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PRESIDENT CONFERS PM RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR ON 20 CHILDREN

Cricketing sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi (pic), singer Esther Lalduhawmi Hanamate, and judoka Yogita Mandavi among 20 awarded on Friday

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPUR • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDU • NAGAPATTINAM • THIRISSUR • KALABURAGI

VISA HASSLE

India presses US to resolve H-1B delay

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Friday said it has taken up with the US the issue of delays, cancellations and difficulties in scheduling H-1B visa appointments amid mounting concerns that recent regulatory changes have affected thousands of Indian nationals. "The Government of India has received several representations from Indian nationals who are facing delays or problems with the rescheduling of their visa appointments," said Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

"While we do understand that visa-related issues pertain to the sovereign domain of any country, we have flagged these issues and concerns of our nationals to the US side, both in Delhi and in Washington."

The latest disruptions follow a series of policy changes announced by Washington, including a steep fee of \$100,000 for first-time H-1B visa applicants and a move away from the random lottery system towards prioritising applicants with higher skills.

From December 15, the US also expanded social media vetting to all H-1B and H-4 visa applicants, a step that has led to widespread appointment cancellations and rescheduling months later.

Jaiswal said India is actively engaging with US to address the issues faced by Indians.

The changes apply to H-1B visas, which allow US firms to employ foreign professionals in specialised fields such as technology, engineering and medicine, as well as H-4 visas issued to dependents.

Reports say thousands of Indians have been affected with several people who travelled to India specifically to renew their visas being stranded.



A hotel owner in West Bengal's Siliguri pastes a notice banning Bangladeshis | PTI

MEA: Relentless attack on B'desh Hindus worrying

Expresses deep concern over unremitting hostilities against minorities in the country

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Friday expressed deep concern about the "unremitting hostilities" against Hindus in Bangladesh and condemned attempts to dismiss the continuing violence against religious minorities as media exaggeration or political violence.

New Delhi also reacted cautiously to the return of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tariqul Rahman to Dhaka after 17 years of exile, stressing that the development should be viewed in the context of ensuring inclusive polls.

"The unremitting hostilities against the minorities in Bangladesh including Hindus, Christians and Buddhists are a matter of grave concern. We condemn the recent killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and expect that the perpetrators of the crime will be brought to justice," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

The comments came in the wake of a string of incidents targeting religious minorities in Bangladesh amid a rapidly evolving political landscape following the ouster of former PM Sheikh Hasina.

Two Hindu men were lynched in two separate incidents in a span of a week. Jaiswal said India is closely monitoring the developments across the border and underlined that protection of minorities is integral to democratic credibility.

Referring to the lynching of Dipu Chandra Das on December 18, Jaiswal said New Delhi has unequivocally condemned the incident and sought swift accountability. On the killing of another Hindu man, Amrit Mondal, on December 24, Jaiswal appealed to link it to hostilities towards minorities.

When asked about BNP's acting chairman Rahman's return, Jaiswal struck a measured note, saying it should be seen in the context of ensuring inclusive elections. He reiterated India's stand that the upcoming elections must be free, fair, and inclusive but refrained from commenting on Bangladesh's internal political rivalries.



2,900 cases of violence

The MEA said that over 2,900 incidents of violence against minorities, including cases of killings, arsons, land grab have been reported during the tenure of the interim government

Sajjanar vows 'zero-drugs' policy for NY celebrations

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Hyderabad

THE Hyderabad city police have moved to enforce a hard-line zero-drugs regime ahead of New Year's Eve, signalling stepped-up surveillance, enforcement and coordinated action across the city.

Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar on Friday ordered immediate deployment of special surveillance teams at pubs, hotels, restaurants and event venues, while directing round-the-clock monitoring of individuals booked in drug-related cases over the past two years.

Chairing a coordination meeting at the Integrated Command and Control Centre in Banjara Hills, Sajjanar instructed senior officers and field staff to maintain constant vigilance throughout the New Year period. He said enforcement would be layered and sustained, involving the Hyderabad Narcotics Enforcement Wing (H-NEW), the Task Force, the Special Branch and local police units.

Officials have been told to

update databases of known peddlers and consumers and to track the movement of individuals entering Hyderabad specifically for New Year celebrations. The focus, Sajjanar said, would be on prevention as much as detection.

Police checks will not be limited to public venues. Service apartments, hostels and other private gathering spaces will also come under scrutiny to deter illegal activity during celebrations.

The city police have fixed 1 am as the closing time for New Year events at pubs, hotels and restaurants. Sajjanar warned that violations would invite immediate action. "If any illegal activity is found, licences will be cancelled without delay," he said.

Check-posts and barricades will be reinforced at key locations, including Maitrivanam, Necklace Road, Tank Bund and KBR Park, to regulate crowd movement and maintain order. While enforcement would be firm, Sajjanar said efforts would be made to minimise inconvenience to the public.

SIDDHARDHA GATTIMI
@ Hyderabad

THE Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) has received more than 30 hoax bomb threat emails over the past three months, but the police have been unable to identify the source, despite multiple investigations.

While six arrests were made this year, the location of those behind the flurry of hoax emails still unknown. The police have made limited progress as far as zeroing in on the hoaxers is concerned.

Shamshabad Deputy Commissioner of Police B Rajesh said six hoaxers were traced



and arrested in Gujarat, while acknowledging that several other complaints remain unresolved.

Senior police officials said tracing the origin of the emails has proved difficult, largely due to the use of anonymous, privacy-focused email services.

Such platforms allow accounts to be created without personal details such as names, phone numbers or addresses. In several cases, the accounts were accessed through browsers without persistent log-ins, leaving little server-side data for investigators to work with.

The investigation has also been slowed by the use of Virtual Private Network (VPN) services, which route internet traffic through multiple servers, often outside India, masking the sender's actual IP address.

Officials said this layering makes digital tracking time-consuming and, in many cases, inconclusive. **CONTINUED ON P2**

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Karimnagar

A Class XI student was allegedly murdered by her parents in Shivarampalli village of Saidapur mandal in Karimnagar district, following objections to her relationship with a married man from the same village.

The victim, Archana (16), was found dead under suspicious circumstances on November 16. Her father, Reddy Raju, initially lodged a complaint

stating that she had died by suicide. However, following a detailed investigation, police concluded that she had been murdered.

Huzurabad Assistant Commissioner of Police V Madhavi said the police suspected foul play and reopened the case. During the probe, it emerged that Archana was in a relationship with Anil, who is married. Despite repeated warnings and scolding by her

parents, she continued the relationship. Police said the parents viewed the matter as an issue of family honour.

According to investigators, on the night of November 15, after Archana went to sleep, her parents allegedly forced her to consume poison.

When she was still alive, her father allegedly strangled her. During interrogation, Reddy Raju confessed to the crime. The case, initially registered as

a suspicious death, was later altered to murder.

The Saidapur police arrested both parents, Reddy Raju and Lavanya, and produced them before a magistrate, who remanded them to judicial custody.

Meanwhile, Archana's sister, Sravanti, lodged a complaint against Anil, alleging that his relationship with the girl led to her death. Based on the complaint, the police registered a POCSO case against Anil on Friday, ACP Madhavi said.

TAPGATE

CASE A-1 PRABHAKAR RAO
RELEASED BY SIT AFTER
QUESTIONING | P2



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9

AWARDDEES AMONG THE 20
ARE SPORTSPERSONS



President Droupadi Murmu confers the award on ten-year-old Shravan Singh, who delivered water and milk to soldiers during Op Sindoor

OF X FACTOR, AND THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

- Cricketer Vaibhav Suryavanshi was feted for making "a name for himself in a highly competitive sport", the President said
- Nine-year-old Coimbatore resident Vyoma Priya, awarded posthumously, had lost her life while trying to save a six-year-old during an electrical accident in their gated community park | P7

FLOATING TO THE TEMPLE

With about a month to go for the Jatara, devotees have already begun thronging the Adivasi place of worship. The long weekend may have helped devotees offer special prayers, with roads leading to Medaram resembling Vanapravesham – a local tradition symbolising a day-long forest dwelling. An elder of a family said they visit the temple every year, but this time they arrived much earlier to the jatara to offer jaggery, locally referred to as gold. "This year it is different as the development works are being taken up. The premises are also widened," said the devotee

rate the legend through symbolic representations, with around 7,000 such symbols engraved across 31 stone installations in and around the sacred platforms. **CONTINUED ON P2**



The newly constructed stone altars bedecked with flowers even as devotees offer prayers on Friday, much ahead of the biennial jatara | SRI LOGANATHAN VELMURUGAN

tribal aristocracy, peacock, holy dots symbolising gotras and Adivasi dances have been inscribed on towering pillars carved out of single gigantic stones. The stone installations nar-

Facelift at Medaram, with roots grounded

B KARTHEEK @ Mulugu

WITH preparations gathering pace ahead of the biennial Sammakkha-Saralamma Jatara, Asia's largest tribal congregation, extensive development works are nearing completion at Medaram in Mulugu district. The jatara, which traces its origins to the medieval period, is scheduled to start on January 28 amid dense forests.

The state government has taken up works with an outlay of over ₹250 crore to give the historic Adivasi place of worship a facelift that blends history, tribal faith and modern infrastructure, while respecting Adivasi customs and offering a completely new experience to devotees. Officials said the development works are almost complete, at least in the core area.

PIL IN DELHI HC TO CUT GST FOR AIR PURIFIERS

STAY OFF LEGISLATIVE TURF: GOVT ON GST NUDGE

UDAYAN KISHORE
@ New Delhi

THE Centre on Friday opposed a PIL seeking reduced air purifier rates, telling the Delhi High Court that judicial intervention would violate the principle of 'separation of powers.'

"This will open up a Pandora's box," the Centre told a vacation bench of justices Vikas Mahajan and Vinod Kumar after the court questioned why the rates couldn't be brought "within reach of the common man".

Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman, for the Centre, said there was already a legislative process involving parliamentary standing committee reports and GST Council deliberations.

"This is not a PIL at all. GST is only a ruse...We are scared from the constitutional perspective. It is doctrine of separation of powers," the ASG said, adding the Centre couldn't commit to a Council meeting.

gestion for a virtual GST Council meeting given Delhi's air pollution crisis, the Centre said it was "not possible" as regulations require physical presence of all members.

"This is not a PIL at all. GST is only a ruse...We are scared from the constitutional perspective. It is doctrine of separation of powers," the ASG said, adding the Centre couldn't commit to a Council meeting.

The bench had noted that

air purifiers are pricey, ranging from ₹10,000-12,000-₹60,000. "It is beyond the reach of a common man. Why not bring it down to a reasonable level...What is the difficulty in the GST Council meeting?" it asked.

The ASG said, "It is a load-ed petition, we want to know who is behind this...Somebody wants a monopoly in air purifiers...Health ministry is not even a party." The court permitted the Centre to file a counter-affidavit within 10 days.

The petitioner submitted that on medical devices, GST was five per cent whereas it was 18 per cent for air purifiers. He sought a direction to authorities to charge five per cent on air purifiers as well considering the capital's pollution crisis

Key demands of the PIL

Hyderabad: A suspected AC compressor blast claimed the lives of a pair of 3-year-old twins in Sundarnagar, Kachiguda on Friday. The deceased were identified as Abdul Rahman and Abdul Rahim. Police said that Abdul Rahman sustained 90% burn injuries in the blast while Abdul Rahim succumbed to asphyxiation | P2

CEO among three held for gang-rape in moving car

RAJESH ASNANI @ Jaipur

THREE persons, including the CEO of a private IT company, have been arrested in connection with the alleged gang-rape of the firm's female manager in a moving car after a birthday party in Udaipur.

Police said a local court on Thursday sent the accused to four-day police custody. They identified the accused as GKM IT Pvt Ltd's owner and CEO, Jitesh Sisodia, a senior female executive of the firm and her husband Gaurav Sirohi.

The horrific incident allegedly took place on December 20, while the complaint was lodged on December 23.

As per the FIR, the alleged assault followed a birthday and New Year's party organised by the CEO at a hotel in Udaipur. The victim said she reached the hotel around 9 pm. The CEO, the senior female executive of the firm and her husband Gaurav Sirohi, reportedly continued till 1.30 am.

The victim said when she began feeling unwell late at night, the senior female executive offered to drop her home. Around 1.45 am, they left the hotel in the victim's car. The executive's husband and the CEO were present in the vehicle as well.

Midway during the journey, the accused allegedly purchased an intoxicant and forced the victim to consume it, following which she passed out. When she partially regained consciousness, she saw the CEO sexually assaulting her in the moving car, the victim said in her statement.

She alleged that despite her repeated pleas, the accused dropped her home only around 5 am. The victim told the police that her car's dashcam recorded audio and video of the entire incident. The footage allegedly shows the presence and involvement of all three accused. Police officials are examining the footage.

7 SUMMITS LATER, TEEN EARN BAL PURASKAR

Award stands as recognition of Vishwanath's years of disciplined training

KHYATI SHAH @Hyderabad



A 16-year-old from Hyderabad, Vishwanath Karthikey Padakanti, has been awarded the Bal Puraskar Award for becoming the youngest Indian and the second youngest person in the world to complete the demanding 7 Summits challenge, which involves scaling the highest peak on each of the seven continents.

The award comes after Vishwanath successfully summited Mount Everest (8,848 metres) on May 26, marking the culmination of a journey shaped by years of physical training, mental resilience and determination.

Everest was the most challenging climb of his mountaineering career and completed his record-setting expedition.

Expressing pride in his achievement, Vishwanath's mother Laxmi told *TNIE*, "We are so proud to see our child excel at what he loves most. After facing all the physical and mental challenges on his journey to the peaks, he is now being recognised by the world. Karthikey was a lazy kid initially and seeing him grow into this achievement makes us extremely proud."

Vishwanath was guided during his climbs by Bharath and Lt Romil Barthwal, a veteran of the Indian Army and an experienced mountaineer. Praising his young protégé, Barthwal

al said, "Vishwanath's achievement is more than a mountaineering milestone. It reflects his character-humility, strength, and unshakable determination. Guiding him has been a privilege. He shows what young minds can accomplish with discipline, purpose, and the right attitude."

Bharath, who has trained Vishwanath for the past five years, said, "We have been training Karthikey for five years. Watching him grow into India's youngest climber to summit all seven peaks and now receive this award has been incredibly special. His focus and commitment have only grown stronger over time."

The peaks conquered by Vishwanath include Mount Everest in Asia (8,848 m / 29,029 ft), Aconcagua in South America (6,961 m / 22,838 ft), Denali in North America (6,190 m / 20,310 ft), Kilimanjaro in Africa (5,895 m / 19,341 ft), Mount Elbrus in Europe (5,642 m / 18,510 ft), Mount Vinson in Antarctica (4,892 m / 16,050 ft) and Mount Kosciuszko in Australia (2,228 m / 7,310 ft).

Govt nod needed for union activity at TGSRTC: MD

ENS @Hyderabad

RESTORATION of union at Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC) is not within the management's purview, but union activities would be allowed with government approval, said managing director Y Nagi Reddy.

He was speaking to leaders of the TGSRTC Joint Action Committee (JAC), who highlighted long-pending issues faced by RTC employees. Nagi Reddy assured measures to ease workload, rationalise kilometres on low-occupancy routes, and seek board approval to raise the age limit for compassionate appointments to 44 years.

A delegation led by JAC chairman Eedula Venkanna, with vice-chairman M Thomas Reddy and co-conveners K Yadaiah and S Suresh, submitted a memorandum outlining 22 demands. The leaders said discussions focused on key concerns, including wage revisions and employee welfare.

Most hoax threats sent to RGIA customer support

FROM PAGE 1

said she had sent the emails in her boyfriend's name after the relationship ended.

In an earlier case in 2017, a 32-year-old Hyderabad-based travel agent was arrested for sending a hoax plane hijack email that led to heightened security at airports in Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai. Police said he had sent the email to Mumbai police after he was unable to afford a trip suggested by his girlfriend.

Despite these isolated arrests, police admit that most recent hoax threats remain unsolved, highlighting continuing gaps in tracking and preventing such emails.

EXPRESS READ

Leadership transition planned at Telangana Lifesciences Foundation

Hyderabad: IT and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu on Friday reviewed the activities of Telangana Lifesciences and announced a structured leadership transition. The minister requested organisation's director and chief executive officer Shakti M Nagappan to continue in his present role until the end of March 2026.

Horoscopes By Holiday

HOLIDAY MATHIS

27th December: Advice for a Saturday Moon Change Puffer fish puff, peacock fan and people at parties posture and sparkle, because making oneself bigger seems like the impressive, attractive thing to do. And with the lunar move from Pisces to competitive Aries, this tactic can even discourage the opposition. Still, approach with humor; the most attractive thing of all is not taking oneself too seriously.

ARIES

(Mar 21-Apr. 20)

There's a time to show your skills, a time to downplay them and wisdom in knowing which way to take things. Downplaying is easy. But are you ready to "show and tell"? Because your moment is coming.

TAURUS

(Apr. 20-May 20)

Your heart's ambition has been hard to make progress with inside a chaotic stretch of life. But do keep the flame alive. This is an aim for the long haul. Forget about short-term heroics and just keep coming back.

GEMINI

(May 21-June 21)

Good relationships, whether with people, places, projects or roles, are going to take effort. But they shouldn't feel like constant work. Give yourself some grace. You're dealing with a complicated situation.

CANCER

(June 22-July 22)

Instead of pinning for distant good fortune, you'll pay closer attention to what's happening around you. The invitations, ideas, people and opportunities crossing your path are just the collaboration you need. It's not "out there"; it's in your realm.

LEO

(July 23-Aug. 22)

It comes up today how might have been nice to have certain opportunities others take for granted. But don't let that diminish the rare, defining experiences that are all yours. You're someone extraordinary despite, or maybe because of, them.

VIRGO

(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

You can't change the number of hours there are in a day, but you can use them well. And today, with a mix of instinct and planning, you can use them better even though you have been. Efficiency is your middle name.

LIBRA

(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

Big moments of intuition are rare. More often intuition comes in microcosms, tiny pangs and pings alerting you to a moment or detail before you consciously understand why it will be important. Today brings three such signals.

SCORPIO

(Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

You'll say yes to simplicity when you say no to superfluosity. Your closet becomes functional when you eliminate what you don't wear. Your schedule eases when you decline social clutter. Your emotions stabilize when you stop engaging with takers. Less is more.

SAGITTARIUS

(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

You are with your 24/7. Any relationship on earth with that kind of schedule is bound to have its tense moments. Expect fluctuations of self-esteem, and roll with them, knowing that you deserve loads of kindness. You're doing great.

CAPRICORN

(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

You have a bit of competition. Your opponent may be worthy, but the game itself is not. You could walk away, come to a deal or give in. Stay flexible and humble, and you just may end up with everything.

AQUARIUS

(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

When you smile, you feel happier. Whether you make up reasons or have no reason at all, either way it just works. It's not about faking it until you make it. It's letting go of the petty ideas keeping you from joy.

PISCES

(Feb. 19-Mar. 20)

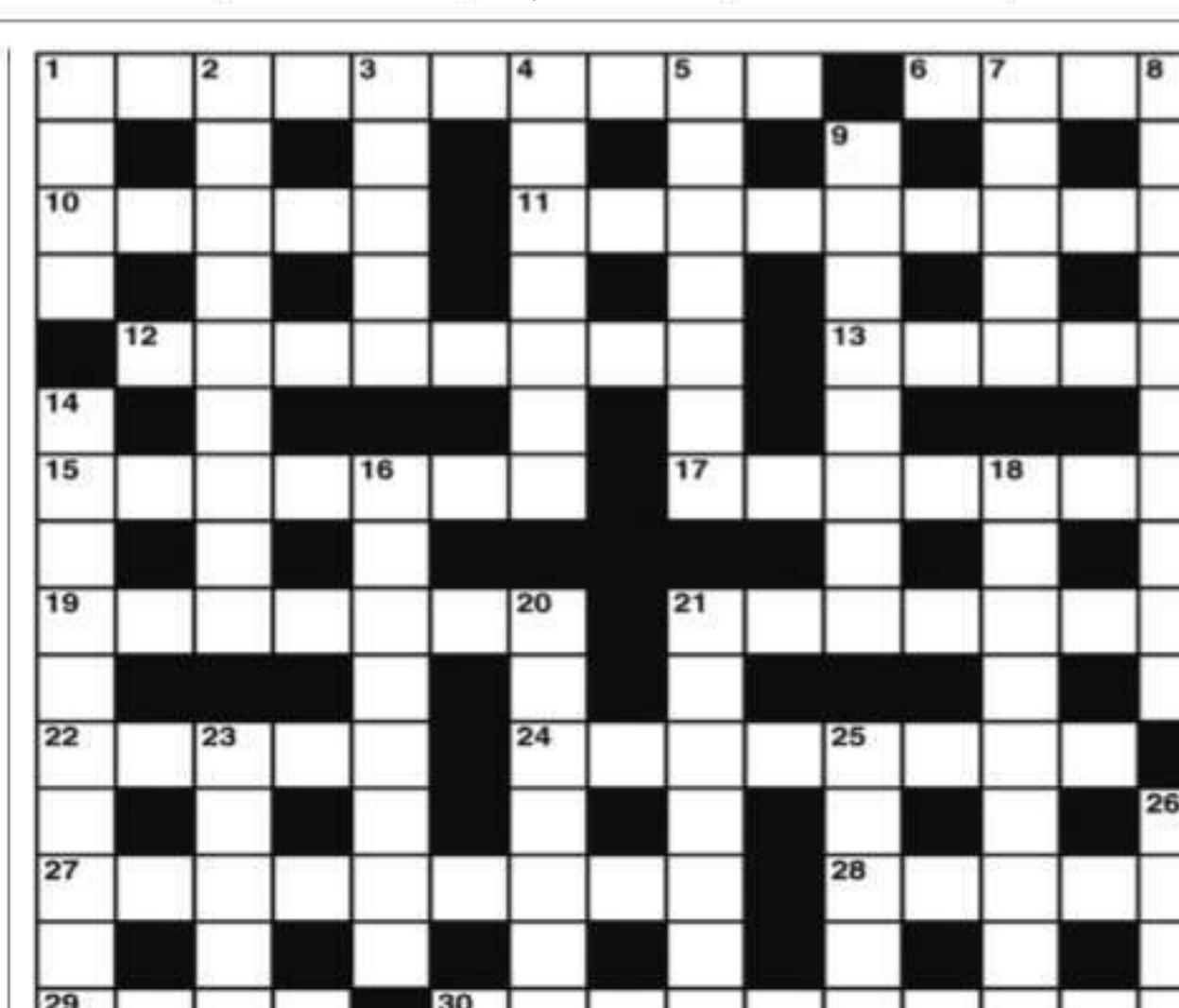
You'll pick up undercurrents of a situation -- the real feeling beneath the surface. Because of this, you'll understand someone without them having to say much. You'll also have the right response at the right moment.



SUDOKU EVIL

TEST YOUR NUMBER CRUNCHING SKILL WITH OUR UNIQUE PUZZLE

Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



CROSS WORD

ACROSS

- Inspection by officers ends the game on board (10)
- Clothes changed frequently in the car (4)
- A doctor and a mother in an exciting story (5)
- Thought me old fashioned about it (9)
- Extreme scepticism (8)
- A blow that's designed to humiliate (5)
- Nautical way to the top (7)
- Strange charm that is pure fantasy (7)
- Plunder piled so haphazardly (7)
- Stays to enclose a number in some armour (7)
- Regretting having to destroy a note (5)
- Ten girls making money (8)
- All agreed to distribution of a unit sum (9)
- Pitched one in an outhouse (5)
- Still having the same points (4)
- Of use to writers still we hear (10)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS

Across: 1 Support, 5 Mufti, 8 Univers, 9 Eat, 10 Late, 12 Left over, 14 Chance, 15 Debris, 17 Discount, 18 Reel, 21 Coo, 22 Anchor man, 24 Lathe, 25 Muleteer, 26

Down: 1 Skull, 2 Phi, 3 Open, 4 Tossed, 5 Muleteer, 6 Free verse, 7 Interns, 8 Transport, 9 Acclade, 10 Codicil, 16 Snacks, 19 Liner, 20 Lout, 23 Moo.

DOWN

- Laws the experts may break (4)
- Wastes time, a case for improvement (5)
- A uniform colour perhaps (5)
- Cupboard that will give more air (7)
- Directions to medie worried about disease type (7)
- Reserve shown by one with nothing to say (5)
- Coarse toast enjoyed by those who are fit (4,6)
- A red tie's construed as more sober (8)
- Main thoroughfare used by merchants (5,5)
- Firm hold for a golf club I ring pro about (7,4)
- An inelegant sort of plant (9)
- Oaf holds some wood for making attack (4,3)
- Salad greenery and French dressing in a basket (7)
- I am on time for the picture (5)
- Rope in a girl with a ring (5)
- Extremely irritable? (4)

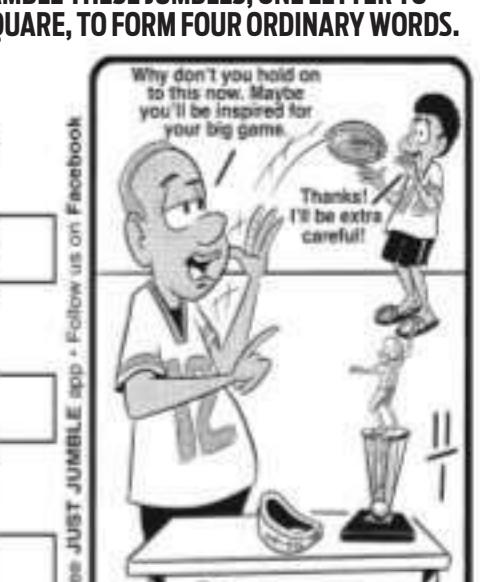
Down: 1 Skull, 2 Phi, 3 Open, 4 Tossed, 5 Muleteer, 6 Free verse, 7 Interns, 8 Transport, 9 Acclade, 10 Codicil, 16 Snacks, 19 Liner, 20 Lout, 23 Moo.

JUMBLE

BY DAVID L. HOYT AND JEFF KNUREK



UNSCRAMBLE THESE JUMBLES, ONE LETTER TO EACH SQUARE, TO FORM FOUR ORDINARY WORDS.



Get the free JUST JUMBLE app. Follow us on Facebook.

THE RETIRED QUARTERBACK HAD KEPT THAT GAME BALL FOR 40 YEARS UNTIL DECIDING TO

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

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Ans. here: 

(Answers Monday)

Jumbles: FORUM JUICE SAFARI

When Stephen King's story became a film starring Sissy Spacek, it was a "SCARIE" MOVIE

ALMANAC TODAY
Saturday : 27/12/2025 • Year: Sri Viswawasu • Ayanam: Dakshinayana
• Rutuvu: Hemantha • Masam: Pushya • Paksham: Shukla • Tithi: Saptami 01.09 pm
• Nakshatram: Purvabhadra 09.09 am • Durmuhurtham: 06.34 am - 07.19 pm
• Varjyam: 06.35 pm - 08.09 pm • Rahukalam: 09.00 am - 10.30 pm

MIN 20°C MAX 29°C
WEATHER WATCH
Partly Sunny

Sunrise 06.44 am
Sunset 05.50 pm
Moonrise 11.45 am
Moonset ---

newindianexpress.com



Journalists to stage dharna against GO 252

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Khammam

JOURNALISTS have called for a strong protest demanding amendments to Government Order (GO) No. 252 related to the issuance of new accreditations.

A dharna has been announced in front of the Khammam Collector's Office on the 27th, urging journalists to participate in large numbers and make the protest a success.

Journalist unions and media representatives alleged that the government is attempting to reduce the number of accreditations, calling it a conspiracy against journalists. They appealed to journalists to unite and fight for the protection of their rights.

While appreciating the government for introducing GO No. 252 after coming to power with a commitment to democratic values and press freedom in Telangana, journalists expressed serious concern over certain provisions in the order.

They warned that nearly 10,000 journalists across the state who currently hold accreditations are at risk of losing them due to the revised norms.

90% of Gaddelu works at Medaram completed

FROM PAGE 1

The government sought the assistance of Dr Mypathi Arun Kumar, a research scholar from the Koya community who has extensively studied the history of Sammakka-Saralamma, in designing the artefacts.

The premises of the Sammakka-Saralamma sacred platforms are being developed into stone-based structures infused with devotion.

The symbols carved on the stones are drawn from Padangal, a sacred flag, and palm-leaf manuscripts, while the inscriptions depict lineage, genealogy, gotras and elements of nature.

Speaking to *TNIE*, Mypathi said, "There are around 256 omens through which the Mulaavasis (aboriginals) predict nature, such as whether it will rain in a particular year. All these signs are engraved on the inscriptions in the sanctum and surrounding areas of the Sammakka-Saralamma Gaddeulu." He thanked the local MLA and Minister for Pancha-

yat Raj and Rural Development, Danasari Anasuya (Seethakka), and the administration for taking the initiative.

Mulugu Collector Divakara TS said the works were nearing completion, with 90% of the Gaddelu works and 85% of the flooring finished.

He said special attention was being paid to translocating na-

tive and sacred trees as per gotras and added that the government was planning to bring out a book.

Minister Seethakka said arrangements were being made to cater to the needs of lakhs of devotees. She said the periphery of the Gaddelu had been expanded to ensure free movement of devotees.

While appreciating the government for introducing GO No. 252 after coming to power with

GHMC EXPANSION

MEGALOPOLIS HYD
EYES GREAT FUTURE

12 zones to ensure better administration and improved service delivery to citizens

S BACHAN JEET SINGH
@Hyderabad

HYDERABAD has officially stepped into the league of megalopolis with the expansion of the territorial jurisdiction of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). With the merger of seven municipal corporations and 20 municipalities, the state government has given final approval for the reorganisation of GHMC into 12 zones and 60 circles.

The erstwhile GHMC, which was spread across 650 square kilometres with six zones, 30 circles and 150 wards, has now expanded to 300 wards covering nearly 2,000 square kilometres. The reorganisation has positioned GHMC as India's largest municipal corporation in terms of both area and population, giving Hyderabad renewed national and international recognition as a major metropolitan centre.

GHMC officials said the state government's move to bring multiple urban local bodies under a single municipal authority is being seen as a landmark step to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation through integrated governance and long-term planning. Following the merger of the urban local bodies, the existing administrative structure witnessed a substantial increase in workload.

It has been stated that the population of GHMC now exceeds 1.34 crore, necessitating further decentralisation to ensure uniform administration, improved service delivery and

GHMC
REORGANISATION

Total zones:

12

Total circles: 60

Total wards: 300

Area covered: ~2,000 sq km

Population: Over 1.34 crore

NEW ZONES ADDED

Malkajgiri, Uppal, Shamshabad, Rajendranagar, Golconda, Quthubulapur

Zone with most circles:

Quthubulapur (7)

Zones with least circles: LB Nagar, Shamshabad, Kukatpally (4 each)

greater convenience to the public. Along with the existing zones — Serilingampally, Kukatpally, Secunderabad, Kharabat, Charminar and LB Nagar — six new zones have been created: Malkajgiri, Uppal, Shamshabad, Rajendranagar, Golconda and Quthubulapur.

Officials noted that the expanded GHMC framework provides the scale and capacity required to manage growth in a more systematic and sustainable manner. Among the zones, Quthubulapur has the highest number of circles at seven, followed by Rajendranagar and Uppal with six each. LB Nagar, Shamshabad and Kukatpally zones have the least number of circles, with four each.

S BACHAN JEET SINGH @Hyderabad

IN a step towards digital governance, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is preparing to launch an Artificial Intelligence-based solution - a Chatbot to offer services and information to citizens, guide citizens through a wide range of civic services.

The proposed GHMC chatbot's objective is to reduce citizens' physical visits to municipal offices and enhance transparency.

As part of its new-year citizen-centric initiatives, GHMC is leveraging modern technology to improve service delivery and enhance revenue, while ensuring that services are accessible, transparent and user-

friendly. The AI chatbot will be developed and hosted on the GHMC website under the label "May I Help You."

The proposals have been submitted to the GHMC Standing Committee for inviting tenders for selection of service provider for implementation, operation and maintenance of AI-based solutions - AI Chatbot in GHMC website and automated form filling solution to GHMC for a period of three years.

According to GHMC officials, the corporation aims to make the chatbot available to the public soon as a new year gift. The chatbot would be designed to function as a virtual civic assistant that will address citizens' queries and grievances without the need for physical



visits to municipal offices.

Through a simple text-based interactions, residents will be able to access critical information related to taxes, licences, civic procedures, and public services.

Once launched, citizens can use the chatbot to apply for trade licenses, file property tax self-assessment, download/receive birth and death certificates, guiding applicants which

application to submit for which service, get step-by-step guidance on filling forms.

The chatbot will not only answer questions, but will also listen to voice queries and guide applicants in real time.

As Hyderabad is known for linguistic diversity, GHMC's chatbot will support Telugu, English and Urdu languages.

Citizens can ask questions in any of these languages and receive responses in the same language, making the platform inclusive and easy to use for all sections of society.

For several GHMC services, citizens currently rely on agents and middlemen, often paying hefty amounts just to navigate application processes. Officials say the chatbot is aimed at eliminating this dependence. The solution will reduce errors while filling applications, prevent avoidable delays, guide citizens directly through official processes, stop exploitation by unauthorised agents.

With services becoming digital and self-guided, GHMC hopes to ensure that citizens need not visit offices repeatedly or depend on intermediaries.

Once the Standing Committee approves the proposal, GHMC will select qualified agencies through tendering for setting up the system and maintaining it for three years. The initiative represents another step toward smart governance, bringing municipal administration closer to residents, they added.

EXPRESS READ

Techie dies on spot as two-wheeler rams divider

Hyderabad: A 23-year-old software engineer, identified as Punith Yadav, died in an accident near US Consulate in Financial District late on Thursday. Gachibowli police suspect that the youth, a native of Warangal, lost control of his two-wheeler due to speeding and fell off his vehicle after hitting the divider, resulting in his death. The police, who rushed to the accident spot after receiving an alert at around 1.30 am, found the youth lying in a pool of blood. They shifted the body to hospital for a post-mortem examination. They registered a case and launched an investigation.



Suspicious husband sets woman ablaze, arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Hyderabad

A

21-year-old second-year degree student died by suicide after consuming pesticide at his farm in Deobadaag village of Kandukuru mandal, allegedly after losing ₹1 lakh on online betting platforms.

The

deceased,

Vasuri

Vikram,

was

studying

at

BJR

College

in

Narayana

guda.

His

brother,

Vasuri

Srikanth,

told

police

that

Vikram

had

taken

around

₹1

lakh

from

home

and

invested

it

in

an

online

betting

app,

"Fun

in

Exchange",

losing

the

entire

amount.

Fearing

questioning

from

his

parents,

Vikram

allegedly

consumed

herbicide

(Para-

force)

in

the

fields

around

7.30

pm

on

Tuesday.

The

couple

hailed

from

Huzur

Nagar

in

Nalgonda

district

and

had

migrated

to

Hyderabad

after

the

incident

and

was

remanded

to

judicial

custody

on

Friday.

The

couple

hailed

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Huzur

Nagar

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Nalgonda

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Nalgonda

district

KCR DRAWS BRS STRATEGY TO CORNER GOVT IN ASSEMBLY

Former CM holds marathon meeting with party leaders, discusses PRLIS and other issues to be raised in the House to corner govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Hyderabad



BRS supremo and former chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao seems to be back in the thick of action. Days after addressing a press conference on the Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme (PRLIS), where he launched a no-holds-barred tirade against the Congress regime, the BRS chief held a marathon meeting with key party leaders at his Erravalli farmhouse on Friday to discuss the proposed state-wide agitations against the Revanth Reddy's government's indifference in completing the project.

The meeting, according to sources, also discussed the strategy to be adopted by the BRS in the forthcoming Assembly session. The party is likely to announce a series of programmes in a day or two. "An announcement on these agitations and public meetings, which are being planned to exert pressure on the government to complete PRLIS at the earliest, will be made either on Saturday or Sunday. The schedule of proposed public meetings too would be revealed in the next two days," sources said.

Chandrasekhar Rao is believed to have directed the party MLAs to raise the PRLIS issue in the upcoming Assembly session and corner the state government on other issues as well.

Sources said that the party is planning to raise several issues in the House and these include:

Why PRLIS has been stalled? Though the Centre returned the detailed project report (DPR) months ago, why has it not been resubmitted? Even though 90 per cent of the work has been completed, why is the government unwilling to spend a little more money to complete the project and ensure water supply to Palamuru farmers?

Revanth lowered dignity of CM's office, says KTR

Meanwhile, BRS working president KT Rama Rao found fault with Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for "frequently using abusive, uncivilised and irresponsible language and making derogatory remarks against KCR".

Addressing the gathering after welcoming several leaders from Serilingampally Assembly segment into the BRS during an event organised at Telangana Bhavan, he said:

"Revanth Reddy's conduct has lowered the dignity of the chief minister's office and exposed his inability to answer serious public questions. He is resorting to foul language as he has no answers to the questions raised by KCR."

PHONE-TAPPING CASE

Prabhakar Rao's custody ends, Aara Mastan deposes before SIT

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad



AFTER questioning him for 14 days, police released former state Special Intelligence Branch (SIB) chief and prime accused in the phone-tapping case T Prabhakar Rao on Friday.

The accused was released from the Jubilee Hills police station, after the Special Investigation Team (SIT) recorded his statements during his 14-day custody. The SIT officials reportedly questioned him on his appointment as SIB chief, Special Operations Team and other details related to alleged phone-tapping during the previous BRS regime.

It may be mentioned here that another accused in the case, former Task Force DCP P Radha Kishan Rao had reportedly referred to TRS (BRS) supremo K Chandrasekhar Rao in his confession. Based on this, the SIT questioned Prabhakar Rao.

Meanwhile, psephologist Aara Mastan, who is a witness

in the case, also deposed before the SIT on Friday.

Later speaking to the media, Mastan said: "They asked me the same questions they asked me previously. They were probably trying to recheck the statement I had given earlier."

"I came to know that my phone too was tapped after police showed me some evidence. I realised that my two numbers were monitored for years... since 2020," he added.

Meanwhile, sources said that based on the technical evidence and statements given by the accused, the SIT will issue notices to some key persons who served in the previous government.

Centre sanctioned ₹686 cr for TG tourism projects in 10 yrs

KHYATI SHAH @ Hyderabad

THE Union Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned ₹686.39 crore to Telangana over the past 10 years under multiple flagship schemes, reflecting sustained support to strengthen pilgrimage, heritage, eco-tourism, wellness and experiential destinations across the state.

According to data accessed by TNIE, Telangana received ₹146.50 crore under the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) scheme for four major religious sites. These include the Jogulamba Devi Temple at Alampur (₹38.9 crore), Ramappa (Rudreshwara) Temple at Mulugu (₹62 crore), Bhadrachalam Temple area development (₹41.38 crore) and basic infrastructure works at Renuka Yellamma Devasthanam (₹4.22 crore). The projects focus on access roads, sanitation, lighting, interpretation centres and pilgrim amenities, while preserving the spiritual character of the sites.

The state also saw substantial funding under the original

FUNDS BREAKUP

₹146.5 CR

FUNDS RECEIVED BY TELANGANA UNDER THE PRASHAD SCHEME

JOGULAMBA DEVI TEMPLE, ALAMPUR ₹38.9 CR

BAHDRACHALAM TEMPLE AREA DEVELOPMENT ₹41.38 CR

INFRASTRUCTURE WORKS AT RENUKA YELLAMMA DEVASTHANAM ₹4.22 CR

₹268.39 CR

FUNDS RECEIVED BY THE STATE UNDER THE SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

HERITAGE CIRCUIT IN HYDERABAD, INCLUDING QUTB SHAHI HERITAGE PARK AND PAIGAH TOMBS ₹96.9 CR

ECO-TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE IN MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT ₹91.62 CR

TRIBAL CIRCUIT COVERING MULUGU-LAKNAVARAM-BOGATHA WATERFALLS ₹79.87 CR

₹94.83 CR

FUNDS RECEIVED BY THE STATE UNDER SWADESH DARSHAN 2.0

ECO-TOURISM EXPERIMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT ANANTHAGIRI FORESTS ₹38.01 CR

DEVELOPMENT AT BHONGIR FORT ₹56.82 CR

₹34.83 CR

UNDER THE CHALLENGE-BASED DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT OF SWADESH DARSHAN 2.0

ECO-TOURISM EXPERIMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT ANANTHAGIRI FORESTS ₹38.01 CR

Swades Darshan scheme, which promotes integrated thematic tourism circuits. Telangana was sanctioned ₹268.39 crore for three circuits: the Eco-Tourism Circuit in Mahbubnagar district (₹91.62 crore), the Tribal Circuit covering Mulugu-Laknavaram-Bogatha waterfalls (₹79.87 crore), and the Heritage Circuit in Hyderabad, including Qutb Shahi Heritage Park and Paigah Tombs (₹96.90 crore). These projects emphasise last-mile connectivity, visi-

tor facilities, landscaping, signage and cultural interpretation.

Sustainable tourism

With the Centre's renewed focus on immersive and sustainable travel, Swades Darshan 2.0 brought ₹94.83 crore to Telangana for two projects — experiential tourism development at Bhongir Fort (₹56.82 crore) and eco-tourism infrastructure at Nizamsagar in Kamareddy.

"The Challenge-Based Desti-

nation Development component of Swades Darshan 2.0 focuses on destination-centric planning, sustainability and community participation. Projects sanctioned for Telangana during 2024-25 were selected through a structured evaluation process based on tourism potential and readiness," Jayesh Ranjan, special chief secretary, Tourism and Culture, told TNIE.

Iconic projects under SASCI

The largest strategic investments were made through SASCI, which supports capital-intensive and iconic tourism projects with long-term economic impact.

Telangana received ₹141.84 crore under this scheme for the Ramappa Region Sustainable Tourism Circuit (₹73.74 crore) and the Somasila Wellness and Spiritual Tourism Project in the Nallamala region (₹68.10 crore).

Officials said Telangana's selection reflects the state's growing emphasis on diversified tourism, combining heritage, spirituality, eco-tourism and digital experiences.

CM LEAVES FOR DELHI TO ATTEND CWC MEET

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, along with Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka and others, left for Delhi on Friday to attend a meeting of the Congress Working Committee on Saturday. They are likely to return on Sunday.

newindianexpress.com

Tributes paid to Manmohan on 1st anniversary

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

TPCC president B Mahesh Kumar Goud on Friday paid rich tributes to former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh on his first death anniversary.

He said that Manmohan Singh served the nation with integrity, foresight and dedication, and his immense contribution to nation's development are truly unforgettable.

The state Congress chief described the former prime min-

ister as an exceptional leader who steered the country out of economic crisis and placed it firmly on the path of growth.

"Dr Manmohan Singh earned the distinction of positioning India on the global economic stage through landmark economic reforms. Key decisions taken by him such as economic liberalisation, industrial development, and attracting foreign investments transformed the future of the nation," he added.



Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka pay floral tributes to a portrait of former PM Manmohan Singh in Hyderabad

Cong neglected Telangana, BJP sanctioned airports, says Kishan

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Adilabad

UNION Minister for Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy on Friday credited the BJP-led Central government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi for sanctioning airports in Adilabad and Warangal.

Speaking at the 'Atmeeyam Sammelanam' organised to felicitate newly elected sarpanches in the district headquarters, he said that the Congress regime in undivided Andhra Pradesh had neglected development of airports in the Telangana region.

He claimed that only Hyderabad airport became operational in Telangana, while the Andhra region had five airports.

Kishan Reddy accused the previous BRS government, led by K Chandrasekhar Rao, of "centralised corruption" for 10 years, alleging that public money was misused. He contrasted this with the current Congress government, which he de-



scribed as engaging in "decentralised corruption" in its two years in power.

The Union minister further alleged that the present Congress government was reluctant to purchase cheaper power from NTPC, preferring higher-priced supplies.

He said that 42 railway stations in Telangana, including Adilabad, are undergoing redevelopment and that all railway lines nationwide have been electrified since the BJP came

to power in 2014, with no trains running on coal.

The Union minister criticised both the previous BRS and current Congress governments for increasing Telangana's debt despite surplus revenues. He said debt rose by 100% under KCR and was now continuing to pile up under Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy.

He referred to upcoming Central initiatives, including a railway manufacturing unit in Warangal, a tribal university, and an anticipated visit by Prime Minister Modi to kick start more development works in the region to drive home the point that the BJP cared for Telangana more than any other party.

He said facilities like Rythu Vedikas, anganwadi centres, additional classrooms in schools, sanitation works and wages for sanitation workers were supported by the central funds, while neither the BRS nor Congress state governments released their shares.

BC unions condemn attack on BJP leader

ENS @ Nalgonda

THE BC unions staged a massive protest at the Clock Tower Centre here on Friday, condemning the assault on BJP leader Pilli Ramaraju, allegedly by the supporters of saffron party district president Nagam Varshith Reddy.

Raising slogans against Varshith Reddy, they demanded that the BJP leadership suspend him from the party. BC leaders D Laxminarayana and N Madhu Yadav expressed their anger over "the heinous act" of a leader's supporters assaulting his own party colleague.

BC student union leaders demanded that Varshith Reddy immediately tender an unconditional apology to Ramaraju and the BC community.

The protest at the busy Clock Tower Centre resulted in a major traffic disruption in the town, following which Nalgonda Two Town police stepped in and dispersed the protesters.

JUSTICE LEAGUE

77 acres prime land belongs to Chevella temple, rules HC

The Telangana High Court has dismissed a writ petition challenging the grant of an Occupancy Rights Certificate (ORC) in favour of Sri Balaji Venkateswara Swamy temple for agricultural lands measuring 77 acres and 30 guntas at Malkapur village in the Chevella mandal of Rangareddy district. The petition was filed by Seri Narayana Reddy and 21 others, who questioned the order dated September 22, 2006, passed by the Joint Collector-I, Rangareddy district. The JC had confirmed earlier proceedings of the Revenue Divisional Officer, Chevella, dated October 27, 2003, by which the RDO, acting as the Inams Tribunal, granted the ORC to the deity under Section 4 of the AP (Telangana Area) Abolition of Inams Act, 1955.

The petitioners claimed absolute ownership and possession of the lands through their ancestors, relying on Sethwar records of 1951-52, Khasra Pahani of 1954-55 and subsequent revenue entries. They contended that the lands were patta lands and not temple inam lands, alleged that they were denied an opportunity of hearing before the RDO, and questioned the reliance placed on a Munthakhab and endowment records. Opposing the plea, the Endowments department and temple authorities submitted that the lands were endowed properties, entered in the Book of Endowments pursuant to a Munthakhab issued in 1958. After examining the record, Justice NV Shrawan Kumar held that the Munthakhab and endowment entries had attained finality and that the ORC granted to the temple constituted a statutory title.

HC admits civic workers' plea for service regularisation

Justice Surepalli Nanda of the Telangana High Court has allowed a writ petition filed by N Ashok and 38 others, who have been working for decades in contingent and daily wage establishments, seeking regularisation of their services. The petitioners approached the court alleging inaction by the state authorities in not regularising their services despite their continuous engagement for nearly three decades against substantial regular vacancies. They sought regularisation in last grade posts such as attender and watchman, relying on the principles laid down by the Supreme Court in State of Karnataka v. Umadevi (2006) and other subsequent judgments, contending that their appointments were irregular but not illegal and that they had completed more than 10 years of continuous service.

Counsel for the petitioners relied on a series of judgments of the Supreme Court and the Telangana High Court, which recognised the entitlement of similarly placed employees to be considered for regularisation. It was argued that the nature of work performed by the petitioners was perennial and essential, and that the state could not continue them indefinitely on temporary or daily wage basis. On the other hand, counsel for the respondent local bodies submitted that the petitioners had not formally submitted representations seeking regularisation and therefore no writ of mandamus could be issued without first approaching the authorities. The court directed the petitioners to submit their claims for regularisation within one week, enclosing all relevant documents.

By T G Naidu

SVU prof from
Mahbubabad
found dead in car

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirupati

A professor from the Department of Management Studies at Sri Venkateswara University (SVU) was found dead inside his car on Friday under suspicious circumstances. The deceased was identified as Gugulothu Sardar Naik, a native of Dharamaram Thanda in Maripeda mandal, Mahbubabad district.

Police said the body was discovered after residents noticed the stationary vehicle and alerted authorities. Officers inspected the scene and shifted the body to RUIA Hospital, Tirupati, for post-mortem examination.

Police officials stated that all possible angles are being examined and further details will be released following the post-mortem and forensic reports.

Naik is survived by his wife, and two daughters.

Is Surjewala deliberately steering clear of Siddu-DKS power tussle?

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

IN a bombshell development rocking the Congress high command, sources in both Karnataka and Delhi confirm that AICC General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala is consciously distancing himself from the leadership tussle that has dominated headlines in the state for months.

Insiders reveal that Surjewala, once a key troubleshooter balancing the rival camps of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, has chosen to stay away from the stormy power battle—and it's by his own choice.

Highly placed party sources disclose that two crucial letters penned by Surjewala to the



AICC leadership were not taken seriously, signalling a clear erosion of his influence.

In the recent high-stakes deliberations over the leadership crisis, Surjewala was conspicuously absent from critical decision-making meetings.

Instead, the Congress high command has leaned heavily on KC Venugopal, the AICC Organisation General Secretary - who, incidentally, previously held the Karnataka in-charge portfolio before Surjewala.

Sources close to the leader say Surjewala has conveyed to the Congress leadership his keen interest in shifting focus to states where Congress needs a stronger push-like Jharkhand - rather than Karnataka, where the party is already in power

and performing well.

One senior legislator said, "Surjewala is keeping away from this turbulent leadership crisis entirely on his own accord."

Another top source echoed the sentiment, underscoring the voluntary nature of his withdrawal.

One source said the Siddaramaiah camp had raised the issue with the Congress high command and even complained that Surjewala was taking sides.

One source said Surjewala was not too happy over being sidelined on this issue.

As the Congress grapples with internal fissures ahead of crucial political battles, this apparent marginalisation of a senior general secretary raises serious questions about unity and strategy at the top.

ICRISAT unveils digital tools to fight red palm pest

KHYATI SHAH @ Hyderabad

AS the red palm weevil (RPW) continues to devastate date palm plantations across the Middle East and parts of North Africa, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad, has launched Workstream 3 - Digital Innovations under the Consortium for Red Palm Weevil Control (C4RPWC), signalling a shift towards predictive, digital-first pest management.

Supported by the Presidential Court of the UAE and the Gates Foundation, the three-year global programme brings together leading research institutions to address key gaps in RPW control.

Dr Srikanth Rupavatharam, senior scientist (Digital Agriculture) at ICRISAT, said the initiative focuses on early detection, as infestations are often noticed only after trees are irreversibly damaged.

The consortium, led by the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), comprises five workstreams. These include semiochemical-based trap-and-kill methods, biotechnological solutions

such as RNA interference, digital early-warning systems, promotion of Good Agricultural Practices, and adoption and scaling up.

Launched at ICRISAT's Hyderabad campus, Workstream 3 aims to integrate IoT sensors, drones, remote and optical sensing into a digital platform capable of generating early-detection alerts. The system is expected to warn farmers well before visible damage occurs, enabling timely intervention and saving affected trees.

A citizen science-based mobile application will allow farmers to report infestations and receive advisories, making them active participants in pest management. The early warning system is being developed with a target accuracy of about 95%.

The programme is also expected to reduce chemical usage, promote integrated pest management, improve fruit quality and support sustainable livelihoods, while safeguarding date exports from the region.

Initial field trials are planned in the UAE and Egypt, after which the solutions will be scaled up to other affected regions.

TRAGEDY

Four from Hyd killed in Nandyal road accident

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kurnool

FOUR people were killed instantly and two others injured in a road accident on National Highway 40 near Nallagatta village in Allagadda mandal, Nandyal district, early Friday.

The deceased were identified as Shravan (21), Gunderao Kulkarni (46), Itikali Narasimulu (30), and Siddappa (50). All were residents of Nizampet, Hyderabad.

Police said the mishap occurred when a Toyota Qualis (AP09 AH 0667), travelling from Tirupati to Hyderabad, lost control, rammed a road divider and collided with an oncoming CGR private bus. The impact killed all four occupants of the car. Two others, Siddharth Kulkarni and Shiva Sai Kulkarni, sustained serious injuries and were admitted to the Nandyal Government Hospital.

On receiving information, Allagadda DSP K Pramod, CI BV Ramana and SI Varaprasad reached the site, regulated the traffic and began an investigation. Police said the victims were returning to Hyderabad after providing catering services at a function in Tirupati.

Dharma, science seek same truth: Bhagwat

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirupati

RASHTRIYA Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat has highlighted India's dual journey towards spiritual depth and scientific excellence.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the 7th Bharatiya Vigyan Sammelan at National Sanskrit University in Tirupati on Friday, he described dharma not merely as a religion, but as the "science governing the functioning of creation," asserting that both fields ultimately seek the same truth through different methodologies.

Mohan Bhagwat emphasised the need for developing a scientific outlook in Indian society while remaining rooted in religious and cultural values.

He stressed that India is des-

SCR extends 16 spl train services

Hyderabad: The South Central Railway (SCR) announced the extension of 16 special trains to clear the festive rush in January and February.

Train No	From - To	Days of run	Date	No. of services
08583/84	Visakhapatnam - Tirupati	Mon/Tues	Jan 5 to Feb 24	16
08547/48	Visakhapatnam - Tirupati	Wed/Thu	Jan 7 to Feb 26	16
08579/80	Visakhapatnam - Charlapalli	Fri/Sat	Jan 2 to Feb 28	18
02811/12	Bhubaneswar - Yesvantpur	Sat/Mon	Jan 3 to Feb 23	16
08581/82	Visakhapatnam - SMVT Bengaluru	Sun/Mon	Jan 4 to 26	8
08311/12	Sambalpur - Erode	Wed/Fri	Jan 7 to 30	8
02863/64	Santragachi - Yelahanka	Thu/Sat	Jan 1 to Feb 28	18
02841/42	Shalimar - Chennai Central	Mon/Wed	Jan 5 to 28	8

EXPRESS READ

Sabarimala pilgrim footfall crosses 30 lakh

Pathanamthitta: The number of devotees who have visited the Sabarimala temple during the ongoing pilgrimage season has crossed the 30-lakh mark. As per official figures till December 25, a total of 30,01,532 pilgrims have had darshan at the hill shrine.

ACB submits report to HC in Parakamani theft case

Vijayawada: The ACB has submitted a sealed investigation report to the Andhra Pradesh High Court detailing its probe into the assets of Ravikumar, the accused in the theft case related to the Tirumala Srivar Parakamani, and his family members on Friday.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER CPD/158 -2025-26			
Tenders are invited through e-Tendering in SRM Two Bid system from the registered vendors for Supply of following:			
Tender No. & Description of Material		Estimated Amount (in Rs. Lakhs)	Due Date & Time (Hrs.) Submission & Opening of Tender
SP/T-0641/1225 RFx 7000038449 (1 st Call) for Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Nagpur islanding scheme under EHV O&M Zone, Nagpur and ALDC Ambazari in MSETCL on Portal.		Rs. 2459.33 Lakhs	15.01.2026 18:00 Hrs
		25,000.00	15.01.2026 18.15 Hrs
Contact Person: Office of the Executive Engineer (Gr-VI) Tel. No. 022-69852712/022-69852720.			
CPA, C.O. MSETCL, 1st Floor, Prakashgad Building, Bandra (E), Mumbai			
Email: 1) C.E. (CPA) 2) S.E. (CPA) 3) E.E. (P&C) 4) E.E. (Group-VI)			
Email id: cecpa@mahatransco.in, secpa@gmail.com, eepc@mahatransco.in, eegrp6@mahatransco.in			
For further details visit our website http://www.srmetender.mahatransco.in			
Any further amendments will be published on the MSETCL website www.mahatransco.in . So bidders are requested to check the website.			
Sd/- Executive Engineer (P&C)			

Government of Tamil Nadu					
KARUR CORPORATION					
KARUR DISTRICT					
E-Tendering Tender Notice					
Roc No: 6052/2025/E5					
Dated: 24.12.2025					
Karur Corporation invites Bids from eligible Bidders through e-procurement portal for "Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leftout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years for collection system and construction of STP including operation and maintenance for the period of 10 years". Bidders shall submit their Bids through online e-procurement portal https://tenders.gov.in up to 03.00 PM (as per the time in the server clock of the tender portal) on 13/02/2026. The Bids will be opened through online at 3.30 PM. on the same day (13.02.2026)					

Sl. No	Name of Work	Bid Value (Rs. In lakh)	Bid Security (Rs. In lakh)	Period of availability of bid document	Date and time of bid opening	Period of Completion
1	Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leftout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years - package 1	11015.26	113.84	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3.00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3.30 PM	36 Months
2	Estimated cost for Providing UGSS	21426.56	220.74	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3.00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3.30 PM	36 Months
3	Estimated cost for Operation and maintenance for the period of 5 Years (Excluding electricity charges)	647.39	94.89	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3.00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3.30 PM	18 Months
	Construction of 35.25 MLD capacity sewage treatment plant at Arasi colony with operation and maintenance for the period of 10 years at Karur Corporation package 3	7791.39				
	Estimated cost for Construction of STP	1698.02				
	Estimated cost for Operation and maintenance for the period of 10 Years (Excluding electricity charges)					

1. The Bid documents shall be made available from 30.12.2025.
2. The Bid documents may be downloaded from the website (<https://tntenders.gov.in>) at free of cost up to 3.00 PM on 13.02.2026.
3. Bids e-submission shall only be accepted.
4. Pre-bid meeting will be held on 12.01.2026 at 11.00 AM in the Office of the Karur Corporation, Main Road, Karur - 639 001.

Commissioner
Karur Corporation

DIPR/ 6847/TENDER/2025



The men the American people admire most extravagantly are the most daring liars

HL Menken

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

JOBS REMAIN BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS ECONOMY CLOSES A MIXED YEAR

IT'S been an unusual year for the Indian economy. If growth surpassed market expectations to settle at 8 percent in the first half of the fiscal, other macro indicators saw a mixed performance. Merchandise exports struggled amid steep US tariffs, while rupee plunged to new lows. The saving grace was that inflation softened and interest rates eased, making credit more affordable to both households and businesses. Even as growth holds up and private demand turns around, the industry remains reluctant to kick-start the much-awaited private investment cycle, thanks to trade uncertainties, a fragmenting global economy reshaped by wars and shifting supply-chain dynamics. Notwithstanding the government's capital expenditure, if private investments and manufacturing activities do not pick up, job creation and wage rise will remain elusive.

The good news amid the prevailing uncertainties is that India's growth forecasts hold promise both for this fiscal and the next. The IMF pegged it above 6.5 percent for each year, citing personal income tax reductions, an accommodative monetary policy, the ongoing GST reforms, and a likely trade deal with the US. But merchandise exports are coursing through a rough patch—not just to the US, but even to ASEAN economies, even though services exports, particularly IT and business-process management, are remaining robust. As if the export shock isn't enough, currency volatility is brewing fresh trouble. The rupee is in a free fall, and the decline isn't just limited against the US dollar but is ending up as a widespread depreciation. For instance, the RBI's index marking changes against 40 odd currencies fell nearly 9.9 percent this year, which means rupee's depreciation is not just a nominal adjustment but an erosion of purchasing power.

Finally, job creation remains one of the toughest challenges for policymakers. Even though India has seen strong economic growth following liberalisation since the 1990s, the employment rate is yet to keep pace with growth. While the unemployment rate fell from 6 percent in 2017-18 to 3.2 percent in 2023-24, according to official data, India needs to create jobs at a much faster clip to accommodate its growing workforce. As the Economic Survey 2024 noted, India must create 7.85 million non-farm jobs annually till 2030; private estimates suggest the need is for about 10 million jobs in the formal sector every year. Undeniably, that will remain the biggest challenge in the new year, too.

PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ALL COMMUNITIES

A spate of attacks and disruptions targeting Christmas celebrations and Christian gatherings in some parts of the country has raised serious concerns, coming as it does at a time when the NDA is seeking to engage with the community. Church bodies including the Catholic Bishops Conference of India have spoken out, urging authorities to act decisively to protect believers. They point to more than 1,500 incidents of anti-Christian violence in 2024-25, marking a steep rise over a decade. Many recent cases have been reported from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh. There is little evidence to suggest these incidents reflect the views of the wider population; they appear to be driven by fringe elements. Rights organisations warn, however, that repeated inaction risks allowing intimidation to harden into a pattern.

The issue has acquired political salience. In Kerala, where assembly polls are due in a few months, the BJP appears uncertain in its approach towards the Christian community, which accounts for about 18 per cent of the population. The Congress, meanwhile, has moved quickly to foreground incidents from BJP-ruled states. Electoral calculations aside, the larger concern is whether governments are responding with the seriousness that threats to public order and religious freedom demand.

At the national level, the BJP leadership has in recent years made visible efforts to reach out to Christian leaders and institutions. Those gestures, however, ring hollow if violence, harassment and disruption of worship are not met with swift and unambiguous action on the ground. Whatever disagreements may exist over religious practice, there can be no justification for preventing a community from observing festivals or creating an atmosphere of fear around places of worship. Law and order is not a matter of interpretation; it is a core responsibility of the state.

Christians constitute a small minority in India despite a presence extending back nearly two millennia. That historical rootedness and their demographic vulnerability place a particular obligation on the State to act without hesitation or bias. Protecting citizens and their right to practise their faith peacefully is not a concession, but a constitutional duty. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and equal protection of the law. Upholding these guarantees, especially when tested, is essential to preserving the credibility of democratic governance. A clear, firm response is necessary—not to privilege one community, but to reaffirm that intimidation and violence have no place in a constitutional republic.

QUICK TAKE

NOT RISING TO THE OCCASION

A food review is more useful when it advises one to steer clear, because it saves a would-be consumer time, money and probably a pungent belch. But when a celebrated British baker who has opened shop in Mexico City pooh-poohs the proud wheat tradition of the hosts, it's a culture war. After Richard Hart slighted the *tortas* of Mexico, chef Tania Medina retorted, "He wants to be the Christopher Columbus of bread." Maybe Hart didn't stomach the difference between low-starch maize, which has a rich history in the region, and high-fibre wheat. It sounds like a half-baked attempt at attracting heat to make daily bread. Not all that leavens brings in dough.

REGIME-change operations often stray from the script, particularly when orchestrated violence becomes a policy tool. Bangladesh is fast becoming a classic case. Both the US and Pakistan were aggrieved at Sheikh Hasina's cold-shouldering, independent foreign policy stance and her friendship with India. The current bonhomie between these two countries is, *inter alia*, an expression of the US's gratitude to Pakistan.

One of the most crucial steps of the regime-change operation in Bangladesh was to install Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as the head of an unelected interim government. In its 17 months in power, his dysfunctional regime has presided over mob violence, economic decline and growing extortion from business houses. There has been a flight of capital, a steep fall in investment, and a fall in GDP growth from a recent peak of 7.5 percent to below 3 percent.

Undeniably, Hasina's own policy miscalculations contributed to her ouster. Apart from corruption, cronyism and manipulating elections, one crucial error was her coddling of selected hardline Islamic groups and a crackdown on others. Madrasas mushroomed, creating a new generation of indoctrinated youngsters. Many of them are fronting violent mobs today.

In this mix, the arrival of Tarique Rahman, the acting chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the eldest son of former PM Khaleda Zia, after 17 years in exile in the UK changes the political matrix before the February 2026 election. It is likely to improve the BNP's chances of winning a majority.

Tarique's return, after acquittal in all cases in which he was convicted, points to a compact with the interim government and Yunus. This compact may have the backing of the regime-change planners, but doubts remain about Tarique's considerable political baggage. Still, India can expect another BNP-Jamaat-e-Islami (Jei) government emerging from the 2026 elections. Whether it will have a 're-formed' policy agenda with India is the million-taka question.

Tarique will have to navigate pressure from Pakistan and the US. He may find it useful to balance such pressures by improving ties with India. With the Hasina's Awami League banned, it could extend support to the BNP to ensure that the bigger 'devil', the Jei, does not become the bigger partner in a future government.

Meanwhile, the Jei, Bangladesh's largest Islamist organisation, is projecting a moderate image and desperately trying to

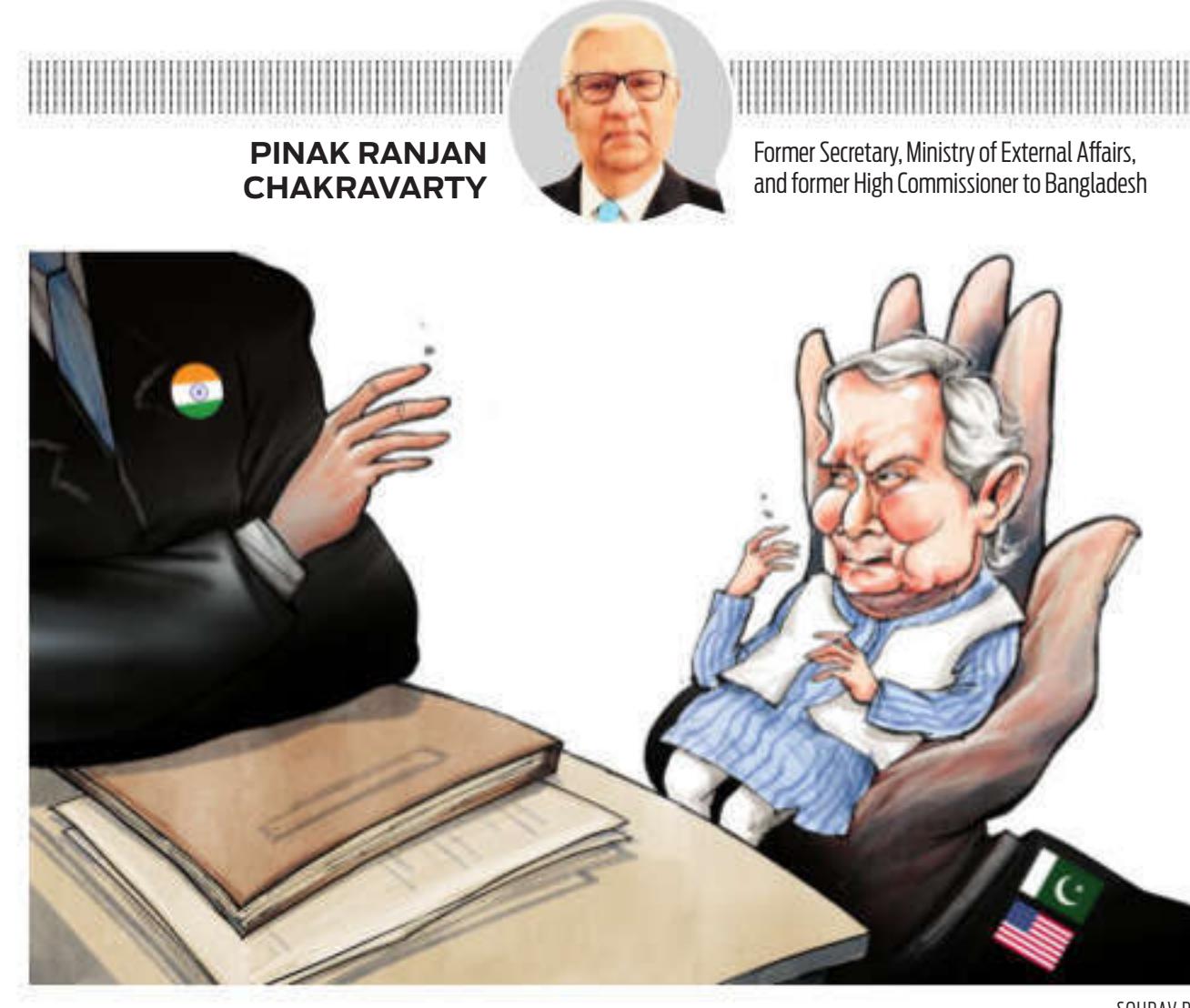
The return of Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman after 17 years in exile points to BNP's compact with the Yunus regime.

Two deaths reveal the alignment of foreign powers

RETURN OF PRODIGAL SON IN BANGLADESH CHANGES PROSPECTS

PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

Former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, and former High Commissioner to Bangladesh



SOURAV ROY

discard its reputation as the Pakistan army's collaborators during the 1971 war. It remains closely aligned with Pakistan and the US and sees the current situation as its best-ever opportunity to grab power. The National Citizen Party formed by student leaders is also in the fray, though without much prospect.

Anti-Indian rhetoric has risen to new levels. Recently, a student leader threatened to isolate India's northeastern states and provide sanctuary to insurgents from India. It reflects a well-planned effort to fan the flames of a hardened nationalist rhetoric. As a direct conflict with India will be self-destructive, surrogates are being used by these new political players.

The death of young anti-Hasina activist Sharif Osman Hadi, who had founded the cultural platform Inqilab Manch—known for spewing hatred against the Awami

League and India—ignited public opinion. This rabble-rouser was shot in Dhaka and died in Singapore. Dhaka was overrun with people mourning his death. His burial site is significant—next to national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in the Dhaka University campus, an unprecedented honour.

Social media was flooded with allegations that the alleged killer had fled to India, though police investigation failed to produce any evidence. Such deliberate provocations have led to another round of testy diplomatic exchanges between Delhi and Dhaka. Mobs burned down and looted two leading Bangladeshi newspapers—*Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*.

Chhayanaut, a leading cultural organisation, suffered the same fate. Islamists appear to have declared war not only on India, but also on their own country's premier institutions and history.

Another mob attacked Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu garment worker, on the false allegation of blasphemy, snatched him from police custody, beat him to death, hung his lifeless body from a tree and set it on fire. Police investigation confirmed that the deceased had not said anything blasphemous. India called the incident "horrendous" and "barbaric"; Dhaka reacted by saying the killing should not be "conflated with the security of minorities" and that several culprits had been arrested.

Mobs also attacked India's high commission in Dhaka and consulates in Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet, compelling India to temporarily stop issuing visas. India has officially reminded the Yunus government about its international obligation to provide security to India's diplomatic missions. Indian public opinion is inflamed. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has stopped issuing visas to Indians, and India has restarted issuing visas on "humanitarian grounds".

The UN country office, embassies of the US, Germany, France and the EU, and advocacy organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were quick to condole the death of the Inqilab Manch leader. The German embassy went further and flew its flag at half-mast. But the brutal killing of the Hindu garment worker elicited a stunning silence. Meanwhile, faced with backlash, the interim government expressed regret and offered funding to the garment worker's family.

India's neighbourhood challenge is being redefined by events in Bangladesh, hitherto a close political and economic partner. India has adopted strategic restraint so far, taking the long view and hoping that the forthcoming election will lead to political stability and a more productive engagement. There are, however, compelling geopolitical factors may force India to reassess its policy.

A Bangladesh-Pakistan military pact seems to be on the anvil. Unverified reports have surfaced of Pakistan and Turkey's intelligence agencies collaborating to create a "special force" comprising members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, with the target of using it against India and Myanmar. Indian intelligence agencies view the effort as a low-cost, deplorable tool that can be used for logistics support and narrative warfare.

All these developments have heightened India's security concerns. Bangladesh must realise that rhetoric and geopolitical reality rarely converge on the same page.

(Views are personal)

Full article on newindianexpress.com

RESIZING AMERICA'S SENSE OF SELF

KAJAL BASU

Veteran journalist

AMERICA'S love affair with monumentalism is hardly a secret: with buildings, warships, automobiles, aircraft—and, most importantly, self-image. So, when this core of self-esteem begins to crack and eventually crumble, we can be sure that something is afoot that will redefine America's sense of self. For better or for worse—which might actually go hand in hand.

Never before has the US introspected more than after Donald Trump took office this January. The most monumental president in the 80 postwar years, according to Gallup, he began with approval ratings of 47 percent (21-27 January) but is now down to 36 percent (1-15 December), where it has been stuck since November 3.

This steadily declining graph is a reliable mirror to America's glissading sense of self under the Trump presidency. Trump has been promising big and delivering small. The Epstein files fiasco is a case in point. One of Trump's presidential election planks was the unconditional release of the entire, unredacted Epstein files. In January, Trump reiterated his promise. In February, his attorney general Pam Bondi told an interviewer that an Epstein "client list" was on her desk. The department of justice (DoJ) ostentatiously sent "declassified" dossiers to far-right influencers—but it was material already in the public domain.

On February 21, Trump's ratings fell to 45 percent. A month later, they were down to 43 percent. On April 25, Virginia Giuffre, one of the early Epstein accusers, died by suicide—and between then and May 18, his ratings plateaued. Giuffre's death forced his ratings further down to 40 percent on June 19, two weeks before the DoJ denied that Epstein maintained a "client list" at all, and that it wouldn't release any more files. On July 21, Trump's ratings plummeted to 37 percent. On October 1, Trump hit a relative high of 40 percent, until Giuffre's posthumous memoir, published on October 19, clubbed the ratings down to 37 percent. They slid further to 36 percent on November 3, where they remained until last declared on December 1.

Meanwhile, the Trump dispensation doubled down on halting the skid, first by releasing emails sent between Epstein and others, then by the Congress passing and Trump signing into law the Epstein Files Transparency Act, and

then by the DoJ releasing the records—only to begin massively redacting them from its website within hours of release, especially for documentation to do with Trump.

In the interstices of this stormy diminution of ratings and the public outcry against the harm done by presidential duplicity to juvenile-focused familyism—one of the foundations of American society—other self-critiques began doing the rounds. Trump has always trumpeted his height as 6'3".



The fall in Trump's approval ratings through 2025 reflected America's glissading sense of self. It coincided with his team's back-and-forth on releasing the Epstein files. A battle of real and proclaimed statutes played out. Portraits of his team, including Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, resized them in the public eye

When photographs surfaced of him walking beside Prince William, who is confirmed as 6'3", in September, Trump appeared six inches shorter. The war of tallness—or *grö/ekrieg*, a war of grandeur—broke hearts across social media platforms, with MAGA warriors sharing the quicksand of doubt with left liberals. Potus guaranteed being larger-than-life in two crucial forms—an ethical promise and his own persona—and fell short in both senses.

There was more to come. On Decem-

ber 16, *Vanity Fair* published 'Eye of the Hurricane', a wrap of the year in two parts featuring interviews of Susie Wiles, the Trump White House's chief of staff, at length and in depth.

But the most extraordinary revelations came not from the text, but from the posed photographs by Christopher Anderson. They seem *prima facie* passable portraits of people in power, posing with their best face forward. But the snarky commentary was in the inconsequential dimensions that Anderson reduced these movers-and-shakers to in their architectural environments.

Anderson posed Vance next to a light switch, installed at a particular height by regulation—and this juxtaposition immediately reduced Vance from his self-proclaimed 6'2" to at most 5'10". Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary whom Trump has occasionally been raffish about, was photographed in close-up, highlighting her spotted lips pierced by filler injections. Right or left, the horror at the careless feet of clay in the mythified high echelons of the White House left the hoipolloi distressed and 'schadenfreuded' in equal measure.

Meanwhile, Trump is mirroring the citizenry—both shrunken and bullfrogged, but still figure-skating on personal and social bewilderment as if none of this resizing was psychologically revealing or long-term. On December 13, following a trip to Japan, Trump spoke positively about "really cute" kei cars, asking, "How would that do in this country?" It sent the bellwether US automobile industry, predicated on design and factory largeness, into a lather. On December 22, he went big, announcing the commissioning of a new series of ginormous 'Trump class' battleships.

Things are changing in America, but, as a March 2020 report by the University of Georgia pointed out, "Americans who do change tend to report a lower sense of well-being." I wonder if this is going to end well.

(Views are personal)
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MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Generation gap

Ref: *Tyranny of RWAs* (Dec 26). RWAs often bearers, most of them belonging to older generations, fail to align themselves with the changing norms of society and get involved in moral policing. Residents, too, must behave responsibly, maintain decorum and not disturb neighbours. RWAs must learn to sail along with Gen Z. R V Baskaran, Pune

Missing half

Ref: *The other half of future* (Dec 26). Predictive systems often replicate biases embedded in historical data. As AI is still in its infancy, humans must ensure that their own shortcomings in matters of gender are not coded into it. It's essential to shape gender-neutral institutions, laws and technologies for an inclusive India that fully harnesses the participation of its 'missing half'.

Anwesha Mishra, Bhadrak

United subcontinent

Ref: *United by blood, split by politics* (Dec 26). We can't turn a blind eye to the happenings in Bangladesh. But it's nonsensical to think of direct warlike action against a sovereign neighbour to protect Hindus there. All parties keep society polarised to reap political gains. In the subcontinent, one can espouse that all inhabitants are united by blood.

Jitendranath Guru, Padampur

Highway tragedy

Ref: *Six dead in bus-truck collision* (Dec 25). The tragic road accident has deeply saddened the local community. In recent days, traffic along this route has increased significantly, and concerns are being raised that long-distance driving fatigue, lack of rest and overspeeding may be contributing to the growing risk of such accidents. It's a stark reminder for the authorities to strengthen safety measures and spread awareness.

Darshan Yadav, Sirsa

Protect wildlife

Ref: *Poachers kill three blackbucks near Chikmagalur* (Dec 25). The killings are deeply disturbing. Allegations of negligence by forest officials and a hurried investigation demand a transparent, high-level inquiry. Blackbucks are a protected species, and such incidents pose a grave threat to biodiversity. The government must strictly enforce wildlife laws, and hold offenders and errant officials accountable.

Umme Haani, Bengaluru



Shashi Tharoor @ShashiTharoor
Remembering Dr Manmohan Singh on the first anniversary of his passing. I dedicated my most recent book, #OurLivingConstitution, to him in tribute.



Akhilesh Yadav @yadavakhilesh
When the gathering of loved ones is adorned, sir, you become gracious, and to others, you issue the decree of a warning.

Devendra Fadnavis @Dev_Fadnavis
Sacrifice of the 10th Guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and his family is an unparalleled example of humanity, faith, and courage in the history of our nation and world.

Zero tolerance on terror: Shah

At NIA meet, home minister bats for national platform where different agencies share ideas

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday inaugurated a two-day Counter-Terrorism Conference organised by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), as he said that terrorism is the biggest threat to humanity and everyone must work together to defeat it. He went on to add that such a conference acts as a national platform where different agencies share ideas and strategies to prepare effective plans to eliminate terrorism.

The minister, during the inaugural session, also unveiled the NIA's updated crime manual - Organised Crime Network Database and Lost/Looted and Recovered Weapon Database.

In his address, the Home Minister said, "Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'zero tolerance' against terrorism, this annual conference has become a platform to deal with emerging threats."

The minister noted that in the last three years, "we have moved forward in the direction of making this conference an annual tradition, and it is not merely a forum for discussion, but actionable points emerge from here, and the NIA, along with all related agencies of the states, continuously work throughout the year towards their implementation."



Landscape of terrorism in world has been changing

Noting that the landscape of terrorism in the world has been changing due to the use of technology in terrorist incidents alongside technological advancements, Union home minister Amit Shah said, "We too must prepare to prevent this by anticipating invisible future challenges and counter them."

"As a result, we are succeeding in building a strong anti-terrorism grid across the country. The objective of this conference is also to analyse all terrorist incidents that occurred in the country and the world in the past year, along with the intelligence received about them, and to enhance our counter-terrorism capabilities accordingly," Shah said.

Noting that the landscape of terrorism in the world has been changing due to the use of technology in terrorist incidents

alongside technological advancements, the minister said, "We too must prepare to prevent this by anticipating invisible future challenges and counter them."

Speaking about the three new initiatives being launched at the event, Shah said, "The updated crime manual prepared by the NIA was released today. I request all the Director Generals of Police from the states to form a team in their respective states and ensure that they study this manual for

investigation and prosecution purposes."

During the conference last year, there was a consensus among various central and state agencies and police forces on the need for stronger collaborative efforts backed by a standardised strategy to combat the menace of terrorism, particularly with respect to cybercrime and financial terrorism.

The Home Minister said that a database on organised crime networks has also been released and noted that they initially operate for the purpose of ransom and extortion, but when their leaders flee abroad and settle there, they automatically come into contact with terrorist organisations and then use the proceeds from ransom and extortion to spread terrorism within the country.

The conference was attended by Union Ministers of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai and Bandi Sanjay Kumar, the Union Home Secretary, the Secretary of counter R&AW, the Director General of NIA and many other dignitaries.

The conference is being attended by senior police officers from states/UTs, officers from central agencies/departments dealing with issues related to counterterrorism and experts from related fields such as law, forensics and technology.

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) on Friday extended the Emergency Procurement (EP) mechanism, aimed at strengthening operational preparedness.

Sources confirmed that "The scheduled DAC meeting on Friday took up the sole case of Emergency Procurement (EP) and was postponed to be held soon, and will be taking up important procurement projects."

The EP provision was introduced following the May 2020 standoff with the Chinese PLA. It empowers authorities in cases of urgent or operationally immediate military necessity linked to preparedness for contingencies such as war or war-like situations, natural calamities and similar emergencies.

The core objective of delegating these powers is to fast-track the procurement or repair of equipment, items, materials, and stores, as well as the provisioning of urgently required services for the successful conduct of operations.

The Competent Financial Authority (CFA) for Emergency Procurement (Capital) up to ₹300 crore rests with the Vice Chiefs of Staff of the three services - the Army, Navy and Air Force.

The defence budget allocated

FAST-TRACKING PROCESS

DAC DETAILS

Chaired by Defence Minister

Highest body for defence capital procurement

Grants acceptance of necessity (AoN) marking the acquisition

by the government for 2025-26 has been pegged at ₹6,81,210.27 crore, of which ₹1,80,000 crore is earmarked for capital acquisition.

The government's financial year runs from April 1 to March 31 and is used for annual financial planning and budgeting.

Budgetary allocations are broadly divided under capital and revenue heads. However, sources said, emergency procurement is time bound, as a project once approved has to be signed within six months of its approval and the supply has to be completed in a year from the signing date. There are certain important cases, told the sources, which are not yet

completed.

Capital outlay is intended for the acquisition of new systems and equipment, as well as the creation of military infrastructure. Allocations to the armed forces under revenue expenditure (excluding salaries) are intended to meet sustainment needs and operational commitments.

The Defence Acquisition Council which is usually chaired by the Defence Minister, is the highest decision-making body for defence policy and capital procurement, and its approval of an Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) marks the first step in the acquisition process.

Plan to double originating train capacity in 48 cities

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi



IN a first-of-its-kind initiative amid sustained growth in passenger travel demand, the Ministry of Railways has decided to expand coaching terminals and enhance sectional and operational capacities in a planned manner over the next five years.

The objective is to meet emerging and projected travel demand by 2030 across 48 major cities in the country. After extensive deliberations covering all aspects, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has accorded priority to this long-pending requirement, setting a deadline for completion by 2030. The initiative aims to significantly ease congestion at busy stations that witness heavy footfalls of originating and terminating passengers.

"We are expanding coaching terminals, enhancing sectional and operational capacities in various cities to meet rising passenger demand and reduce congestions", Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Friday. Under this mega plan, the railways intend to double train-handling capacity in 48 major cities over the next five years. Short- and medium-term meas-

ures proposed by railway zones will contribute to the required capacity addition, particularly at high-density stations.

The plan includes major infrastructure upgrades such as construction of additional platforms and terminals in and around urban areas, along with multi-functional facilities to handle new originating trains. Cities identified for these developments include Mumbai, Hyderabad, Jodhpur, Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi, Pune, Chennai, Gaya, Patna, Puri, Jammu and several others.

Existing infrastructure will be augmented to meet future requirements through the creation of additional platforms, stabilizing lines, pit lines and adequate shunting facilities.

As part of the effort to double

the number of originating trains, the railways will identify and develop new terminals in and around urban centres, supported by maintenance facilities. A critical component of the plan involves increasing sectional capacity through traffic facility works, signalling up-grades and multi-tracking, which will be essential to manage higher train volumes at key locations.

For instance, in Pune, Hadapsar, Khadki and Alandi have been identified for capacity enhancement, alongside additional platforms and stabilizing lines at Pune station. Following the Railway Minister's directive, a comprehensive, city-wise plan for all 48 major cities is under consideration, covering works that are planned, proposed or already sanctioned to achieve the target of doubling train-handling capacity within a defined timeframe.

The cities included in the plan are Delhi, Mumbai (CR, WR), Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Patna, Lucknow, Pune, Nagpur, Varanasi among others. Notably, a majority of these stations experience consistently high footfalls due to pilgrimage traffic throughout the year.

New airlines may have little impact: Experts

S LALITHA @ New Delhi

THE sudden clearance given to two new airlines - the Kozhikode-based Alhind and FlyExpress - by the Centre, which awaited the nod for nearly a year, and the Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu himself announcing the decision appears to be a strong message in light of the disruption caused by the IndiGo crisis from December 1 to 9. However, experts are weighing in if the new airlines can impact the domestic market.

The dominant opinion among aviation professionals is that the newbies may not have any impact on the market share of players like IndiGo, Air India, and Air India Express. Captain CS Randhawa, president of the Federation of Indian Pilots, is critical of the decision. He said, "All these three airlines have neither enough funding nor expertise.

These three airlines have neither enough funding nor expertise. The best of the airlines have not survived. No regional airlines have survived in this country. These airlines are not a threat to any operating airlines in the country as they cannot survive on non-UDAN routes."

Shank Air, based in Uttar Pradesh, too was given the nod last year and plans to begin operations in 2026.

Smaller airlines face the challenges of finances, aircraft leasing, pilot availability, sus-

tainability, and competitive fares, he said. "The government needs to bring fuel under GST and give subsidies to encourage big corporate houses to enter aviation with a big bang to break the existing duopoly," he added.

Randhawa is of the opinion that regional airlines only increase regional connectivity and the government needs to change its outlook for the sector to change. "There is an urgent need for the government to relook at the aviation policies of the country," he said.

An Airline Pilots Association of India representative told this newspaper that the new airlines cannot have big aircraft to disturb the existing market share pattern. "IndiGo presently has 434 aircraft, and it took them two decades to

reach this position. The new airlines need to lease A320 aircraft only from it. Orders placed at Boeing by Air India for the 737s are getting delayed. It will take the new airlines at least two decades to reach the position of these airlines," the source said. SpiceJet and Aksa Air have been around for some time, but they have between 20 and 30 aircraft and cannot match up to IndiGo and Air India, he added.

However, Captain G R Gopinath, who pioneered the low-cost airline concept in the country through Air Deccan, seemed positive about the move. He said, "Permitting new airlines to operate is good for the country, as the industry will become more vibrant. The public stand to benefit, as the prices will be kept under check. Airlines will

become more effective and service-minded. It is good that the government is doing it and it will benefit all."

Aviation expert Captain Mohan Ranganathan gave zero chances of the new airlines offering any competition. "Where are the captains? The title of a 1971 Robert Stirling novel 'She'll Never Get off the Ground' is apt to describe their situation," he said.

Earlier, Alhind CEO Reena Abdul Rahim told this newspaper that the Thiruvananthapuram-Kochi-Kozhikode sector was its priority and to facilitate this, the company had started a base in Kochi airport as early as August 2024. Alhind Air will begin its operations with two ATR 72-600 aircraft, with plans to scale up to seven within the first year.

Bravery awards for 9-yr-old, 11-yr-old posthumously

KAVITA BAJELI-DUTT @ New Delhi



NINE-YEAR-OLD Vyoma Priya lost her life while trying to save a six-year-old during an electrical accident in their gated community park in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore. Kamlesh Kumar, an 11-year-old, died while bravely attempting to save another child in the Durgawati river near Jaipur village in Bihar's Kaimur district.

The two were among the 20 young boys and girls who were conferred with the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2025 by President Droupadi Murmu on Friday.

Lauding the award-winning children for bringing "pride to their families, communities, and the entire country," the President said, "The greatness of a country is certain when its children are filled with patriotism and high ideals."

Remembering the brave deeds of the two children who were awarded posthumously, she said, "Nine-year-old daughter Vyoma Priya and 11-year-old brave son Kamlesh Kumar lost their lives while saving the lives of others with their courage."

The President also conferred the awards in six categories - bravery, art and culture, environment, social service, science and technology and sports.

The President praised 10-year-old Shravan Singh from Chak Tarar Wali, Ferozepur, Punjab, who showed exceptional courage during Operation Sindoor by making daily high-risk supply runs to frontline soldiers

and motivating his family and community to support the Army, despite constant threats from hostile drones.

"Shravan Singh, amidst the risks associated with war during Operation Sindoor, regularly delivered water, milk, and lassi to the Indian soldiers stationed at the border near his home. Whereas, the differently-abled daughter Shivani Hosuru Upadhyaya has achieved extraordi-

nary accomplishments in the world of sports, overcoming economic and physical limitations," she said.

"It is because of talented children such as the seven-year-old Vakri Lakshmi Pragnika that India is considered a chess powerhouse on the world stage. Ajay Raj and Mohammed Sidan P, who saved the lives of others with their bravery and intelligence, deserve the praise they receive," she said.

"Vaibhav Suryavanshi has made a name for himself in the highly competitive and talent-filled world of cricket and has set many records," she added.

Among those the President mentioned was Muhammed Sidan P, an 11-year-old Class 6 student from Palakkad, Kerala. He saved his two friends from electrocution while they waited for their school bus.

Talking about the significance of the Veer Bal Diwas, the president said that about 320 years ago, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru, and his four sons had made the "supreme sacrifices" while fighting for truth and justice.

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

CHIEF Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant said on Friday that he envisions a transition towards a multi-door courthouse where the court is a comprehensive centre for dispute resolution and not merely a place for trial.

Addressing a conference on 'Mediation: How significant in the present-day context', organised by the India International University of Legal Education and Research (IIULER) in South Goa, Justice Kant said mediation is increasingly being accepted as a successful, cost-effective and win-win settlement for both litigating parties. "Mediation is not a sign of the law's weakness, but rather its highest evolution. It is a true transition from a culture of adjudication to a culture of participation where we cultivate harmony," he said.

The CJI, however, said that though he is an advocate of mediation, it does not mean that cases coming up before courts will be mechanically referred to mediation. "There is an internal exercise carried out by a team of experts who identify whether a case is suitable for settlement through mediation. Only such matters are referred to mediation," he said.

The CJI also clarified that courts are prepared to adjudicate disputes on merit when mediation does not succeed. "We have to be mentally prepared that where mediation does not succeed, the matter

has to come back to court. We do not shy away from our responsibilities," the CJI said.

He said that the success of mediation lies in the mediator's ability to speak not only the local or regional language, but also the dialect, expressions, and cultural idiom of the person for whom the mediation is being conducted.

Asserting the need for mediation training, he said there are 39,000 trained mediators, but there is a gap in demand and supply. Justice Kant emphasised the need for a larger number of mediators from district courts to the apex court. For effective implementation of mediation at all levels, the country needs more than 25,000 trained mediators, said the CJI.

The campaign 'Mediation for Nation' was launched in July this year to cut judicial pendency by resolving several kinds of disputes, including matrimonial, commercial and motor accidents, he said.



paper.newindianexpress.com

CM Hemant Soren said protection of tribal self-governance, dignity and cultural heritage is his government's priority, on Friday. The PESA law, which strengthens their rights, pride, and self-governance will prove to be a milestone, he added.

16
DETAINED

FROM DRUG HOTSPOTS
IN J&K DISTRICT



INDIA

	Max	Min	Max	Min
Ahmedabad	41	25	Mumbai	34
Bhopal	37	22	Panaji	34
Jaipur	38	24	Patna	38
Amritsar	33	18	Lucknow	38
Chennai	32	28	Port Blair	28
Kolkata	36	28	Imphal	29
Srinagar	21	07	Chandigarh	34

● Second case within days of another murder ● Youths seek govt's help for rescue ● Accused drew ₹16 lakh salary from state for 10 years

Indian student shot dead near Toronto varsity

HARPREET BAJWA @Chandigarh

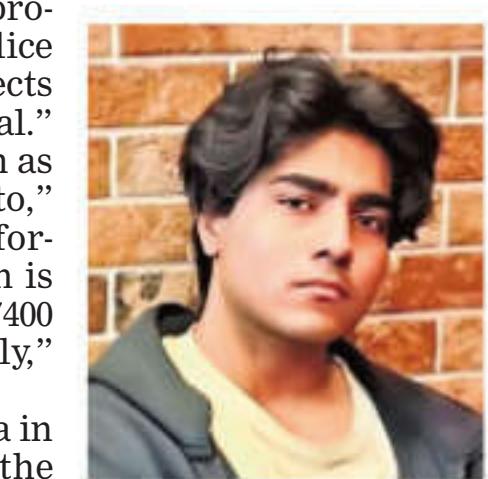
A 20-year-old Indian student was shot dead near the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus, prompting Canadian police to seek public help in finding the suspect. The victim has been identified as Shivank Avasthi, a doctoral student, who was found with a gunshot wound on Tuesday. Police said the incident marked Toronto's 41st homicide of the year.

In a statement, the Toronto Police Service said, "On Tuesday, December 23, 2025, at approximately 3:34 p.m., police responded to a call for an Unknown Trouble in the Highland Creek Trail and Old Kingston Road area. Officers located a male victim with a gunshot wound, and he was pronounced deceased on scene." Police added that "the suspect or suspects fled the area prior to police arrival." Authorities confirmed the victim as "Shivank Avasthi, 20, of Toronto," and urged witnesses to come forward. "Anyone with information is asked to contact police at 416-808-7400 or Crime Stoppers anonymously," the statement said.

The Consulate General of India in Toronto expressed grief over the death and said it is supporting the family. In a post on X, it said, "We express anguish over the tragic death of a young Indian doctoral student, Mr. Shivank Avasthi, in a fatal shooting incident near the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus." It added that officials are "extending all necessary assistance in coordination with the local authorities."

Avasthi was also a member of the University of Toronto Scarborough cheerleading team. Paying tribute on Instagram, the team wrote, "We are saddened and in shock by the sudden loss of a beloved Maroon." Remembering his energy, the post said, "He brought a smile to anyone's face, and he will always be part of our UTSC Cheer family."

The killing comes days after another Indian national, 30-year-old Himanshi Khurana, was found murdered in Toronto, raising renewed concerns within the community there.



25 Lalu MLAs in touch with BJP: Minister

RAMASHANKAR @Patna

A fresh political slugfest erupted in Bihar after a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and state agriculture minister, Ram Kripal Yadav, on Friday claimed that all 25 MLAs of the opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) were in contact with his party.

Yadav, once a trusted aide of RJD chief Laloo Prasad, claimed that RJD MLAs could join his party at any given time. "RJD leader Tejashwi Prasad Yadav's party is finished. He will be out for a duck," he claimed.

Mocking Tejashwi's foreign trip, Yadav alleged that Tejashwi was ashamed of facing people after his party's humiliating defeat in the recently concluded assembly election.

"I am saying with all seriousness, all 25 of his MLAs are in touch with our party. They can join BJP at any time. Take care of your party; there is nothing left," he remarked while addressing Tejashwi, who was the chief ministerial face of the INDIA bloc in the recently concluded assembly election.

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US launches missiles at Islamic State targets in northern Nigeria

Strikes come after Nigerian government provided intelligence on terrorist whereabouts

LAGOS

NIGERIA on Friday signalled that more strikes against jihadist groups were expected after a Christmas Day bombardment by US forces against militants in the north of the country, which it said was a joint operation with its military.

The west African country faces multiple interlinked security crises, with jihadists waging an insurgency in the northeast since 2009 and armed "bandit" gangs raiding villages and staging kidnappings in the northwest.

The strikes came after Abuja and Washington were locked in a diplomatic dispute over what US President Donald Trump has characterised as the mass killing of Christians amid Nigeria's myriad armed

conflicts. A Pentagon official told AFP that "the Department of War worked with the government of Nigeria to carry out these strikes" and that they "were approved by the government of Nigeria", without saying whether Nigeria's military had been involved.

US defence officials later posted a video of what appeared to be a nighttime missile launch from the deck of a battleship flying the US flag.

Meanwhile, Nigeria's military said in a statement that its forces, "in conjunction with the United States", had conducted "precision strike operations".

Both countries said the strikes targeted militants linked to the Islamic State group, without providing details. Washington's framing of the violence in Nigeria as



A missile being launched from a US warship on Thursday

amounting to Christian "persecution" is rejected by the Nigerian government and independent analysts, but has nonetheless resulted in increased security coordination.

"It's Nigeria that provided the intelligence," the country's foreign minister, Yusuf Tuggar, told broadcaster Channels TV,

saying he was on the phone with US State Secretary Marco Rubio ahead of the bombardment.

Asked if there would be more strikes, Tuggar said: "It is an ongoing thing, and we are working with the US. We are working with other countries as well." The Department of Defense's US Africa Command said "multiple ISIS terrorists" were killed in an attack in the northwestern state of Sokoto.

Residents in the far-flung villages of that state told AFP they were shocked by the blasts. The strikes hit multiple locations, including a town that residents said was not a militant stronghold.

Which of Nigeria's myriad, and well-documented, armed groups were targeted remains unclear. *AFP*

EXPRESS READ

9 children injured in drone strike in Pakistan

Peshawar: Nine children, including three girls, were injured when a drone struck a madrassa in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, officials said on Friday. The drone targeted the religious seminary located in Shadikhel village in Tank district on Thursday while children were attending classes, they said. Rescue 1122 teams rushed to the spot and shifted the injured to the District Headquarters Hospital in Tank, officials said. Hospital authorities confirmed the injured comprised three girls and six boys, adding that all were out of danger



Tarique Rahman

Rahman visits father's grave in Dhaka

DHAKA

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman on Friday visited the grave of his father and Bangladesh's former president Ziaur Rahman in Dhaka, a day after he returned home from self-exile in the UK.

Rahman reached Zia Udyan in a red-and-green bulletproof bus and paid floral tributes at the grave, offering 'dua' and 'munajat' for the eternal peace of his father's soul, news portal *bangla.dailysun.com* reported.

The 60-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader returned to the country on Thursday after over 17 years. He has been living in London since 2008. This is the first time in almost 19 years that Rahman has paid tribute at his father's grave, *tbsnews.net* reported.

The last time he did so was on September 1, 2006, when he was serving as BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General, marking the party's founding anniversary, it said.

BNP founder Ziaur Rahman was a Bangladeshi military officer who served as the sixth president of Bangladesh from 1977 until his assassination in 1981. He retired from the army in 1978 with the rank of lieutenant general. Rahman stood before the grave with visible emotion and offered fataha. He was seen wiping tears with a handkerchief, *The Daily Star* newspaper reported.

Though the distance between Rahman's Gulshan residence and Zia Udyan is only 8 km, it took him one hour and 51 minutes to reach the grave due to the massive presence of party leaders and workers, who lined both sides of the road, making the route narrow. *AFP*



Israeli police personnel inspect the car used in Friday's attack | *x.com*

Palestinian rams car into Israeli man, stabs woman

JERUSALEM

A Palestinian killed two people in a stabbing and car-ramming attack in northern Israel on Friday, triggering the defence minister to threaten a crackdown on the assailant's village in the occupied West Bank.

The attack came a day after an Israeli military reservist dressed in civilian clothes rammed his vehicle into a Palestinian man in the West Bank, where violence has surged since the war in Gaza began.

The Gaza war, sparked by Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, also set off several attacks by Palestinians inside Israel that have left dozens dead. "Preliminary investigation indicates this was a rolling terror attack that began in the city of Beit Shean, where a pedestrian was run over," Israeli police said in a statement about Friday's attack, adding that the victim was a 68-year-old man.

"Later, a young woman was stabbed near Road 71, and the suspect was ultimately engaged with gunfire near

Maonot Junction in Afula following intervention by a civilian bystander," it said, adding the attacker was taken to hospital.

Both victims succumbed to the injuries, Israel's Magen David Adom emergency services said in a statement.

The Israeli military said the attacker had "infiltrated into Israel several days ago".

In a later statement on Friday, the Israeli police said the attacker, a 34-year-old man, was a resident of Qabatiya and had taken his employer's vehicle to carry out the attack. After ramming the vehicle into two individuals, the attacker continued and struck a vehicle.

Following the attack, Defence Minister Israel Katz ordered the military to launch an operation in Qabatiya, after it emerged that the attacker came from there. Katz instructed

the army "to act forcefully and immediately against the village of Qabatiya, from which the terrorist emerged, to locate and thwart every terrorist and strike the village's terror infrastructure," his office said. *AFP*



ANOTHER 4 YRS NEEDED TO FULLY RESTORE CHERNOBYL RADIATION SHIELD

KYIV

INSIDE an abandoned control room at Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear power plant, a worker in an orange hard-hat gazed at a grey wall of seemingly endless dials, screens and gauges that were supposed to prevent disaster.



In February, a Russian drone hit and left a large hole in the New Safe Confinement (NSC), the outer of two radiation shells covering the remnants of the nuclear power plant.

It functions as a modern high-tech

replacement for an inner steel-and-concrete structure—known as the Sarcophagus, a defensive layer built hastily after the 1986 incident.

Ten months later, repair work is still ongoing, and it could take another three to four years before the outer dome regains its primary safety functions, plant director Sergiy Tarakanov told *AFP* in an interview from Kyiv.

"It does not perform the function of retaining radioactive substances inside," Tarakanov said, echoing concerns raised by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The 1986 meltdown at the site was the world's worst ever nuclear incident. Since Russia invaded in 2022, Kyiv fears another disaster could be just a matter of time.

The strike had also left it unclear if the shell would last the 100 years it was designed to.

The gaping crater in the structure, which *AFP* journalists saw this summer, has been covered over with a protective screen, but 300 smaller holes made by firefighters when battling the blaze still need to be filled in. Scaffolding engulfs the inside of the giant multi-billion-dollar structure, rising all the way up to the 100-metre-high ceiling. *AFP*

6 dead

and 21 wounded in mosque bombing in Syria



LR: Light Rain • HR: Heavy Rain • LS: Light Snow • SNY: Sunny

TDS: Thundershower • LC: Light Cloud

Beijing	29	19	SNY	Los Angeles	20	12	SNY
Colombo	29	23	TDS	Melbourne	17	5	LC
Dhaka	27	16	TDS	Moscow	4	2	SNY
Dubai	26	22	SNY	New York	2	-3	SNY
Houston	30	23	TDS	Singapore	27	25	TDS
Istanbul	33	21	SNY	Toronto	-6	-8	SNY
London	12	8	SNY	Washington	3	-2	SNY

newindianexpress.com

Najib sentenced to 15 years in 1MDB corruption case

KUALA LUMPUR

A Malaysian judge sentenced former prime minister Najib Razak to 15 more years in jail on Friday after convicting him of abuse of power and money laundering in a sovereign wealth fund graft scandal.

Najib was also fined 11.4 billion ringgit (\$2.8 billion) for his role in the plunder of billions from the now-defunct 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) more than a decade ago. He is already serving a six-year term after being convicted in a separate 1MDB case, and Judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah said Najib's latest term would begin only after that sentence was completed.

Sequerah convicted the 72-year-old former leader on all four counts of abuse of power as well as all 21 counts of money laundering, involving around 2.28 billion ringgit (\$554 million) from the fund.

Najib, dressed in a navy blue suit and white shirt, was seen looking down, slumped in his seat as the judge read the verdict after a marathon eight-hour hearing.

The son of one of Malaysia's founding fathers, Najib was groomed for leadership from a young age but fell from power spectacularly as public anger mounted over the corruption scandal.

Investigations under successive governments have en-



Jailed former prime minister of Malaysia Najib Razak arrives for a court hearing | *AFP*

snared him and his wife, Rosmah Mansor, in graft allegations since his loss in 2018 elections.

Prosecutors say Najib abused his positions as prime minister, finance minister and 1MDB advisory board chairman to move vast sums from the fund into his personal accounts.

According to investigators, proceeds from the fund were used to bankroll high-end real estate, a luxury yacht and precious artworks, including a Monet and a Van Gogh.

Sequerah dismissed several of the arguments of Najib's defence team, including that he had been duped by his close associate, the shadowy businessman Low Taek Jho who is better known as Jho Low.

"The evidence clearly points to the fact that this was no coincidence but was evident of a relationship in which Jho Low operated as a proxy or agent of the accused (Najib) with regard to the running of the affairs of 1MDB," Sequerah said. *AFP*

A SCANDAL THAT SHOOK MALAYSIA

Malaysia's sprawling 1MDB corruption scandal allegedly saw senior figures siphon off billions in state funds—splashing the cash on luxury homes, a Monet painting, and even a Hollywood blockbuster

2009 *IM* Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), a state investment fund, is launched under Prime Minister Najib Razak

2012 Tens of millions of dollars are allegedly used by Najib's stepson, Riza Aziz—an aspiring film producer—to help finance *The Wolf of Wall Street*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio

\$4.5 billion

That's the amount US investigators say was diverted from 1MDB between 2009 and 2015 by fund officials and their associates

2014 Alarm bells ring as 1MDB's debts swell to around \$1 billion, with growing questions over missing money. The US Department of Justice later opens a major investigation, alleging stolen Malaysian funds were laundered through the US financial system to buy luxury assets

CHARGE AGAINST GOLDMAN SACHS

■ Malaysia charged Goldman Sachs for its role in arranging 1MDB bond sales

■ Prosecutors said bank officials helped divert large sums and bribed officials to secure contracts, while misleading investors

Admin-12011(14)/6/2025-eoffice GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (Drugs Section)

Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation invites application from eligible candidates for filling up the post as mentioned below at Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation on deputation basis. The last date for receiving the applications will be within 60 days from the date of publication of this advertisement.

2. For further details please visit CDSCO's website <https://cdsco.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	Pay as per 7th CPC	No. of Post	Office for which the post is filled up
1.	Head Clerk, Non-Gazetted, Non-Ministerial	Pay Level-6 (Rs.35400 - 112400) of pay matrix of 7th CPC	04	Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation

Sd/- Director (Admn.)

CDSCO, HQ, Director General Health Services, FDA Bhawan, Kotla Road, New Delhi - 110002

CBC 17194/11/0020/2526

Repco Home Finance Limited

CORPORATE OFFICE: Alexander Square, No.2 (Old No.34 & 35), 3rd Floor, Sardar Patel Road, Guindy, Chennai-600032

POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Repco Home Finance Ltd., under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice on the dates mentioned below, calling upon them to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The Borrowers, Co-Borrowers and the Guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers, co-borrowers, guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 9 of the said rules on this the 23rd day of December, 2025.

The Borrowers, Co-Borrowers, Guarantors and the public in general



Coforge to acquire US co Encora for ₹17k cr

Acquisition to scale hitech and healthcare verticals, expand nearshore delivery capacity and increase client base in US

SANAL SUDEVAN @Chennai

INDIA'S IT services company Coforge, formerly NIIT Technologies, will acquire US-based engineering services company Encora for ₹17,032 crore through a swap of 93.8 million equity shares at ₹1,815.91 each, which is 14.5% premium to Friday's close. Coforge is also planning to pay off Encora's debt by raising a term loan of ₹550 million funds through a bridge loan or QIP issue.

The company will acquire 100% of shares of Encora US Holdco, Inc. and Encora Holdings Ltd (Cayman) from Advent International, Warburg Pincus and other minority shareholders, whereas Encora will have 21.25% in the combined firm, Coforge said in regulatory filings. The enterprise value of the transaction is \$2.35 billion.

The company said the acquisition is a defining moment for



Acquisition will position the company as capability leader in AI-led engineering services underpinned in data and cloud. Encora, with its Silicon Valley roots, brings strong AI-native DNA

IT services company Coforge

the firm. "This acquisition will position the company as the capability leader in AI-led engineering services underpinned in data and cloud. Encora, with its Silicon Valley roots, brings

strong AI-native DNA and a composable agentic platform (AIVA) that enables it to build intelligent workflows."

As per a company statement, the combined entity is project-

ed to become a \$2.5 billion tech services powerhouse. "In FY27, \$2 billion revenue is expected to accrue from the enterprise core of AI-led engineering, cloud and data services alone. The acquisition will immediately scale Coforge's hitech and healthcare verticals, expand its nearshore delivery capabilities in LATAM, and increase its client footprint in the US West and Midwest," said the company.

Encora is backed by Advent International and Warburg Pincus and offers AI solutions for product, cloud and data engineering, estimating that it would help generate revenue of \$2 billion in next financial year. Encora has a large and widespread nearshore delivery capability with over 3,100 delivery team strength in its LATAM Delivery centers.

The value of the transaction is \$2.35 billion, of which \$1.89

billion will be financed through equity and balance through bridge loan or qualified institutional placement (QIP) of debt securities. The pricing of QIP will be determined by SEBI regulations at the time of transactions. The acquisition is subject to shareholder's approval which will be secured within 30 days, and regulatory approvals which are expected to take another four to six months.

The consolidated turnover of Encora Group in FY25 was \$516 million and \$481 million in FY24. In FY26, it is expected to hit \$600 million with adjusted EBITDA margin of 19%. As per the statement, Coforge's North America unit generated only 25% revenue from US West and Mid-west, whereas post-acquisition the North America business is expected to witness a jump of 50% to \$1.4 billion.

Infosys to offer entry-level salary of up to ₹21 lakh

SANAL SUDEVAN @Chennai

INFOSYS on Friday confirmed that it is offering compensation of up to ₹21 lakh per annum for specialised roles for freshers graduating in the academic year 2026.

Responding to a TNIE query Shaji Mathew, Group CHRO, Infosys, said the company continues to lead the industry in its AI-first approach across everything it designs and delivers for clients. He further said achieving this vision requires not only upskilling its existing workforce but also bringing in digitally native talent with deep expertise and high learnability.

"These new hires will be guided and mentored to work on complex problems, advanced technologies, and enterprise grade platforms for our customers



Shaji Mathew, Group CHRO, Infosys

L2 will get ₹16 lakh, while L1 trainees will earn ₹11 lakh. Digital specialist engineer (trainees) will be offered a package of ₹7 lakh per year. These roles are open to graduates with BE, BTech, ME, MTech, MCA and integrated MSc degrees, mostly from computer science, IT, and select circuit branches like ECE and EEE.

Following the Q2 results, Infosys chief financial officer (CFO) Jayesh Sanghrajka said the company has recruited nearly 12,000 freshers in the first half of the financial year 2026, and its target is to hire nearly 20,000 fresh graduates by the end of this fiscal. "We have a net addition of over 8,000 employees. We had set a target at the beginning of the year to hire around 15,000 freshers for FY26," he had said after the results.

LOAN

PNB declares 2 Srei accounts of ₹2.4k cr as fraud

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @Mumbai

STATE-run Punjab National Bank (PNB) has reported a ₹2,434 crore of loan it had extended to crippled infra lender Srei as fraud to the RBI.

The reported fraudulent borrowing is linked to the former promoters of Srei Equipment Finance and Srei Infrastructure Finance, both in the NCLT since 2021.

Other lenders such as Punjab & Sind Bank, Bank of Baroda, and Union Bank of India had also earlier declared their respective loans to Srei companies as fraud.

In an exchange filing on Friday, PNB said of the total fraudulent borrowings, ₹1,240.94 crore are related to Srei Equipment Finance and the remaining ₹1,193.06 crore are related to Srei Infrastructure Finance.

The third-largest public sector lender also said it has 100% provisions for these loans.

According to the bank, the declaring these two accounts as frauds are based on a forensic audit by KPMG, which pointed to irregularities such as loans to connected parties and potential evergreening of loans.

However, Srei founder Hemant Kanoria has challenged the KPMG report as the basis for the fraud classification, noting the matter is sub-judice.

The Srei group has been undergoing insolvency resolution process since 2021, and the National Company Law Tribunal has approved a resolution plan submitted by the National Asset Reconstruction Company in 2023. Like DHFL and Reliance Capital, the Srei group was sent to the NCLT by the Reserve Bank in October 2021 after it had found governance issues and defaults and the regulator superseded the boards of Srei Infrastructure Finance and Srei Equipment Finance. In February 2023, NARCL emerged as the successful bidder for SIFL and SEFL which together owed ₹32,750 crore to lenders.

Tata Steel faces €1.4 bn lawsuit in Netherlands

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

STITCHING Frisse Wind.nu (SFW), a Dutch nonprofit organisation, has sent legal notice to Tata Steel's unit seeking €1.4 billion (about ₹14,800 crore) compensation for alleged environmental harm and health damages caused to people in the Netherlands due to hazardous emissions.

Tata Steel in a regulatory filing to the exchanges said on December 19, 2025, SFW served a writ of summons on two subsidiaries of Tata Steel Limited - Tata Steel Nederland B.V. and Tata Steel IJmuiden B.V. (collectively referred to as TSN).

The proceedings pertain to

allegations by SFW, holding TSN liable for alleged damages caused by TSN's operations in Velsen-Noord (including, most importantly, emissions of hazardous and/or harmful substances). Tata Steel's subsidiary TSN said that it is fully prepared to defend against the claim. "In our assessment, SFW faces considerable challenges

regarding both admissibility and the merits of its case. Although, TSN is yet to receive the exhibits on which SFW intends to rely, TSN has already identified substantial grounds for defence," said Tata Steel.

As per Tata Steel's filing, SFW seeks € 1.4 billion in compensation on account of increased susceptibility to various health issues and the loss of enjoyment of homes. As per TSN, SFW has provided no supporting evidence for the claim, making it unsubstantiated and speculative.

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Cos raise ₹2 lakh crore in 2025, Dalal Street sees average 1 IPO a day

BENN KOCHUVEEDAN @Mumbai

DALAL STREET is closing 2025 just shy of ₹2 lakh crore (₹2 trillion) fundraising through the primary markets, mopping up as much as ₹1.88 lakh crore from 365 initial share sales—104 mainboard issues and the rest SME issues—eclipsing the 2024 record of mopping up ₹1.68 lakh crore.

In comparison, in a decade from 2015, companies have raised over ₹7.5 lakh crore from IPOs, as per historical data from Prime Database. In 2015, 21 IPOs raised ₹13,614 crore, online publication.

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which rose to ₹26,494 crore in 2016 from 26 issues, 2017 saw 36 issuers collecting ₹67,147 crore, but it declined in 2018 to ₹30,959 crore from 24 issues, and 2019 saw a sharper decline to ₹12,362 crore from 16 issues. Come 2020,

15 issues raised ₹26,613 crore, which rose manifold to ₹18,723 crore in 2021 from 63 issuers, but more than halved in 2022 to just about ₹59,302 crore in 2022 from 63 issues, and going down further to ₹54,125 crore in 2023

from 57 issues, but rose sharply in 2024 to ₹1,68,545 crore from 91 mainboard issues raising ₹1,59,784 crore and 240 small issues raising ₹8,761 crore.

But listing gains are the lowest this year with average IPO gains being at just 9%—lowest in a decade. This was 11% in 2022, 29% in 2023 and 30% in 2024. Only a small number of the 91 listings delivered returns above 50%, while many traded lower within three to six months of debut.

As per Chittorgarh.com, of the 103 mainboard IPOs, only 53 issues made listing day gains, 49 made listing day losses, 67 are trading in gains and 35 are

in losses. Of the 267 SME issues, 123 made listing day gains, 133 made listing day losses and 162 are in green while 94 are in the red now. Foreign investors continued to participate in primary markets, infusing \$7.55 billion into IPOs, even as they sold \$24 billion in secondary markets.

NBFCs, capital goods, technology, healthcare, and consumer durables are the leading sectors in terms of funds raised in the year under review with the largest mainboard issues being Tata Capital (₹15,512 cr), HDB Financial Services (₹12,500 cr), LG Electronics India (₹11,605 cr), and ICICI Prudential AMC (₹10,602 cr).

MSMEs seek collateral-free credit

PUSHPITA DEY @ New Delhi

WITH the Budget around the corner, the MSME industry has asked the finance ministry for relief in terms of taxes and better access to credit. In a letter written to finance ministry by the Association of Indian Entrepreneur (AIE), the major demand of the association is the access to statutory collateral-free lending up to ₹10 crore for micro enterprises with interest capped at 6-7%.

The AIE requested for an Export Risk Equalisation Fund to compensate micro exporters

impacted by sudden tariff hikes and temporary duty drawback enhancement and interest relief during tariff shocks.

The MSME industries expect the government to ease credit constraints for micro enterprises in next year's Budget. Among their other demands include automatic renewal of working capital limits for GST-compliant units, dedicated micro-lending targets for

SIDBI and public sector banks, built-in interest subvention during stress phases, and interest-free loans to support import-substitution projects.

Budget 2025-26 had unveiled a raft of measures to improve credit flow to MSMEs including a credit guarantee cover for micro and small enterprises that was raised to ₹10 crore from ₹5 crore and a guaranteed cover of ₹20 crore for start-ups, with a reduced fee of 1% for loans in 27 priority sectors.

ASIANOMICS

JAPAN

CABINET APPROVES RECORD ₹785 BILLION BUDGET

Japan's cabinet under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Friday approved a record budget of ₹785 billion for next fiscal year, seeking to balance expansionary spending plans with concerns over rising debt by keeping new bond issuance in check. Amid higher government bond yields and a weak yen, the Takaichi administration has moved to reassure markets that it will avoid excessive borrowing or unfunded tax cuts. The budget for the fiscal beginning in April, to be submitted to parliament early next year, stands at a record 122.3 trillion yen, up from 115.2 trillion yen in the current year. Despite the rise in spending, new government bond issuance will rise only marginally.

CHINA

REVISES 2024 GDP FIGURES DOWNWARDS

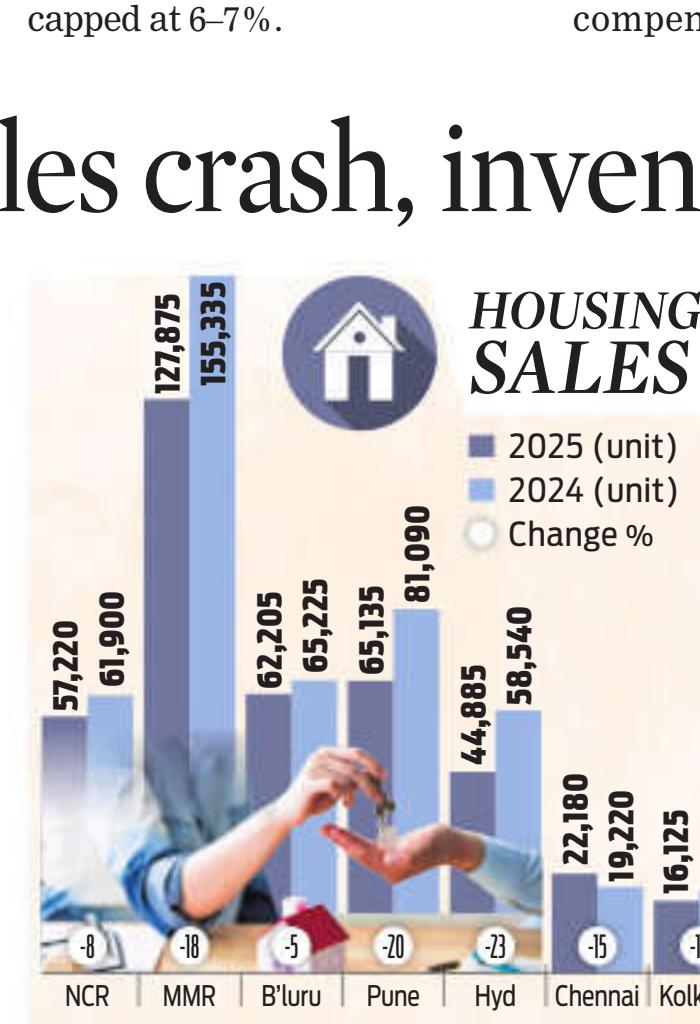
China on Friday said it had revised gross domestic product (GDP) figures for last year downwards, state media reported. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of the world's second-largest economy, GDP was revised to 134,806 trillion yuan (about \$19.16 trillion), down 101.8 billion yuan from the preliminary figure. But the final verified GDP growth rate for 2024 remained at 5%, unchanged from the preliminary calculation, said the NBS. China's GDP target for this year remains at "around 5%", said a bureau report. "China's annual GDP goes through two stages of accounting: preliminary calculation and final verification.

The final verification is conducted based on the annual statistical data, final fiscal accounts, and departmental administrative records," the report said.

THAILAND

LEVERAGES NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY TO BOOST TOURISM

As thousands of fireworks illuminated the sky over the Chao Phraya River, marking the finale of the annual light festival, Thailand has signaled a step forward in its strategy to revitalise the tourism sector through "night economy." The Vtij Chao Phraya 2025 festival transformed Bangkok's main riverbank into an open-air cultural stage, with 15 curated locations ranging from historic sites and temples to bridges and contemporary landmarks adorned with multimedia light installations, laser effects, projection mapping, and drone shows. As per the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the 45-day extravaganza attracted over 1.7 million visitors and generated an estimated revenue of 5.5 billion baht (\$177 mn). Beyond the visual spectacle, the event served as a pilot for the government's broader "night economy" policy, designed to extend visitors' spending hours and encourage overnight stays.



western markets together led residential sales in India's top 7 cities in 2025, comprising a 49% overall share. Besides Chennai (up 15%), sales declined YoY in all the other six major markets (down 23%), Pune (down 20%) and MMR (down 18%) regis-

tered sharply decline in sales. Annually, unsold inventory in the top 7 cities rose 4% by 2025-end, largely because of tapered demand and increased new supply in the year. Approximately 5.77 lakh units are currently on the primary sales market in these cities.

2025 will be one to remember for teams that finally broke decade-long hoodoos. A look at a few...

YEAR OF FIRSTS

ROYAL ECSTASY

"Ee Sala Cup Namde" (in Kannada: this year the cup will be ours) finally became "Ee Sala Cup Namdu" (this year, the cup is ours) as the Royal Challengers Bengaluru finally got their hands on an IPL trophy 17 years after its inception. For Virat Kohli — who went to his knees and broke down in tears — the elusive title has been captured in what has been a decorated career.

PROTEAS TITLE PRAYERS ANSWERED AT MECCA OF CRICKET

After waiting for years and despite boasting of some of the finest cricketers in the recent years, the South African team failed to lay their hands on an ICC trophy. They had come close but it still remained a dream. South Africa made history at Lord's in England when they rallied to defeat Australia in the World Test Championship final in June this year. At the core of it was skipper Temba Bavuma, whose position as captain since 2022 was constantly debated. Not a bad way to silence critics by securing South Africa their first ICC title.



SPURS DELIGHT

For Tottenham Hotspur, their 17-year-wait of winning a trophy ended, by winning the Europa League title against Manchester United. Considering the fact that Tottenham finished one place above relegation in the 24/25 English Premier League, this European glory was of increased significance.

HISTORIC NIGHT IN MUMBAI

After the heartbreak in 2017 ODI World Cup final and failure to win in 2022, the senior women's team finally broke the jinx and won the title in November this year. With the popularity of women's cricket slowly rising, this win could spark another revolution in the country. Harmanpreet Kaur and Co, despite a brief hiccup in the league stages, beat defending champions Australia in the semifinals before seeing off South Africa in the final in front of a jubilant crowd at DY Patil Stadium.



MINNOWS MAKE IT TO BIG STAGE

Curacao — the smallest ever nation with a population of 156,000 — historically qualified to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Their spot was confirmed after avoiding defeat to Jamaica away from home. Cape Verde — another island nation off the West African coast — also made history as they finished on top of their qualifying group which featured big teams like Cameroon. When teams representing these nations walk out to the pitch for their first game, expect a lot of fanfare, passion and emotion.



Elsewhere...

PSG EUROPEAN CHAMPS

After pouring truckloads of money into new recruits, Paris Saint Germain finally broke their European duck, blazing through Inter Milan in June's UEFA Champions League final in Munich. They were ridiculed for their continental failures, for they had the household names in Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe at their disposal once and still failed to win the title.



CHANDRA PRABHU @Chennai

WHILE all the focus has been on Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's performances in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, another player that may also garner sizeable amount of attention is Rishabh Pant. The wicketkeeper-batter's high-risk, high-reward approach has made heads turn in Test cricket, but he has not had a similar impact in white-ball cricket. That lack of influence has put him in the background for some time now. When the national squad for the upcoming men's T20 World Cup was announced, Pant was clearly not part of the equation and it was far from a surprise to see his name missing. Such has been his predicament in the shorter formats in recent times.

The last time he featured in an ODI match was August last year. He was part of the Champions Trophy that India won at the start of the year but he didn't feature in a single game. Likewise, it was the same story during the recent ODI series against South Africa. His below-par shows in recent outings in the Test format has also not helped his case. And his last T20I match came in the same year in July. He's clearly down the pecking order in the short formats of the game. For that reason, his 79-ball 70 for Delhi on Friday in the ongoing domestic competition is a welcome balm for the 28-year-old. Thanks to his contribution, Delhi registered a seven-run over Gujarat in their Group D meeting at the BCCI Centre of Excellence on the outskirts of Bengaluru. Just a couple of days back, he had been dismissed for 5 against Andhra in the first outing. While Pant might have a lot of catching up to do, this knock could give him the confidence going forward.

Before Pant walked onto the pitch, it was Virat Kohli who orchestrated Delhi's quick start. He rallied to a 29-ball half-century

Rishabh Pant (L) in action against Gujarat on Friday | SHASHIDHAR BYRAPPAN

SELECT BRIEF SCORES

Group A: Tamil Nadu 280 in 49.3 ovs (Mohamed Ali 57, Narayan Jagadeesan 55, Sai Sudharsan 51); Kumar Kartikeya 3/62) lost to Madhya Pradesh 283/8 in 49.2 ovs (Yash Dube 92, Himanshu Mantri 90; Govith Ganesh 4/54) by 2 wickets; Kerala 48/7 in 50 overs (Mohammed Azharuddin 84, Babu Aparajith 7; Abhilash Shetty 3/59) lost to Karnataka 285/2 in 48.2 ovs (Karan Nair 130 not out, Devdutt Padikkal 124) by 8 wickets; Group B: Uttar Pradesh 367/4 in 50 ovs (Aryan Juyal 134, Rinku Singh 106 not out; Taranpreet Singh 2/74) bt Chandigarh 140 all out in 29.3 ovs (Manan Vohra 32; Zeeshan Ansar 4/29) by 227 runs; Group C: Mumbai: 331/7 in 50 ovs (Hardik Tamore 93, Sarfaraz Khan 55, Musheer Khan 55; Devendra Bora 3/74) bt Uttrakhand: 280/9 in 50 ovs (Yuvraj Choudhary 96); Group D: Railways: 266/9 in 50 ovs (Ravi Singh 76, Ansh Yadav 59, Satyanarayan Raju 3/41, Narasimha Raju 3/68) lost to Andhra 271/4 in 44.4 ovs (Ricky Bhui 76, Nitish Kumar Reddy 55 not out; Karn Sharma 3/46).

ry — his 84th in List A format. He scored 77 of Delhi's 108 runs before getting stumped by Urvil Patel off a beautiful delivery from left-arm spinner Vishal Jayswal.

Walking in at 98/3 in the 20th over, Pant took a conservative approach. According to partnership statistics, he was at 5 off 10 balls (4th wicket with Kohli), 26 off 26 balls (5th wicket with Ba-

doni), before taking 62 balls to reach 50. He was stuck to his crease, and avoided any extravagant shots. But that eventually changed, post his fifty. It began when Ravi Bishnoi — who was brought back to the attack — saw his deliveries slammed to long on. From thereon, it seemed like Pant was in his natural habitat — shots-off-the-crease, sweep shots deep towards backwards square leg as he rushed to 20 in his next 16 balls after reaching his fifty. But the pick of the lot would be the shots deep from the crease, where he swivelled his bat to a ball moving outside off and the result being the ball on the covers' boundary. With more innings like this, he could give selectors something to think about ahead of future series.

Rohit goes for duck

Days after he slammed a 94-ball 155 against Sikkim, former India captain Rohit Sharma suffered a golden duck in Mumbai's win against Uttarakhand in Jaipur in a Group C tie. Put to bat first, the lanky medium fast bowler Devendra Bora (3/74) scalped the most memorable victim of his career when he dug one short and Rohit instinctively went for a pull shot.

Friday's results: Egypt 1-0 South Africa; Angola 1-1 Zimbabwe.

EXPRESS READ

Muddappa back for drag nationals finale

CHENNAI: After a measured first half of the season, ace Bengaluru biker Hemant Muddappa will be returning this weekend with the title in mind as the final two rounds of the MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship 2025 gets underway here on Saturday. The 15-time National champion will chase yet another milestone, taking part in four categories.

Court restores Jaiveer's post as EFI secy general

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Friday has restored the position of Colonel (retired) Jaiveer Singh as the secretary general of Equestrian Federation of India (EFI), holding his suspension by the federation's Executive Committee illegal and restored his authority. Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chanda on December 22 restrained EFI from extending Singh's suspension.

Sr nat'l: Surya, Shruti enter semifinals

VIJAYAWADA: Producing major upsets, local favourite Surya Charisma Tamiri and seasoned campaigner Shruti Mundada ousted the top two seeds — Unnati Hooda and Anupama Upadhyaya — to advance to the women's singles semifinals of the senior national badminton meet on Friday. Surya sealed a 21-12, 21-15 quarterfinal win against Unnati. Shruti beat Anupama 22-20, 21-12.

Double delight for pistol shooter Suraj



Madhya Pradesh's Suraj Sharma delivered a golden double, sweeping both the senior and junior men's titles in the 25m rapid fire pistol at the national shooting championship. Suraj topped the senior final with 31 hits, finishing three clear of reigning champion Vijayveer Sidhu of Punjab (28 hits). Rajasthan's Bhavesh Shekhawat claimed bronze.

newindianexpress.com

Not a very healthy sight

Amidst few highs, sports in India also saw painful lows. A look...

NO FOOTBALL LEAGUE YET

The country is still yet to witness the start of its premier football league — the 2025/26 Indian Super League — and players, coaches, staff and many depending on the league are left high and dry. The agreement between All India Football Federation (AIFF) and its commercial arm Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) in organising the league expired early December and ever since, no new organisers have been found.

INDIA'S DOPING SHAME PERSISTS

The country has yet again topped doping charts, with 260 Adverse Analytical Findings (AAF) being confirmed by World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) recently. To make things more embarrassing, no other country has crossed 100 cases, exposing the large scale of India's doping issue despite several measures and strict guidelines in place.

MODEST RETURNS FOR BADMINTON

Despite good track-record in recent memory, India's premier doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty could not collect another doubles gold this year. In the singles event, it was largely a struggle for big names like PV Sindhu, HS Prannoy, Kidambi Srikanth, Lakshya Sen salvaged his year by winning the Australian Open in November. Ayush Shetty showed promise after his US Open success in June this year.

TOUGH TIMES CONTINUE FOR TENNIS

Little to nothing has changed after a tumultuous 2024 for Indian tennis on the administrative front. After last year's elections of the sport's national governing body — The All India Tennis Association (AITA) remained unannounced, two factions within the federation reportedly announced their own team managers for the Davis cup matches. On the court, no player is yet to breach the top 100s, as India's best, are still ranked somewhere in the 250s

AIFF proposes 20-year plan to organise ISL

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Chennai

THE beleaguered All India Football Federation (AIFF) had a meeting with all the stakeholders on Friday and submitted a proposal to run the Indian Super League. According to the discussions and document shared in the meeting, the AIFF has said that the league would be "Owned and Operated by the AIFF under the aegis of its new constitution." The AIFF has also proposed that all revenue share will return to the nation

al governing body after every season. And the period of this arrangement would be for 20 seasons that would be calculated from June 1 to May 31 of next year and after every season, it is to be redistributed/re-tendered. The proposal also speaks of relegation.

"Each participating Club would pay the AIFF a 'standard participation fee' of Rs 1 Crore a year at the beginning of the season directly to the AIFF," said the proposal. "This would be independent

of any calculations of the 'Central Operating Expenditure', however, this amount would be fully reimbursable from the central revenue prior to distribution of 'Net Revenue'. As for the initial budget the proposed "total outlay for the purpose of the Indian Super League would be Rs 70 crore for the first season which would be invested into the competition as a 'Central Operations Budget.' Apparently, the total participation fee for all clubs

would be at 20 per cent of the central operational budget of the league. "In case the board decides to raise the 'central operational budget' by 10 per cent in the future, the 'standard participation fee' would proportionately increase," said the proposal.

CFG exit Mumbai

City Football Group (CFG), the holding company which runs EPL club Manchester City, has divested its shares back to the parent company of Mumbai City FC, it confirmed on Friday.

Salah spot on as Egypt beat South Africa

AGENCIES @ Agadir (Morocco)

MOHAMED Salah scored as 10-man Egypt beat South Africa 1-0 in Agadir on Friday to become the first qualifiers for the knockout stage of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations.

Salah converted a penalty on 45 minutes, and South Africa were denied a spot-kick late in the second half when Yasser Ibrahim appeared to handle the ball inside the box. Salah came to Morocco after not starting in five Liverpool matches — his omission leading to an outburst against manager Arne Slot. Egypt were reduced to 10 men in first-half added time when right-back Mohamed Hany was shown a second yellow card for a stamp, followed by a red.

Friday's results: Egypt 1-0 South Africa; Angola 1-1 Zimbabwe.

Deepti in record books as Ind seal series

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Chennai

INDIA all-round Deepti Sharma etched her name into global cricket folklore, becoming the first-ever cricketer across the men's and women's game to register 1000 runs and 150 wickets in T20 Internationals.

The historic milestone came during the third T20I against Sri Lanka in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday, underlining Deepti's status as one of the most complete white-ball cricketers the sport has seen.

With a decisive three-wicket spell, Deepti also rose to joint-highest wicket-taker in women's T20I history, drawing level with Australia's Megan Schutt on 151 wickets.

Sri Lanka's Kavisha Dilhari became her landmark 150th scalp, falling in the 14th over.

Deepti, the player of the Tournament at the 2025 ICC Women's World Cup, was re-



Deepti Sharma (C) celebrates with her teammates on Friday | BP DEEPU

cently bought for ₹3.2 crore by UP Warriorz.

On the day, the right-arm off-spinner's figures of 3 for 18 helped the team restrict Sri Lanka to 112/7 in 20 overs. While it was a significant day for Deepti, it was also a memorable outing for pacer Renuka Singh, who was the top wicket-taker for the home side. Bar-

ring Chamari Athapaththu, who was Deepti's first wicket, Renuka dismissed all the other top-order batters, returning with figures of 4/21 in four overs.

The visiting batters, after a slow start, could never find their footing and ended up with a sub-par total of 112/7. In their chase, opener Shafali Verma sparkled with an unbeaten fifty (79 runs off 42 balls).

She single-handedly dismantled the opposition bowlers, guiding India home with 40 balls to spare. After facing three dot balls, Shafali danced down the track to clobber a towering 83-metre six over long-off. She continued punishing the Sri Lankan bowlers, smashing 11 boundaries and three sixes. With this victory, India have an unassailable 3-0 lead over Sri Lanka in the five-match T20I series. **Brief scores:** SL 112/7 in 20 ovs (Dulan Perera 25; Renuka 4/21; Deepti 3/18) lost to India 115/2 in 13.2 ovs (S Verma 79 n.o.)

THE ASHES

Aus lead Eng by 46 runs after crazy day at MCG

AGENCIES @ Melbourne

AN astounding 20 wickets fell on a frantic day one of the fourth Ashes Test on Friday with Australia all out for 152 before storming back to dismiss England for 110 and leave the clash on a knife-edge. England skipper Ben Stokes won a key toss on a green track and his quicks feasted after sending in the hosts under overcast skies in front of 94,199 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

It was the biggest cricket crowd ever at the cavernous arena, exceeding the 93,013 who watched the 2015 World Cup final, and they witnessed the home side collapse with Josh Tongue grabbing 5-45. But England fared even worse, slumping

to 16-4 and never recovering, leaving Australia to face one over before stumps, which nightwatchman Scott Boland safely negotiated with Travis Head at the other end.

Australia were 4-0 at the close with Boland on four, 46 ahead, with Head yet to face a ball.

"We saw how tough it was when we batted. The ball was nipping around and we needed to bowl in the right areas," Nesser said.



Englandman to take five wickets in an innings in a Test at the MCG since Dean Headley and Darren Gough in 1998. "When I'm at my best I'm bowling at that fuller length. Stokes has spoken to us quite a bit about it, going a touch fuller but hitting the pitch hard.

"If we get the ball in the same areas tomorrow we can get them three of four wickets down in the first hour."

Australia bowler Michael Nesser, who took 4-45, was not making any predictions for the second innings after a day when the ball dominated the bat.

"We saw how tough it was when we batted. The



Anil Jauhri, Former CEO, National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies



Dr. Y Raghuramulu, former Director of Central Coffee Research Institute



Keerthi D Souza, a Sustainability Expert

REWRITTEN INDIA'S COFFEE STORY – FROM SHADE TO STANDARDS

As the Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI) marks its centenary, India introduces new certification standards INDICOFS that will shape the global sustainability landscape for Indian coffee

In celebration of its 100th anniversary, the Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI) has launched the Indian Coffee Sustainability Standards (INDICOFS) through the Coffee Board of India. This initiative is more than just a certification scheme; it represents a significant shift in how agricultural sustainability is defined, measured, and valued in international trade.

For the first time, a major coffee producer from the Global South has created comprehensive sustainability standards that are rooted in its own ecological and social contexts while also incorporating insights from various global frameworks. The new standards present a fresh opportunity for Indian coffee on the world stage – a new identity for everyone's daily cup.

Indian coffee is predominantly produced by smallholder farmers, with over 95 per cent of coffee holdings belonging to small and marginal growers. This coffee-centric farming system plays a vital socio-economic role by providing consistent employment for rural communities and significantly reducing migration from rural to urban areas. As an export-oriented crop, most of India's coffee is sent to international markets, with Europe being a key destination.



@ CENTRAL COFFEE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The three-tier structure of INDICOFS promotes continuous improvement, with each level building toward world-class sustainability performance.

● **DEMOCRATIZING SUSTAINABILITY:** One of INDICOFS's most significant innovations is making sustainability certification accessible to small and marginal farmers. The current global certifi-

cation landscape can be challenging for smallholders due to high costs and requirements that do not always reflect the realities of small-scale farming. By enabling Coffee Board assessments for small farmers at Level 1, INDICOFS expands access to sustainability premiums. This recognizes that sustainable agriculture often occurs at small scales, managed by farmers with extensive ecological knowledge but limited financial resources.

● **INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION:** The development of INDICOFS showcases the enhanced institutional capacity of Indian coffee research. As CCRI enters its second century, the Core Technical Committee brings together diverse expertise – scientists, sustainability professionals, and certification experts – and incorporates feedback from farmers, exporters, and trade associations through consultation. The resulting framework balances rigor with practicality, ambition with achievability.

● **TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER:** INDICOFS harnesses India's digital infrastructure to enable new possibilities not available when international standards were established. Satellite monitoring, blockchain traceability, and mobile connectivity facilitate cost-effective verification and direct engagement with farmers. This integration with evolving digital systems creates an ecosystem where sustainability verification becomes part of everyday business rather than an additional burden. This systematic approach could represent India's contribution to global sustainability practices.

● **MARKET REALITIES:** The ultimate success of INDICOFS hinges on market recognition. The framework is designed to complement existing certification systems while addressing the specific needs of Indian coffee cultivation. As consumers increasingly seek transparency in sustainability claims, a government-backed framework grounded in scientific principles offers additional credibility and assurance.

● **BROADER IMPLICATIONS:** The significance of INDICOFS extends beyond coffee. It demonstrates that sustainability standards can originate from producing countries, enriching the global dialogue on sustainable agriculture. The shade-grown coffee gardens of Coorg offer valuable lessons in sustainable farming for the world. INDICOFS embodies this contribution.

The launch of INDICOFS marks a pivotal moment when India began to define what sustainability means for its unique coffee systems. In the second century of organized coffee development, this shift toward sustainability could transform the future of Indian coffee.

mate Change (MoEFC), Ministry of Power, and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) requested the court in November to reconsider these directives, arguing they would adversely impact India's power sector and its energy transition goals away from fossil fuels. India committed to the Paris Agreement in 2015 to transition to non-fossil fuels and reduce emissions to mitigate climate change.

SC STRIKES A FINE BALANCE TO SAVE THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @New Delhi

After six years, the Supreme Court issued its final order on the conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) or (Ardeotis nigriceps) by revising the priority conservation area while promoting renewable energy in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Supreme

Court's order strikes a fine balance between green energy promotion and conservation efforts.

In 2019, environmental expert MK Ranjitsinh filed a public interest litigation (PIL) to protect the birds from the impacts of human activities in their habitats. The PIL requested interim directions to the governments of Rajasthan and Gujarat to ensure predator-proof fencing, controlled grazing and to halt any further permits for installing overhead power lines, wind turbines and solar infrastructure in GIB's potential habitats identified by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

The PIL also sought installation of bird diverters on power lines and proposed to shift power transmission cables underground.

This case is unique as it involves a conflict between the goals of addressing climate change through generation of green energy via solar fields and the need to preserve the GIB. The solar and wind mill installation have encroached upon the habitat of critically endangered species like the GIB and Lesser Florican (LF) in the Desert National Park of Rajasthan. Earlier, the court had pronounced two interim orders on it. Both the GIB and LF have been listed as Critically Endangered in the Red List of Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 2011. The latest count says there are only 144 GIBs in India - 140 in Rajasthan and 4 in Kutch (Gujarat). In a 2018 survey, the estimated population was 150, including 25 birds in government captivity.

In its final order, the Supreme Court directed renewable energy companies to relocate some overhead power lines underground within two years in areas prioritised for the conservation of the GIB and LF in the Desert National Park of Rajasthan. The court established a revised conservation area of 14,753 sq km for the GIB and strictly instructed power companies not to violate this zone under any circumstances.

First interim order on GIB

The first interim order on April 19, 2021, restricted the establishment of overhead transmission lines over a vast area of approximately 99,000 sq km. The order also mandated the formation of a three-member committee to assess the feasibility of laying high-voltage underground power lines. Additionally, it directed measures to install bird diverters and underground power lines to ensure uninterrupted flight for the GIB and LF.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Cli-

mate Change (MoEFC), Ministry of Power, and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) requested the court in November to reconsider these directives, arguing they would adversely impact India's power sector and its energy transition goals away from fossil fuels. India committed to the Paris Agreement in 2015 to transition to non-fossil fuels and reduce emissions to mitigate climate change.

Moreover, the government also contended in court that the designated area was larger than the actual habitat of the GIB and constituted a significant portion of the country's solar and wind energy potential. It also argued that undergrounding high-voltage power lines was not technically or financially feasible.

Modification of the interim order

On March 21, 2024, the court modified its prior blanket ban on the installation of renewable energy power lines and formed an expert committee to assess the situation and find a balance between the conservation of endangered species and the necessity of combating climate change. The court stated that the decline in GIB and LF populations had various causes, including low fecundity, habitat fragmentation, loss of habitat, predation and loss of prey. It emphasised that converting overhead lines to underground transmission lines might not significantly contribute to species conservation.

Dwindling GIB populations

The GIB, locally known as Godawan, is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world and a flagship species for the arid and semi-arid grasslands of the Indian subcontinent. This majestic bird symbolises the health of fragile grassland ecosystems. Historically found across much of North and West India, the GIB's critically endangered population is now confined to a small region of Rajasthan.

The Rajasthan government initiated 'Project Godawan' on June 5, 2013. Previously, GIBs were heavily hunted for their meat and as trophies by local sportsmen. The birds nest on the ground and primarily feed on pests, termites, rats and snakes, helping maintain ecological balance in the desert. However, the expansion of the Indira Gandhi irrigation canal led to increased agricultural activities in the arid regions of Jaisalmer and Barmer which damaged their habitats. Additionally, use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in agriculture disrupted the GIB's food chain and hindered its population growth. The introduction of renewable energy grids aimed at combating global warming further reduced the GIB's available habitats.

High-voltage power lines posed a significant risk to GIBs. As one of the largest birds in the world, they have inadequate frontal vision, making it difficult for them to detect power lines during flight. This often results in collisions with the lines, leading to electrocution. "The main threats to these birds are

S. E. RAILWAY – TENDER

For on behalf of President of India, the General Manager (Engg.), South Eastern Railway, Garden Reach Kolkata-700043 invites e-tender for the following works: **Tender No. : BR-HQ-KGP-25-26-12; Description of the work : 'Khargpur Division'** Conversion of existing bridges into Composite girders/Ballasted decks for running of 25T Axle loaded freight trains 100Kmph in (a) Bridge No. 69 DN (Span 4x18.3m) in between station Ghatshila-Dhulbhimgarh Bridge No. 94UP (Span 2x18.3m) in between station Jhargram-Gidhni (b) Bridge No. 217 UP (Span 9x18.3m) in between station Raghatai-Aranda (c) Bridge No. 235UP (Span 9x18.3m) in between station Basta-Nuagan Mayurbhanj Road-Basta (e) Bridge No. 264UP (Span 9x18.3m) in between station Haldipada-Balasore (f) Bridge No. 238 UP (Span 3x12.2m) in between station Nuagan Mayurbhanj Road-Rupsa Junction & Bridge No. 239 UP (Span 2x12.2m+2x18.3m) in between station Nuagan Mayurbhanj Road-Basta (g) Bridge No. 239 DN (Span 2x12.2m+2x18.3m) in between station Rupsa Junction-Nuagan Mayurbhanj Road & Bridge No. 258 UP (Span 4x12.2m) in between station Haldipada-Balasore (h) Bridge No. 217DN (Span 9x18.3m) in between station Amarardao-Rajghat & Br. No. 234UP (Span 5x12.2m) in between station Basta-Nuagan Mayurbhanj Road (i) Bridge No. 168DN (Span 4x12.2m+2x18.3m) in between station Bakhtrabad-Narayangarh & Bridge No. 176 DN (Span 3x12.2m) in between station Belia-Bakhtrabad." Tender Value : ₹ 125,56,63,525.18; Earnest Money : ₹ 64,28,300.00; Tender Document Cost : Nil; Tender Closing Date Time : 30.01.2026 - 11:30 hrs. Period of Completion : 24 (Twenty Four) Months; Interested Tenderer's may visit website www.irps.gov.in for full details/ description of the tenders and to know the status of this tender so as to submit their bids online. Physical/manual tender for this work will not be accepted. (PR-989)

For and on behalf of President of India, the Chief Engineer (Can) MGRCC Invites e-tender for the following works: Following tender has been uploaded on website www.irps.gov.in. The tender will be closed at 12:00 Hrs on date : e-Tender Notice No. : 4590-GRC-CE-C-01-21-2025; Brief Description of Works: Composite work for Capacity Augmentation of ELS/BKSC to increase the honing capacity-Up to 300 locos (Ph-1) at ELS/BKSC, Creation of Advance maintenance facilities for Electric locomotives at ELS/BKSC & Creation of Trip Shed at ELS/ BKSC-Execution of Earthwork in Formation & Cutting including P. Way Linking Work with Ballasting including Loop Lines & Siding, Construction of Sheds & Service Building, Road & Platform, Circulating Area including other related work, including S&T & Electrical work in Bakaro of S. E. Railway; Closing Date : 22.01.2026; Approx. Cost: ₹ 65.54 Crore, Bid Security: ₹ 34,27,100/- & Completion period: 18 months; Interested tenderers may visit website www.irps.gov.in for full details/description/specification of the tenders and submit their bids online. In no case manual tenders for these items will be accepted. NB: "Prospective Bidders may regularly visit www.irps.gov.in to participate in all other tenders." (PR-1007)

BENGALURU NORTH CITY CORPORATION

Office of the Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, Zone-1, No. 2152/20, Defence colony, 9th Main, D Block, Sahakarnagar, BNCC Office, Bengaluru-560092

No. BNCC-Z1/EE/BTP/KPPP/PR/03/2025-26 Date: 26.12.2025

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION

(Through GOK Karnataka Public Procurement Portal only)

Tenders on item rate basis are invited by the undersigned for the works mentioned below from the registered contractors of Bengaluru North City Corporation or equivalent registration with CPWD / KPWD / Railways / MES or any State Government Organizations. (Standard Tender Document KW-1,2,3,4)

SI. No.

Name of the Work

Single Cover Tender

1 Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 05 Kogilu. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 60,000/-, Category: Others.**

2 Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 06 Jakkuru. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 60,000/-, Category: Others.**

3 Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 07 Thanisandra. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 60,000/-, Category: Others.**

4 Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 08 Amruthahalli. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 30,000/-, Category: SC.**

5 Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 09 Hebbala Kempapura. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 30,000/-, Category: CAT-I.**

6 Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 10 Byatarayanapura. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 30,000/-, Category: CAT-II(A).**

Two Cover Tender

7 Improvements and Refurbishment of Railway Underbridge at Kodeghalli ward no. 8. **Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 100.00, EMD (in Rupees): 1,00,000/-, Category: ST.**

Calendar of Events: (1) Tender documents can be downloaded from the GOK KPPP website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>. (2) Pre-Bid Meeting will be held on 05.01.2026 at 3:00 p.m. in the Office of the Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, No. 2152/20, Defence Colony, BWSSB Tank Road, Sahakarnagar Office, Bengaluru-560 092. (3) Last Date for uploading the Final proposals is 09.01.2026 up to 4:00 p.m. (4) Date of Opening of Technical Bid is 12.01.2026 after 4:00 p.m. (5) Date of Opening of Financial Bid after Approval of Technical Bid. Further details may be obtained from the above office, during office hours or website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>. Sd/- Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, Zone-1, BNCC

YOUR GUIDE TO SPICY LIVING

INDULGE

Every Friday with THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Environment

SINCE 2011
Critically Endangered in the
Red List of Threatened
Species by IUCN

Extinct
EX EW CR EN VU NT LC

newindianexpress.com

CATCH BENGALURU POLICE COMMISSIONER
SEEMANT KUMAR SINGH, IPS

AS HE TALKS ABOUT
CONTROLLING CRIME IN THE CITY AND
THE HUMAN SIDE OF POLICING

IN A CONVERSATION
WITH
Neha

Scan to listen

Available on: YouTube and Spotify

Event Xpress



Good story, weak writing and execution

PG 4

DAY'S DIARY

Sovereign Indonesia

On this day in 1949, the Dutch formally handed over Indonesia's sovereignty and the Netherlands gave up its claim over the region

SIGNIFICANCE

This act, as part of the Hague Agreement, formally ended four years of armed conflict and diplomatic struggle (1945-1949) between Indonesia and the Dutch



UNITARY STATE

The federal structure of Indonesia was short-lived. By 1950, all constituent states had dissolved, and Indonesia became a unitary state



AGREEMENT REVOKED

The conflict between began once again. On April 21, 1956, six years later, the Indonesian parliament revoked the Hague Agreement



SHREYA VERONICA

AS the year draws to a close, most of us are eager to know what the coming months have in store. But before we step into the new year, it's worth pausing to look back at a year that truly celebrated good food and finger-licking cuisine — experiences that made us fall in love with dining all over again. Hyderabad witnessed a vibrant culinary calendar, packed with standout cafés, inventive food pop-ups, and immersive dining experiences. From global flavours to regional gems, the city indulged in its finest, savouring every bite.

LE MAGNIFIQUE!



HAUTE CUISINE FINDS A MODERN VOICE

Renowned French chef Alexandre Kerbouz brought a refined pop-up experience to Prego at The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace, blending classic French techniques with contemporary flair and subtle Indian influences. With over two decades of experience, Chef Kerbouz is celebrated for his dedication to haute cuisine and his passion for cross-cultural flavours. His Hyderabad pop-up presented a modern interpretation of classic French dishes, offering diners an elegant and thoughtfully curated culinary journey.

SOULFUL FLAVOURS OF TAMIL NADU

From Drumstick Leaf soup to Jeera Samba biryani, Pandya's Virunthu at The Leela Hyderabad celebrated the rich and diverse culinary heritage of Tamil Nadu. Hosted at RAEN — The Chef's Studio, the pop-up moved beyond familiar staples like idli, dosa, and sambar to spotlight regional specialties. Curated by Chef Vijaya Raghavan, the experience featured authentic dishes from Chettinad, Madurai, and Karaikudi. Each plate was hearty, flavourful, and indulgent enough to leave diners in a blissful food coma.



THE WHY JUNCTION

Sandesh

(This comedian is here to tell funny stories about Hyderabad)

IT'S that time of the year again when people start asking, 'Hey, how was your 2025?'

Let's be honest.

The person asking this question has no clear idea how their own year was either.

They've just prepared a highlights package. That's all.

One promotion. One trip they already posted on Instagram. A few likes. No comments asking how they actually got there. Now they ask you this question expecting you to answer before your second sip, so they can jump in and unload their autobiography about how they 'did well' for a couple of days this year.

Which brings me to the real question: why are we even trying to make sense of a full year?

You are a human being. Not a company. You don't need an annual report.

But apps will still try to convince you otherwise. Spotify tells you how many minutes you listened to music. Swiggy tells you how many kilos of biryani you ate. The real truth is told by your bank account, but there is no HDFC Wrapped because they know you'll lose your mind after seeing it.

All these year-end data summaries feel like ideas created by some employee just so their year-end leaves

REWIND PLATES OF THE YEAR



Eshaan's whimsical tablescapes



Multidisciplinary culinary product designer and food stylist, Eshaan Kashyap discusses how he merges culinary creativity with immersive design experiences, paving the way for the next wave of experiential dining

[Read full story](#)

[View photo](#)



At the heart of this whimsical culinary arrangement is a multi-disciplinary artist and designer Eshaan Kashyap, who merges culinary art, design, and storytelling into immersive experiences. Renowned for his innovative approach to food styling, product design, and art direction, Eshaan has created a fusion of art and food, bringing design, food, and experiential dining together in unexpected and delightful ways.

[Read full story](#)

[View photo](#)



How was your year?

don't get rejected.

Think about it logically.

A year has 365 days. To honestly answer 'How was your year?' you would need to remember all 365 days, decide which were good, which were bad, prepare an emotional balance sheet, and then declare whether 2025 was a profit or a loss.

Also notice something else.

This question matters only for the last one week of the year, mostly at parties.

From January to November, nobody is sitting and thinking, 'How is my year shaping up?' But from December 15 onwards, everyone suddenly becomes a life auditor.

And once January 1 arrives, nobody cares. You have resolutions, plans, and fresh pressure. That reflection is over.

The truth is simple. We don't live in years. We live in memories.

Nobody remembers all 365 days. You remember moments. One really good day. One really bad day. And a lot of days where nothing happened.

When people say, 'My year was great', notice what they mention. 'I got promoted', 'I made good money', 'I got married'.

That's not a year. That's a result.

They won't talk about the sixteen-hour workdays, how they hyped their manager like a stand-up act, or how many profiles got rejected before one finally worked out. And somehow, the entire year gets judged only by money, marriage, and promotions. As if health, friends, food, love, and sleep don't count.

Online, a lot of people are saying 2025 was bad. That's normal.

The human brain remembers negative things more clearly. Sadness lasts longer than happiness. We still cry about losing the World Cup final on November 19, 2023, even though we won tournaments after that. That's just how memory works. Sadness has better storage.

So if you feel like your year was bad, it doesn't mean every day was bad. It just means your brain is doing what it does best.

Personally, my answer to 'How was your year?' is simple: 'I don't remember'.

Not because nothing happened.

But because I'm not built to remember 365 things at once.

So this year, instead of asking people for a full-year report, ask better questions. What was your best day? What was your worst day? How many hugs did you get?

Or don't ask anything at all. Just give one.

That already makes the year better.

Happy New Year!

(The writer's views are his own)



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TASTE OF NIKKEI

HYDERABAD GOT A GLIMPSE OF JAPANESE AND PERUVIAN CUISINE POP-UP AT NHCC

[Read full story](#)

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<a href

Business Excellence Means Creating Value, Jobs, and Nation-Building: Experts at 3rd Edition of Hybiz TV Business Excellence Awards 2025 Hyderabad on 23rd December:

On one elegant evening in Hyderabad, public and private sector organizations came together at HICC-Novotel, as Hybiz TV hosted the Business Excellence Awards 2025, 3rd Edition, a celebration of innovation.

Business leaders, entrepreneurs, and public sector representatives shared the stage, marking a moment of unity and achievement across industries. Over 50+ awards were presented, recognising excellence across industries. Leading public sector organisations such as NMDC, NTPC, Union Bank of India, and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd were honoured. Central and state government institutions, including Indian Immunologicals Ltd, Development Commissioner (Handlooms-Govt of India), and the Department of Labour (State), were also recognised, along with international participation from Vietjet Airlines.

The event was graced by distinguished guests Shri Dr. K. Anand Kumar (MD, Indian Immunologicals Ltd), Ms. Kashvi (Miss Universe Telangana 2025), Dr. Narendra Ram Nambula

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HYBIZ TV
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EXCELLENCE
AWARDS 2025
3rd EDITION

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NMDC LTD

NTPC LTD



INDIAN OIL CORPORATION LTD (IOCL)

UNION BANK OF INDIA (UBI)

RECOGNITION OF EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS



(Chairman & MD, Lifespan Private Limited), Shri AVPS Chakravarthi (Global Ambassador, World Packaging Organisation, Chairman-Federation of Pharma Entrepreneurs (TG&AP)), Shri M. Ravinder Reddy (Director – Marketing, Bharathi Cement), and Shri Gummi Ram Reddy (President Elect, CREDAL National).

Speaking at the event, Dr. K. Anand Kumar emphasized the role of entrepreneurship in economic development. "Business excellence is about creating value for society, generating employment, and contributing to nation-building," he said.

Shri Chakravarthi AVPS spoke about the importance of recognizing business achievements. "Such awards motivate entrepreneurs to push boundaries and achieve greater heights," he noted.

Hybiz TV Managing Directors M. Raj Gopal and Dr. J. Sandhya Rani stated that the "awards aim to highlight entrepreneurship, innovation, and quality, to create role models and showcase what dedication and excellence can achieve in business".

The program concluded successfully with awardees expressing pride and appreciation for the recognition.

“CELEBRATING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE”

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः। गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः॥



20+ Government Institutions Felicitated at Hybiz TV Education Excellence Awards:

Hyderabad, December 23, 2025: In a glittering celebration, Hybiz TV hosted its prestigious Education Excellence Awards 2025 at HICC Novotel, Hyderabad, recognizing the outstanding contributions of educators and institutions across Telangana.

The grand ceremony witnessed the felicitation of over 50 award winners, with more than 20 honors going to government schools and colleges, marking a significant milestone in acknowledging excellence in the public education sector.

Hybiz TV Education Excellence Awards - 2025 program was attended by EX CBI JD V.V. Lakshminarayana, IPS, Dr. Preeti Reddy (Vice Chairperson - Malla Reddy Vishwavidya Peeth), Y. Guruswamy Naidu (Chairman & Managing Director - Celkon Group), Srinivas Murthy (Director - TV5 News), Narendra Ram Nambula (Lifespan), ARV Badrinath (CGM IOCL - TG & AP), M. Rajgopal

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MALLA REDDY
VISHWAVIDYAPEETH
(Deemed to be University)

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2025

TELANGANA
RISING

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(Founder & MD - Hybiz TV), Dr. J. Sandhyarani (Hybiz One Founder & MD), and others participated in the event.

Former CBI JD V.V. Lakshminarayana stated that in India, we always look towards light. He explained that this light doesn't come from the sun, but through knowledge. He expressed his view "that the comprehensive development of the nation depends on the progress of students and teachers". He appreciated that over 20 awards were presented to government schools and colleges, calling it a significant achievement.

Dr. Preeti Reddy stated that education plays a very important role in everyone's life. She mentioned that schools are the first step towards this. She appreciated how schools are working hard to enhance students' skills, teach values, and foster ethics. She explained the importance of educational institutions. She clarified that achieving marks and scoring well in exams alone are not crucial, but proper behavior, the way of talking to others, and how to build good relationships are also important.



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A GOOD STORY WITH WEAK SCRIPTING AND EXECUTION

The Roshan Meka starrer fails to capture the emotional depth of the real events it's inspired from

SURESH KAVIRAYANI

BHAIRANPALLY village in Telangana is known for its revolt against the Razakars, the private army, during the Nizam's rule in Hyderabad. While the whole of India gained Independence in 1947, Hyderabad State did not. Kasim Razvi founded the Razakars, a private militia, and tortured those who opposed him, and the villagers of Bhairanpally resisted the Razakars and fought back bravely — this is how the village became historically significant, as one of the first to stand up against Razakar atrocities.

Director Pradeep Advaitham chose this historic revolt of Bhairanpally as the backdrop for his film *Champion*, adding a fictional narrative to it. Though the story idea is promising, it should have been narrated in a gripping and more engaging manner. Even though the director has taken cinematic liberties, the film needed strong emotions, as it is based on one of the most important historical movements in Telangana's history.

Champion largely revolves around Michael Williams (Roshan Meka), a football player from Secunderabad who dreams of going to London to play for a Manchester club. However, since his father fought against the British, Michael is denied entry into London. Later, Michael gets an opportunity to go to London, but only if he smuggles weapons without letting the Razakars know about it. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Michael ends up in Bhairanpally village. Kalavathi (Anaswara Rajan) writes and performs stage plays with villagers,



REVIEW

CHAMPION

CAST: Roshan Meka, Anaswara Rajan, Nandamuri Kalyan Chakravarthy, Kay Kay Menon, VK Naresh, Vennela Kishore

DIRECTOR: Pradeep Advaitham

RATING: ★★★★

spreading awareness and resistance against oppression. Though Michael is still focused on his dream of going to London, he gets involved in the villagers' fight against Razakar atrocities. Whether he continues



ues to help them and achieves his dream forms the crux of the conflict.

While the story by Pradeep Advaitham, who makes his directorial debut here, looks good on paper, the execution leaves you wanting for more — especially when the film tries to mix historical events with fiction. *Razakar* (2024), which dealt with a similar subject, stayed closer to history, portraying Kasim Razvi's brutality and the revolt against him. On the other hand, *Champion* fails to capture

the emotional depth. Here, the director takes too much time to unravel the story, indulging in scenes that barely connect to the central narrative. The opening football sequence lacks impact. The scenes with Kovai Sarala do not work. Even after Michael reaches Bhairanpally, the narrative doesn't get to its core point, dragging on till the interval. Michael's secret mission to transport weapons is an interesting idea, but is not handled in an engaging manner. The romantic track between Roshan and Anaswara brings some interest through the stage-play portions, but appears only in bits and pieces. Anaswara's entry arrives disappointingly late, nearly 45 minutes into the film. Additionally, Several village characters mysteriously disappear in important scenes and reappear later. VK Naresh, who plays Anaswara's father, is also absent for major parts of the film.

While the first half suffers from heavy lag, despite a good interval scene, the second half completely falters in storytelling. The director takes excessive cinematic liberties, such as the scene where an army officer threatening to kill innocent villagers unless Michael scores a goal within stipulated time — which comes off as highly unbelievable. The film loses its core conflict and focuses on irrelevant elements. Most importantly, the emotional depth is entirely missing. The song 'Gira Gira' is the only highlight, but even that is disappointingly used merely as a background track.

Technically, cinematographer Madhie is the biggest asset of the film, delivering grand and rich visuals despite weak content. Production values are solid, and it's evident that the producers invested heavily. However, the background score fails to elevate key moments. The film also desperately needed tighter editing.

Coming to performances, Roshan Meka performs sincerely. However, the role is demanding and requires more intensity. His physicality is not convincing enough for someone leading a revolt against the Razakars. Anaswara looks pleasant, but her role is minimal, offering little scope to perform. Kay Kay Menon is completely wasted; his portrayal of Kasim Razvi lacks depth and impact. Nandamuri Kalyan Chakravarthy's comeback is underwhelming — his character is poorly written, and emotionally flat. None of the supporting cast stands out.

Overall, *Champion* offers very little beyond a few scattered moments. A powerful real-life incident that deserved emotional storytelling is completely diluted by weak writing and poor execution. With no emotional connection and dull narration, *Champion* ends up being a disappointing watch.



This rom-com is a derivative drag

KARTIK BHARDWAJ

REVIEW

TU MERI MAIN TERA MAIN TERA TU MERI

CAST: Kartik Aaryan, Ananya Panday, Jackie Shroff, Neena Gupta

DIRECTOR: Sameer Vidwans

RATING: ★★★★

references to 90s Bollywood flicks; there is another done-to-death rendition of the 'palat' scene from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), a 2025 take on the medley song from *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* (2002) and a 'Saat Samundar' low-fi version, which should be labelled as a blasphemy.

The Sameer Vidwans directorial from the house of Dharma has a warped sense of what clicks with Gen Z. In a scene, Rumi, who professes the need for a '90s love story in a 2025 hookup culture', passionately kisses Ray when he says (lies) that he is actually married. As a protagonist, a hero, Ray is impossible to bear. He is a classic red-flag who can't help but give his opinion on everything, prides himself on being a 'Momma's boy' and confuses narcissism as just a case of 'I am sexy, and I know it'. It would have helped if there was some convincing redemption to his arc, but all he seems to be is an entitled man camouflaging as a new-age progressive.

There is, however, an uptick in the second half when the action shifts to India. Jackie Shroff and Neena Gupta, as Ray's 'not a regular but cool mom' Pinky, are enjoyable. From being a vacation romance, the film devolves into a family melodrama with conflicts that seem forced. *Tu Meri Main Tera...* feels like a glossy, shiny Christmas present which is opened to reveal mere confetti. Or as Rumi perfectly describes Ray: nothing more than laughing gas.

ant he does afterward can be hailed as a he-is-a-good-guy-after-all cutesy gesture. But, as it always happens, two songs down and Rumi and Ray have fallen in love. Rumi, however, calls it quits since she can't move with Ray to the US and, in the process, abandon her ex-Army officer father (Jackie Shroff), who is too attached to his motherland. Ray, who can't wrap his head around no as an answer, thus lands in India to woo her back.

Tu Meri Main Tera... is essentially reheated *DDLJ* for the reel-swiping generation. The writing is so social-media coded for 'youth-connect' that it feels corny and derivative. There are mentions of 'pasandida aurat', the TV show *Friends*, the long wait for season 5 of *Stranger Things* and an abysmal line which translates to 'In between talks, you are sliding in the DMs of my eyes.' The film is riddled with



A thought-provoking film backed by strong writing

to pacify everyone. As more details unravel about Sivaji's life, it also leads to more questions — Why was his body denied burial in the caste cemetery? Why is Vishnu distant from his father? What happened to Sivaji's daughter Sujatha (Manika), who falls in love with a lower-caste man Ravi (Ravi Krishna)? How does the sarpanch handle the escalating conflict? These questions form the rest of the narrative.

Murali Kanth deserves appreciation for choosing such a sensitive subject for his debut. He presents heavy themes like caste discrimination and honour killing by balancing seriousness with subtle humour, and conveys the gravity of the issue with clarity. Usually, caste discrimination is shown between upper and lower castes, but here the director adds an

interesting twist by portraying how even an upper-caste individual can become a victim, highlighting the emotional and social consequences.

The first half progresses at a steady pace, with Sivaji's death bringing villagers together. In a small village, a death becomes a major event, and the sarpanch immediately takes charge. Despite being the sarpanch, Navdeep's character often finds himself powerless, as he must obey the upper-caste leaders. The second half takes a more serious and emotional turn. The songs and romantic portions in the first half feel like a drag, but once Sivaji's court scene begins, the film becomes gripping. Sivaji's decision to reveal the truth in court is one of the film's best moments. As the film approaches its climax, emotions intensify for every character. Vishnu's journey back to the village to perform his father's last rites, and his eventual realisation, stand out strongly. The climax is exceptionally well executed, driven by impactful dialogues.

Performance-wise, the film

REVIEW

DHANDORAA

CAST: Sivaji, Navdeep, Shree Nandu, Ravi Krishna, Bindu Madhavi, Mounica, Manika, Raadhyaa

DIRECTOR: Murali Kanth D

RATING: ★★★★

shines. Sivaji delivers a terrific performance, and after Mangappa in *Court*, this is another strong role for him. Navdeep is perfectly cast as the sarpanch, offering a refreshing and mature performance. His dialogue in the climax, addressing Sivaji, is one of the film's highlights. Shree Nandu gets a performance-oriented role unlike anything he has done before, and does full justice to it. Ravi Krishna brings good energy to his role. Mounica, as Vishnu's wife, is very natural. Manika looks good and performs well as Ravi's love interest. Raadhyaa, though appearing briefly, plays a crucial role, and leaves a strong impression with her performance. The supporting cast contributes effectively, making the village setting feel realistic.

But the biggest strength of *Dhandoraa* lies in its writing. Director Murali Kanth deserves full credit for his strong narration and confident execution, especially as a debutant. The cinematography captures the rural atmosphere authentically, and Mark K Robin's music works well. The title song is particularly impactful and one of the best in recent times.

Finally, *Dhandoraa* is a thought-provoking film driven by strong writing and performances. Kudos to debutant director Murali Kanth for handling such a sensitive subject with conviction, and to producer Ravindra Banerjee Muppaneni for backing it. It's an honest attempt and a well-made Telugu film. After a long time, it feels good to watch a meaningful Telugu film with strong performances.



Mowgli gets OTT premiere date

MOWGLI, Roshan Kanakala's action-romance directed by Sandeep Raj, which had a theatrical release on December 13, has now set an OTT premiere date. The film will begin streaming on ETV Win on January 1.

Produced under the People Media Factory banner, *Mowgli* starred actor-filmmaker Bandi Saroj Kumar as the main antagonist and marked the debut of Sakkshi Mhadolkar. While it received praises for its cinematography and production values, *Mowgli* overall received mixed reviews. The film also struggled at the box office because of the unexpected release date change for *Akhandha 2*. Harsha Chemudu, who played Prabhas Bunti, won accolades for his performance though.

The technical team for *Mowgli* included cinematographer Rama Maruti M, art director Kiran Mamidi, and action choreographer Natraj Madigona. Costumes were by GV Annapurna and Sushmitha Bommidi.