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NEW YEAR IN KASHMIR

Hotels 100% booked in Pahalgam, Gulmarg

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DRONE ATTACK ON CAFE

24 killed as Ukraine hits Russia-held Kherson

WORLD » PAGE 14



CRITICISED FOR 'CHASING LUXURY'

Lokpal cancels tender to procure 7 BMW cars

NEWS » PAGE 8

PARLEY

Is housing prohibitively expensive?

Ownership out of reach for most Indians in cities

OPINION » PAGE 7



THRILLING CONTEST

Tigers have the last laugh against Pipers

SPORT » PAGE 15

A.P. removes five categories of land from prohibited list

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The government has removed five categories of land from the prohibited properties' list under Section 22-A of the Registration Act.

Terming it as a New Year gift, Minister for Revenue, Registration and Stamps Anagani Satya Prasad told the media at the Secretariat on Thursday that the government had taken this decision with the objective of safeguarding the rights of farmers and landowners, and providing relief to genuine titleholders.

Private patta land had been completely removed from the 22-A list, he said, adding that officials were instructed to take suo motu action to delete such lands whenever applications were received.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 4



The explosion ripped through a bar where New Year revelry was on in the intervening night between Wednesday and Thursday. AFP

40 killed in fire at Swiss Alpine resort

Associated Press
CRANS-MONTANA, SWITZERLAND

Nearly 40 people were killed and another 115 injured, most of them seriously, after a fire ripped through a bar's New Year celebration in a Swiss Alpine resort in the intervening night between Wednesday and Thursday, the police said.

Authorities did not immediately have an exact count of the deceased.

The Crans-Montana resort is an international ski and golf venue, and overnight, its crowded Le Constellation bar morphed from a scene of revelry into the site of one of Switzerland's worst tragedies.

Beatrice Pilloud, Valais Canton attorney general, said it was too early to determine the cause of the fire. "At no moment is there a question of any kind of attack," Ms. Pilloud said.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8

Centre's tobacco tax rejig to take effect from Feb. 1

Finance Ministry announces end of GST compensation cess; beedis in 18% slab, other tobacco products in 40% bracket as govt. bids to 'ensure that real cigarette prices rise faster than incomes'

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Union Finance Ministry on Thursday issued a series of notifications that will give effect to the new taxation regime for tobacco products from February 1. The Central Excise (Amendment) Act, 2025, passed in the recently concluded Winter Session of Parliament, specifies new rates of excise duty on tobacco products.

Excise duty on cigarette

The Ministry also notified that provisions of the Health Security *se* National Security Act, 2025, which intends to levy a cess on pan masala units, will come into force from February 1.

In an accompanying FAQ note, the Ministry explained that under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, the excise duty on cigarettes had so far been rendered a nominal amount of a "fraction of a paisa" per cigarette stick, and the GST compensation cess rate on tobacco products had not been increased since it was implemented in July 2017.

"For India, affordability has either stagnated or increased in the past decade, meaning cigarettes have not become more expensive relative to consumers' purchasing power," the note said. "This is contrary to global public health guidance, which emphasises annual increases in specific excise duties to ensure that real cigarette prices rise faster than incomes."

At the same time, the Ministry notified February 1 as the date from which the GST compensation cess would cease to exist. The cess was originally introduced for a period of five years to compensate States for any loss arising out of the implementation of GST.

Tax slabs

The Finance Ministry also notified the new GST rates for tobacco products. Beedis have been moved to the 18% category from the now-defunct 28% slab. All other tobacco products have been moved to the 40% slab. These new rates will be effective from February 1.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8

Tax reset

The Central Excise (Amendment) Act, 2025 specifies new rates of excise duty on tobacco products

- The Finance Ministry has notified that provisions of the Health Security *se* National Security Act, 2025, which intends to levy a cess on pan masala units, will come into force from February 1
- Beedis have been moved to the **18%** GST category from the now-defunct **28%** slab
- All other tobacco products have been moved to the **40%** slab



NEARBY



APERC approves true-up charges of ₹4,498 crore

VIJAYAWADA
The APERC approved net true-up charges amounting to ₹4,498 crore proposed by the DISCOMs, but directed them to claim the amounts from the government. » Page 4

A sense of joy and loss grips Annamayya dist.

MADANAPALLE
Annamayya district began functioning with Madanapalle as its headquarters from Thursday, leaving its former headquarters, Rayachoti, suffering from a sense of loss and uncertainty. » Page 4

METROPLUS » PAGE 13





INBRIEF

One dead as car driven into sea on New Year's eve

One person died when a car was accidentally driven into the sea near Antarvedi in Sakinetipalli mandal in Konaseema district on Wednesday night. The accident occurred while the occupants were celebrating New Year on the beach. The deceased was identified as N. Sridhar (34), a native of Kakinada. Two of his friends - Jaya Krishna and Surya Kiran - escaped unhurt, according to the police. Sridhar, who was behind the wheel, drove the car into the sea at a high speed and got trapped inside the vehicle. His friends jumped out. Police retrieved the vehicle on Thursday. A case has been registered and an investigation is on.

Visakha Book Festival puts focus on rich Telugu literature

Telugu literature was shaped by the intellectual and creative force of Uttarandhra, with Visakhapatnam emerging as a vital cultural centre. The region produced influential writers who not only enriched the language, but also redefined its ideological and aesthetic direction. Set against this rich literary backdrop, the Visakha Book Festival on Andhra University Grounds, running until Friday, celebrates both the legacy and the living spirit of Telugu literature. The book festival is about much more than selling books.

Hindupur bank heist: key accused held, gold worth ₹3.5 crore seized

Ishrar, a habitual offender who has been named as the second accused in the case, was involved in 14 criminal cases registered across India, say police, adding that he was arrested in Rajasthan

The Hindu Bureau
HINDUPUR

In a breakthrough in the Hindupur SBI bank robbery case, the Sri Sathya Sai district police, on Thursday, arrested the second key member of the inter-state gang in Rajasthan and recovered gold ornaments worth ₹3.5 crore, taking the total seizure in the case to ₹5.5 crore.

Addressing the media at the Upgraded police station, Superintendent of Police S. Satish Kumar said that the accused, identified as Mohammed Ishrar Khan alias Ishrar, is a resident of Karauli district of Rajasthan. He was taken into custody under a PT warrant, along with the seized ornaments. The SP said that the case pertained to a robbery at the State Bank of India branch at Thumukunta Industrial Area under Hindupur rural limits in July 2025.



Superintendent of Police S. Satish Kumar inspecting the gold recovered from the accused in the bank heist case in Hindupur of Sri Sathya Sai district on Thursday.

Earlier, the police arrested the prime accused, Anil Kumar Panwar, a resident of Haryana, in August and seized 2 kg of gold worth ₹2 crore, along with a car and a motorcycle used while committing the crime.

"Both accused are habitual bank burglars who targeted financial institutions after conducting detailed reconnaissance. They were involved in 14 criminal cases registered across India, including major bank robbery cases in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu," the SP said.

Police teams led by Deputy SP K.V. Mahesh (Hindupur) worked in coordination across States to crack the case.

Manish Raj Gupta is in-charge CMD of RINL

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM



Manish Raj Gupta

Manish Raj Gupta, Director (Technical, Projects & Raw Materials) at Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), on Thursday, took additional charge as the Chairman & Managing Director (CMD) of RINL-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

A mechanical engineering graduate from MANIT, Bhopal, with a PG Diploma in Management, he joined the SAIL in 1991 as a Management Trainee (Technical) at Durgapur Steel Plant.

During his nearly three-decade tenure at Durgapur Steel Plant, Mr Gupta made significant contributions to plant operations, project execution, and equipment reliability, particularly enhancing the efficiency of the Steel Melting Shop.

Mr. Gupta's focus on safety, quality, and operational excellence laid a foundation for his subsequent leadership roles within SAIL.

In 2019, Mr. Gupta joined Bokaro Steel Plant as Chief General Manager, heading the Steel Melting Shops. Later, he served as Executive Director (Works) at IISCO Steel Plant.

Prior to assuming the office of Director (Technical, Projects & Raw Materials) at SAIL, Mr. Gupta served as Executive Director Incharge (Operations) at SAIL's Corporate Office in New Delhi.

A.P. Jeevandan sets records with 300 transplants in 2025

B Madhu Gopal
VISAKHAPATNAM

A.P. Jeevandan crossed 300 organ transplantations in 2025 calendar year, a record in the State's Medical and Health Department's history. Minister for Health Satya Kumar Yadav termed the achievement a "historic milestone for public healthcare in Andhra Pradesh." This is a testament to strong institutional systems, medical excellence, he added.

The number of deceased donors saw a steady increase year-on-year, with the highest being 93 in 2025. The total number of donors between 2020 and 2025 was 244. The number of organs retrieved was 795. Of this, 301 were retrieved in 2025. The 51-60 age group had the highest number of deceased donors at 52.

The total number of live organ transplantations during 2020-25 was 1,740, which includes 1,697 kidney and 43 liver transplantations. "The live transplants pertain mostly to family members or close relatives, whose blood group matches with that of the patient. Though there is an increase in awareness among the public on organ donation, the response is far from satisfactory," said K. Rambabu, Chief Transplant Coordinator, A.P. Jeevandan.

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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

SAD DEMISE



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Passed away peacefully on Jan 1, 2026
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BEFORE THE HONOURABLE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL AT VISAKHAPATNAM
Ground & First Floors, Sri Narayana Bhawan,
Sai Baba Street, Dabagardens, Visakhapatnam-530020.
O.A. 1174 / 2025

Between:
Bank of Baroda, Eluru Road Branch, Vijayawada, NTR District, represented by its Power of Attorney holder ... Applicant Bank
And:
Mr.Anuchuri Krishna Prasad and others

1.Mr.Anuchuri Krishna Prasad, S/o A.Chandrasekharam, Hindu aged 65 years, 3-651-1/15, Near Sita Rama Super Market, Undavalli Centre, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh-522501, PAN No:ASBPA3409Q
2.Mr.Anuchuri Raja Sekhar, S/o A.Krishna Prasad, Hindu aged 40 years, 3-651-1/15, Near Sita Rama Super Market, Undavalli Centre, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh-522501, PAN No:AQUPA3083F ...Defendants

SUBSTITUTED SERVICE OF SUMMONS TO THE DEFENDANT 1 and 2 BY WAY OF PAPER PUBLICATION

WHEREAS the Applicant Bank has instituted an application U/S 19 of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act 1993 against you for the recovery of sum together with current and future interest and other reliefs. You are hereby summoned to appear and file written statement before this Tribunal at **10.30** or at such time immediately thereafter according to the convenience of Tribunal on **19.01.2026** to answer the claim.

If you intend to file any documents, you may file the same with a list along with the written statement.

You should file your registered address and a memo of appearance when you enter appearance before the Tribunal either in person or by a Pleader / Advocate duly instructed.

Take notice that, in default of your appearance on the day mentioned herein before the proceeding will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this 8th day of December, 2025

Sd/- Signature of the Officer
Authorised to issue summons
Registrar, Debts Recovery Tribunal, Visakhapatnam

BEFORE THE HON'BLE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2
1st FLOOR, TREVENI COMPLEX, PALACE HEIGHTS HOTEL BUILDING, ABIDS, HYDERABAD-1

O.A No. 771 of 2025

BETWEEN :
State Bank of India, SARB, Vijayawada --Applicant
And
Mr. R Vivekananda & Another -- Defendants

SUMMONS BY WAY OF PAPER PUBLICATION

To
1. Mr. R Vivekananda
S/o. Late Venkaiah, Aged: 72 Yrs., Occ., Retired,
2. Mr. R V Ravi Teja,
S/o. R Vivekananda, Aged: 36, Occ: Unknown,

Both 1&2 are R/o. 23-16-9/8, Munireddy Nagar, Ward No. 22, S.V. University, Tirupathi (Village & Mandal), Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh-517502; Ph. No. 9989554929.
Also, at:
R/o. 15-49/3, Padmavathi Nagar, M R Palli, Tirupathi(Urban), Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh-517502.

Take notice that the Applicant-bank has filed a case for recovery of **Rs.53,93,771/-** from you with further interest and costs. The notices sent to you were returned un-served. The Hon'ble Tribunal ordered the present paper publication under substitute of service of notice.

In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are directed as under: -
(i) To show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relief prayed for should not be granted;
(ii) To disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application;
(iii) You are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties;
(iv) You shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is created and /or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal;
(v) You shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realized by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank or financial institutions holding security interest over such assets.
You are hereby required to show cause on **30-12-2025** at **10.30 am** at Debts Recovery Tribunal-II, 1st floor, Triveni complex, Abids, Hyderabad-500001 in person or by advocate duly instructed as to why the relief prayed for should be granted.
Take notice that in case of default the application shall be heard and decided in your absence
Notice issued as per the orders of the Hon'ble Tribunal, dated **20-11-2025**

HYDERABAD
Dt: 08-12-2025

Sd/-Registrar,
Debts Recovery Tribunal-2

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
Roads and Buildings Department
e-Procurement Tender Notice

NIT No.34/1-13/CE(R&B)SH&MD, APRDC/2025-26, Dt.30.12.2025
Online tenders are invited for **2 works** in Vizianagaram, **2 works** in Visakhapatnam, **3 works** in Kakinada, **5 works** in Eluru and **1 work** in Vijayawada circles. Last date of receipt of tenders is **22-01-2026 up to 3.30 PM.** Tenderers can download the tender schedules & details from e-market place i.e, **www.apeprocurement.gov.in.**
DIPR 18625/CL, Dt.01/01/2026 Sd/- Chief Engineer (R&B) SH & Managing Director, APRDC

CITY UNION BANK LIMITED
Credit Recovery and Management Department
Administrative Office: No.24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612001. **E-Mail id:** crmd@cityunionbank.in, **Phone:** 0435-2432322, **Fax:** 0435-2431746

TENDER-CUM-AUCTION SALE NOTICE UNDER SARFAESI ACT 2002

The following property/ies mortgaged to **City Union Bank Limited** will be sold in Tender-cum-Public Auction by the Authorised Officer of the Bank, under Rule 8 (6) & 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, under the SARFAESI Act, 2002, for recovery of a sum of **Rs.1,40,18,540/- (Rupees One Crore Forty Lakh Eighteen Thousand Five Hundred and Forty only)** as on **07-12-2025** together with further interest to be charged from **08-12-2025** onwards and other expenses, any other dues to the Bank by the borrowers / guarantors **No.1) M/s. Sri Sapthagireswara Oil Mill, No.636/1, Musalamma Katta, Near Kasi Visweswara Temple, Anantapur - 515001. No.2) Mrs. Polamada Krishnaveni, W/o. Prabhakar, D.No.20/81, Prabhakar Street, Old Town, Anantapur - 515001. No.3) Mr. Polamada Prabhakar, S/o. Nagabhushanam, D.No.20/81, Prabhakar Street, Old Town, Anantapur - 515001. No.4) M/s. Jaanvika Oil Traders, No.635/1, Musalamma Katta, Near Kasi Visweswara Temple, Anantapur - 515001. No.5) Mr. Polamada Ranjith Kumar, S/o. P. Prabhakar, No.20/81, Prabhakar Street, Old Town, Anantapur - 515001. No.6) Mrs. P. Krishhaja, W/o. P. Prabhakar, No.20/81, Prabhakar Street, Old Town, Anantapur - 515001.**
Note : That Our **179-Anantapur Branch** has also extended Financial Assistance (OLCC : 512020010031097) dated **30-01-2024** requested by No.4 of you represented by No. 5 of you as Proprietor for which Nos.5 & 6 of you stood as Co-obligants for the facility for a Total Amount of **Rs. 1,50,00,000/-** at a **ROI** of **10.15%** and the balance outstanding as on **07-12-2025** is **Rs.1,53,94,546/-.** Plus penal **2.00%** p.a. with monthly rests since **08-12-2025** till realization.

Immovable Properties Mortgaged to our Bank

Schedule - A : (Property Owned by Mr. Polamada Prabhakar, S/o. Nagabhushanam)

Anantapur Registration District and Sub-Registration District and the Property Situated within Anantapur Municipal Area, U/D No.1120/2010, Babu : Government Dry, S.No : 636/2, Extent : Ac. 2-04 Paiki, Extent : Ac. 1-72 Paiki, Extent : Ac. 1 -50 ee Paiki, Extent : Ac. 0-18, H.S. : Ac 0-073, Door No.12/411. Measurement : East - West : 98¼ Feet or 29.95 Meters, North - South : 38 Feet or 11.58 Meters, Finished Extent : 3,733.5 Sq.Ft. Measurement For Shed Varanda : East - West ; 11½ Feet or 3.50 Meters, North - South : 38 Feet or 11.58 Meters. Finished Varanda : 871.2 Sq.Ft., Boundaries including Shed & Other Construction in Open Space, East : C.C. Roads towards Shivalayam, South : Rastha, West : B.Badiri Land in the Name of Survey Number, North : Sapthagireshwara Oil Mill. Total : A.C.0.18 (or) 871.2 Sq.Yds.

Reserve Price : Rs.1,31,00,000/-
(Rupees One Crore Thirty One Lakh only)

Schedule - B : (Property Owned by Mrs. Polamada Krishnaveni, W/o. Prabhakar)

Anantapuramu Registration District and Sub-Registration District and the Property Situated within Bukkarayasamudram Village, Polam & Panchayat Area, U/D No.16171/2005, Babu : Government Dry, S.No : 636/2, Extent Ac. : 2 - 04 Paiki, Extent Ac. : 0-32 Paiki, H.S. : 0.128, Extent of the Property : 32 Cents. Boundaries : East : Sri Kasi Visweswara Swamy Temple Road, South : The Land in the Same Number, West : The Land in Sy. No.636/1 and in the Same Number, North : The Land in Sy. No.636/1.

Reserve Price : Rs.2,19,00,000/-
(Rupees Two Crore Nineteen Lakh only)

AUCTION DETAILS

Date of Tender-cum-Auction Sale	Venue
11-02-2026	City Union Bank Limited, Anantapur Branch, No.15/703, Kamala Nagar, Sreekandam Circle, Opp. Junna Iron Mart, Anathapur - 515001. Telephone No.08554-279777, Cell Nos : 9396643830, 8925887173.

Terms and Conditions of Tender-cum-Auction Sale :
(1) The intending bidders should be present in person for the auction and participate personally and give a declaration in writing to the effect that he/she is bidding for himself / herself. **(2)** The intending bidders may obtain the Tender Forms from **The Manager, City Union Bank Limited, Anantapur Branch, No.15/703, Kamala Nagar, Sreekandam Circle, Opp. Junna Iron Mart, Anathapur - 515001. (3)** The intending bidders should submit their bids only in the Tender Form prescribed in sealed envelopes addressed to **The Authorised Officer, City Union Bank Ltd.,** together with a Pay Order / Demand Draft for an EMD of **10%** of the Reserve Price, drawn in favour of **"City Union Bank Ltd.", on or before 12.00 Noon** on the date of Tender-cum-Auction Sale hereby notified. **(4)** For inspection of the property and other particulars, the intending purchaser may contact : **Telephone No.08554-279777 , Cell Nos : 9396643830, 8925887173. (5)** The property/ies are sold on "As-is-where-is", "As-is-what-is" and "whatever-there is" basis. **(6)** The sealed tenders will be opened in the presence of the intending bidders at **01.00 p.m.** on the date of Tender-cum-Auction Sale hereby notified. Though in general the sale will be by way of closed tenders, the Authorised Officer may, at his sole discretion, conduct an Open Auction among the interested bidders who desire to quote a bid higher than the one received in the closed tender process, and in such an event, the sale shall be conferred on the person making highest bid. The sale, however, is subject to confirmation of City Union Bank Limited. **(7)** The successful bidder shall have to pay **25% (inclusive of EMD paid)** of the sale amount **immediately** on completion of sale and the balance amount of **75%** within **15 days** from the date of confirmation of sale, failing which the initial deposit of **25%** shall be forfeited. **(8)** The Sale Certificate will be issued by the Authorised Officer in favour of the successful purchaser only after receipt of the entire sale consideration within the time limit stipulated herein. **(9)** The successful purchaser shall bear the charges/fees payable for conveyance, such as stamp duty, registration fee etc., as applicable under law. **(10)** The successful bidder should pay the statutory dues (lawful house tax, electricity charges and other dues), TDS, GST if any, due to Government, Government Undertaking and local bodies. **(11)** The Authorised Officer shall have all the powers to accept or reject the bids or postpone or cancel the sale without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Place : Kumbakonam, Date : 30-12-2025 Authorised Officer

Regd. Office: 149, T.S.R. (Big) Street, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu - 612001, CIN - L65110TN1904PLC001287, Telephone No.0435-2402322, Fax: 0435-2431746, Website: www.cityunionbank.com

BEFORE THE HONOURABLE ANDHRA PRADESH ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION (APERC)
Vidyut Niyantrana Bhavan, Adjacent to 220/132/33 KV, AP Carbides Sub Station, Dinnedevarapadu Road, Kurnool - 518 002, Andhra Pradesh, Phones: 08518 - 294823,24,25,26.

SOUTHERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF A.P LIMITED, TIRUPATI
ANDHRA PRADESH CENTRAL POWER DISTRIBUTION CORPORATION LIMITED, VIJAYAWADA
EASTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF A.P LIMITED, VISAKHAPATNAM

PUBLIC NOTICE

In O.P.Nos. 75, 76 & 77 of 2025
Venues for Public hearings on ARR, Retail Supply Tariffs & CSS for FY2026-27

In continuation of the Public Notice dated 10.12.2025, it is hereby informed that the Commission has decided to conduct public hearings through a hybrid method (i.e., in-person and through video conference) on ARR, Tariff, and Cross Subsidy Surcharge (CSS) filings for the Retail Supply Business for FY 2026-27 under Section 62 of the Electricity Act, 2003, in the O.P. Nos. 75, 76 and 77 of 2025 for APSPDCL, APCPDCL and APEPDCL, respectively. The dates, timings and details of venues for public hearings are as follows:

S.No.	Date and Day	Place	Venue
1	20.01.2026 (Tuesday)	Tirupati	Auditorium, 3rd Floor, Annexe Building, APSPDCL Corporate Office, D.No.19-13-65/A, Sreenivasapuram, Tirupati-517503, Andhra Pradesh.
2	22.01.2026 (Thursday)	Vijayawada	Tummalapalli Kalakshetram, Bus Stand Rd, Opposite Government Hospital, Two Town, Hanumanpet, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh-520003.
3	23.01.2026 (Friday)	Vijayawada	Tummalapalli Kalakshetram, Bus Stand Rd, Opposite Government Hospital, Two Town, Hanumanpet, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh-520003.
4	27.01.2026 (Tuesday)	Kurnool	Meeting hall (Ground floor), Vidyut Niyantrana Bhavan, Adjacent to 220/132/33 KV AP Carbides SS, Dinnedevarapadu Road, Kurnool - 518 002, Andhra Pradesh.

Note: The morning session, 10.30 AM/11.00 AM to 1.00 PM/1.30 PM, will be in-person, and the afternoon session, 2.00/2.30 PM to 4.30 PM, will be via video conference. However, these timings will be modified, if necessary, by the Commission depending on public participation each day.
The schedule for each day of the public hearing remains unchanged as published in the notice dated 10.12.2025.

Date : 02-01-2026
Place : Tirupati
Chairman & Managing Director
APSPDCL

Date : 02-01-2026
Place : Vijayawada
Chairman & Managing Director
APCPDCL

Date : 02-01-2026
Place : Vishakapatnam
Chairman & Managing Director
APEPDCL

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LITERARY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

1. What is the title of Dan Brown's latest thriller, released simultaneously in 16 languages in September 2025?
2. Which French author wrote Remembrance of Things Past, listed by the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest novel ever written?
3. Which super-hit song by Taylor Swift shares its title with the best-selling novel by Erich Segal?

*T&C apply.

Scan QR code or visit https://newsth.live/LFLQUIZ to take the quiz. Top 3 winners* every day win gift vouchers.

Answer to yesterday's quiz:
1. Dystopian fiction | 2. Vikas Swarup
3. Srinivasa Ramanujan

Yesterday's Winners:
1.Harshika Pardeshi, Mumbai | 2. Muzammil Ameen.K, Malappuram
3. Kasvi Khurana, Amritsar

Govt. invests big in skilling as core economic growth strategy

Training imparted to over 4.10 lakh youths, 2.10 lakh assessments held and 1.88 lakh certifications issued in 2024-2025; job-linked initiatives led to 1.45 lakh placements, supported by 1,483 job fairs conducted across 175 Assembly constituencies

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Recognising skill development as the central pillar of economic growth, the government is integrating education, industry needs and global labour markets. The State's approach emphasised aspiration-led skilling, strong industry partnership, technology-enabled governance and preparation of youth for both domestic and international employment.

A statement issued to this effect said during 2024-25, Andhra Pradesh achieved significant outcomes by imparting training to over 4.10 lakh youth, conducting over 2.10 lakh assessments, and by issuing 1.88 lakh certifications. Job-linked initiatives led to 1.45 lakh placements, supported by 1,483 job fairs conducted across all 175 Assembly constituencies. The State initiated structured programmes for international skilling and overseas employment, reflecting its global outlook, said the statement.

The idea is to build a comprehensive learning ecosystem that begins with early skill exposure in schools and extends through vocational education, modernised ITIs and polytechnics, short-term market-driven skilling, higher-education-linked employability programmes and international mobility pathways. A unified digital platform tracks candidate lifecycle. Vocational education has reached 3.2 lakh school students and 93,000 junior college students, with 100% on-the-job training and 51,000 internships facilitated. ITIs have witnessed good placement outcomes, active industry tie-ups and infra upgrades, alongside initiatives such as German language training and PM-SETU modernisation planning.



The State government has initiated structured programmes for international skilling and overseas employment. FILE PHOTO

Polytechnics have recorded improvement in admissions, placement rates, accreditation and curriculum modernisation, including the introduction of AI and Quantum Computing basics.

Market-driven short-term skilling, led by A.P. State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC), Society for Employment Generation and Enterprise Development in Andhra Pradesh (SEEDAP) and the National Academy of Construction, has trained and placed large numbers of youth across urban and rural areas.

The Overseas Manpower Company of Andhra Pradesh (OMCAP) implemented global mobility programmes, which opened pathways in healthcare, engineering and technical trades in Germany, Japan, the GCC countries and Europe, supported by language training, safe migration initiatives. The skill development wing has designed 'Naipunyam', an AI-enabled, unified digital (portal) platform that integrates skilling, certification, employment and analytics into a single system.

Supplementary exams for paramedical course students from February 2

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The Department of Health, Family Welfare and Medical Education will hold supplementary exams for the students studying paramedical courses from the 2025-26 academic year.

According to an official release on Thursday, earlier, if students admitted to two-year paramedical courses, including Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology, ECG Technician, Cardiology, failed in the exams, they used to write the supplementary exams only during the annual examinations.

Now, the supplementary examinations will be conducted on February 2, 3, and 4. according to the note. Applications for the exams will be accepted from students till January 5. Around 5,000 students are expected to appear for these examinations.

INBRIEF



DGP offers prayers at Kanaka Durga temple

Director-General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta on Thursday visited Sri Durga Malleswara Swamyvarla Devastanam. Mr. Gupta and his family members offered prayers to the Goddess on the occasion of New Year. Temple EO V.K. Seena Naik gave a traditional welcome to the DGP. The temple priests offered 'teerdha prasadams' to the DGP and offered blessings.

Text & Context and Health

Weekday features on *The Hindu* epaper (epaper.thehindu.com) carry explainers, special articles and quizzes. In the latest issue (January 2, Friday), the following articles are available:

- From encroachment to legal ownership **newsth.live/landownership**
- What trans men face when they access healthcare **newsth.live/healthtransmen**

You can use your smartphone's inbuilt features to access these articles. If it's an Android phone, use Google Lens to read and tap the url to access an article. If it's an iPhone, use Live Text on camera to do the same.

Roundtable on natural farming tomorrow

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The BJP Kisan Morcha will organise a roundtable on natural farming in Vijayawada on January 3.

Addressing the media, Morcha State president Chigurupati Kumara Swamy said the meeting aims to create awareness among farmers on all aspects of natural farming, from seed selection and soil health to livestock management, preparation of natural inputs, certification and marketing.

Timings
VIJAYAWADA

FRIDAY, JAN. 02	
RISE 06:36	SET 17:47
RISE 16:37	SET 05:19
SATURDAY, JAN. 03	
RISE 06:37	SET 17:47
RISE 17:46	SET 06:25
SUNDAY, JAN. 04	
RISE 06:37	SET 17:48
RISE 18:53	SET 07:26

Vijayawada Weather	max	min
Machilipatnam	29	20
Guntur Town	29	15
Vijayawada City	28	18

Vijayawada City Today
30°C The weather will be dry. Mist and haze will occur in cool morning. Day will be slight warm. Night will be cool and hazr.

Vijayawada City Tomorrow
31°C Morning will be cool with mist and haze. Day will be slight warm. Night also will be slight cool. Dry weather to prevail.

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THE HINDU
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13.52 crore Tirumala laddus sold in 2025, says TTD

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUMALA

The sale of Tirumala Laddu prasadam reached a record high in 2025, registering a 10% increase over the previous year, according to data released by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD).

While 12.15 crore laddus were sold in 2024, the figure increased to 13.52 crore in 2025, marking an additional sale of 1.37 crore laddus.

A significant milestone was recorded on December 27, 2025, when devotees purchased 5.13 lakh laddus – the highest single-day sale in the past decade. TTD officials noted that this was the largest daily laddu distribution witnessed in the last ten years.


The TTD has increased daily laddu production at the Tirumala temple to 4 lakh. FILE PHOTO

To meet the growing demand, the TTD has increased daily laddu production to 4 lakh. On the peak and auspicious days, the production is scaled up, with a buffer ranging between 8 lakh and 10 lakh laddus kept ready to ensure an uninterrupted supply to devotees.

Around 700 Sri Vaishnava Brahmins work in two shifts in the temple kitchen round the clock. The laddus are prepared in strict adherence to the established 'dittam' and religious practices.

Medicines donated

Meanwhile, the proprietors of the Hyderabad-based Trishul Enterprises, Chakradhar and Sivaranjini donated medicines worth ₹78 lakh to the TTD.

Man 'ends' life after 'killing' three children in Nandyal

The Hindu Bureau
NANDYAL

A 34-year-old man ended his life after allegedly killing his three children at Thodumuldinne in Nandyal district on Wednesday late night. The person, identified as Vemulapati Surendra, had reportedly been in depression after his wife Maheswari ended her life in August.

Surendra, a daily wager, had three children–Kavya (7), Dhyanaeshwari (4) and Surya Gagan (2). Surendra had been facing financial difficulties . The police suspect that Surendra might have made his three children drink milk laced with poison .

People battling suicidal thoughts can seek help by dialling 100.

Panel formed for transfer of antiques from Telangana

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The government has formed a committee for the identification, selection and transfer of antiques from Telangana, in accordance with the provisions of the A.P. Reorganisation Act, 2014. The antiques are presently housed in the Telangana State Museum.

The government issued a G.O. on December 31, 2025 after a detailed examination of reports submitted by the Commissioner of the Department of Archaeology and Museums in Vijayawada.

The committee will be chaired by Tejaswi Podapati, Chairperson of the A.P. State Creativity and Culture Commission. The Commissioner/Director of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Andhra Pradesh will serve as the Convener and Member.

Other members include eminent historians, archaeologists and museum experts such as Vakulabharanam Ramakrishna, former head of the department of history at the University of Hyderabad, Emani Sivanagi Reddy, retired Stapathi, senior and retired museum officials and a representative of the Finance Department.

The panel has been tasked with reviewing the status of antiques, overseeing their identification and selection and supervising the distribution between the two States. It will organise meetings with the corresponding panel in Telangana to facilitate the transfer.

The government said the transfer of antiques to A.P. is essential for proper conservation, documentation and public display in State museums and institutions, and to showcase the State's cultural, historical and artistic heritage.

Govt. allots 2 acres for TDP office in Bapatla

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued orders for the alienation of two acres of land at West Bapatla village in Bapatla mandal in favour of the district president of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Bapatla, for the construction of a party office building.

According to G.O. 534, 2025, two acres have been allotted on a lease basis for a period of 33 years. The lease rent has been fixed at ₹1,000 per acre per annum, in accordance with the provisions of G.O. 340 dated July 21, 2016, and other applicable G.Os. The decision follows a proposal submitted by Bapatla Collector and recommendations made by the AP Land Management Authority in its meeting held on December 16, 2025. The proposal was initiated at the request of Bapatla MLA Vegesana Narendra Varma Raju.

The government has stipulated several conditions for the alienation. The land must be utilised for intended purpose within three years, and it cannot be transferred, leased or alienated further without the prior approval from the Revenue Department.

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BID NO: GEM/2025/B/7051643 DATED 29.12.2025
2. GOVERNMENT E-MARKET PORTAL - APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANCY/ ADVISORY FIRMS TO CARRY OUT THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF BOARD OF BANK AND ITS SUB COMMITTEES ALONG WITH PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF DIRECTORS
BID NO: GEM/2025/B/7053089 DATED 29.12.2025
The Above GEM Tender document is also available and can be downloaded from the following websites www.iob.bank.in & www.gem.gov.in For Tender details and future amendments, if any, keep referring to the following website www.gem.gov.in

Chowgule SBD
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- Compliance with **safety, quality, and statutory norms**
- Ability to meet project timelines

Interested contractors may submit their **company profile, experience details, and contact information** to:
Email: purchase.csbd@chowgule.co.in
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Chief Administrative Officer

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ISSN 0971 - 751X

Are data centres proposed by tech giants in Vizag a boon or bane?

Sumit Bhattacharjee
VISAKHAPATNAM

The year 2025 has seen the announcement of several big-ticket projects in Visakhapatnam.

While the steel plant being set up by ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel in Anakapalli at a cost of over ₹1.5 lakh crore in phases is among them, what has truly dominated the investment landscape is the announcement of massive AI data centres by tech giants such as Google, Sify, and Reliance.

Anchoring these investments is Google, which will set up a 1 GW AI data hub through its subsidiary, Raiden Infotech India Ltd., with an investment of about ₹88,000 crore. Google is partnering with AdaniConneX and Airtel, and the project will come up across three locations – Tarluvada, Adavivaram, and Rambilli – along with a new international subsea gateway anchored by multiple cable landings.

Meta-Sify has announced a 500 MW facility at Paradesipalem with an investment of ₹15,266 crore, which includes the landing of a water-worth subsea cable. Sify Edge Data Centre is planning a 50 MW AI Edge facility with an open cable landing station at Rushikonda-Madhurawada, with approvals in place for expansion up to 550 MW in total.

Reliance Industries has also announced a 1 GW AI data centre, while CtrlS is planning a 300-350 MW hyperscale data centre.

If all these data centres are established by 2030, Visakhapatnam will be home to about 2.5 to 2.8 GW of data centre capacity, possibly second only to Virginia in the United States, which houses the world's largest data centre cluster with 6.6 GW.

"If the State government's plans materialise, Visakhapatnam will not only emerge as the biggest data centre hub in India but also scale up to 6 GW over the next 10 years," says Kalyan Mangalapalli, a deep-tech expert. According to Mr. Kalyan, data centres are the need of the hour, which align well with both the State and Union governments' plan for technological upgradation.

"Data centres cater to the escalating demand for cloud-based computing, digitised record storage, and online services. They provide reliable, scalable, and secure environment to store, process, and manage digital information – from e-mail and streaming services to e-commerce platforms and Artificial Intelligence applications. The demand for data centres in India is driven by initiatives such as Digital India and data localisation mandates, including the RBI's 2018 directive and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2025," he says.



Visakhapatnam being developed as IT hub, will also be home to data centres of 2.5 to 2.8 GW capacity if Google, Sify and Reliance units are set up. REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

Strain on resources

But is the Port City suitable to house these data centres?

It is a well-known fact that data centres are intensive consumers of power and water. Reports have indicated that residents in Indianapolis forced Google to relocate due to similar concerns. In Visakhapatnam, too, there is growing resistance based on these very issues. According to senior officials of the APEPDCL, the total power consumption of Visakhapatnam city during peak summer hours is around 1,300 MW. To support data centres, the city needs additional power generation capacity, followed by construction of equivalent substations and the laying of 400-785 kV transmission lines.

"Google, which is committed to net-zero norms, has stated that it will rely on low carbon energy such as solar power," Mr. Kalyan said. However, solar and wind energy alone may not be sufficient to power such large facilities. Given its net-zero commitment, Google is unlikely to depend on thermal power and may, instead, explore alternatives such as green hydrogen, nuclear energy, on-site renewable generation with battery energy storage systems, or gas-powered micro-grids.

According to APEPDCL officials, both Google and Reliance have committed themselves to generating solar power. However, they point out that generating 1 MW of solar power requires about five acres of land. "Where is that much land available?" they question. Water availability is another major concern. Visakhapatnam's total daily water consumption is around 400 million litres per day (MLD). Data centres are significant water consumers, and running 2.5 GW of data centres require approximately 30 million litres per day – nearly 10% of the city's current water consumption.

Mr. Kalyan points out that the GVMC is planning 100-MLD large desalination plants to supplement their water requirements.

"Keeping these issues in mind, we have filed an RTI plea seeking disclosure of details of the MoUs signed between the State government and the companies," says Chakradhar Buddha of LibTech, an NGO.

"However, our request has been rejected. We want clarity on power and water supply commitments, as well as employment generation," he says.

'Address challenges'

It is true that data centres do not generate large-scale direct employment once operational. However, there will be significant employment during the construction phase. More importantly, the long-term economic impact lies in the ripple or spillover effect. "Data centres function much like infrastructure projects such as roads and rail networks. They enable the entry of companies and tech giants that depend on high bandwidth and low latency," says Mr. Kalyan. Technology and IT firms, as well as financial giants such as JP Morgan, are highly sensitive to Internet speed, where even minor latency can be a major disadvantage. Once data centres are operational, they can open the gates for such companies to invest in Visakhapatnam, benefiting from millisecond-level data speeds.

"In the long run, both the city and the State stand to gain in terms of employment generation and overall economic development, provided power and water challenges are adequately addressed," observes Mr. Kalyan.

From Page One

Five categories of land removed from 22-A list

Lands allotted to serving and retired defence personnel, freedom fighters, and political victims had also been removed from the prohibited list, provided relevant documents were available, he said.

Similarly, any one of the nearly eight types of documents would be adequate for deletion from the 22-A list. Revenue officials had been strictly instructed not to harass landowners by demanding additional documentation, the Minister said.

Mr. Satya Prasad said that in cases where only a portion of land in a survey number was disputed, authorities had been directed to subdivide the land, retain only the disputed portion in the prohibited list, and remove the remaining land. The decisions on the remaining four categories of land would be taken soon after discussions in the Group of Ministers (GoM). A final decision on prehold lands would be taken in two months, he said.

INBRIEF

YSRCP questions 'secrecy' over Naidu's foreign tour

The YSRCP has questioned the "secrecy" allegedly shrouding Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's foreign visit, and has demanded that the government disclose details of the tour. Addressing the media at the party office at Tadepalli on Wednesday, YSRCP SC Cell president T.J.R. Sudhakar Babu alleged that there was no information even with the GAD on the issue, which was highly suspicious. He also questioned the "frequent use of special aircraft and helicopters by Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan and HRD Minister Nara Lokesh," alleging that they were enjoying luxury travel while claiming that they were paying from their own pocket.

Govt. allots 9.96 acres in Nuzvid for setting up IIPM

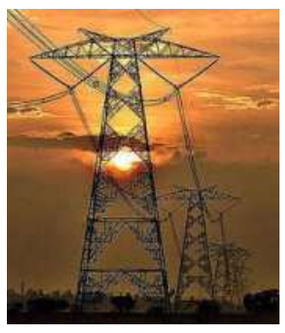
The government has approved the transfer of 9.96 acres of government land in Nuzvid and mandal in Eluru district to the Director of Horticulture & Sericulture Department for the establishment of Indian Institute of Plantation Management (IIPM). In a G.O. issued in this regard on December 31, 2025. Special Chief Secretary G. Sai Prasad, said the land is to be leased for 33 years on a free-of-cost basis.

APERC approves true-up charges of ₹4,498 crore

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) approved net true-up charges for retail supply business amounting to ₹4,498 crore proposed by the DISCOMs for FY 2019-20 to FY 2023-24 but directed them to claim the amounts from the government.

APERC stated in an official release that the government had undertaken to pay the true-up amounts to the DISCOMS to avoid hardship to consumers in tune with its commitment not to burden the people with a hike in electricity charges, therefore, the DISCOMs should claim the approved true-up amounts from the government.



The regulatory body has directed the DISCOMS to claim the amounts from the government. FILE PHOTO

Net charges

The true-up charges proposed by the three DISCOMs amounted to ₹5,933 crore, which came down to ₹4,498 crore after an adjustment of ₹1,435 crore made in the Commission's earlier orders. The net true-up charges originally filed for the said period amounted to ₹12,771 crore including a carrying cost of ₹4,149 crore and other expenses related to bill discounting, bad debts and short-term operational expenditure loans aggregating ₹3,906 crore.

However, the APERC disallowed the DISCOMs from recovering the carrying cost and other expenses adding up to ₹8,274 crore from consumers. This left a sum of ₹4,498 crore to be raised in the form of true-up charges, which the DISCOMs are mandated to claim from the government.

'Tariff cuts on cards'

Meanwhile, Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar said efforts were being made to reduce power purchase costs and plans being drawn up to further lower electricity tariffs in the future. Accusing the YSRCP government of grave misdeeds, he said those misdeeds continued to haunt the power sector even after five years.

Keeping its promise, the NDA government ensured reliable and quality power supply while reducing tariffs without imposing any additional burden on the public, he said in a press release on Thursday.

Since formation of the APERC in 1999, the government created history by implementing a true-down for the first time in 26 years, and reiterated that the YSRCP government had crippled the public by imposing electricity tariff hikes amounting to ₹32,166 crore in the form of true-up charges. He said solar, wind energy, and battery storage projects were being promoted.

A sense of joy and loss grips Annamayya dist.

While there is jubilation in Madanapalle, the new district headquarters, the mood in Rayachoti, which has lost the status, is different as people fear economic and administrative marginalisation

K. Umashanker
MADANAPALLE

Annamayya district officially began functioning with Madanapalle as its headquarters from Thursday, heralding a significant administrative reshuffle, which, at the same time, left its former headquarters, Rayachoti, suffering from a sense of loss and uncertainty.

The reorganisation led to a major redrawing of Assembly constituency boundaries, triggering multiple reactions from a cross-section of public, political, and official circles.

Spanning over 7,951 sq km, the current Annamayya district caters to a population of around 16.9 lakh, with its concentrated rural profile and agriculture being the core economic backbone.

As per the present setup, the district has three revenue divisions – Madanapalle, Rayachoti, and Pilar – with 25 mandals. The reshuffle resulted in Rajampeta Assembly constituency moving back to Kadapa district, and Railway Kodur to Tirupati district. As a compensatory move, the Punganur Assembly constituency of Chittoor district has been transferred to Annamayya district. The move brought cheer to the government officials, who termed it as Madanapalle's true elevation, defending its infrastructure readiness and accessibility.

"Madanapalle offers better road connectivity, institutional capacity, and logistical support for district-level governance. This will translate into faster service delivery," a senior revenue official said.

But in Rayachoti, the mood is different. Denizens of the town that witnessed a real estate boom between 2019-2025 now fear economic and administrative marginalisation.

"Losing the status of headquarters comes secondary, but what about our livelihoods, investments, and identity? Already, much investment was made in public infrastructure, including government offices and educational institutions," said a local traders' association leader.

Similarly, advocates, transporters, and small businesses worry about dwindling footfall.

Meanwhile, with the long-pending demand of the people of Madanapalle for a district being solved, senior leaders and activists of the NDA parties are in a jubilant mood, coinciding with the New Year celebrations.

Shocker for Minister

At the same time, the sudden development of ripping Rayachoti of its district headquarters status came as a big shock to Minister for Transport and Rayachoti MLA M. Ramprasad Reddy.

His followers have a pathetic take that their leader's outspoken attacks and fighting spirit against the YSRCP leaders, particularly former Minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy, were not taken into account by the party leadership.

Two dists. come into being

G.V.R. Subba Rao
VIJAYAWADA

In a major administrative overhaul, the Andhra Pradesh Government has officially created two new districts – Polavaram and Markapuram, increasing the State's total number of districts to 28 from the existing 26.

The move, effective from December 31, 2025, aims to streamline governance, improve service delivery, and address regional development needs more effectively.

Polavaram district, carved out of the Rampachodavaram and Chinturu revenue divisions of Alluri Sitharama Raju district, will have Rampachodavaram as its headquarters.

With a population of approximately 3.49 lakh people, predominantly tribals, the district is designed to focus on rehabilitation and development of villages affected by the Polavaram irrigation project. The district spanning 11 mandals will have two revenue divisions – Rampachodavaram and Chinturu.

Markapuram district, formed by merging the Markapuram and Kanigiri revenue divisions of western Prakasam, will serve a population of 11.42 lakh people. The new district addresses decades'-long demand of the residents, particularly those in the drought-prone farming belts, where groundwater scarcity has hindered agricultural development.

The creation of Markapuram is expected to enhance access to welfare schemes, crop insurance, and emerging industrial corridors, improving livelihood opportunities for the region's population.

The notification making Markapuram the headquarters of the new district has also been issued. The new district spread over 21 mandals will have two revenue divisions, Markapuram and Kanigiri.

Similarly, notifications have been published on the creation of five revenue divisions and other decisions approved by the Cabinet as part of the district reorganisation exercise.

As per the notification, Annamayya district will have three revenue divisions – Madanapalle, Pileru and Rayachoti. A total of 25 mandals are part of it.

Administrative overhaul

The Andhra Pradesh government has officially created two new districts, increasing the State's total number of districts to 28 from the existing 26.

MARKAPURAM DISTRICT
- **Headquarters**: Markapuram
- **Population**: 11.42 lakh
- **Revenue Divisions**: Markapuram and Kanigiri
- **Mandals**: 21
- **In-charge Collector and District Magistrate**: P. Raja Babu (who is also Collector and District Magistrate of Prakasam District)

POLAVARAM DISTRICT
- **Headquarters**: Rampachodavaram
- **Area**: 28.36 sq km
- **Population**: 3.49 lakh
- **Revenue Divisions** : Rampachodavaram and Chinturu
- **Mandals**: 11
- **In-charge Collector and District Magistrate**: A. S. Dinesh Kumar (who is also Collector and District Magistrate of ASR district)

2025 a year of redefined governance, says Pawan

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan said on Thursday that the launch of 'Amarajeevi Jaladhara' (water grid) with an investment of ₹7,910 crore aimed at supplying drinking water to 1.21 crore people by 2027, completion of 4,300-km of roads in villages, and implementation of 'Adavi Talli Baata' project to connect remote tribal hamlets with an outlay of ₹1,005 crore were the major highlights of the performance of the departments in his portfolio (Panchayat Raj & Rural Development, Environment & Forest) in the year 2025.

In a press release, he said the government marked 2025 as a year of redefined governance, wherein a slew of reforms had been introduced for better delivery of services. A significant progress was made towards achieving those goals, Mr. Pawan Kalyan observed.

5.78% growth in Net GST revenue in Dec. 2025

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh recorded a 5.78% year-on-year growth in Net GST collections in December 2025, "defying revenue pressures" caused by GST rate reductions and withdrawal of compensation cess under the GST 2.0 reforms, according to official data released by the State Tax Department. In a statement on Thursday, Chief Commissioner of State Tax Babu A said the Net GST collections stood at ₹2,652 crore, the highest-ever for the month of December since the GST regime began in 2017.

The revenue pertains to business transactions undertaken in November 2025.

Officials attributed the growth to increased consumption, improved compliance, and strengthened enforcement mechanisms despite reduced tax rates on essential goods, consumer durables, pharmaceuticals, cement, and removal of GST on life and medical insurance.

For the ninth consecutive month (April-December 2025), Andhra Pradesh's Net GST collections exceeded those of the corresponding period in the previous financial year, signalling sustained economic activity. The State's growth rate of 5.78% also surpassed the national average of 5.61% (excluding imports). Among southern States, Andhra Pradesh ranked second after Tamil Nadu (7.85%), performing better than Karnataka, Kerala, and Telangana.

R.K. Shriramkumar receives Sangita Kalanidhi award

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Hindustani violinist N. Rajam on Thursday advised students of music to pursue their practice without interruption, saying it would keep opening doors they never expected.

Conferring the Sangita Kalanidhi award on violinist R.K. Shriramkumar on the occasion of the Sadas of the Music Academy in Chennai, Ms. Rajam, Emeritus Professor and former Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at Banaras Hindu University, said that even after more than 85 years of rigorous practice and *sadhana*, she still felt like a student.

While presenting the award, she encouraged the audience to give a standing ovation to Mr. Shriramkumar, an authority on the *keertanas* of Muthuswami Dikshitar.

"Music is such an unfathomable ocean – Carnatic or Hindustani, north or south. What we learn in one lifetime is just a speck of that ocean. I strongly feel that all the great musicians we encounter with prodigious proficiency must have been practising the art for multiple births," said Ms. Rajam, recalling the days when she attended concerts at the Academy as a child.

She said she would sit in the last row of the Academy and try to observe and absorb veteran musicians



Violinist N. Rajam presenting the Sangita Kalanidhi award to R.K. Shriramkumar at the Sadas of the Music Academy on Thursday. N. Murali, President of the Academy, is seen. RAGU R.

rendering complex *Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi*.

"I would run home immediately after the concert, where my father would be eagerly waiting. I would render verbatim the *pallavi* line, *anulomam* and *pratilomam*. I would rest only after my father approved what I had absorbed," she recalled.

She also appreciated the Music Academy's century-long service to the cause of music, as well as the music school attached to it.

N. Murali, President of the Academy, said it was at Banaras Hindu University that Ms. Rajam decided to pursue Hindustani music, having earlier listened to recordings of Pt. Omkarnath Thakur. Ms. Rajam, sister of violinist T.N. Krishnan, later became a student of Pt. Thakur.

"Before her, the violin was not truly an accompanying instrument in Hindustani music. Moreover, instrumentalists in that system played accompanying instruments in a style distinct from the gayaki style adopted by Rajam. She thus played a pioneering role in introducing the gayaki style to Hindustani violin," Mr. Murali said. He also appreciated the teamwork of his colleagues, staff, volunteers and scouts who contributed to the music season's success.

Thavil player T.R. Govindarajan and musician Shyamala Venkateswaran received the Sangita Kala Acharya awards.

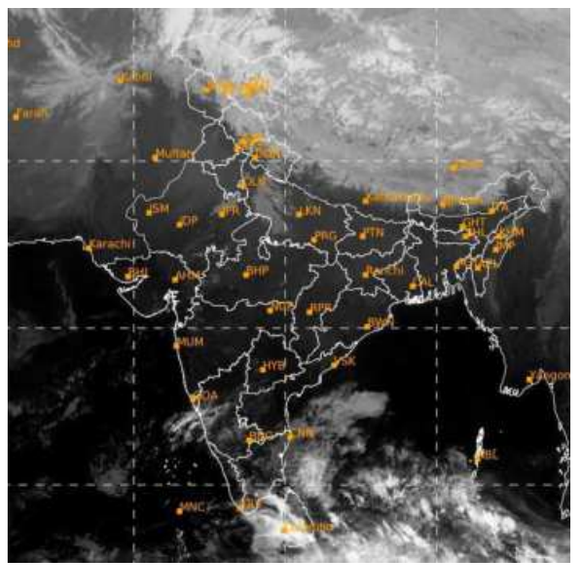
Kathakali musician Madambi Subramanian Namboodiri and veena-playing couple J.T. Jeyaraaj Krishnan and Jaysri Jeyaraaj Krishnan received the TTK awards.

The Musicologist award went to Professor C.A. Sreedhara.

Prizes were given to winners of various competitions. N. Ramji, secretary of the Academy, proposed a vote of thanks.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.15 HRS)

Forecast for Friday: Thunderstorm with lightning likely at isolated places over Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal. Cold wave conditions likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh and Delhi. Dense fog likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Sikkim and West Bengal

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	20.5	9.8	Kozhikode	—	33.4	23.6
Ahmedabad	—	27.7	18.9	Kurnool	—	31.1	19.7
Aizawl	—	22.4	8.6	Lucknow	—	21.0	7.0
Allahabad	—	20.4	8.4	Madurai	—	31.6	22.5
Bengaluru	—	26.4	19.9	Mangaluru	—	30.4	22.0
Bhopal	—	25.5	10.6	Mumbai	7	29.3	19.5
Bhubaneswar	—	25.7	12.7	Mysuru	—	29.0	14.2
Chandigarh	—	15.0	9.7	New Delhi	—	17.3	10.6
Chennai	—	29.1	23.1	Patna	—	19.3	8.2
Coimbatore	—	30.4	21.8	Port Blair	—	28.9	22.8
Dehradun	—	19.8	7.8	Puducherry	—	28.7	23.4
Gangtok	—	17.0	7.2	Pune	—	30.5	16.0
Goa	—	31.4	19.0	Raipur	—	29.6	11.4
Guwahati	—	24.0	11.0	Ranchi	—	24.2	7.0
Hubballi	—	27.0	14.0	Shillong	—	18.0	6.0
Hyderabad	—	27.1	18.0	Shimla	—	13.6	6.8
Imphal	—	23.2	11.3	Srinagar	—	9.4	2.2
Jaipur	0.3	18.6	12.0	Thiruvananthapuram	—	34.7	23.6
Kochi	—	30.4	24.8	Tiruchi	—	29.5	24.0
Kohima	—	13.8	5.2	Vijayawada	—	28.4	21.4
Kolkata	—	24.0	11.0	Visakhapatnam	—	27.8	20.7

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	.10	112	.56	...122	...119	
Bengaluru	...5	..15	.25	...196	...179	
Chennai	...7	9	.32	90	63	
Delhi	.11	113	110	...392	...289	
Hyderabad	...9	..18	.78	...151	...146	
Kolkata	.12	..76	.55	...313	...252	
Lucknow	...7	..44	.44	...239	...240	
Mumbai	...1	..69	.13	...110	...170	
Pune	..—	..37	.37	...239	...178	
Visakhapatnam	.17	..37	.54	...302	...179	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Delhi recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 380 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Damoh, Madhya Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 30

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

1 killed as row over erecting banner triggers clash, firing in Karnataka

The Hindu Bureau
KALABURAGI

One person, believed to be a Congress activist, was killed on Thursday night after a clash broke out between supporters of Ballari MLA Nara Bharath Reddy and Gangavathi MLA Gali Janardhan Reddy over the tying of a banner in Ballari, Karnataka.

While officials were yet to formally confirm the death, Mr. Bharath Reddy, speaking to mediapersons after the incident, alleged that a Congress activist was killed by supporters of Mr. Janardhan Reddy during the clash.

Holding Mr. Janardhan Reddy responsible for what he described as the "murder" of his supporter, Mr. Bharath Reddy demanded the immediate arrest of the Gangavathi MLA on murder charges.

According to preliminary information, Mr. Janardhan Reddy's supporters objected to a banner put up by Mr. Bharath Reddy's supporters in front of their leader's residence. The banner pertained to the installation of a Valmiki statue.

Karnataka Minister's comments fuel talk of CM aspirations

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Extending New Year's greetings to the people of Karnataka, Home Minister G. Parameshwara on Thursday expressed ambition of becoming Chief Minister in 2026.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "If the Congress high command takes a decision, I will get the political promotion." He was apparently referring to his aspiration to become the Chief Minister.

"I am always optimistic in life. Don't you have ambition in your life? When I joined politics, I had the ambition of becoming an MLA, later Minister and so on. Moving one step at a time," Dr. Parameshwara said.

Referring to the current political developments in the State, he said, "You (mediapersons) are watching the political environment every day through camera lenses." He was apparently indicating that the political climate was not favourable to Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar occupying the coveted post of Chief Minister.

THE HINDU GROUP

PRESENTS

THE HINDU
Sustainability Dialogues

Shaping Tomorrow's Sustainable Narrative

Inauguration & Keynote Address by



Chief Guest
Dr Soumya Swaminathan
Chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation
Principal Advisor, National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India.

In the Presence of



Guest of Honour
Dr N M Veeraiyan
Founder & Chancellor, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai

Session 1: 10:45 am – 11:45 am

Panel: Future of Waste Management: Innovation, Technology and Behaviour Change

Panelists: Dr Ashokkumar Veeramuthu, Professor & Head, Center for Waste Management & Renewable Energy, SIMATS, Chennai

Mr Nagesh Prabhu Chinivartha, Director - Sales & Marketing, Zigma Global Environ Solutions Pvt Ltd

Ms Janani Venkitesh, Environmental & Solid Waste Management Enthusiast, Secretary, Residents of Kasturba Nagar Association (ROKA)

Mr Aravind Kolappan, Vice President Business Operations, E-Cycle Solutions Pvt. Ltd.

Moderator: Ms Geetha Srimathi
Senior Reporter, The Hindu

Session 2: 11:50 am – 12:50 pm

Panel: Recycling, Recharging, Restoring – The New Imperatives for Water Management

Panelists: Dr B Ramesh, Principal, Saveetha School of Engineering, SIMATS, Chennai

Mr Gaurav Kumar IAS, Executive Director, CMWSSB, Govt of Tamil Nadu

Dr Beemaraja Sakthivel, Director, Stone Hands Project & Consultancy Pvt Ltd, Chennai

Mr Shailesh Kumar, Chief Executive Officer - India Cluster, VA Tech WABAG Limited

Moderator: Ms Lakshmi K
Deputy Editor, The Hindu

Session 3: 12:55 pm – 1:25 pm

Fireside Chat: Sustainable Campuses – How Institutions Can Lead India's Green Transition

Panelist: Dr Ashwani Kumar
Vice Chancellor, SIMATS, Chennai

Moderator: Mr Saptarshi Bhattacharjee
Asst. Editor – Reporting, The Hindu

Tuesday, January 6, 2026
10:00 am Onwards
Kurinji Hall, SIMATS, Chennai

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Pinarayi denies interference in Sabarimala investigation

Ruling out a CBI probe, Kerala Chief Minister says the SIT probe is monitored by the High Court; he calls the UDF convener's allegation against CMO a bid to 'divert attention from the real issue'

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday denied any interference by his office in the probe by the special investigation team (SIT) in the gold theft case linked to the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple.

Countering United Democratic Front convener Adoor Prakash MP's insinuation against Mr. Vijayan's political secretary, the Chief Minister, at a press conference here, said it was common knowledge that the SIT probe was monitored by the High Court.

He also ruled out the need for a Central Bureau of Investigation probe at this stage.

Mr. Prakash's allegation against the CMO was meant to divert attention from the real issue – as to how the prime accused in the case had gained access to a high-profile leader such as Sonia Gandhi, the Chief Minister said.

> How did these two individuals [Unnikrishnan Potti and Govardhan] gain access to a high-security leader like Sonia Gandhi?
>
> **PINARAYI VIJAYAN**
> Kerala Chief Minister



Mr. Prakash's name had cropped up in connection with this case after a photograph showing prime accused Unnikrishnan Potti and the Bellary-based jeweller Govardhan with Ms. Gandhi surfaced.

"How did these two individuals gain access to a high-security leader like Sonia Gandhi?" Mr. Vijayan said.

Mr. Prakash also should clarify as to why he accepted the invitation extended to him by Mr. Potti, the Chief Minister said. "Mr. Prakash says he went because Potti had invited him. Is he someone who should have accepted Potti's invitation just like that?" Mr. Vijayan said.

Kerala CM defends car trip with SNDP Yogam leader, warns against communalism

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday defended his car trip with Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam general secretary Vellappally Natesan in September. "Pinarayi Vijayan is not Binoy Viswam," replied the Chief Minister, when asked about Communist Party of India State secretary Binoy Viswam's remark that he would not have undertaken such a trip.

"Pinarayi Vijayan is not Binoy Viswam. Pinarayi Vijayan adopted Pinarayi Vijayan's stand. Binoy Viswam may have a different stand. He may not allow him in his car. I still think what I did was right," Mr. Vijayan said at a press conference here.



Vellapally Natesan

At the same time, Mr. Vijayan strongly rejected Mr. Natesan's controversial description of the CPI as "Chathiyan Chandu." The CPI is an important partner in the LDF and no one in the Left harbours any feeling that they have been betrayed, he said.

"The CPI is one of the key partners in our front. It is a Left party. We have very warm relations with that party in matters related to the front. None of us feels being betrayed in any way," he said. In the morning hours of Thursday, CPI (M) State secretary M.V. Govindan told a television channel that the party had no compulsions to rein in Mr. Natesan.

When asked about Mr. Natesan's statement against the CPI, Mr. Govindan said that the CPI and the CPI(M) remained on the same page and were the two strongest allies in the Left Front.

Asked at his press conference as to who will lead the Left front in the Assembly polls, Mr. Vijayan said the party will take a decision at the appropriate time.

"In our case, all such decisions are taken jointly.I don't decide personally, but a decision is taken by the party," he said. Mr. Vijayan also urged caution on letting down the guard any let-up in the level of alertness against communalism in the Kerala society.

"Kerala exists as a strong centre of secualrism. We should seriously look at whether that Kerala is changing and, if so, in which direction," he said.

Mob rule

The bogey of infiltration is resulting in hate crimes across India

In the closing weeks of 2025, a series of violent incidents across India exposed a disturbing pattern of mob violence directed at migrants who were labelled foreigners – Bangladeshis and Chinese – by their attackers. In these cases, the three victims were Indian citizens from various parts of the country. Suspicion based on language, region, appearance or presumed nationality is escalating into mob violence in different regions. This is extremely worrying and the police must act strictly. The political leadership in States and the Centre must make it clear that such violence is unacceptable. In Palakkad district, Kerala, Ram Narayan Baghel, a 31-year-old migrant worker from Chhattisgarh was lynched by a mob on December 17. Baghel was accused of theft and repeatedly questioned about his identity, with his attackers allegedly asking him whether he was "Bangladeshi" before beating him to death. Kerala is heavily dependent on migrant labour, and prides itself on its high levels of education and law and order. The lynching is a blot on its reputation. On December 24, in Sambalpur in Odisha, a young migrant worker from West Bengal was beaten to death by a mob that accused him of being a "Bangladeshi". Juel Sheikh, a daily wage labourer, was confronted at a tea stall by unidentified persons who demanded his identity documents and accused him of being an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant. Two days later, in another incident from Odisha, a Bengali-speaking street vendor from West Bengal was assaulted.

In Tamil Nadu, a man from Odisha was attacked while travelling on a train, in Tiruvallur district, by juveniles armed with machetes and sickles. The assault was filmed and circulated on social media. In Dehradun, on December 28, Anjel Chakma, a 22-year-old student from Tripura, was stabbed by a group that had allegedly hurled racial slurs at him and his brother. He died in hospital later. People from the northeastern States are often treated as perpetual outsiders in other parts of India; Chakma was called "Chinese" by his attackers. These are not isolated incidents: they occur amid numerous other cases of mob intimidation, sometimes targeting worshippers of minority communities, at other times, even young students celebrating a friend's birthday. The police in the States have responded to these horrible crimes by making some arrests, but that is not sufficient. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has turned its incendiary campaign against "illegal infiltration" from Bangladesh as a central plank in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Assam and West Bengal. It is no coincidence that mobs across the country feel emboldened to raise this bogey at random against helpless people. The BJP should realise the dangers of its campaign and restrain itself.

The water divide

The quality of piped water supply must be checked at delivery point

An indicator of public health is the well-being of the poorer sections of the people. Health, education, infrastructure, clean air and clean water all fall under basic needs, and various institutions should be busy working round the clock to improve lives. On most of these counts, however, India appears to be falling short, with the latest being the tragedy unfolding in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. At least four people, including a baby (official toll; unofficial is 14), have lost their lives after drinking municipality-supplied water, with more than 2,000 people falling ill. Over 200 people are in hospital and 32 are in the ICU. It is a development steeped in irony because Indore has been voted India's cleanest city for several years in a row for its exemplary waste segregation and management practice among other cleanliness measures it undertook. As has become the unfortunate norm after every mishap, the blame game began swiftly with authorities pinning it on tardy progress on installing a fresh supply line. A committee is to investigate the issue, but things should not have been allowed to precipitate such a deathly crisis in the first place. This is the second instance of a water issue in the State in the past two months. In November, students at the Vellore Institute of Technology campus near Bhopal vehemently protested against contaminated water supply after many of them began contracting jaundice.

It is a shame that despite progress under the Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission, water woes continue. The National Family Health Survey data show that despite a rural-urban divide, 96% of households use an improved source of drinking water. A municipal supply is always considered to be a safe and "improved source", and if checks and balances were in place, the authorities at Indore would have spotted the contamination and let people know of the dangers. Giving access to water is meaningless unless the quality of the supply is assured. There needs to be better enforcement of water guidelines and other environmental laws at all levels. Air pollution is already wreaking havoc on citizens' health; unsafe drinking water should not be added to the list. The incidents in Madhya Pradesh should be taken as a wake-up call for India's water management. With a population that is close to 147 crore, India's water-borne disease burden is also high. All States should immediately check water supply sources for chemical and sewage contaminants. Old infrastructure including pipes must be repaired or replaced. There should be strict enforcement of policy and monitoring of practice along with awareness campaigns. Indore and many more cities in India have to clean up their act, or risk more deaths.

Mandating student presence, erasing learning



Shelley Walia

has taught Cultural and Literary Theory at the Panjab University, Chandigarh

The Delhi High Court's affirmation that law students may sit for examinations without satisfying rigid attendance thresholds has provoked predictable anxiety among administrators still tethered to an older, bureaucratised conception of education. But the ruling, far from eroding academic seriousness, restores a truth that Indian universities have resisted for decades, a truth that learning cannot be secured through surveillance. Compulsory attendance belongs to a paternalistic era that believed that students must be prodded into intellectual life rather than invited into it. A university worthy of its name should cultivate curiosity, not compliance.

The obsession with a student's presence

I say this not only as a critic of the managerial culture that has consumed our campuses, but as someone who has spent more than 40 years in the classroom. In all those years, I rarely took attendance and almost never prevented a student from taking an examination. I believed, and still believe, that coercion produces neither seriousness nor scholarship. If students do not wish to attend a class, the proper response is not punishment but introspection. A teacher must ask the harder question: what did I fail to offer that could have made this hour indispensable to them? Attendance is not a measure of learning; at best it is a measure of obedience.

The obsession with physical presence, understandably, flourishes where the classroom has been reduced to the perfunctory transfer of "yellowing" notes, the rote delivery of prefabricated knowledge that students could obtain faster and more efficiently through digital means. The ruling disrupts this apathy. It forces institutions of law to confront a truth long evaded, that a classroom that enforces attendance is already pedagogically bankrupt. This ruling of the High Court, I hope, will go a long way in changing the attendance norms across the country in all universities of higher learning.

Paulo Freire saw this with a clarity that remains electrifying. For him, education was never the mechanical depositing of information but a dialogic encounter, an awakening of consciousness through questioning, debate, and the shared labour of inquiry. In his Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a seminal classic, students are not passive vessels receiving knowledge but beings who "name the world" and interpret through thought, and critical imagination.

For instance, my strongest classrooms have always been those born not of obligation but of desire. I remember speaking with Sir Isaiah Berlin, the renowned historian of ideas, over lunch in Oxford many years ago, and he confessed, with characteristic generosity, how rigorously he prepared his notes, outlines, marginalia, a meticulously constructed road map of ideas, jokes, narrative turns, and emotional crescendos. His lectures captivated not by accident but because they were acts of craftsmanship. Students came not out of duty but anticipation.

> Indian universities must confront a truth that they evade — a classroom where attendance is enforced is pedagogically bankrupt

I carried that ethic into my own teaching. I never entered a lecture room unprepared, often working late into the night before class. And like Sir Berlin, I believed that the teacher's labour should disappear into the pleasure of learning, an effort made invisible but unmistakable in its effect. I was not alone in thinking this way. Terry Eagleton's lectures overflowed not because he demanded attendance but because his ideas were intensely incendiary. Germaine Greer filled halls because she brought intellectual rebellion to the podium. The Cambridge historian, Professor Sir Christopher Bayly, spoke history as if it were happening in the present tense. Frank Kermode, the influential literary critic, lectured after dinner with a glass of wine in hand, and this atmosphere of informal brilliance made literature feel even more urgent. None of them needed the threat of consequences to fill a classroom. They made absence unthinkable. This is what the Indian university has forgotten.

Classroom experiences

My strongest classrooms have always been those born not of obligation but of desire. I recall an afternoon when I took my students to a ridge overlooking the valley to read Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." I wanted them to encounter the poem not as a museum piece but as a living meditation on memory and perception. The students dispersed under the pines and wild grass where, suddenly, Wordsworth's idea of nature as "nurse", "guide" and "guardian of my heart" felt neither archaic nor maudlin but provocatively contemporary. I asked a single question: What does it mean for nature to educate us? What followed was not conventional interpretation but a collective reflection on how landscape shapes consciousness. The poem seemed to open of its own accord, demanding a point of view, rather than receiving it.

A similar transformation occurred when we carried Thoreau's Walden to the edge of a wooded trail. The students sat on stones and fallen branches, thumbing through a text, interpreting individually and not merely toeing the line. Thoreau's claim that most lives are lived in "quiet desperation" kindled an unexpected debate about our own system, its addiction to metrics, its reduction of intellectual life to attendance charts, its inability to recognise solitude, reflection, or slowness as virtues. Reading outdoors, my classroom dissolved, and what emerged instead was inquiry in its most rudimentary form.

The ruling, perhaps inadvertently, moves us closer to this ideal. In an era where digital resources, Artificial Intelligence tools, and open-access archives place vast knowledge at students' fingertips, the insistence on physical presence feels not only antiquated but also pedagogically unimaginative. The finest universities, Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, MIT and others, do not treat attendance as the measure of commitment. They assume maturity, always trusting a student's intellectual autonomy. Their confidence lies in the quality of their teaching, not in the surveillance of their students.

The sorry state of the Indian university

In this context, the Indian university has been reduced to a mere shell of its former self, suffocated by bureaucratic rigidity and administrative overreach. The Centre's increasing control has transformed campuses into intellectual vassals, where curricula are scrutinised, dissent is silenced, and administrative positions are filled by those who prioritise loyalty over scholarly merit. Within this stifling paradigm, mandatory attendance policies serve as a tool of pedagogical pacification, undermining student autonomy and intellectual curiosity.

A university that prioritises attendance over engagement ultimately betrays its fundamental purpose to nurture critical thinkers who can challenge and transform society. This is why the attendance debate is not administrative but philosophical, asking whether we trust students as thinking beings, or whether we regard them as wards of the institution. Coercion, indeed, is always the refuge of a pedagogy that has lost confidence.

The High Court ruling opens up a transformative possibility for rethinking the very fabric of teaching across higher education. By removing the coercive element of compulsory attendance, educators will be compelled to innovate and reimagine their pedagogical approaches. An empty classroom can be a catalyst for introspection, prompting teachers to craft learning spaces that are intellectually compelling and inherently engaging. Peer dynamics also undergo a paradigmatic shift, where the shame lies not in absence but in being disconnected from a class that has garnered admiration and enthusiasm from other students. This reorients the incentive structure, shifting the locus of motivation from external compulsion to intrinsic curiosity.

Learning, in this context, is reconceptualised as a dynamic and evolving process, marked by its restless and vital nature. It thrives on contradiction, dialogue, imagination and risk-taking. The true university is built on this refusal of stasis, its purpose not to disseminate information but to facilitate discovery. The future of education hinges on recognising and embracing this fundamental distinction.

The ruling therefore, serves as a testament to the inherent tension between freedom and coercion in the pursuit of knowledge. By decoupling attendance from examination eligibility, the Court has highlighted the futility of attempting to legislate intellectual engagement. True learning cannot be mandated. It can only be cultivated through the creation of spaces that foster intellectual curiosity and freedom. The university's future depends on its ability to navigate this fundamental distinction.

Paying Musk, irrational exuberance and inequality



Rahul Menon

teaches at the Jindal School of Government and Public Policy at O.P. Jindal Global University

Despite the headlines, Elon Musk might never make a trillion dollars. The Tesla CEO would only receive this astronomical amount if he were to meet a set of incredibly ambitious goals, which includes increasing the stock value of the company to $8.5 trillion, selling 20 million vehicles and one million robots. It seems the stuff of science fiction, and perhaps it is. But the fact that Tesla shareholders see it fit to reward this vision should make us re-assess the place of shareholder capitalism in our economy, as it has shown itself unable to tackle two significant problems: irrational exuberance and inequality.

Speculation and inequality

Many analysts have pointed to Tesla's stock being overvalued, with a high price-to-earnings ratio. Its market capitalisation has increased even though sales and profits fell in the wake of his association with the Trump campaign, currently standing at nearly $1.5 trillion. Why then, is Musk being rewarded when his company's real-world performance has not matched up to the stratospheric rise of its financial values?

The current pay package voted in by Tesla shareholders is a pure bet on the future, that the company would eventually be able to transform itself into an Artificial Intelligence-behemoth under Musk's leadership. But there is little to support the claim in the present, and the validation of Musk's extreme pay package is a speculative bet on his ability to deliver record profits in the future. This is irrational exuberance writ large, a gamble made under profound uncertainty regarding the future, the very same irrational exuberance that has seen the economy devastated in 1929 and 2008.

As Keynes himself pointed out, only harm can accompany a system which makes economic activity the byproduct of speculation. Let us assume, however, that the gamble does pay off. The exuberance of shareholders' might prove rational, but it would only exacerbate inequality.

> Rising wealth inequality has also led to a weakening of democracy

Under the deal, if Tesla were to achieve a $8 trillion valuation, Musk would be granted additional Tesla stock that would bring the value of his total holdings to over a trillion dollars – an enormous increase in wealth inequality concentrated under the power of a single individual. An institution designed to mitigate the worst excesses of individual entrepreneurs by diffusing power among several shareholders has shown itself decidedly incapable to the task.

Either they are guilty of perpetuating an inflated view of the company's prospects, or of legitimising a level of wealth concentration unheard of in history, and, by extension, weakening the foundations of democracy.

Voting rights and the principles

Voting rights to shareholders are, in principle, a useful mechanism. If workers were to own shares in the modern corporation, what they would lose out due to slow wage growth could be compensated, in theory, by the rise in equity holdings. Furthermore, the diffusion of voting rights would ensure checks and balances on the exercise of CEO power. The Tesla vote has shown the limitations of these arguments.

One could argue that the trillion dollar payoff is a reward to Musk increasing shareholder wealth. This fits in with a world-view that sees inequality as being justified if it leads to an increase in living standards without making use of market distortions such as strong-arming competitors or cheating consumers. But this is to take too narrow a view of the political import of inequality.

The process of voting at Tesla may be legitimate, given the narrow bounds of procedure laid down by the company, but is unjustifiable given the fact that Elon Musk has interfered in elections, publicly made a gesture that has been interpreted as a Nazi salute and amplified hateful right-wing content on a social media platform that he owns.

The procedural form of voting is necessary, but not sufficient, for the preservation of economic democracy. A simple account of democracy, for instance, would hold that organs of free speech should not be monopolised. Yet this is exactly what X's (Twitter) shareholders voted to do when they agreed to its sale.

Imagine that all workers of Tesla can vote on executive compensation, but not on conditions of work. Further, imagine that Musk provides a credible plan to increase stock values, and along with it comes a significant increase in his own net wealth. Voting for the plan increases workers' net wealth, but increases the possibilities of further election interference. By the narrow bounds of economic rationality, it would be rational for individuals to vote for the plan. For shareholder capitalism to truly uphold democratic norms, voters would have to be economically irrational in prizing political objectives over their narrow economic interests.

The effect of wealth rise

One might criticise this argument by claiming that this writer is unfairly conflating political and economic objectives, which shareholder capitalism was never meant to tackle. But the unchecked wealth accumulation of the last couple of decades has meant a blurring of the boundaries separating the political from the economic. Rising wealth inequality, even if accompanied by rising individual wealth, has brought with it a weakening of political institutions.

X's sale and Tesla's pay package have shown that simple access to equity shares and the act of voting alone cannot meaningfully halt modern capitalism's worst excesses. What is required is to embed these processes in broader democratic institutions that explicitly limit the concentration of wealth and its ability to interfere in democratic processes. Keynes realised this contradiction: capitalism can only meaningfully work if its operation is curtailed. It is beyond time we recognise it as well.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mediation claims

First, U.S. President Donald Trump claimed credit, with his repeated claims, for having mediated in the India-Pakistan stand-off in May 2025. The Government of India was quick to deny this by stating that the truce was a bilateral matter in which the DGMOs of both countries were in contact following a request made by the Pakistan side first. Now, China has jumped into the fray by claiming credit for "stopping" the conflict. The Government of India has again rejected this claim by saying there was no third party involvement. Had Operation Sindoor continued for a few more days, there would have been greater destruction in Pakistan. It is strange to think that China could have mediated at that time, because it was the biggest arms supplier to Pakistan.

Govardhana Myneedu,
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

Water safety

Since the Indus Valley Civilisation, there has been a realisation of lapses in separating sewage and drinking water infrastructure. Such an error is the equivalent of a 'never event' in medical care. Merely suspending officials in Indore is not enough.

Anany Mishra,
Bhilai, Chhattisgarh

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Has housing become prohibitively expensive in Indian cities?



Ashok B. Lall

Practising architect for over four decades who has helped integrate sustainable urban development practices into curricula for architecture students



Tikender Singh Panwar

former Deputy Mayor of Shimla and currently a member of the Kerala Urban Commission

PARLEY

Roti, *kapda aur makaan* (roti, clothes, and housing) has been a political promise for decades in India. Now, with housing becoming increasingly expensive, *makaan* has been taken out of the equation in urban India. In Patna, for instance, buying a 2 BHK (bedroom, hall, kitchen) costs over ₹1 crore. This is the case in other rapidly urbanising cities as well. In metropolises such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru, it can be twice the amount or more, making ownership of a house out of reach for most Indians. According to the World Bank, the per capita income in India is ₹2,42,487.70 (2024). However, this does not reflect income inequality among individuals and across States, which is extremely wide. Has housing become prohibitively expensive in Indian cities? Ashok B. Lall and Tikender Singh Panwar discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Serish Nanisetti.** Edited excerpts:

Why is India in a grip of a housing crisis?

Ashok B. Lall: Economists explain the shortage of housing and the rising costs of housing in desirable locations as a problem of demand and supply. But there is another angle to it and it has to do with urban policies and urban land management. Let's say a house or a flat of 1,500 square feet is priced at ₹1 crore. The cost of construction would be ₹3,000 per sq ft at the most. Yet, the flat is being sold at more than ₹1 crore. What does that mean? It means that ₹50 lakh or ₹55 lakh is attributable to the advantage of the location, the price of land, the profit that the developer wants to make on it.

The problem we are facing is land policy. In the open market, people acquire land at very low prices, wait for the city to grow, hold on to the land, and then ask for high FARs (Floor Area Ratio) or permission to build a lot on the same piece of land and sell it. In this way, the land policy of the state and of the city administration makes affordable housing unaffordable.

Tikender Singh Panwar: This is a social question. It emerges when what I call shelter is transformed from a social necessity into a commodity, subject to speculation, rent extraction, and unequal power relations. Nearly 150 years of Friedrich Engels' observations (*The Condition of the Working Class in England, 1845*), we confront the same contradiction, only amplified by what we call financialisation, land monopolies, and state retreat.

Housing in Indian cities today is not unaffordable because houses are scarce. Houses are abundant, but in the wrong form, the wrong location, and at the wrong price. When you see cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, and even smaller urban centres, you will see a paradox. It is that lakhs of vacant houses coexist with overcrowded slums or informal settlements. At the heart of India's housing crisis is the real estate-led model of urban development. In the last three decades, we have seen how housing has increasingly functioned as a financial asset rather than a social good. Land is being hoarded, apartments are parked, and stores of value and housing supplies calibrated not to need, but to purchasing power. The state largely plays the role of facilitator.



High-rise apartments overlook Mullakathuva Cheruvu near Hitech City in Hyderabad. SIDDHANT THAKUR

What are the sociological implications when a large percentage of people cannot afford to own a house or even dream of it?

ABL: It is about time the state and the government recognise that one of the essential features of a stable polity and a stable economy is access to affordable housing for all citizens in locations and places that support their progress in life. Let's look at the Singapore model. (Former Prime Minister) Lee Kuan Yew had said at the beginning of the very large housing programme that Singapore would fail unless 70-80% of its population was given affordable homes, the necessary comforts and security, and were well connected to the city and to the urban economic system. In the 1960s and '70s, Singapore passed legislation that preserved land at certain prices so that it was taken out of speculative markets. It is not necessary for us to own homes, but we need to have affordable rental housing in favourable locations.

> At the heart of India's housing crisis is the real estate-led model of urban development. In the last three decades, we have seen how housing has increasingly functioned as a financial asset rather than a social good.
> **TIKENDER SINGH PANWAR**

TSP: The sociological consequences of unaffordable housing are profound and long lasting. When a large share of the population cannot afford stable housing, cities become sites of permanent insecurity. Families postpone education, healthcare, and social mobility to pay rent; they cannot stay in the city if they are unable to pay the rent. And migrants remain unregistered, invisible, and politically voiceless. So informality becomes the norm. And more dangerously, housing exclusion fractures the idea of urban citizenship. If you are not able to shape the city yourself, the whole question of your right to the city framework gets fractured. This eventually leads to a ghettoisation and it is a kind of apartheid. People who build cities – construction workers, sanitation workers, care workers, and so on – are systematically denied the right to live within them. There is a great Indian segregation, especially of the marginalised sections: the Dalits and Muslims. And what will happen to the children? They inherit not just poverty, but also instability.

Is there a play book to address this housing crisis in India?

TSP: I would say there is no single solution, but there is direction for sure. Vacant housing and underutilised land must be brought into use with anti-speculation measures. Land policy is central. This means mobilising vacant housing and underutilised land through taxation, inclusionary zoning, and other regulatory measures to curb speculation. In the Kerala Urban Policy Commission, what we have recommended is a kind of inverse taxation. If you are occupying a house, then there is one tax slab, and if you are not occupying one, then you will be paying more. But laws alone, as we know, are insufficient without political will. So, housing reforms must challenge entrenched interests and therefore require a democratic reimagining of the city.

ABL: A recent document that I read by Niti Aayog views the city and land as assets for making money and increasing the GDP. Not as a place to live, where everyone can share and prosper equally. They believe that the more revenue you extract from land by auctioning it to the highest bidder and permitting the highest FAR, the more prices can be pushed up. And they think that this is how a city gets enriched – because the higher the value of transaction, the higher the value of land, the higher the taxes that the city can claim. The document completely misses the fundamental purpose of city planning and city management, which is to give everyone the opportunity to grow economically and give them spatial justice. Therefore, it is a fundamental flaw in the political and economic imagination of policy.

Can transit solutions solve this problem?

ABL: This transit solution is alright but only if the alternative locations they connect to have social amenities that are required for building a reasonably well-rounded, healthy, and prosperous life. But if transit is mostly seen as transportation, with everything else thrown to the winds, then no, it is not a solution. If you look at Singapore's case, at the new townships that have been set up around the heart of the old city of Singapore, some 5 or 7 or 10 kilometres away, there are very good transit connections. Each of those townships is fully developed. That is the imagination you want.

Let's also look at the Dutch example. Every development – even of commercial housing in a municipality – has to designate a certain section as social housing. This is where the pricing of housing for rental and for purchase is kept at half the value of the market value. That is how the bulk of the population that is below the median income level gets integrated into the city economy. The enabling action is to integrate the population below the economic median line into the economy of the city as rapidly as possible. The purpose of urban development is to help society to develop.

TSP: New housing supply often worsens exclusion by pushing the poor further to the peripheries, increasing commuting costs, and fragmenting social life. Looking at transit to address the housing question is too premature. What are the drivers of economic conditions? Those need to be kept in mind. I would like to place the market-oriented solution in perspective. More than cheap passes or commute access, it is the larger ecosystem that needs to be borne in mind. Which way do we want India's urbanisation to go?

To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

Getting teens to read the news

Through board games, photographs, graphics, and chronologically told stories, The Hindu In School engages young readers

Gokul C.

How do you get teenagers to read newspapers? The Hindu In School team is often asked this question by teachers, parents, and fellow journalists. It is also something that we reflect on while writing and producing a newspaper that caters to young readers between the ages of 13 and 18.

The question assumes importance because multiple studies, conducted around the world, claim that the rate of students reading for pleasure or general awareness is declining sharply. These surveys blame the trend on social media, specifically short-form videos, which has significantly altered the patterns of information consumption.

One such survey conducted in the U.K. in 2025, by the communication regulator Ofcom, showed that 57% of respondents in the age range of 12-15 were getting their news and information from social media platforms. The scenario is not very different in other countries, including India.

As one journalism student told the In School team during an interaction, "I don't go looking for news on social media. It comes as part of the overall content that I view. What I like is that I can instantly react to the news, through likes, shares, and comments." This is a popular sentiment among young readers.

Social media has played a significant role in enabling the youth to express themselves, especially in societies where their freedom of expression is restrained. Yet, most of the content pushed to them is not age-appropriate, which is one of the reasons why Australia imposed a ban on social media use for children below 16.

But even on traditional platforms, there is precious little space for child-friendly journalism. This makes the task of creating news that is inclusive, accessible, and explanatory for readers of all ages both daunting and deeply rewarding. Coming back to the question of getting children to read, here is what we do.

We try to cover news that makes sense in their world and present it in their "language". Which is why our headlines look different from the main edition. For instance, stories about the birth anniversary of mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, board examination preparation tips, and research into why you cannot wiggle your toes like your fingers make it to our front page. We focus on topics that are of importance and interest to teen readers.

For many of them, we are their first introduction to news. So, we try to keep it simple. We break down developments to explain context and consequences. We re-invert the inverted pyramid – the traditional form of reporting news with information ordered based on their importance – to tell stories sequentially and chronologically, placing greater emphasis on explanatory journalism.

Since many teenagers are exhausted by their academic workload, we try not to overwhelm them with information. A story on climate change, for instance, may be presented through photographs and graphics rather than dense statistics. We turn empirical data into anecdotal stories that readers can relate to.

For children with an appetite for deeper reading, we narrate national, international, and civic news as stories that are easier to absorb. We have even created a monthly board game to help children engage with news. We present the news of the month on the board game, and every positive news takes the player ahead while negative ones push them back.

What also helps engage young readers is making them feel like they are a part of the editorial process. They write to us regularly, to share their stories, poems, and opinions about news developments, and even puzzles and games. Given the volume of submissions, we dedicated last year's Children's Day issue to articles written by our teen contributors.

The sheer enthusiasm and response underlined us that there is still a significant number of teenagers who enjoy reading news in print. This includes many first-generation English learners who use school newspapers as an educational tool to strengthen their language skills.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Frozen hands, fresh carrots



In the freezing 1°C air on the outskirts of Srinagar, farmers work in their vegetable fields on New Year's day. IMRAN NISSAR

FROM THE ARCHIVES — The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 2, 1976

Jewellery forms bulk of Madras disclosures

Madras, Jan. 1: Mr. V.V. Badami, Commissioner of Income Tax, Tamil Nadu, told pressmen here to-day that a total of 12,153 declarants had disclosed income and wealth amounting to Rs. 154 crores under the voluntary disclosures scheme. Out of this, disclosed income came to Rs. 48 crores, including about Rs. 8 to Rs. 9 crores in respect of search cases. Wealth disclosures accounted for Rs. 106 crores.

Jewellery dominated wealth disclosures.

The highest disclosure of income was about Rs. 2 crores, by a few individuals, and the lowest about Rs. 600.

Though the Ordinance announcing the scheme was issued on October 8 when the scheme technically came into operation, it was only on October 24 that three declarations, each for Rs. 25,000, were filed, from Villupuram in South Arcot district. There was a progressive increase since then: Nov. 1: 10 cases – Rs. 3.25 lakhs; Nov. 15: 44 cases – Rs. 15.5. lakhs; Dec. 15: 448 cases – Rs. 4.64 crores; and Dec. 18: 612 cases – Rs. 8.86 crores. At this stage, Mr. Badami said, his colleagues (Commissioners) went on tours of important towns like Salem, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tiruchi to give clarifications on various people and bring back declarations made to them personally.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 2, 1926

New rugby wireless station

Leafield (Oxford), Mid. Jan 1: Newspapers publish long description of the new Rugby wireless station, which is to-day taken into service for regular transmissions to all parts of the British Empire.

It is the greatest valve station in the world and *The Times* says of it that it is a "triumph of scientific and engineering skill which calls for a warm tribute of admiration to all who have taken part in the solution of many new problems inseparable from the design and construction of such a station. The importance of the achievement can hardly be exaggerated."

From Page One

Tobacco tax rejig to take effect from February 1

The GST compensation cess was to end in 2022. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cess collections were not enough to compensate the States and so the Centre borrowed money to compensate them.

Hence, it was extended until 2026, with the proceeds being used to repay the loan.

With the impending end of the loan, the Centre on September 22, 2025, removed the incidence of the cess on most items except tobacco items. From February 1, 2026, the cess will no longer apply on these items either, effectively ending it.

Finally, the Ministry introduced a new valuation mechanism for tobacco products such as chewing tobacco, filter *khaini*, *jarda*, scented tobacco, and *gutkha*, whereby the GST value would be determined based on the retail sale price declared on the package.

Regarding the Health Security *se* National Security Act, 2025, the Ministry justified the inclusion of the national security aspect by saying that conventional tax revenues cannot always guarantee funding for national security functions, and so a dedicated cess is needed for the purpose.

"General tax revenues are subject to competing developmental priorities and cannot always guarantee sustained long-term funding for core national security functions," the FAQ note said.

"A dedicated purpose-specific cess enables the Union to create a non-lapsable, predictable financial stream that supports multi-year security preparedness, technological upgradation, capacity creation, and advanced equipment procurement – without increasing the tax burden on the general population or raising broad-based rates such as GST."

Fire at Swiss resort leaves dozens dead

Valais Canton police commander Frédéric Gisler said during a news conference that work is underway to identify the victims and inform their families, adding that the community is "devastated".

Ms. Pilloud later said the number of people who were in the bar is "currently totally unknown", adding that its maximum capacity will be part of the investigation.

"For the time being, we don't have any suspect," she added, when asked if anyone had been arrested over the fire. "An investigation has been opened, not against anyone, but to illuminate the circumstances of this dramatic fire."

Two women told French broadcaster BFMTV they were inside when they saw a male bartender lifting a female bartender on his shoulders as she held a lit candle in a bottle. The flames spread, collapsing the wooden ceiling, they told the broadcaster.

One of the women described a crowd surge as people frantically tried to escape from a basement nightclub up a narrow flight of stairs and through a narrow door.

Officials described how the blaze likely triggered the release of combustible gases that ignited violently and caused what English-speaking firefighters call a flashover or backdraft.

"This evening should have been a moment of celebration and coming together, but it turned into a nightmare," said Mathias Reynard, head of the regional government of the Valais Canton.

The injured were so numerous that the intensive care unit and operating theatre at the regional hospital quickly hit full capacity, he said.

Swiss President Guy Parmelin, speaking on his first day in office, said many emergency staff had been "confronted by scenes of indescribable violence and distress".

"This Thursday must be the time of prayer, unity and dignity," he said. "Switzerland is a strong country not because it is sheltered from drama, but because it knows how to face them with courage and a spirit of mutual help."

DRDO will play key role in India's air defence: Rajnath

Organisation will equip critical installations across the nation with advanced air defence systems for comprehensive aerial protection, under the Sudarshan Chakra initiative, says Defence Minister

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) would play a pivotal role in the creation of Sudarshan Chakra, an ambitious air defence initiative announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day 2025 address from the Red Fort.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with DRDO Chairman Samir V. Kamat at the DRDO headquarters in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

Mr. Singh was addressing scientists and senior officials during his visit to the DRDO headquarters in New Delhi on the occasion of the organisation's 68th Foundation Day. Under the Sudarshan Chakra initiative, the DRDO will equip critical installations across the country with advanced air defence systems for comprehensive aerial protection over the next decade.

Highlighting the lessons from Operation Sindoor, the Minister said modern warfare underscored the importance of robust and reliable air defence capabilities. The DRDO would achieve the objectives of the Sudarshan Chakra initiative with dedication and urgency, strengthening India's preparedness against evolving aerial threats, he said.

Weapon systems developed by the DRDO played a decisive role during Operation Sindoor, he said, underlining the organisation's professionalism and commitment to safeguarding national interests. Commending the DRDO for significantly bolstering India's indigenous defence capabilities, he said the state-of-the-art technologies and equipment supplied to the armed forces performed seamlessly during the operation. He noted that their reliable performance boosted the morale of soldiers and demonstrated the growing maturity of India's defence research ecosystem.

Mr. Singh praised the DRDO not only as a technology creator but also as a trust builder, stating that the organisation had emerged as a symbol of hope, certainty, and belief for the nation. He acknowledged the DRDO's expanding collaboration with the private sector, academia, start-ups, and micro, small and medium enterprises, which has contributed to the creation of a synergistic and vibrant defence ecosystem.

Visible improvements across processes – from procurement and project management to industry engagement – had made systems faster, easier, and more reliable, he said.

Calling upon the DRDO to remain aligned with the rapidly evolving global technological landscape, Mr. Singh urged the organisation to continue focusing on innovation, deep tech, and next generation technologies.

Emphasising the need for continuous learning and development, he said technology scanning, capability assessment, and future readiness were essential to ensure India remains prepared for emerging warfare domains.

During the visit, Samir V. Kamat, Chairman of the DRDO, briefed the Minister on the organisation's achievements in 2025, ongoing R&D activities, and reforms planned for 2026.

Facing criticism, Lokpal scraps tender to buy 7 BMW cars

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Anti-graft ombudsman Lokpal has cancelled its controversial tender to procure seven BMW cars, collectively worth around ₹5 crore, two months after it was floated, officials said on Thursday.

The move assumes significance as Opposition parties and civil society activists had slammed the Lokpal's decision to procure the high-end vehicles.

Officials said the decision was made following a resolution of the full Bench of the Lokpal, after which a corrigendum was issued.

The Lokpal had, on October 16, floated a request for proposal seeking bids from agencies for the supply of seven BMW 3 Series 330Li cars.

The procurement was intended to provide a vehicle each for the Chairperson and six members of the Lokpal, currently headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar (retd).

The tender had specified BMW 330Li "M Sport" models with "long wheelbase" in white colour for procurement. The on-road price of the cars in New Delhi was estimated at around ₹5 crore.



Lokpal's proposal had sought bids for the supply of seven BMW 3 Series 330Li cars.

The Lokpal's decision had drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition parties, who accused the "guardians of integrity" of "chasing luxury over legitimacy".

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had dubbed the institution "Shauq Pal", while former NITI Aayog Chief Executive Officer Amitabh Kant had demanded that the Lokpal cancel the tender and opt for electric vehicles made in India.

According to the tender, the selected vendor/firm was required to conduct a comprehensive training programme for the drivers and other designated staff members of the Lokpal to ensure efficient, safe and optimal operation of the BMW vehicles.

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor takes charge as Vice Chief of Air Staff

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor on Thursday assumed charge as the Vice Chief of the Air Staff, succeeding Air Marshal Narmdeshwar Tiwari, who superannuated after 40 years of service.



Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor

An alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College, and National Defence College, Air Marshal Kapoor is an accomplished fighter pilot with over 3,400 flying hours on MiG-21 and MiG-29 aircraft.

He has held key command, operational, instructional, and staff appointments, including Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Training Command and South Western Air Command, and is a recipient of multiple gallantry and distinguished service awards.

In another significant development, Lt. Gen. Harpal Singh on Thursday assumed charge as the 29th Director-General, Border Roads, formally taking over the reins of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

Commissioned into the Corps of Engineers in June 1991, Lt. Gen. Singh brings over three decades of experience across diverse command, staff, and leadership roles.

Raised in 1960, the BRO has been instrumental in developing strategic infrastructure in some of the most challenging terrains, enhancing national security and border connectivity.

Rajnath Singh expresses condolences over Zia death

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday visited the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi and expressed his condolences over the demise of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Sharing a photo of his visit on *X*, Mr. Singh said, "Signed the Condolence Book expressing our profound sorrow at the passing of former Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia. Our thoughts are with her family and the people of Bangladesh."

Zia, the longtime chief of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, died on Tuesday after a prolonged illness. She was 80. The first woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the second in the Muslim world after Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto, Zia dominated the nation's politics for decades.

Don't need treaty with Dhaka to push back illegal immigrants to Bangladesh, says Assam CM

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said his government would not wait for a repatriation treaty between India and Bangladesh to intensify the pushback of "illegal immigrants" under a new policy framework. He exuded confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party would form the government for the third consecutive time in the State and continue with its agenda of development and safeguarding the interests of indigenous peoples.



Himanta Biswa Sarma

Mr. Sarma said some 2,000 foreigners who had been staying illegally in Assam were pushed back over the past few months. They included 18 sent across the India-Bangladesh border on Wednesday. "If the eviction of foreigners from 1.45 lakh hectares of government land was the hallmark last year, 2026 will be marked by the number of foreigners expelled," the Chief Minister told presspersons during the customary New Year interaction. He thanked the Centre for playing an active role in the pushback.

Mr. Sarma attributed the drive to the revitalisation of the Immigrants' (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, with a standard operating procedure for swift action, allowing the District Commissioners to issue orders for suspected foreigners to leave within 10 days or order expulsion within 24 hours if they cannot prove citizenship.

"We are not talking about a repatriation treaty (with Bangladesh), and we don't need it. Just pushing back will be the new way to deal with foreigners," he said, announcing the government's resolve to intensify the identification and deportation of such people over the next five years.

The Chief Minister said he was confident that Assam would be able to evict 10,000 to 15,000 foreigners every year from 2026. He said that the Assam Accord of 1985 has no guidelines on how "illegal immigrants" are to be driven out following detection. "People declared foreigners were kept at a designated jail under detention, but they managed to walk out on bail earlier," he said.

India, Pak. exchange lists of prisoners and nuclear installations

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Continuing an over three-decade practice, India and Pakistan on Thursday exchanged a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral pact that prohibits the two sides from attacking each other's atomic facilities.

The exchange of the list came even as the ties between the two countries remain under deep freeze, following four-day military hostilities last May.

The two countries also exchanged a list of prisoners under the consular access agreement.

"Pakistan and India exchanged the lists of their respective nuclear installations pursuant to the agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India signed on 31st December 1988," Foreign Office spokesman Tahir Andrabi said at a press briefing.

He said that the list of nuclear installations and facilities was handed over to the representative of the Indian High Commission in the Foreign Office.

About the exchange of prisoners lists, he said, "The government of Pakistan today handed over a list of 257 Indian prisoners, including 199 fishermen and 58 other civilians in Pakistan's custody, to the High Commission of India in Islamabad."

After months of silence, tourists flock to Kashmir to ring in the New Year

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

After an eight-month-long lull, New Year's eve saw a surge in tourist numbers in Kashmir and the tourism "golden triangle" of Gulmarg, Pahalgam, and Sonamarg logged in a record 90%-100% hotel occupancy.

Official figures of the Tourism Department suggested that Gulmarg, with 2,300 beds in hotels and huts, recorded 100% occupancy on December 31.

Sonamarg, with 2,580 beds, also recorded 100% occupancy.

"Pahalgam with around 10,000 beds also saw 90% hotel occupancy. At least 5,000 tourists arrived in Pahalgam on December 31. Later, Pahalgam hosted around 7,000 tourists," a senior government official told *The Hindu*.



White vacation: Tourists play in the snow at a ski resort in Gulmarg, on Wednesday. IMRAN NISSAR

Top local artists and singers from Kashmir, including *Indian Idol* icon Qazi Tauqeer, performed at 'musical evenings' events held for tourists in all these destinations.

"There was a good response to the winter festival that started on December 25. Tourist footfall has increased significantly and is evident from the buzz in Pahalgam," said Nasrool Hilal Jeri, chief executive officer, Pahalgam Development Authority. It is for the first time since the Pahalgam terror attack, which left 26 tourists dead in April last year, that the Kashmir valley recorded a bustling tourist season.

Hope rises

The New Year has augured well for the tourism industry of Kashmir.

"We are hopeful the current momentum will sustain and even pick up further. We urge tourists to plan a visit to Kashmir and take up adventurous sports like skiing in winters," said Syed Qamar Sajad, Director, Tourism.

Kashmir hosted only around 10.47 lakh domestic tourists in 2025 compared with around 26 lakh in 2024, according to the Tourism department.

Maoist killed, 2 held in Bihar encounter

The Hindu Bureau
PATNA

An alleged CPI (Maoist) member, carrying a bounty of ₹50,000 on his head, was killed while two of his associates were arrested, following an encounter with security forces in Bihar's Begusarai district on Wednesday evening.

According to the police, the deceased has been identified as Dayanand Malakar, also known as Chhotu and Kuldip. He was a secretary of the North Bihar central zone committee of the banned outfit, and was reportedly wanted in over 14 criminal cases.

APPEAL



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President, V-P and PM extend New Year wishes

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday extended New Year greetings and prayed for peace and happiness in society.

"Wishing everyone a wonderful 2026! May the year ahead bring good health and prosperity, with success in your efforts and fulfilment in all that you do," the Prime Minister said in a post on social media platform X.

"Praying for peace and happiness in our society," the Prime Minister said.

Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan said on X, "may the year ahead bring peace, good health, happiness, and prosperity to all, and strengthen our collective resolve to build a stronger and developed India.

He also called on President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and offered her his New Year greetings. Ms. Murmu too extended New Year wishes through an X post.

Talks on for alliance with Eknath's Sena for polls: Ajit

Two parties have come to a conclusion on several seats in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad, he says; the NCP is also contesting some seats for the municipal elections with Sharad Pawar's faction

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday said his party, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), was in talks with the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena for a potential alliance for the coming municipal corporation elections in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad.

"Sharad Pawar's NCP is also contesting some seats with us in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. We are also in discussion with Shiv Sena party leaders, including Uday Samant, and have come to some conclusion on several seats," Mr. Pawar told presspersons during his visit to the 'Jay Stambh' (victory pillar) in Pune to commemorate the 208th anniversary of the Koregaon Bhima battle.

Mr. Ajit's statement comes two days after the nomination window was closed, and the last day of withdrawal is January 2.



Gearing up: People looking at election campaign material for the municipal corporation elections in Maharashtra. ANI

He emphasised that with the scrutiny of nomination papers and withdrawals, parties would have clarity.

Mr. Pawar held the alliance talks after the Shiv Sena's Pune unit leader, Ravindra Dhangekar, met him, proposing the tie-up as the collaboration fell apart with their State-level ally, the BJP, in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Blurred lines

So far, the NCP has decided to form a union with its rival party, NCP(SP), in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. This is also contrary to the alliance in Mumbai, as the NCP is not part of the BJP-Shiv Sena pact. With all these alliance talks in place, the State-level alliances have blurred the lines, with traditional allies joining hands with rival camps in several cities.

The elections for 29 municipal corporations have been slated for January 15, and the nomination process started on December 23.

The NCP nominating Sonali Andekar, daughter-in-law of gang leader Suryakant, alias Bandu Andekar, and his sister-in-law Laxmi Andekar in Pune, has received flak citing the association of the party with him.

In response to concerns over some candidates with criminal backgrounds getting to contest polls, Mr. Pawar dismissed the claims, saying the NCP has formed an alliance with the RPI (Sachin Kharat faction) and nominated candidates as per their choice.

Kharge calls for movement in New Year to safeguard rights of vulnerable people

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Extending New Year greetings to the people, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday called for a mass movement to safeguard the rights of the vulnerable, including the right to work, vote, and live with dignity.

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge emphasised the need to protect the Constitution and democratic values. "On this joyful new year, I extend my warmest greetings to all of you. Let us make this year a mass movement to protect the rights of the vulnerable – the right to work, the right to vote and the right to live with dignity," he said.

He said citizens must collectively work to uphold constitutional values, strengthen democracy and promote social harmony. Employment for the youth, safety for women, prosperity for farmers, dignity for those on the margins and an improved quality of life for all should be common goals, he added. Mr. Kharge also expressed hope that the year would bring happiness, prosperity and progress to all.



Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge says citizens must collectively work to uphold constitutional values. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi conveyed New Year wishes on X, saying he hoped the year would bring happiness, good health and success to everyone.

On Wednesday, Mr. Kharge had criticised the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government, alleging that plunder, corruption and misgovernance continued to weigh on the country as it entered 2026.

Responding to his remarks, BJP president J.P. Nadda accused Mr. Kharge of spreading falsehood against the NDA government and said the Congress continued to peddle untruths.

Mamata marks Trinamool's foundation day, says she will not bow to malevolent forces

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Extending congratulations to the party's rank and file on its foundation day, West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee on Thursday called upon the people not to bow to any malevolent forces.

"With your unwavering support as our sustenance, we remain resolute in the fight for the rights of every individual in this great democratic nation. We will not bow to any malevolent forces, and disregarding all enmity, our struggle for the common people will continue lifelong," the Chief Minister posted on social media.

The Trinamool Congress was founded in 1998 when Ms. Banerjee and a section of other Congress leaders defected and set up the party. The Trinamool Congress came to power in 2011, ending 34 years of the Left Front rule in the State.



Mamata Banerjee

Ms. Banerjee said the core guiding principle of this historic journey was the honour of the motherland, the development of Bengal, and the protection of the democratic rights of the people.

"Even today, every worker and supporter of our party remains steadfast and committed to this goal. I humbly pay my respects and homage to their tireless efforts and sacrifices," she said in a statement posted on social media.

Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee also took a pledge "to stand beside the people, to shield their democratic voice" on the party's foundation day.

'Unshaken faith'

"Today, we renew our pledge to stand beside the people, to shield their democratic voice, and to ensure that no one in Bengal is harassed, humiliated, or intimidated by the *Bangla-Birodhi zamindari* power," Mr. Banerjee said.

The Diamond Harbour MP also offered respects to "grassroots workers", and added that their sacrifice and unshaken faith "fuels our politics".

The party will be facing one of its toughest electoral challenges in the next few months in the Assembly polls where the party will have to defend 15 years of anti-incumbency and a challenge from an upbeat Bharatiya Janata Party.

Dilip Ghosh likely to return to active role in Bengal BJP

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

Former West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh met incumbent Samik Bhattacharya on Thursday, a day after Union Minister Amit Shah included him in key meetings with the State leadership ahead of the 2026 Assembly election in the State.

Mr. Ghosh is likely to return to active politics after keeping a low profile for several months, with a political rally with Mr. Bhattacharya in Durgapur scheduled for January 13. "There have been some changes in the party recently... I will do as I am told," the former State BJP president said at a press conference on Thursday.

Mr. Ghosh had stayed away from core party activities in 2025, since his controversial meeting with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee after the inauguration of the Jagannath Temple in Digha.

CITU conference condemns Labour Codes and new rural jobs, nuclear energy Acts

Hareesh P.
VISAKHAPATNAM

The 18th All India Conference of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) passed a resolution demanding the repeal of the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, termed the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025.

It called for the restoration and strengthening of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), with enhanced work days and wages and funding by the Centre.

Addressing presspersons here on Thursday to announce the resolutions and deliberations on the second day of the conference, CITU general secretary Tapan Sen said the VB-G RAM G Act was a retrograde enactment of the Centre, which had resulted in the repeal of the MGNREGA, and "totally mutilated and annihilated the legal right of rural households to employment guarantee and unemployment allowance", leaving them at the mercy and discretion of governments.



CITU General Secretary Tapan Sen (right) addressing the media as part of the Conference in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. V RAJU

Moreover, the Centre had brought about Labour Codes that were "nothing but an attack on the rights of workers", Mr. Sen said.

The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant had not been privatised only because of agitations by workers over the past five years, he said.

The CITU passed another resolution condemning the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025.

"The Act is a dangerous, anti-people and anti-sovereignty legislation that opens India's most hazardous and strategic energy sector to private and foreign corporate interests. It dilutes safety, accountability, democratic oversight and workers' rights. This conference demands the immediate repeal of the Act in its entirety," it said.

Officers to visit vulnerable groups for SIR hearings: CEO

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal has instructed all District Electoral Officers (who also serve as District Magistrates) to personally visit marginalised and vulnerable electors, such as sex workers and tribal groups, to facilitate the inclusion of eligible voters as part of hearings being held for the special intensive revision of electoral rolls.

Vulnerable communities have repeatedly appealed for relaxation of SIR norms, in cases where they cannot produce documentary evidence or establish linkages to the 2002 list despite being eligible voters.

The DEOs have also been instructed to consult booth-level agents appointed by political parties during the enquiry and take into consideration their views during the proceedings.

Nana Patole says Rahul is doing same work as Lord Ram, sparks row

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Congress leader Nana Patole on Thursday drew flak for his statement comparing Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi to Lord Ram, saying he was doing the work of Lord Ram. The Bharatiya Janata Party criticised him for the remarks.

"Rahul Gandhi is doing the same work that Lord Ram did, working for vulnerable, oppressed and marginalised people. He has been travelling across the country, trying to understand people and doing the work of Lord Ram, instead of clicking photos and showing off," said Mr. Patole, responding to a question of why Mr. Gandhi had not visited the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The statement sparked political debate, and the BJP labelled him a sycophant. Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar called his remarks "unfortunate", saying, "No one takes him seriously. Shri Ram is our deity; he cannot be compared to anyone. So the public will teach him a lesson in the elections."



Nana Patole

NCP MP Sunil Dattatray Tatkare slammed Mr. Patole for making such statements and called it "irresponsible".

He added that the remarks were probably due to back-to-back defeat in elections.

Both of Nitish Kumar's deputies are wealthier than Bihar Chief Minister

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Bihar's Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha are both significantly richer than Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, according to the public declaration of assets by the members of the State Cabinet made on the last day of 2025.

Mr. Kumar has ₹20,552 cash in hand and total deposits of ₹57,000 in the bank, including ₹27,217 in the State Bank of India branch at Patna Secretariat, ₹3,358 in the SBI branch at Parliament House, Delhi, and ₹27,191 in the Punjab National Bank branch in Boring Road, Patna.

Mr. Kumar's total assets are worth ₹1.66 crore, an increase of ₹68,455 in comparison to last year's declaration. He has movable assets of ₹17.66 lakh and immovable assets valued at ₹1.48 crore. He does not own any agricultural land or a house in Patna. He has a flat in Delhi's Dwarka (Sector-5), which was purchased in 2004 for ₹13.78 lakh. Its current market value stands at ₹1.48 crore.



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with Deputy Chief Ministers Vijay Kumar Sinha and Samrat Choudhary in Patna. ANI

Mr. Kumar has two gold rings and one silver ring studded with pearls, with a total market value of ₹2,03,000. He also owns 10 cows and 13 calves, collectively valued at ₹1.45 lakh.

The practice of declaring assets started in January 2011, aiming to increase transparency in public governance and fight corruption.

Assets of Deputy CMs

Mr. Choudhary, who also heads the Home Department, has declared that his assets are worth ₹6.38 crore. He holds ₹1.35 lakh in cash and ₹34.88 lakh deposited in banks. His wife's bank account has a balance of ₹12.82 lakh. He has an NP bore rifle worth ₹4 lakh and a revolver given to him by his father, valued at ₹2 lakh. He also owns a Bolero Neo car worth ₹7 lakh. Mr. Choudhary has purchased bonds worth over ₹30 lakh and LIC insurance policies worth over ₹19 lakh, and own jewellery and bullion worth ₹20 lakh.

Mr. Sinha has total assets worth ₹8.81 crore, six times greater than the Bihar CM. This includes movable property worth ₹5.13 crore and immovable property worth ₹3.68 crore. Mr. Sinha has 90 grams of gold worth ₹10 lakh which he received as a gift during a marriage. He also owns a rifle and revolver and has ₹88,560 in cash. His wife Sushila Devi owns a company valued at ₹2.4 crore. She owns immovable property worth ₹3.02 crore and has ₹67,528 in cash.

The only three Ministers in the Cabinet whose declared wealth is less than Mr. Kumar's are Sanjay Kumar, Sanjay Singh Tiger, and Surendra Mehta.

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NOTIFICATION

NIMHANS Bengaluru invites applications in the prescribed pro-forma from suitable / eligible Officers of Central / State Govt/UT Administration / Autonomous / Statutory Bodies holding analogous posts on regular basis for filling up of the following **Group "A" - Nursing Posts on Deputation basis.**

Sl. No	Name of the Posts	Number of posts	Pay Level as per 7th CPC	Mode	Important point for candidature
1	Chief Nursing Officer	1	Level-12 (Rs.78,800-2,09,200/-)	Deputation for 3 years	Applications are to be duly forwarded by the Cadre Controlling Authority with NOC Vigilance clearance and enclosing minimum 5 years latest APARs. Officials / Candidates are advised to send an advance copy of the application with relevant enclosures, for intimation purposes only, on the following email on or before the closing date of receipt of applications: dirstaff@nimhans.ac.in
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Eligibility and Other Criteria:

Sl. No	Name of the Posts	Essential Eligibility Criteria for deputation
1	Chief Nursing Officer	Officers of Central/State Govt/UT Administration/Autonomous/Statutory Bodies holding analogous posts on regular basis with 5 years of regular service in the grade of Nursing Superintendent or in similar capacity in nursing administration and not less than 17 years experience in the Nursing Cadre and possessing the following qualifications:- i. B.Sc in Nursing or equivalent qualification from recognized University/Institutes. ii. DPN/DNN OR M.Sc in Psychiatric/Neuro Nursing from recognized University/Institutes. **Desirable:** Should have published once in every two years a research paper in journal of national standing and repute. (Period of deputation shall not ordinarily exceed 3 years).
2	Nursing Superintendent	Officers of Central/State Govt/UT Administration/Autonomous/Statutory Bodies holding analogous posts on regular basis with 3 years of regular service in the grade of Deputy Nursing Superintendent or in similar capacity in nursing administration and not less than 12 years' experience in the Nursing Cadre and possessing the following qualifications:- i. B.Sc in Nursing or equivalent qualification from recognized University/Institutes. ii. DPN/DNN OR M.Sc in Psychiatric/Neuro Nursing from recognized University/Institutes. **Desirable:** Should have published once in every two years a research paper in journal of national standing and repute. (Period of deputation shall not ordinarily exceed 3 years).

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Sd/-
DIRECTOR

INBRIEF



Benefits of AI must reach all sections of society: President

Describing artificial intelligence as a "big opportunity" for ushering in a positive change, President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said it was essential to ensure that its benefits reached all sections of society, especially the underprivileged. Addressing a programme organised by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, she observed that AI was emerging as a critical growth driver and would contribute significantly towards the country's GDP, employment and productivity. She pointed out that skills like data science, AI engineering, and data analytics would play an influential role in developing the country's AI talent pool. PTI

MP flags crisis in Bengal jute industry, seeks Centre's help

Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha member Ritabrata Banerjee has written to the Union government, asking for its immediate intervention in the "serious crisis" in the West Bengal raw jute industry. He wrote to Union Textile Minister Giriraj Singh on Thursday, and said that the "economic and social emergency" in the jute industry was growing rapidly and needed immediate attention. "The present situation – characterised by acute scarcity of raw jute, extreme price volatility, curtailment of mill operations and loss of employment – has not arisen suddenly. It is the cumulative outcome of policy shortcomings over the last few years," Mr. Banerjee said in the letter.

Eight arrested for kidney transplant racket: police

Maharashtra investigators allege illegal network involving two doctors with links to Cambodia; they say poor youth and marginalised farmers from the State sold kidneys for ₹5 lakh to ₹8 lakh

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

A marginal farmer's video against an illegal moneylender last month has led the Chandrapur police in Maharashtra to unearth an international kidney transplant racket spread across several States and with links to Cambodia.

Two doctors from Tiruchi and Delhi are the prime accused in the case, the police said. While one doctor is absconding, the other is on bail and has been asked to appear before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Chandrapur, on Friday. So far, eight people have been arrested for being part of the racket and for illegal moneylending.

"We had arrested Dr. Ravinder Pal Singh from Healthy Human Clinics in Delhi, but he received bail. He has been asked to remain present here tomorrow [Friday]. Dr. Rajratnam Govindaswamy, managing director of STAR KIMS Hospital, Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu, is still absconding," Mummaka Sudharshan, the Superintendent of Police, Chandrapur, told *The Hindu*.

Web of exploitation

How a ₹1 lakh loan trapped a poor famer in a global organ racket



Roshan Kude had borrowed ₹1 lakh from moneylenders in 2021 but exorbitant interest rates saw the debt rise to over ₹70 lakh

- Kude said he was taken to **Cambodia** to sell his kidney for a few lakhs to repay a part of the loan
- Case registered against **moneylenders**
- After examination, doctors at Chandrapur Medical College and Hospital confirm that Kude only has **one kidney**
- Maharashtra Police dispatch teams to **Delhi and Tamil Nadu** to investigate the racket
- Analysis of mobile records and technical data shows complex web of cooperation between **agents**, victims, and **medical professionals**

Last month, the clip by Roshan Kude, a young marginal farmer from Chandrapur, went viral. In the video, he could be heard saying that he had sold one kidney to repay a loan of ₹1 lakh to a moneylender, but the amount had ballooned to over ₹70 lakh with interest. The police took the moneylenders in custody.

The investigation led the police to the racket through which poor youth were allegedly being lured to sell kidneys for a few lakhs. Some of the victims were taken to Cambodia where their kidneys were harvested.

"We have arrested eight persons so far. Six of them are moneylenders. The remaining two are agents who lured the victims. We have identified over eight persons who had sold their kidneys. Roshan Kude, the marginal farmer from Chandrapur, had gone to Cambodia with five more persons, our investigation has revealed. Two persons, namely Himanshu Bharadwaj and Krishna, had acted as agents. But both of them sold their kidneys earlier," Mr. Sudharshan said. Several agents, donors, doctors, and hospitals are involved in this racket, he added.

The police said that after Krishna and Himanshu sold their kidneys, they started a racket to lure marginalised farmers and youth to sell kidneys. These youth were either taken to Delhi, Tiruchi or Cambodia. The police have analysed mobile and technical data of the prime accused. "It has revealed not only international links extending to Cambodia but also a pan-India kidney transplant network involving agents, donors, doctors, and hospitals," a police officer said.

Only 10% paid

The kidney sellers were the most exploited in this chain, Mr. Sudharshan said. While the organ receiver was charged ₹50 lakh to ₹80 lakh for each kidney transplant, the seller received just 10% of that amount. "These youth received ₹5 lakh to ₹8 lakh. Dr. Ravinder Pal Singh received approximately ₹10 lakh. Dr. Rajratnam Govindaswamy charged around ₹20 lakh for treatment, and Krishna and Himanshu collected nearly ₹20 lakh," he said.

26 Indore water samples found contaminated

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Nearly 2,500 people have fallen ill in the area over the past 10 days, with reports claiming 14 deaths

A third of water samples taken from Indore's Bhagirathpura area and tested by medical authorities contained bacterial contamination, according to a report submitted to the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) on Thursday, even as officials took steps to clean and repair the water supply line and begin work on a delayed, new supply line.

Nearly 2,500 people have fallen ill in the area over the past 10 days due to contaminated drinking water supplied by the IMC. While the official death toll remains at four, local reports and residents claim that 14 people had died from the contamination.

NHRC notice

On Thursday, taking *suo moto* cognisance of the situation, the National Human Rights Commission issued a notice to Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary Anurag Jain and sought a detailed report on the matter within two weeks.

Indore Divisional Commissioner Sudam Khade told *The Hindu* that a report has been submitted by the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial (MGM) Medical College to the IMC confirming bacterial contamination in 26 water samples. More than 70 samples had been collected from various locations in the area.

New supply line

"The entire supply line has been cleaned, leakages repaired, and water replaced. Chlorine tablets have been distributed in the area and residents have been advised to boil the water before consuming it," Mr. Khade said, adding that the OPD patients numbers are now decreasing.

A tender had been issued in August for a new water supply line in the area, but work has remained stalled for over four months. Officials pointed to this negligence as one of the main causes behind the tragedy.

This delay was discussed at a high-level meeting on Thursday, and the tender will be cleared by Friday, according to Urban Development Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, who attended the meeting.

Financial dominance over wife cannot qualify as 'cruelty': SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said that monetary and financial dominance of a man over his wife cannot qualify as cruelty, especially in the absence of any tangible mental or physical harm caused to her.

The recent judgment by a Bench headed by Justice B.V. Nagarathna, while quashing a case of dowry harassment instituted by a woman against her husband, found her allegations, including that she was forced to maintain a "pennywise" account of the household expenses in Excel sheet while he sent "lakhs" to his parents and siblings for business purposes, as a reflection of the "daily wear and tear of marriage".

The woman had complained that she was asked to leave her job as a software consultant and stay at home as a "housewife" in the U.S., where the couple were based. She had complained that she was made to "beg for money to meet her daily needs" as the husband had exercised "full monetary control" over her. The woman had submitted that she was pressured to lose weight after the delivery of their child.



The court says criminal litigation cannot be used to settle personal vendettas.

In the judgment authored by Justice Nagarathna, the court said the situation narrated in the case was a "mirror reflection of the Indian society where men of the households often try to dominate and take charge of the finances of the women, but criminal litigation cannot become a gateway or a tool to settle scores and pursue personal vendettas".

Terming her allegations "vague and omnibus", the court found the woman's submission that the husband and his family members had demanded ₹1 crore as unsubstantiated for lack of evidence.

The court said allegations of cruelty and harassment could be invoked only if there was a series of offending acts which would be required to be specifically spelt out against the perpetrators to initiate criminal proceedings against them.

First Vande Bharat sleeper train to ply between Guwahati and Kolkata

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first Vande Bharat sleeper train later this month, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday. It will ply between Guwahati and Kolkata.

The 16-coach train, with a capacity of 823 passengers, has a design speed of upto 180 kmph. It has 11 three-tier and four two-tier AC coaches, and a first-class AC coach.

The third-AC fare will be ₹2,300, second AC ₹3,000, and first AC ₹3,600.

The train boasts ergonomically designed berths with improved cushioning, automatic doors, and enhanced ride comfort with superior suspension and noise reduction. Safety measures include Kavach, an indigenously developed, high-tech automatic train protection system designed to prevent collision, advanced controls, and safety systems inside the driver's cabin. There will be CCTV cameras on all coaches, and specially designed seats for passengers with disabilities, he said.



Ready to roll: The sleeper rake of a Vande Bharat Express at the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai. FILE PHOTO

The 16-coach train, with a capacity of 823 passengers, has a design speed of upto 180 kmph

The districts that will benefit from this service include Kamrup Metropolitan and Bongaigaon in Assam and Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Maldah, Murshidabad, Purba Bardhaman, Hooghly, and Howrah in West Bengal.

Assamese cuisine will be served aboard when the train originates from Guwahati and Bengali cuisine on its return journey.

Bullet train

The Minister also announced that the country's first bullet train would be ready in August 2027, and the route would be opened in a phased manner. The first section to open will be from Surat to Bilimora, followed by Vapi to Surat, Vapi to Ahmedabad, Thane to Ahmedabad, and finally Mumbai to Ahmedabad.

The 508-km Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor has been steadily progressing, with significant work completed on viaducts, bridges, tunnels, and stations. The corridor will see speeds of up to 320 kmph and is set to reduce travel time between Mumbai and Ahmedabad to two hours.

Commercial cylinder price up by ₹111, ATF cut by 7%

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Price of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), or jet fuel, was reduced by 7.3% on Thursday, while commercial LPG rate was raised by ₹111 per cylinder, as state-owned oil marketing companies implemented their monthly price revisions aligned with global fuel benchmarks.

The ATF price in Delhi was cut by ₹7,353.75 a kilolitre, or 7.3%, to ₹92,323.02 per kl, according to fuel retailers. The latest reduction is expected to ease pressure on airlines.

The price of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder used by hotels and restaurants was hiked by a steep ₹111 to ₹1,691.50 in Delhi.

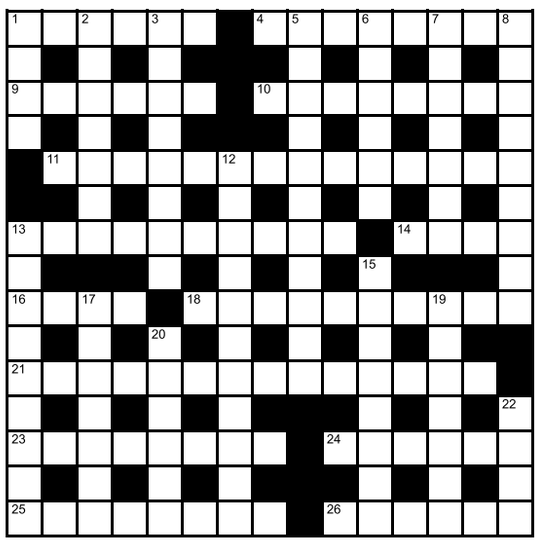
Winter heating requirement have pushed up LPG rates in global markets.

TH CROSSWORD + 14681

(set by Avtaar)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at *https://crossword.thehindu.com*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Log on-line? (6)
4 Substitute works after drink (8)
9 Lathe operator's radio receiver jammed by electrical resistance (6)
10 It keeps one going, perhaps (8)
11 Promiscuous funky offender's left abandoned in high tides (14)
13 Deer getting behind chaps causing annoyance (10)
14 Dope's dumped in idol (4)
16 Silent dog scratching backside with energy (4)
18 Drum played in Rome along with tuba (10)
21 Desi from Bay Area, say, blowing lid off crime in Canadian complex (6-8)
23 Troubles amidst tense, long unending state of frenzy (8)
24 Discharge of lava is toxic (6)
25 Source of aggravated unending distress, sadly (8)
26 Demanding wife finally faced with divorce (6)

Down

1 Roll from a high place after climbing (4)
2 Investigator's ring stolen by crook (7)
3 Most tall and thin afflicted trees having to wither away (8)
5 Legal claim covered in a letter from Greece about backing Italian island cannot be transferred (11)
6 Still cold wearing Highlander's robe (6)
7 Fire in a blazing match (7)
8 So wild, free, hot, welcoming - very bare (9)
12 Chap stealing tiara cycled behind legislator's relative (11)
13 Clumsy, famished bats clutching top of tree (3-6)
15 Change overwhelms the Italian hack (8)
17 Model whirls stuffed toys (7)
19 Island chief taking over Government base for project (7)
20 Frame leaking hard syrupy blackcurrant flavouring (6)
22 The world is so long (4)

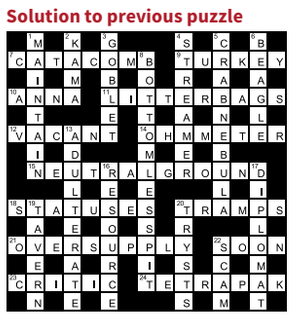
SUDOKU

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

No.SS6749 Distribution: www.knightfeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Beautiful Thiruvellarai

In his Thiruvellarai pasurams, Thirumangai Azhvar recalls the avataras of the Lord, in each of which He performed miraculous deeds. In pasuram five, he praises the Varaha avatara, said K.B. Devarajan in a discourse. When Hiranyaksha carried away Bhooma Devi, who has spear-like eyes, the Lord took the Varaha avatara and rescued Her.

In this verse, Thirumangai Azhvar describes the sugarcane fields in Thiruvellarai. He says *mullai* creepers are in full bloom, and they have climbed up the sugarcane plants, reaching right up to the top. The whiteness of the *mullai* flowers reminds Thirumangai Azhvar of the smile of young women. Bees enjoy the nectar in the flowers. In verse six, he praises the Kurma (tortoise) avatara. When the milky ocean was churned, using the Mandara mountain as the churning rod and with Vasuki the snake as the rope, the Lord took the tortoise avatara, to support the mountain on His back. Thirumangai Azhvar says the male bees in Thiruvellarai abandon their mates, and fly away to suck the nectar in the flowers that the women of Thiruvellarai use to adorn their hair. In pasuram seven, the Azhvar sings of Lord Rama, who killed Ravana using the bow and arrow given to Him by Agastya. The leaves of the lotus plants in Thiruvellarai gleam like emeralds. Nectar flows from the lotus flowers, and bees sing of Rama's valour. In pasuram eight, the Lord's Hamsa avatara is celebrated. There are screw pines and mango trees in Thiruvellarai. In these groves there are many bees buzzing around, singing the Lord's praise. Thus, through his verses, Thirumangai Azhvar paints a pen picture of beauties of Thiruvellarai.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	THURSDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	85,189	-0.04
US Dollar	89.98	-0.11
Gold	1,38,340	0.46

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	2260.00	20.30
Adani Ports	1481.10	11.30
Apollo Hosp	7111.50	69.00
Asian Paints	2752.00	-17.50
Axis Bank	1274.40	5.00
Bajaj Auto	9558.00	215.00
Bajaj Finserv	2037.00	-2.90
Bajaj Finance	973.10	-13.70
Bharat Elec	397.70	-1.90
Bharti Airtel	2110.40	4.80
Cipla	1500.90	-10.40
Coal India	400.45	1.45
Dr Reddys Lab	1253.40	-18.00
Hindustan Unilever	40.20	0.00
Eicher Motors	7348.00	35.50
Eternal Ltd.	283.80	5.75
Grasim Ind	2851.70	22.70
HCL Tech	1634.50	11.20
HDFC Bank	991.15	-0.05
HDFC Life	750.10	0.25
Hindalco	894.95	8.25
Hind Unilever	2323.00	7.10
ICICI Bank	1338.00	-4.90
IntGlobeAvi	5110.50	51.00
Infosys	1629.80	14.40
ITC	363.85	-39.15
Jio Financial Servic-es Ltd.	295.70	0.75
JSW Steel	1171.50	6.70
Kotak Bank	2217.80	16.70
L&T	4140.40	56.90
M&M	3761.00	51.80
Maruti Suzuki	16708.00	11.00
Max Healthcare	1049.40	4.30
NestleIndia	1295.00	7.00
NTPC	336.30	6.75
ONGC	237.94	-2.44
PowerGrid Corp	266.80	2.20
Reliance Ind	1575.60	5.20
SBI Life	2040.40	5.50
State Bank	984.75	2.55
Shriram Finance Ltd.	1019.70	23.50
Sun Pharma	1721.10	1.40
TataConsumerPro-duct	1176.90	-15.10
Tata Steel	181.89	1.81
TCS	3227.40	21.20
Tech Mahindra	1607.70	16.80
Titan	4049.30	-2.20
Tata Motors PV	367.55	0.20
Trent Ltd.	4297.40	18.40
UltraTech Cement	11901.00	117.00
Wipro	267.35	4.07

Automobile sales traction continues in December

Market leader, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. reported 22%YoY growth in total vehicle sales, including exports at 2,17,854 units; GST rate cut a catalyst

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI



Step on gas: Maruti Suzuki cars parked beside an in-plant railway siding at the company's plant in Manesar. (File) REUTERS

The troika of GST cut, income tax rebate and the cumulative 125 basis-point repo rate cut by the RBI imparted momentum to automobile sales with December being no exception.

Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra and Toyota Kirloskar Motor reported more than 20% growth year on year (YoY), and according to Partho Benerjee, head of Sales & Marketing at Maruti Suzuki, the tailwind of the reforms would continue to play out in 2026 and the sector should clock 6-7% growth.

India's passenger vehicles market leader, Maruti reported 22% growth in total vehicle sales, including exports at 2,17,854 units.

Domestic sales reached an all-time high of 1,82,165 units. Sales to other OEMs were at 9,950 units, and exports at 25,739 units.

"With this, we closed CY 2025 with the highest-ever total sales of 2,351,139 units," the company said.

The demand had been so high that at the end of the year, the company had only three days of network-wide stock. There has been a waiting period of 45 days for several models. In CY25 Dzire, at 2,14,00 units, was the top-selling model.

Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) recorded total monthly sales of 58,702 units in December, thereby registering a growth of 6.6%. This includes monthly local sales of 42,416 units and 16,286 units exports.

Tarun Garg, MD & CEO, HMIL said, "Reinforcing our 'Made-in-India, Made-for-the-World' goal, we delivered 26.5% year-on-year growth in export volume in December, reaffirming our commitment to offering world-class products manufactured indigenously."

Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd. in December reported 14.1% growth in total wholesales of vehicles at 50,519 units.

Shailesh Chandra, MD and CEO, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd. said, "CY25 saw steady progress for the PV industry powered by a growing preference for SUVs and accelerating adoption of cleaner, emission-friendly powertrains. For Tata Motors, it was the fifth consecutive year of record-breaking annual sales."

Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. (M&M Ltd.) said its overall auto sales for December 2025 stood at 86,090 vehicles, a growth of 25% YoY including exports.

Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) recorded total sales of 39,333 units compared with 29,529 units in December 2024, up 33%.

For CY25, auto sales climbed by about 6% to 45.5 lakh units, industry sources said. This is lower than 9% growth reported in CY24. The first 9 months of the CY had been slow and sales picked up from October after GST rate cut.

Export of technical textiles witness 1.2% dip in April-October

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

Export of technical textile goods slid 1.2% in April - October this year compared with the first seven months of 2024-2025 mainly on account of tariffs imposed by the U.S.

According to the Manmade and Technical Textiles Export Promotion Council, export of technical textiles from India were worth $1.95 billion during April-October 2025 against $1.97 billion during the same period in 2024. However, shipments climbed 2.3% in rupee terms during the same period.

Between April and September, these exports saw month-on-month growth. But, in October 2025, the exports were $249.7 million against $305.5 million in October 2024.

Geo textiles, medical textiles and packaging materials were some of the main exports. FIBC (flexible intermediate bulk container) bags, sling, ropes, gauze, wipes, etc. constituted almost 60% of the technical textile products exported during April - October 2025, followed by technical fabrics (27.7%), the Council said.

Largest market

The U.S. is the largest market for Indian technical textile goods with 25.9% share of India's exports, followed by Germany (6%) and the U.K. (5%) between April and October 2025. Exports to the U.S. between April and October 2025 were 15% lower than the same period of 2024.

Tariffs have hit exports and Indian goods cannot be shipped to countries such as Vietnam or Bangladesh as these countries are also facing lacklustre demand for their products.

Further, goods produced for customers in one country cannot be easily diverted to another country, said an official at the Council.

If the tariff issue is not resolved, technical textile exports are likely to be affected badly.



Worrying sign: Export of technical textiles were worth $1.95 billion during April – October against $1.97 billion in same period in 2024.

INBRIEF



GST Dec. mop up grows at a three-month high rate of 6.1%

Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections rose 6.1% year-on-year to ₹1.74 lakh crore in December, a three-month high, as per official data. However, a sharp rise in refunds resulted in net revenue slumping to 12-month low of ₹1.46 lakh crore. While gross mop up was marginally higher than the ₹1.7 lakh crore of November, which reflected the collections of the first full month following GST rate cuts, it was well below the 9-month average of ₹1.93 lakh crore for FY26.

Auro buys non-oncology portfolio of Khandelwal Labs

Aurobindo Pharma's Auro Pharma is buying the non-oncology prescription formulations business of Khandelwal Laboratories on a going concern slump sale basis for cash consideration of ₹325 crore subject to true-up adjustments for the working capital as provided for in the definitive agreements. There are 23 brands marketed in 67 SKUs and nine pipeline products in the business where anti-infective as well as pain management are major portfolios, Aurobindo Pharma said.

Garg takes charge as MD & CEO, Hyundai Motor India

Hyundai Motor India Ltd. (HMIL) announced Tarun Garg had assumed charge as the MD & CEO becoming the first Indian national to take on the leadership role within HMIL since its establishment 29 years ago. Mr. Garg, with over three decades of automotive experience, brings in the right expertise to lead HMIL's second phase of growth in India, it said. "It is an extraordinary honour to lead Hyundai Motor India at this defining moment," Mr. Garg said.

ICICI Bank unveils CGAS

ICICI Bank unveiled Capital Gains Account Scheme (CGAS) which will enable tax payers to deposit un-invested long-term capital gains and proceeds from the sale of capital assets.



Broader role: Currently, banks serve as points of presence, handling subscriber registrations, contributions. GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

India allows banks to sponsor pension funds under NPS

Reuters
MUMBAI

In Dec last year, PFRDA allowed NPS to invest in gold, silver exchange traded funds

India's pension fund regulator has allowed banks to sponsor pension funds that will manage monies under the National Pension System (NPS), in a bid to bolster competition in the sector.

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), which oversees assets worth more than $177 billion, said in a statement on Wednesday that it had given in-principle approval for banks to independently set up pension funds to manage the NPS, subject to eligibility norms aligned with the Reserve Bank of India's guidelines.

Meet eligibility criteria

Banks will have to meet eligibility criteria linked to net worth, market capitalisation, and prudential soundness, it added.

Currently, banks serve as points of presence, handling subscriber registrations, contributions, and other system services.

Some existing pension funds have ties to financial institutions, including banks.

At present, there are as many as 10 registered pension funds with the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority.

Broader reforms

The change is part of broader reforms by the regulator.

In December last year, the PFRDA allowed NPS subscribers to invest in gold and silver exchange-traded funds, the Nifty 50 index, and Alternative Investment Funds.

Fee revised

The regulator also revised the Investment Management Fee structure for pension funds starting April 1, 2026, according to the latest release.

Additionally, three new trustees have been appointed to the NPS Trust Board, including Dinesh Kumar Khara, a former chairman of the country's largest lender, the State Bank of India.

KSEB KERALA STATE ELECTRICITY BOARD LIMITED - TENDER NOTICE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (COMMERCIAL & TARIFF), VYDYUTHI BHAVANAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Inviting Short term tender for the procurement of power during peak hours of **18.00 Hrs to 22.00 Hrs for 01.02.2026 to 15.05.2026.**
DEEP portal reference no - **KSEBL/Short/25-26/ET/123 dtd 30.12.2025.**
Last Date for submission of queries - **03.01.2026**
Submission of RfP (online digitally signed non financial technical Bid and IPOs) - **09.01.2026, 02.00 pm**
For more details visit **www.kseb.in** **Ref: PR/MC1/F372/2026**

VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (VMC)
'e' Procurement Notice No.01/VMC/CE/2025-26, Dt.01-01-2026.

S. No.	Name of the work	Estimate Amount (Rs. in Crores)
1	RFP for City Roads improvement programme under PPP model - Development of 19Nos. Roads (23.54 Kms) of Vijayawada City under Hybrid Annuity Model.	171.14

Contact: Executive Engineer, VMC, Vijayawada - 6301553652
Further details can be seen @ 'e' procurement market place @ www.apeprocurement.gov.in
Downloading Starting Date : 06-01-2026 @ 3.30 PM
Downloading Closing Date : 12-02-2026 @ 4.00 PM
Last Date for Opening of Tenders : 12-02-2026 @ 4.30 PM
Last Date for Opening of Price Bid : 27-02-2026 @ 5.00 PM
Sd/- COMMISSIONER

TNPL TAMIL NADU NEWSPRINT AND PAPERS LIMITED
Kagithapuram - 639 136. Karur Dist. Tamil Nadu.
NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender No.	Material Description	Due date
252613 006763	Enlistment of Forest Contractors for Felling, Debarking & Transportation of Pulpwood from Tafcorn & Forest Divisions for the year 2026-27.	16.01.2026
252613 006764	Enlistment of Vendors / Contractors for Execution of Farm Forestry & Captive Plantations and Felling & Transportation of Pulpwood from Farmers field during 2026-27.	17.01.2026

Corrigendum if any will be issued in TNPL Website only. Interested vendors who are having experience in the relevant field may apply for Enlistment. Detailed Terms & conditions are available in tender document at our website : **www.tnpl.com**
DIPR/6908/Tender/2025 *TNPL - Maker of bagasse based eco-friendly Paper*

COCHIN INTERNATIONAL AVIATION SERVICES LTD
(A subsidiary of Cochin International Airport Limited)
TENDER NOTICE 01/01/2026
Sealed item rate tenders are invited from reputed contractors / firms for the below mentioned civil works of STP Facility at Cochin International Aviation Services Ltd.

Name of Work	Estimated Amount (Rs)	EMD (Rs)	Period of Completion
CIASL/ENGG/STP/34/2025-26 Costruction of STP facility-civil works	70 Lakhs	1.4 Lakhs	3 months

For eligibility criteria, Tender Documents and other details, please visit our website www.ciasl.aero , www.cial.aero or contact **0484 2611785, +91 9539702229.**
E-mail: **civil@ciasl.in** Sd/- Managing Director

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Tender No.	Material Description	Due date
252613 006722	Procurement of Burnt Lime for Production of Wet Precipitated Calcium Carbonate (WPCC)	14.01.2026

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender No.	Work Description	Due date
252623 003823	Civil & Structural works for Tissue Paper Machine (TM#5) complex at TNPL Unit - II (Part 2)	12.01.2026

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कार्यालय अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियन्ता, सार्वजनिक निर्माण विभाग, सम्भाग भरतपुर
क्रमांक अमुअ/भरत/त.स./2025-26/डी-2009 दिनांक 29/12/2025
संशोधन पत्र निविदा सूचना संख्या 13/2025-26
इस कार्यालय के पत्र क्रमांक एसीई/बीटीपी/निविदा/2025-26/डी-1194 दिनांक 28.08.2025 से जारी निविदा सूचना संख्या 13/2025-26 बजट घोषणा 2024-25 के अन्तर्गत भरतपुर संभाग के अधीन जिला डीग में बाईपास निर्माण मय आर.ओ.बी. कार्य के लिए, जो कि एसपीपी पोर्टल पर NIB NO. PWD2526A2967 & UBN NO. PWD2526WLOB11157 से प्रकाशित हुई है, की तिथियों में निम्नानुसार संशोधन जारी किया जाता है जो वेबसाईट "www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in" एवं "www.sppp.raj.nic.in" पर देखा जा सकता है

विवरण	पूर्व प्रकाशित तिथियां	पूर्व संशोधित तिथियां	पूर्व संशोधित तिथियां	पूर्व संशोधित तिथियां	संशोधित तिथियां
ऑनलाईन निविदा फार्म मिलने की तारीख	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 06.10.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 03.11.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 04.12.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 29.12.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 29.01.2026 सायं 06.00 बजे तक
ऑनलाईन निविदा फार्म जमा कराने की तारीख	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 06.10.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 03.11.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 04.12.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 29.12.2025 सायं 06.00 बजे तक	दिनांक 04.09.2025 प्रातः 9.30 बजे से दिनांक 29.01.2026 सायं 06.00 बजे तक
ऑनलाईन तकनीकी निविदा खोलने की तारीख	कार्य के सम्मुख अंकित कार्यालय में 07.10.2025 अपरान्ह 03.00 बजे खोली जायेगी।	कार्य के सम्मुख अंकित कार्यालय में 04.11.2025 अपरान्ह 03.00 बजे खोली जायेगी।	कार्य के सम्मुख अंकित कार्यालय में 05.12.2025 अपरान्ह 03.00 बजे खोली जायेगी।	कार्य के सम्मुख अंकित कार्यालय में 30.12.2025 अपरान्ह 03.00 बजे खोली जायेगी।	कार्य के सम्मुख अंकित कार्यालय में 30.01.2026 अपरान्ह 03.00 बजे खोली जायेगी।

नोट:- वित्त विभाग के परिपत्र क्रमांक एफ.8 (6)/ एफडी/ एसपीएफसी/ परिपत्र/ 2023 दिनांक 15.07.2025 के अनुसार ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट पोर्टल पर बोलीदाताओ द्वारा ई-निविदाओं के प्रेषण के लिए बिड सिक्योरिटी राशि राजस्थान लोक उपापन में पारदर्शिता नियम, 2013 के नियम 42 के उप-नियम (6) में वर्णित माध्यमों यथा बैंकर चैक या मांगदेय ड्राफ्ट या बैंक गारंटी या ई-बैंक गारंटी या ई-ग्रास या इन्सूरेंस श्योरिटी बॉन्ड (संबंधित अधिशाषी अभियन्ता के नाम) में से किसी भी माध्यम से जमा करायी जा सकती है एवं ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट पोर्टल पर अपलोड करने होंगे। जिसके मूल दस्तावेज एवं मूल शपथ पत्र इस कार्यालय में दिनांक 30.01.2026 दोपहर 12.00 बजे तक जमा कराये जा सकेंगे।
निविदा की शेष शर्तें यथावत रहेगी।
NIT RO NO. 12819
1 NIT Corrigendum RO NO. 13315
2nd NIT Corrigendum RO NO. 14542
3rd NIT Corrigendum RO NO. 16243
4th NIT Corrigendum RO NO. 17927
DIPR/C/19401/2025
अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियन्ता सानिवि संभाग भरतपुर

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E-mail: tenders@tidelpark.com; Website: www.tidelpark.com
NOTICE NO. TIDEL NEO/2025–26/03 02.01.2026
TIDEL Neo Limited invites "E-Tender for Construction of IT Office Building, Ground Floor + 3 Floors + Terrace, Including Civil Construction, HVAC, Electrical HT/LT, Elevator, IBMS, Fire Protection, Plumbing, Structural Façade, Landscaping, STP, WTP and External Works at **Erode."**
For more details and participation in the above e-Tender, please visit the website www.tntenders.gov.in. Last date for online submission of duly filled in tender documents is **3.00 p.m. on 02.02.2026.** TIDEL Neo Limited reserves the right to accept /reject any one/all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
DIPR/6900/TENDER/2025 **MANAGING DIRECTOR**

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA-DEPARTMENT OF SPACE
CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC –SHAR
SRIHARIKOTA-524124
Brief E-TENDER NOTICE
e-Tender Notice No.SHAR/CMD/E/J 2587210 / 2025-26, SHAR/CMD/E/K 2587211/2025-26 **Date: 31/12/2025**
On behalf of President of India, Item Rate tenders are invited through e-tendering for the following works:

Sl. No.	Brief Name of work	Value (Rs)
1	SITC of 18 Nos. of 11kV / 433V outdoor Transformers.	420.88 Lakhs
2	Electrical installation works for ISROSENE facility (ASLP Package C).- Balance works.	87.03 Lakhs

Last date for sale (Tender documents can be downloaded) up to **15/01/2026**, **14:30 hrs**. For eligibility criteria and other details, interested tenderers may please refer to the detailed bilingual (Hindi-English) Notice Inviting Tenders (NIT) on the website **https://www.isro.gov.in/Tenders.html** and tender free view at **https://www.tenderwizard.com/isro** .
Sd/- GROUP HEAD, CMG/ SDSC SHAR

MAHATRANSCO Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Co. Ltd.
NOTICE INVITING TENDER CPD/161 -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) / Tender Fee (in Rs.)	Due Date & Time (Hrs.) Submission & Opening of Tender
SP/T-0642/1225 [1st Call] RFx No. : 7000038437 for Selection of Solar Power Developers for setting up of 15 MW Grid-Connected Rooftop Solar PV Projects under RESCO Mode at various EHV Substations and Admin Buildings of MSETCL across Maharashtra.	Rs. 44676.00 Lakhs / 25,000/- + GST	30.01.2026 18:00 / 30.01.2026 18.15
Pre-bid meeting Date, Time & Venue	**Date: 07.01.2026 Time: 16:00 Hrs**	**Venue:** Conference Hall, 8th Floor, MSETCL C.O. 'Prakashganga' Plot No. C-19, E-Block, BKC, Bandra East, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400051

Contact Person: Office of the Executive Engineer (Gr-VI)
Email:1) C.E. (CPA) 2) S.E.(CPA) 3)E.E.(P&C) 4) E.E. (Group-VI)
CPA, C.O. MSETCL, 1st Floor, Prakashgad Building, Bandra (E), Mumbai
Tel. No.: 022-69852712
Email id: cecpa@mahatransco.in, secpa@gmail.com eepc@mahatransco.in, eegrp6@mahatransco.in
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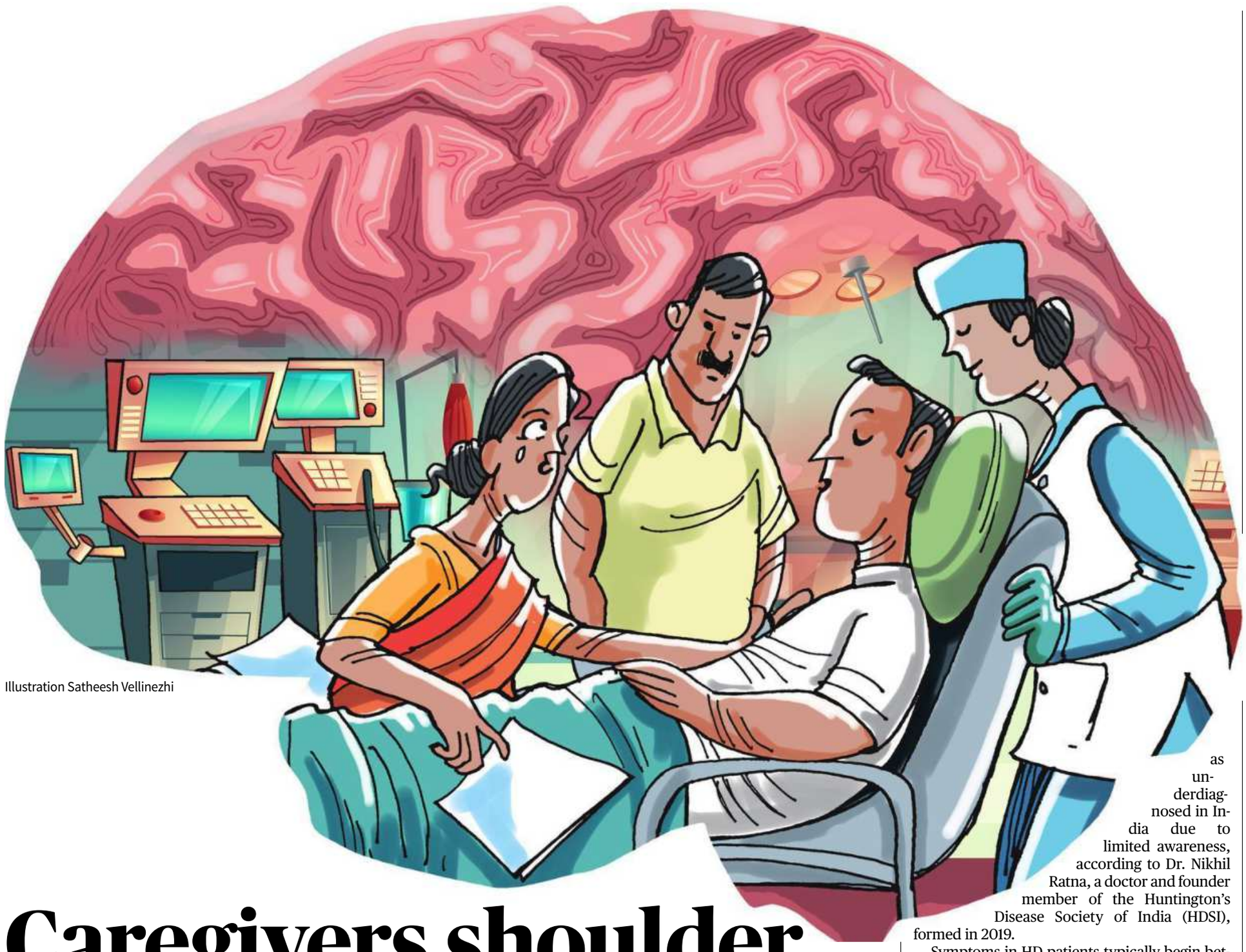


Illustration Satheesh Vellinezhi

Caregivers shoulder Huntington's Disease weight with little aid

Although globally classified as a rare disease, Huntington's Disease is increasingly recognised as underdiagnosed in India due to limited awareness. The delay in its recognition has left families without any financial support from the government. While there is no cure for the disease, treatments are available that can improve patients' quality of life and ease the burden on caregivers. However, lack of awareness and the high cost of treatment remain the biggest hurdles, writes Nellore Shravani.

Sitting on the floor of her modest two-room house in Kalugotla village near Yemmiganur in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, Mahalakshmi (name changed), her face careworn and eyes drooping, pulls out a sheaf of health reports from multiple hospitals. A daily wager who earns barely ₹200 a day and receives a monthly pension of ₹4,000, she is the sole breadwinner for a family of eight–her aged parents, two daughters, and their three children.

Yet, it is not merely the meagre income that weighs upon Mahalakshmi. The heavier burden is Huntington's Disease (HD), a rare medical condition that has afflicted her family. Mahalakshmi's husband and his two siblings lost their battle against the disease, and later her son E. Jagadeesh Goud, who suffered from Juvenile Huntington's Disease, also passed away on November 2, 2025. Now, Mahalakshmi is caring for her daughter Rani (name changed), who was diagnosed with HD two years after giving birth to her own child.

"It is a strange thing," Mahalakshmi says in a tone heavy with sadness, when asked if she understands the disease. "They do not have a fever, but they somehow become very ill. They cannot walk or talk properly. For some reason, they do not sleep either," she says, adding, "No one else in the village has it. It seems to run only in my family."

Sleep-deprived and burnt out, Mahalakshmi points to a report from the heap of files, issued by a neurologist in Kurnool, which mentions the condition "possible Huntington's Disease" that her son Jagadeesh had. "That is what my son had," she says, gazing at his photo frame adorned with a garland in the corner of the living room.

Recalling her son's condition, Mahalakshmi says that what began in 2016 as a slight bend in his shoulder–initially attributed to an external injury–gradually progressed into something far more debilitating and unfathomable: Juvenile Huntington's Disease. Nine years later, Jagadeesh, aged 23, passed away following complications from a fall at home.

"He was a bright student. Even after being diagnosed in Class IX, he continued going to school and later to intermediate college, three villages away, despite our protests," Mahalakshmi says, proudly displaying her son's mark sheets. He fell multiple times while getting on or off the bus and struggled to hold a pen. Yet that did not stop Jagadeesh from pursuing his studies. In his final days, Jagadeesh was bedridden and unable to speak. Mahalakshmi, who had already lost three members of her family to the disease, donated Jagadeesh's brain for research at National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), making it the first juvenile HD brain donation in the country.

> They do not have a fever, but they somehow become very ill. They cannot walk or talk properly. For some reason, they do not sleep either.
> **MAHALAKSHMI**

According to medical experts, Huntington's Disease (HD) is a progressive, hereditary and adult-onset neurodegenerative condition causing severe involuntary movements, motor dysfunction, cognitive, and behavioural symptoms, leading to lifelong disability and loss of independence.

Rani's monthly medical expenses amount to ₹2,000. In addition, with a debt of ₹15 lakh weighing on her, Mahalakshmi constantly worries but never complains. Rani cannot walk without support, and her slurred speech is incomprehensible to everyone except her mother. "They cannot do anything on their own," says Mahalakshmi, who once bathed Jagadeesh, fed him, dressed him, and helped him to the washroom. Now, she does all of these for her daughter, even though she is painfully aware that her daughter, too, may die soon. "I have accepted the reality that I may lose my daughter as well, but I only hope my granddaughter does not inherit it," she says, wiping away tears.

"Had I known about her condition, I would not have let her marry or have children," says Mahalakshmi. Rani's husband abandoned her after learning of her condition and accused the family of betrayal for hiding the truth.

Although globally classified as a rare disease, Huntington's Disease is increasingly recognised as underdiagnosed in India due to limited awareness, according to Dr. Nikhil Ratna, a doctor and founder member of the Huntington's Disease Society of India (HDSI), formed in 2019.

Symptoms in HD patients typically begin between 40 and 50 years of age and progress over 15-20 years, leading to complete loss of independence. In more severe mutation ranges, HD can also occur in childhood or adolescence (juvenile HD).

Dr. Nikhil Ratna, also a clinician-researcher specialising in HD, explains that people with HD suffer from regular falls, are easily prone to infections such as pneumonia, have psychiatric disturbances such as depression, psychosis, irritability, OCD. Usually, HD follows an autosomal dominant inheritance pattern, placing each first-degree relative of an affected individual at 50% risk. The risk of children inheriting the disease increases to 75% in consanguineous marriages, says Dr. Nikhil Ratna.

Mahalakshmi married her maternal uncle, who had HD, and two of her three children inherited the disease. "People say our elders must have committed a sin, and that is why my family is suffering," says Mahalakshmi, who has withdrawn from social life.

"Jagadeesh always wanted me by his side. Now Rani needs me in the same way," she adds. Mahalakshmi, 55, has spent the last 15 years caring for her husband, her son, and now her daughter. She no longer attends functions in the village, and notes that people have stopped inviting her to events.

> Symptoms in HD patients typically begin between 40 and 50 years of age and progress over 15–20 years, leading to complete loss of independence.
> **DR. NIKHIL RATNA**
> clinician-researcher specialising in HD

According to available data, there is currently no database on Huntington's Disease at either the national or State level. However, scientific literature and studies conducted by academicians report more than 900 known HD cases across the country. "In addition to this, there may be many unreported cases," says Dr. Nikhil Ratna.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines rare disease as often debilitating lifelong disease or disorder with a prevalence of one or less, per 1,000 population. In 2021, the Union government formulated the National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD)-2021 for identification, prevention and providing support to families with rare diseases.

According to the National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD), there are more than 7,000 rare diseases worldwide, but fewer than five per cent of them have treatment options. With limited drugs available, such conditions are often referred to as "orphan diseases." The NPRD recognises 63 rare diseases in India, but Huntington's Disease is not among them.

Therefore, a full-fledged survey is yet to be taken to arrive at the epidemiological data of HD patients in the country. In Andhra Pradesh, there is no database on how many people are living with HD or with any of the recognised rare diseases. Director of Medical Education, A.P., G. Raghunandan acknowledged that it is high time they maintained a registry.

At NIMHANS, the nodal centre for neurological disorders in the country, there are 11 patients from Andhra Pradesh receiving treatment for HD at present, as per information from the institute. But, the number may be more, says Dr. Nikhil Ratna.

"It is not easy to care for an HD patient," says HDSI chairman Koushik Venkateswara Rao. "It drains the caregiver mentally and physically," he adds, recalling the co-founder of HDSI from Mumbai, who died by suicide after caring for her mother, an HD patient, for 25 years.

"The patients experience regular falls, fractures and need physiotherapy, speech therapy regularly. Not everyone can afford these," said Mr. Koushik.

A scientist, Mr. Koushik, wakes up at 4 a.m., cooks and feeds his wife, who is battling HD, gives her medicines, locks the door, and leaves for work. He returns at lunchtime to feed her, and then leaves again for work. "In the past 15 years, there has not been a single day when I did not fear that I might find her dead upon returning home," he says, choking on his words.

"There are no trained nurses to handle HD patients. There is very minimal awareness about frontline paramedical staff and health workers about the same anywhere in the country," says Dr. Nikhil Ratna.

There is also the constant fear that the disease may be carried on to the next generation. The fear of inheriting the disease, the social stigma and the lack of support take a toll on one's mental health, says Dr. Nikhil Ratna, who stresses the need for a centre that offers genetic counselling. Even if one wants to go for genetic testing, there are not many government centres in the country, he adds.

Director of Medical Education Dr. Raghunandan said that there is a proposal to set up a centre in Visakhapatnam, but nothing much has come out of it yet. The State does not have a government neurosciences centre, too. This forces people from the State to either travel to Bengaluru or Hyderabad for treatment.

For Raghu (name changed), from Narasannapeta in Srikakulam district, travelling to Bengaluru–around 1,200 km away–has become a worrisome hurdle. His father, aged 56, was diagnosed with HD in June 2025. Since then, they have visited NIMHANS twice for treatment, and his next appointment is scheduled for January. "We have to spend around ₹7,000 on the journey, accommodation, and food," notes Raghu (21), who has just completed his bachelor's degree.

His father, who worked at a gold shop for a monthly salary of ₹9,000, was the main breadwinner for the family of four. Now, Raghu's elder brother works part-time at a restaurant in Hyderabad, while his mother sells papad (an Indian snack), earning about ₹5,000 to help manage household expenses. Raghu, who takes care of his father while preparing for the railways exam, says they have not asked relatives for help, fearing stigma. "But one uncle, who knows that my father is not doing well, sends money," says Raghu, who is hoping to secure a disability certificate for his father.

However, obtaining the certificate is not an easy task. Three doctors from NIMHANS must certify his father's disability. Only then, depending on the degree of disability, the State government may provide a pension under the Dr. NTR Bharosa Pension Scheme.

Mahalakshmi also said that she has been running from pillar to post to secure a disability certificate for Rani. While Jagadeesh used to receive ₹6,000, Rani has yet to get any support from the government. Under the scheme, the government provides between ₹6,000 and ₹15,000 to people with disabilities..

Due to financial constraints, Raghu, who learned that protein-rich food is important for HD patients, says he is able to buy milk for his father. "We cannot afford eggs or chicken, even if he is willing to eat them," says Raghu, grateful that his father can still eat normal food. Typically, because of their continuous irregular and involuntary movements (chorea), HD patients struggle to eat properly. Even feeding them becomes a challenge.

Members of the HD Society of India have requested the governments, both Centre and State, to set up multi-disciplinary care centres, which can provide specialised care involving neurology, psychiatry, physiotherapy, genetic counselling, palliative care at one place. It submitted a representation to the Union government requesting it to include HD in the list of recognised rare diseases to provide respite to patients and caregivers and to allow surveys and research to be taken up.

Every person suffering from any of the 63 recognised rare diseases is eligible to get a financial aid of up to ₹50 lakh from the Union government under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.

The same benefits, however, elude patients of HD since it has not been recognised as a rare disease in the NPRD-2021 yet.

This has forced families engaged in long-term care of their loved ones with HD to make out-of-pocket expenses on medication and treatments.

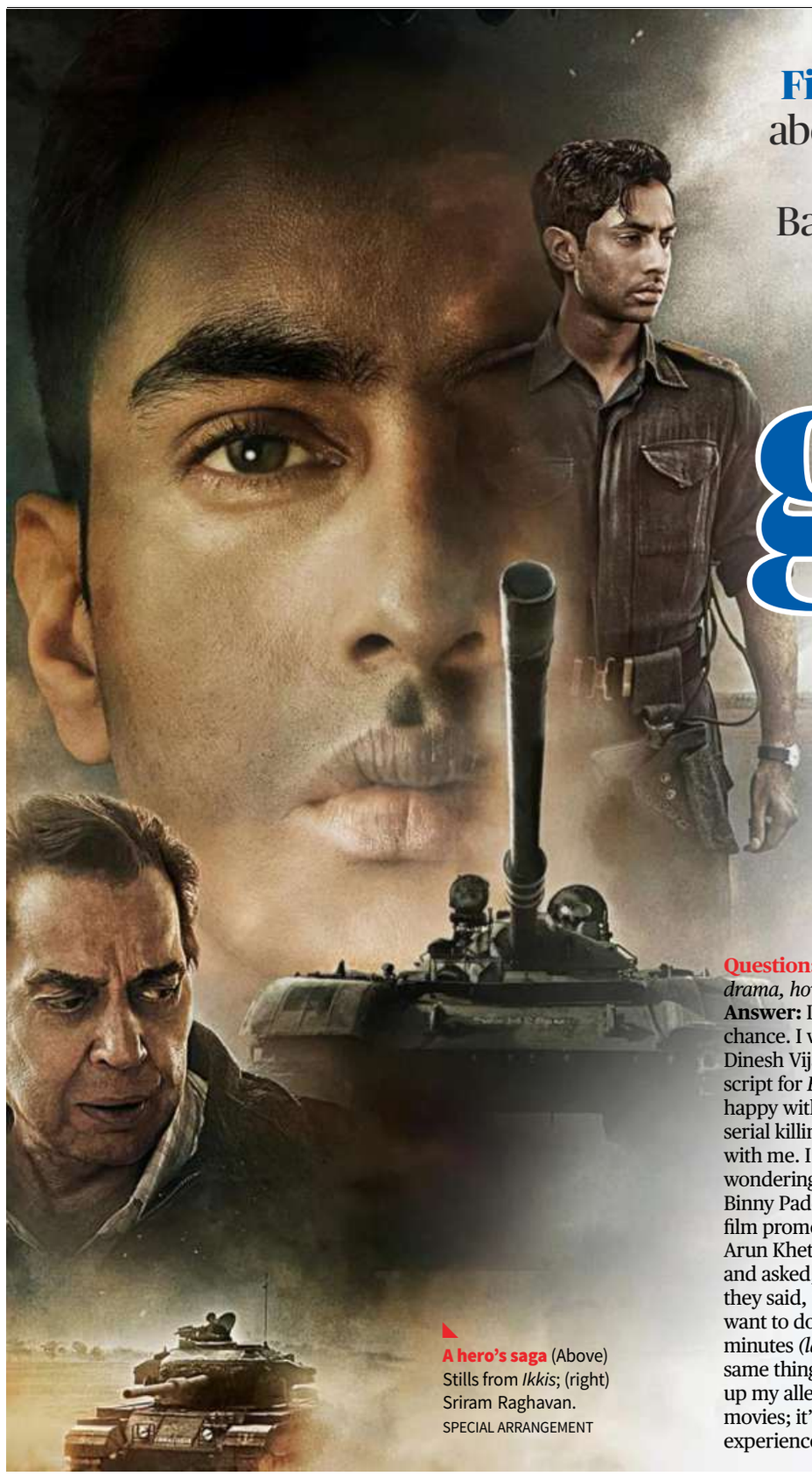
There is no cure for the disease, but there are treatments available that can improve the life of the patient and reduce burden on the caregivers, says Dr. Nikhil Ratna.

Mr. Koushik spent ₹15 lakh on a treatment for his wife that helped control her chorea. However, others cannot afford it.

In Andhra Pradesh, the disease is not covered under the Dr. NTR Vaidya Seva. "If there are any surgical corrections required, then those will be covered under the scheme," says Dr. Raghunandan.



Mahalakshmi with her four-year-old granddaughter, at her house in Kalugotla village near Yemmiganur of Kurnool district.
U. SUBRAMANYAM



Filmmaker Sriram Raghavan talks about telling the story of the boy who dismantled Pakistan's pride in the Battle of Basantar, and the challenges of swimming against the tide

A shot at glory

Anuj Kumar
anuj.kumar@thehindu.co.in

Known for reinventing the thriller with his signature blend of suspense, dark humour, and unpredictable twists, filmmaker Sriram Raghavan has always pushed boundaries. He draws inspiration from classic noir to craft narratives that keep audiences on the edge of their seats. However, this week, Sriram steps into bold new territory with *Ikkis*, a powerful war drama about the heroics of Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, the youngest recipient of the Param Vir Chakra, who made the supreme sacrifice at 21 during the 1971 India-Pakistan war.

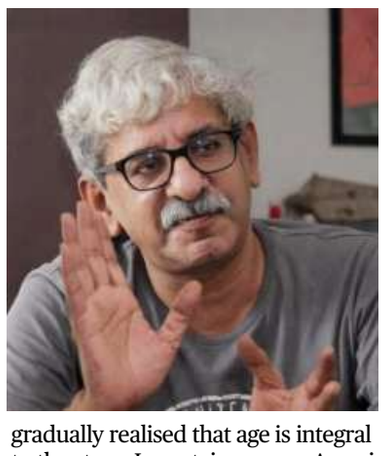
Edited excerpts:

Question: *From noir to nationalist drama, how did this shift happen?*
Answer: It happened by sheer chance. I was in Dino's (producer Dinesh Vijan) office to discuss the script for *Badlapur 2*, which I was not happy with. There was too much serial killing, and it didn't connect with me. I was sitting there wondering what to do when I heard Binny Padda (known for designing film promos) telling Dino the story of Arun Khetarpal. I found it fascinating and asked, 'Who's doing this?' And they said, 'Nobody's attached. Do you want to do it?' I thought for five minutes *(laughs)*, asking myself the same thing that you're asking me. Is it up my alley? I love all kinds of movies; it's just that I have no experience with extensive action, VFX, or shooting tanks. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but somehow I said that I'm interested.

Q: *What pulled you to the sacrifice of Arun Khetarpal and his father's journey?*
A: It's set in two timelines. One is 1971, when the battle was fought, and the other is 2001, when Arun's 80-year-old father, who also served the Indian Army during the British period, goes back in time to Pakistan as part of the cultural exchange that the then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee started, to resolve the conflict after the Kargil War. During this twin-track diplomacy phase, getting visas became easier. When the senior Khetarpal, born in undivided India, received an invitation from his college in Sargodha, he returned to see if his house still stood. In that journey, he meets a certain Pakistani army person who gives him an insight into his son's courage and what happened on the battlefront on December 16, barely two months after he turned 21. Arun didn't even complete his training as a young officer. After one month of rigorous training, he was considered good enough to be in the thick of action. So his story and his father's story connect and make a lot of cinematic sense to me.

Q: *Tell us about the research...*
A: I met Mukesh Khetarpal, Arun's younger brother, and through him, I got a whole list of names, particularly two of Arun's tank crew members, Nathu Singh and Prayag Singh, who survived the December 16, 1971, battle (of Basantar). We spent two days with them. They would come in their full uniform. Brimming with pride, they told us about Arun and the times. Then I got to meet a number of his NDA batchmates, and a jigsaw was formed.

Q: *How did Agastya walk in?*
A: As I developed the script, I



gradually realised that age is integral to the story. In certain scenes, Arun is shown as 19. The script demanded a fresh face, and Agastya was 21 when he was cast.

We needed an actor who was willing to commit two to three years to the project. It's the story of a boy becoming a man. Young age apart, what Arun did heroically, for which he received the Param Vir Chakra, is something that happened in the last two hours of his life. Till those last hours, he didn't know he was a hero. I wanted Agastya to bring that urge to serve and the innocence about the outcome. I guess Agastya's eyes reflect it. He comes from an illustrious family, but for me, Agastya was just a boy who had to grow into his character. He spent four months training. First, he attended boot camp to live the life of a soldier, and then, at the Poona Horse regiment, he gained a sense of what it was like to operate tanks.

Q: *How did Dharmendra come into the picture?*
A: Ever since we worked together in *Johnny Gaddar*, we had been in touch. At times, he would call me to suggest a story I should take up. Like he would say, *Tuesdays with Morrie* is a good idea, or can I do something like *The Bridges of Madison County?* I promised to find a story for him. When we found one, Dino and I had a long discussion about whether to cast someone in his 80s for the role. In the past, we have seen Sanjeev Kumar and Anupam Kher playing characters much older than their age. I felt we can't do it anymore. With Dharamji, there was no acting. I mean, his walk, his gait, everything is part of the character. He connected deeply with the story. The pain of leaving his home in Punjab had settled in his body over the years. The idea of revisiting home became a very personal experience – he was totally into the character.

Q: *The film comes at a time when jingoistic patriotism is gaining currency at the box office. Are you concerned?*
A: Not really. When I began in 2019, all I had was the story. Now, in six years, so many things have changed. There'll be good times, there'll be not-so-good times. Of course, I'm conscious of the kinds of movies being made, but there is no wrong time to tell a good story. We also need these kinds of stories.

Ikkis is currently running in theatres.

A hero's saga (Above) Stills from *Ikkis*; (right) Sriram Raghavan.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Time for love Ahn Bo-hyun and Lee Joo-been in a still from *Spring Fever*.
PRIME VIDEO

Season of love

AHN BO-HYUN AND LEE JOO-BEEN SPEAK ABOUT STARRING IN *SPRING FEVER*, shooting the series in picturesque Pohang, and meeting the expectations set by the original web novel

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Over the years, picturesque small towns, with their array of wholesome characters, have proven to be the perfect setting for K-drama romances. Think *Hometown Cha Cha Cha*, where a city slicker dentist heads to scenic coastal town Gongjin, and is charmed by the resident handyman. Or even in *Summer Strike*, where an office worker quits her job and decides to live in a sleepy town for a year, absolutely taken in by its lovely library (and later, its sweet and shy librarian).

In the upcoming K-Drama *Spring Fever*, Yoon Bom, a teacher from Seoul, heads to teach at a high school in the town of Sinsu. Reserved, quiet and keen on a new beginning, it is here that she meets Seon Jae-Kyu, a tall, tattooed, seemingly tough guy who is effusive, warm and an eager extrovert. The setting is ripe for sparks to fly.

For actors Ahn Bo-hyun and Lee Joo-bin, who play the leads, starring in *Spring Fever* meant travelling out of Seoul to Pohang, where a large part of the show was filmed, and getting to revel in everything that was scenic, wholesome and fun.

"Since I grew up in Busan, the ocean has always been a familiar part of my life. In Seoul, where I live now, it's not easy to see the sea, so filming in Pohang, where the ocean was right there every day, made me genuinely happy," says Bo-hyun. Joo-been, meanwhile, calls the whole experience a 'happy little trip': "We even shot at a sheep ranch, and at first, I was completely thrown off because every time I said my line, all the sheep would start bleating," she recalls.

Adapted from Baek Min-a's web novel of the same name, the show has sparked interest with its first-look posters, especially as Bo-hyun's appearance as Jae-kyu closely resembles the character's original depiction.

"I always feel a certain pressure when it comes to meeting the expectations of fans of the original work. That is why I try to pay even more attention to expressing the character in detail, including the external aspects," he says.

While Jae-kyu and Yoon Bom's romance will take centrestage, the show's teasers also indicate that Jae-kyu and his relationship with his nephew (played by actor Cho Jun-young), whom he is raising, will also be a key part of the show.

His character, Bo-hyun adds, is someone he hopes the audience falls in love with.

"Jae-kyu is a character who's strong on the outside but soft at heart. With his fiery sincerity and straightforward charm, I'm sure he'll win people over," he laughs, also adding that the chemistry his character shares with Yoon Bom, as well as the fun dynamic with the townspeople, is something to watch out for.

Bo-hyun has so far had an interesting mix of roles, with action most notably being his strong forte. This includes *My Name*, *Military Prosecutor Doberman* and, more recently, *Flex X Cop*. *Spring Fever* signals a return to a softer, less intense genre for the actor.

"I still have many genres I haven't had the chance to try, and going forward, I'd love to take on noir projects and even challenge myself with villain roles," he says.

Earlier this year, Yoo-been starred as the lead in *The Divorce Insurance*, a workplace romantic-comedy that saw her paired opposite Lee Dong-wook. "I'm drawn to stories that carry a message and have something meaningful to say. Going forward, I hope to continue playing roles that are layered, emotionally rich, and driven by their own agency," she says.

While expansive period dramas, slice-of-life stories and action thrillers dominated 2025, simple, contemporary romantic comedy K-Dramas were few and far between.

With *Spring Fever* slated to release early in January, things are already looking up for the genre.

Spring Fever *will stream on Prime Video from January 5 onwards.*



Fresh start

Actor Shree Nandu talks about reinventing himself with *Psych Siddhartha*

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December 31, 2024: When the clock struck 12, actor Shree Nandu, director Varun Reddy and the team of the Telugu film *Psych Siddhartha* continued their shooting schedule in Shaikpet, Hyderabad.

"We knew there would be fireworks and the skies would be lit up in colours. We used this backdrop for a sequence. Rather than buy fireworks and shoot or opt for visual effects, we made use of the New Year cheer," says Nandu, during this interview. Every rupee mattered in the making of this indie-style film. *Psych Siddhartha* released on January 1, 2026.

Nandu and Varun's collaborative journey goes back nearly a decade. Movie buffs might be familiar with the characters Nandu portrayed in hits such as *100% Love* and *Pelli Choopulu*, and a brief part in the recent *Dhandoraa*. "It's been a 19-year journey as an actor," he says.

Sports commentary in Telugu on Star Sports made him a household name. He continued to act, but the film that could fetch him recognition was elusive. Rather than wait for something interesting, he decided to direct one. Though he is credited with 'additional screenplay' for *Psych Siddhartha*, he admits, "I am not good at writing, so I wanted to work with a writer." He met Varun, an architect who is passionate about cinema, through director Tharun Bhascker.

Second innings Shree Nandu looks forward to the year with a new venture.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pause, reflect

The two worked on several ideas, but there was always the last mile issue – finding a producer who would back their vision.

They paused. Varun went back to architecture and Nandu got busy with television. Later, Varun made a 40-minute film and asked Nandu if he could help get an OTT release. Watching the film, Nandu sensed its potential to be a full-length feature. *Psych Siddhartha* took shape.

Again, it wasn't easy.

At one point, a producer agreed to fund the film but wanted a different actor since Nandu's market potential was limited. "I agreed to step back," says Nandu.

However, the producer wanted several changes in the script, and Varun returned to work with Nandu.

The two decided to pool in their savings and make the film.

The making of *Psych Siddhartha* is a story in itself. Nandu doubled up as production manager, while an assistant director coordinated food from a mess in Shaikpet. They also befriended people in the neighbourhood. A few props and household items necessary for the film were borrowed from the nearby homes and returned after use. "A lot of *jugaad*," as Nandu puts it.

Working with a crew of not more than 15 or 20 for 40 days, Nandu drew inspiration from how actors Adivi Sesh and Siddhu Jonnalagadda turned writers to chart their own destiny rather than wait for a good film.

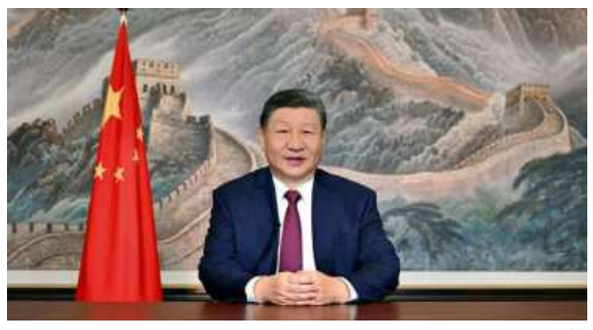
"The documentary *Journey of Kshanam* is one that I recommend to a lot of people. What Sesh and director Ravikanth Perepu pulled off is inspirational," says Nandu, referring to the 2016 thriller.

Psych Siddhartha, says Nandu, will usher in a new voice in filmmaking and its editing style is innovative.

Once the film was completed, Nandu organised screenings for focus groups to get feedback and improve the final product. During a screening, a team member of Rana's Spirit Media watched the film. "Suresh sir (producer Suresh Babu) learnt about this and asked for a screening. When he and Rana bought our film, it was a huge sense of achievement," says Nandu.

BEIJING

China's Xi hails nation's progress, renews pledge to take back Taiwan



AP

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday hailed his country's technological progress in areas such as artificial intelligence and semiconductors while once again insisting his country would annex self-ruled Taiwan. "The reunification of our motherland, a trend of the times, is unstoppable," he said. AP

PARIS

Iran executed at least 1,500 people, a 35-year record, says rights group



AP

Iran executed at least 1,500 people last year, the Norway-based Iran Human Rights group said on Thursday, in what it called an "unprecedented" hike in the use of capital punishment. "It is very alarming and unprecedented in the last 35 years," the group's director, Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, said of the toll. AFP

WASHINGTON

U.S. military strikes five more 'drug boats' over two days, killing eight



AFP

The U.S. military said on Wednesday it struck five alleged drug-smuggling boats over two days, killing a total of eight people while others jumped overboard and may have survived. U.S. Southern Command said it immediately notified the U.S. Coast Guard to activate search and rescue efforts. AP

DHAKA

Hindu businessman attacked, set on fire in Bangladesh, say police



PTI

A Hindu businessman, Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was brutally attacked and set on fire by miscreants near Keurbhanga Bazar in Shariatpur, Bangladesh, police said on Thursday. He was assaulted while returning home, sustaining severe burn and hacking injuries. He was later shifted to Dhaka for advanced treatment. PTI

Ukrainian drone strike in Kherson kills 24, wounds at least 50: Russia

Three drones hit a cafe and hotel, with one carrying an incendiary mixture that caused a fire, says Moscow-installed leader; Ukraine has not commented on alleged strike; Russian leaders condemn 'attack'; Zelenskyy says a peace deal is '90% ready'

Associated Press
KYIV

Russian officials on Thursday said a Ukrainian drone strike killed 24 people and wounded at least 50 as they celebrated the New Year in a Russian-held village in Ukraine's Kherson region, as tensions between the two nations continue to spike despite diplomats hailing productive peace talks.

Three drones struck a cafe and hotel in the resort town of Khorly on the Black Sea coast, the region's Moscow-installed leader, Vladimir Saldo, said in a statement on Telegram. He said that one of the drones carried an incendiary mixture, sparking a blaze.



The site of a drone attack on a hotel in Khroly on Thursday, according to the Russian-appointed Governor of Kherson region. AFP

Ukrainian officials did not immediately comment on the claim of a strike. The attack could not be independently verified by The Associated Press.

The attack was condemned by a number of Russian officials. Valentina Matviyenko, the chair of Russia's Upper House of Parliament, the Federation Council, said that the strike "strengthened" Russia's resolve to quickly achieve its goals in its almost four-year invasion of Ukraine.

The strike "once again demonstrates the validity of our initial demands," Ms. Matviyenko said.

The statement follows claims from Moscow that Ukraine launched a long-range drone attack against one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's official residences in northwestern Russia on Tuesday. Kyiv has denounced the claims as a "lie".

In his New Year's address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that a peace deal was "90% ready" but warned that the remaining 10%, believed to include key sticking points such as territory, would "determine the fate of peace, the fate of Ukraine and Europe, how people will live".

U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said on Wednesday that he, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Mr. Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner had a "productive call" with the national security advisers of Britain, France, Germany and Ukraine.

Fresh clashes kill six in Iran cost-of-living protests

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Protesters and security forces clashed in three Iranian cities on Thursday, with six people reported killed, the first deaths since the cost-of-living demonstrations broke out.

The protests began on Sunday in Tehran, where shopkeepers went on strike over high prices and economic stagnation, and have since spread to other parts of the country.

On Thursday, Iran's Fars news agency reported two people killed in clashes between security forces and protesters in the city of Lordegan, in the province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and three in Azna, in neighbouring Lorestan province.

Fars reported that the buildings were "severely damaged" and that police arrested several people described as "ringleaders".



Shopkeepers and traders protest in the street against the economic conditions in Tehran on December 29. AFP

Earlier Thursday, state television reported that a member of Iran's security forces was killed overnight during protests in the western city of Kouhdasht.

"A 21-year-old member of the Basij from the city of Kouhdasht was killed last night by rioters while defending public order," the channel said, citing Said Pourali, the deputy governor of Lorestan Province.

The Basij are a volunteer paramilitary force linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of the Islamic republic. The demonstrations are smaller than the last major unrest in 2022.

Zohran Mamdani, Democrat, sworn in as New York City Mayor

Associated Press
NEW YORK

Zohran Mamdani became mayor of New York City just after midnight Thursday, taking the oath of office at City Hall station – a historic, decommissioned subway station in Manhattan.

Mr. Mamdani, a Democrat, was sworn in as the first Muslim leader of America's biggest city, placing his hand on a Koran as he took his oath. "This is truly the honour and the privilege of a lifetime," he said.

In Mr. Mamdani's first remarks as Mayor, he said the old subway station was a "testament to the importance of public transit to the vitality, the health and the legacy of our city".



Zohran Mamdani

In addition to being the city's first Muslim mayor, Mr. Mamdani is also its first of South Asian descent and the first to be born in Africa. At 34, Mr. Mamdani is also the city's youngest Mayor in generations.

Israel says one dead as forces open fire on 'stone-throwers'

Reuters

Israeli forces had closed the main entrance to the village of Luban al-Sharqiya

The Israeli military said its forces killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank in the early hours on Thursday as they opened fire on people who were throwing stones at soldiers. Two other people were hit on a main road near the village of Luban al-Sharqiya in Nablus, the military statement added. It described the people as militants and said the stone-throwing was part of an ambush.

Palestinian authorities in the West Bank said a 26-year-old man they named as Khattab Al Sarhan was killed and another person wounded.

Israeli forces had closed the main entrance to the village of Luban al-Sharqiya, in Nablus, and blocked several secondary roads on Wednesday, the Palestinian Authority's official news agency WAFA reported.

More than a thousand Palestinians were killed in the West Bank between October 2023 and October 2025, mostly in operations by security forces and some by settler violence.

Kim praises troops in 'alien land' and hails 'invincible alliance' with Russia

Agence France-Presse
SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has praised his troops fighting abroad as forging an "invincible alliance" with Russia in a New Year's message, state media said on Thursday.

Pyongyang has sent thousands of troops to support Russia's nearly four-year invasion of Ukraine, according to South Korean and Western intelligence agencies.

At least 600 have died and thousands more have sustained injuries, according to South Korean estimates.

Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology and food and energy supplies from Russia in return.



Russian President Vladimir Putin with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un during a visit to Pyongyang, North Korea, in 2024. AP

Mr. Kim praised his men fighting in an "alien land", congratulating their "heroic" defence of the nation's honour and instructing them to "be brave", the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said on Thursday.

"As the whole country is enveloped in a festive atmosphere of greeting the new year, I all the more miss you, who are fighting bravely on the battlefields in the alien land even at this moment," he said, according to KCNA. "Behind you are Pyongyang and Moscow," Mr. Kim said.

The North Korean leader praised soldiers for strengthening the "invincible alliance" with Russia, calling on them to fight "for the fraternal Russian people".

And Mr. Kim hinted that more overseas action would take place this year, highlighting "remarkable feats you will perform on the overseas battlefields".

Analysts say that North Korea's deepening alliance with Russia has offered an economic lifeline to Mr. Kim's regime and allowed him to rebuff U.S. and South Korean overtures for dialogue.



REVENGE

Sabalenka game for a 'Battle of the Sexes' rematch with Kyrgios



AP

Women's World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka says she wants a 'revenge' 'Battle of the Sexes' rematch with Nick Kyrgios but on a full court and two serves. "I think we will have to come up with a different format. Before the match I didn't realise I would have to adjust and it was a bit tricky".

WORRISOME

'ODI format will struggle for relevance after 2027 World Cup'



FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

The ODI format will struggle for survival and relevance after the 2027 World Cup once Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma decide to call time, says Ravichandran Ashwin. "Rohit and Virat came back to Vijay Hazare Trophy and people started watching it. Such players need to come back to make the game relevant," Ashwin said.

BLUNT TALK

I'm not a fan of him: Hayden on Australia batting coach Di Venuto



FILE PHOTO

Michael Di Venuto (Australia batting coach) has been there for at least five years. I'm not a fan of him. I just think, for too long, there has been an influence in this group around batting, and I don't feel it's served either the development of the team or the technical element of Test cricket — Matthew Hayden.

HITTING BACK

Naroditsky controversy: Kramnik sues FIDE in Swiss civil court



REUTERS

Vladimir Kramnik has sued FIDE for defamation in a Swiss civil court after he became the subject of an inquiry for allegedly harassing players with "unsubstantiated" cheating claims following the death of American GM Daniel Naroditsky. Kramnik asserted that his legal claim was not in response to the body's ethics inquiry against him.

Bengal Tigers edge Pipers in shootout

Lalremsiami holds her nerve to secure the bonus point for the former after a late surge by the latter sets up a thrilling finish



A spring in their step: Bengal Tigers players are delighted after scoring a goal. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

WOMEN'S HIL

Sports Bureau

Shrachi Bengal Tigers held its nerve in a thrilling Women's Hockey India League encounter to edge SG Pipers 4-3 in a shootout after the two sides were locked 3-3 at the end of regulation time in Ranchi on Thursday.

Agustina Gorzelany (6, 18) and Lalremsiami (11) netted for the Tigers in regulation time while Lola Riera (10, 60) and Sunelita Toppo (59) found the mark for Pipers.

Tigers started aggressively with an early circle entry, but Pipers absorbed the pressure and responded with swift passing to test the former's defence. Tigers soon earned back-to-back penalty corners, converting the second through Gorzelany to take the lead. The response from Pipers was swift as they won a penalty corner of their own, with Riera slotting home to level the scores.

The parity was short-lived, with Lalremsiami restoring Tigers' advantage through a deft deflection in the very next minute. Tigers extended their lead in the second quarter as Gorzelany struck again from a penalty corner.

Pipers began the second half on the front foot, launching immediate attacks and earning a penalty corner early on, but they were unable to make it count.

Pipers' dominance finally paid dividends with just over two minutes remaining when they won a penalty corner. Captain Navneet unleashed a fierce shot that was deflected home by Sunelita.

Pipers earned a penalty stroke in the dying seconds of the match, which Riera converted to force the shootout.

The shootout also finished 3-3, taking the contest into sudden-death. Pipers failed to score on two occasions while Lalremsiami held her nerve to secure the bonus point for Tigers.



Khawaja. AFP

Khawaja picked for Sydney Test

ANI
SYDNEY

Australia on Thursday announced the 15-member squad for the fifth and final Ashes Test against England, starting on January 4 here. In the absence of regular captain Pat Cummins, Steve Smith will continue to lead.

The 39-year-old Usman Khawaja has retained his place for the fifth Test.

The Australian management has decided to give Cummins rest for the remainder of the Ashes series to manage his workload and keep him fit for the upcoming T20 World Cup.

The squad: Steve Smith (Capt.), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Brendan Doggett, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Todd Murphy, Michael Neser, Jhye Richardson, Mitchell Starc, Jake Weatherald, and Beau Webster.

Cummins, Hazlewood in Australia squad for T20 World Cup

Agence France-Presse
MELBOURNE

Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood were on Thursday named in a spin-heavy provisional Australian squad for this year's Twenty20 World Cup after their Ashes campaign was ruined by injury.

Test skipper Cummins only played one of the five Ashes Tests against England, in Adelaide, as he slowly recovers from a lower back issue, while Hazlewood (Achilles) missed the entire series.

Cummins will have another scan on his back later this month to determine whether he will be fit for the tournament in India and Sri Lanka beginning on February 7.

Hazlewood and Tim David (hamstring) are also on the comeback trail, but are expected to be ready.

Left-arm spinners Matt Kuhnemann and Cooper Connolly were additions to a largely settled 15-man squad, alongside chief tweaker Adam Zampa and part-timer Glenn Maxwell.

Australia's group-stage matches are all being played in Sri Lanka with the expectation of spin-friendly surfaces.

In a surprise, Australia opted against a back-up wicketkeeper for Josh Inglis and no left-arm pace replacement for Mitchell Starc, who has retired from the 20-over game.

The squad: Mitchell Marsh (Capt.), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Short, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.



Hazlewood and Cummins... seasoned campaigners. FILE PHOTOS

Thipsay rates GCL triumph as his greatest moment

CHESS

P.K. Ajith Kumar

Pravin Thipsay became a Grandmaster (GM) at a time when getting the title was a distant dream for even the most talented of Indian chess players. He became India's third GM in 1997, after Viswanathan Anand and Dibyendu Barua.

He doesn't consider it the greatest moment of his life, though. That came in Mumbai, his hometown, a few days ago when he coached Alpine SG Pipers to victory in the third season of the Global Chess League (GCL).

"The GCL title means more to me than the GM title because that was an individual achievement and this was a team event, in which the world's top players competed," Thipsay told *The Hindu*. "It was great working with players of our team, like Fabiano Caruana, Hou Yifan, Anish Giri and R. Praggnanandhaa."

He is also glad that he picked Nino Batsiashvili as the team's second female player.

"I picked her because she is a team player, as the Georgians always are," he said. "And she was a heavy scorer for us. I am also happy that I got Leon Mendonca for our Prodigy board."



Thipsay. GCL

Thipsay was glad that the GCL finally came to India after the first two seasons were held in Dubai and London, respectively. "It was nice to see so many people wanting our team to win," he said. "And I was happy to see good crowds coming to watch the matches, especially during the weekends. Our foreign players like Fabiano and Hou were pleasantly surprised by the kind of response from the chess fans here."

His team had three men who would be playing at the Candidates tournament – Caruana, Praggnanandhaa and Giri. "Caruana and Praggnanandhaa should be among the favourites," he said. "And Anish too should do well".

Compound archers in core group; Reetika dropped

TOPS

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Dope-tainted wrestler Reetika Hooda was dropped, compound archers like Parneet Kaur and Abhishek Verma were promoted to the core group while decathlete Tejaswin Shanker found a place in the developmental list of the updated directory of athletes supported by the Sports Ministry's flagship Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS).

The list was pruned from 179 to 94 last year, marking the end of the 2024 Paris Olympics cycle. But it has been redrawn to reflect the performances of the past one year.

The number of core group athletes has now gone up marginally to 118, comprising 57 able-bodied and 61 para-athletes.

Reetika, an Asian Championships medallist who competed in Paris, failed a dope test during a selection trial in July. She was a part of the TOPS core group released in February last year.



Keenly watched: Compound archer Jyothi is expected to be a strong medal contender in the 2028 LA Olympics. FILE PHOTO

However, World Para Athletics Championship gold-winning sprinter Simran, whose guide Umar Saifi flunked a dope test in October last, has been retained in the core group.

The latest list offers a major upgrade to compound archers, who would be strong medal contenders in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics after the discipline was included in the Games roster.

Eight compound archers, including Parneet, Abhishek, and Jyothi Surekha, have made the core group alongside the three recurve stars in Deepika Kumari, B. Dhiraj and Ankita Bhakat.

Aditi Swami, Ojas Deotale, Priyansh, Prathmesh Jawkar and Rishab Yadav were the other compound names in the updated list.

In athletics, Neeraj Chopra has been joined by Sachin Yadav, who outperformed him in last year's World Championships by finishing fourth.

The other names from track and field in the list are steeplechaser Avinash Sable, long jumper M. Sreeshanker and new addition Sarvesh Kushare, the high jumper who won silver in the Asian Championships and finished sixth in the Worlds.

Three-time para-World Championships medal-winning club thrower Ekta Bhyan has also been been placed in the core group.

The core group continues to be without names from tennis, golf and swimming.

No participation fee, demand 13 clubs for restarting the ISL

FOOTBALL

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Thirteen of the 14 Indian Super League (ISL) clubs on Thursday told All India Football Federation (AIFF) that they "may be ready and willing" to take part in the delayed 2025-26 season if there is no participation fee and the national body takes financial responsibility for the organisational and operational costs of running the truncated competition.

Putting conditions on their participation in ISL, clubs also requested the national federation to furnish "a clear, time-bound roadmap for execution of the long-term plan, including defined timelines for appointment of a commercial partner and/or broadcaster, finalisation of the league's revenue, governance, and risk-sharing framework, and transition to a financially self-sustaining competition model consistent with statutory governance norms".

"Upon receipt of the above confirmations, the undersigned clubs shall be in a position to formally confirm participation and cooperate fully with the AIFF to ensure the orderly, compliant, and successful conduct of the 2025-26 season," a letter from the 13 clubs to the AIFF said.

Reply to AIFF's missive

The letter was in response to AIFF's missive on Wednesday, asking the clubs to confirm within a day their participation in the delayed ISL and the proposed format.

The 13 clubs are Mohun Bagan Super Giant, East Bengal, Kerala Blasters, FC Goa, Sporting Club Delhi, Bengaluru FC, Mumbai City FC, Chennaiyin FC, Mohammedan Sporting, Punjab FC, Inter Kashi, North East United FC and Odisha FC.

Jamshedpur FC was not represented.

With the ISL 2025-26 yet to start, it is certain that the clubs will not be able to play the mandatory 24 matches in the season, to be eligible to feature in the AFC Champions League two.

'Sincaraz' set to dominate as new season commences

TENNIS

Agence France-Presse
SYDNEY

Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner are set for more world domination in 2026, starting at the Australian Open, while Aryna Sabalenka is bubbling with confidence as she chases further Grand Slam success.

The new season gets underway on Friday with the mixed-teams United Cup in Perth and Sydney.

Star-studded field

Top-ranked Sabalenka, who is pursuing a third Melbourne Park trophy, starts at the Brisbane International in a stellar field also boasting Australian Open champion Madison Keys and fourth-ranked Amanda Anisimova.

Alcaraz and Sinner, or "Sincaraz" as they have been dubbed, play an exhibition in South Korea on January 10 in their only warm-up before the Australian Open eight days later.

While Spanish sensation Alcaraz bumped his Italian rival from the season-ending No. 1 spot, Sinner had the last laugh by edging him to retain his ATP Finals title in Turin. It capped a stellar year in which Sinner retained his Australian Open crown and added a landmark triumph at Wimbledon among six titles, despite missing three months over a doping ban.



Battle resumes... Sinner and Alcaraz, who have ruled the circuit for the past two years, will strive to outdo each other again. AP

"I feel like a better player than last year," said Sinner after completing his 2025 campaign with 58 wins and just six defeats. "A lot of wins and not many losses. And in the losses I had, I tried to see the positive thing and tried to use it to evolve me as a player."

Alcaraz was similarly dominant, clocking a 71-9 win-loss record with eight titles including the French Open and U.S. Open.

But he is yet to go beyond the quarterfinals at the Australian Open, losing to Novak Djokovic in the last eight in 2025.

It is the only Slam missing from his resume and the 22-year-old will start afresh with a new coach after his shock split from Juan Carlos Ferrero, who mentored him since he was 15.

Djokovic begins what could be his last year on tour at the Adelaide International starting on January 12, still chasing an elusive record 25th Major crown and 11th Australian Open title.

INBRIEF



Chelsea parts ways with manager Maresca

Chelsea has parted ways with manager Enzo Maresca, the Premier League club announced on Thursday, after the London side won just one of its last seven league games. "With key objectives still to play for across four competitions including qualification for Champions League football, Enzo and the club believe a change gives the team the best chance of getting the season back on track," the club said in a statement.



Real Madrid star Mbappe sidelined with knee injury

Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe has injured his left knee, the Spanish club said on Wednesday. Madrid added that he had been diagnosed with a sprain but did not provide a timeline for his recovery. French sports daily newspaper *L'Equipe* said Mbappe would be unavailable for at least three weeks.

LIVE TELECAST

HIL: Sony Sports Ten 1 & LIV, 7.30 p.m.
Serie A: DAZN, 1.15 a.m. (Saturday)
LaLiga: FanCode, 1.30 a.m. (Saturday)

Vadodara WTT Youth Contender begins today



Ready to roll: Divyanshi will compete in both the under-17 and u-19 categories. FILE PHOTO: R. RAVINDRAN

Press Trust of India
VADODARA

Around 334 players from 10 countries will vie for honours at the WTT Youth Contender and WTT Feeder Series, here from Friday. The second WTT Youth Contender, featuring under-11 to u-19 categories, will be held from January 2 to 5, followed by the WTT Feeder Series from Jan. 7 to 11.

The Youth Contender will see participation from 226 players representing four countries, while the Feeder Series will feature 108 players from 10 nations.

India had dominated the WTT Youth Contenders last year with Ankur Bhattacharjee and Syndrela Das clinching the under-19 boys' and girls' singles titles respectively. Divyanshi Bhowmick won both the u-15 and u-17 girls' singles crowns.

Divyanshi will compete in the u-17 and u-19 categories this year, while Syndrela will aim to defend her u-19 title.

Syndrela and Divyanshi will also be in action in the WTT Feeder Series, along with Korea Republic's Park Gahyeon (world No. 75) and Yoo Yrein (world No. 78).

The Indian challenge in the women's singles will also be led by the experienced Sutirtha Mukherjee and Ayhika Mukherjee, along with world No. 85 Yashaswini Ghorpade, who has been awarded a wild card.

In men's singles, Manush Shah will spearhead the home challenge alongside Harmeet Desai, Fidel S. Snehit and Ankur.

Wild cards for WTT Feeder Series: Main draw:
Singles, men: Pratham Madlani, Sanil Shetty (both India), Ali Alkhadrawi, Abdulaziz Bu Shulaybi, Abdulrahman Al Taher (all Saudi Arabia); **Women:** Yang Ha Eun (Korea Republic), Yashaswini Ghorpade, Debolina Das, Maria Rony (all India).
Doubles, men: Ronit Bhanja & Oishik Ghosh, Divyansh Srivastava & Sarth Mishra (both India);
Women: Tanishka Kalbhairav & Maria Rony; Neha Kumari & Mukta Dalvi.
Mixed doubles: Akash Gupta & Garima Goyal, Ronit Bhanja & Sutirtha Mukherjee (both India).
Qualifying: Women: Tanishka Kalbhairav (India).

Multitasking has become a norm and it's not a big deal, reckons Kushagra

The Jharkhand stumper-batter has pulled his weight as stand-in skipper besides carrying his prime form into the ongoing Hazare Trophy

CRICKET

M.R. Praveen Chandran
AHMEDABAD

Multitasking doesn't burden him and the pressure of captaincy doesn't make him curb his flamboyant batting style.

The 21-year-old Kumar Kushagra is a modern cricketer who embraces pressure rather than letting it get to him.

Kushagra has been in red-hot form this season with the bat for Jharkhand in both Ranji Trophy and limited overs cricket. He played an influential role in Jharkhand's maiden triumph in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) T20 tournament with 422 runs – four fifties – at a strike rate of 161.88.

Kushagra has carried that rich vein of form into the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy (VHT), stroking a fine 105 against Pondicherry after his quick-fire 63 against Karnataka in the opener.

With Ishan Kishan's availability limited to a few matches, Kushagra has also taken over the responsibility as the senior player and astutely led the side.

"I enjoy the responsibility. The association had sounded out to me that I will be captaining the side at various stages during this season. I was mentally prepared for it. Captaincy is about managing the players better, giving them confidence and making them perform to the desired level. Multitasking has become a norm in cricket these days so it's not a big deal," he said.

"Well I had worked on my game during the off-season. Yes it is challenging to switch between formats, but as a professional cricketer you should be able to adjust and adapt. I practised a lot of range-hitting with our coach Ratan Kumar. Key to success in white-ball cricket is pacing the innings and changing your game according to the situation. So far it has been a good season for me personally and for our team," said Kushagra.

"The SMAT triumph was the coming of age of Jharkhand cricket. It was an all-round performance. We are not under any sort of pressure in the VHT. We are taking it match by match. I'm not thinking too much about the future, but definitely want to make a mark in IPl in the coming season," he added.

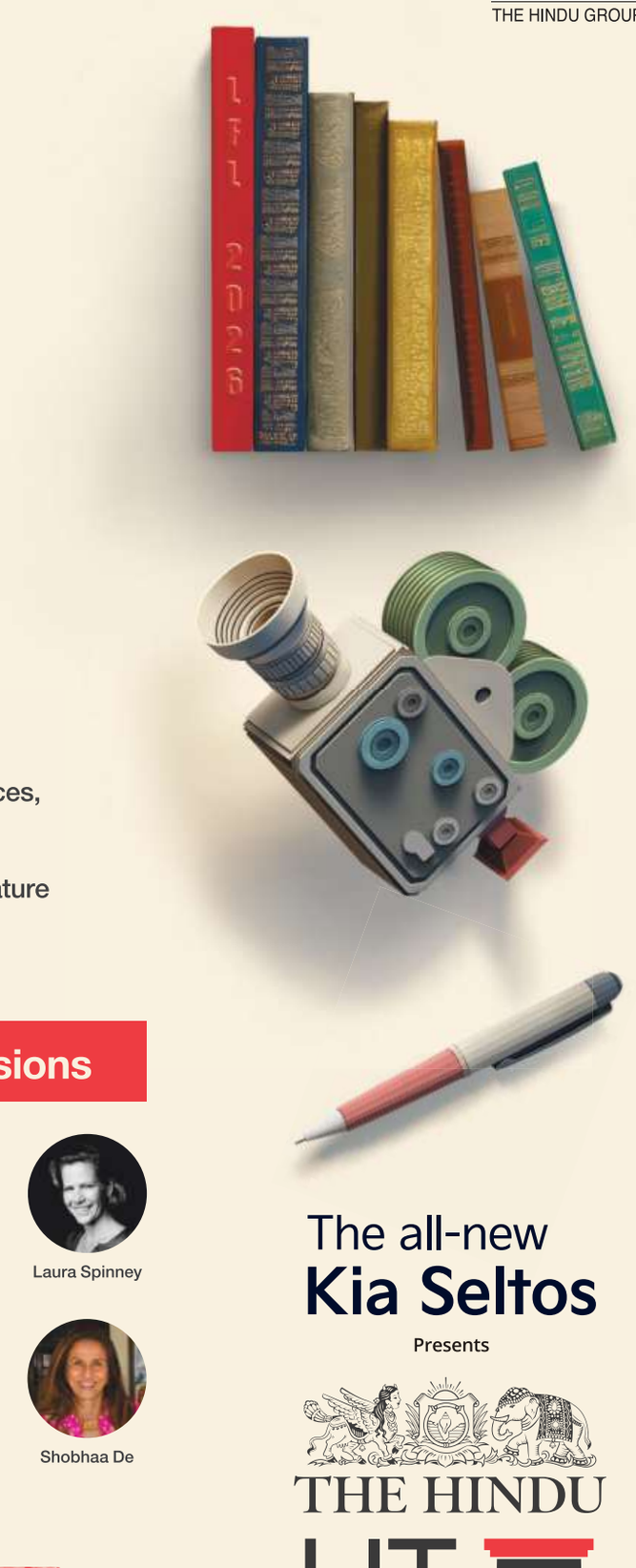


Red-hot: Kushagra has been on a roll on the domestic circuit this season. VIJAY SONEJI

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New year, new challenges for the Men in Blue

India, ahead of the five-match series against New Zealand beginning later this month, are sitting on an unbeaten streak in T20Is stretching to 15 series; they are unequivocally the No. 1 side in the world and possess an array of riches capable of holding its own in any conditions



R. Kaushik

Captain Suryakumar Yadav has primarily occupied the No. 3 and 4 slots, which is why returns of 218 runs with a highest of 47 not out and a strike-rate of 123.16 over the entirety of the last 12 months has raised multiple eyebrows.

The abiding image of 2025 for Indian cricket fans will remain Rohit Sharma holding aloft the Champions Trophy in Dubai in March. Few, the Mumbaikar included, knew at the time that it would be his last assignment as India's captain. In May, Rohit retired from Test cricket and five months later, Ajit Agarkar's selection panel stripped him of the 50-over captaincy, thrusting it instead on the shoulders of his deputy, Shubman Gill, with an eye on the World Cup in 2027 and beyond.

Petulant

The Champions Trophy is the second most prestigious 50-over competition after the World Cup, but Suryakumar Yadav lifting the T20 Asia Cup would still have almost paralleled the jubilation of March, if only... If only he had actually lifted the trophy, that is. India mounted a fabulous campaign, also in the Emirates, winning all seven matches, including on three successive Sundays against their arch-rivals from across the border, Pakistan. However, they had no silverware to show for their exploits after an unbecoming standoff involving Mohsin Naqvi, the president of the Asian Cricket Council.

Naqvi is Pakistan's federal Minister of Interior and Narcotics Control, which perhaps was the final trigger. In the wake of the Pahalgam attack on unsuspecting tourists which claimed 26 civilian lives in April, relations between India and Pakistan had deteriorated alarmingly. The Asia Cup was played against the backdrop of India's retaliatory Operation Sindoor; Indian players refused to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts before or after any of the three matches, and the leadership group had made it clear that Suryakumar would not accept the trophy from Naqvi.

Naqvi's insistence on presenting the trophy led to an anti-climactic end to a gripping tournament and a befitting finale settled by Tilak Varma's calm and class. The sight of the Indian players lolling on the Dubai International Cricket Stadium outfield even as Naqvi walked away with the silverware - shades of a neighbourhood bully's 'My bat, I will take it home once I am dismissed' philosophy there? - was hardly the ending the competition deserved. India made light of the situation by hoisting an imaginary trophy; to paraphrase the tut-tutting old-timers, it simply wasn't cricket.

Suryakumar might have been denied his moment under the DICS lights by the petulance of a cricket administrator, but he can emphatically lay that episode to rest in a little over two months when the 2026 edition of the T20 World Cup wends to its denouement. The final is earmarked for March 8, though whether it is played at Ahmedabad's sprawling Narendra Modi Stadium or at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo will be determined by how far Pakistan go in the competition. If the Pakistanis reach the title round, the final will be played in the Sri Lankan capital; if they don't make it that far, Ahmedabad will host a second World Cup final in 28 months, no matter who the protagonists are. In an ideal world, India would love for an Ahmedabad final with Suryakumar's intrepid band constituting one half of the playing group. A fairytale finish will entail India taming Australia, the team that ended their dream run in the 50-over final in November 2023, as small consolation for the heartbreak that nearly sent Rohit into retirement. It will catapult Suryakumar into cricketing stratosphere, placing him on par with Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Rohit, India's previous T20 World Cup-winning captains.

Sizzling run

Sport as a whole seldom throws up fairytale finishes, but there is no harm in hoping, right? Hoping that India translate their remarkably consistent run in the most unpredictable of international formats to a deserved trophy. Nobody, not even Naqvi, will be able to grudge them their success, were it to eventuate. After all, ahead of the five-match series against New Zealand beginning later this month, India are sitting on an unbeaten streak in T20Is stretching to 15 series, are unequivocally the No. 1 side in the world and possess an array of riches capable of holding its own in any conditions anywhere in the universe.

So assiduously planned is the cricket calendar that every year, there is at least one World Cup. In 2026, there will be two at the senior level alone - the men's and women's T20 flagship competitions, with the latter to be held in England in June. Buoyant after clinching their maiden 50-over World Cup crown in Navi Mumbai in November, Harmanpreet Kaur's spirited outfit will have their eyes set on a fabulous double. But long before the ladies mount their campaign, the focus will be trained on the home World Cup in what is otherwise a rare light year for the men's team.

India won't play a single home match in 2026 in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle. Indeed, had it not been for the pencilling in of a token one-off Test against Afghanistan in June, there would have been no home Test at all for the first time in ages. India play just five Tests in the entire year, the last four split equally on away tours of Sri Lanka (August) and New Zealand (October). India haven't played a Test in Sri Lanka since 2017, while their last visit of New Zealand was back in 2020, just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both these series assume greater than normal importance because of how the two-Test home series against South Africa panned out in November. The 0-2 rout has left India's WTC campaign hanging by a slender thread at the halfway stage. India have won just four of nine Tests in the current cycle and need a bushel of victories to get their campaign back on track. The task ahead isn't easy. While they have won their last two series in Sri Lanka, it is impossible that the islanders wouldn't have taken note of India's travails against the turning ball in their own backyard against New Zealand in 2024 and South Africa last year. Sri Lanka at home are a formidable outfit even without recently retired former Test skipper Angelo Mathews. They know how to play the conditions and their assortment of spinners will Test India's batters, now aware that they are in the crosshairs, repeatedly and unforgivingly.

In New Zealand, India's last Test, and series, win came way back in 2009, under Dhoni. On their last tour, they were well beaten inside three days in both Wellington and Christchurch. As always, the Kiwis will lay out green seamers, a challenge as different from the turners in Galle and Colombo as chalk is from cheese. In the space of two months, India's batters will be asked to adapt to vastly contrasting challenges and even though they have the bowling to cash in on whatever assistance, will have their work cut out to keep themselves in the fray for a place in the final ahead of the five-Test series at home against Australia in early 2027.

The second half of 2026, post the IPL, will largely be about 50-over cricket with an eye on the next World Cup, but the clear and undisputed highlight of the calendar is the T20 World Cup. India's preparations have been on point. They defeated Australia in Australia 2-1 in a rain-affected five-match series before comprehensively outclassing South Africa 3-1 to partially, minimally, atone for the 2-0 Test series hammering. Most of their batters have been in red-hot form, though there linger growing concerns over the lack of meaningful runs from the once-scything willow of their captain.

For near on two years, Suryakumar lorded the T20 landscape internationally, stacking up one spectacular edifice after another, but since becoming the full-time skipper in July 2024 after the retirement of Rohit, he has gone singularly silent. Last year was particularly disappointing with not a single half-century in 19 innings. There is a school of thought which believes half-centuries are overrated in the 20-over format, and there is some merit to that line of thinking if the batter in question regularly bats at No. 5 and lower. But the 35-year-old captain has primarily occupied the No. 3 and No. 4 slots, which is why returns of 218 runs with a highest of 47 not out and a strike-rate of 123.16 over the entirety of the last 12 months has raised multiple eyebrows.

There is no question, though, of India looking beyond Suryakumar till the World Cup. While Agarkar's panel was compelled to leave out Gill after his return to T20Is at the Asia Cup was an unqualified failure, they have still kept their faith in the Mumbaikar, not least because he has run a tight ship. The consensus is that he is too good a batter to not work his way back among the runs, and that he is one good knock away from rolling the clock back. Suryakumar will be hoping that 'one good knock' comes early in the New Zealand series, as early as the first game in Nagpur on January 21, so that it sets him up nicely for the rest of the showdown and, more importantly, for the World Cup starting on February 7.

Perfectly balanced

It isn't fanciful to expect India to become the first side to successfully defend the World Cup or to covet champion status for an unprecedented third time. Alongside England and West Indies, they are the only two-time winners and seem to have most bases covered. The return from injury of Hardik Pandya is the perfect tonic as it lends balance; firepower in the middle-order and handy fast-medium combine to make the all-rounder the fulcrum around which the team will revolve, while in Jasprit Bumrah, India possess the most complete all-format bowler of his generation who will be superbly complemented by late bloomer Varun Chakaravarthy.

It doesn't take a lot for the direction of a T20 game to turn in a contest between equals, but the rest of the pack is well aware that if India play anywhere close to their potential, maybe at even 90%, they will be impossible to stop. The only thing that could weigh India down, apart from the obvious glorious uncertainties of the sport, is the pressure of expectation that's magnified while playing at home. But then again, pressure is a constant in any Indian cricketer's kitbag, isn't it?



THE GIST

- The abiding image of 2025 will remain Rohit Sharma lifting the Champions Trophy in March followed by his successor Suryakumar Yadav lifting the 'imaginary' T20 Asia Cup.
- In 2026, there will be two World Cups at the senior level alone - the men's and women's T20 flagship competitions with the latter to be held in England in June. Harmanpreet's side will look to continue their spirited efforts and set their eyes on a fabulous double.
- India's preparations for the T20 World Cup has been solid after defeating Australia and South Africa. The return of Hardik lends balance and firepower to the middle-order, while in Bumrah, the team possess a complete all-format bowler of this generation.



‘Anti-cholesterol drugs may reduce risk of death in diabetes patients’

Statins, which help treat high cholesterol, may significantly reduce risk of death and major cardiovascular events in adults with type 2 diabetes, including among those considered at low cardiovascular risk, a study said. The findings published in *Annals of Internal Medicine* challenge uncertainty about whether patients at the lowest risk benefit from statin therapy, researchers said. PTI



U.S. FDA approves motion sickness drug from Vanda Pharmaceuticals

Vanda Pharmaceuticals has said that its drug for the prevention of motion-induced vomiting was approved by the U.S. health regulator, becoming the first treatment for the condition to receive the nod in more than 40 years. The company expects to launch the drug, Nereus, in the coming months. The drug works by blocking a brain receptor linked to nausea and vomiting. REUTERS



Flu rising rapidly in the U.S., driven by a new variant of virus

Flu is rising rapidly across the U.S., driven by a new variant of the virus — and cases are expected to keep growing with holiday travel. The variant, known as “subclade K,” led to early outbreaks in the U.K., Japan and Canada. The CDC estimated there have been at least 7.5 million illnesses, 81,000 hospitalisations and 3,100 deaths from flu so far this season. AP



Hair loss drug use by mothers may pose risks to infants, finds analysis

Mothers using minoxidil, a common hair loss drug, could pose a risk of infantile hypertrichosis — abnormal hair growth over the body, including in areas not typically hairy, a global analysis suggests. Researchers from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and AIIMS, New Delhi, analysed 2,664 cases of minoxidil-suspected infantile hypertrichosis from around the world. PTI

What transgender men face when they access healthcare

The healthcare system for trans men and gender-diverse people remains constrained by limited research, poor understanding of their identities, and a one-size-fits-all model of care, say experts; from judgmental stares and misgendering to the outright denial of care based on their identity, the barriers are many

Meenakshy S.

Three years ago, when Manohar, a transgender man, visited a tertiary government hospital in southern Tamil Nadu seeking gender-affirming care, he was met not with support, but with judgment. “I had not come out to my family at that point, so I had to go to the hospital wearing a churidar. I had long hair too. The doctors refused to treat me. They told me, ‘If you are a trans man, why are you dressed like a woman?’”he alleges.

Mr. Manohar, now 28, had to seek a certificate of “recognition” from the District Magistrate, in line with the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, after which the doctors agreed to treat him.

Accessing healthcare is still a Herculean task for transgender and gender-diverse people, even in Tamil Nadu, a State celebrated for its progressive transgender welfare policies. From judgmental stares and misgendering to the outright denial of care based on their identity, the barriers are many. Although trans women, too, face serious challenges, the experiences of trans men and gender-diverse people who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) – including non-binary people – reveal a different set of hurdles, say activists and transgender health experts.

They say the healthcare system for such individuals remains constrained by limited research, poor understanding of their identities, and a one-size-fits-all model of care.

Gaps in medical understanding

Fred Rogers, transgender rights activist and director of the Urimai Kural Trust, a trans rights organisation based in Chennai, says that even accessing general healthcare – such as treatment for a fever or cold – often feels impossible for transmasculine people.“Many healthcare professionals are not even aware of these identities to begin with. People in the community are forced to rely on a small network of recommended doctors: doctors who will treat us with dignity, who will not judge us, misgender us, or use our deadname.”

L. Ramakrishnan, a public health professional and vice-president of SAATHII, a Chennai-based NGO, explains that the trans movement in India was led by trans women, and they have historically and culturally been more visible. “This, therefore, has shaped our view on gender incongruence, and there is a lack of understanding of who trans men and AFAB individuals are, even among healthcare professionals.”

Air Commodore Sanjay Sharma (retd.), who heads the Association for Transgender Health of India (ATHI), says that for transmasculine people, primary care is generally given by gynaecologists, but since specialists delivering these services are usually trained to see gender in a binary fashion, patients often experience ridicule or hostility.

Unsupervised hormonal therapy

For trans men, gender-affirming care may include hormone replacement therapy (HRT), in which testosterone is administered to induce masculinisation and suppress female secondary sex characteristics. There is however, a two-fold problem with hormones: inadequate information given by medical professionals many of whom are also not fully aware of the effects of the hormones, and self-medication by patients.

Hafiz, a 29-year-old trans man who has been on HRT for over two years, says he used to receive his testosterone injections from doctors at the government hospital. However, with the introduction of the Chief Minister’s Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme in T.N., accessing free hormones now requires a two-day hospital admission. “As I come from a conservative family, I cannot get admitted to hospital without raising concerns. So I get the prescriptions and buy the hormones elsewhere,” he says. This is the case with many other trans men too.

While hormones are generally prescribed in doses of 100 mg, 250 mg, or 1,000 mg, there is no strict guideline linking dosage to body weight, according to trans persons. Mr. Hafiz says, often, the available stock determines what is given. “Some trans men may seek higher doses to achieve desired masculinisation, such as increased beard growth, because proper guidance is not provided. Hormones are readily available in the market and online, and there is little oversight from medical professionals on dosage.”

Mr. Hafiz adds: “These are steroids, and without careful monitoring, they can lead to serious long-term side effects, including kidney problems, heart attack, stroke, and diabetes. For individuals with underlying health conditions, hormone therapy may also have immunosuppressive effects, yet this is rarely addressed by doctors.”

Mr. Ramakrishnan points out that in the private sector, the unavailability of affordable endocrinologists, who are also trans-affirming, causes many to self-medicate.

> Medical professionals often do not know whether trans men undergoing hormone therapy can safely receive vaccinations, for instance. They simply do not have the information because it has not been studied or taught
>
> **GOPI SHANKAR MADURAI**
> intersex activist

Gatekeeping, unethical practices

According to intersex activist Gopi Shankar Madurai, the fundamental issue is that medical professionals do not provide affirmative care; they treat gender incongruence as a disorder. “There is always this question of whether you are trans enough. Not everyone can come out to their families, and doing so might be harmful for them but this is not something that is widely understood.”

Dr. Sharma says that care providers also tend to gatekeep care. “Only after a psychiatrist gives you a diagnosis of gender dysphoria can you receive other care. Care, however, should not depend upon whether you have dysphoria or not; it should depend upon whether you are gender incongruent or not.”

Dr. Ramakrishnan further points out that some medical professionals also view trans men through a patriarchal, heteronormative, and reproduction-oriented lens – because of their sex assigned at birth. “There have been instances of surgeons refusing hysterectomies for trans men who have not birthed children,” he notes. He also highlights that certain unethical and unscientific practices continue, such as vaginal examination or asking patients to expose their chests, even when they have clearly stated that they have not undergone top surgery.

What needs to change

One of the key issues, says Gopi Shankar Madurai, is the lack of research on gender-affirming care. “Medical professionals often do not know whether trans men undergoing hormone therapy can safely receive vaccinations for instance. They simply do not have the information because it has not been studied or taught,” they explain. Dr. Sharma notes that while there has been tremendous progress in transgender healthcare research, it has nearly all happened in the West.

The training of care providers poses another massive barrier. “There is an effort by the government to make space for gender-affirming care. But care providers, even if they are well-meaning and sympathetic, are not completely trained,” Dr. Sharma notes. He calls for a structured training of medical professionals and the application of standardised protocols, which have been peer-reviewed and are evidence-based. He also highlights the importance of a community-based cadre: people who have lived experiences to be brought into the government’s healthcare delivery system.

Slight, slow progress

Certain contentious practices, such as to do with clothes, have been discarded by the government at the gender clinics now, says M. Sugumar, who previously headed the gender clinic at Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, Chennai. Moreover, “this is an evolving discipline, so medical practices will also evolve accordingly,” he notes.

The Tamil Nadu government, he adds, conducts periodic gender sensitisation training, with the help of NGOs, for not just doctors specialising in gender care, but also for medical practitioners across hospitals.

Mr. Rogers and others, in 2024, filed a petition in the Madras High Court seeking better healthcare protocols for trans individuals.

The court, hearing the petition recently, has allowed the petitioner to file a rejoinder affidavit suggesting improvements to the government’s existing SOPs with respect to medical and surgical care for transpersons.

(meenakshy.s@thehindu.co.in)



ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

THE GIST

- Accessing healthcare is still a Herculean task for transgender and gender-diverse people, even in Tamil Nadu, a State celebrated for its progressive transgender welfare policies
- Many healthcare professionals are not even aware of these identities to begin with. People in the community are forced to rely on a small network of recommended doctors: doctors who will treat them with dignity, who will not judge them, misgender them, or use their deadname, say experts
- They call for a structured training of medical professionals and the application of standardised protocols, which have been peer-reviewed and are evidence-based

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Stolen and lost mobile phones recovered by Delhi Police in 2025

711 Delhi Police recovered 711 stolen and lost mobile phones worth about ₹1 crore from the Shahdara district under 'Operation Vishwas'. The phones were traced using technical analysis and field action. Of the recovered devices, 86 have been returned to their rightful owners. PTI

People infected due to contaminated water issue in Indore

1,400 Around 1,400 people were infected after consuming contaminated water in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, officials said. Of them, about 200 required hospitalisation. State minister Kailash Vijayvargiya said no patient is in serious condition. ANI

Indian prisoners awaiting repatriation from Pakistan

167 India urged Pakistan to expedite the repatriation of 167 Indian fishermen and civil prisoners who have completed their sentences, the Ministry of External Affairs said. The appeal came as India and Pakistan exchanged lists of prisoners and fishermen held in each other's custody. ANI

Uncollectable voter forms in Uttar Pradesh due to migration

2.88 In crores. Permanent migration is the leading cause behind 2.88 crore uncollectable voter forms identified during Uttar Pradesh's special intensive revision. Official data show nearly 1.3 crore cases linked to permanent shifting. PTI

Number of drunk driving cases filed in Ahmedabad

236 Ahmedabad Police registered 236 cases during a special New Year's eve enforcement drive, arresting 246 people. Of those held, 69 were booked for drunk driving, 123 for alcohol consumption and 54 for liquor possession. PTI

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From encroachment to legal ownership

Haryana government regularises unauthorised occupation of village panchayat land through payment, aiming to reduce litigation and resolve disputes; this risks converting encroachment into ownership, stabilising gains for those with ability to pay while limiting access for marginalised households on village commons

LETTER & SPIRIT

Anand Mehra
Vignesh Karthik K.R.

In late November 2024, the Haryana Legislative Assembly amended the Haryana Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1961, to permit the conversion of certain categories of *Shamilat deh* under unauthorised occupation into private ownership through payment to the gram panchayat, a framework further streamlined and expanded in 2025 by shifting approval powers and diluting the market-rate constraint. The government presents this as an administrative settlement to reduce litigation, recover value for panchayats, and resolve long-running disputes over commons pending in revenue courts. It argues that widespread residential and agricultural encroachments have made a negotiated buy-out preferable to protracted legal battles.

A year on, the question is not only whether the amendment clears the docket, but what kind of rural order it consolidates. Common lands are a political institution, shaping livelihood security, bargaining power in rural markets, and dependence for the landless. If the ability to pay becomes the operative criterion for title, regularisation risks converting de facto possession into de jure ownership in ways that validate elite capture rather than correct it.



GETTY IMAGES

Commons and power

This risk must be read against Haryana's longer history of *Shamilat deh* governance and Dalit exclusion, where encroachment is rarely accidental. Field-based work on village commons (Sucha Singh Gill, Pramajit Judge, Manjit Singh) and K. Gopal Iyer's synthesis documents how Dalits' "due rights" on common land have been systematically denied, with encroachment often sustained through patronage, sarpanch and official complicity, and unequal access to paperwork and coercive authority. This is not only a scholarly claim.

A 2007 Haryana Institute of Rural Development (HIRD) study of Bhiwani and Karnal districts recorded outsiders benefiting from village common land, panchayats not enabling Dalit families' access to cultivable parcels, and Dalit households failing to realise statutory shares because they could not compete with dominant landowners in lease markets. It further noted that roughly 15% of encroachment by dominant landowning communities had the backing of sarpanches, officials, or politically influential persons, while richer households captured disproportionate benefits by bidding higher lease rates.

Scale of capture

The same HIRD exercise provides a sense of scale. It reported 28,628 acres under encroachment out of 2,01,875 acres of cultivable *shamlat* land, constituting 14.18% of the cultivable commons. It also compiled administrative data on 8,270 cases filed between 1994 and 1995 for illegal possession of 21,137 acres of *shamlat* land. The trend line is the point: by 2009-10, encroachment cases pending in revenue courts reportedly reached 19,476, about 2.35 times the 1994-95 figure. These numbers clarify what is at stake.

Field-based agrarian political economy from Haryana reinforces this broader diagnosis. Agrarian life is stratified by land and caste, while landless Dalit households remain concentrated in insecure wage work and tiny self-employment. In such a setting, regularisation through payment is not a neutral technique.

The State's rationale is intelligible; litigation is costly, and decades-long occupations create uncertainty, constrain panchayat planning, and foreclose revenue. Yet technocratic settlement is not distributively neutral. By treating the problem as backlog management rather than a continuing pattern of dispossession, the amendment risks normalising encroachment and converting that normality into ownership through payment.

A contrast with policies elsewhere clarifies the normative hinge. In restitution-oriented frameworks, common or specially earmarked lands are treated as corrective instruments to buffer the landless and historically oppressed, and some States have implemented this logic with relative seriousness. Madhya Pradesh's initiative of distributing a big portion of *charnoi* land to Dalits is a clear example. Tamil Nadu's Panchami lands were similarly earmarked for Dalits, reflecting an explicit premise of protection rather than treating the commons as a negotiable asset. In purchase-oriented frameworks, by contrast, the commons become a negotiable asset allocated through willingness and ability to pay. Haryana's amendment leans toward this latter logic: without first addressing historical entitlement, caste-based deprivation, and the statutory intent of commons as a social safety net, it risks granting *malikana haq* while leaving the underlying injustice intact.

A fairer design would hardwire safeguards so regularisation does not become a conveyor belt for elite capture. Titles should follow mandatory socio-economic and caste profiling with panchayat-level disclosure and privacy protections, and hierarchy of claims aligned with statutory intent, including priority for landless and historically excluded groups. Ecologically and socially critical commons should be excluded from conversion. The process should be independently audited, with credible grievance redress insulated from local executive discretion. Finally, proceeds should be earmarked for distributive repair, and case clearance should be time-bound and paired with legal aid so marginalised claimants are not priced out while better-resourced occupants close disputes through payment.

Justice or tidiness

The 2024 amendment thus crystallises a wider tension in contemporary rural governance: land policy as social justice versus land policy as administrative tidiness. In a rural political economy, legalising encroachment without first correcting for structural inequality is not merely dispute resolution. It is the State selecting a settlement in a long-running social conflict, and calling it efficiency.

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THE GIST

- The Haryana government regularises unauthorised occupation of village commons through payment, framing it as an administrative settlement to reduce litigation and recover value for panchayats.
- This process risks converting encroachment into ownership, privileging those with the ability to pay and reinforcing elite capture.
- Marginalised households, particularly landless Dalits, face limited access to commons, undermining the social and livelihood functions these lands are intended to provide.

Why does India need climate-resilient agriculture?

What makes a coherent national climate-resilient agriculture roadmap necessary?

Shambhavi Naik

The story so far:

Climate change is real, and for India to continue meeting domestic food demands, agriculture needs to cope with the increasing unpredictability of the weather, declining soil health, and growing air pollution.

What is climate-resilient agriculture?

Climate-resilient agriculture uses a range of biotechnology and complementary technologies to guide farming practices and reduce dependence on chemical inputs, while maintaining or improving productivity. These tools include biofertilizers and biopesticides, and soil-microbiome analyses. Genome-edited crops can be developed to withstand drought, heat, salinity, or pest pressures. In parallel, AI-driven analytics can integrate multiple environmental and agronomic variables to generate locally tailored farming strategies.

Why does India need CRA?

India is an agricultural nation with a rapidly growing population, which places increasing pressure on the need for more reliable farm productivity. Yet around 51% of India's net sown area is rainfed, and this land produces nearly 40% of the country's food, making it especially vulnerable to climate variability. Conventional farming methods alone may not withstand the rising stresses of climate change. Climate-resilient agriculture offers a suite of technologies that can enhance productivity while protecting environmental health.

Where does India stand today?

In 2011, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) launched a flagship network project 'National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture'. For enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of farmers to climate variability, location-specific climate resilient technologies such as system of rice intensification, aerobic rice, direct seeding of rice, zero till wheat sowing, cultivation of climate resilient varieties tolerant to extreme weather conditions, in-situ incorporation of rice residues, etc., have been demonstrated under the project in 448 climate-resilient villages. The National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture has been formulated to enhance agricultural productivity, especially in rainfed areas, focusing on integrated farming, water use efficiency, soil health management, and synergising resource conservation.

More recently, the BioE3 policy also positioned CRA as a key thematic area for the development of biotechnology-led solutions. Several technologies relevant to CRA are already commercialised.

Leading companies supply bio-inputs that improve soil health and reduce chemical dependence. India also has an expanding digital agriculture sector, with agritech startups offering AI-enabled advisories, precision irrigation, crop-health monitoring, and yield prediction tools.

What is the way forward?

India faces several risks in scaling CRA, including low adoption among small and marginal farmers due to limited access, awareness, and affordability, and quality inconsistencies in biofertilizers and biopesticides that undermine trust in biological alternatives. The rollout of climate-resilient seeds remains slow, with the adoption of new tools such as gene editing still emerging and uneven distribution across States. Further, the digital divide limits the reach of precision agriculture and AI-based decision tools. These challenges are compounded by ongoing soil degradation, water scarcity, and accelerating climate volatility, which may outpace current adaptation efforts. Fragmented policy coordination further risks slowing progress.

The way forward requires accelerating the development and deployment of climate-tolerant and genome-edited crops, strengthening quality standards and supply chains for biofertilizers and biopesticides, and provision of digital tools and climate advisories to support adoption by small landholders. Financial incentives, climate insurance, and credit access are essential to support farmers during the transition. Above all, India needs a coherent national CRA roadmap under the BioE3 framework, aligning biotechnology, climate adaptation, and policies to deliver resilience at scale.

Shambhavi Naik is chairperson, Takshashila Institution's Health & Life Sciences Policy

THE GIST

- Climate-resilient agriculture uses biotechnology, biofertilizers, biopesticides, genome-edited crops, and AI-driven tools to enhance farm productivity while reducing dependence on chemical inputs.
- Scaling CRA in India requires a coherent national roadmap under the BioE3 framework, stronger adoption among small and marginal farmers, quality bio-inputs, climate-tolerant seeds, and digital tools to deliver resilience at scale.

EXPLAINER

The Aravalli question faces the brunt of India's fondness for 'strategic exemptions'

India does not resolve clashes between its climate commitments and industrial demand through any clear rules; instead, it often resorts to executive discretion and opaque measures, citing 'national defence' or 'strategic considerations' to bypass scrutiny

Vasudevan Mukunth



Under pressure: A view of Aravalli Hills; the landscape is stressed by illegal mining, urban expansion, denudation, and a dropping water table. GETTY IMAGES

The story so far:

On December 23, Air Marshal and the Integrated Defence Staff chief Ashutosh Dixit laid out the defence establishment's case for critical minerals. Modern defence systems, he said, rely on reliable access to these minerals and import dependence has become a strategic vulnerability because global supply chains are concentrated and exposed to export controls and geopolitics. He also linked self-sufficiency in defence manufacturing and operational readiness to secure mineral value chains and pointed to the National Critical Mineral Mission as the policy vehicle of choice. His words came as the defence establishment's contribution to the charged public debate over how the Aravalli Hills should be protected and whether their mineral wealth should be mined.

What is the Aravalli Hills issue?

Controversy over the Aravalli Hills flared up after November 20, when the Supreme Court adopted a uniform way to identify the "hills and ranges", froze new mining leases until the Environment Ministry had prepared a sustainable mining plan for the landscape, and said mining should be prohibited in "core" or "inviolate" areas, with an exception for critical, strategic and atomic minerals notified under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957. The Court called this a "strategic exemption".

In the new operational definition vis-à-vis mining, "Aravalli Hills" is any landform in the Aravalli districts that rises at least 100 m above the local relief (measured from the lowest contour line encircling the landform). Likewise, the "Aravalli Range" is two or more such Aravalli Hills that lie within 500 m of each other, including the landforms in between.

Environmental groups and opposition parties have argued that this definition could still weaken enforcement in large parts of a landscape already stressed by illegal mining, urban expansion, denudation, and a dropping water table. For instance, if a surveyor draws the Aravalli Hills' boundary using the elevation and distance rules, the new landscape that emerges will be of 'Aravalli'-like feature sitting like islands in a sea of non-'Aravalli' features, including valleys, plains, scrubland, and forests. Yet the latter connect the Aravalli Hills and make the current landscape as good as it currently is.

Last week, then, the Supreme Court placed this definition in abeyance and decided to constitute a new committee to examine the issue afresh.

What is the issue with a 'strategic exemption'?

The Environment Ministry that must execute the sustainable mining plan (however it looks) has also weakened the legal environment protection framework to promote ease of doing business, creating gaps that make exemptions easier to misuse.

Further, right now, India doesn't resolve clashes between its climate commitments and industrial demand through any clear rules. Instead, the Environment Ministry often resorts to executive discretion and opaque instruments like office memoranda, project-specific exemptions, and ad hoc appraisals that treat "national defence" or "strategic considerations" as sufficient reason to evade scrutiny.

The environmental impact assessment (EIA) framework itself allows exemptions from public consultation for projects linked to security and other strategic considerations "as determined by the Central Government". This together with the government's disinclination to bind itself to transparent criteria has often rendered the scope of "national interest" arbitrary and opaque.

What have the government and courts done?

The Ministry has repeatedly softened India's environmental clearance process to reduce friction for projects and industrial investments since 2014. Two decisions in 2025 are notable. First, in May, the Supreme Court had held that ex post facto clearances are alien to environmental jurisprudence and "anathema" to the environmental impact assessment (EIA) framework because they invert the logic of prior scrutiny and can lead to irreparable environmental damage. But in November, the Court recalled that judgment and reopened the space for post facto regularisation, this time with the Court's own uncertainty built into the regulatory space. This element wasn't there before.

Second, in September, the Environment Ministry issued an office memorandum to accelerate mining projects involving critical minerals by exempting them from public consultations as required by the EIA Notification 2006. This move didn't require the notification to be amended because it already includes a special clause for "strategic considerations", and the Ministry used that to accelerate projects while also reducing the formal space where affected communities and independent experts could force the government to disclose details of risks and cumulative impact. Ministers also defended the move in Parliament on national security grounds.

Next, the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023 and subsequent administrative practices have widened the exemptions for certain activities and have introduced new categories of land and projects with modified clearance requirements. The amended Act applies to land notified as 'forest' under the Indian Forest Act 1927 (or other laws) and land recorded as forest in government records on or after October 25, 1980, yet it exempted land that had already been shifted to non-forest use on or before December 12, 1996, by a State or U.T. order. It also exempted land along roads and railway tracks, the international border, and near "security-related infrastructure" and expanded the list of activities not treated as "non-forest purpose".

As a result, the Centre and States can now collect information by drilling narrow holes during exploration to pull up rock samples before having to file a mining proposal. And in forest districts with mineral deposits and which overlap with areas notified as harbouring left-wing extremism, it's now easier to establish some connective infrastructure like roads and power lines, which can also support exploration and other mining work.

The amendments don't exempt mining outright but there's a scope creep that, together with the government's sympathetic attitude towards businesses and the post facto regularisation regime, merits scrutiny.

How are the Aravalli Hills threatened?

This is also why the public controversy over the Aravalli Hills matters so much. The Supreme Court order itself linked the Hills to groundwater recharge and to functions that prevent desertification, which are the same ecosystem services that India needs to preserve to meet outcomes linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, including clean air, water security, and good living conditions.

The Hills also contain or are believed to have potential for minerals that India's strategic planners care about, including base metals in certain established belts, minerals such as tungsten and others often classified as 'strategic', and other bulk minerals including stone and rocks. The Court-appointed committee has also emphasised the potential for minerals relevant to the green energy transition, including lithium and rare-earth elements. This combination, together with the Ministry's weakening of safeguards, makes the Court's "strategic exemption" precarious.

The State has also effectively reduced the information that outsiders can access to hold claims of greenness – including "sustainable mining" and the circular economy of critical minerals that the new National Critical Minerals Mission promises – accountable.

If India is going to invoke a "strategic" need to carve out exceptions in sensitive areas, there needs to be more clarity on how India will arbitrate these conflicts, rather than fall back on negotiated exemptions and post-hoc regularisation. Specifically, the government or the Court is expected to set up a binding test for when "strategic considerations" merit simpler or easier procedures; require landscape-level cumulative-impact and groundwater assessments before all leases; and disclose, in the public record, assumptions about the alternatives – including imports, substitution, recycling, and sourcing from less sensitive areas – that were rejected.

Without such a framework, however, climate action and economic growth will keep colliding through ad hoc decisions while environmental law is left to absorb the political pressure.

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THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Last month, thieves stole at least eight works by Henri Matisse from the Mário de Andrade Library in Brazil. A quiz on some of the biggest thefts of artworks

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

Many years ago, a couple of paintings of this Post-Impressionist artist were stolen from a museum in Amsterdam, but they were also recovered quickly. This artist died by suicide. Last year, an immersive experience in his name was brought to several Indian cities, including Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai. Name the artist.

QUESTION 2

Last year, a gang of thieves broke into the Louvre Museum in Paris and stole the French crown jewels. Some of them belonged to an empress, who was the wife of Napoleon III. Name her.

QUESTION 3

Some people believe that this painting by da Vinci shot further to fame only after it was stolen. Today, it can be found in a museum in a bulletproof glass display case and visitors are allowed to stare at it only for about 15 seconds. Name the painting.

QUESTION 4

This painting, one of the most iconic images in art, has been stolen twice and recovered. It shows an agonised face against a colourful sky lit up by a setting sun. Name it.

QUESTION 5

In 2008, an 11th-century Chola bronze sculpture of Dancing Shiva was stolen from a temple in Tamil Nadu and sold to a museum in Australia. An art dealer was found responsible and emerged as a major antiquities smuggler. Name him.



Visual Question:

A stolen painting from Italy by artist X was found in a black bag by a gardener in 1997. X was a huge source of inspiration for the Indian designer, Rahul Mishra. The photo shows a model wearing clothes from Mishra's collection. Name X.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This person was the co-founder of a non-profit organisation that played a critical role in enhancing transparency in Indian elections. **Ans: Jagdeep Chhokar, Association for Democratic Reforms**

2. This veteran political activist went on to become a major mass leader in Kerala and the Chief Minister of the State. **Ans: V.S. Achuthanandan**

3. Author of many bestsellers, he covered the attempted assassination of French President Charles De Gaulle as a journalist and then used that incident to inspire a best-selling thriller novel. **Ans: Frederick Forsyth**

4. One of India's foremost astrophysicists, he was a persistent critic of the Big Bang Theory despite its widespread acceptance. **Ans: Jayant Narlikar**

5. One of three pioneering women primatologists who studied different great apes, she went on from being a primatologist to also be a major climate advocate. **Ans: Jane Goodall**

Visual: Identify this Padma Vibhushan-winning vocalist and a towering figure in Hindustani classical music. **Ans: Chhannulal Mishra**

Early Birds: C. Saravanan | Pranab Biswas | Sushil Prasad | Surojit Pal | Vidyasagar Reddy Kethiri



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"How was the party last night?"

"Pretty good actually. Even the Chairman talked to me."

"That was nice of him. I don't think he had a clue as to what he was talking about. You see, he had had too much tongue oil and he was...."

"...tongue oil?"

"Liquor is sometimes referred to as tongue oil."

"My uncle has a glass of tongue oil every day in the evening. Does that sound ok?"

"It sure does. You can refer to liquor as tonsil bath as well."

"Tonsil bath!"

"For example, my uncle has a tonsil bath every evening."

"I could use a tonsil bath right now."

"That's a good example. By the way, both tonsil bath and tongue oil are considered slang. Do not use the two words on all occasions."

"While we are on the subject of tongue, what does the expression to speak with a forked tongue mean?"

"When you accuse someone of speaking with a forked tongue, you are saying that he/she is lying."

"Can I say: 'The Principal speaks with a forked tongue'."

"You certainly can. Here is another example. For some strange reason, everyone believes what the Chairman says. But if you ask me, he speaks with a forked tongue."

"An editorial in last week's newspaper accuses Sonia Gandhi of speaking with a forked tongue."

"Politicians across the world speak with a forked tongue."

"Yes, but they do...."

"...if politicians didn't speak with a forked tongue, they wouldn't be able to survive."

"My father wouldn't agree with you though."

"...your father and I don't speak the same language when it comes to ...."

"You and he share the same mother tongue, don't you?"

"...ha...ha!"

"What's so funny?"

"When you and someone speak the same language, it means that the two of you have very similar ideas and tastes. Sekhar and Rubina get along really well. They speak the same language about almost everything."

"They have a similar background. So...."

"...uh...and I have similar backgrounds. But we don't speak the same language about anything!"

"Can I say, my father and I don't speak the same language when it comes to sports?"

"You certainly can! When it comes to movies, the Office Accountant and I speak the same language."

"Have you ever taken her out to a movie?"

"Are you joking?"

"...but what's wrong?"

"...if I take her out to a movie, it will set tongues wagging at the office."

"What does it mean?"

"It means to cause people to gossip."

"When Mala entered the room wearing a saree and a new diamond ring, it set tongues wagging. Does that sound ok?"

"It certainly does. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm meeting a friend for lunch."

"Are you planning on having a tonsil bath?"

"You know that I don't touch tongue oil."

"Just joking."

Published in The Hindu on March 9, 1999

Word of the day

Convoluted:

extremely complicated and difficult to follow

Synonyms: tough, intricate, confusing

Usage: *His explanation sounded convoluted to everyone.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/convolutedpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /kɒnvəluːtɪd/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Text & Context'