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'INDIA OPEN TO BUYING ENERGY FROM ALL SOURCES' 8



Vishwak Sen says 'sorry' for Prudhvi's political **COMMENTS** P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY

the pioneer

The upcoming Zilla Parishad elections are a referendum on Congress's failures. Their MLAs themselves are calling this a '30% commission government.' Instead of solving problems in Telangana, the CM is busy lecturing in Kerala, Maharashtra, and Delhi. He should first look at the mess he has created here



— Harish Rao, BRS MLA

P4

DON'T MISS...

'10,000 perished chickens buried;

Minister for Tourism and Cinematography Kandula Durgesh has advised people living around Kanuru Agraharam village in Peravali mandal to avoid consuming chicken and eggs as a precautionary measure against the suspected virus outbreak. He confirmed that officials have buried over 10,000 perished chickens in the village.The Minister assured that all necessary steps were being taken to contain the virus and prevent further infections among poultry. He cautioned residents within a 10-km radius of Kanuru Agraharam to remain...

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'Prosecution must be done seriously'

The Supreme Court on Monday quizzed Delhi Police for not filing appeals against acquittals in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases and said the prosecution should be carried out "seriously and not just for the sake of it". A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan told additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, representing Delhi Police, that special leave petitions against the acquittals must be filed and fought with sincerity. "In a number of cases you have not challenged the order passed by the...

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Govt bans export of raw human hair

The government on Monday imposed export ban on raw human hair if the prices are below USD 65 per kg, according to a notification. In January 2022, the government imposed restrictions on these exports. "The export policy of raw human hair is amended from restricted to prohibited. However, export shall be free if FOB (Free on Board) value is USD 65 or above per kilogram," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification. The decision was taken on the back of reports of smuggling of raw...

-PAGE: 8

Gukesh looks to stage a comeback

World champion D Gukesh will have his task cut out as he looks to stage a comeback against Fabiano Caruana of the USA in the Freestyle Grand Slam chess tournament here. Gukesh suffered a rare setback in normal time control on Sunday, losing to Caruana in the first game of the quarterfinals. The Indian is now under pressure to perform with his black pieces and draw level with Caruana who has been dreaming to be a world champion for a few years now. The freestyle chess is built around 960...

-SPORTS

SWARNANDHRA VISION 2047

CM seeks bankers' support

CALLS FOR PROACTIVE STEPS TO PREVENT FARMER SUICIDES



- CM Naidu emphasises the banking sector's role in agriculture and allied sectors
- The government seeks banks' cooperation in achieving a 15% growth rate
- CM highlights the potential of horticulture and commercial crops
- He urges banks to expedite loan disbursal for eligible farmers
- Dairy farming to be promoted for a boost to rural incomes
- Govt addressing farmers' market challenges using Blockchain Technology
- Banks urged to support organic farming to reduce pesticide-linked health risks



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday called upon bankers to actively participate in the State's ambitious Swarnandhra Vision-2047, aimed at achieving sustained growth and development. Speaking at the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) meeting at the Secretariat, he outlined the government's goal of attaining a 15% growth rate and emphasised the banking sector's role, particularly in agriculture and allied sectors.

The Chief Minister stated that the government has been striving to realise its vision through 10 core principles and sought active cooperation from banks, especially in agriculture.

He noted significant growth potential in farming, with a shift towards horticulture and commercial crops.

In this context, he urged banks to sanction maximum loans to farmers and ensure quick disbursal to eligible beneficiaries.

Highlighting the State's dairy farming policy, he stressed that promoting dairy farming could enhance rural incomes. He suggested that every family could keep two or three cattle to generate additional revenue.

He also addressed farmers' struggles due to inadequate market facilities and the absence of Minimum Support Price (MSP), stating that the government is working on solutions through Blockchain Technology.

Chandrababu Naidu called for greater collaboration with banks to support organic farming, particularly horticulture, as a response to the increasing cases of cancer in states like Punjab linked to pesticide use.

He urged banks not only to sanction loans but also to promote innovative agricultural practices.

On the issue of farmer suicides, the Chief Minister underscored the need for proactive measures to prevent such tragedies, rather than merely offering financial assistance post-incident.

He also urged bankers to simplify loan sanctioning processes for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in alignment with the Centre's efforts to support small traders.

Continued on Page 2



Lab report confirms 'bird flu' outbreak in EG

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

The laboratory report has confirmed the presence of 'bird flu' in Kanuru Agraharam village of Peravali mandal, East Godavari District Collector P Prashanthi announced on Monday.

Following the confirmation, the district administration has declared a one-kilometre 'red zone' and a 10-kilometre 'surveillance zone' around Kanuru village. Section 144 and Section 133 have been imposed to prevent movement in the affected area.

The Collector directed officials to immediately cull poultry within one kilometre of the affected farm, stating that 75% of chickens have already been burned. She also ordered the temporary closure of poultry shops in and around the village.

Residents have been urged to report symptoms of the virus, with control room assistance available at 95429 08025 from 8 am to 6 pm. A house-to-house medical survey will be conducted within the 10-km surveillance zone.

Strict transport restrictions have been imposed, with officials tracking poultry movement from Kanuru village over the past five to six days.

The entry and exit points of the village have also been temporarily closed.

The Collector warned that perished chickens must not be dumped in irrigation canals to prevent further spread of the virus. Meanwhile, similar deaths in Mittipadu, Nallajerla, and Sitanagaram mandals have prompted the administration to extend red zone and surveillance measures to those areas as well.

Authorities have urged the public to exercise caution and limit poultry consumption until further notice.

'Expedite data integration process'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to expedite the data integration process across various government departments to enhance governance efficiency. Chairing a review meeting on Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS) at the Secretariat on Monday, he emphasised the need for faster data consolidation to improve service delivery.

The Chief Minister suggested the creation of a data lake to integrate all departmental data in one place, ensuring quicker and more efficient public service delivery. He also stressed the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deep Technology to analyse data and enhance departmental performance through RTGS. Additionally, he instructed officials to explore expanding WhatsApp Governance services to make public services more accessible.

As part of public safety and surveillance measures, the state has deployed 14,770 CCTV cameras so far. Naidu directed officials to leverage AI for crime detection and tracking criminals, suggesting a system that immediately alerts senior police officers when a crime is reported, preventing suspects from escaping. He also emphasised proactive monitoring of rowdy sheeters to prevent potential crimes.

RTGS CEO K Dinesh Kumar briefed the Chief Minister on ongoing RTGS initiatives, mentioning that Google is providing support for the wider implementation of AI-based solutions.

The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary K Vijayanand, DGP Harish Kumar Gupta, CM's Secretary P.S. Pradyumna, I&PR Director Himanshu Shukla, GSWD Director Shiva Prasad, and other senior officials.

RGV seeks eight-week extension for CID inquiry

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma (RGV) failed to appear before the CID officials in Guntur for questioning in a case registered against him. Instead, he sent his lawyer to the CID office, seeking an eight-week extension, citing his engagement in film promotions.

The case pertains to RGV's 2019 film Kamma Rajyamlo Kadapa Reddlu, which was later renamed Amma Rajyamlo Kadapa Biddalu following objections from the Telangana High Court. However, the film was allegedly uploaded on YouTube under its original title, prompting a complaint from Vamsi Krishna Bandaru, a resident of Atmakur near Mangalagiri.

Continued on Page 2

Jagan not Oppn Leader: Ayyanna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Speaker Chinthakayala Ayyanna Patrudu and Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in Delhi on Monday as part of a courtesy visit.

During the meeting, they invited Om Birla to attend the Orientation Programme for Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), scheduled to be held in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Hall on February 22.

Continued on Page 2

SIT intensifies probe into Tirumala ghee adulteration case

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has intensified its probe into the Tirumala ghee adulteration case, uncovering crucial details in the remand report of the four recently arrested accused.

These persons, arrested on Sunday, have been identified as A-2 to A-5 in the case. Additionally, Sabal Shameemulla Khan, CEO of Vaishnavi Dairy, has been named as A-8 in the report.

Continued on Page 2

Raj police arrest Kiran Royal's 'fraud' victim

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



In a new twist to the viral video drama in which a woman named Lakshmi accused Jana Sena Party (JSP) Tirupati in-charge Kiran Royal of defrauding her of Rs 1.20 crore and threatening her children, the Rajasthan police arrested her on Monday. Her arrest comes amid a controversy over the circulation of private videos allegedly linked to Kiran Royal, which led the Jana Sena high command to temporarily distance itself from him.

Lakshmi was taken into custody by Rajasthan police soon after she addressed a press conference at the Tirupati Press Club. She was reportedly wanted in an online fraud case under investigation by Jaipur police. Authorities had been searching for her, and her public appearances led them to locate and arrest her in Tirupati. She was later taken to the SV University Police Station for further legal proceedings.

Continued on Page 2

MP Midhun calls for fair share for AP in Budget

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MP PV Midhun Reddy, in his speech on the Union Budget 2024-25, urged the Central Government to allocate adequate funds for key development projects in Andhra Pradesh and ensure justice for the State.

Welcoming the proposal to provide income tax incentives for up to Rs 12 lakh, he noted its potential to boost the economy despite an estimated revenue loss of Rs 1 lakh crore.

Continued on Page 2

15% hike in AP liquor prices

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The Andhra Pradesh Excise Department has announced a 15% increase in liquor prices, affecting Indian Made Liquor (IML), Foreign Liquor (FL), and beer. The State government has issued an order confirming the price hike across all categories.

Earlier, the government had raised the margin on liquor sales from 14.5% to 20% to improve profitability and efficiency in the liquor supply chain. Meanwhile, Excise Commissioner Nishant Kumar addressed concerns regarding the price increase, clarifying that the actual hike in Maximum Retail Price (MRP) is Rs 10 per bottle, not Rs 15 or Rs 20, as claimed in some reports. He stated that this Rs 10 hike applies to all bottle sizes— quarter, half, and full — across every brand.

The Excise Commissioner urged the public to disregard misinformation and assured that liquor shops would be directed to display the revised prices prominently to prevent confusion.



CJ of AP HC visits Tirumala

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Andhra Pradesh High Court Chief Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur visited the Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Tirumala on Monday and offered prayers.

TTD Additional EO Ch. Venkaiah Chowdary welcomed him at the temple. After darshan, the Chief Justice received 'Veda Ashirvachanam' at the Ranganayakula Mandapam. The Additional EO presented him with 'Srivari Tirtha Prasadam' and a portrait of the Lord.

TTD DLO Varaprasada Rao, Temple Deputy EO Lokanatham, Peishkar Ramakrishna, and other officials were present.

How can convicted persons return to make laws?

Questions Supreme Court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Flagging "criminalisation of politics" as a major issue, the Supreme Court on Monday asked how could a person return to Parliament after being convicted in a criminal case.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan therefore sought the assistance of the attorney general of India on the issue.

It was hearing a PIL filed by advocate Ashwini Upadhyay seeking a life ban on convicted politicians aside from the expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs in the country.

The court sought the responses of the Centre and the Election Commission of India within three weeks on the challenge to constitutional validity of Sections 8 and 9 of Representation of People Act.

"Once he is convicted, and the conviction is upheld...how can people come back to Parliament and legislature? That they have to answer. There is also an apparent conflict of interest. They would be vetting the laws...," it said.

The bench went on to add, "We need to be enlightened on Sections 8 and 9 of the Representation of People Act. A government employee who is found guilty of corruption or disloyalty to state is not considered suitable in service even as a person but can be a minister."

The top court said since a full bench (three judges) had passed the judgement on expeditious disposal of criminal cases against lawmakers, it would be inappropriate for a division bench (two judges) to reopen the case. The court therefore directed for the issue to be placed before the Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna for consideration by a larger bench.

Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, who is assisting the court as amicus curiae, submitted despite orders by the top court from time to time and monitoring by the high court, a large number of cases were pending against lawmakers.

Hansaria said the PIL sought the expeditious disposal of such cases and challenged the constitutional validity of Section 8 of Representation of People Act, which limits disqualification period of a convicted person to six years.

He said the petition also raised the question whether a person convicted of a criminal offense could form a political party, or be an office bearer of a political party.

Continued on Page 2



"Once he is convicted, and the conviction is upheld...how can people come back to Parliament and legislature? That they have to answer. There is also an apparent conflict of interest. They would be vetting the laws...," it said



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MP praises Centre for support to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



TDP MP Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu pointed out that NITI Aayog had identified Andhra Pradesh's financial condition as "dire." According to its report, the state's revenue growth had slowed significantly by 2023. Between 2014 and 2019, Andhra Pradesh spent Rs 59 for every Rs 100 in revenue, but this figure dropped to Rs 22.54 per Rs 100 between 2019 and 2024.

Member of Parliament Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu has lauded the Central Government's support to Andhra Pradesh, particularly concerning the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. He stated that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has been actively focusing on the steel plant's development and highlighted that the Centre has allocated over Rs 1 lakh crore to the state in the past eight months.

Addressing a media briefing by TDP MPs in Delhi, he noted that the Centre has extended assistance even for initiatives not included in the Union Budget, underscoring its commitment to Andhra Pradesh despite financial constraints.

He also emphasised the state's growing role in the vision of 'Vikasit Bharat', stating that Andhra Pradesh is shaping the nation's future.

Referring to the economic situation, he pointed out that NITI Aayog had identified Andhra Pradesh's financial condition as "dire." According to its report, the state's revenue growth had slowed significantly by 2023. Between 2014 and 2019, Andhra Pradesh spent Rs 59 for every Rs 100 in revenue, but this figure dropped to Rs 22.54 per Rs 100 between 2019 and 2024.

To address this challenge, Sri Krishna Devarayalu urged the Centre to extend further support to the state.

He specifically requested Andhra Pradesh's inclusion in a central initiative to improve educational standards and appealed for funding for the interlinking of rivers, a crucial project for the state's development.

Students face harsh punishment for speaking Telugu

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A shocking case of student mistreatment has emerged at Ravindra Bharathi School in Chandrampalem in Madhurawada, where students were allegedly subjected to severe physical punishment for speaking Telugu. The disturbing incident has raised serious concerns among parents and the public regarding the school's disciplinary policies and student welfare.

Despite Telugu being the medium of instruction at the school, students are reportedly prohibited from conversing in the language within the premises. According to sources, students from classes six and seven were fined Rs 5 for speaking Telugu during study hours. However, the punishment escalated dramatically when nearly 30 students were called to the office room, forced to kneel, and physically assaulted with plastic pipes. Disturbingly, the principal was present as teachers carried out the punishment. Parents were left in shock upon discovering injuries on their children's bodies, with some likening the wounds to those inflicted on animals.

Take Graduate MLC elections seriously, says Kollu Ravindra

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Mines and Geology Kollu Ravindra has stressed the importance of winning the upcoming Graduate MLC elections and urged every party worker to take responsibility. He was speaking at a campaign meeting for Telugu Desam Party's Krishna-Guntur Graduates MLC candidate Alapati Rajendra Prasad at the party office in Machilipatnam on Monday.

Addressing party leaders, cluster in-charges, and activists, the Minister emphasised the need to connect with every voter to secure their support. He pointed out that Alapati Rajendra Prasad had sacrificed his seat in the general elections and said it was the party's collective responsibility to ensure his victory as a mark of appreciation for his commitment. He noted that while voter locations in general elections are clear, party members must actively identify and engage with graduate voters in these elections.

Minister Ravindra underscored that the Graduate MLC elections should be treated with the utmost seriousness, as success here would provide a significant advantage in the upcoming local body elections.

Stating that there are around 10,000 votes in the constituency, he urged cluster and division in charges to directly contact every voter and ensure their participation.



He also lauded Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's efforts in the state's development and emphasised that securing victory in the elections would be a way of honouring his leadership.

The Minister called on all party workers and leaders to intensify their grassroots campaign to ensure success in the elections.



Minister Subhash confident of NDA victory

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Labour, Boilers and Medical Insurance Vasanmsetti Subhash has expressed confidence that the NDA will secure victory in all upcoming Legislative Council elections across Andhra Pradesh. Speaking at the nomination filing event for the East and West Godavari Graduates' MLC elections in Eluru on Monday, he, along with Ministers Nimmala Ramanaidu, Kandula Durgesh, and Nadendla Manohar, highlighted the coalition's strength.

Subhash pointed out that the BJP's recent victory in the Delhi Assembly elections had dealt a severe blow to the ruling AAP and predicted that similar results would follow nationwide. He asserted that under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Andhra Pradesh would witness rapid progress, with efforts underway to address unemployment.

He further stated that the state government is working towards creating 20 lakh jobs, with companies showing interest in investing after the recent Davos summit. He emphasised that only the NDA-led government could ensure the development of the state capital and resolve employment challenges.

Ahead of the Graduate MLC elections, he urged all voters, especially teachers, to support the coalition candidates and ensure their victory. He appealed to the people of both Godavari districts to give an overwhelming mandate to NDA candidate Parabattula Rajasekhar.

The event was attended by local MLAs, coalition leaders, and party workers.

How can convicted...

Continued from Page 1

Hansaria said the top court in 2017 passed directions for setting up 12 special courts in 10 different states and a slew of directions were passed for monitoring of early disposal of pending criminal cases against MPs and MLAs.

Yet, the situation has remained abysmal and the trial was moving at a very slow pace, he added.

"It's a matter of shame that after all this, 42 per cent of sitting Lok Sabha members have pending criminal cases. For 30 years, cases are pending," said Hansaria.

Elaborating on the reasons for the delay, the amicus said special courts often took up cases other than MP/MLA matters, there were repeated adjournments as accused.

CM invited to Sri Kalahasti Brahmotsavam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The officials and priests of Sri Kalahasteeswara Swamy Temple have invited Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu to the Maha Shivaratri Brahmotsavam at the temple.

During a meeting at the Secretariat, MLA Bojjala Sudheer Reddy, along with Temple Executive Officer T Bapireddy and the chief priest, handed over the invitation letter for the Brahmotsavam celebrations.

The Brahmotsavam will be held from February 21 to March 6 at Sri Kalahasti, and the Chief Minister has been requested to attend as the chief guest.

On this occasion, the temple priests presented sacred 'prasadam' and a portrait of Lord Shiva to the Chief Minister. MLA Sudheer Reddy and other officials briefed him on the arrangements being made for the festivities.

Handloom expo in US: Minister Savitha meets Chicago team

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Minister for BC, EWS, Handloom and Khadi, S Savitha, met representatives from Chicago on Monday to discuss opportunities for promoting Andhra Pradesh's handloom sector in the United States. The delegation invited her to participate in the upcoming GSA Global Millets Expo, scheduled for April in Chicago, organised by Purdue University and the GSA organisation.

During the meeting, Chicago government representative La Shawn K Ford formally extended an invitation to the minister. Discussions centred on expanding marketing avenues for handloom products in the US, with the representatives assuring support in organising handloom expos across multiple states. They also expressed willingness to provide training in handloom design to Andhra Pradesh artisans under Purdue University's guidance.

Minister Savitha welcomed the initiative and stated that she would bring the proposal to the attention of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Minister Nara Lokesh. She expressed gratitude for the offer of design training, which could enhance the skills of the state's weavers.

The meeting was attended by Dr Vijay Prabhakar, Dr Rajeev, Dr Mohammed Taj Mul Hussain, Vishwabharathi, K Krishnamurthy, Tirunagari Jyotsna, and others.

RGV seeks...

Continued from Page 1

The complainant alleged that certain controversial scenes from the film were not removed and accused RGV of making provocative social media posts that could incite caste-based tensions. Based on the complaint, a case was registered against RGV at the CID police station in Mangalagiri on November 29, 2024.

The CID issued a notice to RGV on February 7, summoning him for questioning at the CID regional office in Guntur on Monday. However, citing prior commitments related to his film promotion, RGV informed the authorities that he could not attend and sought an extension of eight weeks.

As of now, the CID has not issued an official response to his request.

IA&AD SZ cricket tourney kicks off

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The IA&AD South Zone Cricket Tournament 2025 kicked off in grand style on Monday at the ACA International Cricket Stadium, Mangalagiri. The opening day featured two exciting matches, with Andhra Pradesh-Telangana taking on Kerala and Tamil Nadu facing Karnataka. The tournament, which follows an IPL-style format, provides a platform for employees to showcase their cricketing skills and sportsmanship.

The event was inaugurated at 9 am by Senior Deputy Accountant Generals Bhaskar Kalluru, Kishore Reddy, R. Shyam, Rakesh Naik, and N. Nikhila. Bhaskar Kalluru expressed his delight at the tournament's launch, highlighting that this is the first time the Principal Accountant General's office in Vijayawada is hosting the event. He emphasised the importance of sports in promoting mental and physical well-being and encouraged players to compete in the true spirit of the game.

Kalluru also noted that the tournament could open doors for players to progress to prestigious competitions such as the Ranji Trophy and the IPL. He suggested that improving access roads to the Mangalagiri stadium would enhance its appeal as a sporting venue.

Day 1 match results

In the first match, Kerala won the toss and opted to bowl. Batting first, Andhra Pradesh-Telangana scored 96 runs for 7 wickets in 20 overs. Ravitheja top-scored with 40 runs, while Yash Kotari contributed 26 runs. Kerala's Ankit Mishra was the standout bowler, claiming 4 wickets for 17 runs in 4 overs, while Karthikeya took 1 wicket for 11 runs.

In response, Kerala chased down the target in 18.3 overs, scoring 100 for 4 wickets. Mohammad Shanu played a key role, scoring 43 runs off 49 balls, while Shaly Shyamson contributed 25 runs. For Andhra Pradesh-Telangana, Ravitheja took 1 wicket for 9 runs.

The second match was a thrilling contest, with Tamil Nadu securing a last-ball victory over Karnataka. Karnataka, batting first, posted 169 for 4 in 20 overs, with H. Arjun remaining unbeaten on 47 and Sharath BR scoring 40 off 23 balls. Tamil Nadu's Vighnesh, Ashwin Balaji, and Pandiya Raj picked up one wicket each.

Chasing 170, Tamil Nadu faced stiff resistance. The match came down to the final ball, with Tamil Nadu needing 8 runs in 6 balls. The team managed 7 runs in 5 balls, and a bye on the last ball sealed their victory. Vedant Bharadwaj starred with 83 runs off 57 balls, including 7 fours and 4 sixes, while Vighnesh contributed 27 runs.

For Karnataka, bowlers Darshan and Jai took 2 wickets each but couldn't prevent Tamil Nadu from clinching the win.

SIT intensifies...

Continued from Page 1

Operating under the supervision of the CBI, the SIT revealed that the accused had destroyed their mobile phones to erase evidence and later purchased new devices. The report also noted that they had misled investigators by falsely claiming that their phones had been lost.

Further, the SIT disclosed that employees of Bolebaba Dairy were sent into hiding to evade questioning. The investigation has also confirmed that AR Dairy and Vaishnavi Dairy were engaged in illegal activities.

Dy CM condemns attack on Chilkur Temple priest

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan has condemned the recent attack on Chilkur Balaji Temple Chief Priest C.S. Rangarajan near Hyderabad, calling it unfortunate. He stated that the incident should not be seen as a mere assault on an individual but as an attack on the protection of 'Dharma'.

In a tweet on Monday, Pawan Kalyan expressed deep distress over the mob attack on Rangarajan, the chief priest of the renowned Chilkur Balaji Temple. He strongly condemned the incident, emphasising that it was an assault on the safeguarding of 'Dharma'.

He noted that Rangarajan has been dedicated for several decades to preserving 'Dharma', protecting temple traditions, and upholding the sanctity of temples. The Deputy CM urged the police to investigate the reasons behind the attack by individuals claiming to be members of the 'Ramarajyam' outfit and to identify and punish the leaders of the mob. Pawan Kalyan called upon the Telangana government to take the incident seriously and act accordingly. He also praised Rangarajan for his efforts in preserving 'Sanatana Dharma' and his contributions to the Temple Movement. He acknowledged Rangarajan's unwavering commitment to the management of Hindu temples and the protection of 'Dharma'.

Urging widespread condemnation of the attack, Pawan Kalyan directed Telangana JSP leaders to visit Chilkur and extend their support to the chief priest, assuring him that they stand by him.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Chaturdashi:	Feb 10 06:57 PM to Feb 11 06:55 PM
Purnima:	Feb 11 06:55 PM to Feb 12 07:23 PM
Nakshatram:	
Pushya:	Feb 10 06:00 PM to Feb 11 06:34 PM
Ashlesha:	Feb 11 06:34 PM to Feb 12 07:35 PM
Rahukalam:	3:21 PM to 4:47 PM
Yamagandam:	9:39 AM to 11:04 AM
Varjyam:	07:54 AM to 09:34 AM
Gulika:	12:30 PM to 1:56 PM
Amritakalam:	12:01 PM to 01:39 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:07 PM to 12:53 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 33°c
Humidity: 68%
Sunrise: 6:35 AM
Sunset: 6:08 PM

Updated: February 10, 2025 5:00 PM

CM seeks bankers'...

Continued from Page 1

Further, Naidu sought banks' cooperation in investigating irregularities under the previous government, stating that several inquiries are underway in various departments. Bankers' support is crucial in obtaining necessary details for these investigations, he said.

He also urged banks to collaborate in implementing central schemes such as the Surya Ghar project, which aims to provide solar power to 20 lakh families this year. Under this initiative, solar equipment will be supplied to SC and ST families, with a target of up to two kilowatts per household. Naidu stressed that banks' involvement in these green energy projects would significantly benefit the people of the State.

Reiterating the pivotal role of banks in realising the State's development vision, the Chief Minister expressed confidence that cooperation between the banking sector and the government would contribute to Andhra Pradesh's long-term growth.

Ministers Atchen Naidu, Payyavula Kesav, and Kondapalli Srinivas, along with Union Bank CEO Manimekhalai and other banking officials, attended the meeting.

MP Midhun calls for fair...

Continued from Page 1

However, he expressed concern over the marginal increase of just 0.89% in the capital expenditure (CapEx) budget, which stands at Rs 11.21 lakh crore for the coming fiscal year.

The MP highlighted the importance of the Jal Jeevan Mission and questioned the drastic cut in its allocation from Rs 70,692 crore to Rs 22,694 crore in the revised estimates. He warned that such reductions could delay the mission by over a decade, severely affecting water supply projects across the country.

He also criticised the lack of action against Margadarsi, alleging that the company had illegally collected and diverted Rs 2,600 crore in deposits. He called for stringent measures against financial irregularities, asserting that media influence should not shield wrongdoers.

Reddy further raised concerns over Andhra Pradesh's healthcare sector, condemning the state government's decision to reject additional medical seats offered by the Centre. He pointed out that 17 under-construction medical colleges had been stalled, depriving citizens of essential healthcare services. The MP urged the Finance Minister to intervene and ensure necessary funding for these projects. He also sought clarity on the Polavaram project, questioning the reduction in water capacity and the allocation of just Rs 5,000 crore against the project's estimated Rs 60,000 crore cost.

Reiterating his opposition to the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, he demanded the inclusion of the entire Waltair division in the proposed railway zone for Andhra Pradesh.

Raj police arrest...

Continued from Page 1

Earlier in the day, Lakshmi had reiterated her allegations against Kiran Royal, insisting that she had no political affiliations and seeking justice. She appealed to political leaders, including Chandrababu Naidu, Pawan Kalyan, and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, to intervene in her case.

Dismissing Royal's claim that their financial dealings had been settled a decade ago, she pointed out that he had issued a bond just two years ago. She alleged that since Jana Sena is in power, no action had been taken against him despite her complaints.

Expressing concern for her and her children's safety, Lakshmi accused Royal and his associates of making derogatory remarks about her. She also alleged that he had physically assaulted another woman inside her home but that the victim was too afraid to file a complaint. Calling him a "despicable man," she demanded that he be held accountable.

Jagan not Oppn Leader....

Continued from Page 1

The two-day programme will feature Om Birla as the Chief Guest for the inaugural session, while former Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu will participate on the second day.

Legislative Assembly Secretary-General Prasanna Kumar Suryadevara was also present during the meeting.

Later, speaking to the media, Speaker Ayyanna Patrudu criticised recent remarks by YSRCP leaders questioning the obligation of ministers to respond in the Assembly without attending the session. Terming such claims as "strange," he questioned whether the opposition fully understood the laws and regulations governing the Assembly.

He also dismissed YSRCP's demand for equal speaking time in the Assembly for YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, similar to what was granted to former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu. "Under which rule should such time be given? Why should it be granted?" he asked.

Asserting that Jagan Mohan Reddy is not the Leader of the Opposition, Ayyanna Patrudu said that the YSRCP lacks the required numerical strength for the position. "Unfortunately, Jagan does not seem to understand this," he remarked, adding, "We cannot alter laws and rules to accommodate Jagan."

The Speaker also clarified the procedure regarding absenteeism in the Assembly, stating that any member who fails to attend for 60 days without prior permission could face action.

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Strict monitoring to prevent diversion of PDS rice

Inspections being carried out to ensure there are no irregularities: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha has stated that strict monitoring measures have been implemented to prevent the diversion of rice distributed through the Public Distribution System (PDS) to the poor. He stressed that thorough inspections are being carried out to ensure that there are no irregularities.

On Monday, Dr Lakshmisha, along with officials, inspected the Central Warehousing Corporation (CWC) godown in Bhavanipuram. They conducted tests to verify whether any PDS rice was mixed with Custom Mill Rice (CMR) and ensured that the mills were supplying rice according to prescribed standards. They also reviewed the quality tests and rice age tests conducted as part of the verification process, along with checking stock records and other relevant documents.

Later, the Collector conducted a surprise inspection at a Fair Price Shop in Seetharampuram, Vijayawada Urban Area, at No 225, to check licensing, online stock details, quality of the supplied rice, and whether the dealer was maintaining proper records.

During this inspection, Dr Lakshmisha stated that strict monitoring had been put in place to prevent the illegal mixing of recycled PDS rice with CMR, and that buffer godowns were also being regularly inspected. He directed officials to conduct thorough checks on ration shops, MLS points and the activities of the Mobile Dispensing Unit (MDU) operators. He clarified that inspections should be conducted regularly across the district's 957 ration shops and seven Mandal Level Stock (MLS) points, with reports submitted accordingly.

The deputy tahsildars of Civil Supplies were instructed to inspect 20 shops every month, while the tahsildars were instructed to inspect five shops monthly. The District Civil Supplies Manager and the District Civil Supplies Officer were also tasked with inspecting MLS points.

Civil Supplies District Manager M Srinivasa, DSO A Paparao and other officials were present.



Guv takes part in *'Pariksha Pe Charcha'*

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer, along with students of various schools, virtually participated in the eighth edition of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with school children, from Raj Bhavan here on Monday,

During his interaction with the students, the Prime Minister answered many questions from them on dealing with exam pressure. He spoke to the students on stress management, time management, maintaining good food habits, and the benefits of millet food. He advised the students to learn from failures, set goals and try to achieve them, and believe in themselves. Not getting good marks in exams is not the end of life, he told them.

The Prime Minister further said that students should take up any activity that relieves them from stress during exams, and develop the art of writing to express their feelings. He also advised teachers to identify unique skills among students and encourage them to achieve success in those skills.

Dr M Hari Jawaharlal, Secretary to Governor, K Sasidhar, Secretary School Education, Vijayarama Raju, Commissioner of School Education, B Srinivasa Rao, SPD Samagra Shiksha, DEO, NTR district, teachers and students of SKRMRMCH School, Suryaraopet, KSRZP Girls High School, Patamalanka, and CVRMC High School, Governorpet attended the 'Pariskha Pe Charcha' programme.

Govt failed to address water crisis: Vishnu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party's Central constituency coordinator, Malladi Vishnu, has criticised the coalition government for failing to address the water crisis in the constituency. He urged the government to activate the overhead tanks built during the previous YSRCP administration, which are lying unused. Vishnu claimed the current coalition government has not initiated any new projects in the constituency and has halted ongoing ones due to political reasons, worsening the water scarcity issue.

He highlighted the halted construction of a 1,500KL overhead tank in YV Estate, which had been allocated Rs 4.16 crore under the previous government. Despite nearing completion, the project remains stalled. Vishnu warned that the situation would worsen in the summer if these projects are not resumed.

Vishnu also criticised the State government for neglecting the needs of the people, pointing to completed projects like the Rs 3.30-crore water tank in Davu Buchaiah Colony, which remains nonfunctional. He called for immediate action to make these infrastructure projects operational and threatened protests if the government failed to act.

Stress on effective MGNREGS implementation for rural growth

Prioritise creation of sustainable infrastructure and wealth generation in villages

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM



District Collector A Shyam Prasad emphasised the crucial role of the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in driving rural development during a review meeting with district and mandal officials on Monday. The meeting focused on key areas including the Public Grievance Redressal System (PGRS), Employment Guarantee, and the ongoing MSME Survey.

Collector Shyam Prasad stressed that MGNREGS projects should prioritise the creation of sustainable infrastructure and wealth generation in villages. He suggested projects like crop pond construction, water storage structures, and canal dredging to boost agricultural activities. He also reminded officials that the scheme allows for 90 working days for house construction. To optimise efficiency, he proposed organising labour unions based on skill sets and assigning tasks accordingly.

"These initiatives will not only provide livelihoods but also facilitate material development in rural areas," the Collector stated, highlighting the broader impact of employment guarantee schemes. He directed all village and ward secretariat staff to actively participate in the MSME survey and warned of strict action against non-compliance. Expressing concern over slow progress in municipalities, he instructed officials to expedite PGRS resolutions and establish a robust audit system to prevent recurring problems.

The Collector also urged officials to encourage farmer registrations under the PM Kisan scheme before the end of February and increase enrolments under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Scheme. He mandated the "Palle Nidra" programme every Thursday and visits to the villages under the Gram Darsini programme every Friday. He also called for the swift implementation of the PM Jan Maan initiative and accurate data entry into the insect-borne diseases app.

Joint Collector S.S. Shobika announced that training programmes for presiding officers involved in the Legislative Council elections would be held on February 18 and 24. She directed election officials to ensure smooth coordination and oversee necessary arrangements within their respective departments. Also present at the video conference were Parvathipuram ITDA Project Officer and Sub-Collector Ashutosh Srivastava, Seethampeta ITDA Project Officer and Palakonda Sub-Collector C. Yashwanth Kumar Reddy, District Revenue Officer K. Hemalatha, and other senior district officials.

Ten candidates file nominations for Uttarandhra Teachers' MLC polls

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A total of 10 candidates have filed their nominations for the ensuing MLC elections in the Uttarandhra teachers' constituency by Monday.

The scrutiny of nominations is scheduled for February 11, while the last date for withdrawal is February 13. The election is set to take place on February 27, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., across 123 polling stations catering to teachers representing the north coastal Andhra districts of Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Anakapalli, Alluri Sitaram Raju, and Parvathipuram-Manyam.

Visakhapatnam Collector and Returning Officer MN Harendhira Prasad received the nomination documents. The election notification was issued on February 3, but no nominations were filed on the first day. On the second day, three candidates submitted their nominations.

Pakalapati Raghu Varma, the sitting MLC from the teachers' constituency, filed two sets of nominations on behalf of the Andhra Pradesh Teachers Federation. He was accompanied by Vepada Chiranjeevi Rao, the sitting MLC from the graduate constituency. On the final day, February 10, Pedapanki Siva Prasad and Sunkara Srinivasa Rao filed their nominations.

Raghu Varma, a native of Bhogapuram village in Vizianagaram district, had secured victory in the 2019 MLC elections by obtaining 8,372 'quota' votes in the elimination process, including second-preference votes. His closest contender, Gade Srinivasulu Naidu, had secured 6,044 votes in the elimination round.

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) will remain in effect until polling day. As per the final voter list released on December 30, 2024, there are 21,555 registered voters in the Teachers' MLC constituency, including 12,948 male and 8,607 female voters.

The Returning Officer emphasised that all registered voters will be allowed to cast their votes and reaffirmed that the MCC will be strictly enforced throughout the election period.

Allegations of bias: Demand grows for RRB in Vizag

North Andhra youth seek fair job opportunities

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Even as celebrations over the announcement of the South Coast Railway Zone headquarters in Visakhapatnam continue, an urgent call for the establishment of a Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) in the city is gaining momentum. The demand reflects a long-standing need to ensure fair job opportunities for the youth of North Andhra, a region that has allegedly faced systemic discrimination in railway recruitment under the East Coast Railway (ECoR).

For years, candidates from North Andhra have raised concerns about bias in the selection process. Despite qualifying in written and technical examinations, many aspirants from North Andhra claim they have been unfairly eliminated at the interview stage. Reports also highlight instances where job-seekers travelling to Bhubaneswar for recruitment exams have encountered harassment, with some even facing physical assault, forcing them to abandon their pursuit of railway jobs.

"I have cleared multiple rounds, yet I am always rejected in the final interview. It feels like they don't want candidates from our region to succeed," says Y Krishnaveni, an engineering graduate from Visakhapatnam, who has attempted railway recruitment exams several times. "We travel long distances, spend our hard-earned money, only to face discrimination."

Analysts argue that while the creation of an independent railway zone in Visakhapatnam is a step forward, it must also be accompanied by structural reforms that ensure equitable employment opportunities. Without an RRB in Visakhapatnam, local candidates will continue to be at a disadvantage in the recruitment process, exacerbating existing grievances.

"Every railway zone in India has its own recruitment board to ensure local representation in employment. Why should Visakhapatnam be an exception," questions Dr. K. Ramesh, a labour economist. "An RRB in Visakhapatnam will not only create fairer opportunities, but also prevent the marginalisation of North Andhra's job-seekers."

Visakhapatnam has long been recognised as a city of peace and harmony. However, history has demonstrated that prolonged job deprivation can lead to unrest. "We don't want agitation, we just want justice," says Swathi, another job aspirant who has faced repeated setbacks. "How long do we have to wait before we are treated fairly?"

The call for an RRB in Visakhapatnam is not just about employment; it is about fairness, regional equity, and long-overdue justice for the people of North Andhra.

ST Commission member accorded farewell



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leaders of various tribal organisations felicitated ST Commission member Vadithya Shankar Nayak upon the successful completion of his three-year term. These leaders, along with ST Commission staff, highlighted the dedicated service Shankar Nayak rendered to the tribal community across the State.

On Monday, a felicitation event was organised at the ST Commission office in Vijayawada city. After the completion of his three-year tenure, Shankar Nayak and his spouse were honoured with a grand farewell.

Ramaseshu, Secretary, ST Commission, remarked that Vadithya Shankar Nayak's tireless work in addressing tribal issues by visiting all districts of the State had been truly commendable. His efforts have led to significant solutions for many of the problems faced by tribal communities.

Vadithya Shankar Nayak expressed his gratitude to the State government for giving him the opportunity to serve the tribal community. He considered it an honour to have been appointed as a representative for the tribal people of the State. As part of his role, he visited remote areas, dense forests and regions like Nallamala to understand the struggles of the tribal people and to address their issues swiftly. He appreciated the opportunity to work with the ST Commission staff and acknowledged their contributions to his efforts.

Raju Nayak, president of Girajana Praja Samakya, Madigani Gurunatham, State president of SDF, and Hanumanthu Nayak, State youth president, All-India Banjara Seva Sangh, were present among others

Road safety and anti-drug awareness drive held

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM



Amid the vibrant festivities of the Sri Mahalakshmi Ammavari Jatara Mahotsavam, a sombre message resonated with the estimated 50,000 attendees. J. Puram Circle Inspector (CI) M Avatar spearheaded a significant road safety campaign, leveraging the large gathering to address the pervasive dangers of reckless driving, drug abuse, and cybercrime.

Held from February 7th to 9th in Kammasigadam village in Ranastalam mandal, under the JR Puram police station's jurisdiction, the festival provided a unique platform for Mr. Avatar's initiative. Using an innovative LED display, part of the "Sankalpam" (Resolution) initiative, he delivered a compelling presentation that resonated deeply with the predominantly young audience.

The campaign took on added urgency following a fatal traffic accident in the nearby Etcherla police station limits on Thursday, claiming two lives. Mr. Avatar underscored the tragic frequency with which such incidents are caused by intoxication and negligence. He implored young people to resist the temptation to drive under the influence, emphasizing the devastating and lasting consequences of such actions, not only for the victims but also for their families.

"Reckless behavior steals lives and shatters families," Avatar stated. "We must value our lives and the lives of others." The "Sankalpam – No Drugs Bro" initiative, a key component of the campaign, highlighted the interconnected dangers of substance abuse, excessive speed, and drunk driving. Mr. Avatar also stressed the importance of basic safety measures, such as wearing helmets, to mitigate the risk of injury.

District Superintendent of Police (SP) K.V. Maheshwar Reddy has pledged to expand these grassroots awareness programs through the Sankalpam initiative. Avatar made a personal appeal to the youth, urging them to prioritize their well-being and avoid harmful habits. He reiterated the police's commitment to supporting young people through ongoing campaigns and promoting adherence to road safety regulations for a safer community.

The efforts of the JR Puram police, under Avatar's leadership, have drawn widespread praise, underscoring the critical need for sustained public awareness campaigns to foster responsible behaviour on India's roads.

MARY MATHA FESTIVAL

Thousands throng Gunadala shrine on Day 2

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Gunadala Mary Matha shrine, one of India's most renowned Christian pilgrimage sites, continued to draw thousands of devotees from across the country and abroad on the second day of the three-day celebrations on Monday.

Khammam Catholic Diocese Bishop Sagili Prakash, attending as the chief guest, emphasised the power of faith, stating that Mary, the Mother of God, remains a pillar of unwavering belief. He described the Gunadala Mary Shrine as a sanctuary of miracles, fulfilling the wishes of devotees for over a century.

Bishop Prakash highlighted the role of Christian missionaries in serving the underprivileged even before India's independence, guiding them with faith. He stressed that Christian life would be meaningless without bearing witness to faith and reaffirmed that feeding the hungry is a fundamental Christian duty.

"Jesus Christ shed His blood for the welfare of humanity and is always with us," he affirmed, urging devotees to uphold the values of compassion and service.



Over 10,000 perished chickens buried: Minister Durgesh

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY



The Minister assured that all necessary steps were being taken to contain the virus and prevent further infections among poultry. He cautioned residents within a 10-km radius of Kanuru Agraharam to remain vigilant in the coming days

Minister for Tourism and Cinematography Kandula Durgesh has advised people living around Kanuru Agraharam village in Peravali mandal to avoid consuming chicken and eggs as a precautionary measure against the suspected virus outbreak. He confirmed that officials have buried over 10,000 perished chickens in the village.

The Minister assured that all necessary steps were being taken to contain the virus and prevent further infections among poultry. He cautioned residents within a 10-km radius of Kanuru Agraharam to remain vigilant in the coming days.

Addressing reports that over 50,000 chickens had died due to the virus, Durgesh stated that special medical camps were being set up to monitor the situation and provide treatment to affected poultry. A team of veterinary officials and doctors is overseeing containment measures.

"The authorities have completed the burial of 10,000 chickens suspected to have died from the virus. Sanitation measures have been intensified in the village and poultry farms to curb the spread," he said.

The Minister further stated that he had discussed the situation with Collector P. Prashanthi, MPDO Ch. Venkata Ramana, and MRO Achyut Kumari to review containment efforts. He assured that strict precautionary measures were in place to prevent further spread.

Durgesh directed poultry farm owners to implement bio-security protocols and take all necessary precautions to protect healthy chickens. He also instructed officials to ensure the safe burial of virus-infected chickens using proper disposal methods. Warning against the sale of dead chickens, the Minister urged poultry farmers to immediately report any signs of illness to the authorities. He also emphasised the importance of sanitising feed storage areas to limit contamination. "We are taking all necessary steps to vaccinate poultry and enhance their immunity," he assured.

5 interstate burglars arrested, Rs 23 lakh booty recovered



PNS ■ ELURU

The police have arrested five notorious interstate burglars and recovered stolen valuables worth Rs 23 lakh, including gold and silver ornaments.

Addressing the media on Monday, SP K Pratap Shiva Kishore said that the arrested individuals were identified as Vempala Chanti, Saka Marraju, Potula Ammiraju, Gogulamanda Salman Raju, and Kosuri Srinivasa Rao.

The gang was involved in multiple burglaries across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Their modus operandi involved identifying locked houses and committing thefts during the night.

Special teams led by CIs V Koteswara Rao, P Krishna, Ch Rajasekhar, and SI K Prasad were formed to track the culprits. Using advanced technology, the police identified and arrested the gang members.

The key accused, Vempala Chanti and Kosuri Srinivasa Rao, were apprehended near Hanuman Nagar bridge. During interrogation, they revealed the whereabouts of their accomplices, who were later arrested at Kotturu Indiramma Colony.

The police recovered 251 grams of gold jewellery and 13 kg of silver ornaments, collectively valued at over Rs 23 lakh.

Interestingly, the gang had also targeted the residences of senior officials. A total of 16 cases were registered against them in Eluru, Kakinada, Guntur, Bhimavaram, Hyderabad, and Khammam.

The SP commended the police personnel for successfully apprehending the burglars.



Nine candidates file nominations for MLC polls

PNS ■ ELURU

As many as 49 candidates filed 72 nomination papers for the MLC graduates constituency election of West and East Godavari districts. The filing of nominations came to an end on Monday.

The scrutiny of the nominations will be held on February 11 and the last date for withdrawals of nominations is February 13.

District Collector and election returning officer K Vetri Selvi said that 29 candidates filed their nominations for the MLC election on the last day on Monday.

The notification for the MLC election was issued on February 3 and the nomination process came to an end today. After completion of withdrawals a clear picture of how many candidates would be in the fray would emerge, the Collector said.

Perabattula Rajasekhar filed a nomination as TDP candidate for the MLC election on Monday. He filed his nomination, accompanied by Union Minister of State Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma, Water Resources Development Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu and Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar.

Eradication of child labour stressed



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector A Thameem Ansariya urged voluntary organisations to play a crucial role alongside government agencies in eradicating child labour.

The Collector flagged off an awareness rally on Monday to mark National Child Labour Eradication Day. Speaking on the occasion, she emphasised the need for coordinated efforts between voluntary organisations and government agencies to identify and curb child labour in the district.

Later, the Collector released wall posters to spread awareness and administered a pledge to eliminate child labour.

DEO Kiran Kumar, District Deputy Labour Officer Gayatri, DMHO K. Venkateswarlu, Revenue Officer Obulesu, and HELP voluntary organisation PD B.V. Sagar were among those present.

FOCUS ON ECO, TEMPLE, AND HEALTH TOURISM

Telangana gears up for new Tourism Policy-2025

Skywalk project at Tank Bund and Necklace Road

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari chairing a high-level review meeting on the upcoming Tourism Policy-2025

Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari chaired a high-level review meeting on the upcoming Tourism Policy-2025 at Dr BR Ambedkar Secretariat on Monday. The discussion centered on identifying key heritage sites, tourism destinations and strategies to boost the state's tourism sector.

The Chief Secretary directed officials to integrate prominent tourism and heritage locations into the new policy, ensuring sustainable development. She emphasised the need to promote eco-tourism, temple tourism and health tourism projects to attract a larger number of visitors. She also suggested the development of a skywalk project at Tank Bund and Necklace Road to enhance the experience for tourists visiting Hyderabad's historic monuments.

Officials from the Youth Advancement, Tourism, and Culture department have studied tourism policies from other states and formulated a framework tailored for Telangana. The draft policy was reviewed during the meeting, with inputs from various departments.

Key officials in attendance included Infrastructure Advisor K Srinivasa Raju, Finance Special Chief Secretary Ramakrishna Rao, Industries and IT Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, Endowments Principal Secretary Shailaja Ramaiyer, Tourism Secretary Smita Sabharwal, Health Secretary Christina Z Chongthu, PCCF RM Dobriyal, CMO Secretaries S Sangeeta and Chandrasekhar Reddy, OSD Vemula Srinivasulu, HMDA Commissioner Sarfaraz Ahmad and TSTDC MD Prakash Reddy, among other senior officials.

NIT AP emerging as a hub for innovation: Director



PNS ■ ELURU

The National Institute of Technology, Andhra Pradesh (NIT AP), Tadepalligudem, is not just an educational institution but also a centre for research and innovation, said Prof. N.V. Ramana Rao, In-charge Director of NIT AP.

He inaugurated the newly established DSIR-Common Research Technology Development Hub (CRTDH) at the Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Academic Complex on the NIT campus. The hub has been set up with financial support of Rs 7.50 crore from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Government of India. Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Ramana Rao emphasised the importance of quality research in renewable energy and electric vehicles for the benefit of society. He stated that dedicated research efforts in laboratories lead to innovative ideas.

Highlighting the significance of applied research, he said that translating research outcomes into practical solutions is the true measure of innovation. He also congratulated Dr. Sandeep and Dr. Sankar for their efforts in securing the Rs 7.50 crore project for NIT AP.

Dr. Vipin C. Shukla, Scientist-G and Head of CRTDH at DSIR, New Delhi, noted that micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of the Indian economy, and the primary objective of the CRTDH is to support and enhance their growth.

NIT AP Registrar Dr. P. Dinesh Shankar Reddy, Dean (R&C) Dr. G.R.K. Sastry, DSIR (New Delhi) scientists Dr. Kailash Petkar and Dr. Ranjit Bhairava explained the significance of the DSIR hub and the various benefits it offers.

Project Managers Dr. V. Sandeep and Dr. P. Shankar stated that this hub at NIT AP is the 18th in the country and the first of its kind among NITs. They urged MSME entrepreneurs to utilise the services provided by the hub.

Following the inauguration, Prof. Ramana Rao, DSIR scientists, and faculty members visited the hub and inspected the research equipment. Later, the Director and DSIR scientists were felicitated with mementoes.

The event was attended by Dr. G.B. Veeresh Kumar, Heads of Departments Dr. T. Ramesh, Dr. Raffi Mohammed, Dr. Vinoth Kumar Raja, Dr. Kiran Teeparthi, Dr. Srikanth Allamsetty, Dr. Gurrala Kiran Kumar, and other faculty members. The programme commenced with the lighting of the lamp.

Naidu trying to cover up his lies on 'laddu' issue: Ambati

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Former Minister Ambati Rambabu has accused TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu attempted to cover up his false claims regarding the Tirupati laddu issue by spreading misinformation and making arrests with ulterior motives.

Speaking to the media on Monday, Ambati Rambabu alleged that Chandrababu Naidu is trying to politicise the matter by falsely claiming that animal fat was present in the ghee supplied to TTD for preparing the 'laddu' prasadam. He asserted that there was no such contamination and that the ghee undergoes quality control tests before being accepted.

He pointed out that during the TDP regime (2014-19), ghee tankers were rejected on 15 occasions for failing quality standards, whereas under Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's tenure, 18 tankers were rejected.

"The arrests being made now are merely a face-saving exercise by Chandrababu, who made false claims about the quality of Tirupati 'laddu', alleging the presence of animal fat in the ghee," he said.

Criticising Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan, he said the latter created a spectacle by attempting to cleanse the temple, claiming that a grave mistake had occurred at Tirumala.

"There is no truth in the allegation that the ghee used for prasadam was contaminated," he asserted.

Referring to recent remarks by actor Chiranjeevi, Ambati Rambabu said his statement that Jana Sena is an offshoot of Praja Rajyam indicates a possible merger, similar to what happened in the past.

13 kg ganja seized, 5 held



PNS ■ ELURU

The police seized 13.288 kg of cannabis and arrested five drug peddlers in Tadepalligudem, officials said on Sunday.

Speaking to the media, DSP D Viswanath said that based on a tip-off, a police team apprehended the gang at Railway Shed Road in Tadepalligudem. The arrested individuals have been identified as Musunuri Durga Prasad, G Murali, Kankipati Nagaraju, K Balakrishna, and Nalli Srinivas. However, the kingpin of the gang, K Aravind, remains absconding, he added.

The gang was targeting college students, selling cannabis in small quantities, the DSP said. Efforts are on to apprehend the absconding accused.

Cockfight den raided; 119 roosters seized

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Police raided a cockfight den in Koringa village, arresting 119 organisers and gamblers. They seized Rs 9.87 lakh, 112 roosters, five cars, and 21 motorcycles.

Acting on a tip-off, a team led by SI Satyanarayana conducted the raid at a mango orchard where the illegal activity was underway. The arrested persons are being produced before the court, police said.



Harish Rao protests with RMPs at Indira Park, calls ZP polls a Referendum on 'broken promises'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao launched a scathing attack on the Congress Government, accusing it of deceiving the people with grand pre-election promises and abandoning them after coming to power.

Addressing a protest by RMPs and PMPs at the Indira Park, he said that the government had failed every section of society while Chief Minister Revanth Reddy remained occupied with frequent but fruitless trips to Delhi.

Harish ridiculed Revanth Reddy's inability to secure a meeting with Rahul Gandhi despite multiple visits. "Even their own leader won't take him seriously. If Rahul Gandhi refuses to meet him, how can the people of Telangana trust him?" he asked.



Condemning the police harassment of RMPs and PMPs, he reminded the protesters that the Congress had promised training and certification for them but was now filing cases instead.

"During the BRS government, we ensured your livelihoods were protected. We never harassed you with police cases. But now, under Congress, you live in fear," he said, demanding an immediate rollback of cases and implementation of the promised training program.

On the issue of farm loan waivers, Harish accused the Congress of orchestrating a financial fraud. "They promised Rs 45,000 crore but kept reducing the amount. Now, they claim Rs. 21,000 crore has been disbursed, but in reality, only Rs. 15,000-16,000 crore was given. And that too, not from fresh allocations, but by diverting welfare funds," he alleged.

He detailed how Congress cut funds from Rythu Bandhu, pensions, festival sarees and student fee reimbursements to make up the amount. "This is not a real loan waiver. It's just the Congress taking money away from pocket and putting it in another," he said.

the pioneer

ACROSS THE STATES



Woman collapses, dies while dancing

A 23-year-old woman collapsed and died while dancing on stage at a wedding in Madhya Pradesh's Vidisha district. According to eye-witnesses, the woman, Parnita Jain, was dancing at her cousin's 'sangeet' ceremony at a resort on Vidisha bypass road on Saturday night when she collapsed in the middle of the performance. Indore resident Parnita died, possibly due to cardiac arrest, Sachin Jain, a local Jain community leader said. A video of the incident has surfaced on social media, in which the woman can be seen putting up a well-rehearsed performance and suddenly falling on the stage. He said people at the venue rushed to the stage and performed CPR on her, but she did not respond. She was then taken to a private hospital, where doctors declared her dead. Jain said that Parnita's twin brother had died due to a heart attack while cycling 12 years ago. The last rites were performed on Sunday evening in Vidisha, without post-mortem.



Kerala political leaders apologise in contempt case

Leaders of various political parties facing contempt of court proceedings over roadblock events in Kerala appeared before the High Court, tendering apologies for their actions. Those who appeared before the court included CPI leaders Binoy Viswam and Pannian Raveendran, Congress leaders Mohammed Shiyas and T J Vinod, and CPI(M) leaders M Vijayakumar, Kadakampally Surendran, V K Prasanth, and V Joy. CPI(M) leader M V Govindan has been instructed to appear before the court on Wednesday at 4 pm. Other political leaders, who appeared before the court, have been exempted from further personal appearances. The leaders informed the court that they did not justify their actions. The court emphasised that roads are not meant for setting up stages and expressed dissatisfaction with the affidavit submitted by the police officials. The court ruled that the respondents no longer need to appear in person but must submit affidavits.



Delhi Police busts child trafficking gang

The railway unit of Delhi Police has busted a child-trafficking gang with the arrest of four traffickers and rescued two children, including an infant, officials said on Monday. According to the police, with their arrest, the team has solved three cases spanning from 2023 to 2025, also revealing that the gang was supplying trafficked children to childless couples under the pretext of adoption. "The investigation began after a case was reported at the New Delhi Railway Station on October 17, last year. A woman lodged a complaint stating that her two-and-a-half-year-old son had been kidnapped while she was asleep in the station's main hall," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Railway) KPS Malhotra said. The officer said that CCTV footage revealed an unknown woman taking the child in an auto-rickshaw. Teams traced the auto-rickshaw driver who confirmed that he had dropped the suspect near the Badarpur-Faridabad toll gate. "While investigating the matter, the police teams also got to know that on July 31, another woman's three-year-old son was kidnapped from the ticket counter hall at the railway station.

How can re-passed bills be referred to President?

SC questions TN Guv's silence

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday questioned Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi's "silence" before withholding assent to the bills passed by the legislative assembly and wondered how could he refer the "re-passed bills" to the President.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan posed questions to the Governor, represented by attorney general R Venkataramani, and reserved its verdict on the dispute.

"Why was the Governor silent for years? Why did he not make any communication with the government? Then he withholds his assent and reserves the bills for the consideration of the President," it said. It went on to ask, "How could he refer the re-passed bills to the President?"

Venkataramani submitted there was no express provision in the Constitution which restrained the Governor from sending the re-passed bill to the President for consideration.

Nature of warfare changing rapidly, need to improve solutions: Rajnath

PNS ■ BENGALURU



"The essence of this conclave is, how to join hands to make India a leading defence manufacturer and service provider at the global scale. All this has to be viewed in the backdrop of the new technological revolutions such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum technology and others."

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said as the nature of warfare is changing rapidly, there is a need to adopt and improve solutions constantly, and efforts in defence manufacturing have to focus on creating counter measures for emerging areas.

Also, urging the CEOs of Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to come forward and utilise the opportunities offered by the expanding Indian defence ecosystem, he said, the opportunities are driven by our policies of 'Aatmanirbharata' or 'self-reliance' in defence production and facilitated by conducive policy regime.

The Defence Minister said this while addressing the CEOs Roundtable, as part of the 15th edition of Aero India Aero here.

"The essence of this conclave is, how to join hands to make India a leading defence manufacturer and service provider at the global scale. All this has to be viewed in the backdrop of the new technological revolutions such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum technology and others," Singh said.

He said, "As the nature of warfare is changing rapidly, we need to adopt and improve solutions constantly."

"For example, the earlier reliance on pure hardware based systems is increasingly getting replaced by software based systems. Today, the nature of communication and data sharing in military operations are getting much more complex. Our reliance on space based navigation systems, space based communication and surveillance implies that space based assets would have to be integrated in our operational plans," he said.

Noting that the use of drones in recent conflicts indicates that the future would depend on the integrated efforts of manned, unmanned and autonomous warfare systems, the Defence Minister said, hence, our efforts in defence manufacturing have to focus on creating counter measures for these emerging areas.

Highlighting some of the challenges and concerns coming from the rapidly changing technological scenario in the defence sector, he said, all these challenges need specific targeted solutions and counter measures.

Aero India-2025: SU-57, F35 fighter aircraft steal show

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Russia's Sukhoi 57 and United States of America's Lockheed Martin F35 stole the show during the Aero India-2025 with their dazzling performance here on Monday. In a first, the Aero India mega event witnessed the participation of two of the world's most advanced fifth-generation fighter aircraft equipped with stealth capabilities.

The inaugural day of the five-day event witnessed the two advanced combat aircraft taking to the sky with huge roar and performing the jaw-dropping manoeuvres in the midair.

The Su-57 thrilled the audience with its stunning agility as it took off after a short run on the runway and turned swiftly in the air at ease requiring little space.

The F35 too required little time on the runway for a quick take off. Its agility was quite impressive.

5 of 31 Naxals carried cumulative bounty of Rs 25L

PNS ■ BIJAPUR

Chhattisgarh police on Monday said five of the 31 Naxalites gunned down in an encounter with security forces in Bijapur district carried a cumulative bounty of Rs 25 lakh.

Security personnel have recovered 24 firearms and a huge cache of explosives from the encounter site on a forested hill, they said.

In one of the biggest strikes on Naxalites in the state, security forces on Sunday killed 31 ultras, including 11 women, on a forested hill along the border of Madded and Farsegarh police station areas of Bijapur.

Two security personnel were also killed in the gunfight, and as many others were injured.

According to police, the operation was launched by the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) and Bastar Fighters, all units of the state police, on February 7, based on inputs about the presence of special zonal committee member of Telangana state committee of Maoist Bandi Prakash, Bhaskar and area committee members of the national area park committee.

Five slain cadres have been identified, and efforts are on to ascertain the identity of the others, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range Sundarraj P said in a press conference here.

He said that of the deceased, Hunga Karma, a divisional committee member of the West Bastar division of Maoists, carried a reward of Rs 8 lakh, Mangu Hemla, platoon no. 11 commander, Subhash Oyam, a member of the national park area committee, and Sannu, a Gangaloor area committee member, carried a bounty of Rs 5 lakh each.



Budget politically driven with Delhi polls in mind: PC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader P Chidambaram on Monday said the Union Budget 2025-26 was a 'politically-driven budget' with Delhi elections in mind as it ignored the poor and bottom half of the population.

Initiating discussion on Union Budget 2025-26 in Rajya Sabha, Chidambaram also accused Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman of claiming to improve fiscal deficit by cutting Centre's capital expenditure and grants-in-aid to states and terming it as bad economics.

"There ought to be a philosophy behind the Budget, but I cannot find one in this Budget. I shall not attempt to do so because after going through the Budget speech and Budget numbers, I believe there is no philosophy behind the Budget," he said.

Chidambaram further said, "It is obvious that the budget was politically driven, I shall not elaborate upon that but I congratulate the finance minister for achieving one of her objectives a couple of days ago."He was referring to BJP's win in the Delhi assembly elections.

The former finance minister also stated that the MGNREGA daily wage could have been increased "because the poorest are the ones who are going for MGNREGA work" and also the statutory minimum wage across the board under the Minimum Wages Act, could have been raised and that could have benefitted thousands and thousands of labourers.

Over 5,100 birds culled after avian flu outbreak at Ranchi

PNS ■ RANCHI

A total of 5,163 birds were culled in Ranchi on Monday, after an avian flu case was reported at a poultry farm of Birsa Agriculture University (BAU), an official said.

As many as 5,488 birds have been culled in the past two days at the BAU and the entire affected zone was sanitised, he said.

"On Sunday, a total of 325 guinea fowls were culled, while 5,163 birds were culled on Monday in the university campus," District Animal Husbandry Officer (DAHO) Kavindra Nath Singh said.

OM Birla flags concerns over fewer sittings of legislative bodies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday expressed concern over the declining participation of lawmakers in legislative proceedings and fewer sittings of legislative bodies and low productivity in legislatures.

Addressing the Orientation Programme for newly elected Members of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council, Birla urged the legislators to actively participate in the House proceedings during sessions and listen to all the emanating view points. Birla also expressed displeasure over planned disruptions in legislatures, saying such an approach was against the democratic spirit of the Constitution. The Lok Sabha Speaker appreciated the productivity of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly. Referring to the glorious history of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, the Speaker said that since its establishment in 1937, it has laid the foundation for socio-economic change.

The Lok Sabha Speaker said it was the responsibility of the legislators to ensure proper legislative drafting during the law-making process, as even a small error can have long-term effect on people.

President Murmu takes holy dip at Sangam

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

President Droupadi Murmu took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam here on Monday and said the huge gathering of faith and belief at the Maha Kumbh is a living symbol of India's rich cultural heritage.

After the dip at the Sangam, Murmu offered a coconut to the Ganga river and prayers to the Sun god.

Later, in a post on X, she said, "Today I had the good fortune of bathing in the holy confluence of Maa Ganga, Yamuna and the stream Saraswati in the divine atmosphere of Prayagraj Maha Kumbh."



The president said the Maha Kumbh conveys the message of unity and spirituality to humanity.

"This huge gathering of faith and belief is a wonderful and living symbol of India's rich cultural heritage. Maha Kumbh gives the message of unity and spirituality to humanity. I pray to Maa Ganga that she keeps her blessings on everyone and keeps spreading happiness and peace in everyone's life," she added.

On her way to the Sangam, the president fed grains to the migratory Siberian birds flocking the river.

Officials said while going to the Sangam Ghat by boat, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath told Murmu that the green water coming from one side was that of the Yamuna, while the yellow-coloured water on the other side was that of the Ganga.

"We are going to the confluence of these two rivers," the chief minister said.

The president also offered prayers at the Akshayavat and Bade Hanuman temple.

AFTER HOLY DIP AT MAHA KUMBH

Lakhs of devotees head to Kashi, Ayodhya

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ/ VARANASI/AYODHYA



"We've heard that apart from Prayagraj, Kashi and Ayodhya are also witnessing heavy crowds. But this is a rare opportunity to visit all the three places during Maha Kumbh. We will also go to Ayodhya."

Undeterred by challenges, lakhs of devotees thronging the Maha Kumbh for a holy dip at the Sangam are now heading towards Kashi and Ayodhya, officials said.

According to government data, an average of 1.44 crore people are taking a holy bath at the Maha Kumbh every day.

Dr Sushma, who arrived in Prayagraj from Ranchi with her son on Monday, said. "After taking a dip in the Sangam and visiting the fair, we will head to Kashi for Lord Shiva's darshan and later proceed to Ayodhya."

Similarly, 74-year-old Ketari Devi from Ara, Bihar, said, "We saw on TV and mobile that this Maha Kumbh is happening after 144 years. After taking a holy dip, we will visit Kashi. Despite the huge crowd, we hope that we will get his darshan."

Nishant Abhishek, who travelled from Mumbai, added, "We've heard that apart from Prayagraj, Kashi and Ayodhya are also witnessing heavy crowds. But this is a rare opportunity to visit all the three places during Maha Kumbh. We will also go to Ayodhya."

ACP (Traffic) Shailendra Singh said that a significant number of devotees are heading towards Varanasi and Ayodhya after their visit to the Maha Kumbh. ADCP (Traffic) Kuldeep Singh said that compared to the 2019 Kumbh, the crowd this time is much larger even on regular days, leading to frequent traffic congestion.

Due to the heavy rush outside the Prayagraj railway station, the Northern Railway's Lucknow division has temporarily closed it for passenger movement from 1:30 pm on February 9 to midnight on February 14, an official statement said. However, eight other railway stations in the Maha Kumbh area continue to operate regular and special trains.

As per government figures, over 44 crore devotees have taken a dip at the Triveni Sangam till February 9. On February 10, by 10 am, over 63 lakh devotees had performed the ritual bath.

On key bathing days, the footfall has been record-breaking. On January 13 (Paush Purnima), it was 1.70 crore while on January 14 (Makar Sankranti) it was 3.50 crore, and 7.64 crore (highest so far) took dip in the Sangam on Mauni Amavasya.

With an average of 1.44 crore people taking a dip daily, authorities are managing an unprecedented surge of pilgrims in the holy city.

Over 1.02 crore people have taken holy dip in the Sangam till 4 pm, which included over 10 lakh Kalpwasis and 91.94 lakh pilgrims.

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS

Prosecution must be done seriously, not for sake of it: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



"There was a judgement by the Delhi High Court that there was cover up and the state did not prosecute properly," Phoolka said and sought permission to place the judgements on record.

The Supreme Court on Monday quizzed Delhi Police for not filing appeals against acquittals in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases and said the prosecution should be carried out "seriously and not just for the sake of it".

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan told additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, representing Delhi Police, that special leave petitions against the acquittals must be filed and fought with sincerity.

"In a number of cases you have not challenged the order passed by the Delhi High Court. Frankly speaking, filing SLPs doesn't serve purpose unless it is filed and prosecuted seriously. You tell us, in matters which were filed earlier, were any senior lawyers engaged to argue the matter? It has to be done seriously not just for the sake of it. It must be done earnestly and sincerely. We are not saying that the outcome must be in a particular manner," it said.

Senior advocate HS Phoolka, representing petitioner S Gurlad Singh Kahlon, submitted the appeals filed by the police were just a formality. "There was a judgement by the Delhi High Court that there was cover up and the state did not prosecute properly,"Phoolka said and sought permission to place the judgements on record.

During the hearing, the ASG said letters were written to file appeals in six cases of acquittal.

The bench has posted the hearing on February 17.

It was hearing a PIL filed by former Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee member Kahlon, on whose plea the top court in 2018 constituted an SIT led by justice Dhingra to probe 199 cases where investigations stood closed.

Delhi witnessed large-scale violence and killings of persons from the Sikh community following former PM Indira Gandhi's assassination by her bodyguards in 1984 and the cases stemming from the incident have seen some major twists and turns 40 years on.

According to a report of the one-man Nanavati Commission, formed to probe the violence, there were 587 FIRs registered in Delhi in relation to the 1984 riots that witnessed 2,733 people being killed. Of the total, the police shut about 240 cases as "untraced" and about 250 cases resulted in acquittals.

VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 11, 2025

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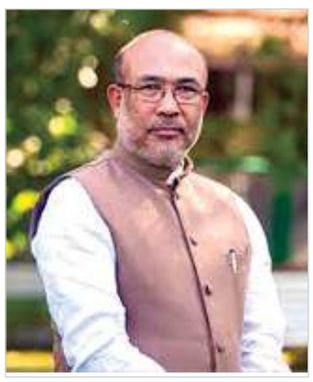
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Resignation long overdue

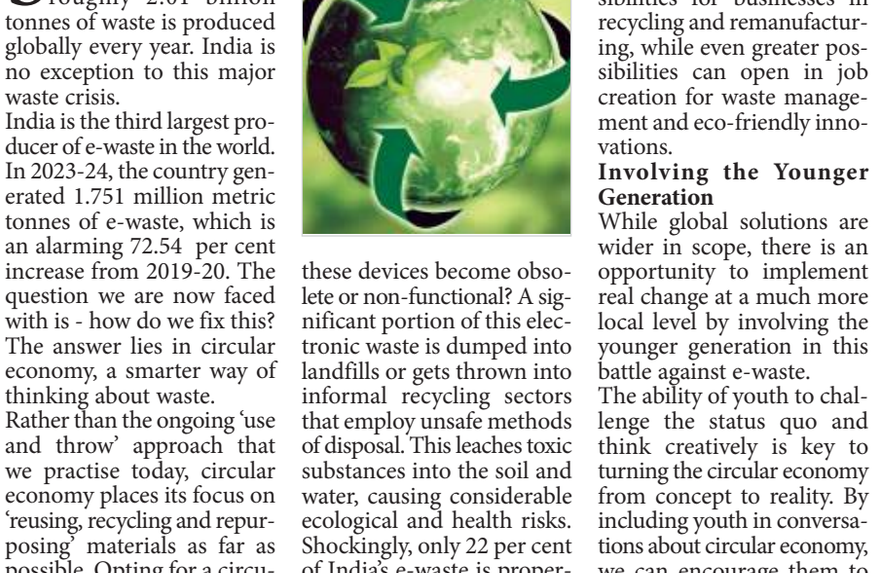
N Biren Singh's resignation as Manipur Chief Minister marks the end of a turbulent tenure but the challenges remain

The adage 'better late than never' fits perfectly in describing the resignation of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh, who stepped down ahead of the State budget session. His resignation comes after nearly two years of ethnic violence in the north-eastern state. His resignation came amid mounting pressure from his own party MLAs, and escalating ethnic tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities. The ethnic conflict in Manipur, which began in May 2023, has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people and the displacement of over 60,000 individuals. The violence has been primarily between the Meitei community, which constitutes the majority in the Imphal Valley, and the Kuki-Zo tribal groups residing in the hill districts. The conflict has been attributed to disputes over economic benefits and job quota. Within the State BJP unit, dissent had been brewing for months and pressure building to oust Singh. Several party MLAs from the state had reportedly approached the central leadership seeking Singh's replacement.



The situation reached a tipping point ahead of the Budget session of the Manipur Assembly which was scheduled to begin on February 10, 2025. Dissident MLAs were prepared to support a no-confidence motion that the opposition Congress party was likely to move. Faced with the possibility of losing the government's majority, the BJP's central leadership withdrew its support for Singh, leading to his resignation. Singh's resignation opens a new chapter for Manipur, but significant challenges still remain. Indeed, the people of Manipur have suffered a lot in last two years and many precious lives have been lost. In fact this resignation is late by months if not by a year. The Central Government should have ensured that the State apparatus was working well and showing results but that did not happen and despite his mishandling of the situation he continued in the office. Now the immediate task for the incoming leadership will be to restore peace and foster reconciliation between the Meitei and Kuki communities. The state administration must address the root causes of the conflict and implement inclusive policies that ensure equitable development and representation for all communities will be essential. Additionally, the new leadership must focus on rehabilitating displaced individuals and rebuilding infrastructure damaged during the violence. Ensuring justice for victims and holding perpetrators accountable will be vital steps toward healing and preventing future conflicts. The Central government's role will be pivotal in supporting Manipur's journey toward peace. Providing adequate resources, facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, and ensuring that security forces act impartially will be necessary to create an environment conducive to reconciliation. While N Biren Singh's resignation marks the end of a tumultuous period in Manipur's politics, the path to lasting peace and development will require concerted efforts from the new state leadership, the central government and the communities themselves.

PICTALK



A child takes photographs of flowers during the Delhi Tulip Festival organised by NDMC, in New Delhi PTI

Aga Khan IV: A bridge of tolerance in a polarised world



BHOPINDER **SINGH**

His legacy, embodied in the Aga Khan Development Network, stands as a testament to pluralism and social upliftment, offering a model of progressive faith



World at large is suffering from acute polarisation based on religious fervour laced with extremism, supremacism and revisionism, across all faiths. This aggressive phenomenon when conflated with politics conjures a dangerous admixture of hatemongering, intolerance and 'othering'.

Very rarely do such dark times lead to the positing of alternatives that bear progressive and reformist interpretations of faith, inter-faith dialogues, and celebration of the proverbial 'other'. One relatively small sect (estimated globally at about 20 million) that defied this regressive trend has been the Ismaili Muslims, led by their spiritual leader, Aga Khan, an honorific title held by the hereditary Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Shias.

Recently the 49th Imam, Prince Shah Karim al Husseini, Aga Khan IV (revered as Mawlana Hazar Imam, by his adherents), passed away peacefully, leaving the world poorer with the loss of the rare 'bridge' in the divided world of faiths. He was a shining and rare example of how faith could be led to coexist in complete harmony with modernity, tolerance and large purposes in life. He defied so many stereotypes of religious leaders as he seamlessly connected the seemingly disconnected world of Ummah (Muslim world) with other faiths, the proverbial 'East' with the 'West', and even the sense of connecting the spiritual with the material, without ever losing the essential essence and benefit to humankind.

The wise leader of his faith always chose the nobler path of dialogue, inclusion and even protection of the 'other' with his foremost organisation, Aga Khan Development Network, employing over 96,000 people in 30 countries towards community work.

As his foundation noted, "Throughout his life, His Highness emphasised the view of Islam as a thinking, spiritual faith: one that teaches compassion and tolerance and that upholds the dignity of humankind. As such, pluralism – the embrace and celebration of diversity – has formed a central pillar of the Ismaili Imamat's work". Delhi itself is witness to the yeoman service in restoring historical sites like the Humayun Tomb, Sunder Nursery, Hazrat Nizamuddin Basti and Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan's Mausoleum. Their societal impact in reaching out to unseen millions with initiatives on health and nutrition, education, early childhood development, agriculture and food security, climate resilience, or even in the space of enterprise, is unprecedented in walking the talk of pluralism and social service.

Even though the larger fount of Islam is going through a crisis of sectarian tensions – the sect led by Aga Khan constantly guided his adherents towards education, employability and peaceful coexistence with all other faiths. Sadly, such progressive anchorage and beliefs also led many within the Ummah to declare the Ismailis as apostates. Ironically no place personifies that dichotomy within faith than Pakistan itself, whose father of the nation, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, was an Ismaili.

It is said Agha Khan I himself gave the name 'Mohammed Ali' to Qaid-e-Azam – however today Ismailis are now openly persecuted and discriminated against within Pakistan. They have even attempted to rewrite history by suggesting that Jinnah had opted to practice Sunni Islam by the end of his life! However, such open diminishment by the other majority strains of Islam has never stopped the Ismailis under Aga Khan to continue investing selflessly in things like Universities, Health facilities, rural support programs etc., be it Pakistan, or even in Afghanistan, where the Aga Khan Development Network remains committed with relief work, socio-economic projects and restoration work, despite the puritanical and discriminatory outlook of the Taliban.

> SADLY, SUCH PROGRESSIVE ANCHORAGE AND BELIEFS ALSO LED MANY WITHIN THE UMMAH TO DECLARE THE ISMAILIS AS APOSTATES. IRONICALLY NO PLACE PERSONIFIES THAT DICHOTOMY WITHIN FAITH THAN PAKISTAN ITSELF, WHOSE FATHER OF THE NATION, MOHAMMED ALI JINNAH, WAS AN ISMAILI

It is little wonder that the Indian Sub-Continent (home to the largest presence of Ismailis) has given a large number of Ismailis of eminence like entrepreneur-philanthropist Azim Premji, nuclear physicist-commentator Pervez Hoodbhoy, painter-filmmaker Tyeb Mehta, jurist-diplomat MC Chagla, Indian Air Force Chief Idris Hasan Latif, journalist-activist Sharmeen Obaid etc., proving how the community always punched above its weight in terms of population numbers. Befittingly, the Indian Prime Minister condoled the passing away of Aga Khan IV by recollecting, "He was a visionary, who dedicated his life to service and spirituality.

His contributions in areas like health, education, rural development and women empowerment will continue to inspire several people." Earlier in 2015, the Indian Government had conferred the Padma Vibhushan to Aga Khan IV.

Given the bitter politics and narratives of the day that seek to 'divide' rather than 'unite' each other – the Aga Khanis are a glorious example of the model citizenry that is inclusive, progressive and concerned about the future, and not just mired in the darkness of the past.

The forward-looking moorings were perhaps institutionalised with the selection of a twenty-one year Aga Khan IV (by his grandfather) overlooking his father, "in view of the altered conditions in the world in very recent years, including the discoveries of atomic sciences, I am convinced that it is in the best interest of the Shia Muslim Ismailian Community that I should be succeeded by a young man", and therefore the "Imam of the atomic age" lived up to his credo and expected anchorage.

Today the mantle passes on to his son, Prince Rahim Aga Khan, to continue providing that hope and direction not just to Ismailis, but also to the larger comity of Ummah and mankind, to still persevere with hope in interfaith dialogue and collective progress, as an investable possibility.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

Why circular economy must be India's response to the rising threat of e-waste



PANKAJ **BAJAJ**

Circular economy, focused on reusing, recycling and repurposing materials, can create jobs and build a sustainable future

Studies by the United Nations show that roughly 2.01 billion tonnes of waste is produced globally every year. India is no exception to this major waste crisis.

India is the third largest producer of e-waste in the world. In 2023-24, the country generated 1.751 million metric tonnes of e-waste, which is an alarming 72.54 per cent increase from 2019-20. The question we are now faced with is - how do we fix this? The answer lies in circular economy, a smarter way of thinking about waste.

Rather than the ongoing 'use and throw' approach that we practise today, circular economy places its focus on 'reusing, recycling and repurposing' materials as far as possible. Opting for a circular economy can have manifold benefits for us, including reduced pollution, new employment opportunities, and a healthier, sustainable future.

The Dire Need for a Circular Economy

In our dynamic digital world, consumers are purchasing gadgets at an unprecedented rate. But what happens when these devices become obsolete or non-functional? A significant portion of this electronic waste is dumped into landfills or gets thrown into informal recycling sectors that employ unsafe methods of disposal. This leaches toxic substances into the soil and water, causing considerable ecological and health risks. Shockingly, only 22 per cent of India's e-waste is properly recycled, while the rest contributes to pollution and resource wastage.

India has a chance to turn its waste crisis into an opportunity by adopting a circular economy. By concentrating on the repair, refurbishment, and recycling of electronic items, we can significantly decrease carbon emissions, conserve valuable resources, and even stimulate the economy. There are endless possibilities for businesses in recycling and remanufacturing, while even greater possibilities can open in job creation for waste management and eco-friendly innovations.

Involving the Younger Generation

While global solutions are wider in scope, there is an opportunity to implement real change at a much more local level by involving the younger generation in this battle against e-waste.

The ability of youth to challenge the status quo and think creatively is key to turning the circular economy from concept to reality. By including youth in conversations about circular economy, we can encourage them to view waste as not an end goal, but a resource that can open up other avenues, if explored.

Government's Role in Promoting Circularity

The Indian government has already taken several measures to mitigate the waste issue and to encourage circular practices. Policies such as the National Resource Efficiency Policy (NREP) seek to minimise wastes while maximising resources. The well-known Swachh Bharat Mission has not only improved sanitation but also highlighted the importance of responsible waste disposal.

Other initiatives such as the Atal Innovation Mission aims at getting the younger generation to think innovatively about meeting the sustainability challenge. Additionally, the Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) campaign launched by Prime Minister Modi at COP 26 in 2021 endeavours to sensitise different sections to inculcate green habits in their daily lives. With the incorporation of this policy along with regional effort, we can lay a stronger base for the circular economy in India.

Moving towards a circular economy is about securing India's future. However, most importantly, it's about cultivating a shift in mindset; from a culture of waste to a culture of value.

(The writer is founder & Director, Bajaj Foundation; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

N BIREN SINGH RESIGNS AS MANIPUR CM

Madam — The belated resignation of the Chief Minister of Manipur after 21 months proving his inability to rule or ensure peace in the state exposes the thirst for power with the least concern for the wellbeing of the people. More than 250 people are reported to have been killed, around 60,000 driven into the forest, destruction of properties and places of worship, government weapons allowed to be looted, women paraded nude in public, rapes and murders, assembly had to meet only for a few minutes to avoid a constitutional crisis, governor and minister ran for safety and still neither the CM volunteered his quit nor the Union Home Ministry dared to remove him in the interest of the people of the State.

This resignation seems to be an outcome of compulsion, as his own MLAs are seen losing patience and extending support to the no-confidence motion planned by the Congress party. Though it is a fit case for dissolving the assembly instead of keeping it under suspended animation and putting the state under the president's rule, the ruling party probably does not want to lose power, as it may not gain power forever. More than the CM, it is the Union Ministry that should be blamed for its sitting mute. The PM's reaction after around 40 days over the incident of women being paraded nude plunged the entire nation into shock. Because as the head of the nation, with a vast network of intelligence services at his disposal, he should have learnt about the turn of events from time to time but remained motionless till it came out on social media. As an effort to wipe out the indelible mark, the women's reservation bill was enacted in an unusual hurry, that too with provisions not to extend the benefits in real terms. It is time the Union Home Ministry shows its real concern for the people rather than for power.

A G Rajmohan | *Anantapur*

MUSK GETS DOGE: RAISES EYEBROWS

Madam— When business and government intertwine, the potential for conflict is undeniable. Elon Musk's appointment as head of DOGE raises questions that cannot be ignored. A man with billions in government contracts now has direct access to policy-making-how does that not blur ethical boundaries?

Even with assurances of recusal, influence is rarely about direct intervention; it's about proximity, relationships, and the quiet shaping of decisions. History has shown that when private interests gain a foothold in public governance, oversight must be airtight. Yet, in this case, the sheer scale of Musk's business empire makes a true separation almost impossible. Efficiency in government is critical, but at what cost? Are we setting a precedent where wealth grants not just access but control?Public service should demand an absolute firewall between personal gain and national policy. The question is not whether Musk intends to act ethically, but whether the system can truly prevent conflicts of interest when one of the world's most powerful businessmen is now also part of the government.

Gopalaswamy J | *Chennai*

Kashmir faces climate crisis



The Kashmir Valley is currently facing the severe impact of climate change. In January-February, the region recorded 88 per cent less rainfall, while December 2024 saw a 58 per cent deficit. As a result, the harsh winter days have shortened, and unseasonal heat is being experienced. This change is not only alarming for the present but also a serious warning for the future. Experts believe that if this situation persists, a severe water crisis could emerge in the coming days. Glaciers, the primary sources of water, are melting rapidly, significantly affecting the valley's water resources.

Previously, winter temperatures remained below freezing, ensuring balanced snowfall, but now, abnormal temperature increases are being observed. According to the meteorological department, due to the sharp decline in rainfall, many areas of the valley will experience prolonged dry spells. If this trend continues, the existence of rivers and streams could be at risk.This is not just a change in weather but a serious warning. If climate imbalance is not controlled, Kashmir's natural beauty and life-giving water bodies may become history in the coming years. It is time to take firm and effective steps for climate conservation

R K Jain | *Barwani*

RACE FOR THE DELHI CM BEGINS

Madam — After the announcement of the result of the Delhi Assembly elections, all eyes are on the next chief minister of Delhi after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ousted the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) from power in the national capital. This mandate is a clear message that people want honest, transparent and development-driven politics.

My commitment to serve with integrity and dedication remains unwavering. Amid speculations, five names have emerged for the top post. These include Parvesh Verma, who defeated AAP's national convenor Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency and Ramesh Bidhuri, who was defeated by former Chief Minister Atishi from the Kalkaji seat. Other names circulating in the political arena include BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, Kapil Mishra, Ashish Sood, Rekha Gupta, and Vijender Gupta.

Dimple Wadhawan | *Kanpur Nagar*

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

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FIRST COLUMN

WHEN TEACHER FAILS THE STUDENTS

A struggling teacher can hinder a student's motivation and academic growth, sometimes permanently



SAKSHI **SETHI**

The question of whether a teacher's underperformance affects students more than teachers themselves is a complex one. While it may seem that underperforming teachers primarily bear the consequences of their shortcomings such as poor evaluations, job insecurity, and professional stagnation there is significant evidence to suggest that their underperformance also has a profound and lasting impact on students. However, the extent of this impact depends on multiple factors, including the school environment, student resilience and administrative interventions.

While effective teaching is undoubtedly beneficial, some argue that teacher underperformance has minimal impact on students due to various compensatory factors such as student resilience, external learning resources, peer support, and the overall educational environment. Although it is sometimes argued that learners can still learn despite ineffective teaching, research suggests that a teacher's performance plays a crucial role in student outcomes.

Underperforming teachers whether due to lack of subject knowledge, ineffective instructional methods, or poor classroom management can hinder student learning, motivation, and overall academic achievement. Research studies also show that learners with such teachers for consecutive years are more likely to experience learning gaps that persist throughout their education. Moreover, these teachers often fail to provide the necessary support for students to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities and enthusiasm for learning and this can particularly disadvantage students from low-income or marginalised backgrounds who rely heavily on schools for academic and personal development. In extreme cases, a teacher's underperformance can lead to disengagement, higher dropout rates, and a lack of preparation for future



education or careers. While students undoubtedly suffer from teacher underperformance, teachers themselves often experience significant negative consequences as well. Underperforming teachers may face criticism from administrators, colleagues and parents, leading to stress, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Many teachers enter the profession with a passion for education and realising that they are not meeting expectations can be emotionally draining. Additionally, such teachers are more likely to receive negative performance evaluations, which can impact their job security, salary and professional growth opportunities. In some cases, chronic underperformance can even lead to disciplinary action or even job loss. The pressure to improve without adequate support can also lead to burnout, causing teachers to leave the profession altogether. Ultimately, the effects of teacher underperformance are felt on both sides, but the consequences for students can be more lasting and difficult to reverse.

While teachers may struggle with professional setbacks, students who receive inadequate instruction may face lifelong challenges in education and career readiness. Schools must provide struggling teachers with professional development, mentorship, and support rather than simply penalising them. At the same time, policies must be in place to ensure that students do not suffer due to prolonged ineffective teaching. The argument that underperformance affects teachers more than students is not entirely accurate. The role of teachers in shaping student success is widely acknowledged, but the extent to which underperformance affects students remains a debated topic. Today, the presence of a standardised curriculum ensures that learning objectives remain consistent regardless of teacher quality. Moreover, beyond the classroom, students have access to private tutors, educational applications, library resources, and academic workshops. Many education systems do follow structured guidelines that specify what students must learn at each grade level, reducing variability in learning outcomes.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Budget effect: Key reforms to strengthen MSME and drive growth



HIMA BINDU **KOTA**

The Budget 2025 introduces transformative measures—including enhanced credit guarantees, the ME-Card initiative, BharatTradeNet— to empower MSME



The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, the backbone of the Indian economy, plays a crucial role in India's socio-economic development by contributing significantly to employment, industrial production, and exports. Spanning across diverse industries, including agribusiness, manufacturing, retail and services, the MSME sector fosters entrepreneurship, innovation and growth. According to the Ministry of MSME, the sector comprises over 63 million enterprises, out of which 39 million are micro-enterprises.

This sector accounts for 30 per cent of the country's GDP and contributes around 45 per cent to India's total exports. In the fiscal year ending September 2024, the sector added 11 million jobs bringing total employment to about 121 million from 110 million in the previous fiscal. It is projected that the MSME sector will grow to USD 1 trillion by 2028 providing immense and diverse opportunities across industries and supply chain systems.

However, despite its significance, MSMEs in India are plagued by multiple challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, regulatory and compliance burden, gaps in policy implementation, limited credit access, technological lag and digital illiteracy, delays in payments and cash flow problems, lack of skilled workforce, sustainability challenges and limited market reach.

To boost sectoral competitiveness and address these issues, the Union Budget 2025 introduced several reforms and policy measures designed to simplify regulations, promote digitalisation, ease financial constraints, enhance export promotion and support technological upgradation. Some Budget highlights are as follows:

Increase in Credit Guarantee cover

The Government has also doubled the Credit Guarantee cover for MSMEs. A credit Guarantee Scheme is a financial support mechanism created for MSMEs to access credit without the need for collateral. Under this scheme, the Government reduces the risk associated with lending to MSMEs by providing a guarantee. In Budget 2025, the credit guarantee cover for micro and small enterprises has increased to Rs 10 crore from an existing limit of Rs 5 crore. Similarly, for start-ups, this cover has increased to Rs 20 crore.

In addition, to boost global competitiveness, reporting MSMEs are now eligible for term loans up to Rs 20 crore.

ME-Card: Credit cards for MSMEs

To provide financial elbow-room to small businesses, Government has introduced a dedicated credit card for micro enterprises on the Udyam portal. With a credit limit of Rs 5 lakhs, this initiative will be helpful to small businesses in improving liquidity and managing their working capital requirements. Supporting inclusive entrepreneurship

To promote inclusive entrepreneurship and enhance participation of underrated communities in businesses, the Government has introduced a new financial inclusion scheme to provide targeted term loans of up to Rs 2 crore over the next five years to 5 lakh first-time women, Scheduled Caste (SC), and Scheduled Tribe (ST) entrepreneurs. This step in trying to create inclusive growth by empowering diverse entrepreneurs is a much-needed step to strengthen the MSME sector. Revision of MSME classification for continued benefits.

> TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL ELBOW-ROOM TO SMALL BUSINESSES, GOVERNMENT HAS INTRODUCED A DEDICATED CREDIT CARD FOR MICRO ENTERPRISES ON THE UDYAM PORTAL

The criteria for classification of MSMEs has been enhanced. The investment threshold has been raised by 2.5X and turnover threshold by 2X to allow fast growing businesses to continue enjoying MSME benefits like tax incentives and priority sector lending. This move is likely to improve economic resilience, boost employment and strengthen global competitiveness.

BharatTradeNet (BTN): Streamlining trade processes

Bharat TradeNet (BTN), a unified public platform for MSMEs, will be introduced by the government to integrate export documentation, financing solutions, and logistics, reducing trade complexities and making Indian MSMEs more competitive in global markets, thereby strengthening the digital ecosystem Introduction of National Manufacturing Mission

The Union Budget 2025 introduced the National Manufacturing Mission which is an initiative aimed at boosting India's manufacturing sector across MSMEs by helping reduce operational expenses, boosting innovation, technological adoption and market expansion, improving manufacturing capabilities and competitiveness, and developing skilled workforce.

Although Budget 2025 presents several notable steps supporting MSMEs, certain gaps still need to be addressed.

1. Complex Compliance and Regulatory Environment

Continued struggles with multiple compliances like GST filings, labour laws, and environmental clearances, is one of the major reasons for MSMEs not reach their growth potential. Simplifying regulatory environment and providing single-window clearance system for MSMEs can go a long way in strengthening MSMEs.

2. Export incentives and global integration:

With government taking a step in the right direction with BharatTradeNet (BTN) for export-oriented MSMEs, it can also look at addressing high logistics costs and tariff barriers. Export incentives, similar to that offered in countries like China and Vietnam, and further assistance to increase bilateral trade agreements with more countries can help MSMEs to gain access to global markets and become competitive.

3. Technology and Digital Adoption Gaps:

Although the emphasis in Budget 2025 was on technology upgradation, the initiative will take wings if governments invests in digital training programs and incentivise or subsidise technology infrastructure.

4. Access to credit and the challenge of last-mile financial inclusion:

For MSMEs, especially in rural areas access to formal credit is till elusive due to lack of awareness and complexity of the process.

The ME-card initiative aims to enhance credit access to manage their finances effectively, but its success depends on effective outreach and simplified application processes. To further enhance digital lending solutions and improve last-mile credit access, collaboration with fintech companies could be a solution.

5. High Cost of Credit and Delayed Payments: Efforts to increase the cover under the credit guarantee scheme may not be effective till the interest rates on MSME loans remain high. Making loans cheaper with lower interest rates can help MSMEs utilise this scheme better for their growth. A framework to incentivise large corporations for paying MSMEs on time can go a long way to ensure timely payments to MSMEs in turn increasing their liquidity.

Conclusion:

The Union Budget 2025 introduced several transformative reforms for MSMEs, focusing on manufacturing growth, credit accessibility, digitalisation and export facilitation. Initiatives like the ME-Card, enhanced credit guarantee, BharatTradeNet, National Manufacturing Mission, and expansion of SIDBI are some of the schemes to provide a strong foundation for MSME expansion and employment generation. However, to enhance the effect of the proposed reforms, the government must address several challenges that plague the MSME sector in India and focus on easing the regulatory framework, gaps in technology adoption, high credit costs, limited access to credit, delayed payments, and global trade barriers.

By effective implementation of the proposed reforms and relevant policies, India can realise the full potential of its MSME sector and drive continued economic growth and development.

(The writer is Associate Professor at Amity University, Noida. The views expressed are personal)

Natural farming: India's path to sustainable agriculture and food security

Sustainable agricultural practices like Zero Budget Natural Farming are gaining traction as food shortages stare us in the face



PARAG **ACHARYA**

Ending hunger, ensuring food security and promoting sustainable agriculture are the main objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agriculture plays a role in achieving all 17 SDGs directly or indirectly by supporting economic, social and environmental progress. Sustainable agriculture focuses on meeting the needs of a growing population while protecting the environment, fostering social equity and ensuring economic viability. By 2050, under current agricultural trends, 60 per cent of India's population –over 10 per cent of the global population may face severe food shortages. Addressing the crisis requires increased production, but high input costs and price volatility are pushing farmers into debt. Natural farming offers a cost-effective alternative aiming to reduce dependency on chemical inputs while promoting sustainable practices.

Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is a grassroots initiative aimed at enhancing farm viability by minimising costs. Over one million hectares in India are currently under natural farming. Natural farming represents an Indianised approach to sustainable agriculture, integrating local ecological principles and indigenous knowledge, in contrast to the European-origin organic farming practices.

India is making significant strides in promoting natural farming, with leading states including Andhra Pradesh (1 lakh hectares), Madhya Pradesh (0.99 lakh hectares) and Chhattisgarh (0.85 lakh hectares).

Other notable contributors are Kerala (0.84 lakh hectares), Odisha (0.24 lakh hectares), Himachal Pradesh (0.12 lakh hectares), Jharkhand (0.034 lakh hectares) and Tamil Nadu (0.02 lakh hectares). ZBNF and the Andhra Pradesh Community-Based Natural Farming (APCNF) models are the most widely used approaches. A NITI Aayog report highlights the potential to double the share of chemical-free farming to 15 per cent immediately and expand it to 30 per cent by 2030, with no adverse impact on food security. The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, serves as the central agency for promoting natural farming.

Natural farming reduces cultivation costs by 60-70 per cent by eliminating chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

To promote natural farming, the Central Government introduced the Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP) scheme in 2020-21 under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY). By 2023, the scheme covered 6.1 lakh



hectares with a budget of Rs 49.8 crore.

Additionally, a five-kilometre natural farming corridor along the Ganges River was launched to cover 960,000 hectares. The National Mission on Natural Farming aims to form 15,000 clusters in Gram Panchayats, involving 1 crore farmers and covering 750,000 hectares. Natural farming optimises the use of resources such as soil, labour and equipment, leading to enhanced crop productivity. It eliminates the dependency on chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.

This approach fosters rapid development of soil microbiota and improves soil aeration through the use of natural inputs. Sikkim achieved its 100 per cent organic status in 2016 through the "Sikkim Organic Mission," which began in 2003. With minimal chemical fertilizer use (5.8 kg/ha) and traditional practices already in place for crops like cardamom, the government phased out fertiliser subsidies, promoted water conservation and trained farmers in practices like vermicomposting and non-pesticide pest management. ICAR is currently studying Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) practices in states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand to assess productivity and soil health impacts.

India's unique agro-ecological diversity and rich traditional knowledge systems position the country as a potential leader in the global transition to sustainable agricultural practices.

However, careful planning, robust infrastructure and targeted training are essential to avoid the pitfalls observed in other nations like Sri Lanka. By integrating modern technologies with natural farming methods, India can further optimise resources, ensure resilience against climate change and bolster long-term food security for its growing population. In essence, natural farming is not just a return to traditional practices but a forward-looking approach that harmonises ecological balance with agricultural productivity, fostering a sustainable future for generations to come.

(The wrtier is Scientist in Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology; views are personal)

the pioneer

VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 11, 2025

MONEY MATTERS



GST evasion of Rs 1.88 L cr detected by CGST

GST evasion of over Rs 1.88 lakh crore was detected by Central GST officers during April-December 2024, the Lok Sabha was informed on Monday. Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said GST evasion, including ITC fraud cases, in 72,393 cases between April and December stood at Rs 1.88 lakh crore. 132 arrests were made and recovery of Rs 20,128 crore was made during the period. In the 2023-24 fiscal, CGST officials detected GST evasion of Rs 2.30 lakh crore in 20,582 cases. Recovery of Rs 31,758 crore was made and 223 people were arrested. In 2022-23 and 2021-22, GST evasion of Rs 1.32 lakh crore and Rs 73,238 crore was detected by CGST officials, respectively. Under the Goods and Services Tax (GST), taxes are levied under four main slabs – 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent. Three special rates of 3 per cent, 1.5 per cent and 0.25 per cent are applicable on gold, silver, diamond and jewellery; cut and polished diamonds and rough diamonds, respectively.



SEBI bans SME firm Kalahridhaan Trendz

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Monday barred SME company Kalahridhaan Trendz and its promoters from the securities markets for flouting disclosure rules. Kalahridhaan Trendz Ltd (KTL) is listed on the NSE's SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) platform Emerge. Apart from KTL, the promoters -- Niranjan D Agarwal, Aditya N Agarwal, and Sunita Niranjan Agarwal -- were also restrained from markets till further orders, Sebi said in an interim order-cum-showcause notice. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) also directed KTL and its promoters to show cause as to why suitable directions of debarment should not be issued against them. The order came after Sebi received certain complaints from HDFC Bank against KTL regarding default in payment of credit card dues. Thereafter, the markets watchdog initiated an examination in the matter to ascertain the violation of various Sebi rules. The examination was conducted from February 23, 2024 to December 15, 2024. Sebi found that KTL is prima facie found to have failed to make material disclosures regarding its default in repayment of its dues to HDFC Bank.



'323 UDAN routes are currently operational'

As many as 323 routes are presently operational out of the 619 routes that were operationalised under the regional air connectivity scheme UDAN, according to the government. Started in 2016, UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) is aimed at connecting unserved and under served routes as well as making flying more affordable.
"As on date, under the Regional Connectivity Scheme - Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (RCS-UDAN), 619 routes have been operationalized in which 323 routes are presently in operation, including those which are being sustained commercially. 114 routes have discontinued before completion of 3 years tenure," Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol said on Monday. In a written reply to Rajya Sabha, he said eligible routes which were discontinued in the past rounds due to various reasons have been re-bid, awarded and operationalised in the subsequent rounds. "Several factors may account for the unoperated flights /discontinuation of routes. Key reasons for the route cancellations include disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the grounding of numerous aircraft due to global engine issues, which significantly reduced the available fleet for all airline operators in the country, the shutdown of certain airlines and low passenger demand on specific routes," the minister said.

'India open to buying energy from all sources'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gas prices to come down in 2026: Puri



Union Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday said that India is open to energy imports from all sources at the lowest rates and domestic oil marketing firms are looking for more gas which is expected to cost less in 2026.

Addressing a presser on Indian Energy Week 2025 beginning on Tuesday, Puri allayed fears of impact on energy supplies to India from Russia after US sanctions. "Today we have a situation that we have (increased) from 27 suppliers to 39 suppliers. We added Argentina among others. We are open to import from all sources."

"We issued tenders at the importation. Those tenders are open to any supplier. We buy from the cheapest source possible."

He also informed that domestic (oil marketing firms) companies are looking for more gas.

"We also expect the prices of gas (natural gas) to come down. My reading of the international market is that in 2026 you will begin to see a major increase in the availability of natural gas. We may get more gas from Qatar. Our companies are looking for more gas."

Puri stated that the LPG (liquified petroleum gas) is more or less saturated in the country and the idea is to take piped natural gas to every house as it is 30 per cent cheaper.

A top official said that Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and GAIL are considering the purchase of LNG (liquified natural gas) and crude oil from the US.

The top official also stated that domestic firms may sign long-term contracts and may look to invest in the US (energy projects).

This assumes significance in view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US later this week where discussion on energy is likely on the agenda.

During the presser, Puri also said, "I will be surprised if sourcing of energy from the US does not figure in the discussions (of PM and Trump)."

He said, "With President (Trump) saying he wants to see global prices of energy to come down, he wants more and more energy to come to the market. For countries like India it is a positive development."

During the India Energy Week 2025, energy buyers will hold meetings with producers in the national capital.

Puri said that IEW'25 is set to be even larger, more diverse, and more impactful than its previous two editions. Covering over 1 lakh square metres, IEW'25 will be the second-largest energy event globally in terms of ministerial and CEO participation, exhibition space, and the number of sessions.

He also said that the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas will host a Clean Cooking Ministerial, bringing together global policymakers, industry leaders, and experts to accelerate the transition to clean cooking solutions.

Gold surges Rs 2,430 to hit lifetime high of Rs 88,500 per 10g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Gold prices zoomed by Rs 2,430 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 88,500 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday following firm global trends and a weak rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal breached the record USD 2,900 an ounce level in spot markets globally after US President Donald Trump announced imposition of fresh 25 per cent tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to the US.

Heavy buying by jewellers and retailers also boosted the prices.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 86,070 per 10 grams last week.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity surged by Rs 2,430 to hit a record high of Rs 88,100 per 10 grams in the local markets.

Silver prices increased Rs 1,000 to Rs 97,500 per kg.

Investors are dumping riskier assets like stocks as they prefer safe haven amid global economic uncertainties, traders said.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery rallied Rs 940 to hit a new lifetime high of Rs 85,828 per 10 grams.

"Gold witnessed strong gains, surging above Rs 85,800 in MCX and hitting USD 2,900 in spot markets as Trump's new round of tariffs on metal products intensified trade war concerns. "With no specific clarity on which countries are included or excluded, uncertainty in global trade has driven significant bullion buying," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

The subseqent contract for June delivery surged Rs 1,015 or 1.18 per cent to hit a fresh peak of Rs 86,636 per 10 grams.

ONGC signs pact with BP for oil exploration, trading



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation on Monday said it has signed a pact with global oil major BP to explore collaboration in exploration and production, trading and other energy vectors, in India and internationally.

The MoU comes within a month of ONGC selecting BP as a technical service provider for raising output from its flagship Mumbai High oil and gas field.

"ONGC and BP have agreed to explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership across the energy industry in India and internationally, focused on oil and gas exploration and production, as well as trading and extending to other energy vectors," the firm said in a statement.

The two companies signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), on the eve of India Energy Week, the premier energy event in India.

The signing ceremony was attended by ONGC Chairman and CEO Arun Kumar Singh and BP Executive Vice President, William Lin, along with senior leadership from both organisations.

"Under the terms of the MoU, BP will collaborate with ONGC to jointly explore and evaluate potential business opportunities in oil and gas projects both within India and internationally," the statement said.

Specific areas of cooperation will include to explore potential collaboration and share best practices for deep-water exploration; to enhance production and optimise the management of ONGC's maturing fields; and to jointly bid for mutually agreed offshore acreage under India's Open Acreage Licensing Program (OALP) rounds in partnership with their respective partners.

Reliance enters sports drinks segment, launches 'Spinner'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Reliance through its FMCG arm Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL) has entered into the sports hydration drink segment with the brand 'Spinner', co-created with Sri Lankan cricket icon Muttiah Muralitharan.

Reliance, which has disrupted the Indian beverages market with aggressive pricing of its Campa Cola, is offering Spinner at a price of Rs 10 for a 150 ml single-serve bottle.

This is relatively lower than other rival sports drinks available in the market such as Pepsico's Gatorade and Coca-Cola's Powerade which are available at Rs 50 for 500 ml. Decathlon's sports drink Aptonia costs Rs 99 for a 400 ml bottle, though it is available at Rs 69 on the portal.

Last month, RCPL launched RasKik Gluco Energy, entering into the energy drink segment.

Reliance, which entered the beverages market with the acquisition of Campa in 2023, has now over 10 per cent market share in the sparkling beverage category in select states, the company stated in its latest quarterly report.

These launches reinforced RCPL's ambition to become a comprehensive total beverages and consumer products company. Spinner has partnerships with top IPL teams, including Lucknow Super Giants, SunRisers Hyderabad, Punjab Kings, Gujarat Titans and Mumbai Indians who will collaborate with RCPL to increase brand visibility nationwide.

"Uniquely positioned, Spinner will lead the movement in creating a sports beverage category of up to USD 1 billion in the next 3 years," said a joint statement.

India sets up EFTA desk to promote trade, investment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Monday announced the setting up of a dedicated platform - European Free Trade Association (EFTA) desk - to promote trade, investment, and business facilitation between the two regions.

India and the four European nations of the EFTA bloc signed a free trade agreement on March 10 last year to boost trade and investment ties.

The pact, officially dubbed as Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), is expected to come into force by the end of this year.

The EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The setting up of the desk is important as under the pact, India has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products such as Swiss watches, chocolates and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties.

This is a first-of-its-kind pledge agreed upon in any of the trade deals signed by India so far.

It aims to serve as a dedicated platform to promote trade, investment, and business facilitation between India and the four EFTA nations.

Inaugurating the desk along with ministers from the bloc, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that it would operate from Invest India, a national investment promotion agency.

CCI to identify districts for cotton productivity trials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has been asked to identify one district in each state for conducting cotton productivity trials, Union Minister Giriraj Singh said on Monday.

Speaking to reporters here, the textiles minister said the government is intensifying efforts to boost cotton productivity by adopting global best practices, to increase the per hectare yield, as countries including Brazil, China, Australia and Russia produce 2,000 to 2,200 kg per hectare whereas India's average production is 450-500 kg per hectare.

"I have told CCI to identify districts across states for cotton trial production. Now we will take Akola model to saturation mode," Singh said.

Moreover, he shared plans to take India's textiles market size to USD 350 billion by 2030 from USD 176 billion at present.

"The country's textile sector is the biggest employment creator after agriculture. We have set a target to take it (number of textile jobs) to 6 crore from 4.5 crore at present. The textile sector has got an allocation of Rs 5,300 crore in the Budget .... In the coming days we will increase job creation and exports from the textiles sector. At present the domestic market size is USD 176 billion. We will increase this to USD 350 billion," said the minister.

Talking about the mega textile exhibition Bharat Tex to be held this month, he said, around 6,000 foreign exhibitors from 126 nations will participate in the event this time, doubling from 3,000 last year.

Govt bans export of raw human hair below USD 65 per kg

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The government on Monday imposed export ban on raw human hair if the prices are below USD 65 per kg, according to a notification.

In January 2022, the government imposed restrictions on these exports.

"The export policy of raw human hair is amended from restricted to prohibited. However, export shall be free if FOB (Free on Board) value is USD 65 or above per kilogram," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

The decision was taken on the back of reports of smuggling of raw human hair to countries like Myanmar and China, which is hurting local industries and exports.

In India, West Bengal is the major hub for the industry besides Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. Major competitors of India are China, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar.

Raw human hair are mainly collected from households and temples of these states to primarily cater to the beauty market globally.

Two types of hair are collected in India - remy and non-remy hair. Remy hair, the best grade, is collected from temples where pilgrims donate their hair as part of a religious vow. This quality is mainly used to make hairpieces and wigs. Non-remy hair is household waste collected by small groups of people in villages and cities. They segregate that and sell it to dealers.

During April-November this fiscal, exports stood at USD 123.96 million, while the same stood at USD 124 million in 2023-24.



Market slump wipes out Rs 7.68 lakh cr from investors' wealth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth eroded Rs 7.68 lakh crore in four days of market slump as foreign fund outflows and fresh tariff concerns unnerved market sentiment.

In the past four days, the BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 1,272.01 points, or 1.61 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms tanked Rs 7,68,252.32 crore to Rs 4,17,82,573.79 crore (USD 4.77 trillion) in four days.

"Indian benchmark indices witnessed a significant decline today following a statement by US President Donald Trump, who announced plans to impose new tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports into the US, along with additional reciprocal tariffs," Ameya Ranadive Chartered Market Technician, CFTe, Sr Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said.

On Monday, the BSE bellwether gauge dropped 548.39 points, or 0.70 per cent, to settle at a week's low of 77,311.80. Intra-day, it tanked 753.3 points, or 0.96 per cent, to 77,106.89.

"Markets displayed pessimism since early trades as stocks crumbed amid subdued corporate earnings and the ongoing uncertainty over global tariff war," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, Power Grid, Tata Steel, Zomato, Titan, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Tata Motors were among the major laggards.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Labour Min inks initial pact with FoundIt

To bring 10 lakh more jobs on NCS portal annually



Labour ministry on Monday announced inking of an initial pact with FoundIt -- a leading job portal -- to enhance job creation and expand opportunities for young jobseekers by adding 10 lakh more opportunities annually.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in the presence of Union Minister of Labour & Employment Mansukh Mandaviya and aims to enhance international and domestic employment opportunities for jobseekers registered on NCS (National Career Service) portal, a labour ministry statement said.

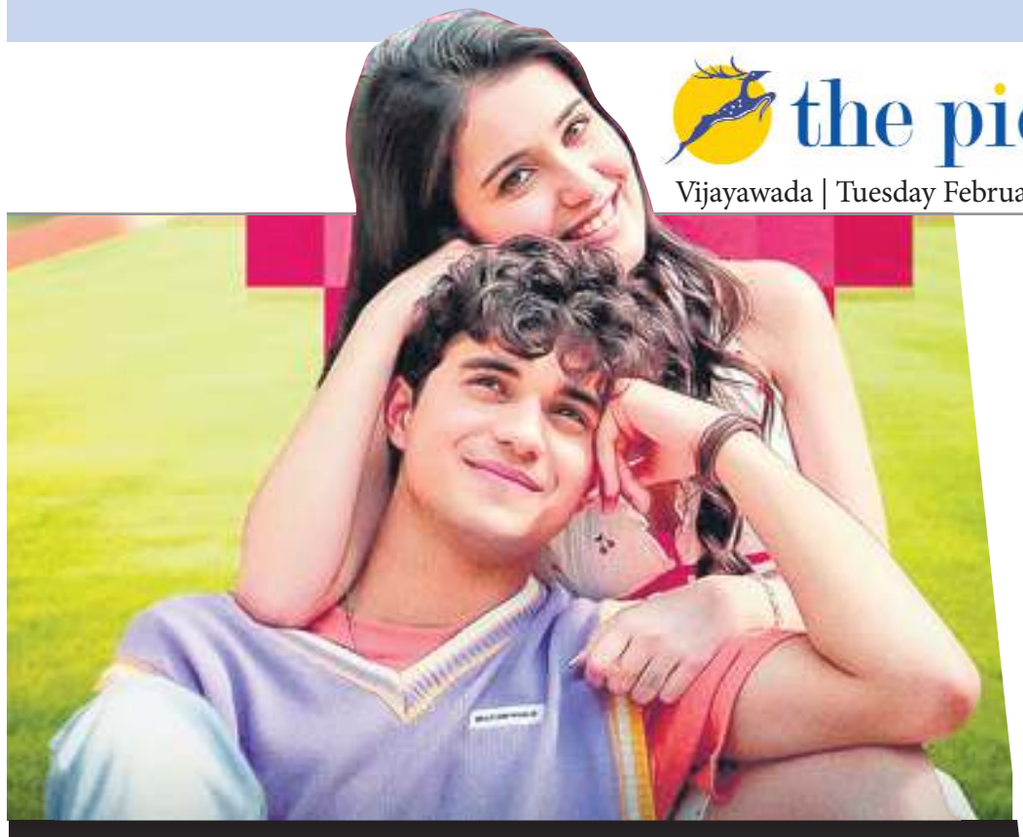
Mandaviya highlighted the NCS portal's transformative role in bridging the gap between jobseekers and employment opportunities, both within India and abroad.

"The NCS portal has become a crucial gateway, connecting millions of jobseekers with employers at the national and international levels. With the addition of 3,000 to 4,000 job postings daily, this MoU is expected to bring 1.25 lakhs international vacancies and over 10 lakhs domestic vacancies to NCS each year, significantly boosting employment prospects for Indian youth," he stated.

"With over 40 lakh employers registered, the portal has facilitated the mobilisation of more than 4.40 crore vacancies since its inception. At any given time, nearly 10 lakh job vacancies are available, ensuring a steady flow of opportunities for the youth," he added.

Mandaviya said the NCS portal's integration with the e-migrate platform, under which more than 500 active recruitment agencies registered with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) have been onboarded.

the pioneer
Vijayawada | Tuesday February 11, 2025



PEHLA NASHA 2.0 BRINGS THE 90S SOUL WITH 2025'S FLAVOUR

A few songs capture the magic of first love quite like Pehla Nasha from Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar. Originally composed by Jatin-Lalit with lyrics by Majrooh Sultanpuri, the song remains an evergreen classic. Now, in a heartfelt tribute to the original, Pehla Nasha 2.0 brings a refreshing sound for a new generation. Featuring the voices of Armaan Malik and Pragati Nagpal, the track is reimagined by Amaal Mallik with lyrics penned by Rashmi Virag.

Reuniting after hits like Main Rahoon Ya Na Rahoon, the trio of Amaal, Armaan and Rashmi infuse the song with their signature touch. Amaal, known for his rich, contemporary soundscapes, enhances the original's romance with fresh orchestral arrangements and soulful qawwali interludes. "Rashmi's additional lyrics complement the classic beautifully while staying true to its essence," he shares. "The emotions remain untouched, but we've given the song a modern resonance. Armaan and Pragati's fresh vocals add a youthful charm, making this a perfect track for today's audience."

The accompanying music video, set to release soon, stars Pragati Nagpal alongside Abhay Verma. Reflecting on the project, Armaan says, "Pehla Nasha has always been a special song for me. Reimagining it was both an honour and a dream come true. This version is my tribute to the magic of first love, and I hope listeners feel the same nostalgia and excitement we felt while creating it." With its blend of classic romance and contemporary sounds, Pehla Nasha 2.0 is set to be the perfect soundtrack for this Valentine's season. The song is released by India's leading music label, Saregama.

Ethan Hunt's ultimate showdown with *Mission: Impossible - The Final* begins

The mission is clear - this time, it's all or nothing. Ethan Hunt is back for his most perilous assignment yet, and the newly released teaser for Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning promises a heart-stopping spectacle. Packed with gravity-defying stunts, high-speed chases, and an intense race against time, this is the beginning of the end for one of cinema's most legendary action heroes.

Premiering during the Super Bowl, the adrenaline-fueled teaser sets the stage for an epic showdown that will push Hunt beyond his limits. Fans can expect an electrifying mix of action, espionage and breathtaking cinematography - hallmarks of the Mission: Impossible franchise.



Directed by Christopher McQuarrie, the film boasts an all-star cast led by Tom Cruise, alongside Hayley Atwell, Ving Rhames, Simon Pegg, Vanessa Kirby, Esai Morales, Pom Klementieff, Mariela Garriga, Henry Czerny, Holt McCallany, Janet McTeer, Nick Offerman, Hannah Waddingham, Angela Bassett, Shea Whigham, Greg Tarzan Davis, Charles Parnell and Frederick Schmidt.

Mark your calendars - Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning hits theatres on May 23, 2025, in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, with stunning IMAX and 4DX experiences. Get ready to witness the ultimate clash where every decision counts and the stakes have never been higher.

Parul Gulati steps into the world of Chambal's dacoits in *Donali*

Parul Gulati is set to captivate audiences with her upcoming period drama Donali, directed by the National Award-winning filmmaker E Niwas. The series, featuring an impressive ensemble cast including Barun Sobti, Divyendu Sharma, Chunky Pandey and Sandhya Mridul, promises to take viewers deep into the turbulent world of Chambal's dacoits in the 1960s.

Shot extensively in and around Gwalior, including locations like Panihar and other small towns, Donali aims to deliver a raw and immersive portrayal of the era. The rugged landscapes and historically rich backdrop add a layer of authenticity to the gripping narrative. Reports suggest that both Parul Gulati and Chunky Pandey will be seen in challenging roles as dacoits, marking an exciting shift in their acting journeys.

Speaking about her role, Parul Gulati shared, "Donali is a project that is very close to E Niwas' heart, and my character is one of the most intense and multi-layered roles I've ever played. She is fierce, deeply embedded in the world of Chambal, and carries a lot of emotional depth. I can't wait for the audience to see this new side of me."

She further expressed her enthusiasm about working alongside such a seasoned cast, saying, "Sharing screen space with actors like Chunky sir, Barun, and Divyendu is an incredible opportunity. The story has a powerful emotional core, and I'm excited to be part of a project that blends action, drama, and history so beautifully."

With a compelling storyline, a stellar cast, and the directorial vision of E Niwas, Donali is shaping up to be a must-watch period drama. The series is expected to release later this year, offering a gripping insight into the lives of Chambal's dacoits and their struggles in a time of upheaval.





Nawazuddin Siddiqui on carving his own legacy amid Irrfan Khan comparisons

Nawazuddin Siddiqui has long been hailed as one of Indian cinema's finest actors, delivering some of the most unforgettable performances in modern film history. Whether it's his intense portrayal of Faizal Khan in Gangs of Wasseypur, the restrained depth of his character in The Lunchbox, or the enigmatic Ganesh Gaitonde in Sacred Games, Nawazuddin's ability to fully inhabit diverse roles has set him apart. His performances are nothing short of master classes in acting, consistently leaving audiences in awe of his craft.

With a career built on authenticity, dedication, and an unwavering commitment to his art, Nawazuddin has earned both critical acclaim and a global fan following. Naturally, comparisons to the late Irrfan Khan - another powerhouse performer who left an indelible mark on world cinema - have followed. When asked about these parallels, Nawazuddin firmly asserted, "I have come to do work my own way, not to imitate anyone else. Of course, he was a great actor, but I want to create my own identity." His words reflect a deep respect for Irrfan while also emphasising his desire to forge his own distinct path in the cinematic landscape.

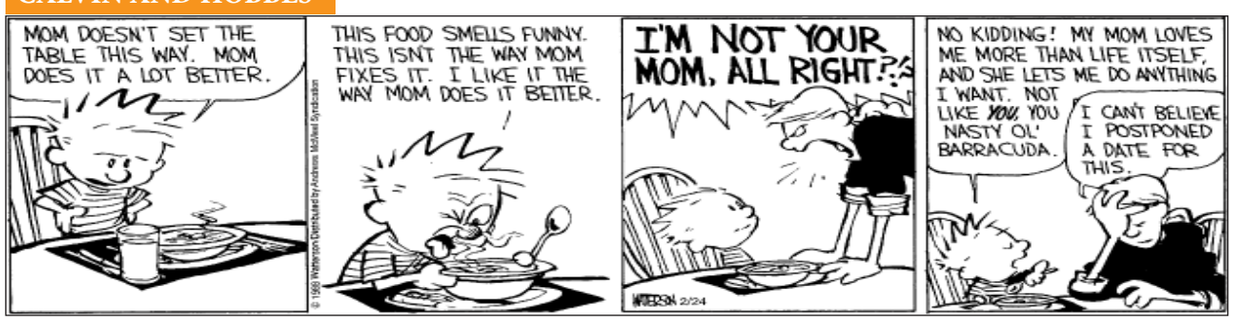
From his humble beginnings to becoming an internationally recognised actor, Nawazuddin's journey is a testament to perseverance and raw talent. While he carries forward the legacy of actors like Irrfan, he has also carved out his own niche, proving time and again that he is a force to be reckoned with. His ability to shoulder expectations while remaining true to his craft makes him a timeless artist in the ever-evolving world of cinema. With every role, Nawazuddin reaffirms that he is not just an actor but a storyteller whose work will be celebrated for generations to come.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



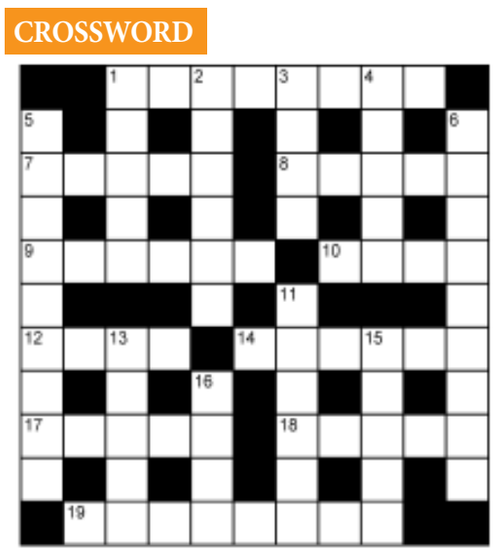
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 A Dutch building with sails
7 A warm thick cover for a bed
8 Prepared
9 Breathe in
10 Say this to make a person or animal go away
12 Small rodents
14 The language spoken in Paris
17 Loud sound
18 Not decorated
19 Sightseers

DOWN

1 Use scales to do this
2 A stinging plant
3 A female horse
4 A dog's lead
5 The things you need for doing something
6 A musical instrument that you hit with a small hammer
11 Make wine from these
13 The capital city of Egypt
15 Gets closer
16 Expensive

SOLUTION

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

the pioneer
Vijayawada

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Tuesday
February 11, 2025

'I TAPPED INTO MY OWN VULNERABILITIES TO PORTRAY SEHER IN *CHIDIYA UDD*'

TEJAL SINHA
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In a deeply personal and introspective conversation with *The Pioneer*, Bhoomika Meena pulls back the curtain on her portrayal of Seher in the Amazon MX Player series Chidiya Udd, revealing the emotional vulnerabilities and transformative experiences that fueled her performance

Bhoomika Meena is a rising star in Indian cinema who boldly swapped a promising medical career for the magic of the silver screen. Born in Jaipur into a family of government doctors, her creative spark was ignited by her parents' love for 90s films and legendary music icons. An academic achiever who even represented India in London after winning the Horlicks Wizkids contest, she left her medical studies at Safdarjung Delhi to pursue acting - earning notable roles in Chuhedaani (2022), Slum Golf (2023), and Dukaan (2024).

Now headlining the Amazon MX Player series Chidiya Udd alongside Jackie Shroff and Sikander Kher, Bhoomika opens up in an exclusive conversation with The Pioneer about her transformative role as Seher and the emotional journey behind it.

"Preparing for Seher was a very humbling experience," she begins enthusiastically. "It allowed me to explore a whole new world of sex workers and made me empathize with someone that, to be honest, I was a little guilty of judging - or even worse, pitying." She went on to explain that acting is "almost spiritual" because it gives actors the unique opportunity to embrace another human being fully. To capture Seher's authenticity and depth, she immersed herself in documentaries and factual research on the lives of familial sex workers. "I devised her entire life story through discussions with Ravi sir, our director, which were very helpful," she recalled. Additionally, she reached out to people in her native village in Rajasthan to better understand the contemporary relevance and social position of sex workers.

Discussing the surprising insights that shaped her performance, she recalled one particularly shocking revelation: "I watched a documentary where a five-year-old girl was being trained to dance - not for fun, but as a preparation to enter sex work when she grew older. In her community, marriage was considered a fate worse than prostitution because it meant losing independence to a husband. That completely changed how I saw Seher's world." For her character, sex work isn't a mark of shame but rather a profession that affords her autonomy. "While society may perceive it as degrading, in her eyes, it's her best chance at freedom," she explained. She further described an unforgettable encounter during her research in Kamathipura: "I interacted with real sex workers - some were wary of me, some were amused that we were shooting there, and some openly shared their experiences. One woman told me, 'Yeh kaam karna padta hai, par jeena toh apni marzi se hai' [We have to do this work, but we live on our own terms]. That resilience stayed with me. The energy of a place transmutes something to you; my intention was to absorb the essence of that environment."

When asked about balancing vulnerability and resilience in portraying Seher, Bhoomika said she naturally connected with the character's duality. "I related with the warrior in her who still has her inner child alive. Honestly, that is pretty much me - yes, I am very ambitious and driven, but I also look at the world like a dreamy, curious child. So exploring the vulnerable yet resilient side came very naturally to me." She described Seher as someone who is deeply trusting - making her prone to heartbreak - yet she refuses to wallow in self-pity. "I tapped into my own vulnerabilities from the times I felt lost in a new city, uncertain about my choices, but also my determination to push through," she explained. Physically, Bhoomika was meticulous: "I had to ensure my body language reflected her internal battle. In emotional scenes, I allowed myself to feel her pain completely, while in moments of defiance, I made sure her spirit remained unbroken. It was all about honouring her humanity in every scene."

> **I watched a documentary where a five-year-old girl was being trained to dance - not for fun, but as a preparation to enter sex work when she grew older. In her community, marriage was considered a fate worse than prostitution because it meant losing independence to a husband.**

The demands of the role meant that both physical and emotional intensity were constant companions on set. Bhoomika recalled, "I approached the toughest moments on set by giving myself to them completely, with absolute honesty. There was no 'overcoming' in the conventional sense - each challenge enriched me as an actor and as a person." She elaborated that as an actor, playing it safe is never an option; she strives to give her all because that's the only recipe for creating magic. One scene, in which Seher had to cater to ten customers in a single day, proved particularly taxing. "Stepping into that mindset was emotionally draining, but I gave it everything I had. When Ravi sir called out 'got it,' the entire crew erupted into applause. He even came over personally to appreciate my performance - that moment made all the intensity worth it." Meena also described the challenges of shooting on location in Kamathipura, where real crowds and interactions with actual sex workers added to the authenticity of the set. "At times, someone would comment that our shoot was affecting their business! These interactions made the setting feel incredibly real and reinforced my responsibility to tell this story authentically."

Despite the emotional toll of inhabiting such a layered character, she maintained that her overwhelming sense of gratitude fueled her through the long, hectic days. "I was living my dream - playing the lead in a big show and challenging myself every single day. Forget unwinding; I felt nourished by the experience." Discipline played a key role, too. "Even with day-and-night shifts, I made sure to meditate religiously - both before going to bed and before leaving for the set. Yoga has been a pivotal anchor in my life, contributing to my growth as an actor and as an individual. It kept me centered and energized."



Looking back on the moment she was cast as Seher, she described it as a culmination of a deep personal journey. She recalled her first audition in early 2021, right after the lockdown, which initially did not lead anywhere. Months later, the project resurfaced through Parag Mehta Casting. Although she hesitated at first - having already tested for the role - she had by then undergone significant personal and professional growth. "I had done workshops with The Artist Collective and Adishakti, and even experienced spiritual growth through trips to places like Thiruvannamalai and Arunachalam. I came back with a newfound sense of self-belief and decided to give the audition another shot." When her audition finally garnered an overwhelmingly positive response - with Parag calling her the very next day and a series of subsequent meetings following - every roadblock, from date clashes to delays, somehow fell into place.

When reflecting on the many auditions and projects that preceded Chidiya Udd, she emphasised that what might seem like a sign from the universe was, in fact, the result of a relentless preparation meeting opportunity. "I was focused on becoming the best version of myself so that when the opportunity arrived, I would be ready. When Chidiya Udd came back to me for the third time, it was like everything aligned. It wasn't just about luck or timing; it was about years of preparation."

Going ahead with the conversation, she addressed what makes Chidiya Udd stand out in today's OTT landscape. "I think what really makes Chidiya Udd stand out is its unapologetic woman protagonist at its core," she explained. "She shakes a world dominated by men, completely disrupts it, and stands tall in front of the most powerful goons, played by Jackie Shroff, Sikandar Kher, and Madhur Mittal. Her strength and determination are unmatched, and her story will empower anyone who thinks they are weak."

Bhoomika shared one particularly memorable anecdote about Jackie Shroff: "There's a day on set I'll never forget. It was chaotic - people rushing around and confusion everywhere - when suddenly, Jackie sir let out this deep, commanding shout in his signature Bombay style. Within seconds, the entire set fell silent. It was like watching a lion roar in the jungle! That moment showcased not only his strong presence but also his warmth and humility. Despite being such a star, he always had kind and encouraging words for everyone. The biggest lesson I learned from him is to stay grounded, no matter how big you become." She fondly recalled celebrating their birthdays together - both being Aquarians with birthdays just a day apart - and how Jackie even gifted her a little plant, a thoughtful gesture that has stayed with her. Another vivid memory was an intense action sequence shot during rains and thunder, where the set transformed into a celebratory space with cake, desserts, and even jam sessions, creating a sense of camaraderie that lingered long after the shoot.

Discussing her collaboration with Sikandar Kher, Bhoomika recounted a light-hearted moment from a previous project. "We'd worked together on a film where I had a cameo, and after our shot, we were casually chatting. I wasn't yet officially on board for Chidiya Udd - I was one of three shortlisted actors. I subtly asked him if he was working on the show, and though he played it cool, I could sense his excitement. Then, when I eventually joined Chidiya Udd as the lead, he was pleasantly surprised and warmly congratulated me."



Celebrating love

YOU DESERVE TO GLOW!

This Valentine's Day, gift your loved one radiance in a jar with Kridha's Turmeric Face Gel. Infused with the power of turmeric, saffron, and aloe vera, this lightweight, hydrating gel works like a charm to soothe, brighten, and nourish the skin. Perfect for all skin types, the non-greasy formula absorbs effortlessly, leaving behind a soft, dewy finish.

Price: INR 960



A GIFT OF GLOWING SKIN

This Valentine's Day, indulge her with a revitalising and hydrating routine infused with the benefits of fresh Roses. This Forest Essentials ritual clears impurities and leaves the skin refreshed, balanced, and energised.



ETERNAL RADIANCE GIFT BOX BY PURELY YOURS

Show your love with the ultimate skincare indulgence. Curated with authentic Ayurvedic essentials like the Eladi Purifying Face Elixir, Madhu Yashti Intense Hydrating Elixir, Organic Skin Puritea, and Organic Glow Brew, it's perfect for self-care enthusiasts who value timeless beauty.

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GET READY FOR SMOOCH-PERFECT POUT!

This Valentine's Day, let your lips do the talking with KIKO Milano's cherry-inspired glossy lip products. Perfect for a romantic look these glosses give your lips a luscious, high-shine finish with a juicy pop of cherry colour.

ZED BLACK LA RIVA GIFT BOX

Zed Black introduced the La Riva Gift Box, a luxurious offering around the rich, woody fragrance of Oudh. Known for its timeless elegance, Oudh transforms any space into a haven of serenity and sophistication. The La Riva Gift Box includes a reed diffuser, scented candle, essential oil, incense sticks, and an incense holder, making it an ideal choice for premium gifting.

Price- INR 2499



VAHDAM INDIA CHAI TEA PRIVATE RESERVE

A royal tea experience featuring 3 aromatic loose-leaf chai teas, perfect for cozy Valentine's evenings and heartwarming conversations. A gift that blends tradition and love in every sip.

Price: INR 2,199



ONCE UPON A TIME ON VACATION...

Some Relais & Châteaux properties offer visiting families special, unforgettable experiences for their kids. These adventures are guaranteed to leave them with magical memories as they explore the world at their own pace. Whether they are on their own or joined by the rest of the family, the fun and sheer freedom offered are guaranteed to bring out children's creativity, curiosity and zest for adventure. These escapades cannot fail to fire youngsters' imaginations and bring out the urge to travel in young and old alike.

IN LEOPARD TERRITORY

RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX SUJÁN JAWAI, Pali, Rajasthan

At Relais & Châteaux SUJÁN JAWAI nature is a kid's playground. With spectacular views of a dramatic wilderness, spend unforgettable days on wilderness adventures and tracking leopards; breakfasts in the bush, yoga outdoors and delicious dinners under constellations of an unending starry sky. It is the most sophisticated and ecological way to discover a truly enchanting landscape. A wander to outlying villages allows immersive experiences of local culture and insights into some of the camp's brilliant community projects. The chefs cater for kids with the children's menu. Families can engage in activities together or the junior rangers activities such as learning bushcraft skills, tracking, photography and nature trails. Other activities on offer include board games, arts and crafts, cooking or baking, stargazing, activity booklets and movies are great to keep the little ones busy.

INTO WILD AT YALA

RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX WILD COAST TENTED LODGE, Yala, Sri Lanka

At Relais & Châteaux Wild Coast Tented Lodge, is a haven of twenty eight cocoon-like tents placed at the edge of the jungle and beach. Alongside some exciting game drives, kids can get hands-on in the kitchen with the Junior Chef program as they enjoy making local favourites like 'coconut and treacle' pancakes, or coconut and cinnamon cookies. They will also be guided through how to make fresh fruit juice and have the opportunity to enjoy their creations afterwards. The Junior Ranger program is the longest and most comprehensive programme is a 3-day experience (covering animal identification, footprint identification and tracking, and animal group characteristics) with a certification. 'Specialist' certification includes training kids on their favourite animal (for example, an elephant specialist) or even a 'Junior Tracker' certification aimed at spoor interpretation. Simple bush walks guided by our ranger can be quite fun too!



ADVENTURE-FILLED DAYS IN BEAUTIFUL COUNTRYSIDE

RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX EDEN ROC CAP CANA, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

At Relais & Châteaux Eden Roc Cap Cana, children can simply walk along the beach to the Kids' Club, where the team offers unique creative workshops inspired by the tropical vegetation of the Caribbean. Exploring the luxuriant natural environment, these budding young artists can collect leaves from tropical trees and draw on their natural creativity to craft works of art entirely out of plants. The pictures and sculptures they create will always remind them of the lush natural beauty of the Dominican Republic. The team will take them tree-planting and teach them all about wildlife protection. For the little sports enthusiasts, kayaking in the lagoon will satisfy their desire to excel. At the end of a busy day, everyone can join their parents for a dance to the rhythm of traditional music.

EXPLORING WILDS

RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX TEMBO PLAINS CAMPS, Sapi Private Reserve, greater Mana Pools Region, Zimbabwe

A day on the open plains of Zimbabwe is an adventure in itself. Relais & Châteaux Tembo Plains Camp has designed the Young Explorers Program as an opportunity for budding travelers to observe wild animals in their natural habitat. Guided by qualified and knowledgeable wildlife guides, the young explorers can head off on an incredible safari. They will learn how to handle a boat on the Zambezi River, identify elephant footprints, pick out leopards camouflaged in the landscape, and follow the distinctive trails of different wild animals. Once all their observations have been recorded in their notebooks (or on camera), they will head back to camp for a tasty meal. If they haven't already expended all their energy, the kids can then prepare a dish for their parents (with the help of the chef). Finally, the time comes for a well-deserved rest. Night falls on the banks of the Zambezi River and also over the camp's magnificent "canvas suites".

the pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 11, 2025

Just another day in office, says Rohit after 32nd ODI century

PTI ■ CUTTACK



It was just another day in office, said a nonchalant India skipper Rohit Sharma after his 32nd ODI century ended a prolonged lean patch but acknowledged that the process of getting back among runs "is quite difficult" even though it "sounds very simple".

Rohit blazed his way to a 90-ball 119 with 12 fours and seven sixes to set up India's four-wicket win over England in the second ODI here on Sunday, giving the hosts an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match affair.

"When people have played for a number of years and scored so many runs over the years... That means something," Rohit said in a video shared by BCCI.

"I have played this game for a long time now and I understand what is required of me. So, it's just about going out there and doing your things and this was, what I did today was, one of my things."

Rohit's 119 was his first century in ODIs since October 2023, a period during which the opening batter hit five fifties in 13 matches. Across formats, this was his first century since March 2024 when he hit 104 against England at Dharamsala.

"In my mind, it was just about doing things that I do, try and bat the way I do. I have been here long enough... One or two knocks is not going to change my mind and the way I bat. But (it was) just another day in the office," the 37-year-old said.

Rohit, however, admitted that regaining form despite knowing the methods and ways, is not always easy. "When you have scored so many, you have done something, right? You just need to get back to that that mindset of you know, how to get runs," he said.

"(It) sounds very simple, but it is quite difficult. But in my mind, it was just about enjoying and that is what we play the sport for, to enjoy the game more than anything else," he explained.

Rohit's lean patch, particularly in Tests since October 2024 wherein he crossed fifty only once in eight games against Bangladesh, New Zealand and Australia, led to calls for the India stalwart to contemplate his future.

The usually affable Mumbaikar has been combative in his response to such suggestions. After Sunday's blitzkrieg too, he asserted that his only goal is to perform on the field and ignore the noise on the periphery.

"We need to do our job, okay? Our job is to go out there and play the game. As long as you go there and you know that today when you go to bed, you know that you have given your best, that is what matters," he said.

"Every time I walk onto the pitch, walk on to play the game, I want to try and do well. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it may not happen. As long as I am clear what I want to do, that's all that matters. Nothing else matters," he added.



Pakistan should make Champions Trophy semifinals: Shastri

PTI ■ DUBAI

Armed with a fearsome pace attack and playing in home conditions, hosts Pakistan could be a force to reckon with in the Champions Trophy (CT) even though they will miss opener Saim Ayub, reckons former India coach Ravi Shastri.

Defending champions Pakistan head into the Champions Trophy riding high on three consecutive ODI series victories over South Africa, Zimbabwe and Australia.

"I think Pakistan are the kind of side that, with the exposure they've had in the last six to eight months in white-ball cricket, have put up some really strong performances, especially in South Africa," Shastri told The ICC Review.

Despite the absence of the injured Ayub, who has become a vital cog in the Pakistan side, Shastri remains confident in the team's depth.

"They've missed Ayub at the top, and he's a crucial player. But Pakistan have enough depth to be dangerous, especially in home conditions. I would say they should qualify for the semi-finals and from there, it's anyone's game."

Shastri is certain that, should Pakistan make it to the knockout stages, they will be a formidable threat to any team.

"Pakistan are still very, very dangerous, and if they qualify, they'll be doubly more dangerous."

Echoing Shastri's thoughts, Australian legend Ricky Ponting focused on Pakistan's lethal pace attack that includes Shaheen Afridi, Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain.

"I agree with Ravi. Saim Ayub is a high-quality player, and his absence is a massive gap to fill," Ponting said.

"But Pakistan's fast bowling brigade is very, very good. Led by Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah, who've been terrific in recent series, they have the pace and skill to trouble any batting line-up."

Since returning from South Africa, where he notched three consecutive fifties, former skipper Babar Azam's form has dipped. Ponting said his form will be crucial for Pakistan.

"Babar has been a bit up and down in recent years, but if he and (Mohammad) Rizwan can bring their A-games, that's when Pakistan becomes incredibly dangerous," Ponting said.

"They've still got enough high-quality players to beat any team on any given day. If they play well, they'll be right in it."

Ponting also acknowledged the added dimension that playing in front of a home crowd can bring. "The pressure of playing at home can work both ways. It can be a real motivator, especially with the home crowd behind you. That support can sometimes help you cross the line in big moments," Ponting said.

Pakistan will begin their Champions Trophy campaign against New Zealand in Karachi on Februrary 19 before taking on arch rivals India on February 23 in Dubai.



Breetzke becomes first batter to score 150 on ODI debut

PTI ■ LAHORE

South African opening batter Matthew Breetzke became the first cricketer to score 150 in his maiden ODI appearance in the tri-nation series game against New Zealand on Monday.

Breetzke, who isn't part of South African squad for this month's Champions Trophy (CT), smashed 150 off 148 balls and broke West Indies batter Desmond Haynes' record of 148 against Australia in 1978.

Breetzke was one of the four South Africans who made their ODI debuts on Monday, with seven players joining the squad in Pakistan late this week for the Champions Trophy.

South Africa rode on Breetzke's blitz to score 304-6 after New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner won his second successive toss and chose to field.

After losing captain Temba Bavuma (20) inside the power play, the 26-year-old Breetzke shared 93-run stand with Jason Smith (41) — another batter overlooked for the Champions Trophy. He pushed the scoring rate with some exhilarating hitting — especially on the off side of the wicket — and added further 131 runs with Wiaan Mulder, who made 64 off 60 balls.

Breetzke raised his century off 128 balls with a square cut boundary of fast bowler Will O'Rourke and needed just another 20 balls to surpass Haynes' 47-year record. He also became the fourth South African batter after Colin Ingram, Bavuma and Reeza Hendricks to get a century in debut ODI.

Breetzke was finally dismissed after hitting 11 boundaries and five sixes when he misread Matt Henry's slower ball and was caught at mid-off as South Africa put up a decent total.

O'Rourke (2-72) and Henry (2-59) picked up two wickets apiece but Ben Sears, who was smashed for 20 runs in one over by Breetzke, ended up with 0-65.

New Zealand had to make one forced change with opening batter Rachin Ravindra replaced by Devon Conway. Ravindra sustained a blow on the forehead while fielding during New Zealand's thumping 78-run win in the first match on Saturday against Pakistan and was rested for the second game.

Ravindra was struck on the head when he lost sight of the ball in what seemingly should have been a routine catch of Khushdil Shah at deep mid-wicket.

Dev Meena wins gold in National Games

PTI ■ DEHRADUN



Madhya Pradesh's Dev Kumar Meena smashed the national record in men's pole vault event while winning the gold medal with an effort of 5.32m on the third day of athletics competition at the National Games here Monday.

Of the eight gold medals on offer on the day, Punjab secured three, while Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Services, Tamil Nadu and host Uttarakhand took one each.

The 19-year-old Meena, who was defending the gold he had won in the 2023 edition, bettered the earlier national record of 5.31m set by Subramani Siva while winning the gold in the 2022 Games in Gujarat.

G Reegan (5m) of Tamil Nadu and Kuldeep Kumar (5m) of Uttar Pradesh won the silver and bronze respectively.

Meena had won a bronze medal in the Asian U20 Championship last year with an effort of 5.10m. He had also won gold in the Senior Federation Cup National Championships in Bhubaneswar last year.

His earlier personal best was 5.20m while winning the gold at the Indian Open U23 Competition in Patna last year.

In the other creditable performance, Anushka Yadav of Uttar Pradesh bettered the women's hammer throw Games record while winning gold with an effort of 62.89m.

The earlier Games record was 62.47m in the name of Tanya Chaudhary of Uttar Pradesh who had won the event in the 2023 edition of the Games.

Tanya finished second on Monday with a throw of 59.74m while Nandini, also of Uttar Pradesh, took the bronze with 58.89m.

In men's shot put, national record holder Tajinderpal Singh Toor of Punjab expectedly won the gold with a throw of 19.74m. Defending champion Samardeep Singh Gill (19.38m) of Madhya Pradesh and Prabhkirpal Singh (19.04m), also of Punjab, clinched the silver and bronze respectively.

Toor's national record stands at 21.77m. He had won gold in the 2022 edition of the Games.

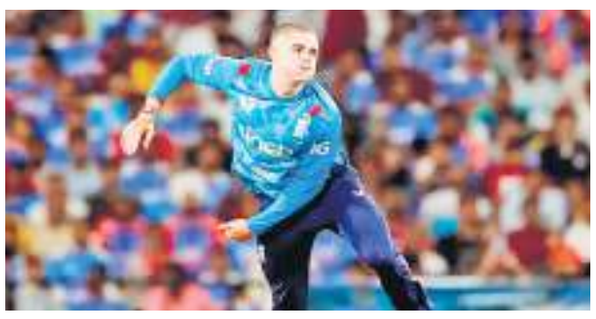
Andhra Pradesh's Jyothi Yarraji, who had won a gold in women's 100m hurdles on Sunday, entered the 200m final after winning her heat race with a time of 23.85 seconds.

Other Results:

Men's 3000m Steeplechase: Gold: Sumit Kumar (Services) - 8:46.26; Silver: Rohit Verma (Services) - 8:49.01; Bronze: Shankar Lal Swami (Haryana) - 8:49.39.

Men's 4x400m Relay: Gold: Tamil Nadu (Gitson Dharmaray, Akash Babu, Vasan, Aswin Krishna) - 3:10.61; Silver: Uttarakhand (Pravesh Roshwal, Prakhar Sharma, Sahil Malik, Anu Kumar) - 3:10.85; Bronze: Services (Nowajis Shaikh, Thomas Mathew, Shubham Deshmukh, Rince Joseph) - 3:10.90.

Bethell ruled out of Champions Trophy



PTI ■ CUTTACK

England suffered a major setback ahead of the Champions Trophy (CT) as promising all-rounder Jacob Bethell has been ruled out of the tournament due to a hamstring injury, skipper Jos Buttler has confirmed.

"I'm pretty sure he's been ruled out of the Champions Trophy, to be honest," Buttler said after their four-wicket defeat to India in the second ODI here on Sunday.

"So, that's really disappointing for him. Obviously, he played nicely the other day and has been one of the really exciting players. So, it's a shame that the injury is going to rule him out."

The 21-year-old left-hander, who scored a half-century and took a wicket in the first ODI at Nagpur, missed the match here as the visitors called up batter Tom Banton as a cover.

The deadline to submit the final squads for the Champions Trophy is Wednesday.

Gukesh eyes comeback against Caruana

PTI ■ HAMBURG



World champion D Gukesh will have his task cut out as he looks to stage a comeback against Fabiano Caruana of the USA in the Freestyle Grand Slam chess tournament here.

Gukesh suffered a rare setback in normal time control on Sunday, losing to Caruana in the first game of the quarterfinals.

The Indian is now under pressure to perform with his black pieces and draw level with Caruana who has been dreaming to be a world champion for a few years now.

The freestyle chess is built around 960 random positions shifting the initial position of the pieces from the base rank while the pawns remain intact.

The legendary Bobby Fischer was the first to advocate freestyle chess, and given the support the new format has received, it could well be the future of the sport.

Gukesh will have to fight hard, as his opening choices have come under scrutiny already while a whole new repertoire needs to be built. Caruana was almost staring at a defeat in the opening game of the quarters but will be looking at the return game with a lot of enthusiasm.

In the first game of the quarters, Gukesh was at the top of his game for the major part, improvising when it was necessary but the Indian failed to find a queen sacrifice in the latter stages of the middle game, and that cost him dearly.

As it happened in the game, Caruana was quick to take charge of the situation and did not give anything back.

Meanwhile, Magnus Carlsen, the main protagonist behind the tour, continued from where he left and scored a fine win over Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan.

Alireza Firouzja of France lost to Vincent Keymer of Germany in the opener, and the irony is that the latter was chosen to be his first round opponent by the winner of the qualifier event.

In the other game of the quarters, Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan played out a draw with Hikaru Nakamura while in the inconsequential ninth place decider, American Levon Aronian finally won his first game at the expense of Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia.

If Rohit can be under pressure, we should be easier on ourselves: Buttler

PTI ■ CUTTACK



If a player of Rohit Sharma's calibre could face pressure at times, the others should be a bit "easier" on themselves, said England skipper Jos Buttler as he hailed the Indian skipper's much-awaited century as a lesson in modern and dynamic ODI batting.

Facing intense scrutiny over his form and calls of retirement, the 37-year-old Rohit returned to form with his first century in the ODI format in 16 months to power India to a series-clinching win here on Sunday.

"It's probably a nice reminder for all of us that if someone of Rohit's caliber can be under pressure, we should be a bit easier on ourselves," Buttler said after their four-wicket loss here.

"He has been a great player for such a long period of time and top players generally come up with the goods and he obviously did that today."

"Any time you're playing against great players and they are playing an innings like that, I'm sure players on both sides will be watching and learning. He played a brilliant innings and (displayed) how he can go up and down the gears and absorb pressure, put a lot of pressure back on (the opponent)," Buttler added in full admiration of Rohit's blistering 119 off 90 balls.

Rohit found his mojo right from the outset, taking on England's new-ball attack of Saqib Mahmood and Gus Atkinson before dismantling the express pacer Mark Wood and spinner Adil Rashid to turn India's 305-run chase into a one-sided contest.

The England captain also lauded Rohit's adaptability and said watching a player of his stature in action was a learning experience.

"He really showed (that) in this day and age, in the modern sort of way of playing 50-over cricket, it's very dynamic, very aggressive. He scored at a rate just confirms really that the way we want to play is the right way that you have to play to try and win games in cricket," Buttler said.

"The way Rohit played showed that the way we want to play our cricket is the way, the correct way to play cricket."

Once again, England got off to a flier scoring 75 for no loss in first 10 overs with Ben Duckett and Phil Salt making the most of the powerplay, before Indian spinners led by Ravindra Jadeja's three-wicket haul seized the momentum. Buttler felt England fell short of a match-winning total.

"We, again, started really well. I thought Duckett and Salt played the powerplay brilliantly and got in some nice positions. We just needed one or two of us to sort of really kick on and play a real innings of note and maybe push our score up to 330-350 kind of territory," Buttler said.

"But some positives (are) there, we've been making steps again in the right direction, but probably didn't (put), not the perfect, complete performance with the bat. Credit to Rohit Sharma, I thought he played a fantastic knock. He's set the standard in ODI cricket for a while and another great innings today," he added.

Despite the defeat, Buttler counted on the positives in England's approach and emphasised the importance of learning from such moments.

"Any time you don't win games in cricket, that tends to be what happens. You just weren't quite good enough for long enough. In the cycle of the team, there's a few players who are just gaining experience and days like today are great lessons and that's what you want.

"You've got to accelerate that learning and keep pushing the guys in the right direction. Like I say, we're doing some things right. You always want to do some things better," he added.

Buttler also acknowledged Joe Root's crucial contribution after the senior batter top scored with a 72-ball 69.

"He's been someone we always rely on, can play that role to bat a lot of time. He doesn't face many dot balls, but he's always scoring at a good rate and he's a very consistent player. So, yeah, (he is a) really important guy in our team," Buttler signed off.



VISHWAK SEN SAYS 'SORRY' FOR PRUDHVI'S POLITICAL COMMENTS

Vishwak Sen's film *Laila* is in trouble as YSRCP people started a hashtag *'Boycott Laila'*, after actor Prudhvi's political comments at the film's pre-release event. Vishwak Sen and the producer apologised for Prudhvi's comments



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The film 'Laila' is in the news for the wrong reasons. The film's pre-release event was held on Sunday at a hotel in Hyderabad and actor Prudhvi's comments on this event irked YSRCP people and from then they ran a hashtag #BoycottLaila. 'Laila' film's lead actor Vishwak Sen and the producer Sahu Garapati held a media conference on Monday and said 'sorry' for Prudhvi's comments.

On Sunday, Prudhvi, in his speech, said that they started the film with nearly 150 goats and when the film comes to an end, the goats become 11 only. This comment became political and YSRCP people started Boycott Laila campaign on the social media and it reached nearly 60,000.

"We don't know what actor Prudhvi spoke about the event. We were at the front gate to receive chief guest Chiranjeevi garu," said Vishwak Sen about the incident. He added he had seen the hashtag on Monday morning and he urged everyone that they put a lot of effort into this film and because of a single person, don't kill the film. "The producer has put in many crores and I put a lot of effort in this film, especially for the lady get-up. I can't tell people how to talk at the film event. More than that, when the actor is talking, we didn't hear what he said, because he was at the front gate," said Vishwak Sen.

On behalf of the actor's comments, Vishwak Sen said 'Sorry'. "I don't know how we are being made scapegoats for a person's comments, but still I am saying 'sorry'," said the actor. The film is releasing on February 14 and it is directed by Ram Narayan.

On Sunday in the same 'Laila' event, another comment by Chiranjeevi was also trending on the social media. Chiranjeevi was the chief guest where he said that he has known Vishwak Sen's father Karate Raj for the past 18 years. He joined the Praja Rajyam Party when Chiru founded it. "Now, the Praja Rajyam has transformed into Jana Sena," said Chiranjeevi. Everyone was surprised by Chiranjeevi's comments. Chiranjeevi started the Praja Rajyam Party and later merged it with the Congress. After a few years, his younger brother Pawan Kalyan floated a new party Jana Sena and now Chiranjeevi is saying both are same. This comment is also trending on the social media.

At the same time, Chiranjeevi also officially announced that his next film is with director Anil Ravipudi and the shooting will start this summer. "Sahu Garapati is the producer along with my daughter Sushmitha Konidela," said Chiranjeevi, at the event. He added that after a long time, he is doing a full entertainment film in Anil Ravipudi's direction.

At the same event, Chiranjeevi said that the industry is in one compound. "Vishwak Sen is close to Balakrishna and sometimes he went to Tarak also. So, some people told me not to go to Vishwak's film function. But I said, my son is a big fan of Suriya. So, can't I attend my son's film function? Someone posed the same question to Vishwak the other day and I appreciate Vishwak's answer to it," said Chiranjeevi. He added that the actors are all one, but the fans are fighting with each other.

For the first time, Chiranjeevi also mentioned the success of 'Pushpa 2' in this event. Everyone knows that the differences between Allu and Mega family. At this juncture, Chiru's comment about 'Pushpa' also went viral. "I went to Balakrishna's 50 years function. Balakrishna, Venkatesh, Nagarjuna and I are all very close and together even now. 'Pushpa 2' became a huge hit and I am proud of it. If one film becomes a hit, we the industry people should be happy," said Chiranjeevi.

The 69-year-old actor said after seeing Vishwak Sen's lady get-up, that it stole his heart. "You are looking very glamorous in it," said Chiru. He added that he, Rajendra Prasad and Naresh played female get-ups in their career and all of them were hits. "I am sure this film is also going to be a big success," said Chiru.



Allu Aravind's apology to Mega fans

A few days back, Allu Aravind talked about Dil Raju and wanted to say that he is facing troubles with one film flop and at the same time he is happy with another film being a hit. These comments irked Mega fans as Allu Aravind indirectly said that Ram Charan's 'Game Changer' is a flop and Venkatesh's 'Sankranthiki Vasthunnam' is a big hit. From then onwards, many of the Mega fans trolled Allu Aravind on the social media and the effect is on the recent film 'Thandel' which is produced by Allu Aravind.

On Monday, Allu Aravind held a media conference to tell that they lodged an official complaint with the Cyber Crime Police about their film 'Thandel"s piracy. At the same time he said that some fans assume that he talked low about Ram Charan at a function and he got trolled for it. "I didn't talk about Ram Charan in a low way. I wanted to tell the circumstances of Dil Raju, where he faced IT raids and other things he was facing at that time. I spoke inadvertently at that time and my intention was not to hurt anyone," said Allu Aravind.

The producer said that he got trolled for that comment. "Ram Charan is like my son, I am the only menamama (uncle) to Charan. He is the only menalludu (nephew) to me. So, leave us behind and our relationship is excellent," said Allu Aravind. "I didn't comment like that and it came out by mistake," said Allu Aravind and asked to stop it with this.

Santhana Prapthirasthu: A dose of humour like never before!

Vikranth and Chandini Chowdary play the lead in the film 'Santhana Prapthirasthu', which is touted to be a perfect blend of laughter, emotions and relatable life moments on the big screen. It is directed by Sanjeev Reddy, known for 'ABCD' and the popular web series 'Aha Naa Pellanta'. Madhura Sreedhar Reddy and Nirvi Hariprasad Reddy are the producers. The film presents a fresh take on modern relationships, with humour at its heart.

The makers unveiled top comedian Vennela Kishore role of Dr Bhramaram. Inspired by renowned real-life specialists, this eccentric doctor from Garbha Gudi Wellness Centre is here to solve 'those' problems like a pro - but with a prescription of laughter, sharp wit, and unexpected life lessons. The makers reveal that the newly unveiled character poster offers a glimpse into Dr Bhramaram's unique world - where Ayurveda meets modern medicine, sarcasm meets science, and every consultation at Garbha Gudi Wellness Centre is an unforgettable experience!

Sheik Dawood G, who is the writer for films like 'Venkatadri Express' and 'Express Raja', is now working for 'Santhana Prapthirasthu'. Sunil Kashyap is the music director.





Dhanush's new film trailer is out

Dhanush is a proven actor with many of his films and he is also successful as a director. His last film 'Raayan' became a sensational hit and now, this versatile actor is all set to bring his third directorial venture, 'Jaabilamma Neeku Antha Kopama'. Dhanush is producing this film on his home production. The movie, which is touted as a romantic comedy, is penned by Dhanush. The Telugu-dubbed version will be released on February 21, alongside the original version.

On Monday, the trailer of this film was unveiled. In the beginning of the trailer, Dhanush calls it a usual love story. Actor Pavish plays the role of Prabhu, an aspiring chef who falls in love with Priya Prakash Varrier. The twist in the tale is Prabhu's ex-girlfriend, played by Anikha Surendran, is about to marry a handsome guy.

What happens to the first love story of Prabhu? Anikha Surendran's father's role is played by Sarathkumar, who opposes their love. What happens when a boy attends his ex-girlfriend's marriage? The fun and entertaining chaos follows. Priyanka Arul Mohan is going to appear in a special song. Dhanush too played a cameo role in this film. GV Prakash Kumar composed the music.



SREE VISHNU TURNS AS *SINGLE*

Actor Sree Vishnu is always coming up with different kind of subjects and he tries to portray those characters. Now, he is working with director Caarthik Raju, and the title is 'Single'. Caarthik earlier directed a few Tamil films and the Telugu film 'Ninu Veedani Needanu Nene', which stars Sundeep Kishan. Vidya Koppineedi, Bhanu Pratapa and Riyaz Chowdary are producing this film.

The makers released a video and revealed the title of this film as 'Single'. In this video, top comedian Vennela Kishore explains that he is still single at the age of 35. In another scene, on Valentines' Day, actor Sree Vishnu enters a park with crackers in one hand and in another hand he is listening to the radio. Ketika Sharma and Ivana are playing the female leads. Then Vennela Kishore reveals that the film title is 'Single'.



Jr NTR for Vijay Deverakonda

Vijay Deverakonda is now working with director Gowtham Tinnanuri for his upcoming film and the shooting is almost complete, according to a source. A few days back, producer Naga Vamsi announced that they will reveal the title of this film soon through his social media. Now, the makers are planning to release a teaser on Wednesday.

The interesting part about this teaser is that Jr NTR is lending his voice over. For the last few days, there has been talk about this teaser and the voice over. Now, the producer confirmed on his social media with a tiger's picture. Ranbir Kapoor may give his voice over for the Hindi version, says the source.

With Naga Vamsi posting the tiger picture, everyone knows that Jr NTR is also called as Young Tiger. Another interesting part is that Vijay Deverakonda replied to Naga Vamsi's post with a love symbol.

Vijay Deverakonda is pinning his hopes on this film as his earlier films 'Liger', 'Khushi' and 'Family Star' didn't do well at the box-office. This upcoming film is touted to be an action drama with Vijay going to appear in a completely new avatar.

