

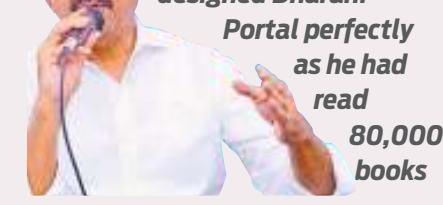
the pioneer

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QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

KCR looted the state like a hunting dog instead of behaving like a watchdog. The government will order a forensic audit of the Dharani Portal. KCR knows the Dharani Portal is full of mistakes. Everyone thought that KCR had designed Dharani Portal perfectly as he had read 80,000 books



- Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy, Minister

P4

'Complete inspection of wetlands in 3 months'

PRIORITY SHOULD BE RESTORING INFLATION-GROWTH BALANCE: DAS

Aishwarya clarifies 'no similarities' b/w Arjun Reddy & DRINKER SAI

DON'T MISS...

Skill hubs being set up: Minister
Minister for Housing K Parthasarathy has announced that skill hubs are being established in all 175 constituencies to provide technical training to unemployed youths. The Minister, accompanied by district Collector K. Vetri Selvi, inaugurated the 'Mega Job Mela' at the IIIT campus in Nuzvid on Friday. Speaking at the event, the Minister reaffirmed the State Government's ...

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NIA conducts raids in 5 states

The National Investigation Agency on Friday searched multiple locations in five states in connection with a case relating to attempts at revival of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit, according to an official statement. Extensive searches were conducted at the premises of suspects at two locations in Patiala and Sri Muktsar Sahib districts of Punjab, four locations in Manesar and Gurgaon districts of ...

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Bihar gets record Rs 1.81 L cr investment

Adani Group, Sun Petrochemicals and a host of other companies - big and small - on Friday committed to investing a record Rs 1.81 lakh crore in Bihar, across sectors ranging from renewable energy to cement, food processing and manufacturing. Hitherto considered laggard, the state signed investment commitments with 423 companies at its only second investor meet, Bihar Business Connect 2024. Bihar's ...

-PAGE: 8

India storm into U19 Women's T20

A rampaging India extended their unbeaten run at the U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup as they reached the final with a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their last Super Four contest here Friday. Aayushi Shukla emerged the wrecker-in-chief with a four-wicket haul as the left-arm spinner conceded only 10 runs in her four overs to help India restrict Sri Lanka to 98 for nine after skipper Niki Prasad opted to bowl. Parunika Sisodia, who also bowls left-arm spin, chipped in with two ...

-SPORTS

Grain procurement fast: CM

PNS ■ PENAMALURU KRISHNA DISTRICT

Grain procurement in the State is progressing at a fast pace, with Civil Supplies officials having purchased 21,04,233 metric tonnes of various farm products so far, said Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on Friday.

After inspecting the grain purchase centres at Rythu Seva Centres in Gangu, located in the Penamaluru Assembly segment of Krishna district, the Chief Minister held a meeting with local farmers. Speaking to the media, he highlighted the losses farmers had suffered under the previous government, which failed to pay them after procuring their grain.

"Under the TDP-led NDA Government, payments are made to farmers within 48 hours of grain purchase. In fact, 93% of farmers receive payments within 24 hours. So far, Rs 4,730 crore has been credited to the accounts of farmers across the State," said Chandrababu.

The Chief Minister assured that measures would be taken to increase farmers' revenue, adding that the farming community is now in a better position compared to before. He also announced the introduction of the silo system, which will bring storage facilities closer to farmers, allowing them to market their produce at their discretion. This system, he said, would also ensure better prices for stored grain.

Continued on Page 2

Steps to increase farmers' income promised

- Payments to farmers are made within 24-48 hours of grain purchase, with Rs 4,730 crore credited to farmers' accounts.
- A silo system will be introduced to help farmers market produce at better prices.
- CM advised farmers to grow high-demand crops and reduce pesticide use.
- Stringent action to be taken against middlemen and illegal rice transport.

1,04,233 metric tonnes purchased so far

'Our govt will resolve all land disputes'

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday said the TDP-led NDA government will comprehensively resolve all land disputes through 'Revenue Sadassu' (meetings) across the State.

Addressing a 'revenue sadassu' at Edupugallu village of Kankipadu mandal in Krishna district, the Chief Minister promised to resolve all kinds of disputes linked to the land.

"We will comprehensively resolve all land issues. This government will take the responsibility to permanently resolve issues once and for all," said Naidu, adding that the government will act humanely during this process.

Continued on Page 2



AMARAVATI DEVELOPMENT

World Bank approves \$ 800 m loan for AP



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors has approved the \$ 800 million Amaravati Integrated Urban Development Programme for building Andhra Pradesh's greenfield capital city Amaravati, the international development said on Friday.

The Bretton Woods institution's Board of Executive Directors met in Washington, USA on Thursday and approved the loan.

"The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors on Thursday approved the USD 800 million Amaravati Integrated Urban Development Program aimed at establishing the city as a well-managed, climate-resilient growth centre in Andhra Pradesh that generates jobs and improves the lives of its current and future residents, especially the most vulnerable," a World Bank press release said.

According to the World Bank, the Government of India requested the USD 800 mn loan to develop Amaravati as an economic hub and the state capital of Andhra Pradesh.

The loan has a final maturity period of 29 years, including a grace period of six years, said the World Bank, adding the government has decided to avail the financing in Japanese Yen.

Auguste Tano Kouame, World Bank's Country Director for India, said the multilateral institution will bring global expertise to support the design of city institutions and infrastructure that can create economic opportunities for residents, including women, youth and vulnerable groups.

"With its urban population expected to double to 950 million by 2050, India aims to build sustainable and liveable cities as growth hubs, and Amaravati offers an exciting opportunity to model this urban transformation," Kouame said.

2.47L cases pending in AP HC: Union Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 2,47,097 cases are pending in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, while 9,04,462 cases remain unresolved in District and Subordinate Courts across the State. This information was provided by Union Minister of State for Law and Justice (Independent Charge) and Parliamentary Affairs, Arjun Ram Meghwal, in response to a query raised by Rajya Sabha member Parimal Nathwani.

The Minister's statement, tabled in the Rajya Sabha, revealed that 82,640 cases are pending in the Supreme Court of India, 61,80,878 cases in High Courts nationwide, and 4,62,34,646 cases in District and



Subordinate Courts across the country.

In Andhra Pradesh, the High Court has 88 judge vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 37, while 59 judge posts are vacant in District and Subordinate Courts against a sanctioned strength of 623.

Continued on Page 2

Rs 14K cr semiconductor investments in pipeline

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Industries Minister T G Bharat on Friday said that potential investments worth Rs 14,000 crore in the semiconductor sector are in the pipeline at Orvakal industrial park in Kurnool district.

The minister noted that an Indo-Japanese company is keen on this investment and arranged a meeting with its executive with IT Minister Nara Lokesh in Amaravati.

Continued on Page 2

Energy Conservation Awards presented

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of the National Energy Conservation Week celebrations from December 14 to 20, the Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM) presented the State Energy Conservation Awards (SECA)-2024 to outstanding performers in energy conservation and efficiency. The awards were conferred on government and private organisations as well as winners of a school short video competition on energy conservation.

At the valedictory function held in Vijayawada on Friday, Special Chief Secretary for Energy, K. Vijayanand, attended as the Chief Guest. Guest of Honour MD APGENCO K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu and CMD APCPDCL Pattanshetti Ravi also graced the occasion. They jointly presented the SECA-2024 awards to



Special Chief Secretary (Energy) K Vijayanand and other officials participated in the valedictory of the National Energy Conservation Week-2024 and awards presentation function in Vijayawada on Friday.

Photo by Ch Vijaya Bhaskar

organisations excelling in energy efficiency across sectors such as buildings, industries, and institutions.

Winners in the Gold category included SEIL Energy India Limited Project (Nelaturu) under Thermal Power Plants, Mohan Spintex India Limited (Krishna district) under

Textiles, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (Visakhapatnam) under Iron & Steel, Electric Traction Centre (Vijayawada) under Buildings, Railway Hospital (Guntakal) under Hospitals, Sattenapalli Bus Depot under APSRTC, and Tadipatri Municipality under Institutions.

Continued on Page 2

Low pressure intensifies into depression

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The well-marked low pressure area over the Bay of Bengal intensified into a depression on Friday evening.

The Meteorological Department, in an update issued at 5:30 pm, confirmed that the low pressure area over the west-central and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal had moved slightly northwards and concentrated into a depression.

A daily weather report stated that the system is associated with an upper cyclonic circulation extend-



ing up to 5.8 km above mean sea level. It is expected to continue moving northwards and intensify into a depression over the west-central Bay of Bengal within the next 12 hours.

Subsequently, the system is likely to move north-northeast, maintaining the intensity of a depression over the next 24 hours. Heavy rain is expected at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next 24 hours.

Thunderstorms with lightning are also likely at isolated locations in

the same region during this period. Squally winds, ranging from 40-50 kmph, gusting up to 60 kmph, are expected in North and South Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next 24 hours.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers are likely at a few places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next seven days. Rainfall occurred at many places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and a few locations in Rayalaseema in the past 24 hours, the report added.

Body found in parcel sent to woman

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

A shocking incident unfolded at Yendagandi village in Undi mandal, on Friday when a woman, Sagi Tulasi, discovered a human body within a parcel box sent by the Kshatriya Foundation.

Tulasi, a recent recipient of a government-allocated house site, had sought assistance from the foundation for construction materials. After receiving an initial shipment, she requested additional electrical

supplies. The foundation responded by sending a parcel containing the ill-fated package.

Upon opening the box, Tulasi was horrified to find the severely decomposed body of a 45-year-old man. A ransom note demanding Rs 1.30 crore was also discovered inside.

SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi and his team arrived at the scene to investigate the gruesome find. A case has been registered, and the body has been sent for postmortem examination.

AP's young skater Jessy Raj to receive PM's Bala Puraskar 2025

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Mathrapu Jessy Raj, a 14-year-old international skater from Mangalagiri has earned a distinguished place among India's brightest young talents. She has been selected for the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bala Puraskar 2025, an award that recognises exceptional achievements by children across various fields.

Jessy will be honoured with the award by the President of India, Draupadi Murmu, at a ceremony on December 26 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. The award, conferred by the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare, celebrates the spirit of excellence and hard work among young achievers.



Jessy is one of 25 children nationwide selected for this honour in 2025.

The invitation to the ceremony came through an official email from the Ministry, marking a momentous occasion in Jessy's life.

Continued on Page 2

AP inks MoUs with tech giants for University of Innovation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh is making rapid strides towards becoming a global hub for technological advancements with two major agreements aimed at enhancing its deep-tech capabilities. In line with its vision to foster innovation, the State government has partnered with key organisations in the education and technology sectors, marking a pivotal moment in its push to integrate cutting-edge technologies into its growth trajectory.

The Andhra Pradesh government has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Physics Wallah (PW), an EdTech firm, and Amazon Web Services (AWS), to establish the first AI-focused Institute of Eminence (IoE) in the State. Named the University of Innovation (UoI),



The State government's partnership with Physics Wallah (PW), an EdTech firm, and Amazon Web Services (AWS) to set up the State's first AI-focused Institute of Eminence (IoE), will focus on advancing artificial intelligence (AI) and related technologies.

this initiative will focus on advancing artificial intelligence (AI) and related technologies. The partnership was formalized in the presence of Nara Lokesh, the state's Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics, at a signing ceremony held at the Undavalli Residence.

The University of Innovation will adopt a unique Hub-and-Spoke model, providing a hybrid learning experience that blends online and in-person education. Its goal is to bridge academic excellence with practical innovation, preparing students to tackle key challenges in research, education, and employment. By collaborating with industry giants like AWS, the university will ensure that its programs remain in tune with the rapidly evolving tech landscape, meeting the needs of emerging industries.

Continued on Page 2

The die is cast: Congress dynasty's end is near

Is a new era in the Congress party's history just around the corner? Will the party be forced to unshackle itself soon from the ownership of the Nehru dynasty, which has lasted seven and a half decades? Like Bahadur Shah Zafar of the Mughals, will Rahul be the last emperor of the Congress? Will the post-dynasty Congress chapter start even before this Lok Sabha's term ends?

One of history's greatest lessons is that dynasties come and go. History proves that even dynasties claiming the lineage of gods could not prevent their political extinction. Hence, the question has never been if the Nehru dynasty's total control over Congress will ever end, but when? The trajectory of the Congress party over the past few decades and the recent political happenings in the country confirm that the

end of the Nehru dynasty's control over the Congress party is surprisingly much closer than anticipated.

Three decades ago, PV Narasimha Rao, a Telangana bidda, proved to the nation that the Congress does not need a Nehru dynasty member at the helm to run a stable full-term government. The fact that the Congress did not have a simple majority in the Lok Sabha, and yet he could steer the nation through a grave economic crisis and introduce path-breaking economic reforms discarding the Nehruvian model, was even more impactful. When future historians write about the end of the Nehru dynasty's era in Congress and Indian politics, they are bound to recognise PV's Prime Ministership as the beginning of that end. That said, PV Narasimha Rao could not prove that Congress could

The trajectory of the Congress party over the past few decades and the recent political happenings in the country confirm that the end of the Nehru dynasty's control over the Congress party is surprisingly much closer than anticipated

get people's mandate to rule without a Nehru dynasty member at the helm. Of course, the ability - real or perceived - to lead the party into power is essential to the next rung leaders in any party, paving the way for the dynasty to regain control over the Congress.

But if PV Narasimha Rao could not prove that a non-dynasty leader could get the party into power, Rahul Gandhi demonstrated that even a dynasty member could

not guarantee it. On the contrary, as the party's de facto owner since 2014, Rahul proved that a dynasty member could helm the party into its decimation. Meanwhile, the Congress's regional stragglers like Mamata Banerjee, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and Sharad Pawar proved that breaking away from the Congress and freeing themselves of the burden of the Nehru dynasty could result in electoral success at the state level.



KISHORE POREDDY

At the same time, as the fortunes of the Congress under the Nehru dynasty leadership were dwindling, Arvind Kejriwal (AAP) and Chandrasekhar Rao (BRS) formed their parties, leading them to electoral victories in the states. Though the 99 seats won by the Congress in this

years' General Election seemed to give the dynasty a much-needed breather, the party's rout in Maharashtra and Haryana, where it performed decently in the Lok Sabha elections, made the respite short-lived.

The recent rumblings within the Congress-led INDI alliance, the proposal to make Mamata Banerjee its leader, and National Conference and Trinamool Congress leaders debunking the Congress's ludicrous stand on EVMs - all reflect their conclusion that Rahul Gandhi's leadership is becoming a liability for not only Congress but its partners too. Rahul Gandhi's becoming the LoP (Leader of the Opposition) further exposed his behaviour as unbecoming of the high office and revealed his lack of political depth and strategy. Additionally, it made his dynasty's record on the

Constitution, Babasaheb Ambedkar, and reservations a liability to the Congress and the entire INDI alliance.

"The best way to predict the future is to create it," said Abraham Lincoln. Except for the vague "Idea of India" slogan, which voters rejected multiple times, and the pursuit of power at any cost - including inviting foreign interference, denigrating India to spite Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fomenting division in society, and championing appeasement politics leading to a perception that Congress is an anti-Hindu party as pointed out by AK Anthony, the dynasty failed in providing an alternate vision to BJP's Viksit Bharat and India First, killing its relevance to Bharat's future. And, that too at a time when Indians, after a thousand years of invaders' rule, are regaining confidence and tak-

ing pride in their Indic roots.

Soon, the Congress will either discard the dynasty and reinvent itself to remain relevant, or its state-level leaders will realise they are better off without the suzerainty of the Nehru dynasty and seek their separate paths. Regional Congress leaders know they are in power (only) in Himachal, Karnataka and Telangana, not because of, but despite, the dynasty. The second outcome is more likely given the ancient regime's hold over the central party - in which case Telangana's development will stop being a hostage to the dynasty's thoughtless posturing and demand for funds to fight elections across the country. The end of the end is near.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson.)

'Govt committed to uplift of livestock keepers'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is actively implementing special programmes to ensure the welfare of livestock and the economic development of livestock keepers, according to MM Naik, Secretary to the Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, and Fisheries Department.

Naik held a virtual review meeting with State-level and District Animal Husbandry officials and Divisional-level Deputy Directors to evaluate ongoing schemes and programmes aimed at uplifting livestock keepers.

During the meeting, Naik emphasised the timely execution of all programmes and schemes under the department, stressing the need to reach livestock keepers in remote areas effectively. He warned against any laxity in implementation, stating that negligence or shortcomings would result in appropriate departmental action.

The Secretary directed officials to prepare detailed action plans for January, focusing on key programmes such as medical services and vaccination drives as per schedule, the Sex-Determined and Semen Scheme, and initiatives under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. These include constructing Gokulas (cattle sheds) and promoting multi-annual fodder cultivation. Other areas reviewed included the progress of the 21st All India Livestock Census, the Pashu Kisan Credit Cards Scheme under the fodder security policy, disease control measures including check posts, and family planning surgeries for dogs.

Naik reaffirmed the government's commitment to livestock welfare and the economic progress of livestock keepers, urging officials to work diligently toward achieving these objectives.

Focus on swift justice for victims: HM Anitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha emphasised that fast and efficient judicial processes are the key to ensuring justice for ordinary victims. She assured that the government would prioritise the necessary arrangements for the police, prisons, and judiciary to function effectively, with special attention to resolving pending cases.

On Thursday, at a review meeting in the conference hall of the State Secretariat, Home Minister Anitha, alongside Law Minister NMD Farooq, discussed the performance, cases, and



progress of Fast Track and Special Courts. They also highlighted the need to strengthen the judicial system, including special courts for women, POC SO cases, and the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB).

The Home Minister assured that the government would address vacancies in the police, jail, and judicial systems by bringing the issue to the attention of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. She also pledged that the coalition government would provide justice to those who had suffered from wrongful cases or harassment under the previous regime. Anitha stressed that under the coalition government, everyone would have equal access to justice, and the process would be efficient, cost-effective, and swift for victims.

In light of an impending

depression, Home Minister Anitha conducted a review meeting with Disaster Management MD K. Kurmanath. With moderate to heavy rains expected in North Andhra on Saturday, district officials have been alerted to remain vigilant. There is also a possibility of thunderstorms in Rayalaseema, and the Disaster Management Department has been directed to issue timely warnings to the public. The Home Minister urged authorities to keep the public informed and prepared for the weather conditions, advising them to stay alert.



Workers' welfare gov't priority: Labour Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Labour, Factories, Boilers, and Medical Insurance Services Vasamsetty Subhash has said that the coalition government prioritises workers' welfare and enforces safety measures in factories. He made these remarks during a review meeting with Factories and Boilers Department officials at the State Secretariat on Friday.

Minister Subhash instructed officials to identify employees who have been in the same position for years and those facing corruption allegations, ordering their prompt transfer.

Highlighting the importance of industries and workers as the "two eyes" of the State, he stressed the need to ensure proper implementation of safety protocols in factories. The Minister warned that negli-

gence during inspections would result in strict action against the responsible officials. He announced that review meetings would be held every three months to monitor the effective implementation of these directives.

The meeting was attended by Director of Factories D. Chandrasekhar Varma, Director of Boilers Uma Maheswara Rao, and other district and regional officials.

AP's young...

Continued from Page 1

This recognition not only shines a light on her incredible sporting talent but also serves as an inspiration for aspiring athletes across the country. Jessy has been a formidable presence in the world of skating, with around 50 medals to her name at state, national, and international levels. Her recent gold medal at the World Oshiyanic Championship in New Zealand further underscores her prowess and determination.

Minister for Human Resources and IT, Nara Lokesh, has been a key figure in supporting Jessy's journey. After personally felicitating her, he instructed the Education Department to propose her name for the prestigious award, ensuring that her talent received the recognition it truly deserves.



AP inks...

Continued from Page 1

Minister Lokesh emphasized that these collaborations align with the vision of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu to make Andhra Pradesh the frontrunner in AI development. He highlighted the importance of equipping the state's youth with the skills necessary to lead in the world of AI and other advanced technologies. "This initiative will not only provide education but will foster talent development and knowledge creation," he said. In addition to this groundbreaking collaboration, the state has also signed an agreement with the Tony Blair Institute (TBI) to modernize higher education in Andhra Pradesh. This move aims to enhance the state's educational infrastructure and ensure that it keeps pace with the demands of the digital age.

The event was attended by notable figures including Physics Wallah Founder & CEO Alakh Pandey, Co-Founder Pratik Boob, and TBI Country Director Vivek Agarwal. They, along with other representatives, expressed their excitement at the potential of this collaboration to transform the educational and technological landscape of the state.

Energy ...

Continued from Page 1

Silver category winners featured Simhadri Super Thermal Power Station (Parwada) under Thermal Power Plants, Ravali Spinners Pvt Ltd (East Godavari) under Textiles, Arjas Steel Pvt Ltd (Tadipatri, Anantapur) under Iron & Steel, Rail Vikas Bhavan (Guntur) under Government Buildings, Vijayawada Railway Hospital under Hospitals, Visakhapatnam Bus Depot under APSRTC, and Vizianagaram Municipal Corporation under Institutions.

Special Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand congratulated the winners and commended APSECM for its national recognition through the National Energy Conservation Award-2024. He expressed confidence that Andhra Pradesh would achieve greater milestones under Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's leadership and Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar's guidance.

"The state government has set a target of 76 GW renewable energy generation in the next five years. With sustained efforts, Andhra Pradesh will emerge as a leader in energy efficiency and renewable energy," he stated.

MD APGENCO KVN Chakradhar Babu urged students to adopt BEE Star-rated appliances, practice judicious use of electricity and water, and promote energy conservation within their families. He stressed that the message of energy efficiency should reach every electricity consumer in the state.

Grain procurement...

Continued from Page 1

Chandrababu encouraged farmers to cultivate crops that have a higher market demand and revealed plans to reduce investment while increasing profits. He stressed the need to significantly reduce pesticide use and instructed officials to prevent water from accumulating in fields with standing crops. The Chief Minister also vowed to take strict action against the middlemen system and pledged to tackle the illegal transport of rice stocks. "We will be very strict in controlling rice smuggling and recycling," he added.

'Our govt will...

Continued from Page 1

According to the CM, he received over 1.5 lakh petitions in the past six months, out of which 78,854 pertained to records of rights, 9,830 linked to house sites and 9,528 were related to land grabbing, among others. After observing all these petitions, the TDP supremo noted that the biggest problem requiring his attention is the resolution of land issues. Observing that the 'revenue sadassulu' scheduled from December 3 to January 9, 2025, will resolve long pending land issues, Naidu highlighted that these meetings will take the onus of returning land to its rightful owners. He said 'revenue sadassulu' received 95,263 petitions until now, attended by up to three lakh people and also reminded that the NDA government has enacted stringent rules to deal with land grabbers.

Further, Naidu promised to update land records and issue passbooks embedded with QR codes for owners to check if a particular parcel of land is under their name or not.

Rs 14K cr semiconductor ...

Continued from Page 1

"Rs 14,000 investments are likely to come into Kurnool district's Orvakal industrial park. An Indo-Japanese company expressed its readiness to invest in the semiconductor sector," said Bharat in an official release.

Incidentally, the executives

deliberated that the Orvakal industrial hub in the Rayalaseema region is conducive to investments.

According to Bharat, the company is expected to ink a deal with the southern state in the presence of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in the second week of January 2025.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Shashthi: Dec 20 10:49 AM to Dec 21 12:21 PM

Saptami: Dec 21 12:21 PM to Dec 22 02:32 PM

Nakshatram: Purva Phalguni: Dec 21 03:47 AM to Dec 22 06:14 AM

Uttara Phalguni: Dec 22 06:14 AM to Dec 23 09:09 AM

Rahukalam: 9:29 AM to 10:52 AM

Yamagandam: 1:36 PM to 2:58 PM

Varjyam: 02:18 PM to 04:06 PM

Gulika: 6:45 AM to 8:07 AM

Amritakalam: 11:10 PM to 12:56 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:52 AM to 12:36 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy

Temp: 31°C

Humidity: 51%

Sunrise: 6:31 AM

Sunset: 5:40 PM

Updated: December 20, 2024 5:00 PM

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KANAKA DURGA TEMPLE ALL SET; ENDOWMENT PRINCIPAL SECRETARY INSPECTS ARRANGEMENTS

Bhavani Deeksha Viramana from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, located atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada, is all set for the Bhavani Deeksha Viramana. The process of the Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment will begin at the Mallikharjuna Maha Mandapam on the temple's premises and later, the temple authorities will allow devotees to have Durga Devi darshan at 6.30 am. The devotees will be allowed from 3 am to 11 pm in the remaining four days. The five-day event is expected to be attended by more than six lakh devotees. The NTR district administration is making all necessary arrangements for them. The Durga Temple authorities, with the collaboration of other departments, have made all facilities for the Bhavani devotees. For the children who come to the temple along with the Bhavani devotees, the temple authorities have implemented the Child Monitoring System (CMS) as per NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminisha's directions. Under this system, the temple authorities will register the details of children at various counters and tag the QR code band to their wrists. In case the children go missing, the security, festival staff and others will scan the QR code to get their information. Meanwhile, Endowment Department Principal Secretary and Commissioner S Satyanarayana, along with Durga Temple Executive Officer (EO) KS Rama Rao, Executive Engineers KVS Koteswara Rao and T Vykunta Rao inspected the arrangements for the Bhavani Deeksha Viramana. He visited the queue lines, Sivalayam stairway, Irumudi points, coconut crushing area, Homa Gundam, Kanaka Durga Nagar Prasadam counters, and Tonsuring Hall at Seethammavari Padalu, besides

the holding points and bathing ghats. He expressed happiness over the arrangements. NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu convened a review meeting with the police officials regarding security and traffic diversion. Also, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra is focusing on drinking water supply and maintenance of sanitation in the city. On the other hand, the temple authorities implemented a strong technology system for the success of the five-day event. For the convenience of

the devotees, the temple authorities have introduced a special app. By using the app, Bhavani devotees can identify the holding areas, parking areas, drinking water, health and other facilities. Additionally, the police have set up an Integrated Command Control Room at the Model Room. The district authorities have arranged bathing showers at various ghats in River Krishna. The Collector held a special meeting with Telecom Network and Internet Service Providers to ensure uninterrupted services during the five-day Bhavani Deeksha relinquishment.

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MP for inclusion of Anganwadi centres under PM Surya Ghar Yojana

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) raised the issue of including Anganwadi centres under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana in the Lok Sabha on Friday under Rule 377. The MP highlighted the critical role of Anganwadi centres in providing essential facilities and a healthy environment for children in rural areas.



MP Sivanath stressed that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has allocated ₹75,021 crore to implement the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana across the country by the 2026-27 financial year. The initiative also focuses on installing rooftop solar panels on government buildings by 2025. Once the scheme is implemented, it would not only produce electricity, but also enable the centres to meet their energy needs independently. Keshineni Sivanath pointed out that Andhra Pradesh has 55,607 Anganwadi centres but 8,455 of them still lack electricity. He noted that during the summer, power supply interruptions in rural areas severely affect these centres, causing significant inconvenience to the children. This disruption has a negative impact on children's attendance and the quality of care they receive. He suggested that Anganwadi centres were included under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, they will have access to a continuous supply of solar power, improving conditions for the children significantly. Moreover, this would reduce electricity costs for the government and promote long-term financial and energy sustainability. The MP stressed the importance of uninterrupted electricity supply for the proper care of children in Anganwadi centres and urged the government to take immediate action to include these centres under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana to ensure that essential facilities are provided to the children.

24/7 tele-ICU system provides advanced medical care to patients

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a first-of-its-kind initiative under the Dr NTR Vaidya Seva Scheme, advanced medical care is being provided at Indo-British Hospitals, managed by Aster Ramesh Hospitals. Dr Potineni Ramesh Babu, Managing Director of Aster Ramesh Hospitals, highlighted the introduction of the innovative 'Cloud Docs Ramesh' tele-ICU system. This system enables the Central Command Centre to monitor patients' health conditions 24/7, ensuring continuous supervision and delivering exceptional healthcare services through senior medical experts. Dr Ramesh Babu stated that from 2008 to 2020, as many as 20,000 heart treatments were



conducted under the Aarogyasri scheme in the regions of Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Utharandhra and some neighbouring districts of Telangana State. Over the past two years, 1,000 heart procedures have been successfully performed at the Indo-British branch with a 99 per cent success rate. These include treatments such as angioplasty with medicated stents, radiofrequency ablation, and pacemaker implan-

tation under the guidance of a cardio-electrophysiologist, as well as device treatments for congenital heart defects like ASD and VSD in children. Advanced surgeries, including Tetralogy of Fallot, septal defect, bypass, and valve replacement have also been successfully carried out. He further mentioned the recent introduction of minimally invasive cardiac surgeries (MICS) for bypass procedures for selected scheme patients.

AP seeks Rs.237 Cr for 24 sports infra projects in State

SAAP CHAIRMAN AND MPS MEETS UNION SPORTS MINISTER; SEEK TO SANCTION OF NATIONAL EXCELLENCE CENTRES IN KAKINADA AND ANU

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation led by Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Chairman Animimi Ravi Naidu, Amalapuram MP GM Harish, and Vizianagaram MP K Appala Naidu met Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Dr Manushuk Mandaviya in New Delhi on Friday. They requested the Union Minister to release Rs.237 crore for 24 sports infrastructure projects proposed by the State government through 'Khelo India' to Andhra Pradesh. During the meeting, the SAAP Chairman and the MPs spoke about various sports infra projects. They pointed out the priority given to sports and games in the State and the new Sports Policy. Also, they submitted a representation to the Central Minister in this regard. They mentioned two key National Excellence Centres at Kakinada and Acharya Nagarjuna University (Guntur) proposed by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. They also requested the Minister to set up hockey and shooting centres in Kakinada, and athletics, archery and weightlifting centres at Acharya



Nagarjuna University. In addition to the already sanctioned 26 district-level Khelo India Centres, they sought another 26 centres for the State. Athletics and wrestling training facilities should be provided at the Tirupati Khelo India Centre, they asked. The team further requested the Central Minister to reinstate railway concessions for sportspersons, which was stopped during the Covid 19 outbreak. Further, Ravi Naidu expressed his desire to organise the National Games and Khelo India Games in the State. He said that the State government is ready to host the two prestigious events.

Minister Manushuk Mandaviya responded positively to the request. Later, Ravi Naidu and Harish, Appalanaidu, Tangella Uday Sri and Life Saving Sports Commission Chairman Pradeep Naidu met Minister of Civil Aviation K Rammoohan Naidu. As part of the new sports policy, they requested the Minister to allot 10 per cent of funds under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to the State. These funds will help to create more sports infrastructure and facilities besides the establishment of Sports Academies, they added. They requested the Minister to allow a Life-Saving Course in Andhra Pradesh.



Pawan Kalyan engages with tribal communities at Parvatipuram

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM

On the sidelines of laying the foundation stones for key infrastructure projects in Parvatipuram, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan interacted with local tribal communities and gained a deeper understanding of their struggles and developmental needs. During his visit, Kalyan highlighted the pressing issues faced by tribal farmers, particularly the importance of the Surapadu reservoir, a project that has seen delays despite its critical role in providing irrigation. "I understand the challenges faced by the tribal farmers here. The completion of the Surapadu reservoir will significantly help them grow crops without difficulty," Kalyan stated, indicating his commitment to advocating for the project with district officials to accelerate its completion. The Surapadu reservoir is expected to be a game-changer for local farmers, offering a reliable water supply for agriculture and addressing the longstanding frustrations associated with water scarcity. In addition to his discussions about agricultural support, Kalyan also unveiled awareness posters created by forest officials in the Saluru Range aimed at reducing cannabis cultivation in the region. "The Forest Department has been working tirelessly to combat cannabis cultivation. This effort is crucial for the well-being of our communities and the preservation of our forests," he remarked. The visit featured a vibrant cultural exchange as Kalyan participated in traditional festivities at the Chilakala Madangi hill, joining local tribes in their energetic Dhimsa dance.

Plea to expedite efforts to set up geopark in Visakhapatnam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

D. Rajasekhar Reddy, convener of INTACH Visakhapatnam, has urged the State and Central governments to expedite efforts to establish a geopark in the city. Reddy believes that Visakhapatnam has the potential to join the prestigious UNESCO Global Geoparks Network, citing its rich geological diversity and cultural heritage. "Recognition as a UNESCO Geopark will not only attract international attention, but also significantly boost tourism and invigorate the local economy," Reddy stated during a seminar on 'Preserving Heritage: Opportunities & Challenges' organised by GTAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences History Department. A geopark will involve a unified Geopark Management Authority to oversee and develop major geological and archaeological sites, adhering to UNESCO standards. Reddy highlighted several key geological and geomorphic sites in and around Visakhapatnam, including the Erra Matti Dibbalu (red sand dunes), coastal features, Borra Caves, bauxite deposits, and the Araku Valley.

DIG calls for heightened vigilance against Maoist infiltration

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In light of recent encounters and exchanges of fire along the Chhattisgarh and Telangana borders, the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Visakhapatnam, Gopinath Jatti, has urged police personnel in Alluri Sitharama Raju district to remain vigilant and intensify security measures. Speaking during a high-level review meeting, Jatti expressed concerns about the potential infiltration of Maoist elements into Andhra Pradesh through these sensitive border areas. He directed senior police officers, along with the Civil Police, APSP, and CRPF personnel, to enhance intelligence gathering and surveillance efforts. "Surveillance measures have been intensified, including deploying informants and conducting drone monitoring," said the DIG, emphasising the importance of gathering advanced intelligence to prevent untoward incidents. He also stressed the need for strengthening internal police communication networks and conducting public awareness campaigns to educate the pub-



lic about Maoist threats and preventive actions. Recognising the significant decline in Maoist influence in the region due to improved infrastructure and enhanced police capabilities, Jatti assured that authorities are fully prepared to counter any attempts by Maoists to re-establish their presence. "Strict legal action will be taken against anyone found aiding or abetting Maoist activities," he warned. The DIG also highlighted the government's rehabilitation initiatives, such as 'Sara' and 'Aatmiya Sammelanam,' aimed at supporting the reintegration of surrendered Maoists into mainstream society. "We are committed to maintaining peace and ensuring the safety of our people."



Semi-Christmas celebrations held at TDP Central office

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Semi-Christmas celebrations were held at the TDP Central Office in Mangalagiri on Friday, where prayers were offered in praise of Jesus Christ. Minister for BC, EWS Welfare, Handlooms and Textiles, S. Savitha, attended the celebrations and highlighted the universal relevance of Jesus Christ's teachings. Speaking on the occasion, Savitha emphasised that Jesus' teachings are practical and universal, transcending all

religious boundaries. She described Jesus as a messenger of peace, urging people to love their enemies and forgive their wrongdoings, reflecting his compassionate sacrifice for humanity. Savitha also referred to Christ's birth as a light for the world and called on everyone to live a life of love and peace in accordance with his teachings. The event was attended by prominent leaders, including AP Gowda Corporation Chairman Veeranki Gurumurthy, TDP leader Yesudas, and others.

ESI Medical College in Amaravati: CITU slams State Govt

SAYS SETTING UP THE MEDICAL COLLEGE IN AMARAVATI, INSTEAD OF UTTARANDHRA, REFLECTS A BIASED APPROACH

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has strongly criticised the Andhra Pradesh government's decision to establish an ESI Medical College in Amaravati, instead of Uttarandhra, which is home to 14 lakh ESI members. CITU State general secretary CH Narasingha Rao expressed his concerns at a press conference held at the CITU office in Jagadamba on Friday. "Setting up the medical college in Amaravati reflects a biased approach," Rao stated. "Andhra Pradesh does not mean just Amaravati. This narrow policy is unfair and overlooks the needs of other regions." Rao emphasised the need for balanced regional development and reiterated the demand to



establish the medical college in Visakhapatnam, where a 500-bed ESI hospital is already under construction in Sheelanager.

Rao also addressed the ongoing issues surrounding the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, accusing the Central govern-

ment of deliberately creating debt to facilitate privatisation. "Instead of saving the steel plant, which was built through

the sacrifices of the people, announcing a new plant in Nakkapalli with RC Mittal is both absurd and insulting," he said. The CITU leader further questioned the State government's commitment to the plant. "The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant has been operational for 30 years. Is it not the government's responsibility to ensure its survival?" he asked. Rao also criticised the State government's plan to procure electric buses, alleging it was a veiled attempt to hand public assets to private operators. "The government plans to buy each bus for Rs. 2 crore and lease them to private operators, instead of addressing the need for 12,700 new buses over the next five years," he explained. The discussion also covered the privatisation of the Road

Transport Corporation (RTC), with Rao claiming that the State government is preparing to sell prime RTC lands worth Rs 2 lakh crore. "These lands, including 129 depots, 423 bus stands, and zonal workshops in Vijayawada, Nellore, Kadapa, and Vizianagaram, are being targeted for privatisation under the guise of modernisation," Rao claimed. "This is a conspiracy to dismantle RTC for private gain." Rao urged workers in Andhra Pradesh to participate in a nationwide protest on December 25 against the Central government's decision to privatise the Chandigarh State Power Company. "This fight is not just about Chandigarh, but about protecting public resources and services across India," he urged.

Four PHCs sanctioned for Eluru dist

PNS ■ ELURU

Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Prataprao Jadhav, announced that four Primary Health Centres (PHCs) have been sanctioned for the Eluru district under the National Health Mission (NHM). These PHCs are currently under construction.

Responding to a question by Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar during the winter session of Parliament, the Union Minister detailed the funds allocated for hospital construction and upgradation in Eluru district and Andhra Pradesh over the past five years.

The Minister stated that six PHCs were sanctioned for Andhra Pradesh under the NHM scheme, of which five have been completed. Four of these PHCs are allocated to the Eluru district and are in progress. Additionally, four maternal and child health wings were sanctioned for Andhra Pradesh, with three already completed.

Regarding health and well-



ness centres, the Union Minister revealed that 2,727 were sanctioned for Andhra Pradesh, including 107 for the Eluru district, all of which are operational. Under the 15th

Finance Commission, 334 Block Public Health Units were approved for Andhra Pradesh, with 35 completed. In the Eluru district, 15 were sanctioned, with one completed.

The Minister also disclosed that nine Community Health Centres were sanctioned for Andhra Pradesh. Under the PM Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission, 26

Integrated Public Health Labs were approved, of which 13, including one in Eluru district, are operational.

For Critical Care Blocks, 24 were sanctioned for Andhra Pradesh, with one allocated to Eluru district. From 2021-22 to 2025-26, Rs 1,271.8 crore was allocated under PM-ABHIM, and Rs 2,600.8 crore under the 15th Finance Commission Health Grant, totalling Rs 3,872.6 crore for strengthening healthcare infrastructure in the state.

The Minister further highlighted the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) for establishing new medical colleges in association with district referral hospitals, with a funding ratio of 90:10 for northeastern and special category states and 60:40 for other states. Under this initiative, 157 medical colleges have been approved nationwide, including three in Andhra Pradesh—Piduguralla, Paderu, and Machilipatnam. Among these, the colleges at Paderu and Machilipatnam are operational.

Skill hubs being set up for youth: Minister Parthasarathy

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing K Parthasarathy has announced that skill hubs are being established in all 175 constituencies to provide technical training to unemployed youths.

The Minister, accompanied by district Collector K. Vetri Selvi, inaugurated the 'Mega Job Melā' at the IIIT campus in Nuzvid on Friday. Speaking at the event, the Minister reaffirmed the State Government's commitment to creating over 20 lakh jobs in the next five years. He emphasised the Government's goal of making an entrepreneur in every home by providing necessary support. "The Government has prioritised quality education, large-scale employment generation, and entrepreneurship. Efforts are underway to attract world-renowned MNCs to establish units in Andhra Pradesh," the Minister highlighted.

He acknowledged that a new industrial policy is being formulated to attract more investments and announced the conduct of a 'Skill Census.' The Minister revealed that NTPC will set up non-conventional energy units in the State, costing Rs 1.87 lakh crore, which will provide 1.06 lakh jobs. "IT Minister Nara Lokesh recently visited foreign coun-



tries, met with Google, and convinced them to set up a unit in the State. He also persuaded Mittal Steel to establish its unit here," Minister Parthasarathy observed.

The Minister further announced that Nara Lokesh had convinced Reliance to establish 500 compressed biogas units at an investment of Rs 65,000 crore in the State. K. Parthasarathy pledged to focus on industrial development while simultaneously implementing welfare schemes to uplift the poor.

Collector Vetri Selvi clarified that technical training is being provided to unemployed youths in 8 skill hubs in the district. After learning about job opportunities and the required technical skills, eligible candidates receive training to secure employment in various industries.

Nuzvid Sub-collector Smaran Raj, IIIT VC Amarendra Kumar, DRDA PD Vijay Raju, and Skill Development Officer Jitendra Kumar were among those present at the event.

Extortionists arrested, Rs 25.57 lakh recovered



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Vijayawada CCS police in NTR district have successfully arrested the individuals who extorted money by impersonating police officers and recovered Rs 25,57,000 from them.

On December 15, 2024, a man from Jaggaiahpet approached the Satyanarayanapuram Police Station, reporting that he worked as a clerk in a gold shop in Jaggaiahpet. He explained that, as per his employer's instructions, he frequently travelled to Chennai and Nellore to buy gold, which he would then craft and sell.

On the same day, an employee from the gold shop in Jaggaiahpet lodged a complaint at Satyanarayanapuram Police Station, stating that two persons, impersonating police officers, had robbed him. He explained that on December 11, he had taken money from his employer to buy gold and had booked a train to Chennai. Missing the train, he opted to travel by car to Vijayawada. However, two unknown individuals, dressed in khaki pants and white T-shirts, stopped his car. They claimed to be police officers, threatened him, and demanded to see his bag. After forcibly taking the bag, they told him they would show it to the authorities and left. When they did not return, the car driver, noticing the complainant's rising blood pressure, took him to a hospital in Jaggaiahpet, where he later

filed a complaint. Following the complaint, the police registered a case and transferred the investigation to the CCS police. Under the guidance of Police Commissioner SV Rajashekhar Babu and Crime DCP K Thirumaleswara Reddy, with the support of Crime ADC M Rajarao, ACP Venkateshwarlu, and CCS Inspector P Srinivas, a special team was formed to investigate the matter. The team gathered technical evidence and apprehended the accused.

On Thursday, the CCS police arrested four individuals near a house in Bapunagar on BRTS Road and took them into custody for questioning. The accused were identified as Chegu Pardasai (32) from Seetharampuram, Vijayawada; Patan Subhani Khan (45) from Vinchipet, Vijayawada; Pratipati Shanti (45) from Banunagar, BRTS Road, Vijayawada; and Sheikh Hazruddin @ Chotu (34) from Old RR Pet, Vijayawada (a rowdy-sheeter). Gulluru Vamsi Krishna Raju (32) from Ibrahimpatnam, Vijayawada, remains absconding.

During the investigation, it was revealed that Chegu Pardasai had learned from the complainant, Ram Krishna, that he had missed the train and was travelling by car. Pardasai, Khan, and Raju, dressed in khaki pants, white T-shirts, and brown shoes, intercepted the car near Kuddu's Nagar.



'Bhoomi Pooja' performed for resort construction

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Tourism Development Corporation Chairman Dr. Nukasani Balaji performed the 'bhoomi pooja' for the construction of resorts at Maddipadu village, near Gundlakamma reservoir, on Friday. Local MLA BN Vijay Kumar and other leaders also participated in the event.

Speaking on the occasion, Nukasani Balaji stated that the new resort, being built at a cost of Rs 3.5 crore, will feature a swimming pool, family restaurant, and a helipad. He

expressed regret that the existing resort structures had fallen into disrepair due to the negligence of the previous YSRCP government. He also mentioned that the old resort would be renovated.

MLA Vijay Kumar, addressing the gathering, highlighted that the new resort would contribute to the tourism development in the area. He expressed hope that the resorts at Gundlakamma Reservoir would attract a large number of tourists. State TDP secretary Adaka Swamulu and other leaders were also present at the event.

Collector sets 15% GSDP growth target in farm sector

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector A. Thameem Ansariya has directed officials of the agriculture and allied departments to work towards achieving a 15% GSDP growth rate as part of the district's comprehensive development plan.

The Collector held a review meeting with the officials of the agriculture and allied departments on Friday to discuss the target of a 15% GSDP growth rate for the agriculture-allied sectors.

Speaking at the meeting, the Collector emphasised the need to formulate an action plan to achieve this target. She instructed the concerned officials to ensure progress towards the goal, highlighting that the programme "Polam Pilustondi" should be conducted in every village by the



Agriculture Department.

"The Polam Pilustondi programmes must be organised in a way that maximises farmer participation," she said, adding that the government is prioritising natural farming. "The farming community should be made aware of natural farming, and the concept should be promoted extensively over the next five years. Awareness should also be raised regarding the use of Agrideep Technology," the Collector stated. She also stressed the importance of sensitising farmers about drone

technology and its applications in farming. The crop insurance process must be completed as prescribed, she added.

The Collector instructed the officials to complete the 21st livestock census in the district by January 2025. She noted that under the Kisan Credit Card Scheme, 9,084 cards had been issued against the target of 2,426, with Rs 82.73 crore sanctioned as loans. As part of efforts to boost fodder production in the district, the target has been set to cultivate fodder across 1,200 acres, of which 748.26 acres have already been covered.

District Agriculture Officer Srinivasa Rao, Fisheries Officer Chandrasekhar Reddy, Animal Husbandry JD Dr. Babyrani, Horticulture Officer Gopichand, and AP MIP PD Ramana were among those present at the meeting.

'Govt will order forensic audit of Dharani Portal'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Declaring that the government will order a forensic audit of the Dharani Portal, Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy said that former Chief Minister KCR looted the state like a mad dog instead of conducting himself like a watchdog.

Reacting to the demand of BJP leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy, the Revenue Minister said the government will order a forensic audit of the Dharani Portal.



Criticising BRS MLAs for creating disturbance in the Assembly and demanding a debate on the Formula E-Car Racing issue, Ponguleti said

that BRS MLAs are trying to block the Bhu Bharati Bill from getting passed in the Assembly so that their irregularities do not come out. BRS leaders are trying to dupe people by speaking lies in the Assembly, he said.

Continuing his speech amidst the slogans of BRS MLAs, Ponguleti said that BRS leaders are behaving like goons ignoring the Assembly's conventions. BRS MLAs threw papers and books at the Speaker and also tried to attack him, he said.

CS offers prayers at Tirumala temple

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad, accompanied by his family, offered prayers to Lord Sri Venkateswara Swamy at the Tirumala temple on Friday.

After the darshan, he was honoured with Vedasirvachanam by Vedic pandits at the Ranganayakula

Mandapam. Additional Executive Officer Ch. Venkaiah Chowdary presented him with a laminated photo of Srivaru and Theertha Prasadams. District Collector Dr. Venkateswar, District Superintendent of Police L. Subbarayudu, and Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Deputy Executive Officers Lokanatham, Bhaskar, and other officials were also present.

In connection with Vaikuntha Ekadasi and Dwadasi on January 10 and 11, respectively, special pujas will be held at the Sri Kalyana Venkateswara Swamy temple in Srinivasa Mangapuram, in the TTD announced in a release on Friday. Following Dhanurmasam

Kainkaryams, Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam will be available to devotees from 3:30 am to 4:00 pm and again from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm on January 10. On January 11, darshan will be available from 4:00 am to 5:00 pm and again from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm. Chakra Snanam will take place between 8:00 am and 9:00 am.



NSP LEFT CANAL PANEL

TDP finalises appointments to key positions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has finalised the appointments of senior leaders Kota Veera Babu from Chandralapadu and Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao from Bapulapadu to important positions in the Nagarjuna Sagar Lal Bahadur Canal (Left Canal) Project Committee. On Friday, the party appointed Kota Veera Babu as Chairman and Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao as Vice Chairman.

The Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal Project consists of 17 Distributary Committees (DCs), and the elections for the President and Vice President of these committees were recent-

ly held unanimously. Elections for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the NSP Project Committee will take place at the Farmer's Training Centre on the Water Resources Department premises in Vijayawada on December 21. All 17 DC Presidents will elect the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Project Committee.

Both Kota Veera Babu and Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao were contenders for the Chairman position and sought support from party leadership, MPs, and MLAs. However, as most of the NSP DCs are in the NTR district, local leaders have requested the Chairman post be given to Kota Veera Babu. Meanwhile, Krishna district



leaders have pushed for Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao, citing his extensive experience in the irrigation sector. Both leaders separately met Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and requested their appointment to the NSP Chairman position. Sources

indicate that, after consulting with MPs and MLAs, TDP leadership finalised Kota Veera Babu as the NSP Project Committee Chairman and Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao as Vice Chairman. On the other hand, the TDP has not yet decided on the Chairman and

Vice Chairman positions for the Krishna Eastern Delta Project Committee. Vallurupalli Ganesh, the Pamarru DC President, is the main contender for the Chairman position. The Krishna and Eluru districts have 32 DCs. Meanwhile, NDA partner Jana Sena Party (JSP) is seeking a key position in the Krishna Eastern Delta Project Committee. The election for this committee will be held at the collectorate in Machilipatnam, and the final decision on the Chairman and Vice Chairman posts will be taken by the TDP and JSP on December 21. According to party sources, discussions are ongoing regarding the Chairman position for

the Nagarjuna Sagar Project Committee, with JSP leadership strongly pushing for it. However, there is internal competition within JSP, particularly from leaders of the Avanigadda and Pedana Assembly constituencies, who are also demanding the Chairman position. JSP is yet to finalise its candidate for the role. If the Chairman post is allotted to JSP, the TDP is likely to receive the Vice Chairman post. The TDP is considering Vemulapalli Ganesh for this position, showcasing the strategic planning of the party. The final decision is awaited, and it will reveal the collaboration and power-sharing dynamics between the two parties.

ACROSS THE STATES



Will plant fruit saplings to tackle money menace: Sukhu

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu told the state assembly on Friday that of the total plantation done by the government in forest areas, 60 per cent will be saplings of fruit to attract monkeys to their natural habitat as a means to tackle the monkey menace. The problem of monkeys entering houses and destroying crops is not new, and farmers have reduced agricultural practices in villages due to this issue, Sukhu said. So far, 1.87 lakh monkeys, including 1,188 in the Nahan assembly constituency, have been sterilized, he said in response to a question by Congress legislator Ajay Solanki. The CM added that despite the Union government declaring monkeys as vermin and allowing their killing, religious sentiments prevailed, and the monkeys were not killed. He also expressed concern over the wildlife menace in the state. Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister Anirudh Singh told the assembly that 81,928 eligible persons have been sanctioned houses under the Prime Minister Gramin Awas Yojana for 2023-24 and 2024-25.



Maha Cong to have a new chief soon: Patole

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Friday said the party's state unit will soon have a new chief as he has asked their central leadership to relieve him of the post. Patole was speaking to reporters on the premises of the Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur, where the Winter Session of the state legislature is underway. He said a decision on the new Maharashtra Congress chief will be taken soon. "We have authorised the party's central leadership to name the new leader," he said. Patole said he has asked the party high command to relieve him as the state Congress chief since he has been holding the post for four years. He said their legislature party leader would also be named soon. Following the Congress' worst-ever defeat in the assembly elections in Maharashtra, party sources had earlier claimed that Patole had requested the central leadership to relieve him of the responsibility of the organisational post.



'Poverty should not pose hindrance to education'

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the state government has been implementing numerous initiatives to ensure that poverty does not hinder access to education. "We are committed to providing every student the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their financial background," Sarma said during the distribution of awards as part of the '12 Days of Development' initiative in Nagaon. The CM highlighted that government schemes for students are aimed at empowering them to become responsible citizens through education. "These initiatives are not just about providing education but about shaping the future of our youth," Sarma said. He further pointed out that nearly 150,000 youth had been provided government jobs over the past three years based on merit, ensuring that even children from underprivileged families had opportunities to succeed. "Assam is now embarking on a journey of development," Sarma declared, adding, "We are focusing on key industries such as semiconductors and making significant strides in infrastructure development, including the construction of bridges over the Brahmaputra and the establishment of medical colleges and universities in every district."

FAKE AB-PMJAY CARDS

'ED searches at hospitals led to seizure of Rs 88 lakh'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Searches conducted at some hospitals in August in connection with alleged generation of fake Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) cards have led to seizure of cash amounting to around Rs 88 lakh and various incriminating documents and digital devices, Lok Sabha was informed Friday. The ED conducted searches at 20 locations in a case



related to alleged generation of fake Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) cards in August, Minister of State for Health Prataprao

Jadhav said in a written reply. The locations searched included seven hospitals and their key management persons, he said.

SOCIAL MEDIA POST

India lodges strong protest with Bangla

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has lodged a strong protest with Dhaka over a now-deleted social media post by a key aide of Bangladesh's interim government that claimed certain areas of Indian territory should be part of that country.

Mahfuz Alam, known for his provocative comments, had also posted on Facebook four days ago a map purportedly showing parts of West Bengal, Tripura and Assam as parts of Bangladesh. He deleted the post after it triggered backlash.

Alam is a de facto minister in the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government of Bangladesh. In strongly reacting to the post, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on Friday reminded all concerned to be "mindful" of



their public comments. "We have taken this up with the Bangladeshi government. We have strongly registered a protest on this issue. We understand that the post being referred to has reportedly been taken down."

"We would like to remind all concerned to be mindful of their public comments. While India has repeatedly signalled interest in fostering relations with the people and the interim government of Bangladesh, such comments underline the

need for responsibility in public articulation," he said. The relations between India and Bangladesh are reeling under severe strain after the interim government headed by Yunus came to power in August.

Injured BJP MPs better, under observation in ICU: RML

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The health condition of two BJP MPs, who suffered head injuries in a face-off between opposition and NDA members in Parliament premises, is much better now and they remain under observation in the ICU of the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital here, authorities said on Friday.

Pratap Sarangi (69) from Odisha and Mukesh Rajput (56) from Uttar Pradesh were brought to the hospital from Parliament with head injuries on Thursday.

"Their health condition is much better now and their blood pressure levels are also under control," RML Hospital's Medical Superintendent Dr



Ajay Shukla said on Friday. "Mukesh Rajput still has little dizziness and heaviness in head. Also Sarangi has an old heart problem. He already had a stent in his heart. They are being kept under observation in the ICU and their condition

is being monitored. Treating doctors will decide further course of treatment and on when to shift them to a ward," Dr Shukla said.

Nothing significant regarding the injury has come up in the MRI and CT scans, he said.

BJP MP gifts '1984' bag to Priyanka Gandhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Aparajita Sarangi on Friday gifted a bag with "1984" written on it in red to Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

This comes days after the Congress MP carried bags with messages on Palestine and Bangladesh written on it to Parliament. Sarangi, the BJP MP from Bhubaneswar, gave the bag to Vadra in the corridor of Parliament. She handed the bag to the

Congress while she was walking in Parliament corridor. Vadra took the bag from Sarangi and walked on.

The bag had "1984 riots" written on it, said the BJP leader, adding this is also an issue that the Congress leader should raise as she makes statements with her tote bags. In a show of support for the people of Palestine, the Wayanad MP had on Monday carried a bag to Parliament that had "Palestine" emblazoned on it.



Former Haryana CM Chautala dies

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

Indian National Lok Dal president and five-time Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala died here on Friday at the age of 89.

Chautala, who was former deputy prime minister Devi Lal's son, suffered a cardiac arrest at his house here and was immediately rushed to a hospital but could not be saved, a party spokesperson told PTI.

He breathed his last at around 12 noon in Medanta hospital, a senior police officer said.

Chautala, who came from a prominent political family in Haryana and was face of a prominent regional outfit, had been facing age-related health issues in the recent past.

He is survived by two sons and three daughters. His wife Sneha Lata had passed away over five years ago.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini were among a host of leaders who consoled the demise of Chautala.

REVIVAL ATTEMPTS BY NAXAL OUTFIT

NIA conducts raids in 5 states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency on Friday searched multiple locations in five states in connection with a case relating to attempts at revival of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit, according to an official statement.

Extensive searches were conducted at the premises of suspects at two locations in Patiala and Sri Muktsar Sahib districts of Punjab, four locations in Manesar and Gurgaon districts of Haryana, two locations in New Delhi, and one location



each in Patna district of Bihar and Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, it said.

The suspects whose premises were searched were believed to be involved in propagating the ideology of CPI (Maoist) and the revival of its northern regional bureau wing through various frontal organisations. The searches led to the

seizure of digital devices, including mobile phones, pen drives/hard discs, laptops and memory cards, SIM cards and other incriminating documents related to Naxalism, said the statement issued by the NIA.

The searches were conducted in a case that relates to attempts by CPI (Maoist) leaders, cadres, sympathisers and over-ground workers (OGWs) to reenergise the outfit's decrepit influence in the NRB region, comprising Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS

SC directs Centre to file fresh status report on trials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Centre to file a fresh status report within two weeks on the status of trials in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih asked additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati to file an affidavit and permitted the petitioners in the case to file detailed objections.

During the hearing, Bhati said recommendations of the

special investigation team, set up by the top court, were carried out. A counsel appearing for one



of the petitioners submitted there were some glaring

instances in the SIT report and said 500 cases were clubbed in one FIR and the investigating officer could not probe them.

"There were many instances where 498 cases were clubbed in one FIR and IO had to investigate all of them. Initially when the hearing began, the court felt that it should be confined to Delhi only. But we have done nothing about other states. We have given examples of Kanpur, Bokaro, etc., nothing has happened," he said.

Indian, Vietnam Coast Guards conduct joint sea exercise

PNS ■ KOCHI

The Vietnam Coast Guard Ship CSB 8005 departed Kochi on Friday, after a successful visit strengthening the partnership between the Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG), according to ICG officials.

The four-day visit was aimed to enhance maritime cooperation and interoperability between the two maritime forces, they added.

The centerpiece of the visit was a comprehensive sea exercise code named "Sahayog - Hop Tac" off Kochi, a press release issued by Coast Guard said.

Will oppose jamili elections 'tooth and nail': Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday said 'one nation, one election' was against the basic structure of the Constitution and asserted that it would oppose the idea "tooth and nail".

The opposition party also said the idea of 'one nation, one election' was anti-democratic and anti-federal.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh wondered how the government would muster the two-third majority required for a constitutional amendment when it could not even assemble 272 MPs at the time of introduction of the bills that lay down the mechanism to hold

simultaneous elections.

"It has been referred to a joint committee of Parliament. Our view is very clear, this is anti-democratic and anti-federal. It goes against the basic structure of the Constitution," Ramesh told PTI.

This government could not even muster 272 MPs at the time of introduction of the bills. How are they going to get two-third majority for amending the Constitution, he asked.

Ramesh said, "It (one nation, one election) is anti-democratic completely. It is anti-accountability, anti-democratic and anti-federal and we will oppose 'one nation, one election' tooth and nail -- lock stock and barrel."

'Worried parents on ferry planned to throw children in sea water'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The panic-stricken parents onboard an ill-fated tourist ferry were thinking of tossing their children into the sea water as a desperate measure after their boat started sinking off Mumbai, but a team of CISF marine commandos stopped them with an assurance that everyone will be saved.

CISF constable Amol Savant (36) and his two colleagues became the "first responders" after the December 18 accident. Their patrol boat reached the accident site off the Mumbai coast around 4 pm, and they decided to utilise the "golden hour" for first saving the most vulnerable, including the children.

Fourteen people were killed after a Navy boat rammed into the tourist ferry -- 'Neel Kamal' -- on way to the Elephanta Island from the Gateway of India in Mumbai late Wednesday afternoon.

"We were on routine patrol at some distance off the shore when our walkie talkie crackled to inform us that a passenger ferry was sinking. I asked the pilot (speed boat driver) to go full throttle and we reached the accident site about 3-4 kms away in no time," Savant told PTI here.

He said he was "astonished to see the accident site. But being a trained soldier, I understood what was to be done and how." "We saw people were ready to throw their children in



the ocean water thinking that they would be saved from the sinking ship. I asked them not to panic and not attempt this. We took charge of the situation

soon," said the jawan, who is posted with the CISF unit that guards the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Navi Mumbai.

Savant said he too was "shaken initially when I reached the site but then when I saw the children hanging dangerously from whatever was left of the sinking ferry and their helpless parents, I and my colleagues just caught hold of the children and brought them in our boat."

The jawan says they rescued about 6-7 children in the first go followed by women and men. "There were many hands raised towards us, some screaming, some just requesting to save them. We don't know how many exactly but we were able to help and rescue as many as 50-60 people who were onboard that ill-fated ferry," Savant, who joined the CISF in 2010, said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

An abhorrible practice

The SC's observation on witchcraft practices is a timely reminder that women still face humiliation under various pretexts

In a landmark observation, the Supreme Court of India recently described the victimisation of women under accusations of witchcraft as a 'blot on the constitutional spirit.' The case before the apex court, involving egregious acts of abuse and violence against women in Bihar's Champaran district, has brought the spotlight on the persistent issue of witch-hunting in the country. The court's remarks emphasise the urgent need to eradicate such practices that undermine the dignity, equality and human rights enshrined in the Constitution of India. The bench, comprising Justices CT Ravikumar and Sanjay Karol, was dealing with a petition concerning a disturbing incident that occurred in early 2020. Women were publicly assaulted, disrobed, and accused of witchcraft. One of the accused individuals, Lakhpati Devi, along with others, faced charges for these heinous acts. Reportedly there was police apathy towards the victim. The apex court expressed its shock and dismay at the brutality of the acts and the apparent indifference of the legal machinery.



Such incidents, the court observed, are a direct affront to the dignity and rights of women, particularly in rural areas where equality remains a distant goal. The court highlighted the role of superstition, patriarchy, and social control in perpetuating witch-hunting practices. It called for the eradication of these regressive beliefs, which often target vulnerable women such as widows and the elderly. Indeed, such practices stand in stark opposition to the scientific temper mandated by the Constitution. Unfortunately these are not isolated cases but are rampant in rural India. The Constitution of India guarantees justice, liberty, equality and dignity for all citizens. Practices like witch-hunting undermine these principles and perpetuate a culture of discrimination and violence against women. What is more shocking is the apathy of the government in such cases who are equal partners in crime. The court reiterated that the responsibility of investigating and adjudicating authorities is heightened in cases involving violations of human dignity. The Supreme Court also criticised the state for not challenging the High Court's non-speaking order, which granted a stay on the proceedings. The bench's observations underscore the need for a multi-pronged approach to address witch-hunting. This includes strengthening laws to explicitly criminalise witch-hunting and ensuring stringent punishment for perpetrators. Besides, promoting scientific temper and educating communities about the illegality and immorality of witch-hunting. But most important is establishing support mechanisms for survivors, including legal aid, rehabilitation, and psychological counseling. The government machinery also need to be sensitised in dealing with such cases. The Supreme Court's remarks serve as a clarion call to address the deep-seated issues of superstition and patriarchy that enable witch-hunting. The victimisation of women under such baseless allegations is not merely a social evil but a constitutional failure.

citizens. Practices like witch-hunting undermine these principles and perpetuate a culture of discrimination and violence against women. What is more shocking is the apathy of the government in such cases who are equal partners in crime. The court reiterated that the responsibility of investigating and adjudicating authorities is heightened in cases involving violations of human dignity. The Supreme Court also criticised the state for not challenging the High Court's non-speaking order, which granted a stay on the proceedings. The bench's observations underscore the need for a multi-pronged approach to address witch-hunting. This includes strengthening laws to explicitly criminalise witch-hunting and ensuring stringent punishment for perpetrators. Besides, promoting scientific temper and educating communities about the illegality and immorality of witch-hunting. But most important is establishing support mechanisms for survivors, including legal aid, rehabilitation, and psychological counseling. The government machinery also need to be sensitised in dealing with such cases. The Supreme Court's remarks serve as a clarion call to address the deep-seated issues of superstition and patriarchy that enable witch-hunting. The victimisation of women under such baseless allegations is not merely a social evil but a constitutional failure.

PICTALK



Elephants inside an enclosure at Alipore Zoological Garden in Kolkata

Revisiting the Places of Worship Act

The Places of Worship Act, 1991, was enacted to maintain the religious status of sites as of August 15, 1947 but there is misunderstandings about its purpose

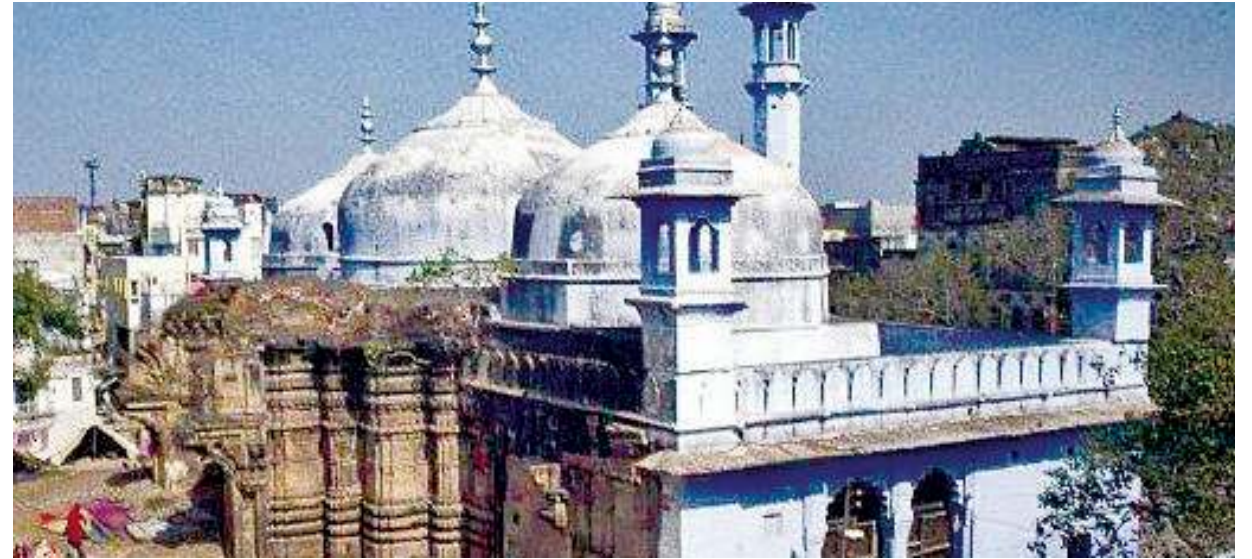


PRAFULL GORADIA

How the Places of Worship Act (1991) is being dealt with at present is due to many not being aware of how and why the Act came about. Evidently, the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao (1991-96) in his heart of hearts was a staunch Hindu. He was anxious to contribute to help solving the then existing—or festering—problem at Ayodhya. Most developments that took place at the Janmasthan on December 6, 1992, spoke of Rao's silent participation in the cause of Ram Lalla.

The most clinching evidence of the Prime Minister's contribution was indicated by the facts when I left Ayodhya on that momentous day. It was 5:45 pm; all the three domes of the Babri edifice had been brought down. All the ten walls were still standing and so was the rest of the structure. Soon after we sat in our car to proceed to Lucknow, my companions and I heard on the transistor radio that the Uttar Pradesh government of then chief minister Kalyan Singh had been dismissed by the Centre, and Governor's rule imposed. That meant whatever was done thereafter was the handiwork directed by someone at the Centre. At the Centre, even the then-home secretary Madhav Godbole is on record saying that he did not know a thing about what was happening and had learnt about it only through the radio and television.

This author has not met not knows anyone who has claimed that he has seen even a photograph of the edifice walls without their domes. At 10 pm that very night, PM Narasimha Rao addressed the nation on television, wherein he assured the people of India that he would rebuild the Babri Masjid as soon as possible. This gave the impression that the entire edifice had been destroyed. The walls were tall and thick as was the style of the architecture of the 16th century. The chabutara around the walls was also solid and tall, apart from being large. Even the domes, which had been the most vulnerable part of the structure,



took selected men of the Uttar Pradesh Public Works Department (PWD) to bring them down, an endeavour that began in the morning and lasted till 4:30 pm when the last dome fell. I came to know that they were men of the PWD, from two of the five photographers whose cameras had been smashed and they beaten up and left with bleeding faces. The photographers thought they were obliging the karsevaks, whereas for government servants, being photographed would have cost them their jobs.

A lady IPS officer who was second-in-command at Ayodhya on that day, in answer to my query told me later that the police had instructions not to intervene unless lives were in danger; presumably, not property. She assured me that there were 15,000 paramilitary personnel in readiness at Faizabad, just 4 km away. Incidentally, she added there were consummate numbers of bulldozers in the nearby vicinity, along with their operators. Evidently, all these preparations were deployed to see the end of the Babri edifice over the next 60 hours. Indeed, an enormous thing to accomplish, in such a short time. All this happened under Central rule. To restate, the Kalyan Singh government was nowhere in power after 5:45



EVIDENTLY, THESE AFGHANS HAD BROUGHT SOME ARCHITECTS WITH THEM, WHO BUILT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BUILDINGS, INCLUDING MOSQUES

pm on December 6. It is only after being aware of these facts can one appreciate the need for the Places of Worship Act. PM Rao, being a Congressman, had to preserve his 'secular' image.

The abovementioned legislation implies how much the Rao government cared to protect the character of every place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. Ayodhya had to be the exception as it was then an object of litigation in the Supreme Court of India. Normally, while legislating, it is taken for granted that anything sub judice has its own rules. But Ayodhya was clearly brought under a provision of being excluded from the ambit of the Act, presumably because it was sub judice. Nevertheless, it was specifically kept out; in fact, it was a separate clause if the Act. Consequently, when being dealt with in the courts, never was Ayodhya, particularly the Janmasthan, mentioned even once in the context of the Places of Act.

The thrust of this submission is that this act need not be taken seriously. What this statement means is that a legitimate difference must be made between genuine places of worship and those edifices or structures that are the outcome of dacoity. There are edifices that were either directly con-

verted from temples to mosques like the Adhai Din Ka Jhoda, about a furlong away from Ajmer Sharif. Three temples were confined into one within 60 hours, or two-and-a-half days, so that the invader Mohammad Ghori would be able to pray there on his return from the decisive Second Battle of Tarain in 1192 AD.

There was no time to erase the Hindu structure. The pristine design has survived till this day. There are many such examples until the Lodi Dynasty conquered north India. Evidently, these Afghans had brought some architects with them, who built a significant number of buildings, including mosques.

How can the courts refuse to hear and try a case when someone petitions against daylight dacoity of a temple, which is either converted immediately like the one described above in Ajmer, or brought down and rebuilt like the Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad? Surely, dacoities can't be condoned out of hand? On the other hand, genuine cases of mosques having become victims of Hindu mischief can be kept out of the courts under the Places of Worship Act.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OPPOSITION TARGETS AMIT SHAH

Madam — The Opposition claimed Home Minister Amit Shah had insulted B.R. Ambedkar. Accusing the Congress Party of opportunism, Shah charged then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with belittling Ambedkar, asserting that his resignation from the Cabinet would have no effect on the government. Shah also pointed out that when Ambedkar contested a Lok Sabha by-election in Bombay, the Congress not only fielded a candidate against him but Nehru personally campaigned to ensure Ambedkar's defeat.

Amit Shah hammered home the point about Congress singing paeans to Ambedkar only after it suffered multiple drubbings in elections, remarking the party now opportunistically chanting, "Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar... itna naam Bhagwan ka lete to janmo tak swarg mil jata." The Opposition seized upon this admittedly poorly framed sentence to accuse Shah of insulting Ambedkar. Of course, this interpretation was far from the truth. Nevertheless, Shah's clumsy construction provided the Opposition with an opportunity to embarrass him. Shah's response during Tuesday's debate was a trenchant critique of the Congress Party. This frontal assault left Congress members squirming, with only feeble attempts to counter Shah's barbs. The Congress's lip service to Ambedkar continues to find few takers.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

DEBATE ON SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Madam — The proposal of holding simultaneous elections is fraught with a lack of clarity in its implementation and practicality for a country as vast and diverse as its expanse. The proposal has several loopholes, like midterm polls and the President's rule, and there is a lack of consideration for regional parties as well. Primarily, the proposal fails to address how precisely the central government plans to hold simultaneous elec-

Revamp education system



The article 'From Kothari to NEP' presents a good analysis. No doubt, there is a conscious attempt made to undermine Indian education with long-term planning to subjugate the youth to be religiously oriented instead of scientifically and technologically excellent sections. The NEP has no provision to improve the standard of education and make it globally competitive. Still, the cream churned out migrants to countries abroad in search of fabulous pack-

ages and incentivised talent recognition. Medical colleges are growing in number, but the standard suffers due to insufficient expert teaching professionals, and focus has shifted to pecuniary aspects rather than imparting knowledge. Privatisation of education has its toll in terms of knowledge and employability, besides denying the aspiring poor its accessibility. The government coming up with programmes to part with skills to graduated youth is a clear example of this fact. The avaricious private players are producing marks without knowledge and degrees without employable skills. Astrology is a subject that could be learnt by anyone at any time and anywhere but need not be a part of the curriculum in university. Therefore, there is a dire need to study the whole system and make education an objective one rather than a tool to hasten the process of communalisation.

A G Rajmohan | Rampur

tions for the nation's 96.88 crore voters at the same time, as such a gargantuan exercise will be practically challenging to execute considering India's demography. Also, conducting all the elections in the same year becomes a major federal issue because it would force current state legislatures to shorten or lengthen their terms to make the election dates coincide with the national deadline. The attempt to impose an artificial cycle of elections and restrict electoral choice compromises the spirit of democracy, which is a direct threat to the constitutional recognition of India as a democratic republic. A rushed and ill-conceived policy can produce unprecedented challenges to the polity of the nation.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

IMPOSE BAN ON FIRECRACKERS

Madam — In the recent verdict, the Supreme Court of India, instructed the Uttar Pradesh as well as the Haryana government to impose the blanket ban on the firecrackers in order to tackle the

menace of air pollution. Today, depleting air quality is among the biggest troubles for the majority of Indian cities. But the million-dollar question is, does such a blanket ban really work to control the air pollution problem in the Indian cities? Often the things that are banned officially were black-marketed unofficially.

This is the actual reality of almost everything banned so far, be it crackers, liquor, or anything else. The extent of air pollution is so huge that even anti-pollution measures like Stage IV of GRAP failed to meet the very commitment. The behavioural changing approach is the need of the hour; more and more awareness has to be established in this regard along with more and more ecological improvement initiatives for tackling this very menace of depleting air quality. Let's us all walk the talk with respect to the circular economy and sustainable practices to improve nature in a real sense.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The key to tackling food security and climate change

Climate-Smart Agriculture emerges as a transformative solution, combining sustainable practices with strategies to mitigate emissions and secure food systems



HIMANSHU VERMA

The demand for food is steadily increasing due to dietary changes and the growing global population. Currently, approximately 690 million people—or 8.9 per cent of the world's population—suffer from hunger. By 2050, the world will need to produce nearly 70 per cent more food to sustain an estimated 9 billion people, which makes food security an increasingly critical challenge. Climate change further exacerbates this problem, intensifying the environmental impacts of food production. Agriculture, while essential, is also a major contributor to the climate crisis, generating between 19 per cent and 29 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.



Climate change adversely affects food production and supply chains while accelerating the degradation of already fragile ecosystems. To counter these challenges, it is imperative to adopt Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices, which aim to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture while sustainably enhancing productivity and income. CSA integrates sustainable agri-

cultural practices and rural development goals, contributing to broader objectives like better environmental management and hunger reduction, as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). **Climate-Smart Agriculture Practices in India:** India is actively adopting Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices to combat climate change's impact on agriculture. These include conservation agriculture techniques like zero-tillage to boost yields, while reducing emissions, agroforestry to enhance biodiversity and resilience, and precision farming technologies such as GPS and GIS to optimise resources. Water management strategies like drip irrigation improve efficiency, while efficient livestock management boosts revenue and product quality. Solar power is increasingly used for irrigation, reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Practices such as crop diversification, rotation with legumes, and the cultivation of climate-resilient varieties enhance sustainability, while integrated pest management and crop residue management minimise chemical use and pollution, ensuring

long-term agricultural and environmental health.

Challenges to Climate-Smart Agriculture in India:

Despite its numerous benefits, the adoption of CSA practices in India faces several challenges. **Climate Variability:** Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and diminishing water resources threaten to lower crop productivity by 10-40 per cent by the end of the century. **Rising sea levels, cyclones, and storm surges** endanger agricultural lands, especially in regions like the Sundarbans, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. **High Costs:** Implementing CSA methods often involves significant financial investment, which can deter farmers. **Policy and Regulatory Barriers:** Inadequate policies and restrictive regulations hinder widespread CSA adoption. The adoption of climate-smart agriculture is no longer optional but an urgent necessity.

(The writer is Assistant Professor Agronomy, College of Agriculture & Environmental Technology, Surajmal University, Kichha, Uttarakhand; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

UNLOCKING LIFE'S TRUE POTENTIAL

Embracing faith, cultivating humility and awakening spiritual awareness can elevate life



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

I am well and truly surprised that good people don't turn to God more actively than doing some rituals, going to a religious place participating in some festivals, etc. They probably are not realising what they are missing. God is ever so keen to take us in His team. He needs lots of us either to act as His 'nimitta' (instrument) as Arjuna was for a specific purpose or just be active mediums. Good people are best placed to be mediums for God's bounties to be given to other good people. They form the bulk of people, who support the working of the Creation. And they are amply rewarded for their 'karmas' (acts). For example, farmers are crucial for keeping humanity well-fed. Teachers are crucial for educating the masses.

Parents keep the Creation going by giving birth to children and then rearing them till they can be useful citizens. Doctors look after the health of people. Workers take the load of manual requirements of humanity. Good officers fulfil the administrative requirements of our societies. Priests enable us to be in contact with God. I can go on with policemen, shopkeepers, bankers, etc. They all benefit by doing so. Why aren't these actively pursuing a good connection with God? They can gain much more.

The first reason has to be a lack of faith due to widespread ignorance. The common man, even the educated class, is helplessly unaware of all the benefits one can gain by taking shelter from God,



who owns everything. We get attracted to the richest, the most powerful, the very famous, etc., but ignore the real owner of all, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God. To top it all, God controls everything. The richest normally try to accumulate more, and many have some money to give to charity, but God has everything to give; you just have to become deserving.

The second reason has to be the overinflated ego of practically everyone. It is hard to accept that God is too big to comprehend and we are too small to accept. But that is reality. By closing our eyes like a duck we don't do ourselves any favour. And we remain sitting ducks against 'karmaphalas', which surely manifest and cause havoc in the lives of all, barring a few, who have taken shelter in God. The third reason is keeping poor company.

Who do we like to spend time with? Those who criticise one and all and who can tell jokes of the kind you know. Public image is another handicap. Only the losers turn to God. We don't have to; we will manage. Surely, this management ends in painful death only. Devotees of God and their lives on a high and are assured of better birth also. Then spiritual activities do not enthuse; they appear so childish. We would rather be grown-ups and be subservient to fellow beings, who are likely to exploit us as much as possible. So we don't get started and lose out.

This article is an open invitation to fence sitters if they chance to read it. I will cite a few amazing benefits if one does that. There will be great cleaning of the self both internally and externally. Such are the powers of spiritual activities. One will become dutiful and most likely begin to live by dharma. One will not limit oneself just to knowing spiritual truths but will also implement them in life. If a painter knows how to paint and does not paint, what is he or she likely to gain? The Creation has been designed to smoothen the lives of devotees.

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

Philippines: The broken promise of democracy



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

The resurgence of the Marcoses, the entrenchment of the Aquinos, and the dominance of families like the Dutertes show the enduring grip of oligarchy



The 1987 Philippine Constitution, crafted in the aftermath of the 1986 People Power Revolution, was supposed to mark the dawn of a new democratic era. The ousting of Ferdinand Marcos Sr., after decades of corruption, repression, and dynastic rule, was a victory for the Filipino people, or so they were told. Yet, the Constitution, supposedly a tool for dismantling the oppressive old order, contains a glaring, unimplemented clause: Article II, Section 26, which bans political dynasties. Nearly four decades later, this promise remains a cruel joke, the prohibition nothing more than a symbol of a nation shackled by its feudal past. Political dynasties thrive unabated, and the Philippines remains trapped in a cycle of oligarchy, where power is passed down like a family heirloom, not earned through democratic means. The rise of Corazon Aquino, the "hero" of People Power, has proven to be a double-edged sword.

While she restored democracy in name, she failed to eradicate the dynastic forces that had long plagued the country. Instead of dismantling the Marcos empire and the dynasties that thrived in its wake, Aquino's presidency paved the way for a new set of ruling families to stake their claim on the throne. The irony is staggering: Aquino, the symbol of resistance to Marcos, was unable to disarm the very forces that helped prop up the dictatorship. Her administration's failure to enact meaningful reform paved the way for the Marcos family's return to power, with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr's rise in 2022 exposing the unyielding grip of dynastic politics, illuminating the eternal truth behind the words of José Rizal, a true revolutionary executed by the Spanish in Manila: "The Filipino is not a slave of the Spanish Government. He is a slave of his own people." The Marcoses, who plundered billions from the nation's coffers, are not the only ones to have manipulated the system to their advantage.

Under Cory Aquino, the promise of land reform was shattered, epitomised by the Mendiola Massacre of 1987, where farmers demanding land reform were gunned down. The Aquino family, despite their image as the champions of democracy, have blood on their hands, betraying the very



THE IRONY IS STAGGERING: AQUINO, THE SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE TO MARCOS, WAS UNABLE TO DISARM THE VERY FORCES THAT HELPED PROP UP THE DICTATORSHIP. HER ADMINISTRATION'S FAILURE TO ENACT MEANINGFUL REFORM PAVED THE WAY FOR THE MARCOS FAMILY'S RETURN TO POWER.

people they claim to defend. The hypocrisy of the political elite is staggering, with families like the Marcoses and the Aquinos using their histories of violence and corruption as stepping stones to further entrench their power. But the Aquino-Marcos rivalry is only the tip of the iceberg. In Mindanao, the Duterte family's hold on power predates Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, with a history of death squad killings and iron-fisted rule. As mayor of Davao City, Duterte ruled with an iron fist, silencing dissent and using extrajudicial executions to rid the streets of perceived enemies.

His presidency, marked by a brutal war on drugs that left thousands dead, further entrenched the dynastic system, where political power is synonymous with violence and impunity. Duterte's rise to the highest office in the land was not a victory for the people, but for a political family that used populist rhetoric to cloak its real agenda: maintaining a stranglehold on power.

The Macapagal-Arroyo family, meanwhile, turned corruption into an art form. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's presidency was marred by scandal after scandal—from the "Hello Garci" election fraud to the NBN-ZTE broadband deal, which saw billions in kickbacks siphoned off to the ruling elite. Despite the overwhelming evidence of corruption, she escaped any lasting accountability, a reflection of the Philippines' toxic political culture where the powerful are above the law.

Like so many others, she found ways to use the machinery of the state to protect her interests. The brutality of the Philippines' political system is not just figurative. The 2009 Maguindanao Massacre, orchestrated by the Ampatuan clan, remains the deadliest attack on journalists in history. Fifty-eight people, including 32 journalists,

were slaughtered in cold blood in a bid to eliminate electoral competition.

And yet, despite the horrific nature of the crime, justice has been slow and incomplete, as political dynasties use their influence to shield themselves from the consequences of their actions. In regions like Cebu and Ilocos Norte, political dynasties such as the Osmeñas, Garcias, and Fariñas manipulate elections and use their wealth to maintain control, treating public office as their domain. This cycle of violence and impunity, where the ruling class prioritises their interests, extends to the economic realm, with families like the villagers growing their wealth through political power. The system persists due to cultural deference to family authority, weak institutions, and pervasive poverty, with voters often coerced into supporting the very dynasties that sustain their suffering.

Foreign powers, particularly the United States, have long been complicit in this system. During the Marcos era, the US provided crucial support to a regime known for its human rights abuses, all in the name of anti-communism. This foreign patronage emboldened the Marcoses and set a dangerous precedent for other dynasties, who continued to seek validation and support from foreign powers. The interplay between domestic power struggles and international interests further deepens the fractures within the Philippines, exacerbating the country's internal divisions.

The Philippines' educational system, which fails to foster critical thinking or civic engagement, ensures that the cycle of dynastic rule will continue. Schools produce citizens ill-equipped to challenge the status quo, while the media, often co-opted by powerful families, serves to protect the interests of the elite. Social media, too, has become a tool for dynasties to spread propaganda, rehabilitate their tarnished images,

and silence critics.

The current political spectacle centred around Vice President Sara Duterte's public threats against President Marcos, is a stark reminder of how fragile the Philippines' democracy truly is. The alliance between the Marcoses and the Dutertes, forged during the 2022 election, is now on the brink of collapse. What once seemed like a partnership between the North and south's ruling classes has devolved into a bitter feud, exposing the cracks in a political system built on corruption, nepotism, and violence.

This is not a battle for the people's interests, but a struggle for control between two families, each vying for supremacy in a system that has failed its citizens. This feud is not just political—it has geopolitical ramifications. Marcos' pivot towards the US and his opposition to China's claims in the South China Sea have reignited regional tensions, while Duterte's pro-China stance during his presidency deepened divides within the Filipino elite.

This divergence in foreign policy has intensified the rift between the Marcos and Duterte families, as they seek to align themselves with opposing global powers.

The Philippines, caught between these imperial rivalries, faces not only internal political decay but external pressures that threaten to destabilise the nation further. As the midterm elections approach, this dynastic battle threatens to unravel whatever semblance of governance remains. Marcos seeks to consolidate power, while Sara Duterte faces the looming threat of impeachment. Yet, the Duterte family's influence, particularly in Mindanao, ensures that this battle will not stay within the confines of parliament. The streets could erupt, worsening societal divisions.

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

Patent risks: Key strategies for businesses amid rising litigation costs

Businesses today must adopt proactive strategies like Freedom-to-Operate searches and patent liability insurance to mitigate risks and protect their innovations

In November 2024, a US jury ruled in favour of Netlist, a company specialising in computer memory and storage solutions, ordering Samsung to pay \$118 million in damages for willfully infringing Netlist's patented technology. This follows an earlier verdict in April 2024, where another jury found Samsung guilty of similar patent infringements, awarding \$303 million to Netlist. Together, these penalties amount to \$421 million—an extraordinary sum that could destabilise even the most established organisations. In India, the Delhi High Court recently delivered a landmark judgment favoring the plaintiff, Antenna Inc., in a patent infringement case against Mubi Antenna Technologies.



AMIT SINGH

The court issued a permanent injunction against the defendant and ordered them to pay damages of USD 26.04 million (INR 216 crores) to compensate for the plaintiff's loss of profits due to the infringement. **Protecting Intellectual Property:** A recent American survey highlights the substantial financial commitment of research-based organisations in the pharmaceutical sector. The annual R&D budget in

this industry often runs into hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars. The cost of developing a new drug ranges from \$314 million to \$4.46 billion, depending on the therapeutic area and assumptions used in data modeling. These figures emphasise the immense investments required in R&D, making intellectual property (IP) protection and preemptive strategies essential. In contrast, R&D expenditures in non-pharmaceutical sectors are generally lower. However, extensive patenting is increasingly common, posing risks for companies introducing new processes or products without adequate precautions. A company might unknowingly infringe on a competitor's patent, leading to unforeseen and costly litigation. Patent disputes can result in significant delays, financial losses, and reputational damage, even when unintentional. **Escalating Costs of Patent Litigation:** The median cost of litigating a patent lawsuit through trial ranges from \$600,000 for cases with less than \$1 million at stake to \$3.625 million for cases involving over \$25 million. Similar trends are observed in India, where litigation and settlement costs are substantial. Sometimes, defendants find themselves embroiled in patent litigation due to unintentional or inadvertent infringement. In such cases, the defendants are essentially victims, underscoring the need for safeguards to prevent unnecessary legal disputes. Tools to Mitigate Patent

Infringement Risks: **Patent Liability Insurance** One effective safeguard against the financial risks of unintended patent infringement is patent liability insurance. This insurance, provided by specialised firms, helps cover legal expenses and damages arising from unintentional infringement. While popular in several countries, its adoption is

steadily growing in India. **Freedom-to-Operate (FTO)** Another cost-effective tool to minimise patent infringement risks is a Freedom-to-Operate (FTO) search. This process evaluates whether a new product or process infringes on existing patents, enabling informed business decisions and reducing the likelihood of legal disputes. Many companies conduct FTO searches before initiating new R&D projects to mitigate financial and reputational risks. An FTO search involves analyzing granted and pending patents to form a techno-legal opinion on whether a product, process, or service infringes existing IP rights. These searches can be conducted using free databases provided by intellectual property offices,

with directories available on the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) website. **When Patents Block Freedom to Operate** If an FTO search reveals conflicting patents, companies have several options: 1. Licensing Agreements: Companies can negotiate licensing or purchase patent rights to gain access to the necessary technology. 2. Patent Pools: Collaborative agreements among companies in the same technological field allow shared access to patents, resolving disputes and controlling costs, especially for essential products like medicines. 3. Designing Around: Companies can modify existing processes or products to avoid infringement.

Steps to Minimise Litigation Risks: Regardless of the strategy chosen, it is crucial for companies to address patent infringement risks early in the research and commercialization process. Proactive measures such as in-licensing, cross-licensing, patent pooling, and designing around can help avoid future disputes. While an FTO search cannot completely eliminate the possibility of litigation due to limitations in patent databases and search expertise, it significantly reduces potential threats. (The writer is deputy controller of patents and designs, Kolkata.; views are personal)



IN BRIEF



Forex reserves drop \$2 bn to \$652.86 bn

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 1.988 billion to \$652.869 billion for the week ended December 13, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped by \$3.235 billion to \$654.857 billion. The reserves have been declining for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation, along with forex market interventions by the RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of \$704.885 billion in September. For the week ended December 13, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by \$3.047 billion to \$562.576 billion, the data released on Friday showed. Expressed in US dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by \$1.121 billion to \$68.056 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by \$35 million to \$17.997 billion, the apex bank said.



Cipla faces over Rs 1 crore penalty by GST authority

Pharma major Cipla Ltd on Friday said a fine of over Rs 1 crore has been imposed on the company by GST authority for alleged inadmissible credit claim. The company has received an order dated December 18, 2024 passed by the GST authority, imposing a penalty of Rs 1,11,94,324 under applicable provisions of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017, Cipla said in a regulatory filing. "The order has been passed by GST Authority on the contention that the company has availed inadmissible TRAN-1 credit. The GST Authority has ordered for recovery of the same along with applicable interest and penalty," it added. Cipla said based on assessment of facts and prevailing law, it is "of the view that the penalty levied is arbitrary and unjustified". "The company will file necessary appeals with the appellate authority in this regard."



RBI imposes Rs 27.30 lakh penalty on IndusInd Bank

A penalty of Rs 27.30 lakh has been imposed on IndusInd Bank for non-compliance with certain provisions of norms related to 'interest rate on deposits', the Reserve Bank said on Friday. The RBI had conducted a statutory inspection for supervisory evaluation of the bank with reference to its financial position as on March 31, 2023, and had issued a notice to the private sector lender. After considering the reply of IndusInd Bank to the notice, additional submissions made by it, RBI said, it found, inter alia, that the charge pertaining to opening of certain savings deposit accounts in the name of ineligible entities was sustained, warranting imposition of monetary penalty. The RBI, however, added the penalty is based on deficiencies in regulatory compliance and is not intended to pronounce upon the validity of any transactions or agreement entered into by IndusInd Bank with its customers.

Bihar gets record Rs 1.81 lakh crore investment

PNS ■ PATNA Adani Group, Sun Petrochemicals and a host of other companies - big and small - on Friday committed to investing a record Rs 1.81 lakh crore in Bihar, across sectors ranging from renewable energy to cement, food processing and manufacturing. Hitherto considered laggard, the state signed investment commitments with 423 companies at its only second investor meet, Bihar Business Connect 2024. Bihar's Industries and Tourism Minister Nitish

Mishra, whose CEO-styled governance was instrumental in pivoting the change in perception about the state as an investment destination, said the first edition of investor meet in 2023 got an investment commitment of Rs 50,300 crore.

"We have today signed MoUs for over Rs 1.8 lakh crore. The numbers are still being compiled and this may go up," he said.

Sun Petrochemicals will invest Rs 36,700 crore in renewable energy projects including pump hydro and solar plants. Adani Group,

Priority should be restoring inflation-growth balance: Das

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Policy priority should be on restoring the inflation-growth balance, said Shaktikanta Das, former Reserve Bank governor, while voting for a status quo on the short-term lending rate earlier this month.

Das, and three other members of the rate-setting panel - Monetary Policy Committee -- voted in favour of keeping the repo rate at 6.25 per cent, while the other two members favoured reduction in the rate.

In its December bi-monthly monetary policy, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept repo rate unchanged but cut the cash reserve ratio that banks are required to park with the central bank, as it did a balancing act between inflation management and supporting economic growth.

With India's GDP seeing a sharper-than-anticipated dip in the July-September period to 5.4 per cent -- its slowest pace in seven quarters -- inflation on the uptick and rupee under pressure, the RBI had few choices to make.

"The policy priority at this critical juncture has to be on restoring the inflation growth balance. The fundamental requirement now is to bring down inflation and align it with the target," Das said as per the minutes of the December 4-6 MPC meeting released by the RBI on Friday.

It was the last meeting of the



Hopefully, this will boost companies' investment plans and improve the scope of employment-linked incentive schemes helping induce a virtual cycle of wage growth and demand

MPC under Das, who demitted office earlier this month after completing an extended six-year tenure.

Sanjay Malhotra has been appointed the RBI Governor, who will chair his first MPC meeting in February. According to the minutes, in the overall assessment of the outgoing governor, the gains achieved so far in the broad direction of disinflation needs to be preserved, while closely monitoring the evolving outlook of both inflation and growth.

Along with Das, Saugata Bhattacharya, Rajiv Ranjan (Executive Director, RBI) and Michael Debabrata Patra (Deputy Governor, RBI) voted for status quo on interest rate. External members Nagesh Kumar and Ram Singh, were both in favour of a 25 basis point reduction in repo rate.

As per the minutes, Nagesh Kumar said he believes that a rate cut would help reviving economic growth without worsening the inflationary situation, which may soften with

seasonal correction in prices. Ram Singh said a rate cut will reduce costs of doing business and increase the opportunity cost of holding on to cash for firms and companies.

"Hopefully, this will boost companies' investment plans and improve the scope of employment-linked incentive schemes helping induce a virtual cycle of wage growth and demand. By tightening the labour market, it will also improve efficacy of the monetary policy," he added.

RBI Executive Director Ranjan said amidst difficult policy trade-offs, the cautious and calibrated approach has kept the economy in good stead. "The need of the hour is to be watchful of the forthcoming data to ascertain the projected improvement in the balance between inflation and growth outlook.

"If food price pressures wane on projected lines, this would open up the policy space to normalise rates."

Bears tighten grip on markets; Sensex tanks 1,176 points

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty plunged about 1.5 per cent on Friday, taking their downtrend to the fifth straight session, due to risk aversion in the global markets after the hawkish stance of the US Federal Reserve.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 1,176.46 points or 1.49 per cent to settle at 78,041.59.

During the day, it slumped 1,343.46 points or 1.69 per cent to 77,874.59. The NSE Nifty tanked 364.20 points or 1.52 per cent to 23,587.50.

From the 30 blue-chip Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India, Tata Consultancy Services, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries were the

biggest laggards. In contrast, JSW Steel, Nestle and Titan were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

Equity markets in Europe were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,224.92 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 72.18 a barrel.

Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05 on Thursday. The Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70



Bajaj Auto launches new series of Chetak e-scooter

PNS ■ PUNE

Bajaj Auto launched a new series of its Chetak brand of electric scooter and said it may commence e-scooter exports next fiscal.

The company also announced that Chetak e-scooter has become market leader with 27.6 per cent market share.

The new '35 series' comprises three variants -- 3501, 3502 and 3503 -- with the first two variants priced at Rs 1.27 lakh and Rs 1.20 lakh (ex-showroom Bengaluru), respectively.

Deliveries of 3501 are expected to begin in late December, and 3502 in January, the company said adding the price of the third variant will be announced later.

"Dozen markets we are targeting in different continents. We will start with the 35 series," Bajaj Auto Executive Director Rakesh Sharma said during an interaction.

RBI board reviews economic situation

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

The central board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday reviewed the global and domestic economic situation and outlook at a meeting chaired by new Governor Sanjay Malhotra.

The 612th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of the RBI also placed on record its appreciation of the valuable services rendered by Shaktikanta Das during his tenure as the governor of the central bank.

Das demitted office earlier this month after completing an extended six-year tenure.

"The Board reviewed the global and domestic economic situation and outlook, and discussed the activities of select central office departments as well as the draft report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India, 2023-24," the RBI said in a statement.

Other directors of the central board -- Satish K Marathe, Revathi Iyer, Sachin Chaturvedi, Venu Srinivasan, and Ravindra H Dholakia -- attended the meeting. Deputy governors Michael Debabrata Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar, and Swaminathan J also participated in the meeting.

Nagaraju Maddirala, Secretary, Department of Financial Services, also attended the meeting.

Will set up data & AI labs; onboards 8 projects for safe AI: Prasada

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government plans to set up data and AI labs in tier 2 and tier 3 cities across the country and has invited proposals from all 36 states as well as Union Territories for the same, Parliament was informed on Friday.

Minister of State for electronics and IT Jitendra Prasada in a written reply to Rajya Sabha said that besides proposals expected

from states and UTs, IndiaAI in collaboration with NIELIT also plans to establish 27 data labs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities across the country.

"All the 36 states and Union Territories (UTs) have been requested to submit their nominated list of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)/Polytechnics located in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities for the setting up of data labs. Additionally, IndiaAI in collaboration with NIELIT plans to establish 27 data labs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities across the country," Prasada said.

The data and AI labs are part of the skilling initiative of the government under IndiaAI mission.

The minister said that a model IndiaAI Data Lab in the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), Delhi has already

been set up, which acts as a reference point for the infrastructure to be set up in tier 2 and tier 3 cities as a part of the initiative.

Prasada said that IndiaAI fellowships are being awarded annually to 400 B-Tech and 500 M-Tech students working in AI domain from All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)-recognised engineering institutions.

"Top 50 National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) ranked research institutes have been asked to take new PhD scholars under IndiaAI PhD fellowship," he said.

On steps being taken by the government for creation of safe and trusted AI, the minister said that eight responsible AI projects have been selected to address the need for robust guardrails to ensure the responsible development, deployment, and adoption of AI technologies.

According to the list shared by Prasada, the selected projects include Machine Unlearning from IIT Jodhpur, Synthetic Data Generation from IIT Roorkee, AI Bias Mitigation Strategy from National Institute of Technology Raipur, AI Ethical Certification Framework from IIT Delhi and Telecommunication Engineering Center (TEC), among others



UltraTech Cement to acquire majority stake in India Cements

Gets CCI's clearance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Friday cleared billionaire Kumar Mangalam Birla-promoted UltraTech Cement's proposal to acquire a majority stake in India Cements.

The proposed combination envisages UltraTech Cement Ltd's (UltraTech/acquirer) acquisition of 32.72 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of India Cements Ltd (India Cements/target) from the promoters and members of the promoter group of India Cements and Sri Saradha Logistics Pvt Ltd, CCI said in a release.

The fair trade regulator also granted its clearance to UltraTech Cement to acquire up to 26 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of India Cements by way of an open offer, it added.

UltraTech is engaged in the business of manufacturing and



sales of grey cement, white cement, ready-mix concrete, clinker, and building products in India.

It is a subsidiary of Grasim Industries Ltd, while India Cements operates core and non-core businesses. The core business of India Cements is the manufacturing and sales of grey cement and ready-mix concrete.

"Competition Commission of India (CCI) approves UltraTech Cement Ltd's acquisition of The India Cements Ltd., the competition watchdog said.

The deals beyond a certain threshold require approval from the regulator, which keeps a tab on unfair business practices and promotes fair competition in the marketplace. In July this year, UltraTech Cement announced the acquisition of a 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from promoters and their associates in a Rs 3,954 deal in a move to expand its footprint in the highly competitive and fast-growing southern cement market, particularly Tamil Nadu.

'Green steel taxonomy to push adoption of decarbonisation measures'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government's push towards green steel (metal produced through sustainable process) will encourage the adoption of decarbonisation initiatives by the steel industry and help increase the usage of scrap as raw material, experts said.

The government last week rolled out the definition of green steel with an aim to encourage the industry to bring down carbon emissions.

Union Steel Minister H D

Kumaraswamy released a 'taxonomy on green steel' with parameters for giving star ratings on products based on the amount of carbon dioxide (CO2) emitted during the production process.

The industry experts hailed the move, saying the green steel taxonomy will help the sector become more competitive globally and increase exports.

"Not only will this propel the decarbonisation initiatives of the industry but would also clearly picture the competitiveness of Indian



steel," said Amarendu Prakash, Chair, FICCI Steel Committee & Chairman.

The star-rated green steel will help all stakeholders in

identifying the sustainability features and provide opportunities for increasing steel exports, said Prakash, who is also the Chairman of Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL).

Ritabrata Ghosh, Vice President & Sector Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said some of the measures steel mills are adopting to reduce their carbon footprint include transition to green power, reducing fuel cost by partly replacing coke with alternative fuels like hydrogen and coal bed methane, and increasing the use of scrap.

Adani, Sun Petchem big draws



which is the largest private investor in the state, committed to investing about Rs 28,000 crore in setting up an ultra super critical thermal power plant as well as expanding cement production capacity, food processing and logistics businesses.

NTPC Green, the renewable energy arm of the state-owned electricity generating giant, committed to investing Rs 10,000 crore in clean energy projects. SJVN, formerly known as Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam, committed a similar amount for pump storage projects. Construction and engi-

neering major Ashoka Buildcon promised an investment of Rs 9,000 crore in setting up a green hydrogen unit in the state.

NHPC, India's largest hydroelectric producer, committed an investment of Rs 5,500 crore in setting up 1,000 MW solar project while SLMG Beverages (a bottler for Coca-Cola) committed Rs 3,000 crore, Shree Cements Rs 800 crore and Haldimar Snacks Pvt Ltd Rs 300 crore.

Tata group, though not signed up any investment commitment, has pledged to skill workforce in the state.

Gold dips to Rs 78,130 per 10 gm

Silver plunges Rs 1,850

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices extended the slide for the third straight session and fell Rs 170 to Rs 78,130 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid selling by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity ended at Rs 78,300 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Silver prices plunged Rs 1,850 to Rs 88,150 per kg due to reduced off-take by industrial units and coin makers. The white metal closed at Rs 90,000 per kg in the previous session.

The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity went lower by Rs 170 to Rs 77,730 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 77,900 per 10 grams.

Traders attributed the fall in yellow metal prices to lacklustre demand from local jewellers. In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 50 or 0.07 per cent to trade at Rs 75,701 per 10 grams on Friday.

"Gold witnessed minor buying as the USD 2,600-level on

Comex acted as a temporary support, alongside Rs 75,500 in the domestic MCX market. The momentum remains volatile due to uncertainties surrounding the interest rate cycle.

"Although the Fed decided to keep rates lower, its projections indicated fewer rate cuts going forward, which has maintained pressure on gold prices for the past two days," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

Meanwhile, silver futures contracts for March delivery slumped

Rs 647 or 0.74 per cent to Rs 86,540 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Globally, Comex gold futures advanced USD 13.10 to USD 2,621.20 per ounce. "Market players will watch the core Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) prices index data due later today, and more selling will be witnessed in precious metals counters if the actual figure comes above estimates," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.



UORFI JAVED STEPS IN AS SECRET SANTA FOR YOUNG HEROES BATTLING CANCER

Uorfi Javed, recognised for her bold fashion choices, embraced the spirit of giving this Christmas for a meaningful cause. Partnering with the Cancer Patients Aid Association (CPAA) as a Secret Santa, she spread joy and festive cheer to children fighting cancer. Uorfi extended her compassion beyond the spotlight, providing an undisclosed contribution to help with the children's treatment and overall well-being. This thoughtful act of kindness not only uplifted the spirits of the children but also sent a powerful message of solidarity and support to those facing one of life's toughest battles. Uorfi's involvement with CPAA embodies the true essence of Christmas spreading light, love, and hope to those who need it most, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of these young cancer patients and reminding us all of the power of kindness during the holiday season.



Radhika Apte reveals 'neither she nor her husband' planned for kids

Radhika Apte has always kept her personal life very private. She has never disclosed any information regarding her family or romantic relationships anywhere. It was merely due to an occasion she went to that everyone learned she is expecting her first baby. She is wedded to British violinist and composer Benedict Taylor. The actress just posted a photo of herself using a laptop while nursing her one-week-old baby. Radhika and Benedict have welcomed a baby girl. It was via this post that everyone learned her baby has arrived. Currently, Radhika Apte conversed with Vogue India and revealed a fascinating anecdote regarding her pregnancy. She recently posted several images from her maternity shoot with Vogue India. She mentioned that her pregnancy tale is a silly one and she prefers to keep it private, yet it's amusing how it all unfolded. She revealed that it wasn't an accident, yet they weren't actively trying, and it still surprised them. She remarked that it's simpler when individuals are clear about wanting a child, but in their situation, neither of them desired children. Nevertheless, she indicated that there was this one percent of curiosity regarding what it would be like, and then, when it occurred, they questioned whether to proceed at all. Previously, Radhika mentioned to ETimes that she believed people wouldn't see the bump at her movie's premiere, but it turned out to be too noticeable. She stated that without the premiere, one might have never been aware. Discussing her and Benedict, Radhika traveled to London in 2011 to study contemporary dance, where she encountered Benedict. They were in a cohabiting relationship prior to formalising their marriage. In the year 2013, had an official intimate wedding.

Chris Martin talks about empty nest syndrome

Lead singer of Coldplay Chris Martin has spoken about becoming an empty nester, a parent whose children have grown up and left home. Both of Martin's children, Apple (20) and Moses (18), leave for college, the singer said that life at home has undergone a significant change. "It's sad," he said, describing the feeling as "the only word" he could use, reports acehowbiz.com. However, he also recognised the natural progression of time and the importance of their independence. "Of course, it'd be weirder if they were still like, 'I can't leave.' Then you'd be more worried," he said. While coping with the quieter household, Martin maintains a strong bond with his children, often displaying his playful humour. "I like my kids very much. Even though they're not biologically mine, I'm breaking the story now," he joked. Martin shared a mischievous tactic he employs to embarrass his son in public. "If we're walking down the street and someone says, 'I'm sorry to disturb you while you're with your son,' I say, 'That's not my son. That's my partner,'" he said with a laugh. "Yeah, I like them a lot. I think they are mine, to be fair." Ahead of Apple's highly anticipated debutante ball at the prestigious Le Bal des Debutantes in Paris, Martin shared his initial hesitations. "It's so not something I ever thought I'd do," he confessed. "But because I'm so in love with her, I'm like, 'OK'." Chris Martin is best known as the vocalist, pianist and co-founder of the rock band Coldplay. Born in Exeter, Martin went to University College London, where he formed Coldplay with Jonny Buckland, Guy Berryman and Will Champion. The band signed with Parlophone in 1999, finding global fame with Parachutes (2000) and following albums. He won seven Grammy Awards and nine Brit Awards as part of Coldplay. Having sold more than 100 million albums worldwide, they are the most successful group of the 21st century.



Leonardo DiCaprio in talks to star in Evel Knievel biopic

Paramount Pictures is currently developing a biopic about legendary motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel, with reports suggesting that Academy Award-winning actor Leonardo DiCaprio is in negotiations to play the iconic stuntman. The film is being scripted by Terrence Winter, the writer behind Boardwalk Empire and the Oscar-nominated screenplay for The Wolf of Wall Street.



DiCaprio's potential involvement, the director for the film has yet to be confirmed. The biopic is based on *Evel Knievel On Tour*, a 1977 book

by Sheldon Saltman that caused significant controversy at the time of its release. Knievel himself strongly objected to the portrayal in the book, claiming it misrepresented both him and his family. The feud reached a dramatic climax when Knievel physically confronted Saltman, breaking his arm with a baseball bat on the Fox lot shortly after the book's publication. Although DiCaprio's participation in the project is not officially confirmed, his involvement would mark another high-profile collaboration for the actor, who has consistently taken on roles that push his range in Hollywood. Fans of Knievel's daring exploits and DiCaprio's career will surely be watching closely for further updates as the biopic develops.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



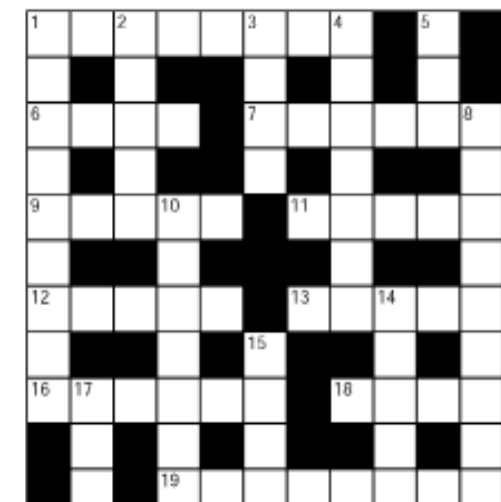
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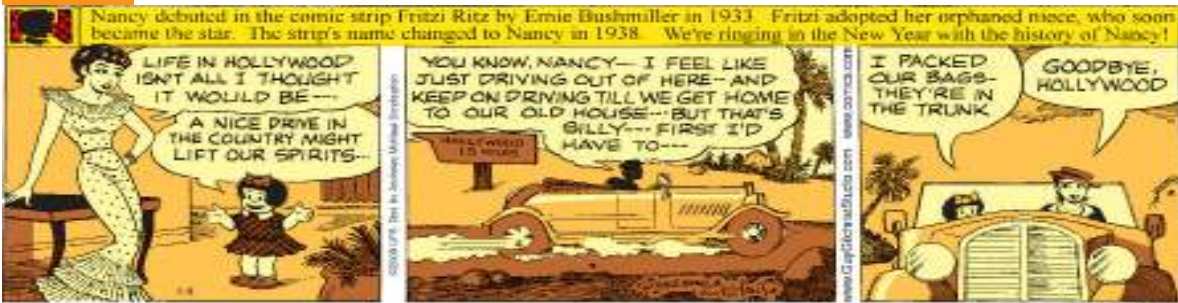
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

- Errors
- Repulsive to look at
- Baby cows
- Bite with these
- Find this in a swimming pool
- A topping for cakes
- Put water in this for washing your hands and face
- Least dangerous
- Enormous
- Without any bends
- A dried grape used in baking
- Tell a fib
- Most powerful
- Holes in hills for trains
- Hurt by a wasp
- Very famous actor
- Enquire

DOWN

- Alps
- Work out the answer to
- Strike with the foot



GINGER MEGGS



Shilpa Chakraborty:

Hyderabad is not just where I live, it's where I thrive

TEJAL SINHA
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Hyderabad is a city that effortlessly blends tradition and modernity, making it a place like no other. Its rich cultural heritage, reflected in the majestic Charminar and sprawling Chowmahalla Palace, co-exists with its thriving IT hubs and bustling urban lifestyle. What makes Hyderabad truly special, however, is its people—their warmth, hospitality and resilience create an atmosphere of belonging for anyone who steps into the city. The aroma of iconic biryani wafting through old bazaars, the serene beauty of Hussain Sagar Lake and the vibrant festivals celebrated with unity add to its undeniable charm. Hyderabad isn't just a city; it's an emotion—a harmonious blend of history, culture and progress that invites you to fall in love with it every day.

For the celebrated anchor Shilpa Chakraborty, Hyderabad is not just a city; it is home, a sanctuary of love, warmth and opportunities. In a candid conversation, she delves into her journey of embracing Hyderabad as her own, the transformations she has witnessed over the years and the deep connection she feels with the people, culture and charm of the city.

Shilpa's association with Hyderabad began during her formative years. Her parents, both working in the Indian Railways, were frequently transferred, and Hyderabad became their final destination when Shilpa was in the 6th standard. She recalls the moment vividly, "My father was transferred here first, followed by my mother. At that time, my brother was preparing for his board exams, so settling down here made sense for the family," she shares. Since the early 1990s, Hyderabad has been her permanent home.

Though originally from Kolkata, Shilpa doesn't identify as a Bengali and feels more connected to Hyderabad than her native city. "Whenever I visit Kolkata, I love being with my people and my house there. But the warmth and hospitality I receive in Hyderabad are unmatched," she reflects. For Shilpa, Hyderabad is not just where she lives—it is where she thrives.

The sense of belonging Shilpa has cultivated in Hyderabad stems from her close connections with the city's people. "Being around people who know you and like you makes all the difference. I have built lifelong friendships here, especially since I've been here since my schooling days. My deepest relationships and strongest bonds are from Hyderabad," she says with pride.

When asked about the differences between Hyderabad and Kolkata, Shilpa points to the city's cleanliness and its

evolving cosmopolitan vibe. "Hyderabad is very clean compared to Kolkata. Over the years, it has developed a metropolitan culture with people from different states making it their home. This change has brought a sense of dynamism to the city," she notes. Despite this, her love for Hyderabad has only grown stronger.

She acknowledges the changes Hyderabad has undergone over the years. She fondly remembers the peaceful roads and pleasant weather of the 1990s. "The roads were much less crowded and the climate was consistently pleasant throughout the year. Now, traffic is everywhere, and the city is much busier," she observes. Despite these challenges, she believes Hyderabad still retains its charm.

Professionally, Hyderabad played a pivotal role in Shilpa's career as she transitioned into the Telugu media industry as a Bengali. Learning Telugu was one of the biggest challenges she faced, but the city and its people were incredibly supportive. "Hyderabadis were very helpful. They taught me the language, corrected my mistakes and accepted me with all my flaws," she recounts. Today, she speaks fluent Telugu and attributes her success to the encouragement she received from the community.

Her love for Hyderabad is also deeply personal. It is where she found her life partner, a Telugu and where she embraced the local culture wholeheartedly. "I adore Telugu cuisine. Being married into a Telugu family, I've learned to cook traditional dishes and appreciate the unique flavours of South Indian food. Beyond that, I admire the people here. They may fight or argue, but they move on quickly and maintain their relationships. That's a beautiful attitude," she shares.

However, there are aspects of the city she finds challenging, particularly the traffic congestion. "The traffic demotivates me to step out at times, especially during working hours," she admits. Despite this, her love for Hyderabad remains unwavering.

For Shilpa, Hyderabad is much more than a city—it is the foundation of her life. "I had opportunities to move to the US or settle in Kolkata, but I refused. Hyderabad is my home. I had my children here, built my career here, and created a life I love. This city means everything to me," she says with conviction.

As she reflects on her journey, her deep bond with Hyderabad shines through. It is a city that welcomed her with open arms, nurtured her dreams, and gave her a sense of belonging that no other place could. For her, Hyderabad is not just a place on the map—it is a testament to a life well-lived, full of love, warmth and endless possibilities.

From her early years to her successful career in the Telugu media industry, celebrated anchor Shilpa Chakraborty, in an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, opens up about her profound connection to Hyderabad, how Hyderabad has shaped her journey, offering warmth, opportunities and more



Reviving traditional designs in today's interiors

In an era where minimalism has become too mainstream, homeowners and women who are often vested with the responsibility to revamp their homes are not hesitating to be different from the rest and choose designs that celebrate their distinct and beautifully subtle choices. Today, homeowners are looking for opportunities to share their individuality and turning back to the roots of traditional Indian art and craft, could be one of many ways to do that. These intricate and timeless designs, born out of centuries of culture, craftsmanship and heritage, are seeing a remarkable resurgence in contemporary spaces. Today, as the lines blur between tradition and innovation, these heritage-inspired designs which extend as an ode to India's rich art and tradition — are proving their relevance and timeless appeal, creating interiors that feel personal, meaningful, and deeply connected to the past.

Taking design cues from grand maharaja palaces

Indian palaces, with their tales of royalty and splendor, remain one of the most celebrated sources of inspiration for interior design. Their architectural brilliance, filled with intricate arches, detailed motifs and luxurious ornamentation, continues to inspire modern aesthetics. But what sets this influence apart today is the ability to reinterpret such grandeur for contemporary spaces. Designs like Gajamudra, Vasantha and Sanskriti exemplify this balance beautifully. Take Gajamudra, inspired by the royal elephant, a timeless emblem of strength and grace in Indian heritage. Its subtle finish exudes understated sophistication. Vasantha captures the lush beauty of palace gardens, infusing interiors with a serene, nature-inspired elegance. Sanskriti celebrates intricate cultural motifs from historic palaces, reimagined in versatile hues for contemporary spaces. Together, these designs blend regal grandeur with modern refinement.

Imbibing the elegance of chikankari

On the other end of the spectrum lies the subtle elegance of Chikankari embroidery. This delicate craft, native to India, has long been celebrated for its finesse and intricacy. In the context of interiors, Chikankari-inspired patterns add depth, texture, and a sense of quiet sophistication to spaces. Designs like Alankrit, Karnika, and Jharokha bring this artistry to life, transforming walls, cabinets, and furniture into understated masterpieces. Alankrit draws from the intricate charm of hand-embroidered fabrics,

with its linen-like finish adding soft, subtle texture. Karnika, inspired by traditional Indian earrings, brings grace and poise to modern designs. Jharokha reflects the grand arches of Indian havelis, adding timeless architectural elegance. These patterns beautifully balance tradition and modernity, enhancing interiors with understated sophistication. Perfect for those who favor quiet elegance, Chikankari-inspired designs seamlessly blend charm and restraint.

Ikkat stands out from the rest

For the bold and adventurous, few Indian art forms match the vibrancy and dynamism of Ikkat. Known for its striking patterns and lively color palette, Ikkat has long been a symbol of artisanal craftsmanship. Today, this iconic weaving technique has been reimagined in modern materials, making it accessible and adaptable to contemporary interiors. Jhoomar reflects the timeless charm of traditional Ikkat with a finish that exudes depth and elegance. Sutra celebrates the intricate threadwork of Ikkat, while Taranga evokes the calming flow of ocean waves. Tarang Pushp blends the grace of blooming flowers with the rhythmic beauty of waves, offering a perfect balance of heritage and modernity. Bringing traditional Indian art into modern interiors isn't merely about aesthetics. It's about creating spaces that resonate with emotion, identity, and history. These heritage-inspired designs tell stories. They evoke memories of family homes, festivals and cherished moments while connecting us to the larger cultural possibilities of India.

End Note

Moreover, as sustainability becomes an integral part of interior design, these traditional influences carry an inherent value. They remind us of the importance of craftsmanship, the beauty of handmade work and the need to preserve these art forms for future generations. Through incorporating traditional designs into modern spaces, we're not only honoring our heritage but also supporting the artisans and craftspeople who keep these traditions alive. Ultimately, the revival of traditional Indian designs in today's interiors is about more than just decoration. It's about creating homes that feel authentic, meaningful, and connected to something larger than ourselves. These designs offer a way to celebrate our heritage while welcoming the future. And in doing so, they remind us that while styles may change, the beauty of tradition is truly timeless.

(The author, Manoj Lohia, is the Director, is Merino Industries Ltd.)



Actresses who conquered global stage this year

In 2024, Indian actresses transcended borders, showcasing their talent and charm on international platforms. From cinema to fashion and global collaborations, these women proved their mettle and made India proud.

DEEPIKA PADUKONE

Deepika continued to break barriers as she became the first Indian to present at the BAFTAs, marking a historic moment. She was recognised as the only Indian Disruptor on Deadline Hollywood Disruptor's prestigious list, solidifying her position as a global trailblazer. With her films dominating the global box office, Deepika cemented her position as the reigning queen of cinema!



ALIA BHATT



Bollywood star Alia Bhatt is set to make her debut at the Paris Fashion Week 2024. Alia, as the global brand ambassador for French personal care brand L'Oréal Paris, walked the ramp at the Le Défilé L'Oréal Paris at the prestigious Place de l'Opéra. Also, she tops the Met Gala 2024 charts in a Sabyasachi saree this year.

JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ

Jacqueline Fernandez had a remarkable year, starring alongside Jean-Claude Van Damme in *Kill'em 2*, which garnered international acclaim. Her song Stormrider became a global sensation, earning her praise for her versatility. Additionally, her much-talked-about



collaboration with YouTube star MrBeast highlighted her widespread appeal and influence. She is the first Indian actress to collaborate with Van Damme and MrBeast.

KRITI SANON

Kriti also shone brightly on the global stage. She turned heads at the F1 Silverstone event and dazzled at the London Fashion Week, earning accolades for her impeccable style. As the brand ambassador for Pepe Jeans, Kriti strengthened her presence in the fashion world. Her co-production *Do Patti* became a global trendsetter, showcasing her creative vision and entrepreneurial spirit.

RASHMIKA MANDANNA

Rashmika represented India twice at the Milan Fashion Week, making bold statements with her appearances. Riding high on the success of *Pushpa 2*, which crossed Rs1000 crore globally, Rashmika firmly established herself as one of pan-India's biggest heroines with worldwide appeal, along with being the number 1 heroine from this generation of India!



SHRADDHA KAPOOR

Shraddha Kapoor added to her international achievements by representing India at the prestigious Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, an event known for attracting global icons from entertainment, fashion and sports. She also made a stunning appearance at the Red Sea International Film Festival. Back home, Shraddha celebrated the blockbuster success of *Stree 2*, further cementing her position as one of Bollywood's most beloved stars.

SOBHITA DHULIPALA

Sobhita Dhulipala had a standout year with her Hollywood debut in Dev Patel's directorial venture, *Monkey Man*. Playing the leading lady opposite Sikander Kher in this high-octane action drama, she left a mark with her powerful performance. Adding to the celebrations, Sobhita tied the knot with actor Naga Chaitanya in a beautiful cere-



mony this December, making headlines for her traditional wedding. Also, she attended the 77th Cannes Film Festival in 2024 as a representative of Magnum India, an ice cream brand. She made a dazzling appearance to the red carpet.

ADITI RAO HYDARI

At the 77th Cannes Film Festival, Aditi Rao Hydari served glamorous looks, which turned heads at the French Riviera. After leaving us in awe of her performance as Bibbojan in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's web series *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*, actor Aditi Rao Hydari returned to France for her third year at the Cannes Film Festival. As expected, she slayed yet again like a total diva.



in her career. Tabu's inclusion in such a high-profile project underscores her global appeal.

ANUSHKA SEN

Anushka emerged as a global youth icon in 2024. She performed live at Times Square, becoming the first Indian to do so. Anushka also rang the bell at South Korea's New Year ceremony and featured on South Korean billboards, earning her widespread recognition. Her collaboration with Korean Olympic shooter Kim Ye-ji added another feather to her cap, showcasing her dynamic global appeal.



BANITA SANDHU



Banita Sandhu, known for her previous work in Bollywood, is now making waves in the international TV scene with her role in *Bridgerton season 3*. The hit Netflix series, known for its witty, contemporary take on romance, features Sandhu as a bold, modern character, earning her international fans and acclaim.

Teenage sensation Konstas called up for Boxing Day Tests, McSweeney dropped

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Teenage sensation Sam Konstas was handed a maiden call up as Australia on Friday dropped rookie opener Nathan McSweeney for the final two Test matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India. The 19-year-old is set to become Australia's youngest Test batting debutant in over 70 years. If Konstas, who turned 19 on October 2, is selected in the playing XI in the Boxing Day Test, he would become Australia's youngest Test debutant since captain Pat Cummins, who was 18 years and 193 days old when he made his debut against South Africa in Johannesburg in 2011. The teenager would also become the youngest specialist batter to debut for Australia since Ian Craig when he played against South Africa at the MCG in 1953 aged 17 years 239 days.

Konstas' inclusion follows a series of disappointing performances from the Australian top order in the first three Tests especially McSweeney. The 25-year-old, who made his Test debut in the series-opener in Perth, failed to score a single half century and could only manage scores of 10, 0, 39, 10 not out, 9 and 4 in his six innings and was dismissed by Indian pace Jasprit Bumrah spearhead four times. Konstas had been in the reckoning to partner experienced Usman Khawaja after grabbing the attention of Cricket Australia's selection committee following his twin Sheffield Shield centuries for New South Wales. He had scored an unbeaten 73 at the MCG against India A while notching up a ton (107) in the Prime Ministers XI pink ball game against India in Canberra. "Sam gets a call up to the Test squad for the first time. His style of batting offers a point of difference and we look



forward to watching his game develop further," Australian Chair of Selectors George Bailey said.

"We remain confident Nathan has the ability and temperament to succeed at Test level in the future. It was a



difficult decision to leave him out. "It has clearly been a challenge at the top of the order for

batters throughout the series and we want to provide the option of a different line up for the next two matches," he

added. Konstas' inclusion follows a warning from former pacer Merv Hughes, who cautioned selectors against making any changes to the batting lineup for the Boxing Day Test. The former selector said it would have been a "panic call" move from Australia to add Konstas in the squad. "Now it would almost be a panic call to me... Just stay calm. They drew the last Test. The last two Tests have been a draw and a win, so what is there to panic about," Hughes had told 'The Courier Mail'. Konstas had said earlier this week, "It would be a dream come true (playing the Boxing Day Test)." "Maybe I'd get a little nervous before the game, but I've worked really hard for that. Hopefully, it happens one day, but we'll see." Pacer Jhye Richardson has also been included in the 15-member squad in place of Josh Hazlewood, who has been ruled out due to a calf injury. Richardson, who himself has

overcome a series of injuries, has not featured in a Test match since his three appearances during the 2021-22 Ashes series. "In the absence of Josh Hazlewood, Jhye provides further options in the fast bowling space. It has been pleasing to see his successful return throughout the early part of the domestic summer," Bailey said. Speedster Sean Abbott is also back in the squad for the remaining two games while uncapped Tasmania all-rounder Beau Webster, who was added ahead of the second Test in Adelaide, retains his place in the 15-member group. Australia squad for 4th and 5th Test: Pat Cummins (c), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Travis Head (vc), Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Jhye Richardson, Steve Smith (vc), Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster.



Tough task awaits Chennaiyin FC against Mumbai City

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Seeking to bridge the gap with the top six, visiting Chennaiyin FC will have their task cut out when they take on fancied hosts Mumbai City FC in their Indian Super League match here on Saturday. The Islanders have an impressive record against Chennaiyin FC, being unbeaten in their last nine ISL meetings. Mumbai have won and drawn twice in their last five matches, and are currently occupying the seventh spot with 17 points from 11 games. Chennaiyin FC are ninth in the table, having garnered 15 points from 12 matches but their previous five outings have seen them succumb to a loss thrice. Neither of them are too far off the sixth-placed Jamshedpur FC, who have 18 points from 10 matches. The Petr Kratky-coached team have struggled offensively, scoring the fourth-least goals in the season (14) so far, whereas the Marina Machans better them in this metric with 17 strikes. Mumbai City have fared better at the back, keeping the third-most clean sheets (4) in the league, conceding only 13 goals, as opposed to the 18 of the Chennaiyin FC. Mumbai City FC have not conceded in their last three ISL games. If they manage another clean sheet, it will mark their longest streak since 2018. Interestingly,

Chennaiyin have netted merely once in their previous three games in the competition. Mumbai City have hit the woodwork seven times this season, the second-highest tally behind Odisha FC (9 times). Last season, they set a single-season high of 10. While it does show that they are constantly on the lookout for creating chances in the final third, the frontline will have to come together to convert these opportunities with greater consistency. Chennaiyin FC have lost their last two away games, failing to score in both. The last time the Marina Machans went on a longer losing run away from home was a stretch of four games between December 2023 and February 2024, which included a 0-3 loss to Mumbai City FC (December 28, 2023). To get their season back on track, a positive result here would be important. Chennaiyin FC have conceded just four goals in the first half of their ISL games this season, the lowest in the league. However, they conceded 14 goals in the second half, the joint most with Kerala Blasters FC. The Marina Machans will have to ensure that they do not continue to lose their shape at the back once the game enters its second essay. Jamshedpur FC face East Bengal FC. In Kolkata, Jamshedpur FC will eye their first-ever league double over East Bengal FC when they face off at the Salt Lake Stadium.

Ashwin's desire to evolve all the time made him stand out: Shastri

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Ravichandran Ashwin's constant drive to evolve and excel in his craft, coupled with his focus on self-improvement rather than being concerned about the opponents made him stand out, says former India coach Ravi Shastri. The 38-year-old surprised the cricketing world by announcing his retirement in the middle of the Test series against Australia after the end of the third Test in Brisbane on Wednesday. "What stands out for me was his wanting to evolve all the time. He wasn't the kind of guy satisfied as to where he started," Shastri said on 'The ICC Review'. "For me it was his guile, wanting to excel in his craft and (especially) in the last two-three years the way he got the ball to the way, gave it a rip and got it to dip on the batsman with drift made him stand out," Shastri said. Known for his relentless drive to develop his game,



Ashwin consistently worked on new deliveries and refined his action, even in the later stages of his career. "He wanted new tricks to be learned. He pursued it, practiced hard at it and continued to look for new things as his career progressed, to keep up with the times," Shastri said. "His legacy will be of being a terrific match-winner, a fabulous record, 537 sticks. I mean anyone over 500 (in

Test cricket) is special." Ashwin, who made his debut in 2011 against the West Indies, quickly cemented his place in India's Test side. He retired as India's second-highest wicket-taker with 765 scalps, including 537 in Tests. Ashwin and fellow spinner Ravindra Jadeja often bowled in tandem, leading India to numerous victories. Shastri felt the "spin twins" played a role in each other's success.

"And for him to do it in his span and the way he has done it, especially when it came to bowling in the last four or five years, I think in India, along with Jadeja, I think they were a terrific pair, the real spin twins." "They complemented each other well and they spurred each other on, so I would say a lot of Jadeja's wickets in the last five-six years have come because of Ashwin and vice-versa." Shastri highlighted that Ashwin's nearly identical record against left and right handed batters -- 269 wickets against right-handers and 268 against left-handers -- demonstrated just how versatile and effective the spinner was, regardless of the opponent or their playing style. "You look at his record against right-handers, against left-handers, it's pretty much similar, you know, which says it all. It didn't matter to him who he was bowling against. He was up for it," he added.



Tottenham beats Man United 4-3 in the English League Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Son Heung-min scored a spectacular goal directly from a corner to fire Tottenham into the English League Cup semifinals in a thrilling 4-3 win over Manchester United. Spurs will play Premier League leader Liverpool for a place in the final, and Arsenal was drawn against Newcastle in the other last-four matchup. Son's strike in the 88th-minute at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium came as Spurs tried to hold off a dramatic comeback from United, having led 3-0 in the second half. United had pulled it back to 3-2 and was pushing for an equalizer when Son whipped in a curling right-footed shot past goalkeeper Altay Bayindir. "Obviously we made it harder than it should have been, for sure," Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou said and added, "Are you not entertained?" United's players complained Bayindir had been fouled by Tottenham's Lucas Bergvall as Son's shot flew past him. Replays appeared to show contact between the two, but with no VAR at this stage of the competition, there was

no chance of a review. Jonny Evans scored again for United in stoppage time, but Spurs held on for the win that had looked all but certain shortly after halftime. Having gone ahead through Dominic Solanke's goal from close range in the 15th, Tottenham took control after the break. Dejan Kulusevski doubled the lead a minute after the restart and Solanke fired in his second in the 54th. United head coach Ruben Amorim made a triple substitution -- bringing on Joshua Zirkzee, Amad Diallo and Kobbie Mainoo. It quickly had an impact with Zirkzee forcing Fraser Forster into a flying save and then capitalizing on a loose pass by the Tottenham goalkeeper to make it 3-1. Forster was guilty of another mistake in the 70th when his attempted clearance was closed down by Diallo and ricocheted over the line. United increased the pressure, but Son's unlikely goal gave Spurs a cushion again -- and it proved to be the decisive strike after Evans' late header reduced the deficit again. "I know the studio (punditry team) is probably going into meltdown over my lack of tactics," Postecoglou said.

India storm into U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup final

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Rampaging India extended their unbeaten run at the U19 Women's T20 Asia Cup as they reached the final with a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their last Super Four contest here Friday. Aayushi Shukla emerged the wrecker-in-chief with a four-wicket haul as the left-arm spinner conceded only 10 runs in her four overs to help India restrict Sri Lanka to 98 for nine after skipper Niki Prasad opted to bowl. Parunika Sisodia, who also bowls left-arm spin, chipped in with two scalps. Such was India's domination that only two Sri Lankan batters -- Sumudu Nisansala (21) and captain Manudi Nanayakkara (33) -- could manage double-digit scores.



The Lankan top-order fared poorly with Sanjana Kavindi (9) and Hiruni Hansika (2) staying together for a mere 12 balls. A 22-run fifth-wicket stand between Nanayakkara and Nisansala was the best for the Lankans. They raised hopes of

a rival but the latter's run out punctured all their hopes. India did not have the best of starts with opener Ishwari Aswari running herself out in the third ball of the chase without bothering the scorer. Left-arm spinner Chamodi Praboda (3/16) led the Sri

Lankan fightback by dismissing three Indian batters but opener G Kamalini (28) and Gongadi Trisha (32) ensured that the small run-chase was completed. Once they departed, Mithila Vinod, batting at number seven, carried the side home with her unbeaten 17-run cameo. India overhauled the target with 31 balls to spare. India had thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in their tournament-opener and then got the better of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka while the contest against Nepal did not yield any result. Brief Scores: Sri Lanka: 98 for 9 in 20 overs. (M Nanayakkara 33, S Nisansala 21; A Shukla 4/10) India: 102 for 6 in 14.5 overs. (G Trisha 32, G Kamalini 28; C Praboda 3/16).

India should have a hard approach against West Indies in ODIs: Richa Ghosh

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh has urged the Indian women's team not to take the foot off the pedal after their T20I series victory, but to adopt a more aggressive approach when they face West Indies in the upcoming three ODIs. Ghosh smashed a world record-equaling fastest fifty, reaching the milestone in just 18 balls. The 21-year-old, who scored 54 off 21 balls, including five sixes and three fours, joining an exclusive club, that features New Zealand's Sophie Devine and Australia's Phoebe Litchfield. Her innings helped India pile on 217 runs in the third T20I on Thursday. "We will look to carry the momentum and approach the ODI series and not go easy, our approach should be much harder. It is a new ground and we will try to assess the situations first and plan accordingly," Ghosh told the media here after India won the

series 2-1. Ghosh said she always has had the mindset to play aggressively. "The mindset (to play aggressively) is there in every game which comes from the practice sessions. If we have done something in the practice session, it feels easier to do to it in a match. I had prepared in that manner and that helped me," she said. "I have always loved power hitting. I have also seen my father hit big shots. I have worked hard on my fitness and in the practice sessions," Ghosh added. Ghosh also credited her experiences in the Women's Big Bash League and Women's Premier League for her exploits with the bat. "I spoke with Sophie Devine and Deandra Dottin during the WBBL and WPL. I have also discussed a lot about hitting with Harry di (Harmanpreet Kaur), she is also one of the finest hitters," she said. The wicketkeeper-batter said India wanted to put their

series loss to Australia behind and start afresh. "We wanted to forget the past and start afresh. We had come into this game to give our absolute best and not worry about the result and everyone gave their best," she said. Hayley Matthews rued the West Indies were not good enough in execution but said her side has a lot of positives to carry forward. "It just probably came down to execution again today. Like I said, we had really strong plans, but India also went back and obviously did some homework as well. Kudos to the way their players came out and batted," Matthews said after India recorded their highest-ever total of 217/4 in the format. With stand-in India skipper Smriti Mandhana hitting consecutive fifties to notch scores of 54, 62 and 77 in the series, Matthews picked her innings in the final T20I as her best. "Smriti obviously had a great series, but her knock today to me

was probably the best one," she said. "Having to bowl at Richa at the end was quite difficult as well. You felt almost as if you didn't land it on a penny. It was going to be pretty hard to stop her from scoring," Matthews added. With the official attendance claiming to be in excess of 47,200 for the final T20I -- the official capacity of DY Patil Stadium is 45,000 -- Matthews said it was the reason she loves playing in India. "Yeah, it was great to see. I have experienced massive Mumbai close before playing down here in the WPL. Obviously, when I am down here playing, usually they're on my side in that tournament," she said. "It is pretty crazy going up against it when they're cheering for the opposition, 100 per cent. I love playing in India for that reason. There's so many people that are into the women's game and want to come out and watch and support," she added.



Subbu Mangadevi delivered a complete dud with *Bachchala Malli*

SURESH KAVIRAYANI

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Allari Naresh, known for his comedic films, has been experimenting with different genres in recent times. Following the success of *Naandi*, *Itlu*, *Maredumilli*, *Prajaneekam* and *Ugram*, he is now set to star in *Bachchala Malli*. The trailer promises an interesting and action-packed ride, featuring Allari Naresh in a rugged avatar.

According to the producer, just as *Rangasthalam* catapulted Ram Charan's career to new heights, *Bachchala Malli* is expected to do the same for Allari Naresh. Amritha Aiyer plays the female lead, while Subbu Mangadevi directs the film.

Story:

Bachchala Malli (Allari Naresh) is a bright student and loves his father (Kota Jayaram). One of his father's decisions hurts Malli and a good boy becomes a bad boy with several bad habits and alcoholism. Discontinuing his studies, Malli takes his tractor and gets involved in unnecessary fights every day. Kaveri (Amritha Aiyer), enters Malli's life and he slowly changes back to a good person. But an incident makes him angry and he is back to his bad habits. What is that incident? The village president Ganapathi Raju (Achyuth Kumar) is

holding all the gunny bag business in that area, but due to some differences with Malli, he is planning something against malli? What happened between Raju and Malli, Did Kaveri marry Malli? If you want to know the answers, you have to watch the movie *Bachchala Malli* movie.

Analysis:

Director Subbu Mangadevi made his debut with *Solo Brathuke So Better* which was a decent hit. Now, he directed *Bachchala Malli* with Naresh as the lead. He said in his interviews that the story is inspired by a real character of *Bachchala Malli*, but he wrote a complete fiction story. When the promotion videos of this film were released, many compared Naresh's character with Pushpa. But those are completely different except for one similarity.

In *Pushpa*, the protagonist is the son of a father's second wife; the first wife's family didn't recognise him as their family. In this movie, the protagonist Malli's father chooses his second wife, and abandons Malli and his mother. From then onwards, he hated his father and the hatred became overboard that he didn't want to tell his father's name.

On paper, director Subbu wrote a good story, but when it comes to the narration on the big screen, he concentrates only on Malli's characterisation. More than that he showed character over stupidity which makes me think

that a character like Malli lives in this world? On the other side the director is showing the father is very positive and despite his son's hatred towards him, he loves his son. Somewhere, after some-time, the son should realise, but in this film the realization came only in the climax, but till then the narration, story goes normal and nothing interesting.

Director showed Malli as a very bright student and stood school first and also loved his father. There are a few scenes where the boy showed some maturity when someone scolded his father. And then suddenly, the boy didn't think a second about his father's gesture and the next minute he decided to hate his father, which may not be agreeable. There is no story to tell with the narration as scene wise. Malli is involved in some fighting or some other issue and the director completely concentrates only on him.

A college girl falls in love with Malli, who always drinks, fights with others with his stupidity, is another reason to not believe this film. The lead pair romantic thread is not coming up nicely. A girl is very close to Malli and called him

chinnanna (uncle), but their bond wasn't established properly. Rao Ramesh is one of the finest actors we have and his character was reduced to two scenes in the first half. If he is not there in the cli-

max, the film is a total waste. Director should establish other characters like Rao Ramesh, Hari Teja, Rohini along with Naresh. Achyuth Kumar's role is a big waste.

Above all, these kind of stories are not new in Telugu cinema. When the director said that he has taken the story from a real person, many thought something special in this, but no new thing, as the story goes completely flat. In the end, you don't get sympathy or anger for the protagonist or the female lead. There is a lack of emotional scenes in the film.

Performances

When it comes to the performance, Naresh shows his sincerity to play this character. He did his job perfectly, but his looks are not matching his characterization. Amritha Aiyer showcases some good performances and she actually did a neat job. She is charming and beautiful. Though Rao Ramesh's role is small, in the climax scenes, he is the best, especially the emotional scenes. He along with Naresh scenes are the only interesting ones in the film. Hari Teja gets a meaty role and she justifies it. Rohini, Kota Jayaram played as parents and they are very adequate. Praveen, Viva Harsha all supported well. Achyuth Kumar's role is not noticed.

Technical aspect

The cinematography is good and also the music is not up to the mark. Here and there the dialogues are good and connected.

Verdict:

Finally, in *Bachchala Malli* the story is written inspired by a real person, but when you watch it on the screen, you don't feel it as real. Does any person behave with that much stupidity? This question arises when we are watching this film. There are no emotional connections except the climax. Naresh's character didn't get either sympathy or anger or anything, because there is a lack of depth in it. You can make a good emotional family story with the characters in the film, but in the end, *Bachchala Malli* became a complete dud.

Cast: Allari Naresh, Amritha Aiyer, Rohini, Rao Ramesh, Kota Jayaram, Achyuth Kumar, Hari Teja, Praveen, Ankit Koyya and others

Music: Vishal Chandrasekhar

Cinematography: Richard M Nathan

Producers: Ramesh Danda, Balaji Gutta

Director: Subbu Mangadevi

Rating: 2



HAS MOHAN BABU ACTUALLY DISAPPEARED?

There are reports that senior actor Mohan Babu left India and reached Dubai and some reported he is hiding in Tirupathi. The veteran actor is in the news for his family disputes and on the other hand he assaulted an electronic media reporter with a mike. An Attempted murder case was filed against him and the actor is also in a legal plea to get a bail.

Whatever the proceedings, Mohan Babu has not appeared in front of Police in Hyderabad till now. Whether the actor is hiding somewhere, or he is at his home in Tirupathi, no one knows. On the other

hand, the actor is quite busy on his social media. Mohan Babu is talking about his old films and some of them are classics and blockbusters. Almost every day he is talking about each of his films and posting a clip from the film and writing about it. Mohan Babu is known for his dialogues and is called 'Dialogue King' and 'Collection King'.

On Friday, he posted about his film *Patnam Vachina Pativrathalu* which was released in 1982. He played lead actor along with Mega Star Chiranjeevi in this one directed by Moulee. He said that this

film is one of the most unforgettable ones for him. "*Patnam Vachina Pativrathalu* (1982) holds a special place in my journey. Directed by the talented Sri Moulee, I truly cherished portraying my role, especially sharing the screen with my dear friend, Sri. Chiranjeevi, as brothers. This movie remains one of the most unforgettable films for me (sic)," said Mohan Babu.

While his disappearance is reported on one side, on the other side, he is posting about his films continuously on his social media.

Aishwarya clarifies 'no similarities' b/w Arjun Reddy & Drinker Sai

Another actress from North, Aishwarya Sharma is making her debut with *Drinker Sai* film opposite Dharma. Kiran Tirumalasetty is the director and the film is releasing on December 27. Ahead of the film's release, Aishwarya talks about her debut and the film. "I play a medical student Baghi in this film," said Aishwarya. She added that when she heard this story, she felt her character is very strong. "It was quite challenging as an actress, but I was excited to take it on. I auditioned for this film by performing a few scenes and they liked it and then were taken into this project," she said.

Talking about her background, Aishwarya's father is a stage actor. "May be his influence has affected me unconsciously. Since childhood, I wanted to become an artist," she said. Initially, she wanted to be a dancer and a singer. "After completing my 12th grade, I moved to Mumbai from Jammu and enrolled in an acting course. Upon finishing the course, I started giving auditions. I had only appeared in advertisements," she said.

Acting in a Telugu film is difficult because of the language. "Sometimes, I didn't fully understand what I was saying, that was the only challenge I faced during the shooting," she said. Her co-actor Dharma is very supportive especially when it comes to delivering the dialogues in Telugu, she added.

"I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of this project. The film also conveys some meaningful messages," she said. Talking about her role, she said her character will appear innocent but also tough, strict, and somewhat rebellious. "There are some fun elements in my character," she said.

The actress said that *Drinker Sai* and *Arjun Reddy* are completely different. "Arjun Reddy portrays a classy version of a drinker, whereas our Sai is a more mass-oriented character," she said. The actress said that her family members mostly watch South Indian films, including Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. "I am very happy to be a part of such an industry," she said and adding that Dhanush is her favourite actor. "I recently watched *Lucky Baskhar*," said Aishwarya.



Aadi Saikumar in action mode

Aadi Sai Kumar is now choosing his scripts carefully. He has now started shooting; one such film, set in a mystical world, is *Shambala*. He is making sure every movie is dissimilar from the other. He is playing a geo-scientist in this film, which he felt is a challenging one. He started shooting for this film in RFC.

Directed by Ugandhar Muni, who gained recognition for his distinctive film *A (Ad Infinitum)*, *Shambala* will follow a unique tone and world, much like his debut film. Archana Iyer is the female lead opposite Aadi Saikumar. Swasika, who is part of

#Suriya45, is also playing a key role.

This supernatural horror thriller will present a storyline that has never been explored on Indian screens before. Ugandhar Muni, who trained in film making at the New York Film Academy, is making *Shambala* with high technical standards and grand visuals. Rajasekhar Annabhimoju and Mahidhar Reddy are the producers. Sriram Madduri is providing the music and he previously worked with Hollywood composers like Hans Zimmer, known for films such as *Dune*, *Inception*, *Batman* and *Dunkirk*.

Attitude star's interesting film title *Barabar Premistha*

Most of the Telugu stars have some prefix to their names like power star, superstar, global star, icon star. But actor Chandra Hass, son of popular TV actor Prabhakar, has a different prefix before his name-Attitude Star. He already made his debut with an interesting title *Ramagar Bunny* and now he is coming up with another interesting one

Barabar Premistha. One of the top directors, VV Vinayak released the teaser of this film. Directed by Sampath Rudra, Geda Chandu and Gayatri Chinni are the producers. A Miss India finalist, Megna Mukherjee, is playing the female lead, while Arjun Mahi (known for *Ishtangaa*) is playing the antagonist.

The teaser shows the *Barabar Premistha* is

going to be a mix of love, action and emotional elements. Set in the village backdrop of Rudraram, Telangana, the teaser hints at a compelling love story amid the conflicts of the town. "The teaser has already created some buzz and with Dhruvan's superb music, I am confident that my film is going to be a good hit," said Chandra Hass.

