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Published From: HYDERABAD DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL RAIPUR CHANDIGARH BHUBANESWAR RANCHI DEHRADUN VIJAYAWADA

QUOTE OF THE DAY The pioneer

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy failed to secure even pass marks in any public survey conducted last year. The discontent among people has been consistent across all sections, reflecting poorly on the Congress Government's performance. Ask anyone, and the response is the same. People are unhappy with Revanth's governance



- Harish Rao, BRS MLA P4

SpaDeX precursor to India's own space station: Jitendra

'I'VE MOVED past dwelling on what's not happening—gratitude drives me forward

Preity looks stunning as Princess Nemali in KANNAPPA

DON'T MISS... 'Govt committed to welfare of elderly'

Minister for Housing and I&PR K. Parthasarathi affirmed that the government is dedicated to the welfare of the elderly and differently-abled people...

Vijayanand assumes office as AP Chief Secy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

K. Vijayanand has officially assumed office as the new Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh at the State Secretariat on Tuesday evening...



Rampachodavaram until 1996 and also held the position of Project Director in the Rural Development Department...

CM vows poverty-free AP

Says illuminating lives of poor is true welfare

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday reiterated that true welfare lies in improving the lives of the poor...



He distributed monthly pensions to beneficiaries at Yanamandala in Palnadu district and personally visited a beneficiary's home...

He criticised the previous govt for mismanagement and destruction, but assured progress, including 198 Anna Canteens, GST removal for handloom workers...

Naidu highlighted the State Government's pension scheme, paying Rs 4,000 to 64 lakh beneficiaries...

Naidu visits Lord Kodandaram temple in Yamandala.

Manipur CM says sorry for ethnic strife

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday apologised for the ethnic conflict in the state which claimed over 250 lives...



New CS calls on CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand met Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu at his residence in Undavalli on Tuesday evening...

coordination between the state's top civil servant and the Chief Minister, ensuring smooth governance.

Vijayanand, who recently took charge at the State Secretariat, reaffirmed his commitment to working closely with the Chief Minister's office to enhance the state administration's efficiency.

CM Chandrababu Naidu vowed to transform Andhra Pradesh into a drought-free State through river interlinking and expressed confidence in the TDP's future with over 90 lakh party members.

that Andhra Pradesh is leading the country in pension distribution, with 64 lakh beneficiaries receiving Rs 4,000 per month.

ed. He also pointed out that industrialists, fearing the 'J' tax, avoided the state during that time, but assured that he was gradually restoring the State to its rightful path.

He also mentioned the establishment of 198 Anna Canteens, with more to be opened if needed. He noted that the GST on handloom workers had been removed...

The Chief Minister affirmed that the TDP has always prioritized water conservation and that transforming Andhra Pradesh into a drought-free State through river interlinking is a key goal.

Chandrababu Naidu celebrated the party membership crossing 90 lakh, calling it a historic achievement. He expressed confidence that his government would continue to work towards the development of the State...

Emerging technologies to drive job growth

Indian IT ecosystem is poised for a promising growth trajectory in the coming years with emerging technologies expected to witness a 20 per cent increase in new jobs in 2025...

Relief for Perni Nani in AP HC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) has received relief from the Andhra Pradesh High Court. The court heard a petition filed by Nani under the lunch motion procedure.

Notification for 340 liquor shops in a week



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has decided to allocate 10% of the liquor shops in the state to today tappers and other sub-communities...

Gamalla, Kalali, Srisayana, Shegidi, Goundla, Balija, Yatha, and Sondi, based on their population in specific areas. Applicants can apply for and pay fees for any number of shops...

Excise dept cracks down on illegal activities in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Prohibition & Excise Department of Andhra Pradesh has intensified its enforcement efforts, leading to significant action against illegal activities, including illicit distillation...

As per official data, between January 1 and December 31, 2024, the department registered 14,539 cases related to illicitly distilled (ID) liquor and jaggery.



City rings in New Year with spectacular celebrations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

New Year's Day celebrations were held on a grand scale in Vijayawada and surrounding areas on Tuesday night. Several event management organisations organised special programmes at various hotels...

General of Police, Ch. Dwaraka Tirumala Rao and NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu ordered strict security measures to prevent any incidents. The Vijayawada police were on high alert from Sunday night to prevent road accidents and other untoward incidents.

Meanwhile, several churches in Vijayawada held special prayers on the eve of New Year's celebrations, known as watch night services, to mark the end of the year and the beginning of the new one.

These services were held across various Christian denominations, including Moravian, Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Adventist, and Reformed Christian traditions.

DRONE SHOW, REMOTE-CONTROLLED LIFEBOUYS

Tech to meet tradition at Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cutting-edge technology will light up the night sky of Sangam during the upcoming Maha Kumbh, as a fleet of 2,000 drones will take off in the holy city of Prayagraj to depict the mythical 'Samudra Manthan' and the emergence of 'Amrit Kalash'.

The Union Culture Ministry on Tuesday said that Maha Kumbh 2025 is set to be a 'divine and digitally advanced event', reflecting the 'seamless integration' of spirituality and technology.

Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be organised from January 13 to February 26 to showcase India's rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions.



tradition while embracing technology, 360-degree virtual reality stalls

will be set up in the fair area, officials said.

"These stalls will show videos of major events such as 'peshwai' (grand

procession of 'akhadas'), auspicious bathing days ('snaan'), 'Ganga aarti', and multiple special footage from the grand festival of faith and harmony," the ministry said in a statement.

A major attraction will be a drone show in the night skies of the holy city. "A fleet of 2,000 drones will narrate the legendary tales of 'Prayag Mahatmyam' and 'Samudra Manthan', creating a magical evening spectacle over the Sangam Nose," it said.

The drone show will also depict the emergence of 'Amrit Kalash' (nectar pot), creating a "magical visual narrative in the evening sky", the statement said. The show will further highlight the religious and spiritual significance of Prayagraj, offering a unique experience for pilgrims and locals, it added.

Govts taking consumers for granted on power tariff

Given long-standing inefficiencies in the utilities following unbundling of the power sector, it appears that consumers are being taken for granted by successive governments over power tariff, be it hike or collection of true-up charges. No section of power consumers in society is spared when it comes to periodical increases in power tariff by the government of the day, regardless of the party or grouping in power.



In the past, Governments did apply their mind on proposals for hiking power charges. In the process, they exempted domestic power users to some extent based on their usage of power units. That is, the lesser the consumption, the more they gained in terms of free units and by way of lower-priced tariff for consumption over 100 units.

In the past, Governments did apply their mind on proposals for hiking power charges. In the process, they exempted domestic power users to some extent based on their usage of power units. That is, the lesser the consumption, the more they gained in terms of free units and by way of lower-priced tariff for consumption over 100 units.

provision of 100 units of free power, leaving down-trodden sections of society in the lurch. A responsible government should consider the interests of all sections of society.

consumers will have to pay extra money for the power they had used in the past in addition to the payment previously made. Imagine those living in rented houses moving their residence and newcomers having to pay for the previous tenants' consumption.



M D RATNA KUMAR Senior Journalist

resentment, the present government has moved forward with proposals to net additional power tariff to the tune of Rs. 18,000 crore from consumers.

charges matter-of-factly, while consumers would feel the pinch. In this context, the present rulers may not face any immediate backlash from the people.

Party of India (Marxist) B. V. Raghavulu had participated in such meetings with ERC. All told, avoiding responsibility for effecting hike in power charges on the grounds that it is 'ERC's decision' is nothing but an act of escapism.

might get huge money from this decision, enabling it to meet its fiscal requirements substantially. Further, the ruling NDA can always blame the YSRCP for putting 'unbearable burden on the shoulders of people'.

10% dip in crime, thanks to technology: NTR dist CP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR district Police Commissioner SV Rajashekar Babu has stated that crime in the district decreased due to the department's focus on technology-driven policing. In 2023, 6,477 cases were reported, which dropped to 5,780 in 2024, marking a reduction of 10.76%.



a crucial role in responding to the Vijayawada floods, implemented cyber safety campaigns, and launched 'Cloud Patrols' using cloud-based monitoring tools.

2024 an inspiring year for TDP: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Wishing TDP leaders and activists a happy New Year, party supremo and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Tuesday evening, described 2024 as an inspiring year for all party leaders.

TDP had set a historic record in the country. "We have achieved the highest membership numbers in the entire country," he said.

signed, which would create 4 lakh jobs. He urged party leaders and activists to start preparing for the 2029 elections, stressing the importance of gathering public opinion and monitoring welfare schemes like pension payments.



Chandrababu assured that the people now have confidence in the government, which has brought the state back on track. He criticised the previous administration for making false promises like total prohibition and for poorly implementing schemes such as Rythu Bharosa and Cheyutha.

Naidu hijacking YSRCP ideas: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has criticised TDP leader N. Chandrababu Naidu for claiming credit for the Godavari-Banakacherla project, asserting that it was envisioned by the late Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and pursued by his son, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.



ren lands and provide water to the arid Rayalaseema region. The project, designed in three phases, aims to prevent Godavari floodwaters from flowing into the sea by diverting them through Krishna and eventually to Banakacherla via the Bollapalli reservoir.

TDP sets record in membership drive, extends deadline by 15 days

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has achieved a milestone in its membership registration drive, enrolling nearly 9.4 million members so far. The campaign, launched by party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on October 26, 2024, has witnessed an average of 1.5 lakh new members joining daily over the past 63 days.



trations during the festival season. This year's membership drive is being conducted entirely through digital platforms, marking a significant shift from traditional methods.

crore over the last five years on initiatives for the welfare of its party workers, a unique effort in the country. Additionally, all new members are provided with Rs 5 lakh accident insurance coverage.

Excise dept cracks down on ...

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister also approved an increase in the retail margin for liquor shops. The current margin stands at 10.5%, but liquor shop owners had requested an increase due to losses. After reviewing the situation, the government decided to raise the margin to 14%, aligning it with the rate offered in Telangana.

available at lower prices across the state to ensure widespread availability. Addressing the issue of belt shops (illegal liquor outlets), the Chief Minister took a firm stance. He ordered that liquor production, distribution, and sales be monitored using technology to prevent violations of regulations.

Amarnath raps coalition govt for broken promises

Former IT minister slams government for unaddressed welfare schemes, rising debt, and increased power tariffs, vows YSRCP will hold authorities accountable

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former IT minister Gudivada Amarnath on Tuesday expressed strong dissatisfaction with the NDA government's performance in the first six months of its tenure, accusing it of failing to deliver on its electoral promises and betraying the trust of the people.



the difference between a government that honours its promises and one that goes back on its word," Amarnath said, emphasising the government's broken promises to the public. He pointed out that crucial initiatives, such as the input subsidy and fee reimbursement for students, had not been addressed, while power tariffs had been hiked instead.

TODAY ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Dwitiya, Tritiya
Nakshatram: Uttara Ashadha, Shravana
Rahukalam: 12:19 PM to 1:42 PM
Yamagandam: 8:12 AM to 9:34 AM
Varjyam: 03:40 AM to 05:13 AM
Gulika: 10:57 AM to 12:19 PM
Amritakalam: 05:26 PM to 07:01 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 31°C
Humidity: 63%
Sunrise: 6:35 AM
Sunset: 5:45 PM
Updated: December 31, 2024 5:00 PM

Vijayanand assumes office as...

Continued from Page 1

From 2007 to 2008, Vijayanand served as the State Project Director for Planning and Programme Implementation. He was appointed Joint Managing Director of AP Transco from 2008 to 2009. Between 2016 and 2019, he held dual roles as Managing Director of AP Genco and CMD of AP Transco. In 2019, Vijayanand was appointed Chief Electoral Officer & Ex Officio Principal Secretary, overseeing critical election processes in the State.

renewable energy generation. The initiative is expected to attract investments worth ₹10,00,000 crore and create approximately 7,50,000 direct and indirect jobs. The policy focuses on solar, wind, hybrid resources, and green hydrogen, contributing to the state's energy self-sufficiency and supporting India's renewable energy goals.

Notification for 340 liquor ...

Continued from Page 1

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(illegal liquor outlets), the Chief Minister took a firm stance. He ordered that liquor production, distribution, and sales be monitored using technology to prevent violations of regulations. The CM emphasised that even if it results in a loss of revenue, the focus should remain on public welfare.

Relief for ...

Continued from Page 1

Despite having paid the recovery amount, the authorities continued to harass him, adding new charges. Nani's wife, Jayasudha, had already been granted anticipatory bail, but new notices were issued. Nani's family had paid Rs 1.68 crore as recovery, but a further Rs 1.67 crore was demanded by the Joint Collector of Krishna District, who issued fresh notices to Jayasudha.

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'Cold storage plants should have fire safety certificates'

● VMC Commissioner visits Kedareshwarapeta fruit market

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has instructed the Kedareshwarapeta Mango Market's fruit merchants that they should have trade licences. He directed them to follow fire safety measures for their cold storage plants to avoid accidents.

Dhyanchandra, along with the VMC officials, visited the Kedareshwarapeta Mango Market and inspected many shops and cold storage plants. He spoke to the traders regarding sanitation, fire safety measures, traffic regulation, and other issues.

Speaking on the occasion, Dhyanchandra said that every cold storage should have fire safety measures following the guidelines from the Fire Department, and obtain a fire safety certificate from the department. Those cold storage plants which have no fire safety certificates so far were given 30 days to obtain it.

Further, he asked the traders and the Mango Growers Association representatives to keep the market clean. He also directed that the vehicles coming to the market should create a traffic issue there.

Later, Commissioner



VMC Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra speaking to traders at Kedareshwarapeta Mango Market during his visit to the market in Vijayawada on Tuesday

Dhyanchandra visited the VMC Hospitals at Mutyalampadu, Gymkhana Grounds and Hanumanpeta in the city. He directed the officials concerned to improve health facilities in all VMC

Hospitals. If any hospital requires repair works, officials should take the necessary steps in this regard immediately, he added.

District Fire Officer Malyadri and Regional Fire Officer Venkateswara

Rao, Fire Station Officer Raja, VMC In charge Chief Medical Health Officer Dr Suresh Babu, Assistant Medical and Health Officer Dr Baba Srinivas, and others accompanied the Commissioner.

New APNGGO general secretary vows to address employees' issues

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Vidyasagar was sworn in as the newly elected State General Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted and Gazetted Officers (APNGGO) Association at the Gymkhana Grounds in Gandhinagar, Vijayawada, on Tuesday. The oath-taking ceremony was conducted by APNGGO Association President KV Siva Reddy, Vidyasagar, who also serves as the President of the West Krishna (NTR District) APNGGO Association, was unanimously elected as the state general secretary through a co-option election.

To mark this occasion, the APNGGO Association organised a grand oath-taking and felicitation programme at the Gymkhana Grounds. During the event, APNGGO leaders honoured President Siva Reddy and General Secretary Vidyasagar. Thousands of APNGGO leaders and employees participated in a large procession from the state office to the Gymkhana Grounds. Following the ceremony, Vidyasagar officially assumed his position at the state office.

In his address at the felicitation meeting, Vidyasagar expressed his commitment to engaging with the government in a constructive manner to address employees' issues. He pledged to diligently fulfil his responsibilities to resolve the challenges faced by employees, emphasising his dedication to advocating for their rights when necessary. He also acknowledged the contribu-



tions of his predecessors and reiterated his intention to work hard for the welfare of government employees.

Vidyasagar further expressed his aim to elevate the reputation of the APNGGO Association among employee associations across the country. His primary objective is to address unresolved issues and secure positive outcomes for employees through discussions with the government. To achieve this, he plans to categorise financial and non-financial benefits separately to expedite the resolution process.

Notable figures present at the event included former APNGGO

Association President and MLC Paruchuri Ashok Babu, Swachh Andhra Corporation Chairman Kommareddy Pattabhi Ram, Andhra Pradesh Intellectuals Forum President Chalasani Srinivas, APNGGO Associate President Dastagiri Reddy, Senior Vice President DV Ramana, Organising Secretary Jagadeeswara Rao, Treasurer Ranga Rao, APSRTC NMTU General Secretary Srinivasa Rao, APTF President Manjula, Pensioners Association President Venkateswarlu, CPS Employees Association President K Satish, Excise Employees Federation president Narasimulu, and others.

CREDAI Vijayawada to host 10th 'Property Show' on Jan 11 & 12

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CREDAI Vijayawada Chapter has been successfully organising property shows for the past 12 years. The 10th edition of the Property Show will be held from January 10 to 12 at a convention centre, announced D. Rambabu, President of CREDAI Vijayawada. He stated that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has been invited to inaugurate the event.

As part of its ongoing efforts to help individuals achieve

their dream of homeownership, the property show aims to bring together builders, developers, and various service providers from the real estate sector.

The event will feature 50 stalls showcasing apartments, villas, and housing-related products. SLV Projects has agreed to be the title sponsor, while PVR Group has come on board as the platinum sponsor. Leading banks such as SBI, ICICI, and other national banks, along with prominent builders and housing companies, will also participate in the event.



Free RTC bus travel for women from Ugadi

■ Ram Mohan Naidu highlights State Govt's welfare initiatives including pensions, transport connectivity

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu has announced that the government will provide free travel for women on RTC buses starting from Ugadi, the Telugu New Year. This announcement was made during a pension distribution event in Dinabandhupuram village, Nandigam mandal, where he was joined by Agriculture Minister Kinjarapu Atchannaidu.

Ram Mohan Naidu emphasised the importance of welfare initiatives that positively impact people's lives, highlighting the government's efforts to improve living standards under the leadership of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu. He also underscored the government's commitment to preventing migration in Srikakulam district and expanding connectivity through various modes of transportation to foster comprehensive development, particularly in the industrial sector.

The Minister noted that within six months of the government's formation, pensions are being dis-

tributed on the 1st of every month, ensuring timely support for the elderly. He also highlighted several initiatives, including the revival of Anna canteens, the repeal of the Land Tiling Act, the provision of free gas cylinders, and the Mega DSC initiative, all of which were implemented for the benefit of the public.

In addition to these announcements, the Agriculture Minister outlined plans for a Rs. 465-crore drinking water project in the Tekkali constituency, which will provide abundant drinking and irrigation water once completed. He also assured that adequate compensation will be given to individuals affected by the construction of a two-lane road between Tamarapalli and Thumukonda.

The event was attended by several local leaders, including former PACS chairman Kinjarapu Hariprasad and Pinakana Ajay Kumar. As the youngest minister in the Union Cabinet, Ram Mohan Naidu has been instrumental in driving growth and development in the region.

TTD makes arrangements at 'Sarva Darshan Token' issuing centres

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

On the auspicious occasion of Vaikuntha Ekadasi, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is making elaborate arrangements at all Sarva Darshan Token issuing centres here, ensuring that devotees can worship Lord Venkateswara Swamy in Tirumala from January 10 to 19, 2025.

TTD Executive Officer J. Shyamala Rao stated that officials from various departments are coordinating to ensure extensive arrangements. Facilities such as queue lines, barricades, sheds, security, drinking water, and toilets are being set up under the supervision of TTD's engineering department. Tokens for the first three days (January 10, 11, and 12) for Vaikuntha Dwara Darshanam, numbering 1.20 lakh, will be issued starting from 5 AM on January 9, 2025.

These tokens will be distributed at 90 counters in 8 centres in Tirupati and 4 counters at one centre in Tirumala. Devotees with original Aadhaar cards can collect tokens at any of the following counters: Indira Maidanam, Ramachandra Pushkarini, Srinivasam Complex, Vishnunivasam Complex, Bhudev Complex, Ramanaidu High School in Bairagipattada, Zilla Parishad High School in MR Palli, Zilla Parishad High School in Jeevakona (all in Tirupati), and Balaji Nagar Community Hall (Tirumala) for residents.

Goal is to make Visakhapatnam a model city: Mayor Golagani Hari

● 813 infrastructure projects costing ₹185.21 crore initiated in 2024; 197 completed

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

During the annual press meet of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC), Mayor Golagani Hari Venkatakumari provided an in-depth overview of the city's developmental activities in 2024. Extending New Year and Sankranti greetings to the media people, the Mayor expressed her administration's commitment to transforming Visakhapatnam into a progressive urban hub.

"Together with 97 ward corporators, we have worked tirelessly to improve the city's infrastructure and public services. Our goal is to make Visakhapatnam a model of urban development," she said. One of the standout highlights from the Engineering Department was the initiation of 813 infrastructure projects, valued at Rs.185.21 crore, with 197 already completed. "Infrastructure development is at the heart of our mission. With 13 of the 22 main road projects completed and 2,771 potholes repaired, we are ensuring smoother connectivity for residents," the Mayor added. She also noted the completion of 58



certification for three consecutive years," she said.

Welfare programmes continued to uplift marginalised communities, with monthly pensions of Rs 62.78 crore benefiting 1,44,680 people. Additionally, 2,496 TIDCO houses were completed, and 33,240 self-help groups received Rs 730.67 crore in low-interest loans. On the city's financial health, the Mayor remarked, "We have made substantial progress in revenue collection, with Rs 283.59 crore collected in property taxes, helping us fund further development."

Concluding the meet, Mayor Venkata kumari called upon citizens to play an active role in the city's sustainability initiatives. "As part of our commitment to environmental responsibility, we are banning single-use plastic starting January 1. I urge everyone to cooperate in this endeavour for a cleaner, greener Visakhapatnam," she said.

She thanked all stakeholders—public representatives, sanitation workers, and citizens—for their collective effort in making the city a clean, green, and vibrant urban centre.

out of 61 Smart City projects, which cost Rs 672 crore, underscoring the city's modernisation efforts.

The water supply and sanitation sector also saw significant progress in 2024. The ADB-funded 24x7 drinking water scheme is now 71 per cent complete, while the Amrut 2.0 initiative, which includes 27 drinking water and two sewerage projects, is progressing well. "We are determined to improve the quality of life for our citizens by ensuring round-the-clock water supply and robust sanitation systems. Our efforts are paying off, with Visakhapatnam ranked as the fourth cleanest city in India and awarded Water Plus

certification for three consecutive years," she said.

Concluding the meet, Mayor Venkata kumari called upon citizens to play an active role in the city's sustainability initiatives. "As part of our commitment to environmental responsibility, we are banning single-use plastic starting January 1. I urge everyone to cooperate in this endeavour for a cleaner, greener Visakhapatnam," she said.

She thanked all stakeholders—public representatives, sanitation workers, and citizens—for their collective effort in making the city a clean, green, and vibrant urban centre.

Salary delays put RINL employees in a fix

● Workers await November salaries as Sankranti approaches

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Employees of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), the corporate entity of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, are grappling with severe financial distress due to salary delays. Non-executive and executive staff, along with contract workers, have not received their November salaries, even as December comes to an end. "Not knowing when we'll be paid is causing immense stress," said an employee, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We used to receive our salaries by the last day of the month or at most by the first day of the next month. Now, there's no certainty."

The plight of contract workers is even worse. Traditionally paid between the 5th and 10th of the month, many have gone months without their wages. "In some departments, we haven't been paid for six months. Others are waiting for four months' dues," a contract worker shared. "Our families are struggling to make ends meet."

The financial turmoil at RINL has been escalating since September. "Only 50 per cent of our September salary was paid in October," revealed a senior staff member. "For October, we received 35 per cent in one instalment and 30 per cent in another, totalling just 65 per cent by November. Now, our November salary hasn't been paid at all." As the Sankranti festival approaches—a time traditionally filled with joy and festivities—employees are left anxious. "We appeal to the management to at least clear our pending salaries before the festival," pleaded another employee.

The delays have cast a shadow not only on workers' livelihoods, but also on the financial stability of RINL itself. "We understand the challenges the company may be facing, but we are the ones bearing the brunt," an executive remarked. "The management must prioritise paying its workers."

Collector unveils initiatives to enhance skill development among youth

● Skill development programmes to focus on employment training, mega job fairs, and Work-from-Home opportunities

PNS ■ PADERU

District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar has announced a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing skill development among youth in the district, paving the way for improved educational and employment prospects. Speaking at a meeting of the Skill Development Committee, the Collector outlined a comprehensive strategy to achieve this goal. "Our focus is on providing employment-oriented training to

youth, particularly adolescent girls and surrendered Maoists," said Collector Dinesh Kumar. "We aim to create work-from-home job opportunities and organize mega job fairs to connect our youth with potential employers."

The plan includes the implementation of residential training programs through the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) scheme at youth training centers operating under Rampachodavaram, Chintoor, and Paderu ITDAs.



Additionally, government degree colleges, intermediate colleges, ITIs, and polytechnic colleges across the district will be registered as non-residential training centers under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) scheme. The Sankalp scheme will also play a pivotal role in the initiatives.

ITDA project officers have been tasked with organizing mega job fairs and conducting skill workshops at each Integrated Tribal Development Agency

(ITDA), with a focus on including degree-qualified volunteers for remote work roles. A survey of existing skill development programs under ITDAs will be conducted to identify and incorporate courses that address the needs of unemployed youth.

To ensure consistent progress, committees have been formed under ITDAs, which will conduct monthly reviews of all skill development initiatives. Prominent officials, including Joint Collector Dr MJ Abhishek Gowda

and District Skill Development Officer P. Rohini, attended the meeting and expressed their commitment to supporting the initiatives. The meeting saw active participation in both physical and virtual modes, with representatives joining from Paderu, Rampachodavaram, and Chintoor ITDAs. With these initiatives, the district is poised to witness significant growth in skill development and employment opportunities for its youth.

Govt committed to welfare of elderly, disabled: I & PR Minister

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K. Parthasarathi affirmed that the government is dedicated to the welfare of the elderly and differently-abled people, especially those from poor backgrounds, and announced that a newly constructed 200-bed hospital in Nuzvid would be inaugurated soon.

The Minister participated in the distribution of social security pensions at Somavaram and Chatrai villages in the Nuzvid constituency on Tuesday. He handed over pension amounts to some beneficiaries at their homes and inquired whether they were benefiting from the welfare schemes. A total of 8,322 beneficiaries received Rs 35.16 lakh in social security pensions in Chatrai mandal.

In his address, the Minister highlighted that over 63.75 lakh beneficiaries are receiving Rs 2,717.31 crore under the NTR Bharosa social security pension scheme. He added that in Eluru district alone, 2,52,228 beneficiaries were disbursed Rs 113.01 crore worth of pensions. The



government has made the eligibility criteria for the social security pension more liberal. The Minister also noted that the

government had implemented a policy to grant pensions to the wife in case the husband, who was already receiving a pension, passes away.

This has been recognised as the 'spouse category' and pensions are being granted under this category. "As promised by Chief Minister

N. Chandrababu Naidu during his visit to Srikakulam district on November 1, pensions under the 'spouse category' are being distributed from this month. In this regard, 5,402 people across the state have been granted pensions, while 212 people in Eluru district have received pensions under this category," Minister Parthasarathi stated.

The Minister also mentioned that 50,000 beneficiaries who had not collected their pensions for three months due to various reasons were disbursed their arrears.

Announcing the inauguration of the new 200-bed government hospital, the Minister assured that all advanced medical equipment would be provided. He also highlighted the completion of 1 lakh houses, with 50,000 more under construction. The completed houses would soon be handed over to the beneficiaries, and housewarming ceremonies would be held. All necessary amenities are being provided to the colonies, he added.

Several officials and leaders accompanied the Minister during his visit.

East Godavari BC action plan prepared with ₹52.46 crore

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

The East Godavari Backward Castes Corporation has drafted an action plan with an outlay of Rs 52.46 crore for the financial year 2024-25. District Collector P Prashanthi, in a statement on Tuesday, said the corporation aims to establish 1,979 units under various schemes.

She stated that the government would implement several programmes through the BC Corporation, including self-employment initiatives, mini dairy units, sheep and goat rearing units, and financial assistance for Medara and Kumari/Shalivahan families under group activities involving 3-5 members. The state government is expected to announce the detailed action plan and timelines shortly. The Collector highlighted that Rs 23.32 crore has been allocated



AID DIVIDED INTO 3 SLABS
Up to ₹2 lakh in the first slab. ₹2 lakh to ₹3 lakh in the second slab. ₹3 lakh to ₹5 lakh in the third slab.

for establishing 1,229 self-employment units under three slabs. The financial assistance will be shared equally as a bank loan (50%) and a subsidy from the APBCCFC (50%). Beneficiaries will be selected through the Online Beneficiary Management and Monitoring System (OBMMS).

Additionally, Rs 22.46 crore has been allocated for 449 mini dairy units, each costing Rs 5 lakh. Of this, Rs 11.23 crore will come from bank loans, with the remaining Rs 11.23 crore provided as a subsidy by the APBCCFC.



AP Speaker highlights welfare initiatives, infra development

● Patrudu announces ₹2,700 cr for pensions benefiting 63 lakh people

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Andhra Pradesh Speaker Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu announced that the State government is distributing pensions to over 63 lakh beneficiaries, allocating a budget of Rs 2,700 crore. Speaking at a pension distribution programme in Komira village, Gologonda mandal, Patrudu highlighted the government's commitment to welfare and development. "Villages are experiencing significant development under the current administration," Patrudu remarked, emphasising the government's efforts to enhance pensions and ensure timely disbursement despite financial constraints. The Speaker assured beneficia-

ries that pensions would be distributed a day in advance if holidays occur, with the process completed by 1 PM. In Anakapalli district, pensions are being distributed to 2.58 lakh beneficiaries, amounting to Rs 107 crore. In Gologonda mandal alone, 8,498 beneficiaries are receiving pensions totalling Rs 3.53 crore. Patrudu praised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for introducing a policy providing immediate pensions to women after the death of their spouses. He expressed opposition to fraudulent pensions, reaffirming that only deserving individuals would receive benefits. The Speaker announced funding for infrastructure projects in Komira village, including Rs 20

lakh for CC roads, Rs 8 lakh for a school retaining wall, and Rs 10 lakh for cemetery development. However, these projects are pending due to the absence of resolutions from the local sarpanch. Patrudu criticised the previous government for leaving the state in debt, explaining how interest payments have constrained the current administration's ability to undertake new initiatives. Over the last six months, Rs 7.11 crore have been allocated for 145 roads in Gologonda mandal. Ayyanna Patrudu assured residents that funding for the remaining projects would be approved by March 2024, highlighting the importance of transparency and efficiency in executing welfare schemes.

Min: Govt keen on welfare schemes implementation

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh reaffirmed the Government's commitment to implement welfare schemes, as promised efficiently, and announced that the free bus travel scheme for women would be launched from Ugadi. Minister Kandula Durgesh took part in Tuesday's NTR Bharosa social security pension distribution programme at Pasalapudi village in Undrajavaram mandal. He visited each house in the town to distribute pensions to the beneficiaries, including differently-abled individuals.

During his visit, the Minister interacted with several beneficiaries to ensure they were receiving the benefits of welfare schemes. The recipients expressed their satisfaction with the timely benefits and thanked him for his support.

The beneficiaries of the social security pension expressed their happiness at receiving the pension a day earlier than expected. They assured the Minister of their full support to the government and its officials.

In his address, the Minister emphasised the Government's determination to implement welfare schemes despite financial challenges. He recalled that, upon assuming office, the Government had increased the social security pension from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 and disbursed the pending arrears.

He added that the pensions were being distributed on December 31, ahead of the New Year, bringing joy to lakhs of social security pensioners across the state, who were receiving their pensions at their doorsteps early in the morning.

"The Coalition Government is fulfilling its promises to the people.

We have increased social security pensions, launched the free gas cylinder scheme (Deepam-2), ensured payment for paddy purchased from farmers within 24 hours, and will launch the free bus service for women from the Telugu New Year, Ugadi," Minister Kandula Durgesh stated.

In a sharp criticism of the previous YSRC government, the Minister accused the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led administration of depleting the state's finances and mismanaging key sectors. During the programme, the Tourism Minister also unveiled the New Year calendar of Annavarappadu Sri Venkateswara Swamy and extended his New Year greetings to all.

Mandal Special Officer M. Sandeep, In-Charge MRO A. Kanaka Durga, MPDO V.V. Rama Rao, and leaders from BJP, JSP, and TDP accompanied the Minister during the event.



West Godavari Collector highlights district's achievements

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District has excelled across multiple sectors, achieving significant milestones in Medical and Health, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, School Education, Panchayati Raj, and Welfare, announced Collector Chadalavada Nagarani on Tuesday. She expressed delight in sharing these accomplishments with the people, crediting the success to the hard work and dedication of officials and staff committed to improving citizens' lives.

The district was honoured with the Best District Award in the Swachata Lakshit Ekayi (Cleanliness Target Units) category for 2024. It also secured the 2nd rank in performance ratings and the 5th rank in learning outcomes in the state.

The District Health Society (DCHS) received accolades as the best performer under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission for its exemplary implementation of digital health records. The Area Hospital in Tadepalligudem won first place in the state-level Kayakalpa Awards 2023-24, receiving Rs 1 crore in prize money.

In the Horticulture sector, hybrid vegetable cultivation has been promoted across 24 hectares with a budget of Rs 12 lakh under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. New oil palm plantations were established in 84 hectares with a Rs 23.34 lakh budget under the National Mission on Edible Oils-Oil Palm.

The Animal Husbandry Department achieved a breakthrough with the birth of the first indigenous female Ongole breed calf through IVF technology, with embryos now available for Ongole, Sahiwal, Gir, and Punganur breeds.

The School Education Department organised Mega Parent-Teacher Meetings in 1,430 schools, engaging 67,415 parents and 11,653 public members. Additionally, Tanuku Municipality was recognised with the Best Municipality Award in the Swachata Lakshit Ekayi category for 2024.

"I extend my gratitude to the officials and staff of various departments for their relentless efforts, which have culminated in these remarkable achievements," said Collector Nagarani.

75% jobs for locals in industries demanded

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Leaders of various organisations met with District Collector Shan Mohan in a delegation on Tuesday, demanding that 75 per cent of jobs in industries and factories be reserved for locals, in accordance with the provisions of the Factories Act of 2019.

The delegation, which included MRPS State General Secretary Baijingsi Sudhakar, former Wakf Board Director Abdul Bashiruddin, Disabled Federation President Suresh, and Seva Bharati Chairman Syfullah, urged the Collector to take stringent action against managements that have failed to implement the Act's stipulation for local employment.

They alleged that the managements of local industries were employing workers from other states, neglecting the local workforce. As a result, educated local youth were being forced to migrate to other areas in search of employment and to sustain their livelihoods.

The delegation expressed concern that local youth were becoming frustrated and were compelled to take up menial jobs to support their families.



Steps for mid-day meals for Inter students reviewed

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Commissioner and Director of the Board of Intermediate Education, Kritika Shukla, reviewed the arrangements being made for the implementation of the mid-day meal scheme for Intermediate students in the district.

Kritika Shukla held a meeting with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Project State Director Srinivasa Rao and other officials at Lady Amphyll College here on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Kritika Shukla stated that since Human Resource Development Minister Nara Lokesh is expected to formally launch the mid-day meal scheme for Intermediate students on January 3, authorities should make prior arrangements in coordination to ensure there are no shortages and everything is in place. However, she clarified that the Minister's programme is yet to be confirmed. Kritika Shukla also interacted

with both junior and senior Intermediate students in the classroom of Lady Amphyll Government Girls College to discuss the syllabus. She inquired if the textbooks were available to all students and how effectively the lecturers were teaching. She expressed satisfaction with the responses from the students. She further asked students about their experience with digital classrooms and online lessons. Later, she encouraged them to prepare well for the upcoming examinations, stressing the importance of setting goals and working hard to achieve them.

Kritika Shukla also inspected the Biology and Chemistry labs in the college and instructed faculty members to ensure all equipment required for practical exams is available. She also inspected the functioning of the RO plant on the college premises. District Intermediate Education Officer PB Salman Raju and DEO Rama Rao accompanied her.

Leopard fatally struck by speeding vehicle

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

Chittoor, Dec 31: A leopard was fatally struck by an unidentified vehicle while crossing the road near the Anjaneya Swamy temple in V Kota village on the national highway in the early hours of Tuesday.

According to police, the leopard was hit by a speeding vehicle on the ghat road, killing it instantly. Motorists passing through the area reported spotting three other leopards near the site, seemingly lingering around the carcass of the deceased animal. Forest officials later arrived at the scene, shifted the carcass for postmortem, and subsequently buried it in the forest.



Revanth failed to secure pass marks in public surveys: Harish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, saying that the Congress leader failed to secure even passing marks in all public surveys conducted last year.

He emphasized that the discontent among people has been consistent across all sections, reflecting poorly on the Congress government's performance.

"Ask anyone, and the response is the same — people are dissatisfied with Revanth's governance," he said, alleging that surveys have uniformly exposed the government's inability to fulfil promises.

He accused the Congress leadership of indulging in diversion tactics and focusing on political vendettas instead of governance.

Harish pointed out that despite guaranteeing the immediate implementation of key schemes within 100 days of assuming power, the Congress government failed to deliver even after 390 days.

"The guarantees have turned into empty words, and instead of fulfilling promises, the Congress is performing tricks to divert public attention," he said.

He criticized the state government's failure to honour commitments made to farmers, students, and women's groups. He cited delays in implementing loan waivers, bounced cheques for farmers, and broken promises of



bonuses for crops. He also alleged that funds meant for women's self-help groups and student aid, such as the promised increase in diet charges, have not materialized.

He accused the Congress government of neglecting Gurukul schools established during KCR's tenure. He lamented the increasing dropout rates and student suicides and said the Chief Minister is more focused on Delhi visits than addressing issues on the ground.

Harish said the government has no vision for critical infrastructure projects, citing delays in repairs to Kaleshwaram, the Metro Rail, and pharmaceutical projects.

He also blamed the Congress for tarnishing Hyderabad's reputation with its HYDRABAD which he said disrupted the lives of commoners and damaged the city's image.

ACROSS THE STATES



Govt forfeits medal awarded to CBI inspector

The government has "forfeited" the Union Home Minister's medal for Excellence in Investigation awarded to CBI Inspector Rahul Raj in 2023 who was later caught by the agency red-handed, allegedly receiving Rs 10 lakh bribe and dismissed from the service, officials said. The action comes on the recommendation of CBI Director Praveen Sood who has cracked down on corrupt elements detected in the agency's internal vigilance process. Raj, a recipient of a prestigious medal in 2023, was caught "red-handed" on May 19 while allegedly accepting an illegal gratification of Rs 10 lakh from Malay College of Nursing chairman Anil Bhaskaran and his wife Suma Anil, an official alleged. The couple were also arrested. The CBI swung into action after inputs and surveillance by its internal vigilance unit indicated that one of the support teams constituted on the orders of the Madhya Pradesh High Court to examine the infrastructure in nursing colleges in the state was indulging in corruption. Officials in the know of developments said that CBI Director Sood had made it clear in no uncertain terms that "internal vigilance is prerequisite to external action".



Dalit youth beaten to death in UP

A Dalit youth was beaten to death and his cousin seriously injured by some men after a dispute in Paldi village here on Tuesday, police said. Superintendent of Police (City) Satyanarayan Prajapat said that some people have been detained in connection with the murder of 20-year-old Sunny. Sunny was returning to his village from Khatauli along with his cousin Shilu on a motorcycle. A quarrel broke out between Sunny and the village head's son who was travelling in a car, the police said. The argument escalated and the two brothers were attacked with lathis by the accused in which Sunny died and Shilu got injured, they said. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination. Meanwhile, security has been tightened in the village and extra police force have been deployed in the area as a precautionary measure. Efforts are on to nab the accused, police said.



NPCIL invites proposals for small nuclear reactors

India's nuclear power operator NPCIL on Tuesday invited proposals from the industry to set up 220 MW Bharat Small Reactors for captive use, replacing the existing coal-fired thermal power plants used by the steel, aluminium, copper and cement industries. Bharat Small Reactors are 220 MW Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR) with an impeccable safety and excellent performance record, which are compact and tailored for captive use, according to a statement from the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL). "NPCIL has today invited Request for Proposals (RFP) from visionary Indian industries for setting up 220 MW Bharat Small Reactors (BSRs) for captive use," said the statement. The nuclear power operator said BSRs can provide a sustainable solution for decarbonisation of hard-to-abate industries. It would also help these industries secure economic benefits resulting from savings in carbon emission related taxes, thus increasing competitiveness of their products in the global markets, the statement said. The government plans to deploy 40-50 of these nuclear reactors over the next decade in partnership with the private sector.

SpaDeX precursor to India's own space station: Jitendra

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will look forward to a heavenly handshake between its two satellites in the new year even as it sets its eyes on launching the most expensive earth observation spacecraft in alliance with NASA.

ISRO's maiden satellite docking experiment (SpaDeX) is scheduled to take place on January 7, which is expected to propel India into a select group of nations having mastered this complex technology.

"This is certainly the first such mission with smaller satellites. We will scale it up with heavier satellites and this docking technology will help us in setting up the Bhartiya Antariksh Station and subsequent missions to it," Jitendra Singh, Science and Technology Minister, told reporters here.

ISRO's SpaDeX mission marks the beginning of a new era in space exploration, showcasing India's technological prowess and ambition. The 'docking' capability will enable future missions to accomplish unimaginable outcomes through transfer of payloads in space which will be a kind of a miracle and a testimony to 'Viksit



Bharat," Singh said.

He said in the new ISRO is set to launch the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite, billed as the most expensive satellite of its kind, by March.

The new year will see the 100th launch from Sriharikota when the GSLV will launch the NVS-02 satellite for the Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) services

"This is certainly the first such mission with smaller satellites. We will scale it up with heavier satellites and this docking technology will help us in setting up the Bhartiya Antariksh Station and subsequent missions to it," Jitendra Singh, Science and Technology Minister, told reporters here.

in January.

The first of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicles (PSLV), built by HAL-L&T industry consortium, will launch a technology demonstration satellite incorporating the high thrust electric propulsion system in the first quarter, which will be followed by a commercial mission of LVM3 for an international customer.

The first of the Gaganyaan uncrewed mission, comprising

the Vyommitra robot, is also expected to be launched in the first quarter of the new year.

"We will have our human space flight - Gaganyaan - by the end of 2025 or early 2026," Singh said, adding that the mission depended on the success of the unmanned missions.

ISRO also plans to carry out a test of the Crew Escape System for the Gaganyaan mission before March.

Teacher sentenced to 111 years in prison for raping minor

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A special fast-track court here on Tuesday sentenced a tuition teacher to 111 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1.05 lakh for raping a plus-one student after luring her five years ago.

If the fine remains unpaid, the convict, Manoj, 44, will face an additional year of imprisonment.

Manoj's wife took her own life upon learning of her husband's abuse of the minor girl.

In the ruling, Judge R Rekha stated that Manoj, who was also supposed to be the child's guardian, had committed a crime that warranted no mercy. The incident occurred on July 2, 2019.

According to the prosecution, the accused, a government employee, conducted tuition classes at his residence.

He summoned the child for a special class and subsequently abused her, also taking photos of the abuse on his mobile phone.

Following the incident, the child became fearful and stopped attending tuition



classes.

The accused then disseminated photos of the incident. Learning about the incident, the child's family lodged a complaint at the Fort Police Station.

Upon the accused's arrest, his phone was seized and sent for forensic examination, revealing photos of the child being abused.

Manoj claimed to have been at the office on the day of the incident, producing registered leave records with signatures. However, call records from the accused's phone, presented by the prosecution, revealed that Manoj was near the tuition centre on the day of the incident.

Special Public Prosecutor R S Vijay Mohan and R V Akhilesh appeared for the prosecution.

Punjab to SC: Dallewal to take medical aid if Centre agrees to talk

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Punjab government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast for over a month, has agreed for medical aid given the Centre accepted his proposal to hold talks.

A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia took note of a plea moved by Punjab government seeking an additional three days to comply with SC's December 20 order.

"...As per the negotiators there is a proposal given by the farmers to the Central government that in case they get an invite for a talk, Dallewal is ready to take medical help as desired," Punjab



advocate general Gurminder Singh said, "therefore, the state government was seeking some more time and work positively towards compliance of the directions."

The bench said, "We will not comment on what's going on as far as negotiations or your law

and order is concerned. If something happens, which is acceptable to both sides and all stakeholders concerned, we will be equally happy. At the moment, we are only concerned with the compliance of our orders. If you want more time, we in peculiar circumstances are inclined to

grant you some time." Singh agreed with the bench on the point that no comments should be made on the negotiations at this stage and sought some time.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and Haryana government, said he did not have any instructions on this issue.

The AG said the intervenors and negotiators had tried complying with the court directives by engaging with the farmers in a dialogue.

Additionally, the government mobilised 7,000 personnel at the protest site, but on December 30, a call for Punjab bandh was called by other farmer organisations, hindering its efforts, he said.

Tigress Zeenat to return to Simlipal

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

After terrorising villagers in Jharkhand and West Bengal, tigress Zeenat on Tuesday night is scheduled to return to the Simlipal Reserve Forest in Odisha from where she escaped about three weeks back, an official said.

The process of getting her back from West Bengal has started and she will reach Simlipal in the night, Odisha's Principal Chief Conservator of Forest



(PCCF) Prem Kumar Jha told PTI.

"She will be released in a natural enclosure in the core area of the Simlipal Tiger Reserve where another tigress, Jamuna, was earlier kept," he said.

"After watching her activities, the authorities will take a decision to release her into the wild," he added.

Zeenat was brought to Simlipal from Maharashtra's Tadoba in November to strengthen the gene pool of the tiger population in the reserve.

Poor, deprived suffering brunt of 'Manuvaad' under BJP: Kharge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday accused the BJP governments at the Centre and the states of having a mindset against the deprived sections of society who are suffering because of the brunt of 'Manuvaad'.

In a post in Hindi on X, Kharge alleged that Union Home Minister Amit Shah insults Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar in Parliament and the same mind-

set against the deprived is being repeated in the BJP ruled states.

He claimed that in the last two days -- a Dalit youth is murdered in police custody in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas and the tribal women are tied to trees and beaten in Balasore, Odisha.

"In Bhiwani, Haryana, a Dalit girl student is forced to commit suicide after being unable to pay her BA exam fees. In Palghar, Maharashtra, a tribal pregnant woman has to travel 100 kilometers in search of ICU and dies."



"In Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, three Dalit families are forced to migrate because of caste-based attacks on them and the police remains silent," he claimed.

"It is well known that atrocities are being committed against Dalits, tribals, backward and minority communities under the 'anti-constitutional rule' of the Modi government. Those who are poor and deprived are suffering the brunt of Manuvaad," the Congress chief alleged. He said a crime is committed every hour against Dalit-tribal women and children, and according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), this figure has doubled since 2014.



considerably restricted with just 25 districts accounting 91 per cent of the LWE violence," it said.

According to the ministry's annual report 2023-24, the CPI (Maoist) continues to be the most potent among the various

LWE outfits in the country, accounting for more than 90 per cent of total violent incidents and 95 per cent of resultant deaths.

"Amidst increasing reverses, the CPI (Maoist) has been making efforts to expand to new

areas along inter-state borders, albeit without any significant success," the report said.

They wish to keep the population in their areas of influence marginalized to perpetuate their outdated ideology, it said.

"Consequently, the process of development has been set back by decades in many parts of the country under LWE influence," it said.

Various measures adopted by (state) governments and the developmental outreach by the Union government have seen an increasingly large number of LWE cadres shunning the path of violence and returning to the

mainstream. Continued operations and crackdowns in the 'core Maoists' areas' have slightly increased the number of resultant deaths and casualties to security forces when compared with the corresponding period in 2022, the report said.

Noting that improvised explosive devices cause the majority of casualties to security forces in anti-LWE operations, the Home Ministry issued a Standard Operating Procedure to promote best practices in IED management besides putting in place extensive counter-IED capacity building of CAPFs and state police forces, it said.

No evidence of paper leak in BPS exam: Bihar minister

PNS ■ PATNA

Amid the stalemate over demand for cancellation of a recent competitive exam in Bihar, a close aide of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday asserted that it has received no evidence, so far, of question paper leak.

The avertment came from Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, one of the senior-most ministers in the state cabinet, a day after the chief secretary spoke to a delegation of protesters, in a gesture aimed at breaking the deadlock.

Speaking to reporters, Chaudhary said, "The government could not have acted with greater clarity. The top official gave a patient hearing to the aggrieved party. But, to my information, no evidence of question paper leak has been furnished so far."

"So, as of now, we hold that there has been no paper leak. This is also the stand of the public service commission. One examination centre had witnessed some disturbances and a re-examination has been ordered for the candidates who were affected," the minister said.

"But obviously, there was a conspiracy. Rumours of question paper leak were spread, but nobody knew where was it leaked, and to whom. Those behind this played with the



future of young students. They must be unmasked," he said. The minister's statement was in line with the stand taken by the BPSC over the matter.

The Combined Competitive Exams were held on December 13 when hundreds, all of them at the Babu Pariksha Parisar in the state capital, boycotted the test alleging that the question paper had been leaked.

The commission has since ordered a re-examination for over 10,000 candidates who have been asked to appear for fresh test at different centres in the city on January 4.

However, the commission has also held the view that the exam was held properly at the remaining 911 centres across Bihar with no complaints from over five lakh candidates.

But, a section of aspirants have launched an agitation, holding that re-examination must be ordered for all the centres to ensure "level playing field".

'Naxals trying to expand to new areas without much success'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Facing tough action from the security forces, the Naxals are making efforts to seep into new areas along inter-state borders but without any notable success, the latest report from the Union Home Ministry has said.

The government's multi-pronged approach -- anti-Naxal operations by paramilitary and state police and simultaneous development initiatives in Maoist-affected areas -- has resulted in a 48 per cent reduction in violent incidents, from 1,136 in 2013 to 594 in 2023, the report said.

A 65 per cent reduction was also noticed in the deaths of civilians and security forces, which came down from 397 to 138 in 2023 as compared to 2013, it said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said that the country would be free of Naxalism by March 31, 2026.

The geographical spread of Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) violence has shrunk considerably. In 2023, 171 police stations in 42 districts reported such incidents, compared to 328 police stations in 76 districts in 2013, the MHA report said.

"The arc of violence has been



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A wish list for 2025

As we reflect on the year that has passed and welcome the new one, let us resolve to make this a year of progress and unity

As we welcome year 2025, the world stands at the cusp of opportunities and challenges. The new year offers a chance to reflect, reset, and reimagine the future. Amidst the advancements and setbacks of recent years, 2025 should be a time for hope, action and collaboration. Here is a wish list for a better world and an earnest appeal to global and Indian leaders to strive for transformative change. The urgency of addressing climate change cannot be overstated. We hope for concrete actions to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and protect biodiversity. Let 2025 be the year when words transform into impactful deeds. The pandemic underscored the disparities in healthcare access. A global commitment to equitable healthcare systems, and increased investments in public health are essential. Bridging the digital divide, improving infrastructure and making quality education accessible to marginalised communities should be a universal priority. As AI and other technologies advance, their application should focus on solving pressing global issues— from poverty to climate resilience—rather than exacerbating inequalities.



The crises we face are interconnected and so must be our solutions. A concerted effort is required under the UN to bring an end to wars raging in Ukraine and West Asia. The untold misery of Gaza people must end. All involved must work to deescalate tensions and bring about a lasting peace in the region which has seen enough misery and human tragedy. Policies should reflect empathy and foresight, ensuring that no one is left behind. India, with its diversity and potential, holds a unique position in shaping the global future. As we

step into 2025, Indian leaders must focus on rural development, job creation and support for small businesses to bridge economic disparities. They should invest in vocational training and innovation to prepare the youth for a competitive global market. Ambitious climate targets must be implemented, alongside enhanced urban planning for sustainable cities and promotion of water and energy conservation. Transparency, accountability and citizen participation must remain central to policy-making, fostering trust and unity. The fringe elements must be brought to mainstream and efforts must be stepped up in places like Manipur to bring about a lasting peace. The government and the citizens alike must work to have a country which is as per the wishes of our Constitution makers—a country which ensures dignity, liberty and freedom for all and no section of society is alienated. The people on the fringe—tribals and dalits need to be given their due and efforts must be made in that direction. The minorities must not feel alienated and targeted. They deserve their due respect and dignity. All religious issues must be settled amicably as per the law. The democratic institutions must be strengthened and parliamentary democracy must work for the people in the right earnest. Wishing all our readers a very happy new year!

A turning point in Taliban politics

The assassination of Maulvi Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, a key leader in the Haqqani network, has sent shockwaves across Afghanistan and the region



NISHAKANT OJHA

The assassination of Maulvi Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, the Taliban's Minister for Refugees and a senior figure in the Haqqani network, has exposed significant fractures within the Taliban leadership and deepened the complexities of regional geopolitics. Claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), the attack not only highlights the Taliban's internal divisions but also reshapes the broader strategic landscape, especially for India. On December 11, 2024, Khalil Haqqani was killed in a high-profile suicide bombing in Kabul. This incident underscored the Taliban's failure to ensure internal security and revealed growing tensions between its Kandahar faction, led by Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, and the Haqqani network, headed by Sirajuddin Haqqani. These tensions have been fueled by the Haqqanis' perception of neglect or even sabotage by the Kandahar faction. In response to this crisis, Sirajuddin Haqqani convened an emergency meeting in Gardez with key network leaders to address security breaches and the escalating threat posed by ISKP. This development points to potential fragmentation within the Taliban, which carries significant implications for regional stability and India's security.



A fragmented Taliban could destabilize Afghanistan, creating fertile ground for extremist groups like ISKP. This faction's hostility toward both the Taliban and regional actors, including India, raises the specter of increased attacks targeting Indian interests. The resultant instability might also spill over into Pakistan, indirectly affecting India's border security, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. Another concern lies in the potential strengthening of the Pakistan-Taliban nexus. Pakistan's historical ties to the Haqqani network could enable it to leverage this faction against Indian activities in Afghanistan, including infrastructure and



FOR INDIA, THE ASSASSINATION OF KHALIL HAQQANI SIGNIFIES A CRITICAL MOMENT TO RECALIBRATE ITS APPROACH. INDIA MUST BOLSTER ITS INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES AND BORDER SECURITY, PARTICULARLY IN SENSITIVE AREAS LIKE JAMMU AND KASHMIR

development projects. Such a scenario could escalate cross-border terrorism, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, and erode India's strategic influence in Afghanistan. Indian investments in key infrastructure projects like the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Chabahar Port route may face heightened risks amidst this instability. India also faces an increased terror threat as ISKP may collaborate with groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which are active in Pakistan. Such alliances could intensify attacks on Indian targets, while prolonged conflict in Afghanistan might radicalize vulnerable populations across the region, including within India. Regionally, these developments complicate India's diplomatic landscape. Iran, for instance, might shift its focus to countering Afghan instability, potentially undermining its collaboration with India on projects like Chabahar Port. Similarly, a stronger Pakistan-Haqqani alliance could align with China's ambitions under the Belt and Road Initiative, further sidelining India in the region. Globally, Pakistan's backing

of the Haqqani network provides it with a lever to influence Afghan politics but risks alienating the Kandahar faction and exacerbating internal Taliban conflicts. ISKP's growing power, meanwhile, poses a direct challenge to South Asian security, threatening to destabilize the region and affect India's geopolitical interests. For India, the assassination of Khalil Haqqani signifies a critical moment to recalibrate its approach. India must bolster its intelligence capabilities and border security, particularly in sensitive areas like Jammu and Kashmir. Strengthening partnerships with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia could counterbalance Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Coordinating with international allies to combat ISKP and other extremist groups will also be vital. Furthermore, India must protect its investments in Afghanistan through global partnerships and maintain diplomatic efforts via multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the United Nations. The killing of Khalil Haqqani has revealed the fragile balance within the Taliban and underscored the potential

for regional destabilization. For India, this evolving scenario demands vigilance, proactive diplomacy, and strengthened security measures to safeguard its interests amid shifting geopolitical realities. For India, the implications are profound, ranging from the potential rise of terrorism to a weakening of its strategic foothold in Afghanistan. The escalating instability could embolden extremist groups like ISKP, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed, increasing the risk of attacks targeting India. To address these challenges, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy. Enhancing intelligence capabilities, securing its borders, and deepening ties with Iran, Central Asia, and Russia are crucial steps. Engaging multilateral platforms to combat the ISKP threat and protect investments is equally vital. The situation demands vigilance and proactive measures to safeguard India's interests in an increasingly volatile region, ensuring its strategic and security objectives remain intact amidst shifting dynamics. (The writer is an eminent expert on counter terrorism in West Asia; views are personal)

PICTALK



Devotees look at a sand sculpture themed on 'clean Mahakumbh' ahead of Mahakumbh 2025, in Prayagraj PTI

New year resolutions: Small steps, lasting change

A meaningful new year vow isn't about dramatic reinvention; it is about mindful reflection, small adjustments and cultivating habits that truly last

On every new year eve a lot of people take a vow to make a new beginning. Families come together, friends exchange greetings, and bold resolutions quietly take shape. "I'll wake up at 5 a.m.," someone might vow, or "This year, I'll get back in shape." However, by February, alarms are snoozed, fitness goals abandoned, and life returns to its familiar rhythm. Why do resolutions often fail? They are usually ambitious yet unrealistic, conceived more in the excitement of the moment than with a long-term perspective. A meaningful New Year doesn't demand grand reinvention; it thrives on small, deliberate adjustments—holding on to what works, letting go of what doesn't, and fostering habits that last. The New Year feels unique due to the "fresh start effect," a concept psychologists use to describe how temporal milestones—such as January 1, birthdays, or even a new week—create a mental reset. These milestones give the illusion of starting afresh, prompting us to buy planners or sign up for gym member-



ships. But enthusiasm alone doesn't guarantee success. Without reflection and structure, even the most well-intentioned plans falter. Reflection is the starting point—not the kind that dwells on failures but one that evaluates life with curiosity. What brought joy or progress last year? Perhaps it was reconnecting with family, starting an evening walk routine, or improving time management. What left you feeling drained? Overcommitting to work, excessive screen time, or trying to please everyone might top the list. Psychologists recommend "self-distanced reflection," where you analyse your life as if observing someone else's. Why did this person abandon their plans? Why did they agree to activ-

ities they didn't enjoy? This detached perspective helps pinpoint habits to retain and those to discard. Even with clarity, life is seldom linear. Setbacks are inevitable, but resilience—the ability to adapt and recover—makes all the difference. Resilience isn't innate; it can be nurtured through practices like gratitude, mindfulness, and reframing challenges. Gratitude shifts focus to what's working. Recognizing small positives rewires the brain to spot opportunities over obstacles. Mindfulness, on the other hand, anchors the mind in the present—whether during a heartfelt conversation or a quiet morning. These practices reduce stress and enhance focus. Reframing failure is equally crucial. Unmet resolutions aren't defeats; they're feedback. Adjusting goals is far more effective than abandoning them altogether. Strong relationships are another cornerstone of happiness. This insight resonates deeply in India, where family bonds and social networks are integral. However, maintaining

these connections in today's fast-paced world requires conscious effort. Being present is challenging in a world of constant notifications, endless emails, and overflowing to-do lists. Yet studies show that mind-wandering—even toward pleasant thoughts—correlates with reduced happiness. The richest moments are those we fully engage in, whether during a family meal, a morning walk, or a simple act of kindness. Adaptability is another essential skill. Life rarely unfolds as planned, and the ability to pivot determines how well we navigate change. After reflection and building resilience, action must follow. Instead of sweeping declarations like "I'll meditate for an hour daily" focus on creating systems. Systems grounded in routine, rather than fleeting motivation, are more sustainable. The New Year isn't magical. It's a psychological cue to pause and reassess, but its real value lies in how you use it. Progress, not perfection, is the key to a fulfilling year. (The writer is author and DGP and head, Haryana State Narcotic Control Bureau; views are personal)



O P SINGH

AUSTRALIA DEFEATS INDIA

Madam—India's hopes for the World Test Championship final took a major hit with a big loss to Australia in the Boxing Day Test at Melbourne, when Australia beat India by 184 runs in the fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar series to take a 2-1 lead in the 5-match series. The match played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground saw Australia take seven wickets after tea on day five to secure a famous win. Despite a valiant effort from Yashasvi Jaiswal, India's batting collapse on the final day sealed their defeat. Meanwhile, Australia has bettered their chances to face South Africa in the WTC Final at Lord's next year with the win. The Proteas have booked their spot in the WTC final after a thrilling two-wicket win over Pakistan on Sunday. Interestingly, the Australian last wicket fought hard for adding more than 60 runs, whereas after the final day tea break India's last seven wickets tumbled for just 34 runs in 20.3 overs.

Wicket had no devils. This fragile nature of the Indian team is very discouraging. Fighting till the last ball - spirit is missing. And we are now blaming the third umpire for Jaiswal's out to malign the Aussies victory and India's shocking performance. But the true cricket lovers are completely agreeing with the Indian skipper Rohit Sharma about Jaiswal's controversial dismissal at the post-match press conference: "Look, I really don't know what to make of that because the technology didn't show anything. With the naked eye, it seemed that he did touch something. I don't know how the umpires want to use the technology, but in all fairness, he did touch the ball." Now it is the time to assess Team India's performance. Actually, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja passed their prime sometime ago but they won't gracefully retire like Ashwin. Please drop them out to build a future team. We only do hero worshipping - only to be disappointed by our so-called heroes. Indian fans and media need to immediately stop making celebrities of hero worship. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Elon Musk stands with immigrants



A rift has emerged among the supporters of US President-elect Donald Trump over the contentious issue of immigration. The faction spearheaded by billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy contrasts sharply with Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) base, which firmly endorses his stringent anti-immigration policies. Amid the simmering row, the President-elect seems to be aligning with

Musk and other supporters in the tech industry over the immigration visa issue. Those who claim to be 'natives' of the country themselves have foreign roots. It is meritocracy that has thrived in that country over the centuries and that has made America the world's most powerful nation by attracting top talents in many fields from across the globe. However, many people may claim that the next century belongs to China or some other country, the fact is that behind all modern day tech innovations and inventions have all been the products greatly attributable to the 'American Dream.' That dream will keep the United States of America as the land of opportunities for a long time to come. That is what will attract the best brains from across the world to sail the oceans to reach the shores of America and create new ideas and innovations that the world will need to use. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

STOP POLITICAL BLAME GAME

Madam—It is indeed a matter of concern to one and all that rape being predominantly a social issue is playing in the hands of political parties to settle political scores over the other parties. The recent incident in Anna University abjectly exposes again the lapses in handling such a serious issue by the government, university authority, the police department and also the political parties. As a matter of fact, for most of the political parties addressing rape and prevalence of drugs, especially in the educational institutions, it is not in their active agenda. BJP sits muted on the shabby happenings in Manipur but cries foul over such incidents taking place in the states ruled by other parties. Manipur has even seen women being paraded nude in public. Such incidents must have taken place during the tenure of the other parties also, who are now out with fierce protest programmes. Every criminal claims support of some political party or the other to escape punishments. The existing system of dealing with such shabby incidents needs reconsideration to

make them more foolproof. More than deterrent acts combined efforts of all institutions and socially conscious individuals, irrespective of political lenience should make sustained efforts to tide over this menace. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

JIMMY CARTER PASSES AWAY

Madam—The 39th president of the United States has died at age 100. Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer and US Navy lieutenant before going into politics, eventually serving one term as governor of Georgia and as president of the United States from 1977 to 1981. He was the only former US president to reach 100 years old. He championed the human rights at the centre of US foreign policy, Carter forged a still-standing peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. He will always be remembered for his key policy decisions making and action-driven blueprint into the execution. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS WITH SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Spirituality can help adolescents face life's challenges with resilience



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJJI

We all know that as per the laws of nature, we live our lives through various stages such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Of these life stages, the most adventurous and interesting stage is adolescence which represents an inner emotional upheaval, a struggle between the eternal human wish to cling to the past and the equally powerful wish to get on with the future. It's indeed a very critical phase in the life of every human being because, in this phase, there is intense growth not only physically but also morally, cognitively, emotionally and intellectually.

Hence, in this stage of life, parents elders or peers must provide adolescents with proper guidance, and support and create an environment to facilitate their holistic development. The primary goal of every adolescent is to achieve complete independence, for which they often seek a lot of space and freedom. They start to think more rationally and abstractly as they form their moral code. In the process, they may often become assertive, rebellious, non-conformist, self-opinionated and aloof. Therefore, they need to be guided and supported with great sensitivity and maturity.



To attain a well-integrated maturity, a series of factors need to be addressed for adolescents, like they need to acquire self-certainty, be ready to try out new roles, strive for achievement, acquire a self-identity, balance their rights with responsibilities and identify personal goals and ideals. One should understand that while dealing with the problems of adolescents, one should try and step into the young person's world and treat them with discerning respect rather than suspicion. It always helps when we share their joys and sorrows and genuinely address their questions whilst engaging them in moral and spiritual discipline.

It is so unfortunate that in the formative stage of adolescence when children need a strong sense of direction & guidance, there is no source for them to get it. The family is no longer the strong institution it used to be. Hence, under this scenario, adolescents try to find support from other means such as their peer group, TV, internet, books etc.

Tempted by the glamour and gloss that is promoted by the media, there is a constant conflict that adolescents go through to measure up to their peer group's values and to cope with the ideals and the reality of life. Unfortunately, in the absence of proper guidance, it is natural that many adolescents are pulled into crime, abuse and drug addiction. While family, educational institutions and social groups do have a major role to play in guiding and supporting adolescents, spirituality lends a deeper and stronger basis for forming a clear identity and value system upon which the edifice of a strong character can be raised.

Since spirituality touches on the core goodness of every human being, it is the most potent tool for guiding all sections of society. The process of empowering adolescents begins with the practice of treating them with respect and facilitating their growth in such a way that they can realise their hidden potential. So, instead of looking at them as helpless or ignorant beings who need to be chastised and controlled, spiritual treatment calls for accepting them as potential carriers of higher wisdom, pure values, fresh ideas and skills that need to be channelised in the proper direction. Such a growth process is driven by their inner self, gently guided by wisdom and love rather than a forced development compelled by insecurity, fear and false expectations. Remember! If adolescents are motivated to explore spirituality at their age they will be equipped with excellent powers to cope with any life situation and excel in their chosen roles, thereby living a quality life.

(Writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Capitalising on 'China Plus One': Will India step up?



UTTAM GUPTA

As global trade dynamics shift under Donald Trump's policies, India stands to gain from the move by multinational companies to diversify supply chains beyond China

Releasing a report the 'Trade Watch', on December 25, 2024, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam has suggested that trade policies under US President-elect Donald Trump could result in a potential economic boom for India, driven by significant trade diversion in global trade. He said 'Whatever Trump has announced so far, which is likely to come up... there are opportunities. We are the man at first slip. The ball is coming in our direction. Whether we hold the catch or drop it is for us to decide. There will be huge disruption, and if we prepare for it, there will be a massive boom due to trade diversion.'

This comes after Trump announced additional tariffs on imports from its biggest trading partners - 25 per cent on Canada and Mexico if they fail to check illegal immigration and drug trade. He also announced a general 10 per cent tariff on the US on all imports and a 60 per cent tariff on imports from China. Meanwhile, the US has also announced restrictions on the export of computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips to China. Trump has also threatened to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries if they try to undermine the US dollar. The US is the biggest importer in the world with a mammoth import valued at US\$ 3200 billion during CY 2022. During that year, its import from China alone was US\$536.3 billion which works out to 16.7 percent of total goods imports.

US goods imports from Canada and Mexico were US\$436.6 billion and US\$454.8 billion or 13.6 per cent and 14.2 per cent respectively. In sharp contrast, US goods imports from India during 2022 were US\$85.5 billion or a meagre 2.6 per cent of its total goods import. Now, if Trump executes his threat of imposing a 60 per cent additional tariff on imports from China, this will lead to an exorbitant increase in the cost of the latter's goods to American consumers thereby rendering them uncompetitive vis-à-vis similar goods coming from other exporting countries such as India. This should help India capture a big slice of the US import basket currently served by China. This should be possible even if Trump imposes a 10 per cent additional tariff on all its imports including from India. As for Trump's threat to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS countries (India is one of them) in the event of the latter putting into action their so-called 'de-dollarization' plan (De-dollarization is a process of moving away from the world's reliance on the U.S. dollar as the chief reserve currency), this is theoretical.

At the 16th summit held on 22-24 October 2024 in Kazan, BRICS leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, publicly voiced their commitment to jointly introduce an alternative payment system that wouldn't be dependent on the U.S. dollar. The feasibility of implementing this idea anytime soon is suspect. Second, the US is also hell-bent on taking measures that will undermine the capabilities of China to



AN OVERARCHING REASON BEHIND INDIA 'DROPPING THE CATCH DESPITE THE MAN AT FIRST SLIP AND THE BALL COMING IN OUR DIRECTION' IS A HIGH-COST DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT WHICH MAKES OUR PRODUCTS UNCOMPETITIVE IN THE EXPORT AS WELL AS DOMESTIC MARKET

boost the production of its goods such as electronics (including smartphones), automobiles etc in which it has a comparative advantage. So, it has imposed restrictions on the export of computer chip-making equipment, software, and high-bandwidth memory chips to China. As a result, China not have much surplus to send to the US (and other countries), and India will have more space to boost its export of electronics, automobiles etc. Third, European Union (EU) countries have also imposed tariffs on Chinese EVs (electric vehicles) and solar equipment. Moreover, the multinational companies (MNCs) headquartered in the US and EU countries are shifting their factories away from China, thanks to growing geopolitical uncertainties, the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, cyber-security, and rule-of-law concerns, rising labour costs in China etc. This opens up opportunities as these MNCs can relocate their production bases to India. All of this reinforces a case for 'China Plus One', a potent business strategy that involves diversifying manufacturing and sourcing away from China aimed at reducing the risk of over-reliance on China for manufacturing and sourcing.

Is India ready to capitalise?

None other than NITI Aayog's 'Trade Watch' report says that even as many Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia have emerged as bigger beneficiaries of the 'China Plus One' strategy - enabled by factors such as cheaper labour, simplified tax laws, lower tariffs, signing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) - lead-

ing to substantial surge in their exports especially in high-growth sectors, India has lagged. Although India has achieved production gains, they have not significantly contributed to domestic value addition, unlike its peer economies.

In India's high-tech sector, while exports surged by 350 per cent between 2017 and 2023, domestic value-added output fell by 18 per cent. In manufacturing, by contrast, during this period, even as domestic value-added grew at 26 per cent, it still trailed behind merchandise export growth of 44 per cent. In electronics, India's share in US imports has grown from 0.2 per cent in 2017 to 2.1 per cent in 2023, courtesy of, the government's push toward high-tech exports. However, competitors like Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand dominate, with each holding a substantially higher market share in US electronics imports.

An overarching reason behind India 'dropping the catch despite the man at first slip and the ball coming in our direction' is a high-cost domestic environment (this is despite a host of incentives given under the Production Linked Incentive or PLI schemes to industries) which makes our products uncompetitive in the export as well as domestic market. It also explains why our industries demand high protective tariffs and government yields; for instance, it has on the table a proposal for a 25 per cent hike in steel import duties. It is also a major factor behind India's reluctance to join major multilateral trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Comprehensive and

Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) etc which help the country to better integrate into the global economy and benefit from expanded trade opportunities by facilitating access to markets of their member countries duty-free or at close to zero tariffs. Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute nearly 40 per cent of exports. But, India not being a part of such trade alliances, they are denied an opportunity to boost exports. At the same time, they suffer due to high protective tariffs on the import of basic materials such as steel. A 25 per cent hike in import duties on steel products - asked by the Ministry of Steel - will impart a deadly blow to the MSMEs.

There are four major reasons as to why costs in India are high. First, businesses in basic materials and feedstock such as copper, zinc, aluminium, oil and gas, chemicals, petrochemicals etc are natural monopolies enabling them to set high prices. Second, tax rates are pretty high particularly when it comes to petroleum products which are still taxed under the pre-GST regime. By increasing movement costs, these increase the cost of all goods across the board.

Third, power tariffs are exorbitant thanks to excessive State controls on power distribution companies. Finally, industries operate in highly interest-rate environments. India can catapult itself to the position of fully leveraging the 'China Plus One' strategy only if it effectively addresses the present high-cost syndrome.

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

De-dollarisation: A bold step toward economic equity or a path fraught with uncertainty

The global economy stands at a crossroads as the concept of 'de-dollarisation' gains momentum, sparking debates about the future of international trade and finance

The global economy is currently rife with discussions surrounding a potential 'de-dollarisation,' which pertains to the anticipated transition away from the supremacy of the US dollar in international trade and finance.



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

Advocates argue that it could stabilise economies, reduce inflation, and ultimately relieve financial pressure on everyday individuals. However, is this change truly the solution to the world's economic problems, or does it introduce a new set of challenges? De-dollarisation refers to the reduction of dependence on the US dollar in the realms of global trade, investments, and reserves. For many years, the dollar has held its position

of elements: an increasing yearning for financial independence, the unpredictability of US policies, and the necessity for a different system that is more resilient against sanctions and market instability. Several nations, particularly those within economic alliances like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), have put forth the concept of establishing a new shared currency to facilitate trade and lessen their dependence on the dollar. Undoubtedly, a significant appeal of a unified currency lies in its potential to mitigate inflation. By minimising the volatility of exchange rates and reducing reliance on fluctuations in the dollar, it could offer a pathway to sta-

bilise prices for traded goods through a singular global currency unit. Countries that rely on importing oil or other essential items ought to engage in negotiations for fixed prices, free from the influence of market fluctuations driven by the volatility of the dollar rate. Inflation, frequently influenced by fluctuations in local currency, could, in principle, be mitigated within a cohesive framework. The reasoning is straightforward: when trade and pricing frameworks are synchronised with a single currency, fluctuations in the dollar will likely exert a diminished impact from external shocks. Having more stable prices for essential items would alleviate the financial strain on

families. A unified currency could simplify many aspects of daily life for the average person. Crossing border lines may appear quite effortless, as there will be no need for currency exchange. Global enterprises will thrive in an environment where stable financial conditions enable them to provide savings to their customers. Nevertheless, the transition to a unified currency faces several challenges. A cohesive monetary system requires exceptional coordination among countries with diverse economic priorities, growth rates, and fiscal strategies.



Creating confidence and setting up governance frameworks for the currency would present a significant challenge. Critics contend that a unified currency could unfairly benefit more robust economies, putting smaller or developing countries at risk. Without the ability to modify their currency values, nations may find it challenging to address specific economic crises effectively. In the immediate term, this may unsettle global financial systems, leading to instability as markets adjust. Although the dollar's strength might not be flawless, it serves as a stabilising force in a tumultuous global economy. The ideas of de-dollarisation and the potential rise of

a unified currency represent daring approaches to addressing enduring economic challenges. The outcome of lower inflation and an improved quality of life hinges on the ability of nations to collaborate effectively and create frameworks that prioritise fairness and stability. However, the journey towards this transformation is set to be long and complex. The discussions it has ignited suggest a more equitable economic future. Whether they evolve into genuine transformation is something only time will reveal—or if the world navigates towards fresh financial horizons is yet to be determined.

(The writer is a freelance writer; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Key infra sectors' growth slows to 4.3 pc

The output of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to 4.3 per cent in November 2024 against 7.9 per cent growth registered a year ago, according to official data released on Tuesday. On a monthly basis, the production growth of these sectors was higher than the 3.7 per cent expansion recorded in October 2024. In November, production of crude oil and natural gas contracted. The production growth of coal, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, and electricity moderated to 7.5 per cent, 2.9 per cent, 2 per cent, 4.8 per cent, and 3.8 per cent, respectively, against 10.9 per cent, 12.4 per cent, 3.3 per cent, 9.7 per cent and 5.8 per cent in November last year. However, cement output rose to 13 per cent in the month under review. The growth of core sectors - coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity - was 4.2 per cent during April-November this fiscal. It was 8.7 per cent in the same period last fiscal. The eight core sectors contribute 40.27 per cent to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), which measures overall industrial growth.



Anthem Biosciences files draft papers for IPO

Anthem Biosciences on Tuesday filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to float a Rs 3,395-crore initial public offering. The proposed initial public offer (IPO) is entirely an offer for sale (OFS) worth Rs 3,395 crore by promoters, investors and other selling shareholders, according to a Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). Under the OFS, promoters - Ganesh Sambasivam and K Ravindra Chandrappa, and investors - Viridity Tone LLP and Portsmouth Technologies LLC - will sell the shares in Anthem Biosciences. Other shareholders - Malay J Barua, Rupesh N Kinekar, Satish Sharma, Prakash Kariabettan, and K Ramakrishnan will also offload their shares in the company. Since the IPO is entirely an OFS, the company will not receive any funds from the issue and the proceeds will go to the selling shareholder.



Cyber attack on IT infra of Thomas Cook (India)

Travel services provider Thomas Cook (India) Ltd on Tuesday said there has been a cyber attack on its IT infrastructure and it is working with security experts to support its investigation and take remedial action. In a regulatory filing, the company said, "...there has been an incident involving a cyber attack on our IT infrastructure." Without disclosing the exact timelines, it said, "Immediately upon becoming aware of the incident, we have taken the necessary steps to investigate and respond to the incident, including shutting down affected systems." Thomas Cook (India) added, "We are working with leading cyber security experts to support our investigation and identify the extent of the issue and take remedial action as necessary."

Emerging technologies to drive job growth: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Indian IT ecosystem is poised for a promising growth trajectory in the coming years with emerging technologies expected to witness a 20 per cent increase in new jobs in 2025, Human Resources (HR) platform FirstMeridian Business Services said on Tuesday. Looking back at 2024, it said the Indian IT and tech ecosystem witnessed a 17 per cent surge in new employment opportunities, driven by rapid digital transformation and the concurrent rising demand for

emerging tech niche job profiles. "After a muted H1, the sector regained momentum, as we gear up for 2025, these trends will continue, while also eyeing an average 20 per cent rise in profiles like application developers, software engineers, DevOps engineers, AI, ML, and Cyber Security," FirstMeridian Business Services CEO, IT Staffing, Sunil Nehra said. Moreover, Artificial Intelligence (AI), which was a major trend in 2024, is expected to further accelerate in 2025,

Interest rates on small savings schemes remain unchanged

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday left the interest rates unchanged on various small savings schemes, including PPF and NSC, for the fourth straight quarter beginning January 1, 2024.

"The rates of interest on various small savings schemes for the fourth quarter of FY 2024-25, starting from January 1, 2025, and ending on March 31, 2025, shall remain unchanged from those notified for the third quarter (October 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024) of FY 2024-25," said a finance ministry notification.

As per the notification, deposits under the Sukanya Samridhi scheme will attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent, while the rate on a three-year term deposit remains at 7.1 per cent prevailing in the current quarter.

The interest rates for pop-

ular Public Provident Fund (PPF) and post office savings deposit schemes too have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra will be 7.5 per cent, and the investments will mature in 115 months.

The interest rate on the National Savings Certificate (NSC) will remain at 7.7 per cent for the January-March 2025 period.

Like the current quarter, the Monthly Income Scheme will earn 7.4 per cent for investors.

The interest rates have been left unchanged for the last four quarters now. The government had last made changes in some schemes for the fourth quarter of the last fiscal.

The government notifies the interest rates on small savings schemes, majorly operated by post offices and banks, every quarter.



Gold set to extend record run; may hit Rs 90,000

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold, a safe-haven bet, is likely to continue its record-smashing journey in the New Year, rising to Rs 85,000 per 10 grams and even Rs 90,000 level in domestic markets if geopolitical tensions and global economic uncertainties continue.

Also aiding the run is a dovish tilt in monetary policy and buying by central banks, but if the geopolitical crisis eases, the precious metal will turn weak on depreciating rupee.

Gold price is hovering at Rs 79,350 per 10 grams in spot markets at present, and Rs 76,600 per 10 grams in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

The precious metal capped off 2024 on a strong note with its best performance, notching 23 per cent returns in the domestic markets. The yellow metal hit an all-time high of Rs 82,400 per 10 grams on October 30 this year. Silver mirrored this stellar performance with a 30 per cent gain, surpassing the Rs 1 lakh level per kg level.

Globally, Comex gold futures started the year at around USD 2,062 per ounce and rallied to a peak of USD



2,790 per ounce on October 31, giving returns of up to 28 per cent, reinforcing their appeal amid global uncertainties.

Experts believe that precious metals remain strong performers in 2025 as well, buoyed by geopolitical tensions, central bank purchases, and a pivot towards lower interest rates by major central banks.

The outlook for gold in 2025 remains positive, though the pace of growth may moderate compared to 2024, LKP Securities VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, Jateen Trivedi said.

"Domestic gold prices are expected to reach Rs 85,000 as modest targets, with a best-case scenario of Rs 90,000 and silver expected to deliver bit higher gains towards Rs 1.1 lakh on modest and even hit Rs

WB'S B-READY REPORT

India may face challenges in achieving good scores: GTRI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India may face challenges in achieving good scores on parameters like business entry, labour regulations, and international trade in the World Bank's Business Ready report, according to think tank GTRI.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said as India is preparing for its inclusion in the B-READY framework, its focus should be on leveraging global insights while championing local reforms.

Business Ready (B-READY) is the World Bank's new flagship report benchmarking the business environment and investment climate in most economies worldwide.

The report assesses the regulatory framework and public services directed at firms, and the efficiency with which regulatory framework and public services are combined in practice.

It is replacing the World Bank Group's earlier Doing



Business index. In 2020, the World Bank decided to pause the publication of its Doing Business report following a number of irregularities regarding changes to data in previous reports.

"In Business Entry, countries like Singapore offer online business registration within a day at minimal cost.

In India, businesses still face multiple steps and incomplete digital integration. India is likely to score moderately on this parameter," it said. Similarly, in labour regula-

gles with delays and inconsistent regulations and due to this India may achieve a low score.

However, GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said India is expected to score healthy in the three key parameters - Quality of Regulations, Effectiveness of Public Services, and Operational Efficiency.

"The World Bank's B-READY Report offers a valuable lens to evaluate business environments globally, but India must resist overemphasising its rankings," he said.

As a vast and complex economy, the country's challenges - high logistics costs, burdensome GST compliance, limited SME credit access, slow dispute resolution, and the need for digital and green technologies - cannot be fully addressed through standardised metrics, he said.

The B-READY report evaluates ten key areas of a firm's lifecycle.

Reliance spends \$13 bn on acquisitions in five years

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd has spent USD 13 billion on acquisitions in the past five years across new energy, telecom, retail and media business to set a pivot away from core oil and petrochemicals business to clean energy and consumer facing verticals. Last week, Reliance bought oncology platform Karkinos Healthcare for Rs 375 crore, adding another stack to its diagnostic and digital healthcare ecosystem, Morgan Stanley said in a report. "Over the past five years, RIL has announced USD 13 billion in acquisitions with 14 per cent in new energy, 48 per cent in technology, media and telecommunications (TMT), 9 per cent in retail, and increasingly more in healthcare," it said.

Of this, USD 6 billion was in acquisition of companies and assets in media and education business and USD 2.6 billion in telecom and internet verticals. It spent USD 1.7 billion on acquisitions in new energy and USD 1.4 billion in retail, according to Morgan Stanley.

WhatsApp Pay can now extend UPI services to all users

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has lifted the limit from onboarding UPI users for the third-party app provider WhatsApp Pay with immediate effect.

With this development, WhatsApp Pay can now extend UPI services to its entire user base in India, NPCI said in a statement.

Previously, NPCI had permitted WhatsApp Pay to expand its UPI user base in a phased manner, it added.

There was a cap of 100 million users which has been lifted by NPCI.

With this notification, it said, NPCI is removing the limit restrictions on user onboarding on WhatsApp Pay.

WhatsApp Pay will continue to comply with all existing UPI guidelines and circulars applicable to existing Third-Party Application Providers (TPAPs), it said.

NPCI, an initiative of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Banks' Association, is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India (IBA).

NPCI governs the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) framework in India.



Markets bid goodbye to 2024 with impressive gains

INVESTORS' WEALTH SOARS BY RS 77.66 LAKH CRORE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stock market investors became richer by a whopping Rs 77.66 lakh crore in 2024, helped by an overall optimistic trend in equities, where the BSE Sensex surged over 8 per cent.

Analysts said the year witnessed a tug of war between the bulls and bears marked by volatility but, despite the uncertainties around the world, the Indian markets sustained the pressure and delivered impressive returns. "The year 2024 has been a

challenging yet rewarding one for the markets. The Nifty steadily climbed from January to September, reaching a historic high of 26,277.35, before giving up some gains to still close the year with an impressive rise. This marked Nifty's ninth consecutive year of positive returns, despite FII's selling shares," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 5,898.75 points or 8.16 per cent this year. The BSE benchmark index hit its all-time high of 85,978.25 on

September 27.

Thanks to the overall optimistic trend in equities, the market capitalisation (mcap) of BSE-listed firms surged Rs 77,66,260.19 crore to Rs 4,41,95,106.44 crore (USD 5.16 trillion) in 2024.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies hit the coveted Rs 400-lakh crore mark for the first time on April 8 this year. The market cap of these firms had hit the Rs 300-lakh crore mark in July last year.

"Early in the year, a combination of anticipated inflation

moderation, expected interest rate cuts, and optimism surrounding the BJP's re-election fuelled a strong rally, pushing indices to record highs. However, the election results, while favouring the BJP, fell short of a complete landslide, leading to a brief market correction.

"Subsequently, the unwinding of the Yen carry trade in August, a global phenomenon where investors borrowed in low-yielding currencies like Yen to invest in higher-yielding assets, triggered another round of volatility.

Indian startups look for a promising new year

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian startup ecosystem experienced a rollercoaster ride in 2024, characterised by a slight-yet-concerning decline in funding activity and a shift in investor sentiment, alongside a silver lining with several startups achieving unicorn status.

Despite facing global economic challenges, India's startups showcased remarkable resilience, adeptly navigating changing market conditions, while continuing to attract investments.

According to data from Tracxn, Indian startups raised a total of USD 30.4 billion in funding throughout 2024, a 6.5 per cent decline from the USD 32.5 billion secured in 2023.

Despite this dip, the Indian startup ecosystem demonstrated resilience, with several companies achieving unicorn status this year. Noteworthy entrants to the unicorn club include Rapido, Ather, Perfos, Porter, and Money View, highlighting ongoing innovation and investment interest in the sector.

The overall funding trend reflects a cautious-yet-optimistic approach from investors, as they navigate a more selective funding environment, while still recognising the potential of high-growth star-

tups in India.

A slight shift towards early-stage investments was evident during the year, with seed and Series A rounds gaining traction, as investors sought to back innovative ideas with long-term potential.

Businesses that could demonstrate robust underlying unit economics found greater favour this year, Dushyant Singh, Managing Partner at Playbook Partners, noted.

Gig economy, retail, and enterprise applications stood

out as top-performing sectors, according to Tracxn. Quick commerce emerged as a high-growth sector, with 40 active companies, including unicorns Zepto, Blinkit, and Swiggy Instamart, and promising newcomers Dunzo, Swish, and Farmako.

In July, the government announced the abolition of the angel tax on investments in startups to provide a more conducive environment for growth.





Jason Momoa makes his DCU comeback as Lobo in *Supergirl: Woman Of Tomorrow*

After being ousted from the DC cinematic universe as Aquaman, Hollywood star Jason Momoa is returning to the fold. However, the actor won't return as Aquaman but as a new character. The actor has signed on to play antihero Lobo in *Supergirl: Woman Of Tomorrow*, reports 'Variety'.

The superhero movie starring *House of the Dragon* actor Milly Alcock as the eponymous hero, is set to be the second film in James Gunn and Peter Safran's rebooted DC Universe following the highly anticipated *Superman* starring David Corenswet as the Man of Steel and Rachel Brosnahan as Lois Lane.

As per 'Variety', Craig Gillespie is directing the film, which also stars Matthias Schoenaerts as villain *Krem of the Yellow Hill* and Eve Ridley as Ruthye Mary Knolle. Ana

Nogueira (*The Vampire Diaries*) wrote the screenplay based on the run of DC comics by Tom King and Bilquis Evely.

The actor confirmed the casting news on Instagram by sharing a quote from an interview with *Fandango* during the press tour for *Aquaman 2* where he discussed his longtime fandom of the character, an anti-hero known for his violent and irreverent personality.

"I collect comics and I don't do so much anymore, but he was always my favourite and I always wanted to play Lobo, because I'm like, 'Hello? It's the perfect role', he said in the interview. "I mean, listen. If they call and ask me to play him, it's a f*** yeah. I haven't received that call, so I don't want to put any fake news out there, but if they ever call me and ask me to play, or ask me to audition, I'm there."

Shweta on her much-anticipated *Mirzapur: The Film*

Shweta Tripathi, fondly recognised as Golu from the hit series *Mirzapur*, has carved a niche for herself in the entertainment industry with her exceptional talent and unique choice of roles. With the announcement of *Mirzapur: The Film*, fans have been eagerly awaiting updates about the highly anticipated adaptation. In a latest chat, Shweta offered an exciting glimpse into the upcoming project, shedding light on its tone and direction.

The actress revealed that the film, which is set to commence production soon, will stay true to the gritty and intense essence of the series. However, she noted that it will be "more testosterone-heavy." Discussing the film's focus, Shweta remarked, "*Mirzapur* is inherently a male-dominated world where power lies in the hands of men. The film will reflect that dynamic."

Fans of the series can also look forward to the return of familiar faces, with Shweta confirming that beloved characters from the first season, such as Compounder and Munna, will appear in the movie. The film aims to maintain the gripping storytelling and raw energy that have made *Mirzapur* a cultural phenomenon.

Shweta expressed her pride in being part of the first Indian OTT series to transition to a feature film, while also acknowledging the responsibility that comes with this milestone. "The love and respect from the audience are immense and it's our responsibility to deliver something that meets their expectations," she said.

Reflecting on her career, Shweta shared her joy in being recognised for her portrayal of Golu, a character that has resonated deeply with fans. She recounted how young women, dressed in makeup and stylish attire, often approach her to express their admiration for Golu, a character starkly different from their own personalities. "It's especially gratifying to see such love for a character that is so raw and real," she added.

Shweta's journey to stardom has been anything but conventional. Following her breakthrough role in *Masaan*, she deliberately chose to focus on OTT platforms rather than chasing commercial blockbusters. "I didn't follow the typical image of a heroine," she explained, encouraging aspiring actors to stay true to their purpose and passion.

The actress also touched upon the evolving landscape of cinema and storytelling, highlighting how projects like *Girls Will Be Girls* represent a positive shift in the industry. "Change is happening and it's

heartening to see not only myself but also the people I admire contributing to this transformation," she remarked.

Shweta emphasised the importance of pursuing one's dreams with intent and purpose, even in the face of challenges. "It's better to wake up every day working towards your passion than to do a job solely for money," she advised, inspiring others to prioritise fulfillment over convention.

With her unwavering dedication and bold career choices, Shweta Tripathi continues to break stereotypes and inspire her audience. As she gears up for *Mirzapur: The Film*, fans are eagerly anticipating what promises to be another thrilling chapter in the world of *Mirzapur*.



Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt reach divorce settlement after 8 years

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt have reached a divorce settlement, apparently ending one of the longest and most contentious divorces in Hollywood history. Jolie and Pitt signed off on a default declaration filed in Los Angeles Superior Court on Monday, saying they have entered into a written agreement on their marital and property rights. The settlement was first reported by People magazine.

"More than eight years ago, Angelina filed for divorce from Mr. Pitt," Jolie's attorney, James Simon, said in a statement. "She and the children left all of the properties they had shared with Mr. Pitt and since that time she has focused on finding peace and healing for their family. This is just one part of a long ongoing process that started eight years ago. Frankly, Angelina is exhausted, but she is relieved this one part is over."

The filing says they give up the right to any future spousal financial support, but gives no other details. A judge will need to sign off on the agreement. An email late Monday night to Pitt's attorney seeking comment was not immediately answered. Jolie, 49 and Pitt, 61, were among Hollywood's most prominent pairings for 12 years, two of them as a married couple. The Oscar winners have six children together. Jolie filed for divorce in 2016, after a private jet flight from Europe during which she said Pitt was abusive toward her and their children.

The FBI and the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services investigated Pitt's actions on the flight and deemed no action needed to be taken against him.

A judge in 2019 declared them divorced and single, but the splitting of assets and child custody needed to be separately settled.

Soon after, a private judge that the two had hired to handle the case reached a decision that included equal custody of their children, but Jolie filed to have him removed from the case over an unreported conflict of interest. An appeals court agreed, the judge was removed, and the couple had to start the process over.

Anurag Kashyap on leaving Mumbai: 'I'm disgusted by my own industry'

Renowned filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, known for his gritty and groundbreaking films like *Gangs of Wasypur*, has now opened up on his decision to leave Mumbai, citing growing discontent with the current state of the film industry. In a candid interview with The Hollywood Reporter India, Kashyap expressed his frustrations, pointing fingers at talent management agencies and the changing dynamics of filmmaking that, he believes, have stripped away the essence of his craft.

"The joy of filmmaking is sucked



out," Kashyap said. "Now it is difficult for me to go out and experiment as it comes at a cost, which makes my producers think about profit and margins. Right from the beginning, before the film starts, it becomes about how to sell it. That's why I want to move out of Mumbai next year. I am going to the South. I want to go where there is stimulation. Otherwise, I will die as an old man. I am so disappointed and disgusted by my own industry. I am disgusted by the mindset."

The filmmaker pointed out the escalating costs of filmmaking,

attributing the issue to rising salaries and profit-driven motives. "The mindset is to remake what's already worked," he remarked. "A film like *Manjummel Boys* would never be made in Hindi cinema but, if successful, would likely be remade in Hindi. They won't try anything new."

Kashyap reserved particular criticism for talent management agencies, accusing them of fostering a toxic culture that prioritises stardom over genuine acting talent. He said, "The first-generation actors and the really entitled ones are very painful

to deal with. Nobody wants to act—they all want to be stars. The agency won't make anybody a star, but the moment someone becomes a star, the agency makes money off them."

According to Kashyap, these agencies often exploit budding actors for profit, only to abandon them when they fail to deliver. "The onus of finding talent is on you—you have to take a risk and firefight with 50 people. And when the film is made, the agency grabs them and turns them into a star. They will brainwash them and tell

them what they need to do to become a star. They won't send them to workshops but to the gym—it's all glam-glam because they have to be massive stars," he explained.

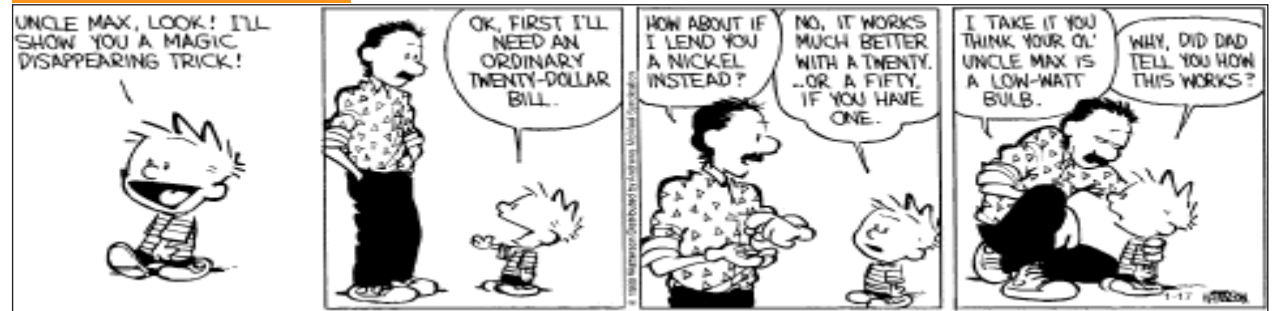
Sharing an incident to illustrate the damaging practices of such agencies, Kashyap recounted how an actor, under the influence of his agency, disappeared but later returned seeking his guidance after being dropped by the same agency. "This is what the agency does—they just make money off you. They aren't invested in building new careers," he said.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



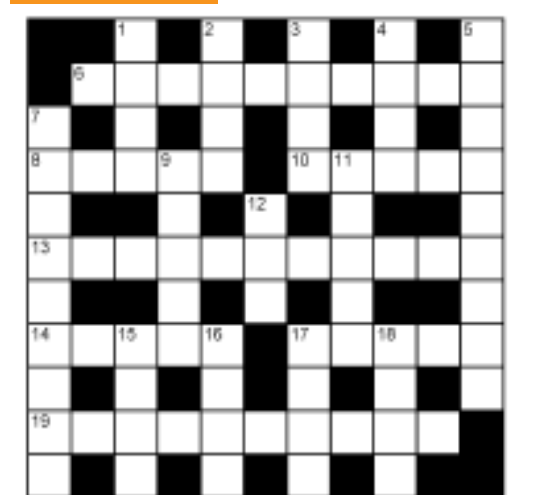
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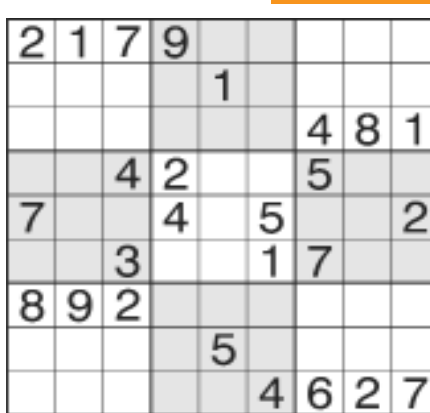
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

- 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

- The group of people who are in charge of a country
- Correct
- A black and white animal
- Coming nearer to
- Before second
- Bad smell
- A popular jam flavour

DOWN

- Measuring a lot from one end to the other
- A compass direction
- Break suddenly
- Stitched
- People who are unknown to you
- A meal

- Cows and goats have these
- Throbbled painfully
- A month
- Uncommon
- A place with houses, shops, schools
- Unlock
- Rowers pull on these



'I've moved past dwelling on what's not happening—gratitude drives me forward'

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

With an effortless charm and a career defined by versatility, Samir Kochhar has established himself as a prominent figure in Indian entertainment. A dynamic actor, acclaimed host and familiar face across film, television and digital platforms, Samir's journey is a testament to his relentless passion and adaptability. From captivating millions as the host of the Indian Premier League (IPL) for over a decade to delivering memorable performances in films and groundbreaking web series, he has continually evolved, earning admiration for his talent and dedication. As he ventures into exciting new projects, Samir remains a force to be reckoned with in the world of entertainment.

In a candid conversation, Samir Kochhar reflects on his remarkable journey in the entertainment industry, his upcoming projects and the challenges that continue to inspire him. From his early days in Delhi to becoming a versatile actor and presenter, he shares insights into his craft and his excitement for his latest venture, *Moonwalk*.

Reflecting on his two-decade-long journey, the *Jannat* fame describes it as one filled with perseverance and self-discovery. "I come from a family of academics and doctors. My mother, a Ph.D. holder, pursued Chartered Accountancy, and our world was far removed from the media industry. But I was always encouraged by my family and school to participate in extracurricular activities—be it theatre or sports. That foundation sparked my interest in the media world."

The *Bade Achhe Lagte Hain* actor reminisces about his days performing plays in Delhi and hosting live events before taking the leap to Mumbai—a city he had never visited before. "Mumbai was an uncharted territory for me. It was tough initially, but the city gave back as much as it demanded," he says.

From hosting the Indian Premier League (IPL) for 10 years to starring in films like *Jannat*, *Zehar* and now making a mark in the OTT space with shows like *Sacred Games* or his latest project *Moonwalk* to name a few, Kochhar has embraced every opportunity with gratitude. "I consider myself fortunate to have been part of both acting and hosting. It's been an enriching journey, and I'm excited for what lies ahead." Talking about his latest project, *Moonwalk*, he shares how the script instantly drew him in. "Ajay Bhuyan, the director, approached me with the idea of making something edgy and out-of-the-box," he recalls. "When I read the 10

FROM HOSTING THE INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE (IPL) FOR A DECADE TO DELIVERING IMPACTFUL PERFORMANCES, SAMIR KOCHHAR'S PATH HAS BEEN MARKED BY GRIT, ADAPTABILITY AND AN UNRELENTING PASSION FOR HIS CRAFT. NOW BACK WITH HIS LATEST VENTURE, MOONWALK, THE CHARISMATIC ENTERTAINER REFLECTS ON HIS CHALLENGES, TRIUMPHS AND THE EXCITING CHAPTERS AHEAD



"I, OF COURSE, WAIT FOR THE RIGHT PROJECT TO COME MY WAY. YOU NEED TO DRAW A THIN LINE BETWEEN WHAT YOU GET AND WHAT YOU WANT TO GET. YOU NEED TO FIND YOUR OWN CALLING IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL OF IT. IF MY HEART IS IN SOMETHING, THEN I'M INTO IT."

episodes in just one day, I was smiling and laughing throughout. The story's bizarre, eccentric tone reminded me of Guy Ritchie's films and the Coen Brothers' humour. It was an irresistible blend."

The character of Maddie Sharma, a con artist with a penchant for elaborate heists, was another compelling factor. "Maddie is slick, manipulative and unapologetically ambitious. He's from a family of thieves, but he doesn't consider himself just a thief—he sees himself as an elite heist artist," Samir explains.

What makes Maddie even more intriguing is his layered personality. "Underneath his narcissistic exterior, he has mommy issues and a desperate need for her approval. That emotional complexity made the role so much fun to explore," he says. The *Four More Shots Please* star dove deep into preparing for Maddie. "I had to step away from my usual self to embody this character. Maddie is cunning and calculated, almost like a snake that paralyzes its prey," he explains.

To bring authenticity to the role, he worked closely with the director to fine-tune the script and add quirks to Maddie's persona. "We decided that Maddie would occasionally speak French—not proper French, but enough to confuse people around him. It's these little eccentricities that make him stand out," he says.

The physical transformation was equally significant. "I grew a thick beard for the role, which is something people haven't seen me with before. It's been a rollercoaster playing Maddie, constantly thinking of ways to make him crazier and more unpredictable," he shares.

For him, selecting a project is about

following his instincts. "I absolutely wait for the right project. Sometimes, the roles you want don't come your way, and you have to find a balance between what's available and what resonates with you. If my heart's not in it, I won't do it."

When asked about his earlier statement of being a 'struggling actor', he believes the struggle is ongoing. "An actor is always struggling. Even when you get the right role, you struggle to perfect it," he says.

However, Samir emphasises the importance of gratitude over struggle. "I've moved past dwelling on what's not happening. Instead, I focus on the opportunities I have and look forward to what's next," he says.

The *Typewriter* fame further shared his thoughtful approach to choosing projects, emphasizing the importance of balance and alignment with personal aspirations. "I, of course, wait for the right project to come my way. You need to draw a thin line between what you get and what you want to get. You need to find your own calling in the middle of all of it." He further added, "If my heart is in something, then I'm into it." For Samir, passion and purpose are the guiding principles behind every career decision.

Beyond *Moonwalk*, Samir has an exciting slate of projects. "I'm currently working on my own podcast series, with four or five episodes already shot. It should be out soon," he reveals.

Additionally, he has signed a show with Netflix, slated to begin production at the end of January. Though he's bound by contract confidentiality, he hints at it being a significant milestone. "I'm also hosting the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) for Sony and a concert series featuring legends like Shankar Mahadevan and Hariharan," he adds.

As he juggles multiple ventures, Samir remains optimistic and driven. "I'm in a good space, but I'm hungry for more. I love the space that I am in. I look forward to continuing this journey with passion and gratitude."

Samir Kochhar's evolution from a budding performer in Delhi to a celebrated actor and host is a testament to his unwavering dedication. With *Moonwalk* and other exciting projects on the horizon, he's set to embark on yet another remarkable chapter in his career.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ANTICIPATION:

The films that have us excited for 2025



AZAAD

Azaad takes the spotlight as one of 2025's most highly anticipated films, promising to captivate audiences with its compelling story of courage, freedom and companionship. Set against the backdrop of 1920s British-occupied India, this epic tale follows 19-year-old Govind (played by Aamir Devgan) and his bond with a remarkable horse, *Azaad*, as they embark on a life-changing journey. With beautiful period settings, stunning visuals, and an emotionally gripping storyline, this adventure film is expected to be one of the biggest blockbusters of the year. Produced by Pragya Kapoor and Ronnie Screwvala, this film is set to be a visual spectacle on the big screen this January.

RAID 2
The much-awaited sequel to the 2018 hit *Raid*, *Raid 2* brings back Ajay Devgn in his intense role as an income tax officer fighting against corruption. This time, the stakes are higher as the story dives deeper into the world of black money, political influence and criminal activities. Directed by Raj Kumar Gupta, and also featuring Shruti Haasan and Sanjay Dutt, *Raid 2* promises to offer an even more intense and action-packed thriller, guaranteed to keep audiences on the edge of their seats.



AS WE ARE COMING TO THE END OF 2024, BOLLYWOOD FANS ARE EAGERLY WAITING FOR AN EPIC LINEUP OF MOVIES IN 2025. NEW YEAR PROMISES A LINEUP OF THRILLING, HEARTWARMING, AND ACTION-PACKED FILMS.

ALPHA

The first female-led spy movie in the YRF universe, *Alpha* stars Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh, directed by Shiv Rawaiil. Catch it in theaters on December 25, 2025.



HOUSEFULL 5

The popular *Housefull* franchise directed by Tarun Mansukhani returns on June 6, 2025, featuring a star-studded cast, including Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh, Abhishek Bachchan, Fardeen Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Chitrangada Singh, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma, Nikitin Dheer and more.

MAALIK

Maalik, starring Rajkumar Rao in a never-before-seen role as a gangster, has quickly become one of the most anticipated films of 2025. Known for his versatile acting, Rajkumar's transformation into a menacing criminal figure is sparking immense curiosity among fans and critics alike. With its gripping narrative and Rajkumar's powerful performance at its core, *Maalik* is undoubtedly shaping up to be one of the most-watched films of the year. The action thriller *Maalik* is directed by Pulkit and produced by Kumar Taurani of Tips Films and Jay Shewakramani of Northern Lights Films.

SIKANDAR

An action thriller directed by A.R. Murugadoss, starring Salman Khan is set to release on Eid 2025. Salman plays a dual role alongside Rashmika Mandanna, Suniel Shetty and Kajal Aggarwal.



Beyond wax, nano-tech meets auto detailing

The automotive industry is progressing rapidly, with nanotechnology emerging as a transformative force in redefining car care. This cutting-edge technology is revolutionising the car detailing process and offering unmatched protection, durability and aesthetic appeal, ushering in an exciting new era for car owners and enthusiasts.

Nanotechnology in car maintenance is based on the atomic and molecular manipulation of matter. Nanoparticles, measured in billionths of a meter, possess extraordinary properties and enhance various aspects of car maintenance. One of the most prominent applications is in the development of nano-ceramic coatings. Nano-ceramic coatings, Nano and regular ceramic coatings are both popular choices for car detailing, but they differ in particle size and composition. Regular ceramic coatings typically consist of micrometre-sized particles, while nano-ceramic coatings utilise particles in the nanometre range. The smaller size of nanoparticles allows for a denser and more uniform coating, improving scratch resistance and chemical protection.

Nanotechnology offers a revolutionary approach to car detailing, providing superior protection and easier maintenance than traditional methods. There are several benefits of nanotechnology in car detailing, such as:

Enhanced protection: Nanoparticles form a microscopic barrier that shields the car's paint and glass and protects it from UV rays and environmental problems, such as bird droppings, during weather conditions. This results in a long-lasting shine and reduced risk of fading or wear and tear.

Deeper cleaning and glossier finishing: Nano-formulated polishes and cleaners can penetrate deeper into the car's surface due

to the particles' tiny size. It removes dirt and grime more effectively, revealing a glossier finish to the car after detailing.

Durability & longevity: Nanotechnology car care products typically offer extended protection compared to traditional waxes and sealants. It translates to fewer detailing sessions and keeps the car looking its best for longer.

Easier maintenance: The hydrophobic coatings created by nanoparticles makes future washes a breeze. Dirt and grime slide off, requiring less scrubbing and reducing the risk of introducing swirl marks.



While the benefits of nanotechnology in car care are undeniable, it is important to approach its implementation with a clear eye. Not all nano-coated products are created equal and selecting reputable brands that adhere to stringent quality standards is crucial. Moreover, proper application and maintenance are always vital to maximising the performance and longevity of these treatments.

As nanotechnology evolves in the rapidly increasing technology world, there are expected to be even more groundbreaking advancements in the car care industry. The future holds immense potential, from self-healing paintwork to intelligent coatings that adapt to environmental conditions. By embracing this technology, the automotive industry can be poised to deliver cars that look stunning and offer unparalleled protection and convenience. From the car owner's perspective, there will be several benefits, such as enhanced car ownership experiences characterised by less time spent on maintenance and greater pride in the car's appearance, instilling a sense of hope for the future of car care.

(The author, Kunal Sethi, is the CEO of The Detailing Mafia.)

Indian cricket has depth to fill Rohit, Virat's void: Lehmann

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Indian cricket has produced a generational superstar in Yashasvi Jaiswal and will remain in good health even when Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma decide to call time on their careers, feels former Australia head coach and two-time World Cup winner Darren Lehmann. The 54-year-old, who played 27 Tests and 117 ODIs during his decade-long career, is also captivated by Jasprit Bumrah's skills, claiming to have never seen any player have more impact in a single series. Talking about impending retirements of Rohit and Kohli following their poor show in the ongoing series where India trail 1-2, Lehmann was empathetic and practical about the transition in Indian cricket. "Look whenever they decide to give it away and whatever happens in next few days they have been great players for India

over a long period of time," Lehmann, a member of 1999 and 2003 ODI World Cup-winning teams told PTI. "Now actually we see younger players starting to step up for India and play well at next level. There is so much depth in Indian cricket I won't worry too much," Lehmann was pretty matter of fact. "Whenever these two guys decide to retire, there are so many talented youngsters that Indian cricket will be in good stead." Having watched Jaiswal emerge as the flagbearer of Indian batting in the series, Lehmann made a bold prediction about the southpaw, who has scores of 161, 82 and 84 in this series. "Oh, superstar. One of the best I have seen," Lehmann said quickly, before the question was finished. "He (Jaiswal) and Harry Brook are two next generation players. They are the ones that people will sit back and say they are good players. He played very well in



Melbourne and was outstanding in Perth. He has come up leaps and bounds on this tour," the beefy left-hander of yesteryears said. But Lehmann reserved his highest praise for Bumrah, equating him with all-time greats such as Wasim Akram and Glenn McGrath. "I presume he (Bumrah) is the next captain when Rohit finishes. He did a really good job in Perth. He is the best bowler I have ever seen live. "I have seen Wasim Akram, Glenn McGrath and all but I have not seen a bowler have impact like him in a single series like Jasprit Bumrah has since Mitchell Johnson in 2013-14 Ashes win. "This is very similar as Bumrah already has 30 wickets. He has been outstanding to watch. He will do well when he gets a chance to lead India." Talking about transition, Lehmann noted that Australia's batting could be a concern, rather than the bowling, even though

Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Scott Boland, and Michael Neser are all in their early to mid-30s. "I am not so worried about bowling as lot of good kids are coming up. Lance Morris, Xavier Bartlett from Brisbane Heats, so there are plenty of them. Spinners are okay but it is the batting that is being tested at the moment," said Lehmann. "There will be some changes with greats retiring but fast bowling will be good enough. How long Cummins and Starc survive time will tell, but hopefully, they will get to till next Ashes." Lehmann has had a decent reputation as a coach but when asked if he would consider coaching the Indian national team, the answer was negative. "It would have been an honour to work with Indian national team but I am done with international cricket. I just want the young guys to get better," Lehmann signed off.



Travis Head explains 'finger on ice' celebration after dismissing Pant

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia batter Travis Head has explained his unusual celebration after dismissing Rishabh Pant in the Boxing Day Test, stating it signifies "finger on the ice," a quirky gesture that he first showed during the tour of Sri Lanka. After batting through an entire session, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant appeared poised to guide India to a draw on the final day of the Boxing Day Test. However, Head turned the game on its head by dismissing Pant, which triggered a dramatic Indian collapse and paved the way for a 184-run Australian victory, giving the hosts a 2-1 lead in the five-match series. Pant mis-timed a pull shot and was caught at long-on, after which Head celebrated the moment with his distinctive gesture of folding the fingers of his left hand into a circle and dipping the forefinger of his right hand into it.



"Finger on the ice. I started in Sri Lanka. I put my finger on the ice and be ready to go for the next one," Head told "Triple M Radio" after the Melbourne Test. "I didn't expect to be bowling. I thought Galle would be my next bowling. I'll go put it down in a little cup of ice, be ready to go up there next," he added, referring to Australia's upcoming tour of the island nation. Head's celebration quickly gained attention and went

viral on social media. After the match, Australian captain Pat Cummins was asked about it and he offered a lighthearted explanation. "I can explain it. It's his finger so hot he's got to put in a cup of ice. Yeah that's what it is," Cummins told reporters. "So, that's normally the running joke. It was in the Gabba or somewhere he got a wicket as well and just straight to the fridge, grabs a bucket of ice, puts his finger in and just walks in front of Lino

(Nathan Lyon)...Just like that (he) thinks it's very funny. "So that's what it would have been, nothing else." However, Head's celebration didn't sit well with former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu, who demanded "stringent action" against the Australian player, calling it "obnoxious". "Travis head's obnoxious behaviour during the course of the Melbourne test doesn't auger well for the gentleman's game...Sets the worst possible example when there are kids, women, young & old watching the game. "...This caustic conduct did not insult an individual but a nation of 1.5 billion Indians...Stringent punishment that would serve a deterrent for the future generations needs to be slapped on him so that no one dares follow suit!!" Sidhu posted on X. The two teams will play the pivotal final Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, starting January 3.

Deepti jumps to fifth spot in ICC ODI rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India off-spinner Deepti Sharma climbed a spot to enter the top 5 in the latest ICC women's ODI ranking for bowlers following her match-winning performances in the recently-concluded series against the West Indies at home. Deepti, who is fifth now, has 665 rating points and is marginally behind fourth-placed South Africa's Marizanne Kapp (677 rating points). The 27-year-old made headlines, taking eight wickets in two matches, including 6/31 in the last game as India completed a clean sweep in the three-match series in Vadodra. Among batters, Jemimah Rodrigues (537 rating points) is closing in on a top-20 as she has jumped four spots to 22nd thanks to scores of 29 and 52 during the series. The big-hitting Richa Ghosh (13 not out and 23 not out) has moved seven spots to 41st (448 rating points), with



Chinelle Henry's half-century in the third ODI leading to a 21-spot leap to 65th (349 rating points). However, charismatic India opener Smriti Mandhana (720 rating points), who scored two half-centuries in the series, has dropped one place to third and trails South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt (773) and Chamari Athapaththu (733). Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur has dropped three places to 13th. Hayley Matthews' seventh ODI century in Vadodra has helped the West Indies opener climb six places to seventh in the ICC Women's Batting Rankings.

Warner wants Australia's seniors to follow Konstas' mindset against India

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Lavishing praise on young Sam Konstas, former opener David Warner has urged Australia's senior players to adopt a similar aggressive approach when facing Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has been a dominant force with the ball in the ongoing series. The 19-year-old Konstas played some stunning scoops and laps off Bumrah en route to a 65-ball 60 on his Test debut during the fourth Test at Melbourne, which the Aussies won by 184 runs on Monday. "It was very special. People are going to criticise him as well. That's the nature of the beast, that's the way he is going to play," Warner told AAP. "When someone like Bumrah is bowling to you, you have to try and execute somehow. They put a third-man in and fine leg to him and bowled him through the gate (in the second innings). "He will look back on that and go 'what a great experience in the Boxing Day Test'. He now gets to come here for New Year's Test." Konstas had scored 107 off 97 balls against India for the Prime Minister's XI. He had also scored an unbeaten 73 at the MCG against India A, besides making two centuries in the Sheffield Shield and a record-breaking 50 on debut for the Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League. "What he did in the Prime Minister's XI shows he has that talent. But it also shows he is brave."

"Him being brave at the top of the order, you've got guys who have played 50 Tests, they could have been brave as well, they could have played different shots, they could have moved out of their crease and batted different." Warner added that while players like Steve Smith had experimented with various approaches, it shouldn't take a newcomer's boldness to shift the momentum. "Smudge (Steve Smith) tried a million different things. But it shouldn't take someone to come out there and be brave to get that momentum shifting. You have experience at the top of the order, experience in that whole line up," Warner said. "Travis Head took the game away from them in Adelaide with that magnificent hundred. It shouldn't take that guy just to come and do that. It's the way the Australians played but other people can be braver as well." **Bumrah is a genius** Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test. The India speedstar has taken 30 wickets at an average of just 12.83 this series, including nine wickets in Melbourne. "You're also hoping Bumrah gets it off that handkerchief, he's a genius. He is averaging under 20. His record is incredible," Warner said.

Wayne Rooney fired as Plymouth coach

AP ■ LONDON

Wayne Rooney was fired as Plymouth Argyle coach on Tuesday after just seven months in charge of the struggling Championship team. The 39-year-old former England and Manchester United striker was hired in May and departs with Plymouth last in the English second tier with four wins in 23 games this season. His final game was a 2-0 loss to Oxford United on Sunday which extended Argyle's winless run to nine games. "Plymouth Argyle can confirm that the club and head coach Wayne Rooney have mutually agreed to part ways with immediate effect," the club said in a statement. "We would like to thank Wayne and his team for all

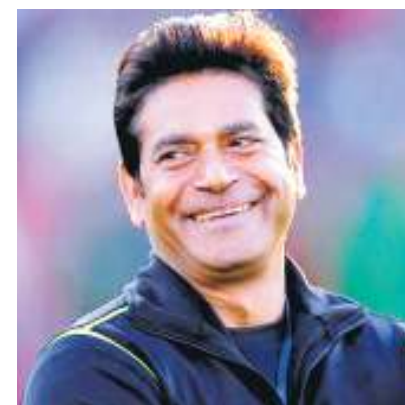


their efforts and wish them well for the future." Rooney took charge at Plymouth following an 83-day tenure at Birmingham, which was relegated from the Championship after last season. He's also been the coach at MLS team DC United and Derby County. "I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board of Plymouth," Rooney said in the club statement.

PCB retains Aaqib Javed on selection committee despite interim head coach role

AP ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided not to remove former Test pacer Aaqib Javed from the national selection committee, despite him accepting the position of interim head coach for both the white and red-ball national squads. According to sources within the PCB, since Aaqib's role as head coach is temporary, he will remain a part of the selection committee. However, one insider noted that Aaqib's influence as a selector had diminished, especially after he assumed the role of red-ball head coach following Jason Gillespie's resignation before the South Africa Test series. Since then, other selectors have gained more authority in decision-making. "Aaqib's role as selector has been minimal in recent times with the team playing its test series in South Africa. As the other selectors, Azhar Ali, Asad Shafiq, Aleem Dar, Hasan Cheema have been more authoritative and had their



say on Shaheen Shah Afridi being sidelined for the two tests in SA after the white ball series," he said. Earlier this year, the PCB had appointed South Africa's Gary Kirsten and Australia's Jason Gillespie as head coaches for the white and red-ball teams. Both were granted selection committee membership and given the final say in team selections.

"But after Pakistan fared poorly in the World T20 Cup followed by the two nil whitewash by Bangladesh in the test series at home, the PCB decided to bring revamp the selection committee by adding Aaqib, Azhar and Aleem to the mix and also stripped Kirsten and Gillespie of considerable powers they enjoyed including being members of the selection committee and final say in team selections," the insider said. When Aaqib was appointed interim head coach for both white and red-ball formats, there was initial confusion among the other selectors regarding his authority. The board later clarified that Aaqib would remain a national selector while taking on the interim coaching role. "The PCB has every intention of appointing one or separate coaches for the white and red ball formats by the time the Champions Trophy is completed," another insider said. However, he also said that the chances of the PCB calling upon foreign coaches again are slim.

McDonald backs under-fire Marsh, remains optimistic about Starc's availability for Sydney Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald conceded that Mitchell Marsh has fallen short of expectations with the bat against India but remained optimistic about Mitchell Starc's availability for the pivotal fifth Test in Sydney. Starc's fitness remains the primary worry for the hosts after the pacer battled through sore ribs from day three of the Boxing Day Test but still managed to bowl effectively, including claiming the prized wicket of Virat Kohli on the final day. "Any time you get through the game, it's always a good indicator that you've a chance at the next game," McDonald told reporters after the hosts picked up memorable victory at the MCG to take a 2-1 lead in the series. "It didn't stop him (Starc). Clearly there was a little bit of discomfort early on in spells, but once he got warm it seemed as though he was pretty free. "We'll see how everyone

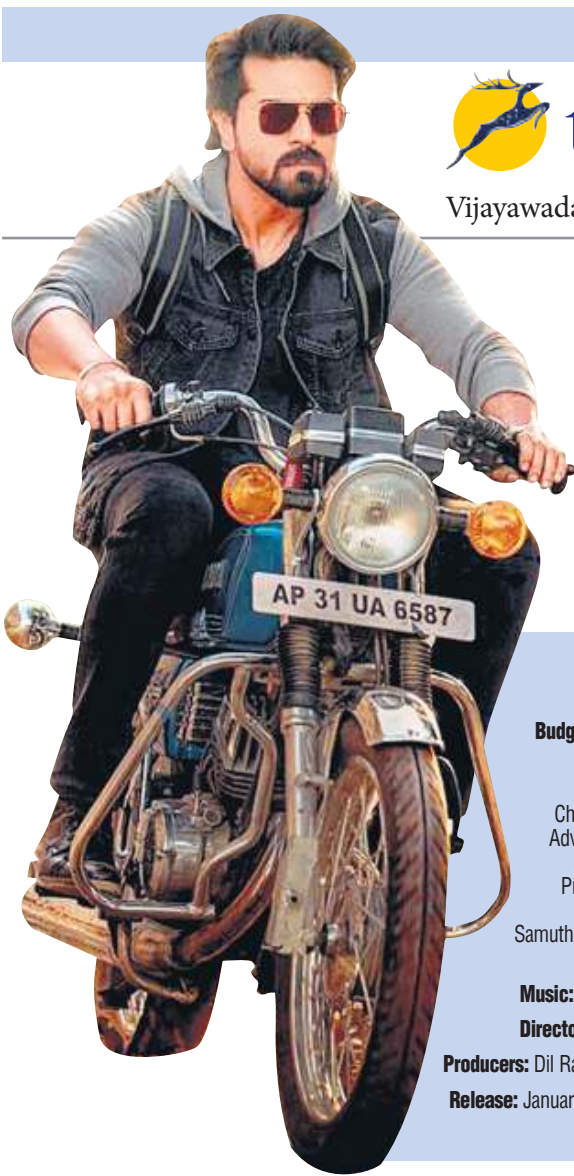
recovers. Bowling last, it was a pretty attritional game, something that we're not used to in the last few years. "Clearly Starc's carrying something of some description. We'll assess that. "But other than that, it looks as though we got through pretty unscathed, but (with a) short turnaround recovery is important, and we'll assess what the team looks like in Sydney based upon the surface, as we always do." Australia will regain the Border-Gavaskar trophy for the first time since 2014-15 if they win or draw the Sydney Test. However, if India win the New Year's Test, they will retain the trophy, winning the series for a record-extending fifth-straight time. Should Starc be unavailable for the series decider at his home ground, McDonald expressed confidence in Jhye Richardson or Sean Abbott stepping in to fill the void. "Very confident. Richardson's



here for a reason. So if we weren't confident, he wouldn't be here. He's had a heavy week with us in the nets. All indications are he'd be capable of bowling 40-plus overs if he was called upon. "Sean Abbott's there as well. We feel like, [the] SCG is his home ground, so he will be serviceable if called upon as well. It'll be about assessing our frontline quicks and then making decisions from there." Starc's fitness issues, compounded by his heavy workload alongside skipper Pat Cummins, have also drawn attention to the limited role of Mitch Marsh as a fifth bowler. Across four Tests, Australia's fifth bowling option Marsh has bowled only 33 overs, a statistic that underscores his underutilization. Marsh's contributions with the bat have been similarly underwhelming, with just 73 runs at an average of 10.42 across four Tests (6, 47, 9, 5, 2, 4, 0). These lackluster returns have sparked criticism and calls for

his exclusion. However, McDonald defended the all-rounder. "He's in a good [head] space. Would you like better performances? There's no doubt about that. Over four Test matches, he hasn't been able to deliver at the level he would like and we would like." "He's up and about though. We just won a Test match. No, there's no concern. And I think people have probably been reading too much into that. "We haven't required him with the ball as often as what we would have thought. He bowled again today. There are no injury concerns there. McDonald insisted that Marsh bowling just 33 overs is simply because the team didn't require him to roll his arm. "I think to sort of head that down that angle is a little bit unfair. We just haven't required him at certain times for whatever reason, so that's more a tactical implementation, as opposed to a body."

WATCH OUT FOR THESE FILMS IN THIS NEW YEAR



GAME CHANGER

Budget: Rs 450 crore

Cast: Ram Charan, Kiara Advani, Anjali, SJ Suryah, Prakash Raj, Srikanth, Samuthirakani and others

Music: S Thaman

Director: Shankar

Producers: Dil Raju, Shirish
Release: January 10, 2025

Ram Charan and Kiara Advani are the lead pair in this film, directed by Shankar. Dil Raju is the producer. Actors like Srikanth, SJ Suryah, Samuthirakani, Sunil, Prakash Raj, Jayaram, Naveen Chandra, and many others played key roles. Anjali is playing one of the female leads alongside Kiara Advani. Ram Charan plays dual roles and portrayed Appanna in the flashback episode, which everyone is raving about. The makers have started promoting the film aggressively, and in the coming days, AP Deputy CM and Ram Charan's uncle, Pawan Kalyan, will attend as the chief guest for the pre-release function in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, on January 4.

The budget for this film is approximately Rs 450 crore, according to a source. It took a few years to complete the film as Shankar got busy with another project, resulting in a nearly two-and-a-half-year-long shoot. While the Telangana government may not agree to a ticket price hike and benefit shows, the AP Government may consider increasing the ticket price. Interestingly, Ram Charan's father, Mega Star Chiranjeevi, has already seen the film, along with director Sukumar and shared his review, stating that the film is going to be a blockbuster. The film will release not only in Telugu but also in other languages.

DAAKU MAHARAJ

Budget: Rs 100 crore

Cast: Balakrishna, Pragna Jaiswal, Shraddha Srinath, Urvashi Rautela, Bobby Deol

Music: S Thaman

Director: Bobby Kolli

Producers: Suryadevara Naga Vamsi, Sai Soujanya

Release: January 12, 2025

In 2023, Balakrishna had two films released, *Veera Simha Reddy* and *Bhagavanth Kesari*, both of which were blockbusters. Interestingly, he didn't have any releases in 2024, so in this New Year, he is making a comeback with his *Daaku Maharaj*. Bobby Kolli, who earlier delivered a blockbuster *Waltair Veerayya* to Chiranjeevi, directs this film. Pragna Jaiswal, Shraddha Srinath, and Urvashi Rautela play the female leads, while Bollywood actor Bobby Deol portrays the villain. The film was released on January 12, 2025, during the Sankranti festival. Suryadevara Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya are the producers. The budget for this film is approximately Rs 100 crore and Balakrishna is on a successful streak with his previous three films. He is also an MLA, representing the Hindupur Assembly constituency in Andhra Pradesh. The film is releasing primarily in the Telugu States only.



SANKRANTHI VASTHUNNAM

Budget: Rs 50 crore

Cast: Venkatesh, Aishwarya Rajesh, Meenakshi Chaudhary, Rajendra Prasad, Upendra Limaye, Nareesh and others

Music: Bheems Ceciroleo

Producer: Dil Raju, Shirish

Director: Anil Ravipudi

Release: January 14, 2025

Venkatesh is one of the senior and safest bets in Tollywood, but he delivered a dud during the 2024 Sankranti season. Now, this Sankranti, he is coming up with a film titled *Sankranti Vasthunnam*, directed by Anil Ravipudi. This marks the third collaboration between Anil and Venkatesh, as they earlier delivered a blockbuster film, *F2: Fun and Frustration*. Generally, Venkatesh has a huge following and his films are perfect for the Sankranti festival, making this year's celebration promising to be fun and entertaining. Venkatesh is promoting this film like never before and judging by the promotions, it's clear that this one is an entertainer. The budget of this film is nearly Rs 50 crore.



HARI HARA VEERA MALLU

Budget: Rs 200 crore

Cast: Pawan Kalyan, Nidhi Agerwal, Bobby Deol

Music: MM Keeravani

Director: Jyothi Krishna

Producer: AM Rathnam, A Dayakar Rao

Release date: March 28, 2025

Actor-turned-politician Pawan Kalyan is busy serving as the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and at the same time, he has allotted a few days to his upcoming films, which are nearing completion. Three films are slated to be completed and *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* is the first film to hit the screens on March 30, not March 28. Krish Jagarlamudi was the initial director, but he opted out of the project due to delays. Producer AM Rathnam's son, Jyothi Krishna, took over as the director. The first part is scheduled to release this year, not in the New Year's, as the New Year has already begun. This film is definitely one of the most awaited ones this year. The budget of this film is also relatively high, with Rs 200 crore, due to the multiple-year delay. The actor's other film, *OG*, is also highly anticipated this year, and fans are eagerly waiting for its release. It is an action-packed film directed by Sujeth.



The Prabhas-starrer *The Raja Saab* is also one of the most-awaited films this New Year. Maruthi directs the film, a horror comedy that marks Prabhas' first foray into this genre. Prabhas has delivered two consecutive hit films, *Salaar* and *Kalki 2898AD*, both of which are first installments. The second parts of these films are slated for release in the coming years. Currently, all eyes are on *The Raja Saab*, with the makers announcing April 10 as the release date.

Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt plays the antagonist in the film. The budget of this film is approximately Rs 350 crore.

THE RAJA SAAB

Cast: Prabhas, Nidhi Agerwal, Malavika Mohanan, Riddhi Kumar, Sanjay Dutt and others

Music: S Thaman

Director: Maruthi

Producer: TG Vishwaprasad

Release date: April 10, 2025



THANDEL

Budget: Rs 75 Crore

Cast: Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi

Music: Devi Sri Prasad

Producer: Bunny Vasu

Director: Chandoo Mondeti

Release: February 7, 2025

Naga Chaitanya is looking for a good hit, as his last few films didn't fare well. In 2024, he didn't have any releases and he is now banking on *Thandel*, which is scheduled to release on February 7, 2025. This is a high-budget film in Naga Chaitanya's career, with top producer Allu Aravind backing the project. Bunny Vasu of Geetha Arts is producing it. Sai Pallavi, the female superstar, plays the female lead. Chandoo Mondeti, who has worked with Naga Chaitanya earlier, directs the film. The story is based on a true incident that occurred near Srikulam. Naga Chaitanya portrays a fisherman, while Sai Pallavi plays his love interest. In their interaction with the media, the producers stated that they aim to add Naga Chaitanya to the Rs 100 crore club with *Thandel*. They expressed confidence in the film's success due to its compelling story and the presence of Sai Pallavi, who has cemented her place in the South Indian film industry with a massive fan following.

Prabhas joins CM Revanth Reddy's crusade against drugs

Recently, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy met with prominent figures from the Telugu film industry, led by Dil Raju, to discuss the new Telangana Film Development Corporation (TFDC).

During the meeting, the Chief Minister requested the industry's support, particularly from actors, in promoting a drug-free Telangana state. He emphasised that Telugu actors have a massive fan following and that their influence can inspire fans to follow their advice. To this end, he asked the actors to create awareness videos about the dangers of drugs.

Prabhas, a top actor, was the first to respond to the Chief Minister's call. He released a video urging the youth to avoid drugs, saying, "There's plenty of entertainment in life, and with loved ones surrounding us, we don't need drugs." In his signature style, he added, "Darlings! Do we need drugs? Say no to drugs!" Prabhas also shared a vital message, informing viewers that those struggling with drug addiction can call a toll-free number for support from the Telangana government, which will provide complete care until they recover.

It appears that other actors are following Prabhas' lead and may release similar videos to raise awareness about the dangers of drugs, with the message "Say no to drugs."

Brahmaji's Baapu is a dark comedy

Brahmaji plays the lead role in the upcoming film *Baapu*, a dark comedy. "The story is based on a farmer's suicide that occurred in Karimnagar, and it's a dark comedy with humor," said Brahmaji. He added that the film has a lot of emotion and drama. Balagam Sudhakar Reddy plays one of the important roles in this film. "He played my father, and the scenes between us have turned out very nicely. It's not a regular story; director Daya has written this story based on a true incident but narrated it in a different style,"

said Brahmaji. The confrontation between the father, son and grandson is interesting in this film. Amani plays Brahmaji's wife, making it a complete family drama that explores the emotions between them against the backdrop of farmer suicide. The story revolves around one person in the family who wants to sacrifice their life for others. How the other family members react to this and what ultimately happens is the story, narrated in a unique way with humour.



Preity looks stunning as princess Nemali in Kannappa

Manchu Vishnu's most anticipated film, *Kannappa*, is scheduled to release on April 25, 2025. Initially, the movie was launched with Nupur Sanon, the younger sister of popular actress Kriti Sanon, as the female lead. However, due to certain reasons, Nupur opted out of the project and the makers subsequently cast Preity Mukundhan in her place. The shooting has been completed, and the film is currently in post-production. Manchu Vishnu plays the title role of Kannappa, while his father, senior actor

Mohan Babu, plays an important role. Several stars, including Prabhas, Akshay Kumar, Mohan Lal, Sarath Kumar and Kajal Aggarwal, make cameo appearances in the film. Mukesh Kumar Singh directs the movie, which was primarily shot in New Zealand. In this mythological film, Preity Mukundhan portrays Nemali, a character embodying grace, beauty, bold courage, extraordinary capacity for love and unwavering devotion. As the heart and soul of *Kannappa*, Nemali plays a pivotal role in the story.

DESPITE LOW SUCCESS, 2024 BELONGS TO MEENAKSHI

Meenakshi Chaudhary is the actress who stole the show in 2024, not because of her great success, but because of her prominent presence in Tollywood. The actress had two films released in 2022, *Khiladi* and *Hit: The Second Case* and in 2023, she didn't have any Telugu film releases. Interestingly, she is the only actress with four of her Telugu films and a Tamil-dubbed Telugu film released in 2024. Meenakshi started 2024 with superstar Mahesh Babu's film *Guntur Kaaram*, followed by *Lucky Bhaskar*, *Matka* and *Mechanic Rocky*. Although only *Lucky Bhaskar* achieved significant success, the other films didn't fare well. The actress was also paired opposite Tamil superstar Vijay in *GOAT*, which was released in Telugu but bombed at the box office. Despite her low success rate, 2024 undoubtedly belongs to Meenakshi, with multiple film releases. In one of her interviews, Meenakshi mentioned, "These films were signed much before and released one after another in 2024." Now, her upcoming film *Sankranti Vasthunnam*, where she plays a cop opposite Venkatesh, is scheduled to release during this Sankranti. She hopes that the New Year brings more joy with this festival release.

