes and Gardens: "(Going bare-faced) was the beginning of me letting go of the image I had always had of myself.

"What is this cartoon character that I'd created? Okay, that was fun. But I'm not that person anymore."

Hrithik Roshan admits initially feeling embarrassed about his documentary



Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan said that he doesn't like attention, however he realised that the upcoming documentary is not about him and said that it is history about his family.

"When I saw this documentary I was absolutely amazed. It's been directed so beautifully…" Hrithik, who turned 51 on Friday, said during the press conference held for the upcoming documentary.

He revealed that he has never met his grandfather.

"I wonder if I magically get a chance to have a conversation with him. After seeing the documentary. I would actually like to ask him about his childhood, about what he went through, I wonder what he would ask me. I think he may ask me 'if I am happy'," he added. He credits his drive for his debut film *Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai*, which was released in 2000.

"I would thank him because I often wonder what was that drive I had when I was doing my first film. What was it? Where did it come from? And I mean the only simplest answer is that it was already there in my cells. It was something that passed on…"

Hrithik, who is tagged as the Greek God of Bollywood courtesy his striking looks, revealed that he does not like attention.

"When my father said that he wanted to make this documentary first I felt embarrassed. I don't like attention and then I realised this is not about me. This is about history and history is important. It is the history about my ancestors, my parents, my grandfather, my chacha that history was in my cells that gave me that drive," he shared.

"Their stories made me so inspired… It inspired me so much that I was unstoppable. It was nothing else but that the true celebrations of this documentary would be that if it is able to inspire other students of cinema, human beings all over the world…"

Asked if he could share one thing with his grandfather what it would be, Hrithik replied: "I would like to share my son's compositions with him and that has come out literally out of nothing and as I said perhaps something in the genes. Perhaps something that is a gift from him."

The upcoming Netflix series chronicles the trials and triumphs of Bollywood's iconic Roshan family — musician Roshan Lal Nagrath, Rajesh, Rakesh and Hrithik.

When Ameesha Patel had her near to death moment shooting *Gadar 2*



Following the massive success of *Gadar 2* in 2023, Ameesha Patel, who reprised her iconic role as Sakina, shared a heart-wrenching and chilling behind-the-scenes story that left her physically and mentally drained during the filming of a key scene. The actress, who once again starred opposite Sunny Deol's character Tara Singh, a passionate Sikh truck driver, revealed how a particularly intense scene pushed her to her limits.

In a latest interview, Ameesha recalled the grueling experience of shooting a sequence that required her to endure freezing cold water. "It was physically and mentally draining. I had spoken to Anil Sharma ji and told him, 'Anil ji, I'll fall sick, please make sure that the water is hot,'" she shared. "He assured me that it would be, but when I went for the shot, I was wearing a thin cotton salwar kameez… This is the problem with heroines—unlike heroes who get to wear jackets and leg warmers under their outfits, we can't do that."

When the water was first poured on her, Ameesha was stunned by how cold it was. Despite the crew's attempts to keep her warm, including giving her brandy to rub on her feet and to drink, her condition deteriorated rapidly. "After finishing the scene, which no one knew about except my staff, they had to carry me to my makeup van. I was unconscious. I didn't wake up for three to four hours. People thought I was dead. Literally, I had reached the point where they said, 'She won't survive.' They wrapped me in woolen blankets, and when I finally woke up, I had no recollection of what happened during those four hours."

The experience, while terrifying, was also a testament to the dedication and strength of Ameesha's character and the efforts of the team to ensure her well-being. The actress shared how, during this ordeal, her co-star Sunny Deol stepped in as her real-life Tara Singh, offering unwavering support.

"Sunny sir was my real-life Tara Singh. He was there for Sakina when I needed him," Ameesha fondly recalled. "He brought a blood pressure machine from his room to check my vitals, checked my temperature with a thermometer, and even made calls to our shared doctor in Mumbai. The local doctors wanted to give me an injection because I was constantly vomiting, but Sunny was determined to make sure I didn't take anything that wasn't suited for me. He was so sweet and made sure everything was alright. He is truly my real-life Tara."

Did Shah Rukh Khan turn down Maddock's *Chamunda*?



A few days ago, there were reports that Shah Rukh Khan had met *Stree 2* director Amar Kaushik. Since then, fans wondered if the duo are collaborating for a movie. Recently, Maddock announced its horror-comedy slate and speculation were rife that SRK will be a part of one of the movies. Fans have been waiting for an update regarding the same. Well, there is an update but it will make the fans sad who wanted the actor to be a part of the film.

A news report mentions that Dinesh Vijan and Amar Kaushik had approached Shah Rukh Khan for their horror-comedy film, *Chamunda*. Sadly, SRK rejected the movie, which was supposed to feature Alia Bhatt as well. The production house was really looking forward to casting the superstar in one of their most ambitious movies.

According to insiders, "Shah Rukh Khan didn't want to enter an already established universe and rather start a new world with Maddock and Amar Kaushik. He has asked the duo to come to him with something fresh and explore a genre never done before. The two are now exploring new names for *Chamunda* and hoping to team up with Shah Rukh Khan in a couple of years on something fresh."

Aaman Devgan to headline horror comedy *Jhalak*



Ajay Devgn's nephew, Aaman Devgan, is all set to make his mark in Bollywood with the much-anticipated horror-comedy *Jhalak*, following his debut in the action-adventure film Azaad. The film is a collaboration between Devgn Films and Panorama Studios, who previously worked together on the supernatural thriller *Shaitaan* (2024). After the success of *Shaitaan*, the duo is reuniting for this fresh, exciting venture in the horror-comedy genre.

Jhalak, which promises a unique blend of thrills and humour, is based on a true story. Aaman Devgan will headline the project, marking a significant milestone in his budding career in Bollywood.

The film will be directed by Umang Vyas, known for his critically acclaimed Gujarati film *Jhamkudi*, while Tushar Ajgaonkar, the celebrated writer of *Munjya*, joins the team as the writer. Produced by Ajay Devgn, Kumar Mangat Pathak and Abhishek Pathak, *Jhalak* is expected to captivate audiences with its mix of supernatural elements and comedic flair.

Currently in pre-production, the movie is gearing up to begin shooting soon. Although details about the supporting cast and release date remain under wraps, more information is expected to be revealed in the coming months. Fans are eager to see Aaman Devgan take on this new genre and follow his exciting journey in the entertainment industry.

FUN

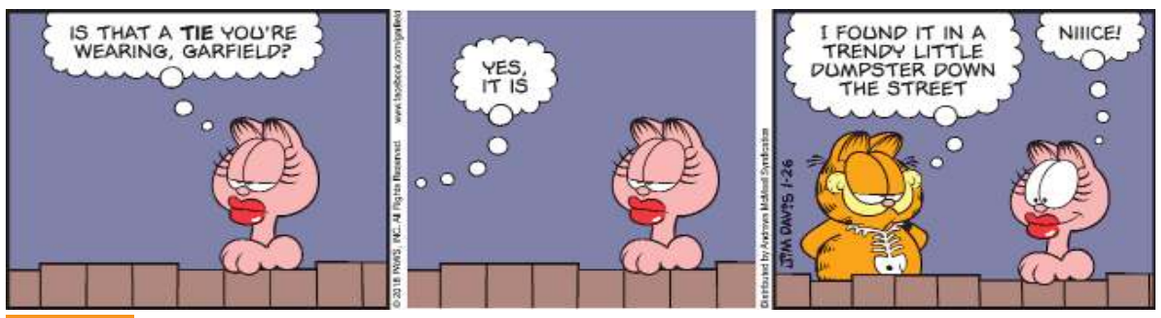
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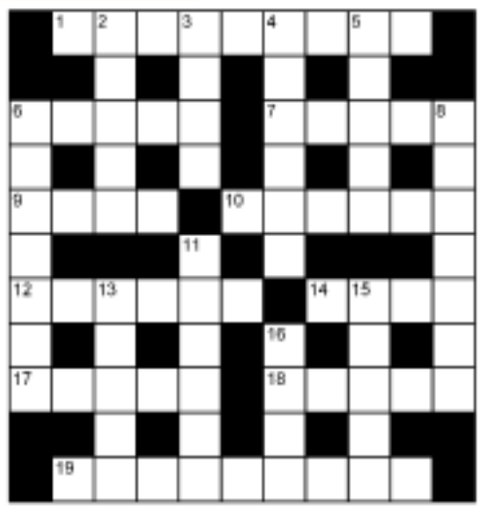
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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1	7	9	5	2	4	3	6	8
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Rules

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

ACROSS

1 Saying again
6 These brown fruit grow on a palm tree
7 A clothing size
9 A hard black fuel
10 Beat in a battle
12 A fire-breathing monster
14 The number in a quartet
17 Frown
18 Played a part in a play
19 Replying

DOWN

2 More than is needed
3 A compass direction
4 Had a conversation
5 A health professional
6 Makes a decision
8 Went in
11 Go after
13 Nut from an oak tree
15 Frequently
16 This grows on heads

SOLUTION



GINGER MEGGS



the pioneer
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Saturday
January 11, 2025

‘HYD HAS BECOME MEDICAL TOURISM HUB’

HYDERABOND

VAISHNAVI TIKKA
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Hyderabad has rapidly emerged as a leading hub for medical excellence and healthcare infrastructure in India. The city boasts of robust healthcare system, featuring world-class hospitals, research centers and medical institutions. Renowned facilities like Apollo Health City, Care Hospitals and KIMS, along with specialized centers for oncology, cardiology and orthopedics, provide top-notch medical services to both domestic and international patients.

Among the distinguished medical professionals contributing to the city’s growing reputation is Dr Sujeeth Kumar Bashetty, a well-known doctor with over 17 years of experience. He strongly believes in the philosophy: “Earn your success based on service to others, not at the expense of others.” Originally from Nizamabad, he is now settled in Hyderabad, where he has made significant contributions to the medical field. Well, he was one of those accomplished health expert, who had saved over 2,000 patients during the COVID-19 for free. He completed his MBBS, MS (General Surgery), FIAGES (Minimal Access Surgery), FAIS, FALS (Advanced Laparoscopic Colorectal Surgery), DIPMAS (Minimal Access Hernia Surgery) and FICRS (Robotic Surgery). Currently, he serves as a Professor and Senior Consultant Laparoscopic & Robotic Surgeon in the Department of General, Surgical GI and Laparoscopic Surgery. He is also affiliated with Apollo Health City, Jubilee Hills, and Apollo Clinics, Manikonda.

In a conversation with ***The Pioneer***, Dr Sujeeth shares that he first visited Hyderabad when he was in 5th grade for a small vacation at his aunt’s house. That was his first experience of the city. He mentioned that during his visit, he explored places like the Salar Jung Museum, Birla Planetarium and Zoo Park.

Born and raised in Nizamabad, he was a scholarly student, scoring 526 in his 10th grade. He said that he is someone who is always open to new experiences. Inspired by the respect doctors commanded, he decided to pursue a career in medicine from a young age. He shares, “I always wanted to do service.” He also recalls a memorable incident where a boy reached out to him and suggested that he start a foundation. “A boy contacted me and suggested that I start a foundation and eventually, it came into the picture.”

Reflecting on his association with Hyderabad, Dr Sujeeth said, “I used to look at Apollo Jubilee since my childhood. It was always my wish to work there and I am glad I got the opportunity. All the senior doctors I got inspired by are now my colleagues.”

When comparing his hometown with Hyderabad, he described, “Hyderabad is a much bigger place than my hometown and here, I get to meet more intellectual people than at the district level. It provides better opportunities and the technology is also better here. Hyderabad has become a medical tourism hub, where people from countries like Australia come for medical treatment and also visit the city’s tourist attractions.”

When asked about Hyderabad’s iconic features, he commented, “The first thing that comes to mind when we hear about Hyderabad is Biryani for food and Birla Temple for places.”

Dr Sujeeth’s journey is truly inspirational. Despite being offered numerous job opportunities, he chose not to accept them in order to establish something different and helpful to people. He has always believed in service. He is also well-known for providing free services to around 3,000 patients during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, he ran a clinic where he offered free treatment to patients who visited.

He further shared that Hyderabad, as a city, has expanded a lot over the years. “I have observed a lot of improvements since the first time I visited. Hyderabad is like an extended family to me,” he added.

I USED TO LOOK AT APOLLO JUBILEE SINCE MY CHILDHOOD. IT WAS ALWAYS MY WISH TO WORK THERE, AND I AM GLAD I GOT THE OPPORTUNITY. ALL THE SENIOR DOCTORS I GOT INSPIRED BY ARE NOW MY COLLEAGUES



IN AN EXCLUSIVE CHAT WITH *THE PIONEER*, DR SUJEETH KUMAR BASHETTY, A PIONEER IN LAPAROSCOPIC AND ROBOTIC SURGERY, SHARED HIS JOURNEY FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IN NIZAMABAD TO BECOMING A RENOWNED MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL IN HYDERABAD

JEANNE MERCHANT’S

Heartfelt melody continues to spread joy beyond

Jeanne Merchant is a name synonymous with passion, excellence and innovation in the music industry. As a multifaceted musician, voice coach and performer, Jeanne has carved a niche for herself by blending technical brilliance with soulful artistry. Her extraordinary ability to channel emotion into every note she sings has not only captivated audiences but also set a new standard for modern music.

Her musical roots run deep. Having sung rigorously in diverse styles such as R&B, Soul, Jazz and Gospel, she brings a versatility to her artistry that resonates across genres. Her talent has allowed her to collaborate with prominent names in Bollywood and international music, earning her a reputation as a sought-after artist and mentor. Beyond the microphone, she has dedicated over a decade to cultivating the talents of budding vocalists, helping them find their voice and build thriving careers. Her students consistently credit her for transforming their musical journeys with her expertise, patience, and personalized approach to teaching.

Her latest offering, *Jesus You’re The Miracle*, is a testament to her ability to bridge tradition with modernity. This vibrant pop anthem encapsulates the true essence of Christmas—hope, love and divine wonder—while delivering a sound that feels fresh, dynamic and accessible to listeners of all ages. Her vision for this track was clear: to create a song that not only celebrates the birth of Christ but also resonates with a modern generation eager for uplifting and meaningful music.

“Lyrically, the song speaks to the miracle of Jesus’ presence in our lives, reminding us of the peace and joy He brings—feelings especially profound during the festive season.”

Musically, it features a captivating blend of contemporary beats, layered harmonies and Jeanne’s powerhouse vocals. The production seamlessly combines traditional Christmas elements with a modern pop sensibility, making it a standout track in any holiday playlist.

“In an era where holiday music often feels repetitive, *Jesus You’re The Miracle* breathes new life into the genre.”

The song appeals to both devout listeners seeking a spiritual connection and music enthusiasts looking for an upbeat, feel-good anthem. Its modern production and relatable message ensure it stands out as a beacon of positivity during the holiday season.

With this track, Jeanne Merchant once again proves her ability to innovate while staying rooted in the timeless themes of faith, love and celebration. “It’s more than just a Christmas song; it’s an anthem for anyone who believes in miracles and the transformative power of faith.”

As you add *Jesus You’re The Miracle* to your holiday playlist, let Jeanne Merchant’s rich vocals and heartfelt lyrics inspire you to embrace the true spirit of Christmas—a season of miracles, joy and unshakable hope.



Alarming disparity: Men’s TBI death rate significantly higher than women’s

PNS|HYDERABAD

A latest study has highlighted the alarming disparity in the impact of traumatic brain injuries (TBI), particularly emphasising how men are three times more likely to die from these injuries compared to women. The study, which analyzed US mortality data from 2021, underscores the persistent and disproportionate toll that TBI takes on older adults, men and certain racial and ethnic groups.

Published in the peer-reviewed journal Brain Injury, the research identifies suicides as the leading cause of TBI-related deaths, followed by unintentional falls. These fatalities continue to disproportionately affect specific groups, especially men and older adults.

According to the study’s findings, men have a significantly higher TBI-related death rate, with 30.5 deaths per 100,000 people, compared to just 9.4 deaths per 100,000 among women. This stark contrast highlights the increased vulnerability of men to fatal outcomes from traumatic brain injuries.

Alexis Peterson, lead author of the study and researcher at the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), emphasised that older adults are particularly at risk. “Unintentional falls are a significant cause of TBI-related death in older adults,” Peterson stated, underscoring the vulnerability of this demographic in the face of such injuries. The study delves into various factors contributing to TBI deaths, including the severity of injuries resulting from incidents like falls or motor vehicle crashes. It also explores how sex and age interact to influence outcomes. Men, as they age, tend to experience worse outcomes from TBI, while postmenopausal women often fare better in similar circumstances, suggesting hormonal and physiological factors play a role in recovery and survival.

Peterson called for more tailored prevention strategies, particularly for at-risk groups. She also highlighted the importance of early intervention by healthcare providers and the need for culturally sensitive care to reduce TBI-related deaths and improve recovery outcomes. “Healthcare providers play a critical role in reducing TBI-related mortality, and implementing early interventions and culturally aware care can significantly help at-risk populations,” she emphasised.

The study, which analyzed data from the National Vital Statistics System, revealed that in 2021 alone, there were 69,473 TBI-related deaths among US residents, averaging about 190 deaths per day. Additionally, the age-adjusted TBI-related mortality rate saw an 8.8% increase from the previous year, rising to 19.5 per 100,000 residents.

This research highlights the urgent need for continued awareness, prevention, and treatment strategies to address the disproportionate impact of traumatic brain injuries, particularly for vulnerable populations such as men and older adults. As the study shows, a deeper understanding of the factors influencing TBI outcomes is essential to reducing these fatalities and improving long-term care.



ACCORDING TO THE STUDY’S FINDINGS, MEN HAVE A SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER TBI-RELATED DEATH RATE, WITH 30.5 DEATHS PER 100,000 PEOPLE, COMPARED TO JUST 9.4 DEATHS PER 100,000 AMONG WOMEN. THIS STARK CONTRAST HIGHLIGHTS THE INCREASED VULNERABILITY OF MEN TO FATAL OUTCOMES FROM TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURIES

WHAT DO DOCTORS HAVE TO SAY?

Dr Venkat Kumar, neurologist and certified life-care planner shares, “Traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) are a major health concern, with a higher incidence in men than in women. Several factors contribute to this disparity, from lifestyle choices to biological differences. Understanding these factors is key to addressing the higher prevalence of TBIs in men and improving prevention and treatment strategies.”

RISKIER BEHAVIOURS

One of the primary reasons men are more likely to experience TBIs is their tendency to engage in riskier behaviours. Men are more often involved in activities that carry a higher likelihood of injury, such as contact sports, military service and physical altercations. These activities increase the chances of head trauma, making men more vulnerable to TBIs than women, who generally engage in these activities at lower rates.

WORK-RELATED INJURIES

Another significant factor contributing to the higher incidence of TBIs in men is their greater representation in hazardous occupations. Men are more likely to work in physically demanding jobs that involve exposure to heavy machinery, construction sites, or other dangerous environments. The risk of accidents in these jobs, which often result in head injuries, is a key factor in the higher rate of TBIs in men.

GENDER-BASED PERCEPTIONS

Society’s gender-based perceptions also play a role in how men experience TBIs. In many cultures, there is a tendency to downplay or misinterpret men’s injuries. Men may be less likely to report symptoms or seek medical attention for fear of being seen as weak or vulnerable. This societal pressure, combined with the expectation to recover quickly and return to work or physical activities, can delay diagnosis and treatment, potentially leading to worsened outcomes.

GENETICS AND SEX HORMONES

Genetics and sex hormones play a crucial role in how the body reacts to injury, including traumatic brain injuries. These factors can influence inflammation, oxidative stress and mitochondrial function, all of which are critical in brain injury recovery. Studies suggest that testosterone, a hormone present in higher levels in men, can influence the severity of TBI outcomes by affecting neuroinflammatory responses and brain cell damage.

NEUROPLASTICITY

Neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to repair itself after injury—also differs between men and women. Research indicates that men and women may have varying levels of neuroplasticity, which could affect how their brains recover from TBIs. While neuroplasticity plays a critical role in recovery, gender differences in brain structure and function may impact the efficiency of this process.

EXTRACEREBRAL TRAUMA

Men and women may experience different patterns of extracerebral trauma, which refers to injury outside the brain but that still impacts brain function. These types of injuries, including damage to the neck, spine, or facial bones, can complicate the aftermath of a TBI. The way the body responds to such trauma can vary between genders, affecting recovery timelines and long-term outcomes.

The higher incidence of traumatic brain injuries in men can be attributed to a combination of risky behaviours, work-related dangers, societal expectations and biological factors. Understanding the reasons behind this disparity is crucial for developing targeted prevention strategies, improving early diagnosis and ensuring that both men and women receive effective care for brain injuries. Recognising the unique challenges that men face when dealing with TBIs can ultimately lead to better health outcomes and more personalised approaches to treatment and recovery.

the pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | SATURDAY | JANUARY 11, 2025

India pacer Varun Aaron retires from 'representative cricket'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India pacer Varun Aaron, who was once regarded as the country's fastest bowler before injuries hampered his promising career, announced retirement from "representative cricket" on Friday after his home state Jharkhand's campaign ended in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy.
The 35-year-old Aaron made the announcement on social media after Jharkhand failed to go beyond the preliminary stage of the marquee domestic one-day event. After a dazzling start, Aaron struggled with erratic form, which was made worse by injury breakdowns, and he had not represented India since 2015.
"For the past 20 years, I have lived, breathed, and thrived on the rush of bowling fast. Today, with immense gratitude, I officially announce my retirement from representative cricket," Aaron posted on his Instagram account At just 21, Aaron burst onto the scene during the 2010-11 Vijay Hazare Trophy, showcasing his raw pace and making a mark with a blistering 153kph delivery against Gujarat in the final.
His ability to consistently bowl at speeds exceeding 150kph quickly caught the attention of the Indian cricketing fraternity and he soon made his international debut in an ODI against England in Mumbai in 2011.
This was followed by a Test debut at the same venue against the West Indies, again in 2011.
However, the relentless demands of bowling at high speed took a significant toll on his body. He played nine ODIs and as many Tests, taking 29 wickets across the two formats for India.
Over the course of his career, he endured as many as eight back stress fractures and three foot fractures, which severely hampered his progress.



Injuries had forced him to give up red-ball cricket last year.
"Over the years, I've had to push both my physical and mental limits to recover from numerous career-threatening injuries, having to come back time and again, this was only possible thanks to the relentless dedication of the physios, trainers, and coaches at the National Cricket Academy.
"I'd also like to thank the BCCI, JSCA (Jharkhand State Cricket Association) , Red Bull, SG Cricket, and MRF Tyres for their invaluable support during critical junctures in my career.
"As I bid farewell to a pursuit that has consumed me completely, I now look forward to savouring the smaller joys in life while staying deeply connected to the game that has given me everything.
"Fast Bowling has been my first love, and though I step off the field, it will always be a part of who I am," he added.
Among his memorable moments in the game, he had grabbed headlines by breaking Stuart Broad's nose with a bouncer during a Test match in 2014.
Broad had tried to pull the delivery but the ball took the edge and sneaked inside the grill of his helmet to hit him on the nose.
Despite not making the Indian team since 2015, Aaron continued to bowl in domestic cricket. He picked 141 wickets at an average of 26.47 and an economy rate of 5.44 in 88 List A matches. He also snared 93 wickets at an economy rate of 8.53 in the 95 T20s he played.
Aaron also played nine seasons of the IPL between 2011 and 2022, turning out for with Delhi Daredevils, Kings XI Punjab, Kolkata Knight Riders, Rajasthan Royals, Royal Challengers Bangalore and Gujarat Titans.
In his final season, he won the title with Gujarat Titans in 2022.



People have opinion but I'm comfortable in my own skin: Steve Smith

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia skipper for the Sri Lankan Test series, Steve Smith is not getting unduly bothered by people's opinion over his role in the 'sandpapergate' episode, saying they are entitled to their views while he continues to be "comfortable" in his own world.
Smith, who was the Australia skipper when the ball-tampering scandal broke out in the 2018 Cape Town Test against South Africa, will lead a 16-member squad to the sub-continent for the two-Test series beginning January 29 after regular skipper Pat Cummins was rested following the Border-Gavaskar Tests.
The charismatic top-order batter, opener David Warner and Cameron Bancroft were found guilty of ball-tampering in 2018 and banned for varying periods. Smith also served a two-year leadership ban for his role in the scandal.
He has since led Australia on four occasions in Tests -- versus England in Adelaide (2021), against the West Indies in Perth (2022) and two away Tests versus India in 2023.
While Cricket Australia deems the matter as closed, some sections still feel that Smith should not be allowed to lead the country's team.
"I mean, everyone's entitled to their opinion," Smith told Sydney Morning Herald.
"They can say whatever they like. I'm pretty comfortable in my own skin. (The environment) around the team has been good for a long time. I get on well with everyone inside. People are entitled to their opinion. They can say what they want," he added.
'Missing 10,000 Test runs hurts'
While Australia finally claimed the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after four attempts, defeating India 1-3 in the five-match series recently, Smith missed the 10,000 Test-run mark by just one run.
He said while it was a "cool win" in the series, missing a personal landmark by just one run was painful.
"It was a cool summer to be a part of... And particularly after the way we fought back from Perth (defeat). Just as a collective, it was a really cool win. Our bowlers were unbelievable. Scotty Boland, the way he came in, was exceptional. He's unbelievable at the moment," said Smith.
Smith was left stranded at 9,999 runs in the fifth Test at Sydney after being dismissed by Prasidh Krishna in both innings.
"One run... It hurt a little bit at the time. It would have been nice to have ticked that off in front of all my friends and family here at my home ground, but hopefully, I can knock it off first thing in Galle (Sri Lanka, first Test).
"I probably let it wander (in my mind) too much throughout the game. It's a cool milestone to tick off," he added.

Travis Head could open in Sri Lanka Tests, says chief selector George Bailey

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian big-hitter Travis Head could open in the two-Test series against Sri Lanka where "quick learner" Sam Konstas is also likely to get more opportunities to showcase his audacious skills, chairman of selectors George Bailey has said.
Head, who wreaked havoc with the bat during the recently-concluded Border-Gavaskar series against India in the middle order, has been tested in the opener's role in the sub-continent.
He had come in for an injured David Warner during the 2023 tour of India and scored 223 runs at 55.75 in five innings at the top of the order.
"Trav's an option (to open). We've got a number of options and there's been a few preliminary discussions around where that may land, and that may depend on the makeup of that first XI," Bailey told cricket.Com.Au.
"I think (head coach) Andrew (McDonald,) and (stand-in captain) Steve (Smith) will settle on that in due course, once we hit Sri Lanka," he added.
Australia announced a 16-member squad on Thursday with several fresh faces added to the group that played India in the fifth and final Test at Sydney last



week. Australia won the marquee series 3-1.
Smith is leading the squad as regular captain Pat Cummins is on leave for the birth of his couple's second child.
With 19-year-old Konstas turning heads with his refreshing style of batting during the Border-Gavaskar Tests, Bailey said the youngster's ability to read match situations quickly would help him excel in Sri Lanka, his maiden international tour.
"What we have seen is he's (Konstas) a quick learner. (He) absorbs a lot of information," Bailey said.
"So (we're) expecting him to get to get a lot out of it. I know from his spin play in Australia, and the opportunities he's (had) in different parts of the world, we think he's got a game that's well suited, and a technique that can stand up.
"But that's one of the exciting things about this tour – we will learn a bit more about his game in different conditions to what he's just faced in Australia," he added.
Bailey feels that Nathan McSweeney, who is there in the Sri Lanka-bound squad, handled his exclusion from the last two BGT Tests quite well and he wil remain in the scheme of things despite the unimpressive show as an opener.
The debutant had a trial by fire against Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, failing to put up a decent score in the first three games. "We still view (McSweeney) as a great Test prospect, and a long-term Test prospect.
"I think at times when someone is left out of a team or squad, there's a view that they fall out of favour, or down the pecking order, but that wasn't the case with Nathan," said Bailey.
"I think it shows the character... And the sort of person he is, the way he responded and spoke so well about (being dropped) publicly pretty soon after it happened."

ICC chairman Jay Shah to be felicitated by BCCI at its SGM

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Newly-elected International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman Jay Shah will be felicitated by the BCCI's state units on the sidelines of the Special General Meeting, scheduled here on Sunday.
Shah, a former BCCI secretary, became the youngest ICC chairman after he was elected unopposed in August last year and took over the prestigious post on December 1. He replaced Greg Barclay who decided not to seek a third term.
Shah was the BCCI secretary since October 2019 and chairman of the Asian Cricket Council since January 2021.
Shah will, however, not be a part of the SGM as he is no longer an office-bearer of the BCCI.
The cricket administrator has been at the forefront of expanding the game's imprint globally and recently met top officials of the 2032 Brisbane



Olympics organising committee to discuss the sport's inclusion in the Summer Games.
Cricket will make a return to the Olympics after 128 years when it is played in the 2028 Los Angeles Games. The sport is not yet confirmed for the 2032 edition in Brisbane.
Australian newspaper, The Age, recently reported that Shah will meet meet Cricket Australia chair Mike Baird and his England counterpart Richard Thompson later this month to discuss the finer points of a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between the big three nations.

Gael Monfils reaches his 35th ATP final

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Gael Monfils became the second oldest player since 1990 to reach a final on the men's elite tennis tour after beating American Nishesh Basavareddy 7-6 (5), 6-4 in the semifinals at Auckland on Friday aged 38 years, 131 days.
Ivo Karlovic holds the ATP Tour record, having won through to final in Pune, India in 2019 at the age of 39 years, 311 days. Monfils edges Stan Wawrinka who was aged 38 years and 124 days when he reached the final at Umag, Croatia in 2023.
Karlovic also reached the final at Den Bosch in 2017 aged 38 years, 110 days while Roger Federer (Basel in 2019 aged 38 years and 80 days) and Rafael Nadal (the 2024 Swedish Open at 38 years and 48 days) also are in the top five.
Frenchman Monfils has been breaking records steadily in



Auckland to reach his 35th ATP Tour final. When he beat Jan-Lennard Struff to reach the quarterfinals, he became the oldest player in the professional era to reach the last eight in Auckland.
He became the oldest-ever semifinalist in Auckland when he beat Facundo Diaz Acosta 6-3, 6-1 to reach his 73rd ATP Tour semifinal. Only Novak Djokovic has played more.
Monfils will face Zizou Bergs of Belgium in Saturday's final.
"Everybody knows I'm a warrior on the court, I don't give up easy," Monfils said after his semifinal.

Real Madrid walks into Spanish Super Cup final with a 3-0 win over Mallorca

PTI ■ JEDDAH

Jude Bellingham scored again to lead Real Madrid into the Spanish Super Cup final with a 3-0 win over Mallorca in Saudi Arabia on Thursday.
The England midfielder, who led Madrid in scoring last season, started this campaign slowly but has netted seven goals in his last eight Spanish league games.
He notched another goal in 63rd minute of the Super Cup semifinal when he finally broke down a tough Mallorca that until his goal had imposed its defensive style on the star-studded Madrid.
Bellingham blasted in the third shot in a row by Madrid after Rodrygo initially hit the post and goalkeeper Dominik Greif blocked a follow-up by Kylian Mbappé. Bellingham collected the



rebound and slotted his shot from just outside the six-yard box under the on-rushing Greif and past three defenders who were trying to protect the goalmouth.
Madrid tacked on two goals late in stoppage time. Mallorca's Martin Valjent scored an own goal when he inadvertently turned a pass by Brahim Díaz into his net. Rodrygo then took Madrid's third.
The match ended with a short scuffle after the final whistle before calm was restored. It started when Bellingham slapped the back of the neck of Mallorca defender Pablo Maffeo, who had had an intense duel with Vinícius Júnior during the game.
Barcelona awaits Madrid in Sunday's final.
Madrid lost Aurélien Tchouaméni, a midfielder playing as a central defender, in the 54th after he took a hard knock to the head during a collision with a Mallorca player. Youth player Raúl Asencio replaced him.
Madrid was competing as last season's Spanish league champion, while Mallorca was invited as the runner-up in the Copa del Rey.
Former Madrid striker Karim Benzema, who now plays in the Saudi Arabian league, was in attendance.
The minor trophy has become a major cash maker for the federation and competing clubs since the federation struck a deal in 2019 to hold it in the Middle Eastern kingdom.

Pratika, Tejal smash fifties as India beat Ireland by six wickets in 1st women's ODI

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Pratika Rawal showcased maturity beyond her experience, while Tejal Hasabnis capped a memorable comeback, posting a fifty each, as India outplayed an inexperienced Ireland by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match women's ODI series here on Friday. Rawal anchored the modest run chase of 239 after stand-in skipper Smriti Mandhana's brisk 41, smashing 10 fours and one six for a career-best 89 (96 balls).
Hasabnis, who last played an ODI against New Zealand in October 2024, struck her first fifty after her comeback, remaining unbeaten on 53 off 46 balls with the help of nine boundaries.
Rawal and Hasabnis put together a match-winning 116-run partnership from 84 balls with India winning the match with 93 balls to spare. Carrying forward her dominant form from the West Indies series, Mandhana gave the team a fantastic start with a blistering 29-ball 41, studded with six fours and a six. In the process, she became the second Indian and 15th overall to surpass 4,000 ODI runs.
Mandhana unsettled the Irish bowlers with her attacking strokeplay on both sides of the wicket. Her aggression was particularly evident against seamer Dempsey in the eighth over, when she stepped out to hammer a boundary, followed by a six and another four.
Her rookie opening partner Rawal, who debuted in the preceding West Indies series, provided excellent support.
The duo shared their third fifty-plus opening stand in four matches, keeping the scoreboard ticking with ease.
However, Ireland managed a breakthrough right at the end of powerplay when Mandhana mistimed a slog sweep to mid-on, falling nine runs short of her fifty.
Harleen Deol (20) and Jemimah Rodrigues (9) looked in good touch initially, but clever bowling by left-arm spinner Aimee Maguire (3/57 from 8 overs) stalled India's momentum temporarily.
The 18-year-old Maguire lured Jemimah into stepping out too far, resulting in a stumping when the batter was at least a foot outside her crease. This phase saw India lose three wickets for 46 runs, but Mandhana's explosive start ensured the team stayed well on par.
The inexperience of Ireland came to fore as they failed to seize the momentum, leaking 21 runs in extras.
Laura Delany was the weakest link in their bowling unit and she bowled successive no balls with two waist-high full tosses in the 24th over when Hasabnis cashed in on the opportunity to hit back-to-back fours from the two freebies. Earlier, butter-fingered India let Ireland off the hook with their pathetic fielding as visiting skipper Gaby Lewis carved out a classy 92 to lift her team to a respectable 238 for 7.
Opting to bat, Ireland were in deep trouble at 56 for four in the 14th over, but Lewis and Leah Paul (59 off 73 balls) added 117 runs for the fifth wicket to steer their team to safety. Lewis scored her runs in 129 balls, lacing the knock with 15 boundaries.
Aided by at least three clear dropped catches and a few misfields, the duo of Lewis and Paul went about their job in a calculated manner and brought a semblance of stability to the Ireland innings while putting together the team's first-ever century partnership against India. Medium pacer Titas Sadhu effected the first breakthrough for India when she induced an outside edge from Sarah Forbes (9) after the batter tried to play away from her body, and Deepti Sharma did the rest in the slip cordon.
Making their first visit to the country, Ireland were reduced to 34 for two thanks to a terrible mix-up that led to the run out of Una Raymond-Hoey (5), who attempted an inexplicable single despite hitting the ball straight to Jemimah Rodrigues at cover.
Orla Prendergast (9) was next to go as she was stumped by Ghosh off the bowling of leg-spinner Priya Mishra (2/56), leaving the visitors in a spot of bother at 56 for three in the 14th over.



Ram Charan shines, but *Game Changer* falters with outdated storyline

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CAST: Ram Charan, Kiara Advani, Anjali, SJ Suryah, Samuthirakani, Srikanth, Jayaram, Sunil, Naveen Chandra, Rajiv Kanakala, Vishwanth and others
MUSIC DIRECTOR: S. Thaman
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Thiru
STORY: Karthik Subbaraj
PRODUCERS: Raju and Shirish
DIRECTOR: Shankar
RATING: 2.5/5

The New Year of 2025 kicked off with a high-budget film like *Game Changer*, which was released on Friday. Starring Ram Charan, Kiara Advani and Anjali in lead roles, this film is directed by the popular filmmaker Shankar Shanmugam. The movie also features prominent actors like Srikanth, Samuthirakani, Jayaram, Sunil, Rajiv Kanakala, Naveen Chandra and others in key roles. *Game Changer* has been one of the most anticipated films of the year, especially for Ram Charan, as it marks his solo release after the massive success of *RRR*. The film took nearly three years to complete and expectations are high due to the star-studded cast and the big budget. Dil Raju is the producer. Here's a breakdown of the story and what the film offers.

Story:

The plot of *Game Changer* revolves around Chief Minister Satyamurthy (Srikanth), who falls ill and is admitted to the hospital. His son and Minister, Mopidevi (SJ Suryah), aims to become the Chief Minister. While Satyamurthy wants to leave behind a clean government in his final year, Mopidevi disagrees. Enters Ram Nandan (Ram Charan), an honest and sincere IAS officer who takes charge as the collector of Visakhapatnam. The conflict between Ram Nandan and Mopidevi ensues as Ram Nandan strives to shut down the illegal operations run by Mopidevi and his allies.

In a flashback, Ram Nandan falls in love with Deepika (Kiara Advani) in college. However, their relationship faces a roadblock when Ram Nandan becomes an IPS officer, which Deepika disapproves of as she wanted him to pursue an IAS career. Eventually, Ram Nandan becomes the collector of Vizag and seeks to marry Deepika. Meanwhile, the chief minister passes away and before his death, he names Ram Nandan as his successor in a video message. Mopidevi, however, plans to seize power. The film unfolds as Ram Nandan fights to hold his ground, and his connection with Appanna (also played by Ram Charan) comes to light. The story follows Ram Nandan's journey as he confronts Mopidevi and unravels the larger political conspiracy.

Analysis:

Director Shankar is renowned for his grandiose visuals, aesthetic songs, and high production values. However, in recent years, he seems to have lost his touch. While Shankar has directed several successful films in the past, such as *Gentleman, Oke Okkadu, Bharateeyudu, Aparichithudu* and *Sivaji*, his recent works, including *Bharateeyudu 2*, have struggled at the box office. His signature style seems outdated and *Game Changer* lacks the innovative spark that his previous films showcased.

The story, penned by Karthik Subbaraj, follows the familiar trope of an honest IAS officer battling a corrupt politician. While the story touches upon relevant themes, the execution feels outdated and predictable. The screenplay fails to captivate the audience, with the romantic track between Ram Charan and Kiara Advani coming across as boring and outdated. Similarly, the comedy sequences featuring Vennela Kishore and Brahmanandam fall flat, failing to evoke laughter.

While the concept of an IAS officer taking on a corrupt minister should have made for an engaging political drama, Shankar's outdated approach undermines the potential of the story. There is a lack of realism and depth in the narrative, making the film feel artificial and far from convincing. Some scenes are cinematic to the point of being unrealistic, with moments that seem detached from the current political landscape.

Anjali's character, though powerful, lacks the depth and emotion it could have had. The second half, which focuses on Appanna's character, shows potential, but after that, the film quickly loses momentum, and the climax becomes unnecessarily dragged out.

Performances:

Ram Charan carries the entire film with his strong performance. As Ram Nandan, an IAS officer and in the flashback as Appanna, he brings energy and conviction to his roles. His portrayal of both characters is commendable, and he succeeds in anchoring the film with his stellar screen presence.

SJ Suryah plays a significant role as the antagonist, Mopidevi. While he has delivered strong performances in the past, his accent here seems ill-suited for the Telugu audience, which detracts from his impact. Anjali, portraying Parvathi, delivers a solid performance, but her character could have been better developed. Despite her powerful presence, her role lacks the emotional weight it could have carried. Srikanth steps into a different role compared to his usual image, but his performance doesn't leave a lasting impression. Jayaram's role is underwhelming, and Sunil's comedy does not hit the mark. Samuthirakani's performance is average, while the other supporting actors do not stand out.

Technical Aspects:

The technical aspects of *Game Changer* are undoubtedly one of the film's strengths. The cinematography by Thiru is visually stunning, capturing the grandeur of the film's high-budget sequences. The songs, though choreographed beautifully in some visually impressive locations, do not live up to the high standards one might expect from a Shankar film. Thaman's music, especially the songs, falls short of expectations and the background score feels average. The dialogue delivery in some scenes is thought-provoking, but the overall screenplay and emotional depth are lacking. Despite the film's impressive visuals, the film's technical elements do not make up for the weak narrative.

Verdict:

Game Changer fails to meet expectations, as it falls short in terms of both story and execution. While Ram Charan's performance is commendable and the film has some grand visuals, the outdated and predictable story, along with a lack of emotional depth, make it a letdown. Shankar's once-innovative approach now feels stale and the film struggles to stay relevant in the current political and cinematic landscape. For those expecting a fresh and exciting political drama, *Game Changer* may not deliver. The film's commercial appeal might help it to some extent, but its longevity remains uncertain without a compelling story to back it up.



Brahmi and his son Raja Goutham in *Brahma Anandam*



Swadharm Entertainment, known for its successful films like *Malli Raava, Agent Sai Srinivasa Athreya* and *Masooda*, is coming up with a unique entertainer titled Brahma Anandam. The movie stars legendary comedian Brahmanandam and his son Raja Goutham in lead roles, alongside Priya Vadlamani and Aishwarya Holakkal in key roles. Directed by debutant RVS Nikhil and produced by Rahul Yadav Nakka, *Brahma Anandam* promises to be a captivating film with a refreshing concept. The film is slated for release soon and the makers have kickstarted promotions with the launch of a lyrical song.

As part of the promotional activities, a melodious song titled *Anandamaaye* was released on Thursday. Composed by Sandilya Pisapati, with lyrics penned by Sri Sai Kiran, the song is beautifully rendered by Manisha Eerabathini and Yashwanth Nag.

Director RVS Nikhil has portrayed the lead pair as two individuals with contrasting personalities and opinions, adding depth to their characters. With its catchy tune and meaningful lyrics, the song is expected to strike a chord with listeners. Sandilya Pisapati's music composition is a highlight of the track, further enhancing its appeal.

With promising performances from its cast and a unique storyline, *Brahma Anandam* is shaping up to be an engaging entertainer that audiences can look forward to.

STANDALONE

Allu Arjun celebrates his dad, Allu Aravind's birthday in style! Marking the special occasion on Vaikuntha Ekadashi, this was the first celebration post the blockbuster success and controversy surrounding *Pushpa*. The highlight? A cake featuring *Pushpa's* iconic palm with '*Pushpa Ka Baap*' written on it—truly a fitting tribute to the star and his journey!





Nala Jilakara Mogga captures the heart of Uttarandhra

Actress Anandhi, known for her powerful performances, is set to deliver another memorable role in the highly anticipated film *Garividi Lakshmi*. Produced by TG Vishwa Prasad and TG Krithi Prasad, the film aims to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Uttarandhra region, with the beloved folk song *Nala Jilakara Mogga* playing a central role in its narrative. *Nala Jilakara Mogga*, a timeless folk song cherished by generations, is renowned for its poetic beauty and cultural significance. The song draws a captivating analogy, comparing the elegance of a young woman to the delicate Nala Jilakara Mogga (cumin bud), symbolising purity, simplicity and grace. Its lyrical message conveys a profound truth: a woman's natural charm and inner beauty far surpass material wealth, jewelry, or even the most exquisite sarees. The song owes much of its fame to the tireless efforts of Garividi Lakshmi, a celebrated Burra Katha artist. Her remarkable work in preserving and popularizing Uttarandhra's folk traditions, particularly during the 1990s, has cemented her place as a cultural icon in the region's history.

With its powerful storytelling and authentic representation of the folk traditions of Uttarandhra, Garividi Lakshmi promises to capture the essence of the region both visually and sonically, offering audiences an immersive cultural experience.



VENKATESH HAD RECORDED THE SONG IN JUST 20 MINUTES : ANIL RAVIPUDI

Director Anil Ravipudi talks about his upcoming film *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* and why he auditioned experienced actress Aishwarya Rajesh for the role of *Bhagyam*

PNS|HYDERABAD

Director Anil Ravipudi, known for delivering continuous box office hits, is now gearing up for *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*. The film stars Venkatesh in the lead role, with Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chaudhary playing the female leads. Interestingly, despite Aishwarya's extensive filmography, the director decided to audition her for the role of *Bhagyam*.

"It's a very important role, and she needed to speak in the Godavari accent. To understand her body language, I auditioned her for the part. She's an exceptional performer and did an outstanding job," said Anil Ravipudi about Aishwarya. He added that she will receive great recognition for her performance in this role. Anil also spoke about Meenakshi Chaudhary, describing her as a disciplined actress.

Actor Venkatesh also surprised everyone by singing a song for the film. Whose idea was it? "Venkatesh liked the song so much that he wanted to sing it himself. He recorded it in just 20 minutes, and even music director Bheems was surprised. It came out really well," said Anil Ravipudi about the song. Anil explained the significance of the film's title, saying, "The story revolves around a rescue operation that begins four days before the Sankranthi festival. When I wrote the story, I finalised the title right away."

The director also mentioned his earlier collaborations with Venkatesh, particularly *F2*, which was a Sankranthi release and became a massive blockbuster. "My other film, *F3*, missed the Sankranthi race, but with this movie, we decided to release it during the festival. That's how it all came together," he explained.

Talking about the film's universal appeal, Anil said, "The story is relatable to everyone. It's about a husband caught between his wife and his ex-girlfriend. I'm confident that the audience will thoroughly enjoy the movie and leave the theatre laughing. This film is going to be a blockbuster and I'm sure I'll continue to succeed as a director," he said.

Reflecting on his collaboration with producer Dil Raju, Anil said, "I started working with Dil Raju with my first film, *Pataas*. It's been almost ten years now. I prefer working with people I share a good bond with and I want to continue this association," he added.

This marks Anil's third collaboration with Venkatesh, and he shared that their working relationship has grown into a deep friendship. "Venkatesh garu and I have become best buddies through this journey," said the director.

He also elaborated on the genre of the film: "I tried something different with Venkatesh in this movie. While it has entertainment, it also includes elements of crime and adventure. The second half takes on a completely unique tone. Even if I were to make an action film with Venkatesh garu, I wouldn't miss adding the entertainment quotient," Anil shared.