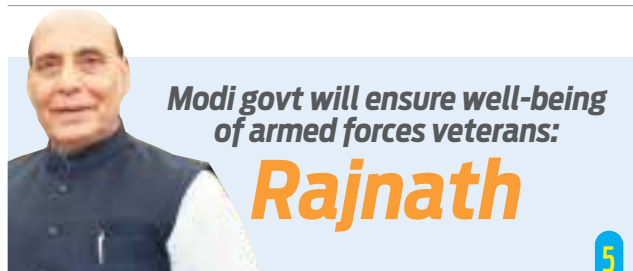




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**Modi govt will ensure well-being of armed forces veterans:**  
**Rajnath**

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**CENTRE,**  
STATE, EXPORTERS TO DISCUSS  
WAYS TO BOOST EXPORTS ON JAN 16

8

**To her amazement, the high tide 'almost carried' Manchu Lakshmi away at**  
**KOH SAMUI**

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**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  

Ram Mandir is not for elections. Many people sacrificed their lives to construct the Ram Mandir. The construction of the Ram Mandir is the result of the sacrifices of many people. The BJP fought a long battle for Ram Mandir. Nobody will prevent Sonia Gandhi if she wants to do Ram Seva. Sonia Gandhi was sent an invitation and one can suggest that she come to Ayodhya and take part in the Prana Prathista of Lord Rama. Congress leaders are pseudo-secularists. The Centre also allotted Rs 100 crore for the development of the Bhadradi Temple. We also made the President visit the Bhadradi Temple

— G. Kishan Reddy, TS BJP president

P4

**DON'T MISS...****DRDO should emerge as...**

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) knowledge and infrastructure base needs to be tapped by MSMEs and private industries, and DRDO should emerge as the world leader in exporting weapon systems, Union Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt said on Sunday. Bhatt visited DRDO's Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex and the Research Centre Imarat (RCI) here and reviewed the ongoing missile technologies and related programmes, a Defence ministry release said....

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**Predictions of AI-powered...**

AI-powered prediction models made accurate predictions within the trial they were developed in, but gave "random predictions" outside of it, according to new research. Researchers said the study showed that generalisations of predictions of artificial intelligence-based models across different study centers cannot be ensured at the moment and that these models were "highly context-dependent". The results of the study have been published in the journal Science....

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**'Army troops turn Davos into ...**

As Davos readies to host its annual talkfest of rich and powerful from across the world, nearly 5,000 army personnel have been deployed to help police and civilian authorities secure this small Alpine resort town. Davos is estimated to have a permanent population of just about 10,000 but is frequented throughout the year by tourists including skiing enthusiasts in ski season, but it is the week of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting when it sees the maximum footfalls with at least 30,000 people....

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**When cricket meets tennis**

Indian cricket icon Virat Kohli on Sunday opened up about the mutual admiration he shares with Serbian tennis legend Novak Djokovic in a heart-warming tale of cross-sport camaraderie. It all started when Kohli reached out to the record 24-time Major champion on social media with a simple greeting. But to his surprise, the tennis maestro had already messaged him, marking the beginning of their friendship. "I got in touch with Novak very organically. I was just looking at his profile once....

-SPORTS

# Davos visit aimed at attracting investments

**CM will meet CEOs of international companies: Min Sridhar**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

IT and Industries Minister D. Sridhar Babu said that his official visit to Davos in Switzerland along with Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is aimed at bagging investments. He said that they would meet the CEOs of global companies during their visit.

In a statement issued on Sunday, Sridhar said that he and the Chief Minister will be leaving for Davos on Sunday to attend the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) being held from January 15 to January 19.

He said the World Economic Forum is the premier international platform where members of governments, global CEOs, industry captains and social entrepreneurs meet every year to



address global issues and shape the agenda for governments, industry and social action. He said that the WEF meet is an invite-only event that

attracts around 3,000 delegates every year including representatives of 100 governments, top 1,000 global companies, leading international organizations, NGOs and the media.

He said that the Chief Minister was invited by WEF to attend this year's event soon after he assumed office. After the formation of Telangana, this is the first time a Chief Minister is leading the official delegation. The Principal Secretary (IT and Industries) and the CM's Principal Secretary are also part of the delegation.

He said that WEF provides an excellent opportunity to interact with industry leaders both from India and abroad and share the new government's

priorities. It is also an ideal platform to showcase the strengths of TS as a leading IT and Life Sciences hub.

Sridhar said that his team has a very busy schedule at Davos. "The CM and I will be meeting around 70 industry leaders in three days. This includes CEOs and CXOs of top companies like Novartis, Medtronic, Astra Zeneca, Google, Uber, Mastercard, Bayer, LDC and UPL. We will also be meeting the captains of Indian industry like Tata, Wipro, HCL Tech, JSW, Godrej, Airtel, and Bajaj. We will also interact with leading business groupings like the CII and NASSCOM as well as media networks," he said.

"We are leaving no stone unturned to make it a very successful trip.

**Prasanna Kumar appointed Advisor to Legislature Secretariat**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has appointed Suryadevara Prasanna Kumar as Advisor to the Telangana Legislature Secretariat from the date he assumes charge.

The Secretary to the state legislature, Dr V. Narasimha Charyulu, issued orders regarding this.

A note issued by the Secretary to the legislature, Narasimha Charyulu, said that Prasanna Kumar Suryadevara has been appointed as 'Advisor to the Secretariat of the Legislature of Telangana.'

Prasanna Kumar is being brought in as an Advisor to infuse professionalism into the functioning of the Legislature Secretariat. His appointment is made as per the initiative of the Presiding Officers of the TS Legislatures, Gutha Sukender Reddy and Gaddam Prasad Kumar.

**Happy Pongal**

The Pioneer wishes its readers, advertisers, suppliers and agents a happy Makara Sankranti. As our offices will remain closed today (15-01-2024), there will be no issue of the newspaper on Tuesday (16-01-2024).

— Resident Editor

## KCR ready to plunge into action

**To address BRS leaders on Feb 17**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS President K. Chandrasekhar Rao will restart his political moves on February 17, which happens to be his birthday. BRS sources said the party is getting ready to invite KCR grandly to the party office 'Telangana Bhavan' on February 17.

KCR will address party leaders on February 17 to infuse confidence among party cadres in view of the forthcoming LS polls.

KCR is now resting after undergoing hip surgery. He has allowed a limited number of BRS leaders and close associates to call him as per the advice of doctors. BRS sources said that KCR will recover fully within four weeks.

The BRS is making arrangements to celebrate KCR's birthday on a grand note and is going to display huge flexes and hoardings



across the city. The party wants to give a grand welcome to KCR as he is coming for the first time to Telangana Bhavan after the Assembly elections.

Although KCR's Nandi Nagar residence is very near Telangana Bhavan, the party is planning to arrange a huge convoy to welcome and take him to Telangana Bhavan. BRS cadres across the state are planning to meet their leaders on February 17 in Hyderabad.

## Congress wants to listen to people's "Mann Ki Baat"

**Country is going through period of 'great injustice': Rahul**

PNS ■ THOUBAL

The Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra began from violence-hit Manipur on Sunday with Rahul Gandhi asserting that the party will present a new vision for India that will be based on harmony, brotherhood and equitability and devoid of hatred, violence and monopoly.

At a rally here to flag off the over-6,700-km yatra from Manipur to Mumbai,

Gandhi and Congress president Kharge attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not visiting Manipur as it reeled under ethnic violence, and vowed to ensure justice for its people.

Gandhi said he had to undertake the yatra as the country was going through a period of "great injustice" and stressed the party wants to listen to people's 'Mann Ki Baat'.

**Revanth, Mallu attend Yatra launch**

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Chennai MLA Vivek, senior Congress leader V. Hanumantha Rao, Kethuri Venkatesh and several others from Telangana attended the launch of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Manipur on Sunday. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy tweeted poetically about Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra saying, "Country as home...the leader made the

people family members...The struggle of the common man...Middle-class destination movement of a poor man...Courage of girls...Leader of youth's hopes...A hard worker solves the troubles of farmers...Another grand journey in progress...Jai Bolo Bharat Nyay Yatra... #BharatJodoNyayYatra". The CM returned to New Delhi from Manipur and went to Davos on Sunday night.

## Godavari villages abuzz with punters, spectators

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Thousands of punters and spectators descended upon several villages in the Godavari districts and others in Andhra Pradesh on Sunday to gamble crores of rupees in the annual Sankranti cockfight extravaganza.

At Pedamiram village near Bhimavaram in West Godavari district, fleets of cars rolled in from various states, including some festival celebrants turning up from overseas to gamble.

"I came from Shamirpet village near Hyderabad. Every year I come to Bhimavaram for



Sankranti to watch cockfights. Some of my friends engage in gambling," M Prabhu (27) from Telangana.

**TSSPDCL hints at 2-hour power cuts in GHMC areas**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The people in Telangana, especially in Hyderabad, have suffered power cuts recently. The electricity department has hinted at 2-hour power cuts in coming days to facilitate maintenance work on the network ahead of summer. The power outages have hit work-from-home (WFH) employees as their employment depends on continuous power supply.

"Power cuts of up to two hours may be required," said Musharraf Ali Faruqui, the MD of the Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (TSSPDCL) on Sunday.

## Sanjay creates stir saying KCR may topple Cong govt after LS polls

**K VENKATESHWARLU**  
■ HYDERABAD

The leaders of all political parties are discussing about the Congress MLAs who are in touch with former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao after BJP General Secretary Bandi Sanjay Kumar said that anything can happen to the TS Congress government after the Lok Sabha polls as some Congress MLAs are in touch with KCR.

Sanjay said that KCR has agents inside the Congress and that there is a danger that KCR may topple the Congress government after the LS polls.



Sanjay's comments attracted strong criticism from Congress leaders who said that the BJP and the BRS are one and that is why Sanjay commented like that. Congress leaders said that Sanjay knew what is happening in the BRS as the BJP

has ties with the BRS.

In the melee, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao tweeted, "The Congress was instrumental in the BJP's victory in Karimnagar and Nizamabad LS seats in 2019. It appears that they are going to work together again as per BJP General Secretary Bandi Sanjay Kumar's statement."

In fact, Sanjay said that there is a chance that a crisis will occur in the Congress government after the LS polls as former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao is trying to purchase Congress MLAs.

## Maldives asks India to withdraw troops by March 15

PNS ■ MALE

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has asked India to withdraw its military personnel from his country by March 15, a senior official here said on Sunday, nearly two months after Male sought their removal.

According to the latest government figures, there are 88 Indian military personnel in the Maldives.

In a press briefing, Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, the public policy secretary at the President's Office, said that President Muizzu has formally asked India to withdraw its military personnel by March 15, the SunOnline newspaper reported.

"Indian military personnel cannot stay in the Maldives. This is the policy of President Dr Mohamed Muizzu and that of this administration," he said.

Maldives and India have set up a

**"Indian military personnel cannot stay in the Maldives. This is the policy of President Dr Mohamed Muizzu and that of this administration"**

High-Level Core Group to negotiate the withdrawal of troops.

In a statement in New Delhi, the Ministry of External Affairs said that the first meeting of the India-Maldives High-Level Core Group was held in Male on Sunday.

"During the meeting, both sides held discussions on wide-ranging

issues related to bilateral cooperation towards identifying steps to enhance the partnership, including expediting the implementation of ongoing development cooperation projects," it said.

"Both sides also held discussions on finding mutually workable solution to enable continued operation

of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medvac services to the people of Maldives," the MEA statement said.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the High Level Core Group in India on a mutually convenient date, it added.

The meeting was also attended by

Indian High Commissioner Munu Mahawar.

Maldives Foreign Ministry said that during the meeting both sides reviewed the existing bilateral cooperation.

"Discussions were held on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including development cooperation. Both sides expressed willingness to intensify cooperation and agreed to fast-track the withdrawal of Indian military personnel," the statement said.

Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives on November 17 last year, Muizzu, who is regarded as a pro-China leader, formally requested India to withdraw its military personnel from his country, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi.

## Petition in HC challenging allotment of 11 acres to BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A petition was filed in the High Court challenging the allocation of 11 acres to the BRS in Kokapet by the then BRS government.

The BRS government had allotted 11 acres in Kokapet in the Gandipet mandal of Rangareddy district in survey numbers 239 and 240. Lawyer Venkatarami Reddy filed the petition alleging that there is no transparency and no justification for allotting the land.

Venkatarami said in his petition that the BRS government did not follow the standard tender process and that the BRS government failed to reveal the process



adopted in allocating the land to the BRS.

The lawyer said that the value of the land is around Rs 50 crore and that the government allocated the land for just Rs 3.41 crore to the BRS. The Forum for Good Governance (FGG) also filed a similar petition regarding this. Hearing on the petition is pending. However, the court issued notices to the government while responding to the FGG petition.

# Monday Mirchi

## HATCHET MAN OF AP ADMINISTRATION

People like to hear good news about them. No amount of niceties and none of those bewitching smiles of the messenger can sweeten a bad news conveyed officially or matter-of-factly. This is where a hatchet man comes into play. Andhra Pradesh is preparing for the General Election as well as the Assembly elections. The ruling YSRCP has begun announcing tickets to some of the innumerable aspirants. Party chief and Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy is talking to sitting MLAs in this connection. If the ticket is confirmed for a sitting legislator, he himself is telling them. But if the ticket is to be denied to a sitting MLA, hatchet man Dhananjay Reddy takes over. A little bird told us that Dhananjay has been conveying the bad news to the aspirants. It is not fair to shoot the messenger, but not everyone can take lying down what Dhananjay sugar-coats and tells them.

## JAYESH FOR DAVOS

A man with stuff does a lot more than occupying a position. He often becomes professionally adept and gets so entrenched in the position that, in due course, the system will be at a loss to find a proper replacement. Jayesh Ranjan, the go-to person in the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi government for all things important, still has grip over the administration, despite the regime change. That he is here to stay is evident from the fact that he is again headed for Davos. While there has always been jealousy among some of his peers over his foreign visits, Jayesh comes across as someone who is a cut above the rest. While some of the babus concur that he is indeed a domain expert, his green-eyed peers decry that there is slight chance of his being replaced after the Lok Sabha elections.

## SHAKING UP ACB

As the head of the Anti Corruption Bureau, C V Anand has become a head-turner of sorts. He gets anand (what if he is alone?) from leaving no stone unturned while doing his job. Consequently, there is pervasive fear in the department now; for, clear instructions have been given to tighten things up and to create deterrence for graft anywhere and everywhere. So, he has been getting compliments via social media posts too for his efforts to clean up the administration. It remains to be seen whether the recognition that matters at the end of the day --from his higher-ups -- comes.

## TOP-DOWN APPROACH WORKS

The Sanskrit proverb ‘Yathta Raja, Tatha praja’ can be mirrored best by the administration; only then it can percolate down to the lowest level. The bureaucracy in Telangana has begun to feel this. In the erstwhile Bharat Rashtra Samithi government,

it was very difficult for the common people to meet some of the key bureaucrats, leave alone the Chief Minister. Even Ministers and legislators could not meet the bureaucrats ensconced in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO). However, a recent social media post of senior IAS officer Smitha Sabarwal has raised eyebrows in bureaucratic circles. Recalling how difficult it was to meet her when she was CMO Secretary in the previous dispensation, some circles pointed out how Smitha has changed her ways. After taking over as Finance Commission member secretary in the new government, Smitha Sabarwal posted that anyone could walk into her office to air their grievances. To leave no doubts about her intention, she even posted Google map coordinates of her office to make things easy for people. Employees at lower levels in the administration in particular are feeling the winds of change.

## MAGNETS FOR ADDITIONAL CHARGE

People holding responsible positions successfully become magnets for additional responsibilities simply because they don't grudge it, and it is not always easy to quickly find proper replacements for them in the administration. In Andhra Pradesh, senior IAS officer Ajay Jain has been elevated by being vested with additional charge as Special Chief Secretary Revenue (Lands & Disaster Management). Ajay Jain is already helming key departments as Special CS -- Housing and Grama Sachivalayas.

When Sai Prasad, Special Chief Secretary Revenue (Lands & DM), went on leave; the government had initially given the additional charge to A Md Imtiaz Ahmed, who is presently discharging duties as Secretary CCLA and helming two other departments. Within two days, it was disaster for Imtiaz Ahmed; he was relieved.

## STRIKING WHILE THE IRON IS HOT

At senior levels, interpersonal skills and tact in people management count. This includes ability to prevent or at least minimize the negative fall-out of a strike by a section of the employees. Senior IAS officer Vivek Yadav, presently Commissioner of Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority, has been given full additional charge of the post of Commissioner and Director of Municipal Administration until further orders. A little bird told us that P Koteswara Rao, who had been discharging duties as the Commissioner and Director of Municipal Administration, was transferred and appointed as Joint Commissioner State Chief Electoral Office in the Secretariat, since he could not effectively handle the ongoing employees' strike.

-- Yours truly

## KALESHWARAM PROJECT EXECUTION Tech panel to examine flaws

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has decided to appoint a technical committee to study in detail the flaws in the investigation, design and execution including O&M of the Kaleshwaram Project covering, but not limited to the following listed aspects and the report will be submitted to the government for action.

The technical committee's report may form the technical basis for going into the contents of the judicial enquiry in due course. The committee will go into the details of the Kaleshwaram Project right from the redesigning stage of the Pranahitha -- Chevella project (earlier designed for the same purpose) and its necessity, the investigation and design, execution, quality control, O&M, and the reasons for the failure of the Medigadda Barrage.

The committee will also obtain a report on the proposed lifts involved in the project, their reliability and the benefits of output etc.

The committee will suggest remedial measures, the quantum of loss in revenue and including but not limited to the possible burden on the TS exchequer in coming years.

The technical committee will consist of Dr Pandya, former chairman CWC (Chairman), expert/ HoD/ Professor from IIT Delhi/ Chennai/ Mumbai/ IISc for conducting a study on hydrology, geo-tech engineering, structural engineering, hydro-mechanical engineering, the Director of CWPRS, Pune, the Director of CSMRS, Delhi, the Director (Finance & Works), Telangana, and the ENC (Admin) I&CAD, Government of TS (Coordinator).

## Cong' Nyay Yatra a hoax: Thakur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday described the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra of the Congress as a hoax and said its senior leaders were not getting justice and joining other outfits.

Thakur referred to the exit of leaders such as Kapil Sibal, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Hardik Patel, Jyotiraditya Scindia, RPN Singh and Sunil Jakhar from the Congress. "There is a long list of leaders who have left the Congress as they are not getting justice in the party. Now, Milind Deora too has left the Congress," the senior BJP leader said.

A former Union minister and once a close aide of Rahul Gandhi, Deora quit the Congress on Sunday to join the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

# Murderous politics not acceptable in TS: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao said that murderous politics will not be accepted in Telangana and that murder politics has started in Telangana like never before.

He warned that the BRS would not remain silent if attacks took place against BRS activists. He said the party would stand by the families of all BRS activists and that the people would revolt if anyone encouraged political violence.

KTR consoled the family of retired jawan Mallesh who died at the hands of Congress activists in the Ganravupally village of Peddakothapally mandal in Kollapur on Sunday along with senior BRS leaders



He warned that the BRS would not remain silent if attacks took place against BRS activists. He said the party would stand by the families of all BRS activists and that the people would revolt if anyone encouraged political violence.

Niranjan Reddy, Srinivas Goud, Laxma Reddy, Beeram Harsha Vardhan Reddy, Dr Sanjay, Shambipur Raju and others.

KTR extended financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh to Mallesh's family and assured them that the BRS would stand by them. They also paid

floral tributes to Mallesh's portrait.

Speaking on the occasion, KTR said that Mallesh's murder was due to political vengeance. Victories and defeats are common in politics. But murders are shocking, he said.

KTR appealed to Minister

## Modi's virtual meeting with Chenchu tribals today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Modi will hold a virtual meeting with the Chenchus of Nagarkurnool district on Monday. Tribal Welfare Department officials are making arrangements for the meeting. The meeting is being held as per Pradhan Mantri Janati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JAN-MAN).

The Adivasi Gurukula Vidyalayam (PTG) was selected for the meeting. District Tribal Development Department Officer Kamalakhar Reddy, ITDA AO Zafar Hussain and other offi-



cials inspected the meeting place on Saturday.

The officials discussed with BSNL officials about setting up a digital screen. They said that 800 Chenchus and Chenchu public representatives will be

invited to the meeting and that there will be a discussion on implementing the PM Janman scheme.

Prime Minister Modi will talk to the tribals about the construction of school buildings and houses, self-employment, solar power and other issues.

Meanwhile, Union Tourism Minister G. Kishan Reddy is attending the same programme near Tanda Tandur constituency.

Speaking to the media, Kishan said that Modi is providing one lakh houses and 200 community halls in 18 states for Adivasis.

## Godavari villages...

Continued from page 1

Prabhu was posing for photographs at a Sankranti-themed selfie point beside a large white tent where the roosters armed with sharp knives fastened to their feet were competing in the bloody sport. Large flex posters of local ruling party leader P V L Narasimha Raju welcomed the crowds to the venue.

Carrying wads of cash in bags, punters placed bets on their chosen roosters, which were well-fed and trained for months together in the run-up to the Sankranti festivities.

Besides the main punters

who are inside the ring, a large number of spectators also gamble with their fellow spectators who watch the contests live on LED screens outside, arranged by the organisers for their convenience.

A few metres away from the cockfight ring, another white tent has been pitched, where a large number of gambling enthusiasts from Hyderabad and the rest of Telangana are engaging in different forms of poker. Seating arrangements for more than 1,000 gamblers, a cash counting machine and card-swiping machines have been arranged to facilitate poker.

## KCR ready...

Continued from page 1

It is learnt that KCR will take part in party activities by coming to Telangana Bhavan every day.

He will select party candidates at the Telangana Bhavan and it is learnt that the party will organise Assembly constituency-level preparatory meetings after LS constituency-level preparatory meetings which will end on January 22.

It is learnt that BRS is planning to organise a huge public meeting in Warangal before the LS polls schedule is released.

## Congress wants to listen...

Continued from page 1

Ahead of the January 22 consecration ceremony at the Ayodhya Ram temple, Kharge said everyone has faith in God but one should not resort to "dhongbaazi (deception)" for securing votes. "Wo samandar ke upar sair karte firte hai, aur jar karte baithe hain -- Ram Ram

Ram Ram (He is seen enjoying the sea, sitting and chanting Ram Ram). 'Mukh mein Ram, bagal mein churi', do not do this with the people," the Congress president said, referring to the Hindi idiom that cautions against people whose words and actions differ. Hours before the start of the yatra with much fanfare, senior Congress leader Milind Deora

announced his resignation from the party, in the latest addition to a list of young leaders who have left it to begin new innings in other parties. But the Congress downplayed his exit, with general secretary Jairam Ramesh saying that one Milind Deora goes away but 'lakhs of Milinds who believe in our organisation and ideology stay'.

## Sanjay creates...

Continued from page 1

Sanjay said that some Congress MLAs are in touch with KCR.

"Anything can happen after LS polls. KCR has no faith in democracy. The BRS was the centre of conspiracies in the state.

First the Congress has to ensure the end of the BRS. Later, the BJP and the Congress would fight each other. Congress leaders have to keep an eye on the movements of KCR.

BRS is the dethroning party but the BJP means constructing party," Sanjay said.

He said that the Centre is ready to cooperate with the Congress government for the sake of Telangana.

However, Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar challenged the BJP

and BRS leaders saying that whether anyone had the guts to touch the Congress government.

Nobody can topple the Congress government, he said and declared that the Congress government is not weak.

"Some people did not believe when we said that the BRS and the BJP are one. However, now everyone knows that the BRS and the BJP are one after Sanjay's comments.

The BRS will split into two soon. The BJP and the BRS know each other," Ponnamp said.

Senior Congress leader Mallu Ravi said that Sanjay's comments indicate that the BJP and the BRS have close ties.

Sanjay has become a brand ambassador of lies and is the true heir of Goebbels.

## TSSPDCL ...

Continued from page 1

He said that due to high power demand during the summer/rabi season power cuts of up to 2 hours may be required.

Faruqui took to X (formerly Twitter) and said, "We regret the inconvenience caused due to power outages in the GHMC area. Kindly note that as part of annual maintenance and to prepare for the higher power demand during the summer/rabi season power cuts of up to 2 hours may be required @ r e v a n t h \_ a n u m u l a @ B h a t t i \_ M a l l u @TsspdclCorporat."

Annual maintenance is done from November to January. The TSSPDCL said that 16 GHMC areas are facing power cuts on Sunday. They are Darulshifa, Hussaini Alam, Seethaphalmandi, Shanthi Nagar, SR Nagar, Chandanagar and Ferozguda.

## 'TIGER ZINDA HAI' Jairam rejects BJP's claims of 2024 being done deal

PNS ■ IMPHAL

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has rejected the BJP's claims that the 2024 poll results are a foregone conclusion, saying "Tiger zinda hai" and that the opposition bloc will repeat the history of 2004 when the saffron party was unseated from power despite its shining India campaign. In an interview with PTI, Ramesh asserted that only a strong Congress can ensure a strong opposition and the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' is an effort to strengthen the grand old party.

On how the poll preparations will be handled by the party while also managing its east to west yatra, Ramesh said a party organisation is in place and Rahul Gandhi would be part of the campaign despite his preoccupation with the yatra.

## 2 Telugu students found dead in US

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a heart-wrenching incident, two promising Telugu youths who ventured to the US with dreams of higher studies were discovered dead in their rented house. The news came to light when locals, alarmed by their bodies, informed the authorities.

The deceased has been identified as Gattu Dinesh, the son of Gattu Venkanna from Vanaparathi District in Telangana, who had recently embarked on a journey to pursue his Master of Science (MS) degree in the United States. Just 16 days ago, Dinesh bid farewell to his family at the airport, filled with hope for a bright future.

Shockingly, news reached the family that Dinesh Chani had gone missing, prompting immediate concern.

Simultaneously, another distressing message was relayed to the relatives of a fellow student from Srikakulam district. Maranim Chada, in the same American city, had tragically passed away. Preliminary investigations by the local police have revealed that both youths were found blindfolded while in their sleep. Authorities are awaiting the results of the post-mortem examination to determine the exact cause of death. The police have assured that the bodies will be repatriated to India soon.

The sudden demise of these promising young individuals has left their families and communities in shock and grief. As the investigation unfolds, there is a collective hope for answers that can provide solace to the grieving families.

## Prasanna Kumar...

Continued from page 1

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy readily approved the proposal to appoint Prasanna Kumar as Advisor. Prasanna Kumar Suryadevara has about 30 years of experience in serving the Centre in diverse capacities.

He served with distinction in the top constitutional offices of India and is endowed with the knowledge of the interplay between the three organs of the State, that is, the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary. He also has a strong educational foundation in science, research and law. For five years he had served as OSD to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. He assisted the Speaker in communicating Parliament decisions to the people. He was a key player in setting up a TV Channel for the Parliament -- the 'Lok Sabha TV' -- the first of its kind in the world. Suryadevara Prasanna

Kumar also served for over six years as Joint Director and Director in the Office of the Vice-President, who is the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. He was a key founding member of 'Rajya Sabha TV'.

For nearly three years, he was Secretary to the Legislative Assembly of the NCT of Delhi. As Head of the Department, he was known for infusing professionalism in the Secretariat and for initiating reforms of far-reaching consequences in the functioning of the Legislature.

Prasanna Kumar also served in the office of the Chief Justice of India and the Registry of the Supreme Court as OSD and Registrar. In the initial phase of his association with the government, he served as a newscaster in Telugu with public service broadcasters and also discharged administrative responsibilities in the News Services Division of All India Radio.

## Maldives asks...

Continued from page 1

The request for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel comes amid a diplomatic row between the two nations in the backdrop of derogatory comments posted by three deputy ministers of the Muizzu government against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Muizzu suspended the three ministers after their social media postings, which stirred concern in India and calls for a boycott by Indian tourists who ranked highest in numbers followed by Russia. Chinese tourists figured third.

During his just-concluded state visit to China, Muizzu sought to align Maldives closer to Beijing.

Speaking to the press on Saturday after returning from

China, President Muizzu indirectly attacked India.

Without naming any country, he said, "We may be small, but that doesn't give you the license to bully us."

He also announced plans to reduce the country's dependency on India, including securing imports of essential food commodities and medicine and consumables from other countries.

"We aren't in anyone's backyard. We are an independent and sovereign state," he said, addressing the reporters gathered at the Velana International Airport.

He said that no country has the right to exert influence over the domestic affairs of a country, regardless of its size.

He vowed that he would not allow any external influence on the domestic affairs of the Maldives.

**EXPORT OF WEAPON SYSTEMS**

# DRDO should emerge as world leader: Ajay Bhatt

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) knowledge and infrastructure base needs to be tapped by MSMEs and private industries, and DRDO should emerge as the world leader in exporting weapon systems, Union Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt said on Sunday. Bhatt visited DRDO's Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex and the Research Centre Imarat (RCI) here and reviewed the ongoing missile technologies and related programmes, a Defence ministry release said.

Director General, Missiles and Strategic Systems, U Raja Babu briefed the minister on various technological developments.

"The DRDO's knowledge and infrastructure base needs to be tapped by MSMEs and private industries, which in turn will lead



Union Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt visiting DRDO's Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex and the Research Centre Imarat in Hyderabad on Sunday

to the establishment of a self-reliant defence industrial ecosystem in our country," he said.

The Union Minister also said that DRDO should emerge as the world leader in exporting weapon systems to the other nations, the release said.

He emphasised that defence today is no longer limited to land,

sea or skies but encompasses space, cyber, economic and social space, it said. Bhatt witnessed the display of the missile systems and the enabling critical technologies indigenously developed by DRDO scientists. He congratulated all DRDO scientists for the recent successful missions including AGNI-PRIME, AKASH, AKASH-NG,

VSHORADS, PRALAY, etc, the release said.

He complimented the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex for indigenising various state-of-the-art technologies and for strengthening the defence industrial base in the country in line with the national goal 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', it said.

At another event hosted here to mark the 8th Armed Forces Veterans Day, Bhatt, felicitated the 'Veer Naris' and paid homage to our gallant heroes who laid down their lives in service of the nation, the release said.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister thanked all the veterans and acknowledged their selfless service to the nation and society.

The Union Minister further said that looking after the welfare and wellbeing of our veterans is our prime concern and the Government of India is committed to it, the release added.

## Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park turns into a cesspool

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The largest lung space in Hyderabad is facing the risk of being swamped by sewage water. It is very sad to see that around 500 trees died and animals, including various kinds of birds are coming to drink effluent water in Mahaveer Harinavasthali national park. Residents of Mansoorabad allege that the effluents of lorries and heavy vehicles are flowing into the National park.

Thousands of lorries arrive daily to Autonagar and hundreds of vehicles' servicing works are carried out here. Despite persistent efforts, officials could not be reached for clarification.

Manoj Vidiyala, a resident of Mansoorabad and co-founder of DhaR NGO said, "There was no pond initially but due to this effluents a new pond was made. It is full of oil, vehicle grease, battery acids and other chemicals. We have been protesting for more than one year. We went to every



Sewage water flowing into Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National park

official but no one took it seriously and the wildlife is deteriorating".

It is one of three national parks in Telangana. The Mahaveer Harinavasthali national park is known for being a home for endangered animal species, Black Buck deer. The deer, which is also known as Krishna Jinka. A variety of birds, including warblers, quails, partridges, flowerpeckers, curlews, lapwings, babblers, and koel, can be found here.

## 'Hyderabad to experience dry weather for next six days'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Indian Meteorological Department -Hyderabad on Sunday predicted that the city will experience dry weather for the next three days.

As per the IMD report, dry weather is expected to prevail over Telangana from January 15 to 21. As per a report by the Telangana State Planning and Development Society (TSDPS), Telangana is likely to experience a minimum temperature of 15 to 18 degrees Celsius. The maximum temperature in the State is expected to be between 30 and 33 degrees Celsius.

Areas under the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation are expected to



have minimum temperature of 16 to 18 degrees, while the maximum temperature is expected to be between 29 and 32 degrees.

Telangana weatherman T Balaji took to X (formerly Twitter) and said, "Soaring heat in Sankranti never in the history, we are witnessing such temp spike. It's 33-34°C now in Hyderabad. Mid Feb type weather in Telangana. Nights to remain mildly cool like Mid Feb type weather."

## Fire breaks out at medical store in Santoshnagar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A fire broke out at a medical store in Santoshnagar on the night of January 13.

The fire erupted around 1.30 am at Furqan Medical Store located at Santoshnagar Road. The residents tried to douse the fire using available resources and informed the fire control room.

A fire tender reached the spot and doused the fire. The fire officials suspect the fire could have been triggered due to a short circuit; local police inspected the spot.



## Two held for online investment fraud

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad Cyber Crime police on Sunday arrested two men involved in online investment fraud.

The accused were identified as Himanshu (30) and Praveen (26), both natives of Faridabad in Haryana. They created fake Aadhaar cards, PAN Cards and open current bank accounts in the name of different firms on the instructions of a Delhi-based resident Devender Panchal.

The accused had previous experience of forging new Aadhaar cards. Praveen operated a Aadhaar Seva Kendra in Faridabad where he printed fake Aadhaar cards.

A fake account was created in the ICICI bank in the name of Ruchika Info System get fraud amount Rs 2.5 crores.

The police froze Rs 6 lakhs in his bank account.

Based on a complaint received from a resident, Cybercrime police booked a case under sections 66(C), (D) ITA Act-2008 and 419, 420 of Indian Penal Code.

Himanshu and Praveen contacted Panchal in Delhi and they planned to supply current bank accounts and cheated the public through online part-time job/investment. For committing these cyber frauds, the accused provided many bank accounts to Panchal by using fake ID proofs to cheat the innocent people.

The police seized a mobile phone, cheque books and other material from the accused.

The main accused Devender Pranchal is still at large.

## Army man dies as Chinese Manjha slits throat



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a shocking incident, an army man died at Langar Houz on Saturday after his throat was slit by a stray kite string. The string which claimed the life of the army man was the Chinese manja.

The deceased was identified as K Koteswar Reddy (28), a native of Visakhapatnam, worked as a driver at the Golconda Military Hospital. On Saturday evening, he completed his duties and was going to his house at Attapur. When he reached the Langer Houz flyover, the China made nylon thread entangled

around his neck.

"He sustained a deep cut on his neck and collapsed on the road. He was rushed to a hospital where he died while undergoing treatment," said Langer Houz Inspector J Niranjan Rao. A case of Culpable homicide not amounting to murder under section 304 part 2 of the IPC was registered.

Based on a complaint, the police booked a case and launched an investigation.

The body was shifted to Osmania General Hospital mortuary where after post-mortem examination it was handed over to the family.

## Minister greets people on Sankranti



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Information and Public Relations Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy has extended warm greetings to the people of the State on the auspicious occasion of Sarok Festival.

He is on a foreign tour with his family, in a statement on Sunday, he wished the people. He said, "The Congress government will benefit all the farmers and are committed to the welfare of farmers along with labourers and tenant farmers".

He stated that the Sankranti festival was a farmer's festival. This festival has a significance that farmers bring their crop to their homes.



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# ISI agents camped in Hyd before Modi took over: Kishan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

There were ISI agents in Hyderabad before Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister, Telangana BJP President G. Kishan Reddy said.

He said that the Gokul Chat, Dilsukh Nagar and Lumbini Park bombings took place before Modi took charge and that Pakistan's ISI tried to keep India under its control. However, that is not the situation now, he added.

Speaking to the media on Sunday, Kishan said that there are no communal riots, curfews, AK-47s and RDXs now.

"Terrorism has been rooted out from India after Modi became the PM. Pakistan used to spend thousands of crores to create destruction in India. However, the people of Pakistan are now fighting for a piece of roti. We successfully isolated Pakistan under Modi's leadership. Interestingly, Pakistanis are killing themselves now," he said.



BJP Telangana unit president Kishan Reddy, along with MP Dr K Laxman and others flying kite while participating in Kite Festival on Necklace Road in Hyderabad on Sunday

selves now," he said.

He said that Modi re-wrote history and showed to Pakistan that Indians will kill 10 Pakistanis if Pakistan kills an Indian.

He said that 46,000 Indians were killed in Jammu and Kashmir. India gave terrorists a stunning blow through its surgical strikes inside Pakistani

territory.

He said that the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya was destroyed by Babur. Later, they constructed Babri Masjid in Babur's memory. In 1990, Lal Krishna Advani launched a Rath Yatra to construct the Ram Mandir. Since then, the BJP has been trying to construct Ram Mandir. However,

some political parties do not like people living in peace. Pseudo-secularists were opposing the construction of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir, he said.

Kishan said that the Congress is not in a position to understand people's aspirations. The Congress graph is falling by the day. The Congress is not in a position to

retain its LS seats in the coming elections. People have decided to make Modi the PM once again, he said.

"Ram Mandir is not for elections. Many sacrificed their lives to construct the Ram Mandir. The construction of the Ram Mandir is the result of the sacrifices of many people. The BJP fought a long battle for Ram Mandir. Nobody will stop Sonia Gandhi if she wants to do Ram Seva. Sonia Gandhi was sent an invitation and we suggest that she must come to Ayodhya and attend the Prana Prathista of Lord Rama. Congress leaders are pseudo-secularists. The Centre has allotted Rs 100 crore for developing the Bhadradi Temple," Kishan said.

Reacting to Rahul Gandhi's Nyay Yatra, he said that Congress leaders think that the defeat of the Congress is injustice and so they have taken up the Nyay Yatra.

# Congress govt will implement addl welfare programmes: Komatireddy

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has said that the State administration is being run from the Praja Bhavan under the Congress regime.

He expressed the wish that the people will lead a happy and prosperous life with happiness greeting them for the Sankranti festival, the first in the Congress regime.

Addressing media at his camp office on Sunday, he said that the government will implement all guarantees promised after going through the applications received during the Praja Palana programme.

The women belonging to poor families are utilising the free RTC bus travel facility to visit their parents' homes for the Sankranti festival, he said, giving credit to the Congress government for providing free travel to at least 30-lakh women.

Besides implementing the revised Arogyasri programme, he said that he would initiate measures to implement INDIRAMMA houses, providing LPG cylinders on subsidy to the poor. The beneficiaries of various schemes would be chosen at grama sabha only, he clarified.

Besides implementing the six guarantees, the government will implement many more welfare



Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy speaking to the media in Nalgonda on Sunday

schemes, he added.

All pending irrigation projects would be completed soon, he said.

A campus hostel would be built for the students at the Mahatma Gandhi University at a cost of Rs 10 crore. Foundation stone would be laid soon, he said.

Besides, he would also perform the ground-breaking ceremony for the Rs 100 crore Nalgonda-Mushampalli-Kannekalli road. The Gundlupalli-Regatta road would be developed into a double road at a cost of Rs 30 crore, he added. Similarly, the works pertaining to development of Darvesipuram-Pagidimarri road via Dorepalli would be grounded at a cost of Rs 34 crore, he elaborated.

He said that the government

would develop all 12 Assembly constituencies in undivided Nalgonda district, he said.

Probe was ordered into the omissions and commissions of Yadadri Thermal Power Plant, he said.

The development of drainage in Nalgonda and also the development of the remainder of the roads in the town would be taken up, he said.

Further, all development works in the villages of Charlapalli, Marrigudem and ArjalaBaavi, which have been merged with Nalgonda Municipality, would be implemented soon, he said.

In-charge Municipal chairman Abbagoni Ramesh Goud and others were present at the press meet.

## All set for first test match between between India & England

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) president A Jaganmohan Rao on Sunday said that all arrangements have been put in place for the conduct of the first test match between India and England, scheduled to be held at Uppal Stadium on January 25.

The ticket prices for match range from Rs 200 to maximum Rs 4,000 for the corporate box.

The HCA has also allocated 25,000 complimentary passes for school students, with 5,000 passes per day for the 5-day event. Free food and drinking water will be provided to these students," Jaganmohan Rao said.

# Uttam confident of Cong winning 13-14 LS seats

PNS ■ SURYAPET

Minister for Civil Supplies N Uttam Kumar Reddy has exuded confidence that the Congress will win at least 13 to 14 Lok Sabha seats in the upcoming general elections.

The Minister performed special puja at the Siva temple at Mellacheruvu, near here, on Sunday.

Later addressing the gathering, the Minister said that he would visit Ayodhya to have darshan of Lord Sriram once the construction of Ram temple is through.

The Minister hinted at establishing an industrial park



Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy speaking to the media in Suryapet on Sunday

in the region.

Turning the tables on the previous BRS regime, he said that the previous rulers pushed

the State into a debt crisis. He was confident that the Congress would win the Nalgonda Lok Sabha seat.

# Male leopard dies of illness in Narayanpet district

PNS ■ NAYARANPET

A male leopard that strayed into the fields of Kamsanpally village under Damaragidda mandal Narayanpet district on Saturday evening died while undergoing treatment. The leopard was shifted to veterinary hospital after it was found lying in the village.

The forest officials on being informed reached the village



spot and extended preliminary treatment. But unfortunately, the leopard died.

The Forest officials noticed that the leopard was partially blind. It did not attack anyone despite the local people captured its images in the village.

No external injury or any scars on the leopard were found.

Investigation would be taken up based on the postmortem report, said the officials.

# Damodar Maoist party secretary

PNS ■ BHUPALAPALLI

After a gap of two years, the Maoist party is understood to have appointed Bade Chokka Rao alias Damodar as its new secretary in place of Yapa Narayana alias Hari Bhushan, who passed away on June 21, 2021 due to Covid-19.

Appointment of Damodar as the secretary to the Maoist Party drops hints that the Maoists have been putting their best foot forward to strengthen revolutionary movement.

Prior to his elevation as secretary, Damodar was the State action team commander and central committee member of the party. In all, over 75 cases have been registered against him and he carries a reward of Rs 25 lakh on his head.

After the death of Haribhushan, the central committee of the party also examined several names of party leaders including KoyyadaSambaiah alias Azad, Gajarla Ravi alias Ganesh, Mylarapu Adella alias Bhaskar, Bandi Prakash alias Bandi Dada, Kankanala Raja Reddy alias Venkatesh for the top post. It kept the decision in reserve for over two and half years. The central committee, headed by NambalaKesava Rao, at last identified Damodar as the

party secretary. He was associated with the party for over two decades. He grew in the party since 1993 from the post of dalam member of Yeturunagaramdalam. Later, he went on to become Yeturunagaram-Mahadevpur Area Committee secretary. He had good grip over Khammam, Warangal, Karimnagar, Adilabad districts in north Telangana. Therefore, the central committee inclined towards him to appoint him as secretary. He hails from Tadwaimandal of Mulugu district. His brother Bade Nageswara Rao, who was a crucial leader in Maoist party, died along with his wife in the exchange of fire that took place in Tawai forest area in 2008. Chokka Rao studied upto SSC in ST Hostel at Eturunagaram.

The Warangal police was put on a high alert with appointment of Damodar as secretary to Maoist Party. Damodar assured charge as secretary of the party four days ago. As a result, the police in Bhupalapalli, Mulugu, Mahabubabad and Warangal police commissionerates were asked to remain on high alert. The police have been closely monitoring the Godavari river banks and gathering information.

# Officials told to release water from Ramanpad reservoir

PNS ■ WANAPARTY

Minister for Excise, Tourism and Culture Jupally Krishna Rao has directed the officials to release water from Ramanpad reservoir for ayacut lands.

The Minister said that the crops are withering for want of irrigation facility. Therefore, the officials should release water from the reservoir to wet the fields for the final time in kharif.

The Minister visited the Ramanpad reservoir on Sunday and enquired from the officials about the availability of water in the reservoir. He asked the officials to ensure that there is no shortage of drinking water during the forthcoming summer season too.

Jurala project's left canal irrigates the lands, including the tail-end lands, in the mandals of Amarachinta, Atmakur, Madanapur, Kothakot, Pebbair, Srirangapuram, Veepanagandla and



Chinnambavi in the region of Ramanpad-Gopaldinne.

Similarly, the lands in the mandals of Kothakota, Srirangapuram, Veepanagandla, Chinnambavi, Pentlavelli, including the tail-end lands, will get the irrigation facility from Bima Lift Irrigation Scheme. However, the availability of water in the reservoir is less due to prevailing dry conditions. Therefore, the minister asked the officials to provide irrigation facility to the lands to cater to the last wetting of the fields.

Superintending Engineer Satyaseela Reddy and local elected people's representatives and others were present.

## NEWS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH

# Amaravati will be AP capital

Naidu and Pawan make bonfire of 'anti-people' orders of Jagan govt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu along with JSP chief Pawan Kalyan actively participated in Bhogi celebrations at Mandadam in Amaravati on Sunday morning. The Sankranti celebrations organised in the name of 'Telugu Jathiki Swarna Yugam-Sankranti Sankalpam' are held on the Golden Role School campus in Amravati on Sunday morning. The farmers of Amaravati gave a warm and traditional welcome to Naidu and Pawan Kalyan. Later, both the leaders burnt copies of the orders of anti-people policies released by this Government in the bonfire.

Addressing the farmers, Naidu made it clear that the public welfare rule will again begin here as Amaravati is going to remain the capital of the state. He said that the primary goal of the TDP-Jana Sena combine is to create assets in the State. Chandrababu Naidu expressed happiness for celebrating the festival in Amaravati. "The future is again going to be ours as Amaravathi is soon going to be the centre for administration," he added.

Making a promise that the TDP-Jana Sena combine will take the responsibility to employ the jobless, Chandrababu Naidu said that steps will be initiated by the coming TDP-Jana Sena government to create assets and distribute it to the people to bring them out of the present crisis. Naidu said that around 8,000 acres in the capital region of Amaravathi remain vacant after allocating lands for building government offices and other private institutions and this amounts to one lakh crore or even three lakh crore if each acre is sold at Rs 30 cr. The land was worth Rs one lakh near Hitech City in Hyderabad 25 years ago while it now costs anywhere around Rs 100 cr and this is how assets should be created, he said.

Chandrababu regretted that the construction of buildings for High Court judges which began five years ago are not completed till now. Stating that he will take the responsibility to promote Visakhapatnam as economic capital, the former chief minister announced that a High Court bench will be established at Kurnool. Naidu is of a firm opinion that the Chief Minister, Jagannathan Reddy, is not fit for politics and said that the people must get rid of him.

Pawan Kalyan said that the time has come for the State to rid itself of evil and that he is aware of the problems being faced by the people. "We have joined hands with the TDP as we could not see the poor condition of the people in the



## SKILL DEVELOPMENT CASE

# SC verdict on Naidu's plea tomorrow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to deliver on January 16 its verdict on former Andhra Pradesh chief minister and TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu's plea challenging the high court order refusing to quash the FIR against him in the Skill Development Corporation scam case.

Naidu was arrested on September 9 last year for allegedly misappropriating funds from the Skill Development Corporation when he was the chief minister in 2015, causing a purported loss of Rs 371 crore to the state exchequer. Naidu has denied the allegations.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court had on November 20 last year granted him regular bail in the case.

An apex court bench comprising Justices Aniruddha Bose and Bela M Trivedi had on October 17 last year

reserved its verdict on Naidu's plea challenging the September 22, 2023 high court order refusing to quash the FIR against him in the case.

During the hearing on the plea before the apex court, the counsel appearing for the state had argued that Naidu's petition for quashing the FIR be rejected as the question about the applicability of section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act does not arise as the provision came into force in July 2018, while the CBI began probing the case in 2017.

Section 17A was introduced by an amendment with effect from July 26, 2018 and the provision stipulates a mandatory requirement for a police officer to seek prior approval from the competent authority for conducting any enquiry or inquiry or investigation into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

ment will transform Andhra Pradesh into a well-developed State.

The Sankranti celebrations will be officially organised in Amaravati next year, he said.

# Telangana govt likely to follow AP formula in reorganising districts

SNCN ACHARYULU  
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Congress government is likely to follow the AP formula while reorganising districts.

When United Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated Telangana state had 10 districts and Andhra Pradesh 13 districts.

In Telangana, the BRS government reorganised districts and the number of districts increased to 33. The Andhra Pradesh government also reorganised districts and created 26 more districts.

The Andhra Pradesh government reorganised districts based on Lok Sabha con-

stituencies. In Andhra Pradesh, there are 25 Lok Sabha constituencies.

There was criticism that in Telangana the reorganisation of districts was based on political convenience. With this, in small districts Assembly constituencies came to be in two districts.

Now the Congress government wants to reorganise districts again. For this, the Congress government has decided to constitute a commission to look after the reorganisation of districts.

The Congress government is planning to create districts based on Lok Sabha constituencies. However, the delimitation of Lok Sabha

constituencies may create problems for the Congress government while reorganising districts.

In Telangana, there are 17 Lok Sabha constituencies. That means there will be 17 districts in Telangana after the reorganisation of districts.

When Telangana state was formed there were 10 districts. The BRS government increased the number of districts to 33. Now the Congress government wants to reduce the number of districts from 33 to 17 or 18. If districts are reorganised the government will have to change the district administration also.

The Centre is likely to start the delimitation of Lok Sabha

constituencies nationwide and Assembly constituencies in both Telugu states in 2026. Once the delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies is completed there will be a change in the number of Lok Sabha constituencies.

There was an allegation that the Centre is trying to decrease the number of Lok Sabha constituencies in south India and increase the number of Lok Sabha constituencies in the north for political gains.

In these circumstances, the Congress government may face problems in reorganising districts due to the delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Vivid contours

INDIA bloc gathers momentum for LS polls with Kharge as chairperson and Nitish as convener

Just when it seemed that the INDIA bloc was heading towards implosion on account of inflated egos, it has managed to cobble up some semblance of order in the house. A consensus is emerging among the grouping of 28 parties which have joined ranks to take on the Narendra Modi-led BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. In a significant development, the bloc has finalised the name of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge as the Opposition grouping's chairperson and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar's nomination as the convener is all but sealed. This move marks a crucial step in unifying the Opposition forces and fostering collaboration among their diverse ideologies. The INDIA bloc was formed to transcend political boundaries and work towards the common goal of taking on the BJP's "divisive politics", which has led to hardships for vulnerable sections of society, especially the Scheduled Castes, tribes and 'Other Backward Classes' (OBC). Kharge is a seasoned leader hailing from an OBC background with a wealth of experience.



His leadership is expected to provide a steady hand to guide the India bloc through political intricacies. Kharge, known for his strong advocacy for social justice and economic equity, brings a wealth of legislative experience as well to the table. As the INDIA chairperson, he is likely to play a pivotal role in shaping the bloc's policies and strategies, ensuring that they are aligned with the all-party vision of a progressive and harmonious India.

Nitish's appointment, assuming he agrees to the responsibility, adds another dimension to this formidable political alliance. A prominent leader from Bihar, Nitish has a track record of successful governance and administration.

Known for his focus on development and governance, his selection underscores the bloc's commitment to effective governance and sustainable development. As the convener, Nitish is expected to play a key role in coordinating the bloc's efforts. His emphasis on inclusive growth and social welfare aligns with its broader goals, fostering a sense of collaboration among the members. While the INDIA bloc represents a promising development in Indian politics, it also faces challenges. The biggest stumbling block is sharing seats, which would be the first challenge for Kharge. His own party is being criticised for high-handedness and selfishness in accommodating regional parties. Building consensus among leaders with differing ideologies and regional interests is no small feat. However, the potential benefits of a united front – efficient governance, improved policy implementation and a stronger voice on the national stage – are significant. The bloc's progress is a promising development for the Opposition. As this alliance gains momentum, it holds the potential to bring about a paradigm shift in the BJP's policies. Thanks to the Opposition, the BJP is now thinking about caste census in a positive manner. The coming months will likely witness the INDIA bloc making significant strides, offering a beacon of hope for a harmonious and prosperous India.

### PICTALK



Young women participate in the kite festival organised to celebrate Makar Sankranti festival, in Bhopal

PTI

## UCC: Will it happen before the general elections?

Despite PM Modi's endorsement, the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code remains uncertain, but some States have taken the initiative

The BJP Government in its current tenure is unlikely to implement the Uniform Civil Code – that is, the law applicable to all religious communities in their personal matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption etc. Is. However, after the abrogation of Article 370 and the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, UCC is being seen as the last ideological promise that is on the agenda of the BJP and RSS. If we are to believe government and party sources, the party will keep this issue alive and fresh in the political discussion. Hope was further strengthened when Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed the need for UCC in a rally in Bhopal on 28 June 23 and said that a law could be made soon. That's when top officials of the party as well as the government said that the law would require very intensive research and extensive consultation, and thus was unlikely to be implemented until the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. To keep the issue alive, many BJP leaders and government ministers start-



ed making statements on the need for UCC. A private bill introduced by Sunil Kumar Singh, BJP Lok Sabha MP from Jharkhand, listed 'appropriate legislation to implement Uniform Civil Code throughout the country'. However, the Lok Sabha did not show much interest in considering the bill. However, the Sangh Parivar believes that states can implement the UCC on their own, and the Center can wait before initiating discussions for a comprehensive law. Several state BJP governments – Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat – have already initiated efforts to introduce UCC; Assam is going to become the third state in India to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), as announced by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at a press conference held in Dispur. Following the footsteps of Gujarat and

Uttarakhand, Assam's UCC will be tailored to the specific needs of the state. CM Sarma stressed that the government is actively working to tackle child marriage and is in the process of introducing a bill to ban polygamy in the state. However, Uttar Pradesh which is the poster boy for the BJP Government has not shown any signs of implementing it. "This is not Article 370 or triple talaq, where bills can be brought in hastily... UCC is a complex issue concerning different sections of the society from different castes and communities. This will require much wider consultation and more in-depth research. The Law Commission of India has already started consultations on UCC. It had issued a public notice on June 14 to seek public views on the UCC and its extended deadline for submitting suggestions ended on July 28. There is also a plan to hold consultations in cities. Sangh Parivar has also warned to exercise caution. Earlier this month, RSS-affiliated Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, which works among tribals, welcomed

suggestions that tribals should be kept out of the ambit of the law. But over the past two weeks, these meetings have witnessed heated debate over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's move to implement the Uniform Civil Code across India. These protests and these meetings in Jharkhand are now turning into training sessions to organise, oppose and oppose the UCC measure of the Bharatiya Janata Party. It is not just the All India Muslim Personal Law Board; The movement has started in tribal India. More than 100 protests have taken place so far. In early July, more than 30 tribal organizations under the Adivasi Coordination Committee protested in Ranchi, taking out protest marches and staging a sit-in outside the state BJP headquarters. Organisation BJP leader and MP Sushil Kumar Modi has suggested in the parliamentary panel that tribals should be kept out of the UCC in view of Article 371 and Scheduled Areas. (The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)



RAJESH K SINGH

## Bose's winning goal for Independence

The INA had won its war on the day Netaji persuaded the Indian prisoners of war in Axis hands to quit their servitude to their British masters and come over to the Azad Hind Fauj

I have read commentaries on, football and hockey matches, where the focus has mostly been on whether goals were scored, by whom and how. Commentaries on these games would seldom mention who dribbled the ball into the 'D', to be converted into a goal by his centre-forward colleague.

If you ask me who scored the goal that won India its independence in August 1947, it was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Strangely, post-independence commentaries do not mention this historic goal, not even those who grew up with me in Kolkata. Most virtually worshipped Netaji for his patriotism and sacrifices, but would not give him substantial credit for scoring the winning goal of Indian independence. Beyond a few who were close to Subhas, others did not walk out of Congress because of Subhas's expulsion from the party in April 1939. Nor was there the scale of protest one would have expected given the stature of Subhas.

What was his fault? Did he harm the Congress? No. His crime, if any, was to get elected as Congress president for a second consecutive year. What he had done, albeit not willingly, was to not have taken Gandhi's consent before contesting for the Congress presidency the second time. Where was the inner-party democracy Jawaharlal Nehru later boasted of? But even he lay low. Subhas Bose concluded that he had no political future left in the Congress. Had he wanted any further progress, he would have to emigrate. Subhas picked Germany as the only likely country he could shift to.

Bose made a daring escape from British captivity on January 7, 1941, travelling through Afghanistan and the Soviet Union to finally reach Germany. His stay, meeting Adolf Hitler and obtaining German support and assistance are the stuff of legend. He then undertook a perilous three-month journey in a German submarine to transfer to a Japanese submarine surfacing off the coast of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. A nucleus of the Indian National Army (INA) already formed by Ras Bihari Bose, awaited his command, and



Subhas soon raised the number of soldiers, including a women's battalion, to a total of 50,000 soldiers. The remarkable thing about these INA numbers was the large number of prisoners of war who had formally sworn loyalty to the king and country (Britain). This had never happened before in British history. Such mutinous behaviour was unthinkable and shocked the British leaders of the day. Not that the British had not experienced a mutiny. They had in fact, overcome a serious one in 1857-58 – the Sepoy Mutiny. But the mutineers then had not sworn by the English king and country. They were mere employees of a private commercial enterprise, the East India Company. The INA came up to Imphal, with one famous battle between the British Indian army and Subhas Indians taking place on the tennis court of the collector's bungalow. This was the INA's last clash before it retreated towards Singapore in 1944. Netaji and his immediate colleagues like Kayani and Shah Nawaz Khan must have been dejected at the defeat and retreat. They might not have realized that even in their

THE BRITISH THEMSELVES, IN THE SERVICE OF THE JEWEL IN THEIR CROWN, WOULD HAVE NUMBERED NO MORE THAN 50,000 MEN AND WOMEN IN THE ENTIRE SUBCONTINENT. COULD SUCH A SMALL NUMBER POSSIBLY HAVE CONTROLLED A POPULATION OF 40 CRORE PEOPLE?

defeat lay the seeds of triumph. They could not have imagined that the INA had won its war on the day Netaji had persuaded the Indian prisoners of war in Axis hands, to quit their servitude to their British masters and come over to the Azad Hind Fauj (the INA). Thereafter, His Majesty's government could never again trust an Indian soldier who had been sworn in by the king and country. There were several lakh officers, clerks and fighting men of them.

The British themselves, in the service of the jewel in their crown, would have numbered no more than 50,000 men and women in the entire subcontinent. Could such a small number possibly have controlled and helped rule a population of 40 crore people? In 1956, Clement Atlee (Prime Minister of Britain during 1945-50), visited Calcutta and stayed with the acting governor of West Bengal, Justice P.B. Chakraborty.

At dinner, the Governor enquired of Atlee why the British quit India in such a hurry when they could have hung on for another ten years. Atlee did not agree with this assessment. Instead, he said that Netaji Subhas forming the

INA and their confronting the British had lit a spark. This could have easily happened with the civilian employees as well. How then could we have held on to the levers of governance? No, Mr. Governor, our time was up. It was best to quit gracefully before being kicked out.

The former British Prime Minister's unequivocal opinion reveals that it was Netaji Subhas who won independence for India. He scored the winning goal, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi knows only too well and has not only acknowledged but has acted upon it as well. It is befitting that the grand consecration of the Shri Ram Temple at Ayodhya on the coming January 22 falls just a day ahead of Netaji's birthday on January 23rd. Aply, the pranpratishtha (consecration ceremony) is to be performed by Narendra Modi, who has fulfilled Netaji's clarion call of "Chalo Dilli" by finally giving India's true independence hero his rightful place in history, both figuratively and literally.

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



PRAFULL GORADIA

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### HASINA SWORN IN AS PM AGAIN

Sir — Sheikh Hasina was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh for the fifth term on Thursday. This comes days after her Awami League secured an overwhelming majority in the general elections, which were boycotted by the main opposition BNP and its allies. President Mohammad Shahabuddin administered the oath of office to the 76-year-old Hasina at a ceremony attended by politicians, foreign diplomats, civil society figures, and senior civil and military officials at the presidential palace. This marks her 12th term as prime minister, the fourth consecutive term, and the fifth overall. Under Hasina's leadership, the governments of India and Bangladesh have worked to strengthen diplomatic ties, and her fifth term as PM is expected to ensure stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Jahangir Shaikh | Mumbai

#### JOLT TO UDDHAV

Sir — When a party splits, determining the authentic or original faction becomes crucial. In Shiv Sena's case, Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar asserts the Shinde faction as the true Shiv Sena. Uddhav Thackeray vehemently opposes the Speaker's ruling, labeling it a "murder of democracy." Yet, Uddhav's own political history includes betraying the BJP for an alliance with the Congress, seizing power against the people's mandate. He now faces a taste of his own medicine as Eknath Shinde challenges his leadership.

The Speaker rightly emphasizes that the National Executive holds supreme authority, curtailing the Paksha Pramukh's absolute power. Uddhav's failure to demonstrate a convened National Executive Committee meeting supports the verdict favoring the Shinde faction. The Speaker's stance shields the MLAs from disqualification due to defection. Uddhav's claim to Shiv Sena, founded by his father Bal Thackeray, is challenged, emphasizing that the party isn't his personal property. Uddhav's altered

#### Misconception about dogs



In a society clouded by the misconception that dogs are potential threats, the heartfelt fondness and affection these animals shower upon humans often go unnoticed. Despite their undeserved reputation dogs demonstrate an incomparable capacity for love and care. Behind the veil of stereotypes, innumerable stories emerge about dogs enriching human lives with unwavering gentleness and loyalty. These

misunderstood creatures, marked as dangerous possess an innate ability to sense human emotions, offering solace in times of adversity. Studies divulge that interactions with dogs can reduce stress and lift one's spirit, exhibiting the therapeutic power integrated into their companionship. From therapy assistance to rescue operations dogs play an essential role in enhancing human well-being. In the often unseen interactions between humans and dogs, an impactful lesson emerges; summons to eliminate prejudgements and embrace the unspoken bonds formed through canine companionship. As we endeavour for a more empathetic society, recognising the overlooked love and care given by these misunderstood dogs becomes a groundbreaking step towards overcoming hindrances and appreciating the pure unconditional endearment they offer.

Tanisha Gupta | Ujjain

ideology for power diverges from his father's principles. With elections looming in 10 months, Uddhav has an opportunity to prove the Speaker wrong by surpassing BJP and Shinde's team in the Assembly polls.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Sir — The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) expressed "extreme disappointment" with the US Department of State for not designating Nigeria and India as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), despite both meeting the legal standard. USCIRF urged Congress to hold a public hearing on the State Department's failure to follow recommendations.

In India, alongside domestic religious freedom violations, the government's transnational repression activities targeting religious minorities abroad raised concerns. The USCIRF recommended

CPC designation for India and Nigeria in its 2023 report.

While the State Department re-designated 12 countries as CPCs in 2024, including Burma, China, Cuba, Iran, and others, India and Nigeria were omitted. USCIRF rejected this omission, vowing to ensure the US prioritizes religious freedom in foreign policy. In October 2023, USCIRF noted a decline in religious freedom conditions in India, citing discriminatory policies against minorities. During a September hearing on 'Advancing Religious Freedom within the US-India Bilateral Relationship,' the commission emphasised these issues. USCIRF, an independent federal entity, monitors global religious freedom, provides recommendations to deter persecution, and upholds freedom of religion in US foreign policy.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not who someone else is today




SAKSHI SETHI

With the advent of the adoption of the so-called Western culture, many of us especially the youth have never developed a relationship with ourselves for it was neither modelled in families nor it was ever encouraged. Moreover, stepping out of the family, popular culture movies, media and literature also made an individual aware that one needs to prioritize building relations with others and not with selves. But having a healthy relationship with self is the cornerstone of happiness and forms the foundation.

Today, perfectionism and self-comparison have been heightened by social media. It has been damaging to one's mental health, as the person is guaranteed to compare self with others who are doing better at something over time. And the loneliness and despair that can lie underneath a bright smile and successful life can be hidden. When an individual struggles with self-comparison, they are actually dealing with envy – which is a universal emotion. It happens when someone wants to have something that others have but can't have due to several factors such as time, money, experience and a lot many.

Though it is inherently normal, too much can cause a person to engage in self-destructive behaviours such as making excessive efforts to change self in ways that will ultimately destroy a person's personal well-being, health and authenticity. Negative self-comparison is essentially a losing game of competing against anyone but yesterday's version of the individual.



Instead of obsessing over ways to change oneself or be like others, one should count upon the blessings that the lord has bestowed upon one; give several reminders to selves that they are beautiful, smart and have wonderful qualities instead of envying or getting the feeling of jealousy. The person must follow the path of admiration for admiration is on the positive end of the comparison spectrum. When an individual admires other people's qualities, they too want to improve themselves. Shifting the focus to taking inspiration from others rather than self-degrading through comparison is a game changer so that the individual can be proud of the fact that they are improving, regardless of how others are doing. Remember, a person should set the standards so that nothing can compete with them.

It does take work, but the person does get there. When people put others into their categories, they greet their confusion with compassion. In learning to cultivate self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-compassion, a person unlocks the opportunity to fully embrace individual beauty and uniqueness.

The mind is powerful and one must use it to their advantage and focus on their journey rather than being in comparison to others. Comparison and negativity bias are hard-wired into the brains as survival mechanisms as they often cripple an individual by moving forward. In conclusion, as we navigate the complexities of modern society influenced by Western culture, it is crucial to recognize the importance of fostering a relationship with oneself. The pervasive emphasis on external validation, fueled by societal norms and amplified by social media, has led many to overlook the significance of internal well-being. The prevalent culture of perfectionism and self-comparison has not only taken a toll on mental health but has also obscured the genuine struggles that individuals may be facing behind seemingly successful facades.

To break free from the damaging cycle of self-comparison, it is essential to shift the focus from external standards to internal growth and self-appreciation. Rather than succumbing to envy, individuals should celebrate their unique qualities, acknowledging that true fulfillment comes from within.

*(The writer is an educator, views are personal)*

Indo-Maldives ties: An emotional tightrope



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

The Maldives must not let political theatrics erode the core principles that have defined its history, interests and relations with India

The ongoing dispute between a select few individuals in one of the world's behemoth nations and the tiniest sovereign state is a stark illustration of the contemporary diplomatic landscape heavily shaped by media biases and their exaggerated, contentious rhetoric. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of Indian analysts adopted a narrative that further inflamed tensions, giving the Maldivians reasons to amplify their dissent against India. In contrast, astute Maldivian analysts swiftly engaged in damage control, countering the repercussions spurred by the ceaseless prattle of inept politicians. The Maldives' shrewd pragmatism in forging alliances with major powers while safeguarding its autonomy is central to understanding its global approach. Unlike many larger nations in the region, including India, the Maldives evaded British colonization, strategically orchestrating a protectorate agreement in 1887 that preserved its political independence while deferring only on foreign affairs to London. Consequently, Malé never flew the British flag, and no British governor held sway, except during the threat posed by Japan in 1941 when Britain established a naval and air base at Addu Atoll in the southern reaches of the archipelago.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi showcased his strategic response in a brief video highlighting Lakshadweep as an alternative destination to the Maldives, 35 days after meeting the newly elected President of the Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai. The subsequent action in this video, not a mere coincidence but rather a calculated response with long-term aims aligned with the evolving policies of the Maldivian administration, echoes Otto von Bismarck's perspective that politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best. On the flip side, there is no cause for jubilation or satisfaction regarding the responses to the video by three young anti-Indian politicians in the Maldives who, a few days ago, exploited their social media platforms, proving in politics, nothing is contemptible. The ensuing disgraceful comments directed at Prime Minister Modi prompted the government to issue clarifications, emphasizing that the statements emanated from individual members of the cabinet and did not reflect the official stance of the government.

President Muizzu, revelling in the triumph of his recent electoral victory, appears to be basking in the dubious glory of long-standing anti-Indian sentiments prevailing in the country. This revelry, however, exposes him as still ensnared in the psychological labyrinth typical of a mere politician. Despite his judicious decision to take swift action against his errant colleagues, suspending Malsha Shareef, Mariyam Shiuna, and Abdulla Mahzoom Majid from their positions as deputy ministers in the so-called Youth Ministry, the repercussions of their fervent anti-Indian rhetoric remain unpredictable. The lingering discontent among the populace has the potential to ignite a fresh wave of violence, inevitably causing further harm to the nation.

Simply seeking attention without a nuanced understanding of the intricate political dynamics within the region and the country offers no tangible benefits for individuals making such inflammatory remarks, either for society or personally. Foreign Affairs Minister Moosa Sameer aptly stated, "The recent remarks against foreign

leaders and our close neighbours are unacceptable and do not reflect the official position of the Government of Maldives. We remain committed to fostering a positive and constructive dialogue with all our partners, especially our neighbours, based on mutual respect and understanding." Following decisive actions, President Muizzu swiftly embarked on a state visit to China, marking the first visit since assuming the presidency, where he reaffirmed the long-delayed Free Trade Agreement initiated in December 2014 and many more. Muizzu, under the banner of "India Out," seeks to reshape the social fabric, leveraging existing political culture. His methods, irrespective of perception, place him on a precarious edge, with the stability of his presidency contingent on the outcomes of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Having solidified his position within the party, Muizzu strategically secures loyalty by distributing governmental positions among senior figures in the PPM and the PNC, even appointing his wife. The lack of anti-defection laws in the Maldives introduces complications, as the repercussions of his juniors' statements could greatly influence whether Muizzu continues to wield power unchecked or experiences a tumultuous political decline.

Feeble minds, devoid of strategic principles and ethical conduct, persist in their unabated campaign of animosity against India, shamelessly unleashing their vitriol through various social media channels. This toxic behaviour, although not a recent development, has been an enduring characteristic of these politicians. On the contrary, India has unexpectedly taken these provocations more seriously than the juvenile politicians who, in their recent diatribes against India, never anticipated the sudden surge in popularity. India's strategic response seems

to revolve around globally tarnishing Maldives' reputation, utilizing its own carefully crafted narratives. However, this ploy is destined for a short-lived existence, as an entrenched ideological revolt against India continues to simmer throughout the region. Those fanning the flames of anti-India sentiment perceive India not as a benevolent caretaker in times of need but as a manipulator, underscoring the pivotal role played by strategies and counter-strategies in this ongoing narrative.

Acknowledging deep cultural, ethnic, and economic ties between the Maldives and India is crucial. Historical connections are evident in linguistic roots, shared exposure to Hindi music, and a history of educational exchanges. Recent collaborations, notably in healthcare, exemplify India's pivotal role, as seen in the timely supply of Covishield vaccines during the pandemic peak. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital stands as a tangible testament to India's enduring assistance, and India remains a primary source of tourists for the Maldives, enhancing the bilateral relationship.

Both nations strengthened ties through agreements, including significant financial support for maritime connectivity and credit lines. Despite this positive trajectory, the Maldivian current administration holds diverse sentiments towards India, ranging from nationalist fervour against military presence to concerns about transparency in agreements. Doubts persist over projects like the new police academy and Uthuru Thila Falhu, fueled by baseless rumours. Despite reservations, the overall relationship, which reached new heights in the previous administration, now faces challenges.

India's understanding of the internal power dynamics in the Maldives seems miscalculated, considering its profound strategic and economic interests in the region. The Maldives strategically holds a pivotal position in the Indian Ocean Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC). Its historical context, from British operational bases to Soviet attempts at naval facilities, underscores its significance. India's concerns about the Maldives' strategic location heightened after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, with reports suggesting the potential adversarial use of the Maldives' position in the region.

In the Maldives, prioritizing juvenile political mentality over mature diplomatic skills is not only foolhardy but also a perverse dance that revels in instant gratification, inflicting unimaginable pain on society. This misguided approach exposes a grotesque disparity between intent and justification, rendering any sympathetic validity null. It represents a condemnable manifestation of disregard, turning governmental relations into a mockery. This is not a call for 'India first' or 'India out,' but an impassioned plea for the Maldives to strengthen its sovereignty and prioritize its interests under the banner of 'Maldives First.' The nation must not let political theatrics erode the core principles that have defined its history – true friendship and sovereignty. Vigilance is paramount against separatist forces exploiting public sentiment, as risking the essence that made this sovereign archipelago unique throughout history is not an option. Unfortunately, many countries and leaders in the world are yet to learn from the untold lessons to be learned from Ukrainian President Zelenskyy.

*(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka. Views are personal)*

Empowering rural India through digital access

Common Service Centres are transforming lives in rural India by offering employment opportunities and delivering digital services

In the expansive rural landscapes of India, where digital access was once a distant aspiration, Common Service Centres (CSCs) have emerged as transformative agents. Operated by CSC e-Governance, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) under the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) of the Government of India, these centers provide a myriad of services to citizens in rural areas. The objective of these centers is to provide the benefits of government schemes by providing e-governance facilities to the people, especially in the villages of the country. Boasting over 500 services, CSCs act as vital information and communication technology access points, seamlessly connecting citizens to digital government resources and business services.

**The Success of CSCs:** The impact of CSCs on rural India becomes apparent when examining the statistics. Since their inception, these centres have touched the lives of millions, becoming a beacon of digital inclusion across the country. The success of CSCs transcends mere numbers; it is a narrative of empowerment, closing the gap between urban and rural areas through digital avenues.

**Tele-Law Scheme:** Among the multitude of services offered by CSCs, the Tele-Law Scheme stands out as a beacon of justice. Department of Justice (DoJ) has entrusted a task to CSC e-Governance Service India Limited for mainstreaming legal information, legal aid, and advice to the marginalized communities through Common Services Center (CSC). Launched in 2017 as a pilot project in the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir, this initiative aimed to bring legal aid to the doorsteps of marginalized communities.

Utilizing video-conferencing infrastructure at CSC centers, citizens can connect with panel lawyers, seeking advice and assistance. The success of the pilot project led to its expansion in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and subsequently to all aspirational districts across the country. As of April 2023, Tele-Law has reached an impressive 2,50,000 CSCs in 765 districts, providing free legal services to all sections of the community. Real-time data from



the Tele-Law Dashboard showcases its impact, with over 65 lakh cases registered and legal advice extended to more than 64 lakh beneficiaries.

**Online Resume Maker:** In the digital age, job hunting has evolved, and CSCs have adapted to this change by introducing the Online Resume Maker tool. This AI-based product, available on the Digital Seva Portal, empowers individuals to create professional resumes tailored to their skill sets.

"The impact of the Online Resume Maker service is evident in its features, providing AI-driven content, a choice of professional templates, and seamless integration with job portals like Rozgar.com. The service not only enhances the job application process but also opens doors to daily job alerts, direct calls from recruiters, and downloadable mobile applications with advanced features," says Sanjay Kumar Rakesh, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer at CSC e-Governance Services India Limited.

**Cultivating Prosperity**  
The Agriculture Department of CSC e-Governance Services

India Ltd, established in 2019-20, has redefined the landscape of agricultural services in the country. Operating through the CSC eAgri portal, the department has achieved significant milestones, surpassing business turnovers and fostering collaborations with leading agricultural brands.

The success of the Agriculture Department is marked by its achievements in FPO network expansion, business growth, brand collaborations, retail portals for VLEs, KVK Crop Healthcare Service, PACS Project, and SFAC Value Chain Organization.

Digital transformation, financial transactions, PACS onboarding, and progress in the SFAC project highlight the impact of the CSC eAgri portal on the agricultural sector.

With over 46 lakh transactions and the onboarding of 50,000+ PACS into the CSC network, the department's role in promoting e-governance services and digital agribusiness is commendable.

"The journey of Common Service Centres (CSCs) in India continues to be one of sustained growth and innovation. As of the latest data available, the network of CSCs has expanded its reach to even the remotest corners of the country, acting as catalysts for rural development. The commitment to providing over 500 services reflects the adaptability and responsiveness of CSCs to the evolving needs of the population," says Sanjay Kumar Rakesh.

*(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)*



KUMAR GIRISH

MONEY MATTERS

## Luxmi Tea plans retail expansion, to step up presence in airports

Luxmi Tea, which owns the iconic Makaibari brand, plans to expand its retail presence across the country, an official of the company said. The company has already opened stores to sell its premium tea inside Kolkata and Bagdogra airports, and also inside the international terminal of Mumbai airport. "The retail and online channels of our tea sales are growing fast. Presently, online and retail constitute less than ten percent of overall sales," MD of Luxmi Tea Rudra Chatterjee said. Luxmi Tea, which has gardens in West Bengal, Assam, and Rwanda in Africa, produces around 25 million kilograms of the crop annually, Chatterjee said. He said, "We have started with three airports at present. Preliminary talks are on to open more retail stores in other airports like Bengaluru and Delhi as well". According to him, the stores have been branded after 'Makaibari' and sell the iconic tea and other premium Luxmi products at the airport outlets.



## Central Bank of India extends festival offer till March 31

State-owned Central Bank of India has extended its festival offer for three months till March 31 with a view to increasing its retail asset book. Earlier, the offer was till December 31, 2023. The bank is offering low interest rate, waiver in processing fee and other facilities for customers during this period, Central Bank of India general manager (retail assets) Vivek Kumar said. Cent Grih Laxmi Scheme and Cent Business Scheme are offering the lowest rate of interest across the industry starting from 8.35 per cent. Last week, the bank also held meeting with major real estate developers across Delhi-NCR. About 150 Direct Sales Agents (DSAs) and 50 renowned builders across the region joined the event. He also said that interest rates on most of the products have peaked and there is hardly any scope for further hike. Rates on the liability side have also more or less saturated and liquidity position is within manageable range, he said.



## TCPL to tap pharma channels with Organic India

Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) now plans to tap pharma channels as the acquisition of Organic India would provide a "fully rounded portfolio" combined with healthy offering from its own brands, said MD and CEO Sunil D'Souza on Sunday. Also, the acquisition of Capital Foods, which has brands including Smith & Jones and Ching's Secret, will address the western cuisine and 'desi Chinese' flavours, which it plans to extend to the oriental cuisine space, he said. Combined with its own brand Sampann, under which it offers Indian food and spices, TCPL now aims to offer a wide gamut of the Indian culinary palate with Ching's Secret, and Smith & Jones. "We now have the brands that were required to address the entire portfolio of the Indian consumer's cuisines per se," D'Souza said. On the other hand, with Organic India, TCPL will enter into the nutraceutical supplement space.



# ONGC makes back-to-back gas discoveries in Mahanadi block

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has made two significant back-to-back natural gas discoveries in a Mahanadi basin deepwater block in the Bay of Bengal as its calculated game plan of venturing into high-risk deep water exploration starts yielding results. The firm made the discoveries in the block MN-DWHP-2018/1, which it had won in the third round of auction under the open acreage licensing policy in 2019, two sources with direct knowledge of the development said.

Significantly, the discoveries have been made in an area, which previously was classified as a 'no-go' area because of national security interests.

The first discovery, named Uktal, is in 714 metres of water depth and flowed more than 3 lakh cubic metres per day of gas during initial testing, they said, adding the other find is at a water depth of 1,110 metres.

ONGC has notified the discoveries to upstream regulator Directorate General of



Hydrocarbons (DGH) and is now doing pool size and commercial viability assessments, they said. For a nation that imports roughly half of its gas needs, finding new reserves augurs well for its energy security. India is targeting raising the share of natural gas in its energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.3 per cent and more domestic production will aid that.

Gas is being seen as a transition fuel in India's journey towards net zero carbon emission by 2070. As the country pivots away from polluting fossil fuels, natural gas with a

lower carbon footprint is seen as a bridge fuel.

Natural gas extracted from below ground or sea-surface is used to generate electricity, make fertilisers or turn into CNG to use as fuel in automobiles and piped to household kitchens for cooking purposes. Greater use of natural gas will replace coal in power generation and liquid fuels in industries.

Sources said ONGC was able to fast-track exploration after the government freed almost one lakh square kilometres of area from restrictions for exploring and producing oil and gas.

This area was called a 'no-go' area as it was either in the path of missile testing or on a satellite launch route. Restrictions on more than 98 per cent of the 'no-go' areas were removed in 2022, allowing for energy companies to send vessels and drillships to find oil and gas.

ONGC acquired 1,432.14 sq km of 3D seismic data in MN-DWHP-2018/1 block (Mahanadi deep-water) and spud well MNDW181H-B-1 in August last year.

The first of its kind under the open acreage licensing policy (OALP) regime, the well has been drilled by the mighty drillship West Polaris.

Sources said these exploration successes in Mahanadi offshore will catalyse opening up new exploration fronts, attracting more investments.

ONGC had last year inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with French energy giant TotalEnergies to establish a framework for the exchange of information on deepwater offshore acreage, especially in the Mahanadi and Andaman basins.

## Quarterly earnings, global trends to guide equity markets this week: Analysts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Movement in the equity market this week will largely be dictated by quarterly earnings of blue-chip firms HDFC Bank and Hindustan Unilever, along with the announcement of WPI inflation data and global trends, analysts said.

The trading activity of foreign investors, global oil benchmark Brent crude and the rupee-dollar trend would also guide the movement.

"The focus will shift towards Q3 earnings, with key players such as HDFC Bank, HUL, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, and Ultratech Cement set to announce their results. Pre-budget expectations are also likely to influence the sector and stock-specific movements," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd said.

As the market gears up for the Budget, institutional flows will play a crucial role in determining its direction, he added.

WPI inflation data for December is scheduled to be announced on Monday.

## Centre, state, exporters to discuss ways to boost exports on Jan 16

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre, state governments and industry representatives will meet on January 16 to discuss ways to boost the country's exports, an official said.

Issues which are expected to figure in the meeting include rupee payment challenges, need of global shipping, and challenges being faced by traders on account of the Red Sea crisis, and uncertain global economic situation due to the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Hamas conflict.

The meeting will be chaired by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. They all are members of the Board of Trade (BoT).

"There are over 135 members of BoT. It is meeting on January 16 at Bharat Mandapam," the official said.

Headed by the minister, the board includes participants from various states, Union Territories, and senior officials from the public and private sectors. In the meeting, representatives of export promotion councils present their views on the export sector.



The board provides an opportunity to have regular discussions and consultations with trade and industry and advise the government on policy measures on foreign trade. It also provides a platform for state governments and Union Territories to articulate their perspective on trade policy and also for the central government to apprise them about international developments affecting India's trade potential and opportunities.

Cumulatively, the country's merchandise exports in April-November 2023-24 contracted by 6.51 per cent to USD 278.8 billion.

Imports were also down by 8.67 per cent to USD 445.15 billion in the eight-month period due to a fall in oil imports.

The trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) during the eight-month period was USD 166.35 billion against USD 189.21 billion in the corresponding period last year.



## India asks US to permit domestic labs for fruit irradiation to cut trade cost

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has asked the US to allow domestic labs also for irradiation of certain fruits like mangoes with a view to helping exporters cut additional trade costs, an official said.

At present, exporters have to carry out irradiation at the US ports, which increases cost and uncertainty in case of rejection of the consignment.

The issue was raised during the 14th India-US Trade Policy Forum meeting here on January 12.

"We have raised the issue of fruit irradiation which they do on their coast. Let it happen here. They can allow Indian labs to do so. It will reduce trade costs in a way," the offi-

cial said. According to international trade experts, several Indian products may require irradiation at the US ports before entering the US market to comply with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) regulations and prevent the introduction of harmful pests and diseases.

Think tank GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said that a better way is to carry out irradiation in India before exports as modern facilities are available in India that can meet the US import requirements.

Irradiation improves safety of fruits as it kills microorganisms. Irradiation helps eliminate pests without affecting the quality of the fruit.

## 'Incentives key to promote bio-fertilizers'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body Indian Biogas Association (IBA) has demanded a host of incentives including a dedicated Rs 1.4 lakh crore 'Biogas-Fertilizer Fund' that aims to promote the use of organic fertilizers for improved soil and human health.

It said the key to accelerating the Bio-CNG/CBG (compressed natural gas/biogas) industry's growth lies in crafting pro-biofertilizer policies.

This includes favorable regulations, tax exemptions, financing incentives, and accessible credit options, with a spotlight on fermented organic manure, it noted.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present an interim budget for financial year 2024-25 on February 1.

In a pre-budget memorandum submitted earlier this month to the finance ministry, the IBA has proposed to set up a new 'Sustainable Biogas Plant Fertilizer-Based Cultivation Programme' (SubiCulP) with a dedicated Rs 1.4 lakh crore fund for five years.

# Pharma industry seeks sops for R&D, conducive policies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The pharma industry has sought fiscal incentives to promote research and development (R&D) in the sector, as it is likely to reach USD 400-450 billion market size by 2047.

In a statement, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance Secretary General Sudarshan Jain said there is a high risk, long gestation period and low success rate in research, and therefore, there is a need for continuous investments.

"The budget 2024-25 should outline conducive policies that



provide benefits in terms of both direct and indirect taxes and also facilitate ease of doing business for the pharma companies," Jain noted.

The interim Budget is sched-

uled to be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1.

Jain said the domestic pharmaceutical industry is at the cusp of change.

## Lupin gets USFDA nod for generic hypertension drug

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug maker Lupin on Sunday said it has received approval from the US health regulator to market a generic hypertension drug in America.

The company has received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for Propranolol Hydrochloride extended-release capsules in multiple strengths, Lupin Ltd said in a regulatory filing. The company's product is the generic ver-

sion of ANI Pharmaceuticals' Inderal LA extended-release capsules, it added.

The product will be manufactured at the company's Pithampur-based manufacturing plant, the drug firm stated. Propranolol Hydrochloride extended-release capsules USP are indicated in the management of hypertension.

They may be used alone or in combination with other antihypertensive agents, particularly a thiazide diuretic.

## FPIs infuse Rs 3,900 cr in equities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have adopted a cautious stance and put around Rs 3,900 crore in Indian equities in the first two weeks of this month, against the backdrop of uncertainty over the interest rate scenario.

The investment has slowed down compared to Rs 66,134 crore attracted in the entire December.

Before that, FPIs invested Rs 9,000 crore in November.

According to data with the depositories, foreign investors



made a net investment of Rs 3,864 crore in Indian equities this month (till January 12).

The latest investment pattern could be largely attributed to investors booking profit with Indian equity market trading near its all-time high level, said Himanshu

Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Adviser India.

Moreover, uncertainty over the interest rate scenario could have also prompted them to stay on the sidelines and wait for further cues, before taking investment decision with respect to investing in emerging markets like India, he said.

Continuing geopolitical conflicts are also a persistent risk, which foreign investors are cognisant of while making investment decisions, he added.

# 'Army troops turn Davos into fortress ahead of WEF meet'

PNS ■ DAVOS

As Davos readies to host its annual talkfest of rich and powerful from across the world, nearly 5,000 army personnel have been deployed to help police and civilian authorities secure this small Alpine resort town.

Davos is estimated to have a permanent population of just about 10,000 but is frequented throughout the year by tourists including skiing enthusiasts in ski season, but it is the week of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting when it sees the maximum footfalls with at least 30,000 people in the town.

Given the high-profile nature of the event, beginning Monday, the security is both discreet and visible and com-

prises snipers, drone jammers, regular frisking and checking and round-the-clock patrol.

In addition to army personnel, there is a huge number of police men and women, support staff running into thousands and then nearly 3,000 world leaders are attending this year's summit, and so are over 500 journalists. And there is no less number of tourists, it being a ski season.

Armed forces began their deployment on January 9 itself and they would be here till January 25, according to Swiss Army. Air Force has also been tasked to monitor and secure the airspace.

Besides, it will use its helicopters to transport people protected under international law on behalf of the Swiss federal government.



These flights are not to be confused with the private helicopter taxis for business giants, which also will be aplenty.

The persons protected under international law mostly include high-ranking officials such as presidents and

members of the government of foreign states, who can benefit from VIP transport by the Air Force.

High-ranking members of international organizations such as the UN or the EU also belong to this group of people, including the UN

Secretary General and the President of the EU Commission. More than 200 internationally protected persons, including nearly 300 heads of state and government, are expected for this year's meeting. The additional costs for security at the WEF Annual Meeting 2024 are estimated at around CHF 9 million (nearly Rs 87 crore).

As in previous years, the federal government, together with the WEF Foundation and its other partners (Canton of Graubunden, commune of Davos), will contribute to the costs of WEF Annual Meeting security measures for the period 2022-2024 as part of a three-tier finance model.

There is a cost ceiling of CHF 9 million a year for security. If the cost ceiling

should be exceeded due to exceptional circumstances, level-2 of the finance model is applied.

The federal government has set aside maximum additional funds of CHF 900,000 to cover such cases for the three annual meetings from 2022 to 2024. If the additional costs exceed this amount, the extra expenditure will be met by the finance partners according to the ratio set under level 1, unless level 3 comes into play.

In the event of exceptional incidents (for example, terrorist attacks, assassination attempts, major threats or clear indications that such acts may be carried out), the federal government will meet 80 per cent of any costs exceeding those under levels 1 and 2.

## India electronics exports to US jump over two-fold to US\$ 6.6 bn : ICEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Electronics exports from India to the US jumped over two-fold year-on-year to US\$ 6.6 billion during January-September 2023, industry body ICEA has said.

India Cellular and Electronics Association Chairman Pankaj Mahindroo told that this is an all-time high electronics export from India, while the share of electronics imported from China into the US market has declined.

"Recent data highlights a notable surge in India's electronics exports to the US, which increased by approximately 253 per cent to an estimated US\$ 6.6 billion in the current year (January-September), compared to an estimated US\$ 2.6 billion in the same period last year," Mohindroo said. According to



data shared by ICEA, India's electronics exports to the US increased by more than 300 per cent from an estimated US\$ 1.3 billion in 2018 to an estimated US\$ 4.5 billion in 2022.

The bilateral electronics trade between India and the US has also seen an impressive rise of 84 per cent, with the current estimate standing at USD 9 billion during January-September 2023 from an estimated USD 4.9 billion in the same period preceding fiscal.





Rajani Marda



Meenakshi



Poonam Daga



Namrutha



Abhilasha



Archana



Shoba



Sushmita TotlaMarda



Anju



Shoba

Party

Photos by- SV Chary

Socialites from the city, graced the 'Samanvay ki Lohri', held at Vijay Anand grounds in Attapur. The guests were seen donning the traditional Punjabi attire. President Sushmita Totla, and Secretary Rajani Marda, along with the other members of Samanvay welcomed the guests.



Several socialites from the city including Ganga Jaju, Priyanka Sarada, Sneha Rathi, Rashmi Rathi, and Surya Rathi, among others, graced the Sankranti festival celebrations, held at Begum Bazar in Hyderabad on Sunday. The guests had a gala time while flying kites and having the traditional authentic delicacies.




A groundbreaking gathering of the Asaf Jaha Dynasty had took place at Nawab Raunaq Yar Khan's property, Function Villa, in Begumpet. The purpose of this gathering was to educate the royal family on their legal rights and provide guidance in safeguarding and recovering their vast property that spans thousands of acres across states and some abroad, in accordance with the present Indian Muslim Law. The gathering was addressed by esteemed guests including Swarnajet Sen, former D.G.P. H.O.P.F. Combined A.P, along with Dinesh Reddy, former D.G.P. H.O.P.F. Combined A.P, and Ajay Mishra, former Home Secretary and present Chairman Red Cross Society.

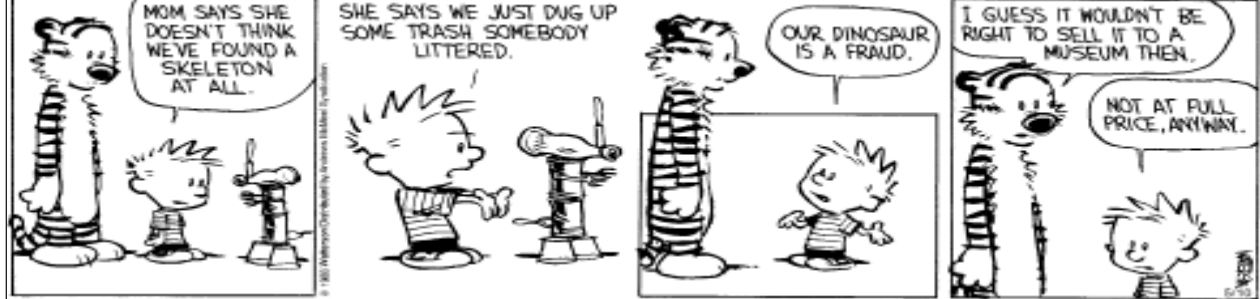


Abhyasa International Residential School organised its mega theatre performance on 'Bharateeya DNA', and several other cultural programs, as part of its Hemanth Utsav 2024. The 27th edition of the utsav, which is held every year in January, was graced by Archaeology minister Jupally Krishna Rao, along with Tollywood film star Santosh Shoban, and CEO and founder of Abhyasa International Residential School, Vinayaka Kalleetla, at Shilpakala Vedika, in Hitech City


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD



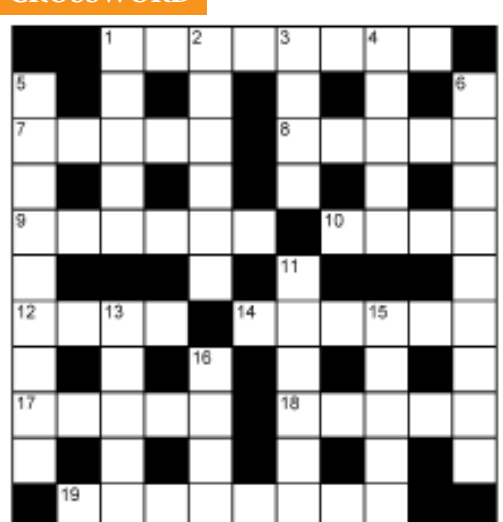
REALITY CHECK




SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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


Yesterday's solution

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

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.

GINGER MEGGS



CROSSWORD SOLUTION

1	Motion
2	A long journey by sea or in space
3	Animal flesh for eating
4	Loud sounds
5	A figure in a field to frighten birds
6	One third of fifty-one
7	Similar
8	Quit your job
9	At this place
10	With nobody in it
11	A communication device
12	Remedy
13	Mother or father
14	Of greater age
15	A fruit with pips
16	A place for sick or injured people

# To her amazement, the high tide ‘almost carried’ Manchu Lakshmi away at Koh Samui

Actress Manchu Lakshmi, who was recently having one of the best times at Koh Samui, gets candid with The Pioneer about this trip and shares some interesting experiences in this exclusive chat.

SHIKHA DUGGAL

The well-known Telugu cinema star Lakshmi Manchu recently revealed some old photos of herself alongside Pragya Jaiswal, Jackky Bhagnani, Bhumi Pednekar, and Rakul Preet Singh, among other celebrities from Koh Samui. The celebrities are seen in the photos enjoying a great time while on vacation. That prompted us to give the actress a quick call for an entertainment feature so we could find out what exactly went into these joyful pictures.

“It’s a favorite spot of mine that I frequently visit. It encompasses

almost the whole island, from top to bottom. In forty-five minutes, you can drive it,” with great delight, the seasoned actress spoke. She goes on to provide specifics. “When Nirvana was two and a half years old, my daughter visited Koh Samui. We participated in all the tourist activities during our previous visit! We merely enjoyed the water this time because, as we become older, we don’t want to visit the elephant and tiger reserve to see the animals in confinement. In particular, the sea! Every day we were in the pool.”

There were twenty of them, and for an instant, the actress thought she was back in college. It was as though she had arrived on a field trip! There were schedules for things like breakfasts and early wake-ups. They accomplished something enjoyable every day that they will never forget. “If you’re curious about my fashion game, it’s hilarious. I made numerous attempts to style my hair so that it wouldn’t fall

on my face. Your hair will frizz very quickly, so you can’t blow dry it to make it appear presentable. You’re going to get tired of the humidity! Being from Los Angeles, I am familiar with beach life. All I needed to do was determine if the beach would be Thai or European. Oh hi, it’s just me, yo, hence the gram on fire,” the boss woman added.

Everybody in the gang loved to eat. They devoured whatever they could! They even have a group on WhatsApp with the same name. Her pals from Bombay love food a lot! “The coconut water had a really sweet taste. I ate rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The mangoes were on the same list! I’ve given up on white rice and beef as of late January. When I was on vacation, I went into overdrive and now I have to make up for it somehow.”

She just liked to spend much of her time lying down on the sand so she could feel the warmth. Next, they grabbed a yacht! They leaped into the center of the ocean, and to

her surprise, the high tidal nearly took her away. It was really intense, and she needed to be saved! Her daughter and she were separated, and she was freaking out. “When I returned to the yacht, I asked my daughter weren’t you afraid? And she says, ‘Ammma, I was just enjoying being in the water,’ because I was wearing a life jacket and everyone could see me. Our children teach us so much. I realise shortly afterward that I could have responded the same way rather than freaking out.”

They were all staying at the same place, as she had previously mentioned, so it was similar to a slumber party. Waking each other up in the morning, and then not letting each other sleep. And this amusing scene: “Pragya just stood up and yelled, Hey, you’re eating all my mango sticky rice, Aman. Pragya has rarely raised her voice, so when she did, we all burst out laughing. Pragya was really possessive about her sticky rice with mango, hehe.”



## ‘An excellent film cannot be stopped, little conflicts between producers during Sankranti happen every year’

Guntur Karam is a massive film produced with great ambition by Radhakrishna. Meenakshi Chaudhary and Sreeleela played the roles of heroines. With high expectations, the movie was released on January 12 as a Sankranti gift and broke the box office records with a first-day collection of Rs 94 crores.

In regards to the same, the makers organised a press conference. According to the producer Naga Vamsi, Guntur Karam was released in honour of Sankranti. “The fact that the response exceeded our expectations makes us very happy. Very good collections have been made. Days later, a Telugu regional film filled with sentimental family moments arrived. The spectators are providing the anchor. Even though there was disagreement in some areas, it all subsided prior to the evening performances. A festive movie that the entire family can enjoy. A film perfect for a festival, complete with sentiment, combat scenes, and songs. We promise to keep everyone amused.”

Meanwhile, producer Dil Raju wished everyone a happy Sankranti. “An eclectic conversation

show aired at one in the evening. I viewed the movie and did a cross-check at the Sudarshan theater. The character of Mahesh Babu is the basis for the film Guntur Karam. A family emotional movie between mother and son. The entire family can enjoy watching this movie together. The feeling that emerges in the end! The final mass song is being enjoyed by the audience. The amount of money the movie made after the festival is visible. There are still four days left in the festival.

An excellent film cannot be stopped. That’s the past. There are little conflicts between the producers during Sankranti every year. This is the commercial world. Here, the only difficulties are commercial ones. They are unopposed.”

Actor Teja Sajja, who has been getting a lot of good response to his recently released film *HanuMan*, has shared that his favourite home-grown superhero films are ‘Koi Mil Gaya’, it’s sequel ‘Krrish’ and the Malayalam film ‘Minnal Murali’.

Teja said that he is a “huge fan of *Koi Mil Gaya*”. He may not have watched many superheroes from international cinema but he takes immense pride in the homegrown superheroes.

## Teja Sajja says he ‘loves homegrown superhero films’, says, ‘Marvel and DC never clicked with me’

He said, “I’ve not watched many English superhero films. Marvel and DC never clicked with me because of the lack of cultural understanding. But I love *Koi Mil Gaya*. I love *Minnal Murali* also. The other day I was in Kochi talking about *Minnal Murali*. Tovino Thomas sir was also there, he said he also knew about *HanuMan* and he wants to do something for *HanuMan*. I hope we can do something together.”

Talking about the unified force that Indian cinema has become with the lines between different film industries in India blurring, the actor said that best is yet to come for Indian cinema.

“We are always better than yesterday. Tomorrow will be brighter and better. That is what we aspire for. It has just begun. The biggest example is Shah Rukh

Khan sir collaborating with Atlee sir, and Prabhas sir collaborating with Prashanth Neel sir from Karnataka. They collaborated with Prithviraj Sukumaran sir from Malayalam as well.”

“We have to give huge respect to both stars, Prithviraj sir in Malayalam, is a huge star. Prabhas sir, who is a huge star himself. There’s *Kalki* coming up and *Thalaivar 170*. These are the kinds of collaborations that we are trying to launch because there are no more boundaries of languages, no more boundaries of cul-



## Varun Dhawan, Atlee perform devotional duties of VD 18 during Muhurat ceremony



The glimpses from the muhurat pooja ceremony of the upcoming Varun Dhawan-starrer film, tentatively titled *VD18*, were unveiled on the occasion of Makar Sankranti and Pongal on Sunday. The movie also marks the debut of Keerthy Suresh in Hindi cinema.

The video shows the team of *VD 18* attending the ceremony. Varun donned a Periwinkle shirt as he walked into the venue. He later changed into ethnic wear as he participated in the ceremony.

The makers

and the cast took to their respective social handles commemorating the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti and Pongal to officially unveil the project by sharing glimpses of the ceremony which was held in Mumbai.

The film is directed by A. Kaleswaran, and brings together a dynamic team of industry talents, promising audiences a solid cinematic experience.

Last month, Varun announced the wrap up of the Kerala sched-

ule of *VD 18*, dropping beautiful glimpses from ‘God’s own country’. Taking to Instagram, Varun, who enjoys 46.8 million followers on Instagram, gave a sneak peek into beautiful Kerala.

In the picture, he was seen wearing a black T-shirt and matching shorts, posing against a picturesque backdrop with his arms spread wide open.

He wrote in the caption: “Thank u Kerala Sched wrap #VD18.” Varun, who has been featured in Forbes India’s Celebrity 100 list since 2014, was last seen on screen in *Bawaal* alongside Janhvi Kapoor. Other details of *VD 18* are still under wraps.

The film is presented by Jio Studios, and the *Jawan* director Atlee in association with A for Apple Studios and Cine1 Studios. It is produced by Murad Khetani, Priya Atlee, and Jyoti Deshpande.

## Maruthi’s *Bhale Unnade* will feature Raj Tarun as the lead

Director and producer Maruthi, who created numerous successful blockbusters, has been helming some unusual films with modern themes. The filmmaker, who is currently working with rebel star Prabhas on a pan-Indian movie, revealed his newest production project. Presenting the film is Maruthi Team Product, with N.V. Kiran Kumar serving as Production No. 1 of Ravikiran Arts! Raj Tarun, a young hero who dabbled in many genres and subjects, will play the lead role in this family-friendly comedy, which will be helmed by J Sivasai Vardhan, a director making his directorial debut and known for his work on popular web series like *Geetha Subramanyam*, *Pelli Gola 2*, *U&I Hello World*, and others. In addition to wishing everyone a happy Bhogi and Sankranti, the film’s title and first look were revealed by the producers.

*Bhale Unnade* is a fitting title for the

film and Raj Tarun plays Radha in the first look poster, who is shown with his equipment and is a professional saree draper. He smiles endearingly as he goes, with flowers, his draped accessories, makeup, and other objects visible in the backdrop. The first look poster is captivating and exudes optimism. Presenting Manisha Kandkur as the leading heroine, Krishna, with the renowned director Singeetham Srinivas playing a key role. Abhirami, Ammu Abhirami (*Narappa* fame), and Leela Samson are the other important cast. Shekar Chandra is in charge of the music section, and Nagesh Banella controls the camera. The executive producers are Mukkara Muralidhar Reddy and B G Govinda Raju. Dasari Venkata Sathish is the line producer, B Ramakrishna Raju is the production controller, Srikanth Patnaik R is the editor, Suresh Bhimagani, aka “baby,” is the art director, and Siva Kumar Macha is the production designer.



# WHEN CRICKET MEETS TENNIS

PTI ■ INDORE

Indian cricket icon Virat Kohli on Sunday opened up about the mutual admiration he shares with Serbian tennis legend Novak Djokovic in a heart-warming tale of cross-sport camaraderie. It all started when Kohli reached out to the record 24-time Major champion on social media with a simple greeting. But to his surprise, the tennis maestro had already messaged him, marking the beginning of their friendship. "I got in touch with Novak very organically, I was just looking at his profile once on Instagram and I just happened to press the message button. I thought I'll just say hello, maybe," Kohli revealed on BCCI twitter ahead of his T20 comeback against Afghanistan at Indore. "And then I saw a message from him on my DM already. I never opened it myself. So, first time I saw my own messages myself, I saw, he messaged me himself. And I was like, let me just check if it's a fake account or some-

thing like that. "But then I checked it again and it was legitimate. And then, yeah, we got talking. We keep exchanging messages every now and then. I congratulated him for all his amazing achievements." The two athletes quickly found common ground, regularly exchanging congratulatory messages on their respective achievements. They both are also epitome of supreme fitness allowing them to excel even in their mid 30s. Djokovic also congratulated Kohli on his 50th ODI century, by posting an Instagram story, a gesture that resonated deeply with the Indian cricketing great. "When I got my 50th century recently, he put out a story and he sent me a very nice message as well. So, there's been a mutual admiration, respect. "It's really nice to connect with global athletes who are, you know, excelling at a high level. And I think, collectively, what I think about it is sending out a message of inspiration to the next generation in a way. "I have a lot of respect for him, his

## KOHLI AND NOVAK MUTUAL ADMIRATION CLUB



journey, his passion for fitness, something that I dearly follow myself and believe in a lot. So there's a lot to con-

nect on. "Hopefully if he comes to India soon-er, I happen to be in a country where

he is playing. I will definitely catch up with him and just chill out and maybe have a cup of coffee."

Kohli's message for Djokovic came hours after the 36-year-old tennis told the Sony Sports Network that they both are "text buddies". "Virat Kohli and I have been texting a bit for a few years. We never got a chance to meet in person, but it was really an honour and a privilege to hear him speak nicely about me. "I obviously admire all of his career and achievements. I started to play cricket, but I'm not very good at it. But I have a task to perfect my cricket skills before I come to India, and don't embarrass myself, when I'm there," Djokovic said. Djokovic's only visit to India came in 2014 when he visited New Delhi for the now defunct International Tennis Premier League. The 36-year-old hopes to revisit the country with which he feels strongly connected to. "I've felt that for many years (connection). I visited India only once around 10 or 11 years ago for a two-day exhibition event in New Delhi. It was a brief stay, and I hope to return soon to explore the country's rich history, culture, and spirituality," he added.

Kohli also extended his best wishes to Djokovic for the Australian Open where the Serb will look for a record-extending 25th Grand Slam. Ahead of the Australian Open, Djokovic was seen playing an exhibition match with Aussie batter Steve Smith. Kohli saw that clip and was also tempted to play with the Serb. "I saw that clip of him and Steve playing a bit of cricket and tennis. I think he's way better at swinging the bat than probably we are at swinging that racket. Steve did pretty well to return his serve. "So I was a bit tempted. I was like, you know when you play cricket and you have hand-eye coordination, you're very tempted with racket sports. "You feel like, I can do this. But I've seen games live, tennis matches, and I know how fast those serves are, so I probably don't have a chance to touch that. "But yeah, it'll be nice to probably do that with him as well. And hopefully, it's probably the only thing I can teach him is how to hold a cricket bat," Kohli added.

## Chappell slams abysmal pace of play in Test cricket

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The T20 boom has threatened the existence of Test cricket but what is also hurting the red-ball game is the "abysmal pace of play," reckons Australian great Ian Chappell. In a column for ESPNcricinfo, Chappell blamed the batters for wasting too much time in the middle. "The pace of play in Test cricket is abysmal. It's slowing every day and nothing is being done to improve matters. "On the one hand Ben Stokes genuinely strives to improve the entertainment quotient of Test cricket but he's being undermined by the administrators' lack of initiative," he wrote before asking some pertinent questions. "Why are batters allowed to meet mid-pitch during overs to discuss who knows what without penalty? Why aren't batters informed that etiquette requires them to be in their stance at the crease when a bowler is ready to deliver? "Heat extremes excepted, why allow drinks at times outside of the regular break? Why do glove changes occur so often? Surely this is superstition more than need. Why aren't boundaries sig-



nalled only for balls that hit the rope rather than allowing pointless replays that look at the whereabouts of a fielder's feet or hands?" he asked. The DRS also has also contributed to the slow pace of the game, feels Chappell. "Have administrators heard how players shouldn't argue with an umpire? Then why do those same administrators encourage arguing with an umpire by allowing players to review decisions? The number of tactical reviews is growing out of hand and replays are taking too much time. "How come players are allowed to charge at umpires while they are appealing, without any recrimination? I was appalled to see Australian players indulging

in this heinous behaviour in the SCG Test recently. This bad habit should be subject to penalty." He also questioned batters getting away with changing stance till the very last moment. "How can it be fair that a bowler has to nominate his method of delivery through the umpire (right- or left arm, over or round the wicket) but a batter can face up left-handed but then change to play a right-handed shot? "There's one main reason for this - to undermine the field placings. There is no doubt it's skilful but it's not fair. Fairness should be a consideration when framing cricket's laws. A batter shouldn't be allowed to change the order of his hands or feet," he wrote.



## Shaun announces retirement from professional cricket

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian cricketer Shaun Marsh on Sunday announced his retirement from professional cricket, with the Melbourne Renegades' fixture against Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League on Wednesday being his last assignment. He joins former Australian skipper Aaron Finch into retirement. "I have loved playing for the Renegades. I've met some great people over the last five years, and the friendships I've made will last a lifetime," Marsh, 40, said in a statement to the Renegades. "To the Renegades' coaches and staff and everyone behind the scenes, thank you for backing me in from the start and over my final years. It's made my job a little easier out in the middle." Despite starting the season late

due to an injury, Marsh accumulating 181 runs in five outings at an average of 45.25 and a strike rate of 138.16. He also hit three half-centuries. Before joining Renegades during the 2019-20 season, he had a lengthy and successful stint with Perth Scorchers between 2011-19, and he also paid tribute to his previous team. "I owe a lot to the Scorchers. I've got some fond memories of playing in Perth and really enjoyed my time there. The back-to-back titles are up there for me as the most enjoyable moments I've experienced on a cricket field," he concluded. Marsh also had a great stint with Australia across formats, scoring more than 5,200 runs and 13 centuries, while his last outing for the Kangaroos was against Sri Lanka at The Oval during the 2019 ODI World Cup.

## New Zealand beats Pakistan by 21 runs in T20

AP ■ HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND)

New Zealand overcame the loss of its captain in an innings that faltered late to beat Pakistan by 21 runs in the second Twenty20 International Sunday, taking a 2-0 lead in the five-match series. The Black Caps failed to build on the foundation of the first half of its innings, making 194 for eight batting first after being 111 for one at the end of 10 overs. The batting slump followed captain Kane Williamson retiring hurt after 10 overs with a tight hamstring. Pakistan also stumbled in the second half of its innings and was bowled out for 173 in the 20th over. Williamson is making a managed return from a serious knee injury and New Zealand would fear any setback to his rehabilitation. But, while he didn't field, Williamson was still padded up and apparently prepared to bat at the end of the New Zealand innings. Finn Allen's 74 from 41 balls set a cracking pace early on in the New Zealand innings. Allen put on 59 in 5.1 overs with Devon Conway (20) for the first wicket and 52 in 4.9 overs with Williamson before the Kiwi captain retired hurt on 26.



The innings began to falter at that point and New Zealand lost three for 35 between the 11th and 16th overs. Allen was out at 137 for two, then Daryl Mitchell fell at 147 and Mark Chapman followed at 157 as the innings began to trend sharply downwards. Mitchell Santner made a bright 25 before being wastefully run out as New Zealand lost its last seven wickets for 55 runs. "It was a good surface which we've come to expect here at Sedden Park and the way Finn Allen and the boys at the top set it up was very pleasing," New Zealand's stand-in captain Tim Southee said. "But Pakistan

pulled it back well and the two innings were quite similar in a way." New Zealand was relieved Pakistan also produced an innings of two halves. It looked well on course to level the series when Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman made half-centuries in an 87-run partnership for the third wicket. Fakhar reached his half-century from 23 balls with three fours and five sixes and seemed likely to follow Allen in providing the impetus for a substantial innings. But, he was out at that score and the onus once again fell on Babar to guide Pakistan home.

## RANJI TROPHY

## Haryana humble defending champions Saurashtra

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Haryana humbled defending champions Saurashtra in their own backyard by four wickets in a low-scoring Ranji Trophy game here on Sunday. Resuming day three at 148 for six, Saurashtra stretched their second innings to 220 all out with the help of skipper Jaydev Unadkat (23) and Parth Bhut (47), setting a 166-run target for Haryana. Haryana did experience some anxious moments before getting home in the final session, having lost three quick wickets. Ashok Menaria (58 not out) anchored

the chase with Rahul Tewatia (10 not out) staying with him at the other end. Saurashtra let the game slip away from them on the opening day when they were bundled out for 145 with Jayant Yadav taking a five-wicket haul. Haryana had made 200 in their first innings with Saurashtra doing well to dismiss the opposition after the visitors made a strong start. The game was dominated by spinners including Jayant and Nishant Sindhu from Haryana. From the hosts' side, veteran Dharmendrasinh Jadeja, Parth



Bhut and Yuvrajsinh Jadeja were the main wicket takers. Cheteshwar Pujara made 49 and 43 in his two innings. It was the first defeat of the season for Saurashtra who had got three points against Jharkhand in their opening game of the season. For Haryana, it was a timely result as they had to share a point each with Rajasthan in their opening game in which only 42 overs could be bowled due to bad light. **BRIEF SCORES:** Saurashtra 145 and 220 in 78.3 overs (Cheteshwar Pujara 43, Arpit Vasavada 45, Parth Bhut 47; Nishant Sindhu 5/84). Haryana

200 in 67 overs and 168/6 in 59.1 overs (Ashok Menaria 58 not out; Dharmendrasinh Jadeja 4/58). Haryana won by four wickets. **IN PUNE: Jharkhand** 1st innings: 403 all out **Maharashtra** 1st innings: 543 all out in 132 overs (Kedar Jadhav 182, Pavan Shah 136, Ankit Bawne 114 not out). **IN DELHI: Services** 1st innings: 466/4 declared in 161.2 overs (Anshul Gupta 149, Ravi Chauhan 107, Rajat Paliwal 108 not out) **Rajasthan** 1st innings: 131/9 in 59 overs (Shubham Sharma 36; Arjun Sharma 3/32, Poonia Poonia 2/21).

## Bhatt takes six wickets as Baroda thrash Puducherry

PTI ■ VADDODARA

Exploiting helpful conditions, veteran left-arm spinner Bhargav Bhatt returned a six-wicket haul to lead Baroda to a comprehensive 98-run win over Puducherry in their Ranji Trophy Group D match, here on Sunday. The 33-year-old bowler, who had taken a fiver in the first innings, totalled 11 wickets for the match, his fourth 10-wicket haul

in first-class cricket. Baroda, led by Vishnu Solanki, after setting Puducherry 218-run target for victory, dismissed the opponents for 119 in 35.1 overs on day 3 of the tournament, with Bhatt (6/46) doing the maximum damage. He was assisted by young leg-spinner Mahesh Pithiya, who made full use of the conditions to grab four second-innings wickets as the two slow bowlers made merry taking all 10 wickets. The day started with the match evenly poised. Baroda were tottering at 128 for 7. Their innings folded soon for 154 with Kinit Patel (28) emerging the highest scorer. However, the 218 Baroda scored on day 1 and the way their slow bowlers dismissed Puducherry for 155 to take a handy 63-run first-innings lead, gave them enough cushion to defend the 218-run target. Bhatt, after his fine 5/49 in his first innings, came back to demolish Puducherry in the second essay. The left-right combination of Bhatt and Pithiya did not allow the Puducherry batters to settle down even as the deteriorating day 3 pitch did its job. Gaurav Yadav was the only Puducherry batter to get past 30 with Bhatt returning a superb economy rate of 2.55 in his 18 overs. **BRIEF SCORES:**

**IN VADODARA:** Baroda 218 and 154 in 48.5 overs (Sagar Udeshi 6/70, Jay Pande 2/26) beat **Puducherry** 155 and 119 in 35.1 overs (Gaurav Yadav 32; Bhargav Bhatt 6/46, Mahesh Pithiya 4/49) by 98 runs. **IN INDORE:** Odisha 498 in 170.2 overs (Subhanshu Senapati 277, Harshit Rathod 60 not out). **Madhya Pradesh** 246/6 in 80.3 overs (Harsh Gawni 137 not out; Sunil Roul 3/76). **IN DHARAMSALA:** Uttarakhand 238 and 227 in 71.5 overs (Aditya Tare 79; Abhishek Kumar 5/43). **Himachal Pradesh** 271 and 39/6 in 12.1 overs (Deepak Dhapola 5/16).

## Mulani 9 wickets haul propels Mumbai to brink of win against Andhra

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Left-arm spinner Shams Mulani claimed a stellar nine-wicket haul to put Mumbai on the brink of a big win against Andhra in their Ranji Trophy Group B fixture here on Sunday. Mulani wreaked havoc on Andhra's batting lineup, scalping an impressive 6/65 wickets in the first innings to help Mumbai shoot out Andhra for 184 in 72 overs. Forced to bat again, Andhra were reduced to 17/3 in the second essay inside the first hour with Mulani accounting for two of the top-three en route to his figures of 3/63. The 26-year-old's ability to extract turn and maintain control over the proceedings left Andhra struggling to stage a fightback as they found themselves tottering at 166/5 following-on. Veteran Hanuma Vihari showed some resilience with a resolute 101-ball 46 but seamer Royston Dias accounted for him. Andhra's battle revolved around Shaik Rasheed who remained unbeaten on 52 (103b) in company with their bowling hero Nitish Reddy (22 batting). The Ricky Bhui-led side need to score 47 more to avoid an innings defeat and make Mumbai bat again. **RANA LIFTS UP HOPE VS BENGAL:** Nitish Rana led from the front with an unbeaten 47 (43b) after Samarth Singh



(54) and Aryan Juyal (42) failed to convert their starts to give home side Uttar Pradesh a glimmer of hope after their first innings setback against Bengal at the Kanpur Green Park. His aggressive yet composed knock, marked by five boundaries and two sixes, played a key role in guiding UP to 178/4 in their second essay, a crucial 50-run lead going into the final day.

Bengal, who are desperate for a win after managing just one-point against Andhra in their Ranji opener, found solace in pacer Mohammed Kaif who was their lone contributor with 3/72. The younger brother of India speedster Mohammed Shami, Kaif had claimed 4/14 in UP's 60 allout in the first innings. Kaif dismissed Samarth Singh (54), Aryan Juyal (42), and Priyam Garg (12)

in UP's top-four to bolster Bengal's hopes. Under fading lights, UP lost Garg and Karna Sharma (4) in successive overs but Rana held the fort with Akashdeep Nath (11 batting from 30b) as the match is poised for a tantalising final day. **CHHATTISGARH ON TOP VS BIHAR:** In Patna, Rishabh Tiwari's magnificent 138 and Ashutosh Singh's unbeaten 134 gave Chhattisgarh a commanding

221-run first innings lead after the away side declared for 329/2. Facing a significant deficit, Bihar's second innings showed some signs of resilience. Sharman Nigrodh's 60 and Babul Kumar's 52 laid the foundation, and the team reached 144/3 at the end of Day 3. Chhattisgarh's Jivesh Butte, Gagandeep Singh and Sourabh Majumdar claimed a wicket each, but Bihar displayed determination to narrow the deficit to 77 runs. The spotlight will be on Bihar's middle order to stage a comeback in what promises to be an intriguing final day. **BRIEF SCORES**

**IN MUMBAI:** Mumbai 395. Andhra 184; 72 overs (Prasanth Kumar 73, Uppara Girinath 34 not out; Shams Mulani 6/65, Dhawal Kulkarni 3/38) and following on 164/5; 51 overs (Shaik Rasheed 52 batting, Hanuma Vihari 46; Mulani 3/63). **Andhra** trail by 47 runs. **IN KANPUR:** Uttar Pradesh 60 and 178/4; 52 overs (Samarth Singh 54, Nitish Rana 47 batting, Aryan Juyal 42; Mohammed Kaif 3/72). **Bengal** 188. UP lead by 50 runs. **IN PATNA:** Bihar 108 and 144/3; 40 overs (Sharman Nigrodh 60, Babul Kumar 52). **Chhattisgarh** 329/2 declared; 83 overs (Rishabh Tiwari 138, Ashutosh Singh 134 not out). Bihar trail by 77 runs. **IN GUWAHATI:** Kerala 419. **Assam** 231/7; 62 overs (Riyen Parag 116; Basil Thampi 4/69). Assam trail by 188 runs.