



the pioneer

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QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

There must not be any cases based on mere suspicion. Cases must be based on evidence. The media has been publishing Revanth Reddy's lies as it is. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is telling lies even in the Assembly.

Ministers too have spoken lies in the Assembly about the state's debts. I am not afraid of Revanth Reddy or even his grandfather

— KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA and former Minister, TG

P4

Rajnath calls for mastering frontier technologies

PROSPECTS OF ECONOMY EXPECTED TO IMPROVE: RBI

Pushpa ante flower ankuntiva? BRAND IDDI!

DON'T MISS...

Kolusu thanks CM for BC officer as CS

Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, K Parthasarathy, commended Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for appointing K Vijayanand as the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh. Speaking to the media, Minister Parthasarathy noted that Vijayanand hails from the Backward Caste (BC) community, underscoring the Chief Minister's commitment to empowering BC leaders. He highlighted that Chandrababu Naidu has consistently prioritised leaders from backward communities in key positions, citing...

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Life hit in Punjab due to farmers' bandh

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

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Reliance seeks premium for oil

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

—PAGE: 8

Australia beat India by 184 runs

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

—SPORTS

Pawan endorses Allu Arjun arrest

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan has extended his support to Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's decision to take legal action in the Sandhya Theatre stampede case, which claimed the life of a woman. Pawan Kalyan endorsed the arrest of film actor Allu Arjun, holding him accountable for the incident.

The tragedy occurred during a screening of an Allu Arjun film, drawing widespread criticism. Pawan Kalyan lauded Revanth Reddy for his decisive stance, contrasting it with the alleged indifference of the previous YSRCP government, which he claimed often targeted the film industry without cause. He praised the Telangana government for demonstrating that the law applies equally to everyone, regardless of their status.

The Deputy Chief Minister also criticised the film unit for its lack of empathy toward the victim's family. "The movie team failed to offer condolences or visit the bereaved family. While Allu Arjun's visit may not have been necessary, someone like the director or producer could have shown solidarity," he remarked.

Although he supported the legal action, Pawan Kalyan questioned the focus on Allu Arjun alone. "A film is a collective effort involving many. It is unfair to single out Allu Arjun for the incident," he said.



JSP chief to go on state-wide tour

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan has announced an extensive statewide tour to address public issues and connect with citizens. Over the next six months, he will visit two districts each month, spending 14 days in each, to closely engage with the public and resolve local problems.

Speaking to the media on Monday, Pawan Kalyan explained that the past six months were dedicated to understanding governance, administration, and bureaucratic processes through review meetings. Now, his focus will

shift to addressing key public concerns, including ensuring access to basic amenities like drinking water and sanitation. He emphasised the importance of balancing welfare initiatives with development efforts during his visits.

The Deputy Chief Minister stated that the tours would help identify district-specific challenges. "Temporary camp offices will be set up in the districts I visit. These will encourage officials to deliver transparent and efficient services while expediting the resolution of public grievances," he said.

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Hearing on actor's bail plea deferred to Jan 3

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

Allu Arjun is currently out on interim bail granted by the Telangana High Court. He was arrested on December 13, after being booked for culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

Following his arrest, the Nampally Court sent him to judicial custody for 14 days, during which he was lodged at the Chanchalguda jail.

The actor's legal team subsequently approached the High Court, which granted interim bail on the same day, directing him to seek regular bail from the trial court.



Rs 1.9L cr investments set to flow into Andhra

CM directs officials to provide prompt clearances for big industrial projects

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday directed officials to ensure that all necessary approvals, including land allocation, are granted promptly to industries investing in Andhra Pradesh on a large scale.

Presiding over the State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) meeting at the State Secretariat, the Chief Minister instructed officials to expedite the provision of basic amenities for such projects to facilitate their timely completion. He emphasised leveraging incentives and subsidies to attract additional investments.

During the meeting, officials informed the Chief Minister that nine projects with a total investment of Rs 1,82,162 crore are currently underway, expected to create employment for 2,63,411 people. Among these, Bharat Petroleum

Corporation Limited (BPCL) is establishing a major refinery at Ramayapatnam in Nellore district. Spread over 6,000 acres, the project involves an investment of Rs 96,862 crore and will generate 2,400 jobs. BPCL also plans to develop a township with facilities including a learning centre, refinery, petrochemical unit, and administrative block. The project is expected to contribute Rs 88,747 crore to the State's revenue over the next 20 years, with completion targeted before 2029.

In Visakhapatnam, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is investing Rs 80 crore to create 2,000 jobs. Azad India Mobility Limited will set up a green project for manufacturing electric buses, three-wheelers, and battery packs in Gudipalli, Satya Sai district, with an investment of Rs 2,381 crore, generating 2,381 jobs over six years.

Continued on Page 2



Revenue Minister Anagani Satya Prasad addressing a review meeting at the IG Office in Tadepalli on Monday.

Land registration values rise by 15% to 20% in AP

Revenue Minister Anagani says revised rates will take effect on Feb 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Revenue and Registrations & Stamps, Anagani Satya Prasad, announced that land registration values in Andhra Pradesh would be revised upwards from February 1, with increases ranging between 15% and 20%, depending on growth centres. He instructed officials to submit a comprehensive report by January 15 to determine areas where values should be raised or reduced.

The minister chaired a review meeting at the Registration & Stamps Department's Inspector General (IG) Office in Tadepalli on Monday. Speaking after the meeting, he stated that while the state is recovering from the financial burden inherited from the previous

YSRCP government, increased revenue is necessary to meet administrative needs.

He highlighted that land registration values would be increased in growth corridors and areas with high land prices. Criticising the previous government for arbitrarily revising values without a scientific approach, he noted that in some regions, registration values exceeded market prices. To address this imbalance, the current government plans to reduce values in such areas, marking the first time in the state's history that registration values will be lowered.

Expressing concern over public grievances, the minister pointed out that about 10% of complaints in the Registrations & Stamps Department and several in the Revenue Department remain unresolved. He assured that these issues would be addressed within a stipulated timeframe.

Continued on Page 2

1L houses to be handed over to poor soon: Minister Parthasarathy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, Kolusu Parthasarathy, announced that the state government has successfully completed the construction of 1,00,000 houses under its coalition programme. He directed officials to set a target of completing an additional 50,000 houses by March 2025.

At a high-level review meeting held at the Secretariat on Monday, the Minister instructed officials to begin handing over keys for the 1,00,000 completed houses immediately after Sankranti.

He emphasised that the distribution ceremonies should be organised in a festive atmosphere across the state.

Parthasarathy revealed that the Chief Minister would personally participate in a key handover event in one district, while ministers, MLAs, and other public representatives would oversee similar events in other districts. He urged all involved to ensure the success of these ceremonies.

Highlighting the importance of infrastructure, the Minister directed departments of Municipal Administration, Rural Development, and Electricity to coordinate efforts to provide essential amenities such as water supply, roads, and electricity in housing colonies.

Continued on Page 2

'River linkage to be a game-changer'

CM says shifting Godavari waters to Banakacherla is his life's ambition

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has declared that his life's ambition is to shift the Godavari waters to Banakacherla, a move he believes will be a transformative milestone for Andhra Pradesh. Presenting a detailed plan for the project on Monday, he stated that its completion would not only address the state's drought issues but also secure water availability for future generations through river inter-linking.

Highlighting water conservation as a priority under the Swarnandhra Vision-2047, the Chief Minister recalled that it was the late NT Rama Rao, founder of the Telugu Desam Party, who first took steps to supply



water to Rayalaseema through the Telugu Ganga project. Chandrababu credited his party for completing 90% of the combined state's irrigation projects, including Gandikota, Kandaluru, and Somasila.

The proposed Banakacherla project aims to utilise 300 TMC feet of Godavari water, which otherwise flows unused into the sea. This project will provide drinking water to 80 lakh people and irrigate 7.5 lakh acres.

The execution will occur in three phases: diverting water from Polavaram to Krishna River, constructing the Bollapalli reservoir, and transferring water from Bollapalli to Banakacherla.

Continued on Page 2

Free bus ride for women from Ugadi: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced that the Andhra Pradesh government is on track to fulfil its election manifesto promise of free

bus travel for women, with the scheme set to launch from Ugadi. The CM chief Minister is expediting efforts to implement this welfare initiative, aimed at enhancing women's access to public transport.

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Former US prez Jimmy Carter passes away



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KVN Chakradhar Babu, MD APGENCO, Pattansetti Ravi, CMD APCCDL, Kirthi Chekuri, JMD HRD & Admin and AKV Bhaskar, APTRANSCO Director Grid, met K Vijayanand and congratulated on his appointment as the new Chief Secretary of the Government of AP.

Naidu richest CM, Mamata Banerjee poorest: ADR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is the richest chief minister in India with assets worth over Rs 931 crore, while West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee is the poorest with just Rs 15 lakh, according to an Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report released on Monday.

The report said the average asset per chief minister from state assemblies and union territories is Rs 52.59 crore.

While India's per capita net national income or NNI was approximately Rs 1,85,854 for 2023-2024, the average self-income of a chief minister is Rs 13,64,310, around 7.3

times the average per capita income of India.

The total assets of 31 chief ministers are worth Rs 1,630 crores. Arunachal Pradesh's Pema Khandu is the second richest chief

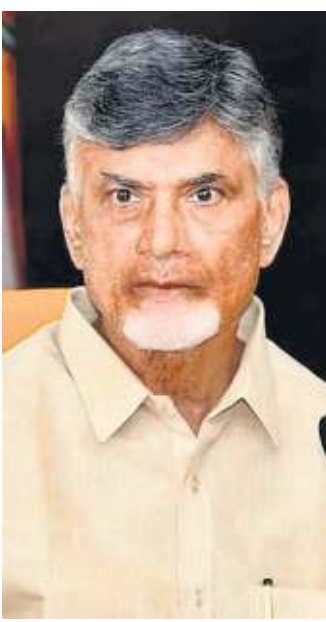
While India's per capita net national income or NNI was approximately Rs 1,85,854 for 2023-2024, the average self-income of a chief minister is Rs 13,64,310, around 7.3 times the average per capita income of India. The total assets of 31 chief ministers are worth Rs 1,630 crores

minister with total assets worth over Rs 332 crores, Karnataka's Siddaramaiah is the third on the list with assets worth more than Rs 51 crore.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, with assets worth Rs 55 lakh, is the second poorest in the list and Pinarayi Vijayan is third with Rs 118 crore. Khandu also has the highest liabilities to the tune of Rs 180 crore. Siddaramaiah has liabilities worth Rs 23 crore and Naidu more than Rs 10 crore, the report said.

It also said 13 (42 percent) chief ministers have declared criminal cases against themselves, while 10 (32 percent) have declared serious criminal cases including those related to attempt to murder, kidnapping, bribery, and criminal intimidation.

Out of the 31 chief ministers, only two are women - West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee and Delhi's Atishi.



Governance should reflect public opinion: CM Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has emphasised the importance of governance driven by public opinion, urging officials to ensure their performance aligns with the expectations of the people. He stated that only by prioritising public feedback can the concept of "people's governance" be truly realised.

During a review meeting on Real-Time Governance at the State Secretariat, the Chief Minister instructed officials to periodically collect public feedback on government schemes and programmes. He highlighted the need for continuous improvement based on these inputs and announced that a review meeting on Real-Time Governance will be held every Monday.

Naidu directed officials to use technology to gather public opinion. For instance, he proposed using IVRS to monitor the implementation of the free sand policy, with CC cameras at sand reaches and GPS tracking of vehicle movements.



Highlighting public health as a priority, Naidu noted a budget allocation of Rs 18,000 crore for the sector. He stressed the need to ensure effective services in hospitals and urged officials to gather feedback on road repair works undertaken with a budget of Rs 860 crore, with repairs already completed on 6,228 km of roads.

He also suggested installing QR codes in RTC buses, major temples, and hospitals to expedite feedback collection and improve services.

The QR codes in RTC buses would help assess punctuality, staff behaviour, and overall service quality. Similarly, QR codes in temples could provide insights into cleanliness, availability of amenities, queue management, and the quality of prasadam. Hospitals could use QR codes to evaluate the availability of doctors, provision of medicines, and maintenance of cleanliness.

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The Chief Minister also called for public opinion on the implementation of schemes like Deepam, grain procurement, and pension distribution. He instructed officials to take action against unauthorised

belt shops operating in the state.

The exercise to identify government properties through GPS is nearing completion and will be finalised by January, officials informed. Naidu further emphasised the integration of drone services to support farmers, highlighting the need to save time and reduce costs.

The Chief Minister concluded by urging officials to adopt technology-driven auditing and prepare for faster governance in the New Year, ensuring a seamless blend of public feedback and technological innovation.

Victims urge Minister Vasamsetti to take action against encroachers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A large number of victims gathered at the TDP central office in Mangalagiri, urging action against encroachers and looters, and demanding justice. They met with Minister Vasamsetti Subhash, State Warehousing Corporation Chairman Raavi Venkateswara Rao, and TTD Board Member Mallela Rajasekhara Goud, seeking action against corruption.

The victims alleged that during the tenure of the previous YSRCP government, several irregularities had taken place in the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) master plan. Many pointed to Vijay Sai Reddy and his associates as being behind these corrupt practices. They argued that an inquiry into the implementation of the master plan would expose the illegalities involved.

Madhav Ravi Kumar from Visakhapatnam-Bhemili submitted a grievance to the leaders, calling for action against corruption. M. Gangadhar from Ruttakrinda Palli village in Dharmavaram Mandal, Sri Sathya Sai district, filed a complaint about their house in Anantapur



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Town being registered twice. He alleged that S. Fakrudin, a local individual, was causing trouble, and claimed that YSRCP leader Gorantla Madhav, during his tenure as Circle Inspector, had supported the encroachers and harassed the victims. Despite receiving a favourable court verdict, Gangadhar alleged that officials had failed to cooperate and appealed to the leaders for justice.

B. Devudu from Vijayanagar district claimed that YSRCP leaders had changed the names online and illegally grabbed his ancestral land. He requested an investigation and

the restoration of his land. Y. Chittamma from A Mallavaram village in Kakinada district complained that despite having concrete evidence, her land was included in the prohibited list. She sought justice, asking for her land to be cleared from the list. Retired employees from SERP also met with the leaders, requesting that the retirement age for staff be extended from 60 to 62 years.

G. Lakshmi Narayana from Anantapur Town appealed for help in reclaiming his ancestral land in Chadulla village, which he said had been encroached

upon by relatives. U. Srinivas from MR Palem in East Godavari district filed a grievance about a resurvey conducted by the previous government, which resulted in his land being transferred to someone else's name. He urged the authorities to rectify the error.

These complaints highlight growing public frustration with land encroachments, illegal transactions, and corruption involving political leaders and their associates. The victims continue to demand prompt action from the authorities for justice.

Job opportunities for youth: APSSDC, OMCAP, 2COMS sign MoU

Goal is to improve skills of youth in Andhra Pradesh to meet international standards

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) and the Overseas Manpower Company of Andhra Pradesh (OMCAP) have signed a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with 2COMS Consulting Private Limited, a Kolkata-based registered recruiting agency recognised by the Ministry of External Affairs. The signing ceremony was held at the APSSDC Head Office in Tadepalli on Monday. The MoU focuses on skill development and employment prospects of the youth of Andhra Pradesh on a global scale.

The MoU is part of the Skill International Programme

under the Skills Development and Training Department and aims to upgrade the skills of aspiring youth in Andhra Pradesh to meet international standards. This partnership will open doors for placements in various sectors across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the Middle East, Germany and Doha (Qatar) providing young professionals with valuable overseas employment opportunities.

D Manohar, Executive Director of APSSDC and General Manager of OMCAP, highlighted the growing demand for skilled professionals, particularly in the healthcare sector, across GCC countries. He emphasised the importance of providing global job opportunities for the youth of the State, positioning

them for long-term career growth.

As part of this collaboration, a pilot training programme will be initiated for the unemployed youth in several key sectors, with the goal of placing them in high-demand positions overseas. The initial focus will be on nurses, mechatronics technicians and industrial electricians in Germany, and home care nurses in Doha, Qatar.

Present on the occasion were: G Ganesh Kumar, APSSDC MD&CEO, D Manohar, Executive Director, and G Kishore Kumar, General Manager, 2COMS founder and Director Prashant Pachisia, Vice-President M Augustin, OMCAP General Manager D Manohar, and HR Manager Satish.

Former US president Jimmy Carter passes away at 100

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Jimmy Carter, the 39th US president and the third American head to make a trip to India, during which a village in Haryana was named Carterpuri in his honour, has died peacefully at his home in Plains, Georgia surrounded by his family. Carter, who died Sunday at 100, was the longest-lived president in US history.

"Today, America and the world lost an extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian," President Joe Biden said in a statement.

Carter is survived by his children -- Jack, Chip, Jeff, and Amy; 11 grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife Rosalynn and one grandchild. "My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights, and unselfish love," Chip Carter said.

Plan to develop Police dept with Central aid: HM Anitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha has announced plans to develop the police department with central government funding. During a review meeting at the state secretariat, she discussed pending dues and central funds, emphasising the coalition government's focus on securing support for police, fire services, prisons, disaster management, and district military welfare schemes.

The Home Minister, along with MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Home Affairs, conducted the review with senior officials of the Home and Disaster Management departments. Anitha outlined plans to establish advanced institutions like Greyhounds, Octopus, and Cyber Security units to address the evolving nature of crimes driven by technological advancements.

Anitha criticised the previous YSRCP government for failing to secure central funds and provide adequate facilities for the police. She noted that the current coalition government is moving quickly to develop infrastructure for the Andhra Pradesh Police Academy (APPA), with land acquisition for permanent



Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha addressing a review meeting at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Monday.

buildings already completed. She revealed that 76 acres in Agiripalli Mandal, Eluru District, have been allocated for the Octopus Training Centre, and 498.23 acres in Relli village, Kottavalasa Mandal, Vizianagaram District, for the Greyhounds Training Centre. Currently, police training for SI-level and senior officers is conducted at the Police Training Centre in Anantapur district, while temporary Greyhounds training is held in Visakhapatnam.

MP Kesineni Sivanath highlighted that the establishment of 118 critical training institutions, expected since the bifurcation of Telugu states, remains incomplete. He announced that Home Minister Anitha

will meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah on January 8 and 9 to discuss Andhra Pradesh's proposals, including the need to secure Rs 1,150 crore in interim funds for disaster management. He also stressed the importance of modernising police stations and prisons.

The meeting was attended by senior officials, including Principal Secretary of the Home Department IG Vijay Kumar, 'EAGLE' Chief RK Ravikrishna, SP (SIB) Geetha Devi, Additional SP Jail Department Raghu, DG Fire Madireddy Prathap, Managing Director of Disaster Management Kurmanath, and Brigadier Reddy, Director of the State Sainik Welfare Board.

Energy sector...

Continued from Page 1

The policy outlines specific targets in Green Hydrogen, Solar, Wind, Pumped Storage, and Battery Energy Storage, along with the establishment of a clean-tech manufacturing sector and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure.

The policy also includes the establishment of a University for Green Energy and Circular Economy (UGCE) in collaboration with the Government of India and industries under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Since the launch of the policy, the state has secured agreements worth Rs 3.58 lakh crore in investments, with the potential to create employment for approximately 3.85 lakh people.

Notable developments during Vijayanand's tenure include a joint venture with NTPC and APGENCO for the development of 5 GW Pumped Storage Projects (PSP), with an investment of Rs 1 lakh crore, expected to create 7,000 jobs. Another joint venture with NTPC Green Energy Limited and NREDCAP aims to develop 25 GW of Solar, Wind, Hybrid, and Pumped Hydro Projects, including Green Hydrogen initiatives, with an investment of Rs 1.81 lakh crore, expected to generate employment for around 1.22 lakh people.

1L houses to be...

Continued from Page 1

If required, meetings with relevant ministers would be convened to ensure the release of funds for these projects.

He also instructed district officials to hold daily meetings to monitor progress and stressed the need for high-quality construction in all housing projects.

Andhra Pradesh Housing Corporation Managing Director K Rajababu briefed the Minister on preparations for the handover of 1,00,000 houses. The review meeting was attended by Chief Engineer GV Prasad, Superintendent Engineers Jayaramachari and Nagabhushan, among other officials.

JSP chief to go on state-wide...

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On balancing welfare and development amidst financial constraints, Pawan Kalyan highlighted the need for careful planning. "Welfare is essential, but it must go hand-in-hand with development. Financial limitations can hinder the effective implementation of welfare programmes," he noted.

To overcome these challenges, he outlined plans to prioritise human resource

development and youth upskilling. "The goal of welfare should be to empower families and make them self-reliant. A rise in welfare beneficiaries year after year reflects a failure to achieve true empowerment," he remarked.

Addressing speculation about his brother Naga Babu's potential induction into the state cabinet, Pawan Kalyan clarified that the Jana Sena Party recognises the contributions of leaders like Nandendra Manohar, Hari Prasad, and

Naga Babu. "Naga Babu has been a dedicated party member, even sacrificing his Anakapalli MP seat for the BJP. We plan to elect him as an MLC first, with a ministerial role under consideration later," he shared.

The Dy CM also announced preparations for the Jana Sena Party's formation day celebrations on March 14, 2025, emphasising that strengthening the party would be a priority in the coming months.

Free bus ride for...

Continued from Page 1

During a review meeting on Monday, he held discussions with senior officials to assess the scheme's progress.

Officials informed the Chief Minister that they are studying similar initiatives implemented in Karnataka, Delhi, and Telangana to understand their effectiveness.

Chandrababu Naidu directed them to prepare a comprehensive report promptly and take all necessary steps to ensure the scheme's timely rollout.

The free bus travel initiative is expected to provide significant relief and support to women across the state, reinforcing the government's commitment to empowering women and improving their mobility.

SPACE DOCKING EXPERIMENT

Spacecraft injected into right orbit

PNS ■ SRIHARIKOTA

Two spacecraft that would aid ISRO in demonstrating space docking, a critical technology for future space missions got separated successfully and were placed into the desired orbit late on Monday, ISRO said.

"PSLV C60 mission accomplished as of SpaDeX spacecraft is considered," said Mission director M Jayakumar. ISRO chief S Somanath said the rocket has placed the satellites in the right orbit of 475 km circular orbit, after over 15 minutes of flight.

"So, as far as we are concerned, the rocket has placed the spacecraft in the right orbit and the Spadex satellites have moved one behind the other, and over the period of time, it will pick up further distance, travel about 20 km away and then the rendezvous



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and also from ISRO centres, he said. These are scheduled to be fired late on Monday night.

Dubbed as a prelude to ISRO setting up its own Space Station by 2035, the PSLV-C60 mission would also make India join an elite club in achieving this feat which is expected to take place in the coming days.

The 44.5 metre tall rocket carried two spacecraft -- Spacraft A and B, each weighing 220kg which would help in space docking, satellite servicing and inter-planetary missions. After the culmination of the 25-hour countdown which commenced on Sunday, the rocket lifted-off at 10 pm from the First Launch Pad at this spaceport, emanating thick orange coloured fumes and thunderous sound in the island, located about 135 km east of Chennai.

Rs 1.9L cr investments...

Continued from Page 1

Balaji Action Buildwell Pvt Ltd is setting up a facility in Rambilli, Anakapalli district, with an investment of Rs 1,174 crore on 106 acres, providing 1,500 jobs. Several investors are also keen on the State's clean energy policy, which is expected to generate over two lakh jobs in the sector.

Tata Power Renewable Energy Limited is launching a solar project in Hosur, Kurnool district, to produce 400

megawatts of power, requiring an investment of Rs 2,000 crore and creating 1,380 jobs.

Additional power projects are being developed in YSR district, while Reliance Industries Limited plans to invest Rs 65,000 crore, creating over two lakh jobs.

The Chief Minister also reviewed the progress of projects cleared during the SIPB meeting on November 19, urging officials to maintain momentum in their execution.

'River linkage to be a...

Continued from Page 1

Chandrababu expressed confidence that the project would turn Rayalaseema into "Ratanalaseema," with significant benefits extending to Prakasam, Nellore, and North Andhra. He emphasised that interlinking

rivers and building reservoirs would eradicate drought in the state.

The Chief Minister criticised the inefficiency of the previous government, stating that his administration is reviving damaged systems. Plans to execute the project under a hybrid model with

private participation and central and state funds are underway, with the Detailed Project Report (DPR) set for completion soon. Chandrababu maintained that tenders would be called shortly and, with timely funding, the project could be completed within three years.

Land registration values rise by...

Continued from Page 1

Minister Satya Prasad also revealed that the Registrations & Stamps Department has recorded increased revenue over the past six months, barring September, and is on track to achieve its Rs 9,500 crore tar-

get for the 2024-25 financial year.

Additionally, he stated that the government is fostering a realtor-friendly environment, contrasting it with the challenges faced under the previous administration. As part of efforts to resolve land disputes, the government is conducting Revenue

Sadassulu across the state, during which 11,000 out of 70,000 complaints were resolved on the spot.

Revenue Department Special Chief Secretary Sisodia, IG Seshagiri Babu, and other officials participated in the review meeting.

Focus on alternative routes to ease Vijayawada traffic

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Shivanath, also known as Chinni, Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rama Mohana Rao, and NTR District Collector Dr Lakshminsha have emphasised that the State government is prioritising large-scale development projects to address the needs of the rapidly growing city of Vijayawada. They stated that efforts are underway to enhance roads and infrastructure through a systematic approach and collaborative efforts.

On Monday, the trio visited Mahanadu-Ballemvari Street and Jawahar Auto Nagar to inspect vehicular traffic and assess internal road conditions.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Kesineni Chinni said that with ongoing development works in Auto Nagar, the focus is on creating alternative routes to ease traffic congestion and ensure smooth movement of vehicles. He expressed confidence that the completion of the Mahanadu Junction-Nidamanuru flyover and the first phase of the Gannavaram-Benz Circle Metro Corridor would accelerate the city's development. Until these

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projects are completed, alternative routes will be prioritised to mitigate heavy traffic, he added.

The MP also outlined plans to develop alternative roads in areas like Murali Nagar and Ballemvari Street. The state government aims to provide pothole-free roads, he noted. He further mentioned that alternative routes are being planned from Ramavarappadu Ring to Gannavaram Airport to ease traffic on the National Highway while constructing the Mahanadu Junction-Nidamanuru flyover and the Gannavaram-Benz Circle Metro Corridor.

NTR District Collector Dr Lakshminsha stated that the administration is drafting special plans to develop infrastructure, including roads. He highlighted the focus on alternative roads to address the demands of ongoing and upcoming projects. He reiterated that Vijayawada serves as a critical gateway to the capital city, Amaravati.

MLA Gadde Rama Mohana Rao assured that with the support of MP Kesineni Chinni, he is committed to the city's development. He noted that public representatives and officials are working together to resolve traffic issues.



Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), Vijayawada-East MLA Rama Mohana Rao, and NTR District Collector Dr Lakshminsha discuss alternative road development during a visit to Jawahar Auto Nagar on Monday.

'Solve SC/ST Atrocities Act cases swiftly'

■ OFFICIALS ASKED TO IDENTIFY ENCROACHED GRAVEYARDS AND RESOLVE LAND DISPUTES IN COLONIES WITHIN 15 DAYS

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Minister for MSME, SERP, and NRI Relations Kondapalli Srinivas has emphasised the urgency of resolving cases registered under the SC and ST Atrocities Act, underscoring the government's responsibility to safeguard the fundamental rights of SC and ST communities. During the District Level Vigilance and Monitoring Committee meeting, Minister Srinivas stressed the critical importance of protecting the rights of marginalised communities and ensuring that the legal provisions designed to protect them are enforced effectively.

Minister Srinivas highlighted that the government remains committed to the overall welfare and development of SC and ST commu-



nities, with a particular focus on improving access to justice and resolving long-standing grievances. He called upon all stakeholders to act swiftly and with determination to uphold the law, ensuring the protection of these vulnerable groups. District Collector Dr. BR

Ambedkar responded to concerns raised by committee members, directing officials to identify encroached graveyards and resolve land disputes in SC and ST colonies within 15 days. He also instructed local authorities to collaborate on inspections and promote public

awareness of the Prevention of Atrocities Act.

To enhance transparency, the Collector assured that meeting minutes will be shared, and pressed for the expedited resolution of 251 pending court cases. Tahsildars were directed to issue caste certificates for SC and ST cases within two days, and the Collector committed to addressing delayed compensation in rape cases promptly.

District SP Vakul Jindal reported that 27 cases had been registered under the SC/ST Atrocities Act, with four DSPs assigned to oversee the investigations. The SP assured that the district police are making significant progress in processing these cases, with steps being taken to file charge sheets within the legally mandated 60-day period.

Collector calls for public participation in development efforts

■ Aims at 15 pc growth in agriculture, 20-25 pc growth in MSME and industry

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha has urged everyone to participate in the ongoing efforts for constructive development and to collectively guide the district toward progress in the New Year. He held a media conference at the VC Hall of the Collector Camp Office in Vijayawada on Monday.

During the conference, he outlined the programmes planned for the district's overall development in the New Year. He highlighted the successes achieved during the Budameru floods, thanks to the collaboration between public representatives and the government. "We successfully supported the victims, from providing relief measures to distributing financial aid," he stated.

The Collector emphasised that Team NTR aims to set new goals for the new year and work diligently to achieve them. He mentioned that the State government is focusing on implementing the Swarnandhra @ 2047 plans, which are designed under the guidance of Chief



NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha addressing a press conference in Vijayawada on Monday (Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar)

Minister Chandrababu Naidu. As part of this initiative, officials are aiming for an average growth rate of 15 per cent in the primary sector, particularly in agriculture.

He also noted that special measures are being taken to develop the MSME and industrial sectors to facilitate large-scale job creation alongside industrial growth. The sector is aiming to register about 20 per cent to 25 per cent growth. To boost the service sector, efforts are underway to transform the district into a tourism hub, including discussions with stakeholders to design a

new tourism package, he added. The sector intends the aim of more than 50 per cent growth, he added.

Further, he said preparations are being made for pilot activities such as establishing tourist guides. The district administration would provide appropriate training and guidance to the tourist guides. Additionally, the Collector expressed a commitment to making Vijayawada, the gateway to the new capital Amaravati, a clean, green, and prosperous city. Later, he said special meetings would be organised to gather suggestions and feedback from representatives of residential welfare associations, NGOs, senior citizens' associations, and others.

Furthermore, the Collector clarified that the State government prioritises development alongside the welfare schemes it implements to aim for zero poverty and improve the living standards of the people. This approach will continue in the new year, ensuring that eligible individuals receive the benefits of the schemes.

Left parties demand Amit Shah's resignation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leaders of Left parties have demanded the immediate resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing him of disrespecting Dr BR Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution and Bharat Ratna recipient, during a recent parliamentary session. They asserted that Shah's remarks exposed the true stance of the BJP and the RSS regarding both the Constitution and Ambedkar's legacy.

In response to Shah's comments, Left parties organised a protest at the 125-foot Ambedkar Nyaya Mahashilpam in Swarajya Maidan, Vijayawada, on Monday. The demonstration was led by CPI Vijayawada city secretary G Koteswara Rao and CPM NTR District leader Donepudi Kashinath.

During the protest, CPI State secretary K Ramakrishna accused the RSS of opposing the Constitution since its inception and claimed that the BJP intended to amend the Constitution if they gained enough parliamentary seats.

Woman's death at Rolugunta PHC sparks outrage over negligence

■ PHC was locked with night-duty staff asleep inside, when the patient was brought

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

The Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Rolugunta has become the centre of public outcry after the death of 59-year-old Vaidasu Lakshmi, allegedly due to delayed medical attention. The incident, which occurred late Sunday night, has exposed glaring deficiencies in the PHC's operations, particularly during critical night hours.

Lakshmi, a resident of Rolugunta, developed severe breathing difficulties around 11.30 pm. Her son, Vaidasu Ganesh, and relatives rushed her to the PHC, only to find

it locked with night-duty staff asleep inside. "We knocked on the doors for almost half an hour while my mother's condition worsened," said Ganesh. "By the time they opened the door, it was too late."

The family was informed that no doctors were available and was advised to take Lakshmi to Narsipatnam Area Hospital, 10 kilometres away. The two doctors assigned to the PHC reportedly reside in Narsipatnam, leaving the facility understaffed during emergencies. The family attempted to transport Lakshmi, but she was declared dead upon arrival at the

hospital. "If the doctors had been here and the staff had acted quickly, my mother might still be alive," Ganesh said, adding, "This was not just a delay; it was negligence." He vowed to file a formal complaint, demanding accountability for what he described as a preventable loss.

Medical Officer Dhanalakshmi, addressing the incident, claimed that the staff on duty had checked Lakshmi's condition before referring her to Narsipatnam. "An investigation will be conducted, and those responsible will face action," she said, promising to issue memos to the staff involved. Residents have

expressed frustration over repeated lapses at the PHC, which is supposed to provide 24-hour medical services. "What's the point of a health centre if it can't save lives when it matters most?" asked a local resident. "This is not the first time we've seen such negligence."

The incident has reignited calls for stricter monitoring of healthcare facilities, the relocation of doctors closer to the PHC, and better accountability for staff. "Healthcare is about saving lives, not excuses," Ganesh emphasised. "My mother deserved better, and so does this community."

Visakhapatnam sees surge in illegal poker games ahead of New Year

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the city gears up for the New Year and Sankranti festivities, a surge in illegal poker games has raised concerns among residents and prompted increased police action. Organisers, often wealthy individuals or businessmen, are renting rooms in hotels and guesthouses across the city, including prominent areas like Dwarakanagar, Narasimhanagar, and MVP Colony, to host private poker games. "Poker during Sankranti has always been a tradition, but this year, we are witnessing a significant increase in the number of illegal games," stated a senior police official. "These organisers are constantly changing venues



to avoid detection, making it challenging for law enforcement."

Despite these challenges, the police have conducted several raids, including a recent operation at Hotel MVV near Shivaji Park and the arrest of individuals at a lodge in Dwarakanagar. "Our efforts are ongoing," the official emphasised. "We are actively mon-

itoring the situation and taking necessary action." Concerns have also been raised about the provision of alcohol, food, and even loans against gold at these gambling venues. Some organisers reportedly deduct a portion of the stakes to cover expenses, further incentivising participation.

The surge in gambling activities has had social consequences, with individuals approaching authorities after experiencing financial losses and facing domestic disputes. The police have acknowledged public concerns and assured citizens that the Commissioner of Police is closely monitoring the situation and will take further action as needed to curb the spread of illegal gambling in the city.



Grievance unresolved, man attempts suicide

■ Amireddy Ramana was denied compensation after a fire destroyed his home

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Amireddy Ramana, a resident of Tuntipalli village in Makavarapalem mandal, attempted to take his own life on Monday after years of seeking help from officials to resolve his grievances. The 30-year-old's desperate act has brought to light the severe emotional and mental toll that unresolved issues can take on individuals, especially when basic needs and promises of support go unmet.

Ramana's ordeal began several years ago when he lost his home to an electrical short circuit, followed by the tragic death of his parents. Despite repeatedly reaching out to officials for assistance, his appeals fell on deaf ears, with both the previous and current governments failing to provide him with the support he needed. The situation took a turn for the worse when Ramana was denied

compensation for the fire that destroyed his home. The three lakh rupees he was owed as compensation never materialised, leaving him homeless and without any family or support.

On Monday, Ramana came to the Collector to submit yet another petition during the Public Grievance Redressal programme. However, overwhelmed by his ongoing struggles, he consumed insecticide in a desperate act, believing his efforts would ultimately lead to no results. He was swiftly rushed to NTR Hospital for immediate medical attention and is currently in critical condition. Ramana's condition remains critical as he continues to receive treatment at NTR Hospital. The government's inaction has also raised questions about the effectiveness of the Public Grievance Redressal programme.

GITAM launches 'Let Us DO Science' for hands-on learning

■ Aims to bridge gap between theoretical science education and real-world applications for high school students

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

GITAM Deemed to be University's School of Science has launched a pioneering science outreach initiative titled "Let Us DO Science" (LuDoS), supported by the National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

The LuDoS initiative aims to bridge the gap between theoretical science education and real-world applications by fostering hands-on learning and innovation among high school students. "Our primary aim is to promote hands-on science learning, inspire cre-

ativity, and encourage students to connect their classroom experiences with practical science applications," said Dr. B Spandana, the project investigator.

The initiative comprises a series of impactful activities, including 20 days of science exhibitions, 90 days of open lab facilities for school children on the GITAM university campus, and specialised workshops for school teachers and student interns focused on active experimentation and innovation. As part of the outreach activities, the LuDoS team has conducted science exhibitions at Zilla Parishad Schools in Anandapuram, Narava, Chandrapalem, and Chintala

Agraharam. The exhibitions were supported by a team of investigators and science educators.

The project team expressed their gratitude to the Department of Education, particularly District Education Officer (DEO) N Prem Kumar, for his invaluable support in helping the initiative effectively reach schoolchildren. The LuDoS initiative promises to be a game-changer in science education, igniting curiosity and fostering a deeper understanding of scientific concepts among young learners. "Through this initiative, we aim to inspire the next generation of scientists, innovators, and thinkers," said Dr. Spandana.



Durga Temple nets ₹2.7 cr in hundi collections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Durga Malleswara Swamy Devasthanam, atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada, reported an income of Rs 2,70,66,162 through hundi collections. The counting of donations commenced on Monday at the Mallikarjuna Maha Mandapam following the conclusion of the Bhavani Deeksha Viramana Mahotsavam.

The two-day hundi counting began under the supervision of the temple's Executive Officer, K.S. Rama Rao. On the first day, the collections amounted to Rs 2.70 crore. Devotees also offered 210 grams of gold ornaments and

11,240 kg of silver jewellery.

In addition to domestic currency, devotees contributed foreign currencies, including 536 US dollars, 10 Australian dollars, 0.5 Kuwaiti dinars, 1,000 Ugandan shillings, 10 euros, 5 pounds sterling, 1 Qatari riyal, 5 UAE dirhams, 20 Scottish pounds, 50 Canadian dollars, and 15 Singapore dollars. Rao stated that the counting would continue on Tuesday.

Deputy Executive Officer M. Ratna Raju and other officials from the endowment department participated in the counting process. Security was ensured by temple staff, the Special Task Force (SPF), and One Town Police.

All set for disbursement of 2.36L pensions in EG

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P. Prashanthi announced that all necessary arrangements have been made to disburse social security pensions to 2,36,927 beneficiaries under the NTR Bharosa scheme on December 31.

The Collector stated on Monday that Rs 101.93 crore would be distributed to the beneficiaries through 5,158 Panchayat Development Officers (PDOs) across 9,041 cluster areas. "Special efforts have been made to ensure that as many pensions as possible are distributed on Tuesday. The pensions will be handed over directly to the beneficiaries at their homes," she said, adding that the process would begin at 6 a.m.

DRDA Project Director N.V.S. Murthy informed that funds had been withdrawn from 71 branches of 11 banks in the district to facilitate the pension disbursement.

Meanwhile, the district administration received 120 petitions through the Public Grievances Redressal System (PGRS) held at the Collectorate on Monday. Joint Collector S. Chinna Ramudu, DRO T. Sitarama Murthy, CPO L. Appalakonda, DALDOs, and other officials attended the grievance session.

Of the petitions received, 65 were related to land disputes, which the Collector assured would be resolved soon.



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Ex-MLC Jayamangala joins Jana Sena

PNS ■ ELURU

Former MLC Jayamangala Venkata Ramana joined the Jana Sena party in the JSP's State office at Mangalagiri on Monday. JSP chief and Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan and Civil Supplies Minister Nadendra Manohar welcomed him into the JSP by wrapping a scarf.

Speaking on the occasion, Jayamangala Venkata Ramana said he had quit the MLC post and the YSRCP as he was unable to tolerate the injustice being meted out to the dwellers of Kolleru surrounding areas. He vowed to do justice to the people of Kolleru area.

Jayamangala Venkata Ramana was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 2009 elections from Kaikaluru. However, in 2014 the Kaikaluru seat was given to the BJP as part of seat sharing. Later he unsuccessfully contested from Kaikaluru in 2019 elections and he joined the YSRCP in 2023. He was sent to the Legislative Council in MLAs quota. Recently he resigned from the YSRCP and the primary membership of the party.



Sub-collector's office employee arrested in files burning case

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

The Special Investigation Team officials arrested Sub-collector's office employee Gautam Tej in connection with the burning of office files in the Sub-collector's office in Madanapalle. The special team officials arrested Gautam Tej and produced him before the Fourth Additional court here on Monday and the court sent him to 14 days judicial remand. It may be mentioned here that on July 21, 2024, crucial files pertaining to the land acquisition, were found burnt in the sub-collector's office in Madanapalle. The government had taken the incident seriously and handed over the investigation to the CID police and special teams were formed.

APCT dept launches new biometric face authentication

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Andhra Pradesh Commercial Taxes Department, in collaboration with the Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) has announced the launch of a new Biometric Face Authentication feature through a mobile application, effective from January 1, 2025.

A Commercial Taxes department release here on Monday said that this Biometric Face Authentication is aimed at streamlining the verification process while preventing bogus taxpayers from entering the GST ecosystem at the registration stage, thus protecting the system from the misuse of fake

Input Tax Credit (ITC).

Additionally, it offers enhanced security against the misuse of Aadhaar details and the creation of fake identity cards, safeguarding innocent individuals whose Aadhaar information may have been misused, and ensuring that only legitimate taxpayers are enrolled in the system.

Currently, there are 12 GST Seva Kendras (GSKs) in Andhra Pradesh where Biometric verification is done using fingerprint or iris scanners. To enhance convenience and accessibility, GSTN has developed a mobile application compatible with Android devices (phones or tablets).

This new app enables Biometric Authentication Officers (BAOs) at GSKs to carry out the verification process without the need for any hardware devices. The new mobile app allows BAOs to log in, enter the Aadhaar details, and capture the applicants' photo for face authentication and verification in a single step.

By using the new functionality, biometric verification will now be completed in two steps instead of the previous three including the photo capture and face authentication, the applicant's biometric details are verified through facial recognition and the verification of the applicant's documents.

Kolusu thanks CM for BC officer as Chief Secy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, K Parthasarathy, commended Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for appointing K Vijayanand as the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh.

Speaking to the media, Minister Parthasarathy noted that Vijayanand hails from the Backward Caste (BC) community, underscoring the Chief Minister's commitment to empowering BC leaders. He highlighted that Chandrababu Naidu has consistently prioritised leaders from backward communities in key positions, citing the appointments of the

Director General of Police (DGP) and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) State President from BC communities.

The Minister expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister for his inclusive leadership, which he said demonstrates Naidu's dedication to ensuring representation for all sections of society.

Separately, Minister Parthasarathy released the book Transforming Stress into Strength, authored by Dr Ramesh Bavishetti, at his office on Monday. He congratulated the author and emphasised the growing importance of stress management in today's society, calling it a crucial issue that needs attention.



Five kg ganja seized, two peddlers arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Kakinada rural police seized 5 kg of ganja while being sold and arrested two peddlers at Saibaba temple at Nadukuduru village in Karapa mandal near here on Monday. Sub-inspector T Sunita told the media that on a tip-off that two

peddlers were selling ganja, a police team conducted a raid and arrested two peddlers Srinu and Ramesh. The police team seized 5 kg of cannabis from them. The police registered cases under section 8 (C) r/w 20 (b) (ii) (B) NDPS Act. The arrested peddlers were being produced before the court, the SI said.

Decline in Maoist activity in ASR district: SP Amit Bardar

PNS ■ PADERU

Superintendent of Police (SP) Amit Bardar has described 2024 as a watershed year for controlling Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) activities in the tribal Agency areas of Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) district. Addressing the annual crime review meeting in Paderu on Monday, Bardar highlighted significant progress in neutralising Maoist influence and reducing violent incidents in the district.

The SP reported a significant decline in Maoist activities, with only one arson case recorded in 2024. Developmental initiatives and continuous outreach programmes in remote tribal areas were credited for the progress.



Notably, no fresh recruitments into the banned CPI-Maoist party were observed, marking a historic low in its influence.

Among the key achievements, the arrest of Sodi Baman, a 23-year-old Maoist platoon commander, in July was a landmark success. Baman was involved in numerous

attacks on paramilitary forces and civilian killings along the Andhra-Chhattisgarh border. Further, 33 militia personnel were bound over, and 14 cadre members, including prominent leaders like divisional commander Khuram Mithilesh alias Raju and others, surrendered.

The police also recovered two significant Maoist explosive dumps—one at Panasalabanda village in Galikona Panchayat on June 24, and another at Kannavaram village in Koyuru mandal on July 12. To foster trust and support in tribal areas, the police organised various outreach programmes, including Spoorthi, Cheyutha, Prerana, Nirman, Saral, Yuva sports events, Sanjeevani medical camps, and Jana Mytri meetings.

'Adoptions must follow legal procedures'

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has issued a stern warning against adopting children without legal permission, stating such practices will not be tolerated. Presiding over a convergence meeting of Mission Vatsalya and Mission Sakthi on Monday, the Collector was joined by Third Additional District Judge and Bhimavaram Mandal Legal Services Committee Chairman, MA Somasekhar.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Nagarani emphasised that unauthorised adoptions must be strictly prevented. She instructed Village Revenue Officers (VROs), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), women police, and Anganwadi workers to collect information vigilantly and take timely action. "Any staff found negligent in



preventing illegal adoptions will face strict action," she warned.

Expressing concern over the low number of adoption applications—just six in the district—she urged officials to raise awareness among childless couples and encourage applications.

The Collector also directed officials to intensify efforts to prevent

child marriages. She stressed the need for coordinated action by officials from the ICDS, Police, Education, and Revenue Departments to tackle such cases. She added that FIRs must be registered, and relevant sections of the POCSO Act enforced against offenders.

Highlighting the importance of post-adoption counselling, the

Collector noted that couples should be made aware of the challenges and responsibilities involved in adoption. She also urged officials to address issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, and the welfare of orphans and children of single parents. Child labourers should be rehabilitated and enrolled in schools, she added.

Third Additional District Judge MA Somasekhar emphasised that preventing crimes against women and children is a collective social responsibility. He recommended disseminating information through pamphlets about services provided by the One Stop Center and expediting compensation for POCSO cases.

The meeting was attended by District Women and Child Welfare Officer B. Sujata Rani, District Child Protection Officer R. Rajesh, Central Administrator Ch. Dhanalakshmi, and other officials.

NABARD extends full support to aqua farmers: CGM

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

NABARD Chief General Manager M.R. Gopal has assured comprehensive support for shrimp farmers while highlighting the organisation's focus on promoting the export of aqua products.

A regional awareness meeting for shrimp farmers was organised at a local hotel on Monday, with NABARD CGM M.R. Gopal attending as the Chief Guest. Addressing the gathering, he outlined NABARD's efforts to boost aqua product exports and enhance shrimp production across the country. He stressed the importance of financial assistance for establishing nucleus breeding centres for prawn farming in the state.

"Andhra Pradesh plays a crucial role in shrimp culture, not only in India but globally, with significant export volumes. The state, with its 974-km-long coastline, is exporting aqua products at record levels, cre-



ating substantial rural employment," he stated, adding that high-quality seeds are essential for improving production.

Gopal also highlighted Andhra Pradesh's high-quality shrimp exports to countries like China and the USA. He noted that

NABARD is providing loan facilities to small and medium corporate farmers to advance the sector. "The aquaculture and fisheries sectors are vital for the state's GDP growth," he said, expressing hope that the awareness seminar would benefit farmers in aquaculture.

NABARD CGM (HO) A.V. Bhavani Shankar added that India is the second-largest producer of fish globally. Over the past seven years, the fisheries sector has grown by seven per cent, surpassing the agricultural and allied sectors. He noted that India is also the second-largest

exporter of shrimp, with Andhra Pradesh leading in production.

Fisheries Joint Director Lal Mohammad revealed that 70 per cent of aquaculture activities are concentrated in East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur districts. He stated, "The Andhra Pradesh government provides electricity subsidies to 54,034 aqua farmers and allocated Rs 930 crore for aqua sector development in the budget. Loans are being extended to aqua farmers, similar to agricultural loans. Drone technology has also been introduced to enhance production, and an aqua park has been established in the district at a cost of Rs 200 crore." He further emphasised the growing market demand for prawns and crabs.

The meeting was attended by prominent figures, including M.S.L. B.C. Srinivas Dasyam, ICAR-CMFRI Principal Scientist J.K. Kijakudin, and MPEDA JD Vijay Kumar Yaragala.

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

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Declaring that the Congress Government has been filing frivolous cases against him, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao lashed out at the government saying that it is filing cases through the ACB even if there was no corruption. He said that he would face the false cases legally.

During a chat with journalists on Monday at the Telangana Bhavan, KTR said, "The CM has been blackmailing officials for making his photo with Formula E-Car Racing representatives public. The CM has been threatening those officials saying that he will suspend them and take disciplinary action. Why didn't the ACB file a case against Revanth Reddy for meeting Formula E-Car Racing

representatives? Revanth hid his meeting with Formula E-Car Racing representatives. I now have a doubt that Revanth might have taken money from them. Why did Revanth's government not file a case against Formula E-Car Racing representatives if they had made illegal gains? The CM has been speaking as he liked saying that a Rs 600 crore 'scam' took place during the Formula E-Car Racing event."

Making it clear that he will stick to his comment, KTR said that he took a decision as a Minister and is sticking to the same.

The comments of Transport Minister Ponnampal Prabhakar prove that there was no corruption in it, KTR said. Even Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is not in a position to tell where the corruption took place, he said.

ACROSS THE STATES



Juveniles to be tried as adults for heinous crimes

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



Protests continue in Rajasthan over abolition of 9 districts

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



Gujarat home to over 200 wolves: Census

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

SP team gives Rs 5 lakh each to Sambhal victims

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

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

Rajnath calls for mastering frontier technologies

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

PNS ■ MHOW (MP)

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



'Arrest Hardeep for having Rohingya infiltrators settled in Delhi'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

BPSC EXAM ROW

JNUSU demands Bihar CM's resignation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

The protest coincided with Kumar's reported visit to the office, the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) said in a statement. Kumar is also national president of the Janata Dal (United) or JD(U). JNUSU president Dhananjay said, "We are demanding the immediate resignation of Bihar's chief minister due to the unacceptable



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

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

Candidates suspect massive corruption in Bihar PSC exam: PK

PNS ■ PATNA

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAIL, BUS SERVICES AFFECTED

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

How American presidents have planned their own funerals

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

Funerals often are planned by the presidents themselves,



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

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

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

Carter had more time to

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

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

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

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

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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Country shamed

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

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



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

PICTALK



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

India's forest cover grows, but grim realities linger



KOTA SRIRAJ

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

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



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



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RELIEF FOR MIDDLE-CLASS

Madam — As the new year approaches, salaried employees are likely to face significant tax deductions from their salaries for the financial year 2024-2025. While taxes are deducted throughout the year, the months leading up to March 2025 will see an increased burden, further aggravating the financial challenges of India's middle class. Reduced take-home pay diminishes purchasing power, leading to decreased spending by the salaried class, which, in turn, impacts the economy.

Considering these challenges, the government is reportedly exploring measures to boost consumer spending. One such measure under consideration for the financial year 2025-2026 budget is making personal income up to Rs 15 lakh per annum tax-free. Speculations suggest that the government is actively working in this direction, and the decision on tax cuts in the upcoming budget appears almost certain. Taxation is currently governed by two systems: the old tax regime (OTR) and the new tax regime (NTR). A reduction in tax liability would particularly benefit salaried employees, increasing their disposable income. This would lead to higher consumer spending, ultimately helping the economy recover from its slowdown. For the financial stability and development of middle-class families, the central government's decision to make personal income up to Rs 15 lakh per annum tax-free in the 2025-2026 budget is crucial. This move would play a vital role in ensuring better financial planning and stability for the middle class.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Ponda

PROFIT OVER HUMANITY

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

Koneru wins World Rapid Chess Champion



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

Indian Chess Champions has marvelled the entire world, be that the moment of India becoming the FIDE Chess Olympiad 2024 winner in Budapest, D Gukesh becoming the World Chess champion at the age of 18 in Singapore, and now Ms Koneru Humpy clinching her second FIDE World Rapid Crown in New York. This year in 2024 particularly, India spent a considerably wonderful time at the podium top stairs, enjoying many titles and trophies.

The chess prowess of Indians need no introduction today, thanks to our chess masters and grandmasters. Especially the young chess players deserve the epitome of appreciation for their wonderful game spirit, patience and sincere grit behind every move of check and mates.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S LIBERALISATION ARCHITECT

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

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

The teachers who shaped my life: Lessons beyond the classroom

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

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

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



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

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



SANJAY CHANDRA

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



FIRST COLUMN OVERCOMING THE GRIP OF FEARFUL THOUGHTS

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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

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

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



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

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

Assessing efficacy and challenges of compensatory afforestation

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

Compensatory Afforestation (CA) relates to the mitigation of environmental damage caused by the diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes and is a mandatory requirement for obtaining clearances under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980; now Van (Sanrakshanevam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam (VSSA) 1980 and Rules. The Government of India guidelines state that normally CA must be carried out on a suitable non-forest land equal to the forest area proposed for diversion and for minimizing the adverse impact on the micro-ecology, such land should be located as near as possible to the diverted area. If suitable non-forest land is unavailable, CA may be carried out on degraded forest land equal to twice the area of the diverted forest land. The unavailability of non-forest land in a district is certified by the District Collector and in the exceptional case of its unavailability in the whole state/union territory (UT), the chief secretary has to certify accordingly and CA land may be identified preferably in a neighbouring state/UTs regards CA, the Government of India guidelines of 2017 and 2019 emphasised compensation for loss of land by land and that of trees by trees. They indicate that at least 1000 plants are to be planted in one hectare and in case 1000 plants are not possible to be accommodated, the balance may be planted in some other government forest identified by the state government. The states having more than 75% forest cover, however, are exempted from the task of procuring non-forest land for CA. Their CA can be taken up in states with deficient forest land/cover. As regards size, lands smaller than 5 hectares can also be accepted for CA if it is contiguous to a wildlife conservation area like National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries. Area equivalence criterion often leads to an understanding that any forest can be equated with tree plantations of any kind but the concept of Net Present Value (NPV) is additionally used to calculate the worth of diverted forests by attaching a monetary value to a whole range of goods and services provided by them. This amount is recovered from the project proponent.

The World Bank's 2002 strategy elaborates the NPV to include goods and services like wood and non-wood items, ecosystem services, support to wildlife, climate regulation, soil & water conservation and flood prevention, carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, health support systems and non-material benefits which may be spiritual, inspirational, recreational, aesthetic, educational etc. Its value thus extends far beyond economics and considering the interest of different stakeholders, the values of different components may also vary, such as the cultural significance of a tree species versus its commercial value as timber. The January 2022 guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) have clubbed the forests of India into six Eco-classes to realize NPV instead of diverted forest land. Out of them, class I includes Tropical Wet Evergreen Forests, Tropical Semi Evergreen Forests, and Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests, while class II contains Littoral and Swamp Forests.



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

Interestingly, the per hectare value of NPV for both these classes has been kept the same, an equality that appears surprising. It is crucial to arrive at a monetized figure for a unit of Nature/biodiversity and ensure that investing in it will offset the loss caused by diversion. Simultaneous sustainable development of biodiversity is of course a formidable challenge. Accordingly, any oversimplification of biodiversity assessment can lead to inaccuracies and undermine genuine conservation efforts. The limitations faced in offsetting losses just through CA are amply covered by CAG reports. Unfortunately, the resource position at the world level also, despite the wrath of climate change being faced globally, shows an annual funding gap of about USD 700 billion in nature conservation. Against the above background, the proposed CA and NPV to mitigate the diversion of forest land in the 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island' (GNI) project is worth a look. The Rs72,000 crore investment will divert 130.75 sq. km. of forest land for infrastructure development that includes a trans-shipment port, an airport, a power plant, a defence base, an industrial park, and a township. The project involves the felling of an estimated one million trees with habitat destruction that would also impact the life, livelihood, and forest rights of the Shompen; a particularly vulnerable hunter-and-gatherer tribal group. The MoEFCC claims to have incorporated into the project some exemplary mitigation measures, including compensatory afforestation, into the project in compliance with the provisions of the VSSA 1980 while securing India's strategic national and defence interests. Out of the total CA area of 26,000 hectares, locating 24,354 hectares in Haryana is justified by highlight-

ing that planting native species in arid landscapes and near urban areas is of greater ecological value. Talks are said to be on with the Madhya Pradesh government for situating the balanced CA area. The CA in Aravali's arid/semi-arid region, approximately 2,400 kilometres away, to compensate for the loss of pristine rainforests of Great Nicobar is a significant departure from the guideline regarding the positioning of CA land. Reportedly, the CA with ₹3000 crore's investment is expected to be mostly a revival plan to improve the soil texture and fertility and to make stone boundary walls since the proposed area already has root stock requiring just protection and supplemental planting wherever required. Indicative of the natural limits imposed by edaphic, geographical, and climatic factors, the Forest Survey of India (FSI) 2021 report on forest status shows that the carbon stock per hectare in A&N forests is fourth highest in the country; next only to Himachal, Sikkim, and J&K while Haryana has the second lowest; next only to Delhi. This fact does raise questions regarding the possibility and efficacy of compensating adequately Nicobar's loss of carbon stock and biomass by investing CA money in Haryana. Considering the aspect of NPV, it is worth noting that Nicobar Island forests are more like that of Malaysia and Indonesia while the Andaman Islands' flora is more akin to the species found in Myanmar, Thailand, and Northeast India. FSI's rapid biodiversity assessment in A&N islands in 2018-19 found that shrubs and herbs together were more than double the number of trees. Many species found there do not occur in mainland India. The understorey and emergent layers with profuse regeneration, herbs, and

shrubs indicate a vibrant ecosystem wherein approximately half of the mammals, a third of the birds, a quarter of the reptiles, and over a tenth of flowering plants are endemic. A crucial for the habitat rights of the Shompen tribe notwithstanding, it is home to the endangered Nicobar Megapode and Leatherback Turtle, and has over twenty thousand coral reefs in its vicinity. In 1989, The UNESCO declared a significant portion of the island as a biosphere reserve. Despite such uniqueness, distinctive parameters, and ecological significance; its NPV per hectare is exactly equal to the forests in Eco-classes I and II. GNI is just one project. An in-depth analysis of forest land diversion cases can provide, in addition to actionable issues related to limitations and risks in offsetting just through the prevalent CA and NPV model, important insights into ways to minimize harm to Nature, redeemability of loss to forest ecosystems, correct determination of NPV, efficient investments in Nature recovery and restoration initiatives, handling of habitat rights of the primitive tribes and pre-agricultural communities, and regulations needed to ensure accountability. Nature's monetization and biodiversity markets are fast emerging as potential funding sources for conservation. Their effectiveness demands an honest valuation of diverted forests and a strict implementation of conservation strategies. The outcomes depend on those having the power to decide. Only time will tell, but the decisions made today will echo through the annals of history shaping the destiny of our country and of humanity itself. (The writers are former PCCFs of U.P. and Maharashtra; views are personal)

Indian agriculture and climate change: Challenges and strategies

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

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



PRAVESH SHARMA

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

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

nificant soil erosion and exacerbates the length of dry spells. Deviations in the hydrological cycle are contributing to extreme events, such as floods caused by intense rainfall or droughts triggered by prolonged dry spells, impacting different parts of the country.

- 2. Temperature Rise:** Rising temperatures pose a greater threat to tropical countries like India, which already operate near the higher end of the temperature spectrum. Elevated temperatures influence various climatic factors, adversely impacting crop production. For instance, extreme heat reduces fruit setting in citrus crops and increases transpiration losses in vegetables.
- 3. Livestock and Poultry Impact:** Climate variability also affects animal production

and reproduction. Increased temperatures and higher temperature-humidity index levels lead to reduced feed intake, lower milk yields, and decreased meat and egg quality. Poultry, in particular, suffers from heat stress, resulting in thinner eggshells and increased egg breakage.

- 4. Pests and Diseases:** Climate change influences the population, survival, and geographic distribution of pests and diseases. Rising temperatures and humidity levels create favorable conditions for pest proliferation, making control measures more challenging and unpredictable.

Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies

Adaptation to climate change involves anticipating adverse impacts and taking proactive



measures to minimize damage or leverage emerging opportunities. Given that most Indian farmers are smallholders with limited coping capacity, building resilience is key.

- 1. Water Resource Management:** Enhancing rainwater productivity through scientific rainwater harvesting, recycling, and precision water use is essential. Improved irrigation techniques and water budgeting can mitigate the impact of erratic rainfall.

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

local communities in production system management and raising awareness about climate-resilient practices is vital. Farmers, consumers, and markets must be educated to embrace sustainable agriculture practices that align with cultural and social contexts. Government Initiatives to Address Climate Change

The Government of India has taken several steps to combat climate change.

National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC): Guided by the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, the NAPCC includes the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), focusing on resource conservation, soil health, integrated farming, and water-use efficiency.

National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA): This initiative provides scientific and technical guidance for sustainable agricultural development. Key Program Interventions: Policies like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, National Food Security Mission, and Soil Health Card Scheme aim to enhance soil health, water efficiency, and farm productivity.

District Agricultural Contingency Plans: These plans provide integrated solutions for crop, livestock, and fishery challenges arising from weather anomalies, supporting farmers during extreme conditions. (The writer is a retired IAS officer; the views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Gold rises Rs 150 to Rs 79,350 per 10 gms

Gold prices rose Rs 150 to Rs 79,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Traders said the potential for upside appears to be limited for gold in the short term, as the market participants are primarily focused on Trump's tariff measures and economic policy, which could determine the direction of the metal next year. The precious metal settled at Rs 79,200 per 10 grams in the previous trading session on Friday. However, silver traded flat at Rs 91,700 per kg on Monday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 150 to Rs 78,950 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 78,800 per 10 grams on Friday. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery slipped Rs 41 or 0.05 per cent to Rs 76,503 per 10 grams. "Gold trading within the range of Rs 76,400-76,750 in MCX. With global markets entering the holiday period for New Year celebrations, trading volumes were thin, and market activity was subdued."



Air Kerala to start operations by June 2025

Upcoming airline Air Kerala on Monday said it is planning to start operations by June next year with the first flight from the Kannur International Airport. Without disclosing the maiden destination, the upcoming airline, which has already put in place all key positions, including of the CEO and CFO, said it has inked a pact with private airport operator Kannur International Airport Ltd (KIAL) to start flight services on regional routes. As part of the agreement between the two companies, Air Kerala initially will have a substantial number of departures from Kannur, to nearby domestic destinations within a flying range of one-and-a-half hour. Infrastructure is already available at Kannur Airport and as an entrant to the aviation industry, the airport management has offered Air Kerala all support in setting up base at Kannur, Air Kerala Chairman Afi Ahmed said.



Rs 17,581 cr invested under PLI scheme for specialty steel

Companies have invested Rs 17,581 crore under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for specialty steel till October 2024, the government said on Monday. To encourage domestic production of 'specialty steel' and lower imports by drawing in capital investments, the government introduced the PLI scheme for specialty steel. "As of October 2024, companies have already invested Rs 17,581 crore and generated over 8,660 in employment," the steel ministry said in a statement. Participating companies have committed to an investment of Rs 27,106 crore, direct employment of 14,760 and estimated production of 7.90 million tonnes of 'specialty steel' identified in the scheme. The ministry earlier said investments in the steel sector have a long gestation period and depend on factors such as procurement of various equipment, many of which are from abroad.

Prospects of economy expected to improve: RBI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Facing criticism from the government over the central bank prioritising inflation over growth, the new RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Monday said that prospects of the Indian economy are expected to improve on the back of high consumer and business confidence in 2025.

"As we strive to preserve financial stability to support a higher growth path for the Indian economy, our focus remains steadfast on maintaining stability of financial institutions and, more broadly, systemic stability," Malhotra said in the foreword to the Financial Stability Report.

He further said that despite the global uncertainties Indian economy is expected to pick up pace in the second half of the current financial year.

"Notwithstanding the uncertainties shrouding the global macro-financial ethos as it unfolds, prospects for the Indian economy are expected to improve after the slowdown in the pace of economic activity in the first half of 2024-25."

"Consumer and business confidence for the year ahead remain high and the investment scenario is brighter as corporations step into 2025 with robust balance sheets and high profitability," said Malhotra who took over as 26th Governor earlier this month.



Flagging the issue of growth moderation in the first half, the Finance Ministry in its November Monthly Economic Review had raised concerns that the possibility that structural factors may also have contributed to the slowdown in H1 should not be ruled out.

India recorded a slowdown in GDP growth to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent for the second quarter ended September 2024. For the first half, the GDP growth stood at 6 per cent.

Slowdown in growth and moderation in inflation are building case for RBI to slash policy rate in its upcoming Monetary Policy Committee meeting.

Malhotra further said that financial sector regulators in India too are intensifying reforms and sharpening their surveillance against the backdrop of the soundness of the financial system bolstered by

robust earnings, low levels of impaired assets and strong capital buffers, as this report highlights.

Stress test results reveal that capital levels of the banking system as well as of the Non-banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) sector will remain well above the regulatory minimum even under adverse stress scenarios, he said.

"We continue to secure and anchor public trust and confidence to support India's aspirational goals. We remain committed to developing a modern financial system that is customer-centric, technologically leveraged and financially inclusive," he said.

Referring to the global economy, he said, it exhibits resilience in the face of formidable headwinds from political and economic policy uncertainty, persisting conflicts and an environment of fragmenting international trade and tariffs.

Adani to exit Adani Wilmar, raise over \$2 bn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group on Monday announced its exit from FMCG joint venture Adani Wilmar by selling its entire stake to the Singaporean partner and in the open market for an estimated over USD 2 billion.

In a statement, Adani Enterprises Ltd said it will sell a 31.06 per cent stake to Wilmar International. Another 13 per cent will be sold in the open market to meet minimum public shareholding requirements.

It, however, did not give the price at which it was selling the stake.

"With this, AEL will fully exit Adani Wilmar Ltd," it said.

"Adani's nominee directors will step down from the board of Adani Wilmar Ltd."

The transaction is likely to conclude before March 31, 2025.



PRE-BUDGET MEET

India Inc seeks cut in personal income tax rates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Representatives from industry bodies sought reduction in personal income tax rates to ensure higher disposable income in the hands of the middle class, reduction in excise duty on fuel, and measures to provide impetus to employment-intensive sectors in their customary pre-Budget meeting with the Finance Minister on Monday.

Industry bodies also raised the issue of dumping of excess stock by China globally, including in India, and challenges posed to food security and inflation due to the "climate emergency", during the fifth pre-Budget consultation meeting.

The 2025-26 Union Budget will be presented on February 1. Apart from the finance minister, the meeting was attended by finance secretary, secretary of DIPAM (Department of Investment and Public Asset Management), Secretaries of the Department of Economic Affairs and the Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India, among others.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, CII President Sanjiv Puri said while the Indian econ-

omy is doing very well, globally there are a lot of challenges.

"We are seeing dumping of a lot of products (by China) into various parts of the world, including India. We also have the issue of climate emergency, which, besides other things, also impacts food and nutrition, (food) security and inflation. In this context we have made several suggestions and ideas".

He said the CII has sought measures to provide impetus to



areas that have large employment potential like garments, footwear, tourism, furniture, among others, apart from making suggestions for MSMEs and integrating India into global value chains.

"From a perspective of boosting consumption, we have suggested that there be some relief provided to income tax up to a Rs 20 lakh on the marginal income tax rate so that it boosts consumption, there is more disposable income and in turn also leads to buoyancy in revenues."

Rupee falls 4 paise to close at 85.52 against US dollar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee dropped 4 paise to 85.52 (provisional) against the US dollar in early trade on Monday, as dollar demand from importers, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities dented investor sentiments.

Forex traders said the rupee witnessed heavy volatility on Friday as well on Monday amid significant dollar demand linked to the expiry of December currency futures and maturing positions in the outstanding forwards.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and witnessed an intra-day low of 85.59 and a high of 85.43 against the American currency. The local unit settled for the day at 85.52 (provisional), registering a fall of 4 paise over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee registered the steepest fall in almost

two years to hit its lifetime intra-day low of 85.80 before a likely central bank intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 21 paise lower at a record low of 85.48 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strength in the US dollar and month-end dollar demand

from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs). Elevated crude oil prices and FII outflows may also put pressure on the local currency," said Anuj Choudhary -- Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

Choudhary added, "Any intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may support rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from Chicago PMI and pending home sales data from the US. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.30 to 85.85."

Airlines to mandatorily share int'l passenger data with Customs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Airlines will have to mandatorily share details of foreign travellers with the Indian Customs authorities from April 1, 2025, and non-compliance can attract penalties.

All air transport service providers operating flights to/from India will have to register with the National Customs Targeting Centre-Passenger (NCTC-Pax) by January 10, 2025, in order to comply with the requirement, according to a communication issued by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

Details ranging from mobile number, and payment mode to travel itinerary need to be shared with the authorities 24 hours before the departure of an international flight.

On August 8, 2022, the CBIC notified the 'Passenger Name Record Indirect Taxes and Customs Regulations, 2022' under which airlines were required to share passenger name record (PNR) details of foreign travellers with the Customs department.

SELLING IN BLUE-CHIPS, FII OUTFLOWS

Sensex drops by 451 pts, Nifty ends below 23,650

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex declined by nearly 451 points on Monday due to selling in heavyweight stocks HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Reliance Industries, weak global trends and unabated foreign fund outflows.

In a volatile trading session, the 30-share BSE barometer dropped by 450.94 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 78,248.13. As many as 23 of its constituents closed lower while seven closed with gains.

The barometer opened lower but recovered losses in the mid session to hit a high of 79,092.70.

The index failed to hold onto gains in the second half due to selling in bluechips and tanked 621.94 points or 0.79 per cent to touch a low of 78,077.13.

The NSE Nifty declined 168.50 points or 0.71 per cent to settle at 23,644.90 as 38 of its components fell and 11



closed higher.

Among Sensex shares, Tata Motors fell the most by 2.24 per cent. Titan, Tata Steel, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, ICICI Bank, Maruti, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Infosys were among the laggards.

Zomato, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers.

"The market began the week on a volatile note, ending with a loss of over half a per cent. After a flat opening, the Nifty gained ground in the first half but faced selling pressure in

heavyweight stocks across sectors, reversing its trajectory," Ajit Mishra -- SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.47 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.13 per cent.

"Prevailing subdued sentiment on account of FIIs selling and a strengthening dollar continued to drag the market. While IT & pharma gained as investors continued to bet on defensive stocks to prevent short-term volatility," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Reliance seeks premium for oil

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Industries Ltd is seeking a premium of at least USD 3.5 per barrel over an international benchmark for crude oil it produces for eastern offshore KG-D6 block, according to the tender the firm put out on Monday.

Reliance and its partner BP of the UK sought bids from domestic refiners for sale of 17,600 barrels (2,800 kilolitres) of crude oil every month from April 2025 to February 2026.

The crude oil has been priced at daily average price of Nigerian Bonny Light grade of crude oil plus USD 1.5 per



barrel quality premium. Bidders have to quote a premium over this price, the tender document said.

Bonny Light last traded for USD 73.5 per barrel. On top of this, USD 1.5 per barrel is added as a composite premium "reflecting quality differ-

ential", it said, adding that interested buyers are required to a "biddable premium, up to one decimal place and greater than USD 2 per barrel".

The sale period can be extended by three months to one year on the same terms and conditions, including

pricing formula. Oil, which is turned into fuels like petrol and diesel when processed at refineries, will be delivered by the sellers at Gadimoga in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

Reliance holds 66.67 per cent interest in the predominantly gas-rich KG-DWN-98/3 block (KG-D6) in the Bay of Bengal. BP Exploration (Alpha) Ltd holds the remaining 33.33 per cent.

The two produce about 30 million standard cubic metres per day of gas from the block. A small quantity of crude oil is also produced, for which they have now sought bids.

India's housing market in de-growth phase

Pins hopes on Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New home sales in India declined for the first time since the pandemic, as a sharp rise in housing prices and elevated borrowing costs ruined buyers' appetite in 2024 and the real estate industry is now eyeing the upcoming Budget for favourable economic conditions -- a key to reviving demand conditions.

The de-growth in the Indian housing market came after three straight years of stellar growth, following the COVID-era downturn, and was attributed in part to a high base in the previous year, a fall in supply of new homes and price appreciation. Anuj Puri, Chairman of Anarock, one of the leading housing brokerage firms in the country, termed the year 2024 as a "mixed bag" for the Indian residential market and noted that, while demand for the affordable housing segment was weak, sales and launches of luxury homes remained strong.

India's residential real estate market, estimated to be valued

at over USD 300 billion, faced a marginal 4 per cent drop in sales volumes during 2024, according to data from consultant Anarock. After a 47 per cent decline in 2020, housing sales had grown by 71 per cent, 54 per cent and 31 per cent in 2021, 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Post-pandemic, the ultra-rich started lapping up luxurious flats, villas and penthouses at launch itself and this year was no different.

"No doubt, the central and state elections played spoilsport to some extent, but it would also be fair to attribute at least some of the decline to the high base considering that in 2023 both new launches and sales had attained all-time high peaks," Puri said.

Going forward, he expects the housing market to stabilize in 2025, with muted growth in prices, as against an average 21 per cent year-on-year rise this year. "Much also depends on what the upcoming Union Budget holds in store," Puri said.

Sebi to auction 23 properties of 9 companies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Monday said it has scheduled an auction of 23 properties belonging to nine firms, such as Tower Infotech and Vibgyor Group of Companies in February, aimed to recoup funds illicitly collected from investors.

Additionally, GBC Industrial Corporation, Waris Group, Pincon Group, Kolkata Weir Industries Ltd (KWIL), Annex Infrastructure India, I-core Group and MPS Group were the other firms whose properties will also be auc-

tioned. The process for the sale of the companies' assets has been initiated by the markets watchdog following the orders of Calcutta High Court.

The properties include plots, apartments and buildings located in West Bengal. It will be auctioned at a reserve price of Rs 55 crore, according to a notice issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

Justice Sailendra Prasad Talukdar has been appointed as the one-man committee for liquidating the assets of the



firm and repaying the investors. The move is part of Sebi's effort to recover investors' money.

Adroit Technical Services

has been engaged by Sebi to assist it in the sale of the properties.

Of the 23 properties, seven each belong to Tower Infotech

and Vibgyor Group, two each related to the Waris Group and GBC Industrial Corporation and the rest belong to MPS Group, I-Core Group, Annex Infrastructure India, KWIL and Pincon Group.

Sebi on behalf of the committee is inviting bids for the sale of the properties from the bidders. The regulator said the auction will be auctioned online on February 6, 2025, from 11 am to 1 pm.

The markets watchdog has asked the bidders to make their own independent enquiries regarding the

encumbrances, litigations, title of the properties put on auction and claims, before submitting their bid.

These firms had mopped up money from investors without complying with regulatory norms. Vibgyor Allied Infrastructure had issued optionally fully convertible debentures in 2009 and raised Rs 61.76 crore.

Tower Infotech had raised nearly Rs 46 crore through the issuance of non-convertible debentures and redeemable preference shares between 2005 and 2010.

what's brewing?

Linda Lavin passes away at 87



Linda Lavin took her last breathe in Los Angeles on Sunday of complications from recently discovered lung cancer, according to her representative, Bill Veloric. A success on Broadway, Lavin tried her luck in Hollywood in the mid-1970s. She was chosen to star in a CBS sitcom based on *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, the Martin Scorsese-directed film that won Ellen Burstyn an Oscar for playing the waitress in the title. Lavin became a role model for working mothers as Alice Hyatt, a widowed woman working in a roadside diner while raising a 12-year-old son. The show, with Lavin singing the theme song *There's A New Girl In Town*, ran from 1976 to 1985.

Lavin soon went on to win a Tony for best actress in a play for Neil Simon's Broadway *Bound* in 1987. She was working as December promoting a new Netflix series in which she appears, *No Good Deed* and filming a forthcoming Hulu series, *Mid-Century Modern*, according to Deadline, which first reported her death. Famous producer and director Hal Prince gave Lavin her first big break while directing the Broadway musical *It's a Bird... It's a Plane... It's Superman*. She earned a Tony nomination in Simon's *Last of the Red Hot Lovers* in 1969 before winning 18 years later for Broadway *Bound*.



SONU SOOD'S FATEH-FUL HOMECOMING

Punjab roared with pride and emotion as its beloved son, Sonu Sood, returned to his homeland to promote his upcoming cybercrime-based action extravaganza, *Fateh*. At the break of dawn, Sonu began his journey at Amritsar's iconic Golden Temple, seeking blessings for his directorial debut. Knowing that a visit to Punjab is incomplete without its culinary delights, he indulged in an authentic Punjabi lunch at a dhaba, a fitting nod to his roots. The day took a patriotic turn as he reached the Wagah Border to salute the valor of India's jawans. While at Wagah, Sonu also visited Check Post 102, the historic partition boundary marking India and Pakistan. The

crowd present during the ceremony cheered enthusiastically, thrilled to see their hometown star in such a meaningful setting. Upon watching the electrifying parade alongside soldiers, Sonu offered them a glimpse of *Fateh*. Its trailer shows Sonu in the role of an ex-special ops officer with a lethal skill set, on a mission to dismantle a cybercrime network threatening innocent lives. With Jacqueline Fernandez, Naseeruddin Shah and Vijay Raaz joining him, the film promises to be a gripping ride. Sonu Sood says, "Punjab is my homeland and stepping into the role of a director, I knew this journey

had to begin at the Golden Temple, where my film opens. Growing up here has shaped who I am and every return fills me with gratitude and pride. As we prepare to present our film to the audience, seeking blessings at the Golden Temple and witnessing the parade at Wagah Border have been very calming and motivating. The patriotism that this soil instills are treasures I carry with me every step of the way." Produced by Umesh KR Bansal of Zee Studios and Sonali Sood of Shakti Sagar Productions, co-produced by Ajay Dhama, *Fateh*, a gripping tale of courage, resilience, and the fight against cybercrime, is slated to release on January 10, 2025.

ANANYA PANDAY OPENS UP ABOUT LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

Actress Ananya Panday, who is rumored to be in a relationship with Walker Blanco, has shared her thoughts on managing a long-distance relationship. Walker, a former model currently working at Anant Ambani's animal shelter, Vantara, was first linked to Ananya after they were spotted together at Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's wedding in July. According to reports, Ananya introduced Walker as her "partner" during the event, where he accompanied her as her date. Now in a latest interview, Ananya was candid about the challenges and dynamics of long-distance relationships. "I believe it's sometimes healthy to have space in a relationship," she explained. "Not meeting for four to five days is manageable, and even two months apart can be fine. Distance often makes the heart grow fonder." Ananya, who is currently filming the second season of *Call Me Bae* for Prime Video, reflected on how her perspective on relationships has evolved over the years. The actress shared that she used to adapt herself completely to her partner's interests, sometimes changing her own preferences to align with theirs. "In the past, I would spend less time with my friends or make changes in my life, even without my partner asking. I felt it was something I needed to do," she admitted. However, Ananya revealed that she has since grown more comfortable in her own skin, which has positively influenced her relationships. "Now, I'm in a better place where I feel comfortable being myself," she said. "I strive to balance my identity with that of my partner, and I believe both individuals can be happy without losing themselves in the process." The CTRL actress emphasized the importance of authenticity in relationships. "I would rather be true to myself than pretend to be someone I'm not just to make a relationship work. That would never work in the long run," she explained.



Gal Gadot reveals she underwent surgery for 'massive blood clot' during fourth pregnancy

Wonder Woman star Gal Gadot has revealed that she underwent emergency surgery for a "massive blood clot" in her brain during the eighth month of her recent pregnancy. The 39-year-old actor gave birth to her and husband-entrepreneur Jaron Varsano's fourth child, daughter Ori, in early March. In an Instagram post, Gadot detailed her medical emergency called cerebral venous thrombosis (CVT), saying this year has been "one of profound challenges and deep reflections." "And I've wrestled with how, or even if, to share a personal story... In February, during my eighth month of pregnancy, I was diagnosed

with a massive blood clot in my brain. For weeks, I had endured excruciating headaches that confined me to bed until I finally underwent an MRI that revealed the terrifying truth," she wrote. "We rushed to the hospital, and within hours, I underwent emergency surgery. My daughter, Ori, was born during that moment of uncertainty and fear. Her name, meaning 'my light,' wasn't chosen by chance," she added. During her health crisis, Gadot said she and her family were faced with how "fragile" life can be. "It was a stark reminder of how quickly everything can change and in the midst of a difficult year, all I wanted was to hold on and live." In the post, she also thanked the staff and doctors at the hospital where she gave birth to Ori, adding she is "fully

healed and filled with gratitude for the life I've been given back." "The journey has taught me so much. First, it's vital to listen to our bodies and trust what they're telling us. Pain, discomfort, or even subtle changes often carry deeper meaning and being attuned to your body can be life-saving," she said. The actor said awareness matters. "I had no idea that 3 in 100,000 pregnant women in the 30s+ age group are diagnosed with CVT (develop a blood clot in the brain). It's so important to identify early because it's treatable." While rare, it's a possibility, and knowing it exists is the first step to addressing it. Sharing this is not meant to frighten anyone but to empower. If even one person feels compelled to take action for their health because of this story, it will have been worth sharing." Gadot shares daughters Alma, 13, Maya, seven and Daniella, three, with Varsano.



Karan Aujla's 'iconic moment' as Asha Bhosle croons to Tauba Tauba

Punjabi singer Karan Aujla says he feels blessed after "the living goddess of music" Asha Bhosle performed his superhit song *Tauba Tauba* at her concert in Dubai over the weekend. Earlier this year, Aujla made headlines with the chartbuster featuring Vicky Kaushal and Tripti Dimri in the movie *Bad Newz*. Reels of fans trying to copy the complicated hookstep of *Tauba Tauba*, choreographed by Bosco Martis, also dominated social media platforms in 2024. On Monday morning, videos of 91-year-old Bhosle singing the song and also shaking a leg to the beats at her Dubai concert on Sunday went viral on the Internet. "I wrote it at 27, she sang it at 91 better than me," Aujla wrote on his Instagram Stories. Aujla posted a clip of the music icon grooving to *Tauba Tauba* on his Instagram Stories and

expressed his admiration for Bhosle. "Asha Bhosle ji, the living Goddess of music, just performed *Tauba Tauba*. A song written by a kid that grew up in a small village, with no music background and no knowledge of musical instruments. A melody made by someone who doesn't play any instrument," he wrote. The singer said the song has received a lot of recognition from the fans but it was "iconic" to see Bhosle perform the number. "This moment is truly iconic and one I will never forget. I am truly blessed and thankful. This has really inspired me to keep giving you all such melodies and create more memories together," he wrote. Aujla on Sunday performed in Jaipur as part of his *It Was All A Dream* tour. He will next have a concert in Ahmedabad on December 31.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



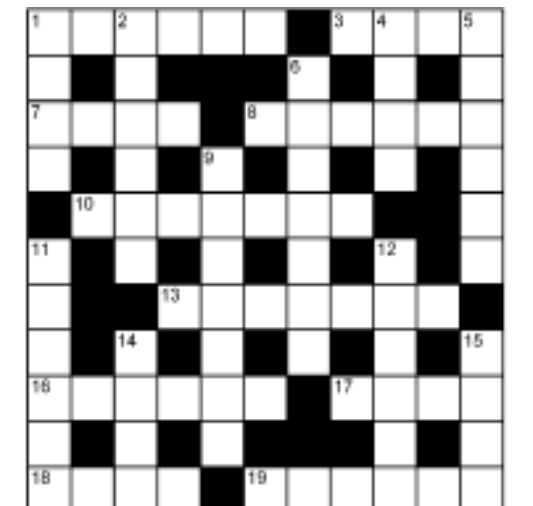
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution
 7 6 3 8 4 2 9 1 5
 8 4 2 5 9 1 7 6 3
 5 9 1 7 3 6 4 2 8
 2 3 8 9 7 5 6 4 1
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 6 7 4 2 1 3 8 5 9
 1 5 7 3 6 8 2 9 4
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 4 8 9 1 2 7 5 3 6

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

ACROSS

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

DOWN

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONTENT OVER CASH

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

ARTICLE 370

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



BHOOR BHULAIYAA 3

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

STREE 2

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



SHAITAAN



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

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

CREW

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

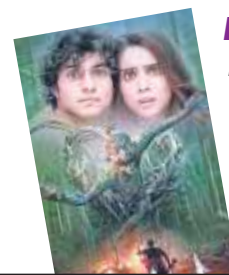


KILL

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



MUNJYA



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

BREATHING PLASTICS

Health risks of inhaling airborne microplastics

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

WHAT ARE AIRBORNE MICROPLASTICS?

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

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

HARMFUL EFFECTS

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



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

TACKLING THE ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

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

Australia beat India by 184 runs in fourth Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said. "The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple of overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared the difference between the teams. After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire. Pant and Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said. "The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple of overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared the difference between the teams. After dismissing Nissanka, Duffy produced a superb yorker to remove Perera in the 16th over when Sri Lanka was 127-4 and still in with a good chance. He then removed Wanindu Hasaranga (1) and Maheesh Theekshana (0) in the space of three balls in the 18th over as the Sri Lanka tail again failed to fire.

New Zealand beats Sri Lanka by 45 runs in second T20

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI

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



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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

Jaiswal's caught-behind dismissal sparks controversy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

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



The left-hander argued with the on-field umpires over the decision before walking back. "In my view the decision was out. The third umpire did make the correct decision in the end," Former ICC Elite Panel umpire Simon Taufel told Channel 7. "With the technology protocols, we do have a hierarchy of redundancy and when the umpire sees a clear deflection off the bat there is no need to go any further and use any other form of technology to prove the case. "The clear deflection is conclusive evidence. In this particular case what we have seen from the third umpire, is they've used a secondary form of technology, which for whatever reason hasn't shown the same conclusive evidence of audio to back up the clear deflection. "In the end the third umpire did the right thing and went back to the clear deflection and overturned the umpire field. So, in my view correct decision made," he added. This incident follows a similar controversy in the opening Test in Perth, where opener KL Rahul's dismissal sparked a debate. After on-field umpire Richard Kettleborough had ruled in Rahul's favour following Australia's appeal, the home team used DRS to challenge the decision. Third umpire Richard Illingworth had overturned the call despite not having the benefit of a split-screen view which would have given him a clearer picture of whether the Mitchell Starc delivery actually grazed the bat or the snicko responded to a hit on the pads.

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

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

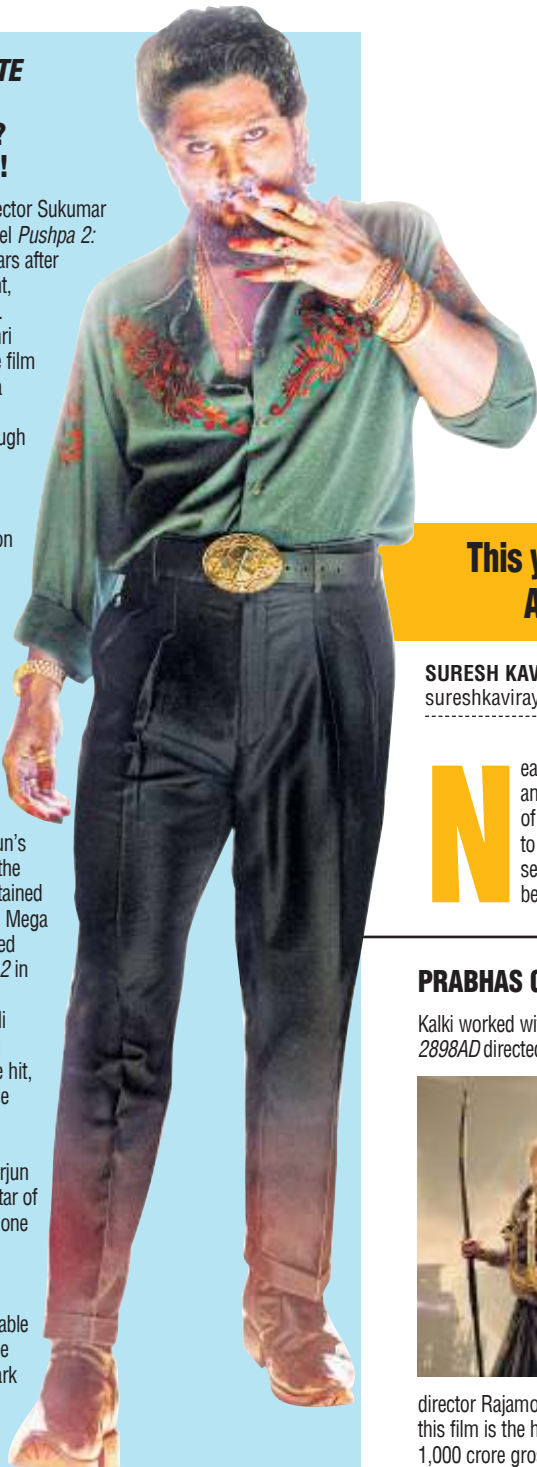
TOLLYWOOD'S 2024

WHAT WORKED AND WHAT NOT!

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

PUSHPA ANTE FLOWER AKUNTIVA? BRAND IDDI!

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



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

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

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

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

PRABHAS GOES SCI-FI WITH KALKI 2898AD

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



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

HITS

JR NTR BREAKS THE RAJAMOULI 'CURSE' WITH DEVARA

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



UNSTOPPABLE SIDDHU GADU

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



THE MIGHTY HANUMAN: A SUPERHERO EMERGES

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



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

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

HITS

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

FLOPS

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

FLOPS

GUNTUR KAARAM MISSES THE SPICE

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



SONG OF THE YEAR: KURCHI MADATHAPETTI

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

RAVI TEJA'S DOUBLE DISASTERS

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



GOPICHAND'S HUNT FOR SUCCESS

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

OPERATION FAILURE FOR VARUN TEJ

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

SAINDHAV: A SANKRANTHI DISAPPOINTMENT FOR VENKATESH

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



VIJAY DEVERAKONDA'S CONTINUED STRUGGLE

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

OTHER BOX-OFFICE DISAPPOINTMENTS

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

MIXED RESPONSE FOR DUBBED FILMS

Vijay Sethupathi's *Maharaja* received positive reviews and was declared a hit in Telugu. *Amaran*, starring Sai Pallavi and Siva Karthikeyan, was also a big hit. Rajinikanth's *Vettaiyan*, directed by TJ Gnanavel and co-starring Fahad Faasil and Rana Daggubati, performed well at the box office. Dhanush's *Raayan*, which he also directed, received positive talk and emerged as a winner. However, Suriya's *Kanguva*, directed by Siva, was a major disappointment despite high expectations and aggressive promotions. Bollywood actor Bobby Deol played the villain in this film. Vijay's *GOAT*, directed by Venkat Prabhu, also disappointed despite its big star cast. Director Shankar and Kamal Haasan's combination *Indian 2* tanked at the box office.

DOUBLE ISMART: A DISAPPOINTING SEQUEL

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

