

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

There must not be any cases based on mere suspicion. Cases must be based on evidence. The media has been publishing Revanth Reddy's lies as it is. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is telling lies even in the Assembly. Ministers too have spoken lies in the Assembly about the state's debts. I am not afraid of Revanth Reddy or even his grandfather

- KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA and former Minister

Rajnath calls for mastering frontier technologies



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PROSPECTS OF ECONOMY EXPECTED TO IMPROVE: RBI



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Pushpa ante flower ankuntiva? BRAND IDDI!



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DON'T MISS...
Middlemen exploiting cotton farmers

Cotton farmers in Rangareddy district are being exploited by brokers and middlemen by engaging in fraudulent practices under the guise of 'benami' armers. These illegal activities are causing significant financial losses to genuine farmers while benefiting trade license holders and brokers. Farmers, who work tirelessly from planting seeds to harvesting their crops, are being cheated in multiple ...

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Life hit in Punjab due to farmers' bandh

Normal life was hit across Punjab on Monday due to a nine-hour 'bandh' called by farmers protesting against the Centre for their various demands including a legal guarantee of a minimum support price for their crops. Rail operations in Punjab were mostly suspended, buses and other vehicles remained off the road, leaving passengers stranded; and shops and establishments downed ...

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Reliance seeks premium for oil

Reliance Industries Ltd is seeking a premium of at least USD 3.5 per barrel over an international benchmark for crude oil it produces for eastern offshore KG-D6 block, according to the tender the firm put out on Monday. Reliance and its partner BP of the UK sought bids from domestic refiners for sale of 17,600 barrels (2,800 kilolitres) of crude oil every month from April 2025 to February 2026. The crude oil has been priced at daily average ...

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Australia beat India by 184 runs

India slumped to a demoralising 184-run loss to Australia in the fourth Test here on Monday with contemporary greats Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli failing to come good yet again, signalling that their walk towards the exit door is not too far. Chasing a near-improbable target of 340, both Rohit (9 off 40 balls) and Kohli (5) failed to battle their technical frailties and mental cobwebs as India lost seven wickets for 34 runs in just 20.4 overs in the final session ...

-SPORTS

Pawan endorses arrest of Allu Arjun

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan has extended his support to Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's decision to take legal action in the Sandhya Theatre stampede case, which claimed the life of a woman. Pawan Kalyan endorsed the arrest of film actor Allu Arjun, holding him accountable for the incident. The tragedy occurred during a screening of an Allu Arjun film, drawing widespread criticism. Pawan Kalyan lauded Revanth Reddy for his decisive stance, contrasting it with the alleged indifference of the previous YSRCP government, which he claimed often

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Hearing on Allu Arjun's bail put off to January 3

The decision follows the actor's virtual appearance before the court on December 27 in connection with the Sandhya Theatre stampede case, which tragically claimed the life of a woman and left her son hospitalized.

ALLU ARJUN ISSUE
Pawan comments stirs hornet's nest again

Politicos sharpen their criticism on Sandhya Theatre issue
Something went wrong between Revanth and Allu Arjun: Sanjay
CM is now maintaining silence after settlement with cinema personalities: KTR

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU
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■ HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's comments on Allu Arjun's Sandhya Theatre issue have stirred the hornet's nest once again. Pawan's comments on Monday gave a chance to Telangana politicians



to speak on the issue at a time when they were silent. Reacting to Pawan's comments that Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is a great leader, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said, "I have no idea what Pawan said. If he has indeed

called him a great leader, I wonder what qualities he saw in him. Revanth hasn't implemented the six guarantees or fulfilled any other promises he made. Crime has increased. So, how he is a great leader is something only they can explain."

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CM Revanth Reddy and Ministers—N Uttam Kumar Reddy, D Sridhar Babu, Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari and IT and Industries Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan meet Microsoft Chief Satya Nadella at Hyderabad on Monday

'Help TG in developing system compatible with AI'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu appealed to Microsoft Corporation President Satya Nadella requesting Microsoft help to develop a system compatible with technological requirements like AI, Gen AI and cloud, which the TG government is focusing on to make Hyderabad a leading city in IT. The CM said that Microsoft is one of the earliest technology companies in Hyderabad and now has a staff strength of 10,000. It has also invested in a data centre with a capacity of 600 MW. The Chief Minister thanked Nadella for regular investments and the expansion of Microsoft's presence in the state. The Chief Minister accompanied by IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu, the Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies,

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Centre should confer Bharat Ratna on Manmohan: CM

Former US prez Jimmy Carter passes away

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Jimmy Carter, the 39th US president and the third American head to make a trip to India, during which a village in Haryana was named Carterpuri in his honour, has died peacefully at his home in Plains, Georgia surrounded by his family. Carter, who died Sunday at 100, was the longest-lived president in US history. "Today, America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian," President Joe Biden said in a statement. Carter is survived by his children -- Jack, Chip, Jeff, and Amy; 11 grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife Rosalynn and one grandchild. "My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights, and unselfish love," Chip Carter said. Carter, a Democrat who served a single term from 1977 to 1981, had been in home hospice care since February 2023 after a series of short hospital stays. In his statement, Biden said over six decades, with his compassion and

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A statesman of great vision: Modi

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SPACE DOCKING EXPERIMENT
Spacecraft injected into right orbit

PNS ■ SRIHARIKOTA

Two spacecraft that would aid ISRO in demonstrating space docking, a critical technology for future space missions got separated successfully and were placed into the desired orbit late on Monday, ISRO said. "PSLV C60 mission accomplished as of SpaDex spacecraft is considered," said Mission director M Jayakumar. ISRO chief S Somanath said the rocket has placed the satellites in the right orbit of 475 km circular orbit, after over 15 minutes of flight. "So, as far as we are concerned, the rocket has placed the spacecraft in the right orbit and the Spadex satellites have moved one behind the other, and over the period of time, it will pick up further distance, travel about 20 km away and then the rendezvous and docking process will start. And we hope that the docking process can happen in another one week and the nominal time is going to be approximately January 7," he said in his address from the

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Govt demanding 8% to 14% kickbacks for clearing bills: Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said that the TG Congress Government is demanding commissions of 8% to 14% for approving bills. He said that some honest ministers in the Congress Cabinet are unhappy with this, leading to conflicts within the Congress. This commission racket could explode anytime, Sanjay said. He accused Congress leaders of focusing on bribing its Delhi high command to retain their posts rather than addressing public issues. The Congress Government has put around 12,000 former sarpanches in trouble across the state by not clearing their pending bills, Sanjay said. He said that under the leadership of BJP's Kishan Reddy, the party would support former sarpanches and launch a movement for their cause. Speaking to the media at Karimnagar on Monday, Sanjay listed the numerous development projects executed by the former sarpanches, like rural development initiatives, farmer support platforms, burial grounds, community halls, roads and water management. He emphasized that the public recognizes the contributions of former sarpanches. Sanjay also highlighted the rising crime rate under the Congress government, with a 22% increase in overall crime and a 28% rise in crimes against women. He accused the government of failing to maintain law and order.

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I think Revanth took money from Formula E-Car Racing reps: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Declaring that the Congress Government has been filing frivolous cases against him, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao lashed out at the government saying that it is filing cases through the ACB even if there was no corruption. He said that he would face the false cases legally. During a chat with journalists on Monday at the Telangana Bhavan, KTR said, "The CM has been blackmailing officials for making his photo with Formula E-Car Racing representatives public. The CM has been threatening those officials saying that he will suspend them and take disciplinary action. Why didn't the ACB file a case against Revanth Reddy for meeting Formula E-Car Racing representatives? Revanth hid his meeting with Formula E-Car Racing representatives. I now have a doubt that Revanth might have taken money from them. Why did Revanth's government not file a case against Formula E-Car Racing representatives if they had made illegal gains? The CM has been speaking as he liked saying that a Rs 600 crore 'scam' took place during the Formula E-Car Racing event." Making it clear that he will stick to his comment, KTR said that he took a decision as a Minister and is sticking to the same. The comments of Transport Minister Ponnampalapati Prabhakar prove that there was no corruption in it, KTR said. Even Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is not in a position to tell where

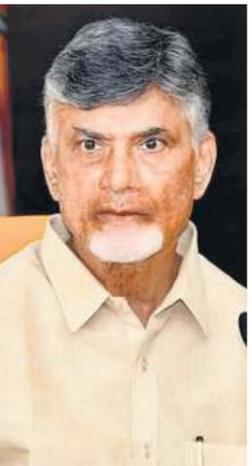
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AP CM accepts TG CM's request for Tirumala break darshan

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has said that the State government has decided to allow VIP break darshan (ticket Rs 500) and Special Entry Darshan (ticket Rs 300) on any two days from Monday to Thursday accepting two letters each from MLA/MLC/MP. The people's representatives can recommend the names of six devotees on each letter. In a release on Monday, Chandrababu Naidu said that directions have been given in this regard responding to a letter addressed to him by his Telangana counterpart A Revanth Reddy taking into consideration the rush of devotees, convenience of devotees coming from various states with these letters and to facilitate them quick darshan. The orders have been issued to maintain cordial relations at people's level in Telugu states. Meanwhile, Revanth Reddy expressed thanks to Chandrababu Naidu for directing TTD to allow letters of appeal from Telangana public representatives at TTD for darshan of Kaliyuga deity Shri Venkateswara Swami.

Chandrababu Naidu richest CM, Mamata Banerjee poorest: ADR



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is the richest chief minister in India with assets worth over Rs 931 crore, while West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee is the poorest with just Rs 15 lakh, according to an Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report released on Monday. The report said the average asset per chief minister from state assemblies and union territories is Rs 52.59 crore. While India's per capita net national income or NNI was approximately Rs 1,85,854 for 2023-2024, the average self-income of a chief minister is Rs 13,64,310, around 7.3 times the average per capita

times the average per capita income of India. The total assets of 31 chief ministers are worth Rs 1,630 crores. Arunachal Pradesh's Pema Khandu is the second richest chief minister with total assets worth over Rs 332 crores, Karnataka's Siddaramaiah is the third on the list with assets worth more than Rs 51 crore. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, with assets worth Rs 55 lakh, is the second poorest in the list and Pinarayi Vijayan is third with Rs 118 crore. Khandu also has the highest liabilities to the tune of Rs 180 crore. Siddaramaiah has liabilities worth Rs 23 crore and Naidu more than Rs 10 crore, the report said. It also said 13 (42 percent) chief ministers have declared criminal cases against themselves, while 10 (32 percent) have declared serious criminal cases including those related to attempt to murder, kidnapping, bribery, and criminal intimidation. Out of the 31 chief ministers, only two are women - West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee and Delhi's Atishi.



World population will be 8.09 billion on New Year's Day

PNS ■ NEW YORK

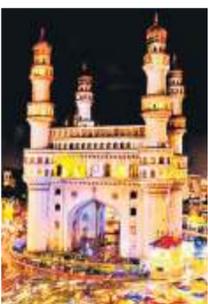
The world population increased by more than 71 million people in 2024 and will be 8.09 billion people on New Year's Day, according to US Census Bureau estimates released Monday. The 0.9 per cent increase in 2024 was a slight slowdown from 2023, when the world population grew by 75 million people. In January 2025, 4.2 births and 2.0 deaths were expected worldwide every second, according to the estimates. The United States grew by 2.6 million people in 2024, and the US population on New Year's Day will be 341 million people, according to the Census Bureau. The United States was expected to have one birth every 9 seconds and one death every 9.4 seconds in January 2025. International migration was expected to add one person to the US population every 23.2 seconds. The combination of births, deaths and net international migration will increase the US population by one person every 21.2 seconds, the Census Bureau said. So far in the 2020s, the US population has grown by almost 9.7 million people, a 2.9 per cent growth rate. In the 2010s, the US grew by 7.4 per cent, which was the lowest rate since the 1930s.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | TUESDAY | DECEMBER 31, 2024

03



CITY EVENTS

Annual Day Celebrations

by Sri Sal Samskar Educational Society

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi, December 31 (9 am to 1 pm)

Cultural programmes

by Shivani Arts Association

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi December 31, (1:30 pm to 5 pm)

New Year Eve 2025

One Last Night

Venue

Katriya Hotel & Towers (Fortune Katriya) December 31 (8 pm)

Kuchipudi performance

By students Of Guru Bindhu Abhinay

Venue

Shilparamam December 31, (5:30 pm)

Christmas Bazaar

Exhibition-cum-Sale

Venue

Lulu mall Till December 31, daily at 10:00 am

NYU CARNIVAL

With singer KARTHIK

Venue

Boulder Hills, Hyderabad December 31

Weekend kids cooking camp

Master cooking and baking in 09 fun weekends

Venue

Culinary Guru Institute, Hyderabad. Till January 11, 2025.

Uttam releases new year diary, calendar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies Department Captain N U t t a m Kumar Reddy has described irrigation engineers as the backbone to the irrigation department.

Releasing a new calendar and diary for 2025 brought out by the Engineering Graduates' Association here on Monday, the Minister said that the skill of the engineers brings good name to the department. He exhorted all employees to take part in strengthening the irrigation department.

Association president Noone Sridhar, secretary-general B Gopalakrishna Rao, working president Veggalam Prakash, associate president K Sudhakar Reddy, joint secretary Mahendranath, vice-president Donti Kavita and others were present on the occasion.

130 grievances submitted across GHMC in Prajavani

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Commissioner Ilambarithi has directed officials to prioritise grievances received through the Prajavani programme and take prompt actions for resolution.

During the Prajavani programme held at the GHMC head office on Monday, citizens from various areas of the Greater Hyderabad region submitted grievances seeking solution. The Commissioner, along with Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shobhan Reddy, personally received the grievances.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Ilambarithi instructed the Town Planning officials to inspect complaints related to the department on-site and issue notices against illegal constructions.

He also directed them to submit a report on the action taken so far on complaints received in the department. To ensure effective



GHMC Commissioner Ilambarithi, along with Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shobhan Reddy at the Prajavani programme in Hyderabad on Monday

monitoring and resolution, a special Additional CCP was appointed under whose supervision the issues should be addressed. The Commissioner stated that he would review the grievances related to town plan-

ning weekly and warned officials against negligence, emphasising strict disciplinary actions if required.

Deputy Mayor Srilatha Shobhan Reddy urged officials to regularly review grievances

submitted through Prajavani and resolve them swiftly. She stressed the need for special attention from officials concerned to address public issues effectively.

In the Prajavani Phone-in Programme, three grievances were received and forwarded to the respective departments for swift resolution.

During the Prajavani programme at the GHMC head office, 48 grievances were received, including 29 for the Town Planning department, nine for the Tax department, three for CE Maintenance, two each for Finance, Health, and Land Acquisition, and one each for Housing and Veterinary departments.

A total of 82 grievances were received across six zones under GHMC, with Kukattapally zone receiving 35, Secunderabad zone 18, Serilingampally zone nine, Charminar zone eight, LB Nagar zone 11 and Khairatabad zone one.

Eight test positive for drugs amid New Year checks

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a late night raid at Madhapur, Anti-Narcotics Bureau with Cyberabad Police found eight individuals positive for drugs such as ganja and cocaine on Sunday.

Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau (TGANB) received information in the afternoon on December 28. Internationally acclaimed German DJ Ben Bohmer and his team were also subjected to the testing process and were cleared as drug-free, said a release.

In collaboration with Cyberabad Police, a team of 22 officers, including DSPs from State Task Force, Cyberabad and Rachakonda Narcotics police stations used a combination of information networks, intelligence inputs, electronic surveillance, physical surveillance and spotters trained to identify individuals displaying signs of drug consumption.

The team identified 25 potential drug consumers. Out of these, 14 individuals were subjected to advanced drug testing. The tests

revealed that eight individuals tested positive for substances such as THC (found in ganja), cocaine, amphetamine and methamphetamine.

The operation utilised cutting-edge equipment, including advanced drug detection kits, rapid-result urine and saliva testing kits and trained narcotics detection dogs. These tools enabled on-the-spot testing with unparalleled accuracy. The advanced technology ensured immediate results, leaving no scope for evasion.

BREAKING PERIOD MYTHS

Crowdfunding hygiene for slum girls in Medchal

DEEPIKA PASHAM
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■ HYDERABAD

Menstrual hygiene remains a taboo in many parts of society, leaving adolescent girls, especially those from families below or just above the poverty line, struggling to manage their periods. For many studying in government schools and colleges, the lack of clean toilets, running water and awareness about menstrual hygiene leads to missed school days or even dropping out entirely.

Amidst these challenges, some teachers in government schools have taken it upon themselves to seek help from non-profit organisations and activists to address these issues and ensure that menstruation no longer disrupts the education of their girl students.

One such effort took place recently in a slum in Jawahar Nagar, Medchal district. A local child rights activist, Hima Bindu, identified the challenges faced by adolescent girls in the community and initiated a crowdfunding campaign to dis-



N Bhanu and Hima Bindu with the adolescent girls while creating awareness on menstruation myths

tribute reusable cloth pads.

The initiative was supported by N Bhanu, the founder of Red Express Hygiene, a social enterprise specialising in reusable fabric pads for women. The campaign successfully provided 50 girls with fabric pad sets, each set costing Rs 450 and containing four pads.

Hima Bindu explained the importance of the initiative, stating, "The menstruation and surrounding myths are a huge concern in society. As part of our work, we form adolescent girls' collectives to raise aware-

ness about gender-specific issues and empower them to fight for their safe spaces. These girls expressed their struggles during their periods, and we decided to crowdfund for reusable fabric pads."

"We train girls and women to understand that period blood is normal and explain the science behind it," she added.

Bhanu highlighted her approach to promoting menstrual hygiene: "I do nothing for money. After testing multiple fabrics, I finalised one that is safe for women."

Stress on increasing fleet strength of RTC, MMTS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The number of vehicles commuting on the city roads in 2024 increased to 10,000 per ever kilometer as against only 6,500 in 2019. Of the 10,000 vehicles, more than 7000 are two-wheelers.

This is attributed to reduction in the fleet of RTC buses and absence of expansion of MMTS by the railways.

According to a study, the emission of micro-polluting substance from the vehicles is put at more than 35,000 tons per year in the city.

In fact, to cater to the transport needs of the city's population at least 250 MMTS services are needed. Earlier, daily at least 80 lakh used to commute using 121 services. However, their number has been cut down to 80 currently, reducing the commuters using the services daily to just 50,000. At least 1.10 lakh preferring to use personal transport to commute. This is attributed to cancellation of the services, delay in running,

Overcoming the problems, if more and more MMTS trains are operated on Alwal, Ghatkesar, Tellapur, Hafizpet, hi-tech city routes, it would be beneficial to more and more commuters.

To cater to the city's population's (1.5 crore) transport needs, 7500 city buses should be operated. Daily at least 20 lakh have been using RTC bus services with the introduction of Mahalakshmi scheme by the Cong regime. They have been commuting on the available 2800 buses almost overcrowding them.

That is why many prefer to use their own vehicles. There are over 3 lakh vehicles in the city whose age is more than 15 years. The pollution-control board officials attribute using of the outdated vehicles to the increasing pollution.

In this backdrop, free pollution check for vehicles has been offered two months ago at seven places in the city. However, only 500 vehicles utilized the facility.



'Civil services provide unique opportunity to serve nation'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A seminar titled 'How to crack civil services in the first attempt: UPSC master class' was organised by VINGS Media and G5 Media Group, in association with 21st Century IAS Academy, at G Pulla Reddy Degree College, Hyderabad, on Monday.

Dr Bhavani Shankar, Chief Mentor of 21st Century IAS Academy, addressed the students and emphasised the importance of leading a reputable life in society.

He highlighted that preparing for the UPSC civil services examination is a pathway to achieving this goal, as civil services provide a unique opportunity to serve the nation.

During his address, Dr Shankar presented a detailed power-point presentation that covered the types of questions typically asked in the UPSC examination.

He urged students not to fear the exam, clarifying that many questions are based on concepts taught in primary classes and dis-

missing misconceptions about the exam's difficulty. He also noted that graduates from any stream with a minimum of 35% marks are eligible to attempt the examination.

The session included an interactive Q&A segment, where students enthusiastically participated and gained valuable insights.

Dr K Murali Krishna, principal of the college, welcomed the participants and shared a brief note on the significance of civil services, encouraging students to make the most of the seminar.

SCR holds safety review meet

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager, South Central Railway, conducted a detailed review meeting on safety and punctuality of trains in the SCR jurisdiction on Monday at Rail Nilayam, Secunderabad.

The General Manager instructed the officials to intensify field inspections focusing on functioning of safety related assets and station assets. He also discussed on the safety instructions to be followed in yard shunting. He instructed that every loco pilot / shunter must conduct brake power test before going to train movements.

The General Manager advised regular counselling of



Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager, South Central Railway, conducting a review meeting on safety and punctuality of trains

the staff such as loco pilots, assistant loco pilots and for the staff who are involved in the working of train operations. Officials informed the General Manager on availability of the safety related stock like smoke

detecting devices and fire extinguishers over the zone. He instructed the officials to maintain adequate stocks in the depots to meet the unusual exigencies.

Arun Kumar Jain instructed

the officials to conduct frequent inspections in the yards and sidings to make train movements better so that they will not affect the punctuality of trains. He also discussed on implementation of the Railway Board safety guidelines and advisory and emphasised on the strict adherence of the board's instructions over the zone.

Neeraj Agrawal, Additional General Manager, SCR also participated in the meeting along with all the Principal Heads of Departments. Divisional Railway Manager's (DRMs) of all six Divisions i.e. Secunderabad, Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Guntakal, Guntur and Nanded through a video conference.

Potholes, ditches abound on GHMC roads in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The city roads in the GHMC limits are full of potholes at many places posing problems to pedestrians as well as vehicle riders. There is apparently negligence in closing the potholes formed in August this year during the monsoon season, let alone developing new roads.

Another strong reason for the damage being caused to the city roads is the contractors digging the roads for installing electric poles, installing water pipelines and for development of drainages and not closing the ditches.

Of the 9013-km-long network of city roads, roads up to a distance of 1000 km have been damaged. Officials are



allegedly apathetic to undertake repairs to the roads.

According to Indian Road Congress rules, the durability of the black top roads should be at least six years, while that of CC roads should be 10 years. But, nowadays the roads have been needing repairs within a few months of their development.

Karwan MLA Kauser

Mohiuddin on December 11 submitted a memorandum to GHMC zonal commissioner seeking urgent repairs to potholes to the roads in his constituency. Similarly, MLAs of other constituencies have been highlighting the bad condition of roads to the civic body attracting to response from it.

In fact, digging of roads in the city requires the contractor

to obtain a NOC from the civic body. It is the responsibility of the contractor to develop the road after completing his work. If the contractor neglects development of road, the civic body has every right to put his bills on hold.

At some places, contractors, without obtaining the permission, have been digging roads overnight and completing their work and leaving the place unnoticed. Because of this, traffic jams have become frequent in the city and sometimes road accidents are occurring due to the phenomenon. The civic body developed white top roads at some places. Such roads should not be dug for at least five years. Such roads are also being dug nowadays.



The Traffic Officers with Commissioner of Police G Sudheer Babu with body-worn cameras

OBJECTIVE RECORD OF EVENTS

Traffic Police introduces body-worn cameras

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

With an initiative aimed at modernising traffic enforcement and fostering greater trust between law enforcement and the public, the Rachakonda Traffic Police has officially introduced body-worn cameras (BWCs) for its officers.

The BWCs will be worn by traffic officers while on duty, recording their interactions with the public. This initiative is designed to provide an objective record of events, significantly reducing the potential for disputes and complaints.

The distribution of BWCs has already commenced, with all sub-inspectors and inspectors in the Rachakonda Traffic division receiving their cameras. The allotment programme was inaugurated by Commissioner G Sudheer Babu, at the CP office in Neramed, with the attendance of several key officials, including DCPs and inspectors from various traffic units.

"The introduction of body-worn cameras is a landmark

step in our efforts to modernise traffic enforcement and foster greater trust between the police and the public. We are committed to leveraging technology to make our roads safer and ensure a more transparent system," said Sudheer Babu.

By recording interactions, BWCs ensure that both officers and citizens are held accountable, thereby minimising misunderstandings and enhancing the integrity of traffic enforcement.

The presence of cameras is anticipated to encourage officers to maintain the highest standards of behavior while on duty, promoting professionalism within the force.

With the assurance that their interactions with enforcement officers are being documented, citizens can feel more confident in the fairness and justice of the enforcement process.

The recorded footage will serve as reliable evidence in cases of traffic violations, disputes or investigations, aiding in the resolution of incidents.

Investigation still underway into cops' suicide

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

District Superintendent of Police Sindhu Sharma on Monday said that the investigation into the suicide of sub-inspector Saikumar, constable Shruti and computer operator Nikhil. The trio jumped in Aloor Yellareddy Pedda tank and drowned.

Commenting on the incident, the Superintendent of Police said that there were no eyewitnesses in the case.

It is suspected that one of the three persons jumped into the tank first and two others could have entered the water body to rescue the first one and drowned on December 25. The bodies were retrieved after painstaking efforts.

In reply to a question, she said, "I am not aware of any



Sindhu Sharma

complaint that indicated a threat to Nikhil's life."

She said the post-mortem primary report has been received.

"We are investigating the reasons behind the suicides of the trio," she said.

Mobile phones and water samples have been collected and sent to the forensic lab for analysis, she added.

Labour shortage shoots paddy transplantation cost

Farmers are forced to hire farmworkers from outside the State by paying higher wages

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Due to a shortage of farmworkers, farmers in the region have been compelled to hire workers from other states such as Bihar, West Bengal, and Maharashtra, often at significantly higher wages. In some cases, farmers are paying double the wages given to local workers. Female workers from other states are paid between Rs 500 to Rs 600 a day, while male workers earn Rs 1,000 a day.

Additionally, farmers are providing free transport, tea, and snacks to the workers, which has become an added financial burden. For example, the cost of transplanting paddy on an acre of land has risen to Rs 6,000, up from Rs 4,000-4,500 two years ago. The decision to hire migrant workers has been driven by the need to save time, as their services allow for faster completion of the work.

To address the shortage of labour, farmers have turned to both farm mechanisation and migrant laborers. The lack of sufficient farm machinery has made manual transplantation of paddy a more viable option, as it can yield better results. Migrant workers from places such as Kolkata, Gachchiroli, Chandrapur, Bihar, Odisha, and Bengal are now a common sight in the fields.

In some cases, locals are arranging accommodation for these migrant workers, striking deals with farmers to supply them with the labour force while making substantial profits by charging higher



rates. According to officials, the total area for paddy cultivation in the district during the current Yasangi (rabi) season is expected to reach 1,91,351 acres. As a result, the demand for migrant workers has surged, as they tend to work in groups and complete tasks more efficiently.

Their fee for transplanting paddy ranges from Rs 5,000 to Rs 5,500 per acre, with some workers in high-demand areas charging up to Rs 6,000 per acre. Farmers generally hire workers on a daily basis to meet the demand.

Babul, a migrant laborer from Kolkata, shared that he earns Rs

2,000 a day by working from dawn to dusk in the fields. He and his fellow workers are employed for about two months each season, and the farmers take good care of them. Mangal, another worker from Kolkata, explained that in their home state, they struggle to find work.

He emphasised that migrant workers transplant paddy more efficiently than local farmerworkers.

Mallareddy, an agent from Gundlapalli, has been bringing around 560 workers from West Bengal annually for the kharif and rabi seasons for the past eight years to help farmers cope with the labor shortage.



Middlemen riding roughshod over cotton farmers

Cotton growers losing Rs 1,000 per quintal due to cheating by brokers

SRINIVAS ■ GUDUPALLI/RANGAREDDY

Cotton farmers in Rangareddy district are being exploited by brokers and middlemen by engaging in fraudulent practices under the guise of 'benami' farmers. These illegal activities are causing significant financial losses to genuine farmers while benefiting trade license holders and brokers.

Farmers, who work tirelessly from planting seeds to harvesting their crops, are being cheated in multiple ways. Brokers are purchasing cotton from farmers in villages at rates far lower than the government-mandated price of Rs 7,521 per quintal. Instead, they are offering Rs 6,400 to Rs 6,500 per quintal, depriving farmers of Rs 1,000 per quintal.

The cotton thus purchased is then resold at Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) centres through benami farmers, generating significant profits for these brokers.

The involvement of trade license holders in this malpractice is particularly alarming. Reports indicate that nearly ten ginning mills across the district are part of this illegal operation. Farmers allege that marketing and agricultural department officials are turning a blind eye to these irregularities, further enabling the exploitation.

Despite the government's assurances of fair practices, brokers are openly purchasing cotton in villages without proper authorisation. Many farmers believe that officials are

complicit in the ongoing fraud, as the licenses of those involved remain untouched. These illegal transactions not only harm farmers but also result in significant revenue losses for the government.

In several cases, cotton purchased at lower rates by brokers is sold under fictitious names at CCI centres, creating an artificial demand and inflating prices.

This benami system has left farmers in Rangareddy district with no option but to sell their produce at unfair prices, leading to mounting financial distress.

Farmers and farmer unions have expressed their frustration, urging the government to intervene and address the irregularities at CCI centres. They demand stricter oversight, immediate cancellation of licenses for violators, and measures to ensure farmers receive fair prices for their crops.

Marketing Officer Srinivas clarified that trade licences would be revoked if violations are confirmed. He emphasised that cotton purchases at CCI centres are conducted based on the farmer's Aadhaar card and photograph. However, this measure appears insufficient to curb the benami operations rampant across the district.

Farmers across Rangareddy district are urging authorities, including the district collector, to take swift action to end the exploitation.

They demand justice and a fair system that safeguards their livelihood, free from the clutches of corrupt brokers and middlemen.

Tummala vows to make medical college as model in medical sector

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Minister for Agriculture Tummala Nageshwara Rao on Monday said that the Khamma Government Medical College would be made a model in the medical and educational sectors. He also mentioned that the Velugumata Urban Park is being developed for the benefit of people in Khammam city. The 500-acre Velugumata Urban Park will be developed as an Eco Park. He announced plans to set up

a ropeway at the historical Khamma Fort, a symbol of the region's heritage. There is a proposal to establish a Shilparamam (craft village) at the Lakaram Tank Bund.

To prevent floods in the Munneru River, he announced that concrete walls would be constructed on both sides of the river with a budget of Rs 700 crore. A drainage system for floodwater diversion is also being constructed with an investment of Rs. 220 crore.



Nirmal Police vows to eradicate drug menace

PNS ■ NIRMAL

District Superintendent of Police Janaki Sharmila on Monday said that though there was an increase in the overall crime rate, the number of cases solved also increased.

"The police are constantly working towards addressing various issues. Compared to previous years, the number of crime cases has increased, but at the same time, the number of cases resolved has also grown," she said at a media conference.

She emphasised the efforts being made to eradicate marijuana menace in the district. Special training was provided to the sniffer dogs to sniff out drugs.

She also mentioned the increase in the number of suicides at Basara and the police were working to address the issue.

The police adopted the Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge and Technologies in Basar and are working seriously to resolve the problems being faced by students.



Nirmal Superintendent of Police Janaki Sharmila addressing a media conference in Nirmal on Monday

and is providing interest-free loans up to Rs 3 lakh to meet their needs. Additionally, the police helped the victims of cyber-crime get back Rs 12 lakh.

Additional Superintendent of Police Upender Reddy, Bhainsa Additional Superintendent of Police Avinash Kumar, Deputy Superintendent of Police Gangareddy, and several Circle Inspectors and sub-inspectors were present.

Through the Bharosa Centre, the police reunited over 50 families, bringing joy to them.

To address the traffic problems in the district, proposals have been sent for the establishment of a women's police station and a traffic police station in Nirmal and Bhainsa.

For the welfare of police personnel, a departmental store has been established

Man held on charge of patricide

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

A tragic incident happened in the Nizamabad district. A man, under the influence of alcohol, allegedly murdered his father.



Mehboob

The event unfolded in the village of Ambam (R) under the Rudr mandal on Sunday night following a confrontation between the duo. A wrangle According to police, the youth, identified as Mehboob, allegedly smothered his father, Haimad, to death while he was asleep.

Local residents alerted the authorities, who promptly arrived at the scene, apprehended the suspect. The police confirmed that a murder case has been filed, and the accused would be taken into custody for interrogation.

Mukkoti Ekadasi fete at Bhadrachalam temple from today

PNS ■ BHADRACHALAM

The Bhadrachalam temple authorities have been making all arrangements for the Mukkoti Ekadasi celebrations at the temple on a grand scale. The Mukkoti Ekadasi celebrations at the Sri Sitaramachandra Swamy temple here will commence from Tuesday. The temple authorities have earmarked Rs 90 lakh for organising the celebrations which will conclude on Jan 10.

Various sectors are going to be set up near the northern gate of the temple to accommodate VIPs, the media, while Sectors A, B, C, D and E will accommodate the devotees. The number of tickets on the offer for VIP sector is 1,300 with each ticket costing Rs 2,000. Besides the VIP sector, there is a VIP sector reserved for celebrities for whom the seating would be allotted by the Collector, EO and RDO. In all, 150 media persons will be allowed in the press sector. Besides these, 3,000 devotees can witness the proceedings free of cost.

In all, 400 tickets each costing Rs 1,000 are on the offer for the persons to witness the proceedings from Sector A, while 1,330 tickets each costing Rs 500 are available for B, C and D sectors. There are 650 tickets available for E sector with each ticket costing Rs 250.

Cultural events would be organised on a grand scale. Therefore, huge number of devotees not only from state from neighbouring states are expected to witness the spectacle.

A float festival (tepotasavam) is scheduled to take place on December 9 evening in River Godavari during which the idols of Lord Rama and Sita Devi will be taken out on a specially-decorated swan-shaped boat. The highlight of the festival Uttara Dwara Darshanam would be held at 5 am on Jan 10 allowing devotees to pass through the temple's northern entrance.

The temple EO Rama Devi said that two lakh laddus would be prepared. The temple authorities are going to procure 7,000 kg of ghee for the preparation of laddus from Vijaya Dairy.

GITAM signs MoU with CDS, SS and II to promote skill development

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

GITAM Deemed to be University has entered into strategic partnerships with Chennai Digital Solutions (CDS), Structural Solutions (SS), and Incline Inventions (II) by signing three pivotal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

These collaborations aim to promote entrepreneurship, skill development, and innovation, further strengthening the university's ties with the industry.

The MoU with CDS focuses on developing cutting-edge technologies, fostering innovation, and providing internship and placement opportunities to students. Structural Solutions will enhance students' industry-aligned skill sets, preparing them for evolving



workforce demands. Meanwhile, Incline Inventions will establish a Silicon Core AI R&D Centre at GITAM, specializing in AI-driven video analytics and broadcasting solutions on System-on-Chip (SoC) platforms.

The agreements, effective for three years, were signed by Dr. Gunasekaran D, Registrar

of GITAM, along with Satyanarayana Chennapragada (MD, CDS), E Dwarakanath (MD, SS), and Dr. B. Pradeep Kumar (Co-Founder & CTO, II). Senior representatives from GITAM, including Dr. Divya Kirithi Gupta, Fakhruddin Sheikh, and Damodar, were present at the signing ceremony.

Bandi calls upon ex sarpanches to defeat Cong in local body polls

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Union Minister of State for Home Bandi Sanjay Kumar called on the former sarpanches to defeat Congress in the upcoming local body elections and assured them that BJP would stand by them in their fight. He said the BJP would force the Congress government to clear all pending bills.

He further accused the Congress government of deceiving the sarpanches by promising to clear the bills but failing to deliver on it word. The former sarpanches, who worked in good faith for public development, are now burdened with debt and left high and dry.

On Monday, a delegation led by Akkinapally Karunakar, president of the State Association of



Former sarpanches submitting a petition to Union Minister of State for Home Bandi Sanjay Kumar in Karimnagar on Monday

Former Sarpanches, met Bandi Sanjay and submitted a petition. Karunakar expressed faith in Sanjay, stating, "He has always fought for resolving issues in the state, and we believe he will address the problems faced by us." Later, speaking to the media, Sanjay criticised the

Congress government for its corrupt practices. He pointed out that approximately Rs 1,300 crore in bills are pending for nearly 12,769 former sarpanches across the state. Despite promises, the Congress government has not released even a single rupee in over a year.

Admonished by parents, student ends life

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

A 17-year-old intermediate student, Mukka Rohan, was found hanging in Godavarikhan late on Sunday night after he had been admonished by his parents regarding his poor academic performance.

According to police, Rohan was

enrolled as a first-year student at a private college.

His parents had expressed their concerns about his academic struggles.

In a state of despair over their warnings, he is believed to have tragically taken his own life at their residence in Markandaya colony here.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
REVENUE (LA) DEPARTMENT
FORM-VII
(See Sub-rule(i) of rule-25
And Section-19(1) of the Act-35(2013)
Collector/Joint Collector
Declaration

No. 76/2024 Dated: 23-12-2024.
No. G/904/2024 Dated: 23-12-2024.

Whereas it appears to the Government of Telangana/Collector that Structures in Total extent in length & Width 610 Sq.yards Karukonda Village of Bijinepally Mandal, Nagarkurnool Division Nagarkurnool District, for public purpose, namely for formation of Vattenm Balancing Reservoir at Karukonda Village of Bijinepally Mandal.

Therefore declaration is made that a piece of Structures in Total extent in length & Width 610 Sq.yards standard measurement under acquisition for the above said project in the village Karukonda, Mandal Bijinepally District Nagarkurnool whose detailed description is as following:

Sl. No.	By	Typ	Ext	Name of the Structures and owner	Boundaries	Te	Sta
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	47	103	41*30*	SRI RAJESWAR TEMPLE	47	47	47
2	47	103	40*	SHIVAJI TEMPLE	47	47	47

Total in Sq.yards 610 Sq.yards

This declaration is made after hearing of objections of persons interested and due enquiry as provided us of the Act No. 13/2013. The number of families likely to be resettled due to land Acquisition is NIL for whom Resettlement area has been identified, whose brief description is as following:

Village Nil Mandal Nil District Nil Area Nil

Mines of coal, iron-stone, slate or other minerals lying under the said land or any particular portion of the said land, except such parts of the mines and minerals which may be required to be dug or removed or used during the construction phase of the project for the purpose of which the land is being acquired, are not needed.

A plan of the land may be inspected in the office of the Land Acquisition Officer & Sp.Dy.Collector LA PRLIS Unit-II, Nagarkurnool on any working day.

On account of the proposed land Acquisition no family is being displaced. Hence rehabilitation and resettlement scheme doesn't arise.

Sd/- Sp. Dy. Collector Sd/- Additional Sd/- Dist. LA (R&R) PRLIS Unit-II Collector (Revenue) Collector Nagarkurnool Nagarkurnool Nagarkurnool

DIPR RO.No: 334/LA/PP/Adv1/Pub/2024-25

ACROSS THE STATES



Juveniles to be tried as adults for heinous crimes

Out of 52 juveniles accused of heinous crimes, 11 will be tried as adults in the outer North Delhi district of the national capital, an official said on Monday. Police said the district has undertaken a special drive aimed at creating a stronger and safer law-and-order environment for its residents. "As part of the special drive, a total of 52 juveniles, all between the ages of 16 and 18, have been identified for their involvement in heinous crimes, including robbery, snatching, murder, attempt to murder, and other such offenses. Recognising the gravity of these cases, 52 applications were moved to try them as adults. We got approval for 11 applications," Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer north) Midhvi Valsan said. Sharing break-up from different police stations of the district, the DCP said that they moved eight applications from the Bawana police station and one person will be tried as adult.



Protests continue in Rajasthan over abolition of 9 districts

Protests against the abolition of nine newly-created districts in Rajasthan spilled into Monday, with the opposition Congress and other organisations warning the government that the agitations would continue till the districts were restored. The state government on December 28 decided to abolish nine of the 17 districts created by the previous Congress dispensation, saying they were neither practical nor in public interest. Three new divisions were also dissolved in a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma. The state will now have seven divisions and 41 districts. In response, a "mahapadav (massive sit-in)" was held outside the Sanchole collectorate under the leadership of former minister Sukhram Vishnoi. Markets were closed on the call of the Vyapar Mandal. In Shahpura, several organisations held protests against the government's decision and submitted a memorandum to the subdivisional officer for the district's restoration.



Gujarat home to over 200 wolves: Census

The latest census conducted by the Gujarat Forest and Environment Department has estimated the population of Indian wolves to be 222 in the state. The enumeration exercise carried out in 2023 in collaboration with the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, surveyed 13 districts, with significant findings on their distribution and habitat, an official release stated on Monday. At 80, Bhavnagar district has recorded the highest number of wolves in Gujarat, followed by 39 in Narmada district, 36 in Banaskantha, 18 in Surendranagar, 12 each in Jamnagar and Morbi, and 9 in Kutch district. Porbandar, Mehsana, Navsari, Patan, Aravalli and Surat districts have also recorded the wolf presence, according to the release. Wolves are mainly found in forest and desert areas in Gujarat. Their natural habitats also include the Bhal area in Bhavnagar, which includes the Blackbuck National Park in Velavadar and surrounding Dholera. Wolves, a natural predator, help control the population of blackbucks in Velavadar. The survey pointed out that the forests of the Shoolpaneshwar sanctuary in Narmada district have also become a preferred habitat for wolves.

SP team gives Rs 5 lakh each to Sambhal victims

A Samajwadi Party (SP) delegation on Monday visited Sambhal and distributed cheques of Rs 5 lakh each to the families of those killed in the November 24 violence in the district during a court-ordered survey of a mosque. The cheques were distributed by Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey, who led the SP delegation, at the Public Works Department guest house. He also interacted with the victims' families. Speaking to reporters,

Pandey alleged that police are harassing Muslims and that the government has no sympathy for them. "They only know (under-world don) Dawood Ibrahim, they do not know Abdul Hamid or Brigadier Usman who sacrificed their lives for the security of the country's borders," he said. "They do not have goodwill in their hearts, they are creating tension between Hindus and Muslims," the SP leader said. Pandey further accused the BJP of creating bitterness among people for its benefit.

Rajnath calls for mastering frontier technologies

SAYS INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPORTS CROSSED RECORD RS 21,000 CRORE

PNS ■ MHOW (MP)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday that India's defence exports have crossed a record Rs 21,000 crore from Rs 2,000 crore a decade ago. Addressing officers at the Army War College (AWC) in more than two-centuries-old Mhow Cantonment, Singh said a target has been set to achieve defence exports of Rs 50,000 crore by 2029.

He said mastering frontier technologies is the need of the hour in the constantly evolving times, noting that military training centres are playing a crucial role in equipping and readying soldiers to deal with future challenges.

"Our defence exports, which around Rs 2,000 crore a decade ago, have crossed the record figure of Rs 21,000 crore today. We have set an export target of Rs 50,000 crore by 2029," Singh said. He said Made-in-India equipment is being exported to other countries.

Singh mentioned radical changes in warfare in his speech, saying that unconventional methods like information warfare, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based warfare, proxy warfare, electromagnetic warfare, space warfare, and cyber-attacks are posing a big challenge.

He stressed the need for the military to be well-trained and equipped to fight off such attacks and lauded training centres in Mhow for their valuable contributions.



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Singh commended the training centres for constantly improving their training curriculum as per changing times, and striving to make the personnel fighting fit for every kind of challenge.

The defence minister said the Modi government is committed to strengthening integration and jointness among the three services.

"In the times to come, the armed forces will be able to

Engineering (MCTE), and leadership - junior and senior command in AWC.

Singh said that some officers will work as defence attaches in the future, and they should strive to secure national interests at the global level.

"When you take up this post of defence attaches, you should imbibe the government's vision of 'atmanirbhar Bharat'. Only through self-reliance can India strengthen its defence capabilities and gain more respect on the world stage," he added.

The defence minister is on a two-day visit to MP since Sunday. He said the government is committed to making India one of the strongest economic and military powers in the world.



'Arrest Hardeep for having Rohingya infiltrators settled in Delhi'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal on Monday demanded the arrest of Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri, alleging he has all the data on the places he has made the Rohingya infiltrators settle down in Delhi.

Puri hit back accusing Kejriwal of playing with national security. The politics over Rohingya immigrants living illegally in Delhi has intensified ahead of Assembly polls with the BJP accusing AAP of helping Rohingya and Bangladeshi infiltrators settle down in the national capital and using them as vote bank in elections. The Delhi Police, following directions from Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena, has launched a campaign to identify and deport the illegal immigrants.

In a press conference, Kejriwal said, "Arrest Hardeep Puri because he has all the data on where he has made the Rohingya immigrants to settle down in Delhi... He (Puri) has told about this in a tweet (post on X). "Why are they

working so hard and creating drama? Hardeep Puri and Amit Shah have all the data of Rohingya settled in Delhi," Kejriwal charged when asked about the police drive.

Hitting back, Puri, the Union petroleum and natural gas minister, charged in a post on X that Kejriwal's repeated "support" to the Rohingya infiltrators is like playing with the national security. He said the whole country knows Rohingyas could be voters of which party and took a dig at Kejriwal saying "inki to fitrat aisi hai ki aisa koi sagaa nahin, jisko Kejriwal ne thagaa nahin (Kejriwal's nature is such that there is no one close to him who he has not cheated)".

The Union minister claimed that no Rohingya infiltrator was ever given any EWS (economically weaker section) flat so far, and asserted that repeating a lie does not turn into truth although it proves one to be a "liar". "Clarification of the tweet, based on which he is spreading lie, was issued the same day by me and the home ministry.

BPSX EXAM ROW

JNUSU demands Bihar CM's resignation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The JNUSU on Monday held a demonstration outside the JD(U) office here to demand Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's resignation and cancellation of the BPSX exam.

The protest coincided with Kumar's reported visit to the office, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) said in a statement.

Kumar is also national president of the Janata Dal (United) or JD(U). JNUSU president Dhananjay said, "We are demanding the immediate resignation of Bihar's chief minister due to the unacceptable



repression of students." Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSX) hopefuls have been protesting for days, seeking cancellation of the 70th Integrated Combined

Competitive Examination due to allegations of a question paper leak in all centres. They have argued that re-examination in just one centre would be unfair.

Candidates suspect massive corruption in Bihar PSC exam: PK

PNS ■ PATNA

Jan Suraaj Party founder Prashant Kishor on Monday claimed to have learnt that "thousands of crores of rupees have changed hands" for posts to be filled up by the Bihar PSC exam, cancellation of which is being demanded by many candidates. The former close aide of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar

also expressed dismay over refusal of his ex-mentor to "utter a single word" on the stir which has been going on for nearly two weeks.

"The candidates are protesting in biting cold, braving baton charge by police and water cannons. The CM is away in Delhi, and having a good time. He did not utter a single word when reporters in the national capital

approached him with queries on the stir," Kishor told reporters here.

Recalling the previous day's demonstration which was addressed by him, Kishor said till about 4 PM, he kept telling the candidates to look forward to a statement from the chief minister who might take a stand that could break the stalemate. "But he kept mum," Kishor claimed.

Life hit in Punjab due to farmers' 9-hour bandh

RAIL, BUS SERVICES AFFECTED

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Normal life was hit across Punjab on Monday due to a nine-hour 'bandh' called by farmers protesting against the Centre for their various demands including a legal guarantee of a minimum support price for their crops.

Rail operations in Punjab were mostly suspended, buses and other vehicles remained off the road, leaving passengers stranded; and shops and establishments downed shutters as the 7 am-4 pm bandh passed off peacefully. Petrol pumps were also shut, a senior farmer leader said. Farmer leaders who gave the bandh call more than a week ago declared it "successful" and thanked the "three crore Punjabis for extending their full support".

Amid a harsh winter chill and dense fog at some places, farmers staged 'dharnas' on several roads and highways including in Patiala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Bathinda, and Pathankot, crippling the traffic. The sit-in at the Dhareri Jattan Toll Plaza affected vehicular movement on the Patiala-Chandigarh National Highway. At Amritsar's Golden Gate, scores of farmers staged a 'dharna' near the city's entry



point. Police there assisted some stranded foreign tourists by arranging auto rickshaws for them to reach the Golden Temple. At some places, commuters were seen arguing with the protesting farmers blocking the roads.

The call for the statewide shutdown was given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha over the Centre not acting on the farmers' demand for a legal guarantee for the MSP. The bandh was also in support of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal (70) who has been on a fast-unto-death at Khanauri border protest site over the non-fulfilment of the demands. His health has deteriorated during the fast which has completed 35 days.

After the bandh, Dallewal thanked the people of Punjab for supporting and making the Bandh a "success".

In a video message, he said the Centre should pay attention to their demands.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher told reporters in Amritsar that emergency and other essential services were allowed to operate. He said those going to airport or for a job interview or a wedding were allowed to go.

"Punjabiyat has won. On behalf of both the forums (speaking protests at Shambhu and Khanauri), I want to thank three crore Punjabis for extending their full support to the bandh," Pandher said after the bandh hours.

How American presidents have planned their own funerals

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Jimmy Carter's memorial journey will end at his house in the tiny town of Plains, Georgia, where he grew up on a peanut farm. That is where his wife, Rosalynn, was laid to rest last year in a burial plot that they chose years ago.

But before Carter reaches his humble final destination, there will be an interstate choreography of grief, ceremony and logistics that is characteristic of state funerals. Ever since the nation's founding, America has bid farewell to former presidents with an intricate series of events weaving together longstanding traditions and personal touches.

Funerals often are planned by the presidents themselves,



who usually have years after leaving the White House to ponder how they want to be memorialised. "They are very much involved in the planning process, and the decisions that

they make tell us a lot about who they are, how they see the presidency, and how they want to be remembered by the American people," said Matthew Costello, senior histo-

rian for the White House Historical Association, who co-wrote a book called "Mourning the Presidents: Loss and Legacy in American Culture." Carter had more time to

"They are very much involved in the planning process, and the decisions that they make tell us a lot about who they are, how they see the presidency, and how they want to be remembered by the American people," said Matthew Costello, senior historian for the White House Historical Association, who co-wrote a book called "Mourning the Presidents: Loss and Legacy in American Culture."

plan than most. He lived for 43 years after his presidency ended, the longest post-presidency in US history, before dying Sunday at 100.

Many details of his funeral remain under wraps, at the discretion of the family and military units that are responsible for carrying out the plans. Most presidents lie in state in the US Capitol, and there is usually a service at Washington National Cathedral.

President Joe Biden let slip last year that Carter had asked him to give a eulogy. ("Excuse me, I shouldn't say that," Biden admitted), Biden said Sunday his team is working with Carter's family and others "to see to it that he is remembered

appropriately, here in the United States and around the world." Carter's son Chip is his main point of contact, though Biden said he has spoken with all the Carter children.

He described a process underway "that will take a little time" but will result in a "major service in Washington, D.C." for Carter, which Biden scheduled for January 9. Sometimes former presidents help with even the smallest details. Jeffrey Engel, director of the Centre for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, recalled meeting with George H.W. Bush shortly after the former president revised the seating chart for his funeral.



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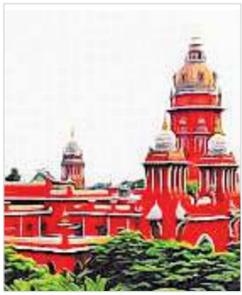
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Country shamed

The victim blaming and procedural lapses in the Anna University rape case underscores the urgent need for reform

The recent sexual assault case involving a 19-year-old student at Anna University has once again brought shame upon the nation, highlighting the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and the systemic failures in addressing it. The horrifying incident, compounded by the insensitivity of law enforcement, has triggered widespread outrage and calls for accountability. On December 23, Gnanasekaran allegedly raped the student on the university campus after threatening to release videos of her. The accused confined the survivor for over an hour and recorded the assault. While the Chennai Police Commissioner, A Arun, claimed swift action by apprehending the accused within 24 hours, the Madras High Court highlighted glaring lapses in the police's handling of the case. Particularly damning was the revelation that the First Information Report (FIR) published on the police website disclosed the victim's details, leading to further victim shaming and mental agony. The High Court's rebuke of the police was scathing. A Bench of Justices SM Subramaniam and V Lakshminarayan criticised the language used in the FIR, terming it misogynistic and reflective of victim-blaming attitudes. Such lapses, the Court noted, breach the victim's fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees dignity. To address these lapses, the Court ordered the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising senior IPS officers to probe the case. It also directed the Tamil Nadu government to provide interim compensation of Rs 25 lakh to the victim and ensure her protection. The Court has rightly underscored the necessity of sensitising police personnel to handle such



cases with empathy and professionalism. This case is not an isolated incident but a grim reminder of the larger problem of sexual violence that plagues India. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity, women continue to face systemic discrimination and violence. The societal tendency to blame victims, coupled with institutional apathy, exacerbates their trauma. The High Court's poignant questions — "Why can't a woman walk freely, dress as she wishes, or speak to a man without being judged?" — resonate deeply in a society still grappling with entrenched patriarchy. The Court rightly emphasised that the onus is on the State and society to protect women without perpetuating stigma or blame. The incident also exposed lapses in campus security at Anna University. The university, which allows unrestricted access to outsiders, failed to prevent the accused from entering the premises. The police's approach also came under scrutiny for prematurely ruling out the involvement of additional suspects. The Court directed the State to examine whether rules were violated during these proceedings. This tragic case underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms. Law enforcement must be trained to handle cases of sexual violence with sensitivity. The media, too, must exercise restraint in reporting such cases to avoid amplifying the victim's trauma.

PICTALK



Tourists enjoy after fresh snowfall, at Patnitop hill station in Udhampur

The teachers who shaped my life: Lessons beyond the classroom

For me, the journey of learning began in classrooms with inspiring teachers and extended into workplaces with exceptional bosses

We meet several people in our lives. While we learn something from each person, many teach us invaluable lessons that help us navigate the rough and tumble of the daily grind. These are the teachers who shape our lives. The earliest I remember are two school-teachers from my classes 5 to 7. Miss Kumar taught us English; Miss Singh was the Arithmetic teacher.



SANJAY CHANDRA

It is no wonder that I developed a liking for the unlikely combination of English and Maths. Another was my mathematics teacher from classes 10 to 11. I was a favourite student, probably because I could discuss with him complex problems on the move while cycling to and from school. My love for communication and thinking on my feet were firmly entrenched in my psyche by him. In later years, I could not have navigated my professional journey but for the few outstanding bosses, I worked with. I joined my first job in a leading government manufacturing company. I stayed there for a year, only for the

maintenance shed with 1000+ staff working under me. My boss went to the shed with me for the first week. The next week, he threw me, not in the swimming pool, but in the ocean. It was training by fire. Yet, he was always there to guide and support me whenever I needed his help. The innumerable management lessons I learned in my first year were to hold me in good stead during my remaining professional journey of almost three decades. After 20 years of service with the railways, I decided to opt for retirement and join a government company. My boss was a soft-spoken Sikh gentleman. He also shared a common trait with my first railway boss. It was a complete freedom to operate. He taught me everything that he knew about a new subject. His only demands were integrity and honesty. I had no problems with that. He would fight fiercely for me with his seniors if the situation demanded. I never regretted my decision to leave the railways. I quit the government to join the pri-

ivate sector. It was a new jungle for me. The boardroom politics, criticism of a subordinate by those sitting at the head of the table in stage-managed whispers loud enough to be heard by the intended victim, and smirks by colleagues at the snub by a senior, were only a few of the goings-on I had not witnessed in the government sector. I had no hesitation in mentioning to a packed audience when asked about the reasons for the success of the government sector, 'Good bosses, who value others and mentor each individual like a teacher.' I hope that someone else remembers me as fondly. These words by an unknown author resonate with me, "I wasn't born to just teach, I was born to inspire others, to change people, and to never give up; even when faced with challenges that seem impossible." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

India's forest cover grows, but grim realities linger



KOTA SRIRAJ

While India's State of Forests Report highlights an increase in forest cover, it also raises concerns about troubling trends such as increase in forest fires and allegations of inflated data

India's State of Forests Report (ISFR) 2023, a biennial report published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change is finally out after a delay of almost one year. The report is being hailed as a harbinger of good news as it announced an increase in India's forest and tree cover by 1,289 sq.km. since 2021 reaching 25.17 per cent of the total geographical area in 2023, which puts India's forest cover at 7,15,342.61 sq.km. But the report also highlights some grim aspects of India's state of forests. In the recent past, the incidence of forest fires has disturbingly gone up, especially in the hill states. These fires have destroyed many hectares of dense forests thereby ruining fragile ecosystems and irreplaceable Himalayan biodiversity. The ISF report echoes the same and observes a sharp spike in forest fires especially in the mountain states of Himachal, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir. The data collected using the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) presented in the report, showed that Himachal Pradesh witnessed an increase of forest fires by a stunning 1,339 per cent, while Jammu & Kashmir saw a rise in forest fire by a staggering 2,822 while Uttarakhand was relatively better off with 293 per cent rise in forest fire incidents. What the government was doing as the pristine forests turned to ashes, is a burning question. On the other hand, the report also highlighted the rapidly dwindling forest cover. Between 2003 and 2023, more than 24,000 sq km of dense forests — half the size of Punjab — have disappeared. More concerning is the fact that the loss has occurred in ecologically fragile zones such as the Western Ghats and The Nilgiris over the past decade. The Western Ghats recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Biodiversity Hotspot suffered an overall loss of 58.22 sq km in forest cover. On the other hand, the Nilgiris reported the steepest decline of 123 sq km. The report also showed a decrease of 327.30 sq km in forest cover in the northeastern region. This irre-



placeable loss of dense forests sadly was not seen as a wake-up call for the authorities even though the forest cover in the hill districts is just 40 per cent of their geographical area against the Forest Policy mandated 66.6 per cent. This is very alarming as the increased number of landslides and floods can be traced to the loss of forest cover in the hills. < The maintenance of the soil health, ecological stability, and ability to counter landslides and floods depend on adequate forest cover in the hills. The biennial ISF report has since its inception in 1991 served as a reference point for the nation to assess its forest wealth and understand the problems plaguing India's afforestation efforts. But this year's report has been criticised by experts who have pointed out discrepancies and have labelled the data as "inflated." Several experts for instance have criticised the inclusion of bamboo plantations, coconut groves, and orchards among others as part of the forest cover, as these are agroforestry-related and make no meaningful contribution towards the environment. The experts opine that the inclusion of agroforestry plantations such as rubber, eucalyptus, acacia and mango, coconut, areca nut and shade trees in tea and coffee plantations has led to the inflation in

FOREST LANDS DIVERTED FOR DAMS, ROADS, RAILWAYS AND OTHER SUCH PERMANENT CONSTRUCTIONS OVER TIME ARE LOST FOREVER BUT ARE NOT DELETED FROM RECORDS, THUS INFLATING THE FIGURES. INDIA LOST 30,808 SQ KM OF OPEN AND SCRUB FORESTS ALONGSIDE 14,073 SQ KM OF MODERATELY DENSE FORESTS

the tree canopy to 1,289 sq.km. But the reality is that these categories of trees are grown for commercial purposes and are harvested in time therefore not providing any ecological value for biodiversity, wildlife conservation or acting as effective carbon sinks. Moreover, the fact that the report does not establish a correlation between forest areas or areas designated as forests in government records and forest cover also adds to the problem. Additionally, the experts also observed that the report failed to comply with the Supreme Court order in the Lafarge case which called for digitisation of forest maps, geo-referencing of Recorded Forest Areas (RFA), and documentation of diverted forest lands. The absence of these elements weakens the report's credibility. Forest lands diverted for dams, roads, railways and other such permanent constructions over time are lost forever but are not deleted from records, thus inflating the figures. India lost 30,808 sq km of open and scrub forests alongside 14,073 sq km of moderately dense forests and 1,816 sq km of dense forests to 'non-forest' uses. By the looks of it, the ISF report 2023 seems to be in a hurry to increase forest cover in India. At least on paper. This could be to do with India's target of increasing its forest and

tree cover which can absorb an additional amount of 2.5 billion to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. The government could have done well to ensure the presentation of accurate data that was based on actual tree census and not plantations, groves, and orchards. The government should have also removed those forest lands from its database that have been permanently diverted for non-forest purposes. The ISF report has immense significance for India as it is widely used as a primary information source by the central and state governments. Additionally, forestry professionals of State Forest Departments rely on the report for the effective discharge of their responsibilities. The inputs and data provided by this report regarding forest resources of India help in the evaluation and formulation of forest-related policies, programmes, and legislation. Given the crucial role played by the ISF report, the government must revisit the recent report and ensure that the questions and doubts raised by experts are effectively addressed. The onus is on the government to keep the trust intact by releasing reports based on robust and accurate data. (The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RELIEF FOR MIDDLE-CLASS

Madam — As the new year approaches, salaried employees are likely to face significant tax deductions from their salaries for the financial year 2024-2025. While taxes are deducted throughout the year, the months leading up to March 2025 will see an increased burden, further aggravating the financial challenges of India's middle class. Reduced take-home pay diminishes purchasing power, leading to decreased spending by the salaried class, which, in turn, impacts the economy. Considering these challenges, the government is reportedly exploring measures to boost consumer spending. One such measure under consideration for the financial year 2025-2026 budget is making personal income up to Rs 15 lakh per annum tax-free. Speculations suggest that the government is actively working in this direction, and the decision on tax cuts in the upcoming budget appears almost certain. Taxation is currently governed by two systems: the old tax regime (OTR) and the new tax regime (NTR). A reduction in tax liability would particularly benefit salaried employees, increasing their disposable income. This would lead to higher consumer spending, ultimately helping the economy recover from its slowdown. For the financial stability and development of middle-class families, the central government's decision to make personal income up to Rs 15 lakh per annum tax-free in the 2025-2026 budget is crucial. This move would play a vital role in ensuring better financial planning and stability for the middle class. Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Ponda

Koneru wins World Rapid Chess Champion



The recent chess title victory by Koneru Humpy as World Rapid Chess Champion is another feather in India's Chess success. We all know that the year 2024 has been a marvellous year for India, particularly as we successfully managed to lift so many titles in the sport of Chess. The grit and brilliance of

Indian Chess Champions has marvelled the entire world, be that the moment of India becoming the FIDE Chess Olympiad 2024 winner in Budapest, D Gukesh becoming the World Chess champion at the age of 18 in Singapore, and now Ms Koneru Humpy clinching her second FIDE World Rapid Crown in New York. This year in 2024 particularly, India spent a considerably wonderful time at the podium top stairs, enjoying many titles and trophies. The chess prowess of Indians need no introduction today, thanks to our chess masters and grandmasters. Especially the young chess players deserve the epitome of appreciation for their wonderful game spirit, patience and sincere grit behind every move of check and mates. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S LIBERALISATION ARCHITECT

Madam — From being an economist of great repute to RBI Governor, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Finance Minister and then becoming Prime Minister of India, not many can walk in his shoes. When the economy was stuttering and license raj was the order of the day and there was a suffocating environment for industrialists, Dr. Manmohan Singh became the architect of liberalisation in 1991 along with late PV Narsimha Rao, who allowed our country to take a great leap forward. The Victor Hugo moment of our 1991 budget was doctored by him, which led to India emerging as an economic powerhouse. He may have been called an accidental Prime Minister but during those 10 years at the helm he did his job with aplomb under the given circumstances of compulsions of coalition politics.

Bal Govind | Noida

PROFIT OVER HUMANITY

Madam — The article on caring for the stars and being careless to earth (December 30) presents worth considering arguments. The basic problem lies in the economic order in vogue in most parts of the world. The essence of the order is commodifying everything and chasing profit in every activity. In the process, small players are being gulped by the big

fish to monopolise the field and then search for opportunities elsewhere with the State's help to emerge as an imperial force is the basic activity found all over. Leaving millions of people to starve to enrich the minuscule super-rich is the prioritised programme of the order in vogue. Instead of political force deciding the economic course it is the economic force that decides the political course. The policies of the governments are designed to favour this ultra-rich section. If policies are not changed to its favour, the giants are capable of changing the government itself. Poverty, climate-related hostilities and human destruction due to induced and perverted conflicts between nations, faiths, races and the greedy groups are simply the fallouts of the empirical power money has gained over the human being instead of helping its inventors. Caring the stars and other planets while being cruel to fellow beings struggling around us is like searching for fuel sticks in a desert lot. Course change is imminent. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN OVERCOMING THE GRIP OF FEARFUL THOUGHTS

Fearful thoughts often take hold of our minds, leading to obsession with worst-case scenarios



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We routinely become obsessed with fearful thoughts. The word obsession is defined as a persistent disturbing pre-occupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling. We don't stop there; we think of the worst. What is the probability of that happening? But that does not prevent us from this common flaw; we do it willingly. There are several reasons for succumbing to this. We have many attachments. We are desperate for something like a good result, and a few like we shouldn't get sick. Unfortunately, these are decided by the Divine Authority based on our past 'Karmas' (deeds). We have no say in it, and they manifest at their designated times. Fortunately, they are very rarely the worst we think of. If so, life would be hellish, which it is not. This earth's planet is a place of misery (The Bhagavad Geeta 8.15) alright, but is not a concentration camp by any standard. But our imagination has no bounds.

The next big offender is a refusal to be prepared to tolerate. We want zero tolerance. Is it possible? Everything is changing like the weather. Bad 'Karmaphalas' (results of bad deeds) will manifest for sure because this is no Vaikuntha; we have most certainly a past with many bad karmas. How else are we here, not even in Heaven? We feel that we are intelligent, but hardly anyone escapes making this mistake. Yes, we are supposed to get fearful, because that protects us from acting foolishly, but excessive fear is due to faulty assessment. Due diligence is required.

The fourth offender is greed. Our desires are open-ended. Is it wise? The evidence shows that downfalls occur due to being too greedy.



But to become greedy and then fear the consequences makes zero sense. Over-stress also causes fearful thoughts, especially about health. It is better to avoid to lessen this possibility. We want to control and are unable to. We act stupidly and then fear the worst. The same problem exists in acting big, which no one can ever become; we are intrinsically small and will remain eternally so. Acting as the sole doer also evolves fearful thoughts. Giving control of our minds to fearful thoughts is making ourselves our enemies. Lord Krishna has warned about it (4.6). Similarly, intelligence is supposed to curb this tendency but, again, we find some justification in harming ourselves. This is also a sad commentary on our knowledge, about which we are so proud. A soul has severe limitations, as we realize; he must remain in the shelter of God. This is the only worthwhile solution. I am sorry to be so stern, but the proliferation of mental diseases points to it only. God controls the Creation (9.10) and He, therefore, has to guide and help to deal with it. By ourselves, we are quite helpless really. How it works? It is quite simple, but a very long drawn exercise, because this problem involves our 'svabhava' (nature). This is what I do. The moment a fearful thought crosses my mind, I pray sincerely for guidance and help, because I need to know a way out. I need exact guidance for my actions. God signals to me what I should do; He uses many ways to communicate. He helps where I fall short. Blissfully, my painful habit of fearing excessively is coming under some control. Thank God for this 'Kripa' (mercy).

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

Assessing efficacy and challenges of compensatory afforestation

With ecosystem at stake, the nation's approach to monetising and restoring nature demands careful evaluation and sustainable strategies write **BKP SINHA** and **ARVIND KUMAR JHA**

Compensatory Afforestation (CA) relates to the mitigation of environmental damage caused by the diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes and is a mandatory requirement for obtaining clearances under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980; now Van (Sanrakshanevam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam (VSSA) 1980 and Rules. The Government of India guidelines state that normally CA must be carried out on a suitable non-forest land equal to the forest area proposed for diversion and for minimizing the adverse impact on the micro-ecology, such land should be located as near as possible to the diverted area. If suitable non-forest land is unavailable, CA may be carried out on degraded forest land equal to twice the area of the diverted forest land. The unavailability of non-forest land in a district is certified by the District Collector and in the exceptional case of its unavailability in the whole state/union territory (UT), the chief secretary has to certify accordingly and CA land may be identified preferably in a neighbouring state/UTs regards CA, the Government of India guidelines of 2017 and 2019 emphasised compensation for loss of land by land and that of trees by trees.

They indicate that at least 1000 plants are to be planted in one hectare and in case 1000 plants are not possible to be accommodated, the balance may be planted in some other government forest identified by the state government. The states having more than 75% forest cover, however, are exempted from the task of procuring non-forest land for CA. Their CA can be taken up in states with deficient forest land/cover. As regards size, lands smaller than 5 hectares can also be accepted for CA if it is contiguous to a wildlife conservation area like National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries. Area equivalence criterion often leads to an understanding that any forest can be equated with tree plantations of any kind but the concept of Net Present Value (NPV) is additionally used to calculate the worth of diverted forests by attaching a monetary value to a whole range of goods and services provided by them. This amount is recovered from the project proponent.

The World Bank's 2002 strategy elaborates the NPV to include goods and services like wood and non-wood items, ecosystem services, support to wildlife, climate regulation, soil & water conservation and flood prevention, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, health support systems and non-material benefits which may be spiritual, inspirational, recreational, aesthetic, educational etc. Its value thus extends far beyond economics and considering the interest of different stakeholders, the values of different components may also vary, such as the cultural significance of a tree species versus its commercial value as timber.

The January 2022 guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) have clubbed the forests of India into six Eco-classes to realize NPV instead of diverted forest land. Out of them, class I includes Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests, and Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests, while class II contains Littoral and Swamp Forests.



HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND PROJECT IS WORTH A LOOK. THE RS 72,000 CRORE INVESTMENT WILL DIVERT 130.75 SQ. KM. OF FOREST LAND FOR INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT THAT INCLUDES A TRANS-SHIPMENT PORT, AN AIRPORT, A POWER PLANT, A DEFENCE BASE, AN INDUSTRIAL PARK AND A TOWNSHIP

Interestingly, the per hectare value of NPV for both these classes has been kept the same, an equality that appears surprising. It is crucial to arrive at a monetized figure for a unit of Nature/biodiversity and ensure that investing in it will offset the loss caused by diversion. Simultaneous sustainable development of biodiversity is of course a formidable challenge. Accordingly, any oversimplification of biodiversity assessment can lead to inaccuracies and undermine genuine conservation efforts.

The limitations faced in offsetting losses just through CA are amply covered by CAG reports. Unfortunately, the resource position at the world level also, despite the wrath of climate change being faced globally, shows an annual funding gap of about USD 700 billion in nature conservation. Against the above background, the proposed CA and NPV to mitigate the diversion of forest land in the 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island' (GNI) project is worth a look. The Rs72,000 crore investment will divert 130.75 sq. km. of forest land for infrastructure development that includes a trans-shipment port, an airport, a power plant, a defence base, an industrial park, and a township.

The project involves the felling of an estimated one million trees with habitat destruction that would also impact the life, livelihood, and forest rights of the Shompen; a particularly vulnerable hunter-and-gatherer tribal group. The MoEFCC claims to have incorporated into the project some exemplary mitigation measures, including compensatory afforestation, into the project in compliance with the provisions of the VSSA 1980 while securing India's strategic national and defence interests. Out of the total CA area of 26,000 hectares, locating 24,354 hectares in Haryana is justified by highlight-

ing that planting native species in arid landscapes and near urban areas is of greater ecological value. Talks are said to be on with the Madhya Pradesh government for situating the balanced CA area. The CA in Aravali's arid/semi-arid region, approximately 2,400 kilometres away, to compensate for the loss of pristine rainforests of Great Nicobar is a significant departure from the guideline regarding the positioning of CA land. Reportedly, the CA with ₹3000 crore's investment is expected to be mostly a revival plan to improve the soil texture and fertility and to make stone boundary walls since the proposed area already has root stock requiring just protection and supplemental planting wherever required.

Indicative of the natural limits imposed by edaphic, geographical, and climatic factors, the Forest Survey of India (FSI) 2021 report on forest status shows that the carbon stock per hectare in A&N forests is fourth highest in the country; next only to Himachal, Sikkim, and J&K while Haryana has the second lowest; next only to Delhi.

This fact does raise questions regarding the possibility and efficacy of compensating adequately Nicobar's loss of carbon stock and biomass by investing CA money in Haryana. Considering the aspect of NPV, it is worth noting that Nicobar Island forests are more like that of Malaysia and Indonesia while the Andaman Islands' flora is more akin to the species found in Myanmar, Thailand, and Northeast India. FSI's rapid biodiversity assessment in A&N islands in 2018-19 found that shrubs and herbs together were more than double the number of trees. Many species found there do not occur in mainland India. The understory and emergent layers with profuse regeneration, herbs, and

shrubs indicate a vibrant ecosystem wherein approximately half of the mammals, a third of the birds, a quarter of the reptiles, and over a tenth of flowering plants are endemic. A crucial for the habitat rights of the Shompen tribe notwithstanding, it is home to the endangered Nicobar Megapode and Leatherback Turtle, and has over twenty thousand coral reefs in its vicinity. In 1989, the UNESCO declared a significant portion of the island as a biosphere reserve. Despite such uniqueness, distinctive parameters, and ecological significance; its NPV per hectare is exactly equal to the forests in Eco-classes I and II. GNI is just one project.

An in-depth analysis of forest land diversion cases can provide, in addition to actionable issues related to limitations and risks in offsetting just through the prevalent CA and NPV model, important insights into ways to minimize harm to Nature, redeemability of loss to forest ecosystems, correct determination of NPV, efficient investments in Nature recovery and restoration initiatives, handling of habitat rights of the primitive tribes and pre-agricultural communities, and regulations needed to ensure accountability.

Nature's monetization and biodiversity markets are fast emerging as potential funding sources for conservation. Their effectiveness demands an honest valuation of diverted forests and a strict implementation of conservation strategies. The outcomes depend on those having the power to decide. Only time will tell, but the decisions made today will echo through the annals of history shaping the destiny of our country and of humanity itself.

(The writers are former PCCFs of U.P. and Maharashtra; views are personal)

Indian agriculture and climate change: Challenges and strategies

India is forging a path toward climate-resilient agriculture, leveraging innovative strategies, integrated farming practices and government-led initiatives

The agriculture and allied sectors play a central role in the sustainable growth and development of India's economy. These sectors not only ensure food and nutritional security for the country's 1.4 billion people but also contribute significantly to production, employment, and demand generation through various backward and forward linkages. While agriculture constitutes about 16% of India's GDP, it supports nearly 49% of the workforce (Economic Survey, 2018). However, with over 50% of India's cultivated land dependent on rainfed irrigation, the sector is highly vulnerable to climate variability. The ongoing challenges to sustain the natural resource base further



PRAVESH SHARMA

amplify the adverse impacts of climate change, which disproportionately affect the poor. Challenges Posed by Climate Change on Agriculture

1. Rainfall Variability: The increasing intra-seasonal variability of rainfall has emerged as a major concern. Rainfall patterns are becoming increasingly skewed, characterized by fewer rainy days with high-intensity. This results in sig-

nificant soil erosion and exacerbates the length of dry spells. Deviations in the hydrological cycle are contributing to extreme events, such as floods caused by intense rainfall or droughts triggered by prolonged dry spells, impacting different parts of the country. **2. Temperature Rise:** Rising temperatures pose a greater threat to tropical countries like India, which already operate near the higher end of the temperature spectrum. Elevated temperatures influence various climatic factors, adversely impacting crop production. For instance, extreme heat reduces fruit setting in citrus crops and increases transpiration losses in vegetables. **3. Livestock and Poultry Impact:** Climate variability also affects animal production

and reproduction. Increased temperatures and higher temperature-humidity index levels lead to reduced feed intake, lower milk yields, and decreased meat and egg quality. Poultry, in particular, suffers from heat stress, resulting in thinner eggshells and increased egg breakage. **4. Pests and Diseases:** Climate change influences the population, survival, and geographic distribution of pests and diseases. Rising temperatures and humidity levels create favorable conditions for pest proliferation, making control measures more challenging and unpredictable. **Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies**

Adaptation to climate change involves anticipating adverse impacts and taking proactive



measures to minimize damage or leverage emerging opportunities. Given that most Indian farmers are smallholders with limited coping capacity, building resilience is key. **1. Water Resource Management:** Enhancing rainwater productivity through scientific rainwater harvesting, recycling, and precision water use is essential. Improved irrigation techniques and water budgeting can mitigate the impact of erratic rainfall.

2. Integrated Farming Systems: Combining crop cultivation with livestock, fisheries, and plantations offers diverse income streams and reduces climate vulnerability. Contingency planning for alternate crops and activities based on agro-climatic conditions further strengthens resilience. **3. Technology and Innovation:** Developing stress-tolerant crop varieties, conserving agro-biodiversity, and promoting resource-efficient technologies are critical. Pest forecasting models, weather-based advisories, and agricultural risk management systems should be expanded to aid farmers in decision-making. **4. Community Involvement and Education:** Engaging

local communities in production system management and raising awareness about climate-resilient practices is vital. Farmers, consumers, and markets must be educated to embrace sustainable agriculture practices that align with cultural and social contexts. **Government Initiatives to Address Climate Change** The Government of India has taken several steps to combat climate change. **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** Guided by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, the NAPCC includes the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), focusing on resource conservation, soil health, integrated farming, and water-use efficiency.

National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA): This initiative provides scientific and technical guidance for sustainable agricultural development. **Key Program Interventions:** Policies like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, National Food Security Mission, and Soil Health Card Scheme aim to enhance soil health, water efficiency, and farm productivity. **District Agricultural Contingency Plans:** These plans provide integrated solutions for crop, livestock, and fishery challenges arising from weather anomalies, supporting farmers during extreme conditions. (The writer is a retired IAS officer; the views expressed are personal)



'Not just song; *Dhun Badal Ke Toh Dekho* redefines inclusivity in art without labels'

The ever-inspiring Sushant Divigikar is back with yet another groundbreaking collaboration, this time with BIG FM for *Dhun Badal Ke Toh Dekho*. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Sushant delves into the collab, breaking stereotypes, reflecting their lifelong mission to champion art without labels, highlighting radio's transformative reach and more

TEJAL SINHA
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In a world that often seeks to define individuals by labels, Sushant Divigikar, also known as the dynamic Rani Ko-HE-Nur, emerges as a trailblazer, breaking barriers with grace and unwavering authenticity. Hosting *Dhun Badal Ke Toh Dekho* on BIG FM, Sushant blends music, storytelling and inclusivity into an empowering anthem for self-expression and embracing diversity.

Celebrating the power of art without labels, it encourages listeners to embrace their true selves and step beyond societal judgments. The anthem at the show's heart serves as an empowering call to action, inspiring people to rediscover their self-worth and pursue their passions unapologetically. Through its collaboration with BIG FM, *Dhun Badal Ke Toh Dekho* isn't just a musical journey—it's a movement that amplifies inclusivity, unity and the transformative power of music in today's world.

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, he reflects on their journey with BIG FM and expressed a heartfelt connection to the radio medium, tracing its influence back to childhood. "BIG FM has been a part of my life since childhood," they shared, recalling how the radio served as a gateway to music and storytelling. "Growing up, I always listened to the radio—it connected me to music and stories in ways I couldn't have imagined."

Sushant described hearing their own songs on the radio later in life as a deeply fulfilling moment, marking what they described as a "full circle" experience. For an artist whose work often amplifies marginalised voices, collaborating with a platform that reaches the farthest corners of the country was a natural fit. "Radio is a medi-

um that reaches places many other platforms can't. For someone who's often been described as a 'voice for the voiceless,' this collaboration was a natural fit," Sushant remarked. At the heart of this partnership is the show's anthem, a powerful musical statement that aligns perfectly with Divigikar's values. Emphasising its significance, Sushant explained that the anthem is more than just a song; it represents inclusivity and the recognition of art without labels. "The anthem doesn't just play on a massive platform—it's symbolic. It's a step toward inclusivity, giving art the recognition it deserves without labels," they noted.

Sushant also lauded BIG FM's vision, commending the platform for taking bold steps to embrace and amplify diverse voices. "Kudos to BIG FM for believing in this vision and for taking a bold step in the right direction," Sushant said, highlighting the show's mission to break barriers and inspire others to celebrate their true selves. Discussing the significance of this partnership, Sushant emphasised how BIG FM's values align seamlessly with their artistic philosophy. "My journey has always been about breaking barriers," Rani Ko-HE-Nur shared, highlighting how the collaboration resonates with their belief in appreciating art for its essence, rather than judging the artist.

BIG FM's ethos of inclusivity struck a particularly deep chord with Sushant. They described how the partnership reflects a broader movement toward celebrating diversity and fostering acceptance. "BIG FM didn't just choose me for who I am, but for the art I

bring. That's true inclusivity," Sushant remarked, adding that this collaboration sets an important precedent for other brands to follow.

The impact of this inclusive approach has been profound, with listeners responding emotionally to the show's anthem. Sushant shared moving accounts of messages and voice notes they've received from people who felt seen and inspired by the song. "People have told me how emotional this anthem made them feel—how they had tears in their eyes because they'd stopped believing in themselves. But seeing me in this space gave them hope, reigniting that fire to believe they are on the right path," Sushant revealed, for whom, the anthem is more than just a musical creation; it is a powerful symbol of transformation and resilience. They noted that the feedback from listeners reaffirmed why they've worked so tirelessly to represent and inspire. "This isn't just a song; it's a movement," Sushant said, underlining the anthem's ability to touch lives and spark meaningful change.

Sushant sees this as a beacon of hope for other platforms and brands, encouraging them to base opportunities on talent rather than stereotypes. For Divigikar, radio has always been more than a medium—it's a bridge connecting voices and stories across diverse landscapes. They regard it as a uniquely democratic platform, accessible to all without the barriers of technology or cost. "Radio doesn't demand fancy gadgets or expensive subscriptions; it's accessible, relatable, and deeply authentic," Sushant said, highlighting the simplicity and intimacy that make radio special.

Reflecting on the essence of radio, Sushant described it as a medium where real voices tell real stories. "Whether it's an RJ bringing life to a morning show with their energy, a caller sharing their personal journey, or a guest pouring their heart out on-air, these moments create an unmatched sense of intimacy." For Sushant, being part of this legacy through their anthem feels like a profound honor, one that aligns perfectly with their belief in inclusivity. Sushant is particularly moved by how radio champions diversity in a way that few platforms can. They applauded its commitment to promoting independent artists, regional music, and underrepresented voices, saying, "Radio celebrates diversity like no other platform. It gives everyone a chance to be heard and celebrated."

Music, for Sushant, is a unifying force that transcends all boundaries. They have always believed in its ability to break through the constraints of gender, nationality, and background, touching hearts in profound ways. "Music is pure art, and art has no barriers. It has the intensity to change worlds and shift conversations. I've seen it firsthand—music has saved lives, sparked joy, and inspired people to wake up and face another day."

Speaking about the anthem for *Dhun Badal Ke Toh Dekho*, Sushant described it as a symbol of breaking boundaries and redefining narratives. "This anthem, for me, is more than just a song—it stands for everything I've championed in my 18 years as an artist: to see the art, not just the artist," Sushant explained, underlining its significance in their journey.

Throughout the career, Sushant has faced societal judgments and preconceived notions about identity. Yet, they have remained steadfast in their mission to let art speak louder than labels. "People often box us in, questioning, 'Is this a man? A woman? Why does she sound like that? What is she wearing?' But I've always said—I am so much more than my gender, my orientation, or my name," they said with conviction. As an artist, Sushant finds profound fulfillment in continuing the legacy of the goddess Saraswati through their work.

Concluding on an inspiring note, Sushant shared their philosophy on music and life. "Music doesn't see who you are—it sees your soul," they said, emphasising the universal language of music. Encouraging others to find joy in the world around them, Sushant added, "If you see beauty, even if it's just a little bit in everything, life will become simpler and more enjoyable. So, keep enjoying, keep loving, and keep listening to my music."

The year 2024 proved to be a game-changer for low-budget films in the entertainment industry, as content-driven cinema stole the spotlight. From gripping thrillers to heartwarming dramas and innovative comedies, filmmakers focused on relatable narratives and fresh perspectives, resonating deeply with viewers. With creative direction, powerful scripts and dedicated performances, these films showcased how innovative filmmaking can transcend financial limitations.

CONTENT OVER CASH

LOW-BUDGET FILMS LEAD 2024'S BOX OFFICE-HITS

ARTICLE 370

Article 370, a thought-provoking drama, defied expectations and became a blockbuster hit despite its low budget. The film tackled the sensitive and complex subject of the abrogation of *Article 370* with a gripping narrative that resonated deeply with audiences. The movie's impactful dialogues and socially relevant theme sparked important conversations, earning both critical acclaim and massive box office success. *Article 370* proved that meaningful storytelling, coupled with strong execution, can create cinematic magic, regardless of budget constraints.



BHOOR BHULAIYAA 3

Bhoor Bhulaiyaa 3, the latest installment in the popular horror-comedy franchise, proved that a strong storyline and stellar performances can overshadow a modest budget. With its clever blend of eerie thrills, laugh-out-loud moments, and unexpected twists, the film captivated audiences across the nation. Despite its low budget, the film relied on innovative direction, sharp writing, and a catchy soundtrack to deliver a top-notch cinematic experience. Its massive box office success cemented its place as a blockbuster, showcasing that great storytelling always wins over extravagant production costs.

STREE 2

Stree 2, the much-anticipated sequel to the 2018 horror-comedy *Stree*, proved that content is king in Bollywood. Despite operating on a relatively low budget, the film struck a perfect balance of humor, suspense and socially relevant storytelling, just like its predecessor. With its quirky characters, engaging plot twists, and a clever mix of scares and laughs, *Stree 2* resonated with audiences across the country. Its unexpected box office success reaffirmed that well-crafted stories and strong performances can triumph over big budgets, turning it into a blockbuster hit and a shining example of creative filmmaking.



SHAITAAN



Shaitaan, a gritty and intense thriller, emerged as a sleeper hit despite its low budget, proving once again that compelling storytelling and raw performances can trump financial constraints. With its dark narrative, gripping pace and realistic portrayal of human emotions, the film struck a chord with audiences. The ensemble cast delivered powerful performances, bringing depth to the characters and drawing viewers into their tumultuous world.

Shaitaan not only earned critical acclaim but also turned into a box-office blockbuster, reaffirming that originality and authenticity can create cinematic magic.

CREW

Crew, a surprise hit in the cinematic landscape, demonstrated how creativity and vision can turn a low-budget film into a blockbuster phenomenon. With its tightly woven narrative, engaging characters, and a fresh perspective, the movie quickly gained traction among audiences. The ensemble cast delivered outstanding performances, adding depth and relatability to the story, while the crisp direction and innovative production techniques maximised every resource. Despite its modest budget, *Crew* broke box office records and became a shining example of how strong storytelling and teamwork can create magic on screen.



KILL

Kill, an action-packed thriller, became a blockbuster hit and a testament to the power of gripping storytelling, even on a low budget. With its intense action sequences, tightly woven plot and relentless pace, the film captivated audiences from start to finish. The raw and gritty performances of the cast, particularly the lead, added authenticity and emotional depth to the high-stakes narrative. *Kill* not only dominated the box office but also garnered critical acclaim, proving that passion and creativity can transform a modest production into a cinematic phenomenon.



MUNJYA



Munjya, a low-budget horror-comedy, took audiences by storm with its unique blend of humour and spine-chilling moments. The film's quirky narrative, rooted in folklore and small-town charm, struck a perfect balance between laughter and suspense. Despite its modest budget, *Munjya* captivated viewers with its witty dialogues, relatable characters and innovative storytelling. Its massive box office success proved that content-driven cinema has the power to outperform big-budget productions, making *Munjya* a true blockbuster and a fan favourite.

BREATHING PLASTICS

Health risks of inhaling airborne microplastics

In recent years, the human exposure to microplastics, particularly in some regions in India, has become alarming. Microplastics are tiny fragments of plastic particles that are smaller than 5 millimeters. The latest studies suggest these microplastics are present in the air that people inhale, causing health implications. Such pollution levels have been noted in Patna, where some researchers identified the remnants of these particles in rainwater.

WHAT ARE AIRBORNE MICROPLASTICS?

Airborne microplastics are plastic particles that are smaller than 5 millimeters and can be carried by air. It is an emerging pollutant originating from disposable tableware, packaging materials, textiles and

other consumer goods. These microplastics are abundant in urban and natural environments, including water bodies and glaciers, as they can travel long distances. The potential toxicity of such particles cannot be underestimated.

HARMFUL EFFECTS

Airborne microplastics can enter the human body through inhalation or ingestion. Once these particles penetrate the lung tissue and the gastrointestinal tract, they can cause various health complications. These particles can carry harmful chemical additives that disrupt cellular functions and promote tumorigenesis. Studies have linked exposure to microplastics with respiratory issues such as Asthma, COPD, Interstitial lung diseases, lung cancer and also risk of colon cancer.



Children and individuals with pre-existing health conditions are the most vulnerable population to get impacted. For instance, those suffering from Bronchial asthma may experience frequent exacerbations due to the inhalation of contaminated air.

TACKLING THE ISSUES

Addressing airborne microplastics issues requires a multifaceted approach. Public awareness campaigns are essential to educate communities about the risks associated with microplastic exposure, encouraging proactive measures to reduce pollution.

Governments must enforce regulations on plastic production and waste management to minimise environmental contamination. Additionally, enhancing air

quality monitoring systems can help to keep a track of microplastic levels. Apart from this, individuals can use air purifiers at homes with a filter that can trap and remove most microplastics.

Airborne microplastics are an alarming threat to public health in India and beyond. As we continue to grapple with the consequences of plastic pollution, it is important that we take collective action to mitigate its impact on our health and environment.

Implementing effective policies and fostering research initiatives can work towards countering the dangers posed by airborne microplastics.

(The author, Dr. Santoshkumar P Hammigi, is a pulmonologist, at Apollo Clinic, Marathahalli.)



The 10th International Dance, Music and Award Festival 2024, organised by Sree Surabhi Academy of Performing Arts, was held at CGO Towers in Hyderabad. The event showcased talented young Kuchipudi artistes, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of Telangana and promoting the classical dance form.



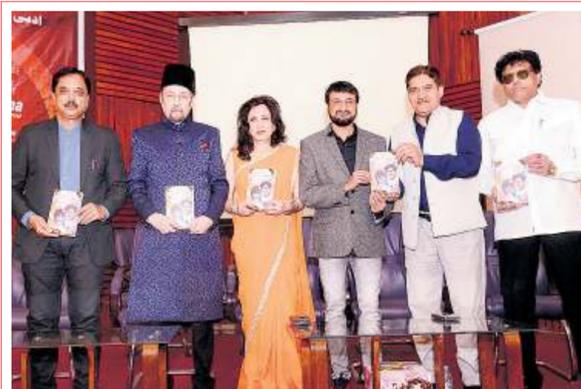
Mahila Dakshata Samiti Educational Institutions hosted a motivational seminar titled "Get Inspired for Success" at its Gangaram campus in Chandanagar, Hyderabad. The seminar commenced with the arrival of Dr Jiwani, Senior Interventional Cardiologist at KIMS Hospital, along with Poonam Yarlagadda, V. S. Ganesh and Satish Kumar Sanghi.



Always Events and SV Productions have announced a grand New Year's Eve celebration at Novotel on December 31. The highlights of the celebration includes the presence of actress Sree Leela, live music by Niraval Band, dance performances and much more



Patilolla Indra Reddy, the grandson of former minister Patilolla Sabitha Indra Reddy, has made a name for himself in the world of chess. He emerged as the champion in the under-11 boys category at the Krishna Gopal Kapoor Memorial International Rating Chess Tournament held in Kanpur.



Anita Advani launched her memoir, "The Endearingly Wicked Ways of Rajesh Khanna," at the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, paying tribute to the Bollywood legend on his birth anniversary. The event was attended by Raunaq Yar Khan, the 9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty, as the chief guest.



Vasanta Seshabhattar, Founder of Aetheria Essentials, was honoured for her outstanding contributions to promoting eco-friendly products and sustainability. Through her innovative approach, incorporating biodegradable materials and sustainable gifting options, Vasanta is inspiring a shift towards conscious consumption.

Students from the Government Girls Primary School (GGPS) in Old Nallagutta made a splash at the Telangana State Sailing Championship, held at Hussain Sagar Lake. Arsheen Ahmed, a Class 4 student, secured a silver medal in the State Sub-Junior Championship (Girls Category), while her schoolmate Yuwaraj Gupta, a Class 5 student, also won a silver medal in the same championship.



Sphoorthy Engineering College in Hyderabad hosted its Alumni Meet 2024, which commenced with a lamp-lighting ceremony. The event featured Bharatanatyam performances and alumni members sharing their experiences and offering valuable advice to final-year students.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



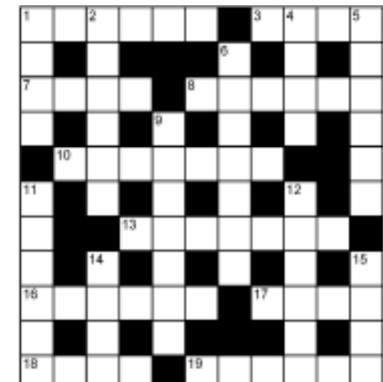
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- One of the continents
- Opposite of false
- A short letter
- Repairing
- Went red in the face
- A game with bat and ball
- A king's son
- Come to an halt
- Sprinkle this on food
- A bird that can be trained to race
- Four times twenty
- You need this to be allowed to drive a car
- The world's largest bird
- Wine is made from these
- Middle
- Young woman
- Twirl

DOWN

- A female relation
- A baby's toy
- Water from the sky



GINGER MEGGS



TOLLYWOOD'S 2024

WHAT WORKED AND WHAT NOT!

This year was a mixed response for Tollywood with only few films being successful, but some of the top actors like Prabhas, Jr NTR and Allu Arjun widened their market with huge success. Some of the small films also did better and here is the round up of the year

PUSHPA ANTE FLOWER AKUNTIVA? BRAND IDDI!

Allu Arjun and director Sukumar delivered the sequel *Pushpa 2: The Rule* three years after the first installment, *Pushpa: The Rise*. Produced by Mythri Movie Makers, the film features Rashmika Mandanna as the female lead. Although the film officially released on December 5, premieres began on the night of December 4. The governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh granted permission to increase the ticket price for this film, a first-time occurrence. Following Allu Arjun's visit to Nandiyal, the Mega family maintained their distance, and Mega Fans largely avoided watching *Pushpa 2* in the Telugu states. However, the Hindi version of the film became a massive hit, catapulting it to the highest-grossing Indian film and establishing Allu Arjun as the new superstar of Indian cinema. As one of the high-budget films in Telugu cinema, *Pushpa 2* achieved a remarkable feat by crossing the Rs 1,000 crore mark within just a few days of its release.



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Nearly 250 Telugu films were released in 2024 and as in previous years, only about 8 percent of them achieved success. This year belonged to Allu Arjun, whose film *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, a sequel to his earlier hit *Pushpa: The Rise*, became a sensational hit in the Hindi belt.

Although the film failed to break even in the Telugu states due to various reasons, it emerged as a huge hit in Hindi, catapulting Allu Arjun to superstardom in India. Despite the film's blockbuster status, the actor was unable to celebrate its success due to controversy and ongoing legal issues. The Telugu film industry is one of the largest in India, with approximately Rs 2,500 crore invested in films this year. *Pushpa 2* had the highest budget, followed by *Kalki 2898AD* and *Devara: Part 1*. Some smaller films, such as *Aay, Committee Kurrollu, Mathu Vadalaru 2* and *KA*, achieved

significant success at the box office. Siddhu Jonnalagadda, popularly known as *DJ Tillu*, emerged as a new star in Telugu cinema after the massive success of his film *Tillu Square*. The film joined the prestigious Rs 100 crore club, a rare feat for an upcoming actor like Siddhu. He is now one of the most sought-after stars in Telugu cinema. On the other hand, the film *Hanuman* was initially released in a limited number of theaters but later expanded to more screens, ultimately emerging as a huge hit. Teja Sajja, a

relatively small star who played the lead role in the film, became a household name following the success of *Hanuman*. Directed by Prashanth Varma, the film not only performed well in Telugu but also in other languages, including Hindi. Mahesh Babu's film *Guntur Kaaram*, released at the beginning of the year, received mixed reviews. However, Mahesh Babu's performance and the film's songs helped it recover its investment. According to the producer, the film generated good profits, performing well in the Telugu states.

PRABHAS GOES SCI-FI WITH KALKI 2898AD

Kalki worked with Prabhas, Amitabh Bachchan played the lead in this science fiction film *Kalki 2898AD* directed by Nag Ashwin and produced by Ashwini Dutt. Deepika Padukone, Kamal Haasan and Disha Patani are the other big stars in this film. The story is set in the year 2898, 6000 years after the Kurukshetra war. According to the director, some people are trying to save the unborn child Kalki, and the film's story is inspired by the Hindu puranas. This is the first part of the film, and the second part has not yet started shooting. Despite receiving mixed reviews, the film was a hit at the box office not only in Telugu but also in other languages. Prabhas played the role of Bhairava and also appeared as Karna in the end. Vijay Deverakonda made a brief appearance as Arjun, and top

director Rajamouli also appeared in one scene. With an estimated budget of Rs 600 crore, this film is the highest-ever budget film made in Indian cinema. It collected more than Rs 1,000 crore gross worldwide and an estimated net of Rs 700 crore.



HITS

JR NTR BREAKS THE RAJAMOULI 'CURSE' WITH DEVARA

There is a sentiment in Telugu cinema that after a film with Rajamouli, the actor's next film will be a big flop. This jinx has affected several actors, including Jr NTR, Nithiin, Prabhas, Ravi Teja and Ram Charan. However, Jr NTR has broken this curse with his film *Devara*. Jr NTR teamed up with director Koratala Siva for *Devara*, which stars Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan as the villain. The film also features Srikanth, Prakash Raj, Murali Sharma, Abhimanyu Singh and Ajay in important roles. Janhvi Kapoor made her Telugu debut as the female lead. Although the movie did not impress critics, the audience made it a huge hit. With this success, Jr NTR has broken the Rajamouli curse. While Allu Arjun emerges as a big star in Hindi, Jr NTR solidifies his position as a leading star in Telugu. The film's budget was around Rs 300 crore, and it collected an estimated amount of Rs 400 crore.



UNSTOPPABLE SIDDHU GADU

Siddhu Jonnalagadda became popular with his variety of scripts, and one of his big hits was *DJ Tillu*. He came to be known as Tillu gadu with that film and the sequel *Tillu Square* was released in March this year. The film got massive openings like a big star, and within a few days, Siddhu joined the Rs 100 crore club. Siddhu surprised everyone with his performance and the songs were also very popular. Anupama Parameswaran played the female lead and her role was completely different from her earlier films. Siddhu Jonnalagadda has emerged as a star with this film, and its impact will likely be seen in his upcoming films. He is undoubtedly the star of 2024 with his stupendous success and entertainment. The film's budget was around Rs 35 crore and it collected nearly Rs 135 crore, making it a surprise and sensational hit in Telugu cinema. Malik Ram directed the film, while Suryadevara Naga Vamsi produced it.



THE MIGHTY HANUMAN: A SUPERHERO EMERGES

Director Prashanth Varma's *Hanuman* is the first superhero Telugu film. Teja Sajja, Anritha Aiyer, Varalakshi Sarath Kumar and Samuthirakani play the main leads. Although the film initially received limited theatrical releases, it generated overwhelmingly positive word-of-mouth. The film's appeal transcended age groups, with both kids and family audiences flocking to watch it. As a result, this small film emerged as one of the biggest hits of the year. Teja Sajja's performance earned him recognition not only in the Telugu states but also among Hindi audiences. Niranjan Reddy produced the film, which had a budget of around Rs 40 crores and collected nearly Rs 350 crores worldwide.



DULQUER SALMAAN'S LUCKY STREAK CONTINUES.....

Malayalam superstar Dulquer Salmaan is now focusing on doing more Telugu films. After the success of *Mahanati* and *Sita Ramam*, the actor is getting good projects in Telugu. Venky Atluri directed him in *Lucky Bhaskar*, a period story set against the backdrop of the banking system and stock market scam. Dulquer Salmaan delivered a neat performance in the film and received praise for his acting. Meenakshi Chaudhary played the female lead, while Suryadevara Naga Vamsi produced the film. The movie was released in all southern languages and declared a hit. Dulquer Salmaan is now working on more Telugu projects.

HITS

Pushpa 2 The Rule
Kalki 2898AD
Devara: Part 1
Hanuman
Tillu Square
Lucky Bhaskar
Saripodhaa Sanivaaram
KA
Committee Kurrollu
Aay
Mathu Vadalaru 2

FLOPS

Saindhav
Eagle
Operation Valentine
Bhimaa
The Family Star
Double iSmart
Mr Bachchan
Maname
Krishnamma
Zebra
Viswam
Harom Hara
Maa Nanna Hero

FLOPS

GUNTUR KAARAM MISSES THE SPICE

Mahesh Babu collaborated with Trivikram for the third time on "Guntur Kaaram," released in January to coincide with the Sankranti festival. Sreeleela and Meenakshi Chaudhary played the female leads, alongside a talented ensemble cast including Ramya Krishna, Prakash Raj, and Jagapathi Babu. However, the film's production was marred by controversies, including a halt in shooting due to creative differences between Mahesh Babu and the action choreographers. Pooja Hegde was initially cast but left the project due to delays. Cinematographer PS Vinod also departed midway through filming. Despite receiving negative reviews, producer S Radhakrishna claimed to have generated profits through Hindi dubbing rights and OTT, satellite channels. S Thaman composed the film's music.



SONG OF THE YEAR: KURCHI MADATHAPETTI

The song "Kurchi Madathapetti" from "Guntur Kaaram" became a massive hit, topping charts for several months. Mahesh Babu, Sreeleela, and Poorna danced to the song in the film. Ramajogalah Sastry penned the lyrics, while Sahithi Chaganti and Sri Krishna provided the vocals. Thaman's music and Mahesh Babu's energetic dance performance made the song unforgettable. After the film's release, "Kurchi Madathapetti" was played extensively and featured in numerous reels.

VIJAY DEVERAKONDA'S CONTINUED STRUGGLE

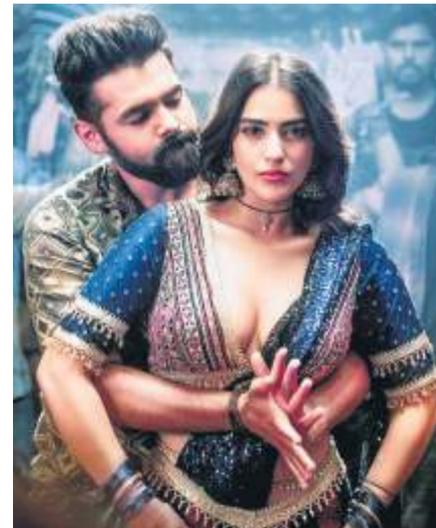
Vijay Deverakonda's rise to fame was meteoric after the success of *Arjun Reddy* and *Geetha Govindam*. However, he has faced a series of flops since 2020, including *World Famous Lover*, *Liger* and *Khushi*. This year, he starred in *The Family Star*, directed by Parasuram and produced by Dil Raju. Despite high expectations, the film failed to deliver and became a mediocre outing. Mrunal Thakur played the female lead. Interestingly, the film performed well in Tamil, but Vijay Deverakonda's struggle to find success in Telugu continues.

OTHER BOX-OFFICE DISAPPOINTMENTS

Sudheer Babu's two films, *Harom Hara* and *Maa Nanna Superhero*, tanked at the box office. Vishwak Sen's three films, *Gaami*, *Gangs of Godavari* and *Mechanic Rocky*, also failed, except for *Gaami*, which received average reviews. Raj Tarun's three films, *Bhale Unnade*, *Tiragabada Saami* and *Purushothamudu*, all bombed. Allari Nareesh's two films, *Aa Okkati Adakku* and *Bachchala Malli*, failed to impress audiences. Anand Deverakonda's *Gam Gam Ganeshu*, Sree Vishnu's *Om Bheem Bush* and *SWAG* and Satya Dev's *Krishnamma* and *Zebra* all failed miserably.

DOUBLE ISMART: A DISAPPOINTING SEQUEL

Director Puri Jagannath's *Double iSmart* was expected to be a comeback film after the success of *Liger*. However, the movie fell short of expectations and became a huge failure at the box office. Ram Pothineni starred as the lead actor, alongside Kavya Thapar as the female lead and Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt as the villain. Unfortunately, Puri Jagannath seemed to have lost his touch on filmmaking and Ram Pothineni's wait for a break continues. Interestingly, *Double iSmart* is a sequel to the hit film *iSmart Shankar*, which was also directed by Puri Jagannath and starred Ram Pothineni.



RAVI TEJA'S DOUBLE DISASTERS

Senior actor Ravi Teja faced a tough year with two of his films, *Eagle* and *Mr. Bachchan*, bombing at the box office. Both films were produced by People Media Factory. *Eagle* was directed by Karthik Ghattamaneni, while *Mr. Bachchan* was directed by Harish Shankar and was a remake of the Hindi film *Raid* starring Ajay Devgn. Despite high expectations, *Mr. Bachchan* failed to impress audiences. However, Ravi Teja remains optimistic, with several projects in the pipeline and is confident of making a comeback in the new year.



GOPICHAND'S HUNT FOR SUCCESS

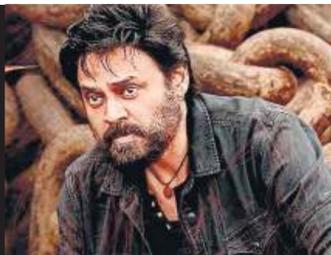
Gopichand's wait for a break continues, with his two films, *Bhimaa* and *Viswam*, failing to impress audiences. The actor's last major hit was *Loukyam* in 2014 and he has been searching for a breakthrough ever since. This year, he tried his luck with two different films: *Bhimaa*, directed by Kannada director A Harsha and *Viswam*, directed by Srinu Vaita, who made a comeback as a director with this film. Unfortunately, neither film brought Gopichand the success he was hoping for.

OPERATION FAILURE FOR VARUN TEJ

Varun Tej, the tall and handsome actor from the Mega family, was looking for a good break this year. He tried a Pan-Indian film, *Operation Valentine*, released in multiple languages, but it was a complete failure. The same subject was already explored in the Hindi film *Fighter*, starring Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone, leaving no takers for Varun Tej's film. His other film, *Matka*, a period drama inspired by Ratan Khatri, the original Matka King, also failed to impress audiences due to its lack of emotion and entertainment. Varun Tej must wait longer for a breakthrough.

SAINDHAV: A SANKRANTHI DISAPPOINTMENT FOR VENKATESH

Venkatesh's film *Saindhav* was released during the Sankranti festival but failed to impress audiences. Typically, Venkatesh's films are considered safe bets, but *Saindhav* turned out to be a huge disaster. Despite being released during the festive season, the film was rejected outright by audiences. Directed by Suresh Kolanu of *Hit* fame, the action film starred Shradha Srinath as the female lead.



Australia beat India by 184 runs in fourth Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India slumped to a demoralising 184-run loss to Australia in the fourth Test here on Monday with contemporary greats Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli failing to come good yet again, signalling that their walk towards the exit door is not too far. Chasing a near improbable target of 340, both Rohit (9 off 40 balls) and Kohli (5) failed to battle their technical frailties and mental cobwebs as India lost seven wickets for 34 runs in just 20.4 overs in the final session to be all out for 155 in 79.1 overs. Australian captain Pat Cummins (3/28 in 18 overs) was superb as usual and Scott Boland was also magnificent (3/39 in 16 overs) in his every spell. Nathan Lyon (2/37 in 20.1 overs) took advantage of variable bounce while Mitchell Starc (1/25 in 16 overs) got the prized scalp of Kohli. This was after an 88-run fourth-wicket stand between Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant. "Pretty disappointing. We wanted

to fight but we could not do it," a dejected Rohit said in the post-match presentation. "We tried everything but they fought hard. We did not grab our chances," he conceded. Australia now lead the series 2-1 and unless India draw level in Sydney, a third successive World Test Championship final could become a distant dream. Even to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, India would need to post a win. Save Jaiswal (84, 208 balls), whose controversial caught-behind in which the third umpire overruled technology to adjudge him out, none of the other batters performed well enough to save the team. "They batted well in the middle session. We knew that we had to get one breakthrough and anything can happen and that proved to be the case. "We had plenty of runs to play with, we had plenty of fielders with the helmet around," a beaming Cummins, who was also adjudged player of the match for his haul of



six wickets, said in the presentation ceremony. The art of saving Test matches has slowly become extinct but India would have depended on their two

senior-most players, who are also fighting to save their legacy and reputation built over nearly two decades. In case of Rishabh Pant, it was one

bad shot too many after a full session in which he concentrated. He got a rank long hop from Travis Head but after a 103-ball vigil, it all came to a naught.

Even Jaiswal's guts and grit couldn't prevent a once highly-rated, but currently a trifle over-rated, Indian batting line-up from implosion with over-the-hill seniors and young superstars unable to handle the pressure. The defeat could have severe repercussions as there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel for skipper Rohit. As for Kohli, despite all his white-ball exploits, the problems outside the off-stump will stick out like a sore thumb. For Rohit, his ultra-defensive approach in the opening slot, is causing India to stare down the barrel with alarming regularity. Rohit did all the hard work during the first hour before opposition skipper Cummins got his bunny for the 10th time in Test matches. Kohli could never control his urge of playing the cover drive again and was caught at first slip after Mitchell Starc pushed one across with the angle. Rahul was out without troubling the scorers after getting a second good ball in the game.

Rohit's decision to bat up the order backfired and it also tinkered with Rahul's mindset despite him being perfectly fine opening the innings. The captaincy was pedestrian as he let the game drift on occasions and there were lot of phases that led to India's defeat but none more telling than the final wicket partnership between Scott Boland and Nathan Lyon where the target went out of reach on Sunday. Save Jasprit Bumrah, who once again toiled manfully for 50 overs and took nine wickets, and find-of-the-series Nitish Reddy, who scored a gritty hundred, there are no positives to be taken from this defeat. The batting, save for the second innings in the opening Perth Test, has been absolutely below par and India won't be doing themselves any favours if they have walking wickets at the top of the order. The team is going through a tough transition and it is now time that their feisty head coach Gautam Gambhir shows some spark along with chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar.



Seniors like Rohit, Kohli haven't really contributed: Gavaskar

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Monday lashed out at senior players such as Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for letting the team down and blamed the Indian top-order for losing the Boxing Day Test against Australia here. Set a target of 340 on the final day of the fourth Test, the Indian batters, with the exception of Yashasvi Jaiswal (84), faltered yet again to lose the match by 184 runs and trail 1-2 in the five-match series. "It all depends on the selectors. The contributions that were expected have not come. It is the top-order which has to contribute, if the top-order is not contributing, why blame the lower-order. "The seniors have not really made the contribution that they should have, all that they had to do was bat out today and live to fight another day in Sydney," Gavaskar told India Today. "It's just that the top-order didn't contribute and that is the reason India found itself in this position." While Gavaskar praised Jaiswal for his gritty knock, the batting great once again was not impressed by Rishabh Pant's shot selection, which opened the floodgates for Australia. Joining hands at 33 for 3, Jaiswal and Pant looked to have settled down, taking India to 121 in the post-lunch session, before a rash shot from Pant set the team back. "Yes, absolutely around tea time when Rishabh

Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said. "The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple of overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared the target with Jaiswal, he hit it straight to Mitchell Marsh at in the deep in search of a six. "...The issue is you know there is this shot called sixer in cricket and which is like a drug. Once you hit a couple of sixes, then you think that's a real high because once you hit the ball cleanly of the middle of the bat and it goes into the stands, there is no better feeling for a batter. Sixer is a different feeling and it's a drug, it gets into your system," Gavaskar said. "The difference between a boundary and a six is just two runs but the risk percentage is 100 per cent. Boundary is hit along the ground no risk at all, a six is attempted with the ball up in the air and if you don't time it, if it hits the toe of your bat, it can go up and you can be out caught."

New Zealand beats Sri Lanka by 45 runs in second T20

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI

Sri Lanka again fell short in a Stough run chase as New Zealand won the second Twenty20 international by 45 runs Monday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. The tourists were edged by eight runs chasing 172-8 in the first match two days ago and again faltered late while chasing New Zealand's 186-5 on Monday. Sri Lanka was all out for 141 in 19.1 overs. "It's really important to finish the game, no matter how it started," Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said. "The way you finish is the most important thing. In the first game we were almost there to win and again we're disappointed." Once again, Jacob Duffy was New Zealand's key bowler, dismissing opener Pathum Nissanka for 37 and returning



to remove Kusal Perera for 48 when both batters looked well placed to steer Sri Lanka to victory. Nissanka made 96 in the first match in a 120-run opening partnership with Kusal Mendis before Duffy turned that match in New Zealand's favor when he took three wickets in four balls, including Mendis, to stifle the Sri Lanka chase. He took 4-15 Monday to once

again stand out as the difference between the teams. After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire.

Matt Henry took two wickets with consecutive balls in the 19th over before Zak Foulkes finished off the Sri Lanka innings with five balls remaining. New Zealand depended on a century partnership between Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell to post a competitive total in the first match. It produced a more balanced batting effort Monday to reach a testing total on a tricky pitch which sometimes skidded, sometimes held up and provided a batting challenge. A strong wind across the Bay Oval also made hitting to one side of the ground difficult and gave an edge to the bowlers. Tim Robinson made 41 from 34 balls at the top of the New Zealand innings, hitting three fours and two sixes to impart early momentum while Rachin Ravindra failed again and was out for 1.



Mentally disturbing, we fell short in finding ways to win: Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma on Monday said the 184-run drubbing at the hands of Australia in the fourth Test here is "mentally disturbing", conceding that his team failed to fight in the match. India will now head to Sydney for the fifth and final Test trailing 1-2 in the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy. The series finale begins on January 3. "It is mentally disturbing when you can't do what you have come to do," Rohit, whose own poor form has been under the scanner, told reporters after the game. "It is pretty disappointing. There are ways to win games and we fell short in finding ways to win the game here. We wanted to fight till the end and unfortunately we couldn't do it," he said in the post-match presentation ceremony. Australia were struggling at 90 for six in their second innings with the overall lead yet to touch 200 on Sunday but managed to make it a 340-run target for the visitors. Rohit admitted his team could not exploit the favourable situation. "We had Australia 90 for 6. We know things can get tough, but we want to play tough cricket from hard situations. But we were not good enough. I went back to my room and thought about what else we could have done as a team," Rohit said. "But we threw everything we

had, they fought hard, especially that last-wicket partnership, which probably cost us the game there," he added. Rohit said the team wanted to have a go at the target despite its daunting nature. "We knew 340 wasn't going to be easy. We tried to set a platform and keep wickets in hand for the last two sessions, but they bowled perfectly as well. We wanted to go for the target, but we didn't set the platform from our side," he noted. The Mumbai-based Nitish Kumar Reddy for making a fine hundred during the first innings, and hoped the youngster will climb the ladder. "He's coming here for the first time, these conditions can get really tough, but he showed great character, solid technique as well. "He's got everything to be successful at this level, I hope he goes from strength to strength, and he's got all the backing from the team as well," he said. The 37-year-old also patted pacer Jasprit Bumrah for leading the Indian bowling attack almost singlehandedly. "Absolutely brilliant, We've been watching him for so many years now, coming here and getting the job done. He's not a statistical player. "He just wants to play for the country and do well for the team, but unfortunately he's not got a lot of support from the other side," he added.

Jaiswal's caught-behind dismissal sparks controversy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's contentious dismissal sparked a controversy on the final day of the fourth Test against Australia here on Monday, as third umpire Saikat Sharfuddoula ruled him out despite no edge being registered on the Snicko. Jaiswal, who was batting on 84, miscued a hook off pacer Pat Cummins' short-pitched, down the leg delivery, and the batter was initially given not out by on-field umpire Joel Wilson after Australia appealed for a caught-behind dismissal. However, upon review, third umpire Saikat adjudged that there was a deflection off Jaiswal's gloves/bat based on the visual evidence. Saikat overruled the Snicko, which showed no spike, leading to chants of "cheater, cheater" around the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Jaiswal was ousted after playing a solid 84 off 208 deliveries. At one stage, he seemed to steer India to a draw before the visitors lost wickets in clusters in their chase of 340, eventually going down by 184 runs.



The left-hander argued with the on-field umpires over the decision before walking back. "In my view the decision was out. The third umpire did make the correct decision in the end," Former ICC Elite Panel umpire Simon Taufel told Channel 7. "With the technology protocols, we do have a hierarchy of redundancy and when the umpire sees a clear deflection off the bat there is no need to go any further and use any other form of

technology to prove the case. "The clear deflection is conclusive evidence. In this particular case what we have seen from the third umpire, is they've used a secondary form of technology, which for whatever reason hasn't shown the same conclusive evidence of audio to back up the clear deflection. "In the end the third umpire did the right thing and went back to the clear deflection and overturned the umpire field. So, in my view correct decision made," he added. This incident follows a similar controversy in the opening Test in Perth, where opener KL Rahul's dismissal sparked a debate. After on-field umpire Richard Kettleborough had ruled in Rahul's favour following Australia's appeal, the home team used DRS to challenge the decision. Third umpire Richard Illingworth had overturned the call despite not having the benefit of a split-screen view which would have given him a clearer picture of whether the Mitchell Starc delivery actually grazed the bat or the snicko responded to a hit on the pads.

India's peerless fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah nominated for ICC Cricketer of the Year award

PTI ■ DUBAI

Operating at a level rarely seen in the game before, India's peerless fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah was on Monday nominated for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year award and also featured in the list for the best player in the Test format. Bumrah, who has left the Australian batters scrambling for survival with his incredible display of fast bowling in the ongoing five-match series Down Under, has been nominated for the top award, named after legendary West Indies all-rounder Sir Garfield Sobers, alongside England's prolific duo of Joe Root and Harry Brook, with swashbuckling Australian batter Travis Head completing the list. Besides Bumrah, who has been at the top of his game throughout 2024, Root, Brook and Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis featured in the list for the ICC Test Cricketer of the

Year award. Bumrah has been the best bowler in Test cricket in 2024 with 71 wickets from 13 matches at an average of 14.92 and a strike rate of 30.16, the best figures for any bowler. The right-arm pacer has also been the top bowler in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 30 wickets in a mere four Tests. "Having returned to the Test arena following his recovery from a recurring back injury in 2023, Bumrah dominated the bowling charts in 2024. Featuring across 13 Tests in the calendar year, Bumrah delivered his best-ever annual tally — 71 wickets — finishing the year with more Test wickets than any of his counterparts," the ICC said on its website. "Be it the pace-conducive conditions in South Africa and Australia, or tougher conditions for quicks at home, Bumrah was equally impressive through the year. However, it was on India's

tour of Australia that the pace spearhead produced his magnum opus," it added. The ICC rated Bumrah's match-defining spells at Perth, to guide India to a 295-run win, among his most memorable performances along with his dominating show in T20 World Cup. "Bumrah nabbed 15 wickets from eight outings — including a couple in the final against South Africa — as India went unbeaten at the 2024 T20 World Cup," the ICC said. Head was nominated after finishing as the leading run-scorer of the T20 World Cup and being at the forefront of Australian batting in Tests. "Typifying an aggressive brand of batting, the southpaw brandished runs at a brisk rate in the shortest format, and finished among the leading run-getters at ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024. In the Test arena, Head was vital to Australia's push for defending their ICC World



Test Championship title," the ICC said. England mainstay Root has been the most dominant batter in the year, amassing 1,556 runs from 17 Tests at 55.57. The 34-year-old crossed the 1,000-run mark in a calendar year for the fifth time in his career while scoring six tons and five

fifties. The game's global governing body said, "Across 17 Tests, Joe Root compiled his second-best annual run-tally in Tests — second only to his 1,708 runs from 2021. It was also the fifth instance of Root scoring over 1,000 Test runs in a calendar year." "With six Test hundreds to go

alongside five half-centuries, Root was a consistent performer for England — both home and away. His impressive run with the bat saw Root amass joint-fifth highest tons in Tests (36) alongside Rahul Dravid," it added. The ICC recalled Root's career-best 262 against

Pakistan at Multan, also his sixth double century in Tests, and termed it one of his best efforts. Root's compatriot Brook is also in the list of four shortlisted players after scoring 1,100 runs from 12 Tests at 55.00 with four centuries and three fifties. Brook is fourth in the list of highest run-scorers in 2024 behind table-topper Root, India's Yashasvi Jaiswal (1,478 runs at 54.74) and England's Ben Duckett (1,149 runs at 37.06). "A flagbearer of England's quickfire brand of batting, Harry Brook emerged as a breakthrough performer in the longest format," the ICC said. "A noticeable trait in his performances was the fact that most of his runs (723) came away from home while playing the same number of games as he did in England (6)," it added. Brook's "blistering" 317 off 322 deliveries was one of his

top performances in the year. Sri Lanka's Mendis, who hit 1,049 runs from nine Tests at 74.92, is also in the list after enjoying a terrific year, during which he became the joint-third quickest to score 1000 Test runs, equalling Sir Don Bradman's 13-innings mark to reach the milestone. "Mendis averaged more than any of the batters who played more than two Tests in the calendar year — a staggering 74.92 from nine matches," the apex body said. "His performances with the bat helped Sri Lanka push their claim for their first-ever appearance in the ICC World Test Championship Final with wins over New Zealand, England and Bangladesh," it added. Mendis' twin centuries against New Zealand at home, which helped him finish as the fifth highest run-scorer this year, were called his most "memorable performance" by the ICC.